

Consociational Politics: The Influence of  
Hezbollah on the Stability of Sectarianism in Lebanon.  
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***Introduction***

A synthesis of the relevant literature on ethnic conflict and consociational politics illustrates the complexity of power-sharing and inclusion in pluralist societies. The case of Lebanon exemplifies a modern case where sectarianism has framed political development from independence until present times. The emergence of Hezbollah, a Shi'a organization, as a new political player has affected the legitimacy of the Lebanese political system. I argue that Hezbollah's integration into the traditional political system originally increased the representation of Shi'a and enhanced the viability of the sectarian system but that, since the Israeli withdrawal from the south of Lebanon, the organization's actions have exacerbated sectarian tensions and consequently eroded the stability of the consociational system. The post-2000 history of Hezbollah in Lebanon highlights the pervasive vulnerability of a political system based on sectarianism. To demonstrate my argument, I have divided my paper into five sections; (1) a review of the literature that addresses ethnic conflict in pluralist societies, (2) a summary of Lebanon's history and the influence of sectarianism on political development, (3) an introduction to Hezbollah's ideologies and goals, (4) an analysis of the role of Hezbollah prior to 2000 in legitimizing sectarianism, and (5) an examination of the influence of Hezbollah on the political system after the Israeli withdrawal.

### *A Synthesized Review of Ethnic Conflict Literature*

The case of Lebanon is relevant to the study of ethnic conflicts and civil wars because it demonstrates that consociational systems are vulnerable in the long-run when the state is weak. Conflict in a society is normal and expected, but escalations into violent clashes are traumatic events that have long-term effects on all aspect of society. Intrastate ethnic conflicts are common, and understanding the domestic factors that result in violent outbursts is crucial to successfully address and resolve crises before they evolve into civil wars. Neal G. Jesse and Kristen P. Williams provide a comprehensive review of comparative politics' approach to ethnic conflict in their book entitled *Ethnic Conflict: A Systematic Approach to Cases of Conflict*. The authors expand on the dominant theories and concepts in the field and provide numerous case studies to demonstrate the advantages and obstacles of each conflict resolution approach. However, the authors do not tackle the case of Lebanon, which offers the opportunity to examine the case in greater detail without relying solely on their interpretation of sectarianism.

The emergence of modern states involved the imposition of internationally recognized boundaries often incorporating numerous ethnic groups without a shared history under the same authority.<sup>1</sup> These newly-established pluralist states must balance the different ethnic identities comprising their society to avoid the intensification of ethnic tensions into a violent conflict.<sup>2</sup> As such, modern countries have to promote nationalism and determine the extent to which ethnicity is incorporated into society and

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<sup>1</sup> Stephan J. Stedman, Introduction to Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements, by Stephan J. Stedman, Donald Rothchild and Elizabeth M. Cousens, eds. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Milton J. Esman, An Introduction to Ethnic Conflict (Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2004), 7.

political institutions. Before exploring ethnic conflict resolution approaches, it is pivotal to define the concepts involved in ethnic conflict studies.

The definition of ethnicity that is most relevant to the sectarian system of Lebanon is provided by Bruce Gilley, “ethnicity is that part of a person’s identity which is drawn from one or more ‘markers’ like race, religion, shared history, region social symbols or language.”<sup>3</sup> This definition includes religion and region, which are applicable to Lebanon since 18 religious sects shape political relations and are predominantly concentrated in homogeneous regions as a result of the ethnic cleansing of the late 1980s.<sup>4</sup> None of the sects comprises the majority of the Lebanese population, which affects sectarian interactions and prevents any sect from imposing its views in a democratic setting.<sup>5</sup> The nature of sectarianism requires politico-religious elites to manage power-sharing and thus society is divided in a vertical manner where sectarian elites develop patron-client relationships with the members of their sects.<sup>6</sup> Often, due to weak state capacity, sectarian patronage has served as the sole source of access to health and education, which reinforces the importance of sectarian loyalties and delegitimizes the state and nationalism.<sup>7</sup> Thus, a definition of ethnicity must consider religious sects as distinct groups interacting in Lebanon to access and control politics.

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce Gilley, “Against the Concept of Ethnic Conflict,” *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 6 (2004): 1158.

<sup>4</sup> Nazih Richani, *Dilemmas of Democracy and Political Parties in Sectarian Societies: The Case of the Progressive Socialist Party of Lebanon 1949-1996* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 14.

<sup>5</sup> Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A Modern History of Lebanon* (Missouri: Pluto Press, 2007), 91.

<sup>6</sup> Imad Mansour, “Washington and Hezbollah: A Rare Convergence of Interests,” *Journal Essay Middle East Policy Council* (February 17, 2011): 2.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Alagha, “Hizballah After the Syrian Withdrawal,” *Middle East Report* no. 237 (Winter 2005): 39.

There are countless interpretations of ethnicity and ethnic conflict provided by academics from the social sciences. The primordialist approach to ethnicity includes three core assumptions: (1) individuals have *one* identity, (2) ethnic identity is *fixed*, and (3) it is *exogenous* to human processes.<sup>8</sup> For instance, Donald L. Horowitz, a prominent primordialist scholar, defines ethnicity as “ascribed traits shared by a group such as language, race, and religion that knit people together.”<sup>9</sup> He also specifies that “ethnic conflict involves the subordination of groups by others over the distribution of resources or inclusion in politics that reinforces the centrality of ethnicity and results in conflict.”<sup>10</sup> While primordialism has been widely critiqued and challenged – mostly for its inability to explain peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups - its contribution to the study of ethnic conflict cannot be ignored because it encourages further debate and examination of the topic. Primordialism’s view of ethnic conflict is relevant to Lebanon because the unequal sharing of power between the different religious sects has occupied a central role in destabilizing the country since its independence.

Constructivists refute primordialist arguments and instead advance three different assumptions: (1) Individuals have *multiple* ethnic identities, (2) identities *can* change, and (3) if change occurs, it is a result of *human processes*.<sup>11</sup> Kanchan Chandra claims that ethnic identities evolve and change through time as part of a social phenomenon to

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<sup>8</sup> Kanchan Chandra, Introduction to Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics,’ by Kanchan Chandra, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press (forthcoming in 2012): 18.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid: 18.

<sup>10</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, Ethnic Groups in Conflict (California : Berkley University Press, 2000), 14.

<sup>11</sup> Chandra, 18.

“satisfy needs.”<sup>12</sup> Chandra adds that collective consciousness “leads to politically salient identities yet ethnicity is not inherently conflictual.”<sup>13</sup> Moreover, constructivists explain that “descent-based attributes are necessary but not sufficient to define ethnicity.”<sup>14</sup> The contribution of constructivists to the field of ethnic conflict studies is significant, as it renders major concepts more applicable from theory to practice than the parsimonious arguments introduced by primordialists. Surveys demonstrate that not all Shi’a select their religious identity as a primary identification.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, the same survey finds that a growing proportion of the Lebanese Shi’a community identifies as Shi’a.<sup>16</sup> Thus, a constructivist approach explains how the evolution of a group consciousness among Lebanese Shi’a enabled Hezbollah to capitalize on its Shi’a identity and gather support.

The instrumentalist perspective presents another interpretation of ethnicity and conflict. Instrumentalist scholars claim that the elites “construct group consciousness through selective evocations of history to legitimize their claims.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, ethnicity alone cannot explain conflict but it is used to facilitate mobilization to demand redistribution of wealth, access to social services or settle territory disputes.<sup>18</sup> Anthony Smith argues that ethnicity is used by political elites and intellectuals to mobilize support.<sup>19</sup> Smith claims

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<sup>12</sup> Chandra, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Neal G. Jesse and Kristen P. Williams, *Ethnic Conflict: A Systematic Approach to Cases of Conflict* (Washington DC: CQ Press, 2011), 11.

<sup>14</sup> Chandra, 45.

<sup>15</sup> Judith Palmer Harik, “Between Islam and the System : Sources and Implementations of Popular Support for Lebanon’s Hizballah,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 40, no. 1 (March 1996):53.

<sup>16</sup> Imad Mansour: 5.

<sup>17</sup> Jesse and Williams, 11.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2001), 54-55.

that “there can be no identity without memory, no collective purpose without myth, and identity and purpose or destiny are necessary elements of the very concept of nation.”<sup>20</sup> Smith’s assumption provides a possible explanation for the failure of Lebanon to develop a cohesive national identity. Furthermore, the instrumentalist perspective suggests that political leaders in Lebanon have capitalized on sectarian identities to shape political relations and promote their interests. As the history of Lebanon demonstrates, political leaders used sectarianism to establish a divide-and-rule strategy to secure their power.

Finally, the modernist approach argues that states are able to make societies more culturally homogeneous as the state develops and industrializes and thus nationalism will eventually replace ethnic identities.<sup>21</sup> However, modernists fail to acknowledge the “historical depth of ethnicities.”<sup>22</sup> Supporters of modernization recognize that the process can increase fragmentation as competition for new resources increases.<sup>23</sup> The modernist approach is not relevant to the case of Lebanon because it has struggled with sectarian divisions and competition since its inception and modernization fails to explain the evolution of sectarian relations in the country.

There are two political systems that deal with the incorporation of ethnicity in a dichotomous manner. A liberal system de-emphasizes ethnicity in politics. Indeed, a liberal system “supersedes current ethnic identities with a common, overlapping

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>21</sup> Jesse and Williams, 12-13.

<sup>22</sup> Jesse and William, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 13.

identity.”<sup>24</sup> Such an approach encourages the emergence of civic nationalism. Unfortunately, civic nationalism requires time and may facilitate the marginalization of a particular ethnic group from politics if legislation does not ensure its representation in the short-run. The United States is an excellent example of a liberal political system.

The alternative to a liberal system is consociationalism, an ethnic conflict resolution framework popular in pluralistic societies transitioning to democracy. Andrew Finlay explains consociational system as ‘a mode of liberal governmentality that is informed by and cultivates particular forms of ethno-national subjectivity.’<sup>25</sup> Consociation embraces pluralism in politics, and as such it “recognizes segmental cleavages explicitly and turns them into constructive elements of a stable democracy that encourages ethnic elites to cooperate.”<sup>26</sup> An important supporter of consociationalism is Arend Lijphart, who writes that “a consociational political system allows the different ethnic groups to have proportional representation within government through elite accommodation and agreement about power-sharing.”<sup>27</sup> Lijphart enumerates four basic characteristics of consociationalism: (1) executive power-sharing, (2) autonomy, (3) proportionality, and (4) veto rights.<sup>28</sup> The Lebanese sectarian system is based on consociationalism notions, where its constitution acknowledges the legitimacy of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Finlay, *Governing Ethnic Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 50-51.

<sup>26</sup>Brendan O’Leary, “Debating Consociational Politics: Normative and Explanatory Arguments,” in *From Power Sharing to Democracy: Post-Conflict Institutions in Ethnically Divided Societies* Sid Noel ed., (Canada: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005): 16-17.

<sup>27</sup> Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in plural societies: A comparative exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 45.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 67.

religious sects in Lebanon and the 1943 National Pact distributes power between the elites of the major sects. However, political power was not based on proportionality, which has often led to escalation into violent clashes along sectarian lines to change the distribution of power. As such, Sectarianism in Lebanon is an incomplete application of consociational politics.

In essence, a hybrid definition of ethnicity that was inspired by primordialist scholars but refined by constructivists allows a relevant clarification of what ethnicity entails. The institutionalization of ethnicity in Lebanese politics reinforces the development of sectarian-based identities that are not immutable but remain pivotal in shaping interactions. Indeed, sectarianism places ethnicity at the center of politics and it makes it instrumental in delineating power-sharing in the country. Lebanon's sectarian system seeks to ensure the representation of the major sects in politics. Unfortunately, its history illustrates that sectarianism has often led to state paralysis and encouraged violent conflict between sectarian groups.

### ***A Modern History of Lebanon and Sectarianism***

Encapsulating the history of Lebanon in a brief essay is challenging. Due to space constraints, I focus solely on the turning points regarding the distribution of power among the different sects of the country's modern history. I recognize that the omission of particular events prevents a complete contextualization of sectarianism in Lebanon but nonetheless such a general approach suffices to demonstrate the lack of a shared national identity and the repercussions on the stability of the country. The overview of Lebanon's history highlights the often polarized interests of the different sects on domestic and

regional policies and the subsequent deadlock it causes in government. The weak central government has empowered sectarian organizations and encouraged the creation of organizations such as Hezbollah that supplement the state's role in their respective regions and encourage sectarian cleavage.

Nation-state building in a multi-ethnic country like Lebanon has proven a complex task. The narratives developed by Lebanese historians often carried a dichotomous approach to the country's heritage. For instance, the Christian-Lebanese nationalist school depicted Lebanon as a unique nation in the Middle East that drew close resemblances to the West.<sup>29</sup> As such, they envisioned the development of Lebanon as a nation with strong ties to Europe and the United States. Meanwhile, the Arab-nationalist school preferred to see Lebanon integrated into the Arab world.<sup>30</sup> Arab-nationalists denounced the West's attempt at dividing the region and advocated for Lebanon to be reunited with Syria.<sup>31</sup> The two schools interpreted the past of Lebanon through different lenses and used distinct –and opposed– narratives to depict the past and future of Lebanon. The absence of a single historical narrative prevented the development of meaningful and efficient nation-building in the period immediately following the independence of Lebanon.<sup>32</sup> The failure to create a Lebanese narrative carried long-term implications for the stability of the country. In short, the case of Lebanon illustrates the

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<sup>29</sup> Hanna Ziadeh, *Sectarianism and Intercommunal Nation-Building in Lebanon* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2006), 28-29.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>31</sup> Ziadeh, 29.

<sup>32</sup> John P. Entelis, *Pluralism and Party Transformation in Lebanon: Al-Kata'ib, 1936-1970* (Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1974), 5-6.

challenges of nation-building in a multi-ethnic society where the lack of consensus about history prevented the emergence of nationalism.

Lebanon received its independence from France in 1943 following an intense struggle.<sup>33</sup> The creation of Lebanon was officialized through two founding documents - a formal constitution and an informal verbal agreement between Maronite and Sunni elites determining power-sharing between Christians and Muslims.<sup>34</sup> The verbal agreement is referred to as the 1943 National Pact. Fawwaz Traboulsi explains that the constitution includes a dichotomy that reinforces the potential for ethnic conflict because it “establishes the judicial, civic and political equality of all Lebanese as citizens while simultaneously institutionalizing judicial and political inequalities as subjects belonging to hierarchized religious communities with unequal access to political power and public office.”<sup>35</sup> Traboulsi notes that the National Pact “is a confirmation of political guarantees for Christians in exchange for political and a socio-cultural promises for Lebanese Muslims.”<sup>36</sup> As such, the National Pact stipulates that while the President is Maronite, the Prime Minister shall be Sunni, and the speaker of Parliament a Shiite.<sup>37</sup> The major sects’ elites reached a power-sharing agreement through the National Pact that determined the role of Maronites, Sunni, and Shi’a Lebanese in politics and placed sectarianism at the center of political development.

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<sup>33</sup> Traboulsi, 107.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>36</sup> Traboulsi, 111.

<sup>37</sup> Augustus Richard Norton, Hezbollah : A Short Story (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 12.

Socio-economic disparities grew as Lebanon's prosperity increased because economic growth was not accompanied by redistributive policies.<sup>38</sup> Sectarian inequalities were pronounced in education and public service and worsened with the inflation of the middle class which increased competition for positions with sectarian quotas.<sup>39</sup> The pro-Western authoritarianism of Kamil Sham'un that lasted from 1952 until 1958 only amplified the tensions in the country as violence erupted to remove him from power.<sup>40</sup> The subsequent political turmoil and violence that plagued Lebanon weakened state capability and encouraged the strengthening of patronage among sectarian lines as elites replaced the state and provided their populations with social services.<sup>41</sup> Student movements and workers unions mobilized against the commercial oligarchy and expressed their frustration with the lack of representation and inclusion. The state reacted with internal repression and insisted that reforms threatened the unity and security of Lebanon.<sup>42</sup> Thus, only a decade after independence, the Lebanese state was already paralyzed by clashes between sectarian elites supporting and opposing Sham'un.

A turning point in the history of Lebanon was the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, which affected Lebanon's stability as the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) became active in Lebanese territory.<sup>43</sup> At first, the Lebanese government supported the activities

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<sup>38</sup> Mona Harb, "Deconstructing Hizballah and its Suburb," Middle East Research Information Project no. 242 (Spring 2007): 15.

<sup>39</sup> Traboulsi, 165.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 162.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 168.

<sup>43</sup> Traboulsi, 152.

of the PLO in the south, but the situation soured quickly as the sovereignty and legitimacy of the state of Lebanon was undermined. The expansion of the PLO's presence in the south of Lebanon and Israel's military retaliation against PLO's strikes transformed the south into a war zone. On 1 March 1968, the Lebanese army launched its first attack against Palestinian armed groups. The military actions against PLO divided the government as the moves were highly contested.<sup>44</sup> The political stalemate between sectarian elites led the government to declare a state of emergency that lasted 215 days.<sup>45</sup> Finally, the Cairo Accords signed on 8 November 1969 temporarily resolved the violence between the Lebanese army and Palestinian armed organizations by recognizing the right of the Palestinian militias to be present on Lebanese soil.<sup>46</sup> The document also confirmed the two parties' willingness to cooperate.<sup>47</sup> The agreement did not please all Lebanese actors, and once again the country was divided along sectarian lines, with Christians advocating for the eviction of Palestinian militias from the south and Muslims supporting the Arab cause against Israel.

Lebanon became the new playground of the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>48</sup> Although Lebanon did not participate in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, its territory became a corridor between Israeli and Syrian forces.<sup>49</sup> The involvement of regional states in Lebanon added

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>48</sup> Robert G. Rabil, *Religion, National Identity, and Confessional Politics in Lebanon: The Challenge of Islamism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2.

<sup>49</sup> Traboulsi, 183.

to the already strenuous struggles in the south involving Lebanese actors and the PLO. A year later, the governments of Lebanon and Syria signed a joint defence treaty “granting Syria early warning facilities in Lebanon.”<sup>50</sup> The move was perceived by Israel as a threat, and it reacted by increasing its operations in the country. Thus, the period between the two civil wars (1958-1975) witnessed the amplification of sectarian tensions as Lebanon became the theatre of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In 1975, Lebanon plunged into civil war. It began with the “Christian-Palestinian War” where the Phalange Party and the Lebanese Front battled the nationalist and progressive movements of the Lebanese National Movement.<sup>51</sup> The second phase of the civil war started in 1997 and the events were influenced by the Peace Agreement signed between Egypt and Israel in 1978. The peace settlement between the two states led Syria to revise its approach towards Lebanon and increase its presence in the country to improve its status during negotiations with Israel.<sup>52</sup> Israel created the ‘Army of Free Lebanon’ (AFL) to patrol and secure the ‘good frontier’ in the south of the country and put pressure on Syria and the Lebanese government to disarm Palestinian militias.<sup>53</sup> The deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) aimed to de-escalate the situation, but the operation was futile in preventing violence. The PLO used the threat of a Phalangist mini-state and a Phalangist-Israeli connection to mobilize support in the Muslim regions of the country.<sup>54</sup> However, the quality of life in PLO-

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 182.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 207.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 206.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 212.

controlled areas was low, as infrastructure was destroyed in the south and access to social services vanished. Gradually, Amal turned against the PLO, and with the help of Syria, it sought to disarm the PLO but failed. In the meantime, while foreign forces battled in the south, the Lebanese government was once again at an impasse due to the lack of cooperation between the sects and their inability to compromise on policies.

On 6 June 1982, Israel invaded the south of the country and encircled Beirut.<sup>55</sup> The move followed two years of fighting in the south between Amal and the Palestinian armed forces. The arrival of Israeli forces was not opposed by the Lebanese government, and many civilians in the south were hopeful the move would end the violence in the region.<sup>56</sup> Once the Palestinian armed groups left Lebanon, Israel insisted on normalizing relations between the two states and threatened that a failure to comply would lead to the Israeli occupation of the south.<sup>57</sup> The initiative failed, and Israel occupied Lebanon until 2000. Israel was vocal about its preference for a Christian state without Palestinians, which alarmed non-Christian sects fearing the loss of representation and power in politics.

The final stage of the civil war lasted from 1983 until 1989. During that period, Amal was fighting both Palestinians and Hezbollah in the south of Lebanon and the suburbs of Beirut. During this time period, Amal's legitimacy decreased.<sup>58</sup> Traboulsi noted that during the civil war:

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<sup>55</sup> Jean-Loup Samaan, *Les Métamorphoses du Liban* (Paris : Editions Karthala, 2007), 32.

<sup>56</sup> David Hirst, *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), 143.

<sup>57</sup> Traboulsi, 216.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 234.

“militia power not only practiced ethnic, sectarian and political ‘cleansing’ of territories but also committed what Juan Goytisolo called ‘memoricide,’ the eradication of all memories of coexistence and common interests between Lebanese. Instead, they imposed their discourse of ‘protection’ on their own ‘people.’”<sup>59</sup>

Traboulsi’s account emphasizes the paradox in Lebanon’s development - the achievement of a sectarian system, i.e., self-rule of each community on its own territory - resulted in more violent responses and unimaginable suffering. Thus, sectarianism was instituted to avoid ethnic conflict but it only encouraged irreconcilable divisions.

Fifteen years of war ended in September 1989 with the negotiation of the Ta’if Agreement.<sup>60</sup> The initiative was led by the Arab League and backed by the United States.<sup>61</sup> Syria was appointed as the enforcer of the agreement and because of the stakes it had in promoting a stable Lebanon, Syria was willing to suffer the costs of implementation. The civil wars were triggered by the dissatisfaction with the Christian-dominated power-sharing formula and perpetual disagreement about the identity of Lebanon.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the Ta’if Agreement redistributed power among the Lebanese sects. The document increased the power of Muslim sects and changed the distribution of Parliamentary seats favoring Christians to an equal amount between Christians and

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<sup>59</sup> Traboulsi, 242.

<sup>60</sup> Stedman, 567.

<sup>61</sup> Talal Nizameddin, “The Political Economy of Lebanon under Rafiq Hariri: An Interpretation,” Middle East Institute 60 no. 1 (Winter 2006): 95.

<sup>62</sup> Stedman, 570.

Muslims.<sup>63</sup> The Ta'if Agreement also aimed “to increase the authority of the Lebanese state over its territory by demanding that all militias disband, disarm and demobilize within six months of the beginning of the implementation.”<sup>64</sup> The Syrian army was to assist Lebanon in implementing the agreement but a deadline was set to ensure the withdrawal of Syrian forces.<sup>65</sup>

The Ta'if Agreement was well received in Lebanon except by a small faction led by General Michel Aoun, which demanded an immediate and complete withdrawal of Syria from Lebanon.<sup>66</sup> At the time, Aoun was in power but his opposition to the agreement led in 1991 to his exile. In 1992 the first elections since the end of the wars were held.<sup>67</sup> Syria promoted a division of labor where the elected Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri “would lead the economy and Hezbollah the resistance against Israel.”<sup>68</sup>

To avoid repetition and redundancy, the history of Lebanon after the 1990s will be covered in the following sections that address the influence of Hezbollah on sectarianism. In essence, a condensed summary of the modern history of Lebanon serves to illustrate the impact of government paralysis due to sectarian divisions over the stability of Lebanon. Civil wars were the result of sectarian tensions and inequalities yet attempts to reform the political system to rectify the situation were always opposed by some group and thus impossible to implement. Only an externally imposed peace agreement enabled

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 571.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 571.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 572.

<sup>66</sup> Stedman, 573.

<sup>67</sup> Rabil, 73.

<sup>68</sup> Mansour: 6.

changes to the distribution of power. Moreover, the results of a central government unable to fulfill its duties include the strengthening of regional sectarian militias and the opportunity for foreign actors to intervene and disrupt internal politics. It is obvious that this brief review oversimplifies the development of Lebanon, but it introduces the context in which Hezbollah was able to capitalize on its sectarian identity to mobilize support and flourish as a resistance movement in the south.

### ***The Emergence of Hezbollah***

Ideological, socio-economical, and political factors encouraged the formation of a militant Shi'a organization. Of course the Israeli invasion of the south in 1982 contributed to its creation but several factors were already developing that explain the timing and approach of Hezbollah. What differentiated Hezbollah from other organizations active in Lebanon, such as Amal, was its refusal to target civilians in the south while providing professional social services to the populations in need.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, Hezbollah was able to mobilize support and become a powerful political player because it filled a gap that none of the existing actors were able to address.

The politicization of Lebanese Shi'a occurred in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>70</sup> In the years leading to the revolution, many clerics were educated and trained in Iran, then relocated throughout the Middle East to share Islam's message and encourage the mobilization of Shi'a Muslims. Religious figures in Iran were influential and powerful, Fouad Ajami explains that "for over four centuries, since the introduction

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<sup>69</sup> Joseph Alagha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology: Religious Ideology, Political Ideology, and Political Program* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 12.

<sup>70</sup> Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: Politics & Religion* (New York: Pluto Press, 2002), 7.

of Shi'a Islam to Iran, Iranian ulama had supported and opposed kings, raised and paid for private armies, put together coalitions that spanned the entire political spectrum (...).<sup>71</sup> It was in this context that Iranian-born Imam Musa al-Sadr was invited to relocate to Lebanon and initiate the mobilization of Lebanese Shi'a.

In 1959 al-Sadr moved to Lebanon and became active within a quiet and passive community where Lebanese Shi'a were a marginalized minority.<sup>72</sup> Until then, the sectarian system of Lebanon did not acknowledge the interests of Lebanese Shi'a because Maronite and Sunni elites monopolized power in government.<sup>73</sup> Al-Sadr entered politics as a reformist religious figure determined to advance the interests of Lebanese Shi'a.<sup>74</sup> To entice support from a dormant population, he framed modern socio-political struggles in a religious context of resisting injustice and later organized the Movement of the Oppressed.<sup>75</sup> In 1974, al-Sadr founded the Ranks of Lebanese Resistance (Amal) as a military branch of the Movement of the Oppressed to fight against Israeli military strikes in Lebanon.<sup>76</sup> His mysterious disappearance in 1978 put an abrupt end to his vision. Hezbollah cites al-Sadr as instrumental in shaping its ideology and programs as well as promoting the politicization of Lebanese Shi'a.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Fouad Ajami, *The Vanishing Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 47.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

<sup>73</sup> Ajami, 89

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 88.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 155.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 167.

<sup>77</sup> Naim Qasser, *Hezbollah: The Story from Within* (London: SAQI, 2005), 14-15.

It is important to understand why prior to that period Shi'ites were not engaged in politics despite their socio-economic deprivation. Imad Mansour notes that Shi'a communities were not organized in Lebanon, mostly because the 1943 National Pact did not include Shi'a elites.<sup>78</sup> Shi'a demands were conveyed by non-Shi'a organizations but there was little accountability. As such, the rural periphery of Beirut and the south of Lebanon, where the majority of Shi'a resided, were characterized by poverty and misery. Furthermore, the urbanization that occurred with modernization efforts exposed the deprivation of the populations located in the south relative to wealthier urbanites living in Beirut.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, levels of literacy, political participation, and other development indicators were significantly lower among Shi'a communities than among their Sunni and Christian counterparts.<sup>80</sup> Shi'a communities suffered the biggest casualties from the civil wars, and conflicts in the south of Lebanon and their forced relocation into overpopulated communities precipitated their radicalization.<sup>81</sup>

The creation of Hezbollah followed the Israeli invasion of the south of Lebanon in 1982 and was the culmination of numerous domestic and regional events. Thus, Hezbollah joined the organizations established in the south that fought foreign occupations but it used Shi'a rhetoric to justify its resistance operations and its socio-economic agenda.

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<sup>78</sup> Imad Mansour: 4.

<sup>79</sup> Saad-Ghorayeb, 7.

<sup>80</sup> Saad-Ghorayeb, 8.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 9.

### *The Ideology of Hezbollah*

The treatment of Shi'a groups became increasingly important because by the 1970s, Lebanese Shi'a was the largest sect in the country.<sup>82</sup> In addition to al-Sadr, Naim Qasser, Second-in-Command of Hezbollah, recognized the influence Ayatollah al-Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah as another key figure in shaping the ideology of Hezbollah, even though he never joined the organization.<sup>83</sup> Qasser also acknowledges the pivotal influence of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. He suggests that the event helped frame Hezbollah's struggle as it Islamicized the Israeli occupation and Shi'a inequality, while the Revolutionary Guard armed and trained Hezbollah members.<sup>84</sup> Thus, the ideological influence of religious figures and events led to the formation of Hezbollah as a rival to secular and non-Shi'a movements active in Lebanon.

The ideological basis of Hezbollah is rooted in Pan-Islamist concepts. Hezbollah was active starting in 1982 but its first publication, an open letter Manifesto, was published in 1985.<sup>85</sup> The document introduced the ideology and the goals of Hezbollah at the time. The Shi'a organization placed Islam at the centre of its ideology. As mentioned above, Hezbollah claimed that the Iranian Revolution was a pivotal source of influence as it demonstrated the power of faithful Muslims organizing under a religious banner against oppression and injustice.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Fouad Ajami, *The Vanishing Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 60.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 15-16.

<sup>84</sup> Saad-Ghorayeb, 17.

<sup>85</sup> Norton, 34.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

In the document Hezbollah separated the world in a dichotomous fashion, where there were only oppressors or oppressed people. It categorized both superpowers of the Cold War as imperialist forces manipulating Third World politics.<sup>87</sup> While the organization identified the United States as the power behind all the problems of the Middle East, Hezbollah perceived communism as an amoral force also detrimental to the interests of Muslims.<sup>88</sup> It argued that the United States' unconditional support of Israel and France's ties with Lebanese Christians only confirmed the statement that major powers undermined the welfare of Muslims.<sup>89</sup> In the Manifesto, Hezbollah also advocated for the liberation of Palestine.<sup>90</sup> The organization's view of global power politics was reflected in its stance on Lebanese domestic politics. For instance, Hezbollah refused to associate itself with the Communist Party and Amal and as such framed its struggle in a religious manner, contradictory to other groups' discourses and narratives.<sup>91</sup>

Hezbollah portrayed the Lebanese state as corrupted and controlled by malevolent foreign forces.<sup>92</sup> Thus, the Lebanese state was considered illegitimate, and Hezbollah argued that it ought to be replaced by "an Islamist state rooted in concepts of justice, integrity and honesty."<sup>93</sup> Due to the global and national political context, Hezbollah

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>90</sup> Adham Saouli, "Lebanon's Hizbullah: The Quest for Survival," World Affairs Institute 166 no. 2 (Fall 2003): 76.

<sup>91</sup> Norton, 37.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>93</sup> Eitan Azani, *Hezbollah: The Story of the Party of G-d: From Revolution to Institutionalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 62.

concluded that only through self-help would Muslims be able to improve their situations and protect Islam.<sup>94</sup> To achieve these goals, Hezbollah advocated for Muslims to fight in unison under the banner of Islam.<sup>95</sup> In the public letter, Hezbollah wrote “(...) freedom is not given but regained with the sacrifice of both heart and soul.”<sup>96</sup> In order to liberate Lebanon from negative foreign influence, Hezbollah justified the use of violence. Since the document was published, Hezbollah has noted that the sectarian nature of Lebanon prevented the emergence of an Islamic state and reassured the Lebanese population that Islam could not be imposed.<sup>97</sup>

In sum, Hezbollah’s ideology as declared in the 1985 public letter was to promote resistance against powers detrimental to Muslim interests. To challenge the status quo, Hezbollah advocated for Muslims to unite and fight for their own interests. Even though the document has been revised since by Hezbollah’s leadership, the public letter serves as an important framework to understand the guiding principles and the programs of Hezbollah. In many ways, Hezbollah challenged the undisputed influence of Amal in the south of Lebanon and used its religious and revolutionary platform to mobilize support and become a significant player in Lebanese politics.

### ***Hezbollah’s Influence on the Lebanese Political System Before 2000***

As stated previously, during the Israeli occupation Hezbollah derived significant legitimacy across sectarian lines because of its resistance operations and its

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<sup>94</sup> Norton, 38.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>96</sup> Traboulsi, 171.

<sup>97</sup> Norton, 40.

institutionalization of a professional social welfare system.<sup>98</sup> The organization's refusal to target civilians as well as the organization's denunciation of corruption further legitimized Hezbollah.<sup>99</sup>

Hezbollah was able to impose order in the south where the local population was abandoned by the state against a foreign occupation and often abused by Lebanese and Palestinian militias that took advantage of the absence of the rule of law.<sup>100</sup> From its inception, Hezbollah was dedicated "to expand its support base, to the recruitment and training of new activists, and to the creation of a military and civilian organizational infrastructure in the Shi'a population centers."<sup>101</sup> Hezbollah social welfare has three components: (1) economic assistance to the needy, (2) medical assistance, and (3) Islamic education and culture.<sup>102</sup> Hezbollah's resistance operations and social initiatives granted the organization significant legitimacy among Shi'a and non-Shi'a communities. Moreover, Israeli retaliations against Hezbollah's operations often improved rather than undermined the legitimacy of the organization.

Once the civil war ended in 1989, Hezbollah was at a crossroads where it had to decide whether or not to integrate with the political system it had denounced since its inception.<sup>103</sup> Thus, in 1992 Hezbollah had to consult its leadership to debate its

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<sup>98</sup> Nizar Hamzeh, "Lebanon's Hizbullah: From Islamic Revolution to Parliamentary Accommodation," *Third World Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1993): 335.

<sup>99</sup> Saad-Ghorayeb, 3.

<sup>100</sup> Mansour: 6.

<sup>101</sup> Azani, 54.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

<sup>103</sup> Norton, 43.

immediate future.<sup>104</sup> Hezbollah moved from radicalism towards pragmatism under the new leadership of Hassan Nasrallah.<sup>105</sup> Thus, with the support of Iran's Ayatollah, Hezbollah transitioned into the political system. Since its decision to participate in elections, Hezbollah has consistently won approximately 10 per cent of parliamentary seats, which indicates that its legitimacy among the Shi'a population remains high.<sup>106</sup>

In essence, Hezbollah led successful resistance operations against the Israeli occupation and Lebanese militias that targeted the populations of the south of the country. Moreover, it established effective and legitimate institutions that provided civilians with socio-economic services such as economic assistance, education, and health. The popularity of Hezbollah enabled the organization to transition into politics and to capture a significant proportion of the seats in Parliament.

### ***Hezbollah's Impact on Sectarianism After 2000***

The withdrawal of Israeli forces from the south of Lebanon in 2000 was associated with Hezbollah's successful resistance campaign and its victory granted it unprecedented support.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, Hezbollah was the first and only organization capable of reclaiming territory occupied by Israeli forces and the exploit amplified its legitimacy throughout the Middle East. Therefore, in the immediate aftermath of the Israeli

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<sup>104</sup> Azani, 45.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>107</sup> Mansour: 9.

withdrawal, Hezbollah's popularity overcame sectarian divisions and as such it did not challenge the political system. However, this trend has since been reversed.<sup>108</sup>

The refusal of Hezbollah to disarm following the end of the Israeli occupation undermines the stability of the sectarian system because it fuels suspicion and distrust within Lebanon. Imad Mansour notes that Hezbollah has the strongest force in Lebanon, only equated by the Lebanese Armed Forces, which 'fuels a radical imbalance of inter-communal military capabilities and encourages an internal arms race.'<sup>109</sup> Moreover, Hezbollah's continued ties with Iran and Syria pose doubts about the organization's commitment to advancing Lebanon's interests.<sup>110</sup>

United Nations Resolution 1559 calls for all armed factions in Lebanon to disarm but Hezbollah has refused to comply.<sup>111</sup> Hezbollah has suggested that it would be willing to disarm if there were "official and enforceable mechanisms guaranteeing the integrity of Lebanon's territory against outside incursions."<sup>112</sup> The contested justification was further challenged after the 2006 incident between Hezbollah and Israel. Hezbollah's kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers prompted Israeli retaliation against indiscriminate targets in southern Lebanon.<sup>113</sup> As a result, more than 1,000 Lebanese civilians lost their lives.<sup>114</sup> The 2006 War eroded the legitimacy of the organization among the Lebanese

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<sup>108</sup> Saad-Ghorayeb, 1.

<sup>109</sup> Mansour: 7.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>111</sup> Alagha, 34.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>113</sup> Mansour : 8.

<sup>114</sup> Harb, 13.

population.<sup>115</sup> The event triggered a public debate about the legitimacy and necessity of Hezbollah's armed faction following its transition into politics because many Lebanese believed it should act as a political party and abandon its armed militia.<sup>116</sup>

The 2008 military campaign launched by the organization against the Lebanese state further decreased the legitimacy of Hezbollah and increased sectarian divisions. The decision by the Lebanese government "to shut-down Hezbollah's private land-communications network was perceived as a threat to its operations and resulted in a nationwide military campaign against the government."<sup>117</sup> Hezbollah's use of force against the Lebanese state amplified sectarian tensions and numerous Shi'a became increasingly vocal in their criticism of Hezbollah's actions.

In addition to the dubious validity of Hezbollah's military actions, its continued links to Iran and Syria raise serious doubts about the organization's Lebanese identity.<sup>118</sup> As mentioned earlier, Hezbollah's existence is a direct consequence of Iran's ideology and support and of Syria's endorsement. The assassination of Hariri in February 2005 triggered internal divisions along sectarian lines as suspicions that Syria was behind the incident spread.<sup>119</sup> As such, a month following his death, mass protests erupted in Lebanon demanding the departure of Syrian forces.<sup>120</sup> The protests were successful, and in April 2005, Syria left the country but its ties to Hezbollah remained strong. The

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<sup>115</sup> Mansour : 8.

<sup>116</sup> Azani, 245-247.

<sup>117</sup> Mansour : 8.

<sup>118</sup> Hirst, 132.

<sup>119</sup> Norton, 148.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 128-129.

obvious ties between Hezbollah and Iran and Syria generate domestic doubts about the motives of the Lebanese organization.<sup>121</sup> While Hezbollah promotes its Arab and Lebanese identity, the debate about its reliance on external patronage casts doubt about the sincerity of Hezbollah's dedication to Lebanon's sovereignty.

In conclusion, ethnic conflict literature introduces the dilemma faced by pluralist societies about the level of integration of ethnicities in politics. Lijphart's concept of consociation as a system ensuring representation and cooperation clarifies the basis of the establishment of the sectarian system in Lebanon. Indeed, following Lebanon's independence, sectarianism was designed to reconcile diverging views and interpretation of Lebanese narratives to avoid violent clashes between the multitude of religious sects. However, an examination of Lebanon's history demonstrates the instability that the sectarian system reinforced. The civil wars and tensions between sects regarding power-sharing weakened the state and invited foreign interventions and occupations of Lebanese territory. The centrality of sectarian identities in the country and the weak central state laid the foundation for the emergence of Hezbollah, which pursued the advancement of Shi'a interests while leading successful resistance operations against Israel's occupation. While sectarianism facilitated and legitimized the creation of the organization, the end of the Israeli occupation forced Hezbollah to revise its ideology. This essay demonstrates the increasing erosion of Hezbollah's credibility and the negative influence it has on the Lebanese sectarian system since the withdrawal of Israeli forces.

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 47.

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