



Middle East Institute
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HIZBULLAH AND THE FREE
PATRIOTIC MOVEMENT:
THE POLITICS OF PERCEPTION
AND THE FAILED SEARCH
FOR A NATIONAL TERRITORY

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HIZBULLAH AND THE FREE PATRIOTIC MOVEMENT: THE POLITICS OF PERCEPTION AND THE FAILED SEARCH FOR A NATIONAL TERRITORY

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ABSTRACT

Since the eleventh century, Twelver Shi'is and Maronites have lived alongside one another in the northern part of Mount Lebanon, both in good times and in bad. Some long-established customs still regulate their relations with one another, and shared rituals and practices can be observed in some of these mixed villages.¹ Such arrangements were in existence long before the political understanding initiated between the Christian leader General Michel 'Awn and the Secretary General of Hizbullah, Sayyid Hasan Nasrullah in February 2006.

These social ties have contributed to transform the political entente between the players into a more profound political alliance, strengthened by the war launched by Israel against Hizbullah between July and August 2006.

A priori, an alliance between a secular movement (FPM) and an armed religious party (Hizbullah) seems to go against the grain. In fact, the social foundations of Shi'i-Maronite solidarity have served to reinforce the political pact between the two; in addition, the alliance has, on the whole, been adroitly and sensitively handled. Both parties have committed to work to preserve Lebanon's independence and sovereignty, and the FPM has avoided any expressions of concern

¹ The Shi'i village of Afqa near Byblos is located next to the Maronite village of Majd al-Aqura. Women from both communities pray to have children at the pagan temple of Adonis. I lived in this region for twenty years and am very familiar with such phenomena. Aida Kanafani-Zahar makes similar observations about common rituals in Hasun, a Shi'i/Maronite village of about five hundred inhabitants located near Byblos. Aida Kanafani-Zahar, 'Le religieux sublimé dans le sacrifice du mouton: un exemple de coexistence communautaire au Liban'; *L'Homme*, 37, 141, 1997, 83-99. There was no ethnic cleansing in the region of Byblos (*Bilad Jubayl*) during the civil war (1975-1990): the Christians did not attempt to remove the Shi'i civilian population by force.

about the mixture of religious and political values that animates Hizbullah.²

After the war of July 2006, Hizbullah and the FPM organised a series of political actions and protests between 1 December 2006 and 21 May 2008 (the Doha Agreement). These protests entailed a set of discursive and territorial practices and semiotics that favoured socialization between the groups both in the more central urban areas and in the suburbs of Beirut.

The imagined frontiers that date back to the geography of the civil war (1975-1990) and new fronts emerging from more recent clashes have challenged the rise of a united imagined national territory. Instead of social cohesion, social distance has grown between the communities as a result of social practices that are shaping and constituting their territories, in addition to the armed control by militias of some areas within and outside Beirut. Besides, the disintegration of many Arab regimes in 2011 in combination with the continuing stalemate in Syria has resulted in a more fractured geopolitical imagination with a more urgent sense of community survival. In August 2011, a political discourse suffused with parochial sectarian politics became prominent. Towards the end of 2011, the violent clashes in Syria and their consequences in both regional and international politics foregrounded the 'axis of rejection', or *mumana'a*,³ to which the FPM-Hizbullah alliance belongs. These external factors have aggravated the

² This new social dynamic is distinct from the notion of social or group resistance (*mujtama' al-muqawama*) under which the institutionalised networks of Hizbullah seek to mobilise the Shi'is of Lebanon. 'In Hizbullah's view, resistance is a mission and a responsibility for every Shi'i in his or her everyday life. Thus resistance is military, but it is primarily political and social: it is a choice of life, or a 'methodology', as recently emphasized by Nasrullah. The resistance society is the product that Hizbullah's holistic network aims to achieve. This society serves to disseminate the concept of spiritual jihad, which is complementary to military jihad: 'The prophet told us: combat is a small jihad, the biggest jihad is the spiritual jihad.' Mona Harb and Reinoud Leenders, 'Know thine enemy: Hizbullah, "terrorism" and the politics of perception', *Third World Quarterly*, 26, 1, 2005, 173-97.

³ Initially, the rejection front (*front du refus*) as described by Sabrina Mervin in *Les mondes chiïtes et l'Iran*, Paris, Karthala 2007, was viewed as a political alliance underpinned by the Shi'is. But the term *mumana'a* has transcended the Shi'is in the Levant to become the slogan of a broader anti-Western axis. This is a tangible trans-Asian alliance, paving a new Silk Road from Shanghai to Beirut, running through Moscow (North Korea/China/Russia/Iraq/Syria/Lebanon and previously Gaza). The anti-tank missiles that made Hizbullah almost invincible during the war with Israel in 2006 are evidence of the ways in which the Resistance benefits from this territorial contiguity. In February 2012 Russia and China vetoed a UN Security Council resolution calling for the Syrian president to step down.

political fault lines in Lebanon and among the sectarian communities. Under these circumstances, the land of the cedars risks spiralling once more into civil war.

However, Lebanese political stability seems to be based on two fairly strong foundations, one of which has to do with the current political leadership, especially President Sulayman and Prime Minister Miqati. They have both been working to try to achieve a form of positive neutrality in Lebanon, which, at least until September 2012, had succeeded in keeping most of the political institutions united. The other main pillar of Lebanese stability is the alliance between FPM and Hizbullah. Even the various Syrian plots to ignite sectarian rifts has not broken the pact between the two. This was when former minister and MP Michel Samaha, a close ally of Hizbullah, admitted that he was involved in a plot to carry out terrorist attacks aiming at shifting the sectarian rift from a Shi'i/Sunni divide to a Muslim/Christian divide,⁴ harking back to the atmosphere of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990). Despite the assumption that the Syrian plot was not sufficient to reignite the passions of the civil war, Hizbullah's possible involvement in diverting the poles of the battle can unfortunately only aggravate the sectarian blinkeredness of the Lebanese communities.

⁴ Samaha was arrested on 9 August 2012 on suspicion of being involved in a plot to carry out terrorist attacks in north Lebanon on orders from Syria.

INTRODUCTION: THE RECENT HISTORY OF MODERN LEBANON⁵

Cohabitation between Shi'is and Maronites in Mount Lebanon dates back to the eleventh century, when these two communities, together with the Druze community, were fleeing persecution. At this point the Maronite community (which did not subscribe to Byzantine orthodoxy) was fleeing en masse from Byzantine control towards the mountains east of Tripoli. Shi'i Muslims fleeing 'Abbasid persecution were also starting to migrate from Syria, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Biqa' valley to the Kisrawan region of Mount Lebanon. The Druzes also migrated to this mountainous area to avoid persecution after the demise of their founder the caliph al-Hakim bi-Amrullah (996-1021). Matti Moosa suggests that Christianity came to Mount Lebanon in the first century AD, but the Maronites only became a separate sect in the eighth century, sometime after the arrival of Islam in the region.⁶ By the twelfth century, the three communities dominated the hills stretching from the 'Homs gap'⁷ to northern Palestine.⁸ The conventional wisdom assumes that the communities lost the trust of later Sunni Muslim overlords, namely the Mamluks (1282-1516) and the Ottomans (1516-1918), who followed a policy that was generally opposed to Shi'ism and to the two other sects. However, Stefan Winter suggests more plausibly that:

... the Ottoman Empire was ideologically too heterogeneous and politically too pragmatic, and therefore the instances of persecution by state authorities should be seen in their specific temporal and political context rather than assumed to be part of a universal anti-Shi'i impulse.⁹

⁵ This introduction is based on a study that I conducted on the divided city of Beirut: Mémoire de DEA 'Des frontières de la différenciation aux frontières de la rupture: la division pathologique de Beyrouth', École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), 2002.

⁶ Matti Moosa, *The Maronites in History*, Athens GA, University of Georgia Press, 2005.

⁷ Also called the Akkar gap, separating the Nusayri mountains and Jabal Zawiyah from the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains.

⁸ William W. Harris, *The Levant: a fractured mosaic*, Princeton, NJ, Markus Wiener 2003.

⁹ Stefan Winter, *The Shi'is of Lebanon under Ottoman Rule, 1516-1788*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, 5.

This could also apply to the Maronites and the Druzes. In any case, the collective memory has accounts of persecuted minorities who saved their cultures by taking refuge in these mountains.

The Maronites experienced remarkable demographic growth after Sultan Sulayman the Magnificent (1520-1566) granted them protection and recognised their rights as a community,¹⁰ and subsequently gained a degree of political empowerment in Lebanon in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The political power of the Maronite community was limited by the rule of a number of Druze feudal families within a Druze amirate that was expanding primarily at the expense of the region's Shi'i rulers.¹¹ Under the pro-Christian Druze Amir Fakhr al-Din II Ma'n (1590-1634), Maronite cultivators and traders had started moving towards the south of Mount Lebanon and the Maronites became the economic backbone of the Ma'n principality, which was supported by France. In 1754, a Druze amir, 'Ali al-Shihab, from the family that had succeeded the Ma'n line in 1697, converted to Maronite Christianity, and was followed by his relatives from the Ma'n and Abi Lama' families.

Towards the end of the 18th century, changes in the demographic balance and political empowerment of the Maronite community together with the decline of the Shi'i feudal families of the north¹² had brought conflict to Mount Lebanon. Historians have described these wars in sectarian terms, especially nationalist narratives that highlight the fighting between the Maronites and the Druzes in the

¹⁰ At this point the Maronites started moving from Tripoli to Kisrawan, Matn al-Gharb and the Shuf.

¹¹ 'Nationalist historians have traditionally traced the origins of Lebanon back to the "Druze amirate", the feudal rule of the Ma'n and Shihab families in the province of Sidon which gradually also encompassed the Maronite community in Tripoli and which has therefore stood as a model of inter-confessional cooperation under Ottoman rule. This romanticized vision of the country's roots, however, ignores the fact that the expansion and consolidation of the Druze amirs' power by the end of the eighteenth century occurred primarily at the expense of the region's Shi'i feudatories, who have been largely written out of the national narrative.' Winter, *Shi'is of Lebanon* ... ii.

¹² See Ilya F. Harik, *Political change in a traditional society: a study of institutional conflict in the Iqta' political system of Mount Lebanon, 1711-1845*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1964, and Stefan Winter, ' "Un Lys dans des épines": maronites et chiites au Mont Liban 1698-1763', *Arabica*, 51, 4, 2004, 478-92.

course of the 19th century (1804, 1845, and 1860).¹³ The last of these wars, in 1860, ended with the abolition of most feudal privileges and the installation of direct Ottoman rule under the special regime of the *mutasarrifiyya*.¹⁴

LEBANON SINCE THE 1930s¹⁵

There are many excellent modern histories of Lebanon, so I will not attempt a narrative account of events since the foundation of the modern state.¹⁶ However, a number of points may be mentioned here. First, the system of quasi-proportional confessional representation that is one of the most visible markers of contemporary Lebanese politics was established a fairly long time ago. Confessional representation was a feature of the system of governance of the *mutasarrifiyya*, the institution under which Mount Lebanon was ruled as a special district within the Ottoman Empire between 1861 and 1915; that is, it was not the creation of the French mandatory authorities. Second, the creation of *Grand Liban* in 1920 added Beirut, the districts of Tripoli and Sidon, and the Biqa' valley to 'Lebanon', with the result that the Maronite community, which had formed the

¹³ The massacre of 1860 was preceded by a civil war in the 1840s leading to Ottoman, British and French intervention, which divided Mount Lebanon into two districts, the northern one under a Maronite governor and the southern district under a Druze governor. A Maronite peasant rebellion began in the north and spread into the south where it took the form of a sectarian conflict between Christians and Druzes, an integral part of the Lebanese collective memory of sectarian violence.

¹⁴ See Engin Akarli, *The Long Peace: Ottoman Lebanon 1861-1920*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1993.

¹⁵ The following paragraphs (pp. 9-11) are based on an unpublished paper by Peter Sluglett, 'Christian militias in Lebanon', presented at the colloque 'La sociologie des forces armées dans l'espace arabo-musulman', Université du Havre, May 2012.

¹⁶ A basic bibliography might begin with Fawaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, London and Ann Arbor MI, Pluto Press, 2007, which covers Lebanese history until the end of the civil war in 1989-90. A broader historical period is covered in William Harris, *Lebanon: A History, 600-2011*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2012, which is especially useful for the pre-modern history of Lebanon's sectarian communities. For the mandate, see Kais Firro, *Inventing Lebanon: Nationalism and the State under the Mandate*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2003. The period since independence is covered in Wade Gorla, *Sovereignty and Leadership in Lebanon 1943-1976*, London, Ithaca Press, 1986, and Michael Hudson, *The precarious republic: political modernization in Lebanon*, Boulder CO, Westview Press, 1985. For the civil war and its aftermath see Michael Johnson, *All Honourable Men: the Social Origins of War in Lebanon*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2001, and Sune Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

overall majority of the population in the *mutasarrifiyya*, was now simply the largest religious community in the new state. In some sense, though, the French continued to treat the Maronites as if they still constituted (at least) an overall demographic majority. Third, with the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Sunni Muslims in both Lebanon and Syria (who formed the overwhelming majority of the population in the Middle East as a whole) no longer enjoyed the unique status that they had enjoyed previously, in that the French authorities attempted to treat them as one among several religious communities.¹⁷

Finally, while many if not most Maronites had welcomed the French as deliverers from the Ottomans (and in some sense from 'Muslim rule', although they had only experienced it between 1840 and 1860), it had become clear by the 1930s that some aspects of French rule were irksome, and that a growing body of Maronites, along with most Muslims, were beginning to consider independence a desirable goal. Thus, however much the 'old guard' of political and regional bosses (*zu'ama*, singular *za'im*) and religious leaders of all sects might be prepared to collaborate with the French, and to impress the importance of doing so upon their followers and dependents, Lebanon could not remain immune from the various anti-colonial currents of the inter-war period in the Arab world, which sought, among other goals, independence from French and British rule. But, as in so many other instances of this kind, participants in the various independence movements were mostly united by a common sense of what they did *not* want.

In addition, the (Sunni) Muslim community of Lebanon – although numerically significant, the Shi'i community would lack effective political clout until the late 1970s – initially resented the whole 'idea of Lebanon,' which many of them regarded as a French plot to separate them from the 'Syrian homeland' and to subject them to Maronite domination. However, by the end of the 1930s it was gradually becoming clear at least to key members of the Sunni leadership first, that the French would insist on a separate Lebanon as a condition of Syrian (and thus Lebanese) independence, and second, that a partnership with the Maronite elite would not be without its economic and socio-political advantages. By the time of the Conference of the Coast in 1936, most Lebanese Muslim leaders, as well as the majority

¹⁷ As in Lebanon, the introduction by the French of the concept of 'majority' and 'minority' into Syria led almost inexorably to the Sunnis' (the 'majority') being regarded simply as 'another religious community', which the Sunni 'ulama regarded as degrading. See Benjamin Thomas White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: Politics and Community in French mandate Syria*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2011, Chapter Two.

of the 'traditional' Christian leadership had come to the conclusion that the territorial integrity of *Grand Liban* was worth preserving.¹⁸ Again, also by the 1930s, notions of 'Arab nationalism' and 'the Arab homeland' were gaining greater traction (though this wave did not crest for a while), that is, the sense that the Muslims of Lebanon were part of a larger community that transcended the country's borders. These political manoeuvrings led to the conclusion of the unwritten National Pact of 1943, between the Maronite and Sunni leaders, which divided executive and parliamentary powers among the major communities in Lebanon: the President would be a Maronite, the Prime Minister a Sunni, and the Speaker of Parliament a Shi'i.

It should be noted that voters in Lebanon are divided among 17 sectarian denominations and other faiths, and that registration on the electoral roll is according to place of origin, not place of residence. The geography of the faith communities essentially inherited from the late Ottoman Empire requires a detailed regional study. Broadly speaking, Sunnis have a strong presence in major cities, and a clear majority in Sidon and Tripoli, while forming the largest faith community in Beirut. In rural areas, the Sunnis live mostly in the northern regions of 'Akkar and Dinniya, and in the south and the Biqa' Iqlim al-Kharrub, northeast of Sidon, where they are in the majority. The Shi'is are concentrated in the south (Jabal 'Amlil) and in the northern Biqa', where they inhabit certain areas almost exclusively. Traditionally they have lacked a significant presence in the cities, while having a minority community in Beirut and its suburbs. Minority communities are located in the region of Jubayl and central Biqa'. The Druze population is concentrated in the southern of Mount Lebanon (Chouf region and 'Aley) and the foothills of Mount Hermon. There are both dominant and mixed communities. There are small communities of Alawites in northern Lebanon, and small minority groups located contiguous to their 'homeland' in northeastern Syria.

The Christian communities also have a strong geographical concentration. The Maronites are located on the western slope of Mount Lebanon. A majority in the north of Mount Lebanon, the region of Kisrawan /Zgharta, they occupy more mixed areas in the south, cohabiting with Shi'is (South Jubayl), Druze (Shuf, 'Aley, Matn) or Orthodox (Matn, Kura). The Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics are minorities in locations that do not overlap completely. The Greek Orthodox have traditionally been strong in the coastal cities of Tripoli and Beirut. In the countryside, they can be found in mixed neighbourhoods in the Matn district and central Mount

¹⁸ See Raghid al-Solh, *Lebanon and Arabism: national identity and state formation*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2004, 20-30.

Lebanon and in the south-east, in the Biqa' and in the central plains of 'Akkar. They are the majority in the Koura district, south of Tripoli. The Greek Catholics are a minority in the towns of Zahleh, Sidon and Tyre, Beirut, and in the smaller towns. Otherwise, they are scattered across southern Mount Lebanon and in the central and northern Biqa'. The Armenian Orthodox and Catholic communities are concentrated in Beirut and its suburbs and in central Biqa' since their arrival from Anatolia. Other Christian communities, whose positions have not been mapped, are found mostly in Beirut and Mount Lebanon and central Biqa'.¹⁹

Naturally, the adoption of the confessional mode model more than a century and a half ago has served to strengthen Lebanese sectarianism. Instead of paving the way for a secular state it buttressed traditional social power by maintaining clannishness in patronage and pork barreling. One result of this is that no census has been taken since 1932, since the results would show the numbers of the communities as they actually are. Lebanon's peculiar composition has led to its great sensitivity to regional political change and the various political upheavals in the Middle East, notably the establishment of the State of Israel and the *nakba* of 1948 that had led to the dispossession of 800,000 Palestinian refugees, of whom some 300,000 ended up in Lebanon; the Cold War and its impact on the Arab political regimes and their political instability, and the various 'revolutionary state' projects of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. In 1958, a movement led by supporters of the United Arab Republic of Egypt and Syria divided Beirut on sectarian lines. Even the Lebanese economic miracle was not sufficient to damp down the flames of multiple competing ideologies.

While the Lebanese state attempted to assert itself against the Palestinian presence in Lebanon, a social and ideological solidarity sprang up between the most destitute Lebanese and the Palestinian refugees. While the pan-Arab left had its supporters, the proletarian and lower middle-class, mostly the Christian right, began to gather around the *Phalanges Libanaises*, also known as *al-Kata'ib*. At the same time, Shi'i consciousness was beginning to develop with the arrival of the Iranian cleric Musa Sadr, who founded and led the Higher Shi'i Council. In the late sixties, Lebanon witnessed the arrival of two new waves of Palestinian refugees, the first as a result of the war of 1967 and the second as a result of the violence in Jordan in 1970 (Black September). Struggling to contain the Palestinian resistance, the Lebanese state also found itself virtually at war

¹⁹ See Eric Verdeil, 'les territoires du vote au Liban', *Environnement Ville Société*, 78 (2-2005), UMR 5600, Lyon.

with Israel in 1968. Now directly involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that had long since become an Arab-Israeli conflict, the Lebanese state signed and ratified agreements that undermined its national sovereignty, including the Cairo Accords of November 1969, under which the presence and activities of Palestinian guerrillas in southeast Lebanon would be tolerated and regulated by the Lebanese authorities.²⁰ In addition to the ideological, demographic, and political turmoil, and the lack of security, an educated but often unemployed middle class emerged in the 1970s as a result of the development policies implemented by Presidents Fu'ad Shihab (1958-64) and Charles Hilu (1964-70).

At that time, the Lebanese cauldron was boiling over, and a set of factors was leading the country towards a civil war that would last from 1975 until 1990. During the war, territories and communal identities were recomposed, the demographics of the country were disrupted, and political issues and warring factions were defined and redefined. The state gradually lost the power to control the national territory, and Israel and Syria, allied with local armed militias, occupied much of Lebanon. These militias had come to stand for the communities they stigmatized; a Christian was automatically accused of being a *Kata'ib* (belonging to the Phalanges) or a *Quwwat* (belonging to the Lebanese Forces) while a Shi'i was either with Amal or Hizbullah, a Sunni was a *Fida'i*, and a Druze, a supporter of Walid Junblat. Worse, each community was tarnished by the terrible massacres committed by 'its' militias. The Druzes were the perpetrators of the massacres in the Shuf and the Christians were the perpetrators of the massacre of Sabra and Shatila. Furthermore, Beirut was divided between East Beirut and West Beirut, and each community experienced an internal revolution in which a number of different warlords were attempting to establish their hegemony.

The Ta'if Accord, signed in 1989, marked the end of a long history of power struggle. The agreement redirected executive power towards the Sunni Prime Minister and attempted to balance democracy by giving the Shi'is the leadership of a parliament, which can pass a vote of no confidence. In 1990, the defeat of General Michel 'Awn and the entry of Syrian troops into east Beirut marked the end of the civil war. While the Ta'if Accord provided for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Lebanon and the disarming of the militias, Israel

²⁰ This was the result of talks between Yassir Arafat of the PLO and General Emile Bustani, the commander of the Lebanese army, brokered by President Nasser of Egypt.

did not withdraw its forces until 2000 and Syria not until 2005, after the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri. In the meantime, the militias were disarmed.²¹ As a Lebanese resistance movement, Hizbullah kept its arms and the right to maintain and acquire weapons. Thus, Lebanon was engaged in a dual project throughout the period of reconstruction, and the resistance had very little in common with Hariri's capitalist project.

After the assassination of Hariri, which was quickly followed by the demand for the withdrawal of Syrian troops, only Hizbullah demonstrated on 8 March 2005 to be in favour of keeping the Syrian presence in Lebanon. In response, a demonstration of a million people, composed of everyone who did not support the Syrian presence in Lebanon, took place on March 14, dubbed the "Cedar Revolution". All the political parties and factions except Hizbullah and the Syrian Ba'ath came out in support. However, the elections of 2005 surprised many Lebanese: the 2000 electoral law, tailored by the occupation forces for their allies, remained unchanged. There were also some 'unnatural' alliances between supporters of the 'democratic movement' of March 14 and Hizbullah. Was this simply in order to achieve short-term goals such as maintaining the date of the elections or guaranteeing various groups seats in Parliament? It certainly had the effect of isolating one prominent Christian figure, General Michel 'Awn.

In February 2006, 'Awn met with Sayyid Hasan Nasrullah and they drew up a joint 'road map' which they claimed would be more effective than the National Dialogue²² in integrating the Resistance

²¹ Elizabeth Picard, *Prospects for Lebanon: the Demobilisation of the Lebanese Militias*, Oxford, Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1999.

²² 'On 2 March 2006, 14 Lebanese leaders representing major sectarian communities and political groups convened a National Dialogue conference to address key issues currently dividing Lebanon. The ground-breaking conference, pushed by parliamentary speaker Nabih Berri and other Lebanese politicians, agreed to address such issues as the status of President Lahoud, the international investigation of the Hariri and other assassinations, arms maintained by Hizbullah and Palestinians outside refugee camps, demarcation of the Syrian-Lebanese border including the disputed Shib'a Farms area, and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria (which has never taken place). According to press reports, the conferees reached initial agreement on March 13 to disarm Palestinians outside refugee camps and to work to establish diplomatic relations with Syria; however, Syria is resisting border demarcation or establishment of diplomatic relations at this time; moreover, the parties were unable so far to agree on the status of President Lahoud or the disarmament of Hizbullah. More sessions resumed in late April 2006.' See Congressional Research Service (March 16, 2006). "CRS Issue Brief for Congress: Lebanon".

into the Lebanese army. This agreement turned out to become the foundation stone of a Maronite-Shi'i alliance. Together with the majority of the Shi'is, the majority of the Maronites now found themselves in what Sabrina Mervin has called the 'axis of rejection' (*mumana'a*).²³ In July 2006, Israel attacked Lebanon in an attempt to defeat Hizbullah. A month later, a UN resolution brought an end to the fighting, and without actually winning the war, Hizbullah emerged stronger than ever, appearing invincible both to its Lebanese compatriots and to its Arab neighbors. The Shi'i party thus became more assertive both in the eyes of its own compatriots and of its Iranian and Syrian allies.

After the war of July 2006, Hizbullah and the FPM ran a joint program of political activities and protest that began on 1 December 2006, and ended on 21 May 2008 after the Doha Agreement.²⁴ These political protests entailed a set of discursive practices, territorial practices, and semiotics that favoured socialization between the groups. However, it was challenged by the imagined frontiers dating back to the geography of the civil war and the new alliances emerging from more recent clashes. Instead of social cohesion, there was increasing social distance between the communities. This was partly the result of social practices shaping and constituting the territory in addition to the armed occupation of some areas inside and outside Beirut. In time, the disintegration of many Arab regimes in 2011 would infuse a more fractured geopolitical imaginary with a more urgent sense of community survival. In August 2011, political discourse suffused

²³ See footnote 4.

²⁴ Marking the end of a political crisis over disagreements about the circumstances in which Hizbullah was allowed to bear arms.

²⁵ This new social dynamic remains clearly distinct from the notion of 'social resistance' (*mujtama' al-muqawama*), in which Hizbullah's institutionalised networks serve to mobilise the Shi'is of Lebanon. 'In Hizbullah's view, resistance is a mission and a responsibility for every Shi'i in his or her everyday life. Thus resistance is military, but it is foremost political and social: it is a choice of life, or a 'methodology', as recently emphasized by Nasrullah. The resistance society is the product that Hizbullah's holistic network aims to achieve. This society serves to disseminate the concept of spiritual jihad, which is complementary to military jihad: "The prophet told us: combat is a small jihad, the biggest jihad is the spiritual jihad." Mona Harb and Reinoud Leenders, 'Know thy enemy: Hizbullah, 'terrorism' and the politics of perception', *Third World Quarterly*, 26, 1, 2005, 173-97.

with parochial sectarian politics became prominent. Towards the end of 2011, the violent clashes in Syria and their consequences for both regional and international politics fore-grounded the 'axis of rejection' (*mumana'a*), to which the FPM and Hizbullah both belong. These external factors aggravated the disputes between the various Lebanese political groups and religious communities. Under these circumstances, it may well be that the land of the cedars will spiral into civil war, but the fact remains that as of the summer of 2012, most Lebanese institutions have remained undivided. This stability is partly due to the FPM-Hizbullah alliance but it also has to do with the sterling efforts of President Suleiman and Prime Minister Miqati to work together in favour of Lebanon adopting a strong and positive stance of neutrality.

CHAPTER 1: FROM IRRECONCILABLES TO POLITICAL UNDERSTANDING: THE FPM AND HIZBULLAH'S MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

HIZBULLAH AND THE FPM

In the nearly thirty years since the Shi'i religious resistance movement against the Israeli occupation was founded in Lebanon in 1982,²⁶ Hizbullah has succeeded in recruiting allies from the Shi'i, Sunni, Maronite, and Druze communities as well as from secular political currents. All these factions would generally have been regarded as historically or culturally hostile to Shi'i religious and political hegemony, inspired as it has been by the Khomeinist doctrine of *wilayat al-faqih*.²⁷ Hizbullah, "the Party of Allah", has become a legitimate political player in the Lebanese democratic race. This armed party is also a power to be reckoned with in the conflict with Israel, and valued as such by its allies, but its rivals seek its disarmament, by political means, to preserve the sovereignty of the Lebanese state. Now that the Arab uprisings have aggravated the disputes among the Lebanese factions, Hizbullah appears as an experienced, stable, and moderate political player against the Salafi effervescence in Tyre and Tripoli.

In addition to the current understanding of Hizbullah's national success against the backdrop of post civil war and sectarian conflicts, we shall focus on the political and social dynamics that have influenced the alliance between Hizbullah and the Maronite-led Free Patriotic Movement (FPM, *al-Tayyar al-Watani al-Hurr*), after the assassination of the Prime Minister, Rafiq al-Hariri, in February 2005 and the withdrawal of the Syrian troops from Lebanon in April 2005. In this way I hope to explain why the Lebanese state and its institutions remain undivided despite their paralysis by political deadlock and the profound social and sectarian rifts in a highly unstable Middle East.

²⁶ See Aurélie Daher, 'Le Hezbollah libanais et la résistance islamique au Liban: des stratégies complémentaires', *Confluences Méditerranées*, 76, 2010-11, 101-11.

²⁷ In *Les mondes chiites et l'Iran*, Paris, Karthala 2007, Olivier Roy suggests that the Islamic revolution in Iran was not meant to be limited to Iran or to Shi'is, but was intended to act as the avant-garde of the Muslim *umma*. He also considers that the radical Shi'ism that nurtured the Iranian revolution revived the rift between the Sunni and Shi'i sects.

On the one hand, Hizbullah is an Islamic organization founded in 1982 after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon (see note 26). It was inspired by the example and teachings of the Iranian revolution in 1979, which was perceived by militant Shi'i factions as a mixture of a renaissance and a revolutionary movement.²⁸ Ayatollah Khomeini in person granted its founding manifesto establishing the principles of belief in Islam, *jihad*, and the authority of the supreme jurist, *wilaya al-faqih*.²⁹ Although Hizbullah declared that it wanted to establish an Islamic state in 1985,³⁰ it reached a political compromise with some of its rivals in the 1990s. Blessed by 'Ali Khamenei who succeeded Ayatollah Khomeini, the party declared in 1992 that it would participate in the Lebanese elections, and proceeded to win twelve seats. This move has been interpreted by some as the "Lebanonization" of Hizbullah, its admission of the diverse composition of Lebanese society, and the impossibility of establishing an Islamic state.³¹ Indeed, in its electoral campaigns Hizbullah focused on social inequality and insecurity, and its slogans did not emphasize religious themes but rather capitalized on Hizbullah's role in the

²⁸ Sran sent Hizbullah considerable military support via Syria, and the Revolutionary Guards set up the first training camp for its militants in the Biqa' Valley. Some Palestinian factions also trained the militants of the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon.

²⁹ See Qasim Na'im, *Hizbullah, al-Manhaj, al-Tajriba, al-Mustaqbal* (Hizbullah, its programme, its experience, its future), Beirut, Dar al-Hadi, 2009.

³⁰ The first official expression to the Lebanese public of an Islamic rule was issued in an open letter from Hizbullah in 1985, in which it was stated: 'We confirm our conviction in Islam as a tenet and a system, both intellectual and legislative, calling on all to learn of it and abide by its code. And we summon the people to adopt it and commit to its instructions, at the individual, political and social levels. Where the freedom of choosing a governing system is attributed to our people in Lebanon, they will not find a better alternative to Islam. Hence, we call for the implementation of an Islamic system based on the people's free choice, but not through forceful imposition as some may assume.'

³¹ See N. Hamzeh, 'Lebanon's Hizbullah: from Islamic revolution to parliamentary accommodation', *Third World Quarterly*, 14, 2, 1993, 321-37. See M Warn, 'Staying the course: the lebanonization of Hizbullah—the integration of an Islamist movement into a pluralist political system', unpublished masters thesis, Department of Political Science, Stockholm University, 1999. See Harb & Leenders, 'Know thy enemy ...'; Amal Sa'id-Ghorayeb, *Hizbullah. Politics and Religion*, London: Pluto Press, 2002; Joseph Alagha, 'Hizbullah's gradual integration in the Lebanese public sphere', in Sharqiyyat, 13,1, 2001. See also Judith Harik, *Hizbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2004.

resistance against Israel.³² However, despite the sophisticated political apparatus and the broad range of social welfare activities among Lebanese Shi'is that the party has developed since the nineties, it is still debatable whether Hizbullah could transform, or in some sense live without, its armed wing after the struggle for liberation comes to an end.³³ In fact the question of the disarmament of Hizbullah was debated just after the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005 in the context of the National Dialogue,³⁴ which assembled the main actors in the Lebanese civil war. When the National Dialogue had reached a deadlock, the leader of the FPM and the secretary general of Hizbullah took the initiative to meet and discuss the debated matters *en aparté* in February 2006. We shall argue that the initial roadmap they had signed turned out to become the foundation stone of a more grounded alliance between the two parties.

al-Tayyar al-Watani al-Hurr, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) is a political party that was founded in September 2005 after freedom of association was permitted again in Lebanon following the Syrian withdrawal in April 2005. The Movement aims at establishing a secular state in a free economic system. The Maronite leader, Michel 'Awn, also known as the General ("*al-General*") is the founder and the chief of this movement.

Michel 'Awn was first heard of in 1988 when he was nominated interim head of state by President Amin Jumayyil. In accordance with the Lebanese constitution, General 'Awn's task as Commander of the Lebanese Army was to ensure that general elections were held for a new Lebanese president. Soon afterwards he declared himself president, appointed six ministers, and launched a war against the Syrians in Lebanon. His battle for independence was acclaimed by hundreds of thousands of Christians living on the eastern side of the green line. At that point the crowd praised, 'Awnak jayi min allah', which is a play on words, meaning simultaneously 'your help is coming from God' and 'your 'Awn is coming from God'. Clearly, that was the time of the cult of the individual.

³² 'They resist with their blood, resist with your vote', was one of its slogans in 1996. See Augustus Richard Norton, *Hizbullah, a short history*, Princeton University Press, 2007. Nevertheless, Hizbullah still criticized the Lebanese political system, which is essentially still based on the 1943 pact: 'We distinguish between participation [in the legislative elections of 1992] and our vision of the current political system that we consider to be the basis of confessional, economic, administrative, and political problems because it is built on a confessional basis and on the basis of muhassasa [allotment] that hinders development and impedes people's rights.' Interview with Na'im Qassim, *al-Nahar*, Beirut, 5 July 1996.

³³ See Harb and Leenders, 'Know thy enemy ...'

³⁴ See footnote 15.

When 'Awn came back from exile in France in May 2005, a large crowd was waiting for him with Lebanese flags and great enthusiasm for his idolized persona. He came back with a party project thriving for a modern and secular state. During his exile in France, he was surrounded by educated Lebanese, mostly with PhDs, who advised him on the state project. As soon as freedom of association was restored in Lebanon, the Free Patriotic Movement was officially declared a political party on 18 September 2005. The party's charter³⁵ as well as the its logo³⁶ was intended to project hope for the construction of a secular democratic state and the enhancement of social as well as gender equality.

In terms of organisation, FPM partisans are classified in three levels: activists, supporters, and voters.³⁷ The supporters are on the party database under one or several committees,³⁸ while voters are those who are known to vote for the FPM.³⁹ Voters, supporters, and

³⁵ The Charter of the FPM is based on fourteen principles that include the party's commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human rights, Lebanese sovereignty and democratic system based on a social contract and on pluralism. It declares that it aims to guarantee the sovereignty of the Lebanese state and to build a nation based on equality through a fair judicial system, democratic institutions, and the establishment of a secular state in a free economic system. See The Charter of the Free Patriotic Movement Party: (<http://www.tayyar.org/Tayyar/FPMParty/CharterNLogo/Charter.htm>).

³⁶ The party's logo is a positive sign in an orange colour that stresses on the signs of openness, hope and memory. For an explanation of the Logo from the FPM perspective: (<http://www.tayyar.org/Tayyar/FPMParty/CharterNLogo/Logo.htm>).

³⁷ Coordinators are organized within twelve Committees. These are the sub-provincial "Caza" Committees (regional organization), Youth and Student Committee, Diaspora Committee, Finance Committee, Foreign Affairs, Human Resources, Information Technology, Media, Political education, Schools, Studies and Research, Unions. See Committees (<http://www.tayyar.org/Tayyar/FPMParty/FPMOrganization/>).

³⁸ A supporter is most active at election times whether parliamentary, trade union or student elections, and he is expected to contribute to the party's public actions, such as taking part in general strikes etc. If registered under a provincial group (*qadha*), a supporter is active whenever specific actions are needed on the ground in his registered region. If a supporter is registered within a professional union, he should then meet on a regular basis with his fellows to build up the party's vision in the relevant sector.

³⁹ Supporters and voters can be called upon without having to obtain party membership in order to avoid discrimination in their professional life.

activists are all updated with the party's politics on a weekly basis; communication is usually effected by SMS or on the party's webpage and Internet forum. In more sensitive situations, communication is handled in face-to-face meetings. The FPM's watchword for its followers is to keep silent on internal debates and to divulgate the same official message outside the room. Moreover to ensure that a common vision is shared within the party, training is regularly scheduled to promulgate a sense of Lebanese history, that of the party and its most recent political guidelines. This apparatus was used to communicate internally about the roadmap that was signed later on by 'Awn and Nasrullah on 6 February 2006.

Back to 2005: soon after his enthusiastic reception on his return from exile in France, 'Awn was dragged into local politics. He had to face his political rivals as well as the partisans' aspirations and ambitions within his own party. Many FPM partisans were disappointed by the undemocratic practices within the party as illustrated by BH, an active senior party member:

'Awn has made many fundamental mistakes within the FPM, including suspending elections within the party! He argued at a meeting, that 'because the political situation is delicate, "we" shall not implement elections within the party.' This is a great deal of disappointment for us intellectuals who have strived all these years to establish a secular and a democratic political party that would not be reduced to *za'amat*, the sole image of its chief. (Interview, 20 July 2011).

The chief in question or *za'amat*, which means chiefdom is 'Awn and his family, since the former Commander of the Lebanese Forces and his sons-in-law run the party's apparatus and represent the party at the parliament and within the cabinet, in addition to running the funds of the FPM and its television channel, Orange TV. Moreover, the partisans who had hoped to be able to rise within the party through free democratic elections, and for political representation within the cabinet or as parliamentary candidates have been disappointed by the straightforward nominations declared by Michel 'Awn:

I had hoped that with 'Awn it would be possible for the upper educated middle class to get into higher civil service employment without cronyism. But without free elections within the party, political promotion is not possible. I know now that I cannot hope to serve in a Ministry in Lebanon.

Thus C.K., who has a PhD from a prestigious university in France, explained on 25 July 2011 how he ended up living in Dubai. In addition to cronyism within the party, there is little institutionalization within the Tayyar. In consequence, the donations for the party were all put into private accounts or into the account of Orange TV, which is run by 'Awn's son-in-law. As an FPM coordinator explained on 20 July 2011:

'Awn turned out not to be the man of the Tayyar project, and he might not do so well in the next elections. He is losing his partisans' support, and fewer and fewer volunteers contribute to his social actions.

Despite all these problems, it is difficult to say that these issues are consistent enough to weaken 'Awn's position electorally, especially after what had happened in Syria between 2011 and 2012. We shall see at the end of this paper that 'Awn's electorate have become motivated by regional strategic choices rather than internal political ideals.

AN UNUSUAL ENCOUNTER: THE CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

After 14 March 2005, Hizbullah became symbolically isolated. The assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri on 14 February 2005 had triggered a few small demonstrations against the Syrian presence in Lebanon. Hizbullah tried to roll back public opinion by organizing a one million people demonstration on March 8, supporting the Syrian regime and the Syrian presence in Lebanon. The 'rest' of the Lebanese public answered back with a huge demonstration on March 14 dubbed as the 'Cedar Revolution', which was a personal initiative led by everyone opposed to the Syrian presence in Lebanon. In political terms, all the existing factions except Hizbullah, Amal, and the Syrian Ba'th supported the demonstration on March 14.

Both practically and politically, and despite its symbolic isolation, the party remained the only armed paramilitary faction in Lebanon after the Syrian withdrawal. In addition, Syria left suddenly after twenty-one years of occupation, with its influence having thoroughly permeated all Lebanese institutions. No arguments for a transition or hand-over of power had been made, and Hizbullah remained armed with no supra-national authority to oversee its militia.

On the political level, between May and June 2005, the Lebanese National Assembly failed to reach a quorum to decide on a new electoral law to govern the elections, and the interim government simply maintained the 2000 electoral law. Hence, the Lebanese were obliged to vote under an electoral law designed by the Syrian occupation forces for the benefit of their allies, mainly Hizbullah, but there were also some “unnatural” alliances between the leaders of the three main communities, namely Sa’id Hariri of the Sunnis, Walid Junblat of the Druzes, and Nabih Berri and Hasan Nasrullah of the Shi’is. These were the first free democratic elections conducted in Lebanon after fifteen years of civil war (1975-1990) and after fifteen years of Syrian post-war occupation (1990-2005). The elections were held under the Ta’if agreement, (and all members were elected by universal suffrage. Seats were still distributed by confession, and the constituencies remained the same size as they had been in 2000. Surprisingly enough the opposition MPs, meaning all those against the Syrian presence and hegemony in Lebanon, showed little interest in discussing reforms to the electoral law (Deputy Speaker Michel Murr, 29 April 2005). Opposition MPs claimed a deal had been struck earlier in the week between the Amal movement, Hizbullah, the opposition leader Walid Junblat, and former Premier Rafiq al-Hariri’s dignity bloc not to contest the 2000 law.⁴⁰ The first round was held on 29 May 2005 in Beirut: the Rafiq al-Hariri Martyr list led by Sa’id al-Hariri and the Progressive Socialist Party led by Walid Junblat together obtained 19 seats with what is known in Lebanese electoral practice as “one seat left free” for a Shi’i candidate, which enabled the Shi’is of Beirut to vote for their candidate.

Even more striking was the “unnatural” alliance in South Lebanon and the Nabatiya Governorate (5 June 2005) where Bahiya al-Hariri, the sister of the assassinated Prime Minister, actually formed part of the Resistance and Development Bloc, a joint ticket by the two main Shi’i parties Hizbullah and Amal, in addition to Mustafa Sa’id from Sidon, an Arab nationalist and a historic rival of the al-Hariri family. The third round in Biqa’ and Mount Lebanon was a premonition of what was to come, since Michel ‘Awn’s Free Patriotic Movement and two smaller parties ran under a single umbrella against the al-Hariri List - the Resistance on one side and the development Bloc on the other. In the fourth round on June 20 in North Lebanon, the al-Hariri List won all 28 seats.

⁴⁰ *Daily Star*, 29 April 2005, ‘Lebanon settles on 2000 electoral law after lack of quorum’.

Table 1 shows the distribution of parliamentary seats after the 2005 general election. Of course the electoral alliances were often purely marriages of convenience, and once all the parties had secured their seats the parliament was to be 'organized' between the majority of the 14 March Alliance and the new opposition of the 8 March Alliance:

TABLE 1: GENERAL ELECTION RESULTS, MAY-JUNE 2005

Alliances named after the Syrian withdrawal	Seats per Alliance	Parties competing for elections	Number of seats obtained after the May-June 2005 general elections
March 14 Alliance	91		
		Future Movement (Sa'id al-Hariri)	36
		Progressive Socialist Party (Walid Junblat)	16
		Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) Michel 'Awn	15
		Lebanese Forces (Samir Geagea)	6
		Qornet Shehwan gathering including the Phalangists (Amin Jumayyil) and independents	6
		Independents (Tripoli Bloc)	3
		Democratic renewal (Tripoli Bloc)	1
		Democratic left (Tripoli Bloc)	1
		Skaff Bloc	5
		Murr Bloc	2
March 8 Alliance	37		
		Amal (Nabih Berri)	14
		Hizbullah	14
		Syrian Ba'th Party	2
		Others	5
Independents	2	Independents	2
TOTAL	128		128

Did this scheme of alliances aim at achieving short-term goals such as maintaining the elections date or guaranteeing the majority of the seats for the opposition (14 March Alliance) in the Parliament? It had certainly led the majority in the Parliament, the 14 March Alliance, which was the previous opposition under the Syrian occupation, to isolate the most prominent Christian political figure, General Michel 'Awn, who was feared as much as a "tsunami", as Walid Junblat nicknamed him.⁴¹ In addition to the electoral isolation imposed on him on his return from his French exile, 'Awn also suffered personal political isolation. Although his party won the majority of the Maronite parliamentary seats in Mount Lebanon, he was unable to obtain a single portfolio in the new cabinet. His new battle became the claim for a representative government, which would elaborate a new electoral law to guarantee better representation of the Christians in future elections.

In the meantime, a dispute arose between the forces of 14 March and their Shi'i electoral allies over the stipulations of an agreement related to the establishment of an international tribunal to investigate the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri. The 14 March members wanted the tribunal to consider all attacks in Lebanon between 1 October 2004 and 12 December 2005, to see whether they were connected to al-Hariri's assassination on 14 February and if they were of similar nature and gravity. Those included such assassination attempts as the car bombing of 1 October 2004 against Minister Marwan Hamadeh, or the one against the outgoing Defence Minister, Elias Murr on 12 July 2005, and the attempt against the journalist May Shidyak, who was seriously injured when a bomb exploded as she got into her car on 25 September 2005. The list of crimes also included 13 other cases including the assassinations of Samir Kassir, a historian and journalist (2 June 2005), and Georges Hawi the former leader of the Lebanese Communist Party (21 June 2005). The Shi'i ministers refused to ratify the agreement to establish the tribunal, and started to boycott cabinet meetings starting 12 December 2005. On that same day, Gibran Tuwayni, the journalist and lawmaker, son of the founder of *al-Nahar* newspaper, was killed by a car bomb. This political rupture provided an opportunity for Michel 'Awn to open channels of negotiations with Hizbullah and to draw a roadmap for the most litigious points in Lebanese politics. In this way, the Lebanese political scene was changed dramatically.

⁴¹ 'Awn's isolation on his return from exile in France was the direct result of his speech. Among the Christians he was the old rival of the *Kata'ib* and the Lebanese forces, and the Maronite patriarch mistrusted his secular tone. He was also unable to attract support from the figures of the 14 March coalition who had been previously allied to Damascus. General Michel 'Awn depicted the forces of March 14 as "neo-opponents", who were very late to join the fight against the Syrian occupation, which made their choices opportunistic. See Rapport Moyen-Orient de Crisis Group, *La nouvelle équation libanaise: le rôle central des Chrétiens*, 78, 15 juillet 2008.

A NEW NATIONAL PACT: THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (6 FEBRUARY 2006)

On 6 February 2006, five months before the outbreak of the July war, and against all odds, General Michel 'Awn and Sayyid Hasan Nasrullah met at St Michael's church in Shiyah, in the southern Beirut suburb of al-Dahiya. A *Memorandum of Understanding* had been signed between the FPM and Hizbullah, and the two men jointly presented their roadmap to the press. The choice of the place was highly symbolic. This as yet untouched Christian holy place is situated in the middle of the Shi'i demographic expansion south of Beirut, in the neighbourhood of Hara Harayk where Michel 'Awn was born. The church is a few meters away from the security perimeter of Hizbullah's *al-murabba' al-amni*, which housed the party's top leadership.

The *Memorandum of Understanding* addressed ten main points, seven of which laid down the principles and actions necessary for post-war reconciliation and state building. Two of them concerned Lebanese-Palestinian and Lebanese-Syrian relations, whilst the last point dealt with the weapons owned by Hizbullah and the Israeli occupation of Shib'a farms under the theme of 'protecting Lebanon and preserving its independence and sovereignty'. The three first points of the text showed a desire to work towards post-war national reconciliation. They advocated conducting a national dialogue, investigating what happened to those missing during the war, finding the locations of mass graves, and ensuring the return of the Lebanese exiled in Israel. Two other points looked into building a modern state through the adoption of an electoral law in which proportional representation would simply be one of a number of possible variations. The other foundations of the modern state would be high standards of justice, equality, parity, merit and integrity, and an equitable and impartial judicial system, as well as efforts to combat corruption. Another point established consensual democracy as the fundamental basis for governance in Lebanon, and reiterated the pact of 1943.

In this agreement both parties addressed the major concerns of the Lebanese people at that time, since the full and complete withdrawal of Syrian forces in April 2005 had become the starting point for post-war reconciliation and state building projects. As noted above, Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon was a consequence of the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri on 14 February 2005. The assassination had immediately mobilized crowds of people in Beirut shouting their indignation and praising the assassinated leader. A day later, the murder was classified as a terrorist act by the president of the

Security Council, who requested the United Nations to ‘follow closely the situation in Lebanon and to report urgently on the circumstances, causes and consequences of this terrorist act.’⁴² In response the Secretary-General sent a Fact-Finding Mission to Beirut to investigate and report to the Security Council. In a report dated 24 March 2005 the Mission concluded that the restoration of the integrity and credibility of the Lebanese security apparatus was of vital importance to the country’s security and stability.⁴³ Based on the Mission’s recommendations the Security Council established an international independent investigation commission on 7 April 2005 based in Lebanon to assist the Lebanese authorities in their investigation of all aspects of the terrorist bombing that killed al-Hariri on 14 February.⁴⁴ On 30 August 2005, four heads of security services were arrested by the Lebanese government based on allegations arising from the international investigation into the attack on 14 February 2005, although they were subsequently released in 2009 for lack of sufficient evidence.⁴⁵

It was within this context that the question of the assassination of al-Hariri fell in the **Memorandum of Understanding** (MoU) under the question of political assassinations and the security situation in general. Having condemned political assassinations and asserted the necessity of investigating and finding the perpetrators of these crimes, ‘Awn and Nasrullah also confirmed the necessity of pre-empting

⁴² Peter FitzGerald, Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Lebanon inquiring into the causes, circumstances and consequences of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, United Nations.
(<http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/79CD8AAA858FDD2D85256FD500536047>)

⁴³ *idem*. See also Security Council Resolution (1595) 2005.

⁴⁴ *idem*.

⁴⁵ General Jamil Sayyid, former head of General Security in Lebanon and close to Rustum Ghazzali, the former head of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon, filed a lawsuit in Damascus in December 2009 against false witnesses that misled the UN investigation commission in Lebanon.

attempts to exploit them politically.⁴⁶ This argument has indeed served Hizbullah well; Hasan Nasrullah still defends Hizbullah against the indictment of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) and claims that the Tribunal is being used as a tool to attack his organisation.

Under the heading of security reforms the signatories called for the centralisation of decision-making in security matters and the neutralization of political patronage as well as the preservation of the basic freedoms guaranteed by the constitution. To do so, they suggested creating a parliamentary security services committee that would take charge of reforming the security services. Having dealt with all Lebanese matters necessary to build what both parties consider to be a modern state, Syrian-Lebanese relations were also addressed in terms of a post-war/post-occupation approach. Sovereignty, independence, and the rejection of any form of foreign tutelage were to be the foundations of mutual and sound relations with Syria. Therefore the accord suggested reviewing past experiences with Syria, uncovering the fate of Lebanese detainees in Syria, and re-casting these relations on clear bases and parity. It also suggested delineating the borders between the two countries and the establishment of diplomatic relations.

The other historical and contemporary issue dealt with in the Memorandum was the delicate matter of the Palestinians. The question was addressed with a positive approach asserting solidarity with the Palestinians in Lebanon, and the need for them to respect the laws of Lebanon. Most delicate were the rejection of permanent Palestinian settlement in Lebanon and the consecration of the Right of Return to the place of origin, as well as preventing weapons from being used outside the camps. Last but not least, both parties admitted that Israel was still occupying Shib'a farms, was imprisoning members of the resistance, and was threatening Lebanon. In this context, until the Lebanese are able to conduct a national dialogue leading to the formulation of a national defence strategy, Hizbullah would keep its weapons until objective conditions leading to the cessation of the reasons and justifications for keeping those weapons would be agreed upon.

⁴⁶ The parties condemned any form of political assassination, and the assassination of 'His Excellency the martyr President Rafiq Hariri and they emphasised the importance of proceeding forward with the investigation according to the officially-approved mechanisms in order to uncover the truth. They also called to distance these issues from any attempts at politically exploiting them, which would harm their essence and the essence of justice that must remain above any political conflicts or disagreements.' "Memorandum of understanding" Article 7- as translated by Joseph Hitti of 'New England Americans for Lebanon' (<http://www.voltairenet.org/Memorandum-of-understanding-by>).

With hindsight, it is remarkable to see how well this *Memorandum of Understanding* was phrased, ensuring a basis for consistent politics and policies which generally survived for the next six years. It actually addresses all the demands presented by Michel 'Awn for reinforcing the political position of the Christians in Lebanon, and Hizbullah's main concern, which is the legitimacy of the Lebanese state. It is also worth noting how it addresses contentious points within Lebanese society, on which both the Shi'i and the Maronite communities would agree. There is compromise in the occasionally ambiguous style of the agreement such as the question of Palestinian weapons in the refugee camps and Hizbullah's efforts to arm its Islamic resistance. Communication over these delicate points has changed over time. The FPM originally presented the agreement as a roadmap to integrate Hizbullah fighting units as Special Forces within the Lebanese army, and it ended up reluctantly arguing in favour of the necessity to maintain an adequate defence apparatus to face Israeli threats and hostilities.

INDIVIDUAL STORIES OF GRATITUDE AND DISENCHANTMENT PROVOKED BY THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Allah ykhalli-li'na al-orange! 'God save the orange colour!'

With these words, Hasan, a service driver (collective taxi), gratefully acknowledges the advantages of his political community's alliance with the FPM (April 2006). He praised the orange colour, symbol and metaphor of the FPM, when he gave way to a woman pedestrian wearing an orange veil over a white T-shirt and a pair of blue jeans. Thus Hasan expressed a shared sentiment of gratitude within the Shi'i community either as a 'society of resistance' or out of sympathy with the party. Indeed, between February 2006 and July 2006, the political entente between the FPM and Hizbullah reinforced Hizbullah's legitimacy in Lebanon. The alliance led by Hasan Nasrullah, Nabih Berri, Walid Junblat, and Sa'id al-Hariri had not greatly shocked public opinion. But when Michel 'Awn chose to meet Hasan Nasrullah, the Secretary General of Hizbullah, the political game took on new complexes.⁴⁷ As well as being a tactical move for both of these

⁴⁷ Radio France International titled on 12 February 2006 'L'alliance 'Awn -Hizbullah brouille les cartes' describing how the alliance between 'Awn and Hizbullah modified the entire political landscape in Lebanon. Le Monde seemed more skeptical about the alliance and wondered if it was one of those fortuitous Lebanese rapprochements between traditionally opposed parties. However the "cooperation" between the two parties was considered to change the parliamentary balance of power although the spinal column of the majority namely Tayyar al-mustaqbal (Movement of the Future) led by Sa'id Hariri and al-Hizb al-taqaddumi al-ishtiraki, (the Progressive Socialist Party) led by Walid Junblat remained untouched (Le Monde, 10 February 2006).

isolated parties, who would then secure a majority in the coming parliamentary elections, it also encompassed the ambitions of a “national pact” with new opportunities for a national dialogue that would make possible a common Lebanese vision.⁴⁸ From an FPM perspective, the aim was to thwart sectarian tensions by freeing the Shi’i party from isolation in a political situation of change within Sunni dominated rule.⁴⁹

With this tactical move over the MoU, Michel ‘Awn had definitely undermined the main issues that were tightening the vice around Hizbullah. The party was indeed threatened with the loss of its national legitimacy and its status as the principal symbol of Lebanese resistance and with being obliged to absorb the unpleasant icon of the Shi’i Islamist militia. With the MoU the pro-Syrian religious party, stamped with notions of jihad and the rule of the Supreme Jurist, Hizbullah was now allying with the instigator of the 1559 resolution,⁵⁰ Michel ‘Awn, an anti-Syrian totem striving for a secular and honest state. Thus ‘Awn reiterated the right of Hizbullah to keep its weapons for objective reasons, including Israel’s occupation of the Shib’a farms. However, the eventual disarmament of Hizbullah was not excluded provided that the Lebanese define a common defence strategy. Thus, despite the profound contradictions between them, the two parties had succeeded in combining their values and were attempting a common vision for state building. With this accord, Michel ‘Awn had not only helped out Hizbullah from a political isolation but he had also sowed its legitimacy at a national level. Within this context one can interpret the orange scarves of the girls in al-Dahyia and the service driver’s exclamation “*Allah ykhalli-l-na al-orange*” as signs of gratitude!

In contrast to the gratitude among the Shi’is, many supporters left Michel ‘Awn precisely because he decided to join Hizbullah in a “national pact” in February 2006:

‘When ‘Awn was first back from exile, I was there cheering with a Lebanese flag with my friend O.B. I remember telling him: “imagine if one day we were to regret this moment”. And there we are, regretting the choice ‘Awn has made to support Hizbullah and give its organisation legitimacy, just because he was frustrated!’

⁴⁸ Ibrahim Kan’an, MP FPM quoted in an interview with ICG, 28 December 2007.

⁴⁹ Ghasan Mukhaibir, MP FPM quoted in an interview with ICG 10 August 2007.

⁵⁰ The Security Council declared on 2 September 2004 its support for a free and fair presidential election in Lebanon conducted according to Lebanese constitutional rules devised without foreign interference or influence and, in that connection, called upon all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon.

So explained Marc, a businessman in his thirties, who graduated from a prestigious business school in France. Marc's frustration is shared by Yusif, who is a movie-maker, but obviously for different reasons:

'There is no possible justification for supporting Hizbullah. This is not about political consensus, but rather it affects the core question of culture, freedom and way of life.'

It is true that now that 'Awn has chosen to bring the Maronites whom he represents into an alliance with Hizbullah, Lebanon's Christians, once considered an occidental icon – deemed 'the Maronite nation' by Louis XIV – and Europe's protégés and shield, are now seen by international observers as an insignificant minority among others and an ally of the Shi'i Islamists. Their presence in Lebanon and their participation in power are no longer sufficient to belie the anti-Western image of the country.

Despite the disenchantment 'Awn's politics might have caused among some of his supporters, the core of his electorate remained faithful to the fundamental causes. One of these is the rejection of the Christian militias, *Kata'ib* and *Quwwat* (Phalangists and Lebanese Forces), and their commanders. The lifeline that 'Awn held out to his voters spoke to their sense of lack of choice and the great disdain felt for the wartime militias by most Lebanese Christians.⁵¹ These people do not share the cult of the individual nor do they follow a specific ideology, for example of passionate Arab nationalism or the hard-line Christian right. This is a group of individuals who are subjects who have chosen to reject the warlords of their own community. Such people are very reliable, bearing in mind that rejecting a war-maker might provide far more motivation than simply being fascinated by the leader. Another argument is that of national security and stability. As such, many Christians supporting Michel 'Awn were also grateful for his agreement with Hizbullah as it 'neutralized' or 'balanced' the Christians' position in Lebanon in any Shi'i/Sunni dispute. Finally, the most dramatic argument was that all the terrorist attacks and assassinations that occurred after Prime Minister al-Hariri's assassination had taken place in Christian areas,⁵² as illustrated in this interview with MH:

⁵¹ Group interview around the question posed about the sense of 8 March and 14 March coalitions and the identity of their supporters, 30 July 2011.

⁵² After al-Hariri's assassination 14 February, 2005, eight bombings occurred in mainly Christian neighbourhoods namely: new Jdeideh (19 March 2005), Kaslik shopping center in Jounieh (23 March 2005), Sad el-Bushrieh (26 March 2005), Brummana (1 April 2005), Junieh (7 May 2005), Monot (22 July 2005), Zalka (22 August 2005), Jeitawi bombing (17 September 2005).

'It was about time we stepped to the side, this was not our fight and we should not be paying the price for it. We should not be the Achilles heel of the Sunnis.'⁵³

Moreover, the 14 March coalition seemed less persuasive in securing the state project and national unity after the incidents of 5 February 2006, when protests prompted by the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad spread in the Tabaris district in Ashrafieh. The Danish Embassy and a few business buildings were set ablaze, churches were vandalized, and vehicles damaged.⁵⁴ Vandalism in an area adjacent to the former green line dividing East Beirut from West Beirut was perceived as an act of intrusion by Muslims into the Christian districts and therefore caused a general "state of shock".⁵⁵ Hasan Saba', the Minister of Defence from the pro-Hariri Future movement resigned within 24 hours on 6 February 2006. Although some of the 14 March politicians alleged Syrian, Palestinian, and Jordanian infiltration in the riots before Ahmad Fatfat, the Interim Minister of Defence denied it, there was a general feeling among the Christians that the

⁵³ M.H. is a Lebanese Christian woman who lived in Lebanon all through the civil war, and is fervently anti-militia. She has a very strong sense of identity as a Maronite from a long-established family in Mount Lebanon. 'We' in this conversation refers to the Christians and more specifically the Maronites in Lebanon. In the interview, conducted in August 2011, she showed her sense of belonging to a regional minority in the Arab world. She revealed that she had learned from the civil war that minorities should distance themselves from troubles, like the Armenians but unlike the Syrian Orthodox Christians, who engaged with the Lebanese Forces under Elie Hubeika (HK) and paid the price of having a whole generation eliminated by Samir Geagea.

⁵⁴ 'What was meant to be a peaceful protest by thousands of Muslims in Beirut Sunday against the publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammad turned into a vicious riot ... Muslims carrying green and black Islamic flags and wearing headbands with the slogan "Soldiers of the Prophet " joined in the global Muslim march against the recent reprinting by European newspapers of caricatures of the Prophet Mohammad by swarming the streets in front and around the 10-storey building housing the Danish Consulate in Beirut.'
Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/Feb/06/Violence-plagues-protest-against-cartoons-of-Prophet-Mohammad.ashx#ixzz1X3NYzkCY> (The Daily Star: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb>). Violence plagues protest against cartoons of Prophet Mohammad 6 February 2006 by Rym Ghazal.

⁵⁵ Samir Geagea, head of the Lebanese forces quoted by the Daily Star, 9 February 2006 Geagea: Blame for riots was issued "hastily" 9 February 2006 12:00 AM By Raed El Rafei. Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/Feb/09/Geagea-Blame-for-riots-was-issued-hastily.ashx#ixzz1X3MGGmb2> (The Daily Star: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb>).

coalition was unable to restore order or guarantee national security.⁵⁶ At this point, despite political patronage and direct interest, those who believed in the necessity of institutional reform to gain better government supported 14 March, and those who believed in the need for national unity to better build institutions in a country after years of civil war supported 8 March.

⁵⁶ This was indeed literally the statement of a former MP secretary general of March 14, who was pleading in favour of his coalition: 'The former MP said Interior Minister Hasan Sabaa, who resigned hours after the riots, is not the only politician to blame for the riots because the Cabinet as a whole cannot make any solid political decisions and is therefore incapable of guaranteeing national security.' Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/Feb/09/Geagea-Blame-for-riots-was-issued-hastily.ashx#ixzz1X3Qni0UI> (The Daily Star: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb>).

CHAPTER 2: FROM POLITICAL ISOLATION TO ARAB LEADERSHIP: THE MYTH OF THE JULY WAR (HARB TAMMUZ) AND THE FOUNDATION OF A NATIONALIST CURRENT LED BY HIZBULLAH

According to Hizbullah, *Harb Tammuz*, the July War in Lebanon known in Israel as the second war in Lebanon, between 12 July and 14 August 2006, involved both the human and the divine. Since 22 September 2006, the 'divine victory' has served as a ritual to affirm a shared sense of nationalism by Hizbullah and its Lebanese allies. This coalition, known as 8 March, is part of the regional axis of 'rejection', *mumana'a*, also described by Sabrina Mervin as 'the rejection front'⁵⁷ and the anti-'New Middle East' axis.⁵⁸ Thus, Hizbullah could maintain its Islamic supra-denominational legitimacy on a regional level by insisting on an ideological analysis of the victory rather than a religious one. The themes of resistance against Israel and the rejection of U.S. policies in the Middle East were strongly affirmed by Hasan Nasrullah, the Secretary General of Hizbullah, on 22 September 2006.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ The term *mumana'a* has transcended the Shi'i element in the Levant to become the label of the anti-Western axis; see footnote 3. In February 2012 Russia and China vetoed a UN Security Council resolution calling for the Syrian president to step down.

⁵⁸ In June 2006, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice introduced to the world, from Tel Aviv, the term 'New Middle East' to replace the older term, the 'Greater Middle East.' Subsequently, on 21 July she declared in her Special Briefing on Travel to the Middle East and Europe, that the United States of America was viewing the Israeli attacks on Lebanon as part of the growing New Middle East, and that the United States will make sure to push forward to the New Middle East and not the old one. *Not clear what this means* (Press Conference, U.S. State Department, Washington, D.C., 21 July 2006). <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/69331.htm>

⁵⁹ In a wider Sunni context, Hizbullah strategy is well explained by Bernard Rougier: 'To avoid losing its prestige among the predominantly Sunni Arab societies in the region, and to maintain a supra-denominational Islamic legitimacy, Hizbullah must insist upon the primacy of ideology over religion. The leaders of Hizbullah constantly affirm the necessity of resistance against Israel and deny the validity of US policies in the Middle East. They also denounce any questioning of the regional role of Syria or Iran on the part of local actors, whom they identify as proxies for US policies.' *L'Oumma en Fragments. Contrôler le Sunnisme au Liban*, Paris, PUF, 2011.

In a society that was just about to fight back the resistance as an armed Shi'i faction in a free and independent state, the July war served to legitimize Hizbullah and enable it to become a key element in the formation of the March 8 conception of the nation-state. In this first part we shall analyze how Hizbullah came to pioneer a nationalist discourse, rallying a very diversified crowd, while building on a long history of social relationships between Maronites and Shi'is in Mount Lebanon.

GOD, THE NATION AND THE ARAB UMMA: THE INVENTION OF THE 'DIVINE VICTORY' AND HIZBULLAH'S NATIONALIST DISCOURSE IN THE CONTEXT OF MUMANA' A (THE AXIS OF REJECTION)

On 12 July 2006, Hizbullah launched an operation across the Lebanese-Israeli border called Operation Promise Fulfilment (*'amaliyat al wa'd al-sadiq*). The Islamic Resistance, or *al-muqawama al-islamiya*, as Hizbullah labels itself, captured two Israeli soldiers and killed eight others, hoping to bargain for the liberation of Lebanese detainees in Israeli prisons. This operation occurred a month after the kidnapping of the IDF soldier Gilad Shalit which was followed by the high level IDF-led Operation Summer Rains. The capture of the Israeli soldiers by Hizbullah was considered a great success, and celebratory gunfire could be heard everywhere in al-Dahiya, a southern suburb of Beirut.⁶⁰ Soon after, Amir Peretz, the Israeli Minister of Defence, and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert ordered Israeli forces to launch the most violent air strike on Lebanon since Operation Peace in Galilee in 1983.

Although the campaign specifically targeted Hizbullah's military infrastructure and social services⁶¹ in South Lebanon, Ba'albak Hirmil, and al-Dahiya, the entire territory of Lebanon was under attack.

⁶⁰ The noise was heard as far away as the *Mathaf* area, and the rumour of the capture of the Israeli soldiers ran faster than the news.

⁶¹ Hizbullah manages a dozen institutions delivering a range of services to Shi'i groups residing in southern Beirut, in South Lebanon and in the Biqa', all of which depend administratively on a Social Services Central Unit in al-Dahiya. 'Two categories of institutions can be identified: those providing services related to the armed resistance, and those delivering services to a wider group of users needing social, economic and urban services. These institutions have autonomous boards of administration and have a specific margin of maneuver but have to follow a minimal 'political and cultural orientation' – as formulated and set by Hizbullah.' Harb and Leenders, 'Know thy enemy ...' See also (Hizbullah Vice-Secretary) N Qasim, *Hizbullah: an-Nahj, al-Tajriba, al-Mustaqbal* (Hizbullah: The Methodology, the Experience, the Future) Beirut: Dar al-Hadi, 2002, p 83. See the speech by Nasrullah on the occasion of the liberation of Lebanese prisoners from Israeli jails, 25 January 2004.

Civilian infrastructures were also damaged including the international airport. The country suffered a naval blockade and Israeli warships occupied Lebanese territorial waters. According to a report by Amnesty International in August 2006, the Israel Air force launched more than 7,000 air attacks on about 7,000 targets during the conflict.

Coverage of the war was international and intensive. The UN warned of a humanitarian disaster on July 18,⁶² and Western naval ships evacuated civilians holding European, Canadian, or American passports.⁶³ International public opinion generally sympathised with the Lebanese civilian population, which put pressure on Israel to achieve its objectives in a short period of time. However, Hizbullah's capacity to resist Israeli attacks resulted in an Israeli ground military operation. A ceasefire was declared on 14 August 2006, three days after United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 was adopted unanimously.

A month or so later, on 22 September, Hasan Nasrullah gave a speech, addressing an impressive crowd close to the Israeli-Lebanese border. He had praised Hizbullah for the 'liberation of South Lebanon in 2000', and on this occasion depicted the Islamic Resistance as the only Arab paramilitary force still undefeated by the Israeli military. In that speech he attempted to erase the inflated image of the Israeli army in the Arab collective imagination. Even 'God's Chariot', the Israeli Merkava tank, turned out to be vulnerable to Hizbullah missiles in this holy war, which he had described as a 'divine victory'.⁶⁴

⁶² There were repeated calls by the Secretary General and the Emergency Relief Coordinator [ERC], for a ceasefire. The Security Council eventually adopted Resolution 1701 on 11 August, which marked the end of a month of hostilities.' (The UN Response to the Lebanon Crisis, An OCHA Lesson Learning Paper, 5 December 2006; T. Kelly & C. White; Evaluation Studies Section, PDSB – OCHA)

⁶³ For detailed information on the US evacuation operations refer to NEO 2006 on (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/neo-lebanon-06.htm>); for the French evacuation on BPC Mistral (<http://www.ambafrance-au.org/spip.php?article1837>)

⁶⁴ Nasrullah was to be comforted in his sense of victory by the Israeli Winograd report, with preliminary conclusions 2008. The report categorized the 2nd Lebanon war (July-war) as a serious missed opportunity. The war had ended without clear military victory, a much smaller paramilitary organization successfully resisted against a much larger force which had complete air superiority among other technological advantages were released on 30 April 2007 and final findings on 30 January 2008. The Winograd Commission is the commission of inquiry into the events of military engagement in Lebanon 2006, which investigated and drew lessons from the July-War known in Israel as the Second Lebanon War.

'Forget about the undefeated Israeli army.'⁶⁵

With these words Sayyid Hasan Nasrullah celebrated the 'divine victory' (*al-nasr al-ilahi*) on 22 September 2006. On that day, the day of 'the divine victory rally', a sacred symbolic dimension was added to the construct of a scenario of victory, although of course the very notion of victory was being debated in Lebanon at the time. Sayyid Nasrullah, whose speeches are remarkable for their clarity, expressed the sacredness of the battles and 'their' victorious feeling in the following:

'...O most honourable, pure and generous people...praise be to God who fulfilled his promise to us and who granted to Lebanon and the people of Lebanon victory over the enemy of Lebanon. This is a big strategic, historic and divine victory. [...]People are debating whether this is a victory or not. Those who feel frustrated with the outcome of this war and did not reach their goals are the losers, and those who feel proud and honourable and who are satisfied with the outcomes are the winners. We feel we are the winners.'⁶⁶

It might be thought that such a speech with its combination of religious values and political and strategic meanings would be embarrassing in the wider Lebanese context, stained as it is with a history of sectarian violence. But Nasrullah managed to preserve a degree of ambiguity about who 'we' are, thus giving anyone free rein to identify with the party's victory. He then blessed the supporters of the Resistance, without criticising other factions or religious communities. On the contrary he sounded grateful and shared the success of Hizbullah not only with the Lebanese people but also with the Arab Umma as a whole.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Nasrullah's speech at the divine victory rally 22 September 2006 (my translation).

⁶⁶ *Idem.*

⁶⁷ First of all, Sayyid Nasrullah addressed the crowd at the rally as most honourable, pure and generous people. This was mainly a crowd under Hizbullah flags, but it also included flags from Amal and somewhat fewer flags from 'Awn's Free Patriotic Movement. Secondly, although he named the territories where the fighting was taking place, distinguishing them with affectionate qualifications (Biqā', South Lebanon and al-Dahiya), he also thanked loyal North Lebanon, Beirut the Arab city, and 'proud' Mount Lebanon. Those were regions under the pressure of war, and these were regions that had shown a high level of solidarity. Having made that distinction, he then widened the debate, tightening the vice around Israel; he 'offered' the victory to the Lebanese people, the Palestinians and the Arab Nation.

'It is the victory of Lebanon, of Palestine, of the Arab Umma[...] It is not the victory of a particular party or community. Don't distort this big historic victory. Do not confine it within party, sectarian, communal or religious frames.'

The speech on 22 September 2006 is a foundational speech.⁶⁸ It is part of Hizbullah's discourse aiming to represent the party as the militant wing of a new nationalist current, which stands for strong, 'clean', sovereign, and united Middle Eastern states against the US Project for a 'New Middle East'. In his way Nasrullah had proclaimed his opposition to the Project and had placed Hizbullah with its allies and sympathetic factions within a nationalist current, 'the only true nationalist current', that is striving for a sovereign Lebanese state.

This political stream opposed to the New Middle East project had a name: *mumana'a*, the anti-Western axis of the resistance along the territorial continuum extending from Shanghai through Moscow to the Mediterranean. The anti-tank missiles that Hizbullah used during the 2006 war, which contributed to its invincibility, are tangible manifestations of this trans-Asian alliance. Since 2006, *mumana'a* has had various kinds of diplomatic backing, most recently with Russia's and China's veto of a UN Security Council resolution calling for the Syrian president to step down in February 2012.

'What is special here is the ideological and political position of Hizbullah as the only Shi'i mass movement to have contracted a series of alliances with non-Shi'i groups or non-Muslims on a basis of equality, combining Lebanese nationalism, pan-Islamism and Shi'i identity.'⁶⁹

On the Lebanese scene, Nasrullah's discourse aimed at consolidating identity as part of the struggle for a common cause. More specifically, Lebanese identity, which he described as threatened by fragmented religious and regional affiliations, needed a cause to transcend its divides. Subsequently, in order to prevent the kinds of sectarian

⁶⁸ Between 12 July and 14 August 2006, Sayyid Hasan Nasrullah gave 8 speeches on the following dates: 15 July, 16 July, 21 July, 26 July, 29 July, 3 August, 9 August, 12 August, and 14 August. These speeches were related to the operations of the war and destined to raise popular morale.

⁶⁹ Olivier Roy, 'L'impact de la révolution iranienne au moyen orient', in Sabrina Mervin, Mervin, Sabrina (éd.), *Le monde chiite et l'Iran*, 2007, 33.

conflict and violent disorder that were fragmenting Iraq,⁷⁰ Sayyid Nasrullah suggested supporting Hizbullah with allies, which he had placed as the guarantor of unity.⁷¹

All through the war and in the weeks that followed the UN Security Council cease-fire, Nasrullah referred in his speeches to the July War as the foundational moment of a national political current. Thanks to this discursive manoeuvre, Hizbullah recovered its national and Arab legitimacy, which the Resistance had largely lost since the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in April 2005.

THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE SOCIAL BASE OF THE 8 MARCH COALITION: THE JULY WAR AND THE BASIS OF A NATIONAL ENTENTE

Founding a moment of national unity based on the vision of Hizbullah would not have been possible if the ground had not already been prepared for unity. As we shall see, the July War had widened the notion of the imagined Lebanese territory. While the Israeli planes thundered over al-Dahiya and other parts of Lebanon, and even while the ceasefire was being debated in New York thirty-four days later, in a month of profound fears and tensions, Lebanese people from the Christian, Sunni, and Druze communities were protecting the women and children of the Hizbullah fighters, the *mujahidin*. Thirty-one years after the beginning of the Lebanese civil war, during which Hizbullah, the Party of God was once in charge of the abduction of journalists

⁷⁰ Refer to the speech of Hasan Nasrullah on the day of “divine victory rally”, 22 September 2006.

⁷¹ Previously, Sayyid Nasrullah described the resistance against Israel to be the shield against another civil war in Lebanon on the eve of the unanimous vote of the United Nations resolution 12 August 2006:

‘At first I would like to confirm that without the tenacity of our brave and heroic resistance of our brave and beautiful people, the Lebanese political forces, the state with its various institutions, civil and military, or in a word, without resistance Lebanon (*lubnan al-muqawama*), we would be in a very bad situation today, the enemy would have imposed its political and military conditions and would have led Lebanon to a situation even worse than the 17 May agreement.’

In a society where civil war memories are crafted by oblivion, warning people to avoid the painful fate of the 17 May 1983 agreement between Israel, the Lebanese government and the US evokes an unhappy part of Lebanese ‘cultural memory’, and refers the listeners to their various war imaginaries. Although 17 May 1983 does not have the same resonance in peoples’ minds, it definitely has dramatically negative associations for everyone. See Sune Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, 9.

and academics, and was called *hizb bi-la Allah* meaning the godless party by its fellow Shi'is from the Amal militia.⁷²

As the Shi'is were fleeing their homes, whether they were secular, supporters of Hizbullah, or benefitting from the party's social services, they were given humanitarian aid by communities all over Lebanon. Public and political organizations as well as civil society groups deployed a massive show of solidarity, irrespective of their political stance. This was significant, given that some of them might have been considered historic rivals of any manifestation of Shi'i political identity as consolidated by Musa al-Sadr, or considered hostile to the doctrine of *wilayat al-faqih*. In this respect help had no sectarian or political or regional preferences. This new solidarity between the Shi'i and Maronite communities in Lebanon is worth analyzing.⁷³ It was evidently expressed more as a social than as a political choice, showing that some Maronites and some Shi'is had preserved inherited customs despite the civil war, and that these customs are still crucial in defining their neighbourly relations.

Saba lives in Shlifa,⁷⁴ a Christian suburb of Ba'albak. He had hosted a Shi'i family whose members had fled their homes in Ba'albak:

We are all one people and we share the same human values. I will always open my 'dar'⁷⁵ to my neighbours.

⁷² This was at the time of the Lebanese sub-conflict "War of the Camps" (Harb al-mukhayamat) 1984-1989, when Palestinian refugee camps were besieged by the Amal militia. Internal fighting among Muslim factions had spread on a massive scale and destroyed the perception of unity between Muslim and Leftists militias. At this stage Amal was the military wing of the Imam Musa Sadr's Movement of the Oppressed, which grew exponentially in size and in organisation between 1978 and 1982.

⁷³ Those were the results of a field survey that I had conducted during the July war to study the displaced population itinerary through the Biqa' Valley. For the methodology please refer to Appendix 1.

⁷⁴ Shlifa is a village some fifteen kilometres from Baalbek, with a mostly Christian population.

⁷⁵ Meaning 'home' both in classical Arabic and in the Lebanese dialect. In Lebanese dialect it also means lounge or reception room.

With these words Saba described his hospitality to Mariam, her husband, and their two-year-old toddler, a Shi'i family from Ba'albak. Saba did not know his guests before the war. He owned a two-storey house, but he had insisted that Mariam and her family reside on the same floor with him. He was a retired farmer who suffered from serious rheumatism and seemed to me like a *fallah makfi*.⁷⁶ Saba had just missed the harvest due to the departure of the seasonal workers for Syria, as a consequence of the Israeli hostilities in the fields during the July War. Mariam expressed her gratitude to Saba's family but she also transmitted the feeling that such interpersonal solidarity was natural. It seemed that Saba and his guests shared common values drawn from the practises of Lebanese clans, where brothers rally against cousins, and cousins rally against foreign enemies.

A second surprising example of long-lasting ties between communities was the community of shepherds in the mountains. Shepherds in the Lebanese mountains, together with the Syrian shepherds, constitute a society on their own, distinct from the sedentary ones. As Munir explained in an interview just after the Israelis kidnapped a Lebanese shepherd on the Lebanese mountains, shepherds 'up there' use different names or surnames from the ones they use in their place of origin. Munir for example spends his time between the node of Sihta and the sedentary village of Mijdil. In Mijdil he is Munir 'Assakir whilst in Sihta he is from a different hamula. The shepherds' customs are distinct, and their territory is shaped differently. While the sedentary civilian population was scattered throughout the country by the war during the summer of 2006, the shepherds kept on meeting on the tops of the mountains, bringing back news from isolated villages. Thus someone from the Maronite village of Mijdil in North Lebanon, could get the shepherds' news or rumours from Ba'albak, which is located in what was then an unreachable valley, on the other side of the mountains.

Finally, humanitarian aid could be considered as a political act of solidarity since it involved organizations, funds, and mobilisation within the parties' structures. Support of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) in Afqa for example is, in that sense, political. Afqa is a small Shi'i agglomeration mostly built on Christian waqf land, meaning it is the inalienable property of the Church. It is in a suburban neighbourhood of Maronite villages in the heights of Byblos in Mount Lebanon. Named after one of the water sources of *Nahr Ibrahim*, the

⁷⁶ A peasant who has all that he needs. In Lebanese dialect the saying is *fallah makfi*, *sultan makhfi*, a contented peasant is a sultan in disguise.

Adonis River, the rural landscape seems to show a very precarious infrastructure. It looks like a shanty town built on the heights of Mount Lebanon, on a very narrow stream between the cliff and the valley. Shi'is who had fled their homes in South Lebanon and the southern suburbs of Beirut, and who had family ties with the population of Afqa, took refuge there. People from the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) organised humanitarian help to provide blankets, drinking water, food, and other kind of basic assistance to families fleeing the war zone. During this solidarity operation, FPM militants raised aid from the neighbouring villages, but the refugee population remained in the village of Afqa.

As a result of the July War, acts of human solidarity widened the imagined territory. Solidarity between neighbours or “cousins” against the foreign enemy created a kind of territorial continuity that the Lebanese had not witnessed for decades. This is what, in a way, served to consolidate Lebanese national territory more profoundly in the imagination of the people of Lebanon. However, although human solidarity was intensified, and a degree of territorial consolidation was achieved in the course of the Israeli attacks, it is significant that the war and the internal displacement of the population did not favour the formation of permanent mixed neighbourhoods. The trajectory of the internal displaced population was not random. If people could not find refuge with their relatives, the displaced and homeless heading towards mainly Sunni or Druze or Christian neighbourhoods would gather either in public places such as the garden of Sanayé' in Beirut, or in churches, mosques, schools, and convents. Those who could afford to rent housing gathered in seasonal tourist resorts such as Kleia'at or Faraya in the region of Kisrawan.

A RELIGIOUS MASTER OR A MASTER OF RHETORIC? A MOTLEY AUDIENCE FOR NASRULLAH'S CHAMELEON SPEECH

Beyond the political discourse and social solidarity, it is interesting to analyze people's openness to Hizbullah despite the party's obvious Islamic identity,⁷⁷ largely because self-representation through Hizbullah is not monolithic. Thus, supporting Hizbullah may have several meanings: supporting the Resistance, national unity, and sovereignty; supporting a social movement in its struggle to assert the rights of a community that sees itself as helpless; adherence to

⁷⁷ As one can read on Hizbullah flag: *Fa-inna Hizbullah humu al-ghalibun*, meaning Hizbullah are the victors. The inscription is above a drawing representing the name of the party together with the symbols of the globe and a weapon. The slogan is signed: *al-muqawama al-islamiya fi lubnan*, the Islamic resistance in Lebanon.

the religious dimension of a societal project. All these different types of membership converge at many points and help create a diverse community around Hizbullah. In addition, the platform of Hizbullah is an eclectic blend of progressive and conservative values, fundamental doctrinal intransigence (Islamic Resistance, Anti-Americanism, anti-Zionism), and tolerance and solidarity (religious and sectarian). Using variables such as socio-economic status, religious observance, and the sense of being part of a national community, the movement has gained a degree of popularity that transcends sectarian divisions. Hence religious affiliation is important but no longer decisive.

Furthermore, support for Hizbullah is not solely determined by socio-economic status: Hizbullah is reaching out to all classes in Lebanon. Along the lines suggested by Gilles Kepel⁷⁸ in his analysis of the Iranian revolution, the party needs the support of the bourgeoisie to carry out its activities on both financial and political levels. The support does not reduce the feeling of belonging to a community: by stressing its Lebanese identity and moving gradually away from its close association with Iran, Hizbullah was able to mobilize on a national basis. In the final analysis, Hizbullah adapts its face to its audience: an Islamic movement for Shi'i radicals, a nationalist movement for Lebanese of other faiths, a progressive movement for poor youngsters from the outskirts of Beirut and the Biqa', and a conservative movement for the pious middle class in Beirut. Thus Hizbullah is constantly rebuilding its image and casts a wider and milder net. More analyses of life stories gathered during the fieldwork in 2006 and 2011 illustrate these points.

*Badna haqq al-nasr!
We claim the price of victory!*

This is how Mrs. G.F. who used to support Arab nationalism in her youth, expressed her feelings in a luxurious sitting room in South Lebanon in September 2006. Like many other Shi'is from her community, she has gained a sense of legitimacy and political empowerment by the result of the undefeated army of the *mujahidin*,

⁷⁸ 'This duality is inherent in social Islamist movements - it is the essence - and explains their focus on moral and cultural dimensions of religion. They conquer the broadest base - up to seize power, as in Iran - when they are able to mobilize all young urban poor and pious bourgeoisie with an ideology based on moral and a social program focus. Each component of the movement can be understood and interpreted at will, because of the ambiguity that characterizes the religious language.' Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: Expansion et déclin de l'islamisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 2000, 97.

Hizbullah. Here 'we' refers to the Shi'is of Lebanon. And 'the price of victory' is the request for a broader political voice in a country where political participation is based on sectarian quotas. The choice of the word *haqq*, meaning 'price' but also 'right(s)' and 'justice' reflects the idea that the political gain made by a particular sectarian community is achieved at the expense of the other sectarian communities. Mrs G.F.'s life story traces the history of representations of the Shi'is of Lebanon. The *Mutawila*⁷⁹ of Ottoman Mount Lebanon, with which her father, who migrated to Africa, used to identify, and the *Mahrumin*⁸⁰ of the 1960s which her husband aimed to lead at the beginning of the civil war, have become transformed into martyrs and national heroes at the beginning of the 21st century under the flag of Hizbullah.

Interestingly, Mrs G.F. only partially identified with Hizbullah. She confirmed clearly that she doesn't belong to 'them', unlike 'ses cousines Hizbullah' (her Hizbullah cousins). 'They', meaning Hizbullah, had sent people to assess the damage and compensate her material losses caused by the Israeli bombardments, but she had dismissed them politely, she said. At first glance, Mrs G.F.'s statements seem open to sectarian interpretations. As such, the victory of Hizbullah could have been interpreted as embodying the political empowerment of the Shi'is vis-à-vis other sectarian communities. But having interviewed more people, it was possible to get a more nuanced interpretation and conclude that people who identified with the achievements of Hizbullah had a sense of empowerment that they projected on their own sense of identity.

⁷⁹ 'While the exact etymology of this term remains obscure, it is connected with the relation of loyalty maintained by these Shi'ites with Imam 'Ali, who is traditionally known as the 'Friend of God' (wali Allah). However, the designation Metwali does not only reflect a confessional adherence, since it is merely borne by the Shi'ites of Jabal 'mel, Kesrawan and the Bekáa.' The earliest appearance of the "Metwalis" as a separate group goes back to the organic regulation of 1861, implemented in Mount Lebanon, as a result of the inter-confessional battles of 1860, which caused much bloodshed in the region. An administrative council was then founded, granting a seat to the Metwalis'. Sabrina Mervin, 'the Shi'is in Lebanon', Encyclopaedia Iranica, originally published on 10 February 2005 (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/Shi'is-in-lebanon>).

⁸⁰ The movement of the deprived was a Shi'i political movement founded by Imam Musa al-Sadr and Husayn al-Husayini in 1974. The movement calls the Shi'is to refuse submission and calls for revolt, as these words of Imam Musa Sadr illustrate it: 'our name is not Metwali. Our name is those who refuse (rafezun), those who seek revenge, those who revolt against tyranny. ... we don't want any more sentiment, we want action. ...if you remain inert, I won't.' Jean Loup Samaan, *Les metamorphoses du Hezbollah*, Karthala, 2007, 28.

Mrs. W.K. is also a Lebanese Shi'i from a family originally from Tyre. She was born in Senegal, speaks Wolof, and was educated in a Christian religious and francophone boarding school in Lebanon. She revealed in a private conversation in her luxurious lounge in Beirut on July 2011 that she only felt Lebanese after the War of July 2006. This was her answer to Mrs. N.Y., a Sunni lady whose father was a prominent Lebanese politician between the 1920s and the 1950s, and who has lived in France since 1990. Surprisingly, Mrs. N.Y. first raised the question, asking Mrs. W.K.:

'When did you first feel Lebanese?'

She obviously asked the question to express her own views on the issue, and her own answer to her own question was:

'Only in 2000, after the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon.'

Mrs. N.Y. explained that this was the first time that she felt that the Christian community could no longer lay exclusive claims on Lebanon. It is worth mentioning that Mrs. N.Y. and Mrs. W.K. are in their '70s, three decades older than Mrs. G.F., and they were educated in the same Christian school in Lebanon. Both of them expressed a distinct sense of exclusion on which they based their interpretations of the achievements of Hizbullah in Lebanon. In addition, although Mrs. N.Y. is a Sunni, she expresses a preference for the Shi'i doctrine which she thinks is fairer to women in religion and in society. So here is another example where the social agent seeks empowerment, and projects many of his/her identity vectors onto Hizbullah.

The most intriguing life story was the one of Dr. G.K., who revealed her own quest for legitimacy in identifying with Hizbullah as a nationalist party. Dr. G.K. is a Sunni lady, a member of the first generation of women who attended medical school in Lebanon. She grew up in a Christian school for girls in Lebanon, became a physician in France, and worked between Paris and Beirut. She holds French and Lebanese passports. She is very active within the Lebanese civil society and works for civic education, and for a Lebanese awareness that would transcend regional and sectarian identities. Dr. G.K. argues that beyond the consolidation of the Lebanese self, people should name their national rivals and enemies. They should have a common vision and agree on differentiation, "the other", but also on the common threat, "the other enemy". To her, Hizbullah is the guarantor that agreement or treaty will be made with Israel, but she is not confident that the Christians who support Michel 'Awn are convinced of this argument. Therefore she fears political change after 'Awn. This last remark is interesting because it is exactly what some Maronites say

about Hizbullah, wondering about the party's politics after Nasrullah. The trust invested in the person of the leader incarnating honesty, transparency, and seeking the collective interest rather than the personal one, is recurrent in all interviews. It shows that confidence in other sectarian communities is still weak and that people trust the leader of the "others" far more than the "others" themselves. This is reciprocal between both sectarian communities, Shi'i and Maronite.

'Allah Yistur shu bissir fina iza rah Hasan Nasrullah!
(God forbid what might happen to us if Nasrullah goes!)

So exclaimed S.G. when he saw the riots that took place in Beirut on the night of Thursday, 1 June 2006 after the broadcast of a satirical programme, 'Basmal Watan', which taunted the Secretary General of Hizbullah on the LBC TV channel. S.G. is a Christian man in his seventies, a lawyer and large landowner who wrote a satirical novel about the Lebanese civil war. Although he lived in Lebanon all through these terrible years, he was never involved in the fratricidal power struggle. Having lost a brother who was kidnapped based on his '*al-hawiya*',⁸¹ S.G. looks back with nostalgia to the peaceful mixed neighbourhoods, but he has lost any hope in the new generation which is so scarred by the stigma of civil war.

To conclude, as an orator, Nasrullah is far more capable than any Lebanese politician of bringing divided constituencies together. Even if people disagree with him, they still admired his philosophical arguments, which are derived from the deductive reasoning of classical Greece. In a group interview conducted with a group of intellectuals from various regions and religions in August 2011, all of whom disagreed profoundly with 'Awn and Hizbullah, all those who were interviewed had declared unanimously that Hasan Nasrullah is a clever and respectable person. Moreover, having collected life stories of Christians who support FPM as well as Hizbullah, it was always possible to identify the strong personal projection of the charismatic figure of Hasan Nasrullah. More than a cult of the individual, people tend to project their ideals on him. Instead of him embracing the crowd, individuals within the crowd fuse with him and unite together. That is the case not only for Shi'is who have attended the Hizbullah *madrassa*, but also for fans of Nasrullah who are neither Islamists nor Muslims and sometimes even avowed secularists!

⁸¹ That is, on the basis of his sectarian identity as shown in his identity card, *al-hawiya*.

Overall, the July War was crucial for Hizbullah and its allies, especially the FPM, in defining a common nationalist political current. The war laid the foundations for Hizbullah's Arab nationalist discourse and its call for the construction of a strong, clean, sovereign, and united Lebanese state. The strong ties between the people despite their political allegiances, as well as the consolidation of the national territory in the popular imagination were to be used by the apparatuses of both parties to give a national dimension to their alliance. This is when the political entente between the FPM and Hizbullah became a militant political alliance, with a set of speeches and actions on the ground which favoured a high level of socialization between formerly alienated groups.

CHAPTER 3:

POLITICS, TERRITORY, AND SOCIETY: FAILED NATIONAL ASPIRATIONS BUT A DURABLE ALLIANCE IN TIMES OF MAJOR UPHEAVALS IN THE ARAB WORLD?

THE SHIFT FROM AN ENTENTE TO A POLITICAL ALLIANCE

When the ceasefire between Israel and Hizbullah was negotiated in New York by the Security Council and implemented in Lebanon on 14 August 2006, the alliance between FPM and Hizbullah had been consolidated by the solidarity that had developed during the July War. Hizbullah was undefeated by the Israeli attacks, and the FPM MPs displayed their political preferences when they came to parliament *à la mode du Hizbullah*, that is with short beards, perhaps better “unshaved”, and with no ties.

The definite shift from an entente towards a political alliance was consolidated after the resignation of the Shi'i ministers in November 2006 because they disagreed with 14 March over the international tribunal. The political crisis actually began on 1 November 2006 when the United States warned of a plot amid "mounting evidence" that Syria, Iran, and Hizbullah were planning to topple the Lebanese government in order to stop the creation of the al-Hariri tribunal.⁸² Syrian and Iranian officials publically rejected these allegations, and Hizbullah declared that the U.S. backing of the government of Prime Minister Fu'ad Siniura was 'a blatant interference' in Lebanon's internal affairs. Ten days later, on 11 November 2006, the five Shi'i Ministers and a sixth minister resigned from the Cabinet but the Prime Minister refused to accept any of the six resignations.⁸³ On 3 November 2006 the remaining eighteen cabinet ministers unanimously approved a draft accord outlining the creation of an international tribunal to try those suspected of involvement in the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri, sending it to the Security Council for endorsement.⁸⁴

⁸² BBC News (1 November 2006): 'US issues Lebanon "plot" warning.' Retrieved 12 December 2006.

⁸³ 'Lebanese Political Crisis Mounting: Sixth Minister Quits Cabinet', globalresearch.ca., accessed 11 November 2006.

⁸⁴ CNN (13 November 2006) 'Lebanon approves court amid crisis.' Retrieved 12 December 2006). FOX News (13 November 2006). 'Lebanese Cabinet Approves U.N. Tribunal.' Retrieved 12 December 2006).

After this, Hizbullah and FPM came together in the ranks of the opposition and the proportions in the parliament were to change again (Table 2).⁸⁵

TABLE 2: THE NEW PARLIAMENT AFTER THE FPM-HIZBULLAH ALLIANCE:

Alliances named after the Syrian withdrawal	Seats per Alliance	Parties competing for elections	Number of seats obtained after the May-June 2005 general elections
March 14 Alliance	71		
		Future Movement led by Sa'ïd al-Hariri	36
		Progressive Socialist Party led by Walid Junblat	16
		Lebanese Forces led by Samir Geagea	6
		Cornet Shehwan gathering including the Phalangists led by Amin Jumayyil and independents	6
		Independents (Tripoli Bloc)	3
		Democratic renewal (Tripoli Bloc)	1
		Democratic left (Tripoli Bloc)	1
		Murr Bloc	2
March 8 Alliance	55		
		Amal led by Nabih Berri	14
		Hizbullah	14
		Syrian Nationalist Party (Baath)	2
		Others	5
		Skaff bloc	5
		Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) led by Michel 'Awn	15
Independents	2	Independents	2
TOTAL	128		128

⁸⁵ The new labelling of the new coalitions became confusing: if only all parties could have agreed on the same labels. Hence, the new alliance between the FPM and Hizbullah was called the 8 March coalition by the 14 March parties, while Michel 'Awn called his new rivals the 14 February bloc. However, the perceptions of the blocs in general remained 8 March and 14 March.

Both parties pressed for their coalition to be represented in the cabinet with a proportion of veto-wielding power (11 portfolios) out of the thirty seats. When their request was rejected, both parties coordinated a sit-in in the downtown area facing the cabinet office demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Fu'ad Siniura.

This sit-in in downtown Beirut was announced in a demonstration on 12 October 2006;⁸⁶ it lasted from December 2006 until May 2008. After the first week of December, space and time were made for the groups to socialize. It is worth mentioning that the 17 months of occupation of downtown Beirut was pervasively militarised. Narguilehs and smoky barbecues made the set of white tents look like some sort of Gallic feast. This was also an opportunity for some people to get out of their post-civil war "ghettos" and to mingle with different communities in what is a generic shared public space.⁸⁷ Social connections and ties would develop during this experience.⁸⁸ In time the sit-in began to lose its free spirit. It was highly organised and secure. No pictures could be taken, and no interviews conducted without special authorizations and introductions. Also, after the July War, displays of security by Hizbullah were becoming more and more intensive. People in civilian clothes with obvious security paramilitary equipment such as walkie-talkies or body armour could stop civilians from taking pictures or question them about the purpose of their trip, etc.

THE POLITICS OF SPACE: THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE POST-SYRIAN LEBANESE COALITIONS

A month after the sit-in began in downtown Beirut, the Lebanese opposition, seeking to intensify its campaign to bring down the Siniura government, called for a general strike on 23 January 2007⁸⁹ officially on the grounds that the government had treated the popular

⁸⁷ al-Jadid TV conducted a vox pop in downtown Beirut all through the first week of December 2006 when the sit-ins started. Most striking were a few testimonies from young men who had discovered the fancy downtown area for the first time and began to denounce social inequality. The vox pop was shown on the evening news all week and the sit-in was identified as a social movement seeking social equality and denouncing capitalism rather than a display of political antagonism.

⁸⁸ Interview of M.F. a Christian MP from the resistance and development block, and PhD in linguistics on 1 August 2011. B.H., with a Ph.D in sociology and an FPM senior mentioned a couple of emblematic weddings. Unfortunately there was no time left to reach out one of these married couples.

⁸⁹ Close to the opposition, the Lebanese Federation of Trade Unions, counting 350,000 members, also called for a general strike against proposed tax increases of the Saniura government.

movement launched on 1 December⁹⁰ with contempt and was burdening Lebanon with further foreign debt.⁹¹ At dawn on 23 January 2007 rioters had gathered at strategic sites such as the entrance of main cities, or at the buffer zones between mainly Shi'i and mainly Christian neighbourhoods. They cut the main roads with tyres and tree trunks and set fires to cover the sky with big black smoky clouds, and many civilians did not try to go out. The security environment was tense. Although it did not intervene, the army maintained security during the riots. At some stages, there were **violent** confrontations between pro- and anti-government gangs. Predominantly Christian neighbourhoods experienced intensive pressure in the regions of Jubayl, Nahr al-Kalb, and in the neighbourhoods of Hazmieh and Ain al-Remaneh, recalling the old 'Awn-Geagea antagonism or what is called the war of elimination, *Harb al-Ilgha'*.

Similar fights broke out in predominantly Muslim areas and among the Druzes. While the Druzes, like the Christians, were divided between the supporters of 8 March and 14 March, the Muslim divide had a more sectarian character since the majority of Shi'is supported the opposition led by Hizbullah and Amal. Therefore clashes between pro- and anti-government supporters within the predominantly Muslim areas occurred in the areas populated by Sunnis and Shi'is, such as the neighbourhood of the Arab University in South Beirut or between Jabal Muhsin and Bab al-Tabbaneh in Tripoli.

In an informal interview with a senior FPM member, it seemed clear that the March 8 coalition was testing the scope of its territorial and trans-sectarian extent across Lebanese territory. Overall, the clashes killed three people, and gunfire or stones all through Lebanon wounded 133 people.

⁹⁰ Siniura had previously responded to the escalation against his government by filing a letter on 15 December 2005 to the UN Secretary General requesting the establishment of a tribunal of an international character to try all those found responsible for the terrorist attack that killed Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri and 22 others. In his letter Siniura also requested that the mandate of the International Independent Investigation Commission be expanded to all terrorist attacks that have occurred since 1 October 2004. Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1644 (2005), S/2006/176, Distr.: General 21 March 2006 Original: English, United Nations Security Council.

⁹¹ This call for a general strike took place three days before the Paris3 conference on 25 January, an international donor conference to finance the reconstruction of Lebanon, whose economy was ruined by the July-war 2006. The opposition denounced the conference, arguing that the five billion dollars that the government hoped to raise would only add to Lebanon's external debt and further weaken the economy.

Forty-eight hours later, violent clashes occurred in predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods in Beirut.⁹² Fighting with sticks and stones began at the Arab University, located in the south of Beirut, after an argument between students in the cafeteria. Clashes then extended to neighbouring areas, notably that of al-Tariq al-Jadida, then to other areas populated by Sunnis and Shi'is, where groups of young rioters burned cars and tyres. Sa'ïd al-Hariri, Hizbullah, and Nabih Berri had to call on their supporters to get off the streets;⁹³ calm eventually returned to Beirut in the late afternoon, where the army was deployed en masse. Hence Lebanon once more became divided between pro-government supporters and their opponents, sliding rapidly into violent street clashes. People dragged into the sad scenario of inter-sectarian fighting threatened the unified trans-sectarian territory that the post-Syrian coalitions had consolidated, and the national unity that people had dreamt of.

After 23 January 2007 a cautious calm was interrupted by sporadic street clashes occurring in neighbourhoods populated by both Shi'is and Sunnis such as Ras al-Nabih, al-Tariq al-Jadidah, As-As, Mar Elias, and Corniche al-Mazra'a. In the meantime the sit-in in downtown Beirut, which was paralysing the economic activity of the area and putting pressure on the government, was turning from a peaceful gathering to a highly secured militant base. These new locations of recurrent fighting and the development of downtown Beirut as the new seat of power became part of the human geography of post-Syria Lebanon. Other hotspots turned out to be the focus of the most severe internal fighting since the Lebanese civil war of 1975-1990. The Palestinian camps, pockets of insecurity that had generally been

⁹² This explosion of violence coincided with the international aid conference for Lebanon held in Paris, when the international community renewed its support for Fu'ad Siniura and promised \$ 7.6 billion of aid to Lebanon. From Paris, Siniura called for 'wisdom' on the part of the Lebanese people, asking them to 'reject the escalation'.

⁹³ The leaders of the parliamentary majority, Sa'ïd al-Hariri and Hizbullah, called on their supporters to show restraint and to withdraw from the streets. 'I call on all supporters of the Future Movement to remain calm and not respond to the provocations of those who want to show unrest in Lebanon to sabotage the positive results of the international conference to aid Lebanon held in Paris.' Sa'ïd al-Hariri, 25 January 2007. For its part Hizbullah's television station *al-Manar* had broadcast a call for 'its followers to withdraw from the streets.' The Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, the leader of Amal reiterated this call: 'We are moving towards the street battles that remind us of the civil war. I call on all parties to withdraw their supporters from the streets and return to the dialogue because there can be no winners or losers,' said Berri.

dormant, became nests from which Islamist extremists could infiltrate into Lebanese territory. On 20 May 2007, following an operation conducted in Tripoli by an Islamist militant organisation Fath al-Islam, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) attacked the gang and besieged them in the Palestinian refugee camp at Nahr al-Barid where they were based. LAF declared victory four months later on 7 September 2007, and Nahr al-Barid Camp was completely devastated with 27,000 homeless Palestinian refugees.⁹⁴ Distress spread throughout the Palestinian camps in Beirut and South Lebanon, and Palestinian camps once more became time bombs on the Lebanese scene.⁹⁵

Thus Lebanon went through seventeen long months of political crisis and insecurity after December 2006 until the political feud burst into violent clashes sparked by a strike on 7 May 2007 and ended with Hizbullah conquering the streets of West Beirut. The warring scenario spread to 'Aley, Baruk, the North, and Bab al-Tebaneh and Jabal Muhsin in Tripoli. The mini scenario of civil war lasted until the government revoked the decisions that had sparked the fighting on 14 May 2008.⁹⁶ During that week, all the hotspots that had emerged since January 2007 became the frontlines of the new confrontations. Thus warfare, speeches, and guns shaped the post-Syria geography

⁹⁴ UNRWA reports on Nahr al-Bared crisis (<http://www.unrwa.org>).

⁹⁵ At that time I was working with UNRWA in Lebanon, and I had often visited Burj al-Barajneh Camp since 2005. My last visit to the most peaceful refugee camp in Lebanon was in October 2007. The security landscape had dramatically changed and fragmented.

⁹⁶ This reversal was provoked by the government's decision to dismantle Hizbullah's secret telecommunications network. 'We are now embarking on totally new era ... similar to the changes that occurred on 14 February 2005,' explained Hasan Nasrullah in his speech on 8 May 2008 in which he explained that this was an attack on Hizbullah's basic capacity to manage combat, insuring the high quality of command and control in the battlefield that was pinpointed in the 2007 Winograd report. Therefore dismantling the telecommunication system was considered as a declaration of war against the Islamic Resistance, which relies on the government's policy statement to preserve its weaponry, especially that the aforementioned network dates back to the late nineties and had been developed ever since. According to the Secretary General of Hizbullah, dispute started over controversy regarding a cable between al-Dahiya and West Beirut, whereas the party was requested to dismantle the cable. The party was then accused of setting up a telecommunication network in Jubayl, Kisrawan, North Lebanon and Shuf. But Hizbullah, defended Nasrullah, only did link the cables between south Beirut and south Lebanon. (Speech of Hasan Nasrullah on 8 May 2008).

of Lebanon. During these dramatic incidents, South Beirut and South Lebanon fell “naturally” under Hizbullah control. Clashes first began in West Beirut along the Corniche al-Mazra’a where Shi’i and Sunni neighbourhoods overlapped. But Hizbullah closed the major highways and took over half of the capital city within hours. Jubayl and Kisrawan were soon out of reach. In North Lebanon, Tripoli’s sensitive Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Muhsin were subject to serious divisions. The Shuf was still the bastion of the Druzes while ‘Aley and Baruk, which separated the Druze heartland from the mainly Shi’i southern Biqa’, came under fire.⁹⁷

Although these street fights involved machine guns, rocket propelled grenades, artillery, and mortars, the army decided not to intervene for fear of provoking splits within its ranks along sectarian lines, as had happened during the civil war. This last episode of violence known in Lebanon as *ahdath saba’ ayyar*, or the incidents of May 7, put the people who did not agree with Hizbullah’s violent retaliation in a desperate mood; lack of confidence in the future, the feeling of living in permanent uncertainty, and the fear of enhanced social hatred nourished by the empowerment of the street fighters.⁹⁸ Although street violence had cost ‘Awn some hesitation among his constituents, he had not commented on the incidents of May 7, believing that this was a sectarian battle beyond his control. However, the partisans still

⁹⁷ In a speech on 8 May 2008 Nasrullah named the Lebanese territories. He considered al-Dahiya, South Beirut and South Lebanon to fall without controversy under Hizbullah control, and admitted that operating in Western Beirut, Jubayl, Kisrawan, North Lebanon and Shuf could raise concerns of intrusion into other communities’ territories.

⁹⁸ ‘This last war made me decide not to live in Lebanon anymore. I was trapped in New York and my pregnant wife was alone in the battlefield’, said ZD, a moviemaker who had subsequently decided to produce his next movie in France. ‘Working in that environment was not possible anymore. I couldn’t speak to the coffee man in my office, who fought with Hizbullah in Hamra. He became arrogant and provocative,’ said SD, a Christian movie editor who used to work in a production house in West-Beirut with colleagues from different religions. YG, also a movie editor who works as a freelancer commented: ‘I cannot understand how people can vote for ‘Awn when he stands by Hizbullah. It is like supporting the *Front National* in France.’ Interviews conducted in June 2008.

defended their alliance with Hizbullah as providing a buffer zone for the Christian area.⁹⁹

A dialogue in Doha between 16 May and 21 May 2008 followed this peak of violence, which ended with an agreement under which the opposition secured its demand for the power of veto in the new government and a new electoral law that adopted smaller constituencies (table 3). The parties also agreed on having the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament to invite the parliament to elect Michel Suleiman as a consensus presidential candidate. Suleiman had been commander of the LAF between 1998 and 2008 and was generally considered as acceptable to both sides. The post-Doha agreement was a cheerful period in Beirut. The sit-in ended on a note of hope for sustainable peace. One even heard that this was the real end of the civil war! Or, as expressed below:

fida' l-watan! L-masari btiji w-bitruh

'The country is redeemed: money comes and money goes',

It was a way for the shop owners in downtown Beirut to forgive and forget. The Doha agreement restored smaller electoral constituencies, enabling voters to elect MPs that would represent their communities. This reinforced the legitimacy of sectarian representation in a country where sectarianism is already institutionalized. The main beneficiary was the Christian community, and this 'reform' was perceived as recovery from the dramatic losses of the Ta'if Accord (see page 13). The results of the general election of June 2009 revealed the persistence of strong regional loyalties to the parliamentary coalitions, thus asserting the new geography that had arisen since January 2007:

⁹⁹ In June 2008 when KH, art director who is publicly pro FPM defended the alliance with Hizbullah: 'Where would you be today if 'Awn did not have good relations with Hizbullah? They took over West-Beirut in hours, and things could have been worse in the Eastern side of the city.' This representation of a buffer alliance is recurrent in the interviews. ' Hamas and Hizbullah proved to be the most powerful on the ground. Hamas took over Gaza and Hizbullah took over West Beirut in hours. 'Awn helped to keep the fighting out of East Beirut,' commented AN, who claims to be undecided between 8 March and 14 March.

Election Results for each alliance		Total	March 14	March 8
Beirut 19	Beirut 1	5	5	0
	Beirut 2	4	2	2
	Beirut 3	10	10	0
Biqā' 23	B'aalbik+Hirmil	10	0	10
	Zahleh	7	7	0
	Rashaya+West Biqā'	6	6	0
Mount Lebanon 35	Jubayl	3	0	3
	Kisrawan	5	0	5
	North Matn	8	2	6
	Ba'abda	6	0	6
	'Aley	5	4	1
	Shuf	8	8	0
North Lebanon 28	'Akkar	7	7	0
	Dinniyeh +Minnieh	3	3	0
	Bsharreh	2	2	0
	Tripoli	8	8	0
	Zgharta	3	0	3
	Kura	3	3	0
	Batrun	2	2	0
South Lebanon 23	Sa'ida	2	2	0
	Tyre	4	0	4
	Zahrani	3	0	3
	Hasbaya+Marj'ayun	5	0	5
	Nabatiyeh	3	0	3
	Bint Jubayl	3	0	3
	Jizzin	3	0	3
TOTAL 128		128	71	57

In 26 electoral constituencies, the parliamentary coalitions obtained clear victories in 22 cazas. The 2009 general elections showed that Beirut, the Druze Mount Lebanon, and North Lebanon voted for 14 March, while mainly Christian Mount Lebanon and Shi'i South Lebanon voted for 8 March. Only the Biqa' remained divided, with Ba'albak and Hirmil voting for Hizbullah, while Zahleh, Rashaya, and Western Biqa' voted for 14 March.¹⁰⁰ 14 March remained the majority, securing 71 seats against 57 seats for 8 March. Sa'id al-Hariri, the leader of Future Movement, was nominated to head the government following binding consultations with MPs. He formed a cabinet, which gave veto power to the 8 March opposition and submitted a ministerial policy maintaining the trinity of the Nation, the Army, and the Resistance. The disarmament of Hizbullah was no longer discussed, and internal security remained on a knife-edge. The word on the street was that the Future Movement had started to build its military wing. Tensions remained high until the Saudis met with the Syrians over Lebanese interests in August 2010. Known as the *ittifaqiyat al-sin-sin*, the Syrian-Saudi agreement had brought the Sunni and the Shi'i poles of discord together. At that point the topic of the al-Hariri tribunal became almost off limits.

This situation remained unchanged until the Arab revolutions began in Tunisia in December 2010 and spread into Egypt in January 2011. In the precarious regional circumstances that followed, the atmosphere of uncertainty generally favored breaking the Syrian-Saudi deal in Lebanon. A new crisis provoked by Hizbullah arose over the International Tribunal indictment, which was to be filed in a few

¹⁰⁰ The Beirut electorate voted massively for the 14 March coalition. However al-Dahiya, Furn al-Shibak and Ain al-Rummaneh, all with the Beirut agglomeration, are not included in Beirut electoral district. In Ba'albak and Hirmil in the Biqa', Tyre, Zahrani, Hasbaya Marjeoun, Nabatyeh, Bint Jubayl and Jizzin in South Lebanon, Shi'is voted massively for Hizbullah. Only Sa'ida, where al-Hariri was born, was loyal to 14 March. Jubayl, Kisrawan and Baabda whose population is mainly Maronite with a Shi'i minority were loyal to Michel 'Awn and voted massively for 8 March. Only the Jumayyil family could win elections in North Matn against four seats for 8 March. Zgharta in North Lebanon was loyal to Sulayman Franjiyya, an ally of Hizbullah and FPM.

months.¹⁰¹ Lebanon lived in a period of political uncertainty until Walid Junblat dissolved his 'Democratic Gathering' and backed the Hizbullah coalition through his new bloc, 'The Front of National Struggle.'¹⁰² Binding consultations with the neutral and mutually agreeable President Michel Sulayman on 25 January 2011 secured 68 votes for a Hizbullah-backed cabinet under Najib Miqati¹⁰³ against 60 votes for the outgoing caretaker PM Sa'id al-Hariri. Mr. Miqati's nomination triggered spontaneous clashes in Sunni areas, especially in Tripoli, between Jabal Muhsin and Bab al-Tebaneh. Meanwhile Sa'id al-Hariri accused Hizbullah of seizing power illegitimately and called for a 'day of rage' on 25 January 2011. Violence in Tripoli and the Sunni districts of Beirut spiralled out of control.

¹⁰¹ This governmental crisis began in Lebanon on 12 January 2011 after the resignation of ten ministers backed by Hizbullah. Their resignation was followed by a speech by Hasan Nasrullah four days later, in which he claimed that the Special Tribunal for Lebanon was being used politically against his organization. He therefore underlined the necessity for the Lebanese government to stop financing the tribunal or appointing Lebanese judges. He also demanded the revocation of the agreement signed between the Lebanese Republic and the United Nations in February 2007. The seriousness of the internal discord led to the adjournment of the parliamentary consultations awaiting political settlement through a process of international and regional mediation. Soon after, these attempts at mediation ended in deadlock, especially as the Saudi mediator 'washed his hands' of the Lebanese question. In the meantime, internally, an overnight security operation led by Hizbullah (18-19 January) increased the tension. Although normal civilian activity was quickly recovered, many political parties issued worrying statements related to the civil peace deterioration. See Camille Germanos, 'Elements of an Analysis of the Lebanese crisis', MEI Insights3, February 2011.

¹⁰² Such a dramatic political shift raised questions about the legitimacy of the new majority, as it suggested that Junblat made this decision under threat. But the Druze leader declared that his switch to the side of Syria and the Resistance served to preserve Lebanon's stability. Further, he accused his old ally Mr. Hariri of misunderstanding the complex political landscape in Lebanon.

¹⁰³ Najib Miqati is a wealthy Sunni businessman from Tripoli who had been Prime Minister April-July 2005.

TABLE 3: SEAT ALLOCATIONS ACCORDING TO THE DOHA AGREEMENT:

Seats allocated per electoral constituency	Maronites	Sniis	Sunnite	Greek Orthodox	Druze	Armenian Orthodox	Greek Catholic	Alawite	Protestant	Other Christians
Beirut 19	Beirut 1	1	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	1
	Beirut 2	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Beirut 3	-	1	5	1	1	-	-	1	1
Biq'a' 23	Baalbek+Hirmil	1	6	2	-	-	1	-	-	-
	Zahlehh	1	1	1	1	1	2	-	-	-
	Rashaya + West Biqa'	1	1	2	1	1	-	-	-	-
	Jubeyl	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mount Lebanon 35	Kisrawan	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	North Matr	4	-	-	2	-	1	-	-	-
	Ba'abda	3	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
	'Aley	2	-	-	1	2	-	-	-	-
North Lebanon 28	Shuf	3	-	2	-	2	1	-	-	-
	'Akar	1	-	3	2	-	-	1	-	-
	Dinniyeh + Minliah	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
South Lebanon 23	Bsharreh	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Tripoli	1	-	5	1	-	-	1	-	-
	Zgharta	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Kura	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-
South Lebanon 23	Barun	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Saida	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Tyre	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL 128	Zahrani	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
	Hasbaya + Marjeyoun	-	2	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
	Nabatiyeh	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Bint Jubayl	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Jizzine	2	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	
TOTAL 128	34	27	27	14	8	5	8	2	1	2

These tensions paralyzed political life until 30 June 2011, when the indictment from the UN-backed Tribunal and the accompanying arrest warrants were transmitted to the Lebanese authorities. At that point the cabinet was meeting to draft the final statement of the government ministerial policy, including the state's commitment to international agreements.¹⁰⁴ This policy approved on the same day, maintained Lebanon's commitment to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) and preserved the trilogy of the Nation, the Army, and the Resistance.¹⁰⁵

THE EFFECTS OF THE ARAB REVOLUTIONS ON THE FRAGMENTED POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF LEBANON

The fall of Mubarak in Egypt in February 2011, and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood all over the Middle East in the months that followed might have resulted in a change in U.S. policy vis-à-vis Hizbullah. This was the time when the discourse of both the media and academics encouraged the inclusion of Islamic organizations in the democratic process, as in Turkey. But as the Arab uprisings went on, the sequence of events made the American administration seem even more determined to maintain its hostility towards the traditional enemies of Israel. Thus, while the discourse on Shi'i-Sunni struggle in the Middle East was inflamed by the riots in Bahrain, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) army intervened in Manama, hence undermining American talk of democracy. Soon after, the axis of mumana'a, which includes most of the Shi'is of the Levant, started to tremble with the mass uprisings in Syria. By the time the American administration put pressure on Bashar al-Assad to step down, Israel launched a war of words against the Iranian nuclear program, threatening to launch a strike over Iran, and ultimately instigating a set of rigorous economic sanctions against Tehran. In this context Hamas completely shifted its policy under the Muslim Brotherhood

¹⁰⁴ 'The accused is innocent until proven guilty', Prime Minister Miqati declared soon after he walked out of the meeting. Lebanon is committed to justice and liberty, he added, and Lebanese people need to be united in consolidating national sovereignty. With these declarations fostered by party politics, he tried to reconcile the demands of Hizbullah with the expectations of the International Community.

¹⁰⁵ In forming his cabinet and introducing new codes of governance, Miqati had to deal with immense political challenges, not least a boycott by the opposition. When the cabinet was finally formed on 13 June, he had to cope with a reshuffle, political gun fights in Tripoli, and demonstrations of anger in Shuf, not to mention longstanding social turbulence and economic malaise. The new parliamentary opposition, the 14 March bloc that had held power since 2005, virulently criticized the cabinet. Meanwhile, international players such as UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon urged Miqati to respect Lebanon's commitment to international agreements.

umbrella, while Hizbullah remained part of the axis of *mumana'a* while trying to avoid any direct clashes with the Lebanese Sunnis or with Israel. Thus, Hizbullah remains in the U.S. sights as the major terrorist group financed by Iran.

With the sanctions biting deeply into the Iranian economy, the American administration assumed that the organization of Hizbullah could not any longer count on receiving \$200 million every year from Tehran, and that it would increasingly have to rely on criminal enterprise to finance its organization. In line with these assumptions, the U.S. tracked a global apparatus of money laundering involving Hizbullah, and the Obama administration looked into the books of the Lebanese banks in February 2011, which was perceived in Lebanon as indicating possible future sanctions against the Lebanese financial system.¹⁰⁶ On 13 December 2011, the *New York Times* published an article by Jo Becker under the headline 'Beirut Bank Seen as a Hub of Hezbollah's Financing', revealing the investigations over the clandestine methods that Hizbullah uses to finance its operations. These investigations calling the credibility of the director of the Lebanese Central Bank into question still continue. In addition to these moral and financial attacks on Hizbullah, Special Tribunal for Lebanon's announcement of its indictments on 30 June 2011 once more posed difficult choices for the Lebanese state.¹⁰⁷ This legal pileup and its economic consequences nurtured further tensions between the main clans of 8 and 14 March.

In these potentially antagonistic circumstances, a more neutral current became visible in Lebanese politics represented by the President, Michel Sulayman, the Prime Minister, Najib Miqati, the Speaker, Nabih Berri, and the Druze leader, Walid Junblat.¹⁰⁸ Together, these politicians, who belong to the four main Lebanese communities,

¹⁰⁶ International economic sanctions have been a matter of concern to the Lebanese public since the sentencing of the Lebanese Canadian Bank in the United States in March 2011 and the potential blow to the banking sector.

¹⁰⁷ The first consisted in challenging the international decisions and thus incurring the risk of attracting economic and political sanctions, whose consequences would weigh heavily on Lebanese society, which was much more concerned with the cost of living than with the next Israeli attack. Further economic deterioration would surely have unfavorable consequences on the Lebanese political players. The second choice would have been to challenge the military command of Hizbullah, some of whose senior members were indicted by the STL.

¹⁰⁸ Walid Junblat ended up by standing publically against the Syrian regime at the risk of becoming alienated from the Syrian Druzes.

have been working for the establishment of a buffer between the two axes now dividing the region. Although the Lebanese administration has not been especially effective, or more accurately ‘paralyzed’ since the beginning of his mandate, Miqati has largely succeeded in preserving Lebanon from international sanctions, and in preserving the state’s institutions from sectarian divisions over regional politics. Miqati started his mandate at a time of high political tension, as was demonstrated in the parliamentary debates preceding the vote of confidence.¹⁰⁹ At that time, between July and August 2011, there was a striking contrast between the calm in the streets and the rage between politicians.¹¹⁰ While MPs fought bitterly among themselves, citizens became silent, and it was very difficult for the researcher to get people to make political comments in social gatherings. The streets of Beirut seemed more serene than ever. This unusual tranquility was intriguing. As a researcher, I had to admit that there was no *a priori* hypothesis to work with. So it was necessary to carry out empirical research based on qualitative surveys and participant observation¹¹¹ while distancing subjective assessments.¹¹² For that reason I needed to go back to those who had been my main informants in what is called the exploratory phase. I needed to confirm whether “things” had changed and if so, how they were different. It appeared from all interviews that there was great disillusionment about the supposed benefits of a possible war with Israel against a backdrop of sectarian tensions, and real concerns about the rising cost of living.

¹⁰⁹ Lebanon’s government won a vote of confidence in parliament on 7 July 2005, securing 68 votes out of possible 128 after the opposition walked out before the vote.

¹¹⁰ I was in Beirut in July and August 2011 conducting field research. See Appendix 1 for more information on the methodology.

¹¹¹ My first impressions required generating and developing the subject of the investigation through the very process of data collection.

¹¹² Fieldwork also required making a clean sweep of the information received by the media and the readings of any kind and try to catch problems that would be made by the inhabitants themselves. To achieve this it was necessary to detach oneself, to discard the idea of the Good (Paul Veyne, *L’inventaire des différences*, Le Seuil, 1976) distance oneself from the political history consumed by the public (Jurgen Habermas, *L’espace public. Archéologie de la publicité comme dimension constitutive de la société bourgeoise*, Payot 1993) by going into the field to get people talking. How do they organize their thoughts, their ways of thinking(s) (Theodor Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality*, New York Harper, 1950), and what are their visions of war? (Raymond and Haumont, *L’habitat pavillonnaire*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2001) What are their cosmologies? (Marc Augé, *Domaines et châteaux*, Seuil, 1989)

My first question was: 'How do you think that the political tensions within the parliament will translate into our lives, bearing in mind that the parliament was also divided along sectarian lines, with the Shi'is supporting the 8 March coalition, which is the majority, and the Sunnis on the side of 14 March, i.e. the opposition.

Muhammad is a Sunni driver who lives in Tariq al-Jadida. His wife is a Shi'i and his mother is a Palestinian from Bourj al-Barajneh refugee camp. Muhammad used to be impassioned by politics and he had divorced his wife twice because of their disagreements over Sunni-Shi'i quarrels/differences in the streets of Beirut. In August 2011, Mohammad did not answer any of my political questions.

'We have nothing to win from these disputes, Madame. Look at the way they use the people, filling their pockets, driving fancy cars and travelling abroad whenever there is tension in the streets. I personally am planning to find a job abroad and start saving for my children.'

Suzanne, whose husband is a Sunni security guard in Solidère, is a fervent Sunni and very much pro al-Hariri. She is a beautician and works in a very fancy salon in East Beirut, near the former front-line in Sodeco. Suzanne usually transmits the rumors coming from Solidère to her clients. In August 2009, Suzanne worked in silence and gave me *al-Wasit*, a free paper for Lebanese ads, to read. She would not answer any political questions and her only comment was to say:

'If there is a war, prices will go higher just like in 2006. We cannot afford more troubles.'

The next step was to ask if the Arab revolts had contributed to the rather wary state of mind of the Lebanese people, and how did they perceive those revolts? Feedback from group interviews revealed that people perceived the Arab revolutions very differently. Curiously enough, those most idealistic and optimistic about the spirit of the Arab revolutions were highly educated young people in their early thirties from various regions and religions who did not support either 8 March or 14 March.

'C'est la revolution partout, même au travail!'
'There's revolution in the air, even at work!'

Exclaimed M.K. who explained to me that this was the era of civil liberties in the Middle East. She is a Sunni Lebanese of Palestinian and Jordanian descent, and she has dedicated herself to writing in a feminist magazine since the beginning of the Egyptian uprising. Her friends, Marun, a Maronite architect, Shaza, a Shi'i interior decorator, Marwa, a Druze actress, and a few others have all been considering resigning from their companies as a statement against the various kinds of injustice or frustration they had been experiencing in their professional environment. Such behavior enabled them to identify with members of their social networks across the Arab world, M.K. explained.

D.B. greeted me when she came to join the interviewees. D.B. is a university teacher of French literature and psychoanalysis. She is a Maronite who had never shown interest in politics before.

'But aren't you worried about the post-toppling era? What would be the regime like and who would govern?' I asked.

'Regime changes are always followed by chaos and sometimes even barbarian acts, it is a joke.'

D.B.'s thoughts were not world-shattering, but were commonly shared by other interviewees with the same socio-economic and intellectual profile. A.H. and H.H., two Sunni siblings working in movie production said to me:

'Criticizing the attitudes of revolutions towards modernization and liberties out of simple fear of the unknown is not an argument.'

In contrast with the optimism of the intellectual upper class, the less educated lower-class interviewees were more suspicious about the 'Arab troubles'. Individual comments were predominantly skeptical about the Arab revolutions, as illustrated by Wafiq, a Catholic homemaker, who has spent her life and raised her two children east of the Green Line in Beirut:

'We are so full of political garbage. Just like the rest of the Arab world. They want freedom and equality! Where? In Yemen! In Libya! I wish they had asked us how much trouble and civil unrest could accompany fighting for democracy.'

People like Wafiqa perceived the Arab revolts as troubles or problems or wars rather than revolutions: 'God forbid they do to us what they did to them!' Such exclamations are typical of those who stick to conspiracy theories. Political players such as ministers or senior civil servants as well as politically active civilians had much more politicized comments, and shared concerns over Syria. What would happen to the Syrian regime seemed to be decisive for Lebanese politics, but the expected outcomes varied. Among the Christian partisans of the FPM, their main concern was the future of their community as a regional minority in the Levant.

'We worry about Syria's future because we worry about minorities.'

Said N.A., an FPM supporter.
I asked her why, and she answered:

'It's obvious! Walaw! The Syrian regime is pro-minority and has always supported the Christians in Lebanon. If extremist Sunnis were to govern Syria we will be affected.'

I asked again:

'Don't you think that faith communities should stay out of Syrian national struggles and that it would be harmful to think in terms of regional minorities?'

N. A. replied:

'Indeed this would be the case if we were in Switzerland. But Syria has always had a load over Lebanon, and whoever will be in power in Syria will get involved in Lebanese politics.'

'So how do you think that regime change in Syria will affect Lebanese politics?', I asked.

N.A. replied: 'They would stand by Hariri in Lebanon.'

I asked: 'Why would this be so dramatic? FPM has been in the opposition before.'

'I don't know.' She replied.

'So should we conclude that your worries are strategic rather than ideological?', I asked.

'Indeed, it is strategic. Bashar al-Asad has been a very good ally to the Christians of Lebanon. He has protected them and he has fulfilled all his promises. Why should we sacrifice such a strategic ally?', N.A. replied.

Among other individual interviews, N.A. expresses her ideas very clearly and is quite flexible in her arguments. Like other interviewees, she perceives the Christians in Lebanon as a regional minority in the Levant, and her arguments are based on that perception.

Unlike FPM supporters, more neutral Christian politicians had broader geo-strategic visions for the future. Some believed in the balance of pluralism in the Middle East, as with an anonymous former minister close to the President of the Republic, who revealed the following:

'We worry tremendously about Syria. The destiny of Syria will surely affect Lebanese politics. I personally support the Lebanese axis of neutrality. Remember, a Shi'i axis will never bother American regional strategies as much as a strong and hostile Sunni pan-Arab alliance. Christians might dream of Arab nationalism, Shi'is might fight for it, but organically and demographically Arab nationalism is predominantly Sunni. Therefore, I am confident that in the course of the Arab revolutions, the U.S. will work hard on restraining Sunni dreams especially in the Gulf, where it will support the monarchies.'

In contrast, another former minister close to the President of the Republic firmly believed that the U.S. and Israel would never let Hizbullah be so powerful in Lebanon. It emerged from all the interviews conducted with FPM supporters or more neutral voices, that the new regional equation had a profound effect on identity awareness among faith communities in Lebanon, and that people no longer identified with regional majorities but felt rather confined to local Lebanese national pluralism. All but one community: the Sunnis. The major political participation of the Muslim Brotherhood and of the Salafis in Egypt that had come about most recently, raised the voice of these organizations and factions in North and South Lebanon, hence shrinking Hariri's influence among the Sunnis.

At the time of the survey, interviewees, who might have been thought to have a broad national vision, based their arguments on sectarian perceptions rather than national ideals or cross-sectarian coalitions. A sense of ascription was also heightened in the interviews, where it appeared that territorial practices have also changed. While in 2009, only two years ago, it was possible to solve a problem between

Shi'i families from Afqa and Christian families from the neighboring village of Munitara through mediation by the notables of the two communities,¹¹³ a legal dispute that broke out in August 2011 over a sacred place in Lassa, a Shi'i village built on church *waqf* land had dramatic national repercussions.¹¹⁴ One consequence of this legal dispute, as confirmed to me informally by an FPM official, was that Hizbullah retreated completely from the village landscape. Only Amal remained present symbolically by posters for Nabih Berri and Imam Musa al-Sadr. All Hizbullah flags, slogans, and posters had been removed. Only one black banderole remained to praise one Martyr of the Resistance originally from Lassa. Even the demography of the place seemed to be different. There was less density and precariousness, as if only buildings in concrete remained in place. The Christian-Shi'i alliance through FPM and Hizbullah had attempted to solve the boundary problem through the Maronite League and the judicial system. All parties promised not to make recourse to political patronage. However the issue in Lassa soon became transformed from the regional to the national sectarian scene, and the matter was passionately debated in the media. The fear of geographical expansion that would ruin the sectarian balance in Lebanon spread into people's hearts. Lassa was no longer a historical and judicial issue but became the symbol of a sectarian intrusion in ethnic ascriptions.

'They speak about the dispute over Lassa as if it was the holy church of al-Quds. ...Lassa is a small village near Byblos and there is a disagreement between the people of Lassa and the Lebanese Patriarch or the Maronite Church. They have exaggerated this matter and they accused Hizbullah and then the Shi'is, and they say that the Shi'is in Byblos are occupying territories belonging to the Christians. This was the language that 14 March used. ...This is an old issue dating back long before the Supreme Shi'i Council. It is a judicial issue, but now the implication is that all the Christians of Lebanon are being targeted.'

¹¹³ Field research and interview with the people who were first concerned with the fighting that occurred in the neighborhood. August 2011.

¹¹⁴ The dispute in Lassa was over boundaries and over a sacred place that the Christians considered as an old church, which the sheikh of the village was using for Muslim prayers.

With these words Sayyid Hasan Nasrullah confirmed in a speech on 17 August 2011 that the imagined borders between ethnic groups impacted social distance in Lebanon and were becoming an argument for social rupture rather than an argument for social differentiation.

In conclusion, one wonders whether the crumbling Arab regimes influenced the more fractured geographical imagination in Lebanon with a keener sense of community survival. The fact remains that political discourse suffused with parochial sectarian politics has become prominent since August 2011. It threatened Christian-Shi'i relations as much as the Sunni-Shi'i truce,¹¹⁵ which is essentially between the Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Hizbullah. The Christian FPM as well as the Maronite Patriarch sounded more threatened as a Christian minority in the Levant, while the Christian forces of 14 March seemed more content with the possible emergence of Sunni rule in the Levant. As for Hizbullah, it has had to manoeuvre between supporting its regional allies and avoiding local political tensions and confrontations, especially with the Sunni population. Would this be a '*saufe qui peut*' situation in which Hizbullah is considering a subtle neutral strategy towards Syria,¹¹⁶ or are we heading towards a more dramatic scenario where Hizbullah's possible involvement in Syria would backfire in the streets of Beirut? That is the question.

¹¹⁵ Roadmaps have been signed between Hizbullah and the Salafis in Lebanon, but they have been suspended or rejected or revisited since the year 2008.

¹¹⁶ Nicholas Noe, 'Hizbullah's subtle shift on Syria', *Foreign Policy the Middle East Channel*, 30 March 2012. Noe is the editor of 'Voice of Hezbollah: The Statements of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah' and writes a weekly column for *Bloomberg View*.

APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION TO THE METHODOLOGY OF THE SURVEYS AND PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Whatever prompted this questionable theme, the perception of Hizbullah by the Resistance's Christian allies, it must have been a personal one. This is borne out by the time in which the Arab revolts were blossoming in February 2011. It was first thought at the time of the Israeli-Lebanese war, known in Lebanon as the July War (Harb Tammuz). This paper has been sponsored by the Middle East Institute of the National University of Singapore and looks into the perception of Hizbullah by the party's Christian allies through the discursive practices, which took shape in the formation of the institutions, in their political speeches and implemented strategies, semiotics, and territorial practices. Reference is also made to the author's participant observation in the field and the in-depth interviews in times of war (the Israel-Hizbullah war between July and August 2006) and during the Arab revolutions (August 2011).

The first survey was conducted in the regions of Mount Lebanon and the Biqa' Valley in 2006 during the July War (12 July to 14 August 2006). It aimed to chart the movement of the Shi'i population through the Biqa' Valley during the war, and to collect people's views on the solidarity between the communities. The second qualitative survey conducted during the Arab revolutions (August 2011) looks into how Lebanese Christians and partisans of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) perceived the alliance founded as a result of the Memorandum of Understanding signed between General Michel 'Awn, head of the FPM and Sayyid Hasan Nasrullah, Secretary General of Hizbullah.

THE TECHNIQUES OF INVESTIGATION IN 2011:

The original idea was to combine various techniques of information gathering: archives, local newspapers, statistics, etc., and to conduct the field research with direct participant observation, interviews, and collections of life stories by bringing people into contact with each other, in their different relationships in their social context, and not as isolated individuals as is often the case when using statistical approaches.

THE DESIGN OF THE SURVEY

For consistency with the spirit of this research, the survey was designed in the field. The sampling was not predetermined and no use of statistics had been made before entering the field. To build this sample I had first used a number of central informants in what is called an exploratory phase. These early stories describe individual experiences. In this exploratory phase, the main function of the first interviews was to highlight the changes that had occurred in the individuals' personal lives after the Arab revolutions. Their revelations served first to raise or rather identify the first questions to be debated later in a group, using the technique of snowball sampling. As such, one agent would lead me to another, and then the others, until I got to meet with a group of people. The group interview is usually a method of maintaining a focus on the experience of all the respondents, where the development of research hypotheses is conceived as a joint production process. As part of the survey, interviews were conducted with groups consisting of people who know each other. These interviews were conducted in order to generate spontaneous conversations leading to the expression of opinions generally held by speakers who are normally politically correct in front of 'others'. To explore specific experiences in-depth and the views expressed during disagreements in the group interview, I used the individual interviews as 'life histories' in order to identify a plausible explanation for understanding the positions of people in the debate and to distinguish between the social and subjective anchoring of each position.

APPENDIX 2: SOURCES

First hand information

Personal Analysis of Sayyid Hasan Nasrullah speeches 2005-2011

Lebanese Newspapers archives:

al-Safir

al-Nahar

al-Akhbar

News agency:

National news agency (NNA)

Websites:

al-Manar TV

Qawem.org

Tayyar.org

TV archives:

al-Jadid TV

Field Survey as described in Appendix 1

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