

**The Emergence of the Twelver Shiite Community of  
Lebanon:  
Socio-Religious Actors & Patterns of Integration**

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# **The Emergence of the Twelver Shiite Community of Lebanon: Socio-Religious Actors & Patterns of Integration**

## **ABSTRACT**

By

Riad N. Yazbeck

This study will try to understand the sudden emergence of the Twelver Shiite community of Lebanon, a previously underrepresented and alienated community that is rarely mentioned in historical accounts. The Shia have failed to play any role either in the successive political entities that were applied to the country, or in the Sunni-Maronite National Pact of 1943 that distributed power in the new Greater Lebanon independent entity. The Shia also failed to play any significant role post-independence, and until the beginning of the 1975 war.

But suddenly, they emerged center-stage with Musa al-Sadr, and later on, with Hezbollah. In fact, the Shiite community underwent a complete social overhaul during the last century due mainly, but not exclusively as was the case with the Maronites, to the role of the religious establishment and opportune events that paved the way for their revival. In July 2006, the Shiite Hezbollah emerged as a regional superpower capable of inflicting heavy damage on Israeli infrastructure and military establishment. Throughout the thirty-three-day July war, a small group of Lebanese Shia armed and trained by Iran and Syria, managed to harass and provoke the Israeli war machine into "open war" and to achieve what late Egyptian President Jamal Abdel Nasser, the *Fedayyin* and all Arab monarchs and regimes combined had failed to achieve for over sixty years of Arab-Israeli conflict; A balance of terror.

This study will further emphasize the socio-religious evolution within the community, shedding light on the main events and milestones that constitute the building blocs of the Shiite community of Lebanon. One should bear in mind that this whole integration was made possible as a result of extremely opportune events and favorable occurrences over the past thirty years. Sadly enough, the Maronites of Lebanon did not enjoy the same fortune. They almost went the opposite direction losing in the process, due to built-in predicaments and unfavorable external and regional factors, their prominent role in Lebanon and the East.

*To my parents,  
Aurore,  
& my friends*

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# 1 Introduction

Two years have passed since the end of the 2006 war, the latest chapter of the never ending Lebanese-Israeli conflict dating back to the mid-1970s. It was during that epic war that the Shiites of Lebanon emerged as a regional superpower capable of inflicting heavy damage on Israeli infrastructure and military establishment. Throughout the thirty-three-day long July war, a small group of Lebanese Shia armed and trained by Iran and Syria, managed to harass and provoke the Israeli war machine into open war, and pyrrhically survive the wrath of what had previously proven to have been an infallible army. The Shia of Lebanon achieved what late Egyptian President Jamal Abdel Nasser, the *Fedayyin*, and all Arab monarchs and regimes combined had failed to achieve for over sixty years of Arab-Israeli conflict; A balance of terror.

It becomes rapidly clear to passers-by in the southernmost villages of Lebanon that the July War has instilled a deep, and probably permanent, pride in the spirits of the populace. The traditional serenity of Bint Jbeil, Marjayoun, Ayta, and Maroun al Ras - villages that were utterly destroyed by Israeli bombardment and close fighting- has now reemerged, the only remaining traces of that war are the new pictures of those fallen martyrs who have now followed the long caravan of Shia martyrs, that started fourteen hundred years ago, who sacrificed their lives for the sake of religion and community. Whether Hezbollah has emerged victorious or not is subject to much debate, but is beyond the scope of this study.

Yet one cannot deny that Hezbollah, championed nowadays by Muslims and Christians alike, has undergone a drastic metamorphosis during the past fifteen years. From another Shiite radical terrorist organization in the 1980s, it is now an organized and

well-disciplined political party with a wide range of welfare services. One should not forget the gloomy and bloody past of the group, as well as other Shiite militant groups, especially in the wake of the Iranian Revolution that preached anti-Americanism and radicalism among other things. It is nowadays well acknowledged that the Party was responsible for a number of operations and assassinations within the first fifteen years of its creation, particularly during the Lebanese 1975-1990 war. Although the combination of Shiite martyrology and radicalism proved to be very effective for the Lebanese Shia in reaching some of their goals, they eventually found it more realistic to adapt to the rules of the Lebanese mosaic and Middle Eastern politics. This huge transformation rendered Hezbollah as well as the whole Shia community a more pragmatic and a less radical player. In this paper, we will trace this transformation and try to understand the reasons behind it, not for the sake of hagiography or historiography, but as part of the larger context which is the understanding of the emergence of the Shiite community of Lebanon as a major player both within the country's borders and regionally.

In this study, we will try to understand the sudden emergence of this previously underrepresented and alienated community that is rarely mentioned in historical accounts, though they settled in the country way back in the seventh and eighth centuries. It is well known that the Ottomans did their job extremely well over the years eradicating the cultural legacy of many of the constituent religious groups under their rule. The Shia were one of their victims. The Shia have also failed to play any role either in the successive political entities that were applied to the country, or in the Sunni-Maronite National Pact of 1943 that distributed power in the new Greater Lebanon independent entity. The Shia also failed to play any significant role post-independence, and until the

beginning of the 1975 war. But suddenly, they emerged center-stage with Musa al-Sadr, and later on, with Hezbollah. In fact, the Shiite community underwent a complete social overhaul during the last century due mainly, but not exclusively as was the case with the Maronites, to the role of the religious establishment and opportune events that paved the way for their revival.

We will mainly focus on the socio-religious evolution within the community, shedding light on the main events and milestones that constitute the building blocs of the Shiite community of Lebanon, namely: the Wady Hujayr meeting of 1920 that constitutes the first ever convention of high Shia notables and *ulamas* signaling communitarian awareness; the role of cultural pillars such as Al-Irfan newspaper and al-Jaafariya and al-Amiliya schools; the deceptions of Arab Nationalism and Marxism; the Shia Renaissance in the 1970s initiated by Musa al-Sadr through the Movement of the Deprived and the Shiite Supreme Council, as well as the influence of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 among others. We will also assess the role of external events and players in shaping and making or breaking this whole process, all while analyzing the effect of the demographic factor in the internal political equation. The role of religion, of religious institutions, and of prominent religious figures is highly significant in the history of the Shia of Lebanon, as of all Shiites, in affecting politics and socio-economic integration and evolution of the community as a community, and as one element within its larger context which is Lebanon. Therefore we will be emphasizing it when necessary.

We will particularly be shedding light on the respective patterns of integration followed by the community, and that from a Lebanon-centered approach with Imam Musa al-Sadr, a religious fundamentalist approach with the exported Iranian revolution,

and finally a more moderate consociational approach merging the first two with that of Sheikh Mohammed Mehdi Shamseddine.

One should bear in mind that this whole integration was made possible thanks to extremely opportune events and favorable occurrences over the past thirty years. Sadly enough, the Maronites of Lebanon did not enjoy the same fortune. They almost went the opposite direction losing in the process, due to built-in predicaments and unfavorable external and regional factors, their prominent role in Lebanon and the East. Hence we will be comparing and contrasting the course of events for the two communities and assessing them.

The importance of this study is that it reflects and traces the most crucial milestones of a communitarian history that remains to this day unknown to many Lebanese of other communities. The Shiite attempts to integrate and their consecutive failures, particularly during the times when the community failed to play politics by the rules of the delicate Lebanese socio-political pluralist make-up, can serve as important case studies for other Lebanese communities seeking a way to reintegrate into the Lebanese political system and reinforce their organizational structure and building blocks.

In this respect, and since in the Middle East communitarian politics, is still the main component of local and regional politics, it is necessary to assess the prospects and dangers that will face the Shiites in their complete integration within the Lebanese socio-cultural fabric, especially after the Syrian withdrawal of 2005 that tore away, at least internally, the unprecedented support they enjoyed.

## 2 Historical Background

“You are defying the sons of Mohammed, Ali, Hasan & Hussein, the prophet’s descendants, and his *sahaba*...”<sup>1</sup>

It is uncommon to find in the Middle East a religious minority group that has a clear understanding of its past and present, as well as a solid vision of its future prospects. But the Shiites of Lebanon constitute an exception, particularly those living in the Bekaa valley, the southern villages of Lebanon, and more recently in the southern suburbs of Lebanon’s capital Beirut. This large minority group underwent great changes during the past thirty or so years. From a truly deprived community living on the distant southern and eastern borders of the country unable to have a say even in the minor developmental issues related to their villages and jobs, the Shiites of Lebanon managed to become an important player in the balance of forces in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Some even fear that their recurrent military ventures have jeopardized Lebanon’s economic opportunities. The above quote of Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, Secretary-General of Hezbollah, can be considered the statement summarizing the whole Shiite experience, beliefs, and goals.

It is really very odd to study the history of one’s country without studying an aspect of it that made it a major player in its region, yet this is a dilemma every Lebanese has to face and overcome at a certain point in his life. The fact that the Shiite community of Lebanon managed to emerge distinctively as a regional power from its legacy of political quietism is also a startling thing to observe. Lebanon’s youth, however, except for the Shiites of course, study the Maronite struggle to create an entity of their own; and

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<sup>1</sup> Hassan Nasrallah. Date Jul. 18, 2006. Public address during the 2006 July war. Addressing the Israelis during the first days of the July war

the Druze struggle to preserve their stronghold in the Lebanese mountains; as well as the successful Sunni and Orthodox cultural interaction that created over the centuries prosperous merchant cities and earned Lebanon its role as a cross-road of civilizations; None studies the history of the Shiite community and its sense of belonging to this country as if the descendants of the Prophet did not settle in the land of the cedars ever since the 8<sup>th</sup> century. This fact reflects and summarizes the awkward relationship between the Shiite 'Amili community, as Tamara Chalabi would call them, and the new country they found themselves incorporated within in 1920: Greater Lebanon.

Surely what bring one's attention to this community, that arguably constitutes around 40% of the total Lebanese population, are the repetitive military endeavors of Hezbollah, which is incontestably the most popular Shiite party in Lebanon.

In this paper, we will try to trace the swift political emergence, over a period of thirty years, of Lebanon's Shiite community and to focus on the role of the evolving religious institutions of this community as well as on the impact of regional sectarian extensions, particularly since the Iranian revolution of 1979. The milestones that will be highlighted in this paper will be the following: The role of Imam Musa al Sadr in reviving the Shiite community after years of political and cultural quietism; the Iranian revolution and its role in tracing a radical future for this community during the subsequent two decades; the role of Muhammad Mehdi Shamseddine in de-radicalizing Lebanese Shiism and his emphasis on consensus politics; the role of Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah and the relationship with the Alawite regime of Syria as well as the undying conflict with Israel; and finally we will try to analyze this recurring role of religious institutions and religious figures in the political evolution of the Shiite community as well

as to shed light on prospects, opportunities and potential threats. We will also shed light on the cases of the Shiite communities of Iraq and Iran respectively and their adaptation to the standing political systems in the two respective countries. What matters most to us is how, within a period of 30 years, the Shiites managed to metamorphose from a poor, radical, and closed society, to one that interacts actively with its surroundings, one that is richer, more powerful, more assertive and more willing to communicate with the other components of the Lebanese socio-cultural mosaic.

Since the topic at hand constitutes a real challenge to any researcher or reader due to the poverty or in some cases absence, of widely available documentation, we will repeatedly link the events with the history of the Maronite community since the latter is more known and in order to make some comparisons with the fall of the latter that coincided with the rise of the Shiite community.

But first, it is very important to trace the historical legacy of the 'Amili community and its socio-political evolution within the Lebanese and regional contexts.

## **2.1 Islam**

The emergence of Islam in the seventh century after Christ, as a third heavenly religion in addition to Christianity and Judaism, led to major changes in the course of human history. Muhammad preached this new religion in the Arabian peninsula and soon after his death in 632 AD, his companions and descendants carried Islam to then Christian Sassanid Persia, the distant lands of India in the East in one of “the bloodiest Stor[ies]of history”, as historian Will Durant puts it and to Spain in the west in what became a war for survival between the Moors on one side and the Spaniards on the other.

In these newly acquired territories, a great civilization emerged that managed to surpass the accomplishments of neighboring war-devoured Europe, which had to wait long centuries before coming out of its Dark Ages into the Renaissance.

Yet the history of Islam was destined, since the beginning, to undergo a series of internal fratricidal wars that would mark its development to our very day. With the death of Prophet Muhammad, his prominent companions disagreed on whom to replace him. Abu Bakir was first chosen as Caliph (in Arabic “successor”) succeeded by Umar Ibn al-Khattab, Uthman Ibn Al-Affan and later by Ali Ibn Abi Taleb in 656 AD. Ali’s succession, based on blood succession, was championed by a minority of Muslims who later became known as Shia; it was disputed by the great majority, the Sunna. This dispute turned into a schism that still divides Muslims in the twenty first century. It is noteworthy to mention that the Shia constitute around 15% of all Muslims worldwide. Ali’s rule obviously ended with his assassination in 661 AD, and power was seized by Muawiyah who founded the first Muslim kingdom, the Umayyad Kingdom. It was under this rule that the *Dhimmi* system was introduced – a sort of caste system discriminating between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens (mainly Christians and Jews) to the advantage of the former. This system was later on adopted by the Abbasid Empire, but more so by the Ottoman Empire that applied it until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The development of Islam after this era was characterized by the emergence of the Abbasid Empire that was later contested due to excessive bids for autonomy by local regional authorities such as the Shiite Fatimid Empire in Egypt. The latter was known to be relatively the most tolerant with respect to religious minority groups when compared



to all other Muslim kingdoms and Sultanates,<sup>2</sup> especially since “Christian and Jewish populations liv[ed] on the whole in peaceful symbiosis with them.”<sup>3</sup> It was also contested by the Seljuk Turkic kingdom later on in 1055 AD. At that time, Muslim theological philosophy underwent great changes with Ibn-Sina, Al-Farabi, and Al-Ghazzali. But more important were the disagreements within Shiism that led to even further schisms.

In the centuries that followed, Islam had to face major threats starting with the European counter-attacks to liberate the occupied territories of Spain and the Holy Lands. The wars, also known as the Crusades, lasted until the 1290s when Islam emerged victorious, although on the brink of collapse with the fall of Baghdad into the hands of the Mongols in 1258, and the loss of Egypt to the Mamluk Sunni slaves who established their own kingdom, and who played a pivotal role in throwing the last Frankish knights out of the Levant. Islam would be two centuries later, defeated by the Order of St. John in Malta and expelled from Spain in 1492.

On a different note, the Ottoman Turks managed to seize power over the northern tips of the Levant, occupied Constantinople in 1453 after a seven-month long siege and established what would become the most influential Sunni Muslim Empire.<sup>4</sup> This Empire would later constitute, for a couple of centuries, a nemesis to all Western Empires bidding for more influence in the East, due to its control over Egyptian territory, which was of great importance to the United Kingdom as it links it with its most distant eastern colonies and the Dardanelles and Bosphorus straits that constitute a vital passage to all Novgorod and, later on, Russian trade routes. The Ottoman Empire also had the religious

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<sup>2</sup> Youssef Courbage & Philippe Fargues, (1997). Christians and Jews under Islam. London: Tauris. P. 19 - 21

<sup>3</sup> Albert Hourani, (2004). Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798 – 1939. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. P. 41

<sup>4</sup> Albert Hourani, (1991). A History of the Arab Peoples. London: Faber and Faber. P. 258

leverage of the Caliphate over Muslims in all four corners of the world. However, and over the following centuries, the Ottomans had to succumb to Western interferences and only managed to regulate them through the many capitulations they granted them *vis-à-vis* local religious minorities such as the Maronites, Druze, Orthodox and Jews. The Shiites living in these areas could not, however, secure any similar protection. Yet, the emergence of the Shiite Safavid Empire in Persia in the sixteenth century paved the way for future cooperation and protection between the two communities, though the Empire itself did not survive except for two centuries. The protection and cooperation between the two communities became particularly strong starting with the twentieth century.

The adoption of the fundamentalist Wahhabi Sunni movement by the Al-Saoud dynasty, a bit to the south, meant that the establishment of Shiism in Persia and its consolidation in the southern parts of Iraq would not go unchallenged. Since then, on many occasions over the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Muslim Brotherhood loyal to the Saoudi Dynasty crossed the Iraqi borders to loot the holy Shiite shrines of Najaf and Karbala. These practices were later on checked by the deployment of British troops between the two belligerents, and finally by the dissolution of the Brotherhood by Al-Saoud.

Nevertheless, the most important change in Islam occurred in the twentieth century with the downfall of the Ottoman Empire, right after the end of World War I. This defeat meant that for the first time since its emergence, Islam had no Caliph to guide and rule Muslims worldwide. Furthermore, the minor Muslim sects could benefit from such concepts as the right to 'self-determination' that would grant them additional autonomy and liberty to practice their creeds in a way they were unable to under Muslim

rule. Hence Shiism, for example, emerged as an important religion in the Middle East alongside other different Muslim sects such as the Ibadi and Yazidi. New boundaries and states were introduced, and all of a sudden communities were divided into different nation-states, and in some cases members from the same religious population found themselves living in two separate countries. The Shia have undoubtedly overcome these new changes in an efficient manner, and managed to create a link between the different Shiite populations living in the diverse newly created countries of the Middle East - something they could not have dreamt of under Ottoman or Abbasid rule. This community had intrinsic elements for such a coalition.

## **2.2 Enter the Sons of Ali**

As we mentioned earlier, Shiism constitutes the second largest Muslim sect in the world with around 180 million adherents. The Shia believe that Ali, as the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad, was his rightful successor. Hence, their beliefs revolve around the teachings of the Prophet and succession of his family and descendants. Therefore, Shiites do not acknowledge the Caliphate of either Abu Bakir, or Muawiya, or Uthman. Ali and his descendants, according to Ja'afari Shiite jurisprudence, had the responsibility to protect, explain, and spread the teachings of Muhammad and the religion of *Allah*. Certainly the martyrdoms of Ali, and his sons Hasan and Hussayn, have played a great role in instilling the culture of martyrdom, so venerated and celebrated by the Shiites, in the service of Allah, his religion, and the community, as a major trait of Shiism. For that purpose as well, Shiites idolize their Imams and praise their lineage that goes back to the Prophet himself. The yearly flagellant commemoration of Ashoura

coincides with the martyrdom of Imam Hussayn, who was killed near Karbala by Yazid, the son of Muawiyah. This commemoration reminds the Shiites of their long history of sacrifice and the persecution they had to endure for the sake of their beliefs. To this very day, Ashoura is commemorated every year by Shiites through rallies that take place in different Shiite cities and towns worldwide, and more recently in the holy city of Najaf, in commemoration of the sacrifices of the early leaders who gave up their lives for the sake of justice and truth, as the Shiites believe.

With the death of Ali, all adherents to the Shiite doctrine were persecuted, discriminated against, and massacred all across the realm of Islam, and had to flee their lands to more distant regions such as the arid lands of Persia and the rugged mountains of Lebanon.

Over the years, the Shia were divided into many subgroups based on their recognition of successive Imams. Hence, there are nowadays Twelvers, Seveners, Zaidis, Druze, and more recently Alawites who are recognized as Shiite sects. As in Christianity among Catholics and Orthodox, the schism in Islam between Sunnis and Shiites was caused by a combination of political conflicts and bloody bids for power, as well as by divergent theological interpretations of the religion itself. Later on, recurrent bloodshed further deepened these differences and increased the causes for dissent and hatred among the two groups. In modern-day socio-cultural dynamics, this schism plays a major role in Middle Eastern as well as global politics.

The Shiites are nowadays distributed mainly in the different countries of this region, particularly in Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Bahrain, and mainly the oil-rich eastern territories of Saudi Arabia. Shiite communities are likely to play important political roles

in the near future, namely those of Lebanon, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. These communities in particular are nowadays recognized as minorities in their respective countries, though their history is characterized by recurrent harassments and suppressions, mainly in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, that tainted their culture with quietism, which is in addition to martyrdom a second trait of the Shiite psyche and legacy.

### 3 Shiism in Mount Lebanon

This polarization in the Muslim world led to the creation in the twentieth century of a number of transnational groups calling for the union of Muslims around the world. But in this new Middle Eastern order, a small Muslim community was destined to emerge as a major regional player, though nothing in its quietist history indicated that it might. Nevertheless, the Shiite sect of Lebanon managed to establish a strong religious institution that became the cornerstone of its emancipation in a country that it did not believe in to begin with. Suitable regional and global changes played favorably as well; nevertheless, the history of this community remains a fascinating one as we shall see.

“The Shia of Lebanon were on the margins of history, cut off from the great ideas. They were on no one’s itinerary. No travelers on the “grand tour” wandered into their midst, no authors who celebrated the “Arab Awakening” in culture and letters turned up in their beaten villages. There was surliness in their world and wounded pride, and crushing poverty. Their history was told in fables, the presumed glory always worlds away...”<sup>5</sup>

Decades later, this community has reached the center-stage of Middle Eastern politics and incarnated its role as a major power with military finesse. No one can deny its new stature and power, though many have tried. Surprisingly enough very few have bothered to trace the emergence of the sons of Ali from the sidelines of Lebanese history to the center-stage, despite this being the logical thing to do in a world where minorities have risen to power and then fallen to the abyss of Levantine civilization. History is full

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<sup>5</sup> Fouad Ajami, (2006). “foreword” in The Shi’is of Jabal Amil and the new Lebanon: community and nation state, 1918 – 1943. By Tamara Chalabi. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

of examples that include the downfall of Lebanon's Maronite community, which struggled for two millennia to create a national homeland only to lose it thirty years after its independence and creation. The Shia managed things the other way around.

Little is known about the early days of Shiite settlement in Lebanon except that the tribes living in what is known today as Jabal Amil, were converted into Shiism during the seventh century by Abi Dharr al-Ghifari, one of the Prophet's companions and one of the first partisans of Ali. Most of these tribes, also known as Banu Amila, originally migrated from Yemen, hence their Arab rather than Iranian lineage.<sup>6</sup> Their contribution to Mount Lebanon's culture and political evolution had little or no effect. The sons of Ali, Hasan, and Hussein later settled in the northern tips of the Mount, namely in what is known today as Becharre and Keserwan, fleeing the oppressions of a victorious and vengeful Sunni majority persecuting and hunting them down all across the Muslim world. They had no better fortune in their new lands, for a couple of centuries later they had to migrate further to the south leaving the ground for the newly arriving Christian Maronites, also fleeing from a different oppression, that of the Byzantine Empire. The Maronites, unlike the Shia managed to take strong hold of these newly acquired lands, and flourished in them building in the process their institutions and economy.

During the following centuries, the Shia were further pushed to the perimeters of Mount Lebanon due to recurrent Mamluk harassments, namely to the Bekaa Valley in 1291 AD where they eventually developed an economy based on tobacco plantation. Their effect and influence on politics and history went almost unnoticed in the greater context of things there. Even when capitulations were granted by the Ottoman Empire to

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<sup>6</sup> Tamara Chalabi, (2006). The Shi'is of Jabal Amil and the new Lebanon: community and nation state, 1918 – 1943. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.164

the different European powers, no one had any interest in sponsoring the Shia, who despite being Muslims were in fact considered and treated as second-class citizens by the Empire. Despite this, the Shia of Lebanon managed to influence the course of things outside the realm of Mount Lebanon, specifically further to the East in Persia where some Amili Ulama played a great role in converting the Safavid Empire into Twelver Shiism.<sup>7</sup>

It should be noticed that at the time the Shia had no proper religious institutional framework similar to that of the Maronites, which could provide the community with enough "*asabiya*" (or internal cohesiveness) to enable it to survive major threats, and overcome as a unified community the major obstacles that were to face it. The influence that religious institutions had in other communities was overshadowed among the Shia by the authority of local feudal lords; this was particularly noted in 1936 by Lescot, French military officer posted in Damascus<sup>8</sup>: "This is a strange thing in Shii country; the religious authorities did not enjoy the authority that one expected. The influence of the 'Sayyids' and 'Sheikhs' remained however for the most part local. If they have some credit among the peasants, then the more evolved classes were increasingly outside their control and merely represented external symbols of respect."<sup>9</sup> This was the exercise of religious quietism par excellence, a trait very intrinsic to the psyche of Twelver Shia; we will expand on this at a later stage. One should note, however, that the most prominent Shiite families at the time were the Assaads, Al-Saghirs, Usayrans, Zeyns, Beydouns and Khalils. Their main focus was at that time local politics relevant to Jabal Amil and hence the Jabal became politically isolated from its surroundings. Furthermore, the Ulamas who

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<sup>7</sup> Chibli Mallat. "Shi'i thought from the south of Lebanon" Papers on Lebanon (April, 1988). Beirut: the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies. P. 7

<sup>8</sup> Chalabi, Op. Cit., p.22

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 48



got their education from Najaf, played little role *vis-à-vis* Jabal Amil's incorporation into the new Lebanese entity. At the time, they were the main intellectual class within the Shia community, and contributed to the society by opening religious schools such as al-Jaafariya, which were affected for the most part by the teachings of Najaf. It is important to note that the two main Shia jurisprudence centers are in the Iraqi city of Najaf known for its quietist trend, and the Iranian city of Qom known for its activist trend.

Hence the role of feudal Shiite families superseded the role of the religious institutions and the Ulamas who followed the somewhat mainstream quietist approach, and therefore did not interfere in politics. Yet one should not overestimate the role played by the feudal families since they lacked any substantial political weight on the overall Lebanese scene. As Tamara Chalabi mentions in her book *The Shia of Jabal Amil and the New Lebanon*, Kamil Bey Assaad, who was leader of the most influential Amili family at the time, had legitimacy but was inefficient and incompetent. She particularly mentions the incident of the man who insulted Kamil Bey in his home, and the latter could only complain to the highest authorities, who in their turn removed the man from office.<sup>10</sup>

This sad reality of the Shia was also reflected not only as a politically weightless major community within a small patch of land, but also as an alienated religion within the greater Ottoman realm where they were considered as second-class citizens. Shiism itself was not considered as a separate religion, and hence, as Chalabi notes, Shiite members of the religious class were forced to conscription during World War I. The Shia also suffered tremendously when all their crops were confiscated by the Ottomans; this had a double effect as their economy relied mainly on agriculture.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 44

Furthermore, and despite all this alienation and weakness, and with the first pangs of Greater Lebanon's genesis, came a new challenge for the Shia of Lebanon who were forced, despite their quietist nature, to take some decisive and critical decisions that would define not only the course of their future but also that of the new Lebanese entity as well as that of the whole region.

The first signs of a more active Shiite community appeared sadly with the tragic Aley Trials of 1915. These trials had a particular significance for the Amilis as they brought to light both shifting political dynamics as well as the beginnings of the integration of the 'Amili *wujaha* into the proto-Lebanese political society. With the failure of earlier claims by Arab societies for greater autonomy and a greater role in the decision-making process within the Empire, a number of Arab societies emerged all over the Ottoman realm, or what was left of it, asking for independence in what became an orchestrated Arab effort. The major Amili families hastened to denounce these movements, particularly the Asaads. Yet another prominent Shiite figure, Abdel Karim Al Khalil, joined ranks alongside other Christian, Sunni, and Amili figures and united under the banner of anti-Turkism. Eventually, Khalil was convicted and executed, becoming in the process a new martyr and a new symbol; another confirmation of his community's sense of injustice, and one more cause for the community to identify with the larger Arab movement, as Chalabi noted.<sup>11</sup> The Aley Trials played a great role in creating a Shia sense of legitimacy and served as a major component of the Arab Revolt of 1918.

The tragedy of the Aley Trials resonated for decades to come in the Lebanese Shiite psyche and culture. Through the reflective words of Sheikh Sulayman Dahir, one

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p.48

of the Amili intellectual trio, the reader can identify major traits of the 'Amili way of life which was poor, candid, and simple.

Neither my killing nor crucifixion did I heed  
If my death were to revive my people  
And death is tastier than the breeze of youth  
Whose enamored heart is primed  
No person reaches that elevated meadow  
If he doesn't pass through the thorny peak  
My favorite thirst is my nation's quenching  
And its preying is sweetest in my hunger<sup>12</sup>

Dahir's poetry reflected the level of hardship the population endured and which, as Chalabi notes, affected their allegiance in later times of peace. Chalabi emphasizes this idea by highlighting the importance of Dahir's diary which: "Has significance far wider than personal expression. On the one hand, his diary provides a unique window to a place and time otherwise ignored in the contemporary literature (Jabal Amil in the last days of the Ottoman Empire). In addition, as Dahir was one of the leading intellectuals, the diary also provides an important insight into the mindset of this segment of 'Amili society".<sup>13</sup>

The incidents that took place during that period of Lebanon's history revealed some very interesting trends in the way the Amilis dealt with the whole matter of self-determination. Although the peoples of the whole Levant and Gulf area were casting their lot to take a part in the major decisions that were to affect their future as distinctive socio-

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 51

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 56

religious and ethnic groups in the Middle East, the Amilis, on the other hand, did not show any communitarian awareness of the scope and importance of either the incidents that were taking place, or the implications that these might have on them as a unified community. Interestingly enough, and as Chalabi notes, the different strata of the Amili community did not show, until very late, a unified policy or vision in joining Faysal's Arab Revolt and later on the creation of Greater Lebanon<sup>14</sup>. This hesitation, particularly on behalf of notables like Kamil al-Asaad, can be explained by the absence of any links between the Amili notables and their Damascene counterparts, as these did not acknowledge, and rightly so, any popular or political weight to the Amili notables.

This might have led to discrepancies, due to lack of information from major Arab decision-making circles, in the interpretation of events by the Shiite notables. Another factor for the hesitation to join Faysal's Revolt was the failure of people like al-Asaad to identify any immediate advantage and gains from this whole Arab movement. Finally, the only people and notables who showed any interest and who were willing to join the Revolt were the notables of Tyre and Sidon. This zeal was not displayed due to their understanding of the new paradigms and imminent changes, but rather due to their enthusiasm in undermining al-Asaad's role within the Amili community. All this happened whence the whole of Jabal Amil was considered as only of tactical importance rather than ideological or nationalistic.<sup>15</sup>

From the other part, the French knew how to draw upon Christian and Shiite support by using a divide, in order to rule policy aimed at enhancing the role of the earlier, and intimidating the latter to accept the incorporation of Jabal Amil to the new

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

Lebanese entity. These practices were perceived by the King-Crane Commission. One should note, however, that some of these petitions reflected the authentic desire of some groups within the community. The petition that was submitted in Tyre, for instance, championed the idea of incorporation of Jabal Amil into Lebanon all while demanding “safeguarding the rights of the different communities and freedom of worship”.<sup>16</sup> These claims reflected, as Chalabi notes, “a lack of political awareness and maturity and isolation in that they failed to mention Iraq or the connection with Syria or potential problems that may be aroused in Palestine”.<sup>17</sup>

These tendencies, which reveal a very weak communitarian belongingness and awareness especially by a community that had its share of suppression and oppression over the centuries, were later on slowly overthrown by a growing minority awareness which should be noted as a very important breakthrough in the sociological evolution of the Shiite community of Lebanon. The community tried to benefit from the Franco-British and Faysal dynamics that shaped the whole political scene for years to come.

The driving force behind this new reality was the growing opposition to the French mandate that started to surface in 1920. Dispersed groups of Shiite militants initiated small-scale guerrilla operations against French soldiers and interests in the area with no prospects of degenerating into full scale upheaval. The likes of Adham Khanjar, Sadek Hamzeh, and Mohammed Ahmad Bazzi, heads of these different groups, became popular heroes defying the popularity of the *bey*s who had no control over them.

Eventually, the *bey*s had to accept the inevitable and succumb to the French demands for controlling these groups from one side, and the growing damage that these

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 66

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 68

groups were inflicting on the *beys* in terms of popularity and influence. On April 24, 1920, all the major notables of the Shiite community including *beys* and *ulamas* had to meet with the leaders of these groups to discuss the future of the community as a whole, and the prospects and dangers of any future alignment and alliance. The Wady Hujayr meeting of 1920 constitutes the first-ever gathering of the Shiites of Lebanon as a community to discuss vital issues. Although little record was made of the meeting, it is considered nevertheless an important landmark in the history of the community. The main decision that was taken at that point was to embrace Faysal's Revolt. It proved to be a fatal decision, for soon after, Sadiq Hamza's armed group entered the Christian village of Ayn Ibl and massacred a number of residents. The situation escalated rapidly afterwards, despite his enmity with the militias, Kamil al-Asaad was held responsible since he was the major Shiite notable and had to flee to Palestine. The French authorities punished the whole community heavy-handedly as aerial bombing followed and financial reparations were forced on the Shiites of the south.

Under the heavy burden of destroyed villages and a razed economy, the Shiites were incorporated into the new Lebanese entity. Abdel Husayn Sadiq described the situation best when he said "Jabal Amil was swallowed by Mount Lebanon".<sup>18</sup> Hence the Shiites had to start anew and bridge the huge cultural gap between the new constituent elements of Greater Lebanon, for Jabal Amil as well as the Bekaa were not perceived as lands with long and rich socio-cultural heritage, but as "the southern extension and natural complement to the core (Mount Lebanon) of a state that was reclaiming its ancestral existence in the newly established Grand Liban. As such, the area was described and appreciated in terms of natural resources and agricultural capacity. Its population was

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 125

invisible except when connected to the central part of what is Mount Lebanon, this connection being implicitly communitarian".<sup>19</sup> Hence the founding fathers of the new entity had not fully reconciled with the newly incorporated area, and only appreciated its agricultural potential; they even justified the government's neglect in developing it and the Bekaa with the temporary and uncertain final incorporation into Greater Lebanon, since the British had previously attempted to join them to Palestine. The South was particularly considered a burden due to its minimal benefits and even more so with the creation of the state of Israel.

To add insult to injury, the Shiites of Jabal Amil not only had to join the new entity as poor and deprived second-class citizens, but also had to live with the fact that their territories were cut in half, and numerous families found themselves suddenly separated by boundaries that meant different citizenships, allegiances, and fates with parts incorporated into Palestine.<sup>20</sup> With the continuous French and Mount Lebanese attempts to establish direct links and emphasize the Phoenician legacy of the Maronites, the Shiites struggled for centuries to be acknowledged by the majority Sunni lands as Arabs on equal footing with their surroundings. Hence the community tried to pull itself back together and lay claim through its own means and traditions to a greater role in Greater Lebanon, but to no avail.

In 1936, growing Arab nationalist sentiments filled the air, particularly among Lebanese Muslims. These faced attempts, mainly by Christians, to declare the independence of Lebanon. Therefore, in 1936 all major Muslim leaders and notables, predominantly Sunni, as well as Arab nationalist groups, Syrian Nationalists, and the

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 87

<sup>20</sup> Mallat, *Op. Cit.*, p. 5

Communist Party of Lebanon and Syria met in what became later known as the Sahel Conference. The major demand was the rejection of the New Greater Lebanon entity and the championing of unity with Syria. Many Shiite notables like Ahmad Arif al-Zayn participated in the conference with the main objective of securing a better future for the community, with the issue of Syrian unity as only secondary. The Shiites found themselves stuck between two unfavorable alternatives, but their failure to offer a third can be brought back to what Tamara Chalabi labeled as cultural inheritance. Chalabi enumerated a number of built-in factors that characterized the Shiites at the time, and that led to this failure: 1. As a minority group, the Shiites had no active political legacy; 2. They had no role outside their regions and therefore lacked any political weight on the Lebanese scene; 3. The community's long legacy of quietism rendered the presence of any strong and capable elite able to voice and realize their community's yearnings quite remote; 4. The absence of a strong religious institution that has strong ties and coordination with regional extensions depleted any chance for the community to offer an alternative.<sup>21</sup>

Eventually, concession politics prevailed among the Sunnis and the Maronites who managed to strike a deal in 1943 in the unwritten National Pact which distributed authority between the two communities. The Shiite community, a helpless bystander, could only accept the new *fait accompli*, and play a marginal role once again. With the constant neglect of the successive governments, and the *beys'* failure to attract the government's attention and development schemes to the rural areas or even to respond to the overwhelming *matlabiyya* (demands political relationship), many country dwellers felt the heavy burden of poverty and life in the countryside, and eventually migrated to

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<sup>21</sup> Chalabi, Op. it., p. 109



Beirut in search for better opportunities diminishing in the process the power of rural *bey*s and eventually Hourani's "ideologies of the mountain and the city"<sup>22</sup> *compromis* with the Sunni elite. Others migrated to the United States of America, the Gulf, and West Africa where they faced much better fortunes. That group was destined to play later on a pivotal role in supporting its community in very critical yet opportune times.

That brief cycle of activism ended with no major breakthroughs and the community returned to its quietism except for groups who joined ideological parties, both nationalist and communist, which offered them chances to get rid of their communitarian label and attempt to be accepted by their broader socio-religious surroundings, yet all with the aim of developing and improving the living conditions of their community. One should mention here that the enrollment of the Shia in parties that were spread all across the country enabled them, alongside better access to education and enhanced internal transportation networks and exposure to the media,<sup>23</sup> to step into the general cultural evolution of Lebanon and get a glimpse of modernization. Eventually, discrimination was felt even in the most secular parties and no Shiite managed to reach a top ranking position in any of these parties. As Vali Nasr notes, the Shia were the first to declare the death of Arab nationalism for its failure to "deliver its promises of inclusion".<sup>24</sup>

Noteworthy also is the fact that after years of Ottoman attempts to eradicate the Shiite culture, the community benefited from the new post-Ottoman wave of freedom to establish cultural pillars that characterized the Shia for years and years, namely al-Irfan

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<sup>22</sup> Albert Hourani. "Ideologies of the Mountain and the City" Essays on the Crisis in Lebanon (1976). ed. Roger Owen. London: Ithaca Press: pp 33-41

<sup>23</sup> Augustus Richard Norton. "Changing Actors and Leadership among the Shiites of Lebanon" The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 482 Nov. 1985: p. 112

<sup>24</sup> Vali Nasr, (2006). The Shia Revival: how conflicts within Islam will shape the future. New York: W.W. Norton and Company. p. 110

newspaper that voiced the demands of the community and carried the works of its most prominent writers to every Shiite home from the south to the northern tip of the Bekaa valley. Throughout its 65 years of publication between 1908 when it was established by Ahmad Arif El-Zein who benefitted from the new wave of freedoms under the reforming Ottoman Empire and 1973, al-Irfan truly reflected the cultural and political concerns and trends of the community. Hence articles strictly reflecting the simple Amili life, written by the likes of Sulayman Dahir, would in time give way to articles written by clerics echoing the changes that were shaping the Shiite world in distant cherished places like Najaf. This had become particularly common with the emergence of Khomeini as a prominent rebellious exiled cleric in the 1960s.

The writings of Shiite clerics in al-Irfan were an important indicator of their growing role in airing the concerns and needs of the community facing the marginal role played by the Shiite political elite who would gradually face a tidal wave led by clerics supported by the grass-roots. Most notable is the role played by Mohammad Jawad Moughniya, who was at one point the head of the Jaafariya tribunal. Moughniya's career as cleric was characterized by his outright opposition to the political elite, something that would eventually lead to his downfall. The major concern of the landed families of the south at the time was "to avoid the nomination to a powerful position of a man whom they felt as antagonistic to their rule;"<sup>25</sup> hence they opted for Musa al-Sadr whose nomination, as Mallat states, had secured them several years of respite. Moughniya's approach, and despite his aggressive opposition to the *zaims* and the state, was nevertheless a Lebanese nationalist approach asking for a fair share in powers and development for his community. Moughniya also championed Arab unity only to replace

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<sup>25</sup> Mallat, Op. Cit., p.17

this support by a support for his Islamism, also a reflection of his community's despair of the Arab promise. All this while opposing Khomeini's *wilayat-al-faqih* as did most Najafi scholars at the time who claimed that "until the return of the Mahdi, no person, not even the *ulemas*, can claim supremacy over the body politic".<sup>26</sup>

In addition to al-Irfan, major educational institutions and schools emerged, particularly al-Ja'fariyya and al-Amiliyya schools. Notable Ulama and intellectuals graduated from these schools, some of which continued their religious education in the religious center of Najaf and then returned with much religious and intellectual insight to the benefit of the whole community.

This infrastructural build-up that started to take shape with the creation of Greater Lebanon and developed further in an independent Lebanon constituted the best written record for understanding the history of the Shia of Lebanon.<sup>27</sup> Most importantly, it provided the perfect setting for the regeneration of a distinctive culture ready to be sowed by a movement that understood the whole Shiite experience in Lebanon, a movement born from the very wounds and sufferings of this community, after all they might have been waiting for Musa al-Sadr's Shiite renaissance that started to show its first birth pangs in the early 1970s.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p. 23

<sup>27</sup> Fouad Ajami, (1986). The Vanished Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon. New York: Cornell University Press. P. 11

## **4 Greater Lebanon – A Haven for Minorities, or a Melting Pot?**

To better appreciate the scope of the Shiite transformation from a quiescent group to a more active community one should understand the cultural and communitarian context this community lived in. After all this tiny and rugged terrain stretching north-to-south on a thin band of mountains, historically known as Mount Lebanon, was also known to be the haven of all religious minorities in the region seeking shelter from a religious oppressor or power bidder. The land itself became a prototype of discriminated peoples becoming, with time, the discriminators. Twelver Shiites fleeing the purges of an expanding Sunni empire found shelter in the mountains of Keserwan and of the North, only to be forced further south by a fleeing Maronite community escaping the threat of extinction at the hands of their fellow Eastern Christian communities a few centuries later. Druze from Egypt found the mountains of the Shouf region most suitable for their survival and flourishing. These three communities formed the main components of the population of Mount Lebanon and blended together, sometimes in the most bloody of ways. The Greek Orthodox and Muslim Sunni communities flourished in the maritime coastal cities of Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon, and Tyre. Over nine centuries these various communal sects constituted the main elements of two distinct entities, sometimes more, living side by side under different conquerors and invaders only to be brought together in 1920, with the newly immigrating Armenian and Alawite communities, under the realm of Greater Lebanon, the ever evasive would-be “Christian” homeland in the Levant.

These entities evolved under Ottoman rule, which lasted more than 400 years. This era was characterized, at its early stages, by the imposition of the *dhimmi* system, a sort of caste discrimination between Muslims and non-Muslims in favor of the former. The later stages were characterized by the capitulations (special commercial and legal privileges for foreigners) granted by the Sublime Porte to major European powers *vis-à-vis* the local minorities in exchange for better diplomatic and political relations. The French were keen to improve their relations with the Maronites and the British with the Druze. This era also witnessed two main events that had a deep impact on the course of history in the country. The first was the imposition of a fixed *jizya* (poll) tax on *dhimmis*, complementing a land tax imposed on all the population, the *kharaj*. It is agreed that under the heavy burden of these taxes, many poor Christians converted to Islam. The second event was the fact that things did not always go smoothly between the Maronite majority and the Druze minority, and in some instances resulting tensions developed into full-scale wars leading to massacres and sectarian cleansing. The events of 1860, for example, led to major demographic and political changes with mixed results: The *mutasarrifiyya* came into effect, dividing the country into two enclaves, a Christian and a Druze one, ruled by a foreign Christian and Ottoman-appointed *mutasarrif* until 1914. Although this era was known to be one of the most stable periods in the history of Lebanon<sup>28</sup>, it witnessed a progressive mass exodus of emigrants with an estimated total of around 300,000 people, most of them Christians.<sup>29</sup>

The multi-confessional demographic composition of the country forced the founding fathers, keen to establish a democratic system, to take into account in 1926 and

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<sup>28</sup> Engin Akarli, (1993). *The Long Peace: Ottoman Lebanon, 1861-1920*. Berkeley: U of California P.

<sup>29</sup> Courbage, Op. Cit., p. 63. Numbers are based on the statistics presented by Courbage for the period ranging between 1860 and 1914.

again in 1943 all this cultural, religious and social diversity and tension. Hence, since its independence in 1943, Lebanon was subjected to the game of numbers embedded in the country's Constitution as well as its unwritten National Pact; a weakness that crippled the political system over the years since delicate adjustments had to be made to meet the subtle demographic changes.

With this, the Lebanese Christians in general and the Maronite community in particular sacrificed their aspirations of creating an economically self-fulfilling haven in the Levant. They had also to acknowledge that Lebanon has an Arab identity and association. This issue became problematic and threatening to the Lebanese entity with the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, and at a later stage when the Christians lost their demographic edge. This is something very ironic, considering that the Christians were historically, for a little less than 2000 years, the majority in the lands that constitute modern-day Lebanon, only to lose this numerical preponderance once they had achieved their goal of independence. With its enlarged borders and newly acquired fertile plains, this new entity was supposed to be a safe shelter for all Levantine Christians, especially the Maronites; instead, it became over the years the home of their broken dreams of an ideal independent nation-state. With them alone to blame, the Maronites failed in 1920 to respond to the warnings of the French Secretary for the High Commissioner, Robert De Caix, who highlighted the danger of incorporating into the newly declared entity the districts of Akkar, Bekaa, Jabal Amil, as well as the coastal cities of Beirut, Tripoli, and Sidon, all with Muslim majorities. De Caix foresaw the long-term problems that such territorial inclusions would create in terms of demographic imbalances leading to

political competition and conflicts.<sup>30</sup> In other words, and according to De Caix, the short-term benefits of such incorporation would be overshadowed by the creation of long-term seeds of future intractable problems. Sadly, De Caix was right. The changes started to show 20 years after the 1920 creation of Greater Lebanon, since it was in 1932 that the last official population census was conducted, and after that obtaining accurate numbers became too politically charged.

The creation of Greater Lebanon meant that new consociational agreements needed to be forged, especially with regard to distributing the top positions among the largest Lebanese religious communities; hence the Presidency was granted to the Christian Maronites, the Premiership (Prime Minister's office) to the Sunnis, and finally the post of Speaker of Parliament went to the Shiites. This distribution had to be further integrated, though not in a written text, on the eve of independence in 1943. It should be noted that the constructive role played in this struggle by the different Muslim sects, particularly the Sunnis, mended the Muslim-Christian schism created by continual Sunni rejection of this new entity, which reached its peak with the Sahel Convention of 1936 during which major components of the Lebanese Muslim population declared their allegiance to a unified greater Syria constituted of Lebanon and other provinces. The consensus reached between the two largest Lebanese communities at that stage, as we discussed earlier, the Maronites and the Sunnis, paved the way for the creation of a unified and independent Lebanon. The agreement was highlighted in the National Pact, which constituted a successful *modus vivendi*, at least until 1958, between the Maronites and the Sunnis under a Maronite presidential system. At that time, numbers went slightly

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<sup>30</sup> Hourani. *Op. Cit.*

in favor of the Christian communities, though they remained elusive due to critical political implications.

The progression of events between the arrival of these different religious groups and until the creation of Greater Lebanon was characterized not only by the evolution of two different entities living side by side, but also and most importantly by the development of characteristics and traits that are distinctive to the respective groups living in these lands. Understanding the development of these traits that have become identifiable characteristics particular to every group would help us understand even better the importance of the emergence of the Shiites of Lebanon and the greater role they have managed to play in the following years as well as the great decline of other communities such as the Maronites.

#### **4.1 The Maronite & Druze Communities of Mount Lebanon**

It should be said that the religious and communal diversities that can be found in the lands of Mount Lebanon had led to some sort of struggle for survival. This was particularly evident when the Ottoman Empire started to lose its grip on the course of events in its lands. It was then that things turned into a survival of the fittest, with the Empire crumbling down and living on support injections from different European powers in return for capitulations. Hence the Maronites forged overt relations with the French who were particularly interested, ever since the withdrawal of the last Crusades from the Levant in 1291, in protecting all Catholic communities in the Orient. French support and Maronite dependency on that support grew stronger over the years until the end of World War I, when the European powers scrambled the territories of the crumbling Empire



among them under the legitimizing banner of Mandate. The French evidently sought to protect the Christians of Lebanon and eventually helped them gain independence and establish an independent entity that was supposed to be their own: Greater Lebanon. For the years that followed the Maronites, who were failing to identify their status as a minority in their country, also failed in the process to loosen their grip on the political system or introduce reforms acknowledging the political weight of other communities.

This unchanging situation turned into a recipe for disaster with the advent of the armed Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1970, and the beginning of the Lebanon War in 1975. Eventually, the war led to the 1989 Taef Agreement which ripped from the Maronite community major privileges it had, particularly by reducing the powers of the Presidency of the Republic, the highest Maronite position. Under the Syrian *tutelle*, the Maronites opted for migration to escape oppression, and eventually after the Syrian withdrawal in 2005 the community failed to reverse this trend and had to adapt by relying on its human resources abroad to tap into their power to lobby, and remittances that could reduce the pressure of the economic situation. Nevertheless, one should acknowledge that the Christians of Lebanon and the Maronites in particular have lost the leverage of western powers, particularly the European powers, which no longer show any interest in playing a protective role in the East. The only remaining solution is to rely on the support of the United States of America; but since that country has no vested interest in protecting Christian minorities in particular, its interests and policies in the Middle East vary according to its interests in oil routes as well as its relationship with Israel which remains despite everything the main effective lobbying force in the US.

Hence the Maronites have to focus on their extensions worldwide, particularly

human capital, and only rely on occasional support from the major powers when interests concur. Maronite emigrants had historically the chance, though they missed repeatedly the occasion, to act as ambassadors for their different causes and to lobby effectively in the centers of power and decision in the West, particularly in the Americas and Europe.

The Druze community, on the other hand, seems to have been able to identify its strength and assess the surrounding opportunities and threats with every major change in the Middle East, be it political or demographic. Hence, the Druze, who constituted the main counterparts to the Maronites in Mount Lebanon, were aware since the beginning that their numbers do not count for much in the region, especially that their presence was concentrated in Mount Lebanon, in Palestine and in Jabal-al-Druze in Syria. The small community managed to forge a reputation of staunch warriors capable of using brutal force against rival communities to deter any future assaults. This was particularly true for their long and bloody relationship with the Maronites. Added to that, the Druze managed to build a strong alliance with the United Kingdom during the Capitulations era. The British tried to balance the situation with the French in the East by forging strong relations with the Druze and the Jews. Although the Druze community relied on, and benefitted tremendously from, this alliance by translating it on the ground into more power both territorially and politically, their strongest trait remained nevertheless their ability to adapt to the changing political environment. Community leaders, particularly the Jumblatts, made sure to forge local alliances with the ruling elites in order to avoid any confrontation with the state that might lead to their undermining. Their strong ties with ruling parties helped them maintain their stature and political power in the country.

One can clearly identify this trend in the shifting of alliances by Walid Jumblatt in

the period between 2001 and 2005 when he read the changing situation on the ground as being in favor of Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon under heavy international pressure. Jumblatt shifted his stance from ally and staunch supporter of the Syrian presence to a staunch anti-Syrian opponent. Eventually, he managed to preserve and even enlarge the political representation of the Druze community after the Syrian withdrawal.

## **4.2 Greek Orthodox & Sunni Communities of the Coast**

The Greek Orthodox community is the second largest Christian community in Lebanon, historically it managed to benefit from Russian protection during the Capitulations era. Unlike the Maronites, this community forged excellent mercantile relations with the Muslim Sunni community of Lebanon. These two communities created an economically self-sufficient entity based on trade. Understandably, the Greek Orthodox had better relations with their Muslim surroundings when compared to the Maronites. Yet in the years that preceded the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, this community played a main role in initiating, spreading and endorsing Arab Nationalism. The Arab Greek Orthodox community was responsible of initiating the two main Arab nationalist parties in the Levant: the Baath Party established by Michel Aflaq and the Nationalist Socialist Syrian Party established by Antoun Saade. These attempts were particularly aimed at gaining Arab and Muslim acceptance of an Arab Christian community united with the Muslims under the banner of Arab nationalism. This community had learned from past Levantine experiences of the dangers of siding with western and external forces that venture every now and then in the Levant and the catastrophic consequences that this incurred on the local communities after the foreigners

left. But in endorsing this Arab Nationalist stand, the Greek Orthodox community risked its ties with other Christian communities living in the East, and seeking a different path, particularly the Maronites and the Greek Catholics who occasionally sided with the Maronites. By doing so, the Greek Orthodox community jeopardized any chance to build on strategic cultural relations with the West. Although this is not a threatening issue when Russian support is available, it can turn into a disastrous recipe with the absence of this support.

The Sunni community of Lebanon is undoubtedly the only community that managed to flourish without having any fear of extinction or losing any political weight in the country. This is mainly due to the geographic location of Lebanon in the center of a region that is predominantly Muslim Sunni, as Courbage asserts in his writings. The Sunnis had abandoned a long time ago the race for demographic superiority within the boundaries of Lebanon, since they could rely on the regional demographic weight that plays in their favor.<sup>31</sup> This community had previously flourished in the coastal cities of Lebanon, as we know it today, and hence nurtured mercantile traits that enabled it to play consensus politics whenever necessary. Even when some Christians were eager to voice their support for Syrian unity, prominent Sunni leaders read the political developments and managed to strike a deal in 1943 with their Maronite counterparts in the form of the National Pact, which gave them a decent decision-making share in the new predominantly Maronite entity. Time and again during the consecutive political crises in Lebanon starting with the 1958 revolt and until the 1975-1990 Lebanese war the Sunnis proved to be weak warriors, and had to rely on Palestinian guerrillas to fight their wars.

Eventually, they reasserted their position as excellent negotiators and mediators

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<sup>31</sup> Courbage, Op. Cit.

during the post-war period starting with the Taef Accord from which they emerged as the major beneficiaries thanks to Saudi sponsorship. And again with the assassination of ex-Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, the Sunni community proved to be an able moderate force in Lebanese politics that could, nevertheless, always rely on the threat, phony or real, of fundamentalist groups that is still very weak compared to other Arab countries, but which constitutes a powerful pivot putting the benefits of preserving the community's moderate forces in the forefront.

The Armenians of Lebanon also follow a stance similar to that of the Druze but with the main difference that the Armenians tend to rally forces with the major Christian force in the country, with few exceptions of course. This trend can be justifiable and is a sign of minority awareness, since it is a defense mechanism used by small communities to maintain their active role in a certain society and which can only be salvaged through an alliance with the strongest and most powerful force on the ground. The alternative would be opposing a power that the community is no match for, in other words a certain undermining that might prove fatal in a region like the Middle East.

### **4.3 Lebanon's Twelver Shiites**

The Shiites of Lebanon, on the other hand, and unlike all the other communities, have lived on the sidelines of Lebanese history. The main indicator of their political irrelevance was the fact that no major power, whether western or even Muslim cared to benefit from the Capitulations system to adopt them, or to use them as a pretext to interfere in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire. This reality was mainly due to the fact that the community itself cared less, at the time, about mingling in politics. It should be said

that practiced quietism. This culminated on many occasions in the practice of *taqiya* (or precautionary dissimulation), especially under extreme Ottoman oppression and discrimination. As Ajami pointed out in explaining the major behavioral nuances between Sunni and Shia Arabs, the Shia adopted a *batini* orientation, to some extent synonymous to quietism, in contrast to the *Zahiri* Sunni orientation:

A *Zahiri* orientation –literally meaning the external of things– that stressed the outward meaning of religious scripture, the apparent order of things, and a *batini* orientation that stressed the inward meaning of the faith, the esoteric, to which the majority was blind and which was only known to the initiated, to the ones who followed an Imam. The *Zahiri* orientation was the one of mainstream Sunni Islam and its self-assured cities and institutions. The *batini* tradition became the culture of the disinherited Shia, of the underground.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to these traits, the most important trait of the Shiites particularly Twelver Shiites, is martyrology. Shiites are generally known for their veneration of their martyrs, it is understandable that every small community born in the midst of hostile surroundings needs to raise its heroes and martyrs over normal humans and use them as examples of altruism and self-sacrifice for the sake of an important and sacred cause. This was the case with early Christians. The importance of martyrs in such communities was delineated by David Cook as first they create through their statements boundaries

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<sup>33</sup> Ajami, Op. Cit., 160

between two belief systems; second they create a standard of conduct by which other believers are judged; and finally they create cohesion and give substance to previously ambiguous values.<sup>34</sup> The thorough description of the bloodiest details would increase the emotional effect of these accounts, making death almost tempting to some people. Martyrologies that occur at the early stages of a certain religion or belief system usually shape the whole history and destiny of their groups through the messages conveyed by the martyrs themselves. Hence, Christianity derived the need to accept earthly sufferings to deserve a place in the Kingdom of Heaven; in other words, its essential characteristics are “the passivity towards the process, the role of exhortation, the demonization and ultimately the irrelevance of the persecutors, the fact that the martyrs usually forgive their tormentors prior to their own deaths, and the long-drawn-out sequence of death with blood and gore described in excruciating detail”.<sup>35</sup> Cook identified “several borrowed martyrdoms [from Christianity] that are of significance to Islam”.<sup>36</sup> In Shiism, the martyrdom of Ali, Hussayn and the remaining twelve Imams conveyed a clear message of standing up against injustice. The history of the community can be easily described as a history of martyrdom par excellence; one Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani wrote a book in 967 in which he identified that 189 descendants from the Prophet’s family were killed up till then.<sup>37</sup> Martyrdom can even be labeled as the main driving force and feature of Shiism. It has played a major propaganda role in converting people to this religion. The martyrology of Hussayn bin Ali is undoubtedly the major single event that shaped and influenced the history of the community. Shiites all over the world, to this very day,

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<sup>34</sup> David Cook, (2007). Martyrdom in Islam. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. P. 2.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p.10 – 11

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 53

mourn the death of Hussayn on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Muharram, or Ashoura, in an attempt to wash away their ancestors' guilt of not standing next to Hussayn in a moment of truth. The death of Hussayn and his companions at Karbala represents a group act undertaken by a communal leader who was willing to sacrifice his life in a defiant act against injustice as well as an act undertaken by his companions who willingly sacrificed their lives for their beliefs. This single act sums up the whole Shiite martyrology based on the need to fight injustice; after all, Shiites describe this act as "when blood vanquished swords", not only did al-Hussayn and his companions deliver a clear cut message, but they also left no place for neutrality. After Ashoura, Muslims were branded as either supporters of Muhammad's descendants or as followers of the Caliphs. The direct effect of Ashoura was the mobilization of Shiites and their "secterianization".<sup>38</sup> Eventually, this mobilization dried out with the twelfth Imam, Muhammad al'Mahdi's occultation in 874, when Arab Shiites decided to endorse quietism waiting for his return to establish the messianic age and to bring justice at the end of time.

Hence, Arab Shiites managed to live with the paradoxical combination of quietism, and the need to act that is recited in the different hagiographical accounts of hundreds of martyrs who stood up for their religion and for justice for centuries to come. Lebanese Shiites who were previously satisfied with one representative out of twelve in the Moutasarifiyyah system could, after the creation of an independent Lebanon, start to benefit from the sense of freedom brought about with this new entity. After all, Shiite martyrdom is not championed by the community for its love of death as many accuse it, but because, as Dr. Ali Fayad, Director of the Consultative Center for Research, affirms: "Martyrdom in Shia Islam is accepted in specific cases only... martyrdom in the service

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 57



of life”.<sup>39</sup> All in all, the mobilizing role of the Jaafariya and Amiliya schools as well as the growing sense of communal awareness combined with all the aspects of a modernizing Lebanese society of which the Shiites got a glimpse when they were forced to migrate to the cities and get exposed to nationalistic and leftist ideologies, transformed the community from a rural community subject to feudal authority into a community that is ready to mobilize under opportune circumstances and leadership to claim its place under the sun. One of these circumstances was undoubtedly the demographic explosion that took place in Jabal Amil in the twentieth century, as the population increased from around 130,000 in the 1920s to 600,000 by the beginning of the Lebanese war in 1975.<sup>40</sup>

One should consider that the Sunnis have no more obsessions with the demographic race since they can feel secure in their majoritarian Sunni regional environment. As for the Christians and Shiites, it is probable that over the long run they will find confidence in each other, strengthen their ties and find security within national borders. However, emigration remains the major player in demographic development. Lebanon is known to be one of the few countries that have more nationals living abroad than on its own territory.

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<sup>39</sup> Abbas al Sabbagh. “The Shi’it in Lebanon: the confused relationship with the state of confessions [part 2 of 2]: form deprivation and the obsession of protection reaching to Amal and Hezbollah” *Annahar* 29 Jan 2007: 13

<sup>40</sup> Mallat, *Op. Cit.*, p. 3

## 5 Musa Al Sadr & the Shia Revival

Historians usually identify the first half of the 1970s as the time when the state broke down in Lebanon and its degeneration into sectarian feuds and religious tensions. It should be noted that tensions started right after the Cairo Agreement of 1969, which permitted Palestinian armed groups to use south Lebanon as a base to launch guerrilla attacks on Israel. This became a main instigator of Christian insecurities and led to a period that was characterized by the creation of undeclared demographic cantons, whereby every religious group fortified itself in its streets and villages. It is at that time that para-military groups started to buy arms and prepare for a long war. Nevertheless, very few historians identify this period and these escalations as the main thrust for the Shia revival in Lebanon. One should really trace inside writings on the Shia of Lebanon during that specific period to understand that the growing sectarian sentiments invading the country at that time and the breakdown of the country's constitutional institutions were in fact and ironically enough, a step forward for the Shia community. This period witnessed the emergence of the Shia not as a divided community following the steps of its weak and helpless feudal lords; on the contrary, the community was emerging as a strong community due to its demographic boom, the arms supplied by different Arab regimes who were starting to believe more and more in the uselessness of fighting Israel directly, and who were convinced that the best way to pay historical dues for their culture and people was to fight Israel through the *Fedayyin* and Lebanese proxy sects, a much cheaper means.

The single most important factor in unifying the Shia of Lebanon at that time came from the East and not from the community itself. One should have predicted back

then that this change was not a mere hopeless and helpless attempt by a maverick Imam voicing his community's demands for social and political change, but a forerunner of winds of change blowing from the mosques and religious *madrasas* of Persia rebelling against a corrupt political system struggling to preserve itself and failing to unify and mobilize millions of Shia scattered around the East.

The role played by Musa Al-Sadr in Lebanese politics and history remains a source of much debate to this very day. Some people perceive him as a popular, progressivist religious figure, whereas others perceive him as a populist politician with the main goal of undermining the authority of feudal lords in rural areas. No matter what point of view one deems correct, one cannot but acknowledge the fact that Musa Al-Sadr, with his energy and charisma, was probably the trigger for what later became known as the Shia Renaissance in Lebanon.

The combination of modernity, migration and socio-economic misery transformed the Shia population into a great recruitment pool for political parties and ideologies of all sorts. As the community was looking for a way out of its misery, major 'reformist', secular and doctrinaire political parties managed to co-opt the grass-roots, namely the Lebanese Communist party and the Syrian Nationalist Socialist Party. Here as well, the role of the Shia was undermined as no Shiite figure managed to reach high-ranking positions in either of the two political parties.

When in 1959 the Lebano-Persian Imam Musa Al-Sadr arrived in Lebanon, the Shia were ready to adopt a new way of thinking and a new ideology: Activism. As noted earlier, the jurisprudence center that was previously acknowledged and followed by Amili Shia was that of Najaf, known for its adherence to the quietist trend in Shia Islam.

But Musa Al-Sadr brought with him the beliefs and religious trends of his birth place, the Persian religious center of Qom - the second jurisprudence center for the Shia. Ideas of activism and political involvement became the order of the day. It can be safely said that the revival triggered by Musa Al-Sadr in Lebanon was somehow a 'prior-shock' to the great Cleric revolution of Persia several years later.

The Imam, one should say, came at the right time in Shia history to play the major role in preparing them for the big changes that Lebanon and the whole region were yet to face. Al-Sadr instigated a popular movement facing Shia deprivation and alienation. His defiance of the traditional *zaims* rallied around him huge numbers of deprived Shia. His tools were, alongside uncontested popularity among his community, three things: His know-how in terms of understanding and dealing with Lebanese politics and politicians, the institutionalization of his popular current, and the creation of a centralized Shia religious institution. These three things evolved in different ways, sometimes contradicting each other, only to add to the aura and mystique of the Imam's personality.

It is widely known that Musa Al-Sadr managed to build close relations with politicians from all currents and viewpoints. Even during the most violent times of the Lebanon war, the Imam preserved his ties with prominent political figures, Christians and Muslims, Rightist and Leftist, Lebanese and Arab. This was thanks to his personality that reflected his true belief, at a time of hatred and sectarianism, in the importance of dialogue, tolerance and empathy among different religions and groups, particularly in a country like Lebanon. This was particularly reflected in the words of one of his associates and quoted by Norton:

The Imam believed that Lebanon represented a unique example to the world to prove the Oneness of God despite its plurality of religions.

For him religions were but different ways to reach God, just like the different ways to reach the peak of a mountain. The Imam does not deny that each way to God has its own and proper characteristics, but in their essence all ways are alike because they lead to the same end. Therefore he rejected estrangement among believers in the name of religion, and he insistently preached the harmonization among them.

The Imam was greatly involved in the salvation of Lebanon, because for him Lebanon is the country of dialogue, of tolerance, and of harmony, in one word, the country of freedom. There is no doubt that the Imam wanted the social and political evolution of Lebanon, but on condition that this evolution would be brought about by peaceful, moral and non-violent means.<sup>41</sup>

This deep belief paved the way not only for building bridges of communication with different Lebanese sects and political groups, but also helped create a preponderate belief among the Shia in the sense of Lebanese belongingness as well as their duty to integrate this cultural mosaic. The Imam forged very good relations with the Christian political elite all while remaining capable of shifting alliances to suit the best interest of his community. In this sense, the Imam reflected the true situation of his community in that he was thirsty for opening up and getting accepted by his surroundings, while being ready and capable of transforming into a fearful foe armed to the teeth and willing to

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<sup>41</sup> Norton, Op. Cit., p. 113

clinch his rights thanks to his community's booming demographic and military weight.

After all, it was Imam Al-Sadr who said: "Arms are the garments of men". These are two characteristics that were experienced firsthand by Yaser Arafat's PLO; since it is with the armed Palestinian groups who were expelled from Jordan to Lebanon in 1970 that the Imam had a very controversial relationship.

The advent of the *Fedayyin* in the early 1970s opened with it a new chapter in the history of Lebanon. The country had already undergone the stipulations of the Cairo Agreement, some sort of *fait-accompli* legitimizing the use of the southern Lebanese border areas by the Palestinians as a base for attacks against Israel. Once more the Shia of Lebanon found themselves neglected by their own state that was willing to compromise their dignity and threaten the peace. Arafat and his Palestinian guerrillas found in Lebanon a suitable ground to retrieve occupied territories, even if this meant razing the whole country to the ground. The Maronites perceived the emergence of these groups as a great threat, the Leftist bloc and the Sunnis saw it as an opportunity, whereas the Shia saw it as the utter destruction and transformation of their villages and lives. Suddenly the Shia found themselves stuck in the middle of a war they did not choose to fight, their villages becoming the battlefield. Although at the beginning they were supportive of the Palestinian cause, as the people who were raised on Arab Nationalist ideologies they now had to pay dearly for centuries of ignorance and alienation. This war was much bigger than they were. The Palestinians paid no attention and had no affections whatsoever for the lands and people who were forced to welcome them and their struggle. The oppressed became the oppressors.

This state of affairs deepened the wounds of an already impoverished and shattered community that was growing at the time more and more abhorrent of the Palestinians and their excessive trespasses. Some authors, like Ajami and Chalabi, did not hesitate to confirm that the community had placed hopes, at some point, on the Israelis to deliver them from the atrocities of the *Fedayyin*. But in reality their hope was crushed with a disillusioning reality, as the fierce Israeli retaliations were too brutal, violent and usually did not spare Amili from Palestinian targets. It was then, as many writers highlighted, that the Israelis lost a potential ally in the Arab world. Ajami puts it best: "The people Musa al Sadr represented were between a rock and the hard place, between the claims of the Palestinians and the facts of Israeli power. Hell came to the quiet villages and towns of South Lebanon. The result was a virtual exodus from the south into the ghettos of Beirut. The people in the middle of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were in an untenable position. They were either "sympathizers with terrorists" or "collaborators with Israel."<sup>42</sup>

The only solution for the Shia was to stand up and defend their rights against all odds. This was rendered easier when the Syrian Baathist regime decided to intervene in Lebanon to stabilize the situation in 1976. For the first time in history, Lebanon's Shia entered the internal scene as a strong and united community. It should be stated that their alliance with the newly established Alawite regime was a win-win situation for both communities as later events would prove, especially that Musa al-Sadr had issued a *fatwa* earlier that year acknowledging the Alawite sect as a subsidiary of Twelver Shiism<sup>43</sup> and granting them in the process a wider popular legitimacy among the Arabs of the Middle

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<sup>42</sup> Ajami, Op. Cit., p. 163

<sup>43</sup> Asad AbuKhalil. "Syria and the Shiites: Al- Asad's Policy in Lebanon" *Third World Quarterly* 12. 2 (1990): 9

East as well as a potentially strong ally inside Lebanon. In return, the regime provided the Shia of Lebanon with sufficient military and moral support to overturn their desperate situation, in addition to protecting them against Palestinian bravados and adventures. This is best described by Fuad Ajami quoting political historian Martin Kramer: "The regime of Hafez al Asad needed quick religious legitimacy; the Shi'is of Lebanon, Musa al Sadr had decided, needed a powerful patron. Interests busily converged from every direction".<sup>44</sup> No other Lebanese community could claim to have such a strong and reliable regional ally. Despite all that, some writers argue that al-Sadr did not enjoy much popularity at that time, a few years before he vanished. That was mainly due to his unwavering support for the Syrian regime, especially when the latter decided to attack the PLO and the Lebanese National Movement. Al-Sadr preferred to remain true to his new regional ally even if that meant endorsing Syria's intervention in Lebanon in 1976, something that was considered by the Lebanese Left as an attempt to occupy the country.<sup>45</sup>

The second major contribution of the Imam was the institutionalization of this significant popular current into a political party, the Movement of the Deprived. This was a first among the Shia community of Lebanon. It was in the early seventies that the Imam's movement started to gain popular momentum. It became clear that the organization of this popularity in a well structured institution would be crucial for its sustainability and development. The Imam could rely at that time on the generous donations of many Shiite emigrants who managed to make a financial breakthrough in West African countries. Added to these, many highly educated Shiite youth adhered to

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<sup>44</sup> Ajami, Op. Cit., 174

<sup>45</sup> AbuKhalil, Op. Cit., p. 10



the Imam's demands and points of view, the most prominent of which was none other than Nabih Berri, who would later become not only the Imam's successor but also a major player in the Lebanese war and post-war eras.

From misery and alienation, the Imam managed to bring his community forth to the center, and surprisingly enough to play a moderate role in Lebanese politics. For the first time, the Shia had a political representation reflecting their aspirations and expectations for a better life, as well as to be treated as equals with respect to other Lebanese communities. After all, it was the Imam's belief in a powerful Lebanese state that pushed him away from the radical Left and the PLO. Imam Musa particularly hated Jumblattism and on many occasions expressed openly his resentment towards Kamal Jumblatt's continual exploitation of the Shia as "cannon fodder"<sup>46</sup> to have them fight their wars against the National Front. Fuad Ajami also states the Imam's famous call to Palestinians not to seek a "substitute homeland"<sup>47</sup> in Lebanon. Also one should not ignore the fact that he blamed the Maronites for neglecting and alienating the Shia time and time again.

This newly created movement was put to the test only one year after its creation with the beginning of the 1975 Lebanese war. Although he preached inter-communal peace and understanding, Musa al-Sadr was nevertheless no Ghandi, and to preserve the best interest of his community he had to adapt to the new situation. Once again the Shia of Lebanon had to keep up with the ever-evolving situation in the country. As they did a couple of years earlier, when they emerged for the first time as a unified political movement, they had to organize for the first time as an armed militia, Amal, to defend

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<sup>46</sup> Ajami, Op. Cit., p. 178

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* P. 179

their rights and claim their share of potential political spoils of war. Amal's history incarnates the true resentment that the community has *vis-à-vis* the repetitive provocations of the PLO. This adversity escalated at some point into a full scale war in what became known as the 1986 war of the camps.

Musa al-Sadr can truly be considered a man who believed in institutions. In addition to the creation of the Movement of the Deprived as a civic institution, Musa al-Sadr will also be forever remembered for institutionalizing the religious framework of the Shia of Lebanon. It was in 1969 that he established the Supreme Shiite Council and presided over it until his disappearance in 1978. This will be considered, for the purpose of this paper, as the major achievement of the Imam.

At the time of his disappearance in August 1978, Musa al-Sadr had left behind him a strong political institution capable of sustaining itself thanks to the remittances of the Shia living and working in Africa and Detroit, as well as a military arm capable of defending its community against any provocations from the PLO. Al-Sadr also paved the way for a strong alliance between the Shia of Lebanon and the Alawite regime of Syria, an alliance that would later become a major Arab player in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the leading pacemaker in Lebanese politics.

Lebanon's constitution consecrated the distribution of power among the largest religious groups in the government. With this distribution, the Shia evidently found themselves as the third ranked community when they were granted the position of speaker of the Chamber of Deputies (later renamed the National Assembly). Not only this, but the Shia faced another problem as well: The absence of any institutional framework for their religious authorities, when both the Sunnis and the Maronites

enjoyed a better organized and more powerful structure. It is very well known that the Maronite church played a pivotal role in preserving the entity and identity of Mount Lebanon throughout history. It is also believed that at some point the Maronite Church owned around 35 percent of Lebanon's real estate. As for the Sunni religious institution, it managed to gain more influence and power with the creation of Greater Lebanon. On the other hand, the Shia had to succumb to the authority of local feudal *zaims* until the daunting effort undertaken by Imam Musa al-Sadr.

It is therefore important to understand that this institutionalization process was not an evident idea, since the major difficulty resided in superseding the authority of the local *zaims*, particularly Kamel al-Asaad, who became the only nemesis to the Imam's authority and bid for a greater role within the community. A second challenge resided in gathering all Shiite clerics and having them participate in, and endorse, this undertaking. Nevertheless, the late sixties were best suited for such an idea to be launched and Imam Musa managed to get hold of the presidency of the Council as soon as it was established. The establishment of the Council eventually paved the way for a separation of authority within Shiism, between a secular centrist leadership and religious leaders. Even though both of them were unified in the person of Imam Musa al-Sadr it remained difficult for his successors to repeat this experience.

As we have seen, Musa al-Sadr's legacy played a major role in unifying the Shia of Lebanon. The Imam's positive impact on the general situation in Lebanon through constant communication with the different parties enabled the Shia to be accepted as major players on the Lebanese internal scene. One can easily say that Imam Musa al-Sadr was the precursor of the Shia socio-political Renaissance in Lebanon. Thanks to his

foresight he managed to forge alliances with major regional stakeholders, and institutionalize the whole political involvement of his community through the creation of the Movement of the Deprived; and when dialogue failed he had prepared his community for the greater evil through the creation of Amal. Nevertheless, his most beneficial input, or the one that was to play the greater cohering role in his community for years to come, was the creation of the Supreme Shiite Council. From a broader Lebanese perspective, Imam Musa al-Sadr will be forever remembered as the leader who made the Shiite community of the country acknowledge and accept its Lebanese belongingness, its definitive incorporation into this new entity, and its role as an intrinsic player and stakeholder in the country's politics. After al-Sadr, the Shiites of Lebanon became Lebanese Shiites.

In 1978, Imam Musa al-Sadr vanished during a trip to Libya with two of his companions. In what became a new chapter in Shiite martyrology, the Imam is thought to have fulfilled his mission, and as the twelfth Imam vanished twelve hundred years earlier, in the lesser *ghaiba* (occultation) so did he. His followers and companions remember to this day his disappearance, faithful that the vanished Imam will someday return to continue the journey. Some argue that his disappearance played a great role in reviving the Movement of the Deprived. It is also noteworthy that his disappearance added more *mystique* to his personality and gave him a more spiritual and "larger-than-life"<sup>48</sup> dimension. The Imam, who appeared suddenly in 1959, brought the Shiite community from darkness to light and upon fulfilling his mission twenty years later he disappeared in very ambiguous circumstances. The Imam's vision of imminent escalations was best reflected in Ajami's *Vanished Imam*:

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<sup>48</sup> Norton, Op. Cit., p.115

The Imam, the clerics explained, had fought for the people of the south, for their control over their land. The Imam had gone to a village that had been subjected to Israeli bombing; he had prayed in its mosque and advised the people to fight for their land. Sell your cow, he had said, your sheep, your bedding, but buy a weapon and hold onto the land. The Imam had warned that southern Lebanon alone could not bear the burden of the encounter with Israel. This was an Arab responsibility, he had said. The cause of Palestine was "dear to the Imam"... But the Imam did not believe that matters in the south could go on much longer as they had before. Sooner or later Israel was bound to strike. Was the Arab world ready to do much for these marginal men led by the Imam?<sup>49</sup>

Had he known he was right!? Although his political views and peaceful trends gained much popularity after his death, mainly thanks to his symbolic disappearance but also thanks to the repetitive PLO-Israeli clashes that gradually increased the support for the Amal movement, this movement seemed to be the only thing that could check the PLO. In addition to these two factors, a third factor emerged in 1979 though it preached radical religious ideology. This was the Iranian clerical revolution and it played a major role, as an example of the effectiveness of concerted and concentrated Shiite efforts, in revitalizing the Amal movement, which stood defiant with a 30,000-man strong militia.

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<sup>49</sup> Ajami, *Op. Cit.*, 186

As the strongest Lebanese militia, Amal overshadowed the Christian Phalanges at the time<sup>50</sup> until the Israeli invasion of 1982, and it became the incarnation of the sum of the whole Lebanese Shiite socio-political experience, only to be toppled soon afterwards from within the community by more radical forces.

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<sup>50</sup> Edgar O'ballance, (1998). Civil war in Lebanon, 1975 – 92. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. P. 113

## 6 The Clerical Revolution of Iran

The winds of change for Lebanon's Shia blew once again from Persia. At a time when the Arab world was doing what it does best, lamenting over the failed experiences of Arab nationalism and Marxism, history had prepared better fortunes for the Shia of the Middle East in general and of Lebanon in particular. Few months after the disappearance of Imam Musa al-Sadr, a group of Iranian ulamas ignited what would be later called the Iranian Revolution that toppled the Iranian Pahlavi Monarchy and replaced it with a theocratic rule, a first in the region. With these changes, the Shia of all the Middle East found a supporter and a protector who was eager to export its religious version to the whole Muslim World. Ajami put it: "The Shia of Lebanon had become part of a larger story. And Musa al Sadr himself came to serve an entirely new function. He was a man of double identity, claimed by the Iranians and by the Shia in Lebanon; he embodied the bonds, both real and imagined, between the two."<sup>51</sup>

The Shia of Iran, unlike all their co-religionists in the world, have had better luck. The lands historically known as Persia were subject to invasions of all sorts and were on many occasions the birthplace of great empires. It was during the seventh century that Islam reached these lands by the sword wiping out the already weakened Christian Sassanid Empire. The marriage of Iran with Shiism, as Vali Nasr points out, dates back to this period when Imam Hussayn married the daughter of the last Sassanid king, Princess Shahrbanou.<sup>52</sup> But the incidents that took place early at the beginning of the fifteenth century determined the whole historical path of these lands and the shaping of

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<sup>51</sup> Ajami, Op. Cit., 191

<sup>52</sup> Vali Nasr, Op. Cit., p. 63

their Persian identity. In 1501, the Safavid Dynasty, a Twelver Shiite dynasty, established itself as ruler of Persia and decreed Shiism as the new state religion while making sure to undermine the presence of any other Muslim sect, sometimes through the use of force. This caused violent disputes with neighboring Sunni realms which never ended. Hence, there emerged the Shiite-Persian identity versus the Sunni-Arab identity, which is the cause of much friction to this very day. Eventually the Safavid Empire succumbed to an invasion from the East, and Persia fell into internal chaos, with the Khajar Dynasty as the dominant force, until it fell under Russo-British semi-colonization.

But unlike their counterparts in Lebanon, the Shia of Persia had all the components for a successful mobilization brought about as early as 1890, namely a strong Persian national identity and a strong religious one, thanks to the rich religious legacy of the city of Qom, which though weakened at the time, remained nevertheless the second Shiite religious center after Najaf, therefore, it had a strong and active religious institution. Hence when in 1892 tobacco concessions were granted to the British, Persian clerics, with the help of a growing sense of liberalism slipped into Persia by Christian missionaries, forced the authorities to cancel these concessions. Eventually, this combination of Liberals and Muslim clerics, as Roskin notes<sup>53</sup>, would prove very pivotal in future changes in Persia. It should be noted that a powerful sheikh of that time, Mirza Hasan Shirazi, had issued a fatwa banning the use of tobacco and this proved very successful in manifesting the growing influence of the ulama on the populace, as Vali Nasr pointed out: "The Shah could grant a tobacco monopoly, but an ayatollah could

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<sup>53</sup> Michael Roskin, (2001). Countries and Concepts: Politics, geography, Culture. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. New Jersey: Prentice Hall. P. 475



decide whether that grant would mean anything”<sup>54</sup> in reference as well to the role of the religious institution as a watch dog, or “first line of defense”, making sure to remind political leaders of the need to stand up for their people’s rights. The following years are full of examples that demonstrate the growing influence of *ulama* intervention and the pushing for change in one way or the other. One such intervention was their joining the constitutional movement initiated by the liberals to put the Monarch’s absolute authority in check. It is safe to say that at the time, the *ulama* were interested in preserving the distribution of power and creating some sort of balance between the power of the Monarchy on one side and the people on the other, fearing that too much of the former would lead to more external influence and eventually colonialism, while too much of the latter would lead to secularism that might be incompatible with the rule of religion and hence undermine their own role in Persian society and their influence over the populace and the course of things in the country. They had no intent at that point to promote or apply an Islamic state or Islamic law.

Eventually, a military maverick leader, Reza Khan, seized power in 1921. The developments that followed proved to what extent Shiism in Persia was different and, in some ways, prouder than Lebanese Shiism. In 1925, Reza Khan crowned himself Pahlavi, a historical pre-Islamic Persian title; Reza Khan even renamed the country Iran, a word deriving from Aryan in reference to the superiority of the race and the people. Pahlavi’s politics clashed with the clerics’ agenda, which needed to make sure that Iran would remain a strong Shiite realm first and foremost, whereas the Pahlavis were seemingly championing Iran’s imperial legacy over its Shiism, which they perceived as: “A stumbling block to their modernizing agenda... Reza Shah secularized the legal system

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* P. 122

and the courts, banned the veiling of women, deemphasized Iran's Shia identity, and marginalized the ulama-when need be, brutally."<sup>55</sup>

Surprisingly enough the Islamic Revolution of 1979 did not reinstate the historical name. This helped further the schism between the Sunni Arab countries and Persian Shiite Iran, especially since this period coincided with the reemergence of Qom as the second center of Shiite religious jurisprudence.

The rules of Reza Khan, and later his son's, were characterized by a statist push towards modernization, heavily relying on returns from oil and the building of a strong army. Nevertheless, the revolution from above, as Pahlavi labeled it, led to an unequal distribution of wealth between the rich and the poor, and the over-expenditure on the military weighed heavily on Iran's GDP. Once more, the liberals, who hated the monarchy and its chronic corruption and championed the creation of Western-type state institutions, joined forces with Muslim clerics, who hated Reza Khan and could not forgive him for the seizing of much of their lands and their redistribution. The clerics were gaining at the time much power and clout due to the rush of impoverished, now well-educated, Iranians migrating from the countryside in hope of better fortunes. The combination of liberals and Muslim clerics, which proved very successful in overthrowing the Khajar Monarchy, could now do it again, this time benefiting from the growing tension between Pahlavi and his nationalist Prime Minister, Mohammed Mossadegh, who was calling for nationalization of the country's resources, particularly the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. It should be noted that, since the Iranian Revolution is not the main element in our study, the events in Iran escalated rapidly at the beginning of the 1970s since the more the United States voiced its support of and alliance with the

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* P. 123

Shah, the more he grew in power and influence and the more he alienated important components of Iranian society, one of which is the clerics, who grew more rebellious and soon afterwards mobilized the masses, and human rights were violated and eventually these practices were criticized by the US that, under the presidency of Jimmy Carter, was calling for more respect for human rights. Eventually, under the heavy combination of external pressure and internal violence, the Shah attempted desperately to loosen his grip over things, but in doing so, he lost control over the events and, finally, after some violent clashes, succumbed to the will of the people and abdicated the throne. The subsequent course of things can be described as the natural debacle of any revolution from below: the supposedly new ruling Liberal elite tried to implement a new constitution but eventually failed when the religious clerics organized a referendum, successfully endorsing the implementation of an Islamic Republic. What the Shia of Iran managed to do, the Shia of Lebanon could never, until then, dream of achieving.

The main person who was pulling the strings behind the curtains was the top-ranking Shiite cleric at the time, Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini shaped the whole revolution according to his beliefs and his vision of what would be the Islamic Republic. Khomeini, a renowned theologian with philosophical training and affected by Ibn Arabi's Sufi writings, was also the prominent cleric of Iran, showing great knowledge in the most difficult religious texts. In addition to that, Khomeini grew up in a changing Iran, where the long-lasting alliance between Shiism and the monarchy that swore to protect it was crumbling due to the latter's greed for more power and authority. This reality forced him and others to unleash the hidden rebellious urge dormant in the spirits of the Shia for the past millennium. Indeed, Shiism in Iran developed in a very distinct manner, enabling it,

as the land's main religion, to develop into a more assertive religion, ready to stand up and call for its rights when the need is there.

Ironically enough, and as Vali Nasr extensively explains, nothing but Communism fueled up the Islamic Revolution of Iran.<sup>56</sup> The economic depth of the atheistic ideology, merged with the calls of Muslim clerics for change and equality was a vital combination that surely should have appealed to the Iranian youth, who went for the streets in 1978 and asked for change and equality. This unprecedented marriage of convenience was made possible thanks mainly to the authoritarian rule of the Shahs, who put both Muslim clerics and radical Marxists in jail. It was in jail that clerics like Mahmoud Talequani, also known as the red ayatollah, later on adopted the idea of collective ownership as a Muslim ideal, blended with the ideals of the Marxists. It was this combination of activist Shiism particular to Iran and an ever-evolving and rebellious spirit of Marxism that shaped Iran and Shiism in a very prodigal and new way.

If Khomeini played the major role in initiating the Revolution, it was Ali Shariati who provided it with its social depth. "Shariati saw Shiism as a creed of revolution. Its history told the tale of a grand quest for justice. Its saints were revolutionary heroes. He [Shariati] perceived Imam Hussayn as a seventh-century Che Guevara and Karbala as a revolutionary drama".<sup>57</sup> It was Shariati who famously said "Every Day is Ashoura, every place is Karbala". Shariati had previously blamed the religious ulama for extinguishing the flame of a revolutionary creed. Socialism and progressivism, which affected the beliefs and aspirations of Iranian clerics and particularly Khomeini, merged with

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* P. 130

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* P. 128

religious activism and radicalism to taint the Islamic Revolution and enable it to become more popular and acceptable to different strata of Iranian society.

Following the successful seizing of power in Iran, the Islamic Revolution failed to export its experience to other Muslim and Shia peoples. This failure among the Sunnis can be easily identified as caused by the millennium-old conflict between the two sects, and the example of the Iranian Revolution brought fear to the different Arab rulers, who tried to unite on several occasions to put in check the expansion of the Revolution to other Arab lands; The major clash being the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988, with Khomeini's Iran opposed to Saddam Hussein's Iraq. It should be said that the Gulf countries and monarchs had literally put their lot in support of Hussein, the thing that the US willingly did as well. Whereas the war brought nothing but destruction to the two countries, as well as hundreds of thousands of casualties, and economic collapse, the Arabs managed to ruin Iran's aura *vis-à-vis* the Arab masses, while the Islamic Revolution consolidated its radical stance in Iran and managed to prove to all Arab Shia, except Iraqi Shia, of course, who had to suffer for decades to come under Hussein's iron fist and almost pay the bill single-handedly, that they now had a strong protector in the region willing to invest money and ideology to empower them.

It should be said that this new Shiism, as we might call it, could easily co-opt the sentiments and support of the Shia, as it offered the unanimously underprivileged Arab Shia a chance and a hope to bid for reform in their countries. This new Shiism, an activist one, brought back the city of Qom to its historical place as the second center of religious jurisprudence. Whereas the city of Najaf in Iraq reflected the true situation of the Arab Shiite communities and endorsed quietism, which characterized the Shia for centuries,

especially since its scholars had preached that Shiites should not care about seeking earthly power, but should await quietly the return of the Mehdi Imam who would bring justice to his people; Qom, on the other hand, now offered a more activist and rebellious approach, in the Shia psyche it called for seeking justice, not only religious but social as well, which is the core driving force in Shiism. Shariati summarized this new approach best when he used to say that “Shias should not merely await the imam in a passive state but instead should feel themselves called upon actively to work for the hastening of his return.”<sup>58</sup>

Yet the attempts of Arab Shia to mobilize could only be faced by hostile autocracies that now perceived them as proxies and extensions for a potential regional enemy. This was particularly the case in all Gulf countries with large Shia minorities. The Shia of Iraq did not answer the calls of their Iranian counterparts to endorse the revolution, even at the peak of Iranian strength in the midst of the Iraq-Iran war, when Iranian forces had reached the outskirts of Basra, the largest Shiite city in Iraq. Khomeini had failed to mobilize any support amongst the Shia, who even by trying to remain outside that struggle, were punished heavy-handedly by Hussein. Ironically enough, Hussein would punish them several years later when they tried to mobilize against him during the Gulf war of 1990-1991.

Nevertheless, the Iranian Revolution succeeded in exporting its experience to one country: Lebanon. In Lebanon, the Iranian Revolution managed to find the perfect breeding ground as the country was torn by years of civil war, and hence, lacked any centralized authority that could manage to abort the Iranian attempts to cut through its social mosaic. In Lebanon’s Shiite community, the Clerical Revolution found the perfect

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* P. 129

seeds to build a strong and lasting, as well as reliable, protégé, who could translate its vows for Islam into actions, particularly against Israel. In Iran, Lebanon's Shiite community found a strong regional protector who could help it gain more power and more strength within the country's borders. In the Revolution, they found socialism that endorses and respects the message of Islam unlike Lebanon's socialism and leftism that only used their aspiration in order to dominate. In Qom, they found a new religious center that relates to their alienation, sufferings, but most importantly to their aspirations for change.

Khomeini did not spare anything in supporting the rise of a radical Islamist Shiite force in Lebanon. Amal, which was by then the strongest Shiite force in the country, did not appeal to the calls of the Revolution; Al-Sadr never endorsed Khomeini as his *marja'*, instead he publicly endorsed and preached the teachings of Imam Khoi of Najaf, the main opponent of Khomeini's radical teachings, particularly his Wilayat-al-faqih (rule of the jurisprudent) that Khoi considered a mere heresy fabricated by Khomeini. This issue, in fact, first emerged with the death of the last "recognized supreme *marja'*",<sup>59</sup> Husain Burujerdi, in the early 1960s in Iran, with no irrefutable successor.

In addition to that, Amal had its strong ties and relations with the Syrian regime, especially when Nabih Berri became leader of the movement, thanks to overt support from the Syrian rulers.<sup>60</sup> Khomeini, for his part, was searching for a Shiite movement that would declare its religious and political support for him and him only. It should be noted here, that the ground was suitable for the emergence of a more religious movement within the Lebanese Shiite community, especially since the disappearance of Imam Musa

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<sup>59</sup> Mallat, Op. Cit., p. 22

<sup>60</sup> Marius Deeb. (1988, April). " Shia movements in Lebanon: Their Formation, Ideology, Social Basis, and Links with Iran and Syria" Third World Quarterly 10. 2 (1988): 687

al-Sadr, who was both the leader of Amal and the head of the Shiite Highest Council, left a vacuum that needed to be filled but would not. After a brief leadership by Hussein Husseini, Nabih Berri managed to become leader of Amal which entered a long era of Syrian hegemony under his leadership. The religious authority, on the other hand, fell into Mohammed Mehdi Shamseddine's hands who would play a great role in furthering the Lebanonization process of the Shiite community, as well as the split with Amal and alignment with Husseini. These internal struggles that resulted in no socio-political achievements combined with the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon in 1982 that went almost unchallenged led to growing Shiite dissatisfaction and the need for a more radical approach; hence, Khomeini found the right moment to cut through Lebanese politics.

Khomeini managed, nevertheless, to appeal to a number of Lebanese clerics who would, thanks to the generous support of the Islamic Republic, declare the creation in 1983 of what would eventually become the strongest Arab Shiite movement and a main player in Middle Eastern politics - Hezbollah. Although the party initially copied the Revolution's radicalism and called for the founding of an Islamic state in Lebanon, it eventually, as did all other radical Shiite groups in Lebanon, was tamed and Lebanonized, when it faced the difficult situation with all its local and regional interferences. With the end of the Lebanese civil war, the pragmatic calls for consociational politics and inter-religious tolerance would win over the turbulent calls for the implementation of an Islamic state in line with the rule in Iran; the acknowledgment and subtle implementation of *Wilayat-al-Faqih*, on the other hand, would, nevertheless, become a reality.



## 7 Hezbollah & Lebanon's Clerics

The radical force unleashed by Khomeini in Lebanon would soon afterwards compete with Iran's radicalism through sectarian rhetoric and Jihadist resistance that developed into terrorist attacks targeting Israeli and Western interests worldwide. It should be said that the Islamic Revolution in Iran emboldened Arab Shia to awaken; hence, riots and terrorist plots became the order of the day in numerous Arab countries; the main concern remained to maintain stability in the oil rich eastern provinces of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which had an overwhelming majority of Shia and which organized riots and disturbances that were soon afterwards suppressed by the local authorities.<sup>61</sup> Hence, desperate to export the Islamic Revolution successfully to the Arab world, Khomeini needed to seize the perfect opportunity at the right moment by offering full-fledged support to the Shia of Lebanon who were eager to take arms and counter the Israeli occupation in 1982.

But Khomeini's historic relationship with Amal was tainted with mutual distrust, since, as Vali Nasr notes: "Musa al-Sadr and his followers saw Khomeini as a political upstart with unorthodox views on religion and politics. Khomeini, for his part, found Amal insufficiently radical and too lost in Lebanon's Byzantine internal politics to be a genuine revolutionary movement."<sup>62</sup> After all, Amal was orbiting in the Syrian sphere of influence, especially since its new leadership was elected, thanks to direct Syrian interference. Khomeini needed a fully obedient and loyal group that would reflect his policies; hence the Islamic Republic decided to offer support to a loosely organized group

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<sup>61</sup> Nasr, *Op. Cit.*, p. 139

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* p. 142

of clerics, which seemed the perfect choice especially since the Shia were keen to avoid a “Palestinian fate”.<sup>63</sup> This new tendency was reflected at the time by clerics like Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, who had previously embraced Khoi’s teachings and Muhammad Mehdi Shamseddine, who called for open resistance against the occupiers; eventually, factions split from Amal and created, under the directives of clerics, Hezbollah. The Party managed to successfully kill 600<sup>64</sup> Israeli soldiers over the two following years through innovative guerrilla and suicide attacks; the movement also targeted westerners, on several occasions, and led to around 300 US and French casualties of the Multinational Forces sent to stabilize the situation in the country and support the new President-elect Amin Gemayel. These attacks were a direct cause for the withdrawal of the Multinational Force as well as the Israeli withdrawal to a new security zone close to the Litani. Despite all these achievements, Hezbollah was only officially launched on February 16, 1985, on the eve of the first anniversary of Sheikh Raghیب Harb’s assassination.<sup>65</sup> Harb was a prominent figure among Amili Shia, since he called upon the community, from within the occupied territories, to resist and oppose the Israeli occupation of Shia villages. Harb was only an example among many others of clerics choosing to support Hezbollah’s resistance and mobilize the Shiite community from within the occupied zone. A recurrent practice, as cited by Timor Goksel<sup>66</sup>, was that the clerics would use their mosques’ turrets to warn the Resistance of imminent Israeli convoys, which eventually forced the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) to target the mosques and walk into the trap of having to answer the condemnations of the United Nations.

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Al Sabbagh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 13

<sup>66</sup> Timor Goksel. Harb Lebnen. TV Documentary. Omar Al Issawi. Sabbah Media Corporation, 2001.

These early successes consolidated Hezbollah's situation on the ground. Not only had the Party enjoyed ideological support from Iran, but it could now rely on the Islamic Republic's financial support as well, which was estimated at around 100 million US dollars a year<sup>67</sup>, as well as on training offered from 1000 Revolutionary Guards sent from Iran specifically to support the Party. The Party also organized its leadership hierarchy in line with the Revolution's guidelines; hence, a central politburo of twelve members, including clerics and military men, was created and elected Sheikh Subhi Toufayli as its first Secretary-General. Toufayli was a radical white-turbaned Sheikh, as opposed to black-turbaned Sayyids who can claim direct lineage to the Prophet's family, and renowned for being extremely radical and having relied on planting and exporting drugs from the Bekaa to raise additional funds; of kidnapping foreigners and airplanes to advertise his Party's unwavering and uncompromising Shiite doctrinaire radicalism.

Toufayli's era was also characterized by the shaping of a regional alliance that would constitute over the following decades a much-needed safety net, not only for Hezbollah but for the whole Shiite community as well. Since the successful seizing of power in Iran, the leaders of the Islamic Revolution have attempted to undermine the Arab Perso-phobia by trying to openly confront Israel and by supporting the resistance movement in Lebanon. As a matter of fact, Iran succeeded in becoming more anti-Israeli than the Arabs,<sup>68</sup> something that Hafez al-Asad managed to achieve as well over his first ten years as head of the Syrian regime, by offering lip service to reality to Arab and Syrian masses regarding Syria's struggle against the Jewish state, particularly by emphasizing the political aspect of the struggle over the military conflict. Hence, the two

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<sup>67</sup> Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism. Report on the Lebanese Hezbollah retrieved from: <http://www.tkb.org/Group.jsp?groupID=3101>

<sup>68</sup> Nasr, Op. Cit., p. 137

countries that were suffering from a *de facto* isolation from all Arab regimes found consolation in one another. Thus a very controversial alliance grew between a Secular Arab Syria and an Islamist Persian Iran. Their alliance, one should mention, had its ups and downs which eventually translated during the 1980s into open military confrontations between Amal and Hezbollah representing the interests of the two states respectively and escalating to a full-scale war in 1986 between the two groups.

As a matter of fact, the whole relationship between Amal and Hezbollah was tainted by continuous bloodshed and confrontations most of the time pertaining to geo-political issues that the two groups could not control. In addition to that, on a local Lebanese level, the struggle and competition between the two groups was mainly due to the conflict in views regarding the community's relationship with the state; whereas Amal worked in line with Musa al-Sadr's calls for a "nationalist" approach investing great effort to integrate in the system, according to a reformed Lebanese model respecting the rights of the different communities, all of which were clearly integrated in the Movement's manifest: "Amal depicts Lebanon as the meeting place of the West and the East, rich in cultural diversity and influenced by both Islam and Christianity... [Lebanon should be the outcome of] a tolerant melting pot of patriotism".<sup>69</sup> Hezbollah, on the other hand, emphasized the bolder "internationalist" Shiite approach initiated by the Iranian Revolution and overtly called for Islamization. It should be mentioned here that at the time, Amal had already slipped and overcame the void in its leadership that was left by the disappearance of Musa al-Sadr. Since Hussein Husseini had failed to exercise any relevant authority on the degenerating movement, Amal turned into a loose organization where the center could exercise little and sometimes no authority at all on the peripheries.

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<sup>69</sup> Deeb, Op. Cit., 691

But with Syria's growing need for a local Shiite ally to counter-balance the growing popularity and power of the pro-Iranian Hezbollah, Asad's regime decided to re-invest in its relationship with Amal, which had weakened a lot since the disappearance of al-Sadr, by influencing, through direct intervention, the appointment of Nabih Berri as new leader of the movement. Berri had to rely heavily on Syria's support to maintain his status as Shiite moderate leader, especially since the Syrians had to save his neck on several occasions, one of which was, when in 1987 the Progressive Socialist Party's militia, under the leadership of Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, and the Lebanese Communist Party, tried to wipe out Amal from Beirut, only to be deterred by a direct Syrian intervention through the deployment of 7,000 troops.<sup>70</sup> Although Amal had proved to be more of a liability than a powerful ally, Asad could not, nevertheless, do without them, especially when faced with a growing Shiite radicalism supported by Iran in Lebanon and internal attempts by Sunni radical groups to revolt against the Alawite regime in Syria. On a different note, Amal had already lost popularity due to its moderate stance and willingness to collaborate with Gemayel, who was perceived by grass-root Shiites, and despite his openness to Asad, as an Israeli agent willing to enter into negotiations and agreements with Lebanon's southern neighbor. Hence, Amal's attempts to compromise and reach a somewhat moderate Lebanese deal, led to its demise in front of a radical tidal wave that was gaining support among the once more deprived Shiite community in the South, Bekaa, and Beirut.

Hezbollah emerged on the Lebanese and international scenes as a terrorist group adopting a wave of terrorist and suicide attacks committed prior to its public creation by Islamist cells directly linked to Iran. The Party's early successes in forcing the

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 687

Multinational Force to pull-out from the country, as well as in driving the Israelis to succumb under the heavy burden of casualties to the new security zone, provided it with a widespread support among the community's rank and file. The Party's early doctrinaire announcements stressing "the ethos of resistance to tyranny and oppression"<sup>71</sup> highlighted in the Shiite psyche as well as its endeavor to provide basic welfare services to its deprived community helped it increase and preserve this support in the long run. Yet no one would deny the Party's ideological and political link to Iran, especially that Hezbollah clerics stated openly their adherence to Khomeini's *wilayat-al-faqih* (the rule of the jurisprudent) which intensified the fears of different Lebanese communities who now perceived Hezbollah as an Iranian attempt to destroy Lebanon's unique multi-confessionalism and pluralism. In other words, and by adopting Khomeini's views, Hezbollah preached the creation of an Islamic state where Shia clerics would play the major role in bringing the system under Islamic governance.

These new dynamics characterized the relationship between Amal and Hezbollah during the following few years. Syria, for its part, tried to reinforce its position as a pacemaker in Lebanon all while trying to contain the emergence of Iran as a new player. Despite this latent struggle for dominance between the two regional powers, they managed to cooperate with each other on several matters such as the conflict with Israel. In order to preserve its hollow opposition against Israel, Syria had to maintain its presence in Lebanon and was able to achieve that by following a divide-in-order-to-rule policy, whereas it reinforced its allies while rendering them fully dependent on its continuous support; on the other hand, it threatened the anti-Syrian camp with a potential

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<sup>71</sup> Gary C. Gambill. "Islamist Groups in Lebanon" The Middle East Review of International Affairs. 11. 4 (2007). Retrieved from: [www.foreignaffairs.com](http://www.foreignaffairs.com)

invasion. Asad did not hesitate on numerous occasions to attack the PLO directly as in 1976 to prevent the emergence of radicalism, and indirectly through Amal in 1986 in what became known as the “war of the camps”. Syria’s relation with Hezbollah, on the other hand, developed hand in hand with Hezbollah’s posture to become a strategic alliance. Initially, Syria benefitted from Hezbollah’s attacks on the Multinational Forces and the Israeli Defense Forces and the ensuing aftermath, particularly the abrogation of Amin Gemayel’s May 17, 1983 agreement with Israel,<sup>72</sup> which reinstated Syria as the main broker of any future deals regarding Lebanon and the Middle East. But Hezbollah’s own agenda, coordinated at the time strictly with Iran, made things unpredictable, which put Asad repeatedly in unfavorable situations, hence the recurrent clashes between the Syrian army and Hezbollah fighters. Eventually, Hezbollah would be forced to succumb to the delicate and intriguing balance of power and demography in the country and gradually adopt a less radical approach towards the system, probably until the coming together of all the ingredients of Islamization. These changes in rhetoric and posture *vis-à-vis* the plutocratic and consociational Lebanese system would only emerge during Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah’s leadership in the 1990s. The building blocks for such a change came together in the writings of Sayyid Mohammed Husseyn Fadlallah and Sayyid Muhammed Mehdi Shamseddine, whose combined thought highlighted the evolution of the Shiite-state relationship and integration approaches during the critical decade of the 1980s.

It is during the early 1980s that the reputation of both Sayyids grew among Shiites. Growing wary of a degenerating Arab cause against Israel, especially after the Arab defeat of 1967, the Shiite communities focused on developing their own doctrines

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<sup>72</sup> AbouKhalil, Op. Cit., p. 14

that would eventually be recognized as nationalist and internationalist models adopted by Amal and Hezbollah respectively. Hence it was not surprising to see that even Fadlallah and Shamseddine would endorse major parts of Hezbollah's doctrine all while keeping their distance from the movement itself, since it would have narrowed down the two *Mujtahids'* options in terms of their scope of influence among all the strata of the Shiite community of Lebanon as well as driving them to the game of Lebanese sectarianism, particularly among Shiites and Sunnis.<sup>73</sup> Both Fadlallah and Shamseddine emphasized an internationalist militant discourse in the first half of the 1980s. Fadlallah's works "can be seen [as] the intellectual and psychological change which turned the familiar Shia history of political quietism and withdrawal into a doctrine of rebellion and confrontation".<sup>74</sup>

At the time, Shamseddine focused on undermining the influence of Israeli politics and culture on Jabal Amil. Shamseddine's stance came early on as a call for cultural resistance against the occupiers before developing it into an outright call for "total civil resistance against Israel"<sup>75</sup> by issuing a *fatwa*.

As for Fadlallah, he adopted a more Internationalist stance regarding the struggle against Israel in that he emphasized the call for Islamic, not nationalist, resistance against the occupier. He was a vanguard in calling for a Shiite bid for power. "In this, the correspondence between the positions of Fadlallah and Hizbullah is complete".<sup>76</sup> Added to that, Fadlallah's tendency to broaden the scope of resistance to the liberation of both south Lebanon and Palestine further highlights the conformity between his discourse and Hezbollah's; whereas at that time, Amal and Sheikh Abdel Amir Qabalan limited their

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<sup>73</sup> Mallat, Op. Cit., p. 29

<sup>74</sup> Ajami, Op. Cit., p. 214

<sup>75</sup> Mallat, Op. Cit., p. 34 and 76

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* P. 35



discourse to the liberation of South Lebanon. In this respect, one can easily distinguish a difference between Fadlallah's radical internationalist militant approach shared with Hezbollah, and Shamseddine's internationalist but more moderate approach, and finally the strictly nationalist approach of Qabalan and Amal. Nevertheless, and as Chibli Mallat notes: "the policy of resistance for both groups is ultimately second to their main concern, Lebanese central power. Liberation is used as a tool of legitimization for both groups, and is not pursued per se. For Hezbollah and Amal, control comes first, and liberation comes second".<sup>77</sup>

Eventually, the geo-strategic needs for gaining legitimacy in the Arab world pushed Hezbollah to focus on the Liberation part that could serve its internationalist facet; whereas Amal focused on gaining more power in Lebanese internal politics. During the 1990s, and under a favorable Syrian-Iranian relationship the two movements developed a complementary relationship that magnified their political and popular weight and turned them into a main pillar in Lebanese geo-politics. As a matter of fact the two movements were as Ajami underlines: "Two Shia revolts [that] were rolled together in Lebanon: an extremist millenarian revolt and a reformist mainstream one. And both were grafted onto the legacy of Musa al Sadr by their respective adherents. The first revolt could go nowhere. It could rail against the world; it could talk about the establishment of an 'Islamic republic' in Lebanon. But it could not change the nature of that land of rival sects, nor could it overcome the harsh economic limits of a small country that has lived off trade and services."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* P. 36

<sup>78</sup> Ajami, *Op. Cit.*, p. 217

One should say that between the 1980s and 1990s Hezbollah transformed itself from a radical Islamist organization to a more moderate political party acknowledging the plethora of communities living in the country and even endorsing consociational democracy as the most suitable *modus Vivendi*, probably until change can be achieved. As a matter of fact, Hezbollah's policies clashed with the multi-confessionalism of the Lebanese society particularly the presence of a large Christian community, the growing hegemony of the Syrian Baath regime, and finally the intrinsic and inter-related international-regional-local stakeholders that made Islamization impossible. The foundations of a new moderate Shiite approach were underlined in Shamseddine's writings on Christian-Muslim dialogue, fearing a reemergence of secularism and communism. Shamseddine even praised pluralism (*al t'adoudiyya*) and suggested major reforms consisting of developing "general lines of the system of a pluralist democracy based on the principle of consultation".<sup>79</sup> This reflected a more pragmatic understanding on Shamseddine's part *vis-à-vis* the Lebanese situation, something that Fadlallah was unwilling to do during the 1980s since it compromised to some extent the Iranian model that he endorsed, despite having fulfilled his religious studies in Najaf, even if this meant a conflict with major building blocks of the Lebanese society. In the end, Fadlallah would become acknowledged, by his supporters at least, as the third learned Shiite scholar after Khomeini and Khoi.

As for the community itself, it had once more a meeting with destiny incarnated in new dangers and prospects especially that news coming early in 1990 from Iraq and Kuwait signaled that eastern winds would soon be blowing towards the country bringing

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<sup>79</sup> Mallat, P. 40 and 88

in change that could make or break the community's claims for a rightful share in power and representation.

## **8 The Shia of Lebanon & the Taef Agreement:**

### **Nasrallah-Berri Duality**

The course of regional events intertwined with the situation in Lebanon in a way favorable to the Syrian regime. Assad found an opportune exit from the Lebanese war that was turning into a quagmire threatening to Syria's role in the whole region. The Saudi-sponsored, US and Syrian-backed Taef Accord that took place in Saudi Arabia and consisted of meetings held by a number of Lebanese members of Parliament, who were elected back in 1972 and whose terms should have ended fifteen years prior to the Accord, discussed reforms for the Lebanese political system and constitution. The end result was the emergence of the Lebanese second republic, a concept based on equal distribution of authority between the Maronites, the Sunnis, and the Shiites. The reforms went drastically in favor of the Sunni community especially that major presidential prerogatives were granted through the new reforms to the Premiership of the cabinet. The Agreement faced mixed reactions from the different Lebanese groups, while the Syrian regime undoubtedly perceived it as a threatening attempt to undermine its role in Lebanon, in particular the gains and leverage Damascus had managed to accumulate and develop over the previous fifteen years. Yet the Syrians managed, as always under the Presidency of Hafez al-Asad, to turn this unfavorable situation into a more favorable one. Syria exercised its power and leverage on its different allies to elect Husseyn Husseini as Speaker of the Parliament and a close Christian ally, Rene Mouawad, as President of the Republic. It should be said that Syria's main concern at the time was to check the growing Saudi bid for influence in Lebanon, which only fueled the now emerging Iranian

and Iraqi interventions and leverages. Mouawad was nevertheless assassinated seventeen days only after he assumed his new position and was succeeded soon after by Elias Hrawi. Iran, on the other hand, voiced its objection to these new reforms, especially that it considered them as the continuation of “the unbearable domination of the Maronites”.<sup>80</sup> Hezbollah and Amal also stood against the new Agreement, considering it a political defeat especially that Berri felt left out of the Agreement whereas Hezbollah and Iran considered it an attempt to resurrect the Maronites and to inflate the Sunnis all while undermining the community’s achievements over the previous eight years by only increasing the term of the Speaker of Parliament from one to four years, this being the only gain for the Shiites from the Taef Accord.<sup>81</sup>

Yet the year 1990 brought major changes to the situation in Lebanon due to local as well as regional escalations, all of which played favorably in securing Syria’s future in Lebanon as a hegemon. The Liberation war declared by Christian General Michel Aoun, in an attempt to expel the Syrians from Lebanon, relied mainly on Saddam Hussein’s enmity with Asad to get military supplies and arms. But the long-living expansionist dreams of Saddam Hussein reemerged at the wrong time for Lebanon, right timing though for Asad, as he decided to invade neighboring Kuwait and reclaim “this Iraqi territory back”, as he depicted things. The United States and a diverse coalition decided to act swiftly under the umbrella of the United Nations. The geo-economic importance of Kuwait and Hussein’s threats to invade Saudi Arabia necessitated such a quick response. And in an attempt to avoid international isolation and, in a worse case, a potential

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<sup>80</sup> AbouKhalil, Op. Cit., p. 16

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18 and 19

military strike, Asad struck a deal with the United States, and agreed on securing cover, as did most Arab countries, in return for gaining hegemony over Lebanon.

The first thing Asad did to consolidate this favorable new situation was to cut the pie and assign roles among his Lebanese allies from the entire political spectrum. It should be said that over fifteen years Syria did not implement the stipulations of the Taef Accord and never cared to, despite its international pledges to secure its implementation. On the contrary, Asad first crushed the movement led by General Michel Aoun and forced him to seek asylum in the French Embassy, he then consolidated the presidency of Hrawi. He mainly worked on co-opting Shiite support through which he could forge a strong alliance with Iran, the only power in the Middle East to be willing to improve relations with the Syrians. Hence the Syrians consolidated the political powers of Nabih Berri who succeeded Husseini as Speaker of the Parliament in 1992. Asad also granted Hezbollah, through a deal struck with Iran, monopoly over all military action in the south against Israel, eradicating in the process any remaining Lebanese guerrillas in south Lebanon and pushing Palestinian militias back to the camps of Ain Helweh and al-Rachidiyeh. In return, both Amal and Hezbollah provided the necessary legitimacy to the Syrians in order to preserve stability in the country. As for the Christians, and in order to avoid any disturbances from a community that never hesitated to voice its discontent *vis-à-vis* occupiers, Asad rapidly alienated popular Christian leaders: Soon after he overthrew General Michel Aoun, he forced him into exile in France joining other prominent leaders such as Amin Gemayel, Raymond Edde and Etienne Sakr. National Liberal Party leader and son of late President Camille Chamoun, Dany, was brutally murdered along with his family in their East Beirut suburb apartment two days after Aoun's demise; as for Samir

Geagea, leader of the Lebanese Forces, and despite his initial decision to endorse the reforms of the Taef Accord, he was sentenced to life imprisonment starting in 1994; Asad replaced the Christian elite by parachuted leaders who virtually enjoyed no or little popular support. As for the Sunnis, Asad eventually succumbed to economic pressure exercised by Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries in 1992 and accepted to appoint Saudi Arabia's man Rafiq Hariri as Prime Minister. The relation between the two men reflected the tensions between Alawite Syria and Sunni Saudi Arabia. Eventually, Hariri would manage to co-opt not only Elias Hrawi but also some prominent Syrian intelligence officers who acted as "high-commissioners" responsible for managing even the smallest details pertaining to Lebanon and its politics and also leading Sunni figures in the Asad regime like Abdel Halim Khaddam and Hikmat Shehabi. Noteworthy here is to mention that Hezbollah never participated in any cabinet under the Syrian tutelage from 1990 and until 2005, probably to emphasize its rejection of the political system.

Hence, to the detriment of Saudi Arabia and the Sunni community of Lebanon, Syria managed to turn what seemed to be on paper reforms in favor of the Sunni community of Lebanon, into a *de facto* Maronite-Shiite national pact that secured Syrian interests in Lebanon. Added to that, Lebanon entered in 1990 a second experience of a community exercising political dominance thanks to its demographic weight or regional support as the newly created Christian leadership could not co-opt popular support and hence starting in the second half of the 1990s the balance of forces turned hugely in favor of the Shiites. All in all, so far there have been three main experiences that Lebanon's short history provides us: Christian domination between 1943 and 1975, the Shiite awakening starting in the late 1970s, and finally the new emergence of the Sunni

domination starting in 2005 which constitutes a major challenge to Shiite integration while offering the community major prospects.

The Maronite ascendancy in Lebanon, as we have seen, lasted from 1943 until the eve of the 1975 war. Although the Christians had big dreams of having a country of their own, they had to downsize them to meet the reality on the ground. They managed however, to establish a plutocratic presidential political system. This first republic was characterized by a strong Maronite presidency with wide authorities, supported by a Sunni Prime Minister. The whole system had a Christian inclination especially that the ratio of Parliament members was 6 to 5 in favor of the Christians. At the time, the demography went slightly in favor of the Christian communities. But things started to change in the fifties with the Muslims gaining the edge demographically while being alienated from the political system and from the major developmental projects undertaken by the successive governments. This was particularly true in the regions with a Shiite majority, namely Jabal Amil, which was still perceived as just a territorial addition that would increase the economic self-sufficiency of the Lebanese territories. But with the Arab-Israeli conflict taking a new turn with the arrival of Jamal Abdel Nasser with his Arabist dreams, the Lebanese system had to face tremendous pressures both regionally and internally. These culminated in the 1958 clashes. With Fouad Chehab becoming President, the system had to heavily rely on the intelligence services, or what was called the Second Bureau of the Lebanese Army, to maintain security and stability.

In the seventies, however, a new era forced the Chehabists out, but with the arrival of the PLO to Lebanon and the Asad regime in Syria, Lebanon could no longer avoid the Arab-Israeli conflict. The whole country was drawn into a war it did not want



to fight, but things were made even worse due to the internal political conflicts between the Maronite elite, from one side, refusing to share some of their authority with the Muslim population of the country, and the latter, from the other side, trying to get a greater share of power with the aim of accommodating Lebanon to its Arab environment through full commitment to the Palestinian cause. With both sides unwilling to compromise, the country became an open arena for different conflicts occurring at the same time: The Christians had to fight for their rights and survival as a minority against the Leftist parties supported by the PLO; The Arab regimes, crippled by the successive wars with Israel, fought their wars with the Jewish state and with each other on Lebanese territories; and finally belligerents fought a proxy war for the United States from one side and for the USSR from the other. Fifteen years later, the Christians saw their prerogatives and political supremacy shattered, in the Taef Accord, where the Presidency lost most of its powers and the Parliamentary reforms redistributed the seats equally among Christians and Muslims. The post-war era was characterized by a total subjugation of true Christian representation through the imprisonment of some of their leaders and the exile of others. Hence the Christian fear of sharing some power led to the community's utter undermining and alienation. Demography played against them, even though history shows that under favorable circumstances, namely local and regional stability, the Christian communities in the Levant are capable of developing their economy and growing demographically by their own means. But these circumstances seem a bit distant, especially with the rise of Muslim fundamentalism in the region and the world.

The Maronite experience delivers a strong lesson as do the two other experiences, the Shiite and the Sunni; these three experiences confirm the fact that, despite their

differences in the details: it is only natural for a growing minority to bid for additional power and an enhanced role in the political system of a country. Yet the particularities that one can find in a country like Lebanon, whether in terms of constant regional interventions, or confessional tensions that can be easily turned into occasions for confessional violence; with all that taken into account, we can conclude that, whether it was the security and intelligence system created by the Maronite regime, or the aggressiveness and tremendous demographic weight that the Shiites had, or even the international support and economic weight that the Sunnis are exercising, monopolizing authority in Lebanon has never succeeded and probably never will. The fact that the country has three main groups with different aspirations and ties requires that the system should reflect the weight of each and every one of them. Therefore, the system should be flexible, and everyone should make compromises. Only in such a consociational political system that may with time metamorphose into a workable federal arrangement among divergent religious communities would numbers, and all the tensions and insecurities that come with them, become secondary and unproblematic.

The Shiites of Lebanon followed a different route yet made the same fatal mistake of refusing to share mainly due to their alliance with Syria and Iran as well as the radical politics that still affected their politics by the beginning of the 1990s. Summarizing things that were said earlier in this paper, one notes that the community that was unwillingly incorporated into the new Lebanese entity, due to the richness of its lands, had to suffer from years of alienation and deprivation in terms of political participation as well as economic development. Until the mid-seventies, the Shiite communities of Jabal Amil and the Bekaa had no influential political *zaim* or party to rely on. Things took a major

turn with the arrival of a Persian *imam*, Musa Al-Sadr, trying to rally around him the poor and underprivileged people in the South, in Beirut, as well as in the Bekaa. This movement became known later on as the '*Movement of the Deprived*'. But Musa Al Sadr was no Ghandi. He tried to reach major goals through peaceful means and tried to bridge the differences between the diverse communities in Lebanon and he even issued a *fatwa* stating that the Alawites are a Shiite sect, which provided the community with a strong regional ally. Nevertheless, Al-Sadr had to prepare for war like all other leaders, and thus the Shiite community of Lebanon was poised for its awakening. When the Iranian Revolution toppled the Shah's regime in Iran in 1979, the Lebanese war was already at its peak, and the Shiites of Lebanon were ready to echo the Revolution's successes on Lebanese soil. With a long history of deprivation and a recent emigration from their villages in the South to the suburbs of Beirut, the Shiites became the right breeding ground for fanaticism and fundamentalism. In the early eighties they gained the infamous reputation of being terrorists especially that they did not hesitate to demonstrate their allegiance to the Iranian Revolution in the most violent ways: Suicidal attacks against the multi-national forces deployed in Beirut and against the Israeli positions. Under these circumstances, Hezbollah emerged as an Islamist group with the aim of establishing an Islamist political system. Though at the time it adopted the tools and ideological lexicon of a typical fundamentalist group, the radical movement managed in the nineties to transform itself into a popular political party and resistance movement fighting the Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon. This shift in policy and tactics was made possible thanks to the successful pact the Syrians managed to pull off with the United States during the Gulf War of 1991. In return for Syria's fig-leaf support in Iraq the Syrians

gained full hegemony over Lebanon. Hence the suitable regional setup for a true Shiite political awakening was now in place, and in 1992 this transition to politics was completed with the participation of the main Shiite political parties in the Parliamentary elections. Under the leadership of Nabih Berri, successor of Imam Musa, and Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, leader of Hezbollah, the Shiites succeeded in gaining a lot of ground internally, mainly due to their demographic weight but also due to Syrian presence. Syria and Iran rapidly adapted to the new geo-political situation and relied on their repetitive proxy-confrontations through Hezbollah to rally grass-root Arab support. The Party itself managed successfully to transform slowly from a terrorist organization that has committed around 179 terrorist acts between 1982 and 1996<sup>82</sup> into a resistance group that focuses on guerrilla warfare against an occupying force and an organization capable of offering full social welfare services to the Shiite community of Lebanon. It is in the 1990s that Hezbollah started to emerge as a strong political-ideological-Islamist-social-guerrilla organization that appealed to Arabs and Muslims worldwide. This popularity was mainly nurtured during Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah's leadership.

Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah assumed leadership of Hezbollah right after the assassination of Sayyid Abbas Moussawi in 1992. Little signs of change appeared during the first couple of years of Nasrallah's leadership of the Shiite movement whether in terms of ideology or radicalism. The first achievements of Nasrallah, were a war against Israel in 1993 and a number of terrorist operations against Israeli interests around the world. Though these acts isolated the movement even further around the globe, it nevertheless had a different impact internally where Hezbollah was investing in, and

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<sup>82</sup> Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism Report on the Lebanese Hezbollah retrieved from: <http://www.tkb.org/Group.jsp?groupID=3101>

monopolizing, a plethora of social welfare services, and literally acting as a state within the state, especially in the Shiite suburbs of Beirut where it became very well known that these areas were denied to government officers and tax collectors.

Nevertheless, things took a different turn as of 1996. It was during that year that Israel waged the “Grapes of Wrath” operation against Hezbollah in retaliation for the Party’s guerrilla “the Islamic Resistance” repetitive operations against Israeli targets across the occupied Lebanese territories as well as other operations that took place in Israel with the assistance of Hezbollah itself. The heavy bombardment and resulting damage could only be stopped thanks to the April understanding brokered by the United States and France thanks to the diplomatic efforts of the then Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. Hariri’s implementation of good offices constituted a first step towards further *rapprochement* between the Shiites and Sunnis of the country. It should be acknowledged that since that time, Hezbollah’s feeling of the great importance yet fragility of this internal safety net helped it focus on transforming the movement from a conventional terrorist organization into a three-dimensional movement composed of first a political party actively seeking a greater role in Lebanese politics and voicing its community’s needs and interests all while reorienting its ideology and discourse from “religious to nationalist discourse more acceptable to the broader Lebanese public (and the Syrians)”<sup>83</sup>; second a military organization that slowly restricted its military operations to attacking Israeli military targets on Lebanese occupied soil; and third a web of welfare institutions including hospitals and schools that provide all necessary social services. As a matter of fact, the unequal development plans adopted by the consecutive Lebanese governments alienated Shia areas, “ironically, the inequities strengthened

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<sup>83</sup> Gambill, Op. Cit., p. 2

Hezbollah by perpetuating the Shia community's dependence on its social welfare institutions and discrediting rival political forces.”<sup>84</sup> Eventually, the death of Hafez al Asad and Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon would render the April understanding impotent due to a loosening Syrian hand over Hezbollah's maneuverability that does not take all regional factors at all times into account<sup>85</sup>. In a broader political context, Hezbollah endorsed a more moderate stance, as preached by Sistani in Iraq, regarding its support of consociational democracy and the “one-man one-vote” concept in parliamentary elections,<sup>86</sup> all while never denying its support of implementing in the long run an Islamic Republic and the guidance of an Ayatollah; some scholars labeled this policy as a “gradual adaptation”<sup>87</sup>. This reflects a more pragmatic approach to Lebanese politics and the delicate balance of demography-based politics emphasizing arguably a Shiite awareness of their probable future demographic supremacy in the country, hence their bet on this moderate approach that would improve their image on the international scene.

## **8.1 Israel's Security Dilemma & Withdrawal: The End of the Era of Defeats**

On the security front, Hezbollah's growing pressure on the Israeli forces as well as changes in Israel's political elite regarding the question of security developed hand in hand to lead to the expected yet swift Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3

<sup>85</sup> Volker Perthes, “The Syrian Solution” *Foreign Affairs* 85.6 (2006): p. 36 and 37

<sup>86</sup> Vali Nasr, *Op. Cit.*, p. 232

<sup>87</sup> Elie A. Samia, Lectures from the “Lebanese Politics & Administration” course at the Lebanese American University, Spring Semester 2003.

Throughout the 1990s, Hezbollah developed, as we mentioned earlier into an effective guerrilla force capable of inflicting serious damage on the Israeli military forces stationed on Lebanese territories. The resistance movement that started to organize as of 1990, right after the end of the Lebanese War, witnessed a sharp increase in the Party's military operations: from 19 attacks in 1990, to 158 in 1993, 715 in 1997, and finally an impressive 1200 in 1998.<sup>88</sup> Hezbollah started to play a more important role in the Syrian-Israeli conflict, and major operations were orchestrated in coordination with Syria's own agenda.

The assassination of Sheikh Abbas Moussawi in 1992 had a particular impact on the conflict and made things worse. Rabin's Labor government, which was voicing at the time its support for refreshing the peace process, was forced to launch full-scale military operations in Lebanon in 1993 and 1996, operation Accountability and operation Grapes of Wrath respectively, to put a check on Hezbollah's militancy. What made things worse for Israel was that its massive bombardment had to miss at some point, and when in 1996 more than 100 Lebanese refugees died in a UNIFIL headquarters in the small town of Qana, Israel had to be held responsible and had to succumb to international pressure to end the operation that constituted a sort of collective punishment for the whole of Lebanon. Hence the deal that ended the 1993 war and that was concluded between Israel and Hezbollah both pledging to avoid targeting civilian targets turned into a broader and more substantial agreement in 1996 as it was concluded by the Lebanese government and Israel under the sponsorship of France and the United States of America. One should note

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<sup>88</sup> Simon Murden. "Understanding Israel's long conflict in Lebanon: the search for an alternative approach to security during the peace process" *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 27. 1(2000): p. 35 and 43

that both Accountability and Grapes of Wrath have logically had undesired results as they “justified the Party’s continued existence,”<sup>89</sup> particularly as a military resistance.

Noteworthy here is to mention that the April agreement highlighted the importance of restricting military operations on Lebanese soil and against military targets, the thing that made the then Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri assert that the agreement has “Shut the door completely for the possibility of a recurrence of what happened”.<sup>90</sup> But Rabin’s emphasis on trying to reach peace with Syria made him miss several occasions to achieve breakthroughs in the Lebanese and Palestinian tracks. To what extent were Syria’s claims of its willingness to revive the Peace Process real is surely something very doubtful.

The 1996 Israeli elections produced a right-wing cabinet headed by Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu. This led to a change in Israel’s approach to all security issues, especially Rabin’s “altercasting” based on enhancing mutual interests with surrounding Arab states to co-opt them for further cooperation against radical forces.<sup>91</sup> Netanyahu benefitted from a small margin of maneuverability in 1997 when he sent Israeli commandos to execute a covert operation in Insariyah town near Tyre but the group fell into an ambush laid by Hezbollah, and 12 Israeli soldiers died in the operation. In the aftermath, a majority of Israelis started to support an exit from the Lebanese quagmire.<sup>92</sup> This coincided with an already heated debate inside Netanyahu’s government, which was trying to formulate a way to end the Lebanese issue. Ariel Sharon had previously presented a plan for unilateral withdrawal from South Lebanon emphasizing the

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* P. 37

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* P. 40

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* P. 30

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* P. 53



moribund need to keep troops stationed in the security strip. On the other side, Defense Minister Mordechai and other security officers were in favor of intensifying military operations against Hezbollah, one of which proved to be the catastrophic Insariyeh operation. The Mordechai camp highlighted after the Insariyeh operation the importance of reaching an agreement with Syria and that would undermine in the process Iran's role in harboring and financing Hezbollah. But this attempt failed and eventually Sharon's view was endorsed, especially after the stalemate reached during the negotiations with the Syrians as well as the growing number of Hezbollah military operations in the south in 1998. In March 1999, an opinion poll conducted in Israel revealed that around 55% of Israelis wanted an immediate withdrawal from Lebanon.<sup>93</sup> Under heavy internal as well as security problems which now included the assassination of General Erez Gerstein in the security zone, Netanyahu's government came to the brink of collapse, and he soon called for early parliamentary elections. The Labor party managed to win the elections especially that Ehud Barak had "pledged to withdraw the IDF within a year of taking office"<sup>94</sup> Barak thought the best way to achieve that was to rely on altercasting again and hence engaged Syria in bilateral talks. These proved once again fruitless since the Syrians as usual sought straightforward and simple negotiations aimed at retrieving the lands that were occupied in 1967, whereas the Israelis were seeking a broader agreement that would deal with security concerns as well while not giving any pledge regarding the withdrawal from the lands that were occupied in 1967. It soon became clear that Barak's bet on reaching a solution with the Syrians, which would constitute a way out from Lebanon, was going nowhere, whereas his pledge to the Israeli public was an assertive one

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* P. 43

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* P. 44

promising them a withdrawal from Lebanon. As Murden puts it, just months prior to the withdrawal: "Israel has two realistic options for ending its military presence in Lebanon: either to negotiate a comprehensive deal with Syria, or to withdraw unilaterally."<sup>95</sup>

Eventually, it was Ariel Sharon's mathematical equation that won the day, showing that Israel's presence in south Lebanon is becoming more and more costly in vain. Hence, on May 24, 2000 all Israeli divisions withdrew from the south of Lebanon in a sudden movement that left the whole world in awe, particularly Arab regimes and Israel's South Lebanon Army militia, whose members were now stuck in the middle of a very unfavorable and threatening situation. Nevertheless, Hezbollah militias soon filled the new vacuum and avoided any vengeful acts against the small Christian communities and villages. Nasrallah rapidly claimed a historic Arab victory, the first against Israel, and asserted that the struggle against Israel was not over yet as there remained the lands of Shebaa to the east that were yet to be liberated.

During that period, Hezbollah revamped its media and worked drastically on advertising a moderate movement relying heavily on its Muslim Shiite culture and legacy and endorsement of the Palestinian cause, while emphasizing Hezbollah's unwavering and uncompromising stance concerning the Arab cause against Israel.

As a matter of fact, Israel's withdrawal from South Lebanon was made possible thanks to a number of reasons, one of which was certainly the sustainable damage inflicted by Hezbollah's resistance which was proving costly for Israel in terms of casualties – A factor that was magnified by Hezbollah's and eventually Arab media. But in addition to that, Israel was under the rule of the Labor party that was willing to give unilateral disengagement a chance in order to calm things down over the conventional

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* P. 46

military action that is usually championed by the rightist Likud party. One should nevertheless acknowledge that Israeli public opinion was growing weary at the time of the violence that was ripping the whole region apart.

Israel's withdrawal brought mixed fortunes to the region. First as early as September 2000, the Palestinians, emboldened by Hezbollah's victory over Israel and the failure of the Shepherds Town negotiations between Arafat and Barack, initiated their second Intifada that would last for more than four years only to end with the splitting up of the Palestinian leadership into pro-American and pro-Syrian camps; Syria, on the other hand, found itself with a new and unpredictable situation to deal with, especially that prominent Syrian allies such as Druze leader Walid Jumblatt shifted position and started to voice their opposition to Syria's occupation of Lebanon. Initially, Asad and his allies had used the pretext of Israel's occupation of South Lebanon to cover their own occupation of other parts of the country and their hegemony over Lebanese decision-making, but with Israel's withdrawal things had apparently changed. Eventually, these changes piled up and together with the election of Ariel Sharon as Israel's new Prime Minister, the uncompromising US stance after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and later on President George Bush's war on terror against Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's regime (part of what he would call the Axis of Evil, an axis that included Syria and Iran) led in the end to an orchestrated pressure on Syria to withdraw its troops from Lebanon in April 2005, few months after the assassination of Rafiq Hariri.

But Bush's failure to recognize that people in the Middle East see politics not only as the relationship between individuals and the states, but also as the balance of

power among communities meant that “the Middle East [that] emerged from the crucible of the Iraq war [would prove] not to be more democratic, but definitely more Shiite.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Vali Nasr, “When the Shiites Rise” Foreign Affairs 85. 4 (2006): 59-60

## **9 Lebanon's Second Independence: New challenges, New Opportunities & New Prospects**

The assassination of Lebanon's ex-Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005 subsequently led to a chain reaction that led to the withdrawal of the Syrians from Lebanon and the return of the Christians to the Lebanese political arena with the homecoming of the exiled former Prime Minister General Michel Aoun and the release of Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea. A whole new era had begun, and benefiting from the momentum created by the assassination of his father and the ensuing popular liberation movement, Saad Hariri succeeded, with his allies in the "Fourteenth of March" Movement, to gain the majority in Parliament and subsequently managed to form a cabinet. The country was, however, polarized into two camps reflecting the regional division: one camp, the Fourteenth of March, were closely tied with Saudi Arabia and the United States; while the second, the opposition, was closely tied with Syria and Iran. This new recipe is proving that the Taef Accord and the Second Republic it created are not very operational without a certain hegemon setting the pace of internal politics. Tensions were elevated to the extent of clashes in the streets in January 2007 between the partisans of the two camps as well as many security breaches. On an institutional level, the government had to shut down the Constitutional Council in order to avoid reconsiderations of the election results in one of the 14 districts. This became known as the Sunni experience in governing Lebanon. The mainstream governing Sunni elite showed no signs that it had learned from the failed experiences of the Christians and Shiites, and hence was opposed to a big coalition of forces that managed to block its

attempts at governing the country, all while literally blocking the country and its institutions. The Shiites had to deal with these changes in an uncompromising way at the beginning, especially that the changes came with the support of the United States, first under the Syria Accountability Act, then through Resolution 1559, and finally through direct pressure on Syria. All these components emphasized the need to disarm all military organizations and militias active on Lebanese soil. Finding itself stuck in a very unfavorable situation with the Syrian withdrawal, Hezbollah displayed tremendous capabilities in adapting to new situations whether through forging new alliances locally and engaging in executive decision-making, or by maintaining its ideological and logistical support for the Palestinian resistance in the occupied territories, or even by reasserting the need for its arms in order to raise the stakes for the Israelis. But before reaching these new conditions, Hezbollah and the mainstream Shiite bloc had to survive three years of threatening pressure and alienation that proved that the Lebanese had a long way yet to integrate major parts of the Lebanese society, particularly the Shiite community that felt that calls for Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon and the establishment of an independent Lebanon were a threat to its existence and its participation in Lebanese politics, and an attempt to bring the country into the US orbit.

## **9.1 The Long Road to Independence**

Nevertheless, 2004 might be considered as the sowing year for Lebanon's "Second Independence". The continual reluctance of Asad to cooperate with the US regarding the situation in Iraq meant an increase of pressure and sanctions on the Syrian regime: Asad certainly based his policies at the time on the sheer idea that the US would

soon get tired and pack its military and return home. Assad had surely based his calculations on the Pax Americana that granted Syria leverage over Lebanon for the previous fourteen years just in return for stability. But Bashar's shortsightedness made him miss the vital point "Hard as Damascus may have tried to maintain that Iraq was not its affair, the toppling of the Baathist tyranny next door was a crystal ball in which Syria's rulers could glimpse intimations of their own demise."<sup>97</sup> The point-of-no-return came on September 3, 2004, when the Lebanese Constitution was amended under Syrian pressure, to extend President Emile Lahoud's term as the head of the country. Syria decided to support Lahoud, challenging in the process Western warnings and increased pressure by the Security Council of the United Nations, which was convened at the time, and which would eventually issue Resolution 1559 to check further Syrian intervention in Lebanon. Syria's decision came as a huge surprise almost to everyone, especially that, at the time, it didn't lack allies and loyalists in Lebanon; added to that, the extension of Lahoud's term was sure to formalize the division between Syria's local allies and sympathizers, at a time when the Syrians should have avoided any unnecessary tensions.

Hence emerged, from one side a pro-Syrian bloc constituted of President Lahoud as well as the main Shiite political parties, the Amal Movement and Hezbollah; added to them, other political parties such as the Baath party and the N SSP, all of which were known for their strong alliance with the Syrian regime. From the other side, an anti-Syrian bloc constituted of the late Rafiq Hariri and Druze *zaim* Walid Jumblatt, who were mainly opposed to the extension of Lahoud's term. The two leaders could now rely on the main Christian political currents known for their radical opposition to the whole question of Syrian presence/occupation of Lebanon, particularly Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement

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<sup>97</sup> Fouad Ajami, "The Autumn of the Autocrats" Foreign Affairs (May – June, 2005): 2

and Geagea's Lebanese Forces, to boost their demographic support facing the frightening Shiite popular mass, at that time. This popular mass was used three months prior to the assassination of Hariri as a part of the "Rally of the 1 Million", organized by pro-Syrian political parties mainly Amal and Hezbollah, to express their unconditional support for Syria and the "Lebanese" opposition to Resolution 1559 issued by the Security Council of the United Nations in September 2004, in response to Syria's extension of Lahoud's term and its continual support for militant Islamist groups. Demography would later play a decisive factor in shaping the turbulent period that followed Hariri's assassination; whether during demonstrations or during the formation of electoral alliances.

Hence, the main Lebanese political entities took opposing stances, with one side having a virtual Shiite demographic upper-hand, while the other benefiting from international attention, particularly a renewed US-French rapprochement in summer 2004 that followed a period of tension in the relations of the two countries. It is also believed that the situation in Lebanon came at a right time for the two NATO members to bury their differences once and for all.<sup>98</sup>

After the amendment of Lahoud's term, a former Prime Minister, Omar Karami, was delegated to form a new cabinet that would enable the country to overcome the current difficulties. His was to be a Pro-Syrian cabinet like Lebanon never witnessed before... all the main Syrian allies and loyalists as well as puppets were appointed as ministers. A major task for this government was to organize the Parliamentary elections that were postponed in 2004, probably to insure the reelection of Lahoud while avoiding the entire fuss that President Chamoun had to face in 1958.

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<sup>98</sup> Lectures from the course: Arab States System after 9/11 (Oct. 2005-Jan. 2006) with Prof. Habib C. Malik



As Minister of Internal Affairs, Sleiman Frangieh, a descendant of a hardliner Christian political family also known for its close ties to the Asad family, had the task of organizing the elections. Frangieh opted for an electoral law similar to the one applied in the 1960 parliamentary elections, dividing Lebanon according to its *Qada'* (small district) administrative boundaries. According to Frangieh, this electoral law would be favorable to each community, particularly the Christians<sup>99</sup>. Although it was probable that such an electoral law would have minimized Hezbollah and Amal's clout, especially that the Shiites could correct their under-representation by winning in larger electoral districts, it was also probable that the Syrians were trying to regain Christian support at the time while minimizing Jumblatt's political domain. It is even probable that Frangieh and others, predicting an eventual Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, something they genuinely considered as a guarantee for Christian political survival, were trying to pass an electoral law that would secure the political survival of this community in a post-Syrian Lebanon.

These questions and speculations will never have a clear answer, and the outcome of elections on the basis of that or a similar electoral law would never be known as well, because on February 14, 2005, and while in the midst of the electoral discussions and build-ups, Lebanon and its parliament had to bear the heavy political burden created by Hariri's assassination, and at a critical time; while a helpless Asad and his Syria had to watch their small empire crumble.

The thing with the Hariri assassination is that it reeked of symbolism: the billionaire who rebuilt the financial and tourist center of Lebanon's capital was to die in

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<sup>99</sup>TV interview with former Interior Minister Suleiman Frangieh in Kalam El Ness on the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation Intl. February 10, 2005.

its rubble. Lebanon's plutocratic colossus, who forged amicable relations with all the Western powers, France in particular, while maintaining close relations with Muslim countries, was to fall in front of the St Georges Hotel, whose owner was the last local businessman to defy Hariri's ambitions of restructuring the new Beirut. And finally, the politician known for taking unusual security measures and equipped with the most sophisticated jamming devices was to be found dead-naked. The message intended was received clearly by all Lebanese: none shall be spared if they have the indecency of openly opposing the Syrian presence. The message might have been even clearer than intended, as the popular response would later prove: none are above the sacrifice in this last battle for independence, whether they be college or university students, journalists or politicians, low-class farmers or middle-class entrepreneurs or even upper-class billionaires, whether Christian or Muslim... all should rally together to succeed in the final push to regain their freedom. And to add insult to injury, the assassination took place on St. Valentine's Day. Was it intended to be a love letter to Hariri or to the Lebanese people? Or was it only an attempt to benefit from a day when emotions would be high and malleable to divert them to another direction?

On the first eve after Hariri's death, all the fingers pointed assertively to the Syrian regime and no one else. A spontaneous gathering was formed next to the assassination spot, Muslims prayed next to Christians for mercy on Hariri's soul and for mercy on Lebanon and its salvation. In the meantime, all the personalities and parties opposing the Syrian presence met in Hariri's residence in Ras Beirut to organize their ranks and to orchestrate their efforts... On February 16, hundreds of thousands went to the streets in a farewell to Hariri and his companions; representatives of all political

parties and of all confessions were present. It became clear that time would be of the essence. The spontaneous gathering of the 14<sup>th</sup> became a sit-in that would eventually outlast the Syrian presence in Lebanon. That sit-in would later become a camp in Martyr's Square where student representatives from different political parties could express their grief and opposition to the Syrian occupation and its quisling government while being, symbolically at least, protected by the neighboring building of Annahar newspaper, perceived by most Lebanese as the last bastion of freedom in the country, and by the close tomb of Hariri, and by the historic legacy of the Square. The following weeks, would witness anti-Syrian demonstrations on Mondays and counter-demonstrations on Tuesdays organized mainly by Hezbollah that was trying to remain steadfast and not lose ground in front of this massive wind of change; Karami's government would eventually resign and an international investigation committee would be formed.

Yet the March 14 demonstration would probably remain the most decisive event in the contemporary history of Lebanon. One and a half million Lebanese, according to most sources, gathered in Martyr's Square. Nevertheless, this gigantic manifestation would have not been possible were it not for the pro-Syrian demonstration that took place 6 days earlier organized by the pro-Syrian camp where Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah's speech revealed that things have been taking a steady course that would eventually lead to Syria's withdrawal. Sayyid Nasrallah's speech seemed to be laying the foundations for a post-Syrian Lebanon where he stressed gratitude to Syria for its long support and made sure to send clear warnings to the Israelis that "what they failed to achieve in war will

surely not be able to achieve in politics”;<sup>100</sup> Nasrallah also acknowledged the Shiites’ willingness to abide by consociational politics. The anti-Syrian Camp was focused at the time on pushing the Syrians out of the country and bringing about justice in Hariri’s case, and hence their reaction to what became known as the Forces of the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, came on the 14<sup>th</sup>, when the Lebanese went down to the street, as if believing that each one of them can play a decisive role in shaping their country’s future, and all genuinely believing that their multi-confessional unity would be an everlasting unity.

Asad and Lahoud were by then facing a four-dimensional form of pressure: First, the Lebanese masses, almost unanimously, consented to the need to overthrow Lahoud and end the Syrian occupation; what is of importance here is that the opposition to the Syrian presence could now be voiced despite an almost unanimous Shiite alignment with Lahoud and the Syrians. The second dimension is the unity of the Lebanese political elite, most of which was either coordinating with the Syrians or suppressed by them during the previous fifteen years. This elite was now united and willing to transfer its entire popular, diplomatic and financial means for a cause that is, luckily, in the best interest of its people and its country. The third dimension, which is the most important, the international community would gain a lot by ending Syria’s occupation of Lebanon. These gains were diplomatic as well as geopolitical achievements, particularly in the area of overall stability. And finally, the fourth was the heavy weight of political mistakes committed by the Syrian regime over the previous two years such as the extension of Lahoud’s term as President and the refusal to acknowledge UN Security Council Resolution 1559 among others; all these mistakes further isolated the Syrian regime. Predictably, Asad succumbed to these pressures, and on April 27, the Syrians withdrew

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<sup>100</sup> Nasrallah, Op. Cit. March 8, 2005 Speech.

from Lebanon, losing in the process their most precious political and economic gain during the past thirty years. Lahoud focused on containing the March 14 movement through closing ranks of all Syria's allies and engaging in active negotiations with the different political leaders. This was mainly true through negotiations held between Druze leader Jumblatt and Shiite leaders Nasrallah and Berri.

Eventually these negotiations revived the quadruple alliance that was active under Syrian tutelage between Amal, Hezbollah, Jumblatt and Hariri and managed to organize parliamentary elections in June 2005, according to an electoral law carved by the late Ghazi Kanaan in 2000, serving the sole purpose of consecrating an over-inflated Jumblatt, Hariri, Amal and Hezbollah and finally Lahoud's allies as the true representatives of the people. Although Jumblatt states nowadays that the 2000 Electoral Law was aimed at minimizing his and Hariri's leadership, at the time this law was issued, Jumblatt was still a loyalist to Syria and his opposition to the Syrian presence emerged only after the elections in September 2000, when he made his new position public. He would later make the famous "Reconciliation of the Mountain", in August 2001, with Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Sfeir, much to the anger of the Syrians, who retaliated with the infamous August 7 and 9 arrests. This Reconciliation, as events would later prove, remained superficial, and could not co-opt grass-root support. As for Hariri, his close ties with Kanaan were a major cause in replacing Kanaan with Rustom Ghazali in 2001, when the former started to show his sympathy for Hariri at the expense of Lahoud.

Hence, the 2005 elections proved, among other things, that the Syrian era was a hibernation period for Lebanese politics because what was in 1990 remained the same in 2005: "as a result, many young Lebanese feel that they surrendered the Cedar

Revolution's promise of 'people power' to the very same faces that have always ruled the country."<sup>101</sup> And what was in 2000 remained almost the same in 2005, with the exception of the emergence of Aoun as a major figure in Lebanese politics and the return of the Christians as the focal point of interest for all the other communities. In other terms, the latent result of the elections was a sorting out of different religious communities. Hence, Lebanon entered a delicate era, where religious and sectarian balances became the order of the day, only this time without the Syrians acting as regulators.

Five parliamentary blocs that can be brought down to three political coalitions had emerged: The Christian bloc of Aoun is the first one. The second coalition, the Shiite, is constituted of both Amal and Hezbollah. And finally, the third coalition, also known as the Forces of the 14<sup>th</sup> of March, is constituted of Hariri and Jumblatt and other minor Christian political powers such as the Qornet Chehwan gathering, the Kataeb and the Lebanese Forces, all of which were foresightedly used by the Hariri-Jumblatt alliance to co-opt Hezbollah during the last elections. If one recalls, Hezbollah was under extreme pressure regarding the issue of disarmament, and without Syrian cover, Hassan Nasrallah had to look for an internal consensus to maintain the *status quo* and reduce the pressure, especially since "giving up the enormous reputational benefits derived from projecting itself as the vanguard of the Arab-Islamic struggle against Zionism would have condemned Hezbollah to political oblivion";<sup>102</sup> and with Aoun still considered as the main person behind Resolution 1559, and hence responsible for the Western storm on Hezbollah, it seemed more logical to seek an alliance with Hariri-Jumblatt, even if that meant a *rapprochement* with the Lebanese Forces, which can be found at the opposite

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<sup>101</sup> Annia Ciezadlo. From the New Republic. *Cedar Bluffs* (Nov. 7, 2005). Retrieved from the Internet.

<sup>102</sup> Gambill, Op. Cit., p. 3

end of the spectrum of Lebanese politics, but which seemed to be tamed at the time by the momentum and thrust of the Sunni-Druze alliance. Eventually the four blocs, excluding Aoun's, formed a cabinet under the Premiership of Fuad Saniora. Yet, at the end of the elections, major points of disagreement emerged in this marriage of convenience regarding issues such as the Shiite arsenal and the relations with Syria. Hezbollah's Secretary General Hasan Nasrallah would later declare that the Quadruple Alliance of the Muslim body politic was revived after the elections, something everybody knew, but which nobody could prove.<sup>103</sup> These domestic events were accompanied by a Syrian political and economic counter-attack aimed at absorbing the shock of losing a main source of stability and income.

Syria's loss due to the withdrawal from Lebanon was multi-faceted: first, it was due to the fact that Lebanon constituted, during the past two decades, a job market for an estimated 2 million blue-collar Syrian workers, mainly in the agricultural and the construction sectors. These used to provide, in financial terms, an additional annual income to Syria estimated at 2 to 4 billion US dollars.<sup>104</sup> In terms of security and politics, this meant that the attention of those working in Lebanon, as well as their families, would be turned to non-political matters; second, the Syrian regime had allowed a *laissez-faire* policy for its political supporting elite in Lebanon, thus securing their allegiance, as long as they could benefit from the situation, especially from Lebanon's banking system and certain underground activities such as drug production, counterfeiting and money laundering, all estimated at more than 3.4 billion US dollars;<sup>105</sup> third, by losing the thirty-year old close ties between the Syrian Alawite regime and the Shiite community in

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<sup>103</sup> TV interview with Hezbollah Secretary General Hasan Nasrallah on New TV. January 18, 2006.

<sup>104</sup> Gary Gambill. *Syria After Lebanon: Hooked on Lebanon* From Middle East Quarterly: Fall 2005

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* P. 1

Lebanon. Alongside other alliances it constituted some sort of a web within the Lebanese political life, which amplified the space for Syrian political and geopolitical maneuvering in Lebanon; fourth, the treaties that were signed between the Syrians and their Lebanese quislings in the 1990s gave Syria the upper hand in every domain; fifth, Syria's hegemony over Lebanon was one of many cards that constituted Syrian extensions in the region, which allowed the regime to play a bigger role in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the role of the uncompromising 'tough' rule, highly admired by the Arab masses, facing the United States and hence gaining some popularity in Syria itself; sixth, Syria found itself isolated as neither Egypt nor Saudi Arabia were willing to come to its rescue, especially since the former's will to do so would fall on deaf ears in the US Administration, whereas the latter considered Hariri's death one of a family member who brought the "Saudi way" to Lebanon.<sup>106</sup> Finally, all these achievements fulfilled Syria's long lasting irredentist dreams *vis-à-vis* Lebanon, and showed that when Syria was allowed to retain what "genuinely" belonged to it, it would become a major regional power and a potential stabilizing force in the region. Yet, all these achievements, one should acknowledge, were the achievements of the late Hafez Asad who was a master tactician and strategist, whereas nowadays, it has fallen on the shoulders of the inexperienced Bashar to solve Syria's current dilemma: If Syria withdraws from Lebanon and decides to cooperate with the United Nations and the West, it will lose the entire aforementioned benefits, and the regime would be highly threatened from below and from within. In case the opposite occurs, that is, if Bashar decides not to cooperate, his regime would be squeezed for concessions until it lost all its pillars and crumbled from within. Surprisingly enough, Bashar decided to choose a third option: brinkmanship.

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<sup>106</sup> Ajami, "The Autumn of the Autocrats", Op. Cit., P. 66



This policy, a trademark of the late Asad's reign, has always helped the Syrian regime survive the most threatening and dangerous situations; but as mentioned earlier, Bashar is not his father, in addition to that, Russia is no longer the Soviet Union, and the Bush Administration can no longer be checked by the balances of the Cold War. Many are convinced that Bashar had in mind and in heart a possible return to Lebanon. If his regime survived the current crisis, he surely believed, while creating a state of chaos in Lebanon, the international community would beg him to re-enter Lebanon to stabilize the situation as his father did in 1976. However, his attempts to create a state of chaos in Lebanon have failed. Whereas the Lebanese do have some critical issues to be resolved, they nevertheless know better than falling into Asad's traps: He first closed the borders between the two countries in an attempt to suffocate the Lebanese economy, using the prejudice of tightening things up for security reasons. Second, the numerous destabilizing attempts and the threats and armed displays of Palestinians in Lebanon known for their loyalty to Syria did not benefit Asad; on the contrary, these events brought the issue of arms mentioned in Resolution 1559 back on the table. Third, the assassinations of renowned opposition figures, particularly the rebel journalist Samir Kassir, maverick journalist Gebran Tueini, and Industry Minister Pierre Gemayel, to name a few, all of whom were well known for their ruthless opposition to the Syrian regime and their enthusiasm for the idea of overthrowing Asad and replacing him and his entourage with a democratic and liberal government. These assassinations pointed fingers of accusation directly at Damascus, even though no tangible proofs that might incriminate Asad have been found. Finally, the regime's alliance with Lebanon's Shiites meant repetitive Syrian interventions and setbacks and political crisis in Lebanon. One such crisis took place after

Tueini's assassination in December 2005, when all the Shiite ministers withdrew from a cabinet meeting in protest against demands for the creation of an international court to deal with the Lebanese situation. These ministers would eventually resign. But all these maneuvers did not help Asad to escape from the inevitable. The first preliminary report, in October 2005, by the international inquiry committee tightened the rope around Asad's neck, and his days seemed numbered at the time, and Ghazi Kanaan's death was reported to be a potential assassination of a conspirator who aimed at overthrowing Bashar.<sup>107</sup> Everyone believed that the second report of the committee, expected in December, would be a death sentence for the Syrian regime.

But surprisingly enough, and though Asad had failed to save his own neck, his was to be saved by none other than Israel. Prior to the first Melhis Report, Israel had not said its word, and after seeing that things were going too far, the Israelis, it is reported, had convinced the US not to overthrow Bashar, fearing a power vacuum where Islamist Sunni groups might take control of power or worse, a state of chaos might become the order of the day in a post-Asad Syria.<sup>108</sup> Thus a new lease on life was granted to Bashar thanks to the Israelis. This, unfortunately, made him dream big again, regarding his chances in Lebanon, and it was at that time that Tueini's death occurred and the Shiite withdrawal from the cabinet meeting took place. Furthermore, the recurrence of security breaches in Lebanon over the following years that ranged from car bombs to Fath al-Islam's insurgency in Nahr al-Bared Camp, among others, pointed once again the finger of accusation at Syria.

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<sup>107</sup> Gary Gambill. "Why did Kanaan die?" National Post 17 Oct. 2005

<sup>108</sup> Nathan Guttman. "Israel, US disagree on post- Assad Syria" Jerusalem Post 4 Dec. 2005

Under this extreme pressure, Lebanon's political parties and population became polarized even further, and space for compromise and concessions dwindled significantly, especially since continual external interference from Syria and Iran through the former, in support of the opposition from one side; and Saudi Arabia, Chirac's France and the United States from the other, in support of the government; urged their local allies not to concede ground. Eventually, government institutions crumbled and were undermined, and Lebanon entered a deadlock that threatened the stability and future of the country. It should be noted that, at the time, two major components of Lebanese society found themselves alienated by the ruling elite: The Shiite community whose parliamentary representation was almost completely constituted of Amal and Hezbollah representatives, and the Christian community, whose major bloc was Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement. This alienation raised a very sensitive issue that dates back to the very creation of Lebanon and the distribution of power among its religious constituents. In other words, demographic weight is an important factor in Lebanese politics. And Lebanese history has proved that no one can rule the country, while alienating a major constituent, not to mention two major ones.

## **9.2 Consensus & Demography**

It is true that the year 2005 will surely remain an important landmark in the history of Lebanon, a 9/11 on a smaller scale. The symbolic withdrawal of the Syrian army and the return of the Christians to the political scene, following the assassination, on 14 February, of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, marked the end of a long and tragic era that had imposed drastic changes on the political system and the country's

regional alliances and international alignments. Most notably, however, this seismic occurrence reinforced the long-disputed Arab belonging and association of the country through huge internal shifts in power distribution, as well as confessional demographic alterations over the years which, in a country like Lebanon, have always had an appreciable impact on all the aforementioned issues. It remains very difficult though to estimate the exact demographic distribution of the different socio-religious groups in Lebanon, and one should not forget that Lebanon, with all its religious communities and its weak political system, has always been subject to intense external political interventions incarnated in a capitulation-like model of relations between the different regional and international stakeholders and the communities they most identify with.

Nevertheless, individual researchers have managed to come up with very interesting statistics revealing, once compared to old censuses, important trends in the demographic developments of Lebanon. Youssef Doueihy published one such study in 2007; the study relied on the government's registers of holders of Lebanese identity cards. Doueihy gave detailed estimates for all 18 confessions and concluded that the total number of Lebanese registered was around 4,751,000 of whom 34.96 percent were Christians, or 1,598,220. In terms of confessional distribution, Doueihy came in with the following numbers, according to which we can understand that: The Muslim communities remain more compact than the Christians, with the 1,336,375 Sunnis, traditionally identifying themselves with the Palestinian cause and the more general Arab causes, and known for their mercantile prowess, especially the inhabitants of the major coastal trading cities; while the 1,333,233 Shiites, particularly the Twelvers, lately identify themselves more with Syrian and Iranian politics. As for the 37,000 Alawites,

they consider the good relations between the Alawite regime of the Asad family and the Shiites of Lebanon as a safety-valve for their existence in Lebanon. Finally, the small Druze community, which numbers around 247,000 people, was historically protected by the United Kingdom and lately managed, through the leadership of the Jumblatt family, to maintain an important political role thanks to its close ties with the ruling blocs ever since the beginning of the twentieth century. The Druzes are nowadays located mainly in the Shouf and Alley districts of Mount Lebanon.<sup>109</sup>

The Christian communities are known to be less compact and politically unified, particularly the Maronite community, whose continual fratricidal disputes and internal conflicts led to its self-subversion and decline. These inter-Maronite disputes have been acutely detrimental to Lebanon's Christians since it was historically the Maronite community that openly resisted the scourge of dhimmitude and acted as the spearhead of free Christian existence within a wider Muslim-majority region of the world. Today, the Maronite community is constituted of around 880,000 people living mainly in the northern districts of Bcharre and Zghorta as well as in the *mouhafazet* of Mount Lebanon, its historical enclave. The Christian population is currently being consumed by a new internal fight for identity between two main political trends, both of which are trying to reconcile with the community's surroundings. The second largest Christian community is the Greek Orthodox community, which historically played a moderate role and built trade relations with the Sunni communities of the coastal cities of Beirut, Tripoli and Sidon. The Orthodox community of around 310,000 plays a minor political role in Lebanon, particularly due to the successive electoral laws that gerrymandered the districts in a way

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<sup>109</sup> All figures from Youssef Chahi Zakhia Doueihy, "The Lebanese 1907 – 2006", obtained from the author, Beirut 2007.

that did not allow the Orthodox to choose their representatives even in the enclaves, such as the Koura district, where they predominate numerically. The third major Christian community, the Greek Catholic (or Melkite), is constituted of around 204,000 people and is predominantly based in the Zahle area as well as in other southern districts. The Greek Catholics also played a minor political role in Lebanese politics and usually sided with the more powerful Maronite community. Alongside these communities, Lebanon has several other communities that account for almost 200,000 and are mainly located in the greater Beirut area and the Bekaa.<sup>110</sup>

### 9.3 Factors Affecting Demography

Once compared to older estimates, these statistics reveal the trends of demographic developments over the years. In a study published in Youssef Courbage's *Christians & Jews under Islam*, the Christian population of Lebanon was 418,702 in 1894 and constituted 60.47 percent of the whole population then living on the lands of modern-day Lebanon. This percentage steadily went down over the years, with the exception of the 1950s period, to 42.90 percent in 1975<sup>111</sup>; therefore the 34.96 percent figure published by Doueihy in 2007 seems very plausible. This gradual demographic shrinkage of the Christians since 1943 is affected by many factors, some of which have become social features of the Lebanese population; others are related to political and economic conditions. Amazingly, some factors affect negatively a certain community but work favorably for another, and *vice-versa*.

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Courbage, Op. Cit., p. 197

Unlike the other Arab regimes, Lebanon never knew how to deal decisively with the Palestinian issue; perhaps because its political system lacked the decisiveness and brutality that other autocratic Arab regimes had. According to all estimates, there are around 300,000 Palestinian refugees living in camps throughout Lebanon,<sup>112</sup> the overwhelming majority of them being Sunnis. The Palestinian presence, both in its civilian and military aspects, played a destructive role mainly because it was abused by some Lebanese groups. Nevertheless, things started to deteriorate after the Cairo Agreement of 1969 that permitted Palestinian attacks against Israel from Lebanese territory, and following the arrival of the PLO that was expelled from Jordan in 1970. Since then, things degenerated rapidly after a number of clashes between the Palestinians and the Lebanese Army in 1971 and 1973; the PLO also played a major role in internal Lebanese politics, siding with the Leftist parties claiming reform; in addition to all that, the Palestinians were a major instigator of the Lebanese war of 1975. In its civilian aspect, the Palestinian factor has always been used by Lebanese politicians as a weapon to intimidate other factions. In this respect, President Camille Chamoun naturalized around 200,000 Palestinians, most of whom were Christians.<sup>113</sup> Nowadays, the threat of naturalizing the 300,000 Palestinians, most of whom are Sunnis, still looms in the background of Lebanese politics. Ironically, it is used by both sides: the Shiite-Christian opposition talks about it as a threat so as to rally more support, while the Sunni-dominated government uses it as a bargaining tool. Moreover, some Palestinian armed groups declare openly their allegiance to regional regimes. The Palestinian issue in

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<sup>112</sup> Doueihy, Op. Cit.

<sup>113</sup> Habib Malik, (2007, September 17). [personal interview]

Lebanon has recently reemerged on the scene as a threat to the country's stability, as was demonstrated in the Nahr Al Bared camp incidents of spring and summer 2007.

The unstable security situation has always played a negative role in Lebanese history, but more so since 1943. The tensions of 1958 signaled the beginning of long years of turbulence. The crisis ended with the election of Lebanese Army Commander General Fouad Chehab as new President and the deployment of US Marines in Beirut. But the situation escalated again in 1973, when clashes between the Lebanese army and the Palestinian armed groups necessitated once again regional and international interventions. But the Lebanese war that started in 1975 played the major role in shattering Lebanese society and metamorphosing the country's demography. In addition to the 200,000 casualties, it is estimated that 800,000 Lebanese fled the country, of these 75 percent were Christians.<sup>114</sup> On top of that, the war led to major internal displacements that redrew the confessional map of post-war Lebanon. The Christians migrated in large numbers from the southern half of the country and the Shouf and assembled in the central and northern parts of Mount Lebanon, namely in the Metn and Keserwan regions. The Shiites escaped the south and gathered in the crowded southern suburbs of the capital, which became even more congested. Hence, the Lebanese were forced to regroup themselves into small undeclared cantons. Even after the end of the war, very few managed to overcome the fear of returning to their lands to live with the other groups. In August 2001, the Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Sfeir tried to mend the wounds between the Maronite and Druze communities through the 'Reconciliation of the Mountain', with Druze Leader Walid Jumblatt. Few Christians returned to their ruined homes and villages in the Shouf, and fewer still received any financial compensation. On another level, the

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<sup>114</sup> Boutros Labaki, (2007, August 22). [personal interview]



Council of Eastern Churches that convened in Cyprus in 1998 identified proliferating fundamentalist Islamist groups as a major threat for the Christian communities living in the Middle East.<sup>115</sup>

It should be noted that during the 1990s, the Christian community started to develop a sense of its minority status, especially after the end of the war, but mainly after the Naturalization Decree of 1994, which was considered a new attempt to undermine the Christians of Lebanon. Sadly, many Christian leaders had a significant involvement in passing this Decree, as they were trying to improve their electoral chances, especially since they had lost any weight on the political scene. Hence a great portion of the people who acquired Lebanese citizenship through this Decree was registered in districts like Zahle, Metn, or even Beirut where large numbers of Christians reside. Around 100,000 Sunnis and 30,000 Shiites were naturalized; whereas only 5,000 Maronites acquired the Lebanese nationality.<sup>116</sup> Two-thirds of those naturalized were Syrians.<sup>117</sup>

Nevertheless, it remains surprising to know that during the period between 1990 and 1998, a period of great uncertainty for the Christian communities, these communities constituted only 28 percent of those migrating from Lebanon out of a total of 820,000 Lebanese who left their country.<sup>118</sup> This is a great indicator of improved resiliency among Christian communities, but also an indicator of development among the Muslim communities, since in order to be able to emigrate; one should be multi-lingual, educated, and possessing material means.<sup>119</sup> But one should not underestimate the role of desperate

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<sup>115</sup> Carole Dagher. Eastern Churches discuss the destiny of Christians: unity and emigration and the relation with Muslims *As Safi* 1 Jan. 1998: 1

<sup>116</sup> Doueihy, Op. Cit.

<sup>117</sup> Malik, Op Cit.

<sup>118</sup> Labaki, Op. Cit.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

economic conditions in leading to migration, which is in itself a major factor of demographic alteration. Wars and repeated political tensions constantly handicap the growth of the country's GDP, and as the economy has relied heavily on tourism and services, it has rarely shown signs of development or growth in recent years. This directly affects the availability of quality job opportunities; therefore, it is common to find fresh graduates applying for emigration. A recent study conducted by Information International in February 2007, showed that around 30.9 percent of the Lebanese consider emigrating; the highest percentages of these can be found within the Maronite and Druze confessions with a combined average of 45 percent. Of this percentage, 28.9 percent have already submitted emigration applications, with the three main Christian confessions (Maronite, Orthodox, Melkite) constituting around 39.9 percent, whereas the Sunnis and Shiites together constitute 11.5 percent and the Druze 5.3 percent. If we go deeper into details, we can find that the lack of job opportunities constitutes a psycho-social inclination for fresh graduates to emigrate, since the same study has shown that one third of the Lebanese, between 18 and 34 years of age, is considering emigration.<sup>120</sup> It should be noted that emigration has become a trend or some sort of tradition since it is very common to find Lebanese teenagers and particularly high school students who think of emigrating even before they finish their education and enter the job market. This tendency sometimes exceeds the simple need of enrolling in foreign universities.

Another major factor in demographic development is the differences in birth rates among the various communities. It is obvious that the difference in the way of life and the standard of living between one region and the other can have a deep impact on access

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<sup>120</sup> An opinion poll conducted by Information International. "The Lebanese follow their leaders." Feb. 2007 [Online] Available: [http://information-international.com/pdf/iipolla/2007/pages%20from%20li-issue56-Feb2007\\_ENGLISH.pdf](http://information-international.com/pdf/iipolla/2007/pages%20from%20li-issue56-Feb2007_ENGLISH.pdf). [2007, August 3].

to education and medication, which, in turn, translates into a difference in the birth and death rates. According to Courbage, and as early as the nineteenth century, the conversion of poor Christians to Islam under the heavy burden of the *jizya* and *kharaj* taxes had further transformed the Christian community into an elitist community, which in itself had important consequences: "Modernity reached the Arab East through its non-Muslim minorities. Both the Christian and Jewish communities, therefore, experienced a decline in their death rate, while their birth rate was maintained, half a century ahead of the Muslims."<sup>121</sup> Recent Studies conducted in the early 1970s show that infant mortality rates among Muslims still exceeded those among Christians by more than 50 percent. In the case of mortality rates for mothers aged between 20 and 24, the Christians had exactly half the rate of child mortality. Nevertheless, the average final number of children per women aged between 45 and 49 remained very high among Muslims. The average Muslim Shiite woman in that age group had on average 8.49 children, while Sunnis came second with 6.91, whereas Maronites and Druze averaged 5.20 and 5.33 respectively.<sup>122</sup> Nevertheless, things changed during the 1975 war, when all communities were subject to the same harsh living conditions.

Doueihy's study revealed some very significant statistics regarding the age distribution among the different confessions. In a sociological context, the population distribution pyramids of major Muslim confessions have an Expansive shape, that is, a great propensity to increase in numbers over the years, whereas population distribution pyramids for the Christian confessions tend to be more constrictive, meaning that it has little or no tendency to grow over the years, or even a tendency to decrease in numbers. A

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<sup>121</sup> Courbage, Op. Cit., P. 63

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* Figures derived from tables 8.6 and 8.7 on page 200.

good example would be to compare the statistics for each confession according to age groups: for the 1997-2006 age group, the Maronites constitute 15.09 percent, the Shiites 34.5 percent, and the Sunnis 35.14 percent. All in all, the Christians constitute 24.33 percent. As for the distribution of the 1937-1946 age group, the Maronites constitute 24.17 percent, the Shiites 20.89 percent, and the Sunnis 23.23 percent. The Christians constitute 48.98 percent of the same age group. These figures indicate that the Muslim communities are growing faster than the Maronites, even though they still constitute the larger portion of those emigrating. On a more general note, the Lebanese population is relatively a young one, with almost 61 percent of the people aged less than forty years.<sup>123</sup>

All in all, these changes have mixed socio-economic effects. In most countries, such changes can have a deep negative impact on society, since emigration becomes a brain drain affecting the economic development of that country. In Lebanon, this brain-drain could hamper any potential economic growth and development, but at the same time, the remittances sent by Lebanese working and living abroad could provide important benefits. In addition to that, the emigration of members of the Lebanese Muslim communities to Western countries, namely in Europe and the Americas, can have a constructive role in bridging the socio-cultural differences between Lebanon's different communities, especially when they return to live in Lebanon.

The Shiites tried to benefit from these developments, and Hezbollah in particular entered a tri-lateral effort to fill in the vacuum left by the Syrian withdrawal: First, forging new alliances and engaging other Lebanese religious constituents; second dealing with pressing local issues, some of which emerged right after Syria's withdrawal; third,

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<sup>123</sup> Doueihy, Op. Cit.

and finally, surviving the numerous attempts to disarm the Party and force it into a more local role as a political party.

#### **9.4 Bridging Shiite Fears and Christian Yearning to Reconcile with the Community's Surroundings**

After the Syrian withdrawal, the Shiites, rightfully fearing a great isolation and alienation in the new Lebanese political reality, have become more favorable to the idea of consensus politics preached by the late Sayyid Mohammad Mehdi Shamseddine, who believed that such politics are the only way for the Shiites to integrate in Lebanese society and interact with the other confessions, and was ready to open up to the Christian community that was still lamenting its political defeats and trying to hold itself together, despite the huge brain drain it suffered during the previous thirty years or so as well as its current alienation. Hence, on February 6, 2006, and only one day after a Sunni fundamentalist push into the Achrafieh district in eastern Beirut, in protest against caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed in a Danish newspaper, that left destruction and damages in residential buildings and churches alike, while missing the Danish embassy, Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) announced, from the St. Mikhael church in the Shiite district of Shiyah, the launching of their Memorandum of Understanding, in which they agreed on a common approach to deal with pressing issues of great interest to both communities in particular, and the country in general. The Memorandum was quickly attacked by the forces of the 14<sup>th</sup> of March, as well as by regional and external powers, as a pretext for Hezbollah to reinforce its political and popular clout and proceed with its radical, terrorist to some, agenda. All in all, the

Memorandum constituted a step forward, despite many lacunas especially that it helped the Shiite community establish close ties with a major Christian political party that historically had senior concerns and doubts *vis-à-vis* this community. In addition to that, Hezbollah leaders declared on numerous occasions since then that they have dropped their claims of establishing an Islamist political system and have committed themselves to a multi-confessional and diverse one, at the same time while endorsing consociational democracy that secures the community's interests and caters to its fears and aspirations".<sup>124</sup> Typical demonstrations of this shift are the party's schools, which implement the government's curricula including, among other things, the rather problematic official History curriculum in addition to the French language and books. The Memorandum had mixed results among the Christians of Lebanon as some perceived it as constituting a safety net for religious minorities in the country, particularly the Christians, due to the new regional extensions with other minority-ruled, in respect to regional demography, regimes, ie: Syria and Iran and hence improving any future prospects; others perceived it as a lousy attempt by Hezbollah to secure a communitarian diverse cover for its operations. It is very well known in Lebanon that both political parties enjoyed, despite their sometimes opposing agendas, much respect in each others' communities and hence the new understanding managed to gain much approval among the grass roots, especially since both sides have invested time and effort to market it among their supporters. The Christian eagerness to enter such an agreement might also be rationalized as their thirst to claim some military victories as their own, after decades and centuries of repetitive defeats and deprivation; this might explain as well some Christian abhorrence of Shiite victories over the years as those of a community that was for a long

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<sup>124</sup> Hasan Nasrallah, Feb. 6 2008 Interview on OTV with Jean Aziz.

time perceived as second-rate. The popular and political support of the Memorandum was particularly tested during the July War of 2006, when hundreds of thousands of Shiites fled to Christian areas, where they were granted shelter and help. The political test was, nevertheless, tougher as Aoun's FPM spent months afterwards trying to justify its stance *vis-à-vis* Hezbollah's unilateral declaration of war and its role in providing a cover for it.

Yet the Memorandum turned into an alliance between the two parties and was confirmed on a number of occasions, ranging from university elections to coordinated political decisions. It should be said that this new cooperation has had a direct effect on the parties' stances regarding many issues: Aoun's opposition to any US interference has become more aggressive, whereas Hezbollah has recalculated its options on many occasions, according to its local interests and its allies'. This is particularly true in Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah's speeches after the assassination of Imad Mughniya, in which the Sayyid first pledged to launch an all-out war on Israeli interests worldwide, in other words, a potential return to international terrorism, but he soon after clarified that the Party will only target Israeli interests relevant to the Party's war with Israel exclusively in Israel.

Hence, two years after its declaration, the Memorandum helped in one way or the other, to avoid the worst. Aoun's FPM during the July War of 2006 embraced Shiite refugees forced to flee their homes and seek shelter only to find it, and surprisingly, in Christian suburbs. The direct consequence of this act reinforced ties not only between Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement and Hezbollah on an elitist political level, which eventually engulfed Amal, but also between Shiite grass-roots and their Christian counterparts, two sections of the Lebanese community which previously knew nothing

about each other and even perceived the other not only as different, but as a potential adversary.<sup>125</sup> In return, it seems that Hezbollah's latest stance regarding any potential retaliation against Mughniya's assassination was toned down due to new parameters that Hezbollah had now to take into its tactical and strategic considerations, among others, one of which is the Party's new web of local alliances. Yet, the Understanding will be facing its greatest test in the 2009 Parliamentary elections, which will either make or break this new Shiite attempt to integrate and communicate with other constituents in the Lebanese mosaic society. Interestingly enough, Hezbollah, which historically favored electoral laws with large districts, showed no reservations in adopting an electoral law that suits their Christian counterparts.<sup>126</sup> All in all, the Memorandum of Understanding enhanced the bargaining positions of both Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement and Hezbollah regarding major pressing issues, while enabling the Party to survive the numerous attempts launched since 2005 to disarm it.

## **9.5 Political Prospects & Security Challenges**

The wide net of allies that Hezbollah and Amal have managed to forge helped the Shia to play a major and decisive role in the most pertinent issues. In addition to the question of security, the Lebanese had to deal with critical issues such as: Hezbollah's disarmament, the Palestinian presence, the relations with Syria, the confessional relations and the need to devise a new electoral law, and finally the need to reform the political system. It was primordial that these inter-related issues be discussed and solved, as they

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<sup>125</sup> Abbas Al Sabbagh. "a year has passed on the understanding between the Free Patriotic Movement and Hezbollah: a contradicting political reading" *Annahar* 9 Feb. 2007 : 13

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*



constitute a double-edged sword for Lebanese stability and prosperity (in case they were solved) or for destruction and destabilization (in case they were neglected). The polarization of the Lebanese political body led to a stalemate on most of these issues, yet the position of the Shiite community *vis-à-vis* these issues is an important indicator of the Lebanon the community is trying to promote, as well as their relevance in making or breaking Lebanon's second independence. Most of these issues were discussed on the table of dialogue that gathered political elites representing 14 different points of view but to no avail, since none of the decisions reached were implemented. Interestingly enough, Hezbollah has to abandon its traditional stance of "remain(ing) above Lebanon's communal fray, portraying itself as a resistance movement that transcends petty politics"<sup>127</sup> - the thing that hampered the Party's aura.

Living in a desperate economic situation, the Lebanese population urgently needed to feel secure. Thus, security formed a major concern and a major challenge for the government. But President Lahoud's constant bickering with any eventual cabinet brought by the Hariri-Jumblatt alliance meant too much talk without any tangible achievements for the first couple of years, taking into account that both sides were brought to power by some sort of unconstitutional or fraudulent procedures. In addition to that, the Forces of the 14<sup>th</sup> of March could no longer hide behind the excuse of not holding key positions, especially that they were able to appoint their people and control security forces. Moreover, it is well known that every Lebanese *Zaim* has his own intelligence network, which makes everything known to everyone. Finally, there were reports of abuses taking place, by some pro-government high-rank intelligence officers within the Lebanese army acting against officers known for their loyalty to other political

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<sup>127</sup> Daniel Byman. "Hezbollah's Dilemma" Foreign Affairs 13 Apr. 2005 : 1

groups; these raise the following question: Isn't exercising such an amount of pressure a sign that the government is wasting its resources for vindictive and questionable goals? In order to solve the security question, it is important that the political elite join forces. More importantly, the government should take steps to monopolize the means of coercion. Even more importantly, the government should seek some sort of compromise with the Syrian regime through the Shiite community.

Hezbollah's disarmament had been timidly discussed right after the Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in 2000, especially since the Shiite community "remained unwilling to entrust their security to the state and fearful of being marginalized after disarmament".<sup>128</sup> Hezbollah's resistance against Israel was legitimized, however, by Israel's occupation of the much contested Chebaa farms, claimed to be Lebanese by Lebanon and Syria, which refuses, nevertheless, to delineate the boundaries to prove the area's Lebaneseness, and claimed to be Syrian by the Israelis, as they conquered it during the 1967 war against the Syrian army. Hence, Hezbollah's military *raison d'être* was now fig-leafed by the notorious Syrian-Israeli relationship that remains ambiguous to many.

But it was only after the issuance of Resolution 1559 and later, with the withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon, that this issue became a problematic one. All the Lebanese communities, except the Shiites, of course, perceive this issue as a problem for Lebanese stability. Although Hezbollah has never used its military capabilities against any other Lebanese group, its close ties with Syria and Iranian patronage constitute the worst nightmare for other communities. Khamneii's Iran is still perceived as an Islamizing force, whose aim is to overwhelm Lebanon with its militant Shiite doctrine, and Syria's achievements are still fresh in the Lebanese psyche. With the

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<sup>128</sup> Gambill, Op. Cit., p. 4

regional extensions in mind, Hezbollah represents an Islamic invasion to the Christians, which is the main fear of this community<sup>129</sup> and a militant Shiite takeover to the Sunnis. In a country where confessional demography plays a major role in defining power balances, once supported by fire power, demography becomes a recipe for frustration and eventually confrontation. Yet the opening up between the Shiites and Aoun might prove to be a future safety valve for both the Shiite and the Christian Communities. This becomes relevant if we take into consideration that the survival of the Alawite regime of Syria, also a minority regime, is now a fact. In addition to that, any future change of regimes in Iran would eventually bring a moderate and less radical Shiite rule that would still seek good relations and alliances with other Shiite communities in the region.

Finally, the pseudo-Federal system implemented in Iraq, has empowered the Shiite community there, which would allow it to play a substantial role in regional politics, albeit latent in the short term. Hence, a chain of minority-ruled countries, considering we are living in a Sunni majority region, would be formed from Iran to Lebanon, with a potential Shiite empowerment, and a financial and economic one, in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, it seems that an improved relation with the Shiites in Lebanon might prove to be a good step for the Christians, on the condition that Hezbollah be willing to negotiate on the question of disarmament and deeply reconsiders its relations with the Syrian regime, something they have not considered yet. However, since government institutions in Lebanon are practically nonfunctional, security breaches might prove fatal, a foretaste of which has been seen with the insurgency of Fath al-Islam in 2007. The using of the Palestinian issue as a pretext to corner other Lebanese

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<sup>129</sup> Habib C. Malik. (2000). Between Damascus and Jerusalem: Lebanon and the Middle East Washington D.C. : The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. P. 8

communities might prove to be a dangerous and fatal mistake, especially if the Palestinians, who are armed to the teeth, are irritated and dragged into a fight that some of them are trying to avoid, despite Syrian and now Saudi attempts through loyalist factions to inflame things.

Thus the Palestinian issue might be considered the issue to be solved. The whole Palestinian question ignited the war of 1975. And as Farid El Khazen highlights, all the Lebanese agree today that the Palestinian arms threaten Lebanese stability, and, hence, it is necessary to solve this issue once and for all.<sup>130</sup> This agreement however, does not solve the problem. As mentioned earlier, some pro-Syrian and pro-Saudi Palestinian factions wreak havoc from time to time in the camps and sometimes even outside the camps. And the latest events in Nahr al-Bared and Ayn Helwe have proven that new red lines have been crossed, whereas the Palestinians are being dragged and used as an excuse to solve internal problems, something that has already happened in 1975 with catastrophic consequences.

Part of this problem can be solved by changing things with Syria, or in Syria; while the other part needs a new consensus by the Lebanese in order to address and solve the matter in a peaceful and non-provocative manner. We should take into account here the role of the miserable socio-economic conditions within the camps in turning them into ghettos ruled by gangsters and extremist organizations. What matters the most is that the issue of naturalization remains out of the question, because "...a radical transformation in Lebanon's demographic structure, particularly when imposed against the will of many Lebanese, will have negative political and social repercussions affecting

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<sup>130</sup> Farid El Khazen. "Permanent settlement of Palestinians in Lebanon: A recipe for conflict" Journal of Refugee Studies No. 3 (1997): 288

Lebanon's civil society, political openness, and democratic process"<sup>131</sup> and stability. The Shiites are categorically against any plans for naturalization, in addition to that, Sayyid Nasrallah had asserted in a speech during the Nahr al-Bared Camp war that storming Palestinian camps should be considered a "red line" not to be crossed by the Lebanese Army.<sup>132</sup> Although Nasrallah's speech was soon after criticized by March 14 on the basis that it undermines the role of the government and promotes Palestinian Camps as security zones forbidden to the government's authority, Nasrallah's speech, in fact, reflected his community's and Party's fears of entering in a Sunni-Shiite open war that would eventually drag Hezbollah into a fight with Palestinian armed groups and hence destroy its aura as protector and safe guardian of the Palestinian cause. As a matter of fact, and as Professor Habib Malik confirms, it was proven that Saudi financing helped breed Fath al-Islam in an attempt to nominally counter-balance Hezbollah.<sup>133</sup> Yet the movement went out of control and, unleashed by Syrian intelligence, wreaked havoc in northern Lebanon. All three issues discussed above have in some way or another a Syrian component; for this reason a readjustment in Lebanese-Syrian relations is a must to consolidate the new Lebanese independence. But the divergence in positions regarding Syria makes things more complicated. At one extreme, we have the so-called forces of the 14<sup>th</sup> of March who are trying to bring things to their ends by repeatedly trying to topple Asad's regime. As it appears, one such attempt was Abdel Halim Khaddam's breakaway from the regime. Khaddam, a Sunni Muslim, had played a decisive role in Syria's politics during Hafez Asad's reign, but was slowly pushed to the sidelines after the rise of Bashar to power. His close ties with the Hariri family, some suggest family ones, might be the reason for his

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Hasan Nasrallah, Speech, May 25 2007, Al Manar Television.

<sup>133</sup> Habib C. Malik, US Foreign Policy MA course at LAU. Fall 2008

latest breakaway in an attempt to magnify the pressure on Asad. This time, however, Israel's claims that it contacted Khaddam through the Mossad have failed to diffuse the bomb. But all these attempts have proven futile to this moment.

At the other extreme, we have the Shiite view towards Syria. The Shiites do acknowledge Syria's support during the past thirty years: a geopolitical support of Hezbollah and an internal political support of Amal, as we explained earlier. Therefore, they both seem in the right position to diffuse most of the tension between the two countries. Thus a Shiite toned-down friendship with Syria might benefit both countries and play a stabilizing role in the relations of the two neighbors; while a Sunni-Druze toned down animosity against Syria might be financially and economically beneficial for both countries. After all, the regime in Syria knows that the remittances of more than 600,000 Syrians working in Lebanon are vital for the Syrian economy and the collapse of the Lebanese economy would have disastrous effects on the Syrian political elite, which has invested most of its wealth in Lebanese banks, benefiting from bank secrecy, in contrast to threats that they might face in international banks. All this depends, however, on Syria's willingness to cooperate with the international community on critical issues, and with the United States on the issue of Iraq, but more so in acknowledging the role of the forces of the 14<sup>th</sup> of March. We should bear in mind that the Report on Hariri's assassination and the international tribunal will still loom on the horizon as threatening devices, in case the Syrians decide to misbehave. But in order to build a strong foreign policy, the Lebanese need to have a truly representative leadership without alienating any segment of the population. Here comes the need to have a truly representative Electoral Law, something that Lebanon has never had.

Every Democracy must be based on the true political representation of its people. That is only in theory; in fact, in Lebanon, gerrymandery is a common practice intrinsic to the democratic culture of the country. Ever since independence, presidents and parliaments have had the habit of reshuffling the electoral districts in ways that enabled them to boost their chances of remaining in power. When the Syrians took control of the country, they developed and optimized this technique, eradicating in the process the concept of power succession. And for fifteen years, those who were in power, remained in power. But after independence, Lebanon and particularly its elite, pledged to devise a new electoral law to adjust popular representation. The latest elections, that took place according to an electoral law devised by the Syrians, did nothing but extend the leadership of the previous allies of Syria, with the exception of the Christian communities, whose previously exiled and imprisoned political elite were able to achieve a triumphant comeback. This comeback was stained, however, by the restrictions of the law itself. Hence, the feeling of political frustration remains strong within this community in particular, which was deprived of true representation in major districts such as Northern Lebanon. But a new electoral law should not only focus on securing fair sectarian representation, but should also introduce other vital restrictions on religious *fatwas* and spending limits.

It is true, as Nawaf Salam has once said: "In Lebanon, we are condemned to live together" therefore, the minimum that needs to be insured is the right representation of each community in an attempt to avert the threats that might be caused by misrepresentation. All should agree on critical issues such as the right to vote for expatriates, and which ones. Hence the committee presided over by former Minister

Fouad Boutros had a difficult task to reconcile all the views and to eventually devise a “fair” electoral law that would play a decisive role in making or breaking the renewed Independence of Lebanon, yet the Boutros electoral law, which merged proportional and majoritarian representation, was not appropriately discussed in the Parliament and presumably discussions of a law will only take place at the last minute, to minimize the chances of maneuverability and prolonged discussions. In this respect, the Doha Agreement of last May which shaped a whole new era in Lebanese politics by going beyond the recommendations of the Boutros committee recommendations in favor for a more political electoral law, The 1960 law with minor changes. The adoption of this law seems to be a middle ground solution for all communities and not a perfect solution for the problem. Lebanon’s history shows us that there will never be unanimous agreement on electoral laws. In this respect, Christians and Druze usually champion small electoral districts on the *Qada’*, basis which would cater to their numerical disadvantage; Sunnis would champion medium-sized districts, whereas Shiites have always championed larger districts on the Mouhafazat basis, the thing that would suit their demographic weight, while the biggest disagreements would pertain to whether to opt for a majoritarian system or a proportional one. The most suitable electoral law remains the one that would eradicate sectarian alienation, especially since Lebanon’s political system is conceived on the basis of confessional equilibrium; hence, any electoral law must respect this criterion, the creation of a proportional assembly respecting confessional proportionality might be one of the solutions. The Shiites have shown readiness to compromise on this issue. In the words of Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, they have made the sacrifice of opting for smaller electoral districts for the sake of national unity.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Nabih Berri, Speaker of Parliament (24 March 2008) interview on New TV.



A representative and fair electoral law would, once introduced, bring into power a group of people or political powers willing to reform the current political system. The current system, which was introduced and has evolved under Syrian tutelage under the title of “Second Republic”, would not help Lebanon progress on the path to freedom and sovereignty. Therefore, some constitutional amendments should be made, especially regarding the power-sharing and prerogatives of the three presidencies, or Troika. This power-sharing formula had turned into a power struggle during the fifteen years following the end of the civil war, where the Syrians were the only ones capable of solving the problems and setting the pace of Lebanese political life. This power sharing then turned into a complete deadlock after Syrian withdrawal. Hence the need to amend the Taef accord and the need to produce a Third Republic that would cater to the needs of all Lebanese sects, while empowering governmental institutions, especially the ones dealing with accountability and supervision, i.e., the Constitutional Council and the Bureau of Accounts. It is also important to empower the presidency which became a “ceremonial”<sup>135</sup> position after Taef, in an attempt to raise the expectations of the Christian community. Lebanon is in dire need for these reforms; they should be, however, discussed and introduced by a parliament that truly represents all segments of the Lebanese community. In this respect, the Shiite community in general, and Hezbollah and Amal in particular, would be willing to cooperate and would surely put their own concerns for discussion. But the problem in Lebanon remains, nevertheless, the failure of the Lebanese to introduce reforms, even though everyone calls for them. The best example is the failure of applying the reforms suggested by Najib Mikati’s government in 2005, which never materialized, and nowadays, Seniora’s government has even failed to

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<sup>135</sup> Habib C. Malik. Op. Cit. p.24

“adopt a national budget in a timely manner for two consecutive years”<sup>136</sup> at a time when economic divergence between the different social strata is increasing.

## 9.6 Surviving against all Odds

Despite having been able to achieve a breakthrough in forging new alliances that would insure the participation of the Shiite community internally, as well as having a say and potential to solve most of the pressing internal issues and concerns, the Shiite community in general and Hezbollah in particular have had to deal with an existential struggle over the several years following Lebanon’s new independence. After having inflicted a severe blow on Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and punished Saddam Hussein’s autocratic regime in Iraq, voices inside the United States have called for dealing urgently with Hezbollah, which was labeled as the “A Team” of terrorism by Richard Armitage.<sup>137</sup> Policy makers and scholars in the US failed to identify or credit Hezbollah for the great leap it took between 1996 and 2005 in that it changed its whole approach to fighting Israel from a radical and literally global terrorist approach into a legitimate guerrilla warfare against an occupier, while at the same time developing its welfare services and power over opinion. In addition to that, US and western policy-makers had divergent solutions for how to deal with Hezbollah and its arms’ threats: Logically, solutions ranged between the hard line calls for a direct blitzkrieg and the French realist approach calling for the use of a carrot and stick approach locally to transform the Party to a political movement, while simultaneously pressing Iran and Syria regionally to

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<sup>136</sup> Reinoud Leenders. “How UN pressure on Hizballah impedes Lebanese reform” Middle East Report Online 23 May 2006: 2, Retrieved from the internet

<sup>137</sup> Daniel Byman, (2003, November- December). “Should Hezbollah be next?” Foreign Affairs (Dec. – Nov., 2003): 1 retrieved from the internet.

eventually grant concessions on Hezbollah's arms, after all, "the evolution of Hezbollah over the 1990s has altered both the nature of its threat and the best means of confronting it."<sup>138</sup> Nevertheless, Hezbollah managed to tie its own struggle with Israel to that of the Palestinians, especially since the Party would never spare a chance to remind Israel that "its policies toward the Palestinians cannot be isolated from the region as a whole."<sup>139</sup> After all, the Intifada, as Blanford notes, as well as other Palestinian insurgencies, provide Hezbollah with "continued relevance as a resistance force and places it in the vanguard of the struggle against Israel."<sup>140</sup>

The United States and the Western World should be aware that disarming Hezbollah would have to go through Iran, which is the ideological and theological inspirer of much of Hezbollah's doctrine, as well as Syria, which would not be willing to let go of this card that is "meant to remind Israel that it cannot end terrorism without accommodating Damascus."<sup>141</sup> One should by no means, however, consider the relationship between Hezbollah from one side and Syria and Iran from the other as simply a patron-client relationship. In addition to that, the US will sooner or later have to face the greater dilemma that "containing Iran today would mean promoting Sunni extremism – a self-defeating proposition for Washington".<sup>142</sup> And though almost all solutions have been exhausted between 2005 and 2008, one can easily identify 4 stages of engaging Hezbollah with the aim of removing its weapons.

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* P. 2

<sup>139</sup> Nicholas Blanford, (2004, September 14). "Hizballah and Syria's "Lebanese Card" Middle East Report Online: P. 2, retrieved from internet

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Byman, "Should Hezbollah be next?" *Op. Cit.*, p.4

<sup>142</sup> Vali Nasr and Ray Takeyh. "Why containing Iran won't work" Foreign Affairs 87. 1(Feb. – Jan., 2008): 91

The first stage came right after Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon. At that time, the forces of the 14<sup>th</sup> of March entered negotiations with both Hezbollah and Amal on different local issues, including agreeing on implementing the 2000 electoral law and running jointly in the elections, acknowledging Hezbollah's right to armed resistance against Israel, and finally forming a cabinet that would encompass, in addition to the forces of 14<sup>th</sup> of March, both Amal and Hezbollah; in other words, they were able to revive the Quadruple Alliance. It seems that, even at that time, Seniora's government promised the United States and other European stakeholders that it would be able to persuade Hezbollah to remove its arms through local carrot and stick negotiations. But having surprisingly failed to recognize that Hezbollah's role as a resistance movement is linked to regional considerations pertaining to the Shiite community of Lebanon, as well as to Syria's need for regional extensions and Iran's need for proxies, Seniora and Jumblatt eventually failed to persuade the Party of the need to disarm.

Hence, the second stage started coincidentally with the launching of the July war of 2006. In retaliation for an ambush set by Hezbollah on the Blue Line that led to the death of six Israeli soldiers and the kidnapping of two others, Israel bombarded heavily south Lebanon. The operation later on widened to include artillery barrages, air bombing of the southern suburbs of Beirut, and an air and sea embargo that would last for over thirty-three days. Sayyid Nasrallah warned since day one that only indirect negotiations would lead to the release of the two hostages in return for the release of Lebanese and Arab detainees from Israeli prisons. Nevertheless, Israel relied on heavy military bombardment that was coupled with an active US diplomacy aimed at cornering Hezbollah to accept greater concessions. In the meantime, Seniora and other prominent

leaders from the March 14<sup>th</sup> group as well as King Abdullah II of Jordan, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, and the Saudi royal family - all blamed Hezbollah for this new round of bravado that would bring about Lebanon's demise. But when news from the battleground confirmed that Hezbollah was resisting Israel's embargo and inflicting unbearable losses on Israel's military and civilian infrastructure, the mood in the Arab street soon started pressure Arab regimes to take action, and a domino effect led to an orchestrated effort culminating in a 7-point initiative by Seniors that would be discussed in the United Nations Security Council. Eventually, Resolution 1701 would be issued at the right moment to salvage both Hezbollah and Israel from what was proving to be a mutually destructive war. The stipulations of Resolution 1701 called, among other things, for the deployment of elements of the Lebanese Army on the Blue Line, in addition to increasing the prerogatives of a reinforced UNIFIL – with newly incorporated Chinese, French, German, Italian, and Turkish units signaling a stabilizing role for the multinational UN force - stationed in Southern Lebanon. Hence, the Resolution offered a decent way out for both sides, while constituting a chance to avoid any future wars between the two sides. It should be mentioned that at the time, Hezbollah aimed to conduct, aimed through the kidnapping of the two Israeli soldiers, a successful military operation that would preserve its stature and *raison d'être*; Hezbollah failed, however, to predict the magnitude of an Israeli retaliation that proved to be targeting Hezbollah's backbone, popular support: Israeli bombardment targeted civilian suburbs in Beirut and villages in the South and the Bekaa, eventually a million civilians were displaced, 1,200 died, and some 130,000 housing units, thousands of small businesses, hundreds of roads, 30 factories, 80 bridges, dozens of schools and hospitals, and the country's electricity

network were destroyed or damaged.<sup>143</sup> All in all, Lebanon sustained “economic and infrastructure damage estimated at 3.9 billion Dollars,<sup>144</sup> and eventually “Hezbollah ended up in a full scale war, in which it won some battlefield victories and popularity in the Arab and Muslim world, but which devastated its Lebanese Shiite constituency and narrowed its tactical and political options, especially since it gave up control of the area south of the Litani river”.<sup>145</sup> Israel, on the other hand, needed to make a point by retaliating in such a way as to avoid any future recurrences. One should not forget that Israel’s senior political decision-makers at the time, ie: Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livny and Defense Minister ‘Amir Peretz, all lacked any substantial military experience that would have enabled them to make the right decisions, hence the big number of miscalculations and military *faux pas* particularly carpet bombing Hezbollah’s stronghold in Beirut’s southern suburb, which only exacerbated hatred against Israel and support of Hezbollah. Eventually, Israel was shaken “to its core,”<sup>146</sup> especially since the Israeli Defense Forces underwent a dire test in southern Lebanon with devastating losses including among other things, the loss of 47 tanks<sup>147</sup> and boats, as well as complaints from reserve soldiers regarding the mismanagement of the war; but more important than all this is that Israel had to answer the question of whether its military deterrent power has been diminished.<sup>148</sup> As for the United States, it thought it could achieve its goal of disarming Hezbollah and deflating it

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<sup>143</sup> Paul Salem, (2006, November- December). “The Future of Lebanon” Foreign Affairs vol. 85, no. 6: p. 18

<sup>144</sup> Edward P. Djerjian, (2006, November- December). “From conflict management to conflict resolution” Foreign Affairs 85. 6 (Dec. – Nov., 2006): 41

<sup>145</sup> Salem, Op. Cit., p. 13 - 18

<sup>146</sup> Ze’ev Schiff, (2006, November- December). “Israel’s war with Iran” Foreign Affairs 85. 6 (Nov. – Dec, 2006): 28

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.* p. 30

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

with a most suitable cost-benefit ratio combined with coercive democracy. After all, Hezbollah's support of Hamas in Palestine obstructed an apparently successful US attempt to co-opt Mahmoud Abbas' Fath into the negotiation table.

With the end of the July 2006 war, tensions grew stronger in Lebanon between the two political blocs. Hence, the third stage developed into what would become an attempt to drag Hezbollah into internal disputes and feuds that would undermine its aura among Lebanese and Arab grass-roots. For the six months following the July War, Hezbollah and Amal found themselves in a position where they had to justify the community's monopoly over the war and peace decision, as well as its attempts to build a state within the state, and fighting Syria and Iran's wars and working according to their agenda. The Hezbollah-Amal-Aoun coalition tried to invest Hezbollah's "Victory" in internal Lebanese politics by calling the government to resign and creating a new government of National Unity, labeling it on many occasions as a quisling government. Clashes on the streets ensued for months to follow, and on one occasion, escalated to a full street fight between supporters from both sides that resulted in many casualties. With the end of the term of President Lahoud things took a more critical turn, but eventually feuding sides negotiated a way out together in February 2008 to end all street clashes that might hamper and threaten Lebanon's stability. Hence the attempts to drag Hezbollah into an internal fight fell short of a full-scale war.

Yet the fourth stage, to this date, proved to be the direr for Hezbollah and the more threatening for all of Hasan Nasrallah's achievements in turning the movement into a legitimate political party and resistance movement. On the eve of February 13, 2008 a blast echoed throughout Damascus. The news resonated badly among Hezbollah's top

officials; senior military leader Imad Mughniya had been assassinated in a tight security zone. Mughniya, who was on the loose for the previous twenty years, had hitherto evaded death and arrest on several occasions. To most countries of the world he was considered a terrorist *par excellence*, as he was responsible for major terrorist acts in the past, particularly the kidnapping of a TWA airplane in the 1980s and the Argentina bombing in 1992. As for Hezbollah in general, and Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah in particular, he was responsible for the complete overhauling of the Party's military arm to become an efficient fighting force and the major orchestrator of the 2006 "Divine Victory".

Understandably, Sayyid Hasan's reaction became very radical and uncompromising during Mughniya's funeral, as he promised to wage war on all fronts and worldwide against Israeli and Zionist interests; in other words, Nasrallah was preaching an all out terrorist war against military and civilian targets alike. Something that would in itself bring about the demise of Hezbollah, as the return to such acts and operations would turn the Party to another Al-Qaeda, or any other Sunni fundamentalist group, which it worked hard to distance itself from. Foresightedly enough, Hezbollah evaded this trap when Sayyid Hasan reaffirmed several days later that the Party will only target Israeli targets inside Israel, probably fearing to lose at some point the unprecedented support it enjoyed, after the July war, which provided it with the upper hand both locally and regionally, as well as in its existential fight against Israel.

As for who killed Mughniya, some hardliners would like to believe that Syria was responsible for the assassination in return for promises of loosening up on the part of the United States; others would point the finger at Israel, which although having benefited the most from Mughniya's death, was in no situation to embark on a new escalation with



Hezbollah, especially with the issuance of the Winograd Report that laid responsibility on the Israeli political establishment, without blaming anyone in particular for the July war failures. As for the United States, it had chased Mughniya through the Federal Bureau of Investigation for over twenty years and placed a twenty-five million dollar bounty for hunting him down. It is not improbable that the United States had liquidated Mughniya in an attempt to drag Hezbollah into an unfavorable situation that would prove fatal to it. A recent report published by the German newspaper *Die Welt*, pointed to the probability that Assaf Shawkat, head of the Syria's military intelligence, killed Mughniya who had informed Asad that Shawkat plotted a coup to topple him.<sup>149</sup>

Under these circumstances, Hezbollah is trying to balance its moderate approach to Lebanese politics, while not compromising on vital issues such as the Shiite share in participation and decision-making. To this very moment, Hezbollah has managed to evade attempts to undermine its military role, which is perceived by the West as radical and terrorist and by the Shiites of Lebanon as vital for securing their place in local and regional politics. Lebanon is truly at a critical crossroad. Whether or not the Lebanese decide to discuss and solve their problematic issues, will affect their country's future to a great extent. The Middle East is currently experiencing some tectonic changes: a democratization and federalization in Iraq is allowing all the ethnic and religious minorities in the country to have a say in politics. While a democratization process in Palestine is bringing new blood to power and new conflicts as well. The sustained pressure on Asad and Olmert's turbulent rule mean that the two neighboring countries will be passing through an unstable period, with the latter having to survive a tougher

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<sup>149</sup> Haaretz Service "Syria Foiled Attempted Coup by Assad's Brother-in-law" [Haaretz](http://www.haaretz.com) (June 8, 2008)  
Retrieved from: [www.haaretz.com](http://www.haaretz.com)

test. In addition to that, the increasing pressure of the United States and its allies to make these entire radical changes possible with little time left for President Bush in office, mean that the area would remain in the eye of the storm for a period of time. All this is taking place at a time when Lebanon is facing the task of rebuilding its political life and rediscovering democracy. Therefore, it is very critical for the Shiite community to play a pivotal role in approaching different points of view on internal issues, as well as on issues pertaining to Lebanon's relation with its neighbors, which can also be described as pillars of Lebanon's stability. All these issues are inter-related, thus reaching a consensus on any one of them would be enough to pave the way for the others to be solved.

Lebanon's second independence, a more authentic one, has nevertheless been a pyrrhic one. Whether or not it is worth the cost paid will be determined by the Lebanese willingness to strengthen it at a time when all the Middle East is boiling. It would be a wrong step to interfere in Syrian affairs by trying to topple the regime there or affecting the course of events, because as history has taught us, Lebanon could be easily left out of any bargains between greater powers and eventually pay the price. It would also be very wrong to wage Iran's and Syria's wars of stature at the expense of Lebanon's stability and prosperity, or to act as Iran's soft power agent in the Arab world. The Lebanese should also get rid of their idealist dreams of fabled neutrality since this proved to be fatal in the pre-1975 era.

After having done the tough work of aligning Lebanon's interests with the interests of the international community in general and the United States in particular, the Lebanese should be careful not to lose their independence due to minor issues. It is true that "the devil lies in the details" but for Lebanon, to drown in hopeless fractures and

factionalism is synonymous to taking the road to hell. Therefore, Lebanon's salvation will be incarnated in a final push towards implementing a true consociational democracy that would eventually make Lebanon's positive attributes resurface and be revived, in order to serve as a true conduit of democracy to other Arab societies. Lebanon's moment has come (again), at a time when all its "enemies and brothers, guests and allies"<sup>150</sup> are walking down the path of a new "others' war on Lebanon's soil". Will the small country, which "contains treasure in greater abundance than any place else in the Middle East... called human capital"<sup>151</sup> prove to be up to the task? Will it be able to light up the Arab World once again, overcoming in the process the irredentist dreams of its neighbors further east?

The situation in the country resembles the situation of 1975 with the main difference being that alliances are not conceived on a confessional basis, but to a great extent on a political one. Thus the threat of any escalation into confessional blood baths seems improbable. Moreover, there is very little appetite among the Lebanese of all political or religious stripes to revisit the horrors of bloody internal conflict or any semblance of civil strife. Yet the Sunni-dominated government's attempts to avoid any sharing of authority or power based on the time-honored principle of consensus politics are crippling the whole country, in particular economically. On the other hand, the Shiite repetitive war-clamoring has put the community on the run from an eventual showdown between Hezbollah and Israel, something that no one will be capable or willing to cover, except some Syrian puppets. All this will have an adverse impact in the long run on emigration, social growth, economic development, and stability. In comparing the

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<sup>150</sup> Ghassan Tueini. "Beware 'the other's war'" *Annahar* 10 Jan. 2006: 1 & 12

<sup>151</sup> Claudia Rozette. "End the occupation...of Lebanon" *The weekly standard* 8. 32 (2003)

situation in Lebanon to that of Iraq, Vali Nasr foresightedly advised: "Iraq's sectarian pains are reminiscent of Lebanon's past but may also be a window on its future."<sup>152</sup> After all, it might be true that "without the heavy external pressures for it to disarm, Hizballah's military agenda would likely become less pertinent by the day."<sup>153</sup>

With the Doha Agreement, the situation evolved to resemble that of 1969, when Lebanon signed the Cairo Agreement that "legitimized" the Palestinian armed struggle from Lebanese soil and thereby sowed the seeds of deep fears in several communities, mainly the Christians, which caused them to start arming and training until things escalated to open war in 1975. It seems that today, radical and fundamentalist Sunni factions are reemerging in the community to counter Hezbollah's and Iran's threats in response to the Shiite gains from Doha. The first signs of this new trend are being manifested through the recurrent attacks on Lebanese army barracks and renewed terrorist threats by Shaker al-Absi, head of Fath al-Islam. If this proves to be the case, than Lebanon might be on the verge of a new cycle of tensions and instability.

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<sup>152</sup> Vali Nasr, *Op. Cit.*, p. 50

<sup>153</sup> Leenders, *Op. Cit.*, p. 10

## 10 Concluding Notes

No Orientalist could perceive the nineteenth century Shiite communities of Jabal Amil and the Bekaa Valley as anything other than small rural communities whose everyday lives were predominantly based on tobacco plantation in Jabal Amil and tribal balances in the Bekaa as their only concern. The community had surely learned to live on the sidelines of history for many centuries. Their apparently desperate struggle for survival against the more numerous and powerful Sunnis in the early centuries of Islam forced them to go quiescent and adapt to their passive-reactive role in history. Starting in the fifteenth century, the Ottomans did not spare any means to undermine and marginalize even further the small minority groups living in their realm, and the Shiite communities spreading around the empire had no better fortunes.

But the small Shiite community that settled in the southern mountains of Lebanon starting in the seventh century managed a huge leap thanks to elements that are intrinsic to it that allowed its smaller building blocs to unite together and gather around the banner of Shiism. Truly, opportune events and unusual men and women played the major role in bringing the Shiite community of Lebanon from darkness into light. Initially, many Shiite scholars tried desperately to explain the community's integration through the Lebanese model, in hope of more recognition from other constituting communities. Chalabi notes that Shaykh Ali al-Zayn focused on the Shiite integration along this three-dimensional Maronite historical experience that all other communities tried to follow and rationalize theirs in return for a place under the democratizing sun of Greater Lebanon.<sup>154</sup> This model is based on: first, the singular source of origin of Amilis that goes back to the

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<sup>154</sup> Chalabi, *Op. Cit.* P. 164 – 165

Banou Amila of Yemen and who settled in the Levant as far back as the sixth century; second, the singular religious source of the community which, as explained earlier, originated from the direct companions of Prophet Mohammed and Imam Ali hence the nobility and purity of this community; third and finally, the geographical claim of the community which is its territorial settling in the region stretching from Jabal Amil through the Bekaa Valley.

Nevertheless, it was not that explanation and rationalization that earned the Shiites their recognition and acceptance as a main pillar of the new Lebanese entity, which to this very day remains, in the eyes of many, subject to much debate and refutation. On the contrary, the Shiite community has worked hard for its acceptance in this new entity. Shaykh al-Zayn's integration model has provided the credentials for the community allowing it to be able to live in the new Lebanon. Yet the Shiites of Lebanon, though they have passed a long way towards their full integration in the Lebanese entity, have still a lot to prove.

The community has walked a path of its own towards full integration. The continual alienation the Shiites had endured over the centuries left them helpless facing the big changes of the 1910s and 1920s when the future of the whole region was being decided in the negotiations that took place between European powers from one side, and the leaders of the Arab Revolt from the other, and representatives from the different native communities from a third, but not the Shiites. The Shiites spent the 1920s and 1930s trying to catch up with the moving train. Their world was divided between two entities and the majority of their lands have been integrated into a new country that incorporated them, not for the sake of their cultural value, but due to the richness and

vitality of their lands. Yet the community managed, facing these tectonic changes, to nurture a communitarian sense when all its notables and *Zaims* met in 1920 in Wady Hujayr to discuss the community's options as it faces major threats and changes. This sense of community was also forged slowly by the writings of the Amili trio, the Jaafariya and Amiliya schools as well as the Irfan newsletter the three of which constituted the main reservoirs of Shiite culture communicated over the years from one generation to another. The community's disappointment in the fading promises of pan-Arabism and leftist ideologies right after the 1967 war only paved the way through social mobilization for a real Shiite renaissance in the 1970s with the emergence of Sayyid Musa al-Sadr as a beacon of change and institutionalization. Al-Sadr foresightedly understood that the entrenchment of the Shiite community as a main player in Lebanese politics does not only occur through adopting a moderate political stance *vis-à-vis* other religious communities, but also through institutionalizing Shiite politics and religion. Hence al-Sadr created the Movement of the Deprived and the Higher Shiite Council. With time, and mainly after the disappearance of Imam Musa al-Sadr, the two entities he created played a major role, since no one other than al-Sadr could manage to head both institutions, in providing more political options for the community, hence the second Lebanonist pattern of integration. The Shiite attempts at integration took again a different approach, a radical Islamist one, when major influence came from further east from Iran where the Islamic Republic was eager to export the revolution and succeeded in doing so in Lebanon where the Shiite community was, with all its newly founded intrinsic elements as well as despair, the perfect breeding ground for radicalism. But even the Islamic Revolution failed to cut through the diverse Lebanese mosaic and eventually

major Shiite scholars had to adapt the Iranian model to the difficult Lebanese reality, hence the new pattern of Lebanizing the Islamic approach. Consociational democracy as a concept that is publicly championed by all communities with each preserving their true eagerness for religious dominance concealed became the order of the day and even the most radical Hezbollah had to adapt to this new reality, especially when Syria became the main power-broker in the country. Hence the drastic approach for radicalism also failed.

The Shiites, who emerged in 1990 as the biggest community in Lebanon, assertively opposed the new stipulations of the Taef Accord that constituted a typical Lebanese solution according to the “no winner and no loser” formula. The community claimed that since it emerged victorious it should gain a bigger share of the pie. But realism and pragmatism eventually prevailed when the community benefitted from regional compromise to gain a de facto political, entrepreneurship, and even military dominance over the following fifteen years. But here as well the Shiites failed, since Lebanon’s history proves that any attempt at unilateral dominance always ends up in utter failure.

With the failure of all previous attempts for integration, the Shiites of Lebanon are again, after the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, trying to find a way for full integration. For sure integration should pass through a new national pact involving the major Lebanese communities. The first pangs of this new national pact might be revealing themselves here and there. One of these is undoubtedly the hosting of Shiite emigrants in Keserwan and Metn during the last July War that proved that the new rapprochement between the Christians and the Shiites has cut through grass-roots on both sides,



something that the reconciliation of the Mountain between Patriarch Nasrallah Sfeir and Druze leader Walid Jumblatt failed to achieve. On a decision-making level, the major indicator of Hezbollah's Lebanonization process is the Party leadership's willingness to take a more compromising stance pertaining to vital issues. The best example of this is the case of Imad Mughniya's assassination and Hezbollah's reaction afterwards. The willingness to compromise in adopting a new electoral law is another example.

Any Lebanese coming back home after thirty years abroad would be surely surprised to find out on his way from Beirut's International Airport, that not only was it now renamed Rafiq Hariri International Airport, but also that on the road to the capital's most vital part, Downtown Beirut, pictures commemorating Shiite Martyrs and heroes are nowadays displayed side by side with those of living Lebanese Shiite leaders, not martyrs, who have generated glory and pride for the community over the years. Sadly enough, Downtown Beirut is nowadays garnished with portraits of promising popular Christian leaders who fell to the assassin's bullets or the terrorist's car bomb, and who despite having had promising prospects to become national heroes have paid dearly the price of dreaming big again. All this probably reflects and summarizes the dramatic changes that shaped today's Lebanon as well as the opposing fates of its major communities, whether it be the downfall of the Maronites or the emergence of the Shiites. All this stands as a reminder of the cruelty of the East towards the ones who manipulate its delicate balances and latent powers, but also as a reminder of the fortunes it can bestow over those willing to venture against all odds to claim their place under its sun, never excluding the ever-present potential for reversal of fortunes.

The major achievements piled-up by the community over the years would probably never fade away, yet its future prospects lie primarily in its willingness and ability to adapt to the ever-changing Lebanese political reality as well as the effort it is willing to invest to cope and integrate in this reality, even at the expense of its regional extensions. After all, the Shiites are at a time when they have, as all other communities did at some point, to answer the main question of whether to favor their integration into Lebanon, or their Shiism that might in some cases, especially in the presence of an Islamist and radical Iran and an autocratic Alawite regime in Syria, contradict the interests of Lebanon. The window for maneuverability is narrowing, and soon the community will find itself bound to make a decision, a historic one that would definitely shape the future of the country, its people, and its communities.

One should note that the successive communal ascendancies and their eventual failures as exclusive determinants of Lebanese politics come down simply to the fact that these unilateral ascendancies did not respect the multi-confessional, pluralist fabric of Lebanon. Hence, for the country to break out of this recurring pattern of communal political monopolies and their often catastrophic failures the ultimate solution might be reached through the formulation of some communal consensus on the basic ground rules that govern Lebanese pluralism. In this respect, would emphasizing political/administrative decentralization, or acknowledging the concept of multi-cultural citizenship, or even implementing some version of creative communal federalism within the single unified state serve as possible solutions for this perennial Lebanese dilemma? How could such solutions be reached while, on one hand, some Lebanese sub-groups still emphasize their own webs of social and security services at the expense of a strong

central government as do the Sunnis and the Shiites, and, on the other, other major sub-groups that currently lack political cohesiveness like the Christians do not even display the necessary minimal requirements to play an active role in Lebanese politics and government?

Yet, one should not underestimate the importance of the community's achievements, but rather appreciate its willingness and capability to make the huge leap and occupy center-stage in Lebanese and regional politics. Fuad Ajami described the magnitude of Shiite achievements best through the words of John Mack:

“The fast-track emergence of the Shiite community of Lebanon will be probably echoed for centuries to come as a myth, a heroic one, as John Mack puts it: The creation of a heroic myth depends upon the compliance of history, the coming together of special events and situations with unusual men and women who take hold of these circumstances”.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Ajami, *Op. Cit.*, p. 190

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