



The Ideological Transformation of Hezbollah Since its Involvement in the Syrian Civil War : Local Perspectives and Foreign Observations

Mémoire

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Résumé

Le Hezbollah a été, et est toujours, une organisation sectaire impliquée dans un système politique où il est contraint de s'y imposer pour avoir un poids politique fort vis-à-vis d'autres acteurs sectaires en place. Lorsque le conflit avec Israël, un ennemi clairement reconnaissable selon des critères nationaux, linguistiques, ethniques et religieux, s'est intensifié contre la nation libanaise, le Hezbollah s'est auto-prétendu être le protecteur de la nation libanaise. La guerre civile syrienne est un conflit principalement entre Arabes et embourbé par le sectarisme, a une fois de plus donné au Hezbollah un ennemi clairement défini. Cependant, contrairement à Israël, les ennemis du Hezbollah sont désormais des Arabes sunnites, qui constituent également une importante minorité au Liban. Le conflit syrien a amené le Hezbollah à modifier radicalement sa politique étrangère et sa stratégie militaire pour faire face aux menaces émergentes dans son voisinage. Comment le Hezbollah a-t-il changé idéologiquement à la suite de la guerre civile syrienne ? La théorie de la sécurisation prédit que les élites utiliseront un petit problème de sécurité et le feront apparaître comme une menace importante pour la sécurité d'une société afin de concentrer les ressources et de gagner la confiance de la population. L'auteur suppose que le Hezbollah a permis de sécuriser le pays face à la menace posée par l'État islamique, comme il l'a fait avec Israël, transformant ainsi son idéologie pour être encore plus nationaliste qu'avant la guerre civile syrienne. Afin de tester cette théorie, un travail de terrain a été effectué au Liban afin de déterminer si le Hezbollah insistait sur son rôle dans la protection de la nation libanaise contre la menace de l'État islamique. Les conclusions de l'étude qualitative suggèrent que, alors que le secrétaire général du Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, défendait le rôle du Hezbollah dans la protection de la communauté imaginée libanaise contre la menace de l'État islamique, l'implication du Hezbollah en Syrie impliquait qu'il adhère plus à une idéologie nationaliste sectaire, comparée à ce qu'il l'avait fait contre Israël avant. De plus, le discours physique du Hezbollah continue de susciter le symbolisme islamiste universaliste.

Abstract

Since its creation, Hezbollah has been a sectarian organization in a political system where it has been compelled to compete for power against other sectarian actors. However, at times when conflict with Israel escalated, an enemy that was clearly distinguishable via national, linguistic, ethnic, and religious criteria, Hezbollah often claimed to be the protector of the Lebanese nation. The Syrian Civil War, a conflict mainly between Arabs that is mired by sectarianism, has once again given Hezbollah a clearly defined enemy. However, unlike Israel, Hezbollah's enemies are now Sunni Arabs, which is also a large minority within Lebanon. The Syrian conflict caused Hezbollah to dramatically alter its foreign policy and military strategy to confront such emerging threats within its neighbourhood. How has Hezbollah ideologically changed as a result of the Syrian Civil War? Securitization theory predicts that elites will use a small security issue and make it appear as a large security threat to a society in order to concentrate resources and gain the trust of the population. From being a sectarian actor in Lebanese politics, the author hypothesises that Hezbollah securitized the threat posed by the Islamic State to the Lebanese nation, as it has done with Israel, thus transforming its ideology to be even more nationalist than prior to the Syrian Civil War. In order to test this theory, fieldwork was conducted in Lebanon to observe if Hezbollah emphasized its role in protecting the Lebanese nation against the threat of the Islamic State. Findings from the qualitative study suggest that while Hezbollah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah advocates Hezbollah's role in protecting the Lebanese imagined community from the threat of the Islamic State, Hezbollah's involvement in Syria has meant that it engages in a more sectarianized nationalist ideology than it previously did with Israel. Furthermore, Hezbollah's physical discourse continues to elicit universalist Islamic symbolism.

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Introduction

Political and social movements use ideology as a method of justifying, interpreting, and challenging the surrounding social-political order (McAdam, Doug, et al., 1996). The success with which a social or political movement constructs and expresses the set of explanatory and normative beliefs and assumptions that make up its ideology can often translate into its competitive advantage over contending movements.

In the modern nation-state, nationalist ideology, where nations are “imagined communities,” according to Benedict Anderson, is the most common form of political ideology that fabricates a collective intersubjective identity for a population and legitimates groups’ power. However, in Lebanon, sectarianism, where political ideology is tied to a specific religious community, is also a compelling narrative that has so often characterized the ideology of the myriad actors in Lebanese state and society. In the Lebanese political realm, sectarian and nationalist ideologies of organizations and movements both blend and compete with each other as elites vie for political power over populations.

Authors of sectarianism often take a constructivist and instrumentalist approach in explaining the ideological power of sectarianism in Lebanon: Just as history demonstrates state leaders’ use of nationalist fervour in the pursuit of political power, sectarianism is also an ideology in which elites can play a manipulative role and exploit the religious identity of populations in order to further their own political goals (Cammett, 2014; Haddad, 2011; Salloukh, Barakat, Al-Habbal, Khattab, & Mikaelian, 2015; Wehrey, 2018). Writers also admit that sectarianism in Lebanon has existed since European colonization, and that it will continue to exist for years to come. It is reproducing. In reviewing Paul Kingston’s book (2013), Di Peri writes that according to “Kingston, the Lebanese sectarian democracy model produces circuits of path-dependence that create powerful obstacles to change, especially for civil society” (Di Peri, 2013).

Furthermore, like nationalism’s tendency to transform another nation into a threat, sectarianism can also frame different religious communities as menacing. That said, it is not always the case that the ideological protagonist’s foil belongs to the same classification of collective identities as

the protagonist. For example, the enemy of the nationalist German in the 1930s was portrayed primarily as the Jew (and not the Frenchman), and the enemy of the sectarian Sunni Jihadist in the Iraq War was the American (along with the Shiite).

The endurance of sectarianism's convoluted relationship with nationalism in Lebanese politics has most recently been demonstrated by the Lebanese Shia organization known as *Hezbollah* ("the party of God" in Arabic) during its involvement in the Syrian Civil War. This study qualitatively describes and illustrates how Hezbollah's expressed ideology has transformed as a result of its participation in the Syrian Civil War and how it is linked to both sectarianism and nationalism, along with universal Islamic symbolism.

The conflict in Syria emerged in 2011 in reaction to Syrian President Bashar Assad's violent suppression of civil protests across the country in early 2011. The war in Syria is a conflict that has, so far, displaced more people than the entirety of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (Connor, 2018; UNRWA, 2017). The war has left over 500 000 people dead (Reuters, 2018). Apart from engulfing and destroying a once key regional power and nation-state, the war brought further destruction to Iraq and led to attacks in Lebanon, Turkey, and even the European Union. The civil war turned international once foreign powers such as Iran, Russia, Iraqi militias, and western powers began a direct role in the fighting. Other countries, such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Turkey, took a less direct role as well. Although the Lebanese government's military influence in the conflict has been trivial, Hezbollah is a Lebanese political movement and non-state actor that played a critical role in altering the course of the conflict and helped to turn the tide in favour of President Assad.

Political and social movements' ideologies are continually shifting and changing as they adapt to new external and internal threats and environmental transformations. Hezbollah was born during the highly sectarian Lebanese Civil War and it offered political Shiism and Velayat-e faqih as its guiding ideology while also championing the Palestinian cause, in contrast to its leftist Shi'a rival Amal. Although Itani (2007) writes that "a close reading of the party's doctrine and belief system demonstrates that Hizbullah is not a Lebanese nationalist movement, nor has it ever been one," with the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990, the elites of Hezbollah played national politics

and toned-down sectarian rhetoric and attempted a balancing act of Shia and Lebanese nationalist ideology. It intermingled both ideologies against its primary scapegoat, the state of Israel, as it claimed to be leading the “Islamic Resistance.” Hezbollah framed itself as the only liberator of the Lebanese against Israel after the Jewish state’s withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 and again during the 2006 July War. During the early years of the 21st century, one may also witness Hezbollah’s instrumentalist usage of nationalism via its nationalist claim to the Sheb‘a Farms: Salloukh, Barakat, Al-Habbal, Khattab, and Mikaelian (2015) write that “Hizbullah’s seemingly newly found interest in the Sheb‘a Farms was considered—especially by the Christian political establishment—as a pretext to maintain its weapons arsenal”. Furthermore, Hezbollah even mobilized Arab and Palestinian nationalism to gain popular influence amongst its Palestinian brethren and Lebanese and other Arabs who were sympathetic to Palestinian grievances. It should also be noted that throughout its history, Hezbollah’s domestic policy focused on providing previously marginalized Shia in Lebanon with basic social services, such as healthcare and religious and secular education services (Azani, 2011), which is a form of sectarian welfare.

However, the eruption of the Syrian Civil War led to Hezbollah’s direct and influential involvement in the conflict, along with the transformation of Middle Eastern allegiances across the region. Hezbollah’s participation in the conflict on the side of President Assad also had significant consequences for the organization. Salloukh and his coauthors (2015) write that “Hizbullah’s public declaration of support for what was otherwise portrayed across the region as an oppressive, sectarian ‘Alawi regime further inflamed sectarian tensions in Lebanon and the region and delegitimized the party in the eyes of the majority of Arabs and Muslims.” The conflict also led to the deaths of thousands of Hezbollah’s soldiers and drained the organization’s finances. Because involvement in the Syrian Civil War dramatically altered Hezbollah’s military strategy, foreign policy, and organizational resources, Hezbollah’s ideology also did not remain stagnant.

Firstly, it should be noted that Israel was no longer the main threat to Hezbollah’s armed forces and Israel’s role in the Syrian conflict, while not non-existent, was limited. Therefore, Hezbollah was forced to frame its involvement in Syria beyond the anti-Zionist lens. At first, Hezbollah justified its involvement in Syria to the Lebanese public and its Shia base via sectarian ideology by citing the need to protect Shia shrines and Shia villages on the Syrian border. However, both

the Assad regime's and Hezbollah's discourses have also expressed their desire to protect the sovereignty of their respective nation-states. Therefore, given the void that Israel's absence in the Syrian Civil War created in Hezbollah's ideological framing process, the organization found a new existential threat with the emergence of the Islamic State, a Sunni jihadist proto-state. With the strengthening of the Islamic State and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, and the radicalization of many Sunni Arab opposition groups in Syria, Nasrallah portrayed Hezbollah's involvement in Syria as one of immense sacrifice for the safety of Lebanon and its multi-faith society (Exum, 2017; JPost, 2015; Khoury, 2018; Soffer, 2014). Furthermore, Hezbollah-allied Speaker of the House Nabih Berri (from the Amal party) said that if "it had not been for Hezbollah there [in Syria], ISIL would have been here [in Lebanon]" (Al Manar, 2018e). Even in 2018, the organization continued to use the argument of protecting the Lebanese nation as a way of justifying its involvement in the Syrian Civil War.

Keeping in mind the competing national and sectarian identities in Lebanon and the organization's shift away from framing Israel as the enemy and towards framing Sunni Jihadist groups in Syria, how has Hezbollah transformed ideologically as an organization since its involvement in the Syrian Civil War? During times of violent political conflict, Corstange and Young (2018) note that "aptly framed narratives could alter citizens' views dramatically by focusing their attention on different aspects of an issue." As a principal actor in the Syrian Civil War, Hezbollah has needed to engage in ideological framing of the conflict for its Lebanese audience. Securitization theory stipulates that elites will frame something or some group that is often not immediately threatening as an urgent and existential security threat that requires public mobilization. Balzacq (2010) explains that "securitization theory elaborates the insight that no issue is essentially a menace. Something becomes a security problem through discursive politics." Hezbollah's involvement has mandated its concentration and consumption of men and resources from Lebanon in Syria. During the Syrian Civil War, the radical jihadist groups have been a well-defined, gruesome, and contemporary actor. Furthermore, stability in Lebanon, something that Hezbollah needs to flourish, is based on maintaining the sectarian status quo. Therefore, the hypothesis of this study stipulates that Hezbollah has attempted to securitize and hijack the threat of "the Sunni Jihadist" in Syria to the Lebanese nation in order to justify its involvement in the Syrian Civil War, both verbally through speeches of Hezbollah's officials and physically via its media and public imagery.

As a result, sectarian conflict in the Middle East has led Hezbollah to embrace a nationalistic discourse, causing a further shift away from sectarianism in Hezbollah's ideology.

To test securitization theory and Hezbollah's potential nationalist ideological transformation following the rise of the Islamic State, this study qualitatively interviewed a small sample of twenty-seven Lebanese participants while also engaging in non-participant observation in the field in Lebanon in search of Hezbollah's expressed ideology. Observation was undertaken in neighbourhoods and regions controlled by Hezbollah, and Hezbollah's media was examined, looking for recent public demonstrations of nationalism, anti-Jihadism, sectarianism, universalist Islamic symbolism, and any other type of ideology and symbolism relevant to the research in question. Furthermore, the study interviewed Lebanese participants in order to understand how they believed Hezbollah had changed ideologically, even if they did not belong to the Shia community in Lebanon. Results from the qualitative study suggest that Hezbollah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah securitized the threat of Sunni Jihadists to the Lebanese nation as a way of justifying Hezbollah's role in the Syrian Civil War. While such a discourse was nationalist, and constituted an increased discourse about Hezbollah's commitment to protecting Lebanon, it represented a shift in Hezbollah's ideology from a form nationalism that used another nation, Israel, as the primary mortal threat to Lebanon, towards a more sectarianized form of nationalism. Rather than only framing the Islamic State, Hezbollah ideologically portrayed all Sunni Muslim rebels against whom it was fighting in Syria as a radical existential threat to the Lebanese nation. However, Hezbollah did not physically alter in such a manner: Through its physical portrayal of itself, via banners, speakerphones, posters, murals, and flags, Hezbollah focused more on advocating universalist Islamic symbolism, along with its continued discourse of anti-Zionism, than it did on securitizing the Islamic State's threat to the Lebanese nation. There also appeared to be a visible demonstration of an affinity for the Islamic Republic of Iran, a geopolitical discourse.

Such a study is critical in order to understand how elites express ideology to construct and manipulate a population's political identity. Much of the research that focuses on sectarian identity in Lebanon is concentrated on elites' actions while in positions of power. However, this study also focuses on the specific impacts of such actions on the daily lives of ordinary people and the public interpretation of such impacts. Furthermore, research about the effects of the Syrian Civil War on

Lebanese society has concentrated mainly on Muslim perceptions of the Islamic State (Haddad, 2017) or about the attitudes of Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon (Corstange & York, 2018). While the global impact of the Islamic State has led to exhaustive literature, the study of Hezbollah's role in Lebanon has been less comprehensive, although still significant, despite the immediate impact that it has on Lebanon. In addition, Hezbollah matters for both Lebanon and the wider Middle East: Hezbollah's involvement in Syria has "caused a further deterioration in domestic and regional sectarian relations and led to a wave of terrorist attacks against Shia-populated areas housing Hizbullah's core constituency" (Salloukh et al., 2015). Finally, those studies that do focus on perceptions of Hezbollah in Lebanon have so far been quantitative rather than qualitative (Suh, 2014; Rodriguez-Gitler, 2017). And, while comprehensive and enlightening, such quantitative studies are not meant to delve into the personal complexities of everyday life underlying competing sectarian and national narratives. Having said that, as will be demonstrated during the chapter on methodology, this study is like the financial statements of a corporation: it is neither predictive nor prescriptive. Instead, it attempts to objectively take a descriptive snapshot of Lebanese politics and society during a particular point in time.

How This Thesis is Organized

The first chapter of this thesis is both the literature review and the theoretical framework. Chapter 1 outlines the past studies on sectarianism and nationalism in Lebanon and the Syrian Civil War. It also explains the theoretical framework and the works that contribute to the theorizing. Chapter 2 focuses on the history of sectarianism and nationalism in Lebanon. Chapter 3 describes the methodology during the study and the necessity of using qualitative research methods to examine and scrutinize sectarianism and nationalism in Lebanese state and society. Chapter 4 outlines the findings of the study while placing them in the current theoretical debate about sectarianism and nationalism in political theory. The conclusion summarizes the research project and the main takeaways.

Chapter 1: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Literature Review

When it comes to Hezbollah's involvement in the Syria Civil War, past studies, including journalistic, grey literature, and academic ones, have attempted to explain either Hezbollah's motivation for engaging in the conflict or the conflict's impact on Hezbollah from an organizational perspective. In describing why Hezbollah decided to intervene in Syria, Byman, and Saab (2014) write that the Sunni jihadists operating in Syria did actually pose a formidable threat to the stability of Lebanon and Hezbollah's existence. Furthermore, analysts confirm that Hezbollah could not lose Syria as a critical ally should the Assad regime be replaced by an Islamist or western-friendly regime (Bahout, 2016). Authors also agree on the paramount importance for Hezbollah to maintain its arms route from Iran through the airport in Damascus in order to continue armed resistance against Israel (Nasr, 2016; Norton, 2014).

Authors who have examined the impact of the Syrian Civil War on Hezbollah often cite its economic and military transformation. Recently, Hezbollah has struggled financially. Given that Iran has faced crippling sanctions for its nuclear program and owing to the fact that Hezbollah pays the families of its martyrs killed in combat, Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian Civil War has undermined the organization's cash flow. Others look at the military impact of fighting in Syria and claim that the conflict has helped Hezbollah develop into a modern military fighting power that will be able to pose an even graver threat to Israel's security (Daher, 2016).

A few sources have covered Hezbollah's ideological transformation. Often, they claim that Hezbollah has radicalized along sectarian lines because of the sectarian nature of the Syrian Civil War. Through the organization's constant demonization of the rebel opposition as jihadists, terrorists, and radicals who engage in excommunication (i.e. *takfiri*), Hezbollah is largely believed to have also exploited religious identity (Smyth, 2015; Tokmajyan, 2014). On the other hand, and as a key source that helped develop this study's hypothesis, Suechika (2018) writes that it is not so much Hezbollah that has exploited sectarianism, but rather the opposition:

“In reality, the organization has never adopted a sectarian discourse in its political and military activities; rather, it has had a discourse that combines ‘true Islam’ and ‘Lebanese nationalism.’ Hezbollah, along with other Lebanese political factions, has been plausibly opposed to any form of sectarianism or sectarian-oriented mindsets. As far as the Syrian conflict is concerned, it was the takfiri jihadists who employed the anti-Shia sectarian discourse to mobilize its sectarian constituencies inside and outside of Syria, not Hezbollah.”

(Suechika, 2018)

The goal of this study is not to understand why Hezbollah was involved in the Syrian conflict. It does not seek to understand if Hezbollah’s motivation was national, sectarian, or economic. Given the interview-ban within Hezbollah’s ranks, trying to understand the exact motives of Hezbollah’s involvement in Syria would be like working with black boxes. Therefore, this study examines how the war ideologically affected Hezbollah by examining Hezbollah’s physical demonstration of ideology on Lebanese streets and how Lebanese participants corroborate such observations. Other sources that cover the ideology of Hezbollah deal with Hezbollah’s transformation through history since its inception, rather than in the present period.

The recent studies that do study sectarianism in Lebanon and Hezbollah are mostly quantitative and do not specifically address Hezbollah’s ideology. A Pew survey from 2014 quantitatively researched views of Hezbollah in Lebanon. According to the study, 86% of Shias, 31% of Christians, and 9% of Sunni Muslims viewed Hezbollah in a positive light. This is less than half of the country. Nonetheless, the average unfavourable view of Hezbollah within Lebanon decreased from 64% to 59% in Lebanon over a seven-year period (Suh, 2014). In the years that followed 2014, if Hezbollah ideologically securitized the Islamic State’s threat to the Lebanese nation, as it appeared to have done so prior to this study, then the percentage of unfavourable views of Hezbollah in Lebanon may have further decreased. Such numbers are also in contrast to the rest of the Middle East, which has significantly increased hostility towards the organization. Over the same time period, unfavourable views of Hezbollah in Turkey rose from 66% to 85%. In Egypt, it skyrocketed from 41% to 83%, as it did in Jordan. In Palestine, where Hezbollah flags were once flown during the Second Intifada, the population also became more negative towards Hezbollah, from 20% in 2007 to 55% in 2014 (Rodriguez-Gitler, 2017).

Simon Haddad's 2005 study uses 256 interviews with ten interviewers to understand support for Hezbollah in general. However, this dates back to before the 2006 July War with Israel, which directly implicated Hezbollah and radically impacted Lebanese state and society. His study only examines Shia attitudes rather than Shia, Sunni, and Christian perspectives. Moreover, the study only assesses general levels of support for Hezbollah rather than a specific action or policy of the movement, such as its involvement in a foreign conflict. Haddad's results suggest that socioeconomic status and religiosity, independent of age and gender, positively affect support for Hezbollah.

Most studies about the impacts of the Syrian Civil War on Lebanese state and society deal with levels of support for the Islamic State. Haddad's 2017 study statistically examines Lebanese Muslims' views of ISIS using a sample of 302 respondents. His research suggests that attributes such as age, education, and marital status do indeed have a statistically significant impact on Lebanese support for the Islamic State. Interestingly, Haddad's study focuses on the enemy of Hezbollah, ISIS, and concludes that "adherence to the tenets of political Islam, sectarianism and educational attainment are major predictors of endorsement for ISIS" (Haddad, 2017). However, once again, his sample is limited to Muslims in Lebanon and his research does not focus on Hezbollah as an actor in the Syrian Civil War.

Another recent quantitative study examined ideological framing by actors from both sides of the conflict in the Syrian Civil War and was completed in the field in Lebanon (Corstange and York, 2018). However, this fascinating study examined the ideas and opinions of Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon and not of Lebanese nationals. Nonetheless, the study explores the competing narratives from different factions in the Syrian Civil War. The authors describe the main narratives as being 1) the opposition's telling of a struggle for freedom and democracy against the tyranny and dictatorship of the regime, in contrast to 2) the government's counterclaims of law and order against terrorism and foreign intervention. Corstange and York write that as a result, the opposition frequently denounced the Syrian government for playing the "sectarian card" as it attempted to fear monger minorities into supporting the regime. The authors conclude that, amongst Syrian refugees in Lebanon, sectarian narratives have an impact on people's perceptions of the conflict. Understandably, sectarian narratives are particularly salient amongst supporters of the Syrian

regime. Nonetheless, “exposure to competing arguments can counteract this effect” (Corstange and York, 2018).

This study differs from past studies in that it examines sectarian and national narratives using a qualitative lens. It looks at Lebanese, not Syrian, perceptions of Hezbollah’s transformation since its involvement in the Syrian Civil War, along with the author’s observations. Furthermore, this research is interested in learning about a sectarian organization’s potential relationship with Lebanese nationalism, a surprisingly under-examined subject in English publications.

Theoretical Framework

Defining Concepts: Nationalism and Sectarianism

Jonathan Turner (1989), wrote that concepts are the “basic building blocks of theory.” The two main concepts in this research project are nationalist ideology and sectarian ideology. Both are defined using a constructivist approach.

In answering the question, “what is ideology?” Eagleton (1991) writes that ideology possesses a “whole range of useful meanings, not all of which are compatible with each other.” Most frequently, ideology is the set of beliefs that have “to do with legitimating the power of a dominant social group” (Eagleton, 1991). Ideology is the medium through which meaning maintains relations of domination within society (Thompson, 1984) and through which meaning is used to justify social and political action, whether such action challenges or safeguards the political status quo (Seliger, 1976). Gramsci’s notion of political hegemony is political leadership that secures the consent to lead using ideology, or the “diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling class” (Bates, 1975). Through speeches, media, religious institutions, public symbols, ceremonies, and imagery, volunteer activities, individual activism, the education system, and other social services, political leaders transmit ideology to a population.

A basic definition of nationalism is a population's intersubjective belief in and devotion to a shared common historical memory, cultural traditions, political institutions, language, religion, ethnic background, and connection to a designated territory. However, given the frequency and profligacy associated with the utilization of the word "nationalism," and as with many concepts in political thought, there lacks a standardized definition in precisely defining nationalism. The world's myriad nationalisms may possess all of the above characteristics or, as in the case with Switzerland's, Belgium's, and Canada's civic, secular, and multilingual nationalisms, they may possess fewer characteristics than the above definition. Theories and explanations of the emergence of nationalism can broadly be summarized into three main time categories: Primordialism, modernism, and ethnosymbolism have so far dominated debates about nationalism (Ozkirimli, 2017). Having said that, there are, at times, new theories about nationalism that emerge, including, but not limited to, theories that adopt a feminist or post-colonial approach.¹

In defining nationalism, and nationalist ideology, Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" is necessary. Anderson argues that nationalism is used as a way of creating community between individuals who, more often than not, possess no acquaintance. According to Anderson, the nation is an imagined political community that is both limited and sovereign. The nation is a "community" because "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 2006). Rich or poor, the nation includes all. It is imagined because the members of the nation "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 2006). Even in Tuvalu (or any micro-state), no member knows every other member of the nation. The nation is also limited because no nation encompasses all of humanity, and unlike many universalist religions, no nation aspires to. Finally, it is sovereign because each nation strives for its own freedom against illegitimate and unpopular systems of governance such as dynasties and empires (Anderson, 2006).

¹ Partha Chatterjee, one of the most imminent post-colonial scholars in International Relations, was also one of the first scholars to critically engage with Benedict Anderson's book about nationalism, entitled *Imagined Communities* (Bergholz, 2018).

Anderson's work demonstrates his positive opinion of nationalism. Indeed, he is one of the rare writers of nationalism, along with Tom Nairn and Will Kymlicka, who does not view the phenomenon in a negative light (Ozkirimli, 2017). *Imagined Communities* was also written in the context of war between communist countries (Vietnam, China, and Cambodia) that proved the strength of nationalism over other political ideologies. Anderson was, therefore, fascinated by nationalism's "enormous emotional power, and its ability to make people willing to die for its sake" (Anderson, 2016). It should also be noted that since the world wars' humanitarian catastrophes and the rise of globalization, nationalism has become increasingly secular, civic, and inclusive, and decreasingly ethnic, religious, and exclusive.

The Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari supports Benedict Anderson with similar, although simpler, language by calling nations "intersubjective orders." They are neither subjective, because a nation is not dependent on the conscious experience of one person, nor are they objective because a nation cannot exist independently of human consciousness. Instead, nations, like the stock market that crashes when there is a lack of consumer and investor trust within society, exist only when there is a "communication network linking the subjective consciousness of many individuals." If one were to wish to change an intersubjective order such as a nation, one would have to change the minds of the thousands, millions, or billions of people that believe it (Harari, 2018). While beauty is in the eye of the beholder, the nation is in the minds of its citizens, and only so.

According to Anderson, nationalism developed as an intersubjectivity once the importance of three central elements to older societies had deteriorated. "Sacred languages and scripts (e.g., Latin), which were believed to be the sole keys to truth; the primacy of divine monarchs; and a cosmological sense of past time" (Bergholz, 2018) were eroded by mass printing and capitalism, both of which paved the way for the emergence of nations. As mentioned, Anderson is a modernist. He, like Ernest Gellner and Karl Deutsch, "reject the primordialist view of nations as historically immanent, arguing instead that the idea of nationality became compelling to people only in the modern period as a result of economic and attendant social changes" (Fearon and Laitin, 2000).

In explaining the emergence of nationalism, the imagined community that ideologically justifies the nation-state, this study also draws on another modernist theory of nationalism: Marxist

historian Eric Hobsbawm's invention of tradition implies that nationalism was the result of political transformation with the dawn of modernity. According to Hobsbawm, elites helped construct nationalism by exploiting "tradition" in society in order to counteract the threat posed to them by mass democracy. Three developments, in particular, the development of primary school, the creation of public ceremonies, and the mass production of public monuments (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2012) helped solidify nationalism as a social phenomenon. Furthermore, education, public ceremonies, monuments, and banners continue to be artefacts through which the controlling power can express and reinforce its ideology of choice.

In the Arab world, transnational ideologies have undermined the strength of nationalisms. Quintan Wiktorowicz wrote following the 9/11 attacks in 2001 that Salafist movements threatened nationalism in Arab countries. Wiktorowicz even uses Anderson's "imagined communities" to describe how the Salafi movement connects members committed to religious purification. The eventual goal of Salafists is to eradicate innovations in Islam "by returning to the pure form of Islam practiced by the Prophet and his Companions" (Wiktorowicz, 2001). Wiktorowicz (2005) divides the Salafi movement into purists, politicians, and jihadists. It is this last branch that has posed the most potent threat to the Arab nation and even contributed to the sectarianization and failure of Middle Eastern nation-states. During the Syrian Civil War, the Islamic State was, at its peak, the gravest threat that both the Assad regime and the Iraqi regime faced. Although the Islamic State was a grandiose portrayal of sectarianism threatening multiple nations and nationalisms in the Middle East, including those of Syria, Iraq, Kurdistan, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel, Hezbollah likely shifted towards further emphasizing nationalist ideology as a counternarrative.

Defining Sectarianism

It is critical to define sectarianism as well because Hezbollah may not have actually ideologically shifted towards nationalism and may have further radicalized towards sectarianism, as some authors suggest (as previously cited). While the recent surge in transnational jihadi Salafism has emerged as a new form of sectarianism within the Arab and Muslim world during the past 30 years, sectarianism within Lebanon is much older and even institutionalized. A basic definition of sectarianism would be when "religious cleavages politicise and become markers of conflict" (Darwich and Fakhoury, 2017). Nonetheless, this study takes a constructivist approach like Melani

Cammett's in her seminal work (2014). According to Cammett, sectarianism is predominantly about politics. Cammett views "sectarianism as a fundamentally political phenomenon rather than as the expression of essential cultural differences." Fanar Haddad concurs. He writes that discourse about sectarianism in the Arab world "portrays sectarian difference as a societal feature that is manipulated by elites, regimes and foreign forces into sectarian discord" (Haddad, 2011). Salloukh takes a similar approach: "the era of the homogenizing centralized authoritarian Arab state seems to be giving way to an era of dreadful sectarianism, anchored on presumably primordial but actually historically-constructed and very modern identities" (Salloukh et al., 2015). In other words, sectarianism is created from the top down, rather than as a grassroots movement within society or organizations. Cammett writes that "sectarian identity becomes politically salient through the witting and unwitting actions of political actors" (Cammett, 2014). Perhaps it is because of such actions that, as Alexander Henley writes, "one need only ask around in Beirut to discover the cynicism with which religious leaders are commonly regarded, even among the most pious of any sect" (Wehrey, 2017).

Writing in 2000, James Fearon and David Laitin juxtapose a constructivist approach in studying ethnic identity in civil wars with primordialism, or the now largely archaic belief that violence between different ethnic groups is the result of ancient and unchanging antipathies between groups (Fearon and Laitin, 2000), much like how the American media portrays sectarian conflict within the Middle East. Furthermore, regarding constructivism in defining sectarianism, it is fundamentally critical to note that while elites may be the ones constructing identities, they may be doing so unbeknownst to their own will.

What is most pertinent to this study from Cammett's work is her theoretical framework that defines sectarianism. Having said that, the premise of Cammett's work that "the more the parties [in Lebanon] pursue a state-centric strategy, using formal and institutional channels, the more they tend to offer trans-sectarian welfare services, in contrast to those parties pursuing an extra-state logic that tend, instead, to offer intra-sectarian services" (Di Peri, 2017) is also essential to understanding sectarian politics in Lebanon. Furthermore, other authors of sectarianism in Lebanon, such as Bassel Salloukh and Paul Kingston, agree with Cammett's conclusion that sectarian politics in Lebanon is self-perpetuating (Di Peri, 2017; Salloukh and al., 2015).

Securitization Theory

As mentioned, this study's hypothesis regarding how Hezbollah has ideologically changed since its involvement in the Syrian Civil War is formulated with the help of securitization theory. Those who developed securitization theory, Buzan and Wæver, claim that it is an act "through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat" (Buzan and Wæver, 2005). Wæver (1993) further emphasized the importance of elites during the process of securitization when he wrote that "something is a security problem when the elites declare it to be so." Securitization theory mainly emerged from the Copenhagen School in International Relations and believes that security is a socially constructed phenomenon (Darwich and Fakhoury, 2016). Just as sectarianism is the political and violent mobilization of religious identity by elites, "often, security issues are the result of leaders' efforts to understand and shape the world" (Balzacq, Léonard, and Ruzicka, 2016). In securitizing an issue, elites are able to accumulate society's monetary and human resources while simultaneously quelling pacifist qualms.

Balzacq defines securitization as follows:

I define securitization as an articulated assemblage of practices whereby heuristic artefacts (metaphors, polity tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes, emotions, etc.) are contextually mobilized by a securitizing actor, who works to prompt an audience to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thoughts, and intuitions), about the critical vulnerability of a referent object, that concurs with the securitizing actor's reasons for choices and actions, by investing the referent subject with such an aura of unprecedented threatening complexion that a customized policy must be undertaken immediately to block its development.

(Balzacq, 2010)

One of the most under-defined aspects of the securitization theory is the audience, even according to the leading developer of securitization theory, Ole Wæver (Kaunert and Léonard, 2010). Nonetheless, the audience is critical in securitization theory because securitization is an intersubjective process (Balzacq, Léonard, and Ruzicka, 2016). Therefore, in the case of

Hezbollah's justification for its involvement in Syria, this study defines its audience as Lebanese from all confessional backgrounds living or having lived in Lebanon.

Hezbollah as a Rational Actor

It is important to note that one of this study's major assumptions is that Hezbollah makes decisions as a rational actor. This means that, making use of rational choice theory in economics and sociology, Hezbollah makes decisions that it believes are in its best interests in order to ensure its continued survival as an organization. John Scott writes that "sociologists and political scientists have tried to build theories around the idea that all action is fundamentally 'rational' in character and that people calculate the likely costs and benefits of any action before deciding what to do" (Browning, Halci, & Webster, 1999). When asking if Hezbollah has towed a more nationalistic or a more sectarian line, the author does not mean to say that the top echelon of Hezbollah has become more ebullient about Lebanese fraternity or that its members are more pious Shia Muslims. Instead, this study assumes that Hezbollah is exploiting national and sectarian ideology for its own interests, being the organization's continued survival as a political party, militia, and social service provider in Lebanon, and even the wider Middle East region. Using rational choice theory, we can understand that whatever ideology Hezbollah exploits to justify its involvement in Syria, "a study of military activities inside Syria indicates that Hezbollah actually follows its political and geostrategic interests" (Tokmajyan, 2014).

The Demographics of Lebanon

Although only possessing a small population of 4.1 million,² Lebanon’s pantheon of religious groups is immense. The country boasts eighteen recognized religious minorities. They include Alawite, Armenian Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Assyrian Church of the East, Chaldean Catholic, Copts, Druze, Greek Orthodox, Isma’ili, Jewish, Latin Catholic, Maronite Catholic, Melkite, Greek Catholic, Protestant, Sunni, Shia, Syriac Catholic Church, and Syriac Orthodox Church. The largest groups are Shia, Sunni, Maronite Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and the Druze.³ Given the existence of two Armenian churches, the unique Armenian language, rather than the two different denominations, is the main characteristic identifying Armenians in Lebanon.

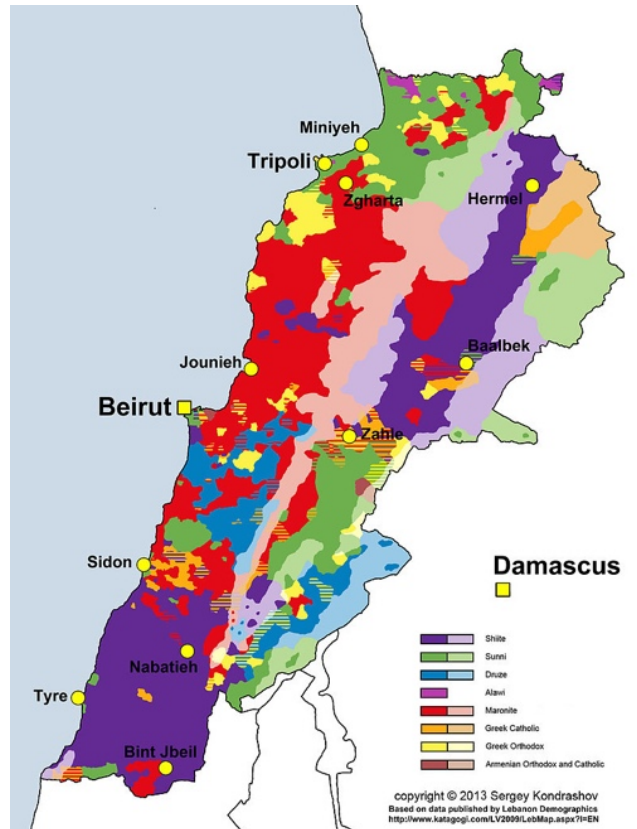


Image 2.1: A map that shows the labyrinthine distribution of Lebanon’s main religious groups.

The History of Shiism of Lebanon

The Shia population in Lebanon is of mixed origins: Some come from previous migratory waves of Arab Shiites to the Levant, while others come from Iran. Both the Mamluk and the Ottoman

² This figure does not include the 500 000 Palestinians, nor does it include the 1.5 million Syrian refugees living within Lebanese borders (Lust, 2016).

³ Because this thesis is about Hezbollah, in the Appendix one will find an in-depth history explaining the emergence of Shiism and the multiple Shia sects in existence today.

Empire persecuted Shiites in their Shia heartland of Lebanon, Jabal ‘Amil. As a result of the Safavid Empire’s conversion to Shiism in 1501, many Lebanese Shiites took refuge in Persia.

Few events in the modern history of Islam are as crucial as the Safavid conversion to Twelver Shiism beginning in the 16th century. It meant that Persia would over the following decades cease being Sunni. It also led to the global numerical domination of Twelver Shiism over the Ismailis and the Zaydis, the two other major sects in Shia Islam. Furthermore, as Twelver Shiism transformed Persian society, Persian culture would come to influence Twelver Shiism. Mixed marriages and migration back to the Levant ensued in the decades and centuries that followed (Alagha, 2012).

The Global Sunni-Shia Divide

The sectarian divide between Sunnis and Shias in geopolitics has not always been so evident. As conflict heightened between the Ottoman Empire, where the Sunni Caliphate was based, and the Safavid Empire, which had adopted Shiism as its official form of Islam in order to help solidify its newly established state, the sectarian divide widened. Furthermore, hatred for the Shia was exemplified in the (literally and figuratively) medieval writings of Ibn Taymiyya as he claimed the Shia to be heretical and mocked their admiration for a “hidden” Imam who was unable to provide any substantial leadership (see the Appendix for an explanation of Shia religious beliefs). Anti-Shiism within the Sunni community experienced a backward renaissance as writers such as Mawdudi, al-Banna, and Qutb equated Sunni Islam with the only true Islam, admonishing all other forms of “innovations” and interpretations of Islamic texts. However, with the rise of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, new revolutionary ideology empowered Shia around the world who would no longer be content living on the margins of society and in “poor, mountainous or desert areas with access to few resources and only the poorest land” (Owen, 2003). At the same time, throughout the final decades of the 20th Century, Saudi Arabia, possessing a Wahhabi religious ideology critical of Shiism, was able to transform into a regional power resulting from its remunerative reserves of oil.

In recent decades, sectarian violence has been most visible following the 2003 American invasion of Iraq, where violence erupted between Sunni and Shia communities in 2006. Today, the vast majority of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims are Sunnis. Only 10 to 15 percent are Shia. However, Shiites live in regions that are critical in global geopolitics. Roughly half the population of the "Shia crescent," a region spanning from Lebanon to Pakistan, are considered Shia, while the oil-rich Arab Gulf hosts a population that is almost 80% Shia (Nasr, 2016). Iran and Saudi Arabia, two religiously antipodal states rich in oil, theocratic ideology, and population size, feud for regional dominance.

Institutionalizing Sectarianism in Lebanon

Gilles Dorronsoro writes that "throughout the entire Muslim world the separation of the religious and political functions has historically been the norm: few ulema have exercised political power other than in situations of crisis which have been viewed as exceptions to the norm" (Dorronsoro, 2005). While this may be true, including in Lebanon where ulema do not possess any form of political control, both Muslim and Christian elites have exercised considerable political and societal influence within Lebanese state and society. Sectarianism in Lebanon is much older than most religious-themed conflicts today. The spread of the Ottoman Empire culminated in an Ottoman administration being imposed upon a majority Muslim Arab population in most of the Middle East and North Africa. Unlike under the Christian crusaders who violently persecuted Muslims, the Ottoman Empire gave certain protection to the religious minorities who were considered "people of the book," such as the Abrahamic religions of Judaism and Christianity. Guarantees of religious freedom came at a cost: a religious head tax, known as the *jizya*, was a required payment. However, Lebanon was treated differently. Given the large Maronite and Druze populations surrounding Mount Lebanon, the Ottoman Empire recognized Lebanese emirs and endowed them with a degree of autonomy (Mansfield, 2013).

During the reign of the Ottoman Empire, the capitulations institutionalized sectarianism within the Levant. The capitulations, beginning in 1453, were a series of agreements outlining economic privileges granted to European powers and foreign communities living within the Ottoman Empire. Eventually, they became based on religious identity, too. Soon the French were permitted to protect

Christian holy places and Catholics throughout the Levant. Russia claimed similar rights over Orthodox Christians and England over Lebanon's Druze and Jews (Mansfield, 2013). Many foreigners in the Middle East began living outside Ottoman law. The first significant outbreak of violence around Mount Lebanon occurred in 1840 between Druze and Christians (Werhey, 2018). For the Druze and Maronite elites living around Lebanon, sectarianism emerged as an instrument of increasing one's power:

During the course of the nineteenth-century, demographic changes in favor of the Christian population, increasing European penetration and economic incorporation into European markets inspired local elites to make appeals to the European powers along religious lines to legitimate their position in rapidly changing circumstances. Both the Maronite and Druze elites sought to cohere an exclusively religious definition of community, where loyalties of kinship, region and village were subsumed by an overarching religious solidarity.

(Makdisi, 1996)

In 1860, civil war broke out in Lebanon that resulted in a massacre of Christians in Damascus. The violence was in reaction to Ottoman reforms and the increasing European influence in the region, as epitomized by the capitulations. As a result, European powers intervened. Napoleon III even landed troops in Beirut (Mansfield, 2013). European powers created the special zone of Mount Lebanon and empowered a Christian governor (Hourani, 2013). While many Lebanese, and especially Westerners, conclude that sectarian identities are as old as the religions with which they identify, the tribulations of the 19th century, and the colonial sectarian institutionalization that followed, did much to cement and politicize the imagined differences between Lebanese religious groups (Werhey, 2018). Religious and colonial elites also tied social service provision to religious identity during this time. Throughout much of the 19th century, in reaction to Christian missionaries (predominately Catholic, but also American Protestant) establishing schools throughout the Levant, most religious communities within Lebanon also began provisioning social services. However, the underdeveloped, marginalized, and penurious Shiites were anomalistic as their schools were far and few between. Of the 41 Muslim schools that existed in Lebanon by 1920, only eleven were Shia (compared to 451 Christian-run schools) (Cammett, 2014).

The Development of the Lebanese Nation-State

Arab nationalism first emerged in the latter half of the 19th century with educated Muslims and Christians in Damascus and Lebanon (Hourani, 2013). Maronite elites and clergy later developed Lebanese nationalism as a reaction to both Arabism and Syrianism. In doing so, the elites exploited the myth of Phoenicia as an escape from Arabism (Firro, 2004). However, such ideas did not formulate until the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire with the Treaty of Lausanne, and the formation of an “independent” state of Lebanon was proclaimed on August 31st, 1920 as a French mandate (Hakim-Dowek, 1997; Rogan, 2012). Having said that, Hakim-Dowek (1997) writes that clerical and secular elites began conceiving some of the basic myths and core ideas that would later crystalize into Lebanese nationalism in the last half of the 19th century. The French created Lebanon’s constitution in 1926, based mainly on that of the Third Republic’s and proceeded in giving Christians an inordinate representation in the government.⁴ Administrators of the French mandate conducted a census of the myriad religious groups. According to that survey, Lebanon’s population was 28.6 percent Maronite, 22.4 percent Sunni, and 19.6 percent Shia (Faour, 2007).

The idea of a multi-faith Lebanese nation-state did not emerge in Lebanon until the late 1930s (Hourani, 2013). By World War Two, the French language had made a considerable impact on Lebanese society, and, although to a lesser extent, remains as a first, second, or third language for many Lebanese citizens. Desiring an independent and sovereign Lebanese state of their own, Lebanese faith leaders from divergent backgrounds worked together to create the unwritten National Pact during World War Two. Despite Lebanese national ambitions, the pact further institutionalized sectarianism in the Levant. According to the agreement, the president had to be a Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of the house a Shia Muslim, while Druze politicians would hold certain cabinet posts. Christians possessed a six to five ratio in parliament. Imitating the French colonial structure, Lebanon continued to uphold a system of confessionalism, or division of roles based on religious lines (Rogan, 2012).

The Lebanese Civil War

⁴ The document has since been modified twice, once in 1943 during decolonization and again in 1990 at the end of the civil war.

Lebanon witnessed the tragic triumph of sectarianism over nationalism via the deconstruction of Lebanese state institutions, such as the army, and the burgeoning of sectarian militias during the Lebanese Civil War from 1975 to 1990. While the history and complexity of the Lebanese Civil War are beyond the scope of this chapter, it should be noted that the conflict killed 150 000 people, resulted in foreign occupation by Syria and Israel, and prompted multilateral peacekeeping missions. The Ta'if Agreement officially concluded the Lebanese Civil War with modifications to its confessional system of governance and a stated determination to gradually find an alternative to the confessional system, or a religious form of Arend Lijphart's "consociationalism" (Lijphart, 1977). The agreement granted more powers to the Muslim positions of prime minister and speaker of the house (Cammett, 2014). The Ta'if Agreement redistributed parliamentary representation so that Muslims held 50 percent of the seats, while Christians held the other 50 percent. However, given the higher birth rates of Muslims in Lebanon, and the emigration of Christians from the Middle East, the demographics since the last survey have certainly changed. Not only is the Lebanese confessional system of governance a democratic failure because it reproduces sectarianism throughout society, but it is fundamentally flawed because it fails to give equal representation ("one man, one vote") to its citizens.

The Birth of Hezbollah

Within Lebanon, Amal was both the predecessor and the rival of Hezbollah. The leadership of Imam Musa al-Sadr, a Shia cleric born in Iran, helped unify the Shia of Lebanon, a grossly fragmented and impoverished population throughout much of the 20th century. Upon realising the underdevelopment and lack of political organization of the Lebanese Shia, al-Sadr created the Movement of the Deprived (Harakat al-Mahrumin), which, as so often happens with Lebanese political movements, eventually developed a militia and named it *Amal* ("hope" in Arabic) (Norton, 1987). Amal experienced a power vacuum after the Musa al-Sadr's disappearance during a trip to Libya. As a result, the organization splintered into multiple fractions. A group of previous Amal supporters embraced the Iranian Grand Ayatollah Khomeini's more radical call to creating an Islamic republic. This group became known as Hezbollah.

After the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the new Iranian regime began funding militant Shia groups within Lebanon, including the newly minted Hezbollah (Nasr, 2016). By 1996, “at least three 747 jumbo cargo jets were landing in Damascus every month ferrying weapons sent by Tehran to its minions in Hezbollah. Among the armaments were long-range Katyusha rockets, Russian-made Sagger anti-tank weapons, and other sophisticated ordnance” (Hoffman, 2006). However, most importantly, the Iranian Revolution gave Shiites throughout the Muslim world, a diverse people who were previously a disempowered minority in Sunni-dominated regions, a new inspiration and ideology to aspire to (Nasr, 2016). Having said that, the independence of Hezbollah from foreign actors, such as Iran and Syria, should be emphasized, despite modern rhetoric from Netanyahu, Donald Trump, and Lebanese Phalangists to create an alternative narrative of “Iranian meddling” and “Iranian proxies.” Although there exist economic and military ties to the Iranian regime, Lebanon’s Hezbollah is very much an independent organization.

At first, when Hezbollah operated as a loose alliance of Shiite community leaders that were disenfranchised by the Amal movement (Cammett, 2014), before 1985, the organization operated clandestinely (Alagha, 2012). However, it did eventually take the form of a concrete organization with the publication of its Open Letter of 1985, a written letter outlining its policy against Zionism and imperialism and its position on Jihad and pan-Islamism (Cammett, 2014). Hezbollah was once an organization that was convinced that Lebanese from all confessional backgrounds would “willingly opt for the greater justice of God’s law once the Islamic system of government had proven its superiority to secular nationalism” (Rogan, 2012). Nonetheless, ideological discourse changed when Nasrallah would later say in 2006 that a referendum on the subject of creating an Islamic republic would need an affirmative vote of at least 90% rather than 50% plus one (Daher, 2014). As parliamentary session resumed in Beirut following the Ta’if agreement, Hezbollah tamed itself, even making allies with its old rival Amal in the late 1990s after Syria helped broker an agreement that would lead to Amal and Hezbollah running on joint ballots. During this time Hezbollah also changed its flag: From reading “Islamic Revolution in Lebanon” (*el-thawra el-islamiyya fy lubnan*), Hezbollah’s new flag read “Islamic Resistance in Lebanon” (*el-muquawama el-islamiyaa fy lubnan*) (Daher, 2014). Such moves give the appearance of Hezbollah shifting its tone from sectarianism to nationalism.

New Divisions in Lebanon

The political status quo in Lebanon dramatically reconfigured on February 14th, 2005 when a massive car bomb in Beirut murdered the recently retired Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. Anti-Syrian protests across Lebanon erupted, blaming Syria for the assassination, charges the Syrian regime denied. Hezbollah organized counter-rallies, both to remember Hariri and to thank Syria for its legacy in Lebanon. The March 14th Alliance emerged from the initial anti-Syrian protests that culminated in the March 14th Cedar Revolution, a moment that witnessed both the resignation of the Lebanese pro-Syrian Kirami government and the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. In recent years, the March 14th Alliance has consisted of a broad coalition of Christian groups, such as Kataeb and the Lebanese Forces, and Sunni parties, such as Hariri's Future Movement. On February 6th, 2006, Hassan Nasrallah and Michel Aoun, head of the Free Patriotic Movement, signed a Memorandum of Understanding in an attempt to balance the March 14th Alliance. What developed has since been named the March 8th Alliance. The March 14th Alliance has tended to seek closer links with Saudi Arabia and the United States. Hariri's son and political successor, Saad Hariri, even wants to make peace with Israel if the Jewish state is willing to pay for a large part of the Lebanese debt (Daher, 2014). In contrast, the March 8th Alliance, consisting of mostly Shia parties, along with smaller Christian, Druze and Sunni parties, seeks closer ties and influence with Iran, Syria, and Russia and often demonizes the United States and Israel. Eventually, a UN-backed Special Tribunal for Lebanon concluded that several members of Hezbollah were linked to the Hariri assassination. This caused Nasrallah to denounce the ICC and lay the blame on Israel in its traditional conspiratorial manner (Andrews, 2016). Despite a new division in Lebanese society that continues to exploit religious identities, at least the March 8th and March 14th Alliances represent new inter-sectarian developments within Lebanese society.

Hezbollah's gross miscalculation in kidnapping two IDF soldiers, accompanied by Israeli foolishness and bloodthirst, led to the massive destruction of Lebanon's infrastructure and the death of over a thousand civilians when Israel attacked Hezbollah's territory in July of 2006 (Norton, 2013). While Hezbollah claims a magnanimous victory in the month-long conflict, many argue that the brief war was a stalemate and chastise the organization for provoking Israel to attack and destroy much of Lebanon for no strategic advantage. The attack on the Future Movement's

underdeveloped military infrastructure in May of 2008 further highlighted the Party of God's proclivity for inter-sect (Norton, 2013). The 2006 July War and 2008 conflict in Beirut significantly contributed to further dividing the Shia and Sunni population within Lebanon as many Sunnis blamed Hezbollah for provoking Israel to destroy much of the country.

Hezbollah's Involvement in Syria

During the popular Arab uprisings of 2011, Hezbollah iterated a near schizophrenic foreign policy towards the protests: Hezbollah first supported Arab revolutionaries in North Africa while simultaneously siding with the Assad regime against Syrian civilians. For Hezbollah, a just and unjust regime could largely be defined by how closely it collaborated with the United States and Israel. The Party of God's support for the popular Arab revolts in North Africa was justified by the fact that it considered the old regimes of Tunisia and Egypt as agents of America and Israel rather than representative of the popular will of the people. However, when it came to protests in Syria, Nasrallah held a different opinion. Owing to Assad's support for Palestinians, alliance with Iran, hostility towards Western powers, and the regime's apparent willingness to engage in reform, Hezbollah continued to support the Syrian regime against protestors. Nasrallah argued in favor of Assad's proposed "reforms" (Phillips, 2016). Michael Clark argues that two main phases define Hezbollah's support for Assad: At first, Hezbollah spread pro-regime propaganda and even organized protests in support of Assad. The Party framed violence against the Assad regime as an American-Israeli-Turkish conspiracy. Then, Hezbollah eventually engaged rebel groups militarily (Clark, 2018).

As Hezbollah and Iran's involvement deepened, so did the sectarian nature of the conflict: Rebels chanted slogans such as "No Hezbollah, no Iran, we want a Muslim who fears God" (Phillips, 2016). On the other hand, "the Iranian Revolutionary Guard also trained the regime's new National Defense Force, a militia of at least 70,000 drawn from Syria's Alawi and Shia communities" (Bacevich, 2017). And Hezbollah continually referred to Sunni rebels as "takfiri."⁵ In the early

⁵ As will be demonstrated with this study's interviews, some people interpret Hezbollah using the word *takfiri* as a way of distancing itself from the sectarian discourse by arguing that jihadists are radical and not true Muslims, unlike more moderate Sunnis.

years of the war, Hezbollah first justified its limited deployment by emphasising the need to protect Shia villages along the border and to protect Shia shrines, such as the Sayyidah Zaynab Mosque, dedicated to the daughter of ‘Ali.⁶ On the other hand, Hezbollah’s forces in Syria did not exclusively consist of Shia fighters from Lebanon’s impoverished population: “According to IDF analysts, Hezbollah’s deployment to Syria consists of fighters from all of Hezbollah’s units, including some from the Resistance Brigades,” (Pollak, 2016) or units that consist of non-Shia Lebanese that were originally used to fight against Israel.

As a Lebanese political party, Hezbollah was not purely employing a sectarian discourse. The Hezbollah MP Hassan Fadlallah explained that the organization was sacrificing its soldiers in order to protect the Lebanese state against jihadist groups that wanted to destroy the country. Nasrallah would repeat this discourse again and again. The leader of Hezbollah pointed out that the organization had sent fighters to Bosnia during the Yugoslav Wars, where the Muslim population was entirely Sunni: “We went to Bosnia and Herzegovina... We fought there and martyrs fell. Whom were we defending? We were defending Sunni Muslims in Bosnia. There are no Shiites in Bosnia” (Nasrallah, 2013).

Whether a spillover of Hezbollah’s involvement or an inevitable tremor of the Syrian conflict, violence did come to Lebanon. Bombings, followed by revenge bombings, exploded in Shia and Sunni dominated areas throughout 2013 and 2014. In clashes that followed, Hezbollah enjoyed passive, and even at times logistical, support from the Lebanese military that wanted to maintain the pre-2011 status quo and feared radical Sunni groups within Lebanon (Phillips, 2016). Hezbollah actively works with the Lebanese army today in joint-operations against Syrian Jihadi rebels on the Syrian-Lebanese border.

⁶ As ISIS swept across much of Iraq in 2014, Nasrallah pledged that Hezbollah was willing to sacrifice five times the number of martyrs liberating the Shia sites of Iraq, which were particularly more important than those found in Syria.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The Challenges of Conducting Quantitative Research in the Middle East

The author chose to engage in qualitative research because myriad challenges exist when conducting quantitative research in the Middle East. Although innumerable quantitative research projects undertaken in Lebanon have successfully contributed methodologically sound studies to social inquiry, the existing challenges do render the research process more taxing and exigent for the amateur researcher. Many scholars researching the Middle East often lament “Middle East exceptionalism” and believe that quantitative research methods are seldom reliable in a region mired in authoritarianism, underdevelopment, and conflict. Pellicer, Wegner, and Cavatorta (2015: pg. 1) argue that “there are reasons for the scepticism surrounding quantitative methods, ranging from the validity of data, as Hibou, Meddeb and Hamdi make clear in their study on Tunisia, to ethical issues of employing statistics that remind many of past colonial practices, to the legitimate concerns about the actual validity of quantitative methods in capturing what are essentially human and social interactions.” Tessler and Jamal (2006) write, while referencing Harik (1987), that “political attitude surveys are possible ‘only under conditions of political freedom,’ and the most important explanation for the paucity of such surveys in the Arab world is that the ‘political climate for this type of research does not exist’”.

The fact that Lebanon is a conflict zone compounds issues regarding quantitative research. For a region to be a conflict zone, there does not necessarily have to be an actual war: a conflict zone “implies a wider range of adverse social situations. Galtung (1969) differentiates between negative and positive peace. While negative peace is simply the absence of war, positive peace means that the structures of domination underlying war are eliminated from the societal condition” (Cohen and Arieli, 2011).⁷

⁷ Having said that, Romano (2006) illuminates that, in a region that is synonymous with the word “conflict”, violence is primarily political in nature and the Middle East’s intentional homicide rate is dwarfed when compared to both Latin America and Africa (UNODC, n.d.).

As depicted, Lebanon is also a highly diverse country with myriad linguistic, religious, ethnic, and, due to more than a century of receiving refugees, national differences. Although writing in the context of conducting research in the UAE, Muzio and Tomlinson (2012) point out that “such diversity poses unique opportunity for researchers but also raises considerable challenges to the researcher in terms of research design, implementation and interpretation” (Ryan and Daly, 2018).

Quantitative researchers studying the Middle East may use the Arab Barometer, a research project organized by Princeton University, the University of Michigan, and the Arab Reform Institute, or the World Values Survey, as sources of data. However, it can be challenging to gain access to a large enough sample for quantitative sampling. Universities in Lebanon and throughout the Middle East possess neither the same resources as many Western universities regarding sampling, such as mass email messaging, online panels, and crowd-surfing platforms (Ryan and Daly, 2018; Steelman, Hammer, and Limayem, 2014), nor the same research-intensive culture that has symbiotically emerged with the development of Western society’s university system. Also, given that politics of Lebanon have prevented any official national census since 1932 and the lack of government resources to conduct statistical analysis, basic demographic information required for quantitative research, such as population size, religious and linguistic makeup, literacy rates, average GDP per capita, and unemployment statistics, are absent. Researchers are forced to rely on polls, estimations, and population registers. In addition, “census records are one of the most frequently used sources of extracting sampling frames [for quantitative research]. When available, they can be used to extract many different frames, such as lists of census enumeration areas or of households” (Haer and Becher, 2012). When they are not available, quantitative research, and specifically sampling, becomes even more challenging. The researcher must instead use cluster, snowball, and convenience sampling.

The Importance of Conducting Qualitative Research in the Middle East

Given the difficulties of conducting quantitative research in the Middle East, challenges that are not entirely alien to qualitative research, research in the Arab world via qualitative analysis has both its benefits and its challenges. For example, the previously cited polls about support for Hezbollah fall short of explaining the minute intricateness of national and sectarian politics; they

omit any justification of why such citizens hold the beliefs that they do. King, Keohane, and Verba argue that qualitative methods can be methodologically as sound as quantitative methods in the social sciences and that the differences existing between the two methods are mainly stylistic (King, Keohane, and Verba, 2014).

Quantitative research focuses on the counts and measures of natural phenomenon, whereas qualitative research is concentrated on the subjective experience, “meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things” (Berg, 2001). Howard Lane and Bruce Berg (2004) write the following:

“In the social sciences, we tend to favor quantitative methods of data collection and analysis when we are seeking to measure the relatively stable patterns and practices that define our social structures; we adopt more qualitative methods when we need a deeper understanding of the exceptions and special cases, or when we want to understand the meanings and preferences that underlie those larger patterns.”

(Lane and Berg, 2004)

This study is also phenomenological in that it “looks at the person, seeking to understand lived experience and seeking to learn about the individual’s perspectives and world view” (Rossman & Rallis, 2016). This research hopes to delve beneath the surface of the politics of identity and understand the richness of the lived experience of people from Lebanon living in a society with competing identities. Survey questions during quantitative studies about identity often possess just a few predetermined choices as possible answers, providing no room for amplification of the subject’s perceptions and opinions. However, qualitative studies grant the research participant the opportunity to express, reflect on, and expand upon their own intersubjective experiences of competing narratives that consist of innumerable cultural, social, religious, economic, and historical influences. Through the aide of the interviewer’s guided questions, and in much more than through the blankness of a questionnaire sheet or online survey, the participant may even come to realizations and reflections that were previously unbeknownst to himself or herself. The Middle East is home to not only weak states with competing national narratives, but it also exhibits layers of historical memories, religious identities, and cultural differences—all of which tug and pull and partition the cognitive sympathies of citizens. Understanding these individual experiences,

along with their agents and instigators, as acutely as possible, is paramount to comprehending the greater complexities and dynamics of the Middle East. The same can also be said for other regions in the world, such as the Caucasus, Eastern Ukraine, South Asia, and parts of Africa, where political violence leads to the expression and manipulation of competing identities, and vice versa.

Research Methods

In understanding how the Syrian Civil War changed Hezbollah, the author originally wanted to interview individuals who were close or connected to the organization. However, Didier Leroy from the Université Libre de Bruxelles and Matthieu Cimino from Oxford University informed the author that it would be impossible to conduct interviews with individuals linked to Hezbollah as the organization had banned all communications with press and researchers since Hezbollah's involvement in Syria as a security precaution. Furthermore, the author was extremely wary of the ethical and safety implications associated with trying to interview such individuals. Therefore, this study only interviewed Lebanese citizens and observed in neighbourhoods under the influence and control of Hezbollah.

Fieldwork was conducted in the summer of 2017 and the spring of 2018. In 2017, non-participant observation was undertaken in Lebanon to understand how Hezbollah portrayed itself as an organization. The researcher observed mural paintings, posters, flags, festivals, and banners in neighbourhoods dominated by Hezbollah in the southern suburbs of Beirut and the South of Lebanon. Twenty-seven qualitative semi-standardized interviews with Lebanese citizens from multiple confessional backgrounds were completed. The research is not meant to represent the views of Lebanon as a country owing to the fact that the sample of twenty-seven people is far too small and does not represent the demographics of the population.

That said, the small sample was still selected in such a manner that attempted to mimic the diversity of Lebanon: The census conducted by the French during the mandate of Lebanon measured Lebanese confessional demographics as follows: Lebanon's population was 28.6 percent Maronite, 22.4 percent Sunni, and 19.6 percent Shia (Faour, 2007). However, given the higher birth rates of Muslims in Lebanon, and the emigration of Christians from the Middle East, the

demographics since the last survey have certainly changed. Today, Lebanon's religious demographics are estimated to be 70% Muslim (with near equal Sunni and Shia populations) and 30 percent Christian (with Maronites being the largest population, followed by Greek Orthodox and Melkite, respectively). Druze and Armenians have smaller, but still substantial, population sizes. The sample of the study includes seven Shiites, four Sunnis, one Druze, one Armenian, and fourteen Christians.

The Christians in the study were not further divided into denominations because many of the Christians interviewed came from mixed families. Participants were recruited initially from the Lebanese that the author knew personally. The network of participants was then expanded with snowball sampling. This implies that at the end of each interview, the interviewer would then ask the participant if they could provide the contact information of an acquaintance of theirs, and so on (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). Such a method of sampling is limited in its randomness because of the segregated nature of Lebanese society. The researcher's inner circle consisted primarily of Lebanese Christians. Since it is by no means atypical to possess friends that come from one's confessional group, most recommendations from the Christian Lebanese who the author knew were also Christian. This meant that the sample possesses a disproportionate number of Christians when compared to the actual religious demographics of Lebanon.

Interviews lasted between twenty-five minutes to one hour. Fake names have replaced the real names of all participants to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. While all Lebanese come from a designated religious background, not all were religious. Moreover, of those who were religious, some considered themselves to be believing, but not practising. Both men and women were interviewed. All participants were citizens of Lebanon and had lived in Lebanon for at least five years, the exception being the Armenian who was only a citizen of Armenia. Nonetheless, she was included because she lived in Lebanon, and the author wanted to understand the perspective of someone from Lebanon's Armenian community. Participants were male and female. All participants had a university degree or were undertaking university studies. As a result, they likely came from a higher than average socio-economic background. The interviews were conducted in either French or English. However, in one case, a participant who spoke neither English nor French wrote his responses in Arabic, and his text was translated.

The author did not record the interviews. Instead, he typed what the participants were saying as they spoke. He decided to do this because the author did not want to render his participants uncomfortable by recording them and, therefore, prevent them from elaborating on their personal experiences and observations that dealt with taboo issues in Lebanese society (i.e. sectarianism and conflict). Multiple participants even asked to verify that they were not being recorded in the midst of the interview. Once all the interviews were completed, the author reviewed the transcripts and coded them into primary themes without using NVivo.

Owing to a delayed process in the ethics committee process, interviews, including the recruitment, had to be conducted in 2018 once the ethics committee had approved the research project. Therefore, interviews were not done in person during the fieldwork in Lebanon and, instead, were conducted via WhatsApp, Skype, telephoning, and Messenger video calling after the researcher had left Lebanon. This the author regrets because so much more can be learned from non-verbal communication than from verbal communication.

The study is both deductive and inductive. It is deductive in that it borrows from already established theories of nationalism, sectarianism, and securitization to create a hypothesis that is then tested in the field using qualitative research methods. Results are then analyzed to inductively contribute to the current theoretical debate on nationalism and sectarianism in the Middle East.

Limitations of Research

During the research, there existed certain limitations. First and foremost, the sample is too small (N = 27) and not representative of the actual demographics to speak for all of Lebanon. As mentioned, Christians are overrepresented in the sample, while both Sunni and Shia Muslims are underrepresented. Underrepresentation of Shia Muslims is particularly problematic given that Shia Muslims are the most likely confessional group to have an informed opinion on how Hezbollah has ideologically transformed. As mentioned, almost all of the participants had a university degree or were obtaining a university degree. Such a characteristic is clearly not representative of the Lebanese population. Given that one's level of education is often the result of one's level of wealth, the sample possesses a class limitation. Also, the participants came primarily from Beirut, the

Beqaa, and the South of Lebanon. The researcher did not manage to interview many people from Tripoli or the northern governates. Furthermore, almost all participants lived in urban centers, and, therefore, the sample lacks a rural perspective. The shortcomings of the sample, therefore, limit the universality and predictive value of the conclusions that are drawn from the research.

Interviews were conducted either in English or French, both of which were rarely the native tongues of the participants. Having said that, there never appeared to be a significant language barrier. The researcher chose to type the responses of participants while they were speaking.

Regarding the author's positionality, his whole life has been lived in the West, and he undoubtedly possesses a western cultural bias that likely played a role in the interpretation of data.

Chapter 4: Results

The research primarily involved non-participant observation coupled with semi-led interviews: the author travelled for one month in Lebanon, including deep into Lebanon's South and into the southern suburbs of Beirut. The titles of the following sections represent the primary themes garnered from the participants and field observations.

Hezbollah is the Protector of the Lebanese Nation

Most participants did perceive that Hezbollah had ideologically shifted towards being more nationalistic as a result of its involvement in Syria, although they differed when it came to their belief in the authenticity of such ideology. According to these participants, Hezbollah's involvement in Syria was a clear sign that Hezbollah was now engaged in the national project and seeking to protect the Lebanese nation. While not the dominant view, 7 out of 27 participants believed that Hezbollah was also in Syria because it genuinely wanted to protect the Lebanese nation and that Hezbollah was victorious at its goal of preserving Lebanese national sovereignty. Of the seven, two were Shiite, and five were Christian. Both of the Shiites were from the Beqaa Valley and felt threatened by the rise of the Islamic State and were much more likely to be exposed to Hezbollah's ideology than other participants.

One businessman from Beirut named Anthony, an Aounist, who was technically a Christian but said that his real religion was "Lebanese," gave the following monologue in interpreting Hezbollah's involvement in Syria:

At the end of the day, you have to know who Assad and Hezbollah are fighting: they are fighting 68 nationalities of mercenaries who call themselves ISIS. ISIS became very powerful and violent. They were literally eating people and said that they will come to Lebanon next to eat the Christians and Shiites. Hezbollah had a choice to make: either we let ISIS come to Lebanon, and we fight them here, or we go to Syria and destroy them.

ISIS has a fifth column of Palestinians and Sunnis [in Lebanon]. You have a lot of extremists in Lebanon. The extremists are in Lebanon, and if ISIS were to come, you would have a big clash. The only armed militia that is in Lebanon are Hezbollah and their arms flow are already being disrupted by the war in Syria... Hezbollah has won

the war in Syria. The USA did not fight ISIS in Syria. On the contrary, they were providing them with intelligence and funding. Syrians, Iranians, Russians, and Hezbollah were the ones fighting ISIS. If ISIS were to win in Syria, you would have had radical Islamists. Lebanon would have fallen very quickly. Am I for the involvement of Hezbollah in Syria? Yes. Would that be not minding your own business? Yes. But it is no different than the USA in Iraq and Afghanistan, except that Hezbollah is in their neighbor's [territory]. It is an immediate threat. The USA travels around the world to bomb Kabul when it is not even close to their country.

Anthony, like a handful of participants, clearly felt threatened by an indomitable Islamic State. As a result, he was an ardent support of Hezbollah being involved in Syria and thought that the organization was protecting the Lebanese imagined community by preventing a jihadi encroachment and takeover in Lebanon.

Stuart Kaufman remarks that societies will often engage in violence when they feel that there is an "existential threat" to an in-group (Kaufman, 2006). In the case of Anthony, the existential threat was the Islamic State group in Syria and the danger that it posed to the Lebanese nation. According to him, any violence against the Islamic State group was clearly in his ingroup's interests. Given his devotion to the Lebanese nation rather than any particular religious group, as depicted through his speech, he framed Hezbollah's involvement in Syria and the organization's accompanying rhetoric in Lebanon as a commitment to Lebanese nationalism. Both Anthony and Hezbollah had aligned mutual interests. Nonetheless, although Anthony claimed that his religion was "Lebanese," he viewed Hezbollah's involvement in Syria as a form of "sectarian nationalism." This implies that while the secular nation as defined by Anderson remains strong in the subjective consciousness of Anthony, the enemy of the nation, both in Lebanon and in Syria, was still a religious community (i.e. Sunni Muslims sympathetic to Salafi Jihadism).

As depicted during the historical portion of this thesis, the involvement of Hezbollah in Syria preceded the rise of the Islamic State. However, in the imagination of Anthony, and the handful of other participants interpreting Hezbollah's actions in Syria for the sake of protecting Lebanon, the fear of the Islamic State and the desire to destroy the organization seemed to be more important than the fact that Hezbollah was fighting for its own interests as an organization. They also gave greater credence to Hezbollah's most recent justification, the threat of the Islamic State to Lebanon, than its previous arguments in the early years of the war such as protecting Shia villages and Shia

shrines. This, according to participants, did not matter. What mattered most for these participants was that Hezbollah was committed to safeguarding Lebanon as a sovereign country. In addition, this may also be explained by the Syrian regime's frequency, persistence, and success with which its ubiquitous propaganda continually framed the Syrian opposition as terrorists.

Those who did perceive Hezbollah's involvement in Syria as fighting in the interest of the Lebanese nation differed in how they believed Hezbollah should be pursuing its military strategy. Another example from the fieldwork of Lebanese believing that Hezbollah had become the protector of Lebanon as a result of its engagement in Syria is the story of Abdullah. During non-participant observation, the author travelled with a group of non-practicing Shia throughout the Shia heartland in the South of Lebanon. During the trip, the group stopped a travelling nut salesman named Abdullah to ask for directions to the Israeli-Lebanese border. He insisted that the convoy join him at his home for coffee, juice, and traditional Lebanese snacks. During this time, Abdullah expressed his dislike for the political system in Lebanon, as many Lebanese so often do. He claimed that he had supported Amal during the Lebanese Civil War. Now he was disenfranchised with both Amal and Hezbollah. He was particularly critical of Hezbollah's ideology of insisting on opposing Israel all these years when it was a country that could clearly bring him a substantial and lucrative market for his nut business. In his view, Hezbollah's hostility towards Israel did nothing for the protection of Lebanon. However, he could never voice such criticism publicly within his village. On the other hand, regarding the war in Syria, he sympathized with Hezbollah in desiring to protect Lebanon and perceived Hezbollah's fight as one that was necessary to protect the Lebanese nation. He also believed that Hezbollah's military actions should only be limited to fighting Jihadist rebels at the Syrian-Lebanese border and the Lebanese territory within such frontiers. In his view, it was not up to Hezbollah to be involved within the frontiers of Syria.

Actions Speak Louder Than Words: Hezbollah's Ideology is Neither Sectarian nor Nationalist. It is Foreign.

Some participants strongly believed that Hezbollah's actions in Syria were the most critical factor in illustrating Hezbollah's public expression of ideology, rather than what it said in speeches and what it portrayed via banners and posters. Involvement in Syria proved that the ideas and ideals

that guide its behavior are defined via the organization's connections to Iran. Delilah went so far as to say that Hezbollah was not even Lebanese: "They are working for Iran. When you are working for another regime, you are not considered 100% patriotic." However, as noted during the historical overview of this study, such a view is misguided, considering that Hezbollah possesses a considerable amount of agency.

According to Anna, the fact that Hezbollah was fighting on the side of the Syrian regime in Syria proved the organization's lack of commitment to the Lebanese nation and its loyalty to foreign governments: "The Syrian regime caused so much death and destruction in Lebanon. I do not think a single Lebanese Sunni, Shia, Druze, or Christian should be sent to fight for the Syrian regime. It is a regime. It is [a] dictatorship. The fact that Hezbollah fights for Syria proves its apathy towards Lebanon... If they were truly a national actor, then they would give their guns to the army, but they will never." Rali, a Sunni from a Shia dominant area, echoed Anna's opinions when she argued that it was not up to Hezbollah to protect Lebanon. "It is only the role of the Lebanese Armed Forces to protect Lebanon," he claimed.

Participants Were Conscious of Hezbollah's Securitization of the Islamic State

The majority of the participants perceived Hezbollah's role in Syria to be the exploitation of sectarian identity and people's fear of sectarian violence. Some did acknowledge that Hezbollah had exploited, at times, a discourse that it was committed to protecting the Lebanese nation. However, its hypocritical policy of also exploiting sectarian rhetoric, and its actions of supporting a highly sectarian regime, that of Bashar al-Assad, rendered superficial any national discourse, as the nation, according to Benedict Anderson, is a horizontal community undivided by religious identities.

Nonetheless, one must not take for granted the sectarian nature of Bashar Assad's regime during the Syrian Civil War. Syria has possessed sectarian divisions since before the creation of the sovereign state; like in Lebanon, the French cultivated a close relationship with the minority Druze, Alawite, and Christian populations in the region now known as Syria during the final decades of the Ottoman Empire. French rule during the Mandate era further compounded the sectarian nature

of Syrian politics and even granted the Alawites a certain degree of political autonomy and excessive representation in the military (Fildis, 2012). The Assad *regimes* have been sectarian since conception when Hafez Assad came to power in 1970. Both father and son concentrated power in the hands of the Alawites. During the first years of the Syrian Civil War, the regime's thug-like Shabiha perpetrated myriad massacres against almost entirely Sunni Arab communities (Phillips, 2015). On the other hand, along with Alawite and Shia minorities in Syria, other religious minority groups within Syria, such as Syria's Syriac Orthodox Church and Armenian Apostolic Church, have also supported the Syrian government in the war (Carpenter, 2013). Furthermore, Collier and Hoeffler (2004) write that in civil wars, economic variables provide considerable explanatory power in explaining combatants' participation and allegiance. Likewise, in the Syrian conflict even entire Sunni tribes who benefited economically under the Assad regime, along with Sunni bureaucrats reliant on government paychecks, continued their support during the conflict (Phillips, 2015) and their loyalty was by no means shunned by Assad and his henchmen. In addition, both the Assad regime and multiple rebel groups claimed to protect the Syrian nation and even provided rival Syrian flags. Instead of painting the Syrian conflict purely in terms of sectarianism, Philipps (2015) prefers to label it as "semi-sectarian." That said, Philipps also acknowledges Assad's conspicuous role in stoking sectarian tensions during the conflict.

Alam Saleh and Hendrik Kraetzschmar write that Egyptian Salafists often use a sectarian discourse against Egypt's negligible Shia population. They cite Barry Buzan and write "that when an identity issue — be it religious, sectarian, or ideological — is portrayed as an existential security threat, it requires 'emergency measures, and actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure.'" This is a process that the authors label "securitization." Most of the participants recognized that Hezbollah used a similar security issue, the "Rise of ISIS" as a justification for its involvement in Syria. However, many did not find such an ideology to be very convincing or legitimate.

Many of my participants debunked Hezbollah's sectarian and securitization narrative that it was protecting both Lebanon and Lebanese Shiites against the Islamic State. George, a former classmate of the author, "once thought that Hezbollah was perhaps the lesser of two evils." He then continued, "but then I saw the torturing and the massacring that the Assad regime was doing against his own population, total annihilation."

Alya, a Lebanese Shiite working in the Arab Gulf, said that Hezbollah had framed itself as the saviour of the Lebanese nation against ISIS, when in reality, its involvement did not mean that it single-handedly destroyed a transnational proto-state: “It is like with Israel in the 2006 war when Hezbollah’s leaders just hid in their fox holes and underground bunkers until the Israelis went home. Just because a broad group of actors destroyed ISIS does not mean that Hezbollah has the right to claim it as their victory.”

Delilah, a Sunni tour-guide said that she had to stop listening to Nasrallah’s speeches because the propaganda and blatant exaggeration of the Islamic State were so evident: “‘ISIS, ISIS, ISIS, ISIS,’ all he talks about is ISIS. It is so boring and repetitive! He pretends that if they do not stop ISIS in Syria, they will come home to Lebanon. Nasrallah acts as the sole hero of Lebanon.” Although Delilah may feel this way, the evidence from Nasrallah’s speeches demonstrates that he continues to speak about Israel as much, or even more often, than he currently speaks about the Islamic State.

Given participants’ perceptions of Hezbollah’s prodigious discursive obsession with the Islamic State, one may argue that the threat of the Islamic State was the only public justification that Hezbollah could use in its public ideology to fully pursue its own interests in Syria. The gruesome savagery with which the Islamic State marketed itself, and the subsequent fear that it instigated, was critical in aiding Hezbollah to validate its concentration of men and resources used to protect the Syrian regime (just as the brutality of the Syrian regime was paramount in creating the Islamic State).

Although correlation does not necessarily mean causation, one should also note that the Syrian opposition was not immediately radicalized during the early years of the war in 2011 and 2012. However, as the opposition continued to splinter and the war sectarianized, Nasrallah became increasingly vocal about Hezbollah’s role in Syria. As the Islamic State dominated international headlines in 2014 and 2015, it also dominated Nasrallah’s speeches.

Visually, Hezbollah Mainly Exploits Universalist Islamic Symbolism

Some participants that lived or travelled often in Hezbollah controlled areas said that they felt that Hezbollah was emphasizing its sectarian identity much more now than compared to five years ago.

Alan, a doctor from the southern suburbs of Beirut, said that he could not go into a coffee-shop now without seeing a banner simultaneously praising Imam Ali and Hezbollah.

However, during non-participant observation, the author found that rhetoric emphasizing Shia religious doctrine as not being particularly common. Posters such as those pictured in image



Image 4.1: Posters such as these depict fallen Hezbollah fighters. The names of each fallen soldier are preceded with “the martyr.” In pictures with multiple lines of Arabic text, there are verses from the Quran. Posters such as these, along with banners with no photos, are advertised throughout regions with a large Hezbollah presence. However, from what the author could tell, verses from Shia texts such as *Nahj al-Balagha*, which portray a more sectarian tone, were not used.
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4.1 were customary throughout the southern suburbs of Beirut and the South of Lebanon. Such posters demonstrated the sanctimonious exploitation of a universalist Islamic rhetoric praising fallen martyrs in Israel and Syria. Such posters cited verses from the Quran, rather than from religious texts that were exclusive to Shiism. Hussein, an agnostic Shia resident of Dahieh, corroborated such observations. He said that he sees Hezbollah’s posters and banners every day. Instead of an ice cream truck, Hezbollah has a vehicle that drives around Dahieh with loudspeakers reading verses from the Quran and inviting people to the burial ceremonies of fallen martyrs. He says that verses from the Quran are repeated continually and juxtaposed with the names of fallen soldiers. However, Hassan claimed that they are not sectarian: They refer neither to Karbala nor to any other Shia-specific theology. Instead, it is a universalist Islam that is used in Hezbollah’s discourse. In a sense, this could be said to be a form of neutral sectarianism void of any negative connotation because it is a demonstration of elites mobilizing populations based on religious identity, even if it is not directly vilifying another religious group.

Nonetheless, Alya said that when she returns home to the South, Hezbollah is visually emphasizing its Shia identity as a recruitment strategy for fighters. However, it is nothing radical, by any means. “They must be doing something right to appeal to all confessional backgrounds because they possess a wide base of support,



Image 4.2: At the Israeli border, Iranian and Hezbollah flags fly alongside that of Lebanon’s. Posters celebrating the soldiers killed in action against Israel are also shown.

not just Shiites,” she said. However, such a claim also depends on one’s definition of “wide” given that the previously cited Pew opinion poll (Suh, 2014) showed that only 34% of Christians and 9% of Sunnis in Lebanon viewed the organization in a positive light. Moreover, when questioned further on what exactly Hezbollah was doing correctly to garner such a large support base, Alya was unable to give any specifics.

While driving through the South of Lebanon, one may witness some Shia religious symbolism. However, Hezbollah’s and Iranian propaganda is much more recurrent. For example, upon entering Jbaa, a bigger than life-size body portrait of the late Ayatollah Khomeini greets the newcomer. Furthermore, the author’s group eventually travelled to the Gate of Fatima on the Israeli border. Graffiti is most evident on the border wall. Most of the graffiti pertained to the struggle against Israel. However, there was also much praise of Imam Ali and Imam Hussein, along with the Grand Ayatollahs of Iran. One can often spot posters and signs of Nasrallah and Musa al-Sadr on the Israeli-built separation wall. Walls, buildings, and traffic signs also exhibit posters of Hezbollah’s fallen martyrs in Syria. What does not appear particularly commonplace is Lebanese national propaganda. Lebanese flags were as common as Palestinian flags. There were, however, Lebanese Armed Forces soldiers partnered with Indonesian United Nations peacekeepers on patrol.

The group also travelled to Hezbollah's well-designed museum in the picturesque village of Mleeta in the South of Lebanon. The entire exhibit focused on Hezbollah's defeat of Israel. From what was witnessed during the guided tour, there was no mention of Hezbollah's involvement in Syria nor any mention of Syrian "terrorists" or "takfiri rebels."

Hezbollah's Media is Biased, not Sectarian

On Al Manar's website, the news organization certainly demonstrates a pro-Assad bias. Articles on the website use diction that distinctly differs from other international news websites such as the BBC, Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, and CNN. For example, Al Manar describes Assad's forces as the "government" rather than the "regime" (Al Manar, 2018a), the former having a more positive and less authoritarian connotation compared to the latter. Al Manar also broadly paints all insurgent forces fighting against Assad as "terrorists" rather than the less loaded and more accurate "rebels" that other newsgroups choose to use. Al Manar's apparent bias when selecting to say "terrorist" rather than "insurgent" or "rebel" is most evident in one article (Al Manar, 2018d) that claims that "terrorists" laid siege to a village for three years. In reality, such a lengthy siege explicitly implies the use of conventional military tactics rather than random acts of violence against civilians for political gain that defines terror tactics. Fulfilling its part of Russia's conspiratorial misinformation war against Sunni rebels, Al Manar labels the Syrian Civil Defence as the "White Helmets," never forgetting quotation marks as a way to create further unfounded doubt about the charity's legitimacy (Al Manar, 2018b; Solon, 2017). However, rebel groups in Syria are not the only target of Al Manar's communication warfare. Al Manar's portrayal of Israel is even more slanted than its description of Sunni rebel groups: Israel is put in quotation marks, and the Israeli Defence Forces are rebranded the "Zionist enemy."

Religious rhetoric is demonstrated in some of Al Manar's articles. For example, it calls Hezbollah fighters who were killed in Syria, "Islamic Resistance fighters... [who] embraced martyrdom" (Al Manar, 2018d). However, it is debatable whether such rhetoric is "sectarian" or "religious" rhetoric for reasons that are of fundamental importance to the debate on defining sectarianism. As mentioned during the theoretical section of this study, the most basic definition of sectarianism is

the politicization of religious cleavages during conflict.⁸ Islam is, of course, a religious identity that is, in the case of Hezbollah, being used to mobilize Muslim individuals into a political movement whenever Hezbollah evokes imagery using universalist Islamic rhetoric. However, in Lebanon, the specific branch of Islam (i.e., Sunni and Shia) plays a more significant role in the political mobilization than the encompassing religion (i.e., Islam) does. The same can be said of the sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland. Despite Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, and Anglicans all being Christian, political identity depended partly on the specific Christian denomination with which one identified. This is in contrast to sectarian violence in India, where the politico-religious marker of one's identity was Hinduism or Islam, rather than Shaivism or Shaktism, for example. This implies that for politics to be sectarian, there must also exist the *other* with which one's politico-religious identity is contrasted.

Therefore, in the case of Hezbollah, for its rhetoric to be considered sectarian within the Lebanese and Syrian context, it is not enough for Hezbollah to use a universalist Islamic discourse because there is no implied *other* since non-Muslim groups are not particularly relevant to Hezbollah's conflict in Syria. Hezbollah's usage of universalist Islamic rhetoric would be sectarian only if it also incorporated elements of Shiism *or* if it simultaneously claimed that Sunnis were heretical. To put this into perspective, the Islamic State's propaganda often systematically and violently targets Shiites, Christians, Yazidis, and other religious and ethnoreligious minorities in Syria and Iraq (Hubbard, 2018; Lusher, 2014; Robinson, n.d.; Shaheen, 2015;). In contrast, one could claim that Hezbollah's rhetoric is *asectarian* because it visibly makes only a few references to Shia theology and its Shia and Alawite geopolitical allies, in order to appeal to members of both the Shia *and* the Sunni religious communities. One would have difficulty in accusing Hezbollah's media of directly targeting other religious groups.

Hezbollah's Islamic exploitation of propaganda is not unique. On the other end of the sectarian spectrum, Saudi Arabia has even more passionately embraced both biased media, as is standard in conflict, and sectarian media (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Darwich and Fakhoury note that "the Saudi Kingdom has widely used its media organisations, namely the TV channel Al-Arabiya and

⁸ However, Cammett (2014), Salloukh (2015), and Kingston (2013) also claim that elites' political manipulation of religious identity in Lebanon is a form of sectarian politics even when there is an absence of conflict.

newspapers such as al-Hayat and al-Sharq al-Awsat, to cover the conflict in a way that tilted heavily in favour of the rebels” (Darwich & Fakhoury, 2016). Reverting to securitization theory, Darwich and Fakhoury assert that Saudi Arabia, even more so than Hezbollah, casts its religious counterpart (in this case, the Shiite) as the “Other” and as an existential threat to Sunnis around the world. Within Saudi Arabia, unlike in Lebanon, anti-Shiism is not tamed during periods of strengthened nationalism because Saudi Arabian nationalism is based on Wahabi Islam (Matthiesen, 2014).⁹ Furthermore, as King Salman took to the Saudi throne in 2015, and Saudi Arabia increased pressure on Iran via the war in Syria, the Saudi government began desperately supporting (and in some instances, creating) sectarianized Salafi rebel groups such as Jaish al-Fatah and Ahrar al-Sham (Blanga, 2017).

Through its media, Hezbollah has directly attacked Saudi Arabia’s religious ideology. When referring to the Islamic State, Hezbollah’s Nasrallah has even stressed that “Wahhabism [*sic.*] is the source and origin of this thought of darkness” and asserted that “the Umma [the global Islamic community] must take a resolute attitude towards Wahhabism in order to prevent the recurrence of such dangerous phenomena” (Al Manar, 2017, October 1). At the same time, Hezbollah has simultaneously praised “the role of Sunni clerics in [the] ISIL fight for refuting the claims that the battle was sectarian” (Al Manar, 2017, July 11).

While watching Al Manar in cafes and restaurants in the South of Lebanon, it was remarked that of the TV shows that were dramatized war programs all pertained to Hezbollah’s victory over Israel rather than recent military engagements in Syria (obviously, news reports did focus on the current military campaign in Syria). In such shows, Arabic-speaking Israeli officers, with their bulging stomachs, bald heads, and aviator sunglasses, are vilified, and Hezbollah soldiers are portrayed as the saviors of Lebanon. Commercial breaks pay homage to tombstones and the faces of Hezbollah’s martyrs from the 2006 July War in idyllic rainforest environments, alien to the Middle East. Nasrallah’s speeches and Al Manar’s English-language publications are also overwhelmingly anti-Israeli and anti-American, much more than they are anti-Saudi Arabia or anti-Sunni (Al Manar, 2017, May 2; Al Manar, 2017, August 14; Al Manar, 2017, September 24; Al Manar, 2017, November 20; Al Manar, 2018, February 16; Al Manar, 2018, April 15; Al Manar,

⁹ Wahabi Islam, following Hanbali *fiqh*, directly opposes most Shia traditions (Blanchard, 2007).

2018, April 27; Al Manar, 2018, May 16; Al Manar, 2018, June 11; Al Manar, 2018, August 9; Al Manar, 2018, August 16). Hezbollah also frames the Israeli conflict as one which is paramount for the protection of Lebanon. In 2017, Nasrallah publicly claimed that if it were not for Hezbollah, “it is certain that in Lebanon there would be Israeli colonies and part of the Lebanese people would live in refugee camps outside or inside Lebanon” (Al Manar, 2017, September 24). This is critical to understand because, although the Syrian conflict has led to the deaths of thousands of Hezbollah fighters and cost Hezbollah millions of dollars while also inciting violence within Lebanon, the organization continues to frame Israel as the primary enemy instead of Syrian rebels in its media.

Pluralist or Sectarian? *Takfiri*, *Takfir*, and *Kafir*

While Hezbollah may have refrained from physically demonstrating its sectarian side, one might also interpret a sectarian discourse through Nasrallah’s speeches. Hassan Nasrallah, in particular, employs the adjective *takfiri* when describing the Islamic State (Al Manar, 2017, May 2; Al Manar, 2017, July 11; Al Manar, 2017, August 24; Al Manar, 2017, August 29; Al Manar, 2017, August 30; Al Manar, 2017, September 24; Al Manar, 2017, October 1; Al Manar, 2017, November 20; Al Manar, 2018, August 16) and all rebel groups, in general (Al Manar, 2016, June 28; Al Manar, 2017, May 2; Al Manar, 2017, July 11; Al Manar, 2017, August 30; Al Manar, 2017, December 11; Al Manar, 2018, May 16; Al Manar, 2018, August 16).

In the Islamic lexicon, *takfir* technically means the action of declaring another individual to be an unbeliever and, therefore, to issue the death penalty. Salafists such as Qutb and Mawdudi used *takfir* to declare a ruler of a Muslim majority population as illegitimate (Qutb denounced Egypt’s President Gamal Abdel Nasser, for example). Someone who is *takfiri* is someone who, therefore, makes use of *takfir* (Kilcullen, 2011). To be “takfiri” does not mean to be an “unbeliever” (which is *kafir*). Being accused of *takfiri* in the Muslim world means that one is equated to the violent extremism of Jihadi Salafist groups, such as al Qaeda and the Taliban. It became even more pejorative when, in 2005, King Abdullah II of Jordan brought together more than 500 *ulema* to issue the *Amman Message*, a statement unanimously condemning the use of *takfir* within Islam. Therefore, some, but not all, of the participants interpreted Nasrallah’s appellation of jihadists operating in Syria as *takfiri* as a way of avoiding sectarianism because it demonstrated Hezbollah’s

commitment to plurality within Islam and an abhorrence for capital punishment of non-believers. Others, however, claimed that Nasrallah calling all rebel groups in Syria *takfiri* and terrorists showed a further sectarianization of the conflict and Hezbollah. This is because many groups, such as the Western-backed Syrian Democratic Forces and groups connected to the obscurely defined Free Syrian Army, like the Syrian Revolutionaries Front, actually abhor *takfir* as an ideology.

Hezbollah Continues to Express its Sectarian Ideology through its Social Service Provision

Given the massive debt of the Lebanese government, the complex sectarian stalemate that so often plagues Lebanese politics, and destruction from years of war, the Lebanese state provides limited social services, to say the least. As a result, charitable and political organizations often fill the void. Melani Cammett calls this “compassionate communalism.” Socio-political parties such as Hezbollah and the Future Movement provide social services. Furthermore, this clientelist system is self-perpetuating: “the emergence and consolidation of nonstate providers encourages further fragmentation of the welfare system and hinders any longer-term efforts to construct national welfare regimes” (Cammett, 2014). Hezbollah, in particular, is characterized in Lebanon as being the most generous extra-state provider of social services: “Hezbollah runs a multitude of social programs focused on health, education, and material assistance as well as agricultural extension, infrastructure and construction, micro-credit, sports and youth clubs, media outlets, and religious institutions” (Cammett, 2014). Hezbollah has six hospitals in Lebanon. On top of this, associations linked to Hezbollah provide clinics and other medical services such as ambulances.

Cammett argues that Hezbollah primarily focuses on buying the support of and servicing its ingroup population when competition from other movements, such as Amal or the Future Movement, threatens to influence its base. As competition from other socio-political movements decreases, Hezbollah then expands to service and mobilize its outgroup. Furthermore, the more aggressive the competition from other groups, the more Hezbollah is willing to lavish its target population with perquisites. When it comes to providing social services to its ingroup population, Cammett argues the ingroup member’s “piety has no statistically significant relationship with the receipt of social benefits” (Cammett, 2014). On the other hand, participation in the organization consistently demonstrates a significant association with access to welfare.

Hezbollah chooses to distribute its resources primarily based on the level of commitment that its supporters give. Firstly, core activists within Hezbollah and the families of fallen soldiers and those soldiers maimed in combat receive the most amount of benefits. Preferential treatment for soldiers and their families often comes in the form of subsidized medical care, housing, a monthly financial allowance, and even exclusive access to restaurants. Non-party members are not always wholly denied access to Hezbollah's services. However, the party has been known sometimes to turn away individuals from its hospitals who have not demonstrated sufficient support for the party (Cammett, 2014). In referencing Judith Harik's work, Janine Clark writes that "many professionals, lawyers, engineers, and teachers are Party members or strong supporters of Hizballah... due to the fact that this middle stratum does not benefit from the Amal party in any real sense, whereas Hizballah's social and economic projects affect Shiites of all classes" (Clark, 2004).

Participants were interviewed about their perceptions of Hezbollah's social service provision since its involvement in Syria. According to theory, if the war in Syria obliged Hezbollah to become more committed to the Lebanese imagined community, then Hezbollah would likely be more willing to distribute its social services to all Lebanese citizens, despite religious identity or an individual's level of commitment to Hezbollah, in order to pacify the Lebanese population to its foreign policy. On the other hand, if the war in Syria led to Hezbollah becoming more ideologically sectarian, then the organization would more strictly limit its social service provision within Lebanon to its Shia population.

The vast majority of participants said that they did not know enough about Hezbollah's social service program to comment on the subject of sectarian social provision versus national social provision. Those who did have experience claimed that there was no change in the system of distribution since Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian Civil War. Hezbollah had become neither more exclusive towards its in-group nor more inclusive towards other sectarian groups. As a doctor working in a private clinic, Radia said that if you were sick and needed to go to the hospital and were not a Shiite, Hezbollah would still accept you. Nonetheless, she claimed, Christians like to stick with Christians and Sunni Muslims with Sunni Muslims. Therefore, it is unlikely that a non-

Shia would even try to go to a Hezbollah-run hospital. “Anyways,” she expressed, “Christian hospitals are the best. So, there is no reason why a Christian would try to go to a Hezbollah-run hospital for Shiites.”

Professor Cammett was asked her opinion on whether or not she believed that Hezbollah had become more committed to the Lebanese nation since its involvement in the Syrian Civil War via its provision of social programs or if she thought it had swung further towards the sectarian side of the pendulum. Although she said that she did not have data on this topic, she said that Hezbollah seemed to be playing the national card to increase its chances of success in the Lebanese elections. However, given the martyrs program¹⁰ and preliminary data that shows that outgroup members continue to receive an inferior quality of care in Hezbollah’s hospitals, it would appear that Hezbollah continues to distribute its resources based on sectarianism. Nonetheless, it is unknown if this is the result of the war in Syria or not.

Much of the funds for Hezbollah’s social services are raised domestically. Melanie Cammett further writes that “investments in private businesses, and revenue from religious taxes such as zakat and khums” (Cammett, 2014) contribute to funding the organization’s social services. However, Iran also heavily subsidizes the movement’s charitable activities. The Shia diaspora operating mainly throughout Africa, the Persian (or Arab) Gulf, South America, and North America have also made considerable contributions to Hezbollah’s wealth and capacity to contribute to Shia society. However, faced with falling oil prices and international sanctions, Iran has been less willing to foot Hezbollah’s medical expenses. As a result, the organization has engaged in illicit activities, as Joseph Daher describes:

Hezbollah has also been accused of being involved in illegal transnational activities as a source of funding for the Islamic movement, such as bank frauds, currency counterfeiting, drug trafficking, the manufacture and sale of fake goods, intellectual property piracy and the trade in African “blood diamonds” (Blanford 2011: 356).

(Daher, 2016)

¹⁰ The “martyrs” program is a welfare program that financially supports the families of killed soldiers fighting in Syria.

One recent article from the New York Times even reports on the possibility of Hezbollah's ties to the Maduro regime in Venezuela as the organization tries to expand its drug trafficking routes and intelligence network throughout South America (Casey, 2019).

Some of the phalangist participants used the example of Hezbollah trafficking drugs to fund itself as an example of Hezbollah's imperiousness, hypocrisy, and its sectarian turn in recent years.¹¹ Myriam said that it is evident that Hezbollah's leaders exploit religion for their personal gain: "Although I am a Christian, I do not think that drug-trafficking is very Islamic. It is a clear demonstration that Hezbollah, like ISIS, uses Islam for their image, but in the end, they are all just criminals trafficking drugs."

Hezbollah's War in Syria Causes National Division in Lebanon

Radia worked as a doctor in a private clinic in the Beqaa. She said that many of her patients were Shiite. According to them, the war in Syria was a fight between Sunnis and Shiites. "Hezbollah has created a deeper Sunni-Shiite divide," Radia explained, "because the Shiites have many more dead. When you have so many dead young men, it is certain that you will have problems and divisions will be created between religious communities." However, what is more probable is not the deepening of cleavages between confessional groups within Lebanon, but rather the creation of new divisions between Shia populations experiencing such high mortality rates amongst their young men population. During the author's time in the South of Lebanon, almost every Shia person with whom he shared coffee or juice with (which was only on about five different occasions) admitted that he or she had had a close relative (i.e., a brother or a cousin) or friend who died while fighting in Syria. Despite such tragedy, such individuals still believed that Hezbollah's war in Syria was necessary to protect against the Islamic State.

Understandably, the Sunni participants held the starkest criticism of Hezbollah. Delilah said that Hezbollah was guilty of painting all Sunni rebels as "racist and fundamentalist... this is awful. They are creating a monster. Islam is just one religion to me." Paradoxically, according to her, while simultaneously demonising Sunnis, Hezbollah "makes Shia Islam look like such an open

¹¹ To learn more about Hezbollah's involvement in drug trafficking see Ottolenghi's article (2018).

religion. It is total propaganda! Shias are not so different from Sunnis... The reason why they use Shiism as an excuse is to recruit more young men into their militia.” Rami admitted that now many Sunnis within Lebanon believe Hezbollah to be “worse than Israel because Israel does not go out of its way to enter another country to kill Muslim Arabs that want democracy. And Hezbollah does.”

Hezbollah’s War in Syria Prevents National Division in Lebanon

Almost all Lebanese interviewed claimed that Hezbollah had undoubtedly exacerbated sectarianism, while using a discourse about protecting the Lebanese nation. However, there are notable exceptions. Anthony and Alia argued, for example, that there were indeed political conflicts within Lebanese society, but at least they were not deadly and did not lead to the destruction of the Lebanese state. Anthony claimed the following:

“those against Hezbollah say they do not want bombs going off in Lebanon because of Hezbollah inciting radical Salafists. But, there are only political conflicts in Lebanon as a result of Hezbollah’s war in Syria. There are no actual wars and no real conflicts at home. ISIS did not need an excuse to blow up [the Beirut southern suburb of Dahieh]. They were doing that all over the world, like in Paris and Brussels.”

Nadia, believing that Hezbollah only pursued its own interests in Syria, admitted that the organization exploited Shia religious doctrine as a way to justify its involvement in the conflict to its support base. However, she added, one must not forget that villages under Hezbollah’s influence in Southern Lebanon have overwhelmingly accepted Syrian refugees. “Almost all of whom are Sunni,” she affirmed. In her village of 10 000 people, there are perhaps 2 500 Sunni Syrians that are there as refugees. In other words, this one small Shia town hosts the equivalent of 6% of all the Syrian refugees Canada has accepted as of 2017 (Citizenship Canada, 2017).

Hezbollah is Much Stronger as a Result of its Involvement in Syria

Participants agreed with past studies (Daher, 2016; Pollak, 2016; Salloukh, 2017) that Hezbollah had changed militarily. A common theme throughout many of the interviews was the belief that

Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian Civil War had endowed it with considerably more power as a sectarian actor. Many believed that its military superiority over the Lebanese army strengthened when compared to years preceding the Syrian Civil War. It had now moved from being a key player in Lebanese politics, with sporadic (often violent) action linked to its operations in foreign countries, to a key *regional* actor within the Levant and even the Gulf. Professor Adham Saouli admitted that an interesting study would now be to examine Hezbollah's foreign policy in Yemen.

Youssef, a Greek Orthodox and a professor of political science at Lebanese State University, argued that the battle for Syria had rendered the organization much stronger to engage in a conventional war against Israel. Muhammed agreed on this point. Its ranks have swelled. Far from being a movement whose primary mode of attack is the suicide bomber, Hezbollah's battle-hardened troops are now experts in urban guerilla warfare. Iran and Russia supplied even more arms to the organization. As well as the moral debt of Syria for having helped save the regime. Hezbollah has become much stronger politically because it has worked with Russia, Iran, and Syria, agreed Radia.

37-year-old Myriam, who did not support Hezbollah, admitted that despite the fact that Hezbollah was now engaged in a full conventional war, it was now a much better-organized group that effectively participated in politics rather than just a militia: "Growing up, it [Hezbollah] was pretty much just fighters in the street. Now they are organized with their own institutions." Joseph Daher writes that Hezbollah's growing influence meant that Israel had new fears of an empowered, militarized Hezbollah and Iran at its immediate border. Israeli Brigadier General Muni Katz even claimed that "working alongside Russian forces will likely enhance the group's ongoing shift toward a more offensive-minded strategy" (Daher, 2016). As a result, Israel has periodically bombarded Iranian and Hezbollah military convoys and bases. Having said that, the fact that over 1 500 soldiers of Hezbollah have perished in Syria has likely meant that the organization's ranks have suffered a dilution in terms of military talent and training.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Summary of Results

Securitization theory helps us understand why political elites may want to demonize the “other” and turn certain outside groups into an intersubjective security threat: “Securitizing an issue ultimately enables certain elites to increase their power as a consequence of being granted special privileges in dealing with a security issue or, in other words, breaking free from the procedures and rules that actors ‘would otherwise be bound by’” (Balzacq, 2010). Before the Syrian Civil War, Hezbollah securitized the threat of Israel to the Lebanese nation and its Shia community. Based on interviews conducted with Lebanese participants and non-participant observation, it was observed that Hezbollah’s ideology did change in that it began to also securitize the threat of the Islamic State to the Lebanese nation, even if most of the Lebanese participants in the study were aware of what Hezbollah was doing and only a few were in agreement with Hezbollah’s expressed ideology. Hezbollah’s securitization process evoked a sectarian nationalism as its ideology in that it claimed to protect the Lebanese nation, but relied on a religiously identifiable people, Sunni Muslim Arabs, as its primary adversary.

Of the twenty-seven Lebanese participants that were interviewed, only seven perceived Hezbollah’s fight in Syria to be both just and in the national interests of Lebanon. Of these seven, some understood that Hezbollah was in Syria to preserve its interests as an organization but still believed that its interests and ideology were aligned with that of Lebanon’s. The others amongst the seven wholeheartedly believed that Hezbollah was sacrificing its resources out of goodwill in order to protect Lebanon. Such individuals did not give considerable importance to the fact that Hezbollah was fighting in Syria before the Islamic State existed.

Furthermore, what was not foreseen is that some participants interpreted Hezbollah’s actions in Syria as proof that it was ideologically becoming neither more nationalistic nor increasingly sectarian, but just more foreign. Hezbollah’s involvement in Syria demonstrated to them that Hezbollah was nothing but a proxy of Syria and Iran. While many analysts now conclude that

Hezbollah possesses agency and independence from Iran, the fact that many of the Christian and Sunni participants interpreted Hezbollah's war this way is an interesting dynamic.

Sectarian nationalism is represented through Hezbollah's elites' portrayal of all Syrian rebels as radical Salafi jihadists during public discourse because it evokes ardor for Lebanese nationalism while relying on the demonization of Sunni Arabs in Syria. Nonetheless, such sectarian nationalism, along with sectarianism, is not present in Hezbollah's physical portrayal of its ideology. During non-participant observation in Hezbollah dominated areas where the majority of non-Shia Lebanese would typically avoid due to safety concerns, Hezbollah was not conveying sectarian rhetoric by either demonizing Sunnis or evoking Shia doctrine. What the author, along with some of the participants, noticed was that Hezbollah used universalist Islamic rhetoric as a way of honouring fallen martyrs and, most likely, as a way to recruit new members to the organization. Nonetheless, such Islamic rhetoric and imagery was not fundamentalist in that it did not claim to replace the current political system with a religious system, such as vilayat-e faqih in Iran, nor did it attempt to claim that society had deviated from an "original" form of Islam practiced by the founders and that such a form of Islam had to be restored. In addition, such rhetoric was not used to create antipathy towards non-Muslim groups or other Muslim groups. Therefore, this cannot be classified as sectarian, and it cannot be concisely concluded that Hezbollah exploited sectarianism in its visual and physical propaganda as a way to ideologically justify its implication in the Syrian Civil War.

Most of the participants made the argument for Hezbollah's sectarian ideological transformation from the perspective that actions speak louder than words: Hezbollah's engagement in a conflict mired in sectarianism certainly meant that the organization was *ipso facto* linked to sectarianism because military involvement was the strongest demonstration of political ideology. Furthermore, some Lebanese participants did fear that even if Hezbollah itself was not overly sectarian, its involvement in a sectarian war could result in religiously-themed conflict at home.

Finally, some of the participants interpreted Hezbollah's portrayal of Salafist groups in Syria as *takfiri* as an example of sectarian rhetoric, even if calling someone *takfiri* means that you are accusing someone of the now archaic practice of excommunicating or executing another Muslim

who is believed to be *kafir*. Calling someone *takfiri* and declaring *takfir* are two radically different actions. The latter is, ultimately, much more fanatical and sectarian in Islam. Nonetheless, and once again, the fact that certain, well-educated, Lebanese did not detect any discrepancy demonstrates that even if Hezbollah engages with other factions in a sectarian conflict, using their enemies' language, it can give the impression that Hezbollah, too, is radicalizing and can further exacerbate tensions at home. Furthermore, certain participants did recognize a difference between *takfir* and *takfiri* but believed that Hezbollah exploited the term *takfiri* to brand all moderate Sunni rebel groups as extremists, which could also be interpreted as sectarianism.

Hezbollah continues to use Israel as its favourite discursive punching bag. Even Nasrallah's speeches consistently paint Israel as the predominant enemy of both Hezbollah and the Lebanese. However, this is nothing unfamiliar to past policies and does not represent an ideological transformation. Furthermore, the author did not observe that Hezbollah physically displayed affection for the Lebanese nation. Only in Hezbollah's public political speeches did it use nationalism to securitize the threat of the Islamic State and Israel to the Lebanese nation. Why exactly Hezbollah securitized the danger of the Islamic State to the Lebanese nation solely through the ideology dissemination tools of public speeches and media, rather than other sources that Hezbollah uses for ideological dissemination, which is used to promote remembrance of martyrs, Iranian propaganda, and Islamic imagery, would make for interesting discussion.

It should be noted that the perspectives that harshly criticized Hezbollah, which were the majority, and saw through its mixed sectarian, religious, and nationalistic rhetoric and acknowledged Hezbollah's realist self-interest in Syria, offered fascinating insight into how some urbanized, university-educated (sometimes even possessing dual American, Belgian, French, or Canadian nationalities) Lebanese feel. It should also be noted that this study did not take into account the perspectives of the uneducated and rural population, who both would likely provide divergent opinions.

Conclusion: Hezbollah's Adaptability as a Rational Actor

In the Middle East, as in many other parts of the world, the ideological leverage of nationalism is relatively weak since many of the national intersubjective imagined communities in the Middle East were forced upon their host populations with decolonization after World War Two, despite there being some organic national movements. As Hinnebusch notes, competing narratives, both supranational, such as pan-Arabism and pan-Islamist, and subnational, such as tribal, ethnic, and religious affiliations, plague the Middle East (Hinnebusch, 2013). When nation-states are weak, securitization theory will find the mobilization of religious identity more fruitful than the exploitation of nationalism. An ideology advocating the protection of the Lebanese imagined community is unlikely to have much of an influence in a region where, as Alam Saleh and Hendrik Kraetzschmar write, “the region’s societal make-up, the transnational nature of identities, and the incomplete processes of creating nation-states have made this particular region prone to an internationalization of conflicts. Identities are neither organic nor autochthonous, though they are often portrayed as such in popular discourse.” Nonetheless, given Lebanon’s multi-confessional make-up, if Hezbollah were to solely exploit sectarianism at home, it would risk disrupting peace in Lebanon. Instead, Hezbollah employs nationalism while securitizing the sect.

Hezbollah’s involvement in the Syrian Civil War demonstrates its desire to pursue its own interests in a bloody conflict while attempting to justify its actions to a broader Lebanese audience that did not consist only of its Shia ingroup. Thus, it found that the desire to protect Lebanon from the securitized threat of the Salafist to the Lebanese nation, sectarian nationalism, along with the exploitation of universalist Islamic doctrine, to be a more convenient justification than it did any fervent purely nationalistic or purely anti-Sunni sectarian ideology. The only interviewed Druze, who was also engaged in politics, acknowledged that Hezbollah was a “very pragmatic organization” and would always attempt to preserve its interests. Hezbollah may exploit Lebanese fears of the Islamic State today, but tomorrow it may expound unconditional devotion to Ali, as would be logical for a rational actor seeking to maximize its power in politics. If transnational identities and movements continue to challenge Hezbollah’s power, the organization is unlikely to relinquish its anti-Salafi narrative. If leftist Shia organizations begin to oppose Hezbollah’s legitimacy, such as Amal in the 1980s and 1990s, or there exists a state of anarchy amongst all religious minorities in the Levant, then perhaps Hezbollah might revert to a more frequent practice

of sectarian ideology in manufacturing the consent to govern over its in-group population.¹² However, if nation-states throughout the Middle East are strengthened, then Hezbollah may passionately participate in the national discourse. Until that time, Hezbollah's elites, whether aware of it or not, are ideologically constructing both a sectarian actor in Lebanon's confessional system and a national defender of Lebanon's borders, while also existing as a rational agent seeking to enhance its prowess in a feuded realm.

¹² "Manufacturing consent" is a term invented by Herman and Chomsky that refers to the propaganda model of communication in the United States (Harman and Chomsky, 2010).

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Appendix

The History of Shia Islam

The first caliph following the prophet Mohammed's death in Islam was Abu Bakr. Unlike a prophet, or "messenger of God," the caliph was chosen only to lead the community of Muslims. Similar to Christian tradition, and unlike the ethnic religion of Judaism, Islam claimed universal authority. As a result, Abu Bakr began a period of conquest and proselytizing. In due course, the might of the Muslim armies overwhelmed the century-battered and plagued Byzantine and Sassanian Empires. By the beginning of the rule of the third caliph Uthman, the Muslims had conquered most of Arabia, North Africa, the Levant, Mesopotamia, and Persia. As Muslim armies reached as far as Sicily and Spain, so too did the Arabic language.

Within Islamic history, the "Big Bang" of Shiism, as Heinz Halm puts it, did not emerge until after the death of the third caliph Uthman. With an irresponsible governing policy that led to the nepotistic Caliph Uthman's murder, tension within the Muslim community began to arise. Muhammed's closest confidant, second convert, cousin, and son-in-law, Ali, claimed electoral victory and ruled initially from Kufa. Ali, like most of his supporters, believed that the caliph should be of direct relation to the prophet. However, a relative of Uthman known as Muawiya challenged Ali's legitimacy. After a brief period of fighting, the two forces agreed to arbitration. Compromise angered certain supporters of Ali known as the Kharijites. They later assassinated him, leaving Ali's son Hasan to succeed him and challenge Muawiya (Halm, 2007).

Rather than continue the struggle, Hassan abdicated the leadership role and sought a quiet life of seclusion, comfort, and wealth in Medina (Halm, 2007). His brother, Hussein, continued the fight. Outnumbered and cut-off from supply lines, Hussein's forces were slaughtered near Karbala. It was at this moment that the religious dimension of Shiism was created. According to the Shia tradition, the "death of the third Imam and his followers marked the 'big bang' that created the rapidly expanding cosmos of Shi'ism and brought it into motion" (Halm, 2007).

Diversity in Shiism

After the initial fitna ("split") from the main Muslim community, Shiites ("Shiat 'Ali" or partisans of Ali) did not remain a homologous group. While still believing in the legitimacy of Ali's descendants as caliph, the first rebels amongst the rebels were the Zaydis. They believed that the Imam should "be the worthiest member of the Prophet's family who was willing to oppose illegitimate rulers" (Hourani, 2013). Therefore, the Zaydis refused to recognize Muhammed al-Baqir, the fifth Imam for the majority of Shiites, and instead chose to follow his brother Zayd. Zayd, the son of 'Ali ibn Hussein (caliph number four), led an ultimately suicidal revolt against the Umayyad caliph Hisham (Halm, 2007). The Zaydis continue to exist in northern Yemen as the Houthis and, to this day, believe that the rightful caliph is not to be determined by lineage but by a fight to the death.

Ismailis trace their lineage to the eldest son, named Ismail, of the sixth Imam named Ja'far al-Sadiq. Ismail failed to outlive his father, who is considered to be the founder of Shia jurisprudence (Halm, 2007; Nasr, 2016). And instead of supporting who most Shiites believe to be the seventh Imam, Musa al-Kazim, Ismailis claim that Ismail became caliph and appointed his son, also named Muhammed, as his successor. Ismailis also believe that Muhammed will eventually return as the Mahdi and bring Quranic revelation and eternal justice to the world, similar to other millennialist religions. Ismail's descendants continue to lead the community of Ismailis. After extensive missionary work, the Ismailis created the Fatimid dynasty. The Fatimids established a vast empire in the Nile valley in Egypt where they ruled over a majority Sunni, Jewish, and Christian population. Today, Ismailis continue to worship their distinct form of Shia Islam in Yemen, Syria, Iran, and western India (Hourani, 2013). The Ismaili Fatimids, like the Crusaders at Jerusalem, witnessed their end with the rise of the Kurdish (and Sunni) Salah al-Din of the Ayyubid Dynasty.

The most popular Shia branch, one which counts Hezbollah and the Iranian regime amongst its flock, believes that the end of the accession of Imams terminated with Muhammed, the twelfth Imam. The "Twelvers" believe that Muhammed disappeared in 874 during a time known as the "lesser occultation" where he only communicated with the faithful. During the "greater occultation" his appearances became rarer, only in the form of visions and dreams. Twelvers, the majority of Shia, believe that he will later return in full glory, bringing justice and an end to the world. Although the Shia claim divine inspiration, some historians argue that the messianism of Twelver Shiism reflects Zoroastrian and Judeo-Christian influence (Halm, 2007).

Finally, two smaller branches of Shiism that remain of utter importance for both Syria and Lebanon today are the Druze and the Alawites. The Druze originate from the teaching of the Ismaili Hamza ibn 'Ali and the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim (Hourani, 2013): the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim declared himself to be God. Upon his death, his followers argued, like other branches of Shiism, that he had disappeared rather than died. The Druze take their name from one of their leaders who fled to Mount Lebanon, Ismail al-Darazi (Mansfield, 2013).

The Alawites, who were known as the Nusayris before the French colonization of the Levant, are of crucial importance today because the current Syrian regime of President Assad of Syria draws much of his support from his ethnoreligious Alawite base. Alawites trace their origins to Ibn Nusayr, a follower of the 10th and 11th Shia Imams. However, much is debated regarding their exact history. The Alawites incorporate some aspects of Christianity into their belief system (Procházka, 2015). Today they reside primarily in the Syrian Coastal Mountain Range in northwestern Syria.

Like Sunnis, Shiites also make a pilgrimage to the holy sites of Mecca and Medina. However, the Shia differ in that they also worship the graves of their Imams, the children of the Imams, and tombs of notable scholars (Hourani, 2013). They have even been known to worship the tombs of Sufi saints. Shias are known for their celebration of 'Ashura, the remembrance of the battle of Karbala where Hussein was slaughtered. During 'Ashura, Shias engage in passionate self-flagellation in an expression of their collective guilt for having failed to come to the aid of Hussein.