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Lebanon struggling: the land of cedars between religious legacy and modern ambitions

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A tutte le persone che credono in me:

siete la mia forza più grande

"Voi avete il vostro Libano, con i conflitti che lo accompagnano.

Io ho il mio Libano con i sogni che ci vivono.

Il mio Libano è un solo uomo,

la testa appoggiata sul braccio,

che si rilassa all'ombra del cedro,

dimentico di tutto,

tranne che di Dio

e della luce del sole."

- Khalil Gibran

Table of Contents

Introduction

I travelled to Lebanon for the first time in my life last year for holiday: I immediately felt, as foreign person, the peculiar character of that country and I fell in love with its cultural heritage. Known as "the land of cedars" because of the particular kind of tree growing in that region, Lebanon has a fascinating history characterised by a geographical concentration of numerous religious denominations. Wars fought in the name of different Gods characterise the entire history of Lebanon: Christians, Muslims (Shia and Sunni), Druze, and other fourteen denominations have been present in Lebanon and have sought to prevail over each other during hundreds of useless bloodsheds. Still today the political and economic framework of Lebanon is still uncertain and it is true that Lebanese people have been learning to live as the Latin poet Orazio used to say: *carpe diem*. Since the Lebanese history is mostly characterised by unexpected wars fought sometimes in a matter of days, sometimes for years, Lebanese people have learnt over time not to care about tomorrow, but to live in deep today.

However, it is true that nowadays the security framework has been enhanced by Lebanese security forces and the country lives peacefully, at least in the capital. The skyline of Beirut reminds an American coastal town and the average wealth of its inhabitants has been greatly improving. Valentino, Hermès and other luxury shops appear in every corner of the city centre, in the same place which was bombed tens of times during the Civil War (1975-1989). Billboards showing past and present photos have been put on the roads to remember, or better, not to forget the high price of freedom and (still fragile) peace.

Skyscrapers and luxury cars are the result of the last years' displacement of thousands of people from the Arabic Peninsula, who have moved to Beirut with their families for better tax conditions or just for living in milder weather areas, evading from the infernal temperatures of Doha or Abu Dhabi. Thus, it is evident that Beirut centre is mainly artificial and it does not reflect the real spirit of the country. Moving to other neighbourhoods, the scenario changes in a deep and unexpected way. The Shia-majority areas show crumbling structures and poverty: kids and disabled people beg beside the road and street vendors sell common use objects at very low price. There is an incredible dichotomy and an evident paradox between these two realities, and this state of things is

replicated in all the other areas of Lebanon. Indeed, the north (except for Tripoli) is Christian-majority and the landscape here is composed by luxurious hotels and casinos, with people owning fabulous villas and vineyards, as this country could be the Middle Eastern Monte Carlo.

In the Beqaa Valley, close to the Syrian border, the scenario is very different: wonderful restaurants and 5-star hotels are replaced by street vendors of bread and hummus and barely decent accommodations.

Given this framework, what is Lebanon today? Pretending to have understood this country that nothing has been understood. What I can say is that the land of cedars is today a real melting pot where different cultures, traditions and languages (yes, for example Armenians speak Armenian to each other) get together in a place and seek to find a common living without making war. It is a country large as the Italian region Abruzzo but with 6 million people and 18 different religious denominations. It is an ever-changing country where youngest generations are more and more open-minded and more belonging to their countries than their fathers. It is also a country, and this is a tremendously important matter in this period, with a fragile economy that struggles to grow.

In addition to its internal issues, Lebanon is weak also on the external side. It is surrounded by Syria, which has brought millions of refugees to its neighbour in the last seven years and has shaken political and economic stability of the land of cedars, and by Israel, with which Lebanon is in an everlasting conflict, kept under control by UNFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) along the *Blue Line*, the southern border close to Naqoura.

The past is written and still hurts, the present is unstable and the future is uncertain. Twelve years have passed from the last internal conflict and even though the centre of Beirut gives the impression of being Beverly Hills, nothing is very durable in this country and "be on the lookout" has become a *mantra* for every person living in Lebanon.

I decided to write a thesis on Lebanon after having won an internship at the Italian Embassy in Beirut from May to August 2019. I remember how excited I was last February when I met with Professor Corrao, my supervisor, for informing her about the experience I was going to live. On that occasion, we decided to set the thesis on Lebanon, since I would have lived there for three months and I would have had the possibility to fully experience Lebanese culture and way of living. Since Lebanon is a general subject and it

can be analysed through tens of point of views, in accord with Professor Corrao I decided to focus on three issues: religious denominations, Hezbollah and economic perspectives. In my view, these are key aspects of modern Lebanon in order to try to understand a little bit of this country. Of course, there are many other important and interesting subjects that deserve to be analysed: the United Nations' activity in the country, the migration wave from Syria, and others. I decided to focus on those three because they greatly interested me during my stay in Lebanon and especially for what concerns the chapter on economy, as intern at the Italian Embassy I was in charge of monitoring the long approval process of the 2019 budget and the implementation of reforms as requested by the CEDRE Conference.

I will start with an historical overview of religious denominations' history through the time, focusing on the hardest periods of Lebanon and seeking to demonstrate how the religious problem has always played a crucial role in the country.

In the second chapter I will outline the main characteristics of the Shia party Hezbollah, starting with its historical evolution, then focusing on the most important *manifestos* released through the years and also seeking to get a glimpse into the party's hierarchical organisation chart.

Lastly, in the third chapter, I will deepen several economic aspects of the country, firstly presenting main characteristics of Lebanon's internal and external economy, then focusing on the 2019 budget, eventually speaking about the discovery of oil and gas fields in the Mediterranean Sea and the related offshore licensing rounds.

Lebanon and religious communities: an historical perspective

1.1 Religious communities in the land of cedars

It is common opinion that religious communities' interests and their sectarian character have always played a crucial role in the modern history of Lebanon. If this is true on one side, it is also evident that clashes and wars between religious factions have been the result of years of foreign dominion of the country, in particular under the Ottoman Empire before and under the French protectorate later. Indeed, if we analyse Lebanon before the introduction of the Millet system by the Ottomans in the 19th century, local communities used to live peacefully and in this sense the Mount Lebanon area represented an example of this way of living.

Contrary to another erroneous common opinion which prevailed for a long time, Lebanon is not the only country in the Middle East characterised by a great religious variety: in truth, it is the demographic relevance of Christian communities which has made Lebanon a very peculiar case (Corm, 2003, p.11).

Aiming at giving an order to the cosmos of different and numerous religious communities in the country, a first division must be made between two groups: Christian and Muslim. For what concerns the first one, it is primarily important to say that there are several particular churches[1] in Lebanon, called *Eastern* (or *Oriental*) *Catholic Churches*, which are present or based in this country. An Eastern Catholic Church (*sui iuris*) is defined by the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches[2] (CCEC) as a group of Christian faithful set in a hierarchy according to the norm of law which the supreme authority of the Church expressly or tacitly recognizes as *sui iuris* (Can. 27, CCEC). Thus, since *sui iuris* means "of one's own right", Eastern Catholic Churches (ECC) are a group of twenty-three particular churches (yet catholic), in full communion with the Pope, which differ from the Latin Church for the liturgical rites (Antiochian, Byzantine, Armenian, East Syriac)

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[1] According to the Code of Canon Law, a *particular church* is defined as an ecclesiastical community or faithful in which and from which the one and only Catholic Church exists (Can. 368, Code of Canon Law). Examples of particular churches are all dioceses, territorial prelature, territorial abbacy and apostolic administrations.

[2] The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEC) is the title of the codification promulgated by Pope John Paul II on 18th October 1990 which constitutes the legal framework of Eastern Churches.

and various traditions related to their origins. ECC are headed by patriarchs, major archbishops or metropolitans depending on their polities (Patriarchate, Major Archiepiscopate or Metropolitanate).

In Lebanon we find the presence of five EEC, all patriarchates: the Maronite Church, the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, the Armenian Catholic Church, the Syriac Catholic Church and the Chaldean Catholic church (even though the latter is based in Baghdad and it is represented in Beirut by a vicar). The Maronite Church, born in the 6th century in Syria, was part of those churches called "autocephalous" (not subdued to the patriarchates of Rome and Constantinople); persecuted by other Christian Churches, Maronites sought refuge on Mount Lebanon and from there they spread throughout the country. Since the beginning of the 19th century and still today, they are one of the most powerful communities in Lebanon.

The table below helps to understand the complex framework of the ECC in Lebanon.

Table 1: EEC in Lebanon[3]

Name	Polity	Rite	Members	Patriarch
Maronite	Patriarchate	Antiochian	3,498,707	Bechara Boutros Rai
Melkite Greek Catholic	Patriarchate	Byzantine	1,568,239	Youssef Absi
Armenian Catholic	Patriarchate	Armenian	757,726	Krikor Bedros XX Ghabroyan
Syriac Catholic	Patriarchate	Antiochian	195,765	Ignatius Ephrem Joseph III Yonan
Chaldean Catholic	Patriarchate (based in Baghdad)	East Syriac	628,405	Louis Raphaël I Sako

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[3] Source: Annuario Pontificio, 2013; Roberson, Ronald, The Eastern Catholic Churches, 2017

In addition to these Churches, within the vast world of Christian communities in Lebanon we also find the Greek, Syrian, Armenian and Coptic Orthodox and others.

Muslim communities' presence in Lebanon is relatively easier to explain, as Islam (as largely known) is split mainly on the principle of succession of the Prophet, which in the past led to the schism between Shiites and Sunni. For what concerns the Shiites, Lebanese mountains represented a shelter for them until the arrival of Mamelukes in the 14th century who decimated them. The Shia community is split into numerous branches, namely Ismailism, Twelver, Zaidism and the Alawism, the latter being in charge in Syria today. Other Shiite religious sub-groups exist throughout all the Middle East.

The Druze community dates back to the 11th century and it is actually based on the Shia teaching. However, since the Druze have acquired a syncretic character throughout the centuries, they are not easily identifiable in a specific Muslim community, making them peculiar at their own. Nevertheless, it is notable that from the 19th century, in time of crisis, they preferred to support Sunni and to be identified as Muslims (Corm, 2003, p.14). Until the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Druze have played very important roles in the Lebanese political arena; only after the establishment of the Greater Lebanon by French, under their mandate for Syria and Lebanon, the other communities from the coast (notably Sunni and Greek Orthodox Christians) entered into the political scene.

In order to give an idea of the complex and structured framework of religious communities just partially described, it is useful to say that today there are eighteen recognized communities in Lebanon (Aboujaoude, 1985, pp.155-90). Their power and their relevance depend on several factors. First of all, their political weight is strictly linked to demographic, social, economic and cultural factors, as well as to the cohesion of the community concerning the decisions and strategies taken within the halls of power. Secondly, the geographic distribution of the communities has influenced their role and their power all over the years: for instance, because of their location in the south, Shiites had to deal with the immigration of Palestinians in the aftermath of the Israeli independence (1948) more than any other community. Lastly, the influence of foreign powers in Lebanese has always had a crucial role and their support to one or other religious group have shaped all the Lebanese contemporary history, determining and altering the balance of power.

12

Table 2: Religious communities in Lebanon

Communities[4]	Christian	Muslim
	1) Maronite	13) Sunni
	2) Greek Catholic, Melikite	14) Shia
	3) Armenian Catholic	15) Druze
	4) Syriac Catholic	16) Alawi
	5) Greek Orthodox	17) Ismaeli
	6) Sirian Orthodox, Jacobite	18) Jewish
	7) Armenian Gregorian, Orthodox	
	8) Assyrian Chaldean, Nestorian	
	9) Chaldean	
	10) Latin	
	11) Protestant or Evangelic	
	12) Coptic Orthodox	

1.2 From the Emirate to the independence: the six transformations

The period from the 16th century to the independence's eve in 1943 is of paramount importance for the development of the Lebanese communities' sense of belonging and for the birth of that feeling of hostility among them which has characterised the entire modern era of the land of cedars.

This historical period can be analysed through six great transformations (Di Peri, 2017, p.18).

The first transformation coincides with the establishment of the Emirate of Mount Lebanon[5] by Fakhreddine Maan II, a very powerful Druze lord, in 17th century. At the time, the area corresponding to the current Lebanon was part of the Ottoman Empire. As already stated, all communities used to live peacefully and Mount Lebanon was the

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[4] Source: Rondot (1979) and Di Peri (2017)
[5] The establishment of the *Imāra* (Emirate) was part of the Ottoman Empire's government model. Indeed, it used to maintain solely the power of tax collection, leaving to local lords the day-by-day management.

shelter for persecuted minorities, whether they were Maronites, Shiites or Druze. Under the guidance of Lord Fakhreddine Maan II (1572-1635)[6], religious groups began to bond socially and economically. A century later, with the government of Bachir II Chehab, the contemporary Lebanese entity was born. The Chehab family promoted and guaranteed a peaceful living in Mount Lebanon, dividing the Emirate in cantons (the so-called *muqāt'a*) managed by Druze and Maronite noble families. All communities viewed this form of governance as a way to guarantee them prosperity.

Yet it is during the Chehab government that we observe the second transformation, namely the 1832 Egyptian invasion of Lebanon. Ibrahim Pacha, son of the viceroy of Egypt Mohammed 'Ali, enhanced commerce and promoted great innovations on the education sector during his government of Mount Lebanon, fostering a western modernity. Under the religious point of view, Ibrahim Pacha went down in history for having let the Christian community become a crucial actor in the government of Mount Lebanon, coming to be as powerful as Druze.

The expulsion of Egyptians at the hand of Druze and Maronites in 1840-1842 triggered the third transformation, which lasted until 1860. With the emergence of the Christian community, the Egyptian occupation in a way had sown the seeds of conflict between religious groups, and when Ibrahim Pacha was expelled, a new form of government was established: northern Lebanon was placed under control of Christians, whilst the south of the country became a Druze area. Every region had its own legislation, called *qaimaqam*[7], and elected their own governors.

It was in this period that foreign powers began to influence Lebanese politics and society: France supported Christians in the north, England supported Druze in the south and Austria backed Orthodoxies. In 1850s there were numerous clashes inside and outside Lebanon and in 1860 hundreds of thousands of Christians were killed in Damascus because they were perceived both as opponents of the Ottomans and as puppets of France. In this framework, religious communities began to have political objectives, transforming themselves into political movements and radicalizing.

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[6] Intelligent and powerful Lebanese prince, he is remembered for his ability to promote a way of living based on the respect of diversity and religious pluralism. He was a great ally of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, notably the House of Medici. He was killed by Sultan Murad IV in 1635 because of his excessive popularity and nationalist ideology.
[7] This period was indeed called "era of the double qaimaqam"

The event considered to be the starting point of the institutionalisation of modern Lebanese religious identities was the introduction of the Ottoman administrative reform at the end of the 19th century, which led to the creation of the Millet system. This particular form of government granted autonomy and rights to religious communities which were part of the "People of the Book"[8], letting them organising under the guidance of their religious head and delegating them the administration of judicial and fiscal matters.

The concept of *millet* can be compared to the *dhimmi*, the statute provided for by *shari'a*. The *millet system* was different depending on communities: for Jewish, Greeks, Armenians and Maronite the legal framework was clear, whilst for the Orthodox and the Druze ones it was more obscure. However, it is important to underline that through the *millet* the Ottomans did not aim at radicalising the various religious identities; instead, their purpose was only to create a more definite administrative and social control.

It is within the period of *tanzīmāt* reforms (1839-1876), promoted by Sultan Muhammad II, that a larger room for manoeuvre was given to religious communities. In 1839 and in 1856 we find two important steps in the process of recognition of the Christian community in Lebanon and its rising importance. The first step, in 1839, was represented by the issue of a royal decree (*hatt-i sharif*) which was later to be known as Edict of Gülhane, by Sultan Abdulmejid II; this edict provided for the equality of Christians and Muslims, and so same rights for both communities. But it is with another royal decree in 1856 that Christian communities were officially recognized and their equality with the Muslim *umma* was declared.

The fourth transformation coincides with the period comprised between 1862-1915, namely until the outbreak of the First World War. In 1861 European powers, in accordance with the Ottoman Empire, gave a new statute to the Mount Lebanon: this new entity survived until 1915. The statute gave birth to the *mutasarrifiyya*, a particular type of administrative unit chaired by a *mutasarrif* (Christian), appointed by the Ottoman Government and assisted by an assembly in which all Lebanese religious groups sat, following a proportional criterion: three Druses, four Maronites, two Greek-Orthodoxies, one Greek-Catholic, one Sunni and one Shia. It is from now on that the use of religious criterion as a way of State management becomes the status quo in Lebanon. This entire

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[8] In Arabic *Ahl al-Kitāb*, this term is commonly used to identify those religionists who are possessors of divine books, namely Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and Sabians.

historical period which lasted until the First World War was mainly peaceful and it was also characterised by a high emigration of Lebanese people, mostly to America and Egypt, where they formed a new intellectual élite.

The fifth transformation has to do with the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and falls within the period 1914-1920. With the beginning of the First World War, the Ottoman Empire suspended the *mutassarif*, reassuming control over Lebanon in October 1914. With the end of the conflict and the defeat of the Ottomans (and the consequent loss of territory), there was an attempt by the European powers to increase their influence in the region, almost in the Arab provinces which the Empire had lost. In Lebanon, Maronite leaders asked for an independent country falling under the French protectorate, geographically comparable to the *mutasarrifiyya*. France had at least four reasons for backing Maronites (Di Peri, 2017, p. 27): first of all, the desire to create a second area of influence in the Mashrek, in addition to the Maghreb; secondly, the expectation of economic advantages; thirdly, its will to have territorial rewards after the enormous sacrifices in the First World War; lastly, French thought to have a sort of mission to defend and safeguard Christians in the Middle East.

It is in 1920 that we witness the beginning of the sixth transformation, which lasted until 1943. Article 22 of Covenant of the League of Nations[9] established the mandate system and entered into force on 28th June 1919. For what concerns the countries which had been part of the Ottoman Empire, the mandate provided for the drafting of a statute for Syria and Lebanon made by foreign powers, to be finalised in three years, in order to establish a judicial system capable to guarantee same rights for all. In Lebanon, this happened with the Constitution of 1926 and with some special decrees issued by the High Commission for Lebanon and Syria ten years later. This period saw the concretisation of the idea of Greater Lebanon, a territorial entity which comprised, in addition to Mount Lebanon, other surrounding areas such as the Bekaa Valley, Tripoli and the south of the country. The formation of the Greater Lebanon, contrary to many other cases such as Syria, was not a creation *ex nihilo*; instead, it was based on historical and legal facts. Through several decrees (among which the number 318 is the most important), French General Henri Gouraud established a new spatial planning of Lebanon. The creation of Greater Lebanon provoked the greatest change of numerical proportions of Lebanese population. The census of 1932 (Table 3), a crucial document for the entire Lebanese history, underlined

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[9] https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp

16

some great differences in comparison to the numbers of the *mutassarifiyya* period: indeed, it was evident that the biggest change deriving from the creation of Greater Lebanon was for Christians, who decreased from 79,4% to 50,4% (Maronites decreased from 58,3% to 29%). Contrary, Muslim community rose from 85.232 units to 385.946 units; within the Muslims, Druze were the only ones who decreased, arriving to count for 6,8%.

Table 3[10]: Composition of Lebanese population in the region of Mount Lebanon (mutasarrifiyya period, 1911) and in Greater Lebanon (1932)

Rel. Community	Mount Lebanon (1911)		Greater Lebanon (1932)	
Maronites	242.308	58,3%	227.800	29%
Greek-Catholics	31.936	7,7%	46.709	5,9%
Greek-Orthodoxies	52.356	12,6%	77.312	9,8%
Other Christian comm.	3.026	0,8%	45.125	5,7%
Tot. Christians	*329.626*	*79,4%*	*396.946*	*50,4%*
Sunni	14.529	3,5%	177.100	22,5%
Shia	23.413	5,6%	155.035	19,8%
Druzes	47.290	11,5%	53.334	6,8%
Tot. Muslims	*85.232*	*20,6%*	*385.489*	*49,1%*
Jewish	86	-	3.518	0,5%
Tot.	**414.944**	**100%**	**785.933**	**100**

In 1925, consultations for the drafting of a Constitution began: it is important to stress that the outcome, the Constitution of 1926, was not imposed by France or England, but it was the result of numerous negotiations among all the actors involved. Maronite businessman Michel Chiha was in a way the ideologist of the text with the help of other people, in particular the Greek-Orthodox Charles Debbas. Chiha believed that the

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[10] Source: Di Peri, 2017 from Akarli, 1993

creation of a strong central State would have been deleterious to the Lebanese societies; instead, he thought that the preservation of communities' diversity through the non-interference of the State in the management of communities' mechanisms of power and economies would have led to the best result. The final text of the Constitution was mainly liberal, inspired to the French one of 1875 and to the Belgian one of 1831.

The Constitution affirmed the equality of citizens before the law and recognized the existence of a communitarian regime guaranteeing respect, protection and free exercise of religious belief.

A sort of double-level confessionalism (Di Peri, 2017, p. 30) was established: article 9 referred to the personal sphere of it, allowing that all matters regarding the family (e.g. marriage and succession) fell under the rule of religious tribunals; article 95 sanctioned political confessionalism, by providing that all administrative and political functions had to be properly allocated among different communities. The Constitution represented a sort of return to the *mutassarifiyya* period, in particular for what concerned the allocation of seats.

Among several amendments to the Constitution in the biennium 1927-1929, there are some of great interest. Constitutional Law of 17th October 1927 established the abolition of the Senate and aimed at making the President of Republic more powerful, giving him a legislative competence even in financial matters. At the same time, the law stressed the parliamentary character of the Republic, establishing the responsibility of the government before the Parliament and the duty of the executive to choose at least half of the ministers among deputies. Another Constitutional Law, two years after, extended the President of the Republic's term from three to six years, it gave him the power to appoint as ministers people outside the Parliament and the power to dissolve Parliament with the sole necessity of having a motivated decree of the Council of Ministers.

Lastly, it is important to underline how, notwithstanding the confessional belonging of all politicians, the election of deputies was not based on a denominational rule; instead, candidates had to obtain the majority of votes in their constituency, which was definitely not religiously homogeneous.

It is in this period that to blocs were formed in each of the Sunni and Christian communities: those in favour of an independent Lebanon and those against it.

The Sunni group witnessed the creation of two movements inside of it: the first one, which referred to Riad el-Solh, upheld the establishment of the Greater Lebanon; the second

one, headed by Abd Al-Hamid Karamé, reflected pan-arabist ideals and was deeply favourable to an annexation of the Lebanese territory to Syria.

Also on the Christian (Maronite) side, two blocs were formed: the first one, named Constitutional Bloc and headed by Bechara al-Khouri, believed in a Greater Lebanon conceived as a State where different religious communities could cooperate together at the best and where the diversity represented a value; the second bloc, called National Bloc and referred to Émile Eddé, believed in a Lebanon where France could guarantee the survival, the protection and the hegemony of the Maronite community, and so a relationship with this European country (marked by an absolute dependence) was the only viable way.

Because of the fights between Eddé and Khoury, the High Commissioner Henri Ponsot cancelled the 1932 elections and dissolved the Parliament.

In the 1930s two important decrees, then united in a unique law in 1951, were enacted. The 1951 text represented the organic law that holds up the functioning of non-Muslim communities still today. According to it, religious communities are divided in two categories: the first one refers to the historical ones, namely Christian, Muslim and Jewish ones; the second category refers to all those religious groups which are not identifiable within a specific religious doctrine. In practice, the law gave the possibility to the people to establish new autonomous communities with same rights of the historical ones. Lastly, the law allowed people to change their religious belief and so to change religious community; this decision saw a strong opposition of the Muslim community, as Sharia punishes the crime of apostasy with death penalty.

1.3 Independent Lebanon and its 'ahd

The 1940s were marked by a rapid deterioration of Franco-Lebanese relations. In particular, in November 1943, after the rising of anti-French parties at the parliamentary elections held in September, Jean Helleu, the High Commissioner, suspended the Constitution, imprisoned the President of the Republic (Bechara al-Khoury) and other members of the Government, and appointed Émile Eddé as new President. There was an insurrection against France and on 22nd November all institutional members were released from prison; this day has become then the Independence Day of Lebanon.

Even though the Franco-Lebanese Friendship Treaty had been signed on 23rd March 1946, Lebanese people had to wait until December of that year for seeing French troops leaving the country.

At the same time, the Constitutional Bloc headed by al-Khouri and the Sunni movement led by Solh agreed on the National Pact, the document which gave birth to the first Lebanese Republic. The National Pact essentially complemented the 1926 Constitution, legitimizing the power of Maronite and Sunni communities; furthermore, and most important, it was based on a political-religious representation following a 6:5 ratio. Also the top jobs reflected a representative rule: the President of the Republic had to be (and still today has to be) Christian Maronite and for the same rule the Prime Minister has to be Sunni. Only from 1947 the practice of a President of the Parliament Shia being Shia became rule.

The National Pact also provided a communitarian proportional distribution in all public administration's sectors of and different legal status for every religious community.

Thus, the National Pact was mainly based on two principles:

- The principle of "*double identification*": Lebanon is a country with Maronite social, historical and cultural structures within an Arab context; at the same time, it lays on its Arabic culture.
- The principle of equal distribution of power and influence in the institutions, which should have guaranteed a sort of balance between Christians and Muslims.

The National Pact had a double effect: a "*Libanisation*" of Muslims and an Arabisation of Christians (Di Peri, 2017, p. 40). Hence, both the 1926 Constitution before and the 1943 National Pact then certainly embodied strong factors of integration between communities.

From the Independence on, the political history of the country has always been linked to the various characters of the Presidents of the Republic. Until the breakout of the Civil War in 1975, the term *'ahd* was used to identify the different presidencies: every *'ahd* reflected the character of a President and his management of power.

The al-Khouri presidency (1943-1952) is remembered for being the period in which communitarianism, only theoretically expressed in the National Pact, had its practical

effect on society. The mechanism of equilibrium among communities established by the National Pact developed and radicalised: cases of nepotism, corruption and favouritism linked to the communitarian belonging emerged in all public sectors, and the President Bechara al-Khouri did not undertake to promote a gradual de-confessionalisation of the country. The entire presidency lasted for nine years thanks to several amendments to the Constitution for extending the term; in 1952, al-Khouri resigned. It is significant that in this first phase of the Republic there was no protest about the appointment of a Maronite Prime Minister, a role that, according to the National Pact, pertained to a Sunni.

Camille Chamoun was President from 1952 until 1958. His presidency was marked by a strong support for reforms in political and electoral sectors; at the same time, his commitment for economic and financial reforms was not very impressive. Chamoun, who did not belong to a Lebanese family, promoted a special relationship with the United Kingdom and the United States: during his term, the country adhered to the Eisenhower Doctrine and thus to the western alliance against Gamal Abd el-Nasser and the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. This stance led to a very negative effect on both the anti-colonialist Maronite-Christian élite and the Muslim community: the first one saw the rapprochement with the US as a first step of the American penetration into the country, the latter had to abandon its pan-Arabic ideals.

The electoral campaign for another term of Chamoun promoted by Christians in 1958 led to the "Pasha revolt" staged by Muslim leaders. In a short time, the political clash became religious and Chamoun asked for the involvement of the United States. The US intervened in the same year and succeeded in calming fights, but Chamoun had to abandon the idea of another term. However, the intervention of the US and the rapprochement of Chamoun to the western countries had a significant impact on the Muslim community, contributing to undermine the preconditions of the National Pact (Rabbath, 1986, p. 568).

Fouad Chehab (1958-1964) became President after Chamoun, in a period in which the country was deeply divided internally. His presidency was divided in two phases: in the first one, which lasted until 1961, he sought to promote reconciliation and reconstruction of the country (see Dagher, 1995); the second one, from 1961 to 1964, was marked by a strong influence of the army in political and public life (Kiwan, 1994, pp. 68-9). Chehab set up a government in which Christians and Muslims sat together, seeking to reinvigorate the National Pact. The president was a strong supporter of the "fifty-fifty" rule, according

to which the distribution of State jobs had to be equally allocated between Muslims and Christians.

For what concerned social policies, President Chehab gave extensive concessions to all religious communities and thanks to this he gained popularity among lower social classes; this political approach was then remembered as *chehabism*.

In 1961 there was a *coup d'état* done by the Syrian Social Nationalist Party[11] (which had supported Chamoun until then), but the opposition made by the government and the army was ultimately strong. From this moment on the army and the intelligence had a crucial role in the events of the country.

During the *'ahd* of Charles Helou (1964-1970) there was a critical juncture. 1967 represented for Lebanon, as well as for all Arab countries, a real disaster: the Six-Day War and the flow of Palestinian refugees were all elements which contributed to the disaggregation of Lebanon.

For what concerns the problem of refugees, it is needed to say that in the aftermath of the establishment of the State of Israel more than 100.000 Palestinians sought shelter in Lebanon; for a small country like this, problems arose almost immediately (Petran, 1987, p. 73). During 1950s Shia population sympathized with the Palestinians (Sunni) and at the beginning they cooperated in the attacks against Israel through military raids. But then, the control of the OLP on big portions of Lebanon caused some friction between Palestinians and religious communities. On 28th December 1968 Israel bombed the airport of Beirut: at first, this event unified different groups of Lebanon in a national feeling, but then Christian communities understood how dangerous was hosting Palestinian armed groups (which were not under State control) on Lebanese territory, and how they constituted a real menace for the stability of the country. Previously, President Chehab had already introduced strict controls on Palestinian refugee camps, placing them under

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[11] The Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) is a party operating in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine. It was founded in 1932 by Antoun Saadé, a Greek-Orthodox, in the wake of the Italian Fascist Party (Di Peri, 2017, p.189.). In the past, this party pushed for the formation of the "Great Syria" (which had to include Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Cyprus), and promoted an anti-denominational message. In 1960s the party abandoned its fascist roots and in 1975 it joined the National Movement. It has always had a deep connection with Syria, and thanks to this relationship it gained some seats at the Parliament at 1992 elections.

control of the *Deuxième Bureau*[12], which controlled entrances and exits of camps and limited movements inside of them (Petran, 1987, pp. 102-3).

In addition to this repressive policy against Palestinians, the bombing of Beirut airport by Israel led to the resignation of Prime Minister Abdullah Yafi and the appointment of Rachid Karamé as new PM. Karamé and Helou stated that Palestinians were the real cause of the Israeli raid and began to cut supplies designed for refugees by Syria. All these events caused a Palestinian revolt in April 1969 in Beirut and Sidon, in which important armed clashes with the Lebanese Army happened. In a public statement made on 30th May 1969, President Helou declared that all Palestinians combatants should have submitted to the authority of the Lebanese State; otherwise, the disaggregation of the country would have been very probable.

Thanks to the mediation of the Egyptian President Nasser, on 3rd November 1969 the Cairo Agreement was signed by Yasser Arafat and the Lebanese Army General Commander Emile Bustani. The agreement legitimised the presence of armed Palestinian groups and allowed them attacking Israel with raids from Southern Lebanon. Yet the agreement also provided the beginning of cooperation between Palestinians and the Lebanese Army (Petran, 1987, p. 104). From then on, it is possible to affirm that the OLP effectively established "a state within a state" (Di Peri, 2017, p. 52).

At the elections of 1970, Sleiman Frangié became President of the Republic (in the same year Nasser died), marking the end of an era, the *chehabism*.

1.4 State deterioration

The end of *chehabism* and the election of Frangié as President of the Republic marked the beginning of the Lebanese State's deterioration. The denominational repartition of government jobs had brought corruption within the institutions, making the management of State impossible (Leenders, 2004). Frangié was not able to tackle these challenges; indeed, his presidency was not stable, and he was constrained to reappoint the Prime Minister after only 18 months of government.

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[12] The Deuxième Bureau was an organ created by President Chehab during his term and it had both security and intimidating purposes. Internal Security Forces, General Security Forces and the army were reunited under the command of the Bureau.

Worsening economic factors, escalating social tensions, the emergence of religious militia and the bulky presence of Palestinians were the reasons at the base of Lebanon's collapse, highlighting serious deficiencies in the management of State and leading to the failure of the National Pact.

In 1960s there was a money supply boom. In 1970s, following the rise of oil prices in the afterwards of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, there was a great expansion of financial and bank sectors mainly because of the advantageous terms for foreign investors, who started to do business in Lebanon. On the other side, all Lebanese governments were not able to launch or just to promote public investments' plans which should have improved country's productivity.

At the beginning of 1970s, Lebanon presented several fragilities in the economic sector. First of all, a comprehensive modernisation of infrastructures was needed: this was not put in practice, leading to severe consequences such as the blockade of Beirut Port in 1972. Secondly, a reform of the agricultural sector (in which 40% of Lebanese workforce was employed) was required: in 1970 and 1975 there were numerous revolts, during which protesters asked for additional economic helps from the State (Petran, 1987, pp. 130-9).

Instead of generating an economic boost, new economic policies of President Frangié caused a further deterioration of the economic framework, provoking a decrease of investments on national industry and leading to additional import of goods from abroad, especially luxury and food products. These policies pushed people to protest and to strike all over the country. Frangié decided for the elimination of those economic policies but it was definitely too late: Lebanon entered into a great inflationary spiral, undermining the economic foundations of the country.

On the eve of the Civil War there was a strong economic growth, but it was very fictitious, because it was focused on financial and banking sector, leaving productive sectors aside. Having made this economic comment and coming back to religious communities, another factor which had a crucial role in the weakening of the State was the rising hostility between Christians and Muslims: in detail, the latter was asking for a stronger representation in national politics, whilst Christians sought to maintain their strong role within institutions. The Shia community, more than all, had been excluded from 1943 National Pact, but in 1970s its demographic rise was tremendous and the distribution of

positions of power did not represent the demographic weights of various religious communities anymore.

The emergence of the figure of *imam* Musa al-Sadr, who was the founder of the *Amal* movement, was crucial in this period: many young people, who were tired by the corruption logic of *zu'amā* (Shia local bosses) backed him and shared his thoughts; Al-Sadr urged all Shiites to react against their poor condition and submission (Ajami, 1986, pp. 29-51). He started to play an important role within Lebanese politics when the Parliament authorized the establishment of the *Supreme Islamic Council*, of which al-Sadr became President.

At the eve of the Civil War, Lebanon was witnessing a very tense situation because of two types of contestation: the first one concerned the political underrepresentation and was carried out by the Shia community; the second one, which referred to the Christian community and was predominantly conservative, argued instead that the system generated by the National Pact had demonstrated to be too much tolerant with regard to all communities. These two fronts led to a militarization of the society through the establishment of several militia on both sides. Even though internal factors had a crucial role in the outbreak of the Civil War, the emergence of militia marked the point of no return, after which the conflict was inevitable.

In order to clearly understand roles and events of the Civil War and how religious communities played their roles, a clarification of main groups of militia and political parties is needed.

The first group, the Christian right-wing group, was the so-called Lebanese Front. Inside of it, we find the four more prominent Christian leaders, namely Frangié, Chamoun, Gemayel and Kassis[13]. The first militia to be created during the first half of the 1970s was the Phalange, armed wing of the Kataeb party. The Phalange counted around 15'000 people and it had been originally established to fight Palestinians on Lebanese territory (Suleiman, 1967, p. 232). This militia was headed by Pierre Gemayel, and after his death (in 1984) it was split in different groups; the group headed by Samir Geagea became the most important one: the leader promoted infrastructure projects for Christian community and marginalised the Kataeb party.

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[13] Eddé and his National Bloc did not take part of this group because they felt betrayed by other Maronite leaders after Eddé refused to back the Cairo Agreement.

The second Maronite militia was the one headed by Chamoun, the so-called *Tigers*, counting 3'500 people. The third and last one (in order of importance) was the one of Frangié, called Marada Brigade or Zgharta Liberation Army, counting 1500 militants and dislocated in the north of the country (Khalidi, 1979, pp. 70-1).

A second group of militia was the one emerging from the National Movement, composed by 80% of Muslims, but also by Christians as Antoun Saadé and his Syrian Social Nationalist Party. This second group mainly represented the left-wing Islam and Kamal Joumblatt rose as the most important and influent leader among all others[14]. Joumblatt set up a militia thought as the armed wing of his Progressive Socialist Party[15]. Inside this group of militia there were also some pro-Syrian ones from the *Ba'ath* party and others. Among the most important militias, there was the one which came from the Amal movement, created by imam Musa al-Sadr in 1974[16]. Inside of this armed group, in addition to Lebanese Shiites, there were also combatants from al-Fatah (Picard, 1986, p. 284); the point of reference of this militia was Nabih Berri, who is still today President of the Parliament since 1982. During the first years of the Civil War, Amal was for some time within the National Movement coalition, but then al-Sadr broke his alliance with it and backed Syria against National Movement from 1976 on (Ajami, 1986, pp. 29-51). It was also from Amal that Hezbollah was born, supported by the Islamic Republic of Iran (see chapter 2).

In addition to these groups of militia, there were also some which can be defined as "external" because they were supported by foreign powers: one of these was surely the South Lebanon Army (SLA) headed by Saad Haddad (Christian), whom troops were trained and financed by Israel. Israeli raids on Lebanese territory were guided and supported many times by Haddad's armed group, which faced not only Palestinian militias, but also Amal and Hezbollah.

For what concerns Palestinians, they began to be very present and to have a crucial role in Lebanon since the 1970 Black September, for their actions against Israel (Tessler,

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[14] Even after the death of Kamal, the leadership of the son Walid was never questioned (Kiwan, 1994, pp 68-9)

[15] The Progressive Socialist Party was founded in 1950s by Kamal Joumblatt. According to him, the nationalistic approach was a failure if applied to the eastern world. He promoted socialist ideals that, also in the western world, were the ones which granted fundamental rights. He promoted a trans-denominational approach for giving a sense of unity to the country.

[16] Amal emerged as a non-denominational movement in defence of poors, but became predominantly Shia very soon.

1994, pp. 279-283); there were five distinct groups united within the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA): al-Fatah, al-Saiqa, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and the Arab Liberation Front (ALF).

Talking about all these armed groups, it is needed to say that the Lebanese army played a crucial role in the weakening of the State and the emergence of militia. Indeed, the incapacity of all Presidents and governments to give the army a non-denominational character led to the creation of armed groups reflecting various religious communities and parties. The national army was then subjugated by militia and it was not able to defend national interests or to avoid internal splits.

1.5 The first phase of the Civil War

The years before the outbreak of the Civil War were mainly characterised by the expansion of operations by Lebanese militia, Israel and Syria. Focusing on the first actor, in 1973 there was a great mobilisation involving all the armed groups, in particular those ones which referred to the Kataeb party and to the Maronite community. Christians began to recruit combatants from other parties, to establish training camps and to organize military parades. On one side, these activities assured Christian people, but on the other side they contributed to create a climate of tension in the country, which eventually led to the outbreak of the Civil War.

The conflict can be schematically divided in two phases: the first one, from 1975 to 1976 (also called two-years war), was mainly characterised by the confrontation between the Lebanese Front and the National Movement, whilst the second one, which lasted for more than ten years from 1978 to 1989, was characterised by a very high fragmentation of groups and reshuffle of alliances.

The triggering event of the conflict happened on 13th April 1975, when some Muslim combatants opened fire against Christians (among which there was Pierre Gemayel) in Ain Rummaneh, Beirut. Maronites responded attacking a bus full of Palestinians, and from then on there were clashes all over the country. Rachid Karamé replaced Rachid Solh as Prime Minister. In this phase the conflict, as I already said, was basically between

the Lebanese Front and the National Movement, namely between Christians and Muslims.

In summer 1975 clashes were more violent, with the stated intention of Maronites to create a sort of "second Christian State of Israel", or a "Maronite Sion" in Lebanon (Odeh, 1985, p. 142). At the beginning of 1976, Maronites proposed the creation of a federal State, triggering Syrians to act immediately in order to prevent a federal division of Lebanon. At the same time, Christian militia attacked a Palestinian refugee camp in Tel Zaatar and the National Movement (with the backing of Syria) attacked some Maronite areas throughout the country, in particular Damour, the headquarter of former president Chamoun.

The army disintegrated in the same year, with the mutiny of a Sunni component headed by Ahmed Khatib which led to the creation of the Lebanese Arab Army (LAA) in Bekaa Valley.

At the end of January 1976, Muslim groups came together for proposing and finding a solution to the conflict: what emerged was the Arab Report: it provided, among other things, an equal distribution of power between Muslims and Christians (50-50), the election of the Prime Minister by the Parliament and a written declaration stating the "Arabic character" of Lebanon. In return, the Maronite Presidency of the Republic was not called into question, and the de-confessionalisation of the country was postponed. The plan was presented by Frangié on 14th February 1976. However, events on the ground forced the President to run away, with Khatib and his armed group willing to assault the Presidential Palace; on 9th April a ceasefire was reached.

In this climate, political forces found an accord on two candidates for the Presidency of the Republic: Raymond Eddé and Elias Sarkis. Sarkis won the elections, backed by Karamé, Gemayel, Chamoun, Frangié and Syria. In his opening speech, the President reaffirmed his will not to proceed to the division of Lebanon and his support to the Palestinians as long as the OLP would have implemented Cairo Agreement.

In this phase of the conflict it is important to underline that Syria, which had backed the National Movement and the Palestinian resistance, from 1975 on (namely when the National Movement seemed to prevail) started to support its allies with less conviction and enthusiasm. The reasons behind this new approach were mainly two: first of all, the Assad regime feared that Maronites could have decided to split the country, establishing a new autonomous Christian State which Syria could not tolerate because it could have

been taken as a successful example of secession by minorities within its borders; secondly, the victory of the National Movement could have led to the establishment of a radical regime in Lebanon: this new government could have provoked an early intervention of Israel into the country and Syria could not afford Israeli troops so close to its borders.

The new soft approach of Syria provoked a strong answer from Arab movements, especially from Palestinians and the OLP.

A summit of the Arab League held in Riyadh in October 1976 agreed on the so-called "Riyadh Resolution", which provided for a ceasefire and the establishment of an intervention force under President Sarkis' control, with the name of Arab Deterrent Force (ADF). This force had to be composed by soldiers coming from many Arab States, but it was rapidly transformed into a force mainly made up by Syrian soldiers. However, with the election of Sarkis as President of the Republic and the appointment of the Prime Minister Salim el-Hoss, Lebanon seemed to proceed towards a slow normalization of the country in the last months of 1976.

1.6 The intermezzo and the beginning of the second phase of the Civil War

Two years of war had provoked an enormous loss of human life and thousands of internal migrants. Even though the ADF seemed capable to guarantee a sort of stability in the country, President Sarkis found himself completely alone and without power: indeed, he was the commander of ADF but without effective power, he was not able to manage the numerous clashes between militia that started again in 1977 and he could do nothing for the prevention of the Israeli invasion in 1978. In addition, the willingness of the President to promote a new movement of national reconciliation did not have an effective result because every part involved in the conflict was definitely not in favour of it or did not have a clear policy program: Maronites took sides against a new National Pact and they were pushing for an autonomous State; Muslims were completely disoriented and frustrated for the change of direction of Syria and the murder of the leader Khalil Joumblatt (probably by the hands of Syrians) in March 1977 aggravated the situation within the movement; lastly, Palestinians felt themselves victims of a regional and international conspiracy and did not accept the disarmament, given the combative

approach of Israel in the south and the support of the Jewish State to the Maronite right-wing parties.

For what concerns the ADF, even though it should have been stationed in Lebanon for few months, its mandate was extended until April 1978. It was also evident that the entire socio-political context was deeply changing (Khalidi, 1979, pp. 114-21): for the first time since the outbreak of the Civil War, Muslims (both Sunni and Shiites) stood against the OLP and along with Christians they criticized the work of the ADF (so of Syria), asking for the withdrawal of foreign troops from the country.

Lastly, the end of the hostility had led to the re-emergence of pronounced confessional identities, with *zu'amā'* taking again the power in Lebanese politics.

An accord reached in Chtaura (Bekaa Valley) on 25th July 1977 pushed for the necessity of reallocation of Palestinian combatants, their disarmament and, in a second phase, the establishment of demilitarized zones in southern Lebanon. Israel obviously opposed the Chtaura Accord and along with Syria it asked for the complete withdrawal of Palestinian and National Movement troops from Southern Lebanon.

In March 1979 Israel launched the *Operation Litani*, invading southern Lebanon and marking the beginning of the Civil War's second phase. The declared goal of the raid was the creation of a buffer zone for preventing Palestinian attacks; however, Israel changed its plan while invading and troops reached the Litani river facing almost no opposition by Palestinians. Because of the numerous attacks towards civilians carried out by Israeli troops, Shiites perceived the invasion as it was against them (Fadlallah, 1987, p. 3).

Shortly after the beginning of the conflict, Lebanese people began to perceive *Operation Litani* as an attempt of Israel to annex major areas of its territory, taking also significant water resources (Amery, 1993, pp. 18-9).

From an international perspective, the US stood against the Israeli invasion and President Carter pushed for an intervention of the UN: on 19th March 1978 the UN Security Council adopted the Resolution 425[17], forcing Israel to immediately withdraw from the Lebanese territory and providing an international intervention force, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), along the Lebanese-Israeli border. Only President Sarkis considered positively the UN Resolution and the sending of foreign troops in Lebanon. Other actors stood against it: Syria feared a loss of power of ADF (and consequently its power), Israel obviously opposed UNIFIL because the international force had the implied

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[17] http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/425

task of limiting its expansionist ambitions, Palestinians felt neglected because Resolution 425 did not mention them. Israel eventually accepted Res. 425 and decided for the withdrawal of troops from southern Lebanon, completing it on the 13th of June. However, the axis with Haddad allowed Israel to continue having a control on the region.

The 1978 invasion contributed to polarise Lebanese' positions: on one side, those who thought that Israel did not have to interfere on Lebanese politics (National Movement, members of Ba'ath party, Shia groups and several Sunni oligarchs) and on the other side those who thought that Israeli invasion had been an inevitable consequence of OLP actions (Maronites and Sunni oligarchs).

Internally, it is important to underline the victory of Bechir Gemayel over Camille Chamoun. Gemayel presented himself as the great defender of the Maronite community and became the candidate for the subsequent Presidential elections. He privileged relations with Israel, considering it as a modern and democratic State, an essential ally; the relationship between Gemayel and Israel deepened after 1978 invasion and became crucial before and during the 1982 invasion.

The Lebanese Front transformed, whilst the National Movement totally disintegrated: Sunni élite lost its power and various militia found themselves without a leader and a clear structure of power. It is properly in these years that Shia community rose and Hezbollah emerged in 1982 (officially in 1985, see ch. 2).

In October 1978 the Conference of Beiteddine was held and it was focused on the reorganisation of the army. It was evident that the solution to this problem had to deal with Haddad (Petran, 1987, pp. 249-52), and a proposal for the creation of a new army was presented. The UN backed this idea through the S/RES/444[18] in which the UNIFIL term was extended and the Lebanese government was requested to regain control of its territory. Consequently, many Arab countries (except for Syria) withdrew their troops from ADF; Haddad started to attack the Lebanese army for defending his position: he was eventually expelled from the army, but this did not contribute to solve the intricate situation in the south nor to dismantle the Haddad armed forces (Rabinovich, 1980, pp. 673-6).

In 1979 two external crucial events affected the evolution of Lebanese history: the signing of Camp David Accords and the Iranian Revolution. The first one had the result of consolidating some alliances (namely Syria with OLP against Israel with Maronites), the

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[18] http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/444

latter gave new consciousness to the Shia community (Odeh, 1985, pp. 193-4). In 1980s Bechir Gemayel became the main interlocutor with the US, with President Ronald Reagan having a Cold-War approach to Lebanon: indeed, the US President supported pro-Western forces as the right-wing Christian militia against Syria and Palestinians, which instead remained in the Soviet sphere of influence.

It was in this scenario that the new Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin drew up the "Big Pines" plan, which provided for the establishment of a 40km Palestinian-free zone on southern Lebanese territory, the withdraw of all Syrian forces from Lebanon, the destruction of OLP headquarter in Beirut, the expulsion of OLP forces from the country and the signing of a peace treaty with Lebanese Maronites (Elman, 1997, p. 304). The plan was not approved by Knesset, but then an assassination attempt of Israeli ambassador in London on 3rd June 1982 convinced Israel to take action and two days later the Operation *Peace for Galilee* (that eventually had the same objectives of Big Pines) was approved by Knesset. Israel tended to a reversal of the situation in Lebanon, with its forces and Gemayel's ones being eventually the sole on the territory, expelling Syrian and OLP from the country.

On 6th June 1982, Israeli troops invaded Lebanon for the second time and after four days they reached Beirut, where an urban warfare broke out. Israeli forces besieged the town with medieval methods, establishing a total blockade of supplies (Ball, 1984, p. 89).

Here, it is very important to underline how at the time Palestinian armed groups were becoming unpopular in the eyes of other communities: Shia community saw favourably the 1982 invasion because it hoped that Israel could expel the OLP out of the country (Fadlallah, 1987, p. 3). In this sense Sarkis, on 14th of June, established a Council in order to put pressure on OLP.

On 13th of August an accord (and a subsequent ceasefire) among the involved parts was reached, and the OLP evacuation was ensured by a multinational force; Palestinian combatants were sent to Syria, Jordan, Tunisia, Iraq and South Yemen.

In addition to the expulsion of OLP from Lebanon, the 1982 invasion had the consequence of increasing Israel and US influences in the country: the support of these two States to the Phalange militia favoured the election of Bechir Gemayel as President of the Republic on 23rd August 1982.

Gemayel, who was aware of the impossibility for the Phalange to govern autonomously and who was also determined to promote a national reconciliation policy, pushed for an

interdenominational mediation, particularly with Sunni community; Gemayel needed to stand as an autonomous President at the eyes of Lebanese people and not as a puppet in the hands of Israel (Gowers, Walker, 1994, pp. 237-240). On 14th September 1982 Gemayel was assassinated by a member of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) and two days later, as revenge, Lebanese Forces (with the collusion of Israeli forces) massacred between 500 and 3.500 civilians, including many Shiites, in what is still remembered as the Sabra and Shatila massacre. The raid was conducted with an incredible violence and had very negative repercussions on international and regional public opinion (see al-Hout, 2004).

On September, Amine Gemayel, Bechir's brother, was elected President of the Republic in a very critical moment of the conflict and his government was weak. In 1983 there was a renewed conflict in different areas of the country.

The period which goes from 1984 to 1988 were marked by several attempts to find a political solution to the Civil War, also through a new course of the relationship with Syria; however, national reconciliation conferences held in Geneve and Lausanne in 1983-84 did not accomplish any result. On the ground, clashes between Amal militia (backed by Syria) and Palestinians on one side, and the signing of the tripartite agreement between major militia of Lebanon (Lebanese Forces, Amal and Progressive Socialist Party) contributed to weaken the State authority and led to the interference of Syria into the Lebanese internal affairs once again. The assassination of the Prime Minister Rachid Karamé on 1st June 1987 blocked political attempts to find an agreement on national basis, and the beginning of the first Palestinian Intifada in the same year (which lasted until 1993) aggravated the situation.

1988 was marked by an intense diplomatic activity both internationally and regionally, with the purpose of finding a compromise for the election of the new President of the Republic: this was particularly difficult because of the blockade policy of many parliamentarians and the consequent impossibility to find a quorum for the election.

On 23rd September 1988 the outgoing President Gemayel appointed a government of five military ministers (two Christians and three Muslims) headed by General Michel Aoun; at the same time the Parliament, under the leadership of Salim el-Hoss, declared itself the only legitimate authority of Lebanon (Corm, 2003, p. 134). Thus, for some months the country had two separate governments which somehow were able to manage public administration at the best.

In this period Aoun launched a liberation war of Lebanon from Syria with a broad people involvement, even though for some authors that was only a political manoeuvre for having popular support (Corm, 2003).

Before going to analyse in detail the 1989Ta'if Agreement, some final remarks about the 15-years long Civil War is needed.

A first relevant aspect is that the Lebanese Civil War always reinforced confessional belongings of the population, instead of sever them. Indeed, the entire period of the Civil War had been characterised by inter and intra-denominational clashes, both on Christian and Muslim sides. The Palestinian element had the role of exacerbating these conflicts, and acted as a fuse in an already tense situation.

Nevertheless, it is true that only in few moments the national unity of the country was questioned: as we have seen, some Maronite fringe, backed by Israel, evoked the establishment of a Christian State on Lebanese territory on several occasions. In contrast, the National Movement never challenged national unity and pushed for a progressive de-confessionalisation of the country.

For what concerns external actors, it is possible to affirm that, with the exception of Israel, nobody would have gained something from the failure of Lebanon: an event like that would have only destabilized the entire region and led to an additional fragmentation of communities.

A second aspect of the Civil War regards the reasons behind the outbreak of it. Indeed, it is clear that rules and formulae established with 1943 National Pact had been demonstrated not to follow economic, social, and most of all demographic changes of the country. For example, the political proportional representation in favour of Maronites, which was based on 1932 census, was not valid anymore: Muslim communities, especially the Shia one, had grown a lot since that year and exactly this disproportion was at the base of the system's vulnerability from external pressures.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, and here comes the third aspect, the two options on the ground, the federal one and the secular one (providing for a complete "de-confessionalisation" of the country), were both impracticable: a federal State would have met the opposition of Muslim parties, whilst a de-confessionalisation process would have seen the resistance of Maronites for the possibility of the establishment of a new *dhimmi*. It was in this confusing situation that the Ta'if Agreement was signed. It is now the time to analyse them in detail.

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1.7 Ta'if Agreement

In addition to the very tense and volatile situation of the conflict, in 1989 there was a critical economic framework, characterised by a very high emigration rate, high unemployment and the consequent collapse of public services. (Labaki, 1998, pp. 81-142). On 30th October 1989, 62 members of Lebanese Parliament, in charge since 1972, met in Ta'if, Saudi Arabia, under the auspices of the Arab League.

What emerged was the Document of National Accord (*wathīqat al-wifāq al-watanī*), which in a way sought to continue the purpose of previous attempts, namely to tackle all the challenges to the building and the development of the Lebanese State; it is sure that Ta'if Agreement represented the most important constitutional and institutional change in Lebanon since the establishment of the Republic (Di Peri, 2017, p. 103).

The aim of the agreement was basically to put an end to the Civil War, reaching a comprehensive and effective sovereignty of the State through the abolition of confessionalism, the imposition of economic and political reforms, the liberation of Lebanese territory from foreign troops and the establishment of a new framework of relations with Syria.

Thus, the Document of National Accord was divided in four sections: general principles and reforms; Lebanese sovereignty on national soil; liberation of Lebanon from Israeli occupation; Syria-Lebanon relationship. In the first section, which represents the central core of the agreement, institutional and constitutional reforms were inserted: the two key principles affirmed the abolition of political confessionalism and the Arabic character of Lebanon.

Section 1, point B
<<Lebanon is Arab in belonging and identity.

It is an active and founding member of the Arab League and is committed to the league's charter. It is an active and founding member of the United Nations Organization and is committed to its charters. Lebanon is a member of the nonaligned movement. The state of Lebanon shall embody these principles in all areas and spheres, without exception.>>

Section 2, point G

<<Abolishing political sectarianism is a fundamental national objective.

To achieve it, it is required that efforts be made in accordance with a phased plan. The Chamber of Deputies election the basis of equal sharing by Christians and Muslims shall adopt the proper measures to achieve this objective [...]

a. Abolish the sectarian representation base and rely on capability and specialization in public jobs, the judiciary, the military, security, public, and joint institutions, and in the independent agencies

b. Abolish the mention of sect and denomination on the identity card.>>

These two concepts are enhanced by a series of reforms amending the 1926 Constitution and transforming the Republic from a presidential system to a new political structure in which the Council of Ministers gets more powers than both the President of the Republic and the President of the Parliament. However, generally speaking the latter acquires a greater weight. Another important change is the rebalance of power within the Parliament among religious communities: the proportion goes from 6:5 (in favour of Christians) to 5:5, thus increasing the weight of Sunni.

For what concerns the President of the Republic, after Ta'if Agreement his decisions request the countersignature of the Prime Minister and he is subjected to the Council of Ministers' directives; he must follow Parliament's guidelines concerning the choice of Prime Minister and he has not the absolute right to chair Council of Ministers' meetings, in which he also has not voting right; he is still commander of Armed Forced and he conserves the duty to ensure respect of the Constitution, of independence and of territorial integrity of the country.

The Prime Minister is appointed by the President of the Republic by designation of the President of the Parliament after binding parliamentary consultations; for the formation of the government, Prime Minister proceeds to non-binding parliamentary consultations and he can dissolve the Parliament under request of the President of the Republic.

Regarding the Parliament, the term of the President is extended to four years; members move from 99 to 108 and they can express their vote of confidence on the appointment of ministers and Prime Minister. With the equalisation of the number of Christians and Muslims within the Chamber, the denominational character is laid down in Lebanese

political life (Di Peri, 2017, p. 106). Other reforms such as wider electoral districts and more independent judicial system were provided in this section.

In the second section of the Agreement the Lebanese sovereignty on the entire national territory was affirmed. The aim was to disarm militia with the help of the Syrian Army: this army would have remained on Lebanese soil for two years, after which it would have had the possibility to settle in Bekaa Valley only if necessary. It is true that the problem of militia was really more complex, mainly because of the impossibility to dismantle Hezbollah or Palestinian militia, which were committed to free the southern territory from Israeli forces; on other cases, militia were significantly resized and they tended to transform themselves into political parties (Maïla, 1991, p. 33).

The third section of the Ta'if Agreement is dedicated to Israel-Lebanon relations. The necessity to free Southern Lebanon from Israeli occupation is affirmed, and the need to respect and to enforce S/RES/425 is also reiterated, providing for the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from that region. This section became no more valid after the withdrawal of those troops in May of 2000.

The fourth and last section deals with Syria-Lebanon relations. All aspects of this relationship were analysed, with both parts pledged to sign a bilateral agreement: this was put into practice on 22nd May 1991 with the *Traité de fraternité*, being a sort of general framework agreement which established guidelines for future relations.

Now, before moving to analyse 1990s, a brief analysis of what the Ta'if Agreement meant for Lebanon's course of history is needed. Under a denominational point of view, it is true that Ta'if represented a milestone in changing the weights of religious groups within the institutional bodies: as we saw, Christians were widely downsized and equalized to the Muslims; Shiites had a political legitimisation thanks to the comprehensive acceptance of a Shia President of the Parliament; Sunni were the real winners of the agreement, being able to tip the balance towards them after years of waiting. However, it is possible to say that the Ta'if Agreement has never been entirely implemented: confessionalism has never been eliminated from the management of the State; instead, maybe it was reinforced after the Agreement. Furthermore, Syria continued to interfere on Lebanese matters. Nevertheless, the Ta'if Agreement certainly had the crucial role to draw a new denominational equilibrium which facilitated Lebanon on overcoming a difficult historical moment.

Table 4: Institutional framework before and after Ta'if Agreement[19]

<div align="center">

Pre Ta'if   ***Post Ta'if***

Chamber of Deputies

</div>

- **99 seats, 6:5** (Christian:Muslims) **proportion**	- **108 seats, 5:5** (Christian:Muslims) **proportion**
- President of the Parliament's term is **one year**, and he is usually a Shiite	- The President's term is extended to **four years**
- The Chamber **shares** with the President of the Republic the **power to reject ministers**	- The Chamber is **the only authority to express confidence** on Ministers and on the Government

<div align="center">

Prime Minister

</div>

- He is usually a Sunni and he is appointed by the President of the Republic after parliamentary **non-binding** consultations	- He is appointed by the President of the Republic after parliamentary **binding** consultations
- He **shares** with the President of the Republic the task of forming the Government	- He **forms** the Government after non-binding parliamentary consultations

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[19] Personal processing based on Norton (1991) and Di Peri (2017)

- He is usually a Christian Maronite and he **governs through** the Council of Ministers, over which he has an absolute authority

- He is **the only one who can convene** the Council of Ministers or the Chamber of Deputies in extraordinary session

- He is the **commander** of armed forces

- He **can exercise** a tacit veto, refusing to promulgate laws

- He **has not the right** to vote at the Council of Ministers, but he can preside over it whenever he desires

- He can convene, **in accordance with the Prime Minister**, extraordinary sessions of Council and Parliament

- He **presides** over the Supreme Defence Council, but Lebanese Armed Forces are subject to the authority of the Council of Ministers

- He **cannot refuse** to promulgate laws, halting the legislative iter

1.8 The 1990s and the rise of Rafiq Hariri

The end of the Civil War and the sign of the Ta'if Agreement did not have an immediate and effective result on the ground. Indeed, for what concerns foreign troops, more than 30.000 Syrian soldiers and thousands of Israeli soldiers remained on the Lebanese soil (el-Khazen, 2003, p. 55). In addition, the problem of the reallocation of Palestinians remained urgent, and immediately after the end of the conflict the Lebanese Government strongly pushed for a disarmament of them, which however was not decisive.

The agreement signed in Saudi Arabia was not positively welcomed, at least immediately after its signing: many militia and Hezbollah strongly opposed to their own disarmament, as provided for by Ta'if, and all this process requested much time for being completely concluded. Hezbollah represented a peculiar case, because it was the only actor which eventually remained armed, for two reasons: Lebanese Government did not intend to send

regular troops in the south because of the tense situation and Hezbollah was at the time the only one capable to carry on the resistance strategy against Israel.

In this atmosphere, first parliamentary elections were held in 1992, with the introduction of a new electoral law. A short focus on the new electoral law is needed for understanding how the denominational matter was englobed into the democratic process.

The reform basically enlarged electoral constituencies, basing them on governorates (*muhāfaza*) and not on districts (*qadā*), as it had been until that time; thus, with the enlargement of constituencies, candidates had larger electoral bases. In all constituencies the number of deputies of every denomination was based on the following table.

Table 5: Denominational distribution of electoral seats, 1992 electoral law[20]

Electoral Seats[21]	TOT N°	MA	GO	GC	AO	AC	P	MI	S	SH	D	A
Beirut	19	1	2	1	3	1	1	1	6	2	1	
Mount Lebanon	35	19	4	1	1				2	3	5	
North	28	9	6						11			2
Bekaa	23	3	2	3	1				5	8	1	
South and Nabatiyyeh	23	2	1	2					3	14	1	
TOTAL	128	34	14	8	5	1	1	1	27	27	8	2
	100%	26%	11%	6%	4%	1%	1%	1%	21%	21%	6%	2%

The new electoral system was made to ensure that every candidate could represent his geographical constituency and his religious community at the same time: indeed, the seat was reserved to his religious groups, but the deputy was elected by the entire multi-confessional population.

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[20] Source: el-Khazen, 1998
[21] MA = Maronite; GO = Greek Orthodox; GC = Greek Catholic; AO = Armenian Orthodox; AC = Armenian Catholic; P = Protestant; MI = Minorities; S = Sunni; SH = Shia; A = Alewite

The 1992 elections were characterised by a low turnout (29%) also because of Maronite community's boycott and numerous irregularities (el-Khazen, 1994, pp. 120-36); Christian community opposed elections because they were concerned about the interdenominational equilibrium change in favour of Muslims; for this reason they also boycotted 1996 elections.

Eventually, international community recognized elections' result and the new Parliament was characterised by a downsizing of Christians and the entrance into the Parliament of militia and new parties, namely Amal and Hezbollah on the Shia side. At the time, the Chamber had mainly four objectives: solve the refugees issue; strengthen State's authority through the promulgation of new laws; liberate the country from Israeli occupation; make operative the cooperation treaty with Syria (Nasrallah, 1996, p. 208).

Rafiq Hariri, a Sunni millionaire coming from Sidon who was strongly supported by the President of the Republic Elias Hraoui, became Prime Minister: he was not perceived positively by Syria, which was concerned about the rising power of him. Indeed, Hariri asked for and obtained special legislative powers for promoting necessary reforms in a rapid way, even though he met the opposition of Nabih Berri, the new President of the Parliament (which he is still today). Hariri pushed for a rejuvenation of politics through the elimination of bureaucracy and favouritism, but he was not always able to disentangle among political games and thus to promote his economic reforms entirely, tended to make Lebanon a "Montecarlo of the Middle East" (Di Peri, 2017, p. 114). However, it is true that he was appreciated by Sunni, backed by Saudi Arabia and he was also able to earn the trust of Christians thanks to his financial credibility and to his personal friendship with President Jacques Chirac.

After some time, it was evident that economic and infrastructural plans of Hariri were focused on Beirut and not on the entire country, and that large-scale projects risked to led national economy to bankruptcy. In November 1995 the Parliament modified the Constitution for extending the presidential term of Elias Hrawi for other three years in an exceptional way (thanks also to the pressure Hariri made to the Parliament). The Prime Minister was criticized by trade unions and large parts of population for his unsustainable policies, and his response to the protests was strongly repressive; the overall situation compelled Hariri to resign, but the Parliament was unable to find a political alternative, so a new Hariri Government was formed. The parliamentary debate at the time was focused on a new electoral law for the upcoming 1996 elections: eventually it approved

an electoral law very similar to the 1992 one, with some little variation on a few districts. Even though the elections saw a very weak opposition to Hariri, the Prime Minister resigned in 1998 after the election of Émile Lahoud as President of the Republic, mainly because of the escalation of political climate.

The new Prime Minister, Salim al-Hoss, faced a difficult situation: on one side Hariri set up a strong opposition to him in the Parliament, on the other side he had only two years of government before the next elections in 2000.

Under President Lahoud, the tripartite management of power (so called *troika*) established with Ta'if Agreement was interrupted because of his actions willing to limit Prime Minister's power; a sort of two-headed system was established, with President of the Republic and President of the Parliament at its top.

For 2000 legislative elections Lahoud signed a new ambiguous electoral law which modified several constituencies, with the aim of facilitating some candidates (Di Peri, 2017, p. 118).

Hariri was the undisputed winner of those elections and he was able to extend his influence all over the country. However, instead of the previous Government, the Prime Minister had to face the new President of the Republic, Lahoud, who was determined to make him weak. The comprehensive control of media made by Hariri and his ties with rich members of economic and financial world let him to act autonomously: he promoted a contradictory economic program, and the effect was a true disaster; only the prompt answer of several international organisations, among which the EU and the World Bank, saved Lebanon from bankruptcy (Corm, 2001, pp. 80-3).

1.9 2000s: the Cedar Revolution and the third Israeli invasion

As said, the 2000 elections saw the victory of Rafiq Hariri and the rising power of Islamic parties. Two issues characterised the first years of the 21st century in the aftermath of the elections: the fall of the Christian Maronite party and the relations with Israel and Syria. As already stated, the Maronites came out weakened from the Ta'if Agreement, and in the following years they were not able to reorganize themselves politically. In addition, even though they expressed aversion to the Israeli occupation, there was never an explicit condemnation to it, neither citing Israel as an enemy.

On the other side, Hezbollah became stronger and presented itself as the only actor able to face Israeli forces in southern Lebanon. In May 2000 there was a withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon, leaving Hezbollah without its main purpose. However, through an attempt to find a pretext to continue its actions in the south of the country, Hezbollah reclaimed the Sheeba Farms' territory, a portion of land occupied by Israel since 1967. In October 2000 Hezbollah launched a military campaign for reclaiming Sheeba Farms. The 9/11 aggravated the situation and made the atmosphere very tense in the Middle East, with the US including Hezbollah into the list of terrorist organisation; Hariri sought to convince Americans that the Shia militia were not terrorist, but it was useless.

For what concerns Syria, it was evident that the neighbouring country had always had a crucial role in the political events of Lebanon, seeking to influence local communities and parties. The 2000 elections were marked by a strong anti-Syrian spirit, promptly repressed by President Lahoud (who was definitely pro-Syrian). Furthermore, in 2002 a bloc of deputies was formed, with the purpose of counterbalancing the pro-Syrian Christian coalition and restoring a friendly but equal relationship with Syria. However, it was only after the assassination of Hariri in 2005 that a strong anti-Syrian coalition rose: we are going to analyse that hard period now.

First of all, it is important to say that even though - in the first years of 2000s - the economy was stagnant mainly due to the economic policy pursued by Hariri, the Prime Minister was perceived by the majority of Lebanese people as a sort of strong man that had been able to take the country out of the crisis. Indeed, the beginning of the century seemed to lead Lebanon towards a normalisation of the overall situation. Under a political point of view, Lebanese political life was dominated by the presence of a Hariri-led strong anti-Syrian bloc, which gathered a heterogeneous group composed by the Druze of Walid Joumblatt, the Samir Geagea's Lebanese Forces, some former members of the Kataeb Party and some others from Aoun's movement; in December 2004 these forces signed a joint agreement denouncing the requests of the extension of Lahoud's term. Furthermore, in September 2004 the S/RES/1559[22] clearly asked for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon.

It was in this atmosphere that on 14th February 2005 Rafiq Hariri was assassinated with a bomb placed on a street of Beirut promenade. This event shocked Lebanon and the international community and it had at least two main consequences: firstly, it triggered

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[22] http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1559

an enormous wave of protests throughout the country, known as "Cedar Revolution" (remarkable for its avoidance of violence); secondly, it led to the withdrawal of Syrian forces from the Lebanese territory (on the 26th of April).

Hezbollah sought to ride the indignation of people and organized a great demonstration on the 8th of March, during which it asked for the initiation of an independent investigation concerning the assassination of Hariri and the formation of a new government led by Rachid Karamé. Furthermore, Hezbollah proposed a tolerant approach (but not an alignment) with Syria. As a response to that, the 14th of March there was another demonstration made by all the Hezbollah's opponents which mobilized around 1/3 of Lebanese population (Di Peri, 2017, p. 144). On that occasion, protestants asked for the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, the removal of intelligence's chiefs, the formation of a neutral government and the establishment of an international tribunal which would have investigated the assassination of Hariri.

Of course, the two demonstrations represented two opposite poles: those who supported Syria and those who did not. The country was on an institutional crisis once again.

Immediately after the assassination of Hariri a new Government under the leadership of Najib Mikati was formed. At the same time, General Aoun returned to Lebanon after some years spent in France in exile (in 1990s he survived several Syrian attempts on his life): the arrival on the scene of Aoun had a fragmentation effect on many political parties. Indeed, in order to contrast the alliance formed by Saad Hariri (son of Rafiq and current Prime Minister), Joumblatt's Druze, Lebanese Forces led by Samir Geagea and the Phalange of Gemayel, Aoun decided to make an alliance with Hezbollah and other Maronite forces, creating a sort of chaos in the political scenario. Legislative elections were held between 29th May and 19th June 2005. The heterogeneity of the electoral roll (mainly due to the political game of Aoun) led to the formation of a Parliament without a clear political line: it was immediately evident that the 2005 elections had exacerbated denominational divisions. A Government of national unity was established under the guidance of Fouad Siniora, who had to cope with the difficult coexistence of an anti-Syrian Parliament and a pro-Syrian President (Lahoud). Another issue not yet solved was the establishment of the Tribunal for the investigation of the assassination of Hariri: eventually, a committee of inquiry was provided for by the S/RES/1644[23]. Some Lebanese parties, such as Hezbollah, criticised this decision because they perceived the

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[23] http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1644

new Committee as an umpteenth attempt of international actors to interfere in the internal affairs. Detlev Mehlis, a German judge in charge of the investigation, accused Syria and Lebanese secret service to be responsible of the assassination of the former Prime Minister; in September 2005 Mehlis was constrained to resign because of numerous political pressures. On top of that and once again, the investigations of the international tribunal exacerbated denominational divisions.

2005 had not been an easy year for Lebanon and 2006 was going to be worse. Under an economic point of view, the country witnessed a slight improvement, mainly thanks to the foreign policy of openness promoted since 2002, year in which an Association Agreement with the EU was signed (it entered into force in 2006)[24]. Under a political point of view, Hezbollah was continuing to pursue an aggressive approach towards Israel and it had conducted several military operations in those years.

On 12th July 2006 the Shia militia captured two Israeli soldiers at the border, overthrowing any existing equilibrium until then; the same day Israel launched an incursion into southern Lebanon, marking the beginning of the 34-Day War. The Israeli operation had been probably ready for months or years, and the capture of hostages carried out by Hezbollah only represented an excuse for Israel (Achar, Warschawski, 2006, pp. 44-6). The beginning of the conflict seemed to bring Lebanon twenty years back. If in the first days Israel thought to lead the war in a fast and efficient way through the use of the only air forces, it was soon evident how the military strategy of Hezbollah forced Israel not only to deploy land forces, but also to redefine its objectives. Shia militia, greatly outnumbered in respect to Israeli forces (between 10:1 and 5:1 ratio depending on the areas of the conflict), were able to utilise an efficient electronic espionage system and many surface-to-air, surface-to-surface and anti-ship missiles: in this way, the military invasion of Lebanon by Israeli forces was delayed, with great losses for both parties. The war's effects were devastating: Israeli raids were not limited to the south but also struck Beirut and, most of all, numerous infrastructures of the country, notably ports, streets, industries and the airport. More than 1200 Lebanese people died (both civilian and military), against 43 Israeli military victims. More than one million people were forced to leave their homes and serious human rights violations were made[25].

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[24] https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/euro_mediterranean_agreement_en.pdf
[25] The attack on the village of Qana has become very famous: here, more than fifty civilians lost their lives, among which there were at least 20 children

On August 11[26] the UNSC adopted Res. 1701[26] through which Hezbollah had to accept the deploying of 15.000 soldiers of the Lebanese army along the Litani river and the deployment of troops by the United Nations. In the resolution there was no mention of the Israeli aggression nor a condemnation of it; instead, the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers made by Hezbollah was mentioned as an act of aggression. On August 14th an agreement for the ceasefire was reached.

The 34-Day War did not guarantee a unanimous support to Hezbollah by Lebanese parties. Indeed, Maronites condemned the kidnapping of the Israeli soldiers and pushed for the implementation of S/RES/1701 and the disarmament of Hezbollah. Similarly, Sunni supported Prime Minister Siniora and his will to disarm Shia militia.

In 2008 there was a prolonged confrontation between Hezbollah and the Prime Minister, an umpteenth political fight between religious groups which had to deal with the election of the new President of the Republic. After two weeks of clashes, on 21st May a new denominational compromise was signed in Doha[27]: the key elements of the agreement were the election of Michel Suleiman to the Presidency, a revision of the electoral law and new economic reforms.

In 2009 new general elections were held: the results were quite similar to the previous elections of 2005, with little changes concerning the number of parliamentary seats of some small political parties. Summarizing the results, it is possible to say that the 8th March coalition was disadvantaged by the high number of independent candidates and the presence of very small parties, whilst the 14th March coalition came out as the winner, even though also in this political wing the number of independent candidates was extremely high.

As it is evident in Table 6, the 2009 elections did not constitute a surprise in the overall results of political blocs compared to the 2005 elections, confirming the *status quo* of the Lebanese confessional/political system. In the meantime, Saad Hariri, son of Rafiq, had taken the leadership of his father's party and he had become the point of reference of the Sunni community. From 2009 on, Lebanese history and Saad Hariri's actions will be very bound.

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[26] http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1701
[27] https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/Lebanon_DohaAgreement2008_Engl.pdf

Table 6: Comparison between 2005 and 2009 general elections

2005/2009 elections	2005 parliamentary seats	2009 parliamentary seats	Gap
March 14 Alliance	69	68	**-1**
Future Movement	36	26	**-10**
Lebanese Forces	6	5	**-1**
Kataeb	6	5	**-1**
Progressive Socialist Party	16	4	**-12**
Independents	3	25	**+22**
Others	2	3	**+1**
March 8 Alliance	57	57	-
Hezbollah	14	12	**-2**
Amal	14	10	**-4**
Free Patriotic Movement	15	10	**-5**
Syrian Socialist National Party	2	2	-
Independent	-	16	**+16**
Others	12	8	**-4**

1.10 The last decade: Saad Hariri, the political vacuum and the new Government

In 2009 the Saad Hariri era began, but through the years the son of Rafiq did not demonstrate to act successfully. Until the assassination of his father, there had been a sort of *harirification* of the Lebanese Sunnism (Meier, Di Peri, 2016, pp. 35-53), thanks to the economic capacities of Rafiq and his political ability.

The victory of Saad at the leadership of the March 14 Alliance was due to the necessity of the Sunni community to find a leader able to protect its interests and to ensure a sort of continuity from the past. However, Saad did not have the same charisma of his father and he had to cope with exogenous and endogenous challenges. First of all, problems began to raise within his political party, *al-mustaqbal*, which was without a clear internal

hierarchy and a defined political strategy after the assassination of Rafiq. Saad had difficulties in his attempt to forcibly keep the community together basically because he was not a real leader both in the party and in the coalition. Then, he made several mistakes for what concerned his relationship with Hezbollah and the Lebanese army: some telephone tapping proved his involvement in an attempt to find fake witnesses of his father's assassination for accusing Hezbollah of the murder; then, on 25th January 2011, Future Movement's militia fired to the Lebanese Army after the appointment of Najib Mikati as Prime Minister, perceived by Hariri as a Shia attempt to take control of the Government. Political difficulties within *al-mustaqbal* led to a migration of deputies from that party to Hezbollah and other radical Sunni political groups. In December 2009 the first Saad Hariri Government was formed. Since the beginning, the Council of Ministers demonstrated to be unstable, mostly because of the veto power exerted by Hezbollah and by all the 8 March Alliance, rapidly leading to a stalemate.

For what concerns the relationship between Hariri and foreign countries, here I will outline only the one with the Saudi royal family, since it is by far the most important and the most affecting one. It is evident that since Hariri family has always represented one of the pillars of the Sunni community in Lebanon, it has always been backed by the Saudi royal family, being a long-time ally of it. Both Rafiq and Saad owed their political career and considerable family fortune to Saudi backing, always benefiting by its influence in Lebanon. Furthermore, the current Prime Minister is also of Saudi nationality and he owns a property in Riyadh, in addition to many economic activities.

In November 2017 a state visit of Hariri in Saudi Arabia made clear how the country of Arabic Peninsula controls and interferes in Lebanese affairs. Indeed, on 4th November, the Lebanese Prime Minister paid a state visit to Riyadh for having a meeting with the crown prince, the strong man of Saudi Arabia, Muhammad Bin Salman. At the arrival, according to newspaper sources[28][29], Hariri was taken into custody by Saudi security forces and both his phone and his bodyguards' ones were seized. The same day Hariri appeared on television from Saudi Arabia, tendering his resignation as Prime Minister, accusing Iran sowing discord, devastation and destruction in the region and claiming the existence of an assassination plot against him. He also made a call to Aoun: Lebanese

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[28]   https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-politics-hariri-exclusive/exclusive-how-saudi-arabia-turned-on-lebanons-hariri-idUSKBN1DB0QL
[29] https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/24/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-saad-hariri-mohammed-bin-salman-lebanon.html

President of the Republic stated that he would not have accepted Hariri's resignation until he would have returned to Beirut. Some days later the Saudi government accused Iran and Lebanon of an act of war after Yemeni rebels fired a missile to Riyadh, and it ordered Saudi citizens to leave Lebanon immediately. It is so clear that this move was, with the most probability, undertaken by Muhammad Bin Salman for hitting Hezbollah and Iran and for curbing their influence in Lebanon and in the region. As a proof of that, Saudis affirmed (and this was actually true) that the Shia party had made several political deals with the Future Movement of Hariri in that period and that it had publicly accused Saudi royal family of interfering in Lebanese matters. Even the request of Hariri to Hezbollah, some days before his "state visit" to Riyadh, to tone down was insufficient. Thus, all the operation was aiming at toning down Hezbollah. Under international pressure and for proving that the Lebanese Prime Minister was free to move, several photos of Saad were released. On 12th November Hariri reappeared on television[30], assuring his supporters, announcing his return to Lebanon and blaming Iran for interfering on "Arab affairs". Under international pressure, Saudis had to solve the diplomatic impasse one way or another. On 10th November, a flash and surprise state visit to Saudi Arabia was paid by Emmanuel Macron[31]. The French President was in Abu Dhabi for another state visit when his staff office announced he would have flown to Riyadh for a meeting with Mohammad Bin Salman. In those circumstances, the role played by France was undoubtedly crucial. Macron decided not to play a condescending role with the Saudis[32], seeking to exert all its political power in the Middle East to unblock the diplomatic impasse. With the excuse of an official invite directed at Saad Hariri to make a state visit to France, the Élysée achieved a great international result: indeed, on Saturday 18th November Hariri flew to Paris and on the following Tuesday he returned to Lebanon and suspended resignation[33]. This anecdote is very useful to understand how foreign powers daily interfere on Lebanese political life and it shows the role of the Wahhabite kingdom in Lebanon.

Willing to return to the historical narration, in 2011 a wave of protests broke out through all the Middle East, leading to what was then called "Arab Spring". At the same time, the incriminating statements made by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon directed at four

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[30] http://www.limesonline.com/il-nuovo-discorso-di-hariri-e-il-nulla-di-fatto-saudita/102907
[31] https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2017/11/10/news/macron_arabia_saudita_mbs-180719862/
[32] https://www.ilfoglio.it/esteri/2017/11/17/news/macron-sbroglia-il-caso-hariri-sotto-il-naso-dei-sauditi-e-lo-porta-parigi-163951/
[33] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-42079999

members of Hezbollah made the Shia party bringing down the Government and, strong of Joumblatt's support, appointing the Sunni Najib Mikati as Prime Minister in June 2011. Even though Lebanon was not very affected by the Arab Spring in its extreme version, at least two events had repercussions on the country (Di Peri, 2017, p. 166): first of all, the breakout of some protests throughout the country demanding for the abolition of the "denominational regime"; secondly, the beginning of the Syrian War in March 2011, which still and mostly today has tremendous effects on Lebanon, both on refugees and on economic issues.

Yet another remarkable effect of the Syrian War, even though it was already evident with the assassination of Rafiq Hariri, was the emergence of several Sunni Salafist radical groups. In deepen, we can divide them in three main groups. The first one is represented by *Jamiyyat al-Hidaya wal-Ihsan* (The Association of Guidance and Charity), founded by Sheikh Salem al-Shahhal in 1946 in Tripoli with the name of *al-Haraka al-Salafiyya*, originally configured as a group of more than fifty organisations with charitable purposes. The group is Wahabi-inspired and puts a high premium on scholastic activities and social work and embraces a conservative vision of politics and society (Abdel-Latif, 2008, p. 12). The second group of Salafist movements, more reformist and less extremists than the first one, can be summarized in the Lebanese Islamic Forum for Dialogue and Daawa, founded and led by Sheikh Muhammad al-Khodr, who has always been critical of the extremist Islamic movements in Lebanon. The forum aims at becoming a common ground to find a shared Islamic project and vision (Abdel-Latif, 2008, p. 14). In addition, the Forum stands against the aversion of Tripoli Salafists concerning Shiites and Hezbollah, seeking to find a compromise with them. For what regards Salafist jihadist groups inspired by al-Qaeda, some movements such as Fatah al-Islam and Jabhat al-Nousra have their grounds in Lebanon, with a transnational vocation. In addition, it is important to mention Ahmad al-Assir, the former Imam of Sidon, who claimed himself to be the representative of South Lebanon Sunni community (an area under Hezbollah's control and with a Shiite majority) and stood against *al-mustaqbal* and Hezbollah for being too much accommodating with Israel, having a nationwide echo. There were several clashes between militia of al-Assir and Lebanese Forces, among which the most important one was in 2013 in Abra, a neighbourhood of Sidon. On that occasion al-Assir disappeared, becoming a fugitive for years until the 15th August 2015, when the General Security

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unmasked him while seeking to flee to Egypt[34]. On 28th September 2017, al-Assir was sentenced to death.

In march 2013 Najib Mikati tendered his resignation because of the impossibility to find an agreement on a new electoral law and the persistent violations of the policy of dissociation concerning the Syrian War. A month after Tammam Salam was tasked of forming a new government, which eventually was born in February 2014. However, the absence of public safety forced the State to postpone the elections *sine die*. Three months later, in May, the President of the Republic Michel Sleiman ended his term, leading the Prime Minister Tammam to assume presidential duties until the election of the new President. From then on Lebanon began to live a two-years period of great political vacuum apparently with no chance of solution. Tens of voting rounds were needed at the Parliament to overcome the stalemate: among the candidates, at the beginning Samir Geagea was on the short list, and others included Henri Helou, Suleiman Frangieh, Jean Obeid, Riad Salameh. No one candidate had been able, in two years of rounds, to gain neither the two-thirds majority (as required by the first vote in every session) nor the absolute majority (as provided after a failed first voting). This stalemate laid its roots undoubtedly in internal political divisions, exacerbated by the emergency situation happening on neighbour countries, mostly in Syria, from where millions of refugees have arrived during the last nine years. Eventually, after forty-six rounds and two years of political negotiations, on 31st October 2016 Michel Aoun was elected President of the Republic with an absolute majority of 83 votes. Some weeks later, in December, Saad Hariri was newly appointed as Prime Minister, forming his second government.

However, the executive of Hariri lasted for two years as it was decided that requisites for holding parliamentary elections were present again (after having postponed them three times in 2013, 2014 and 2017). On 6th May 2018 Lebanese people returned to vote, giving the Parliament some important changes[35]: Free Patriotic Movement emerged as the first bloc, gaining 11 seats; Hariri's Future movement shrank by more than 40% in comparison to the previous elections, whilst the 8th March Alliance performed well, with Amal gaining three more seats and Hezbollah one more; Lebanese Forces of Samir Geagea almost doubled its seats, passing from 8 to 15.

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[34] https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/08/15/Lebanese-authorities-detain-hardline-leader-Ahmed-al-Assir.html

[35] https://www.lebaneseelections.com/results

Table 7: Comparison between 2009 and 2018 general elections

2009/2018 elections	2009 parliamentary seats	2018 parliamentary seats	Gap
Free Patriotic Movement	10	20	+10
Future Movement	26	19	-7
Amal	10	15	+5
Lebanese Forces	5	14	+9
Hezbollah	12	13	+1
Progressive Socialist Party	4	9	+5
Kataeb	5	3	-2
Syrian Socialist National Party	2	3	+1
Marada	3	3	-
Tashnag	2	3	+1
Independents	41	17	-24
Others	11	9	-2

In the afterwards of the elections, political bargaining for the forming of a new government began. The entire process lasted almost one year and saw several confrontations between all political parties involved for appointing 30 ministers. The first main instance which blocked the new government's formation for a long period was the one made by Hezbollah: for the first time, the Shia party advanced the imperative request of receiving at least one portfolio minister (until then they had always been at the head of ministers without portfolio), eventually gaining the Ministry of Public Wealth with Jamil Jabrak. Then, the second main instance was advanced by the Free Patriotic Movement headed by Gebran Bassil, actually the most influent and powerful politician in this Government by far, which demanded for eleven ministries, but eventually were able to gain ten seats. The eleventh minister was debated for long time: Hezbollah demanded for a representative of a group of six pro-Syria Sunni MPs; a deal between Hezbollah and FPM was eventually reached in the person of Hasan Mrad. Notwithstanding his political and religious belonging, Mrad never votes against FPM and Aoun in cabinet agenda

items. The Progressive Socialist Party, the major Druze party headed by Joumblatt, has two seats.

Talking about coalitions, President Aoun's bloc and Bassil's one have together 10 ministers, while the two Shia movement, Amal and Hezbollah, have 6 seats combined. Hariri's FM has 6 seats and the allied Lebanese Forces of Geagea have 4, controlling 10 ministries in total.

Analysing the new Government under a religious point of view, the denominational distribution consists of 15 Christian ministers, 6 Sunni ministers, 6 Shia ministers and 3 Druze ministers. No one party has veto power or majority, although it is evident that the Prime Minister can force the collapse of the Government through his resignation.

It is undoubtedly true that, as always in the long history of the land of cedars, the political and religious balances are very delicate as a new chapter of this country's history sets to begin. Everything will depend on how different souls of Lebanon will decide to behave, seeking to deal or fighting each other.

Lebanese people will be asked to choose, but everything has a price, and through the last centuries these marvellous people have learnt how much it can be high.

Table 8: Government Hariri III (since 31st January 2019)[36]

N.	Office	Name	Religion	Party
1	Minister of Foreign Affairs and Exp.	Gebran Bassil	Maronite	FPM
2	Minister of Energy and Water	Nada Boustani	Maronite	FPM
3	Minister of Environment	Fadi Jreissati	Greek-Catholic	FPM
4	Minister of Economy and Trade	Mansour Bteich	Matronite	FPM
5	Minister of the Displaced Affairs	Ghassan Atallah	Greek-Catholic	FPM
6	Minister of Tourism	Avedis Guidanian	Arm.-Orthodox	Tashnag
7	Minister of Defense	Elias Bou Saab	Greek-Orthodox	PoR
8	Minister of Justice	Albert Sehran	Greek-Orthodox	PoR
9	Minister for Presidential Affairs	Selim Jreissati	Greek-Catholic	PoR
10	Minister for Refugee Affairs	Saleh Al Gharib	Druze	PoR
11	Minister for Foreign Trade	Hassan Mrad	Sunni	~PoR
12	Minister of Public Health	Jamil Jabak	Shia	Hezbollah
13	Minister of Youth and Sports	Mohamad Fneish	Shia	Hezbollah
14	Minister for Parliamentary Affairs	Mahmoud Komati	Shia	Hezbollah
15	Minister of Finance	Ali Hasan Khalil	Shia	Amal
16	Minister of Agriculture	Hassan Lakkis	Shia	Amal
17	Minister of Culture	Mohammad Daoud	Shia	Amal
18	Minister of Public Works and Transp.	Youssef Fenianos	Maronite	Marada
19	Prime Minister	Saad Hariri	Sunni	FM
20	Minister of Interior and Municipalities	Raya El Hassan	Sunni	FM
21	Minister of Telecommunications	Mohamad Choucair	Sunni	FM
22	Minister of Information	Jamal Jarrah	Sunni	FM
23	Minister for Technology and Investment	Adel Afiouni	Sunni	Mikati
24	Minister for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth	Violette Khairallah	Greek-Orthodox	Safadi
25	Deputy Prime Minister	Ghassan Hasbani	Greek-Orthodox	LF
26	Minister of Social Affairs	Richard Kouyoumjian	Arm.-Orthodox	LF
27	Minister of Labor	Camille Abou Sleiman	Maronite	LF
28	Minister for Administrative Development	May Chidiac	Maronite	LF
29	Minister of Education	Akram Chehayeb	Druze	PSP
30	Minister of Industry	Wael Abou Faour	Druze	PSP

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[36] Personal processing based on Italian Embassy data

Hezbollah: an ever-changing and international actor

2.1 A peculiar case in the Middle East

Hezbollah represents a very peculiar case in the entire Middle Eastern scenario, both if we intend the Party of God as a community of people or a political and military force. Emerged from a split of the largely-known Amal movement (the other major Shia force in Lebanon), Hezbollah has been deeply evolving over the years, always seeking to concretely respond to Lebanese people's requests depending on the historical period. Hence, there are two main erroneous considerations to be falsified. First of all, it is inaccurate to think Hezbollah as a very impenetrable Shia force which is only devoted to defend and protect Shia people. Instead, Hezbollah has always wanted to present itself as a political and military body aiming at protecting and preserving Lebanese people's interests in its widest definition. Secondly, as the name suggests, the Party of God is definitely not limited to the military sphere, but it is also (and mostly) a political party with defined objectives and social programs. Precisely the political sphere of Hezbollah represents today an interesting case to be investigated because of its impressive rise in power within the Parliament over the years. From its establishment in 1982 and especially from its first appearance in local and parliamentary elections, the Party of God has been able to evolve and to penetrate Lebanese institutions more and more. As it is largely known, it is absolutely true that Hezbollah went down in history for its military activities and for the unremitting resistance against Israeli troops in southern Lebanon. It is therefore correct to affirm that this Shia movement was born with a specific purpose, namely to fight Israel and kick its troops out of the country; however, the substantial change of Hezbollah must not be forgotten and must be analysed and understood.

I will firstly make an historical background of Hezbollah aimed at stressing how the party has been evolving over the years; secondly, I will focus on the apparatus of Hezbollah, seeking to draw out a sort of organisation chart based on the interviews and researches of several authors; lastly, I will focus on the international relations of the Party of God, both on the Middle Eastern region and the entire world. It will be very interesting to find out how the Shia movement has developed and maintained huge economic, political and military interests throughout the world.

2.2 The origins of the Shia community in Lebanon and the heritage of Musa and Baqir al-Sadr

Starting our historical analysis in the Ottoman Empire period, it is firstly necessary to say that the majority of Shia people was at the time involved in agricultural activities, submitted to the power of *zu'ama*, who were very rich landowners inhabiting the Mount Lebanon area. In this sense, the six major Shia families (*As'ad*, *Osseyran*, *al-Zayn*, *al-Khalil*, *Hamadah* and *Haydar*) were meant to play a sort of intermediary role between poor masses and the State (Hazran, 2009, p. 4; Shaery-Eisenlohr, 2008, p. 24). However, this role was never put in practice and paupers Shia people needed to find shelter in the urban areas of the country; in this way, they set up a new underclass in numerous towns. This peculiar character of the Shia community appeared to have a crucial role during the several Palestinian waves of migration from Israel. Indeed, it is undoubtedly true that Shiites began to have a kind of amicable approach towards Palestinians, feeling to be "oppressed people" like them.

Shiites opposed the colonial invasion and the despotic power of France under its protectorate at the beginning of the 20th century. Contrary to what other religious denominations had, Shiites lacked a link or a support by a significant State. In fact, Maronites enjoyed an historical bond with France, Orthodox were backed by Russia and, at least until the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Sunni identified themselves as belonging to the Arab world and received the support of Istanbul (Olmert, 1987, p. 190). Thus, until the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Shia community in Lebanon pursued a self-pity behaviour (Di Donato, 2015, p. 22).

Although it is not directly linked to the Party of God, the figure of Imam Musa al-Sadr is of paramount importance in the development of the Shia community in Lebanon; hence, a short analysis is needed.

Musa al-Sadr was born in Qom (the Iranian holy city) in 1928. His father was one of the most prominent Lebanese Ayatollah and he sent his son to Najaf for educational purposes just until Musa al-Sadr decided to move to his homeland, precisely to Sur (southern Lebanon). Since the beginning, Musa al-Sadr became an important member of the Lebanese Shia community and he focused his political action towards "oppressed people", namely the underclasses. However, it is true that his strategy was not limited to push forward a sort of *welfare* activity: instead, he aimed at resurrecting the Shia community in Lebanon, seeking to push Shiites to redeem themselves and to deeply

transform their living conditions. Musa al-Sadr had three objectives in mind: to diminish the influence of communist and secularist parties within the Shia community, to reduce the power of *zu'ama* and eventually to fight the denominational system (which characterises Lebanon still today) both at political and institutional level.

Al-Sadr wanted the Shia community to play a major role in the country's political life, and the first result heading towards this direction was surely the establishment of the *Majlis al-Islamiyya al-Shia al-'Ala*, better known as *Higher Islamic Shi'i Council* (HISC). One year after the establishment of the HISC, the Lebanese government recognized it as an official institution and allocated $10 million for aid in southern provinces. Al-Sadr remained President of the HISC until his mysterious disappearance during a trip to Libya in 1978. Thanks to the activities of the HISC al-Sadr was able to place his movement within the Lebanese institutions' framework and, notably under the Fouhad Chehab's presidency, a very fruitful collaboration was established between the President of the Republic and al-Sadr.

Furthermore, we need to consider that already in 1960 Shia people constituted the 30% of the entire Lebanese population. Indeed, the 1932 demographic census became outdated soon after its release. Already in the early 1970s seemed to be proved that Shia community was certainly the largest one in Lebanon (Scarcia Amoretti, 1994, p. 110).

As the majority of Shiites, al-Sadr sympathized with Palestinian refugees and expressed his support to their purposes, particularly after the Six-Day War in 1967. Al-Sadr coined a slogan concerning this new alliance between the two communities, stating that it was between "those deprived in their homeland and those deprived of their homeland" (Traboulsi, 2007, p. 186). However, due to the massive presence of Palestinian people, al-Sadr was definitely aware of the danger for Lebanon to become a Palestinian State, so he pursued an ambiguous political standing with respect to them, a sort of middle position between Maronites (who were against the armed presence of refugees) and Sunni (who backed Palestinians) (Ajami, 1986, p. 162). Al-Sadr always stood against a Palestinian "State within a State" established in Lebanon, in which Yasser Arafat's OLP could have had an independent control after the expulsion from Jordan in the 1970 Black September events.

Although the rise to the power of Ayatollah Khomeini is still far in the future, many authors have agreed on recognising a match between the father of the Iranian revolution and the first great voice of the Lebanese Shia community, Musa al-Sadr. Indeed, as

Khomeini represented a political and social earthquake in Iran ten years later, Musa al-Sadr was the first one to put an end to the "political quietism" which had characterised the Shia community's approach until then. For the first time, through al-Sadr Shiites found a leader being able to represent and pursue their interests and to respond to their needs, never breaking ties with national institutions nor with other Lebanese communities. In this sense, even during the bloody Lebanese Civil War, Musa al-Sadr repeatedly intervened in support of Christians in southern Lebanon.

In 1975 he established the *Afwag al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniyya*, known today as *Amal*[37], one of the two major Shia parties in Lebanon. At the time, Amal was the armed wing of *Harakat al-Mahrumin*, or *The Movement of the Deprived*. As already said, the Imam disappeared on 31st August 1978 during a trip to Libya. The figure of Musa al-Sadr helps us to witness the first phase of a politicization process of Lebanese Shia.

Another important figure which played an important role in the establishment of Hezbollah was the cousin of Musa al-Sadr, Baqir al-Sadr. Notwithstanding his relevance (he was then called "the Iraqi Khomeini" by Ajami), differently from Musa, Baqir al-Sadr was more a scholar than a political leader. He spent his life mainly in Najaf, the Shiite holy city in Iraq. Although his works are remarkable and deserve a focus aside, here I would spend some words on the main differences between Baqir and Musa. If Musa had pursued for his entire life a tolerant and dialoguing approach with institutions and other communities, Baqir had developed the idea of a purely Islamic State owing to the repressive policies of the Ba'ath party in Iraq. He thought a State in which God was the only source of authority, the legislation derived from Islam and the Supreme Leader (called *marjiyya* by Baqir) was the solely representative of Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Mahdi.

There is a sort of connection between the *marjiyya* of Baqir al-Sadr and the *Velâyat-e Faqih* of Khomeini. Several authors have focused on this link, with a distinction between those who think the two concepts are essentially equal (such as Richard Hair Dekmejaian) and those who stress several discrepancies (among others, Pejman Abdolmohammadi). According to Abdolmohammadi, the "Islamic government" thought by Sadr is very different from the Khomeini's one. Indeed, in Sadr's mind the *faghih* had a limited role: his task was to check if laws were in accordance with *shari'ah*, with no possibility to take

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[37] The acronym "Amal" means "Hope" in Arabic. They say this name was suggested to al-Sadr by Yasser Arafat.

direct action on governmental activities. According to Baqir al-Sadr, political, social and economic activities had to be managed by democratically-elected representatives (Abdolmohammadi, 2009, p. 191). However, it is undeniable that Baqir al-Sadr's model concerning the "Islamic government" represented an embryonic theory of what Khomeini promoted and concretised few years later.

2.3 From the Islamic Revolution to the establishment of Hezbollah

The *wilayat al-faqih* doctrine represents one of the most controversial aspects of the Shia ideology. Contrary to the common thought, not the entire Shia community has been supporting the Khomeini's doctrine: instead, numerous clerics have opposed to it, notably stressing their disapproval regarding the new relation between State and religion.

However, Khomeini's doctrine is rooted back to the 16th century with the figure of *shaykh* Zaynu'd-Din ibn 'Ali al Juba'i and his concept of *na'ib al-'amm* (a sort of general delegate). As already stated, also Baqir al-Sadr and his concept of *marjiyya* can be considered as a precursor of what the 1979 Iranian Revolution brought ten years after.

Khomeini, starting from a world analysis mainly divided between Capitalism and Communism, arrives to identify the Shia system as a third pole completely unrelated from the other two, and soon he promotes the new idea of a world order split between oppressed and oppressors (a concept which was then taken up by Hezbollah). In this scenario, the role of the *faqih* (the Islamic jurist) is to protect oppressed people, acting on behalf of the Prophet, albeit he cannot be comparable to the latter. Hence, Khomeini was the first one (or one of the first ones) to consider the role of *faqih* to be active, contrary to several prominent Shia leaders who believed in a clear separation between religion and politics, waiting for the twelfth imam (promoting a sort of wait-and-see approach). In Khomeini's vision, the Iranian Revolution only represented the starting point of a Pan-Islamic global revolution against Communism, Capitalism and Zionism. Particularly with regards to the fight against Zionism, from 1968 on Khomeini began to deepen his relations with Palestine, namely with Yasser Arafat and the *al-Fatah* movement, aiming at consolidating and reinforcing the battlefront against Israel (Abdolmohammadi, 2009, p. 120). For what concerns Lebanon, from 1979 Khomeini was committed to export the Islamic Revolution in the Land of Cedars, giving support to the local Shia community.

The inception of Hezbollah was the perfect example of the Islamic Revolution's exportation in Lebanon.

In the 1970s and 1980s, following the disappearance of imam Musa al-Sadr who was a charismatic figure as well as the founder of the Amal movement, his followers found themselves very vulnerable and unable to appoint another leader like him: Amal witnessed a very deep internal crisis, which was aggravated by the 1978 and the 1982 Israeli invasions[38]. Following the assassination of Bechir Gemayel in 1982, Nabih Berri, the new undisputed leader of Amal, supported the decision of appointing Amin Gemayel (brother of Bechir) as President of the Republic. Under the guidance of Hussein al-Moussawi, who strongly criticised the quisling approach of Berri, the *Amal Islamic Movement* (an embryonic Hezbollah) emerged. This was a grouping of all those who felt betrayed by Berri and did not back his decisions at all; among them, there was a young Hassan Nasrallah[39].

Three years had passed since the Iranian Revolution and from then on Lebanese Shiites were aiming at creating a political organisation based on the teachings of Khomeini, namely on the Islamic faith, on the resistance against the oppressors and on the *wilayat al-faqih*. According to the author Qassem, in 1982 several representatives of major Lebanese Islamic groups (three from the Beqaa Valley, three from various Islamic committees and other three from Amal) gathered with the scope of discussing their perception concerning Islamic activities in Lebanon; the result of this meeting was collected in a document (Qassem, 2010, p. 65). Khomeini did not hesitate to express his support to the document and to the emerging movement. Differently to Qassem, the author Ahmad Nizar Hazmeh argues that it was Khomeini to convene the meeting gathering the various *'ulama* (plural of *mullā*) in Teheran. According to Hazmeh, the Supreme Leader invited *shaykh* Mihamad Hussein Fadlallah, *shaykh* Subhi al-Tufayli, *shaykh* Muhammad Yazbak, *shaykh* Afif al-Nablusi, *shaykh* Husayn Kurani, *shaykh* Ragheb Harb and Sayyed Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyed to return to Lebanon and to mobilise popular masses against Israel (Hamzeh, 2004, p. 24).

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[38] Although we are used to consider Hezbollah as the most influent actor in southern Lebanon, it is needed to say that before the inception of the Party of God it was Amal to control the region along the Israeli border.

[39] Hassan Nasrallah is the current leader and Secretary General of Hezbollah. He succeeded to Abbas al-Musawi in 1982.

Other authors (mainly Joseph Elie Alagha and Sabrina Mervin) stress the prominent role of 'Ali Akbar Mutashami and Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah in the development of Hezbollah. However, it is important to underline how the Party of God did not act under this name between 1982 and 1985: this period represented a vesting period in which the new organisation laid the foundations for a political, social and economic independence. In 1985 the *Risala al-Maftuha*, known as "The Open Letter to all the Oppressed in Lebanon and the World", was released. It is the first official document of the Shia organisation named Hezbollah and it represents its *manifesto* as it focuses on the Party of God's thought concerning foreign, internal policy and the *modus operandi* of the organisation.

Already in the opening statement[40] the Shia leader Khomeini is identified as the main ideological reference and the *wilayat al-faqih* as the only and the best system the human being can apply to the world; thus, it is evident how since the beginning of the *Risala al-Maftuha* the *fil rouge* between the Iranian revolution and the inception of Hezbollah is evident. However, it is important to highlight that even though the *manifesto* declares Hezbollah to be the official wing of the Iranian *wilayat al-faqih* in Lebanon, it does not compel Shiites to follow precepts of any specific religious representative; instead, it gives religious freedom but not political choice. There is a strict relationship, identified as *abawiyya* (paternalistic) between the Supreme Leader (currently Ali Khamenei) and the Hezbollah Leader (Hassan Nasrallah today)[41].

All throughout the Letter the approach is basically aggressive and not proactive, as a proof of the historical moment in which the *manifesto* was written. Indeed, at the time the Party of God was at its first years and pushed for destructive actions. In the paragraph titled "Our Objectives" (there is a total of six paragraphs), Hezbollah affirms its fight against the major enemies in the Middle East: the Phalanges, Israel, France and the US. Then, the Party of God expresses its three objectives, namely to definitely expel the Americans and their allies from Lebanon, to prosecute the Phalanges for the crimes they have perpetrated and to permit Lebanese people to choose the form of government they desire, unencumbered from imperialistic and colonial leverages.

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[40] https://web.archive.org/web/20060821215729/http://www.ict.org.il/Articles/Hiz_letter.htm
[41] It is a common error to consider the *wali* as a religious figure related to the Iranian scenario. Instead, the Supreme Leader could also come from other countries (such as Iran or Kuwait); even in this case, Hezbollah would follow his teachings and his political leadership.

An interesting paragraph is the one dedicated "To the Christians". In this part, it is clearly stated that Christians are not considered directly responsible for the crimes perpetrated by the Phalanges and Hezbollah consider them innocent as Jesus Christ has been for any injustice made in his name.

The Jews are instead differently considered, with no mention about their innocence for what concerns Israel's actions. A paragraph is dedicated to Israel, considering it a danger under two points of view: for being the US's closest ally and for having taken territories from Palestinians.

The last part of the document regards the international organisations. The UN and UNSC do not represent, under Hezbollah's view, a valid instrument to guarantee the respect of oppressed people's rights and for this reason the Party of God does not support them. Following the document's reasoning, the veto power enjoyed by several States is a prove of the undeniable link between the UN and the imperialist and colonialist powers. In addition, within international organisations Israel is fully considered a member State: for Hezbollah, this is enough for cutting any relation with them.

2.4 The Party of God after Ta'if

During the years after the split from Amal and the inception of a fully independent group, Hezbollah gained more and more power, presenting itself as a direct competitor of Amal. As I already stated, with the disappearance of Musa al-Sadr and the rise to power of Nabih Berri, Amal sought (and succeeded) to become an integral part of the Lebanese institutional framework. It was precisely for this reason, namely the pragmatic and collaborationist approach of Berri, that a wing of Amal split and gave birth to Hezbollah. Indeed, at least for the first years after its establishment, the Party of God did not aim at becoming an institutional organisation or a party: instead, as I already affirmed, it was seeking to combat confessionalism and all its supporters. Thus, since the beginning, Hezbollah presented itself as the main opponent to Amal, leading to a consequent split at the international level, namely between Syria and Iran, the first as the main supporter of Amal and the latter as the principal power backing the Party of God.

There are at least three causes of tension between Iran and Amal (Shaery-Eisenlohr, 2008, pp. 103-104). First of all, Amal accused Iran for having contributed very little to solve the mysterious disappearance of Musa al-Sadr and for not having taken any political

measure against Gaddafi, at the time Head of the State of Libya. Secondly, several members of Amal did not agree with the sending of some Iranian troops to the Beqaa Valley with the purpose of training Shia militia. Last but not least, Amal totally opposed to follow teachings of Khomeini, so to apply to the *wilayat al-faqih*. Other actions against Palestinians and the PSP of Jumblatt were undertaken by Amal in the 1980s.

In the last years of the 1980s, particularly in 1988, there was a series of armed struggles and guerrilla warfare between the two Lebanese Shia groups and soon the conflict spread quickly in Beirut. It was soon evident that Amal was capable to resist the fight thanks to the Syrian regime's support. However, on 9th October 1990 a reconciliation accord between Amal and Hezbollah was reached and the Party of God came out of the conflict very strengthened (Qassem, 2010, p. 187). In those months Hezbollah seemed to set aside the Israeli matter for a while; it was more focused (and it realised that it was of outstanding importance) on gaining an important official role in the cosmos of Lebanese political and power groups.

Finally, in 1989-90, the Lebanese Civil War ended. With the signing of the Ta'if Agreement, the Lebanese institutional and political framework deeply changed[42]. For what concerns the point of view of Hezbollah, what was hardly acceptable was the reaffirmation of the denominational subdivision of powers seats in all institutions. However, the Party of God opted for a cooperative approach with the new national framework, aiming at avoiding any exclusion from the decision making process.

With the death of the Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 and the rise to the power of both 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to the Presidency and the Ayatollah 'Ali Khamenei to the Supreme Leadership in Iran, the newly adopted political approach of Hezbollah (namely of collaboration) was greatly welcomed by the new Persian establishment. Indeed, soon after Khomeini passed away, an extraordinary meeting was convened in Teheran gathering almost two hundred delegates from all around the Shia world. During the meeting, delegates split into two main groups (Di Donato, 2015, p. 96). The first one, represented by the Secretary General *shaykh* Subhi al-Tufayli, pursued an extremist approach, perpetuating the armed conflict against Israel and neglecting the entire Lebanese political and institutional framework. The second one, with Sayyed Abbas al-Moussawi as spokesperson, was in favour of a soft approach, aiming at establishing a *jihad siyasi* (political jihad) along with the perpetuation of military activities in southern

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[42] For more details, see

Lebanon. Khamenei supported the latter approach, recommending the introduction of a political strategy for Hezbollah. In 1991, when Subhi al-Tufayli ended his term, Sayyed Abbas al-Moussawi became Secretary General and he officially began the new course of Hezbollah's history, paving the way for what was then called by scholars "the *lebanisation* phase of Hezbollah".

The Secretary General had three objectives in mind (Di Donato, 2015, p. 97): the continuation of the resistance against Israel, the development of a cooperation in harmony with all the other Lebanese religious denominations and the strengthening of social action for the needier sections of the population. When al-Moussawi was assassinated on 16th February 1992, Hezbollah agreed on appointing his pupil Hassan Nasrallah as Secretary General. After Ta'if, internal fights persisted between the newly appointed Nasrallah and *shaykh* al-Tufayli, especially when it came to decide if the Party of God would have participated to the 1992 elections, as intended by the new cooperative approach of the party, or not. It became soon evident that through the gaining of electoral seats Hezbollah would have been able to directly influence the government and the management of State resources, as well as to create a new "positive image" concerning its activities in southern Lebanon and not only. There was a real democratic consultation within the party and the Nasrallah's political line came out as the winner, with the blessing of the Supreme Leader Khamenei. The 1992 Hezbollah's electoral program was published on 7th July 1992 and it started by describing two necessary objectives in Lebanon: the liberation of the country and the abolition of the denominational system (both provided for by the Ta'if Agreement). Of course and as it had already stressed during the years before, the Party of God identifies the denominational system as the evil and its abolition as a duty for the common good. However, as in the National Accord Document, in the electoral program there is no mention of an alternative institutional framework, but just the desire for a reform of the electoral law which would have taken into consideration the decrease of the voting age (to eighteen years) and the revision of electoral districts, with the purpose of removing the littlest ones which would have facilitated single groups' interests. There is also no mention of the possible emergence of an Islamic State on the Iranian example. Hezbollah proposes to build a society of opposition and resistance, what was called *mujtama' al-sumud wa al-muqawama*. This society, the *muqawama*, goes far beyond the military meaning: it concerns social support for the underdeveloped areas through the

building of hospitals, schools and medical centres and through a comprehensive plan of agricultural development.

Regardless of the request of dismantling of the militia already underlined in the Ta'if Agreement, Hezbollah did not have any intention to renounce to the essential obligation of resistance in southern Lebanon. On this matter, Nasrallah sought to bring the armed wing of the party close to the Lebanese Army, affirming that both of them were pursuing the same objectives and thus seeking to avoid the connotation of "militia" to his party, which would have led to the unavoidable dismantling of its armed wing. In addition, the Party of God recalled the necessity of respect for all monotheistic religions in the country. For what concerns the Palestinian issue, in this case Hezbollah was more cautious in mentioning it and diminished its degree of support towards Palestinians, aiming at aligning itself with the desires and requests of the Lebanese society.

In sum, through the 1992 electoral program Hezbollah clearly wanted to identify its priorities and objectives, namely to focus on the fight against Israel and to cooperate with national institutions, notwithstanding the necessity to eliminate confessionalism from institutions. It is true that the Party of God remained mostly faithful to these elements: for the election of Rafiq al-Hariri as Prime Minister in 1992 Hezbollah voted against his appointment because, according to Shia deputies, Hariri's political program lacked an official recognition of the role of the Islamic resistance and there was no mention of a time period concerning the abolition of the denominational system (Hamzeh, 1993, pp. 321-337).

2.5 Hezbollah's politics in the 90s

Since its establishment and especially during the 1990s, the actions of Hezbollah were very focused on the martyrdom. Before going to mention the main actions related to the human sacrifice, it is important to say that Islamic lawyers agree on recognise three levels of Islamic resistance against enemies (Tamini, 2007, p. 178): the first one is a purely ideological opposition based on language, the second one is yet a linguistic level but carried out with harsh tones, whilst the last one provides for all means of resistance.

Given this, Hezbollah recognises the martyrdom as a legitimate and founding element of its ideology. Even though it is needed to remember that only in 1985 Hezbollah was

established as a separate wing of Amal, all the actions of martyrs before that date are still celebrated by the Party of God.

There are three martyrs who died before 1985. The first martyr to be officially recognised by the Party of God is Ahmed Qassir (*faith 'asr al-itishhasiyyin*, namely "the one who opens the martyrs' era"), who committed suicide through a car bombing in the headquarter of Israel in Sur on 11th November 1982. The second martyr is 'Ali Safieddine, who killed tens of Israeli soldiers in Deir Qanoun al-Nahr on 12th April 1984. The last one before the official establishment of Hezbollah was Hassan Qassir, who blew himself up in the vicinity of Burj Shemali, killing fifteen Israeli soldiers with four hundred kilograms of explosive.

From then on, there were many other suicide attacks following the example of the previous martyrs, until 1989, when for three years after there was no activity in this sense. The Party of God was improving its methods against Israel, and indeed from 1992 on the attacks started again. It is noteworthy that the martyrdom was meant as an *extrema ratio*, an action to be carry out only in exceptional cases and when any other measure and method is unsuccessful.

Since the Shia world is very hierarchical (we will have a clear example of it in the next paragraphs), even the martyrs follow a strict hierarchy according to the circumstances in which they died. Indeed, there are four categories of martyrs: the *istishhadi mujahid* are those who have sought the dead voluntarily through a suicide attack; the second category is the one of the 1281 *shahid mujahid*, namely those who have died during the 18 years of Israeli occupation; the third category comprises the *shahid*, those who have been accidentally killed by Israeli troops or other enemies; the last category, the *shahid al-watan*, are all the Lebanese people of any religious affiliation killed during the military operations of Israel and the South Lebanese Army militia (Kepel, 2009, p. 64). In total we count 218 Hezbollah martyrs died between 1982 and 1994.

The 1990s were crucial years for the Party of God which had to focus both on the resistance against Israel and the its willingness to increase its clout in the Lebanese institutional framework. Following the 1992 elections, in 1993 Israel launched the military Operation Accountability, or Seven-Day War. Clashes lasted from the 25th to the 31st of July and on this occasion Israel was impressed by the military improvements of the Shia militia. According to the data, in 1990 five Hezbollah fighters were killed for every IDF fatality, but by 1991, the figure had dropped to two Hezbollah dead for every

Israeli soldier killed (Blandford, 2011, p. 145). This outstanding result was made possible through a consolidated learning of modern military and combat tactics by Hezbollah and also through the shipment of new Iranian technologies, allowing the Party of God to extend its military range.

In April 1996 another military operation carried on by Israel, named "Grapes of Wrath", brought again Hezbollah into the war. Willing to focus on the fundamental result of this event, the April Understanding of the 26th April marked another vital step for the Party of God. Indeed, as Nasrallah stressed during an interview on the 30th of April, the agreement implicitly recognised the right to fight and to resist for Hezbollah, owing to the fact that there was no mention of any denial about that (Noe, 2007, p. 154).

Notwithstanding the heavy military commitment in southern Lebanon, Hezbollah decided to participate in the 1996 elections with the purpose of increasing its role in the Parliament and to influence Lebanese institutions. In its electoral program, the Party of God reaffirmed its opposition to the US leverage in Lebanon and neighbouring countries and its hostility towards Israel. In addition to this (already known) stance, for the first time Hezbollah mentioned Syria as a guarantee of stability in Lebanon: indeed, it is undeniable that in those elections the Syrian clout was undoubtedly overwhelming, both during the electoral campaign and in the aftermath of the vote. On that occasion, Hezbollah lost one parliamentary seat whilst Amal gained three seats: this happened due to some friction between the Party of God and Syria during the electoral campaign, which eventually was a victory for the neighbouring country. As an evident proof of that, Amal (major ally of Syria) gained 18 seats in the various electoral districts in southern Lebanon, whilst Hezbollah gained only four seats. Notwithstanding this little tension, Hezbollah remained under the umbrella of Syria and did not seek to oppose.

A new element of this round of voting was that Hezbollah did not mention the Palestinian issue at all: this was done for not antagonising a wide part of Lebanese population and for not destabilizing fragile balances.

Generally speaking, in the electoral program the Party of God did not aim at drafting a government program yet; instead, it was still more focused on continuing to pursue an aggressive and warring approach, presenting itself as an opposition force and party.

Hezbollah also participated in the 1998 municipal elections: on that occasion, the Party of God showed to have perfectly understood the Lebanese political game, in which different parties fight each other until it comes to bargain for electoral seats. Where

religious groups are ready to cooperate – so to have common candidates – they all gain the best result; instead, when they prefer maintaining an isolationist approach, they lose. It is worthwhile to stress out that, as compared with 1992 and 1996 elections, the 1998 ones were the first electoral vote in which the Syria's insider role was substantially lower than before, so Hezbollah was able to confront Amal concretely on crucial issues in many occasions.

However, it should be noted that even during electoral campaigns, Hezbollah's military actions against Israel were never interrupted. During January and February 2000, the Party of God made the situation more and more tense through a series of attacks against Israeli military installations. A new era of the Lebanese troubled history was going to begin.

2.6 From offensive to defensive approach: Hezbollah in the 21ˢᵗ century

On 26ᵗʰ May 2000, following the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Lebanese soil, the Secretary General of Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah celebrated this event with other 100.000 Lebanese people gathered in Bint Jbeil. That was an historical moment which would have been remembered forever: Hezbollah had accomplished its main purpose, and Nasrallah became a celebrity all over the country and beyond the national borders.

In the aftermath of the celebration, it became soon evident how it was necessary to radically change the strategy and the politics of Hezbollah: Israeli troops were gone, so the main reason of existence of the Party of God was no longer valid. The Shia Party began to shift its action from an offensive approach to a defensive one, aiming at presenting itself as a still valid and necessary popular movement and not as an ended one. During his speech at the celebration for the liberation of Lebanon, Nasrallah mentioned the Palestinian issue and he asserted that the Lebanese case had to be intended as an inspiration for Palestinians, as an example of oppressed people who had won, and what was happened in the land of cedars had to push them to resist and to combat through an Intifada (Noe, 2007, p. 242). The speech of Nasrallah, analysed *ex post*, seems to take a prophetic meaning: indeed, in September 2000, just four months after that sentence, the Second Intifada, or Intifada al-Aqsa, broke out in the Palestinian territories.

To sum up, it is possible to affirm that in the aftermath of the Israeli troops' withdrawal from Lebanon Hezbollah changed its political strategy both on the internal side and on the external one: indeed, on the first one the Shia party privileged a defensive approach[43] instead of an offensive one, whilst on the external side the Party of God encouraged Palestinians to take action.

In an interview with Nicholas Blandford, the Secretary General of Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah confirmed the economic support made by the Party of God towards Palestinian militia, affirming that it was easier to send money instead of guns (Blandford, 2011, p. 351). In addition to the economic support, other authors assert that Hezbollah helped Palestinians also through military training programs, logistic and social assistance (Hamzeh, 2004, p. 147).

From 2000 on the strategy of the *muqawama* in Lebanon was pursued by Hezbollah through *reminder operations*, a sort of military focused attacks which would have substituted the regular military activity over the years (Di Donato, 2015, p. 152). According to Adham Saouli, the pivot of the Hezbollah's strategy was mainly based on the following points: the use of media for conveying messages to Lebanese people against Israel, the support to the Palestinian cause and lastly the maintaining of the so called *balance of fear* through, as I just said, *reminder operations* in the Shebaa Farms area (Saouli, 2003, p. 76). It is evident how Hezbollah, from then on, pushed for being a political and social actor in addition to present itself as a militia.

At the 2000 general elections, Hezbollah pursued a double strategy: in the electoral districts where it enjoyed a high consensus by the population, the Party of God presented as a unique actor with its candidates; instead, in the areas where it knew there was a low consensus, the Iranian-backed Shia party made deals with Amal and the Syrian Government of Bashar al-Asad, with the purpose of gaining some seats through a shared list of candidates among the regional Shia forces.

In its 2000 electoral program, Hezbollah focused on the Islamic resistance carried on by Shiites against Israel, but on this matter the Party of God also stressed the national character of the fight, seeking to present the victory achieved with the liberation of the country from Israeli troops as a victory for Lebanon, with no religious belonging.

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[43] In the eyes of Hezbollah, the Shebaa Farms remained occupied, so the offensive approach towards Israel concerning this issue did not change.

For what concerns the foreign policy, always stressing the evil character of the United States, the new course of the third millennium had to follow three guidelines: recognising the crucial role of Syria in the victory against Israel in southern Lebanon, implementing the State relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran[44] and recognising the right of Palestinians to return to their homeland. After the first two paragraphs dedicated to the military and foreign policy, in the third chapter of the electoral program Hezbollah totally changed the linguistic register, focusing on the rebirth and the reconstruction of the country. This section of the program was definitely more complex and structured than the others, laying out the necessity to lower the national budget deficit, to implement fiscal and monetary policies, and to develop a reform of the agricultural sector. Hence, this is certainly the part of the electoral program which can be defined more proactive, even though the Party of God is still away from demonstrating a real willingness to take the power at the government of Lebanon. However, it is certainly true that the *lebanisation process* was finally completed.

At the 2000 general elections Hezbollah gained nine parliamentary seats. Again, the participation to the new government was questioned, and the major members of the party split into two radically different groups. The first group aimed at actively forming the new government because it argued that the participation of Hezbollah to the new executive was the natural continuation of the elections. Furthermore, the members supporting this idea argued that the management of certain ministries could ensure to pursue the party's objectives. On the other hand, the second group argued that the final objective of the political jihad was not the management of power at the national level, but rather the fight against Israel, the support to the most disadvantaged people, the liberation of the still occupied territories (namely Shebaa Farms) and the compliance with the *shari'a* principles. According to this group of party's members, the participation of Hezbollah to the government would have limited the achievement of these tremendously important objectives. Eventually, the second group emerged as the winner and Hezbollah remained at the opposition.

Some years later, in 2004, at the municipal elections Hezbollah reached an historical victory. The Party of God won 75 municipalities out of 248 in the south, whilst Amal won 67 municipalities. The *realpolitik* of the two major Shia parties acted well: where

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[44] It must be noted that this is the first time in which the Islamic Republic of Iran is mentioned in a Hezbollah's electoral program, leading to the observation that from then on the relationship with the Persian State became definitely official.

their interest clashed, they presented different candidates, but they cooperated when there was a common objective.

According to Hamzeh, there are three main reasons why Hezbollah was capable to win in so many districts: a wide social services' program, the still favourable public opinion since the withdrawal of the Israeli troops four years before, and the better capacity of the Party of God (in comparison to Amal) of taking care of Lebanese people and aiding them in their basic needs (Hamzeh, 2004, pp. 134-135).

The year after, on 14th February 2005, Rafiq al-Hariri, the strong man of the Lebanese Sunni community in Lebanon was killed by a car bomb while he was passing with his motorcade through the *corniche*, which is the seafront of the capital. I have already stressed in chapter one the importance of that event and the troubling aftermath linked to the accusations for the responsibility of the attack, so I will not dwell on it again. It is largely known that Hezbollah took the lead of the 8th March Alliance along with Amal in support of Syria. On the occasion of the massive gathering on 8th March 2005, Nasrallah delivered a fundamental speech in Hezbollah's history, marking the beginning of a new era. Indeed, the Secretary General asserted that his party would have pushed for the formation of a government of national consent in order to face all the urgent challenges worrying the country. On that occasion, the Party of God was capable to listen to the people's feelings, with many Shiites present at the demonstration showing and raising the country's flag and not the party's one. That was the moment in which the entry of Hezbollah into the political game for the formation of the government became necessary, with the Shia party sending a clear message to all its allies (Ajami, 2005, p. 29).

With the withdrawal of the foreign forces on the 26th April 2005 as a direct consequence of the assassination of Hariri, Hezbollah (along with Amal) could not count anymore on the Syrian support and on the occasion of the 2005 legislative elections the two Lebanese Shia parties had to deal for taking the best result, in the first round of vote with no neighbours' interference[45]. As already outlined in chapter one, the March 8 Alliance gained 57 seats compared to the 69 of the March 14 Alliance. As foreseen by Nasrallah in his historical speech some months before, in the aftermath of the elections his party participated to the national consent's government. The 2005 elections represented an historical result for Hezbollah. Indeed, even though in the aftermath of the Hariri's

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[45] The Party of God and Amal formed the coalition named *al-tanmya, wa al-tahrir wa al-muqawama*, in English *Development, Liberation, Resistance*.

assassination the popular feeling was mostly anti-Syrian, Hezbollah was capable to maintain a solid support from large parts of the population thanks not only to the historical result achieved with the 2000 liberation of Lebanon from Israeli forces, but also and mainly to the social support given to the Lebanese people regarding its basic needs and the daily administrative issues. Hence, it is possible to affirm that there was a crucial bond between the population and the party, with the top members of Hezbollah (Nasrallah above all) always fostering this link between the leadership and the electoral base.

Hezbollah backed the appointment of Fouad Siniora as Prime Minister and sought to gain the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in addition to the Ministry of Labour (with Trad Hamadeh) and the Ministry of Energy and Water (Muhammad Fneish). However, the efforts were in vain and eventually the two Shia party had to accept the name of Fawzi Salloukh, former Lebanese ambassador to Australia. It is noteworthy that even though the Party of God joined the government, at the time the Shia party still constituted a minority within the executive and continued to maintain the freedom of expression on all the issues, never feeling obliged to back or criticize a matter in the name of governmental cohesion.

2.7 The last ten years

The 2006 34-Day War certainly marked another crucial turning point for the history of Lebanon and mostly for the course of Hezbollah. While in chapter one I dwelled on telling the story of the conflict, here I would like to stress how Hezbollah sought to claim for itself the victory of the war and laid out a personal narration of the conflict with Israel, with the purpose of having the popular consensus on its side. Indeed, Secretary General Nasrallah stated that Hezbollah had won in defending southern Lebanon and in repelling the enemy: thus, since the new approach of the Party of God was defensive and not offensive anymore, Nasrallah argued that his party had succeeded in taking Israel out of the country and being survived the war. It must be noted that, as in the aftermath of the 2000 Israeli troops' withdrawal, the Secretary General mentioned the victory as a win of all Lebanese people, with no specific reference to the Shia community. Again, Hezbollah's leadership confirmed its willingness to be identified as a movement

72

representing the interests of the entire Lebanese population and not of a precise religious group.

Furthermore, in the eyes of the Lebanese people, the Party of God became a movement aimed at defending the country's territorial integrity, also proving how the Shia community had become indispensable for the land of cedars. On the wave of this high popular consensus and pursuing the strategy of the "common enemy" (Israel), in the aftermath of the *harb al-tammuz* (*War of July*) Hezbollah was committed to promote a massive infrastructural restoration project owing to the huge damages made by Israeli raids. The reconstruction project was named *al Wa'ad* (*the Promise*) and concerned all the people who had personally suffered from the Israeli invasion and who had lost everything. In these terms, the Party of God guaranteed the reconstruction of hundreds of houses to all Lebanese people, without taking into consideration religious belongings. The scope was easily identifiable: giving the idea that through the 34-Day War Israel had hit the entire country with no specific targets. It is estimated that the *al-Wa'ad* project rebuilt 265 residential and commercial buildings, always acting in accordance with the State except for the Haret Hreik area (Fawaz, 2009, p. 129). Notwithstanding the great positive impact of the *al-Wa'ad* project, it is true that not all Lebanese agreed on the Hezbollah's narration of the conflict, with Israel and the 14th March Alliance continuing to have success among people. Particularly the Sunni community, headed at the time by Saad Hariri (son of Rafiq), pushed for the disarmament of Hezbollah and the Siniora's Government started to oust several leaders of the Party of God from institutional key roles, also criticising the independent communication apparatus of the Shia party. In response to that, on 7th May 2008 Hezbollah killed 10 civilians who were not politically involved at all, and the country was on the brink of another civil war. At that point, it was evident that Hezbollah had betrayed its historical promise, namely to defend the country with no regard for different religious denominations, since it had used weapons against Lebanese people. Only the Doha compromise signed in the Qatari capital the 21st May of that year ended the confrontation. In the light of the 2006 and 2008 events, the Party of God and particularly the Secretary General Nasrallah realized that a new manifesto was needed. Not an electoral program, but rather a document that had to draw the new course of the party, similarly to the role of the 1985 *Risala al-Maftuha*.

Hence, in 2009 the *Wathiqa al-Siasiyya* (*Political Manifesto*) was released as a result of the Party of God's eighth General Conference. The new manifesto is very dense and

detailed, in line with the new political strategy of Hezbollah. It opens with a verbal attack to the "arrogant American hegemonic project", particularly dangerous under the Bush presidency. Then, the *muqawama* is presented as an element strongly rooted in Lebanon and which enjoys the backing of the State. A strong critic is later evoked against Israel and its "racism". The Islamic Republic of Iran is taken as an example to be followed and the Supreme Leader Khamenei is presented as the main guarantor of the Islamic community's integrity. The first step to be done, according to the text, is to abolish the confessionalism, recalling what was provided for by the Ta'if Agreement and considering this path as the only way in order to reach a "real democracy". However, Hezbollah was conscious that the abolishment of the denominational system was not an immediate action and much time was necessary in order to achieve it. In the meanwhile, the Shia party proposed (this is actually written in the text) the establishment of a "consociated democracy", the *al-dimuqratiyya al-tawafiqiyya*, without giving more details about it. However, it was meant to be a sort of transitional political system through which Lebanon should have passed in order to eventually give an end to the denominational system. It is worthwhile to stress out that Hezbollah did not give any detail about what form of institutional framework would have been at the end of this process: an Islamic State? A civil State? A theocracy? What was clearly affirmed was the establishment of a high commission for the national dialogue which had to include all Lebanese religious denominations.

Furthermore, according to the new manifesto, for what concerns the foreign policy Hezbollah aimed at opening relations and establishing partnerships with all the countries which could be committed to better Lebanon under an economical point of view. This message was particularly referred to the Mediterranean countries and to the Latin America's ones[46]. It goes without saying that the support for the Palestinian cause was confirmed and even more convinced.

Going to put in comparison the 1985 *Risala al-Maftuha* and the 2009 *Wathiqa al-Siasiyya*, some differences are evident. The 1985 document had been written during an inter-denominational Civil War in which Hezbollah fought against both Israel and Phalangists; thus, there was no possibility of dialogue with other forces and parties.

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[46] The mention of Latin America is not a coincidence: some of the countries of Southern America were taken as an example of "anti-hegemonic experiences". Indeed, in the 1985 *Risala al-Maftuha* the Party of God exhorted all the oppressed people of the world to take action, with no particular reference to the Middle or the Near East.

74

Instead, the 2009 manifesto was a comprehensive document which was referred to all the Lebanese people. Accordingly, also the tone of the two documents is different: in the first one there are harsh tones and many quotations from the Quran, whilst in the second one the vocabulary is more diplomatic and cautious[47] and there is a total of three quotations from the Quran.

Following the new manifesto, in 2009 parliamentary elections were held and the Party of God's electoral program clearly reflected the tones and the objectives of the *Wathiqa al-Siasiyya*. The results of that round of elections were not very favourable to Hezbollah, which was still affected by the 2008 events. It was evident that the entire Shia community had been touched by the clashes of the year before and we need to wait until the 2018 elections for witnessing a revival of the two major Shia parties, Hezbollah and Amal. We arrive to the present day. In the aftermath of last year's elections, the Party of God bargained a lot for conquering a crucial role in the Hariri's Government[48]. The future is certainly uncertain, and at the time I am writing (September 2019) there has been a worrying escalation between Hezbollah and Israel[49][50][51].

2.8 The Hezbollah's apparatus[52]

Having completed the historical overview of Hezbollah and having analysed the long course of its action in Lebanon, it is now time to deepen its internal organisation, in order to better understand how the Party of God conducts its activity and which is its general power apparatus. The first body to be mentioned is the *al-Majlis al-Markazi*, namely the Central Council, which gather all the Hezbollah's representatives from the different areas

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[47] As an example, in the *Wathiqa al-Siasiyya* the term "imperialism" is substituted with the term "hegemony"

[48] For further details, see p. 51

[49] https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/09/04/hezbollah-readies-for-new-war-against-israel-lebanon-drone-strikes/

[50] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/01/israel-anti-tank-missiles-fired-from-lebanon-military-says
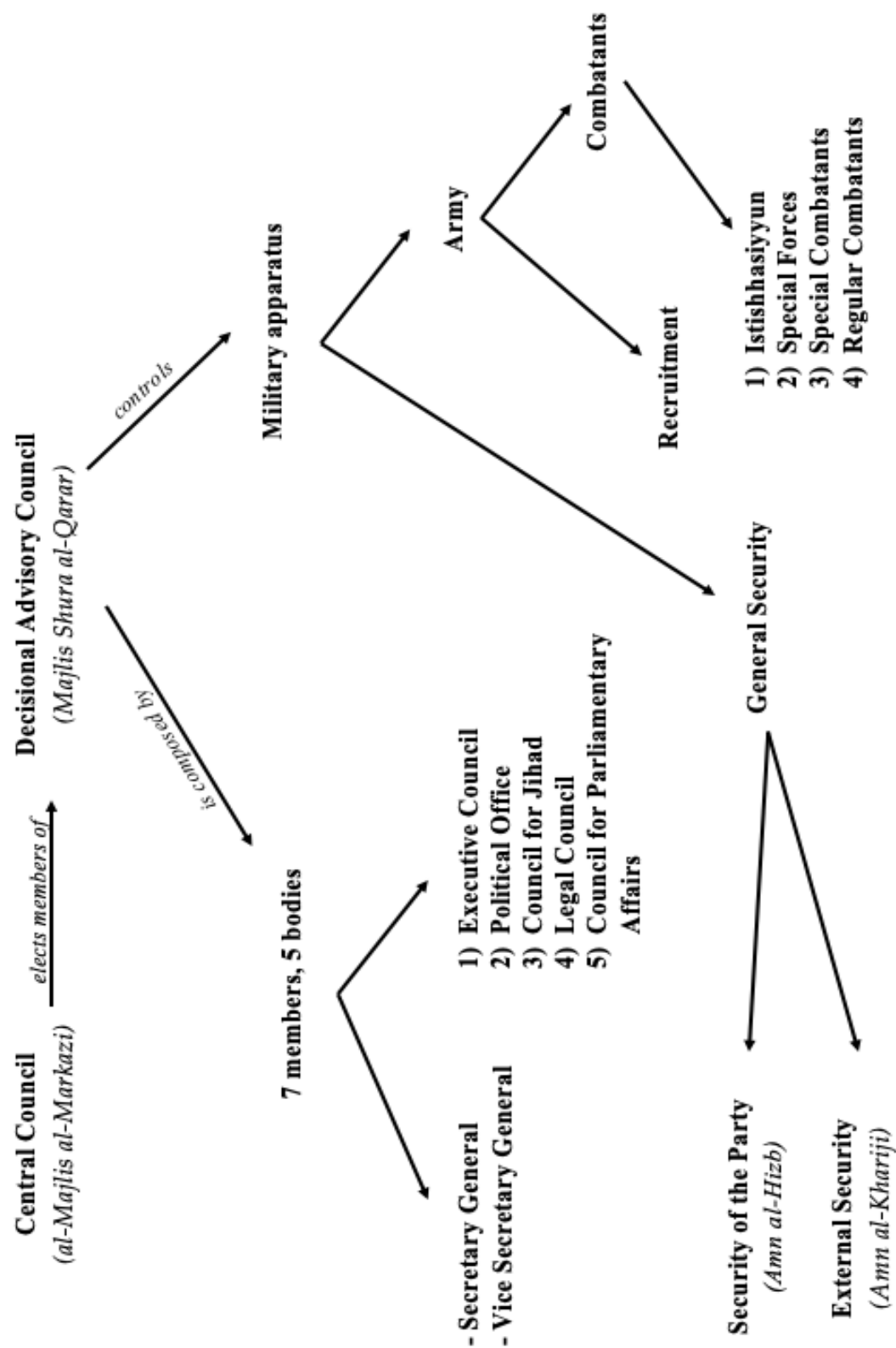
[51] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/israel-claims-uncover-hezbollah-missile-plant-lebanon-190904063634550.html

[52] Unless otherwise stated, all the information of this paragraph have been taken from Di Donato (2014), pp. 65-70; Harb, 2010, pp. 86-87; Hamzeh, 2004, p. 47, 49-66, 70, 71; Qassem, 2010, p. 130.

of the country (districts and local sections). The Central Council elects the seven components of the *Majlis Shura al-Qarar*, or Decisional Advisory Council, which is the main and most important body of the entire apparatus. Once elected, the seven members of the Decisional Advisory Council appoint (choosing among themselves) the Secretary General, the Vice Secretary General and the directors of five other minor bodies: the Executive Council, the Political Office, the Council for Jihad, the Legal Council and the Council for Parliamentary Affairs.

Moving to analyse individually these bodies, the Executive Council is formed by 12 members who manage the Hezbollah's activities at national and regional level. This council is internally divided into eight units, namely: social unit, healthcare unit, education unit, information unit, unit for the relations with trade unions, external relations' unit, unit for the financial control, unit for recruitment and coordination. Then, the Political Office is composed by 11 members and it has a consultative role in support of the Decisional Advisory Council, in addition to having the task of converting the political strategy of the party into effective actions on the ground. The Council for Jihad is responsible for all the activities concerning the military resistance against Israel and, according to some authors, because of the delicacy of the matter it would be headed by the Secretary General. The Legal Council acts as a tribunal within the party, resolving disputes and issuing opinions in accordance to the Islamic Law. Ultimately, the Council for Parliamentary Affairs has the task of managing all the Hezbollah's activity within the Lebanese Parliament, acting as a coordination's body. The Decisional Advisory Council is also directly responsible for the managing of the party's military apparatus, which would be divided in two sections. The first one refers to the General Security and it is split in two subsections: the *Amn al-Hizb* (Security of the Party), with the task of protecting party's buildings and representatives, and the *Amn al-Khariji* (External Security) for blocking external infiltrations. The second section of the military apparatus is the army of the party *stricto sensu* and it is subdivided in two sections: recruitment and combatants. The combatants' section is in its turn divided in: *istishhasiyyun* (martyrs), special forces, combatants specialized in the use of heavy weapons and regular combatants who carry out tasks of surveillance, logistic and medical support. The following table helps to have a clear and comprehensive idea of what I have just described.

Table 9: Hezbollah apparatus[53]

Central Council
(al-Majlis al-Markazi)

elects members of →

Decisional Advisory Council
(Majlis Shura al-Qarar)

controls → **Military apparatus**

is composed by → **7 members, 5 bodies**

Military apparatus
- **Army** → **Combatants**
- **Recruitment**
  1) Istishhasiyyun — Special Forces
  2) Special Forces
  3) Special Combatants
  4) Regular Combatants
- **General Security**
  - **Security of the Party** *(Amn al-Hizb)*
  - **External Security** *(Amn al-Khariji)*

7 members, 5 bodies
- Secretary General
- Vice Secretary General

1) Executive Council
2) Political Office
3) Council for Jihad
4) Legal Council
5) Council for Parliamentary Affairs

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[53] Personal processing

2.9 Hezbollah in the regional and international arena

It is now time to analyse the crucial role that Hezbollah plays in the international arena and the network of interests promoted by the Shia party abroad. In order to seek to draw a sort of map of Near East countries' relations, it must be firstly said that within that regional scenario there are two subsystem: the first one is related to the Arab Shia regional front, including Syria, Lebanon (with particular reference to Hezbollah) and Iran[54][55], whilst the second one is undoubtedly Israel, which is perceived as an enemy and the struggle against it has become the common denominator for all the above players over the years (Azani, 2011, p. 180). We have already seen how Syria has always played (or it has sought to play) a role of patron in Lebanon, still dreaming the Great Syria project. The Syrian government has influenced Lebanese politics for decades, both during the elections and for what concerns the appointments of top institutional members. Amal is surely the Lebanese actor which has been enjoying Syrian backing more than any other party or movement. I have also outlined the controversial relationship between Hezbollah and the geographical neighbour: it is possible to affirm that this link has been inconstant depending on the historical period and also on the relationship between the al-Asad government and the Islamic Republic of Iran, the latter being the indisputable and major ally of the Party of God. However, it is undeniable that the Lebanese Shia community (both represented by Amal and Hezbollah) has always been at the core of the Syrian foreign policy, which has guaranteed (some more, some less) its support especially during the country's rounds of voting. Before deepening the great role of Iran in the Hezbollah's inception and evolution (already outlined in the course of this chapter), a brief consideration about the relationship between Syria and Iran is needed. The strategic alliance between the two Shia countries has not always been stable and it was challenged during the years: as an example of this, I would like to recall the 1990s. In those years, three processes formulated the Middle Eastern regional front (Azami, 2011, p. 191): the first one was linked to the downfall of the Soviet Union, which led to a reconciliation policy of Syria towards the US (Zisser, 1999, p. 65); the second one regarded the outbreak of the First Gulf War (August 1990-March 1991), which marked the affirmation of the US leadership in a new middle eastern order; the third and last process regarded the

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[54] As it is known, Iran is not an Arab country, but it shall be analysed along with this system.
[55] Even though Iraq is another fundamental Shia player, I have decided to leave it aside so as to focus on the countries having the deepest relations with Lebanon.

regional peace talks between 1991 and 1996. In this framework, the strategic alliance between Syria and Iran was questioned because of the Syrian closeness towards the United States and in 1995 they reached the lowest point; only in 1997 there was a warming of the relations between the two countries thanks to the visit of the Syrian President to Teheran the year before. However, it is true that today the two countries have great relations and the Iranian backing to the al-Asad government in the Syrian War continues to be of paramount importance.

For what concerns the relations between Iran and Hezbollah, it is noteworthy that the Persian State's influence on numerous people within the Shiite community mainly derives from the cultural exchanges in the Shiite colleges of Najaf, in Iraq, and others. Already before the outbreak of the Iranian revolution, Khomeini's thoughts circulated among the students and they were carried on by several Lebanese people once returned to their home country[56]. This foothold in the land of cedars was surely accelerated by the outbreak of the 1979 Iranian revolution, after which it was evident the sympathy and the identification of the Lebanese Shiites with the new Iranian regime. From then on, Hezbollah has been accused many times of being an instrument in the hands of the government of Tehran, albeit the top members of the Party of God have always claimed the opposite. In this sense, in 1992 Nasrallah opposed to all the accuses against Hezbollah regarding its "puppet role", stating that his party was an independent movement and that its activity was totally cut off from the influence of the political trends in Iran (Azami, 2011, p. 194). He affirmed: "We are subjected to the spiritual leader, which used to be Khomeini and is now Ali Khamenei. We adhere to the principle of obeying the religious scholar. […] a decision by the government of Iran does not obligate Hezbollah in any way. […] We receive support from religious factors with materialistic abilities, and this is without connection to the Iranian political system."[57] Hence, on that occasion the leader of Hezbollah wanted to claim that there is a spiritual belonging to the Iranian State, as carried on by Khomenei before and Khamenei then, but not a political submissive role. However, in my opinion and as it is evident from the previous pages, it is undoubtedly true that Hezbollah has received over the years a massive support from Iran, especially for what

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[56] Baqir al-Sadr and his cousin Musa al-Sadr spent most of their lives in Najaf, as already stressed at the beginning of this chapter.
[57] ACN Television, 20 November 1992; Al-Shu'la, 11 June 1993; Orbit Television, 23 May 1997; Alarab Alyoum, 21 March 1998; Al-Diyar, 10 June 1994; Alawsat, 25 October 1993.

concerns military equipment; in exchange for that, Teheran has obtained to play a crucial role in Lebanese politics and has influenced the activity of the Shia party.

Aiming at focusing out beyond the Middle East region and deepening the relations between Hezbollah and the rest of the world, it is firstly important to specify in which way the Shia party is considered and recognised by other States. As it is evident from the historical perspective, the United States have always been the major foreign enemy of Hezbollah along with Israel. Indeed, already in 1997 the US had declared Hezbollah's activities as a threat to American interests and since then they have always inserted top members of the Shia party into the FBI's most wanted list. However, before 2005 only the United States, Canada, Australia, Netherlands and Israel had declared Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation, whilst Europe considered the Party of God only as a legitimate social movement. In march 2005, the European Parliament declared Hezbollah as an international terrorist organisation (Azami, 2011, p. 206), marking an historical moment for the reputation of the Shia movement abroad. This occurred mainly due to the geographically extensive Hezbollah's activity concerning numerous alleged terrorist attacks.

In the last decades several intelligence agencies have reported the following Hezbollah-linked planned terrorist attacks outside the Middle East:

a. In 1995 the Singapore's security agencies foiled a terrorist attack involving a Hezbollah's terrorist cell which planned to make a suicide attack against Israeli and American vessels docked at the harbour of the South East Asian city-state.[58]

b. In 1997 Hezbollah members were arrested by Cypriot security forces on suspicion of planning attacks to the United States Embassy in Nicosia (Levitt, 2003).

c. According to a 2004 American report, al-Qaeda terrorists involved in the 2004 attacks against the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were trained in Hezbollah's camps.[59]

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[58] "Hezbollah Had Plans to Attack US, Israeli Ships in Singapore" AFP, 9 June 2002; "Hezbollah Denies Plan to Attack US, Israeli Ships in Singapore," AFP, 10 June 2002.
[59] "9/11 Commission Find Ties between Al-Qaeda and Iran," Time Magazine, 16 July 2004; 9/11 Commission Report, pp. 86, 128.

d. In 1999, a combined police activity in South America foiled a combined Hezbollah-al-Qaeda terrorist attack against Jewish targets in Buenos Aires, Ottawa and Ciudad del Este.[60]

e. In 2001, Mexican security force arrested Hezbollah-linked terrorists who were planning an attack against governmental targets.[61]

f. Always in 2001, Swedish authorities exposed a network of terrorist activists directly related to al-Qaeda and Hezbollah.[62]

g. In 2002, a Canadian police report found the existence of a Hezbollah network in the North American country.[63]

Given this overview, Hezbollah's global network regards over forty countries in all five continents.

In North America, the Shia party had a strong presence until 9/11. As I mentioned in the list above, the Party of God's activities regarded not only the United States, but also Canada. Indeed, it is worthwhile to stress out that many arrests and intelligence investigations have been done in the Commonwealth's country.

In South America Hezbollah carries on a great infrastructural activity, especially in Latin America and in the Tri-border area (Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina). Particularly in this region, Hezbollah's activities include domestic and international crime, terrorism, logistic support and funding, with local authorities not always able to hinder this illegal business (Azami, 2011, p. 209). The Party of God is also widely present in Columbia, Guatemala, Panama, Costa Rica and Mexico.

In Europe, Hezbollah carried on many activities until 2005, when the European Parliament declared to consider it a terrorist organisation. Until then, the Shia party had raised funds for its interests through charitable societies mainly present in Britain, Germany and Switzerland. Today, the Party of God remains active in Russia, the Balkan countries, Germany, Turkey, Cyprus and Spain.[64]

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[60] "Terrorist and Organized Crime Groups in the Tri Border Area (TBA) of South America," Federal Research Division Library of the Congress Washington D.C., July 2003, pp. 14–24.
[61] Ibid., p. 19
[62] Ely Karmon, "Fight on all Fronts, Hizballah the War on Terror and the War in Iraq," Washington Institute Policy Focus, 2003, p. 11.
[63] "Asian Organized Crime and Terrorist Activity in Canada, 1999–2000," Federal Research Division Library of the Congress Washington D.C. July 2003, p. 34.
[64] http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/bu/hizbullah/chap_d.doc

In Asia, thanks to the existence of many countries with a strong Muslim presence particularly in the South-East area (e.g. Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Korea and India), Hezbollah focuses its activities by carrying out attacks against Jewish targets and also by recruiting young people, with the purpose of sending them to Lebanon once trained.

Lastly, in Africa we witness the presence of many Lebanese Shiite who contribute to finance Hezbollah. The existence of the party is particularly extensive in Ivory Coast, Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Sudan. It is noteworthy that the Shia movement and Iranians had deep relations with Osama bin Laden in Sudan between 1991 and 1996. In this area, Hezbollah also operates in the diamond grey market[65].

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[65] http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/bu/hizbullah/chap_d.doc

Economic perspectives: a hard work ahead of Lebanon

3.1 General overview: domestic and external economy

Having completed the first two chapters which regarded religious denominations and Hezbollah under a political and historical point of view, it is now time to analyse the land of cedars in economic terms. This is a tremendously important matter and it is also crucial for Lebanon's present time. I have chosen to write about the present economic situation and the perspectives of the country on this issue, with particular reference to international economics and with no reference to the past[66]. This chapter mostly represents my work at the Italian Embassy during my internship in May-August 2019.

Seeking to outline a general overview of Lebanese economy, it is firstly necessary to say that Lebanon is a middle-income country, with a population of around six million inhabitants. The 85% of people lives in towns, with a very limited part of them in the rest of the country[67]. This reflects the characteristics of the national economic apparatus. Indeed, Lebanon's economy is mainly focused on services sector (with particular regard to banks, trade, tourism and transports), which contributes 73% of the gross national product; the agricultural sector accounts for no more than 6%[68]. Even the industrial sector is not very developed due to the continuing problems linked to electricity supplies. The building sector is another pillar of the country's economy and it has been experiencing an increase during the last years, especially since the Rafiq Hariri government[69]. In 2016, building permits were 17.097, in increase of 13,3% compared to the previous year. By detailing the services sector, the banking industry has recorded an increase of 10% on

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[66] In the chapter there are historical trends, but analysis on specific economic policies are not widely analysed.

[67] Source: Infomercatiesteri

[68] Source: World Bank data

[69] Even though I will not focus on the economical historical background in this chapter, it is important to stress here how much the Hariri's government was focused on the construction sector, leading to a building boom and speculative excesses. Today, this is evident particularly in the capital centre, which presents skyscrapers and modern buildings. Moving to the suburbs, the skyline is deeply different and people mainly live in very poor conditions. The building boom during the Hariri era led to a great deportation of people from old buildings, mainly Armenian, who were forced to move to Beirut's suburbs or to establish new neighbourhoods: this is one of the reasons why the major part of Lebanese Armenian population has not a good relationship with the Sunni community (*unnamed local source*), which is still today represented by Hariri family.

assets, 6,5% on deposits and 5,4% on loans from 2015 to 2017[70]. Notwithstanding the Syrian War's negative impact, the tourism sector has recorded an increase of 11,2% from 2016 to 2017. In addition, at the beginning of 2019 summer, Pierre Achkar, president of the Syndicate of Lebanese Hotel Owners, stressed the excellent predictions for the season in this regard, with an expected reaching of 70% occupancy at least[71].

Moving our analysis to the GDP, Lebanon has certainly made significant advances in the last years, even though not at satisfactory rates. Especially from 2011 on, the GDP annual growth has recorded a modest increase (no more than 2%) and in 2018 it reached the lowest point of 0,2%[72] with respect to 2017 (Table 10). In absolute terms, Lebanese GDP stands at 56 billion $ in 2018, positioning itself at twelfth place in comparison to the MENA region's countries. It is worthwhile to note that always in the MENA region, Lebanon is the second worst country for what concerns GDP % annual growth before Yemen. The uncertain and modest growth of last years is mainly related to the Lebanese economic perspectives, which are affected by very high deficit-to-GDP and debt-to-GDP ratios. In addition to this precarious data, it is needed to stress that the Syrian War has affected Lebanon's economy since 2011, worsening it. The 2019 budget aims at fixing economic losses through significant reduction of specific ministries' budget and lowering or eliminating benefits enjoyed by retired military personnel. We will see this in detail paragraph 2.
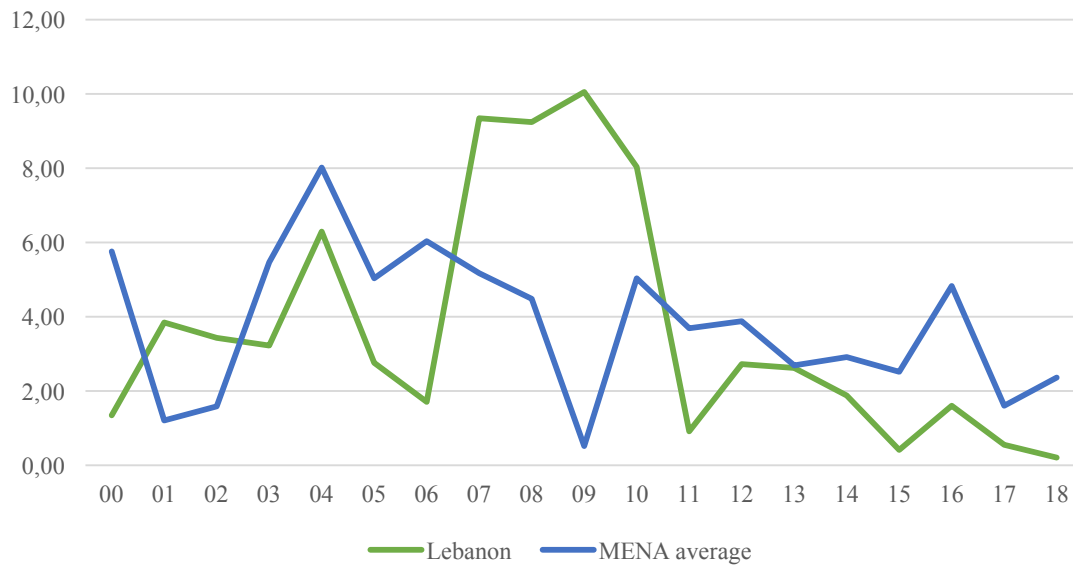
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[70] Source: Lebanese Central Bank
[71] http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Local/2019/May-24/483888-hotels-predict-best-summer-tourism-since-2010.ashx
[72] Source: World Bank Data

Table 10: MENA and Lebanese GDP (%, annual growth)

For what concerns the Human Development Index (HDI), it is interesting to see how Lebanon presents better numbers: indeed, in 2018 the UNDP reported Lebanon standing at 0,757, positioning itself among the "High human development countries"[73].

Having introduced Lebanon's domestic economy, it is now time to deepen its external version, analysing economic relations with other countries.

Lebanon presents a huge trade imbalance. Although some oil and gas reserves have been found recently in the Lebanese Mediterranean Sea (as we will see in detail the last paragraph), the country is still short on natural resources and machinery parts, relying mainly on imports of raw materials[74].

On the other side, main exported commodities are jewellery, chemicals, miscellaneous consumer goods, tobacco, base metals, construction materials, fruit and vegetables, textile fibres and papers. The agricultural sector, even though it is not very profitable, has its main core area in the fertile Beqaa Valley.

In 2017, Lebanese trade balance recorded -16,9 billion $, exporting for a value of 3,91 billion $ against 20,8 billion $ worth of imports, meaning that the country imports around
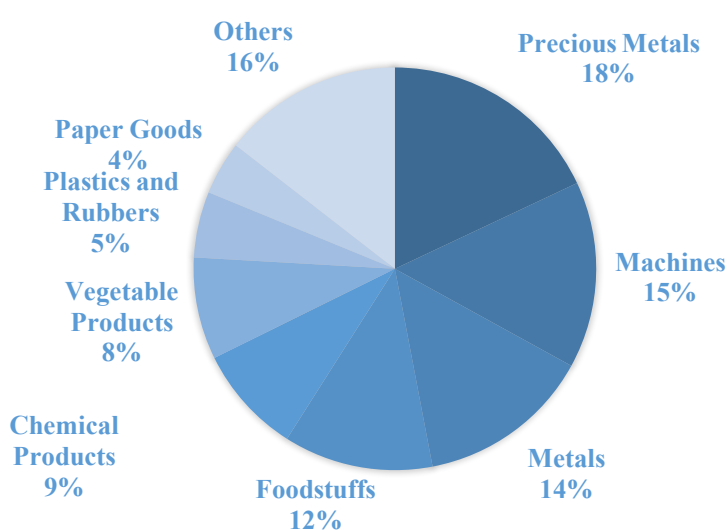
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[73] Source: UNDP,
http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2018_human_development_statistical_update.pdf
[74] https://www.economywatch.com/world_economy/lebanon/export-import.html

five times more than what it exports[75]. During the last five years Lebanese exports have decreased at an annualized rate of -5%, whilst imports have recorded a decrease of -1,8%. As of 2017, Lebanon's primary export partners are: South Africa (8,1% of exports), UAE (6,8%), Syria (6,3%), Saudi Arabia (6.1%) and Switzerland (6.1%). On the other hand, the top import origins of Lebanon are China (9,1%), the US (8,3%), Italy (8,3%), Greece (6,7%) and Germany (5,4%).
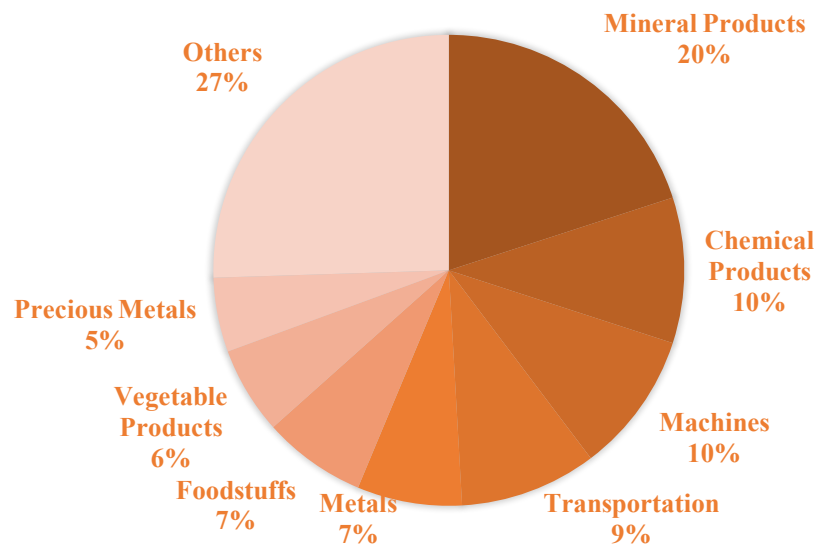
I would like to stress the crucial role of Italy as it positions itself at the third place (*parimerito* with the US) of top exporters to Lebanon. Italy mainly exports to the Middle Eastern country (1,73 billion $ worth in 2017) Mineral Products, Machines, Chemical Products and Textiles, whilst it imports (51,5 million $, 2017) Metals, Chemical Products, Animal Hides and Textiles. The entire trade between the two countries is worth more than 2 billion $[9]. Looking at the trade balance's historical change (Table 13), we can make two considerations: first of all, it is evident how the situation has been worsening since the 1990s, increasing trade deficit especially between 2006 and 2013, after which the Syrian War has deeply affected Lebanese economy, decreasing the entire trade volume of the country. Then, in 2016 both exports and imports went back to grow. Secondly, it is clear that Lebanon has never experienced a period of positive trade balance, and this is definitely due to the lack of a profitable land and not developed export-led industries.

Table 11: Lebanon's Exports

[75] https://oec.world/en/profile/country/lbn/

Table 12: Lebanon's Imports

Mineral Products 20%
Chemical Products 10%
Machines 10%
Transportation 9%
Metals 7%
Foodstuffs 7%
Vegetable Products 6%
Precious Metals 5%
Others 27%

Table 13: Lebanon's Trade Balance (billion $)
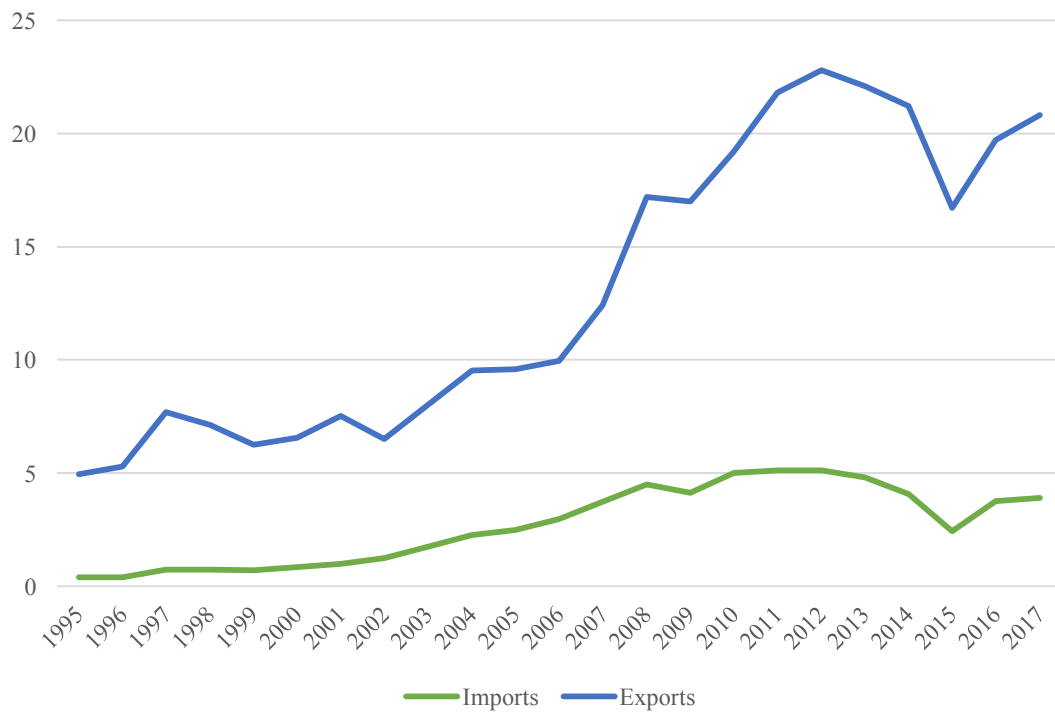
Imports   Exports

Table 14: Italy's Exports to Lebanon
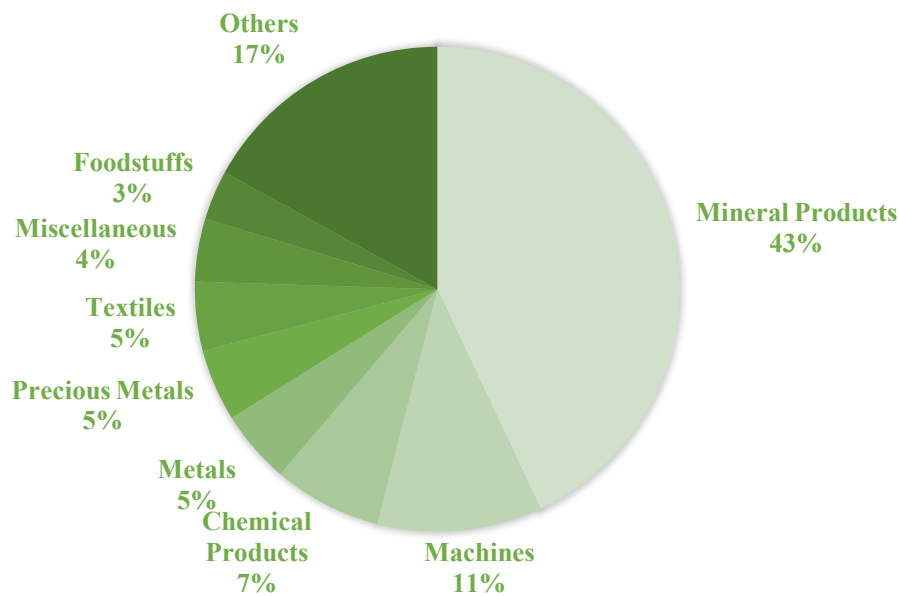
Moving to examine the financial sector of the country, I already stressed the importance of banking in Lebanon. This driving sector mainly relies on favourable tax conditions intended for local and foreign people, and also on a big bank activity made by Lebanese expatriates who live all around the world[76]. Furthermore, infrastructural sector is one of the leading industries of the country and it surely provides most of the banks' profits. During my stay in Beirut I had the opportunity to have thorough discussions with several Lebanese people working in financial institutions and commercial banks: according to them, since the tax regime is very favourable, it is common that businessmen and other very wealthy individuals from the Arabic Peninsula move their money to Lebanese banks, enjoying low taxes on deposits. This phenomenon has led to a situation in which today numerous foreign families, mainly from the emirates, live in Beirut and actively contribute to make the city more thriving and rich.

However, due to the economic uncertainty concerning the approval's delay of the 2019 budget, during the first months of this year a great number of Lebanese expatriates

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[76] It is estimated that there are around six million Lebanese citizens living abroad (World Bank, 2017).

reduced their economic and financial affairs in the country, mostly diminishing the amount of money in their bank deposits. This unstable framework triggered international rating agencies to make some statements accordingly. On 4 June Moody's expressed its concerns about the reduction of bank deposits and the related high risks on new Eurobonds' emission, sharing the Bank of America's view on the Lebanon's economic situation [77]. Three weeks later, always Moody's stated that higher uncertainties of Lebanese economy risked to have a serious impact on the national public debt and on other economic variables[78]. On the same day, the 27th of June, Fitch declared in an official statement that the implementation of all the alleged 2019 budget's reforms was very unlikely and even though they could have been implemented, it would have been a very tough exercise[79]; in addition, the reduction of the deficit-to-GDP ratio of 4 percentage points was a too high expectation; at the time, the budget law was being discussed at the Parliament's Finance Committee.

As the economic and financial situations remain deeply unstable in Lebanon (even though with the approval of the 2019 budget law in July, international community and investors breathed a sigh of relief), all the main rating agencies have downgraded Lebanon recently, with an even worse perspective. This trend has been maintained for the last four-five years, stressing the lack of credibility of the country's economic framework, still too involved in a possibility of conflict with its neighbours.

In detail, as shown in Table 15, the last Moody's rating on Lebanon dates back to the 21st of January and on that occasion the agency downgraded the Middle Eastern country's ability to pay back debt at "Caa1" category, namely "junk bonds with substantial risks". Fitch confirms this trend (Table 16), with a worse perspective. Indeed, Fitch is the last rating agency to have released a credit rating for Lebanon, on the 23rd of August: at that time Fitch rated Lebanon as "CCC" with negative outlook, a category which corresponds to a situation ranging from "Substantial risks" to "Default imminent with little prospect for recovery".

From the analysis of these two rating class histories it is evident how the approval of the 2019 budget law (a matter which will be unfolded in a while) at the end of July was not

[77]   https://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Local/2019/Jun-04/484612-bank-of-america-cautiously-optimistic-on-beirut-budget.ashx

[78]   http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Local/2019/Jun-27/486241-lebanon-risks-debt-rescheduling-despite-budget-moodys.ashx

[79]   http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Local/2019/Jun-27/486201-fitch-implementing-reforms-will-be-tough.ashx

sufficient to convince rating agencies and financial markets, and the implementation of structural and comprehensive reforms in Lebanon remains a priority to be implemented.

Table 15: Moody's Rating Class History - Lebanon

Date	Rating	Remarks
30 Jul 2001	B2	Downgrade
24 Mar 2005	B3	Downgrade
01 Apr 2009	B2	Upgrade
13 Apr 2010	B1	Upgrade
14 May 2013	B1	Rating Affirmation
16 Dec 2014	B2	Downgrade
02 Jun 2016	B2	Rating Affirmation
25 Aug 2017	B3	Downgrade
13 Dec 2018	B3	Rating Affirmation
21 Jan 2019	Caa1	Downgrade

Table 16: Fitch Rating Class History - Lebanon

Date	Rating	Remarks
21 Sep 2000	BB-	Negative Outlook
02 Feb 2001	B+	Stable
21 Sep 2001	B-	Stable
18 Nov 2005	B-	Positive Outlook
14 Jul 2006	B-	Stable
31 Mar 2010	B	Stable
21 Nov 2011	B	Stable
19 Dec 2013	B	Negative Outlook
18 Dec 2018	B-	Negative Outlook
23 Aug 2019	CCC	Negative Outlook

Before entering into the details of the 2019 budget, it is extremely interesting to mention an important document released on 2 July 2019: it is the IMF Lebanon Staff Concluding Statement[80]. It is essential to read and analyse this document because it represents an accurate summary of the economic and financial situation of Lebanon and it contains IMF's remarks and wise recommendations concerning the possibility for a national economic adjustment.

First of all, the IMF outlines three major areas with need of intervention: a credible fiscal programme aiming at setting a budget surplus in the medium term which would lead to a reduction of the public debt; the implementation of structural reforms, with particular reference to the very necessary energetic recovery plan: these reforms would act as preconditions for an increase of Lebanese companies' competitiveness; implementation of measures aimed to strengthen the Lebanon's banking sector, starting from the Central Bank.

The IMF expresses its deep awareness about the crucial character of the country's current historical phase, with a sluggish economic framework and other alarming economic fundamentals. Just for stressing two of them, the deficit-to-GDP ratio stands at 11% and the debt-to-GDP ratio at 151%.

Nevertheless, in this release the IMF acknowledges the government's efforts to go on an economic consolidation path and recognises the importance of the energy sector's reform and the austerity measures provided for by the 2019 budget law. Precisely on this issue, the Organisation foresees a lower reduction of deficit and expresses the possibility to have a 9,75% deficit-to-GDP ratio, more realistic than 7,59% sponsored by the Government.

In the medium period, the IMF advocates for a right balancing between expansive fiscal policies and restrictive monetary policies, in addition to a value-added tax increase, the removal of state subsidies to the EdL (Électricité du Liban, the Lebanon's national power company), an increase of infrastructural investments and social transfers to the most disadvantaged population groups.

Obviously, the IMF also stresses and recommends a serious commitment by the State against corruption, to be carried out through a full implementation of legislation in this area and the establishment of a special national commission for fighting this sort of social evil.

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[80]   https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2019/07/02/mcs070219-lebanon-staff-concluding-statement-of-the-2019-article-iv-mission

The IMF argues that the implementation of these reforms would allow the government to regain the confidence of international investors and to release the funds provided for by the Capital Investment Plan, a great infrastructural plan $17 billion worth of which the first phase will be financed by the $11 billion pledged at the CEDRE Conference by numerous international actors.

Lastly, the IMF report focuses on the Central Bank's role, considering it as a pillar of the national financial system's stability. The IMF recommends the pursuing of a strategy focused on the consolidation of the Banque du Liban's budget through the interruption of low-interest-rate bonds purchasing and leaving the market determining the natural yield accordingly. Notwithstanding all the negative aspects outlined in the report, the IMF recognises the efforts of Lebanon in seeking to take a virtuous economic path, in a tense regional situation which is the Near East. Indeed, despite several and constant escalations of violence with Israel and the presence of almost 1,5 billion Syrian refugees, the country has been able to hold legislative elections in 2018 and the standard of living, according to the IMF, remains high throughout the country.

3.2 The 2019 budget

Having outlined the main economic characteristics of Lebanon, especially for what concerns international economics and finance, it is now time to deepen internal economy and to see in detail the latest developments of it. In this sense, the 2019 national budget has a prominent role.

During my stay in Lebanon, I had the opportunity to witness the long and troubled making of this year's budget, starting from the government's approval (May 2019) to the parliamentary vote (July), passing through the Finance committee's discussions. Here is a summary of what it provides for and what it has meant for the country.

First of all, it is necessary to say that the 2019 budget is an austerity package which aims at drastically reducing the deficit-to-GDP ratio from 11,2% (2018) to 7,59%, going well beyond the CEDRE Conference's commitments [81] of April 2018. It is true that international organisations have stressed that, from their perspectives, with the approval

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[81] In exchange for 11 billion $ pledged, Lebanon has undertaken to reduce the deficit-to-GDP ratio of 1% every year.

of the 209 budget the deficit-to-GDP ratio is expected to be reduced to 9-9,5%; however, the 2019 budget has the importance of proving the commitment of the Lebanese government to undertake a new economic path for the country.

The following list summarises the most important measures provided for by the 2019 budget law[82]:

- Tax increases from 7 to 10% on bank deposits' interests, Treasury and Central Bank bonds, with the exception of Eurobonds.

- Introduction of an income bracket having a 25% fiscal fixed rate intended to all people and companies with a revenue greater than €133.000.

- Introduction of a 3% tariff on all imported goods, with the exception of fuel, machines (main Italian goods exported to Lebanon) and raw materials for agricultural and industrial sectors. The comprehensive list of all exempt products will be decided by the Council of Ministers at a forthcoming meeting.

- Introduction of new taxes on salaries and pensions of public employees and security forces' members. Families of martyrs and disabled retired militaries are exempted from this tax.

- Introduction of a 1,5% tax on veterans' pensions, aimed at funding their healthcare and social assistance.

- Abolition of duty exemptions for parliamentarians and highest state officials.

- Introduction of an 85% reduction on sanctions intended to tax evaders who are willing to regularise their positions before the end of 2019. Furthermore, cadastral registration's expenses concerning residential properties are reduced from 3 to 2%.

- Hiring freeze on public sector. New competitions for recruitment are conditioned to the completion of an ongoing comprehensive review concerning public employees' number.

- Freezing of pension requests made by public employees.

- Increase from 20 to 25 years of work needed to retire (public employees).

- Reduction of annual vacation days from 20 to 15 (public employees).

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[82] This list is the product of a personal study based on Lebanese local sources, with the help of the Italian diplomats in Beirut.

- Introduction of a salary cap for public employees, estimated at 20 times the national minimum wage (for a total of €8.000 monthly).
- Introduction of a limit concerning benefits up to 75% of annual salary.
- Introduction of the ban concerning the possibility to get multiple pensions in the public sector.
- Increase of allocations to the Reconstruction and Development Council (50 million $).

Through the adoption of these unpopular economic measures, which have been strongly criticised by thousands of people who have led great protests in the streets outside institutional buildings in Beirut, the Lebanese Government has undoubtedly proven its commitment to better the economic and financial stability and to bring them back on a virtuous and sustainable path. Prime Minister Hariri, who is one of the main architects of the compromise achieved through the budget law, announced that he aims to start discussions for the 2020 budget project within the time allowed by law (15th October), with no further delay. This target represents a decisive change of course, since from 2005 to 2017 the government acted without an official budget. It is evident that statements like this have the ultimate objective of reassuring both the markets, at a time when the economic trend is very critical, and international investors, with the scope of boosting investments in the country.

3.3 Oil and gas in the Mediterranean Sea: an opportunity not to be missed for Lebanon

In the last years the Lebanon's Ministry of Energy has been focusing on deepening the possibility to find gas and oil reserves in the Mediterranean Sea. I have already outlined the scarce presence of export products in the country and the low development of export-led industries. Lebanon is mainly an import country, so in this regard the discovery of hydrocarbon reserves in the waters off Lebanon would represent a unique opportunity for better the trade balance and the country's income.

The Lebanese Government has decided for dividing the granting of licences in different rounds and different offshore blocks.

The first offshore licensing round (which regarded blocks 4 and 9) had a road map extending over a period of ten months starting in February 2017 and ending in November 2017. This road map included several events and steps to be accomplished by international companies joining the round.

There was a pre-qualification round from 2 February to 31 March 2017. In this phase, the criteria to be followed were very strict and there was a division between *right-holder operators* and *right-holder non-operators* (together they constituted different consortium)[83]. The first category is entitled to have the task of managing day-to-day field operations on behalf of other right-holders, notably: to design and execute the exploration programme; to carry on design, drilling, completion, production; engineering, infrastructure and facilities construction and maintenance; services and logistics; to represent the consortium. The second category (*non-operators*) is entitled to participate in the Managing Committee of the Consortium along with the operator and other right-holders providing: Co-financing the project; commercial and marketing activities; technical input; regulatory role. The prequalification exam saw the application of 16 companies (*right-holders operators*) and the qualification of 12 of them, namely:

- Anadarka (USA)
- Petrobras (Brazil)
- Chevron (USA)
- ExxonMobil (USA)
- ENI (Italy)
- Maersk (Denmark)
- Repsol (Spain)
- Shell (Netherlands)
- Statoil (Norway)
- Total (France)
- Inpex (Japan)
- Petronas (Malaysia)

For what concerned *right-holders non-operators*, there were 34 qualified companies out of 38 applicants, namely:

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[83] https://www.lpa.gov.lb/pdf/Pre-Qualification Results Presentation.pdf

- Suncor Energy Inc. (Canada)

- Geopark Holdings/Petroleb SAL (Bermuda/Lebanon)

- Marathon Oil Netherlands (USA)

- Santos Limited (Australia)

- OMV Aktiengesellschaft (Austria)

- GDF Suez Exploration and Production International S.A. (France)

- MOL Hungarian Oil and Gas Company Plc (Hungary)

- Edison International Spa (Italy)

- Petroceltic International Plc (Ireland)

- Cairn Energy Plc (United Kingdom)

- Dana Petroleum E&E Limited (United Kingdom)

- Genel Energy PLC (United Kingdom)

- Heritage Oil PLC (United Kingdom)

- SOCO International PLC (United Kingdom)

- JAPEX – Japan Petroleum Exploration Co. Ltd. (Japan)

- JX Nippon Oil & Gas Exploration Corporation (Japan)

- Mitsui E&P Middle East B.V. (Japan)

- Cairn India Limited (India)

- ONGC Videsh Limited (India)

- KNOC – Korean National Oil Corporation (Korea)

- Korea Gas Corporation (Korea)

- Kuwait Foreign Petroleum Exploration Company (Kuwait)

- CC Energy Limited (Lebanon)

- Lukoil Overseas Lebanon B.V. (Russia)

- OAO Novatek/GBP Global Resources B.V. (Russia)

- Roseneft Oil Company (Russia)

- PTT Exploration and Production (Thailand)

- TPAO – Turkiye Petrolleri Anonim Ortakligi (Turkey)

- Crescent Petroleum Company International Limited (UAE)

- Crescent Petroleum Company International Limited/Apex Gas Ltd. (UAE/Lebanon)

- Dana Gas PJSC (UAE)

96

- Dragon Oil Holdings Ltd. (UAE)
- Mubadala Petroleum (UAE)

Then, after months of workshops and events, the submission of bids by pre-qualified companies was set on 12 October 2017.

On the 14th of December 2017 the Council of Ministers approved the awards of two exclusive petroleum licenses for exploration and production in blocks 4 and 9 for the consortium composed of Total S.A. (France), ENI (Italy) and JSC Novatek (Russia).

In order to pave the way for the approval of the exclusive petroleum rights to the Consortium, a clear procedure took place as per the published legislative framework governing petroleum activities in Lebanon. Drilling activities in blocks 4 and 9 have started in 2019 after the Consortium finalised the needed logistics and studies throughout 2018.

Then, on 5 April 2019 the Minister of Energy Nasa Boustani declared that blocks 1, 2, 5, 8 and 10 were open to receive bids in the Second Offshore Licensing Round. The process is still underway and the deadline for the submission of the Licensing Round Application is the 31st of January 2020. As in the first licensing round, the results of this evaluation will then be declared by Minister Boustani before proceeding with the evaluation of EPA Application. Then, the Minister will conduct negotiations and will submit the results of these to the Council of Ministers. Eventually, the Council of Ministers will take the appropriate decision regarding the awards of Exploration and Production Agreements.

In this Second Licensing Round, there are several rumours regarding the participation of ENI, this time in consortium with Qatar Petroleum.[84]

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[84] This information is based on anonymous sources located in Lebanon. There is not any official confirmation from ENI nor from Qatar Petroleum yet (22nd September 2019).

Table 17: Second Offshore Licensing Round
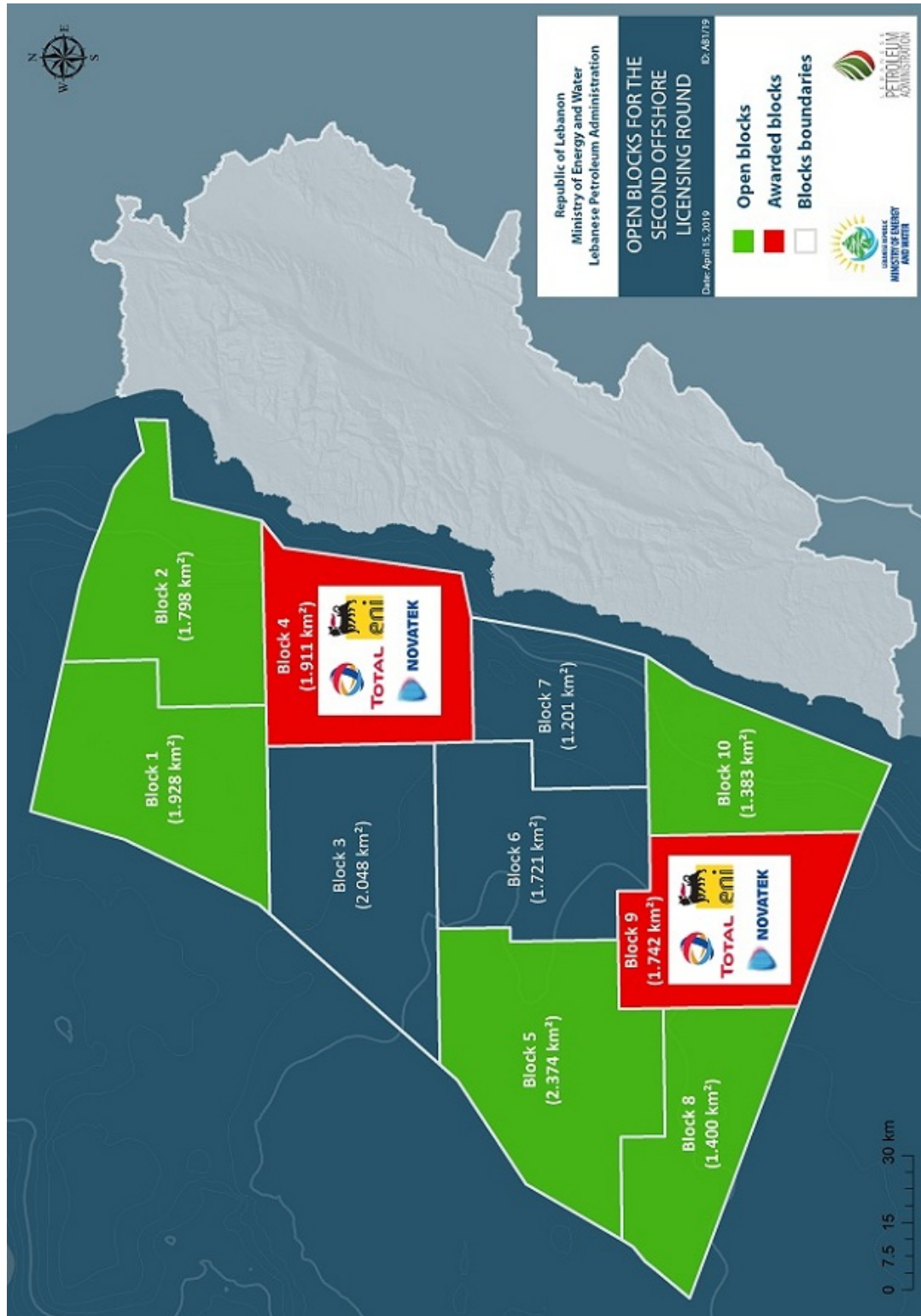
Conclusions

It is now time to go back to the title of this thesis for drawing up the conclusions of this work.

In the first two chapters I firstly deepened the issue related to the religious legacy of the country from an historical point of view. Secondly, I outlined the current situation under political, religious and social aspects, stressing the priorities of the State and the Shia party Hezbollah.

After the explanation of these two issues, I focused on the economic aspects of Lebanon, both on internal and external sides. This chapter was the only one not having an historical character: indeed, it was only centred on the perspectives of the land of cedars under economic and financial points of view as the second part of the thesis' title suggests.

The results of this work are the following. First of all, my first aim was to give a glimpse into the complex world of Lebanon's religious denominations. The historical background gives a proof of the troubled path that Lebanese people had to take in order to find a current peaceful living, even though unstable, as reported in the first chapter of this thesis. My willingness to start the historical analysis well before the 19th century is not fortuitous: my goal was to demonstrate that there was a time in which religious denominations lived peacefully, cooperating and working hard to make the Mount Lebanon area more flourishing and prosperous. As already stressed in the chapter, the turning point of Lebanese religious denominations' way of living, with the outbreak of clashes and wars, was undoubtedly the beginning of foreign dominion of the country, in particular under the Ottoman Empire before and under the French protectorate later. In the 20th century we have witnessed how the interference of foreign countries into Lebanese affairs by colonial powers has brought the country to numerous social problems, especially exacerbating the already bad conditions of inter-denominational relations. When singular economic interests have prevailed on a broader cooperation, the point of no return has been rapidly reached. In the last pages of the first chapter I went through the troubled composition of the current government: in my view there is an important aspect to be noted. The one-year long process needed for the government's formation has a crucial meaning: still today, the political life in Lebanon is based on religious factions and parties have demonstrated to be ready to find a compromise, to bargain and to seat at the same table instead of renouncing to cooperate.

In the second chapter, dedicated to the analysis of the Shia party Hezbollah, I outlined its main characteristics and I highlighted its historical process, since its establishment in 1985 until today. In my opinion, we can make two relevant remarks about this chapter. First of all, it is evident that Hezbollah is not only an armed group, as it is usually presented from several news agencies, but a complex and large organisation with many other fields of actions, above all the social activities in favour of the most disadvantaged people. Secondly, we have also seen that Hezbollah has changed over time, always seeking to adapt itself to Lebanon's priorities and never missing direct contacts with civil society. Furthermore, through the years and especially in the aftermath of the 2006 Lebanon War, the Party of God guaranteed the reconstruction of hundreds of houses to Lebanese people, without taking into consideration their religious belongings. This strategy, as we have seen, was surely aimed at giving the impression that Israel had hit the entire country and not specific targets; notwithstanding Hezbollah's self-interest, the party has demonstrated to have a clear and smart strategy over the years.

In the third and last chapter I analysed economic aspects and perspectives of Lebanon. What I would like to stress at this point is the fundamental need of an economic boost for the country and the relevance of the discovery of oil and gas reserves in the Mediterranean Sea. The two offshore licensing rounds carried out so far by the Ministry of Energy represent a unique opportunity for Lebanon to rebalance its external economy and to raise national incomes. Furthermore, the $11 billion worth investments pledged by international investors to Lebanon at the 2018 CEDRE Conference can represent a real turning point. Everything will depend on how Lebanese people, political and religious leaders above all, will manage the near future, fully aware of the cultural and human potentialities of this marvellous land.

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Summary

Lebanon has always played a crucial role in the Middle East, especially during last two centuries. This land has witnessed the disastrous events of its neighbours, Syria and Israel, and it has also lived one of the most cruel and bloody civil wars in the region in the 1975-1990 period. Lebanon is a marvellous land enclosed by the Mediterranean Sea and the Syrian border; it is large as the Italian region Abruzzo and has a population of 6 million people belonging to 18 different religious denominations. Thus, it goes without saying that problems concerning the relations between the various communities are a daily occurrence.

From May to August 2019 I had the opportunity to work at the Italian Embassy in Beirut as an intern. During that period, I was in charge of monitoring the long approval process of the 2019 State budget and the implementation of economic reforms under the auspices of the 2018 CEDRE Conference, in which international actors pledged $11 billion worth investments.

This thesis aims at reporting the result of my studies in Lebanon and giving my first-hand experience as a temporary resident in the country.

It analyses the country under three points of view: religious communities, Hezbollah, economic perspectives.

In the first chapter, I start the analysis of religious denominations in Lebanon by outlining the main characteristics of the most notable ones focusing, in particular, on the role of Eastern Catholic Churches in the country. This deepening has been made possible thanks to the thorough discussion I had with Father Ivan Santus at the apostolic nunciature in Harissa.

After the presentation of other religious communities, namely Shia, Sunni and Druze, I inserted a table showing a comprehensive overview of the Lebanon's eighteen denominations.

Then, moving to the historical analysis, it is evident that clashes and wars between religious factions have been the result of years of foreign dominion of the country, in particular under the Ottoman Empire before and under the French protectorate later. Indeed, if we analyse Lebanon before the introduction of the Millet system by the Ottomans in the 19th century, local communities used to live peacefully, and in this sense

the Mount Lebanon area represented an example of this way of living. The period from the 16th century to the independence's eve in 1943 is of paramount importance for the development of the Lebanese communities' sense of belonging and for the birth of hostilities among them which has characterized the entire modern era of the land of cedars. This period is described through six transformations: the establishment of the Emirate of Mount Lebanon in the 17th century; the 1832 Egyptian invasion; the period after the Egyptians' expulsion which lasted until 1860; the 1861-1915 peaceful period characterised by the *mutasarrifiyya*, a particular type of administrative unit; the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War until 1920; the path towards the country's independence, which eventually occurred in 1943.

Focusing on the last transformation, the article 22 of the 1919 Covenant of the League of Nations established the mandate system. At the same time, the mandate provided for the drafting of a statute for Lebanon made by foreign powers, to be finalised in three years. All this happened with the 1926 Constitution and with some special decrees issued by the High Commission for Lebanon and Syria ten years later. This period (1920s-1930s) saw the concretisation of the Greater Lebanon, a territorial entity which comprised, in addition to Mount Lebanon, other surrounding areas such as the Bekaa Valley, Tripoli and the south of the current country. In 1932 the release of the second (and last) official population census marked a very significant moment for Lebanon, leading to a balance of power between religious denominations which remained fixed until the 1989 Ta'if Agreement. Compared to the first 1911 census, the biggest change was for Christians, who decreased from 79,4% to 50,4% (Maronites decreased from 58,3% to 29%). Contrarily, Muslim community rose from 85.232 to 385.946 units, representing a 49% of the total population; within the Muslims, the Druze community was the only one who decreased (6,8%).

In the 1920s two blocs were formed in each of the Sunni and Christian communities: those in favour of an independent Lebanon and those against it. For what concerned Sunni, a first movement headed by Riad el-Solh upheld the establishment of the Greater Lebanon, whilst the second one, headed by Abd Al-Hamid Karamé, reflected pan-Arab ideals and was deeply in favour of an annexation of the Lebanese territory to Syria. Also on the Christian (Maronite) side, two blocs were formed: the first one, named Constitutional Bloc and headed by Bechara al-Khouri, believed in a Greater Lebanon conceived as a State where different religious communities could cooperate together at the best and

where the diversity could have represented a value; the second bloc, called National Bloc and referred to Émile Eddé, strongly believed in a Lebanon about which France could guarantee the survival, the protection and the hegemony of the Maronite community, and so a relationship with this European country (marked by an absolute dependence) was the only viable way.

In 1925, consultations for the drafting of a Constitution began: the outcome, the 1926 Constitution, was not imposed by France or England, but it was the result of numerous bargaining among all the actors involved. The Constitution affirmed the equality of citizens before the law and recognized the existence of a communitarian regime guaranteeing respect, protection and free exercise of religious belief. Furthermore, article 95 ruled that all administrative and political functions had to be properly allocated among different communities.

The 1940s were marked by a rapid deterioration of Franco-Lebanese relations. It is in this period that the Constitutional Bloc headed by al-Khouri and the Sunni movement led by Solh agreed on the National Pact, the document which gave birth to the first Lebanese Republic. The National Pact essentially complemented the 1926 Constitution, legitimizing the power of Maronite and Sunni communities; furthermore, and most important, it was based on a political-religious representation following a 6:5 ratio in favour of Christians. Also the top jobs reflected a representative rule: the President of the Republic had to be (and still today has to be) Christian Maronite and for the same rule the Prime Minister has to be Sunni. Only from 1947 the practice of a President of the Parliament being Shia became rule. The National Pact also provided for a communitarian proportional distribution in all public administration's sectors and different legal status for every religious community. Hence, it is true that both the 1926 Constitution before and the 1943 National Pact surely embodied strong factors of integration between communities.

From the 1943 independence until the Civil War, the political history of the country has been linked to the various characters of the Presidents of the Republic. Until 1975, the term *'ahd* was used to identify the different presidencies: every *'ahd* reflected the character of a President and his management of power.

Seeking to shortly outline them, the al-Khouri presidency (1943-1952) is remembered for being the period in which the communitarianism regime, only theoretically expressed in the National Pact, had its practical effect on society. The mechanism of equilibrium

among communities established by the National Pact developed and radicalised: cases of nepotism, corruption and favouritism linked to the communitarian belonging emerged in all public sectors and the President Bechara al-Khouri did not undertake to promote a gradual de-confessionalisation of the country.

Camille Chamoun was President from 1952 until 1958. His presidency was marked by a strong support to reforms in political and electoral sectors; at the same time, his commitment for economic and financial reforms was not very impressive.

Fouad Chehab (1958-1964) became President after Chamoun, in a period in which the country was deeply divided internally. His presidency was divided in two phases: in the first one, which lasted until 1961, he sought to promote reconciliation and reconstruction of the country; the second one, from 1961 to 1964, was marked by a strong influence of the army in political and public life. Chehab set up a government in which Christians and Muslims sat together, seeking to reinvigorate the National Pact. The president was a strong supporter of the "fifty-fifty" rule, according to which the distribution of State jobs had to be equally allocated between Muslims and Christians.

During the *'ahd* of Charles Helou (1964-1970) there was a critical juncture. 1967 represented for Lebanon, as well as for all Arab countries, a real disaster: the Six-Day War and the flow of Palestinian refugees were all elements which triggered the disaggregation of Lebanon. It is also in this period that Palestinian waves of migration began, with more than 100.000 refugees seeking shelter into the country, fleeing from the new-born Israel. Initially Shia population sympathized with the Palestinians (Sunni) and they cooperated in the attacks against Israel through military raids. Thereafter, the control of the OLP on big portions of Lebanon caused some friction between Palestinians and religious communities. In a public statement made on 30th May 1969, President Helou declared that all Palestinians combatants should have submitted to the authority of the Lebanese State, otherwise, the disaggregation of the country would have been very probable.

Thanks to the mediation of the Egyptian President Nasser, on 3rd November 1969 the Cairo Agreement was signed by Yasser Arafat and the Lebanese Army General Commander Emile Bustani. The agreement legitimised the presence of armed Palestinian groups and allowed them attacking Israel with raids from Southern Lebanon. Yet the agreement also provided for the beginning of cooperation between Palestinians and the

Lebanese Army. From then on, it is possible to affirm that the OLP effectively established "a state within a state".

The election of Frangié to the Presidency (1970-1976) marked the beginning of the Lebanese State's deterioration: worsening economic factors, escalating social tensions, the emergence of religious militia and the bulky presence of Palestinians were the reasons at the basis of Lebanon's collapse, highlighting serious deficiencies in the management of State and leading to the failure of the National Pact.

At the eve of the Civil War (1975-1990), Lebanon was witnessing a very tense situation because of two types of contestations: the first one concerned the political underrepresentation and was carried out by the Shia community; the second one, which referred to the Christian community and was predominantly conservative, argued instead that the system generated by the National Pact had demonstrated to be too much tolerant with regard to all communities. These two fronts led to a militarization of society through the establishment of various militia on both sides.

The years before the outbreak of the Civil War were mainly characterized by the expansion of operations by Lebanese militia, Israel and Syria. The conflict can be schematically divided in two phases: the first one, from 1975 to 1976 (also called two-years war), was mainly characterised by the confrontation between the Lebanese Front (Christian) and the National Movement (Muslim), whilst the second one, which lasted for more than ten years from 1978 to 1989, was characterised by a very high fragmentation of groups and reshuffle of alliances. In summer 1975 clashes were very violent, with the stated intention of Maronite to establish a "Maronite Sion" in Lebanon. At the end of January 1976, Muslim groups came together for proposing and finding a solution to the conflict. What emerged was the Arab Report: it provided for an equal distribution of power between Muslims and Christians (50-50), the election of the Prime Minister by the Parliament and a written declaration stating the "Arabic character" of Lebanon. In return, the Maronite Presidency of the Republic was not called into question, and the de-confessionalisation of the country was postponed.

However, fights went on until October 1976, when a summit of the Arab League held in Riyadh agreed on the so-called "Riyadh Resolution", which provided for a ceasefire and established an intervention force under President Sarkis' control, with the name of Arab Deterrent Force (ADF). This force had to be composed by soldiers coming from many Arab States, but it was rapidly transformed into a force made up by Syrian soldiers.

However, with the election of Sarkis and the appointment of Prime Minister Salim el-Hoss Lebanon seemed to proceed towards a slow normalization of the country in the last months of 1976.

In March 1978 Israel launched the *Operation Litani,* invading southern Lebanon and marking the beginning of the Civil War's second phase. The declared goal of the raid was the creation of a buffer zone for preventing Palestinian attacks; however, Israel changed its plan of attack while invading and troops reached the Litani river facing almost no opposition by Palestinians. Because of the numerous attacks towards civilians carried out by Israeli troops, Shiites perceived the invasion as it was against them. On 19th March 1978 the UN Security Council adopted the Resolution 425, forcing Israel to immediately withdraw from the Lebanese territory and providing for an international intervention force, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), along the Lebanese-Israeli border. Israel eventually accepted Res. 425 and withdrew its troops from southern Lebanon in June.

In 1979 two external crucial events affected the evolution of Lebanese history: the signing of Camp David Accords and the Iranian Revolution. The first one had the result of consolidating some alliances (namely Syria with the OLP against Israel with Maronites), whilst the latter gave new consciousness to the Shia community.

On 6th June 1982, Israeli troops invaded Lebanon for the second time (Operation *Peace for Galilee*) and after four days they reached Beirut, where an urban warfare broke out. Israeli forces besieged the town with medieval methods, namely establishing a total blockade of supplies. On 14th September 1982 the Christian President Gemayel was assassinated by a member of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) and two days later, as revenge, Lebanese Forces (with the collusion of Israeli forces) massacred between 500 and 3.500 civilians, including many Shiites, in what is still remembered as the Sabra and Shatila massacre. The period which goes from 1984 to 1988 was marked by constant conflicts across Lebanon and also by several attempts in order to find a political solution to the Civil War. In particular, 1988 was marked by an intense diplomatic activity both internationally and regionally.

It is in this scenario that the Ta'if Agreement was signed. Apart from marking the end of the 15 years long Civil War, the agreement aimed at reaching a comprehensive and effective sovereignty of the State through the abolition of confessionalism, the imposition of economic and political reforms, the liberation of Lebanese territory from foreign troops

and the establishment of a new framework of relations with Syria. The Ta'if Agreement gave Lebanon a new institutional balance, modifying powers of the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister and the President of the Parliament. Under a denominational point of view, Ta'if represented a milestone in changing the political weights of religious groups within the institutional bodies: Christians were widely downsized and equalized to the Muslims; Shiites had a political legitimisation thanks to the comprehensive acceptance of a Shia President of the Parliament; Sunni were the real winners of the agreement, being able to tip the balance towards them after years of waiting. However, it is possible to say that the Ta'if Agreement has never been entirely implemented: indeed, confessionalism has never been eliminated from the management of the State and Syria continued to interfere on Lebanese matters. Nevertheless, the Ta'if Agreement surely had the crucial role of drawing a new denominational equilibrium which facilitated Lebanon on overcoming a difficult historical moment.

The end of the Civil War and the signing of the Ta'if Agreement did not have an immediate and effective result on the ground. The Agreement was not positively welcomed, at least immediately after its signing: many militia and Hezbollah strongly opposed their own disarmament, as provided for by Ta'if, and all this process requested much time for being completely concluded. In this atmosphere, first parliamentary elections were held in 1992 with a new electoral law and the result was characterised by a low turnout (29%) and the entrance into the Parliament of new militia and parties, namely Amal and Hezbollah. Rafiq Hariri became Prime Minister and a new chapter of Lebanon's history was set to begin. Hariri asked for and obtained special legislative powers for promoting necessary reforms in a rapid way, he pushed for a rejuvenation of politics through the elimination of bureaucracy and favouritism but he was not always able to disentangle among political games and hence to fully put into practice his economic reforms. In the 2000 legislative elections Hariri was the undisputed winner and he was able to extend his influence all over the country. The years after were characterised by rising instability coming from outside: in particular, 9/11 had a remarkable effect in the country due to the inclusion of Hezbollah into the list of terrorist organisation by the US.

On 14th February 2005 Rafiq Hariri was assassinated with a bomb placed on a street of Beirut promenade. This event shocked Lebanon and the international community and it had at least two main consequences: firstly, the event triggered an enormous wave of

protests throughout the country, known as the "Cedar Revolution"; secondly, it led to the withdrawal of Syrian forces from the Lebanese territory on the 26th of April.

As Syria was thought by everyone as the alleged responsible for the assassination of Hariri, Hezbollah sought to ride the indignation of people and organized a great demonstration on the 8th of March, during which it asked for the initiation of an independent investigation concerning the assassination of Hariri and the formation of a new government led by Rachid Karamé. Furthermore, Hezbollah proposed a tolerant approach with Syria, as at the time it was its supporter along with Iran. As a response to that, the 14th of March there was another demonstration made by all the Hezbollah's opponents which mobilized around 1/3 of Lebanese population. On that occasion, protestants asked for the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, the removal of intelligence's chiefs, the formation of a neutral government and the establishment of an international tribunal which would have investigated the assassination of Hariri.

Legislative elections were held between 29th May and 19th June 2005 and the heterogeneity of the electoral roll led to the formation of a Parliament without a clear political line. Once again, Lebanon was on an institutional crisis.

On 12th July 2006 the Shia militia captured two Israeli soldiers at the border, overthrowing any existing equilibrium being present until then; the same day Israel launched an incursion into southern Lebanon, marking the beginning of the 34-Day War. The beginning of the conflict seemed to bring Lebanon twenty years back. Even though in the first days Israel thought to lead the war in a fast and efficient way through the use of the only air forces, it was soon evident how the military strategy of Hezbollah forced Israel not only to deploy land forces, but also to redefine its objectives. The war's effects were devastating: Israeli raids were not limited to the south, but also struck Beirut and, most of all, numerous infrastructures of the country, notably ports, streets, industries and the airport. More than 1200 Lebanese people died (both civilian and military), against 43 Israeli military victims. More than one million people were forced to leave their homes and serious human rights violations were made.

On August 11th the UNSC adopted Res. 1701 through which Hezbollah had to accept the deploying of 15.000 soldiers of the Lebanese army along the Litani river and the deployment of troops by the United Nations. In the resolution there was no mention of the Israeli aggression nor a condemnation of it; instead, the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers made by Hezbollah was mentioned as an act of aggression. On August 14th an

agreement for the ceasefire was reached. On 21st May 2008 a new denominational agreement called "Doha Compromise" was reached, providing for the election of Michel Suleiman to the Presidency, a revision of the electoral law and new economic reforms.

In 2009 new general elections were held: the results were quite similar to the previous elections of 2005 and Rafiq Hariri, son of Saad, became Prime Minister, taking the lead of the Sunni political wing.

That was the year in which the Saad Hariri era began, but through the years the son of Rafiq did not demonstrate to have the same charisma of his father and he had to cope with exogenous and endogenous challenges. Internally, Hariri government was unstable since its establishment primarily because of the lack of a clear hierarchy within his party and the veto power exerted by Hezbollah. For what concerns the foreign side, chapter one deepens the relationship between the Hariri family and the reigning al-Saud family and the disgraceful affair occurred in November 2017.

The 2011 Arab Spring and the outbreak of the Syrian war in the last years triggered some protests in Lebanon and fostered the emergence of several Sunni Salafist radical groups. Coming to the most recent past, the first chapter ends with the analysis of the hard bargaining put in place for the formation of the new government in the aftermath of 2018 elections. The entire process lasted almost one year and saw several confrontations between all political parties involved for appointing 30 ministers, ended in a denominational distribution consisting of 15 Christian ministers, 6 Sunni, 6 Shia and 3 Druze.

The second chapter of the thesis is focused on Hezbollah. The Shia party is today one of the most important players both in the country and the region, representing a very peculiar case in the entire Middle Eastern scenario. Since its establishment in 1982 and especially from its first appearance in local and parliamentary elections, the Party of God has been able to evolve and to penetrate Lebanese institutions more and more. Thus, it is very erroneous to consider Hezbollah only as a military body. The aim of the chapter is to investigate the origins of the party and the political and social powers it exerts in Lebanon, viewing how the strategy of the Shia movement has changed over the years.

First of all, it is necessary to say that until the 1979 Iranian Revolution the Shia community in Lebanon pursued a self-pity behaviour. The first figure to give a feeling of consciousness to Lebanese Shiites was Musa al-Sadr, who was the first one to focus his political action towards the "oppressed people", a concept that became significant later

on. Under a demographic point of view, in 1960 Shia people constituted the 30% of the entire Lebanese population and their rate of birth was constantly increasing. For the first time, through al-Sadr Shiites found a leader being able to represent and pursue their interests and to respond to their needs, never breaking ties with national institutions nor with other Lebanese communities. In this sense, even during the bloody Lebanese Civil War, Musa al-Sadr repeatedly intervened in support of Christians in southern Lebanon. In 1975 he established the *Afwag al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniyya*, known today as Amal, one of the two major Shia parties in Lebanon. The Imam disappeared on 31st August 1978 during a trip to Libya.

Another important figure which played an important role in the establishment of Hezbollah was the cousin of Musa al-Sadr, Baqir al-Sadr. Differently from his relative Musa, Baqir developed the idea of a purely Islamic State, laying the groundwork for the *Velâyat-e Faqih* of Khomeini. In the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, from 1979 Khomeini was committed to export the Islamic Revolution to Lebanon, giving support to the local Shia community.

In the 1980s, following the disappearance of imam Musa al-Sadr who was a charismatic figure as well as the founder of the Amal movement, his followers found themselves very vulnerable and unable to appoint another leader like him: Amal witnessed a very deep internal crisis, which was aggravated by the 1982 Israeli invasion.

It was exactly because of this domestic crisis that in 1982 the Amal Islamic Movement, an embryonic Hezbollah, was established, splitting from Amal. For three years the group laid the foundations for a political, social and economic independence, which they gained in 1985 with the release of the *Risala al-Maftuha*, known as "The Open Letter to all the Oppressed in Lebanon and the World". It is the first official document of the Shia organisation named Hezbollah and it represents its manifesto as it focuses on the Party of God's thought concerning foreign and internal policy and the *modus operandi* of the organisation. All throughout the Letter the approach is basically aggressive and not proactive, as a proof of the historical moment in which the *manifesto* was written. Indeed, at the time the Party of God was at its first years and pushed for destructive actions. From then on, Hezbollah presented itself as a direct competitor of Amal, and internationally speaking a sort of double axis was established: on one side Amal with Syria, on the other Hezbollah with Iran. In the last years of the 1980s, particularly in 1988, there was a series of armed struggles and guerrilla warfare between the two Lebanese Shia groups and soon

the conflict spread quickly in Beirut. It was soon evident that Amal was capable to resist the fight thanks to the Syrian regime's support. However, on 9th October 1990 a reconciliation accord between Amal and Hezbollah was reached and the Party of God came out of the conflict very strengthened.

With the signing of the 1989 Ta'if Agreement, the Party of God opted for a cooperative approach with the new national framework, aiming at avoiding any exclusion from the decision making process. This was possible thanks to the rise to the power of both 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to the Iranian Presidency and the Ayatollah 'Ali Khamenei to the Supreme Leadership, who both welcomed the newly adopted political strategy of the Party of God. Therefore, Hezbollah participated for the first time at the elections in 1992 with an electoral program aimed at identifying priorities and objectives of the movement, namely to focus on the fight against Israel and to cooperate with national institutions, notwithstanding the necessity to eliminate confessionalism from institutions. However, the overall tone used in the text was still more focused on opposition than proposition.

During the 1990s, the actions of Hezbollah were very focused on the martyrdom as a mean of resistance, recognising this kind of sacrifice as a legitimate and founding element of its ideology. In addition, in these years the Party of God deeply improved its military capacity: in 1990 five Hezbollah fighters were killed for every IDF fatality, but by 1991, the figure had dropped to two Hezbollah dead for every Israeli soldier killed. Notwithstanding the heavy military activity in southern Lebanon, the Party of God participated in the 1996 elections, with the purpose of increasing its role in the Parliament and to influence Lebanese institutions. Nevertheless, it is evident by reading that year's electoral program that the Party of God did not aim at drafting a government program yet; instead, it still kept to pursue an aggressive and warring approach, presenting itself as an opposition force and party.

The turning point of Hezbollah's political strategy was on the occasion of the 2000 withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanese soil. Indeed, with the absence of Israeli soldiers in Lebanon the Party of God seemed to have lost its main reason of existence. Thus, Hezbollah shifted its action from an offensive approach to a defensive one, carrying on the military activity in the south through reminder operations against Israel, namely focused attacks which would have substituted the regular military activity over the years. At the 2000 general elections, Hezbollah gained nine parliamentary seats. The participation to the new government was questioned, and the party was split into two

radically different currents of thought: those who argued that the management of certain ministries could have ensured the pursuing of the party's objectives and those who considered the fight against Israel as the only objective of the Shia movement. Eventually, the second group emerged as the winner and Hezbollah remained at the opposition.

It is with the 2005 elections, held in the aftermath of Rafiq Hariri's assassination, that Hezbollah joined the Fouad Siniora's government, even though it constituted a minority within the executive power.

The 2006 34-Day War certainly marked another crucial turning point for Hezbollah. In the aftermath of the conflict, Secretary General Nasrallah argued that his party had succeeded in taking Israel out of the country and being survived the war. The aim was to present Hezbollah as a force which had defended the entire country and population and not only the Shia community. This was evident when the Party of God was committed to promote a massive infrastructural restoration project in 2008. The reconstruction project was named *al Wa'ad* (the Promise) and concerned all the people who had personally suffered from the Israeli invasion and who had lost everything. In these terms, the Party of God guaranteed the reconstruction of hundreds of houses to all Lebanese people, without taking into consideration religious belongings.

On the occasion of 2009 elections, Hezbollah released a new political manifesto which presented several differences with the 1985 *Risala al-Maftuha*. Indeed, the 1985 document had been written during an inter-denominational Civil War in which Hezbollah fought against both Israel and Phalangists; thus, there was no possibility of dialogue with other forces and parties. Instead, the 2009 manifesto was a comprehensive document which was referred to all the Lebanese people. Accordingly, also the tone of the two texts is much different: in the *Risala al-Maftuha* there were harsh tones and many quotations from the Quran, whilst in the 2009 manifesto the vocabulary is more diplomatic and cautious and there is a total of three quotations from the Quran. However, the Hezbollah's stance as defender of Lebanon did not find the approval of Lebanese people, still affected by the 2008 events. Several years were needed to both Amal and Hezbollah for regaining consensus until the 2018 elections, in which they were able to play a leading role among all the parties involved.

After having completed the historical overview of Hezbollah and analysed the long course of its action in Lebanon, the second chapter focuses on the current hierarchical apparatus

of the Party of God, outlining a sort of organisation chart as derived from several authors' data.

Lastly, the chapter analyses the crucial role played by Hezbollah in the international arena and the network of interests promoted by the Shia party out of Lebanon. Looking at the regional area, Hezbollah has always been considered on the Shia axis which from Beirut passes through Damascus and Tehran, notwithstanding the numerous differences and occasional tense moments between these countries. After having described in detail the relationship between Syria and Hezbollah and Iran and Hezbollah, the chapter ends deepening the international extra-regional radius of action of the Shia party. Hezbollah's global network regards over forty countries in all five continents. In North America, the Shia party had a strong presence until 9/11, not only in the United States, but also in Canada. In South America Hezbollah carries on a great infrastructural activity, especially in Latin America and in the Tri-border area (Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina). Particularly in this region, Hezbollah's activities include domestic and international crime, terrorism, logistic support and funding, with local authorities not always able to hinder this illegal business. The Party of God is also widely present in Columbia, Guatemala, Panama, Costa Rica and Mexico. In Europe, Hezbollah carried on many activities until 2005, when the European Parliament declared to consider the Party of God a terrorist organisation. Until then, the Shia party had raised funds for its interests through charitable societies mainly present in Britain, Germany and Switzerland.

Today, the Party of God remains active in Russia, the Balkan countries, Germany, Turkey, Cyprus and Spain. In Asia, thanks to the existence many countries with a strong Muslim presence particularly in the South-East area (e.g. Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Korea and India), Hezbollah focuses its activities by carrying out attacks against Jewish targets and also by recruiting young people for sending them to Lebanon once trained. Lastly, in Africa we witness the presence of many Lebanese Shiites who contribute to finance Hezbollah. The existence of the party is notably extensive in Ivory Coast, Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Sudan. It is noteworthy that the Shia movement and Iranians had deep relations with Osama bin Laden while he lived in Sudan between 1991 and 1996. In this area, Hezbollah also operates in the diamond grey market. The third and last chapter is fully focused on the economic perspectives of Lebanon without reference to the past. This section of the thesis mostly represents my work at the Italian Embassy during my internship in May-August 2019.

The chapter opens with a general overview of the Lebanese economy, focusing on the GDP, the HDI and the trade balance of the country; on the latter issue, trade with Italy is highlighted. Then, Lebanon's financial industry is deepened: this driving sector mainly relies on favourable tax conditions intended for local and foreign people, and also on a big bank activity made by Lebanese expatriates who live all around the world. Furthermore, infrastructural sector is one of the leading industries of the country and it surely provides most of the banks' profits. However, due to the economic uncertainty concerning the approval's delay of the 2019 budget, during the first months of this year a great number of Lebanese expatriates reduced their economic and financial affairs in the country, mostly diminishing the amount of money in their bank deposits. This unstable framework triggered international rating agencies to make some statements accordingly. Yet Moody's and Fitch downgraded the rating of Lebanon several times during 2019, arriving at ranking the country at Caa1 and CCC levels, namely corresponding to "Substantial risk/Default imminent with little prospect of recovery". Also the IMF made some remarks on Lebanon in June, expressing its deep awareness about the current economic situation of the country and giving some recommendations for an economic adjustment.

The second paragraph focuses on the approval of the contested 2019 budget and the reforms foreseen in it. The 2019 budget is an austerity package which aims at drastically reducing the deficit-to-GDP ratio from 11,2% (2018) to 7,59%, going well beyond the CEDRE Conference's commitments of April 2018. Some of the measures provided for in this budget law regard tax increases from 7 to 10% on bank deposits' interests, the introduction of a 3% tariff on imported goods, hiring freeze on public sector and several limits on benefits enjoyed by public employees. Through the adoption of these unpopular economic measures, which have been strongly criticised by thousands of people who have led great protests in the streets outside institutional buildings in Beirut, the Lebanese Government has undoubtedly proven its commitment to better the economic and financial stability and to bring them back on a virtuous and sustainable path.

The third chapter of the thesis ends with a last paragraph regarding gas and oil reserves in the Mediterranean Sea. Lebanon is mainly an import country, so in this regard the discovery of hydrocarbon reserves in the waters off Lebanon would represent a unique opportunity for better the trade balance and the country's income. The first offshore licensing round had a road map extending over a period of ten months starting in February

2017 and ending in November of the same year. On the 14th of December 2017 the Council of Ministers approved the awards of two exclusive petroleum licenses for exploration and production in two blocks for the consortium composed of Total S.A. (France), ENI (Italy) and JSC Novatek (Russia).

Then, on 5th April 2019 the Minister of Energy Nasa Boustani declared that other five blocks were open to receive bids in the Second Offshore Licensing Round. The process is still underway and the deadline for the submission of the Licensing Round Application is the 31st of January 2020. In this Second Licensing Round, there are several rumours regarding the participation of ENI, this time in consortium with Qatar Petroleum.