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INTER-COMMUNITY COOPERATION IN ETHNICALLY PLURAL SOCIETIES

SHI`I-MARONITE RELATIONS AND THE ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE FREE PATRIOTIC MOVEMENT AND HIZBULLAH IN LEBANON

by

Manuel Samir Sakmani

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree at the Department of Political Science and the Graduate Center for Humanities and Social Sciences of the Philipps University Marburg

April 2020

First Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Rachid Ouaissa (Philipps University Marburg)
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ii. Note on transliterations and translations

For the transliteration of Arabic terms the author has relied on a slightly modified version of the simplified system offered by the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES). Names of contemporary persons (e.g. Nasrallah, al-Hariri) and places (e.g. Sour, Saida, Trablous) have been spelled as common to English-language Lebanese news coverage, thus without diacritics, non-italicized, and not following any consistent order. Historical names, in contrast, have been transliterated systematically and include diacritical marks (e.g. \`Alī al-Ṣaghīr). The same applies to technical terms which are yet additionally italicized (e.g. *intifāḍat al-istiqlāl)*. Exceptions from this rule occur if terms are considered to have accepted English spellings (e.g. jihad) and are either to be found on the “IJMES Word List” or in Merriam–Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (online). Names of organizations appear with diacritics but non-italicized (e.g. Ḥizb al-Ba\`thī al-\`Arabī al-Ishtirāqī). Yet, if these names have an accepted English spelling, the diacritics are dropped (e.g. Hizbullah, Harakat Amal). Authors´ names and titles of magazines or newspapers are spelled as published and the same applies to the original spellings in text passages quoted for this work. All translations within this work, finally, are the author´s, unless otherwise noted.

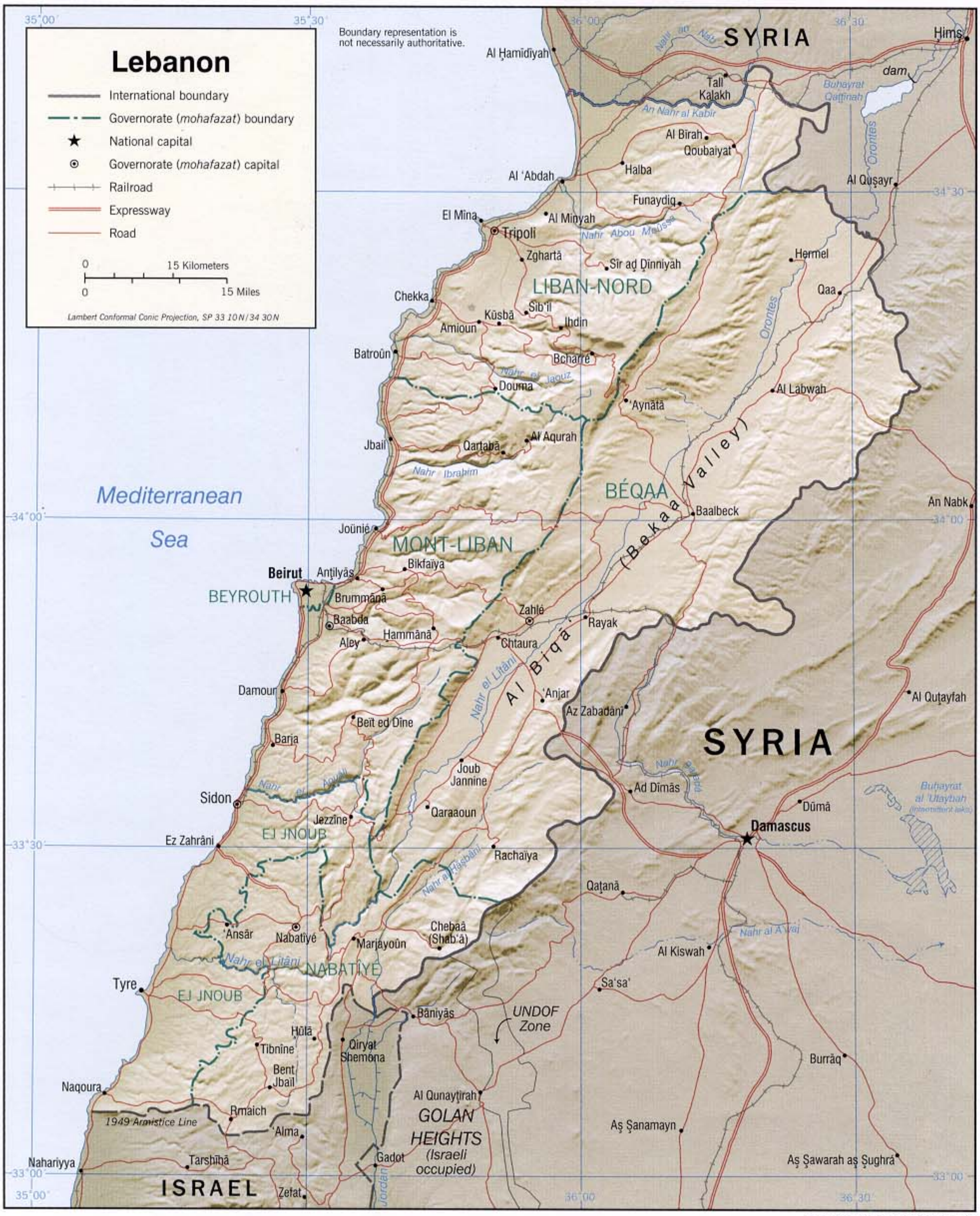
iii. Abbreviations

ADF	Arab Deterrent Force
ADST	Association for Diplomatic Studies & Training
AFL	Army of Free Lebanon
AI	Amnesty International
AIVD	General Intelligence and Security Service of the Netherlands
ALCC	American Lebanese Coordination Council
AMAL (Harakat Amal)	Afwāj al-Muqāwama al-Lubnāniyya (Lebanese Resistance Battalions)
AUB	American University of Beirut
AUC	American University in Cairo
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BMI	Bundesministerium des Inneren
BpB	Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung
CBNC	Central Bureau of National Coordination
CBC	Capital Broadcasting Center
CDL	Center for Democracy in Lebanon
CFR	Council on Foreign Relations
CLS	Centre for Lebanese Studies
CNN	Cable News Network
CR	Conciliation Resources
CSD	Centre for Safety and Development
CSS	Center for Security Studies
CSM	Christian Science Monitor
CTC	Combating Terrorism Center
DMG	Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft
DW	Deutsche Welle
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
EDL	Électricité du Liban
EEZ	(Lebanese maritime) Exclusive Economic Zone
EU	European Union
FATAH (Fatah)	Ḥarakat al-Taḥrīr al-Waṭanī al-Filasṭīnī (Movement for the Liberation of Palestine)
FDD	Foundation for Defense of Democracies
FFP	The Fund for Peace
FLA	Free Lebanon Army
FP	Foreign Policy
FPM	Free Patriotic Movement (al-Tayyār al-Waṭanī al-Ḥurr)
FriEnt	Arbeitsgemeinschaft Frieden und Entwicklung
FU Berlin	Free University of Berlin
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GFP	Global Firepower

GIGA	(German) Institute of Global and Area Studies
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (formerly GTZ)
GoC	Guardians of the Cedars (al-Ḥurrās al-Arz)
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (now GIZ)
HBS (-ME)	Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (Middle East Office)
HISC	Higher Islamic Shi`i Council (al-Majlis al-Islāmī al-Shī`ī al-A`lā)
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HSS	Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung
IBT	International Business Times
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICRD	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDF	Israeli Defense Forces
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IJMES	International Journal of Middle East Studies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
inamo	Informationsprojekt Naher und Mittlerer Osten
INTRAC	International NGO Training and Research Centre
IRBC	Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
IS	Islamic State
ISIM	International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World
JBDA	Jihād al-Binā´ Development Association (Holy struggle for [re]construction)
KAS	Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
LACD	Lebanese American Council for Democracy
LAF	Lebanese Armed Forces
LAU	Lebanese American University
LBCI	Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International
LCP	Lebanese Communist Party
LCPS	Lebanese Center for Policy Studies
LDP	Lebanese Democratic Party
LF	Lebanese Forces (al-Quwwāt al-Lubnāniyya)
LNM	Lebanese National Movement
LoLA	Liberation of Lebanon Act
LoN	League of Nations
LRF	Lebanon Renaissance Foundation
LRP	Lebanese Renewal Party (Ḥizb al-Tajaddud al-Lubnāniyya)
LYM	Lebanese Youth Movement (al-Ḥarakat al-Shabab al-Lubnāniyya)
MEF	Middle East Forum
MEI	Middle East Institute
MEIB	Middle East Intelligence Bulletin

MEM	Middle East Mirror
MEMRI TV	Middle East Media Research Institute – TV Monitor Project (MEMRI TV)
MERIP	Middle East Research and Information Project
MKL	Maroun al-Khouri Group
ML	Maronite League (al-Marūn al-Lijān)
MNF	Multinational Force
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NCR	National Catholic Reporter
NDC	National Dialogue Committee
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NLP	National Liberal Party (Ḥizb al-Waṭanī al-Aḥrār)
NNA	National News Agency
NOW	New Opinion Workshop
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PIJ	Palestinian Islamic Jihad
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PNO	Popular Nasserist Organization
PSP	Progressive Socialist Party (Ḥizb al-Taqaddumī al-Ishtirāqī)
RLS	Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung
SAF	Syrian Armed Forces
SALSRA	Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act
SLA	South Lebanese Army (Jaish Lubnān al-Janūbī)
SOLIDE	Support of Lebanese in Detention and Exile
SSNP	Syrian Social Nationalist Party
STL	(UN) Special Tribunal for Lebanon
SWP	Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UN-ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency (for Palestine refugees in the Near East)
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UPI	United Press International
USCfL	United States Committee for a free Lebanon
USDT	US Department of the Treasury
USEK	Holy Spirit University of Kaslik
USGS	US Geological Survey
ZLA	Zgharta Liberation Army (Zgharta Jaish al-Taḥrīr)

iv. Map of Lebanon


Lebanon
International boundary
Governorate (mohafazat) boundary
National capital
Governorate (mohafazat) capital
Railroad
Expressway
Road
0 15 Kilometers
0 15 Miles
Lambert Conformal Conic Projection, SP 33 10N/34 30N
Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative.
SYRIA
Hims
Al Ḩamīdīyah
Tall Kalakh
An Nahr al Kabīr
Al Bīrah
Qoubaiyat
Halba
Al 'Abdah
Al Quşayr
Funaydiq
El Mîna
Al Minyah
Tripoli
Zghartâ
Sîr ad Dinniyah
Hermel
LIBAN-NORD
Qaa
Chekka
Sib'il
Kûsbâ
Ihdin
Amioun
Batroûn
Bcharré
Douma
Al Labwah
'Aynātā
Orontes
Jbail
Qartaba
Al Aqurah
Nahr Ibrahim
Mediterranean Sea
BÉQAA
Bekaa Valley
Baalbeck
An Nabk
Joûnié
MONT-LIBAN
Bikfaïya
Beirut
Anţilyās
BEYROUTH
Brummānā
Baabda
Zahlé
Rayak
Hammâna
Aley
Chtaura
Al Biqā'
Damour
'Anjar
Az Zabadānī
Al Quţayfah
Beit ed Dîne
Barja
SYRIA
Joub Jannine
Sidon
Ad Dimās
Dūmā
Qaraaoun
Jezzîne
Damascus
Ez Zahrâni
EJ JNOUB
Rachaïya
Buhayrat al 'Utaybah
Qaţanā
'Ansâr
Nabatîyé
Marjayoûn
Chebaâ (Shab'â)
Nahr al A'waj
Al Kiswah
Nahr el Lîtâni
NABATÎYÉ
Tyre
EJ JNOUB
Sa'sa'
Bāniyās
UNDOF Zone
Hûla
Tibnîne
Qiryat Shemona
Bent Jbail
Burrāq
Naqoura
Al Qunayţirah
GOLAN HEIGHTS (Israeli occupied)
Rmaich
1949 Armistice Line
'Alma
Aş Şanamayn
Nahariyya
Tarshîhâ
Gadot
Aş Şawarah aş Şughrá
ISRAEL
Zefat
Jordan
35°00'
35°30'
36°00'
36°30'
34°30'
34°00'
33°30'
33°00'

Base 802857AI (C00059) 5-02

(mapcruzin.com 2002)

v. Summary

At the intersection of political science, history and social anthropology, this dissertation asks for the givens and conditions of inter-communal cooperation in the ethnically-plural setting of Lebanon. It explores the social base of the party alliance between the mainly Maronite Christian Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) and the Shi`i Muslim Hizbullah ("Party of God"), which began in 2006, upon their leaders signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). It analyzes the formation of this alliance against the historical background of Maronite-Shi`i relations in the area of modern Lebanon since the late 7th century, portrays its development and effects and reconstructs the social microstructure and the motives of supporters. The core period of investigation extends from May 2005 until May 2018, covering the time of the FPM-Hizbullah alliance (including the preceding phase of consultations) up until the 2018 Lebanese general elections (including their immediate aftermath).

As of the 1960s, Shi`i actors gradually created a new Lebanese national narrative that countered the prevailing Maronite centered nationalist discourse. After the Lebanese Civil War (1975-90), this included especially Hizbullah. With the Syrian army present in huge parts of the country, the power relations had, for the first time in modern Lebanon, shifted in favor of the Shi`i community. Now, their counter-hegemonic activism received both Syrian and official Lebanese support. The formerly privileged Maronite community now comprised most opposition and thus experienced the exact opposite scenario. Since the Syrian withdrawal in 2005, however, the self-styled secular Christians of the FPM – notorious for their staunch opposition to Syrian tutelage – and the "pro-Syrian" armed Islamists of Hizbullah formed a previously unthinkable alliance that groups together huge sections of the Lebanese Shi`a and Maronites alongside other Christians. It withstood the storms of the 2006 July War (Israel vs. Hizbullah/ Lebanon) and the spillover effects of the civil war in neighboring Syria (2011–) in which Hizbullah is openly involved since 2013. This requires us to rethink notions, depicting inter-community relations in the region as a pervasive zero-sum game of sectarian make-up.

This dissertation argues that the alliance and the outcomes it yielded on the inter-communal and inter-personal levels challenge persistent assumptions about the conflict-prone coexistence of religious communities in Lebanon and in the wider Middle East. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the findings disclose a sphere of the social in Lebanon which neither sectarianism nor clientelism have ever successfully penetrated. The theoretical framework applied captures this sphere within the "field of inter-community relations," under recourse to the field theory of Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002).

1. INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2006, the relative calm along the “Blue Line” – the demarcation separating the national territories of Lebanon and Israel – was interrupted with a blow. In a renewed attempt to release Lebanese prisoners from Israeli jails, in the morning hours of July 12th, the Lebanese Islamic Resistance (al-Muqāwamah al-Islāmiyya); the military apparatus of the Shi`i Lebanese political and military organization Hizbullah ([lit.:] *Ḥizb Allāh* – “Party of God”), ambushed an Israeli military patrol on the Israeli-claimed side of the Blue Line in the Sheb`a farms area, captured two Israeli soldiers and killed three more. When the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) followed the assailants into Lebanese territory to rescue their abducted soldiers, five more Israelis got killed. To the surprise of informed observers – and explicitly to the Hizbullah leadership itself (Hassan Nasrallah on New TV 2006, quoted after Noe 2007, pp. 378, 388–94; Guardian 28/8/2006) – Israel´s government immediately reacted with a full-scale war against Hizbullah and Lebanon by land, air and sea.

The declared aims of Tel Aviv were to free the two missing soldiers, get back the bodies of those Israelis killed during the operation, and destroy Hizbullah´s military capacities once and for all so that it could not pose a threat to Israel’s security anymore. There was speculation amongst Lebanese, however, that among the undeclared aims of the heavy warfare against civilian targets, Israel intended to dispel hundreds of thousands of Shi`i inhabitants from South Lebanon into the main settlement areas of other confessional groups – notably of Christians – in order to create internal friction with sectarian overtones. Lebanon is known for its particularly diverse population and is regularly described as a “deeply divided society” (e.g. Rosiny 2016, pp. 485–6; Salamey 2009, pp. 84–5). Accordingly, the reasoning behind this plan, as it was assumed in Lebanon (Centre for Lebanese Studies [CLS] 2007, p. 16; Zurayk 2011, p. 7) and partially beyond,[1] was to create or aggravate tensions by the continuous presence of Shi`i internally displaced people in residential areas mainly inhabited by Maronite and Orthodox Christians, Sunni Muslims, Druze or others. Such tensions would have weakened national unity; Hizbullah would have been blamed for this and subsequently would have decreased influence and stature in Lebanon.

---

[1] Veteran investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, referring to information he said to have received from a “senior U.S. government consultant with close ties to Israel,” phrased it as follows: “Israel believed that, by targeting Lebanon’s infrastructure, including highways, fuel depots, and even the civilian runways at the main Beirut airport, it could persuade Lebanon’s large Christian and Sunni populations to turn against Hezbollah.” (Seymour Hersh in: The New Yorker 13/8/2006)

However, Israel´s leadership and many observers did not take into account a development which had only recently led to increased cooperation between Hizbullah – one of the two major Shi`i parties in Lebanon and one with close links to the Iranian and Syrian governments – and al-Tayyār al-Waṭanī al-Ḥurr (Free Patriotic Movement [FPM]) – a party representing mainly Lebanese Christians, especially Maronites. The FPM is also widely known as "al-Tayyār al-`Aūniyya" (the "Aounist movement") and its followers as *"`Aūniyoun"* (or *"`Aūniyeen"* in Lebanese dialect) ("Aounists"), in reference to its paramount founding father; retired General Michel Aoun (1933-). The latter had fought an unsuccessful "War of Liberation" (1989-1990) against Syria at the end of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-90) and was subsequently forced into extended French exile (1991-2005). He returned to Lebanon in early May 2005, only a few days after the Syrians had completed their enforced withdrawal, where he soon engaged into covert negotiations with Hizbullah. Taking everyone by surprise, the outcome of these was the public signing on February 6th, 2006 of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the FPM and Hizbullah (FPM/ Hizbullah 2006, quoted after Yalibnan.com 9/2/2006).[2]

Under these circumstances, despite all of the strains brought up by the displacement crisis of 2006, many Shi`a were warmly received in Christian homes and by local governmental, civil society and community institutions. To be sure, the increasing convergence between the FPM and Hizbullah alone cannot explain the overall rather brotherly reception of the fleeing Southerners. It remains, nonetheless, safe to say that the MoU had a profound impact on the general mood towards them.

Immediately after the hostilities ended, Hizbullah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah (1960-) voiced a call asking those who had fled the bombardment to swiftly return home. In response, nearly all people left their refuges at once and headed back even to their damaged and destroyed homes in the South. Crucially, this "orderly withdrawal" prevented a situation in which the annual summer school holidays would have ended while schools would not have started to operate because their facilities had served as shelters for internally displaced Lebanese – a scenario feared by many, given the known sensitivities of parents in regard to their children´s undisturbed education. The MoU between the FPM and Hizbullah had thus passed its first test satisfactorily. Many more were to come, and contrary to widespread expectation of a short-lived agreement, the rapprochement of the two parties intensified and became a full-fledged alliance that experienced ups and downs but remains intact at the time of this writing.

---

[2] See Appendix for the full text of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Hizbullah and the Free Patrotic Movement as translated by Joseph Hitti.

In October 2016, a decade after signing the MoU, Michel Aoun became president of the Lebanese Republic – a post traditionally reserved for a Maronite Christian. In his inauguration speech, the former General remarked: “As for the conflict with Israel, we shall spare no effort and no resistance to liberate the remaining occupied Lebanese territories, and protect our country from an enemy which still covets our land, water and natural resources.” (Aoun 2016a) Similarly, on the occasion of Lebanon´s 73rd Independence Day, November 21st, 2016, Aoun stated:

> “We have brothers and sisters, citizens who live in the border areas, from North to South, forming the first shield for the protection of Lebanon. We must grant them a special attention, to develop their towns and villages, developing our rural areas, promoting the bonds that link their residents to the state, which consolidates national unity and reduces land migration.” (Aoun 2016b)

Both of these statements entail not only an implicit acknowledgment of the Shi`i communities´ belonging to the Lebanese nation-state but also an unequivocal reference to Hizbullah and the legitimacy of its armed struggle against Israel. With respect to the latter, President Aoun became even more outspoken when, in February 2017, he described “the resistance army [i.e. Hizbullah] as a complement to the Lebanese army's actions” and furthermore explained, that the “resistance’s arms are not contrary to the state project” but form “an essential part of Lebanon’s defense.” (Aoun 2017)[3] This is important because critics of Hizbullah often cite the group’s bearing of arms as proof of its disloyalty to the state, constituting an extra-national militia (Badran 2009, pp. 56–7). Hizbullah, in turn, replies that its arms are necessary to defend the state against Israel (FPM/ Hizbullah 2006, quoted after Yalibnan.com 9/2/2006), the weakly equipped Lebanese army being unable to do so.

The Lebanese Republic (al-Jumhūriyyah al-Lubnāniyyah) is located in the eastern Mediterranean, bordering Syria to its north and east and Palestine/ Israel to the south. With a population of about 6.8 Million (2018) (Statistisches Bundesamt 2019) and a territory accounting for 10.452 km², Lebanon is the smallest sovereign state on mainland Asia. Its current boundaries date back to 1920 when France was granted a League of Nations (LoN) Mandate for the formerly Ottoman controlled Arab territory identified broadly as “Syria,” which included modern Lebanon. Lebanon´s constitution of 1926 was last amended in 1999.

---

[3] Excerpts from an interview Michel ‘Aoun gave to the Capital Broadcasting Center (CBC) on February 12th, 2017. Quoted after Al-Monitor 3/3/2017.

The country formally gained independence in 1943, while the last French troops and bureaucrats pulled out only in 1946 (Traboulsi 2007, pp. 75, 107–13, 249). The young nation-state was among the founding members of the United Nations (UN) in 1945 and it constitutes the oldest democracy in the Middle East. At the same time, it comprises a religiously highly diverse population.

Lebanon´s political system, a consociational model of a power-sharing democracy, officially recognizes eighteen different confessional groups. It is characterized by an important role for the political elites and a large margin for their bargaining which aims to reach consensus (Lijphart 1977; Hanf 1990, pp. 98–102). The Lebanese power-sharing arrangement is known as "political confessionalism" (*al-ṭā´ifiyya al-siyāsiyya).* It is foremost intended to avert civil strife and disencourage attempts at mutual domination, especially from among the three major communities (Shiite and Sunni Muslims and Maronite Christians). However, in interplay with Lebanon´s traditional *laissez-faire* economy as well as widespread structures of clientelism, nepotism and corruption, the system has also contributed to rising income disparities and massive inequality (Turkmani 2018). Moreover, the religious and/ or confessional belonging of Lebanese citizens is enshrined by birth and thus constitutes a prime marker of their formal identity which naturally comes with implications for national cohesion.

Against this background, Lebanon is frequently cited as a vivid example of Middle Eastern "sectarianism." (e.g. Patterson 2013, Habib 2009, Salamey 2009) In more empirical terms, it is moreover portrayed not only as a Christian center of gravity in the Middle East but also as a bastion of Shi`i- and to a lesser extent Sunni-Muslim Islamists, some of which are considered terrorists by Israel, the USA, other Western powers and the Gulf states (Sakmani 2016, p. 164). The mere idea of a huge section of the Lebanese Christians allying with one of exactly these Islamist groups – let alone with one that proudly claims the best of relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, openly fights Israel, and is considered the world´s "A-Team of terrorism" by the US (Byman 2003, p. 55) – usually sparks expressions of disbelief in those parts of the world and in such circles far off from the Lebanese political and cultural milieus.

The FPM-Hizbullah *entente* was initially met with astonishment in Lebanon too, especially because it brought together Damascus´ former nemesis (Michel Aoun) and one of its prime clients (Hizbullah). Moreover, the respective party bases´ lifestyles and especially their milieus seemed highly contrasting; the Shi`i-Islamist (pious, "pro-armed struggle," "pro-Iranian," "anti-Western," etc.) milieu vs. a "secular" Christian ("nonviolent," "liberal-democratic," "pro-Western," etc.) one. Historically, the Maronites, with French sponsorship, had entered modern Lebanon in a privileged socio-economic and political position (Daher

2016, p. 10). The Shi`i community, in contrast, started out as the most marginalized of all (Shaery 2008, p. 23). Whereas this situation began to gradually change as of the 1960s, the Shi`a kept their lower status well into the 1980´s. In self-portrayal as in mutual perception, however, the Shi`a largely continue to appear as belonging to the economic and cultural underclass (Deeb 2006, p. 11) and the Maronites to the avant-garde (Shaery 2008, pp. 40–49; Author´s interv. CC.S.2 2013).

To understand the actual depth and far-reaching implications of this situation, it makes sense to look into the case of "Mariam H.," a 37-year-old Shi`i woman from the "far South" (close to the Blue Line). Born to a Maronite mother and a Shi`i father, "Mariam H." underwent a strictly "Maronite education," has been baptized, received her communion and generally grew up as a Maronite (by her own account, however, the parents were not particularly religious). The Maronite side of the family strongly condemned the marriage with a Shi`i, thus forcing the spouses to emigrate, whereas they later returned with their children to settle in Beirut. The mother of "Mariam H.," like her family, was staunchly anti-Shi`a, frequently depicting them as "dirty pigs" or in similar derogatory terms, also in the presence of the father (who "always kept silent"). When turning eighteen, however, "Mariam H." decided to become a Shi`i and herewith, in her own words, also a "dirty pig." She explained to the author that the reality of Maronite-Shi`i relations poses a strong burden for her as these have rendered her life "contemptuous." The Shi`a, she said, are truly the "*maḥrūmīn*" (the disenfranchised), yet finally are self-responsible for this situation, as they were indeed "dirty pigs, merely wallowing in their own filth." Among the "privileged" Maronites, on the other hand, she always sensed "a very destructive energy, mortifying all that is not them." (Author´s interv. CC.S.2 2013)

In line with these perceptions, "Mariam H." credited Amal and Hizbullah with the empowerment of the Shi`a, which "the people needed so desperately," and which she saw as a precondition for the current alliance "with the Maronites." At the same time, however, she deemed the form of this empowerment "neither good for the country, nor for the Shia," arguing that it was mainly based on the military strength of Hizbullah which was ultimately not sustainable. The FPM-Hizbullah alliance appeared "absolutely implausible, yes, laughable" to her, because she would "not buy the Maronites´ sudden sympathies for the Shi`a." When the circumstances changed and the immediate political advantages of appeasing the Shi`a disappeared, "the Maronites," she said, "will turn against the Shi`a again." (Ibid.) This example of "Mariam H.," of course, constitutes a special case and her subjective political opinion is not representative. It yet vividly illustrates what is at stake in contemporary

Maronite-Shi` relations, shedding light on the imagined contradictions, disparities, and invisible borders that accompany them.

All these oppositions, however, were jointly disregarded and overstepped by the top leaders of the FPM and Hizbullah on February 6th, 2006. With short-term honeymoons for short-term (e.g. electoral) purposes between otherwise unlikely partners being rather the norm in Lebanon, it was hardly surprising that this *alliánce contre náture*, as it appeared to many, initially came to be viewed as but another standard Lebanese "marriage of opportunity."[4] The bulk of explanatory approaches that have come about since thus remain limited to the identification of a) opportunistic motives supposedly harbored by the participating political elites (Patterson 2013, p. 7) and/ or b) the same elites´ desire to forge a minority-pact between Lebanese Maronites and Shi`a in the face of regional Sunni Muslim preponderance and alleged imminence (cf. International Crisis Group [ICG] 2008b, pp. 9–10). The protagonists´ own lines of reasoning – inasmuch as they deviate from these explanations – have been broadly dismissed for supposedly constituting mere lip service (e.g. Khashan 2012; Bejjani 7/12/2006) Views of the involved party bases – the grassroots – are by and large absent altogether. The analysis at hand, and in particular the insights and impressions gained by the author from talking to supporters of both parties, however, disclose a much more complex social fabric underlying and shaping these developments, pointing to the insufficiency of conventional attempts of explanation.

1.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

1.1.1 Focus of research & central question

The epistemological interest of this study is twofold. First, it is directed to exploring and analyzing in-depth the so-far unresearched case of Maronite-Shi`i relations in the geographical area of modern Lebanon in both its historical and its contemporary dimensions. Secondly, it is also aimed at gaining a more nuanced understanding of the role and agency of "common citizens," besides that of the "elites,"[5] in shaping the conditions of inter- and intra-community relations within the ethnically-plural setting of Lebanon. The main underlying rationale is to draw conclusions about their relevance/ irrelevance in the corresponding societal processes. Do they have an active role or merely a passive one? Do they follow their community leaders "blindly," or on what basis do they take their political choices? Thus, against the background of the historical development of Maronite-Shi`i relations in proto- and modern Lebanon (part I), the work at hand asks for the motives and patterns of meaning-making underlying the grassroots support for the contemporary alliance between the overwhelmingly Maronite/ Christian FPM and the Shi`i Muslim Hizbullah (part II), as expressed by members of both party´s bases. The historical excursus reaches back to the earliest traceable encounters of Maronites and Shi`a in the area considered and closes with the post-Civil War (1975-90) era, i.e. the 1990s and early 2000s. The main period of investigation, meanwhile, extends from May 2005 to May 2018, covering most of the running time of the FPM-Hizbullah alliance thus far, including the developments leading up to it.

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[4] The political system – "political confessionalism" or "sectarianism" – enforces cross-confessional political alliances, as the political parties have to come up with election lists that roughly reflect the confessional balance of a given voting district (in communal elections) or of the country altogether (in parliamentary elections). In communal elections, this frequently leads to declared political opponents forming lists together in areas where both have a strong following within their respective community. In parliamentary elections, the outcome often consists in such opponents forming governments together.

[5] For the theoretical foundations of this dichotomy see section 1.1.4 Methodology.

1.1.2 Working hypothesis

"Common citizens;" the parties´ grassroots, have an important share in the alliance, as it could not persist without their support. Especially the upwardly-mobile middle class sections of both parties´ followers share a whole number of concerns and interests and have thus palpable reasons – that go beyond mere clientelist considerations – to not only grant their support to the rapprochement but to actively participate in it.

1.1.3 Objectives

This dissertation aims at filling significant gaps in research on Lebanon by delivering the required empirical data. This concerns Shi`i-Maronite relations in historical perspective and in particular the contemporary FPM-Hizbullah alliance alongside the repercussions of more intense encounters between Maronites and Shi`a, such as during the internal refugee crisis of 2006 and a joint protest camp staged by the FPM and Hizbullah between 2006 and 2008. It seeks to revisit a number of prevalent, yet highly questionable, axioms concerning Lebanon and inter-community relations in ethnically-plural societies. These include the handed-down perceptions of the communities as antagonists *per se*, and of the individual Lebanese citizens as politically immature and/ or their political thinking as irrelevant. This study also tackles the active or passive negation of a Shi`i role in the emergence of modern Lebanon, as well as assumptions about the limits of Muslim-Christian coexistence.

The conceptual approach applied is designed to shed light on aspects of the social reality in the multi-confessional setting of Lebanon that otherwise remained undiscovered, thus adding a fresh perspective. The results generated allow for careful generalizations and contribute to the larger debates on the conditions of inter-community relations in ethnically plural settings.

1.1.4 Methodology

1.1.4.1 Theoretical considerations

One core aspect of the methodology concerns the theoretical distinction between members of the involved "elites" as opposed to "common citizens." This particular discrimination is actually quite problematic because, always depending on which field and forms of capital the focus rests, someone allocated to the "elite" in one field, in following the same logic consistently, must be counted to the "common citizenry" in others. Moreover, the different thinkable constellations are numerous. Someone belonging to the sports elite, for instance, must not belong to the economic elite of his or her country, even if, as we all know, such cases are not rare either. However, not all forms of capital (Bourdieu 1983) are equally convertible in real life so that, in fact, a hierarchy is discernible among the various elites. Given the salient conditions in the contemporary world, economic capital is the one with the highest degree of convertibility. Most importantly, it allows for access to education (cultural capital) or simply for leisure time that can in turn be invested into making or keeping relations (social capital) (ibid., pp. 186, 196–99). Thus, even though hardly any stable border could be drawn between both categories ("elites"/ "common citizens"), the distinction nonetheless becomes sharper the higher one reaches in the identified hierarchy.

"Elites" are to be distinguished further by their discipline or branch and it might occasionally make sense to also allocate them to categories such as gender, age, origin or religion. Yet, no matter in which of these scenarios, the highest political and military leaders of a given country usually also belong to its economic elite and vice versa. We can moreover observe a frequent intermingling of the latter with the eminent and landed families, with the super-rich, with the most successful celebrities (including athletes) and with the chief executives of large corporations and financial institutions. All of these groups feed into what C. Wright Mills famously designated the "power elite," ultimately concentrated in the political, military and economic domains (Mills 1956, pp. 1–6). Its most salient feature is not constituted by the economic status of the actors included in this equation, which in fact varies significantly, but by their very ability to free decision-making on a level which concerns many or even most people in a given societal setting. In the words of Mills himself, "[t]he power elite is composed of men whose positions enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women; they are in positions to make decisions having major consequences." (Ibid., pp. 3–4)

For example, in the present study, the author has included interviews conducted with mid-range functionaries of both relevant parties, whom he had originally pre-allocated to the category of "elite," because it was assumed that their perspectives and insights must be quite similar to that of their superiors. However, it turned out that most of them did not want – or, presumably, did not feel fully entitled – to make clear official statements on behalf of their respective organizations. Moreover, besides their particular function and corresponding insight into one of the relevant parties, they were not categorically distinguishable from those people grouped as "common" or "ordinary citizens." This even goes for their economic status, which varied more or less on the same scale, only that, unlike the "common citizens," the mid-range functionaries did not encompass anyone belonging to the "lower class" in either perceived or empirical terms. A consequent reconsideration of this aspect resulted in the following categories and interview-groupings applied.

First of all, the application of the dualism "elites"/ "common citizens" merely serves to technically separate these categories of interviewees and has no significant relevance beyond that within the theoretical framework of the overall analysis. "Elite" thereby means those in power (Mills 1956 pp. 1–6; Bourdieu 1998, p. 52) in the sense described above. The "common" or "ordinary citizen" is then, quite simply, everybody not belonging to the former group. With regard to the interviewees, "elites" are thus those people yielding substantial political decision-making power within their respective party. All others are categorized as "common citizens," no matter if they belong to one of the relevant party bases (this includes medium- and lower-level functionaries, ordinary members, declared followers lacking membership and mere electoral supporters) or not.

To tackle the contradiction that emerges with regard to the mid-range functionaries having insider knowledge comparable to that of the top leaders on the one hand but lacking the latter's sovereignty in decision-making on the other hand, a third, crosscutting category has been introduced; that of the "insider experts." Their statements and testimonies are evaluated twofold, always depending on the issue at hand. Finally, there is also the category of "academic experts," i.e. external academics specializing in the topics of relevance here, which, however, applies only to one interviewee included.

Closely related to the elite-citizens dichotomy and also of relevance for the methodology is the category of class. We are investigating a subject in which the perceptions of the people involved are of major relevance and this includes their subjective perceptions of their own social position and ranking. There are yet some structural social markers that are just too important to ignore, even if this may infringe on what the concerned people themselves say or think. This pertains in particular to a) income, b) education, and c) those kinds of cultural and social capital one can normally not acquire in a lifetime but only inherit, such as intimate relations to members of the power elite, nobility, or distinct tastes related to the "higher circles." (Bourdieu 1998, pp. 20–3; ibid. 2012, pp. 104–15)

In light of these givens and requirements resulting thereof, the class definition decided for and operated throughout this work is a slightly modified three-stratum model, encompassing the grand categories "upper," "middle" and "lower class." The upper class is understood as largely resembling Mills´ aforementioned "power elite." (Mills, 1956, pp. 1–6) The lower class is delimited upwardly through either lacking higher (or even basic) formal education and/ or the absence of a "sufficient" regular income, i.e. high enough to cover the basic costs of living of an individual, a married couple or a small family respectively.[6] The middle class is the broadest of these three categories. It is delimited downwardly by a "sufficient" regular income[7] and the criteria of higher formal education. Thus, it includes all those that are able to participate in public life (including the educational sector and leisure activities) and to cover their monthly expenditures without facing extraordinary difficulties. Given the immense discrepancies that persist within this definition of "middle class" in terms of economic, social and/ or cultural capital, the category is further divided into the subcategories of "lower" and "upper" middle class. At times, it is furthermore differentiated according to the marker of mobility orientation ("descending" vs. "upwardly mobile"). In any case, the middle class is upwardly delimited by its members´ lack of both the freedom and the influence of the "power elite" to make decisions of major consequence for a larger group of people.

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[6] Laithy et al. have defined the "upper poverty line" for Lebanon at 4 USD/ day and the "lower poverty line" (applicable to people that are not able to meet their daily food needs and are thus to be categorized as "extremely poor") at 2.40 USD/ day (Laithy et al. 2008, pp. 4 –5). Based on these marks and further data, a 2016 research report on poverty and inequality in Lebanon concludes that "a typical household with five members needs an income of $7,300/ year to lead a dignified life that is above the upper poverty line, and at least $4,380/ year to protect them from extreme poverty." (Kukrety/ Al Jamal 2016, p. 8)

[7] That is more than 4 USD/ day or about 1,460 USD/ year for an individual and more than 7,300 USD/ year for a five-member household (Kukrety/ Al Jamal 2016, p. 8). To be sure, however, the interviewees questioned for the sake of this study have not been asked about the exact amount of their annual income but only about their living conditions and circumstances (family background, education, work, etc.) and, most importantly, where they would situate themselves. This is because what counts for the matter at hand, as explained earlier, is mainly their perception.

1.1.4.2 Data generation

The empirical study at hand is theory-guided and follows a qualitative research design. The main intent is not to produce representative results but to reconstruct socially-shared meanings (Hollstein 2003, pp. 35–38) by theoretically generalizing qualitative findings in a way that is controlled and transparent. The methods applied are of an equally qualitative nature. Besides making extensive use of documents – including important quantitative data on Lebanon and its populace –, earlier interviews conducted by the author in Lebanon since 2005, secondary literature and also local and international news coverage, subject-specific empirical data was gained primarily through a series of twenty-two semi-structured in-depth[8] interviews or group interviews with twenty-four interviewees, conducted between 2012 and 2018.[9] Of the twenty-four interviewees, fourteen are "common citizens" from different regions of the country that feel represented by the allied parties[10] – six Shi`i Muslims and one Orthodox Christian supportive of Hizbullah and six Maronite Christians as well as one Shi`i Muslim supporting the FPM respectively. As a crosscheck, four interviews – with two Shi`a and two Maronites respectively – have been conducted with "common citizens" that are not explicitly among the followers nor generally supportive of either Hizbullah or the FPM.

In order to understand the circumstances of the initial evolution of the alliance, its internal and external conditions and its general perception from an elite perspective, five interviews have been conducted with senior representatives of the involved or otherwise concerned parties; two with high-level party functionaries from Hizbullah; former politburo member, Ghaleb Abou Zaynab, and former Minister of Labor, Trad Hamadeh and one from the FPM; former Minister of Energy and Water, Cesar Abou Khalil, one with a leading Maronite political opponent; the head of the Ḥizb al-Waṭanī al-Aḥrār (National Liberal Party [NLP]), Dory Chamoun and one with a high-level representative of the Maronite Patriarchate; *Monsignor* (Bishop) Samir Mazloum. Furthermore, with respect to their insider knowledge, three of the “common citizens” are marked out as “insider experts” as they are in fact medium-level party functionaries; one in Hizbullah and two in the FPM. Aside from these, one “academic expert” interview has been conducted with a social scientist from Lebanon (Amal Dibo, senior instructor in the Civilization Sequence Program at the American University of Beirut [AUB] and a renowned peace activist).

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[8] The only exception is one interview with a Shi'i supporter of the MoU, which has been conducted in the midst of the interviewee´s work and only lasted for about 15 minutes, while all other interviews took between 75 and 120 minutes and in some cases even longer.

[9] In Lebanon, an interview quickly develops into a group interview, if friends or relatives of the interviewee are present. For the case at hand, such instances represent especially favorable opportunities, as subjective meanings here, are strongly interspersed with social relations.

[10] Followership or at least general support of one of the relevant parties has to be explicit. Party membership is not cogent.

Except for the aforementioned academic, the high level representatives and one of those grouped as “common citizens” – Ghazi Robert Aad (1957-2016) – who, in contrast to the others in this category, has been a figure of public life in post-Civil War Lebanon (see below); all interviewees´ names, and occasionally also further identifying details, have been, at their request, changed for the sake of protecting their privacy. The interviewees have been selected in the first place for their attitude towards one or both of the parties and/ or belonging to one of the communities of relevance here. The author started his inquiry by approaching people he knew, explaining his research and asking them to be introduced to persons that would broadly match his criteria. Once this process had begun, one interview partner would put him in contact with another and so on (the “Snowball method”). Interventions into this process were staged only to ensure a diversity of regional perspectives in the final sample.

Nearly all interviewees identified themselves as members of the middle class. They furthermore either located themselves in the lower middle class or did not specify. Nobody – including those categorized by the author as “elites” – explicitly counted him or herself to the upper-middle class, let alone to the upper class. Only four interviewees identified themselves or were clearly identifiable as belonging to the lower class. This included three Shi`a – two of them artists, with regular output and a notable degree of local fame, the third a fisherman by profession – and the one Orthodox Christian – also a fisherman. All lacked a formal higher education and were without regular income, forced to look for new job opportunities on a daily basis and thus affected by chronic economic hardship. Against the background of this stratification, the bulk of what the interviewees had to say, with respect to the central topics, must be categorized as being reflective of the thinking prevalent amongst the middle class sections of the parties´ bases (and partially beyond).

1.1.4.3 Data evaluation and procedure

The data generated through the entirety of interviews constitutes the basis for verifying the working hypothesis and answering the central research question. Guided by the central epistemological interest of this study, it has been evaluated with respect to one or more of three distinct aspects; a) individual memories that help to close gaps in our knowledge and understanding of Shi`i-Maronite relations in historical perspective, especially with respect to the Civil War years and the post-war era, both of which have been personally witnessed by many of the author´s interlocutors, b) expert and/ or insider knowledge and background information on the communities, actors, the MoU and the alliance in focus, and, most importantly, c) insights into the political thinking, motivations, perceptions, interests, needs and values of altogether twenty-three concerned Lebanese citizens respectively.

The interviews´ general structure featured sections common to both of the main categories of interviewees ("common citizens"/ "elites") and specific sections pertinent to each one of them, rendering these internally comparable. It was designed to allow for a swift division of answers into topical sections – as specified by the headings of chapters and subchapters respectively – and the testing criteria applied each comply with the specific subject in question. As regarding the aspects a) and b), the different descriptions or memories expressed by the author´s interlocutors were – and necessarily had to be – taken for face value; simply because all of them alike, irrespective of their background, are naturally experts with respect to this particular content (their own subjective memories). The concerns or political preferences and the perceptions of significance for the central aspect c) are not necessarily expressed directly by the narrators, nor are these always aware of them. While their overt political positions can be simply adopted from accordant statements, gaining a more comprehensive understanding of their personal motivations for the alliance requires interpretation. To this end, the author relied on their explicitly or implicitly-stated ideas about the state and society, democracy, justice, freedom and personal security (this includes fears), on their assessment of the political system in force, clientelism and corruption, concepts of friend and enemy, feelings of victimhood, perceived impotence or empowerment and triumph. To make sense of such uttered thoughts – and to understand their partially codified meaning – necessitates their sufficient contextualization through a precise context analysis (Fröhlich/ Rehbein 2009, p. 223) which will be delivered step by step in this manuscript, embedded within the overall structure.

We will now first turn to a discussion of the theoretical concepts applied alongside their operationalization and thereafter to a description of the general background and state of the art. From here, we will proceed to the central analysis, which comes in two parts; part I deals with Shi`i-Maronite relations in Lebanon in historical perspective. Against this background, part II covers the MoU of 2006 and the contemporary alliance between Hizbullah and the FPM, with a special focus on its social basis. This is followed by a summarizing analysis of all intermediate findings and a final conclusion.

1.1.5 Theoretical framework

The central theoretical framework applied is provided by some basic components of Pierre Bourdieu´s sociology. The main emphasis is on his field theory, which is inseparable from his broader theory of action (Fröhlich/ Rehbein 2009, pp. 99–103). Because of their special significance for society, community relations in Lebanon display all features that qualify them for applying the theoretical construction of a "field of forces" (Bourdieu 1998, p. 49). First of all, they constitute a sphere of societal infightings, fought by the participants for forms of capital of high value within this particular field. Secondly, a largely unwritten body of rules is "in force" and incorporated by the field participants in the form of their *habitus*. The latter, to Bourdieu, are basically "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations," which are in turn the product of the "structures constitutive for a particular type of environment." (Bourdieu 1977, p. 72) Our *habitus*, accordingly, enables us to cope with ever changing situations and allows us to act and function best within the social setting – i.e. structures, the segments of which correspond to the different fields of relevance in a given case (Fröhlich/ Rehbein 2009, pp. 100) – we have been nurtured in. A given field is finally generated through the participants´ belief in the validity of the body of rules and the value of the contested forms of capital (Bourdieu 2004, S. 123). Shi`i-Maronite relations may thus be treated as a subfield, the FPM-Hizbullah alliance as a variety of "playing" according to the rules and under the conditions of these fields.

1.1.5.1 Sectarianism and Confessionalism

The Lebanese polity is sometimes cited as a textbook example for the manifestation of "sectarian" properties (Patterson 2013) that, from such a point of view, are intrinsic to most Middle Eastern societies (Rand Corporation 2019). The anthropologist Suad Joseph has lamented, as early as 1983, "a widely accepted theoretical model characterizing Middle Eastern social structure as divided into culturally different tribal, ethnic, and sectarian groups [presuming] that relationships based on trust and common values could take place only within such groups." (Joseph 1983, p. 2) It is only logical then, that Lebanon, in light of its demographic and political specificities, "became the prime Middle Eastern candidate for such models [as] 'mosaic,' 'sectarianism,' 'consociationalism,' 'confessionalism,' and 'pluralism' [all of which] explained political behavior in Lebanon as a consequence of 'rigid' ethnic-sect boundaries." (Ibid.) Elsewhere, Joseph explains how, whilst such "theoretical interventions" and "classificatory efforts" do offer insights, they nonetheless

> “often gloss over the dynamic character of political relations and the institutional frames that animate ideologies and practices locally [and have predominantly] been used to explain the 'backwardness' of Middle Eastern states, their 'lacks,' especially of democracy, civil society, rights, gender equality, and political individualism.” (Joseph 2011, pp. 150–1)

There are a number of valuable exceptions to this rule and not everything that has been concluded on the basis of the categories presented is to be dismissed either. It is not that these aspects play no role, but they are continuously overvalued. The mere fact that the latter attest of Joseph has been issued in 2011 makes it clear that not much has changed about the practice criticized in the 28 years that have passed between then and 1983 when her formerly cited work was published. Six years later, Ussama Makdisi, in a similar tone, laments how the “idea of a 'sectarian' Middle East causes far more obfuscation than illumination,” noting, “[s]ectarianism is often characterized as the violent and illiberal manifestation of competing, age-old antagonistic religious identities in the region.” (Makdisi 2017, p. 2) It is therefore not only constructed as a particular Middle Eastern antithesis to nationalism,[11] but in sum also to both “true religion” and modern civilization altogether (ibid., p. 3):

> “Typically, the term is used to denote pervasive forms of prejudice, historic solidarities, the identification with a religious or ethnic community as if it were a political party, or the systems through which political, economic, and social claims are made in multireligious and multiethnic societies [,]to indicate the favoring of one group over another, whether in hiring practices, renting, job allocation, or the distribution of state resources — that is to say, behavior akin to racial discrimination and profiling [but also] to describe sentiments that propel strident communal mobilizations, intercommunal warfare, and genocidal violence perpetrated by one group against another.” (Ibid., p. 4)

Al-ṭāʹifiyya al-siyāsiyya al-Lubnāniyya (Lebanese political confessionalism/ sectarianism) accordingly appears as mere institutionalized sectarianism, which analogously translates into formalized primordialism, i.e. backwardness.

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[11] As a proof of the persistence of such views, one may take notice of a recent analysis of Francis Fukuyama, one of the world´s most influential liberal theorists, in which he argues that the US under president Donald Trump was caught up in an identity crisis, which made it “more like the Middle East” because,“[t]he polarization of American society is so extreme that the Republican and Democratic parties resemble warring tribes that see each other as existential threats.” He furthermore explains how “politics become Middle Eastern-like the moment we begin thinking that the fixed characteristics with which we are born — race, ethnicity, gender, religion, etc. — ought to determine the way we think and act, not just about politics but across culture more generally.” (Fukuyama 2018b) Fukuyama, with proclaiming an “end of history” – in the sense that the final victory of a western-liberal democratic order was imminent, rendering ideological struggles superfluous in the future (Fukuyama 1989) – was originally at odds with the other leading liberal theorist, Samual Huntington, and his prophecy of a culture-induced “clash of civilizations.” However, Fukuyama, over the years gradually adopted Huntington´s deeply essentialist notion of “Middle East exceptionalism,” (cf. Fukuyama 2018a) claiming in short that this region and its culture (especially Islam) are particulary resistant towards western-style modernization alongside democratization and political liberalization (e.g. Lust 2011).

We cannot let out of sight the historical context in which the identification of sectarianism as a "problem" actually emerged; the colonization of the Middle East by the imperial powers in the 19th century. Seen in this light, sectarianism was primarily, "a colonial strategy of governance." (Ibid., p. 4) It is therefore not something primal or age-old, but exactly the opposite, something utmost modern. The concept of sectarianism is thus not only heavily charged but also essentialist and anachronistic.

Merely labeling the system (i.e. translating "*ṭāʹifiyya"* as) "confessionalism" instead of "sectarianism" – as done throughout this work – can certainly not undo the distorting meanings largely applied to it. It nonetheless serves to categorically distinguish between the subjects of Lebanese political confessionalism on the one hand and of the broader and much more diffuse concept of sectarianism on the other hand.

1.1.5.2 Inter-communal conflict

For the analysis and classification of inter-group conflict, this dissertation takes recourse to Georg Simmel´s sociology of conflict (Simmel 1964). Simmel was the first to argue for an understanding of conflict as a necessity for social development, and as generally geared towards achieving unity between the diverging parts (the conflicting actors):

> „[C]onflict – after all one of the most vivid interactions, which, furthermore, cannot possibly be carried out by one individual alone – must certainly be considered as sociation. [D]issociating factors – hate, envy, need, desire – are the causes of conflict. It breaks out because of them. Conflict is thus designed to resolve divergent dualisms; it is a way of achieving […] unity." (Simmel 1964, p. 13)

Simmel distinguishes between different subtypes of conflict; "pure conflict" on the one hand (ibid., pp. 34-55), and "competition" on the other hand (ibid., pp. 57-85). The main difference between them lies in the very nature of the matter in dispute. Whereas in pure conflict one of the conflicting parties is in control over what the other side wants, in competition scenarios the prize of the fight is not in the hands of either adversary. Thus, competition, according to Simmel, is always an indirect type of conflict. There are yet two different forms in which competition manifests. In one form, the competitors use their strength on each other while in the other, "each competitor by himself aims at the goal, without using his strength on the adversary." (Ibid., pp. 58)

When looking at most internal political conflicts in Lebanon between (mostly community-based) parties and groups, they usually take the form of competition rather than of pure conflict. Because of the Lebanese power-sharing arrangement, the state and its revenues – the major prizes in the competition between the Lebanese communities – were at no times under sole control of one community. As an example, we may refer to the Lebanese Civil War (1975-90). True, in its initial phase, predominantly Muslim militias fought predominantly Christian militias. The Muslim actors thereby aimed at gaining what Christian – predominantly Maronite – elites had relatively more of; political power and privileges, while Christian militias defended their communities´ status quo. Yet, despite this obvious mismatch to the advantage of the Christians, the prize was still not completely in the hands of either adversary, as the Muslims, while lacking behind, were by no means deprived of political power and privileges altogether. However, the most destructive conflicts of the war, in which Lebanese battled Lebanese,[12] occurred as intra- and not inter-communal violence. Among the Shi`i parties, Harakat Amal (Amal Movement)[13] fought Hizbullah and among the Maronite/ Christian actors al-Quwwāt al-Lubnāniyya (Lebanese Forces [LF]) first fought most other Christian militias and were later pitted in a destructive war with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) under General Michel Aoun. All of these intra-community battles were fought primarily for reasons of competition. At stake were – besides the steady quest for control over the own community in order to politically speak in its name and economically gain the revenues associated with communal leadership – primarily the respective recruitment bases.

Given popular imaginations of the Lebanese communities as constant antagonists, (Andraos 2016, pp. 116–20; Habib 2009, p. 65) this point has major implications. That is especially because the difference in nature between other types of conflict and competition also pertains to how opponents can be possibly viewed and approached. The former "make for the mutual annihilation of the combatants." (Simmel 1964, p. 60) Competition, in contrast, while having poisonous, divisive and destructive potentials – as vividly illustrated by the Civil War years – additionally has "this immense sociating effect." (Ibid., p. 61) Thus, while a communal competitor who is also a compatriot may under certain conditions become an enemy, he or she can as easily be approached as a neighbor. In Lebanese politics, the same competitor can turn into an ally. There is accordingly nothing preventing cross-communal rapprochement *per se*. More than that,

> "[c]ompetition compels the wooer who has a co-wooer, and often in this way alone comes to be a wooer properly speaking, to go out to the wooed, come close to him, establish ties with

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[12] The war also frequently pitted Lebanese against outside forces; Lebanese Shi'a fought Israelis and Palestinians, and Maronites battled Palestinians and Syrians.

[13] Amal translates into "hope" and is an acronym for Afwāj al-Muqāwama al-Lubnāniyya (Lebanese Resistance Battalions).

> him, find his strength and weaknesses and adjust to them, find old bridges, or cast new ones, which might connect the competitor´s own being and doing with his." (Ibid., p. 61)

In competition scenarios, the potential for rapprochement and reconciliation is thus especially high (which is not to say that they cannot turn as violent and brutal as pure conflicts either).

Because of the legal separation of Lebanon's communities and their unequal access to state revenues, they compete for power and influence in the political field. This competition has frequently fuelled violent conflict in the past – not least because of additional key drivers such as histories of mutual hostilities that amount to "chosen glories" (events in the past that are collectively imagined and memorized as glorious deeds performed by the own group) or "chosen traumas" (past events that are collectively imagined and memorized as traumatic breaks in the own group´s history) (Volkan 2003, pp. 58–60) respectively. However, the political field is only partially overlapping with that of community relations and the same goes for the logic and effects of competition governing the former. In other words, these are by far not all encompassing, as will be explained in more detail below.

1.1.5.3 A nexus of imagined communities

For the sociological conceptualization of the different kinds of large groups dealt with in this analysis, reference is mainly made to Benedict Anderson´s concept of "imagined communities" (Anderson 2006). It is not only useful to capture the essence of the community of a nation, to which it had been foremost applied by Anderson himself. It equally applies to other forms of communities that fulfill the basic criteria for being considered "imagined" and "limited" in Anderson´s sense. These criteria are a) for reasons of scope, the members of the community do not, and cannot, know all their fellow members, "yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion," (ibid., p. 6) and, b) the community is imagined as limited "because even the largest […] has finite, if elastic, boundaries" (ibid., p. 7) smaller than those of the world. For the case at hand, besides for classifying and providing an understanding of notions referring to the Lebanese nation/ nation-state, the concept will also be applied to make sense of both the confessional communities of Lebanon and the larger religious and/ or confessional communities (cf. ibid. pp. 12–9, 22) they are inevitably linked to.

Applying the concept of imagined communities allows for viewing the Lebanese confessional compounds, not as quasi-eternal, natural entities with "'rigid' ethnic-sect boundaries," (Joseph 1983, p.2) but, on the contrary, as dynamic constructs held together by the imaginations and ideas – shaped by the common experiences, memories and fears – of their members (Anderson 2006, p. 6). This implies that they are subject to continuous change and that they are likely to witness noteworthy change, the more their members (or their most influential members) are subjected to incisive, or even traumatic, experiences.

1.1.5.4 The Lebanese nation and the question of national unity

The subjects of the Lebanese nation, its specifics and the question if it exists at all are contested. The historian Ussama Makdisi discusses how, for Lebanon, the notion of a “nation is projected as inclusive, stable and democratic, [whilst] sectarianism is depicted as exclusionary, undemocratic and disordered.” (Makdisi 1996, p. 23) In short, if Lebanon is generally viewed as sectarian, it cannot, from such a point of view, constitute a real nation. Makdisi acknowledges a lack of national unity in Lebanon. He cautions, however, to not reflexively blame this on confessionalism or sectarianism, minding that “[t]he Lebanese state was created as a result of a series of compromises between the French mandatory power and the indigenous elites, and not as the result of popular anti-colonial mobilization. An ethos of national unity was never forged in a collective struggle.” (Ibid., p. 24)

Max Weiss presents a slightly different reading. He blames the “reproduction of sectarian institutions, boundaries, and practices” for “weakening the foundations of national unity without necessarily disrupting the pull of nationalism altogether.” (Weiss 2010, p. 230) Other assessments of relevance range from such depicting Lebanon as a “state without a nation” (cf. Deeb 2009, p. 13; Kassis 1985, pp. 226–7) to those acknowledging the Lebanese nation´s existence (Salibi 1971) or at least that of all crucial ascribing prerequisites or “basic infrastructural values” (Khury 2008, p. 103) while asserting varying reservations about their quality. Salibi as early as 1971 noted that

> “the practice of Lebanese nationality has been clearly ahead of the theory. The Lebanese, despite persisting differences which often seem grave, have actually become more and more of a distinct people, recognizing themselves as such and being recognized by others as such, simply by the process of living together and sharing in a common national life.” (Salibi 1971, p. 86)

The author of this work basically shares Salibi’s assessment and the existence of Lebanon´s nation as such is explicitly not questioned. Indeed, the imagination of a nation as a community marked by horizontal comradeship comes “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each.” (Anderson 2006, p. 7) Having said that, it is nonetheless acknowledged that there is obviously a charged relationship between the effects of confessionalism and the development of a sustainably uniting nationalism. Makdisi, by taking recourse to Beydoun, has identified “the paradox of a national unity in a multi-religious society wherein religion is inscribed as the citizen's most important public attribute." (Makdisi 1996, p. 24; cf. Beydoun 1993, p. 22)

Yet the conditions of confessionalism and its effects on the everyday life of the Lebanese are also a major commonality, functioning as a strong marker of national identity and mutual recognition. The author has witnessed the uniting power of this particular feature of national identity on countless occasions. Few others have the same effect of immediately making imagined "Lebaneseness" that obvious.

1.1.5.5 Lebanon as an ethnically-plural society

The term "ethnicity" has been subject to "a bewildering variety of approaches" (Green 2006, p. 3) and forms of application are still far from a consensual understanding. It was supposed to be a genetic category in the 19th and 20th centuries (Balibar/ Wallerstein 1991, p. 77). Roughly from the 1960s onwards, however, the label was gradually uncoupled from its mere racial/ genetic meaning and loaded with others, to the extent that by today "ethnicity has become an unwieldy concept and currently suffers from both polysemy – whereby it has multiple definitions – and synonymy – whereby it is close in meaning to other terms like 'nation' and 'race'." (Green 2006, p. 1) In line with the "ordinary language definition" (systematically deducted from ordinary language use of the term ethnicity) put forward originally by Fearon and Laitin in 2000, and taking into consideration Green´s revision of 2006, if not explicitly mentioned otherwise, within this work, the term ethnicity "refers to a group larger than a family for which membership is reckoned primarily by descent, is conceptually autonomous, […] has a conventionally recognized 'natural history' as a group" (Fearon/ Laitin 2000) and has a "notion of a homeland." (Green 2006)

From this point of view, the overwhelming number of states in the world are made up of more than one single "ethnic group," so that, strictly speaking, most states in the world comprise multi-ethnic or ethnically-plural societies. However, there is a distinction to be made between the dimension of multi-ethnicity in countries such as Germany or Poland (where more than 90 % of the population belongs to the eponymous ethnicity respectively) on the one hand, and countries such as Belgium, Switzerland or Indonesia (all harboring more than one ethnic group of significant numbers) on the other. Many countries of the latter type of ethnically-plural societies have reacted to their respective realities with institutional arrangements intended to mitigate the potential for inter-group conflict resulting from attempts of suppression or dominance among their respective "ethnic groups." This holds equally true for Lebanon, with its unique and highly controversial power-sharing arrangement.

The Lebanese confessional communities do not match the aforementioned definition of racialized ethnicity. First of all, the Lebanese all more or less share the same origins, with 95 % being of Arab, 4 % of Armenian and 1 % of "other" descent (Joseph 2011, p. 157). With respect to the Phoenician (or Canaanite) heritage of the Lebanese, which has been claimed and stressed mainly by Maronites and other Catholics in the past, it is worth noting, that a recent study comes to the result that the "present-day Lebanese [explicitly Muslim, Christian, and Druze] derive most of their ancestry [93 %] from a Canaanite-related population" (Haber et al. 2017).

Even if interpreting descent culturally, however, the differences in place are arguably not universal enough to justify a separate delineation of the different communities on that basis. Furthermore, the notion of a homeland only applies to a certain degree in the case of the Maronites (Khalifah 1997, p. 3), which is not to say that the other Lebanese communities would not call Lebanon their homeland but only that a link between the exclusive belonging of their entire confessional group and Lebanon is absent. So, why is Lebanon considered an ethnically-plural society by the author?

To be sure, it is not about the groups´ supposed internal cohesion and solidarity (e.g. Lüders 2018, p. 62). As we know, sectarianism is not an age-old but a modern phenomenon and the Lebanese communities´ identities "have always represented dynamic and highly contextual understandings of self and other […] and have also undergone repeated redefinitions throughout their long histories." (Makdisi 2017, p. 2) Therefore, if they at times and/ or in certain respects indeed appear as ethnicities, this cannot be evaluated without looking at the conditions under which this occurs.

The answer lies foremost in the political system´s *de facto* – yet, not *de jure* – treatment of Lebanon's confessional communities as ethnicities through its primordialization of confessional belonging. Even though neither the Lebanese Constitution, nor the "Charter of National Reconciliation" (popularly known as the "Ta`if Accord") that complements the former since November 1989, formally treats the confessional groups as ethnicities, the confessional identity is not a marker of free choice but determined by birth. While it is possible to convert from one to another recognized community, possibilities to opt out, like civil marriage, to date remain cumbersome and limited and their occurrence exceptional (Naharnet 20/6/2019). In contrast to the applied concept of ethnicity, finally, when speaking of "ethnicization" (as in the case of "ethnicized confession"), the term refers to the instrumental process by which ethnic features have been made salient, even though other (in this sense "non-ethnic") features are actually predominant (or when "ethnic" features are absent altogether), as in the case at hand.

1.1.5.6 Politics & Religion

The political field

Bourdieu holds that the main actors in the political field are the professional politicians and bureaucrats and, crucially, that their relations are governed by a specific logic of competition, which is identified as the very motor of political production.

> "The political field is the site in which, through the competition between the agents involved in it, political products, issues, programmes, analyses, commentaries, concepts and events are created – products between which ordinary citizens, reduced to the status of 'consumers', have to choose." (Bourdieu 1994, p. 171)

At the same time, he draws a clear line between these agents and "ordinary citizens," between the active agenda-setters and the passive "consumers," who can merely choose from different agendas. Whereas passive and active political participation is principally open to all Lebanese citizens, the latter necessitates a substantial amount of economic, in addition to cultural and social capital. The distance or proximity of a random Lebanese citizen to the means of political production is therefore strongly determined by the marker of class and in particular by his or her economic status, irrespective of professional qualifications.

The political field itself, i.e. the "arena," is centered on the state and the political system, which are accordingly decisive for shaping its overall rules and conditions. Wherever these spheres intersect with civil structures, the rules and conditions of the political field are imposed, which is tantamount to expanding the borders of the field – at least temporarily. This becomes most palpable with respect to the central criteria for the formal admissibility of citizenship and hence for political participation on a legal basis; patrimonial descent[14] and the verified belonging to one of Lebanon´s officially recognized communities. In other words, there is no way for political participation without invoking the marker of ethnicized-confessional belonging. The following sections will discuss the Lebanese state and the political system (with a focus on political confessionalism as its most salient feature) separately to point out their respective specifics so as to more clearly delineate the borders of the political field.

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[14] As of this writing, Lebanese women are not able to pass on Lebanese citizenship or confessional religious or ethnic belonging to their children, creating many problems for the children of mixed-nationality marriages (Al-Jazeera 8/3/2019).

The Lebanese state: "weak" as compared to what?

While a common understanding of statehood does not exist (Nohlen 1991, pp. 733-743),[15] concepts aiming to describe perceived deficits of potential states enjoy high resonance among scientists, journalists and policy makers. In light of these concepts, Lebanon´s state is commonly described as weak, interchangeably labeled as "fragile" (e.g. Malaeb 2017, pp. 4 – 5), "failing" or even a "failed state" according to the "Fragile State Index" annually published by The Fund for Peace (FFP),[16] or in line with the terminology applied by the Free University of Berlin´s (FU Berlin) *Sonderforschungsbereich 700*, as an "area of limited statehood" (FFP 2018; FU Berlin 2018).[17]

The short-cut for arriving at the conclusion that Lebanon (or any other Middle Eastern country) suffers from "state failure" runs via a simple equation. Lebanese confessionalism renders the country sectarian (or, alternatively, the sectarian attributes of the Lebanese became manifest in the country´s political system) which prevents the development of a unifying nationalism and results in a "deeply divided society" instead. This condition in turn leads to frequent sectarian violence, prevents or undermines the state´s monopoly on violence, paralyzes governmental institutions and the political process and ultimately culminates in the "failure" of the state. The common denominator of all such theories and categorizations (summarized by Fregonese as "'weak state' approaches" [Fregonese 2012, p. 1053]) is constituted by a shared belief in the internal monopoly on physical violence and military strength – sufficient to deter at least average potential threats from the exterior – as the prime preconditions for effective statehood.[18] Above that, central features of what is commonly imagined a functioning state include the levying and collection of taxes, a monopoly on educational curricula, the maintenance of public security and the provision of social welfare. In regard to Lebanon, however, a number of aspects apparently stand in contrast to these stipulations, most importantly, with respect to the main focus of all “weak state” approaches; the Lebanese state´s “lacking” monopoly on physical violence within the boundaries of its entire territory, seen as compromising the country´s sovereignty.

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[15] Max Weber´s influential definition, for instance, describes an ideal, not a typical type of statehood (Nohlen 1991, p. 733) In essence, it says that a "state" is a human association the administration of which successfully claims the monopoly on legitimate violence within a defined territory for the purpose of maintaining public order (Weber 1921/22, p. 29; ibid. 1921, p. 506).

[16] In 2018 Lebanon ranked 44 out of a total of 178 countries included altogether (FFP 2018). The higher ranked, the more fragile a state is said to be.

[17] The full title of this *Sonderforschungsbereich* (special research field) reads *"Governance in Räumen begrenzter Staatlichkeit"* ("Governance in areas of limited statehood") (FU Berlin 2018).

[18] Bourdieu notices the same observation for "most models of state genesis," regardless if offered by Marxists, classical sociologists such as Max Weber or contemporary social scientists like Norbert Elias (Bourdieu 1994, p. 101).

Fregonese (2012) and Hazbun (2016), among others, have pointed out, how “weak state” approaches fail to account for both “differential views of sovereignty and weakness from inside the Lebanese political system” (Fregonese 2012, p. 655) and for “the complex dynamics of security politics in Lebanon since 2005.” (Hazbun 2016, p. 1053) They have remained blind to how, after the elimination of a central coercive power (Syria), an assembly of state- (most notably the Lebanese Armed Forces [LAF]) and sub-state (especially Hizbullah) elements has substituted the former with “a system of hybrid sovereignty.” (Hazbun 2016, p. 1056) This came about despite – or rather precisely because of – rival understandings of sources of insecurity held by opposed political actors in Lebanon. This approach has resulted in Lebanon having “been better able to contain and deter both domestic and external security threats, including from Islamic State and other radical Sunni Islamist militants, than the authoritarian states in the Arab region.” (Hazbun 2016, p. 1053)

Lebanon has, in fact, “a history marked by a perpetual blurring of imagined boundaries between the state and its outside.” (Hourani 2013, p. 40) These imagined boundaries, in turn, are the outcome of concepts that see the distinction between state and society as static. Yet, the boundary between them is not one drawn between two distinct essential entities “but a line drawn internally within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a social and political order is maintained.” (Mitchell 1991, p. 78) Therefore, expectations resulting from conventional views on the state and state sovereignty, as manifest especially in “weak state” approaches, are doomed to be disappointed in the case of Lebanon simply because their static conception of state boundaries fails to capture the Lebanese reality.

Within this work, the Lebanese state is conceptualized not only as an integral state – at least inasmuch as this holds true for other states too – but also as one, the boundaries of which are under continuous construction. Additionally, their current extension goes well beyond what conventional academic thought (including that of Bourdieu [Bourdieu 1994, p. 117])[19] suggests.

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[19] This gives rise to the impression, that even Bourdieu, while being highly cautious to avoid "applying to the state, categories of thought produced and guaranteed by the state" (Bourdieu 1994, p. 93) seems to have done exactly that, by apparently negating the mere possibility of scenarios in which the central government shares governance with non-state power centers of whatsoever kind.

Rebutting the “weak state” debate does explicitly not, upon inversion, aim at precluding a critical treatment of the Lebanese state or delegitimizing demands for a “stronger” Lebanese state *per se*. After all, such demands are voiced vehemently by Lebanese from all walks of life and – as we will see – are often based on palpable interests and needs. This kind of critique is not ideology-based in the first place, but commonly arises from tangible problems in everyday life and is directed at the state´s performance in particular areas.

The political system: Consensual democracy and political confessionalism

While "consociational" or "consensual" democratic systems (as in force in Lebanon, Belgium or Luxembourg) or the appliance of accordant elements (as in the Netherlands, Switzerland or Germany) are no exception among states whose citizens either feel or are perceived as belonging to distinct groups or segments, the Lebanese model is unique inasmuch as it effectively ethnicizes confessional belonging. Thus, membership in one of Lebanon’s eighteen recognized sects, which is enshrined by birth, is not only a precondition for political and societal participation and a minimum level of social security, but also a central pattern of identity, regardless of if this aspect of identity is individually pronounced or accepted at all. The effects of confessionalism on Lebanese society in general and inter-confessional relations in particular are indeed far-reaching. Against common expectations, however, they are far from being all-encompassing either (Karam 2017, pp. 1–2).

One common misunderstanding finds expression in the idea that Lebanese confessionalism also encompasses the field of religion. This can be attributed to the usual confusion of the Lebanese political system, or, more precisely, of Lebanese political confessionalism with the concept of sectarianism itself. Ussama Makdisi has aptly noticed that the latter in general “conflates a religious identification with a political one, and it ignores the kinship, class, and national and regional networks within which sectarian self-expression has invariably been enmeshed.” (Makdisi 2017, p. 2)

Lebanese confessionalism functions on the basis of large-group elite interaction whereas the relevant groups are defined by the category of confession. Individual religious convictions and theological questions have no meaning whatsoever in this respect, although most individuals tend to believe in the doctrine of their respective faith (Hanf 2007, p. 15). The only relevance deriving from religion here lies in the pre-existence of religiously-homogenous groups and in the implicit acceptance of religious hierarchies by many individuals (despite frequent criticism of their elites´ behavior). This made it possible to have the populace divided and ethnicized along confessional lines and to fix in place uneven conditions (reflecting the correspondence of economical and inter- and intra-communal power relations in place upon the foundation of modern Lebanon). It also serves as a fulcrum for the people´s effective mobilization. It can tell us not much more, however, about the overall givens and conditions of inter- and intra-community relations in Lebanon, in particular concerning the everyday togetherness on the grassroots level or regarding the important sphere of religion and how it factually relates to that of politics.

The Field of Religion

> “Churches in Lebanon should try to become 'Christian' and behave as leaders in moral guidance and not as political antagonists.”
>
> Bassem Khalifah 1997

Religion plays a paramount role in Lebanese society and hence within this work. As Theodor Hanf concluded, “[s]ecularising moderation of religious convictions and less observance of religious practice is not part of the Lebanese agenda, not 20 years ago, and today even less so.” (Hanf 2007, p. 15) This attested weight of religion is furthermore accompanied by its far-reaching visibility and “very natural presence” in everyday life (Deeb 2006, p. 101). For religious people, their own actions are without doubt connected to their own faith and religious knowledge. Hence, the vast majority of Lebanese encounter each other also as believing adherents of either the same or different religions or confessions.

The concept of religion

Given the complexity and varying meanings of religion due to perspective (from outside or as believers of a certain religion) as well as different scientific disciplines, a brief clarification of the understanding applied here seems highly necessary. In sociology, religion is basically understood as a central institution of society, comprising three broad elements: 1. Convictions: While convictions are essential elements of every kind of culture, for religious people, especially the belief in a higher authority (God) is decisive. 2. Social Practices: Religion provides for a set of organized and highly structured forms of social practices (rituals). It furthermore structures the social practice of believers through its provision of norms, values, commandments, and laws. 3. Moral Community: Religion integrates the believers into a social structure and organizes their inter-relations through the moral obligations resulting from the norms and rules in place and from pressure exerted through the sanctioning or rewarding of acts of behavior respectively (cf. Joas 2001, p. 337).

What must be added to this is the outstanding importance of symbols (ibid., p. 338). The religious belief – that is the spiritual dimension of religion – is expressed and becomes materially manifest not only in social practice but also and especially in accordant symbols. These not only include devotional objects or images, such as the cross in Christianity, but also clothing/ dress codes, buildings/ sanctuaries, and artifacts of various kinds. Both the individual believer and the moral community he or she is attached to, become visible only through symbols and the symbolism inherent in social practices, the demarcation of which is not always obvious (because many acts of religious practices do involve symbols, as when praying at sanctuaries and/ or with a rosary [Catholic prayer chain] or a *turba* [Shi`i prayer stone] for instance). However, religious symbols, once established, are often subject to varying and partially competing interpretations just as other symbols are. They can be alienated from their original content in various ways because they commonly persist even without substance. In other words, the presence of religious symbols is neither a guarantee for the simultaneous presence of practiced belief in a form commonly associated with them nor for an involvement of religion in the sense of accordant convictions at all.

It is within the confines of the aforementioned that the term religion is utilized here in general, while the following deliberations outline its specific application. As mentioned earlier, Lebanese citizens cannot choose freely their religious and confessional belonging but are members of a certain community by birth. They might choose to convert at one point and this is legally possible. They cannot, however, opt out from belonging to one of Lebanon´s acknowledged confessional groups. This does not automatically render them religious people in the sense of believers, even if most Lebanese from all walks of life can be considered religious in that sense. To be a believer, one must believe and not only be labeled accordingly. The question of if a believer truly believes as he pretends to, however, will neither be attempted to answer here, nor is it arguably significant or answerable at all. Yet the study of the subject at hand necessitates a wording that is able to categorically discriminate between religion as a matter of convictions – which involves religious ideologies, questions of dogma and the spiritual dimension (theology) – on the one hand, and its mere appearance through symbolic representation on the other hand. Therefore, given that the aspects of social practices, a moral community and symbols are always in place when that of conviction is too, while this is not necessarily true the other way around, we will speak of religion only if the element of convictions is involved and relevant (whereby subjective accounts of the own religiosity will, as a rule, not be questioned).

In contrast, when dealing with confessional belonging within the context of Lebanon´s political system, we will speak of ethnicized confession as a rule. Religion will, in that same context, be mentioned only when religious convictions, ideology, or spirituality of whatsoever kind come into play. This is the case, for instance, when an individual like a politician, or a collective such as a political party, bases its policies on religious grounds either explicitly or where that intention is clearly discernible. It is not so, when, for example, a party – the members of which happen to belong primarily to one of the Lebanese confessional communities – declares to better the situation of that sect, or criticizes the policies of other confessional group´s main representatives.

Defining Islamism

The discussion of religion leads us to another concept, the application of which calls for clarification: Islamism. This term has been subject to so many different interpretations that, without further limitation, it can literally mean anything related to Islam and politics. Many of the leading scholars in this field, to begin with, define Islamism as a kind of "Islamic, political fundamentalism," (e.g. Roy 2006, p.71) "radical Islam" (Heine 2004, p. 7) or as synonym for "political Islam." (Fuller 2003, p. XI) These and other authors belonging to the same spectrum, while disagreeing about the final essence of Islamism, all have in common a serious analytical approach, free of polemics.

In popular understanding, however, the term is applied rather negatively as referring to something revolving around or in between the former categories and what is variously depicted as "Islamic terrorism," "Islamic conservatism" and/ or "Islamic chauvinism." (cf. Mayer 2005, pp. 10-3; Küntzel 2002, p. 1) In some extreme cases, authors even describe it as actually overlapping with or being rooted in totalitarianism, fascism, or anti-Semitism (Tibi 2008, pp. 123–41; Boroumand/ Boroumand 2002, p. 7–9). If Islamism was to simply mean anything of the latter, however, we were not in need of that term but could rather speak outright of conservatism, terrorism, chauvinism, fascism or anti-semitism.

So what is the essence and unique feature of Islamism? What is it that otherwise varying actors like the Turkish or Iranian governments, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the Lebanese Hizbullah, the Jordanian Islamic Action Front, the Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr (Party of Liberation), the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and Ḥamās movements, the Afghan Tāliban, al-Qaʿida, al-Dawlat al-Islāmiyya (the Islamic State [IS]) and many others have in common? In approaching a definition, recourse is foremost taken to Graham Fuller, who says:

> "[A]n Islamist is one who believes that Islam as a body of faith has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim World and who seeks to implement this idea in some fashion. The term "political Islam" should be neutral in character, neither pejorative nor judgmental in itself; only upon further definition of the specific views, means, and goals of an Islamist movement in each case can we be critical of the process." (Fuller 2003, p. XI)

In addition to this, the aspects of a holistic interpretation of the range of Islam´s spheres of validity and action (Rosiny 2008, p. 61) and the utopian ideal of the 7th century Muhammadan society of Medina can be singled out as defining features. These are at the same time the criteria separating Islamists most clearly from other politically active Muslims.

The observable link between religious ideology and political activism characterizing Islamism thereby makes it clear why any conservative or traditionalist Muslim can not, on that basis alone, be categorized as an Islamist. Islamism then, as understood by the author and applied in this work, is a form of Islamically-motivated political activism, aspiring for the ideal of a Muhammadan i.e. "just" society and viewing Islam – as a body of faith – as ultimately comprising answers to all thinkable questions. Islamism can thus, by definition, only be pursued by Muslims while (by far) not all Muslims can be counted as Islamists.

The huge differences separating and marking out the various manifestations of Islamism result from equally huge differences in the political aims, visions, practices, habits, interests and values; that is to say, in both the ways of interpreting what is mutually depicted as "correct Islam," or the ideal of the Muhammadan society, and the means seen as legitimate to achieve those ends (Rosiny 2008, pp. 63–74). Some Islamists, such as certain *salafī* (Salafist) currents, clearly seek the erection of a kind of neo-Medina in the present, ideally featuring as few concessions to later developments as possible. Others, including most Lebanese Shi`i Islamist trends like Hizbullah, from the onset have much more protested what they experienced as blocked mobility and being deprived of modernization. In fact, "[t]heir goal is not the return to a glorious past, but the foundation of just future conditions." (Rosiny 1996, p. 9) It can therefore never be sufficient to stop at the point of identifying an actor as Islamist or not. Rather, each actor in question must be treated separately.

Religious secularism

It is easy to imagine an Islamist party like Hizbullah, or the more pious politicians from any of Lebanon´s confessional communities, being eager to carry their own religious convictions, values and doctrine into politics, thereby giving rise to the impression of blurring the boundary between politics and religion. In fact, within the confines of the political system, religiously motivated action may have an influence on the outcome of legislation just as any other ideologically based action (e.g. socialist) potentially has. It will not – because it cannot – however, change the *de facto* secular nature of the system itself (cf. Grafton 2002, p. 34). Ironically, it is the very system of confessionalism, which, because of its effective ethnicization of confessional belonging within its scope of application (that is the political field) serves to safeguard *de facto* secularism in Lebanon´s polity, by largely cleansing it from religion, the role of which is emptied and reduced to symbolic functions in this respect.

Whenever religious actors involve themselves in politics, they act primarily as representatives of their own ethnicized confessional group, not so much of their religion or church, and their interventions are usually about tangible political demands, not doctrine.[20] When such actors indeed harbor religious intentions, the system turns any attempt of mixing politics and religion into ethno-politics. The religious leaders´ involvement is where the symbolic function of religion in Lebanese politics comes to the fore most clearly; lending aura, appearance and vocabulary to the polity, politicians, policies, and to the political process, which conceals the ethnicized and ethnicizing nature of the political system.

Most self-styled secular or lay leaders such as the speaker of the parliament (Majlis al-Nuwwab) and head of Amal, Nabih Birri (1938-), among the Shi`a, LF leader Samir Geagea (1952-) among the Maronites, or the paramount Druze leader and head of the Ḥizb al-Taqaddumī al-Ishtirāqī (Progressive Socialist Party [PSP]), Walid Jumblatt (1949-), are no less amplifiers of religious symbolism in the field of politics than their outright religious and often clerical counterparts who are acting as politicians either primarily (e.g. Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, the Secretary General of Hizbullah) or at least partially (the most heads and other leaders of their respective sects, such as the Maronite Patriarch, the Sunni Grand Mufti, the head of the "Higher Islamic Shi`i Council" [HISC] [al-Majlis al-Islāmī al-Shī`ī al-A`lā], the Druze *Shaykh al-`Aql*, etc.).[21] Both types of leaders attend important religious events of their respective sect and religion as much as political conferences, state receptions, business and other worldly events. Both serve the manifestation of the particularities of the Lebanese case by only seemingly blurring the boundaries of religion and ethno-politics on the one hand and by lending a religious aura to the political field on the other hand.

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[20] With reference to the specific case of the Lebanese *Monsignore* Antoine II Boutrus Arida (Maronite Patriarch of Antioch, 1933-1955), the British historian Stephen Hemsley Longrigg has argued that religious community leaders in the Middle East commonly acted "solely" as politicians, which he described as a consequence of the structures of the former (Ottoman) Millet system (Longrigg 1958, p. 207 [FN 1]). Longrigg wrote that in the 1950s, at a time in which the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922) had ceased to exist roughly 35 years ago and thus "only recently," so to speak. However, in regard to the political involvement of religious dignitaries, Lebanon has arguably been a special case since its inception in 1922.

[21] Alexander D.M. Henley writes: "Religious leadership [in Lebanon] is inherently ambiguous, combining two roles: that of spiritual authorities on matters of religious doctrine and behavior, and that of public spokesmen for broader religious communities." (Henley 2016, p. 1) And furthermore: "And while religious representatives are not politicians, they are also not apolitical. As their recognition as representatives is normalized, these religious leaders often find themselves caught up in an interplay of local, national, and regional political interests." (Ibid., p. 4)

Those religious dignitaries and representatives acting as ethno-politicians within the political field unfold their genuinely religious relevance only in the corresponding field of religion. The degree of their religious authority in terms of followership amongst the faithful is thereby obviously conditioned by how their political stances are viewed and to what extent these are appreciated. Good examples are the Maronite Patriarch or the Sunni Mufti of Lebanon, the standings of which are commonly subject to heavy fluctuations corresponding to the political actions or inactions of their representatives respectively. The highest formal Shi`i authority of Lebanon, the aforementioned HISC, meanwhile, since its inception in 1969, has at no point in time commanded unquestioned authority amongst Lebanon´s Shi`a in religious matters. Thus, in terms of religious functions, none of the chief religious representatives of Lebanon´s communities are truly irreplaceable.

In any case, we can clearly see how political considerations do frequently infringe on the scope of their authority in religious matters. This demonstrates not only how far the rules and conditions of the political field can at times expand but also points to their categorical dominance i.e. to how the effects of ethnicized confession outdo those of religion whenever both happen to occur simultaneously. In other words, the field of religion in Lebanon is largely circumscribed by the political field. We can still not, however, speak of perfect mutual exclusiveness, minding that religion persists in the sphere of politics in the form of the religious convictions and values of individual and collective political actors.

The concept of secularism applied here is not based on a “Jacobist” understanding that champions the eradication of all religion from the public sphere. Such endeavors go well beyond the actual targets of preventing religious authorities from meddling in politics and in the private religious life of the citizens. As argued by David Grafton, James “Madison’s concept of the secular state provides a more appropriate interpretation of the Lebanese context,” (Grafton 2002, p. 49) considering that it was never his intent to do away with religion altogether but “to legalize the acceptance and place of multiple religious denominations within the American public sphere. Most importantly, he wanted to ensure that no denomination would be established as the national religion.” (Ibid., p. 51)

The Lebanese givens – like those in the USA – are captured most accurately by William Shepard´s concept of “religious secularism,” (Shepard 1987, p. 309) “which allows for religion in the public sphere but prohibits the domination of one confession by another within state institutions.” (Grafton 2002, pp. 34, 49) As in the case of the US, there is no state religion in Lebanon either, whilst a neutrally religious commitment to God is emphasized in both the US Declaration of Independence (Minna 2016) and the Lebanese Constitution

(Government of Lebanon 1926) alike. In the case of Lebanon, however, this nominal commitment is legally enforced with citizenship being conditional upon belonging to a recognized confessional community. In the words of Lara Deeb, "[i]t is difficult to be an atheist in Lebanon, or rather, it is impossible to refuse a religious identity." (Deeb 2006, p. 10)

However, when religiously motivated political actors pursue policies within the domain of civil society rather than the state – e.g. offering social services to the needy on the basis of religious commandments, which has the effect of (re)producing structures of political loyalty – we can well speak of religion mixing with politics in a broader sense. No matter how controversial, this aspect is conventional to secular, pluralist democracies and cannot be seen as a reason for classifying the Lebanese system as anything different in this respect.

1.1.5.7 Lebanon´s economy and the relation of class and ethnicized confession

At least as old as Lebanon´s democracy is the country´s economic *laissez-faire* tradition. "With its minimal restrictions on cash flow, Lebanon served as the bridge between the Arab countries, Europe, and the United States." (Turkmani 2018) Originally a multi-confessional though Maronite/ Christian-dominated group of thirty families (including only six Muslim families, one of which was Shi`i) from the spheres of business and politics – the *"consortium"* – revolving around Lebanon´s first president after independence, Bishara al-Khouri (life: 1890-64; presidency: 1943-52), was more or less in sole control of the national economy (Traboulsi 2006, pp. 115–6). Thus, whereas Lebanon experienced its decisive neoliberal turn in the 1990s, the structures allowing that endeavor to blossom were in place since 1943. Briefly compromised only by Fouad Shihab´s (1902-73) presidential term (1958-64), characterized by pronounced étatism[22] (Harris 2012, pp. 212-9), and once more by the Civil War (1975-90); the post-war reconstruction policies and associated economic projects initiated by former prime minister, multi-billionaire and construction magnate Rafiq al-Hariri (life: 1944-2005; premiership 1992-98, 2000-04) reanimated the old ties between politics and the economy. However, in the post-war order, Syria stepped in as the "new" central broker.

Al-Hariri´s economic policy in practice essentially meant neoliberalism *par excellence*, i.e. extensive privatization and the withdrawal of the state from much of its public duties. The economic aim "was to expand construction, real estate, and the service industry" and to (re)establish Beirut as a financial and commercial center (Turkmani 2018). All of these goals have arguably been fulfilled to a certain degree. However, this was accomplished only at the cost of prioritizing services over agriculture and cementing imbalanced regional development, leading to a further neglect of some of the most weakly developed parts of the country, a collapsing welfare state, rising unemployment, a normalization of insecure and informal labour, mushrooming prices and costs of living, intensified clientelism and corruption amongst the political class, and a widening disparity between rich and poor amongst other negative consequences (ibid.).

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[22] "Étatism" describes a political approach that gives preference to state-action for resolving economic and social problems.

Lebanon´s GINI-coefficient score currently (2018) stands at 85.6/ 100, rendering it the sixth-most unequal country in the world. Meanwhile, Saad al-Hariri (Rafiq al-Hariri´s second-born son and political heir) and former Prime Minister Najib Miqati along with four other men from the same two families – i.e. six Sunni-Muslim Lebanese men alone – together own estimated assets worth 14 Billion USD which amounts to roughly 15 % of Lebanon´s private wealth (ibid.). Furthermore, eighteen of Lebanon´s "20 biggest commercial banks […] are wholly or partly owned by politicians or well-connected families." (The Economist 30/8/2018) Thus, nowadays´ situation, in this respect, pretty much resembles the days of the "consortium." Since the post of the (Sunni Muslim) prime minister had been strengthened to the disadvantage of that of the (Maronite Christian) president with the changes introduced through the Ta`if Accord (1989) (see below), the composition of the main players involved has been altered in similar terms, with Sunni Muslims now in the economic lead in the country.

Public debt in 2016 amounted to 151 % of the national GDP (50.4 billion USD in 2016) with the lion´s share of 60.4 % accounting for external debt (Focus Economics 2018). The Syrian Civil War (since 2011) and the heavily increased influx of Syrian and other refugees rendered Lebanon the country hosting, in proportional terms, the most refugees in the world. These developments stressed the critical economic situation, as reflected in the rate of economic growth, which stood around 9 % in 2011 and had dropped to an alarming 1 % by 2017 (Middleeasteye.net 16/4/2018). Thus, Lebanon´s economy currently stands at the verge of a catastrophe, with some experts predicting a property slump and a banking crisis that threatens Lebanon´s currency (Economist 30/8/2018).

Considering this state of things, it is only logical to ask, why "is focus placed almost entirely on sectarianism and sectarian politics in mainstream literature?" (Turkmani 2018) In approaching a topical answer to this question, the sociologist Rima Majed lists "the decline of the Left and the rise of postmodernist trends in knowledge production" as well as "a decline in sociological analyses that engage with the question of social structures and social cleavages and attempt to study, rather than assume, the nature of social conflict." (Majed 2017) In other words, if we want to reach valid conclusions regarding questions about social relations in Lebanon, we cannot simply pass over the marker of class.

Stephan Rosiny, with reference to other authors´ findings, pointed to a partial overlapping of class and confession in Lebanon at the outbreak of Civil War, with most of the Muslims, and especially Shi`a, being economically disadvantaged in comparison to many of the Christians (Rosiny 1996, p. 17). By today, however, many parameters have been altered and this particular equation can therefore not be upheld without significant qualifications. Even if the most deprived regions of the country are still Muslim-dominated, they are now Akkar and much of the rest of North Lebanon (inhabited mostly by Sunnis but also by a sizable number of Maronites and other Christians) and the Bekaa (including Baalbek-Hermel) (with Shi`a making up the overwhelming majority, followed by Sunnis and mainly Orthodox as well as other Christians) (Turkmani 2018; Zoughaib 2019). The Shi`i-dominated South of Lebanon, which has long been one of the country´s central stages for armed and violent conflict, has until recently also belonged to the poorest parts of the country. However, in the post-Civil-War era and especially in recent years, its development has significantly improved. One main reason for this is the capital investment in real estate by Southern Lebanese expatriates who have made their fortune abroad. Another reason is that Nabih Birri, leader of Harakat Amal and Speaker of the House (the Parliament´s President) for nearly three decades, has frequently used his influence to attract investments in the South (fanack.com 2018). Yet, there are still significant discrepancies between the South and Nabatiyah on the one hand and the developmental showcases of Mount Lebanon (mainly inhabited by Maronites and Druze) and parts of East-Beirut (clearly Maronite-dominated) on the other hand.

The main point to make is that, while the overlapping of economic status and class with the marker of ethnicized-confession has, to date, not disappeared, its impact has been significantly defused, so that by today all of Lebanon´s major communities comprise a robust middle class that is able to make its interests heard. Yet, the Lebanese economy´s downturn over the last years has of course affected not only the lower class but also and especially the Lebanese middle class, which is steadily and rapidly shrinking (Deutsche Welle [DW] 7/1/2013; fanack.com 2019). On the other side, party membership in Lebanon, through the access it grants to the respective clientelist network(s), also serves as a substitute for a functioning public welfare system. This relatively eases concerns about income-related matters, as confirmed by the results of a 2018 opinion survey:

> “One characteristic seems to ease the economic burden, namely, being a member of a political party. Taking into account other variations, political party membership seems to correspond with lower reporting of economic concerns. Put more succinctly, members of political parties are less concerned about employment opportunities and the cost of living.” (Zoughaib 2019)

This finding explains the persistence of agency of the FPM´s and Hizbullah´s middle class members against the economic trend and despite the decline of Lebanon´s middle class in overall terms.

The entanglement of class and ethnicized confession, however, does not stop here, because the Lebanese clientelist networks such as those constituted by the political parties flourish largely intra- and not so much inter-communally. Rima Majed therefore argues that within the structures described, “it seems that people do not follow sectarian leaders blindly, but rather follow their perceived interests closely.” (Majed 2017) Such a reading is echoed by Nur Turkmani, who states that, in light of a progressively collapsing welfare-state, not only the ruling elite but actually “all classes in Lebanon, whether they identify with their sect as an overarching identity or not, have much to benefit from the logic of sectarianism.” (Turkmani 2018)

1.1.5.8 Synopsis

The political system not only ethnicizes confessional belonging, it also seemingly conveys the “logic of competition” (Bourdieu 1994, p. 172) resulting from the political field to the communities in their entirety. Their respective politicians (and bureaucrats) indeed compete for power and influence on the political level (Patterson 2013, p. 7) and are moreover cheered on for this by their party bases that are in turn overwhelmingly located within their own respective communities. This is furthermore the level that is best perceivable from the inside as from the outside. Therefore, when viewed against the background of confessionalism – again, in particular when this is understood as sectarianism – the communities necessarily appear as antagonists *per se*. This seems to confirm their assumed collective sectarian make-up and state of mind.

One major outcome of this is the prevalent idea that Lebanon´s “sectarianism” generally prevents nationalism. Another is the imagined irrelevance of the individual citizens, for their supposed political immaturity and “blind” following of their leader(s), leading to their neglect in the relevant academic debates. Yet, neither do the logic and effects of competition governing the political field apply to that of community relations altogether, nor can we approve – in light of what has been clarified above – of conventional views on political individualism in Lebanon and the irrelevance of the grassroots for societal developments. In that respect, we can furthermore not ignore the aspect of individual class interests. These take shape independent of ethnicized-confessional belonging, even if, for the reasons described, they are commonly pursued within the own community.

The most striking case in point is arguably the understanding of the Lebanese political system as a blend of politics and religion and this as the main reason for what is conceived of as frequent sectarian conflict and violence. When explicitly understood as encompassing the element of conviction (and all that entails), as in the present study, religion – against common perceptions – plays a merely symbolic role within the political field in Lebanon, where ethnicized confession is of paramount relevance instead. The confessionalist political system does not therefore render Lebanon sectarian in the sense of religion mixing with politics, whereas this is a main pillar of what conventional wisdom holds. And that´s not all; because the transfer of the "logic of competition" proves analytically distorting too (as it does not generally apply to community relations beyond the political field) we cannot even presuppose that the ethnicization of confessional belonging as the legally engrained form of institutional difference-making in place automatically leads to ethno-political conflict. As a matter of fact, the main topic of this work; the MoU between Hizbullah and the FPM has led to an unprecedented state of inter-communal integration (Habib 2009, p. 67) and it can potentially lead even further in this direction, which complicates accordant dialectical assumptions about community relations in Lebanon.

1.1.6 The field of community relations in Lebanon

Frank Janning noted: "[A]lthough political pools [in the political field] have to correspond to a specific logic of competition first, they always react to homologous interests among social groups too." (Fröhlich/ Rehbein 2009, p. 345f) Bourdieu himself observed a correspondence of the political and the social spaces, which were largely homologous in the sense of corresponding in structure but not necessarily in function (Bourdieu 1992b, p. 187). Both remarks imply that the autonomy and seclusion of the political field (and other fields) are not to be understood as absolute and that the limitations and effects of different fields overlap and therefore impinge on one another. The same applies to the case at hand, where both the political and religious fields have significant intersections with that of community relations but do not cover its entirety.

As described earlier, a social field exists where its internal rules are accepted by the participants and where its specific forms of capital are valid. The borders of a field are therefore to be searched for where this acceptance and validity end respectively. With regard to the political field, both the rules and the main form(s) of capital derive principally from the state and the political system. Bourdieu describes the state as a result of the concentrated accumulation of varying forms of capital (i.e. means to apply physical violence, economic, cultural/ informational and symbolic capital), which in turn brings about a specific form of "state capital," enabling the state to wield power over the different social fields, forms of capital and especially over their exchange rates and the balances of power between the owners of capital (Bourdieu 1985, p. 101). However, in Lebanon those politicians, bureaucrats and others which represent the state and/ or more or less successfully act in its name (cf. Hackler 2015, pp. 2–4), do always – willingly or not – also represent their respective ethnicized confessional community and vice versa. Simultaneously, most of them are affiliated to a certain political faction too, which is – with the exception of the Lebanese Communist Party (or rather its different factions) – mainly attached to only one of the various communities. These actors are therefore commonly expected to guarantee a share as high as possible for their community and party base respectively, and their ability to fulfill those expectations in turn is directly linked to their own political success or failure.

The political field is thus marked by a high degree of both inter- and intra-group competition. Yet, the logic of this competition does neither extend to the field of religion nor to the everyday interactions of ordinary Lebanese citizens. In strong contrast to the former, the two latter spheres feature no institutional mechanism making competition comparably relevant. Still, the politicization and collective mobilization of ordinary citizens by their respective community leaders of various kinds is not seldom (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia [UN-ESCWA]/ *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung* [HBS] 2009, p. 12). It is observable, however, that this mobilization which in the past has periodically led to violent clashes, happens to be much less successful in areas marked by notable ethnicized confessional heterogeneity, such as the Southern Lebanese port city of Sour (Tyre),[23] certain border villages in the North of Lebanon and elsewhere, or the area of Ras Beirut in both pre- (Khury 2008, pp. 96–7) and post-Civil War times, for instance. This empirical fact indicates that geographical distance can count as one decisive factor in this regard (if surely not the only one).

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[23] According to official as well as numerous personal accounts of locals shared with the author (e.g. Author´s interv. CC.Hzb.4 2017), even in Civil War times (1975-90), besides the violent Israeli occupation of South Lebanon and indigenous resistance against the latter, Sour (Tyre) stayed largely free of the tragic inter- and intra-community violence that took place in other parts of the country, especially in Beirut.

In any case, the Lebanese Civil War (1975-90) had the effect of homogenizing many areas of Lebanon, which until then had been of a bi- or multi-communitarian composition (Traboulsi 2007, pp. 233, 238–9). Missing knowledge and mutual misconceptions about "the other" remain common up until this very day (Younan 1999, pp. 71–90; Hajjar 2002). Indeed, if many Lebanese have travelled abroad, when arriving back in Lebanon, the route goes usually straight from Beirut´s Rafiq al-Hariri International Airport to the respective resident village or hometown (and here to the respective residential neighborhood, the demographic composition of which typically reflects that of the village). Thus, whilst the Lebanese may have seen the world, they have often neither seen much of their own small but multifaceted country nor of the greater part of their fellow countrymen.

1.1.6.1 Forms of Capital

The degree of the communities´ top leaders´ ability to secure a piece of the pie – partially used for redistribution among their respective community and/ or party base, and partially for their own benefit (Bourdieu 1998, p. 30) – is the central form of capital in the Lebanese political field and as such is to be categorized as the main kind of "elite capital" in the field of community relations. Top leaders – the power elite – are the three presidents and ministers as well as persons in their immediate surroundings (political advisors, secretaries, aides) but also other high-ranking members of the religious and political establishment of Lebanon (Turkmani 2018). These include the official religious heads of all communities and senior political leaders currently lacking a formal position (other than being senior leader of a party), close aides, spouses, parents and children of high ranking politicians, and, largely overlapping with the former, the financial elite of the country (Turkmani 2018; cf. Traboulsi 2007, pp. 115–27).

All actors in question share the decisive attributes of sovereign decision making with consequences for a substantial amount of the Lebanese populace (at the least for their own followers) and having access to important economic and political power centers in the world. Usually, they also enjoy special relations to – or even hold citizenship in – the one particular foreign power constituting the prime patron of the leader´s community respectively (e.g. Saudi Arabia for the Sunnis, Iran for the Shi`a, or France for the Maronites). It is primarily irrelevant if these attributes stem from a top rank position in the Lebanese governmental structure, from economic power or elsewhere.[24]

The intermediary level, in turn, includes middle-range politicians and functionaries as well as bureaucrats of higher status, economic players and even cultural actors such as celebrities of various kinds (provided that they wield a comparable degree of influence towards the top leaders). The informal institution of *wāsṭa* (medium) makes up their main form of capital. *Wāsṭa* pertains to the ability of such actors to act as an intermediary between requests from ordinary citizens and top leaders. In order to positively respond to such requests they have to carve out an accordant amount of the larger piece of the economic pie secured by their respective top leaders, and channel it, partially at least, towards the demanding side. The other way around, top leaders expect the intermediaries to secure a loyal following among the principle target group or, if possible, beyond, which is why they are generally willing to respond to their requests – up to a certain degree of course.

Thus far, the forms of capital described are exclusively rooted in the political field and for scholars versed with both the theories of Pierre Bourdieu and with studying Lebanon these findings might not suggest anything very new. With regards to Lebanon, this is because up until now we are staying more or less in line with what has been rightly said about the effects of Lebanon's polity and system, chiefly, political confessionalism and the logic of competition resulting thereof. There is, however, another dimension that has to be taken into consideration; the ordinary citizens or grassroots level.

Here, beside having *wāsṭa*, which basically translates into knowing the right people or at least knowing other people who know the right people, and so forth – in contradistinction to quasi-embodying *wāsṭa*, as is the case with the actors on the intermediary level – the most valuable capital consists, very banally speaking, of having good relations with fellow citizens (social capital *par excellence*). While this holds generally true for all societies or even for all thinkable social situations to a certain degree, there are still significant differences resulting from the prevailing cultures and societal settings respectively. In some societies, especially in those in which individualism has progressively gained ground during the last decades, it is quite easy to at least physically – not necessarily psychologically – get along without much social relations, while in others this is almost impossible (Cherry 2019a, ibid. 2019b). The specific requirements furthermore vary from context to context, whereby the Lebanese particularities – inasmuch as they have not become apparent already – are discussed below.

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[24] This difference only becomes decisive in relation to the question of durability, as especially the persons "merely" filling governmental positions are principally interchangeable, which makes this kind of top leaders more likely to lose of their influence once they lose their position (even if such persons can mostly count on the sustainability of at least some relations they were able to establish during their tenure, especially if these relations are of an economic nature).

1.1.6.2 Playing the field under the rules of the game

In Lebanon, the everyday experience of living close together and having constant interchange with many people is not only a cultural reality – and this, to be sure, proves a common cultural trait of all Lebanese (Khoury 2008, pp. 102–7) – but for most people their personal economic situation and physical safety, together translating into the essential universal need for security, make it necessary to keep good relations with their extended family (Joseph 2011, p. 161), neighbors, friends and beyond, and usually, in an everyday situation, at least some of these will be around. It remains furthermore very common that those family members or friends who have a regular income (perhaps from living and working abroad) share it with those who have not, or help with credit or manpower when needed e.g. for buying a car or an estate, or for building a house or affording a religious pilgrimage. In village life all over the country and partly even in the urban centers, family and neighbors protect – for instance when there are quarrels with "outsiders," involving fistfights or worse – and help each other out with whatever needed when there are shortcomings (e.g. electricity, water, fuel or food), and they will usually take care of ones property if one happens to be absent. Inasmuch as possible, family networks are furthermore used for activating kin structures involving the intermediary or, if available, even the top level of politics, and channeling *wāsṭa*. In any case, "[t]he family is the ultimate economic safety net for Lebanese." (Joseph 2011, p. 161)

In Civil War times (1975-90), during the Israeli occupation of the South (1978-2000) and under the reign of Syria in Lebanon (1976-2004); being imprisoned in certain areas made it often difficult or impossible to have visits from ones own family, party, confessional community, or even compatriots, so that moral or material support could only (if at all) be provided by members of groups other than ones own. It was not seldom in those days either, that lives would and could be saved only upon the intervention of citizens belonging to the community of the power in charge respectively. For example, during the so-called "passport killings," whereby the ID of anyone passing a militia checkpoint was mainly searched for the entry about the ethnicized confessional belonging and, always dependent on the current friend- and enemy-conceptions of those in control, was either granted safe passage or taken away for execution. These memories live on in the minds of Lebanese today.

The 75-year-old Shi`i Aounist “Abbas A.,” for instance, upon the outbreak of the war in 1975, was living in Sin el-Fil, from where he had to go to Haddath for work and come back every day, thereby having to cross the Phalangist checkpoints. Having tears in his eyes, he related that he usually got along by professing to be Christian, whereby he was once forced to remain inactive while witnessing a group of about twenty-five Shi`a women dragged away, presumably for execution. Another time he witnessed how the militiamen cut the throats of three Pakistani migrant workers who “had not known anything about this conflict or the Lebanese particularities at all.” (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.5 2017) It was on this same day that he sensed how the Phalangists were eying him and preparing to come for him too. In this situation, he resorted to, right in front of the militiamen, calling his brother, who was an officer in the Lebanese army, stationed in the Bekaa valley. Because the LAF, in the words of “Abbas A.,” were seen as being “for the Maronites,” this phone call most likely saved his life (ibid.).[25]

Aside from such far-reaching and rather deep aspects of the grassroots-level relations, being on good terms with others also helps facilitate common daily interactions as in the local suq (market) or within a *service* (shared taxi) or on a bus, for instance. As divergent in their nature these examples are, in all cases, being able to make your living or even surviving is foremost enabled by the most basic level of social relations and this is by far more essential than reaching anything more than that (the latter of which is normally not possible without having and activating *wāsṭa*).

Most commonly, when knowing each other, the willingness of others to help when needed is directly related to the personal impression one has left with those others, while in first-time encounters, i.e. among strangers, it is rather the perception others have evolved of the conduct of a whole group – a family, a party or a confessional community – over time which has a major impact on that very willingness to intervene (e.g. when strangers decide to activate *wāsṭa* networks or take direct action in ones favor). With regard to our subject, when a Shi`i appears in a Maronite neighborhood or vice versa, for instance, he or she will usually soon be recognized as such, be it through his or her appearance or through the standard conversations usually taking place in the first minutes of nearly all encounters of Lebanese that have so far not known each other, whether they happen within Lebanon or abroad. The consequences of such a meeting are, of course, not only decided by the conduct (manners) and appearance (e.g.

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[25] Although “Abbas A.´”s brother was, little surprisingly, a Shi’i too, the latter´s belonging to an institution then widely imagined as Maronite rendered this aspect irrelevant, at least for the moment (ibid.).

unkempt or groomed, language skills, displayed knowledge) of that single Shi`i or Maronite person respectively but also by general attitudes as well as pre-existing stereotypes and/ or prejudices prevalent towards the group for which the visitor in our example is seen as representative (Younan 1999, pp. 71–90). In any case, the less common such encounters are for the respective other(s), the more likely a single instance is to have a lasting impact on the larger picture of his or her group in the eyes of the other side.

It is on this level, where also the dimension of religion in the sense applied in this work comes into play most forcefully. The majority of Lebanese shares an expressed belief in one God and accordant convictions (Hanf 2007, pp. 15–6). If not disturbed by interventions from within the political field and its central actors that regularly aim at mobilization and thereby often emphasize the differences rather than commonalities among the respective groups, this manifests as another strong cultural bond, irrespective of all differences resulting from the varying faiths, confessions, saints, dogmata, forms of worship, etc. Many Lebanese encounter each other as believers in a single higher authority, in a day of judgment, and in the final destinations of heaven and hell. This is what they have in common when being religious, and naturally, this does also influence their conduct in many ways.

Arguably as a result of the high confessional/ religious diversity of their country and nation, the Lebanese have developed a set of "shared devotional practices," such as in particular the regular mutual pilgrimages to and worshiping at the holy sites of other faiths and/ or confessions (Farra-Haddad 2013, pp. 68–9; Germanos 2012, p.1 [fn 1]), and of participating in their respective religious ceremonies. The local culture of saint worship takes a special place in this equation, given that a) most holy sites are simply connected to a certain saint and b) that the mutual veneration includes both "shared saints" who have a holy status in more than one Abrahamic religion (e.g. the various biblical prophets, the Virgin Mary, or Saint George) (Farra-Haddad, pp. 4–6) and such otherwise – i.e. outside of the Lebanese context – exclusively venerated by one religious or confessional group (e.g. the Maronite Saint Charbel) (ibid., pp. 6–7).

By taking recourse to a typology put forward by Anne-Françoise Weber (Weber 2007, p. 88), distinguishing different forms of dialogue observable in Lebanon – theological, intellectual, spiritual, ethical and "dialogue of life" – Nour Farra-Haddad assigns the shared devotional practices in Lebanon, especially the worshipping of saints to the latter, the dialogue-of-life-category, adding, "they exist and promote interreligious dialogue away from political interests." (Farra-Haddad 2013, p. 69–70) This renders them an exceptional social space largely protected from whatsoever influences emanating from the political field, allowing for the maintenance of dialogue even during phases of tremendous social and political unrest, like during the Lebanese Civil War (ibid., p. 54).

According to Farra-Haddad, social markers such as “gender, social class, and religion [here obviously in the function of ethnicized confession] have no place in saint worship and thus do not play any role in the achievement or success of the vow.” (Ibid., p. 54) However, while they are neither decisive for the ritual or its subjectively felt success, nor for the question of mutual acceptance, it is still safe to conclude that none of these social markers becomes fully “invisible” at any point in time. In other words, the different pilgrims do indeed recognize the social and in particular the ethnicized-confessional background of their fellow worshippers. And even if the qualitative judgment usually linked to that recognition – based on experience, friend-enemy conceptions, stereotypes and bias – is temporarily suspended through the specifics of this protected social space, the commonly positive experience made by the various faithful in their joint veneration and worshipping can of course be remembered and, crucially, reconnected to the overall patterns of sense-making when stepping back out of this protected social space. Thus, besides the potentially uniting power the shared pilgrimages and mutual worshipping of saints – but also the participation in other faiths´ ceremonies – possess in their own right, they also have a radiating effect on inter- and intra-community relations in Lebanon in more general. They are, after all, not only expressions of the religious belief, piety and conviction of a given believer but also display respect for the values and sensitivities of the religious other.

This display of respect is taken further by instances of efforts aimed at facilitating the religious practices and ceremonies of other confessional groups. The Shi`i Hizbullah, for instance, was among the most ardent supporters of the renovation of the Maghen Abraham Synagogue in Beirut’s former Jewish quarter, Wadi Abu Jamil (Haaretz 27/5/2009). In a similar manner, the party usually offers its Christmas greetings to the major Maronite, Orthodox and other Christian representations (Yalibnan.com 29/12/2014) and it allegedly at times provided Christmas trees to Christians in some spots of South Lebanon readily before the Holy Night.[26] Hizbullah furthermore regularly takes on even participating in the celebration of Christmas to a certain degree, as when decorating areas under its influence with Christmas trees, sending its boy scouts to sing Christmas songs in Maronite churches or when it just pays general attention to this important Christian festival, as manifested in media coverage or speeches (Daily Star 31/12/2014; Al-Monitor 30/12/2012). While these last examples clearly have a political dimension too, they do also constitute, like all other aspects of inter-religious interaction described, a lasting investment in good inter-community relations on the citizen level. This is because, whatever these acts of Hizbullah – to stay with the example – may entail in terms of political calculus and opportunism, they are before anything else perceived and will be remembered by those at the receiving end as generous and respectful deeds, a marked display of religious tolerance, extended by Shi`i Muslims towards their Christian countrymen.

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[26] This information has been shared with the author by some South Lebanese Maronite Christians in informal talks in 2011.

What has been delineated above points not to sectarian, ethnicized-confessional, or tribal characteristics, but rather to the opposite; highly inclusive, partially religious, and, with reference to Anderson´s concept of imagined communities – basically nationalist traits. This might become much more palpable when considering that, in spite of the pronounced hospitality of many Lebanese (which makes up another significant cultural commonality); by far not all of what has been said about the interaction on the grassroots level extends to people other than fellow countrymen. This matter is clearly observable in the relations between Lebanese on the one hand, and foreigners in Lebanon on the other hand, as well as between Lebanese diaspora communities and their respective host societies. Whilst the quality and intensity of those interactions do indeed heavily vary according to the particular constellation and friend- and enemy-conceptions or other factors influencing the attitude of the Lebanese in question, they all have in common that they generally remain confined to relations between an in- and an out-group (another characteristic indicating a national bond). This is especially the case because it is implicitly – and in most instances accurately – assumed on behalf of the Lebanese, that their respective counterparts are either not aware of, or not comparably affected by the bulk of inner-Lebanese affairs and conditions, or both. It is therefore safe to conclude, that the citizens level of inter-community relations, when not disturbed by negligent interventions from within the political field, constitutes a significant sphere of the social in Lebanon which neither confessionalism nor sectarianism, neither clientelism nor regionalism or patrimonialism have ever successfully penetrated in sustainable terms.

Under normal conditions, this form of grassroots or social capital is something that most people in Lebanon are granted by birth. As they are most commonly growing up within pre-existing social relations of the kind described, they are literally inheriting the accordant social capital (including, in many cases, the access to particular *wāsṭa* networks). It is by no means something that will stay, however, if one does not actively do something to preserve or extend these relations (Bourdieu 1983, p. 193). Doing so requires a) time and money (i.e. economic capital) to invest in the necessary efforts to keep up and build social relations, b) special knowledge of the cultural norms, behavioral rules, and of the symbols and symbolic practices governing the field, and c) having the skills and sensitivity to act as demanded by the context. While a) and b) are mainly a matter of chances and class, c) over time became part of the Lebanese *habitus*.

Being capable of thinking and acting in confessionalist terms is not only an important commonality but also another cultural trait shared by all Lebanese – as individuals and as distinct groups or classes. Because neither the ethnicizing nature nor the logic of competition of the political field usually extend to all levels of inter- and intra-community relations, antagonism along these lines is by no means inevitable, nor is it even more likely than harmony. The character and the quality of the actual relations thus vary significantly. In any case, being able to recognize and distinguish between the different components of Lebanon´s social fabric, in order to locate and classify other Lebanese and being able to address them accordingly is among the skills necessary for mastering the field. In general, the more knowledge of the different communities, their particularities and sensitivities, of their history, religion, collective traumas and glories one has, the more inter- and intra-community capital one owns.

The most obvious markers of distinction of any large group are usually their particular symbols (Volkan 2003, pp. 51–61). Because our focus rests on communities primarily defined by confession, this to a large degree pertains to religious symbols and social practices too. We are referring here exclusively to highly obvious distinctive markers such as clothing, language, names or religious ceremonies and rituals. It is precisely because of their obviousness that they can be learned relatively easy and quickly even by outsiders. As is so often the case, however, the devil is in the details. Such symbols that are shared by any of the Lebanese communities, with one of the larger sacral – religious (Christian, Muslim, Druze or Jewish) and/ or confessional (Maronite-Catholic/ Orthodox/ Protestant or Twelver Shi`i/ *Isma´ili*/ `Alawite) – communities to which they belong (Anderson 2006, p. 22), are only of secondary relevance to us, as they are not in that sense "valued in specific ways by only one large group," (Volkan 2003, p. 60) because we are here only concerned with those large groups constituted by each of their Lebanese branches respectively.

Yet, such broader markers may still be of relevance, if and when they nonetheless fulfill the basic function of distinction within any given Lebanese context (be it at home or abroad). As an example we may think of traditional Twelver Shi`i or Maronite clothing, or of children named after the communities´ saints (e.g. `Alī, Ḥusayn or Zaynab for the Shi`a and Charbel or

Maroun for the Maronites): In both cases, when meeting someone dressed or named accordingly in Lebanon, it is almost for certain, that this person belongs to the relevant Lebanese community, and not, let´s say to the Iraqi Shi`a or Syrian Maronites.

A noteworthy specialty of the Lebanese Christians, and in particular the Maronites, is that they often choose Western or Westernized (most often in their French, sometimes in their English, version) names for their children, such as Daniel, Michel, Raymond or Sabine. Together with other markers of a Western lifestyle (clothes, art, etc.) and the frequent resorting to French (and to a lesser extent English) terms or language altogether, these names stand out as symbols for the Francophone leanings and feelings of belonging to Europe or the Global West[27] altogether, that are explicitly harbored by many Lebanese Maronites.

To stay with the issue of names for a moment, in contrast to many other places (including most Muslim-majority societies) in the world, in Lebanon, Sunni Muslims would under normal circumstances not give their children such names as Ali or Husayn, nor would Shi`a name their offspring Umar,[28] except for cases, in which the parents want to make a particular statement, as in the following instance. In 2005, the author came to know a Sunni Lebanese family that hospitably invited him and his colleagues to stay overnight at their house on the slopes of the Anti-Lebanon mountain range, in the northeast of Lebanon, less than a mile away from the border to Syria. The two eldest boys in the family were named Hassan and Ali. As the father, a Lebanese border official, frankly explained, this was because both he and his wife were staunch admirers of Hassan Nasrallah and Hizbullah (which was hardly to be overlooked given that the walls of the tiny house were virtually covered with posters, photos and emblems of both). Such cases, albeit occurring regularly, do still constitute exceptions to the norm. In a similar fashion, neither would Lebanese Maronites or other Christians here usually give their children any unequivocally Muslim names, nor vice versa, whereas names such as `Īsa (Jesus), Mariam (Mary) Moussa (Moses) or Zakariya (Zacharias) constitute a special case because of their religious meaning to both groups. This last aspect, however, is not so much of a Lebanese particularity but rather the worldwide norm wherever Muslims and Christians live together in substantial numbers.

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[27] When applying the term "West" in this study, while taking recourse to the centuries old conception of an East-West schism marking the major ecclesial-theological rift that occurred in the mid-eleventh century, I no longer refer to a geographical unit. Rather, the concept of "West" in this context is one defined through a correlation of attributes (interests, worldview, self-perception, etc.) among the elements included, whereas they remain far from being viewed as coherent, and the prefix "global" only serves to display its non-geographical character. Representatives of western countries in this sense may hail from such different geographical locations as the UK, Germany, France, Israel, South Korea, Australia or the USA.

[28] The respective meanings of these names for Sunni and Shi'i Muslims are clarified in chapter 2.

A Lebanese specialty can be found in the application of language. Certain terms and expressions have in Lebanon become markers of distinction in their own right, even though their original meaning alone does not account for any such distinction. For example, some Lebanese Christians, again in particular Maronites, tend to refrain from applying the traditional Arab salutation "*al-salāmu `alaikum*" ("peace be upon you") or the correct reply "*wa-`alaikum al-salām*" ("and peace be upon you") and instead either, when interacting with Muslims, use the simple "*marḥabā*" (hello), or, when talking to fellow Christians – the term "*sa`īdī*" (happiness; short form of "*awqāt al-sa`īdī"* [happy times]). Muslims in turn would rather use the phrase "*al-salāmu `alaikum*" when interacting amongst each other, and "*marḥabā*", or – if they want to express their respect for the Christians – also "*sa`īdī*," when communicating with Christians. The author has frequently witnessed the latter habit when passing with Lebanese Muslims through the *hārat al-masīhiyya* ([residential] quarter of the Christians) of Tyre or other Christian residential places in South Lebanon.

The discussed markers may inform the observer about more than just the ethnicized-confessional belonging of a random person. Besides the obvious function and effects of outright political symbols (e.g. FPM or Hizbullah shirts, headbands, or flags), there are numerous, often much more subtle forms of expressing belonging. A traditional religious outfit for instance, informs us about the religiosity of that person, while the particular choice of that outfit within the confines of the culturally accepted may tell us just as much about his or her partisan affiliation and/ or lifestyle.

A suitable example of how partisan affiliation became symbolized and recognizable through a certain dress code is the originally Persian chador (the formerly clear-cut religious meaning of which has previously been dismantled, politically loaded, reinterpreted and finally reconstructed anew against the background – and by the protagonists – of the Islamic Revolution in Iran [1978/ 79]), an outer cloak, traditionally worn by pious Shi`i woman in Iran and partially in neighboring countries. In Lebanon, the chador gained momentum first during the Islamic Revolution in Iran and henceforth became a symbol of allegiance to Sayyid Ayatollah Ruhollah Musawi Khomeini (1902–89) and the revolution itself. Women that nowadays wear a chador in Lebanon most certainly – again, not without exceptions – belong to the environment of Hizbullah, and if not so, in any case to the broader Shi`i Islamist milieu. Aside from partisan affiliation, it also tells us something about the lifestyle of the woman in question, or, more precisely, what she wants to represent; in this example namely piety (Deeb 2006, p. 204).

Western-style clothing and aspects of an accordant lifestyle nowadays hardly make up distinguishing factors in Lebanon, given the effects of globalization and the advanced Westernization of much of the domestic cultural sphere. As a result, both Christian and Muslim urban youth meet at modern shopping malls and cinemas, have their coffee and snacks at Starbucks, McDonalds or local establishments of a comparable kind and often buy their clothes – of largely similar brands – in the same array of fancy shops (such as Vero Moda, H&M or Jack & Jones) that today have branches in most major cities all over the world. This should not belie the fact that Lebanon´s large ethnicized-confessional groups all have their own opportunities for doing all of the aforementioned more or less separately from each other. Shopping malls in Beirut can today be equally found in the Sunni-dominated city center, in the mainly Shi`i-inhabited southern suburbs, and in the overwhelmingly Maronite Christian eastern part of the capital alongside its adjacent eastern suburbs. In addition, all groups have their own specific infrastructures such as hospitals, schools, or spots for leisure activities, providing their members with opportunities to stay largely amongst themselves. A UN-ESCWA-led focus group analysis of perception among youth in Lebanon, published in 2009, meanwhile found that participants generally accepted social mixing in spaces designated for work, studying, shopping and leisure time, which, to them seemed to carry little political or communal meaning but were rather viewed as "banal spaces," to be pragmatically utilized according to their respective function (UN-ESCWA/ HBS-ME 2009, p. 18).

Having said all this, it is still more often than not, that people encounter each other without knowing their mutual names and in the absence of other obvious markers of the kind discussed before. The common act or ritual applied in practice to then find out about the counterpart is guided by a number of behavioral norms (none of which are followed at all times by everyone, of course). To begin with, one should not ask straightforwardly for the confessional belonging of anybody. Alternatively, one first engages in a conversation about something more insignificant or at least non-controversial. At one point, one might recognize a certain accent or make other observations pointing to the communal and/ or religious background of the stranger. On that basis one may ask if he or she comes from a certain region perceived as suiting one or more of these attributes.[29] Afterwards, one asks for the family name (literally “house,” *al-bayt*). From that point on, one will usually not only receive the information needed for a successful social classification but will also be asked and be answering the same questions in turn. This ritual has an important socializing function too, as the very mastering and performance of this act itself, through its steady repetition in varying constellations, reinforces the common national and cultural bonds of the participants, marking them out as all belonging to one and the same society and nation.

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[29] "Qassem A.", a Shi'i supporter of Hizbullah from South Lebanon explained: "we can [recognize] each other from the names, from the behaviors, from when we are [asking] each other; from where are you? We can

There are a multitude of unwritten social norms and cultural messages,[30] the incorporated knowledge of which allows the participants of the field to play according to its rules and move safely within its virtual confines. The overwhelming share of them, however, are not of special relevance for the aspect of inter- and intra-community interaction, but govern the social in Lebanon irrespective of the country’s internal divisions. As examples we could think of behavioral traditions deriving from the larger Arab culture, e.g. in regard to family loyalty and honor, generosity and hospitality; or of something more specifically Lebanese, such as the rules following how men, women, or couples respectively find their seat in Lebanese public transport,[31] or how believers deal with self-styled atheists and vice versa.

It would neither be possible within the confines of this work, nor would it be of any special relevance for satisfying its epistemological interest, to go into such details any further. It must be understood, however, that all of these social and cultural norms and rules, be they of a specific or of a general significance for inter- and intra-community relations in Lebanon, belong to the overall body of rules governing the field as a whole.

… we know which one is Shi’a, which one is Sunni, which one is Marouni, which one is Orthodox … we can [recognize] each other.” (Author´s interv. CC.Hzb.5 2017)

[30] In the words of Michelle LeBaron “Cultural messages, simply, are what everyone in a group knows that outsiders do not know.” (LeBaron 2003)

[31] In short, the rule is that women are either seated beside their husbands or in the midst of their relatives, between the latter and the exterior, or besides other women. People within the transport in question usually react immediately and seemingly automatically to the constellations of passengers waiting to get on respectively and often the chauffeur takes the role of the director. The idea is to make every possible effort to shield women from strange men. Strikingly, if this is not possible without losing a paying passenger, the rule is simply repealed and everybody acts accordingly. Yet, as soon as the constellation of passengers allows for a correction, this is immediately enacted. Although the aforementioned goes in particular for Muslim majority areas whereas Christians are partially a bit more relaxed with these codices, it is still the general rule in most of the country (field observations of the author, 2002-2019).

1.2 BACKGROUND AND STATE OF THE ART

1.2.1 Communal power-sharing and political confessionalism

Lebanon´s mode of consociational democracy combines regional with communal power sharing, based on fixed quotas supposed to guarantee proportional representation. As the Lebanese communities referred to here are foremost defined by confession, this aspect of the political system is known as political confessionalism or political sectarianism (*al-ṭā´ifiyya al-siyāsiyya*). Recognition is granted to eighteen confessional communities belonging to at least three Abrahamic-monotheist religions; Twelve Christian (Maronite Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Chaldean, Assyrian, Copt and Protestant), five Muslim (Shi`i, Sunni, Druze,[32] Isma'ili, `Alawite or *Nusayri-Isma´ili*) denominations plus a small Jewish community are officially registered and enjoy special political, juridical and social rights.

The acknowledged highest authorities of these communities "are considered state figures with specially marked cars and official titles." (Khalifah 1997, p. 134) With some notable exceptions (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.4 2017), they even "receive salaries from the state budget" (Henley 2016, p. 15) and wield a notable degree of formal decision-making power in elementary fields of governance. Most importantly, basically all are operating their own judicial courts for personal status matters such as inheritance, marriage and divorce (Harris 2012, p. 15).[33]

Senior political and military positions as well as higher administrative offices are allocated according to a pre-fixed ratio, roughly in proportion to the relative demographic weight of the communities, based on Lebanon´s census of 1932 (Hanf 1990, p. 91), since when the demographic composition has changed dramatically. Yet, despite some adjustments, "[t]he distribution of parliamentary seats and the staffing of the state administration were not seriously attuned to demographic change." (Rosiny 2015, p. 489) Although significant modifications of the system have been implemented, following the Ta`if Accord (see below) at the end of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-90), this situation remains the case until today.

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[32] The Druze are counted among the Muslims in Lebanon, because they are originally an 11th century off-shoot of Isma'ili (Sevener Shi'i) Islam. However, they are nowadays widely viewed as constituting an independent faith, even if that view is by no means undisputed, neither among non-Druze, nor among the Druze themselves (Schenk 2006, p. 84). In January 2010, the author discussed this question with a number of Lebanese Druze, most of which were either activists or local politicians belonging to the Jumblatt-led *Progressive Socialist Party* [PSP], in different spots in Mount Lebanon. Their comments broadly corroborated this ambivalence; with some considering the Druze a self-standing religion and others not, while again others were indifferent about this aspect.

[33] There are two exceptions; the tiny minority of Copts which is vicariously represented by the Syrian Orthodox (Harris 2012, p. 15) and the Jews, which, after the Lebanese Civil War (1975-90) counted less than one hundred. The last Chief Rabbi to head the Rabbinic Tribunal of Lebanon served from 1960-1977, after which this post remained vacant (Schulze 2009, pp. 110, 175–8). Jewish community life in Lebanon has since become quasi-invisible. Yet, a president at the head of the Lebanese Jewish Community Council remains in office until today and in a statement of 2016, on its official Facebook page, the Council claimed that there were more than 2,000 Lebanese Jews residing in the country (Facebook page of the Lebanese Jewish Community Council and the Maghen Abraham Synagogue in Beirut 2016).

The highest positions available in the Lebanese body politic – the troika of the "three presidents" – are traditionally reserved for representatives of the three largest sects with the President of the Republic being a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister (or "Minister President") a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of the House (i.e. the "President of the Parliament") a Shi`i Muslim. The latter tradition goes back to the National Pact of 1943, an unwritten "gentleman´s agreement," outlining a compromise on the country´s identity (mediated between perceptions of Western or Arab belonging, as expressed by leading Christians and Muslims respectively) and the element of communal power-sharing, concluded between the first (Maronite) President of the Republic, Bishara al-Khouri, and the first (Sunni) Prime Minister, Riad al-Sulh, following independence (Hanf 1990, p. 98–102).

The confessional system necessitates citizenship based on confessional belonging because in interplay with aspects of the societal order of Lebanon it renders this belonging a precondition of political and societal participation. It "ethnicizes" confessional identities by allocating every citizen to a certain *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*[34] by birth (Rosiny 2011a, pp. 4–5).

Lebanese confessionalism is and has been subject to profound criticism for what is described as its sectarian nature, judged as blending politics and religion (Habib 2009, p. 64; cf. Makdisi 2017), quasi-inevitably leading to inter-group antagonism (Andraos 2016, pp. 116–20; Nelson 2013, pp. 373-4, Habib 2009, p. 65), making inter-group violence a likely possibility (Choucair 2006, pp. 3–6) and hampering nationalism (cf. Makdisi 1996, pp. 23–24). It has also been criticized for what are viewed as procedural and institutional shortcomings of an otherwise more or less successful system (Hanf 1990, p. 101) or for aspects related to the model of consociationalism and its usually deprecated features (Andraos 2016, pp. 54–85; Habib 2009). It is thereby commonly identified as being the "root of all evils" in Lebanon (cf. Karam 2017, p. 2; cf. Majed 2017). Camille Habib, for instance, in his essay, "Lebanese Politics and the Tyranny of Confessionalism," writes, "Lebanon is a confessional, not a democratic, state; for democracy can only develop and flourish in a secular state" (Habib 2009, p. 64) and that, "[i]t is of an urgent need for Lebanon to begin the process of deconfessionalism [sic] as a departure point towards modernizing the state and the mentality of the citizens." (Ibid., p. 65)

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[34] This common German phrase has no equivalent in English. It analogously translates into "a community bound together by common destiny."

In a similar spirit, Julia Choucair characterizes the system, "as a chronic disease that periodically erupts into a crisis [because e]ven low levels of internal dissatisfaction or external pressure can upset the delicate balance and cause the government to disintegrate." (Choucair 2006, p. 3) Theodor Hanf, in contrast, identifies certain aspects of the system as problematic, not so much the system itself. One of his main arguments concerns the fixed mode of proportional representation: "While the National Pact constituted a great, indeed a historical compromise, the adoption of a fixed mode of proportional representation heavily constricted the margin for the small, daily compromises, equally necessary in consociational systems." (Hanf 1990, p. 101)

The circumstances and givens of Lebanon´s political and societal order described have three major implications for the study at hand. The first is that political concerns or demands cannot be effectively articulated other than based on the ethnicized confessional affiliation. Otherwise they bear no weight. This implies that being a formal member of one of Lebanon´s recognized communities and being capable of applying confessionalist rhetoric and practice are necessary pre-conditions for participating in the nation, for making nationalist claims, and, in fact, for actually being a national. As Roschanack Shaery-Yazdi has put it, in modern Lebanon,

> "sectarianism is a set of political, religious, and socio-economic practices aimed at breaking the hegemonic national claims of other religious communities and of establishing visions of the nation in which the existence of sectarian others is not denied, but in which one´s own community is accorded a central place in the nation." (Shaery 2008, p. 9)

In Lebanon, nationalism and confessionalism do not therefore exclude one another; unlike it is often assumed as a kind of basic rule (cf. Makdisi 1996, pp. 23–24). Rather, confessionalism must be granted the role of the main precursor to Lebanese nationalisms, however different or concurring they may be (Shaery 2008, pp. 8–10). Secondly, the coexistence of Lebanon´s confessional communities as a basic condition of cohabitation is a principle firmly established in the country's political culture (Shaery 2008, p. 9; Hanf 1990, pp. 664–7, ibid. 2007). At stake, however, are the conditions of coexistence, especially the distribution of power, economic resources and shares in the sovereignty to interpret "the essence" of the Lebanese nation (Shaery 2008, p. 9; Hanf 1990, pp. 69, 102, 116–50; Salibi

1988, pp. 200–15). All of these aspects are subject to a process of continuous negotiation, which in the past has periodically contributed to the outbreak of violent conflict (Hanf 1990). The third implication, finally, is the one most central to this study. The relations among and within the recognized communities of Lebanon, especially amongst the four largest and politically most relevant (Shi`i and Sunni Muslims, Maronite Christians, and Druze),[35] constitute the main causative variable for developments concerning the societal level as a whole. Their intensity and quality decide, as a last resort, about progress or stagnation, cooperation or blockade, reconciliation or alienation and, finally, war or peace.

1.2.2 Maronite-Shi`i communal relations

As most of the larger Lebanese communities (with the notable exception of the Orthodox Christians), the Maronites and Shi`a are each thoroughly described in academic literature (Maronites: Dau 1984, Khashan 1990, Salibi 1991, Khoury-Harb 1995, Khalifah 1997/ Shi`a: Norton 1987, Rosiny 1996, Deeb 2006, Shaery 2008, Chalabi 2006, Weiss 2010, Winter 2010, Abisaab/ Abisaab 2014 amongst others). Regarding the inter-relations of Lebanon's Shi`a, Sunnis, Maronites and Druze, much has been said about Sunni-Shi`i relations (e.g. Council on Foreign Relations [CFR] 2017; Khashan 2016; CFR 2016; Abdo 2013; Fisk 2001, pp. 56-7; Salibi 1988, pp. 50–2), Maronite-Druze relations (e.g. Traboulsi 2007, pp. 3–40; Salibi 2006, pp. 105–11¸ 197–205; Hanf 1990, pp. 354–8; Salibi 1988 pp. 15–6, 50–6, 67–8, 146–7, 229–31) and Sunni-Maronite relations (e.g. el-Khazen 1991; Hanf 1990 pp. 98–100, 170–7; Salibi 1988, pp. 34–5, 49-55). Besides being implicitly included in studies on Christian-Muslim relations in Lebanon (e.g. Münch-Heubner 2002; Azar/ Mullet 2002; Hajjar 2002), the Shi`i-Maronite relations have so far been hardly recognized. As one central cause for this, we can identify an implicit denial "in the traditional historical literatures on Lebanon" (Chalabi 2006, p. 7) of any noteworthy role of the Lebanese Shi`a in the consolidation, foundation and early developments of modern Lebanon. Tamara Chalabi notes:

> "Although Christian and Muslim historians have had different agendas, both have succeeded in excluding the Shiʿis from their history – they are at best allocated a few sentences in contemporary school books. The Maronites´ need to emphasize their strong roots in Lebanon led them to ignore the other inhabitants of this land. As for the Arabist interpretations, the Shiʿis perceived lack of involvement in the dominant political focus of the time, Arab nationalism,

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[35] The (Greek) Orthodox Christians are estimated to account for the fourth largest community in terms of numbers, while the Druze only come fifth in this respect (Harris 2012, p. 14). Yet, the Druze are widely regarded as one of Lebanon´s most influential and politically most relevant communities, because of their acknowledged role in the foundation of modern Lebanon.

> was used as a justification by those who pursued Arab nationalist interpretations of the modern Middle East to ignore the political presence of this community.” (Chalabi 2006, pp. 7–8)

This process of hushing up the Shi`a´s role in Lebanese history has had lasting effects. The historian Josephine Quinn, for instance, in a recent essay, describes the foundations of early modern Lebanon as follows:

> “The French Mandate of Syria included a strip of prosperous Mediterranean ports backing on to the rural highlands of Mount Lebanon, the traditional home of the Maronites, who are Eastern Catholics in communion with the Vatican, and the Druze, whose beliefs combine Islamic teachings with elements from other Eurasian religious traditions. The Maronites and the Druze had a history of warfare and little in common. Nonetheless, since 1861 they had been governed together under the Turks as a separate administrative district from the coastal cities of Beirut, Tyre and Sidon, which were largely inhabited by Sunni Muslims.” (Quinn 2018)

Not only does this depiction of things completely ignore the Shi`a and also other Lebanese communities, it also perfectly mirrors the dominant national founding myth of modern Lebanon. According to the latter, the basically Druze emirate of Mount Lebanon (1523–1842) with the Maronite and Druze communities in tow constitutes the sole nucleus of modern Lebanon (1920-present) (Traboulsi 2007, pp. 3–23; Salibi 1988, pp. 15–7; Quinn 2018; cf. Winter 2010, p. 2; Chalabi 2006, pp. 7-8). Upon reversion to the special rights enjoyed by Maronites and Druze in the “small Lebanon” under European protection, the Shi`a are generally considered to have suffered the fate of a paralyzed community at best, given their exposure to direct Sunni Ottoman rule and the absence of a foreign patron (El Husseini 2008; cf. Winter 2010, pp. 2–6). More recent research, however, has questioned this narrative. In fact, Shi`a historically wielded much influence in Mount Lebanon and many of the local Maronites were subjects to Shi`i notables´ direct rule for the bulk of the period of Ottoman rule (Winter 2010). As a consequence, traditional understandings of the Shi`i community´s role in the emergence of modern Lebanon, and its relationships to the other communities have to be revisited and adjusted.[36]

Whereas the moments of intense contact between Maronites and Shi`a in historical perspective happen to be much more than commonly suggested, their distance in the more recent past, especially during the last few decades, has been comparably high. Viewed from an angle of geopolitics, some of the foreign protecting powers of both groups have been frequently at loggerheads. In geographical terms, since the early years of the Civil War (1975-

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[36] This process seems to have slowly come into operation as reflected in parts of William Harris´ work “Lebanon. A History 600–2011” (2012), which takes notice of and includes some findings of Stefan Winter (2010).

90), which saw the effective homogenization of many formerly mixed neighborhoods, their respective core areas of settlement in Lebanon have been largely divided[37] and many individuals on both sides have never or only occasionally visited the regions of "the other." During the war years, the two communities, in Beirut and far beyond, were separated through physical borders and their fighters often faced each other as enemies, given their numerical preponderance among the Christian and Muslim dominated militias respectively. Moreover, there is also the kind of felt distance, which results from the diverging perceptions of both group's roles and status within the Lebanese nation.

1.2.3 Against a "Maronite blueprint:" patterns of Lebanese nationalism

To understand the Maronites – and the stands, actions and policies of contemporary Maronite political and religious actors in Lebanon – one must first understand their strong feeling of attachment to Lebanon: "Without the Maronites there would not have been a Lebanon, and without Lebanon the destiny of Christianity in the Middle East would certainly have been more unstable." (St. Elias Maronite Catholic Church n.y. b)

This quite representative statement carries within itself, the most important implications of this feeling of attachment. Lebanon, and especially the modern nation-state of Lebanon, is unthinkable without the Maronites, which, upon inversion, renders the Maronites the Lebanese people *par excellence*. At the latest since the end of World War I, when the age of nationalism fully unfolded in the Middle East, the Maronites thus already perceived of themselves as a distinct nation, which sets them apart from all other Lebanese communities, except for the Lebanese Armenians and Jews, with both of whom they share the self-conception of a not only religiously but also ethnically distinct people.[38] In fact, modern Maronite historians are strongly concerned with pointing out their conviction, that, while their religion was brought to them by Syrians and from Syria, the growing Maronite flock was largely made up of converted pagans from Lebanon: "The people remained the same, but their religion changed." (Dau 1984, p. 189) It follows that their genetic decent is overwhelmingly

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[37] There are still important spots, for which the opposite holds true. Most importantly, this pertains to the southern port city of Tyre, the Ras Beirut area in the capital, the extreme South and parts of the Bekaa valley.

[38] In contrast to the Maronites, however, the Jews do neither in their entirety have a fixed concept of a homeland, as claimed in particular by Zionist ideologues (the nowadays tiny – but until about 1982 numerically substantial – Lebanese Jewish community has throughout the history of modern Lebanon been well integrated without being forced to assimilate [Schulze 2009, p. 179]), nor would such a Jewish homeland be constituted by Lebanon for any Jew worldwide.

Canaanite or Phoenician, which is seen as synonymous with Lebanese, often in delimitation from Syrian or Arab (Khoury Harb 1995, p. 46–8; Dau 1984, pp. 9–16, 187–90):

> "The Syrian origin of the Maronites in Lebanon is religious, not ethnic. The great bulk of the Maronites in Lebanon are indigenous and Phoenician, not Syrian. [W]e cannot deny however that the Maronites of Lebanon do have some Syrian blood in them. Some Maronites emigrated from Syria in successive waves over a long period of time extending from the sixth to the eighteenth century, and were assimilated by the larger mass of native Lebanese Maronites." (Dau 1984, pp. 189–90)

The claim of most Maronite historians – and some others – to a more or less undiffused Phoenician (or Canaanite) genetic heritage is surely the one most vehemently opposed of all the historical controversies in question here. The principal counter-narrative holds that the first Maronites in Lebanon were Syrians, which, from the mid-7th through the 8th century "moved south from the Orontes Valley into the heights inland from Tripoli [a coastal town located in the North of modern Lebanon]." (Harris 2012, p. 34) The unspoken implication of such a view is, of course, that the Lebanese Maronites must share a significant percentage of their genetic heritage with Syrians.

Be that as it may, the linkage between being Maronite and being Lebanese made by Maronites in their identity construction allows for different conclusions to be drawn with respect to the legitimacy of other group´s claims to the latter and such different conclusions have led to different ideological trends among Maronite nationalists. To put it in a nutshell: To be a Lebanese people *par excellence*, is certainly not the same as being the sole Lebanese people *par excellence*. Most importantly, while the first perception leaves some room for others, the second entails a claim to exclusiveness, based on narratives in which the Maronites appear as the "only true" Lebanese – that is the "natives" (Mallat 1987, p. 16) – because all other groups, and in particular the Muslim communities, are considered immigrants of mostly Arab origin (e.g. ibid., pp. 13–7). This perceived exclusiveness of the Maronites, which has in modern times been explicitly proclaimed by a section of their community´s elites, often surfaced in combination with ideas of superiority, according to which the Phoenician genetic heritage was superior to that of Arabs (and basically all others).[39] This brought about a specifically Maronite form of chauvinism preaching the primacy of the Maronites. It has been derogatorily labeled “Political Maronitism” or “Maronite Isolationism” by its opponents (Jumblatt 1982, pp. 46, 48, 53).

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[39] However, "Maronites and Copts, many of them products of Beirut´s American College […] and the Jesuit College of St. Joseph […] were major contributors to the revival of classical Arabic […]" (Anderson 2006, p. 75) whereby they willingly or not patronized the rise of Arab nationalism too.

Even though the term “Maronitism” originally denoted “those Maronites of the early 20th century who opposed the State of Greater Lebanon, created in 1920 under the French mandate, and supported a “small Lebanon” under French protection in the mountains, because the Muslim population is much smaller in that area,” (Felsch 2014) the corresponding ideologies referred to here had their main momentum only during the Civil War (1975-90) years and manifested to different degrees in the practice of some of the major Maronite-dominated militias. The unique ideological attributes of Maronitism then and now boil down to a) the idea of a Christian Lebanon with strong ties to the West (comparable to the Zionist idea of a Jewish state, ideally accommodating the worldwide Jewish diaspora in the area of historical Palestine) b) isolationism, internally aiming (under the conditions of Greater Lebanon – that is having to share Lebanon with other confessional groups and religions) at a cantonization and federation/ confederation, and resisting regional integration and c) safeguarding or, nowadays, reinstating Maronite supremacy and dominance in the national economy and polity.

In post-war Lebanon under Syrian tutelage, however, such positions have been largely tabooed and condemned as “extremist” from non-Maronites and from within core Maronite circles alike. Subsequently, they ceased to have the strong clout they used to have in the debate on Lebanese nationalism. Yet, they have never disappeared, nor have they failed to leave their lasting imprint.

In contrast to the label “(Political) Maronitism” the concepts of “Phoenicianism” and “Lebanism” or “Lebanonism” represent broader categories. In principle, they merely capture the collective focal points of basically all strands of Maronite nationalism – Phoenicia[40] and

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[40] Imaginations of the Phoenicians as a politically homogenous group, or even nation, are a quite frequent phenomenon, which is by no means limited to Lebanese historians. They are a side effect of the *Zeitgeist* marking the age of nationalism – i.e. our age – and not a result of empirical analysis (Quinn 2018). However, while the idea of an ancient Phoenician nation in the modern sense of this term is highly improbable, the true nature and extent of cooperation and coordination between the different Phoenician city states alongside their trading colonies (not to be confused with colonies in the sense of fully controlled oversea territories) and patterns of their peoples´ identity construction, are both still largely unknown. What can be said almost for certain is that a) ancient Tyre, from the onset, shined as the undisputed center of Phoenicia, and surely dominated within whatsoever exact power structure in place among its parts and/ or in the region, until its fall to the Macedonian Alexander the Great in 332 BC and subsequent subjection to foreign rule; b) that the former lead of Tyre was consequently taken up by the metropolis Carthage, located in nowadays Tunisia, which has been founded by Phoenician settlers from Tyre about 400 BC, and finally c) that at the latest at the times of Hamilcar Barca and his larger-than-life son Hannibal, coinciding with the first and second Punic Wars (264-41 and 218-201 BC respectively), both centralization and the level of exerted control in center-periphery relations between Carthage,

Lebanon – and are therefore applicable to all of these strands alike. Moreover, they have in common a pronounced ethno-centrism, which easily translates into Maronitist chauvinism, yet, not necessarily. The true godfathers of Phoenicianism, Charles Corm (1894-1963) and Michel Chiha (1891-1954), did not see a contradiction between being Lebanese of Phoenician origin and Arab at the same time:

> For our part […], we shall say that the population of Lebanon is Lebanese, quite simply, and that, with due reservations made in the case of those very recently naturalized, it is at present no more Phoenician than Egyptian, Aegean, Assyrian or Medic, Greek, Roman, Byzantine or Arab, with or without consanguinity, or European by alliance or Turk for that matter.” (Chiha 1966, pp. 33–4).[41]

In such views, the Phoenician/ Lebanese heritage rests on genetic descent while the Arab belonging mainly stems from culture, whereas both may be valued to a certain degree. In general, “Lebanonism, although non-Arabist in its themes and metaphors, [also] targeted Lebanon’s Muslims and attempted to lure them into assimilating and embracing a Lebanese national idea drained of their traditionally held Arabist convictions.” (Salameh 2004, pp. x–xi) In practice, active outreach from within the Maronite nationalist camp to the Muslims proved fairly limited but it was always existent.

The most influential ideologue of Lebanonism, himself being strongly influenced by both Corm and Chiha, was the cross-confessionally celebrated Lebanese Maronite poet, philosopher and ultra-nationalist Said Aql (1912-2014). Aql vehemently rejected the idea of a decisive Arab heritage and/ or identity of Lebanon. In support of this position, he argued that the Lebanese tongue had developed largely independent from Arabic and was actually not a local Arab dialect but a language in its own right. He even developed a Lebanese alphabet based on partly modified Latin letters (Middle East Forum [MEF]/ United States Committee for a free Lebanon [USCfL] 2003) and actively promoted its application through a far-reaching language reform project (Salameh 2004, p. xii). As of the early 1970s, Aql became the spiritual mentor of the newly founded Lebanese Renewal Party (LRP) (Ḥizb al-Tajaddud al-Lubnāniyya) alongside its more important military wing; the Guardians of the Cedars (GoC) militia (Hurras al-Arz). The GoC are until today led by Étienne Sakr (1937-), better

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other Phoenician settlements and allied powers, had reached a different quality. For this later period of Carthaginian dominance, we can well speak of a kind of Phoenician empire or at least something coming very close to that. Yet, this does still not allow for speaking of a Phoenician nation.

[41] Strikingly, in a one-sentence recital of non-native business elites in colonial Africa, with whom economic power was unevenly shared by the colonialists, Benedict Anderson lists “Lebanese” and “Arab” as distinct identities (Anderson 2006, p. 116).

known by his *nom de guerre*, “Abou Arz” (“Father of the Cedars”), and they were among the first Maronite organizations to collaborate with Israel in Lebanon. They are staunchly anti-Palestinian, anti-Syrian, anti-Arab/ Arabism, but also anti-sectarian and anti-federalist, opposing any sort of partition (of Lebanon). In their own words,

> “[t]he ideology of the 'Guardians of the Cedars' is based on an undivided trinity that is God, Man and Lebanon […] The historic holy land; temple of God on earth […] Lebanon will remain, as always, Lebanese without any labels. The French passed through it yet it remained Lebanese. The Ottomans ruled it and it remained Lebanese. The stinky winds of Arabism blows (sic!) through it, but the wind will wither away and Lebanon will remain Lebanese. I do not know what will become of those wretched people who claim that Lebanon is Arabic when Arabism disappears from the map of the Middle East and a new Middle East would emerge, which is clean from Arabs and Arabism.” (gotc-se.org n.d.)

In the Civil War (1975-90) the GoC quickly earned a reputation for both their fanatic extremism, taking the form of barbarous, ruthless cruelty, especially towards the Palestinians, and their notable effectiveness and steadfastness on the battlefield. At the same time, their anti-sectarianist, anti-federalist, and, most-importantly, anti-Syrian positions at one point all ran counter to the interests of most other major Maronite pro-status-quo groups, whilst they appeared in full harmony with those of General Michel Aoun. As of 1989, Sakr therefore positioned the GoC at the service of the General´s cause of liberating Lebanon from the Syrian occupation. While Michel Aoun and Étienne Sakr clearly found common ground and were willingly cooperating, in reply to the latter´s repeated offer to call in the Israelis, Aoun reportedly “persisted in condemning the Israelis nearly as loudly as he condemned the Syrians.” (MEF/ USCfL 2003) This position of Aoun was not tactical but proved a persistent feature of his political discourse. In a 1995 interview he declared that Lebanon suffered a “dual occupation” and if it still existed, that was only “because of a face-off between Israel and Syria. Were those two states to agree on Lebanon's elimination, it would be gone. We are always someone's plaything.” (Aoun 1995)[42] This particular aspect of General Aoun´s record in retrospect has proven decisive for the materialization of the FPM-Hizbullah rapprochement, given Hizbullah´s known red line when it comes to collaboration with Israel.

Thus, the spectrum of Maronite nationalist currents and ideologies was and continues to be all but monolithic. This is because the twin-concepts of Phoenicianism and Lebanonism do leave room for interpretation and do not automatically culminate in intra-Lebanese isolationism and/ or chauvinism. The GoC, for example, albeit extremist and overtly racist, still never made a qualitative difference between the various ethnicized-confessional communities of Lebanon on ideological grounds but, in following Aql, rather sought to convince the Lebanese altogether of their supposed non-Arabness (this is by no means to say that the GoC´s militiamens´ factual behaviour would have reflected such a nuanced differentiation).

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[42] Quoted after Pipes 1995.

Michel Aoun, in turn, personifies the founding father of yet another strand of Lebanese nationalism, the central principles of which have been born from his military background and the particular situation prevailing in Lebanon upon his ascendancy to power at the height of the Civil War. Ever since he first appeared in the public sphere in the mid-1980s, Aoun stressed in particular the notion of national sovereignty, the primacy of the state, the rule of law and the central role of the national army vice-versa the illegitimacy of militias said to follow their own and not the national interests. As a Maronite Christian in a leading political position in Lebanon, however, Michel Aoun was and is also interested in preserving the Christian´s special status. His support base has always been predominantly Christian (again mainly Maronite) and no one – not even his co-religionist critics – would seriously deny his outstanding importance for the plight of the Lebanese Christians.

Yet, General Aoun reportedly made no difference between Muslims and Christians under his military command and made it clear that what counted for him was merit, patriotism and loyalty to Lebanon, irrespective of the ethnicized-confessional belonging of people. That he did not only pay lip-service to these principles but largely acted accordingly as soon as he was in the position to do so, automatically rendered him an obstacle; not only to most militias, including the Palestinian commandos, but also to the interests of the neighboring states of Syria and Israel, all of which were heavily infringing on Lebanese sovereignty. During his Civil War career, Michel Aoun literally battled all of them. At the same time – exactly because of this displayed indifference towards the ethnicized confessional background of his friends and adversaries alike – the outreach of a Maronite Christian top leader to the Muslims has seldom, if at all, been perceived as comparably sincere ever since the presidency of Fouad Shihab (life: 1903-72; presidency: 1958-64) (with whom Aoun has arguably more in common than this single aspect). As “Abbas A.,” a Shi`i Muslim “Aounist of the first hour,” put it:

> “The first thing Michel Aoun did when he got in charge of the defense ministry was to begin with his own region; with combating and containing the Christian militias, not the Shi`a or others. He started infront of his own door, moved against the Quwwāt [Lebanese Forces] etc. Because of this, I started to like him. He was against the Syrians and against the Quwwāt. In light of his deeds and stances, I gained the impression, that he was loyal to Lebanon and nothing

> else. Since 1988, I was constantly following all steps and actions of Michel Aoun in the news." (Authors interv. CC.FPM.5 2017)

In any case, the mere fact that Maronite nationalism in the making was linked to the idea of Lebanon long before there was a Lebanon in the sense of the modern nation-state carrying that name; the establishment the country´s current borders in 1920 by the French Mandate power, under spacious consideration of some leading Maronite nationalists´ interests, forced all other groups settling on its soil to at least grapple with the Maronite view(s) – a task which they coped with in different ways and with only limited success. This situation brought about two special givens that accompany the process of Lebanese identity construction up until today. First, the whole debate started on the basis of a "Maronite blueprint" (or rather of varieties of such, as there was never a unified Maronite position in this respect) and therefore never stopped revolving around it either, which quasi-automatically ensures the universal recognition of the Maronites´ organic relation with Lebanon, irrespective and independent of the roles and importance of other groups. Secondly, because the Maronite version of Lebanese nationalism is at least difficult to adapt unqualified for any other group, especially for non-Christians, alternatives to it emerged almost entirely in the form of counter-narratives and discourses. This holds true as much for pan-Arab, pan-Syrian, or communist/ socialist, as for pan-Islamic/ Islamist ideologies, all of which dispute the legitimacy of claims to distinct and separate Lebanese identities and nationhood altogether.

The Shi`i community of Lebanon represents a special case in this respect. While referring to the period 1918-1943, Tamara Chalabi attested it a "limited ability to integrate with the nationalist (Arab) or national (Lebanese) narrative, leaving it with the option of a subnational narrative focused on South Lebanon instead." (Chalabi 2006, p. 3) Thus, in contrast to the aforementioned, we are facing no counter-narrative here but rather a "subnational" i.e. a subordinate one that furthermore mirrors the factual power relations at that point in time. As Ajami noted, "[i]n the world of modern Lebanon, the Shia were 'appendages.' The ennobling Phoenician myth of modern Lebanon was not theirs. It belonged to the seafarers, to the coast, and to the Maronite mountain." (Ibid., p. xii)

This situation began to change as of the early 1960s, when the paramount Shi`i cleric and community leader Musa al-Sadr (1928-1978?),[43] actively started pushing for the marginalized Shi`i community´s political participation under full recognition of its numerical weight. He did so with the aim of bringing the Lebanese Shi`a to eye-level with their Sunni Muslim, Druze, Maronite and Orthodox Christian compatriots. Al-Sadr enacted the crucial steps in this direction and kicked off the process as such. However, he did so not by discrediting and/ or attacking the Maronite nationalist, i.e. the Lebanist, narrative and/ or the consociational order in their respective foundations, but, in short, by claiming what he depicted as the Shi`a´s righteous place and stakes in both (Abisaab/ Abisaab 2014, p. 112).

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[43] Musa al-Sadr disappeared, under still nebulous circumstances, in late August 1978, after arriving in Libya (Norton 1987, p. 55).

Ayatollah Mahdi Shamseddine (1936-2001), al-Sadr´s long-time peer and successor at the HISC, is quoted by Antoine Saad as having told the former Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir (life: 1920–; tenure: 1985–2011) in 1991 (thus, right after the Civil War and under *Pax Syriana*) that the Shi`a supported Lebanon, arguing, "we do not want union with Syria. Rural residents have always supported Lebanon. Therefore, the Maronites and the Shiites are the communities most attached to Lebanon. On the other hand, residents of the urban areas and coastal regions lack a similar spirit." (Saad 2005, p. 521)

Whether with respect to the political system or the national ideology, al-Sadr and his followers did not press for revolutionary change but for reform; in particular concerning the national integration and empowerment of the Shi`i masses. The Shi`i Islamists of Lebanon, meanwhile, started out with ideas of revolutionary change but later on adopted an attitude similar to that of al-Sadr and followed suit.

In the outcome, an only slightly, but decisively, modified version of Lebanonism informs contemporary Lebanese Shi`i nationalist thinking at its core (Shaery 2008, p. xv). And while the major contemporary Shi`i currents – Harakat Amal, Hizbullah and the network of Ayatollah Fadlallah – developed specific, yet, partially competitive, brands of Lebanese nationalism and strategies of assertion respectively, they all have a common basis. Thus, Shi`i-inspired Lebanonism is primarily detached from its Maronite-centrism as a precondition for granting the Shi`a (and others) their due place and recognition. At the same time, it involves a discourse aiming at the harmonization – in one way or the other – of these claims to the nation with the Lebanese Shi`i milieu´s real, perceived, or ascribed specifics (piety, transnational relations to Iran, Iraq, and other Shi`i centers of gravity, advocacy of armed resistance against Israel, etc.). This comes "against the backdrop of a widely held view that national identifications and religious solidarities with transnational dimensions are separate and irreconcilable forces." (Shaery 2008, p. 210) However, with regard to external distinction, Shi`i-inspired Lebanonism increasingly invokes notions of Phoenicianism too,[44] even if seldom with a fervor comparable to that of many Maronites.

As a case in point, one declared Shi`i supporter of Hizbullah, when asked since when Lebanon and the Lebanese exist, answered unhesitatingly: "Since [the] old days, since Elissar[45] and Hannibal, since that day we are present." (Author´s interv. CC.Hzb.5 2017) Moreover, a medium-range functionary in Hizbullah, "Mahmoud A.," explained to the author that, "yes … we are from here, we are from the South, we are from Lebanon, we are ancient Canaanites, we are the ancient Phoenicians; we simply changed our religion and became Shi`a. That's all what [we] are."[46] He added, however, that in his view, this was the case irrespective of other influences that were no less valid without this being perceived as a contradiction. He explicitly referred to the role granted to Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (d. 652 A.D.), a companion of the prophet Muhammad who is said to have first converted the population of South Lebanon to Islam (Harris 2012, p. 38) – or, from a Shi`i perspective, to proto-Shi`i Islam – as well as the `Amili Shi`a´s (that is Shi'a from Jabal `Amil, which is the historical name of the region largely overlapping with nowadays´ South Lebanon) assumed or claimed decent from Yemeni migrants (Chalabi 2006, p. 22; Khuri 1975, p. 27), the *Banū `Āmila.*

This latter statement not only demonstrates the described change in Shi`i Lebanese nationalist thought and identity construction but also captures the moment of transition itself; as we can see, despite a semi-implicit, yet very palpable claim to the nation ("we are from Lebanon, we are ancient […] Phoenicians"), the comparably narrow focus on South Lebanon ("we are from the South") has by no means disappeared either, but remains fairly relevant, although the Lebanese Shi`a were, of course, never only from the South and the factual Shi`i clout in Lebanon reaches far beyond their main areas of settlement too.

1.2.4 The Maronites and "other" Lebanese Christians

The relations between the Maronite and other Lebanese Christians since the foundation of modern Lebanon have been characterized by closeness and a degree of consistent political solidarity but also by continuous subliminal tensions. Both are outcomes of the above-described situation in which the Maronites not only yield the numerical superiority and have a hold on most senior positions reserved for Christians in the state structure but also commonly speak for “Christian Lebanon” when it comes to inter- or transnational affairs. Most importantly, Maronites also dominate the major “Christian” political parties, just as they had commanded the most important “Christian” militias during the Civil War (1975-90) (Author´s interv. AE.1 2013). The only other Christian group that comprises a noteworthy independent political organization in communal terms is that of the Armenians.

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[44] Field observations of the author in Lebanon between 2002 and 2019.

[45] According to legend, a Phoenician princess from Tyre, said to have founded Carthage in North Africa.

[46] This statement has not been recorded as part of the original interview conducted with "Mahmoud A." in 2013 (IE.Hzb.1 2013) but in a later written exchange on the subject, in August 2019.

Thus, the main political representations of Lebanese Maronite Christians – the LF, the FPM, *Ḥizb al-Katā´ib al-Lubnāniyya* (*Lebanese Brigades Party*; french: *Phalanges*), *al-Marada* and the NLP – are all, to different degrees, also the main political representations of Lebanese Christians in general terms. Because Michel Aoun´s own brand of Lebanese nationalism was Lebanist but not Maronitist, which made it arguably more attractive for non-Maronite Christians and even non-Christians, this holds especially true for the FPM.

On the one hand, this state of things quasi-compels all non-Maronite Christians to be on good terms or even actively cooperate with the Maronites for sheer reasons of self-preservation and representation. On the other hand, however, it also causes deep frustration, especially among the numerically more significant Christian minorities (Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian Orthodox and Armenian Catholic), that largely feel marginalized (DW 7/7/2018). For when talk is about “the Christians” in Lebanon, this is often meant and/ or understood synonymous with “the Maronites,” leaving other Christians out of the picture.

Whereas the Maronites are indeed the Christians in focus of this study, the common implicit marginalization of non-Maronite Lebanese Christians shall not be reproduced here. At the end of the day, however, what concerns the Maronite Christians collectively is likely to concern the other Lebanese Christians too. This includes much of what is centrally discussed in this work. In particular the MoU and subsequent alliance between the FPM and Hizbullah do not only pertain to Shi`i-Maronite but also to Shi`i-Christian relations. Yet, the epistemological interest rests on the former and the overwhelming majority of Aounists are indeed Maronite Christians. For doing justice to these givens, whenever the dual – Maronite and generally Christian – identity of political representations of Lebanese Christians is invoked, the form applied is “Maronite/ Christian(s)” (instead of “Maronite Christian(s)” when it is only about them).

1.2.5 The FPM-Hizbullah rapprochement

Following the assassination of Lebanon´s former Prime Minister and multi-billionaire Rafiq al-Hariri on February 14th, 2005 and the subsequent enforced withdrawal of Syrian troops and security staff in spring that same year, Lebanon experienced a sustained and polarizing political conflict, literally splitting the Lebanese in two (the accordant party coalitions were labeled “March 8th” and “March 14th,” after the dates of respective protest marches). With the signing of their MoU on February 6th, 2006 (FPM/ Hizbullah 2006, quoted after Yalibnan.com 9/2/2006), however, the top leaders of Hizbullah and the FPM also confronted the country with a rapprochement between two political actors whose constituencies primarily belong to the Shi`i and Maronite communities respectively. They herewith paved the way for a political alliance that has endured more than fourteen years and a number of severe crises – including internal quarrels and disruptions – at the time of writing. The same period was moreover characterized by a generally tense political climate both nationally and regionally, which significantly aggravated the overall pressure on this first of its kind *entente* in Lebanon.

The MoU depicts the basic tenets of a political action program entailing a national vision for Lebanon. “The interests of the nation” are thereby elevated above any other interest. It addresses the issue of Hizbullah´s arms with a prospect of defining clear-cut conditions for their eventual submission to the state´s authority. The reforms proposed for central governance sectors aim at a “strong state,” comprehensive security, the dismantling of clientelist structures and combating corruption. Moreover, the MoU offers guidelines for dealings with the neighboring states of Syria and Israel and with the Palestinians in Lebanon (FPM/ Hizbullah 2006, quoted after Yalibnan.com 9/2/2006).

Both independent observers and political opponents have mostly characterized the alliance as a mere opportunist “marriage of convenience” that does “not reflect the wishes of the support bases of both parties.” (Saab 2018) Aoun is thereby said to have sought the post of the presidency “at any cost” (Moubayed 2016) before he finally gained it in October 2016, while Hizbullah is allegedly betting on boosting its own – and, by extension, Iran´s – influence in Lebanon and its legitimization to remain an armed actor beside the Lebanese state (Author´s interv. E.M.2 2012; Holtmann 6/2008; Statestimes.net 26/11/2011). Another theory – and this is the only significant variation or addition to the former explanation – starts from the assumption of a Christian-Shi`i minority pact, concluded to confront what is supposedly perceived as an imminent threat constituted by the regional Sunni majority (ICG 2008b, pp. 9–10; Now Lebanon 7/6/2011; Khashan 2012).

Both explanations derive from an elite-centrist perspective and take recourse to a number of well-established, handed-down conceptions of the Middle East in general and of Lebanon in particular (Joseph 1983, p. 2; ibid. 2011, pp. 150–1). In their light, the Lebanese communities appear as constant antagonists, able to approach each other in times of elections at best, but ultimately unable to reconcile. The chances for the development of sustainable structures of inter-communal solidarity are accordingly portrayed as nil (Karam 2017, p. 2). Following the same logic further, the Lebanese appear as politically immature individuals. This is because they are seen as paralyzed by the effects of sectarianism and political confessionalism, stuck in primordial relations – clientelism, regionalism, tribalism and patrimonialism – and ultimately incapable of freely developing an autonomous political will.

In the words of Elizabeth Picar, "[i]n a country where the individual is submitted to the rule of the community, the civil society remains segmented and powerless in front of the state." (Picar 2012, p. 14) In a similar tone – and in full harmony with modernization theory – yet referring to the impact of identity markers such as "clan, tribe, confession, [and] ethnicity" in the Middle East at large, the German political scientist Michael Lüders states that

> "[t]he identity of an individual is commonly part of its respective group identity. Individualism as practiced in the West, under the conditions of mobility and modernity, can hardly unfold, let alone prevail, in the context of a blocked societal development. […] This also means that newly developed, socially based group identities are in trouble to gain a foothold vis-á-vis traditional ones. In the cities and metropolises such endeavors have been partly successful, yet these developments are usually aborted when war, violence, and the breakdown of the central state, force the people to organize their very survival. At the latest upon such instances they fall back to their century old and reliable communities of solidarity, which then bloodily assert themselves." (Lüders 2018, p. 62)[47]

As we can see, although actors from below state-level are not completely overlooked from that point of view, their actions are still interpreted largely in light of confessionalism/ sectarianism alone. And because their *habitus* also (but not solely) enables them to follow the respective "rules of the game," inquiries for correlations will usually prove successful. Besides his or her passive potential for collective mobilization, the Lebanese (or any other Middle Eastern) citizen thus finally appears politically irrelevant (cf. Hamzeh 2001, pp. 176–7). This applies notwithstanding a discernible academic and arguably even stronger political interest in Lebanese civil society at large.[48]

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[47] The generalization of all Middle Eastern societies in this statement is striking. It certainly does not stand a sincere review. To mention only one apparent example: In Lebanon´s Civil War (1975-90), much of the bloodiest and brutal confrontations were intra- rather than inter-communal; this goes in particular for the Maronite and the Shi'i communities. Lüders furthermore ignores that the psycho-social mechanisms governing the process of large-group identity formation and/ or preservation are everywhere the same, while the outcome depends on the specific circumstances, which are at least as various in the Middle East as they are within Europe.

[48] Lebanese civil society actors are among the central target group of the various donors – primarily Western governments and inter- or supranational organizations – emanating from the field of international development cooperation. Given the large sums of money invested in this sector, and the many jobs and individual possibilities it generates, it is no surprise that Lebanon today ranks among the countries with the highest density of NGO´s in the world. On the one hand, the vested interest of the large donors and executing agencies active in

To be sure, neither the aforementioned approaches to making sense of the MoU and the alliance, nor their underlying theoretical conceptions of Lebanon could or should be disregarded in their entirety. They are yet destined to produce distorted results if not supplemented by further analysis. Highly significant implications of this rapprochement process simply remain invisible when settling for assuming that the motivations of the actors involved are merely opportunistic with respect to both the leaderships´ as well as the communities´ interests.

The persistence of this alliance up until today suggests that its glue must consist of more than short- or even medium-term benefits such as electoral gains and their revenues or reaching the presidency for instance. The diagnosis of a mere minority alliance is not satisfying either. Although this aspect is of high relevance, it cannot explain the depth of individual cross-communal relations that have developed in the MoU´s wake. Most importantly; those followers encountered during the preparatory phase (before launching the systematic field research) all seemed to have very palpable reasons for supporting the alliance and these went far beyond mere clientelist considerations such as securing the immediate benefits commonly expected in return for loyal party followership. Not only did they express similar political positions and interpretations of events (which was arguably already an outcome of the rapprochement in progress) but also appeared to share certain needs, ideas, wishes and fears, translating into a number of common interests and concerns.

This pertains not only but especially to certain segments of the middle class – to which most of my interviewees explicitly counted themselves. Their self-assessments are moreover affirmed by empirical research suggesting that by today, the “upwardly-mobile” section of the middle class makes up the core of the FPM´s constituency and also an important share of Hizbullah´s support base (Daher 2016, pp. 70–2, 88–92; El-Khazen 2018). This same section is commonly assumed to be particularly future-oriented, likely to carry liberal and democratic

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the field of development cooperation has not only significantly facilitated the standing of area specialists but also contributed to a sizable amount of studies on the givens and conditions of Lebanon (or other target countries of international development cooperation), its state, its society and in particular its conflicts (e.g. Zupan et al. 2008; Picard/ Ramsbotham 2012); or on cross-cutting issues that are of relevance for the Lebanese context too, such as the question: How to deal with Islamist currents (e.g. Schlumberger et al. 2013) or Muslims and Islam as such (Ganter/ Bigalke 2006; GTZ 2007; GIZ 2011-2013) in the field of development cooperation – always with a functional view on what that means for the feasibility of prospected interventions. On the other hand, this situation is also subject to a critical academic debate, raising important questions such as: Why is there such a high international interest in developing Lebanese civil society, when after all the Lebanese civil society is surely one of the most developed in the region? Or: How does the constant criticism of Lebanon’s alleged weak or even “failing” state go together with actively building up - or assisting in doing so – a myriad of NGOs, the bulk of which engages in tasks otherwise seen as sovereign governmental functions and duties? (e.g. Sen 2008; Seyfert/ Toukan 2008; cf. Moghnie 2016, p. 36) values (whereas this must not be the case *per se*, as middle classes "can also support extremist and fascist movements." [Ouaissa 2014, p. 14]) and, crucially, to be pushing most strongly for economic and political change (Neubert 2014, p. 23). It is here, were we can expect to find much emphasis being placed on children education coupled with the hopes of this enhancing their chances to find good work (as we can also observe among the lower class) and partially also the means to pursue this and other aims. Against this background, shedding light on the motives of the followers of this inter-communal alliance, how they feel about it and in which ways they make sense of their mutual relations, is not only a pioneering task but has also, in retrospect, proven to be an appropriate venue towards closing this yawning research gap.

With respect to the aforementioned bulk of literature on the subject of the MoU and the FPM-Hizbullah *entente*, there are, fortunately, some noteworthy exceptions,[49] and at least in two cases (Ilias 2011 and Germanos 2013) attention has been paid to the grassroots voices. They all form exceptions either because they are academic in form and/ or because they deviate from what conventional wisdom – the dominant narrative – holds.

The first is a short analysis of both the implications of Michel Aoun´s return to Lebanon and the FPM-Hizbullah rapprochement. It takes sufficient notice of the dimension of a minority alliance, yet, considers many further details of relevance (Wimmen 2007). The second is a contribution of the International Crisis Group (ICG 2008b) examining the alliance in light of the (then) contemporary political role of Lebanon´s Christians. The third is a critical paper on the larger subject of confessionalism, citing the MoU and its underlying conditions – if as a side note only – as an example for expressed and effective support of national dialogue and implicitly as what is viewed as an appropriate means to make a positive change (Habib 2009, p. 67). The fourth is a short essay by Nicolas Dot Pouillard, who identifies an "ideological shift at the heart of the Maronite Christian camp created by the alliance between Aoun and Hizbullah," which he classifies as "a minor revolution among the Maronite public." (Pouillard 2009) The fifth is a critical short study by Hilal Khashan (2012) that echoes the common explanations (political opportunism; minority pact) for the alliance.

Next comes an MA thesis analyzing the perception of Hizbullah among FPM members (Ilias 2011, p. 1), thus clearly focusing on the citizen level in that respect. Another is a quite comprehensive study weighing the question if and how the alliance has shaped imaginations of a "united […] national territory" and to what extent it has contributed to political stability in Lebanon after Syrias´s withdrawal in April 2005 (Germanos 2013, pp. 1–3, 65). Germanos thereby touches upon a number of aspects of direct relevance for the present study. Most importantly, she not only pays attention to the perceptions of “common citizens” or “followers” (ibid.) but also recognizes a link between the historical development of Shi`i-Maronite (or rather Shi`i-Christian) relations in the territory of modern Lebanon and the MoU forged by Hizbullah and the FPM (ibid., pp. 1, 4). Because her central epistemological interest rests elsewhere, however, both of these aspects are rather dealt with *en passé*. None is scrutinized or fleshed out as such, and the corresponding concepts and categories lack operationalization (which is not a shortcoming given Germanos´ different focus).

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[49] This assessment considers publications in the English, German and Arabic languages.

One significant conclusion of Germanos is that the MoU itself must be categorized as a national document in the tradition of the unwritten National Pact of 1943, which implies the assumption of its potential for accelerating state and nation building by diminishing what is viewed as the sectarian fragmentation of Lebanon’s society and body politic (ibid., pp. 23–30). The latter aspect also constitutes the main theme of a further work published in 2013 on the political entente of the FPM and Hizbullah (Bouyoub 2013), which confirms the categorization of the MoU as a “national document.” (Ibid., p. 174) In contrast to Germanos, however, Bouyoub focuses on the concerned elite´s narrative of how the MoU and the subsequent alliance came about and pays no attention to the grassroots´ perspective.

Beside their coverage of the external circumstances leading first to the MoU and subsequently to the alliance, most of the aforementioned publications also offer valuable insight into the internal structures of the FPM – which is still poorly documented in contrast to Hizbullah (e.g. Rosiny 1996, Qassem 2005, Norton 2007a, Sakmani 2008, ibid. 2016, Daher 2016). In fact, the first monograph on the FPM (Helou 2020) has only just reached the market and hence the author shortly before concluding the study at hand. Helou´s contrubution, however, constitutes another significant exception to be mentioned here.

2. PART I: A HISTORY OF SHI`I-MARONITE RELATIONS IN THE AREA OF MODERN LEBANON

Looking into Maronite-Shi`i relations in Lebanon in historical perspective, before anything else, raises the questions of these communities´ origins in the area considered and of their self-conceptions and external recognizability as distinct large groups. This brings us back to our pertinent theoretical point of reference; Benedict Anderson´s concept of imagined communities. Whereas the condition of limitation is definitely given for both larger sacral communities (the entirety of Maronite Christians and Twelver Shi`i Muslims irrespective of their areas of settlement respectively), those of their components in focus here are distinguished further through their permanent settlement in the territory that roughly corresponds to modern Lebanon. There remains then the question of imagination. Since when and to what extent did the members of the communities perceive of themselves as distinct groups, respectively, based on the properties of their confession and their place of permanent residence? And did they recognize fellow members, and were they equally recognizable to outsiders? With regard to the latter, it has been noted correctly, that while,

> "from their inception, the communities had identities derived from their religious orientations[; t]he understanding of being Maronite or Twelver Shia was of course not the same in the tenth or eleventh century as today; there were no institutions resembling the Maronite church or Ja'afari courts of recent times, nor today´s public proceedings for saints´ days or Ashura. Nonetheless, if such chroniclers as the geographer Muqaddasi and the geographer/ historian al-Mas'udi could recognize Shia and Maronites respectively as distinctive populations, then they undoubtly recognized themselves." (Harris 2012., p. 4)

In other words, while both the communities and their immediate contexts, as well as most probably their members´ individual perceptions of themselves and of their group-belonging, have continuously changed and developed dramatically since their inception, they were nonetheless at all times recognizable and recognized – or rather imaginable and imagined – both internally and externally as Maronite Christians and a particular fraction of Alid Muslims respectively, the latter of which from the mid-10th century A.D. was to constitute the Twelver Shi`a (see below). We can add to this, that their medieval representatives in the coastal highlands of Mount Lebanon and its vicinity were overwhelmingly organized as tribes, which additionally fostered and sustained their group cohesion on the local level over time. Yet, feelings of tribal, regional and family belonging did (and do) not only foster group cohesion, but served (and still serve) as powerful intra- and inter-community dividers too, always depending on the specific times and circumstances.

The seemingly banal finding that "the understanding of being Maronite or Twelver Shia was of course not the same […] as today" (ibid., p. 4) however, is of special significance with regard to the dawn of the age of nationalism in the later part of the 18th century.[50] The latter marked a watershed in the self-perception of most groups that feel or are perceived to be distinct because of specific ethnic markers of whatsoever kind; no matter if they later developed into acknowledged nations, often combined with receiving a nation-state, or not. In fact, the impact of this period was so profound that we must correctly speak of a time before and a time after the rise of nationalism as concerning collective identity construction and history writing altogether.

Twelver Shi`a and Maronites in the territory that constitutes modern Lebanon have a history as large groups that predates the age of nationalism by centuries. This objective finding, however, tells us little about the actual or subjective relevance and quality of group belonging. Such questions as whether, when inter-community cooperation or conflicts occurred, this was perceived by the actors as taking place primarily between individuals, tribes, families, political camps, or neighboring communities defined by their confessional belonging, can only – if at all – be attempted to answer by looking to historical instances of the communities´ inter- and intra-relations. Whilst we can safely assume a minimum of group cohesion and awareness, we can by no means take for granted whether the respective members´ concepts of their own communities and feelings of belonging rendered the boundaries between those communities especially decisive. And if so, the questions are, when, why and under what conditions. The same applies to the contemporary situation and herein lies one main value of looking into the history of Maronite-Shi`i relations in Lebanon.

Another important aspect pertains to a revised weighting and location of the relevant large groups´ roles in and for the foundation of modern Lebanon. Most significantly, in contrast to the impression one must gain when consuming conventional accounts of Lebanese history, the Shi`a indeed constitute one of the three preeminent mountain communities (Maronites,

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[50] There is no universally accepted time frame marking the age of nationalism. We keep in line here with Benedict Anderson´s assessment, whereby he locates the origins of nationalism in the liberation struggles of the white settler colonies of the Americas between 1776 and 1838, from where, he says, it spilled over to the mother countries by 1820, initiating the age of nationalism in Europe and henceforth profoundly changing the face of the Old World until after the end of World War I (1914–1918) (Anderson 2006, pp. 4, 67). "From this time on, the legitimate international norm was the nation-state […]," (ibid., p. 113) with the last big wave of new nations coming into being in the course of the decolonization struggles in Asia and Africa after World War II. The age of nationalism has, however, not ended with quasi-all countries in the world having become nation states during one of the aforementioned periods, as the ideas of the nation and the nation state remain at the heart of the international order in place, with new varieties of nationalism continuously surfacing in different parts of the world.

Twelver Shi`a and Druze) of pre-modern Lebanon (cf. Harris 2012, p. 4) and therefore have an equivalent share, at least, in bringing about the developments culminating in the foundation and further elaboration of the modern state of Lebanon (we will come back to this in more detail below). Moreover, and crucially for the subject at hand, the mere physical closeness of Maronites and Shi`a and their shared destiny as mountaineers rendered frequent interaction and mutual influences rather likely. This makes investigating their relations over time even more relevant because it can teach us about the nature of those relations outside and irrespective of the modern realm of political confessionalism.

To this end, we will in the subsequent section first take a closer look at the very foundations of the community´s collective identities – their confessional belonging – and some of their most important particularities, before turning to their earliest appearances and encounters in the territory making up modern Lebanon. With respect to the central theme of this work, we will then largely skip the ancient period up to the phase of Ottoman rule (1516-1918). The latter receives special attention because it features developments that let Maronite-Shi`i relations in Lebanon appear in a wholly different light on the one hand and that have so far not been acknowledged or even recognized sufficiently on the other hand. We will then only slightly touch upon the following periods of French mandate and post-independence up to the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975. The subsequent time frame up to the Israeli withdrawal of most of Lebanon in 2000 receives the main share of attention.

2.1 FOUNDATIONS OF THE TWELVER SHI`I MUSLIM AND MARONITE CHRISTIAN CONFESSIONS

2.1.1 Twelver Shi`i Muslims

The term “Shi`a” is the anglicized short form of the Arab term “*Shī`at `Alī;”* the “Partisans of `Alī,” in reference to the Muslim followers of `Alī ibn Abi Talib (ca. 600–661 A.D.), the cousin, son in law, and father of Ḥassan (625–670 A.D.) and Ḥusayn (626–680 A.D.), the only male heirs of the prophet Mohammad (ca. 570-632 A.D.). For the early Alids, the larger strand from which various Shi`i Muslim confessions as well as the Anatolian Alevis originate, the fourth Caliph `Alī represented the one and only acceptable successor to the prophet as a leader of the Islamic community (*ummah*). This claim was and is mainly justified on the basis of `Alī´s genealogy (consanguinity to the Prophet combined with his marriage to the latter´s daughter Fāṭima) and the conviction that the Prophet Muhammad has unmistakably designated `Alī as his sole “inheritor and viceregent,” for the first time upon the latter´s embracement of the faith of Islam (Tabataba´i 2008, p. 59–60 [fn 3]) and again shortly before the Prophet´s death in 632 A.D. (ibid., pp. 61–2; Krämer 2005, p. 113).[51] Thus, the caliphates of Abū Bakr, `Umar, and `Uṯmān, preceding that of `Alī in the presented order, were all seen as illegitimate, and the post-Muhammadan caliphate itself, understood from that point of view as an institution of political rule and administration, was never accepted as anything more than that; worldly rule (cf. Tabataba´i 2008, pp. 21–2). This should not belie the fact, however, that in the history of Islam, there were remarkable periods of coexistence and exchange of Shi`i imams with different representatives of the caliphate.

The decisive rift, the first *fitna*[52] (intra-Islamic/ Muslim strife), effecting the drifting apart of what was to become the three primary branches of Islam can be most clearly dated back to the Battle of Siffin (Summer 657 A.D.), in which the later fifth Caliph Mu`āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān, then governor of the provinces Syria and Jazira, stood against the acting Caliph `Alī after having refused to pay him allegiance. When, at one point of the battle `Alī reluctantly agreed to arbitration as the means for settling the conflict, a particular group in `Alī´s camp rejected this option "as illegitimate, because it could only produce a human decision, while the outcome of the battle was perceived as a divine judgement." (Krämer 2005, p. 40) After the arbitration had produced no clear results, this faction angrily broke away from `Alī´s camp in 658 A.D. and founded its own movement, soon to be labeled the *Khārijiyya* (Kharijites ["those leaving"]). It would be a *Khāriji* too, who would later, in 661 A.D., assassinate `Alī, by stabbing him with a poisoned knife while praying in the mosque and thus put an end to the political reign over the Muslim community of the first Shi`i imam.

Yet, we cannot immediately speak of the acting parties as Kharijites, Shi`a, and Sunnis in the sense of what these terms came to mean later on. Upon their formation we must rather think of them as competing "religious-political groups" (Krämer 2005, pp. 38–9) which only over time developed truly distinct theological traditions and symbolic specificities, marking them out as varying confessions of one and the same faith. While the Kharijites were early on to be distinguished by their religiously-phrased political program, and the Shi`a by their loyalty to `Alī, a Sunni current only manifested quite a bit later, which has much to do with its main point of reference. After all, `Alī claimed to faithfully and precisely abide by the sunna

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[51] "For Shi´ites, the central evidence of Ali´s legitimacy as successor to the Prophet is the event of Ghadir Khumm [a pond laying on the way from Mecca to Medina] when the prophet chose Ali to the 'general guardianship' […] of the people and made Ali, like himself, their 'guardian' (wali)." (Tarataba´i 2008, pp. 61–2)

[52] The "first *fitna*" refers to the first of four civil wars that shook the caliphate between the 7th and the 9th century A.D.).

(the collected teachings, sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad) of the Prophet, and his personal character remains to be widely considered as best exemplifying the Islamic and general human virtues among Shi`a and non-Shi`a, Muslims and non-Muslims alike (Krämer 2005, pp. 37–9). This renders the sunna a comparably weak marker of distinction, especially when contrasted with the beliefs and dogmatic principles of the other two prime branches of Islam.

All subsequent Islamic currents, schools of thought and confessions have their roots in one of these three larger traditions (Krämer 2005, p. 114), with the Kharijites´ numerical share nowadays being negligible,[53] and the Shi`a – after having had politically the upper hand in the 11th century A.D., which coincided with the zenith of Fatimid (an *Isma'ili* or Sevener Shi`i dynasty) power and influence (ibid., p. 125) – today coming second to an overwhelming Sunni majority. The Shi`a, as both other major currents, experienced several divisions over time. Their main and numerically paramount branch is meanwhile that of the Twelver Shi`a:

> "The dogma of Twelver Shiʿism acknowledges a succession of twelve Imams from the ahl al-bayt (people of the house) of Muhammad, who are his successors as leaders of the community. First among these is ʿAli b. Abi Talib […] followed by his two sons Hasan and then Husayn, the martyr of Karbala. The twelfth and last successor is the Mahdi, the hidden Imam who, according to doctrine, has been in Major Occultation since 941 and will reappear before the end of times to restore justice on earth; the faithful await him." (Mervin 2010, p. 12)

Crucially, from a Twelver Shi`i perspective, there are altogether fourteen infallibles, which are the Prophet Muḥammad ibn `Abdallāh himself, his youngest daughter Fāṭima al-Zahrā´, and the twelve imams (Ansariyan [N.N.] 2007). All of these imams are furthermore seen as divinely designated – with their names having been revealed in the right order already by the Prophet himself (ibid., p. 55) – and thus as constituting significantly more than mere worldly leaders of the Islamic community. They are rather considered to exclusively combine the qualities needed for wisely and justly executing the exoteric responsibility of worldly rule on the one hand with a special esoteric knowledge and "function of interpreting the inner mysteries of the Holy Qur´an and the Shari`ah" (Tabataba´i 2008, p. 21) on the other hand:

> "According to the Shi'ite view, the successor of the Prophet of Islam must be one who not only rules over the community in justice but also is able to interpret the Divine Law and its esoteric meaning. Hence, he must be free from error and sin […] and he must be chosen from on high by divine decree (*nass*) through the Prophet." (Tabataba´i 2008, p. 21)

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[53] The center and only significant occurrence of Kharijites today is the Sultanate of Oman, in which followers of the *Ibadi* version of Kharijite Islam make up the majority of the population. Pockets of Kharijites can furthermore still be found in Northern Africa (Gaiser 2010, p. 167).

From a historians´ perspective, the sixth imam, Ja`far ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq (ca. 700–765 A.D.), in light of his important theological contributions to Shi`i and Sunni doctrine, became the eponym – and in retrospective counts as the founder – of the *Ja`farite* school of jurisprudence and rite (Krämer 2005, p. 116), which is synonymous with the Twelver Shi`i school of thought. However, it was only "[i]n the expectation of the return of Muhammad al-Mahdi [that] the Imamiyya became the Twelver Shi`a." (Ibid. 2005, p.117) Therefore, although both terms – *imāmiyya* and Twelver Shi`a – refer to the same group and are commonly used interchangeably, the latter one is historically applicable only as of 941 A.D.

Other noteworthy branches of the Shi`a are the `Alawites or *Nusayris*, the *Zaidites* or Fiver Shi`a, and the *Isma'ili* or Sevener Shi`a alongside their important sub-branch of the *Nizārī Isma'iliyya* or *Assassins*, nowadays represented by the Aga Khan dynasty (currently Aga Khan IV) (ibid. 2005, p. 114). However, it is the Twelver Shi`a who are of central relevance for the work at hand, and whenever the terms Shi`a, Shi`i or Shi`ism are used within its confines without further specification; this always refers exclusively to that grouping.

The violent death of the fourth Caliph and first Imam `Alī was to remain no isolated incident. According to Shi`i doctrine, all following imams, except for the twelfth – Imam Muḥammad al-Mahdī, who is believed to have vanished into major occultation in 941 A.D. – have also been killed (Rosiny 1996, p. 83). `Alī´s elder son Ḥassan, the second imam, practicing a quietist approach to the imamate in the sense that he did not actively fight his opponents, is believed to have been poisoned on the orders of then acting Caliph Muawiya. His younger brother, the third Imam Ḥusayn, in contrast, explicitly refused to pay allegiance to Muawiya´s son, the sixth Caliph Yazīd, and

> "in 680 A.D., accompanied by a small flock of followers, embarked on his way to Kufa in todays´ Iraq, the inhabitants of which, by means of a petition, had requested his coming to their aid. Under the pressure of the Umayyad superiority, however, they abandoned their former pledge of assistance, which is why they count as traitors ever since in the Shi`i mythology. After a long march, full of privation, warnings and foreshadowings of the cruel outcome of his mission, the remaining 72-man-troop of Imam Ḥusayn was awaited by the caliph´s army, counting 30,000 soldiers, dispatched to force the imam to swear an oath of obedience to Yazīd. Because Ḥusayn had refused this, in the battle of Karbala, all of his male relatives and followers were brutally massacred. On `Ashura´, the tenth day of the month of Muḥarram, he himself died last, according to legend struck by 4,000 arrows and weakened from innumerable afflicted wounds, finally decapitated by Shimr. Solely his minor, sick son, the later fourth imam, `Alī Zain al-`Ābidīn, through the courageous engagement of Zaynab, daughter of Imam `Alī and sister of Ḥusayn, remained untouched. All women were brought as captives to the court of Yazīd in Damascus, alongside the heads of the rebels spiked on lances. Only after the caliph had let them go again, forty days after the end of the battle, they were finally able to bury the corpse of Ḥusayn, which had so far – on the third day – been only provisionally buried in sand." (Rosiny 1996, pp.81–2)

`Ashura´ became the central commemoration of the Shi`a while Imam Ḥusayn serves as the paramount example of a selfless and brave martyr, unhesitatingly willing to give his life for the common good and/ or the prospect of justice. His sister, Zaynab, "the woman who saved Islam" (Khamenei.ir 29/11/2016) in the eyes of the believers, represents the imam´s counterpart as a female role model to be emulated (Deeb 2006, p. 32). Over time, the imamates of Ḥassan and Ḥusayn, the deeds of their companions and relatives, and especially the events of Karbala served as an inspiration for both, quietist and activist interpretations and paths. The outcome of the battle can thus be viewed "as a warning, to not revolt against a superior suppressor in the absence of any chances of winning," (Rosiny 1996, p. 82) to be easily contrasted with the example of Imam Ḥassan, who, understood as having practiced *taqiyya,*[54] only seemingly accepted subordinating himself to what from a Shi`i point of view was the illegitimate and despicable rule of Muawiya. Or it can be interpreted as an utmost exemplary behavior in the face of injustice and tyranny and thus as a model to be emulated in everyday life. The tremendous suffering and – obviously expected and therefore deliberate – death of Ḥusayn may analogously be interpreted either as a conscious self-sacrifice, ultimately aiming at the salvation of mankind – very similar to the central Christian belief that Jesus Christ suffered and died for our sins – or read as a courageous, calculated act, designed to salvage what is understood to be the true Islam in the long term, by explicitly and openly "bearing witness" in the most honorable form of martyrdom (ibid., p. 82–3). In line with their activist orientation, contemporary Shi`i Islamists, such as a whole number of Iraqi groups, the Lebanese Hizbullah, and large parts of the Iranian political and religious establishment, have all naturally stressed the latter reading.

Following the disappearance of their twelfth imam, initially, the Shi`a have in majority resorted to quietism. The question of whether participation in governance prior to the return of the acting Imam al-Mahdī is permissible at all, and if, in what form, has thereby been and still is subject to a highly controversial debate among Shi`i religious scholars (`ulama´). Yet the originally sovereign functions belonging to the imamate – calling for and leading jihad (*[holy] struggle)*, distributing war booty, holding the Friday prayers, announcing judgments, imposing legal punishments and collecting religious taxes (for all Muslims zakat [the poor-tax] and for the Shi`a also *al-khums* [the fifth of once annual income]) – have over the centuries gradually been transferred to the `ulama´s hands (ibid., p. 84): In the early 16th century, when the Safavids (1501-1722) took over in Iran, the new rulers officially declared Twelver Shi'ism the state religion of their empire. For the effective Shi'itization of their populace they invited and employed mainly \`ulama´ from Jabal \`Amil, broadly situated in modern day South Lebanon, which was considered the most important center of Shi\`i learning at that point in time. The \`ulama´ became a cornerstone of the worldly rule of the Safavid Shahs and were naturally in charge of a huge array of religious functions.

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[54] A primarily Shi`i doctrine allowing, or in some cases even prescribing the denial of one´s own religious beliefs in times of danger, e.g. by pretending to belong to another confession or faith.

The mid-20th century then saw the most recent boost to the process of the Shi\`i clergy´s empowerment, when both the Iraqi Ayatollah Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr (1935–80) and the Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini (1902–89) each independently (albeit mutual knowledge of the respective work of the other cannot be ruled out) developed different doctrines, effectively granting the \`ulama´ the right to rule politically. Upon the success of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Khomeini´s concept of *wilāyat al-faqīh* (Guardianship of the [most learned Islamic] Jurisprudent) (Khomeini 2005) became the basis of the constitution of the newfound Islamic Republic of Iran, with Khomeini being its first representative. After Khomeini´s death in 1989, Sayyid Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (1939-) took over as *walī al-faqīh* (Guardian Jurisprudent) and remains in this position at the time of writing.

Given the traditional plurality of the Shi\`i clergy, with the *marja\`iyya* as its highest level, the theory of *wilāyat al-faqīh* – which by its very substance entails an attempt to monopolize decision-making power within the worldwide Shi\`i community – was strongly contested since its inception and remains to be disputed by many Shi\`i religious authorities.[55] In Shi\`i Islam, the believers are usually required to individually choose their personal *marja\` al-taqlīd* (source of emulation) from among those scholars which have reached the highest level of learning (*al-mujtahid* [singular]/ *al-mujtahidūn* [plural]), are therefore considered able to interpret the holy sources by independent reasoning and judgement (*ijtihād*), and have been acknowledged by already established *maraji al-taqlīd* (plural) as *maraja* in their own right. Such recognition, in turn, becomes possible only after having independently published a particular theological treatise (*risāla \`amaliyya*) that has to fulfill certain requirements. Thus, although there were periods in which there was only one *marja*, there are usually more than one at a time, and most offer relatively distinct interpretations of the legal Islamic sources and command their own loyal flock of followers respectively. This situation is yet a rather recent phenomenon, as the *marja`iyya* in its current form came about only in the 19th century (Rosiny 1996, p. 86 [fn 26]). It produced both a quasi-formal, if flexible, religious hierarchy – so that it makes absolute sense to talk about the Shi`i religious establishment as a clergy – and a top leadership level marked by its fluctuating degree of plurality.

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[55] However, the Lebanese Hizbullah is one of the few examples – and surely the most prominent one – of a group outside of Iran that has embraced the message of the Islamic Revolution and voluntarily submitted its highest decision-making structure to the final rulings of *walī al-faqīh* since its inception in 1982.

The specifics of the history of Shi`i Islam – especially its origins, but also later developments – were decisive for bringing about a stark sense of victimhood among the community´s members. Vali Nasr notes: "The Shias´ historical experience is akin to those of Jews and Christians in that it is a millenium-long tale of martyrdom, persecution, and suffering." (Nasr 2007, p. 57) This is a feature clearly detectable in the patterns of Shi`i identity representation, be it from within or without. The traumas are many in the community´s collective memory. Beginning with the tragedies accompanying the period of the early imamate, the Shi`a found themselves in a minority situation most of the time and frequently became targets of persecution by their Sunni Muslim rulers. Furthermore, since the Safavids had established their rule in Iran, whenever there were conflicts between them and the neighboring Sunni Ottoman Empire, the Arab Shi`a living under Ottoman rule were quickly viewed as a fifth column and often treated accordingly. As Shi`a were officially considered heretics by the Ottoman authorities, in contrast to Jews and Christians – who enjoyed recognition as a *millet*, that is a respected religious minority – they had no official status or recognized rights of whatsoever kind, and were therefore especially vulnerable (Rosiny 1996, p. 85). Yet, persecution and suppression – notwithstanding the very real suffering they brought about – were neither permanent, nor were accordant policies at all times implemented consequently. Decisions of certain Sunni rulers to go after the Shi`a, when they occurred, were often enough influenced by a whole number of pragmatic calculations and not only of an ideological nature, and the same can be said for the periods in which nothing of such a sort took place (Winter 2010, pp. 2, 4, 7–30, 176). This seemingly minor aspect has major consequences for accurately situating the role of Lebanon´s Shiʿa community in the course of history.

2.1.2 Maronite Christians

> "Maronity, as I believe, is not a purely lay concept, nor is it a purely religious concept: rather, it is the most successful experience embodying practical theory and Christian application in this region of the East."
>
> Reverend Boulos Naaman 1980

The Maronite Christians are an Eastern Rite *sui iuris* (of one´s own right) Catholic Church in full communion with the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. Tracing their origins back to the late 4th century A.D., the Maronites "take pride in having retained their identity through many changes of fortune," especially with a view to centuries under Muslim rule (Salibi 1991, p. 15). Like all Eastern Catholic Churches, they preserved some of their ancient traditions that deviate from the Latin Rite. The Maronites in particular maintain their "own distinct theology, spirituality, liturgy and code of canon law." (Maronite Monks of Adoration n.y.) A notable difference is furthermore constituted by the fact, that in the Maronite Church, married men can become priests, while in the Latin Rite Catholic Church, celibate priesthood is the norm (National Catholic Reporter [NCR] 28/2/2014). The common language of the first Maronites was Syriac Aramaic which nowadays "is still used by the Maronites in various hymns and parts of the Mass." (Ibid.)

Whereas they are "perhaps the smallest of the Eastern Christian communions," (Salibi 1991, p. 15) they nonetheless account for the largest of all Christian denominations to be found in Lebanon, and are one of the three numerically strongest of all groups present here. Indigenous Maronite communities can also be found in Syria, Palestine/ Israel, and to a negligible degree in Jordan. Above that, numerous Maronites (overwhelmingly originating from Lebanon) live in the worldwide diaspora with important centers in Cyprus, the USA, France, Australia, Latin America and Africa. Lebanon, however, is not only their main area of settlement and the place where their Church and Patriarchate have been forged and are located (Loosley 2005, p. 183), but also the declared homeland of most Maronites, whether actually living in Lebanon or elsewhere. Because modern Lebanon is the only Arab country with a Christian head of state that must according to tradition always be a Maronite Christian, the Maronites are furthermore in charge of the single most important political representations of Oriental Christians, not least through the Lebanese President´s obligatory participation in Arab League summits at eye-level with the Muslim heads of all other Arab states.

The early history of the Maronites is surrounded by controversies, mainly because Maronite tradition as reflected in large parts of the writings of Maronite historians of all ages – with the notable exception of Kamal Salibi (1929-2011) – deviates significantly from many modern historical accounts produced by non-Maronites (Loosley 2005, pp. 183–4). This situation poses a challenge to the study at hand because both versions of Maronite history are of equal importance. Maronite identity construction, on the one hand, is and has been a process mainly based on the group´s internal reading of its own history and therefore remains detached from, if not actively shielded against, whatever narratives run counter to it. Only relying on the counter-narratives, however, would be tantamount to ignoring the basis of how most Maronites make sense of their own identity. The pioneering reconstruction of a history of Shi`i-Maronite relations, on the other hand, requires an accurate synchronization of certain events so far transmitted in the separate accounts of the respective communities´ histories only. This necessitates a minimum level of common ground in terms of historical science and such can be better established by reference to non-apologetic accounts. It has been decided to face this challenge by presenting the important aspects of both versions juxtaposed, with the Maronite tradition as the thematic thread, supplemented by the counter-claims levied from without Maronite circles.

The term "Maronites" (*al-Marūniyya*) goes directly back to Saint Marūn (ca. 350–410 A.D.) who hailed from Cyrrhus, situated in Northern Syria (Khoury Harb 1995, p. 36). The saint was a Christian priest who later became a hermit and who is said to have spent most of his life on the mountain Ol-Yambos in a place called Kfarnabo (St. Elias Maronite Catholic Church n.y. a). Tradition holds that he was of extraordinary piety and spirituality, so that "[h]is holiness and miracles attracted many followers, and drew attention throughout the empire;"

> "Maroun's way was deeply monastic with emphasis on the spiritual and ascetic aspects of living […]. For St. Maroun, all was connected to God and God was connected to all. He did not separate the physical and spiritual world and actually used the physical world to deepen his faith and spiritual experience with God. St. Maroun embraced the quiet solitude of the mountain life. He lived his life in open air exposed to the forces of nature such as sun, rain, hail and snow. His extraordinary desire to come to know God's presence in all things allowed St. Maroun to transcend such forces and discover that intimate union with God. He was able to free himself from the physical world by his passion and fervour for prayer and enter into a mystical relationship of love with God." (Ibid.)

In a letter sent to Saint Maroun around the year 405 A.D. by the former Archbishop of Constantinople, Saint John Chrysostom – who, after having been singled out as a troublemaker by Teophilos, then Patriarch of Alexandria, was now finding himself back in forced exile in Armenia (St. John Chrysostom Church n.y.) – the latter basically expressed "his great love and respect and asked St. Maroun to pray for him." (Khoury Harb 1995, p. 38) This documented historical incidence – insofar as one wants to accept that the one Maroun addressed in the letter indeed refers to the Saint Maroun in question here (cf. Chrysostom Epistula 36) – not only verifies the fact that Saint Maroun was known to his contemporaries, but – given the influence and standing of Saint John Chrysostom himself – also renders Maronite claims to his marked popularity, such as the following, quite reasonable; “Saint Maron attracted people from far and near who were drawn by his godliness and wisdom and who desired to live under his spiritual guidance.” (St. Elias Maronite Catholic Church n.y. b)

Thus, while historical sources do not allow for any substantial accounts of its numerical size, it is almost for certain that Saint Maroun inspired and gathered a flock of loyal disciples around himself during his lifetime. Upon his death around 410 A.D, the saint seems to have been buried “in the populous town of Barad [i.e. Brad] in the proximity of Kfarnabo” (Khoury Harb 1995, p. 38) after which the locals, who must have at least in part belonged to his disciples, built a church over his remains (Dau 1984, p. 166). Those disciples can in retrospective be seen as the first Maronites, with the Saint as their founding father. The first Maronite Monastery, the Saint Maroun Monastery or *Bayt Maroun* was built in 452 A.D. between Hama and Haleb (Aleppo), close to the Orontes River banks (ibid., pp. 172–3; Khoury Harb 1995, p. 38). The cradle of Maronitism – with regard to both the birth of Maronite theology and the first Maronite people – is accordingly the Northern Syrian vicinity of Cyrrhus, and not Lebanon (at that time equally belonging to Syria – at least politically), which the Maronites view as their original homeland and with the history of which their own is so strongly interwoven.

This entanglement, according to Maronite tradition, found its beginning in the years immediately following Saint Maroun´s death, with the arrival of the hermit Saint Ibrahim (Abraham) of Cyrrhus (d. 422 A.D.) alongside a small group of followers in the village of Afqa, situated within the territory of modern Lebanon. Here they are said to have begun their Christianizing mission among the indigenous inhabitants, the majority (or even all) of whom were allegedly pagans (Khoury Harb 1995, p. 42–4). The group around Saint Ibrahim disguised themselves as a delegation of walnut merchants, a story which made sense given that “walnut [was] the produce of the region.” (Ibid., p. 44) When they rented a house in Afqa and prayed there for four days, upon hearing this unfamiliar type of prayer, the locals “attacked the hermits and asked them to leave the village.” (Ibid., p. 44) When the group around Saint Ibrahim, in the midst of this turmoil, kept on praying within the house, the natives were impressed by their steadfastness and therefore “suspended their siege, opened the doors of the house and freed the missionaries, ordering them nevertheless to leave the city immediately.” (Dau 1984, p. 185) In that very moment, government tax collectors reportedly came to the village to carry out their duty. Upon being told that the demanded amount was not available, they resorted to mistreating the local population. Disturbed by what he witnessed, Saint Ibrahim is said to have paid the collectors the entire sum (100 silver pieces) levied on the village "on the condition that they would leave the population in peace," (Dau 1984, p. 185) after which the villagers asked him to stay and become their leader. According to tradition, Saint Ibrahim

> "agreed on [the] one condition, that the inhabitants embrace Christianity. Thus the population of the city converted, and built a church. St. Abraham was their priest and leader. After three years of preaching, [and founding the Maronite monastery of Afqa-Akoura] St. Abraham appointed one of his followers to replace him and returned to his hermitage [in Northern Syria]." (Khoury Harb 1995, p. 44)

The ascetic way of life exemplified by Saint Maroun is meanwhile said to have been taken to its climax by the hermit Saint Simon Stylites (389-459 A.D.), who is believed to have for thirty-seven years "lived on the top of a seventy foot high pillar, in the open air, without any shelter, on the hill of Telanissos, between Aleppo and Antioch. The fame of his sanctity and miracles reached the furthest countries of Europe and Asia." (Dau 1984, p. 186) Having heard about this saint and his extraordinary spirituality, a group of people from the village of Jibbet, (Khoury Harb 1995, p. 46), situated in "the Mountains of Lebanon visited him asking for his blessing and help against the beasts which were threatening their lives and those of their children and cattle." (Dau 1984., p. 186) The saint, after finding out that his guests were not Christians, recommended to them to accept baptism and convert to Christianity. They agreed and returned to Jibbet accompanied by a group of disciples of Saint Simon, who took care of baptizing the inhabitants and, upon the orders of the saint, advised them "to place crosses around their villages to protect them against beasts. When they did his bidding, beasts stopped attacking them." (Khoury Harb 1995, p. 46)

With regard to the effect of this episode on the (Maronite) Christianization of Lebanon, Butros Dau writes: "The crosses were set up in the region of Tannourine, Hasroun, Hadshit, Besharreh, Ehden, Aitau and elsewhere. Thus the greater part of Lebanon was converted from paganism to Christianity in the first half of the fifth century." (Dau 1984, p. 187) According to Maronite historiography, the Maronites have thus established a base for their henceforth-growing presence in Lebanon already during the first half of the 5th century A.D. It was not until the advent of Saint John (Youhanna) Maroun (628-707 A.D.), however, that the Maronite church would become organized in a hierarchical structure with its center, the Patriarchal See, emanating from within Lebanon. In contrast to what is said in apologetic scriptures informing the Maronite tradition, it is this period to which non-Maronite historians date back the origins of a notable Maronite presence in Lebanon (Harris 2012, pp. 34–5) and not earlier.

Butros Dau states that “St. John Maron was born in the village of Sarum in the region of Antioch.” (Dau 1984, p. 207) As a boy he was sent to Antioch to study Syriac and Greek, and at an unspecified time later to the Saint Maroun monastery, where he became a monk (on the occasion of which he took on the byname Maroun), studied grammar, mathematics and Holy Scripture and was finally ordained a priest. Believed to have had French relatives (his father is said to have been the nephew of a French prince), he had good relations with the French community in Antioch, and these Frenchmen allegedly presented and recommended him to the Pope´s delegate in Syria, after which, in 676 A.D., he was consecrated Bishop of Batroun, one of the smaller of the old Phoenician coastal settlements, situated between Jbeil (Byblos) and Trablous (Tripoli) in the area of modern Lebanon (ibid., pp. 208–9). Maronite tradition holds that is was in the same year, that

> “[t]he Maronites under the guidance of John Maron decided to defend their freedom, independence, rights and religion [*vis-à-vis* the Sunni Muslim rule of the Umayyads, 661-750 A.D.]. A military organization was created for this purpose, called Al-Maradah by the Byzantine historians, and Al-Jarajimah by the Arabs and Syrians. The two words Al-Maradah or Mardaites and Al-Jarajimah are synonymous and mean ʻfree heroes of high stature.’” (Ibid., pp. 210–1)

Whereas the Mardaites/ *al-Marāda* and their relation to both the Maronites and *al-Jarājima* are subject to a century old controversial debate – which is not confined to the described divide between Maronite and non-Maronite historical accounts but features numerous different assessments (e.g. Moosa 1967; Dau 1984, Salibi 1988, pp. 82–6; Harris 2012, pp. 35–7; Kassis 1985, p. 122) –, for many Maronites themselves, including most of their historians, *al-Marāda*, without a doubt, embodied not only ancestors of the present-day Maronite Lebanese (Chiha 1966, p. 30) but also their personal “Maronite Mardaite Army,” which was independent from both “the ’Umayyad Empire in the East and […] the Byzantine Empire in the West.” (Dau 1984, p. 216)

The Patriarchal See of Antioch had in effect been vacant since the early 7th century A.D., when Saint John Maroun is said to have been finally elected patriarch by the Maronites and their allies in 686 A.D. (ibid., pp. 214–5). After the Byzantine Emperor Justinian II (669–711 A.D.) had “directed an armed force in 694 A.D. to crush the Maronite military power,” (ibid., p. 216) whereby the Byzantines allegedly pursued the new patriarch and attacked and destroyed the Saint Maroun monastery, the surrounding Maronite villages, and other Maronite institutions in Syria, John Maroun moved the Patriarchal See from the Church of Saint Babilas the Martyr in Antioch to the Monastery of Kfarhi in the vicinity of the Lebanese coastal town of Batroun (ibid., pp. 222–3).

The ascension of Saint John Maroun to the Patriarchate and him moving the Patriarchal See to Lebanon, for Maronites, in retrospect, marks the birth of the Maronite Catholic Patriarchate of Antioch and all the East and thus opened a new, independent line of succession to the Antiochian patriarchate. After several relocations within Lebanon, under the sixty-eighth Patriarch Buṭrus Yūsuf VIII Ḥubaish (life: 1787–1845; tenure: 1823–45)[56] the Patriarchal See was finally moved to Bkerke in Mount Lebanon, where it remains today. The incumbent, seventy-seventh Maronite Patriarch is Bishara Boutros al-Rahi (1940–), since taking over from his predecessor Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir in 2011.

Putting the central objections to much of the aforementioned in a nutshell, William Harris writes:

> "While mythology has been important since the fifteenth century in constructing Maronite identity, modern historians dismiss it in terms of provable fact. First, there is scant evidence of any line of Maronite patriarchs before the Crusades, the claimed early link with the West cannot be substantiated, and the monastery of Maron was demonstrably Monothelite with Jacobite antecedents. Second, the notion of a Byzantine army attacking a Byzantine client inside Arab territory commanded in 694 by the redoubtable Caliph Abd al-Malik is absurd. […] John Maron […] may have moved independently to Mount Lebanon from the Orontos Valley during the Arab civil war between Caliph Ali and Mu´awia." (Harris 2012, pp. 35–6)

Taking up and reflecting these demurs, one must first of all notice, that while of all Eastern Christian communions, the Maronites were indeed the "first to begin a tradition of attachment to Rome," (Salibi 1991, p. 15) the emphatic claim of the Maronite church and the bulk of Maronite historians to both the originality of this attachment and its flawlessness over the centuries (cf. Jibrail Ibn al-Qila´i [d. 1516], Istifan ad-Duwayhi [d. 1704], and Tannus ash-Shidyaq [d. 1861] quoted after Salibi 1991; Dau 1984, p. 212; Khoury Harb 1995, pp. 50–8), has been credibly refuted by Kamal Salibi, himself a Maronite Lebanese historian, in a work first published in 1959 (Salibi 1991). In his groundbreaking study, Salibi points to the "Monothelite" (a doctrine saying that Jesus Christ possessed two natures – one divine and one human – but only one will, which is thus located between "Monophysitism" and "Dyophysitsm") and therefore heretic origins of the Maronites, which, he says, entered into union with Rome only in 1180 A.D. (ibid., p. 16). He moreover identifies a persistently resurfacing challenge posed by several remaining anti-Catholic currents "among the Maronites during the three centuries which followed their union with Rome" (Salibi 1991, p. 16), all of which opposed the Chalcedonian doctrine of Dyophysitism – that Jesus Christ possessed two inseparable natures and wills, one divine and one human – to which both, the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Churches adhere until today.

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[56] Upon ascension the Maronite patriarchs obligatory assume the name Butros (Peter) in reference to Saint Peter, the first bishop/ patriarch of Antioch.

Salibi´s objections – while having been confirmed in later historical accounts of non-Maronites (e.g. Harris 2012, pp. 35–8; Encyclopaedia Britannica 2017) – have not led to a far-reaching review of this aspect of Maronite history among Lebanese Maronite historians. Some, however, do take notice of the larger debate, if to a limited degree. A rare, clear acknowledgement of the Monothelite origins of Maronitism has been offered up until October 2005, by a Maronite diaspora association based in Berlin, Germany, which had stated on its webpage that the Maronites have been judged as heretics and excommunicated for their Monothelite creed during the third Council of Constantinople in 681 A.D. (Maronitische Christliche Versammlung Berlin e.V. 2005). The organization in question, however, has meanwhile vanished and been replaced by the *Maronitenmission Deutschland* (Maronite Mission Germany). The latter has fully subscribed to the dominant Maronite narrative, stating that the Maronite Church was founded in 451 A.D. after the Council of Chalcedon, in order of disseminating the new (Chalcedonian) doctrine (Maronitenmission Deutschland 2017). A kind of middle ground approach, creatively attempting to harmonize the historical finding of the Maronites´ Monothelite beginnings with the narrative of an unbroken commitment to the Catholic Church, can meanwhile be deducted from the following statement of the St. Elias Maronite Catholic Church:

> "In the beginning of their stay in Lebanon, isolated by the mountains and worried about the political unrest in the Near East, the Maronites faithfully adhered to the creed of the Catholic Church. But here is a paradox. Because the tradition of Antioch always preferred biblical expressions over dogmatic formulations the creed they professed did not contain the 'new' formulations of the councils regarding the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Hesitations to accept these formulations belonged to the sphere of theological terminology; they did not lessen the unshakable attachment of the Maronites to the Catholic faith. In fact Maronite followers are renowned for their strong commitment to the Universal Catholic Church and are in perfect harmony with the Holy See." (St. Elias Maronite Catholic Church n.y. b)

2.2 EARLY ENCOUNTERS OF SHI`A AND MARONITES IN THE AREA OF MODERN LEBANON

The history of Shi`i-Maronite relations in Lebanon begins with the first encounters of adherents of both confessions in the area constituting the modern day country. Drawing on much of the sources available on the early history of modern Lebanon, including more recent corrections and revisions, William Harris undertook a pioneering synthesis, which adds up to a comparably comprehensive account of medieval Mount Lebanon and its vicinity (cf. Harris 2012, p. 31). He thereby traces the "[p]robable arrival of Maronite monks and followers in Mount Lebanon" to the late 650s A.D. (ibid., p. xxiii) and the presence of forerunners of what would become Shi`i Muslims on Lebanese soil back to the "early Islamic centuries," (ibid., p. 30) stating in support of this assumption that the "principal political divide in Islam, which became the Sunni/ Shia divide, appeared early in Mount Lebanon." (Ibid., p. 34) In particular the area of Jabal `Amil – overlapping largely with the hilly inland of modern South Lebanon, but stretching into Upper Galilee of present-day Israel – Harris says, has been "inhabited from the early days of Islam by partisans of the Caliph `Alī and the Shia Imams." (Ibid., p. 29) Considering that the Arab Islamic conquest of Syria and the Levant took place between 634 and 644 A.D. (ibid., p. xxiii), and the rift between future Kharijites, Sunnis and Shi`a in the making appeared between 657 and 661 A.D. (see above), we can conclude, that first encounters of Maronites and Muslims in the territory of Lebanon took place immediately upon the Maronites´ initial spreading. First contacts of Maronites and Alids on the same spot, the majority of whom would later become Twelver Shi`a, must meanwhile have occurred not much later than that – still in the second half of the 7th century A.D.

The original main settlement area of future Twelver Shi`i Alids in Lebanon – and one of the oldest centers of Twelver Shi'ism altogether – from the mid-7th century A.D. onwards, were the hills of Jabal `Amil. At the latest by Crusader times (1099-1289 A.D.), Shi`a not only represented the majority population here, but also in much of the Bekaa valley and in parts of central Mount Lebanon (Harris 2012, p. 18), especially in the Kisrawan. They furthermore had a notable presence in the Jbeil (Byblos) district (ibid., p. 45).

The Maronite presence started in northern Mount Lebanon around the mid-7th century A.D. (or, according to Maronite tradition, much earlier) and from there gradually expanded into the Bekaa valley and southwards up into parts of Jabal `Amil (ibid., p. 17). Kisrawan became increasingly inhabited by Maronites too in the early period of Ottoman rule, after three punitive campaigns under the Mamluks in 1292, 1300, and 1305 A.D. – the latter of which has been commanded by Druze chieftains – had significantly diminished the presence of Twelvers and ended that of the Alawites there (ibid., p. 18). Yet, Shi`a remained the dominant group in the Kisrawan until the "Maronite colonization push in the seventeenth century," (Winter 2010, p. 63) which finally turned it into a Maronite stronghold. In general, both Maronites and Druze[57] gradually took over much of the former residential areas of Shi`a in Mount Lebanon (Harris 2012, p. 18). This finally reduced the Shi`i presence in what is nowadays Lebanon almost exclusively to the Bekaa valley and Jabal `Amil which, besides their more recent urban centers, remain their main strongholds until today.

The major coastal towns and cities of Lebanon, which all represent former Phoenician settlements, were traditionally strongholds of Sunni Muslims and Orthodox Christians, featuring notable Jewish and other minorities. Maronites were instantly rather few and Shi`i and Druze numbers were by and large negligible. Only Tyre presumably had a significant Alid (and later Twelver Shi`i) population ever since the first *fitna* had occurred (Harris 2012, p. 40). However, as of 1860, Beirut – then hosting a population of about 70,000 – gradually established its position as one of the three major cities in Ottoman Syria (the others were Damascus and Aleppo). In 1888, it rose to the status of a provincial capital and by 1914, its population stood at roughly 150,000. As a consequence of refugee flows (see below), Maronites had doubled their share from 10 % in 1845 to 20 % in 1860 – as compared to about 40 % Sunnis, 30 % Orthodox Christians and 8 % Greek Catholics (with other groups´ numbers being negligible). Until the turn of the century, while the Maronite´s mobility between the mountain and Beirut steadily increased, most still retained their official residence in the highlands (likely because of significant tax advantages). Yet, by 1900/ 1901, according to Ottoman accounts, 55 % Christians, 30 % of which were Orthodox, now slightly outnumbered the remaining 45 % mainly Sunni Muslims in Beirut (ibid., p. 167–8).

Thus, as we have seen, the two communities, as the two preeminent groups of Lebanese mountaineers, have been close neighbors since their establishments here. But how did they get along with one another and how did their relations flourish over time?

Kamal Salibi relates that a quarrel persisted between ostensibly Shi`i herdsman from Baalbek (Bekaa) and Maronites from Jubbat Bsharri (Northern Mount Lebanon) "since time immemorial" (Salibi 1968, p. 66) which still played a role during the period of the Shi`i Hamadeh family´s rule over large parts of Mount Lebanon (1633-1697) (see below). It would erupt anew every spring, when both groups followed “the retreating snows into the Mountain pastures above Tripoli.” (Winter 2010, p. 61) Yet, while according to Salibi this recurring dispute took “the form of a Maronite-Shiite religious conflict,” (Salibi 1968, p. 66) Stefan Winter cautions that such an interpretation “reinforces a popular misconception,” according to which Shi`a had no presence in Mount Lebanon to that time.

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[57] The Shuf area of Mount Lebanon remains the traditional stronghold of the Lebanese Druze since their emerging presence in Lebanon as of 1021 A.D. (Harris 2012, p. 18)

Winter seems to imply, that, because Maronite and Shi`i herdsman were both represented in the Bekaa and in Mount Lebanon, it might have well been mixed Maronite-Shi`i groups from both sides that came into conflict with one another in this yearly goat war (cf. ibid., p. 61). If this were true, it would point to a group solidarity, which was – in this particular constellation – arising from regional (Baalbek/ Bekaa vs. Jubbat Bsharri/ Northern Mount Lebanon) and/ or professional (goat herding) rather than confessional belonging. It would furthermore render this episode one marked by at least as much cross-communal cooperation as conflict. All of this seems probable.

Indeed, documented instances of earlier as well as later periods strongly suggest that the confessional community was neither the sole nor the ultimate point of reference for the people. As a case in point, contemporaries describe the shepherds of the Lebanese mountains, including those hailing from the Syrian side of the border, as traditionally constituting a society on their own, following distinct rules and customs. An interviewee of Camille Germanos relates how the mountain shepherds´ inter-communal communication networks were utilized during the July War of 2006 (Germanos 2012 p. 38), implying that these ties have survived the centuries and are still fully in effect. The same can be said for the local culture of saint worship, shared devotional practices (Farra-Haddad 2013, pp. 68–9) and even instances of facilitating the religious practices and ceremonies of other confessional groups as described above. These inter-communal practices have in fact an age-old tradition in this region (Winter 2010, pp. 44 –5).

Before we move on to a brief discussion of Shi`i-Maronite relations under Ottoman rule, some initial remarks seem appropriate. First of all, most of the powers in charge respectively, during a succession of periods of non-local (mainly Crusader, Mamluk, Ottoman, and French) rule between 1099 and 1943/ 46, applied a rather pragmatic approach in their dealings with the heterogeneous religious composition of Mount Lebanon and its vicinity. This holds true despite regular waves of persecutions along with severe cruelties that are by no means to be downplayed, especially regarding their dire impact on the victims. Such persecutions, however, while having been frequently justified by the perpetrators with the supposed religious heresy and/ or infidelity of those persecuted, still seem to have been only conducted whenever their own dominance was contested or at least perceived to be so.

The minorities´ degree of independence – or rather that of their respective notables – was steadily subject to re-negotiation, with the local chieftains continuously trying to expand their margin of autonomy. This periodically resulted in punitive campaigns on behalf of the overlords, aimed at curbing in the ambitions of their local princes. Such campaigns were usually constructed as taking action against the infidels. Selling it this way fulfilled the functions of both satisfying the demands of influential hardliners among their own majority population and basing the own actions on a broader legal basis. In any case, none of the ruling powers followed a permanent systematic policy of resolute persecution towards any of the local minorities. Even in Mamluk times (1289-1516 A.D.) – and despite these rulers´ particular notoriety for the ruthless persecution of Shi`a and ‘Alawites in Mount Lebanon, it was still possible for such “heretics” to become part of their masters´ administrative hierarchy. One Shi`i, Ibn Harfush, for instance, has, according to Mamluk sources, been the local headman (*al-muqaddam*) of the Anti-Lebanon mountain village Jubbat Assal in 1483 A.D. and another one deputy (*nā´ib*) of Baalbek in 1498 A.D. (Winter 2010, p. 46).

Secondly, it must be clarified how to make sense of the Turkish title *“emir”* (from the Arabic *amīr,* meaning lord or “commander in chief”) and the term *“emirate”* during the period of Ottoman rule (1516-1918 A.D.), which coincided with the institutionalized local rule of different mountaineers’ clans in the territory of what is nowadays´ Lebanon: “[W]hile the Ottomans certainly recognized individual tribal notables and their families as ‘emirs’ […] in return for their services,” (Winter 2010, p. 57) the available sources do not suggest that those ever conceived of an “emirate” in the more abstract sense. Neither the famous Druze emirate, nor those of the Shi`a were built on “a set institution of local governance in the coastal highlands that would allow us to infer the existence of a […] polity, at this time.” (Ibid.) The emirs in question must be rather understood as recognized local strongmen, employed by the imperial authorities as “government tax farmers over the local population” (ibid., p. 5) and not so much as quasi-sovereign princes of an early Lebanese polity (which is what the founding myth of modern Lebanon suggests).

2.3 SHI`I-MARONITE RELATIONS UNDER OTTOMAN RULE, 1516-1918 A.D.

While Jabal `Amil had been under control of local Shi`i families since centuries (Chalabi 2006, pp. 22–3), after the Ottoman´s conquest of Syria and the Levant in 1516 A.D., the same Harfush family mentioned above rose to become one of two further major Shi`i ruling dynasties in the area of modern Lebanon. Their stronghold was Baalbek from where they controlled much of the Bekaa and as one reason for the comparably vast amount of historical references to the Harfush emirs, Winter mentions "their constant interaction with Christian communities" (Winter 2010, p. 45) in this region. The Harfush´s initial relations to the Sublime Porte, however, proved rather problematic, and it is therefore not certain in exactly which year their emirate came about. It was mentioned in historical sources for the first time in 1534 A.D. and an order sent to an `Alī Harfush by the Ottomans in 1555 A.D. is the first documented case of a Harfush being addressed with the title of "emir" by the imperial authorities (ibid., pp. 46–7). There is no exact year of the Harfush emirate´s demise either. It seems to have finally collapsed by the mid-17th century, after an intensifiying contest with the Druze Fakhr al-Dīn Ma`n finally turned out in the latter´s favor (ibid., pp. 53–7).

The other and even more powerful Shi`i ruling family of relevance were the Hamadehs of Mount Lebanon, which constituted the main feudal power in that area between 1633 and 1697 A.D. Their emirate was in place from 1641–1685 A.D. and they "retained some of their tax farms until 1763, when they were evicted by the Druze emirs of Sidon, the Shihabis, and went with their affiliated clans into exile on the other side of Mt. Lebanon in the Bekaa Valley." (Ibid., p. 58)

These important episodes of Lebanese history took place in a time that must be registered as crucial for the formation of modern Lebanon and their impact was significant in many respects. From a global perspective, what becomes apparent is that Shi`a, in the later 16th and early 17th centuries, were the paramount (yet, never the sole) rulers of Mount Lebanon, the Bekaa and Jabal `Amil and yielded influence well beyond that (including the province of Tripoli). Added together, this amounts to pretty much all of the territory of modern Lebanon (ibid., p. 176). They were thus also in charge of the Maronite heartland and inter-communal interaction was indeed constant (ibid., p. 45).

In their capacity as "the secular lords of the greater part of the Maronite population of Mt. Lebanon as well as of the central institutions of the Maronite Church" (ibid., p. 156) in particular "the Hamadas regulary intervened or were drawn into profane and even ecclesiastic disputes within the Maronite community itself.” (Ibid., p. 157) They played a key role in the election of several patriarchs at the beginning of the eighteenth century. On one occasion, in 1714, the former Patriarch Yakoub Awwad, who was harassed by the Imperial authorities as a result of intra-Maronite intrigues, found shelter only with the powerful Hamadehs, thus escaping arrest (Scheffler 2012, p. 173).

Maronites were no less deeply involved into Shi`i communal affairs than vice versa. The Hamadehs´ *iltizam* (tax) contracts in the 18th century, for instance, were continuously guaranteed by a group of village *shuyukh,* the majority of whom were Maronite, hailing from the different districts concerned respectively. They all had a long record of close cooperation with the Hamadehs until they finally revolted and turned against them as of 1759: “[W]hen the Shihabis, the Maronite lay aristocracy and other local notables finally joined forces in 1763 to replace the Shiite mukataacis altogether, it was really after decades of experience as their agents, guardians and warrantors vis-à-vis the Ottoman authorities.” (Winter 2010, pp. 163–4)

Alliances and fault lines were only in rare cases conditioned by confessional affiliations but rather the outcome of political considerations. This applies as much to the Shi`i and Maronite but also to the Sunni, Orthodox and Druze power centers and clans. They cooperated at times and fought each other at other times. It is precisely because intra- and inter-communal relations were evenly volatile that we cannot speak of a proto-Lebanon ruled by “the Shi`a” for the period in question, as if the Shi`i clans of relevance would have not also been frequently at loggerheads with each other. It is the case rather of that territory having being ruled by different Lebanese mountain lords, i.e. local rulers with roots somewhere in the same territory, the most powerful of which in all regions happened to be Shi`a. On the other hand, the psycho-social dynamics that guide the perceptions of people entangled in complex inter- and intra-group relations today were, generally speaking, no less applicable in those days and the status and performance of the rulers naturally affected the self-awareness and external perceptions and thus also the well-being of their respective co-religionists. In less abstract terms; the Hamadehs´ and Harfushes´ as well as the `Amili rulers´ perceived behavior of course mattered for the overall perception and standing of the Lebanese Shi`a altogether.

This aspect is also instructive with respect to the nature of *de facto* local autonomy even if such was not granted *de jure*. Families such as the Hamadehs or Harfushes but also the Ma´n and Shihābis were chosen by the Sublime Porte not as guardians of their respective confessional group´s religious or worldly affairs but as Imperial tax collectors and local security agents exactly because of their factual position within the complex power equation in early modern Lebanon. Communal identities were thereby as much of a precondition as was their diversity. As long as there was a local power balance in place, the formal employment of selected factions held the empire´s own material investments in the periphery low. Once any of those empowered actors happened or appeared to become too strong and independent, however, the empire usually intervened. Not uncommonly then, such interventions affected the whole community affiliated with the actor in question, not least because, as we know, corresponding campaigns were usually constructed and presented as actions to contain heresy. This sealed the fate of the Hamadeh clan alongside the Shi`a living in areas under its control. In response to frequently raised complaints of certain Maronite power centers over what they depicted as the "Hamadehs´ misrule," (a not completely unfounded, yet, one-sided and greatly exaggerated claim) they became the prime target of "a far-reaching discipline and punish initiative […] which was reflected in a major [Ottoman] punitive campaign into Mt. Lebanon in 1693–4." (Ibid., p. 177)

After that, the rule of Shi`i notables was far from over. From now on, however, it was progressively on the decline. The Hamadehs first became gradually "dependent on the Druze emirs´ political protection and on their own subjects´ financial guarantees for their tax farms" and were thereafter "easily driven from power and exiled from Mt. Lebanon after the Shihabis had converted to Maronitsm and were ready to expand into the north in the 1760´s." (Ibid., p. 177) The `Alī al-Ṣaghīrs and other powerful Shi`i families from Jabal `Amil successfully defended their autonomy until the 1770s whereafter they were also subjected to Shihābi rule. "The Harfushes, on the other hand, were able to maintain their hold on the Bekaa Valley into the next century precisely by subordinating themselves to the Shihabis." (Ibid., p. 178) Yet, the "growing reality of a properly Lebanese sovereignty in the region" (ibid., p. 178) was not to come about before Bashir II´s (1767-1850) accession to the Shihābi emirate in 1788 and his imposition of "a unified administrative and legal system throughout the highlands of Sidon and Tripoli" by the end of the 18th century (ibid.).

All of these developments were accompanied by fierce battles between the different feudal factions – often drawing in the Ottomans or European powers such as France or Britain – and civilians were usually not spared. In such instances, Shi`a had the option to resort to *taqiyya*, which led to many individual families converting to Maronitism for good, as, over time, they lost knowledge about their own Shi`i roots (ibid., p. 63). This surely represents the most extreme and definite form of Shi`i-Maronite intermingling in proto-Lebanon.

When about a century earlier, leading Maronites had begun to challenge the Shi`i centers of authority, their community gradually evolved into the Druze Ma'ns´ principal commercial and political ally. “The Maronites′ colonization of formerly Shiite-inhabited districts [especially Kisrawan], spearheaded by the [Maronite] Khazin family and underwritten by Catholic Europe, thus coincided with and in fact defined the emergence of the ʽDruze Emirate’ as a regional locus of power.” (Ibid., pp. 114–5) The rise of that emirate, however, went along with intensifying rivalry and conflict between the Druze overlords and their now significantly empowered Maronite subjects. Its demise, shortly after Bashir II′s removal from power in October 1840, saw these tensions discharging in several rounds of brutal fighting featuring mutual massacres, so as in 1845 and 1860, which left a deep and lasting trace on Druze-Maronite relations (Harris 2012, 151–9; Traboulsi 2007, pp. 26–40). The broader context of these escalations was provided by the “*Ḥarakat*” (“Movement”), a series of commoner and peasant revolts, “*muqata`ji* preemptive strikes and civil disorder that lasted from 1841 to 1861, [which also marked] the bloody transition from the *muqata`ji* system to peripheral capitalism,”[58] (Traboulsi 2007, p. 24) pointing to the important social and indeed, class dimensions of these conflicts.

Maronites fleeing the 1860-violence in the mountain reportedly found shelter in the Shi`i neighborhoods of Saida, Jezzine and elsewhere in Jabal `Amil (Author′s interv. E.Hzb.2 2012). Among the local Shi`i notable families opening their areas of influence for receiving their displaced neighbors were namely the `Usayrans and Zayns, which in turn provided these with relatively stable “future links to the capitalist networks in Mount Lebanon.” (Chalabi 2006, p. 24)

Crucially, the period of the *Ḥarakat* also saw the introduction of the *qā′im maqāmiyya* system in early 1843, which divided the territory of Mount Lebanon into one Druze and one Maronite administrative region respectively (a deal the Ottomans agreed to only due to their already weakened position and under massive pressure from European powers). This step effectively sealed “the institutionalization of the sectarian system of political representation.” (Traboulsi 2007, p. 24) The confessionalist system was then further developed in the subsequently installed *mutaṣarrifiyya* (1861-1915) (Ottoman special province) in which an elected council of multi-confessional, local composition – equipped mainly with consultative powers – presided over Mount Lebanon under the auspices of a Christian Ottoman governor (Traboulsi 2007, p. 43). This administrative council was first equally divided between

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[58] *Muqata`ji* is a hereditary title, carried, in Ottoman Mount Lebanon, by the senior leaders of aristocratic families that “held political authority over districts in which they collected taxes, maintained peace and order […] and acted as judges,” (Eisenstadt/ Roniger 1984, p. 91) whereby they formally depended on the local emir.

Christians and Muslims with each two representatives of the six major sects. As of 1864 it was divided on a 7-5 ratio between four Maronites, two Orthodox and one Greek Catholic Christian on the one hand, as well as three Druze and each one Shi`i and Sunni Muslim on the other hand (Harris 2012, p. 160). The *mutaṣarrifiyya* was a political "compromise between the French-sponsored project for an independent Christian emirate […] and the complete submission of Mount Lebanon to [direct] Ottoman authority." (Ibid., p. 41) It´s autonomous status was guaranteed by the five European powers (Britain, France, Russia, Austria, and Prussia) (Harris 2012, p. 159).

By the mid-19th century, the Maronite Church was already one of the most powerful players and the single largest landowner in Mount Lebanon (Traboulsi 2007, p. 22). From the onset, it was therefore a priority for the Ottoman *mutaṣarrifs* (governors of a *mutaṣarrifiyya*) to contain this growing power (Harris 2012, p. 162). This happened also and especially by patronizing such Maronite notables that were not among the Church´s favorite candidates. France, on the other hand, having been the "chief architect of the eventual competitor of the church – the elected administrative council," (ibid.) was now increasingly diversifying its outreach and endowment to a broader spectrum of the Maronite community after centuries of preoccupation with its clergy. Combined with the commercial and educational boom Mount Lebanon under the *mutaṣarrifiyya* alongside adjacent Beirut (which was not part of the special province) experienced in the later part of the 19th century as well as the novel introduction of legal equality and other liberal-democratic measures, these developments brought about a new social elite, encompassing "lesser Sheikhs, wealthy peasants, merchants, and town professionals emerging in the mountain and Beirut." (Ibid., p. 159)

Advances in technology and the medical field as well as a fairly long period of peace had resulted in a renewal of Christian population growth too. Between the 1860s and 1911, the population of the *mutaṣarrifiyya*, roughly 80 % of which was Christian, rose from around 300,000 to 414,000 despite a significant number of emigrants that left for the Americas in the same timeframe. As of the 1830s, Maronites had furthermore started to migrate from the mountain to Beirut, constantly increasing their population share in the city (ibid., p. 166). This went along with an intensification of Western engagement in Beirut, especially (US and British) Protestant and (French) Catholic educational activity (ibid., p. 155).

Crucially, these developments benefited primarily the Maronites and other Catholics followed by other Christian denominations. Only a small number of the Druze and Muslim population initially shared in the new prosperity, mainly their bourgeoisie (Harris 2012, p. 147). The Maronites therefore came out of the local power struggles of the preceding centuries victorious and they entered the 20th century in a "pole position" for becoming the most privileged of all communities upon the formation of Greater Lebanon (see below) under French military rule and mandate as of 1918. Although permanently overshadowed by the Maronites, by and large, all other Christian communities heavily gained from the new developments and French – as well as general Western – bias. The Druze, traditionally protected by the British and economically fairly well off, were able to retain a strong, if secondary, position in the new Lebanon. The Sunnis profited from their status of belonging to the regional majority that had constantly enjoyed a privileged position under the likewise Sunni rulers that preceded the French in the Levant. The Shi`i community, however, had no foreign patron to rely on, its traditional leaders were left clawless and its overall condition, especially in socio-economic terms, was desolate. When the Lebanese nation-state was to be finally formed in 1920, that momentary status quo was reflected and preserved in subsequent power-sharing arrangements. Tamara Chalabi rightly notes with respect to the `Amili Shi`a, that they "were the least empowered in both Ottoman and later Lebanese societies." (Chalabi 2006, p. 25) The same can be attested for the Lebanese Shi`a in their entirety.

Approaching the nation-state went along with the construction of a national myth of Lebanon that was preoccupied with the Maronite and Druze communities and nearly exclusively based on a Maronite nationalist narrative in which the Shi`a and their central role in the foundation of modern Lebanon had no place. It is not that they were completely denied but they were blatantly ignored and largely written out of this chapter of history (Winter 2010, p. 2). Henceforth, if their historical role received attention at all, it was usually with respect to their perceived misrule, brutality, backwardness and alienness. This situation was not so much the conscious product of any faction – even if the 57th Maronite patriarch and historian Isṭifān al-Duwaihī (life: 1630-1704; patriarchate: 1670-1704) alongside later Maronite nationalists must be granted leading roles – but a convergence of several factors.

For one, it was facilitated by the precarious status the Shi`a had under Ottoman Islamic law, the interpretation of which resulted in a legal position legitimizing their slaying as heretics (Winter 2010, pp. 1, 15). In cases of rivalry and conflict between the Sunni Sublime Porte and Shi`i Safavid Iran, the Ottomans′ Shi`i subjects would be commonly treated as a fifth column. More than that, despite the ancient roots and notable importance of Shi'ism in Jabal `Amil, the Bekaa and Mount Lebanon, the Shi`a of Lebanon (and elsewhere) have been frequently viewed and/ or portrayed as Iranians themselves, an aberration that gained far-reaching popularity during the Arab literary revival (*al-nahḍa*) (Winter 2010, p. 60). The necessity to still explain their presence resulted in the myth of their relatively “recent intrusion into rightly Christian Mt. Lebanon.” (Ibid., p. 59)

The scarceness of comprehensive historical sources from below notwithstanding, what we have at our disposal as empirical evidence surely renders ideas pertaining to secluded communities based on structures of quasi-exclusive internal group solidarity in early modern Lebanon absurd. In contrast to the impression one must gain when consuming the narrative of pronounced “Shi`i misrule,” as presented by certain Maronite notables and picked up by historians of this and later times (ibid., p. 177), the Shi`i-Maronite relations during this period of “ambiguous rapport between the Shiite feudatories, the local population and the state authorities” (ibid., p. 177) were not only constant, deep and pronounced but also highly diverse, amounting to the whole range of possible interrelations between neighbors and/ or between rulers and subjects (including, of course, instances of misrule).

Confessional belonging, in all of this, was a fairly relevant marker. It was yet not the only one and surely not a principal divider, even if, for the reasons described, it was to function as one upon the formation of the Lebanese Republic. However, when Salibi rightly observed that, “[a]mong the Lebanese people, the Christians were the first to begin adapting to the ways of the modern world, and the Shiites among the Muslims were the last,” (Salibi 1988, p. 232) this must yet be assessed in light of its historical context and cannot be understood as a result of supposed cultural differences i.e. varying degrees of culturally ingrained capacities to adapt to modernity – an assumption which is always implicit when other explanations are absent.

In summary; the relations between local Shi`a and Maronites had shaped the fortunes of proto-Lebanon for the most of this crucial early modern period that was to culminate in the emergence of the modern nation-state of Lebanon. As an irony of history, this went along with the Shi`a´s own marginalization to the advantage of the Druze and especially the Maronites, which was due to a combination of economic factors and foreign interference. After decades of particularly close relations (encompassing conflict too) and mutual profiting from these, the Hamadehs had “outlived their usefulness to both local society and the Ottoman state,” and the Shi`a in general came to be viewed “as ever more of an obstacle to the Maronites´ path to self-determination.” (Winter 2010, p. 177) Their subsequent downfall was accompanied and facilitated by a process that had the effect of deleting the Shi`a share in the history of the development of modern Lebanon and simultaneously reinforced their marginalization. Yet, “[s]erious reflection on modern-day questions of identity, sovereignty, political confessionalism or communitarianism in Lebanon cannot begin without also coming to terms more seriously with the Shiites´ place in this history.” (Ibid., p. 6)

2.4 SHI`I-MARONITE RELATIONS IN THE FIRST LEBANESE REPUBLIC, 1918-1990

2.4.1 Towards unequal citizenship in a modern nation

After 1914, in the course of World War I (1914-18), a British seizure of the Levant became an ever more likely prospect. France was quick to raise its claims and the subsequent clandestine negotiations between Britain and France culminated in the infamous Sykes-Picot accord of 1916, which, besides other provisions and effects, granted France rule over Syria and Lebanon. After finally landing in Beirut on October 8th, 1918, the British therefore first thwarted attempts of the Arab nationalist camp based in Damascus to assume authority over Beirut in the name of King Faysal I (1885-1933) and shortly thereafter appointed the senior French officer present, Colonel de Piépape, as military governor of Beirut (Longrigg 1968, pp. 65–6). The latter took office on October 11th, 1918, which marks the beginning of French military rule over proto-Lebanon. A provisional mandate for Syria and Lebanon was granted to France only in April 1920 at an allied conference in San Remo, Italy. It was rubber-stamped by the League of Nations (LoN) in June 1922 and came into legal effect in September 1923 (Harris 2012, p. 182). In contrast to the provisional mandate, the LoN mandate made a clear distinction between Syria and Lebanon and gave France three years for setting up a constitution.

Maronite nationalism, in the meantime, had manifested in full force after the Young Turk Revolution in Istanbul of July 1908. However, explicit demands for forming "an enlarged Lebanon as a Catholic Christian homeland" (Harris 2012, p. 175) had been raised by Maronite publicists at least since 1900. As of 1916, French officials, the Maronite Church and mainly Christian Levantine emigrants in France informally negotiated the territorial question of a future Lebanon. In the course of this debate, advocates of a "Small Lebanon" (amounting to the territory of the former *mutaṣarrifiyya*) were largely silenced under the impression of the Great Famine of 1915-18, in which about half of Mount Lebanon´s population (the bulk of which was Maronite) died from starvation.

A future national territory, as it was now seen by most of the parties participating in the debate (basically France and a selection of leading Maronites), should provide for what is necessary to feed its citizen´s (keeping in mind, however, that "[t]he impact of World War One in Jabal `Amil was as terrible as it was in other parts of the region" [Chalabi 2006, p. 45]). Thus the idea of "Greater Lebanon," equaling the territory of contemporary Lebanon –

with its significant agricultural areas in the Bekaa, Akkar and the South, as well as the adjacent coastline including the major cities and seaports of Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon and Tyre – gained ground among both the Maronites and the French, even though that meant reducing the Christian share of the envisaged national populace to about 55 %. National legitimacy was constructed by a) presenting all of the territory included as forming a "natural unit," clearly delimited from its "Syrian surrounding," and b) as being the ancient homeland primarily of the Maronites (from that point of view the native Lebanese) and subordinately also of many other regional minorities, especially the Druze (invoking the incorporated myth of the "Mountain refugee" [cf. Chiha 1966, pp. 30 –1]). This position was also emphasized by a Maronite delegation headed by then Patriarch Elias Boutros Hoayek (life: 1843–1931; patriarchate: 1898–1931) in Paris and at the Versailles Peace Conference (August – October 1919) (Harris 2012, p. 175).

The US-American King-Crane-Commission (a regional fact-finding mission) of July 1919 actually gave strong preference to Arab nationalism and showed a rejection of any Greater Lebanon especially among the Sunnis of Sidon, Beirut and Tripoli but also among significant parts of the Shi`i, Druze and Orthodox Christian communities. It moreover revealed growing anti-French sentiments (ibid.).[59] This did not, however, let the French reconsider their approach but rather brought them closer together with their Maronite protégées. In South Lebanon, anti-French/ Maronite/ Greater Lebanon sentiments as of mid-1919 discharged into pro-Arab unity actions and clashes, deploying mainly poorly organized armed Shi`i gangs, suspected of receiving support from the Faysal government in Damascus, versus pro-French Maronite villagers and gangs, armed and supported by the French military, "with a clear aim to their combating the Shiʿis." (Chalabi 2006, p. 74) It must be yet noted, that this conflict was limited to the rural areas and villages, whereas in the urban centers Sidon and Tyre, Shi`a and Maronites continued to be on good terms with one another (ibid. p. 74). The turning point in this revolt came in May 1920, when, "a large gang from Bint Jubayl massacred fifty residents of the neighboring Catholic village of Ayn Ibl." (Harris 2012, p. 177. See also Chalabi 2006, p. 79) The French, after having been initially eager to avoid exactly such an image, now made it crystal clear to everyone who was their prime client in Lebanon. They reacted with a punitive campaign through Jabal `Amil, deploying thousands of soldiers and conducting ruthless aerial bombardments (Chalabi 2006, p. 83).

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[59] Strikingly, the Maronite historian Butros Dau seems to have understood quite the opposite from the report, stating that, "[t]he American commission reported that the majority of Lebanese stood for France and called for a Greater Lebanon, from Tyre to Tripoli, entirely independent of Syria." (Dau 1984, p. 697)

The Lebanese Shi`a, however, were by far not all Arab nationalists and the French, in a self-confident colonial spirit and for the benefit of their motherland, were primarily interested in controlling the northern Levant – despite all their pro-Maronite bias. In contrast to all other influential powers and actors they therefore at least recognized the Shi`a as a reality on the ground that had to be taken into account. In fact, during the summer of 1920, the chieftain Sabri Hamadeh, "coalesced with Maronite feudal leaders in support of French colonial plans and rejected unity with Syria under Faysal." (Abisaab/ Abisaab 2014, pp. 5–6) He did so by supporting the French politically and militarily against pro-Syrian Shi`a, reportedly providing close to 50,000 soldiers (ibid., p. 227). The French, on the other hand, "raised the possibility of a Lebanese federation with a Shia 'state' in the south and Tripoli and Beirut as autonomous districts." (Harris 2012, p. 177) Yet, neither did concerned Maronites want to hear about such ideas, nor were they enthusiastically defended by their French authors. And so it came that on September 1st, 1920, the French high commissioner proclaimed "Greater Lebanon," furnished with an appointed administrative council comprising ten Christians and seven Muslims (including Druze). Jabal `Amil, after the May-July 1920 events, entered the new nation-state "paralyzed and beaten," with its gaping socio-economic gap to the other communities′ regions even widened (Chalabi 2006, p. 84).

As of 1918, the aforementioned banker and journalist Michel Chiha ascended to become the leading thinker of Lebanese Nationalism. No Maronite but a Roman Catholic, he was to become one of the main architects of the Lebanese Republic of 1926. A Lebanist and pioneering Phoenicianist at heart, Chiha was no Christian isolationist but motivated by the idea of building a modern nation based on religious pluralism and liberal-democratic values, that should make progress "thanks especially to a rectification of political and social behaviour and by the inculcation of growing respect for one′s fellow-men and for the opinion of one′s fellow-citizens." (Chiha 1966, p. 76) What becomes apparent, however, is that Chiha′s approach to state- and nation-building in Lebanon seems to have been strongly informed by his own social background. No matter how inclusive it was meant to be; it did not sufficiently consider the huge socio-economic disparities in place and their all too apparent correspondence to ethnicized-confessional belonging.

Chiha was of course not ignorant of these lamentable givens but rather disinterested. He took notice of both major Shi`i areas of settlement, the Bekaa and the South, mainly in functional terms, i.e. with respect to their agricultural relevance and future potentials as well as the Souths´ strategic position vis-vis Palestine (Chalabi 2006, pp. 88–9), where he early on sensed a looming security threat, constituted by the expanding Zionist movement.[60] The plight of these areas´ inhabitants played no discernible role in his calculations (ibid., p. 89). Thus, when, through Michel Chiha´s pen, Lebanism indeed for the first time gained "a pluralist veneer appropriate for inclusion of non-Catholics and non-Christians[; t]here was no doubt, […] that Maronites and other Catholics would dominate." (Harris 2012, p. 175)

In 1926, the Lebanese constitution was promulgated, with Chiha having been the secretary of its twelve-member drafting committee (Salibi 1988, p. 180). The constitution declared the first Lebanese Republic; Greater Lebanon within its current boundaries (Government of Lebanon 1926, chapter one, articles 1 & 4, pp. 3–4) and with Beirut as its capital (ibid., chapter one, article 4, p. 4). It furthermore included the principles of multi-communal representation in the legislature (ibid., chapter two, article 24, pp. 6–7) as well as executive power-sharing between the President and the Prime Minister alongside the Council of Ministers (ibid., chapter four, articles 49–72, pp. 10–5). It took until Lebanese independence in 1943, however, for the confessionalist system, roughly as we know it by today, to fully take shape. The unwritten National Pact forged in the same year between post-independence´s first Maronite Christian President Bishara al-Khouri and first Sunni Muslim Prime Minister Riad al-Sulh respectively, introduced the traditional allocation of the three highest positions in the state (the troika of the three presidents) according to confession and therewith added the last main cornerstone of the modern system. It prevailed without significant changes until the end of the second Lebanese Civil War (1975-90).

Maronites had been the focal point of the French in their project of constructing modern Lebanon and this was naturally reflected in the outcome. According to two censuses conducted in 1921 and 1932 (Harris 2012, pp. 180, 183) respectively, the Maronites constituted the single largest community in the new entity and the French were more receptive to Maronite demands than to any other. Hardly surprising then, from the beginning on, Maronites factually occupied the bulk of the most influential positions in state and society (ibid., pp. 184–5) while Shi`i leaders, despite their community´s numerical weight, were to be appeased with a handful of senior political and administrative posts (Abisaab/ Abisaab 2014, p. 13). In the late 1950´s, these still amounted to only 4 out of 115 (Harris 2012, p. 215). Thus, if power-sharing between the Maronites and other communities was real and the system indeed enforced cross-communal cooperation too; none of this ever occured on eye-level but according to the power-relations in place upon the formation of the Lebanese nation-state.

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[60] Michel Chiha was in fact among the first Lebanese to anticipate the potentials for a future confrontation between Lebanon and the Zionist movement, or, as of May 14th, 1948, the state of Israel. On June 7th, 1948, less than a month following the proclamation of the Jewish state in historical Palestine, Chiha, in a lecture on the subject of values, stated; "The formidable proximity of Israel comes on top of many long-standing dangers. For not just beautiful music will come forth from Israel, but a bid for hegemony backed up by the sublest of intellectuals, by the most rigid discipline and by the most varied and powerful ways of infiltration. […] the immediate proximity of the state of Israel is a very serious danger." (Chiha 1966, pp. 72–3)

When the French finally left official Lebanon alone, in 1946, the Maronite elites had successfully secured their assets and were able to maintain their supremacy up until the Ta`if Accord of 1989. The latter was then to significantly reduce the Maronite president´s powers to the advantage of mainly the Sunni prime minister, which translated into a broader shift of powers between the both communities (as reflected in a similar shift of financial power).

The Ottomans had already enacted the establishment of Twelver Shi`i (*Ja`farite*) religious courts, independent of their Sunni counterparts, in the late 19th century. The French, in 1926, followed suit and formally recognized the Ja'afari law school (Weiss 2010, p. 159), implying the recognition of the Shi`a as a separate Muslim community of the new state of Lebanon (Harris 2012, p. 179). This was of course a necessary precondition for implementing their plan of establishing a confessionalist political order. Yet, the French liked to proudly present this as an altruist act of liberation.

Territorial and administrative fusion of the different regions incorporated into Greater Lebanon boosted intra-communal Shi`i interaction especially between Jabal `Amil – now South Lebanon – and the Bekaa and thus fostered communal cohesion at a point at which communal self-awareness has long been anchored (Harris 2012, p. 179). Moreover, as of the 1930s, thousands of Shi`a moved from their mostly rural places of origin in either the Bekaa or the South to intermingle in West-Beirut and the city´s southern suburbs, steadily expanding the formerly discreet Shi`i presence in Nabaa, Shiyyah, and Burj al-Barajneh (Harris 2012, p. 180; Abisaab/ Abisaab 2014, p. 107).

As a consequence of the historical developments discussed above, the Shi`i community had, upon the formation of the nation, not so far produced a strong modern elite, capable of immediately challenging more traditional centers of authority constituted by the often landed, notable families (especially the al-Asʿads – the last remaining offspring of the `Alī al-Ṣaghīrs –, the al-Khalils, the al-Zayns, and the `Usayrans of Jabal `Amil as well as the Hamadehs and Haydars of the Bekaa valley), provincial leaders (former administrative servicemen to the Ottomans) and the `ulama´ dynasties (such as the Sharaf al-Dins, al-Amins, and Mughniyyas of Jabal `Amil) (Abisaab/ Abisaab 2014, pp. 9–12). At the same time, especially in the agricultural sector, pre-modern structures of dependency prevailed persistently (by the late

1960s, still only 3 % of landholders owned 40 % of agricultural land, while 54 % of the peasants had to cope with 9 % of the whole agricultural land [Rosiny 1996, p. 49]) and – besides their notable families, tribal chiefs, and higher clergy – most Shi`a faced dire living-conditions. In the vast majority underprivileged, economically weak, continuously neglected by the state and left without a formal political representation on the highest level; the Shi`a´s marginalization, in relative terms, only intensified over the decades to come.

This is not to say, however, that modernization and elite diversification did not take place among the Shi`a too. It is only that in comparison to the Maronites and the other larger groups in Lebanon, both occurred under much more difficult conditions and thus with a significant delay. On the one hand, awareness over the general state of things and inherent injustices was widespread among the Shi`a early on. This found its first strong expression in 1936, when restrictions imposed by the French tobacco monopoly on poor Shi`i tobacco growers sparked a serious revolt – basically anti-colonial in nature. Within this context, several members of influential Shi`i families raised complaints about regional and communal neglect and other inequalities and they delivered warnings to the French, not to ignore those issues. This pertains in particular to the Shi`a´s numerical strength, which they felt already to come second only to the Maronites. Demands for shares in the new entity therefore amounted to no less than a quarter of official posts (Harris 2012, p. 191; Abisaab/ Abisaab 2014, pp. 28–34). Shi`i peasants, echoing the grassroots voices from the South, called primarily for basic measures of development (access to clean water, roads, schools, health clinics/ hospitals, electricity, etc.) to be implemented in the neglected Shi`i regions (Abisaab/ Abisaab 2014, p. 35).

On the other hand, the notable families all quickly came to terms with the new French authorities (ibid. pp. 34–5) and despite growing discontent over the years, the Lebanese Shi`a´s miserable situation was to profoundly begin to change only after the arrival in Lebanon by late 1959 of the Iran-born Shi`i cleric of South-Lebanese descent, Musa al-Sadr (1928–1978?).[61] (Norton 1987, p. 39) Up until 1967, despite formal recognition and prominent inclusion into the power-sharing formula, the Shi`a were lacking both communal representation at the highest state level and political organizations comparable to those of the Maronites, Sunnis and other large communities. Well up into the early Civil War years, Shi`a were therefore to be found especially among the lower ranks of most parties in Lebanon, including the prime Maronite/ Christian and Druze representations. However, their main bastion since the foundation of Lebanon was the political Left – in particular the Communist parties but also other revolutionary-Leftist and/ or secular movements such as the Nasserists, the Iraqi or Syrian *Ba`th Party* (Ḥizb al-Ba`thī al-`Arabī al-Ishtirāqī; [lit.] Arab Socialist Renaissance Party) branches, or the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). Later, as of the late 1960s and early 1970´s run-up to the Lebanese Civil War, this progressively also pertained to the manifold armed Palestinian resistance factions (especially the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine [PFLP]) affiliated in one way or the other with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). They would soon come to play a decisive role in the fate of Lebanon and its inhabitants.

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[61] Musa al-Sadr´s family is originally from Jabal `Amil. His great-great-grandfather, Ṣāliḥ ibn Muḥammad Sharaf al-Dīn, was born in a village near Tyre and was an important cleric of his times (Chehabi/ Tafreshi 2006, p.138).

2.4.2 Patterns of Maronite-Shi`i distance in the new nation-state

The Lebanist national narrative alongside its underlying founding myth as well as the conditions that allowed for both to become framed this way helped in fostering the factual discrepancy between the communities upon the formation of the modern nation-state. Intensified by citizenship in the new entity, the Lebanist narrative has shaped the mutual perception and self-perception of Maronites and Shi`a and has largely erased the intensity of their historical inter-relations from both group´s collective memories. Indeed, except for one senior member of the Hamadeh family itself, none of the numerous Lebanese the author has talked to and asked about this aspect of history, knew of the Shi`i emirates in proto-Lebanon under Ottoman rule and the historical developments surrounding their rise and demise. Some actually found the idea laughable, others sought to correct it, clearly considering the author having gone astray on this issue, and others were truly astonished.

In real life, interaction between Shi`a and Maronites, wherever both groups happened to live side-by-side, continued to be as frequent and as varying in both character (oscillating between friendly/ cooperative and hostile/ competitive) and intensity (influenced, amongst other, by markers such as class, regional or political belonging), as it was in the past. In contrast to that past, however, these real-life givens were now processed under the conditions of a Lebanist discourse that was progressively internalized by much of the Lebanese citizenry.

Of relevance is therefore not so much the question how strong the distance between Shi`a and Maronites really was but rather how strong it was perceived to be. And as we have seen, the Lebanist narrative strongly suggests such a distance in implicit terms. Lebanese political confessionalism, on the other side – through the inflexibility of its power-sharing arrangement that has cemented the unbalanced power-relations in place upon the formation of the state –, only reinforced the factual socio-economic distance between Maronites and Shi`a, thereby seemingly confirming the Lebanist narrative´s culturalist communal ranking.

2.4.3 The Civil War of 1958 and the Shihabist *intermezzo*

In 1958, fueled by the centrifugal forces of the Cold War in its regional guise, the first Lebanese Civil War broke out. It pitted a pro Nasserist/ Arabist Lebanese camp indirectly aligned with the Soviet-led Eastern bloc against President Camille Nimr Chamoun´s (life: 1900–1987; presidency: 1952–1958) Lebanist government, directly – through endorsement of the Eisenhower Doctrine in April 1957 – allied with the West. The main danger of that war lay in the fact that the core divide ran between Muslims and Christians, even if, as usual in Lebanon, this division was far from perfect. Besides the major Maronite/ Christian political party, al-Katā´ib, and the (Orthodox Christian dominated, yet, credibly non-denominational) SSNP – anti-Nasserist/ Arabist because of its advocacy of Greater Syria – also a major Druze (Majid Arslan) and Sunni (Sami al-Sulh) as well as important Shi`i (e.g. Kazim al-Khalil) leaders respectively sided with Chamoun. Meanwhile, one major Maronite family (the Frangiehs) backed the opposition while the Maronite patriarchy kept a clear distance from Chamoun without siding with his opponents.

Then supreme commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), General Fouad Shihab (life: 1902-73; presidency: 1958–64) managed to keep the army out of the fighting,[62] fully aware of its otherwise imminent disintegration. This first Lebanese Civil War caused about 2,500 deaths. It was finally brought to a close with US mediation and an agreement replacing President Chamoun with General Shihab, endorsed by the parliament on September 24, 1958 (while the last round of fighting ended only on October 19th that year) (Harris 2012, pp. 209–12).

Fouad Shihab, despite his especially illustrious family background – he was a heir to the aforementioned Shihābi dynasty –, grew up in humble circumstances. He escaped poverty only by joining the French army in 1919; the starting point for a professional military career. In 1945, he was promoted to the rank of general and became Lebanon´s first army commander. In 1958, he became the country´s first officer president. As was his background, also Shihab´s presidential term was exceptional in many respects. First of all, the pious

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[62] He had actually done the same already in 1952, during an uprising that forced president Bishara al-Khury to step down. Shihab was appointed interim-prime minister and headed a transition government for four consecutive days, which he used to prepare for the subsequent election of president Chamoun.

Maronite Catholic President Shihab was evidently and honestly concerned with dismantling the uneven distribution of wealth and political power in Lebanon and balancing the Christian and Muslim shares in influential political offices. He especially disliked and at times openly attacked the established political class. In fact, as one means to provoke change within the Maronite´s elite structure, he cooperated closely with the Katā´ib, which he correctly identified as a fairly modernizing force but, as it would turn out, wrongly as an agent of change. Solid alliances were furthermore established with the Shi`i Bekaa strongman Sabri Hamadeh and with the paramount Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt. Musa al-Sadr, once settled in Lebanon, also established a tight working relation with Shihab. This offered a new Maronite-Shi`i track which was to later turn out as a main catalyst of the Lebanese Shi`a´s mobilization and their subsequent march on the state, reaching out for empowerment and full participation (Harris 2012, p. 217-9).

Besides his political network, Shihab relied especially on a number of selected professionals running newly created quasi-state authorities of various kinds, mounting up to a full-fledged parallel bureaucracy that was underpinned by an expanding military intelligence shadow state. Thus, with the traditional elites of all communities largely bypassed, yet, multi-communal popular backing achieved, Shihab embarked on an impressive quest for state-building and modernization, introducing significant social (not least a moderate public welfare system), administrative and public service reforms and pushing for an outbalancing regional development (targeting the most deprived regions and its inhabitants in the Shi`i Muslim strongholds of the Bekaa valley and South Lebanon, and in the Sunni Muslim dominated Akkar). As he saw it, only a strong state was capable to assure the citizens´ basic rights by keeping especially the elites in check (Harris 2012, p. 213).

Expectedly, the political establishment of the country in the majority reacted with disdain. From now on, as much as his determined étatism, accordant reforms and development policies were initially very popular among Muslims and moderate Christians (Khalifa 1997, p. 127), Shihab´s adversaries among the powerful were not few either. While this pertained especially to the Maronites, given their exorbitant share in political power; the Shi`i traditional leaders such as the As`ads, the `Usayrans or the Khalils still faced the most complete erosion of their powerbasees under Shihab, who openly favored and patronized the activist clerical leadership of Musa al-Sadr (Harris 2012, p. 217). Thus, with real change indeed beginning to happen, the traditional establishment at large grew ever more determined in its opposition to Shihab.

In December 1961, the SSNP in collaboration with a number of junior LAF officers attempted a coup against Shihab. They failed but this episode left its imprint on the President, who suspected Camille Chamoun, Raymond Émile Eddé (1913 – 2000) and others from among the Maronite establishment of complicity. Henceforth, he was to significantly increase his reliance on military intelligence, which now for certain also interfered in the political process (Khalifa 1997, pp. 126–7). In the future, this significant aspect of his approach to governance was to tarnish his presidency alongside the remarkable achievements of Shihabism altogether. The ever-expanding activities of the military intelligence and other security agencies increasingly made people perceive his rule as authoritarian. This state of things was to antagonize nearly all political parties and finally alienated even many of his allies (but not al-Sadr), which let Shihab´s circle of those he trusted grow ever smaller and only reinforced his reliance on the parallel structures he had nurtured.

After Shihab himself had forbidden any attempts at amending the constitution for allowing him to have his tenure prolonged, yet with still enough parliamentarian backing for Shihabism at this point in time, he instead successfully promoted the journalist Charles Hilou (life: 1913-2001; presidency: 1964-70) Hilou, scion of a influential Maronite family from Baabda, had been an original member of al-Katā´ib but shortly afterwards left the party for differences with its leader, Pierre Gemayel (1905–1984). His record had since stayed free of political affiliation. Against Shihab´s expectations, however, Hilou was soon to abandon Shihabism´s main tenets; he gradually left the path of reforms and helped the traditional elites resume political offices and power, thereby "dropping the many loyal people who helped elect him." (Khalifah 1997, p. 129) The security services even intensified their scope of activities under Hilou. All of this and his dealing with the increasing presence of armed Palestinian commandos in Lebnon during the late 1960´s earned him the strong critique of Fouad Shihab.

Upon the end of Hilou´s term, in 1970, the Shihabist candidate Elias Sarkis (life: 1924–85, presidency: 1976-82) lost the presidential race against the pronounced anti-Shihabist Sulayman Frangieh (senior) (life: 1919-92; presidency: 1970-76). While Frangieh had the nearly complete backing of Lebanon´s traditional elites, his victory was even more reflective of the current extent of popular discontent with Shihabist authoritarianism. However, the Shihabist period and especially Fouad Shihab´s presidential term are nowadays increasingly, and often regretfully, remembered as an exceptional era of accountability, attempted confessional equality and rule of law.

Most importantly for our subject, however, Shihabism not only had the effect of letting the tensions between "progressives" (anti-status quo) and "conservatives" (pro-status quo) in Lebanon come to the fore more clearly, but also woke up the "sleeping giant;" the Shi`a as a communal force, thus paving the way for their political mobilization and for their absorbtion into ethnicized-confessional and Islamist grounded formations as of the late 1960s. Against the backdrop of the political climate prevailing in the 1970s in Lebanon, the Shi`i´s push for their due share in the Lebanese power equation was thereby predestined to clash with the vested interests of the ruling class with its Maronite core.

2.4.4 Shi`i-Maronite relations under stress: mobilization, war, occupation

2.4.4.1 Mobilization (ca. 1965-75)

With the notable exception of the étatist reform-period of the 1960s; governmental neglect and failed agricultural policies had progressively contributed to a deterioration of rural life in South Lebanon and the Bekaa valley ever since independence (1943/ 46) (Abisaab/ Abisaab 2014, p. 51). The Shihabi reforms then, exactly by delivering urgently needed development measures, had the initial effect of destabilizing the agricultural sector altogether. This was especially true for the South, where capital investments quickly displaced sharecroppers and laborers. These developments caused a growing rural exodus to the urban centers, in particular Beirut. Thus, whereas in 1959, the share of urban Lebanese stood at 49.8 %, by 1970 it had climbed up to 61.2 % (reaching 83.4 % by 1990) (Rosiny 1996, p. 51).

The agricultural workforce, as we know, consisted largely of Shi`a, yet; the Maronites had also traditionally been a rural community. Against the background of the deepening socio-economic crisis that mainly affected the countryside, Maronite villagers flocked to the urban centers in significant numbers too (Khuri 1975, pp. 32–4). Depending on relations and status, most Maronite newcomers settled in East Beirut or its suburbs. Comparably few contributed to strengthening the originally strong Christian presence in the Southern suburbs. Instead, these areas became increasingly inhabited by Shi`a, which, from all communities, experienced the most radical transformation from an originally rural to an urban life-style. By 1974, more than half of the Lebanese Shi`a had settled in the Southern suburbs of Beirut, now making up 76 % of the total population here (Abisaab/ Abisaab 2014, p. 108). A high birth rate and improvement in sanitary conditions in the countryside had also contributed to Shi`i population growth. While in 1932, Shi`a accounted for about 20 % of the population (Rosiny 1996, p. 90), by 1975, their numerical strength was already estimated at 30 % (cf. Nasr 1987, p. 155) rendering them the single largest community in Lebanon.

After decades of blocked development; during the 1960s Shihabi era, population growth, urbanization, education, access to proper infrastructure and professional differentiation – in short, modernization and mobilization in general – had taken hold of the Shi`a more drastically and rapidly than any of the other communities (which all experienced a gradual but steady shift from traditional modes of living to modernity). With growing numbers of professional academics, we can register the emergence of a Shi`i intellectual elite. At the same time, growing numbers of returning Shi`i émigrés that had made their fortunes abroad formed the nucleus of a modest "new" Shi`i bourgeois. The latter now pushed into the academic and economic spheres, both of which had so far been the prerogative of the other communities (cf. Rosiny 1996, p. 89). They were thus not only received as unwanted new competitors but often also confronted with anti-Shi`i sentiments (in ethnicized-confessional rather than religious terms) that were widespread then and are still notable today.

One major problem crystalizing in the early 1970s was that the expectations resulting from this profound mobilization – in short; to reach better economic and living conditions by adapting to modernity – were not fulfilled; not least because the post-Shihabi years were marked by a relapse into the old, i.e. pre-Shihabi structures. Especially among the many educated young Muslims (Sunni, Shi`i and Druze), the unequal opportunities persisting for them *vis-à-vis* the Christians caused widespread frustration (Rosiny 1996, p. 49). This frustration was soon to be channeled into political action.

Political mobilization as of the late 1960s affected basically all communities alike. For the Shi`a, however, this process went hand-in-hand with their community´s overall transformation described and served as an additional – and particular strong – catalyst. As a matter of fact, Shi`a played a central role in most notable domestic social conflicts of the immediate pre-war years (Rosiny 1996, pp. 51–3), thereby often clashing directly or indirectly with the interests of leading Maronites. At the same time, regional and local turmoil and the centrifugal forces of the Arab-Israeli conflict and of the ideological rift between Nasserist-captured Arabism, Syrianism and Lebanism provided the background against which the politicization of the Lebanese, in particular the urban youth, took place.

For the Shi`a, we have to add here the emergence, as of the late 1960s, of what scholars have summarized as the "Shi`i Movement" (Nasr 1987, p. 153; Rosiny 1996, pp. 100–11). It pertained to an ethnicized-confession-based i.e. Shi`i Lebanese nationalist trend under the lead of Musa al-Sadr, as well as a revolutionary Shi`i Islamist trend that came to be represented prominently by Sayyid Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah (1935-2010). Both al-Sadr and Fadlallah were graduates of *al-ḥawza al-`ilmiyya* (circle of learning), in Najaf, Iraq – the world´s leading seminary for the education of Shi`i Muslim scholars. While the different trends were clearly divided by their respective approach to religion and politics (nominal secularism vs. Islamism) and originally also by by their strategic outlook (al-Sadr´s clear-cut nationalism vs. [Shi`i] Islamist transnationalism/ pan-Islamism), both had in common clerical leadership, rather aggressive anti-communism (mainly as a result of experiences made by Shi`i religious scholars and [proto-]Islamists with “Shi`i Communism” in Iraq [Abisaab/ Abisaab 2014, pp. 76–95]) and, most importantly, the absorbtion of Shi`a into newly founded community-based organizations. The practice of actively harmonizing Shi`i religiosity with Communist, Socialist and Anarchist ideas, that was so characteristic for the period between independence and the late 1960s (Abissaab/ Abisaab 2014, pp. 54–75), would be henceforth strongly challenged and, in the long term, largely contained.

Following the death in 1957 of `Abd al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn (1872 –1957), Musa al-Sadr, then at the verge of completing his advanced studies in Shi`i Islamic jurisprudence in Najaf, Iraq, was invited to replace the deceased *mujtahid* in his former position of Shi`i mufti of Tyre in South Lebanon. Initially hesitant, al-Sadr finally followed the invitation with the blessing of his late mentor, the *marja* and Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Muḥsin al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī al-Ḥakīm, and arrived in Tyre by late 1959 (Sankari 2005, p. 126; Norton 1987, p. 39).

Sayyid Fadlallah moved from Iraq to Lebanon in early 1966. Then thirty years old, he first settled in the mainly Shi`i inhabited Nabaa quarter of the capital´s eastern suburb Burj Hammoud, which was otherwise mainly a bastion of Armenian Christians. Nabaa, alongside the other Shi`i inhabited areas of Burj Hammoud comprised part of what was depicted as the “Belt of Misery,” extending from the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra, Shatilla and Burj al-Barajneh in the South, over the portside slums of Maslakh and Karantina, up to Nabaa and the Palestinian camps of Jisr al-Pasha and Tel al-Zaatar in the East (the Palestinian refugee camps always also hosted many poor Lebanese, especially Shi`a) (Sankari 2005, p. 131).

The Shi`a were highly politicized and mobilized already, but, despite incipient political organization on a communal basis, they were still scattered across the whole political spectrum of Lebanon, in particular amongst the Leftist parties. Both clerics´ arrival could thus have not been more timely and they were each to have an immense impact on Shi`i affairs. Their advent in the social, religious and political spheres of Lebanon also marked the bankruptcy of the established local Shi`i `ulama´ class that – with few exceptions, such as the aforementioned `Abd al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn – had long been viewed as co-opted, corrupted and aligned with the system, dependent on the traditional zuama (feudal lords).

The overall situation in Lebanon, meanwhile, increasingly tapered towards escalation, at the heart of which stood the Israeli-Arab conflict and the Palestinian struggle for human rights, recognition and statehood – progressively interfusing with domestic tensions. After the PLO and affiliated armed Palestinian groups had gained notable popular and military power in

Lebanon in the late 1960s, and especially after the Arab defeat in the 1967 war with Israel, they frequently conducted cross-border raids from South Lebanon into occupied Palestine. With the aim of pushing the Lebanese to turn against the Palestinians in return (Hanf 1990, p. 223), the Jewish state – aware of the Lebanese army´s limited capacity to face its military power – responded by ruthlessly attacking Lebanese (mainly Shi`i) villages, triggering several waves of mass migration to Beirut and its suburbs. While many Lebanese Leftists and Muslims quickly rallied around the Palestinian cause, the majority of Maronites and many other Lebanese Christians felt threatened and grew more hostile towards the Palestinians´ presence on a daily basis.

The Lebanese authorities attempted to rein the Palestinian commandos in, which led to a series of clashes between both sides in the years 1968-69. This was accompanied by repeated popular rallies bringing together thousands of Lebanese in support of the commandos. In 1969 the controversial Cairo Accord[63] handed authority from the Lebanese security bodies to the Palestinian armed struggle command; the head of the strongest PLO faction, Fatah,[64] larger-than-life Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat (alias: "Abu Ammar") (1929–2004) and sanctioned the continuation of its guerilla fight against Israel from within Lebanon. Moreover, after facing defeat in the Jordanian Civil War of 1970-71, Arafat moved the PLO´s headquarters from Amman to Lebanon (Cobban 1984, pp. 47–8). He and the manifold armed Palestinian resistance factions were thus *de facto* in charge over large parts of South Lebanon, now sardonically labeled "Fatahland" by all those resenting this state of things. And these, to be sure, were many.

Originally, the Lebanese Shi`a, given their own national marginalization and suffering at the hands of Israel, identified strongly with the stateless Palestinians (cf. Hanf 1990, p. 223), and their initial joining of forces has been viewed as nothing short of a "natural alliance." (Norton 1987, p. 59) In light of the increasingly dominant and encroaching behaviour of especially Fatah but also other Palestinian groups, Shi`i solidarity and tolerance was yet also increasingly stretched to its limits. However, outright consternation, at this point in time, was evident especially among the Maronites and other Christians. Their leaders, at the latest by now, in the face of the Lebanese army´s failed attempts to get the Palestinian commandos under control, started their self-armament and began to set up private militias. With only a slight delay, the same holds true for their adversaries; the Lebanese Leftist and/ or Muslim dominated groups, which received armament and training from their allies among the Palestinian commandos.[65]

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[63] The Cairo Accord was a deal struck between Yasir Arafat (1929-2004) for the PLO and then Lebanese Army commander, General Émile Boustany (1909-2002) under the auspices of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-70) in November 1969 in Cairo, Egypt. It factually compromised Lebanese sovereignty in a number of respects and was therefore opposed by most Maronites and many other Lebanese ever since its content first became public in April 1970. It was formally annulled in 1987 in a rare act of agreement between the Maronite president, the Shi'i speaker and the Sunni prime minister, while Lebanon was still caught up in the Civil War.

[64] Fatah means conquest/ victory and is an Arabic acronym for Ḥarakat al-Taḥrīr al-Waṭanī al-Filasṭīnī (Movement for the Liberation of Palestine).

Against this historical backdrop, like no one before him, the charismatic and rhetorically well-versed al-Sadr, over the years, managed to rally large parts of the Lebanese Shi`a behind him and his cause: uniting the three distinct Shi`i regions; the Bekaa, which is widely imagined as “tribalist,” the landlord-peasant based society of Jabal `Amil, and the poor southern suburbs of Beirut (Abdul-Jabar 2003, p. 179). Al-Sadr organized the Lebanese Shi`a on an ethnicized-confessional basis, which he (correctly) identified as a precondition to their full participation in the Lebanese nation. At the same time, the Imam, as he was respectfully titled by his followers, with all the weight this entails in Shi`i tradition, vehemently lamented their unjust exclusion and resulting socio-economic backwardness for which he held the government responsible. Yet, to become modern in the absence of both a nurturing surrounding and supportive governmental policies, and being continuously prone to Israeli aggressions ever since the first brief Israeli occupation of South Lebanon in 1948; al-Sadr argued, the Shi`a themselves must make an extraordinary effort and shake off their primordial affiliations and resulting backward traditions (such as blood feuds for instance) on the spot. In fact he urged them “to be loyal citizens of a disloyal state, one he blamed for failing to fulfill its duties towards them.” (Abisaab/ Abisaab 2014, p. 112) What Imam al-Sadr proposed was nothing short of a reformed Lebanist nationalism, in the utopia of which Maronite domination and other systemic misalignments were finally obliterated and the Shi`a had their due share on eye-level with the other large communities and, crucially, within the framework of political confessionalism (ibid.). As indicated earlier, these aims were highly compatible with Fouad Shihab´s endeavours of state-building and balancing development, bringing both men into a close and friendly working relationship.

Besides being an active champion of inter-confessional dialogue, al-Sadr mainly engaged in diverse social and political activities to overcome the Shi`a´s plight. Among his major achievements is the creation of the Majlis al-Islāmī al-Shī`ī al-A`lā (Higher Islamic Shi`i

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[65] Also the Maronite militias initially bought their weapons in parts from Palestinian arms dealers (Asad Shaftari, quoted after Sakmani/ More 2012).

Council [HISC]) between 1967 – when it acquired legal status – and 1969 – when it started functioning, with al-Sadr being elected its first president. The council, for the first time gave the Lebanese Shi`a an ethnicized-confessional political representation comparable to those of the other large communities. Initially, upon the personal invitation of then Greek-Catholic Archbishop of Beirut and Byblos, *Monsignore* Gregoire Haddad (life: 1924-2015, tenure: 1968-1975), Imam Musa also participated vividly in the non-denominational *Mouvement Social* (The Social Movement), founded in the early 1960s. Haddad and al-Sadr thereafter developed a close relationship, marked by mutual trust and friendship (Gregoire Haddad, quoted after Sakmani/ Mohr 2012) Al-Sadr´s professional attention, however, was soon to become almost entirely caught by the Shi`i cause (ibid.). In 1974, during a speech held in front of a crowd of about 75,000 people – an unprecedented number in those days – in the town of Baalbek he founded al-Ḥarakat al-Maḥrūmīn (Movement of the Deprived) (Sankari 2005, p. 151), which, despite an initially cross-confessional outlook, quickly turned into an impressive, purely Lebanese Shi`i social mass and protest movement. Salim Nasr summarizes:

> “The main purpose of the movement was to defend a community in crisis – the crisis of breakdown in rural Lebanon, of Israeli attacks, of mass rural exodus, and of proletarianization. The movement also sought to achieve equality with other communities within the Lebanese confessional system, including a share in the administration, the national budget and the economy.” (Nasr 1987, p. 157)

At the outbreak of the Civil War in 1975, the Ḥarakat al-Maḥrūmīn gave birth to the Afwāj al-Muqāwama al-Lubnāniyya (Lebanese Resistance Battalions), better known by their acronym Amal (Hope), as its military wing. Instructors, training, arms and access to training bases were all provided from among the Palestinian resistance (Nasr 1987, p. 156). So far, the bonds were still strong.

Ayatollah Fadlallah, like Imam al-Sadr, engaged into systematic communal institution-building, yet, in contrast to his slightly elder peer,[66] maintained a clear focus on religion rather than ethnicized-confession. He begun by setting up a number of religious, educational and social institutions, all formed along Islamic lines, in Nabaa and its surroundings, gradually expanding these activities to other eastern suburbs of Beirut. Still in 1966, Fadlallah also founded al-Ma`had al-Sharì´ al-Islāmī (The Islamic Legal Institute), modeled after the Najafi *ḥawza* and, under his own stewardship, offering advanced Shi`i juristic studies to young

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[66] Having had close relations during their advanced studies in Najaf, Fadlallah and al-Sadr were all but strangers to each other.

`ulama´ aspirants – a unique institution in Lebanon. Simultaneously, he held lectures and sermons on both religious and political affairs. Fadlallah regularly toured the rural areas of South Lebanon where he preached to Shi`i villagers and organized public discussion forums. He thereby never refrained from debating all kind of controversial issues, which marked one of his most distinctive characteristics throughout his clerical career. Indeed, the young *mujtahid*, fully aware of the Lebanese Shi`a´s political leanings, conciously engaged Communists, Ba`thists and other Leftists, whereby he challenged their ideologies from an Islamist point of view (Sankari 2005, pp. 131–7). Unlike al-Sadr, he did not initially engage into activism, for which he did not see the right circumstances in place. He first confined himself to the "formulation and inculcation of Islamist ideology [,] discreetly nurturing an indigenous Islamist movement that was passing through an embryonic stage of development." (Sankari 2005, p. 133) It was to fully unfold only after the Iraeli invasion of 1982 (see below).

In contrast to the Shi`a – which, with al-Sadr and Fadlallah, had two recent newcomers in the religious and political fields of Lebanon as focal points –, the Maronites, within the course of developments described, mainly gathered around their established leaders. At the end of the Shihabist era in 1970, these were especially Pierre Gemayel, Raymond Eddé, Camille Chamoun and Sulayman Frangieh (senior). The latter had founded the Zgharta Jaish al-Taḥrīr (Zgharta Liberation Army [ZLA]) (Zgharta in North Lebanon is the Frangiehs´ home base), better known as Liwa' al-Marada (Marada Brigade – named after the legendary medieval Mardaites) as his private militia in 1967. Raymond Eddé led al-Kutla al-Waṭaniyya (National Bloc) (founded by his father, Émile Eddé, in 1943), which, as one of the few major Maronite/ Christian political currents, did not launch a private militia throughout the war years.

The Gemayels commanded one of Lebanon´s oldest and most important political parties; al-Katā´ib (better known under its synonymous French name "Phalanges"), founded by the pharmacist Shaykh Pierre Gemayel in 1936 and led by him until his death in 1987. The party advocated close ties to the West and liberal democracy, yet "it´s leadership always supported the divisive status quo, distributing power among the various religious groups in Lebanon, but always reserving a lion´s share for the Maronites." (Khalifah 1997, p. 107) Thus, al-Katā´ib accepted, in principle, the idea of Lebanon´s multiconfessional character. It neither positioned itself against cross-communal cooperation, nor did it prevent Muslims from becoming members. In light of the party´s Maronitist-Lebanist agenda, only few did ever join, however, and the Phalanges were to remain a predominantly Maronite party up until today. It´s "raison d'etre was to fight those elements and parties with political agendas that were not considered

Lebanese." (Khalifah 1997, p. 107) It became the central incubator for most other notable Maronite/ Christian nationalist parties following a Lebanist and/ or Maronitist ideology.

These included Camille Chamoun´s National Liberal Party (NLP) (founded in 1958) with its military wing, al-Katība al-Numurī al-Lubnāniyya (Lebanese Tigers Brigades, founded as early as 1968), al-Harakat al-Shabab al-Lubnaniyya (Lebanese Youth Movement [LYM], also known as the Maroun al-Khouri Group [MKG], founded in the early 1970s by a group of ultra-right university students that gathered around one Bashir Maroun al-Khouri ["Bash Maroun"]), the Lebanese Forces (LF) (founded in 1977) with their Elie Hobeika and Samir Geagea led wings respectively, al-Tanẓīm (The Organization; founded by a group of army officers in 1969), and al-Ḥurrās al-Arz (Guardians of the Cedars [GoC]). In 1976, under the lead of al-Katā´ib, most of the aforementioned organizations joined together in the Jabhat al-Lubnaniya (Lebanese Front), for which Bashir Gemayel (1947-82), second-born to Pierre Gemayel, in 1977, formed the Lebanese Forces as its own militia.[67]

The Front, despite progressively breaking apart as of 1978, was to finally persist in some form until the very last days of the war. A reliable umbrella structure for all of these Maronite/ Christian military and political organizations that ideologically only differed in nuances (ranging from center-right to far-right) and practically in their conduct and degree of fervor and brutality on the battlefield (with the far-right GoC and LYM/ MKG in the lead), was provided by the Maronite Patriarchate and, since its inception in 1952, also by al-Marūn al-Lijān (Maronite League – ML), a privately financed purely Maronite elite organization, depicting its main purpose as bringing "together members of the Maronite Community with the aim of providing them with continuous support and defending their vital interests." (Maronite League 2008) As of the early 1970´s, the League secretly funded and facilitated recruitment for many of the aforementioned militias, nearly all leaders of which were its affiliates. At the outbreak of the Civil War in 1975, it even formed its own small fighting force, which was in 1977 absorbed into the Front´s Lebanese Forces militia.

Their opponents, under the lead of Kamal Jumblatt and his Druze dominated PSP (founded in 1949), in the early 1970s, collectively formed up as al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya al-Lubnāniyya (Lebanese National Movement [LNM]), a coalition dominated by Leftist parties, comprising, besides the PSP, also the main Sunni Muslim Lebanese militia Mourabitoun (engl: Men of the *ribāṭ*[68]) and most other Lebanese Nasserist groups, the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), the Communist Action Organization in Lebanon, as well as several minor groupings. In addition, the main "rejectionist"[69] Palestinian organizations – the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) – became members. Upon the outbreak of the war in 1975, with Amal still in its infancy, Shi`a were still largely dispersed among the various parties belonging to the LNM, basically providing their "cannon fodder." (Norton 1987, p. 51)

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[67] The only senior Greek-Orthodox co-founder of this otherwise purely Maronite conglomerate was none other than the outstanding Lebanese intellectual Charles Habib Malik (1906-1987); former Minister of Foreign Affairs (1956-1958) and Minister of National Education and Fine Arts (1956-1957). Malik gained international esteem, amongst other, for having co-authored both, the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (LebaneseForces.com n.d.).

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), in the meantime, quickly fell apart, seeing most Muslims deserting to the LNM and Christians to the Lebanese Front or affiliates. However, after Israel´s second large-scale invasion and occupation of South Lebanon in 1982, the army was to be reconstituted.

The division between Muslims and Christians was never absolute, with notable numbers of Christians fighting with the Palestinians and/ or the LNM and, vice versa, Muslims fighting in the ranks of the Maronite-dominated forces. Yet, this trend progressively declined since mutual massacres in the early war years triggered a homogenization of residential areas and increasingly pushed all groups alike to seek protection within community-based organizations. To be sure, this happened not as any imagined primordial reflex but simply for reasons of logic, as it appeared to be the most rational short-term reaction to a situation in which more long-term considerations – such as emigration – were not always affordable – and if they were, they were in fact often chosen. Neither have these steps turned out to be especially successful, as notions such as that of "century old and reliable communities of solidarity" (Lüders 2018, p. 62) would suggest, because in fact neither reliability nor solidarity proved defining, i.e. principal, features of the communities in question.

Especially the militias that initially drew their legitimacy foremost from their role of protecting their respective communities were not to live up to such expectations of their constituencies. To the contrary, in the vast majority they were soon to stand out not only for their excessive brutality and mercilessness towards members of other communities but also for the reigns of terror they installed within their own respective "cantons." (Author´s interv.

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[68] *Ribāṭ* is the Arabic term for border fortifications delimiting the Muslim territory during the early centuries of Islamic conquests.

[69] Those Palestinian movements opposing a two-state-solution and peace negotiations with Israel by any means, in 1974, in response to the PLO signaling willingness in such a direction, formed the "Rejectionist Front," which henceforth opposed the PLO and especially Fatah (Muslih 1976, p. 127).

CC.FPM.5 2017; CC.Hzb.6 2017) Among the Lebanese people at large, this grave misconduct was to generate “disillusionment and a moral shock that resulted in resentment.” (Helou 2020, pp. 25–26) Joseph Helou writes:

> “Lebanese individuals may have viewed militias as protecting them from their sectarian counterparts at the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975, but quickly formed adverse opinions of those militias due to their deleterious practices that incited feelings of disgust, repulsion and fear. The militias did not stop short of harassing, threatening and brutally torturing Lebanese individuals who expressed a political opinion that diverged from theirs.” (Ibid., p. 26)

2.4.4.2 Civil War and Ta`if Accord, 1975-90

The final trigger for the war came in the morning hours of Sunday, April 13th, 1975, with a Palestinian (supposedly from a PLO faction) being killed after a quarrel with al-Katā´ib militiamen diverting traffic infront of a church in the district of Ain al-Rummaneh, in East Beirut, on the occasion of a ceremony with notable Katā´ib officials, including Pierre Gemayel, attending. Around 11 am, unidentified gunmen opened fire on the guests from two passing cars, killing four, including Joseph Abou Assi, the bodyguard of Pierre Gemayel. Gemayel himself got away unharmed. In fury about the losses and the attempted assassination of the most popular Maronite leader at this time, both al-Katā´ib and Chamoun´s Tigers decreed a general mobilization. Their militiamen immediately deployed throughout East Beirut, built up roadblocks and checkpoints and began stopping cars and controlling identities, with other Maronite/ Christian political groups soon following suit. Palestinian factions in West Beirut did the same. When around noon, a bus carrying dozens of Palestinians (and maybe some Lebanese sympathizers) – either mainly civilians including woman and children, or, according to Phalangist claims, exclusively armed Palestinian guerilla fighters – passed by the same church where the morning incidents happened, it was machine-gunned by the Phalangists in retaliation, whereby most likely all passengers were killed (cf. Hatem 1999, pp. 3–4).

The frequent clashes of the pre-war phase now turned into more constant fighting and several new militias – many of which amounted to nothing more than better armed street gangs and were short-lived – mushroomed on both sides in addition to those already in place. The war had finally begun. And indeed, among the warring parties, not a few had been craving it. As of December 1975, in response to the killing of four of their members, al-Katā´ib reinforced their checkpoints and started the practice of ID killings, whereby members of ethnicized-confessional groups viewed as suspicious got taken away for execution on the spot, while others were kidnapped and mostly disappeared afterwards. Other groups – allies and opponents alike – quickly started imitating these practices. Henceforth, kidnappings and the ruthless killing of civilians upon invading the territory held by opposing groups became common practice.

Whereas the second Lebanese Civil War was of course the result of many factors, when, for the sake of the analysis, concentrating solely on the dimension of Maronite-Shi`i relations, what becomes apparent first is that within the mere domestic equation (i.e. irrespective of motives and interests of foreign actors involved) Maronites and Shi`a stood at the poles of the looming conflict from the beginning on. In the early 1970s, in the immediate pre-war period, Shi`a, on the one hand, were the group most strongly pressing for appropriate recognition and change to the status quo because they were the ones which were collectively most affected by the unfair state of things. The Maronites, on the other hand, were the ones most interested in preserving the status quo (Rosiny 1996, p. 55) because they were enjoying a privileged status, facing the best conditions in relative terms.

To put this into perspective; by 1980 the Shi`a already accounted for an estimated 40 % of Lebanon´s population, while the overall Christian share has dropped from slightly more than 50 % in 1932 to less than 30 % in 1980 (Rosiny 1996, p. 90). In the same time-span however, with the community´s respective shares in political offices and numbers of parliamentarians' largely remaining stable; the numerical weight of the Christian´s political representation in relation to their share in the population had doubled, while that of the Shi`a was halved (Rosiny 1996, pp. 90–1).

Therefore, with the one side having most to lose and the other most to gain, while the contradictions inherent in Shi`i-Maronite relations did not immediately ignite the war (which occurred via the Maronite-Palestinian track), they provided the main accelerant. Moreover, given the ethnic-confessional stratification prevailing in the national administration as well as in the economic sphere, the Maronites were also the main addressee of Shi`i complaints and demands – no matter if consciously or unconsciously, if outspoken or implicit.

While it is thus discernible, in retrospective, that objective factors had put Shi`a and Maronites at loggerheads in this conflict from day one, direct clashes of both communities´ core actors did neither occur instantly, nor were they especially frequent when compared to other battle constellations. As one main reason, we can identify once more the overall developmental delay of the Shi`a which, after all, made them also the last to form community-based militias. Another important aspect is not as apparent. It pertains to the nature and character of the conflict at hand; the Maronite-Shi`i conflict during the Civil War, in light of the theoretical considerations discussed earlier. Both Maronites and Shi`a fought for a status within an agreed framework; the Lebanese nation-state. The conflict was about who gets how much (or even everything or nothing) – pro- vs. anti-status quo, but the desired result (the price) was the same. Therefore, there was an implicit understanding that the framework itself must prevail.

Distinct Maronite and Shi`i tracks

In contrast to the Maronites´ age-old communal organization (the nucleus of which was constituted by the Maronite Church), that of the Shi`a is comparably recent and was still under construction upon the outbreak of the war. Still, both had in common not only their factual status as one of the single strongest communities in numerical terms, but also their vehement claims to the nation and their isolated tracks in following their corresponding interests respectively. While a separate Maronite Christian track in the war is clearly discernible from day one, that of the Shi`a was originally rather obscure as they appeared as just one component among many in the larger "Muslim camp." Yet, a separate Shi`i Muslim track was to progressively crystallize during a process of estrangement and disentanglement from both the LNM and the Palestinians, concluded at the latest in the wake of Israel´s second full-scale invasion of Lebanon in 1982 (see below).

Disappearance of a leader – emergence of a symbol

During the first year of the war (1975/6), Amal was aligned with the LNM and the Palestinian groups and played a minor role in the battles against the Lebanese Front. It broke with its former allies, however, when Syria intervened in June 1976 to prevent the Front´s imminent defeat (Norton 1987, p. 48). After subsequent setbacks of the LNM and the Palestinians in Beirut and its suburbs, in August 1976, al-Sadr alongside his dedicated followers retreated to the South. In the two years to come, Imam Musa would remain active as a person and leader, hold speeches and travel around the Middle East to seek support for the Lebanese Shi`a´s cause (and, allegedly, also to agitate against Pahlavi rule in Iran [Norton 1987, p. 53]), while Amal´s military activities were largely on hold.

Then, in late August 1978, after arriving in Libya, Musa al-Sadr disappeared under still unclear circumstances. Both his family and the Iranian establishment, ever since, blame the late Libyan leader, Muammar el Qaddafi (1942-2011), for the cleric´s disappearance. In any case, his death has never been verified, and so he came to be venerated as the "vanished Imam;" an analogy to the expected twelfth Imam al-Mahdī in Shi`i religious tradition (Ajami 1987, p. 23), ascending to become the central national martyr of the Amal movement and to some degree of the modern Lebanese Shi`a altogether (Norton 1987, p. 55).

Brutalization

The Maronite/ Christian militias, under the lead of al-Katā´ib, were initially locked in fighting with their Palestinian and LNM opponents in the capital. The so-called Battle of the Hotels (October 1975 – March 1976) proved costly to both sides and its main outcome was not the victory of any of them but the separation of East- and West-Beirut along the "Green Line." It was around that time, at the latest, that Israel forged an alliance with the Katā´ib leadership and other Maronite leaders and began supplying them with weapons and equipment besides dispatching military advisors to East Beirut. In the meantime, severe massacres were committed by the feuding parties. On January 18th, 1976, the (proto-) Lebanese Front invaded the Muslim-inhabited slums of Karantina and Maslakh in East Beirut and committed a cruel massacre leaving more than one thousand people dead. In response, the LNM and Palestinian groups, on January 20th, attacked the Maronite/ Christian NLP stronghold of Damour, a coastal town south of Beirut, and massacred or otherwise ejected all its inhabitants (Harris 2012, p. 236).

On January 22nd in turn, the Maronite/ Christian militias laid siege to the refugee camp of Tel al-Zaatar in north-eastern Beirut, which was also a fortified stronghold of a number of important PLO factions. In command of this operation were, besides the senior militia leaders, also and especially two LAF officers, namely Fouad al-Malek (1934-) and Michel Naim Aoun, with the latter having carried out the major planning (Moumneh 2019, p. 56). Malek eventually joined the LF (MEF/ USCfL 2002) while Aoun was to remain with the LAF throughout his career. As mentioned earlier, Syria intervened in the war in June 1976 on the side of the Maronite/ Christian forces, with the aims of disciplining the PLO and preventing Lebanon´s all-out disintegration. Thus, with the LAF´s (i.e. Aoun´s), Syrian and Israeli support, the merciless siege of Tel al-Zaatar was intensified and a full-scale assault launched after which, on August 12th, 1976, the camp fell to the Maronite/ Christian militias (Harris 2012, p. 238). By then, on top of the many victims of the military confrontation, thousands of the inhabitants died a slow, horrible death caused by dehydration and/ or starvation.

In October 1976, in the Battle of Aishiya, a mainly Christian village in the Jezzine district of South Lebanon, the IDF for the first time militarily backed up Maronite/ Christians overtly and directly when it fired artillery shells on the advancing PLO and Communist forces. The village still fell, however, and all Maronite/ Christian inhabitants were forced to flee. In the same month, Syria´s intervention was bolstered with an official mandate of the Arab League to keep 40,000 troops in Lebanon as the main part of a newly created Arab Deterrent Force (ADF). With other participating nations quickly losing interest, however, Syria was soon to be in sole control again and this time with a broad legitimization. This reality had now to be acknowledged and coped with by all warring parties.

It was especially these sinister early events of the war that caused the numbers of those politically conservative Muslims and Druze originally supporting the Maronite camp, as well as vice versa, Maronites and other Christians fighting with the Leftist and Palestinian forces, to substantially and sustainably decline. The most important outcome of this was the homogenization of residential areas, which in turn allowed for a subsequent cantonization (referring to the largely autonomous political administration of such “cantons” by the militia or coalition in charge respectively) of much of the entire country.

Intra-Maronite rifts in the making

As of 1977, Bashir Gemayel – by now the most popular Maronite/ Christian leader, frenetically celebrated by the Maronite youth for his radical stances – embarked on forcefully unifying, by either subjugating or ruthlessly breaking, many of the Maronite/ Christian militias under the roof of the Lebanese Front´s LF, whom he commanded. By doing so, he successfully expanded his power base and thus became the most precious ally for Israel. He and most other Maronite warlords were growing weary of the Syrian refusal to decisively go against the Palestinians and their Lebanese allies, or allow the Front to do so. In consequence, the Hundred Days´ War, which dragged from February to April 1978 (synchronized with Israel´s invasion of the South. See below), erupted, in which the Syrian army was driven out of East Beirut (Traboulsi 2007, pp. 208–10).

These developments in combination with the Front´s plan to declare a Christian canton in East Beirut and adjacent Mount Lebanon alongside prospective Shi`i, Sunni and Druze cantons in other regions affected the final divorce of al-Marada from the Front. Frangieh opposed all ideas of a federal Lebanon allied to Israel and the West, took a decisive pro-Syrian and Arab stance, and entered into alliance with Sunni leader and former Prime Minister Rashid Karami (1921-87) from Tripoli. Frangieh was now considered a traitor by the Front. Therefore, on June 13th, 1978, a commando ostensibly led by Bashir Gemayel and Samir Geagea (1952-) – another aspiring leader within the LF structure – launched a deadly assault on the Frangieh´s summer residence in Ehden, a small hamlet situated in the remote Qadisha valley of northern Mount Lebanon. Among those slain were Sulayman Frangieh´s son and Marada commander, Tony Frangieh, his wife, their three year-old daughter and about thirty more men. The episode became known as the “Ehden Massacre.” (Traboulsi 2007, p. 209; Fisk 2001, p. 76; Harris 2012, p. 240)

Israel´s quest for Lebanon part I: From the “State of Free Lebanon” to the Lahad Army

On March 14th, 1978, in response to a significant Fatah attack within the disputed territory, the Israeli government launched “Operation Litani,” the first of its major invasions of Lebanon since 1948, whereby it occupied the whole Lebanese territory south of the Litani River. Approximately 2,000 civilians fell victim to the Israeli onslaught (Harris 2012, p. 240). Following complaints by the Lebanese government, two UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions (425 and 426) issued on March 19th, 1978, demanded an end of the fighting and the immediate withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon. To the end of overseeing the implementation of these stipulations, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), was formed and started operating as of March 23rd, 1978 (UNSC 1978a and 1978b). Originally intended to operate only for a short interim period, UNIFIL became a *de facto* permanent institution in South Lebanon, with its mandate being regularly renewed and the precise scope of its tasks at times altered to meet changing requirements and interests. Its headquarters are located in the village of Naqoura (UNIFIL 2019), one of Lebanon´s most beautiful and pristine coastal spots, directly neighboring the Blue Line.

With an eye on South Lebanon´s vast water resources (Harik 2004, p. 49) and fully aware of the Lebanese state´s and also UNIFIL´s inability to militarily fight back, however, water-scarce Israel was not even considering complying with international demands and giving up its precious new conquest. Following a strategy of simulating compliance instead, during the following months, the IDF retreated to an 800 km² large border strip which they declared as a “security zone” and formally handed over control to the Jaish Lubnān al-Janūbī (South Lebanese Army [SLA]) under the renegade Maronite Christian Major Saad Haddad (1936-1984). The latter had earlier been in command of a battalion of the Jaish Lubnan al-Hurr (Army of Free Lebanon [AFL]; a significant early break-away faction of the LAF), stationed in South Lebanon. In 1976, Haddad, alongside his loyal troops, split from the AFL to form the Free Lebanon Army (FLA), later renamed into SLA. Originally overwhelmingly consisting of Maronites (in later years, its foot soldiers comprised also many Shi`a), the SLA became Israel´s most loyal proxy militia in Lebanon (Harris 2012, p. 206). In April 1979, Haddad went as far as proclaiming the “Dawlat Lubnān al-Ḥurr” (“State of Free Lebanon”) within the area under his militia´s – yet, *de facto* Israel´s – control. One day later, Haddad was condemned as a traitor by the Lebanese Government and officially dismissed from the LAF (Blanford 2011, p. 36). Needless to say, the “State of Free Lebanon” was never recognized and Haddad´s pipe dream came to an end with him dying from cancer in 1984. As their new puppet at the head of the SLA, the Israelis then picked retired Lieutenant General Antoine

Lahad (1927-2015), a close peer of former President Chamoun. Henceforth the SLA came to be widely referred to as the "Lahad Army."

In 1985, the SLA and its Israeli masters converted a former army barracks complex in the village of Khiam into a permanent detention center for "Lebanese suspected of belonging to armed organizations hostile to Israel and the SLA, or of having been involved in attacks against […] Israel's armed forces, or the SLA in south Lebanon." (Amnesty International [AI] 1992, p. 1) The Khiam Detention Center became infamous for systematic torture and severe ill-treatment of its inmates who were held outside any legal framework and without access to humanitarian organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRD) or any other (AI 1992, p. 3). Among its more prominent inmates was the (Orthodox Christian) communist Soha Bechara, who was imprisoned for her attempted assassination of Antoine Lahad in 1988.[70]

Amal and the Palestinians part I: Brothers in arms no more - yet, the enemy of an enemy is not always a friend

The Lebanese Shi`a now found themselves neglected by the government, targeted by the Israelis and their Lebanese Maronite agents and viewed with growing suspicion from the Palestinian commandos, from whom they had increasingly distanced themselves since 1976. With Israel as of 1978 launching a brutal intensive campaign of driving a wedge between the Shi`a and the Palestinian resistance through collective punishment of Shi`i villages for every attack of Fatah and/ or affiliates, and the increasingly arrogant and/ or hostile conduct of many of the latter´s members, the most pressing needs for the Shi`a became security and protection. Amal came to fill this void and from now on, the ranks of its supporters and sympathizers became increasingly filled with Shi`i defectors from other militias, most of which had fought with the Palestinians before (Norton 1987, pp. 59–62).

In 1980 and 1981, the first important clashes took place between Amal and the Palestinians and their Lebanese allies. The fighting intensified in early 1982 and by spring that year, many Shi`a expected an all out war to erupt between them at any given moment (Norton 1987, pp. 51–2, 66–7). The schism between the Palestinian forces and their Shi`i-Lebanese hosts, however, never translated into sustainable pro-Israeli sentiments among the Shi`a. Yet, "[i]n what can only be described as a supreme miscalculation, the IDF and the Israeli security services operating in the South," (Norton 1987, p. 109) in the early 1980s, were betting exactly on such a scenario. Initial cheerings of pro-Amal Shi`a upon Israel´s violent crossing into Lebanon in June 1982 (see below) encouraged such wishful thinking. Aware of Haddad´s massive lack of popularity and plain unacceptability to the majority of the South Lebanese, Israel actually tried to establish close relations with the Shi`a and to co-opt Amal and/ or raise independent pro-Israeli Shi`i militias as a possible supplement or even substitute for the SLA (Norton 1987, p. 110–2). Despite a noteworthy number of Shi`a having been in fact successfully co-opted into the SLA structure over the years (Blanford 2011, pp. 36 –7), this endeavour still by and large failed, as the Shi`i population had "no desire to trade one foreign overlord for another." (Norton 1987, p. 109) Instead of an ally, as Israel has wished for, the Lebanese Shi`a were soon to become a bastion of fierce resistance against Israel and its interests in Lebanon and beyond.

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[70] In light of this high-level offense, she was subjected to particular cruel acts of torture over years, which she partially details in her memoirs, entitled, "Resistance. My life for Lebanon." (Bechara 2003)

The consolidation of the Shi`i-Lebanese Islamist forces

The victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran over Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi (1919-1980), in January 1979, substantially boosted the Shi`a in their quest for their place in Lebanon (and the region at large). It provided an outstanding example of how an unarmed yet pious Shi`i Muslim mass movement was able to overthrow one of the regions´ most powerful, heavily armed and autocratic secular regimes, which was furthermore intimately allied with the US, the UK and other Western powers. The new Iranian rulers installed an Islamic Republic based on Khomeini´s theory of *wilāyat al-faqīh*, with Khomeini himself becoming the first wali and supreme leader. As of now, the young theocracy was also to fill the previous void of a foreign patron for the Lebanese Shi`a.

Amal was the major Shi`i force in Lebanon and, in fact, some leading Iranians (including the son of the Revolution´s leader, Ahmad Khomeini) had received military training under the auspices of Amal in Lebanon before the decisive events in Iran unfolded. Moreover, several Amal officials had played active roles in the Islamic Revolution. For all of these reasons, the newly-founded Islamic Republic initially supported Amal and relations have never been fully severed until today. Yet, obscurities surrounding the death in a plane crash in 1981 of the high ranking Amal official and former right hand of Musa al-Sadr, the Iran-born Mustafa Chamran (1932-1981), who, since 1979, had assumed the position of chairman of the Supreme Defence Council in Iran, revealed the early level of estrangement between Amal and the Khomeinist camp (Norton 1987, pp. 56 –7; ibid. 2007a, p. 30).

In contrast to Amal, the Iranian leadership was especially interested in having excellent relations with the Palestinian guerillas in Lebanon and bolstering their struggle (Sankari 2005, pp. 173–4), defining the liberation of Palestine, with its religious center, Jeruslam (*Al-Quds*; regarded as a holy city by Jews, Christians and Muslims alike), as an Islamic duty. Moreover, the new Iranian leadership was especially concerned with supporting clear-cut Islamic and/ or Islamist movements in an effort to export its own Islamist revolution (Norton 1987, p. 88). Amal, however, was not only nominally secular but had otherwise also lost, with the disappearance of al-Sadr, much of what it possessed in terms of religious identity. At the same time, Syria saw Amal mainly as “a mechanism for checking Palestinian power in Lebanon.” (Norton 2007a, p. 32)

Against this backdrop, the Khomeinist/ Islamist camp within Amal grew ever more frustrated with the movement´s course (Sankari 2005, p. 173), lamenting not only its lacking religious foundation but also what they perceived as a confusion of friend and foe with respect to Amal´s growing disparities with the Palestinian guerillas in Lebanon to the disadvantage of its active resistance against the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon. The latter aspect would prove the most decisive in bringing about an Islamist split from Amal and the subsequent foundation of a separate Shi`i movement: Hizbullah. The final trigger came with Israel´s second massive invasion of Lebanon in June 1982.

Israel´s quest for Lebanon part II: Dropping all pretenses

The Israeli´s had dubbed their assault “Operation Peace for Galilee,” claiming to avenge a PLO-led assassination attempt, conducted on June 3rd, 1982, on their ambassador to London. Yet, it was common knowledge that the organisation which operated this attack was a splinter movement and bitter enemy of the PLO. Anyway, only two days later, on June 6th, the IDF entered Lebanon with full force (Norton 2007a, pp. 32–3), bringing in tens of thousands of soldiers and hundreds of tanks on the ground, backed up by air and naval forces. Against them stood the PLO and the Syrian army, both of which fought bitterly, attempting in vain to bring the Israeli advance on Beirut to a halt. By June 13th, the IDF had fought through, joined forces with al-Katā´ib / the LF and its affiliates in East Beirut and completed its encirclement of West-Beirut, placing it under siege. The objective was to force the Syrians and the PLO out of the city. Israel would continuously bombard the Western part of the Lebanese capital from land, air and sea, until Arafat finally accepted an agreement, according to which a four-nation Multinational Force (MNF), comprised of US, French, British and Italian regiments, would assist in the PLO´s (and other non-Lebanese) combatants´ evacuation to Tunis. This was completed by late August 1982. In consequence, the Palestinian and Lebanese civilians, especially woman and children, remaining in the camps were left in the midst of a raging Civil War without defense.

On August 23rd, 1982, Bashir Gemayel was elected the new President of the Republic under the presence of patrolling Israeli tanks. Given the massive Israeli support granted to the LF earlier, the Israelis now demanded a peace treaty to be concluded on their terms. Gemayel, who had already refused to let his forces openly support the IDF´s onslaught, now also dared to reject signing a peace treaty, making the Israeli´s furious. He was assassinated only a short while later, on September 14th, 1982, by a Maronite Christian belonging to the SSNP. In retaliation, outraged LF militiamen, with direct Israeli logistical support, on September 16th, stormed the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps that had been left more or less defenseless after the PLO´s departure to Tunis. Until September 18th, they had in cold blood slaughtered an unclear number – somewhere between 1,500 and 3,500 – of Palestinian and Shi`i Lebanese civilians (Harris 2012, pp. 243–5).

Bashir was followed in his office by his elder brother, Amin Gemayel (1942-), who was elected the new president on September 21st. Reportedly against his conviction and under strong pressure from both Israel and the US, on May 17th, he signed a controversial agreement amounting to a Lebanese-Israeli peace treaty (Harris 2012, pp. 245–6). The "May 17th Agreement," however, proved stillborn. It encountered strong opposition from many Lebanese and most Arabs and was therefore boycotted from day one until being formerly revoked in late 1984, by then new (Shi`i) Speaker of Parliament (and former Secretary General of Amal) Husayn al-Husayni (1937-), right after President Amin Gemayel had disowned it in Damascus (Harris 2012, pp. 245, 248).

The spirits invoked: Hizbullah

In the South, with the Palestinian groups reduced to mere remnants after the PLO´s withdrawal, Lebanese factions took the lead in the armed resistance against the Israeli occupiers and their local agents. Initially, Communists and other Leftists fought at the front. The leaders of Harakat Amal, at first adopted a strategy of waiting the Israelis out. When it became ever clearer, that the latter were here to stay, however, Amal´s strategy changed. The trigger came when an IDF convoy forced its way through the pious Shi`i masses (estimated at 60,000) attending the annual `Ashura´ ceremony in Nabatiyah on October 16th, 1983. This blatant disrespect of one of their most holy ceremonies was met with angry chantings and stones thrown at the armored IDF vehicles. The frightened soldiers answered with opening fire on the civilians, resulting in at least two dead and numerous wounded. After this incident, basically all of Shi`i Lebanon turned anti-Israeli and also Amal started paying more attention to resisting the occupation. However, a new force became visible on the field too (Norton 1987, pp. 112–3). It consisted of Shi`i Islamists, the central figures of which were ideologically shaped by the Shi`i milieu of Najaf and inspired by Ayatollah Fadlallah in Lebanon as well as by Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Yet, it was Israel´s invasion and the IDF´s conduct that caused these forces to become fully activated.

Thus, in the months following the 1982 invasion, numerous small militant Shi`i Islamist groups emerged under different, yet often very similar names (Harik 2004, p. 171). In April 1983, a self-killing attack against the US embassy brought about sixty-three dead (including most of the CIA´s Beirut station) and in October 1983, two similar operations carried out simultaneously killed 241 US Marines and fifty-eight French paratroopers of the MNF contingents in their barracks in Beirut. The MNF had, especially after US warships had shelled Muslim areas of Lebanon in a show of support for Amin Gemayel (Fisk 2001, p. xviii), came to be largely perceived as a warring party siding with Israel and the Maronites against Syria and “the Muslims.” (Jaber 1997, pp. 76–7; Rosiny 1996, pp. 59–60) This, and Gemayel´s annulment of the May 17th Agreement, ultimately led to the MNF´s withdrawal, fully concluded by July 1984. The group that claimed responsibility for all three of these attacks identified itself as al-Jihād al-Islāmī (Islamic Jihad) (Fisk 2001, p. xviii). Yet, the US, France and the MNF blamed Iran (Jaber 1997, p. 80) and therefore bombarded in retaliation the single spot of notable Iranian presence in Lebanon, which was situated in the Bekaa. Until today, Tel Aviv, Washington D.C. and many other Western governments claim that Islamic Jihad was an alias for Hizbullah (Bell 2007, p. 108; Ranstorp 1997, pp. 62–3), which the party denies (Jaber 1997, p. 80).

In any case, Hizbullah turned out to be the most persistent of all the different militant Shi`i Islamist groups that appeared in this period. It stepped into the limelight in February 1985 (Sakmani 2008, p. 40) when publicly announcing its identity, rationale, and aims in its “Open Letter addressed by Hizbullah to the oppressed in Lebanon and the World.” (Hizbullah/ al-Ahd 1985, quoted after Alagha 2006, pp. 223–38) Postrevolutionary Iran has supported the young movement´s foundation and development financially and militarily since day one. Upon Israel´s “invasion in June 1982, Lebanon´s leading Shia Muslim clerics were in Tehran, attending the annual Islamic Conference. The timing was fateful: Iran immediately volunteered to help its Lebanese brethren” (Jaber 1997, p. 47) and dispatched a number of officials and around 1,500 of its elite Revolutionary Guards (Pasdaran) to the remote

Lebanese Bekaa valley where they were to train the first group of Khomeinist Lebanese Shi`i *mujahidūn*. Most of the volunteer trainees belonged to a fresh renegade faction of Amal, which had its headquarters in the Bekaa too. The new group called itself Islamic Amal (al-Ḥarakat Amal al-Islāmiyya). It was led by the influential young cleric Sayyid Husayn al-Musawi and initially counted about 500 followers. Soon, a number of further, likeminded young Lebanese Shi`i clerics, joined in. These men constituted the nucleus of what very soon was to become Hizbullah, and indeed, the first recorded military operations of its Islamic Resistance (al-Muqāwamah al-Islāmiyya) – the title of Hizbullah´s military apparatus until today – took place in that same month of June 1982, against the IDF and its Lebanese stooges in South Lebanon (Sakmani 2008, pp. 30–7).

Syria was at first only a reluctant supporter of the party. Its main *protégé* in Lebanon was Amal, at that time a bitter intra-Shi`i rival of Hizbullah. Yet, a Syrian-Iranian alliance (which, against all odds, was to become the most stable bilateral state alliance in the Middle East, standing rock solid until today) was in place since 1979, which allowed for the coordination of their mutual interests in Lebanon. Thus, Syria originally acted only passively in Hizbullah´s favor by allowing Iran to establish a supply line for transporting military personal and weapons all the way through Syria into the Lebanese Bekaa valley. However, the persistence of the Syrian alliance with Iran, and the common anti-Israeli stance of both aforementioned governments and the party led to Syria´s leadership gradually opening up towards Hizbullah (Goodarzi 2013, pp. 24, 44, 47), a process which ended up with them becoming firm allies.

Under these conditions and circumstances, Hizbullah, in the course of the 1980s, rose to become the spearhead of the Lebanese armed struggle against the Israeli occupation forces and their infamous Lebanese proxy, the SLA, in Israel´s "security zone" in South Lebanon. Israel´s approach to Lebanon and its success in containing Fatah and affiliates had finally given birth to a movement that would eventually become one of the most influential non-state actors of our times and a new kind of antagonist for Tel Aviv. Despite the power asymmetry of these adversaries, with the number of Israel´s human losses and material expenses steadily increasing, the continuous occupation of Lebanon was to prove ever more of a burden for Israeli society.

Amal and the Palestinians part II: All-out war

In 1984, the anticipated war between Amal and the Palestinians (which had by now regrouped) broke out. In what came to be known as the “War of the Camps,” Amal, backed by Syria, alongside a changing coalition of other major forces, including pro-Syrian Palestinian groups, battled the Arafat-led PLO camp supported by an equally changing coalition of third parties. Fighting took place mainly in Beirut but also in South Lebanon. The whole episode lasted until 1988. In May 1985, in the battles for control of the Sabra, Shatila and Burj al-Barajneh camps, Amal was not only supported by the Shi`i dominated 6th mechanized infantry brigade of the restructured, post-1982 LAF, which was basically under operational control of Amal at this point in time, but also by the mainly Maronite 8th mechanized infantry brigade loyal to then army commander General Michel Aoun (Harris 2012, pp. 248–9).

The General

Michel Aoun was born in 1933 (lebarmy.gov.lb 2018) in the Christian and Shi`i inhabited village of Haret Hreik, in the *qaḍa* (district) of Baabda, while his family´s origins lay in the South Lebanese *qaḍa* of Jezzine. We already came across his share in responsibility for the siege and subsequent massacre of Tel al-Zaater. His military footprint was yet soon to expand, alongside the circle of his adversaries. In June 1982, the outnumbered defense forces (the same 8th mechanized infantry brigade mentioned above) of then Sector Commander (in the rank of Staff Colonel) of the Ain al-Rummaneh-Baabda department, Michel Aoun, successfully aborted the advance of the lavishly equipped IDF towards the southern suburbs (Tayyar.org 5/4/2009) (which meanwhile also included Aoun´s village of origin, Haret Hreik). In August 1982, Aoun was promoted to the level of Staff Brigadier-General, tasked with upholding security in Beirut and law enforcement during the evacuation of the Israeli army. Then, in September 1983, his troops also “fought the pro-Syrian Shiite, Druze and Palestinian forces in Souq al-Gharb, a decisive battle that prevented the mountain town from falling into the hands of the alliance.” (Daily Star 31/10/2016) In June 1984, Aoun was appointed Commander in Chief of the Lebanese Armed Forces (lebarmy.gov.lb 2018; Tayyar.org 5/4/2009).

Communities of solidarity no more: From inter- to intra-communal enmity

As a result of the process that had started as early as 1977, with Bashir Gemayel´s brutal subjugation of rival militias into the LF, by the mid-1980´s, many of these forces had regrouped (while others had never been successfully brought to heel) and were now caught in bitter infighting for the control over neighborhoods, their respective communities, or the state altogether. Many of their leaders thereby abandoned their former complicity with Israel and intensified collaboration with the Syrians instead, while these were actively fostering their dominion over most parts of Lebanon not occupied by Israel; applying a classical divide-and-rule strategy. In 1985, Elie Hobeika on behalf of the LF, then head of Amal, Nabih Birri (1938-), and Kamal Jumblatt´s son Walid (1949-), who now headed the PSP, signed their famous Tripartite Accord in Damascus. The document was meant to be a peace accord between the main Maronite/ Christian, Shi`i Muslim and Druze warring parties, granting Syria far-reaching influence in Lebanon (Harris, 2012, p. 249).

According to Robert Hatem, the accords military part was drafted by General Aoun, for which he accepted bribes from the hands of the (Greek Orthodox) businessman and politician Michel al-Murr (1932-). The latter is meanwhile said to have bribed all participants alike, with money-filled suitcases provided by Rafiq al-Hariri (Hatem 1999, p. 45). However, the agreement was not only struck irrespective of an overall anti-Syrian mood prevailing in the Maronite milieu (Hatem 1999, p. 6), but also was there disagreement within the LF´s command structure about Hobeika´s competence to single-handedly decide such a serious matter as a peace accord, with especially his rival, Samir Geagea, opposing it.

In the years to come, most notable Maronite leaders intensified their relations with Damascus, not least with an eye to the looming end of Amin Gemayel´s presidential term in 1988 and mutual hopes of being favored by the Syrian power brokers as his successor. This also goes for Michel Aoun, who is said to have sent numerous signals to the Syrian´s (Saad 2005, p. 211). As a case in point, in January 1986, he came to the rescue of Syrian ally Elie Hobeika, who was encircled and under fire from Samir Geagea and his LF wing, only upon Syrian intervention (Hatem 1999, p. 50). Aoun´s openness to Syrian authority and hopes for becoming the next president survived until the end of Gemayel´s term, when it became clear, that Syria´s Asad would not opt for Aoun (Shaery 2020). In that respect, he did not differ much from other Maronite leaders. Yet what distinguished him from those others was his persistently demonstrated commitment to a unified, undivided and independent Lebanon. The fact that he chose himself as the one to set the agenda and lead the nation unto this path may be interpreted either as a noble act of assuming patriotic responsibility – as seen by his followers – or as merely stemming from selfishness, ego-centrism or even megalomania – as by not a few of his adversaries. In any case, Aoun sought to represent Lebanon as a whole (Hatem 1999, p. 61). This not only stood in sharp contrast to the federal aspirations of the Lebanese Front and especially Samir Geagea (see below) but was also destined to, in the long run, collide with any permanent structures of foreign tutelage – be they Israeli, Syrian, or US-American – over Lebanon.

Intra-Maronite/ Christian fragmentation and complicity with Syria furthered the relative alienation of the Maronite/ Christian elites from their respective bases, even if the former could at all times count on their die-hard followers and, as long as remaining financially solvent, also on their resident mercenaries. At the same time, however, Michel Aoun and his actions were largely seen in a different light, as reflected in his steadily growing popularity so that, by the end of Gemayel´s term, his influence extended far beyond the Christian milieu. In any case, the intra-Maronite fault lines resulting from this period would not only outlive the Civil War but continue to shape Lebanese domestic politics today.

As of 1987, meanwhile, when fighting spread throughout West-Beirut, Hizbullah (and also the SSNP amongst others) intervened in the War of the Camps, siding with the Palestinians against Amal. This first serious confrontation of the two major Shi`i forces now fluently merged into a more clear-cut inner-Shi`i "fraternal war," that, just like the intra-Maronite conflict, cut through families all over the country and even pitted siblings against each other (Harik 2004, pp. 51–2; Qassem 2005, pp. 100–2; Rosiny 1996, pp. 117–20). Despite their fundamentally different stances towards the Palestinians, the Lebanese state, and other crucial issues; the Amal-Hizbullah war was caused less by ideological differences, than by competition for both recruits and influence within the limited Shi`i milieu of Lebanon (Sakmani 2008, pp. 69–70; Rosiny 1996, pp. 65–6). This even hampered temporarily Hizbullah´s otherwise so resolute fight against the Israeli forces and their local agents in the South (Qassem 2005, pp. 100).

The conflict in South Lebanon was the only front in which one major fault line continued to correspond to a Maronite-Shi`i split. However, this picture became increasingly blurred either, with a growing number of Shi`a being coerced and/ or co-opted into the SLA over the years to serve as its foot soldiers, while its leadership remained Maronite until the end.

The Syrians backed Amal and their relationship to Hizbullah at this time was accordingly hostile. In 1987, for instance, when the Syrian army, in support of Amal, moved into West Beirut; Syrian soldiers cut to pieces twenty-two Hizbullah fighters, making use of their bayonets and axes (LA Times 25/2/1987). By 1988, Hizbullah had still gained the upper hand, seized control of formerly Amal-held areas and, for the first time, emerged as the major Shi`i force in the capital. The Amal-Hizbullah war was yet to periodically rage on. It was finally aborted only after 1990,[71] as a result of Iranian-Syrian mediation (Sankari 2005, p. 236).

Two rival governments and the formal partition of Lebanon

When, by midnight of Thursday, September 22nd, 1988, no agreement had been reached about a successive presidential candidate, the outgoing President Amin Gemayel dismissed the civil government under Prime Minister Salim al-Hoss (who had boycotted all meetings of his own cabinet for months to protest the president´s course of action, and could thus be well considered to have had actually resigned [Traboulsi 2007, p. 240]), and, in a highly contested move – because it violated the National Pact´s stipulation that the prime minister shall always be a Sunni Muslim – appointed a six-member military interim government, evenly consisting of each three Christians and Muslims and headed by the (Maronite Christian) LAF Supreme Commander Michel Aoun (Traboulsi 2007, pp. 240; 254; Harris 2012, p. 254; NY Times 10/9/1989). In the absence of a constitutional president, the appointment to interim prime minister rendered Aoun also the *de facto* head of state (Moubayed 2016). According to later statements of Michel Aoun, Gemayel was staunchly opposed to the General becoming president and had actually planned to fire him as head of the LAF. His decision to the contrary came about under pressure and in the nick of time; Gemayel called and informed Aoun about his intentions only fifteen minutes before his term ended (Aoun 1995).[72] Thereafter, Gemayel chose voluntary exile in the USA and elsewhere.

The former President had based this decision on a specific interpretation of certain passages of the Lebanese constitution[73] and furthermore “cited the historical precedent of 1952, when General Fouad Chehab, a Maronite, was appointed as prime minister of a transition government following the resignation of President Bechara el-Khoury.” (fanack.com 2017) His interpretation was neither shared by al-Hoss, nor Syria and, crucially, it was neither approved by the US nor by the international community at large. In agreement with Syria´s leadership, al-Hoss therefore promptly declared the dismissal of his government invalid and refused to step down before the election of a new president. The three Muslims appointed to the interim government of Aoun furthermore attempted to boycott its formation by non-participation (Syria is said, to have forbidden their participation [Harris 2012, p. 254]). In consequence, two rival governments emerged – a civil and Muslim one in West-Beirut, backed by Syria, and headed by al-Hoss and a military and Christian one in East Beirut, headed by General Michel Aoun. Both competed for recognition. With most foreign governments and even a number of Lebanese players entertaining relations with both Aoun and al-Hoss, the partition of Lebanon had thus become official (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada [IRBC] 1990; Fisk 2001, p. 630).

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[71] The relationship between the parties´ bases remains delicate and highly competitive. Fistfights between youth of both parties, especially in times of communal elections, are no exception.

[72] Quoted after Pipes 1995.

[73] Amin Gemayel argued that the National Pact´s stipulation that the president of the republic must be a Maronite, justified to (in the event of a vacancy) temporarily fill the office of his surrogate (the prime minister) with a Maronite too (fanack.com 2017).

This outcome was considered positive by much of the Maronite establishment, in particular among the remnants of what had formerly been the Lebanese Front (this includes Amin Gemayel, even if exiled), because such a relatively clear-cut division between Maronite/ Christian and Muslim authority was understood as a probable "step towards the realization of the Lebanese Front´s ancient dream of [confession-based] federalism." (Saad 2005, p. 209) Moreover, in the period preceding the end of Gemayel´s term, it already became increasingly "[…] evident to all political players […] that a presidential vacuum was a probable outcome, and that the trend was drifting towards the formation of two governments." (Ibid.) The Front´s insistence on holding presidential elections in time anyway indicates that the option of partition was not only aspired for, but may have well been brought about deliberately (ibid., pp. 209–10).

The "Aoun phenomenon"

Michel Aoun, so far embraced mainly by his troops as well as "a number of politicians, men of thought and high-ranking officers" (Saad 2005, p. 211) that gathered around him during the last two years of Gemayel´s term; from the beginning of his controversial appointment on, was carried by a huge wave of popular support too. The "Aoun phenomenon," (Hatem 1999, p. 70) as it came to be called, was born at this point in time – even if it reached its climax only in March 1989, when the General launched his "War of Liberation" (see below). Aoun almost immediately rallied the absolute majority of Christians and, in contrast to all other Maronite/ Christian leaders, also a significant number of Muslims behind himself. His supporters – soon to become known as the "Aounists" –, aside of a comparably low average age and middle class belonging (many were students, young academics or otherwise professionals), were also characterized by a striking amount of loyalty and trust in the wisdom and integrity of their paramount leader. For the time to come, they would be staging regular sit-ins and mass protests (numbering up to 650,000 [Daily Star

13/10/2000]) around the Baabda Presidential palace, demanding the full recognition of Aoun´s government and later also the withdrawal of Syria and all other foreign forces from Lebanese soil (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.4 2017 and E.FPM.1 2012b).

The first important action undertaken by the General after having been appointed interim prime minister was to move against the heavily armed Lebanese Forces (LF) – the most powerful Maronite/ Christian militia at that time (a move which further convinced many of his non-Christian Lebanese admirers that they had "bet on the right horse"). The LF were now solely headed by Samir Geagea, who had in the meantime introduced an effective reorganization of his troops and now attempted to take full control of the Christian dominated areas of the country (Hatem 1999, pp. 53, 61). As of August 1988, both the LF and the LAF under Aoun´s command were receiving shipments of heavy weaponry from Iraq´s strong man Saddam Hussein, who thereby *en passé* sought to punish his rival al-Asad for having stood by Iran´s side during the first Gulf War (Iraq vs. Iran, 1980–88) (Harris 2012, p. 254). Under these conditions, a violent conflict between the army and the Lebanese Forces in the immediate future seemed all the more likely.

Aoun began his endeavor to reestablish the state´s authority by setting up a naval operations room to confiscate or otherwise close down all illegally-run ports which were among the main sources of revenues for various militia´s, not least the LF. Next, the General effectively prevented the levying of taxes by the LF in areas under its control. Besides restoring the reach of the state in Lebanon, the timing of both moves indicates that they also aimed at weakening the Forces militarily in advance of any direct confrontation. The first clashes erupted in early February, 1989. The LF under Geagea´s lead, however, bowed after a few days of fighting. They were subsequently subdued under the military cabinet´s command and had their main port, the Beirut "fifth basin," confiscated (Harris 2012, pp. 254–5; Saad 2005, pp. 312–3).

The "War of Liberation"

In terms of military economy, the General now felt strong enough to reach for more, that is far beyond "Christian Lebanon" with East Beirut as its "capital:" He thus promptly ordered the closure of illegal ports along the Lebanese coastline south of Beirut, thereby targeting those of Amal and the PSP – both strategic allies of the Syrian government –, and on March 6th, 1989, imposed a blockade (Harris 2012, pp. 254–5). Both militias immediately fought back and answered with a counter blockade. On March 14th, the Syrian command demonstrated its degree of disapproval by responding with a heavy bombardment of the

Baabda Palace (where Aoun and his family lived) and the Ministry of Defense, leaving 38 dead and more than 140 people injured. General Aoun, still on the same day, reacted by declaring a “War of Liberation” on Syria with its roughly 33,000 to 40,000 troops stationed in Lebanon at that time, and began targeting Syrian installations “from Beirut to the Bekaa,” (Harris 2002, p. 255; Saad 2005, pp. 319–20) alternating with further Syrian strikes on his strongholds. He furthermore officially ordered the Syrian government to completely withdraw its forces and security staff from Lebanon and appealed to the international community for support (fanack.com 2017).

For the six months to come the war raged on in form of static artillery battles and as of July 1989 the Syrians imposed a naval blockade on Aoun-controlled ports, with a focus on Jounieh (a small but significant “Christian” town situated at the coastline North of adjacent Beirut). This episode alone caused the death of more than 850 people, the most of which were civilians (Harris 2012, p. 255). The LF, more than reluctant to follow Aoun into his all-out war against Syria (Hatem 1999, p. 70), could nonetheless be expected to at least participate in fighting any general Syrian attack. Still in August 1989, in a private meeting with Patriarch Sfeir, Gegaea expressed doubts about Aoun´s prospects of military success and portrayed his relationship with the latter as “restricted to taking and carrying out orders, and not commenting,” because, he added, “[i]f we tried to comment, the General´s tone changed, the atmosphere got chilly and the storm clouds gathered.” (Samir Geagea, quoted after Saad 1995, p. 373) Thus, Geagea´s explicit discontent with Aoun´s leadership had so far not led to the former´s all-out rebellion. Under these conditions, East Beirut, with roughly 25,000 thousand troops and 300 artillery pieces at the General´s disposal, was still able to withstand and even a major Syrian frontal assault on August 14th, 1989 was effectively thwarted. A subsequent call by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for a ceasefire secured a temporary subsiding of hostilities (Harris 2012, p. 255).

Ta`if Accord and Pax Syriana

The Syrian claim to Lebanon was meanwhile progressively gaining international and also Arab backing. Crucial was the US repositioning itself and now openly encouraging and pressuring for a stabilization of Lebanon under Syrian rule. Already in May 1989, a newly formed tripartite committee with representatives from Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Algeria had met “in Morocco under the aegis of the Arab League to draw up a peace plan designed to end the civil war.” (IRBC 1990) While the relations between Aoun and the US had been tense since his appointment to interim prime minister, the former now levied open accusations that the US was siding with Syria against Lebanon besides other statements regarded as provocative. He was therefore finally emitted from the circle of US-allies in the Middle East.

In early September 1989, the US pulled out its embassy staff from Lebanon and had official spokespersons inform the Arab tripartite committee that their government was not interested in Syria leaving Lebanon (ibid.; Harris 2012, p. 255). The committee responded to the US´ and Saudi Arabian preferences and drafted a "Charter of National Reconciliation" for Lebanon, presented to the surviving deputies of the 1972 Lebanese parliament for approval on September 17th, 1989, before summoning the later for negotiations in the Saudi Arabian city of Ta`if as of September 22nd. On October 22nd, all but four of the sixty-two deputies that have been gathered in Ta`if signed the Charter of National Reconciliation, by today commonly known as the "Ta`if Accord."

This document paved the way for ending the second Lebanese Civil War and introduced significant institutional reforms. Most importantly, it changed the power-sharing formula that traditionally favored the Christian representation in both parliament and cabinet over that of the Muslims from a 6:5 to a 5:5 ratio; the Sunni prime minister – originally appointed by and responsible to the Maronite president – was made responsible to the legislature; and the executive authority that formerly rested with the president of the republic was now shifted to the cabinet – rendering the prime minister the henceforth most powerful member of the governing troika (presumably a result of Saudi Arabia´s growing influence [Harris 2012, p. 255]). The president, meanwhile, retained some crucial prerogatives, such as heading the higher defense council as the supreme commander of the armed forces and by decree granting special pardon. The position of the Shi`i speaker of the house (the president of the parliament) was slightly strengthened by prolonging his term from two to four years (Ta`if Accord 1989).

The agreement fell short of a decisive mechanism to abolish political confessionalism (which was at least verbally demanded by most parties concerned). It moreover cemented the imposition of a *Pax Syriana* in Lebanon, by recognizing Syria´s "special interests" in the country and legalizing the Syrian troop presence while remaining silent on a definite withdrawal (although the Syrian forces are called upon to redeploy to the Bekaa valley after a period of two years) (Ta`if Accord 1989; IRBC 1990; Harris 2012, p. 255). On November 5th, 1989, finally, the remaining Lebanese parliamentarians assembled at the Qoleiat Airbase in North Lebanon, ratified the Ta`if Accord and elected the Maronite lawyer and long-standing politician René Mouawad (life: 1925–1989; presidency: 1989) as new president of the republic. Under the prevailing conditions, however, Michel Aoun had no intentions to give in.

While Hizbullah´s main problem with Ta`if lay in its cementation rather than abolishment of political confessionalism, Michel Aoun´s categorical disapproval of the accord was sparked primarily by the provisions dealing with Syria´s role in Lebanon (IRBC 1990), although he is said to have been personally discontent with the reduction of Maronite political privileges and overall power too (Daily Star 31/10/2016). In any case, Hizbullah, prior to the negotiations´ conclusion, had criticized but afterwards accepted the peace of Ta`if (to which it was naturally no party). Aoun, in contrast, had declined the invitation to Ta`if before negotiations started and now stubbornly refused to acknowledge their outcome. He moreover publicly accused the undersigned of treason, ruled by decree to have the parliament resolved, called for elections under UN supervision (fanack.com 2017) and refused to recognize the presidency of René Mouawad. The Aounists therefore staged mass demonstrations and held a general strike in East Beirut to protest the accord (Washington Post 7/11/1989).

In fact, in the night of November 5th, after then Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir (life: 1920-; patriarchy: 1986-2011) had accepted the Ta`if agreement and publicly endorsed President Mouawad, an angry Aounist mob stormed Sfeir´s private residence in Bkerke (the Patriarchal See) and coerced the then 68-year old cleric to get up from bed and listen to their complaints. In response, Sfeir stated that he principally supported the General "and his demand for absolute sovereignty." (Saad 2005, p. 431) However, his words did not convince the protestors, which now started rioting and, amidst increasing turmoil, attempted to force the Patriarch to kiss a picture of General Aoun (Saad 2005, p. 431; Harris 2012, p. 256). Fearful of further such encroachments, Sfeir subsequently fled to the patriarchal summer residence in Dimane (a village overlooking the Qadisha valley, in the North Lebanese district of Bsharri).

Collaboration of whatsoever kind with Syria, at this point in time, was irreconcilable with the General´s quest for full Lebanese sovereignty, or – as his opponents would alternatively say – with his ego and narcissism. However, Mouawad considered reconciliation with Aoun but was assassinated only seventeen days later, on November 22nd (the Lebanese Independence Day), in a car bomb explosion. He was followed in his post, on November 24th, 1989, by the staunchly pro-Syrian veteran politician and former Minister for Public Works, Elias Hrawi (life: 1926–2006; presidency: 1989-98), the first Maronite Lebanese President who did not originate from the Maronite heartland (Mount Lebanon), but from a village near Zahle in the remote Bekaa valley. Hrawi almost immediately (on November 26th) announced a new government under Salim al-Hoss, which in turn replaced Aoun as army commander with General Émile Lahoud. Hrawi was surely no less President by the grace of Syria, than

Mouawad had been. Aoun accordingly did not recognize him either. He remained entrenched in fortified East Beirut – and for the time being, there was nothing the new authorities could do about that (Harris 2012, p. 256).

The final duel: Aoun vs. Geagea

> “From now on, no gun shall remain, except the army gun.”
>
> Michel Aoun 1990[74]

Despite the unwavering support Aoun received from his admirers and followers; what the latter saw as noble steadfastness, was increasingly perceived as reckless intransigence by most others. The General therefore became progressively isolated in Lebanon. Meanwhile, the character of Geagea´s engagement in the War of Liberation on the side of Aoun, which was never enthusiastic, as of October 23rd, 1989, was becoming increasingly fake because, according to Robert “Cobra” Hatem, it was since that date that the LF-leader was conspiring with the Syrians (Hatem 1999, p. 71). On January 31st, 1990, finally, after Aoun had declared the absorption of the LF into the army (Harris 2012, p. 256), “Samir Geagea ran out of patience, budged his troops, and went into action against the General and the Christian people, without discrimination. All the military, logistic and human forces were engaged in this mortal inter-Christian 'duel'.” (Hatem 1999, p. 71)

From February to June that year, the war between the LAF and the Forces literally tore the Maronite community of Lebanon apart and brought about the vastest destruction their majority areas had ever seen. After only eighteen days of fighting, the death toll stood at more than six hundred – so far mainly combatants – and by April 1990 more than 300,000 people had fled the sector of East Beirut. With his military resources by now severely weakened, the General turned to some of Syria´s allies for urgent supplies. However, as even Samir Geagea had on April 9th, 1990 (ibid., p. 71) joined the Ta`if agreement without reservations, while Aoun still demanded changes of the passages dealing with Syria´s role in Lebanon, Syria strictly ordered its allies to once and for all suspend relations of whatsoever kind with the military cabinet (Harris 2012, p. 256). According to high-ranking officials of both the FPM and Hizbullah some basic supplies were in fact passed through by the fighters of Hizbullah (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.1 2012; Ilias 2011) which, as astonishing as it may sound, makes perfect sense when considering that the “Party of God” was the only notable faction present that neither belonged to the Aounists nor to Syria´s (or Israel´s) allies at this point in time and was therefore out of the circle of those to be enlisted against the General.

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[74] Quoted after Saad 2005, p. 456

The geopolitical constellation of that time was not in Aoun´s favor either. The US´ inclination towards Syria grew with the diminishment of all of its remaining sympathies for its former friend Saddam Hussein, after the latter had dared to invade and annex the Western oil reservoir Kuwait in August 1990. Syria and Iraq were both long ruled by the Ba`th Party. Yet, the Iraqi and Syrian branches experienced a divorce in 1966 and ever since developed independently from one another in a spirit of deep-rooted rivalry. As mentioned earlier, Syria was a traditional ally of Iran and stood by the latter during the first Gulf War, which naturally rendered the relations between Iraq and Syria hostile. Now, in the run-up to the second Gulf War (August 1990/ January 1991–March 1991), Syria was enlisted by the US as a coalition partner against Iraq, and directly rewarded for its participation with a free hand in Lebanon. Syria´s alliance with the regional US archenemy Iran was thereby largely ignored or talked away. General Michel Aoun on the other side happened to be supported militarily by Saddam Hussein (Saad 2005, p. 311; Goodarzi 2009, p. 287), yesterday´s friend but today´s staunch enemy of the West, who had recently undergone an intense phase of demonization by huge parts of European and North-American media. In this situation, the only notable power besides Iraq still upholding solidarity with Aoun was France under President Francois Mitterrand (life: 1916–1996; presidential tenure: 1981–1995) (NY Times 30/8/1991).

The end: Liberation suspended

The war between the LAF and the Forces on the one hand, and the violent Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in August 1990 on the other hand, in retrospective seem to have sealed the looming defeat of Aoun. As of late September that year, Hrawi, soon backed-up by Syrian troops, blockaded the Eastern enclave controlled by the General, confronting the roughly 500,000 inhabitants of this area with food and fuel shortages (IRBC 1990). At the latest by early October, basically everyone with stakes in Lebanon – with the notable exception of Hizbullah that had erstwhile opposed Ta`if too – had actively or passively joined into the effort of ousting Michel Aoun. After having accepted the Ta`if Accord, Geagea now overtly switched to the Syrian side. The same goes for several high-ranking officers from Aoun´s ranks, which had been secretly won over for the Syrians by the notorious Maronite warlord Elie Hobeika (1956–2002) and his entourage (Hatem 1999, pp. 71–5). On October 12th, 1990, Aoun survived an assassination attempt by a lone gunman while speaking to his supporters from the balcony of the presidential palace, around which they gathered to form a human shield of protection for him (IRBC 1990).

Convinced until the end that the Syrian Forces would not enter the Eastern sector under his control (Saad 2005, pp. 489, 494) – a misjudgement that was most probably a result of Hobeika´s intrigues (Hatem 1999, pp. 72–3) –, General Aoun had held on firmly to his rejection of any settlement. It was only on October 12th, when it became certain, that a large-scale Syrian offensive was to be expected at any moment, that he surprisingly signed a document according to which he was ready to step-down and recognize the Hrawi government in exchange for al-Hoss likewise stepping down. As further conditions it lists a lifting of the siege, the dissolution of all militias and unification of the army, the formation of a national unity government and subsequent legislative elections under international supervision, followed by the implementation of mutually agreed measures of constitutional reform. However, Michel Aoun´s proposal neither appealed to the Syrian leadership, nor to the Lebanese decision-makers it had enlisted, “probably because those who desired the entry of the Syrian army into the Eastern region would miss their opportunity.” (Saad 2005, p. 488) Because the General had this significant goodwill offer neither broadcasted via governmental channels nor had he leaked it to the press or anyone else, essentially no one other than himself, his closest aides and the assailants knew about it. This allowed the latter to proceed as if nothing had happened (Saad 2005, p. 488).

Equipped with an US, Arab and Israeli green light, the final blow came only hours later. On October 13th at 06:00 am local time (IRBC 1990. Cf. Saad 2005, p. 491), Syrian aircraft “carried out the only air raid authorized in the Lebanese […] war,” (Hatem 1999, p. 74) targeting the Baabda Palace and the Ministry of Defense. This attack was joined by the LF´s artillery blindly pounding other strategic positions of Aoun alongside the surrounding residential areas, once more drawing numerous civilian casualties. The fatal strike lasted only thirteen minutes. It was followed by the Syrian army´s Special Forces, accompanied by renegade LAF units under the command of Émile Lahoud – who was loyal to Hrawi –, storming the Eastern sector. Shortly afterwards, General Aoun left Baabda for the nearby French embassy aboard an armored tank. At about 09:30 am (IRBC 1990, cf. Saad 2005, p. 491) he broadcast a personal statement of surrender, “to prevent bloodshed and preserve what has remained.” (Aoun 1990, quoted after Saad 2005, p. 491) He thereby also asked his soldiers to in the future take their orders from General Lahoud and cease fighting (IRBC 1990). However, some of his LAF units and supporting forces (such as the GoC) – continued their fierce resistance and ardently defended their positions until they, alongside hundreds of unarmed soldiers and civilians, were mercilessly and brutally slaughtered by the overpowering assailants in what is collectively remembered by the Aounists as the “October 13th massacre.” (Daily Star 13/10/2000; ibid. 17/10/2016) On top of this carnage, “[a]bout 60 Lebanese Christian soldiers disappeared that day, most probably taken across the border to Syria, according to testimonies from other soldiers and some local eyewitnesses who saw these soldiers forced into Syrian military jeeps.” (Shaery 2020) Furthermore, as to the account of “Cobra” Hatem, Aoun´s wife and daughters, who remained in the Baabda palace after the General´s enforced departure escaped being raped by Syrian soldiers only upon Hatem´s own last-minute intervention. General Aoun was militarily defeated; the War of Liberation was lost. Thousands were killed along the way (Hatem 1999, pp. 74–5). As it would turn out, however, Michel Aoun was far from being silenced and the Aounists´ struggle by non-military means was only to begin. We will turn to this in due course.

2.5 SHI`I-MARONITE RELATIONS IN THE EARLY SECOND REPUBLIC, 1990-2000

2.5.1 No victor – no vanquished?

As in prior domestic Lebanese conflicts, the formula; “no victor - no vanquished” was also raised at the end of the nation´s second Civil War. As a case in point, none of the Lebanese warring parties were able to realize their maximalist aims and none were completely defeated. Furthermore, on August 26th, 1991, an amnesty law pardoning all war crimes committed between April 1975 and March 28th, 1991, except for assassinations of political and religious leaders, came in effect and in May that year, basically all militias, except for Hizbullah, were disarmed (at least, this was the impression. It turned out later that some other parties also retained parts of their weaponries) and disbanded (Harris 2012, p. 259; de Clerck 2012, p. 24), only to mostly reappear as political parties with quasi-identical leaderships afterwards. Thus, in absolute and superficial terms, “the no victor - no vanquished” formula seems to be fairly applicable. In relative terms and when applying a more sophisticated view, however, different victors and vanquished become visible at different points in time.

For one, the Lebanese at large must clearly be considered the vanquished. After more than fifteen years of fighting in ever changing constellations, there were an estimated 150,000 casualties, about 100,000 war invalids and more than 17,000 forced-disappeared (Haugbolle 2002, p. 6). Nearly all families of this tiny country were left in grief. As a consequence of the amnesty law and the swift metamorphosis of former warlords into high-level politicians, alongside the absence of governmental policies to constructively confront the violence of the war years and its long-term psycho-social effects, the Lebanese were forced to bear seeing their former tormentors, participating untroubled in public life and enjoying its amenities, on a daily basis.

Moreover, all Lebanese had to bend to the will of either Israel or Syria, both of whom actively continued to torment the Lebanese populace and their respective opponents. For the time being, these two foreign powers were also the sole true victors of the war. Both had snatched away their shares by unilaterally taking often ruthless action and thereby divided Lebanon among themselves. Strikingly, and despite all of the high-level condemnations recorded, with consequences failing to materialize; this *de facto* happened with international consent. *De jure*, however, Israel´s non-compliance with UN resolutions, without doubt, ran counter to international law. Syria, in contrast, bolstered its grip on Lebanon with a number of treaties and institutions suggesting legitimacy – which only works, of course, when blatantly ignoring the overwhelming power asymmetry governing the relations between the two signatory states. Besides the Ta`if Accord (1989), these included a new "Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination" (May 1991), which stipulated the establishment of a "Higher Council," overseeing the work of committees for "prime ministerial coordination," economic, social, and foreign affairs, as well as defense and security, and a separate "Defense and Security Pact" (September 1991) (Harris 2012, p. 259). It must be noted, however, that of Damascus´ clients in the Lebanese government throughout the 1990s, many were authentic in their positions and had popular support bases. They were not simply imposed on the populace – as was the case with Lahad and the SLA, for which recruitment and "support" among the South Lebanese Maronites and Shi`a was secured through outright terror and coercion – but rather endorsed by al-Asad´s regime for exactly who they were politically (Harik 2004, p. 46).

Secondly, and imperative for our subject, the peace of Ta`if brought with it very palpable changes. Most notably these are a) a general shift of power between Muslims and Christians, and – with respect to the executive powers – in particular between Sunni Muslims and Maronite Christians, to the disadvantage of the latter and b) the first full accommodation and visibility of the Shi`i community in modern Lebanon, although its formal political weight was still strongly below what its numerical strength would command. This remaining political disadvantage of the Shi`a was now increasingly outbalanced by Hizbullah´s ever ascending military superiority and, as of the mid-1990s – when relations between Hizbullah and Damascus had significantly improved – Syrian tutelage, which relatively favored the Shi`a and discriminated against the Maronites, for their community was where the prime opposition rested.[75] Oppositionist Christians, especially the Aounists, boycotted the 1992 parliamentary elections, a move only reinforcing their marginalization in post-Ta`if Lebanon. Against this background, the boycott could not be sustained during the following elections, and many Christians chose the role of a "loyal opposition" instead of being left out completely and rendered politically invisible (Harik 2004, p. 46).

In fact, with Michel Aoun exiled and most other senior Maronites either sharing his fate (such as Etienne Saqr, Raymond Eddé, and Amin Gemayel) or dead (most notably, Bashir and Pierre Gemayel, Camille Chamoun, and Sulayman Frangieh senior),[76] the main remaining opponent on the spot was Samir Geagea. While Geagea had rallied to the Syrians against Aoun, after the common foe was defeated; Syrian attempts of further co-opting him failed. Thus, as of 1994, a different path was pursued to silence Geagea´s critique. The LF were disbanded for running a militia in the guise of a political party, and Samir Geagea – on charges of being personally responsible for the planning and execution of the murder of former Prime Minister Rashid Karami in 1987 and other acts of political violence during the war years – tried, convicted and jailed in the basement of the defense ministry for the next eleven years (Harris 2012, pp. 261–2).

Irrespective of the question to what degree the precise accusations levied by the prosecutors were accurate (at least some seemed highly dubious); Geagea was surely not the only Lebanese warlord with blood on his hands. Yet, no other of the former militia leaders present in Lebanon was subjected to a similar treatment, simply because quasi-all of them collaborated with Damascus. The move was therefore not only infuriating to Geagea´s followers, but seen critically by many Lebanese, including not a few of his opponents.

In effect, the Maronites had to some degree been dethroned and degraded within the communal hierarchy (i.e. relatively vanquished), while the Shi`a came out significantly empowered in comparison to their pre-war status (i.e. relatively victorious). Under these recalibrated conditions, Maronite-Shi`i relations on eye-level, for the first time since the late 18th century, stood potentially ready to be re-launched by the early 1990´s.

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[75] Another noteworthy base of opposition, however, was constituted by Sunni Islamists, such as especially the Lebanese branch of the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood, al-Jamā`a al-Islāmiyya (Islamic Group), hailing from Tripoli and North Lebanon.

[76] Pierre Gemayel (78 y.) had suffered a deadly heart attack in 1984 (Kataebonline.org 2018) and the same fate overtook Camille Chamoun (87 y.) in 1987 (NY Times 8/8/1987), wheras Sulayman Frangieh senior (82 y.) died from general geriatric ailments in 1992 (Fisk 1992).

As we will still come to see, the erstwhile victors, Israel and Syria, instead of reaping the fruits of their conquests in the opportune moment respectively (Harris 2012, pp. 258, 264–9), were soon to overstretch their capacities and lose their hold over Lebanon altogether. At the end, both were forced out in humiliating processes and on conditions not in their interest, which rendered them vanquished too. The departure of these foreign forces from Lebanon in 2000 and 2005 and the power vacuum they respectively left – without it being immediately filled by any other foreign power – allowed for a profound reshuffling of the domestic equation. The alliance struck between the Aounists and Hizbullah in February 2006 is one of the most immediate and significant outcomes of these developments.

2.5.2 Hizbullah and its struggle gaining national approval

When in 1991 all wartime militias had to hand over their weapon´s to the state authorities, Hizbullah, as we know already, was exempted. The official argument in this respect was that the party had not – in the more narrow sense – participated in the Civil War but rather always focused on combating the Israeli occupation, which is why it could not count as a Civil War militia but must be categorized as a legitimate national resistance movement (Norton 2007a, p. 83). This acknowledgement marks the beginning of what Judith Harik has labeled the "state/ resistance deal" (Harik 2004, p. 47). Whether its conditions have ever been articulated precisely or not, it demanded, in short, that Hizbullah demonstrates loyalty to the system, which foremost implied saying farewell to aspirations for an Islamic Republic *à la* Iran. In exchange, the party gained governmental recognition as a national resistance force, which may, to this end, act autonomously. In other words, both sides to the deal were required to accept the legitimacy of the other (Harik 2004, pp. 47–8).

All this was possible under Syrian tutelage. For Damascus, the continuation of Hizbullah´s struggle in South Lebanon was a vital feature of its strategy for gaining back national territory from Israel. Thus, the relationship between Syria and Hizbullah began to slowly improve after the war, but it remained characterized by mutual distrust up until the mid-1990s. In 1993, for instance, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), on Syrian orders, shot dead a number of adherents of the party on the occasion of them protesting the Oslo Accords (Hage Ali 2019; Harris 2012, p. 261).

The Syrian control over all but South Lebanon also allowed for an intensification of Iranian aid reaching Hizbullah via the old supply route running through Syria. Hizbullah, in the meantime, was registered and licensed as an official Lebanese political party in January 1992 (Rosiny 1996, p. 355). After having implemented an internal policy of opening up to its national surroundings already by the late 1980s (Sakmani 2008, p. 69), the party now also started participating fully in political life, including regularly running in parliamentary and municipal elections. Fully in line with the aforementioned state/ resistance deal, it chose the role of a “loyal opposition,” that is within the confines of the system, and, starting with its first participation in the 1992 parliamentary elections, Hizbullah always reached competitive outcomes (Qassem 2005, pp. 187–93). Simultaneously, it stepped up its armed struggle against the occupation of South Lebanon (Harris 2012, p. 258), followed closely by an increasingly supportive national audience. Indeed, irrespective of their stances towards Syria and the post-war order in general, and despite “lingering suspicions about Hezbollah´s Islamic plans for Lebanon, a consensus seemed to have formed among the Lebanese by the beginning of the 1990s that the Party of God was doing a good job on the battlefield against the Israelis and should continue its operations.” (Harik 2004, p. 48)

In June 1993, Israel targeted civilian areas in South Lebanon located outside the “security zone,” in response to Hizbullah operations against Israeli and SLA military within the zone. This was seen as a grave violation of the “rules of combat,” established in a tactical agreement that limited the fight to military installations and personnel within the zone. Hizbullah therefore felt entitled to fire rockets (at this time almost exclusively non-steerable WWII Soviet-developed *Katjusha* rockets) into Northern Israel as a means of deterrence. Several weeks later, on July 25th, 1993, Israel answered with “Operation Accountability” (Harik 2004, p. 115), whereby it, for the duration of one week, heavily bombarded civilian residential areas and infrastructure in the South, the Bekaa and beyond – claiming that this happened because Hizbullah fired its rockets from close by – killing about 120 Lebanese civilians and displacing another 300,000. Hizbullah responded by shelling the upper Galilee, causing two civilian deaths and comparably little damage. The seven-day long war ended with a ceasefire and an oral agreement, according to which Israel would no longer shell civilian targets in Lebanon, and Hizbullah would refrain from shooting its rockets into northern Israel, mutually reserving the right to respond to violations in similar terms.

The agreement was not respected. Israel had reportedly targeted civilians in Lebanon more than 230 times between 1993 and 1996, while Hizbullah, in the same time span, retaliated with rockets in thirteen cases (Jaber 1997, p. 173). Then, after a chain of events similar to those preceding “Operation Accountability,” in April 1996, Israel launched its “Operation Grapes of Wrath,” significantly larger in scope and even more destructive than the former. This time, on April 18th, Israel bombarded a UN compound in Qana, serving as a shelter for the local population, killing around a hundred civilians and wounding even more at one strike.

It became known as the "first Qana massacre," and was internationally condemned. The Israeli government spoke of a mistake and expressed regret but ultimately blamed Hizbullah. Further consequences never materialized (Harik 2004, p. 121).

While domestic sentiments towards Hizbullah were still quite ambivalent during "Operation Accountability" (with not a few Lebanese blaming the party for the fatal outcome), "Operation Grapes of Wrath" had the effect of letting virtually the whole country rally around what was now increasingly perceived as a national resistance defending Lebanese sovereignty (in contrast to a mere pro-Iranian and/ or pro-Syrian Shi`i Muslim project). The Lebanese government and army now both indirectly flanked Hizbullah´s struggle. Be that with diplomatic efforts – featuring a presidential complaint about Israel´s assault on Lebanon to the UNSC – or by the LAF constructing temporary bypass routes and bridges to keep the South linked to the rest of the country. It moreover came to several, thus far unprecedented, proclamations of solidarity, for instance in form of t-shirts worn by students of all denominations condemning "Israeli terrorism," or of anti-Syrian Maronite leaders in Ashrafiyah publicly gathering under the slogan of "national solidarity with the South." (Harik 2004, pp. 120–1)

The outcome of the war only fostered this trend. It came about as another ceasefire with the former oral agreement now recycled in written form, becoming known as the "April Understanding." The feuding parties' compliance was henceforth overseen by a monitoring committee composed of Lebanese, US, French, Syrian and Israeli representatives, factually granting Hizbullah´s military jihad recognition of an unprecedented kind (Harik 2004, pp. 122–3).

In retrospective, this episode marks a decisive turning point in Hizbullah´s relation to its Lebanese brethren. The national embrace of the resistance was not one-sided but encouraged the party to intensify its course of opening-up to Lebanese society. By now, Hizbullah had become a full member of the Lebanese political fabric – albeit with a special status – once and for all leaving its secretive, uncompromising and anti-systemic beginnings behind. While such an image continues to occasionally haunt the movement on the domestic scene, it by and large persists in external views.

The notion of resistance, meanwhile, not only captures Hizbullah´s paramount *raison d'être* and the focal point of its ideology since day one, but now also became the explicit thematic basis for its national political program and a central element in its quest for the hearts and minds of the Lebanese. Despite the religious foundation of the concept "resistance" in Hizbullah´s own reading, this link is not always emphasized by its spokespersons, nor is it anyhow indispensable. It therefore constitutes a palpable rallying point, potentially suitable and open to all citizens alike and not only to pro-Khomeini Shi`i Muslims, as is the case with party membership.

2.5.3 Shi`i-Maronite relations at eye-level relaunched

The highest representatives of most ethnicized-confessional groups took reconciliatory stances towards their Lebanese counterparts early on and "Muslim-Christian" dialogue on that level quickly became the norm again. Head of Amal and central Syrian ally, Nabih Birri (1938-), was awarded the Speaker of the Parliament position in post-war Lebanon, which he has retained ever since. Most of the positions in the state administration reserved for Shi`a were henceforth filled with Amal affiliates. Also the Higher Islamic Shi`i Council (HISC), founded by al-Sadr, remained close to Amal, and so was Ayatollah Mahdi Shamseddine, al-Sadr´s former comrade in Najaf and Lebanon and his successor as the council´s Vice-President. Moreover, Hizbullah then still rejected taking over governmental responsibility in light of its remaining critique of the confessionalist political order and was therefore not competing for such positions. The official, civil and public face of the Shi`i part in Maronite-Shi`i relations during the 1990s was therefore largely Amal.

As for the Islamists, especially Ayatollah Fadlallah was an early advocate of Muslim-Christian dialogue and he actively cultivated good relations with several of his Christian counterparts throughout his lifetime. Hizbullah pursued a quite similar, yet independent path. On December 1st, 1992 – in an unprecedented move – the party had a high-level delegation (Khodr Tleis and Nawaf Musawi) visit Patriarch Mar Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir in Bkerke (Saad 2012, p. 33). According to its vice Secretary General, Naim Qassem (1953-), Hizbullah, "which was besieged by a number of false claims and accusations concerning the Party´s perception of Christians and its stances towards them [took this step] as part of an overall vision to open communication channels with all except those harbouring connections with Israel." (Qassem 2005, pp. 205–6) The meeting was obviously perceived as positive by both sides, and on January 22nd, 1993, a patriarchal high-level delegation (the patriarch´s deputy, Bishop Roland Abou Jaoude and Father Antoine Gemayel) visited Hizbullah Secretary General, Shaykh Hassan Nasrallah, in response (Saad 2012, p. 34; Qassem 2005, p. 206–7). "The delegation returned with a favorable impression and the opinion that Hezbollah desired to set up a mechanism to pursue dialogue." (Saad 2012, p. 34) Henceforth, relations between Hizbullah and the Maronite Patriarchate were intensified and became institutionalized over the years to come (Author´s interv. E.M.1 2012). At the same time, Hizbullah actively – and rather successfully – reached out to all notable actors of Lebanese society, except for those it suspects of continuous relations with Israel (Sakmani 2008, 133–42).

2.6 SUMMARIZING ANALYSIS AND INTERMEDIARY RESULTS

We have now gained an overview of the historical development of the Shi`i and Maronite communities and their inter- and intra-relations in the area of modern Lebanon. We have seen that they represent two of the major early mountain communities and that their fates have been interwoven to some degree ever since. Under Ottoman rule, however, their century-old relations gained special significance during the period of extended Shi`i rule over much of Mount Lebanon, rendering most of the local Maronites their subjects. It was this period with its political and social struggles, in which the foundations of modern Lebanon were set and – just as the Maronites (and Druze) – the Shi`a naturally had a major share in both this process and its outcome; the modern Lebanese Republic. Yet, the Maronite-centered Lebanist narrative alongside its national founding myth, not only offered no place for the Shi`a and their central role but also, after becoming semi-formal national doctrine (through implicit inclusion in history books and other educational material) upon the founding of the Lebanese nation-state in 1918, produced a profound loss of collective memory of the relevant developments among the entire populace.

With the local Shi`i ruling dynasties having been fought over decades and finally defeated to the advantage of Maronite and Druze notables, the Shi`i community entered modern Lebanon in a devastated condition. The Maronites, in contrast, thanks to their strong relations with the West and in particular their age-old French patronage, were not only in a highly privileged position but basically in charge (right after the French, of course) of the body politic – the creation of which and separation from Syria was nothing short of a Maronite demand. Under these conditions, a lack of knowledge of the Shi`a´s share in the eventual birth of modern Lebanon and the particular form of "othering" (depicting them as Iranian) that they were subjected to helped to foster Shi`i marginalization in early modern Lebanon. The factual socio-economic discrepancy between Maronites and Shi`a was as large as it could be and this fed into the prevalent images and self-perceptions of the Shi`a as uneducated and backward, and of the Maronites as educated, successful and modern. This situation was sustained by the groups´ heavily unequal access to economic resources and state revenues and also by their respective positions within the communal hierarchy implicit in the Lebanist narrative.

As humans, we not only develop a *habitus* that corresponds to the requirements of our environment, chiefly defined by our social position (including objective class belonging) in the world (Bourdieu 2012, pp. 164, 174 –5, 187–8), but we also tend to accept that position, and, when needed, make a virtue from given necessities (ibid., p. 189). Moreover, self- or external images, if persistent and dominant enough, do not remain on the level of thoughts and words but manifest and become reality for all those participating in this process. In the case at hand, this refers to all participants in the field of inter-and intra-community relations in Lebanon, more precisely, the subfield of Shi`i-Maronite relations. The perceptions Shi`a and Maronites had of themselves and of each other therefore had an important share in preserving the state of things between them roughly up to the 1960´s.

After hat, the Shi`a made their giant leap forward in terms of modernization and socio-economic development, in particular education, bringing with it a major mobilization and rapid transformation from a rural to an urban community. Upon their arrival in the cities, especially Beirut, however, their access to jobs and investment opportunities was largely blocked by the other communities´ established elites, which by and large saw the Shi`a as an unwanted new competitor. Maronites, in turn, were mainly mobilized through the collective perception of a growing threat to the status quo. These fears were triggered by the local and regional turmoil of the 1960´s and early 1970´s and – in Maronite perception – especially by the growing presence and clout of Palestinian armed actors encroaching on Lebanese sovereignty with the help of their Muslim Lebanese supporters. Factually, however, the one domestic group pushing most vehemently for change – for reasons of sheer socio-economic necessity – were the Shi`a.

In objective terms, Shi`a and Maronites stood at the very poles of the domestic conflict in the second Lebanese Civil War before it even had begun. Beside the occupation front in the South, however, they rather seldom fought each other directly in inter-communal battle constellations (and the fight against the SLA in the South increasingly involved substantial numbers of Shi`a on both sides too). This is to be clearly differentiated from the fights involving the Leftist parties, although for the first years of the war these still represented the main bastion of the Shi`a. That is because, here, escaping socio-economic misery and political marginalization was sought not by communal organization, empowerment and integration but, in contrast, by profound revolutionary change, following which issues pertaining to the communities´ domestic relations and their status and respective positions in the state would have ideally dispersed. However, as of 1982, the ethnicized-confession-based communal organization of the Shi`a was by and large completed. Henceforth, besides the Maronites, also the Shi`a followed a separate communal track, and both groups, as of a certain point in time, were mainly caught in violent intra-communal conflict, sparked in both cases by competition for resources and communal leadership rather than by ideological differences.[77]

Yet, in the case of the Shi`a, a long-term fragmentation, similar to that of the Maronites failed to materialize. This comes for a whole number of reasons. For one, the Maronites witnessed their first communal rifts at a time when the Shi`a were caught in an embryonic stage of communal organization. In other words; intra-Maronite fragmentation has much deeper roots. Second, the Shi`a, in the post-war phase, were subject to collective empowerment (Author´s interv. CC.S.2 2013) from both below (through communal institution building – especially by Amal, Hizbullah and Ayatollah Fadlallah – and through the growing success of Hizbullah´s military engagement in South Lebanon) and from above (through Syrian patronage and Amal´s successful seizure of central positions in the state), while the Maronites experienced the exact opposite. Third, two parties – Amal and Hizbullah – continue to dominate the Shi`i political scene, and their leaderships, ever since ending their armed conflict – and precisely for the reason of not repeating such an experience –, have found a *modus vivendi* that has long been shaped by a top-down suppression and censorship of too-outspoken critique of the other and by a relatively clear division of spheres of influence and responsibilities.

Amal, on the one hand, has traditionally played the role of the "official" and "civil face" of Lebanon´s Shi`a both internally and externally, as its cadres fill most of the senior and medium-range positions in the state and administration reserved for Shi`a. Given Hizbullah´s classification as a "terrorist entity" in parts of the NATO sphere and most Arab Gulf states, this renders Amal a crucial intermediary. Hizbullah, on the other hand, through its armed status, constitutes a factual source of security for the whole community, including Amal. Its "Islamic Resistance" is, in this sense, the Lebanese Shi`a´s power card (Author´s interv. CC.S.2 2013). In short; until recently, Hizbullah left much of the political arena and the Shi`a´s representation on state level to Amal in exchange for the latter having its back when it comes to pursuing its own paramount resistance agenda. Framing this in theoretical terms, we can see clearly how Shi`i intra-communal competition, especially for state capital, has long been softened, not so much by evenly sharing the amount that has altogether been secured for the Shi`a in post-Civil War Lebanon, but rather by functional differentiation and specialization and most importantly, on the basis of a largely implicit agreement between the party elites involved. This gave birth to – and is preserved through – a persistent political alliance drawing much of the Shi`i Lebanese community together.

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[77] Such ideological differences were and are nonetheless existent and, naturally, they are also of profound relevance in many other respects.

The Maronites, in contrast, have at the latest since the 1960´s been – and continue to be – politically far more diverse than the Shi`a, even if by today likewise two parties – the FPM and the LF – have emerged as the strongest Maronite/ Christian political camps. Al-Marada has a constant but limited followership with a mere regional presence. The once powerful Katā´ib alongside its first important breakaway faction, the NLP, have been substantially marginalized but continue to play minor roles. Politically nearly invisible yet still existent are furthermore the GoC and a whole number of others. Competition in the political field therefore continues to be a comparably important feature of intra-Maronite relations.

Another commonality of the Shi`i and Maronite tracks, however, concerns the negative perception of the armed Palestinian factions in Lebanon during the Civil War period. The Maronites, again, came first in this respect, yet, as we have seen, their initial enmity was only a few years later to be shared by many Shi`a, leading even to instances of military cooperation and coordination between Amal and certain Maronite/ Christian forces against pro-Arafat Palestinian factions and their Lebanese allies. True, this picture was to be significantly relativized through the rise of Hizbullah, as the Shi`i Islamists´ special sympathy for the Palestinian cause stands out. Yet, solidarity does not mean subservience either, and once its war with Amal had ended, also Hizbullah was keen to have the Palestinian forces under control. This remains the case until today. Finally, Maronites and Shi`a were also the groups most occupied with resisting and pushing out or neutralizing the foreign forces involved, with the former focused on the Syrians, the latter on the Israelis, and both on the Palestinians.

Not only the Maronites, but also and especially the Shi`a fought for the preservation of the nation, the state, and the system in general terms. What they sought was full and equal participation in this system and not a revolution to do away with it, although they demanded significant adjustments. As a matter of fact, even Hizbullah, which started out as a declared anti-systemic faction, in spite of this early revolutionary ideological stance, never in practice attacked any central elements of the system or the state. Furthermore, and regardless if one wants to see its statements as trustworthy or not, the original aspiration to turn Lebanon into an Islamic Republic, as articulated by the organization in its first manifesto and unofficial founding document (the "Open Letter" – see below) in 1985, never came as a demand but only as an emphatic suggestion. Its potential implementation was explicitly linked to the free decision of all Lebanese, including the Christians (of which Hizbullah´s leadership at this point in time ostensibly really thought they might voluntarily opt for an Islamic government).

After the implementation of the Ta`if Accord, Hizbullah dropped its plans to overthrow the system, albeit remaining outspokenly critical of it. Henceforth it participated actively within the confines of political confessionalism. In line with the described state/ resistance deal, it thereby restricted itself to loyal parliamentary opposition. However, after Syria´s enforced withdrawal in 2005, it first accepted and thereafter constantly assumed governmental responsibility too. On this path, it was soon to be joined by the mainly Maronite/ Christian backed FPM, which remains the case until today (see below).

The Civil War conflict between the Maronites and Shi`a as communal forces is to be categorized as competiton, with the major prize being (stakes/ participation in) the state, that is state capital. Most of the time, it was moreover indirect competition, because the two groups´ military actors fought each other directly only seldomly. If the prize was still largely in the hands of the Maronite Christians at the beginning of the war, this quickly changed after 1975, when the different militias and foreign armies temporarily, and in varying constellations, divided the national territory and – partially successfully – attempted to replace the state in their areas of influence respectively. The most notable counter-offensive of the state came in 1988, upon Michel Aoun being appointed interim prime minister and head of a military cabinet by Amin Gemayel. Crucially, Michel Aoun and his étatist agenda were not only backed by the vast majority of Christians – especially Maronites – but also and increasingly by Muslims – especially Shi`a.

Georg Simmel´s basic postulate that conflict is “designed to resolve divergent dualisms; it is a way of achieving […] unity,” (Simmel 1964, p. 13) becomes, in fact, very palpable with respect to Maronite-Shi`i relations. A period of perceived and factual distance was followed – after the Shi`a´s full-scale mobilization and socio-economic reemergence – by one of violent, if largely indirect, conflict. This relativized the former distance in the sense that it brought the parties back into much closer – yet, erstwhile hostile – contact with one another. And if one immediate effect of the war was another phase of distance, affecting the relations between most communities – in the case of Maronite-Shi`i relations, this distance and its conditions were yet fundamentally different from those preceding the war years.

The former, as we know, were shaped by a tremendous socio-economic discrepancy and accompanied by both sides´ broad identification with the stereotyped images of their communities, in light of a dominant Lebanist narrative strongly supporting this state of things. The war years then fundamentally changed these parameters and the Shi`i community, despite having suffered substantially, came out empowered in both economical and political terms and aware of its own strength and place within the system; being most likely the largest of all Lebanese groups and militarily out of (internal) competition.

The Maronites´ undisputed political and economic lead in the pre-war first republic had become a thing of the past. The main Maronite/ Christian forces and their respective bases, as we know, were not only bitterly at odds, but also many of their leaders either dead or otherwise effectively neutralized for the time being. The whole community (except for those Maronites of the ruling class overtly aligned with Damascus, such as the Frangieh family, Émile Lahoud or Elie Hobeika) was viewed with suspicion by the Syrians and therefore – alongside the Sunni Islamist camp – had to bear the worst under their rule. Changes to the nations´ power-sharing arrangement agreed upon in Ta`if were to the disadvantage of the Maronites and to the benefit of the Sunni Muslims. Earlier attempts or actual manifestations of Maronite collaboration with Israel were furthermore to heavily backfire on them in the post-war order, in which Israel was not only officially defined, but also increasingly viewed by most Lebanese, as the one eternal enemy. This, in turn, played a decisive role in the growing acceptance of Hizbullah and its embracement by the Lebanese as a national resistance army.

In the final outcome, the extreme asymmetry that had governed pre-war Shi`i-Maronite relations had been substantially corrected (albeit not completely evened) throughout the war years and in the post-war order. This potentially allowed for both groups to encounter each other at eye-level for the first time in more than a century.

The post-war distance between most Lebanese communities was or is mainly an outcome of the earlier war years, in which fighting still took place largely inter-communally and when many of the worst mutual massacres happened. It is based on two components, namely fear and demography. As for the latter, ethnic cleansing had affected a strong homogenization of residential neighborhoods, up to whole regions, the borders of which have largely survived the end of the war in form of psychological barriers. Their substance is made from fears that have palpable origins but have since been nurtured without verification. This has reinforced partially age-old stereotypes and prejudices harbored about one another. Shi`a and Maronites pose by no means exceptions in this respect. The re-launching of their relations at eye-level therefore largely remained on the elite level for the time being, with the key slogan being “Muslim-Christian dialogue.” It was nonetheless a new kind of beginning, and as we will soon come to see; relations were not to remain restricted chiefly to the elite level for ever, but took a decisive turn once the double-occupation of Lebanon had come to an end, with Israel forced out in 2000 and Syria in 2005 respectively.

To be sure, none of the aforementioned is to say that the other communities of Lebanon, nor even the non-Lebanese participants in the war, would not have harbored aspirations with respect to the Lebanese state and their share in it too. Literally all communities were disadvantaged relative to the Maronites, and all, including the latter, at all times had their own rich and poor. Yet, as stated earlier, in no case was the gap in absolute terms as yawning as it was between Maronites and Shi`a.

Furthermore, in other constellations, other issues were often more important. For the PLO and affiliates, for instance, control over parts of Lebanon was a short-term objective, directly linked to their superordinate goal of gaining back their adjacent homeland, and for the Maronites it was about not allowing "their" Lebanon to be used to that end and to bear the repercussions on top. The Druze-Maronite conflict was perceived by many participants on both sides as a delayed continuation of the war-like clashes and mutual massacres of Maronites and Druze in the 1840s and 1860s. For many Sunni Muslims (and Leftist Shi`a), in turn, the Maronites´ dominance represented a serious obstacle on the road to the realization of pan-Arab/ Nasserist, pan-Syrian aspirations, with socialist undertones, political leanings to the East, and, crucially, under inclusion of Lebanon. As such, this point was not evaluated any differently by the Maronites, who indeed openly took position to block exactly that road. And finally, there were also the ideological clashes between the Leftists on the one hand, and the "anti-communist" front, constituted by the central Maronite/ Christian political representations but also by the communally organized Shi`a, on the other hand.

3. PART II: THE ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE FREE PATRIOTIC MOVEMENT AND HIZBULLAH

> “There is a beauty in human diversity, and most people can enjoy human diversity when they are not preoccupied with the pressures and anxieties associated with the repair and maintenance of their large-group tent (large-group identity). Recognizing the beauty of diversity, however, often requires a great deal of work.”
>
> Vamik D. Volkan 2003[78]

> “If civil war is avoided and if Hezbollah is to be disarmed, it will most likely come about through the person to person bonds being made right now between Christians and Shia.”
>
> Charles Malik 2006

> “Let’s build on what we believe in, what’s common for us, common ground, the common factor, and not on what separates us. What separates us can separate me from my children. There are thousand things that separate my children from me, but we have a common thing; that I am their father and they are my children. And that’s a great thing. That’s enough to bring them close to me and bring me close to them. […] There are a thousand things that separate the Christians from the Muslims, the Sunnis from the Shi`a, from the Druze, from the non-believers. Yeah, but there are thousand other things that bring us together. Let’s think about those things. Let’s not be worried what they´re going to think in this country or that country and know that we have one enemy and one enemy only; it’s Israel. Our brother-Lebanese or fellow-Lebanese are not my enemies. They are my – they are [maybe] not my allies, politically, but they are my friends, they are my brothers, they are my Lebanese, we live together. I might not agree with them intellectually or even politically but I have to tolerate them and they have to tolerate me. We live together.”
>
> “Mahmoud A.” 2013[79]

3.1 PROLOGUE

By 1999, the war of attrition fought by the Lebanese resistance factions spearheaded by Hizbullah to force an end to the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon bore fruit. The ever increasing number of young IDF soldiers coming home in body bags, accompanied by a massive PR campaign of “liberation propaganda,” defined by Zahera Harb as “a national media campaign aiming to free occupied land from foreign occupation forces,” (Harb 2011, p. 233) led by both official national and partisan Lebanese media institutions (ibid., pp. 113–234), had significantly contributed to a gradual change of public opinion within Israel. In 2000, reportedly about three fourths of Jewish Israelis supported a unilateral withdrawal

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[78] Volkan 2003, p. 25

[79] Author´s interv. IE.Hzb.1 2013.

(Lieberfeld n.d., p. 6).[80] The subject was finally taken up by the top candidate of the Israeli Labor party, Ehud Barak, in his campaign for the Israeli parliamentary elections of May 1999. Upon becoming Prime Minister he announced that Israel would leave Lebanon within one year (Lieberfeld n.d., pp. 5–6; cf. Harris 2012, p. 264).

In the months to come, Tel Aviv repeatedly attempted to gain concessions from Beirut and by extension from the armed Lebanese resistance factions, by phrasing their fulfillment as a precondition for the implementation of Barak´s post-election promise.[81] The transparency of the situation on the ground, however, gave the Lebanese side no reason to give in (Harik 2004, pp. 134–5). The Israeli quest for concessions remained futile. On May 25th, the remaining IDF troops alongside about a thousand Lebanese collaborators (mainly Maronites and Shi`a that belonged to the SLA), unconditionally retreated to Israel under enemy fire. In contrast to the worries raised by many at that time, those roughly 1,500 collaborators who stayed behind and were captured by the Islamic Resistance were not subjected to ill treatment on behalf of the victors, but swiftly handed over to the LAF to subsequently face an orderly trial (Harik 2004, pp. 135–7).

From a Lebanese perspective, the liberation of the South was widely attributed to the armed struggle of Hizbullah, a view shared by its supporters and most of its domestic opponents,[82] and May 25th henceforth received the status of a national holiday; "Resistance and Liberation Day." Speaking for official Lebanon and therefore implicitly for Damascus, however, President Émile Lahoud was quick to point out that, in his reading, the Sheb`a farms and the village of Ghajar also belong to Lebanon and not to the Israeli annexed Syrian Golan Heights, as claimed by Israel, the US and the UN. The withdrawal was therefore deemed incomplete. Hizbullah, not very surprisingly, shared this reading, as did the vast majority of Lebanese (Harik 2004, pp. 139–40).[83] In any case, the general opinion approved of Hizbullah´s performance in the South (Harik 2004, pp. 150–1) and the following years marked a rare period of pronounced internal calm in Lebanon.

The Israeli pullout yet also triggered a re-evaluation of the Syrian presence (MEF/ USCfL 2000a). Some – especially those, who had chosen the path of open opposition and regularly faced the repercussions (such as the Aounists) – identified the Syrian tutelage as the main problem (MEF/ USCfL 2000a; ibid. 2000b; ibid. 2000c; ibid. 2001b). In general, this holds true for those parts of the population (in particular Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims) hailing from geographical areas in which the Syrians had a quasi-continuous presence since their troops´ first arrival in Lebanon in 1976. For many others – including many Shi`a, even if they would not say so publicly – the Syrian overlordship constituted the lesser evil in comparison to the prospect of a more far-reaching Israeli one.[84] From such a perspective, the Syrian presence had foremost served as a guarantee against further Israeli ambitions in Lebanon. Now that the Israelis were gone, the question if the Syrian counterweight was needed any longer became more pressing (Harris 2012, p. 264; cf. Bouyoub 2013, p. 178).

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[80] This situation had given rise, in 1997, to the "*Four Mothers – Leave Lebanon in Peace Movement,*" which intensively campaigned for its demand that no more Israeli sons would die in Lebanon in vain (Harb 2011, pp. 218–9).

[81] Most importantly, Israel sought guarantees for a calm withdrawal, and for the safety of its troops and those of the SLA, demanding the LAF to move into the South immediately.

[82] This view stands in contrast to the official Israeli position, depicting a voluntary retreat.

[83] The Lebanese government filed a complaint to the UN, which disputed Israel´s compliance with UNSC Resolution 425 (UNSC 1978).

The exclusively Christian Qornet Shehwan Gathering illustrates the overall sentiment characterizing the period in focus here. It was founded on May 1st, 2001 with the blessing of the Maronite Patriarch Cardinal Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir in the eponymous town of Qornet Shehwan (Rabil 2011, p. 97), which is also the seat of the Maronite Archbishopric of the Metn district in Mount Lebanon. Originally, it included nearly all noteworthy Maronite-based political currents of Lebanon – including the Aounists, the LF, al-Katā´ib [Phalanges], the Maronite League and the National Liberal Party –[85] as well as a whole number of influential individuals from the cultural, political and business spheres (Middle East Mirror [MEM] n.d.; cf. Dick 2002). Its founding principles, at least in wording, were reflective of an inclusive nationalist spirit, and not so much Maronite-centered as the confessional composition of the gathering might suggest. Indeed, Lebanon, with the explicit inclusion of the South, was here defined as "the final homeland of all of its people" and Israel identified as "the major source of danger to the people and the land" (MEM n.d.). Hizbullah was furthermore acknowledged as both patriotically Lebanese and successful in the defense of the homeland against hostile Israeli actions and ambitions.[86]

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[84] Acts of oppression on behalf of the Syrian authorities, neither in Syria, nor in Lebanon, ever systematically followed an ethnic, ethnicized confessional, or confessional pattern of discrimination, but at all times a political – and pronounced pragmatic – one. The basic question was, and still is: Are you with, or against us? This explains why victims of Syria in Lebanon are to be found among all groups alike (Harris 2012, pp. 261–3), only that the brunt was naturally borne by those living under its direct rule.

[85] The 'Aounists were the first to desert the Gathering, almost immediately after its inception due to numerous political disagreements (MEF/ USCfL 2001b). Many other original members followed over the months and years to come, and by today it plays no political role anymore.

[86] The accordant passage reads: "The success of the Resistance, given the popular and national support, in inflicting defeat on the occupying enemy and liberating the land, was an additional demonstration of the right of Lebanon and the Lebanese to exist and to live together and an indication of their high-level contribution to Arab life." (MEM n.d.)

On the other side, the principles also entailed diplomatically phrased demands for a full Syrian withdrawal and the subsequent launching of “brotherly” relations between two sovereign states, as well as the spread of governmental authority over all parts of Lebanon (clearly addressing Hizbullah, and the issue of its arms remaining outside of state control).[87] Meanwhile, for such Lebanese parties and individuals supporting the sustained presence of Syrian troops, a main point – besides deterrence *vis-à-vis* Israel – was the stabilizing role they had played in post-Civil War Lebanon (Al-Jazeera 14/10/2007). While these points mattered for Hizbullah, its challenge was yet much more existential; to sustain its popular legitimacy and semi-formal role as a national resistance movement, without the cover it had enjoyed under Syrian tutelage (Hage Ali 2019, p. 7). After all, Syria´s role in the rise of Hizbullah in the post-war setting of the country was no secret to the party´s adversaries. It was around that time that machinery was set in motion, which actively aimed at cornering and in the long term neutralizing Hizbullah in Lebanon. The accordant activities and processes were taking place overwhelmingly abroad and so the internal calm in Lebanon was not immediately disrupted. In retrospect, however, the period between 2000 and 2004 appears as the proverbial calm before the storm.

The prelude to the crisis came with the converging interests of some influential actors, all of which, for different reasons, wanted to see Syria leaving Lebanon. All but one of them sought to weaken Hizbullah, Syria and/ or Iran at once. Forcing Syria out of Lebanon was only correctly identified as a very effective point of leverage. The “Resistance Axis” in general and Hizbullah in particular appeared just too successful in accomplishing their own aims. Especially Israel was alarmed by Hizbullah´s growing role in thwarting its interests and ambitions in Lebanon and, increasingly, in the region at large, a concern explicitly shared by Israel’s most important ally, the USA.

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[87] The relevant passage reads: “However, this success [of the Lebanese Resistance and people, see above] will not be complete until government institutions, especially the army, return to the liberated South to protect the people and the land as the embodiment of the return of the South to the state as an indivisible and effective unit of the nation. […] The maintaining of relations with Syria with the present level of faults and shortcomings is detrimental to both countries and is rejected by the Lebanese who unanimously agree on the establishment of the best possible brotherly ties and relations between the two countries and on the preserving of historic links between the two peoples in terms of friendly ties and common interests. This objective will not be achieved unless Lebanon regains its full independence, sovereignty and decision-making freedom. The equation, which should regulate relations between the two countries, should be based on a combination of the closest degree of solidarity and cooperation and the clearest components of sovereignty and independence. This equation paves the way for conclusion of the historic settlement, which ensures the stability of the two countries and lays the foundation for sound and permanent relations of cooperation.” (ibid.)

Syria had been a strategic ally of the US; it participated with troops in the US-led strike against Iraq under Saddam Hussein in the Second Gulf War (Iraq vs. Kuwait/ US-led coalition vs. Iraq, 1990-91)[88] and initially also in the US-led “War on Terror” that was proclaimed immediately after the attacks of September 11th, 2001. Syria was furthermore considered a potential ally by the George W. Bush administration (2001-2009), prior to its large-scale invasion of Iraq in 2003. This time, however, Syrian President Bashar al-Asad (1965-) – who had in 2000 succeeded his father, the late Hafiz al-Asad (life: 1930-2000; Syrian Presidency: 1970-2000) – rejected the idea of participation and voiced opposition to the war instead, which marks the beginning of the deterioration of US-Syrian relations.[89]

Most of the Gulf monarchies under the lead of Saudi Arabia have at all times been skeptical of self-confident Shi`i political actors (anti-Shi'ism is a feature implicit in *wahhābī* ideology, the official doctrine of Saudi Arabia´s state and society), especially when such are allied to Saudi Arabia´s main regional economic and political rival – the Islamic Republic of Iran. From that point of view, curbing Hizbullah directly translates into containing Iran and a similar scheme applies to Saudi Arabia´s view on the Syrian-Iranian alliance.

France, the former mandate power in both Lebanon and Syria, has continuously lost influence here since both states gained independence in 1943/46 (Lebanon) and 1946 (Syria) respectively, and has long been eager to re-establish itself as a power broker in the region. To this aim its leadership has in this period chosen to join the ranks of the influential Western and pro-Western powers and echoed their friend-enemy-conceptions.

We know that opposition to Syrian tutelage in its most basic form was widespread in particular among Maronites. Yet, the Aounists are the core actor to be listed here, as they came to play a decisive role in the process leading to Syria’s withdrawal. They still pose an exception within this equation for two reasons. For one, they account for the sole non-state actor. Moreover, and more importantly, while originally sharing much of the US government’s´ voiced concerns and arguments, in approaching them, they explicitly aimed at nothing but a complete Syrian pullout from Lebanon. It was to this end that they restlessly knocked on the doors of the major decision-making circles worldwide.

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[88] Saddam Hussein, at that time faced with a UN deadline for an unconditional Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, offered to comply only if Israel was to pull out from occupied territories in Palestine and Lebanon, and Syria from Lebanon, besides some further issues. Hussein´s offer, however, was rejected by the US on the spot (Association for Diplomatic Studies & Training [ADST] 2015; LA Times 16/2/1991; Baltimore Sun 3/1/2001).

[89] The US was moreover becoming frustrated with Damascus´ treatment of the Middle East peace process and began to openly distrust the Syrians´ sincerity in this respect. It was still during the reign of late Hafiz al-Asad that Syria had accepted to engage in bilateral peace negotiations with Israel (Hage Ali 2019, p. 5).

Their center of activities, besides France, was the USA. Here – after the al-Qaʿida attacks of September 11th, 2001 – their appeals at once met open ears, and so the Aounists´ efforts were once more intensified, culminating in Michel Aoun´s testimony at a hearing of the US Congress House Subcommittee on International Relations, in September 2003 (Aoun 2003). The US Congress passed the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act (SALSRA) in December 2003. Then US President George W. Bush signed the implementing order in May 2004 (Schenker 2006; US Congress 2006, p. 53) and therewith enacted a comprehensive package of sanctions against Syria. In the words of the Bush Administration´s press office at that time, the "[i]mplementation of sanctions comes after many months of diplomatic efforts to convince the Syrian government to change its unacceptable behavior." (White House - Office of the Press Secretary 2004) This in turn prepared the ground for the UNSC passing Resolution 1559 in September 2004 (US Congress 2006, p.7). It basically called for "all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon" (with a clear reference to Syria) as well as "for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias" (generally understood to primarily address Hizbullah, and secondary some Palestinian armed groups) (UNSC 2004a). Thus, as the result of a process centrally involving the Aounists, the international pressure on Syria was raised sharply, and the stage was set for the enforcement of its pullout from Lebanon.[90] All that was needed now was an occasion. It came with the assassination of Lebanon´s former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri on February 14th, 2005.

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[90] In anticipation of such a development, the Syrian leadership had attempted in advance, to take measures to avert what it viewed as an international plot against itself. Its main action in this respect consisted of enforcing a one-time, exceptional amendment of article 49 of the Lebanese constitution (prohibiting that a president serves for more than six consecutive years) (Government of Lebanon 1926, chapter one, article 49, p. 10) in order of subsequently prolonging the six-year-tenure of the then actually outgoing President Émile Lahoud – a close ally of the Syrian government – by three more years (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2008). To this end, Bashar al-Asad had summoned Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri in late August 2004, "to instruct him to support the amendment. Hariri previously had strongly opposed such a move, but apparently changed his mind after meeting Syria's top official in Lebanon, Intelligence Chief Rustom Ghazaleh, on August 27. After meeting Al Assad, Hariri reportedly informed the cabinet that ʻthe situation in the region requires special measures and a continuity of leadership.'" (Ibid.) Despite the significant turmoil this decision triggered, it was pushed through in parliament – with al-Hariri´s majority block voting in favor of extension – on September 3rd, 2004. The step caused, however, the resignation in protest of four ministers, three of whom belonged to Walid Jumblatt's Democratic Gathering Bloc, on September 6th. Moreover, in contrast to 1995, when a similar action had occurred to extend the presidential term of then-President Elias Hrawi, this time, both the US and France criticized the Syrian-Lebanese maneuver (ibid.). Under these circumstances, it did not take al-Hariri long to change course himself and to start voicing support for Resolution 1559 and its central concerns – which drew the massive anger of the Syrian leadership. He subsequently resigned as prime minister on October 20th, 2004 and was succeeded in this post by Omar Karami, who entertained equally close – yet, in contrast to al-Hariri, still unhampered – relations to the Syrian regime. On February 14th, 2005, Rafiq al-Hariri alongside twenty-two other persons (among those several of his bodyguards) were killed through a 1,800 kilograms-TNT load that was hidden in a Mitsubishi van parked at the roadside, which detonated when his motorcade passed by St. Georges Hotel in Beirut (the blast wounded more than a hundred additional persons and gutted a number of large buildings) (ICG 2010, p. 2).

The incident was to send shockwaves around the world. The Presidents of France and the USA, Jacques R. Chirac and George W. Bush respectively "headed the chorus of international outrage." (Harris 2012, p. 269) In a joint statement of February 21st, 2005, they strongly condemned the assassination of al-Hariri, and directly linked this to the goals and implementation of UNSC Resolution 1559, thus unequivocally, if so far only implicitly, suggesting a Syrian responsibility (White House - Office of the Press Secretary 2005). Also many Lebanese and observers from all around the world immediately blamed the Syrian government for the assassination (Bortolazzi 2013, pp. 5–6), which is not very surprising, given Syria´s record of interference in Lebanon in general and the preceding chain of events in particular. On the other hand, the idea of a foreign plot to force Syria out of Lebanon is also not too far-fetched, when considering the constellation of interests at that time. It is thus not surprising that both theories had (and still have) their adherents in Lebanon. More importantly, however, it was exactly this question that served to initiate a nearly perfect political polarization in the country for years to come. The opposing coalitions that now formed up were chiefly identified by their stance towards Syria – i.e. "pro-" or "anti-Syrian" respectively.

The "anti-Syrian" side originally consisted of the Aounists (mainly Maronite/ Christian), the Future Movement (Tayyār al-Mustaqbal, mainly Sunni Muslim), the PSP (mainly Druze), the LF (Maronite/ Christian), al-Katā´ib (Maronite/ Christian), the NLP (Maronite/ Christian), the Independence Movement (Maronite/ Christian), the Lebanese National Bloc (mainly Maronite/ Christian), the Armenian Democratic Liberal and Social Democrat Hunchakian Parties (both Armenian Christian), the Syriac Union of Lebanon (Syriac/ Assyrian Christian) the Free Shi`a Movement (Shi`i Muslim), the remnants of the Qornet Shehwan Gathering (Maronite/ Christian) and a number of further, smaller groups.

On the other, the "pro-Syrian" side, gathered the Amal movement and Hizbullah (both Shi`i Muslim), the SSNP (mainly Orthodox Christian) and the Lebanese branch of the Arab Socialist Ba`th Party (mixed), al-Marada (mainly Maronite Christian), the Glory Movement and the Popular Nasserist Organization (both Sunni Muslim), the Lebanese Democratic Party (LDP) (Druze), the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Armenian Christian), the Skaff Bloc (Greek Catholic Christian), and others. The Lebanese Communists (mixed), finally, were split, and represented with factions in both coalitions.

On February 21st, 2005, tens of thousands of “anti-Syrian” Lebanese gathered at the assassination site to hold their first rally in memory of Rafiq al-Hariri and in protest of the Syrian occupation. The masses blamed both Syria and President Émile Lahoud for al-Hariri´s violent death. In the weeks to come, demonstrations of this camp were held every Monday at Beirut´s Martyr´s Square. At the same time, similar rallies were held by “anti-Syrian” Lebanese in the worldwide diaspora (Bortolazzi 2013, p. 8).

Upon a call from Hassan Nasrallah, the “pro-Syrian” Lebanese, gathered at Martyr´s Square in downtown Beirut, on March 8th, 2005, in impressive numbers, in memory of Rafiq al-Hariri, in support of Syria – Syria was explicitly thanked for its role in Lebanon – and in protest of Israeli and US meddling in Lebanese affairs. In Nasrallah´s speech, UNSC Resolution 1559 was criticized and rejected as being gerrymandered to serve Israeli and US interests. Despite all the implications a Syrian withdrawal would have for Hizbullah, however, Nasrallah avoided drawing any red lines in this respect (Nasrallah 2008, quoted after Noe 2012, pp. 319–27). The numbers of these “pro-Syrian” protestors dwarfed all former demonstrations of the “anti-Syrians.” Estimations varied, ranging from about 200,000 (CNN 9/3/2005) to some 800,000 (Noe 2012, p. 319).[91]

On March 14th, 2005, exactly one month after Rafiq al-Hariri´s assassination, a massive crowd of “anti-Syrian” protestors – estimated at nearly 1.2 million (Bortolazzi 2013, p. 6) – gathered on Martyrs Square to demand an immediate and comprehensive Syrian withdrawal alongside the restoration of Lebanon´s sovereignty. Further demands included an international investigation into the case of al-Hariri´s murder and the termination of employment contracts of all Syrian-backed senior security staff within the state structure. It was this event which received the largest amount of international attention and which constitutes the main reference point for what has since, in Lebanon and the region, been referred to as the “*Intifāḍat al-Istiqlāl*” (“Independence Uprising”) (Bortolazzi 2013, p. 5), and internationally as the “Cedar Revolution” – a term coined by then U.S.-Under-Secretary of State, Paula Dobriansky, in a February 28th news conference (Washington Post 3/3/2005).

The March 8th and March 14th demonstrations, i.e. the respective largest rallies held, became eponymous for the new coalitions in the making. From now on, and for years to come, when referring to the “pro-” and “anti-Syrian” Lebanese camps, the talk was about

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[91] Another notable rally of the same coalition was held on March 13th, 2005, under participation of “[t]ens of thousands of pro-Syrian protesters” in the southern district capital of Nabatiyah (United Press International [UPI] 13/3/2005).

March 8th and March 14th respectively and close to all Lebanese – individually or organized in associations of whatsoever kind – were swiftly drawn into this equation. This brought about a sustained polarization of Lebanese society as a whole. Soon, finding out if the counterpart belonged to March 8th or March 14th became the first thing to be settled between Lebanese when encountering each other. It served as what one might label as a "basket-property," informing about many aspects at once (pro- or anti-Hizbullah´s arms; pro- or anti-Iran, -Syria, -Saudi Arabia, -USA, etc.) and therefore a kind of short-cut to the usual Lebanese way of finding out about one another, even if the latter was at no time suspended. It was only that knowing to which political camp the counterpart belonged seemed for many sufficient to decide if further inquiries were necessary.[92]

The Independence Uprising had directed the attention of the international community to the Syrian role in Lebanon, which was henceforth viewed critically by all governments belonging to the NATO-sphere of the world and partially beyond. In that sense, one may say that the now following withdrawal of all Syrian forces and security staff from Lebanon was a development sealed by the popular uprising, while it would be greatly exaggerated to say that the protests alone brought this development about.[93]

The Syrian government had started to react to the increased pressure towards the end of February 2005; that is only a few days after the first huge "anti-Syrian" protest. Then Lebanese Defense Minister Abdel Rahim Murad, in a February 24th telephone interview with United Press International (UPI), stated that "[t]he Syrian army will start pulling back to the Bekaa Valley in the eastern part of the country," and that Lebanese and Syrian army commanders were currently meeting to discuss the details of the withdrawal and a timetable (UPI 24/2/2005). The "pro-Syrian" Karami Government, in the meantime, had opposed all plans for a full Syrian withdrawal and was therefore subjected to the same pressure as the Syrians themselves. Thus, on February 28th, Omar Karami declared the resignation of his government, which was yet to remain in office in a caretaker function until further notice. On March 5th, Syrian President Bashar al-Asad announced, "We will withdraw our forces stationed in Lebanon fully to the Bekaa region and later to the Lebanese-Syrian border areas," (Guardian 5/3/2005) thereby leaving open which side of the border he had in mind for the definitive destination of his troops. The Syrian regime was obviously still wagering on a compromise solution, whereby it would withdraw its troops to the Bekaa valley and therewith retroactively comply with the accordant stipulation of the Ta`if Accord (Ta`if Accord 1989) (see above). On March 10th, however, the President of the Republic, Émile Lahoud, reappointed Karami as Prime Minister and once more tasked him with forming a new government. When Karami´s attempts to bring to life a national unity cabinet failed, he stepped down again on April 13th (BBC 13/4/2005), this time irrevocably. Lahoud then, on April 15th, 2005, appointed the moderately "pro-Syrian" former Minister of Public Works and Transport, Najib Miqati, to form and preside over yet another caretaker cabinet (Daily Star 19/4/2005).

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[92] This detail strongly suggests that also the usual Lebanese way of finding out about one another most commonly serves to find out about political loyalties and stances.

[93] This is by no means to say, however, that the uprising was not a courageous and also effective undertaking, given that the Syrians had not withdrawn so far, and their intelligence services remained highly active in Lebanon.

With both external and internal pressure on the Syrian leadership increasing, Asad soon realized that the time to negotiate or impose a compromise had ended. He thus started to step-wise pull out his troops and security staff up until April 26th, which was the day the last remaining 500 or so Syrian soldiers left Lebanon for Syria after a "bittersweet" farewell ceremony in an airbase located in the Bekaa, a few miles from the Syrian-Lebanese border (NY Times 26/4/2005).

With Syria out, things began to move quickly in Lebanon. In contrast to Karami, who was viewed by his opponents as a mere extension of the Syrian regime, the billionaire Miqati, although known to be "pro-Syrian" too, was able to gain a minimum level of trust from the March 14th forces. This allowed him to swiftly set up a national unity government and to call for parliamentary elections before April 30th, so that these could still be commenced before the acting parliaments´ regular four-year term was to end on May 31st, 2005.[94]

On May 7th, 2005, Michel Aoun returned to Lebanon after fifteen years of exile in France. To the surprise of many – including the Aounists themselves –, his belonging to the "anti-Syrian" March 14th coalition was not to prevail (Harris 2012, p. 270). The reasons were increasing tensions between the General and other leaders of his camp that crystallized fully only upon the former´s return to the Lebanese stage in person. The cards – in particular within the Maronite political milieu – were now to be shuffled anew, and as it turned out, a yawning gulf prevailed between the respective ideas about the distribution of political shares. This evolving competition between Michel Aoun and all other components of the March 14th alliance turned into verbal hostility almost on the spot. The Aounists therefore cut all their ties to their former camp and started into the parliamentary elections on their own as a third force besides March 8th and March 14th (Haddad 2005, p. 311). The elections were eventually held between May 29th and June 19th, 2005 (ibid., p. 305).

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[94] Originally, elections had been scheduled already for March, yet, no government was in place to call for them in time (BBC 14/5/2005; ibid. 13/4/2005).

Because of the general set-up of the Lebanese electoral system, which is intended to encourage intra-community rather than inter-community competition, and because of the specifics of the particular election law in place in 2005 (the 2000 version), important parties of both March 8th and March 14th found it suitable to form electoral alliances with one another. Thus, "[s]ome of Syria´s staunchest allies – such as Amal, Hezbollah, the Ba`th Party and SSNP – were as a result associated to al-Hariri, Jumblatt, and Quornet Shehwan election lists [which] left the Free Patriotic Current [i.e. the FPM] with little room for maneuver." (Ibid., p. 309)

In the outcome, al-Hariri´s Future Movement obtained thirty-six of the 128 available parliamentary seats and thus captured the largest single block, followed by the Jumblatt-led PSP with sixteen, the Aounist´s with fourteen, Harakat Amal with fifteen, and Hizbullah with fourteen seats. The Future Movement, the PSP, Amal and Hizbullah, now forged what came to be known as the Quadripartite Alliance and, on July 19th, 2005, the newly appointed Prime Minister Fouad Siniora (Future Movement) announced the formation of a fresh national unity government (which also included some independents and each one representative of the LF, al-Katā´ib, President Émile Lahoud and the Qornet Shehwan Gathering). Hizbullah´s leadership had for the first time in the organization´s parliamentary history decided to leave the path of loyal opposition and to join a government to which it contributed two ministers (Muhammad Fneish for Energy and Water and Trad Hamadeh for Labour). After Syria's retreat, the party deemed it necessary to make its own influence felt on the political level more strongly in order to safeguard its vital interests (Bouyoub 2013, p. 180). This task must so far be registered as fulfilled, given that Hizbullah´s protective role and function as a national resistance movement has been acknowledged by Siniora´s as by all successive cabinets up until 2018 in what is commonly referred to as the "Army-People-Resistance-Formula." The Aounists, in the meantime, commanded the only larger block in parliament – twenty-one seats altogether –, which remained outside of the governmental equation and thus, for the time being, were to constitute the sole true parliamentary opposition (Harris 2012, p. 270).

The Quadripartite Alliance fell apart along the March 8th/ March 14th divide towards the end of 2005, when Amal and Hizbullah ministers enacted their empty-chair policy in protest of the Siniora government´s unilateral invitation of the UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) (soon to be tasked with the investigating the assassinations of Rafiq al-Hariri and other high-level personalities in Lebanon) (Ilias 2011, p. 13). To be sure, the main argument was not about the question if there should be a major investigation at all – its necessity was agreed upon by all parties – but about the framework and conditions within and under which it should be finally set up.[95]

On February 5th, 2006, thousands of mainly Muslims – many of them Salafists from Tripoli and elsewhere in Lebanon (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.1 2012) – attended a rally to protest the recent publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad by a Danish newspaper. At least partially misinformed, the angry masses stormed Beirut´s Christian neighborhood of Ashrafiyah where the Danish embassy is located and set it on fire. "On their way, they vandalized shops, cars, and churches, shocking and horrifying the population." (Rabil 2014, p. 194)

Only one day later, on February 6th, 2006, as a result of a process that – according to central insiders – set in around the time of Aoun´s return to Lebanon (early May 2005) but went on unnoticed by anyone other than the senior leaders and negotiators themselves (Bouyoub 2013, pp. 178–9), Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah and former General Michel Aoun, publicly signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on behalf of their respective parties in the Mar Mikhael (Saint Michael´s) church in Beirut´s mixed Muslim-Christian suburb Shiyyah. The contrast to what happened the day before could not have been more striking.

The MoU laid the foundation for a new alliance between the FPM and Hizbullah, which not only transcended the borders of both the Quadripartite Alliance and the March 8th/ March 14th divide, but was also to prove remarkably stable in the face of the emerging crises, most imminently, the 2006 July War (July 12th–August 14th, 2006). With respect to Maronite-Shi`i relations, the FPM-Hizbullah *entente* marks a watershed in more than one respect.

However, while the novel agreement drew in major factions of the Maronite/ Christians and Shi`a – and was viewed with sympathy by most allies of other communities too –, it was opposed by many Sunnis, Druze and, most importantly, other Maronites. This was mainly because they interpreted it as a mere marriage of convenience in which both Aoun and Hizbullah, in an opportunist spirit, followed very clear aims (Aoun becoming president and

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[95] The March 14th actors, from the onset, opted for establishing a tribunal under chapter VII of the UN Charter, "Actions with respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression" (UN 1945), which principally grants the UN permission to act without parliamentary approval, and, crucially, to resort to sanctions up to military force, if deemed necessary to coerce the tribunal´s establishment and working ability. The March 8th representatives, in contrast, argued for establishing a tribunal under chapter VI, "Pacific Settlement of Disputes" (ibid.), which would have left the final say with the national legal authorities (Sakmani 2008, p. 88).

Hizbullah remaining “armed and dangerous” respectively) (e.g. Author´s interv. E.M.2 2013). It was furthermore understood as a partisan alliance; politically directed against everybody not belonging to the signatory parties or their allies. In light of the Salafists´ vandalizing Ashrafiyah one day earlier, according to the senior Hizbullah functionary Ghaleb Abou Zaynab (who belonged to the architects of the MoU), the decision to sign the paper in a church was interpreted by the Future Movement as deliberately targeting it, even though, he said, “we signed [the Memorandum] in a church, but it was only … just something that … a coincidence.” (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.1 2012)

However, when developments in Lebanon would indeed let the FPM quickly close ranks with March 8th, this only fostered the caveats of its adversaries. The Lebanese journalist Hazem Saghieh, for instance, deemed the MoU as “[t]he Origin [sic!] of the current crisis”, describing it as “a lack of understanding with all those who are not part of it, and an attempt to drag them into conflict, the outcome of which is already known, as a result of the balance of power that the 'understanding' has designed.” (Asharq al-Awsat 7/7/2019) Also regional turmoil – in particular the civil war dragging on in neighboring Syria since 2011 and the Saudi-Iranian conflict, which is widely imagined as one between “Arab Sunnis” and “Persian Shi`a” – has reinforced perceptions of the MoU or the subsequent alliance as one mainly struck between two minorities, that is essentially “sectarian” (Mneimneh 2012), in defence against what is imagined as regional Sunni hegemonism backed by a Sunni jihadist onslaught (Al-Arabiya 9/9/2017).

As we will yet come to see, the signatory parties themselves envisioned their MoU quite differently from any such interpretations, as a basis for a much more extensive national accord document, intended and designed to draw in further important actors over time. They portray it as a step that immediately aimed at preventing more serious civil strife. Many of their followers and supporters, meanwhile, considered the alliance emerging in the wake of the MoU as basically “theirs,” and as a kind of natural outcome of a seldom seen opportunity to get to know one another more intimately (see below).

To tackle these apparent contradictions, in the following sections, we will first have a closer look at the two central actors involved, followed by an analysis of the nature of the MoU and the subsequent alliance. Thereafter, we will turn to the performance of the allies and the development of relations within the context of political events shaping the main period of investigation (May 2005 – May 2018). Finally, we will acquaint ourselves with some of the people involved on the grassroots level and beyond, to understand especially their motivations for participating in, and in fact carrying, this cross-communal rapprochement process. All of this will lead us to a conclusion, encompassing the final analysis, based on a synthesis of the different intermediate results.

3.2 THE CENTRAL ACTORS

3.2.1 Hizbullah

The Lebanese Hizbullah is a phenomenon as multifaceted as it is contested, constituting a non-state military organization, a social movement and a political party at the same time. After having experienced significant processes of transformation in the corresponding military, sociopolitical, and programmatic-ideological spheres, it nowadays represents one of the most powerful actors on the scene and has significantly enlarged its regional reach. Thus, a loose grouping of comparably inexperienced, yet highly motivated *mujahidūn* (those engaged in the holy struggle [jihad]) has turned into one of the most effective and capable non-state military actors of our times. A clandestine and militant association of Shi`i Lebanese Islamists has become an influential religio-political actor in Lebanon and far beyond and an anti-systemic fundamental opposition party with a transnational orientation has developed into an Islamist party belonging to the political mainstream and following a pronounced nationalist program (Sakmani 2016, p. 159; Kranz 2019). Its different roles, overall performance and very identity are thereby subject to controversial, often diametrically opposed assessments, depending on the differing friend-enemy conceptions prevailing among the variant participants in the debate. Most importantly with regard to the study at hand, Hizbullah today claims for itself a primarily nationalist agenda (Moqawama.org 2009), which is emphatically endorsed by its followers and allies, while being accused by its opponents of being a mere tool in the hands of Tehran; following Iranian, rather than genuine Lebanese interests (Author´s interv. E.M.2 2013).

The central Iranian role with regard to Hizbullah´s inception and the Islamic Republic´s continuous funding of the organization ever since are indeed factors that should not be underestimated. Hizbullah´s official ideological submission to the *walī al-faqīh* (Guardian Jurisprudent), currently embodied by the Iranian supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the intimate relationships of members of Hizbullah´s elite with leading figures from among the Iranian religious and political establishment, Iran´s and Hizbullah´s rather similar – yet, by no means identical – Shi`i Islamist ideologies and both parties´ declared belonging to the "Resistance Axis," which has long positioned itself against US, Israeli and Saudi Arabian regional interests; all of these aspects fuel the debate about the degree of Iranian influence on Hizbullah vice versa the latter’s independence and perceived “Lebaneseness.”

Controversial is furthermore the question if Hizbullah can or must be categorized as a terrorist entity – from that point of view responsible for a whole number of activities viewed as terrorism, including the assassination of late Rafiq al-Hariri – as claimed by Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the USA – or rather as a legitimate resistance movement, guaranteeing protection from Israeli and others´ military might – as argued by its members and advocates. Similar diverging perceptions exist with regard to accusations levied against Hizbullah according to which it was engaged in various criminal activities such as international drugs and arms smuggling or money laundering. Moreover, Hizbullah´s participation in the Syrian Civil War on the side of its strategic ally, the Asad government, sparked wide-scale discontent within its own camp at first, yet, at the end of the day has been widely hailed as the only effective protection against the announced expansion plans of the Islamic State and al-Qaʿida into Lebanon, with its density of religious minorities. In the eyes of most of its adversaries, however, its move into Syria only cemented the image of the party as an irregular fighting force in the hands of the Iranian government. Finally, there is also the larger debate about the trustworthiness of Islamists´ commitments to the principles and rules of national democratic settings altogether, which is, generally speaking, doubted.

3.2.1.1 Self-image and organizational structure

Hizbullah is an Islamist organization in both external and internal perception[96] which implies an immediate claim to “*wertrationales Handeln.*” (Weber 1980, p. 12)[97] The organization therefore basically views itself as a mass movement of faithful Muslims and as such as an integral part of the worldwide Muslim community (*umma*). At the same time, however, it sees itself as belonging to a worldwide movement of the oppressed, deprived and disenfranchised (*al-mustaḍ`afūn*) against the imperialism and Zionism of “the arrogant” (*al-mustakbirūn*) (Sakmani 2008, p. 46). From the outset it therefore expressed solidarity with “all the world's oppressed peoples.” (Hizbullah/ al-Ahd 1985, quoted after Alagha 2006, p.

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[96] Members of Hizbullah occasionally refer to themselves as *islāmiyūn* (Islamists), while in the international media, Hizbullah is frequently labeled as such. This does by no means imply, however, that both perspectives would rely on the same concept when applying the term Islamism.

[97] The German concepts „*wertrationales Handeln*“ and „*zweckrationales Handeln*“ (Weber 1980, p. 12) are both borrowed from Max Weber and do “[…] not translate smoothly into English.” To put it in a nutshell, the first refers to “goal-oriented rational action in relation to values or ultimate ends” and the latter to “goal-oriented rational behavior based on observation and logic.” (Elwell 2013, pp. 146–8)

227) This and further passages of the “Open Letter,” from which the former quote is taken, demonstrated the party´s readiness to also cooperate with Sunnis, non-Muslims and even atheists. In contrast to its Islamist self-conception, this points to an orientation much more based on *“zweck-”* than on *“wertrationales Handeln.”* (Weber 1980, p. 12)[98] Hizbullah sees no contradictions resulting from the distinct components of its identity, but to the opposite, rather perceives them as complementary, allowing its leadership to weigh and pronounce or sideline them according to the distinct requirements arising from ever changing circumstances.

If the emphasis of the transnational focus indicated by the term “world” has never completely waned – which becomes apparent in Hizbullah´s attention to the plight of the Palestinians and in its regular statements in support of suppressed groups elsewhere – it has yet, by today, been superseded by a Lebanese-nationalist self-image (Sakmani 2016, p. 160). However, as Hizbullah interprets all of its intentional activities as “resistance” (*muqāwama*) in the long term aiming at the ideal of what it depicts as a “society of resistance,” (*al-mujtama`a al-muqāwama*) (Harb/ Leenders 2005, pp. 188–91) we see both the transnational and the national foci harmoniously included within this concept. “Resistance” must be furthermore registered as the *de facto* prime focus of Hizbullah ever since stepping on the scene in the Israeli-occupied Lebanese South in the early 1980s.

Hizbullah has throughout its existence voluntarily subordinated its highest decision-making structure to the *wilāyat al-faqīh* (Guardianship of the [most learned Islamic] Jurisprudent) (Rosiny 1996, p. 131), which became state doctrine and the base of the political system of Iran upon the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The revolution´s paramount leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, in turn became the first *walī al-faqīh*. After his death in 1989, he was succeeded by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who remains in this position at the time of writing. For those who acknowledge the legitimacy of *wilāyat al-faqīh*, the question of the *walī*´s position within the power structure governing modern Iran is irrelevant, as he is not seen as the leader of any national people but ultimately of the *umma* in its entirety. The office could thus be filled by a suitable person from whatsoever place in the world – at least in theory.

The highest decision making body within Hizbullah, the *shūrā* council (*majlis al-shūrā*) is a seven-member advisory board, consisting overwhelmingly of clerics. They are elected by the central council (*majlis al-markazi*) – an ad-hoc assembly of the 200 most honored members – for a period of three years. The *majlis al-shūrā* then elects (or obviously rather appoints) from among its midst a secretary general and his deputy – since 1992, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah and Shaykh Naim Qassem respectively – as well as five chairmen each of which heads one of the five councils making up the party´s administrative executive apparatus.

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[98] See above.

Decisions in the *majlis al-shūrā* are either reached unanimously or by majority vote. When facing disagreement or deadlock, recourse may be taken to the *walī al-faqīh* for arbitration and in such cases his final ruling is incontestable. Decisions of the *majlis al-shūrā* itself are definite and religiously binding for all members. This centralist – indeed Leninist – basic structure resulting from the absolute authority and decision-making power of the *majlis al-shūrā* notwithstanding, Hizbullah resorts to decentralized structures when and where its leaders perceive this as necessary, e.g. in the military sphere.

The five councils of the administrative executive apparatus are comparable with governmental ministries and are divided according to policy fields and responsibilities Sakmani 2008, pp. 49–50). Hizbullah distinguishes between a) the Executive Council (with various subdivisions for social, educational, health, labor, finance and foreign policy, amongst others) b) Judicial Affairs (issuing religious rulings and opinion, arbitration, etc.) c) Parliamentary Affairs (overseeing Hizbullah´s involvement in the Lebanese legislature) d) Politburo (taking care of internal affairs and public relations) and e) Jihad (coordination of the armed struggle and the Islamic Resistance, including recruitment, training, security issues, etc.) (Qassem 2005, pp. 62–4).

Hizbullah used to receive generous payments from the Iranian government (as well as from other Iranian power centers) surely amounting to tens – and given Hizbullah´s ever increasing military apparatus and firepower – likely hundreds of millions in USD annually (Author´s interview IE.Hzb.1 2013). The exact sums are neither known to the public nor at all ascertainable (and any claims to the contrary can be safely ignored). However, recent US sanctions against both Iran and Hizbullah had the effect of diminishing these payments, prompting Hassan Nasrallah to call upon Hizbullah´s support base to increase donations in March 2019 (Reuters 8/3/2019). Aside of the Iranian funding basket, Hizbullah also commands its own sources of financing, such as the traditional religious taxes paid by believers to religious authorities within Hizbullah (besides the poor-tax [zakat], which is obligatory for Sunnis and Shi`a alike, the latter are also required to pay one fifth of their individual annual income [*al-khums*]), charitable contributions (*ṣadaqa*), and commercially generated income. It seems probable that Hizbullah could nowadays sustain its existence without the substantial Iranian payments – except for special situations (Sakmani 2008, pp. 50–1), such as immediately after the July War 2006, when large parts of South Lebanon, and much of the country beyond, lay in ruins.

3.2.1.2 Hizbullah´s development

The military and security spheres

Hizbullah started out as a typical guerilla force, overwhelmingly applying “hit-and-run” operations of various kinds to counter the superior Israeli military machinery. Especially its spectacular self-killing attacks – framed as “martyr operations” by Hizbullah itself and “suicide attacks” by most observers – quickly caught the attention of an international audience. Until 1999, Hizbullah had declared its responsibility for twelve such operations (Norton 2007a, p. 80). None have followed ever since. The governments of Israel, the USA and other states furthermore hold the organization responsible for a number of terrorist activities,[99] most of which occurred between 1982 and 1992. After having resisted accordant calls from the USA and Israel for years, the European Union (EU) has, in July 2013, classified the “military wing” of Hizbullah as a terrorist organization for its putative involvement in an assault on a tourist bus in Burgas, Bulgaria (EU 2013, p. 5). The six-member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates [UAE], Qatar, Oman and Kuwait), and thus the first Arab states to ever do so, labeled Hizbullah a terrorist entity officially in March 2016 (Reuters 2016b), a move long expected since Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE had already taken measures in such a direction, and had been strongly pushing for collective action, since May 2013 (Levitt 2016; Reuters 4/3/2014).

Finally, Hizbullah also stands accused by the STL of standing behind the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri on February 14th, 2005 in Beirut. Five of its members have been indicted in absentia at the tribunal´s court in Leidschendam (at the outskirts of Den Haag, the Netherlands), while the highest ranking of them, Mustafa Badreddine, was himself assassinated (STL 2018a).

The party has never declared its responsibility for any of the incidences in question and has actively defended itself against the accusations of the STL. While its involvement in some of the relevant cases seems almost certain in light of given indications and conceivable vested interests (Norton 2007a, pp. 77–9; Jaber 1997, pp 97–144, cf. Ranstorp 1997),[100] others raise many questions. The STL, for instance, since day one suffers legitimacy deficits and stands accused of being politically motivated (Finnish Institute in the Middle East n.d.; Al-Manar 24/11/2010). It has moreover been massively criticized for its questionable performance during the investigation period but also in later phases (Oehmichen 2012).

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[99] The states mentioned as well as Canada and the Netherlands classify Hizbullah as such as a terrorist entity. Australia and Great Britain list persons and entities supposedly associated with Hizbullah as terrorist (Australian Government National Security 2010; AIVD 2005, p. 19). Until July 2013 the same was true for the European Union (EU) (EU 2013, p. 5).

Another controversial case is constituted by the October 1983 "suicide attacks" against the headquarters of the Multinational Forces (MNF) in Beirut, for which the US government holds Hizbullah accountable, while the latter´s spokespersons have denied any role. The most interesting point here is that Hizbullah immediately expressed its admiration for what it viewed as a highly successful operation, then claimed by a group calling itself "Islamic Jihad" (not to be confused with the PIJ) (Harik 2004, p. 36). It has been frequently assumed by certain governments and academics (broadly overlapping with those viewing Hizbullah as a terrorist organization anyway) that this group was but a code name for the party´s "terror wing." (Bell 2007, p. 108; Ranstorp 1997, pp. 62–3) Yet, whilst Hizbullah proudly declared its responsibility for similar operations against Israeli military targets in South Lebanon, it stubbornly denies its involvement in this particular case (Jaber 1997, pp. 75, 80).

It is also worthwhile to scrutinize the nature of the attack in question. Whereas a universal definition of "terrorism" remains of no avail, there is a quasi-consensus that for any credible approach in that direction both means and ends of a given action must be taken into account. This is reflected in the widely shared view – the smallest common denominator of most participants in the debate – that terrorism, in essence, is violence targeting innocent civilians for political ends. When neglecting either the means or the ends defined here, the phenomenon to be captured and described with the concept of terrorism will become indistinguishable from either ordinary crime or common military action. And here is the point to make; the targets of the attacks were all part of the Multinational Forces – they were soldiers, not civilians, and they were attacked and killed within the walls of military installations in the midst of Lebanon´s raging Civil War. In other words, irrespective of the question of who perpetrated that operation and the fact, that it constituted a "suicide mission" (which commonly leaves many observers disconcerted), it can from such a point of departure not even be considered "terrorism."

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[100] In February 1992, one of Hizbullah´s central founding figures and that-time acting Secretary General, Sayyid Abbas al-Musawi, alongside his wife, his son and a number of further people, were assassinated in an Israeli helicopter raid in South Lebanon. Musawi´s long time companion, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, succeeded him in the office of General Secretary and promised revenge. In March 1992 a massive bombing occurred in the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires (Argentine) that killed twenty-nine and wounded more than two hundred people. Both, the date and the target of the attack suggest an authorship or at least participation of Hizbullah (Nasrallah has yet denied involvement and in turn suspects the Israeli intelligence of responsibility) (Saad-Ghorayeb 2002, p. 137). Some of the group´s members were furthermore involved in the abductions of Western hostages within the course of the Lebanese Hostage Crisis (1982–92). It seems that these, however, rather followed a personal agenda, of which Hizbullah disapproved (Jaber 1997, pp. 139–44).

Since the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990, Hizbullah was able to progressively professionalize its warfare and advance its military capabilities while simultaneously increasing its resource availability. Its armament and overall military structures, by today, in many respects resemble those of a professional army – only that it employs no air and naval forces, and only recently, during its fight in Syria, established its own tank regiment (Southfront 2017), a branch for which it had no use in its traditional mode of guerilla warfare with Israel. Given that Hizbullah´s leadership intentionally keeps the movement´s military strength top-secret, we can only rely on estimations in this regard. Iran´s news agency, FARS, in October 2016, reportedly "put Hezbollah's armed strength at no less than 65,000 troops [of which an estimated 21,000 are thought to be "professional soldiers"], including reserves." (Southfront 2016) The current deputy defense minister of Israel, Ben Dahan, meanwhile, in January 2018, assumed that the numerical strength of Hizbullah´s "standing army" (full time soldiers) has risen from about 20,000 in 2006 to about 45,000 in 2016, and that its missile arsenal "has skyrocketed from around 13,000 during the 2006 conflict to more than 120,000 today." (Jerusalem Post 25/1/2018)

Whatever the exact numbers, Hizbullah´s most impressive segment is nowadays surely its rocket arsenal. While the organization used to retaliate for Israeli attacks on civil targets in Lebanon by shelling the Upper Galilee (Northern Israel) with outdated, overwhelmingly non-steerable rockets (especially the Soviet made *Katjusha*, 107 and 122 mm caliber respectively), the summer of 2006 marked an important new development: Hizbullah surprised not only Israel but also an audience worldwide with both the quality and quantity of its missile arsenal. For one, it made use of weapon systems, of which to date nobody knew that it possessed them (like the Chinese-made cruise missile type C-802 ["Silkworm"]) and secondly, it was able to sustain its daily rocket campaign against Northern Israel up until the end of the war and to gradually increase the number of missiles launched per day (the majority of which were still of the non-steerable type) (Sakmani 2008, p. 57).

The 2006 war marked yet another watershed in Hizbullah´s military development. By combining traditional guerilla practice with important facets of conventional warfare, the party for the first time applied a new, hybrid operational strategy by means of which it was able to stop the Israeli onslaught on the ground a few kilometers beyond the border only. Since Israel's withdrawal from South Lebanon in 2000, Hizbullah enjoyed a high reputation in most Arab and Islamic circles (and beyond) for being the only actor that has militarily enforced an unconditional Israeli retreat. Following the war of 2006, it thus advanced to become a modern Arab myth. In a series of German and UN mediated prisoner-exchanges with Israel between 2004 and 2008, the party was able to free all Israeli-detained Lebanese plus hundreds of other Arab (mainly Palestinian) citizens, which further boosted its reputation as a kind of savior of the Lebanese, Arab and Muslim causes and the only effective bulwark against the advancement of Israeli interests in the region (Sakmani 2016, p. 165).

In light of these developments, beginning with the year 2000, and especially in the wake of the 2006 war, the party experienced an immense inflow of potential new members, translating into a quantitative extension of its security and military apparatus (Rosiny 2012, p. 181). Although the balance of powers between Israel and Hizbullah is by no means even, its deterrence capabilities are today sufficient to uphold an effective balance of terror (Sakmani 2010, p. 56). In fact, Hassan Nasrallah declared more than once in the past few years that Hizbullah reserves the right to respond to any upcoming Israeli aggression against Lebanon with an invasion of the Galilee (Moqawama.org 16/2/2011). Hizbullah´s open intervention into the Syrian Civil War since spring 2013 has further upgraded the party´s military strength and fighting experience of its troops (in particular with respect to conventional warfare).[101] It also demonstrated to all observers that its "Islamic Resistance" is capable of leading and winning offensive battles (Sullivan 2014, p. 5), albeit its adversaries in Syria are hardly comparable with Israel in terms of their military strength or equipment.

Finally, Hizbullah entertains a highly advanced security branch, which reportedly – and given the party´s military structures almost necessarily – features an internal (*Amn al-Ḥizb* [Party Security] as well an external (*Amn al-Khārijī* [External Security]) intelligence unit (the latter of which is frequently equated with what is viewed as Hizbullah´s terrorist wing). Hizbullah´s security apparatus, for a long time was renowned for being literally impenetrable (Hamzeh 2004, p. 72–3) while at the same time capable of infiltrating Israel´s security structures (Harik 2004, pp. 130–1). And while this impressive record has been belittled to a degree after a series of assassinations of high-ranking cadres of the party between 2008 and 2016 (most observers attribute these killings to Israel) (Haaretz 18/7/2018), it must still be registered as one of the more effective intelligence establishments in the world (Sakmani 2008, pp. 53–4, 104).

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[101] Amos Harel, in an article for the Israeli daily newspaper Haaretz, from March 2016, summed this aspect up as follows: "The close work with Iranian commanders and recently, to a lesser extent, with Russian officers as well, has upgraded Hezbollahs fighting capability. Those commanders and fighters who have survived the war years have accumulated very valuable experience in difficult battles. In Syria, Hezbollah has engaged in a wide range of operations including joint actions with airplanes, helicopters, drones, artillery, tanks and advanced intelligence capabilities." (Haaretz 4/3/2016)

The socio-political sphere

In its initial phase, members of Hizbullah reportedly displayed extremist behavior. Women and girls living in areas under the party´s control were forced to veil themselves, stores selling alcoholic beverages were devastated and their owners intimidated, tea and coffee shops were closed down and gender segregation and a rigid Islamic dress code enforced at the beaches of Tyre and its surroundings (Jaber 1997, pp. 29–30, 52–3). In talks with contemporary witnesses, the author was neither able to verify, nor to unambiguously falsify these and similar charges. As for the period of time in question, confusion prevails over the factual political affiliation of the acting individuals accused. This, in particular, concerns Amal and Hizbullah. At this point in time, defections and transfers between both (and other, smaller) organizations (especially from Amal to Hizbullah) were still frequent and external distinguishing features not always unambiguous. In any case, the dominant perception then and now was that these were Hizbullah´s deeds.

As of the late 1980s, however, Hizbullah had initiated its "opening policy" (*al-infitāḥ*) and reports such as the aforementioned from now on belonged to the past (Saad-Ghorayeb 2002, p. 46). Ever since, Hizbullah has sought to engage in a dialogue with its Lebanese surroundings. On the one hand, as a Shi`i party, it thereby pursues the representation of its community within the Lebanese consociational democratic system. On the other hand, it also undertakes efforts to overcome the invisible boundaries drawn by regionalism, familarism and confessionalism, in order to reach out to a broader Lebanese audience (Harik 2004, pp. 73–9). It nowadays retains multiple contacts to all strata of Lebanese society (Kranz 2019). Those are surely not always free of strains, yet, with the important exception of armed clashes that erupted between important March 8th and March 14th forces in May 2008 (see below) – which, no matter how inescapable this action appeared to Hizbullah´s decision makers, constituted a clear violation of the party´s promise to never deploy its arms against fellow Lebanese, and naturally triggered veritable fears of the party´s military superiority among its political opponents (ICG 2008a) – they have until today remained largely non-violent in physical terms. In fact, wary of the simmering tensions on the junction of Sunni-Shi`i relations, Hizbullah has hammered out a MoU with a grouping of Lebanese Salafist currents in August 2008 that aimed exactly at defusing these tensions (Alahednews.com 2008). The agreement was heavily opposed by other, more senior, Salafists and, most importantly, by the Future movement, which is why it was suspended almost on the spot. Yet, it opened channels of communication that have since never completely disappeared and may well be revitalized in the future (Al-Akhbar 6/2/2015).

Hizbullah shows strong solidarity with – and has close ties to – the Lebanese army and is nowadays usually on good terms with UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon). At the same time, it makes constant use of its impressive media network – encompassing all thinkable components from print, over radio and TV, to the internet and social media – to communicate its own views and concerns to both its Lebanese and international audience.

A decisive factor for the broad approval Hizbullah enjoys in Lebanon,[102] aside from its widely perceived role as a bulwark against Israeli and Sunni jihadist threats, is constituted by its comprehensive social services and development program. Both have been significantly broadened and upgraded since the late 1980s and in the absence of an effective governmental social security system, notable portions of the populace pretty much depend on them. The social and welfare engagement finds expression in a whole number of hospitals, specialized clinics and schools on the one hand and in specialized associations, such as for widows, orphans, or its *al-Mahdī* scouts on the other hand (Harik 2004, pp. 81–90). The development program is organized centrally under the roof of its Jihād al-Binā´ (Holy struggle for [re]construction) Development Association (JBDA) (Harik 2004, p. 84–93), with the *Wa`d* (Promise) project, founded for the sake of reconstruction in the wake of the devastating July War in 2006, as its currently most visible and active sub-division (Author´s interv. with, at that time, director of Wa`d, Hassan Jishi, July 8th, 2011).[103]

Hizbullah, among friends and enemies alike, has a reputation for being highly disciplined, and the words and announcements of its Secretary General, Hassan Nasrallah, are widely considered reliable and trustworthy.[104] In contrast to most other former Civil War militias that became political parties later on, Hizbullah was able to build up its impressive institutional network without channeling off and misusing government money, simply because it has always had massive Iranian subsidies at its disposal. Furthermore, as this latter aspect is commonly known, Hizbullah´s politicians, until recently (see below), were never subject to serious charges of corruption or even suspicions in such a direction, unlike so many of their Lebanese fellows in the political field. These givens, combined with a regularly refined, palpable political program, attractive to many Lebanese from different walks of life, repeatedly bestowed it with notable electoral success on both the national (parliamentary) and the municipal levels. Its electorate naturally consists overwhelmingly of Shi`a, yet includes also sizable numbers of most other Lebanese communities.

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[102] The party can currently count on roughly half of the population´s general support.

[103] Another noteworthy subdivision of JBDA is the 'Friends of the Lebanese Environment' society, whereby the name unequivocally reflects its program; "defending the safety of the Lebanese environment." (Ressalat n.d.)

[104] The latter´s regular speeches are viewed by a broad audience from Beirut to Tel Aviv.

One case in point is the 80-year-old Greek-Orthodox Christian fisherman "Naim E.," from Tyre in South Lebanon. "Naim E." explained his "love" for Hizbullah by contrasting the party´s conduct with those of others, arguing that the former does not "do any harm [but] protects the people," adding: "Many parties came to Lebanon and governed in Lebanon; but the best up until now is Hizbullah and it also has the best manners of all." (Authors interv. CC.Hzb.7 2017) Asked if he was not afraid of Hizbullah actually seeking an Iran-like Islamic state and *wilāyat al-faqīh* for Lebanon, "Naim E." – instead of rebutting such accusations, as one might have expected – wholeheartedly declared that he did not mind if Hizbullah was to install an Islamic government, saying furthermore: "There is no problem; there will be peace. Whatever kind of government, the most important thing is that there is peace. We need peace and safety." (Ibid.)

The already mentioned quantitative growth Hizbullah has experienced since 2000, and especially after the July War of 2006, is by no means only a blessing to the party, as it has contributed to a number of detrimental developments. Most significantly, it has reflected negatively on its centers´ assertiveness *vis-à-vis* the organizational ranks at the basis – at least temporarily. This in turn has a) led to a decline in the effectiveness of the rigid security and defense mechanisms that used to seal Hizbullah literally hermetically against infiltration attempts, and b) allowed for some individuals to gain membership, the behavior of whom does not reflect the traditionally disciplined and professional demeanor for which the party is known – and therefore disappointed the expectations of its operational environment. In consequence, we can register a number of serious security gaps of the kind referred to above. Also, since Hizbullah´s acceptance of governmental responsibility as of 2005, for the first time reports of corruption and nepotism within Hizbullah´s ranks have emerged. The latter find expression in discontent about an increasingly clientelist-based provision of social services (e.g. medical care) as well as in complaints about some middle range functionaries´ general behavior. Such, as the author was told in private talks, would shamelessly flaunt their newly acquired wealth (expensive cars, jewelry, real estate) – a behavior considered largely disgraceful within the Shi`i, the broader Islamic and most other religious milieus alike (Sakmani 2016, pp. 180–1).[105]

Interestingly, while emerging weaknesses in Hizbullah´s domestic performance (Al-Monitor 20/3/2013), such as the aforementioned, are identified and verbalized especially by some of its most enthusiastic supporters (Al-Akhbar 15/9/2017),[106] the same tend to explain these developments with what is viewed as the party´s preoccupation with its responsibilities in the regional power struggles – especially in Syria – ultimately aiming at shielding the Lebanese homeland. After all, Hizbullah is measured here against its own self-set standards – especially from among its core constituency, which is the group most used to and affected by these standards.

Hizbullah´s overt intervention in the Syrian Civil War, on the side of Bashar al-Asad and the Syrian army, since the spring of 2013, has cost it the nearly unreserved approval of its struggle on the Arab and Muslim streets and fueled imaginations of the Syrian and other regional conflicts (e.g. Bahrain, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia vs. Iran), as mere continuations of the historical Sunni-Shi`a divide. However, no theological questions are at stake (if yet invoked by many of the actors involved) nor can we verify, in empricial terms, any clear-cut Shi`i or Sunni Muslim fronts opposing each other primarily on that basis). In fact, Hizbullah´s decision to enter the Syrian war was not only followed by prompt condemnations of especially Sunni Lebanese politicians but also provoked a serious disruption of the party´s relations to the Palestinian Ḥamās movement (Al-Monitor 5/6/2013) which is composed of Sunni Muslims too. Moreover, the high number of Hizbullah´s casualties in Syria (De Luce 2015) has led to parts of its core (Shi`i) supporters critically questioning the party´s involvement here (Al-Monitor 25/4/2013), not least as the link made by its leadership between bolstering the Asad-regime in Syria and safeguarding Lebanon/ resisting Israel (Daher 2015; Al-Anbaa 10/3/2013) appeared rather abstract for many. [107]

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[105] Although both individual economic prosperity and disparities between rich and poor are, generally speaking, seen as absolutely legitimate in the Islamic as well as the Christian religious milieus of Lebanon and beyond; priding oneself with such worldly status aspects and displaying wealth are rejected – at least in theory. This is simply because humbleness and asceticism are considered important virtues and signs of true piety, which logically implies, that their opposites cannot be deemed recommendable.

[106] Al-Akhbar, like most other Lebanese media institutions is explicitly supportive of a certain local fraction alongside its regional extension, in this case Hizbullah and its allies in Lebanon and in the regional "Resistance Axis."

[107] Unrecorded conversations with South Lebanese Shi'a counting themselves to Hizbullah´s base during several field stays in Lebanon between 2014 and 2019.

Nonetheless, against the background of a deepening regional polarization, in the long run, Hizbullah was able to close its ranks. Ḥamās has meanwhile backpedalled and repositioned itself in the "Resistance Axis"´ lap (Ad-Diyyar 24/11/2017) and the critical voices from within have largely fallen silent after imminent threats caused by attempts of the IS and Jabhat al-Nuṣra (al-Qaʿida in Syria) to conquer Lebanon have been successfully repelled – not least through the military engagement of Hizbullah (ICG 2016, p. 9; Blanford 2017, pp. 27–31). These developments, alongside the party´s major role in the liberation of, formerly conquered or besieged, Christian towns and villages in Syria (especially Maaloula, in April 2014 [McClatchy 15/4/2014; Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013]), have triggered expressions of support from within its own camp and beyond, in particular among Christians. As a case in point, the Syrian-born Archbishop of the Melkite Greek Catholic Archdiocese of Zahle and Furzol in Lebanon, Issam John Darwish (1945-), in an interview in 2014 stated:

> "Most of the Christians accept now [the] presence of Hezbollah, because they have defended the Christian villages in Syria, like Maaloula. Maaloula was liberated by Hezbollah and other Christian villages in Syria also. That is why we now see Hezbollah as resistance against Israel and the Jihadists in Syria, and especially against Daesh." (Issam J. Darwish 2014)[108]

Moreover, in looking for effective protection, not a few Lebanese Christians living in villages adjacent to Syria – whether in the Bekaa or in the South – have openly approached Hizbullah. This includes cadres from the FPM but also many others. The party has answered their calls and supported them with armament and training while integrating their newly founded militias into joint organizational structures that would become activated in the instance of attacks (Al-Mustaqbal 13/9/14; IBT 21/4/2015; Christian Post 11/5/2015). Finally, despite all what has been said; there is also a sizable number of Sunni Muslims, Druze and basically all other confessional groups of Lebanon, which remained loyal to Hizbullah during all the aforementioned developments and continues to back its political stances and policies.

The programmatic-ideological sphere

In its "Open letter addressed by Hizbullah to the oppressed in Lebanon and the world" from February 16th, 1985 (Hizbullah/ al-Ahd 1985, quoted after Alagha 2006, pp. 223–38), the still young organization for the first time presented its identity and ideology, its friend and enemy conceptions, as well as its general *raison d'être* and overall struggle. Its main three aims at that time were phrased as follows:

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[108] Quoted after d'Avillez 2014.

> "(a) to expel the Americans. the French and their allies definitely from Lebanon,[109] putting an end to any colonialist entity on our land;
>
> (b) to submit the Phalanges to a just power and bring them all to justice for the crimes they have perpetrated against Muslims and Christians;
>
> (c) to permit all the sons of our people to determine their future and to choose in all the liberty the form of government they desire. We call upon all of them to pick the option of Islamic government which, alone, is capable of guaranteeing justice and liberty for all. Only an Islamic regime can stop any further tentative attempts of imperialistic infiltration into our country." (Ibid., p. 227)

A further central aim is outlined in a separate paragraph, eponymously titled: "Israel must be completely obliterated/ wiped out of existence." (Ibid., p. 231) The most important passages read as follows:

> "We see in Israel the vanguard of the United States in our Islamic world. It is the hated enemy that must be fought until the hated ones get what they deserve. This enemy is the greatest danger to our future generations and to the destiny of our lands, particularly as it glorifies the ideas of settlement and expansion, initiated in Palestine, and yearning outward to the extension of the Great Israel, from the Euphrates to the Nile.
>
> Our primary assumption in our fight against Israel states that the Zionist entity is aggressive from its inception, and built on lands wrested from their owners, at the expense of the rights of the Muslim people. Therefore, our struggle will end only when this entity is obliterated. We recognize no treaty with it, no cease fire, and no peace agreements, whether separate or consolidated.
>
> We vigorously condemn all plans for negotiation with Israel, and regard all negotiators as enemies, for the reason that such negotiation is nothing but the recognition of the legitimacy of the Zionist occupation of Palestine." (Ibid., p. 231)

The USA, Israel, France and the Katā´ib (Phalanges) are identified in this document as Hizbullah´s main enemies (ibid., p. 227). UNIFIL is described as a mere tool "sent by world arrogance to occupy areas evacuated by Israel and serve for the latter as a buffer zone." (Ibid., p. 230) With respect to the bipolar world order in place at that time and its ideological foundations, the USSR and communism are rejected as much as the USA and capitalism are (ibid., p. 230).

The political system of Lebanon is judged as categorically corrupt and unjust, which is why Hizbullah dismissed the idea of even attempting to reform it and called for a radical system change instead (ibid., pp. 228–9). Yet, when a reformatory approach was decided for with the Ta`if Accord of 1989, the party immediately accepted that pathway, even if verbally criticizing the preservation of the confessionalist system (Qassem 2005, p. 104). Indeed, Hizbullah´s participation in the 1992 parliamentary elections and its subsequent role as a loyal opposition faction point to an important ideological shift. The political system should henceforth not anymore be destroyed from the outside but reformed from the inside. In its election program of 1992, however, this ideological shift is not depicted as such. With reference to the hope that the upcoming elections may constitute a step towards the abolishment of political confessionalism, and a contribution to a "new order," Hizbullah rather justifies its participation as being congruent with its "permanent political and fundamental principles." (Hizbullah 1992, quoted after Qassem 2005, pp. 272) As its main goals, the party now names a) liberating Lebanon from the "Zionist" occupation and b) the abolishment of political confessionalism. The prospect of a normalization of relations with Israel is categorically dismissed. Above that, Hizbullah now for the first time published a comprehensive political election program containing detailed goals for the different areas of Lebanese domestic policy. The goals of the "destruction of Israel" and the "punishment" of a part of the Lebanese Christians, explicated in the 1985 Open Letter, are absent and so are calls for the establishment of an Islamic order in Lebanon (ibid. pp. 271–7).

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[109] The mentioned powers plus Italy and the UK then (1982–84) had troops stationed in Lebanon as components of the Multinational Forces (MNF).

In subsequent programmatic statements, Hizbullah affirmed most of the aforementioned points, whereby its political program became more sophisticated over time. New subjects such as environmental protection and sustainability were taken up and incorporated and a steady tendency towards Lebanese domestic policy and developmental work is observable. Hizbullah thereby presents all of its goals and methods as resulting from its particular interpretation of Islam, yet, at the same time also as convergent with the International Bill of Human Rights (UN General Assembly 1948); claiming to be "anxious to present Islam as being the guardian for human rights." (Hizbullah 1998)

After Syria´s enforced withdrawal from Lebanon (February-April 2005), Hizbullah for the first time decided to opt for governmental participation. This marks another watershed in its development, as its leadership has so far ruled out that option categorically, even though it long had the possibility to do so, if it had wanted. Indeed, still in 2005, in his insider monograph on Hizbullah, its Deputy Secretary-General, Naim Qassem, had justified his party´s non-participation in the government with the argument that it could not take (even partial) responsibility for decisions which it programmatically opposes and which it views as resulting from deficits rooted in the political system itself (Qassem 2005, pp. 196–200).

While Hizbullah has long – at the latest since 1992 – embraced in principle the main corner-stones of liberal democracy, such as pluralism, universal suffrage, civil and political liberties, political participation and representation; strikingly, in its 2006 MoU with the FPM, laying at the heart of this study, the party for the first time also accepted to call this by its name. It explicitly committed itself to consensual democracy as the current – and majoritarian democracy as the prospected – form of governance for Lebanon (FPM/ Hizbullah 2006, quoted after Yalibnan.com 9/2/2006).

With its Political Manifesto of 2009, Hizbullah yet again presented a reformed version of its overall program. Hassan Nasrallah, before reading the text during a press conference, introduced it as follows: "This political document aims at characterizing the political vision of the party and includes its visions, stands, and ambitions." (Moqawama.org 30/11/2009) It contains, amongst others, the party´s analysis of the national, regional and international political states of affairs and lists the perceived challenges resulting from them. It thereby becomes apparent that Hizbullah continues to see its prime role in what it views as resistance against Israeli aggressions directed against Lebanon and the whole region, that its classification of the USA as the major culprit behind political and economic injustices in the Middle East and the world at large remains untouched, and that it carries on invoking its version of Islam as its ultimate framework of reference. Noticeable is furthermore a strong focus on Lebanese belonging. Lebanon is depicted empathically as "our homeland and the homeland of our fathers and ancestors. It is also the homeland of our children, grandchildren, and the future generations," (ibid.) with a clear reference to all those, claiming Hizbullah (or Shi`a in general) to be primarily loyal to Iran. Lebanon is thereby envisioned as an integral part of the Arab and Islamic worlds and as a spearhead of the anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist struggles. In line with the Hizbullah-FPM MoU of 2006, while maintaining its stance, that "[t]he major problem in the Lebanese political system […] is political sectarianism," the current version of democracy is still accepted and even valued as "a proper political formula to assure true partnership [, which] contributes to opening the doors for everyone to join the phase of building the reassuring state." (Ibid.) The latter is a central demand, and its eventual emergence is envisioned as a national project:

> "Our vision for the State that we should build together in Lebanon is embodied in the State that protects public freedoms, the State that is devoted to national unity, the State that protects its land, people, and sovereignty, the State that has a national, strong and prepared army, the State that is structured under the base of modern, effective and cooperative institutions." (Ibid.)

A substantial component of Hizbullah´s ideology is nowadays constituted by its holistic concept of a "*society of resistance*" ("*al-mujtama`a al-muqāwama*") which has been in the making ever since the organization´s formation. It has, over time, continuously gained in theoretical and – via intensive institution building (Harb/ Leenders 2005, p. 190) –[110] also practical depth. The meaning of the term “resistance” thereby exceeds its mere military connotation and encompasses the spiritual, social, political, and economic spheres alike. “Resistance” is to be simultaneously understood as a religious duty, a universal method, and an individual attitude, enabling the initiation of a process of collective empowerment. The central aim is a society comprising the moral, socio-economic, and military capabilities perceived as necessary for a value-based togetherness and for securing its own independence and sovereignty in the long run (Harb/ Leenders 2005, pp. 188–9). The base of this concept, in turn, is provided by Hizbullah´s particular interpretation of the Islamic concept of jihad (struggle/ effort).

In the party´s terminology, nearly any kind of conscious and sincere individual or collective effort, directed towards oneself (internal) or to the outside (external), as long as being reflective of moral virtues in accordance with its own understanding of Islam, is considered jihad. Hizbullah thereby discriminates between a) the *greater jihad* (*al-jihād al-akbar*), which can analogously be translated as a “struggle with oneself” and a “continues effort towards self-perfection” and b) the military, *smaller jihad* (*al-jihād al-asghar*), which, according to Shi`i interpretation, is permitted only for the ends of defending the *umma* and the nation (*al-waṭan*), one´s own life, family, property, and/ or other individuals or groups judged as vulnerable (Rosiny 2007, p. 162–6).

The effort towards self-perfection, as demanded for by the greater jihad, can be also – quite accurately – read as an attempt to resist human frailties and herein lays the connection to the utopian ideal of a society of resistance; an organized form of association, in which every individual constantly works hard on themself and thereby contributes to a society characterized by the highest possible degree of perfection (measured against the values held high by Hizbullah) in regard to both the social behavior amongst its members and its external relations. The concept of the “society of resistance,” on the one hand, points to the significance Hizbullah meanwhile attributes to the socio-economical and political spheres. On the other hand, it also constitutes a framework in which, ideally, every single unit of the society, directly or indirectly, contributes to the aim of military success.

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[110] The title of an undated brochure the author received from Hassan Jishi, then director of the Wa`d project, in 2011 upon the occasion of interviewing him on Hizbullah´s development activities, reads as follows: “Resistance Community Associations.” It contains information on altogether sixteen subdivisions (overwhelmingly operated as NGOs) of Hizbullah, including its main media organs (Rissalat n.d.).

3.2.2 Al-Tayyār al-Waṭanī al-Ḥurr (Free Patriotic Movement [FPM])

> “The aim of the Free National Current [the FPM] is to liberate Lebanon from all foreign occupation forces. We will never accept any Middle East settlement at the expense of Lebanon's freedom, sovereignty and independence. The recent student demonstrations and strikes in occupied Lebanon are a testament that the Lebanese are as determined as ever to restore their dignity and lost freedoms.”
>
> Issam Abou Jamra 2000[111]

Al-Tayyār al-Waṭanī al-Ḥurr (Free Patriotic Movement [FPM]) is among Lebanon´s youngest political associations, not only concerning its members´ low average age but also with regard to its existence as an officially registered political party, which is only since September 2005. Factually, however, the FPM existed well before this date, with its roots reaching back into the Civil War setting of the mid-1980´s. Both the foundation of the movement and its development are closely connected to the career and personality of former army commander and prime minister as well as acting President of the Republic, Michel Naim Aoun.

3.2.2.1 Origins

Upon his appointment as Commander in Chief of the Lebanese Armed Forces in 1984 (lebarmy.gov.lb 2018; Tayyar.org 5/4/2009), General Aoun already had a loyal following among those soldiers having fought under his command in prior battles. Ever since, the number of his admirers and active followers grew steadily, given Aoun´s rise to prominence after his promotion and for his charismatic leadership style and principled position widely viewed as laudable. For one, the General, at that time 53 years in age, was the youngest commander in chief the LAF had ever seen, looking back on a stellar army career ever since he joined military school as an officer cadet at the age of 20 in 1955. Next, himself a practicing Maronite Christian – and indeed, also invoking this aspect –, Michel Aoun quickly earned a reputation for being foremost an ardent Lebanese patriot to whom the confessional affiliation of his fellow citizens and soldiers under his command never counted as a political but merely as a religious marker (Daily Star 13/10/2000). His upbringing in the multi-confessional town of Haret Hreik (nowadays a Shi`i dominated suburb of Beirut) is commonly cited as one major factor for Aoun´s confessional candor (e.g. Helou 2020, p. 22).

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[111] Quoted after MEF/ USCfL 2000a.

From the beginning on, the General moreover presented himself as a pronounced étatist. As a military commander he and his flock remained loyal to the state of Lebanon, neither to any of the major Christian militias, nor to an outside power. This holds true even if the remnants of the LAF in Civil War times were overwhelmingly Christian and therefore often viewed as but another Christian actor on the ground. As Robert Hatem has put it rather tauntingly: "[Aoun´s] final objective was to represent, and speak in the name of all of Lebanon […] He could[n´t] care less about the Christians." (Hatem 1999, p. 61) The climax of Aoun´s early popularity, the "Aoun phenomenon," as we have seen, came about after the General´s appointment as interim prime minister in 1988 but fully unfolded upon his declaration of a "War of Liberation" against the Syrians and their allies in Lebanon, on March 14th, 1989. At the latest by now, "every time certain political developments occurred, supporters expressed their show of political support for Aoun at the Ba'abda Palace." (Helou 2020, p. 23) In doing so, they would also form a "human shield" against probable Syrian attacks (Wimmen 2007). In retrospect, this date can therefore be seen as marking the factual birth of the Aounist movement – both forerunner and nucleus of the later founded FPM.

3.2.2.2 From social movement to political party

The Aounist movement was in many respects born as a protest movement, rejecting the state of things in the last years of Lebanon´s Civil War. By that time, all of what had been left of the hopes of the Lebanese people for a "normal life" to be achieved by any of their rivaling militias had definitely waned. In fact, many suffered under the reign of the militias and earlier expectations that these could offer effective protection for their respective ethnicized-confessional groups had long made way for a broad feeling of disillusionment and resentment (Helou 2020, pp. 25–6). This was especially true for the Christian camp with its multitude of factions caught in bloody infightings. On top of this came the double occupation of Lebanon, with Israeli troops (and their proxy) in much of the South and the Syrian forces (with their allies) in large parts of the remaining territory. All of this only added to the people´s grievances and bitter feelings of humiliation.

For many – in particular, but not only, Maronite Christians – this changed with the political advent of Michel Aoun, who like no other managed to revitalize the people´s hopes in a better future and mobilize even those whom had already resigned. In fact, Aoun morally empowered these people "by convincing them that they possessed the ability to effect positive change." (Helou 2020, p. 36) The growing flock of people rallying around the General was therefore not merely protesting the state of things but followed a clear vision concerning what to do about the situation. Thus, in positive terms, the “emerging Aounist movement aimed to achieve an independent Lebanon free from foreign forces, end the war, create a new leadership not reliant on the corrupt machinations of the old order, and construct a positive secular image of Lebanon.” (Helou 2020, p. 23) These aims converged in the agenda put forward by General Aoun since assuming the post of Lebanon´s prime minister in 1988. Besides his acquisition of the premiership, however, it were foremost his military position and LAF uniform as well as his military record, which, in the setting of the Lebanese Civil War, marked him out as representing the state and let people vest trust in him to successfully defend it against foreign and militia rule.

To his admirers, Aoun appeared not only as the “antithesis of militia order and chaos” (ibid., p. 35) but also as the sole alternative at hand. This earned him the status of a savior who was accordingly glorified by his followers (Author´s interv. E.M.1 2012). Among these counted also many famous Lebanese intellectuals such as Said Aql or the singer Laure Abs for instance. These and other members of Lebanon´s cultural elite regularly attended the Baabda manifestations on the side of Aoun and numerous popular songs and poems were written in praise of the General (Helou 2020, pp. 23–4). Helou, as many others before him (e.g. Wimmen 2007), classifies Aoun´s rhetoric as populist in the sense that he constantly made use of simple language and clear terms while consciously addressing the concerns of his audience (Helou 2020, pp. 34 –5). This obviously helped to mobilize and attract people that were simply fed-up with the situation.

Considering that popular support for Aoun was strongest among both soldiers and the Christian public – in particular the intelligentsia and the educated middle class youth (Ilias 2011, p. 10) (from among the people gathering around Baabda at the time, 35 % were under the age of 18 and another 40 % under 39 [Helou 2020, p. 23]); the FPM is also the result of a marriage between members of two at least apparently contradicting milieus – that of the military on the one hand, and civil society on the other hand. Such a distinction, however, is also slightly misleading, as of course, many of the civil society activists that first assembled at the Baabda Palace upon Aoun´s appointment in 1988 had male family members serving in the army or hired as militiamen.

Others were themselves only defecting from their former militias now or had in the past volunteered with al-Anṣār (the Supporters), which was a mainly Maronite paramilitary unit, established early in the Lebanese Civil War to fight in support of the LAF (Helou 2020, p. 32). Factually a militia, al-Anṣār reportedly had a similar status as the army reserve, yet, was more strictly trained (IRBC 1993; cf. Helou 2020, p. 32). According to the veteran Aounist and human rights activist Ghazi Aad (1957-2016), when he had volunteered to fight with al-Anṣār in 1976, Michel Aoun was the commander of the army barracks in Broumana, where the training took place (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.3 2013). Furthermore, during the "War of Liberation," General Aoun is said to have "re-energized this organization with new recruits." (IRBC 1993) Other factual militias that in the late 1980s fought under the orders of Aoun, while maintaining their organizational integrity, included the National Liberal Party (NLP), al-Tanẓīm, and the Guardians of the Cedars (GoC). Against this diverse background of support, in 1988, General Aoun and some of his closest companions, among them especially Pierre Raffoul (1951-), launched the Central Bureau of National Coordination (CBNC). It was tasked not only with coordinating the various armed forces under Aoun´s command but also with logistics (distributing water and food) and security (deploying the army to ensure the safety of the gathering people) for the popular supportive movement (Raffoul 2009; Holy Spirit University of Kaslik [USEK] 2019, Helou 2020, p. 24).

However, many of those now flocking to Aoun have not been members of any militia before and some have not even been politically active (Helou 2020, p. 32). As for those who were, some were strongly emphasizing their religion and own religiosity, others were outright secularists or even atheists and their ideological orientations ranged from the political left, including communists, to the far right, so as with the GoC milieu:

> "Whether individuals stood on the left or right of the political spectrum, the ideologies they subscribed to contained a set of common humanitarian views that motivated them to join the FPM. Since the FPM did not emphasize an ideological stance, it maintained a wide avenue for the absorption of people from all ideological persuasions, as long as they expressed their interests in solid state institutions versus militia rule, support for the cause of freedom, sovereignty and independence against foreign intervention in Lebanese affairs, and commitment to transparency and integrity to fight the corrupt machinations of the political system of Lebanon." (Helou 2020, pp. 33–4)

Thus, the Aounist movement never followed any outgrown ideology or philosophy but rather a set of principles and goals that do sum up to a straight political line, but one that is able to integrate different ideological persuasions. The Lebanese English-language Daily Star newspaper, in 2000, quoted George Haddad, then head of the movement´s press office in Lebanon, as follows: "We're a movement that attracts people from different parties for the causes we uphold," adding: "We don't have a political agenda that defines, for instance, a specific economic plan. We simply deal with the national pillars of sovereignty, freedom and independence, calling for the liberation of Lebanon from all foreign troops and reforming the political system." (Daily Star 13/10/2000)

After Aoun´s defeat on October 13th, 1990, and his subsequent departure into exile in France almost exactly one year later (October 30th, 1991), where he was to stay for the fourteen years to come, he “nevertheless managed to present himself as a hero opposing the occupation and domination of Lebanon.” (Ilias 2011, p. 10) His followers remained highly active politically, both in Lebanon and abroad. In Lebanon, organizational institutionalization was largely renounced, “[p]artly to avoid repression, but also out of fear that local leaders would emerge, gain autonomy and challenge Aoun’s leadership.” (Ilias 2011, p. 10) Organized efforts until the mid 1990s therefore remained restricted to student activism featuring in particular campus demonstrations or other actions (such as distributing anti-Syrian leaflets) in protest of the Syrian tutelage (Daily Star 13/10/2000). In the second half of the 1990s the movements´ sphere of action was gradually extended to the streets and the first timid steps in the direction of formalization were enacted (see below). However, during all these years, the Aounists bore the brunt of the Syrian repression – with, according to their own claims, about 16,000 of them having been detained between 1990 and 2005 (Ilias 2011, p. 10; ICG 2008a, p. 3; cf. Daily Star 13/10/2000[112]).

The central importance Aounists´ attributed to the universities as both stage and minimal cover for their activism becomes very clear by what former national coordinator of the FPM in Lebanon, Nadim Lteif, stated in a 2001-interview. Lteif commented on that-time plans of the pro-Syrian government to unify the various branches of the state-run Lebanese University in East and West Beirut, saying these were by no means aiming at defusing sectarianism, as claimed by government officials. In his interpretation the move was much more aiming “to silence any calls for the restoration of Lebanese sovereignty and independence” (Lteif 2001[113]) because,

> “throughout the past decade, the Lebanese University's second branch [located in different parts of East Beirut] has constituted the only forum that courageously brought up, in the face of government repression, issues relating to ending the occupation and achieving a better Lebanese-Syrian relationship.” (Ibid.)

The Aounists remaining at home, in Lebanon, were highly active but their possibilities limited and the price they paid for making use of them was disproportionately high. Abroad, however, they played a leading role in influencing the Lebanon policies of major foreign powers, such as the USA, Canada and France. And while full formalization was an option blocked to the Aounists within Syrian-controlled Lebanon; the USA and Europe – and here in particular Aoun´s host country, France – provided even the more favorable conditions for the young movement to officially form up and take shape. And so it came that the Free Patriotic Movement as a Lebanese nationalist political organization was born on February 16th, 1996, not in Beirut, but in Paris (Ilias 2011, p. 10).

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[112] This article, which is of late 2000, cites George Haddad as then putting the number of ‘Aounist activists that were“detained, beaten and abused for their political beliefs” since 1990 at 4,000 (Daily Star 13/10/2000).

[113] Quoted after MEF/ USCfL 2001b.

Thus, the FPM as a social movement with close affiliations to the military has its roots in the late 1980s in Lebanon, while its origins as a formal political organization are to be found in the diaspora, beginning with Aoun´s arrival in French exile in 1991. However, this distinction between a social movement and a political organization does neither pertain to the level of political activism (as the Aounists were at least as politically active at home, as they were abroad) nor to the content of their political program – which was similar in Lebanon and in the diaspora – but only to the factor of organization. The fact that the important step of formalization first occurred in the European and increasingly also in the North-American diasporas is directly linked to the array of freedom enjoyed here by a movement of mainly Christians, the friend-enemy conceptions of which were so far still broadly in line with what official stances of most Western governments towards the developments in Lebanon and the region reflected (MEF/ USCfL 2000a; Aoun 2002[114]; Aoun 2003; Bejjani 2006).

Those features that were most clearly distinguishing the Aounists during their movement´s incubation-phase persisted throughout all the years of its further evolution and remain defining markers of the FPM´s base at the time of writing. They are constituted by a) a huge share of educated middle class youth (including many students), b) a deep – sometimes almost devoted – loyalty to General Aoun based on trust in his judgement and “father-like” (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013) guidance and c) a highly passionate and committed engagement in grassroots activism for the sake of the common cause, even when this meant risking “abuse, beatings and detentions by security agents.” (Daily Star 13/10/2000) Besides their original method of mass manifestations to make their cause heard, the Aounist´s pronounced activism was soon to include several further forms such as participating in student and syndicate elections, distributing prohibited leaflets and pamphlets denouncing the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, campaigning, PR and media work, building advocacy alliances and lobbying for their cause at the relevant decision-making centers in the region and the world.

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[114] Quoted after Robertson 2002.

3.2.2.3 Principles, goals, and political program

In its days as a social movement, the goals of the FPM and its political program were not very diverse and basically identical. The main point was liberation from foreign – especially Syrian – occupation and militia rule as a precondition for restoring order (which implies ending the Civil War). This should be followed by a fundamental reshuffling of the Lebanese establishment with the outcome of a new responsible and accountable leadership that does not rely on the corrupt machinations of the old order but takes it on to build a just and secular state (Helou 2020, p. 23).

A noteworthy change in the content of the Aounists´ official political program occurred only upon Michel Aoun´s triumphant return to Lebanon in May 2005 and subsequent launching of the Free Patriotic Movement as a full-fledged Lebanese political party. Well aware that the original Aounist slogan, “freedom, sovereignty and independence” had, after the Syrian forces´ departure, outlived the mobilizing power it had during the phase of direct Syrian tutelage, a new one, seen as more appropriately capturing the contemporary challenges to be faced, was adopted. It reads “change and reform” (FPM 2005b) and has been maintained by the FPM until today (Helou 2020, pp. 140–1). This is reflected most palpably in the FPM-led parliamentary bloc carrying this slogan in its name (“Change & Reform bloc”). However, the trinity of freedom, sovereignty and independence has not factually lost in importance for Aounists but continues to account for the fundament of the movement´s vision and ideal outlook. It is prominently featured in the introductions of both the Charter of the Free Patriotic Movement Party (FPM 2005b) from September 2005 – which remains valid at the time of writing – and in the (FPM´s) General Rules of Procedure 2015 (FPM 2015, p. 2).[115] Among the Charter´s listing of the party´s principles is furthermore a bullet point declaring “[i]ts intransigence in the belief that Lebanon is a sovereign, free and independent entity founded on a social pact sanctioned by the free will of its people.” (FPM 2005)

The FPM Charter sketches out the party´s seven principles and fourteen goals. In general, it says that, “the Free Patriotic Movement aims at renewing the political life in Lebanon on the bases of knowledge, ethics, progressiveness and the emancipation of the Lebanese individual.” (FPM 2005b) As principles, the FPM declares (1) its belief in the intrinsic value of the individual and in the equality of people and their rights, (2) its “commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to all pertinent international charters and conventions, whose values and principles will act as guidelines to the Party's goals and programs," (3) its belief in the sovereignty, freedom, and independence of Lebanon, which is valued as (4) "a distinctive human experience by virtue of its pluralism, intellectual interaction and openness to civilizations, and due to its pioneering democratic experience in the Arab world," (5) its "abidance by the Lebanese Constitution as a charter of governance in Lebanon, in its practice, interpretation, and ratification," (6) its "adherence to the openness of Lebanon to and its interaction with its Arab surroundings and the world" – only "provided that the Lebanese will be a dimension of Lebanon in foreign countries and not a foreign dimension within Lebanon" – and finally (7) its "conviction that men and women are equal in rights and obligations." (FPM 2005b)

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[115] The FPM Charter has been incorporated into the *“General Rules of Procedure 2015”* in full (FPM 2015, pp. 5–6).

The FPM´s stated goals naturally correspond to these principles. They pertain to (1) guaranteeing "the sovereignty of the Lebanese state [,] its independence and to safeguard its existence," (2) building "a nation of law based on equality, justice, social solidarity, equal opportunities and the upholding of a fair judicial system," (3) establishing democracy, (4) institutionalizing "a culture of citizenship [,] achieving equality between the Lebanese; [enacting] a discretionary civil personal status law" and separating "politics from religion to facilitate the establishment of a secular state," (5) protecting the family, wich is seen as "the nucleus in the building of a society and a nation," (6) eliminating "all legal and social distinctions between men and women," (7) "supporting the youth and […] their role in developing the society," (8) strengthening bonds between Lebanon and the Lebanese diaspora and enabling the latter to exercise their political rights in Lebanon from abroad, (9) disseminating "a political culture that liberates the Lebanese from a mentality of tutelage and supplication," (10) adhering to the "free economic system and personal initiative within the boundaries of human dignity and the welfare and principles of social justice," (11) promoting liable and accountable state institutions, (12) protecting and preserving the environment and natural resources, (13) making "education available to all Lebanese," propagating "Lebanese heritage," developing all economic sectors and encouraging "the mastering of skills, sciences and arts in such a way as to cater to the needs of the society and the requirements of the age" and finally (14) propagating "the culture of peace, dialogue and democracy." (FPM 2005b)

Given the weight placed on core liberal demands such as "freedom, sovereignty, and independence," (FPM 2005b) a free market economy, secularization, developing a culture of citizenship and strengthening civic freedoms and individual as well as human rights, the FPM may be characterized most appropriately as a liberal-democratic political party. However, the Charter obviously recognizes the tense relationship that exists between liberal and social policy measures (which stems from the fact that the main goals of Liberals and Socialists – freedom and equality respectively – are partially contradicting, at least when each is pursued radically) and seeks to ensure a balance, as indicated by the wording applied in goal 10 (see above). This and calls for "establishing equality between the Lebanese," "making education available to all Lebanese," "welfare" and adherence to the "principles of social justice" (FPM 2005b) are clearly socialist/ social-democratic in nature. They furthermore presuppose a huge margin for the state, which fully corresponds to Michel Aoun´s pronounced étatism, yet clashes with the minimal state model idealized by hardcore Liberals. The FPM must therefore be registered as a hybrid between a liberal and a social-democratic party.

With respect to its vision of the Lebanese state, mode of governance and political system, it is obvious that the FPM aspires for fundamental changes, including in the variant of democracy applied. The importance attributed to the state and its institutions, namely the Lebanese Constitution (principle 5), make it clear that these changes shall not be brought about revolutionary but by reforms. Calling for the actual establishment of democracy (goal 3) implies that the Lebanese democracy in place is not fully seen as such, or, at least not perceived as sufficient by the FPM. This view is related to its disapproval of political confessionalism, which is seen as undermining democracy. It shall be finally abolished by separating "politics from religion to facilitate the establishment of a secular state" (goal 4) (FPM 2005b). Despite this wording, what the Aounists mean with establishing "a secular state" is not the Jacobist-favored eradication of religion from public life but must be translated as a call to abolish the communal power-sharing arrangement in the long term.

Last but not least, al-Tayyār al-Waṭanī al-Ḥurr is obviously a nationalist party too, which is not only prominently suggested by the term *waṭanī* (patriotic/ nationalist) in its very name. In its Charter, besides the frequent references made to Lebanon´s freedom, sovereignty and independence (principle 3), this also finds expression in praising Lebanon as "a distinctive human experience by virtue of its pluralism, intellectual interaction and openness to civilizations, and due to its pioneering democratic experience in the Arab world" (principle 4), in calling for the propagation of "Lebanese heritage" (goal 13), or in comments on the need to ensure that Lebanon, despite all "openness to and its interaction with its Arab surroundings and the world," remains a home for the Lebanese first (principle 6) (FPM 2005).

The FPM´s brand of Lebanese nationalism resembles that of Michel Aoun himself; a version of Lebanism that is inclusive within the confines of what is perceived as the Lebanese nation, largely free from Maronitist influences, and emphasizes the country´s need to get along in its Arab environment, while leaving the question if Lebanon must be registered as

Arab or not unanswered. In fact, one will receive different opinions about it when asking different Aounists (e.g. Author´s interv. CC.FPM.2 2012; cf. gotc-se.org [n.d.]) just as these partially still adhere to different ideological persuasions, once more illustrating the non-ideological character of the movement.

The FPM´s political program as put forward in May 2005, i.e. readily before the first elections after Syria´s departure from Lebanon, is named "Reform Program. FPM political program" (FPM 2005a) and comprises fourteen bullet points each indicating different issue-areas to become active in. They read as follows: "Revitalize the constitutional institutions," "Economic recovery plan," "Administrative Reforms," "Reform the Judiciary," "Protect public freedoms," "Promote human rights and good governance," "Promote tourism," "Provide equal access to medical care," "Promote and protect the environment," "Integrate the Diaspora into the process," "Rehabilitate the educational system," "Citizenship building," "Foreign Affairs: Recapture the initiative," "Restructure armed forces." (FPM 2005a)

Both the goals listed in the FPM Charter and the party´s Reform Program remain valid until today. However, the MoU between the FPM and Hizbullah of February 2006 has refined many of the FPM´s earlier stances and added some important complements. Most importantly, these include a clarification of Lebanese-Palestinian and a normalization of Lebanese-Syrian relations, facilitating the return of the Lebanese detainees in Syria and Israel as well as the Lebanese diaspora in Israel (foremost former SLA militiamen and their families), and a perspective for dealing with the controversial issue of Hizbullah´s armament (FPM/ Hizbullah 2006, quoted after Yalibnan.com 9/2/2006).

As for the FPM´s formal political program, these are its fundamentals and – although some issues have lost in importance while others came up newly in-between – they have been basically upheld by the party, also in times of elections, up until today. Beyond that, Michel Aoun and the FPM as a Lebanese political party have also followed an important agenda not explicitly covered by their official political program, namely that of safeguarding Christian interests within the confines of the Lebanese system and beyond. This aspect will be dealt with separately below.

As we have seen, the FPM can claim to have transparently exposed its official principles and aims and to have issued a comparably detailed political program ever since becoming an official Lebanese political party in 2005 (and actually already much earlier. See below). Yet, with respect to what is widely concluded about the political will of the Lebanese citizens at large, especially the Aounists are frequently depicted by others as following their leader "blindly." For instance, one internet user calling himself "formertayyar" (thus, supposedly a former Aounist) had in May 2008 contributed an entry titled “[A]ounist” to the “urban dictionary,” a popular online dictionary for slang phrases (which on sufferance features numerous vulgar and also offensive entries). The “definition” reads as follows: “A complete idiot, especially in matters of politics. This man does not seem to understand what's going on, as if he's totally blind! He's definitely an Aounist.” (formertayyar 18/5/2008) The head of the March 14th-alligned NLP, Dory Chamoun, by today a core political opponent of Michel Aoun, stated: “If Michel Aoun tomorrow slips in the bathroom and cracks his head, the whole thing is going to blow – [I refer to] the followers of Michel Aoun.” (Author´s interv. E.M.2 2013) Bishop Samir Mazloum (1934-) – who, despite the strained past of the Maronite Patriarchate and the FPM, and contrary to the former speakers, did neither appear to be personally biased against Michel Aoun, nor against his followers – argued: “[T]hose who see in General Aoun a savior, they are attached to him only because he is General Aoun, not because what he does politically. It’s the same with other leaders.” (Author´s interv. E.M.1 2012) All of these examples have in common, that they depict the Aounists (or, in the case of Bishop Mazloum´s statement, all Lebanese political parties´ constituencies alike) as particular submissive and servile, and their political decisions – like following Michel Aoun – as resulting not so much from mature and “rational” political thinking than from emotionality and instincts.

The issue has been thematised by Aounists in their online forum “Orange room.” In October 2004, a user dubbed “Comrade Bassem” started a chat under the heading “Between Aounism and Ghandism...,” raising the following questions: “Why some people consider [“Aounism”] to mean blindly following what a man does or says? Why should some people consider that "Aounists" are in a […] Aoun's Fan Club or something like that?” (Orange room forum 14/10/2004) The user “Omega_leb” replied to this as follows:

> “[W]e are called Aounists [because] the media and those who consider us their enemies would make us look like dumb people who know nothing and only followed His Excellency Prime Minister General Michel Aoun for stupid reasons. No, to these people I say, we the so called Aounists are proud to be Aounists. It happened that we and H.E. P.M. General Michel Aoun have the same beliefs. He believed in a free, democratic Lebanon ... we too believed in a free, democratic Lebanon. Now we are Free Patriotic Movement members and anybody who wants to call us Aounist, that's not a problem to us ... to the contrary, it is what we are proud to be.” (Orange room forum 14/10/2004)[116]

To say that the media and political opponents (“those who consider us their enemies” [ibid.]) would make the Aounists “look like dumb people who know nothing and only followed […] Aoun for stupid reasons” (ibid.) implies suggesting that the opposite holds true. In other words, what “Omega_leb” says is that his and other Aounist´s followership did not stem from their admiration of the person of Michel Aoun in the first place, but from their identification of his political beliefs and ideas matching their own as a result of autonomous political reasoning. In a similar spirit, one activist interviewed by the Daily Star in October 2000, in defiance of the Aounist´s critics, concisely declared: “Our beliefs are not the result of naive emotions, but based on hard facts.” (Daily Star 13/10/2000)

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[116] The original text was edited by the author for reasons of comprehensibility.

3.2.2.4 Organizational development

The organizational structure of the Aounist movement experienced significant changes over time. From its inception in March 1989 to Aoun being militarily defeated in October 1990, the only organization one could speak of was either militarily or informal – voluntary grassroots activism – in nature, with the CBNC ensuring harmonization of activities in both the civil and military spheres and supporting in matters of logistics and security. After Aoun´s ousting and subsequent disappearance from the scene in Lebanon, and with the Aounists and other Christian parties boycotting the 1992 and 1996 parliamentary elections, the young movement first rose in civil society.

In the very beginning, in the absence of a central-command, FPM units were formed across Lebanon basically upon personal initiative. These initial units were largely autonomous in decision-making and coordination was highly limited. They were usually integrated in either a pyramid- or a cluster-like type of organization, in all cases keeping the contacts among the different units – as far as existent at all – at a minimum level and restricted to a few selected persons only (Helou 2020, pp. 86–7). This modus of operation “ensured the persistence of FPM activism, since the detainment of some members of some units did not paralyze the ability of others to carry out collective activity.” (Ibid., p. 86)

Besides the towns and villages from where the activists hailed and the private homes or office premises of leading Aounists, serving for clandestine meetings (ibid., p. 96), especially the universities and the professional syndicates were soon to become core spheres of engagement for them: “With their leader in exile and officially banned by the Lebanese government, Aoun´s supporters perceived university campus elections as a political opportunity to emerge as a movement.” (Ibid., p. 64) In this situation, it naturally proved advantageous, that the bulk of the Aounists belonged to the educated middle class youth, with many being students (Daily Star 13/10/2000), dispearsed over the landscape of notable Lebanese universities. Here, they organized in student clubs under names such as “Social

Club," "Lebanese Patriotic Movement," "Free Student Movement," or "Freedom Club," striving to achieve majorities in student government elections, as these

> "provided the movement with access to the formal institutional setting of the university, representative legitimacy as a movement enjoying popularity among young people, and a pool of resources crucial for the organization of FPM collective activity. This helped FPM activists organize collective political activities that were opposed to the Lebanese government." (Helou 2020, p. 66)

Early Aounists had a strong presence in professional syndicates too, as the movement´s "ideas and reformist outlook resonated with middle-class professionals." (Ibid., p. 67) Here, quite similar to its campus activities, the movement engaged in internal elections. These two venues allowed it a degree of political organization and visibility during a phase of intense governmental repression, marked by frequent crack-downs on – and arrests of – oppositionists, rendering formalization quasi-impossible. At the same time, they also brought the Aounists into close contact with other Lebanese political players of relevance. Most notably for the case at hand, the "initial support received by the FPM in an electoral syndicate race was in the syndicate of engineers from Hizbullah in 1993." (Helou 2020, p. 67) This early moment of cooperation led to a first brief exchange between the proto-FPM and Hizbullah over social and political issues concerning Lebanon (ibid.).

As of the mid-1990s a number of state-controls affecting the FPM experienced a relative relaxation when compared to the preceding years. These included

> "the five-year media-ban imposed on Aoun, the detainment of FPM activists for crossing red lines in terms of organizing for mass collective activity on the streets […], and other elite strategies that aimed to maintain the dominance of the political elite while excluding members of the opposition." (Helou 2020, p. 69)

According to George Haddad, moreover, "a charge in 1992 led to the detention of an activist for 53 days, whereas the same charge in 1996 caused an activist to be detained for 48 hours." (Daily Star 13/10/2000)

Under these conditions, the organizational structure of the Aounist movement experienced a significant boost, marked by the emergence of a central FPM command in Lebanon – with the national coordinator and representative of Aoun in Lebanon being former General Nadim Lteif (1937-)[117] (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012a; MEF/ USCfL 2001) – and the opening of a first public office in 1996 (Helou 2020, p. 69). The new central command stood in permanent contact to Michel Aoun in France. It included a twelve-member political committee, who´s members were directly appointed by Aoun, and a general committee, the executive branch, grouping together the elected representatives of thirteen *qaḍas* and five professional associations as well as student delegates (Daily Star 13/10/2000). This step effected an ever-closer coordination of the various units´ activities while infringing on their former relative autonomy. Yet, when the central command called for collective activity, the organizational tasks were never carried out centrally but left to the decentralized units (Helou 2020, pp. 70, 101). In any case, as of now, collective action was possible on a different scale and the Aounists´ decision to go public indeed went along with their rememergence on the streets (ibid., p. 70).

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[117] The author was not able to verify since when exactly Lteif held this position.

In December 1997, even though a post-war media ban that was imposed on Aoun for five years had by now expired, an interview with the former General, to be aired by the private Lebanese broadcasting channel MTV, was preventively banned by the Lebanese authorities. This time, however, collective action taken by enraged Aounists did not remain confined to the spheres of universities and syndicates but brought them out into the streets and public spaces. This incidence was credited by a renowned Lebanese political analyst as having broken the post-war state prohibition of protests (Helou 2020, p. 70).

The next watershed in the FPM´s organizational development came with its fielding of candidates in the municipal elections of 1998 and the single-candidate parliamentary by-elections of 2003. The decision to participate in both changed its status from a formerly pure extra-parliamentary opposition to one now partially, if selectively, resorting to the institutional pathway too. It furthermore bestowed the FPM with its "first rise on a nationwide scale via public office." (Ibid., p. 72) At the same time, this made its political program visible to the Lebanese public at large. In light of its comparably elaborated development and reform agenda, marking the FPM out as more than a mere opposition movement, this contributed to its rise in popularity.

The organizational development of the FPM in Lebanon was heavily assisted by Aounists in the diaspora and finally overseen by Michel Aoun himself. It is thus no coincidence that first steps in the direction of formalization in Lebanon were taken upon the FPM´s foundation in Paris in 1996 (Ilias 2011, p. 10) as it was here, where the large FPM conferences conveyed and milestone decisions were taken (Helou 2020, p. 75). The original decision to resist formalization and institutionalization of the movement in Lebanon has been taken by Michel Aoun (Daily Star 13/10/2000), just as it was him who had decided to gradually deviate from this course and to finally transform the movement into a full-fledged political party in Lebanon right after his return in May 2005. It was only logical then, that Aoun would now also become “the main decision-maker in almost all aspects of the movement.” (Helou 2020, p. 138)

As of 2005 the FPM basically took the shape it maintains until today: a fully formalized and institutionalized Lebanese political party that participates in the Lebanese political system and public life in all respects. Being forced to erstwhile remain in the opposition following the elections of May 2005; as of July 2008, the FPM has continuously taken over governmental responsibility. Michel Aoun remained at the top of the movement up until summer 2015 (Ad-Diyyar 1/6/2016), when he handed the FPM´s official leadership over to his son in-law, Lebanon´s current Foreign Minister, Gibran Bassil (Haboush 2019).

In form, the FPM is marked by a modern party structure featuring multiple measures to ensure internal democracy, participation and also transparency, which are detailed on no less than fifty-five pages in its General Rules of Procedure 2015 (FPM 2015). Its organizational structure is moreover intended to involve all members in one way or the other in political work. Most importantly, the FPM has maintained its system of committee´s on the local and provincial levels, each of which shall elect their representatives according to either majoritarian or proportional electoral modes, depending on the size of the electorate (Helou 2020, p. 149). On the provincial level, besides the relevant committee, there is furthermore a provincial council which groups together “a coordinator, an officer for provincial municipal affairs, an officer for provincial public relations, current and former party Members of Parliament and Ministers, FPM heads of professional syndicates, FPM heads of municipal councils and others.” (Ibid., p. 150) The FPM organizational hierarchy culminates in the “national assembly” and an “executive council” comprising fourteen central committees. There is furthermore an “advisory council,” a “political council,” and the “general secretariat.” The president (who is assisted by two vice presidents; one for political and one for administrative affairs), finally, “is elected by the general assembly; that is, all the members of the FPM.” (Ibid., p. 150)

Michel Aoun had been the president of the party since its foundation up until summer 2015. However, according to a special clause in the party´s General Rules of Procedure, he is also granted the status of “honorary president for lifetime.” (FPM 2015, p. 55) This must be considered with respect to the position of his successor and current President of the FPM, Gibran Bassil.

The FPM, formerly a social movement with a few thousand active members on the ground in Lebanon, immediately upon its inception as a political party in 2005, registered more than 60,000 new members (cf. Wimmen 2007). The imminent task to struck a balance in the evolving party structure between the representation of senior Aounists that had carried the movement through all the years of hardship and that of the many “newcomers” that now increased the FPM´s presence on a national scale, was to prove challenging for the young political party (Helou 2020, pp. 148–9). A main problem was that “political ascendancy inside the party was not rooted in clearly established criteria.” (Ibid., p. 152) Moreover, the continual reliance on appointing individuals to high-level party positions while consistently failing to hold periodic elections for the various committees and – not least – the post of the president itself, resulted in the concentration of authority in the hands of only a few persons (ibid., p. 154).

This situation and the random political appointments that took place raised significant disgruntlement, especially among veteran FPM activists who felt that political ascendancy should have been treated according to what is outlined in the General Rules of Procedure (FPM 2015) and clearly “commensurate with a person´s years of active involvement in FPM activity.” (Helou 2020, p. 154) In summing-up the disappointment felt by many senior Aounists, one of Michel Aoun´s nephews, Naim Aoun, in 2014 stated: “The FPM which I and many others knew no longer exists today.” (Now. 13/8/2014)

As a main cause for the repeated calling-off or postponement of internal party elections, Helou, in following his own interviewees from within the FPM, identifies a desire on behalf of the FPM leadership to avoid major electoral confrontations that could affect the overall unity within its own ranks (Helou 2020, pp. 156–7). The paramount case in point is constituted by the competition that loomed between Michel Aoun´s son in-law, Gibran Bassil, and another of the General´s nephews, Alain Aoun, prior to the electoral race for the party´s presidency, scheduled for the summer of 2015. When it turned out that both candidates were supported by different influential party functionaries respectively and that a clear victory of either seemed improbable, internal mediation attempts lead to Alain Aoun´s “voluntary” withdrawal from the race. This averted an electoral showdown that might have caused a lasting rift whereas Michel Aoun would have appeared as unable to resolve conflicts within his “own house.” As in all such instances, however, the members were prevented from participating in the political decisions of the party, in violation of the party´s own procedural rules and principles (Helou 2020, p. 157).

Upon Bassil´s appointment, the brooding anger of some veteran Aounists reached a pinnacle, leading to an open internal dispute. In consequence, by July 2016, the FPM judicial council sacked three of its senior activists who have spearheaded the chorus of critique, namely Naim Aoun (Michel Aoun´s nephew), Ziad Abs (one of the core contributors to the

2006 MOU with Hizbullah), and Antoine Nasrallah (Helou 2020, p. 182), for “raising the FPM crisis in the media” and “rebelling against movement decisions.” (Naharnet 29/7/2016) At the latest since Bassil took over as FPM president, indeed, a horizontal division within the party became discernable, that seems to feature one current “that remains loyal to Aoun’ and one that wishes to outbid the first by expressing its absolute loyalty to the heir [Bassil].” (Ad-Diyyar 1/6/2016)

3.2.2.5 The FPM as a Maronite/ Christian political representation

The original central aim of the Aounists (to end the Syrian occupation of Lebanon) had dispersed through Syria´s withdrawal in spring 2005. This turned their focus to other long-standing aims, such as building the state and fighting corruption (Helou 2020, p. 140). Paradoxically, however, the sudden reemergence of Aoun on the political scene in Lebanon by May 2005 had also sparked expectations in parts of his environment, that he would soon be able to allocate “pieces of the cake,” (Helou 2020, p. 151) as this is what is commonly expected from all communal leaders within the clientelist structures in place in Lebanon. This shows how Michel Aoun was also seen as – and increasingly became – a senior Maronite/ Christian leader in ethnicized-confessional terms and the FPM – since its establishment as a national political party and launching full participation in the Lebanese political system and democracy – a Maronite/ Christian interest representation. This holds true, irrespective of the significant number of non-Christian FPM members and despite the Aounists´ traditional aim of “secularization,” meaning abolishing Lebanese political confessionalism, especially for what is seen as its role in fostering clientelist and nepotist structures and political corruption (FPM 2005a; ibid. 2005b; Pouillard 2009).

Thus, the FPM´s post-2005 political course was also and increasingly guided by what Helou describes as “sectarian strategies.” (Helou 2020, p. 141) As a result of the movement´s origins, the core constituency of the FPM has traditionally been Maronite/ Christian and this constituency now equaled the political party´s electoral base. In fact, out of the FPM´s twenty-one lawmakers in the 2005-2009 parliament, only one was a Sunni and two where Shi`i Muslims. The remaining eighteen were all Christians of different denominations, yet, in the vast majority (twelve) Maronites. Moreover, in the 2005 and 2009 parliamentary elections, the FPM was favored by roughly 70 % and 50 % of the country´s Christian voter base respectively.

Even though the prime target of political critique raised by FPM politicians in daily politics was usually the al-Hariri-led (Sunni) Mustaqbal movement (e.g. Naharnet 9/7/2015; ibid.

29/3/2016; Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012a&b), the factual core rivals of the FPM were the other notable Maronite/ Christian political representations, headed by the LF and al-Katā´ib. Just as General Aoun had fought them militarily in their earlier occurrences as Civil War militias; the party that has evolved in inspiration of his political path and under his guidance now faced them in the constant intra-communal competition for supporters and votes that is so characteristic especially for the heterogenous Maronite/ Christian political landscape. Seen in this light, Aoun and the FPM were also under pressure to cater to the demands of a predominantly Christian voter base, which largely translated into safeguarding ethnicized-confessional Christian interests (ibid.).

Against the background of its strong popular support among the Lebanese Christians, the FPM was soon to engage in a discourse depicting Michel Aoun "as the leader of Christians in Lebanon" up to effectively equating him with the Christians altogether (Helou 2020, p. 142). On this basis, "the FPM began portraying any political attempt to underrepresent it in the Council of Ministers as a devious plot to marginalize the Christians." (Ibid. p. 141) Moreover, the FPM now also increasingly resorted to the same kind of clientelist practices it has always explicitly condemned and defied, such as playing the "welfare card," i.e. distributing social services of various kinds as a means to reinforce the loyalty of supporters, especially in times of elections (ibid., pp. 143–7, 171–2). At the same time, this is also what was factually expected from its followers, as in Lebanon "[c]itizens have become accustomed to receiving services from their politicians as opposed to state institutions, which they probably consider inefficient." (Helou 2020, p. 144)

Moreover, in light of the imagined Sunni-Shi`i rift accompanying the domestic divide between March 8th and March 14th in Lebanon which was heavily fueled by the rivalry between these camps´ regional backers (mainly Shi`i Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia respectively) from day one – and considering further the factual curbing of Maronite/ Christian political power through the Ta`if Accord – there was also a strong sense of fear among many Christians upon the time of Michel Aoun´s return to Lebanon, to now become "crushed" in what has been described as a "Sunni Shiite Cold War." (Center for Democracy in Lebanon [CDL] 2007) It came under this heading that someone calling himself "Don Quixotte"[118] from the CDL wrote:

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[118] In a footnote illustrating this choice of alias, the author says: "*The voice of one… or maybe of thousands*."

> “The attack on MP Ghanim in Sin El-Fil is the eighteenth in a series of terrorist attacks that hit Lebanon after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005. Similar previous attacks aimed at the assassination of prominent leaders and public figures (Samir Kassir, Georges Hawi, Elias El-Murr, May Chidiac, Gebran Tueini, Pierre Gemayel, Walid Eido and Antoine Ghanem) and at creating mayhem and killing innocent civilians in different areas of Keserwan, Metn and Beirut (New Jdeideh, Kaslik, Sad El-Bouchrieh, Broummana, Jounieh, Monot, Zalka, Jeitawi, Ain Alak and Sin El-Fil). Except for the assassination of MP Walid Eido, seventeen of the eighteen acts of terrorism targeted Christian civilians, leaders, members of Parliament (MPs), public figures, and civilian and business targets. […] Without detailing the chronology of all the other events and reviving the sad memories of each one, it is safe to say that they all happened around key decisions where Shias and Sunnis in government did not see eye to eye. Instead of heating up the war between the two groups directly, someone found an easier alternative and a less costly target: the Christians – their blood may be cheaper. This is not to say that there was an executive decision by the Sunni political leadership or by the Shiite political leadership to kill the Christians; but both Sunnis and Shias have, in their cold war, created a fertile environment for the forces of darkness to further their agendas; be it pro-Syrian, pro-Iranian, pro-American or pro-Islamic. The only agenda that certainly does not seem to be furthered in Lebanon today, is pro-Lebanese.” (CDL 2007)

Against the background of such a mood prevailing in large parts of the Christian milieu, Michel Aoun also “found himself asserting leadership in defense of his predominantly Christian voter base.” (Helou 2020, p. 170) Given the beset situation faced by many Christian minorities in the Middle East in general (Beck 2012, pp. 1–4), Aoun, as the intermittently most popular Christian leader and current President of the Lebanese Republic – the one Middle Eastern state in which Christians not only make up a major share of the population but are also thoroughly represented – now also gradually positioned himself as a “Christian Orientalist,” that is a leader of the Christians within the East (Helou 2020, p. 170; Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013; Pouillard 2009). This new self-understanding was reflected in accordant speech and also, for instance, in several visits paid by Aoun to the presumed burial site of St. Maroun in the Syrian city of Brad (Helou 2020, p. 170; Loosley 2005, p. 184), in receiving representatives of the Eastern Churches and discussing with them the varying situations of Christians in the Middle East (National News Agency [NNA] 22/6/2018), or in keeping good relations with (and visiting) the Pope and the Vatican (Assaf 2017).

All of these examples have in common that they invoke and display the religious dimension of Aoun´s Maronite Christian identity. At the same time, since the emergence of the historical rift between Michel Aoun and the Maronite Patriarchate in the late Civil War years (sealed by late Patriarch Sfeir accepting the Ta`if Accord and the subsequent storming of Bkerke by angry Aounists on November 5, 1989) there has never been a full reconciliation between these two Maronite Christian powerhouses and their relations remain highly delicate. In fact, Aoun, in line with his official secular stances, maintains his long-standing position that the Patriarchate should keep out of politics and focus on its role as a religious institution (Daily Star 4/12/2007). This distinguishes him from other senior Maronite Christian leaders, which, especially during the Patriarchate (1986-2011) of Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir (1920-2019), had commonly excellent relations with Bkerke, frequently sought the Patriarch´s advise or approval, and competed for his political backing (Saad 2005; ibid. 2012). Michel Aoun, in contrast, claims Christian leadership while openly sidelining the Maronite Patriarchate. Yet, neither does he neglect his own Christian religious identity nor the Maronite Catholic Church as such.

The to date clearest indication for Aoun´s claim to Christian leadership was arguably his "Memorandum of Christian Principles and Basics," which he presented in early December 2007 after days of deliberations with other Lebanese Christian figures. It lists a number of "immediate demands," such as ensuring that (Maronite) candidates for the post of the president enjoy certain "representative and personal qualities," that a "Christian imbalance in government jobs be redressed," the adoption of a "just election law," which employs small electoral districts "to ensure fair representation," that those "Christians displaced during the 1975-1990 Civil War be returned to their homes; and that the fate of those missing from the same conflict be determined." (Daily Star 4/12/2007) On the same occasion, "Aoun also decried attempts to push the Maronite Church into a more political role" (ibid.), slammed what he considered a currently mere "'symbolic' participation" of Christians in government and confirmed that the Lebanese Christians sought to cooperate with other communities for fostering national unity. Aoun argued that an active Christian role in state and society was beneficial for the Christian presence in Lebanon (ibid.). The retired General furthermore emphasized the Christian "role as a conduit between the East and the West" and lamented what he identified as "regional and Western perceptions" according to which this Christian role was no longer relevant. Finally, Aoun also stressed the need to find a just solution to the Palestinian issue and to spread democracy in the region as indispensible preconditions for resolving the regional crisis at large (ibid.).

Aoun´s (and the FPM´s) nowadays´ position towards the plight of the Christians in the region is meanwhile not simply echoing the widespread thesis that "Muslim extremism" was affecting a Christian exodus from the Midle East (Beck 2012, pp. 6–7), even though the identification of Christians as prime victims of extremist violence is shared. Michel Aoun rejects the idea that this extremism was rooted in Islam, minding that its victims were Muslims and Christians alike: "Terrorism constitutes a retroactive reaction that has nothing to do with Islam and is moving away from the fundamental principles of this religion […]

Christians and Muslims! Everyone has been affected; both mosques and churches have been attacked in Syria." (Aoun 2017[119]) This view is also a result of Aoun´s rapprochement with Hizbullah, the military potency of which, according to the FPM mid-level functionary "Alain R.," then Vice-Coordinator of the FPM Diaspora Committee, "simply deters extremists and other groups following a war agenda here" so that "they cannot put their plans into practice." (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013) Against this backdrop, while fully acknowledging the grave threat posed by Muslim extremist groups such as al-Qaʿida or the IS, Aoun still emphazises that "Christians in the region are no longer in 'direct danger'" (ibid.) and that "Christianity continues in the East." (NNA 22/6/2018) All of this is indicative of the Aounists´ distinguished concern and agenda with respect to Eastern Christendom: Preserving and preferably enhancing the Christian presence in the Orient – the true cradle of Christianity. The FPM member "Yousef B.," a 25-year-old student from Kisrawan, who also worked as a "political officer" with Gibran Bassil, explained:

> "After 2006 and [since] the Memorandum of Understanding, there is a big Christian shift to the East. There is a public speech, especially [from] within the Free Patriotic Movement, saying; we are Christians from the Middle East, we have to stay here, we have to … Especially when he went … the leader of the FPM … when he went to Syria or Iran, he said; we have to live with our neighbors, which are Muslims. We have to be in good relations. Stop looking to France and the United States and Europe to protect us because we are obliged to live here in Lebanon. […] Christianity was born here and this is kind of our land and we are obliged to live with our … we can't live alone here. And it's not a good idea that all Christians go to Europe or Canada or …" (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.2 2012)

Taking these pro-Christian aims and stances, on the one hand, clearly serves the FPM´s interests as its leadership is well aware about the huge Christian Lebanese diaspora, a notable share of which it counts to its own potential voter base. On the other hand, however, the explicit focus on the East alongside the emphasis placed on belonging to an Eastern Church stands also in contrast to the anti-Arabist/ pro-Western or pro-Israeli tendencies displayed by important Lebanese Maronite leaders in the past, which therefore resonates with not a few Muslims either. As "Ahmad K.," a Shi`i Lebanese journalist working at al-Mabarrāt (belonging to the network of the deceased Ayatollah Fadlallah) in Haret Hreik, 53 years in age, and supportive of the MoU and alliance between the FPM and Hizbullah, has approvingly noted:

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[119] Quoted after Assaf 2017.

> “Christians usually turned to the West for fighting internal adversaries. This was the first time … not the first time exactly, as there have always been certain Christian personalities that were anti-Israel. However, this was the first time that there was this popular Christian trend that did not look primarily up to the West but to the East.” (Author´s interv. CC.Hzb.3 2013)

3.3 A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) AS FOUNDING DOCUMENT

On February 6th, 2006, in a move that surprised literally everyone except for the few people involved into the preceding process (cf. Bouyoub 2013, p. 178; Ilias 2011, chapter 2.2), Hizbullah´s Secretary General Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah and senior FPM leader General Michel Aoun held their first personal meeting ever whereafter they ceremoniously signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on behalf of their respective parties. The two top leaders were accompanied by Mahmoud Qumati and Ghaleb Abou Zaynab from Hizbullah and Gibran Bassil, Ziad Abs and Fouad al-Ashkar from the FPM. The meeting lasted for three hours and was followed by a press conference in which Abou Zaynab and Bassil read the text of the MoU to the public.

As a location for this watershed event to take place, the organizers had chosen Mar Mikhael church in Shiyyah, directly bordering Haret Hreik, both located in the Southern suburbs of Beirut and formally belonging to the district of Baabda – a symbolic venue for many reasons. Not only was Michel Aoun born in the village of Haret Hreik; the whole area, which once had a nearly exclusive Maronite Christian population, is nowadays – after decades of internal working migration, fifteen years of Civil War (1975-90), the vast destruction of the July War (2006) and more than a decade of intense political polarization (2005-2016) – predominantly inhabited by Shi`a, with still some Maronites in their midst. The southern suburbs count as a Hizbullah stronghold, and much of the party´s security environment was concentrated not very far from Mar Mikhael church at that point in time.

The church is moreover located in the immediate vicinity of the former Green Line that separated the “Muslim” West from the “Christian” East Beirut during the Civil War and has seen and withstood massive fighting not only but especially between Muslims and Christians. Finally, and most importantly, picking a historic church as the venue for Eastern Christians and Muslims striking a constructive agreement against the backdrop of frequent assaults perpetrated by extremist Muslims against Christians in several parts of the Middle East was also a direct message to all those doubting the religious tolerance of the Islamist Hizbullah – whether from within Lebanon or from without.

3.3.1 Content of the MoU

The MoU constitutes a ten-point political program for Lebanon. What follows are – partially commented – summaries of each point separately. The paper begins with the subject of (1) dialogue, here referring to the idea of a permanent, institutionalized national dialogue in form of a round table, addressing all "issues of a national character" under participation of all "the parties that have a political, popular and national standing." It should be guided by Lebanese interests only and based on "free and committed Lebanese decision-making." (FPM/ Hizbullah 2006, quoted after Yalibnan.com 9/2/2006)

Second comes a clear commitment to (2) consensual democracy (i.e. consociationalism), which is not so much credited, let alone endorsed, for what it is, but rather pragmatically seen as the only viable solution at hand until "the historic and social conditions for practicing effective [i.e. majoritarian] democracy" have been brought about and "the citizen becomes a self standing value." (Ibid.) Bullet-point three demands a profound (3) reform of the electoral law. Proportional representation (as opposed to the "first past the post system" then still in place) is prominently mentioned as one possibility for guaranteeing "the accuracy and equity of popular representation." The reforms shall in effect help to

> "develop the role of the political parties in achieving civil society [, l]imit the influence of political money and sectarian fanaticisms [, m]ake available equal opportunities for using the various media channels [and s]ecure the required means for enabling the expatriate Lebanese to exercise their voting rights." (Ibid.)

The next point is headlined (4) "Building the State." This rather vague slogan is then broken down to what is seen as the main requirements for achieving a strong and just state. This includes institutional stability in the face of geo-political and regional political volatility, to be achieved by a strengthening of the central institutions, the separation of powers and the rule of law. It also includes clearly defined democratic standards ("standards of justice, equality, parity, merit and integrity") against which the institutions´ performance would become measurable, as well as a system of effective checks and balances – especially with respect to combating political corruption. The latter point is particularly pronounced and includes a detailed suggestion for an action program, pointing to its centrality for both parties involved (ibid.).

Point five addresses the issue of (5) the missing during the (civil) war.[120] The main emphasis, however, is not on blame or revenge, but on accountability and clarification of the numerous open cases as a precondition for forgiveness on behalf of the victims and for a process of true reconciliation to set in. To this end, “all the forces and parties that participated in the war [are asked] for their full cooperation to uncover the fate of the missing and the locations of the mass graves.” (Ibid.)

Point six calls upon (6) the Lebanese residing in the “enemy territory” of Israel to “promptly return to their country,” where they would face an orderly trial.[121] As explicated in the same passage, this position results from the conviction of both parties to the MoU, “that the presence of Lebanese citizens in their homeland is better than their presence in enemy territory.” (Ibid.)

The seventh point subsumes a number of tangible, then all still unresolved, issues under the heading (7) “The Security Question.” It begins with a condemnation of political assassinations because of their “violation of basic human rights, the most important foundations of the existence of Lebanon represented by difference and diversity, and the essence of democracy and its practice.” With regard to the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri and “all assassinations and assassination attempts that preceded and followed it,” the MoU calls for “proceeding forward with the investigation according to the officially-approved mechanisms in order to uncover the truth, […] to achieve justice […] as well as to bring an end to the cycle of murder and bombings.” At the same time, these issues should be distanced “from any attempts at politically exploiting them.” (Ibid.)

Far-reaching reforms in the security sector are urged, as they are seen as “an inseparable part of the broader reform process of the basic State institutions, and to rebuild them on sound and solid bases.” In more detail, “an integrated security plan based on the centralization of decision in security matters and a clear definition of enemy versus friend” is proposed, that would go in line with the goal of neutralizing “the Security Services against any political considerations and patronages.” Meritocratic considerations should furthermore guide the filling of positions and assignments of responsibilities. A word of caution is uttered with regard to the danger of security measures infringing on the constitutionally guaranteed basic freedoms – which must be prevented. For the purpose of overseeing and controlling the envisaged security-sector reform, finally, a “joint Parliamentary-Security Services committee” shall be set-up (ibid.).

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[120] The veteran ‘Aounist Ghazi Aad (1957-2016) was the founder of the Lebanese NGO Support of Lebanese in Detention and Exile (SOLIDE), standing up for the rights of the detained Lebanese in Syria, Israel and elsewhere and their families by peaceful means. By his own account, his influence within the FPM – and on Michel ‘Aoun himself – has been imperative for the MoU´s inclusion of this point (follow-up talks with Ghazi Aad in October 2013).

[121] This assurance is only indirectly included in the text of the MoU, by reference to accordant statements of both Nasrallah and ‘Aoun (FPM/ Hizbullah 2006, quoted after Yalibnan 9/2/2006).

The eighth and ninth points deal with Lebanon´s relations to (8) Syria and (9) to the Palestinians respectively. Concerning the former, a review of the past is depicted as indispensible for avoiding “the accumulated mistakes, blemishes and breaches.” The goal is, however, to “re-cast these relations on clear bases on parity and the full and mutual respect for the sovereignty and independence of both States, and on the grounds of a rejection of a return to any form of foreign tutelage.” (Ibid.) To this end, the Lebanese government is called upon to,

> “take all legal measures and procedures pertaining to the assertion of the Lebanese identity of the Shebaa Farms and present these to the United Nations [, d]elineate the borders between Lebanon and Syria, while eliminating the tensions that could break down the process [, d]emand the Syrian State to fully cooperate with the Lebanese State in order to uncover the fate of the Lebanese detainees in Syrian prisons in the absence of provocation, tension and negativity [and e]stablish diplomatic relations between the two countries and provide appropriate conditions […] to secure their permanence and constancy.” (Ibid.)

As with regard to Lebanese-Palestinian relations, the MoU mainly addresses official Lebanon´s relations to those Palestinians living within its borders. It thereby emphasizes both the Palestinians´ duty to respect the authority of the Lebanese state and abide by its laws and solidarity with the Palestinians´ “cause and their recovery of their rights.” It therefore acknowledges the necessity to improve their living conditions and secure “a decent standard for the bases of a dignified human life [in accordance with] the human rights charter, in addition to [enable them] to move inside and outside of Lebanese territory.” (Ibid.) The paper then affirms the refugees´ right to return to their homeland and the rejection of their naturalization, which is said to be a consensual position of all Lebanese. It furthermore calls for a centralization of Palestinian decision-making with respect to Palestinian-Lebanese relations within “a single institutional Palestinian framework[,]” and for bringing “the practice of weapons outside the camps to an end, [as well as arranging] for the security situation inside the camps.” At the end of the day, these efforts shall culminate in “the exercise of the State’s authority and laws over all Lebanese territory.” (Ibid.)

The last point ten, finally, addresses (10) “The Protection of Lebanon and Preserving its Independence and Sovereignty,” which are described as “a national public responsibility and duty, guaranteed by international treaties and the Human Rights Charter.” It argues that "carrying arms is not an objective in itself [but] is an honorable and sacred means that is exercised by any group whose land is occupied, in a manner identical to the methods of political resistance." (Ibid.) The controversy of Hizbullah's weapons should therefore be addressed by striving for a national consensus for keeping the weapons until the objective conditions for the party´s disarmament are met. Crucially, these conditions shall be clearly defined. In the meantime, the Lebanese people are urged to

> "share the burden of protecting Lebanon, safeguarding its existence and security and protecting its independence and sovereignty by: A- Liberating the Shebaa Farms from the Israeli occupation. B- Liberating the Lebanese prisoners from Israeli prisons. C- Protecting Lebanon from Israeli threats through a national dialogue leading to the formulation of a national defense strategy over which the Lebanese agree to and subscribe to by assuming its burdens and benefiting from its outcomes." (Ibid.)

3.3.2 A national or a partisan program?

The commitment to the method of dialogue as the preferred form of intra-Lebanese political communication expressed in point one of the document is, of course, much more than that. As repeatedly explained by the elites involved, the MoU is essentially to be understood as an invitation to all other noteworthy political currents of Lebanon, whether allies or opponents, to join in, with the opportunity of taking part in shaping its further elaboration. Dialogue – guided by nothing but Lebanese interests and considerations – is the vehicle seen as appropriate to get there. This highlights an understanding of the MoU by its originators as a "national" in contrast to a "partisan" political program (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.1 2012 & IE.FPM.2 2013; Bouyoub 2013, p. 179).

3.3.2.1 In the interest of whom?

The aforementioned difference becomes apparent when taking a closer look at the representation of interests throughout the document´s text. While some of the main vested interests of the FPM and Hizbullah respectively are clearly reflected, this only goes for the ones which are viewed by them as serving the common good. This includes the Aounist´s longstanding demands for electoral and security sector reforms, the fighting of corruption, border demarcation, facilitating a return of the former SLA men and their families from Israel back to Lebanon and elucidating the files of the missing during the war and the detainees in Syrian prisons. It also includes Hizbullah´s right to armed resistance, the freeing of Lebanese prisoners from Israeli jails, the liberation of occupied territory and – generally speaking – deterrence and security.

More narrow group interests, in contrast, be they of a political, ethnicized-confessional, or religious nature, are not discernable. One could have expected, for instance, clear demands for readjusting the political power-balance given the Christians´ relative loss of power to the advantage of the Sunnis after Ta`if and the longstanding political underrepresentation of the Shi`a. In light of Hizbullah´s religious basic orientation, we could furthermore imagine appeals for safeguarding the acceptance of religion as a source of morals in politics, phrased in formulas that might have gained the acceptance of the officially secular FPM too. Likewise, the FPM could have demanded a higher share in governmental representation, based on the results of the May-June 2005 elections – which, at least for the moment, rendered it the single strongest Christian political representation – and by applying a corresponding reading of the relevant constitutional stipulations (as is frequently done in the absence of an unambiguous legal formula). This list could be continued at will. However, none such issues were raised.

Irrespective of the interests involved, the points that were included in the document amount to a summary of much of what politically moved (and mostly still moves) the Lebanese from all walks of life (Germanos 2013, p. 23). Given the imperative role of Palestinian actors in the Lebanese Civil War and the delicate and volatile arrangements in place for governing the Palestinian presence in the country; regulating this presence is a longstanding and urgent concern of both the Lebanese and the residential Palestinians alike. The same can be said for the relations to Syria, which have proven highly complicated ever since Lebanon became a separate polity under French mandate in 1920. Most Lebanese, regardless of their stance towards the Asad administration, would likely agree that the destinies of Lebanon and Syria are so deeply interwoven that neither mutual seclusion, nor continuous hostility constitute viable options for the future of their relations. A return to Syrian tutelage is equally rejected by most parties, including Hizbullah (Shabb 2018). In other words, a clear arrangement is needed to bring about good neighborly relations at eye-level.

The question of Hizbullah´s weapons constitutes one of the single most heated and controversially-debated aspects of Lebanese domestic (and foreign) policy ever since the party was exempted from disarmament after the official end of the Civil War in 1990. The prospect of a transparent approach to defining the conditions under which Hizbullah shall keep its arms and the parameters for it´s independent armament to cease, must, by any standards, be seen as a crucial breakthrough. This holds true no matter how much it falls short of fulfilling the wishes of the staunchest adversaries of Hizbullah´s weapons; to immediately transfer the authority over these to the state.

The extensive corruption among the Lebanese political class is subject to the frequent commotion of most Lebanese. At the same time, it constitutes one of the things most difficult to bring under control, given the direct and deep implication of much of the legislature and the executive. The question is simply where the political interest for fighting corruption should actually stem from. We know, however, that by 2006, Hizbullah was still enjoying its "Mr. Clean" image based on the parameters and perceptions discussed above, and, even by today, corruption charges levied against the party remain marginal in comparison to most other political actors on the stage. The FPM, in turn, had just formed in 2005 and was therefore out of the equation. Its record as a political party was virginal and its prehistory in Lebanon is much more shaped by the General´s efforts towards state-building and good governance than by anything else in this respect. In other words, the two parties that now called for pursuing a national path of combating corruption and delivered a relatively mature template for its implementation were exactly those which were in the most predestined position to do so. This picture has since changed, as many citizens evidently gained the perception that both the FPM and Hizbullah, in constantly consolidating their comparably newfound positions in the country´s ruling elite up until May 2018, have become implicated in the traditional modes of Lebanese politics too (Naharnet 25/10/2019). However, in 2006, none of this was foreseeable and all complaints levied against these parties on behalf of their domestic opponents notwithstanding; corruption and nepotism were no issue then.

Investigating the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri and others was the most topical and critical issue in Lebanon upon the MoU's proclamation, minding that the accordant rift (the STL-controversy) had already begun. The wording applied in the MoU, however; "we emphasize the importance of proceeding forward with the investigation according to the officially-approved mechanisms" remains highly ambiguous. This is because the question of where and on which level (national vs. international) the authority to officially approve of the investigation´s nature should have been located was what actually constituted the conflict. This ambiguity came surely not by mistake but points to the intention to not open that controversy here.

Freeing the Lebanese detained in Syria or Israel and getting back the former SLA militiamen and their families, the demarcation of Lebanon´s borders, strengthening its security organs (in particular the LAF) and the "Lebanization" of Lebanese politics; all of these themes were – and most still are – subject to heated internal debates and constantly represented in the daily domestic news coverage. In this sense, they all constitute issues of national interest. The approaches suggested for tackling them could of course not in all cases be expected to be consensually endorsed, yet there is nothing particular radical about them either (except maybe for raising them so frankly). More than that, there is also nothing offensive about them; neither in terms of policies that would be directly detrimental to any other notable Lebanese actor´s interests, nor in the form of implicit cultural messages or outright offenses. When reading the MoU, one rather gets the feeling that its authors were especially concerned to present a true basis for mutual consent and not to hurt the feelings of any of Lebanon´s relevant components but to raise a patriotic, national spirit that would make everyone feel relaxed and invited. This intention is also claimed by Abou Zaynab, who noted that, in the pre-MoU period, after an initial phase that mainly focused on reducing fears and getting to know one another better, "[t]he next step was to find out the points of contention among the Lebanese [and what] is important for [them,] in order to have a common ground amongst them and [to] come up with a solution or a statement that will satisfy everybody and [evict] the fears of everyone." (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.1 2012)

3.3.2.2 What kind of national program?

The most common agreements between Lebanese political parties are forged on the highest level, between two or more parties, for electoral or similar short-term purposes, with their content never made public, if documented at all. In such instances, the followers of the actors involved are at one point informed about this given and asked to vote for the relevant lists, without knowledge about what has been actually agreed upon. This works, because, in light of the conditions of clientelism, everyone involved is well aware about the nature and benefits of such bargains. They necessitate a period of displayed harmony but do not affect political ideas or loyalties as such. In some cases, when the relevant parties are otherwise adversaries (as for instance with the Quadripartite Alliance), it furthermore requires a temporary truce between them.

None of this happens by chance but is basically what the consociational political system is aiming at (relying on quasi-coercive measures to this end); cross-community elite negotiations as a way to achieve consensus and overcome political deadlock. The aim of diffusing tensions, however, is only temporarily served through these kinds of agreements, as "[t]hey usually cease to exist shortly after the elections, when the context changes or foreign states force the alliance to end." (Bouyoub 2013, p. 185)

The difference in nature between such tactical and, from an external perspective, rather obscure political bargains on the one hand and the strategic outreach and transparency of the MoU on the other hand is obvious and needs no further explanation. However, in the post-

MoU phase, both Hizbullah and the FPM each signed a further, separate paper of understanding with a third party respectively. First, on August 18th, 2008, Hizbullah signed a MoU with a number of Lebanese *salafī* groups and individuals (Alahednews.com 2008), which, however, was suspended on behalf of the *salafīs* one day later in response to heavy objections faced by the Future Movement alongside opposed Salafist groups (Al-Akhbar 6/2/2015). Secondly, on January 18th, 2016, Michel Aoun for the FPM and Samir Geagea for the Lebanese Forces signed their "Maarab Understanding" (An-Nahar 18/1/2016) which has so far not been abandoned, despite continuous tensions between the FPM and the LF.

In both of these cases, just as with the FPM-Hizbullah MoU, dialogue is valued as a virtue in its own right and the content of the agreements has been documented and presented to the public in full. Another similarity lies in the rapprochement of seemingly very unlikely partners. In other respects, however, the later MoUs differ significantly from the original one. Pointing to the social and political weight of both Hizbullah and the FPM in comparison to the Hizbullah-*salafī* pairing, Boushra Bouyoub has argued that "[t]he significance of the MoU rests with the importance of the signatories." (Bouyoub 2013, p. 185) In light of the Lebanese Salafists´ comparably minor status, this observation is obviously correct and the Maarab Understanding was not yet existent, let alone foreseeable, when Bouyoub´s contribution was published in 2013. Still, since the steady demise of al-Katā´ib, the LF party is the other major Maronite/ Christian representation and therefore absolutely comparable to the FPM in terms of political and social weight. On the other hand, the Maarab Understanding lacks the cross-communal foundation of both the Hizbullah-Salafist and the Hizbullah-FPM pairings, while only the latter also bridges the broader Muslim-Christian divide.

When looking into the categories of focus and reach, both later understandings have in common that they foremost aim at reducing specific intra-group tensions respectively and are therefore especially concerned with the relevant communities and their sub-units. The Hizbullah-Salafist MoU aims at preventing Sunni-Shi`i strife. In a side note, however, it also calls for the coexistence of all Lebanese communities. The Maarab Understanding, in contrast, touches upon a whole number of national issues (like confirming commitment to the Ta`if Accord while criticizing its implementation in light of the situation of the Christians, strengthening the LAF, or changing the electoral law) but remains vague and superficial in doing so. Its prime focus is on intra-Maronite reconciliation, which is directly related to the goal of restoring Christian influence in the state.

In the words of Michel Aoun, the Maarab Understanding is primarily "based on the idea of strengthening friendship with people whom we did not have strongly friendly ties before."

(Aoun 2016)[122] Indeed, in light of the violent history of relations between the Aounists and the LF, this point may well be considered the most beneficial for the people on the ground. The same applies all the more to the Hizbullah-Salafists MoU and the relations between Sunni and Shi`i Muslims in Lebanon; especially in the wake of the mini civil war of May 2008 and under the impression of rising regional tensions between actors categorized as “Shi`i” or “Sunni” by many observers or by these actors themselves. The timing of this agreement was therefore well picked – even if it never crystalized. However, the original motivation of both sides has ostensibly not vanished so far (Al-Akhbar 6/2/2015) and we might well see its delayed realization sometime in the future.

Civil peace and coexistence are certainly subjects of national importance, no matter if the focus is placed on particular segments of the society only, as in the two examples at hand. Yet, there is a major difference between suggesting or even successfully implementing a specific solution to an identified and delimited problem – such as Sunni- Shi`i strife or the LF-Aounist legacy – on the one hand, and coming up with an overall program, the principles of which are more or less applicable in any given situation on the other hand. Herein lies the decisive difference.

The FPM-Hizbullah MoU offers a national program in the sense that it a) addresses the major issues of national concern, b) delivers suggestions for policies to tackle these national issues and c) is non-partisan in outlook and therefore open to all national currents, communities and regions alike. The latter two MoUs, in contrast, do also address issues of national concern but offer no palpable suggestion for accordant policies, except for their respective main concern; Sunni-Shi`a strife and the LF-FPM (i.e. intra-Maronite/ Christian) conflict. Their attention rests on the communal spheres concerned, even if a successful implementation might facilitate mutual cooperation on the national level too.

As relevant Lebanese national agreements of the past, Bouyoub mainly lists the *mutaṣarrifiyya* (1861-1915/18), the French mandate (1918/20-1943/46), the National Pact (1943) and the Ta`if Accord (1990) (Bouyoub 2013, p. 186). The latter can meanwhile not all be equated either. The *mutaṣarrifiyya*, the French mandate and the Ta`if Accord were all brokered by foreign actors and were reflective of their respective interests in Lebanon. The *mutaṣarrifiyya* was a result of asymmetric negotiations between the militarily superior European imperialist powers (Britain, France, Russia, Austria and Prussia) and an already weakened Ottoman empire (Harris 2012, p. 159; Corm 1997, pp. 18–24). The French mandate was a result of French-British bargaining, yet officially granted by the League of Nations. The Ta`if Accord was officially brokered by the Arab League. Yet, it was reflective especially of US, Saudi Arabian and Syrian interests. In the case of Syria, as we know, the recognition of these interests was explicit and the consequences most far-reaching. The National Pact, in contrast to all the aforementioned, was a verbal agreement struck between two leading Lebanese politicians of their times; the Maronite Christian Bishara al-Khouri and the Sunni Muslim Riad al-Sulh. It was announced in the ministerial statement of the first independent government of Lebanon and this link "to the struggles of independence legitimized it among all Lebanese sects." (Bouyoub 2013, p. 186)

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[122] Quoted after Daily Star 31/10/2016.

So how does the MoU fit into this array in comparison? In light of its content and the ambitions of the parties involved, Germanos speaks of the MoU as a "new National Pact." (Germanos 2013, pp. 23–6) Bouyoub argues that from all the aforementioned, the MoU is at least best comparable to the National Pact, pointing to its similar structures. This includes that two prominent political leaders from different communities – one Christian and one Muslim respectively – decided to come together for the negotiation of an agreement that is meant to serve the national interest. It also pertains to similarities in context, such as the post-independence background to the National Pact *vis-à-vis* the post-Syrian tutelage context of the MoU. In contrast to the National Pact, however, the MoU cannot be reduced to a deal, struck between two political leaders. It was negotiated by delegations of both parties and on behalf of these parties, even if the circle of adepts was highly limited. Finally, whilst both the National Pact and the MoU have a cross-communal foundation, the latter, in contrast to the former, makes no mention of confessional belonging (Bouyoub 2013, pp. 186–7).

Thus, the MoU must be registered as a national rather than a partisan political program in outlook. It constitutes a political understanding of two influential communal representatives of Lebanon, meant to become a foundation upon which first a) imminent dangers could be fended-off and thereafter b) all of Lebanon´s identified illnesses could be cured in a systematic fashion. In the words of Hizbullah´s Ghaleb Abou Zaynab:

> "[T]his is an alliance that transcends time and the small bits and pieces of political entanglement or political alliances in certain electoral areas. It is […] a vision of a strategic […] understanding of how the Lebanese entity and the Lebanese government should be and could be." (Authors interv. E.Hzb.1 2012)

A political, i.e. a partisan alliance was not only no original intent; in fact, sincere efforts were initially made to avoid such a development. Commenting on the dissatisfaction expressed by some allies over not having been inaugurated into the process of drafting the MoU (see below), Abou Zaynab stated that, “we did not want to appear in a political alignment against others.” He furthermore referred to the invitation extended by General Michel Aoun and Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah “to all political leaders to adopt the document and propose ratifications if it were found necessary.” (Ghaleb Abou Zaynab 2012, quoted after Bouyoub 2013, p. 179)

However, there was a reason for both groups to start this endeavor with each other instead of with anyone else. Indeed, when viewing the MoUs content, we can detect a high compatibility of both groups´ general ideas about what is best for their common homeland just as we can discern a notable degree of mutual influence. To the account of Hizbullah´s senior politician and former Minister of Labor, Trad Hamadeh, the FPM and Hizbullah have actually a lot in common. As examples he mainly lists the importance supposedly attributed to “social issues and reforms,” seeking a “fair state,” looking back to a corruption-free record and “fighting corruption,” that neither Hizbullah´s nor the FPM´s leaders were descendants from “established feudal or political families” and that family background, in both parties, played “only a minor role,” especially when compared to the “traditional Lebanese parties […] where everything turns around one family.” Finally, Hamadeh also claims that both the FPM and Hizbullah put special “emphasis on the youth, and [create] opportunities for various youth leadership roles and for the formation of new elites that were not part of the elites of the past.” (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.2 2012)

Yet, the FPM was originally at odds with Hizbullah in political terms and the parties had no publicly known record of notable relations. Occasionally, Michel Aoun and Hassan Nasrallah have even talked disapproving about each other in the past, with the former having still in 2005, less than six months before signing the MoU, criticized the latter´s “intolerable preconditions for dialogue.” (Khashan 2012, p. 81) So what made them actually become aware of their compatibility? How did they come together and got to know about each other better? In other words; how did it all begin? These and further questions will be addressed in the following section, before turning to the development of relations in the time span considered.

3.4 WHO´S ALLIANCE?

3.4.1 How it all began

Many of Lebanon´s political leaders, especially from among the Maronite/ Christian establishment, felt all but relieved about Michel Aoun´s return to Lebanon from French exile on May 7th, 2005. Witnessing this man being frenetically received by an impressive crowd of overwhelmingly but by no means solely Christian Lebanese – despite his altogether fifteen years of absence (this includes his one-year stay at the French embassy in Beirut) – made it visible to everyone that this powerful player would from now on have to be reckoned with anew and that he would demand a considerable share in Lebanon´s rather consistent political post-war order. Most importantly, he was also likely to receive this share sooner rather than later. Michel Aoun´s return could thus be expected to disrupt the power balance in place, especially in view of the established Christian representations, many of whom were led by his former adversaries. After all, not a few of the people that gathered to welcome the General, had until now, willy-nilly (in Lebanon, party membership is key to a minimum degree of social security) counted to the constituencies of exactly these parties respectively, even though, as it turned out now, they "were actually supporters of Michel Aoun." (Wimmen 2007)

The Aounists had not officially registered a Lebanese party yet, because under Syrian tutelage over Lebanon they were effectively criminalized. Not only did they have no opportunity for political representation at all, their activists also clearly bore the brunt of the repression. Besides their own activities on the spot, their open conflict with the Syrian rulers in Lebanon was significantly fuelled by the political activities of Michel Aoun and some of his long-time comrades and followers abroad.

As the senior FPM politician Cesar Abou Khalil explained, Michel Aoun, immediately upon his secretive arrival in Marseille, France, on October 30th, 1991 (LA Times 31/8/1991) instructed his followers in Lebanon and abroad to follow a two-track strategy. The first track would have to be exclusively taken on by those Aounists remaining in Lebanon and basically amounted to not missing any occasion to demonstrate their refusal of the prevailing situation – the occupation of Lebanon. The second track was to be pursued solely by the diaspora loyal to Aoun and his cause. It consisted of changing the opinion in the important decision-making centers outside of Lebanon, especially in Europe and North-America (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012b). The rationale was summarized by Abou Khalil as follows: "Lebanon was under occupation and tutelage because of the consent of the West[, which] subcontracted

Lebanon to Syria. Therefore, to annul or cancel that subcontract, we had to work with the […] principals – the decision makers in Europe and the US." (Ibid.)

Given the crucial impact of the US´ positioning in that question, political activity of the Aounist diaspora reached its peak there. Two individuals, Gabriel Issa and Tony Haddad, were especially decisive (Sabeh 2016). As early as 1990, they founded the Lebanese American Council for Democracy (LACD), which, according to its official website, until today, aims at "restoring Lebanon's democracy, stability, integrity, and sovereignty [as well as] to build awareness of Lebanon within the American government, media, and culture." (LACD 2018) In other words, they were "lobbying in the United States for the sovereignty of Lebanon and the withdrawal of all Syrian troops," which in practice meant to personally approach numerous politicians under successive administrations, to keep good relations with media professionals and to repeatedly and tirelessly explain to them their cause and its context (Sabeh 2016). It thus afforded to have a long breath before anything else.

According to Abou Khalil, the US-based Aounists were primarily tasked and occupied with "preparing the Liberation of Lebanon Act – LoLA –, that was later on transformed into the SALSRA [Syria Accountability and Lebanon Sovereignty Restoration Act]," (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012b) passed by the US Congress in 2003. This in turn prepared the ground for the UNSC passing its Resolution 1559 in September 2004 (ibid.; Aoun 2003; UNSC 2004; Irish Times 11/2/2005; US-Congress 2006, p. 7) and must in retrospective be seen as the kickoff to Syria´s withdrawal in April 2005. However, this situation also meant that Michel Aoun and his core followership – that is, those people who did not choose to rely on another political representation during his absence – in stark contrast to most other Lebanese leaders and parties that switched to the "anti-Syrian" camp (March 14th) only in the wake of the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri on February 14th, 2005 – stood out as the only political current, that had no record of either explicit cooperation (such as Amal, Hizbullah, the Ba`th Party, al-Marada or the SSNP) or implicit collaboration (such as al-Hariri and the Future Movement, Walid Jumblatt and the PSP, Dany Chamoun and the NLP, the Gemayels and al-Katā´ib, etc.) with the Syrian authorities between 1990 and 2005.

The Aounist´s mere presence on the political stage raised the prospect that this fine difference would henceforth be steadily exposed; through the newly added contrast alone. It was against this background that the initial consultations between Michel Aoun and his aides on the one hand, and the residential Lebanese establishment on the other hand took place.

From an elite´s perspective of both the FPM and Hizbullah this is also where the whole story of their political entente begins.[123]

3.4.1.1 The elites´ perspectives

The FPM

Cesar Abou Khalil was born in 1971 in the village of Bleibel, in the *qaḍa* of Aley. He was part of the FPM´s high-level delegation that between May 2005 and February 2006 negotiated the MoU with its counterpart from Hizbullah. From 2009 to 2016 he was the political advisor of, then Lebanese Minister of Energy and Water, Gibran Bassil Gibran, a position into which he himself followed Bassil upon the formation of the new government on December 18th, 2016. In two interviews with the author, conducted in October and November 2012 respectively, Abou Khalil, as one of the central participants, recalled the following account of events:

> "Since General Aoun came back from France on the 7th of May 2005, he took initiatives towards all the parties in Lebanon. He – we – started with the Christian side. The General visited Samir Geagea in his cell at the defense ministry. He told Geagea, that he was ready to turn the page. The two men agreed that what happened would not be forgotten, and shall be avoided in the future. It later turned out, that Samir Geagea didn´t stand to his word. However, at the same time there was a committee from our side […] discussing with the Katā´ib party – represented by late Minister Pierre Amin Gemayel and the Vice President of the party, Joseph Abou Khalil. We were trying to build some kind of MoU with them at that time. And at once – we didn´t know why –, […] one day during the negotiations […] late Minister Pierre Gemayel, on the occasion of a political rally, all of a sudden launched an attack on us. And he overthrew everything what has been agreed upon so far. […] We had by now discovered that they were already committed to the other side. And so they didn't want to talk to us no more. All they wanted for us is to vanish. That's all they wanted. […] The same happened with Chamoun and the other minor Christian factions. They were also bought from – and committed to – the other side.
>
> Between the elections in Mount Lebanon and the North respectively, […] General Aoun visited Sulayman Frangieh in the North and repeated the same thing. And it went alright with him. He also visited Omar Karami, on the Muslim side, and it went alright with him either." (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012a)

Summed up, the Aounists´ representatives found all noteworthy Maronite Christian political leaders in the country – with the notable exception of Sulayman Frangieh – as well as the major Sunni Muslim current, the Future Movement, literally shutting their doors in their faces early on. From this point of view, Michel Aoun, for the sake of the country, extended his hands for cooperation to everyone, but this friendly and patriotic gesture was neither adequately honored nor was such a far reaching cooperation at eye-level actually wanted.

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[123] Bouchra Bouyoub, however, by referring to an interview with the senior FPM functionary Ziad Abs, who was also involved in the drafting of the MoU, states that "[i]t is believed that just before the return of General Michel 'Aoun to Lebanon, Al-Manar Television (Hizbullah-run television) organized an interview with him and that is how the rapprochement commenced." (Bouyoub 2013, p. 178)

While this lack of approval alone would constitute a matter one just has to cope with – if grudgingly – because it constitutes something naturally possible within any pluralist political setting, the initial signaling of interest by most of the relevant party leaders, despite their prior decision to sideline Aoun, is perceived by the FPM as outright hypocrisy. It added a dimension of humiliation, a feeling of betrayal that fully came to the fore only through the ex-post evaluation of the circumstances surrounding the Independence Uprising of March 14th, 2005.[124]

Surely, March 14th coincided with the one-month anniversary of Rafiq al-Hariri´s assassination, the immediate trigger of the popular uprising, which is why it ostensively made sense to pick that date. This was also the rationale presented to anyone who actually asked about it. However, it would have been at least as logical to choose March 26th, because the traditional period of mourning in Islam accounts for forty days and not one month. Yet, those in charge chose to adopt March 14th, the anniversary of Michel Aoun´s declaration of the War of Liberation against Syria in Lebanon and thus the prime symbolic date for the Aounists, marking both a "chosen glory" and the prelude to a "chosen trauma" (Volkan 2003, pp. 58–60) in their collective group memory. The organizers now chose that date for their large-scale rally in Beirut calling for the Syrians to withdraw – which, taken for itself, seems pretty convenient precisely because of its historical significance. Yet, Michel Aoun, without question the most clear-cut embodiment of outright opposition to Syrian tutelage over Lebanon and the person who gave this date its historical meaning, according to Abou Khalil, was denied the chance to give a speech (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012a).

It should come as no surprise then, that from an Aounist perspective, both the date and the cause itself appear to have been intentionally hijacked by exactly the same people which had so far collaborated untroubled with the Syrian authorities, and only now, as it was becoming obvious that Syria would have to bend sooner or later, tried to safeguard their assets and switched sides (cf. Haddad 2005, p. 311). Cesar Abou Khalil expressed his dismay over this issue as follows:

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[124] This ex post re-evaluation in the process of meaning making is also reflected in the sequence of events in Abou Khalil´s narrative. Just as presented here, Abou Khalil first described the circumstances of ‘Aoun´s return to Lebanon as of May 7th, 2005 and only from here turned to the preceding events of March 14th, 2005 (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012a).

> “[E]ven before that [before Aoun ´s return to Lebanon], we were engaged in negotiations with the Future Movement. Yet, all of a sudden, on the 14th of March of that same year – and the 14th of March was a date chosen by us, because […] we used to demonstrate every year on that date. It was a symbolic date for the Free Patriotic Movement because it is the date of the declaration of the Liberation War against Syria! […] We chose the 14th of March! – General Aoun was denied to speak to the crowd, by the organizers who were also paying the money – the Future Movement –, while people like Zaid, with maybe two hundred votes in Artaba and Carlos Eddé with maybe fifty votes I don’t know where…if there are fifty votes…, or someone like Chamoun… All these faces… You know? … You know?! ... How to address a crowd like that of the 14th of March rally with General Aoun being denied to speak?! The excuse was that there was a technical problem, because he was still in France then. He would have had to address the crowd through the phone [which was claimed to not work out for the mentioned technical problems].” (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012a)

He then turned to the 2005 parliamentary elections, and the accompanying circumstances:

> “Then, when we were discussing the elections, they […] proposed that the FPM would have four MPs for all the country. And we refused that and said that if we want to have four MPs then we will have them through our own efforts and capacities. We will not be granted four MPs. And we ran the elections and got twenty-one MPs. […] And then came the formation of the 2005 Government, the Siniora government. […] Even before that, when the Syrian´s were driven out and we were to form the first government – we were allies [at that time] – they [the later March 14th Forces] came to the General, to France, and said that they won’t participate in this first government until all the Syrians had withdrawn. We said: Okay, you won´t participate. […] That is a mutual agreement. We won’t participate either. Yet, they participated with two ministers – the Minister of Interior […] and the Minister of Education. […] And then, after the elections, we asked for three or four ministers […] in the first Siniora government. But they refused […] and gave them to President Émile Lahoud instead. To the same one of whom they said he was a Syrian puppet […] and whom they accused of [being involved in] the killing of al-Hariri. They accepted giving him the Christian Ministers rather than giving them to us. So we saw that these people with whom we had initiated talks way before having initiated talks with Hizbullah, just didn’t want us on the scene. They wanted us to vanish. […] After General Aoun came back, just as we talked to the different Christian factions we also talked to all the parties on the other side. So we spoke with all the parties, and this [Hizbullah] was a case that proved successful. It proved successful then and its proving successful ever since.” (Ibid.)

Summarizing the core of this part of Abou Khalil´s narrative, we have here a combination of betrayal, deception and rejection being identified and highlighted by the narrator as lying at the root of the FPM´s elites´ motivation to initiate talks with Hizbullah. Once these talks had commenced, the process was experienced as promising and therefore deemed worth continuing.

In the accord of “Alain R.,” then Vice-Coordinator of the FPM´s Diaspora-Committee, emphasis was not so much placed on the chronological order of events but rather on what he thought to be the main aspects and inter-relations that brought about the MoU. In his perspective, the decisive factor lay in Michel Aoun´s identification of a war of annihilation that was waged against the Lebanese Shi`a in their entirety and against Hizbullah in particular, by Israel, the USA and all those Lebanese actors which were soon to form the March 14th political camp (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013).

At the time of Aoun´s return to Lebanon, he himself alongside the larger part of the Lebanese Christians altogether (about 90 % according to "Alain R.´"s estimation, whereby it is unclear if he refers to the Maronites only, or to the Christians in their entirety), were still rather fearful of and opposed to Hizbullah. Indeed, largely in line with the position of the US and its regional allies, also the Aounists in those days accused the party of following a Syro-Iranian agenda; seeking *wilāyat al-faqīh* in Lebanon and simultaneously bolstering Syria´s interests here (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013; cf. IE.FPM.1 2012, CC.FPM.3 2013).

As "Alain R." claimed, however, Aoun´s immediate concern in this respect was not so much of a partisan nature – e.g. fighting Hizbullah´s supposed Iranian agenda for the sake of "true" Lebanese independence – but rather served the higher purpose of saving Lebanon from the threat of civil war, which was seen as imminent through the quality of – and especially the means employed in – the campaign enacted against Hizbullah and the Lebanese Shi`a altogether. It follows in this equation that Michel Aoun took the step of approaching Hizbullah irrespective of his own political convictions at that point in time.

The sequence of Abou Khalil´s narrative presented here suggests a highly pragmatic motive based on a simple calculation. None of those supposed to form an alliance with the Aounists were sincerely willing to do so whilst granting them the share the latter felt to naturally deserve. Aoun thus turned to those willing to work with him based on fair conditions. One of the few parties that stood ready to do so was Hizbullah. The account of "Alain R.," in contrast, names a different and – if not fully un-pragmatic either – significantly more altruist motive as decisive; preventing civil war. These two varying accounts – both of which are frequently echoed by Aounists – are obviously not treated as mutually exclusive but seem to be implicitly viewed as complementary. At least they become blurred, as reflected in the following statement of "Alain R.:"

> "This [the prevention of civil war caused by attempts to annihilate Hizbullah] was the trigger of the Memorandum as seen by Michel Aoun. The latter then realized: Al-Hariri attempted to take control of everything. Together with Feldman a new Lebanon was ʻknitted.' Then, they granted Aoun only two ministerial posts and six MPs – despite his political weight. ʻSo, you do this, you that,' etc. When Aoun realized this… and Aoun told us more than once to that time that he had warned Hizbullah, not to enter the proposed Quadripartite agreement [with Amal, the Future Movement and the PSP] which was a mere fake [agreement], only designed to later topple the government and subsequently isolate Hizbullah completely alongside the Shi`a in general." (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013)

In this example, the interviewee fluently switched from one of the identified accounts to the other as if they were one. Only afterwards he referred to Aoun having realized “this” i.e. both the dangerous course taken against Hizbullah and the attempts of al-Hariri (and his allies) to marginalize and sideline himself.

Hizbullah

Ghaleb Abou Zaynab, up until his resignation in December 2014, was a senior member of Hizbullah´s politburo and one of the main responsible persons for handling the party´s relations with the Lebanese Christians (Alahednews.com 2011; YaLibnan 2014). In this function he was also in charge of overseeing the negotiations with the Aounists that in February 2006 culminated in the MoU. The author had the chance to interview him on December 18th, 2012, in Hizbullah´s premises in the southern suburbs of Beirut. His account of how the MoU came about is preceded by a concise digression to the history of Hizbullah´s relations with the Aounists:

> “After General Aoun [had] left for France in the 1990s, the Aounists stayed [i.e. they kept up their presence] in Lebanon. The articles [i.e. principals] that they adhered to and they […] proposed to the people were things that no one can be against. Even when General Aoun was still in East Beirut and he was besieged by the Syrian Forces – and with that steel siege that was applied by the Syrian Forces –, we – as Hizbullah – were able to pass through some supplies such as bread etc. to the Aounists, and we had relations […] to that time. And after the 1990s we cooperated on many other occasions, like in elections in unions – [e.g.] in the union of the […] engineers. It wasn´t a political relationship in the beginning, but it was on a continuous basis. (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.1 2012)

Abou Zaynab thereafter turns to the initial beginnings of a political relationship between Hizbullah and the Aounists, which he dates back to the period shortly preceding the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri and the Syrian withdrawal. At that time, he relates, “General Aoun [via his emissaries on the spot] made a round among all political parties and personalities in Lebanon, presenting a paper calling for the Syrian Forces to leave Lebanon.” (Ibid.) Aoun was then still in France but preparations had begun to facilitate his return, an effort in which, according to Abou Zaynab, Hizbullah took an active part. This held true, he says, although political relations were so far approached only cautiously and even though Aoun, as we know, harbored significant reservations towards Hizbullah:

> “When the General decided to come back to Lebanon, […] we were amongst the people who made it easier for him to come back and […] any blockade, any political or legal barrier that prevented him from coming back to Lebanon; we assisted in dismantling them. We helped in facilitating his return because we knew – we believed – he had a role to play here.” (Ibid.)

The looming tensions between Aoun and his allies seem to have then already been clearly perceptible – at least in Abou Zaynab´s ex-post evaluation of events – and a direct link is made between this given and Hizbullah´s drawing closer to the Aounists. In fact, Abou Zaynab says that, to facilitate the General´s return, his party,

> “worked with then President Lahoud […], because other parties that were with him [Michel Aoun] at that time made it tough for him to return. They didn’t want him to come back because they knew how strong he is on the streets and among the people and how strong his following was, because elections were soon to be held and they didn´t want him to garner […] the majority of the Christian seats. At that time we started to increase our meetings with the Tayyār al-Waṭanī al-Ḥurr. After Aoun´s return there were also more meetings [in order] to see, if and to what extend we can cooperate in the elections. [These meetings took place] on leadership level. For the al-Tayyār it was Gibran Bassil who was assigned […] and Hizbullah [was represented by senior functionaries of] its politburo.” (Ibid.)

As concerning the motivation of Hizbullah to further open up towards the Aounists, Abou Zaynab names a strongly perceived political compatibility of both parties, which, he says, has almost led to an electoral alliance already in May 2005. Yet, the higher interest of saving Lebanon from civil war – the danger of which, from this point of view, mainly arose from the intensifying Sunni-Shi`i tensions plaguing the entire region – reportedly inhibited such a development:

> “We were eager to have a relationship or an understanding with al-Tayyār al-Waṭanī al-Ḥurr because […] their reading of the joint situation […] and the political atmosphere in Lebanon; it coincides almost to the point with our view and our reading of the situation in Lebanon. We discussed in-depth with them to have a cooperation in the elections […] within all the areas that we [share a popular] representation in. There was[, however,] another urgent matter manifesting itself at that time […], which was the problem between the Sunnis and the Shi`a. At that time, shortly after the assassination of *shahīd* al-Hariri, there were the parliamentary elections and […] the Sunni forces [were] represented by Tayyār al-Mustaqbal – the Future Movement – and the Shi`i forces represented by Harakat Amal and Hizbullah … and if there [was during] the elections a problem or any conflict, this might [have been perceived] as a Sunni-Shi`i conflict – and that would have lead to a civil war … a Sunni-Shi`i civil war.
>
> [T]hat was the situation in 2005. We were forced, because of our understanding of the situation, to meet with al-Mustaqbal and even with the Lebanese Forces. […] The Lebanese Forces were not directly involved at that time but represented by the former governor of the Lebanese Central Bank. And we informed the Tayyar [i.e. the FPM] that we were about to be at odds with them politically. But in the areas for which we had no electoral agreement with al-Mustaqbal – such as in Metn, Jbeil and Mount Lebanon – and where the Tayyār al-Waṭanī al-Ḥurr had a presence, we were still encouraging people to go and vote for them.” (Ibid.)

According to statements of different senior Hizbullah and FPM politicians that have been involved in the process of drafting the MoU, as quoted by Bouyoub, the negotiations may have been occasionally slowed down, yet, they were never suspended because of the diverging electoral paths pursued. In any case, social interaction is said to have continuously intensified and so has the mutual trust between the respective representatives (Bouyoub 2013,

p. 180). This is confirmed in Abou Zaynab´s following statement, wherewith he closes his account of how things began:

> “In spite of all the outcomes of the elections, we maintained our dialogue and the relations with al-Tayyār al-Waṭanī al-Ḫurr. In the course of our continuous meetings, we came to find it increasingly necessary to draft a written statement, a memorandum [capturing all what has been preliminary agreed upon], so that General Aoun and Sayyid Hassan [Nasrallah] could sit together and discuss all issues in depth[. Thus,] through these continued meetings and discussions evolved a Memorandum of Understanding that addresses the main bones of contention between the Lebanese and brings together the points of view of both sides [i.e. those of the FPM and Hizbullah]. [It] was envisaged as a solution to all the crises going on […] at that time and it is still meant to fulfill that function.” (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.1 2012)

The Hizbullah-elite´s narrative in summary: Hizbullah and the Aounists were no strangers to each other but had a minimum degree of constructive relations ever since the latter´s movements´ birth. This claim is, by the way, confirmed by authoritive voices of the FPM, such as the veteran Aounist, General Coordinator of the FPM and since December 18, 2016, Minister for Presidential Affairs, Pierre Raffoul. The latter is quoted by Ilias as follows:

> “You know, we actually have had good contacts with them since 1990. At that time, when we were besieged by the Syrian Army and its allies in Eastern Beirut (notably the Lebanese Forces), I would personally go to the check points held by the Hizb and ask to open them to allow goods to enter, which they did.” (Ilias 2011)

Likewise, the senior FPM politician Cesar Abou Khalil stated:

> “I don’t retain the exact timeline, but I can tell you, that during the liberation war, in 1989, there have been talks between our side and Hizbullah. And Hizbullah at that time did not participate, you know, in the mutual shelling that used to happen between the Lebanese factions, nor did it help the Syrian forces to invade the liberated areas and the presidential palace. There have been talks with them in 1989 and 1990, and after the Syrian invasion a group of our friends and colleagues at the FPM was in contact with Hizbullah. At that time we had different priorities. Our priority was the Syrian evacuation from Lebanon. […] We always asked them to take a position on that front. They were not able to take a position at that time. They had a different priority, the resistance and the liberation of the South. Well, we had no demarcation line at that time with the Israelis. They had a demarcation line with the Israelis. […] There were different fronts. Everyone was fighting on a front. But I can tell you that there [were] always talks with them. [At first] the political moment was not right. And when the political moment was right, there has been an understanding, and since the understanding everything is going smooth.” (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012a)

Against this background, the incentive for Hizbullah´s elite – as represented by Ghaleb Abou Zaynab – for entering into dialogue with the FPM and drafting the joint MoU is to be searched for in Hizbullah´s early identification of a more or less similar, in any case harmonious, view of Lebanon´s internal situation and how it should be treated. One may well recall, in this respect, the early exchanges of Aounists and Hizbullah supporters in the syndicates and on the university campuses (see above).

Abou Zaynab relates how himself, in a political meeting conducted in Jbeil, "[a]bout a week or maybe ten days before the assassination of *shahīd* (martyr) al-Hariri" (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.1 2012) – explicitly endorsed the FPM´s approach to Lebanon´s interior in the name of Hizbullah, and agreed with it on "how Lebanon should be run without all the bad things going on in government, without the corruption and all that." At the same time, however, Hizbullah "disagreed with it on how it looked at the geopolitical situation around Lebanon." (Ibid.) The situation with Hizbullah´s allies amounted exactly to the opposite; here the party disapproved of much of their domestic performance and of "their corruption" but shared with them their geopolitical positioning (ibid.).[125] The senior Hizbullah leader furthermore stressed that corruption in Lebanon, as seen by his party, "has nothing to do with the Syrians. Corruption is not something made by the Syrians; it's the Lebanese political establishment that sort of ... [invited] the Syrian army officers and asked them for their protection in exchange for a cut of profits." (Ibid.) Having so frankly taken these stances – endorsing the anti-Syrian FPM´s position on domestic politics and implicitly acknowledging a Syrian participation in corruption –, according to Abou Zaynab, led to "a big problem for Hizbullah with the Syrians" as their intelligence establishment "put a tremendous pressure" (ibid.) on the party in response.

The elite narratives in comparison

When looking at the two accounts in comparative perspective, two things become apparent. The first is that harmony prevails in regard to what actually happened. None of what the one side claims is contested by the other. The second is that both sides still cling to slightly different interpretations of events and also name different motivations. While for the FPM it was about preventing attempts to marginalize Aoun and annihilate Hizbullah – and by extension Lebanon´s Shi`a – as well as forestalling the eruption of civil war; for Hizbullah it was mainly about the identification of programmatic features of the FPM similar to its own. Hizbullah´s positive predisposition towards the Aounists thereby seems to result partially from earlier encounters it had with them, given that this is where the party´s narrative actually begins. Thus, despite Aoun´s earlier anti-Hizbullah stances, the pre-MoU moments of interaction with the Aounists are memorized as largely cooperative and in no case as hostile.

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[125] This situation has meanwhile changed. The running time of the alliance has contributed to a further approximation of both parties´ positions with regard to both the internal and the external spheres of politics (see below).

The corresponding depiction of past events as put forward by Abou Zaynab is moreover echoed by FPM officials.

Sensing the danger of civil war and making efforts to avoid it are central features of both narratives. Aoun, on the one hand, through his own earlier belonging to the international anti-Syria/ Iran/ Hizbullah coalition, detected serious preparations for a plan to completely finish Hizbullah, which he deemed highly dangerous. He therefore decided to leave that very coalition in order of thwarting any such attempts. Hizbullah, on the other hand, decided to temporarily ally itself to two of its central political adversaries – belonging to the same coalition just deserted by Aoun – one of which, the Future Movement, represented the major political representation of Lebanese Sunnis. The prime rationale behind this move was to prevent a scenario in which the main Sunni and Shi`i currents were to enter into electoral competition with one another. Both Aoun´s and Hizbullah´s detrimental decisions in this respect were thus driven by the same consideration; to prevent Sunni-Shi`i tensions or even major clashes with the potential to reignite the flame of civil war.

Reception by third parties

The rapprochement process occurring between Hizbullah and the FPM on the elite level which finally culminated in the Memorandum of Understanding was consciously kept highly secret by those involved and went by absolutely unnoticed by everybody else up until the moment of its proclamation. The circle of adepts was limited to the party´s paramount leaders, their aides and the respective negotiating delegations. Even the closest allies were excluded and none of them was invited to join the press conference either. This did not go by without criticism. Then SSNP´s President, Ali Qanso (1947-2018), as a case in point, complained about not having had the possibility to contribute to the MoU, arguing that it would be in a much better position if more influential national actors had been involved in drafting it (Qanso 2012, quoted after Bouyoub 2013, pp. 178–9). Aside of such *Manöverkritik*,[126] however, Hizbullah´s allies were basically in favor of the MoU, even if their respective enthusiasm differed significantly. This was confirmed by their overall cooperative behaviour towards the FPM. The Aounists, on the other side, had been largely isolated in the pre-MoU phase and had therefore not many allies, the opinion of which would have mattered, left.

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[126] The German term *"Manöverkritik"* depicts a critical debriefing after an action or exercise (originally after a military manoeuvre). More generally, one could also translate it as a "lessons-learned session."

Of the Lebanese political adversaries of both Michel Aoun and Hizbullah (minding that, although some of them were still sharing governmental responsibility with the latter up until late 2006, the Quadripartite Alliance had already fallen apart by late 2005), despite all notable efforts to the opposite, none endorsed the MoU as the national accord proposal it was meant to be (according to its originators). In the words of Dory Chamoun, head of the National Liberal Party and one of their most prominent political opponents in March 14th, Hizbullah has still not dropped its aim of turning Lebanon into an Islamic Republic modelled after Iran and clearly attempts "to take over the country." He added, amongst other things, that its members were systematically buying up land owned by Christians, that they were engaged in huge money laundering and drug smuggling operations and that "as a duty to Allah, they get as many children as they can."[127] All of that, he continued, made the Lebanese Christians "very worrysome about their future." When asked in reply, how then to make sense of the FPM´s cooperation with Hizbullah, he answered that, "General Aoun is power crazy" and therefore "ready to make a deal with the devil to become president." (Author´s interv. E.M.2 2013)

Other important figures of March 14th essentially echoed these views – even if Chamoun´s pronounced frankness in stating them is rather exceptional even among the March 14th hawks. Some moreover described the MoU as a mere bilateral (Maronite-Shi`i) "minority pact" and interpreted the absence of any mentioning of the Ta`if Accord as implying that there was no existing understanding between the Lebanese (Bouyoub 2013, p. 179). Basically all representatives belonging to March 14th meanwhile described the MoU as an attempt to push through what they imagined as the prime vested interests of its originators (legitimizing Hizbullah´s weapons and elevating Aoun to the post of the President of the Republic while indirectly boosting Syria´s and Iran´s clout in Lebanon). In short, they received the MoU as a partisan program and therefore as hostile to their own partisan interests.

Monsignor (Bishop) Samir Mazloum, the man then in charge of the Maronite Patriarchates´ institutionalized relations with Hizbullah (and of inter-communal relations in general), also described the MoU to be foremost based on the mutual vested interests of the relevant parties. His assessment of both the nature and quality of these interests and of the MoU itself, however, differed from the aforementioned positions. For one, he considered Hizbullah to have simply been interested in a major Christian ally. And even though he did not specify why he thought they had this particular interest, he neither found this unusual, nor suspicious. The same goes for his assessment of Michel Aoun´s main concern, which he located in gaining a reliable partner as such, given the General´s orchestrated marginalization through the other established parties back then.

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[127] It is not clearly discernible if this latter "they" referred to Hizbullah or to the Shi'a in general.

The Bishop insisted that Hizbullah was no terrorist organization as claimed by the relevant foreign powers and he stressed that the Lebanese were well aware of this. He furthermore identified the unconditional support of the USA and the European countries for Israel as "a very, very big mistake" and the main reason for this misconception of the party, as he saw it. Turning to the MoU again, Mazloum said that the Lebanese had nothing to fear from it and he judged it to have made "a positive change in 2006" during the July War, when the Shi`a from South Lebanon were fleeing in particular to the Christian regions. To his account, especially the FPM´s efforts contributed to the overall welcoming attitude displayed in this moment of extraordinary national solidarity. Fears harbored by a sizable number of Christians, that the Shi`a were here to stay indefinitely, are moreover considered to have been dispersed through the internally displaced´s swift return to the South immediately after the ceasefire had taken effect and Hassan Nasrallah voiced his famous call to this end (Author´s interv. E.M.1 2012).

International perceptions, not surprisingly, kept largely in line with the existing political fault lines (inasmuch as the relevant actors were taking notice of the MoU at all). This rendered Hizbullah once more the crucial denominator. Thus, the US/ Israel/ Saudi Arabia camp more or less echoed the views of Hizbullah´s and the FPM´s internal opponents. The MoU was therefore registered as but another attempt of Hizbullah to push through its "foreign (Irano-Syrian) and terrorist" agenda, while the FPM´s Christians are mainly viewed as being exploited to these ends. The "Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD)," a Washington D.C.-based research institution with close links to the US government and security establishment, phrased this as follows:

> "Hezbollah succeeded in a penetration of the Christian community, the hardcore of the anti-Syrian resistance, by enlisting the former commander of the Lebanese Army who performed an about face after 10 years in exile, where he claimed opposition to Syria. Michel Aoun signed an agreement of 'understanding' with Hassan Nasrallah during the spring of 2006. The 'revolution' [referring to the 'Independence Intifadah' of 2005] was beheaded and Hezbollah was waiting for the right time to operate its come back into the center of Lebanese politics, while executing the instructions of Tehran and Damascus." (FDD 2006)

Indeed, a leaked August 9th, 2007-cable classified by, then US Ambassador to Lebanon, Jeffrey Feltman, claims that Michel Aoun had explained to then Lebanese Minister of Justice (2005-2008), Charles Rizk (1935-), a Maronite close to former President Émile Lahoud, that while entertaining “a temporary relationship with the Syrian regime […], Aoun counted on a long-term strategic relationship with Iran and Hizballah.” (Feltman 2007b) Thus, the Aounists have by no means been exempted from critique but were rather subjected to increasing pressure on behalf of the US ever since drawing closer to Hizbullah. With Donald Trump´s rise to power in December 2016, this situation has intensified sharply, to the point of members of his administration levying unambiguous threats to directly sanction prominent Aounists over their ties to Hizbullah (Al-Akhbar 19/8/2019; Asharq al-Awsat 24/8/19). In this sense, a US forged “Sword of Damocles” has hung over all FPM affiliates´ heads ever since 2006, a price they were – and still are – willing to pay.

Iran, Syria and their respective allies, on the other hand, all welcomed the MoU, and it took Michel Aoun not long to visit both countries´ capitals and leaders (Iran in Ocober and Syria in December 2008), which proved especially controversial in light of his own and his followers´ history of conflict with the Syrian regime (Al-Jazeera 3/12/2008). As a result, by today, Michel Aoun and the FPM are often associated with the “Resistance Axis.” (Guardian 31/10/2016) In one way or the other, this goes for its advocates and actual components as much as for its declared adversaries (FDD 2006; Majidyar 2016) (see below).

3.4.1.2 A Grassroots perspective

Against the background of the exclusively bilateral negotiation process culminating in the Memorandum of Understanding, the question if it was a top-down or bottom-up initiative becomes redundant as its top-down-character could not be more obvious. A handful of people on leadership-level met secretively, negotiated and agreed on a certain output that was subsequently read out in public, confronting everyone with accomplished facts.

Two aspects must yet be taken into consideration. For one, nobody was ever forced into the reality generated by this *fait accompli*. In other words, supporters of both parties were at all times free to either accept this decision and to endorse the MoU in pragmatic terms at least, or to disapprove. The latter option, however, in real-life translated into abandoning all political ties to the party in question, or at least the author knows of no other case. The MoU was just too central to the henceforth political development of Hizbullah and the FPM as that fundamental individual opposition to it would have been compatible with continued party association. A sizable number of Aounists indeed decided to opt-out in reaction to this unexpected – and in their view unbearable – development. Clear numbers of defections are not available, yet, the majority of the FPM´s electorate remained faithful. Even Dory Chamoun, who has no reason to grant Aoun anything, when confronted with this aspect, noted with regret that those who left the General at this point were “not many.” (Author´s interv. E.M.2 2013) Beyond that, however, it is observable that also among the Aounists that stayed loyal to the FPM and their leader upon entering the entente with Hizbullah, not all have been fully convinced by today that this move´s benefits have outweighed its costs. A minority even wishes for this alliance to end (e.g. Orange room forum 14/8/2015; ibid. 6/3/2018). The vast majority, however, is fully supportive of it (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012a). Hizbullah followers, caught by surprise no less, have quasi-entirely backed the understanding without significant reservations (Germanos 2013, pp. 27–8).

Secondly, the MoU is not to be confused with the alliance that emerged in its wake even if both are not always clearly separated in the accounts of involved politicians and supporters. While it is true that the MoU was a straight-forward top-down manoeuvre, its acceptance did not go along with a commitment to from now on personally open up to the respective “other,” let alone to like him or her. Neither was there an officially prescribed path to approaching the past in a particular sensitive manner. There was no systematically attempted change to the mostly community- and party-specific patterns of history-reading in place and people were not politically pressured to let go of their perceptions or stereotypes. What was required in the eyes of the leaderships was political commitment to form and content of the understanding, no more, no less.

The narrative of “how it all began” from a grassroots perspective is therefore surely no less relevant than that of the concerned elites; it only necessarily has a different point of departure; the declaration of the MoU (as already indicated, however, the interviewees nonetheless partially blended their accounts of this episode with ex-post acquired knowledge about the elite-level processes leading to the MoU). The “it” in “how it all began” then logically also refers to something partially different for the “common citizens” than for the “elites.” While for both groups “it” was initially something with a clear beginning but indefinite direction, the decision over the question of where “it” would lead to was heavily dependent on what supporters would make from “it” – simply because neither the FPM nor Hizbullah are totalitarian parties that would not have to mind about the opinion(s) of their followers. Therefore, even if these conditions are rather part of the internalized knowledge of those involved and can as such not be considered to have necessarily been consciously taken into account by them when weighing their choices, the absence of guidelines for how to behave – other than those prescribed by the Lebanese context and the rules of the field of inter-community relations – rendered “free choice” the sole option at hand.

In November 2012 the author interviewed "Maher A.," a Maronite student and mid-range functionary in the FPM´s Youth and Students Committee, then in his late twenties, in his office premises at the FPM´s headquarters in Sin el-Fil, a northern suburb of Beirut. Asked, if we could actually speak of an alliance by now, he answered:

> "I think it is an evolution of things. It started with the memorandum. [T]he alliance was something … even if the leaders did not want it to become an alliance, I think they were forced to do it because […] the public liked what happened. The two [groups of] supporters of the FPM and Hizbullah liked the scene and liked the memorandum and all the points in it and […] the alliance happened eventually. I am not sure if it was planned or not, but it was going to happen either way […] from the basis, the supporters." (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.1 2012)

"Bishara B.," a Maronite Aounist in his mid-thirties, hailing from the Metn region – but frequently shuttling between Lebanon and the German diaspora for professional reasons – related that in the immediate wake of the MoU, there were intense discussions both between the FPM´s elite and its base and in-between the latter and that of Hizbullah, not only but especially among the respective student associations. In his reading, the bases only after this process signalled their approval to a more far-reaching alliance: "[T]he alliance between [the] FPM and Hizbullah was only allowed because the party base … both party bases agreed beforehand … […] and were ready for it." (Authors interv. CC.FPM.1 2013)

Thus, while taking notice of the top-down character of the MoU, the first narrator, "Maher A.," confidently speaks of the alliance as being initiated by the supporters irrespective of the possible plans of the elites, rendering it a bottom-up process *par excellence*.[128] The statement of "Bishara B." not only confirms this view but actually goes a step further by indicating that the bases had to give their green light first. By far not all interviewees, however, were as clear in their differentiation between the MoU and the alliance. Still, many stressed that the central significance of the whole entente lay in how it was reflected on the grassroots. As the FPM member "Yousef B." from Kisrawan put it:

> "[T]his alliance did not [remain on] the politician level. It went to the people, to the streets in many areas. So, it really reflects peace on the ground. You can touch it. For example, in mixed areas; in [the] southern suburbs or in Baabda. In Lebanon, in general, alliances […] are made during the elections and the next day, after the elections, they [i.e. the allies] forget everything. And it's only made by two political leaders. It's not going to the people. […] This Memorandum of Understanding [was] made outside the election procedures. It was in 2006, after the 2005 election [and] three years before the 2009 elections. So, that's one [point] and the

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[128] This statement also indicates that the idea of democratic participation and activism on grassroots-level is taken for granted by "Maher A." Any signs of fear of internal repression, e.g. for pursuing aims that might deviate from those of the leaders, are absent.

> second [is that] it touches the ground, the grassroots. So, these are the two main positive points." (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.2 2012)

The afore-cited examples point to the perception of an alliance that has truly reached the party bases. Although from among the common citizens interviewed, this has been explicitly stated only by Aounists and by none of the Hizbullah supporters, it is yet implicit in the accounts of nearly all participants encountered by the author – recorded or not. As in the case of the Shi`i Hizbullah supporter "Musa H.," the MoU is thereby commonly identified as having broken "the wall of fears from the others," (CC.Hzb.1 2013) which has then allowed for a largely independent process of getting to know one another and forging an alliance on grassroots level to actually take place. This perception is shared by Ghaleb Abou Zaynab (that is from an elite perspective), who categorized the alliance as nothing short of a "need" for the people involved on the ground:

> "[T]he first thing we did is, we broke down the walls between the two [sides] and in that, in doing so, the people were ahead of us. The common people were ahead of us in that. There was an easy way for the social segments to cooperate and to integrate and to be with each other. And there was an understanding that that's what the two sides actually wanted; […] after the walls came down, the people just [began] comingling with each other and they wanted that relationship to be established!" (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.1 2012)

3.5 THE MOU´S LEGACY: DEVELOPMENT OF RELATIONS

Ever since the MoU was signed by Hassan Nasrallah and Michel Aoun for their respective parties, it has been met with rejection by both actors´ opponents who instantly perceived it as a hostile partisan entente. Also many independent observers, journalists and academics, were initially skeptical and remain so up until today. Interpreting it as but another Lebanese political marriage of opportunity or otherwise as an *alliánce contre náture*, these circles have frequently predicted that it will fall apart "soon" (e.g. Feltman 2007c, yalibnan.com 5/10/2011, Gulfnews 13/5/2017, En-Nashra 5/2/2018). This was in particular the case, whenever political problems arose between the parties and/ or their common allies – and such problems were indeed not few. Still, these predictions have so far never materialized and to date the alliance between the FPM and Hizbullah that emerged in the strait of the MoU stands firm. So how and at what point in time did the shift from the MoU to an alliance occur and how did this alliance evolve in both the political and social spheres against the backdrop of major developments in the time-span considered?

3.5.1 Political alliance

The first and to date most serious test the fresh rapprochement between the FPM and Hizbullah had to undergo came embodied in the 2006 July War (July 12th–August 14th, 2006) which left more than 1,100 overwhelmingly civilian Lebanese and about 120 Israelis (including more than 40 civilians) dead and nearly 4,400 Lebanese injured (Human Rights Watch [HRW] 2007; cf. Norton 2007a, pp. 142, 152). It also laid much of the South, the southern suburbs, as well as nation-wide infrastructure in ruins and pushed hundreds of thousands of overwhelmingly Shi`i residents of Southern Lebanon to seek shelter in the Christian heartland or other communities´ main residential areas.

The end of the war only marked the beginning of a deepening internal rift along March 8th + FPM vs. March 14th lines. It was ignited by the controversy over the STL and fuelled by growing political tensions and clashes between Sunni and Shi`i Muslim actors in many parts of the Middle East (frequently interpretet as a revival or continuation of the historical Sunni-Shi`i divide [CFR 2016; Independent 4/1/2016; DW 5/1/2016]). This aspect is of relevance because the majority of Lebanese Sunnis belonged to March 14th and most Lebanese Shi`a to March 8th.

The intensification of conflict began with March 14th loyalists in the Siniora Government unilaterally (because, amongst others, all Shi`a representatives denied their consent) approving of the establishment of the STL. This triggered the resignation of all five Shi`i ministers alongside one Maronite minister loyal to acting President Émile Lahoud, on November 12th and 13th, 2006 respectively. According to the constitution, this should have enacted the dissolution of the cabinet, and this was also expected from the March 8th + FPM camp. It was seen as a means to push for an investigation under national auspices. The international community, however, ignoring the legal situation and sidelining Lahoud, continued to treat Siniora as their central reference as the latter stubbornly refused leaving office. All inner-Lebanese opposition was passed over and Siniora´s torso-cabinet and the UN signed an agreement for the STL on January 23rd and February 6th, 2007 respectively. The agreement was never ratified by Lebanese lawmakers because the Speaker, Nabih Birri, refused to convene the parliament to vote on it. The STL was nonetheless established under chapter VII of the UN Charter on May 30th, 2007 and came into effect on June 10th that year (STL 2018b; Sakmani 2016, p. 173; cf. Harris 2012, p. 271–2).

In protest of Siniora´s refusal to resign and his invitation of the STL; as of December 1st, 2006, the FPM, Hizbullah, Amal and other March 8th forces staged a large scale, long term protest-camp in Beirut´s city center (downtown) (ICG 2010, p. 7; Shaery 2008, p. 210), where both, the parliament and the seat of the Prime Minister (*Grand Serail*) are located. Their two main demonstrations (staged on December 1st and 10th respectively) brought together hundreds of thousands of Lebanese, and thus clearly rivaled the "Cedar Revolution" masses that had gathered to demand Syria´s eviction from Lebanon one year earlier. The protesters now effectively impeded political life in downtown almost to the point of institutional standstill up until May 2008 (Sakmani 2016, p. 173). In the meantime, a further side-battlefield emerged upon the end of Lahoud´s controversial term extension on November 23rd, 2007. The post remained vacant because the competing camps could not agree on the conditions to elect the consensual candidate, LAF Commander General Michel Sulayman (Harris 2012, p. 273; STL 2018b).

Camille Germanos has argued, that solidarity between the FPM and Hizbullah had significantly consolidated during the July War but that the "definitive shift from an entente towards a political alliance" (Germanos 2013, p. 45) came only after the advent of the STL controversy by early November 2006. The subsequent developments first brought the FPM together with Hizbullah alongside March 8th in the ranks of the opposition (ibid.). Yet, close political coordination already emerged between Hizbullah and the FPM during the July War and found its expression in particular in the handling of the internal displacement crisis. The political alliance has been initiated at this point in time and not later. This view is shared by Michel Aoun who said: "We moved from the phase of understanding to alliance during the July War, when I took a stance." (Aoun 2013)[129]

According to Ghaleb Abou Zaynab, three days after the initial raid of the Islamic Resistance when things began to fully unfold, Michel Aoun and a high level delegation of Hizbullah including Abou Zaynab himself, held an emergency meeting, in which Aoun inquired about "how the military situation is, how […] *al-shabab* [the boys] are doing, how prepared they are and how the general situation is." (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.1 2012) In response, all books were opened for the General and he was put in the full picture of what were Hizbullah´s plans to fight back the Israeli onslaught (ibid.; Author´s interv. IE.Hzb.1 2013). In his capacity as a senior expert in warfare and military matters, Aoun was reportedly reassured by what he heard: "And he said, after having this information, if the shabbab [act] according to this plan, we will be victorious. So, go ahead, go! Take care of business! And I will [take care of] the political situation." (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.1 2012)

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[129] Quoted after Al-Hayat 17/8/2013.

"Bassem H.," a Maronite FPM member from Metn, 35 years in age, working as a school director and also as an assistant for a senior MP of their party, related that upon the war´s beginning, despite a high level of trust in Hizbullah´s military skills, many Aounists doubted that this non-state armed group could withstand a full-scale Israeli air, naval, and sea assault, such as the one taking shape just now (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.4 2017). The same holds true for many others, including pro-Hizbullah Shi`a, like "Qassem A.," 42 years in age, from the area of Bint Jbeil in South Lebanon (Author´s interv. CC.Hzb.5. 2017). After all, Israel continuously ranks among the world mightiest military powers according to the annual Global Firepower (GFP) Military strength ranking (GFP 2018). Yet, Michel Aoun is said to have calmed his supporters: "I remember that General Aoun, from the first day in our internal meetings, was saying; the Israelis won't win […] this war." (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.4 2017)

From a Lebanese perspective, General Aoun was to be proven right. Hizbullah stood its ground on the battlefield and surprised Israel and the world with its military capabilities, methods of warfare and quantity and quality of its arsenal alike, while the FPM provided the party and the mainly Shi`i displaced with a civil national cover. This was done by facilitating popular support through conventional politics (as most March 8th components did to different degrees), extended diplomacy (encompassing the activation of contacts to politicians in France or Germany for instance),[130] organizing or participating in public rallies or manifestations abroad, PR campaigning and by much of the practical organization of things on the ground in Lebanon (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.3 2013, CC.FPM.3 2013, CC.FPM.4 2017).

With respect to the question, how this organization looked like, officials of both parties confirmed the existence of a "coordination body" (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.2 2012, E.FPM.1 2012b). The FPM´s Cesar Abou Khalil related that

> "[m]ore than 800,000 people were displaced. The same day when this displacement started, General Aoun made an announcement for [the] FPM and the Christians that are our supporters, to open their regions to receive our brothers [that are] being displaced by the Israeli bombings. That's something the Christians of South Mount Lebanon have already experienced in 1983 and 1984 and the Christians of Eastern Saida – meaning Zahrani and Jezzine – have also witnessed

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[130] This information was shared with the author by a mid-range FPM functionary during an informal conversation in Beirut in early 2010.

> in 1985. They have experienced in 1985 [what it means to be] driven out of your house by force. So, there has been a […] remarkably positive reaction from the side of the FPM and our Christian supporters. Some people were received in private homes, some people in schools, because it was in the summer and there were no classes. People were received in … There were lots of our supporters and activists that started […] humanitarian and relief work. Of course there has been coordination with Hizbullah." (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012b)

There was yet no official task force overseeing the process of relief work from above. From the beginning on, people largely organized themselves from below and according to their varying capacities and capabilities: "It was natural. So, it hasn't to be said, you know, we had people that were taking care of the rations supplies, the medicine supplies … for people needed medicine, water supplies, etc." (Ibid.)

To be sure, solidarity with both Hizbullah and the fleeing Southerners was broad in the instance of the war and, especially in individual terms, extended hands and compassion were by no means restricted to the FPM or other allies of the party but rather a phenomenon encompassing most components of society as a whole (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.2 2012, CC.FPM.1 2013, CC.M.2 2013, CC.Hzb.5 2017). Yet, there were also instances in which the displaced reportedly faced rejection, insults or even physical offenses. According to supporters of the FPM and Hizbullah, such occurred in the milieu´s of political opponents like the Katā´ib, the LF or the Mustaqbal movement (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.1 2013, CC.Hzb.4 2017, E.FPM.1 2012b). The author has been furthermore told in unrecorded talks with two Shi`a from Tyre in 2007, that the displacement in some of the Jumblatt-affiliated Druze areas was problematic too, as the reception was remembered as "cold."

Much of the urgent work was done by the government and especially the army. Churches and other religious institutions, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and other humanitarian NGO´s and INGO´s present in Lebanon were highly active too. However, according to the FPM functionary "Maher A.," "[m]ost of the NGOs came after the war ended. And also the governmental … of course, there were some […] governmental institutions helping a lot, as much as possible, you know, it was a very hard time. The war was very strong and violent." In any case, no other Lebanese political movement – allied to Hizbullah or not – reacted with a mobilization as dedicated, unconditional and universal as the FPM. The Aounist´s role was decisive for the national support extended directly to the displaced and indirectly to the Islamic Resistance, now widely perceived as defending the Lebanese homeland as a whole. In the eyes of both group´s elites and social bases, the FPM and its paramount leader had therefore an important share in bringing about what they all viewed as Hizbullah´s victory of 2006 (e.g. Author´s interv. CC.FPM.4 2017, CC.Hzb.5 2017).

In clearly claiming this share, Abou Khalil stated: “I think also the resistance [men] that were on the front, when knowing that their families were at safe, they had a better moral condition to fight. And it contributed also to the success of the war then … this was something natural to be done.” (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012b) Abou Zaynab confirmed such a reading and expressed deep thankfulness towards Michel Aoun, whom, he said, has

> “transformed the Tayyār into a blossom for all the [displaced] people, the people coming from the South. He took [a] political stance on the side of the resistance. By doing so, he [repelled] all the plans of pressure that were being formulated at the time, […] which are as strong internally, as the pressure from the outside is, on the *muqāwama* … on the resistance and on Hizbullah, either by the displaced, by the people escaping from all … and all the destruction that was going on … and he was able to foil all these pressure trials. […] In essence he was a true partner in what occurred and transpired in 2006. At that time he became a momentous person, a historical figure that transcends its stature.” (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.1 2012)

As of December 1st, 2006, Hizbullah, the FPM and some of their allies in March 8th launched their protest-camp in downtown Beirut. After their intimate coordination during the July War and its displacement crisis, this move marks their second major joint political action. At the latest as of now, the FPM was commonly counted with March 8th by most external observers but also in parts of the March 8th milieu itself. The FPM has meanwhile always insisted that it does (or did) not belong to March 8th but is (or has been) only allied to it politically (Bouyoub 2013, p. 188; Asharq al-Awsat 11/7/2013). The main argument in this respect was that the Aounists have not – and would never have – participated in the eponymous demonstration of March 8th, 2005, because they did not agree on thanking Syria for its role in Lebanon (As-Safir n.d. [2013]).

About two months after launching its sit-in, the opposition intensified its campaign of ousting Siniora to pave the way for the formation of a national unity government. On January 23rd, 2007, the Lebanese Confederation of Labor Unions called for a general strike, demanding higher wages and decrying excessive prices, tax hikes and the renewed privatization plans of the Siniora government. March 8th and the FPM backed these claims and simultaneously utilized the strike to push for their own, more far-reaching, demands. The subsequent riots and instances of fighting between Siniora-loyalists (March 14th) and oppositionists (March 8th/ FPM) lead to three dead victims and more than 130 injured. In retrospective, this not only gave an idea of what was still to come but also forcefully made it clear that the March 8th + FPM/ March 14th divide was not only about contemporary issues but also integrated or built on much older feuds, such as the modern Frangieh-Geagea and Aoun-Geagea antagonisms among the Christians and increasingly also the Sunni-Shi`i divide on the Muslim side. These embedded disputes were reflected in the conflicting constellations during the riots on the ground (Germanos pp. 47–8).

The situation escalated with a blow in early May 2008, after Siniora´s disputed government on May 6th announced two decisions that directly aimed at weakening Hizbullah´s influence. The first was to dismantle the party´s strategic fiber-optic communications network, on the grounds that it was irregular and therefore illegal and the second was to remove the chief security officer of the Rafiq al-Hariri International Airport in Beirut from his office for his alleged ties to Hizbullah (ICG 2008a, pp. 2–4). The pro-Hizbullah camp in its entirety understood these announcements as a hostile attempt to dismantle the party´s defensive shield against Israel. Nasrallah warned that their implementation would be tantamount to a "declaration of war."

The ruling coalition yet clung to its decisions. Fighting broke out in Beirut on May 8th and quickly spread to other parts of the capital and from here to Sidon, Tripoli and many spots in Mount Lebanon. By the afternoon of May 9th, West-Beirut had largely fallen to Hizbullah and its allies. The occupied areas were then swiftly handed over to the LAF. In the mountain, Jumblatt´s Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) was the only one of all March 14th forces that was able to hold its ground during heavy battles with Hizbullah. On May 13th finally, the army deployed to prevent any further armed clashes before things were to spin entirely out of control. One day later, the opposing political factions agreed on a bargain for a preliminary settlement, whereby the controversial decisions of Siniora were formally repealed and the civil disobedience campaign of March 8th/ FPM was in turn terminated (STL 2018b).

The May clashes had involved rocket-propelled grenades (RPG´s) and various types of machine guns, but also mortars and artillery on both sides, and they were fought out by at least six Lebanese parties, namely Hizbullah and Harakat Amal (Shi`i), the Syrian Social-National Party (SSNP) (mainly Orthodox Christian), and the Lebanese Democratic Party (LDP) (Druze) on the side of March 8th, as well as Tayyār al-Mustaqbal (Future Movement) (Sunni) and the PSP (Druze) on behalf of March 14th. They not only caused a notable number of human casualties and suffering (more than 80 casualties and 250 injured [ICG 2008a, p. 8]) but also marked a watershed in post-Civil War internal Lebanese affairs in at least two respects. For one, Hizbullah, for the first time in its history since its inner-Shi`i feud with Amal, turned parts of its weapons inwards and used them against fellow Lebanese; whereby it broke its steadily reiterated promise to never do so under whatever circumstances. Secondly, some of those parties of March 14th which had always professed to be unarmed based on principle – in particular the Future Movement – had now proved the opposite to the public, which ridiculed much of their central cause. In both respects, taboos had been broken and dangerous precedents set, affecting the overall perception of security within society at large.

During all these developments, the FPM once more stood by its ally Hizbullah – without getting involved in the fighting. The same holds true for the LF, which remained politically loyal to March 14th but did not contribute to its militias. With the major Christian representations standing back, the May clashes pitted essentially Shi`a against Sunnis and Druze. Thus, in contrast to the Israeli onslaught of the July War, this time the issue was about armed intra-Lebanese (Muslim) fighting. It was therefore much more delicate for all parties involved. This was also felt and resented by senior FPM members (ICG 2008a, pp. 6–7).

By and large and, crucially, publicly, however, the FPM´s elite shared the interpretation of events put forward by Hizbullah according to which it´s command had no choice but to act as it did. As a case in point, right after Hizbullah´s seizure of West-Beirut, Aoun is quoted as having said "the train is back on the right track," clearly implying his general approval (Aoun 2008).[131] Such a reading is prevalent at its base too. The Aounist "Bishara B.," for example, told the author in 2013 that he has "never seen Hizbullah fighting against anyone in Lebanon so far." When asked in reply how to make sense of its actions in May 2008 then, he answered unhesitatingly: "That was self-defense," adding, "if you ask me, if Hizbullah didn't do what it did, there would have been a civil war. No discussion. There would have been definitely a civil war." (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.1 2013) The FPM member "Bassem H." furthermore elaborated that

> "they [Fouad Siniora and the ministers loyal to him] took a decision at the council of ministers to expose Hizbullah, to expose Hassan Nasrallah. For example, if you are a Future Movement or a FPM supporter, and I say, okay, listen – and of course, you are threatened by Israel –, and I tell you, okay, I am now going to expose Saad al-Hariri or Samir Geagea or Michel Aoun; of course, you would revolt, you know? Because Israel wants the head of this guy [i.e. Nasrallah]. And you think, if they shot a missile on the place he is staying, you will see the international community or anything? Of course not. So, this [action taken by the Siniora cabinet] was not provocative. It was unacceptable." (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.4 2017)

The FPM functionary "Alain R." expressed regret that Hizbullah had not actually went further to take over the state and subsequently hand it to army command until further notice. He added, however, that this only reflected his very personal opinion (Author´s interv.

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[131] Quoted after CBS News 9/5/2008.

IE.FPM.2 2013). Reports of a similar stance having been taken by Michel Aoun in the immediate wake of the clashes (An-Nahar 9/5/2012) could not be verified by the author (which is not to say that this did not occur either). As a matter of fact, no other interviewee or otherwise interlocutor of the author supportive of either Hizbullah or the FPM ever stated anything comparable. More often, these would rather express sorrow about the war-like events and its victims, yet not without pointing to what they perceived as the inevitability of Hizbullah´s taking action. On the one side, the Shi`i Hizbullah supporter "Qassem A." said:

> "I wish that what happened, it […] didn't happen. But for a certain reason, it [had to] be done. Because something was prepared … something was going on under the table. But, by … if we can talk about the reasons for that … regardless the reasons … what we had built in 2006, it was destroyed in 2008 in terms of the national alignment between the Lebanese groups. Yani, there was … yani, in a short statement, there was … I don't feel, it should [have] happened this way. I wish there was a way to skip what happened in 2008." (Author´s interv. CC.Hzb.5 2017)

The FPM member and school director "Bassem H.," on the other side, explained that

> "the 7th of May was the result of a series of actions that were done by the 8th of March and the 14th of March. For example, the 14th of March […] killed many young people on their way to the demonstrations of [the] 8th of March. So, back then, all of the political life was poisoned. And I think that the 14th of March back then – of course, I am being biased here – was applying a Saudi agenda, you know? They wanted this confrontation with us, with Hizbullah […] They needed to trigger this Shi`a-Sunni strife. And you know what? They also had arms. The 14th of March, they also had arms […] They were not fighting with sticks. They also had arms but the thing is that Hizbullah was stronger. […] Walid Jumblatt had artillery guns. He was shooting artillery guns. So, you can't say it's the arms of Hizbullah. Okay, it's the arms of Hizbullah and it's your arms but Hizbullah and its allies won at the end of the day. So, this, for me, is the result of this sad day." (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.4 2017)

A number of Aounists – yet, no Hizbullah supporter or member interviewed – raised the issue of "Hizbullah´s weapon´s turned inwards" (ICG 2008a) and how to make sense of that assessment. They told the author that the phrase "the party´s weapons" usually pertains to its overall armament. The main focus was thereby on its rocket arsenal as this was what really made the difference to other non-state armed actors on the scene such as the PSP for instance (ICG 2008a, pp. 7–8). Yet, a deployment of these weapons, which had certainly caused the instant defeat of the opponents, was at no time even considered. This and the party´s immediate transfer of authority to the LAF after its seizure of West Beirut is interpreted as a proof, that Hizbullah never had in mind to subjugate, let alone destroy, its opponents whom it did not view as enemies but as adversaries. The common talk of "Hizbullah´s weapons turned inwards," if levied unqualified, was therefore deemed misleading because the cornerstone of these weapons, the rocket arsenal, played no role in the May 2008 fightings (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.4 2017). As the FPM youth functionary "Maher A." explained: "[T]he weapons that were used on the 7th of May were individual weapons like machine guns and other stuff, individual weapons, that all the Lebanese have, all, all of them.” (Author´s interv. IE.FPM1 2012) A similar stance was taken by the senior FPM politician Abou Khalil, who noted: “Well, the two sides used light arms. Do you think the light arms are supplied by Iran? Do you think there is a house in Lebanon that doesn’t have a Kalashnikov, an AK47, in the closet? Everybody has these.” (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012b)

Following the violent clashes of May 2008, the FPM then also negotiated together with the March 8th forces the subsequent Doha Accord (May 16th–20th/21st, 2008) and was naturally included in the resulting equation: A new government of national unity was to be formed by Saad al-Hariri, in which the current opposition (March 8th and the FPM) would receive a blocking minority of eleven ministers (of those, one was to formally belong to the President´s share). Furthermore, the Speaker of the House (Nabih Birri) was to immediately convene the parliament to elect the consensual candidate, General Michel Sulayman, as President (Doha Agreement quoted after ICG 2008b p. 26), and so it was done (STL 2018b; Harris 2012, pp. 273–4). This bestowed the FPM with key ministerial portfolios by July 2008 and as of 2009 brought it into al-Hariri´s first cabinet, marking the movement´s first-time acquisition of governmental responsibility (Helou 2019, p. 170).

On August 24th, 2008, General Michel Aoun visited South Lebanon for the first time in 33 years. Here, he met with Hizbullah´s top representative for the South, Shaykh Nabil Qawouk, and the party´s security chief, Wafiq Safa. He furthermore “went walkabout in Bint Jbeil beneath huge portraits of Imad Mughniyeh, Hizbullah’s military chief assassinated […] in February 2008. He visited the Museum of the Resistance at Nabatiyeh and paid homage to the victims of the 1996 and 2006 Israeli bombings of Qanaa.” (Dot Pouillard 2009) This visit of a senior Maronite Christian leader of national stature carried symbolic significance not only for demonstrating the strength of the FPM´s alliance with Hizbullah (ibid.). It also implied an acknowledgement of the integral belonging of the Shi`i-dominated South Lebanon with its important Christian (and other) minorities to the Lebanese nation, a gesture well received by the Southerners.

In light of a political deadlock over the future electoral law still to come about, the 2009 parliament, in strong contrast to the short-lived 2009 government, was to remain in place in the same composition until May 6th, 2018, after having voted on extending its mandate for seventeen months in May 2013, for an additional thirty-one months in November 2014 and once more for eleven months in June 2017. Altogether, the 2009 parliament was to persist for almost nine years, amounting to more than double the regular tenure. In the same time, Lebanon saw the birth of four and the fall of two governments as well as another two and a half years of presidential vacuum.

The national unity government of al-Hariri was brought down in January 2011 (Harris 2012, p. 274). The following March 8th/ FPM dominated government of the "centrist" Najib Miqati collapsed though the Prime Minister´s own resignation in March 2013, following which he erstwhile remained in office presiding over yet another caretaker government (najib-mikati.net 2011 [2014]). In February 2014, the moderately pro-March 14th Tammam Sa'ib Salam formed a new government that remained in office until December 2016, when Saad al-Hariri took over again. The term of President Michel Sulayman had meanwhile ended already in May 2014 without the competing political camps having been able to agree on a successor candidate. In consequence, the presidential post remained vacant once more, and the question of whom to nominate next became one of the most pressing issues for the two years to come.

The same period saw notable tensions arising within the March 8th + FPM coalition (as of mid-2012) and the FPM witnessing its internal quarrels and power-struggles between many of the movement´s veterans and its "new" elite cadres (basically as of mid-2005) reaching a climax upon Gibran Bassil´s assumption of the FPM presidency by summer 2015. It also encompassed the outbreak of Civil War in Syria (March 2011) and Hizbullah´s declared participation in it (as of April 2013), accompanied by a number of significant spillovers from the Syrian war to Lebanon (see below).

The STL continued to drive a wedge between the Lebanese, whereby it in-between redirected its investigations from Syria to Hizbullah: On June 30th, 2011, it "transmitted a sealed indictment and arrest warrants to the Lebanese government, but the identities of the indicted were leaked." (STL 2018b) All four (later five) arrest warrants were issued against members of Hizbullah. The trial against the first four of the five accused was opened at the STL in January 2014 (ibid.). However, neither were any attempts made on behalf of the Lebanese authorities to track down, let alone arrest the latter, for reasons of missing capabilities or political will to do so or both, nor did Hizbullah consider at any time handing over the accused.

Another notable, yet, very different issue imposed itself on July 17th, 2015, when the last active landfill in Lebanon, located in Na'ameh (shortly before reaching Damur on the seaside motorway from Beirut to Sidon), ceased operating without the administration having concluded new contracts for the country´s waste management in advance. Waste collection all over Lebanon was suspended and the garbage piled up, culminating in a waste crisis of unprecedented dimensions (The National 7/5/2019). As of August 2015 a cross-confessional and non-partisan civil protest movement emerged in response, holding responsible and addressing the entire establishment with it´s “You Stink” campaign. This protest movement stood in contrast to the likewise multi-confessional camps of March 8th and March 14th, as it not only transcended ethnicized-confessional but also party-based political loyalties.[132]

Finally, this timeframe also saw Aoun´s ascendancy to the Lebanese presidency (October 2016) under a deal that was to sustainably estrange him from Frangieh so as Geagea from al-Hariri, while catapulting the latter into his second premiership (December 2016). The “Maarab Agreement” struck between the FPM and the LF in January 2016 has remained superficial and fragile ever since (Toubia et al. 2019, p. 8; Ad-Diyyar 9/4/2018) but is still existent at the time of writing. The March 8th and March 14th coalitions had nearly disintegrated by late 2016 and their re-emergence a few months later came about only after serious disruptions and re-arrangements had already caused irrevocable damage.

The FPM and Hizbullah in contrast appeared as nearly politically one during all these days of intense internal struggle and volatility. A whole number of political disagreements and controversies have in-between arisen between them too and, as will be shown below, such have become even more frequent over the last years. Still, within an atmosphere of sufficient mutual trust (Author´s interv. IE.FPM1 2012), so far all have been overcome and the allies’ coordination of policies and frequent launching of concerted action, i.e. their political alliance, continues up until today.

3.5.1.1 The “General´s” presidential tenure

President Aoun´s tenure´s first year, on the one hand, began with a noticeable softening of the competing political positions and blurring boundaries of the respective camps and it saw the military defeat of both Jabhat al-Nuṣra and the Islamic State in and around Lebanon. Both developments had an immediate positive impact on the security situation. On the other hand, however, Aoun also ascended to the presidency literally in the eye of the storm. The war in neighboring Syria was still raging on (if meanwhile to the advantage of the pro-government coalition), the high number of Syrian and other refugees in Lebanon stood largely unchanged and the country´s economic situation, “[w]ith an estimated debt of $80bn, representing 150 percent of GDP (the third highest percentage in the world, behind Japan and Greece), a budget deficit tantamount to 10 percent of GDP, not to mention the country's over-stressed obsolete infrastructure," (Middleeasteye.net 16/4/2018) was desolate.

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[132] In attempting to exit the circle of the accused, nearly all political groups of rank and file sooner or later responded by declaring their respect and support for the protesters, thereby passing the buck amongst each other. Far from realizing the sincerity of the situation and acting responsible, the relevant politicians have largely sat things out. The problem has only been treated cosmetically and still waits to be resolved.

Michel Aoun´s inauguration on October 31st, 2016 furthermore coincided almost exactly with Donald J. Trump becoming the 45th President of the USA in December 2016. After initial irritations on all sides about Trump´s foreign policy in general and in the Middle East in particular, he quite quickly settled for openly assisting the Saudi-led axis in its quest for regional leadership while simultaneously attempting to contain Iran and its allies in the "Resistance Axis" and supporting the Israelis far more uncompromisingly than the USA has traditionally done. Nothing suggests, however, that this approach came about as a result of thorough deliberation (Thompson 2018, p. 2).

These are the regional circumstances and conditions under which Michel Aoun took up office as president of the Lebanese Republic and – following the brief undisturbed honeymoon between al-Hariri, Aoun and Nasrallah that allowed for breaking up the decade-old political deadlock – their impact started to be felt on the domestic scene much more strongly since the beginning of Aoun´s second year in office. This coincided with Saudi Arabia forcefully attempting to gain back its traditional role and influence in Lebanese affairs, which became obvious when Saad al-Hariri visited Riyadh in November 2017 and suddenly "resigned under apparent duress, citing Hizbollah's involvement in regional conflict and threats to his life." (Wimmen 2018) Hassan Nasrallah responded to this bizarre affair by calling for al-Hariri being released and allowed to come home (Reuters 2017d). President Aoun, for his part, refused to accept the prime minister´s resignation and insisted to have it presented in person. He accused the Saudi authorities of holding the Lebanese head of government hostage and demanded for him to be allowed free movement. Upon the diplomatic intervention of mainly France and Egypt, but also the USA and others, a deal was struck to lift Saad al-Hariri´s house arrest. After two weeks he was therefore allowed to terminate his involuntary stay in the *wahhābī* Kingdom (NY Times 24/12/2017). On Saturday, November 18th, 2017, al-Hariri left Riyadh for Paris where he was received by French President Emmanuel Macron. On Tuesday, November 21st, Saad al-Hariri then first headed to Cairo, from there travelled to Cyprus and subsequently flew on to Beirut, arriving at Rafiq al-Hariri International Airport shortly before midnight. He was just in time to celebrate Lebanon´s Independence Day on November 22nd, as he had promised his supporters from Paris before (Guardian 22/11/2017).

After an urgent meeting with President Aoun in a confidential setting in the Baabda Palace on Wednesday, November 22nd, 2018, al-Hariri suspended his resignation. He moreover signaled relief that Aoun had not accepted it blindly, explicitly thanking the president for respecting the constitutional norms. The airing of these developments sparked celebrations of Future supporters in Beirut and elsewhere and they were generally received with relief in all of Lebanon (Reuters 22/11/2017).

The first parliamentary elections to be held since 2009 were now scheduled for May 6th, 2018. This time, so it seemed to everyone, the elections would eventually take place. This was affirmed by President Aoun in a speech delivered before heads of the Arab diplomatic representations and international missions accredited to Lebanon on January 16th, 2018. On this occasion, he also praised the achievement of a new electoral law, which abandons the long applied "first past the post" system to the advantage of one based on proportional representation. With an eye to Lebanon´s internal situation in light of its geopolitical position, he furthermore stated:

> "Undoubtedly, it is very difficult to maintain the security stability [sic!] in an inflamed region and in a country like Lebanon which is agitated by its surrounding and interacts with it to a great extent. Nevertheless, we managed to achieve it and to prevent the spark of sedition to reach the inside of Lebanon, thanks to the joint wills and to the total coordination between all the organs after the new appointments at the level of leaderships." (Michel Aoun 2018)[133]

The new proportional electoral law, together with another new provision which for the first time granted Lebanese nationals abroad the right to participate in the elections and cast ballots in early voting, were not only important goals explicated by Hizbullah and the FPM in their MoU of 2006 (FPM/ Hizbullah 2006, quoted after Yalibnan.com 9/2/2006; Bouyoub 2013, p. 182) but also widely viewed as an achievement in itself, because this potentially allowed for breaking "up the monopoly of big parties and bring in representation from smaller constituencies and civil society." (El-Amine 2018) Under these conditions, inter-party competition, albeit commonly high in pre-election times anywhere, assumed a special character this time reflecting the different actor´s efforts to adjust to the new reality. Depending on their prior positions, this either translated into strategies aiming at keeping the losses as low as possible, or to increase gains by taking maximum advantage of the new opportunities. As a result, many of the alliances and relations in place prior to the phase of electoral competition – with the notable exception of the Amal-Hizbullah covenant – became almost invisible for outsiders during that time, as most of "[t]he big parties went as far as to make contradictory alliances in order to defeat independent competitors." (Ibid) This temporarily led to heavily strained relations between otherwise allies, such as in particular between the FPM and Amal and the Future Movement and the LF respectively. Although all this is hardly atypical for Lebanese electoral alliances, it was nonetheless surprising in light of the power-balances in place, which rather prescribed a strategy betting on the maximum joining of forces.

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[133] Quoted after Asharq Al-Awsat 17/1/2018.

The elections were indeed conducted on time and on one single day in all of the fifteen newly formed electoral districts on May 6th, 2018. The results again yielded a number of surprises. First of all, while it was widely expected that the character of the new electoral law together with the long wait after several postponements since 2013 would provide strong incentives for active and passive participation, the voter turnout only reached 49 %, which was even lower than in 2009. Secondly, there was no "major rebellion against the traditional sectarian-based parties," and thirdly, all of the newly emerged "civil society groups [failed] to have any real representation in the new parliament." (El-Amine 2018)

Of the main parties, Amal gained thirteen (+2) seats, Hizbullah twelve (+1); the FPM eighteen (+8); the Future Movement thirteen (-11); the LF twelve (+7); the Marada three (+/-0); the PSP nine (-2), and the Katā´ib three (-2) seats. Above that, a whole number of independents and small party representatives entered the parliament that to a large degree consisted of either "recycled politicians from previous parliaments [or] candidates rotated in from the ranks of the big political parties, leaving only a dozen or so out of 128 seats held by truly independent candidates." (Ibid.)

With regard to the post-election power relations in light of likely future alliances to be reinforced or newly formed, Amal, Hizbullah, the FPM and all of their allies together account for at least 69 of the 128 seats in the parliament. The three Marada-deputies are not counted in for the time being, as the relations between Sulayman Franjieh and Michel Aoun have steadily regressed ever since al-Hariri´s original nomination of the former in December 2015, before switching to the latter by October 2016. The Future Movement, the Lebanese Forces (LF) and their respective loyalists altogether captured thirty-five seats, and the PSP´s nine can be expected to join in while a possible participation of al-Katā´ib cannot be finally excluded but seems unlikely for the time being. The Future-LF-PSP block – if to come about as predicted – can thus be expected to make up at least forty-four seats, possibly slightly more, given that many of the remaining new parliamentarians are likely to side with one or the other of these coalitions, once the cabinet has been formed.

3.5.1.2 Tensons within

> "And that's what's good about it. That […] if we agree on disagreeing than we can work on what we agree on and work towards either bringing you to my side or going to your side [by] the intellectual discourse."
>
> "Mahmoud A." 2013[134]

The tensions that have accompanied and also shaped the political *entente* between the FPM and Hizbullah were of different kinds and marked by different levels of intensity. At times they involved one or more third parties and at others merely one of the two allies in focus. As we have seen, to begin with, both the FPM and Hizbullah are caught in a continuous process of development and each organization has experienced profound change in the runtime of the alliance and partially because of it. Some of the internal disruptions caused by these changes had important implications for the alliance, its further course and its persistence. The FPM´s internal power struggles, for instance, have by today consolidated the standing of Michel Aoun´s son-in-law, Gibran Bassil, who is surely the most controversial of all FPM politicians, especially for his "confrontational style with several political heavyweights in Lebanon." (Helou 20120, p. 174) Haboush even argues that up until Aoun´s "election as president in October 2016, the alliance seemed unbreakable. But since he assumed office and handed over the leadership of the FPM to his son-in-law, Gebran Bassil, tensions have surfaced." (Haboush 2019)

From among the larger March 8th grouping, two actors enjoy a special status with respect to the FPM-Hizbullah alliance; Harakat Amal and Marada. For one, this is because Amal is the other major Shi`i Muslim player besides Hizbullah, and Marada is another important representation of Maronite/ Christians in Lebanon. Secondly, the inter-relations of these actors are treated especially sensitive by all sides given the different histories of inter- and intra-communal strife and violence they share. In light of the deeply interwoven, often kinship-based ties linking the Amal and Hizbullah social and political milieus, any disturbance of the FPM´s relations to Amal has the potential to backfire on the Aounists´ alliance with Hizbullah. However, given the extraordinary importance of their alliance for the FPM´s and Hizbullah´s elites and the nowadays strong ties linking their social bases too, the same holds true the other way around.

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[134] Author´s interv. IE.Hzb.1 2013.

The Marada party has been a reliable ally of the Syrians throughout their presence in Lebanon and the Frangieh family looks back to a long-standing friendship with the Asads. Both of these aspects awarded the party a highly comfortable position in post-Civil War Lebanon. This stands in stark contrast to many other Maronites´ known opposition to and suffering under Syrian tutelage – with the Aounists standing at the forefront.

The rules of communication resulting from these sensitivities are usually respected by the allies. However, a number of quarrels have broken out between the FPM and Amal and one major clash has blown up the FPM-Marada bond. Hizbullah, for its part, given its close relations to Amal, Marada, and the FPM alike, was in all such situations actively mediating and concerned to build bridges – even when implicated in the tensions itself. While Amal-FPM relations were arguably never marked by full trust and always a bit shaky anyway (Al-Joumhouria 17/1/2012), they were nonetheless never severed. FPM-Marada relations in contrast, have been rather harmonious since the FPM-Hizbullah rapprochement of early 2006. Yet, one major clash proved enough to bring about a lasting divide between Aoun and Frangieh. What follows, is an overwiew over some of the most relevant instances of tensions within the March 8th + FPM camp in the period of investigation.

The first major dispute between the FPM and Amal – and to a lesser degree also between the FPM and Hizbullah – emerged by mid-2012 about the demands for permanent employment raised by contract workers of the state-run Lebanese energy agency, *Électricité du Liban* (EDL), in months-long strikes (Naharnet 2/7/2012). A majority of these workers were Shi`a affiliated with Harakat Amal (Lebanon Support n.d.) and Nabih Birri backed their demands unconditionally. On July 2nd, 2012, the parliament approved of a draft law on permanently hiring the contract workers. Amongst others, also Hizbullah MP´s had voted in favor of the bill (Daily Star 9/7/2012). The FPM´s parliamentarians alongside most other Christian lawmakers from both the March 8th and March 14th coalitions, however, opposed such a step on the basis that it was to enshrine the current disruption of the sectarian (i.e. ethnicized-confessional) balance in a public institution. According to Gibran Bassil, then Minister of Energy and Water, 80 % of the contract workers belonged to non-Christian sects and most of them supported Birri (Naharnet 31/7/2012).

With respect to Hizbullah, the FPM´s main complaint was that it had "allowed its ally, Nabih Birri, to insult the head of the largest Christian bloc at the parliament through the passing of the daily workers' law." (As-Safir 9/7/2012) High level talks between the FPM and Hizbullah were launched immediately, followed by a swift settlement in the following weeks. Efforts of both Hizbullah and Marada to bridge the differences between Birri and Aoun have since helped to ensure a continuity of dialogue and cooperation in other domains. Yet, the EDL workers´ protest movement, just as the related quarrels between Amal and the FPM, lasted on for several more years (Lebanon Support n.d.).

Another controversy between Amal and the FPM surfaced in August 2012, this time revolving around the prospects and conditions of oil and gas exploration in Lebanon´s coastal waters (Naharnet 30/8/2012). In early 2009 and 2010 respectively an Israeli oil company had discovered two large gas reservoirs off the coast of Haifa (Abdel-Kader 2011). The US Geological Survey (USGS) then, in March 2010, published a report, claiming that the Levant Basin Province (encompassing parts of the coastal waters of Lebanon, Palestine/ Israel, and Cyprus [Abdallah/ Salami 2015, p. 2]) comprises an estimated "mean of 1.7 billion barrels of recoverable oil and a mean of 122 trillion cubic feet of recoverable gas." (USGS 2010) Ever since, "Lebanon and Israel have been feuding over an 860-sq km disputed area that extends along the edge of three of the 10 blocks that form Lebanon's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), with both parties staking their claim to the oil-rich surface." (Reuters 2018)

Most actors counting to the Lebanese ruling class were naturally interested in kicking-off the process of exploration by launching tenders for licenses as soon as possible. With all three Lebanese presidents in office, the first necessary steps were indeed taken in a timely manner.[135] However, Israel´s as well as Hizbullah´s leaderships quickly made it clear that they stand ready for protecting the interests of their respective countries by means of force, when necessary (Abdel-Kader 2011; Haaretz 2011). The FPM and Amal meanwhile disagreed about making the inclusion of the disputed three blocks in Lebanon´s EEZ a pre-condition for starting exploration (Amal´s position) or starting with the seven undisputed blocks alone, while still clinging to the claim on the entire Lebanese EEZ (the FPM´s position). The dispute was resolved in July 2016, with Birri having reportedly convinced Bassil of the need to start out with all ten blocks at once (Naharnet 30/8/2012; Daily Star 10/8/2016).[136]

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[135] First, in response to the Israeli official claims to those 850 square kilometers of the waters in question, seen by Lebanese authorities and Hizbullah as belonging to the Lebanese maritime Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), Lebanon immediately objected and submitted an official dossier outlining its counter-claims as well as the underlying reasoning. Second, "[…] a long-awaited draft bill on gas and oil exploration […]" (Abdel-Kader 2011) was approved by the Lebanese parliament in August 2010. Third, the Lebanese government submitted its own maritime borders proposal to the UN in July 2011 (ibid.; Haaretz 2011) and fourth, the parliament endorsed "[…] a draft law demarcating the country's maritime borders with Israel and Cyprus […]" in August 2011 (Abdel-Kader 2011).

[136] A first round of offshore licensing was launched in 2017 and the first oil and gas exploration and production agreements were completed in February 2018, under the auspices of Bassil´s FPM-companion and successor as Lebanese Minister for Energy and Water, Cesar Abou Khalil. Exploration reportedly began in May 2018 (Reuters 29/5/2018).

The next clash within the March 8th coalition, affecting also FPM-Hizbullah relations, came with Saad al-Hariri in November 2015 surprisingly deserting his close March 14th ally, LF-leader Samir Geagea, by passing over the latter's own presidential ambitions and nominating another important Maronite leader, al-Marada head Sulayman Frangieh, from the March 8th alliance instead:

> "[B]y supporting Frangieh, the Future Movement was trying to lure Hezbollah away from Aoun. They hoped that open support for Frangieh, who has close ties with the Syrian regime, would encourage Hezbollah to switch its votes toward Frangieh and in so doing destroy the Hezbollah–FPM alliance that forms the cornerstone of the March 8 coalition." (Dagher 2016)

This attempt remained futile with respect to the outcome of the presidential race. Not only did Hizbullah continue to stand by Aoun but the nomination of Frangieh bestowed him with the additional support of his long-standing adversary, Samir Geagea, who is involved in a historical personal blood feud with Frangieh (cf. Hatem, p. 10) and naturally viewed his nomination as an affront (As-Safir 22/1/2016). Faced with these new givens, al-Hariri finally gave in and agreed to Aoun´s nomination who was elected president of the republic on October 31st, 2016 (Guardian 31/10/2016). According to their prior deal, Aoun thereafter tasked al-Hariri to form and head a new cabinet, which was accomplished on December 18th, 2016 (Reuters 18/12/2016).

Al-Hariri´s move was still partially successful in shaking the so far universal – if largely implicit – support for Michel Aoun´s candidacy within March 8th and in creating strife between the latter´s components. Crucially, Frangieh accepted his own nomination and thus consciously stepped into competition with Aoun. To make things worse, Nabih Birri was among the first to openly welcome this development and hence support the candidacy of Frangieh. Among March 8th, the same applied to the SSNP and the Ba`th Party (En-Nashra 28/9/2016). After initial signs to the opposite (Naharnet 24/11/2015), Michel Aoun soon rejected the nomination of Franjieh and neither personal consultations between both leaders, nor Hizbullah´s mediation efforts, could prevent the subsequent deterioration of FPM-Marada relations (Ad-Diyyar 5/10/2017; ibid. 9/4/2018).

Hizbullah´s leadership had always made it clear, that its presidential candidate was Michel Aoun (Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International [LBCI] 19/8/2015; Al Jazeera 30/11/2017) or whomever the latter would have proposed instead of himself. Now, it faced the dilemma of having to deal with the presidential aspirations of its two main Maronite Christian allies at once. This was presumably also the reason for Hizbullah not publicly reiterating its unconditional support for Aoun in the immediate wake of the crisis, which drew the latter´s anger (cf. Elghossein 2016). This, in interplay with accusations of obstructing the conduction of presidential elections, gave rise to speculations about the party having abandoned Aoun (Elghossein 2016; Al-Modon 10/9/2016; cf. Al-Akhbar 14/3/2016). Yet, by December 2015 Hizbullah had informed Frangieh that it wouldn´t be backing away from its support for Aoun´s candidacy (Naharnet 12/12/2015). It fully stuck to its commitment (Dagher 2016) and, in fact, Aoun´s ascendancy to the Lebanese presidency by October 2016 has been widely attributed to the Shi`i party´s efforts and unconditional support to that end (Al-Rai al-Youm 31/10/2016; Al-Quds al-Arabi 1/11/2016).

FPM-Amal relations remained difficult, with disagreements and stand-offs in parliament being frequent and about several different issues (Al-Akhbar 27/4/2016). Noteworthy among these were the controversies about the three term extensions of the 2009-parliament and of the former commander-in-chief of the LAF (2008-2017), Jean Kahwaji (1953-), respectively. Aoun and the FPM opposed most of these extensions (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013; Yalibnan.com 29/7/2013; ibid. 30/9/2016; Naharnet 19/9/2014), while Amal and also Hizbullah, took divergent stances on more than one occasion (As-Safir 3/4/2013; Asharq al-Awsat 1/9/2013; Al-Modon 26/8/2016).

The run-up to the Lebanese parliamentary elections of May 2018, with its new electoral law and the numerous short-term electoral coalitions to be eventually formed between otherwise opponents, provided the ideal climate for tensions to become fueled or newly erupt between otherwise allies. This rendered the March 8th/ March 14th divide quasi-irrelevant. While this picture spared the Hizbullah-Amal alliance, it pertained to relations between Hizbullah and the FPM. Their electoral competition was exaggerated through Bassil´s insistence to field own Shi`i candidates in the face of Amal and Hizbullah in a number of districts where there are Shi`i seats, including Bint Jbeil, Nabatiyah, Baalbek-Hermel and Jbeil (En-Nashra 27/3/2018). In the absence of other satisfying explanations, this move – in particular with respect to the single seat reserved for a Shi`i in Christian dominated Jbeil – left the impression of Bassil having merely aimed at politically weakening Hizbullah (ibid.).

However, the most critical dispute within March 8th + FPM during this phase once more occurred between the FPM and Harakat Amal. It had its origin in a decree signed by President Aoun and Prime Minister al-Hariri in December 2017, granting seniority to dozens of officers that were undergoing officer training at the Military Academy when the Syrian forces had ousted Michel Aoun from Baabda in 1990. Amal, however, opposed this step on the grounds that it was tipping the sectarian balance in the army´s highest ranks in favor of Christians. Both Nabih Birri and his close aide, Ali Hassan Khalil, then Minister of Finance, moreover took the position that the decree required the additional signature of Khalil. Aoun and his aides in turn argued that this was not the case, for the decree did not carry any financial burden.

The crisis between the two sides fully escalated in late January 2018 when a leaked video started circulating on social media, which showed Bassil, now FPM-head and Lebanon´s Foreign Minister, calling Nabih Birri a "thug." In response, Khalil depicted Bassil as "lowly" and a "political dwarf" while angry Amal supporters, demanding an apology from Bassil, took to the streets in Beirut and its suburbs. They soon headed to the FPM´s headquarters in Sin el-Fil and into the mixed Shi`i-Christian neighborhood of Hadath, an FPM stronghold. Upon gunfire being heard, the army deployed to prevent things from spiraling out of control. After three days of disturbing unrest and intensive diplomacy behind closed doors, on February 2nd, 2018, a joint delegation of Amal, FPM and Hizbullah parliamentarians visited the municipality of Hadath to demonstrate unity and to calm the tensions. Bassil and Birri never publicly reconciled after this incidence, yet, Bassil had expressed his regret while Birri distanced himself and his party from what had happened on the streets (Reuters 29/1/2018; ibid. 2/2/2018; Al-Akhbar 30/1/2018; An-Nahar 2/2/2018; Naharnet 27/12/2017; ibid. 2/2/2018). This issue has left a scar on FPM-Amal relations and if earlier reports over preparations for a possible future MoU between the two parties (Al-Joumhouria 8/5/2017; Ad-Diyyar 2/3/2017; Naharnet 2/3/2017) contained any truth, such were certainly suspended now. Yet, their cooperation within the remnants of the March 8th framework continues on a shaky basis.

Already in December 2017, meanwhile, Bassil, in a televised interview with Al-Mayadeen TV (close to Hizbullah), amongst other, said "[t]o us, [Israel] isn't an ideological cause. We are not against Israel existing with security." (Daily Star 29/12/2017) With this statement, Bassil not only overstepped the main red line (normalization of relations with Israel) of its ally Hizbullah but also appeared to have broken with the official national-Lebanese position in this respect (ibid.). Condemnations from across Lebanon´s political establishment and calls for his resignation triggered an immediate "statement of clarification" from Bassil´s office. According to this, Al-Mayadeen had taken his comments out of context "in order to distort the Minister's image and his position, which has always been that Israel is an aggressor who conducts state terrorism." It noted further that "Israel has always been considered an enemy of Lebanon as it continues to violate the rights of Palestinians, Lebanon and the rest of the Arab world, and that position hasn't changed." (Quoted after An-Nahar 28/12/2017)

In February 2018 then, an earlier interview with Bassil was published in which he was analogously quoted as saying that “Hizbullah was taking choices in internal matters that did not serve the interests of the Lebanese state.” A later statement by his media office did neither deny nor downplay this critique. It maintained, however, that the alliance with Hizbullah was strategic and bound to continue, while it has already broken the record of political alliances in Lebanon (Daily Star 3/2/2018). The behaviour and statements of Bassil in all of these incidents have raised widespread condemnation, extending to parts of the FPM´s highest echelons. Hizbullah was certainly not amused either. Yet its leadership remained publicly silent (ibid.). It's only noteworthy response to Bassil in these days consisted of declaring its refusal to have the speaker (Nabh Birri) being the subject of what it viewed as exaggerated criticism (Asharq al-Awsat 4/2/2018).

Thus, while it is true, as Haboush claims, that Bassil´s emergence as the FPM´s new leader has also contributed to increased tensions between his party, its allies and its adversaries alike (Haboush 2019), such tensions have appeared well before 2016. Moreover, his widely perceived role as a “troublemaker” notwithstanding, Gibran Bassil is also a skilled politician, among the architects of the MoU, and known for being especially dedicated to its preservation. Finally, those tensions that have indeed increased after 2016 were overwhelmingly not directly between the FPM and Hizbullah but related to – or even outcomes of – disagreements between the FPM and Amal. The FPM thereby repeatedly complained about Hizbullah´s perceived or factual siding with Amal – or otherwise shielding of Birri against critique – in matters it deems important (Al-Modon 26/8/2016).

Issues involving solely Hizbullah and the FPM were few and most of them minor. And even when more profound – so as with Bassil´s remarks about Israel´s security – they never escalated to points comparable to what has shaken the FPM-Amal relations and, until further notice, aborted those between the FPM and al-Marada. To a certain degree, this has to do with Amal´s and Hizbullah´s division of responsibilities, which automatically renders Amal the central Shi`i competitor for shares in the state and its resources – at least in appearance. In at least two of the cases of tensions discussed – the contract worker´s file and the seniority decree – conflict arose for reasons of ethnicized-confessional competition and clientelism in the first place. In the other examples, these aspects played a less predominant role, yet they were not completely absent either. The FPM´s repeated complaints about Hizbullah´s covering up for Amal´s and Birri´s involvement in nepotism and corruption, for instance, are rooted in the perception that this is guided by the party´s interest of avoiding the resurgence of an intra-Shi`i schism. This implies a silent charge of being more concerned with the well being of the own ethnicized-confessional community than with that of the nation.

When it comes to securing Shi`i communal interests, Hizbullah´s position is necessarily close to that of Amal. For similar reasons, when it was about securing Maronite/ Christian interests, the FPM was to be backed even by rival Christian factions. In that light, Amal, representing the Shi`i establishment party, is not only more deeply involved in the mud of Lebanese politics (therefore the nepotism and corruption charges) but also the one more invested in fighting the open battles for the Lebanese Shi`a in the political field. It therefore also draws the bulk of annoyance and anger from other communal actors. Even if this picture has evidently started to change since Hizbullah´s first-time acceptance of assuming governmental responsibility in 2005, the party still prefers to stay in the background and avoids confrontation with its allies in public. This, in turn, allows it to play the part of the honest mediator (Al-Akhbar 14/7/2012), as it has done so often in the past.

The comparably swift resolution of disputes between the FPM and Hizbullah can also be attributed to the particular way(s) the parties view and treat their alliance and through the *modus operandi* they have developed in their inter-relations. Ghaleb Abou Zaynab, when asked about tensions that have emerged between the FPM and Hizbullah in the past, replied:

> "These are daily things that happen and take place. It does not affect the heart of the alliance. Maybe other instances occur in the future but that doesn't mean that the alliance is going to break down. It's not natural to be exactly the same. That's a problem, that's a catastrophe if that happens." (Author´s interview E.Hzb.1 2012)

A similar reading is applied by the FPM, whose functionary "Maher A." pointed out that, "we [the FPM and Hizbullah] have arrived at a point at which we can trust each other. We still have a lot of differences but we can discuss them and solve them one by one." (Author´s interv. IE.FPM1 2012)

The MoU, as we know, was originally not meant to initiate a political alliance, let alone a merger. In other words, sameness between the signatories´ political stances, practices or philosophical foundations was never an aim (even if a process of mutual approximation has nonetheless set in). To the opposite, the general discrepancies and disagreements in place between the FPM and Hizbullah were transparent to both sides *ab initio* (Al-Akhbar 14/7/2012). Neither were they seen as an obstacle to reach an understanding over what was agreed upon, nor did they prevent this understanding to swiftly translate into an alliance only shortly afterwards: "It was a political agreement and it led to a political alliance. Yani, it didn’t diminish the respective margin, the free movement of the two parties.” (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.2 2012)

The Shi`i Muslim “Mahmoud A.,” 56 years in age, and originally from a village in the South, had started out with the Communist party in the Civil War. In what can be described as a rather typical career, he later switched to Amal and shortly afterwards to Hizbullah where he by today became a mid-level functionary. After seven years of alliance with the FPM, he stated:

> “What the Memorandum in effect told [the] people [is] that, we are two political parties, we are not two […] sects. We are two political parties. We have two different ideologies, we have two different outlooks and we have two different philosophies. But we agree on these issues. And these issues are enough to guarantee to you that I am a Lebanese […] working for Lebanon and [for you to] guarantee to me that, yes, you are also working for Lebanon and not for Israel or any other country.” (Author´s interv. IE.Hzb.1 2013)

Four years later, that is after eleven years of alliance with Hizbullah, the 35-year-old FPM member from Metn, “Bassem H.,” said:

> “[I]t [is] an alliance between very honorable people and we honor and respect this alliance. This doesn’t mean that I am Hizbullah. No, I am not. I am Free Patriotic Movement. And it doesn’t mean that Hizbullah, they are Free Patriotic Movement. No, they are Hizbullah. They are, they have their … of course their proper characteristics and specificities that I don’t have and vice versa, you know?” (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.4 2017)

It becomes clear against this background that political disagreements between the FPM and Hizbullah, when they occurred, came usually not very surprising as such, as both were (and are) aware of the central viewpoints and circumstances of the other. There is also steady communication taking place within a climate of trust between the parties on different levels, which allows for early responses to actual or imminent threats to their relations. As the alliance “didn’t diminish the respective margin, the free movement of the two parties,” (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.2 2012) there is also no pressure to find a common position at all costs – as within a joint command structure – but only to find a practical *modus vivendi* which allows the allies to keep marching on together despite differences in particular issue areas.

3.5.1.3 Hizbullah in Syria

On the regional scene, the Syrian Civil War (2011-) had and continues to have grave repercussions for Lebanon given the geographical proximity, the historical bonds, and the various intimate relations that accrued from both. The political division between the March 8th and March 14th camps, as we know, came about also as a result of different views of and stances towards the Syrian role in Lebanon and the Syrian leadership – at least at the surface.

The split that occurred within Syria since the outbreak of the Civil War there corresponds to this Lebanese division. It came to no surprise that March 14th instantly sided with the opposition factions, and March 8th + FPM with the government. Accordingly – despite an official self-distancing policy to which much of the Lebanese political establishment had committed itself in the "Baabda Declaration" as a result of a National Dialogue session held on June 11th, 2012 (National Dialogue Committee [NDC] 2012) –[137] Lebanese actors were quickly drawn into the conflict and a number of direct spillovers of the war have occurred in Lebanon.

For one, Lebanon has served as one of the prime destinations for Syrian refugees since the outbreak of hostilities in Syria. Proportional to its territory and native population, it thereby quickly advanced to become the country hosting the largest amounts of refugees worldwide.[138] This situation "has added a major strain on Lebanon's economy and infrastructure. Although Lebanon has shown remarkable generosity, increased competition for jobs and resources is fueling tensions between Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugees." (European Commission 2018) The Lebanese government began enacting measures to mitigate the influx of Syrian refugees in January 2015 by introducing rigid border entry regulations, which "effectively sealed the border to many Syrians fleeing armed conflict and persecution." (HRW 2018)

The Civil War in Syria moreover contributed to a radicalization of parts of the Lebanese population and elevated the Sunni-Shi`a divide, which has played only a minor role in Lebanon before, to a significant issue here too (Salloukh 2017). It also witnessed the direct involvement of a number of Lebanese actors in Syria – most prominently Hizbullah´s declared intervention as of April 2013 –[139] as well as numerous attacks from "armed groups that grew out of the Syrian crisis," (ICG 2016, p. 8), partially targeting Shi`a and/ or Hizbullah and partially Lebanon and its diverse populace as a whole. Instances of relevance include the abduction of Shi`i Lebanese pilgrims in Syria in 2012 (BBC 25/5/2012), two massive attacks against residential areas considered Hizbullah strongholds leading to at least ten dead and more than 150 wounded in May and June 2013 respectively, and dozens more, if smaller in scale, in the months and years to come (ICG 2016, p. 8; STL 2018, p. 2–5). A November 2013 attack on the Iranian embassy in the Bir Hassan quarter in the southern suburbs of Beirut, which killed 23 and injured more than 150 (Guardian 19/11/2013) is to be seen in the same context.

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[137] The "Baabda Declaration" was a brainchild of, and in particular pushed for by, President Michel Sulayman.

[138] Currently, registered – and factually present – refugees in Lebanon amount to more than 1 million Syrians and more than 30,000 Palestinians from Syria, about 180,000 Palestinians from Palestine (with their registered number standing at roughly 450,000 [UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) 2014]), and roughly 6,000 Iraqis, which sums up to about 30 % of the native population (European Commission 2018). The factual numbers, however, are much higher, because a) an unclear, yet surely high amount of Syrian refugees never registered with UN Agencies in Lebanon (the Lebanese government estimates that their number amounts to 500,000) because of the delicate political situation and b) children born from refugees in Lebanon are not counted in, so that they appear in none of the relevant statistics (Reuters 2017a; cf. Salloukh 2017).

[139] In light of the close relations between Hizbullah and the Syrian regime, some of the party´s opponents both in Lebanon and Syria had suspected and in some cases explicitly accused it of a military presence and involvement since shortly after hostilities in Syria started. Hizbullah´s leadership has repeatedly denied it. Yet, on April 30th, 2013, Hassan Nasrallah declared that Hizbullah´s Islamic Resistance was now in combat within Syria alongside its strategic ally, the Asad government, for the primary aims of defending Lebanese citizens settling in the vicinity of the Syrian town al-Qusair, in the Homs province and to protect the holy shrine of

Meanwhile, in Sidon, the so-far inconspicuous *salafī* preacher Shaykh Ahmad al-Assir had gathered a noteworthy protest movement staging a sit-in in the form of a large-scale tent city beginning August 2012 (Standard 18/8/2015). His group – to which the shaykh as of 2013 referred to as the "Free Resistance Brigades" – was politically distinguished not only by its anti-Hizbullah and LAF stances (the latter was condemned for supposedly having become a mere tool in Hizbullah´s hands) but also by its vehement intra-Sunni agitation, especially targeting the Future Movement. Preceded by several limited clashes between Al-Assir´s supporters and followers of Hizbullah and the allied (mainly Sunni) Popular Nasserist Organization (PNO), heavy battles broke out in June 2013. Al-Assir´s men then launched a deadly assault on an army checkpoint on June 23rd, triggering a battle with the LAF that ended with the latter's victory around noon the next day (ibid.; Reuters 28/9/2017).

In August 2014, only one month after the IS had declared Lebanon a goal for the extension of its caliphate, the latter alongside its like-minded rival, Jabhat al-Nuṣra (al-Qaʿida in Syria), attempted a full-scale military invasion of the Lebanese border town of `Arsal and its vicinity, where tens of thousands Syrian refugees had sought shelter since the Syrian war had begun (ICG 2016, p. 9). The offensive was thwarted by the LAF within five days, forcing the assailants to retreat and regroup along the border. The battle had "caused heavy material destruction and dozens of casualties among civilians, LAF troops and Sunni militants, and left 29 soldiers and police in IS and al-Nusra hands." (Ibid., p. 10)

Sayyida Zaynab, a central Shi'i pilgrimage site on the outskirts of Damascus. Since when this was the case, exactly, was a question Nasrallah left unaddressed. Besides this declaration by Nasrallah, Hizbullah officials also argued that fighting the jihadists in Syria now was the only way to prevent their advance towards Lebanon and the need to battle them at home in the near future (cf. ICG 2016, p. 8/ fn 29).

In October 2014, simultaneous jihadist attacks on a number of Hizbullah positions in the eastern border area to Syria were launched, all of which were fended off by the party. Militants in `Arsal – for the time being – kept a low profile but the town´s outskirts were now gradually transformed into bases of the IS and Jabhat al-Nuṣra. In particular the former had "reportedly set up parallel judicial structures inside some informal Syrian refugee camps." (Ibid.) While the LAF´s measures around `Arsal have helped to improve the security situation in Lebanon and bombings of Shi`i residential areas have since ceased (Blanford 2017, p. 31), it was clear to all sides that the decisive battle would come sooner or later. However, the delicate situation brought about by the armed jihadists mixing with the refugees and the local population made both the Lebanese authorities and Hizbullah hesitant. It therefore took until July 2017 that Hizbullah militarily forced al-Nuṣra fighters and other Syrian rebels out of their border strongholds in cooperation with the Syrian Armed Forces (SAF). The operation was concluded with a ceasefire and in "subsequent negotiations it was agreed that 7,777 people, including 1,116 militants and 6,101 civilian refugees, would be" granted safe passage "to the rebel-held Idlib province in northern Syria." (Blanford 2017, p. 28)

This reduced the remaining presence of insurgents to that of the IS alone and only one month later, in August 2017, the LAF launched an offensive against it´s remaining enclave on Lebanese territory while Hizbullah and the SAF advanced from the Syrian side in what from a military perspective seemed to be a coordinated operation, although this interpretation is contested (cf. Blanford 2017, pp. 28–30). The battle ended on August 28th with a ceasefire deal that would "allow the surviving militants safe passage to Boukamal on Syria's eastern border with Iraq in exchange for information on the nine LAF soldiers who had been captured three years earlier." (Ibid., p. 29) The deal was implemented the following day. The defeat of the Islamic State on Lebanese soil and the adjacent Syrian border areas marked the completed liberation of Lebanon and its surroundings from armed rebel forces – a declared goal of Hizbullah ever since its announced intervention into the Syrian War (NY Times 27/8/2017).

Hizbullah´s engagement in Syria was initially seen highly skeptical by many Lebanese, including parts of the party´s base and allies. In principle, this also pertained to Michel Aoun (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.3 2013; cf. al-Hayat 17/8/2013). However, in an interview given to the Lebanese an-Nahar daily only a few weeks after Nasrallah´s announcement that Hizbullah was fighting in Syria, Aoun clarified his and his party´s official stance towards this issue as follows: "We are against intervention in the absolute sense. But the series of security [incidents] forces those who are responsible to intervene. Even when committing a crime, when there is a legitimate self-defense act, the accused is exempted from punishment." (Aoun 2013)[140]

This view can be seen as representative for the position of the FPM and the dominant perception among its base (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.1 2013, CC.FPM.3 2013, CC.FPM.4 2017, IE.FPM.2 2013).[141] It is moreover reflective of the general mood prevailing in much of the country at that time. As discussed above, this concerns in particular the Christian street, extending to otherwise opponents of the party (Kranz 2019; Malik 2018, Al-Mustaqbal 13/9/14; IBT 21/4/2015; Christian Post 11/5/2015). The Beirut-based political analyst Halim Shebaya summarizes:

> "While most Christians would naturally side with the sovereignty of the state and would support the need for Hezbollah to hand over its weapons, there is a general perception that the party has played a role in protecting Lebanon against ISIL, despite attempts by Saudi Arabia and its allies to equate the two as being one and the same manifestation of terrorism." (Al-Jazeera 2017b)

Thus, Hizbullah´s military success against *salafī* jihadist groups in Syria and northeastern Lebanon was met with "a huge sigh of relief" and applauded by the "vast majority of Lebanese including the Christians." (Malik 2018) The senior Aounist Ghazi Aad, in 2013, shared his personal assessment of this situation and what it meant for Lebanon as follows:

> "Regardless of the FPM´s position … […] officially, they said that they are against [the intervention]. I cannot say that. I believe that without Hizbullah´s intervention in Syria things would have been awful. Because all these fanatic fundamentalist, I mean Salafist-jihadist groups would be at the borders of Lebanon, creating chaos and destruction. And I believe it was … I mean, the intervention was really helpful to Lebanon. […] All the politicians in Lebanon know that, but they take stances just to win popular support. But they know, everybody knows – except for the Future movement, which supports these currents – but everybody in Lebanon knows that without Hizbullah´s intervention, *Daesh* [the IS] would be sitting here somewhere at the borders. […] This is my personal view. Without discussing this view with anyone; I believe that the intervention of Hizbullah made a big difference. It shifted the battle from one side to another. I think it was good for Lebanon as a whole; not only for the Shi`a villages there, but also for the whole of Lebanon. Because can you imagine al-Nuṣra or any other fundamentalist group [here]?" (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.3 2013)

With all what happened in the years to follow, the Aounists backing of what they viewed as Hizbullah´s and the LAF´s effective protection of Lebanon´s borders and interior against a dangerous jihadist onslaught would become even more pronounced. Some Aounists thereby identified with the role and conduct of their ally on the battlefield. The FPM member "Bassem H.," for instance, said: "[L]ately I felt very proud when we have defeated the IS in our Eastern borders. And we are the first country, the first country, that [has] defeated the IS … and we have liberated all of our soil. So, this is Lebanon for me too; we are the Lebanese people, we are a strong people." (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.4 2017)

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[140] Quoted after an-Nahar 21/7/2013.

[141] Among the 'Aounists interviewed, only the Shi'i "Abbas A." was explicitly opposed to Hizbullah´s engagement in Syria, stating: "I am not with Hizbullah going to and fighting in Syria and all of this. […] In my eyes, it was a fault to go somewhere else. The most important thing was and is to care for our land, to get rid of Israel, to look for our country and see how to build it and how to proceed." (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.5 2017)

The war in Syria has affected the strategic outlook of both the FPM and Hizbullah. As Hashem has noted, "a paradox of Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian conflict is that it has pushed the party to focus more on Lebanon's political scene." (Hashem 2018) That is not only because a stable homefront and the Christian domestic backing is essential for the party´s performance abroad (ibid.) but also because its members and other constituents want to live safely within the borders of Lebanon. After all, there is also rising popular dissatisfaction with socio-economic conditions and the corruption of the political class in Lebanon. Against this background, in particular Hizbullah´s own base demands from it to not – over being occupied with fighting oppositionists in Syria – neglect these crucial domestic issues but to take accurately care of them (Al-Akhbar 15/9/2017).

In particular the common threat identified in the rise of *wahhābī*-minded jihadist movements, directly or indirectly nurtured by what is viewed as a steady tightening US-Israeli-Gulf-Arab interest coalition, has lead the FPM to further approximate Hizbullah´s reading of geopolitics alongside its foreign policy preferences. As Aoun explained in an interview in September 2018, in contrast to his more cautious earlier stances in this respect, he now explicitly saw Hizbullah´s role in Syria as imperative for the protection of Lebanon. As a consequence, he said, the question of how to proceed with Hizbullah´s weapons has "become related to the Middle East question and to solving the conflict in Syria." (Aoun 2018)[142]

Despite initial irritations; Hizbullah´s controversial decision to militarily intervene in the Syrian Civil War finally gained the FPM´s and a larger Christian approval. Thus, on the one hand, the alliance had withstood another major storm, marking a further milestone in the allies´ joint march since 2006. On the other hand, however, the disgruntlement felt especially by many Sunni Lebanese over Hizbullah´s unilateral decision to militarily enter the Syrian Civil War and factually fight mostly Sunni Muslims there (including Lebanese that chose to enter the ranks of the Syrian opposition), has not diminished. It has much more been additionally fueled through the years of bloodshed in Syria, political turmoil in Lebanon, and a steadily deepening conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran alongside their respective regional allies and international backers.

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[142] Quoted after NNA 24/9/2018.

3.5.1.4 A “minority alliance” against Sunni Muslims?

While explanations identifying the MoU as the base of a mere “minority alliance” formed “against the perceived Sunni threat” (Khashan 2012, p. 79) are problematic because they are reductive, they do not fully miss the point either, as this aspect clearly plays a role in the meaning-making of those concerned. The fact that the communal equation associated with the MoU includes two, but spares the third of Lebanon´s three largest communities, that of the Sunni Muslims, was of course obvious to the signatory parties. Given both the FPM´s and Hizbullah´s discontent with the Ta`if Accord, with one major outcome having been the cementation of political confessionalism and another the transfer of political power from Maronite to Sunni hands while the Shi`i´s political under-representation was continued, the prospect of curbing this Sunni power through joining forces on a communal basis was clearly recognized. It was likely also welcomed, at least partially, by the elites involved.

Former US ambassador to Lebanon, Jeffrey Feltman, in the same wikileaked 2007-cable cited earlier, claims that Michel Aoun has told Charles Rizk how his “temporary relationship” with the Syrian government was actually sought as “a bulwark against the Sunnis,” allegedly adding: “Lebanon's Maronites and Lebanon's Shia are alike, with a love for the land that the Sunnis, foreigners and extremists, will never understand.” (Feltman 2007b) Of course, Feltman´s reports in this leaked cable cannot simply be taken for face value (especially as he merely reports what Charles Rizk supposedly told him about what Michel Aoun had supposedly said). However, the possibility of Aoun indeed having said so does not seem all too far off from reality. Whilst the ideological spectrum within the FPM remains diverse (Ilias 2011), general fears of Muslim extremism among Aounist (and other) Christians in Lebanon have been prevalent since the early Civil War years. They were originally triggered especially by the emergence of militant Shi`i-Lebanese Islamist currents in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013; CC.FPM.3 2013). Yet, the signing of the MoU with Hizbullah and the progressive socialization of both groups´ bases in its wake has altered this state of things dramatically. Ever since, there is a tendency discernable among Aounists to, on the one hand, view the Shi`a as a prime communal partner in state- and nation-building (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013; CC.FPM.4 2017), while, on the other hand, rather distrusting the Sunnis in this respect (which, as we know, is not uncommon among Shi`a either [Saad 2005, p. 521]). Besides the FPM´s rapprochement with Hizbullah, this development came about through the convergence of several factors.

For one, there is a – largely implicit – perception prevailing among supporters of both parties´ bases (as well as among many observers [e.g. Dot Pouillard 2009; Al-Monitor 18/7/2013]) that the alliance between the FPM and Hizbullah was not only one of two political parties but also one of the associated communities; Maronite/ Christians and Shi`i Muslims respectively (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012a). In particular "[i]n the eyes of many FPM members, Hizballah is the Shi`a. When they talk about being allied, they are inclined to consider themselves as being allied to the Shi`a community as a whole." (Ilias 2011) The senior human rights activist Ghazi Aad, for example, when asked if he took into account that Hizbullah was one Shi`i actor amongst others, replied:

> "It is a fact. It is the biggest representation. I mean, not all the Shi`a are members of Hizbullah but we cannot deny that Hizbullah as a political power and as a military power has the last word. It has the upper hand within the Shi`i community for the time being. That is a fact. […] They have the upper hand in Shi`i matters, in their community. And of course, now, being more powerful, they have a strong word on Lebanese matters too." (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.3 2013)

The new openness towards each other facilitated the mutual identification of substantial common ground between the Shi`a and Maronites of Lebanon. However, in the meaning-making of FPM members – as experienced by the author – this common ground seemed to come to the fore especially by being contrasted to how they experienced and remember their communal and individual relations with Sunni Muslims and the latter´s general performance. This is well exemplified by the following statement of the FPM member "Bassem H.:"

> "I am not saying that we should be in bad relations with the Sunnis or with the Druze or […] whatever other sect we have in our community. But […] I think that the Maronites and Shi`a, […] they suffered from the same […] beasts in history. For example, take the time when the Mamluks where here; […] we suffered. And during the Ottoman Empire; the Maronites and the Shi`a, they both suffered from the Ottomans and the practices they used against Christians and against Shi`a, just because they were not Sunni. And if you take a look now on the IS … of course, the IS is against everything that's human, you know? But if you take a look; these two sects and communities, they were specifically targeted by the IS. So, I think that they have a lot in common. And they have something similar. The Shi`a, they have something within their idea … something similar [to us]. They have Imam Ḥusayn, [who] was killed … and also we have Christ, [who] was killed by the Romans … I am not saying that I […] don't believe in our Christian ideology. But it's something … they have a lot of similarities, the Maronites and the Shi`a. And they are both minorities, so they have a strategic need to be together." (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.4 2017)

The in-between reference made to the IS in this quote points to another aspect of relevance: the growing clout of armed *salafī* jihadist movements in the region (accelerated through the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011), has evidently increased the Levantine Christian´s fears of Sunni Islamic extremism (see above). For many of them, and especially for those Lebanese Christians affiliated with the FPM, the Shi`i Hizbullah is perceived as a bulwark against Sunni extremist violence (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013). And because Hizbullah is more or less equated with the Shi`a by many Aounists, this only adds to the contrast between the two sects as viewed by the latter.

Furthermore, the prime Lebanese political representation of Sunni Muslims, the Future Movement, happened to constitute one of the FPM´s and Hizbullah´s core domestic rivals between May 2005 and late 2016 that is for much of the time of the FPM-Hizbullah alliance. The Future Movement is openly patronaged by the Saudi Arabian leadership, which – alongside some other Sunni Muslim-commanded governments in the region, such as those of the UAE and Turkey – stands accused of partial collaboration with some of the relevant Salafist jihadist currents with whom it shares much of its own official doctrine. More importantly, however, accusations of links to armed jihadist groups have in the past also been levied against the Future Movement itself or against certain of its members (Time 2012; Asharq al-Awsat 2012; Al-Akhbar 2012a; ibid. 2012b; Gade 2012, p. 21). In the view of the FPM politician Cesar Abou Khalil, a clear distinction between the Future Movement and groups such as the Islamic State or Fatah al-Islam could therefore not be drawn. In his own words: "[T]he future movement has demonstrated strong ties with these movements in the region. They were just hiding behind a […] tie […] and a beautiful suit. But in fact, if you only rubbed them a bit, the Neo-Mamluks, or Neo-Ottomans, or Neo-Taliban, or I don't know how you would call that, you could see them." (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012a) In reference to the so called "Arab Spring," which he said, was rather "a very stormy cold winter, nothing but that," Abou Khalil rhetorically asked: "What's happening with the Christians in Syria now?" (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012a) He then answered his own question as follows:

> "So, that´s the alliance, the alliance [of the FPM and Hizbullah] … in front of us, or in our face if you want, the al-Hariri movement and its […] Christian proxies, they are in line with this street that is […] boosting all these Qa'ida-inspired movements in the region, and they have caused nothing but prejudice and damage and killings to the Christian community. So, there is also a strong belief among the Christians, that General Aoun´s understanding and agreement with the Shi`a has born its fruits and has demonstrated its righteousness." (Ibid.)

Hizbullah, for its part, is commonly very concerned to avoid any statements that could be interpreted as anti-Sunni agitation. Moreover, when Hizbullah´s elites address the Sunni community of Lebanon or even the Sunni Muslims in their entirety, they do so with utmost courtesy, usually beginning with formulas such as "Our dear Sunni brethren" or "Sunni brothers" etc. It does not matter if one wants to believe that Hizbullah is at heart truly non-sectarian, or that the party simply does this for pragmatic reasons such as flattering its sizable Sunni Lebanese support-base or keeping good relations with its Palestinian allies for maintaining its influence on their struggle. What counts is that this is how the officials of Hizbullah factually treat the subject. At the same time, the individual standpoints of Shi`i members, supporters, and allies of the party towards Sunni Muslims and/ or the different Sunni legal schools and traditions do of course vary heavily. Especially when it comes to debates on "correct" religious practice or truly theological questions, certain aspects of Sunnism or associated personalities are also heavily criticized or condemned by some Shi`a.

Moreover, since its entry into the Syrian Civil War, for mobilizing its base, Hizbullah has strongly increased the invocation of Shi`i symbolism and collective historical narratives of victimization. This goes along with emphasizing not only the differences distinguishing Shi`a from Sunni Muslims but also what from a Shi`i perspective is condemned as Sunni (or proto-Sunni) misconduct. And since Hizbullah´s core enemies on the battlefield in Syria were Sunni Muslim Islamists with an ideology that condemns Shi'ism – and all Muslim and non-Muslim currents that do not bend and subscribe to it – as heresy, eschatological imaginations of a final battle between "good and evil" played a role on both sides of the equation, only that the respective ascription of roles ran opposite.

Thus, for large parts of the Hizbullah and FPM milieus – and for much of the Lebanese Shi`a and Christians altogether – their shared fears and common identification of the sources of insecurity, have contributed to a growing sense of (also) sharing in a "minority alliance," promising security in the first place. However, not a few members and supporters of both parties resented precisely this state of things too. They cited it as a major shortcoming of the alliance, because of its inherent potential to fuel ethnicized-confessional, especially Sunni-Shi`i, strife. The 25-year-old Maronite Aounist "Yousef B.," from Kisrawan, for instance, said:

> "I criticize this point because, despite [that] also from [the side of the] Sunnis there are tensions … from both sides, […] in the end we will stay here in the same country, you see? We´ve got to live together […], we have to work on the common points with both parts [i.e. Shi`a and Sunnis] to build a country later." (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.2 2012)

At a later point, he added:

> "It's unfortunate, but it seems, as if we made an alliance against Sunnis, just as being two … if you want, two minorities in the region against the majority. Maybe it's being … How do we say it? […]. We can say, maybe; the enemy of my enemy is my friend, but that's not the main point of it, especially [not] in Lebanon." (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.2 2012)

In a similar tone, the Shi`i Hizbullah supporter "Qassem A.," 42 years in age, from South Lebanon resented that "the Sunnis, they have also a certain alignment with other Marouni groups like Katā´ib and […] the Lebanese Forces. So, instead of uniting all around the same table, now we had divided in two groups." (Author´s interv. CC.Hzb.5 2017) Not all interviewees criticized this aspect of the MoU in such explicit terms. The acknowledgement of an accordant deficit was often implicit, so as in the following statement of Ghazi Aad: "Having good terms now with the Shi`a is one step on the road with others – with the Sunnis, with the Druze, with everybody." (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.3 2013)

Despite the narratives of "histories of persecution" which both Maronites and Shi`a have nurtured over centuries as part of their collective identity construction respectively, and although Sunni Muslims are remembered as the main perpetrators in both of these narratives (Winter 2010, p. 7), the aspect of a "minority alliance against Sunnis" was of course never a formal – let alone programmatic – feature, neither of the MoU nor of the subsequent alliance. The MoU, as we know, came with an open invitation to all political actors of national significance. The political alliance that crystallized in its wake was, for one, not intended, and secondly, as stated by Michel Aoun himself (Now Lebanon 7/6/2011), never consciously directed against the Sunni Muslim or any other Lebanese community. We know that the danger of Sunni-Shi`i strife to take fully hold of Lebanese domestic politics was a major concern for both the FPM and Hizbullah when forging their MoU. This is one important reason why their outreach to the Lebanese Sunnis – and especially to their opponents in March 14th – was never aborted. To the opposite, ever since the armed escalation of May 2008 and the subsequent Doha Accord, cooperation with the Future Movement under Saad al-Hariri was mostly tense but still the norm. This cooperation has become even closer since Michel Aoun became president and al-Hariri once more prime minister in late 2016.

3.5.1.5 The "presidency-for-weapons-equation"

The other prominent approach to explaining the FPM-Hizbullah alliance, often cited in combination with the former, says that it is based on a classical political bargain: Hizbullah, with its huge voter base and influence, would pave the way for Aoun´s ascendancy to the presidency. In exchange for this, Michel Aoun alongside the FPM´s popular base would throw their full weight behind Hizbullah´s right to carry arms, thus providing the party with a broad "Christian cover."

Michel Aoun´s presidential ambitions, on the one hand, do in fact reach back to 1988 at the least. Furthermore, popular reactions to his return to Lebanon in 2005 clearly marked him out as a natural candidate for the highest Maronite post. The residential Maronite elite, however, tried to marginalize him politically for reasons of intra-Maronite competition. In this situation, Aoun and the FPM turned to Hizbullah and simultaneously drew politically closer to March 8th, a constellation in which the retired General would automatically stand out as the only realistic candidate in his camp (even if Sulayman Frangieh managed to appear as a true competitor for some weeks in-between).

Hizbullah, on the other hand, had enjoyed governmental recognition as an armed national resistance movement ever since the "state/ resistance deal" was forged under Syrian tutelage at the end of Lebanon´s Civil War (1975-90). Upon Syria´s withdrawal from Lebanon in spring 2005 it suddenly faced uncertainty with respect to this former status. It therefore dropped earlier self-imposed taboos to participate in the Lebanese government under the prevailing conditions, and entered into ruling coalition with Amal, the PSP and al-Mustaqbal in summer 2005. International pressure on Hizbullah to disarm had strongly increased since Israel´s withdrawal from most of Lebanon in 2000 and even more so after the UNSC had passed its Resolution 1559 in September 2004. Facing these givens, the party was surely interested in gaining the approval for its armed struggle of the then single most popular leader of the Lebanese Maronite/ Christians.

These interests and therefore the element of opportunism have been of relevance for the FPM and Hizbullah finding together. However, there is really nothing surprising about the fact that political parties are inclined to advance their interests in the instance of opportunities. Moreover, some Aounists have raised strong objections to portrayals of the alliance as one resulting merely from these or similar elite interests. The FPM functionary "Alain R.," for example, classified these as "known […] March 14th propagande claims that can be levered relatively easily." (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013) He argued that Michel Aoun, at the point in time of relevance here, despite all his street popularity, had nothing to offer to Hizbullah other than potential Christian votes, as he had so far "no political power." (Ibid.) To the contrary, in his words, Aoun was "isolated from all those who then yielded enough influence in Lebanon to legitimize Hizbullah´s weapons." (Ibid.) The same, he said, held true vice versa, as Hizbullah was isolated no less. So "how should he [Michel Aoun] reach the presidency through Hizbullah?" (Ibid.) "Alain R." moreover claimed that, behind closed doors, Saad al-Hariri had frequently offered Aoun to become president under the condition of abandoning Hizbullah. Yet, as we know, this never materialized, which is seen as further proof for that Aoun´s ambitions to become president were not a key driver (ibid.).

Similar stances were voiced by Ghazi Aad. When confronted with the theory of Aoun´s presidential ambitions, he vehemently rejected it:

> "No. […] Presidency is not on his mind. He is not motivated by becoming president. That's not true. I know him personally, and I know what he thinks. We have seen him since 1988 … what he did. I have known him by the way. I have told you about the barracks where I trained; he was the commander of the barracks, back in 1976. So, [it's been] a long way with him and I know. I am not defending him [simply based on opinion], no. Based on his history and his path in life and military positions and everything; No, presidency is not the motivating force on his mind. So, it's [the MoU] not any kind of understanding; It´s not opportunistic, it´s not momentary. No. It is based on the belief that the Shi`a community is part of Lebanon and we have to be on good terms as one Lebanese group." (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.3 2013)

When asked about the view that Michel Aoun legitimized Hizbullah´s weapons by granting them a "Christian cover," he answered:

> "Nobody can take the weapons from them in a peaceful way. Nobody can. No one can convince Hizbullah to give up its arms. You know that, I know that. Everybody knows that. So, saying that Aoun gave cover for Hizbullah´s weapons is a myth. This is a myth. I mean, everybody is against Hizbullah now, but who can take its weapons away? And then Aoun, […] in one of his interviews, he said; they want to disarm Hizbullah, let them go. […] *Tfadal*, go! Take the weapons. I am not standing in your way. I am not standing in anybody's way. If you want to disarm Hizbullah, *yalla*, go! […] I said, I am against disarming them. That´s all I said. But you have the power to disarm [them]? Go!
>
> […] It's also a myth that Aoun legitimized the weapons of Hizbullah. […] Who said that? Where was Aoun when Hizbullah was legitimized in 1993? Where was Aoun when Hizbullah was legitimized in 1996? Where was Aoun when Hizbullah was legitimized in 2000? 2001, where was Aoun? Where was Aoun? Who wrote in the ministerial statement that we are with the *muqawami*? [It was] Rafiq al-Hariri himself! Who said that Aoun legitimized Hizbullah? Aoun was against Hizbullah at that time. […] Who legitimized Hizbullah – Aoun? They are waiting for Aoun to legitimize Hizbullah? […] So, it's a myth, it´s a legend that Aoun legitimized Hizbullah and that Aoun is preventing anyone from disarming Hizbullah." (Ibid.)

Aad did not deny the factor of popular legitimization through the Aounist Christians´ embracement of Hizbullah. He simply saw no issue in this matter. For him this belonged to the sphere of free political choice:

> "So what? They [pro-Hizbullah Christians] don't have the right to have their opinion? No freedom of opinion? […] What bothers you if I support them? What bothers you? … What is bothering you if I support Hizbullah? […] I mean the critics, that say, the Christians, they used to love you and your party but now they don't love your party, they love that party…What is bothering you? Behave and do things in a better way and people will love you [and] support you. If you do things in a wrong way, people will not support you. And if they want to support Hizbullah it's not your business. They can support whomever they want to support." (Ibid.)

Crucially, the statements of both "Alain R." and Ghazi Aad do not deny the existence of the relevant interests themselves but only the idea that these were pivotal for forging an alliance. In the final picture, just as the aspect of a "minority alliance," also the "presidency-for-weapons-equation" (or opportunist considerations of the elites involved in more general terms) plays a role in the vested interests coming together in the alliance of the FPM and Hizbullah. Yet, as the former, this is just one piece to the puzzle. Most importantly, both of these attempts at explanation imply the assumption that the allies have actually nothing in common but cooperate merely based on pragmatism to reach the own political ends. "The allies" thereby mean their elites only, whilst their constituencies are not visible from this perspective. As we know, however, not only do both parties´ elites paint a different picture but also parts of the the grassroots claim the alliance to be actually theirs.

3.5.1.6 Ambitions, challenges and achievements

The joint march of the FPM and Hizbullah had a profound impact on the developments shaping post-*Pax Syriana* Lebanon, so much is for certain. Yet, to what degree did these developments go along with the ambitions of the allies? What did they achieve in terms of self-defined goals and which challenges did they encounter on the way? For answering these questions, we have to categorically distinguish once more between the MOU with its transparently explicated aims and the political alliance. The latter is informal in nature and therefore features no clear-cut political objectives. It´s goals are yet defined by the sum of shared traceable interests of the FPM and Hizbullah.

The general view of both parties, to begin with, is that their efforts to put the MoU into practice have been sincere and largely effective but partially obstructed by their political adversaries and the political division in Lebanon as such (e.g. Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013; IE.Hzb.1 2013). With respect to the March 8th dominated government of Najib Mikati, the mid-range Hizbullah functionary "Mahmoud A." explained that high-ranking bureaucrats in the administrative structure of the government that were not elected but appointed by Siniora and al-Hariri before, effectively hindered the allies from doing their work. This was done, he said, simply by refusing to execute decisions (Author´s interv. IE.Hzb.1 2013). One FPM functionary pointed to difficulties arising from the US´ and other governments listing of Hizbullah as a terrorist entity, it being targeted by the STL, and its military intervention in Syria. Taken together, these issues had made it more difficult for the FPM and Hizbullah to work on implementing all items mentioned in the MoU (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013).

These self-assessments notwithstanding, the allies have, in the period of investigation, factually delivered on a number of points mentioned in the MoU. This includes (1) "Dialogue," (3) "The Electoral Law," (4) "Building the State," (6) "The Lebanese in Israel,"

(8) “Lebanese-Syrian Relations” and (10) “The Protection of Lebanon and Preserving its Independence and Sovereignty.” (FPM/ Hizbullah 2006, quoted after Yalibnan.com 9/2/2006)

As for the subject of (1) “Dialogue;” both Hizbullah and the FPM have strongly encouraged the continuation of the National Dialogue[143] and have actively participated in all rounds that were held since 2006. As two of Lebanon´s most relevant political actors, their participation was decisive for maintaining and strengthening the legitimacy of this forum. On the one hand, this brings together merely the political elites of the country, usually in an extra-parliamentary setting. It reinforces their special role and position within the state and society, fully in line with the consociational system in place. The National Dialogue is therefore not necessarily a vehicle to bring about fundamental systemic change, so as transforming Lebanese consociational democracy into a majoritarian democracy in the long term, as principally envisioned by the FPM and Hizbullah in their MoU too (ibid.). On the other hand, the National Dialogue has at times effectively helped “breaking political deadlocks but also kept contentious issues at bay when consensus could not be reached.” (Wählisch 2017, p. 4) Most importantly, it guaranteed a continuity of direct communication between the country´s opposing forces during all the years of intensive polarization since 2005, even directly after the armed clashes of May 2008. This must be seen as an achievement in itself.

Reforming (3) “The Electoral law” and allowing for expatriates to vote from abroad and introducing “proportional” representation have been main concerns especially for the FPM. That is because – as long as the confessionalist system is not abolished – both are seen as long overdue steps towards outbalancing communal electoral competition by enhancing the political position of the Maronites and the Lebanese Christians altogether. For one, the Aounists consider the number of Lebanese Christians in the diaspora comparably high. The Maronite FPM functionary “Alain R.,” in 2013, estimated it to stand around 3 Million. Under the inclusion of these Christians, he argued, the Maronites might account for the actual majority of Lebanese (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013). With respect to the post-Ta`if electoral arrangement, many Christians have lamented that it did not do them justice, for it was allowing Muslim voters to choose many of the Christian representatives (Saad 2012, p. 19; Arnous 2018). In the words of Cesar Abou Khalil: “The previous electoral laws have [caused] that only a few Christian MP´s are elected with Christian votes.” (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012a) Against this background, the FPM had previously pushed for the *Orthodox*

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[143] These have a long tradition in Lebanon, reaching back at least to shortly after the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975 (Wählisch 2017, pp. 5–7).

Law proposal of 2011, which was put forward by the *Orthodox Gathering*, a group founded by various Orthodox clerics and politicians in the same year (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013). Their original aim was to ensure a fixed quota for Greek Orthodox parliamentarians who felt underrepresented (DW 7/7/2018). However, the final law proposal stipulated that each sect was to elect only its own representatives on a proportional basis while having all of Lebanon as one electoral district (Atallah 2018).

In February 2013, the joint parliamentary committee approved of the draft Orthodox law, as formally proposed by the FPM (Naharnet 19/2/2013). The draft was backed by Amal and Hizbullah as well as by all major Christian currents, while the Future Movement, the PSP and some independent Christian MPs walked out of the parliamentary session to demonstrate their refusal (albawaba.com 19/2/2013). A few weeks later, however, the LF under Samir Geagea re-positioned itself on the side of its non-Christian March 14th allies against the Orthodox law and therewith rendered its adoption numerically impossible. Reportedly, Geagea only agreed to drop the Orthodox proposal after receiving reassurances from Saad al-Hariri and Walid Jumblatt that he was to decide about the appointment of some of the Christian candidates running on their electoral lists and that he would be bestowed with a parliamentary bloc of sixteen deputies. That Geagea, as the leader of one of Lebanon´s two major representations of Maronite/ Christians, was to turn against a proposal perceived by most Christians as a remedy and that he seemingly did so for nothing but short-term benefits, earned him massive condemnation and accusations of being a "traitor" not only from within FPM circles (Khalaf 2013; Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013, CC.FPM.1 2013).

Nonetheless, with the continued backing of the "Shi`i duo," the Tayyār kept advocating for the law proposal for the years to come (Yalibnan.com 3/5/2016) until finally settling for the "proportional" formula as a base for the new electoral law, which was passed in June 2017 (International Foundation for Electoral Systems [IFES] 2018). While much less controversial than the Orthodox law, according to Samy Atallah, the 2017 electoral law contains hidden traces of the Gathering´s proposal, as "[c]andidates sought preferential votes from their co-confessionalists, leading to the electoral system operating similarly to the 'Orthodox law', under which it had been proposed that citizens cast votes exclusively for candidates of the same confession." (Atallah 2018)

Electoral reform was demanded by many in Lebanon and by no means only by Christians. Yet, in particular Hizbullah and Amal were among those doing well under previous arrangements. This notwithstanding, Hizbullah had not only agreed to have the aim of reforming the electoral law prominently mentioned in the MoU but also uncompromisingly backed the FPM in putting this aim into practice the way it deemed appropriate. It´s leadership had in fact signaled to the FPM early on that it may proceed in this matter and that both Hizbullah and Amal would go along anyway. This gesture was well received by the FPM. Abou Khalil in early October 2012 recounted that,

> "it was maximally a week ago, they said, they would accept anything that would be accepted by the Free Patriotic Movement. And they back the projected law, or any projected law, that is initiated or proposed by the Free Patriotic Movement. So, positions like that tend to reinforce and develop this understanding into an alliance." (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012a)

(4) "Building the state" is clearly the broadest of all headlines included in the MoU in terms of both the requirements listed for its achievement and the prospected impact this would ideally bring about. While success of the allies´ efforts in this matter is difficult to measure, their joint political course between 2006 and 2018 is reflective of keeping this aim in sight. The main indicator for this is both parties´ shifts from positions of opposition to assuming central governmental posts and national responsibility in post-*Pax Syriana* Lebanon. This shift, however, not only effected that the FPM and Hizbullah increasingly acted to safeguard and strengthen public institutions and governmental stability,[144] which, of course, implied safeguarding their own newfound power positions within the Lebanese state too. It also brought with it a progressive implication of both parties into the Lebanese establishment – the "ruling elite" – with all its known concomitants. Thus, whereas the goal of "building the state," according to the MoU, has the fight against structural misalignments such as excessive clientelism, nepotism and corruption at its center (FPM/ Hizbullah 2006, quoted after Yalibnan.com 9/2/2006), the parties themselves were now facing accuses of having part in exactly these structures (Helou 2020, pp. 138–48; Sakmani 2016, pp. 180–1). Those of the tensions within March 8th that came about for reasons of ethnicized sectarian competition (see above) are one outcome of this situation.

The parties´ leaderships are both aware but not happy about these tendencies (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.2 2012; Helou 2020, p. 144). The senior Hizbullah politician and former Lebanese Minister of Labor (2005-2006), Trad Hamadeh, when asked about this issue by the author, replied:

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[144] The allies´ pressing for the release of their long-standing political opponent, Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri, from his involuntary stay in Saudi Arabia in late 2017 must be seen in the same light; despite all compassion that was surely felt among many Lebanese for Saad al-Hariri in this situation, the demand was for the release of the head of Lebanon´s government rather than for the person behind it.

> “[T]he party knows that, as it grows, as its responsibility and participation in the country grows, it will be more vulnerable to corruption. But it has an immunity and the capacity to fight against it. If it happens, this is something normal in the sense that it can just happen. But we will fight it!” (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.2 2012)

The FPM´s lawmaker Simon Abi Ramia, in a 2014-interview, explained:

> “Because the state is in its present shape, we are obliged to adapt to the conditions. When someone has a problem with a police station and the station is at fault, I´m definitely going to […] contact the police station, judge and general prosecuter to help him. We are being drawn into the system without being supporters of this system. We need to find a balance between both.” (Abi Ramia 2014, qouted after Helou 2020, p. 144)

The aspect of fighting clientelism, corruption and nepotism has nonetheless received special attention from the allies and remains one of their most central concerns (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.1 2012; E.Hzb.2 2012; IE.FPM1 2012). In particular the FPM took care of keeping the issue alive (Issa 2017), repeatedly raising it in parliament or discussing it in the media. Hizbullah, in contrast, has long acted comparably restrained in its treatment of the subject in public. In the run-up to the 2018 parliamentary elections, however, Hassan Nasrallah addressed the issue in an unprecedentedly bold manner when he declared that the level of corruption had by now reached a level that threatens Lebanon´s stability in all respects and therefore promised to set-up a specialized committee for its effective containment. In the wake of the elections, Hizbullah then launched this initiative (Al-Joumhouriya 31/12/2018), ostensibly in coordination with the FPM (Al-Akhbar 4/6/2018).

With respect to (6) “The Lebanese in Israel,” in November 2011 the Lebanese parliament – notably with the votes of Hizbullah and Amal – approved of a draft law proposed by Michel Aoun, allowing former SLA militiamen who fled to Israel in 2000 to return to Lebanon alongside their families. Here, they would face a fair trial under local law while their families would not be prosecuted (IRBC 2012; Naharnet 3/11/2011). The law was a major breakthrough in a highly delicate matter, yet, so far no mechanisms have been adopted for its proper implementation, so that its effects remain limited (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013; Asharq al-Awsat 21/7/2019).

The official nature of (8) “Lebanese-Syrian relations” witnessed a watershed in October 2008, when Bashar al-Asad (reportedly with French encouragement) decreed the commencement of formal diplomatic relations with Lebanon. Embassies of both states were inaugurated in 2008 and 2009 respectively. For the first time in both countries´ modern existence, Syria had officially recognized Lebanese sovereignty and independence (Reuters 14/10/2008; ibid. 16/3/2009).

This recognition had been a longstanding demand, especially of many Christians and not least Michel Aoun himself. It was unambiguously explicated in the Qornet Shehwan Gathering´s founding document of 2001, which speaks of "the establishment of the best possible brotherly ties and relations between the two countries and […] between the two peoples [which] will not be achieved unless Lebanon regains its full independence, sovereignty and decision-making freedom." (MEM n.d.) Yet, in light of the hard-line stances Aoun had taken against Syria, Hizbullah and Iran in-between, his critics have depicted him as a turncoat since signing the MoU with Hizbullah in 2006 and subsequently opening up to Iran and Syria (Bejjani 2006). Upon his controversial visit to Damascus in December 2008, Aoun furthermore predicted a "bright future" for Lebanese-Syrian relations and said that these were now back to normal (BBC 3/12/2008).

However, in FPM circles and principally also among Hizbullah supporters, Aoun´s positions in this respect are seen as consistent. Cesar Abou Khalil noted that "[a]t the height of the War of Liberation, General Aoun was saying, once Syria will be in Syria … when they pulled out, we will work to build the best relations with them as neighbors." (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012b) The FPM youth functionary "Maher A." explained:

> "After the withdrawal of the Syrian troops from Lebanon in 2005, we think that there is no need any more for being in a conflict or clash with Syria. So General Aoun visited Syria and called for good and respectful relations between a state and another. And we are still at that point." (Author´s interv. IE.FPM1 2012)

From such a perspective, Syria leaving Lebanon was a precondition for launching diplomatic and friendly relations on state-level. While many of the thorny issues between Lebanon and Syria, as listed in the MoU, remain unresolved; to not only have formal but also friendly relations to the Syrian leadership is seen as the best possible basis for resolving those issues in the future.

The MoU´s last bullet-point (10) "The Protection of Lebanon and Preserving its Independence and Sovereignty" has received a particular huge share of attention from both the allies and the Lebanese at large, given that it has the controversial question of Hizbullah´s armament at its heart. Critics of the MoU and/ or its signatory parties, on the one hand, have long argued that the "grave sin" General Aoun has committed in February 2006 consisted of legitimizing Hizbullah´s independent armament by granting it a broad Christian cover. The FPM is judged as the weaker party in a relationship seen as characterized by dominance and submission (Khashan 2012, p. 83; Jacob/ Varulkar 2018). That the MoU in fact promised an outlook to resolving this issue in the long run while this has to date not crystallized, is thereby viewed as a consequence of this situation in which Aoun supposedly follows Hizbullah´s, if not ultimately Teheran´s, orders (ibid.).

Michel Aoun, on the other hand, just as Hizbullah itself, has long argued that the party´s weapons are needed for the liberation of occupied Lebanese land (mainly the Sheb`a farms), for deterrence, and for the defense of Lebanon against exterior threats from Israel or elsewhere. In 2009 he said, Hizbullah´s "weapons will no longer be a problem when the causes behind its existence disappear, including the borders' issues." (Aoun 2009)[145] In several, overwhelmingly Germany-mediated, rounds of prisoner exchanges between Hizbullah and Israel, conducted between 2004 and 2008, all Lebanese (alongside many other Arab) detainees in Israeli prisons have been freed. This marks the fulfillment of one explicit aim mentioned under bullet-point (10) of the MoU and thus also the disappearance of one of the causes referred to by Aoun in his afore-cited statement. However, the background to Hizbullah´s participation in the Syrian Civil War, seen by both allies´ constituencies – and partially beyond – as only adding up on the causes for the weapons, was then still to come about.

Besides this, Hizbullah´s role as a "resistance movement" and the maintenanc of its arsenal were continuously bestowed with governmental legitimacy, as the "Army-People-Resistance-Formula" has found entry into the ministerial statements of all successive governments since 2009 (see above). At the same time, the "national defense strategy" – including the question of Hizbullah´s arms – was a prominent topic at the National Dialogue rounds of 2006, 2010, 2012 and 2014, demonstrating the party´s readiness to have an open exchange on the subject and ideally gain far-reaching consensus. However, its representatives at the National Dialogue also made it clear that disarmament under the prevailing conditions was rejected (Wählisch 2017, p. 15). Moreover, they "tried to enlarge the agenda and proposed to include discussions about state-building, education, improving the economy and wider military issues, which political opponents saw as an attempt to 'dilute' the focus of the dialogue on core contentious issues." (Ibid., p. 15)

When viewing all this in comparison to what is written in section (10) of the MoU, one will find that the parties have delivered substantially on what they have put down in writing earlier. The outcome is understandably disappointing for its opponents and critics, as it has not brought about Hizbullah´s disarmament. However, the MoU did not precisely promise to have this effect but only to establish the conditions under which this may become possible. Thus, whereas much has been achieved of what the MoU stipulates with respect to the protection, independence and sovereignty of Lebanon, the controversy over Hizbullah´s weapons remains unresolved.

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[145] Quoted after CNN 7/7/2009.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter; in contrast to the explicit aims listed in the MoU, those pursued by the FPM and Hizbullah in and through their political alliance have never been articulated in a formal or precise manner. There are, however, certain common political positions of consistency and these are rooted in particular interests. So what were and are these positions and central interests of the allies with respect to their own alliance?

In many respects, these questions have already been answered. This concerns what the parties´ elites have said about their motivations for opening up to each other and starting cooperation, the aims and positions voiced in the MoU, the aspects of a "minority alliance," and the "presidency-for-weapons-equation." The MoU is furthermore reflective of those interests perceived by the parties as serving the "common good," that is "national interests," and these basically delineate the allies´ vision for Lebanon.

What remains to be discussed are the joint partisan aims and interests of the allies. This is of course a mere theoretical distinction, as in practice the parties perceive much of their own respective causes, and especially their joint cause as presented in the MoU, as serving the "common good." This pertains to the shared concerns for Lebanese sovereignty, border security, building a "strong state" and fighting corruption. Both parties alike view the realization of these aspects as a precondition for their core constituencies – Maronite/ Christians and Shi`i Muslims respectively – as well as the Lebanese at large, to enjoy socio-economic security in the long run. At the same time, catering to these needs goes along with strengthening one´s position within both the own community and the political field at large.

In the absence of a consistent systematic differentiation drawn by the participants between the MoU and the alliance that emerged in its wake, the former is furthermore treated as a de *facto* working program for the latter. As Ghaleb Abou Zaynab put it: "The [ten] points … the memorandum is the base for an alliance. What happens, what transpires of that … what took place after that will tell if the alliance is going to be a straw alliance or [if] it's going to be a deep alliance between the two." (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.1 2012)

In fact, the content of the MoU, as seen by the allies and many of its supporters, cannot in itself be a reason for broad domestic opposition exactly because it is viewed as a national accord aimed at serving the "common good." In the words of the Hizbullah supporter "Qassem A.:" "[T]his alignment, from my perspective, it was not good [only] for Shi`a and

Maronites. It was good for Lebanon as a country because it prevented a lot of problems [from] coming to Lebanon." (Author´s interv. CC.Hzb.5 2017) It follows that those Lebanese political players opposing the MoU are perceived as actually opposing not the content of the paper but rather its originators for reasons of political competition. When the author addressed the issue of the MoU´s reception in interviews with party representatives, some expressed doubts that their opponents have ever truly read the document. The FPM´s "Maher A." related:

> "We [sometimes] find it hard to explain to others why we [concluded] this memorandum. […] I mean, I am sure, everyone who criticized what happened; they did not even read the memorandum. They don't know what it consists of. And if you ask all the Lebanese political parties, they don't disagree on any point of this memorandum. And from the second day they started criticizing what happened and it was very rough and unfair. They started criticizing; now you are with Syria and Hizbullah, and so on and you [only] want to do this, so General Aoun will become president. They started throwing a lot of things in the media and a lot of them didn't even read the memorandum. And now, while I am talking, I remember, there was a live TV show, a talk show going on and one of … I forgot who it was … one of the 14th March was criticizing what happened. One of our MPs called and was talking live. He asked him; did you read the memorandum? He [the March 14th representative] said; yes. He asked him about one point in it and he didn't know it. Apparently he didn´t read it but he was criticizing it for like one hour." (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.1 2012)

The rejection of the MoU by the political opponents of the FPM and Hizbullah alongside the latter´s impression that this rejection comes merely for reasons of political competition have accelerated the birth of a partisan alliance in its wake. At the latest as of now, striving for the better of Lebanon according to the vision outlined in the MoU appeared to the allies as being possible only by confronting the March 14th forces and ideally gaining the upper hand in Lebanon. That is because these forces rejection of the MoU was read as a rejection of the better for Lebanon, the "common good."

Against this background, the partisan alliance of the FPM and Hizbullah took shape through the confrontation with March 14th. Its course can therefore to a large degree be traced by following the cooperation of the FPM and Hizbullah with/ in the March 8th coalition beginning with the July War of 2006 and leading up to their victory in the May-2018-elections. By today, this coalition has in many respects gained the upper hand in the Lebanese polity, with Michel Aoun being the president of the republic and a government numerically dominated by the FPM, Hizbullah, Amal and their allies. In that sense, the partisan course taken by the FPM and Hizbullah was to date rather successful. This erstwhile outcome of the domestic power-struggles remains shaky, however, not least because a massive economic downturn and eroding living conditions (Alami 2018) are sparking growing popular discontent among the bases of all communities and parties alike. In this situation, it may eventually come to the detriment of the allies, that none of them was able to fully retain its former “Mr. Clean” image in the process of becoming part of Lebanon´s political establishment.

3.5.1.7 Mutual influences

The positions of both the Free Patriotic Movement and Hizbullah have experienced notable change, moving closer to each other in important respects, as a result of mutual influence. On the one side, the MoU is in itself a striking case in point. While Hizbullah has long refrained from emphasizing its original vision of establishing an Iran-like Islamic order in Lebanon and acted as a loyal opposition force within the confines of the liberal-democratic and confessionalist system ever since 1992, it for the first time explicitly committed itself to the concept of democracy only upon signing the MoU with the FPM in 2006. Six years later, the senior Hizbullah politician Trad Hamadeh identified “democracy” as the “only safety net” for the Christians and other minority groups in the Levant, and for securing their continuous presence here. He argued that without preserving and nurturing democracy in Lebanon and the region, “the Christian minorities in all the countries of the East might see the European or the occidental countries, where Christians are the majority, as the better option for them.” (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.2 2012) Ghaleb Abou Zaynab moreover stressed that through the MoU, its signatory parties, “belied the idea that was proposed by others, that the Shi`a and Hizbullah in particular wanted an Islamic Republic in Lebanon and the Christians would be kicked out.” (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.1 2012)

Thus, whilst Hizbullah had displayed a pronounced tolerance and acceptance of democracy long before, its full and explicit commitment to this concept as forming the base of whatsoever future governmental system to be considered for Lebanon, is obviously an outcome of the initial negotiations with the FPM. This view is also widespread among Aounists. Ghazi Aad for instance, while focusing on the goal of developing a “true civil society” in Lebanon, as one important facet of democracy, said:

> “Can you imagine Hizbullah signing a paper talking about civil society – an Islamist party talking about civil society? Can you imagine that? […] Anyway, they signed to this understanding. They have their signature on it. Things did not go well with this system of governance in Lebanon, but things will change.” (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.3 2013)

The FPM functionary “Alain R.“ was even of the opinion that Hizbullah´s general democratic performance has improved through the MoU:

> “Yes, these people are democracy *par excellence*. On all levels; the ministers are well prepared, the deputies know exactly what they are doing. They are present, participate in all commissions and do an excellent job there. This is a difference to the time before 2005. In this process one can make out a change […], how Hizbullah was before 2005 and how it suddenly developed after the Memorandum of Understanding.” (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013)

With respect to friend-enemy conceptions in foreign affairs, on the other side, the influence ran clearly opposite, with the FPM having soon adjusted to Hizbullah´s stances. Just as the FPM had originally considered Hizbullah a terrorist party following a Syro-Iranian and not a national agenda, it had vehemently vilified Syria and Iran (Bejjani 2006; Aoun 2002[146], Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013). While it is also true that Aoun had frequently reiterated his willingness to launch friendly neighborly relations with Syria once its forces and staff had fully departed (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012b), Iran is not a neighboring state of Lebanon. At the same time, despite all reservations that were harbored in this direction too, the Aounists surely saw their natural allies much more in Washington D.C. and Paris than in Damascus or Tehran. In any case, the FPM elite´s perception of these powers experienced a dramatic improvement in the wake of the MoU, culminating in Aoun´s successive visits to both of their capitals in 2008. From now on, relations between the Tayyār and the leaderships of Iran and Syria steadily improved. By 2012, Cesar Abou Khalil explained to the author that “Iran is a friendly country,” (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012b) adding:

> “I have visited Iran. I have seen that the Christians and Armenian Christians and Jews have seats in the Iranian parliament. I have seen music played in the public gardens of Tehran. I have seen statues, beautiful sculptures, in the public gardens of Iran. I saw high-tech factories and high-tech […] industries in Iran. Okay, I am not a Muslim. This is an Islamic country. If the Iranians don’t want it, it’s up to the Iranians. If they don’t want to live under the *wilāyat al-faqīh*, […] it’s up to the Iranians to refuse it and to change the way they are governed. […] So, in Iran, there are elections, there are parliaments that are elected in Iran, there is a president of the republic who is elected in Iran [under] universal [suffrage] […]. I would like to see that happen in other countries before they start criticizing.” (Ibid.)

Iran´s role in Lebanon was evaluated positively by Abou Khalil no less:

> “They have helped a lot. They have helped a lot [in] funding projects; roads and bridges after the 2006 war. Okay they have provided Hizbullah with arms. Well, okay, these arms have contributed to build [up] a deterrence force [against] Israel. Okay, so what? What’s the alternative?” (Ibid.)

A similar stance was taken by the FPM´s “Maher A.” who said:

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[146] Quoted after Robertson 2002.

> "I don't know why in Lebanon and most other countries they pictured Iran like it's a monster. But as Lebanese people we never saw anything wrong or any [bad] behavior from the Iranians. They help in a lot of sections and sectors. Of course, I insist on this, we strongly insist on that the relations between us and any other country should be respectful from one state to another, and we are against any interference." (Author´s interv. IE.FPM1 2012)

The Aounists have indeed a record of opposing foreign interference in Lebanese affairs including that of Israel. However, their focus in defending national integrity until 2005 rested mainly on Syria and by extension on Hizbullah and Iran. Upon the rapprochement with Hizbullah and, crucially, after experiencing the July War in close contact to – and therefore partially through the eyes of – those affected by it, this focus soon shifted to Israel, the US, and Saudi Arabia (Dot Pouillard 2009). In June 2011, Michel Aoun told his supporters in Jbeil, that Syria, just as "[a]ll those who are not obedient are targeted," adding: "[We] are targeted by Israel. I do not believe that the US and Israel want democracy in the Middle East." (Aoun 2011[147]) In short; the FPM elite´s conceptions of the relevant foreign actors are by today fully in line with those of Hizbullah.

Through the close relations of the different Lebanese groups to their foreign patrons, domestic politics in Lebanon are usually also conditioned by the ambitions and actions of those foreign powers as well as their their inter-relations. This applies as much to the March 8th/ March 14th divide with its Sunni-Shi`i division as to the corresponding siding of Lebanese political actors with different feuding parties in the Syrian Civil War. Russia´s military intervention on the side of the Syrian government and its allies – thus, at least indirectly facing the US and their allies on the battlefield – has moreover added to this a notable East-West dimension. This is because the Russian leadership is well aware that safeguarding its interests in Syria and the region cannot happen under the exclusion of Lebanon, which is mainly due to the role currently played by Hizbullah in both countries.

Against this background, it becomes apparent that the FPM has willingly or not become affiliated to the regional "Resistance Axis." Not only is its elite closely allied to one (Hizbullah) and factually on excellent terms with the other two (Iran and Syria) of the three most central actors of this "Axis," it also largely shares their identification of the USA, Israel and Saudi Arabia as adversaries in Lebanon and the Middle East at large (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012b; IE.FPM1 2012; IE.FPM.2 2013). In an inclusive spirit, the FPM is indeed regarded by some pro-Hizbullah Shi`a as belonging to their "Resistance community," which is not exactly the same as the "Resistance Axis," but also not very far from it. The pro-

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[147] Quoted after Now Lebanon 7/6/2011.

Resistance Shi`i "Ali S.," 63 years in age, hailing from the Southern Lebanese port city of Tyre, said:

> "Well, I really think that al-Tayyār is belonging to the side which understands the resistance community […]. And they […] have a good look for the future. And they can help very much in building a new system. And they are able to be much in the resistance. And they are […] also for the freedom … they are." (Author´s interv. CC.Hzb.2 2013)

Finally, the Aounists also stand accused by their Lebanese opponents to have factually joined the "Resistance Axis" through teaming-up with Hizbullah. For instance, Pierre Maroun, the Secretary General of the March 14th-affiliated American Lebanese Coordination Council (ALCC), in 2010, wrote that "[s]ince his return from exile […], it has become quite evident that Michael Aoun and his followers, both in Lebanon and abroad have abandoned their principles to become convenient tools in the hands of the terrorist group Hezbollah and the Syrio-Iranian alliance." (Maroun 2010)

3.5.2 Grassroots alliance

> "I truly believe that the FPM and Hizbullah … its more than an alliance […]. We have survived together."
>
> "Bassem H." 2017[148]

It has already been pointed out that for supporters of both parties – and also in the view of their elites – the FPM-Hizbullah alliance has clearly took along the grassroots, if it was not actually forged here. In the very beginning, immediately after signing the MoU, the leaderships of both parties felt it necessary to explain this development to their respective bases. Hizbullah´s Ghaleb Abou Zaynab recalled that,

> "with our understanding, we brought onto paper the points of contention amongst us, amongst the Lebanese. Not only on the Syrian presence in Lebanon but also on the resistance against the Israelis in the South. It was told to them that this resistance is something to be [afraid] of by the Christians in Lebanon and it was stated in this memorandum that this resistance is against Israel only. What was said before the memorandum, before *harb al-tammouz* [the July War of 2006] [is] that these weapons, the armament of the resistance, [were] to have a live battlefront between Lebanon and Israel and […] the armament was to be used for other projects than defending Lebanon. But we came and clarified; no, these weapons are for the sole purpose of defending Lebanon. After [the MoU] was signed by Sayyid Hassan and General Aoun, we had many political meetings … grassroots meetings in both areas, in all areas, that we made rounds at … and we explained this memorandum and the points in it to the people and made it clear to them." (Author´s interv. E.Hzb.1 2012)

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[148] Author´s interv. CC.FPM.4 2017.

The senior Hizbullah functionary furthermore emphasized that these meetings were not conducted separately but under participation of both parties' representatives and bases (whereby the compositions of the latter must have always depended on the demographic structure of their respective areas) (ibid.). During this process, the elites gained the strong impression that an understanding and rapprochement was exactly "what the two sides actually wanted." (Ibid.)

In confirmation of this assessment, the 35-year old Aounist "Bassem H." said that the joining of forces with Hizbullah made himself, as an individual, feel

> "stronger […] because […] it's something beautiful to see that you have an ally, a good … a strong supporter from the community … from within a community that was something like a taboo to you. We felt […] a good unity and it's something I have touched during work […]. The second day, [after] we did the Memorandum of Understanding … […] it's like something magical, you know? I have Shi`a friends of Hizbullah […] We were smiling to each other […]. It's like saying, we did it! Okay, we are stronger now. We are together now. We are partners now. So it was something beautiful for me." (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.4 2017)

The kind of excitement and curiosity displayed towards "the other" in this statement was no exceptional phenomenon among supporters of both sides. For instance, "Muhamad J.," a Shi`i Muslim teacher and archeologist from Ras al-Ain in South Lebanon, 44 years in age and supportive of "the Resistance," related how his collegue, who participated in the joint protest camp in downtown Beirut told him about the situation there, saying: "[W]e are happy, we discuss, for example, the Christians are discussing politics with me and I discuss politics with them. […] After [fifteen] years of Civil War between the groups!" (Author´s interv. CC.Hzb.4 2017) The Aounist "Youssef B.," talking about the difference the MoU has made for him personally, stated that "for example, before 2006, I didn't go to [the] Southern suburbs [of] Beirut. After 2006 I went lots of times … and I feel secure there […]. So that's a point concerning the Memorandum of Understanding, […] how it reflects on the street, you see?" (Authors´s interv. CC.FPM.2 2012)

The invisible borders that function as dividers between the Lebanese communities are largely made from fears that are are fed and sustained by prejudices and stereotypes about the self and other. The signing of the MoU demonstrated to the bases of Hizbullah and the FPM that their trusted leaders had decided to trust one another across the invisible borders running between them. Given the high contrast between the two milieus involved according to popular imaginations, this amounted to nothing short of breaking a silent taboo. It was therefore that the parties' leaderships felt it necessary to conduct their grassroots tour to explain this step. While not all Aounists were ready to go along, however, by and large, both parties' bases reacted highly receptively. The high esteem which both Aoun and Nasrallah enjoy among their followers was instrumental for instantly alienating fears through dismantling stereotypes and prejudices at the grassroots. In the eyes of their supporters, if *al-Imad* (General) Michel Aoun and Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah respectively have decided to trust one another, this decision must have been justified (Author´s interv. E.M.1 2012).

Against this background, it became much easier for the people to open up to one another and this was surely what was hoped for by the parties´ elites. Yet, the bases´ excitement about this development and the curiosity displayed towards the respective other was not foreseeable, let alone intended or even ordered from above. It was much more a reaction as spontaneous as innocent, indicating a deep desire, if not actually a true "need," as Abou Zeinab had suggested, of the people to be on good terms with each other. Thus, whilst the MoU served as the spark plug, it was the people´s genuine excitement and curiosity that provided for the two bases´ approximation almost on the spot. As of now, it was possible for members of the two groups involved to really get to know one another, probably for the first time since the foundation of the modern Lebanese Republic, without this being overshadowed by massive power-asymmetries or deep-seated fears going along with pre-defined imaginations of the other, or by both of this. When asked about the MoU´s achievements, the FPM functionary "Alain R." told the author:

> "Well, I can definitely say that there is an – and for me this is the greatest achievement – […] emotional achievement. The rapprochement of two religious communities that have indeed lived traditionally, also […] in geographical terms, rather close and peaceful together, but that have diverged since the foundation of Hizbullah … The fear of the Shi`a grew. The fear of Hizbullah reached its peak after the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri, for which it was held partially responsible, under the table, already then. […] And this fear has been taken from the people. There have been approximations […] in the different regions of Lebanon [between] Shi`a and Christians – Maronites, Greek-Catholics, Armenians and so on – that have meanwhile reached a level of respect […] which we couldn't have imagined a few years ago. I, personally, was very afraid of Hizbullah. I do admit that. Through my political work and [based on] the experiences made with many people close to Hizbullah but also with its functionaries, I can only report positive on them." (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013)

3.5.2.1 Socialization in the shadow of war and political turmoil

Two occasions were decisive for the process of getting to know one another to intensify; the internally displaced crisis during the July War 2006 and the joint protest camp in downtown Beirut from December 2006 until May 2008. Both situations alike created outstanding opportunities for getting into close and sustained contact with each other without encountering significant disturbances from the outside. During the 2006 war, this was in principle true for encounters between the displaced and any other Lebanese on the receiving end. Not a few Aounists moreover stressed that their commitment to support the fleeing Southerners was not so much a result of their party´s MoU with Hizbullah as it was a matter of principle. “Bassem H.” said: “It was not only about supporting Hizbullah. We were supporting our Lebanese citizens […]. Even though he is from the South, this guy is Lebanese.” (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.4 2017)

Yet, the progressive rapprochement at the grassroots initiated in the wake of the MoU had by now already made a difference with respect to the mutual perceptions of the other. It was therefore not by chance that the FPM stood out as the only political movement with a mainly non-Shi`i membership base that truly welcomed the Shi`i displaced. In fact, while the Southerners were sheltered in most areas they went to, many non-FPM Christians maintained their reservations and, crucially, a distance to them. This situation is well exemplified by the experiences of the politically non-aligned Maronite Christian seminarian, student, peace-worker and Red Cross volunteer “Samir M.,” 28 years in age, from Kisrawan. “Samir M.,” by his own account, grew up with the common stereotypes about the “Muslim other” and without personal contact to Lebanese Shi`a at all. Still, when growing elder, he independently developed the will to overcome this situation: “The level of hatred starts to [grow] inside but a personal decision will let you discover the other.” (Author´s interv. CC.M.2 2013)

Upon the outbreak of the 2006 war, “Samir M.” was caught in the border region of South Lebanon where he was engaged in a church-sponsored annual camping activity for disadvantaged Maronite youth. He and all others managed to escape the havoc of the war to Mount Lebanon but only after risking their lives and experiencing tremendous hardship on their flight. Finally back in safety, “Samir M.” immediately went to his Red Cross center in Antelias to engage in relief work for the displaced Southerners. As of now, he said, he made his first experiences with Shi`a, as not only the displaced people but also his new colleagues at the center were all Shi`a. His relations soon deepened and he came to be fondly nicknamed “Hajj Samir” by his colleagues and the families he helped taking care of and with which he experienced both heartbreaking and -warming moments. All of this, he said, not only changed his perceptions of the “Shi`i other” but also his own very identity. Yet, when he went back to his Christian friends, he reportedly came “under stress:” They “didn’t accept that I was staying with Shi`a all these days. It was too much; [they said:] 'you smell Shi`a.'” (Author´s interv. CC.M.2 2013)

The FPM-member and school-director “Bassem H.” related that during the war, he was

> “responsible [for] a shelter area. […] It was in Fanar, in […] the media college of the Lebanese University. […] So we had people, they came – *ya Allah* – from Bint Jbeil and people

> from Qana. [U]s, as a Free Patriotic Movement, we have a good presence here in Metn, and I was [an] active member in Fanar, the place where the university is located. [S]o, we had people coming to these areas, to the university. At first we saw […] people from the Lebanese Forces, they were saying, 'no, you can´t enter', stuff like that … because the committee … the youth committee of students […] was won by the Lebanese Forces. So, we encountered […] resistance from them. [We were] saying, they are Lebanese as much as you, so … they have bombardments, and […] they will be staying here. [I]n the end they stayed.” (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.4 2017)

The tireless efforts of FPM activists to not only welcome and comfort the incoming Southerners, but also to diffuse the reservations and resistance displayed against them by others, were also reported by Ghazi Aad who said:

> “The people who took care on the ground here were the FPM members and supporters in cooperation with the army and police in areas where they needed security. Things like that, because after all it is the job of the army and the police to maintain security. For example, if a school director said, at that time, he would not want to take up [internal] refugees in his school; nobody forced him to do so. It was by, you know, negotiating with him, telling him that we have to shelter some here, others there … talking with the different orders of the Maronite clergy, to open the schools and things like that. So it was by cooperation. And organizing things on the ground was mainly done by the FPM and its supporters.” (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.3 2013)

The pro-Resistance Shi`i “Ali S.” (63 years in age, from Tyre in South Lebanon) and his close friend, “Musa H.,” 43-year-old, from Baalbek in the Bekaa valley, have been interviewed together. Both are dedicated artists, the former a writer and the latter a painter. Both are married and have children and both, in economical and educational terms, clearly belong to the lower class. Asked about the displacement crisis of 2006, they first explained to the author that the mere situation of being compelled to ask for help felt degrading and uncomfortable for most people, especially as this necessarily had to happen largely across the invisible inter-communal boundaries in place. Nuanced differences in the reception as experienced by the displaced, in the various destinations they arrived at, therefore chiefly codetermined their capability to preserve self-esteem in the face of agony, painful losses, and the general disruption of their lives. According to “Musa H.,” it was mainly in the strongholds of the FPM where the people “have been treated as normal citizens,” so that “they didn’t feel foreign in their own country [while] in some of [the other] places they did treat them … I don’t want to say [in a] bad way, but not [in a] good way [either].” (Author´s interv. CC.Hzb.1 2013) “Ali S.” added:

> “You lose your dignity. Even if somebody is helping; in the end you know that somebody is helping you. Tayyār al-Waṭanī, they were the only people who treated us very good … [“Musa H.”: Yeah, the only ones!] … who treated the people who went from here very good. And

> really, this is something. This will help. If we keep this experience in a good way, this will help Lebanon for the future.” (Author´s interv. CC.Hzb.2 2013)

Thus, the grassroots alliance between the FPM and Hizbullah was already taking shape and making a significant difference during the July War and the internally displaced crisis of 2006. The 25-year-old Maronite Aounist “Yousef B.,” from Kisrawan, identified this difference as a direct outcome of the new openness between both sides since the signing of the MoU:

> “[I]n [the] 2006 war […]. When most of [the] Shi`a from the South […] came as displaced here, [to] Beirut and Mount Lebanon … they were very welcomed, they lived in the [people´s] houses and then they [went] back when the war finished. So this is how this document [i.e. the MoU] touches the point about something wrong. It was, 'ah okay, you are Lebanese' … but no one talks to the other and everyone is [afraid] from the others also, at the same time. So, let’s talk, let’s discuss our views and see what the common points are. Let’s work on the other points [on which we´ve] not agreed [so far].” (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.2 2012)

The Maronite Aounist and human rights activist Ghazi Aad made a similar link as “Yousef B.,” when he described the atmosphere during the internal displacement crisis in his home region, the Upper North Metn (Mount Lebanon):

> “It was really good. I mean, the … How can I say it? The atmosphere was really different from before. I mean before the Memorandum of Understanding and before that political upheaval; talking to Hizbullah, being friends with Hizbullah, etc. The perspective changed. The perspective towards Hizbullah changed. And the perspective towards the Shi`a also changed. That made the difference. In July 2006, what made the difference were the paper of understanding and the change of political perspective, in social and political terms, towards the Shi`a in Lebanon […] represented by Hizbullah.” (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.3 2013)

The 35-year-old Maronite FPM member and school director “Bassem H.,” also from Metn, explained that the displacement crisis was the first occasion for him, to really get to know the “Shi`i other,” stating: “[A]t that time General Aoun said, […] these are our people, these are Lebanese, and you should be acting like Christians. And we were doing this and we found out that, truly, we had a lot in common with these people. So, it was a very, very interesting period for me.” (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.4 2017)

The approximation of both parties´ bases then once more deepened through their activists´ sharing of extended time in a limited space in the joint protest camp launched in downtown Beirut between December 2006 and May 2008. This time, youth activists from both sides (alongside other March 8th forces) made up the protagonists and interaction – besides the need for taking jointly care of logistics (Author´s interv. IE.FPM1 2012) – chiefly pertained to political discussions and socializing in a relaxed atmosphere. In the evenings and at nighttime, this would frequently take the shape of a leisure event. The 35-year-old Maronite Aounist

"Bishara B.," from Jdeide, who, as described, commutes between Lebanon and Germany for his academic work, has not permanently participated in the sit-in but visited it a number of times. He reported that, "at night they would like … get music and they started dancing and they were just like … yeah!" (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.1 2013)

As one main difference to the situation caused by the internally displaced crisis, the FPM´s 28-year-old youth functionary "Maher A.," from Kisrawan, identified the amount of time available for socialization. New relations and knowledge about the other, he said, developed especially through the sit-in,

> "because we had a lot of free time. We had nothing to do, just to sit in tents. So it was a very good chance for us to sit and discuss a lot of stuff. From [the] responsibles in both parties to supporters and … you know, just sit and discuss anything they want … it was a very good experience. […] I learned about a lot of stuff, met a lot of people that I didn't know before. And the good thing about this is that everyone was honest with each other, so, like we said, we don't like this in you and they said, we don't like … you know? We shared everything we disagree and agree on. It was a very good experience. […] In the beginning, we used to go every day. But, after a while, you know, you have your studies, your classes to attend, so we started to go whenever we had time. But supporters from all parties were there at all times. […] I slept there, many nights. […] I can share this because at that time I was not in the [FPM´s Youth and Students] Committee: I had [so far] never met official people from Hizbullah. Yeah, it was a good chance to meet supporters and leaders in their party, especially among the youth, the young people. So, we had a lot to share, to talk about. Especially the Syrian occupation, we talked …. [asking them;] why [have] you supported the Syrian occupation of Lebanon and so on. We talked a lot about this. We talked about civil marriage. Things we agree on, [things] we disagree on." (Author´s interv. IE.FPM1 2012)

Ghazi Aad meanwhile experienced the sit-in from a unique perspective: When it was launched in downtown in early December 2006, he was already there with a protest tent facing the UN-Economic Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA) building. In his capacity as the founder and head of his NGO SOLIDE – Support of Lebanese in Detention and Exile, he had erected this protest tent in 2005. Henceforth it served to raise attention for the cause, as a meeting point for the families of the victims of enforced disappearances, and, in the absence of a formal SOLIDE headquarters, as a quasi-office for Ghazi Aad (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.3 2013) until his sad demise in November 2016 (AI 2016).

The March 8th/ FPM sit-in, for the time of its duration, wholeheartedly integrated the SOLIDE tent irrespective of the diverging agenda followed by Aad which naturally constituted a delicate matter. Hizbullah, after all, is allied to the Syrian leadership in the "Resistance Axis." Yet, Aad insisted that he was able to continue his work not only undisturbed but that he actually felt comforted by Hizbullah – even in the instance of a press conference with Syrian oppositionists:

> “I have been in my tent. […] Hizbullah was around us. […] I used to go there every day. I was doing my work as usual, attending to the issues of the detainees in Syria and the missing in Lebanon. […] But there was no confrontation between us. […] I had to pass through the security to get to the tent. But really they were helpful. Taking into consideration that I am talking about Syria and I am attacking Syria, they did not do anything to prevent us or to deny us entrance. No. […] More than that; I had a press conference and I got Syrian opposition leaders to that conference there, while Hizbullah was around us. And I had that conference there. They did not say anything. And they were helpful to the ladies sitting in the tent. They provided food sometimes when food was not there, and provided water, and they even provided a makeshift bathroom at the tent. They were helpful in that sense. [The Syrian oppositionists] were afraid and didn’t want to go there. And I told them; I am responsible, I am telling you, come there, nobody will say anything. They used to say; this guy is crazy […] I mean, they were afraid in the beginning and in the end they felt relieved. We had that conference and they left. It was really [laughing] a daring experience for them. Not for me. I am used to this.” (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.3 2013)

The closeness between both group´s bases during the displacement crisis and the sit-in has reportedly also led to new personal bonds between Christians and Shi`a being forged. The author has been told in private talks and interviews about several instances in which new friendships developed between displaced Southerners and their hosts that have partially outlasted the crisis itself. For instance, the Shi`i Muslim “Qassem A.” related that

> “some people of Zgharta, they started to visit South Lebanon because some people of South Lebanon, they [had] stayed there some time and then they invited the Zghartari people to visit South Lebanon. Yes … *yani*, […] this is the positive side of the [internally displaced] issue, if we can say so …” (Author´s interv. CC.Hzb.5 2017)

Also the FPM´s Cesar Abou Khalil noted that, since the summer of 2006, “people are exchanging visits between the Mountain and the South. Lots of things, lots of cases!” (Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012) He contextualized this as follows:

> “[T]here have been demarcation lines for fifteen years and after the demarcation lines [had vanished], people were still […] in their own regions. [T]he relationship between the Lebanese did not return to normal very quickly. Of course, this [MoU] helped a lot. And I tell you, if we can sit like that, and I … Yes, I have heard of plenty cases, like; 'now, when we are going to the South, we are invited to lunch at the family that was here in 2006' […] or, 'they are coming … this family is coming back to visit these families here', etc. There are lots of these cases. It has built strong ties between, yes, ordinary people. Ordinary people that lived apart for thirty years maybe … since 1975.” (Ibid.)

When asked about the sit-in in the same respect, Abou Khalil explained that also here, through the activist´s living in neighboring tents, eating together and having their celebration-like get-togethers almost “every night […], lots of friendships have been formed.” (Ibid.) Ghazi Aad furthermore mentioned that he knew of a Maronite-Shi`i couple that chose the sit-in as a venue for their wedding, yet, the spouses got to know each other elsewhere (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.3 2013).

Thus, both of these exceptional settings, the internal displacement crisis and the joint sit-in, have served as central catalysts for socialization between the two bases up to the point of facilitating the emergence of new cross-communal relationships between Lebanese Maronite/ Christians and Shi`a. They allowed for the two groups to find out about and truly get to know one another. The special opportunities to, in an atmosphere of trust and comradeship, find out about the backgrounds to diverging viewpoints on contested subjects, and the deep insights into the reasoning of the respective counterparts for which these allowed, have significantly increased the share of inter-community capital for all participants alike. This in particular concerns the subfield of Shi`i-Maronite relations. Most importantly, however, many of the people involved on both sides liked what they found. "Bassem H.," the Maronite Aounist school director from Metn, said: "I am glad that we did this alliance, because, you know, first of all, I had the chance to meet very good Lebanese that I did not know about … very good and honorable people that I didn't know about." (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.4 2017)

As mentioned earlier, the first step in this process was losing the fear of the other. Lately this in particular pertained to many Christian´s fears of Hizbullah (which was and is seen as representative for the Shi`a of Lebanon by many Aounists) rather than vice-versa. Ghazi Aad explained:

> "People here used to think that Hizbullah is pro-Iran and Iran is the source of evil, and Hizbullah is a puppet of Iran and they are the source of evil in Lebanon, and they are against us and they want to get rid of us, they want to turn Lebanon into a Shi`i State [and impose] *wilāyat al-faqīh*. People used to think this way. And the animosity with Hizbullah was based on this. But with the Memorandum of Understanding and with explaining that paper […] and explaining that they [Hizbullah/ Shi`i Lebanese] represent a part of the population of Lebanon [with whom] we have to live together and [that] it's not true that they seek *wilāyat al-faqīh*. Things like that. I mean, they changed the perspective." (Author´s interv. CC.FPM.3 2013)

After this "change of perspective," in Aad´s view, truly getting to know one another was finally possible. This stepwise brought about the progressive dismantling of mutual stereotypes and this, in turn, has allowed for the individuals participating in this process to recognize what they identified as much more common ground than they had expected:

> "People knowing each other; people talking to each other. That's what we miss in Lebanon. Lebanon was divided based on nothing. People don't talk to each other. Because they don't talk, they create illusions and things about the other community which are not true. Which are not true. Having the chance to sit and talk together, to exchange ideas and to exchange…I mean, they both watch the same movies, they both watch the same television series, they both like this song and like that song, this or that singer [undertone, reflecting a bright smile while talking]. I mean, they have many things in common. But they never had the chance to sit together. The division was imposed on them. Like the politicians and the militias… So, people don't know about the Shi`a community. They never sat together, they never talked together. And they have these illusions about the Shi`a. And also, on the other side, the Shi`a have the same illusions

> about the Maronites and Christians; 'they want this, they want that, they want to take everything…' So, these things go away when people sit together and feel that they have the same aspirations and they have the same outlook to many things. That brings people together more and more and that's exactly what happened." (Ibid.)

Thus, Aad attests the bases of the FPM and Hizbullah – or at least significant parts of these – to not only pose no threats to each other but to indeed share "the same aspirations and […] the same outlook to many things." (Ibid.) At the same time, he implies that this development, the rapprochement on grassroots level, only reflects what the people actually wanted, only that this was commonly made impossible, as the "division was imposed on them" by actors like "the politicians and the militias." (Ibid.)

3.5.2.2 The socio-economic link: Cross-communal clientelism and beyond

Whereas the intensity of collective socialization between the bases of Hizbullah and the FPM had its peak already in the early phase of the alliance (2006-2008), the newly forged bonds have since remained in place. Even for those Hizbullah supporters and Aounists living geographically more or less secluded from each other, for many, especially the youth, continuous relations were guaranteed through regular cooperation and coordinated action in student committee´s and the professional syndicates and via joint political action on the communal and national stages. This new closeness of two social milieu´s that, until then, had few points of contact at all, now also granted the participants novel access to the respective clientelist networks of the other.

True, the transgression of communal borders for economic benefits, that is economic capital, constitutes nothing special in Lebanon. Yet, this mostly pertains to the economic relations of Lebanon´s socio-economic and political elites and otherwise seldom exceeds the boundaries of the clientelist networks maintained by the different political parties. As explained earlier, because these parties´ constituencies do by and large account for one particular community only, clientelism in Lebanon flourishes largely intra-communal. By today, as we know, this also applies to Hizbullah and the FPM, both of which engage in clientelist practices for ethnicized confessional considerations. The FPM-Hizbullah alliance, however, did not remain restricted to the elite level but drew in much of the grassroots, which in turn belong to mainly two of Lebanon´s communities. This opened up a new venue of cross-communal socio-economic clientelism for all those who had or have the means to individually or collectively pursue private economic enterprises, i.e. those participants belonging to the middle or upper classes. This aspect is therefore as relevant for the parties´

elites as it is for the middle class sections of their grassroots, and these are well represented on both sides, yet, especially among the Aounists.

Little surprisingly, the new chances were utilized on the spot. The following statement of the FPM member and mid-level functionary “Alain R.” is illuminating in this respect:

> “Friends of mine are running construction sites in the *Dahiye* [the southern suburbs of Beirut]. Not long ago, this idea would have been absurd. Maronite engineers from Kisrawan, through the opening up of Hizbullah and the *Dahiye* , have received construction projects there; huge construction projects that are very beneficial.” (Author´s interv. IE.FPM.2 2013)

Asked if this also pertains to the Hizbullah-run Wa`d project for the reconstruction of the *Dahiye* after the July War 2006, “Alain R.” unhesitatingly answered: “Yes, also. But there were several other projects more. And […] the reason for these developments is the Memorandum of Understanding. Without it, this openness would have never materialized.” (Ibid.) Slightly more profane, yet no less important and surely drawing in significantly larger sections of the party bases, is the aspect of increased intra-communal “commercial exchange,” which was raised by the 25-year-old Maronite Aounist “Yousef B.” He explained that neither him nor his friends have ever visited the *Dahiye* before the signing of the MoU but have since been there more than once, smilingly hinting in this respect that “some shops there are cheaper.” (Author´s interv.IE.FPM1 2012) Like many other Christians, especially from the FPM and al-Marada, he has moreover visited Hizbullah´s main permanent tourism site, the “Resistance Touristic Landmark Mleeta,” in South Lebanon (ibid.), thereby indirectly contributing to regional development (with especially small local shops and restaurants profiting from the numerous incoming visitors).

Although empirical evidence is lacking, it is likely that this new access to the clientelist networks of the allies at least partially – that is for the elites – also extends to foreign patrons such as Syria and Iran. As a matter of fact, the FPM, since its alignment with Hizbullah, stands accused by leading opponents to, for its demonstrated loyalty, periodically receive large sums of money from Iran (Washington Times 15/7/2019). A wikileaked US embassy cable from 2007, citing “[t]wo longtime Michel Aoun supporters,” even speaks of Michel Aoun´s supposed “acceptance of Syrian and Iranian funds.” (Feltman 2007a) No matter if these precise allegations are true or not (in light of the political interests of those who voiced them, they should be treated with caution), it is plainly unrealistic to assume that the post-2006 political positions of Aoun and the FPM and the friendly relations they since entertain to the governments of Iran and Syria would have not also opened up new economic windows of opportunity to them.

3.5.2.3 Sustainable trust?

> "[T]he relationship between Hizbullah and the FPM has been extended on to the supporters of the two parties. And not [only] to the supporters, if you want, also to the […] two communities. So, now, even if there is a split or so … Okay, some very politicized people may have some strong opinion or anything of this sort but … No, at the level of the population, I think, there has been a normalization of the relations and it cannot … it won't go back."
>
> Cesar Abou Khalil 2012[149]

As one main outcome of the events and processes described, mutual trust has been built between the two parties´ bases. This is reflected in what all but one of the supporters of Hizbullah and the FPM interviewed for this study had to say in either implicit or explicit terms. We have already come across multiple examples for implicit expressions of trust, as these include all such occasions on which members and supporters of one party praised the reliability, discipline, loyalty, or honesty of the other party or its members. As for explicit remarks, the Aounist "Yousef B.," for instance, said: "I think we have arrived at a point at which we can trust each other." (Author´s interv.IE.FPM1 2012) Likewise, the 35-year-old Maronite Aounist academic "Bishara B.," explained: "[T]his is something that the agreement did, which is complete trust. […] I mean, even now, that there is a political problem [the controversy over Hizbullah´s involvement in Syria], the trust is still there. Nobody will ever […] backstab [the other] politically." (Author´s interv.CC.FPM.1 2013)

To be sure, this finding cannot be attested for every single individual involved in the rapprochement. As a case in point, also one of the interviewees belonging to the allied parties´ bases, the 56-years-old Hizbullah functionary "Mahmoud A.," despite being in favor of the alliance and its outcomes so far, harbored explicit reservations about Michel Aoun´s intentions: "His ambition is to become president of Lebanon to do something. To what […] extent I can trust him, I don't know." (Author´s interv.IE.Hzb.1 2013) Such reservations do persist among individuals on both sides of the equation. This notwithstanding, the experiences made with each other, especially in the early phase of forging the alliance, have brought about a general level of trust between significant factions of the Lebanese Maronites and Shi`a that is unprecedented in modern Lebanon.

Ever since, the FPM-Hizbullah alliance has witnessed ups and downs in the midst of major political turmoil both domestic and regional. It has yet persisted and so have the bonds that have been newly forged between common Maronite/ Christian and Shi`a Lebanese citizens.

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[149] Author´s interv. E.FPM.1 2012b.

This impact – the level and depth of social integration reached through the alliance, and the extent of ownership and agency claimed by the grassroots – is what sets it most clearly apart from conventional Lebanese political agreements. After all, a political alliance is forged for certain political aims and when the political context changes, the strategies for reaching these aims are likely to change too. In other words, even if the leaders of both Hizbullah and the FPM have categorized their alliance as strategic in outlook and treat it with much care, there is no guarantee that this state of things will prevail and that the alliance will not break apart at one point. However, while it is impossible to predict the exact repercussions of such a scenario, it is unlikely that this would annul the by and large positive experiences individually made with each other, and the newfound trust into the basic motives of "the others."

In light of the historical development of Maronite-Shi`i relations and the traditional prejudices and stereotypes in place, this pertains foremost to the mutual commitment and loyalty to the Lebanese state and nation (which was doubted especially for the Shi`a, seen as primarily loyal to Iran) and to the prospect of including all of its components at eye-level (which was seen as being blocked especially by the Maronite elites, suspected of being unwilling to forgo their traditional privileges). This amounts to the essence of the important "change in perspective" identified by Ghazi Aad. It pertains to fundamental, i.e. categorical, alterations in the way that "the communal other" is seen, largely irrespective of immediate political considerations.

3.6 SUMMARIZING ANALYSIS AND FINAL RESULTS

> "Many have argued there is only self-interest in the MoU…. I disagree and believe in part, that the MoU was founded and has grown on common ideas and values, as well as pure interests….whether one agrees with those values or not is another matter."
>
> Nicholas Noe 2011

The Lebanese Shi`i and Maronite communities not only share a long and rich history with each other; they also had and have a lot in common. Initially, this especially pertained to basic structural conditions, such as their their shared habitat (Mount Lebanon and its surroundings), their rural/ agrarian background, and their both being subjected, as confessional minorities (albeit with very different formal status), to the same frameworks of non-local dominion. At the same time, however, they entered modern Lebanon under highly uneven conditions, rendering the factual and perceived state of Maronite-Shi`i relations, in many respects, the most distant and unequal when compared to other inter-communal constellations.

On the one hand, this asymmetry placed their respective military and political actors at the poles of the Civil War (1975-90) conflict with regard to its domestic dimension. On the other hand, direct clashes of communally organized Maronite/ Christian and Shi`i militias were seldom and both groups' elites followed largely separate tracks in the war. These were in both cases geared towards gaining or preserving shares in the state alongside the prerogative of (re-)interpreting the Lebanese national narrative (summing up to state capital *par excellence*). The particular line of conflict between their militias and parties was therefore one, in Georg Simmel´s terms, characterized mainly by competition (as opposed to "pure conflict"), and both communities´ central warring actors, all their atrocities notwithstanding, were at all times careful not to fully destroy the prospected "prize," the Lebanese state and system as such.

At the end of the war, no Lebanese party had been able to realize its maximalist aims. However, the Shi`a stood out as the community that had gained the most in relative terms, while the Maronites had lost some of their main privileges to the advantage of the Sunnis. The continued twin-occupation of Lebanon – with Israel in the South and Syria in much of the remaining country – created conditions under which the core Shi`i political actors were relatively favoured by official Lebanon. They could thus foster their largely newfound shares and positions in the state and administration, a role erstwhile filled mainly by Harakat Amal. Hizbullah, in turn, received formal recognition and indirect support for its armed struggle against the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon. Opposition to the Syrian presence and tutelage was ruthlessly and brutally suppressed by the authorities and besides the Sunni Lebanese Muslim Brotherhood this mainly applied to Maronite/ Christian factions and actors, further diminishing their former political status and socio-economic clout. These drastic changes in the power relations and general conditions, finally, allowed for the Shi`i and Maronite communities to meet at eye-level, for the first time since the foundation of the Lebanese Republic.

When Israel withrew from South Lebanon in May 2000, this was widely attributed to the armed struggle spearheaded by the Shi`i Muslim Hizbullah, boosting the party´s popularity at home and abroad and fostering its domestic image of a "national resistance." Syria´s withdrawal in 2005, in contrast, came about for many reasons, yet, the overwhelmingly Maronite/ Christian Aounists stood out as the one Lebanese movement that had pushed for this development most vehemently and they certainly had a major share in its crystallization. Both Hizbullah and the FPM, moreover, each represented one of the two single most important political representations of their respective communities (which is still the case).

It has been pointed out in this work, how the rapprochement between these two actors has directly contributed to increased cooperation and closeness of Lebanese Maronites and Shi`a. Thus, even though this process has not reached anything close to completeness, the FPM-Hizbullah alliance as a variety of playing the field of inter-community relations, or, more precisely, the subfield of Shi`i-Maronite relations, has proven a remarkably workable approach. It integrates, partially harmonizes, and largely caters to the needs and interests, articulated or displayed on different levels, in two different political milieus, associated with two distinct communities of Lebanon.

On the elite level, political power and state capital, whether deriving from the position yielded within the own confessional community or in the political field as such, has been mutually invested by the allies also to facilitate the achievement of interests or aims followed by the respective other. On the one side, this prominently includes Hizbullah´s (and Amal´s) backing of first the Orthodox and later the proportional election law proposal (both primarily reflective of Christian interests) and also the party´s demonstrative deployment of its military apparatus in the face of armed jihadist groups´ attempts to conquer Lebanon, thereby serving Lebanese security at large, as perceived not least by many Christians. On the other side, this most strikingly pertains to the FPM´s contribution to a national cover for the "resistance" during the July War and the internal displacement crisis of 2006. It also applies to Michel Aoun´s and other FPM politicians´ repeated rallying to the defense of Hizbullah against accusations as to which it was lacking a true nationalist agenda and was primarily a tool in the hands of Tehran or of constituting a terrorist entity.

As for the common citizens concerned, for many of them, the described change in perspective that occurred in the wake of the MoU, has not only significantly boosted their shares of (Maronite-Shi`i) inter-community capital (in the form of intimate knowledge of the particularities, circumstances and affairs of the other, including, in the case at hand, insights into their fears, needs, interests and values) and social capital (through novel relations to members of a community other than the own); it, crucially, also extended their individual scope of mobility within their own country (as many only now, in some cases for the first time in their lives, dared to cross into the regions perceived as strongholds of the respective other). The newly felt freedom of movement, in turn, facilitated the growth of inter-communal commercial exchange in its most basic form (e.g. eating at a restaurant or drinking coffee during a trip into the region of the other), to be rather easily pursued by most concerned, and comparably irrespective of questions of income and private wealth. Among the elites and those middle class members of both parties´ bases, possessing the means to pursue private enterprises, finally, new trans-communal business networks are being forged, accompanied by the simultaneous growth of equally novel inter-communal clientelist structures that notably exceed traditional modes of mere cross-communal elite cooperation in the economic field.

When putting all pieces of the puzzle together, in a retroactive assessment, it becomes clear then too, why the track of Maronite-Shi`i rapprochement materialized precisely via an alliance between the FPM and Hizbullah and not through one between other mainly Maronite/ Christian or Shi`i Muslim backed parties. With respect to their numerical weight, to begin with, on the Maronite/ Christian scene, the FPM, at least between 2005 and 2010, was out of competition, as it commanded the clear majority here. Amal, however, always since Hizbullah´s emergence and subsequent ascent, maintained a substantial following among the Lebanese Shia, roughly comparable to that of its Islamist competitor. Given its officially secular, civil (i.e. supposedly unarmed), and nationalist outlook, one might thus ask why Amal was not considered by the Aounists a choice as good, if not even the more attractive one. As we have seen, however, Amal was not only Damascus´ original Shi`i ally in Lebanon but for a long time also its most important one, while the Aounists stood at the forefront of the anti-Syrian opposition. Amal was moreover the official face of the Lebanese Shi`a, and its elite part of the Lebanese ruling class (long before Hizbullah and the FPM got involved themselves), which was despised by the Aounists for its perceived corruption and nepotism. In fact, a lack of trust and sympathies between the FPM and Amal is evident on both elite and grassroots level up until today, not least in their frequent political quarrels.

All of this stands in stark contrast to the conditions defining the relations between the Aounists and Hizbullah prior to launching political relations after Michel Aoun´s return to Lebanon in May 2005. Despite the obvious differences prevailing between these actors and between their associated milieus respectively, and although their leaders had expressed disapproving views of each other in the past; points of contact, including moments of cooperation, nonetheless existed since the War of Liberation (1989-90). Hizbullah and the FPM early on found common ground too, especially in their visions for how the nation´s interior should be structured and governed. Members of both movements´ elites and bases had therefore already identified features in the mutual other, which they judged as virtues. Furthermore, with the completed withdrawal of Syria in May 2005, the central divide between them – their diametrically opposed reading of Syria´s role in Lebanon – has been significantly diffused and was to become finally irrelevant. When, in this situation, Michel Aoun, upon his return from exile – despite the outstanding popularity he visibly enjoyed among the Maronite/ Christians of Lebanon – was consciously sidelined by his former allies in the March 14th coalition, the last potential obstacle to a – then, even for informed observers, unthinkable – political understanding between the FPM and Hizbullah had been removed.

That it finally came to this point on February 6th, 2006 (with Nasrallah and Aoun signing their MoU for Hizbullah and the FPM) was, on the one side, destined to take literally everybody by surprise. This was not only because the process leading up to the signing of the MoU was kept top-secret by its few participants, nor merely because it naturally appeared like an *alliánce contre náture* to many, given the parties´ diverging stances on Syria and other apparent contradictions, but also and especially because it marks a true watershed in Maronite-Shi`i relations in the Lebanese Republic. Against the background of the overall history of these relations in the area of modern Lebanon, in contrast, the occurrence of a political alliance forged by one of the two major Maronite/ Christian with one of the two prime Shi`i Muslim parties (with the second one in tow) must be registered much more as a return to “normality” after a remarkably long period of deviation. This becomes even more evident, when considering the aspect of a “minority alliance,” formed as a shield against a perceived “Sunni jihadist threat,” Hizbullah´s military fight against mainly Sunni jihadist opposition forces in Syria, as well as the fact that the major political representation of Lebanese Sunni Muslims, the Future Movement – which is overtly backed by the Sunni regional powers Saudi Arabia and the UAE – has counted to Hizbullah´s and the FPM´s core political adversaries for the most of the period covered by this analysis.

Hence, there are some undeniable, if shallow, similarities to the groups´ inter- and intra-relations under Sunni Mamluk and Ottoman rule over Mount Lebanon and its vicinity, and this evidently plays a role in the meaning-making of not a few participants in the alliance. This situation has reinforced partially age-old fears and stereotypes harbored by some Maronite and/ or Shi`i Lebanese towards their Sunni compatriots, of them being especially susceptible to radicalization, religious intolerance and extremism (a view fuelled immensely by the jihadist upsurge in Syria, Libya and elsewhere) and being primarily loyal to the (Sunni) Muslim *umma*, rather than to the Lebanese nation. At this particular junction, the FPM-Hizbullah alliance serves to fuel inter-communal divisions rather than to diffuse them as envisioned by the protagonists.

One must yet be careful to not draw the wrong conclusions from this aspect. The alliance was neither consciously forged against Sunni Muslims nor did it ever follow a corresponding political program. To the contrary, sensing the danger of escalating Sunni-Shi`i strife in Lebanon, the Hizbullah and FPM elites considered their MoU an attempt to avert exactly such a development. As soon as the term of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora – the relationship with whom was experienced especially problematic and conflictual by the allies – faded out, after the May 2008 clashes and the Doha Accord, they were keen to keep up cooperation with the Future Movement and Saad al-Hariri, at least to the extent demanded by the Lebanese consociational order. This resulted in Aoun becoming president of the republic and Saad al-Hariri once more prime minister of Lebanon, through a deal struck between them in late 2016.

Thus, the *modus operandi* commonly pursued by Lebanese political elites, whereby they seek to mobilize their bases with ethnicized-confessional ("sectarian") rhetoric and incitement, does not fully apply in our case. Although such instances occurred, they were only of secondary importance for the FPM-Hizbullah pact´s dimension of a Maronite-Shi`i minority alliance to crystallize. That is especially because the elite interests involved do partially run contrary to incitements against the Lebanese Sunni Muslims. That this dimension nonetheless plays a notable role, must therefore be attributed to the accordant perceptions, fears and concerns that are prevalent anyway, not only among parts of the FPM´s and Hizbullah´s elites, but also and especially among their bases and many of Lebanon´s Maronite/ Christians and Shi`i Muslims in general.

Turning to the aspect of political opportunism, Hizbullah and the FPM were clearly helpful to each other for successfully pursuing some of their elite´s interests respectively, such as Aoun becoming president of the republic and Hizbullah broadening and fostering societal approval of its armed status far beyond the Shi`a milieu. In the view of the parties' opponents, these interests are followed as ends in themselves, aiming at nothing but a maximization of power. The allies, in contrast, see them as means to achieve a number of higher aims that find expression, most importantly, in the content of the MoU.

This document takes up many of the national issues that moved the Lebanese to that time, whereby it stays formally free from partisan interests. It has moreover been authored in a wording that is intended to not affront any of the components of Lebanon´s socio-political fabric, reflecting the stated intention of the allies to draw in more (or ideally all) of the other important political players of the country over time. Thus, the leaders of Hizbullah and the FPM have envisioned their MoU as a national, not as a partisan political program. That it was nonetheless perceived in the latter terms and therefore not appreciated by their various opponents, in the reading of the allies, only confirmed these forces´ disloyalties towards the nation and its inhabitants.

Against this background, the political path jointly pursued by the FPM and Hizbullah was largely shaped by, and in fact, became an integral part in, the domestic competition between March 8th and March 14th that has, upon the completion of this work, been erstwhile decided to the former´s advantage. In other words, even if intended otherwise, the political alliance has clearly served to advance the partisan interests of the allies. At the same time, however, the national aims articulated in the MoU have never been given up and a noteworthy number of them have been successfully addressed. Measured against their self-set agenda, the FPM and Hizbullah can therefore claim to have obtained substantial achievements together. This can be expected to foster their elites´ willingness to continue on the joint path.

All obvious differences between the secular, unarmed and mainly Christian-backed FPM and the pro-Iranian, armed Islamist party Hizbullah notwithstanding, the overall discrepancy between the two is not as all-emcompassing as commonly imagined. For one, both parties comprise solely Lebanese members and have their origins in the 1980s and the path of armed resistance against foreign occupation forces within the context of the second Lebanese Civil War (1975-90). Secondly, both are movements that, since their inception, were carried by a strong social base and none of their leaders owed his status to the belonging of one of Lebanon´s established political families (such as al-Katā´ib or the PSP for instance) or political money (like Tayyār al-Mustaqbal). At the end of the Civil War, the Aounists and Hizbullah both opposed the Ta`if Accord. Although they did so for partially different reasons and by different means, common ground existed with respect to their rejection of the cementation of political confessionalism. Beyond that, both parties have long decried the corruption, nepotism and ethnicized-confession-based clientelism that is so widespread among the Lebanese political class. After Syria´s withdrawal, however, both parties have started participating in the government and therewith also became engaged, to some degree, in basically all what is typical for Lebanese elite politics, including the grim sides. Through their rapprochement and mutual influences, moreover, Hizbullah and the FPM were both quick to modify important political stances so that most of their central political positions nowadays are in harmony.

Especially the parties´ bases, finally, despite belonging to highly contrasting milieus, in the wake of the MoU, found a substantial amount of common ground that did not remain restricted to echoing the common political positions prescribed by the elites´ rapprochement. Based on the various accounts recorded of both parties´ supporters, a whole number of shared fears, needs, interests and even values can be deducted. Common fears, for instance, pertain to individual economic collapse or to the prospect of falling victim to assaults by the Israeli military and/ or Sunni jihadists. In correspondence to these fears, we can identify the shared needs for economic security and physical safety.

Common interests are manifold and largely overlap with what has been addressed by the party elites in their MoU. This goes especially for the demanded reforms of the political system and the security sector. The political parties and their alliance are seen by their followers as proper vehicles to build a “reliable,” “just” and “strong state” based on the foundation of solid institutions, able and capable of guaranteeing its citizen’s security and economic chances, irrespective of community belonging and personal relations of a clientelist nature. In the meantime, as long as current conditions remain in place, party-membership is tantamount to social security. Furthermore, until in particular the goal of security is reached, Hizbullah´s military strength is appreciated as a substitute for a strong national army, providing deterrence and defense.

In contrast to what their opponents would say, however, neither Hizbullah, nor the FPM, nor any of their constituencies, would ever want to see the army´s role limited. To the contrary, not only that both sides – just as the majority of Lebanese of all confessions and most political trends – feel highly attached to the LAF, there is also a mutually shared interest in strengthening its capabilities and role for the protection of Lebanon. This role may be envisaged differently from what its opponents have in mind, yet, it is surely not a minor one (Noe 2009, p. 26).

When it comes to shared values – which just as human needs, tend to be non-negotiable –, it must be noted that the author has neither asked for them directly, nor have the interviewees explicitly mentioned them by themselves. Yet, the identified political positions, interests and needs heavily suggest that these amount to a broad range, including justice, loyalty, reliability honesty and tolerance. More importantly, however, the allies identify such shared values amongst themselves. It is only therefore that the extent of sustained trust described could develop between them. If the majority of Aounists, for instance, were not truly convinced of the honesty of Hizbullah´s claims to religious tolerance or of its endorsement of the concepts of democracy and human rights; or if the Hizbullah supporters were to distrust the Aounist´s loyalty or sincere valuing of justice, neither would the political alliance continue any longer than until the immediate benefits have been reaped by the parties´ elites and first conflicts arose between them, nor would it ever take among the grassroots. Instead, we sense a strong feeling of ownership at the parties´ bases, to the point of claiming the alliance for themselves.

Thus, while the MoU was the result of an elite process *par excellence*, the broad consent granted by the grassroots to a more far-reaching alliance and the self-motivated socialization and integration that immediately occurred between both sides were instrumental for its foundation and stability. The notable educated middle-class sections of both parties´

constituencies account for a key factor in this equation. Not only do the common interests described most clearly apply to them, they are also most likely to be aware of these interests and often have the means to pursue them in an organized fashion too, thus making them felt at the parties´ top levels. The main factor for the alliance´ remarkable persistence, however, is to be identified in the sustained mutual trust that does not stop at class borders but extends to all segments involved, from the bottom to the top.

Common citizens have thus been key players in the Hizbullah-FPM alliance and continue to be so. All supporters interviewed, without exception, are mature individuals that expressed palpable motivations for being supportive of the alliance besides mere clientelist considerations. They had varying political views on a whole range of subjects, reflecting their individual viewpoints and not simply echoing their elites. Most importantly, however, they expressed ownership of the alliance and claimed agency. This view is supported by the fact that the party leaders saw it necessary to inform their bases about the background to the MoU to gain their consent and were actually surprised about the enthusiasm with which it was instantly met.

When coming together, in early 2006, the FPM and Hizbullah were just starting to fully participate in the Lebanese political order. So far, both had a record free of corruption, nepotism and ethnicized-confession-based clientelism and they were thus in the most predestined position to call for their abolition. Upon assuming governmental responsibility and becoming part of the political establishment themselves, however, this picture has evidently changed. Both the FPM (alongside other Maronite/ Christian political actors) and Hizbullah (alongside Amal) have since progressively engaged into exactly the kind of practices vehemently criticized by them; building-up ethnicized-confessionalist clientelist networks comparable to those of other established political parties and being accused of nepotism and corruption. Whereas this immediately applies much more to the FPM than to Hizbullah, the latter is commonly viewed as at least co-responsible for the deeds of Harakat Amal, and Amal is viewed by many as belonging to the most corrupt. In any case, the self-images prevalent among Hizbullah´s and the FPM´s elites, according to which their actions solely serve to cleanse the state and nation from corruption and mismanagement, do no longer match reality, in which they simultaneously contribute to the persistence of those practices and aspects of the political system they continue to decry.

Not surprisingly, the bulk of the tensions that have accompanied the FPM-Hizbullah *entente* can be attributed to exactly such ethnicized-confessional considerations and actions of the parties, as these must naturally run afoul of the requirements of their inter-communal alliance. Most often, these tensions have been triggered by preceding frictions between Amal and the FPM, with Hizbullah standing accused by the latter to give cover to the former, "only" for safeguarding intra-Shi`i peace. This notwithstanding, the allied parties have treated their relations sensitive enough to overcome all contentious issues that have so far arisen between them. It thereby proved helpful that accepting to be different has been treated as a main principle by the allies from the onset.

In the more than twelve years since Aoun and Nasrallah have signed the MoU – a period that was introduced by the devastating July War (2006) and has since been characterized by intense political crises both regionally and domestically – their parties also came under additional pressure from outside at different points in time. Syria´s intelligence establishment in Lebanon, as we know, was furious over Hizbullah´s displayed sympathies for the Aounists alongside the party´s acknowledgement of Syria´s implication in corruption, which occured only a few months prior to the staging of negotiations between the FPM and Hizbullah. Yet, this did not stop Hizbullah from pursuing its subsequent rapprochement with the FPM. Many senior Aounists, in turn, as a result of having allied themselves to Hizbullah, were subjected to heavy pressure up to outright threats spoken by US government officials; to become the target of unspecified US-sanctions for their cooperation with a "terrorist group." To date, these efforts yielded no results, as the FPM remains steadfast in its core positions.

The mere fact that their alliance stands firm after all these years, despite all the crises and difficulties encountered by the allies on the way, is reason enough to once and for all say farewell to attempts of explaining the FPM-Hizbullah covenant as a mere "marriage of convenience." This was to hold true even if the alliance fell apart tomorrow. Whatever the case, however, it is highly unlikely that the effects of the rapprochement process at the grassroots, namely progressive inter-communal integration in a climate of trust, could be undone so easily at all.

In the final picture, the most important result yielded by the alliance is without doubt that of the fundamental change in perspective which occurred among many of the Maronite/ Christians and Shi`a involved as a result of the elites´ first step towards breaking down the invisible borders of fear between them. It is this change of perspective which allowed for the extraordinary level of trust towards the communal "other" to develop and their integration to happen; a process by which the respective counterpart was to progressively appear much less "other" than ever before in the modern nation-state of Lebanon. Thus, the alliance between the FPM and Hizbullah has not only significantly shaped the post-*Pax-Syriana* political order in Lebanon, but also lastingly altered the field of inter- and intra-community relations, bringing Maronite-Shi`i relations back to the center – where they had originally stood until roughly a century ago.

4. CONCLUSION

Maronite-Shi`i relations in the territory of modern Lebanon, in historical perspective, have been constantly vivid and deep. Most importantly, they occurred at eye-level up until shortly before the foundation of modern Lebanon, for which they have accordingly been decisive. Then, they took on a highly asymmetrical shape and it took until the end of the second Lebanese Civil War (1975-90) for the relations to come back to eye-level and potentially allow for a return to conditions that resemble the historical norm. The extent of Maronite-Shi`i closeness and cross-communal cooperation observable in the contemporary alliance between the FPM and Hizbullah – even though necessarily appearing as an *alliánce contre nature* in modern Lebanon at glimpse – must correctly be registered as exactly this return to the historical norm.

The alliance is neither a mere opportunist elite project, as the grassroots have an important share in it, nor can it be explained exclusively in terms of a "minority alliance," as multiple shared interests, common values and needs of the participating constituencies play an important role. Common citizens evidently command major agency in the FPM-Hizbullah alliance. The views expressed by supporters (and opponents) were reflective of their independent political reasoning, even if sharing most political positions. This rebuts prevalent assumptions about the political irrelevance of Lebanese citizens beyond their potential for ethnicized-confessional mobilization.

The simultaneous belonging of the FPM´s and Hizbullah´s core constituencies to different religions and diverging socio-cultural milieus, moreover, did neither pose principal obstacles to the parties´ close political cooperation nor to their bases´ progressive social integration. An upwardly mobile middle-class (both Maronite and Shi`i) has been central for the alliance´ persistence, as here we can find a comparably wide array of common ground, leading to a comparably wide array of common interests. The single most important factor, however, is the high amount of trust that has developed between both sides on all levels and encompassing all classes. In many cases, this has been directly invested into the most valuable form of capital identified for the field of community relations; having good relations with fellow citizens both intra- and inter-communally. This refutes depictions of the Lebanese confessional groups as more or less closed communities that are inevitably caught in constant competition and antagonism. At the same time, it verifies the existence of a sphere of the social in Lebanon (located in the field of community relations) which is neither primarily conditioned by the logic of competition stemming from the political field, nor by clientelism or sectarianism.

Lebanon is commonly cited as a prime example for Middle Eastern sectarian strife. Yet, this picture is incomplete and finally inaccurate. The findings presented here therefore suggest reconsidering conceptions of inter-community relations in Middle Eastern societies at large. The case of Maronite-Shi`i relations in the area of modern Lebanon and the contemporary alliance between the FPM and Hizbullah, finally, should not be left out of sight when debating the prospects of Christian-Muslim coexistence in Europe or elsewhere. The protagonists in our example have left the level of mere coexistence behind them, forcefully demonstrating the absence of principal obstacles to close cooperation and intimate relations between Christians and Muslims. After all, their successful integration extends to nominally secular Catholics and declared Islamists and it occurs despite highly volatile and in many respects much more difficult socio-economic conditions than those prevalent in the Global West.

5. EPILOGUE

After the May 2018 parliamentary elections, it took nearly nine months of negotiations before a new cabinet of national unity saw life on January 31st, 2019. The prime minister, Saad al-Hariri, remained in his position and the FPM was able to secure a share of eight ministers out of a total of thirty, rendering it the single strongest force in the cabinet. Hizbullah was represented by two members and one independent; the Shi`i physician Jamil Jabak. The party had insisted on receiving one of the truly substantial portfolios this time; that of the ministry of public health.

As a result of decades of vast corruption and political mismanagement, Lebanon´s national debt to gross domestic product ratio stood at 151 % in 2018 (Trading Economics 2020), rendering Lebanon the third most indebted country in the world. The new governmental tenure was therefore overshadowed by the worsening economic conditions from its inception. The recent US sanctions against Hizbullah, the party who´s independent representative has just been appointed minister of public health, accelerated this state of things.

By early October 2019, a shortage of USD in the country´s main banks caused the Lebanese pound to lose value against the dollar for the first time since the end of the Civil War (1975-90). As a result, the atmosphere all over the country turned more tense. Wherever people came together and engaged in conversation, their complaints were similar; decrying their own dire living circumstances and the extensive corruption of the political class. In contrast to earlier instances of collective discontent, however, this time, the critique raised did not spare the respective own leaders,[150] although the core of most political parties´ bases was to remain loyal.

As of October 13th, heavy forest fires erupted in several spots of Lebanon, quickly overwhelming the under-equipped civil defense units. The government had therefore to turn to Cyprus and to other countries for help. The fires destroyed much of Lebanon´s precious forest reserves alongside numerous livelihoods. These renewed losses in the face of the government's ill-preparedness and inability to confront the problem by its own only added on the grief of the Lebanese. The final trigger came on October 17th, when the government proposed fresh taxes on tobacco and petrol as well as the absurd introduction of a 6 USD/ month charge on voice calls via WhatsApp and other services. This served as the proverbial straw that broke the camel´s back. Beginning with the immediate gathering of a few dozen protesters in downtown Beirut; as of the next day, tens of thousands of people from all walks of life started taking to the streets nation-wide. The government canceled its proposed new taxes within hours; yet, the backlash could not be inhibited anymore. The masses were soon to account for roughly a million (BBC 7/12/2019). Their demands ranged from improving the public infrastructure and securing a stable water and electricity supply, over ending corruption, recovering the stolen funds, holding those responsible accountable and introducing a just tax system, to the resignation of the government and the entire political class and abolishing political confessionalism (AI 2020).

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[150] The author´s observations and conversations with Lebanese from different walks of life in Beirut, Mount Lebanon and the South in October 2019.

The political establishment was shaken in its foundations in the face of this revolutionary uprising. “All means all” became the key-slogan of the demonstrators, making it clear that they were not ready to make any differences between the members of the political class. On October 18th, protestors rioted FPM, Hizbullah and Amal offices in Nabatiyah and elsewhere. Others attempted storming the Grand Serail. Walid Jumblatt and the PSP organized anti-Aoun rallies in the Druze strongholds of Mount Lebanon. Hassan Nasrallah, in the morning of October 19th, held a speech in which he decried the proposed taxes and expressed strong sympathy with the popular movements´ core demands. Yet, he also made it clear that Hizbullah was against the fall of the government in this particular situation, implying that Lebanon was targeted and was to be left vulnerable without a government (Nasrallah 19/10/2019[151]).

The US was evidently opposed to what its leadership saw as a “Hizbullah-government” anyway and now overtly supported the demands for its resignation. The first to opt-out was Samir Geagea and all four Lebanese Forces ministers announced their resignation on October 19th (Al-Jazeera 20/10/2019). In the following weeks, the popular movement gained steady ground and received much international attention, while the activists frequently closed down central roads and bridges. The army and security forces repeatedly clashed with the protestors when deployed to reopen these places. Explicit demands of the masses for President Aoun to resign and denunciations of Hasan Nasrallah and Nabih Birri led to clashes between their followers and the protestors. In a number of instances, coordinated acts of intimidation occurred that appeared to have been ordered from Amal´s and Hizbullah´s leaderships, who yet distanced themselves from these actions. Aoun reacted to the calls for his resignation by offering to hold a dialogue with the legitimate popular movement´s representatives, while categorically refusing to step-down. Nasrallah, in further speeches, repeated his earlier stances and pledged to seriously combat corruption but additionally pointed to the negative influence of foreign forces that were hostile to both the mandate of President Aoun and the current government in which Hizbullah was a key-player, warning against the prospect of civil war (e.g. Nasrallah 25/10/2019[152]).

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[151] Quoted after Alahednews.com 19/10/2020.

Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri, against the wishes of his central partners in the government, resigned on October 29th, leading to a sustained rift between the both sides. The protests and turmoil in the country continued, however, and so the leading political forces settled for the formation of a nominally technocratic cabinet under the academic and former minister of education, Hassan Diab. The compromise said that the new technocrat ministers were yet to be appointed by the respective political parties, which were the legally elected representatives. Even though it was obvious that this move would not satisfy the masses´ demands for radical change, Diab´s candidacy won the support of a slight majority of parliamentarians. The fact that it was backed by Hizbullah and its allies led to accusations of Diab being a mere ”Hizbullah puppet,” even though he has no known political affiliations. The new government was formed on January 21st, 2020.

The new prime minister was immediately confronted, not only with the ongoing protests, but also with safeguarding what was left of the Lebanese economy and bringing it back on track. Yet, by early March 2020, Diab was forced to announce the first instance of illiquidity in the country´s history, as Lebanon was unable to pay back a due bond of 1.2 Billion USD in time. The state now evidently stood at the brink of bankruptcy, compelling those responsible to engage in rescheduling negotiations with the creditors (Handelsblatt 9/3/2020). Around the same time, however, the global COVID-19 (“Coronavirus disease”) pandemic began overshadowing both the economic crisis and the popular uprising. On March 15th the government declared a state of emergency and by the end of the month all protest camps dispersed over the country had either been deserted voluntarily by the protestors in the face of the pandemic, or cleared by the security forces.

Next to this major socio-political upheaval, one other issue received notable attention in Lebanon. The US-Lebanese citizen Amer al-Fakhoury, nicknamed “the butcher of Khiam” – a former SLA member and senior ward at the Khiam detention camp, who had fled the country to Israel in 1998 and as of 2000 settled in the USA – reentered Lebanon in early September 2019. On September 13th, 2019 he was arrested and interrogated by the security forces (American Herald Tribune 23/9/2019). On March 16th, 2020, he was suddenly acquitted and released by the responsible military court on the basis that the statute of limitations had expired as the alleged offences took place more than a decade ago (Al-Jazeera 16/3/2020). The judgment, which came after notable US pressure to release the former Khiam ward, was met with a public outcry in Lebanon, sparking protests and prison riots. Three days later, on March 19th, a military judge issued a retrial of al-Fakhoury (Middle East Monitor 19/3/2020). Yet, the man left Lebanon on board a US helicopter departing from the US embassy the same day. This was met with another public outcry and sparked sharp condemnations including from Hizbullah, Amal, the FPM, Prime Minister Hassan Diab and President Michel Aoun. Yet, speculations circulated that al-Fakhoury´s getaway had occurred under implication of FPM politicians that had bent to the US pressure. Hizbullah faced accusations of having turned a blind-eye to the episode (Al-Jazeera 21/3/2020). This situation led to a number of accusations being exchanged via the social media networks between both parties´ bases. The FPM´s central media department, however, promptly issued a statement denying any involvement in al-Fakhoury´s departure (Ad-Diyyar 24/3/2020) and Nasrallah, on March 20th, declared that Hizbullah had no prior “information regarding the existence of a deal on the release of the 'Israeli' agent Al-Fakhoury.” (Alahednews.com 20/3/2020)

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[152] Quoted after Al-Manar 25/10/2019.

The October uprising proved problematic for all established political forces, yet, for the FPM and Hizbullah it constituted a true dilemma. On the one hand, Michel Aoun was president of the republic and the level of representation of the FPM, Hizbullah and March 8th in both the executive and the legislative put them in the political lead of the country, rendering them central addressees of the protestors. In their own view, however, while all notable political forces carried responsibility to a degree (as we know, representatives of the FPM and Hizbullah are aware of, and have acknowledged, their own shortcomings in this respect, if grudgingly), Lebanon´s disastrous socio-economic situation has not in the first place been caused by the current majority forces but by their predecessors, especially under Fouad Siniora´s premiership (2005-2009). The allies felt treated unfairly by the protestors, who were not willing to acknowledge such a difference. It moreover took the FPM and Hizbullah years of domestic struggle in the midst of regional turmoil to get where they are now in defiance of massive US and Saudi-Arabian efforts applied to abort their joint political march forward. Finally, in light of the civil war dragging on in neighboring Syria and regional turmoil in general, the allies´ uttered concerns that the indefinite continuance of the protests could lead to serious clashes in Lebanon, are not ill-founded.

On the other hand, the demands of the masses are basically no others than those raised by the allies themselves since many years. There is moreover no question about the movement´s principal legitimacy, given that the living conditions in Lebanon had reached a point unbearable to many, while those responsible for this situation did not feel any of the consequences themselves. So, how, if not by peaceful demonstrations and civil disobedience, should this ever be changed?

The popular movement brings together Lebanese from all communities and it has, arguably for the first time in modern Lebanon, pushed the ruling elite collectively in the defensive and forced its different components to make concessions. The COVID-19 pandemic has erstwhile aborted the protests and they might not resume immediately in its wake. Yet, what happened has happened and the structures are in place. Just as the "You Stink" campaign and protests that erupted in response to the waste crisis of 2015 were a mere preload to the recent developments; as long as the main concerns of the Lebanese people are left unaddressed, their anger will discharge anew upon the next occasion.

The events that unfolded in Lebanon shortly after the period of investigation illustrate how the mainly Maronite/ Christian FPM and the Shi`i Muslim Hizbullah have steadily deepened their joint nationalist course and grew into main pillars of the state up to the point of shielding it against the anger of a public protest movement of unprecedented dimensions. They thereby (each independently) clashed with the protestors, yet, recognize the legitimacy of their demands and ultimately seek conciliation. By becoming central components of the government, they have also assumed responsibility, not for the actions of previous governments, but for the unresolved consequences resulting thereof. Thus, whilst their desire to safeguard the fruits of their political victories of 2016 (Aoun becoming president of the republic) and 2018 (March 8 + FPM becoming the strongest parliamentary forces) is only natural; to do so, they will have to seriously address the main causes of popular despair and dissatisfaction. This holds true although their formal participation in the government has ended, for the time being, with the formation of the Diab cabinet in January 2020.

The degree of the FPM´s and Hizbullah´s possible success in confronting the challenges ahead of them will be conditioned by a whole array of variables. One of them is the outcome of the US presidential elections, to take place in November 2020. Another is, if there will be a subsequent change in the US´ dealing with Iran and Saudi Arabia respectively. More important, however, is the question, if the alliance will prevail, that is if the challenges to come will be tackled jointly, as in the past, or not. Especially the al-Fakhoury case has reignited speculations about the FPM-Hizbullah alliance being “shaken.” (Al-Liwaa 28/3/2020; Ad-Diyyar 24/3/2020) The findings of this study, in contrast, suggest that it will remain intact. This is, for one, because the frontlines that have centrally accompanied the alliance thus far have not experienced any significant modifications in the last months, even if a lot of other conditions – especially with respect to domestic stability and civil peace – have dramatically changed. Secondly, there is also an amount of “path dependency” at play, whereby it is more beneficial for an actor to continue in a path long followed because the transaction costs of abruptly changing it were disproportionally high. The same applies, for instance, with respect to Gibran Bassil´s hopes to become the next president of the republic, which are strongly based on Hizbullah´s anticipated support. Thirdly, the allies claim to follow a vision for Lebanon, which is explicated in their MoU. When taking this claim seriously, it must be noted that there is still much left to do. Fourthly and finally, the bonds between the two parties are not restricted to their political elites but extend to the grassroots, encompassing true integration. It is here where the alliance has its most ardent advocates. Just as forging the alliance was largely an outcome of the two bases´ approval; any change to this status quo would have to take their response into account no less.

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APPENDIX

Full text of the Memorandum of understanding between Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement

signed by Michel Aoun and Hassan Nasrallah
Beirut (Lebanon)/ February 6th, 2006
Translated by Joseph Hitti[154]

Introduction

The first meeting ever between the head of the Change and Reform Bloc, MP Michel Aoun, and the Secretary General of Hezbollah, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, took place today afternoon at St. Michael Church in Shiah in the presence of Mahmoud Comati and Ghaleb Abu-Zeinab from Hezbollah, and Gebran Bassil, Ziad Abs and Fuad Al-Ashkar from the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM). The meeting was held under high security measures around the periphery of the church.

The meeting lasted 3 hours, at the end of which a joint memorandum of understanding between the FPM and Hezbollah was made public and read by Abu-Zeinab and Bassil. The following is the text of the memorandum dated February 6, 2006

1 – Dialogue

National dialogue is the only avenue to find solutions for Lebanon’s crises on stable and firm bases that are a reflection of a unifying consensual will. The following conditions must obtain to ensure its success:

A- The participation of the parties that have a political, popular and national standing with a round table as a venue.

B- Transparency, openness, and placing the interests of the nation above any other interest, through the reliance on self-driven will, and a free and committed Lebanese decision-making.

C- Include all issues of a national character and requiring general concordance.

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[154] This version of Joseph Hitti´s translation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the FPM and Hizbullah has been taken in full from Voltairenet.org (2006). However, the author has edited the heading and conducted minor changes in form.

2 – Consensual Democracy

Consensual democracy remains the fundamental basis for governance in Lebanon, because it is the effective embodiment of the spirit of the Constitution and of the essence of the pact of shared coexistence. From this standpoint, any approach for resolving national issues according to a majority- minority formula remains dependent on historic and social conditions for practicing effective democracy in which the citizen becomes a self standing value.

3 – The Electoral Law

The reform and systematization of political life in Lebanon require the adoption of a modern electoral law (in which proportional representation may be one of its effective variations) that guarantees the accuracy and equity of popular representation and contributes in accomplishing the following items:

A- Actuate and develop the role of the political parties in achieving civil society.

B- Limit the influence of political money and sectarian fanaticisms.

C- Make available equal opportunities for using the various media channels.

D- Secure the required means for enabling the expatriate Lebanese to exercise their voting rights. We demand the Government and Parliament to commit to the shortest possible deadline to enact the required electoral law.

4 – Building the State

Building a modern State that enjoys the trust of its citizens and is able to meet their needs and aspirations, and provide them with the sense of security and safety as to their present and future, requires that State to be erected on strong and solid foundations that make it impervious to destabilization and periodic crises whenever it is threatened by difficult circumstances or changes. This requires adhering to the following:

A- Adopt the standards of justice, equality, parity, merit and integrity.

B- An equitable and impartial judiciary is the essential condition for creating a State of rights, laws and institutions, which is based on:

a- The complete independence of the judiciary as an institution and the selection of judges with recognized competence in order to activate the work of all courts

b- Respect for the actions of the constitutional institutions; shelter them from political polarization; ensure the continuity of their work; and prevent their breakdown (the Judicial Council and the Constitutional Council). What happened in the Constitutional Council is an example of such a breakdown, particularly with respect to the issue of parliamentary challenges submitted to it and which have not yet been decided.

c- Address corruption at the root, because temporary and pacifying solutions are no longer sufficient. They have in fact become a simple exercise in deception that the beneficiaries of corruption at all levels carry out to perpetuate the theft of the resources of the State and the citizen. This requires:

I- Activate the financial and administrative control and inspection institutions and boards, with the mandate to separate them from the executive power in order to guarantee that their work is not politicized.

II- Conduct a complete survey of the pockets of corruption, in preparation for opening judicial investigations that ensure the prosecution of those responsible for corruption, and return the embezzled public funds.

III- Legislate the required laws that contribute to combating corruption in all its aspects and demand of the government that Lebanon signs on the United Nations Treaty for Combating Corruption.

IV- Act toward a global administrative reform that ensures that the right person is assigned to the right position, particularly those whose merit, competence and integrity are recognized. This can be accomplished by empowering the Civil Service Council to assume its full prerogatives. Timeframes and deadlines need to be set for actions on these issues because the factor of time has become critical. The matter requires solutions that are simultaneously judicious and rapid and that use the time factor to their advantage instead of the corrupt using it to theirs.

5 – The Missing During the War

To turn the page of the past and have global national reconciliation, all the outstanding files of the war must be closed. The file of the missing in the war requires a stance of responsibility to end this anomalous situation and put the parents’ minds at ease. The parents cannot be expected to forgive without respecting their rights to know the fate of their children. Which is why we ask all the forces and parties that participated in the war for their full cooperation to uncover the fate of the missing and the locations of the mass graves.

6 – The Lebanese in Israel

Whereas both sides are convinced that the presence of Lebanese citizens in their homeland is better than their presence in enemy territory, a resolution of the question of the Lebanese residing in Israel requires a speedy action to ensure their return to their country while taking in consideration all the political, security and livelihood circumstances surrounding the matter. On this basis, we issue a call to them to promptly return to their country at the basis of the call by His Eminence Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah following the Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon and the speech delivered by General Michel Aoun at the first assembly of Parliament.

7 – The Security Question

First- political assassinations: Any form of political assassination is condemned and rejected because of its violation of basic human rights, the most important foundations of the existence of Lebanon represented by difference and diversity, and the essence of democracy and its practice. Therefore, to the extent that we condemn the assassination of His Excellency the martyr President Rafik Hariri and all assassinations and assassination attempts that preceded and followed it leading to the assassination of MP Gibran Tueni, we emphasize the importance of proceeding forward with the investigation according to the officially-approved mechanisms in order to uncover the truth, which is an issue that cannot be subjected to any compromise because it is a required condition to achieve justice and serve it against the criminals, as well as to bring an end to the cycle of murder and bombings. For this reason, it is an obligation to distance these issues from any attempts at politically exploiting them, which would harm their essence and the essence of justice that must remain above any political conflicts or disagreements.

Second- Security Reforms: A reform of the Security Services is an inseparable part of the broader reform process of the basic State institutions, and to rebuild them on sound and solid bases. Given the delicate position that the Security Services occupy in protecting and defending a stable security environment in the country against any breaches or threats, the process of building those Services must be given special attention. As such, the government is hereby urged to assume its full responsibilities as follows:

A- Put in place an integrated security plan based on the centralization of decision in security matters and a clear definition of enemy versus friend, the foci of security threats, including the question of terrorism and security breaches that must be addressed.

B- Neutralize the Security Services against any political considerations and patronages, such that their full loyalty is to the nation alone.

C- Assign the responsibility of the Services to personalities with recognized competence and integrity.

D- Security measures must not be in conflict with the basic freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, with first the freedom of expression and political action that do not threaten security and public stability.

E- Constitute a joint Parliamentary-Security Services committee that would oversee and control the reform and building processes of the Security Services.

8 – Lebanese-Syrian Relations

The establishment of mutual and sound Lebanese-Syrian relations requires a review of the past experience and drawing the necessary conclusions and lessons in order to avoid the accumulated mistakes, blemishes and breaches. This is in order to pave the way to re-cast these relations on clear bases on parity and the full and mutual respect for the sovereignty and independence of both States, and on the grounds of a rejection of a return to any form of foreign tutelage.

Therefore, it is required:

A- That the Lebanese government take all legal measures and procedures pertaining to the assertion of the Lebanese identity of the Shebaa Farms and present these to the United Nations, after the Syrian State has declared the Shebaa Farms to be fully Lebanese in identity.

B- Delineate the borders between Lebanon and Syria, while eliminating the tensions that could break down the process, as both Lebanon and Syria have a long-standing need to complete this process as part of an agreement by the two countries.

C- Demand the Syrian State to fully cooperate with the Lebanese State in order to uncover the fate of the Lebanese detainees in Syrian prisons in the absence of provocation, tension and negativity that would hinder a positive resolution to this file.

D- Establish diplomatic relations between the two countries and provide appropriate conditions for them, which would move the relation from one between individuals and groups to one between institutions in order to secure their permanence and constancy.

9 – Lebanese-Palestinian Relations

Addressing the Palestinian file requires a global approach that asserts, on one hand, the respect by the Palestinians of the authority of the Lebanese State and their compliance with its laws, and on the other hand, the reaffirmation of solidarity with their cause and their recovery of their rights, in accordance with the following rules:

A- The social condition of the Palestinians requires a strong attention to improving their living conditions and securing a decent standard for the bases of a dignified human life according to the mandates of bilateral cooperation and the human rights charter, in addition to giving them the required facilitations to move inside and outside of Lebanese territory.

B- The Right of Return of the Palestinians is a fundamental and permanent right, and the rejection of the settling of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon is an issue that has the consensus of the Lebanese people and cannot be conceded under any circumstance.

C- Define the relationship between the Lebanese State and the Palestinians in a single institutional Palestinian framework that would be a legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in Lebanon in a manner conducive to proper coordination and cooperation.

D- Address the issue of bringing the practice of weapons outside the camps to an end, and make arrangements for the security situation inside the camps. This must be done as part of a serious, responsible and close dialogue between the Lebanese government and the Palestinians, leading to the exercise of the State’s authority and laws over all Lebanese territory.

10 – The Protection of Lebanon and Preserving its Independence and Sovereignty

The protection of Lebanon and the preservation of its independence and sovereignty are a national public responsibility and duty, guaranteed by international treaties and the Human Rights Charter, particularly in confronting any threats or dangers from any source that could harm them.

Therefore, carrying arms is not an objective in itself. Rather it is an honorable and sacred means that is exercised by any group whose land is occupied, in a manner identical to the methods of political resistance. In this context, Hezbollah’s weapons should be addressed as part of a global approach that falls within two bounds:

The first bound is the reliance on justifications that meet a national consensus for keeping the weapons, which would constitute a source of strength for Lebanon and the Lebanese people, and the other bound is the definition of objective conditions that would lead to a cessation of the reasons and justifications for keeping those weapons. Since Israel occupies the Shebaa Farms, imprisons Lebanese resistance members and threatens Lebanon, the Lebanese people should assume their responsibilities and share the burden of protecting Lebanon, safeguarding its existence and security and protecting its independence and sovereignty by:

A- Liberating the Shebaa Farms from the Israeli occupation.

B- Liberating the Lebanese prisoners from Israeli prisons.

C- Protecting Lebanon from Israeli threats through a national dialogue leading to the formulation of a national defense strategy over which the Lebanese agree to and subscribe to by assuming its burdens and benefiting from its outcomes.

Général Michel Aoun
Hassan Nasrallah