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Supra-state Identity Formation: Velayat-e Faqih and Hezbollah in Lebanon

By

Mirian Nasser

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

Student Name: Myrian Nasser I.D. #: 202005363

Thesis Title: Supra-State Identity Formation: Velayat-e Faqih and Hezbollah in Lebanon

Program: International Affairs

Department: Social and Education Sciences

School: Arts and Sciences

The undersigned certify that they have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis and approved it in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

Master of Arts in the major of International Affairs

Thesis Advisor's Name: Imad Salamey

Signature:  Date: 22 / 07 / 2022
Day Month Year

Committee Member's Name: Sami Baroudi

Signature:  Date: 22 / 07 / 2022
Day Month Year

Committee Member's Name: Latife Reda

Signature:  Date: 22 / 07 / 2022
Day Month Year

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To my mentor

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Supra-state Identity Formation: Velayat-e Faqih and Hezbollah in Lebanon

Mirian Nasser

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the development of transnational identity formation in nation states. The influence of velayat-e faqih through the rising power of Hezbollah among the Lebanese Shiites and its ability to create a new identity is closely studied. The paper reviews various identity-formation theoretical propositions while assessing the Lebanese case. The findings suggest that in a fragile state and divided society nationhood is shaped by sub- and supra-state identities. In the case of the Shiite community in Lebanon, the rise of Iranian regional power along its transnational “velayat-e” ideology has served as a mean for communal empowerment against Sunni-dirven “Arabization” and Christian-led “westernization”. The paper discusses the various turbulent historical junctures that have fertilized the ground for the growth of the “velayat-e” identity among the Lebanese Shiite community. This study confirms that transnational revisionist identities thrive amid socio-economic nation-state fragility and communal insecurity.

Keywords: Middle East; Lebanon; Iran; Hezbollah; Shiites; transnational identity; constructivism, communitarianism; nationalism; power sharing; consociationalism.

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Chapter One

The Malleability of the Lebanese Identity: a Door for Sub- and Supra-national identities

1.1 Introduction

The Italian philosopher Umberto Eco once said: “National identity is the last bastion of the dispossessed. But the meaning of identity is now based on hatred, on hatred for those who are not the same” (Pecníková et al., 2017).

Lebanon, a country in the heart of the Middle East, has passed through decades of colonialism and was left subject to deep-rooted religious divisions, nurturing strong sub- and supra-state identities. In fact, several groups have formed over the years, each with its own primordial identity shaped by history, religion, ethnicity and ideological beliefs (Ghais, 2021: 30-1). This multicultural identity reinforces the notion that Lebanon was seen differently by Christians and Muslims, the former viewing themselves as descendants of Phoenicians, while the latter identified as Arab nationals (Ghais, 2021: 32). These contrasting identities were delicately sewn together in the 1945 National Pact to form the multicultural nation-state of Lebanon that we know today. However, despite the National Pact — which endeavored to resolve the clash over identity and defined the new country of Lebanon and its state — the communities involved lacked a unified Lebanese identity (Ghais, 2021: 33).

Eighteen different religious groups were meant to live peacefully within the small land of Lebanon; however, with the passing of time, some communities have become more dominant, thus tilting the delicate power balance. Throughout

Lebanon's history, the Shiites have been considered a suppressed sect lacking many of the privileges given to other communities. Therefore, with a fragmented and subdivided Lebanese society emerging from the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) — a war that witnessed the Israeli invasion of 1982 — Hezbollah, the “Party of God,” was born.

Hezbollah continues to be one of the most debated Islamist groups in the world. Although it is purported to be a Lebanese Shiite party, its ideology is rooted in velayat-e Faqih (the guardianship of Islamic jurist), with Iran's supreme leader at its helm. By nature, Hezbollah is considered supranational, as it was established to fight Western and Israeli terrorist activities in Lebanon (Daher, 2021). In fact, after its inception, Hezbollah fiercely fought both the Israeli army and its local allies. Hezbollah vindicated its use of weapons by depicting itself as a “resistance movement, fighting against hegemony and occupation as a part of its enduring struggle to defend the ‘oppressed’ from the ‘oppressor’” (Kızılkaya, 2017). Consequently, a novel supra-state velayat-e identity saw the light, diffusing itself among the Shiites of Lebanon. But important questions remain: How did this identity weave its way into the fabric of multicultural Lebanon? Did it persist in its supranational state or metamorphose into a subnational identity? In order to piece together the puzzle, one must first delve deeper and find answers to the following: How do normative and ideational structures shape the identities of political actors? How are the interests and actions of actors affected by their identities? In what way does a non-state actor or movement mobilize people? What effect does globalization have on the creation of new identities? How is national identity affected by a robust nation-state?

1.2 Literature Review

Existing theoretical studies have focused on and provided answers to the aforementioned questions. Hence, this part reviews literature on: identities and constructivism, emphasizing the importance of normative and materialistic structures on the formation of identity; supra-state identities and communitarianism, explaining how groups are driven toward autonomous governing arrangements beyond the state's authority; social mobilization theory to outline how and why communities follow a certain party or movement; the globalization theory; and the securitization and nation-state theory.

1.2.1 Identities and Constructivism

Unlike other theories in international relations, constructivism sees normative and ideational structures as important as material structures in conditioning the behaviors of social and political actors (Reus-Smit, 2005: 95). In addition, they believe that “interests and identities are always in process” because “actions continually produce and reproduce conceptions of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’” (Wendt, 1999, 36). Reus-Smit (2005) and Wendt (1995) concluded that constructivists believe in “shared ideas, beliefs and values” having a dominant impact on social and political action and identity (Reus-Smit, 2005: 96). Reus-Smit claimed that ideational and ideological structures shape identity, revealing interests and influencing actions. Wendt (1992) stated that: “Identities are the basis of interests.” Moreover, Reus-Smit pointed out that constructivists contend that normative structures marginalize the actors' imagination of their actions between practical and ethical terms. In addition, non-materialistic structures could put major constraints on the actor's conduct. Therefore, according to constructivists, political actors' identities are formed according to their ideological beliefs and norms, and thus their interests and actions

are predictable. Furthermore, in his *Social Theory*, Wendt explored the idea of collective identity and the identification of ‘Self’ and ‘Other.’ He claimed that identification was usually issue-specific, like ideological issues in which the Self and Other become embedded in each other (Wendt, 1992: 229). This collectivity is well illustrated in the case of the Shia community of Lebanon, discussed in this paper. Wendt realized the fundamentality of community in creating the conditions for identity formation (Wendt, 1999: 177). Therefore, the following section will tackle the impact of communitarianism on the formation of a supra-state identity.

1.2.2 Supra-state Identities and Communitarianism

This part of the literature review examines Hinnebusch (2015) and Salamey (2017), two of the most influential writers in the field. Their work helps to explain the current order in the Middle East. They discussed how weakness of the state leads to the rise of new supra-state identities, forming stronger communities beyond the borders of the state. Salamey (2017) asserted: “Growing deficiencies in state protectionism have turned many communitarian groups to seek self-help and devise their own means for self-preservation” (Salamey, 2017, 66). Similarly, Hinnebusch (2015) claimed: “A supra-state community assumes that common norms, regimes, or collective institutions, to some extent substitute for the absent common government in constraining the use of violence in political competition” (Hinnebusch, 2015, 63). Hinnebusch said that people are more “emotionally” driven to identify with their supra-state identity than their national state (Hinnebusch, 2015: 59). As for Salamey (2017), he represented communitarianism as a theory to demystify the new world order. Salamey examined communitarianism as a sustainable ideological substitute to dominant nationalist politics. He also revealed its principles based on cultural, economic and security features (Salamey, 2017: 8). Salamey (2017) suggested that

communitarian ideologies, like velayat-e Faqih and salafism, are irredentist, where “irredentism guides a particular group’s over-arching political affiliations and vision” (Salamey, 2017: 98). Both Hinnebusch (2015) and Salamey (2017) agreed that the revolution in Iran had led to the appointment of a leader who sought to export his ideology, which became a supra-state ideology. Iran’s supreme leader provided Iran with the robust ideology of velayat-e Faqih that extended beyond Iran’s borders. Salamey (2016) claimed that this ideology has promoted itself as a shield for the Shiite worldwide and has prospered in integrating the geographically dispersed Shia community into an “irredentist collectivity” (Salamey, 2017). He added that this process has empowered the group in the Middle East, yielding a powerful role in ruling governments, evidenced in Iraq and Lebanon. The strength of the velayat-e Faqih ideology is exemplified by the rise of Hezbollah, which became a “trans-national Islamic movement” (Hinnebusch, 2015: 180). According to Salamey, communitarianism builds an ideological base for “mobilization and militant action,” claiming shared interests and self-protection, which can be observed in the case of Hezbollah (Salamey, 2017: 60). Thus, the literature review that follows will discuss the social mobilization theory used by Hezbollah.

1.2.3 Social Mobilization Theory

The mobilization of individuals or communities in influencing major transformations is clarified through the social mobilization theory. This theory is a comprehensive and diverse field within sociology and political science. Giddens (1997) defined a social movement as one seeking to further a common interest or goal “through collective action outside the sphere of established institutions” (Giddens, 1997: 511). Farida (2020) claimed that social mobilization indicates

specifically the mobilization of religious groups within the context of argumentative politics as a political objection. Similarly, Klandermans (2013) said: “Social mobilization is the mechanism that brings demand and supply of protest together” (Klandemans, 2013: 12). Farida (2020) further revealed that literature on the topic addresses two fundamental stages in the process: consensus mobilization and action mobilization (Farida, 2020: 67). Klandermans (1984) defined consensus mobilization as the process by which a social movement organization, such as Hezbollah, “may seek to gain support for its socio-political positions or perspectives” (Klandermans, 1984: 586). The literature on social mobilization theory also illuminates the use of religious encryptions and symbols by mobilization characters. Patterson (2013) theorized that religious symbols could be used as political objects to mobilize supporters or “shape the nature of conflict and security” (Patterson, 2013: 120). Hence security is considered a catalyst for social mobilization, which guides us toward literature related to securitization in the next section.

1.2.4 Securitization Theory

William (2003) inferred that the term security has been re-conceptualized to justify its expanding schema “beyond the narrow concepts of state and military security and beyond the concerns of state actors” (William, 2003: 512-3). Based on the securitization theory, an issue becomes related to security when it is labeled as such by a “securitizing actor” with the power to move the issue beyond politics. Eroukhmanoff (2018) explained that security issues must be expressed “as problems by securitizing actors.” She added that an issue becomes securitized “when an audience collectively agrees on the nature of the threat and supports taking

extraordinary measures.” However, if rejected by the audience, the author concluded that this would simply represent a securitization failure.

1.2.5 Identity and Globalization

Globalization is a multidimensional cultural construct, reflecting the necessary interdependence and connections of all core facets of culture: economy, politics, ideology, languages, education, consumer goods, travel, modes of communication, technology and people around the world. Globalization, among other things, has also contributed to strengthening various cultural identities: religious, national, ethnic and geographic (Castells, 2006, see also Castells, 2010; Napier & Majhanovich, 2013).

The construct of cultural identity is associated with a reification of culture, which becomes a defining feature of the dominant discourse on identity (Bauman, 1996). Furthermore, identity is not that “transparent or unproblematic,” according to Hall (1996), who argued that identity is always positioned in the cultural context and, as such, is dynamic as a continuous cultural process. Castells (2010) stated that globalization, with its cultural homogenization, is a potential threat to local cultures and to specific identities due to perceived ideas that it encourages a global, cosmopolitan culture and cultural homogenization. In parallel, due to dominant political and religious ideologies, some nations wanted to preserve their historically defined identities based on language, nationality, ethnicity, religion, territory and other defining characteristics. This has resulted in cultural dichotomy.

1.2.6 National Identity and the Nation-State

National identity represents a specific cultural community whose members are united by common historical memories, values, beliefs, customs, conventions,

habits, languages and practices, myths, symbols and traditions. It denotes such elements as “historic territory, legal-political community, legal political equality of members, and common civic culture and ideology” (Smith, 1991, p. 11). According to Smith (1991), the underlying sentiments and aspirations that nationalist ideology, nationalist language and symbols evoke relate to three main concepts: territory, history and community (Smith, 1991: 78). In his analysis of the impact of globalization on cultural identity, Smith (2007a, 2007b) argued that global culture is not only unable to replace national culture, national identity possesses the capacity to withstand the forces of globalization (Smith, 2007a, 2007b: 30). In contrast, Guibernau (2004), who was critical of Smith’s assertions (2002), said that that national identity is also a modern phenomenon of a “fluid and dynamic nature.”

According to Guibernau (2001), national identity refers to the characteristics and beliefs shared by those who belong to the same nation and that the political aspect of national identity, when applied to the nation-state and nation-building, “focuses upon those state’s strategies, often referred to as ‘nation-building,’ designed to cultivate a ‘cohesive, loyal and up to a point, homogeneous citizenry’” (Guibernau, 2001: 242–68). The state’s strategies for building a single national identity — to unite its citizens by shared core values — includes, among other things, the promotion of a preferred image of the nation, communicating a desirable set of symbols and rituals to reinforce a sense of solidarity and community, and “the advancement of citizenship involving a well-defined set of civil and legal rights, political rights and duties as well as socio-economic rights” (Guibernau, 2004: 140).

1.2.7 Summary and Implications

The reviewed literature forms a solid foundation upon which this thesis will build its theoretical framework, merging insights from different approaches in international relations. First, constructivism revealed the influence of ideological thoughts of an actor on forming an identity, reflected later on in their actions. Moreover, the social theory by Wendt shows how ideological issues can lead to the identification of “Self” as part of “Other,” which would create a community having the same ideology. Subsequently, communitarianism in its definition explicates the rise of supra-state identities. Communitarianism, as viewed by Salamey, is a viable ideological substitute to dominant nationalist politics. Moreover, communitarianism creates an ideological base for mobilization and militant action that sells itself on shared interests and self-protection. Thus, the ideology of velayat-e Faqih offers an explanation supporting the birth of the supra-state identity in the Lebanese Shiite community under the banner of “Hezbollah.” The social mobilization theory, on the other hand, conveys the rise and proliferation of the velayat-e identity among Lebanese Shiites. The social mobilization theory illustrates how mobilization actors use religious symbols to influence communities. This theory is supported when we observe Hezbollah, which mobilizes the Shiite community through its use of religious symbols. While the securitization theory explains how issues are securitized by the words and speeches of actors, literature on the topic also references identity as a dynamic cultural process affected by globalization, especially when it comes to sharing common ideologies.

1.3 Research Question

As a supranational affiliation, the case of Hezbollah will be studied by shedding light on theories from the aforementioned literature review. The aim of this thesis is to form a theoretical understanding of the emergence of the velayat-e identity and how it was fostered. Therefore, to better understand how identities are formed, this thesis seeks to answer the following: What are the ideational and materialistic reasons for Hezbollah to embrace the ideology of velayat-e Faqih? And to what extent was the emergence of the velayat-e identity affected by the malleability of the Lebanese identity?

In order to provide a convincing and thorough argument, this paper examines: (1) the malleability of the Lebanese identity; (2) the origins of velayat-e Faqih; (3) the origins of the attachment between the Shiites of Lebanon and those of Iran; and (4) the nature of the velayat-e identity and its effect on Lebanon.

1.4 Hypothesis

Based on the reviewed literature, I hypothesize that the velayat-e identity has strengthened in the wake of a declining Lebanese nation-state. Therefore, this paper will examine how heightened insecurity for the Shia in Lebanon, due to the weakening of the nation-state, is considered one of the main reasons for the rise of the velayat-e identity within this community.

1.5 Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative research method, with an inductive approach, to answer the main research questions. It analyzes a case study to synthesize a theory. Such an approach is suitable for this purpose. Theoretically, this thesis focuses on the

origins of the emergence of the supranational identity (velayat-e identity), subsequently studying the origins of the weakness of the national identity (Lebanese identity). Finally, it describes the potential link between the weakness of the national identity and the rise of new supranational identities. Thus, the thesis moves from explicit observations to broader generalizations, concluding with new theories. This paper theorizes that as the nation-state declines, supranational identity affiliations increase.

The literature referenced in this thesis originates from different works of prominent Shiite scholars. In addition, it draws on a wide range of reliable official publications, delicate studies and trustworthy reports of writers, analysts and institutions. This paper undertakes intensive analysis in qualitative research, such as interpretive and analytical or critical approaches, to generate observable outcomes. A type of research such as this is truly unique in approach to research design and balanced evaluation.

1.6 Significance

Today, the Lebanese people are primarily concerned with the future of their country. Therefore, the issue of Lebanese identity and its preservation is considered key in determining the destiny of Lebanese society.

This thesis is significant in solving the mystery of a new uprising supranational identity supported by the strongest party in Lebanon, whose community was once considered the most suppressed in the country. Understanding the origins and the ideology of the velayat-e identity will unveil the effect of this identity on shaping the future of Lebanon. Significant results from this study will add to the existing literature. In fact, this study will be useful in the discipline of IR, as it

will create a theoretical framework that will help predict when a new supranational identity is likely manifest itself.

1.7 Thesis Outline

This chapter has provided an introduction to the research topic, literature review and the methodology of this thesis. The second chapter will delve deeper into identity formations, as they are related to state-building and national affiliations. This chapter will theoretically explain the identity formations by digging into several IR theories, including constructivism and communitarianism. Chapter three will provide a background to Lebanon and the struggle for identity. It shows how the nation-state of Lebanon was established, despite great voids between communities belonging to different identities. The penultimate fourth chapter will introduce Shiism in Lebanon and the rise of Hezbollah. This chapter tackles the peculiarity of sectarian affiliations within the nation-state of Lebanon while paying particular attention to the specificities of Shia community. The final chapter brings us closer to the question of contemporary transnationalism and the struggle over Lebanese destiny. It sums up the various analyses about state power and transnational identity formation, with Shiites and velayat-e Faqih as a case in point, and ties together the significance of this study, its limitations and scope for further investigations.

Chapter Two

Identity Formation and Nation-building: Theories under the Microscope

2.1 Introduction

Identity has always been an influential force in modeling politics and society (Sirin, 2012). It's a motive that unites people together under a single cause. However, in the case of Lebanon, identity became the separator between multiple groups, leading to the outburst of severe tensions and clashes (Sirin, 2012). Lebanon has struggled to achieve a unified national identity due its religious and cultural diversity and affiliations to different identities. Lebanon's case is not unique in this respect; indeed, plurality is evident in most countries (ethnic, religious, ideological, territorial, etc.) Such multiplicity usually results in having a variety of interests and also dissimilarities in perceptions on different subjects, such as economic policy, political issues and cultural plans. However, if robust institutions satisfy the rights of individuals, the multiplicity of interests and perceptions that appear due to the variety of identities may not result in societal clashes. Nevertheless, such situations are uncommon, and when the necessary institutions are absent, people become inclined to seek trust in their identity-based community to gain security, societal care and economical support. Hence, identity-based allegiances become a foundation for social mobilization when clash over properties and authority leads to aggressive conflicts. Therefore, in this chapter, it is fundamental to throw a spotlight on identity formation and its relation to state-building, state legitimacy and national affiliations.

2.2 Constructivism and Identity Formation

To understand the process of forming a collective identity, one must first address the dynamics of this process, which are represented by security, demography, literacy levels, economic status and many other aspects. Constructivism is considered the general theoretical approach that studies the features shaping collective identities and susceptibilities of a people to identify with specific collectivities. Thus, almost all social scientists studying identity formation adopt constructivist standpoints. According to this theory, individuals and groups uphold ranges of potential identities. Therefore, identities are perceived as diverse, changeable and affected by pressures of native traditionalism, larger cultural alterations, as well as devious tactics employed by political and cultural leaders.

Generally, the variation of identities, represented by noticeable multiplicity of communal acuties, aims and actions among individuals, is affected by the nature of identity, individual perceptions and the influence of actors. Lustick proposed that identities are “malleable, tradable and deployable.” He added that groups and individuals react differently to fluctuating “incentive structures.” In addition, social or political leaders could have an uneven impact on the way of initiation of certain identities among groups (Lustick & Miodownik, 2002).

According to Theys (2018), constructivists believe that states could have several identities that are communally created through communication with other actors. She added that an actor’s interests are indicated by their identity, which illustrates the viewpoint of “who they are”. Alexander Wendt, a notable constructivist scholar, once said: “State identities and interests are an important part

constructed by these social structures, rather than given exogenously to the system by human nature or domestic politics” (Wendt, 1994). Constructivists believe that identities are imperative in state formation since they create interests and actions. Theys (2018) illustrated her argument by comparing the interests of small and large states. She argued that the former focuses on its survival, while the latter is concerned with controlling international economic, political and military relations. However, Theys emphasized the importance of alignment between a state’s actions and its identity; otherwise, the identity’s validity would be called into question (Introducing Constructivism in International Relations Theory, 2018).

Two different standpoints are distinguished in constructivism: conventional and critical. Whereas the first is concerned with the “what,” the second is concerned with the “how.” Conventional constructivists deem it possible to explain the world in causative relationships and are concerned in determining the relations between interests, social standards, actors and identities. They believe that actors’ behaviors are related to their identity and that it is possible to predict when this identity becomes noticeable. They also examine the aspects that trigger change in a certain identity (Introducing Constructivism in International Relations Theory, 2018).

On the other hand, critical constructivists are interested in how actors support a certain identity (Introducing Constructivism in International Relations Theory, 2018). Although they are not concerned with the effect that this identity has, they are interested in discovering the component parts of an identity to reconstruct it. These components are created through written or spoken communication among and between people. Language plays a pivotal role for critical constructivists because it

constructs — and has the ability to change — social reality (Introducing Constructivism in International Relations Theory, 2018).

Wendt distinguished between the corporate and social constitution of state actors, which both argue that “interests are dependent on identities but play different roles in explaining action” (Wendt, 1994). However, he denoted that the corporate identity of the state engenders four basic benefits: physical security, including its separation from other actors; predictableness in international relations, which builds an aspiration for solid social identities; acknowledgment as an actor by others; and development, by supporting the human ambition for quality of life (Wendt, 1994).

Additionally, Wendt (1994) further discussed the structural context of collective identity formation from the constructivist viewpoint. He contended: “Structures of regional or global international systems constitute interaction contexts that either inhibit or facilitate the emergence of dynamics of collective identity formation” (Wendt, 1994). He focused on the intersubjective structure, rather than the materialistic structure. According to Wendt, intersubjective structures comprise common thoughts, prospects and social awareness through which states reveal some of their identities and interests. He asserted that these structures define the space given by the state for the dynamics to form a collective identity (Wendt, 1994).

2.3 Identity and Nation-Building

In his book “Nation-Building as Necessary Effort in Fragile States,” René Grotenhuis stated: “The approach to nation-building should be based on the capacity of people to handle multiple identities that are not necessarily contradictory but reflect the complexity of the contexts that they live in” (Grotenhuis, 2016). The robustness of a state is predominantly shaped by the strength of the shared identity

within it. When people have collective thoughts about a common identity, their country will develop good governance, consequently boosting political and economic development. Kriesberg (2003) stated that those sharing a collective identity think of themselves as having a “common interest and common fate.” Contrarily, states without a collective identity or solid society will not evolve. Thus, in the same way a solid sense of identity can unify people and reinforce a state, a fragile national identity or the existence of several rival identities has the potential to divide people and weaken a state. Grotenhuis (2016) purported that fragile states lack a shared identity or sense of belonging. In his words: “The challenge in fragile states is to build an overarching national identity out of a range of minority identities” (Grotenhuis, 2016). Therefore, it is imperative to make sense of how identities outline the fate of states to assist weaker countries, like Lebanon, in overcoming their challenges.

Initially, the primary stages of state-building in Europe were principally achieved through imperialist downfalls or responses to such actions. The historian Lewis Namier noted the following: “States are not created or destroyed, and frontiers redrawn or obliterated, by arguments and majority votes; nations are freed, united, or broken by blood and iron, and not by a generous application of liberty and tomato sauce” (Bosworth, 2002:18). Charles Tilly (1975) agreed that the states of Europe had risen as a result of wars (Identity Politics, Democratisation and State Building in Ethiopia’s Federal Arrangement – ACCORD, n.d.).

Following initial state formation, state-building requires the activation of several mechanisms, including: socialization, democratization and economic integration. However, different ethnic groups finding common ground on which to

build a collective identity is a prerequisite to achieving socialization in a country. Identity shapes the links that bond persons to groups. Unified groups are “integrated not by one but by a combination of several kinds of objective relationships (economic, political, linguistic, cultural, religious, geographical, and historical) and their subjective reflection in collective consciousness” (Hroch, 1996: 79).

When referencing the Middle East, Lewis had the following to say: “...a region of old and deep-rooted identities, not nationality, not citizenship, not descent, but religion, or more precisely membership of a religious community, is the ultimate determinant of identity” (Lewis, 1998: 9, 15). Wars between religions represented the barriers, which kept these religious groups apart in the Middle Eastern region, thus worsening the conditions of fragile states. In fragile states, where the general circumstances are unsteady, and the state’s official institutions are frail and society is shattered, the consequences of having miscellaneous identities are much more devastating. A person’s identity is the product of certain characteristics and practices, according to Kriesberg (2003), and usually incorporates affiliation in various identity communities; however, unsteady, changeable settings embolden institutions to split along the deepest societal divides, represented by religion or ethnicity. In Iraq, for example, numerous communities had been living together peacefully for years; yet the unsteadiness and insecurity that accompanied a recently unstable situation brought ethnic and religious identities to the surface, becoming determinants of a person’s identity. Lines of loyalty emerged and the country became trapped in a vicious cycle of civil wars (Identity Politics, Democratisation and State Building in Ethiopia’s Federal Arrangement – ACCORD, n.d.).

With the Middle East in mind, Raymond Hinnebusch (2020) claimed: “Relation between identity and statehood is an outcome of the ‘export’ of the Westphalian states system from the Western ‘core’ to the ‘periphery,’ including the Middle East” (Hinnebusch, 2020). Based on his theory, Western imperialism had executed the borders and governments of the “territorial statehood.” National sovereignty was incorporated by native nationalist movements and, after independence, state builders wanted to imitate the nation-state form of governance. In his theory, Hinnebusch claimed that the state — the terrain under an independent government — is harmonious with the nation, which is the unit of “political community” (Hinnebusch, 2020). This provides legitimacy “inside” the state and boosts its power capability in respect to the “outside” (Hinnebusch, 2020).

However, in this region, the outcome was a very defective state system that deviated from the Westphalian model due to the significant superior influence of sub- and supra-state identities over statehood. In addition, the random border illustration by imperial powers created irregularity between state region and the “felt nation.” This resulted in the creation of a false nation lacking legitimacy (Hinnebusch, 2020). Consequently, state builders had to instrumentalize sub- and supra-state identities, reflected by the “hybrids of patrimonial and bureaucratic authority that utilized both sectarian and national identities,” as Hinnebusch put it. The patrimonial feature, prone to sectarian values, is represented by the utilization of sectarian bonds to generate a reliable base of devotees who support its leader. Conversely, the bureaucratic side of governments, with nationalistic nuances, improves the state’s capability of supplying benefit to the public and providing inclusion through its institutions. Loss of balance, resulting in gravitation toward the patrimonial side, often leads to the collapse of the state due to security issues fueling

the rise of sectarianism. Hence, Hinnebusch claimed that the stability of a state is determined by the ability of nationalism to contain instrumental sectarianism (Hinnebusch, 2020).

Grotenhuis (2016) believed that the most important aspect in building nationhood was to create a sense of belonging. He concluded that the nation's flag and its unique symbols were not enough to face the obstacles faced by a fragile state and proposed three fundamental attitudes for strengthening the roots of the sense of belonging: (1) nation-building should not be seen as a zero-sum game, where the identity of one of the rivaling groups can't become the national identity, neither the national identity can substitute for the groups' identities; (2) a "winner-takes-it-all" outcome is not viable, where the groups will have to primarily admit that the result will not be a replica of their "minority identity." However, he claimed that family, tribal or religious identities could remain an integral part of everyday life if, at the same time, the person identifies with shared national identity and respects the laws of the country; (3) accepting difference, where groups need to accept that they are equal but unique. Thus, Grotenhuis emphasized the importance of embracing symbols, festivals, heroes and cultures from small minorities to ensure the involvement of all groups in the nation-building process (Grotenhuis, 2016).

2.4 Identity and Legitimacy of a State

McCullough defined legitimacy as "acceptance of authority by both elite and non-elite groups" (McCullough, 2015). In her topic guide "The Legitimacy of States and Armed Non-state Actors," she stressed on the importance of legitimacy in all power relations, explaining that it is this legitimacy that permits power to be applied

through acquiescence, as opposed to pressure and compulsion. She concluded that the absence of legitimacy is highly related to the instability of a state (McCullough, 2015).

Kaplan reiterated the significance of identity in the formation of state legitimacy. He expressed that a “legitimate political order is usually built around a cohesive group and uses institutions that are a reflection of that group’s historical evolution” (Kaplan, 2009). According to Michael Hudson, a legitimate political order needs an agreement over the “national identity” and the “boundaries of the political community”, and “some collective understanding of national priorities”. “If the population within given political boundaries is so deeply divided within itself on ethnic or class lines, or if the demands of a larger supranational community are compelling to some [significant] portion of it, then it is extremely difficult to develop a legitimate order” (Hudson, 1977:389-390) (Kaplan, 2009).

Easterly (2000) argued that it was the legitimacy of institutions — not the number of identities — that reflected growth of a state, since multi-ethnicity was not considered a barrier to development or a hindrance to economic policies of countries establishing sound institutions (Easterly, 2000:12).

Kaplan traced the illegitimacy and poor governance that had pushed fragile states toward: (1) colonialism, separating “states from their environments, governments from their societies, and elites from their citizens”; (2) undermining local identities, capacities and institutions. Consequently, a frail state cannot “leverage its people’s histories and customs to construct effective formal institutions with wide legitimacy; nor can it draw on the social capital embedded in cohesive groups to facilitate economic, political, and social intercourse; and nor is it able to

employ the traditional governing capacities of its citizens to run the affairs of state” (Kaplan, 2009).

The Role of Religion/Ideology in the Legitimacy of State/Non-state

Actors:

According to McCullough, literature on the subject offers a miscellaneous depiction of the role of ideology and religion in forming the behaviors of states and non-state actors. In countries like Uzbekistan, where the state is conscious of the increased support for resistance movements using Islamic narratives for legitimacy, the state places great emphasis on the nationalist ideology to reinforce its claim to authority, further limiting the use of religious symbols. Other state actors, like the Libyan ruler Muammar Qaddafi, have aimed to strengthen their legitimacy, exploiting their Islamic identity by building mosques, for example. As for non-state groups, they have used ideology and religion to delegitimize prevailing authorities and inequality systems (McCullough, 2015).

Beetham (2013) claimed that only those who share analogous values and beliefs with a certain ideology or religion will provide legitimacy to utilize this ideology or religion in state-building (Beetham, 2013). McCullough used the Islamic Republic of Iran to illustrate her point, saying: “the legitimacy of the revolutionary Islamic Republic of Iran, based on its Islamic principles and rejection of liberal democratic philosophy, was accepted by a broad swathe of the more conservative/religious Iranians but was questioned by most of the non-Muslim West for precisely the same reasons” (McCullough, 2015).

In fragile states, which are usually multi-ethnic or multi-religious, non-state groups become stronger than the state governance. However, how can non-state groups gain legitimacy in such states? McCullough (2015) proposed a number of strategies in her guide: “(1) filling perceived gaps in state performance; (2) drawing on nationalist and religious ideological narratives to build a shared identity; (3) redistributing wealth through taxation; and (4) challenging existing states that are perceived as illegitimate by significant parts of the population” (McCullough, 2015).

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter clarified the prevailing theory behind identity formation: the constructivist theory. Constructivism addresses matters and notions that are abandoned by mainstream international relations theories, like realism. For instance, it shows that identities are formed and affected by fluctuating circumstances in a country, thus implying that it is always possible to witness the birth of new identities. Moreover, the reviewed literature showed that fragile states are most vulnerable vis-à-vis the rise of new sub- and supra-state identities. Consequently, this results in a weaker state that’s incapable of providing public services efficiently or inadequately in presenting itself as a neutral agent of wider communal interests.

The next chapter will build on the theories provided in this chapter to prove the fragility of the Lebanese state. It will reveal the how different identities were born in Lebanon by taking a close look into its history. It will also discuss the rivalry between the different sects over deciding the identity of Lebanon.

Chapter Three

Tug of War: Phoenicianism vs. Arabism

3.1 Introduction

Having celebrated its centenary in 2020, Lebanon is considered a young country. However, it has a long and rich history that dates back around 5,000 years. Like the Phoenicians, Banu 'Amilah, Maronites and Catholics, the Ottomans and French have played key roles in the nation's evolution. Unsurprisingly, a vast melting pot of cultures has resulted in the multiplicity of languages, political identifications and communities in Lebanon. Furthermore, globalization has added an additional layer of complexity to the case of Lebanese identity.

Many intellectuals have tried to define Lebanese nationalism over the past century. Some have recommended that Lebanon should adhere to its Arab heritage and its geographical location at the center of the Arab world, while others have emphasized the importance of an identity that honors the country's Phoenician roots and close relations with its Western colonizers. This "tug of war" has paved the way for sub- and supra-state identities to fill the vacuum. Thus, it is paramount to observe Lebanon's complex and layered history to understand its struggle in building a robust national identity.

3.2 Historical Background

The Phoenicians were the last civilization to occupy the geographic region currently known as Lebanon. After the fall of this great civilization, the early

Egyptians, followed by the Assyrians and then the Babylonians controlled Mount Lebanon and the Lebanese coastline. Later, these areas were ruled by the Persians and were then taken from them by the Romans. After the demise of the Roman Empire, Lebanon was governed as a Byzantine province, before the Arab conquest in the sixth century. Having converted to Islam, the Arabs were keen on spreading their religion (“Lebanon in the Middle Ages”).

Arab sovereignty in the Islamic world declined, leading to Turkish-Ottoman rule in Lebanon from the early 1500s until the end of the First World War. Despite 400-plus years of Ottoman control, Arabic remained the main language. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the French Mandate was established (1918 to 1943), before the declaration of independence and the rise of the state of Lebanon.

The 19th century was marked by economic growth, social change and political upheavals. The growing Christian population moved south and occupied towns. Toward the end of the century, countless Christians emigrated to North America, South America and Egypt. French-Catholic and American-Protestant mission schools multiplied, as did local community schools.

In 1866, the American mission established the Syrian Protestant College — known today as the American University of Beirut — and in 1875, the Jesuits founded Université Saint-Joseph. Such academic institutions produced a literate class, particularly among the Christians, that found employment as professionals. Beirut became a busy international port, and its merchant houses established connections with Egypt, the Mediterranean countries and England (“Lebanon in the Middle Ages”).

It is critical to note that despite the invasions of numerous civilizations, cities along the Lebanese coast were almost constantly governed independently as their

own distinct areas by these grand powers (Salibi, 1988). While Mount Lebanon created a natural barrier delineating this region, Salibi asserted that the common political and administrative history formed by the mountain acted as the foundation for the creation of Lebanon as an autonomous state detached from Syria (Salibi, 1988).

Another key factor relating to this natural geographical barrier was the migration of oppressed religious subgroups to Lebanon, who found safety in its isolated mountains and hidden coastal areas. The Maronites are among the most notable of these religious subgroups, arriving in Lebanon from Syria in the ninth century. They went on to become the largest Christian sect in Lebanon, as the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon converted to Maronite Catholicism.

Banu 'Amilah was another Christian denomination that found refuge in Lebanon. Its followers escaped persecution at the hands of Sunni Abbasids and Tulunids to settle in Jabal Amel (South Lebanon). This group converted to Shia because of its openness to alternative theologies espoused by Shia movements that occasionally threatened the Umayyads and later the Caliphates (Harris & Harris, 2014). This affinity to the Shia cause was strengthened following the capture of the family of Husayn ibn Ali — the grandson of the Islamic prophet Muhammad — in nearby Damascus, which occurred after the Battle of Karbala (Rubin, 2009). Identifying themselves as Shia, the Banu 'Amilah people were marginalized and persecuted under successive Sunni regimes up to and including the Ottoman Empire, following the defeat of the Crusaders from the Levant. As a result, they sought refuge and subsequently dispersed across Lebanon (Menken et al., 2010).

Other groups who made Lebanon their home include the Druze, a Muslim sect considered irreligious by many mainstream Muslims, and the Armenians, who fled genocide in Turkey during the First World War (Raymond, 2013).

Immigration in large numbers paved the way for a greatly mixed society, both religiously and ethnically; a fact that would come to define the modern history of Lebanon and play an important role in the loss of Lebanese identity. Hence, in this chapter, I will investigate the two main concepts behind the clash over identity in Lebanon: Phoenicianism and Arabism.

3.3 Phoenicianism

The Theory:

During the 19th century, the Maronites of Mount Lebanon sculpted the notion of a “nation.” Religious diversity was at the heart of this idea. Diversity was represented by the alignment of Maronites, Sunnis and Druze to form a nation, where Maronites asserted supremacy (Hourani, 1976: 33-41). During this period, Maronite ideologists developed the theory of Phoenicianism. It denotes that the same people have primordially inhabited Lebanon since the time of the Phoenicians and explains how the ancient Phoenician culture was preserved by the Phoenicians moving to the mountain areas, revived in the novel nation of Lebanon. The Maronites wanted to resurrect Phoenician civilization in the independent nation of Lebanon (Hourani, 1976: 33-41). They claimed that Lebanon was not only “Hellenized and Westernized” but also “non-Islamic and non-Arabic” (Khalaf, 1976: 43-57). While it was acknowledged that the Arabic language had been embraced, the idea of Arabism was rejected, as intermarriage between Maronites and Arabs was uncommon (Kaufman, 2004). This theory supported the governing Maronite institution with a historical rationalization for the presence of a Greater Lebanon. In Kaufman's view,

Phoenicianism, as the national non-Arab identity of Lebanon, continued to be articulated by a select group of Christians in Beirut and in the mountains. Thus, according to Kaufman, two kinds of Phoenicianism existed and were thriving shoulder to shoulder by the 1950s and 1960s. One was the “cult of the ancestors,” as articulated by intellectuals from Beirut, who regarded the ancient Phoenicians as the forefathers of cosmopolitan, liberal and open-minded Lebanon. The second was embedded in the ideology of Christian Lebanese nationalism that continued to view Lebanon as a Christian non-Arab neo-Phoenicia in a predominantly Arab-Muslim region. In 1975, this kind of Phoenicianism became the dominant ideology.

Indeed, this theory was promoted by a number of Lebanese intellectuals. For example, Yusuf al-Saouda (1888 – 1970), a jurist who worked for an association that supported the notion of Lebanese independence, wrote in his 1919 published work “Fi Sabeel Lubnan” that the “national characteristics” of the Lebanese people were inherited from the Phoenicians (Saouda, 1919). Salibi (1971) supported this stance, putting forth the idea of the Lebanese and Phoenicians as natural traders at the crossroads of the East and West. He added that the modern Lebanese people walked the walk of their Phoenician ancestors in playing the role of cultural mediators, standing at the meeting gate between the East and the West.

Another intellectual and enthusiast of Phoenicianism was Michel Chiha, a prominent Lebanese banker who participated in achieving independence for the state of Lebanon. According to Chiha, this state was meant to continue the commercial legacy of the Phoenicians. He believed that the Lebanese had the necessary tools to embrace this role because they understood both worlds — the East and the West — and encouraged them to hold on to traditions, customs and language. “This identification of the soul and the thought that connects us, the Lebanese, with the

Latin West is so strong that we cannot abandon it without abandoning ourselves” (Chiha, 1919: 91-2).

The Lebanese poet Charles Qorm (1894–1962) also supported Phoenicianism, evidenced by “Revue Phoénicienne,” a journal he released in 1919. This periodical helped the advancement of this theory (Kaufman, 1920: 173-94).

Another proponent of the Phoenicianist cause was the Lebanese philosopher and poet Said Akl, who tried to revive the Phoenician alphabet by teaching it to his college scholars (Kaufman, 2004).

Genetics:

When Phoenicianism was in its early stages, its advocates could only rely on cultural artifacts and language to substantiate a Phoenician lineage. However, these claims were to be scientifically proven by the beginning of the 20th century, with progress in genetics. Research was conducted to link the genetic lineage of Lebanon’s residents to the Phoenicians (The History of DNA Timeline, 2013). A genetic marker was discovered in the Lebanese population, which was also present in other communities where Phoenicians had once lived (Abed, 2017). In addition, according to the American Journal of Human Genetics, a study released in 2017 proved that 93% of the DNA of the modern Lebanese citizen is shared with 3,700-year-old Phoenician remains discovered in the port city of Sidon (Regalado, 2018). Moreover, no major variance was detected between the DNA of Lebanese Muslims and Christians. “The Lebanese genome is not widely varied. As a whole, the Lebanese people have more genetic overlap with the Canaanites from Sidon than do other modern Middle Eastern populations such as the Jordanians, Syrians or Palestinians” (Abed, 2017). This shows that most Maronites and Muslims in

Lebanon are the descendants of native converts to these religions rather than immigrants.

However, new realities in Lebanon in the late 1920s and 1930s required the Phoenician cause to be abandoned, at least in part; after all, the Lebanese state established in 1920 was not a Maronite national homeland with a homogeneous Maronite population

3.4 Arabism

Between 1936 and 1945, Lebanon metamorphosed from a “foyer of French influence” and a Maronite homeland, as perceived by the founders of Grand Liban, to a country with an “Arab face,” as declared by the leaders of Lebanon’s first independent government in 1943. This formula was intended to initiate a period of conciliatory relations between Lebanon and Arab nationalism by providing a solution that would accommodate both the aspirations of the Lebanese nationalists (and their French protectors) to safeguard the country's sovereignty and independence, and the unionist aims of the Arab nationalists.

In the years preceding the end of the Second World War, there was increasing disenchantment with the French authorities, which, in turn, was partially amplified by a number of serious mistakes committed by French officials in the Levant. This led some Lebanese nationalists to join Arab nationalists in forming an alliance, which produced the “Arab face” formula. It provided a framework for the new ruling coalition to initiate a number of major steps, such as the declaration of Lebanese independence, the reassertion of Arabic as the official language of the state, the conclusion of an agreement over common interests with Syria and membership of the League of Arab States. The “Arab face” blueprint was, however, set down in vague terms, which implied to some Lebanese that Lebanon was “less Arab” than other

Arab states. The Lebanese nationalists who interpreted the formula as Lebanon being less Arab than others suggested that by agreeing to conclude the National Pact, the Arab nationalists had abandoned the cause of Arab unity and had accepted Lebanon as an “eternal” state.

The role of history was implicit to the drafters of the Ta'if Accord. They were aware of the fact that the civil war was, in large part, a battle over Lebanon's identity and its place within the Arab sphere. The accord, therefore, begins and concludes with the following statements: “Lebanon is Arab in belonging and identity” and “Lebanon, with its Arab identity, is tied to all the Arab countries by true fraternal relations.” The accord is the first official document that states in no uncertain terms the national identity of Lebanon. However, preoccupation with Lebanon’s Arabism in the Ta'if Accord is so explicit that one wonders if, by insisting on its Arab-ness, the drafters wanted to address the issue because they knew that for many Lebanese the identity of their country was ambiguous.

For some Lebanese intellectuals, Arabism implied ending the context of an independent state of Lebanon and merging its territory with the greater Arab entity. Antoun Saade was one of the Lebanese Greek Orthodox intellectuals who created the National Syrian Social Party and proposed the idea of a Greater Syrian nation by uniting Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and Cyprus. Many followed Saade’s movement, especially those among the Greek Orthodox community, to unite the Greek Orthodox of the Middle East (Beshara, n.d.).

Another advocate of Greater Syria was Nadra Moutran, who joined in the Arab Congress in Paris in 1913 to discuss the future of the Ottoman Arab provinces. However, Moutran’s Greater Syria differed from that of Saade, as his position toward Syria was close to that of the French commercial and colonial circles. In his

1916 book “La Syrie Demain” Moutran defines Lebanon as: “an integral part of Syria. From the historical, ethnographical and commercial point of view, they should not be distinguished” (Moutran, 1916).

3.5 Sectarian Dimensions of Affiliations to Phoenicianism and Arabism

The issue of sectarianism is not new in Lebanon. In fact, it began with the arrival and settlement of different sectarian groups affiliated to the aforementioned identities, striving to serve their own needs and benefits.

Catholic Christians, for instance, have used Phoenicianism as the shield that protects their presence at the heart of the Arab-Muslim world against any regional interference. They had to distinguish themselves from their neighbors to highlight their own cultural uniqueness and emphasize the historical kinship of their community. Moreover, they were fearful of being swamped by a Muslim hinterland. Thus, they also made strong ties with the West, especially France, to safeguard additional protection.

The ties between France and the Maronites began with the reign of the Crusaders in the region, an era in which the Vatican embraced the Maronite Church. The French officially “extended the borders of the Mt. Lebanon province to include all of what is now Lebanon” (Refugees, n.d.). This was done to enhance the political situation of the Maronite community, whose population would exceed that of the Sunni Muslims in the new district. Hence, the Maronite Church provided the foundation for a separate non-Arab ancestry.

However, their fear created “Maronite hegemony” and not a civic state, which, according to Salibi, led to the failure of the Lebanese state. In Salibi’s words:

“Had the concept of Lebanese nationality, as advanced by the Maronites, been a truly civic one, rationally and realistically interpreted within the broader context of Arabism, its chances of success as the basis of a Lebanese state acceptable to all its peoples would have been good” (Salibi 1988: 53).

Chibli said: “Arabism, originally a reaction to Ottomanism, eventually established its own dominant ideological framework” (Chibli, 2006:6). In her book “The Shi‘is of Jabal ‘Amil and the New Lebanon,” Chibli went on to say: “Arab nationalism has been an expression of the ideological enframent of the Sunni majority. There is an implicit hierarchy in the Arab national community, the criteria for the top level being Arab, Sunni, and urban.” Consequently, Sunni Muslims adhered to the ideology of Arabism to gain power over Maronite hegemony. The Lebanese Sunni Muslims initially opposed the creation of a Lebanese state separated from Syria, where the majority of the population was also Sunni Muslim, and wanted the territory of present-day Lebanon to be incorporated within the so-called Greater Syria (Pipes, 1992).

The Greek Orthodox also supported the idea of belonging to Greater Syria. As previously mentioned, the Greek Orthodox intellectual Antoun Saade’ created the National Syrian Social Party to unite the Greek Orthodox of the Middle East.

However, Druzes in Lebanon have willingly complied with the concept of a Greater Lebanon since “they understood very well the nature of pan-Arabism and were not particularly eager to fall under Sunni domination” (Reinkowski, 1997: 503).

3.6 The Position of the Shiites in this Tug of War’

Regarding the Shiite sect, scholars have agreed on their poor social status, illiteracy and marginalization throughout the 20th century (Beydoun, 1984), (Shaery-

Eisenlohr, 2008), (Calabi, 2006). After World War I, the communities present in the Arab Ottoman provinces had to identify themselves with a certain political allegiance. However, unlike the Christians who identified with the West and the Sunnis who identified with the Arab world, the Shiites were unsure of where they belonged. Confronted by the collapse of the Ottoman state and the rivalry between colonial powers and emerging local players, they found themselves without a clearly defined political allegiance (Chalabi, 2006:3). Beydoun (1984) argued that the Shiites, a marginalized group, were torn between the idea of remaining within their own community and being part of the state (Beydoun 1984: 119).

Between 1918 and 1920, the period of the Arab government, the Shiites shifted away “from the Arab/Greater Syria nationalist discourse in favor of a Lebanese national integration approach” due to the “transformation of Arab nationalism from being an ideology of opposition, protest, and empowerment of marginal communities (whether Arab Muslim, Christian, or rural) to becoming a tool for the assertion of political domination by the majority” (Chalabi, 2006: 6).

Despite this traditional dichotomy that crystallized after the independence of Lebanon, the Shiites were left out and weren't able to fully integrate into either of the two rival identities. In addition, the Shiites' historic political subjugations, being excluded from the state, weren't fulfilled by any of these identities. The sect remained excluded both socially and politically. Other sects, especially Christians, saw them as a backward class. They also carried relatively little political weight in the government. Norton (1987) claimed that by the 1960s, Shiites exceeded 30% of the Lebanese population, but they were only given 20% of seats in Parliament (Norton, 1987: 109-111).

Consequently, the Shiites questioned Lebanese identity being Phoenician or Arab solely, which further hampered their integration. Chalabi (2006) emphasized in her book on the limited ability of the Shiite community “to integrate with the nationalist (Arab) or national (Lebanese) narrative, leaving it with the option of a subnational narrative focused on South Lebanon” (Chalabi, 2006: 5). Hence, the Shiites took advantage of this predicament to adhere to a new sub-national identity that would reflect who they really are, giving them the power to make other sects notice their presence.

3.7 Conclusion

Inter-confessional rivalries and denominational allegiances remain argumentative and extremely entrenched in the histories of groups who have lived in Lebanon. Lebanese entity lacks unity and cultural cohesion; differences are ideologically regulated and seemingly incompatible. Christians continue to have strong political and cultural ties with Western countries, while Sunni Muslims, in response to Westernization, have sought to privilege their own beliefs and traditions and adhere to their Arabism. On the other hand, the marginalized Shiites found themselves left with no other choice than to create a unique sub-state identity, subsequently upgrading it to a supra-state identity.

Chapter Four

The Lebanese Shiites: The Search for Identity

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we established that weaker states are more vulnerable to fostering novel identities. Being fragile, Lebanon has witnessed the rise of various identities throughout its history and has lacked the ability to cultivate a clearly unified national identity for its citizens. Hence, each communal group has had to adhere to an identity reflecting its distinctiveness and fulfilling its interests. Just like the Christians, who embraced Phoenicianism and the Western identity, and the Sunnis, who clung to Arabism — which became their prevailing identity — the Shiites sought an identity that would support them as a community, empower them and secure their presence in the nation-state of Lebanon.

This chapter introduces the peculiarity of sectarian affiliations in the Lebanese nation-state while paying particular attention to the unique characteristics of the Shiite community. Firstly, this chapter will present the case of Shiism through an analysis of the history of Shiites in Lebanon. The rise of Hezbollah will then be analyzed to understand how the party became a power booster to the Lebanese Shiite community. Finally, this chapter will delve into the relationship between velayat e-Faqih and the Shiites to help rationalize the escalation of transnational velayat-e identity.

4.2 A Vague History of the Lebanese Shiites

Although Lebanon is considered a relatively small country, historians have spent much time and ink narrating its history. Nevertheless, the Shiite population has received the least amount of press. “Crossroads to Civil War: Lebanon 1958-1976” by Kamal S. Salibi and “Civil War in Lebanon: 1975-92” by Edgar O’Ballance scrutinized the Lebanese Civil War, with a special focus on the Christian and Palestinian communities (Salibi, 1976) (O’Ballance, 1998). “Faces of Lebanon” by William Harris, on the other hand, is a social examination of all the Lebanese sects, although it mainly observes the Lebanese Christians (Harris, 1997). Moreover, Chalabi’s book “The Shi’Is of Jabal ‘Amil and the New Lebanon: Community and Nation-State” critiques the writings of the prominent economist and writer Michel Chiha, who participated in the founding of Greater Lebanon. She highlighted Chiha’s disregard of the Shiites inhabiting the region of Jabal Amil, stating: “Chiha realized the agricultural potential of the south for Lebanon, particularly in citrus cultivation. He talked of the country’s obligations to this region, and admitted that it had been abandoned, while reiterating that it was an extension of ‘our Mountain.’ Yet he also suggested a need for populating it, and was seemingly oblivious to the fact that there was a population that had lived there for centuries and which by 1943 had grown to approximately 200,000. His indifference to, and ignorance of, its inhabitants is a perfect example of the elite’s attitude toward ‘Southerners,’ the ‘Amilis’ in particular” (Chalabi, 2006: 89).

Scarcity of information regarding Lebanese Shiite history in books and articles mirrors the way in which this community has been viewed throughout history. With this in mind, “The Shi’Is of Jabal ‘Amil and the New Lebanon:

Community and Nation-State” has provided much-needed insight into the history of this sect in Lebanon. Chalabi’s (2006) book opens with:

“The narrative I write about was in many ways so hidden, so obscure, so denied that even its own participants have frequently not accepted or acknowledged its existence. Searching for it has been an adventure and this adventure itself—the challenges of self-denial and disenfranchisement associated with the ‘Amilis of South Lebanon—has been probably the most illuminating feature of this book, which is about the formation of the Shi‘i Lebanese identity throughout the turbulent 1918–1943 period” (Chalabi, 2006: 1).

Chalabi (2006) wrote that the Lebanese Shiites’ view of their identity is intermixed with Twelver Shiite history, encompassing the time between Imam Ali, the first Imam, and the wait for the 12th Imam, the Mahdi, in his occultation. Although the scope of this research does not cover the progress of Twelver Shiite Islam, it is crucial to pause at two major milestones in this historical account, which are directly related to identity formation of the community in question. The first is the martyrdom of the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, Imam Hussein, in Karbala’s battle; and the second is the occultation of the 12th Imam, the Mahdi.

The first marker has shaped the structure of Shiite thought and has helped to create Shiite consciousness, because this sect could never overcome the “suppression of the essence of truth and justice” represented by the martyrdom of their holy imams (Chalabi, 2006: 160). However, the second milepost is indicative of the reparation of injustice, which is achieved by the comeback of the Mahdi, who will spread righteousness and “signal the end of the world” (Chalabi, 2006: 161). In essence, the

Shiite notion of history comprises of mourning a painful past and looking ahead to a victorious future.

The history of the Shiites in Lebanon, one shrouded in oppression and demographic flow, became an extension to their inherited traumatic past. Shiism prospered in Lebanon with the dynasty of Bani Mirdas in the 11th century. Shiites occupied the southern and northern coastline of Lebanon. However, in the 13th century, the Mamluks committed massacres against the Shiites inhabiting Keserwan and the north of Lebanon, prompting an exodus toward the south (Chalabi, 2006: 162). Oppression against the Shiites continued in the 16th and 17th centuries. The two leading Shiite scholars in Jabal Amil, Sheikh Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Makki and Sheikh Zein al-Din ibn Nour al-Din Ali, were executed while pursuing truth and justice. They are regarded as the first and second martyrs in the Shiite faith. In addition, Mustapha Kamal Pasha's brutality in Jabal Amil in the 16th century is still etched on the minds of Shiites, especially among clerics. Pasha burned libraries, thereby attempting to wipe out Shiite legacy.

4.3 The Shiites in the Time of Grand Liban

In 1920, following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire — a time when European colonialists carved the nation-state of Grand Liban out of Greater Syria — French colonialists occupied the regions of the Bekaa and the South. The Shiites strongly resisted this occupation; thus, the French authorities founded a specific administrative arm to gain control over the South. They controlled local and parliamentary elections, applied political reconnaissance and imposed harsh tax penalties and economic sanctions (Abisaab & Abisaab, 2014). Mutual social history and economic ties between South Lebanon and northern Palestine was disturbed by

the British annexation of Palestine and the aggressive Zionist movement in northern Palestine and the South. These complex circumstances prevented the unification of Lebanon's South and Palestine, leaving the Shiites inhabiting the southern region as a religious minority (Abisaab & Abisaab, 2014: 26).

Meanwhile, Shiites complained of economic disparities, diminution in local manufacture and scarcity of transferable water. They had poor methods for distributing water and wells in the region needed repair. Transportation networks in the South were rudimentary and the roads linking the South to littoral cities were unpaved. Education and health amenities were underdeveloped. Furthermore, Shiites had an inconspicuous role in the government (Abisaab & Abisaab, 2014: 30). These factors made it hard for southerners to develop the feeling of belonging to Grand Lebanon and reignited the interest in uniting with Syria.

Due to these conditions and the harsh attitude of French colonialists toward Shiites, farmworkers in the South — supported by a group of public figures and religious scholars — revolted against the rule of the French in 1936 (Abisaab & Abisaab, 2014: 28). However, the French quelled the revolution and tried to force the southerners to abandon their thoughts of a Syrian unification in favor of a Greater Lebanon. Notable figures, leaders in the South and clerics found resistance futile and joined Grand Lebanon to attain security and economic relief. In the absence of backing from the upper classes, the peasants were unable to withstand a long-term revolt and withdrew in exchange for tax relief and exemption from economic sanctions and taxes (Abisaab & Abisaab, 2014: 34).

In the absence of a practical and robust ideology, Shiite intellectuals were left with limited choices. The first was to abandon their mission of uniting with the Arabs, thus approving their ideological fragility and political weakness. The second

was to follow ideological movements such as Syrian, Communist and Arab nationalist movements. In fact, many of those who studied in Najaf joined such movements after the independence of Lebanon. The Communist Party had the greatest uptake among the Shiite because of its attitude toward communal change and justice. The magnetic appeal of the party was due to its call for two basic demands of the Shiites: justice and social change. Moreover, this secular party was viewed as one that could free the Shiites from being stigmatized as a religious minority. Although the first two options secured the inclusion of the Shiites in Grand Lebanon, they still represented some degree of alienation. Therefore, a third option — which was not applicable at the time — was to advance the Shiites' unique ideology, empowering them among present ideologies.

4.4 The Shiites after the Independence of Lebanon

A scaffold of religious communities, which was favored by a compulsory power, created a delicate balance in Lebanon and gave birth to the Lebanese National Pact in 1943. This unwritten pact declared the independence of Lebanon. Consequently, the last French soldiers hesitantly withdrew from Lebanon by 1946. The slightly Christian majority had the upper hand in government — the position of president and a 6:5 Christian to Muslim ratio in parliament (Salamey, 2013). However, it wasn't long before the threads of the National Pact began to unravel.

The dissolution began in 1948, with the announcement of the state of Israel on the Land of Palestine, which led to an ongoing war with Israel. More than 150,000 Palestinian refugees forcibly or voluntarily arrived in Lebanon and created bases to stage their guerilla attacks against Israel. Yasser Arafat led these fighters in Lebanon

under the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) after being expelled from Jordan in 1970 following the “Black Saturday” conflict. The fragile state of Lebanon attracted these fighters because of its internal divisions. Existence of the PLO in the South resulted in the influx of Shiites into Beirut due to insecurity and economic backwardness. However, relocation wasn’t the best solution, as there were insufficient jobs to satisfy the large number of southern migrants. Moreover, frustrations grew among the Muslims, as they outnumbered the Christians in the following decades. In the 1960s, the Shiite population accounted for more than 30% of the population, but they were allocated only 20% of parliamentary seats (Norton, 1985: 109-11). Meanwhile, the Shiite community prepared itself to welcome a new game changer, the cleric Musa al-Sadr, who would transform their desperate situation and boost their power to become a primary player in the Lebanese battle for identity.

The Lebanese cleric Musa al-Sadr, who was born in Iran, became the religious judge of Tyr by the age of 31. He acknowledged the social problems facing the Shiites, thus he sought to empower and unite them against oppression. Al-Sadr greeted Lebanon for the dialog between the different communities, which creates an inter-communal acceptance. (Norton, 1985:109-11)

Al-Sadr never saw violence as a way to achieve change for the Shiite community. He believed that political sectarianism was not a solution for Lebanese society; instead, he saw that the “establishment of the state of believers,” based on the “oneness of God” for Christians and Muslims, was the way forward to unite the Lebanese people (Shaery-Eisenlohr, 2008: 26). Thus, al-Sadr rapidly gained a support from the Lebanese society as a whole.

A decade and a half proved sufficient for al-Sadr to reveal his alluring image among the Shiites, following his arrival in Lebanon in 1960. He used his position to raise greater political awareness among the Shiites, many of whom gravitated toward different secular and leftist parties — particularly the Lebanese Communist party — due to the absence of a single organization that subjugated Shiite politics (Norton, 1985: 113). In 1969, al-Sadr established The Supreme Shiite Council, a state institution that would unite Shiite scholars, clerics, and politicians. In addition, this council treated the Shiites and Sunnis as equals for the first time in Lebanese history, because it was able to isolate Shiite legal matters from the Sunni jurisdictional system.

In the early 1970s, two camps emerged: the Christian-majority camp, which believed that they shouldn't interfere in Palestinian affairs; and the Muslim-majority camp, which made the Palestinian issue their primary concern. While Shiite militancy was still absent at this time, al-Sadr began to mold a movement among the Shiites, with obvious signs of a civil war on the horizon.

After the deterioration of security in South Lebanon following PLO insurgence, it became challenging for the Supreme Shiite Council to ameliorate the Shiites' dire situation. Lebanon rapidly metamorphosed into a land of militias, and the Lebanese Army lost its ability to defend Lebanese citizens. Musa al-Sadr was irritated and continuously reiterated the necessity of taking up arms.

At a gathering of his armed followers in March 1974, al-Sadr blamed the government for neglecting its grassroots' basic needs. At this rally, al-Sadr formed "The Movement of the Deprived" to support the social needs of underprivileged Shiites until these needs were sufficiently provided by the government. The onset of war in 1975 signaled a major turning point, as this movement formed an armed wing called AMAL to deal with the novel situation (Norton & Binder, 1987: 46-48).

Interestingly, while AMAL is the acronym of Afwaj al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniya, or the Lebanese Resistance Units, the word also means “hope” in Arabic.

Musa al-Sadr’s religiousness and activism were reflected in the movement’s charter. Its first article expresses Amal’s faith in God and how faith in man’s dignity, sovereignty and movement is linked to God. The second article minutes the contributions made by Arab civilizations to math and science, and pledges commitment to this legacy. Al-Sadr recalls several prominent Shiite figures and mentions the struggles of the prophets of the three heavenly religions to demonstrate the openness of this movement to other religions. The third article discourses human rights and the freedom of religion and thought. This article also states “conditional economic freedom,” which must be limited by regulations that reserve the communal rights of citizens. It also calls for revolution against corruption and “the rejection of worldly idols to find true freedom in the worship of God.” In addition, the charter comprises “the duty to combat political feudalism” through dwindling the dominance of the traditional Shiite leaders. Al-Sadr believed that “political feudalists” didn’t miss out on the chance to abuse sectarianism to serve their own benefits at the expense of national unity (Norton & Binder, 1987: 147-159). The fifth and sixth articles focus on Lebanon’s independence and refuse any kind of imperialism or colonialism. This was emphasized in Amal’s mission against Israel, the “entity” viewed by Amal as an “imperialist presence in the Arab World” to be removed. The charter concludes with the assertion that Amal refuses any kind of discrimination between citizens and avoids sectarian extremism (Norton & Binder, 1987:161-166).

Musa al-Sadr’s aim was to diminish the power of traditional landlords; therefore, Amal existed as an alternative to its presence via intensifying the power of the Shiite clerics. He also believed in the importance of Amal in fighting Israeli

invasions in the South, since Shiites were frequently dragged into the conflict between PLO guerrillas and Israeli forces. In al-Sadr's own words, this movement: "responded to the call of the wounded homeland...in days when Israeli assaults on southern Lebanon reached their peak while authorities were not performing their duty in defending the homeland and the citizens" (Maasri, 2009: 65).

Amal held onto its frail political and militant position until 1978, because al-Sadr didn't want his efforts in forming the "bottom-up" grassroots movement to be masked by his militant group. He sought to make Amal an organization that work with the system of the Lebanese government (Deeb, 1988: 685-686). However, the militant wing of the Movement of the Deprived eventually merged with Amal. In 1978, Musa al-Sadr's popularity began to diminish due to instability caused by the Lebanese Civil War. Moreover, after the brief Israeli invasion of South Lebanon in 1978, an act that aimed to antagonize PLO guerillas, UN forces were deployed to the region and a security zone was established by Israel at its border with Lebanon. The aftermath of this outbreak was a devastating blow for the Shiites, who were gaining recognition due to Musa al-Sadr. One could argue that al-Sadr should have empowered the militant wing of Amal for the Shiites to continue this upward trajectory. However, he vanished during a visit to Libya that year, which obliterated any chance of change in his movement. Many Shiites viewed his disappearance as an incarnation of the occultation of their twelfth Imam, which made al-Sadr regain his status among the Shiites (Norton, 1985: 114). It is interesting to note that after his disappearance, Musa al-Sadr became more known. Even today, posters of him can be found in Shiite areas.

Following al-Sadr's disappearance, a historic event took place that would become the base block upon which the Shiites of the world would build a victorious

future. For the first time in history, the Shiites were given the chance to rule a country. The Leader of the Iranian Revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, defeated Iran's Shah in February 1979 and established the first Shiite Islamic state, the Islamic Republic of Iran. The founding of a non-Arab Shiite state significantly empowered the Shiites of Lebanon and gave them a novel transnational identity. Just like Musa al-Sadr, Ayatollah Khomeini became a prominent figure in Lebanon, and the Shiites expected that they could improve their standard of living by replicating the Iranian Revolution in Lebanon. After this event, some Shiites in Lebanon started believing that the Islamic principles would free them from their marginalization and oppression. In addition, they believed that the Amal movement was promoting sectarian clashes among Muslims, which would eventually lead to its failure (Ajami, 2012). On the other hand, mainstream Lebanese Shiites dismissed replicating the Islamic Republic inside a multi-sectarian country like Lebanon. Disparities emerged among Shiites within Amal concerning the founding of an Islamic state in Lebanon; yet external forces were needed to persuade the Iranian supporters to abandon this movement.

An ideological cleft appeared between Shiites after the Iranian experience; however, the main catalyst for division was the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Shiite-heavy regions were gravely affected as Israeli forces entered the South and moved toward Beirut (NORTON, 1985: 118). Meanwhile, the Lebanese president Elias Sarkis formed a transitional government under a U.S. sponsored committee, The Committee of National Salvation. Nabih Berri, the Shiite speaker of parliament and Amal's leader, assisted this committee as well. The committee arranged a Lebanese-Israeli Accord in 1983, allowing the Israeli Army to patrol South Lebanon along with the Lebanese Army and empowered the Israeli proxy militia, the South

Lebanon Army. According to the Shiites, this accord secured Israeli control over Lebanon, so they perceived Berri's involvement in this committee as deplorable (Ajami, 2012).

Meanwhile, Amal's leadership suffered from political and geographical fragmentation, and its clerics lacked the same influence that Musa al-Sadr had. This fragile leadership, along with the Iranian Revolution's influence and Israel's annexation of Lebanon, led to the formation of new Shiite-led organizations.

The official spokesman of Amal, Hussein al-Musawi, faulted the leadership for supporting the Israeli annexation of the South. He then abandoned the movement and created a new Iranian-supported organization that would establish an Islamic state in Lebanon (Deeb, 1988: 686-689). This organization later merged with the newly formed group known as the "Party of God" or "Hezbollah," one that significantly repositioned Shiites in Lebanon (Deeb, 1988: 694).

4.5 The Rise of Hezbollah

Hezbollah formed in the shadows as a secret organization devoted to fighting Israel. In June 1982, Sheikh Ragheb Harb and Sheikh Sohbi Tufaily, two of the leading Lebanese clerics who were at an annual Shiite Islamic conference in Iran at the same time as the start of the Israeli invasion, thought of establishing an Iranian-sculpted military wing to fight Israel (Jaber, 1997: 47-48). By November the same year, Ahmad Kassir killed around a hundred Israeli soldiers by carrying out a martyrdom operation in which he drove a truck loaded with explosives into an Israeli army building in South Lebanon. Hezbollah adopted this operation in 1984, memorializing the event on a poster declaring Ahmad Kassir as "the pioneer of martyrdom operations" (Maasri, 2008: 94).

Sayyid Mohammad Hussein Fadlullah, an influential Shiite cleric, became a prominent religious and political figure for Shiite activists. Although he was thought to be Hezbollah's spiritual leader, Fadlullah disclaimed being the leader of any movement (Norton, 1985: 119).

In 1983, Hezbollah was still a hidden organization. Headed by a federation of clerics, who discussed Islamism as the key to Lebanon's problems, it only had around 300 troops (Nasrallah, 2007: 95). It was only in 1984, on the second anniversary of the Sabra and Shatila massacre — the Christian Phalange militia was circuitously assisted by Israel to perform this massacre — that Hezbollah came out of the darkness

In 1985, Hezbollah distributed its open letter and became an official body, declaring itself as an "Islamic Resistance" movement. Sheikh Sobhi Tofaily, who initially assisted in the creation of Hezbollah, turned out to be its first official leader (Jaber, 1997: 47).

Following in the footsteps of Ayatollah Khomeini, Hezbollah prohibited any settlements with the United States and Israel, believed to be a malicious alliance. It avowed its devotion to liberate the whole land of Palestine from the Zionist entity (Usher, 1997: 62). In 1986, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, who was appointed the secretary-general of Hezbollah in 1992, declared in an interview that the establishment of Israel was aiming to divide the Islamic world and that Hezbollah wanted to unite the worldwide Muslim community. He also rejected the division of the Islamic world into several states and affirmed Lebanon was part of the Muslim community, denying the fact that Hezbollah would enforce Islam on Lebanese citizens (Nasrallah, 2007: 32). This perception reveals Hezbollah's adaptation to the fact that Lebanon is a multi-religious country.

4.6 The Identity of Hezbollah

Although Hezbollah's origins lie within the Lebanese Shiite community, it focused on belonging to the greater Islamic Ummah or "the Muslim nation of the world" rather than the land of Lebanon in its open letter published on February 16, 1985.

"We are the sons of the faction of God, and we consider ourselves an integral part of the Muslim nation in the world, facing the most arrogant assault of imperialism, from the West and from the East, whose aim is to drain it of the prophetic charge with which God has graced it" (Avon et al., 2012: 105).

By this point, the Shiites had passed through decades of oppression and marginalization. They didn't relate to the ideologies of Phoenicianism or Arabism. Therefore, a subgroup that could compete with Phoenicianism that was supported by the West, and Arabism that was supported by the Arab world, needed to have a macro view to gain power and become a player on the field. It had to target supporters beyond its borders, even beyond the region.

The victory of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 empowered the oppressed Shiites around the world, especially in Lebanon, and gave them hope that they could change their pitiful reality. Thus, no supporters could be better than the Iranians themselves. Meanwhile, the Leader of the Iranian Revolution also set himself up as the Wali al-Faqih or (the guardian jurist), considered the representative of the twelfth Imam in his occultation. This doctrine became the argument upon which Hezbollah's ideology was built. This was also made clear in the open letter:

"We are the sons of the faction of God. He granted victory to our vanguard in Iran. That vanguard has once again founded the nucleus of the central state of Islam in the world. We are enlisted under the orders of a single leadership, wise and just,

represented by the power (wali) of the jurist-theologian uniting all conditions. That leadership is at present incarnated by the imam, the supreme ayatollah Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini—may his shadow remain— who launched the revolution of the Muslims and who instigated their glorious rebirth. On these foundations, we in Lebanon are not an organized party closed upon itself, nor do we confine ourselves within a narrow political framework...” (Avon et al., 2012: 106).

Hezbollah gained an even larger scale of resemblance because it presented itself as “a community connected to Muslims from every corner of the world” including “Muslims in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in the Philippines, or anywhere else assaults the body of the Muslim nation”. They “take great pains to confront that fact, based on a legal obligation and in light of an overall political conception, determined by the authority [wilayat] of the jurist-theologian commander” (Avon et al., 2012: 106).

This subordination to velayat el-Faqih provided the Shiites in Lebanon with a strong back to lean on in fighting Israeli attacks. Hezbollah received military training in Iran, as well as financial support and weaponry, things Iran still provides it with. Hence, for the first time in Shiite history, the sect felt secure in the presence of Hezbollah under the umbrella of velayat el-Faqih.

With the birth of Hezbollah, Lebanon witnessed the genesis of the velayat-e identity among Shiites, which was nurtured with every victory for Hezbollah. This identity propagated within the Shiite community until it reached its peak after the end of the 2006 war. On July 26, 2006, the Beirut Center for Research and Information conducted a poll revealing that 87% of Lebanese supported Hezbollah's reciprocal attacks on Israel (Singh, 2020).

This percentage increased in February in a similar survey. Strikingly, non-Shiite communities showed greater support for Hezbollah resistance. More than 80% of Sunnis, Christians and Druze declared their support for Hezbollah (Blanford, 2006).

This victory empowered Hezbollah locally and regionally, where Hezbollah's political position became stronger, as seen by Lebanese citizens after the end of this war.

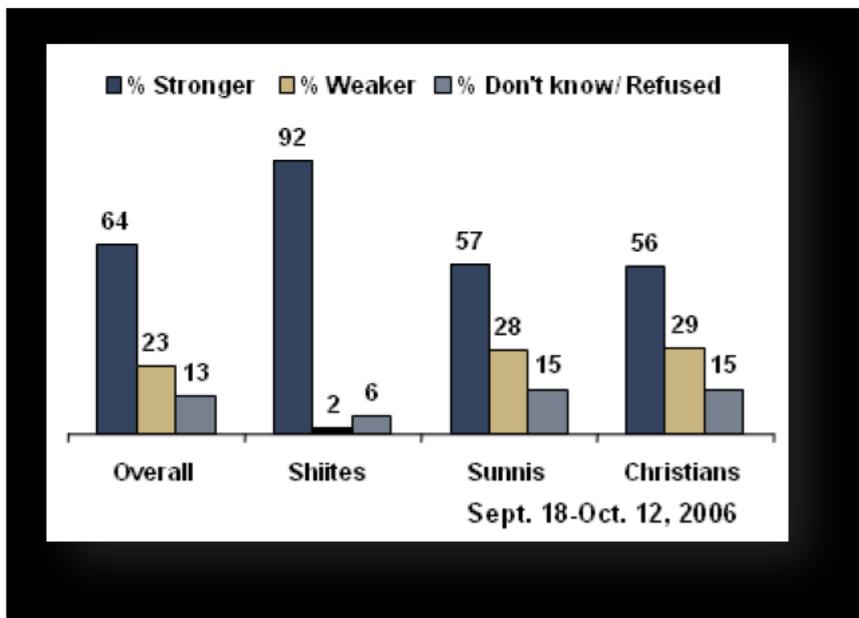


Fig. 1: A bar chart representing the results of a poll conducted in 2006 to identify opinions among Lebanese citizens regarding Hezbollah's political power after the end of the 2006 war in Lebanon (Gallup, 2006)

Figure 1 shows the percentage of Lebanese citizens who considered Hezbollah to be politically stronger following the 2006 war in Lebanon. It reveals that the majority (64%) of those interviewed believed that Hezbollah's political position became stronger. More than half of the Sunnis and Christians thought the same. As for the Shiites, more than 90% believed in the strength of this Islamic political party. Hezbollah was viewed as the savior by Shiites' who yearned for security and protection from oppression and marginalization.

Hezbollah's ideology didn't change over time; it sustained its allegiance to velayat el-Faqih, creating its velayat-e identity. Velayat el-Faqih is not tied to a certain nationality, rather it is related to the vali el-Faqih himself. Thus, in theory velayat el-Faqih is not restricted to Iran, and it could be in any country where a person fulfills the criteria of a vali el-Faqih (Vaezi, 2013). Hence, the velayat-e identity is a transnational identity that is not restricted to a certain nationality. However, opponents of velayat-e Faqih relate this doctrine to Iran, putting it in the mold of a geopolitical strategy used by Iran to invade the world.

However, in their newest political charter, which was released on November 30, 2009, Hezbollah aborted the idea that their supranational identity neglected its Lebanese national identity. They claimed:

“Lebanon is our homeland, the land of our fathers and forefathers. It is the homeland of our children, grandchildren, and of all the generations to come. For its sovereignty, its dignity, and its honor, for the liberation of its soil, we have offered the dearest sacrifices and the worthiest martyrs. We want that homeland to belong to all Lebanese equally, we want it to embrace them, encompass them, rise up through them and through what they bring to it” (Khatchadourian, Avon, 2012: 140).

Accordingly, Hezbollah shaped the dominant identity for the Shiites of Lebanon — the transnational velayat-e identity — but rooted attachment to their homeland by offering sacrifices to maintain their security.

The velayat-e identity resembles an Islamic doctrine for Shiites who believe in velayet-e Faqih and see their salvation in following this doctrine. They believe that belonging to this identity speeds up the appearance of their twelfth Imam from his occultation to free them from oppression and injustice (Vaezi, 2013). However,

based in Iran, the movement of this doctrine to other countries was seen as a threat by Iran's Western opponents, who viewed this movement as a Persian cultural invasion "Iranizing" the Shiite communities worldwide (Shaery-Eisenlohr, 2009). For Iran, spreading the original Muhammadi Islam is its way of fighting Western hegemony. Released in 2018, Imam Khameni's "Islamic-Iranian blueprint for Progress" reveals his vision to achieve regional and international omnipotence in the next 40 years through: (1) the persistent resistance of Western concepts of "international order, politics, and culture"; and (2) "the use of advanced scientific achievements to become technologically self-reliant" (Khalaji, 2018). These goals fit Hezbollah's ideology, as its purpose was to fight Western dominance. Hezbollah and Iran became partners in fulfilling this goal. Consequently, Hezbollah, which was unable to walk the walk of Iran alone, had to promote Iran's achievements in the face of the Western soft war.

4.7 The Relation between Lebanese and Iranian Shiites

The relation between Lebanese and Iranian Shiites can be traced back to the Safavid dynasty of Iran, Turkey and Georgia from 1501 until 1722. The Safavids hosted Shiite clerics from Jabal Amil in Lebanon to assist with Shiite converts as a means of fighting the Sunni Ottomans (*BBC - Religions - Islam: Safavid Empire (1501-1722)*, 2009). Jabal Amil was viewed by historians as "the site of a sustained intellectual and literary movement with schools of Shiite higher learning and rich private libraries that were only entirely destroyed by al-Jazzar in the late 18th century (Winter, 2011)." Muhaqqiq al-Karaki, a Lebanese cleric, was granted an official position with absolute privileges in religion and governance in the Safavid state. The theocratic nature of the Safavid empire eased the conversion to Shiism, as

the religious and political powers were concurrent in the person of the Shah. Shiism developed theologically and philosophically after it became a state religion, and notable educational institutions were devoted to teaching the religion. After the fall of the Safavid empire, the non-religious Pahlavi Dynasty came to power (*BBC - Religions - Islam: Safavid Empire (1501-1722)*, 2009). The Shiite clerics tolerated the corrupt system of the Pahlavis until Ayatollah Khomeini dethroned the Shah and applied the doctrine of velayat-e Faqih that was originally presented by Sheikh Ahmad al-Naraqi, author of the book *Awa'id al-Ayyam in the principles of Fiqh* (Al-Zoubi, 2022).

The relationship between Lebanese and Iranian Shiites resumed after the rise of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran's main goal was to defeat Western hegemony and spread the original Mohammadi Islam; therefore, it was essential for Iran to find subgroups in the region that were negatively affected by Western hegemony. The oppressed and marginalized Lebanese Shiites were the first candidates. Hence, relations between Iran and Hezbollah blossomed.

4.8 Conclusion

The history of the Shiites in Lebanon reveals that they were a neglected minority who needed an identity to feel empowered, because Lebanon's numerous communities lacked a unified national identity. Therefore, after the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Shiites were hopeful that they too would rise up from their oppression.

Hezbollah was born to emulate the Islamic Revolution in Lebanon and provide the Shiites with the identity that they were so desperately seeking, marking their

presence among other identities. Hence, by adopting velayat el-Faqih, Hezbollah founded the velayat-e identity in Lebanon. Hezbollah became the main source of security for the Shiites, especially against Israeli invasions. Thus, the majority of Shiites were left with no other choice than to support Hezbollah and adopt velayat-e identity in exchange for security and power, things they had been deprived of.

However, in what way could this identity shape the destiny of Lebanon? And could similar minorities follow the Shiites' steps to transnationalism? The final chapter will observe various analyses on state power and the formation of transnational identity to explain the case of Hezbollah and its velayat-e identity.

Chapter Five

Fragile States and Insecurities: Precursors for Transnationalism

5.1 Introduction

Studying the nature of the Lebanese state, and the history of the marginalized Shiites within it, sheds light on the genesis of current transnational Shiite identity. This thesis exposes the direct relationship between the fragility of a state, the insecurities it engenders and transnationalism. The theories reviewed in the third chapter prove that a fragile state like Lebanon is prone to witnessing the birth of new identities because it is unable to gather the Lebanese people under the umbrella of its national identity. The penultimate chapter tackled the history of the Shiites in Lebanon to gain a comprehensive understanding of the reason behind the rise of Hezbollah and the foundation of the velayat-e identity. This chapter will summarize various analyses regarding the state's power and transnational identity formation in the case reviewed: the Lebanese Shiites. It will also shed some light on the future of Lebanon in the face of the rising tide of the velayat-e identity. Explicit conclusions will be drawn from this study, and its significance and limitations will be detailed.

5.2 Relating Facts to Theories

5.2.1 State Fragility

According to the theories studied in chapter two, Lebanon's state fragility is a product of its colonial past. Its borders were randomly illustrated by the colonial powers, which created a false nation lacking legitimacy, according to Hinnebusch's

theory. For Hinnebusch, Kaplan and McCullough, state legitimacy is a precursor for state-building and requires agreement on a national identity. Yet, the Lebanese government failed to enhance nationalism and improve the state's ability to supply social services; instead, these were more supported by the patrimonial side of the state. As a result, sectarianism was enhanced in Lebanon, leading to greater security issues and the eventual collapse of the state.

In the shadow of a collapsing state, McCullough suggested that non-state actors often grow stronger and gain legitimacy by fulfilling four key criteria — Hezbollah is a case in point. For the Shiites of Lebanon, Hezbollah satisfied these criteria, becoming a legitimate substitute for the government, especially in issues related to security. Firstly, Hezbollah has filled the gaps in the state's performance through its resistance to Israel and has provided the marginalized Shiites in South Lebanon and the Bekaa region with the social services they have lacked. Secondly, Hezbollah draws on a religious ideological narrative to build a shared identity for one of the largest sects in Lebanon. Thirdly, following Islamic jurisdiction, Hezbollah redistributes wealth among Shiites through money collected from the Khums (the tax paid on any profit earned by Shiite Muslims); and finally, according to statistics mentioned in chapter four, Hezbollah gains legitimacy from the support it receives from significant segments of the population.

5.2.2 Constructivism and Identities

According to constructivism, which was examined in chapter three, states can have numerous identities that are communally created through communication with other actors. In addition, social or political leaders can have an irregular impact on

the way of initiation of certain identities among groups (Lustick & Miodownik, 2002). Hezbollah was born in a multi-sectarian atmosphere that was susceptible to the formation of numerous identities. Initially, Lebanon witnessed the birth of several identities, like Phoenicianism and Arabism; hence, the formation of a novel identity was expected, especially for a marginalized minority. According to Wendt's theory regarding the formation of a collective identity, it is unrealistic to form a collective identity in Lebanon as prerequisites include common thoughts, prospects and social awareness between the different groups, things that are absent among Lebanese communities. Therefore, in a fragile state like Lebanon, the challenge is to "build an overarching national identity out of a range of minority identities" (Grotenhuis, 2016). Nevertheless, building such an identity was confounding amid Phoenicianism and Arabism. With yet another identity that would represent around half the population, it became even harder to gather the Lebanese communities under the umbrella of an overarching common identity. Perhaps the greatest challenge for the different Lebanese sects, especially Christians, is acceptance of an exponentially propagating identity that resembles a marginalized sect disregarded for centuries, one that now hold the greatest power in Lebanon. As a result, the velayat-e identity is being strongly refused and fought by the other Lebanese communities who consider it a threat.

5.2.3 Securitization Theory

Securitization has been the Shiites' primary issue for centuries. As this research reveals, the Shiites have existed on the margins for a long time, escaping the wrongdoings of the government and oppression from the other sects. They have lived under poor conditions with limited access to education, making them inferior to other

Lebanese sects, many of whom still look upon the Shiites as savages. In addition, the Shiites had to endure difficult conditions in South Lebanon, where they were abandoned by the government and frequently attacked by Israeli forces. Therefore, compromised security was a major issue that was put on the table with the appearance of the Shiite securitizing political actors. According to the Copenhagen School, referenced in the first chapter, an issue is securitized through the speeches and representations made by political actors.

Primarily, Sayyed Musa al-Sadr was the first religious political actor to raise awareness among the Shiites through his movement of the deprived. Subsequently, after the Iranian Revolution, the Shiites gained incorporeal strength to leverage themselves from their dire situation. Hezbollah appeared, backed by the Iranians, to elevate the Shiites from their oppressed existence, launching its resistance against Israel, which became the main issue. As mentioned in the first chapter, Eroukhmanoff (2019) asserted: “an issue becomes securitized when an audience collectively agrees on the nature of the threat and supports taking extraordinary measures” (Eroukhmanoff, 2019). Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary-general of the party, appeared to be a charismatic leader, whose rhetoric had and continues to have an extraordinary influence on the Shiites’ beliefs and opinions. In his speeches, Sayyed Nasrallah highlights the matters that need to be securitized to create public opinion among the Shiites. The subject of resistance became Hezbollah’s main theme, which is solidified by the Shiite audience that collectively agrees on the nature of the Israeli threat. Hence, the Shiites put their trust in Hezbollah’s securitization plans solely, which created a robust grassroots base for Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The strength of this base was tested in the 2022 parliamentary elections, when the number of votes for seats occupied by Hezbollah rose by 3,951 compared to the previous 2018 elections (Fakhr el-Din, 2022). This came at a time when Lebanon was experiencing the worst economic crisis in its history and occurred against a backdrop of heightened rage toward political parties and leaders blamed for this situation. This proves that although the Shiites, like other sects in Lebanon, are facing a ruthless security situation that is threatening their quality of life, most of them still believe their salvation lies in the hands of Hezbollah and its prevailing velayat-e identity. This prompts us to ask how this young-age identity became so deeply rooted in the Shiite community.

5.3 The Transnational Velayat-e Identity

The velayat-e identity was realized following the rise of the doctrine of velayat-e Faqih that succeeded the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. According to this doctrine, which was initially brought to the table by Ayatollah Khomeini in the 1970s, the supreme leader of the Islamic Ummah is considered the representative of the messianic infallible imam in his prolonged occultation, featuring the same authority as the imam. He is responsible for interpreting Islamic jurisdictions on both the individual and social level, as well as handling the state's affairs on behalf of the imam. Ayatollah Khomeini prioritized the state's preservation over Islamic sacraments, like prayer and fasting. Khomeini focused on this point more than once in his preaching. In his words: "I should state that the government, which is part of the absolute deputyship of the Prophet, is one of the primary injunctions of Islam and has priority over all other secondary injunctions, even prayers, fasting and hajj" (Khomeini, 2013: 82-3). He added: "It is our duty to preserve Islam. This duty is

one of the most important obligations incumbent upon us; it is more necessary even than prayer and fasting” (Khomeini, 2013: 75).

Based on these interpretations, Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian Revolution, became the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran after the Pahlavi dynasty was overthrown. This doctrine wasn't exclusive to Iran; it traveled the world, becoming a source of inspiration for oppressed Islamic communities worldwide.

Young Shiites from around the world, captivated by Khomeini's innovatory version of Shiism, came to Mashhad and Qom to study Shiite theology and Islamic ideology. This created a transnational network of Shiite clerics who exported the ideology and doctrine of velayat-e Faqih (Iran's regime of Religion, Mehdi Khalaji, *Journal of International Affairs*, 136). The Shiites of Lebanon were the first to trust in this doctrine and implement it in their country. The fact that velayat-e Faqih is linked to the twelfth infallible imam, who it is believed will rescue humanity from oppression and will spread justice with his reappearance, convinced Lebanese Shiites that salvation could be found in this doctrine. This takes us back to the marginalization of this community throughout history, oppression, lack of security and the frail national Lebanese identity. The Shiites also inferred from the Holy Quran that the persecuted would triumph and rule the land afterward. “And we wished to be gracious to those who were being depressed in the land, to make them leaders (in Faith) and make them heirs” (28:5 Quran). Thus, the Shiites believed that by having the first Shiite Islamic State in Iran after their oppression was some form of substantiation of the aforementioned verse. This doctrine was instilled in the

oppressed Shiites and created a transnational identity characteristic of believers in velayat-e Faqih.

Without a rigid Lebanese identity, the Lebanese Shiites, in particular, found this identity a floating log sent to save them from drowning between the tides of Christian Phoenicianism and Sunni Arabism. This identity empowered the Shiites and created a new culture and lifestyle, which would guarantee that new generations preserve this identity. They established their own schools, scouts, hospitals, TV and radio station, and institutions. They even developed their own resistance army, which, according to Sayyed Nasrallah, consists of 100,000 trained and armed soldiers ready to resist foreign attacks (Khraiche, 2021). Moreover, in light of the economic downfall of Lebanon that followed the 2019 Revolution, Iran-backed Hezbollah provided its supporters and other Lebanese citizens with basic needs that were hard to source, like fuel, medicine, and food products (Taha, 2021). This system of networks created a self-sufficient community. Consequently, the velayat-e identity has established the conditions it needs to nurture and grow within the Shiite community.

One of the latest, most prevailing images of the transnationalism of the velayat-e identity within the Shiite international community is the propagating phenomenon of events where Shiite children chant the anthem “Salam Fermande” (or “Hello Commander”) for the twelfth Imam in his occultation. This anthem was chanted in Iran, Bahrain, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, the United Kingdom, Germany, Nigeria, India, Pakistan and Turkey (Hussain, 2022). The significance of this anthem lies in the nature of the salute: their Imam in his occultation and the forefather of velayat-e Faqih “Ayatollah Khomeini,” whose photograph was carried in all versions of this

anthem. The anthem also holds a hidden message of saluting the current supreme Leader of Iran Imam Ali Khamenei as being the commander of the Shiite Islamic Ummah. In the Lebanese version, prominent figures who played significant roles in Hezbollah's journey were mentioned in the anthem too, like Sayed Abbas el-Mousawi, Sheikh Ragheb Harb, and the martyrs Imad Moughnieh and General Qassem Soleimani. Children have also been seen carrying the photos of these figures. This shows that the new generation is attached to the Imam in his occultation through the journey of those who have played a role in shaping the present and the future. Ultimately, an anthem that was launched in Iran and exported to several countries reflects the transnational nature of the velayat-e identity. In addition, the young generation chanting this anthem illustrates the strategic plan for creating a future to uphold the legacy of this identity and prepare the stage for the reappearance of the Imam to spread justice on earth.

5.4 Transnational Identity Formation: A Theoretical Framework

After analyzing the case of Hezbollah, several observations were made to deduce a theory of formation of transnational identities. Hezbollah was born in an oppressed community that has lived under coercion for a long time. The Lebanese Shiite community sought security in a homeland marked by a fragile state shaped by colonial powers and rival identities lacking a common history. Hence, this country proved too weak in its ability to gather majorities and minorities under a common identity. Consequently, this oppressed minority yearned for an identity to remove the chains of hardship and despair. The Islamic Revolution in Iran bolstered the power of the Lebanese Shiites, helping them found their new transnational identity. This identity has been exported to Shiites all over the world; however, the peculiarity of

this identity for the Lebanese Shiites is that they lacked the feeling of belonging to a robust national identity that would secure their presence in their country. Hence, this identity substituted the frail Lebanese national identity. Accordingly, one can hypothesize that the probability of forming a transnational identity is correlated with fragility of the state, accompanying insecurities and the fading of a national identity.

5.5 The Future of Lebanon in Light of the Velayat-e Identity

Although countries periodically conduct population surveys, Lebanon's last census was taken 90 years ago. In 1932, the population in Lebanon stood at 875,252: 58.7% Christian and 40% Muslim. However, an independent regional research and consultancy company named "Information International" conducted research to assess population growth between 1932 and 2018, as well as distribution according to the different sects. The report showed that the Christian population decreased by half to 30.6%, while the Muslim population increased significantly to 69.4%. By conducting an official census to back up these claims, the fragile state of Lebanon would have to confront the numbers and redistribute political power. Moreover, according to this report, the Shiites represented 31.6% of the entire population, making them the largest community in Lebanon (Ramadan, 2019). Despite some Shiites rejecting the doctrine of velayat-e Faqih, like the followers of Sayyed Mohammad Hussein Fadlullah, a significant number of Shiites support it and belong to the velayat-e identity. These statistics corroborate the velayat-e identity being rooted in Lebanon, just like the identities that came before. However, not all the Lebanese are accepting this demographic and cultural change. Some see this change as an Iranian cultural invasion of Lebanese culture. Thus, after the 2019 Revolution, some of the revolutionaries started demanding the confrontation and "withdrawal" of

Iranian occupation, represented by Hezbollah (Mneimneh, 2020). Although Sayyed Nasrallah has declared that Hezbollah is fully supported financially and militarily by Iran, there isn't any physical evidence of an alleged Iranian occupation because Hezbollah and its followers are all purely Lebanese. Interestingly, the party has garnered legitimacy from the government and a large portion of Lebanese society for resisting Israel. On the other hand, eradicating a deeply rooted identity that is intertwined with the religious beliefs of one third of Lebanese society has become an impossible target. The velayat-e identity was seen to elevate the Shiites from their low-level position, so turning back is not considered an option by the Shiites.

As Phoenicianism was initiated to secure the presence of Christians at the center of the Islamic Arab world under the auspices of West, while Saudi-backed Arabism was nurtured to empower the Sunnis in a Maronite-dominant region, the Iranian-supported velayat-e identity was established to place the marginalized Shiites in the Lebanese equation. Therefore, the future of Lebanon will include the presence of all three identities, although the way they interact and live together will decide Lebanon's destiny. With this in mind, it is crucial for the communities of Lebanese to accept and embrace this diversity, and work on creating an overarching primary identity to unite the Lebanese people notwithstanding their secondary identities. Amartya Sen said in his book "Identity and Violence": "Any classification according to a singular identity polarizes people in a particular way, but if we take note of the fact that we have many different identities - related not just to religion but also to language, occupation and business, politics, class and poverty, and many others - we can see that the polarization of one can be resisted by a fuller picture. So knowledge and understanding are extremely important to fight against singular polarization" (Sen, 2007). Thus, a brighter future in Lebanon begins with fighting singular

polarization, which can be achieved by communities getting to know and understand their different identities.

5.6 Significance of the Study

This study has focused on a time-sensitive issue that concerns the Lebanese people in particular. It clarified the debatable nature of the newly formed identity of the Shiites by focusing on the case of Hezbollah. Understanding the nature and background of this identity clarified its rooted nature. This would open the doors for the Lebanese to find new strategies for coexistence to build a better future for their homeland.

On the other hand, this thesis has added great significance to the discipline of international relations. It has synthesized a theoretical framework regarding the formation of transnational identities. Applying the case of Hezbollah to different theories has unearthed the causes that led to the prevalence of the velayat-e identity in Lebanon. Accordingly, any oppressed or marginalized minority lacking security and living in a fragile state is susceptible to seeking a transnational identity that identifies with its beliefs.

5.7 What is missing?

This thesis has three main limitations, the first being the fact that there were very few resources to explain Shiite history in Lebanon. However, this reality simply reinforced the fact that the Shiite community has been marginalized throughout history. The second limitation was unintentionally overlooking the Shiites who oppose the velayat-e Faqih doctrine in favor of coherence and unity of chapters discussed in this thesis. Finally, it should be stated that the researcher of this paper is

a Lebanese Shiite and may have an unintended bias in several issues discussed in this research.

5.8 Conclusion

The unsteady state of Lebanon was created by colonial powers that occupied its land for centuries — a land that has also sheltered people escaping oppression and persecution in neighbouring countries. This led to the creation of modern-day Lebanon, a melting pot of cultures and religions. This multiplicity of oppressed minorities pushed each community to seek dominance. As a result of this rivalry, the national identity of the fragile state of Lebanon was weakened, thereby elevating the disparate identities represented by Phoenicianism and Arabism. Each of these identities received transnational support. Phoenicianism was backed by the West to empower the Christians in the Middle East, while Arabism was backed by the Arab League to empower the Sunnis. As for Lebanese national identity, it only became the perception of a compound emotional structure of the attachment to the land and the declaration of it. However, the Shiites didn't fit in; instead they formed part of a neglected underclass, until Sayyed Moussa el-Sadr paved the way for the Shiites to upgrade their status. He created the Shiite grassroots Amal movement. Following the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, some Shiites were fascinated by the groundbreaking Shiism presented by Ayatollah Khomeini, embracing the doctrine of velayat-e Faqih. Hezbollah was born and helped to improve the image of Shiites through their continuous victory against Israel. Hence, the support for Hezbollah increased from within the Shiite community; in parallel, the velayat-e identity was embraced and its followers grew in number.

Over the past 40 years, this identity has penetrated the Shiite community, becoming deeply embedded. Thus, this study has concluded that when an oppressed minority is living in a fragile state, it will look to substitute the weak national identity with a transnational identity that reflects its beliefs and empowers it.

The velayat-e identity was this substitute for the oppressed Shiites therefore it is starting to take its place on the Lebanese multi-cultural fabric of identities. However, other Lebanese communities are anxious about this transnational identity weaving its way into a shared quilt.

Several queries emerge for future research: What is the prospect of velayat-e Faqih regarding the presence of this identity in other countries? What are Iran's ambitions to spread the velayat-e identity? Will sharing the Lebanese quilt with this identity turn it into a Persian carpet? Is the concluded theory reversible? Would strengthening the national identity weaken other sub- and supra-state identities?

Finding a common identity is a mission that should be launched in Lebanon. Amartya Sen claimed in "Identity and Violence": "Each human being is a citizen of this world. We have many identities, of which one of the identities is our human identity" (Sen, 2007). Finding a common identity can be straightforward; the bigger challenge is to adjust mindsets and mentalities to accept a shared identity.

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