A LEBAANESE VANGUARD FOR THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION: HEZBOLLAH’S COMBINED STRATEGY OF ACCOMMODATION AND RESISTANCE
A Lebanese vanguard for the Islamic revolution: Hezbollah’s combined strategy of accommodation and resistance

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Abbreviations

DFF De Facto Forces
GATT General Agreements of Tariff and Trade
GDP Gross Domestic Product
LBC Lebanese Broadcast Cooperation
LCP Lebanese Communist Party
LNM Lebanese National Movement
MNF The Multinational Force
NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PFLP GC Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command
PLO Palestinian Liberation Organization
SLA South Lebanese Army
UN United Nations
UNIFIL United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
USSR Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
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Chapter 1. Introduction

In early June 2000, I stood at the outskirts of the village of Ghajjar in the eastern area of south Lebanon and watched a squad of Hezbollah guerrillas sitting in the shadow of a tree, sheltering themselves from the harsh glare of the sun. Barely 100 meters away, behind a fence and a few sandbags, some Israeli soldiers manned a light machine gun, vigilantly observing the scene. The two archenemies of the Middle East; so close together; the situation so volatile, yet so calm. Nothing happened. The notorious Hezbollah guerrillas were chatting peacefully, sitting in a ring, like a soccer team taking a break. At that moment, observing the serenity and the fixed positions of the antagonists, one could assume this to be the final triumph for Hezbollah. Two weeks earlier, the Israeli army had unilaterally withdrawn its forces from South Lebanon, and all along the border zone Hezbollah crews were surveying Israeli settlements without taking hostile action. In much of the Arab world, the Israeli withdrawal was described as a great triumph; since this was the first time an Arab military force had imposed its conditions on the Israelis and liberated Arab land. After years of mounting losses in south Lebanon, Israel had given up its self-proclaimed ‘security zone’ in south Lebanon without its long standing demands having been met in return: no peace treaty, no guarantees for its security on which Israel had for years conditioned its withdrawal. In Lebanon and beyond, the unconditional Israeli withdrawal shattered a common perception of Israeli military dominance that had imposed itself on the Arab world for decades, shaping a political map that still registered occupied Arab land and millions of Palestinian refugees, which sustained a widespread historical sense of incapacity and defeat. The
withdrawal also marked - or was at least conceived of and hoped as marking - the end to decades of Israeli transgressions into Lebanese territory.

Ever since the PLO presence in Lebanon in the sixties, the south of the country had been an arena for violent clashes between Palestinian and Lebanese guerrillas and Israeli forces. Israeli troops had invaded several times, conducting two large scale invasions: in 1978 they invaded with the declared aim of eliminating the PLO presence in the south; in 1982, they entered by force, pushing their way up to Beirut, in order to completely eliminate the PLO militarily and politically. While succeeding in driving the main body of the PLO out of Lebanon and refusing to leave the country in the absence of security cooperation with the regime in Beirut, Israel would soon face new enemies on Lebanese soil, like Hezbollah, which during the eighties would make world headlines as embodying a fanatic creed, accused of taking Western citizens hostage and famed for conducting a zealous armed resistance - including spectacular suicide-bombings - against Western forces and Israeli troops deployed on Lebanese soil.

From the outset, Hezbollah declared its ideological allegiance and loyalty to Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic revolution in Iran, adopting the central themes of Khomeini’s vision and central themes of this revolution: the establishment of an Islamic order and the ‘Islamic duty’ for Muslims to strive towards the ‘elimination of Israel’ under the slogan of ‘liberating Jerusalem’. Because of its zeal and commitment and its overtly clandestine structure of organization in the eighties, Hezbollah created a frightening reputation for itself, causing concern on the part of many Lebanese who regarded the movement as nothing more than an ‘Iranian proxy’ bent on transforming Lebanon into an Iranian-style ‘Islamic republic’. In addition, the Israelis, describing Hezbollah as an ‘Islamic terrorist organization’ wishing to see the end of the Jewish state, refused pull their troops out of Lebanon as long as Israel’s security - as it said - could not be guaranteed. Any Israeli withdrawal would only give Hezbollah – and other ‘terrorist organiza-
tions’ - a platform for the ‘liberation of Jerusalem’. Hence, Israel chose to hang on in the ‘security zone’ of south Lebanon, protecting this zone in co-operation with the South Lebanese Army (the SLA), a Lebanese militia financed, equipped and trained by Israel. Yet the nature of Hezbollah as a military and political movement drastically shifted as the eighties moved into the nineties and as the turbulent conditions of the Lebanese war changed for the better and the country entered a process of civil peace, reconstruction and reconciliation in 1990-91. During the chaotic years of the Lebanese war, Hezbollah refused to cooperate with the Lebanese regime and even questioned the legitimacy of the Lebanese nation-state, considering it a “colonial creation” with the aim of cultivating a Lebanese nationalism that would weaken the unity of the umma (nation).¹ Now facing a situation with radically altered conditions, Hezbollah decided, despite internal dissent, to take part in this national process of civil peace and reconciliation. It embraced the notion of Lebanon as a ‘homeland’ (watan) and chose to participate in the parliamentary elections in 1992, cultivating a political constituency which provided it with several seats in the Lebanese parliament. It also captured many hearts and minds among the Lebanese by expanding its social welfare services to the poor and destitute areas, displaying a social pathos and caring that could not be matched by the weak and rather incapable Lebanese state.

Equally important, Hezbollah developed its military capabilities by fighting the Israeli occupation in the south, being provided legitimacy and status as a ‘national resistance movement’ by the regime in Beirut (as long as the Israeli occupation remained). The party itself would label this development an infitah (opening), although observers commonly referred to it as Hezbollah’s process of ‘Lebanonization’, suggesting that the party’s strategy of integration and accommodation assumed priorities that mainly concerned Lebanon and not, as before, its foreign patron, the Islamic republic of Iran

¹ ‘Nation’ is used here in the sense of a Muslim people as a community that transcends the borders of any nation-state.
(which still offered great financial largesse to the movement). This ‘Lebanonization’ process proved to be very successful. During the painstaking work of integration in the nineties, Hezbollah’s popularity would outdo that of its main political rival, Amal, within the Shi’ite community, while managing to popularize the idea of the \textit{al mogawama} (the resistance) across political and religious barriers and mobilizing support for it as a ‘nationalist’ guerrilla, fighting to rid the country of a despised occupation.

However, whereas Hezbollah had been able to project an aura of Khomeini’s revolutionary spirit as it challenged the Israeli forces in the mountains and valleys of the south, it appeared to be deprived of this ‘opportunity’ once the Israeli army left in May 2000. Now that the Israelis were gone, what was Hezbollah up to? What would be the significance of this ‘national resistance’? Observers were puzzled since there seemed to be a significant tension between establishing itself as a national resistance (committed to liberating Lebanese territory) while at the same time being aligned with Ayatollah Khomeini’s transnational revolutionary project, which involved the Muslim ‘obligation’ (\textit{wajib}) to ‘liberate Jerusalem’. Had Hezbollah given up that vision? It was suggested that Hezbollah’s guerrillas, although successful and now standing at the border fence looking into ‘occupied Palestine’, were facing a dilemma: how to pursue this \textit{transnational} commitment when having banked on a \textit{nationally} oriented strategy? How could Hezbollah’s radical vision of Khomeinism be combined with a pragmatic strategy of accommodation to a regime that it only a few years earlier had claimed was ‘illegitimate’?
1.1 Post-islamism: accommodation instead of rejection

Significantly, Hezbollah’s process of ‘Lebanonization’ occurred at the same time as similar developments were taking place among and within Islamist movements in the Muslim world, i.e. Islamist parties were seemingly abandoning transnational loyalties to the *umma* in exchange for integration into the political system of their respective nation-states. As such, it posed a seeming contradiction for the Islamist project in general. After all, the ideological landmark of Islamist parties involved their rejection of both the borders of the nation-states and the political systems that made up the geographical and political fabric of the Middle East, since the borders were a product of colonialist schemes and the political systems were not subjected to Islamic law, *the shari’ah*. Hezbollah also expressed its deep apprehensions at that time of the Lebanese state and borders as such, considering these as a “geometric colonial box” designed and manufactured by the French under mandated power together with collaborating Lebanese elites.² Abbas Musawi, the former secretary-general of Hizbollah (assassinated by the Israelis in 1992) put it in no uncertain terms when he claimed, “Our interpretation of Islam could not be reconciled with geographic considerations. We follow the leadership of Ayatollah Khumayini, and this leadership is as compelling in Lebanon as it is in Iran…All boundaries dividing up Dar al-Islam are artificial and will soon disappear.”³ The alleged independence of the Muslim world was only nominal; the colonial legacy still fettered Muslims in terms of political geography, culture and ideology. The Islamic revolution in Iran, thus, introduced a radical alternative to this order, since it carried a transnational call for eliminating these structures that derived from the colonial legacy and Western ideas of governance and administration. In addition, it aimed to alter thinking in politics by embedding it in the foundations and norms of the

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³ Quoted in Ghasan Salame, 1986.
Islamic system of faith. Throughout the eighties, observers were therefore alarmed by the possible repercussions of the Ayatollah Khomeini’s call for spreading the Islamic revolution across the Muslim world.

However, no great repercussions or changes were taking place as a consequence of the Islamic revolution. Rather, in the early nineties, observers began to note that the Islamic revolution and Islamist movements in general had reached an impasse, since they appeared trapped or severely constrained by the very borders and state apparatuses that they despised and rejected. No revolutionary enterprise similar to that in Iran came into being, no Islamic take-over, no fall of any other secular regime. As the regional system of states remained rather stable, despite the wide array of conflicts going on in the Middle East, many Islamists appeared bent on submitting to the existing system of nation-states and even accepting the various political systems they initially claimed to reject. For instance, as some regimes undertook reforms and arranged for elections in the early nineties, many Islamist movements, like Hezbollah, declared a readiness to take part, thus opting for a political pluralism presumably rejected by Islamist ideology. It was suggested that these tendencies of accommodation underlined how the Islamist challenge had begun to peter out and that Islamist radicalism was entering a so-called ‘post-Islamist’ phase in which absolutist ideals were giving way to more moderate and compromising standpoints. Others warned that these Islamist measures of accommodation were a strategic ‘trick’ and a ‘Trojan horse’ in that these measures aimed at gradually establishing an Islamic state and order from within through the ballot box rather than through revolution. Indeed, Gilles Kepel suggested that the thesis of Islamist failure is “reminiscent of the debates about ‘post-communism’ in former Soviet societies,” and in both cases, he notes, “the evidence suggests the ethical defeat of a histori-

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cally dated and rejected model that posited a future utopia.”6 Others have objected to such assumptions, arguing that Islamists (like Hezbollah) still assert the Islamic state as an ideal, even though it is unrealizable within the current configuration of power. However, to draw the conclusion that Islamism ends with such concessions might be very premature or simplistic.7

1.2 The aim of the thesis

In this thesis, it will be argued that viewing the Islamists project as aiming primarily for a state based upon the Islamic law is too instrumentalistic a perspective, even though that is the ideal and ultimate aim of these movements. It will also be suggested that a nationalist approach, as adopted by Hezbollah in Lebanon, does not necessarily exclude a transnational ambition. While there may be a tension between Islamism – i.e., in terms of a commitment to the greater umma (nation) – and a territorially bounded nationalism – i.e., submission to the confines of the nation-state – these two elements are not necessarily contradictory, let alone mutually exclusive. Through a detailed study of Hezbollah’s process of so-called ‘Lebanonization’, it will be argued that while the movement has accepted the structures of the Lebanese nation-state it has not abandoned its original commitment to the Islamic revolution as outlined by Ayatollah Khomeini. Rather, the movement’s project – and challenge – is to maintain a strategic endeavour in which accommodation and resistance to a certain order are entwined and mutually constituted.

The aim is to study Hezbollah’s effort to square two seemingly irreconcilable projects: on the one hand, to become a part of the Lebanese political system and subordinate to the nation-state and, on the other, to maintain

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its commitment to the Islamic revolution. While it could be claimed that Hezbollah had to abandon this commitment as it subjugated itself to the Lebanese state, it will be argued that the aim of the movement involves both of these ambitions. The question is: how and why?

In this thesis, it will be suggested that rejectionism and resistance cannot be reduced to an absolutist project or a zero-sum game as Islamists enter a more pluralist political milieu. True, some hard-line Islamist movements do regard accommodation to non-Islamic systems as veritable ‘sell-out’ and betrayal of the divine call inherent in Islam, and they refuse to exchange ideological purity for strategic accommodation, fearing that the latter might corrupt the former. They also denounce many of today’s Islamists – like Hezbollah – who opt for accommodation for committing ‘treason’ in relation to a higher celestial cause. Yet, the aspect of rejectionism can be problematized, since more accommodating Islamists – like other radicals – can reject the underlying logic of the system while still participating within it. As will be shown in this thesis, Hezbollah is a case in point. To Hezbollah, *al-moqawama* is absolutely central to its ambitions. However, its resistance does not only involve its guerrilla operations in the south; these are rather the expression of a wider impulsion towards resistance to a particular order encompassing political, cultural and religious dimensions. In this sense, Hezbollah’s project and ambition express a larger Islamist tendency, as part of the Shi’ite Muslim activist school of Khomeinism. Does this notion of resistance exclude political participation and integration? In this thesis, it will be argued that Hezbollah’s resistance project is conducted in constant tension with its ambition to subjugate itself to the Lebanese political system. To explore and understand this tension is also part of the overall aim of this thesis.
The overarching research questions are:

- How can a radical party remain committed to its commitment to change in a context not conducive to its revolutionary ambitions? This issue concerns the challenge faced by a radical movement to accommodate to a system that it basically rejects, to opt for integration while not succumbing to the system itself. There is a tension between successful strategies of accommodation and resistance, the objectives of which are to promote agency related to an ideological desire for change. For instance, radical socialist scholars have discussed how to participate in political systems - essentially considered illegitimate - while not surrendering to the power of those systems.

- How can we understand the tension between Hezbollah’s accommodation to the Lebanese state and its presumed commitment to Khomeini’s vision of an Islamic revolution? How can we conceive the radical impulses of Islamism and the Islamic revolution?

- How can the experience of Hezbollah in Lebanon contribute to our understanding of the accommodating strategies of radical Islamist parties in the Middle East? What remains of these impulses in a context in which more and more Islamist movements declare themselves ready to take part in pluralist political elections, opting for accommodation instead of confrontation?

Hezbollah’s transformative process will be studied in three separate, yet connected phases in time between 1982 and 2006; firstly from 1982 to 1991, as the emerging movement struggled to become an actor in the Lebanese arena (however chaotic it was at the time) up until the Ta’if Accord (mediated in 1989) put an end to the civil war. The second phase includes 1992 to
2000, when the country underwent a phase of reconciliation and political stabilization and when Hezbollah began its so-called ‘Lebanonization’ process. The third phase runs from 2001 to 2006, during which Hezbollah refused to give up its arms and subjugated itself to the Syrian hegemony over Lebanese politics. The purpose of this periodization is to see how Hezbollah emerged as a deeply radical force that rejected any compromise with the Lebanese regime involving its transformation into an integral part of this regime and how Hezbollah squared this with its own self-proclaimed revolutionary credentials.

1.3 ‘Post-Islamism’ and Hezbollah’s “Lebanonization” process

Considering Hezbollah’s accommodation to the Lebanese political system and state, some observers preferred not to see Hezbollah as a uniquely Islamist movement. For example, an Egyptian academic once told me (shortly after the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in May, 2000) that Hezbollah was not an Islamist movement but a ‘national resistance with Islamic features’. To her, Hezbollah’s accommodating posture towards Lebanese pluralism, its bent for alliances and cooperation, disqualified it from being labeled as ‘Islamist’ – a conception that she felt involved a larger degree of exclusionism and outward hostility towards ideological adversaries (Hezbollah’s warfare, she also added, concerned the liberation of Lebanese land, not some far-fetched prospect of “liberating Palestine”). Her argument was quite common in the debate on the party’s so-called ‘Lebanonization’ process, which discussed Hezbollah’s lingering alignments and commitments to the Islamic revolution and the model of Ayatollah Khomeini’s Islamic state, the *Welayat al-Faqih*. To many observers, the traits and ambitions of the Islamic revolution, which dominated Hezbollah’s image during the eighties, came across as obsolete and irrelevant once the party submitted to the national pluralism of
the Lebanese nation-state in the nineties. This kind of remark is very common in the more general discussion on the nature of Islamism, and it suggests, crucially, a notion of incompatibility or tension. That is, the question arises of how to understand the radical nature of a political and ideological project once it begins to tone down differences with a system and structure that it inherently rejects and perhaps even despises.

This is akin to how Olivier Roy in the early nineties declared the ‘failure of Islamism’ and suggested that we are witnessing a phase of so-called ‘post-Islamism’; i.e., Islamists forfeiting their ideal of an Islamic state and enter the process of becoming part and parcel of the political system of the nation-state.\(^8\) In a similar way, they were also supposed to abandon the transnational and revolutionary impulses of the Islamic revolution in Iran. Roy acknowledged that the radical prospects of Ayatollah Khomeini’s promises of spreading and imposing the Islamic revolution across the region appeared increasingly pale and diluted. Either Islamist parties had gotten bogged down in nation-state models, parliamentarian bickering or they were concentrating their efforts on mobilising Islamic mores and ethics across society, with no discernible impact on state policy, let alone the establishment an Islamic state.\(^9\) Furthermore, Roy emphasized how nationalism contradicted Islamism and how the very logic of the nation-state would undermine an Islamist ambition, be it its demand for an Islamic state or a transnational objective; most Islamist parties and movements that had adapted to the nation-state, he claimed, had become nationalist rather than Islamist.\(^10\) From this angle, Hezbollah would be a case in point.

Indeed, in its early days, and in addition to its scepticism, if not rejectionism, of the Lebanese state, Hezbollah displayed a strong allegiance, perhaps even subordination, to the Islamic republic of Iran. For instance, in 1986, after the Islamic Republic of Iran declared its opposition to UN Secu-

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\(^9\) Ibid.
\(^10\) Roy 1999.
rity Council Resolution 425 (which demanded Israel’s unconditional withdrawal from Lebanon but which also, Iran felt, recognised the existence of the Israeli state), Hezbollah followed suit and also contested the resolution. “We already announced our decision”, Sheikh Karim Obeid, a Hezbollah leader of the south commented. “It is a decision that cannot be separated from that of the Islamic republic of Iran. It said no and we say no. We don’t think too much in these matters. In political matters the Islamic republic decides and we support it directly.” The Lebanese observer Fawas Gerges has described Hezbollah during its early years as “direct[ing] its guns not just against secular and Christian opposition forces but also against the plural Lebanese formula”, and “[one] of its planks”, he suggests, “aimed at building an Islamic state on the ashes of the liberal Lebanese entity…”

Hizbollah never shied away from its Iranian inheritance and served Teheran’s regional and foreign policies. For all intents and purposes, Hizbollah’s beginning was a negation of the very foundation of Lebanon’s plural, secular, multi-religious, multi-ethnic experiment. Hizbollah was initially determined to subvert Lebanon’s very existence and establish Allah’s kingdom along the same rigid lines as those of Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini. It hoped to extend Iranian influence to Lebanon as well as to fertilize its secular soil with revolutionary Islamism.12

Nowadays Hezbollah officials normally disapprove of any such descriptions, even of the earlier years (one of its senior officials reacted in a very disdainful manner to this author when this early image of Hezbollah was proposed as a fact of history) stressing how the party has been keen to become a serious political player in Lebanon.13 In the nineties, observers of Hezbollah characterized this strategy largely as an abdication from radical zeal to

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13 Interview with Ali Fayyad, Beirut, June 2005.
pragmatism, much as Roy suggested that the nation-state would squeeze the radical ambition out of the Islamist project. May Chartouni-Dubarray claimed in 1996 that the party’s objective was “to be recognised as a fully Lebanese party…to take part in the competitive power-sharing game among and with each Lebanese major community”, and this implied, she noted, that Hezbollah “would work from inside the Lebanese system and never against it.”14 Equally, Fuller and Francke suggested that Hezbollah was the “first Shi’ite movement that appears to have evolved from fully embracing Khomeini’s goal of an Islamic state to becoming a pragmatic political movement that accept and is willing to work within a society that includes not only Sunni Muslims but also a large Christian population. This transition is important not only in studying the evolution of Shi’ite religious organization, but in the broader annals of the Islamic movement.”15

But again, such reflections, while accurate and interesting, assume Hezbollah’s ideological vision to presume an Islamic state as the prime objective and that the party’s pragmatism somehow would imply its recognition of a more ‘concrete reality’ shaped within the certain exigencies of the Lebanese context of competing groups and sects for the spoils of the state and its resources. That is, accommodation would entail the watering down of its ideological ambitions. Chartouni-Dubarray points out that while Hezbollah rather readily adapted to the Lebanese sectarian system once the decision was made, observers would claim that this exposed the “ideological shallowness” of the movement, since “no party could easily renge so bluntly on its past commitments without losing its political credibility.” However, she notes that Hezbollah’s influence had emerged unharmed from this change of course towards accommodation, since the party’s “dynamics were from the beginning communally based”, and the manner in which Hezbollah was deeply rooted within the Shi’ite identity of Lebanon assisted its integration

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14 Chartouni-Dubarray 1996, p. 60.
15 Fuller & Francke 1999, p. 222.
into this environment, despite its Islamist adherence. That is, Hezbollah saw
to the desires of the Shi’ite community, especially with respect to the way it
delivered welfare services, and – in comparison with other players in Leba-
nese politics – could lay claim to a social pathos and to non-corrupt practic-
es. In short, Hezbollah’s popular project was more part of the mundane reali-
ties of Lebanese politics than of any grand Islamist revolutionary ambitions.

As noted above, this tapped into a more general debate on Islamism as
primarily being focused on establishing an Islamic state. In the early ninety-
ties, many warned that the rise of Islamist movements – witnessed across the
Muslim world – posed a challenge, since they were assumed to be inherently
anti-democratic and since their political agendas are rooted in the Holy Writ.
As various prospects for political liberalization were seen to arise in the
nineties, observers warned that elections in the Muslim world might para-
doxically result in the end of future elections. Addressing the Algerian case
in particular as an example, Edward Djerejian, U.S. Assistant Secretary for
Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, asserted in June 1992 that “those who
seek to broaden political participation in the Middle East” would find Wash-
ington supportive, yet continuing that “we are suspect of those who would
use the democratic process to come to power, only to destroy that very pro-
cess in order to retain power and political dominance. While we believe in
the principle of ‘one person, one vote’ we do not support ‘one person, one
vote, one time’.”16 Scholars like Bernard Lewis also claimed that Islamists
“regard liberal democracy with contempt as a corrupt and corrupting form of
government” and that they are “willing to see it, at best, as an avenue to
power…that runs one way only.”17

In this way, Farhad Kazemi, speaking in the mid-nineties of Hezbo-
lah, suggested that the “real question” concerns whether the party “has be-
come moderate as a result of being included in the political system” or

17 Lewis 1996, p. 54.
whether its accommodation was “yet another manoeuvre - the instrumentalists’ line - to gain power in Lebanon’. He pointed out that there is “no way to give definitive answers”; “[o]nly time can be the ultimate arbiter.”

James Piscator as well believed that the contradictions inherent in Hezbollah’s Lebanonization policy offer a complex picture of strategic schemes and elaborations. “On one level, this accommodating can be seen as short-term and tactical only, allowing the movement freedom to prepare for the imposition of an intolerant order later. Yet, on another level, it can be interpreted as a substantial concession to pluralism, which in the long run would amount a virtual acceptance of the principle.”

Nizar Hamzeh, a prominent observer of Hezbollah also suggested that the party’s long term project is embedded in a “gradual strategy” that had the aim of gaining more influence step-by-step and rooting itself in Shi’ite communities – the fastest growing population in Lebanon – in order to ultimately establish an Islamic state.

Nonetheless, such views tap into the broader perspectives of Islamism that assume a stern negation between the claim of an Islamic state and the assumption of pluralist politics, but that negation, I argue, is insufficient for grasping the nature of the Islamic project. After all, with respect to Hezbollah, it has declared its persistent pledge to an Islamic state although it concedes that the Islamic state is not a realistic enterprise in a small and diverse country such as Lebanon. While not overlooking that quest in itself, it is equally important to ask what such a quest entails ideologically and strategically in Lebanon, where conditions are not conducive for the establishment

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18 Khazemi 1996, p. 5
19 Piscatori, 2000, p. 29-30.
21 As secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah said in 1994: ‘The solution, in our opinion, is the establishment of an Islamic state in Lebanon and beyond...I cannot honestly say I do not advocate an Islamic state...but I do not wish [to impose this] by force or violence, rather we prefer to wait for the day that we succeed in convincing our countrymen - by means of dialogue and in an open atmosphere - that the only alternative is the founding of an Islamic state’. Quoted in Zisser 1996, p. 103-104.
A similar debate involved Hezbollah’s resistance to the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon. A bone of contention throughout the nineties concerned the priority of the military resistance – *al moqawama* - for Hezbollah’s project. Observers wondered whether its increasingly efficient guerrilla warfare in the south should be understood as merely ‘national’ resistance to liberate Lebanese occupied territory or whether their actions should be comprehended from within Hezbollah’s own vision – appealed to by Ayatollah Khomeini – of ‘liberating Jerusalem’. That is, would Hezbollah pack up and go home in the case of an Israeli withdrawal from the south, or would they attack the Israelis across the border? For the Israelis, an official reason for hanging on in the south was the fear that ‘terrorist groups’, among them Hezbollah, would be given free range to continue anti-Israeli hostilities should they withdraw their occupation forces; hence, its presence in Lebanon was a necessary evil.\(^{22}\) Hezbollah, for its part, remained – as we shall see – mute on the topic. A Lebanese observer did in 1998 – two years before the large scale Israeli retreat from the south - refer to this issue as the ‘ten-thousand dollar question’, i.e., Hezbollah’s possible action if the Israelis were to abandon its occupation of the south. Yet, some observers toned down the more grandiose claims of Islamic militancy and argued that Hezbollah would be constrained by its own popular constituencies in the case of an Israeli withdrawal, thus stressing the more ‘national’ character of Hezbollah. Richard Norton, for instance, a long-term observer of the Lebanese Islamist movement who suggested that Islamists should be understood as shaped within their own constituencies, claimed in a report only months before the Israeli withdrawal in May 2000 that the experience of Hezbollah displays the way political constraints and opportunities are “the desiderata of

\(^{22}\) See for instance Clive Jones 1997.
political behaviour and [how] ideology takes a back seat…the game of politics erode ideals but the vast majority of Hezbollah’s followers want to be in the game.”

However, as Hezbollah decided to engage in hot pursuit against Israel after the withdrawal of Israeli troops form the occupied zone in May 2000, observers remained puzzled. Norton apparently confounded, argued that “an adventuresome core within Hezbollah is inspired by revolutionary ideals, but that core totally misreads its own community if it believes that even a significant minority will follow it. Hezbollah has a stark choice: it can be a serious and important political party, or it can pursue the chimera of defeating Israel.” After all, observers charged, ever since the end of the nineties, Hezbollah had been ‘standing at the crossroads’ obliged to make a choice: to become national or to remain loyal to Ayatollah Khomeini’s more transnational aspirations of spreading the Islamic revolution across the Muslim world. Did this development, then, gainsay assumptions of ‘Islamico-nationalism’ or the notion that the Islamist project would turn ‘inwards’ and become domestic once Islamists opted for the choice of integration and accommodation? Or did it indicate an ideological and strategic ‘schizophrenia’ in which an Islamist party – like Hezbollah – was unable to decide its future course?

In this dissertation, there is an attempt to understand Hezbollah’s ambitions and strategies in relation to the more complex and ongoing problematic of Lebanon itself: a postcolonial state squeezed in a regional conflict of international stature and, equally important, domestically at odds over how to deal with this predicament. Thus, this dissertation is guided by the idea that Hezbollah’s assumed ‘Lebanonization’ process was not about adapting to an already given national identity or position of the Lebanese state. The process rather concerned how Hezbollah evolved within a troublesome contest over the very national identity of Lebanon, which still remains unre-

23 Norton 1999, p. 35.
solved. Or in other words, the accommodation of Hezbollah should be seen as a strategic option that also involves a dimension of agency that is overlooked if integration is only considered to entail adaptation. That is, accommodation and integration could also involve a dimension of resistance. Ironically, Hezbollah has thus adapted to certain confessional structures and borders of the Lebanese state that it essentially rejects. Equally ironic, it will be argued that this does not mean that it has deviated from its original ideological ambitions. The question is rather how Hezbollah has been able to preserve its ideological ambition throughout this very adaptation.

1.4 How it all started, and why

My interest in Hezbollah sparked when I served with the UN forces in south Lebanon for one year (two mandates in a row) in the early nineties (Oct 1992 to Nov 1992). I arrived in Lebanon rather ignorant of the Middle Eastern conflict, as were most of my comrades in service, including officers at higher levels. Serving as soldiers in blue berets, coming from a peaceful country in the north, we were a largely innocent group, intent on working for peace. We received only scant information about the nature of the ongoing conflict in south Lebanon. We observed that ‘armed elements’ (UN talk primarily for Hezbollah guerrillas, which had become the most active at the time) were fighting an Israeli occupation of the south that we, as UN forces, could not do much about. The briefings every morning offered new reports of the number of shells and rounds of fire that had been exchanged between the guerrillas and the occupation forces and their local allies, the DFF (“De Facto Forces”, a UN reference to the South Lebanese Army (SLA) that was not recognised as a legitimate army by the world community). To us, south Lebanon appeared as a rather exotic game of war, a hotspot jammed with good stories and daring experiences, albeit cruel and disturbing. We did not
understand it, and few of us tried to. We saw a lot of smoke but failed to grasp the reasons for the fire. Nevertheless, we did observe the arrogance of occupation. We heard of the indiscriminate shelling of and shooting at civilian Lebanese villages. We heard stories of the notorious Israeli-controlled Khiam prison run by the SLA. We witnessed Israeli manhunts of suspected resistance members in broad daylight. And we considered the casualties and debris caused by the Israeli bombing campaign in July 1993. The Lebanese were no doubt paying a high price in terms of human misery and humiliation for an occupation they seemingly could not defeat. With respect to Hezbollah, they appeared to be a bunch of ‘bearded, wild-eyed fanatics’, crazy enough to challenge the strongest military power of the region and sometimes even picking fights with our own UN troops. While on a string of night patrols in the outskirts of the village of Qana in early 1993, looking for katyuscha ramps allegedly mounted too close to civilians residences (this was one of the UN tasks), we saw the Hezbollah guerrillas as frightening ghosts lurking in the dark that, truthfully speaking, none of us wished to confront, at least not there in the middle of the night. Luckily, we did not, and neither did we find any ramps.

However, the impression of Hezbollah remained rather ambiguous. Besides being violently hostile and defiant, it was both cherished and abhorred by the locals: respected for its way of distributing welfare services to the poor and unfortunate in the southern villages and for projecting an increasingly successful resistance campaign against a detested occupation but also despised for placing Lebanese civilians in the line of fire by provoking the mighty Israeli temper in a war many considered futile and foolhardy. Indeed, the ambiguity even permeated the ranks of the UN, some impressed by the courage and skill of the guerrillas, others frightened by their zeal and conviction. Across the areas controlled by Hezbollah, images of Ayatollah Khomeini and of fallen martyrs covered walls and waysides, offering the image of an uncompromising Islamist movement that occasionally ended up
in trouble with the UN forces. Indeed, the very notion of Hezbollah – Arabic for the ‘Party of God’ – smacked of Islamist extremism and unyielding zeal and rejectionism. How was it possible for a political movement like this to become a political party subordinate to such a pluralist – and indeed corrupt – system as the Lebanese one? How could the ‘Party of God’ co-exist with other parties in the Lebanese political and social fabric?

1.5 Interviews: meeting with Hezbollah

Back in Sweden and having entered the university to study political science, I decided to go back to Beirut to meet with the movement. I was anxious to get beyond these impressions and understand the apparent contradictions. The meetings brought new insights into perspectives on the conflict that challenged my earlier perceptions of it. Indeed, it seemed to me that common images of Hezbollah as gun-toting extremists beyond the pale and beyond reason appeared flawed and simplistic, projected by people who either had scant knowledge of the Lebanese Islamists or who were attempting to discredit them. It appeared to me that the ‘voice’ of Hezbollah was generally missing and that the movement was usually referred to rather than spoken to, a condition that in and of itself could lead to serious misunderstandings. Francois Burgat suggests in his study of Islamist movements that early writings on Islamism were produced by people who never met or talked to the subjects of their studies. Thus, actually meeting with Islamists had many advantages, including, he notes, “the discovery of new, totally unmediated material and, of course, uncensored information.” He also stresses that establishing contacts and “showing [the subjects] your respect and eventually gaining theirs in return, allows authors to avoid the myriad of fantasies that are the product of the mutual misunderstandings and sometimes wrongly reproduced in the name of ‘science’.” By being aware of “the angles of ob-
ervation of the subject of study, one can enrich one’s own understanding and explore new avenues of interpretation.”

Roxanne L. Euben argues that there is a very influential discourse of power – and a flaw within the research, it should be added - among experts and observers that wish to “pronounce the identity, meaning and function of a movement without reference to the adherents’ own understanding of the connection between action and meaning.” Hence, Euben suggests that the self-understandings of Islamists should be central to the study, since that may enable the researcher to come beyond distortions constructed by such discourses and images based upon a certain structure of power that have the very intention of seeing the subjects studied in a particular way. This will be further discussed below with respect to common conceptions of ‘terrorism’ and ‘fundamentalism’ that to my mind are seriously flawed and even misleading. Euben refers to “better understanding” as one that “carves out an analytic space” for those subjects of concern and “in which the subject might recognize himself or herself…and might even agree.”

Yet, to perceive self-understanding as central does not mean that the researcher should observe the subject’s discourse and statements uncritically. Euben argues that they should “make central the explication of the subject’s meanings without concluding that there is no perspective adequately distant from them from which to criticize the actors’ account of her own experience.”

Still, critical voices would urge me to remain sceptical of Hezbollah’s own explanations and discourses; they warned that a Western student might perhaps be too naive and easily taken for a ride. After all, it was argued, Hezbollah needs foreigners to spread its words; it might need students to present a more benign image of the movement. “They will tell you one

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26 Burgat 2003, p. 3.
27 Euben 1999, p. 43.
28 Ibid., p. 45.
29 Ibid.
thing”, one Lebanese scholar told me, “and their own cadres something else.”

However, after learning Arabic and after years of following Hezbollah’s discourse, my impression is that Hezbollah’s spokesmen are rather coherent, whatever the audience they address, and that they have remained so over time. Indeed, my own method of working would be to spot incoherencies and bring them up in interviews with Hezbollah’s spokesmen, which is, of course, a great advantage in using interviews as a method of research. Hezbollah’s elaboration on such incoherencies, such as the apparent contradiction between not recognising Lebanon as a nation-state and submitting to the Lebanese political system, provided splendid insights into the movement’s strategic and ideological thinking. Furthermore, to me the problem was not that interviews would offer Hezbollah’s spokesmen great leeway to design their own perceptions and images of the struggle but rather that these perceptions and images were sorely lacking at the period of time during which I approached the subject. This is similar to how Euben promotes the self-understandings of Islamists, since the literature on Islamism does not suffer “from a dearth of critique but a paucity of insight.”

As argued above, interviews were at this period of time a necessity, since neither the literature nor the media (at least the English language media) would provide sufficient material on the topic. As also noted, interviews also enabled me to tailor my own questions and particularly to emphasize issues that I considered paradoxical or as dilemmas for the movement. Despite Hezbollah being a very secretive organization, it was at that time very generous in providing time with its spokesmen. Interviews would often last from 30 minutes to an hour, and I was free to choose the topics. In addition, interviews enable to researcher to tailor a specific set of questions. The meetings also provide the opportunity to follow up on certain answers, to investigate certain details and to scrutinize what might at times appear to be mere

30 Ibid., p.17.
rhetoric. There were no topics declared to be ‘off limits’ in those interviews; as a researcher I was free to choose whatever subjects I wanted to discuss. To be sure, certain topics were sensitive, like some of the shadier and gruesome details of the movement during the eighties (as suggested above) or the party’s view on the rampant repression and corruptive practices of the Syrian intelligence structures in Lebanon. With respect to the latter, Hezbollah’s spokesmen would often offer very vague comments or indicate in an indirect manner that they had no wish to discuss the matter. Such ‘non-answers’ were, of course, answers in their own right and might say a lot about the movement’s subordination to Syrian hegemony over Lebanon.

1.6 The way to go about

This study as been in progress over many years, and one may indeed consider much of the interview material to be rather old. The first round of interviews was conducted during the course of three weeks in 1996, and another set of interviews was concluded during a two-month stay in Beirut in the spring of 1998. These interviews centered mostly on the formative years of Hezbollah’s ‘Lebanonization’ process (becoming part of the Lebanese political system) and thus provided a rather unique insight into the movement’s thinking at that time. They also expose, I think, what is rather central to the thesis of the dissertation, i.e., that Hezbollah has stayed the course with respect to its ideological outlook and its intent to combine a strategy of both accommodation and resistance. I also conducted a string of interviews after the year 2000 and the Israeli withdrawal. These interviews centred primarily on the new regional climate as a result of the September 11 attacks and how that impacted on Lebanon and on Hezbollah’s thinking and strategy.

The insights I gained from those meetings and interviews aided my own understanding what Hezbollah’s accommodation to the Lebanese na-
tion-state had entailed over time. In my encounters with Hezbollah, the movement did not downplay its violent actions, and it never came across as less militant than my preconceptions of it. The ‘Party of God’ is, after all, a profoundly revolutionary Islamist movement whose very identity and self-perception is in many ways shaped by its claimed imperative of armed struggle. Importantly, however, Hezbollah’s self-understanding offered a reason and rationale for the violence, and this grasp of this rationale, I thought, was lacking in more mainstream perceptions of the movement. Indeed, Hezbollah’s self-understanding hinted at a historical perspective in which the party’s identity and self-perception is groomed and maintained in the violent chronicle of Lebanon and the region as generated by colonialism, dispossession, foreign invasions, war and marginalisation.

Meeting Hezbollah’s functionaries brought an alternative understanding of the movement’s project, which appeared more historical and less ‘mystical’ or ‘inexplicable’. This impression has benefited my grasp of the conflicting structures and modes of power – as well as cooperation – within Lebanon itself. It elucidated the notion of Islamists as being part of a more historical type of ‘anti-systemic’ movement, i.e., a movement that emerges as a force of resistance from within – and presumably against – asymmetric structures of power. Hezbollah, like many other Islamists, shares an ambition to resist the regional order of foreign, mainly Western, intrusion. This resistance is not a recent development but goes back in history, and it has been promoted (and still is) by forces of other hues: leftist, Arab nationalist, liberal. This is why I will dedicate a part of this thesis (Chapter 2) to discussing the various dimensions of the nature of Islamism in general and how it has been constituted historically in a region ravaged by conflict, repression and disorder. In this way, Islamists’ bent for violence is structurally dependent, i.e., often born and bred in a context of violence or in response to structures of power sustained by violence. Hence, I will make a point by drawing on the revolutionary theorist Frantz Fanon, who not only regarded violence as a
product of a colonial order maintained by violence (Fanon’s own experience was the Algerian war) but who also viewed violence as an inevitability in a process of liberation and, more controversially, who saw violence as liberating in itself, as a way of boosting self-esteem. There are two main points in choosing Fanon as a theorist. First, what I will describe as a ‘Fanonian logic’ can help to explain not only Hezbollah’s resort to violence but also its view – indeed glorification - of violent resistance as a strategy and, as we shall see, as its main priority.

Second, Fanon’s elaboration on violence may also help to ‘demystify’ the notion of violence by Islamists, such as Hezbollah, and to regard such hot pursuit as a general phenomenon grounded in a historical and structural conflict and, thus, not easily reducible to some fanaticism grounded in Islamic teachings. In this regard, my point is to see Islamism, with a special focus on ‘Khomeinism’ (to which Hezbollah subscribes), as a ‘third worldist’ phenomenon; i.e., an anti-systemic force that has emerged in the anti-colonial struggle and that still exists in a struggle – real or perceived – against an order of ‘neo-colonial’ domination. Still, while Islamists share many of these elements of forces that struggle for independence, they also stress important aspects of identity and religious beliefs. Hence, I will develop Euben’s notion of Islamist ‘self-understandings’ by suggesting that while many studies on Islamism denote their ‘rationalist’ explanations of Islamists – those that for example claim Islamism to express a reaction to particular worldly grievances – one should also account for how they describe the religious depth and more deeper ‘meanings’ of the struggle. ‘Meanings’ in this sense expresses the particularity of Islamism; i.e., if Islamism is seen as a kind of resistance, emerging from certain grim conditions, there is a need to understand what distinguishing Islamists from other – let us say, leftist – movements that also rage against such conditions. Or, in other words, what do Islamists actually resist?
While a large part of this thesis will focus on Hezbollah’s armed resistance against Israel, the argument is that this resistance is part of a larger form of defiance against a specific order that is grounded in history and that taps into more general notions of Islamism as well as a more concrete struggle for national liberation. Indeed, since this study is centred on Hezbollah’s so-called ‘Lebanonization’ process, I will also stress the notion of ‘accommodation’, or how many Islamist parties, Hezbollah included, have opted for integration into political systems they view as seriously flawed. Indeed, accommodation also involves how they presumably subjugate themselves to their respective nation-states, despite their perception of these states as ‘colonial constructions’. In this sense, I have chosen to apply a theoretical understanding of Antonio Gramsci who, as an Italian socialist scholar and activist, elaborated on how a radical ambition can – and should – be pursued by accommodating strategies if contextual features do not allow for any revolutionary enterprise. To this aim, Gramsci applied the notion of ‘hegemony’ as an analytical structure by which power is not only structured on ‘coercion’ but also on ‘consent’. This means that if a certain power structure is characterised by a ‘strong hegemony’, those subordinated to this structure of power by and large consent to the system. According to Gramsci, the task of the radicals is, thus, to gradually mobilise a counter-hegemonic force that can gradually undermine the consent upon which the system is structured. Gramsci claimed that this should be done by accepting the structures of power yet changing them ‘from within’ or ‘from below’. That is, for Gramsci, strategies of accommodation can also be viewed as a means of resistance and perhaps even change. I will draw upon such a Gramscian understanding in order to study how Hezbollah, during its decades of struggle in Lebanon, has been keen to develop this kind of ‘counter-hegemonic’ ambition through a combined strategy of accommodation and resistance in its so-called ‘Lebanonization’ process. Yet, by also emphasizing that there is a ‘Fanonian logic’ to Hezbollah’s campaign of resistance, I will examine how this logic
is an integral part of the party’s efforts towards accommodation to the Lebanese political system and the recognition of Lebanon as a nation-state. While positions of accommodation and resistance can be understood as mutually exclusive, they can also, through a Gramscian theoretical perspective, be seen as mutually constituted. At the least, my aim is to understand Hezbollah’s ‘Lebanonization’ through this Gramscian framework.

My ambition is to present Hezbollah’s struggle from both a historical and a structural perspective, i.e., by showing how the movement emerged out of the conflicting processes that have characterised Lebanese history ever since the birth of the Lebanese nation-state in 1920. In this regard, Hezbollah is in many ways part of a larger struggle over Lebanon that involves a domestic conflict over power as well as what position or identity the Lebanese nation should have in the region, not least as this relates to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Yet, in line with Euben’s emphasis on the need for ‘self-understandings’, my ambition is also to allow Hezbollah’s ‘voice’ and perspective to comprise a central part of the study, this for two basic reasons. First, I believe that there is a need to better understand how the movement is grounded in the Lebanese context, i.e., that its leaders and cadres are Lebanese and that its struggle bear many of the same traits as other Lebanese forces, be this historically or contemporarily. This idea could assist in dismissing the notion of Hezbollah as a mere ‘Iranian proxy’ and situate the movement within a Lebanese context. Second, having said that, there is also a need to take note of Hezbollah’s own perspective on Khomenism and its revolutionary and religious dimension in order to grasp how these important elements are being applied to the movement’s struggle in Lebanon. To do so, I will offer an understanding of Islamism that goes beyond the quest for an Islamic state and that involves a more inclusive aspect in the way that Islamism expresses religiously-based ‘criticism’ of modernity and existing power structures. From this aspect of criticism, it is will be easier to spot the Gramscian element in an Islamist movement’s pursuit of accommodation and in
the way it attempts to alter and resist certain structures of power – for example the political system or a nation-state – by subjugating itself to them.

The dissertation is structured as follows. Chapter 2 takes up a broader discussion of Islamism. I will elaborate on how certain common conceptions - such as ‘terrorism’ and ‘fundamentalism’ – tend to be misleading in the way that they situate Islamist militancy and indeed religiosity within an understanding that points to the disturbingly irrational and fanatic, and that ignores the harsh conditions that may trigger Islamist vengeance and that skirt the very notion of agency. In this chapter, I will also discuss the nature of Islamism and propose a more inclusive understanding of Islamist through and strategy that stresses the need for Islamist self-understandings. i.e., their own perspective on their goals and actions. I will argue that such an approach will allow for a Gramscian perspective that considers how a combined strategy of accommodation and resistance can be both complementary and problematic. In particular, I will discuss how identities, be they Islamic or nationalist, are malleable and how they may change during the course of struggle. Yet to grasp that point, I believe that Islamists’ self-understandings are crucial. Chapter 3 examines the history of the Lebanese conflict (from 1920 to 1985), the establishment of the Lebanese state and the controversy over its national identity. This conflict is crucial for understanding Hezbollah’s rejection of and accommodation to this state and how Hezbollah has conditioned its process of Lebanonization. The chapter highlights the external and internal dimensions of the Lebanese conflict and how they are intertwined. The chapter will focus in particular on the conflicting currents within the Shi’ite community in order to better understand how the Iranian Islamic revolution was absorbed by various groups within this community and how it impacted on the formation of Hezbollah.

Chapter 4 describes the period from 1985 to 1991 and deals with the ideological outlook of Hezbollah as it was presented in the mid-eighties, including the party’s objectives and views on its enemies and allies. Indeed,
I will also attempt to situate this ideological outlook in the revolutionary Khomeinist tradition that I believe has characterised the party’s objectives, even when it later embarked upon a ‘nationalist’-oriented strategy - its so-called ‘Lebanonization’ process. More contextually, the chapter also deals with how Hezbollah made efforts to carve out a territorial space for itself during the civil war, with the main ambition to battle the Israelis in the south.

Chapter 5 concerns the period from 1991 to 2000 and illustrates the Lebanese order as formed alongside of the Ta’if Accord (or the Peace and Reconciliation Accord) that put an end to the Lebanese civil war. The chapter takes up how Hezbollah adapted to the new order and the Syrian hegemony that supervised it. The chapter, thus, describes in detail Hezbollah’s so-called ‘Lebanonization’ process and its own view of this process. It deals with Hezbollah’s explanations for its strategy of accommodation as well as its priority of resistance. The chapter highlights Hezbollah’s agency in making a bargain with the Lebanese state and with the Syrians, which could be likened to a Gramscian strategy of pursuing a ‘war of positions’. The chapter also deals with how Hezbollah was severely criticised from within its own ranks for this strategy of accommodation and how it perceived its victory with the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon in May, 2000.

Chapter 6 covers the period from 2000 to 2006, examining Hezbollah’s victory more closely and how the movement aspired to pursue a strategy by which the movement would maintain its project of military resistance as well as a certain ‘bargain’ with the Lebanese regime. The chapter attempts to resolve what could be understood as the movements ‘dilemma’, i.e., how to give priority to itself as a ‘national resistance’ when victory has been achieved? It will discuss how Hezbollah perceived this victory in a ‘Fanonian’ way and how its national strategy had a transnational ambition. The chapter will also emphasise how Hezbollah’s accommodation to the Lebanese regime is strictly conditioned by the maintenance of this armed
resistance wing of the party. The chapter will conclude that this Gramscian strategy has also enabled Hezbollah to conduct a rather radical policy that does not, I will argue, deviate form its original pledge to Ayatollah Khomeini’s Islamic revolution. Through these combined strategies of accommodation and resistance, Hezbollah can still promote itself as a Lebanese vanguard for the Islamic revolution.

1.7 Use of material

This study is based on both literature and press material, in addition to the interviews discussed above. I have made field trips to Lebanon (May 1996 and April to June 1998), combining those with studies in Arabic pursued in Damascus, Syria (January to May, 2000; February to May, 2002; September to November, 2003; March, 2004; February to June, 2005; and Januray, 2007). In addition to meeting with Hezbollah officials, I also met with both persons involved in observers of Lebanese politics. Interviews were conducted in English and, as my language skills improved, in Arabic. However, during most interviews with spokesmen of Hezbollah, I was assisted by an interpreter employed by the movement. Besides the vast literature on Lebanon and Islamism that this study is based on, I also searched for material in the media, past and present. Hezbollah runs a very good research institute in south Beirut (destroyed by the Israeli bombings during the July War in 2006) where I was able to copy a lot of historical materials from the movement’s own media, particularly its weekly al-Ahd from the eighties. It can be noted that the movement is very keen for its official spokesmen to make the party’s line accessible. Hezbollah possess of two main media channels, the tv-station al-Manar (the beacon) which also runs a website: almanar.com.lb, and the radio station al-Nour (the light) which also offers a website: alnour.com.lb (including web radio). Hezbollah also offers a website
moqawama.org which includes an electronic weekly, *al-Intiqad* (the critique) as well as various archived material, including speeches and interviews with its leadership. Earlier, many speeches by Hezbollah’s secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah were to be found at nasrollah.net, but this website now appears to be cancelled. The strength with the material in this thesis is that it includes first-hand material from the movement’s ‘own voice’, not least from the formative years during the Lebanonization process when rather few – as compared to now – Western scholars and journalists met with the party. The weakness of the material is that I was not able to gain access to more ‘informal’ voices within the movement, i.e., dissenting voices ‘from within’, since the party’s spokesmen appear to be very disciplined with respect to the ‘official line’ and do not leave much leeway for an outsider to get to know them in a more private and open manner. Hezbollah’s spokesmen are very stringent in this regard, and this includes the personnel that are not official spokesmen. Hence, I was not able to get at any ‘alternative’ understandings beyond the official line.
Chapter 2. A theoretical approach to Islamism

This chapter will deal with the nature of Islamism and how its emphasis on an Islamic state can be problematised and understood as a critical discourse and more inclusive project that involves resistance and rebellion. But, against what? The chapter will discuss certain notion of ‘terrorism’ and ‘fundamentalism’ that are both common - and, I argue, misleading - in the debate on Islamism and will also examine the very definition of Islamism as the quest for an Islamic state. Beyond this quest, it will be suggested that Islamism is akin to a more historic ‘anti-systemic’ movement that is grounded in the anti-colonial struggles, or what will be referred to as ‘third-worldism’. However, while Islamists have traits similar to other kinds of movement that have fought for independence, it is also embedded in a more religious dimension of rebellion and criticism. The chapter will also present Gramsci as a theoretical framework in order to present how strategies of accommodation can also be understood as schemes of resistance. This combined strategy - and tension - between accommodation and resistance with respect to an Islamist pursuit will comprise the theoretical framework for attempting to understand Hezbollah’s strategies and ambitions in Lebanon.

2.1 ‘Terrorism’, structures of violence and Frantz Fanon

For me, certain conceptions, such as ‘terrorism’ and ‘fundamentalism’, often connected with Islamism and Hezbollah in the debate, have come across as futile and misleading. ‘Terrorism’ in particular is a pervasive and influential conception, undeniably effective in its ability to epitomize and scorn, which
repeatedly directs the debate in certain directions and towards certain comprehensions, inevitably giving rise to a hostile outlook on the designated ‘terrorists’ without providing a sufficient grasp of why they pursue a violent path in the first place.\textsuperscript{31} Nonetheless, while politically loaded and extremely compelling, from an academic analytical point of view it is ultimately empty. The concept of ‘terrorism’ denies or suppresses certain voices and alternative perspectives, and it even denigrates certain struggles, depriving them of proper recognition. As one author notes: “Terrorists are, or have become, a Platonic essence: they never change, they have no history, they simply terrorize.”\textsuperscript{32} That is, terror understood as an –ism, reduced to some assumed dogma or doctrine, hardly explains the political and social dynamic that usually lies beneath any conflict, providing cause for resentment and grievances and ultimately vengeance and violence, whatever its character. \textsuperscript{33} Neither would the application of the concept of terrorism, or terrorists, tell us much about the actor behind the deed, except for highlighting his (or her) grisly character – which is, conceivably, the very point of using it.

The notion of terrorism taps into a problematic similar to that of Orientalism, i.e., the perspectives, discourses, ways of thinking that have derived from and justified colonial schemes of power. Edward Said suggests that there is a severe problem of \textit{representation}, i.e., those subjected to a certain order in the peripheries of the world are seldom allowed to represent themselves; their grievances, rage, and militancy - indeed use of violence - are explained by experts and observers distant from their own lived experiences. Edward Said criticised the self-praise of Orientalist scholarship,

\textsuperscript{31} See for instance Stanley Fish’s comment on the climate after the September 11-attacks; \textit{New York Times} 15 October 2001.
\textsuperscript{32} Marrouchi 2002, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{33} An editorial in the British daily \textit{The Independent} put it succinctly in a rather dry comment after the American president George W. Bush’s declaration of ‘war on terrorism’ after September 11, “You cannot declare war on a tactic; it is as if President Roosevelt responded to the attack on Pearl Harbor by declaring war on bombing.” \textit{The Independent}, 17 September 2001.
which is based on the dichotomy between “Western civilisation” and the backwardness of the Orient and claims of the envy and resentment of the latter towards the former that the contrasts evoke. “The Oriental”, Said claimed, “is imagined to feel his world threatened by a superior civilization; yet his motives are impelled, not by some positive desire for freedom, political independence, or cultural achievement on their own terms, but instead by rancour and jealous malice.”

In a more contemporary setting, Dag Tuastad described this tendency of knowledge production as *symbolic power*, which he argues is the “power to construct a hegemonic version of reality.” He bases his argument on what in the literature has been referred to as the “new barbarism thesis”, closely akin to the older schools of Orientalism, which creates “presentations of political violence that omit political and economic interests and contexts when describing that violence” and which instead reduce political violence to the ‘resurgence of tribalism’ and the “cultural backwardness among peripheral, non-civilised groups”; that is, the violence is “irrational and cannot be stopped by means of diplomacy or conciliation.”

However, an alternative view would be that the violence perpetrated by the presumed ‘terrorists’ are part of a more dialectic context of violence; a vicious vendetta that incorporates structures of repression imposed and sustained by violence that may face a fierce response in kind. For instance, with respect to the Palestinian suicide-bombers attacking civilian targets in Israel during the al-Aqsa intifada, the Israeli journalist Danny Rubenstein observed that “[t]hose who are humiliated at the road-blocks, the ill and the wounded, the pregnant women who are unable to reach hospitals, the unem-

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34 Said 1978, p. 249. Bernard Lewis describes ‘the roots of Muslim rage’ from the perspective of the envy of the Muslim world towards the successful development in the West – downplaying the way the two experiences are intertwined through colonialism, continual foreign interference and asymmetric structures of power. Lewis 1990.
36 Ibid.
ployed and those who are imprisoned in their homes and villages, the children who watched the demolition of their homes and trampling on their parents’ dignity – they are all blowing up in our faces…Whoever is repulsed, justifiably, by their actions should keep what caused them in mind.”

Indeed, Islamist spokesmen and scholars would themselves make this point to audiences that had no insight or experience in subjugation or repression. “The Americans are concerned about sports”, the Lebanese Shi’ite scholar Muhammed Husayn Fadallah noted in the eighties as the U.S. public was alarmed from a great distance away by the hostage-takings and suicide-bombings taking place in Lebanon.

They are not concerned with politics of what their administration is doing. Perhaps this is why Americans do no not understand us…The problem of the oppressors is that they see a phenomena but they do not try to look for its causes. Their problem is that they see the tragedy in the reaction to their action but they do not see the tragedies created by their action…The problem of a person who does not experience hunger is that he cannot understand hunger. That is why he cannot understand the screams of a hungry man.

From within the gruesome experiences of the Algerian war, Frantz Fanon likewise sarcastically noted how prevailing images of the Algerian ‘natives’ and their struggles against French colonialism were perceived of as acts of barbarism and retardation: “The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but the also the negation of values.

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37 See Haaretz, May 16, 2004. Elias Zayyar, a psychiatrist in Gaza similarly acknowledged: ‘During the first intifada, studies showed that 55 percent of the children had witnessed their father being humiliated and beaten by Israeli soldiers. The psychological impact of this is stunning. The father, normally the authority figure, comes to be seen as somebody who is helpless, who can’t even protect himself – let alone his children. So children became more militant, more violent. People are the products of their environment. Children who have seen so much inhumanity – basically the Israeli occupation policies – inevitably come out with inhuman responses. That’s really how to understand the suicide bombing’. Zayyar 2004.
38 Fadlallah, interview Middle East Insight, June-July 1985.
He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil.”39 To Fanon, the colonial order was inherently racist by structurally subordinating the natives and claiming their rage and resistance barbaric and evil, especially as their vengeance, he asserted, derived from this repressive order based upon violent subjugation. Only racism (explicit or implicit) could justify the exploitation of resources, the imposition of borders, and the creation and maintenance of corrupt but pliant despots. Indeed, this racism was also internalised. “It is not possible to enslave men without logically making them [feel] inferior through and through”, he argued. “And racism is the only emotional, affective, sometimes intellectual explanation of this inferiorization.”40 The epistemology of the colonial order was, thus, racism, and its ontology is violence; these are the two main pillars upon which the status quo rests. To Fanon, neither reasoning nor supplication would change this reality; in a world construed by force and subjugation, the liberation of the colonized natives had to be seized. The political order would not yield but to counter-violence and a reification of the native self, and only armed resistance could break down the political and economic as well as intellectual and mental structures that kept the system together. Violent resistance only mirrored a grim reality and the way out of it, and indeed, Fanon even claimed that proclivity to violence even expressed the very humanity of the dispossessed. The resistant native, he argued, “knows that he is not an animal; and it is precisely at the moment he realizes this humanity that he begins to sharpen the weapons with which he will secure his victory.”41 Even though Fanon was not entirely unique, nor entirely original, in his theoretical elaboration (accounts of peoples resisting domination and oppression are surely as old as historiography itself), he identified and articulated a dynamic that is relevant for this discussion of ‘terrorism’ as a concept that I see as misleading.

40 Fanon 1964, p. 40.
41 Fanon, 1963, p. 43.
When I started out studying the nature of Hezbollah and indeed Islamism in general, the notion of ‘terrorism’ dominated most common understandings and images of these phenomena, evading contextual exigencies that I discovered to be most central in grasping the objectives and strategies of these Islamists operating in Lebanon. However, it appeared to me that the discourse of ‘terrorism’ rendered superfluous any discussion of motives and objectives by pushing those to whom the terrorism label is applied beyond the pale and beyond reason and dialogue. It thereby provided a powerful semantic device in the construction of a universe of comprehension that sustains dominating political and economic modes of power and interests. In this thesis, I will argue that the ‘Fanonian’ understanding of violence applies to Hezbollah’s experience and leads to a more nuanced view of it, i.e., as a deeply militant movement born in a harsh and violent terrain, a ‘child of its time’. The presupposed image of violent fanaticism ignores the realities that provide the reason for it and even for Hezbollah’s own perception of violence as a remedy in a world structured by force.

2.2 The deceptive notion of ‘fundamentalism’

For many of the same reasons given above, I am also sceptical of the conception of fundamentalism, often applied in an effort to denote what I in this dissertation will label ‘Islamism’. According to Appleby et al., who edited the comprehensive five-volume “Fundamentalist project” in the nineties, the term is workable because it enables researchers to compare the growing phenomenon of religious resurgence across the globe – involving the monotheistic religions present on all five continents - and to determine their common traits and characteristics, above all their common rejection of and resistance to modernity, or more precisely the post-Enlightenment ethos of rationalism and the secularization process that it entails. They note that although the
fundamentalist “understanding of, and reaction against, secularization may vary...fundamentalists across religious traditions and regions of the world share an animus against political cultures that would deny religion what they feel to be its central place ordering society.”  

That is, to them, fundamentalism is suitable in the sense that it defines these movements as counterpoints to secularism; either as a violent rejection of or more moderate criticism of the secularization of state and society; and it promotes a scheme according to which state and society should submit to the mores and teachings of the “Holy writ.” Roxanne L. Euben also adopts the concept with the claim that ‘fundamentalism’ exposes the inherent meaning of the phenomenon in question, a sentiment and perspective rooted in fundamentals, origins, foundations, and in that sense it refers “to contemporary religio-political movements that attempt to return to the scriptural foundations of the community, excavating and reinterpreting these foundations for application to the contemporary and social and political world.”

Yet, as Joel Beinin and Joe Stork argue, a common objection to ‘fundamentalism’ is that it is “inescapably rooted in a specific Protestant experience whose principal theological premise is that the Bible is the true word of God and should be understood literally.” Thence, the term makes no sense in regard to Islam because, they note, all believing Muslims view the Qu’ran as “the literal (hence absolutely true) word of God as revealed to his Prophet Muhammad through the intermediary of the angel Gabriel.” Rather, Beinin and Stork suggest that the big debate within Islamic thought concerns how the Holy Writ is to be understood and applied, and this opens up for wide range of rather open-ended ideas, points, counterpoints and strategies, which such a term can hardly grasp since it suggests, they argue, “the restoration of a pure, unsullified, and authentic form of the religion, cleansed of historical

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42 Almond et al. 2003. p. 20-21
43 Euben 1999. p. 17
44 Beinin & Stork. p. 3.
45 Ibid.
accretions, distortions, and modernist deviations. This is indeed how many Islamist leaders and ideologues present their ideas and the movements they lead. But it is a substantial error to conceptualize these movements as restoring an ‘original’ form of Islam. Rather, they seek to revitalize and re-Islamize modern Muslim societies.”

Robin Wright likewise argues that “fundamentalism” resembles inflexibility and backwardness, hardly the “forward-looking, interpretive and often innovative attempts” made by Islamists when reconstructing the political order.

In addition, according to Najib Ghadbian, “fundamentalism” signifies a downright bias: “with its judgemental tone”, he notes, “and its implications of literalism, antimodernism, and fanaticism, [it] is a term for those who have already made up their minds about all Islamists and is therefore inappropriate for scholarly research.”

Esposito, who agrees that the term carries too much of Christian protestant connotations and that it is too value-laden and strengthens misguided impressions widely prevailing in western societies of Islam as a “monolithic threat”, proposes “more fitting general terms” such as “Islamic revivalism” or ‘Islamic activism’, which ‘are less value-laden and have roots within the Islamic tradition.”

“Islam”, he argues, “possesses a long tradition of revival (tajdid) and reform (islah) which includes notions of political and social activism dating from the early Islamic centuries to present day.”

Indeed, his claim is vindicated by Fadallah, who argues that “we are not fundamentalists the way Westerners see us.

We refuse to be called fundamentalists. We are Islamic activists. As for the etymological sense of ‘usuliyya (fundamentalism in Arabic), meaning returning to one’s roots and origins (’usul), our roots are the Qu’ran and the true Sunnah or way of the Prophet, not the historical period in which the Prophet

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46 Ibid.
47 Wright 1992, p. 31. See also the discussion of fundamentalism in Abrahamian 1993.
lived or the periods that followed - we are not fundamentalists (\textit{usuliyyin}) in the sense of wanting to live like people at the time of the Prophet or the first Caliphs or the time of the Umayyads...\textsuperscript{50}

My own position is that the term ‘fundamentalism’ should be avoided. To be sure, these movements, across political and religious barriers, do claim primacy of the holy scriptures for their political and social action, and they do constitute a reaction against and criticism of secular modernity, or what Euben refers to as the post-Enlightenment ethos of rationalism, the core belief in human reason and ideologies that separates religion from political life, making the former an issue for private life.\textsuperscript{51} They also claim - as a remedy for the ills caused by modern state and society - that a political order should be subordinated to the mores and visions provided and guided by religious foundations. Yet, the weakness of the concept is that it taps into, or widens, a \textit{normative} gap in the narratives of understanding that presupposes a strict dichotomy between these religious-political movements and secular ones and that it suggests – or indeed, emphasises - the common ground between alleged ‘fundamentalists’ in their religious aspirations. It is as if the agendas of the promoters of ‘fundamentalism’ almost by definition exist in total contradiction and negation with the secular order and as if no common ground of interests, values, norms or problems exist. Appleby et al. suggest that the most prominent characteristics and traits of what they call ‘fundamentalism’ determine strategies and objectives. True, while there are indeed similarities between movements deemed ‘fundamentalist’, especially in terms of the general reference to the imperative of religion, social-conservative values, the promotion of communitarianism, etc., there are also radical differences that suggest totally different struggles, projects and objectives.

\textsuperscript{50} Fadlallah 1995.
\textsuperscript{51} Euben 1999.
While there is a ‘fundamentalist’ bent among zealous Christians attacking abortion clinics in the U.S. and Hamas operations against Israeli settlers, there is also a risk in reducing these acts of violence to religious impulses, as if religion is the underlying cause of the grievances. With regard to Hamas’ military operations against Israeli settlers, for instance, there is a commitment shared with a wide array of secular Palestinian militants, since the bone of contention is occupation and settler colonialism, not primarily religion. Nonetheless, Appleby et al. make a good point in their definition of “fundamentalism” as a description of religio-political movements when they suggest that it “refers to a discernible pattern of religious militance by which self-styled ‘true believers’ attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, fortify the borders of the religious community, and create viable alternatives to secular institutions and behaviours.”

That is, these movements express a critique of modernity, understood in its secular sense, which is perceived to have lost direction and meaning. Modernity, they argue, is bereft of ethics and mores, which no secular science or ideology can offer or base justice on but which are readily available in the Holy Scriptures. Yet, scholars have pointed at the pitfall in being categorical about the hostile position of these movements towards secular modernity. While these movements hold a hostile – and often rejectionist – position in relation to things secular, the very nature of their antagonism varies in degrees and positions and, indeed, in strategies to deal with it. Whereas some Islamist movements disapprove of and denounce any dealings with secular ideas, concepts and systems, others work towards accommodation while offering posing a harsh critique of the assumptions that are fundamental to secular thinking. The pejorative element inherent in a concept such as ‘fundamentalism’ does not allow, I think, for such nuance.

Hence, while alleged ‘fundamentalists’ do share a common aspiration (in the most general sense) to evoke religious teachings and ‘fundamentals’

52 Appleby et al., p. 17.
as authoritative guidance in social and political life, that fact itself is not
enough to justify the use of the notion, largely because it is denigrating and
taps into images of hostility that are very prevalent in Western society. This
aspect is what discredits the concept, since it suggests and reinforces the
rather common view that it is religion - in this case, the political manifesta-
tions of Islam - that is the problem; that it is the very ideas that are to be
considered detrimental and destructive, not the context - often repressive and
exploitive - from which these ideas emerge. Of course, this does not negate
the fact that there are many religious-political movements which are fanatic,
exclusionist, xenophobic, chauvinistic and violent. However, to apply a con-
cept that inherently suggests characteristics in that direction is no good start
for studies that merit a more open-ended theoretical and empirical inquiry.
Curiously, Appleby et al. themselves also seem cautious, even a bit con-
founded, since their emphasis on religion as a determining factor of
worldviews and politics smacks of zeal and purity that does not, apparently,
allow for flexible strategies and actions, which challenge the idealistic
‘wholesomeness’ that ‘fundamentalism’ conveys. “Political involvement,”
they argue, which involves “compromise and accommodation…tends to alter
the exclusivist, dogmatic, confrontational mode of the fundamentalist to such
a degree that the word fundamentalism or its cognates is no longer appropri-
ate.”53 In that sense, they validate the basic critique of the concept as it is
proposed here.

2.3 Islamism: permeating all spheres of life

Despite the diversity of Islamists movements, they do share a submission to
a vision grounded in Islam as encompassing all spheres of life, from private
to public. As Nazih Ayyubi claims, among the monotheist religions, Islam is

53 Appleby et al. p. 12.
the most monotheist, as there are “no minor deities and no ‘Trinity’ or other semblance of multiplicity in the essence of eternal omnipotence.” Such an all-embracing course of God is known as the doctrine of tawhid (oneness, unification, monotheism) (ibid). In common Islamist thinking this holistic notion of Islam is manifested in the “three Ds,” i.e., Islam as din (religion), duniya (way of worldly life), and dawla (state). Central to this view is, thus, that the Islamic state, i.e., a state founded and governed by the shari’ah, is understood as the ultimate ideal and aspiring vision of the Islamist project. Laura Guazzzone, for instance, argues that even though Islamists differ “in background, circumstances and types of political and social action, all Islamist movements share the common final objective of establishing an Islamic state – the political configuration considered not only ideal but also essential for the well-being of every Muslim.”

Many thinkers and ideologues categorized as Islamists most often lend support to such a definition. For instance, Muhammed Husayn Fadlallah, a revered Shi’ite Islamic scholar in Lebanon and to a certain extent close to Hezbollah, claims that “it is natural for those who have an Islamic mentality to use this language [of an Islamic state and government]; if not they would be liars or heretics to their ideology [since] Islam is basically a religion that embraces politics as part of its ideology, and of its regulations.

A Muslim cannot but think from the vantage of his religious faith, of political reality as part of his responsibility, as well as legislative activity in all its aspects…This is why Islam contains the idea of the state within its ideology, and in its line of action. That is why the notion of separation between religion and state is (for Islam) similar to the amputation of a concept from itself. That cannot be embraced by the Muslim because it would mean backing away

54 Ayubi 1992, p. 68.
from his understanding of Islam as a complete code of life, as we say, for all life and the universe.  

This definition and understanding of the Islamist project has kept scholars busy regarding the very nature of Islamism and the various ways to ‘manage’ the diversity of the supposed challenges and “threats” it may pose to modern politics. As Sidahmed and Ehteshami note, the issue involves “an inherent contradiction between the absolutist nature of Islamist ideology and the relativist character of democracy,” since there is a “contradiction between a force that sees itself as a custodian of the divine message, hence as having a monopoly on truth, and a system built on relative truths and opinions.”  

John Waterbury has similarly argued that “religious political groups are non-democrats of a peculiar kind”, and when “the scriptures are both holy and explicit as is the case in Islam, pragmatic compromise will be very difficult.” In this regard, Ehteshami and Sidahmed warned, for instance, that Islamists’ perceptions of democracy and democratization could be understood as cynical and merely strategic, since “even when an Islamist party endorses democracy, it will not have the same value for them as it has for a liberal secularist. This attitude is intimately associated with the Islamic Utopia.” Indeed, most Islamist scholars would probably agree, given that many of them make no bones about what they think of the democratic project in comparison with their ideal vision of an Islamic state. Yet their positions vary and are often conflicting; while some see a multi-party system in pragmatic and strategic terms, others deplore it altogether. Ayatollah Khomeini claimed that no legitimacy could be bestowed upon a government that did not abide by the precepts of the divine. He argued, “in Islam the legislative power and the competence to establish laws belong exclusively to God al-

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57 Sidahmed & Ehteshami, p. 13.  
59 Ibid.
mighty. The Sacred Legislator of Islam is the sole legislative power. No one has the right to legislate and no law may be executed except the law of the Divine legislator.”

According to another revered Islamist ideologue, Allameh Tabataba’i, the important point is that Islam is neither a democratic nor a communist system but a “different order” in which consultation is commuted within the framework of Islamic norms, and these norms, he argues, are not based “on the wishes of the majority” or the “desires and inclinations of the people”, as in democracy, “but on the realization of what is true.” However, submitting to such an ideal vision would not necessarily preclude participation. Fadlallah, a partner in the Khomeinist school of Islamism, who for many years has urged Islamists – like Hezbollah in the nineties - to accept and take part in the systems under which they reside, underlines the persistent tension between the method of democracy and legitimacy of power. Whereas the first is justified as a modus operandi for Islamists groups to partake in elections, it could never yield true authority and legitimacy, since that is only to be attributed to an Islamic framework. However, he also claims that in a temporal world there is a huge gap between vision and reality and, therefore, when choosing between “tyranny” and “democracy,” he suggests that Islamists should opt for democracy because then they can

exercise their freedom to spread Islam and revive it, and rally the people around it, and so advance the cause of Islam or achieve total control by will of the majority. Islamists would have no freedom under a dictatorial regime. This certainly does not mean recognition by the Islamists of democratic rule, either in thought or in practice. It is an accommodation to reality, and to the freedoms accorded to the Islamic movement (alongside non-Islamic movements) to contest one another.

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60 Euben, p. 119.
61 Quoted in Boroujerdi 1996, p. 87.
62 Quoted in Kramer 1997, p. 158.
Hence, while the willingness of Islamists to accommodation and integration may – with good reason - appear confusing - or, perhaps better put, cynical - a competing perspective on Islamism suggested that a quest for absolutism and negation of pluralism was exaggerated and too simplistic for understanding the underlying dynamics that sustained the various – not seldom conflicting – versions of the Islamist project.

2.3 Islamism as expression of grievances

Rather than positing absolutist tendencies, scholars have argued that the Islamist phenomenon is triggered by worldly complaints about injustices that have been committed and political and social repression and marginalisation. Norton suggests that Islamist parties should be seen in terms of a “sociological dynamic” in that people’s “allegiance to an Islamist organization often has less to do with piety or religiosity than with the organization’s demonstrated efficacy and integrity”. Islamist parties, he contends, “have tapped into a wellspring of discontent” with a “penetrating critique of government performance…Of course, the failure of government to implement sharia (Islamic law) is often cited as part of the Islamists’ critique, but central [to it] is the emphasis on corruption, malfeasance, and misbehaviour. The mistreatment of people at the hands of government is constant refrain. The Islamist critique is persuasive because it rings so true.”\textsuperscript{63} In this sense, Islamism expresses a certain protest in relation to existing grievances more than being the harbinger of an absolutist project. Indeed, the authoritarian nature of Arab states and societies usually left the mosque and religious discourse as the sole paths for venting such grievances. Charles Tripp refers to this as the “secular logic” of modern forms of mass politics, including Islamist ac-

\textsuperscript{63} Norton 1995.
tivities, even if these are described as divinely decreed by their protagonists. To him, the concept of “secular” does not involve the separation between the secular and the religious but rather (and what he claims to be the “original sense” of the term) the life in the here and now and not in some presumed “hereafter.” That is, Islamist parties, like any parties, must succumb to popular aspirations and needs that make up the complex political terrain because, in the end, to be successful in this contest of mass politics, it is votes that count and not proposed political principles as determined by faith. Hence, for those fearing the dilemma of Islamists’ inclusion into the political system (i.e., a dilemma that may involve the end to inclusion and pluralism), Tripp’s secular logic may suggest a comforting pragmatism, as “utopian ideals” would have to abide by the crass reality of day-to-day politics.

Furthermore, the Islamist militancy or absolutism was not generated by itself. It did not emerge out of a solitary universe of ideas but was very much moulded within the confines of – and exclusion from – certain structures of the state. For instance, Daniel Brumberg questions the assumed “essentialism” of Islamism and suggests that the main issue should not be to study whether Islamists bear autocratic traits or not nor to view the issue along the continuum of “the liberal versus the illiberal.” The task is rather “to see whether this or that Islamist group is acting within a hegemonic political arena where the game is to shut out alternative approaches, or else within a competitive – let’s call it dissonant – arena where Islamists, like other players, find themselves pushed to accommodate the logic of power-sharing.” This “dissonant” political milieu and context should, thus, be compared with what he refers to as “harmonic states,” those one-party states that “attempt to create unity or its appearance through repression, cooptation, or distraction” and hence “create a unipolar field that easily can become a

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64 Tripp 1997, p. 52-54.
place for deadly games of ‘winner takes it all’ between ruler and their opponents.”

It is often noted that Sayyed Qutb, the icon of hard-line Islamism, was early on rather liberal. His contempt for the secular world developed in the dark dungeons of Nasser’s Egypt, where, behind bars, he elaborated the notion of *jahiliyya*, the “state of ignorance” that starkly contrasted with the just world of a pious Islamic order. Hence, Qutb’s ideological firebrand was a child of the time: badly burnt and fuelled by vengeance. In a Fanonian manner, these structures of repression he was subjected to would feed both violence and ideological rejectionism. Lisa Anderson remarks that the character of any political opposition is often related to the character of the regime. It has “the unusual characteristic of being defined by what it opposes.” Hence, with respect to the often arbitrary and despotic nature of the regimes in the Muslim world, the Islamist forces in opposition are responding in kind. Repressive measures may breed rejectionist world views and violent resistance; a lawless government will face lawless opponents. Or, as she puts it, “although Islamist leaders frequently condoned the use of violence...the quick resort of violence for which the Islamists were so often noted was at least partly attributable to the violence visited upon them by their government.” In a way, this was all similar to the Fanonian understanding of how structures of power, permeated and sustained by violence and repression, will evoke a response in kind. Conversely, it could be

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66 Ibid., p. 113.
67 See Abu-Rabi 1996, p. 92-219. Yet, Sayyed Qutb’s militant and hostile rejectionism may not be seen as a standard for Islamism, despite his iconic status among a variety of Islamist movements. Qutb’s ostracism has troubled Islamist ideologues. For such a critique, see, for instance, ibid., p. 208-219.
69 Francois Burgat makes a similar claim when he argues that that violence at the hands of Islamists is "more than the concoction of a particularly totalitarian ideology with unscrupulous, power-hungry candidates; it is the relatively predictable, if not natural, result of the behaviour of the governmental and international environment. It should be remembered that the methods of political opposition are to a large extent determined by the methods of those in power." Burgat 2003, p. 78.
claimed that openness and inclusion would breed a corresponding kind of Islamist position.

2.5 Strategies of pragmatism and accommodation

There are thus scholars who tone down the despotic dimension of Islamist parties and claim that they merely reflect the widespread grievances against regimes that have failed to deliver on their promises of social welfare and security and the wider spectre of ongoing injustices that trigger dissent, effectively picked up, channelled and articulated by Islamist ideologues and propagandists. In a mid-nineties study of the Islamic Action Front in Jordan (the political branch of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood), it was suggested that the Front had adopted the idea of political pluralism and political parliamentarianism as a “strategic choice,” and while they may not be “Jeffersonian democrats,” they did abide by the “rules of the game” once they were allowed to become participants.\(^{70}\) Mandaville also observes that in countries that have allowed for political inclusion (such as Jordan, Malaysia, Morocco and Pakistan), Islamist parties have been participating and respecting the rules of the game for some time now. And even though there have not yet been cases in which Islamists have made the rules (not just followed them), “there is every reason,” he notes, “to believe that Islamists today are becoming increasingly accustomed to the idea of sharing power with either groups and respecting the rules of multiparty democracy.”\(^{71}\) Claims of an inherent despotism within Islamism should be contrasted with the ways in which Islamist parties have had to adapt to the various social and political structures of a country in order to broaden their appeal and constituency.

\(^{71}\) Mandaville 2007, p. 338.
For instance, when studying the political integration of Islamists in Pakistan, S.V.R. Nasr has argued that “most observers have been preoccupied solely with the impact of Islamic revivalism on politics, whereas participation in politics has had an equally important influence on the development of revivalist movements, which in turn conditions their political impact.”

Hence, hampered by what is usually referred to as ‘the reality’, even Islamists - whatever their divine plan - must learn to cope with prevailing power relations and constellations of various interests in society. Therefore, analyses “ought to critically examine both the extent of the impact of the Islamic revivalist movements on state policy and patterns of political change once these movements join the political process” as well as “the nature of the constrictions on the political manoeuvrability of Islamic movements pursuant to their political enfranchisement.”

The assumption of Islamist absolutism poses a problem, since it tends to obscure the multiple layers of the Islamist project, especially when context is taken into consideration. There is a hollow ring to the idea that the Islamist agenda is mainly concerned with establishing the Islamic state; the notion of such an effort appears as too instrumentalist. Of course, the aim of achieving political dominance (and the instrumentalism and rational choices involved in that aim) is, as Brannan et al. suggest, “undoubtedly useful in understanding organizational decision-making, yet few (if any) sub-state activist groups engage in their struggles solely for strategic concerns. There is invariably a multiplicity of social, ideological, theological and other factors that need to be accounted for.”

Therefore, while acknowledging the more flexible and transformative aspects of Islamist movements, strategically and pragmatically generated and shaped by the various structures of state and society, there is reason to emphasize the nature of Islamist agency itself. In what follows, it will be suggested that Islamists are part of a more histori-

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73 Ibid.
cally contingent force of resistance, or what observers have labelled an ‘anti-systemic movement’. But against what kind of system and under what conditions?

2.6 The historico-dynamical process of resistance

A common argument in studies on Islamism is that Islamist movements in a more general and historical way promote a struggle previously fought by nationalist groups, often with a leftist and Marxist orientation. There is, thus, a rebellious characteristic of Islamist movements that extends beyond, or augments, the conspicuous calls for an Islamic order. They also expose regimes and accuse them of acting subserviently to external interests and of exploiting their country’s resources (such as oil and gas), and they often express vehement opposition to the Israeli colonisation of Palestine, a constant source of radicalism. In an early comment on the Islamic revolution in Iran, Nikki Keddie claimed that the Islamist movement in more general terms could be understood from within the framework of what she referred to as “third worldism,” a “hybrid of various ideologies that expresses a viewpoint from which the third world (roughly Asia, Africa and Latin America) is perceived of as exploited and heavily controlled by the West,” and which asserts that “third world countries must strive to rid themselves of Western control, influence and customs (or, for the leftists, with new radical roots) where Western power to profit from exploitation of the third world will be negated.”

75 She suggests that a comparison of this kind with Third Worldism “might make the Muslim revival appear less unique and incomprehensible, and in part as one type of a movement that the world has already experienced and whose general causes and ideological manifestations

75 Keddi 1982, p. 277.
may be usefully compared.” The veteran observer Eric Rouleau similarly claimed that Islamists are “essentially political” actors. “I once took a number of speeches of Khomeini and stripped them of all references to Islam,’ he has told,

and what was left were speeches that could have been delivered by Nasir or Mossadegh or Nkrumeh – they were purely Third World speeches. They were about foreign domination, CIA responsibility for the area’s woes, government corruption, the need for social justice. While Khomeini was speaking of Islamic unity, Nasir was speaking of Arab unity and Nkrumeh of African unity. To my mind, Khomeini was not an Islamic leader but a third world statesman. …So I believe that the Islamic movement is in fact the reincarnation of the nationalist movement, with, of course, a mystical dimension the other didn’t have. If you take the core of it, it’s just the continuation of the other movements that failed, with an Islamic face.

Indeed, while Arab nationalist forces dominated the idioms and struggle in the phase of de-colonialisation - not only while in opposition but also while in power, as with Abdul Nasser in Egypt and the Ba’th parties in Iraq and Syria - their common nemesis is often understood in terms of their devastating defeat against Israel in 1967, i.e., it was not only a defeat for the Arab armies but it also implied a serious setback for the nationalist secular project. Among a myriad of other competing political forces, Islam would rise as a popular force. Hence, as Burgat suggests, Islamism could more generally be understood as “the common product of one underlying historical dynamic’, i.e., “Islamism is effectively the reincarnation of an older Arab national-

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76 Ibid., p. 275.
77 Roleau 1993, p. 55.
78 While the nationalist forces suffered in this defeat and while the defeat boosted the Islamists, it should be underlined that even leftist forces became more popular as well as the PLO, the rising star of anti-colonial ‘heroism’ in the Arab world.
ism, clothed in an imaginary considered more indigenous.” This is why scholars have referred to Islamists as representing the continuity of so-called ‘anti-systemic’ movements that are more or less bound to emerge in an order characterised by asymmetric structures of power. To Islamists, the nationalists could not bolster the stamina or commitment, since their thinking, identity and ideology were basically imported from the “outside” (i.e., Western Europe). In this sense, they tapped into a rather general urge for identity that also characterised these third worldlist impulses of resistance. This entailed an important position mirroring an essentialist or so-called nativist impulse to claim the opposite of what was to be opposed.

2.7 ‘Nativism’ and ‘counter-othering’ as resistance

The element of culture or religion as a means of mobilising an assertive self was not restricted to Muslim countries, or Islamists, but widely adopted across various anti-colonial arenas of struggle in the third world, as many anti-colonial activists saw culture and traditions as a field of resistance and an arena for boosting a ‘sense of self’. Jorge Larrain suggests that the urge for a cultural identity arises “whenever there is a conflictive and asymmetric encounter between different cultures, be it by means of invasion, colonization or extensive forms of communication,” and it does not usually become an issue “in situations of relative isolation, prosperity and stability.” Thus, this only occurs in “a period of instability and crises, a threat to old-established ways…especially as this happens in the presence of, or in relation to, other cultural forms.” Culture contributed importantly to the popular consciousness, and a wide range of third worldlist leaders and intellectuals

79 Burgat 2003, p. xiv.
80 Larrain 2000, p. 143.
saw this as a field of struggle, especially as the colonisers promoted a self-proclaimed superior culture while denigrating the local and traditional.

This kind of glorification of an indigenous identity has been referred to by Mehrzad Boroujerdi as “nativism” - “the doctrine that calls for the resurgence, reinstatement or continuance of native or indigenous cultural customs, beliefs, and values”. This urge for roots, he notes, should be understood in relation to the way “Western discourses and theories of modernity, prevailing and dominant, denigrated these historical conditions and traditions of cultures and religion of the third world, imposing this sense of inferiority and incapability among those people dominated by colonialism.”

The Western powers claimed their superiority within this domain, hence demeaning the culture and traditions of the colonized, imposing a sense of inferiority. Pal Ahluwaia and Abebe Zegeye refer to this as the “colonialization of the mind” in which “the people’s history is denied and they are made to feel inferior and incapable of challenging the colonial order...The colonized not only are made rendered economically dependent but also psychologically so, making them subjects of the colonial power.” Hence, various third worldist leaders and intellectuals would celebrate an authentic cultural identity as a tool for self-empowerment and resistance. While observing and participating in the Algerian struggle for independence, Frantz Fanon argued that the re-discovery of tradition (“living it as a defense mechanism, as a symbol of purity, of salvation”), while denied by the colonizer, could serve, in a Manichean way, as a formidable weapon in the face of the superior that made efforts to construe the means and positions that the ‘native’ was denied and that were assumed to justify his subordination. “This culture,” he asserted, “abandoned, sloughed off, rejected, despised, becomes for the inferiorized an

object of passionate attachment.”

Amilcar Cabral, a leader for self-determination of Guinea-Bissau against the Portuguese, also suggested that it is “within the culture that we find the seed of opposition” and “whatever the material aspects of [foreign] domination, it can be maintained only by the permanent, organized repression of the cultural life of the concerned people.”

Many scholars trace the embryo of today’s Islamism to Jamil al-Din al-Afghani and his disciples who – in the late nineteenth century - claimed the imperative of an Islamic identity to withstand the way the colonial powers were about to impose themselves and their models of modernity with the objective of subduing the Muslim world, bringing it into the colonial order.

These pioneering thinkers did not, however, elaborate on an Islamic state but rather on how Islam could offer an assertive identity capable of facing the wide array of challenges coming from the West. Above and beyond the proclaimed – and by some of these early Muslim thinkers, greatly respected – values of Western Enlightenment, they could also see the greedy ambitions inherent in Western colonialist schemes, the dark side of liberalism. To al-Afghani, for instance, Islam represented a source of “authenticity” and pride that should be contrasted with widespread perceptions of “Western superiority.” Islam, he claimed, was the most prosperous source of unity in mobilising the Muslim umma against Western imperialism.

Keddie speaks of the

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83 Fanon 1964, p. 41. This also corresponds to Calhoun’s observation that “where a particular category of identity has been repressed, delegitimatized and devalued in dominant discourses, a vital response may be to claim value for all those labelled by that category, thus implicitly invoking it in an essentialist way.” Calhoun 1994 , p. 17

84 Cabral 1973, p. 43, 39.


86 Hourani argues that ‘for a Muslim…whether he was Turkish or Arab, the seizure of power by Europe meant that his community was in danger. The umma was, among other things, a political community expressing itself in all the forms of political life, and a community which has no power may cease to exist. The problem of inner decay still exercised men’s minds, but there was grafted on it a new problem,
“self-strengthening” mood that permeates al-Afghani’s project and that was shared by many Muslims who “did not wish simply to continue borrowing form the West or bowing to growing Western domination, but wished rather to find in indigenous traditions, both Islamic and national, precedents for the reforms and self-strengthening they wanted to undertake.” As she notes, in relation to al-Afghani, “it was important not to lay undue stress on the Western origin of what he was borrowing, as this might encourage the trend of admiration for the West and feelings of Islamic inferiority and helplessness.” Such self-images of helplessness and weakness were the strength of the imperialists, and, hence, the image of self was also objectified as a target in the struggle. As Albert Hourani points out, al-Afghani dismissed the idea that the European powers were “innately stronger than the Muslim states”, and while there was “the prevalent idea that the English were superior,” it should be considered a dangerous “illusion (wahm)” since “such illusions make men cowardly, and so tend to bring about what they fear.”

The following examplifies how Iranian Shi’ite activism, as promoted by Ali Shariati, made use of the Imam Hussein’s death – or ‘martyrdom’ – at Kerbala.

### 2.8 Self-strengthening Shi’ite activism: the Kerbala narrative

The same kind of self-strengthening was a pervasive impulse in the Islamic revolution in Iran. In fact, one of its ideologues in addition to Khomeini, Ali Shariati, was an Iranian intellectual and admirer of Fanon (who even trans-
lated his books into Persian). His thinking has been described as immensely influential on the Iranian revolution (and indeed on Ayatollah Khomeini himself), having forged his ideas into what has been referred to as “Shi’ite activism.” The activist Shi’ite school was deeply critical of the traditional clergy within Shi’ism, which – it was argued – had become too distant from the deeply radicalized ideas of the fifties and sixties in Iran and the Muslim world. Like Ayatollah Khomeini, Shariati’s contribution to the Shi’ite activist school castigated the traditional clergy for remaining indifferent or quietist towards the role of politics and the wide array of injustices that plagued Muslims, including imperialism, despotism, corruption and so on. In that sense, he invoked images, narratives and idioms of Islamic history that appealed to many Shi’ites, stories they could identify with, tales that were “theirs.”

One of Shariati’s main contributions to the popular mobilisation in the seventies that was to be central for the Islamic revolution in Iran was his interpretation of the tragic drama of Imam Hussein’s death at Kerbala, Iraq in the year 680. According to Shi’ism, the fundamental problem menacing mankind is the long-time absence of a righteous leadership. In the subsequent power struggle over who was to be the Prophet’s heir after his death in 632, the group later to be known as the Shi’ites (partisans) regarded it as imperative that the legitimacy of rule should rest within the Household of the Prophet, i.e. that the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law, Ali, should head the Muslim community. To the Shi’ites, Ali was an Imam (divine leader) appointed by the Prophet to succeed him. Accordingly, only he had the skills

89 According to Abrahamian, Shariati was deeply influenced by the French Marxist Georges Gurvitch, who argued that “religion was the key element in popular culture providing the oppressed with comfort, dignity, an outlet for suffering, a sense of injustice, the feeling of community and, at times, even the ideological tools to fight the oppressors.” Abrahamian 1989, p. 114.
90 Shariati promoted an ‘action-oriented’ Islam that stressed actions more than beliefs, or that beliefs had no value in themselves, only as guidance for actions. Faith alone did not make a “good Muslim,” but actions and deeds do. Truth, he claimed (in a severe criticism to the quietist clergy), was to be found in human action, not formal learning. See Mirsepassi 2001, p. 125.
necessary for translating the Qu’ran - the words of God - and making it comprehensible for human beings in a contemporary context. However, instead of Ali, a Muslim leader from the Umayyad clan, Abu Bakr, was appointed to head the Muslim community. Ali and his followers could not recognize the leadership of Abu Bakr, and, therefore, the “partisan” epithet was attached to this group, the Shi’ites. Furthermore, the Imams - Ali and his heirs - were only to be twelve, the last one of them disappeared, according to Shi’ite belief, in occultation in the year 874. As a result, a messianic doctrine, ghabyah (occultation) established that the just society will only be realized once the Mahdi, the Hidden Imam, returns to Earth on Judgement Day. In the meantime, any ruler or regime should be regarded as more or less illegitimate. Among various Shi’ite creeds, therefore, there are conflicting views on contesting power, since politics in the absence of the missing Imam can never be legitimate. Should they get involved in politics or not? Should they rebel against injustice or not? As a persecuted minority subjected to many repressive rulers, Shi’ites feel that they have lived through many eras when rebellion was justified and wanted, but because of their numerical inferiority some of the Imams and mujtahids (scholars of Islamic law to guide the community in the absence of the last Imam) have advised them not to.

The events at Kerbala where Husayn, the third Imam (and grandson to the Prophet’s daughter), and his small group of 72 men were slaughtered by the 5000 troops of the Caliph Yazid - described as a cruel and corrupt tyrant (who called upon the Imam to abide by the leadership of the Caliphate) - have served as a symbol for various interpretations of this conflict within

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91 “As a religious ideology,” Sachedina maintains, “Shiism functions within a specific sociopolitical order which constantly evaluates and calls upon its adherents either to defend and preserve or to overthrow and transform...[It] is both a critical assessment of human society and a program of action, whether leading to a quetist authoritarianism or an activist radicalism, as the situation may require, to realize God’s will on earth to the fullest extent possible.” Sachedina 1991, p. 421.
Shi’ism. To the quietist strand of the Shi’ites, like the traditional ulama, the symbolism of Kerbala and Imam Husayn’s death displayed the prevailing injustice and sorrows of the world and the futile effort of rebellion in the face of overwhelming power. To the activist Shi’ites, however, the Kerbala drama offered a more operative scheme of interpretation. In Shariati’s reading, Husayn’s death was a symbolic sacrifice; he knew he was about to die, but he made a conscious decision to conduct jihad and obtain martyrdom instead of living a life in defeat, submission and humiliation. According to Anderson and Afary, the “key point” of Sharati’s perspective was that Imam Husayn opted for death, or martyrdom, well aware that he could not fight Yazid and win; but neither would he accept to remain silent and subservient. By consciously opting for martyrdom, Imam Husayn showed generations to come that injustice should never be accepted and that grievances should not be reduced to mere tears and lamentations. Life is a struggle and death always nearby; or better, martyrdom is “truth,” the ultimate sacrifice for the just community and a straight path to heaven. Giving one’s life for a righteous cause was to sanctify society with an ongoing impulse of self-asserting and giving: “Just as the heart injects life in the body by pumping blood through its dry veins, so the shaheed (martyr) is the heart that transmits his blood and gives life to the dried-up and dying body of society – a society where people have submitted to false values, coercion, and oppression so as

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92 Sharaiti ridiculed the traditional ulama for equating the virtue of jihad (and challenge injustice) to other virtues in Islam, if the believer is to reach paradise in the hereafter. He criticised this more “conventional” ulama for telling their followers: “You are not obliged to enter only through the door of jihad. Jihad is simply one of the keys, which opens the doors to paradise. Prayer, other forms of worship, and incantation are safer keys and you can use them without harm, danger or risk! There are a lot of charitable affairs that will take you to the same point, such as the feeding the needy, looking after the poor families, visiting the holy places, praying, asceticism, piety, making vows, dedication, helping your neighbour, incantation, prayer ceremonies, lamentation, and intercession. You will reach the same goal as the person who chooses jihad, so why cause yourself suffering and pain by choosing the much more difficult action of jihad!.” Quoted in Afary & Anderson 2005, p. 61.

93 Ibid, p. 60-63.
to survive a little longer and are content with sheer physical survival.”

Ayatollah Khomeini would similarly capitalize on such an activist reading of the Kerbala events during the insurrection against the Shah (the modern “Yazid”) when he urged the masses to follow Husayn’s example at Kerbala while opposing the oppressive Iranian regime. To the believers, it was a powerful paradigm of action, to be adopted later on, as we shall see, by Hezbollah in Lebanon.

2.9 The nativism and counter-othering of Khomeinism

Also central to Islamism, not least the Islamic revolution, was what Larbi Sadiki labels as “counter-othering”, i.e., “countering the logos of the ‘other’ with one’s own logos, speaking of oneself instead of being spoken for, and grounding one’s agency in one’s own cultural foundations. Nonetheless, counter-othering reclaims largely, but not solely, a resistance aimed at salvaging one’s sense of self and autonomy, at asserting one’s cultural belonging and meaning, and at securing recognition for them.”

Importantly, this counter-othering grew in response to incumbent elites who were adopting secular models and idioms of governance while being accused of subordinating the resources and interests of their countries to foreign powers. In Iran, for instance, austere programs of secularism (by which the clergy was increasingly repressed and marginalised) combined with the deepening of cooperation with the British and the U.S. Many Iranian clergy thus joined anti-imperialist positions that denounced the Iranian regime for ‘selling out’ the nation’s dignity and resources. Ayatollah Khomeini agitated against this

94 Sabt 2008, p. 57.
95 Still, Shariati (like also Afghani in his time) was vehemently criticised for paying less attention to Islam as a ‘true’ faith, blending it with non-Islamic sources and influences.
96 Sadiki 2001, p. 111.
position as early as in the forties. For example, Reza Shah Pahlavi imposed a particular dress code requiring men to wear a round peaked cap that became known as the ‘Pahlavi cap’.\textsuperscript{97} In 1941 Khomeini published a tract that elucidates his scorn for this ‘treacherous’ means of modernity:

The Day everyone was forced to wear the Pahlavi cap, it was said, “We need to have a national symbol. Independence in matters of dress is proof and guarantee of the independence of a nation.” Then a few days later, everyone was forced to put on European hats, and suddenly the justification changed: “We have dealings with foreigners and must dress the same way they do in order to enjoy greatness in the world.” If a country’s greatness depended on its hat, it would be very easily lost! While all this was going on, the foreigners, who wished to implement their plans and rob you of one hat while putting another on your head, watched you in amusement from afar and laughed at your infantile games. With a European hat on your head, you would parade around the streets enjoying the naked girls, taking pride in this “achievement,” totally headless of the fact that meanwhile, the historic patrimony of the country was being plundered from one end to the other, all of its sources of wealth were being carried off…In short, these idiotic and treacherous rulers, these officials – high and low – these reprobates and smugglers must change in order for the country to change. Otherwise, you will experience worse times than these, times so bad that the present will seem like a paradise by comparison’.\textsuperscript{98}

Many ‘nativist’ thinkers strongly emphasized the binaries that distinguished the ‘East’ from the ‘West’ and developed a critical narrative of the Western world and civilization. Whereas Western forms of modernity had been successful with respect to technology and science, they were inferior in terms of the spiritual dimension of the East, a view that permeates much Islamist thought. Jamal al-Ahmed, for instance, wrote the seminal work “Westoxica-

\textsuperscript{97} Algar 1981, 307.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., p. 172-73.
tion” (Gharbzadegi) in which he derided the materialism of the West and its mastery of technology that would subjugate the East if the latter were not able to find alternative paths to becoming superior. “We have been unable to preserve our own historico-cultural character in the face of the machine and its fateful onslaught”, he wrote. “Rather, we have been routed. We have been unable to take a considered stand in the face of this contemporary monster. So long as we do not comprehend the real essence, basis, and philosophy of Western civilization, only aping the West outwardly and formally (by consuming its machines), we shall be like the ass going about in a lion’s skin.”

This ‘Westoxication’, hence, involved a critical discourse against Western intrusion as well as a keen celebration of the authentic identity of Islam, which, it was argued, could guarantee and maintain purity, dignity and national salvation, and it evolved within the context of a process of modernization that left Muslim countries vulnerably exposed to foreign interests.

‘Westoxication’ was at the heart of Khomeini’s ideological outlook, in addition to his strong “third worldist” bent, that derided the asymmetric structures of power forged in the era of colonialization and reproduced within the Cold War standoff. Khomeini directed his ire against Muslim elites’

100 In the early sixties, Khomeini’s vehement opposition to the Iranian secular regime and its subservience to the U.S. scheme of domination over the Iranians developed radically. In 1963, as the Iranian parliament granted American civilian and personal diplomatic immunity (linked to a loan of $200 million from the U.S.) Khomeini rhetorically described how the dignity of the Iranians had been usurped for U.S. imperial schemes in Iran: “They have sold us and our independence…If they had the slightest bit of feeling for the national honour, they would have called for general morning…Our dignity has been trampled underfoot; the dignity of Iran has been destroyed…They have reduced the Iranian people to a level lower than that of America’s dogs. If someone runs over a dog belonging to an American, he will be subject to investigation and prosecution, even if he is ‘the shah’ himself. But if an American cook runs over ‘the shah of Iran’ or any other important person, no one can prosecute him…You have sold the independence of Iran and its dignity to reduce it to the level of the enslaved and most backward nations.” Henry Munson 2003, p. 42.
admiration of Western culture and thinking, which, to his mind, served as tools for subjugation. “The threat to the world today stems from the two superpowers”, Khomeini asserted. “They have manipulated the world under their own control and use it for their own interests.” Khomeini thus dichotomizes the world into the mostafaza’an (the oppressed) and the mustakbaraan (the oppressors, or the arrogant), and Khomeini claimed to be concern with the plight of any country that suffered under the thumb of either superpower in the Cold War stand off. “Beware that the world today will be that of the oppressed (mostafaza’an); sooner or later they will be victorious. God has promised that they will inherit the earth. Once again I declare my full support for all movement, groups and parties who struggle against the superpowers of left or right.” However, Khomeini’s animosity was not only directed at the superpowers but even at their allies (or “lackeys”, in Khomeini’s own words) among powerful elites in the Muslim world who aligned themselves with one of the blocs in order to dominate their countries with outside backing and support. In this regard, he was especially hostile to the oil rich Arab states in the Gulf that were close to Washington and to Egypt that signed a peace treaty with Israel and moved into the “American camp in the end of the seventies”, at the same time as the revolution occurred in Iran. To Khomeini, the allegedly pious Muslim rulers in the Gulf could be classified as munafiqin (a Quranic conception for “hypocrites”) as they served – to his mind – the imperialist schemes of the U.S. to consolidate its domination in the Middle East. In Khomeini’s own reading, it was this rebellious aspect of Islam - i.e., its declared quest for dignity and self-assertion – that provoked the incumbent elites in the prevailing global order and brought enemies upon the Islamic republic; the revolution, carried a

102 Ibid., p. 79. Khomeini was overtly concerned with the dominance of the U.S. in the global order, even though he despised the Soviet empire as well. Rajaee argues that this animosity has much to do with Khomeini’s own experience of U.S. involvement in Iranian politics from the mid-twentieth century onwards, when he became politically conscious and active himself. Ibid.
message of challenging the strong to the benefit of the weak. As he declared in the “Manifest of the Islamic Revolution” (1987):

Today everyone knows that so far the imperialists are concerned our real crime is our determination to defend Islam, to give credence to the Islamic republic as the legitimate system which has replaced the former regime of Taghoot (idol and demon) and the oppressive monarchy; our real crime is reviving the tradition of the Apostle and acting according to the commandments of the Beneficent Quran; our crime is announcing the unity of Muslims both Shia and Sunni and thus foiling the plots of international paganism. Our real crime is our support of the disinherited of Palestine, Afghanistan and Lebanon, the closing down of the Israeli embassy in Tehran and declaring war on this malignant tumour [Israel] and on international Zionism. Our crime is our struggle against apartheid, our defense of the disinherited of Africa and the annulment of the enslaving treaties of the dirty regime of Pahvali with the Imperialist America. Surely our greatest crime so far as the imperialists and their shiftless lackeys are concerned is speaking about and advocating the sovereignty of Islam, and inviting Muslims to seek honour, independence and to resist tyranny and aggression.\(^\text{103}\)

To reiterate the argument thus far, Islamism emerged as a reaction to Western schemes of colonialisation and subordination, including a ‘nativist’ impulse against the cultural and social models of the West, which tended to denigrate indigenous culture. Still, it is important to underline the constitutive dimension of faith with respect to Islamist thinking, which goes beyond the structures and grievances of materialist world views. In the early eighties, Kurshid Ahmed charged that the phenomenon of “awakening of faith” was often reduced by Western secular scholarship to “political and social rearrangements”, ignoring the way in which religious convictions could recreate “the moral personality and character of the individual” and thus author-

\(^{103}\) Khomeini 1987, p. 33-34.
ize “an upsurge of spirituality and idealism, generating a sense of direction and commitment to reconstruct their world, whatever the sacrifice.” While Islamist thought could be derived from the structural disorders and conflicting processes underway in the Muslim – and most of the postcolonial – world, and while Islamists thus share many of these dynamics with other ‘anti-systemic movements’, the religious dimension brings a certain distinctiveness to the Islamist project that is important to a more open-ended understanding of it. The specificity of this religious dimension will be explored and discussed in the next section. It will investigate in particular how Islamism is concerned with human nature and how Islamist thinkers see the ‘human spirit’ as an imperative in understanding a material order rather than the reverse. Importantly, Islamist thinking entails a critique of the very assumption of modern, rationalist thought. On the basis of this criticism, it will be suggested that Islamist thinking and strategies can be more open-ended and can thus transcend the alleged tensions discussed previously.

2.10 The constitutive dimension: function and meaning

The view of faith as intertwined with a materialist struggle is acknowledged by Euben, who argues that the modern rationalist approaches to Islamist thought and action appears unable to grasp the more comprehensive impulses and objectives of this phenomenon. According to her reading, there are two common – yet conflicting – approaches in studies of Islamists; either they are reduced to “the irrational, the stubborn persistence of the archaic and particularistic” or they are dealing with an identity or ideology that cover what ultimately could be understood as material urges derived from structural tensions and grievances. However, such tendencies, while assumedly valid, depending on the particular case concerned, cannot be categorically

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taken-for-granted, and, equally important, tend to overlook the appeal of Islamism as *Islamism*, i.e., as distinct from, say, leftist or nationalist ideologies. As Euben contends, Islamist mobilisation and popularity, while often rooted in material grievances, cannot be reduced to them. There is also moral force, she claims, embedded in the belief in revelation that permeates and sustain the Islamist project. In this regard, she makes a distinction between what she refers to as *function* and *meaning*. The “function” involves - as has also been suggested above - Islamists for various reasons promoting certain struggles and channelling various grievances earlier claimed by other forces. Analyses categorised as embedded in this aspect of “function” tend to support a rationalist approach, i.e., they collect the “brute data” and the various conflicting modes and structures that generate particular urges, or, as she puts it, “[d]evelopments such as modernization, urbanization, industrialization, rising unemployment, and increased literacy may indeed explain the urge toward revolutionary expression, or, at the very least, the urge to challenge prevailing conditions and the powers and processes that produced them.”105 Such material grievances may also single out certain conditions for various classes and groups in society and explain why they are receptive to revolutionary ideas or radical appeals. She notes, for instance, that Islamist movements – in contrast to other opposition forces across the Arab and Muslim world – are often particularly able to project political criticism through the language of religion and tradition and through activism through a network of mosques, while other political contenders, like liberals and leftists, are more easily suppressed and marginalised by a repressive state. She also mentions the common explanation that the rise of Islamism (earlier noted) results from the experiences of other ideologies that have left a lot to be desired (such as after the loss of Arab nationalism in 1967). As she notes, “the implication is that given such failures, Islam appears to be the remaining rational choice, the ideology that promises to achieve the economic justice,

105 Euben 1999, p. 46-47.
political liberation, and international redress that other ideologies have failed to deliver.”¹⁰⁶

But while valid as an explanation of the function of the contextual factors that give way to Islamist mobilisation, this cannot explain the more profound, subjective appeal of Islamist ideas, i.e., the meaning of Islamism. Hence, this leaves us with the question of why Islamism, “as opposed to any other set of ideas, is the increasingly popular vehicle to register protest.”¹⁰⁷ She claims that analyses that mostly stress materialist aspects will marginalise the Islamists’ own sense of “meaning and purpose” and hence also pay insufficient attention to the more inherent impulses of the Islamist project that are constitutive of certain thinking, norms and values. As Euben notes, by “deriving meaning from function”, explanations of Islamist mobilisation do not become more rational, in the sense of being more intelligible, as they tend to disassociate from the Islamists’ “own understandings of the world.”¹⁰⁸

Her suggestion, however, is that these self-understandings should be “central to the very standards of intelligibility”, since these may overcome the unfortunate perspectives that either tend to situate the Islamists in an irrational rejectionism, if not fanaticism, or as mere agents for material betterment. Self-understandings, she notes, are helpful in grasping, more particularly, what is being challenged. This is a valid point, and it may assist us in transcending the assumptions of absolutism – discussed previously - that characterise studies on Islamism and may provide a more profound comprehension of agency within that notion of ‘hybridity’, i.e., how certain structures and identities are taken over from within by Islamists and given a new meaning and purpose.¹⁰⁹ That is, despite the often presumed rejectionism of Islamism, expressed in their urge for an Islamic state (and refusal to provide

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 47.
¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p., 154.
¹⁰⁹ For a discussion on hybridity, see Loomba, 2005, p. 145-153.
a non-Islamic state with legitimacy, as it contradicts the ‘truth’ of governance by a divine decree), Islamists are still, as noted above, very much involved with things modern, such as the nation-state, parliaments and so on. There is, thus, a need to study what, more exactly, is being rejected and what is resisted.

In this sense, Islamism, despite all of the various theories and models of an Islamic state among Islamist thinkers (and they do vary) and despite the diverging strategies and tactics among Islamist movements, does share a common denominator: their rejection of rationalism, or what Euben refers to as the ‘post-Enlightenment ethos’, i.e., the belief in that human reason alone can shape a just society and order. After all, the very basis of modernity, in the version of Enlightenment, was to discard religion and traditional superstition and metaphysical beliefs in transcendence as ways of structuring state and society and instead to allow human beings themselves to take care of their decisions and thereby subordinating their path of development and justice to human reason.¹¹⁰ Yet, to Islamist thinking, such assumption and belief in human reason is naïve at best, disastrous at worst; it is, in short, erroneous. To Islamists, human beings are by nature arrogant, selfish, full of greedy desires and thus prone to corruption and injustice. The assumed ‘reason’ of human beings can easily submit to and operate in the interests of destructive desires. Efficiency and knowledge do not necessarily translate into righteous ethics and norms.

The ‘rationalist’ order, understood as a secular order, thus offers a devious path, as the illusory idea of allowing the ‘human spirit’ to flourish unrestrained will lead mankind into what the Tunisian Islamist thinker Ra-

¹¹⁰ As Larraine puts it, “modernity [in the sense of Enlightenment] made the human being the centre of the world, the measure of all things, as against the old theocentric worldview which prevailed in medieval times. The human being becomes ‘the subject’: the basis of all knowledge, the master of all things, the necessary point of reference for all that goes on. The world ceases to be an order created by God and becomes ‘nature’, with its own autonomous logic which the subject must know in order to use it.” Larrain 2000, p. 15.
shid Ghannoushi has termed *tawahush* (barbarity).111 “Humans, by nature, have a readiness to become brute”, he argues, and suggests that the age of Enlightenment - which liberated the human mind from decrees of the Church - was both a blessing and a curse to the world, depending on the historically contingent dimension one looks at. In the West, modernity implied that political liberalism would at last be able (after having fought feudalism and fascism and communism) to dominate the political order, and it is, Ghannoushi notes, exemplified in the “democratic system and the recognition and defence of rights and freedoms.” However, there is also, he adds, a darker side of the “philosophical dimension of liberalism which is based on the belief in the absolute ability of the mind to independently organise life; on giving precedence to the individual over the community; on excluding religious guidance and values from the organisation of economics, social relations, politics and international relations; and on ignoring the metaphysical component of man in favour of solely fulfilling his material needs.”112

That is, while democracy would grant basic rights to its citizens in the Western world, the very philosophy and nature underlying it would not grant any relief for the third world, upon whose exploitation Western material privileges and power thrived. The *tawahush* was ever-present in these structures formed by colonialism. Its racist legacy and materialist greed constantly reproduced this order, as seen, for instance, in today’s Western support for despotic Arab regimes rich in oil and for Israeli colonialism at the expense of Palestinian rights.113 This is why Ghannoushi argues that Western countries may experience much democracy, tolerance and civility in their own countries and societies, but the potential for *tawahush* is continually present, since the civility in these societies is conditioned by expansive social welfare guarantees and high materialist living standards, which in many

111 Ghannousci 2003, p. 117.
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid.
ways are financed and facilitated by the colonial and post-colonial exploitation and repression of the poor world. The alleged ‘civility’ of Western democracies are, thus, to a large extent rooted in the material riches garnered by an unjust and repressive historical trajectory. In contrast, many poor countries of the third world enjoy civility because of their adherence to norms and ethics decreed by religious conviction. Central to this religious logic is *taqwa* (the fear of God) and the belief in transcendence and the hereafter. Human beings, Ghannoushi asserts, are naturally “more willing to sacrifice to satisfy their desires than ratify their conscience. Islam recognises this weakness and responds by imparting a dimension to interest or benefit that transcends the worldly and the material. Benefit is not restricted to this life…Individuals are trained to sacrifice their own personal interests to serve the public interests; they do so because they are promised a great reward if they *forfeit what is immediate and temporary in exchange for that which is delayed but everlasting.*”

While this standpoint reflects a common principle within religious belief, i.e., the connection between deeds done in this life and the hereafter, it is among Islamists deeply *politicised*. For instance, Ayatollah Khomeini claims that while human beings possess the capacity to become “superior”, such ambitions could easily be eliminated because “his capacities for passion, anger, and other forms of evil are virtually boundless.” The Islamists see this nature of man as central; no economic or political theory can or should ignore the assumption of *human nature* as the basic foundation for existence. Rather, the world order of diverse injustices, past or present, colonialism, exploitation, starvation, repression, massacres, inequalities and so

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114 Ibid., p. 119. Ghannoushi describes this succinctly when he argues that “[h]umans are instinctively inclined to think in terms of gains and losses”, and in a secular society, he notes, people are avoiding doing bad deeds in fear of punishment by the law. In contrast, in an Islamic society civility among the human beings prevail because they fear God, and they perform in good deeds not because escaping the law primarily but because they seek the goodwill of Allah to prepare for a life in the hereafter.” Ibid.
on, result out of this egoism of mankind. As Ayatollah Khomeini described
the greedy nature of human beings:

if a person acquires a house, he will begin to desire another house. If a per-
son conquers a country, he will begin plotting to conquer another country.
And if a person were to conquer the entire globe, he would begin planning
the conquests of the moon or Mars…If this animal that has broken its bridle
is allowed to roam freely outside all recognizable bounds, it is left to itself
and no attempt is made to train it, it will desire everything for itself and be
prepared to sacrifice everyone to its desires. 115

“The prophets”, Khomeini asserts, “came to tame this unbridled beast and to
make it subject to certain restraints.”116 Hence, while rationalist ideas made
the world more efficient, in a scientific and technical sense, it increasingly
lacked the depth of ethics and meaning as well as mission or purpose. Im-
portantly, this spiritual realm was the point of departure for Khomeini’s ide-
ological outline. That is, the squalid conditions in the world could not be
grasped primarily by economic or political theories but were to be under-
stood by the spiritual convictions, or lack thereof, of human beings. As
Khomeini wrote in an open letter to the Soviet leader Michail Gorbachev in
1989, when the Soviet Union crumbled and looked to the capitalist West for
answers to its predicament:

Reality must be faced. The main problem confronting your country is not
one of private ownership, freedom and economy; your problem is the ab-
sence of true faith in God, the very problem that has dragged, or will drag,
the West to vulgarism and an impasse. Your main problem is the prolonged
and futile war you have waged against God, the source of existence and cre-
ation…It is clear to everybody that from now on Communism will only

116 Ibid.
have to be found in the museums of world political history, [since] Marxism cannot meet any of the real needs of mankind. Marxism is a materialistic ideology and materialism cannot bring humanity out of the crises caused by a lack of belief in spirituality [which is] the prime affliction of the human society in the East and West alike.117

This Islamist quest for spirituality is central in getting human beings to cultivate the norms governing a more righteous order. This is the very logic that Khomeini politicised and even formed in to a state enterprise, the Welayat al-faqih.

2.11 Khomeini’s Islamic state, the Welayat al-Faqih

In Khomeini’s version of Islamism, the struggle for justice compelled believers to be involved in the action, indicating how the divine decree that would make human beings stand accountable in this world and the hereafter was politicised. In that endeavour, Khomeini professed that faith and conviction would be best expressed and guarded through the governance of an Islamic state. In addition, it would provide the best protective shield and resource of resistance in the regional and global landscape of foreign schemes to exploit and control ‘the oppressed’. As he declared: “The Muslims will be able to live in security and tranquility and preserve their faith and morals only when they enjoy the protection of a government based on justice and law, a government whose form, and administrative system, and laws have been laid down by Islam. It is our duty now to implement and put into practice the plans of government established by Islam.”118 His own theoretical model of this effort was the Welayat al-Faqih (the Rule of the Jurist), based on the notion that the most skilled and experienced of Muslim (Shi’ite)

118 Algar 1983, p. 149.
scholars should lead the governance of Muslims in the absence of the Twelfth Imam (the Mahdi, who someday will return to Earth). To this end, the *Shar’ia*, the Islamic law, should be the foundation of the country’s constitution and the law that the administration should abide by (and the Faqih’s duty was to oversee this process). Yet, he also stressed the idea of a ‘republic’, which entailed that the people should have a role in due process, and they were thus given the opportunity to vote for candidates to the government that would be accepted by the Guardian Council, under the supervision of the Faqih. For Khomeini, the ‘Islamic republic’ thus struck a balance between his own sceptical view of the materialist ideologies and his unyielding emphasis on faith. That is, Khomeini’s idea of the *Welayat al-Faqih* was derived from the ‘nativist’ urge to rebel against the various ideological models and doctrines that sought to weaken the self-esteem of the Muslims and make them susceptible to schemes of Western domination. The Islamic state was the ultimate expression of this urge for resistance and dignity; and it would secure the righteous call enshrined in revelation and transcendence. Khomeini thus urged Muslims not to look elsewhere for remedies for the maladies of their countries:

For the solution of social problems and the relief of human misery require foundations in faith and morals; merely acquiring material power and wealth, conquering nature and space, have no effect in this regard. They must be supplemented by, and balanced with, the faith, the conviction, and the morality of Islam in order to truly serve humanity instead of endangering it. These convictions, this morality, these laws that are needed, we already possess. So as soon as someone goes somewhere or invents something, we should not hurry to abandon our religion and its laws, which regulate the life of man and *provide for his well-being in this world and the hereafter*.\footnote{Quoted in Euben 1999, p. 119-120.}
For Khomeini, this guidance entailed a deep ideological and political mission, and as part of the Shi’ite activist school of the sixties, he castigated the clergy for not taking decisive political stands in Iran and beyond. This was most urgent in the demanding struggle against an unjust order, and for Khomeini it was thus the duty of the clergy to guide the Muslims in their imperative to rebel. For him, Islam obliged believers to fight the ongoing injustices of the time. As he denounced the passive ulama in his seminal political tract “The Islamic Government” (published in 1970): “Do you not see that the Israelis are attacking, killing, and destroying and that the British and Americans are helping them? You sit their watching, but you must wake up; you must try to find a remedy for the ills of the people.” For Khomeini, mere discussion and opinions on law were not enough; the turbulent times of various independence struggles did not allow for a quietist clergy. “Do not keep silent at a time when Islam is being destroyed. Do not let yourself be so negligent…Are you waiting for the angels to come down and carry you on their wings? Is it the function of the angles to pamper the idle?”

Still, it is necessary in this regard to identify the dimension of faith and a nativist urge within the Islamic revolution, i.e., a rebellious process to challenge a system of exploitation as well as a quest for an identity of self-esteem as such and the establishment of the Islam republic. That is, the Welayat al-Faqih was necessarily not an end in itself but an ideal strategy – and model of governance – to withstand a certain world order in which Muslims find themselves under persistent duress and challenge from the outside. Moreover, the Islamic revolution, as it unfolded in Iran, expressed a certain historical trajectory that involved both the particular exigencies of the Iranian context and a more common and widespread ‘third worldist’ struggle seen in many countries that battle with troublesome phases of independence and foreign intervention. There was in this reading a significant difference between the Islamic revolution itself and the structures that generated it and its

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120 Algar, p. 142-143.
final outcome of the establishment of the Welayat al-Faqih; i.e. a difference between its anti-imperialist and nativist expressions and endorsement of faith that constituted a form of *resistance* and the administrative institutionalisation of Islamic rule by a Muslim clergy. In what follows, this notion of resistance will be problematised, as observers suggest that Islamist movements are unable to overcome either the stumbling bloc of the nation-state or their own inner contradictions, especially in the way nativism and emphasis on identity tend to sew division rather than unity.

### 2.12 The failure of accommodation

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Olivier Roy has claimed that Islamists have not been able to promote its radical ambitions because of inner contradictions. Some Islamist parties have chosen the nationalist path and subjugated themselves to the system in place, hence losing their radical edge. Others, rejecting such integration, have opted for a more transnational pursuit, though becoming irrelevant for the people whom they claim to represent. Such divergence between nationalist ‘retreat’ and globalist militancy was underlined once again by the 9-11 attacks in the United States. According to Roy, Islamist parties, because of their inability to challenge the nation-state system, had either become part of it, abandoning Islamism for nation-state nationalism – what he referred to as Islamico-nationalism - or joined the transnational ranks of rootless Islamist wanderers and warriors (like al-Qaida) seeking battlefields with which they had no local connection nor attachment other than serving the cause of a global Muslim ‘umma’.¹²¹ Roy’s

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¹²¹ “The Sunni fundamentalist movements are capable of spectacular attacks and portray themselves as the vanguard of struggle against the United States,” Roy commented the divide between the transnationalist- and nationalist Islamist networks at the end of the nineties. “But in fact they are largely disconnected from the real strategic issues of the Muslim world (except in Pakistan and Afghanistan). Their distinctive feature is their internationalism and lack of territorial base. Their activists
claim about how Islamists subjugate themselves to the order of the nation-state is akin to Tripp’s suggestion of a ‘secular logic’ mentioned earlier. Just as Islamists ascended as agents for grievances among their constituencies, these very constituencies may also constrain a radical world view and agenda, much like Tripp suggested with respect to the “secular logic.” These are valid observations, as they pinpoint the tension for any radical movement whose objectives are both to accommodate and to alter a certain political system; i.e., how to maintain a radical platform while broadening a popular constituency? There is a risk that the righteousness, purity and zeal claimed by Islamists might be blurred or diluted once they accept various parameters of the existing order. Or, as Tripp contends, “there is a fear that the more successful they are in organizing within the state or the closer they come in adapting the framework of the state to their ideals, the greater the number of compromises concerning the latter they will have to make.”122

Gudrun Krämer suggests that the Islamists’ dilemma is similar to all protest movements that pose a radical alternative to the existing order and value system...Differing from most other political groups in that they developed independently of, and indeed in direct opposition to, the state apparatus, and that they are able to project a sense of purpose, community and identity, they owe their appeal of purity and autonomy to their distance from established (party) politics...reflecting a widespread view that politics in general and party politics in particular are dirty business. Integration into the given political framework cannot but cost the some of this appeal. It cannot but compromise the uncorrupted.123

wander from jihad to jihad, generally on the fringes of the Middle East (Afghanistan, Kashmir Bosnia.) They are indifferent to their own nationalities. Some have several.” See Roy 1998.
122 Tripp 1997, p. 68.
123 Krämer 1994, p. 204-205. Femia suggests that radical critics of Gramsci charged that his accommodating postures would work as a ‘sell-out’ to the reigning principles of the order that essentially is to be opposed: “His willingness to work for intermediate objectives, to strive for class alliances, to build a consensus, and to adjust
Importantly, this tension between accommodation and resistance has led to deep rifts between the variety of existing Islamist movements as ‘hardliners’ denounce those Islamists who opt for entering the political systems and administration. In Egypt, for instance, a spokesman for jihad al-islamiyya refused to participate politically: “The goal of permitting Islamists to enter the People’s Assembly is nothing more than an attempt to drag a wide section of the youth behind a course of faction in which the path (of the movement) is lost and its goal concealed. The presence of Islamists inside the regime’s legislative assembly bestows upon the regime legitimacy it never dreamed of. The mere direction of Islamists toward the ballot box guarantees the fulfilment of [the state’s] goal.”

Yet, it is significant that while many Islamist movements formed political parties during the nineties and participated (if allowed to) in elections, jihadi currents in places like Egypt and Algeria were more or less defeated after a range of bloody vendettas with their respective regimes, leading some of them, like al-Zawahiri, to seek a transnational organization with the al-Qaida network in far away places like Afghanistan and Sudan. To Zawahiri, widely regarded as the chief ideologue of Al-Qa’ida, any accommodation to any system in the Middle East would imply the neutralisation of a cause sanctioned by Islam. As an example, in March, 2006, he scolded the Palestinian Hamas for participating in the parliamentary elections to the Palestinian Authority, since “[j]oining those who sold Palestine in one legislative council…as a constructive religious judgement and accepting that the number of votes is the judge between us and them is a clear violation of the approach of the Koran.”

the revolutionary process to specific national practices’ displayed that his was ‘so anxious to compromise, to work within the existing framework, that he lost sight of the need for revolutionary purity, for an unwavering commitment to a radical rupture with the past.” Femia 1987, p. 204.

124 Quoted in Hafez and Wicktorowicz 2004, p. 75.
125 Al-Zayyat 2004.
That we recognize the legitimacy of their government and system means that we recognize the agreements they signed. It also means that, should these criminals receive a majority in any forthcoming elections, we will have to accept their right to sell Palestine. However, nobody, be he Palestinian or not, has the right to relinquish a grain of Palestinian soil. This was an Islamic country, which the infidels occupied. It is the duty of every Muslim to seek to regain it. This is the dangerous meaning of agreeing to join these secular councils on the basis of a secular constitution and on the basis of the Madrid and Oslo accords, the road map, and other agreements of surrender that violate, and even clash with the shar’iah.126

Zawahiri appealed to all of his “Muslim brothers” in Palestine and Iraq and elsewhere that the various political processes including elections was part of a deceptive “American game” involving four objectives: firstly, to abandon the Shari’ah; secondly, to recognise various agreements “imposed by the enemy”; thirdly, to relinquish arms and abandon the jihad; and, fourthly, to recognise the “enemy’s” military superiority and accept the presence of U.S. military bases throughout the region. As Zawahiri concluded, “the Crusader-Zionist enemy lures some of us into approving part of the game’s rules with promises of power and freedom of movement, but then resorts to pressure and siege to force them to accept the remaining rule.” That is, inclusion was conditioned on surrendering the larger struggle and grander objectives of the Islamist opposition forces.

2.13 A Gramscian approach

Islamists are not alone in facing the hardship of trying to pursue a rather radical project within structures, powers and norms that are not prepared for it. This is a common challenge for many radical movements - Islamist or

otherwise – that have to consider to what extent one should accommodate, abstain, reject or resist. Here we are dealing with a certain tension that must be empirically investigated though theoretically recognised. That is, this tension - the consistent pull or oscillation between radicalization and moderation – also ought to be situated in more historical and structural processes that give reason to both. Moreover, Islamist thought, as a radical enterprise, also share strategic challenges with other radical currents that have contemplated accommodation and integration due to the complex terrain of the political context. This is the reason for reflecting over a ‘Gramscian’ approach to strategy and power, or what he referred to as hegemony. Hegemony is a conception useful for understanding power and strategies to undermine it and that could also be used to understand Islamist strategies of accommodation or impact ‘from below’. While Gramsci himself was a socialist and contemplated the revolution from a radical leftist perspective, his theoretical approach has been adopted by scholars on Islamism who view Gramsci’s approach to integration as a radical venture and strategy.

A question posed by many radical ideologists and strategists, despite political varieties, would go like this: Does strategic accommodation necessarily imply ideological deviation or the abandoning of short- and long-term objectives and ambitions that could be considered radical? How can a revolutionary course be taken in a context not conducive to it? Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was an Italian scholar and activist who contemplated the challenge for socialist radicals whose ambitions were to radically change a society that was perceivably in no mood for any such change. Gramsci’s inquiry concerned why the Communist revolution erupted in rural Russia and not in Western industrialised Europe, as Marx himself had predicted. His conclusion was to be understood within the framework of his perception of power, in which he made a distinction between domination (as power imposed by coercion) and hegemony (as power by consent, backed up by coercion). That is, hegemony – which is a lot more stable and sustainable than mere domi-
nation - involved how the authorities command the army, the police and the security branches of the state (coercion), but also how they gain public legitimacy from below (consent) by the compliance fostered in “civil society” through the school system, the bureaucracy, the media, churches, social and cultural associations and so on. Christine B.N. Chin and James H. Mittelman suggest that “[h]egemony encompasses whole ways of life: it is a dynamic lived process in which social identities, relations, organizations, and structures based on asymmetrical distributions of power are constituted by the dominant classes.”  

Through such institutions a common norm was cultivated in which specific configurations of power within the state were embedded in society, what Gramsci referred to as “common sense” - a naturally assumed impression of things as they are, that the current order is “unproblematic” or at least overwhelmingly impregnable for change. As Rupe Simms describes it, “The dominant class does not utilize violence or coercion to govern, but instead constructs a generally accepted philosophy of life to convince the exploited masses that their subordination is the natural, universal, eternal ‘way of things’ and that their political situation cannot be changed and should not be resisted. To Gramsci, cultural institutions like the state, school, and church persuade the subordinated class to conform and consent to the political status quo and therefore to their own domination”.  

While this kind of “civil society” was well developed in Western industrialised societies, with various layers of institutions projecting the norms of the capitalist system, no such “buffer” existed in Russia. The Tsar regime ruled mostly by coercion alone, and the masses did not need to be “convinced” of the need for his overthrow. Gramsci thus followed the Leninist school, which objected to the determinism of Marxist orthodoxy that forecasted how societies would ultimately experience revolution by the inevitable collapse of underlying conflicting structures and which stressed the imperative of a

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127 Chin and Mittelman 1997, p. 31.
vanguard party to show them the way. In this strategic endeavour of disseminating a “counter-hegemonic” culture, he promoted the need for “organic intellectuals” who could spread out in society and cultivate broader constituencies from where an alternative map of values in opposition to the system would be gradually established. In short, where civil society was dense, no confrontation was possible, or was at least futile. Instead, revolutionary groups had to conduct what Gramsci referred to as a ‘war of position’ in contrast to a ‘war of manoeuvre’.

These conceptions made up an allegory that Gramsci utilized from the war in the trenches of WW I. That is, whereas a ‘war of manoeuvre’ implied a direct assault on the enemy’s bases (i.e., the regime), a ‘war of position’ involved a more systematic grabbing trench by trench, until one would be able to totally overcome the enemy in the field. In Western Europe, he noted, the dense civil societies supporting the regimes – and the system – necessitated a ‘war of position’, i.e., a revolutionary party should opt for a strategy of integration into society - taking trench by trench - becoming part of society, such as teachers in schools, bureaucrats, officers, policemen, politicians, and so on, in order to gradually change it from within by disseminating counter-hegemonic norms and values. Just as institutions may produce a map of values, norms and principles that underlie and reproduce modes and structures of power, there are also groups and institutions that may undermine them by producing and cultivating a counter-hegemonic narrative that criticises and defies prevailing principles and norms. As Simms notes, “these revolutionary minded ideologues must progressively build a libratory ideology that will gradually become universal and create a foundational change in popular philosophy (i.e. hegemonic ideology) and the role of the state.”

Politicization had to forego revolution. Structures alone would never bring down the current system, however unjust and exploitive. Of utmost importance, therefore, was the dimension of consciousness as a field of struggle. That is, according to Gramsci, the perceptions, narratives and norms shaped the view of masses of the dominant culture in society, which maintained the legitimacy of the system. The human mindset was thus very much part of their own subjugation. As Joseph Femia contends, Gramsci emphasized how human beings construe the world but also how they willingly submitted to it, and thus man “allowed himself to be enslaved by machines and processes which he himself has made, but which appear to him as natural forces, directing the way he organises social and political life.” In shaping a counter-hegemonic alternative, it was up to the organic intellectual of the revolutionary formation to inform and convince of the injustice of the current order, and indeed of the ability to change it.

Indeed, ‘consent’ could be understood as a troublesome concept, since the nature of it may vary. That is, a strong hegemony should be seen as an ideal form of power, seldom found in reality, since consent may not necessarily involve active support for the system. Femia, for instance, conceives of “consent” as a lack of awareness of alternatives to the prevailing power structures, or as particular interests that are shared with the incumbent regime (or the regime’s concessions of those interests in order to co-opt potential adversaries), or as a mere fear of what could happen if one does not conform to the current order. He suggests that consent among the subordinate classes is “essentially passive”, masking and marginalising a potentially more critical consciousness. It emerges “not so much because the masses

130 Gramsci would also refer to this as ‘organic intellectuals’, and conscious organization; a rejection of the determinism in orthodox Marxist thought: ‘A human mass does not ‘distinguish’ itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in its widest sense, organizing itself; and there is no organisation without intellectuals, that is, without organizers and leaders’. Callinicos 1989, p. 212.
131 Femia 1987, p. 119.
profundely regard the social order as an expression of their aspirations as because they lack the conceptual tools, the “clear theoretical consciousness,” which would enable them to effectively comprehend and act on their discontent.”\textsuperscript{133} Furthermore, this passive consent is underpinned by “common sense”, the “uncritical and partly unconscious way in which people perceive the world” and on which “the dominant ideology is constructed.”\textsuperscript{134} This field of common sense was thus an arena of struggle that highlighted these oppressive structures that subjugated people and convinced them of the need – and possibility – for change.

These are ongoing, integrating processes that correspond to earlier claims of a ‘secular logic’ at play; i.e., that Islamists in opposition adapt to a certain context, not only in order to adapt to it but also in order to change it. Hence, the Gramscian matrix would spot a radical movement’s strategic agency while assuming certain structures and norms it essentially rejects. In this sense, accommodation could also be a strategic means of rejection and resistance. Or rather, a tension may exist here, an ongoing contest within and between the structures and norms making up the hegemony. As William Rosenbery suggests, a Gramscian hegemony should not be understood as consent but as struggle, i.e., “the ways in which words, images, symbols, form, organizations, institutions, and movements used by subordinate populations to talk about, understand, confront, accommodate themselves to, or resist their domination are shaped by the process of domination itself”.\textsuperscript{135}

The aspects of ‘nativism’ and of ‘counter-othering’, rooted in a more general ‘third-worldist’ struggle against a certain order of domination, real or perceived, is most vital in understanding the very notion of \textit{resistance} within the Islamist project. As a Gramscian outlook would have it, resistance can be conducted to various degrees and at various levels, not only as an absolute quest for state power. Simms applies such a Gramscian matrix in his study of

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid, p. 43.  \\
\textsuperscript{134} Stuart Hall 1991, p. 26-27.  \\
\textsuperscript{135} Roseberry 1994, p. 391
\end{flushleft}
the Muslim Brotherhood’s opposition to British rule in Egypt. The British, he argues, made efforts to impress upon the Egyptians a perception of representing a superior role of modernity. For instance, the intellectuals serving British rule “reproduced a ruling-class ideology, characterised by racist paternalism, to justify their subordination of Egypt. They created a philosophy that validated their sense of cultural and racial superiority, and that supported the notion that without their supervision Egyptian society would degenerate into self-destruction.”¹³⁶ For the Muslim Brotherhood, the task was to cultivate a rejectionist outlook on this British cultural imposition and instead offer an indigenous alternative, the superiority of Islam, as a faith and code of law, politics and culture. Simms labels the MB as cultural and ideological “subversives,” rejecting any laws that stemmed from Europe, since those were implemented in order to subordinate the natives. Simms notes how the Egyptian MB “appreciated the strengths of Western culture, often applauding its technological sophistication and scientific know-how,” although they “condemned the destructive effects of its blatant immorality and blind materialism. To them, as counter-hegemonic intellectuals, Islam was the perfect remedy: it was an infallible guide to righteous living and a powerful deterrent to social stratification.”¹³⁷

Central to this theorising is that any radical scheme must start with raising consciousness in order to shape a new ‘common sense’. Butko argues that Islamists are similar to Gramsci in that they “do not conceive an individual’s human nature as fixed and unchanging, but as malleable and open to influence by the dominant forces of society.”¹³⁸ In this regard, “[a] revolution should not be perceived simply as a seizure of state power but, more importantly, as a long-term transformation reflecting advances in the consciousness and organizational capacity of the majority of the population.” Islamists’ strategies of accommodation, be it within the political system or

¹³⁸ Butko 2004, p. 44.
throughout society (through various civil society projects), can be understood as a Gramscian ‘war of position’.

However, such an approach also raises certain important questions. Firstly, where are Islamists heading with such a gradualist strategy? While Butko sees Islamist gradualist mobilisation from below in a Gramscian perspective, he concludes that the ultimate objective of Islamists is to establish an Islamic state. As argued above, such assumptions are theoretically valid, yet in practice many Islamist parties, not least Hezbollah, appear to be involved in more open-ended struggles that cannot be understood in that linear or instrumental sense. Rather, as Gramsci suggested, radical parties, while endorsing a more inclusive and integrative strategy, will be involved in a struggle over hegemony that means a simultaneous accommodation to power and resistance to it.

2.14 Risks and pitfalls

As noted above, this kind of accommodating posture, or what we may call a Gramscian gradualist strategy, has been severely criticised by various Islamist thinkers and movements for ‘selling-out’. It is telling that the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, since it decided to remain within the official Jordanian political system (through its political branch, the Islamic Action Front), has lost numerous cadres to the more radical Islamist movements that shun the parliament and political participation and conduct activities in society - some open, some clandestine. Charles Tripp argues that the “manifestations of self-consciously Islamic political activity are best understood as responses to encounters with particular forms of power, of which the state may be the most public symbolic and actual repository.” That is, Islamist

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139 Ibid.
141 Tripp 1997, p. 52.
hostility and militancy against the state can hardly be categorically determined or understood in a contextual vacuum, but is likely due to the repressive or exclusionist methods of the regime, leaving the opposition suppressed, marginalised or co-opted. At least this is the concern of the more rejectionist tendencies among Islamist parties. Indeed, in Egypt the regime has conducted a strategy of both repressing and involving Islamist groups and persons, engaging in bloody vendettas with radical cells, allowing conditional and selective inclusion, even co-opting conservative Islamic preachers by allowing them space in religious and cultural, albeit hardly political, affairs.

This is a regime strategy of neutralisation ‘from above’, which Gramsci referred to as transformismo, that is, strategic measures undertaken by the regime to compromise with the opposition, or parts of it, in a way that would not seriously threaten the incumbent elites’ prestige and privileges of power. Even so, the transformismo would also neutralise the opposition, taking the esteem out of its radical appeal or simply sowing division within it. In the Muslim world, this implies that some regimes have involved the more conservative Islamist elements in religious and cultural, though not political, matters. Regimes have thus been able to subvert the more “anti-systemic” potential of Islamist opposition forces that might ally with the left or more assertive nationalist groups. For instance, in Jordan, more radical-minded Islamists complained that the Muslim Brotherhood had been coopted by the system and only involved itself in “trivial things” that avoided the real problems in society.\textsuperscript{142} That is, the regimes have been able to exploit the tension within – and indeed between – the Islamist movements in order to weaken their potential as an assertive force.

In this sense, observers have claimed that Islamists, despite their credentials and claims of anti-imperialism are unable to project themselves as ‘anti-systemic’ movements. As we have seen, Khomeini’s brand of Islamism

promoted itself from an ‘underdog’ position, as forming an Islamic bulwark against an imperialist American order, both in Iran and beyond. In this regard, his brand of Islamism stemmed from and had elements in common with a wide range of third worldlist movements. Even liberals and leftist could sympathise with the rebellious thinking and resistance of Khomeini’s revolutionary thinking. However, anti-imperialist forces of various colours also warned of how detrimental the construction of nativist identities could be for more universal and progressive projects of resistance. Boroujerdi suggests that nativist intellectuals can be criticized for their “high-pitched polemic[s]” that too often traps them “in the marshlands of insular, nostalgic, jingoistic, and particularistic mind-set[s]…Needless to say, these tendencies along with nativism’s uncritical exaltation of the past and the indigenous can have dire consequences for progressive projects.”

Roy also suggests that Islamist movements are incapable of construing what could be likened to Gramscian ‘historical blocs’. While the Islamists, Roy claimed, had “taken up the torch of the Third World”, its “slogans can no longer be shared by Western leftists or by other third world movements: religious universalism has killed universalism plain and simple.” Islamism thus differs from Marxism, since it “cannot reach beyond its cultural sphere,” and it demarcates “its own limits and produces a ‘cultural war’ effect that makes it difficult to see the relationship between Third World contestation and Islamist self-assertion.” In terms of the ‘anti-systemic’ nature of Islamist movements, Anna Secor suggests that while “socialism was able to be adapted to local contexts and interwoven with anti-colonial and anti-imperialist nationalism, the appeal of Islamist politics will remain limited socially and geographically simply because it is an identity politics from which non-Muslims are inevitably excluded,” and hence it is “less compatible with hegemonic

144 Roy, 1994, p.5.
145 Ibid., p. 6.
notions of secular modernity.” That is, the secular notion of modern politics cannot coexist with Islamist ambitions of grounding a political scheme derived from the Holy Writ.

Indeed, empirical experiences would lend credence to such assumptions. For instance, leftist observers have criticised Islamist movements for supporting, directly or indirectly, downright reactionary policies and regimes. Samir Amin notes how Islamists have been financed by conservative regimes – like the House of Saud – and how they have been involved in fighting and weakening leftist opposition forces in a variety of countries in the Arab and Muslim world. Besides the widely known cooperation between Islamists and the U.S. in Afghanistan against the Soviet forces, Amin notes how Hamas was groomed – partly by Saudi Arabia - in Palestine as a counterweight to the secular PLO. The Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood has a long history of cooperating with the Western-oriented Hashemite regime against Arab nationalists and socialists, and their ‘brothers’ in Egypt bear a similar legacy of hostilities against the left and - at times, as in the seventies - of cooperation with the Sadat regime against them. Amin also points out how Hezbollah - during the turbulent mid-eighties during the Lebanese war - was a partner in an Iranian-Syrian effort to suppress the secular groups (not allied to Syria). Hezbollah is still accused (although it denies it) of killing scores of Lebanese communists during the turbulent years of the Lebanese war. Contrary to assumptions that Islamists are fighting U.S. hegemony, Amin claims that these are mere slogans, and, rather - due to their sectarian nature - Islamists tend to facilitate and strengthen such American hegemonic efforts. That is, the exclusionary and sectarian oriented Is-

\[\text{\footnotesize 146 Secor 2001, p. 123.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 147 Amin 2007.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 148 One should neither overlook the mass -arrests and executions of communist members on the part of the Khomeini regime in the early eighties on the basis of a list passed to it by the CIA, thereby "virtually [eliminating] the pro-Soviet infrastructure in Iran". Beinin and Stork 1997, p. 11-12.}\]
lamist groupings are undermining the coalescing of a more coherent and unified national consciousness, the formation of which is imperative in challenging the current ‘American order’. Such arguments would indeed be in line with Bobby Sayyid, who argues that “all hegemonies are confronted by dissenting elements; the ability of a hegemonic bloc to remain in power depends on its preventing these elements from coalescing into a counter-hegemonic force.”\(^{149}\)

In other words, whereas an authentic identity may operate as a bulwark to fight and eliminate a certain system (or sentiment underpinning this system, such as a subservient mindset among the colonized), it also may also entail pitfalls of tribalism and division that might hamper further emancipation. Manuel Castells refers to this as a “resistance identity” that is “reactive” by nature. They emerge, he argued, in many different settings in the third world, but he questions whether such “reactive identities” can become “pro-active” and “build a new identity that redefine their position on society and, by doing so, seek the transformation of the over all structures” instead of causing fragmentation into a “constellation of tribes.”\(^{150}\) Schwartsmantel’s claims that identity contrasts with ideology and that the “politics of identity” involves how groups demand recognition for being a group while not really being concerned with broader and profound change in society beyond the group, as is the case with more ideological politics. “It is this that distinguishes identity politics from ideological politics”, he suggests. “The latter seek to bring people together for broad projects of social transformation, while the former accepts the irreducible differences in society and is more sceptical of broad programs of social action.”\(^{151}\) That is, groups asserting an identity are less concerned with forming political parties and working from within the system but are more inclined “to create a space for the growth or

\(^{149}\) Sayyid 1997, p. 86.
\(^{150}\) Castells 1997, p. 9.
\(^{151}\) Schwarzmantel 2008, p. 126
at least preservation of the particular identity in question, and its recognition by and respect from the wider society.”\textsuperscript{152} Still, he remains cautious, since claims of identity recognition can have broader, transformative implications. Feminism, for instance, has a totalising ambition grounded in a wide terrain encompassing both the private and public that \textit{involves the gradual change of values and attitudes}. “What is at stake here is not the capture of political power but a transformation of mentalities, and of mentalities solidly implanted and backed up by centuries of prejudice and tradition. In these ways it seems that feminism is both akin to more traditional ideologies in its attempt at total social transformation, albeit by different and less narrowly political methods, as well as being different from such ideologies.”\textsuperscript{153}

This view of identity corresponds to a Gramscian understanding of a gradual altering of ‘common sense’ comprising the consent in a given hegemonic order. This idea of feminist empowerment as an identity with a more ideological, long-term ambition of transformation also reflects a similarity to nativist impulses of self-assertion that has been discussed above. That is, it involves how identity-making triggers “recognition of the self” aiming at gradually breaking down power structures that are intertwined with the perceived ‘other’ and that assume the internalization of a certain ‘inferiority complex’ among the subjugated. At least this is how many nativist – and Islamist – thinkers and movements view this more dynamic and assertive aspect of identity. This is also how I will argue that Islamism can be understood as an ‘antisystemic thrust’ that goes beyond the more instrumental quest for an Islamic state. From this angle, the Islamist struggle appears more intertwined with the order that it rejects, opening up for a more Gramscian understanding viewing struggles over hegemony as mixed and overlapping. The dynamic of resistance (and its combined impulses of accommodation and rejection) will most likely entail a more open-ended outcome.

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid. p. 117.
2.15 The so-called ‘Lebanonization’ of Hezbollah

Hezbollah claims to be in the forefront of more inclusive Islamist enterprises. In the mid-nineties, the movement’s secretary-general, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, claimed that “we are open to everybody and we have relations with personalities and parties and forces which involves different religious communities, and different ideologies and political currents. I think that Hezbollah was the first Islamist movement, a pioneer, in reaching out to the Arab world on this level of openness, either in Muslim–Christian relations, or in the relation with nationalist parties, or any party which we may agree with on [certain] ideological principles.”\textsuperscript{154} In addition, Hezbollah has also taken a critical position (mostly without naming names) against other Islamist parties that have advocated exclusionist standpoints and positions. Ali Fayyad, a Hezbollah official, claimed in the late nineties that Islamist movements “must accept the idea of political pluralism and differences of opinion and give up their habit of transforming them into antagonistic conflicts. They must also stop using violence in the struggle for power and avoid sinking into the logic of civil war that threatens the unity of Arab-Muslim societies.”\textsuperscript{155} To reiterate, how can we combine such accommodating positions with the revolutionary ambition of Hezbollah’s presumed – and persistent – commitment to being a vanguard of Khomeini’s Islamic revolution? How does Hezbollah reconcile its adherence to Khomeini’s doctrine of the Welayat al-Faqih to the pluralist system of the Lebanese state? Moreover, how does Hezbollah relate to the nation-state itself, as this appears to subvert any transnational ambition? Like Roy, Mohammed Ayoob has pointed out that Hezbollah belongs to a category of Islamists that are distinguished from the more “transnationally”-oriented Islamists, such as the various networks that make up Al-Qaida’s project. Whereas Hezbollah “works within the con-

\textsuperscript{154} Al-Bayrak February 19, 1997.
\textsuperscript{155} Qouted in Le Monde Diplomatique, November 1999.
fines of a state system, aiming at liberation of secession”, the transnational category of groups “operates in defiance of such parameters, in near total disregard of national boundaries.”\textsuperscript{156} The idea is that, whereas al-Qaida operates according to a global and imprecise agenda (which is nevertheless determined by its opposition to global power structures imposed by the U.S.), Hezbollah aims more straightforwardly at liberating territory. Indeed, this suggestion was also made by Hezbollah’s vice secretary-general Naim Qassem who – with respect to the differences between Al-Qaida and his own movement - told me that “al-Qaida has adopted a position against the Americans to go after them directly.

They have declared this and expressed that they will confront the American presence wherever the US may be present in the whole world, whereas Hezbollah’s choice has been entirely different. Hezbollah perceives that the confrontation must be restricted to the Israelis where they are occupiers of the land, and that does not involve going after all Jews in the world, or even going after the Israelis wherever they may be present in the world. Therefore Hezbollah [and al-Qaida’s] projects are poles apart...Hezbollah’s project has to do with liberating the occupied land whereas al-Qaida’s project is about confronting the US directly as an international hegemon.\textsuperscript{157}

Qassem contended that “those who examine the background closely will find a clear distinction between these movements.” Such a position, declared emphatically and repeatedly by numerous Hezbollah officials, is part of the discourse of the movement’s process of Lebanonization. Still, in this thesis I will suggest that the notion of ‘Islamico-nationalism’ is to be situated in the various tensions that the strategic option of accommodation and resistance entail. I will also question whether Hezbollah has subordinated itself to a national path, and I will do so by questioning the idea of the ‘national’ as

\textsuperscript{156} Ayoob 2008, p. 113.
\textsuperscript{157} Authors’ interview, Beirut, March 2004.
such. That is, does nationalism primarily involve ambitions and desires that are confined to the nation-state, being remote or even isolated from larger struggles and conflicts? Moreover, does nationalism necessarily contradict Islamism as a transnational message and mission? As mentioned previously, I will suggest that Hezbollah has been able to combine rather successfully the aspirations both of assuming a national identity and of maintaining the commitment to the transnational ambitions of the Islamic revolution. In this sense, the distinction between the national and the transnational becomes blurry, since Hezbollah is rather using the national for a transnational goal. The aim is thus to illustrate how the movement has applied this as a working strategy to uphold its cause and struggle. That is, how can we understand Hezbollah’s way of promoting this Islamist idea of ‘truth’ and mission within the confines of structures that it essentially rejects but strategically adopts?

2.16 The changing character of a national identity

It has been argued thus far that perspectives of Islamist absolutism or maximalism are problematic when considering the struggles and strategies that Islamists are involved in, even though they do make sense in terms of an ideological ideal. Islamism will be discussed as a project and identity that is formed – and transformed - in a dynamic historical struggle for independence and emancipation and, thus, has features in common with nationalism. However, such reflection does not necessarily restrict nationalism to the confines of the borders of the nation-state but rather situates the mobilisation of nationalism in a struggle that goes beyond the borders of the nation-state and challenges a more regional system of power. Or, as will be suggested in the following, nationalism is ultimately a political project that expresses the various conflicts that are taking place within and beyond those borders. The
understanding of the nation, expressed as an identity, also demonstrates the ongoing challenges to and conflicts within prevailing structures of power. This is especially true in the Middle East, where, as Raymond Hinnebusch points out, borders were imposed and conflicts more or less built into the structures of the various nation-states. Nations are, thus, not given but are continuously reconstructed as a result of the contending forces that either protect or defy the identities and structures of power that they represent.

Before approaching how Hezbollah projects itself as a contender in the shaping of Lebanese identity and the struggle this involves, it is worth considering the very construction – or re-construction – of cultural, national and Islamist identities, if not ideology. That is, the idea of an identity being constructed involves a subjective dimension, contrary to identities perceived as fixed or given. The feeling of belonging to a group or a nation or of being a member of a certain creed or mission is derived from a specific context, often with a purpose contingent upon contextual exigencies, be they local, national, regional or global. With regard to nations and nationalism, Benedict Anderson conceived of them as “imagined communities”, i.e., as subjective edifices rather than as given or “natural” bodies of cohesion. The “imagination” of a community and unity was rather the product of certain objective factors, such as language, borders, print media, common administration and so on, which produced the feeling of a coherent whole, a national culture around which the community would coalesce. Such an idea of the nation as emerging out of the structures of the state contradicted many nationalist accounts, which assume the nation to be a natural body based on cohesion throughout history. Many ‘imagined’ and assumed ‘nations’ and ‘peoples’ are in fact rather young, since a great deal of the state structures generating their sense of belonging are quite novel.

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159 Anderson 1989.
Yet such structures are not unproblematic, since they create various – often conflicting – notions of belonging and community, that is, who belongs and who does not and under what conditions. As Immanuel Wallerstein notes, the “increasing definition of state-structures has led to the shaping, reshaping, creation, destruction, revival of ‘peoples’”, and “[t]o the extent that these ‘peoples’ are defined by themselves (and others) as controlling or having the ‘moral’ right to control state-structures, these ‘peoples’ become ‘nations’. To the extent that a given ‘people’ is not defined as having the right to control as a state-structure, these people become ‘minorities’ or ‘ethnic groups’. Defining given states as nation-states is an aid in strengthening the state.”

Wallerstein concludes that there is a conflict involved in this very definition of the nation-state, which is accepted by some and rejected by others. The various “nationalist” projects, he argues, can work both to sustain and to challenge structures of power: “The peoples are not hazardly defined, but neither are they simple and unfixed derivations from an historical past. They are solidarity groupings whose boundaries are a matter of constant social transmittal/redefinition.” This is akin to Larrain, who argues that “[c]ultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power.”

Yet, these histories involve their own meanings and experiences of privilege or persecution, domination or subordination. While a functionalist theory of identity would assume that a sense of belonging is constituted for the sake of stability, a theory centred on conflict would rather contend that these formations are the tools and products of power struggles. According to Paul Gilbert, the wide range of groups across society seldom nurture a “unitary culture” but will rather experience “a variety of cultural constructions

161 Ibid.
resulting from contestation between conflicting interests in the formation or development of the group.”\textsuperscript{163} While a national identity, he notes, “can seem natural and immemorial…its political character shows it is neither of these things”, since “national consciousness is a response to specific political circumstances” and these circumstances may vary. Gilbert suggests that it is “a consciousness of different things, of different ways in which people may be collected together in their differing circumstances. It is for this reason that it should not be viewed as a consciousness of some pre-existing collectivity.”\textsuperscript{164} This point is also succinctly put by Larraine, who claims that the “public version” of a national identity wants to affirm that there is only one of its kind and that it is “able to determine with precision what belongs to it and what does not, and [which is] more or less shared by everyone in society. In fact the selective and excluding character of the symbolic process shows that there is nothing natural or spontaneous about it and that many other versions could equally be constructed around different selections and exclusions. \textit{A national identity is always, therefore, a terrain of conflict.}”\textsuperscript{165}

This notion of continuous inconsistencies in the making of a national identity was apparent in the anti-colonial struggles in which the colonized would often assume an identity designed by the colonial powers. This was evident, for instance, when the Middle East borders and administrations were designed by France and Great Britain with the aim of undermining more cohesive formations of Arab nationalism. The ‘Sykes-Picot Agreement’ of May 1916 is a case in point. This agreement stipulated how Paris and London would divide the Levant (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Pal-

\textsuperscript{163} Gilbert, 2000, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid. p. 59. “Now the political character of national identity has an immediate consequence. It is that, because politics always involves a struggle for power, a national identity is a contestable identity. While some national identities are relatively well-sedimented into a stable and permanent political system, none is immune to contestation and thus none can be avowed or ascribed without fear of contradiction or emendation.” Ibid., p. 60.
\textsuperscript{165} Larraine 2000, p. 35 (my own emphasis).
estine) into different interest zones, enabling both to impose their control and domination. Furthermore, while anti-colonial struggles often led the subjected people to cohere around slogans of independence directed against the colonial centres of power, the era of independence often experienced a continued conflict, though of a different kind since certain groups might have cultivated particular positions of power and privilege from within the colonial legacy. At the moment of emancipation, their status (and the history behind it) was contested by those marginalised and repressed during the same period of time. Again, as we shall see, Lebanon is a case in point, since one variety of Lebanese nationalism, which stressed the ‘authenticity’ of the ‘Lebanese nation’, was in fact the ambition of one group – the Maronites – to secure an incumbent position of domination (backed by the French), which was continuously contested by more marginalised groups, not least by the deprived Shi’ite Muslims among whom Hezbollah’s struggle was to be rooted, generated and cultivated, and who challenged the Maronites’ claim to power and the particular form of Lebanese nationalism it expressed. Nationalism emerged as a continuously contested expression and substance. While certain varieties of nationalism served certain structures of power, other expressions of nationalism challenged these structures. Nations are, thus, not given but continuously reconstructed, as a result of contending forces that either protect or defy the identities and structures of power they represent.

2.17 Concluding remarks and empirical chapters

In this chapter, it has been argued that Islamism is rooted in a specific historical struggle for independence, from the era of anti-colonialism to more modern modes of resistance against an order that is still perceived as subor-
ordinated to Western schemes. In this way, Islamism shares common ground with various nationalist forces that have also embarked on a project of emancipation. It has been argued that this notion of struggle, or resistance, is essential to the Islamist project, since it adds a crucial dimension to its quest to establish an Islamic state. Indeed, the claim has been that this quest should not be seen as an end in itself but as a strategy to maintain this project of resistance. This notion of resistance can be understood as a crucial cornerstone, even if an Islamic state is not in the cards or not realizable, as it comprises a crucial dimension of Islamism when considering strategies of accommodation. That is, could such an ambition of resistance be combined, or even promoted, from within a strategy of accommodation? In order to focus on this seeming paradox, I have taken up a Gramscian perspective that treats a radical movement’s efforts to conduct its struggle from within the system, or what Gramsci labelled a ‘war of position’ (in stark contrast to a ‘war of manoeuvre’). The Gramscian ‘war of position’ is taking place in that struggle over ‘hegemony’, and it has been suggested that Islamists can be seen as ‘counter-hegenomic’ movements in this regard. Yet, the chapter also noted that a Gramscian strategy can be criticised by more radical factions for ‘selling-out’ to the regime in charge. To formulate this in a more problematic way, if a radical current intends to co-opt the system through a strategy of accommodation, it can also be co-opted by this system. The important point, nonetheless, is that these efforts at accommodation and, presumably, resistance involve a struggle over norms and institutions that necessitate empirical investigation. Furthermore, it has been claimed that the notion of resistance is best understood through an approach that takes Islamist self-understandings into account. Such an approach will bring more clarity to what is actually being resisted and why, and, significantly, it can bring a better understanding to what the religious dimension in this resistance project entails. Indeed, it has also been suggested that such an approach may bring an alternative dimension to the rather instrumental notion that Islam-
Islamism primarily involves the quest for an Islamic state or that it can be considered a ‘failure’ if this state is not established. In this regard, it has been suggested that Islamism can be seen as offering a ‘critical diagnosis’ of society that rejects the assumption of rationalism, i.e., that state and society should be subordinated to human reason alone. While Islamists propose a more religiously guided agenda, they see the Islamic state as a ‘remedy’ in relation to this diagnosis. However, if this remedy is not realizable, the challenge is to understand what remedies are proposed and what diagnosis Islamists make of surrounding conditions. This approach challenges the thesis that Islamism has ‘failed’ and offers an alternative approach. This notion of a diagnosis is reminiscent of Wallerstein’s response to the alleged ‘death of Marxism’. That is, while many observers, after the end of the cold war, conceived of Marxism as a dead ideology, Wallerstein responded that it was “Marxist-Leninism” that was deceased, i.e., the radical project of gaining state power and imposing a Communist utopia form above. However, Marxism as a critical perspective and reading of reality – the capitalist world-economy – was far from dead. Rather, as a critical diagnosis of the world order, it was very much alive. As Wallerstein suggested, “[w]hat has not died is the antisystemic thrust – popular and ‘Marxian’ in language – which inspired real social forces.”

A similar point, I argue, could also be made in relation to Islamism as a critical perspective of ‘antisystemic thrust’. If studies on Islamism are too focused on how Islamists strive to establish an Islamic state, their very reason for doing so might go missing. Or in other words, if an Islamic state is seen as a ‘cure’ (the remedy for solving the ills of mankind), then such a ‘cure’ is derived from a diagnosis. And while the cure might not be realistic (as Hezbollah, and other Islamists, claim is the case in the context in which it operates), alternative remedies might be possible. Yet, these alternative remedies are best understood in terms of the specific diagnosis from which they are derived. Why this quest for an Islamic state? What pur-

\[\text{167} \quad \text{Wallerstein 1995, p. 220.}\]
pose does Islam serve? How should we understand alternative objectives of Islamist movements that are applicable to such a diagnosis? How should we conceive of this tension within the Islamist project between accommodation and resistance? Is it possible to submit to a given corruptive secular order while maintaining a radical pursuit?

As we approach the empirical chapters of this thesis, it will be assumed that Hezbollah has faced the above mentioned dilemma of integration and that it has – from both within and outside of the movement – been severely criticised for ‘selling-out’ to the Lebanese state. As noted above, it also remains widely debated to what extent Hezbollah has ‘adapted’ to given parameters of the Lebanese state or whether it is still engaged in the revolutionary enterprise outlined by Ayatollah Khomeini. There will, thus, be an emphasis in the following chapters on Hezbollah’s own discourse as to how it has dealt with this presumed dilemma or paradox. Under what conditions did Hezbollah emerge to conduct its resistance? In what kinds of decisions did it accommodate the Lebanese state? How does Hezbollah view the problems and opportunities with such strategies of accommodation?

The following parts of this dissertation are an empirical endeavour that encompasses three chapters structured in a chronological order. The first chapter offers an outline of the Lebanese conflict and the outbreak of the Lebanese war. This conflict over the Lebanese state forms the backdrop of the 1982 Israeli invasion and the emergence of Hezbollah. That is, the Israelis did not invade a ‘vacuum’ in 1982; the Israeli troops entered a context already rift with various contests and struggles. Above all, perhaps, for the purpose of this dissertation, it was a contest over Lebanon that had been going on ever since the state was formed in 1920. That is, the Lebanese state was born out of conflict, which it in many ways still endures. The first part of this thesis will, thus, consider the historical contours of this conflict and how it has always been an integral part of wider regional struggles, since this is increasingly important in understanding how various groups in the Leba-
nese arena, like Hezbollah, view Lebanon´s position in this regional struggle, especially that of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The second part of the thesis involves how the Lebanese war ended with the Ta’if Accord in 1990, how this offered a new opportunity for Hezbollah and how the movement reasoned and contemplated its strategies in this new era as it developed throughout the nineties, especially the way Hezbollah put great and painstaking efforts into protecting its resistance and mobilising the resistance as a ‘national endeavour’. The third part considers the phase that followed the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in May, 2000, when many observers suggested that the war in the Lebanese south might be over with. In fact, it was not, and Hezbollah and Israel continued their ‘wrestling match’ in the border zone. This part considers how Hezbollah, through its triumph in ousting the Israelis from the south, opted to convert its victory into a platform for continued resistance in which Hezbollah would maintain a certain ‘bargain’ with the Lebanese regime, enabled by Syrian tutelage and mediation. In that sense, Hezbollah’s experience in the Middle East differs from many other Islamist parties that have been repressed or ‘neutralised’ in various ways by a state that has conformed to U.S. hegemony. Hezbollah, on the other hand, has effectively, through nearly three decades of struggle, obstructed Lebanon from moving towards that path.

In sum, in contrast to those who argue that Hezbollah suffers from political ‘schizophrenia’ in its attempt to forge a precarious balance between its Islamic commitments to the radical doctrines of Ayatollah Khomeini and its declared loyalties to the Lebanese state, it will be argued here that Hezbollah has been rather consistent in its ambitions since it emerged as a resistance movement against the Israeli invasion of 1982 and its ensuing process of blending Islamist zeal with nationalist fervour. Hezbollah’s project is deeply embedded in the predicaments of postcolonial states tragically squeezed in a regional conflict of international stature. Its so-called ‘Lebanonization’ process was not about adapting to an already given national identity of the Leb-
anese state. Rather, it tapped into a historical contest over the very national identity of Lebanon, which remains unresolved.
Hezbollah’s initial worldwide fame arrived with a series of devastating ‘suicide attacks’ against Western and Israeli targets in Lebanon in the early eighties. On April 18, 1983, the American embassy in Beirut was blown up, killing 63 people. On October 16 of the same year, another suicide bomber with a truckload of explosives ripped apart the U.S. Marine headquarters in Beirut. A few minutes later, a similar attack was directed against the French headquarters in another part of the town, taking the life of 58 French paratroopers. In Tyre, a coastal town in the Lebanese south, the Israeli military headquarters were turned into rubble, also by a suicide bomber, killing 29 soldiers. These attacks signalled the birth of a fiery reaction and resistance against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and its aftermath of political schemes and strategies to forge a pro-Western government in Beirut that would be able to sign a peace agreement, like that between Israel and Egypt three years earlier. In June 1982 Israeli forces had invaded Lebanon on a massive scale to redraw the political map of the Middle East. The Israelis declared that their ambition was to make way for a 40 km wide ‘security zone’ to protect the northern settlements in Israel from harassment by PLO guerrillas residing in south Lebanon. Yet, behind such a declaration there was a larger agenda. Firstly, not only should the Palestinian guerrillas be pushed northwards, but Ariel Sharon, at the time Israeli defence minister and architect behind the invasion, and Menachem Begin, the Israeli prime minister, sought to weaken or even eliminate the PLO as a political and military body by delivering it a “crushing blow.” Secondly, Israel wanted to oust the

168 For comprehensive accounts of the intentions behind the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, see Schiff & Ya'ari 1984; Rabonovich 1984; Yaniv 1987.
Syrian forces that had been deployed in Lebanon since 1976 from the country in order to restore authority to the Maronite groups within the Phalange Party and its leader Bashir Gemayel, thus facilitating the formation of a government in Beirut ready and able to sign a peace treaty with the Jewish state, just as Egypt did in 1979. Hence, Hezbollah’s emergence can be understood as the birth of resistance (backed by Syria and Iran) against this transpiring order and illustrates how Lebanon in the eighties had been transformed into the central arena for the Arab-Israeli conflict, in which the ordeal of the Palestinians is central.

There is also the more local and national context that prepared the ground for Hezbollah’s emergence. Its convergence and interrelation with a larger regional dynamic offer the terrain and space in which Hezbollah has sought its raison d’être and within which it makes its moves and forms its thinking and strategy. This chapter begins with a historical overview of the formation of the Lebanese state and the various conflicts that developed alongside the configuration of this state. It acknowledges how the Lebanese identity as a nation-state, which in many ways was formed by and during the French Mandate after WWI, was deeply contested from the very beginning. This contest over identity involved domestic structures of power, especially the confessional political system. It also highlights how Lebanese identity was controversial in terms of how the state should position itself in relation to the ongoing struggles for independence in the Middle East. Especially difficult in this regard was the Arab-Israeli conflict that broke out after the Palestinian exodus in 1948.

3.1 The formation of the Lebanese state and civil war

Before taking up the Lebanese war, it is reasonable, as Abukhalil suggests, to distinguish the Lebanese war, which broke out in 1975, from the Leba-
nese conflict, which has been going on ever since the creation of the state in 1920, if not longer. Abukhalil describes the “major problem in Lebanese history and politics” as the novelty of the very idea of Lebanon as a nation-state. He underlines the lack of consensus among the various groups residing in today’s Lebanon about “the identity of the new state or about the formula of power sharing in government. There was substantial opposition among the Lebanese Muslims to the creation of a state called Lebanon because it would lead to the fragmentation of the Arab world.” Abukhalil 1994, p. 42. The Lebanese state was, thus, born out of conflict (like many other third world states), since its borders and political system were contested from the very beginning. After all, the Lebanese state was basically established under the auspices of the French mandate after WWI, when the Ottoman Empire disintegrated and its ‘pieces’ were shared according to the scheme outlined by Paris and London in the so-called ‘Sykes-Picot Agreement’ in 1916. This agreement carved out their respective spheres of influence in the Middle East, i.e., France was to administer Syria and Lebanon and Britain Iraq and the historical Palestine, divided soon after in 1948. For France, the mandate was a means of asserting control over the region. The establishment of the nation-state of ‘Greater Lebanon’ served this end, since the body of the state would be sliced out of what Arab nationalists - in their demand for independence from the Ottoman empire and the Europeans - referred to as ‘Greater Syria’, i.e., a large patch of territory of which Lebanon was only a part and no ‘real’ nation-state, as these Arab nationalists argued.

However, in their effort to impose control, the French authorities deepened their already close relation to the Maronite community, which resided mainly in ‘Mount Lebanon’, an old province of the Ottoman Empire where Maronite groups had for centuries sought refuge from persecution within a realm dominated by Sunni Muslims. To the Maronites, ‘Mount Lebanon’ signified the potential for the creation of a nation-state, and this

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ambition had fostered strong feelings of a “Lebanese nationalism” as distinguished from the Arab world, which was more rooted in a ‘Phoenician heritage’. Bitter and bloody conflicts with the Druze communities in the area strengthened both group cohesion among the Maronites as well as their awareness of the necessity of establishing a formula for ‘communal coexistence’. Still, as a group, the Maronites had long benefited from their privileged relations with France and the Vatican in terms of trade, finance and religion. That augmented their strength as a cohesive and assertive group demanding a special position in the new state, readily cooperating with the French to achieve that end.

However, there were conflicting sides within this brand of ‘Lebanese nationalism’ that flourished among the Maronites, since some of them saw the ‘Mountain’ as the ‘true homeland’ where they could assume more reliable control, others felt the need to construct a more viable state and accepted the inclusion of ‘additional’ areas where many Muslim groups resided. Conflicting sentiments thus permeated the Lebanese nation-state: while its detractors among Arab nationalists saw the ‘Lebanese nationalists’ as a privileged group, shrewdly cooperating with powerful Western backers, many Christians saw the Lebanese nation-state as a “safe refuge”; a guarantee from being dominated and ‘swallowed up’ by the Muslim-dominated Arab world. There was a relation of mutual mistrust: both sides saw the other as ‘collaborators’ with outside forces: the Lebanese nationalists with the Western powers and the Arab nationalists with the Arab regimes in the region. The ‘National Pact’ of 1943, also referred to as a ‘Gentlemen’s Agreement’, was concluded as the Lebanese state became independent from France. It was an

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170 As Petran notes, “...of the major sects in Lebanon, the Maronite community alone was located almost exclusively in the Mountain, and so acquired a geographic as well as a religious identity. As these identities over time merged into one, Mount Lebanon became for the Maronites their ‘historic homeland’ and a national tradition and national myth evolved, assiduously cultivated by the Maronite Church.” Petran 1987, p. 24.
attempt – worked out by the most prominent Maronite and Sunnite leaders, Bishara al-Khoury and Riad al-Solh – to strike a balance between the many conflicting differences within the Lebanese body politic.

First of all, the most heated disagreements had been tempered during the thirties, as many Muslims and Arab nationalist groups both saw advantages, and less of a ‘danger’, with the Lebanese state. Hanis A. Faris notes that the National Pact was informed by three basic principles: accommodation, representation and co-optation.\textsuperscript{171} Domestically, the National Pact expressed the ambition of establishing a formula of ‘coexistence’ (\textit{aysh-mushtarak}) that provided each community with posts in the cabinet and members in parliament: the president was to be a Christian Maronite, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, the speaker of the parliament a Shi’ite Muslim and the head of the armed forces a Druze. In parliament, the seats were distributed according to a 6:5 ratio: for every six seats given to Christians, the Muslims were allotted five. Hence, the idea was that no community would be able to impose its will on the other, and the maintenance of the system was dependent on the shared interests of each community.\textsuperscript{172} In terms of national identity and international relations, the National Pact sought to position itself in the “middle of the road” by suggesting that Lebanese identity have an ‘Arab face’ but that no community should seek alliances from outside; i.e., the Maronite community should abstain from seeking support from their Western backers, and the Muslims or Arab nationalists should not ally with other Arab states or seek an integration with “Greater Syria”. How-

\textsuperscript{171} Faris 1993, p. 17-29.

\textsuperscript{172} As Hanf notes: ‘The country is never governed by a simple majority, always by a grand coalition; in effect every large community has a right of veto; under Article 95 of the Constitution proportional representation applies to the executive and administration; Articles 9 and 10 guarantee the communities wide cultural autonomy. Although the Constitution permits other forms of government, the Pact institutionalized consociational democracy as constitutional reality: important decisions cannot be taken by simple majority; they require consensus and compromise.” Hanf 1993, p. 73.
ever, while this formula (*sighra*) of coexistence was meant to facilitate compromise and balance, it could also, by a different reading, be seen as inflexible and rigid, if not unjust and offensively unbalanced. While those favouring the National Pact stressed the compromises between the communities and ‘Christian fear’, a different reading pointed to the way the Pact granted one community (the Christians, and especially the Maronites) a superior position in relation to the others, whose votes and voices would count for less.\(^{173}\)

What is more, this formula of coexistence would be subjected to severe tensions as the region ‘heated up’. The Palestinian trauma in 1948 radicalized many Arab nationalist groups and movements that felt betrayed by the ‘feeble’ Arab regimes, as they proved incapable of rescuing the Palestinians. The massive and popular support for Nasserism that cut across the Arab world in the fifties also impressed Lebanese Arab nationalists who became more assertive as the Maronite-dominated regime became more insecure. This deepened complexity became conspicuous in the crises of 1958, when the Western-friendly Lebanese president, Camille Chamoun, tried to extend his presidency with the backing of the U.S. Chamoun called for assistance from a U.S. Marine intervention - according to the Eisenhower-doctrine - when he faced militant opposition, some of which was prepared for armed opposition to the state.\(^{174}\) After violent and deadly clashes that lasted for some weeks, Chamoun left the presidency, to be succeeded by the Lebanese army general, Fouad Chehab.\(^{175}\) The 1958 crises ended with the motto ‘no victor, no vanquished’, which emerged as a slogan and became a formula for

\(^{173}\) Ibid.

\(^{174}\) The ‘Eisenhower-doctrine’ refers to the American president Diwght David Eisenhower who in the late fifties promised to support any country that claimed independence from what was deemed to be Soviet interference.

\(^{175}\) The Lebanese elites were divided over regional allegiances. The president, Camille Chamoun, wanted admittance into the Baghdad Pact, an initiative by Washington to counter ‘communist inroads’ and nationalist aspirations, triggered by the Nasserist triumph in the Suez crises the previous year.
co-existence, even during the Ta’if era. The intention was to restore the common ambition expressed in the Pact that no group in Lebanon should ever ‘outdo’ or dominate another. In that way, Fouad Chehab made great efforts to improve the conditions for maintaining the “balance” of the National Pact. Firstly, he sought a modus operandi with Abdul Nasser by concluding an agreement with the Egyptian leader that Lebanon should be left out of the ‘regional turmoil’. Secondly, he would invest in infrastructure in the heretofore ignored areas of Lebanon, especially the south, thereby giving discriminated areas and communities better opportunities for education, health care and socio-economic improvements. In addition, his presidency would empower the security services and keep oppositional groups in check, especially within the growing Lebanese left and among the various Palestinian groups in Lebanon. Conditions, however, became direr.

In 1964, Chehab was succeeded by Charles Helou, who was to face the tremendous challenges of the 1967 war and its consequences. Unlike other Arab regimes, the Lebanese army did not partake in the war, but the country was nonetheless subjected to the Arab defeat and the second Palestinian disaster, as massive numbers of Palestinian refugees sought security and solace in the Lebanese south and the Bekaa Valley. Many of them were armed and were members of PLO guerrilla groups determined to carry on the struggle for their lost homeland from Lebanese soil.\(^{176}\) Hence, the Arab-Israeli war entered Lebanese territory directly with disastrous consequences, as the Lebanese state appeared unable to respond to the challenge in an adequate manner. Significantly, the humiliation of the Arab regimes and armies in the war entailed the rising prominence of the PLO, which – in the eyes and hopes of many - resurrected the lost dignity of the Arabs. For Lebanon, this ascending star of the PLO was politically explosive, since the Palestini-

\(^{176}\) Many Palestinian refugees – around 110 000 - also sought refuge in Lebanon, especially in the south, after the war in 1948. However, the difference in 1967 was that many of the Palestinian newcomers were armed and thus drastically militarised the situation in the south. See Brynen 1993.
an ordeal divided the country. Helena Cobban notes that while the “wave of support for the infant Palestinian guerrilla movement occurred within Lebanon as in the other Arab countries,” there was in Lebanon “a significant group…a section of the Maronites” which expressed their reservations about the Palestinian movement openly, from the beginning, and the “Palestinian issue was thus brought to the very heart of the Lebanese political system.”\(^{177}\) Firstly, the Israelis made clear that they would not tolerate Palestinian operations taking place from Lebanese territory and that it would hold the Lebanese state responsible for any such attacks.\(^{178}\) Secondly, the Lebanese state was too weak to curb the Palestinians, both in a military and a political sense. That is, the PLO guerrillas were heavily armed and experienced in battle and not that easy to deal with. Equally important politically, they enjoyed at this time significant popular support among many Lebanese, especially among the Muslims and Arab nationalists who identified with the Palestinian cause, seeing it as an Arab struggle against the supremacy of the Western powers. In addition, Arab regimes vehemently protested when the Lebanese army turned against the PLO.

This political dilemma was ‘resolved’ by the so-called Cairo Agreement, agreed upon by the Lebanese army and the PLO and mediated by Abdul Nasser. It stipulated that certain areas in the Lebanese south would be subject to Palestinian self-rule from where the PLO were allowed to launch attack against Israeli targets. In return, the Palestinians would be obliged “to

\(^{177}\) Cobban 1987 (my own emphasis). As Cobban notes: “The Lebanese could not as easily set aside their differences on this new issue as they had after 1958, over the whole question of Nasserism. For the Palestinian guerrillas movement existed right within Lebanon itself, among the quarter-million Palestinian refugees who formed at least 10 per cent of Lebanon’s total population.” Ibid., p. 102.

\(^{178}\) Characteristic for this policy is the event in 1968 when Israeli commandos blew up 13 civilian aircrafts at Beirut airport in response to the hijacking of an Israeli civilian aircraft in Athens by Palestinian gunmen. The Israeli Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan justified the raid by declaring that if the “Government of Lebanon allows the [PLO branch] Fatah to train on its territory they must be punished.” Yaniv p. 41. p. 544-45.
maintain discipline among their own troops and not to interfere in Lebanese affairs.” However, these agreements were to be broken. Similar to the turmoil in 1958, opposition forces on the left began to question – if not downright denounce - the logic and the righteousness of the ‘National Pact’ and the motto of ‘no victor, no vanquished’, which they saw as merely benefiting the privileged elites and the domination of Western powers that preferred Lebanon – like the rest of the Arab world – to ignore the Palestinian plight and cause. The Lebanese National Movement (LNM), headed by the Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt, engaged an array of disparate forces in the Lebanese opposition that promoted slogans of ‘anti-imperialism’ and ‘anti-Zionism’ and that demanded an end to the confessional system and, consequently, the National Pact. Jumblatt referred to the Maronite isolationists as “the spoilt children of the colonizers” who “entrenched themselves in sectarianism”. He claimed that the “carving up of Syria” was a “fairly barbarous act” and similarly described the Lebanese confessional formula as “doomed from birth” while asserting that Lebanon had to be “secular” and “progressive” in order to survive. Hence, backed by the PLO that, despite of the Cairo Agreement, became more and more involved in Lebanese domestic politics, the LNM-PLO alliance posed a radical - and even existential - danger to the regime and the traditional elites in Beirut. As the Lebanese army was too weak to take any action, Maronite groups began to arm their own militias in

179 Hanf 1993, p. 166.
180 Kamal Jumblatt argued: “The eventual partition of Syria was indeed purely artificial. Mandate Palestine, Mandate Lebanon, Mandate Syria and Jordan should have been a single state. Within such a framework, all the minorities could have finally overcome the temptations of sectarianism and committed themselves to that Syro-Arab nationalism which has been the basis for independence struggles throughout the previous 1200 years. As I see it, this nationalism was the only viable for the region. People cobbled together a Lebanese nationalism, a Palestinian nationalism, a Syrian nationalism and a Jordanian nationalism, whilst in fact the whole notion is anti-national and runs counter to the political orientation of our entire history.” See Jumblatt 1982, p. 47.
order preserve the power and privileges given them under the confessional regime or to protect their own idea of the Lebanese homeland.

In the beginning of the seventies, Lebanon was becoming hopelessly divided. The elected president, Suleiman Franjieh (1970-1976), began to arm the Maronite militias as an ‘anti-Palestinian force’ to assist the Lebanese army, even though they failed to suppress the PLO guerrillas, only to further polarise the country. By that time, the Palestinian cause was deeply entrenched in Lebanese domestic politics, mobilising militant parties on both sides of the divide that utilized the presence of the PLO for their own objectives: the Maronite groups to alarm their constituencies of the Palestinian ‘threat’ to the Lebanese state and homeland, and the LNM to promote radical change of the entire Lebanese system. As a result of socio-economic deterioration, a government that was divided between the Maronite and Sunni elites (the latter who were “losing the street,” as many Muslims were radicalised by the turmoil) and foreign intervention that in no way assisted efforts to reconcile differences but rather exacerbated the polarisation, a full scale civil war finally broke out in 1975. The formula of balance and coexistence as expressed (ambiguously) in the National Pact was thus no longer able to withstand domestic and regional pressures.

The following section of this chapter will illustrate how two of the primary external actors on the Lebanese scene, Syria and Israel, became even more involved in the unfolding Lebanese drama and how they also established their own ‘spheres of interest’ in the country. It is important to acknowledge this as a contextual backdrop to how the Shi’ite mobilisation occurred in relation to the Syrian and Israeli presence. This is also crucial for grasping the structures of power and interests in which Hezbollah would later emerge and develop its own project of resistance.

Asad Abukhalil notes how the PLO received massive support from many Lebanese when they resisted attempts by the Lebanese army in 1973 to quell the PLO, like the Jordanian army did in the ‘Black September’ in 1970-1971. See Abukhalil 1988 and 1990.
3.2 Civil war, divisions and invasions

The first phase of the Lebanese civil war, which was horrendously cruel, almost ended in a victory for the LNM-PLO alliance. However, outside forces would not allow that to happen. In 1976, Syrian forces intervened in the conflict – at the behest of the regime in Beirut – in order to safeguard the status quo and obstruct any further advances of the LNM-PLO. For Syria, a radical take-over by the LNM and the PLO in Beirut was seen as a ‘threat’ to its own possibility of controlling and dominating the Palestinian struggle. The Syrian president Hafez al-Assad considered there to be too many dangerous and volatile dimensions and elements for this to be handled by the Palestinians themselves.\(^\text{182}\) Neither did Damascus have any trust in the leadership of Kamal Jumblatt. There was no love lost between the Syrian leaders and the LNM chieftain, and Jumblatt would be assassinated in 1976, widely believed to be the work of the Syrians. By intervening and saving the Beirut regime, Syria would gain a stake in preserving the Lebanese status quo, however turbulent and unruly, but without restoring any authority to the Lebanese state. As Syrian forces entered Lebanon, “the war had turned the [Lebanese] state into an empty shell. The authority of Lebanon’s president, government, parliament and central bureaucracy was limited to a small part of Beirut”, and the rest of the country was “divided among external forces and local baronies.”\(^\text{183}\) However, Damascus’s clout in the Lebanese drama was also accepted in a ‘tacit understanding’ (even though grudgingly) by the U.S. and Israel, who both naturally feared the consequences of ‘too radical’ a regime in Beirut, especially one allied with (if not directed by) the PLO. Within the framework of this “tacit understanding”, certain “red lines” were established. The Israelis laid claim to the south as its sphere of interest; the line was drawn at the Litani River, which Syrian troops were not allowed to

\(^{182}\) For an overview, see Patrick Seale, 1988, p. 267-289.
\(^{183}\) Rabinovich 1983, p. 57.
Syria was, thus, allowed to maintain its military presence in the Lebanese landscape of disorder and strife, thereby depriving any Lebanese party of a decisive victory. This was to be the Syrian strategy in Lebanon for many years to follow.\footnote{185}{Hafez Al-Asad outlined this strategy in a formative speech in 1976, after the intervention, i.e., the dangers and opportunities that Syria perceived in Lebanon. The entire speech can be found in Rabinovic 1983, p. 183-218.}

With respect to Israel, it had been involved in fighting the PLO in the south ever since the sixties, using various means in this effort. Firstly, it promoted what the Israeli scholar Avner Yaniv refers to as a “retaliation policy” with heavy bombings and shelling as well as raids across the border in response to every Palestinian guerrilla attack. These attacks were often aimed at turning Lebanese civilians in the south against the PLO.\footnote{186}{Yaniv 1987, p. 39-40. In addition, Ahmad Beydon, a Professor of Sociology at the Lebanese University of Beirut, who grew up in the south during this period of time, asserts that the Israelis “carried out operations with no other purpose than to terrorize the civilian population and make them understand the price of tolerating the Palestinian presence.” Beydon 1992, p. 39} Israel also sought Lebanese allies. Sa’ad Haddad was a Christian major in the Lebanese army from the south with a strong dislike for the Palestinian presence. He became a close partner to the Zionists state, as he assumed responsibility for building up the South Lebanese Army (SLA), initially made up mainly of Christian soldiers who had deserted the disintegrating regular army for the sake of defending their homes in the south from the PLO.\footnote{187}{Richard Norton argues that these soldiers were fertile ground for Israel and Major Haddad, since among them, hatred of “the PLO, and hatred of the Lebanese Muslims, who were viewed as PLO supporters, was widely expressed, so Israel seemed a natural ally.” Norton 1993, p. 64.}

Thirdly, Israel also developed a policy that it referred to as ‘the Good Fence’, aimed at creating a friendly atmosphere in the border zone by offering health care, food supplies and even employment opportunities on the other side of the border.

\footnote{184}{The agreement was never written down, and its essentials are highly controversial and subject to many interpretations. The Israeli prime minister at the time, Yitchak Rabin, said that “any interpretation of the tacit understanding [with Syria] is correct.” See Randall1989, p. 195.}
to villages that refused to home Palestinian guerrillas.\textsuperscript{188} According to the Israeli Minister of Defence at the time, Shimon Peres, the Israeli objective was to help the Lebanese to help themselves, since the Israelis were “determined not to get sucked into the quagmire of internal Lebanese strife.”\textsuperscript{189} Despite such pronounced ambitions, Israel became more deeply and directly involved in the conflict on the other side of the border. A rightwing Israeli government, elected in 1977, chose to invade Lebanon in April 1978 in response to a Palestinian hijacking of a bus in northern Israel that ended in the death of 37 dead Israelis. Threatening to “cut of the evil arm of the PLO”, Israel conducted “Operation Litani” by invading Lebanon with thousands of troops that forced their way up to the “red line” of the Litani river, emptying most of the southern areas of Palestinian guerrillas.\textsuperscript{190}

However, international pressure soon obliged Israel to withdraw its troops. The U.S. president Jimmy Carter denounced the invasion as an “overreaction”, and the United Nations Security Council ratified Resolution 425, which demanded that Israel “cease its military action against Lebanese territorial integrity and withdraw forthwith its forces from all Lebanese territory.” Moreover, UN Resolution 425 also demanded that the southern areas of Lebanon be supervised by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with the “purpose of confirming the withdrawal of the Israeli forces, restoring international peace and security, and assisting the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area.” However, the Israelis refused to abide by 425 and instead conferred control on the SLA, establishing the infamous “security-zone” in south Lebanon.\textsuperscript{191} In 1979, Sa’ad Haddad declared the establishment of the “Free and Independent Lebanese State” in this border strip of the “security zone.” Further north, alongside UNIFIL’s area and in between the Syrians and the Israelis

\textsuperscript{188} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{189} Peres 1994, p. 225.
\textsuperscript{190} Ajami 1986, p. 179.
\textsuperscript{191} See Norton 1993.
and SLA, PLO guerrillas and their Lebanese allies entrenched themselves in the so-called “militia land” of enclaves ruled by a variety of groups and warlords. These enclaves proved profitable for new elites that enriched themselves through the “war-economy” where the Lebanese state was largely absent. Hence efforts to reach a resolution of the conflict were bound to fail, since these elites saw no reason to cut off their sources of income. Neither did their external sponsors see any reason to relinquish their support to the conflicting parties. The war, as Theodor Hanf argues, had become a “self-perpetuating phenomenon,” as the new elites knew fully well that peace might endanger their privileges.\(^\text{192}\) In this regard, the 1982 Israeli invasion was an effort to turn the tables in this stalemate. The Israeli objectives were drastically more radical and comprehensive, since the invasion aimed at rewriting the entire map of Lebanon and, indeed, of much of the Middle East. While the Israelis attempted to assist the Lebanese Maronites in entrenching their power base as outlined in the National Pact, they also aimed at upsetting the presumed balance of the Pact by attracting the new Lebanese regime into a “pro-Western” orbit, directed and supervised by the U.S.

Nonetheless, even though the Israelis managed to rid much of Lebanon of the PLO, new antagonist forces would make sure that no larger transformation of Lebanon would be possible. The following chapter will address how Shi’ite mobilisation grew in this context of war and disintegration, why this mobilisation took on a certain ‘Shi’ite’ character and how the Shi’ite community cultivated a specific notion of historical martyrdom and marginalisation. It will also elucidate the diverse, even conflicting, nature of this mobilisation in the way Shi’ite dignitaries understood the position of their constituency towards the Lebanese state and its character. By primarily addressing the differences between Sayyed Musa al-Sadr and Sayyed Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, the following section intends to show how Hez-

\(^{192}\) Hanf 1993, p. 562.
bollah’s emergence and world view tapped into an already existing conflict over the Lebanese state among these Shi’ite activists and ideologues, especially with respect to the Palestinian cause. This inter-Shi’ite conflict was seriously aggravated when the Islamic revolution erupted in Iran, with a profound impact on the Lebanese context. The chapter will address how the various Shi’ite positions towards the Iranian revolution were tied to a specific understanding of Lebanon as a nation and its predicament. This is crucial in grasping how Hezbollah would later adopt a Lebanese nationalism that did not contradict its commitment to the Islamic revolution, or so the party would argue.

3.3 Shi’ite divisions: national versus transnational

Within the confines of the Lebanese confessional system, the Shi’ite community was marginalized in several ways. Historically, the Shi’ites had maintained much of their trade and work connections with the ports on the coasts of Palestine. With the establishment of Israel, they were cut off from those historically important centres of trade. For them, the Lebanese confessional state offered few improvements as a community. Firstly, despite being the largest community in the country and growing, they were allocated the fewest number of parliamentary seats. What is more, they were ‘doubly marginalised’, not only in terms of the number of representatives in the system but also by the very social and political structures within the community itself. Residing in mostly rural areas, the Shi’ites were governed by traditional family and clan structures, the zu’ama, that “took full advantage of the

193 Indeed, the French granted the Shi’ite community recognition as a religious community – able to administer their Shi’ite family law and so on (in contrast to elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire), but these were also a French colonialist scheme to undermine the Muslim unity in Lebanon and boost sectarian loyalties to weaken the clout of Arab nationalism.
community-based system and were reluctant to make social demands in parliament on behalf of the people they claimed to represent.” These traditional strongmen preferred to exploit their access to state resources by fostering client-patron relations within their community.\(^{194}\) Still, there was some increase in mobility among Shi’ites in the sixties, partly because of the modernization of agriculture and infrastructure, which made many peasants jobless, forcing them to the cities for work only to end up in the slum, the so-called “Belt of Misery.”\(^{195}\) This urbanization was augmented by the escalation of the conflict in the south between the PLO and Israel.

However, the Shi’ite zu’ama could hardly cope with the pressures of the sixties, the rural exodus from the south, the new urbanized strata in the city slums or the new classes of educated Shi’ites who had either studied abroad or been provided with education through the modernisation programs administered by the Lebanese state. These new contenders saw that the clientist arrangement of the Lebanese confessional system was blocked, i.e., they had limited possibilities to compete with the settled elites of the Shi’ite zu’ama. Therefore, in the early decades of the fifties and sixties, and even the seventies, many of the Shi’ites were attracted by the anti-systemic slogans of the left and the Arab nationalist groups, not least the radicalism of the LNM. However, beyond the non-sectarian sense of belonging that permeated the Lebanese left, there was also a more communally-oriented identity growing among the Shi’ites, i.e., a sense of belonging as Shi’ites. Richard Norton describes how Lebanese society presented difficulties because of its sectarian character. In Lebanon, he points out, “the religious identity defines one’s primary organisation,” and “where class consciousness seems to exist, it is overlain (and obscured) by primordial interest.”\(^{196}\) According to Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, there were certain processes that aggravate such sectarian

\(^{194}\) Picard 1997, p. 198.
\(^{195}\) Ibid.
\(^{196}\) Norton 1987, p. 247
sentiments and weakening the clout of the left. In particular, Shi’ite refugees came together in the “Belt of Misery” that surrounded the outskirts of Beirut, and Shi’ites from the south met other Shi’ites from the Bekaa, sharing many of the same conditions and the same experiences of discrimination and daily degradation.\textsuperscript{197} They were perceived as the fastest growing community, demographically speaking, and thus sensed unfair treatment by the system due to being Shi’ites. In addition, there was the war in the south and the perceived unwillingness of the state to come to the rescue of the southerners. In this context, clerics of the school of Shi’ite activism and close to the thinking of Ali Shariati and Ayatollah Khomeini started to mobilize an assertive Shi’ite mindset.

At an early stage in the sixties, the most important of those was no doubt Sayyed Musa al Sadr, who arrived in Lebanon from Iran in 1959.\textsuperscript{198} As partner to the Shi’ite activist school (described previously in Chapter 2), he combined Islamic faith and idioms with political protests. Like Ayatollah Khomeini and Ali Shariati – he blamed the traditional ulama for not standing up against the many injustices befalling the people they were supposed to guide and protect. Like Khomeini, and contrary to the left, he utilised a populist discourse which transcended class-struggles in order to strengthen the bonds between Shi’ites as Shi’ites. For instance, by assailing corruption and appealing to the ‘deprived’ and ‘disinherited’, attacking the centres of power in Beirut that neglected the Shi’ites as a community, Musa al-Sadr both appealed to the poor and the more well-to-do within the community who feared the slogans of the left (and who supported Sadr for that reason). Transcending class barriers within the community, he also applied Shi’ite idioms common to the Shi’ite activist school of thinking and mobilisation. As men-

\textsuperscript{197} Saad-Ghorayeb 2003, p. 276. The Shi’ites were most commonly the ones to take care of the dead-end jobs in the cities. They were the ones to serve the more well-to-do of the other communities. Hence they were also subjected to a great amount of racist scorn and humiliation.

\textsuperscript{198} See Fouad Ajami’s biography of Sayyed Musa al-Sadr, Ajami 1986.
tioned previously, one of the most prominent is the Kerbala paradigm. Al-Sadr charged the traditional clergy in Lebanon with “ossifying the example of Husayn, to restrict the meaning of life to tears and lamentation.” Thus, similar to Shariati, al-Sadr promoted Husayn’s sacrifice into a timeless symbolism in order to boost self-esteem and action, to make Shi’ites aware of how the deeds of their heroes in history spoke to them in present times.\(^\text{199}\)

The tragedy at Kerbala encompassed a historical event and a symbolism that many Shi’ites knew and could identify with, especially as they translate into the present-day realities of ongoing struggles in Lebanon. As al-Sadr stated at a large rally in the south in 1974 when grievances were on the rise:

> The umma was silent, free men were fugitives; fear reduced men to silence. Islam was threatened…A great sacrifice was needed to…stir feelings. The event of Kerbala was that sacrifice. Imam Hussein put his family, his forces, and even his life, in the balance against tyranny and corruption. Then the Islamic world burst forward with this revolution. This revolution did not die in the sands of Kerbala; it flowed into the life stream of the Islamic world, and passed from generation to generation, even to our day. It is a deposit placed in our hands so that we may profit from it, that we draw out of it a new source of reform, a new position, a new movement, a new revolution, to repel darkness, to stop tyranny and to pulverize evil.\(^\text{200}\)

In 1974, al-Sadr established Amal (meaning ‘hope’ in Arabic, but also an acronym for The Movement of the Deprived), a sectarian Shi’ite formation in a context in which most communities in Lebanon were represented by a sectarian party. However, despite this sectarian profile, it is crucial to note that Musa al-Sadr and Amal did not call for an Islamic state, like more radical Shi’ite activists of the Khomeinist branch would do. His activist posture involved criticism and demands for participation and change. He was a reformist, not a revolutionary; he was not anti-regime as such. Musa al-Sadr

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199 Ajami 1986, p. 142.
200 Qouted in ibid., p. 143.

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recognized the multitude of the Lebanese social fabric and the imperative of confessional co-existence, and he was deeply concerned about the Christians’ fear and sense of insecurity in a Muslim-dominated environment. As Fouad Ajami puts it, Musa al-Sadr had “learned the realities of the country” and thus he “remained committed to the idea of a sectarian contract among the country’s principal sects.”201 He opposed, however, the semi-feudal composition of the Lebanese society and political system and the disproportionate share of Shi’ites in the political and administrative structures. He did not share the sentiments of the Lebanese left of the time that maintained that Lebanon ought to be turned into an Arab nationalist revolutionary enterprise. Importantly, Musa al-Sadr also grew wary of the Palestinian struggle in the seventies. Being close to Hafez al-Asad in Damascus, he sided with the Syrian intervention into Lebanon in 1976, taking a stand against the PLO and the LNM. Musa al-Sadr witnessed the plight of the southerners, and he scorned the bullish behaviour of the PLO and LNM guerrillas towards the local population in the south.202 While assailing the Lebanese army for its passivity, he also started to arm the Amal movement in order to defend its constituencies, not only against the Israelis but also against the PLO. As such, Musa al-Sadr mirrored, and perhaps galvanised, a growing popular sentiment of enmity towards the Palestinians in south Lebanon. From being a stern supporter of the Palestinian cause, Sayyed al-Sadr turned critical. The southerners, Sadr asserted, had had enough burdens to bear.203 Shaery-Eisenlohr notes,

some Palestinian guerrillas had already split off from Fatah and were acting on their own in the south, often harassing the shi’ite inhabitants in the Fatah-

201 Ibid., p. 73.
202 According to Asad Abukhalil, this behaviour on the part of the PLO and the LNM was a strong contributing factor to why the left was wakened and the sectarian movement of Amal – and later Hezbollah – would gain so much popularity and local support. See Abukhalil 1990.
203 Norton 1987, p. 43-44.
controlled region. Sadr grew increasingly impatient with Fatah’s loose organisation in the south, with Israeli retaliation attacks that killed mainly shia, and with Yasir Arafat’s cooperation with the LNM, which competed with Amal to win Shi’ite members. By 1976, the clashes between Palestinian militias in the south and shi’a had increased to the extent that it led Sadr to side with the Syrians.\textsuperscript{204}

Musa al-Sadr was especially disturbed by Palestinian \textit{feyadeen} who fired rockets into Israel from Lebanese soil, referring to it as “totally impermissible”, since that ‘also means that Lebanon is in a state of war with Israel. Who is opening fire. This is not important. The gist of the matter is that Lebanese territory became a base for launching missiles and grenades.”\textsuperscript{205} Al-Sadr was not alone in this criticism. Declaring solidarity with the Palestinian struggle – however just and noble - also posed a dilemma, since it endangered the security and livelihood of the local people in south Lebanon, especially as the strategy - notwithstanding the behaviour of the Palestinian guerrillas - appeared reckless and lacking clear direction. As one prominent Shi’ite cleric of the south, Jawad Mughniyya (otherwise well-known and revered for his commitment to ‘third worldist’ struggle), cried out:

Palestinians declare that whatever happens, they will not leave the Lebanese south. This means that they provoke Israel so that Israel destroys and occupies the south…Knowing Israel’s aggressive and expansionist goals, is not that a strange Palestinian logic! As if you would tell the peaceful inhabitants of a quiet house: I want to blow up your house over your heads not for any other purpose than to prove my existence in the world.\textsuperscript{206}

\textsuperscript{204} Shaery-Eisenlohr 2008, p. 278.
\textsuperscript{205} Quoted in Norton 1987, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{206} Hanf, 1993, 244-245.
According to Chibli Mallat, these conflicting national and transnational commitments - which stretched beyond the Lebanese borders – became one of the most pressing topics among the Lebanese activist clergy in the seventies, i.e., what was the price for the commitment to a just cause?207 During the rise of Shi’ite mobilisation and radicalization in the sixties and seventies, Sayyed Muhammed Husayn Fadlallah developed a contending thesis and position to that of Sayyed Musa al-Sadr. Like Musa al-Sadr, Fadlallah had studied at the Shi’ite centres of higher Islamic learning in Najaf, Iraq (even together with Musa al-Sadr), and he was dispatched to Lebanon in 1959 to preach and educate in the poor and destitute Shi’ite areas of Lebanon. Like al-Sadr, Fadlallah was part of the activist Shi’ite thinking that was developed by scholars such as Muhammed Baqir al-Sadr in Iraq and Ayatollah Khomeini and Ali Shariati in Iran. However, while Musa al-Sadr and Fadlallah shared a great deal of common outlooks, they differed greatly in their positions on how to deal with them. Indeed, Fadlallah and al-Sadr both held the Shi’ite activist view of denouncing the traditional ulama, which had opted for quetism in times too turbulent and conflicting to allow for any neutral or apolitical positions. They both feared how foreign interventions and ongoing conflicts in the Middle East endangered Muslim unity and the umma’s deterioration into division and destruction. They also shared the anxieties of many Muslim clergy that the leftist and secular ideologies were attracting the younger assertive and increasingly politicized generations who demanded change. In this regard, they both promoted Islam as a comprehensive role model for civil conduct and political thinking.208 They thus worked to com-

208 Fadlallah’s biographer Jamal Sankari mentions, for instance, a lecture by the Shi’ite Mujahid in the southern village of 1972, an era known for a lot of leftist activity at the time, in which he “presented a portrait of diverse social and ethical maladies that were plaguing the Muslims society. [Fadlallah] pointed to the marked disparity between Muslim reality and Islamic norms with respect to the individual character and social behaviour. Reminding his audience that modern Western societies did not represent the only model for social civility, he stressed that Islam, by virtue of its divine and comprehensive legal system, embodied an unsurpassed nor-
bine a model of modernity grounded in Islamic mores, or in religious faith more generally, to overcome the popularity of their secular contenders. To Fadlallah, this was done, as his biographer Jamal Sankari notes, “by engaging in a modernist Islamic discourse that expounded the civilizational and humanist of Islam” and “stress[ing] [its] compatibility with the technological and scientific dimensions of Western modernity, and underscor[ing] the dynamic nexus between religion, social justice and political activism.” Importantly, they were both aware of the Lebanese Christian fear and sensitivity of being ‘surrounded’ by a majority of Muslims and both advocated cross-religious, ecumenical programs of dialogue, understanding and co-operation in a bid to surmount the suspicions and insecurities that might feed into sectarian hostilities. They also conveyed a common social pathos for the poor and unfortunate that flocked to the “Belt of Misery” through their efforts to distribute comprehensive social welfare services, which they combined with a dire political critique of the ignorance that – as they charged - manifested itself in the centres of power in Beirut. As radicalized Shi’ite activists, they shared and demonstrated at an early stage a commitment to support the Palestinian cause and the Palestinians right to fight Israel, which they condemned as the “ultimate evil,” even though Musa al-Sadr, as we have seen, would become more hesitant as time went by.

Nonetheless, while sharing much common ground, they also differed considerably in terms of ideological outlook and projected strategies for change. Firstly, Musa al-Sadr, as earlier noted, was no Islamist and did not

\[\text{mative code and practical set of values, which together provided the basis for refining individual behaviour and reforming social relations.}^{207}\] Sankari 2005, p. 138.

\[\text{Ibid p. 146.}\]

\[210\text{It should be noted that Musa al-Sadr, like many Lebanese, was a committed supporter of the Palestinian cause in the end of the sixties and the early seventies; especially, as Sankari notes, when a most prestigious jurisconsult of Shi’ite theology, Sayyed Muhsin al-Hakim, promulgated a fatwa in support of the Palestinian struggle in June 1968. In December of the same year, he convened a conference in Beirut for standing by the Palestinian cause. Such solidarity and commitment would remain after the Cairo Agreement in 1969 and Black September in Jordan in 1970. See Sankari 2005, p. 148-149.}\]
subscribe to Khomeini’s idea of an Islamic state, the Welayat al-Faqih.\textsuperscript{211} This differed sharply from Fadlallah who, as an Islamist (claiming ideal governance to be an Islamic state), remained profoundly sceptical and antagonistic towards the confessional system and the Maronite-dominated regime. Thus, while al-Sadr appeared willing to work from within the confines of the structure of the regime, Fadlallah opted to remain aloof from the confessional system, which he despised as the contemptible outcome of a colonial era that aimed at sowing division among the Lebanese and the Arabs. A case in point is al-Sadr’s initiative in the late sixties to form the Higher Shi’ite Council of the south, a state-financed institution to administer political, social and economic affairs and interests of the Shi’ite community. Whereas al-Sadr intended to improve the conditions for the Shi’ites, Fadlallah saw the Council as fostering and nurturing a sectarian mindset that threatened to undermine the potential unity of the Muslims, both Sunni and Shi’ites, as Muslims, hence consolidating an already subordinate position.\textsuperscript{212} Fadlallah was allegedly suspicious of how al-Sadr, despite his critical discourses, hearted the more powerful Maronite group of the country and how “he was treated as a star by the Christians.”\textsuperscript{213} Fadlallah did not have any trust in the Maronite-dominated regime, and he was more cautious about negotiating or dealing with it than was al-Sadr. Moreover, whereas Sadr’s tactic was to mobilize mass rallies at which he would utilise Shi’ite idioms for the construction of a Shi’ite identity, Fadlallah was more concerned, in a Gramscian sense, with the slow and gradual indoctrination of ideology through educational, cultural and religious institutions. As Sankari notes, “Fadlallah was

\textsuperscript{211} Norton, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{212} As Sankari notes, Fadlallah believed in “Islamic universalism rather than shi’i communalism” and his “overriding concern was to maintain cohesion between the two communities [Sunnis and Shi’is], which professed the same faith – primary allegiance was owed to the global umma (he thus supported the idea of the Higher Islamic Council). Fadlallah was not present when the council was established in May 1969. See Sankari 2005, p. 145.
\textsuperscript{213} Abukhalil 1991.
(and remains) an Islamist committed to radical change in society through gradual means. His strategy has always been based on cadre indoctrination in Islamist ideology, cohesive organisation, careful and long-term planning, and the peaceful dissemination of Islam.” That contrasted with Sadr “who actively sought rapid but not revolutionary change, and [who] employed mass rallies and strikes; a strategy that necessarily downplayed the importance of the lengthy process of indoctrination of selected individuals.”

They also differ with respect to the Palestinian ordeal. For Fadlallah, the Palestinian cause could not be ignored at any price, since it reflected the colonial legacy that still burdened the entire region, including Lebanon. He saw the Beirut regime’s disinterest in developing the south and leaving the Shi’ite community subordinated to the zu’ama as a part of a larger scheme, which also involved the mute and weak positions of the Arab regimes towards the Palestinian question and the problems in Lebanon. He assailed the radical fractions that, since their popular surge in the 1950s, had been unable to show any results for their supposed radicalism and ambitions to change the realities of the Arabs. He considered Arab nationalism to involve a lot of emotionalism but with meagre results to show for their efforts. He also feared that the Western powers were pursuing a long-term strategy that sought to divide and dissolve a larger transnational Islamic unity “so as to preserve their own presence and interest.”

Lebanon was and is part of such a scheme, as evidenced its artificial borders and its political system, Fadlallah asserted. Hence, he could not see that the predicament of Lebanon could be solved inside Lebanon nor within the current configuration of power. He foresaw a new assertive generation of youths that could change the balance of power, not only in Lebanon but in the region as a whole. The ‘Gramscian’ strategic character in Fadlallah’s thought emphasized how ideology had to be rooted and consolidated in more

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214 Sankari 2005, p. 147.
215 Ibid., p. 150.
216 Ibid., p. 140.
long-term planning. He argued that mere slogans and sectarian mobilisation could not bring any change, thus criticizing the sectarian sloganeering of al-Sadr and the Amal movement, which Fadlallah considered detrimental to the imperative of cohesion and unity across sectarian boundaries. However, in the late sixties and early seventies, the time was not right for Fadlallah’s position, and he had to contend with working in the shadow of Musa al-Sadr’s popularity. The depth of faith and commitment he projected needed more time and a change of conditions. In the next section we will see how a new series of events deepened the turmoil in Lebanon and further radicalized the Shi’ites, influencing the emergence of Hezbollah. What was the context of the further radicalization of the Shi’ites, and what triggered the emergence of Hezbollah within this mobilization? The section focuses specifically on the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and its aftermath. This is important, since it shows how the Lebanese regime was willing – but unable – to abandon the special formula on which the Lebanese state was established, however precariously.

### 3.4 More radicalization, deepening cleavages

Certain events would further radicalise the Shi’ite community at the end of the seventies and deepen the already existing schisms and divisions. Firstly, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in March 1978 and the establishment of the Israeli ‘security zone’ in the south dramatically increased the hardships and suffering of the local population, especially since the SLA intensified its policy of deterring southerners from cooperating with or housing Palestinians. The Israelis themselves, Richard Norton points out, “moved far beyond the slimmest pretence of retaliation” and sought to keep the Palestinian guerrillas at bay by “air-attacks, raids, kidnappings and house-bombings.”

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217 Norton 1987, p. 48
ondly, in August of the same year, Musa Al-Sadr mysteriously disappeared on a visit to President Qadaffi in Libya, and he has never been heard from since. His mysterious disappearance was followed by bitterness and outrage among the Lebanese Shi’ites. Thirdly, there was the Iranian revolution in 1979, which operated as a catalyst of inspiration for many Lebanese Shi’ites, since it showed what a determined force of Muslim unity could achieve in the face of a wicked ruler strongly backed by a superpower. If the defeat of the Arab regimes in 1967 was a defeat for secular Arab nationalism, the victory in Iran boosted the political credentials of faith and divine inspiration. Still, Khomeini’s triumph in Iran would be interpreted differently among radicalized Shi’ites in Lebanon. What did it mean for them as Shi’ites, as Muslims, as Lebanese? For those inspired by Khomeini’s own brand of Islamism, the revolution carried a divinely inspired revelation - a ‘transnational message’ of faith and rebellion against the wide range of injustices caused by U.S. imperialism and corruption in the Muslim and third world countries.

The Palestinian issue was at the heart of this transnational revolution. It created a cleavage in Lebanon and also widened the divide within the Shi’ite community. Like Fadlallah who saw the Israeli occupation of the south as an expression of a larger oppressive order, the radicals close to Khomeini saw the battle against Israel – and support for the Palestinians - as existential. Khomeini himself had been devoted to the Palestinian cause for many years, and he shared this devotion with many others among the Iranian clergy who saw the symbolism of Jerusalem as a unifying factor for the Muslim umma, in spite of sectarian differences.\(^{218}\) To him, Israel served as an

\(^{218}\) According to Agha and Khalidi, the anti-Zionism of the Iranian clergy even preceded the state of Israel, as it feared, already in the thirties and forties, that Muslim land would be lost together with “the status of Jerusalem as a religious symbol to Sunni and Shia alike”. It was thus necessary to develop channels for coordination with clerics in Palestine at an early stage. “The continuing antagonism between the Iranian clergy and the Jewish state,” they note, “was in fact manifest as early as 1962 in Khomeini’s very first stirrings against the shah. Khomeini’s speeches before his exile from Iran in 1965 already foreshadowed some of the main themes he was
imperialist outpost for the U.S. It was a close ally of the despotic Pahlavi dynasty in Iran. Moreover, the Zionist victory symbolised and manifested Arab and Muslim weakness, incapacity and defeatism. Hence, the liberation of Palestine was central to his project of Islamic emancipation, both in terms of liberating the land and of strengthening the Muslim umma. As an example, in August 1979, Khomeini declared the last Friday of the Ramadan to be ‘Jerusalem Day’ (al-youm al-Quds) – or a “day of fate” - to symbolize how the revolution should spread across the Muslim world and defeat the Israeli colonial project and “liberate Jerusalem”. In the decree that introduced this anniversary, Khomeini stated that he had long been “warning Muslims of the menace posed by the usurper Israel”, which was bent on the “destruction of the Palestinian freedom fighters” and which “ceaselessly [were] bombing their houses and homes in southern Lebanon.” For Khomeini, the “Quds Day” was not only “a day to proclaim the international solidarity of Muslims in support of the legitimate rights of the Muslim people of Palestine”, it was also “a global day” to call for a broad uprising:

It is a day when the oppressed confront the oppressors. It is a day of confrontations for nations that have been under the tyranny of the American government and other oppressors…Quds day is a day when the fate of the oppressed nations must be determined. Oppressed nations should make their presence known to the oppressors, just like Iran rose up and defeated [the oppressor]. All nations should rise up and throw these germs of corruption in the garbage. Quds day is a day when these followers of Iran’s past regime and these corrupt plot-making regimes and superpowers in other places, especially in Lebanon, should know their assignment. It is a day when we and

later to develop during the struggle for Iran, such as the links between the shah and Israel, the role of Israel as a usurper of Islamic rights in Palestine and the linkage between the Shah, Israel and the United States.” Agha & Khalidi1995, p. 34.
they should exert our efforts to liberate Quds and save our Lebanese brothers.

Such defiant radicalism attracted many Shi’ite activist clergy, who saw the Palestinian cause as central and who located – as Fadlallah did - the Lebanese struggle in a more transnational moment of struggle, as conveyed by Khomeini and the Islamic revolution. However, as noted, while these events boosted the Shi’ite sense of community, they also, paradoxically, widened the already significant divide within this community. How should these new revolutionary conditions be interpreted in a Lebanese context? Should the Shi’ites of Lebanon be a part of the transnational impulses of the Islamic revolution as they unfolded in Iran, or should they limit their ambitions to a Lebanese environment? This cleavage was exacerbated even further with the secular leadership that succeeded Musa al-Sadr in 1978, first by Hussein al-Husseini, a prominent southerner, and after him by Nabih Berri, a lawyer, in early 1980. According to Shaery-Eisenlohr, Nabih Berri was opposed - yet respectful - to Khomeini’s brand of the Welayat al-Faqih. He emphasised Lebanese roots and the loyalty of the Amal movement to the idea of Lebanon as a nation-state. As the leader of the Amal movement, he was cautious in terms of what the Iranian upheaval would mean for Lebanon. Many Lebanese Shi’ites - while approving of the revolution as a show of

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220 Besides altruism (to support a just cause), Iranian support for Palestine also increased the popularity of the Islamic revolution in the ‘Arab street’, and it undermined many Arab regimes that were considered to be too idle, too weak, or cooperating too closely with the U.S. to challenge Israel.
221 As Simon Shapira notes, when Amal “lost its charismatic leader,” it also lost “the central unifying axis around whom the entire movement’s leadership had coalesced…No longer would there be a religious leader, an Imam garbed in the traditional robe, but a largely secular and active leadership which saw its paramount mission as promoting the interests of the Shi’ite community within the framework of the Lebanese state, and whose feet were firmly planted in the murky reality of Lebanese politics.” Shapira 1988.
Shi’ite (or Muslim) strength - did not want to emulate the Islamic model among the Lebanese multitude.

The Amal movement, thus, took a more appeasing attitude towards the Lebanese regime, stressing demands for a larger slice of the confessional pie in parliament and the administration. It also assumed a hostile position in relation to PLO’s control over the south and the way the Palestinian cause was creating suffering among the southerners. Nabih Berri’s stance in favour of the regime is clear in his statement – made prior to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 - that he would prefer the army to deploy in the south, even if it was “100 per cent Maronite.” According to Norton, Amal’s commitment to the sovereignty and legitimacy of the regime was due to the perception that any division of Lebanon would split the Shi’ite community. That is, by preserving the state instead of wrecking it and by working to gain more influence in its national institutions, the Shi’ites would have the best opportunities for improving their situation. No other alternative was regarded as realistic. Still, the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon proved to be a real catalyst within the Shi’ite community, as the radical circles within Amal broke away from the movement and established an embryo of what was to become Hezbollah. Hassan Nasrallah, himself a former Amal member, recalled the tensions within Amal that “surfaced after the disappearance of Sayyed Musa Al-Sadr” and that involved “a difference in vision,” claiming that these differences – and the problems they entailed - remained rather confined until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. “This [invasion] changed everything, and all the [earlier] political movements became simple zeroes in the face of the very challenging Israeli number.

The common denominator among those people was the strong feeling that what was present in the arena in the form of parties and organizations did not express their [political] proposals nor the structural form they sought.

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222 See Norton 1987, p. 75.
What contributed also was the breaking out of the Iranian revolution in 1979. This inspired these men to benefit from its experiences. So, from 1979 to 1982, there was only a general desire to create something that would translate the interests of our Islamic proposals. There was a need to develop a force which would also enjoy popular extension…But having a desire to start something could only be achieved if the right circumstances prevailed. That only came when about when Israel invaded Lebanon. That provided the conditions to realize the already present desire. With the willingness of the Islamic republic to support the motives of this alliance, Hezbollah’s take-off occurred. 223

The Palestinian issue in particular amplified tensions among the Shi’ites. Indeed, when the Israeli invasion troops crushed the PLO fortifications in the south, inhabitants across the Shi’ite southern villages welcomed the Israelis as liberators from the reign of Palestinian guerrillas. 224 Furthermore, as the new ‘Israeli order’ was about to take form, Nabih Berri capitalized on these anti-Palestinian sentiments and declared his willingness to comply by accepting a seat in the “National Salvation Committee,” chaired by the Lebanese president Elias Sarkis, set up to manage the new situation. Thereby, he accepted sitting side by side with Bashir Gemayel, the leader of the Phalange movement who had collaborated with Israel in order to become president in Lebanon after the PLO and Syria had been expelled. Prominent members within Amal, like Sayyed Ibrahim Al-Amin, its spokesman in Teheran, instantly declared their rejection of Amal and Nabih Berri’s leadership. Rather soon, Al-Amin became a leading official within Hezbollah. Likewise, another Amal officer, Husayn al-Musawi, also broke away from the movement and left for the Bekaa Valley, where he established the Islamic Amal. 225

224 This is acknowledged by Naim Qassem in his political biography over Hezbollah. See Qassem 2004, p. 88.
225 Some of those radicals had their educational backgrounds in Najaf from where they had been expelled by Saddam Hussein, who feared the ‘subversive propensi-
However, despite Nabih Berri’s appeasing posture, the Amal movement did not gain many benefits. That is, the Israeli objectives were only partially realised, i.e., the PLO was driven out of Beirut, but the Syrians were merely redeployed to the Bekaa Valley, vigilantly observing the scene in the capital. In August, Bashir Gemayel was elected president by the Lebanese parliament. He was, however, assassinated shortly thereafter. As an act of vengeance, his militiamen perpetrated the massacres in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila. As result of the international outcry following the massacres, the MNF, which had supervised the departure of the PLO guerrillas from the Lebanese capital, returned to Beirut to assist the Lebanese regime, headed by President Amin Gemayel (Bashir’s brother), in restoring its authority over Lebanese soil. Confident due to American support and the departure of the PLO, the Gemayel government began to behave in a manner that would deepen already existing tensions and hostility. Instead of seeking consensus in order to facilitate cooperation, it clamped down on various opposition forces, dismantling leftist and Muslim guerrillas while not even entering the neighbourhoods dominated by the Christian militias. President Gemayel also carried out many sweeping and arbitrary arrests of – mainly Muslim – citizens. He demolished the houses (or what his government considered illegally built shanties) in the Shi’ite dominated southern suburbs, driving many of the Shi’ites away. He also chose to cooperate with the old traditional strongmen – the zu’ama - of the Shi’ite establishment, which had been sidelined by the rising popularity of the Amal movement, thus ignoring the readiness of Nabih Berri to cooperate with the regime. In this way, he also made enemies in the Druze community as he tried to conquer the Druze

ties’ of the Shi’ites. Prominent up-and-coming figures within Hezbollah, like Abbas Musawi and Hassan Nasrallah, who were close to particular circles in Iran, were also members of Amal but soon left the movement for Hezbollah (some claim that these radicals had become part of Amal at an early stage in order to change it from within into a more radical breed). See Shaery-Eisenlohr 2008, p. 89-118.
areas of the Chouf mountains. In that sense, the Gemayel administration seemingly had no inclination to rely on the old Lebanese motto of “no victor, no vanquished”, and it blatantly misread the new emerging balance of power that was growing in the shadow of the rather illusionary might the U.S. troops provided.

While the possibility for “coexistence” and cooperation as outlined in the National Pact was shattered, the possibility for any single party to dominate was obstructed, if not completely eliminated. To be sure, by reaching out to the old, traditional guard within the Shi’ite community, Amin Gemayel made an effort to re-vitalise the spirit of the National Pact. However, he ignored the new realties of the political and social fabric of Lebanon, since that would have involved concessions on part of the dominance of the Maronites or that of the traditional elites.

Nevertheless, there was also a regional dimension. By allying itself with the U.S., the Beirut government betrayed the supposed “neutrality” of the contract with regard to the national identity and position of Lebanon. This was evident as Amin Gemayel’s cabinet approved the so-called 17th of May Agreement with Israel, mediated by the U.S. According to Richard Norton, the agreement “provides a clear outline of the conditions under which Israel envisages withdrawal from the south”, as it offers guidelines for the establishment of a “security region” in the south to be policed by a limited number of Lebanese troops, into which the SLA should be integrated. The agreement was also to be supervised by a committee composed of American, Lebanese and Israeli observers. In effect, Norton suggests that given the restrictions on Israeli forces and the transformations of the SLA into a legitimate “territorial brigade”, the agreement implied that the southern areas of Lebanon would fall under Israeli control. In this way, Gemayel also drew the MNF into the quagmire of the civil war. As Fadlallah sug-

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226 Norton 1991, p. 120-121
227 Norton 1993, p. 68.
gested from his Islamist-oriented perspective, the MNF was perceived by the people as “an umbrella organization protecting the regime, protecting Israel, not protecting the people.”

In taking that step, the Lebanese regime brought trouble on itself, since powerful regional players – like Iran and Syria – would not allow this kind of Lebanese manoeuvre to pass. For them, Lebanon was an arena in the greater regional contest. After all, the new order of the 17th of May Agreement entailed that Syria was increasingly sidelined in Lebanon. Certainly, Syria was about to lose its trusted partner, Amal, that since the days of Musa al-Sadr had been a ‘proxy’ for Damascus in controlling the Shi’ite community and in weakening the LNM-PLO alliance. Now, as the Israeli forces were surrounding Beirut, Amal’s leader Nabih Berri appeared, in a ‘moment of truth’, to distance himself from Damascus. Thus, Lebanon was about to move into a new sphere of influence, which was, if not dictated by Israel, at least coordinated with it. That alarmed the Syrians as well as the newly born Islamic republic in Iran. For Syria, Israel was the arch-enemy, an occupier of the Syrian Golan Heights and a “state alien to the region” whose interference could only be “illegitimate and malign.” As the battle between Syria and Israel had for years been fought by proxy on Lebanese soil, the loss of Lebanon to an Israeli sphere of influence would render Damascus isolated in the region. Agha and Khalidi point out that Syrian hostility towards Israel is “essentially reactive, based on a deep-seated perception of an Israeli military, political and cultural threat.

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228 Interview, Middle East Insight, Jan 1985
229 Syria was not part of the negotiations over the 17th of May agreement but was informed of the agreement when it was already negotiated between the Lebanese, American and Israeli negotiators.
230 For instance, when called to Damascus to oppose the 17th May agreement, Berri refused. According to Da’ud Da’ud, a prominent Amal leader in the south, Berri claimed: “We are not prepared to oppose our government’s move form Damascus., Whoever wants to oppose it should go to Beirut.” Quoted in Bailey 1987, p. 234, n. 14.
But this hostility also has other elements, primary among them the Syrian commitment to the Palestinian cause. From a [Syrian] Baathist Pan-Arab perspective, the creation of Israel is not only morally unjust and a trespass against the Palestinians but a transgression against the Arab people and the greater Arab homeland. In this sense, the Syrian/Arab-Israeli conflict is not merely a political confrontation but a clash of destinies and civilizations. Israel is seen as a device to perpetuate Arab division and weakness, thus facilitating the continued external exploitation and manipulations of the Arab world and its resources.\textsuperscript{232}

Moreover, as already noted, Israel was anathema to Iran. The Iranian-Islamist rejection of the Jewish state stemmed from the latter’s prior cooperation with the Shah regime, on the one hand, and Khomeini’s ideological conviction that the Americans sought to subdue the Muslim world through the presence of Israel, on the other. In addition, taking into account the Ayatollah’s quest for exporting his revolution, “strife-torn Lebanon”, as Ramazani puts it, could serve as an “ideal battlefield” when opposing the “twin evils of Zionism and American imperialism.”\textsuperscript{233} Hence, external interests merged with domestic ones as both Damascus and Teheran wished to provide assistance to a Lebanese resistance, bold enough to take on the mighty force of the Israeli war machine. In the search of a new player, then, Syria approved an Iranian offer to send a small contingent of 800-1000 Pasdarans

\textsuperscript{232} Agha and Khalidi 1995, p. 42. As Seale notes with respect to Hafez al-Assad’s view upon the Palestinian cause: “It was much bigger than a disputed land or the fate of a few hundred thousand refugees. It was the rightful concern of all the Arabs, and the way it was settled would determine under whose order the Arabs would live and what meaning was to be given to their independence. A ‘wrong settlement’ – for example, the proposal for Palestinian ‘autonomy’ under an Israeli umbrella of any sort of Israel-Jordan deal over the West Bank – would perpetuate Israel’s hegemony and put the Arabs at a permanent strategic disadvantage. Containing Israel, checking what he saw as its inherent expansionism, forcing it to abandon aggression by a system of mutual deterrence – these were the constants of Asad’s thinking in the years after Camp David.” Seale 1988, p. 348.

\textsuperscript{233} Ramazani, 1988, p. 155
(Revolutionary Guards) to the areas of the Bekaa Valley that were still under Syrian control.\textsuperscript{234} The mission of these ideological soldiers was to boost the steam, spirit and appeal of the Iranian revolution in the hearts and the minds the Shi’ites in the Bekaa, who refused to recognize the accommodating posture of Amal.

In a short time, the attacks against the MNF, the Lebanese army and the Israelis gained momentum. In harsh words, the \textit{New York Times} correspondent Thomas L. Friedman claimed that American Marines had become victims due to their own innocence and the “ignorance and arrogance of the weak, cynical and in some times venal Reagan Administration. By blindly supporting [president] Amin Gemayel, by allowing Israel a virtually free hand to invade Lebanon with American arms and by not curtailing Israel’s demands for a peace treaty with Beirut, the Reagan Administration had tipped the scales in favour of one Lebanese tribe - the Maronites - and against many others, mainly Muslims. Washington was helping to inflict real pain among the people, and there would be a price to pay for that.”\textsuperscript{235} In February 1984, the MNF left Beirut, leaving the Lebanese government in shambles. At the same time, an insurgence was also brewing against the Israeli troops in the south.

\textbf{3.5 The emerging resistance in the south}

A similar development of resistance was taking form in south Lebanon. With the bulk of the PLO guerrillas having been driven away, the south, despite

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\item \textsuperscript{234} Agha and Khalidi p. 15. According to Shaery-Eisenlohr, the Iranians expressed their desire to send a contingent of revolutionary guards to fight side by side with the PLO already in the 1980s, but Hussein Husayni, the first Amal leader after Musa al-Sadr, and Nabih Berri reportedly rejected any such venture. See Shaery-Eisenlohr 2008, p. 104.
\item \textsuperscript{235} Friedman 1989, p. 204. The American President, Ronald Reagan, explained that “once the terrorist attacks started, there was no way that we could really contribute to the original mission by staying there as a target.” See Fisk 1991, p. 534.
\end{itemize}
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(or perhaps because of) earlier conflicts, was rather calm and silent. Indeed, resentment of the PLO among the war-weary southerners made many hostile to any armed resistance against the Israelis; lots of people in the south even welcomed the Israelis as liberators from the PLO. Ahmad Beydon argues that there was a “paradoxical sense that an Israeli occupation would end the Israeli bombings – in a word, that Israel should free Lebanon from Israel.” Indeed, there were even reports of tacit cooperation between Israel and Amal in the early aftermath of the invasion. However, the problem for Amal was that Israel did not leave Lebanon. According to Clinton Bailey, an Israeli security officer operating in the south at the time, the Israelis would not be satisfied with a “tacit” agreement of cooperation with Amal. They would not leave Lebanon entirely without a formal security arrangement worked out with a responsible Lebanese party. While the 17th of May Agreement represented an effort in that direction, conditions drastically changed in the south as the power balance shifted in Beirut when the MNF crouched under the fire of the resistance in the capital. There were several reasons for the deterioration. Firstly, despite the relief of being rid of the PLO, the people of the south were deeply suspicious of Israeli intentions, especially as the Israeli troops lingered on. The decades of Israeli aggression against the Palestinians (and the Lebanese), the annexation of the Golan Heights (in 1981) and the continued occupation and expansion of settlements in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and in Jerusalem created an image of the Zionist state as in-

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236 Norton also charges that there is “no overstatement to claim that many Shi’ites welcomed the Israelis invasion, but – it must be emphasized – they did so on the presumption that Israel would not linger in Lebanon.” Norton 1987, p. 86.

237 According to Clinton Bailey, Amal in the south was ready “to turn PLO personnel, whether Palestinian or Lebanese, over to the Israeli forces.” As he argues, Amal’s “initial contact with Israeli officers and soldiers were open, friendly, and cooperative.” Bailey 1987.

238 Ibid.

239 According to Sayiegh, the Islamist cells that formed the embryo of Hezbollah unleashed the operations in Beirut at such a high speed and intensity, largely due to their frustration with how slow the emergence of the resistance was in the south was going. See Sayiegh 1994, p. 183.
herently bent on domination and aggression. In that context, the 17th of May Agreement only demonstrated how the Israelis were trying to establish indirect control over the south, and Amal could not be a partner in such cooperation, especially not as order faltered in the capital. Hence, the Israelis searched in vain for reliable partners in the south and, thus, had to establish local militias by themselves. However, as Norton points out, “the very men who were recruited to serve in the militias were the social misfits and toughs who had been terrorizing the south for years. Israel came to be judged by the company it chose to keep.” Thus, the Israeli troops slowly turned into an enemy. The increasing number of mass arrests of members of the resistance who were Lebanese, not Palestinian, strengthened the popular impressions of the Israelis as oppressors and occupiers. In that way, the locals also saw a danger in leaving their homes. As Jaber notes,

If the Shiites had learned anything from the Palestinian experience, it was that fighting was the only way to prevent Israel or anyone else from taking their land. Everyone remembered how the Palestinians were driven out of their homeland when the state of Israel was founded. Most had heard how the refugees had believed their displacement would only be temporary, but it lasted nearly four decades. Above all, the Palestinians’ ordeal had taught the Lebanese not to abandon their villages and homes: confrontation and opposition were the only answer.

Furthermore, as Israeli scholar Avner Yaniv notes, the Israeli administration dealing with the situation in the southern areas had no “coherent and well-thought-out plan” for this undertaking. Its measures were based on an “un-

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241 Jaber 1997, p.17. As one Shi’ite mullah of the south pointed out: “For seven or eight months, there was no resistance against the Israelis because people thought they had come for peace...Israel said it was to provide protection for the Galilee [in northern Israel]. But people were deceived. They began to believe they were facing a bigger nightmare than that of the Palestinians.” Wright 1986, p. 220.
bound faith in improvisation” and “proceeded to deal with situations as they arose.” Besides, the Israeli policy-makers had gained their experiences from administering the occupied areas of the West Bank and Gaza. As a result, Avner Yaniv concludes, they bore the “unspoken assumption” that “all Arabs are the same - more dangerous verbally than in practical terms, cowardly, submissive, greedy, untrustworthy, emotional, bribable, and easily intimidated into collaboration with any authority, Arab or not.” South Lebanon, however, was to be a different story, especially as the tide turned against the Israelis. Norton concludes that “[g]iven the requirement of the political milieu, Amal’s dilemma is transparent: it must not be seen as abetting Israel’s interests, but instead present itself as the prime force responsible for expelling Israel from Lebanon.”

A few days before a partial phase of an Israeli withdrawal in September 1983, an Amal leader, Mohammar Ghaddar declared:

The trouble will really begin for the Israelis, after the partial withdrawal. Amal is ready to take decision against the Israelis. After the partial they will no longer be on a peace mission - they will be an army of occupation. The Israelis say “we want to get rid of the terrorists.” That’s all right with us - so long as they leave eventually. They say that the partial withdrawal is a first step toward a full withdrawal. But they are doing the opposite of what they are saying. They are building new roads, defences and fixed houses - not for one winter but for many winters...Every time they arrest people and beat them, there is more hatred for the Israelis. They are stirring up the people - we in Amal don’t need to stir them.

What followed was escalating chaos, a dialectical deterioration into violence and warfare. Due to the Israeli occupation forces, any attempt on the part of


\(^{243}\) Qouted in Yaniv 1987, p.241.
a Lebanese authority to restore law and order would unavoidably be perceived among the Shia as collaboration with an occupier. The Israeli response was to unleash its security forces, hunting down any suspected member of the emerging resistance, a course of actions that generated even more hatred. The last straw was an incident in October 1983 at an Ashura gathering in the southern town of Nabatiyha. Here, while commemorating the death of Hussein at Kerbala, an estimated number of 50000-60000 Shi’ites were interrupted by an Israeli convoy that tried to make its way through the masses. The riots that erupted signalled the start of an all-out war. It was blatant symbolism, and just as deadly. The following day, the head of the Higher Shia Council of the South, Sheikh Shams al Din, condemned the Israelis through a fatwa (binding religious opinion) calling for Shi’ite activism, for “civil disobedience” and “resistance.” By using the same paradigm as Musa al-Sadr, the sheikh declared that every generation has its own Kerbala, that a “man makes his own choice”: he can “soar and sacrifice” or he can “submit and betray.” Once Amal took part in the resistance, the real momentum started. The south more or less detonated in the face of the occupation forces. One observer commented that the Shi’ites “attacked the Israeli troops any way and anywhere they could – with hit-and-run ambushes, nail bombs, exploding donkeys. Red Cross ambulances packed with TNT, and snipers.” Likewise, veteran correspondent Robert Fisk described how southern Lebanon “was turning into a death trap for the Israelis, a place of constant ambushes and booby traps in which the most powerful army in the

244 "Far from cowing the resistance", a correspondent noted, ‘Israel’s “Iron Fist” policy has been accompanied by a mounting deluge of attacks on Israeli forces and position. Until recent months, the Israelis used to complain gloomily that barely a day went by without an attack on them. Now it is true to say that barely an hour or two elapse between attacks of one sort or another on Israeli positions or convoys in some part of the south.” See Middle East International, 22 March 1985.
Middle East seemed unable to defend itself.” 246 Incapable of dealing with the pressure, the Israelis undertook a large scale withdrawal between February and May 1985, deploying their forces in the so-called ‘security zone’, where they would remain while facing increasing pressure from the ‘Islamic resistance’ up until May 2000.

**Concluding remarks**

This chapter surveyed the historical dimension of the Lebanese conflict, not just the war itself that broke out in 1975 but the historical contest over the Lebanese state as such (of which the war was a consequence). The chapter also surveyed the specific historical aspects of the Lebanese war in order to contextualise the environment in which Hezbollah emerged. These aspects involve the controversial borders of the Lebanese state and its confessional political system, both of which aggravated deeply conflicting sentiments of nationalism and identity. These conflicting identities were rooted in political and ideological positions that entered a deeply precarious state when the regional climate of the Arab-Israeli war heated up. The chapter also showed how the Lebanese state and regional powers, like Syria and Israel, were deeply challenged by the Palestinian political and military presence in Lebanon and tried to handle – and control - this presence in their own different ways. As the domestic disagreements were intertwined with the regional conflict, Lebanese were looking down into the abyss of an internationalised war. The chapter highlighted in particular how the various conflicting cur-

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246 Fisk 1991, p. 551. In April 1984, another observer reported that the “Israeli attempts to smash the resistance, despite the army of informants and collective reprisals against the population, have failed abjectly. With each week that passes, the resistance appears to be gaining in strength and confidence…To cut the risk of casualties, occasioned mainly by ambushes, the Israelis have begun to reduce their troops, either sending them back to Israel or withdrawing hem into fortified barracks and strong points.” *Middle East International*, 20 April 1984.
rents within the Shi’ite community viewed the conflict and the nature of the Lebanese state and how they argued with regard to absorbing and understanding the impulses of the Islamic revolution in a Lebanese environment. It elucidated their disagreements in relation to the Lebanese state and the Palestinian cause as well as over means and strategies for confronting the Israeli aggression against Lebanon, not least the Israeli invasion of the country in 1982. In this context, it was shown how Hezbollah emerged as a deeply radical alternative for the Lebanese Shi’ites who, in a Khomeinist way, regarded Lebanon’s fate as inevitably interlinked with the regional conflict, especially the struggle against Israel and U.S. domination. Its absolute priority was to fight this new ‘Israeli order’, or indeed a ‘Western hegemony’, and that implied striking at the MNF – which facilitated this order (and hegemony) – as well as the Israeli occupation forces. At this initial phase of its coming into being, it had no broad popular base, but its leadership and cadres, while operating in clandestinely, emerged from among the radicalized Shi’ites who regarded Amal’s position as to feeble and opportunist.

The next chapter will take up Hezbollah’s ideological vision, as announced in the mid-eighties, and how the movement intended to proceed with this vision. The chapter also deals with how Hezbollah fought for its autonomy on Lebanese territory, challenging both Syria and the Amal movement, while also concluding necessary agreements between the two as the Lebanese approached a phase of peace and reconciliation. The chapter answers the following questions: What was Hezbollah’s vision, and how should this vision be understood in the Lebanese context? Under what kind of conditions did Hezbollah operate and make compromises? What were the leading objectives of the movement during this process?
Chapter 4. The rise of Hezbollah

The Israelis left most of the occupied territory of Lebanon in stages between February and May 1985. On February 16, Hezbollah released an ideological manifesto - ‘The Open Letter to the Oppressed of the World’ - which meant that the movement was to leave its clandestine role for a more public and political one. The vice secretary-general of Hezbollah, Sheikh Naim Kassem describes the manifesto as Hezbollah’s own sign of ‘maturity’ in which it was able to reveal its message to the world and declare its various positions and objectives and the overall nature of its struggle [note]. In the manifesto, Hezbollah defined its enemies and potential friends. While many have seen the hostile tone of the letter as characterising Hezbollah’s militant and harsh position during the eighties, it will be suggested that the basic objectives as defined in this manifesto remained relevant for the following decades, even when Hezbollah assumed a more accommodating position and strategy, especially towards the Lebanese regime. Yet, in the following, the manifesto will be presented as the ideological outline of Hezbollah’s struggle. What are the short- and long-term objectives of Hezbollah? How did it conceive of the Islamic revolution and the Lebanese regime? What was the party’s position towards Israel and other actors – like the Phalange party – on the Lebanese scene? How did the movement conceive of its strategies in Lebanon and beyond? Moreover, I will also stress the ‘third worldist’ dimension of Hezbollah by likening its ideological manifesto to Frantz Fanon’s idea of violence as expressed in the ‘Wretched of the Earth’ so as not to reduce Hezbollah’s glorification of violence and martyrdom to its Islamic commitment alone. Rather, this commitment can be understood as an Islamic expression of a certain militancy that emerged in various violent contexts of anti-
colonial struggle, Islamic or otherwise. Lastly, this chapter will also deal with how Hezbollah in the latter half of the eighties had to fight for its own survival on Lebanese territory, especially against Amal but even against the Syrians. This is important because this battle shows how Hezbollah was determined to secure a certain objective – fighting Israel – and made strategic concessions during the effort. As will be argued later, this ambition on the part of Hezbollah to construe Gramscian ‘historical blocs’ has been a long-term strategy during both its radical and its more accommodating periods.

4.1 Hezbollah’s ideological manifesto to the world

Hezbollah usually describes its earliest phase of formation as an indigenous initiative based on the imperative to defeat the Israeli occupation of Lebanon. Hassan Nasrallah has stated, “[t]here was no plan other than to resist the occupation. Hezbollah was at its inception – its thoughts, mind, conscience, feeling and plan – centred on resisting the occupation, nothing else...Remember, the south was all occupied, as was Beirut, and part of the Mountain and the Central and West Bekaa. The rest of Lebanon was threatened as no one knew when the invasion would stop. We were thinking at first: Let us restore the homeland and then we will think of the political system. That was the thrust and focus of attention of Hezbollah."\textsuperscript{247}

In that way, the first years of Hezbollah’s coming to being were characterized mostly by clandestine activities: the formation of small militant cells that committed spectacular and intense acts of violence as well as being part of a disparate front of resistance groups that attacked Israeli troops and their

\textsuperscript{247} Interview, \textit{Middle East Insight}, May-August 1996
allies. The first ideological tract of Hezbollah would emerge later, on the eve of the Israeli withdrawal in 1985. As Naim Kassem points out, it took the movement about two and a half years until it could declare a coherent ideological vision, as stated in the “Open Letter to the Downtrodden in the World”, presented on February 16, 1985. Through that declaration, he notes, “Hezbollah entered a new phase, shifting the Party from secret resistance activity that ran free from political or media interaction into the public political work.”\textsuperscript{248} The letter starts with a pledged loyalty to Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic revolution in Iran. As it goes: “We, the sons of Hizb Allah’s nation, whose vanguard God has given victory in Iran and which has established the nucleus of the world’s Islamic state, abide by the orders of a single wise and just command currently embodied in the supreme Ayatollah Ruollah al-Musawi al-Khomeini, the rightly guided imam who combines all the qualities of the total imam, who has detonated the Muslims’ revolution, and who is bringing about the glorious qualities of Islamic resistance.”\textsuperscript{249} Loyalty to Khomeini and the Iranian revolution indicates a transnational commitment, and Hezbollah announces that it is not “a closed organizational party nor a narrow political framework” but sees itself as a “nation tied to Muslims in every part of the world by a strong ideological and political bond, namely Islam...Therefore, what befalls the Muslims in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Philippines, or elsewhere befalls the body of our Islamic nation of which we are an indivisible part and we move to confront it out of a religious duty primarily and in the light of a general political visualization decided by the leader jurisprudent.”\textsuperscript{250}

The movement reiterates Khomeini’s ethos that “America is the reason for all our catastrophes and the source for all malice” and that by resisting America, Hezbollah is only “exercising [its] legitimate right to defend Islam and the dignity of the nation.” Its ambitions are thus mainly defensive:

\textsuperscript{248} Qassem 2004, p. 98
\textsuperscript{249} Hezbollah’s ideological manifesto is to be found in Norton 1987, p. 168-169.
\textsuperscript{250} Norton 1987, p. 169.
to oppose schemes of subjugation. “We declare frankly and clearly that we are a nation that fears only God and that does not accept tyranny, aggression, and humiliation. America and its allies and the Zionist entity that has usurped the sacred Islamic land of Palestine have engaged and continue to engage in constant aggression against us and are working constantly to humiliate us. Therefore, we are in a state of constant and escalating preparedness to repel aggression and to defend our religion, existence, and dignity.”

The ambition, Hezbollah asserts, is to “liberate our country, to drive the imperialists out of it, and to determine our fate with our own hands.” In this effort to liberate the land, Hezbollah sees a combined front of enemies in the Christian Phalange, Israel, the U.S. and France but also in a range of Arab regimes that are part of the U.S. ambition to impose its hegemony in the region. The letter refers to Bashir Gemayel, the assassinated Phalangist leader, as a “butcher” who gained the presidency with the assistance of the Israeli invasion, the Arab oil countries and the Muslim deputies in the Lebanese parliament who banked on becoming partners in the new American order; the ‘Salvation Committee’ (which Berri chose to join) is described as “an American-Israeli bridge over which the Phalange crossed to oppress the downtrodden.” Hezbollah accuses the Phalange of exploiting U.S. ambitions of domination for its own purposes of maintaining positions of power and privilege.

Hezbollah defines four objectives in Lebanon. Firstly, Israel should leave Lebanon, but only as a “prelude to its final obliteration from existence and the liberation of venerable Jerusalem from the talons of occupation.” Hezbollah adopts Khomeini’s position that the battle with Israel is existential. On the one hand, Israel operates as “the American spearhead in our Islamic world” by subjugating the various forces of opposition to the U.S.

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251 Ibid., p. 170.
252 Ibid., p. 171.
253 Ibid.
order. On the other hand, it also poses a colonial challenge and, thus, expresses a deep injustice towards the Palestinians:

This enemy poses a great danger to our future generations and to the destiny of our nation, especially since it embraces a settlement oriented and expansionist idea that has already begun to apply in occupied Palestine...Our struggle with usurping Israel emanates from an ideological and historical awareness that this Zionist entity is aggressive in its origins and structure and is built on usurped land and at the expense of the rights of a Muslim people. Therefore, our confrontation with this entity must end with its obliteration from existence.\(^\text{254}\)

Secondly, besides – or, in line with – such existential showdowns, Hezbollah demands the “final departure of America, France, and their allies from Lebanon and the termination of the influence of any imperialist power in the country.” Thirdly, it demands that the Phalange be brought to trial for the “crimes they have committed against both Muslims and Christians with the encouragement of America and Israel.” Finally, Hezbollah declares the right for the Lebanese people to have “the opportunity to determine their fate and to choose with full freedom the system of government they want” while at the same time claiming that “we do not hide our commitment to the rule of Islam and that we urge to choose the Islamic system that alone guarantees justice and dignity for all and prevents any imperialist attempt to infiltrate our country.”\(^\text{255}\) However, Hezbollah’s appeal to the “rule of Islam” can be understood as rather ambiguous, since it is described as an ideal, an aspiration and not necessarily a realistic project in a Lebanese context. That is, while Hezbollah does not conceal its commitment to Islam as a “faith system, thought and rule” (urging “all to recognize it and resort to its law”), it also emphasises that it has no ambition or will to “impose Islam on any-

\(^{254}\) Ibid., 179.
\(^{255}\) Ibid., 173.
body”, in the same way as the movement “hates to see others impose on us their convictions and their systems. We do not want Islam to rule in Lebanon by force, as the political Maronism is ruling at the present.” Hezbollah thus stresses that its “minimum aspiration in Lebanon” is to rescue the country from “subservience either to the West or the East, expelling the Zionist occupation from its territories finally and adopting a system that the people establish of their free will and choice.”

Still, the movement rejects any accommodation with the Lebanese regime, partly because it considers it to be “a protégé of world arrogance and a part of the political map that is hostile to Islam” and partly because “it is a fundamentally oppressive structure that no reform or patchwork improvement would do any good and that must be changed from the roots…” That is, Hezbollah denounces the confessional structure of the political system and asserts that it is “not all interested in any projection for political reform within the framework of the rotten sectarian system, just exactly as we are not interested in any formation of any cabinet or the participation of any figure in any ministry representing a part of the oppressive regime.” The party declares that “[a]ny opposition moving within the sphere of protecting and safeguarding the constitution currently in force and not committed to making fundamental changes in the system’s roots is also a superficial opposition that will not achieve the interests of the oppressed masses.”

At this time, Hezbollah expresses not only its hostility towards the confessional system but also towards the Lebanese nation-state as such, which it considers to be the colonial fabrication of a French legacy aimed at suppressing and marginalizing the Muslims. In a lecture held in July 1985, Hassan Nasrallah (at the time, a young cleric within Hezbollah) referred to Lebanon as “10452 square km”, i.e., an entity established by France for sowing mere schemes of division, for facilitating colonial rule. Lebanon had no

256 Ibid., 175.
257 Ibid.
258 Ibid., p. 175-176.
real history as a “political entity”, Nasrallah pointed out, other than being the
gathering of patches of land that were historically part of a larger region, including Sham (Syria) and the rest of the umma. Both in terms of borders and the domestic political order (the confessional system), the Lebanese project was essentially one of division, which also discriminated against the Muslims (interestingly, Nasrallah does not refer to the Shi’ite Muslims, who were Hezbollah’s constituency and the ones more discriminated against than the Sunni, most likely because he wished to avoid further sectarian division).

In this lecture, Nasrallah pulled no punches concerning Maronite dominance in Lebanon, not because he condemned Maronites as a community but because their political privileges were an expression of the colonialist scheme of continued Western domination as well as of the resulting denigration and marginalisation of the Muslim community. “For the sake of the fear of the Christians [to be dominated by Muslims], they would sit in the house and the Muslims would remain outside of it, in heat as in cold. They also charged that the Muslims are not qualified to govern Lebanon because they were staying behind in their small villages and townships when the Maronites went to the universities of London and Paris…This creation of France is the fundamental reason for the injustice and deprivation we endure”, Nasrallah said. Like Fadlallah earlier and the radicals close to Khomeini, Nasrallah also asserted that the solution to the Lebanese predicament was not to be found in Lebanon, only beyond its borders, because the country’s mess was part of a regional problem. Nasrallah charged that outside forces demand that the Lebanese elites remain neutral in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Referring to events during the civil war, he argued that the Lebanese army was only to be deployed to suppress domestic opposition, not to fight against

260 Expressing the same view, Sheikh Subhi Tufayli, a prominent leader within Hezbollah during the eighties (and secretary-general between 1989 and 1991) declared that “We do not work or think within the border of Lebanon, this little geometric box, which is one of the legacies of imperialism. Rather, we seek to defend Muslims throughout the world.” Quoted in Kramer 1989, p. 26.
Israel. However, he also claimed that the U.S.-Israeli effort to squeeze Lebanon into an American orbit through the Israeli invasion of 1982 had failed, not least of all because the Islamic revolution in Iran had led to an “awakening” among the oppressed. “The question is what we can do for this [revolution] in Lebanon. We don’t say that the Lebanese Muslims are able to take on regional challenges by themselves, but neither does this mean that they should relax and stay at home. Rather we say that the Lebanese Muslims should become part of a movement which encompasses the whole region…and the Islamic republic is the centre of it.”

The ambition, Nasrallah declared, was to build a generation of *mujahidin* to challenge this fate of the nation.

### 4.2 A Fanonian logic: the ontology of violence

Hezbollah’s projection of Islamism into Lebanon was, even at this early stage of its formation, mainly about *resistance* and *awakening*, not about establishing an Islamic state. This is akin to Sankari’s point about Fadlallah, who, he argues, saw the Islamic revolution through a “Fanonian” perspective as it “provided the dynamism necessary for the awakening and the rebellion of the hitherto subjugated collective indigenous spirit against its conditions of resignation, enfeeblement and subservience.”

As earlier noted (in the introductory chapter), Fanon’s own experience was with the Algerian war of independence, which had taught him that the very ontology of the colonial world was violence. The colonial system of subordination was shaped and sustained by the violence that the colonizers imposed and that the colonized internalized through their own sense of weakness and lack of self-esteem. “It is not possible to enslave men without logically making them inferior

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261 *Al-Ahd*, 12 July 1985
262 Ibid.
through and through,” he wrote.²⁶³ For Fanon, this sense of weakness and inferiority was fostered in an order that knew of no universal values other than those of force and subordination (in a harsh reflection over the self-proclaimed values of Western civilization, he claimed that the “native laughs in mockery when Western values are mentioned in front of him”). Therefore, the colonized only had themselves to rely upon. Liberation could not be begged for – it had to be taken. The Fanonian remedy for such ends was violence, the very ontology of the prevailing order. “French colonialism is a war force; it has to be beaten down by force”, he asserted. “No diplomacy, no political genius, no skill can cope with it.”²⁶⁴ Yet Fanon saw violence not only as a necessity, i.e., as the only option in a grim, repressive reality, but he also conceived of it as a “cleansing force.” From within this ontology of violence, armed struggle inherited a cathartic impulse, since it would “free the native from his inferiority complex… it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect.”²⁶⁵ Significantly, there was thus a dual logic in this perspective: not only was armed struggle the only alternative for liberating the land, but the very act of doing so would break down those assumptions of weakness and incapacity that the colonial order had fostered among the colonized. It was a question of consciousness, to be aware not only of prevailing injustices but also of the ability to alter one’s grim conditions. The colonial order would not yield through negotiation, but it would crumble once such consciousness took hold in the minds of the oppressed.

While this outlook might appear as mere hyperbole to some, it is absolutely central to Fadlallah’s Islamic liberation philosophy and to Hezbollah’s doctrines of Islamic resistance and martyrdom. As with Fanon, these doctrines grew out of the realities of the Shi’ites in Lebanon: political and social marginalisation, the years of civil war, the numerous Israeli incursions, invasions and occupations and decades of the Palestinian trauma so

²⁶³ As cited in Nursery-Bray, 1980, p 135-142.
²⁶⁴ Fanon, 1964, p. 97.
²⁶⁵ Fanon 1963, p. 94.
closely entangled with Lebanese strife. “As for the state of violence we live in today”, Fadlallah wrote in 1986, “the reality [is] that violence is the current condition in the Middle East” which has been “forced upon the peoples in the region’ and it escalates “as the people feeling themselves bound by impotence, [are] stirred to shatter some of that enveloping powerlessness for the sake of liberty.”

Recalling the brutalities and the hopelessness surrounding the Israeli invasion in 1982, Hezbollah notes in its ideological manifesto how “[t]heir bombs fell on our kinsmen like rain during the Zionist [1982] invasion of our country’, concluding: ‘We appealed to the world’s conscience but heard nothing from it and found no trace in it…We were horrified and then realized that this world conscience stirs only at the request of the strong and in response to the interests of arrogance.”

Embedded in this ‘ontology of violence’, Hezbollah sees armed struggle as essential to the liberation of south Lebanon from occupation. In a Fanonian sense, Hezbollah contends that “freedom is not given but regained with the sacrifice of both heart and soul.” Indeed, Hezbollah spokesmen also deny that the Islamic state was ever proposed as a realistic alternative by Hezbollah, even during the more formative and radical days. To be sure, while certain circles around Hezbollah advocated the imposition of an Islamic state in Lebanon, insiders saw that objective as rather irrelevant in comparison to the pressing danger of the Israeli occupation. According to veteran member Mohammed Raad, currently head of Hezbollah’s parliamentarian group, the early years witnessed a disorder and confusion, especially as the Israeli occupation made transport difficult. He notes, however, that the common desire among Hezbollah’s militants of disparate cadres was resistance.

For two or three years, we had contributed to the escalation of resistance operations. At the same time, we debated the political project of this re-

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266 Fadlallah, 1986.
267 Norton 1987, p. 170
268 Ibid.
The debate centred on one question: Should we elaborate on a detailed political project in the context of national liberation? A majority of us retained the consistent opinion to give priority to the resistance. All the same, our project of national liberation did not gainsay our Islamic intellectual and cultural identity. I think that this aspect of incomprehension or misunderstanding resulted from this fact. This media affirmed that our battle would end in the creation of an Islamic republic in Lebanon. But this goal was not our agenda. However, we do not deny that during course of battle against the occupier, certain groups were carried away to the point that they claimed the creation of an Islamic republic. But we had no organized relation with them. During two or three years, we had no knowledge of everybody involved. Some Islamist groups resisted without having any organized relations with us.\footnote{As quoted in Charara & Domont, 2004, p 99-100.}

Around the time of the release of the movement’s ideological manifesto in 1985, Fadlallah similarly complained about those Islamists that are “in a hurry”, who “appear to think that Islamic rule is enough an issue to arouse the masses” and who seem to have no qualms about imposing an Islamic state by violence, if need be. Many people are incapable, he warned, of seeing “the realities on the ground”. Hence, he advocated this more gradual work of changing the realities. For Hezbollah, this notion of resistance encompassed a larger upheaval across the region that may end in the establishment of an Islamic state, but Lebanon was too small and to diversified for such a project. Even before the declaration of the party’s manifesto in 1985, Sayyed Ibrahim al-Amin argued that “it would not be natural for Lebanon to be an Islamic state outside the project of the [greater Islamic] nation \textit{[mashroyyat al umma]}. We want Lebanon to be part of that nation.”\footnote{\textit{Al-Ahd}, 19 August 1984.} Rather, considering this wider “awakening” that Hezbollah sought to trigger, the aspect of resistance was no doubt more inclusive for mobilizing and
maintaining a broad front – or what Gramsci would refer to as a “historical bloc” – against the incumbent structures of power. In 1986, Hassan Nasrallah contended that Hezbollah did not “believe in multiple Islamic republics” but preferred “a single Islamic world governed by a central government, because we consider all borders throughout the Muslim world as fake and colonialist, and therefore doomed to disappear.” Furthermore, this notion of resistance tapped into the Khomeinist “third worldist” angle of the Islamic revolution, which involved a global uprising against the two major superpowers, though within the confines and depth of Islam; or as the Khomeinist revolutionary slogan echoed: “no East, no West, only Islam.” That is, in the Cold War stand-off between the two superpowers, Hezbollah offers an alternative to Western capitalism and to Eastern socialism, since these two ideologies have failed – the movement declares – to create the “just and serene society” and have been unable to “establish a balance between the individual and society or between nature and public interest.” Driven by materialist desires but “behind the mask of disagreement over principles,” the two superpowers are only “struggling to extend their influences and interests over the world.” As Hezbollah’s manifesto concludes: “Consequently, the oppressed countries have become the struggle’s bone of contention and the oppressed people have become its fuel...Therefore, we stand against any Western and Eastern imperialist intervention in the affairs of the oppressed and of their countries and we confront every ambition and intervention in our affairs.”

271 Qouted in Noe 2006 p. 32. Nasrallah also reiterated his claim that Hezbollah did not “believe in a nation whose borders are 10452 square kilometres in Lebanon; our project foresees Lebanon as a part of the political map of an Islamic world of an Islamic world in which specificities would cease to exist, but in which the rights, freedom, and dignity of minorities within are guaranteed’ (quoted in Noe 2007, p.32). Likewise, Sheikh Subhi Tufayli argued that “We do not work or think within the borders of Lebanon, this little geometric box, which is one of the legacies of imperialism. Rather, we seek to defend Muslims throughout the world.” Kramer 1989, p. 26.
Similar to Khomeini, Hezbollah castigates “the reactionary Arab regimes the Gulf Cooperation Council, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, and the ‘Arafat organization’” for a “policy of defeatism.” As Hezbollah’s manifesto goes: “As for the Arab regimes falling over themselves for reconciliation with the Zionist enemy, they are decrepit regimes incapable of keeping up with the nation’s ambitions and aspirations and they cannot think of confronting the Zionist usurping Palestine because these regimes came into existence under a colonialist guardianship that played a major role in the creation of these eroded regimes.”\(^272\) These are the “reactionary rulers,” according to Hezbollah, especially those “in the oil countries,” who are not “reluctant to turn their countries into military bases for America and Britain” and who are “implementing the policies set for them by the White House circles to smuggle their countries’ wealth and divide it among the imperialists by various means.”\(^273\) With regard to this defeatism, Hezbollah perceives Israel as playing an instrumental role in persuading the Arab regimes that “it has become a fait accompli that cannot go unrecognized, not to mention the necessity of acknowledging the need to ensure its security. This defeatist policy is what encouraged the buried [Egyptian president] al-Sadat to commit high treason and sign the humiliation treaty with it.”

Importantly, Hezbollah sees the Arab regimes as poorly lacking the trust of the people they are supposed to represent. Because of their “defeatist policies”, they are “keep[ing] their people ignorant” by “dissolv[ing] their Islamic identity” and suppressing the Islamist movements in their countries that oppose U.S. policy. It is the kind of defeatist policy, Hezbollah suggests, that “causes these regimes to fear the awakening of the downtrodden,” since growing awareness will expose their corruption and “suspect ties” to foreign

\(^{272}\) Norton 1987, p. 182.  
\(^{273}\) Ibid. In their dire criticism of the traditional regimes in the Gulf countries, Hezbollah argues that they “claim to be the protectors of the Islamic Shari’a so that they may cover up their treason and may justify their submission to America’s will while at the same time considering the entry of a single revolutionary book into their country something banned and prohibited.” Ibid., p. 182.
powers. These are the regimes that obstruct the development of awareness and unity and impede “the attempts to keep the wound open and the struggle continued with the Zionist enemy.” However, the movement argues that it has “great hope in the Muslim peoples that clearly have begun to complain in most Islamic countries…The day will come when all these brittle regimes will collapse under the blows of the oppressed, as the throne of the tyrant in Iran has already collapsed.”

However, while Hezbollah emphasized its commitment to Islam, it also sought to foment a cross-religious and political alliance of forces to oppose the Israeli occupation of Lebanon and the Maronite regime in Beirut. The magnitude and depth of that battle requires unity, and Hezbollah is well aware of the vulnerability of standing alone. Hezbollah thus urges Lebanese Christians and Sunni Muslims to drop sectarian loyalties - a main cause of the Lebanese tragedy - and thereby avoid the imperialist trap of dividing and ruling. Hezbollah notes that Islam does not exclude the common ground of ideas, mere sectarianism does. The basic objectives of the movement rather craves unity among the Lebanese, whatever their belongings and origins. “You carry ideas that do not stem from Islam”, the letter goes.

This should not prevent cooperation between us for these objectives... Though formed through non-Islamic ideas, these motives must inevitably revert to their essence when you find that revolutionary Islam is the force leading the struggle and confronting oppression and arrogance...You will find us eager to open up to you. You will find that our relationship with you will grow stronger the closer our ideas move toward each other, the more we feel that your decision-making is independent, and the more the inter-

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274 To keep ‘the wound open’ is Hezbollah’s expression for not allowing the hurt of the Palestinian tragedy to be buried by time passed. The injustice committed against the Palestinians shall not go unheeded, as Hezbollah charges is the ambition of the Arab regimes.

ests of Islam and Muslims dictate that this relationship be bolstered and developed.\textsuperscript{276}

In addition, while Hezbollah acknowledges its common ground with various non-Islamic Lebanese actors, it also emphasizes that it is Islam that best bolsters the spirit needed for sacrifice and enduring resistance. Were this Islamic character to be effaced, “its patriotism would become extremely fragile.”\textsuperscript{277} That is, the Islamic depth could boost stamina in the struggle that non-Islamic models and thinking could not.

\textbf{4.3 1985-1990: fighting for turf and survival}

Despite Hezbollah’s claim for unity and its professed ambition to promote and extend the Islamic resistance, the movement faced certain predicaments in its efforts. Firstly, well into the mid-eighties and the virtual breakdown of the Lebanese state, the country had been transformed into a notorious “militia land” - a patchwork of homogenous sectarian enclaves and neighbourhoods in which, absent a functioning state, clan lords and their affiliates, backed up by external sponsors, ruled by alternating between terror and providing welfare services and by administering the system of taxes and social infrastructure ordinarily managed by the state. Secondly, Hezbollah’s deep affiliation with the revolutionary events and changes in Iran seemed to place it at odds with the Lebanese political terrain. Even though the party, as we have seen, remained dubious in its promotion of an Islamic republic in Lebanon, its party zealots alienated many people by imposing Islamic mores and certain dress codes, banning the sales of alcohol as well as dancing and gambling, harassing unveiled women and even beating up girls for swim-

\textsuperscript{276} Ibid., p. 174
\textsuperscript{277} Ibid., p. 180.
ming at the beaches of the south. According to Ahmad Beydon, the large part of the local population in south Lebanon identified with Amal, while Hezbollah remained “isolated on the popular level,” since the party’s ideology and behaviour, he argued, differed too sharply from anything corresponding to a collective aspiration.” As zealous vanguards of the Islamic revolution, Hezbollah’s cadres appeared to be out of step with any formation of a popular struggle that was an imperative for spreading that revolution. Indeed, the movement would also gain a gruesome reputation for allegedly being behind the numerous hostage-takings of Westerners in Lebanon. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to delve into the nature of Hezbollah’s role in the wide range of kidnappings that took place in the mid- and late eighties in Lebanon. However, while the direct participation of Hezbollah’s leadership is disputed and debated, it should be emphasised that Hezbollah gained both in prestige and in protection from these hostage affairs, as well as losing popular support. According to Jaber, there is no reason to doubt that Hezbollah shared ideological outlooks with the hostage-takers and even “allowed them to operate in the areas under its control”. However, it is

278 Chehabi 2006, p. 225. As Jaber notes: “Shortly after its arrival in the South, Hezbollah banned the sale of alcohol in shops and restaurants and prohibited parties, dancing and loud music. They also closed down coffee shops. The old men who used to frequent the coffee shops in the afternoons and early evenings were deprived of their simple pastime of paying cards and backgammon. A strict code of Islamic behaviour was imposed on the towns and villages bringing with it some extreme interpretations of what was considered permissible behaviour. Although there were those who were happy to abide by the new regulations and restrictions, many others rejected them” See Jaber, 1997, p. 29-30. According to Smit, Hezbollah had little success in imposing Islamic norms and dress codes in south Beirut and “reportedly had to pay incentives to have some impact.” Smit 2000, p. 230.
279 Beydon 1992, p. 47.
280 When discussing this period with Ali Fayyad, he objected to the assumption that Hezbollah lacked a popular base, as “the massive demonstrations in support for Hezbollah could show”. However, he did concede that in 1986 the party started to contemplate a strategy and position that could better be rooted in a “Lebanese reality”. Author’s interview, Beirut, June 2005.
281 For an overview and thorough analysis of Hezbollah and the hostage crisis, see Ranstorp 1997.
less certain whether Hezbollah was “the prime mover,” i.e., she notes that “there were other players in the game, whose influence spread beyond the boundaries of Lebanon.” Indeed, Hezbollah’s spokesmen appeared divided over the issue of hostage-taking, although they would claim the right of the weak to undertake “unconventional means” in certain extraordinary circumstances, as those that prevailed in Lebanon in the aftermath of the Israeli 1982 invasion. Nasrallah denies that Hezbollah ever adopted the policy of hostage-taking but argues that the groups committing those actions only tried to safeguard their own members in captivity “from the noose.” Yet, he also situated the debate over the hostages in a perspective of the presumed racism and injustice plaguing the world, referring to how only Western hostages received attention, while there were thousands of Lebanese captives in Israeli jails. “Is it because they are Lebanese no one would talk about them? You feel that you are living in a barbaric world, an unjust world.” In a similar way, the newly elected secretary general Abbas Musawi claimed in August 1991 (not long before the release of the hostages) that the issue did not bother him that much, since it was never weighed against the many Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. To him, the groups taking hostages were doing so in self-defence, well aware of what the U.S. and Israel might do. The hostages were “a way to stay clear of this danger.” By invoking the “logic of force” that ruled the balance of power in the region, he also noted how the U.S. wanted to use these hostages as bargaining chips, and Washington was well aware of how to get the hostages released: by meeting the

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284 Interview in Middle East Insight, May-Aug 1996.
285 Ibid. During the hostage crises, a similar view was expressed by a member of the Islamic Jihad to the Middle East correspondent, Robert Fisk, who conceded that “t[taking] innocent people as hostage is wrong’ but there was ‘no other option’. The Islamic jihad member regarded the issue as a “reaction to a situation that had been imposed upon them” and referred to the “5000 Lebanese civilians in the south of Lebanon” that had been abducted by Israel, “not even to mention the invasion itself and the killings of many people.” Fisk 1991, p. 655.
demands of Hezbollah. “If this was an issue of humanity on part of America”, he contended, “America would have solved it already.”

It seems that many of the more ‘shadowy’ actions that Hezbollah would deny direct involvement in were often credited to the clandestine organisation “Islamic Jihad.” In addition, Hezbollah denied any involvement in other gruesome actions, such as assassinations of leftist intellectuals in the mid-eighties (among them, the revered Marxist scholar Hussein Mrohe). While the party was indeed involved in a vendetta with leftist groups for a period of time, the party would claim that this was an orchestrated effort to discredit the popular upsurge of Islam in Lebanon (which competed with the left for support and sympathisers). According to Nasrallah, the Communist Party tried to mobilize against Hezbollah in Beirut but overstepped the boundary of what is acceptable when it attacked the Iranian embassy in 1986. Nasrallah stuck to Hezbollah’s recurring theme that it did not desire any clashes with any party on the Lebanese scene, since its key ambition was to fight Israel in the south. As he claimed with respect to Hezbollah’s battles with the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP): “We are always very careful to avoid fighting with anyone, and most of all with those with whom we have ideological differences, like the Communists.” Underlining Hezbollah’s difference from other parties in the civil war, he argued that “[t]he methodology according to which we operate does not involve building positions in the Lebanese state system”, but “the strategy is to build a future for ourselves through confrontation with the Zionist enemy.” That is, Hezbollah’s

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286 See Al-Ahd, 28 aug 1991.
287 As Hassan Nasrallah notes with respect to the attack against the U.S. marines in Beirut: ‘It was not Hezbollah that committed this act. Islamic jihad did that and declared its responsibility to the operation. I do not exonerate myself from it. Au contraire; they were doing the right thing…because the Marines in Lebanon did not – and let the American people know – come to Lebanon to make peace but to protect the Israeli occupation and to impose by force a certain political system…The Marines on Lebanese soil were in fact occupation forces’. See interview Middle East Insight, May-Aug 1996.
supreme concern was access to the occupied border strip in the south, nothing else. However, he also warned that “any attack on our mujahidin would be unacceptable and costly, as the incidents that have taken place recently have shown; we also intend to contain any incident that might occur.”

When I discussed this issue with a spokesman for the LCP, he appeared vague on the topic. The chaotic reign of the militias during this period made it unclear who belonged to whom, he said. “We did not know if those firing were from Hezbollah or Amal, the boundaries were very unclear.” Of course, making this comment in 2007, this vagueness might also be an expression of the LCP’s inclination to forge common strategic bonds with Hezbollah and, thus, let sleeping dogs lie. In any case, it appeared as if Hezbollah was as determined throughout the eighties to defend the territory for its constituency as it was eager to cooperate and compromise for gaining access in order to fight the Israelis in the south. This will be illustrated in what follows.

4.4 The unsteady formation of “Pax Syriana”

These statements by Nasrallah were made in the middle of the turbulence during which a new Lebanese order was formed. That is, as the MNF left Beirut and the Israelis began to redeploy down south, the Beirut government had no other choice than to seek rapprochement with Damascus. This was the phase during which Hezbollah and Syria would both clash and cooperate in order to arrange for a common resistance project against joint enemies while also competing for territorial control and support. The Israeli

290 Interview with Maurice Nahra, Beirut, January 2007.
291 Pierre Yazzak, Head of the Lebanese Forces Office in Jerusalem (which was closed down), commented on the issue: “We have no option but to reach an understanding with Syria. Our strategy now is simply survival. Anything else would be sheer suicide.” See Norton 1987, p. 131.
withdrawal in 1985 no doubt offered Damascus leeway to impose itself as the “ultimate arbiter” in the more or less chaotic Lebanese landscape of sectarian cantons and a weak and fractured regime lacking authority. As a price for this rapprochement, Syria demanded that the 17th of May Agreement be abrogated, and it was. In this new order, all of the parties, as Theodor Hanf notes, were “more dependent on Syria than ever before.” According to him, the battle over the 17th of May Agreement was part of the civil war. It ended, as earlier, with “no victor, no vanquished,” i.e., the Maronites had failed to impose their supremacy over the Lebanese multitude or to give Lebanon a new, more “pro-Western” position in the regional order (page). However, as the Lebanese regime accommodated Syrian control, it did not have to make any real concessions to the radicals in opposition other than offering Nabih Berri’s Amal movement influential (and prosperous) positions in the government. For Syria, the post-Israeli withdrawal environment entailed the quest for Syrian supremacy, i.e., to prove to those involved, mainly the Lebanese, but, importantly, even to the U.S., that Syria was the “indispensable authority” that one had better not ignore. In fact, President Asad outlined this Syrian strategy already in 1976: Damascus would not try to defeat any party in Lebanon but rather make sure that no side would gain the upper hand over the other. This was the Syrian way of sustaining the

292 While Israeli troops retreated to the south, Uri Lubrani, the coordinating officer of Lebanese affairs, lamented that “Israel lacks a responsible, viable and capable Lebanese counterpart into whose hands it could place the responsibility for law and order in the territories to be evacuated by its defense forces.” Lubrani 1985, p 11. He also professed that “the Government of Lebanon will continue to find itself with its hands tied to Syria, unable to proceed with any arrangements for an orderly transfer. This very regrettable state of affairs is quite naturally causing deep disappointment together with dark forebodings in Israel...Is this vision of a free independent, united and prosperous Lebanon just a dream? Who knows? Maybe the answer should be sought in Damascus?” Ibid, p. 13.
post-1958 Lebanese formula of co-existence, as expressed in “no victor, no vanquished” – though with Syria on top of it.\textsuperscript{293} As William Harris writes:

Syria had the advantages of familiarity with Lebanon’s internal affairs and acceptability to some segments of the population that dated back to Syria’s 1976 intervention as a peace-making force, invited by the Lebanese regime. The standard Syrian modus operandi was to have local Lebanese officials and militia proxies handle what passed for administration, while Syrian troops overawed the population at high-way checkpoints and the Syrian intelligence apparatus monitored bureaucratic and political activity. Syrian military intelligence proved adept at exploiting the antagonisms within and between the Christian, Shi’i, and Sunni populations of the Biqa’ and northern Lebanon to make Syria indispensable as protector and mediator among the factions.\textsuperscript{294}

The Lausanne conference in 1984 was a Syrian effort to coordinate the various powerful militias and warlords into a new order in Lebanon that would bear a “pro-Syrian aura”. The Maronite leaders, though, backed away from any deal at the last moment. Syria’s failure at Lausanne revealed that the various Lebanese groups carried their own clout and intended to create their own “spaces” within this more general Syrian ambition to impose and consolidate hegemony in Lebanon. In this disarray, Hezbollah was obliged to make some difficult strategic choices. Firstly, there was the Syrian objective of stifling, or directing, the Palestinian resistance groups still present on Lebanese soil, as those loyal to Arafat’s branch of the PLO and, thus, outside

\textsuperscript{293} This point is borrowed form Asad Abukhalil. He notes that Assad stressed the impossibility of a “decisive military solution” to the Lebanese conflict. “Syria has consistently followed this principle, even when it required he use of military force against any of the warring factions. Syrian military intervention in Lebanon and confrontation with the various sides was motivated by the Syrian attempt t prevent any side in the war from prevailing, and consequently from diminishing Syrian power in Lebanon…It is this balance that allows Syria to maintain its supreme control.” Abukhalil, 1990, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{294} Harris 1997, p. 212.
the control of the Damascus regime were returning to Lebanon after the Israeli withdrawal. Syria wished to subjugate these Palestinian groups to the new ‘Pax Syriana’. For this purpose, Syria ‘unleashed’ the Amal movement (also back into the Syrian fold) against the Palestinian refugee camps in a gruesome two-year long incident called the “War of the Camps”. Amal, as previously discussed, had long resented the actions of the PLO guerrillas. As the Israelis returned down south, the movement was determined to obstruct any “adventurism” in relation to the peace and quiet in the south. In 1984, Nabih Berri had made it clear that a “return of the Palestinian masquerade to the south is strictly forbidden…There’s no question of a return to the situation that prevailed before 1982.”

By curbing the PLO, Amal thrived on the widespread anti-Palestinian sentiments within the Shi’ite community. For its part, Amal wanted to prove its worth to the Syrian schemes of domination in Lebanon. As Abukhalil notes: “Amal was more than ready to serve as Syria’s pawns; not only because of its vehement opposition to PLOs military power in Lebanon, but also wanted prove itself as the most trusted client of Syria in Lebanon, at a time when all of Lebanon’s Muslims and leftist leaders begged in Damascus for Syrian approval and support.”

Yet the brutal siege that Amal subjected the camps to provoked Hezbollah, galvanizing the bitter rivalry within the Shi’ite community. As we have seen, this rivalry extended back to the seventies and was in many ways rooted in the question of the Palestinian struggle. For Hezbollah, the ‘War of the Camps’ signified the sorry state of affairs of the Arab world, already plagued by divisions and conflicts that drained vital energy and capacity from the ‘real’ battle, i.e., challenging the Zionist-American project in Lebanon and beyond. However, despite the party’s disgust, it remained much on the sidelines as the “war of the camp” raged on, refusing to take sides, at least actively. According to Abukhalil, Hezbollah did not abstain for

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ideological reasons or due to solidarity with the Palestinian cause but for “petty sectarian calculation”, i.e., it did not want to go against the anti-Palestinian attitudes of their own community.297 Indeed, besides seeing the Palestinian cause as central in battling U.S. hegemony in the Middle East, Hezbollah deeply mistrusted, perhaps even loathed, the branches of the PLO loyal to Arafat for their lack of commitment and their readiness to negotiate with “the enemy.”298 In his political biography, Qassem admits that severe divisions and hostile sentiments existed between the Palestinian and Shi’ite communities and that Hezbollah suffered from these tensions. He also argues that various “pressure groups insisted that Hezbollah [should] participate in the war against the Palestinians in the camps” but stresses that the main concern of Hezbollah was to combat Israel, and the party’s policy was to avoid

297 Abukhalil stresses the sectarian climate of Lebanese politics and notes that the very strong anti-Palestinian-sentiments within the Shi’ite community also led to Hezbollah fighters, against orders, siding with Amal in the siege. He even argues that Hezbollah at the start of the war “encountered great difficulty in restraining its members from aiding Amal in its war against the Palestinians”, and Sayyed Ibrahim al-Amin al Sayyed told him that the Shi’ites had to ‘crush’ their Shi’ite Lebanese identity to toe the party line of neutrality. Fadlallah even told him of groups pressure within families against those Shi’ites, even members of Hezbollah, who did not side with Amal in the fight. Dawud Dawud declared that the Shi’ites of Lebanon would not forget Palestinian ‘crimes’, declaring, “We want their return, but only to subject them to punishment.” Abukhalil 1988. Alongside antagonism towards the PLO and the Palestinians, Amal also developed hostility towards the Arab regimes that the movement asserted had proven incapable of coming to the rescue in Lebanon. Asad Abukhalil describes how Shi’ites in Tyre, a town in south Lebanon, were seen chanting, “There is no God but God, and the Arabs are the enemies of God.” Abukhalil 1988.

298 Note on Hezbollah’s suspicion of Arafat and the PLO… Abukhalil argues that the Palestinian suffering was held in low esteem by many Lebanese, even Shi’ites. “It became customary for Lebanese Muslims and Christians to ridicule the constant sorrow and complaint of the Palestinian. The view that Palestinian did very little to salvage their homeland was very common among Lebanese, and still among Lebanese and Arabs alike.” Abukhalil1988. Note Abukhalil’s point of long-standing grievances among Shi’ites against the Palestinians and how many Hezbollah fighters fought with Amal against the Palestinians “against the strict orders of Hezbollah.” Naim Kassem seems to object to such accusations, seeing them as aimed to ‘tarnishing the image of the muhajidin’ See Qassem 2004, p. 100.
any “internal strife.” However, while Hezbollah appealed for unity among the ranks of the Shi’ites and other groups, its project of resistance also provoked hostilities and resentment, both with the Amal movement and with Syria itself. After all, Damascus desired – along with the support for Amal – to prove its credentials as the guardians of stability and security in Lebanon as well as as the ultimate arbiter between the conflicting parties in the Lebanese turmoil. Hezbollah’s radicalism posed a dilemma for the Syrian scheme to hang on in Lebanon as the ‘ultimate arbiter’. While Hezbollah provided Syria with a raison d’être as a supervisor in the Lebanese disorder, i.e., as a strong force capable of keeping radicals at bay, its unruly character could also “spill over” and reveal the Syria’s – and Amal’s – lack of clout and influence over the Shi’ite community. Hezbollah’s dubious involvement in the hostage affairs, for instance, was a constant embarrassment to Nabih Berri’s image on the international scene, as he appeared unable to manage this troublesome development of Westerners being held hostage on ‘Shi’ite territory’. Harris points out that Hezbollah’s involvement in the TWA hijacking also humiliated Nabih Berri to the extent that it was ultimately a major reason for the bitter war that later broke out between the two movements.

Still, Hezbollah’s determination to fight Israel also benefited the Syrians, who welcomed the pressure the Islamist guerrillas could bring to bear on the Israeli occupation forces in the south - as long as they did not “step out of line.” What is more, by approving Hezbollah’s fighting in the

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299 Qassem 2004, p. 100.
300 As Smit notes, Berri was especially disturbed by the way Islamist militants attacked foreigners, which “threatened to isolate West Beirut internationally” and which had a “devastating effect on the image of the shi’ites worldwide.” Smit 2000, p. 230.
301 According to William Harris, the TWA hijacking was a humiliating reminder to Amal that it did not control the Shi’ite community and was, he argues, “an important milestone on the road to the 1988-1990 show down between Amal and Hezbollah.” Harris 1997, p. 197.
south, Syria could appear as a champion of Arab rights and dignity, in addition to smoothing relations with various Islamist currents that regarded the secular regime in Damascus with contempt (also keeping in mind how the regime massacred the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1982). But these tensions and benefits with Syria’s relations with Hezbollah were also part its equally tensed – but yet beneficial – relations with Iran.

However, at the end of 1986, the ‘War of the Camps’ began to turn against Amal, whose militiamen were often backed up by the determined Palestinian guerrillas. As Amal’s image was deteriorating in the eyes of many Lebanese and among the wider Arab audience, an alliance of leftist Lebanese groups began to challenge Amal in the streets of Beirut. As the “balance of forces” was about to fall apart at the expense of Amal, Syria was prompted, as in 1976, to intervene in Beirut in order to save its ally and maintain the equilibrium in the capital. This intervention involved clashes with Hezbollah, which suspected Syria’s of wanting to impress Washington by demonstrating its ability to deliver stability. Hezbollah thus wished to prove its increasing weight in the balance of forces (and its autonomy from Damascus). Tensions rose after the movement briefly captured some Syrian intelligence officers in late 1986. On February 24, 1987, in a show of force, Syrian forces entered the Hezbollah stronghold in Basta, West Beirut, capturing and killing 22 members of the Islamist movement. While the Syrian operation caused an outrage within Islamist ranks, and large scale demon-

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302 After the 17th of May agreement was ruined, Syria was disturbed by the persistent violent situation in Lebanon. It was also provoked, and could not accept, the strategies of hijackings and hostages at the hands of the Islamist cells operating in Lebanon. As Patrik Seale notes, Asad would condemn hostage takings and hijackings, but he could do little about it. Therefore, he would not give Hezbollah any prestigious welcoming to Damascus, since he believed that their methods could hardly be seen as legitimate in a struggle for liberation. That said, Asad commended their struggle in the south against the Israeli occupation. Seale 1988, p. 468.

303 Harris 1997, p. 216.

304 Most of the captured and killed Hezbollah members were men, three were women. They were reportedly found with their hands tied, shot in the head at close range; some had been knived.
strations were held in the southern suburbs (where the chants of ‘death to Syria’ could be heard), the parties involved soon covered over their differences.\textsuperscript{305} Asad agreed to a modus operandi with the Iranian interior minister Ali Akbar Mohtashamipur and allowed for Hezbollah’s freedom of movement in Beirut. However, he also made it clear that Syria considered Lebanon its own turf to master: “A solution will not come from overseas, or from anywhere outside of the borders of Lebanon and Syria. Those who are against imperialism and Zionism must go along with Syria, appreciate Syria’s direction in Lebanon and respect and support that direction.”\textsuperscript{306} The Syrian operation was carried out as the Amal movement had been weakened and Hezbollah emerged as an ever stronger and more assertive contender.\textsuperscript{307} Syria was afraid that its ally’s influence among the Shi’ites would be taken over by Hezbollah. To the Islamists, the massacre at the barracks was a very sour experience, and the movement’s leadership had a difficult time calming the aggrieved sentiments and groups that wanted to exact vengeance on the Syrian forces. However, the leadership could also see the benefit in acquiescing to the Syrian presence in Beirut (and while Syria contemplated a more comprehensive offensive against Hezbollah, it also acknowledged that it was – being rather isolated in the Arab world – dependent on the support from Iran). A deal was hammered out between the two parties according to which Hezbollah would keep its guns if it acknowledged Syrian supremacy over the Lebanese capital. Yet, tensions lingered on. A consistent lack of trust prevailed between the parties involved, especially as American pressures

\textsuperscript{305} Considering the battles between Syrian and Hezbollah and south Beirut, Iran’s interior minister Ali Akbar Mohtashami reportedly warned the Syrians against moving on Hezbollah, because if the movement decided to turn against Syria, “there would be nothing we could do for you.” \textit{Middle East International}, 20 March 1987.\textsuperscript{306} Ibid.\textsuperscript{307} One Western military attaché observed at the time that “Amal has a lot of problems. They’re more of an armed mob than a military outfit. Amal is seen as a conservative do-nothing outfit. Hezbollah is seen as more action-oriented.” \textit{Sunday Morning Herald}, 25 March 1987.
mounted on Syria to control Hezbollah. One observer noted that the U.S. administration surely wanted Damascus to clamp down on and disarm the Islamist militants in Lebanon, but Syria would not do that for free – it demanded an advantageous role in the regional balance and supremacy in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{308}

The very fact that Damascus sought to negotiate with Washington made Hezbollah deeply vigilant and apprehensive. This included circles within the Iranian regime who also claimed that Syria’s objective was to “annihilate” Hezbollah.\textsuperscript{309} In September 1987, tensions escalated down south as Hezbollah’s guerrillas tried to make inroads into the southern Shi’ite areas under the control of the Amal movement.\textsuperscript{310} For Amal, these attempts were challenges to its authority over these fiefdoms of the south, many of them accessing the Israeli occupation-zone.\textsuperscript{311} Hezbollah, for its part, was anxious about being sacrificed in any forthcoming deals mediated by the U.S. and, thus, attempted to adjust the balance of power by gaining new influence. These were conditions for war to emerge between Hezbollah and Amal. On February 17, 1988, Islamist militants – who claimed to belong to a group called ‘The Oppressed of the Earth’ - kidnapped Colonel William Higgins,

\textsuperscript{308} Middle East International 11 July 1987
\textsuperscript{309} Goodzari notes how the U.S. was eager to cooperate with Syria at the end of 1987, especially since Damascus had cordial relations with Iran, whose participation was vital for restoring “peace in the Levant and the Gulf, and securing the release of US hostages.” Goodzari 2005, p. 258.
\textsuperscript{310} Ibid., p. 257.
\textsuperscript{311} Amal had controlled the south for some years, containing the actions and growth of Hezbollah. As one Amal commander, Daoud Daoud, asserted in April 1986: “The effect of Hezbollah in the south is not as strong as you think. We have some rules and regulations, and anybody who disobeys them will be punished. We are keeping security in this area, and anybody who tries to break security will be punished.” He said that as a response to how Amal was reported to have cooperated with Hezbollah in order to control it. He continued: “All resistance inside [the zone] is allowed, but to shoot Katyushas to Israel is not allowed. Others say we are trying to prevent resistance, but this is not so. Shooting into Israel only weakness the resistance inside, and we don’t want to provide the Israelis with an excuse to invade like they did in 1982.” Washington Post, April 20, 1986.
who served as head of the UN Truce and Supervision Organization’s observer group. While Hezbollah’s leadership denied any involvement, it still praised the action, referring to Higgins as a “spy”.\(^{312}\) When Ayatollah Montazeri in Iran rejected Asad’s calls for a release of Higgins, Syria decided to alter the balance on the ground, since it was deeply provoked and disturbed by the hostage takings.\(^{313}\) Whatever Hezbollah’s exact role in the kidnapping of Higgins, the operation itself offered Amal a ‘green light’ to launch a comprehensive operation against Hezbollah’s strongholds in the south, expelling many of its fighters and members. In response, Hezbollah attacked Amal’s positions and territories in southern Beirut. While Hezbollah saw the confrontation as “a fight for existence”, Amal described Hezbollah as “Iranian agents” and troublemakers with no roots in the south and rejected Hezbollah’s demand for access to the frontlines in the southern zone in order to fight the Israeli occupation. A Hezbollah spokesman, Al Hashem commented:

> We have no problems with our Syrian brothers. We have a strategic collaboration with Hafez al-Assad’s Syria in combating America's imperialist policy and in our joint struggle against Israel. The problem today is our political disagreement with Amal and before everything else that must be settled politically. The disagreement stems from Amal’s aim to wipe out Hezbollah. When Amal stops fighting us, we could settle our differences…The obstacles to the Islamic resistance in southern Lebanon will have to be removed…This is a fundamental question for our Iranian brothers; they regard the matter as non-negotiable. It’s not in Syria's interest, either, to halt


\(^{313}\) See Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, 1997, p. 133-134. They argue that “Iran leaned on Hezbollah to accept the deal in order to keep the Syrian alliance intact. Syria did not object to a controllable Hezbollah presence in the south to play off against Amal and use against Israel. Thus, the Iranian alliance allowed Syria to balance and mediate between the two wings of the Shi’a movement, which it had itself helped to divide, making both beholden to it.” Ibid.
the Islamic resistance's operations. It would be wise not to throw that card away.  

It was a war of real bitterness and hostility, the enmity between Hezbollah and Nabih Berri is blatantly clear in the words of Sayyed Ibrahim al-Amin al Sayyed, who in January 1989 claimed that Berri possessed a “pharaonic mentality” that obstructed any paths to a common understanding.  

Hezbollah’s demands were an immediate cease-fire, the evacuation of casualties, the lifting of Amal’s food siege in the Iqlim Tuffah area where Hezbollah fighters were deployed and the release of detainees on both sides. Amal should also abandon the idea of uprooting the Islamic resistance and instead engage in a ‘serious dialogue’ to solve issues of politics and security. That is, a plan for security should be combined with an effort to fight the Israeli occupation; Hezbollah would not budge on the latter.

Nonetheless, Hezbollah’s position also reflected a struggle of power in Teheran, where the more radical centres of power – led by Ayatollah Montazeri and Sheikh Mohtashemi - were being weakened at the expense of the aspiring leadership of Ayatollah Khamenei and Ayatollah Rafsanjani, who favoured more cordial and pragmatic relations with Syria and who attempted to work out a modus vivendi between Amal and Hezbollah in the south.  

Syria and Iran managed to conclude an agreement between the two parties in February 1989 granting Hezbollah limited access in order to fight the Israelis in south Lebanon. Yet, the relation between Hezbollah and Iran

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316 As Goodzari notes, “While the pragmatists in the Tehran regime wanted stable, strategic ties with Damascus and to cooperate wit it to ease tensions and gain the release of western hostages, as long as some Iranian influence was tolerated in Lebanon, the more radical elements distrusted Syria and Amal, suspecting that Iranian and Hezbollah interests in Lebanon would eventually be compromised as part of an overall agreement between Syria and the USA on Lebanon’s political future.” Goodarzi 2005, p. 260.
was gradually changing. At the end of the eighties, Hezbollah was developing various social, religious, cultural and political institutions and cultivating a broader popular base and was thus able to assert increasing independence from Iran. Secondly, Iran was losing ground in the war against Iraq in the Gulf and was, therefore, keener to attach more weight to its allies and whatever influence it could muster in Lebanon. While these two points might appear to be in conflict, they may also demonstrate how Iran was determined to maintain the clout of Hezbollah as an important ally, not necessarily as a ‘proxy’. Hezbollah’s prominent official Abbas Musawi expressed a more “independent” (and domestically oriented) perspective in November 1988 as he stated:

When we search for power from the outside, it does not mean that we want to subdue to that power; but rather that we are looking for support, so we can be strong. Who stood by us when we confronted the May 17 accord, and who stood by in the past and present troubles?’…When Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 and crushed all its adversaries, everybody, Saudi Arabia and the other Arab states, and the US and the West were silent, they did nothing [for us].

Iran’s increasing lack of clout over Hezbollah could also be seen in a number of failed efforts to calm the vicious cycle of violence and vendettas between Hezbollah and Amal that cut like a dagger through the Shi’ite community. The new leadership in Iran under Rafsanjani (consolidating its position of

318 Al Ahd, 12 nov 1988.
319 The bad blood caused by the war would turn into a vendetta that stretched throughout the south, and it displayed how ideology was not always the motivating factor in how the war was fought by those involved. As one youth whose cousin – belonging to Amal – had been killed by Hezbollah, claimed: “The leaders can make this agreement but not the fighters…if I see the man who killed my cousin, I will kill him. If anyone from Hezbollah comes past my checkpoint, I will kill him. There has been too much blood for peace.” Guardian February 2, 1989.
power after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini) did not bear the same hostility towards Amal as the more radical centres within the Islamic republic did but rather favoured unity among the Lebanese Shi’ites in order to improve their relations with Teheran. In November 1990, these ambitions resulted in positive dividends, as Iran and Syria managed to calm the hostilities between the Lebanese Shi’ite rivals in a new agreement. On the eve of the conclusion of the agreement, Hezbollah’s secretary-general at the time, Sheikh Subhi Tu-fayli, was reported on Hezbollah radio to praise this agreement. He foresaw that the Lebanese army would be able to deploy in the south in order to restore order and authority. The Lebanese army, he said, was no longer “pro-Israel” but directed by a “pro-Syrian decision which advocated resistance and [which] rejected Israel,” and Hezbollah had thus no longer any reason to be suspicious of the army’s role.\(^{320}\) However, the agreement was also the outcome of the new order fostered thanks to the Ta’if Accord. This will be dealt with in the next chapter.

**Concluding remarks**

This chapter described the ideological outline of Hezbollah, first declared in 1985. The chapter discussed Hezbollah objectives and various positions on adversaries and potential allies. However, I also connected this ideological outline to Frantz Fanon’s idea of armed insurrection in order to highlight how Hezbollah’s worldview shares crucial elements with other non-Islamic, third worldist, revolutionary movements, even though the movement’s brand of radicalism is embedded in the Islamic faith. These shared dimensions of

\(^{320}\)According to the ‘November 1990 Agreement’, the two parties, Amal and Hezbollah, should be “extending facilities and removing obstacles for the deployment of the Lebanese army in southern Lebanon in accordance with the deployment of its ability to enforce law and order.” It also stipulated that the two parties, in case of disagreement should turn to Syria and Iran for mediating any such disagreement. *BBC World Service*. 31 October 1990.
struggle involve the imperative of armed struggle as well as the objectives that Hezbollah promoted in Lebanon and that it shared with other groups, at least this was the party’s ambition. The chapter also illustrated how Hezbollah, after having been a party to the broad resistance front that succeeded in pushing Israeli troops out of much of Lebanon, had to fight for its own survival in Lebanon during the late eighties (both against the Amal movement and against Syria). I have claimed that it is crucial to understand how Hezbollah, from early on, focused its objective on fighting the Israeli occupation of Lebanon and how it was keen to enter into adopt alliances in consideration of that very objective. Still, it is important to note that at that time Hezbollah rejected any kind of adaptation to the Lebanese regime. It is also significant that the party even displayed a readiness to fight Syrian troops on Lebanese soil for the sake of maintaining the resistance against Israel. This is, as we shall see, the main objective that the movement has worked for, even when it decided to mend its relations with Syria and integrate into the Lebanese regime.

The next chapter will treat the nature of the Ta’if Accord and the context in which it developed during its implementation. Who benefitted from the Ta’if Accord? How did the Lebanese order change, as compared to the earlier balance of the National Pact in 1943? What did this change in conditions mean for Hezbollah, and what was Hezbollah’s position in relation to the Ta’if Accord? As we shall see, while the Ta’if Accord sustained – and even deepened - the structures and norms of the sectarian system, it also offered certain opportunities for Hezbollah, which opted to subjugate itself to the system. The Ta’if order was, thus, instrumental for Hezbollah in embarking upon its process of ‘Lebanonization’. For Hezbollah, this would occur while facing a similar kind of challenge as during the unruly years of the eighties. That is, just as Hezbollah feared that Lebanon would become a partner of the U.S. after the Israeli invasion of 1982, it now feared that the Ta’if Accord represented a joint U.S.-Saudi scheme to ‘neutralize’ Lebanon
in the new order taking form as the Cold War was coming to an end. Its efforts at integration should be seen in that light. The chapter investigates how Hezbollah adapted to the Lebanese system but also how it adapted to the resistance that it defended in the eighties. By working out a modus operandi with the regime, which was safeguarded by Syrian protection, Hezbollah was able to maintain this commitment. It also took a position, for strategic purposes, in the battle over the meaning of Lebanese national identity. The chapter, thus, gives voice to Hezbollah in how the movement rather carefully weighed its options before deciding to enter the political system and to become a partner in this new order.
Chapter 5. The new era of the Ta’if Accord

The Ta’if Accord agreed upon by the traditional Lebanese elites (the MPs from the Lebanese parliament of 1972) in October 1989 (although the practical implementation began in November 1990) implied both a blessing and a curse for Lebanon. While it brought civil peace, it also involved the country’s authority being subordinated to Syrian tutelage. With troops and connections, Damascus had been a major player in the Lebanese killing fields for nearly fifteen years when the National Reconciliation Charter was signed in the town of Ta’if, Saudi Arabia. Without Damascus, any effort of signing - or indeed implementing - this so-called Ta’if Accord would most likely have been futile. By the end of the eighties, the Lebanese quagmire was messier than ever. Arbitrary misrule by militias, relentless intra-sectarian fighting, vast emigration and brain-drain (mainly among Christians) and an economy in ruins had brought the populace to utter, unbearable despair. In addition, since 1988, Lebanon had two governments. The Amin Gemayel presidency was never able to mobilize any national authority, and on the eve of the presidential elections in 1988, the polarized positions throughout Lebanese society made it impossible to nominate any plausible presidential candidate. The country was too fragmented, and most Muslim politicians boycotted the presidential palace. As a result, Lebanon became plagued by two governments: one in the Christian-dominated areas under the leadership of the former Lebanese army general Michael Aoun, and another in the Muslim-dominated quarters under the leadership of Sunni politician Salim Hoss. Whereas the former was Maronite-dominated and supported by Iraq, the latter was mostly composed of Muslims and enjoyed the backing of Damascus. The ensuing crisis in the Gulf and the U.S.-led international coa-
lition that was about to oust Saddam Hussein in Kuwait provided leverage for breaking the stalemate, since Syria sided with the Allies against Saddam. In return, Washington offered Damascus free reign to take on general Aoun and push forward for a new Lebanese order. According to Harris, the U.S. in 1989 had “learnt the lessons” from 1982-83 and had no desire to bring Lebanon into some larger regional plan. It aimed instead at clearing “Lebanese complications from the regional scene”. To this end, Damascus would be the “facilitator of American realpolitik.” That is, the U.S. would not – as in the early eighties – try to enforce a Lebanese government allied to the U.S. in Beirut but rather to rely on Syria as the ‘indispensable arbiter’ in forging a balance of forces acceptable to the U.S. Continuous relations between Damascus and those hostile to U.S. hegemony in the region – such as Iran and Hezbollah - were valuable to Washington, since they enabled the Syrians to meddle in any impending conflict and constrain possible radicalisation. At least this was the idea. The U.S. also banked on Syrian cooperation, as the Soviet Union (a long-time supporter of Damascus) disintegrated and as Washington planned to extend and deepen its hegemony across the Middle East. This American ambition presented a golden opportunity for Syria to consolidate regional prominence.

This prominence also enabled Syria to impose its own conditions, which triggered tensions and exposed impending difficulties. Ironically, much of Syria’s clout rested on its close relations with the radical parties of Iran and Hezbollah (and a range of Palestinian groups whose offices were located in Damascus). Syria did not want to forsake these relations for less than realising its own ambitions. The presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon

321 Harris 1997, p. 238.
322 Ibid., p. 239. As Harris notes, “Syria expected the US and Israel to commit themselves to a package of regional rewards before it shifted its posture. The package would include full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan, acknowledgment of a Syrian free hand with the Lebanese regime, an appropriate financial pay off, and widened access to Western aid and technology. On its side the US indicated friendly inten-
was, thus, both a blessing and a curse for the U.S. as well as for the Lebanese. Elizabeth Picard points out that at the local level, average Lebanese were more than fed up with living a life in fear. The persistent insecurity created a desperate desire for a strong unifying state that could restore overwhelming order, “opposite to what [they] had suffered in the domination of militia.” In addition, the militia order deteriorated as the Lebanese economy did likewise, that is, the ‘good business’ which benefited profiteers and rackets in this order vanished. There was also the emerging perception among militia leaders that they were unable to impose their will on each other and that they began to feel “the public’s passive resistance to their hegemony.”

5.1 The nature of the Ta’if Accord

What, more precisely, did the Ta’if Accord imply? What interests and groups did it serve? The Accord stipulated that the authority of the Lebanese state should extend over the entire territory recognized by the international community, that the militias should be disarmed by the state and that the constitution should be amended for the purpose of reaching an equilibrium with respect to the confessional order and balance. The aim was, in particular, to weaken the Christian – and Maronite – dominance in the legislative and executive branches of power. Thus, the parliamentarian ratio was changed from 6:5 to 5:5, that is the balance of seats in parliament between Christians and Muslims became equal, and the role of the president within the executive branch (still to be assigned to a Maronite) was weakened in

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relation to the prime minister (still to be assigned to a Sunni Muslim). Furthermore, the accord emphasises the importance of implementing UN Resolution 425 and the imperative of Syria’s assistance when implementing the accords. To be sure, the Ta’if Accord stipulated a time frame for the Syrian presence in Lebanon (it should withdraw its forces to the Bekaa Valley two years after its implementation), but it also stressed the necessity for cultivating relations with Syria in various fields of security, economics and politics. This Syrian factor gave rise to resistance against the accord, mainly from the Christian camp headed by Aoun, who regarded it as a sell-out of Lebanese independence (Aoun would seek asylum in France after having been defeated by Syrian forces in October 1990 – it thus took one year from the signing of the accord in October 1989 to the possibility of realizing it in October 1990). As one observer described the situation at the time, left “to deal with Syria alone, Lebanon was unable to prevent Damascus from turning the Ta’if Accord into an instrument applied in ways that suited Syrian interest.”

Shortly after the process of implementing the Ta’if was underway, new procedures and treaties were actualized in order to deepen and strengthen relations—however asymmetric—between the two countries. In May 1991, the Treaty of the Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination was signed, and prior to the Arab-Israeli peace conference in Madrid the same year, the two countries signed the Security and Defense Pact. These two

325 Joseph Maila 1993, p. 41.
326 When the militias were disarmed, the Lebanese army received firm—indeed indispensable—support from the Syrian army, and this treaty can thus be regarded as “pay-back” from Beirut to Damascus. As Theodor Hanf points out, “after Syria had fulfilled its undertaking of disarming the militias ‘without reservation or hesitation’, it was high time for the Lebanese government ‘to fulfil a Lebanese undertaking without reservation or hesitation: the treaty with Syria.’” Hanf 1993, p. 617. The Security and Defense Pact implied a comprehensive exchange of military information between the intelligence services of the two countries and the banning of ‘any activity or organisation in all military, security, political and informational fields that might endanger and cause threats to the other country.’ The Lebanese defense minister also declared that he would hand over any information to his Syrian
treaties were aimed at cultivating Syrian-Lebanese relations of security, economy, politics and social affairs. However, as a correspondent commented, with “brotherhood” as a main recurring theme, Syria “is very much of a big brother.” Beirut could hardly oppose Damascus, given its dependence on its mighty neighbour for realising the Ta’if and acknowledgement of the outside worlds of Syria’s role. While the U.S. offered a “green light” to the Syrians to crush Aoun’s rebellion against the Ta’if and also acknowledged Syria’s role in implementing the accord, it also displayed signs of resignation to this new order. As a leading U.S. official commented: “Given the facts on the ground – Syria’s 13 million people to Lebanon’s 3.5 million and the continued presence of 40,000 Syrian troops on two-thirds of Lebanon’s territory – there really isn’t very much we can do about the situation.”

The government that was appointed to carry out the implementation of the Ta’if Accord had an undeniably “pro-Syrian aura”, as Norton points out. He also observed that it was composed primarily of former heads of militias in an attempt to make them “willing to exchange paramilitary authority for a role in politics.” The Ta’if Accord was a restructuring of the “National Pact”, with some prerogatives transferred from the Christians to Muslims, though it retained the confessional formula and its stress on “parity” and “mutual recognition and coexistence.” Still, the Ta’if, as compared to the counterpart that could be relevant for Syrian interests. Harris remarks that this pact was approved of by the Lebanese government before the ministers even had seen the text of it. See Harris 1997, p. 292-293.

327 *Middle East International*, 31 May 1991. The Lebanese observer, Khairallah Khairallah, concluded that the treaty was signed by Lebanon “under pressure;” and if the Lebanese had been able to decide the matter themselves “few would have approved,” Not because the Lebanese are anti-Syrian, he asserts, but because the treaty has been “forced” upon them: “Syria is giving them a choice between the treaty and the resumption of the piracy practised by the militias in most of the country since 1975.” Ibid.


329 Norton 1991, p. 261. Jim Muir suggests that the president, prime minister and speaker of parliament all came from Syrian controlled areas’ and they were ‘keenly aware of Syrian interests’. Of the whole cabinet, he argued, were about ’90 percent pro-Syrian’. See *Middle East International*, 31 May 1991.
“National Pact”, clearly weakened the Maronite dominance of the system, as the presidency lost much of its previous power. According to Elizabeth Picard, the “most salient feature” of this “post-war political system” is the consolidation of confessionalism, despite talks at the time involved the abolishment of confessionalism as outlined by paragraph 95 of the constitution. It only considers the confessional formula to be “temporary” with the communities being equally represented during a transition period. Picard also argues that the Ta’if Accord, as compared to the “National Pact”, emphasized to a far greater degree “communitarian coexistence”; the “pact of shared existence” that was made more “explicit and the power’s legitimacy was based on this new pact.”

There were several interests involved in the consolidation – and deepening – of the sectarian logic that developed from the National Pact to the Ta’if Accord. Firstly, Saudi Arabia, which hosted and oversaw the negotiations, was keen on seeing religious confessions as an organizational principle for the system, rather than a secular one. And Syria, Picard notes, had already built its hegemony in the fragmented country on ‘its role as an official arbiter of Lebanon’s communal groups’. She adds that the Ta’if Accord partly reflected a sectarian logic of identity (what she refers to as a “war-induced notion of communal identity”) that was formed during the war. The seventies witnessed more of secular customs and demands, with the post-war Lebanese body politic to a much greater extent cherishing certain assumed traits and characteristics of sectarian groups, or, as she puts it, “[t]he failure to abolish confessionalism not only lifted the taboo against communal so-

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331 Picard also notes: “If any state has taken advantage of the latent confliction of the Lebanese system, then, it is Syria, exerting external pressures in the absence of Lebanese consensus,” she also makes the important reflection that the “paradox of Syria, a regime that trumpets itself as a secular state with the utmost respect for its smaller neighbour’s sovereignty, is that by promoting sectarianism and manipulating the balances of local populations, its presence in Lebanon is at once indispensable and sorely resented.” Ibid., p. 159.
cialization but presented it as the norm.”332 That is, the war and the division of the country into sectarian enclaves had fomented a widespread fear and suspicion of the “other” that the new sectarian elites could mobilize in order to cultivate sectarian constituencies, while claiming to defend and protect the interests of the group. Secondly, the new form of governance would be based on the so-called “troika”, i.e., with the strong presidency gone, executive powers were shared by the president, the prime minister and the speaker of parliament - each representing one of the major sects in Lebanon and each having a “veto”. Disputes were, in practice, to be resolved by Syria, the ‘indispensable arbiter’. As Picard notes, the party with the best relations to Syria (for the moment) would most likely win the day. Hence, this “triumvirate system” of sectarian schisms and group interests would, perhaps more that before, undermine any notion of a “national consensus.” She suggests that “[t]he postwar state…has been characterized by a lack of higher authority and the rejection of communal group pre-eminence. Now under threat of structural upheaval, no one group can assert itself over the others; but neither is any authority in a position to regulate the competition.”333

However, while the “confessional balance” – as emphasised in the National Pact in 1943 as well – remained (though altered), another important feature involved this idea of national identity, which was a troublesome and conflictual dimension of the previous formula for coexistence. Now, this idea of a “national direction” in the regional conflict would be controlled by Syria and its Lebanese allies. The Ta’if Accord emphasizes that “Lebanon is Arab in belonging and identity” and that Lebanon is a “member of the non-aligned movement”, which is a clear indication that Lebanon should not side with the “Western bloc” in any regional standoff or, more specifically, in the Arab-Israeli conflict.334 In that sense, Lebanon would stand by Syria in any

332 Ibid.
333 Ibid. p. 158.
334 For the text of the Ta’if Accord, see Le Monde Diplomatique (http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/cahier/proche-orient/region-liban-taef-en)
future confrontation with Israel. Equally important, it would not conduct any bilateral negotiations on its own (as secured by the treaties following the Ta’if Accord). Neither would Lebanon – or Syria - accept Israel remaining an occupier of the Lebanese south, and the accord stressed that “all steps necessary” should be taken “to liberate Lebanese territories from the Israeli occupation, to spread state sovereignty over all the territories, and to deploy the Lebanese army in the border area adjacent to Israel; and making efforts to reinforce the presence of the UN forces in south Lebanon to insure the Israeli withdrawal and to provide the opportunity for the return of security and stability in the border area.”

This implied, as we shall see, that Hezbollah would be given the role as a “legitimate armed resistance” to carry out that task of liberation. In many ways, the Ta’if Accord implied that Syria was able to accomplish what the Israelis and the U.S. had failed to do nearly a decade earlier, i.e., to control the various cantons of the Lebanese body politic and create what might be referred to as a ‘Pax Syriana’. Firstly, the disarmament of the militias involved Syrian forces not encountering any serious threats while implementing this order, curbing the peril of an armed opposition. The weakening of the Maronites in Lebanon also meant that Syria’s most serious contender no longer held the same political sway from within the system. Secondly, by allowing Hezbollah to attack the Israelis in the south, Damascus had a stake in turning that southern Israeli occupied zone into a quagmire for its most serious contender and antagonist in the regional stand-off, i.e., south Lebanon would become a tool for Syria to exert pressure in the negotiation process with Israel.

In 1992, parliamentarian elections were held in Lebanon for the first time in twenty years. They were characterized foremost by a low turnout: of those Lebanese entitled to vote, not even thirty percent actually did. A larger number among the Christians – who regarded the regime’s manoeuvring of

335 Ibid.
the elections as blatant attempts to preserve Syrian hegemony – called for and spearheaded a boycott, which they claimed was a ‘referendum’ against the ‘pro-Syrian’ regime. Not only did the Syrian presence guarantee a pro-Syrian parliament, but a new electoral law, it was widely argued, diminished the influence of the Christian camp in legislative power. The Syrian dominance in Lebanon was gradually sealed. Lebanese living in exile – many of them Christians – had been deprived of the right to vote. In addition, the 1992 election campaign witnessed harassment, arrests and even kidnappings of those opposing the Syrian presence, and there were accusations of widespread electoral fraud. The elections resulted in a new administration, however, headed by the multi-billionaire businessman Rafiq Hariri as prime minister and a cabinet and parliament the bulk of which ‘pro-Damascus’.

Finally, as a last step towards Syrian ascendancy, the Syrian vice-president Abdul Halim Khaddam declared that Damascus was ready to consider a partial withdrawal from Lebanon, but under the condition that the political system was to be de-confessionalized, as stated in the Ta’if Accord.\(^{336}\) This was the final verdict to come down on the ‘unruly’ Christian community, especially the Maronites, who would lose many privileges should the system no longer rely on confessional quotas. Hence, a kind of Syrian hegemony over Lebanon was sealed.

However, what was Hezbollah’s position on this new order? On what basis would the movement pass from a total rejection of the system to endorsing it? What did this new contextual scheme imply for Hezbollah? How did the movement conceive of the constrains and opportunities resulting from the Ta’if Accord?

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\(^{336}\) Hanf, p. 636.
5.2 Hezbollah takes a stand towards the new order

Hezbollah at first denounced the Ta’if Accord, since it preserved the confessional system that the movement had long derided. The party did not reject the idea of co-existence as such, but it deplored the confessional system in which the Muslims – by stipulated quotas – were discriminated. The 50-50 balance as provided by the Ta’if Accord did not reflect the realities on the ground, Hezbollah stated, and the Maronites would still retain a dominant position within the government.\footnote{See Wathiqat al Ta’if (Hezbollah’s study on the Ta’if agreement, provided to the author by Hezbollah’s press office) (Arabic).} Equally important, the movement also feared its pending disarmament, should the militias of the civil war be forced to hand in their arms to the Lebanese army. The clashes that recurred between Hezbollah and Amal in late 1989 (after the accord was signed) and throughout the 1990s could be seen in this light: Hezbollah wanted to make sure that it carried weight within the Shi’ite community and could not be easily disarmed. However, relations with Damascus, as noted, were strained. Hezbollah was constantly suspicious of the Syrian scheme in Lebanon, especially as Damascus sought to better its relations with Washington. However, relations between the Lebanese Islamists and Damascus did improve, as Teheran displayed a willingness to resolve the situation with the Western hostages and adapt its ambitions to the Ta’if order. Despite the hostage incidents souring relations between Damascus and Teheran, it also provided some opportunities. Syria could, by influencing Iran, appear to be the “indispensable arbiter”, and Iran could, by courting Syria and meeting its demands, remain influential within the Shi’ite community through Hezbollah. As Hinnebusch and Ehteshami suggest, “[e]ven when their objectives conspicuously diverged, they still needed each other: Syria needed Iranian sup-
port for its policy in Lebanon and Iran needed Syrian tolerance of its presence there.**338

Still, Hezbollah was concerned that Saudi ambitions behind the Accord were part of a larger regional scheme (after all, Saudi is a close American ally), and these apprehensions were to become even more serious when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and the U.S.-led coalition mobilized its many and mighty forces in the Gulf, marking a ‘new’ regional order (as the Cold War was coming to an end). Many Arab states sided with the U.S. in the effort to oust Saddam from Kuwait, not least Syria. For Hezbollah, Saddam’s invasion and Saudi’s invitation to NATO forces were part of a U.S. scheme to consolidate its control over the region. The movement declared that the entire build-up of NATO forces in the Gulf was aimed at protecting Saudi Arabia from the threats of Saddam Hussein who “made the foolish move” to invade Kuwait and impose himself by force:

> While we denounce the Iraqi regime and warn of the perils it poses for the entire Muslim people, we firmly state that the summoning of NATO armies to the Gulf region and the use of these armies to protect the puppet regimes there is equally condemnable. We fear that such move could help shore up the tottering regime in Baghdad and place the oil fields and the sources of the people's wealth under the control of the international forces of atheism.339

Furthermore, the movement lashed out against the Saudi regime, emphasizing the deep cleavages between it and the Khomeinist radical positions (as expressed in the party’s manifesto). “The stupidity of the al-Sa’ud” was no less than that of Saddam’s regime, Hezbollah declared, since “the utter servility of the Al Sa’ud to the [American] will and designs in the region jeopardises the safety of the entire Muslim nation...[by promoting] the interests of the covetous West and its [conspiring] designs.” The party referred to how

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339 Hezbollah statement, 10 August 1990, BBC World Service.
such “American schemes” implied “the Gulf regime’s involvement in supporting the Iraqi regime’s aggression against the Islamic republic of Iran” in the first place and turning “Saddam into a powerful wolf that now threatens his close neighbours.

We firmly state that Muslim countries and their wealth, oil and navigation routes belong only to the Muslims, not to the agent rulers who are imposed on them by America and others. . . The mercenary rulers must stop encouraging and facilitating all forms of invasion by world arrogance. They must understand that they are held fully responsible for such actions before God, the Muslims and history. 340

This tapped into how the movement saw on going struggles as being conducted by “nations,” not “regimes,” and the great gap that – according to the movement - kept them separated. “Who will expel these invaders after they establish a foothold on the sacred land?” Hezbollah asked as huge numbers of NATO troops were deploying in the Gulf in mid-August. “To whom can the masses of the Islamic nation entrust the task of expelling the invaders of the beloved land? Is it reasonable to depend, on such a mission, on the ruler of Iraq, who was the main cause of the American invasion of the Gulf?

Or will the masses rely on those who supported the invasion and gave it their political and media endorsement? The Islamic nation cannot possibly rely on regimes that were created by the Americans and that could not have their thrones and offices without American blessing. Such regimes cannot help but serve the US arrogant designs in the region...Those who think that the Americans are leaving soon are wrong...The Gulf map has been changed. Tens of thousands of soldiers have poured into the region, with massive supplies of military equipment. This can only indicate that the design concocted by the Americans, the Zionists and some Arab leaders is on a large scale...What we are witnessing is the beginning of con-

340 Ibid.
flict between the masses of the Islamic nation and the latter-day crusaders...America has opened the door for confrontation by using Saddam as a pretext. But however many agents it may have, America will not be able to close that door.\(^{341}\)

According to Hezbollah, there was a large difference between “controlling regimes” and “controlling nations.” Whereas the former would always have “its ruler, its men, and its spies”, the latter would be governed by no one “but their maker”, i.e., Allah - a clear appeal to (and hope in) the rise of Islamist movements across the region. In this regard, the party warned the umma that “the enemies are going to distract the Muslims in the Arab world with secondary problems in order to divert their attention from what is taking place now.” This was, the party added (in an extremely harsh attack on Amal’s leader Nabih Berri), similar to how “the Zionists...use their agent Nabih Berri to wage a dirty war against the Islamic resistance in [Lebanon].” Akin to its call in the ‘Open Letter’ of 1985, Hezbollah called for a broader regional insurgency.\(^{342}\)

While calling for such an upheaval, it also assumed a defensive position, embedding itself in the trenches in Lebanon. The movement was determined to oppose a similar kind of development in Lebanon, where its disarmament would be part of a comparable ambition to neutralize forces that resisted an American scheme of hegemony. The build-up of NATO

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\(^{341}\) Hezbollah statement, *BBC Summary*, 16 August 1990.

\(^{342}\) The statement went: “What are the sons of the Islamic nation waiting for, after what has happened? Their sacred places, in Palestine, Mecca and Medina, have been taken away from them. Their wealth has been stolen and their land is occupied. Will the masses of this nation wait much longer? Will they wait for more disasters and calamities to happen? The masses of our Islamic nation should rely on God and throw the filth of arrogance onto the garbage dumps. These masses should revolt against the agent and apostate regimes in their countries. This will be their redemption. This will ensure that no one is able to bring the enemies home and give them backing. The regimes that we refer to here are the agent and reactionary regimes in Arab countries.” Ibid.
forces, though, and the new order, however loathsome for Hezbollah, also had its advantages, as Syrian tutelage meant that Hezbollah would be able to continue as a “resistance” against the Israeli occupation in the south. That deal, which was concluded in early November 1990, was based on the ‘Damascus Agreement’ of January 1989, which offered Hezbollah access in order to fight the Israelis in the south, even if in a “restrained manner” and with the Islamists acknowledging the authoritative position of Syria throughout Lebanese territory. As a comment to the disarmament, Hezbollah secretary-general Subhi Tufayli stated on 29 October 1990 that it was necessary to “differentiate between the militias and the resistance. We want the militias to be eliminated and the resistance to continue. We are quite comfortable with this position.” With respect to the Ta’if Accord, he said that “[w]e have fought to preserve our freedom and express our point of view. It is true that we are opposed to Ta’if, but our opposition is political rather than military” (alluding to Aoun’s military opposition to the Ta’if Accord). However, despite Tufayli’s acceptance of Hezbollah’s adaptation to this new order, he was to be ousted as secretary-general in May 1990 and replaced by Sayyed Abbas Musawi, who was closer to the new ruling circles in Iran and not as tainted as Tufayli by the bitter war with Amal. Such credentials were very desirable for Hezbollah, within this new Lebanese context, to build bridges of trust and reconciliation within the Shi’ite community.

The election of Abbas Musawi did not indicate Hezbollah’s moderation, neither with respect to the resistance in the south nor with its criticism of the government. Musawi lamented the ‘weakness’ of the Lebanese regime and its apprehensions about fighting the Israeli occupation (despite Syrian approval of this position, circles within the government were at odds with the resistance, most likely because of its lack of control over it and the dangers it posed with respect to Israeli aggression and retaliation). Despite its accommodating position towards the Ta’if Accord, the party chose to remain

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343 Interview with Tufayli, *BBC World Service* 30 October 1990.
aloof from the system as such. It refused, for instance, to participate in the appointed care-taker government of 1990, largely due to its apprehensions about the ambitions of the Lebanese regime. As it declared in a statement

The repeated stand of the head of the regime towards the resistance movement, which is the honour and pride of the nation, arouses suspicion and concern. Without the sacrifices of the resistance fighters, no homeland, no regime and no establishment would have been left and those who are today undermining the role of the resistance and ignoring its achievements would not have been able to occupy positions of responsibility…The continuation of this bitter reality, the absence of a clear concept for the liberation of the south and the protection of its land and inhabitants from the ambitions of the Zionist enemy and the repetition of suspicious talks on ending the resistance and its role and selecting only a political treatment for the issue of the south - all of this prompts us to refuse to take part in a new government which lacks a unified vision, a clear concept and a minimum of hegemony to tackle the country's problems. . . 344

The party also declared that it would adapt its position to the government with respect to its ambitions of “changing the sectarian system, ensuring internal freedoms and supporting the resistance until the whole land is liberated without letting the enemy profit politically or in security.” 345 However, even though Hezbollah distanced itself from the Lebanese government, it emphasized “the need for all to co-operate to achieve a just and balanced security, establish civilian peace and ensure the citizen’s livelihood.” The movement would also escalate its campaign against any U.S. effort to bring a comprehensive peace settlement to the region. With respect to the ensuing Madrid conference in November 1991, the movement participated in a ‘counter-conference’ in Teheran that rejected the logic of peace negotiations

344 BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, December 22, 1990
345 Ibid.
with Israel. Abiding by its ‘Fanonian’ view on how a strong colonial party like Israel would not yield in the face of weak antagonists, Hezbollah claimed that the coming negotiations would not bring peace but rather entail even more war and conflict since Israel, Hezbollah charged, is an aggressive ‘entity’ by its very nature of being a colonial, racist and expansionist state. As one of the party’s statements charged:

The [Teheran] conference is being held at a time when defeat casts its heavy shadow on the Arabs. It’s very context is designed to sell off the sacred cause of Palestine, and the recognition and negotiation with the enemy that it involves will entail, as a fait accompli, an acceptance of Israel as legitimate. This is accompanied by an aggrandisement of the usurping Zionist entity in human, geographical and military terms. All this will make regional peace impossible. It will open the doors wide for Israeli expansionist ambitions and, consequently, will subject the entire region to more wars and crises. Judging by the foregoing, Madrid is not a road to peace, as they allege, but is a key to manifold and inevitable future crises and wars. Consequently, it has been necessary for this nation to declare its position.\(^346\)

Hezbollah also lashed out against the “scandalous” positions of the Arab regimes at the conference (even though it did not mention Syria by name), which ignored how the Lebanese in the south and the Beqaa and the Palestinians in Palestine were encircled and under the constant duress of the Israeli occupation. In this context, Hezbollah declared that “the peace which we aspire to will come from the disappearance of Israel, the liberation of Palestine, and the departure of all Jews who have come from Ethiopia, the USSR, Europe, the U.S. and elsewhere since the creation of the Hebrew state.”\(^347\) Abbas Musawi vowed that the movement would “intensify its military, political and popular action in order to undermine the peace talks.”\(^348\)

\(^346\) BBC World Summary, 29 October 1991.
\(^347\) Middle East International, 8 November 1991.
\(^348\) Ibid.
In the following, it will be illustrated how Hezbollah made efforts to promote this logic while still sticking to an increasingly accommodating - yet conditional - position towards the Lebanese government. How did Hezbollah justify this accommodation? What problems did it foresee by becoming part of a system that it essentially rejected? The next section will also explore how Hezbollah’s decision did not escape harsh criticism from more radical currents within the party.

5.3 ‘Infitah’: Entering the political system

Despite the intransigence and criticism against the Lebanese regime, Hezbollah embarked upon a more inclusive strategy after the implementation of the Ta’if Accord. The movement changed its attitude towards its surroundings - from apprehensive, even hostile, to more accommodating and cooperative. According to Timor Goksel, a long-time spokesman for UNIFIL, Hezbollah drastically changed style in the south as soon as the implementation of the Ta’if Accord got started. “Before 1991, we couldn’t talk to these guys”, he told this author.

We had a big problem with that, very difficult communication. When we had a communication, they were very angry with us, very suspicious. In 1991, they came themselves and said, “Look, let’s forget the past and start again. We will have a dialogue; we will talk to you guys. We have decided that you are not our enemy.” Before that they were actually treating us like enemies, in the mosques, in their lectures, songs and so on.349

He also acknowledged how Hezbollah from then on changed its behaviour towards the local population, dropping its dogmatic ways of imposing what

349 Author’s interview, Tyre (south Lebanon), May 1998.
it viewed as Islamic codes of life. According to Goksel, there was a significant change in Hezbollah’s conduct, in particular, when Hassan Nasrallah was elected secretary-general after Israel assassinated Abbas Musawi in February 1992.\footnote{Abbas Musawi was killed by a so-called ‘Hellfire’ robot launched from an Israeli attack helicopter against his convoy of cars after he had been present at a memorial ceremony for Rachid Harb, killed by Lebanese proxies close to Israel in 1983. Abbas Musawi died together with his family - wife and 3-year old son - and his bodyguards.} Nasrallah, he said, would emphasise that resistance should remain a supreme value within the context of a multitude of confessions and ways of life. With Nasrallah as new leader, Hezbollah involved the Shi’ite women of the south in the movement’s welfare projects, which significantly increased its popularity in the south (where Amal was the predominant party at the time).\footnote{Author’s interview, Beirut, January 2007.} Indeed, under Nasrallah’s command, Hezbollah also prepared itself for entering the Lebanese political system by participating in the first parliamentary election in August 1992, the first to be held in post-war Lebanon. This decision to participate was not uncontroversial. Former secretary-general Sheikh Tufayli branded any participation as “selling out” the party’s principles, since taking part would consolidate the confessional system which – as a remnant of the colonial legacy - discriminated against the Muslims and, thus, could not reflect any true popular vote. Tufayli also expressed his contempt for the Lebanese way of “buying votes” and denounced any elections to be held while the country was still suffering under Israeli occupation.\footnote{See Tufayli’s speech, al-Ahd 27 July 1992. Tufayli, who even called upon his supporters to burn down the polls on the eve of the elections (and he was also reported to consider a formal break with Hezbollah, setting up his own movement Ansar Allah (the partisans of God). Hamzeh 1993, p. 325. Foreign Report 27 May 1993.} To Tufayli’s mind, Hezbollah should remain outside of the system, staying committed to the task of resistance, and submit to a more “close-knit” organization true to its ideological principles. Indeed, Sayyed Sadiq Musawi, who is close to Tufayli, also criticized the leadership under Nasrallah’s command for entering the political system.
lah for abandoning the spirit of Ayatollah Khomeini when he wrote in a letter to a Lebanese periodical:

Who is going to explain the deviation of the Hezbollah command from the clear-cut fatwa of Imam Khomeini to eradicate the atheist Maronite regime? Hezbollah leaders have become a part of that regime. I declare to all Hezbollah faithful that the Nasrallah and Kassem leadership has deviated from the true line of Ayatollah Khomeini and sold out the principles of Islamic revolution and the pure blood of the youths for its own purposes.\(^{353}\)

Yet, Hezbollah did advocate a more pragmatic line, which carefully weighed the pros and cons of subjugating itself to a system it essentially disliked and rebuked. In a direct response to Sadiq Musawi’s criticism, Hajj Youssef Mehri, an official spokesman of Hezbollah, told this author that Khomeini’s denouncement of the Lebanese confessional system was not a *fatwa*; it expressed the Ayatollah’s view of the confessional system, and Hezbollah shared this viewpoint, which was clear in the party’s criticism of the Ta’if Accord. However, he said Hezbollah’s acceptance of the Ta’if Accord was conditioned on its being a “temporary settlement”, while stressing that the Accord stipulated a timetable for the elimination of political confessionalism. He added that eliminating this was one of the party’s top priorities – “to change it from the roots” (as declared in the Open Letter).\(^{354}\) Importantly, Mehri also highlighted the positive aspects of the Ta’if Accord: it brought an end to the civil war, it contained certain reforms that weakened the Maronite dominance and it gave legitimacy to the resistance in the south, which also implied that the regime had to work towards ending the Israeli occupation. However, Mehri did not see Hezbollah’s participation in the system as recognition of it per se but rather considered this participation as an effort to

\(^{354}\) Author’s interview, Beirut, May 1996. The question was posed by referring to Sayyed Sadiq Musawi’s criticism and the article in the Open letter, and Mehri responded directly in accordance to these texts.
change it from within: “Our rejection of something does not mean we cannot coexist with it, refusing does not mean we cannot live with it...This government does not match our ambitions, but this does not mean we cannot deal with this government...That’s why we have taken part in this system, hoping that we can change from within, and this is for us nothing illegitimate.” Naim Qassem also argued that any idea of taking part in the system in the eighties was “useless” because of the “framework of divisions and the complicated situation.” As soon as it was made clear that the elections were to be held, Hezbollah “decided that, in the context of our concept of what Lebanon should be, and of the fact that we represent a large part of the Lebanese society, we had a duty to take part in the elections.”

In his political biography, Qassem is more elaborate and offers an interesting insider’s glimpse of how the party’s decision was taken. He notes that a committee, consisting of the twelve most prominent figureheads of the party, convened to work out an analysis of conceivable advantages and disadvantages with political participation. Four main questions formed the bones of contention that were elaborated upon. Firstly, how could the movement, from a principal standpoint, take part in the confessionalist system when it did not conform to the ideals of the movement? Secondly, would accommodation imply just any ideological deviation from the party’s ideals, the consolidation of this system and, hence, the abandonment of the Islamic vision? Thirdly, what were the pros and cons, and how could possible benefits outweigh the more negative aspects? Fourthly, could participation imply that the party would become trapped in internal politics and, thus, abandon the armed resistance? That is, there was a tension regarding the extent to which accommodation to the system would engulf and hamper the essence of the party’s resistance to it. Or, as Qassem puts it: “Awarding priority to interests at the expense of principles is not permissible, but consider-

355 Ibid.
ation of interests within the scope of preserving the principles is acceptable.”

Hezbollah contemplated the very same questions posed in previous chapters of this dissertation, i.e., the tension inherent in what Charles Tripp referred to as a “secular logic” - the extent to which compromise over vision and values would or would not succumb to the logic of power. How did Hezbollah reason concerning these matters? And what were the values that the party wished to preserve by its strategic accommodation?

Interestingly, Qassem explains how Hezbollah’s committee discussed the three latter questions in compiling a presentation for the Welayat al-Faqih to decide on the first. Similar to Mehri, Qassem suggests that participation in a parliamentary system does not mean the preservation of that system. However, a presence in parliament can offer a platform for expressing viewpoints and criticism. “Suggestions for change could always be made, and influence on proposed legislation remained a sure possibility…It suffices for one to be able to defend his or her position in order to avoid entrapment within a particular political structure.” What would the alternative be, he asks? Would the voice of criticism be more effective outside of the parliament and official channels? He, thus, outlines some specific advantages with participation. Firstly, a parliamentary presence would ensure a podium for advocating the necessity of continued resistance against Israel in the south. As Qassem notes, the “creation of an atmosphere conducive to drawing public attention to the voice of the resistance could be achieved through public representation.” Secondly, a presence in parliament would offer opportunities for gaining insight into the planning and discussion of the state’s budget and allocation of its resources, especially pertinent since the movement upholds a banner of social pathos and a call for the regime to end its neglect of deprived areas. Thirdly, from within the system, the party would be more aware of and better prepared for discussing proposed legisla-

357 Qassem 2004, p. 188-189.
358 Ibid.
tion, instead of being surprised by “being suddenly bound by legislative real-
ities that cannot be discussed after their official adoption.” Fourthly, from
the “inside” there would be opportunities to cultivate informal relations
across sectarian and political barriers and to discuss and reach common
ground and break down suspicions. Fifthly, to be a resistance and at the same
time a part of the state structure would strengthen the legitimacy of the re-
sistance. Sixthly, there would be a possibility for expressing the Islamic
point of view among other viewpoints. However, he also cautioned against
the system as such, since the political representation would not reflect the
popular and proper numbers on the ground due to the nature of the confes-
sional quotas. An additional problem was that some legislation may be in
contradiction to Islamic principles. In sum, however, he argued that the ad-
vantages of participation outweighed the negative aspects and, thus, was “a
worthy concern.”

Most importantly, Qassem emphasized that parliamentary participa-
tion would not impact negatively on the activities of the resistance in the
south, but rather could increase the legitimacy, understanding and popularity
of the resistance project. In this regard, he rejects the assumptions (or what
he refers to as “false impressions”) that “the magnetism of internal politics
would pave the way for a reconsideration of the priority awarded to res-
sistance activity.” As he contends: “Such an impression is linked to the per-
ception of these individuals that political life represents the ultimate of all
aspirations. This differs from the party’s view which is inclined to the inte-
gration of political work with resistance activity without any conflict be-

359 Ibid., p. 190.
360 Ibid.
361 Ibid. Sayyed Muhammed Husayn Fadlallah had all along advocated that Hezbol-
lah, like any other Islamist movement, should take part in national elections. With-
out participation, he claimed, others would “harvest the fruits” of the forthcoming
liberation of the south, conducted by the Islamic Resistance. Besides, what did the
rejectionists offer as an alternative, he asked? Just to “sit in their seats, waiting for
the Prophet to send down angels to clear the way for them to take power here and
there?” Quoted in Kramer 1997, p. 158.
tween the two.” He claims that the vote of Hezbollah’s committee was 10 in favour and 2 against participation. Importantly, while he describes participation as favouring a “nascent Islamic faction with a new experience,” he also stresses that what conditioned it was particular to the Lebanese context. Other Islamists, he adds, may face entirely different realities. In all, the party committee presented its report to the Welayat al-Faqih “who was supportive and granted his permission.” Qassem’s remarks about Hezbollah’s submission to the final word of the Welayat al-Faqih is revealing, since it concedes that Hezbollah still pledged an allegiance to the dictates of the supreme and spiritual leader of the Islamic republic in Iran. This could be understood as contradictory to Nasrallah’s statement after the election in 1995 when he claimed that “Hezbollah is not an Iranian community in Lebanon, and its fighters are not Iranian citizens.” However, sticking to Islamist principles, he underlined that “every Islamic entity is part of the particular milieu in which it exists, and each milieu, in turn, has its own specificities.” There was undeniably an ideological linkage between the Hezbollah’s orientation in Lebanon and the Islamic republic. Ever since the advent of Hezbollah, it has adhered to the Welayat al-Faqih (the Jurist of the Consult), that is, Ayatollah Khomeini’s concept of how a political order needs to be supervised by a God’s ‘deputy’ as long as the twelfth Imam remains missing for the world. Khomeini’s establishment of the Islamic republic of Iran was the embodiment of his theory, and just as Hezbollah subordinated itself to his command in the eighties, they recognize today Ali Khamene’i, the successor of Khomeini, as their Welayat al-Faqih. For Hezbollah, adherence to the Welayat al-Faqih entails a religiously sanctioned but also general guideline for action. According to Qassem, the directives of the Welayat al-Faqih do not interfere with domestic concerns. Only if uncertainties arise on vital issues can they turn to the Welayat al-Faqih for direction, as was the case with participation

363 Ibid., p. 191
in the Lebanese elections. Otherwise, the working assumption is that those living on the terrain know best.\textsuperscript{365} Given that it is operating from within a Lebanese context, the party repeatedly rebuffed any intention to create a Lebanese Islamic state.

\textbf{5.4 No ambitions to establish an Islamic state}

Hezbollah was, as noted, extremely cautious about any tampering with the \textit{resistance}, i.e., the proclaimed \textit{right} to fight the Israeli occupation of the south. This dovetailed with the earlier “Fananian” understanding of the Islamic revolution as such. Beyond Islamic rule (as advocated by Khomeini), it was also a catalyst for self-assertion, as Nasrallah emphasized that the Islamic revolution emerging in Iran expressed a quest for emancipation which would take different shapes contingent upon local conditions and exigencies. He contended that, aside from Islam being “a ritual and faith”, it was also “a way to organize people’s lives until judgement day” and, thus, possesses the “ability to adapt and respond to changes in time and space.” Before the Islamic revolution, Nasrallah argued, many Islamic scholars had contemplated over a broader Islamic awareness and uprising, since the “Islamic world were awash in foreign-inspired ideologies poring in from the East and the West” and, thus, he added, “[t]he most distinct achievement of the Iranian Revolution was its success in shaking up the world, giving a spiritual and moral boost to the already existing ideology, crystallizing it, and awakening the Muslims.”\textsuperscript{366} In this regard, Qassem also stresses the centrality of the “third worldist” dimension of Khomeini’s version of \textit{Welayat al-Faqih} and the general norm of opposing injustice:

\textsuperscript{365} Qassem 2004, p 56-57.
\textsuperscript{366} Qouted in Noe, 2006, p. 91 (author’s emphasis).
As a guardian of Muslims, Imam Khomeini governed the Islamic state in Iran as a guide, leader, and supervisor of the Islamic system on that territory, but defined the general political commandments for all Muslims anywhere they lived in the context of preservation of the resources of Muslim states; enmity towards hegemony; protection of independence from domination and subjugation; work towards unity, especially on common and faithful issues; confrontation with the cancer implanted forcefully in Palestine as represented by the Israeli entity; refusal of all forms of oppression and deflection; caring for the needy and repressed; and strengthening of the practice of joint responsibility amongst people.\textsuperscript{367}

Therefore, while the \textit{Welayat al-Faqih} is a spiritual leader offering general guidance on principles for the believers to abide by, Hezbollah was not under the command of the Iranian government whose task concerned the management of the Iranian nation-state. In 1992, Nasrallah reiterated the ideological outline that Hezbollah “never proposed the idea of an Islamic republic in Lebanon by force, and will not do so in the future, because the nature of the Islamic republic does not lend itself to forceful action.”\textsuperscript{368} There was also the question of stability and civil order. Muhammed Fneish claimed that a state should seek consensus in society in order to be strong and solid. “You cannot insert a state in a society which is not totally fit for it”, he commented with respect to the Islamic state in Lebanon. Hence, due to regional conditions and the Lebanese mix of “cultural varieties, multitude of confessions, different values, political currents and agendas”, any effort to implement an Islamic regime at the present stage “would only cause chaos, instability and disturbances.”\textsuperscript{369} That is, any attempt to promote an Islamic state would be

\textsuperscript{367} Ibid., p. 55-56.
\textsuperscript{368} Noe 2007, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{369} Author’s interview, June 1996. One Hezbollah spokesman claimed that Hezbollah naturally adhered to the idea of an Islamic republic because otherwise they ‘would not be real believers’, but he described this project as a “dream” and a “final goal” that was not realistic in Lebanon. “Every Muslim has the idea of Islam, the
counter-productive, as it would undermine Hezbollah’s ambition to conduct the resistance. In this regard, Mehri also concurred that “there is a multitude in Lebanon that we are careful to keep, and that’s why we don’t have this proposal [for an Islamic state] in our political program.” So, the movement stuck to its commitment expressed in the “Open Letter”: it did not deny that it considered the Islamic state an ideal solution (as inherent in its ideology), but while the party conceded the infeasibility of establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon, it reserved its right to promote Islam as a political project and a code of life.

For Hezbollah, the country should be a free space for all. As Nasrallah stated: “We fully understand that a communist would want a communist state, and a Muslim or Christian would want a state that reflects his own faith and ideology. What we do not understand, however, is someone who wants to impose on others by force, or through violent means, his own beliefs and a governance system of his choice. This we will never do.” Muhammad Fneish similarly suggested: “We as a party have our ideology, our creed and our beliefs in Islam. We have the right and we have the freedom to work within the general existing system. We seek to spread out Islam as an ideology, because Islam is an invitation and a message. However, we do not attempt to impose our creed and beliefs on other parties...And there shall be most just system in the world. Therefore, our vision of saving humanity and society is by raising the Islamic state,” he said. Author’s interview with Abdallah Mortada, Beirut, May 1996.

370 Interview with Youssef Mehri, Beirut, May 1996.

371 It did not pass painlessly, however. Hezbollah's former secretary-general Sheikh Subhi Tufayli, who led the movement through the militant eighties and was succeeded by the more moderate Sayyed Abbas Musawi in 1991, condemned participation. On the eve of the elections, he was even reported as having called upon his followers to burn down the voting centres, as there was no fatwa (edict) to support participation. Hamzeh, 1993: 325.
a possibility for any party to seek to express their opinion and convince others about it.”

Fneish also brushed away the assumption that his party, with respect to rapid changes in demography in favour of the Shi’ite community, demands de-confessionalization for the sake of gathering a majority vote and thereby establishing an Islamic state (a census on the demographics). The weakness of such an assumption, he claimed, is that no community, the Shi’ites included, can claim political homogeneity, as they consist of many different political orientations. For Fneish, the party’s demand for de-confessionalization means that confessional belonging should not determine an individual’s political status and that the “mingling of people” is a unifying factor in itself. Fneish and other Hezbollah officials complained that sectarianism fostered disunity and that the confessional system was largely responsible for the drama that Lebanon experienced during the decades of instability, conflict and war. According to deputy secretary-general Na’im Kassem, Hezbollah condemns sectarianism because “sectarian affiliations mean that one has a certain religion because of his parents and he becomes a fanatic for it without understanding it or without being convinced to it.” For example, he contended, “some Muslims are not Muslims in terms of actually living their religion, while they are sectarian in all senses of the word. Some of them are leaders who boast that they represent Muslims in the elections, but they represent the sect of Muslims, not Islamic principles or thought.” For the movement, sectarianism would thus undermine the imperative of a coherent national consciousness. This was akin to Fadlallah’s view that “sectarianism is preventing the Lebanese from being related to their home land,

372 Author's interview, Beirut, May 1996. On Monday Morning, 6 March 1995, he said that freedom of speech is a guarantee for stability in society, and it is not the other way around: “Preventing parties from undertaking political action would not end their existence. It would merely drive them underground, which would threaten social stability…[as] is seen in Algeria and Egypt.”

373 That said, it should be noted that Hezbollah does not approve of civil status law.

because every sect believes that [the sect] is its own homeland. That is why
the sectarian system bars the feeling of national unity."

But how would Hezbollah create any such national unity, consider-
ing its own affiliation to an Islamist ideal? And what would this national
unity involve? In the following, Hezbollah’s strategies of entering the elec-
toral process will be considered, along with how the movement forged a
‘modus operandi’ with the Lebanese regime, despite very strained relations
between them. This was also a modus operandi - enabled by the Syrian tute-
lage – that the party would guard and cultivate for many years to come.

5.6 Protecting the resistance

In the parliamentary elections of August-September 1992, Hezbollah gained
eight seats out of ten by forming a parliamentary alliance called ‘The Bloc
Loyal to the Resistance’, which included two Christian and two Sunni Mus-
lim MPs. The ambition with this bloc was to form cross-sectarian unity for
resisting the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon. To be sure, while Hez-
bollah considered its campaign to be a ‘success’, it should be noted that
many Christians boycotted the elections, which had a beneficial effect on
Hezbollah’s results. Also noteworthy is that while all former warlords from
the Lebanese war were granted a place in the cabinet, Hezbollah chose, once
again, to abstain from participation. In fact, despite the conciliatory approach
and attitudes that followed the implementation of the Ta’if Accord, there
was increasing tension between Hezbollah and the Lebanese government.
The party was especially aggrieved by what it viewed as the imperative of
resistance in the south being ignored. In addition, it did not approve of the
government’s social policies. In many ways, these issues were part of con-

375 Author’s interview, Beirut, June 1998.
376 Author’s interview with Ibrahim Bayan, Sunni MP and member of the “Bloc
flicting visions of Lebanon’s course into the ‘new order’. The ongoing peace negotiations promised, many thought, a successful conclusion, and the party feared that the Lebanese government was adapting itself to this order. In a critical assessment of the government’s policy statement in November 1992, Hezbollah claimed that it was too vague in its reference to the liberation of the south. As the party charged, “it did not discuss Lebanon’s official and popular right to resistance or the role of the resistance,” and the movement deplored how the government ignored “to salute the resistance of our steadfast people.” This was a clear reference to the Lebanese state’s historical neglect of the people of the south, as not really “belonging” to the state’s sphere of interest.\(^{377}\) The competing visions between Hezbollah (determined to stay committed to resistance) and the Hariri-government (inclined towards business and reconstruction) was also evident in the party’s observation that, while the government made brief references to the resistance, “it expounded abnormally on tourism, welfare and other such topics, which should not be discussed in a country where an essential part of its territory is being occupied.” Hezbollah added that it was not “opposed to promoting tourism or the Lebanese people’s well-being” but that these issues could not take priority over the resistance for the sake of liberating the land:

> If liberation is truly a priority, the policy statement should not discuss the issue of prosperity. We are not against prosperity; however, we doubt that it will exist as long as the country remains in a state of confrontation and cannot receive international aid...[W]e see the cabinet statement as a liberation statement that has given the people the wrong idea. What the people need to hear about are their responsibilities and reality and the challenges inherent in this reality...Of course, we must distinguish between prosperity and providing the necessary services and source of livelihood for the people. The lat-

\(^{377}\) In this regard, Hezbollah also complained that the ministerial policy statement did not secure ‘the necessary requirements for...infrastructure, shelters, hospitals and everything else that is needed for an area in a state of emergency’. See statement in *BBC World Service* 12 November 1992.
ter...is an urgent necessity and a demand that cannot be ignored, regardless of the issues. Talk about prosperity and the tourism and services sectors, however, has nothing to do with today's political reality. If this talk is serious, it reflects a very shaky situation. Promoting tourism, services and other such sectors in one part of the country means continuing to watch the tragedy in the other occupied part of the homeland, which is constantly being attacked.378

Hezbollah, thus, wanted to mobilize a ‘national effort’ to support and care for the liberation in the south. The reconstruction programs of the government, mainly concentrated around the capital, would cause the same divisions that had plagued Lebanon in the past, especially the relation between the country’s capital and the south, or, indeed, the very idea of positioning itself in the new regional order of negotiations and envisaged cooperation and settlement, which Hezbollah opposed.

The contradiction between these visions grew worse, and even turned into hostilities, especially as the conflict in the south escalated in the spring and summer of 1993 and the Israelis attacked Lebanon on a wide scale for seven days in its so-called ‘Operation Accountability’. The Israelis launched their operation after suffering heavy losses (seven soldiers) in an attack by Hezbollah guerrillas. It targeted many civilian areas across the south, which, in turn, prompted Hezbollah to start firing katyusha rockets across the border against civilian settlements in Israel. By attacking Lebanon, Israel tried to exploit the divisions between Hezbollah and the Lebanese government, isolating Hezbollah and turning both the Lebanese people and the government against the resistance. The Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres argued:

Look, this is not a war against Lebanon but against Hezbollah... [which] is actually a foreign presence in Lebanon in that it receives its real instructions from Tehran. It is an Iranian foreign agent. Moreover, Lebanon’s problems have always been caused by foreign agents and bodies and by deranged

378 Ibid.
groups, and today Hezbollah is the most outstanding foreign agent and de-
d ranged group in Lebanon.”

However, Israel appeared unable to stop Hezbollah from either conducting
operations or firing katyushas. In Beirut, the Lebanese government claimed
that it could not stop Hezbollah and only stated that Israel had to comply
with UN Resolution 425. As Hezbollah rejected any U.S. mediation for
solving the conflict, it left ample room for Syria to again prove its position as
the “indispensable arbiter.” As Judith Harik Palmer notes: “Operation Ac-
countability…not only failed to exploit tensions between the Lebanese au-
thorities and Hezbollah, but also gave Damascus a key role in the situation
as Syria mediated the ceasefire between Hezbollah and the Israelis, with the
USA.” She suggests that “Syria was able to defeat Israel’s strategy of ex-
ploring tensions between the Lebanese state and Hezbollah, not by smooth-
ing over or resolving them, but simply by channelling them to achieve its
policy-goals”. And while the Lebanese parties received full support on the
part of Syria, “their behaviour towards one another was apparently so closely
regulated that any impingement on the other’s sphere of influence was pre-
vented.” Both diplomatic and military means were given full Syrian sup-
port for making the Israelis withdraw. According to Harik-Palmer, “Damasc-
cus’ ‘rules’ seem to preclude the use of other Lebanese groups or external

380 As Hariri told reporters in 24 March 1993: ‘Now, if you are speaking about the
Lebanese resistance against the Israeli occupation and asking the state to disarm the
resistance, the state cannot do this. So long as Israel occupies the south, the state will
not disarm the resistance. Israel has not left nor has it promised to leave within a
certain period. What is required of the state? Is it required to let Israel sit comforta-
bly in occupied Lebanese territory? What kind of logic is that?’ BBC World Sum-
mary. 25 March 1993. However, Uri Lubrani at a press briefing on July 30 argued
that 425 was no solution to the problem, since it did not guarantee any mechanism of
security and, hence, the Israeli government would not be able to meet the demands
of its Lebanese counterpart. BBC World Summary 31 July 1993.
382 Ibid. My own emphasis.
actors to promote their cause or derogate the other.” In that sense, Syria deployed its logic of being above the major differences, combining those domestic conflicts and divergences into a “coherent” matrix, which it was able to master and control. However, behind the scenes there were reportedly significant tensions. Shortly after the ceasefire, the Lebanese government voted to deploy the army down south in order to obstruct the resistance from conducting operations against the Israeli troops and the SLA, however Syria made sure that the decision was not implemented. “If that [government intervention] would have happened”, Nasrallah recalled years later, “Lebanon would have entered into a dark tunnel, in which the resistance, the army, and all of Lebanon would have been lost.”

While cooperating with this Syrian ‘protection’, Hezbollah maintained its role as a resistance force and withstood the pressure from the Israelis. It was, thus, able to establish a certain balance of power that gradually began to tilt conditions in favour of the resistance.

The 1993 July Agreement demonstrated how Hezbollah had been able to gain recognition for itself as a resistance force in the south. Not only did it indirectly acknowledge Hezbollah’s proclaimed right to fight the occupation troops, but the agreement also paid tribute (albeit indirectly) to the skills and clout of the resistance. That is, a few days into the Israeli bomb campaign in 1993, Nasrallah offered the Israelis a truce. They refused this, and, perhaps spotting a sign of weakness in that offer, the Israelis demanded that the Lebanese government take action against Hezbollah, but no such thing happened. Hezbollah continued to pound katyushas at Israeli settlements in the north, imposing the same logic of force upon the Israelis who,

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384 Hizbollah chief Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah said that halting rocket attacks on settlements in northern Israel “cannot be achieved but with the complete and permanent halt of aggression against villages and civilians . . . and the stopping of Israeli attacks from air, land and sea on all Lebanese territories.” See The Toronto Star 30 July 1993.
after seven days, agreed to a ceasefire, which was mediated between Washington and Damascus.

The agreement that ended the fighting across the border said nothing of Hezbollah’s attacks against the Israeli forces and the SLA within the occupied zone. Hence, the agreement considered, in a roundabout way, these attacks to be ‘legitimate’. Moreover, by firing katyushas at Israeli settlements, Hezbollah had been able to construe a balance of terror that hindered Israel from attacking civilian areas and turning the local civilians against the resistance (as was successfully done when fighting the PLO in the seventies). Hence, Israel had been unable to impose its own terms of security by force. The logic of firing katyushas was explained by Nasrallah:

The Islamic Resistance has fought the Zionist enemy face to face, striking painfully at him. The Resistance cannot sit and look at Israeli aircraft, rockets and artillery striking at our civilian population in our steadfast villages. After the enemy targets villages and civilians, the Islamic Resistance fires rockets at settlements in occupied north Palestine according to the Koran verse: If then any one transgresses the prohibition against you, transgress ye likewise against him.\(^{385}\)

This was a logic that Hezbollah, as we have seen, had advocated ever since its inception, but which now, much thanks to the Syrian tutelage (and its own military capabilities) could be claimed to be an alternative to the logic of peace negotiations that gained momentum during this period of time. For Hezbollah, these negotiations exposed the despondent and defeatist condition of the Arab regimes, and the movement claimed to offer a totally different approach to dealing with the new realities taking form. In September

\(^{385}\) BBC 30 July 1993. This was also confirmed, one may suggest, when two weeks after the ceasefire, Hezbollah killed 7 Israeli soldiers in the ‘security zone’, and Yitchak Rabin claimed that Israel would not bring massive relation, since the nature of Hezbollah’s attack was within the ‘rules of the game’. \textit{The Independent} 20 Aug, 1993.
1992, Nasrallah contended that the party adhered to a theory challenging that of “diplomatic chivalry and international forums” by instead opting for a “war against the enemy”:

They said that those who advocate this are insane; we said in response, let us try – the sane can talk politics and the insane can fight. Be certain that the theory of the sane will not bear fruit, but that of the insane – the mujahidin, the martyrs and suicide bombers – has already caused the enemy to bleed and had doubled the number of its dead and wounded. The bleeding within the Zionist entity had added public pressure on the enemy’s government and put it in front of two clear options: either it remains in the south and suffers additional human losses, or it withdraws…Experience and common sense have shown that the theory of resistance is still valid, and that the other logic has failed and should therefore not be counted on anymore’. 386

Hezbollah was also keen to cultivate this view among the people of the south, who were already too accustomed to being victims of Israeli aggression. After the 1993 Israeli bombing campaign, Nasrallah told the people of the south that no negotiations would give them tranquillity, claiming that the south was part of a larger scheme of injustice:

Don’t listen to those who want to blame the resistance [for the crises], for the cause is Israel…Unless you defend yourself…who will defend you?...the Security Council or the worn out [Arab] regimes? This is your battle and this is the war being imposed on you by the Israeli enemy and his American masters. This is your war whether you like it or not. Your land is occupied and your fate is threatened and your resources are coveted by Zionist ambitions…we thank Syria led by Asad and Muslim Iran because they

are the only countries in the world that strongly support your right to defend yourself and to achieve liberation.  

However, Hezbollah’s relation with the Beirut regime was still fraught with tension, and they were to become graver, reflecting the development in the regional conflict. On September 13, 1993, Lebanese army troops opened fire on a demonstration arranged by Hezbollah as a protest against the Oslo Accords (signed between the PLO and Israel the day earlier), killing 8 party demonstrators and wounding 38. Hezbollah responded furiously, albeit without taking to violence. In a fiery speech commemorating the victims, Nasrallah called for the resignation of the Lebanese President Elias Hrawi and the Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, both of whom he declared to be “dictators” and adding that “our people cannot anymore co-exist with such a criminal and murderous leadership.” In the momentum of the Oslo Accords, he also warned the government from trying to impress the United States and Israel by claiming that it was capable of suppressing the radical forces. These radicals would vehemently oppose any such deal in Lebanon. “It is a losing bet if they meant to send a message to the U.S. and Israel that Lebanon is capable of controlling the situation, spilling the blood of the strugglers and destroying opposition”, Nasrallah said. The Hariri-regime, he continued, could not be trusted “for a single moment.” Indeed, drawing a parallel to Egypt and Algeria, where the regimes were fighting gruesome battles against radical opposition forces, he also asserted that “Lebanon cannot tolerate a suppressive regime which we will fight by all means.” He added that any peace deal would not be binding “to our people and our nation.”

In his political biography, Naim Qassem describes how the massacres risked trig-

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388 BBC World Broadcast News on September 19, 1993. In this regard, Sayyed Mohammed Husayn Fadlallah also stated that should the Lebanese leaders sign a peace treaty with Israel, “they would be at the edge of the margin and their signature would not be recognised by their people.”
gering civil strife and “pulling the resistance in the maze and corridors of Oslo’s repercussions.” He added that “Hezbollah’s tolerance and the positive resoluteness of martyr’s families seized the opportunity from the hands of those who were aiming at distorting the party’s objectives, distracting from a more worthy cause and [pushing it] towards [domestic] issues.” The party was adamant about not getting involved in any such civil strife, despite the bad blood between them and the regime. Qassem acknowledges that the tensions persisted for 18 months, until the High Commission of rescue, chaired by Rafiq Hariri expressed in a statement its sorrow for the victims that were supporting a cause of “defending the land” and “who refuse partial and unilateral solutions and defend their stance with the dearest of capabilities.”

Like the slogan that declared the end of the Lebanese crises in 1958, both sides were increasingly aware that there would be ‘no victor, no vanquished’ in this drama either. Thus, they had to settle for a compromise that had long been a common logic for the political formula governing the country, or at least kept it from sliding into civil war. However, as we have seen, Hezbollah was able to a large extent to develop this modus operandi thanks to the Syrian tutelage over Lebanon. Hezbollah submitted to the Syrian order in Lebanon while popularising and safeguarding its modus operandi with the regime.

389 Qassem 2004, p. 113.
390 Ibid.
5.7 Consolidating a chord with the Syrians

Although the Syrian tutelage offered Hezbollah room to manoeuvre, there were tensions not only between the Beirut regime and the party but also between the party and Damascus. According to Asaam Namaan, the former Lebanese minister of Telecommunications (1998-2000), the Syrians were consistently afraid that the operations of the resistance would get out of hand in the south and that Israeli relations would be “embarrassing” since “the Syrians were here and they were not capable to defend Lebanon, they were not even capable to defend themselves.”\(^{391}\) In addition, Syria was a partner in the peace process, whereas Hezbollah (backed by Iran) opposed any such peace deal with Israel, or indeed the process itself. So, while subordinating itself to Syria, the party was at the mercy of the outcomes of Syria’s conduct at the negotiation table. How did the party respond to this complex of problems?

Even though Hezbollah referred to the fighting in the south as a “sacred duty”, it was also, to some extent, controlled by the Syrians. While it is impossible (and naïve) to determine the nature and scope of this control, Hezbollah officials themselves conceded this. “We don’t need to be told”, as one of them reportedly said. “We know the Syrians are the key to even our future. We have no benefit in weakening its bargaining position. This, of course, doesn’t mean we have begun to support the peace process. It only means survival through pragmatism.”\(^{392}\) During this same period of time, another Hezbollah source revealed that the party had taken “great pains” when calibrating what they “perceive as Syrian interests”, albeit adding that “watching out for Syrian interests is one thing – submission to Syria is an-

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\(^{391}\) Author’s interview, Beirut, January 2007.
other.” In April 1995, Hezbollah convened a congress at which views differed sharply and strong protests were heard against the movement’s subordination to Syria. However, the leadership elected by the congress (for instance, Hassan Nasrallah who was re-elected as secretary-general) clearly favoured an accommodating attitude towards Syria. Dissidents, like former secretary-general Subhi Tufayli, who toed an anti-Syrian line, were reported to have been eased “out of power and influence.” For Hezbollah, Syria’s presence was a condition for Lebanese stability in the context of its ongoing resistance campaign. As Youssef Merhi noted, the Syrian domination was “a fact at present”. It made Lebanon strong against Israel, and this, he concluded, is “the most important issue between us and Syria.” Muhammed Fneish claimed that Syria had been crucial for bringing domestic peace and stability, but he also added that the tendency in global policy in general, in Europe and elsewhere, was to form regional blocs, and, in this regard, a deepening of the cooperation with Syria was to the advantage of both. However, Mehri complained about the weak leadership as manifested in the troika system, which resolved their differences in Damascus. “Our position is that we don’t like that”, he said, “but this is the state of the country…We hope that the

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393 Foreign Report, September 21, 1995. also noteworthy in this regard that Iran supported the Syrian line of being cautious with respect to armed resistance; the Iranian foreign minister, Ali Akbar Velayti, called upon Hezbollah to avoid being ‘reckless’ in the early stages of the nineties. Calabrese 1994.

394 Foreign Report, 27 July 1995. During this period of time, it was also reported that guerrillas within the Islamic resistance went ‘on strike’ for a time in 1995 and refused to fight, as Hezbollah’s leadership had agreed to Syrian demands to be briefed about the movement’s military operations in advance. However, Syria soon dropped these demands, and the Islamic resistance resumed its operations (Foreign Report 19 October 1995).

395 Author’s interview, Beirut, May 1996. Naim Qassem also voiced a similar position in 1994 when he declared that “[our] relationship with Syria is good. Syria upholds the Lebanese right to resist the occupier. This is a base meeting point, and Syria is working to maintain internal stability in Lebanon”, Monday Morning 17 October 1994.
Lebanese should be able to solve their problems themselves, not with the help of anybody. We want complete independence and sovereignty.”

Still, the relationship between Hezbollah and the Syrian tutelage was not free from tensions. When the Hariri government, backed by Damascus, cracked down hard on the various media institutions of the opposition in the mid-nineties, Hezbollah reacted harshly and protested alongside other groups in opposition. Fadlallah also complained in late 1995 that “[t]his country is subjected to political occupation, in that all its political freedoms have been usurped so that it is subjugated to other political forces that impose what they like on it, whether in its internal business or its external policy… what sort of political independence [exists] when the country is always looking to the outside for its political direction?” In addition to infringements by the regime on media freedom and the like, there was this tension-ridden aspect of the peace negotiations, which concealed a deep contradiction between Hezbollah’s ambitions and Syria’s ambitions, and which also involved conflicting schemes on the part of Damascus and Iran (which, like Hezbollah, rejected any peace settlement with Israel). To reiterate, Hezbollah had no intention to “recognise Israel” and it denounced the “two state solution” (upon which the process relied) as a deep injustice and expression of coloni-

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396 Ibid.
397 Harris describes how in April 1993 Hezbollah even backed a Christian-run television station and newspaper (Nida al-Watan) which had interviewed General Aoun and was charged by the regime for fomenting ‘confessional tensions’. Hezbollah claimed ‘the right of opposition against the mentality of the rulers’. Harris 1997, p. 290. In doing so, the movement most likely protected its own right to “speak out” through its own media networks. Harris notes with respect to how the Syrians guarded the order under its command: “Syria’s overwhelming presence enforces self-censorship and self-limitation. Fear imposed sharper constraints than government regulation – nobody in the media or academia, for example, needed to be reminded of the fate of the journalist Salim al-Lawzi. Al-Lawzihad attacked the Syrian regime in the late 1970s and had been kidnapped in February 1980. His body was found with the writing hand burned with acids.” Harris 1997, p. 291.
398 Qouted in Harris 1997, p. 296.
alism. Yet, the Syrians were deeply involved into negotiations with ‘the enemy’, which put Hezbollah at the mercy of the outcome to be concluded at the negotiation table. However, in 1996, Youssef Mehri described this situation as “choosing between two evils,” and he saw Syria’s accompanying track with Lebanon as the lesser evil. He argued:

We believe that an accompanying course with Syria and Lebanon together in the peace negotiations is in the interests of the Lebanese – even if Hezbollah is against the issue of negotiations…And we say this because this accompanying track can restrict Israel from putting pressure on Lebanon…Israel doesn’t want this. Israel wants to do to Lebanon exactly what it has done to all those other countries it has established peace treaties with, singling them out, making them weak…

He also expressed his belief that Syria was aware of the “weakness” of Lebanon (even for its own sake) and that Syria would never “sell Lebanon out.”

399 Naim Qassem noted that the negotiations only considered the land occupied by Israel from 1967 onwards, and this is ‘preventing the discussion of 80 per cent of Palestinian land [occupied since 1948] and take for granted Israeli possession of that land…Where are the negotiations for peace? They are overlooking in this process all the problems and difficulties of the region and the objective circumstances for coexistence’. Monday Morning, 17 October 1994.

400 Author’s interview, Beirut, May 1996. Merhi’s apprehensions are akin to how Hezbollah official Abdallah Mortada described the nature of the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks to this author. He cautioned that observers should not be seduced by the attractive connotation of the concept of “peace”, since the ongoing process, he argued, had anything to do with peace. Backed up by the U.S., Israel had been able to single Arab countries out because of their weakness. He argued: “The ‘pseudo-peace’ [Israel] is bringing forward can be translated as making all people in the Arab world dependent upon the strength of Israel’s economy, through manufacturing, banking etc. The production will be in hand of the Israelis and the consumers will be the Arab countries. This means that Israel can impose its power economically rather than military…Israel wants peace, maybe, but on the terms of Israel – like the ‘peace’ with the PLO. Is that peace? With 4 million Palestinian refugees that are not allowed to return to the country where they belong?...That is peace with no equilibrium. Israel simply exploited the weakness of the PLO…” Author’s interview, Beirut, May 1996.
However, while at the mercy of a peace settlement, Hezbollah still had a prominent platform from which to oppose such a process by fighting the Israelis in the south. After all, the war in the south involved two fronts. Firstly, it concerned a battle of wills between Hezbollah and Israel, both keen to impose its force on the other. Secondly, this battle of wills concerned the two contrasting logics of larger ongoing scenario in the region; i.e., to be for or against the so-called ‘peace process’, to be in favour of negotiations or not. For Israel, the purpose of remaining behind in the south was to impose itself militarily until a more comprehensive agreement was reached. For Hezbollah, the objective was to make sure that this Israeli military clout (and its prospective dividends) did not become more than deceptive and illusionary. The resistance was at the heart of Hezbollah’s project, and it was willing to cooperate – even compromise – with the Beirut regime for this particular purpose. As Israel unleashed a new comprehensive bombing campaign against Lebanon in 1996, Hezbollah would be able to develop its modus operandi with the regime even further, as will be illustrated below.

5.8 Developing a modus operandi with the regime

As previously described, the resistance became a top priority for the movement, as it could establish a sort of modus operandi with the Lebanese government, allowing it a kind of autonomous position for conducting operations. In this sense, Hezbollah also distanced itself from getting too involved in the structures of the state, especially the cabinet. Naim Qassem explains that the resistance fared better by having an independent role, away from the government, since otherwise the international community would more easily constrain the government and even the resistance. A more favourable division of tasks, he suggested, was for the resistance to fight and the Lebanese government to operate as a mediator, whose objective was also to “draw the
international community’s attention to that very danger which bred the re-
sistance” and thus, “the bottom line in the Lebanese government’s approach was that there was no solution except for Israel to withdraw unconditionally from Lebanon.”  

This division of tasks deepened and even brought a na-
tional dimension to the resistance, as Israel embarked upon a new com-
prehensive bombing campaign in April 1996, the so-called “Operation Grapes of Wrath.” The events leading up to the Israeli operation involved the escalation of clashes in the south (with Israel suffering significant casualties) in which both parties claimed that the other violated the understandings of July 1993 by attacking the civilians on respective sides. The Israeli campaign in 1996 was more comprehensive than that in 1993-number [numbers of casualties and destruction] It ended, however, with a similar kind of outcome: a ceasefire mediated by Syria and France and the U.S., foremost after an Israeli shelling hit a UN base in the southern town of Qana, killing 112 civilian refugees who had sought shelter within the base. This attack brought a huge international outcry, and it imposed an obligation on the U.S. - as the recog-
nized sponsor of the peace process - to stop the fighting. The new agreement was dubbed “the April understanding”. As in 1993, it “allowed” the conflicting parties to fight each other on condition that they did not attack civilian areas. The French Foreign Minister Herve de Charette described the new agreement as differing from that in 1993 in three ways. Firstly, the 1993 agreement was a “verbal agreement” and not codified in a written text, and it was concluded between Hezbollah and the Israelis through U.S. [and Syria; author’s note] mediation. Secondly, the written text implied that it was a “stronger deal.” Thirdly, he described the new prospects for peace (in 1996) that were not as conceivable in the summer of 1993, contending that “peace

401 Qassem 2004, p. 106-107. Expressing his doubt over the government’s inten-
tions, or even stamina, Qassem argued that the resistance feared that it would be treated as a bargaining chip if subordinated to the government.

negotiations could resume some time in the summer or autumn” and that “a temporary agreement may lead to lasting peace.” In addition, he recognized Hezbollah’s military capacity and claimed that the objective [of a military operation] itself “could not be the destruction of Hezbollah because an armed force of that kind cannot be wiped by shelling villages and roads with heavy artillery. This is not the way to do it.”  

Indeed, the “Grapes of Wrath” was something of a watershed for Hezbollah’s struggle in the south, boosting its image in many ways. As the French foreign minister hinted, the Israeli campaign revealed the movement’s military clout and ability to sustain the pressure from the mighty Israeli firepower. Like in 1993, Hezbollah continued to fire katyushas across the border until the ceasefire. It is worthy of note that Hezbollah had earlier rejected a U.S.-mediated ceasefire proposal, which it felt to be too favourable to Israel and which changed the already established ‘rules of the game’ in the south. In addition, when Syria was under pressure to force Hezbollah to accept it, Damascus reported that Hezbollah simply refused (hinting that it could do nothing about the Islamists). Neither could Israel or the U.S. Secondly, Hezbollah approved of the April Understanding, since its basic content conformed to the July agreement of 1993, and the movement throughout the fighting in April 1996 would accept no less. In that sense, it was a field victory for Hezbollah, which could assume an assertive attitude while accepting the April Understanding. That is, even though it was written down, Hezbollah refused to sign it since, as Nasrallah claimed, there were “terms [in the agreement] we do not approve of…[as] we do not believe there is a land called Israel; there is a land called occupied Palestine.” However, Nasrallah argued that it would abide by the provisions of the text by not strik-

403 See BBC World Service, 29 April 1996.
404 The point of this was to show that Israel could not “tame” Hezbollah into a cease-fire, but the movement still had the ability to fire katyushas if it wanted to.
406 See interview with Nasrallah, Middle East Insight, May-Aug 1996.
407 Al-Maokif May 1996.
ing at civilian targets, since, he argued, “it is not in Hezbollah’s interest or to its benefit to retaliate anywhere outside of the occupied area.” For the movement, the firing of katyuscas was part of fomenting a “terror balance” with the Israelis aiming at protecting the civilians in the south. As in 1993, Hezbollah deployed the ‘katyuscha logic’ as a means to defend the civilians in the south, or so the movement explained its policy of firing katyuscas. Shortly after the end of the war in 1996, one spokesman stressed the aspect of defence and retaliation with respect to the firing of katyuscas at civilian Israeli settlements across the border. Throughout the years of occupation in the south, he asserted, the Israelis had been able to use the Lebanese civilians as pawns, terrorising them with bombing and shelling as a price for putting up with resistance. In 1993, Hezbollah began to retaliate by “firing katyuscas against the civilian population in northern Israel, all in order to make the Israeli army stop shooting at our civilian population fed up with this policy of Israel.” From then on, he said, “we have answered with firing katyuscas against the civilian population in northern Israel, all in order to make the Israeli army stop shooting at our civilian population. From my point of view this has worked. It is not a strategy of ours to attack civilians, but a means to make the Israelis stop attacking ours.” Nasrallah explained that Hezbollah applied the same logic as the Israelis; if they attacked Lebanese civilians in order to turn the people against the resistance, Hezbollah would do likewise:

If you cannot catch the fish, then drain the pool and the fish will automatically die. Where’s the value of the resistance. It is a fish which swims in a sea of people...When we mount an operation [against a military target], they hit the

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408 *Time* 13 May 1996.
409 Indeed, in this context, it is worth noting that Hezbollah actually was reported to have recognized this principle until 1992. With one exception, UNIFIL spokesman Mikael Lindwall said, Hezbollah have only launched katyuscas against civilian settlements in Israel when being preceded by at least one Lebanese civilian casualty at the hands of the Israeli forces or the SLA. Conversation, Beirut, June 1996.
civilians. Why are we sensitive to the issue of civilians? The civilians are our people. The Israelis are using them as a pressure tactic against us...In the same manner they are pressuring our civilians to tell us to stop the resistance, we can pressure their civilians to tell the Israelis not to shell Lebanese civilians.\textsuperscript{410}

For Hezbollah there was also a larger victory inherent in maintaining the “understandings” in the south and boosting its own clout, as it also weakened the impression of Israeli might and how it could be applied to suit the American ambition to pursue the peace process. Having met Nasrallah at the time, an observer notes that the Hezbollah secretary-general was most animated by the theme of an Israeli failure. As Nasrallah reportedly put it:

Israel’s basic goal was to destroy the infrastructure of the resistance and destroy the will of the resistance, to kill as many fighters and leaders as possible...By killing civilians, the Israelis wanted to terrorise civilians so that they would demonstrate on the streets to demand the disarming of Hezbollah. They wanted a clash between the resistance and the government in Lebanon. And when they bombarded installations like the electricity station, they wanted to exert more pressure on the government.\textsuperscript{411}

According to Nasrallah, the Israelis aimed at “[stirring] up the internal situation so that [U.S. Secretary of State] Warren Christopher could come and say: ‘If you want a solution, let Israel and Lebanon sit at the negotiating table’, So [Lebanon] would have sat humiliated, weak and sad at table and

\textsuperscript{410} See Middle East Insight May-August 1996. ‘The direct retaliation is no more a right’, he in a comment to the agreement after the war’s end. ‘Now both parties are restricted. We cannot launch katyushas and the Israelis cannot retaliate. For us it is not a problem...A few katyushas to protect our civilians, and now they restrict us. In return, Israel, which has the tanks, cruisers, artillery and air power, was restricted. Our main concern is the civilians. Not launching katyushas’. Middle East Insight, p. 86, May-August 1996

\textsuperscript{411} The Independent, 5 May 1996
given Israel everything it wanted. Secondly, Syria would be isolated and lose all its strong cards. Had Peres been able to achieve any of these goals, he would have won votes in the elections. Neither of these goals were achieved. *The failure of the enemy is our victory.*“

Observers have accounted for how Hezbollah managed during the war in 1996 to cross many of the sectarian and political barriers that permeate Lebanese society, especially the long-held enmity towards Hezbollah as ‘Iranian revolutionaries’. However, such new-won popular standing was not only of Hezbollah’s own making. Harik-Palmer describes how the Lebanese regime’s inability to quell Hezbollah and the modus operandi that had developed thanks to Syrian mediation entailed a greater coordination, as the Lebanese government, by stressing the unfeasibility of anyone defeating Hezbollah militarily, could convince the international community that the only solution for Israel was to abide by UNSC Resolution 425. This also entailed that the government was much better prepared to deal with the massive exodus of refugees that arrived to Beirut from the south in 1996 (com-

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412 Ibid (my own emphasis).
413 Hala Jaber describes: “Men and women from all walks of life contributed generously to the Resistance. Some of the boxes collected donations for the refugees while others were clearly for the Resistance. But that made little difference to the supporters. For most, the issue had gone beyond Hezbollah itself: Israel and the US were attempting to force Lebanon to comply with their strategies in the region, by means of waging a war against Lebanon’s right to resist an unlawful occupation. The unprecedented public outrage against Israelis offensive, shared by Lebanon’s Christians and Muslims alike, was at last giving the country a long-awaited sense of national unity” Jaber 1997, p. 199.
414 The Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri argued that it is “the [Israeli] occupation which generates the resistance. Whether their political convictions please us or not, there will be no confrontation [between us and the resistance] and certainly not with Hezbollah...The only solution to this cycle of violence which has lasted for years lies in the application of UN security Council Resolution 425”, *Monday Morning* 15 April 1996. In addition, the Lebanese Foreign Minister, Faris Buways, stated that if the government took any action against Hezbollah while Israeli still occupied the south, it would make the regime “look like a collaborator with an occupier”, *Middle East International*, 12 April 1996.
pared to 1993). She notes that local media – “which had been indulged to hold off all criticism [against the resistance] during the crises” – provided extensive reporting about the government’s efforts to assist the refugees and their plight, including the coverage of “demonstrations of public and private support for the national resistance…This publicity had an important effect on the Lebanese public opinion…because it drew the ordinary citizen into the heart of the state’s efforts to repulse the Israeli attack, thus helping the government to shape a supportive national consensus.”

By cooperating with the resistance, the Lebanese government could make a point to the international community that no Israeli aggression would pay off and that the Israelis in the end were obliged to withdraw according to UN Resolution 425. However, this position on the part of the Lebanese government offered an opportunity for Hezbollah to thrive as a national resistance. In this regard, the outcome of “Operation Grapes of Wrath” was a painful blowback to Israel’s desire to quell Hezbollah and impose its will in Lebanon by force. Hezbollah’s triumph was not without problems, however, since its relationship to the regime – and the Syrians – was still fraught with tension. As a result of its rising popularity, it had to subordinate itself to further negotiations with both. The following sections will deal with the way Hezbollah was forced to reach compromises with the Lebanese political establishment, especially in the 1996 parliamentary elections. What did these compromises involve? What benefits did Hezbollah expect to get out of them? Indeed, there was also a harsh reaction against Hezbollah from the radical circles surrounding the party, not least from dissident Sheikh Subhi Tufayli. On what ground did Tufayli criticize the party? And how did the party respond? The following section will discuss the state-resistance bar-

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415 Harik-Palmer, 2003, p. 119-129. Importantly, she also observes that the “media was apparently galvanised into taking this line by a proposal from Parliament’s Defense and National Security Committee that a state of emergency be declared.
gain and the nature of the settlements Hezbollah had to contend with in order to promote its own strategy of struggle.

5.9 Assailed and accused

The rise in popularity for Hezbollah after ‘Operation Grapes of Wrath’ made the Lebanese political elites, and most likely even the Syrians, anxious, since it tended to upset the delicate balance within the political life of the country. While this Syrian-mediated ‘arrangement’ with the Lebanese political establishment had given Hezbollah ample room for manoeuvre on the military field of resistance, it was now feared that the Lebanese Islamists were becoming too influential in the political domain as well. This was witnessed during the parliamentary election campaign in August-September 1996, when Hezbollah declined an offer by Amal to cooperate in sharing the votes within the Shi’ite community and instead allied itself with various leftist and independent groups. As a result, the Lebanese political establishment, including the Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, Amal leader Nabih Berri (also speaker of parliament) and Druze leader Walid Jumblatt criticized Hezbollah for fragmenting the country by advocating a ‘Muslim state’ and encouraging ‘extremism’. After being summoned to Damascus, however, Amal and Hezbollah decided to run on a joint election list in the south, preserving a pro-Syrian alliance within the Shi’ite community. The outcome was that Hezbollah was unable to win more seats in the parliament, and thus the party came up in the end with one seat less than in the elections in 1992. Furthermore, two of the candidates within its parliamentary alliance, “the Bloc Loyal to the Resistance” - one Christian and one Sunni - also lost their seats, thus leaving the opposition bloc with nine seats instead of twelve. The cam-

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416 See Usher 1996.
417 Ibid.
campaign was most likely orchestrated - or at least approved of – by the Syrians. As a Lebanese observer told this author, the prime minister would not have said a word without permission from Damascus.\textsuperscript{418} A source close to the movement, claimed that Syria did not fully approve of “the new style” of Hezbollah, since it had become “too nationalist” by crossing confessional barriers, forging “too much” of Lebanese unity. Syrian interests, he said, were basically concerned with supervising the fragmentation and petty domestic conflicts that generally characterized Lebanese politics in the post-Ta’if era. While the Syrians supported the resistance, they wished to \textit{contain the political clout} of Hezbollah. Damascus preferred that the party “remain[ed] within the sectarian arena of the Shi’ites.”\textsuperscript{419} Hence, the party’s popularity was \textit{not} to be reflected in the parliament.

However, according to Hezbollah M.P. Husayn Hajj Hassan, the election campaign against the movement reflected a “retarded political mentality” in Lebanon, which was a result of the sectarian system in which politicians are merely looking for personal benefits and privileges while forgetting about ideological concerns. Hezbollah’s call for a non-sectarian state irked too many interests within the establishment, he contended, and thus they united against Hezbollah. Interestingly, he denied any Syrian involvement behind the scenes. “We and the Syrians are allies”, Husayn Hajj Hasan maintained. “We will remain on our terms of understanding with the Syrians. The details will not disrupt the situation on the basis of what we [earlier] talked about: unity and strength in terms of confronting Israel.”\textsuperscript{420}

This pledge to the Syrian ‘protectorate’ over Lebanon and the resistance proved to be a contradiction within Hezbollah’s two-pronged objectives and ambitions of both liberating the south and of calling for an abolishment of the confessional system. That is, by aligning with the Syrians for

\textsuperscript{418} Author’s interview with Paul Salem, Beirut, May 1998.
\textsuperscript{419} A source close to Hezbollah who wished to stay anonymous. Author’s interview, Beirut, May 1998.
\textsuperscript{420} Author’s interview, Beirut, May 1998.
the sake of the resistance, it had to submit to the confines and balances of the confessional system – *opposition to the latter remained mere rhetoric*. Indeed, abiding by the ‘pax Syriana’ also implied more painful compromises and concessions that went beyond accepting the confessional system. It also implied that Hezbollah had to accept how elites in the Lebanese and Syrian establishment would benefit from corruption and practices that would hardly do ordinary Lebanese any good, especially not the Shi’ites within Hezbollah’s own constituency. For instance, the UN estimated that $1.5 billion annually (one tenth of the Lebanese GDP) was sliding into the pockets of Syrian and Lebanese elites.\textsuperscript{421} For the sake of cooperation, Hezbollah had to acknowledge, in an awkward way, this reality. As Cambill notes, Hezbollah also had to accept that “the unregulated influx of unskilled Syrian workers into Lebanon pushed the predominantly Shi’ite urban poor out of the workforce” and that “Syrian produce smugglers drove destitute Shi’ite farmers into bankruptcy.”\textsuperscript{422} In this context Cambill suggests, “Hezbollah was permitted to condemn the veils of corruption and criticise Hairi’s economic policies, but not to mobilize the kind of protests that might threaten the stability of Syria’s delicately managed political ecosystem in Lebanon.”\textsuperscript{423}

More generally, the neo-liberal reconstruction programs of the Hariri government in the nineties consistently neglected the already marginalized areas, not least among the Shi’ite communities where Hezbollah had a strong following. The reconstruction program also implied a staggering debt, which the Hariri government envisioned being financed by a pending peace treaty; i.e., his government, as earlier noted, banked on a peace that never materialised (and which also caused tensions between Hariri and the rejectionists in the Islamist camp of Hezbollah). However, this was a benefit for the government accruing from the ‘state-resistance-bargain’. Hezbollah kept a large

\textsuperscript{421} Cambill 2006.
\textsuperscript{422} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{423} Ibid.
Shi’ite lower class in check by not demanding, beyond mere rhetoric, any more serious reforms of the confessional system. Neither did it oppose corruption nor even propose a more comprehensive plan for reallocation of the resources of the state. Paradoxically, like many other Islamist movements, a great deal of Hezbollah’s popular “fortunes” lay in the neglect and ignorance of a state riddled by corruption and self-enrichment and plagued by a glaring absence of social pathos. In such a context, the movement could transmit an image of altruism and commitment for the poor by developing and expanding well-organized and generous welfare programs among people suffering hardships in those areas neglected by the Lebanese state. That is, since the day of the ‘war economy’ in Lebanon, when militias handled many of the tasks of an absent state (to a large extent, on the principle of patronage, in order to cultivate a constituency of supporters), Hezbollah has been busy providing a wide range of services to the communities, mainly Shi’ites, but also to other groups. Various branches of Hezbollah, or organs affiliated with it, are, therefore, involved in the fields of medical care, scholarships, education, infrastructure, funding families of martyrs, orphans, etc., that all are part of a strategy to foment a loyal community of followers. A leftist Lebanese observer critically underlined this irony by suggesting that the harsh policies of reconstruction in the nineties would naturally “have provoked violent social insurrections”, but these grievances were largely absorbed by Hezbollah’s “social safety net for large sectors of the Lebanese population.”

While voices of the left criticized Hezbollah, a more serious challenge emerged from the Shi’ite community itself and among certain dissident ranks of Hezbollah’s own adherents, led by former secretary-general Sheikh Subhi Tufayli. Coming from the more impoverished areas of the Bekaa Valley, where he also commanded great authority and enjoyed popular support, Sheikh Tufayli in the summer of 1997 staged a civil protest.

movement among the rural poor, which he called the ‘Revolution of the Hungry’. According to Tufayli, there was a need for a revolt, since “many of the Lebanese today cannot find anything to eat, and so we must defend their rights which have been usurped by the authority. Having waited a long time in vain for change, we felt it was imperative in the end to adopt a negative attitude towards authority so that it would act to save the badly deteriorating economic conditions in the country.”

While vehemently opposing the government’s policy (among else using a subversive slogan such as ‘revolution’), Tufayli underlined the imperative of civil protest and disobedience and of refraining from military action, a relevant caution in a country suffering from decades of unrest and civil strife. As he said, “we are obliged to safeguard the peace and public safety of the people and not to cause any disturbances in the general situation, particularly as the Lebanese have just come out of a war that lasted for 16 years.” However, he declared that the protesters would “bring pressure upon the Lebanese authorities” by “adopt[ing] the method of ‘civil disobedience’”, by “refusing to pay taxes and refraining from any positive measure that could serve the authorities.” While not calling for “toppling the government”, he did warn that should the state not heed the citizens’ demands and “persist with its course stubbornly and close its eyes and block its ears so as not to hear the voice of the hungry, then we will certainly continue with our march even if it were to lead to the toppling of the government...”

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425 As Tufayli also stated to an Arab magazine, with respect to the huge debt of the regime: “Generally it is the government, which embroiled the Lebanese citizens in a loan of billions of dollars, which far exceeds the Lebanese people’s capacity to repay. Furthermore, these funds were not used for the appropriate purposes - indeed, what has happened was the opposite. Much of the funds were squandered on inappropriate matters. The authorities have also imposed taxes on the poor while exempting the rich from paying these taxes, as it fixed taxes on a per capita basis rather than according to income...”  

BBC World Broadcast Summary, 5 June 1997.

426 Ibid.
Still, while Tufayli challenged the government’s policies in this way, he also brought a barrage of criticism – direct and indirect – upon Hezbollah’s strategic position, which he considered too negligent and submissive. Whilst denying any rift estrangement from Hezbollah’s leadership, he blamed them for being “reluctant, apprehensive or unaware of the state into which the country could fall.” He also described himself as responsible for the party’s direction, which he resented and now desired to redress. “We ought to support our oppressed kinsfolk against the oppressive government”, he said. “Our people in Bekaa and elsewhere have been greatly harmed. We are supposed to support them against their oppressors, not to support the oppressors against them. Very regrettably, we, through our policy [as Hezbollah] in the past few years, have become one of the pillars of the oppressive government in Lebanon.”

Adopting a conciliatory attitude, he claimed that he was involved in a continuous dialogue with the party’s leadership and that a new position for Hezbollah was pending: “I believe it will not be long before this reluctance and this apprehension fade and we see them take the natural position which they should take, alongside the hungry and the deprived and in defence of the resistance and our people.” In this way, Tufayli placed himself in a more assertive position, striking a popular chord by punching Hezbollah on its most vulnerable flank as a consequence of its cooperation with the Hariri regime. Interestingly, Tufayli saw this compliant position of Hezbollah towards the government as the outcome of its decision to take part in the confessional political system (which he opposed in 1992). He elaborated:

I did not oppose the party’s participation in the elections but only the method of this participation. I wanted Hezbollah to contest the elections from a position of opposition to the authority and in defence of the people on the grounds that Islamic political jurisprudence makes it incumbent on all Mus-

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427 Ibid.
428 Ibid.
lims to take a stand of opposition against the oppressive ruler and that since the Lebanese authority is an oppressor then Muslims should take a political stand in opposition to it. Thus if a Muslim becomes a member of parliament, his position should be one of true opposition to the corrupt administration. The brothers in the party did not define such a stance clearly in their policies and adopted a policy akin or similar to that of the other parties and factions. I objected to their policy and considered it not to be founded on the principles of Islamic political jurisprudence and consequently it could expose the citizens to great harm besides involving a religious sin...429

In early 1998, however, events got out of hand as the Lebanese army conducted an operation to arrest Sheikh Tufayli, leading to an intense shoot-out that left a number of dead on both sides. The dissident sheikh managed to escape and went into hiding. Shortly before, Tufayli was dismissed from Hezbollah.430

**5.10 Hezbollah responds to the accusations**

So, how did the party respond to these accusations? How did it defend its accommodating position? And not least, what was Hezbollah’s radical ambition in seeking a *modus vivendi* with the Lebanese regime? A Hezbollah spokesman told this author in 1998 that the party saw Tufayli’s claims and criticism as “100 percent correct” with respect to the state’s neglect of social

429 Ibid.
430 Tufayli rejected his dismissal, saying that the party has sold out on his principles. As he put it: ‘This [decision] is without content, and we do not care much about it. I believe the brothers will come to realize their mistake, even if this takes some time. Through their action, they greatly harmed the resistance, the Islamic situation, and the situation of our kinsfolk, who need people to support, not harm them. I am sorry for what some of our sons have done, and I hope they will return to their senses’ (BBC World Broadcast, 25 January 1998). To a British daily, he put it bluntly: ‘The brothers [i.e., Hezbollah] have taken a path that supports the authorities, ‘if they continue in this way, no one will respect them’. *The Independent*, 1 February 1998.
welfare policies. However, the spokesman added, Tufayli made two grave mistakes: firstly he turned his arms against the state, and “these procedures we do mind”; and secondly, he did not consider the resistance a “top priority.” Mortada emphasized that resistance was the absolute priority for Hezbollah, and such an effort required a “strong and solid base.” Attacking the state would, thus, work contrary to this ambition.\(^{431}\) Hezbollah made a great effort to establish the legitimacy of this main priority among the Lebanese on various levels. Its cadres were busy on university and college campuses across the country organizing activities to promote the perspective of an absolute priority for the resistance in south Lebanon. This involved holding lectures, showing films, even arranging bus trips down to the front line villages in order to facilitate an understanding among students who were not affiliated with Hezbollah.\(^{432}\) Hezbollah’s female branch was also holding similar lectures in neighbourhoods and villages across the country. As Sheikh Nabil Qaouk, Hezbollah’s commander in the south, claimed, the Israelis would usually present an image of the war in the south as being fought between Israel and Hezbollah; but the purpose with Hezbollah’s campaign was to present an image of Israel as threatening all of Lebanon and its people.\(^{433}\)

In a bid to cultivate this cross-sectarian ‘Lebanese’ image, Hezbollah formed at the end of 1997 the so-called ‘Lebanese Resistance brigades’, which Lebanese citizens of all confessional affiliations were welcome to join. Nasrallah declared that the “purpose of this resistance is to give the opportunity to anyone who is Lebanese and wishes to participate in the re-

\(^{431}\) Interview, Beirut, June 1998. A source close to Hezbollah also told this author that the movement greatly valued its alliance with Syria in this regard. ‘If you choose to fight Tel Aviv from Lebanon, you’d better make sure that you will have the back-up of Damascus’, he suggested. As such, Hezbollah had chosen a path different from the earlier Palestinian resistance movement.

\(^{432}\) Interview with Hezbollah student leader, Beirut, May 1998.

\(^{433}\) Quote in Jaber 1997, p. 43.
sistance, to fight through the framework of his beliefs.” Any martyrs or wounded and their families, he asserted, would be given the same care as the fighters of the Islamic resistance. The purpose of the formation of these brigades was probably two-fold. Firstly, its aim was to harness the various groupings within the Lebanese masses around the idea of fighting the Israeli occupation. After all, the continuation of resistance was a controversial subject among the Lebanese, since many people dreaded escalation of war and instead preferred negotiations in line with the more general outline of the peace process. Another common criticism was that the resistance aroused suspicions about ulterior motives that served particular groups and interests (such as Iranian ambitions for inroads into the Arab world or Syrian ambitions to place pressure on Israel – with the Lebanese paying the high price for the effort). Secondly, Hezbollah’s ambition was to show that it did not claim a “monopoly” on the resistance. Above all, the formation of the “brigades” constituted an important dimension of its “Lebanonization” process, i.e., to construe a “national flare” around the idea of a continued resistance, as opposed to the confessional mindset that the party claimed plagued Lebanon. A few weeks after the formation of the brigades, Nasrallah expressed his hope that “the day will come when no one can say that the resistance is Shi’ite or Islamic. It will be recognized as a serious framework in which all Lebanese from all sects are involved.”

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435 The Daily Star, 15 November 1997. Despite Hezbollah’s efforts to offer a more multi-sectarian and inclusive model of resistance, Palestinian radicals in particular expressed their concern that Hezbollah was monopolising the south and even hindering Palestinian groups from attacking the Israelis. According to UN spokesman Timor Goksel, this was natural for Hezbollah, since they knew that it was their own guerrillas who would take the brunt of the Israeli reprisals and, thus, wanted to control the field of operation. Author’s interview, Beirut, Jan 2007. Abu Muhajid, a prominent veteran of the Palestinian PFLP in Beirut, also told this author: “At first I was angry about Hezbollah’s way of stopping us from attacking the Israelis in the south. I thought they were unfair. But now, looking back, I can agree to that they were doing the right thing. They have been a lot smarter and more successful in fighting the Israelis than any Palestinian group.” Author’s interview, Beirut, January 2007.
Nonetheless, widespread caution lingered, and observers remained wary of Hezbollah’s intentions. A Lebanese observer, well acquainted with the movement, claimed in a Lebanese journal published by a research institute close to the Islamic republic of Iran that Hezbollah had yet to disclose its position on the Lebanese state as contrary to its ambition to establish an Islamic state. He underlined that the movement was still too ambiguous—or even indecisive—about its position on the nature of the struggle in the south as it related to the broader framework of negotiations that involved the Arab-Israeli conflict. Indeed, former Prime Minister Salim Hoss argued that Hezbollah had become a trusted member in the parliament that cooperated with all other Lebanese groups in the committees. Yet, he also cautioned about the ulterior aims of Hezbollah, if those involved the establishment of an “Islamic republic.”

Hezbollah MP Husayn Hajj Hassan responded to these remarks by reiterating the movement’s long-standing position that Hezbollah never had concealed its conviction that the Islamic state is the most ideal form for governing a society but that this objective was not a top priority, or even a realistic alternative. “When we move into the framework of reality”, he noted, “an intellectual, politician or statesman will be forced to couple theory with reality.

So for Lebanon, which is a pluralist society with many faces, where there are Muslims and Christians, among whom there are many different divisions and sects, I don’t know of anyone of us who has proposed an Islamic state the Iranian way, or even the Saudi way...[I]n our country, there is a large per cent of Christians. We respect their history and we live our present together. We also look forward to the future together. They are our fellowmen. We will build our state together. We also know that some Muslims adopt ideas that do not necessarily suit Islamic thought.

437 See Jaber 1997, p. 210-211.
438 Author’s interview, Beirut, May 1998.
For Husayn Hajj Hassan, Islam was an ‘intellectual concept’ that promoted certain principles – like resistance – that all Lebanese could agree upon, whereas the Islamic state was an “idealistic solution” that Hezbollah conceived as inapplicable in Lebanon. With respect to Lebanon, he emphasized the colonial legacy of its borders and how they were imposed by the French and the British in order to instigate dissention and conflict. However, he conceded that these borders are today facts and, thus, must be taken into account. However, while considering these facts, he also stressed that borders should not exclude cooperation between states. Globalization, Husayn Hajj Hassan noted, reduces the significance of borders, and this can work either in favour of or against the interests of the weak and oppressed in the world order. He charged that “when the Americans talk of globalization, the GATT and the [new] economic world order, they just want to tighten their grip on the world because [they] are the strongest on the economic and military levels.

There is no other pool to confront them...So would it be shameful or wrong to propose that we should melt the borders among ourselves, abolishing our borders as Arabs or as Muslims or as Third World countries? All in order to build a new force or a power to be able to confront [the Americans] - or just to be able to go on, to remain, to survive in this brutal system which is crushing the poor all over the world...When we propose our ideology which calls for all people to unite against the American imperialism, we don't only talk about Muslims...The issue of borders does not mean abolishing the national identity; it means uniting efforts and forcing powers within a system which may produce strength.439

In this regard, he spoke of Israel as a “cancer” (seratan) that drove a wedge between the Arabs countries and pacified them by force. Palestine, he said, is the heart of the Arab world; it is located next to the Suez Canal, separating

439 Ibid.
the Arab east from the west; it includes Jerusalem, the door to Asia, and it is
close to Africa. Palestine borders the Red Sea as well as the Mediterranean.
In this context, the task of Israel as an “entity” is to strike all of the Arab
world, or at least to be able to do so. The prevailing divisions in the Arab
world were embarrassing and shameful, he argued. “We are 200 million
Arabs in the face of 5 million Israelis and they are defeating us”, he said.
“They are taking our resources; they are occupying our land, killing our peo-
ple. There are five million displaced Palestinians in refugee camps, [living]
in misery.” He claimed the reason to be that the Americans penetrate the
Arab world through ideology and media in order to provoke dissention and
conflict among the Arabs and Muslims.

[They say] that “you have your identity, [so] you must remain Lebanese, Pal-
estinian, or Egyptian.” Our borders are artificial, made up in order to tear us
apart. Thereby, controlling us will be easier. We don’t call for formal unity,
we don’t call for unbalanced unity, meaning that some treat others from
above. We just need to know that our disunity is the reason for our weakness.
We know that when we are proposing unity that will provoke fears among the
Christians and all the other minorities all over the Arab world. But until then
must our disunity remain in the face of our Zionist enemy?¹⁴⁰

In fact, Hezbollah has been rather frank in its persistent criticism of the Leb-
anese state. Even in the midst of it so-called ‘Lebanonization process’ in
1995, Nasrallah told the LBC channel that the Lebanese republic was a
“homeland” originally designed by a colonial order that aimed at sowing -
and maintaining - division among Arabs and Muslims. Many people, he
argued, had no desire to live in this reality of divisions. Hence, “we wish that
there comes a day when we can abolish this [regional] map, because it was
not shaped by the umma but by the colonialists.” He added that this was an
ideological viewpoint of Hezbollah, and it could only be realised by a “large,

¹⁴⁰ Interview with author, Beirut, May 1998.
dominating majority of the Lebanese people”. So for now, “we are living here, as long as it is the wish for the majority of the people.” Nasrallah’s comment is significant, since it was made at LBC (Lebanese Broadcast Cooperation) – traditionally a ‘Christian’ channel close to the right wing Lebanese forces – and could be understood as how Hezbollah systemically assumed the Lebanese national structures as contingent upon its own idea of resistance, or, in other words, how its accommodation was conditioned by certain principles that were central to its counter-hegemonic project. Hezbollah wanted to convey the idea that when it adapted to a specific ‘repressive’ order, it did not necessarily subjugate itself to it. Rather, it promoted its own priorities by taking such strategic and pragmatic steps; indeed, it would also alter this order in the process of integration. In this regard, Nasrallah ridiculed suggestions that there is a ‘given’ Lebanese national identity to which the party had to conform or that the aspect of the party’s ‘Lebanonization’ entailed its entrance into a national community to which it did not really belong. As Nasrallah asked, considering critical allegations about Hezbollah’s loyalties to the religious authorities in Iran, what of the Lebanese Christians’ affiliation with the Vatican in Rome, does that make them “Vaticanese”? “We do not speak Persian…[but] there are a lot of Lebanese Christians who speak French. Why, then, are they Lebanese and not French? If the criterion is language, we speak Arabic with a Lebanese accent. So, what is meant by Lebanonization?”

For Hezbollah, the Lebanese identity remained an open field of contestation, ready for change, and for Hezbollah this change involved resistance as sacrifice in a bid to express the ‘true love of the homeland’ and its independence. Nasrallah claimed: “The man who [offers] his blood [for the] homeland…is the most patriotic.” Hence, the Lebanese nationalism

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441 Interview documented in *Kitab al-Senoi* (Hizbullah yearbook, 1995-1996), p. 496.
442 Quoted in an undated leaflet (*al maokif*, The Standpoint), Hezbollah’s Foreign Relation Department, 1996.
443 Ibid.
advanced by Hezbollah harnessed a new meaning by invoking the idea of strength and steadfastness, the right to resist the Israeli occupation and the duty for the country to take a position on the Arab-Israeli conflict. But how could this assumption of a Lebanese identity be reconciled with an Islamic commitment to Khomeinism and especially the commitment to ‘liberate Jerusalem’? Did Hezbollah’s demand for a national resistance imply that only national territory should be liberated? Did the ‘Lebanonization process’ imply that Hezbollah ultimately had abandoned its commitment to the Islamic revolution?

5.11 The ambiguity of resistance: national or Islamic?

Despite Hezbollah’s declared commitment to the resistance, the more radical ranks around dissident cleric Sheikh Subhi Tufayli blamed the party for transforming the ‘Islamic resistance’ into a “national” resistance that only fought for the liberation of Lebanese territory and, thus, forfeited the more comprehensive ambitions of the Islamic revolution to “liberate Jerusalem.” For instance, when Hezbollah brought a bill before the parliament to provide amnesty for defectors from the SLA, a cleric close to Tufayli declared,

We cannot accept the bill to pardon the militia men who collaborated against their people. [And we] can’t understand how the resistance movement, whose initial goal was to destroy Israel, can accept UN resolution 425 and hint that it may stop attacking Israel in the case of a full withdrawal from the south...What happened to the goal of liberating Jerusalem, the city revered by Muslims? Has the resistance movement limited its goal to the implementation of 425?444

444 Daily Star, 21 April, 1998. A vehement enemy of any kind of modus vivendi with Israel, Sheikh Tufayli accused the current Hizbollah leadership of adapting to a political structure that will most likely sign a peace treaty with Israel in the near
In a direct response to that comment, a Hezbollah spokesman, Nabil Naim, claimed that it exposed a lack of understanding of realpolitik (or, as he put it, “there are dogmatic people who would not accept any change that will deliver such criticism”). He suggested that the bill concerning the SLA made sense, as it would encourage soldiers to defect, and eventually these units might evaporate from within. He also described the importance of Hezbollah’s integration into the Lebanese society and political system as a strategic measure to show that “we are not an Iranian community or Iranian mercenaries as the propaganda used to portray Hezbollah.” The movement is keen to be accepted, he claimed. Yet, he also emphasized that this readiness to be accepted and the altering of strategy and rhetoric did not mean that the movement had deviated from its ideological principles or ambitions. Nor had it turned its back on the Khomeinist revolution. “Take for example the issue of liberating Jerusalem”, Nabil Naim suggested. “Since the Lebanese have only agreed upon liberating Lebanon, Hezbollah has not said that it will not liberate Jerusalem – we have just dropped that issue in terms that we are not talking about it. We will first liberate Lebanon, then we can talk about that issue. Just because we used to talk about and now we don’t, some people think that we have deviated from it – which we have not.”

future. During a rally in 1995, he declared that if Palestine was the home of Muslims and if Hizbollah still clung to Khomeini’s decree that Israel was a cancerous growth that must be cut out’, then the resistance could not cease even in the case of a peace treaty. "If peace is made tomorrow with the enemy and you had the chance to kill the Zionist [Israeli] ambassador in Beirut, then it is your duty to do so", he told the crowd. ‘You should not hesitate to undertake such a feat. The Resistance will be alive and you should know that the Resistance is continuous whether peace is made or not. We shall shred the peace documents and humiliate those rulers of ours who agree to sign them. We shall not be the supporters or helpers of the Zionists and we shall never permit the loss of our rights. We shall never allow the humiliation of our people and we shall never grant Palestine to the Jews.” Quoted in Jaber 1997, p. 209.

445 Author’s interview, Beirut, June 1998.
446 Ibid.
Also responding to this accusation of abandoning ideological commitments, the chief editor of Hezbollah’s mouthpiece Al-Ahd, Hajj Mofaq Gamal, claimed - two years before the Israeli withdrawal - that the “liberation of Jerusalem” was an “invariable point” for Hezbollah. However, he emphasised that any such endeavour would proceed in certain stages and that the liberation of the south was a “tactical phase” within a more “strategic” ambition to “maintain the conflict” with Israel. “The Crusaders who once ruled this area were strong”, he said, pointing at their ruling of the region for centuries. “However, the local population’s ambitions to maintain the conflict finally forced the Crusaders to withdraw. We believe that in this perspective the 50 years Israel is now celebrating is not such a long time.” Yet, Hajj Mofaq Gamal did not elaborate on Hezbollah’s pending strategy to “maintain the conflict with Israel.”

At the end of the nineties, there was an increasing debate over Hezbollah’s ambitions after an Israeli withdrawal. Observers began to debate Hezbollah’s ulterior motives with its operations against the Israelis in south Lebanon. Would the guerrillas attack the Israelis across the border in a bid to “liberate Jerusalem”, or would the party respect the national border and confirm the increasingly common perception of Hezbollah as becoming a mere “national resistance”? This was an open question. After all, Hezbollah’s battle with Israel was existential; it did not only concern territory. As its ideological manifesto emphatically declared, the party was determined to work for the obliteration of Israel, a state whose legitimacy Hezbollah under no circumstances would recognize. However, during this period of time, i.e., the latter half of the nineties, its spokesmen refused to give a straight answer about its future position should the Israelis leave the south. Their common standpoint on the topic was best characterized as ambiguous, even though the party conceded that the prospects for any large-scale confrontation with

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447 Author’s interview, Beirut, April, 1998.
Israel appeared distant. Why this ambiguity on the part of Hezbollah? Why did it refuse to reveal its intentions, should the Israelis leave the south?

There were perhaps several reasons for Hezbollah’s disinclination to talk about its future moves. Firstly, as Hajj Youssef Mehri noted, it was simply “wrong” to talk about any such scenario while the Israelis were still occupying the south. His brief answer (he did not want to elaborate) might be understood as a refusal on part of Hezbollah to offer the Israelis any sense of security, should they leave Lebanon. For instance, in early 1998, Nasrallah argued that the resistance could not ensure any such commitment because “the task of the resistance is to liberate the land and not to be the border guard for Israel or to offer the enemy any guarantees.” The comment was a response to the Lebanese president Elias Hrawi’s earlier statement that no bullet would be fired across the border in the event of an Israeli withdrawal. Nasrallah added that while he refused to make any commitments to Israel’s security, he also questioned on what basis the Lebanese president could make any. To Nasrallah, the very idea that it was up to Lebanon to make security commitments expressed an erroneous understanding of the problem: “It is as if the resistance and Lebanon are the problem and not the [Israeli] forces of occupation.” Nasrallah declared that Hezbollah would only announce its steps ahead after an Israeli withdrawal. Secondly, Nasrallah also referred to the unknown conditions after an Israeli withdrawal from the south, since the Arab-Israeli conflict would persist. For Hezbollah, Israel is an aggressive entity with the intention of dominating the region and, thus, Lebanon would remain an Israeli target. Besides, there were hundreds of

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448 At about the same time, Abdallah Mortada also claimed: “To be frank, and this is important”, he said, “one can predict that for our generation, it will be difficult to liberate Palestine. Let us leave this issue to future generations. One can say we are pessimists on this point, at least for the time being.” Interview, Beirut, June 1998.
449 Al-Afkar, 3 March 1998. Nasrallah stated: “In the first scenario, which is what we have now, the withdrawal took place without coordination with Lebanon and Syria, but to the accompaniment of ceaseless Israeli threats. Even if Hizbollah did nothing, even if the Palestinians in Lebanon didn't attack Israel, and even if the borders re-
thousands of Palestinians still in exile in Lebanon, and in such a context no one could guarantee anybody anything. Importantly, Nasrallah foresaw that the south would remain an arena of tension but assured that no chaos would emerge in the occupied zone in the absence of the Israelis, as some claimed. For Nasrallah, an Israeli withdrawal would trigger an awareness of Israeli aggression and how it best could be repelled:

Some assume that an unexpected and unconditional Israeli withdrawal would lead to confusion in the Lebanese domestic arena. But I can assure that any unconditional withdrawal, whether unexpected or expected, will not lead to any confusion because Lebanon and its people and resistance and state and army will consider that we have committed a marvellous victory in this era of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and we will all behave decently in this victory and we will handle it from the constructive angle, well aware that this Israeli enemy is not concerned with any international resolutions.450

Thirdly, the party did not only want to defeat the Israelis but to humiliate them. As Nasrallah stated, the Israelis should withdraw “without any conditions and in disgrace.”451 Recognising Israel’s need for security would be akin to offering a ‘pay off’ for decades of Israeli aggression against Lebanon. By denying Israel any such dividend, Hezbollah could put the final nail in the coffin of Israeli ambitions with the 1982 invasion, which aimed at

450 Ibid.
'silencing’ the border to Lebanon just as the border to Egypt was silenced with the peace treaty in 1979. In the absence of any peace treaty, Hezbollah’s apparent ambition was to let the northern border remain an ‘open wound’ in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Fourthly, this measure of denying Israel any of its objectives in Lebanon ruined the Israeli ambition to impose itself by violence. That is, by denying the Israelis any guarantees, Hezbollah had defeated the Israelis on their own terms, since Hezbollah proved the Israeli claim of military superiority to be deceptive. Hezbollah had turned Israel’s logic of force against it, invoking the Fanonian dictum from the Algerians’ triumphs over the French: “He whom they have never stopped saying that the only language he understands is that of force, decides to give utterance by force…The argument the native chooses has been furnished by the settler, and by an ironic turning of the tables it is the native who now affirms that the colonialists understand nothing but force.”452

Importantly, it was the strength and commitment of Hezbollah that exposed this deception with regard to Israeli strength, and it enabled the Lebanese Islamist movement to impose conditions and bargaining a way that it saw as positive achievements in its struggle (as for example the April Understandings had shown). Hezbollah would not submit to negotiations or dialogue within the existing structures of power (imposed largely by violence) but aimed instead at shattering these structures. As a guerrilla movement embedded in the ‘Fanonian logic’ of struggle, it would not ‘ask’ the occupier to leave the land within the current configuration of power; it believed in taking – or liberating - the land. To be sure, while Hezbollah’s increasingly assertive position reflected the movement’s ascending strength and prominence, it should also be noted that it had not always been that ambiguous considering its whereabouts in case of an Israeli pull-back from Lebanon. For instance, in the early nineties, at the height of the peace process and amid a widely held belief that Arab-Israeli negotiations would bring a con-

452 Fanon 1963, p. 84.
clusion to the conflict (and indeed amid the tensions between the Lebanese regime and Hezbollah), Nasrallah conceded that “[i]f Israel withdraws from Lebanon, we will consider that our land has been liberated and we will close the file concerning the occupation of Lebanese land.” Significantly, he underlined that the liberation of Palestine was mainly the responsibility of the Palestinians, i.e., Hezbollah, as a *Lebanese* movement, did not ask anyone to fight on the behalf of the Lebanese, and Nasrallah, thus, contended that no one could replace the Palestinians in liberating Palestinian land; “this nobody can do other than the Palestinians themselves.”

Equally, in 1993, Nasrallah told the magazine of the radical Palestinian group PFLP-GC that even though ‘the mottos and ethics’ of Hezbollah were to see the end of the Zionist state, the issue was ultimately linked to the ambitions and actions of the Palestinian people, and no combatant (*mujahid*), he argued, would be able to fight that battle outside of the Palestinian domain. Hezbollah, he said, would be a vanguard (*taliyya*) in fighting for its own turf (meaning Lebanon), and he stated that it was the political, moral and financial duty for any nationalist or Islamist movement to support the Palestinian intifada. That is, whereas the Palestinians had to fight their own battles, Hezbollah showed the way by example. While containing the armed struggle to the national territory, it hoped to convey norms and principles that defied the logic of the so-called peace process, especially as this process relied on Palestinian compliance, understood as ‘pragmatic’ and

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453 Nasrallah’s comments were given to veteran correspondent Robert Fisk in November 1993, after the wide-scale Israeli ‘Operation Accountability’ and the tensions that erupted between the Lebanese government and Hezbollah after the massacre at Hezbollah’s demonstration against the ‘Oslo Accords’ in September. As Fisk points out, ‘closing the file’ was the phrase that Hezbollah spokesmen would use at the time when the Western hostages were released in Beirut some years earlier. *The Independent*, 10 November 1993.

454 Fisk adds, ”when I asked if it was none the less true that after a total Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, the war there would end – and that it would be up to the Palestinians to fight their conflict, albeit with Hezbollah’s moral support, he responded “mazbout” (correct).” Ibid.

“realistic” by those supporting it. Indeed, on its own satellite TV-channel, Al-Manar, Nasrallah said that the party was “ready to confront the situation” if there would be a peace accord signed by Syria and Lebanon with Israel, yet hinting that this would occur by civilian and popular means. “We are not only a military movement”, he said. “We have popular roots everywhere. No one will be able to uproot us, no matter what happens.” Hezbollah’s victory, thus, informed the Palestinian radicals who had for a long time derided the peace process and logic of negotiations over the path to their liberation.

Hezbollah’s resistance did not only fight the Israelis but also the prevailing climate of subordination and silence that it conceived to be cultivated by the Arab elites (who supported the peace process and negotiations) and the international community. This was also akin to Robert J.C Young’s reflection on Fanon’s view of how “violence offers a primary form of agency through which the subject moves from non-being to being, from being an object to a subject.” By violence, that is, the colonized were able to impose themselves upon reality instead of merely subordinating themselves to it and opting for violence within a reality ultimately shaped by violence; a rebellious group was able to transcend a position of subordination that resulted from a perceived sense of weakness. This assertive aspect of Hezbollah’s ‘vanguardism’ was thus aimed at smashing to smithereens impressions of Israeli military superiority. By doing so, it would also – or so was the hope and strategy – ruin the very logic of negotiations that Arab elites promoted. For Hezbollah, this was a crucial dimension of resistance, since it claimed that it revealed the deception of the strength of Israel.

The party referred to this ambition as istinhaad (awakening). In the mid-nineties, Nasrallah told an Egyptian weekly that there was no reason to conceal the objectives of the ‘Islamic resistance’, which involved some “intermediate objectives for the near future” (the liberation of the south) as well

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457 Young 2001, p. 95.
a more strategic scheme. Whatever Israeli withdrawal that might take place, Nasrallah asserted that Hezbollah would still insist that “Israel was not legitimate”, and, he stressed, “we have repeated, and still repeat that even if the whole world and all of its governments recognise a state named Israel, we won’t.” He added: “Thus the strategy of the resistance is to be in operation because there will come a day when…the Arab and the Muslim *umma* can rise and uproot this usurping entity from existence.” “We believe this *umma* has many strong cadres, abilities to rise, and revolutionary potentials…[and] our ambition is to turn these potentials into real activity.” While he conceded that some of this awakening could be spirited by words, it could not do without blood and sacrifice. “We think that our *jihad* (effort, struggle) and our martyrs have made a great impression upon the Lebanese and the Palestinians [and others]…and we are still projecting these objectives.”

To deny the Israelis any knowledge of or insight into the party’s future moves was, thus, part of this project of *istinhaad* – to prove Israel to be weak and incapable of imposing conditions on the Lebanese, or indeed the Arabs. This was the ‘Fanonian dualism’ of liberating the south, and, as we shall see, it would serve as Hezbollah’s strategy after the Israelis withdrew in May 2000.

### 5.12 Escalation and efficiency of resistance in the south

To reiterate, the Israelis had, ever since their first invasion of Lebanon in 1978, refused to leave the south in the absence of security guarantees. Efforts to shape a new comprehensive order through the 1982 invasion of Lebanon had failed dismally, be it an agreement with the government in Beirut (the 17th of May Agreement) or the cooperation with a local partner, like the Amal movement in the south. Hence the Israelis stayed behind in its so-called ‘security zone’, backed up by its local ally, the SLA. It can be as-

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sumed that the Ta’if process that began to be implemented in 1990 signalled a golden opportunity for Israel to leave Lebanon. After all, at that time the war-weary Lebanese were longing for the state authority of Lebanon to be restored, and Syrian troops were present to supervise the process of national reconciliation. Yet, the Israelis did not trust the Syrians or the Lebanese and demanded formal guarantees for its security that only could be realized within a comprehensive peace agreement. It should be added that the south at the time was of no great concern to the Israelis. Norton also remarks that Israel might be excused for ‘belittling’ the Islamic resistance at the time since the south was relatively calm and the ‘security zone’ was “widely viewed as a success within Israel.” Moreover, Hezbollah was relatively small in number (compared to later on).

In this context, the Israelis appeared to rely on a perception of military superiority that was able to deal with the various armed groups in the south. An example is Israel’s assassination of Hezbollah’s secretary general Sayyed Abbas Musawi, his wife and a three-year old son in February 1992. This assassination can be understood as an Israeli response to the rising number of operations undertaken by Hezbollah, as it was recognised as a legitimate national resistance by the Lebanese government. The Israelis wanted to make clear who dominated the military field. Uri Lubrani, the

459 “We are not against Taif, but we do not see it happening”, one senior Israeli diplomat said in November 1990 as the Syrians started to oversee the implementation of the Ta’if Accord. “I wish that Lebanon would be rebuilt and we could clear out of the security zone on the basis of negotiations, with the knowledge that Israel could hold a strong central government responsible for terror infiltrations. The Syrians partly want to keep Lebanon weak, so no faction can gain the upper hand. But, basically, they cannot keep order because no force in history has ever succeeded in disarming the Lebanese.” Jerusalem Post, 16 November 1990.


461 While serving with the UN in south Lebanon in late 1992 and early 1993, this author also recalls conversations with Israeli soldiers from elite units who regarded duty in Lebanon as a ‘holiday’ compared to more demanding tasks, such as patrolling the Gaza Strip. Yet, this was before the real escalation of resistance operations in the south took off. Hezbollah’s leadership has even conceded that the real resistance campaign in the south did not get started until 1993.
Israeli government’s coordinator on Lebanon at the time, commented on the operation: “I see [Abbas Musawi’s] demise as a severe blow to the Hezbollah and something which might accelerate a process by which the organization comes to realize that militancy is no way to act in Lebanon.” However, the assassination of Musawi was contra-productive to Israeli schemes, as it created momentum for Hezbollah as public anger boosted the popularity of its resistance campaign. It also led to Hassan Nasrallah being elected successor to Abbas Musawi. According to Timor Goksel, Hezbollah became more and more rooted and popular among the people in the south – a former stronghold of the Amal movement - under Nasrallah’s command. It mended ties with former antagonists and popularised the idea of resistance, not least by involving the women of the south in Hezbollah’s wide range of welfare services. Indeed, with Nasrallah, Hezbollah also escalated attacks against the Israeli forces. In 1990, Hezbollah conducted 19 operations, compared to 52 in 1991 and 63 in 1992. In 1993, it launched 1993 attacks and in 1994 the number increased to 187 and in 1995 it carried out 344 assaults. Significantly, in 1998 Hezbollah undertook nearly 1200 operations against the occupation forces, who were engaged more or less on a daily basis in the border zone. Indeed, along with the years of warfare in the mud and mountains of the Lebanese south, Hezbollah’s guerrillas also improved its standards and emerged from a rag-tag character to a skilful and efficient unit of elite standards. They also managed to counter-balance a ratio of one dead Israeli/SLA soldier to 5.2 dead guerrilla fighters in 1990, to 1:1.7 in 1992. In addition, an estimated number of 100 Israeli soldiers lost their lives on duty in Leba-

462 Jerusalem Post, 18 Februari 1992.
463 As one prominent Amal leader in the south reportedly commented on the assassination of Abbas Musawi and the popularity of Hezbollah’s project of resistance that it provoked: “These Israelis are amazing. How can they know so much about one place and understand nothing about it.” Foreign Report 20 April 1992.
464 Author’s interview Beirut, January 2007.
465 Murden 2000, p. 35; 43.
non after 1993, most of them at the hands of the Islamic Resistance.\textsuperscript{467} During this period of time, Israeli units serving in Lebanon suffered from increasing demoralization owing to the steady loss of lives and the heavy psychological pressures those conscripts and reserves endured in the ‘security-zone’. Still, for a long time, the Israeli administration considered the zone as a necessity, since the perception was that it guarded northern Israel from the enemies. The Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made that clear when stating in 1997 that Israel’s “purpose in being in Lebanon is to defend the north of Israel, so that children, buses, tourists are not subjected to the murderous attacks of terrorists. We pay a heavy price in dead and wounded soldiers for this protection…only after we find all the ways to achieve this objective we will be able to leave Lebanon.”\textsuperscript{468} Hence, as in the eighties, Israel was looking for a formal settlement with Lebanon in order to arrange for the security at the border.

Hezbollah’s type of fighting proved otherwise, and its guerrilla strategy was to a certain extent part of its ‘Lebanonization process’. That is, Hezbollah never attacked Israeli territory as a target in itself, which even Israeli leaders at an early stage recognized. General Shlomo Gazit, former commander of the Israeli military intelligence, stated that “[we] need to say it again and again that Hezbollah did observe ‘the rules of the game’ for a long period. They refrained from shelling [Israeli] territory and infiltrating it. They limited their operations to the ‘security zone’. It was our retaliation for their skilful strikes at [our] soldiers [in the zone] which made them escalate the fighting.”\textsuperscript{469} Moreover, in 1992, just before the assassination of Hezbollah’s secretary-general Abbas al-Musawi (an event followed by a storm of

\textsuperscript{467} Newsweek 17 February 1997.
\textsuperscript{468} Haaretz, 30 November 1998.
\textsuperscript{469} Middle East International 18 December 1992. The Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, even admitted as much that Hezbollah never fired katyushas against Israel without “provocation” and never at a populated area “as a target in itself” – “they were invariably launched I response to “Israeli operations against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.” Middle East International, 20 November 1992.
katyushas against northern Israel), another UNIFIL spokesman, Timor Goksel - who has served in the force since its inception in 1978 - argued: “I don’t think that anyone can claim that any of these groups have ever attacked Israel - they have been fighting Israeli forces in Lebanon...I don’t think that anyone can claim that these groups have inflicted any civilian causalities on the other side of the border, because they have not breached the border. We don’t think, as United Nations here, that there has ever been an attempt by Lebanese groups to breach the border.”

As we have seen, the fierce clashes between Hezbollah and Israel in 1993 and 1996 also led to agreements that would spare civilians from the fighting and limit any warfare to the so-called ‘security zone’.

While these methods would slowly sap the morale out of the occupation forces, it would also gain recognition and popularity among the Lebanese who were earlier sceptical towards Hezbollah and the resistance. Nizar Hamzeh, an analyst on Islamist affairs at the American University of Beirut, argued that this is, on the one hand, due to the Syrian surveillance and, on the other, due to the resistance having “proved itself”, i.e. it has become more professional and efficient. Likewise, Issa Ghorayb, editor of the Lebanese daily L’Orient Le Jour, argued that Hizbollah’s guerrillas of today are of a different character than before. From being looked upon as a “bunch of excited fanatic people lined up and trapped with TNT on their way to jihad and martyrdom” they have, he said, during the past years managed to conduct a very modern and efficient resistance against the Israeli occupation. “There is a lot of admiration for them among the village people [in the south], both among Christians and Muslims”, he argued. After a heated period during which five Israeli soldiers were killed in south Lebanon, an editorial in The Beirut Daily Star praised the resistance in the same vein for its

471 Author’s interview, Beirut, May 1998.
472 Author’s interview, Beirut May, 1998.
“bravery, superb professionalism and, most of all, repeated successes of [its] fighters.” “We salute them”, the editorial ended. Another notable show of unity around the resistance occurred when 18-year old Hadi Nasrallah, the son of Hizbollah’s secretary-general, was killed in action in a confrontation with the Israelis in autumn of 1997. As a soldier of the elite core in the Islamic Resistance, Hadi Nasrallah was hailed as a national martyr by vast segments of the Lebanese public. During a seven-day mourning period, an estimated 200 000 well-wishers per day - including politicians, religious leaders and Lebanese from ‘all walks of life’ - were reported to have visited the commemoration reception hall in Hizbollah’s stronghold in south Beirut. 

A similar recognition of Hezbollah’s clout also began to emerge, not only within Israeli society (where activists protested against Israeli conscripts being sent off to Lebanon) but also from within the security establishment itself where prominent officials began to demand an Israeli pull-out as the very perception of the nature of Hezbollah began to shift; i.e., from an understanding of the Islamists as mere “terrorists” to that of a national resistance movement involved in a legitimate struggle to liberate an occupied territory. For instance, a senior veteran of the Israeli intelligence, Revuen Merhan, stated openly that Hezbollah are “freedom fighters in every respect, an authentic expression of the deep desire to eject Israel from southern Lebanon.” Addressing the hawks in the establishment opposed to a unilateral withdrawal, he maintained that had they been born Lebanese Shi’ites, they would have fought the Israeli occupation with the same zeal as did Hezbollah. Yossef Beilin, a prominent member of the Israeli Labour party and architect of the Oslo Accords, who was instrumental in the Israeli government at the withdrawal in May 2000, began to lead a parliamentary group that demanded a withdrawal from Lebanon in 1998.

474 Ha’aretz 27 December 1998.
In 1998, the Defence Minister of Israel, Mordechai, offered what he dubbed a ‘Lebanon first’ deal, which was an attempt to modify the “unconditional withdrawal” as outlined in UN Resolution 425 by subordinating it to certain demands of international peace and security. As Simon Murden notes: “The Israelis did not expect Lebanon to sign a full peace treaty, and this was a significant change, but still wanted joint security arrangements and wanted Hezbollah disarmed. Guarantees for the SLA were also wanted, ideally as incorporated members of the Lebanese Army, although there was an undercurrent in Israel that accepted that the SLA problem was now more a problem of asylum than of incorporation.” However, as Beirut was allied with – or rather subordinated to – the schemes of Damascus, no such deal could be concluded in the absence of a comprehensive peace settlement that involved the Syrian Golan Heights. Beirut and Damascus did not approve the proposal, both saying that Resolution 425 demands Israel’s unconditional withdrawal. Beirut repeatedly stated that it will not negotiate with Israel if its forces still occupy Lebanese territory. In Damascus, the Syrian president Hafez al-Assad declared that UN Resolution 425 did not need any elaboration, just implementation to the letter. “Israel has just to withdraw from Lebanon”, he commented on the issue. “The Israelis entered Lebanon so they can get out of it.” Yet, while the incumbent Lebanese elites were in consensus over the demand for an unconditional withdrawal, questions remained concerning Hezbollah’s future position in the case of such a withdrawal.

475 In 1996, Netanyahu, while voted into office, offered a deal in which Israel would leave Lebanon and gain ‘security guarantees’ in return. When both Lebanon and Syria refused, Netanyahu replied: ‘I find myself in a kafkaesque, an almost unbelievable situation…[Here is] a situation where the prime minister of Israel announces he wants to get out of the territory of an Arab state - Lebanon. And the Syrian government, together with the Lebanese, are opposing this withdrawal…The Middle East has seen a lot of strange things, but this I’ve never seen before…” (ibid). See Jerusalem Post International Edition, 17th August 1996.
476 Murden 2000, p. 41.
Concluding remarks

This chapter described the formation of the new Lebanese order of the Ta’if Accord, or the Peace and Reconciliation Accord, signed by Lebanese elites (assisted by Saudi mediation) in 1989, which ended the civil war. The chapter displayed how the this ‘Ta’if order’ consolidated the confessional system that Hezbollah detests and rejects but also how the efforts of national reconciliation were supervised by the Syrians who offered Hezbollah leeway to fight the Israelis in the south. The chapter thus described the period in which Hezbollah embarked upon its so-called ‘Lebanonization process’, how it opted for integration into the system and how it managed to work out a modus operandi with the Lebanese regime. This modus operandi is important to acknowledge, since it enabled Hezbollah to combine its strategies of integration with its prerogative to pursue its resistance activities. There is a significant bargain in this ‘deal’ that needs to be acknowledged in order to grasp Hezbollah’s maintenance of agency, i.e., how it made great efforts to maintain its commitment to the resistance and turning it into a ‘national endeavour’. However, the chapter also recognised how Hezbollah’s – arguably successful – integration was severely criticised from more radical quarters from within the party and how Hezbollah responded to this criticism. This dispute highlights the Gramscian character of Hezbollah’s project of integration. It also elucidates the agency of the party in a context of bargaining and appeasement, or the tension between accommodation and resistance. Yet, despite the declared social pathos of the movement (displayed by its vast network of social welfare services), it would abide by government policy for the sake of the resistance.

The next chapter will address the apparent ambiguity of Hezbollah concerning its future plans, or the ‘national’ character of the resistance. After all, Hezbollah’s resistance against the Israeli occupation was the initial reason for the movement’s existence. The chapter will deal with how Hezbollah
persisted in its strategic project once the Israelis were out of the south. *How* did Hezbollah deal with the presumed ‘dilemma’ the movement faced once the Israeli troops left their ‘security zone’ in May 2000? *Why* did the movement take the course it did? As noted previously in this thesis, many observers suggested that Hezbollah faced a quandary after its victory over the Israelis, since it was this very struggle in the south that had given the movement’s militancy its *raison d’être*. Would the party now be able to change the bullets for administration posts and turn to mere civil affairs? How would Hezbollah be able to keep its commitment to the Islamic revolution when no more Israeli soldiers were battling on Lebanese soil?
Chapter 6. The post-Israeli withdrawal phase

In this chapter I will describe how various contextual exigencies – particularly with respect to the party’s relations with Syria – enabled Hezbollah to promote its military campaign against the Israelis in the south. This will be situated in the context of a lingering regional complex of problems: the absence of any progress in the negotiations between Syria and Israel, the outbreak of the Palestinian intifada (that Hezbollah passionately and strategically supported) and not least the ‘war on terror’ that the U.S. unleashed after the 9-11 attacks in 2001.

However, the most important factor for understanding Hezbollah’s conduct will be that Hezbollah’s triumph over the Israeli occupation did not only involve liberating the land but also erasing the ‘inferiority complex’ that Hezbollah claimed underpinned the regional order and that forced the Arab regimes to act subserviently in relation to U.S. hegemony. The peace negotiations were central to this struggle. Hezbollah’s objective was to show that its defeat of the Israelis in Lebanon proved its own logic of resistance to be the correct path in that it defied the presumed ‘reality’ of the structures of power that obliged the weak Arab elites to offer concessions to Israel. Hence, there was this ‘Fanonian’ dual logic to Hezbollah’s victory: it not only liberated the land but also liberated ‘the self’ of the Arab and the Islamic umma. Furthermore, while Hezbollah claimed to have exposed the chimera of presumed weakness, it worked to cultivate a new ‘Gramscian’ common sense of resistance and defiance. To a large extent, this was the essence of Hezbollah’s radicalism: breaking down prevailing images of incapability. This was also one of the alleged objectives, as we have seen, of the Islamic revolution in Iran. After the Israelis withdrew from Lebanon, Hezbollah’s
ambition was to stick to this objective, or to ‘maintain the conflict’, as one of
the party’s officials earlier envisaged. This chapter studies how Hezbollah
promoted this effort while also strategically accommodating to the Lebanese
confessional regime and driving a stake into the ‘balance of coexistence’ that
has been the ruling formula for this regime ever since its formation. By dom-
inating the Shi’ite community, Hezbollah has been able to cultivate a strong
ideological constituency, which has forged this confessional balance to its
own favour from below. Hence, it has been able to strike a bargain by pro-
moting the resistance while ‘accepting’ the confessional political system.

6.1. The Israeli withdrawal

In August 1999, Ehud Barak was elected Israeli prime minister on the prom-
ise of bringing the Israeli soldiers out of Lebanon. What, though, would be
the purpose of this Israeli withdrawal? While observers questioned the pos-
sibility for the Israelis to work out a security arrangement with the Lebanese
– and Syrian – authorities, it was widely believed – and hoped – that a top
summit between Bill Clinton and Hafez al-Assad in Geneva in March 2000
might bring about a comprehensive Syrian-Israeli-Lebanese peace agree-
ment. An Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon would be an important corner-
stone of such an agreement. As noted, the Israelis had long demanded secur-
ty guarantees for any withdrawal, and those guarantees, it was widely as-
sumed, could only be granted if Syria was a party to the deal. However, the
summit was a failure, as Hafez al-Assad considered the promises relayed by
Clinton on behalf of the Israeli government to be too vague and unpromis-
ing.478 Once the prospects for a comprehensive solution were shattered, Hez-
bollah again escalated attacks against Israeli troops. While sticking to its
demand for an unconditional Israeli withdrawal, it persisted in its refusal to

478 See Middle East International, 7 April 2000.
speculate about future actions beyond any withdrawal. As Naim Qassem argued only two months before the Israeli pullout:

We are not obliged to consider some 20 possibilities. We can say that there are two possibilities. There can be a total withdrawal that does not leave a single inch of Lebanese territory under occupation. If this happens, we will then declare our plans of action for the next stage. Or there can be a withdrawal that is not total that leaves a part of Lebanese territory under occupation. If one inch of Lebanese territory remains with them, the resistance will continue. As to the details, these are issues that will be discussed when the time is right.479

Some observers claimed that Hezbollah’s ambiguity displayed its bewilderment concerning future actions in case of an Israeli withdrawal; i.e., that Hezbollah’s raison d’être was in fact founded on the resistance against Israel and that it would lose this reason for existence if there were no Israeli forces to fight. With the successful ‘Lebanonization process’, this was described as the movement’s ‘dilemma’: its ultimate success would translate into its final demise.480 Such reflections were indeed valid, especially as Hezbollah’s constituencies in the south were most likely tired of war and tension and demanded reconstruction and tranquility. At the same time, in the absence of any comprehensive peace agreement, tensions remained, as did the conflict itself, and this was, if anything, reason for Hezbollah to remain as well. So, how would the movement proceed?

When the Israelis withdrew their forces in May 2000, Hezbollah arguably experienced its finest hours. The organization that for years had been branded as extremist and fanatic and an ‘Iranian stooge’ was widely hailed as national heroes, widely cheered in Lebanon and beyond. This was, after all, the first time an Arab military force had defeated the Israeli war ma-

479 MBC 28 March 2000
480 Zisser 2000.
chine, and Hezbollah would not lose any momentum in exploiting this experience and turning victory into political currency by emphasizing how armed struggle was an imperative agent for change. In his “victory speech” in the southern town of Bint Jbeil days after the Israeli withdrawal, Nasrallah told the crowds that they owed the United Nations nothing, since the world community had for decades been unable, or unwilling, to make the Israelis withdraw from south Lebanon, and that they only had themselves to thank, plus Syria and Iran for standing by the resistance. Addressing the Palestinians, he claimed that negotiations would give them nothing but “an ally here or a village there”, and he called upon them to follow the Lebanese path of resistance and launch a new intifada that could “restore your land and your rights even though the entire world has abandoned you…The choice is yours and lies before your eyes.”

The humiliation of the Israeli army in south Lebanon had repercussions all the way down to the occupied territories in Palestine, and the message was that Israel could be defeated. Armed resistance, not negotiations, could bring the Palestinians their rights. “People of Palestine, your destiny is in your own hands”, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah declared in a victorious speech the day after the Israeli withdrawal. “The road for the Palestinians is through resistance, through intifada – not the false ‘intifada’ of Oslo and compromise…We present to the Palestinians the Lebanese tactic of not accepting anything but the total liberty of the land.”

This was the second objective of Hezbollah’s defeat over the Israelis: to send a message to the Palestinians and stir them to insurgency. Nasrallah claimed that Israel’s strength was no greater than a “spider’s web” and that the Islamist guerrillas had revealed the deceptive character of the “legendary” clout of Israel’s military prowess.

Indeed, observers spotted Hezbollah’s indirect stake in the second intifada that broke out some weeks after Clinton’s failed attempt to bring the

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481 For Nasrallah’s speech, see as-Asafir 25 May 2000.
482 The Independent, 27 May 2000.
Israeli-Palestinian conflict to an end. When the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations collapsed at Camp David in August 2000, it could well be understood as another triumph for Hezbollah’s victory in south Lebanon only months earlier. As Norton acknowledged, “[i]n Palestinian hearts hardened by endemic poverty, Israeli occupation and Arafat’s corrupt-ridden Palestinian Authority, Hezbollah’s model of guerrilla warfare is not without appeal. Who can say to what extent Arafat’s back was stiffened during August Camp David by Israel’s unconditional withdrawal from Lebanon? No doubt, the hardening of the Palestinian position…reflects events in Lebanon.”

Palestinian radicals of the intifada would also attribute this momentum to Hezbollah’s victory in the south.

The Palestinian intifada could be considered – from Hezbollah’s perspective – as the successful outcome of this project of istinahaad, or – on the basis of Fanonian logic - as a counter-hegemonic Gramscian struggle over hegemony. That is, the peace process could be seen as a strategy for the U.S. to consolidate the post-1967 order by strengthening the position of Israel and its Arab allies and by snuffing out the embers of the Palestinian ordeal – the constant seedbed of radicalism - which constantly appeared to flame and breed militant sentiments. By contributing to the downfall of this process, Hezbollah was able to boast of a counter-hegemonic project of rejectionism towards this U.S. strategy of fostering peace – a term which Hezbollah regarded as deeply deceptive and misleading. That is, Hezbollah opposed the ‘common sense’ notion advocated by Arab regimes that negotiations were imperative, since the Arab world was too weak and incapable of confronting the Israeli war machine backed by the U.S. Among the Arab elites favouring the peace process, there was, as Muhammed Muslih notes, a camp advocating realpolitik, i.e., that every negotiation over Palestine would be promoted with the motto “salvaging whatever could be salvaged (inqadh ma mumkin

Joseph Massad also remarks that Palestinian compliance, as displayed by the leadership of Yasir Arafat and the circles around him (forming the Palestinian Authority) was assured by a sense of “realist-pragmatism” shaped by perceived defeat and capitulation. Earlier revolutionary aspirations were over, and “[a]ny attempt to revolt against the West…is bound to failure and defeat.” This was the very mentality and assumption – the “common sense” as represented by various incumbent elites across the Arab world – which Hezbollah aimed at subverting. To repeat, Hezbollah wanted to expose that view not only as defeatist but also as illusory, since the movement by its own modes of resistance gainsaid the alleged Arab weakness that demanded surrender.

From a Gramscian perspective, Hezbollah believes that the most important contests and struggles take place at the level of consciousness and perception. That is, in conditions characterized by asymmetric structures of power and exploitative relations, the task for the radical vanguard is to ‘enlighten’ the oppressed and make them conscious of their subordinate positions, to lead them out of the ‘common sense’ that assumes prevailing conditions to be ‘natural’ and ‘given’ or ‘overpowering’, in the sense of being impossible to alter. As Gramsci suggested, structures of conflict in a society have to be exposed and understood as unjust and conducive to change. This requires education and action at the level of consciousness and awareness. It is akin to how Nasrallah commented on the peace process in the mid-nineties:

The logic of history, laws and historical norms which govern societies say that the unjust peace will not work and the just peace will work. The peace process going on is unjust. Not only unjust but humiliating, too. If today our rulers accept this injustice and abasement and are quiet about it, no one can guarantee that the future generations can accept them…Therefore I believe

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485 Massad 2006, p. 105
the entire situation that is being founded is founded on unacceptable foundations…and cannot last in the future.\footnote{Middle East Insight, May-Aug 1996.}

Shortly after the Israeli withdrawal in May 2000, Nasrallah reiterated that the ‘Palestinian Question’ could not be solved through the ongoing peace process, since the Palestinian leadership would not be able to deliver in accordance with the concessions demanded. He said: “Perhaps Arafat and others in the PLO really think they can tell the Palestinian people one day that Jerusalem is gone forever and that’s it,” but he did not consider it that easy to fool the Palestinians:

We know the Palestinian people well. We know what the Palestinian youth is made of…It’s not that simple for Arafat to convince the Palestinian people that four million of their number should go on living in refugee camps and forget they ever had a homeland - especially at a time when Barak opens the doors for millions of Jews to come to Palestine. If they kept quiet, then we can safely assume that the Palestinian people is dead; that the Palestinians have lost their will, their honor, their faith, their chivalry, and their manhood. In other words, that the Palestinians have surrendered.\footnote{BBC world report, 30 May 2000.}

For Hezbollah, the objective was, as noted, to expose the injustice of this process and to offer a viable and credible scheme to oppose it by building on sentiments of dignity and empowerment; it sought to cultivate and deepen the popular impulses of resistance. This is reminiscent of how Bobbio suggests, from a Gramscian perspective, that the “active subject” is liberated once he recognizes these “objective conditions” and is, thus, able to mold these conditions into “an instrument for whatever end is desired”. Or, as he quotes Gramsci: “Structure ceases to be an external force which crushes man, assimilates him into himself and makes him passive; and is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethico-
political form; and into a source of new initiatives.”

Some months later, in November 2000, when the intifada had erupted and entered a higher gear, Nasrallah commented: “What is happening in Palestine is the transformation of a specific mind-set that has prevailed for some time now; it is a cultural transformation. When the culture of resistance and uprising becomes dominant instead of that of negotiations and settlements, this is a crucial factor that can determine many things.”

In the following, it will be illustrated how Hezbollah – after the liberation – was still determined to project its campaign of istinnaad, which constituted the impulses of resistance of the Islamic revolution and which Hezbollah wanted to reproduce in a Lebanese – and ultimately, transnational – context. A consequence of this was that Hezbollah did not turn inwards to challenge the corrupt and confessional structures once the Israelis had withdrawn from the south but rather embedded itself in the former occupation zone, close to the border. By doing so, Hezbollah developed the existing modus operandi with the regime (established, as we have seen, in the nineties) and cooperation with the Syrian. This also undermined the ‘national image’ that Hezbollah had mobilized during the years of struggle against the Israeli occupation. However, while sticking to this path and, thus, contributing to the widening divisions in Lebanon (especially as this related to the Syrian tutelage), Hezbollah could retain its commitment to the Islamic revolution in a Lebanese context, particularly with respect to the istinnaad in order to trigger and intensify a mood of defiance and resistance against the various structures of power permeating the region, most specifically the existence and schemes of Israel. Thus, it was important for Hezbollah to constantly expose this image of Israeli weakness for strategic purposes. But how could Hezbollah project this spirit of istinnaad once the Israelis were out of the south? Would its guerrillas relax with their arms crossed while the Pale-

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488 Bobbio 1979, p. 34.
489 See Ahram Weekly 2-8 November 2000.
tinians embarked on the path of resistance, as called for by Hezbollah? How could Hezbollah contribute to that Palestinian struggle from the other side of the border?

### 6.2. Maintaining the conflict in the border zone and beyond

As noted earlier in this thesis, in the immediate aftermath of the Israeli withdrawal, many observers hoped that Hezbollah would let guns fall silent and turn to more domestic affairs, not least towards reforming the Lebanese state structures that the party had long condemned as inherently corrupt and repressive. As a Lebanese editorial argued some six weeks after the Israeli withdrawal:

> Hizbullah understands what most individuals – and a very few politicians – all over this country do, namely that the status quo, like the occupation before it, is unacceptable…people driven by a genuine desire to bring about a far-reaching change in this country have heretofore operated singly in twos or threes, but now they are being presented with an opportunity to ally themselves with a powerful movement whose aims largely coincide with theirs, whose supporters are numerous and enthusiastic, and whose respect abroad grows with each passing day. Since no one doubts Hezbollah’s commitment to achieving its goals, and no serious-minded person would argue that Lebanon’s political system needs anything short of a drastic overhaul, those who have looted our foundering ship of state have been served notice that they will no longer be allowed to do so with impunity. The determined people of Hezbollah who dared to take on the Merkava tanks will not be intimidated into silence by a few detestable power-brokers whose bad suits, fat cigars, and loathsome amorality would have made them fit nicely with the mobsters of 1950s Havana.\(^{490}\)

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Indeed, the days after the withdrawal, Nasrallah did not oppose but rather affirmed the plausibility of such speculations by arguing:

Hizbollah already enjoys substantial political influence. It has always adopted the cause of the poor, the oppressed, workers, and deprived areas, and has always been interested in the nuances of Lebanese political life. This role will undoubtedly grow in future. On the other hand, thanks to the victory it achieved, Hizbollah’s influence in Lebanese politics will inevitably increase. This won’t be because Hizbollah expects to reap the rewards of its victory; it is because Lebanon needs the party to play a more prominent role.\(^{491}\)

Yet, as we know, the border was not sealed, and Hezbollah’s guerrillas did not pack up. Maintaining their alliance, Beirut and Damascus, claimed that the Israel withdrawal was incomplete, thus defying the UN conclusion that Security Resolution 425 (which demanded Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon) had been implemented. Critical remarks were made on the so-called ‘Blue Line’ as demarcated by the UN. As a result, units of the resistance continued to patrol and control the border zone (close to the fence) where the Lebanese authorities refused to deploy the army. A tense atmosphere lingered on. At a meeting with the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in Beirut in July 2000, Hassan Nasrallah stressed that, apart from the remaining occupation of Lebanese land (the so-called Shebaa farms), it was imperative for Israel to release the 20 Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails who had participated in the resistance against the Israeli occupation.\(^{492}\) However, while Israeli troops hanged on and no prisoners were released, Hizbollah resumed its guerrilla campaign around the Shebaa-farms. In early October 2000 the party abducted three Israeli soldiers and kidnapped one Israeli businessman in two simultaneous operations.

\(^{491}\) *al-Watan* 30 May 2000.

\(^{492}\) See *al-Ahram Weekly* 22-28 June 2000.
As noted earlier, some observers were puzzled by this ‘brinkmanship’ in the border zone on the part of Hezbollah, since it defied the notion of Hezbollah as being constrained by its popular constituencies, who had presumably demanded reconstruction and tranquillity. Israeli scholar Eyal Zisser claims that the eruption of the Palestinian al-Aqsa intifada in the early fall of 2000 solved the conundrum of Hezbollah, since it could assume a more militant and aggressive posture once the violence raged in the Palestinian territories and Arab public opinion was aggravated.\footnote{Zisser 2006, p. 89-90.} Others suggested that Hezbollah acted accordingly, considering the environment that still appeared too rigid to recognize and did not meet Lebanese demands that were perfectly legitimate and represented by Hezbollah’s assertive position. For instance, an editorial in a Lebanese daily commented Hezbollah’s capture of the Israelis: “Nasrallah has already complained to Kofi Annan about unfulfilled conditions, yet no European diplomats came galloping to Lebanon in order to solve the status quo...Unaccustomed to sitting on its hands, Hezbollah’s reaction to this international intransigence could not have been more natural.”\footnote{See editorial in \textit{Daily Star} 19 October 2000.}

According to Hezbollah, the operations were conducted in a common symbolic and practical landscape of conflict that wedded Lebanon to Palestine. Naim Qassem explained that the capture of the Israeli soldiers was meant “to swap our detainees in Israeli prisons” and “to show solidarity with the Palestinian intifada, to show that we are in the same bunker in the confrontation against the Israeli occupation. Also, we wanted to emphasize our right in the Lebanese Shebaa farms region. So this operation sent many messages, all underlining one essential point: arousal to this occupation and aggression in any shape or form.”\footnote{\textit{Time Magazine}, 16 October 2000.} As described earlier, this has been Hezbollah’s position since its inception in the early eighties, and it tapped into a
more historical Arab nationalist position that saw Lebanon as part of a regional scheme of subordination. Hence, any strategic vision of resistance had to be situated on a regional level (akin to how Fadlallah promoted a vision of resistance in the seventies). To Hezbollah, the eruption of the intifada ought to make it clear the Arab regimes that the era of negotiations and attempts at reconciliation was over with. For instance, after the escalation of operations in early October, the party stated that “Arab leaders must come up with stands and decisions that match the aspirations of their people, who see the Palestinian intifada as the only option of the Arab nation and its only way to liberate the land.” The movement, thus, called upon Arab leaders “to re-evaluate their priorities and consider Palestine as their central cause and the essence of the conflict with the Zionist entity.”

In September 2001, as Hezbollah celebrated the first anniversary of the intifada, Nasrallah claimed that the “Zionist plan…is to become part of this region; that is, *normalization* [tatbiyah].

The objective is to make Israel accepted by Arab and Islamic governments and peoples. When Israel becomes accepted and when it normalizes its political, diplomatic and cultural relations, as well as those within the mass media and the economy, and with the Arab world and its people, it will become a part of this world with a military superiority over the Arabs, a capable system of security, a strong economy, and backed up by the strongest forces that con-

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496 *Daily Star* 21 October 2000. The Lebanese Defense minister was remarkably blunt with respect to the independence of Hezbollah’s guerrillas in the south: “They don’t tell us and we don’t know,’ he commented as Hezbollah had conducted an operation in the Shebaa farms. ‘The resistance can take action that a government can’t. Our government does not want to look like it is doing something not accepted by law . . . From a point northward, we make the rules, and from a certain point on in the south, there is no presence of the armed forces, and the Hezbollah coordinates their actions with themselves.” *Washington Post* 30 January 2001.
tols the world [i.e. the US]. This will achieve its plan for hegemony whether this plan is called the “New Middle East” or carries any other name.\textsuperscript{497}

However, Nasrallah stressed that the escalation of the intifada in Palestine had dealt this scheme a great blow, in spite of the great efforts by the U.S. and Israel - in cooperation with some Arab rulers - to have Israel accepted as a “reality.” The intifada, he asserted, “torpedoed all these results for which they worked tens of years, for which they spent millions of dollars.”\textsuperscript{498} Whatever peace accords had been concluded, Nasrallah charged that they were powerless to realize any objective of normalization, regardless of Arab regimes and elites boasting that their policy of accepting Israel was “sound” and “realistic.” The Palestinian intifada (and the brutal Israeli efforts to suppress it) exposed the “racism and brutality of the Zionists in killing children, women and civilians.” That is, the actions of the resistance forces had shed light and awareness on the oppressive structures of the Israeli occupation, akin to how Bobbio charged that repressive structures could accelerate motions of resistance. To Nasrallah, the Palestinian intifada had restored the “true feelings” of the Arabs vis-à-vis Israel in the way that it invoked a consciousness of rejection and hostility, rather than the deceptive perception of reconciling with a “usurper terrorist entity.”

The wider escalation could be seen in the context of the Beirut Arab Summit in March when a Saudi-directed proposal stressed the need for a two-state solution. For Hezbollah, any such proposal exposed the weak and feeble standards of the Arab regimes in the Arab-Israeli conflict. In a response to the “Arab initiative for peace”, Nasrallah described it as a sign of cowardice that would not be forgiven by history. Repeating Hezbollah’s standing position that Israel is an “absolute lie,” a “raping entity’ and a “can-

\textsuperscript{497} \textit{al-Manar} 29 September, 2001. Nasrallah was most likely alluding to Shimon Peres vision of a ‘new Middle East’ as outlined in his book form the mid-nineties on the peace process.

\textsuperscript{498} Ibid.
cerous gland that has to be extracted”, he urged that there is no Muslim or Arab leader who has “the right to abandon one grain of soil from the land of Palestine.” There would be no historical sustenance for such an initiative, he claimed, since “it would mean nothing to the umma”; “the nation will consider this recognition as disgraceful throughout the history, and it will take the chance when it comes to terminate and purify itself from it.” He also reiterated that the people of Egypt and Jordan persisted in their refusal to reconcile with Israel, despite the conclusion of treaties between the regimes, which was also the case for the Palestinians in spite of the harsh conditions they endured. “Dear rulers”, Nasrallah addressed the regimes at the summit, “if you cannot confront, then at least be hard as a rock. Do not pass a culture of historic defeat to your next generation. Let them be a solid rock contravening the waves of defeat in order to achieve victory in the future.”

Even worse, he claimed, the initiative would not appease the brutality of the Israeli regime. It would never recognise the ‘humiliating’ efforts of Arab regimes to demand what were - to his mind - minor concessions for concluding a peace on the basis of the 1967 borders. “What was the Israeli reaction to the Arab peace initiatives during the past weeks?” he questioned.

The reaction was more killings, massacres, bloodshed, and the destruction of their houses and Palestinian camps. Sharon and the enemy soldiers are shedding the blood of the Palestinians while the Arabs respond with peace initiatives…Is this how we should react to the brutal Israeli attacks? Haven’t we learned after so many years of conflicts with this enemy that when it is encouraged to assault, attack and kill us, we in return respond with a peace initiative? Our peace initiatives are well being interpreted by this enemy as that Arabs have no fire and no metal to retaliate with; so they keep killing us, shedding pure blood, and destroying more of our houses. Moreover, they would conceive that this would lead Arabs to offer more reconciliation, sub-

mission, and more of giving up of their rights. Isn’t this the fact that is lying ahead at this stage?  

Hezbollah stuck to its ‘Fanonian’ position that the ongoing struggle demanded sacrifices and courage, not the diplomatic overtures continuously called for by Arab governments. Negotiations from a position of weakness could only spell defeat. “They are positioning us before two choices”, Nasrallah declared in a commemoration of Ayatollah Khomeini in early June 2003.

Either we surrender and accept the governments, systems, projects and administrations they want to impose on us, in addition to the solutions and reconciliations [with Israel] [the US] want to achieve in this region. Or we maintain our steadfastness and resist…At this stage of the nation’s history, if there is any leader, president, thinker, scientist or cleric who is responsible of any position and feel within himself the feebleness, cowardice, and the inability to confront, challenge and defy…Let him go and sit at home. Then God will bring to this nation and this people someone who is worthy of leading and continuing the road towards the inevitable victory.

Despite a lull in the hostilities in early 2003, Nasrallah dispelled any idea that the resistance had “abandoned the era of jihad” by arguing that “our eyes, minds and hearts are now centred on the land beyond the border…we still exist as the frontline and our eyes and hearts are present inside Pales-

500 Ibid. At the International Day for al-Quds in December 2001, Nasrallah recalled how Ayatollah Khomeini invented the al-Quds day as an occasion for the world to not forget about the Palestinian struggle and that the liberation of Jerusalem was each and everyone’s responsibility. Nasrallah contended that Khomeini’s concern was that the cause of Palestine would be weakened as “it was transformed from an Islamic to an Arab matter, and from an Arab to a Palestinian matter. Then, regrettably from a Palestinian case to a Palestine divided into the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.” However, as things are now developing, Nasrallah charged, while referring to the way the peace process had been proceeding in the nineties, the cause of Palestine has become “a case of percentage of these lands…today the case of East Jerusalem has Jerusalem has become the case of the Holy Mosque, a place of worship only…” al-Manar 14 Dec, 2001.

tine.” Yet, vocal voices inside Lebanon protested against such defiant and assertive – or, as they argued, foolhardy - positions. “Who gave Sayyed Nasrallah the complete mandate to decide on behalf of the Lebanese people and throw them into the quick sands they don’t want to be thrown into?” asked Gebran Tueni, a columnist at An-Nahar, as the Beirut Summit was taking place in March 2002. Tueni acknowledged that Hezbollah rejected both UN resolutions and recognition of the Israeli state. “Hezbollah believes the solution is the obliteration of Israel, not the establishment of a Palestinian state existing side by side with Israel.” This is akin to the Iranian policy, he argued, which had “nothing to do with Middle Eastern policy of the Arab countries, Lebanon and Syria included.” Why should Lebanon serve this “mad extremism” plaguing the region, whether it was Arab, Israeli or Iranian, Tueni lamented. “Have we not played enough with fire on the Lebanese-Israeli border or through the smuggling of arms to the Palestinians via Jordan? This is the kind of fire that can destroy Lebanon, set the region ablaze…and which may give Israel the excuse to persist in a process to disfigure the Arab world.”

Lebanon was becoming increasingly divided, especially as opposition to the lingering Syrian presence was increasing. As early as in September 2000, the Maronite church had openly called for a Syrian withdrawal. Hezbollah did not turn against the ‘crooked centres’ in Beirut but rather consolidated its ties and modus operandi with the Lebanese regime, still subordinated to the Syrian security services operating in the country. Thus, the movement prolonged this state/resistance cooperation as it developed in the nineties. By doing so, Hezbollah provoked a portion of Lebanese public opinion and lost the consensus the movement had painstakingly – and rather successfully – cultivated around the notion of the resistance as a ‘national’ and ultimately Lebanese endeavour.

503 an-Nahar 26 March 2002.
However, as Lebanon began to become polarized on the matters of the resistance and the Syrian presence (Syrian troops still lingering on and showing no signs of leaving the country), the party maintained, as we have seen, a course of militancy in which the Palestinian cause was emerging as even more central to the movement’s actions and rhetoric. While some observers might suggest that this showed Hezbollah endorsing a Lebanese identity to be a sham, an alternative view might claim that Hezbollah was very much developing a Lebanese identity from within the confessional system, while simultaneously carving out a special position for Lebanon in the Arab-Israeli conflict, which, for Hezbollah, was key to the destiny of the country and the region. As Qasim argued in a conversation with this author, there was no contradiction for an Islamist group - like Hezbollah – fulfilling a patriotic duty since Islamic, nationalist and patriotic principles can “cover common ground.” As he put it:

If, from a religious point of view, the declared topic is to liberate the land, then one should liberate the land. From a nationalist point of view, we believe in independence, and from a patriotic standpoint we cooperate with those who, like us, are damned, for the sake of our common geographical origins.504

By facing the danger of national division, Hezbollah would persist in defending the Syrian presence, since the party (paradoxically, one may argue) defended its own view of ‘Lebanese independence’ that had to be protected from Israeli transgression and U.S. domination. Palestine, as we have seen, remained a central cause for Hezbollah’s struggle, not only in rhetoric but also in action and strategy. This is why the resistance remained a supreme priority. And since Syria protected Hezbollah’s resistance, this Syrian tutelage was an acceptable price to pay. However, Hezbollah’s power was also

504 Author’s interview, Beirut, April 2004.
embedded in its popular constituencies within Shi’ite communities, found mainly in the Bekaa Valley, the southern suburbs of Beirut and the south itself. In the following section, I will outline how Hezbollah combines these levels of conviction and adherence to the Lebanese ‘nation’. It will be argued that Hezbollah has been able to adapt to the Lebanese system by embedding itself within the Shi’ite community, not only materially (by providing a wide range of welfares services) but also ideologically. Given this, the party is fighting a ‘war of positions’ in which a firm rooting in society would enable Hezbollah to drive a stake into the ‘balance of coexistence’ and the “no victor, no vanquished” formula that has characterised the working formula of the Lebanese groups’ coexistence ever since the forties and fifties. By doing so, Hezbollah would also be able to promote – and maintain – its own resistance project which it considered to be ‘above’ this sectarian balance and coexistence, if not above the Lebanese nation-state itself.

6.3. Digging into the ‘resistance society’

Earlier in this thesis, it was suggested that radicalized groups would have to submit to pragmatism in order to cultivate a broader popular base while moving towards the centre of the system. With respect to Hezbollah, it has been suggested that its ‘Lebanonization process’ moved the Islamist party towards a more conventional and pragmatic politics, especially as the Israelis withdrew from the south. However, as we have seen, Hezbollah did not turn towards more domestic objectives once the Israelis were out of the south but rather claimed that the withdrawal was not complete, maintaining an assertive - and indeed, aggressive and provocative - position in the border zone. Deeply engaged in the Palestinian intifada, the party combined a heated rhetoric with acts of brinkmanship (like operations in the Shebaa area and its efforts to shape a ‘terror balance’ with Israel). While some argued that Hez-
bollah would lose its popular credentials through such a position, the years following the withdrawal proved otherwise, not least in the local government elections. Hezbollah’s rising popularity and clout – in comparison to its main Shi’ite rival, the Amal movement – could be discerned in the municipal elections of 1998 and 2004. In contrast to the parliamentary elections that are subjected to the confessional logic of quotas and strategic electoral alliances, the local elections provide a better estimate of the ‘popular vote’ each party and candidate enjoys. While Hezbollah suffered a backlash in the Bekaa Valley in 1998 (a painful defeat in Baalbek, which was most likely due to its conflict with Tufayli), it won a landslide victory in the southern suburbs. And even though the party lost to Amal in the latter’s strongholds in the south, Hezbollah was depicted by one Lebanese magazine as “the spokesman of the majority of Lebanon’s Shi’ite community.” In the municipal elections in 2004, Hezbollah did even better. Not only did it score victories in the Shi’ite areas of Beirut and the Bekaa but it also won several districts that were traditionally dominated by the Amal movement. According to Hamzeh, the victory was largely due to Amal’s general decline and image of being corrupt, while Hezbollah could present a clean reputation. It was also, significantly, due to Hezbollah having made a broader alliance, which allowed the Islamists to avoid the usual claims of forbidding alcohol and nightclubs. Those claims tended to undermine the broader popularity that transcended political, religious and cultural barriers. Hezbollah now emphasized everyday matters and material needs for the citizens, in addition, of course, to the imperative of protecting the interests of the resistance.

According to Harb and Leenders, the view of ‘Lebanonization’ that predicted the ‘de-radicalization’ of Hezbollah has focused on *adjustment* while ignoring the norms and values that Hezbollah brought into the Lebanese system, especially as it emerged as the dominant party within the

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Shi’ite community.\textsuperscript{507} As they contend, two factors are normally mentioned when discussing Hezbollah’s success in creating a large popular following: firstly, the way in which the movement was able to adjust rather smoothly to the parliamentary politics and the pluralism and bargaining of Lebanese political culture; secondly, the movement’s comprehensive and well-organized social welfare projects for the needy and destitute primarily within Shi’ite constituencies. As we have seen, these social welfare programs, which emerged in the war economy, were a supplement after the long absence and historical ignorance of the Lebanese state towards the Shi’ite areas, especially in southern Beirut, the Bekaa and the south.

While it may be suggested that these dimensions of adjustment and social welfare provision may well explain Hezbollah’s firm popular support and widespread legitimacy among the Shi’ites (as well as many other Lebanese), Harb and Leenders also add that these aspects of accommodation and social pathos shape strategic venues. They involve the cultivation of ideological norms and values, i.e., in addition to the party’s ‘acceptance’ among the Lebanese masses, especially among the Shi’ites, there is an important constitutive element in the way Hezbollah impacts upon popular perceptions and positions. As they suggest, Hezbollah’s clout is not only recognized by the poor and unfortunate but also by the well-to-do Shi’ite classes, clans and families; it is a “cross-class” phenomenon.\textsuperscript{508} The norms shaped and maintained within the hala al-Islamiyya are equal to what Euben referred to as the meaning of the Islamist project. That is, the Islamist agenda was not only about representing and channelling material grievances and demands but also about fostering a certain critical understanding of reality, rooted in the belief in revelation. In Gramsci’s terms, this constitutive element carries the objective of shaping a new ‘common sense’ by promoting gradualist and long-term strategies ‘from below’. Harb and Leenders contend that the wide

\textsuperscript{507} Harb and Leenders 2005, p. 174-175.
\textsuperscript{508} Ibid. P. 186.
range of social services provided by Hezbollah’s civil institutions enable the movement to convey its Islamic and revolutionary message through a “material lens”, which is also a “symbolic lens” that offer an “identity” and “sense of belonging” within the Shi’a community.\textsuperscript{509} According to Carol Wickham, Islamist movements usually arrange for certain communities – so-called \textit{hala al-Islamiyya} (Islamic milieu, or sphere) – where certain religious, cultural and political norms and values are fostered and spread. She refers to this as the “transvaluation of values” that contradict superficiality and greedy materialism (often deemed synonymous with Western culture) and that instead instil a “fear of God” among its adherents, encouraging modesty and simple lifestyles. While this kind of pursuit could be understood as fostering a “mentality” that conserved social structures and made the poor content and, effectively, pacified (i.e., serving existing relations of power), there was also an “anti-systemic” element in this faith system, as it empowered forces in opposition to become less afraid of the repressive apparatus of the state. As Wickham elaborates:

\begin{quote}
The point to be made here is not that all graduates active in the Islamic movement were ready to sacrifice their lives for the cause, but rather that a firm belief in the righteousness of their mission and its backing by God enabled many of them to overcome the paralyzing fear that impedes protest in authoritarian settings. By stressing the fleeting and ephemeral nature of life on earth in comparison with the life in the world to come, the Islamist message reduced the potency of regime threats to citizens physical and material comfort and well-being, perhaps more than leftist and other secular ideologies.\textsuperscript{510}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{509} Ibid., p. 191.
\textsuperscript{510} Wickham has described how Islamist youth in an Egyptian context revalued priorities and status in life; leaders argued that society’s troubles were not related to resources but to values (and this is the social aspect). Or, as one member of the Islamic Jihad told her: “We need very little, take life in simplicity, don’t need fancy cars and apartments and all that. I married a woman from the university. We lived
She argues that the “Islamic outreach” represented a certain assertive position against the authorities as the “Islamist ideology challenged the prevailing climate of fear and passivity by exhorting graduates to obey a higher authority [that is, God], regardless of the results of the risks they would incur…The embrace of Islamist commitments was thus a form of psychic empowerment.”

Hezbollah explicitly refers to these efforts as a ‘resistance society’ (mujtimma al-moqawama) in the way they are aimed at instilling a sense a capacity and dignity among the Shi’ite constituencies, long deprived and marginalised. According to Fawaz, they operate in consideration of two objectives: one is to assist; the other is to improve self-sufficiency. While these efforts involve material needs, they also aim at empowerment and raising self-esteem among the Shi’ite constituencies and, thus, bring them out of an ingrained sense of victim hood. Furthermore, the religious foundation of these NGOs and institutions, which are either run by or close to Hezbollah, are all embedded in Islam and, hence, the community itself is also referred to as the “hala al Islamiyya”, not only in Lebanon but also elsewhere in the Muslim world where it is common for Islamist organisations to offer these kinds of services. The directors behind these programs make no secret of the fact that the aim is to generate certain values and norms that support the Islamic project. As one director put it: “The specificity of the Islamic Institute’s schools is their particular spirit (ruhiya khassa) and their ambiance (jaw), which produce mobilization through all the studied topics. We want to disseminate the culture of religious commitment (iltizam). We insist on culture, because this is what makes identity.”

For instance, Kassem Oleik, the head of Jihad al-Binaa (the Holy Construction), an NGO of Hezbollah that very simply, but we didn’t feel the poverty. Society imposes shackles on people; it pressures them to worry about clothes and apartments and money…The problem is that we are not living in an Islamic reality” Wickham 2004, p. 242-243.

511 Ibid. p. 244 (my own emphasis).
512 Fawaz 2005.
513 Ibid.
undertakes the improvement of infrastructure in the south and Bekaa, claimed as a “vision” to “build a society that will refuse oppression and fight for its rights. All the rest – water provision, garbage collection, agricultural training - is only a working strategy.”

Oleik similarly told this author that it was important that these services are embedded in Islam and that the values and norms of the Islamic faith are taught. “If Islam is the solution to all ills of mankind, why keep quiet about it?” he asked. The dissemination of the Islamic faith was a main objective of Hezbollah, and the movement’s social pathos and will to resist was contingent on the Islamic faith. Hezbollah began its efforts in the early eighties on ‘the ruins of a collapsed society: morally, politically, and economically.” There was a deep-felt need, he noted, to “revive” the people of Lebanon through Islamic mores and teachings, which is still relevant. The very idea of reconstruction and resistance are combined efforts that necessitate a deep commitment and belief grounded in certain morals and ethics. “How can we build this resisting society if no one is supporting it?” he charged. ‘With the morals that we are pumping into the society, we are building new powers form within…We will be able [to improve] the solidity of it.”

While most of these institutions work rather autonomously, they do submit to the general guidance and norms of Hezbollah’s highest command. In this way, they operate so as to create a loyal constituency that adopts its values and ideological appeal. This could be understood as a communitarian strategy for supporting political and social communes that may impact upon the state ‘from below’; or, in Gramscian terms, it involves the cultivating of political constituencies whose presence, extension and assertive positions can operate a ‘war of positions’ in broadening new norms, a new “common sense” and block or advance certain paths the state may opt for. That kind of Gramscian communitarian strategy does not in-

514 Ibid.
515 Author’s interview, Beirut, May 1996.
516 Harb and Leenders 2005.
volve state power but rather **pressuring** the state to head in a certain direction or blocking it from heading in another. For Hezbollah, this entailed not establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon (as its officials continuously reiterated) but to see to it that the values and norms of Khomeinism permeated the Shi’ite constituency - what Harb and Leenders refer to as the “hala al-Islamiyya” and what Hezbollah calls *al-mujtumma al-mogawama*. For instance, Hezbollah undeniably had the ability to obstruct the Lebanese regime from accepting a Western-oriented hegemony. Through its ideologically inspired social welfare organs, it can rally many sentiments of defiance against Western ambitions to ‘turn’ Lebanon into an Arab ally. However, importantly and ironically, this is a strategy that the movement successfully pursues within the framework of the confessional system, which it essentially despises and - at least theoretically and rhetorically - would like to see dismantled. This Gramscian strategy of a ‘war of positions’ was especially favourable to the Lebanese formula of confessionalism, as it relied on a ‘balance of coexistence’. By gradually dominating the Shi’ite constituency, Hezbollah was able to force its own ideological agenda into this balance. In the next section of this chapter, I will describe how the commands of the *Welayat al-faqih* can influence the Shi’ites through this communitarian strategy of Hezbollah and what this involves, ideologically speaking.

**6.4 Resistance embedded in faith and transcendence**

Mona Harb describes the popular support cultivated by Hezbollah by these institutions in the *hala al Islamiyya* through a Weberian understanding of legitimacy and power that involves charisma, rationality and tradition.\(^{517}\) For Weber, **charisma** involved popular leadership possessing two main characteristics: firstly, a sentiment that revolutionized the mentality of human be-

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ings “from within” which, in turn, would impact on material and social structures. This contrasted with the “bureaucratic mode” of pursuing change “from without”, i.e., seeing changes in material and social conditions as a top priority. Secondly, charisma also implied the rejection of convention or traditional modes of thought. Such Weberian reflection taps into the strategy of Hezbollah’s strategy of promoting an ideological scheme through the betterment of material and social conditions, and it echoes Hezbollah’s affiliation to Khomeinism and the legacy of Shi’ite activism that denounced the traditional Shi’ite ulama for its quietist position towards power. In terms of charisma and appeal, she also notes how the ideological prominence of Hezbollah is hard to escape from in this *hala al-Islamiyya*, since the pictures, slogans and symbols of the party and of the resistance (the face of martyrs, for instance) and the religious and political leaders of the movement and the Islamic republic are present everywhere, imposing an ambiance rooted in the identity of the Islamic resistance. Secondly, Hezbollah’s strength within the Shi’ite community also stems from a more rationalist aspect of its social welfare programs, since those are often more comprehensive, generous and efficient than those offered by the Lebanese state. In addition, there is an aspect of ‘surveillance’ involved in those social welfare projects, since they enable Hezbollah’s personnel on the ground both to heed the needs of the citizens’ and to monitor their commitment to the mores and norms of the party.\footnote{See Danawi 2002.} Thirdly, Harb also suggests that Hezbollah is able to impose itself through tradition, in this sense religion, and by calling for political obligation (*iltizam*) through faith and the belief in transcendence (as discussed in Chapter 2). In this regard, the Welayat al-Faqih is a central authority for Hezbollah’s adherents to follow. As Sheik Naim Qassem suggests,

The Wilayat is necessary to maintain and apply Islam. It is impossible to realize the great Islamic project with punctual and isolated operations. We need a
guiding axis that links the umma together. This is what is achieved by the wilayat direction and management...[The wali] preserves the rules and the system [of Muslims], ensures justice, prevents injustice, and guarantees mechanisms for progress, as well as cultural, political and social evolution, and prosperity.519

Furthermore, through this authority, the party was able to encourage a deep commitment to justice and resistance that combined human deeds in the worldly life (dunya) with those of the hereafter (akhira). When discussing the topic of jihad, Naim Qassem underlines that this conception stems from the Arabic root (j-h-d) of the verb “to strive” or “to struggle”, which in an Islamic context has “a broader reach than military combat” since it also embraces “the struggle against man’s internal foes as represented by the soul’s insinuations and temptations to evil or satanic calls to falsehood, and all that lead to straying and corruption.” Jihad, he argues, “bears a great influence on the trajectory of a Muslim’s life” since it is “an integral part of one’s true belief without which God’s acceptance of such belief is not granted”.520 The particular task of jihad is integrated with Islam’s observation that the hardships of life are part of a reality that no one escapes. Qassem describes this world as “a perishable home, a departing pleasure and a temporary life”, which is “a place of test and tribulation for man, the outcome of whose actions determines his fate on the Day of Resurrection [Yam al-Qiyyama] when God revives all Creation, committing the disbelievers to Hell and the believ-

519 Qouted in Harb and Leenders 2005, p. 191. That said, it should be emphasised that far from all of Hezbollah’s followers recognize Ayatollah Khameinei, the current Welayat al-Faqih for the party, as their highest religious authority. Many Hezbollah adherents see Sayyed Fadlallah as their greatest religious interpreter of the writ. A Hezbollah cadre told this author that he always was present at Fadlallah’s Friday sermons, since that would grant him, he argued, a better place in the hereafter. Conversation in Beirut, May 2005.
520 Qassem 2005, p. 34.
ers to Heaven.” And this “testing”, he notes, is often “coupled with difficul-
ties, pain and weariness.”\textsuperscript{521}

In this context, Qassem asserts, there is a key conflict between two dif-
fferent logics. One logic is devoted to materialism and worldly life \textit{(dunya)} as “the end in itself.” Those assuming this logic will care less of the “evil re-
percussions” of their deeds, since they probably will not suffer any account-
ability and, hence, this logic usually entails various elements of corruption
and repression and violation of people’s rights. The other logic is that of “the
believers in God who go through life as a \textit{trail leading to the hereafter’}; to
those devotees of the divine, “life is not the eternal abode, and should they
suffer loss as a result of adhering to their obligations and being indifferent to
whims, then they are promised reward on the Day of Resurrection.”\textsuperscript{522}
That is, human beings are free to choose in this life, and as with Shi’ite activism
more generally, Hezbollah’s thinking emphasizes how the world is construed
by this human choice. As Nasrallah contends, “man makes history and
events. All the events that took place in the past and that are taking place
until the Judgement Day are manmade. They are contingent upon his belief,
disbelief, concepts, justice, injustice, righteousness, corruption, goodness
and evil. The matter starts with man himself.”\textsuperscript{523}

As earlier noted, according to Khomeini, the prophets were sent to
guide man in making these crucial choices. While the human beings were
free to ignore this guidance, they were doing so at their own peril since eve-
rybody, believer as non-believer, will stand accountable on the Day of Res-
urrection. There is no way for anybody to escape the doom of God. Or, as
Nasrallah himself puts it: “No one can run away from this truth of this ines-
capable day. Where to could anyone run? Is there any place in this universe
that does not belong to Allah? Where to can anyone run away from the

\textsuperscript{521} Ibid. p. 35.
\textsuperscript{522} Ibid. 35-36.
\textsuperscript{523} \textit{al-Manar} 22 March 2002.
judgement of Allah and his punishment?” On that day, good deeds will be rewarded and bad deeds punished. Significantly, good deeds did not only involve praying and fasting. Rather, in Hezbollah’s exceedingly politicised perspective on Islam, there is a commitment (iltizam) that entails political struggle against injustice; neutrality in these matters is deceptive, and it indicates ignorance and, thus, implies the pending wrath of God. According to Nasrallah, the believers must contemplate their “responsibility” (masoliyye), not only to themselves but also to their families, people and nation. This involves, he argues, “two futures” (mustaqbalan) for the pious to consider: the one during this life (al-dunya) and the afterlife (al-akhira). Their fate in the latter will be shown no mercy, if they ignore their responsibility in the former. This is what the movement refers to as the taklef shar’i (obligation) and it fosters a mentality within the community of believers that hails solidarity and somod (steadfastness) and the necessary sacrifices such positions might entail. Thus, akin to Wickham’s description of the “transvaluation of values” Nasrallah has stated that “life is not just about food, drink, money and personal interests…there is also a place for dignity, pride, honour, sovereignty, personal generosity, and the generosity of the country, nation, and people…Those who accepted a life in humiliation and died miserably and disgracefully have neither place in history, nor in the spirit of the nation, nor the afterlife.” Furthermore, for Nasrallah, a society embedded in this Islamic belief-system becomes superior because of its quest for fairness and justice. This is akin to Khomeini’s ‘strive for perfection’, in the sense that it enables the humans to rise above more corruptive and destructive desires inherent in the nature of mankind:

524 Ibid
525 Speech by Nasrallah, al-Manar 7 January 2005. In this regard, Saad-Ghorayeb points out that Hezbollah saw the resistance as religiously obligatory for the Lebanese Shi’ite believers, not necessarily to fight, like the Islamic resistance, but to see resistance as a ‘priority’, in ‘the political, cultural, and educational fields’. Saad-Ghorayeb 2002, p. 126.
Imagine a society, village, country, or region, whose entire people believe in Allah and the afterlife and are afraid of torment on that day. This fear of suffering will become a factor that is sufficient enough to prevent each member from terrorizing or being unjust to the other. It will prevent people from assaulting, robbing, causing troubles, disputes, commotions, and divisions. Therefore having faith in Allah and the Day of Judgment in addition to fear from the torment of that day are the best deterring factors, mentally and spiritually, that will deter any person from committing bad issues, even in clandestine. It will deter people from committing sins and at the same time encourage them to love afterlife, the meeting with Allah and his prophets.\textsuperscript{527}

Following Khomeini’s promotion of “perfection”, Hezbollah claims that submission to Islam is a way to \textit{liberate} the more “righteous” and ‘progressive’ spirits of mankind, which are constantly troubled by the human desire that tends towards degeneration and corruption. Lara Deeb describes the norms of the \textit{hala al-Islamiyya} as appealing to what she refers to as a “pious modern,” which she likens with “an ethos, a way of being in the world” and an “idea” that combines norms of material progress with spiritual piety. That is, it is the Islamists’ norm of “modernity” that coalesces – and emphasizes – both material and spiritual progress. As Deeb notes, “[s]piritual development alone was not \textit{complete} without the drive to improve one’s situation materially, and material progress alone would not lead to the empty modernity of the west – spiritually and morally vacuous, and therefore incomplete.”\textsuperscript{528} Today, the world has submitted to the cravings of the latter; human beings, Nasrallah states, have forfeited their ‘humanity’ by subordinating to a system that defines the objectives and aspirations of a more human order:

\textsuperscript{527} \textit{al-Manar} 15 March 2002.  
\textsuperscript{528} Deeb 2006, p. 228-229.
Instead of exploiting money, prestige, fortunes, plants, orchards, castles, rivers, seas, mountains, valleys, nature and environment and the universe in favour of mankind, we changed the human being to become the servant of capitalism, stones, superiority, authority and science. Instead of using science to serve man, man is being used to serve science. Instead of using authority to serve man, man is being used to serve authority. Instead of using money and exploit it to serve the social and moral needs of mankind, man is being used to serve money.\(^{529}\)

The Islamic faith thus serves the objective of creating among believers and adherents this ‘new mentality’, which underpins and reproduces the spirit of Ayatollah Khomeini’s Islamic revolution. As earlier argued, this is also reminiscent of other revolutionary and secular creeds, even though for these Islamist currents, it is the \textit{faith} that ensures this revolutionary consciousness. To Hezbollah, resistance towards the occupation was also religiously obligatory for the Lebanese Shi’ite believers - not necessarily downright fighting, but at least resistance as a “priority”, in “the political, cultural, and educational fields.”\(^{530}\) The party’s ideologues describe the Islamic depth of conviction as the movement’s unfathomable strength in its confrontation with tremendous adversaries, as far as conventional means go. That is, for a movement with relative modest means (compared to those of their enemies), this religious dimension is a major – purportedly superior – strength, since those fearing God have no reason to fear death and “eternity.” Hezbollah’s school of \textit{martyrdom} epitomises this point, as the martyrs of the \textit{mujahidin} (fighters) are of the highest order. Naim Qassem describes “the martyr” as a person “who has sold his soul and body to the Lord” and “against whom nothing is a threat.” He is prepared to sacrifice his life for the cause, and whereas the enemy only possesses weapons that can “inflict danger on life”, they can

\(^{529}\) Nasrallah, \textit{al-Manar} 22 March 2002  
\(^{530}\) Saad-Ghorayeb 2002, p. 126.
merely harm those who seek life as an end in itself - they become “futile to combat those who believe in martyrdom.”

In this regard, Hezbollah – like many other Shi’ite activists (as seen in Chapter 2) – looks upon the tale of Imam Husayn as general guidance in their strategy of confrontation and struggle. Imam Husayn did not hesitate to rise against injustice, embodied by the troops of the corrupt tyrant Yazid, despite knowing he would die in the effort. To him and the believers, his choice professed a certain message: not even death should scare the righteous from resistance. As Qassem notes, “We have learned through Imam al-Hussein that the love of martyrdom is part of the love of God. We have learned to glorify jihad for the sake of Islam. Generations after al-Hussein’s resurgence in Kerbala, we still learn from the magnificent accomplishments that materialized through his martyrdom. His vision was not momentary or restricted to the battle: it was directed at the future of Islam and the Muslims.” Imam Husayn’s example was a deed that spoke larger than words; it established a principle and infused a norm: to refuse injustice and humiliation. “[Kerbala] is a symbol for every mistreated person who refuses submission, to resist, and fight by offering his blood, sons, properties, and then cry it out to the whole world”, Hassan Nasrallah characteristically stated in 2002 at an Ashoura gathering, the tenth day of Muharam, a Shi’ite time for grief and for cherishing and cultivating the religious, political and moral ethos of the events in Kerbala.

To die, then, as a martyr for a just cause may not assure a direct victory, but it promises great rewards for the mujahid in the afterlife; and it generates a value, a sense of justice and dignity within the community of believers, even in the harshest of circumstances. The struggle would, thus, validate itself, undermining the enemy’s efforts to consolidate and reproduce

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531 Qassem 2005, p. 28.
532 Ibid. p. 45.
an order of injustice; *to struggle was to qualify the dignity of life*. It also bolstered the self-esteem and clout of the community assuming such a path. To die - or become a martyr - while fighting the injustice is an *ambition*, a reward in itself, as the sacrifice will benefit the strength of the community on Earth and the martyr’s fate in the hereafter. This is what makes faith superior to any secular ideology.\(^5\)\(^3\)\(^4\) As Qassem puts it: “When a man is cultivated to seek victory, making it the sole purpose of his actions, his quest ceases as soon as the possibility of victory seems vague or difficult to achieve. But when brought to learn of jihad and martyrdom, his sacrifice would be of the highest order, his actions effective, his martyrdom a fulfilment of desire, and thus victory would be but a worldly blessing and reward for his efforts.” In that sense, the struggle and the resistance have a value in themselves, even though it may not in the foreseeable future result in a worldly achievement, other than strengthening the community. “Cultivating victory does not assure it”, Qassem argues, “and may weaken the strengths of a nation, while cultivation of martyrdom invests all resources to achieve either martyrdom of victory or both, opening the horizon to all possibilities and *carrying the hope for victory*.”\(^5\)\(^3\)\(^5\) Most important, however, death will not scare Hezbollah’s school of believers. “All that the enemy is capable of is implanting the fear of death in us. When we halt this fear, we render the power of death with

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\(^5\)\(^3\)\(^4\) Note how Nasrallah speaks about fighting for Allah in the first place in 1987. In this regard, the former Secretary-General, Sayyed Abbas Musawi, described the matter of “suicide attacks” from a religious angle, emphasizing the determinism of a fighter’s commitment to Islam and his special relation with God, which, he stated, is based upon a “oneness”, a “melting”, and the perishable world we now experience is the only barrier keeping them apart. Therefore, dying in combat is a “liberation” in itself; a path to peace for the soul and to live in close harmony with God. As he stated: ‘In the other world, man live before God for eternity. Happiness and eternal life is over there. Self-satisfaction and peace of mind occurs in the other world. When man reaches this stage of awareness, a Muslim will break all barriers to become eternal – and the road to break this barrier is martyrdom. If he achieves it, he wins much in this world – but much more in the next world’. Qoutes in Fisk 1991, p. 653.

\(^5\)\(^3\)\(^5\) Qassem 2005, p. 44-45.
which he menaces us futile.” In the mid-nineties, Qassem described this culture of martyrdom as a strength that distinguished Hezbollah fighters and followers from those of the Israelis; in spite of the latter being militarily superior, they were inferior with regard to determination and moral:

When we have casualties, and this can be painful, we continue to praise the victim who sacrificed his life for the nation, and we are proud of him…This is also the environment of the victim’s family and friends, an atmosphere of determination and not of weakness. But when an Israel soldier is killed, senior officials begin crying over his death. They explain that appropriate measures were not taken, and apologize to his family. This causes frustration and confusion in Israel. Their point of departure is the preservation of life, while our point of departure is the preservation of principle and sacrifice. What is the value of a life in humiliation?

The benefit of the community and the cause transcends the integrity of the individual - he is a part of the whole: both the umma on earth and the world of the divine. His fate is that of his community and his worldly life can be utilized if conditions demand it, both to benefit the community and himself. In fact, between those two, himself and his community, there is no distinction. This is the culture of resistance, martyrdom and national dignity that

536 Ibid. p. 48.
537 Haaretz 15 December 1996. Only months before the Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon, Nasrallah similarly stated: “We believe that God promises victory to those who fight for his sake and in defence of their people, their countries and the weak. While it is true that Israel possesses tremendous [material] capabilities, on the human level, it is poor and very weak. What kind of state or army shakes when a number of its officers or soldiers are killed, and allows such events to turn it upside down? Surely this is a sign of weakness. When they suffer losses they tremble because they are not ready to make sacrifices for their beliefs. In contrast, this is exactly our point of strength. We are ready to sacrifice for what we believe in with our lives, and those of our sons, and loved ones. This spirit, which the resistance and the fighters enjoy, is the reason for all of our victories. It is the reason the resistance has continued for the past 17 years without suffering from exhaustion, decline or loss of morale.” Ahram Weekly 2 November 1999.
permeates Hezbollah´s ideological thinking and ambition. It penetrates the *hala al-Islamiyya* or the *mujtumma al-moqawama* in which Hezbollah´s adherents are found. This is where the party´s solid power is entrenched. Its authority, as Harb and Leenders note, is generated from this communal support “among the majority of the Shi’a,” and the “commitment [iltizam] to Hizbullah’s *hala Islamiyya* has become, in many ways, the norm of the majority of the community.”

This is also how to grasp the movement’s ‘Lebanonization’ process. As representatives of the Shi’ite community, the party has been able to force itself into the ‘balance of coexistence’ that is stipulated by the confessional political system in Lebanon. Hence, Hezbollah can impose a ‘veto’ upon any policy that contradicts the interests of the resistance. To speak with Putnam, Hezbollah has thus ‘bonded’ a support for the resistance within the Shi’ite community. Yet, Hezbollah has also ‘bridged’ alliances beyond the Shi’ite community, both – as we have seen – with the Lebanese regime and with the Syrians and other Lebanese actors. For Hezbollah, this bridging has set the resistance as a top priority, excluding domestic conflicts, in contrast to, for instance, the LNM who in the seventies challenged the Maronite regime and thereby exposing itself to an overwhelming number of enemies, including the Syrians who were supported by the Israelis and the U.S. when they cracked down on the LNM and the PLO in the mid-seventies. Hezbollah, as we have seen, instead swallowed its pride at the end of the eighties and cultivated relations and common interests with the Syrians, while making sure that it was able and ready to protect its turf and strongholds. It also mediated an accord with its long-standing foe Amal for the sake of gaining access to the south. This way of bridging for the benefit of pursuing the resistance against Israel would, as we have seen, be a long-term strategy for Hezbollah, even after the Israeli withdrawal. However, it necessitated this further en-
endorsement of the Lebanese formula of coexistence and of Syrian tutelage. This was no less urgent with the U.S. embarking on a more confrontational approach after the 9-11 attacks in 2001. In the following section, I will illustrate how Hezbollah extended its modus operandi with the regime and submitted to the rules of confessionalism, as well as how it finally dominated the Shi’ite community (as evidenced by its victories in the municipal elections). It also defended Syrian tutelage over Lebanon, despite an increasingly loud Lebanese opposition to the Syrian presence. So, if Hezbollah was keen to seek a national consensus and unity in Lebanon, why did it defend the Syrian presence? Siding with Damascus appeared as somewhat of a dilemma for the party after the Israeli withdrawal in May 2000.

6.5 Reaching out: a conditional appeal for unity

As suggested earlier in this thesis, there was a Gramscian ‘counter-hegemonic’ effort in Hezbollah’s attempt to seek common denominators with other actors in Lebanese politics. But what structures of power did Hezbollah aim to break down, and what political conditions did it have to submit to for the sake of this counter-hegemonic ambition? As argued above, Hezbollah’s desire was not only to liberate Lebanese territory from Israeli occupation but also – by doing so - to defy the very norms and perceptions that the movement perceived to have enabled the occupation (and indeed invasion); that is, a sense of weakness and incapacity to stand up against a professed Israeli superiority (which benefited American ambitions for hegemony). In this sense, Hezbollah tapped into the ‘historical dynamic’ of anti-systemic groups and forces that challenged Israeli occupation and Western influence over the Middle East region. Hence, Hezbollah could seek a common denominator between its Islamic idea of emancipation and more nationalist ambitions for independence.
While the party cultivated such an idea of resistance in the *hala al-Islamiyya*, by bonding the religious ties and norms within the Shi’ite community, its efforts also involved a certain amount of bridging across political and sectarian barriers. Firstly, in the parliamentary election in late summer 2000, Hezbollah chose to cooperate on joint lists with its long-term rival, the Amal movement, to the surprise of many observers. After all, many expected, not least of all many followers of Hezbollah, that the party would reap the dividends of its tremendous popularity after the Israeli withdrawal by roundly defeating the Amal movement in the election contest. Yet, in contrast to the 1996 parliamentary elections when the party was forced – by the ‘Syrian hand’ – to share electoral lists with Amal in the south, the cooperation in 2000 was voluntary. The reason was Hezbollah’s objective to maintain its clout within the Shi’ite community by cooperating with potential adversaries who otherwise might shatter this unity – i.e., just as much as it was a question of cooperation, it was also a question of *co-opting* the Amal movement into the new Lebanese order in which Hezbollah saw the persistence of the resistance in the south as supreme. Secondly, Hezbollah also declared its commitment to cooperate with anybody in the Lebanese arena in order to preserve the ideas and norms as well as capacities of the resistance. Nasrallah described an emerging “national dialogue” as a “blessed call” since “foreign challenges cannot be confronted except through unity, cohesion, understanding and cooperation among the people of the country.”

Hezbollah was becoming increasingly accepted by a wide range of players as a bona fide Lebanese party whose existence necessitated recognition. This was evident, for instance, when the French President Jacques Chirac invited

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540 *The most dangerous thing the enemy counts on is internal weakness or division,* Nasrallah charged. *“Cohesion is a weapon in our hand. We are talking about, integration and cohesion. This cannot be imposed through the force of weapons, but through quiet and logical dialogue. When people who share major Islamic and national interests meet and feel that this is their country and that the enemy targets them, they will certainly hold a quiet dialogue and discuss things clearly.”* *al-Manar* 18 August 2003.
Nasrallah to be a guest at the Francophone summit in Beirut in October 2002. For Hezbollah, such occasions also entailed the opportunity to call for national unity. Importantly, while endorsing unity and national cohesion, the party also stressed that the idea of resistance was imperative and reigned supreme in any scheme of national unification. “At the very least, we are engaged in a national enterprise”, Nasrallah stated at a national conference in late 2002. The resistance, he argued, did not belong to any certain party, nor was it a proxy for regional interests, or a sectarian enterprise: it was “an authentic national enterprise.” As he charted: “You and I may differ over particular elections – municipal, parliamentary, trade unions etc. These arguments are legitimate, but when it comes to the resistance, I reiterate that these differences have no background, role, or place.”

That is, Hezbollah’s accommodating gestures of unity were strictly conditioned by this commitment to the resistance.

However, various voices began to question Hezbollah’s continued belligerence and brinkmanship against the Israelis in the south. Some claimed that it expressed Hezbollah’s bewilderment over lacking a real raison d’être after the Israeli withdrawal. Others argued that Hezbollah, through its more regionally oriented scheme, was transgressing Lebanese national sovereignty and that the party displayed a worrisome disrespect for Lebanon as a sovereign state, placing its own radical agenda above the legitimacy of the system and the Lebanese. As an-Nahar columnist Gebran Tueni claimed:

We have heard [from Hizbollah] that the role of the Islamic resistance goes beyond liberating the Shebaa farms and that it is directly linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hizbollah thus views itself as having a role in the regional conflict, including the conflict between Israel and Syria...Doesn’t this contradict what the president of Lebanon, Emile Lahod, said, namely

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541 Sobelman 2004, p. 96.
that Hizbollah’s role is limited to the liberation of Lebanese land, namely the Shebaa farms? Does this mean that Lebanon will continue to be a staging ground for all types of activity and pressure within the framework of the Middle East conflict? Doesn’t the president think the time has come for Lebanon to take a rest?\textsuperscript{543}

However, Hezbollah refuted any such allegations by asserting its ‘Fanonian’ perspective of the region, still mired in violence and threatened by an Israeli ambition to impose solutions by military superiority and force. For Hezbollah, the lingering issue of the Shebaa farms did no only concern the occupation of territory as such but the very order of power in which such occupation were allowed to linger on. Hezbollah saw the Lebanese complex of problems - the Shebaa farms, Lebanese and Arab prisoners in Israeli jails, the Palestinian refugees still remaining in refugee camps in Lebanon - as intertwined with that of the regional conflict and structure of power. As long as these issues remained, Hezbollah called for a continued defiant position. For this author, Naof Musawi described a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict as an “ideal solution”, implying that Hezbollah would have to face a new situation and would act accordingly.\textsuperscript{544} However, making this comment in October 2003, he also added that the region was far from any such solution. With respect to Lebanon, Musawi underlined that neither the liberation of the Shebaa Farms nor the successful conclusion of a prisoner exchange would remove Lebanon from the regional equation. “Around 300 000 Palestinian refugees are present in Lebanon”, he argued, “and it is their right to

\textsuperscript{543} an-Nahar, 10 November 2003. When speaking with this author, one Hezbollah official belittled Tueni’s remarks by arguing that Tueni was “no great thinker, he has no great popular following in Lebanon.” Conversation, Beirut, November 2003. Of course, many Lebanese critical of the Syrian presence in Lebanon would suggest such belittling as arrogant, and perhaps even most naïve. The starkly contrasting positions between Tueni and Hezbollah rather reflected the old historical contest over the Lebanese identity.

\textsuperscript{544} Interview with author, Beirut, October 2003.
return as well as the Lebanese right to make the human claim of their right to return.” Rather dryly, he suggested that “if someone considers these issues a mere pretext for carrying arms, let him regain the Shebaa farms and solve the Palestinian tragedy, and then we’ll give up our arms.” While defending Hezbollah’s armed capabilities, Musawi referred to how the movement in 2002 threatened Israel with military action should the Israelis hinder the Lebanese authorities from expanding its tapping of water from the Hasbani river. The operation was regarded as a success within Hezbollah. In any case, he noted that “as long as the Arab-Israeli conflict remains, Lebanon is not able to stay out of it, and as a part of the Lebanese people, Hezbollah is dedicated to strengthen Lebanon’s role in this conflict.”

This position required strong allies. With respect to the Syrian presence in Lebanon and Hezbollah’s close cooperation with Damascus, Musawi also claimed that Hezbollah should not be regarded as a “Syrian pawn” but rather a “Syrian ally.” To him, it was “not bad at all” for Hezbollah to take sides with Syria in its effort to liberate its occupied land. “In Lebanon, when we were fighting to liberate our land, we benefited from the political and moral support, and the logistics, from Syria. Thus there is a moral, human, and patriotic duty for us to side with the Syrians to liberate their land.”

Indeed, Hezbollah’s resistance project was in many ways enabled and ensured by the persistent Syrian tutelage over Lebanon, and this is why Hezbollah emerged as such a staunch defender of the Syrian presence in Lebanon, despite the increasingly vocal domestic opposition to it. After all, the resistance was the supreme priority for the movement, and Hezbollah saw the Syrian presence as an imperative for guarding the stability from which the resistance could benefit. “The consolidation of civil calm needs the presence of a strong force that imposes security in the country under a general political umbrella”, Nasrallah argued, “and this is what the Syrian troops

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545 Author’s interview, Beirut, October 2003.
546 Ibid
have done in Lebanon.” However, importantly, while Hezbollah was dependent on Syria to be able to persist in its resistance project, the Syrians were also increasingly dependent on its Shi’ite allies, In fact, the cohesive Shi’ite community – or at least those dominating and representing it (i.e., Hezbollah and Amal) - came across as the most loyal partners to Damascus in a Lebanese political terrain that appeared ever more erratic and unreliable to the Syrians, especially as other communities (both the Christians, Druze and Sunnis) began to display signs of unease and hostility towards the Syrians. The clout that Syria had over Hezbollah was, thus, mutual, and the movement was eager to benefit from this influence and carve out space for autonomous manoeuvre for itself in the south, which led to serious frictions with Hariri in 2001.

What is more, Hezbollah’s relations with Damascus changed since Hafez al-Assad died in June 2000, only weeks after the Israeli withdrawal. His son, Bashar al-Assad, who succeeded his father, had cultivated a new relationship with Hezbollah ever since he took over the ‘Lebanese-Syrian file’ in 1998. After 2000, there was a changing of the guard in the Syrian capital to the party’s advantage. Nasrallah cultivated close relations with Bashar al-Assad, in contrast to his father, Hafez, who never even met Nasrallah in person. Observers suggest that Bashar al-Asad also holds the Hezbollah leader in high-esteem, even considering him, at least in those early days, as a “mentor.”

A more problematic side of this alliance with Syria involved the way the Lebanese-Syrian security regime exerted repression mired in corruption and cronyism. In Lebanon, Syria manipulated the Lebanese governments,

\footnote{al-Manar 5 October, 2000.}

\footnote{The frictions with Hariri in 2001 also indicated Hezbollah’s way of stressing the state/resistance continuum, while at the same time tell the Lebanese government that it would not allow itself to be ignored.}

\footnote{Interview with Asaam Namaan, Beirut, January 2007.}

\footnote{For an assessment of Syrian authoritarianism in Lebanon, see Khazen, 2003.}
gerrymandered and controlled elections and monitored (or directed) the Lebanese foreign policy. Syrian elites within the political establishment and the security services had benefited Lebanese banks through which they gained access to smuggling and protection rackets. In 2001, a United Nation-commissioned corruption inquiry estimated that Lebanon had lost nearly $1.5 million annually (more than ten per cent of the country’s gross domestic product) to corruption.\textsuperscript{551} In addition, the economy of Syria also gained from the hundreds of thousands of Syrian labourers who participated in the Lebanese post-war reconstruction, at the expense of the Lebanese workforce, many of them Shi’ites. Such notions, of course, reinforced images of Hezbollah as a “Syrian tool,” and they strengthened the arguments of those who claimed that the whole ordeal of resistance was a sideshow, a mere smokescreen, for the greed of Syrian officials and their Lebanese pawns. This started to wear on Hezbollah, even among its own supporters. However, Hezbollah – and Amal – would keep the Shi’ite’s social grievances in check, thus being a precious ally for Damascus. They appeared to be content with swallowing the bitter pill for the sake of Syrian “protection” of the resistance.\textsuperscript{552}

Yet, whereas Hezbollah’s officials declined to speak out against Syria’s hand in the misconduct, they too were frustrated by the alarming degree of corruption within the regime.\textsuperscript{553} At a nationalist conference in Beirut in 2005, this author would hear many complaints and rumours from Hezbollah’s sympathisers of the corruption practices among Syrian officials in Lebanon. Still, Hezbollah’s officials would never comment on such allegations, but often preferred to keep silent on the subject.\textsuperscript{554} In 2003, this author tried to approach the sensitive topic of how the Syrian supervision over Lebanon started to tarnish the image of the resistance, but they refused to comment on the subject, always underlining how the Syrians had supported the resistance over the years. However, they never denied that Syrian officials were involved in corrupt schemes in the country. It just appeared as a ”no-go” subject to speak about. A source close to the movement, deeply critical of Hezbollah’s silence, suggested to this author in October 2003 (in Beirut): “They do not dare to challenge the Syrians on this topic. Too high stakes are involved, too much money. Hezbollah

\textsuperscript{551} Cambill 2005.
\textsuperscript{552} During visits to Lebanon in 2003-2004, this author would hear many complaints and rumours from Hezbollah’s sympathisers of the corruption practices among Syrian officials in Lebanon. Still, Hezbollah’s officials would never comment on such allegations, but often preferred to keep silent on the subject.
\textsuperscript{553} In 2003, this author tried to approach the sensitive topic of how the Syrian supervision over Lebanon started to tarnish the image of the resistance, but they refused to comment on the subject, always underlining how the Syrians had supported the resistance over the years. However, they never denied that Syrian officials were involved in corrupt schemes in the country. It just appeared as a ”no-go” subject to speak about. A source close to the movement, deeply critical of Hezbollah’s silence, suggested to this author in October 2003 (in Beirut): “They do not dare to challenge the Syrians on this topic. Too high stakes are involved, too much money. Hezbollah

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rut in 2003, only months after the U.S. invasion had consolidated its grip on Iraq, Sayyed Ibrahim al-Amin al Sayyed, a Hezbollah veteran from the top echelon of the party, lashed out at those Lebanese officials who claimed to toe the Arab nationalist line but who had their feet so deep in the mud of theft and stealing that ordinary people in the end, he warned, would find it hard to take them seriously and would instead go looking for ‘international saviours’ and solutions. The speech was given at the height of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the U.S. ambition to spread its ‘war on terror’. Hezbollah dreaded the divisions and ruptures this might bring about on the domestic and regional arenas. As Ibrahim al-Amin argued: “Today, we must see the domestic situation in Lebanon, from the angle of the [U.S.] aggression the region is facing, and we are afraid that the domestic political and financial crises will pave the way for the American political project, which is creeping towards Lebanon.” In reference to Iraq (and perhaps Syria), he said, “just like with the repression and corruption in the Arab world, what happens in Lebanon will force the Lebanese to be snatched by the American calls, even if these calls are lies and deception, and there will be no popular confidence in the nationalist alternative.”

Hence, in the era after the Israeli withdrawal, this posed a dilemma for Hezbollah: it enjoyed the protection of the Syrian-Lebanese security regime to conduct its course of resistance, but this project of resistance – however noble and “clean” - was also sullied by the malfeasance of the incumbent elites of this very regime. To resolve this dilemma, Hezbollah chose to remain aloof of the political system; maintaining a presence in parliament while taking no responsibility in the government. In 2003, Nasrallah asserted that Hizbollah were no “power lovers” and that they would not join the government head-on even if given the opportunity. On the one hand, the gov-

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is happy as long as it is allowed to continue with the resistance; they don’t want to upset or cause a rift with Damascus.”

ernment should have a clear policy, he argued, and not only be a formula for representing the various sects making up the country’s demographic fabric, a clear reference to the Lebanese sectarian system that the party despised.\footnote{See interview with Nasrallah, \textit{al-Arabie} 24 March, 2003.}

On the other hand, Nasrallah acknowledged a bargain made with the government: as long as the resistance enjoyed state recognition, the party would accept the confessional system and conduct its role as a loyal, but critical, opposition in parliament. “Hard sectarian calculations are ruling the set-up of this system”, he said, “and we are bound by this set-up.”\footnote{Ibid.}

In the pending era of domestic turbulence, Hezbollah zealously maintained and protected this arrangement, especially as it feared schemes of division and strife. Hezbollah, thus, persisted in subordination to a system it essentially despised and rejected for the sake of protecting the resistance. This effort thrived under Syrian tutelage, perhaps even more with the new Syrian regime under Bashar. Yet the crux was the corruption that penetrated the nexus of Lebanese and Syria security services and that ate at the image of Hezbollah’s ‘cleanliness’.

Moreover, domestic grievances and criticism was not the only problem facing Hezbollah’s resistance project. The ‘war on terror’ unleashed in late 2001 (after the 9-11 attacks in the U.S.) targeted in particular Hezbollah and the Syrian dominance over Lebanon, the U.S. policy tending to aggravate the tension within Lebanon in order to isolate Hezbollah and push Syria out of the country. Yet, the party pursued its defence of Syria’s presence in Lebanon, and it continued to advocate a dialogue conditioned upon the maintenance of the resistance. But did not this appear paradoxical, especially as the Syrian presence triggered increasing divisions in Lebanon? The next section of this chapter will discuss how Hezbollah saw the Lebanese unity as contingent upon the resistance, since its main predicament was centred on a
regional level. This would over again become evident in aftermath of the 9-11 events and the ‘war on terror’.

6.6 Post-9-11: dreading and daring schemes of division

As we have seen, just as Hezbollah was being criticized for its ‘adventurism’ in the south, the Lebanese regime and Syrian tutelage came under increasing pressure and criticism, both domestically and internationally. The party’s increasingly uneasy position at home was both the result of and most likely reason for an escalating U.S. campaign against both Hizbollah and Syria. Almost instantly after the September 11 attacks in the U.S., the Bush administration singled out Hizbollah as a top ranking target in the ensuing “war on terrorism.” Dealing with old enemies anew, the U.S. strategy implied an obvious redrawing of the map of interests. While the Clinton administration through the nineties had tried to co-opt Ba’thist Syria at the negotiation table, the Bush administration sought to isolate Syria by weakening its influence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and driving a wedge into the alliance between Damascus and Beirut. In that way, Washington would be able to deprive Hizbollah of the political cover it enjoyed from Syrian tutelage in Lebanon. Daunting demands were imposed on Damascus: it should close down the offices of Palestinian groups that favoured armed struggle and opposed the Oslo Accords and the Palestinian authority (such as Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and others, most of them designated ‘terrorists’ by the U.S. State Department). It should disarm Hizbollah, withdraw its forces from Lebanon, and start to cooperate with the U.S. occupation in Iraq. Certainly, instead of co-optation, Washington demanded Damascus’ submission.\footnote{Andreas Malm points out that even though the armed Palestinian struggle emanates from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and even though these offices of the Palestinian groups in Damascus are of a mere political nature, they were too much} The U.S. had
various tools with which to exert pressure; one was, of course, the invasion of Iraq, which deployed over a 100,000 U.S. troops in a neighbouring country east of the border of President Bashar al-Assad’s Syria. The Bush government also signed a bill proposed by the Congress, the Syria Accountability Act, which stipulated a range of sanctions against the Damascus regime. Under the thumb of this international pressure, Hezbollah came across as a reliable partner for Syria in Lebanon, and as we have seen, the appreciation was mutual. After the 9-11 attacks in the United States and the ‘war on terror’, the Lebanese Islamists feared that the pending conflicts would be aimed at breaking up a new scheme across the Middle East. Commenting on the 9-11 attacks, a Hezbollah press release cautioned that there should be “no panic”, which might “give the US administration free rein to practice all types of aggression and terrorism under the pretext of fighting aggressions and terrorism.” The party statement claimed that “the big question” now was whether the U.S. planned to respond to “the perpetrators of the latest attacks [i.e., the 9-11 assaults], or whether it wants to exploit those tragic events to exercise more hegemony over the world and practice more unjust policies which have led to this level of hate against the U.S. by many people and governments in the world.”

559 While Hezbollah – like several other Islamist movements and personalities – condemned the 9-11 attacks as illegitimate and immoral, it also placed them into a context of a

for Washington, which - by closing them down – aimed to suppress and silence the very voice of the Palestinian cause. See Malm 2004, p. 377-378. In an interview in the Syrian capital with a spokesman of one of these Palestinian organisations, he said that the meeting better be registered as have taken place on the planet Mars. “I’ve hear some space wagon discovered water up there, so we Palestinians might better go there anyway”, he suggested bitterly. Author’s interview, Damascus, spring 2004.

558 As Raymond Hinnebusch notes, “These demands struck at Syria’s most vital interests – its cards in the struggle over the Golan, its sphere of influence in the Levant, its Arab nationalist stature in the Arab world, its stability at home. No Syrian government could accede to them except under the direst and most imminent threat.” Hinnebusch 2005, p. 8.

power structure in which the aggressive and dominating policies of the U.S. generated popular rage. Hezbollah MP Muhammed Fneish told this author that “no responsible political player could justify these attacks on any moral, religious nor political bases,” and that they did not “advance any political cause.” However, he also added that they may have provided a vent for public joy in the streets, since the U.S. Middle Eastern policy for many years had accumulated rage and indignation.\textsuperscript{560}

In an instructive speech only weeks after the 9-11 attacks, Nasrallah reiterated Ayatollah Khamenei’s ‘universal’ call that one should condemn “the killing of innocent people all over the world, from Hiroshima, to Nagasaki, to Dayr Yasin, to Sabra and Shatila, to Qana, to New York, and others.” But Nasrallah’s statements also expressed the “ontology of violence” that permeates Hezbollah’s worldviews by emphasizing that there was no universalism involved in the American outcry over the 9-11 attacks; it was “regrettable,” he said, that “the whole world is asked to engage in the hysteria of condemnation just because these incidents took place in the United States and just because the victims were Americans.” Had they been Arab or Muslims, he said, the situation would have been poles apart, naming the various massacres perpetrated at the hands of Israelis that did not elicit U.S. condemnation. Not only would the U.S. \textit{refuse} to condemn Israeli shedding of Arab blood, Nasrallah went on, but it would also “endeavour to\textit{ prevent any denunciation} of Israeli crimes, massacres, and terrorism” by using “its influence in the UN Security Council to block any UN statement of condemnation.”\textsuperscript{561}

The entire people of Afghanistan are today facing displacement, in addition to their misery, poverty, deprivation, and starvation. Millions of Afghans are fleeing their country only because the United States suspects

\textsuperscript{560} Author’s interview, Beirut, May 2002. 
\textsuperscript{561} \textit{al-Manar}, 16 September, 2001. Nasrallah’s claim of a more universal condemnation of the killing of civilians is, of course, unsound with respect to his repeated praise of Palestinian attacks on civilian Israelis in Israel.
Bin Ladin...It punishes them without any piece of evidence, without trial. [The US] is the attorney, the judge, and the executioner. This is the US arrogance. In the meantime, Israel, the Israeli rulers, the Israeli army, who, according to all documents and pieces of evidence, are guilty of the massacres they committed, should not be denounced. The tragicomedy here is that Israel, in the view of the United States, is the oasis of democracy, humanity, and civilization in the backward Middle East. Israel is also one of the forces, whose cooperation and great experience, will be utilized in the fight against terrorism. This is the US justice, brothers and sisters.\footnote{Ibid.}

According to Nasrallah, the U.S. targeting of Osama Bin Laden was a mere ‘pretext’ for imposing ‘US control and domination in the world’ by ‘establishing military basis in Afghanistan and Central Asia, near the Caspian sea, in the Gulf, and the Mediterranean and for [protecting] Israel...In this context, it should be clear to every Arab, Muslim, and honest person in the world that no one should extend assistance to the United States in its aggression against Afghanistan or any other people in the world’. Furthermore, Nasrallah urged Arab and Islamist leaders - and he especially addressed the Islamist movements around the Muslim world - to stay away from the U.S. labelling of the war as a ‘new crusade’, since this was a discourse construed by Western leaders (he explicitly mentioned Bush and Berlusconi) who wanted to sow division among the Arabs and the peoples of the Middle East. “No Muslim should believe that the war waged against the Arabs and Muslims is Christianity’s war against Islam’, he stated. Any such comprehension of the conflict would cause a catastrophe by inflicting civil strife within the umma and ultimately weaken it in the face of those aspiring to control the Arab and the Muslim world:

O brothers and Sisters, O Arab and Islamic peoples: You should know that the Zionists want to see a war between Christianity and Islam and a war be-
tween Christians and Muslims all over the world. Would you fulfil that desire for them? Many Christians and Muslims reject terrorism whatever its source might be. They adopt great positions in fighting Israel and Zionism, and have offered martyrs who defended Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, the Arab homeland, and the Islamic states. By all standards, no one should be drawn to sedition of this kind.  

This call for unity and common bond with the Christians of the region, thus, resembled the call for unity as professed in the ‘Open Letter’ of 1985, in which Hezbollah wanted to construe a political common platform by rooting certain norms in the more general dimension of faith, which, he said, Muslims shared with Christians. He warned, however, that the alleged clash between Christianity and Islam could easily tap into various “local, regional, national, or sectarian conflicts” around the world, but cautioned that “the burning of a church anywhere… in retaliation for the burning of a mosque” only would serve the “schemes of the Zionists and the Arrogant.” The war, he said, had nothing to do with any such religious clashes. It was especially wedded to the ambitions of the U.S. administration and the nature of its quest for hegemony. Nasrallah stated, “it involves the savage, capitalist, materialistic, and arrogant mentality that has no connection whatsoever to Jesus Christ, to Christianity or to Christians.” Still, while urging caution, he did not call for restraint in the very confrontation with the American and Israeli systematic ambitions to keep the region subordinated. There was no change in policy.

6.7 Assailed, again

As U.S. troops entered Iraq, the threat of a Shi’ite-Sunni fitna appeared to seriously undermine Hezbollah’s call for Muslim unity. Not only would the  

563 Ibid.
very radical restructuring of power in Iraq after the collapse of Saddam’s regime allow for schemes in which Sunni groups and elites could be pitted against Shi’ites; the very chaos that ensued in Iraq offered a platform and foothold for extremely militant Salafist and Wahabite-inspired Islamist groups. Many of these were affiliated with the obscure networks of al-Qaida that denounced Shi’ite Islam as rafadiyye (rejectionist) and that, thus, formulated a more exclusionist and sectarian agenda than nationalist-oriented Islamist groups like Hezbollah.\textsuperscript{564} Central for many of these groups is the notion of takfir, i.e., to denounce Muslims as apostates if they do not abide by the ‘true’ path of Islam. These Sunni Islamist radicals contasted starkly with Hezbollah’s strategy of ‘Lebanonization’, which widely diverged from that exclusionist outlook since the movement had subordinated to the structures of the Lebanese state and even recognized the borders in the south. Moreover, apart from such an exclusionist and belligerent takfiri outlook, these Sunni Islamists also assumed a transnational position, i.e., they formed an Islamist creed that did not recognize national borders or nation-states, instead seeking a confrontation on a transnational level. By ‘transnational’ was meant, according to Djevlis, that their network had no public base comparable to nationally oriented Islamist groups (like Hezbollah). Their members identified with a Muslim umma (nation) rather than with a particular nation-state; and that “territory serves only as a temporary base for some greater project, not as an object of desire or control in its own right.”\textsuperscript{565} A case in point is a Salafist tract published in March 2004 by Al-Tartusi that depicted Hezbollah as a rafadiyya-movement. In the tract, Hezbollah is described as an ally to “infidelity and apostasy”, since it is subordinated to the Syrian regime that is governed by the secular Ba’th party. Furthermore, the tract

\textsuperscript{564} Hamas has also displayed an inclusive agenda and strategy akin to that of Hezbollah. However, this accommodating position has provoked Sunni Islamists affiliated with Al-Qaida. Hamas has even been urged to join these Sunni Islamists on the condition that it cuts ties with Iran and Syria as well as Hezbollah. Strindberg & Wärn 2005, p. 28.

\textsuperscript{565} Dejvi 2005, p. 153.
contends that Hezbollah “does not even conceal its ignorant, nationalist orientation” and that it has “sullied itself” by adapting to the Maronite governed regime in Lebanon and by assuming an ultimately secular system, including the embracing of national unity and observing the law of the state. “It is a Lebanese party protecting nothing but Lebanese lands”, the tract went on, criticizing Hezbollah for not crossing the Lebanese borders and for seeking allies on the basis of territorial belonging “regardless of religion, virtue, and ideological orientation.” This implied “that Hezbollah is not an Islamic Jihadi movement, striving to establish a world of Allah and his rule; rather it is a Lebanese national rafadite movement whose only concern is spreading Shi’ite Islam.” In this way, Hezbollah’s pragmatic alliances with various Lebanese ‘criminal gangs’ only aimed at protecting the party from domestic confrontation and conflict. Hezbollah also exploited the Palestinian cause for propaganda purposes, presenting itself as a legitimate defender of Palestine, while in reality it served the interests of both Syria and Israel by “preventing the armed Palestinian groups present in Lebanon from practicing their legitimate right of protecting Palestine.”

The Israeli withdrawal had, thus, been carried out because the Israelis shrewdly regarded Hezbollah as a “better guard against the Palestinian mujahidin than the SLA.”

From this more radical and clearly transnational standpoint, Hezbollah appeared as a sell-out’, or, as the Gramscian problematic accounted for

566 As al-Tartusi claimed: “The Jewish Zionists are interested in their security, and they do not care about the type or colour of the dog that guards them, be it a Syrian from among the Ba'ath-Ansaries, or a Lebanese from among the Shi’ite Rafidite soldiers. If Hezbollah is honest with its calls for Jihad and in its claims of liberating Palestine from the invading Zionists, why is it preventing tens of thousands of Palestinians residing in Lebanon, as well as other Sunni Muslims desiring to fight and wage Jihad for the sake of Allah, from implementing their right and waging Jihad against the Jewish Zionist through the southern borders?...Hezbollah, itself, has announced time and again that its resistance will not exceed the Lebanese lands, and that its resistance is restricted to the Lebanese lands, aimed to liberate Lebanon and committed to the directives and laws of the Lebanese state. It has no connection to Palestine, nor to the Palestinian resistance.” Tartusi 2004.

567 Ibid.
in Chapter 2, by ‘strategic accommodation’ (or a ‘war of position’). Hezbollah had been ‘co-opted’ into the system. Its revolutionary ambitions had gone awry as it now served and consolidated structures of power that it was supposed to reject. The movement had effectively become neutralised by a process of transformismo in which borders demarcated armed struggle, and political inclusion effectively implied political pacification. Of course, Hezbollah rejected any such criticism, and it was deeply disturbed by the Sunni Islamist groups that promoted this sectarian and exclusionist outlook. Firstly, Hezbollah refuted the idea of a takfiri ideology. As Ali Fayyad, a senior ideologue within Hezbollah, described it to this author:

We practice the idea of the umma, taken from the root amma, which means ‘to go’, ‘to move forward’, ‘to have some place as your destination’. The idea is that a group has a common objective, a common goal to struggle for. This means that the umma must be flexible and not rigidly conceived…There may be many roads towards reaching this goal, not just one. This differs from the conception of the umma as a group, which is held by the Wahhabis. Their conception of the umma does not imply plurality, they believe in one solid entity. Our conception involves plurality. Taking this from the theoretical to the practical level, it enables us to say that the umma includes a variety of parties, currents and sects. All these are Muslims, those concerned with the faith and those who are not. Even secular Muslims are part of this umma. This is completely different from the thought of the Wahhabi movements…By extension, this implies that the conception of the umma may also include non-Muslims, Christians and Jews…If we apply this notion of the umma, we can never endorse the notion of takfir [declaring Muslims to be apostates].

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568 Interview with author, Beirut, March 2004. This interview was conducted in the context of this increasing speculation about an ascending Shi‘ite-Sunni in the region and the way this would impact on the various struggles that Islamist movements were involved in.
He, thus, reiterated and concurred with the position that Hezbollah had promoted ever since the Open Letter in 1985: that the resistance was supreme and universal and that the party would not hesitate to ally itself with anyone agreeing on the terms of resistance against the Israeli and American schemes of subjecting the region to a U.S. hegemony. Likewise, in March 2002, Nasrallah spoke about the imperative of Muslim unity and how the momentum of the Iranian revolution was lost in the eighties because too many Muslims identified Ayatollah Khomeini with Shi’ism, thereby undermining the need for unity of Muslim ranks. Now, the Muslim world was facing the same challenge after the September 11, as the U.S. desired to cause splits and division. “Why don’t we hold each other’s hand and defend our great interests?” he asked. “These interests do not belong to a certain sect of Muslims. They concern all Muslims. We see at present this war and campaign as declared on Islam to which we belong, and the Quran which we believe in and the prophet and the prophecy in which we believe.” Without mentioning names, he contended that there were “some people in our Islamic world who insist on causing disputes between Muslims, and wasting enormous amounts of money on printing books that create differences and hatred between various Muslim creeds, and this is truly sad.”

Still, while Hezbollah was careful not to take its criticism too far for fear of inflaming sectarian divisions, it lashed out against certain Islamist creeds, like the takfiriyuun groups and the Taliban in Afghanistan. For instance, after the assassination of widely revered Shi’ite scholar Sayyed Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr (by many Shi’ites referred to as the ‘Iraqi Khomeini’)

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569 When debating this issue, a cadre within Hezbollah argued, “if there is a logic, there is a logic, and then we may both discuss it, identify it, and perhaps agree upon it, in order to proceed in unity, even if I’m a believing Muslim and you are not.” Conversation, Beirut, April, 2004.
571 Hezbollah officials have also complained that some satellite channels in the Arab and Muslim world make efforts to talk of differences between Sunni and Shia. Therefore, the al-Manar hosts programs in which representatives of Sunnite and Shi’ite scholars speak about common religious and political topics in order to display and discuss the common ground between them.
in late August 2003, Nasrallah denounced the takfiriyyun as the most dangerous creed for the umma. Following an attack against a Shi`ite mosque in Baghdad in April 2004, he condemned the Islamist radicals for triggering sectarian strife and division that only would benefit the U.S. and Israel. “I cannot say that this is ignorance; it is treason…Those who kill and target the occupiers can be classified as Islamic fighters and loyal patriots. On the other hand those who target the Iraqis are assassins belonging to the American caravan. They are accomplices in the American crime…”572 Indeed, in February 2006, after a large scale bomb attack against of the world’s holiest Shi`ite shrines in Iraq, the 1000-year-old Imam Ali al-Hadi mausoleum, which prompted a wave of sectarian violence whilst Iraqi Shi`ite militias attacked a series of Sunni mosques, Nasrallah called for calm at a mass rally in Beirut. The first to benefit from these attacks, he claimed, is the U.S. occupation, which seeks to exacerbate sectarian strife and make the Iraqis feel that the occupation is their only guarantee for security. The occupation, he claimed, is afraid of popular unity. The second to benefit, he stated, are the takfiriyyun, who wishes to provoke a civil war between the Shi`ites and the Sunnis, instilling a climate of strife and hatred that only serves the American project of division.573 For Hezbollah, the sectarian hostilities of these groups only served to undermine the counter-hegemonic efforts the party had been trying to foster. Hezbollah’s purpose was to unite a wide array of identities into a Gramscian ‘historical bloc’ of cohesion that could resist U.S. interference and Israeli aggression.

573 See ad-Diyar, 24 February 2006. In 2006, Nasrallah also claimed that his party’s intelligence sources had heard from ‘trustworthy’ sources that many of these obscure militant groups were funded and directed by the CIA and the Mossad. See speech al-Manar, 30 March 2006.
6.8 **Nationalist resistance with a transnational commitment**

Hezbollah, thus, appeared to be squeezed between two kinds of criticisms: one that denounced the movement for transgressing Lebanese sovereignty and pursuing a transnational ambition of the Islamic revolution, and another that blamed the movement for subjugating itself to a national and ultimately secular project. Indeed, as we have seen, Hezbollah did not deny that its actions are limited to Lebanese territory. However, the contention of this dissertation is that Hezbollah nonetheless - while limiting its actions to the nationally defined territory of Lebanon – was aiming to promote a more transnational ambition of undermining U.S. hegemony in the region and embedding this struggle in the Islamic faith. These were also, inevitably, the cornerstones of the Islamic revolution, whose nature and ambition was *transnational*; i.e., to spread across borders, upset power structures and create a new revolutionary mindset and consciousness among the ‘Muslim masses’ in order to confront the incumbent regimes (denounced by Ayatollah Khomeini for serving a U.S.-directed order). However, Hezbollah’s strategy, in contrast to radical Sunni rejectionist groups, was to unleash these revolutionary impulses from within the system. Hence, it sought platforms of unity with other ideological parties and strands in cultivating common ambitions and values. By allowing for such congruence of identities and ideas, Hezbollah had embedded its resistance project within the Lebanese social and political fabric, especially within the Shi’ite community.

However, to repeat, Hezbollah’s call for national unity was *strictly conditioned* upon adherence to the idea of resistance against Israeli aggression and against a U.S. quest for hegemony. In the immediate aftermath of 9-11, when the Lebanese government was under U.S. pressure to impose severe restrictions on Hezbollah’s activities in south Lebanon, Nasrallah warned that if “the Lebanese government would become like a police force for American, and by extension Israeli, interests,” it could “lead the country
to a civil war." Thus, unity had the political purpose of resisting American interference and control. A similar case in point is Nasrallah’s controversial proposal to mediate a “national reconciliation charter” between Saddam Hussein’s regime and the Iraqi Shi’ite-dominated opposition (which were long-term deadly foes), while the U.S. was mobilising an international coalition for invading Iraq in early 2003. However, to the Iraqi Shi’ite opposition (historically, religiously and through numerous family ties wedded to the Shi’ites of Lebanon), the proposal was a non-starter and rejected.

It has been argued thus far that Hezbollah’s strategy of accommodation was consistently conditioned on Lebanon remaining committed to the resistance and that Hezbollah should not be disarmed or obstructed by the Lebanese state authorities. From a ‘Gramscian angle’, the movement conquered a certain amount of space and turf in the ‘war of positions’. It was deeply rooted within the Shi’ite constituency in Lebanon, and the resistance was given protection by prevailing Syrian tutelage over Lebanon. To be sure, Hezbollah had decreased its activity in the border zone since 2003, but it still claimed to have achieved a ‘balance of terror’ against the Israelis. As this balance allegedly deterred the Israelis from attacking Lebanon, it weakened the Israeli image of being military superior. This defeat of the Israeli image of ‘invincibility’ has been a central objective for Hezbollah. By continuously challenging this image of Israeli military might, Hezbollah hoped to upset structures of power by creating a new ‘common sense’ that might persuade the people throughout the region to see the benefit and possibility in being assertive and defiant, especially against the peace negotiations and the way Arab regimes sought to meet U.S. conditions for putting an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict. For Hezbollah, the Palestinian ordeal is the axis of both the hegemonic ambitions of the U.S. and the counter-hegemonic ambitions that derive from the legacy of the Islamic revolution.

575 See as-Safir February 2003
Furthermore, the party’s ambition to ‘reconstruct’ the Lebanese identity involved assuming the idea of resistance. It could also be understood as part of the ‘war of positions’, i.e., as a gradualist strategy to embed itself in the political and social structures of the country in order to cultivate certain norms and increase levels of power and influence. For this purpose, Hezbollah stressed the idea of resistance as a universal principle while playing down cultural and social-conservative Islamic features (such as forbidding alcohol, nightclubs and so on) since these could undermine cohesion around the resistance. This did not imply that Hezbollah evaded the religious depth as such, since the pious commitment was firmly embedded within its own constituency. Its strategy was, thus, to combine the self-assertion and determination of this constituency with a more alliance-oriented policy towards Lebanese groups that would abide by the idea of resistance.

Equally crucial, the Gramscian idea of hegemony involves a dynamic and dialectic struggle that it is not ‘linear’. A strategic counter-hegemonic scheme can be both offensive and defensive. It entails conquering positions and privileges as well as protecting what is already conquered and possessed. In this regard, counter-hegemonic forces might be forced - if they are to be effective - to cooperate with groups with which they may share common strategic interests, especially with respect to opposing a hegemonic structure. For instance, when reflecting on the pre-World War II context of Germany, Trotsky claimed that the Communist Party had been too ideologically doctrinaire and particularistic in their refusal to cooperate with the Social-Democrats against the rise of Fascism. That was one reason, he argued, why Fascism was able to defeat the left in Germany. It may well be suggested that this ‘Trotskyan insight’ is similar to how Hezbollah has oriented its strategy of inclusion, declaring its openness (ever since the ideological declaration published in 1985) to cooperate with anyone to resist the ‘Zionist enemy’. The movement was part of the resistance front to oust the Israelis.

from Lebanon in the mid-eighties. Then it fought for its claimed right to gain access to the so-called Israeli ‘security zone’ in the years following the large scale withdrawal in the late eighties (even making enemies with Amal and Syria in the effort). The party’s ‘Lebanonization’ process involved how the resistance should become a congruent part of the Lebanese national identity, in contrast to earlier nationalist images that described ‘Lebanon’s weakness as its strength’ or claimed a Lebanese ‘neutrality’ in the larger regional confrontation, especially the Arab-Israeli conflict. After the withdrawal in May 2000, some confusion reigned concerning Hezbollah’s attitude towards this struggle. The movement maintained a precarious position along the border, causing trouble but not war in the tense climate of mutual provocations with the Israelis. This seemed to be a ‘defensive’ war of position; it was about keeping the conflict alive and reminding the Israelis of Hezbollah’s victory rather than taking the battle into Israeli territory (as observers had warned of and envisaged). This war of position, as also argued in this thesis, carried a Fanonian meaning involving how Hezbollah sought to break down common images of Israeli ‘invincibility’ and self-proclaimed Arab weakness.

In this way, Hezbollah’s vanguardism reflected Che Guevara’s idea of guerrilla warfare as a ‘catalysing agent’, i.e., how a determined vanguard in one place would be able ‘echo’ impulses of defiance to inspire and inform other rebellious movements to rise up against centres of power in oppressive arenas elsewhere.\footnote{As Michel Löwy describes Che Guevara’s “foco-theory” on guerrilla-warfare and its wider repercussions; “by its politico-military action, guerrilla warfare tears away the mask form the ruling authority, compelling it to reveal the nakedness of its violent dictatorship, and at the same time shows its vulnerability, its weakness, together with the impunity and invincibility of the guerrillas; it thus arouses the revolutionary consciousness and fighting enthusiasm of the masses and makes it possible for the second subjective condition to appear and strike root: confidence that victory over the oppressors is possible.” Löwy 1973, p. 85.} Similar to many third worldist movements, Hezbollah’s objective was to claim dignity and boost the self-esteem of the masses that the movement perceived as suppressed and subjugated. According to John Holloway, this aspect of “dignity” as a political category is invariably sub-
versive because “the consistent pursuit of dignity in a society based on the denial of dignity is in itself revolutionary.” That is, it breaks down the norms and rules that obscure, consolidate and reproduce marginalisation and oppression in society. Writing about the Zapatista struggle in Mexico, Holloway argues:

If dignity were simply the assertion of something that already is, then it would be an absolutely flabby concept, an empty complacency. To simply assert human dignity as a principle (as in ‘all humans have dignity’) would be either so general as to be meaningless or, worse, so general as to obscure the fact that existing society is based on the negation of dignity. Similarly, if dignity were simply the assertion of something that is not, then it would be an empty daydream or a religious wish. The concept of dignity only gains force if it is understood in its double dimension, as the struggle against its own denial.

This quest for dignity informed Hezbollah’s stern rejection of the peace negotiations, the conditions of which the Islamist movement considered to mirror the denial of dignity of the Arabs, certainly that of the Palestinians. Its emphasis on the quest for resistance that conditioned its ‘Lebanonization process’ mirrored this ‘subversive’ appeal for dignity: to liberate the land by armed force rather than begging for it. Thanks to the break down of the Arab-Israeli negotiations in 2000, Hezbollah could also maintain this belligerent and defiant position; in fact, this was the strategy of the movement. The collapse of this process was a victory equal to Hezbollah’s liberation of the south, since both implied – according to the party - that resistance was the only logic that could defeat the Israelis and gain concessions from the Zionist state, i.e., resistance was the realistic alternative to a settlement that would otherwise be unjust and humiliating.

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580 Ibid.
The crux of the matter was that Hezbollah could continue to promote this view while adapting to the confessional system that it essentially despised and rejected. Strategically speaking, Hezbollah benefited, paradoxically, from this system, as it had been able to portray itself as the dominant party of the Shi’ite community and, thus, adjust the ‘balance of coexistence’ as stipulated by confessionalism. However, the party made concessions in the domestic arena of politics. In particular, it did not push for any reforms of the confessional system, which had, ideologically speaking, been a longstanding demand, while it sternly refused any disarming of the resistance.

While the movement’s actions were concentrated inside Lebanon, its ambitions also lay beyond Lebanon. For Hezbollah, there was no contradiction in both promoting a national and a transnational project – these two being intertwined. In this sense, Hezbollah’s accommodation to the Lebanese state was to accept the already ongoing historical contest over the state and national identity, long preceding the advent of Hezbollah. After all, the Lebanese Islamists emerged in a context in which the Lebanese left – also firmly committed to the Palestinian cause and deeply critical of the confessional construction of the Lebanese state – crumbled alongside the Israeli defeat of the PLO in Lebanon in 1982. In contest with Amal, Hezbollah managed to gradually develop its own constituencies within the sectarian structures of the Lebanese social and political fabric. Inspired by the Iranian revolution and the sectarian mobilisation (that finally conquered the secular left), Hezbollah succeeded in surviving the turbulence of the Lebanese war. It then adapted to the new post-Taif order by both rooting itself within the Shi’ite community and by conforming to the confessional system under the Syrian tutelage, which enabled Hezbollah’s resistance project to thrive and develop. Under those conditions and circumstances, Hezbollah assumed the challenge of partaking in the reconstruction of the Lebanese national identity.
and embedding this identity in resistance against Israeli aggression and the rejection of Western interference.

In this sense, there was also an additional dimension of nationalism in this so-called ‘Lebanonization process’. It is a reminder that national identity (as argued in Chapter 2) is constantly transformed and contested within the realm of the political struggles that concern the structures and direction of the state itself, and Lebanon is no doubt a case in point. Hezbollah’s assumption of the Lebanese identity did not imply an adjustment to an already given or settled idea of the nation. The party’s claim to a Lebanese identity tapped into the historical contest over the Lebanese national character. Hezbollah aimed at promoting an idea of the Lebanese nation as pluralistic and co-existing but also strong, cohesive and defiant, embedded in the successful experience of resistance against Israel. In this sense, Hezbollah’s adopted nationalism resembles Fanon’s idea of nationalism as a vehicle for struggle and not as an end in itself. Importantly, Fanon saw no ‘essence’ in a national or native identity, but he claimed that values and norms are shaped by actions and achievements in the field. An identity, whatever its character, could only serve the purpose of action, and, moreover, action would also shape the nature of the identity. Without action, any claimed identity would remain an empty shell, or worse, a rigid, exclusionary conception that may lead down the blind alley of chauvinism and exclusion. Furthermore, Fanon stressed this dimension of action and identity-making in the process by which the nation was shaped and construed within the anti-colonial struggle for independence. The notion of a nation could bring an awareness of unity and cohesion among the colonized, as they had to define their adversaries and at the same time overcome conflicting interests of tribe, ethnic affiliation and class (associations fostering particular loyalties that might bring down the unity needed to defeat the colonial order). Pal Ahluwia has described Fanon’s idea of a national identity as fostered in struggle: “In order to re-
claim the history of the colonized, it is not enough that the colonial power be
defeated. A new consciousness that is part of the national culture is required.” To Fanon, there was “no returning to an old culture. Rather, a national culture arises out of the struggle in the fight against colonialism.”

This Fanonian notion of nationalism is also akin to Khomeini’s understanding, and acceptance, of nationalism. He regarded it as a tool in promoting a certain objective (uniting the Iranians in bringing down the Shah). What is more, the Fanonian idea of a national consciousness could also serve as a tool for mobilisation of self-esteem and awareness. It also brings a constitutive element to the nation as such, i.e., the understanding of the nation can be transformed because of the various dynamics of struggle. To Fanon, concessions to a colonial power in mediating independence could only spell a future weak position and sense of inferiority towards the former ‘masters’. A liberation realized through armed struggle with no concessions would offer a “sounder self-identity” to the consciousness of the nation. Fanon recounts how his own homeland, Martinique, was granted independence by France and how the Martiniquian state was deeply grateful to France. Fanon acknowledges that there was no violent struggle involved in his country’s quest for independence. According to Gail M. Presbey’s interpretation of Fanon’s thinking, a violent struggle for liberation would have shaped a new national consciousness and perception of the nature of French colonialism and how Martinique had been trapped in a certain subordinate role in that order. “The consciousness of the Martiniquian would have been changed after violence”, she notes. They would have seen France as its true enemy instead of its smiling, deceiving friend. Therefore, they would have had a sounder self-identity in relation to the French. Secondly, although ‘independence’ was achieved, the independence after an armed struggle would have had a different character. It could more radically diverge from the colonial government and the native elite. So the effect of violence would have been both

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581 Ahluwhalia 2001, p. 41.
psychological and practical.”\footnote{Presbey 1996, p. 294.} Olufemi Taiwo adds that national consciousness in Fanon’s thinking had to progress beyond the mere liberation of land if to safeguard the country from sliding into destructive divisions of ethnic and religious character once independence was accomplished.\footnote{Taiwo 1996, p. 259.}

This is akin to how Hezbollah has made large efforts in rendering resistance as an inherent trait of a new Lebanese national consciousness. In Lebanon, Hezbollah knew that its emphasis on resistance (especially after the Israeli withdrawal) would sow division and polarize the country. However, assisted by the Syrian protectorate, it considered this polarization manageable and well worth the effort when promoting what it considered to be primary: opposing Israeli and U.S. schemes of controlling and subjugating Lebanon and the Middle East. After all, this was Hezbollah’s central objective: national cohesion should serve the resistance, not be an end in itself. In addition, without resistance, division would probably be even worse, since the Israeli domination and occupation and expansive colonization remained in force, triggering more frustration, rage and conflict. As noted above, for Hezbollah, the resistance was the result of the problem, not the cause of it. The cause was Israel and the prevailing structures of power. Hezbollah’s project of alliance-making around the idea of resistance, thus, functioned both as a matter of right and just cause as well as a realistic means of liberation and a bulwark against division and strife. This is also the context in which it endorsed the Syrian tutelage over Lebanon.

The next and concluding part of this thesis will describe how Hezbollah strictly conditioned its compromise with the Lebanese state over its arms and how it protected the Syrian presence to the ‘bitter end’, i.e., until the Syrians were forced to withdraw after the assassination of Rafiq Hariri in February 2005. It will also illustrate how Hezbollah clung to its position on the resistance after the Syrian withdrawal and how it opted for further inte-
gration in order to protect its armed capability. In this way, it would still force itself upon the Lebanese state from below, maintaining – and safeguarding – the ‘balance of co-existence’ while securing the privilege for the resistance.

6.9 The conflict over UNSC Resolution 1559

The way in which Hezbollah’s accommodation to the confessionalist pluralism of the Lebanese political system was firmly conditioned by supporting the resistance is well illustrated by the way the situation “heated up” in Lebanon in the summer of 2004, as the presidential mandate of Emile Lahoud was to expire and the Lebanese were preparing for presidential elections. The bone of contention was that the Syrians desired to extend the mandate of Lahoud, a close ally of Syria. Concerned by the Syrian move, the U.S. and France induced the UN Security Council to prepare Resolution 1559, which called for the immediate withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanese territory and the disarmament of armed groups (Lebanese and non-Lebanese) outside the authority of the state. The resolution was voted through in the UNSC the day, after the extension of Lahoud’s mandate was declared. The decision concerning Lahoud (directed by Syria and a largely pro-Syrian Lebanese parliament) caused an outrage among the Lebanese opposition. The country was dividing into very problematic fractions. Of course, these divisions, as we have seen, had been present ever since the formation of the Lebanese state. While temporarily ‘solved’ – or smoothed over – by the Ta’if Accord, they would not now emerge as more troublesome, alongside international pressure.\(^\text{584}\)

\(^{584}\) On September 1, 2004, the extension of Emile Lahod’s presidential mandate, the Maronite Church issued a statement that severely criticised the Syrian presence in Lebanon. “While Syria may have helped Lebanon in some respects, it has exhausted it in others, as it gives orders, appoint leaders, organizes parliamentary elections and
A few days after the decision on the extension (from which Hezbollah had abstained), Nasrallah made a speech in which he emphasized the absolute imperative of a continued Syrian presence in Lebanon. The decision on Syrian troops was not only a Syrian decision, he asserted, but a *Lebanese decision* “par excellence”, since Syria guaranteed “Lebanese security.” In this context, Hezbollah conceived of 1559 as a move towards a *fitna* (civil strife) and a scheme to weaken the resistance by pressuring it to disarm. In his speech, Nasrallah described UNSC 1559 as a position against the will of the Lebanese people, since “the vast majority [of the Lebanese] supports the resistance.” In this regard, he charged that Hezbollah would accept a “popular referendum” on the resistance and that the movement would “accept fair opinion polls if they rely upon such fair polls.”

Nasrallah’s reference to a “popular referendum” is telling because it exposed the delicate balance by which Hezbollah has endorsed Lebanese pluralism. After all, Hezbollah’s own constituency, the Shi’ite community, was deeply discriminated against by the confessional system (in terms of the quotas in parliament), a legacy, as we have seen, of earlier decades when the Shi’ites accounted for a ‘lower rank’ of citizens, the country’s lower class. Hezbollah had entered this bargain involving the acceptance of the confessional system (and the continued discrimination other elections…[it] interferes in all aspects of life in the administration, judiciary, economy, and particularly politics. It compromises Lebanese interests…protects the corrupt…while some of its nationals and some Lebanese share the spoils and trade in power.” See *Middle East International* 10 September 2004. Yet, in an indirect response to the statement, Sayyed Muhammed Hussein Fadlallah claimed, in his Friday speech, that Lebanese politics should be seen in a regional context. “We do not want to talk about a result [of a Syrian presence] that is completely positive or totally negative, since things in this world are relative…we have to turn our attention to the outside challenges, posed by those who wish to subdue the entire region to promote their interests…The problem is that America is trying to use Lebanon as a card in its hands to undermine the unity of the Syrian-Lebanese track. Let us discuss with Syria the issue of freedom and let us determine our position: Are we with the Lebanon that serves the American interests or with the Lebanon, the entity that founds its Arab relations on the basis of a common fate?” See Fadlallah 2004 (www.bayynat.org.lb)

of the Shi‘ites) on the condition that its arms would be protected and the resistance recognized. Nasrallah charged that “the Lebanese people – let us be clear, since we must settle these matters once and for all – are all Lebanese. There isn’t first class, second class, or third class Lebanese. The Lebanese are all the Lebanese in all the districts and areas and the sons of all the communities and political lines and trends? Okay? So these are the Lebanese people.”

A popular vote - that is, a numerical vote outside the discriminatory confines of confessionalism – would illuminate the numerical strength of the Shi‘ites and, hence, the ‘deceptive’ clout of the other communities resulting from confessionalism. However, it would also, he said, reveal the popular support for the resistance. He stated confidently that a popular referendum would decide all “important issues concerning the destiny of the country”, and “what were accepted by the majority would also have to be accepted by the minority.”

Talking of a majority-minority continuum (in which the Shi‘ites would have far more clout and which strongly contrasted the ‘balance of coexistence’ as inherent in the confessional formula) was Nasrallah’s way of – indirectly - reminding the other communities of the bargain that the party – holding sway over the large Shi‘ite community - originally had agreed to. It would accept confessionalism as long as its resistance was recognised. Sticking to this barter, Hezbollah would, thus, paradoxically, embed itself in the confessional formula that it essentially rejected.

For purposes of appeasement, the movement could describe its position as involving a concern for the various minorities in Lebanon, for in-

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586 Ibid.
587 Ibid.
588 Indeed, these were sensitive matters, and two days later, after outrage in the Lebanese media (as Nasrallah touched upon the delicate balance between communities), Hezbollah’s media office issued a statement saying that Nasrallah only ‘posed a clear question about the formula that the Lebanese will adopt should a disagreement [emerge] among them on one of the major internal issues’. See BBC Monitoring Middle East 7 September, 2004.
stance the anxiety among Christians in Lebanon over being dominated by a majority of Muslims. As argued by Hezbollah spokesman Ghaleb Abu Zeinab: “If we want to get full democracy here we need to have everyone persuaded of its benefits, and not afraid that they will be overthrown. Besides, we look at the coexistence we have between the different confessions here as an example, and we don’t want to overthrow it. If it was a ‘majority-minority’ system here it would be explosive. So we’ll hang on to this confessional balance we have for now. But I don’t know what will happen in 20 years.”

From this angle, Hezbollah’s acceptance of the confessional system appeared to be a concession (and to a certain extent, it is), but it was also a means of bringing pressure on the ‘other side’ to accept the bargain. Hezbollah agreed to abide by a system it considered unfair and discriminatory, and in exchange it would be able to maintain its logic of resistance.

In sum, then, for its own ideological purposes, the movement *thrived* in this confessional system, since its clout and popularity within the Shi’ite community enabled it to insert a veto into the Lebanese body politics. Five years after the liberation of the south, the once painstakingly earned national consensus around Hezbollah’s resistance was exhausted. Lebanese politicians, highly suspicious of Hezbollah’s arms, claimed them to be unnecessary in the absence of an Israeli occupation. Hezbollah insisted, however, that they were in the interests of the Lebanese, in the event Israel were to attack Lebanon, for whatever reason.

These efforts on the part of Hezbollah to assume a Lebanese identity in the ‘Fanonian’ sense – of transforming it into an identity of struggle

589 Cobban 2005.

590 Some argued that they made a mockery of the sectarian equilibrium of the country, as Hizbollah’s guerrillas found their home ground in the increasingly assertive, and growing, Shi’ite community. Others argued that they served the interests of Syria or that they were aimed to be deployed against Israel for the sake of Iran, in the case of an Israeli attack against Iranian nuclear facilities.
and self-assertion - would appear as even more explicit as the Syrian troops were forced to withdraw in March 2005 after Damascus was accused of involvement in the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in February 2005. The withdrawal left Hezbollah exposed, since there would no longer be any Syrian ‘protection’ against calls – domestic or international – for the disarmament of the movement’s military wing. Yet, while international pressure to implement UNSC 1559 mounted, there was nothing approaching a national consensus to do so. Hezbollah had a great stake in mobilizing opposition to the resolution, for the sake of protecting the resistance as well as a particular understanding of the Lebanese identity and position (of which the resistance was a part). The domestic turbulence that escalated after Hariri’s assassination split the country into two rival camps: the 8 March camp (the name alludes to a big demonstration headed by Hezbollah in downtown Beirut as a ‘thank-you’ celebration for Syria) and the 14 March (which refers to the anti-Syrian opposition assembling an even larger demonstration a week later). Many who had hoped for an era of independence to follow the Syrian withdrawal witnessed instead a country sliding towards civil war. Whereas the March 14 would lean towards the Western countries (especially the U.S. and France), in addition to Saudi Arabia, the March 8 group cultivated long-standing alliances with Syria and Iran.

At a press conference two days before the rally, Nasrallah warned that the turmoil after the assassination of Hariri had offered the U.S. the opportunity to sow division in Lebanon and, thus, weaken the resolve that the country had enjoyed during the Syrian protectorate. “The aim of America and Israel is to spread chaos in Lebanon and bring it into a state of anarchy”, he claimed. In this new sensitive situation, Nasrallah urged all Lebanese political fractions, loyalists as well as opposition, to engage in a national
dialogue on the basis of the Ta’if Accord.\footnote{For a full text of the press conference, see al-Intiqad, 11 March 2005.} At the demonstration in Riad al-Solh Square in central Beirut, Nasrallah defiantly addressed the U.S. administration, stating: “Your calculations in dividing this country are wrong. Lebanon cannot be divided nor defeated. Lebanon will neither change its name, nor its history, nor its identity...Lebanon will remain the country of Arabism, the country of nationalism, and resistance...I tell the Americans: Do not interfere in our domestic affairs. Let your ambassador relax in is embassy...and leave us alone.”\footnote{as-Safir 9 March 2005. Nasrallah also threatened the U.S. to consider any plans of returning to Lebanon once the Syrians were out of the country.} The speech itself offered two outline: firstly that Hezbollah held the Syrian achievements in Lebanon in high esteem, and secondly, that the party would emphasize the imperative of a “national consensus” as a strategic option in any future course of the country. Indeed, a great many observers were puzzled by the huge turnout at the rally and Nasrallah’s way of expressing his gratefulness to “Bashar’s Assad’s Syria, the resisting Syrian people and the steadfastness of the Syrian Arab Army who accompanied us, and still does, throughout years of defiance and resistance.”\footnote{Ibid.} A Washington Post columnist may have set the tone for many international observers (who saw the Syrian withdrawal as the beginning of a new “dawn” of independence for Lebanon) when he wondered: “Is [Nasrallah] a man of the future or of the past. Is he a Lebanese patriot or a Syrian stooge?”\footnote{David Ignatius in Washington Post, March 11 2005.} Similarly, Michael Young, a Lebanese critique of Hezbollah, claimed that the party had to choose between two options: “Does it want to be local or does it want to be regional? It cannot be both...Lebanese society is under no obligation to accept permanent revolution and an open-ended Syrian domination so Hezbollah can remain regionally relevant.”\footnote{Daily Star March 10 2005.}

However, as we have seen, Hezbollah’s ambition was to make itself and the whole of Lebanon “regionally relevant”, as this would be the ines-
capable fate of Lebanon whether one liked it or not. The country could not close its eyes to the struggle that was rooted in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the question of U.S. hegemony.\footnote{See interview in \textit{al-Hayat}, 20 January 2006.} Later on, Nasrallah explained that the March 8 demonstration in support of Syria was important, since it “absorbed the very considerable and important psychological tensions”, as the country was severely divided into “two sides,” and one of the sides - the anti-Syrian March 14 camp - attacked both Syria and the resistance as a joint project. Serious tensions existed in the streets, Nasrallah cautioned, and the demonstration was aimed at showing the Lebanese and the world that there was a “national rivalry” that should be worked out and channelled on a political level, not left to explode in the street – hence, the need for the “8 March-movement.”\footnote{See interview with Nasrallah in \textit{al-Hayat}, 20 January 2006.} For Nasrallah, the alliance with Syria was a “strategic decision.” He reiterated his position that Syria served the stability of Lebanon and protected the resistance. This strategic and long-term perspective on Lebanese-Syrian relations, he argued, differed starkly from that of the Lebanese elites, who used to ally themselves with the Syrian “protectorate” for their own personal benefits.\footnote{As he put it: ‘I didn’t support Syria in Lebanon because I would receive positions in the state administration, or because it would secure a certain project for me, or to give me a budget to work with, or ministers or MPs in parliament. \textit{That’s how they work.}’ On the contrary, he said, the ‘Syrian committee that used to manage Lebanese affairs up to 2000 would purposely ignore Hezbollah when it came to the Lebanese domestic formula’. Ibid.} Lebanon faced conflicting ideas, though, about the national identity. This was not only a concern for Hezbollah; it was a \textit{Lebanese} problem, he stressed:

What kind of Lebanon do we want? Where do we want Lebanon to go? What is the future of Lebanon, its strategic options, and the policies that should govern the domestic situation and the country’s foreign relations?...Hezbollah
has its point of view, with which some political forces in the government disagree, and with which some other political forces might agree…\footnote{Ibid.}

In this context of rising debates on nationalism and identity, the March 14 camp started to float the discourse of “Lebanon first”, meaning that the Lebanese commitment to Palestine and “Arabness” was becoming obsolete, again evoking the same old query over the identity of the Lebanese nation. To the believers among the party’s adherents, Nasrallah ridiculed such Lebanese ‘isolationist’ discourses by invoking the believer’s continuum between the dummy and the akhira that encompassed the issues of responsibility and obligations of solidarity that “know of no borders at all”, especially for those who feared the hereafter: “What will I say on Judgement Day when I will face the great Lord and he will ask me of my efforts for the oppressed and deprived in Palestine and Iraq?...Shall I tell him, ‘Well, that is not of my concern because I am Lebanese’?”\footnote{al-Manar 24 May 2005.} Still, while this was Nasrallah’s way of embedding the Lebanese problematic in a religious discourse, it expressed concerns that were historically rooted among an array of Lebanese groups and thinkers, religious or not. It is worth noting that Nasrallah’s declared imperative of solidarity and awareness of Lebanon’s predicament as being intertwined with a larger regional problematic was shared by secular elements in Lebanese society. As Joseph Samaha, a veteran leftist Lebanese observer warned: ‘Lebanon First’ is a slogan that is far from answering a prior question:

\textit{Which Lebanon?...Any observer might note that this slogan that is aimed to separate Lebanon from any other axis… [and which] seeks to rearrange the internal balances in Lebanon so that it becomes, with total objectivity, linked to a whole other series of axis. Lebanon entered its crisis in 1975 because there were people who gave the ‘First’ the meaning of isolation from}
the region and its causes…There are things that suggest that this experience might be repeated under the light of objective regional conditions that render the [desired] neutrality an impossibility…

In this regard, Nasrallah stated that the country had to make decisions on some important issues, such as whether Israel was an enemy or not; how to respond to Israeli violations of Lebanese territory, or whether to retrieve the Lebanese territory still under occupation; the issue of Palestinian rights, i.e., their right to return to Palestine or to bear arms. Another vital issue involved future relations with Syria (which the party embraced as a necessity in order to withstand Western and Israeli pressures on Lebanon). Relations with Western states – like the U.S. and France – were equally important. They had increasingly interfered in Lebanese politics, according to Nasrallah. Has Lebanon escaped the Syrian tutelage to now subject itself to American or French tutelage, he wondered? “What are the limits of American and French interference in Lebanon? What is our viewpoint regarding the assistance being provided by our fellow Arabs?” “These are divisive issues”, he pointed out. “There are those who reject any kind of ‘Arabisation’ or Arab assistance, unless it serves their goals. However, they welcome any American and Syrian intervention.” Indeed, the party feared the ‘opening floodgates’ of Western interferences as the Syrians left Lebanon. When this author proposed to the chief editor of Hezbollah’s weekly Al-Intiqad, Husayn Rahal, that the party may be relieved from the troubles instigated by the Syrian-Lebanese security regime, he retorted with a short, “maybe.” Yet he complained how “many Western embassies now are increasingly dabbling in Lebanese domestic politics.”

The party’s back was now exposed. For Hezbollah, the 1559 campaign expressed the “bias” of the United Nations and how this forum of the

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601 Al-Akhbar, 1 March 2006.
603 Conversation with author, Beirut, June 2005.
“international community” served the interests of the greater powers. Thus, Hezbollah stressed that it would not be subdue if pushed into a corner; it drew red lines in the sand. At a rally in the southern city of Bint Jbil on the fifth anniversary of the Israeli withdrawal in May 2000, Nasrallah wondered where on earth the international community was when the Israelis occupied the south for 22 years in a flagrant violation of UNSC Resolution 425. In contrast, he pointed out that it took the international community only seven months to apply UN Resolution 1559 targeting Syria and the resistance. ‘Why?’ he asked. ‘Because 425 targeted Israel whereas 1559 is in the service of Israel’. Today, he continued, Lebanon is plagued by foreign interference, especially by the U.S., which wants to disarm the resistance in common interest with Israel. Yet, he added,

Anyone who thinks of disarming the resistance is crazy. In Lebanon, we want the people to live in peace and stability, and in national unity, and we will not be hostile to anyone. But listen carefully: if anybody thinks of removing the weapons from the resistance, anybody, we will fight him in the spirit of Kerbala and martyrdom, because we know that any step or action in this direction is an Israeli act, and an Israeli decision…Any arm to reach for our guns we will consider an Israeli arm, and we will cut it off.604

Husayn Rahal, chief editor of Hezbollah’s weekly al-Intiqad, acknowledged the necessity of Hezbollah’s arms in a more ‘Fanonian’ perspective as he asserted that the maintenance of the resistance was imperative, since the Western powers only understand the language of force; i.e., not only does

604 See as-Safir 26 May 2005. In a comment to the speech, one Hizbollah official argued that the Lebanese army would never be able to move against the resistance because “half of the army”, he claimed, “support us, they are with our cause.” Should any decision be taken to move against the resistance, the official argued that the Lebanese army would probably break apart, with chaotic consequences, as happened during the civil war. Hence, the party feels confident that it is supported (at least indirectly) by one of the country’s most vital centres of power. Conversation, Beirut, June 2005.
their own power rely upon force, they also estimate others according to force:

Consequently, they only respect the ones with the ability to threaten them. The one who has the right to be respected is usually not respected. That is why it is not enough for Third World countries to only possess rights – they must also possess strength to defend their rights. This is why we say that we need to maintain our arms, because that accords with prevailing [global] norms. If we don’t, our rights will vanish, as was the case with the Palestinians. Even if we have a hundred UN resolutions to support us, [without power] no one will care about us.\(^6\)

He also expressed his cautious, *yet endorsing*, position towards this Lebanese formula of co-existence, even though he lamented that the confessional system would still discriminate against him as a Shi’ite Muslim. He added that the Lebanese state nowadays, in contrast to earlier times, embraced Arabism and the resistance which, to him, were encouraging fundamentals for a development of the state.\(^6\) Hence, the resistance and the Lebanese predicament intertwined with the regional Arab-Israeli conflict were primary for Hezbollah. Without the arms of the resistance, Lebanon would end up ‘neutralized’, i.e., outside, and isolated from, the orbit of the Arab-Israeli conflict. That was, the party argued, exactly the U.S. intention in calling for disarmament. At the same time, by remaining in a ‘war of position’, Hezbollah maintained an air of hostility and defiance that would deny the Americans and the Israelis the possibility of marginalising the existence of the resistance. The ambition was, thus, to promote an accommodating strategy for the sake of maintaining an assertive, subversive and counter-hegemonic position.

\(^6\)[Author’s interview, Beirut, June 2005.]
\(^6\)[Ibid.]
In the parliamentary elections in the summer of 2005, Hezbollah gained 14 seats for its parliamentary bloc after tactical alliances, which involved, as is usual in Lebanon, the sharing of electoral lists with opponents as well as partners on various political topics. Besides protecting the resistance, the main ambitions for the party involved obstructing, as far as possible, what it perceived as foreign attempts at interfering in the internal politics of the country, above all the UN Resolution 1559. Therefore, in contrast to the past, the party chose to dig itself even deeper into the political system by accepting posts in the Lebanese cabinet, having Mohammed Fneish, a long term serving MP for the party, as Minister of Energy and Water. Yet, the political turbulence in the country persisted. While Hezbollah recognised the government’s declaration in support of the resistance, its leadership consistently criticised the U.S. and France for meddling in Lebanese internal affairs. In the cabinet, it also opposed any attempts to take decisions by a majority vote, stressing the imperative of dialogue and consensus; thereby enabling its strategy of using the veto. In December 2005, the Shi’ite ministers in the government chose to boycott the government because of a majority decision in the cabinet to ask the United Nations to set up an international court to rule on the assassination of Rafiq Hariri. Hezbollah objected that it had not been consulted in the matter. During the boycott, the Syrian-friendly Lebanese president Emile Lahoud refused to participate in cabinet meetings.

In February 2006, while boycotting the government, Hezbollah signed a political document (or what was referred to as ‘national understanding’), with former Lebanese Army general Michel Aoun, a Christian leader of the

607 Three other ministers in the cabinet are considered close to Hizbollah: Fawsi Sallokh, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Trad Hamadeh, Minister of Labour and Talal Al Sahili, Minister of Agriculture.
608 See interview with Nasrallah, al-Manar, 22 December, 2005.
“Free Patriotic Movement” and diehard enemy of the Syrian presence in Lebanon (a standpoint that earned him 15 years in exile after the end of the civil war). While dealing with issues of reforms concerning the state, the electoral, law and international relations, the document stated that “consensus democracy remains the basis of governance.” The issue of the arms of the resistance should be taken up in due time, though not as long a Lebanese territory was still under occupation. In a speech a week after the signing of the document, Nasrallah said, in reference to the modus operandi with Michel Aoun and his Christian supporters: “Their school is different, like their culture and overall orientation, but [we show that] the Lebanese can meet each other if they have the determination to do so.” What was the response of the rest of the opposition to this mutual recognition, he asked? “They said that the arms of [Hizbollah] no longer enjoy the benefit of a national consensus. We have lost nothing, nonetheless, because in any case, there has never been any such consensus before either.” He then added, with a clear address to the new balance of powers facing Lebanon after the Syrian withdrawal: “Certain parties [of the anti-Syrian opposition] have never supported the resistance, ever since 1982, but have rather cooperated with the enemy.”

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The ambition, thus, was to see to it that these parties, towards which Hezbollah was deeply suspicious, never be able to rule by majority - the logic of a national consensus, as noted, facilitated the mechanism of a veto - to guard the gained privilege of having armed guerrillas deployed and embedded in the south. At a series of roundtable discussions during February and March 2006, the so-called national dialogue, at which all of the Leba-

609 Daily Star 7 February 2006
610 L’Orient Le Jour 17 February 2006.
611 At another address, Nasrallah noted how the U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleeza Rice had stated that it was essential to implement 1559 and disarm the resistance. “Me, I ask Mrs Rice: who should disarm Hizbollah? Instead of urging the Lebanese state to apply its entire means to this effort, why not sending the US troops to do the work? I invite her to take that decision, but she prefers Lebanese bloodshed for the sake of Israel. Just like in Palestine.” L’Orient Le Jour 24 February 2006.
nese political elites participated, Hizbollah effectively blocked any attempt by the anti-Syrian groups (the 14 March alliance) to either oust President Emile Lahoud or to find any solution to the disarmament of the resistance. This led Nasrallah to announce that “the US project in Lebanon has reached a dead end.” At a conference convened in support of the resistance, Nasrallah repeatedly mocked how certain Lebanese elites at the earlier “national dialogue” sittings made efforts to promote a “Lebanon first” agenda. Nasrallah, who participated in the talks, recalled how “today, it is even forbidden to speak Arabic. During the dialogue sessions, some would speak some sentences in English. I said: ‘I don’t speak English, speak Arabic so we can understand each other’ [the audience laughed as this worked as a metaphor for the way Nasrallah envisaged that understanding and bonds among the Lebanese had to be rooted in Arabism]. He then continued:

So it is forbidden to speak in Arabic, forbidden to think in Arabic, forbidden to speak of an Arab cause, an Arab-Israeli struggle, an Arab umma. These are issues [they say] that we have finished with. Speak instead of Lebanon ‘the homeland’, Lebanon ‘the people’, Lebanon ‘the entity’, Lebanon ‘the nation’, Lebanon ‘the history’, ‘the geography’, ‘the future’ and so on; and if we continue like this some two three years, [we will speak of] Lebanon ‘the god’. This is hyperbole and it is bogus…”

As the Lebanese political stalemate remained, with Hezbollah and the Shi’ite ministers still boycotting the government, tensions worsened, not only in Beirut, but also in the south. In November 2005, Hezbollah launched a botched attempt to capture Israeli soldiers in the southern village of Ghajjar, an operation that ended the guerrillas being killed. The party promised that 2006 would be the year when the Lebanese prisoners still in Israeli prisons would be released.

612 *ad-Diyar*, 31 March 2006.
613 *al-Manar* 30 March 2006.
In July 2006, the guerrillas struck again in a cross-border operation ambushing an Israeli patrol in the Lebanese-Israeli border zone. Eight Israeli soldiers were killed and two were captured. At a press conference just hours after the attack, Nasrallah stated that the operation “True Promise” – to take Israeli soldiers prisoners for exchange with Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails – had been planned and promised long in advance. Yet, while domestic and international criticism raged, Israeli reprisals were immediately launched and increased by the hour. As Lebanese civilian casualties mounted, critics charged that Hezbollah’s decision to attack Israeli soldiers seriously undermined Lebanese security and sovereignty. Arab states joined the chorus of condemnation, and Saudi Arabia indirectly criticized Hezbollah for having chosen an “adventurous” path by putting the stability of the region at risk.

The following day, Nasrallah replied by affirming that Hezbollah had always been “adventurous.” “That is very true”, he said, “we have been so since 1982”, adding that “we have never brought to our country anything but victory, freedom, liberation, honour, and dignity, and [we have] hold our heads high.” This contrasted sharply, he argued, with Arab leaders who always banked on “realism”, relentlessly rejecting the path of resistance and rebellion. “In 1982, you declared us insane”, Nasrallah charged, “but we have proved that we are fair-minded people…You could count on your reason. We will count on our adventure. God is our supporter and helper. We have never counted on you. We have always relied on God and our people, our hearts, our arms and our sons.”

In fact, during the course of the Israeli bombardment of Lebanon, Nasrallah stressed how Hezbollah’s boldness and persistence in the field (to contest the Israeli military might) was strategic in itself. When al-Jazeera asked Nasrallah about Hezbollah’s objectives with the war, Nasrallah men-

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614 as-Safir 13 July 2006
615 AFP 14 July 2006
616 al-Jazeera, 14 July 2006.
617 Ibid.
tioned the imperative of taking Israeli prisoners in order to exchange them for Lebanese prisoners. He also emphasised the imperative to disallow Israel to impose itself by military might.\textsuperscript{618} That is, Israel’s failure would be Hezbollah’s victory. Again, this was part of Hezbollah’s ‘war of position’, to prove that the Israeli military force was no longer able to set the political agenda in the regional order. Indeed, as the July war ended and Israel’s objectives were not met (i.e., to secure the release of the abducted Israeli soldiers and to disarm Hezbollah), the Islamist guerrillas once again proclaimed victory and described themselves as a ‘vanguard’ of resistance and of national and Muslim dignity.

Still, in confining its struggle to Lebanon, Hezbollah hoped for a regional - if not global - audience to register another defeat for U.S. attempts to impose its hegemony through Israeli aggression. Some months after the war, Nasrallah boasted at a “Divine Victory” rally in the party’s strongholds in Beirut that Lebanon has become “a strong power that the West must take into account and about which Israel has a thousand apprehensions. The oppressed of the world view Lebanon with appreciation, respect, honour and pride.”\textsuperscript{619} Nonetheless, since the devastation and human losses of the war were horrific, with over 1200 Lebanese dead, Hezbollah would receive a lot of criticism for ignoring the plight of the Lebanese by recklessly challenging the Israeli temper. While many Lebanese, especially on the side of the March 14 camp, voiced criticism against Hezbollah for abiding by a “philosophy of death” instead of a “philosophy of life,” Nasrallah responded: “We all want to live, but how do we want to live?” Would physical desires be enough, like food and drink? Or does mankind desire a more? He suggested that human beings living in harmony, be they of any religion or tribe, abhor a life humiliation; this was part of a healthy mindset. “Do we want to live humiliated and threatened by the Zionists?” he asked. “[Do we want] to live

\textsuperscript{618} See 	extit{al-Jazeera}, 20 July, 2006.
\textsuperscript{619} 	extit{al-Manar}, 22 September, 2006.
controlled by the main powers of this world? Do we want to live in Lebanon [in the absence] of a strong army that can defend us against Israel? Do we want to live a life where we are not allowed to build a good economy away from the conditions of the World Bank?” Nasrallah continued: “We want to live, yes. [But] we want to live with dignity. We are the children of the school that rejects to live humiliated and [our slogan] has always been ‘humiliation is rejected by us’.” The sacrifice of martyrdom was thus “to get killed in the battle for life”

Those who are noble will come to defend their parents, people, nation and the dignity of what they cherish…When a nation offers its neck to a tyrant, lots of people will be slaughtered like sheep on the steps of this powerful man. But then it fights and resists, it will give less numbers of victims, but they will be martyrs, and this will change the reality…There is no death in martyrdom. Martyrs creates life for the nation, and protects it…Martyrs thus make life. 620

To repeat, Hezbollah saw resistance as supreme. Its autonomous decision-making even reigned above that of the Lebanese state, and the Islamist movement has curiously been able to promote this project from within the confines of the Lebanese system. As argued above, Hezbollah’s clout within the Shi’ite community enables the movement to exploit the confessional balance of co-existence to its own advantage, which is to prioritize the ambitions of the resistance. Eli El-Hokayem puts it succinctly: “In Lebanon’s consensus-based politics, monopolising Shi’ite representation guarantees that no combination of political forces can compel Hezbollah to abide by rules and principles it deems contrary to its interests, unless its opponents are willing to risk a civil war…To be fair, the rest of Lebanon’s political elites is also not serious about political reform. Yet the difference between Hezbollah and Lebanon’s other politicians is fundamental; the former hijacks the sys-

tem for ideological reasons and the latter abuse it to promote parochial and economic interests."\textsuperscript{621} Hezbollah has forged a position from which it can remain ‘above’ the system while promoting its resistance project that in many ways carries the same ambitions nowadays as when it emerged it the early eighties.

Did this development, then, gainsay assumptions of ‘Islamico-nationalism’ or that the Islamist project would turn ‘inwards’ and become domestic once Islamists opt for the choice of integration and accommodation? Or did it indicate an ideological and strategic ‘schizophrenia’ in which an Islamist party – like Hezbollah – was unable to decide on its future course. After all, observers have charged, ever since the end of the nineties, that Hezbollah was ‘standing at the crossroads’ obliged to make a choice: to become national or to remain loyal to Ayatollah Khomeini’s more transnational aspirations of spreading the Islamic revolution across the Muslim world.\textsuperscript{622} Indeed, in July 2003, as the stand-off in the south continued, the International Crises Group published a report in which it claimed that Hezbollah was a “rebel without a cause,” bewildered over its future role now that the Israelis were out of the south. “Pressured to undertake a strategic shift,” the report noted, “[Hizbollah] faces the decision whether its future is one among many Lebanese parties or whether it will maintain the hybrid nature, half political party and half armed militia, part local organisation and part internationalist movement that has defined it from the outset.”\textsuperscript{623} For Hezbollah, however, there were no crossroads, or indeed no distinctions between the national and the transnational. Rather, the predicament of the Lebanese nation-state was deeply intertwined with the regional conflict. That is, the understanding of the ‘national’ as a choice was a chimera, or indeed a trap, since Lebanon from the outset was a colonial formation intended to sow division and undermine a more regional cohesion opposed to Western inter-

\textsuperscript{621} El-Hokayem 2006.
\textsuperscript{622} Zisser 1997.
\textsuperscript{623} ICG report July 2003, p. 1.
ference. As such, the movement was still very much a partner in the Islamic revolution, as once envisioned and called for by Ayatollah Khomeini.

In an important contribution to the debate on Hezbollah’s supposed ‘Lebanonization process’, Jacob Hoigilt claimed that the party’s embracing of Lebanon’s pluralism is sincere, meaning that Hezbollah most likely does not carry any totalitarian ambitions, in the sense of implementing Islamic rule. However, this inclusive approach is *strictly conditioned* for the sake of the Palestinian question, which still remains supreme in terms of Hezbollah’s ideological ambitions. Hoigilt emphasises that Hezbollah in this regard sees the resistance in the south as its main priority, and it is “connected to the issue of the Shib’a farms and Israeli air space violations, the word has been more and more connected with the Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation.” That is, Hezbollah is increasingly blurring the national borders that distinguish Lebanon from Palestine, and in doing this - despite its calls for national unity and cohesion with regard to the Palestinian cause - Hoigilt argues that this is a road Hezbollah most likely walks alone. He concludes that “the national unity that Hizbullah preaches is one where internal dialogue and discussion are suppressed in favour of the party’s own views about the necessity and the aims of the resistance in Palestine…Hizbullah’s national unity includes only those who agree with its views about Palestine, and this notion of unity excludes a significant part of the Lebanese population.” He also suggests that because Hezbollah deems the Palestinian issue to be a religious obligation, “religious absolutes enter the national stage indirectly.” Hoigilt’s remarks are well-worthy of consideration in the way they tap into the debate concerning the extent to which Islamist movements may submit to pluralist politics, especially in as much as ‘religious absolutes’, in his view, undermine pluralism.

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625 Ibid., p. 131.
626 Ibid., p. 132-133.
However, while Hezbollah’s ideologists would welcome that Islamic faith obliges greater solidarity with the Palestinians, it is not clear why a secular person (committed to Palestine) would. Nor is it clear why Hezbollah alone would display solidarity with the Palestinian cause (even if that means military combat, cherished by the Islamic resistance). After all, the Palestinian cause, as we have seen, has always divided the Lebanese across the spectrum of confessional and ideological barriers. And it has been a bone of contention that has contributed to the country’s slide towards civil war long before Hezbollah came into being. Rather, Hezbollah’s solidarity with Palestine taps into a more general perception that sees the Lebanese predicament as intertwined with the Palestinian ordeal. In this sense, the Palestinian cause has also impacted on the struggle over the Lebanese identity. In fact, ever since the days of independence, if not before, the subject of the national identity, commitment and direction of Lebanon has been severely contested. In that sense, it could be argued that Hezbollah tapped into a Lebanese problematic that existed long before the movement’s own coming to being. It also confirms the suggestion mentioned previously that today’s Islamists are yesterday’s leftists or nationalists, i.e., they could be considered to be ‘anti-systemic movements’ that in a sense are pursuing much of the same struggle, rooted in the same conflict, generated within the same structural disorder, yet with a different idiom and foundation of faith and ideology.

Hezbollah’s experience, thus, testifies to how an Islamist movement can project itself within a multitude of confessional and political groups. As mentioned above in this regard, the Syrian tutelage and the confessional system has ‘privileged’ the party in comparison with other Islamist forces that are often fiercely repressed by incumbent regimes. The Lebanese regime is in no position to curb Hezbollah in that way, even if parts of it may want to do so. In contrast to 1982, however, Hezbollah does not challenge the Arab regimes directly, as during the revolutionary days of the eighties. However, to work from within a Lebanese framework, securing stability, entering
into dialogue, opposing fragmentation and sectarianism and promoting what Hezbollah calls ‘consensus democracy’ but yet within certain ‘red lines’ and commitments, it hopes to convey a model of resistance to other radical movements, Islamic or otherwise. While taking a firm stand for the Palestinians, the party also demoralizes incumbent Arab regimes that opt for ‘pragmatism’ in the era of an U.S.-led order. As one Hezbollah cadre told this author, while not attacking these regimes directly, either verbally or otherwise (as in the early days), the present strategy is “to be embarrassing to them by stripping them of their clothes, one by one.” With a strong rooting on a communal basis, an inclusive approach to the political system and an armed resistance whose existence and performance echo beyond Lebanon, Hezbollah wishes to secure a position for its conduct as a Fanonian subversive subject, able to defy and alter the ‘common sense’ underpinning of the regional order while expanding, or so is their hope, its counter-hegemonic project.

As claimed above, the safeguarding of the resistance also has this dualist ‘Fanonian logic’ of promoting the istinhaad - the ‘awakening’ - since the Lebanese problem, as Nasrallah charged already in 1985 cannot be solved in Lebanon but only on a regional level. For Hezbollah, Israel remains the main problem, and the region will persist in despotism, regime corruption, conspiracies and instability as long as Israel is present, since this presence expresses, and is conditioned by, a prevailing U.S. hegemony. For Hezbollah’s lexicon, however, this order is very much sustained by the claimed weakness of the Arab regimes and by challenging the order, especially in Palestine, a larger regional change might be in the offing, and new generations are alerted by the movement’s istinhaad. In the late nineties, Muhammed Muslih offered an outline of the various Arab camps and their positions in relation to the ongoing ‘peace process’. The camp favouring negotiations relied upon an assumption of realpolitik; any negotiation over

627 Conversation, Beirut, January 2007.
Palestine would be promoted with the motto “salvaging whatever could be salvaged” (inqadh ma mumkin inqadahu). Yet the Arab camp opposing negotiations were of two different strands: the idealists who saw Israel as the ultimate injustice and who would never come to terms with it under any circumstance, and the pragmatists who would accept a negotiated solution, but only from a position of strength, not given the prevailing weakness and Arab division.628 It is easy to situate Hezbollah in the idealist camp of ‘rejectionists’. However, the movement may also, indirectly, be placed among the ‘pragmatists’, since Hezbollah has hinted several times that it will ultimately have to accept disarmament within the framework of a larger peace agreement.629 Hezbollah is, thus, telling the Arab pragmatists to see the movement’s arms and principles as an asset in the negotiations over Palestine. The movement is determined to change the current balance of power. As Palestinian intellectual Azmi Bishara has succinctly pointed out: “Hizbullah isn’t looking for peace with Israel”, and “[n]or is it interested in receiving brownie points for being ‘enlightened’ or ‘moderate’.

It sees its own enlightenment, as Israel sees hers, in its rationalisation and organisational strength. Ideologically, morally and in its origins, Hizbullah is founded within the Palestinian historical narrative, related by Palestinian refugees to the farmers and poets of Lebanon ever since catastrophe brought the poor of the Lebanese south and Palestinian refugees together in the same saga. Hizbullah will not lend itself as fodder to the “dialogue and coexistence industry.” It is too deep for that. It is too busy writing a hands-on theology for the wretched of the Arab earth. This leaves very little opening for opportunist intellectuals to sell Hizbullah to the West. Hizbullah is not concerned with “the recognition of Israel” and, unlike the PLO and others, it refuses to engage in a discourse that involves using basic principles as bargaining chips.

Hizbullah thrives on fighting as an equal, not on being compensated for its absence in the field by a false equality around the negotiating table.\textsuperscript{630}

As Hezbollah is probably banking on its own ideological assumption of the ‘ontology of violence’, it is confident that Israel will never offer the conditions necessary to please the more demanding pragmatists. Therefore, resistance will continue. Hezbollah will promote the \textit{istinbaad}, continually weakening the clout of those regimes that have opted to move into the orbit of U.S. hegemony and will put its effort into making sure that Lebanon will not.

\textsuperscript{630} Bishara 2006.
Chapter 7. Summary and conclusion

In this thesis the aim was to study and understand how Hezbollah has accommodated a system that it initially rejected, and still essentially rejects, but endorses for strategic purposes. It has been suggested that this strategic undertaking involves a certain tension between making compromises and concessions while also sticking to its radical commitment to Khomeinism and the Islamic revolution. How could Hezbollah strategically reproduce and promote these revolutionary impulses in a Lebanese context? Did accommodation entail Hezbollah abstaining from these radical impulses while submitting to the social and political Lebanese fabric of pluralism? This question also tapped into the more general debate on Islamism. In this debate, a common perception assumes Islamism is a rather absolutist enterprise, i.e., a project that ultimately involves the objective of establishing an Islamic state grounded in Islamic law. In that sense, it is a project that is essentially opposed to political pluralism in a liberal democratic sense. As we have seen, many Islamist thinkers would assume this viewpoint while taking very different strategic positions towards political inclusion and multi-party pluralism. While some Islamists rejected participation in pluralist political systems on the grounds that this would neutralize or corrupt the ‘divine’ call and mission of the Islamist project, other Islamists accepted inclusion as a strategy for committing to its political and ideological ambitions from within the system instead of outside of it.

However, scholars have interpreted such accommodating endeavours differently. Some scholars suggest an instrumental reading that con-
ceives of Islamist integration as a means of taking control over the system from within - like a ‘Trojan horse’ - with the ultimate objective of establishing an Islamic state. Other scholars tone down the presumably religious dimension of Islamist politics and suggest a more materialist reading in which the claimed absolutist tendencies are seen as less relevant, and Islamists are viewed primarily as agents for socio-economic betterment and political reforms, channelling grievances against incumbent regimes. In contrast to these often despotic and corrupt elites, Islamists are understood as offering a more credible and sincere political project, displaying great social pathos, often by distributing effective and generous welfare services. While stressing these contextual features in which Islamists are embedded (and nurtured), scholars also propose that Islamist ambitions, however absolutist, are still constrained by their popular constituencies, which may be less interested in advancing any maximalist political project of establishing an Islamic state and order. This is what Charles Tripp referred to as the ‘secular logic’ that would oblige Islamist radicalism to conform to surrounding realities. And once they do, they will be neutralised by the system. It is, thus, argued that increasing overtures of Islamist thinkers and parties to pluralism and power sharing ought to be understood in terms of this spectre of accommodation and popular support. Scholars have also referred to this development as ‘post-Islamism’, i.e., a new phase in which the maximalist nature of Islamism – especially the objective of establishing an Islamic state - remains redundant and obsolete. From this angle, Olivier Roy claimed that Islamism ‘failed’ as a revolutionary enterprise, since it has been unable to establish any Islamic state beyond the Iranian experience. According to him, Islamist parties have either become trapped within the political systems they enter, or they have chosen to abstain from any involvement, thus becoming increasingly marginalised, alienated and sometimes violent. Roy’s claim is that the absolutist strain within Islamism undermines its efforts to promote any
tangible radical political project – the Iranian experience was, in this regard, an exception to the rule. Indeed, he also challenged a common view among scholars that Islamists are to be understood within a historical dynamic that involves an ongoing struggle for independence in the Muslims world, i.e., taking into account that many Muslim countries are still subjected to foreign – especially Western - interference and domination. In this sense, Islamism carries an ‘anti-systemic thrust’ that was previously claimed and represented primarily by nationalist and leftist ideologies and movements. For various reasons, as discussed in this thesis, Islamists have come across for many as a more potent and credible alternative than their secular counterparts, especially since the end of the sixties. However, for Roy and other scholars, Islamism involves a troublesome dimension of religious conviction that undermines any universal enterprise, hence the doom of its radical aspirations. Furthermore, he also questions the view that the structures of the nation-state and of multiparty politics have absorbed the radicalism of the Islamist project, leading to an ‘Islamicoc-nationalism’ that gainsays or undermines the transnational aspirations of Islamism, not least Khomeini’s own desire to promote a large scale revolution across the region. After all, Islamist parties of many hues condemn the borders and administrations of the Muslim world for being part of a colonial legacy, aimed at sowing division and rancour within the Muslim umma.

This point is well worth considering, since many Islamist parties appear to have assumed more modest and marginalised roles within their respective national domains of operation. As noted, in some countries Islamist parties have been allowed to agitate within the fields of religion and culture, but hardly in political affairs, as their position would contradict the interests of the regime and the regional order, especially in the way the latter has evolved since 1967, the so-called ‘Pax Americana’. In this way, regimes have been able to sow division among leftist, nationalist
and Islamist ranks that otherwise might be able to muster an effective opposition. Indeed, more radically oriented Islamists have opposed this development by violently attacking the regimes (often in response to the repressive hands of the incumbent regimes). In addition, the emerging phenomenon of \textit{transnational jihadism} - as represented, for instance, by al-Qa’ida and other Salafist and Wahabite groups - is a reaction to the way the nation-state in the Muslim world has allegedly worked to squeeze the radicalism out of Islamism. As noted, these groups condemn the willingness of some Islamists to integrate into the political systems in place.

As we have seen, Hezbollah has been a case in point.

However, can we take the integration of Hezbollah into the Lebanese confessional system as an indication of the movement’s abandonment of its radical commitment to Ayatollah Khomeini’s Islamic revolution? As we have seen, the features of the more general debate on Islamism have also been a bone of contention with respect to Hezbollah’s so-called ‘Lebanonization process’. That is, various observers have suggested that Hezbollah’s metamorphosis from a rather zealous Lebanese vanguard of the revolutionary Islamic leadership in Iran of the eighties to a more cooperative Lebanese political party in the nineties indicated that the movement’s commitment to the Khomeinism of the Islamic revolution had petered out and that this signalled a wider trend of accommodation among Islamist parties, once they were allowed to take part in multi-party political systems. Some also suggested that Hezbollah had a crucial choice to make in this regard: it could either remain committed to the Khomeinist revolutionary school or submit to the interests of the Lebanese nation-state, becoming a true ‘Lebanese political party’. But the contention and contribution of this thesis is that Hezbollah has operated in a way that combines its revolutionary commitment to the Islamic revolution with its accommodating strategies towards the Lebanese state. From the standpoint of the party, there is no contradiction in this regard. That is, the na-
tional path chosen by Hezbollah should not be seen as the movement sur-
rendering an Islamist objective to the constraints of the nation-state or to
the confessional system inherently despised by the Hezbollah. Rather, its
efforts to become part of the system should be understood as a strategy of
resistance. This aspect of resistance is crucial, since it forms a cornerstone
of the movement’s grasp of Khomeini’s Islamic revolution. This revolu-
tion did not only involve the establishment of an Islamic state and order,
but it embodied the spirit of a revolutionary enterprise that defied a specif-
ic global and regional structure of power in which the Western powers,
especially the U.S., imposed itself, assisted by local Muslim and Arab
allies as well as the state of Israel, ‘the American spearhead in the Islamic
world’.

The Islamic revolution, as guided by Ayatollah Khomeini, ex-
pressed a zealous determination to oppose and alter this order. This is why
scholars claimed that it also expressed this historical continuity of anti-
systemic rebellion, or what has been referred to in this thesis as ‘third
worldism’, albeit with a deep religious dimension grounded in Islamic
faith. As noted, in the postcolonial order, Arab and Muslim states were
still struggling to achieve independence, to resist foreign - especially
Western - interference, to control their own resources, to contest incu-
bent domestic elites and to liberate Palestine. Importantly, the Palestinian
ordeal was just as central to Khomeinism as to the Arab nationalist pro-
ject, since the Israeli expulsion of the Palestinians and occupation of their
land crystallised the order and condition that they opposed: humiliation,
incapability, weakness, in addition to Western domination and conceit.
But the Islamists claimed that the Arab nationalists had proven themselves
incapable of leading this struggle, since the secular dimension of Arab
nationalism implied that the weakness inherent in the human spirit – eais-
ly subjected to corruption, egoism and fear – remained in charge. This is
where the Islamic dimension of resistance becomes relevant. Firstly, the
notion of resistance involves a comprehension of struggle, i.e., the order is repressive and humiliating but also amenable to change, if there is will-power and determination on the part of the oppressed to opt for a rebellious path. No order is given or naturally settled, it is imposed by certain forces.

Of course, to the Khomeinist school, the Islamic state was the ideal shield to brandish in defiance of and resistance towards this regional order, or the ‘Pax Americana’. However, importantly, for a group like Hezbollah operating in Lebanon where the context was far from conducive to any such Islamic state project, an alternative strategy had to be used. As has been pointed out in this thesis, the Khomeinist idea of an Islamic state should not be seen as an end in itself but as a strategy for opposing a given order. The very essence of it involves this crucial dimension of resistance. Equally important, the Islamist rejection of this order also involves its epistemological underpinnings, or what Roxanne L. Euben labels the ‘ethos of post-Enlightenment’, i.e., the very assumption that human reason and rationality alone can shape a just world order. Central to Islamist thinking is that this rationalist assumption is deeply flawed, since human nature is ravaged by corruptive impulses and desires, and it is argued that the wide range of injustices and forms of exploitation in history and at present is testimony to this fact. The norms of religion – in this case Islam – have, thus, been given to human beings in order to assist them in evading this pitfall of greed and selfishness and instead assuming divine virtues for the sake of establishing a righteous order. Hence, it has been argued that the Islamist project, in a more general sense, can be understood from the two angles of diagnosis and remedy. The Islamist diagnosis concerns how the condition of modernity lacks this crucial dimension of faith and has, thus, gone awry. In fact, this diagnosis is the common basis for all Islamist thinkers, as they share this critique of the post-Enlightenment ethos. However, their proposed remedies – how to deal with this predica-
ment – differ greatly. As emphasised, while some reject the secular and rationalist order wholesale, others - like Hezbollah - has chosen to deal with it from within. Thus, Hezbollah’s rejectionism of this secular order concerns its assumptions, not necessarily the practices and systems that have grown out of it. Rather, it has chosen to deal with this system ‘from within’. In this regard, Hezbollah has shelved any idea of an Islamic state as a plausible strategy in a context such as Lebanon, and we have seen that this has been the standpoint of the movement from its very inception. Rather, the movement has successfully combined its project of resistance with a strategy of accommodation to the Lebanese state. But resistance against what, more precisely?

To answer this question, I have emphasised the importance of grasping Hezbollah’s professed remedy to the Lebanese condition by listening to its diagnosis of it. In this regard, the movement stresses its emergence as an Islamic resistance movement against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. However, the resistance against the invasion did not only concern the liberation of Lebanese territory; to Hezbollah, it was a battle for existence. Just as the Israeli invasion was part of a grander scheme to subordinate Lebanon to a ‘new order’, or a ‘Pax Americana’ that would bring an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict and silence the Palestinian cause, Hezbollah pledged to oppose this development. In this regard, it brought armed and financial support and ideological inspiration from the Islamic revolution unfolding in Iran. Thus, Hezbollah shared the third worldist outlook of Khomeinism, equally embedded in Islamic faith. As argued in this thesis, the Islamic depth of the struggle expressed the right to resistance and justice, and for Hezbollah, it served the purpose of boosting self-esteem in a regional climate of prevailing Arab and Muslim defeatism and sense of weakness and incapacity. The strength of Islam should enable the umma to conquer this inferiority complex that it had
suffered historically from the colonial powers, the new American domination or the military superiority of Israel.

Hence, I have likened this quest for self-assertion to Frantz Fanon’s elaboration of guerrilla warfare in the Algerian war for independence. To Fanon, armed struggle – also vigorously endorsed by Hezbollah – may accomplish two objectives. Firstly, it was the only way to liberate the land, since the coloniser whose power was contingent upon force and violence would not yield but in the face of the same. Hezbollah, as we have seen, abides by the same logic and has consistently rooted its strategy accordingly: to safeguard its right and capacity to resist the Israeli occupation by force. Secondly, the Fanonian logic suggested that endorsing violence – in this assumed ‘ontology of violence’ – would break down images of inferiority and weakness that have long been internalised in the psyche of the colonised and the occupied; the strategy of violence validated itself by expressing the breaking down of a defeatist mindset (which conditioned the submission).

In this Fanonian sense, Hezbollah aimed at proving prevailing images of Israeli superiority to be deceptive. Importantly, Hezbollah’s warfare in the south did not only concern the liberation of the land but also bringing an echo of strength across the region and thereby undermining the various structures of power that relied on these images of Israeli strength. Perhaps this was a crucial aspect of the ongoing war in south Lebanon that many observers missed at the time: Hezbollah’s stress on resistance aimed at projecting a more universal appeal involving this ‘Fanonian logic’. Thus, it has also been argued that armed resistance was crucial as ‘catharsis’ to defeat this sense of weakness and also to enable the maintaining of the conflict with Israel. That is, Hezbollah’s resistance operation in south Lebanon subverted the logic of the peace negotiations (between Arabs and Israelis) by proving the success of confrontation. As noted, the liberation of the south in May 2000 was an important victory
for this logic. By this victory, Hezbollah has also hoped to undermine attempts at reconciliation in the name of the peace process, which the party regards as Arab submission to an Israeli and American scheme of hegemony. Significantly, the movement has been most keen to transmit this message of resistance to the Palestinians. This is also why the Palestinian cause remains central to Hezbollah’s Khomeinism; it is situated at the heart of this struggle of hegemony in the Middle East. As we have seen, Hezbollah’s subordination to the Welayat al-Faqih in Iran is also centred on this subject of resistance and its alleged third worldist aspirations. For Hezbollah, loyalty to the Faqih is universal and transnational. It offers a general guideline of norms and values that the umma should abide by. Hezbollah also considers itself a vanguard – a Lebanese vanguard – in this more universal effort to oppose American efforts to silence the Palestinian cause and to make Israel a ‘naturalised’ entity in the Middle East region, thus enforcing U.S. domination.

Indeed, in this thesis, I have also applied a Gramscian matrix to highlight how a radical movement like Hezbollah enforces its ideological ambitions from within, through a strategy of accommodation. As argued above, the very logic of resistance did not only aim at liberating Lebanese territory but at shaping a new Gramscian ‘common sense’ that would proved not only that resistance is just but also realistic and effective. Like Gramsci, Hezbollah sees that structures of oppression and injustice are already present and permeating the region. The objective of the struggle is, thus, to disseminate a critical consciousness to penetrate the awareness of the masses. In this effort, Hezbollah has also, rather successfully, been able to seek common ground with a wide range of actors in the unfolding drama of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In addition to the connection with Iran, the most crucial has probably been its relation to Syria. With Syria and Iran, and other Lebanese and Palestinian groups endorsing the logic of resistance, Hezbollah has been construing a ‘historical bloc’ to subvert an
American quest for hegemony. Hezbollah’s counter-hegemonic efforts should be grasped according to the movement’s ambitions to strive for a consensus on the right to resistance.

Yet, the Gramscian notion of integration highlighted Hezbollah’s combined strategy of accommodation and resistance as witnessed in the so-called ‘Lebanonization’ process. This process has occurred in four different arenas simultaneously: 1) the resistance against the Israeli occupation in the south; 2) the embedding of strong popular support within the local Shi’ite communities; 3), the earlier rejection and later endorsement of the Lebanese political system on a national level; and 4) the transnational level of promoting the tenets of the Islamic revolution and resisting an American and Israeli quest for hegemony in the Middle East.

Firstly, from the chaotic years of the eighties to the Ta’if era of national reconciliation, Hezbollah’s absolute priority was to secure access and capabilities to fight the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon. Indeed, the Islamist guerrillas even fought a costly and brutal ‘brother war’ with the Amal movement to insure this access. The era of the Ta’if Accord, thus, greatly benefitted this ambition of Hezbollah since, thanks to the Syrian tutelage, it was granted the opportunity to improve as a ‘national resistance’ against the Israeli occupation in the south. Hence, even though Hezbollah rejected the confessional system as such, in the way it confirmed the sectarian system (which Hezbollah claims to reject and oppose), the new order made the south a more or less open arena for the guerrillas to ameliorate their skills in fighting the Israelis and to cultivate a ‘culture of resistance’ with a combined flare of Lebanese nationalism and Islamism. Secondly, this opened up for a modus operandi with the Lebanese regime on the national political arena, in which Hezbollah would give less priority to domestic concerns while concentrating on its operations in the south. This enabled the movement to remain somehow distanced from the system while cultivating an image of skill and bravery
(with the resistance) and cleanliness and social pathos (through its increasingly vast and well-organised network of welfare services). Thirdly, this accommodation in relation to the Lebanese state also involved a rather timid criticism of the government’s neo-liberal policies that was to the disadvantage to the poor strata making up much of Hezbollah’s rank and file of support within the traditionally marginalised Shi’ite community. The irony is that the social policy of the state offered Hezbollah the opportunity of cultivating broad bases of support by providing welfare services where the state was absent. In addition, while these services enabled Hezbollah to appear as a champion of the poor, they also worked to mobilise a Shi’ite community of devote followers in the ‘hala al-Islamiyya’ or the ‘resistance society’, among whom the movement could politicise the believed transcendent realities between al-dunya (worldly life) and the al-akhira (the hereafter), especially with respect to the movement’s claimed imperative of resistance. In this way, faith is a constitutive strategy of Hezbollah, akin to how Khomeini elaborated on a ‘revolutionary’ mentality embedded in faith. To be sure, in shaping such an insurgent consciousness, Hezbollah’s ambition is no different from other revolutionaries, such as Che Guevara. But to Khomeini, this defiant and self-assertive mindset of the ‘perfect man’ should be subordinate to Islam and the belief in transcendence.

Importantly, from this strong position within the Shi’ite community (the third arena), Hezbollah was able to cut into the confessional ‘balance of coexistence’ as stipulated by the Lebanese National Pact in 1943 and reinforced by the Ta’if Accord in 1989 (in the second arena). As we have seen, the movement would also claim – however subtly - that this was a bargain: it would not challenge this balance of co-existence (which gravely discriminated against the Lebanese Shi’ites) as long as the elites of the regime did not challenge the idea of the resistance. This highlights how Hezbollah’s Islamist project could not be seen as categorically opposed to
nationalism as such, but the party has adopted Lebanese nationalism for instrumental and strategic objectives. It also indicates how Hezbollah is partner to a historical dynamic in which the notion of Lebanon – as a nation-state – is still subject to *a terrain of conflict* over its very meaning and direction. If Hezbollah has conceded to the confessional balances of the country, it claims the right to embed the Lebanese national identity in the Arab and Muslim umma, away from any notion of Lebanon as a ‘neutral’ bastion in a very volatile region. The movement’s emphasis on the resistance and claimed loyalty to the Palestinian struggle highlights this position. It is noteworthy that this conflict over the ‘Lebanese soul’ is historical and long preceded the advent of Hezbollah. This was no less evident after the Syrians left Lebanon in the spring of 2005. At that time, Hezbollah became more explicit in stressing this assumed bargain and modus operandi with the Lebanese regime. The party rather skilfully tapped into the complexities that are involved the country’s troublesome colonial legacy. And in this sense, Hezbollah was both ‘bonding’ the ties within the Shi’ite community while ‘bridging’ its relations across the Lebanese system. In fact, this bonding and bridging has enabled Hezbollah to maintain an assertive ideological position within its own constituency as well as becoming a partner in the Lebanese political fabric. This is Hezbollah’s gradualist strategy, since it aims to make an impact on state policy from below, without taking power. By firmly safeguarding the right to resistance, Hezbollah can remain rather aloof and autonomous from the Lebanese regime. Hence, it can evade the Gramscian pitfall of subordinating to the regime to the extent that the cause is lost.

Of course, the truth may be in the eyes of the beholder, since many Islamist radicals – as seen in this thesis – criticise Hezbollah for doing just that. However, banking on a strategy akin to the Gramscian ‘war of position’ would not allow for any risky confrontations across the border. Hezbollah has rather chosen a nationalist strategy of vanguardism that it hopes
shall give a ‘transnational echo’. Indeed, as we have seen, leftist observers also blame the party for thriving on the misery of its constituency rather than really challenging the root causes of this misery, which would demand a more confrontational policy towards the Lebanese regime. For the sake of protecting the resistance, Hezbollah has chosen to abstain from such an endeavour.

Fourthly, this shows how Hezbollah is still committed to the fourth arena, the transnational dimension, i.e., Khomeini’s Islamic revolution and the ‘liberation of Jerusalem’, which means seeing the final end of the Israeli state (even though this struggle may take generations and necessitates new structures of power across the region). Neither has the party chosen to provoke non-Islamic groups throughout Lebanese society (as Islamists have done elsewhere and as even Hezbollah did in the eighties) by demanding social-conservative mores and standards (except perhaps within its own community, but that remains an issue for further research). While Islamic idioms and teachings penetrate the communitarian level of the hala al-Islamiyya, it does not extend into cross-sectarian fields where Hezbollah advocates the idea of the Lebanese nation and the imperative of resistance (which is ‘universal’ in the sense that it involves - from Hezbollah’s viewpoint - everyone, pious Islamist or not).

In this way, the movement has been able to evade the absolutist tendencies that Roy claimed had led to the ‘failure’ of Islamist movements. By using a Gramscian matrix of how a revolutionary ambition adopts a gradualist strategy it is easier to identify Hezbollah’s long-term intention to conduct a ‘war of position’ that gradually may undermine the prevailing structures and norms of power. As we have seen, in Lebanon, Hezbollah has assumed the legacy of colonialism (the confessional system) on a national level in order to oppose a grander scheme of power on a regional one (Israel and the ‘defeatist’ mood of the Arab regimes). It has also been argued that the resistance – which has both a national and a
transnational ambition – is the axis for maintaining this simultaneous strategy involving a combined effort of accommodation and resistance. Hezbollah’s emphasis on resistance, its ‘culture of martyrdom’ and embeddedness in the *hala al-Islamiyya* expresses a Lebanese version of Khomeinism that is less concerned with the establishment of an Islamic state and more with empowering through a certain mindset and attitude. This dimension of self-assertion towards a certain world order is also an essential ambition within the Islamist project. It involves a ‘Fanonian logic’ embedded in an Islamic foundation and expressed by an Islamic idiom. This is also how the movement can reproduce the revolutionary impulses of the Islamic revolution from within the context of a continuously contested Lebanese national identity.

Ironically, while Hezbollah has consistently denounced the confessional system in Lebanon, it also thrives upon it, since it has been able to exploit successfully its own clout over the Shi’ite community as a ‘veto’ in the historically stipulated formula of the ‘balance of coexistence’ provided by the confessional system, expressed in the National Pact of 1943 and reiterated and emphasised with the Ta’if Accord of 1989. The question is whether Hezbollah would be able to promote and maintain the resistance project should a dismantling of the confessional system occur, since that would most likely deprive the Islamists of this veto and of its dominance over the Shi’ite community, since a more proportional system might enable new constellations of parties to emerge *across* sectarian barriers.
Sammanfattning på svenska

I debatten om islamism har forskare tolkat dessa islamistiska föreställningar och strategier olika. En del ser islamisternas integration i ett ’instrumentellt perspektiv’, d v s som ett strategiskt försök att likt en ’Trojansk häst’ ta över systemen inifrån och resa den islamska staten. På så sätt skulle islamisterna utgöra ett hot mot politisk pluralism även om de (på kort sikt) bejakar den. Andra forskare tonar ned den islamistiska ’absolutismen’ och betonar istället hur islamister ska förstås i ett mer kontextuell perspektiv där de representerar kritiska krav på socioekonomisk utveckling och en protest mot rådande korruption och maktmissbruk.

Forskare menar att islamister – deras ideal må vara hur höga som helst - är begränsade av den miljö de är sprungna ur och att islamisterna popularitet snarare bygger på deras sociala patos och trovärdighet än på kraven på en islamsk stat. Det måste därför en sorts ’sekulär logik’ som tvingar islamister att anpassa sig till den miljö de vill förankra sig i och denna miljö kommer också att neutralisera de mer radikala och absolutistiska tendenserna i det islamistiska projektet. I den meningen talas det inom forskningen om en sorts ’post-islamism’ där strävandet efter den islamska staten har blivit tämligen irrelevant och islamismen är dömd att misslyckas, antingen som revolution eller absolutistiskt projekt, eftersom den i många fall har underordnat sig nationalstatens struktur. Khomeinis islamska revolution, som var transnationell i sin ambition, har kommit av sig och islamister har i många och mycket blivit en del av de politiska strukturer de ideologiskt vänder sig emot. Den transnationella jihadismen, inte minst representerad av al-Qaida, är delvis en reaktion mot denna ’post-islamism’ eller ’islamska nationalism’ och det sätt som nationalstaten har kvävt det revolutionära motstånd som islamismen har potential att göra mot neokoloniala maktstrukturer.

Avhandlingen studerar just hur Hizbollah har hanterat detta förmenta dilemma, d v s att anpassa sig till nationalstatens strukturer och samtidigt
är motståndet en central del, och i avhandlingen hävdas att rörelsens 'Libanoniserings-process' måste förstås i detta perspektiv.

**Teori och metod**

självkänsla som brutits ned av decennier av ockupation och förtryck. På samma sätt som Fanon såg det väpnade motståndet som nödvändigt och ’terapeutiskt’ ser Hizbollah sin väpnade kamp som absolut nödvändig och förlösande, i avhandlingens beskrivet som ’the Fanonian logic’. Tillämplandet av Fanons teoretiska resonemang bidrar även till att ’demystifiera’ Hizbollahs syn på våld som ett imperativ och visa att denna syn bottnar i en process av pågående ’avkolonialisering’ och - om än kontroversiellt - inte kan reduceras till någon sorts islamitisk extremism.

Islamismen eller Hizbollah ska inte heller bara reduceras till en bred historisk motståndsprocess mot ’avkolonialisering’ där man delar likheter med många andra icke-islamistiska grupperingar. De ska också förstås i en religiös dimension. I det sammanhanget har jag använt mig av Roxanne L. Eubens argument för att islamisters självförståelse bör vara central för analysen. I debatten, menar Euben, har islamisternas olika projekt ofta reducerats till en ’rationell’ förklaringsmodell. Ex kan deras popularitet förklaras av att deras sociala patos framstår som icke-korrumpert och att sekulära grupperingar har förlorat i förtroende efter decennier av misslyckande och så vidare. Även om den typen av rationella förklaringsmodeller är nödvändiga och fruktbara bör de kompletteras, menar Euben, av islamisternas egen uppfattning av den religiösa dimensionen. På så sätt kan man förstå inte bara ’funktionen’ utan också ’meningen’ med islamismen, som den uttolkas av islamisterna själva. Avhandlingen lägger därför stor tonvikt på Hizbollahs egen diskurs för att bidra till en bättre förståelse av dess val av strategi i den så kallade ’Libanoniseringsprocessen’.
**Material**


**Avhandlingens struktur och kapitel**

Avhandlingen är strukturerad på följande vis: kapitel två inbegriper en bredare diskussion om islamism och förståelsen av islamistiska rörelsers olika
strategier, inte minst i ett gramscianskt perspektiv. Här diskuterar jag även hur islamistiska liksom nationella identiteter är föränderliga i en process präglad av kamp och konflikt. Jag argumenterar för att islamisters självförståelse är av vikt i den analysen.


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