The Post Syrian Civil War image of Hezbollah: The legitimization struggle after 2011

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Thesis for the M.A. Modern Middle Eastern Studies

July, 2019

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Introduction

On March 15, 2011 the influence of the Arab Uprising that started with the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia, materialized in the Syrian city of Deraa. The role of Hezbollah as a supporter of the opposition movements was challenged with conciliating their ideology established in the 2009 The New Hezbollah Manifesto with the recent changes in the regional context. The series of protests that became known as the "Arab Spring" were seen as part of the wave of demonstrations against authoritarian regimes in Egypt and Tunisia and would later spread to Morocco, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain.

Hezbollah's support of the revolutionary nature and ideology of the opposition movements became an issue when the anti-government demonstrations began in Syria and the organization suddenly contradicted its previous posture by backing the regime. This was done while endorsing the Bashar al-Assad regime in 2011, and later in 2013, a joint military intervention was started alongside the Syrian forces in al-Qusayr. The Janus-faced behavior of the organization had an immediate negative impact on the image that Hezbollah had been building through a pragmatic and selective legitimation process.

As a result, Hezbollah was confronted with the need to justify their imminent contradiction to the resistance ideology that defined their relationship with the Shiite community and the transgression of the Baabda Declaration, in which Lebanon confirmed its neutrality in the Syrian civil war, and that risked their national legitimacy and their intervention in a foreign conflict that exposed the organization to international retaliation. In this scenario, how does Hezbollah react to the challenges to the legitimacy of its organization?. In light of the aforementioned, this thesis will aim to analyze and identify the way in which Hezbollah justify the intervention in Syria to their support groups at the local, national and international level. Hezbollah has used a process of identity construction to achieve legitimacy by using the socio-political changes that affected the environment surrounding the organization's development (Alagha, 2011a, 30). Therefore, the hypothesis is that Hezbollah uses ideology as the base of their identity in a process of self-redefinition to target the interests of their different support groups as they interact with different factors that modify the current circumstances. This research focuses on Hezbollah's creation of

meaning in the ideological discourse in order to justify their actions and preserve their legitimacy at three different levels of target audiences (communal, national, international) by developing diverse context models (van Dijk, 2006, 21) according to each audience's particular interests.

The strategy is mainly based on the appropriation of rhetoric devices that connect to the existing ideology of the target audience, regardless of whether or not it was originally influenced by Hezbollah. Justifications based on ideological restructuration are required because "ideology is also a powerful informal constraint on behavior, and, as such it helps an organization to minimize the transaction costs related to information and compliance" (Berti, 2013, 25); moreover, the improvement in communication with the support base increases their legitimacy and creates a competitive advantage regarding other rival actors. Diverse justifications that create meaning have been identified in all three levels of discourse. They should, however, not be analyzed as isolated explanations. Rather, they have been separated and classified with the objective of demonstrating how the justifications create coherence by entwining meanings across the three levels.

Literature Review

The role of ideological restructuration in achieving legitimacy

This section will give an overview of the existing literature concerning the main premise of this thesis, identity construction as a source of legitimacy in political actors. In addition, a section specifically dealing with organizations that based their ideology on Islamism will be included.

The first group of authors that analyse the role of ideology in identity construction take an approach that defies the linear study of the process and is mainly based on critical realism (Knio 2013, Berti 2013, Alagha 2011a). Understanding the transformation of organizations in order to identify the key aspects of achieving constant legitimation has been a central topic in the study of armed groups that have reached a level of expansion to the realm of politics. Their analysis of the interaction between the different elements that affect the internal transformation of the organization can be adopted to explain Hezbollah's

legitimacy in diverse contexts throughout its history and the dilemma presented due to their Janus-faced behaviour.

Berti defies the linear-history paradigm and its implication regarding the automatic adherence to the "democratic rules of the game" that has been used to analyse the creation of political wings (Berti, 2013, 4). In this paradigm, the armed groups that enter politics are expected to eventually evolve into a moderate organization that renounces the use of violent means since violence itself is seen as a by-product of exclusion from the political system (Berti, 2013, 24). Berti's cyclical development model contributes to the comprehension of the factors behind the political expansion and the consequences of that decision (Berti, 2013, 25). The model is particularly useful to explain the transformation of hybrid politico-military organizations such as Hezbollah and the strategies developed to achieve legitimacy. It relies on the assumption that the public does not automatically penalize the use of violence by a hybrid organization due to the clear separation between the armed and the political wing in the general perspective of society (Berti, 2013, 24).

Furthermore, to understand the contribution of this cyclical analysis it is essential to recognize the contribution of Margaret Archer's sociological distinctions. Unlike the structure-agency perspective, Archer separates the realm of the material and the ideational in society into two categories. The material is represented by the Structural Emergent Properties (SEP) and the ideational by the Cultural Emergent Properties (CEP), and in addition to this distinction, she uses the ontological concept of People's Emergent Properties (PEP) to study changes in the role of people throughout the different stages of the cycle (Archer, 1995, 226).

Restructuring Islamism as an ideology

The second approach to identity construction is also based on a realist approach, yet is centred in the specific role of Islam in the construction of ideology. They defy the notion of categorizing Islamism as a purely ideological movement by putting political pragmatism as the main motivation to start the process of ideological restructuration.

Asef Bayat recognizes an important shift in the identity construction of some of the groups that used Islamism as their main guiding ideology towards what he labelled as "post-Islamism" (Bayat, 2013, 8). Post-Islamism can be divided into two representations: as a condition and as a project (Bayat, 2013, 8). The former, where the sources of legitimacy of Islamism as seen as worn out and its inadequacies became self-evident in the process of institutionalization, leading to a pragmatic adaptation to the national and international context. The latter, which is expressed in the conscious pursuit to "strategize the rationale" of Islamism in order to transcend into intellectual, social and political domains (Bayat, 2013,8). In Bayat's perspective, post-Islamism seeks to achieve an "alternative modernity". Bayat clearly identifies the need for an ideological transformation due to the need for a pragmatic approach that enables an actor to preserve its legitimacy (Bayat, 2013, 8). Nevertheless, the author uses a linear Western-centric notion of modernity. Democracy and liberal values become the modernizing axis that Islamism starts adopting in a progressive manner to avoid a legitimacy crisis.

On the other hand, the transformation of Islamism in the ideology of an organization is a topic also examined as a negative manifestation. Thomas Hegghammer analyses ideological reorientation as a tool for maintaining legitimacy as a sign of weakness, since the process of hybridization of diverse principles might reflect a lack of compelling initial arguments and issues with recruitment and political isolation (Hegghammer, 2009, 1). For Hegghammer, the hybridization occurs when there is a presence of discrete ideal types of ideologies that defined narrowly a set of principles to guide political behaviour and, in the case of Jihadi groups, he labels it as 'rationale for Islamic violence' (Hegghammer, 2009, 2). Nevertheless, the author did not take into consideration that ideological hybridization could be used to successfully expand an armed group, nor he consider that a selective and well-planned hybridization that accompanies a cyclical development could serve as a strong mechanism to enhance legitimacy.

The authors have created different frameworks to map out the role of ideology in the reconstruction of identity. They, however, do not analyse the specific strategies used by Hezbollah to achieve the transformation. The organization possesses a centralized and efficient media-apparatus that plays a central function in the communication between them

and their support base, and they use this channel to spread their ideology through controlled sources of information and specific speeches addressing issues relevant to them. The existing literature has omitted or diminished the role of discourse restructuration in the legitimation of the organization's identity. The official speeches that are distributed by Hezbollah's official media have played a central role in the transmission of their ideology to different selected audiences depending on the issue.

Evaluating Hezbollah's legitimacy

The following group of authors analyse Hezbollah's legitimation process to identify the strategies that have led to the organization's growth and expansion, specially regarding the permeation in the Lebanese political agenda.

The case of Hezbollah's successful participation in the general national elections of 1992 represented a critical juncture to redefine the image of the organization in an effort to prove its relevance in the post-Civil War context, where the political configuration was permeable due to its restructuration. In the case of Hezbollah, Berti identifies the factors for political participation in the institutional pressures to expand in response to legitimacy and relevancy threat after the Civil War and the separation from Amal; an opening in the political opportunity system after the ratification of the Document of National Accord; the decline in the availability of mobilization resources due to the changes in Iranian foreign policy after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and the beginning of the reconciliation process in Lebanon (Berti, 2013, 37).

In addition, Berti highlights the importance of the internal commitment to reform of Hezbollah, initially promoted by the majority of the leadership and Iran, but later achieved through a centralized balance of power (Berti, 2013, 39). To a certain extent, the creation of a political wing placed Hezbollah under public scrutiny and pressured the organization to have positive relations with other actors that could allow them to have greater influence in decision-making processes inside established institutions (Berti, 2013, 44). Nevertheless, this change should not be seen as part of a linear transformation towards the eventual eradication of the military wing, but as a stage in the cyclical development of the organization (Berti, 2013, 53). Berti ends her analysis of Hezbollah with a short description

of the impact of the Syrian Civil War on the "resistance" narrative that the organization emphasized during the "Arab Uprisings", however, she does not examine the military involvement in the conflict or the influence it had on the cyclical development (Berti, 2013, 78).

The cyclical development can be identified in Archer's morphogenetic framework, and it was used by Karim Knio to provide a deeper understanding of the relation between the context and the interaction of Hezbollah with other structural and cultural entities. Nevertheless, his analysis is solely focused on a historical approach. This particular perspective limits his understanding of the evolution of Hezbollah to a series of organizational changes intrinsically backed by ideological modifications. Knio does not explain the legitimization strategy behind what he identifies as the "reproduction of the *status quo*", which he defines as the period between 1992 and 2000 (Knio, 2013, 865). His Janus-faced argument can only be partially understood without the examination of the centralized ideology production and the role of the mass media in the popular endorsement of the contradictory decisions made by Hezbollah in various contexts, and specifically after the Syrian intervention.

In his study of the post-Cedar Revolution, Knio identifies three traditions of conceptualizing the framework of Hezbollah's interaction with the current environment and its changing raison d'être (Knio in Salih, 2009, 259). The author is particularly critical of two of the approaches; first, the use of the instrumentalist perspective where Hezbollah is mainly studied as a proxy client of Iran and Syria, and the rational-structural perspective that clearly separates the military and the political wing as two separate entities (Knio in Salih, 2009, 261). Instead, he selects a "mutually constitutive structure/agency type of argumentation in which they envisage a holistic interaction between Hezbollah's welfare institutions and the culture of resistance" (Knio in Salih, 2009, p.260) that enabled him to evaluate the impact of the Cedar Revolution on the legitimacy of the organization. Nevertheless, the case study does not engage in an exhaustive manner with this third conceptualization. Rather, it tends to focus on the description of the particular events and cannot explain the further development of other events such as the identity contradictions after the new 2009 political Manifesto. Rather, the proposed third framework of analysis is

applied in a greater degree in his study on the legitimacy struggle of Hezbollah after the "Arab Uprisings" (Knio, 2013, 856).

Criticizing the same lack of flexibility of previous analytical frameworks in the study of the complex division and behaviour of Hezbollah, Knio proposes another cyclical perspective based on the sociological approach of critical realism (Knio, 2013, 858). The author identifies the response of Hezbollah to the Syrian protests as a decisive point, due to the challenge it represents to the commonly used dualistic analyses where there is a clear separation between the military and the political wing (Knio, 2013, 857). Knio labels Hezbollah's reaction to the uprisings as Janus-faced and gives a sociological explanation beyond the dialectical analysis of structure-agency to understand the decisions made by the organization after 2011. The author uses the three-moment cycle of the morphogenetic analysis (interaction, conditioning, reproduction) proposed by Margaret Archer to illustrate the interaction of internal relations with contingent factors that originated the changes in ideology (Knio, 2013, 864). Knio argues that "collapsing Hezbollah's socioeconomic and military infrastructures (structural/material) with the construction of a resistance governmentality (culture/ideational) in one point in time obfuscates our analysis of the party" (Knio, 2013, 863).

In a similar manner, Richard Norton identifies the Janus-faced behaviour of Hezbollah as he described the development of the organization since its creation to the current scenario, including the engagement in the Syrian Civil War after 2013.His book explains the changing national and international context in which Hezbollah has evolved, an essential element to construct the identity transformation throughout that process (Norton, 2018, 197). Norton's political approach on the history of Hezbollah provides a deep analysis to understand the expanding national and international role of the organization, as well as a framework to explain their constant adaptation to different contexts (Norton, 2018, 83-210). Moreover, it provides an updated examination of the latest main events that have marked the conflict. Norton achieves placing Hezbollah in a scenario larger than the national Lebanese context by including a regional perspective and a description of the organization's interaction with international actors. Nevertheless, his perspective does not include the efforts made by Hezbollah to reduce the negative impact of their decisions

through the different stages of their development, and excludes the role of ideology in the organizational adaptation to the context.

Joseph Alagha defines Hezbollah as an identity-based movement that modified its Islamic jihadi narrative in three main stages: exclusivist religious ideology; an encompassing political ideology; and a pragmatic political program (Alagha, 2006, 14). The author connects the adaptation of Hezbollah's identity to the political reality of Lebanon through the internal changes of the organization and the promotion of different sets of values in each stage (Alagha, 2011a, 24). He uses the conceptual transformation in the main documents promoted by the organization as a focal point, yet he excludes additional information shared constantly through the other official media channels.

Alagha places Hezbollah's identity construction in diverse contexts, and just as Berti, he recognizes the role of the centralization of the leadership through the eight conclaves that led to the new Manifesto in 2009 (Alagha, 2011a, 160). The contextualization of the conclaves, the modification of organizational hierarchies and the release of official documents provide a useful interrelated examination of the dynamics between internal and external factors. Alagha gives identity a central role in his three books. His general framework of analysis, however, remains linear and does not engage with the contradictions between the promoted identity and some of the actual decisions, like their role in the Cedar Revolution, that were made. According to the previous authors, there are considerable issues with this linear approach. As Knio indicates in his work, the linear paradigm limits the interpretation of the Janus-faced behaviour, especially after the Syrian uprisings in 2011 (Knio, 2013, 857). For Berti, the use of the linear reasoning usually implies that there is an evolution towards a standard "more democratic" or liberal behaviour (Berti, 2013, 26).

Hezbollah was founded in a regional context dominated by the after effects of the Iranian Islamic revolution and the national power struggle of the Lebanese civil war. In their founding manifesto expressed in the 1985 Open Letter (*Nass al-Risala al-Maftuha allati wajahaha Hizballahila-l-Mustad'afin fi Lubnan wa-l-Alam*), Islamism played a central role in the definition of the revolutionary ideology that justified the military and political path that the organization followed during the first years after its creation. Islamism can be

defined in general terms as "those ideologies and movements that strive to establish some kind of an 'Islamic order'- a religious state, shari'a law, and moral codes in Muslim societies and communities. Association with the state is a key feature [...]" (Bayat, 2013, 4), but it has different variations regarding the means to achieve different goals. In the 2009 Manifesto, Hezbollah decided to portrait itself as an organization that represented more than the Shia community by emphasizing the dichotomy of oppressors and oppressed in a Manichean manner beyond the religious dimension of Islam. This dichotomy had been used to describe the marginalization of the Shi'ite. However, the stress over the universality of the concepts derived from the Quran was accentuated as a cross cultural and class notion.

Joseph Alagha examines Hezbollah's *infitah* as a case of post-Islamism. He defines post-Islamism using the words of his Hezbollah interviewees as an *infitah*, an "opening up to global cultural trends while preserving indigenous values as an Islamic moral alternative" and the guardianship-based political system (*wilayat al-faqih*) as the main source of Islamism of the organization (Alagha in Bayat, 2013, 242). He uses Bayat's notion of "collectivity" that describes fluid and fragmented movements based on different layers and orientations to describe the nature of Hezbollah's transformation (Alagha in Bayat, 2013, 24). This framework allowed Alagha to analyse the current scenario of post-Islamism in the case of Hezbollah, where the political status quo is part of the official discourse, especially after the evident Lebanonization of the 2009 Manifesto (Alagha in Bayat, 2013). The author recognizes that the changes in the national and international context led to a transformation towards a post-Islamist path, nevertheless this shift has been "inconsistent, selective, and pragmatic" (Alagha in Bayat, 2013, 252).

Political discourse as a tool for legitimacy

Hezbollah's *raison d'être*, as both a political and an armed organization, has been continuously justified in public speeches and written declarations that contribute to their *project identity* through the use of *intellectual ideology*. Hezbollah's ideology is not a static guideline of values and beliefs, but has acted as a dynamic notion that adapts to contextual changes to justify the organization's relevance.

The fact that these narratives have not remained static is integral to the legitimization process. The base of the image building platform is currently centralized and controlled

through their mass media system which includes the newspaper *Al-Ahd*, the radio station *Al-Nour* and the *Al-Manar* TV channel and website. The Hezbollah-affiliated think tank Consultative Centre for Studies and Documentation (CCSD), led by Abdel Halim Fadlallah, also plays an important role in the distribution of information. The CCSD produced academic articles and reports that are aligned with Hezbollah's ideology promotion at the moment. The significance of the media apparatus was evident when a military escalation arose after the Lebanese government axed their telecommunication network in 2008 on the basis that the organization represented a threat to national security.

The information spread through the media has been carefully constructed based on a specific discourse. In this context, discourse analysis represents a mechanism to achieve legitimacy through the justification of the actions and decisions taken via rational argumentation. For Foucault "[...] language is an *analysis* of thought: not a simple patterning, but a profound establishment of order in space", and discourse is a sequence of artificial verbal signs that might use arranged knowledge to create *Ideology"* (Foucault, 1994, p.83). This process of creating representation can be used by political actors to reproduce or contest political power. Discourse becomes one of the channels through which the struggle for power and the pursuit of cooperation inherent in politics unfolds. Moreover, the use of discourse is essential in the creation of shared perceptions that define political associations (Chilton, 2004, 5).

The relevance of the use of discourse originates from the central role of language and communication in social interactions. Language is the medium in which referents are assigned a meaning. In the political arena, this process is fundamental because "[...] non-existing entities can be accepted as having meaning and the way in which *alternate* ways of referring to the *same* entity can have different meanings" (Chilton, 2004, 49). There is a strategic use of language in politics that depends on the formulation of meaning, and that is mediated on a basic level by the constraints of communication.

For Jürgen Habermas human communication is based on knowledge, which is a non-neutral representation of a context and is expressed by language (Habermas, 2007, 235). Language cannot be neutral since it is highly ambivalent and it is constructed by determined interests to achieve diverse goals. Habermas adds the notion of rationality to achieve understanding

as an abstract goal of the communication process (universal pragmatics), which relies upon validity claims. Validity claims were divided into the claim to understandability (intelligibility), claim to truth (affirming a truthful representation), claim to be telling the truth (claiming sincerity corresponds to intended meanings) and the claim to rightness (authority affirms that the allegation is normatively right) (Habermas, 2007, 235).

Since the validity of the claims is usually challenged, Chilton proposes the use of strategic functions of language to understand the distortion of communication to achieve certain interests. The functions are mainly, but not purely linguistic strategies, and are classified by the author as coercion, legitimation and delegitimation, and representation and misrepresentation (Chilton, 2004, 45). Both the validity claims and the strategic functions depend to a great extent on the use of representations and the cognitive approaches that manipulate such constructed meanings. Chilton describes several cognitive approaches that help in the generation and storage of representations and that eventually create a base of social information of values, ideas and practices (Chilton, 2004, 49). The approaches include the use of frames as theoretical constructs of "an area of experience" inside a determined culture, the adoption of metaphors as mappings of meanings and knowledge, the mention of specific agents and events, and the "discourse worlds" created by the representation of the reality of the speaker (Chilton, 2004, 54). Van Dijk classifies the cognitive approaches as *discourse structures* that influence the understanding of the representation and that are mainly identified in the semantic properties of headlines and leads, implications and presuppositions, metaphors, lexical expression, and the use of passive sentence structures and nominalizations (van Dijk, Tannen *et al*, 2015, 352).

This thesis will focus on the existing gap between the theoretical approach of identity construction based on ideological restructuration and the actual material (speeches) produced by Hezbollah to achieved it. It will attempt to fill the gaps in the existing literature on Hezbollah's expansion by basing the analysis on an integral approach that combines the examination of the socio-political circumstances (Alagha 2006, 2011a; Alagha in Salih 2009 ; Bayat 2013; Knio 2009, 2013) with Hezbollah's use of speech in mass media as a strategy to achieve legitimacy in these changing scenarios (Chilton 2004; Johansen 2016; Kızılkaya 2017; Wang 2016). Hezbollah will be referred to an organization

due to the distinct centralization of the various parts of the organizational structure within the supervision of the Shura Council; this clarification is relevant to avoid the use of the common artificial distinction between the political and the military wing of the organization (Berti 2013, 25). Additionally, the thesis will follow a methodology that includes the evaluation of the official speeches of the organization by classifying them as political discourses that can be scrutinized with the use of critical discourse analysis (CDA) proposed by Teun van Dijk (van Dijk 1998, 2006, 2015).

The combination between the two different aspects will provide a more comprehensive approach to the successful expansion of Hezbollah through their identity transformation, specifically during critical junctures such as the 2013 military intervention in the Syrian conflict. Consequently, the analysis will lead to a comparison between actual political and military action and the image portrayed through official speeches, connecting the existing literature to fill the gaps in order to obtain a comprehensive research. The justifications that were used after the intervention are classified by the arguments directed to different support groups, which provide an insight of how the organization uses national and international pre existing and accepted motivations to preserve their legitimacy (Calculli 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Johansen 2016). This thesis aims to minimize the existing gap by creating a case study of the discourse strategy used by Hezbollah to justify the military intervention in Syria after 2013, in which it was identified that the organization used twelve main arguments directed to the Shiite community, the Lebanese base and their international audience.

Methodology

This thesis will be based on the critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach proposed by Teun A. van Dijk to analyze ideological discourse (van Dijk 1998, 2006, 2015). The theoretical framework will be applied to analyze the main discourses that justify Hezbollah's intervention in Syria, and discourses, which were produced and distributed by the organization in their media channels. The ideological discourse analysis will be applied to identify the creation of *meaning* through the different justifications that targeted the interests of the support base. The object of study will include speeches from the early period of the main public interventions (2011-2016), due to their representative relevance

as the initial justification for military engagement. The main limitation of this thesis is that the speeches are retrieved from the organization's English version of the websites (*al-Manar* and *al-Ahed*), which means that the information relies on the accuracy of Hezbollah's translation. The multiple translations, however, are distributed in a controlled manner by the organization.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

The analytical framework that will be used to examine Hezbollah's political discourse is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which includes Political Discourse Analysis (PDA). Van Dijk describes CDA as "discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimate and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context." (van Dijk, 2015, 466). It is a means in which power, ideology, dominance and hegemony are being decoded in a context in order to understand how language is able to reinforce social power (Wang, 2016, 2769). CDA has often been criticized for emphasizing the role of grammar and for isolating language from contexts and disciplines (Wang, 2016, 2772). The deficiencies stated in this argument can be reduced with the use of a cross-disciplinary approach that contextualizes discourse. Van Dijk supports this and adds "rather than merely describe discourse structures, it [CDA] tries to explain them in terms of properties of social interaction and especially social structure" (van Dijk, 2015, 467). There is not a single framework to apply CDA or PDA due to the particularity of the discourse development in each context; however, in this thesis the model proposed by van Dijk to analyze ideological discourse will be applied (van Dijk, 1998, 4).

The object of study of this research is the discourse produced by Hezbollah during the Syrian civil war to justify their intervention. Discourse is referred to a communicative event (written or spoken) that involves social actors in different roles, in a specific context and diverse setting features (van Dijk, 1998, 194). The use of discourse is central in the reproduction of ideology. Nonetheless, it can also be expressed and reproduced by other social and semiotic practices (van Dijk, 1998, 191). Moreover, ideologies are outlined in various levels and dimensions of discourse, each one with its own structures and strategies (van Dijk, 1998, 200). The reproduction of ideology through discourse is used as a tool to

reinforce basic principles of group-internal legitimization (van Dijk, 2006, 121). For the author, this reproduction is closely linked to legitimization due to the fact that it intrinsically involves the claim that the actions taken by the group were made within their general moral order, hence not only justified by self-serving grounds (van Dijk, 1998, 258). In a concrete manner, "legitimation is related to the speech act of defending oneself [...] that the speaker is providing good reasons, grounds, or acceptable motivations for action that could be criticized by others" (van Dijk, 1998, 255). In this framework, discourse is used to defend an action by using the particular guidelines of an ideology, not only in a single speech, but also by using a set of interrelated discourses.

Van Dijk proposes a model to analyze discourse with a strong ideological base; the structure of this type of discourse is analyzed with a multidisciplinary approach, in which linguistics, cognitive and socio-cultural aspects are intersected with a socio-political critical perspective (van Dijk, 1998, 4). The author states the importance of examining the levels of a discourse, specially the circumstances of the environment that surround the speech and its content. The environment that surrounds Hezbollah's discourses is strictly controlled and standardized. For this reason, this thesis will mainly focus on the content of the discourse, specifically on the creation of meaning by the organization. Van Dijk includes meaning inside the category of semantics, and describes it as "the kinds of things language users assign to such expressions in processes of interpretation or understanding [...] discourse meanings are the result of selecting relevant positions of mental models about events" (van Dijk, 1998, 205). Meanings work along with other aspects to map ideology. In this framework, they interact with propositions[1], local and global coherence, and the implicit and the explicit (van Dijk, 1998, 207). The aspect of coherence is highly relevant, yet it is contextual and socially relative because it is dependent on the existing ideology of the individual and the controlled interpretation that he has of the world (van Dijk, 1998, 206).

Regarding the external structure of the discourse, or circumstances that surround it, it is essential to clarify certain aspects. As mentioned before, the main object of this research is the content of the discourse, yet the general description of this standardized external

[1] The role of prepositions in this case is to represent the meaning of sentences and other clauses in order to identify how participants have diverse semantic roles (related to agency) and how they interact with the environment.

structure will be given to distinguish the main elements used by Hezbollah to construct it. Van Dijk indicates that there is a relation between the interaction strategies and the transmission of ideology. Furthermore, he recognizes that:

"Social position, power and control of social members may be exercised, opposed, mitigated or emphasized [...] Powerful speakers may control context structures by requiring or prohibiting the presence of specific participants, setting a time or place, allowing specific genres [...]" (van Dijk, 1998, 209).

The speeches are by the Secretary General Nasrallah, who acts as the representative of the organization in the transmission of the messages, and has a central role in presenting a unified and centralized image of the group. The fact that he is the point of distribution of the speeches creates the illusion of having only one approach to the issues and that it has not been challenged by any other member of the organization. The use of the charismatic leader is accompanied by graphics (visual elements) that define his role and the interaction that he has with the audience. Most of the speeches are given in front of a small live audience that is formed by men of different ages, and that usually carry yellow banners that show support for the organization. During the T.V or web transmission, the cameras also display audiences in a similar environment but in other cities. Nasrallah sits in front of a blue screen that only has the date of the speech and a small reference to the day. In some occasions, the portrait of martyrs is also used. The interaction between Nasrallah and the audience is defined by the power structure that permeates the organization and the nature of the relationship with its followers.

Hezbollah creates meaning through the development of justifications, which are based on propositional relations that include presupposition, entailment and implication and that work with previously created mental models (beliefs). The coherence of the discourse is attempted through the constant connection between the context, the mental model and the justifications. The creation of meaning in their discourses is related to the definition of several target audiences that require different types of justification. The separation between the target audiences (Hezbollah's support groups) to justify the military intervention is most of the times barely perceived due to the entwining of narratives used during each speech. In order to analyze the creation of meaning for different audiences, this research

will separate its study by target audience; however, the interaction between the justifications will be mentioned since they are deeply interlaced. The result of this process is the mental modeling constructed by language users and that "represent how participants in a communicative event see, interpret and mentally represent the properties of the social situation that are now relevant for them" (van Dijk, 1998, 212). The complexity of the use of CDA demonstrates that its main contribution to analysis relies on the explanation of how language assumes a central role in most socio-political processes and that its comprehension serves as tool to map the sources of power and legitimacy in a society.

Chapter overview

The structure of the thesis is divided into one theoretical chapter and three chapters with empirical evidence based on the analysis of the speeches transmitted by Hezbollah since the beginning of the Syrian military intervention. Chapter 1 will discuss the diverse approaches to identity transformation through ideological reform and its connection to legitimacy. This will be examined by using a cyclical perspective in the description of the historical critical junctures, including the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, the 2006 Israel–Hezbollah War and the start of the "Arab Uprisings", which represented challenges to the organization's identity and that affected their legitimacy due to ideological inconsistencies. The second part of the first chapter will describe the main concepts of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory that will be applied in the analysis of the speeches in the upcoming chapters. The following chapters will discuss the application of the CDA in Hezbollah's speeches, which are directed mainly to three target audiences. Chapter 2 will describe the application of the CDA concepts in the justifications formulated to target the Shiite community, whereas chapter 3 will illustrate the same process in the targeting of their national support base with specific justifications. Chapter 4 will describe the application of the CDA concepts in the justifications created to target the international audience. Finally, the last section will discuss the concluding remarks.

Chapter I

Theoretical framework

1.1 Achieving legitimacy through identity and ideology construction

Hezbollah has modified their organizational structure and their identity in parallel with national and international transformations. The definition of a particular identity has been central to adapt to such transformations, and the creation of a concrete identity is closely linked to ideology as it "[...] appears most prominently as an ideological device to justify self-interested politics [...] makes some action legitimate and intelligible and others not so" (Telhami and Barnett, 2002, 63). If identity is seen as an ideological device, it is important to clarify the process of its construction. There are diverse perspectives on the creation and transformation of identity and specifically on the application of that process in the collective identity of organizations.

Manuel Castells examines the role of collective identity in the context of globalization, and identifies a process of "project identity". Project identity, according to Castells, is present "when social actors, on the basis of whichever cultural materials available to them, build a *new identity* that redefines their position in society and, by doing so, seek the *transformation* of overall social structure" (Castells, 2004, 8). The author also includes the concept of "resistance identity". Due to the dynamical changes in Hezbollah's identity, however, the broader concept of "project identity" provides a more adequate description of their identity construction. Joseph Alagha defines intellectual ideology as a formal system of belief and a coherent system of thought that includes political programs or manifestos, philosophical orientations and religious codification (Alagha, 2011a, 26). The "world views" produced from this system can be subject to re-description. Moreover, the intellectual ideology can be used to create a particular worldview to justify the actions of a social group in different circumstances since the contextual changes cause a continuous restructuration, reformulation and reinterpretation of the ideals initially promoted.

Telhami and Barnett summarize the relevance of this interaction when they state that it creates a justification that can make an action legitimate while others illegitimate (Telhami

and Barnett, 2002, 317). Furthermore, ideology and identity are usually promoted and spread through discourse. Foucault defines discourse as "an entity of sequences, of signs, in that they are enouncements (*énoncés*), statements in conversation" (Foucault, 1972, 32). An *énoncé* becomes an abstract construct that enables semiotic signs to assign meaning, and in that manner to transmit specific communications to, between, and among subjects and objects (Focault, 1972, 33).

In this perspective, the production of an outlined and deliberated ideology is fundamental in an argumentative perspective; this is due to the connection it has to the justification to follow a certain course of action. According to Fairclough and Fairclough, the legitimization of a decision-making process or of the outcome of such is usually central in the definition of the authority inside a particular power structure (Fairclough, I. Fairclough, N., 2012, 105). In this context, "the justification involved in legitimation seems to have one particularity, namely to invoke *publicly shared* and *publicly justifiable* [...] codified, institutional systems of beliefs, values and norms, in virtue of which the action proposed is considered legitimate" (Fairclough, I. Fairclough, N., 2012, 109). Legitimacy in argumentation is therefore achieved through the perception of rational acceptability, independently of the procedure to obtain the result. Authority is frequently used to exert power over an agent by proving reasons to act in a certain manner; the reasons can be prudential or deontic depending on their nature (Fairclough, I. Fairclough, N., 2012, 110).

1.2 Hezbollah's identity construction

The dilemma stemming from the contradiction between Hezbollah's identity and their actions after the Syrian invasion in 2013 is not unknown to the organization. Since its creation the organization has undergone profound changes in both national and international contexts, which can be defined as seminal moments that impacted their identity construction. Johansen describes three events that conflicted with the ideological credentials of Hezbollah. For the author, the Israeli withdrawal in 2000, the murder of the former Prime Minister of Lebanon Rafic Hariri in 2005, and the July war in 2006 represented moments where there was a critical need to realign public perception because a disjuncture between two separate meanings of an event originates (Johansen, 2016, 23).

Johansen explains Hezbollah's identity shift in generalized terms when he concludes that there was a process of "openness" (*infitah*) first and another of "Lebanonization" later (Johansen, 2016, 14). Alagha recognizes these critical junctures, but he adds the Taif Agreement that represented the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1989, the Cedar Revolution that concluded Syria's military intervention in Lebanon, the culmination of the political crisis and standstill with the Doha Accord in 2008, and the loss in legislative elections in 2009 to such conjunctures (Alagha, 2011a, 31). Norton describes the events in a similar manner, but he also includes the "Arab Uprisings" and the 2013 military intervention in Syria (Norton, 2018, 179).

Calculli uses a more international perspective and analyzes the impact of the War on Terror (divided in two stages), UN Security Council Resolution 1559 in 2004, and the international military intervention in Libya in 2011 on Hezbollah's discourse and actions (Calculli, 2018a, 101-129). The critical junctures mentioned by the authors impacted to a varying degree the transformation of their official discourse, however the process of identity construction has been complex and identifying only a couple of major events to define it could be inaccurate. In a general sense, Hezbollah only promulgated two political documents (*al-wathiqa al-siyasiyya*) that defined the ideological platform in an extensive and a clear form - first the Open Letter in 1985 and later the 2009 Manifesto. The following analysis of the main identity construction shifts should not be treated as chronological and linear, but rather as part of a cyclical development that is constantly being influenced by external and internal factors.

1.2.1 Identity construction from 1985 to 2011

In 1985 Hezbollah defined their particular worldview in the uncertain context of the Lebanese civil war with an Open Letter. The success of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran yielded more than a strategic regional ally; ideologically, it represented the crystallization of the victory of the oppressed over the oppressor. Moreover, the broader context of the Cold War benefited this rhetoric because it exemplified how the hegemonic powers had their own interests and that they were prone to fight through proxy wars.

The first critical juncture for Hezbollah came just four years after the publication of the 1985 Open Letter when the civil war ended with the Taif Agreement. The new national context was going to be defined by "mutual coexistence" (*al 'aysh al-mushtarak*) between the different sects and their adequate political representation (*sihat al-tamthil al-siyasi*) in the confessional system. The *status quo* created with the armed confrontation was solidified with the disarmament of all militias, with the exception of Hezbollah which was defined as a resistance movement. In the conciliation phase that followed the Taif Agreement, Hezbollah needed to probe its relevance in the new political environment, while reinforcing its legitimacy and autonomy. In 1992, a major change was made by the organization when it expanded to create a political wing. This transformation in their identity was "[...] triggered by the group's institutional development and its related push towards expansion which was motivated by the group's desire to acquire power and stability while ensuring that it continued to be viewed as relevant and legitimate" (Berti, 2013, 44). The armed and the political wing should not be seen as two separate entities since they are controlled by a centralized authority as well as due to the fact that they frequently work in coordination to achieve common aims. The permeability of the structure of power during the first years after the civil war allowed Hezbollah to get involved in institutionalized politics, a change that was also triggered by the impact of the Iran-Iraq War on Iran's capacity to export the Islamic Revolution.

In the period of 2000 to 2005, Hezbollah had to confront another central change in their national context. The withdrawal of the Israeli troops from South Lebanon in 2000 marked a juncture in the ideology and identity of the organization. The presence of Israel in Lebanon was a key aspect that defined the resistance ideology and that functioned as a base for the political and military program since the organization's establishment, which compelled Hezbollah to adopt an ideological, political and a military response. In the ideological realm, the fact that Israel was still present in the Shebaa Farms provided a narrative to continue with the resistance discourse, while at the same time it was used as an example of the impact of Hezbollah's military actions against the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). The military response was limited to the change of target, which meant that activities now focused on the Shebaa Farms area. However, one of the most relevant challenges was the political response to the national criticism that arose regarding the purpose of keeping

an armed wing after the Israeli withdrawal, a reaction that is closely related to Calculli's argument of the rivalry between the state and the non-state in the domain of legitimacy (Calculli, 2018a, 27-43).

The death of Hafez al-Assad during the same year became an opportunity to strengthen the relationship with Syria through a closer alliance with his son, Bashar. Hezbollah justified the support to Syria as protection of the *status quo* that kept the equilibrium and peace between the different actors in Lebanon (Berti, 2013, 62). This justification was questioned when the UN Security Council passed the Resolution 1559 in 2004 which called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the Lebanese territory (UN, 2019). John Danforth, the United States Ambassador to the United Nations in 2004, added that "the continued presence of armed Hezbollah militia and the presence of Syrian military and Iranian forces in Lebanon hindered that goal" (UN Security Council, 2004). A few months later, the assassination of Rafic Hariri in 2005 became another critical juncture due to the political crisis derived from it, which lasted until the Doha Agreement was reached in 2008.

In the international arena, former United States President George W. Bush addressed Congress on the 21 September of 2001 after the 9/11 attacks. His discourse framed the concept of terrorism in relation to Islam in a binary manner (us versus the others) while it characterized the enemy with statements such as: "Its goal is remaking the world - and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere" or "They hate our freedoms - our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other" (Bush, 2001). Bush was asking his allies to join the War on Terror to target an enemy that had no defined territory or even common characteristics, yet in this context it is important to point out that Hezbollah had been part of the U.S Foreign Terrorist Organizations list since 1997 (U.S. Department of State).

The formation of the "March 14 alliance" that demanded the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon originated the counter movement of the "March 8 forces" led by the pro-Syria supporters during the "Cedar Revolution" or the "Independence Intifada". The withdrawal was achieved on 26 April 2005, and Hezbollah's reaction to this change included the deepening of their participation in the political system by joining the executive cabinet of Najib Mikati and later that of Foaud Saniora (Berti, 2013, 65). The military operations

continued with the limited focus on the Shebaa Farms until July 2006, when the IDF and Hezbollah resumed the armed confrontation after a cross-border raid escalated.

The conflict worsened when a ground invasion of Southern Lebanon was launched by the IDF, followed by an air and naval blockade. After 34 days of confrontation and the intervention of the UN Security Council with the 1701 Resolution that called for the end of the hostilities, the July War was over. The invasion boosted the relevance of Hezbollah's resistance discourse, especially after it was used to portray the organization's "divine victory" over Israel in their official media channels (Al Manar, 2018) and as a reason to rebuild the war-damaged areas in cooperation with the government. The positive outcome at the end of the 2006 War did not last long. This was due to the national political deadlock surrounding the government of Foaud Siniora from 2006 to 2008, when the Doha Agreement was reached.

The role of Hezbollah in the protests and the escalation of violence impacted the organization in the political domain when the opposition led by them lost in the 2009 legislative elections. The diverse changes in the organization's context contributed to making the 1985 Open Letter obsolete, and, as a result, on 30th November Hezbollah revealed the new political platform in the 2009 Manifesto after their eighth conclave.

1.2.2 The ideological reconstruction: the 2009 Manifesto

The Manifesto's main ideological change is related to what Asef Bayat labels as "post-Islamism" (Bayat, 2013, 7). Post-Islamism can be considered as a condition when the sources of legitimacy of the Islamist discourse are exhausted and the supporters realize that there are anomalies and inadequacies during the process of institutionalization of the group. Post-Islamism can also be considered a project when there is a planned attempt to create a strategy that aims to fuse religiosity, rights, and specific values related to the Western notion of democracy and modernity in order to transcend Islam to multiple domains. Hezbollah's spokesman al-Musawi stated regarding the Manifesto: "It will send waves of awareness about the Party and help shatter negative, preconceived ideas" (al-Musawi in Alagha, 2011b, 28). In the new Manifesto, the binary notion of "East versus West" is

replaced completely with the more general conception of "oppressed versus oppressors" by using the motto "Unity of the Oppressed" (Alagha, 2011b, 29).

The United States and Israel remained the main targets of criticism, yet the language used reduced the geographic connection between the oppressed and the oppressor, as they mentioned Latin America and other countries with "colonial inheritance" as well (Alagha, 2011b, 119). In this Manifesto, the consequences of the War on Terror discourse can be identified as they directly blame the Bush Administration for establishing a correlation between "terrorism" and "national resistance" "[...] in order to disarm the resistance of its humanitarian legitimacy and its righteous of cause and to justify the waging of all forms of war." (Hezbollah in Alagha, 2011b, 120).

This particular attack on the War on Terror discourse came to become part of the Janus-faced behavior after the Syrian intervention in 2013, a circumstance analyzed by Calculli (Calculli, 2018, 101-129). Furthermore, the post-Islamist trend can be largely seen in "Chapter 2: Lebanon" of the document. In this chapter, the organization frames their relationship with the state and the population, which was influenced by the national and international changes that occurred from 1985 to 2009, resulting in a more pragmatic approach. The general claim of the organization relies on the notion of national unity, leaving behind the idea of establishing an Islamic State, but also rejecting cantons or any other form division that could affect the sovereignty or territorial integrity of a "strong, capable and impartial" state (Alagha, 2011b, 32). The opposition to sectarianism in the political system is sustained. The organization, however, calls for "consensual democracy that contributes in opening the doors for everyone to join the phase of state building" (Hezbollah in Alagha, 2011b, 126). The adaptation to a language that goes in accordance with the Western discourse of a state and democracy can be interpreted as a manner to react to Bayat's post-Islamism as a condition. The circumstances that led to the creation of a new a political document required a more pragmatic and ideologically diluted guideline.

1.3 Framing the Janus-faced behavior: The Arab Uprisings and the Syrian Civil War

The self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi in 2010 in Tunisia sparked a series of protests and a period of contentious politics that reshaped the regional dynamics in the Middle East. By the end of February 2011, mass demonstrations demanding fundamental political change were present in a large part of the region and Hezbollah's "Unity of the Oppressed" discourse seemed to be more relevant than ever. Former Tunisian President Ben Ali attempted to discredit the protesters while at the same time promising new elections, yet the mass demonstrations continued until he was forced to flee to Saudi Arabia.

The development of the events that followed the beginning of the protests in Tunisia varied considerably from one location to another. Nonetheless, the promise of concessions and use of brutal force were common patterns. Ben Ali and former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak were ousted in a short period of time while the "political transition" of Ali Saleh in Yemen, the failed overthrow of King Hamad in Bahrain and the assassination of Muammar al-Qaddafi in Libya after the intervention of NATO ended the escalation of violence between their government and the opposing fractions, which was not the case with the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

As the demands for change increased in some states in the region, Nasrallah used the momentum to insert their "oppressed versus oppressor" narrative into public discourse in March 2011 when he declared: "These popular revolutions are real. They came from the people [...] this should not be forgotten by the regimes that are facing these peoples." (Norton, 2018, 161). The resistance discourse was aligned with the contextual changes and Hezbollah embraced the call for change in their narrative.

In March 2011, protests erupted in the city of Deraa in Syria and Hezbollah had to face a plight. The same social movements that had served as an example of resistance began affecting a strategic ally, and the organization had to develop a response that would not fully compromise their legitimacy. The relevance of Syria as an ally does not only rely on the access to military and financial assistance but has also been defined by the transferring of weapons, equipment, and money from Iran (Sullivan, 2014, 4). Although Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian conflict was highly suspected, the organization did not admit

their direct participation until Nasrallah acknowledged the Qusayr offensive in a speech delivered on 25 May, 2013.

The initial involvement in Qusayr was followed by operations in the Qalamun Mountains during the three following years (Sullivan, 2014, 20). The actual strategy pursued by Hezbollah in Syria cannot be accurately assessed, yet Sullivan analyzes their goals in terms of preserving the Axis of Resistance (Iran, Iraq, Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas), to secure the lines of communication to connect material support from Iran and Syria, and to prevent the rise of a Sunni-led regime that threatens the stability in Lebanon (Sullivan, 2014, 9). The military intervention jeopardized Hezbollah's legitimacy as the defender of the foreign oppressor (Israel) in Lebanon as a result of its own incursion in another state, but also compromised its image by choosing fellow Arab and Muslim targets (Kızılkaya, 2017, 228).

The events described above summarize the main challenges faced by Hezbollah and the reactions to them. The summary has the objective of presenting a general overview of the organization's adaptation to the national and international context, but it is not meant to include a detailed description of the process. Hezbollah is classified as a collectivity or an agent that interacts with its structural and cultural surroundings; the response to the contextual changes can be understandable through the morphogenetic approach proposed by Margaret Archer (annex 1). Archer's approach attempts to explain the changes in society in two main frameworks - the first is the morphogenesis perspective that is based on mechanisms that disrupt and transform the existing structure; the second is the morphostasis frame which relies on the preservation of the existing structure (Archer, 1995, 230).

The information can be used to understand the cyclical process of identity construction beyond the artificial distinction between the social structure of the organization and their military branch. At the first stage of conditioning, the previous events that shaped the *status quo* of Hezbollah until 2011 served as the base of the identity that was projected in the 2009 Manifesto. In the phase of interaction, the critical juncture created by the Syrian uprisings reshaped Hezbollah's identity due to the input of national and international actors that reacted and engaged with the organization in this period. The current stage of

elaboration represents the recent formation of entangled structural and cultural constraints that enhanced the morphostasis of the *status quo.*

Chapter II

Discourse in the legitimization process

Political discourse as a tool to promote a specific ideology is entwined with the dynamics of power structures and dominance within a society. Van Dijk emphasizes the connection between the access to socially valued resources to the use of power to control other groups or individuals. For the author, power is mostly cognitive, yet it is based on the idea of coercion and persuasion to change someone's mind to align it to particular interests (van Dijk, 1993, p. 254). This is attained through the divulgation of an ideology to achieve the mobilization of people (in the case of Hezbollah, to use or to accept the use of violence) in a situation that requires an ideological justification. Furthermore, it is important to note that the access and control over public discourse is also a sign of power in a society.

When Hasan Nasrallah delivered a speech recognizing the military involvement in Syria on 25 May 2013, there arose an urgency to justify this decision. Since 2011, there had been heavy speculation on the role of Hezbollah in providing assistance to the Assad regime; however, it was mainly related to providing advice and training. This was frequently used in Lebanon by the March 14 coalition to accuse Hezbollah of breaching the 2012 Baabda Declaration, which confirmed Lebanon's neutrality in the Syrian conflict. Once the leadership of the organization confirmed the Qusayr offensive, the transgression of the Baabda Declaration was imminent and Hezbollah faced the challenge of justifying the action to their national and international allies, in addition to their national base in the Shiite community. The conceptual disciplinary triangle between discourse, society and cognition, and the function of discourse as social cognition was adopted to reformulate the organization's ideology (van Dijk, 1998, 6).

2.1 The need for an "all-embracing" justification

Hezbollah's diverse support base required different justifications that relied on the construction of *meaning* (chapter 1). These justifications can be identified through speeches and the information shared in their official media channels. Nevertheless, the target audience is not always clearly defined or it includes more than one recipient. The organization frequently chooses a particular set of the justifications to address the interests of particular audiences.

The aim of the analysis of the official discourses with the CDA approach is to identify the justifications given to the groups that formed Hezbollah's support base in order to determine the patterns of the strategic use of language (Calculli, 2018a, 24). The division between the different groups that support the organization cannot be delineated in a precise manner due to the ambiguity in the "membership" of each group, since it an artificial division made to simplify the research. Through the study of this material, three different main target audiences were identified: the Shiite community, their national support base, and their international allies. The support bases interact with each other, along with the diverse factors affecting the context, which should be considered even though the present analysis separates it in the categories mentioned above.

During the analysis of the material, the "types" of justification used to identify the target audiences were not always explicit or completely identifiable. Some justifications were also used for more than one target audience, and two of them were used as general and "all-embracing" explanations that aimed all audiences and that are aligned to the prominent international discourse that justifies intervention. These two explanations can be examined as prominently directed to the international allies, yet the "universality" of the values defended is too broad to limit their scope to that audience and it is usually appealing for all three types of support groups. This was done alongside another relevant change, the re-contextualization of the resistance. The resistance (*al-muqa*̄*wama*) and the formula "the army, the people, the resistance" (*al-sha'b, al-jaysh, al-muqa*̄*wama*) has been the core ideology of Hezbollah since its formation and has been closely linked to the position of Israel as a threat to Lebanon's sovereignty.

The notion of resistance evolved to adapt to other contexts, especially after the Israeli withdrawal in 2000. In that moment the resistance was redefined to include the deterrence of Israel, and in 2013 after the intervention, it was given the meaning of fighting against the threat of the *takfiri* (Koss, 2018).

2.1.1 The Manichean moral justification

Manichaeism, or the worldview where there is a division of forces that are able to act on the behalf of good and evil, is a dualistic approach that has been used by Hezbollah throughout the years, and that during that has been adopted largely in the rhetoric on the Syrian intervention. Van Dijk conceived the *ideological* and *social enemy* as part of the contextual models. This Manichean worldview simplifies the separation between "us" (good) and the "other" (evil) and frames the other justification in this scheme. This all-embracing justification is an indispensable link between the social situation surrounding a discourse and the context that is built upon the cultural common ground (annex II). This approach has been used as the base of the resistance ideology that defined Hezbollah as a representative in the struggle of the "oppressed" (good) versus the "oppressors" (evil), but it was redefined to comply with the circumstances in 2013.

The dichotomy "oppressed versus oppressors" was highly suitable during the "Arab uprisings", however, it could no longer be sustained after the Qusayr offensive in favor of the Assad regime. Support for a regime that was publicly targeting the civil population and suppressing any manifestation against the government represented a clear Janus-faced behavior from Hezbollah. The organization decided to redefine the Manichean worldview in the first speech where the intervention could be accepted. In this context, it was essential to alienate the Syrian opposition from the rest of the protest movements in the region, in order to minimize the contradictions between the organization's attitude towards the previous protests and the Syrian movement. To achieve this, an explicit demarcation was made: "*[...]* it is no longer a matter of people rebelling against their regime or a matter of reformations. The Syrian president has been ready to make reforms, so why did the opposition refuse dialogue?" (Nasrallah, 2013b).

This speech, released on the 25 of May 2013, represented a shift in attitudes. It was given in Mashghara on Resistance and Liberation Day, an important feature, since it indirectly associated the "victory" of the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 with the need to take action in a new "critical historical moment" (Nasrallah, 2013a). Van Dijk describes this moment as the definition of the conflict and the crisis, which is fundamental since the ideological struggles are grounded on actual social, economic and political conflicts (van Dijk, 1998, 282).

The new Manichean perspective was defined in the original and more encompassing terms of morality. The justifications are based on a combination between previous ideological conceptions and redesigned ideals to fit in the context in a more appropriate manner; therefore, the actors in the morality claim are a combination of both. Hezbollah mixed the frequent list of enemies (the U.S and Israel) with the new threat of the *takfiri* to create an updated axis of enemies. *Takfir* refers to the "pronouncement that someone is an unbeliever (*kafir*) and no longer Muslim" (Oxford Islamic Studies Dictionary).

It was relevant for the ideological continuity that constructs Hezbollah's identity to preserve the main objects of rivalry, especially Israel, because the opposition to its presence is still one of the main pivots of their *raison d'être*. The link between the United States and the *takfiri* is not evident at first glance, but the connection was clarify by the organization during the speech: "[...] they only served the CIA, the Pentagon, and other intelligence agencies...what can the Western states tell their people and the public opinion after having armed such groups?". He continues the argument by stating "those states are facilitating the armed groups' movement to Syria" (Nasrallah, 2013a). Once the enemy was clearly delimited, Nasrallah explained the dangers of the *takfir* mind to make the Manichean distinction more explicit. The "evil" nature of the new enemy was based on statements such as "Do you know what the problem with the Takfiri mentality is? It regards others as "disbelievers" for the silliest reasons. So, it's not only a matter of different creeds or doctrines; it's actually political (...) this is what danger is: a mentality that you can never communicate with through dialogue. They know nothing as "being flexible," "setting priorities," or "finding common things." They don't want to know anything; they simply tell

you that you are "disbelievers" who should be disgraced and killed, and whose money should be seized!" (Nasrallah, 2013a).

Additionally, the *takfiri* narrative is directly connected to the notion of the War on Terror declared by George W. Bush in 2001, which represents an adoption of the common narrative used by "Western" alliances to justify interventions. Calculli identifies the paradox of this perspective, and associates it with the state-alike behavior of the organization. This approach will be discussed in the third part of this thesis. This demarcation of the enemy is one of the main mechanisms to clarify the societal position of the organization in relation to the other groups during the construction of the ideological structure; in this case it is an overall framing of -we (our values) is superior to the others- that creates a positive self-presentation (van Dijk, 1998, 289).

2.2 The justification to the Shiite community: Hezbollah as a resistance movement

Hezbollah can hardly be defined in terms of single entity, or even in the classic but misleading dichotomy of political party and armed group. As an organization, Hezbollah is able to appeal to a wide range of audiences to create the *status quo* that prevailed until the intervention, and that gave them the ability to operate the military branch after the Taif Agreement. The Shiite community in Lebanon represents the original base of Hezbollah's support and an important source of their militants. Moreover, Hezbollah is still self-defined as essentially a Shiite organization. During a speech in 2014, Nasrallah recovered the topic when he proclaimed, "This resistance was made by Islam. It is an Islamic resistance. It is true this resistance is Lebanese national, and Arab; however, this resistance is Islamic" (Nasrallah, 2014a).

The significance of the resistance for the Shiite community goes beyond the shared narrative; it has forged the relation between Hezbollah's role as one of the main providers of services through the Islamic Health, Social and Education Unit (Flanigan and Mounah, 2009, 124). The intervention in Syrian mean that part of the material and human resources of the organization had to be diverted to it; this implication was tackled during a speech when it was assured that "the resistance still keeps its power despite all the developments

and events taking place in the region, on top of which is Syria" (Nasrallah, 2014a). The justification given to the Shiite community is essential to keep the current position of the organization in Lebanese society. After all, ideologies are social beliefs that are shared by specific social groups and create ideology-schemas. The ideology schema is usually formed by a concrete membership to the group, activities, resources, goals, positions and certain values (van Dijk, 1998, 314).

The initial involvement in Syria was solely based on the protection of the Sayyida Zeinab shrine in Damascus, a place that is central for the Shiite since the remains of the daughter of the Imam Ali lie there. This justification was accompanied by the release of a videogame named "Sacred Defense – Protecting the Homeland And Holy Sites" in 2018, which starts with the defense of the shrine, yet it also includes the 2013 Qusayr offensive and several battles against the Islamic State.

The military intervention in Qusayr demanded a different explanation, the creation of the "new super-threat" (Johansen, 2016, 43) that required the participation and support of the Shiite community. The *takfiri* discourse was refocused to reflect the seriousness of the threat to the Shiite existence, a task that was facilitated by the *al-rafida* ("those who reject") rhetoric used by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Jabhat al-Nusra. During Nasrallah's 25 of May speech, the situation was presented using the following premises: if the "*takfiri* mentality" was incapable of engaging in dialogue, then the expansion of the groups that promoted this discourse represented the imminent annihilation of the Shiite if they entered Lebanon. The danger of this mentality is that "they don't know nothing as 'being flexible', 'settling priorities', or 'finding common things'. They don't want to know anything; they simply tell you that you are 'disbelievers'" (Nasrallah, 2013b). Hezbollah reiterated here that the issue is non-sectarian, but is related to the belligerent nature of the enemy.

2.3 The *takfiri* justification: risking the sectarian discord

In a conflicting perspective, this justification plays along the guidelines of sectarianism. As a result of the pragmatism inside a society dominated by a confessional system, Hezbollah

decided to portray itself in the 2009 Manifesto as a protector of a unified Lebanon and specially a condemner of the "fabricated rivalry" between the Sunni and the Shiite community. The organization defines these differences as diversity, furthermore, they stated that such diversity "[...] has been abused and employed in a quest of infusing disintegration and social break-up" and that the main responsible for this situation had been the "[...] overlap between deliberate Western policies-US policies in particular-and internal practices of radical irresponsibility" (Hezbollah in Alagha, 2011b, 130). The fact that the fundamentalists groups that were present in Syria allegedly belonged to the Sunni branch of Islam worsened the sectarian tensions. The Manifesto explicitly mentions the use of the label of terrorism by the West as a cause for this demarcation.

The adoption of the same *takfir* rhetoric that Hezbollah denounced is one of the main ideological contradictions that had to be reformulated into an adequate justification. The notion of *takfiri* itself already marks a classification of "non-Islamic" since it is embedded in the meaning in apostasy, which is useful to delimit the perception of an "us" (good, practitioners of real Islam) and the "other" (evil, apostates and transgressors of religion) and alienates one group from another. A year after the acknowledgement of the intervention, the link between Islam and the *takfiri* was condemned again when Nasrallah stated that "[...] to link Islam and arbitrary killing, slaughtering, demolition, blazing, massacres, genocides [...] This link is a crime against Islam and a treason by those who perpetrate it" (Nasrallah, 2014a). Even more, these takfiri are not only unrelated to Islam, but are part of the known axis of enemies because:

"Syria is no longer a place for public revolution against a political regime; it is a place for forced implementation of a political US-West-regional puppet regimes-led scheme. And we all know that the US scheme for the region is entirely 'Israeli'" (Nasrallah, 2013a)

With the use of this framework, the risk of classifying other Muslims as *takfiri* is somehow diluted. The *takfiri* operate within the same scheme of the traditional enemies of the resistance and with shared goals, such as the invasion of Lebanon by Israel and the fall of Palestine (Nasrallah, 2013a). In addition to this demarcation, Hezbollah deliberately clarifies that the organization is not supporting sectarianism in any manner:

"[...] Accusing us of sectarianism is nonsense [...] we offered martyrs in defense of Bosnia's Sunni Muslims. There are no Shia Muslims there. The same applies to Palestine as it is a matter of creed [...] No one can call us 'sectarian'. Likewise, our stances on Iraq and all other developments are clear." (Nasrallah, 2013a)

After the clear non-sectarian approach of the 2009 Manifesto for the sake of political pragmatism in Lebanon, it was important to state that the *takfiri* label or the direct confrontation with the groups in Syria was unrelated to the religious differences. In a state that is dominated by a confessional system, the sectarian tension creates a permanent unstable situation that is sensitive to the changes in discourse or alliances.

Less than a month after the May speech, Nasrallah confronted the criticism on the use of a sectarian rhetoric in a speech during the "Day for the Wounded", where he reiterated Hezbollah's instance on sectarianism:

"The worst thing happening in the last past few weeks [...] is the resort to sectarian rhetoric. Actually, this indicates weakness [...] Syria's conflict has two frontlines with different schemes, so why are they trying to make it sound like it's a conflict between two sects, the Shiites and the Sunnis?! [...] they are making it sound like one because they're weak and helpless, and because they're failing" (Nasrallah, 2013b)

In this speech, sectarianism is not only unrelated to Hezbollah's intentions in Syria, but is part of the plot of the axis of enemies to delegitimize the intervention. During this pronouncement, Nasrallah also blames the media for increasing the sectarian tension by spreading "fake news". The emphasis on the non-sectarian approach to the conflict was further developed with examples of the "levels of indiscriminate annihilation" perpetuated by *takfiri* groups in different parts of the region a year after the initial acknowledgement discourse (Nasrallah, 2014b).

In the al-Manar website, Hezbollah reiterated the anti-sectarian approach to the conflict when they distributed a video in 2013 that showed Syrian monks and nuns thanking the organization for saving them from the takfiri groups. The comment that accompanied this video stated that it "showed how Hezbollah defended them and prevented the takfiri terrorists from causing any harm to them and hail the Resistance role in bringing peace to their souls as well, rejecting all attempts to deform the party's reputation." (al-Manar, 2013)

2.4 The Jihadi justification

Hezbollah's decisions on using an armed initiative are influenced by the Shiite rulings on *jihad* (Kizilkaya, 2017, 215). The organization follows the Twelver Shia Islam, which states that in the absence of the hidden 12th Imam, offensive *jihad* (*jihad al-talab*) is unlawful and only the defensive *jihad* (*jihad al-daf*) is permissible (Moghadam, 2007, 143). In addition, Hezbollah has been a follower of Imam Khomeini's interpretation of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist (*wilayat al-faqih*), which presumes that the call for jihad requires a legal opinion (*fatwa*) from the "guardian jurist" (*wali faqih*) for approval. However, the current *wali faqih* Ayatollah Khamenei did not issue a *fatwa* calling for *jihad* in Syria, which implies that there is no public religious legitimacy from this authority (Kizilkaya, 2017, 220).

The *jihadi* justification was employed in two different instances. The first occasion was during the protection of the Sayyida Zaynab Mosque. Nasrallah explained the possible destruction of the shrine would provoke an immediate regional sectarian war because the Shiite would avenge this attack (Nasrallah in NOW, 2013). The Grand Ayatollah Hussein Fadlallah equated the term "defensive" with "preventive" when he talked about defensive *jihad* (*jihad al-daf*) and its accepted use (Kizilkaya, 2017, 216). In this case, Nasrallah uses the "preventive" *jihad* as the base to intervene in Syria. The second *jihadi* justification was based on the *takfiri* discourse. The use of this discourse differs from the general moral justification related to the "*takfiri* mentality" due to the fact that it was refocused on the speeches to emphasize the Islamic components. ISIL's own *al-rafida* discourse was taken to illustrate the threat to the different branches of Islam, but specifically to highlight ISIL's label of the Shiite as "grave threats to God's rule in the world" (Kizilkaya, 2017, 216).

2.5 The divine victory (*al-nasr al-ilahı̂*) justification

Hezbollah framed the result of the 2006 July War as a "significant historic Divine and strategic victory", retaking the description of the May 25th, 2000 Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon (Nasrallah, 2006). The use of the divine victory argument is based on the belief that the 2000 withdrawal "was the foundation for the era of victories that followed-it is the

in time in which defeats came to an end and will be gone forever" (Nasrallah, 2014a). "Divine" comes from the power and confidence in Allah, along with the pursuit of the "righteous" goals in the resistance: "Allah the Exalted in Might and Perfection has granted us this victory. He has guided us to the course of resistance, and He has shown us the right way" (Nasrallah, 2000).

Following this rationale, the military intervention in Syria was depicted as another certain triumph when Nasrallah proclaimed, "I promise you victory again" (Nasrallah, 2013a) at the end of the acceptance of the military engagement. The promise of an imminent victory is directly linked to the notion likelihood of success in the ethics of just war (developed further in chapter 4), which serves as a justification to violate the sovereignty of a state.

The importance of the 2000 "divine" victory in the national imagination goes beyond the confessional divisions. Although the conception of divine is linked to Allah and the pursuit of Islamic beliefs, the Israeli withdrawal represents an achievement for national sovereignty. An example of the relevance of narrative for the non-Shiite community can be observed in the performance of the Maronite singer Julia Boutros[2], in which she dedicated the song "My Beloved Ones" (*Ahibaii*) to Hezbollah; the song includes the phrase "our upcoming victory you are" (Boutros, 2013a). The performance was made during the same year of the Syrian intervention, a few months after its acknowledgment. In addition to this, she released a song in favor of the Assad regime and the Hezbollah forces after the Qusayr offensive (Boutros, 2013b). Nasrallah gave a more nationalistic approach to the victory when he declared that it was "a Lebanese-Arab-national-Islamic achievement which cannot be attributed to a single party, faction, region, as it belongs to an entire nation" (Nasrallah, 2014a).

[2] Julia Boutros is currently married to the current Lebanese Minister of National Defense and Advisor to the President of Lebanon Michel Aoun on International Cooperation, Elias Bou Saab.

Chapter III

The justification to the national allies: Hezbollah as a national political actor

Hezbollah has changed its role in Lebanon throughout different circumstances, however, it can be said that the organization has become a *de facto* arbiter within the political system of Lebanon; moreover, the transformation can be interpreted as an evolution from resistance to establishment (Calculli, 2018c). The discourse to justify the military intervention of 2013 in Syria demonstrates the relevance that Hezbollah gives to their role as a political actor, on account of the detailed rationalization given to their national audience. The broader focus on the Lebanese benefits the "non-sectarian" approach of the *takfiri* justification, while at the same time presents Hezbollah as a national actor that is concerned for the integrity of the state and the wellbeing of the citizens. The second chapter of the 2009 Manifesto ("Lebanon") represents this pragmatic technique because it abandons the idea of an Islamic state and embraces the national unity beyond sectarian politics with the recurrent use of the term "citizen" (New Manifesto, 2009). The preservation of continuity in the production of intellectual ideology is essential for achieving legitimacy during the identity construction (Alagha, 2011b, 23), and in this case, it reduces the perception of a Janus-faced behavior by using arguments that were stated before the intervention. The creation of meaning in this context is related to the positive self-representation in the national political arena. The arguments given to construct meaning are useful to support the ideology promoted by the organization in national politics and reinforce their status as a legitimate political actor in the country, especially when they question the capabilities of the Lebanese government (section 3.4) (van Dijk, 2006, 45). The justification at a national level was particularly needed to diminish the negative impact on Hezbollah's image after the clear violation to the 2012 Baabda Declaration. The organization's initial acceptance of the declaration was contradicted by their actions and when the national opposition (March 14 coalition) began attacking the organization, Hezbollah MP Mohammad Raad accused them of disavowing it first (Daily Star, 2013).

3.1 The Palestine justification: the analogical fallacy

The portrayal of Palestine in the ideology of the organization has always been significant in the definition of their resistance identity. Calculli's interpretation of Hezbollah's transformation from resistance to establishment (Calculli, 2018c) does not imply that the resistance *façade* is no longer used to justify decision-making processes. In the case of the Syrian intervention, the connection between the Palestinian cause, the role of Israel and their involvement is reiterated through several speeches. The use of the Palestinian example is not only expressed explicitly during the speeches or the wording of the information spread through their media, but it has been handled as a frame of reference. Framing the situation in Syria in comparison with the Palestinian experience creates a questionable analogy in which the similarities in circumstances surrounding the events are highlighted in order to create presumption of the possible outcome of the conflict. Hezbollah presents a general solution to foreign intervention that equalizes the situation in three countries: "The future of Lebanon is the Resistance, the future of Palestine is the Resistance, and the future of Syria is the Resistance (Nasrallah, 2016). The frame can be identified as part of the speech (during the introduction or the argumentation) or as symbolic implication resulting from the context.

The symbolic framing was clearly used during the 25 of May speech in 2013, when Nasrallah introduced it with an explanation of the importance of the *Nakba* Day (Catastrophe Day) for the region. After the introduction he stated that there were two threatening challenges for the Lebanese; one was the scheme left by the *Nakba* Day, in which Israel became a permanent danger for the country, and the second one corresponded to the "Syrian developments" (Nasrallah, 2013a). Furthermore, the speech was given during the commemoration of the "Resistance and Liberation Day", in which the withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon in the year 2000 is celebrated. During the speech, the comparison between the two experiences continues to appear. Only in this speech the Palestinian link was made in four different means. To make the transition from the danger of Israel to the situation in Syria, Nasrallah declares, "we have known how significant Syria is to Lebanon, the region, the 'Israeli'-Arab conflict, resistance movements, and the Palestinian cause" (Nasrallah, 2013a). The connection between the relevance of Syria and the main defining

concepts of their ideological position was made to justify the legitimacy of the intervention within their ideology.

The analogy with Palestine was also adopted to ease the annexation of the *takfiri* to the existing axis of enemies. The situation in Syria was described as part of a reprisal in order to punish "the Resistance that triumphed in 2000 and that foiled the "New Middle East" scheme in 2006" (Nasrallah, 2013a). The goals of each member of this axis connect and form a general plan against Lebanon and Palestine. Nasrallah expressed this in a straightforward manner when he declared that:

"[...] if Syria falls in the hands of the US, 'Israel', *takfiris*, and US puppet regimes [...] 'Israel' will invade Lebanon [...] if Syria falls , then Palestine, the Palestinian Resistance, Gaza, the West Bank, and the Holy al-Quds will be lost" (Nasrallah, 2013).

Hezbollah expands the Palestinian experience to include the civil war in Syria as part of a plan that includes the annihilation of both. The defense of the Palestinian resistance has been supported by the organization since its creation, and by comparing the two events; Hezbollah is using an analogy with a justificatory role to support their conclusion.

3.2 The Israeli invasion justification: appealing to national sovereignty

The Palestinian analogy is not only useful to conclude that the experiences are similar or that the enemies act following a general plan for the region, but it also has been suitable to give continuity to the organization's *raison d'etre.* The original resistance ideology promoted by Hezbollah was based on the Israeli occupation of Lebanon, however, this situation changed with the Israeli withdrawal in 2000. The *status quo* was forced to change due to this critical juncture, yet the confrontation in the Shebaa Farms and the 2006 July War supported the justification for existence of the armed wing of Hezbollah. The escalation of violence and the involvement of international actors in Syria served as a revival of the original resistance discourse, in which Israel takes a central role in planning the offensive in the intervention in order to later expand to Lebanon. Nasrallah explained during the 25 of May speech that the fall of the Resistance would incite a situation where "'Israel' will invade Lebanon to impose its conditions and achieve its greedy schemes

again. In that case, an 'Israeli' era will mask Lebanon!" (Nasrallah, 2013a). In this justification, the previous ideological discourse production that defined the interaction between the organization and the Israel is taken to create a new context model that is more socially and ideologically appropriate for this situation but that continues the *negative other-presentation* (van Dijk, 1998, 317).

3.3 The "imminent expansion" justification: Lebanese national security under threat

The comparison between Palestine and Syria, and the possibility of having the same situation in Lebanon afterwards, is part of a larger justification that is based on the idea of protecting the national security of Lebanon. The process of "Lebanonization" of Hezbollah has been deeply related to their increasing infiltration in the political system; however, in the 2009 Manifesto it was clear that they wanted to be portrayed as a nationalist political actor. The second part of the Manifesto ("Lebanon") describes in a detailed manner the political program and reforms that they support, but more importantly, it links their resistance project with the national security of the country. This juxtaposition was beneficial when they assessed its regional intervention on its own domestic interests, especially since "Hezbollah imposes himself as the main pillar of Lebanon's security and government stability" (Calculli, 2018c). The endorsement of the "what if" logical approach was essential to legitimize the organization's purported preemptive action (Kizilkaya, 2017, 217). In this situation, the organization is using the national security discourse in what Calculli describes as the mimesis of the non-state with the state (Calculli, 2018a, 27).

3.4 The "incapable Lebanese government" justification: the State versus the non-State

To achieve the mimesis, Hezbollah positions itself as the main security apparatus in Lebanon, but does this with caution to avoid any direct criticism of the Lebanese army. The first measure to assure this was accentuating the inability of the Lebanese state to ensure security and to act against the obvious threats. Nasrallah starts the 25 May speech with a comparison between the Israeli and the Lebanese government, in which the incompetence of the Lebanese state contrasts with the continuous preparation of Israel for an armed

confrontation (Nasrallah, 2013a). He marked as a breakpoint the withdrawal of Syria from Lebanon in 2005 as an example of how the independent state has not been able to reinforce the army or to take any stance that might upset the U.S and allies. It is important to illustrate the lack of control of the "alleged" authority: "So, who's in charge of the Lebanese interior frontline?! Who?! is there any minister, administrator general, or officer in charge?!"(Nasrallah, 2013a) Furthermore, the government is depicted as the responsible for the fragility of the borders. The general strategy of ideological polarization is used again to establish a *positive self-presentation,* Hezbollah's capabilities to give institutionalized support, against the *negative other-presentation* of the inefficient Lebanese state (van Dijk, 1998, 159). In support to this representation, Nasrallah stated "we're among the people who care most about Lebanon's security, stability, civil peace, unity, state, and sovereignty" (Nasrallah, 2013b). The use of concrete examples that demonstrate the flaws of the government work as rhetorical devices to create meaning that emphasize the polarization between the two actors. The ideological influence interacts with the existing mental representations that the individual has related the state.

The lack of response of the Lebanese government and their unwillingness to get involved in Syria (a reference to the Baabda Declaration is later made during a speech in June) are compared with the success of the resistance and the social institutions led by Hezbollah (Nasrallah, 2013a). The frame is relevant to justify the need of intervening and violating the sovereignty of a state because it is directly challenging the legitimate use of the force (or the non-use of this force) and its positioning itself as alternative with the right to act in the situation. In this context, Hezbollah carefully clarified their position regarding the state by defending its integrity: "having mentioned our need for a strong, responsible state that can defend its people, we say that it's better to have one that's not strong or capable of defending us than to have none" (Nasrallah, 2013a). The urgency of the situation is accentuated with particular adjectives and descriptions that emphasize the geographic contiguity between Lebanon and Syria. Nasrallah adopted this strategy when he accepted Hezbollah's intervention in Syria by using remarks such as "our neighboring Syria's developments", "we are in the border villages", "here on the border", "specific Syrian provinces, especially those adjacent to Lebanon" (Nasrallah, 2013a). By using this justification, Hezbollah challenged the other visions of the state inside of Lebanon and

made their own vision prevail, bringing the discussion to the morality realm (Calculli, 2018a, 134).

Chapter IV

The justification to the international community: contesting the role of the state

Hezbollah has justified the intervention in Syria by portraying itself with a particular identity, depending on the target audience. The justifications intertwined and interact in a dynamic manner, and the role that the organization assumes varies in a similar way. Calculli's mimetic strategy can be used to observe the imitation and camouflage of the organization in regards to the Lebanese state (Calculli, 2018a, 28). As part of the imitation, Hezbollah has done state-related activities focused on security and welfare, using institutionalization as a tool to expand the impact of their actions. This type of interaction with the state is not recent, it has been developed in a cyclical form, and after the Syrian intervention in 2013 it was reconstructed to adapt to the new circumstances. The state-related functions are closely related to the exercise of sovereignty, even if *de jure*, "di fatto, Hizbullah esercita la sovranità, pur senza godere dei diritti di sovranità, così come questi sono codificati nel sistema internazionale" (Calculli, 2018b). Hezbollah has shared the sovereignty of the state with the Lebanese government by defending its territorial integrity with the resistance, in this manner; it has appropriated part of the security function from the state. The organization made this clear in 2014 when Nasrallah declared, "the resistance in Lebanon protects the state, the people, the nation, the entity, the honor, the sovereignty, and the nation" (Nasrallah, 2014a). This is associated with the redefinition of the *interaction*, where, using this strategy, Hezbollah is appropriating objectives that are articulated by international actors and using them to follow their own interests (Calculli, 2018b).

The alliance of Hezbollah with the Assad regime had to be redefined in their discourse to align to the discourse of their international allies, which is mainly based on a moral justification originated from righteousness, rather than emphasizing the geopolitical implications of the alliance (Kizilkaya, 2017, 218). Hezbollah then uses the mimetic

strategy in two complementary ways; first as a political actor that is able to contest the sovereignty of the state *de facto* in Lebanon, and in a second approach, to use its state-related qualities to endorse a discourse that depicts the organization as an international actor. This suggests that at a national level, the organization first contested the legitimate use of violence inside Lebanon (later at the international level with their counterinsurgency tactic in Syria), and subsequently appropriated the hegemonic language of the state to adopt a sovereignist and internationalist speech (Calculli, 2018a, 141). The fact that Hezbollah has recognized its participation in an international alliance (Axis of Resistance) in which the Lebanese state is not involved, has helped in the legitimization discourse of the military intervention in Syria since there is a juxtaposition between the Axis's discourse and their own. The organization associates parts of its discourse to the justification used by these international allies (mainly Russia and Iran) in their own military intervention. The violation of the sovereignty of the Syrian territory is vindicated with arguments adopted by states and international actors to justify their own actions in an attempt to further legitimize their intervention. Hezbollah's has constantly criticized the foreign intervention in the regional and international conflicts, however, now they had to justify this contradiction.

4.1 The support of institutions justification

One of the main components of Hezbollah's discourse is the defense of the state institutions in Syria. In order to create distance between the regime and the organization, the speeches started focusing on the dangers of state collapse, especially to avoid any connection between the intervention and any sectarian or political implications. Nasrallah began modifying the oppressed discourse to include "the whole of Syria", implying that their suffering would only end if the national unity and regime would remain intact (Kizilkaya, 2017, 218). The rephrasing of a more morally accepted justification became a priority to avoid any mayor repercussions from international actors; after all, the states intervening military used the same rhetoric. The fear of eventually having the *takfiri* groups in power was also employed by Hezbollah to argue that these groups would not maintain the state institutions. Nasrallah suggested that the lack of institutions would not only be fatal for the Syrian population, but it would also mean the incapability of Syria to confront and deter

Israel (Holmquist, 2015, 37). Moreover, the organization presented itself with legitimate authority to fight on foreign territory, by associating the actions to its religious and national identity (Kizilkaya, 2017, 219).

Hezbollah's argument refers to the stability of the institutions as a central aspect in a functional state[3]. The defense of a state with functional institutions has been a formal theme in their ideology since the 2009 Manifesto, where they highlight its relevance:

"The State that safewards national unity and national cohesion [...] that is founded on modern, effective and cooperative institutions [...] committed to applying the rule of law on all constituents within a framework of respect for public freedoms" (Hezbollah in Alagha, 2011b, 126)

The defense of the state (initially focused in the Lebanese state) was employed by Nasrallah in the 25 of May speech to connect the ideology expressed in the Manifesto as part of the justification aimed to the international actors. The connection between the national integrity of Lebanon and the cohesion of Syria was made to through the emphasis on the defense of the idea of a functional state for the sake of security. Nasrallah declared regarding the issue: "Build a strong, fair, able state and I would be the first along with my brethrens. We will still be resistance men who would fight following the orders of the state" (Nasrallah, 2013a). In addition, the support of institutions argument was also used by Russia as a justification. The Russian president Vladimir Putin declared during the 2017 St. Petersburg International Economic Forum regarding Russia's role: "we are protecting the Syrian statehood [...] we do not want, in Syria, a situation similar to Libya, Somalia or Afghanistan" (Putin, 2017). As Hezbollah, Russia has focused its justification discourse on the importance of preserving the integrity of the state and not on defending the regime.

Another "institutional" aspect defended by Hezbollah in several occasions has been the participation in elections. During the 25th May speech, Nasrallah accentuated the dangers of the *takfiri* groups by mentioning their rejection towards elections and by exemplifying this argument with the attacks of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in the 2013 Pakistani general election when he declared that "those takfiri believe that whoever takes part in the parliamentary elections is a "disbeliever" who should be killed and disgraced" (Nasrallah,

[3] Francis Fukuyama describes the strength of a state as "the effectiveness with which countries can implement a given policy" (Fukuyama, 2004).

2013a). He resumed this argument in 2014 when he denounced that ISIL had announced that it was forbidden to participate in elections and that the punishment for violating this was the death penalty (Nasrallah, 2014a). This particular aspect was essential since the 2014 Syrian presidential election was taking place 9 days after the speech, and Nasrallah did not hesitate in making the connection:

"Well, see, this great alternative which was brought to the Syrian people. I have a political viewpoint, and I want to vote [...]. This civilized alternative which was presented by the 'friends of Syria' is saying that should I go to the ballots, my blood will be permissible and I will be sentenced to a death penalty" (Nasrallah, 2014a)

In this context, Hezbollah and the Assad regime are defending the institutional integrity of Syria by accepting the electoral process in the country. Hezbollah, Iran, and Russia expressed their congratulations after the Bashar al-Assad won the elections.

4.2 The War on Terror justification: the appropriation of the discourse

The escalation of violence in Syria and the emergence of the *takfiri* groups (as non-state actors) differentiated the engagement of the international actors in the conflict. The public campaigns and attacks launched by ISIL created the ideal scenario to frame intervention as part of the global War on Terror. George W. Bush used the concept of War on Terror in 2001 to start a global campaign against terrorism after the 9/11 attacks. Terrorism is not bounded to a specific territory and has no unique definition, which makes the concept ambiguous but adaptable to different discourses. As clarified in previous cases, the War on Terror is not isolated from the rest of the justifications; moreover, it is part of the "all-embracing" Manichean moral justification. The *takfiri* approach is connected to the more internationally used notion of terrorist when the discourse (or parts of it) is directed to a broader audience. The apparent sanitary and neutral language of *legitimacy* and of the exclusive *rights of sovereignty* used in the framework of the war on terror (Calculli, 2018, 105) plays a central role in Hezbollah's endorsement of the discourse. Hezbollah uses the same premises and argumentation that they classify as "hypocrite" to justify their own military engagement in the conflict, in several occasions during the same speech. The hybridization of ideological strands is part of the strategy to obtain a legitimacy that goes beyond the state and any confessional membership.

Inside the war on terror discourse, the representation of the enemy is one of the main tools in the Manichean moral justification due to its function in the binary definition of good and evil. The *takfiri* are described in detail during the speeches, moreover, Nasrallah made sure to define the *takfiri* mentality during the acknowledgment of the Syrian military intervention in 2013. According to him, the real danger lies on the fact that they cannot engage in dialogue and that they do not accept anyone who does not follow their concrete beliefs (Nasrallah, 2013a). Additionally, the gruesomeness of these groups' actions was highlighted to accentuate the Manichean moral division between the "two" axes in the conflict:

"After all, those Takfiris behead people and cut their chests, dig up graves, and ruin the past that has existed for 1400 years! [...] (Hezbollah) can never choose to be on the side of the US, "Israel," or ones digging up people's graves and cutting their chests or beheading them!" (Nasrallah, 2013a).

In this Manichean vision, Hezbollah's role is not contesting the security institutions of the state, rather it is presenting itself as an auxiliary in this global war against terror. The organization was able to "carved out for itself the role of security guarantor based on a state-like morality, founded on border protection and the preservation of the *status quo*" (Calculli, 2018c). A relevant process that is taking place in this description of the enemy is the combination of factual beliefs (correct/incorrect knowledge) and the evaluative beliefs (ideology/opinions) that are usually based on socio-cultural values; the evaluative beliefs serve as the base of the group's social judgments, and they are constructed with ideologically controlled knowledge (van Dijk, 1998, 315). The complex association between the factual and the ideological beliefs in Hezbollah's portrayal of the *takfiri* formed a stronger argument that disguises the subjective opinions by presenting the "facts" along with them.

4.3 The ethics of war justification: hawkishness legitimized

The language related to the war on terror is based on broader notions of the traditions on the ethics of war. Morality of war had been debated on four major theories: pacifism, realism, militarism and the tradition on just war; jihad and the holy war seen during the crusades are also occasionally added. The arguments used by Hezbollah to justify the

intervention as part of the war on terror are widely constructed on the just war tradition (Kizilkaya, 2017, 224). The narrative used to morally justify the engagement in war stresses the conditions required classifying as "just" the use of armed means. The conditions involve the use of admissible reasons to declare war (*jus ad bellum*), to achieve justice during war (*jus in bello),* and to seek for an appropriate arrangement after war (*jus post bellum*); these represent the moral constraints to the use of the force (Coppieters, Fotion et al, 2008, 11).

The use of the just war principles has been entwined with the ones followed in the *jihad,* creating a justification that originates from a hybrid morality and that is adjusted to be compatible with the Syrian conflict. This occurs partly because the just war principles are not only Western-centric concepts, but are shared in several cultural contests. The criteria of *jus ad bellum* consist of several elements, including a just cause, a legitimate authority, the right intentions, the likelihood of success, proportionality, and war being the last resource (Coppieters, Fotion et al, 2008, 129). The ethics of just war are usually applied in international conflicts between states; however, Hezbollah is again using the language proper of a state. Due to this, the legitimacy of their authority can be highly contested, but the rest of the principles can be identified in the "defensive" justifications (just cause), the Manichean moral justification (the right intentions), the divine victory (likelihood of success), proportionality (potential moral costs of not intervening) and portraying the intervention as their last resource after two years of analysis. This last justification was frequently mentioned to portray the decision as a well thought and rational during the first months after the acknowledgment speech. Only in the "Day of the Wounded" speech, Nasrallah mentioned the topic twice when he declared: " I have to say that we only decided to take part in combat late. We made our political stance, however, in the first or second week after Syria's crisis began" (Nasrallah, 2013b). Later, he continued:

" [...] our decision wasn't something we came up with that very moment. What does that mean? It means we'd been observing since the very beginning, and we knew what decision we would eventually reach. And, as time went by, we could tell more clearly what the nature of the scheme for Syria was and what its consequences would be, whether it succeeds or not" (Nasrallah, 2013b).

4.4 Defending the "righteous" justification: embracing the Axis of Resistance

The Manichean division that was used to define the "factions" in the conflict (chapter 2) played a central role in the defense of the decision to ally with the Syrian regime. The organization did not frame the alliance as a mechanism to defend their interests, rather they highlighted the importance of Syria for Lebanon and the region. The arguments focused on convincing their allies that protecting Syria was the right stance to take, and that neutrality in this conflict meant supporting the terrorist groups. Nasrallah used the year 2005 (the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon) as a breaking moment in Lebanon's territorial security to emphasize the previous period where they enjoyed Syria's "protection" (Nasrallah, 2013a, 2014a, 2016). Hezbollah admitted the military intervention in 2013, however, during the commemoration of the Resistance and Liberation Day in 2011 the organization clarified their standpoint regarding the protests in Syria. This speech has a particular significance because it contradicted the arguments given by Nasrallah a few months earlier in the Ceremony for Consolidation with the Arab Peoples where he declared:

"Instead of initiating an honest dialogue with representatives of these revolutions and uprisings and carrying out true and serious reformations with no hypocrisy or maneuvers, these systems have coerced, killed, tortured, accused, insulted, and humiliated the peoples. [...] They were accused of belonging to Al Qaeda at places, of agency to America at other places, and the like." (Nasrallah, 2011a)

After Hezbollah openly supported the uprisings, the organization had to create an "exceptionalist" discourse with the case of Syria, which contradicted the previous speech. This was achieved by appealing to the close relation between Lebanon and Syria, especially before 2005: "We, in Lebanon and especially in Hizbullah, are highly grateful to Syria, its leadership, its President Hafiz Assad and President Bashar Assad and the Syrian resisting and opposing and patient people" (Nasrallah, 2011b). Nasrallah also exalted the role of Syria on a regional level with phrases such as "Syria was and is still the core of Arabism" or "Syria alone stood next to Egypt" (Nasrallah, 2014b). In addition to this, Nasrallah has stressed the willingness of the regime to respond to the demands for change -"President Bashar Assad believes and is serious and determined about reform" (Nasrallah, 2011b)- and the eagerness of the organization to reach a solution - "I, along, the Hizbullah brothers, have worked with Mr. President Bashar al-Assad and opposition officials as well to reach

political dialogue and a settlement since the beginning" (Nasrallah, 2013a). The compliance of the government to achieve a peaceful solution contrasts with the *takfiri* mentality that is completely closed to dialogue (chapter 2).

The support to the Syrian regime is additionally outlined in the defense of the Axis of Resistance. By depicting the intervention in Syria as part of a larger loyalty towards an international alliance, Hezbollah positions itself in equal terms with other states. The legitimacy of their actions relies on the collective approach that they embraced by emphasizing their adherence to the Axis, and in the case of Syria, the collaboration and mutual support with Russia.

Conclusion

Hezbollah's military intervention in Syria that began in 2013 contradicted their existing ideological guidelines, which were formally defined in the 2009 Manifesto and informally outlined in their discourses, news broadcasting and other media content production. This was achieved by the transmission of highly regulated information through their centralized media apparatus, which is fundamental since "the effective reproduction and implementation of group ideologies often requires organization and institutionalization, typically so by ideological institutions such as those of politics, the media and education" (van Dijk, 1998, 316). The organization has been using strategies based on discourse to adapt their ideology to the changing circumstances in order to preserve their legitimacy through different contexts.

Hezbollah's strategy is not separated between the political and the armed wing. Rather, the organization acts as one entity that manages and redistributes resources between the two wings. In this way, Hezbollah sacrificed part of its political legitimacy to secure the alliance with the regime since it would protect the Axis of Resistance, secure the access to the Syrian and Iranian material support by retaining the communication lines and prevent the rise of a Sunni-dominated regime that could threat their regional coalition (Sullivan, 2014, 5). The prediction of the negative effects on the organization's image led Hezbollah to transform their discourse to minimize the contradictions and lack of coherence between their previous ideological position and their actions. This Janus-faced behavior alienated their support base and risked their legitimacy in a communal, national and international level.

Hezbollah portrayed its involvement in Syria by use of previous ideological stances and by reinterpreting these when appropriate. The creation of new meaning based on an existing shared belief among the members of the support groups facilitated the transition and coherence amid the diverse connotations. The main conceptions that were used to build this connection were the confrontation with Israel and the "West", the fight for Palestine and the imminent security threat for the Lebanese territorial integrity. Hezbollah adopted this strategy to generate contextual models in which the organization turned words into polysemic concepts, thus giving them different meanings depending on the context and the

target audience. The context models aligned to the interests of each particular group; however, they were usually found inside the same speech.

To understand the relevance of Hezbollah's strategy it is essential to deconstruct ideology into diverse theoretical frameworks such as traditionally used theories of class, power or group and combine them with theories of cognition. Cognition enables the recognition of processes that construct ideas and beliefs through the interaction of knowledge (epistêmê) and opinions (doxa), which exposes the role of the discursive manifestations of ideology in the influence of the perception of events and people to achieve persuasion (van Dijk, 1998, 19). Hezbollah's discourse works on the cognitive level as they are based on the reinterpretation of their activities; in this case, ideology provides the structure for judgment and actions that leads to group-related legitimation. Individuals have preconceived ideas and beliefs that might or might not align with the organization's ideology. However, Hezbollah attempts to diminish these constraints by adopting semantic macrostructures related to social or group memory. In this manner, Hezbollah uses an approach that goes from cognition to discourse, and then from discourse to persuasion and legitimation of their actions.

The structure of the speeches is predominantly marked by an opening that includes a pleading to Allah and a closing statement with a blessing. The content of the discourse usually combines national political issues and international events, and by doing this, Hezbollah is able to address all their support groups during one single appearance. The full control of the environment that surrounds the speech gives Nasrallah an automatic superiority in the interaction between him and the audience, which exemplifies the power relationship among the leader and the support base.

The discourse strategy applied to minimize the negative impact on their image demonstrates that the organization is able to reconstruct their identity based on restructuring their ideology for different audiences. Nevertheless, this approach has not fully avoided the backlash from the intervention. The most notorious repercussions for their stance include the immediate protest of a anti-Hezbollah Shiite affiliated group in front of Iranian Embassy, which ended in a confrontation between the organization's supporters and the protesters (Sullivan, 2014, 24). The national reaction continued with the declaration of the

former Lebanese president Michel Suleiman that called for the end of Hezbollah's ability to unilaterally conduct these type of military interventions (Sullivan, 2014, 24). There have also been attacks in the zones controlled by Hezbollah as part of the response to this decision. During 2013, two rockets were launched to target Dahiyed a day after the speech in which the intervention was acknowledged. Two months later, a car bomb detonated in the same area and in August another one struck the neighborhood. The Iranian Embassy was targeted along with the Chatah district during the same year. In addition to these attacks, rockets have been fired from Syria to Hermel in Bekaa, for which the residents have retaliated with attacks against Arsal (Sullivan, 2014, 25). This has increased the sectarian tensions between the Shiite community that resides in Hermel and the Sunni majority that habits Arsal. Hezbollah referred to the material consequences as "sacrifices" that the resistance had to make in order to continue pursuing its goals (Nasrallah, 2013a).

In the international arena, the European Union blacklisted the military wing of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization in 2013 (Kanter and Rudoren, 2013). By January 2012, the sectarian tension of the conflict began affecting the relation with the sunni-ally Hamas, which was evident when Hamas relocated its headquarters from Syria to the Sunni sheikhdom of Qatar, and later formally announced support for Sunni rebels (Ghaddar, 2013). In 2016, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) classified Hezbollah as a terrorist organization because, as stated by the Secretary General Abdullatif al-Zayani, "the [Hezbollah] militia recruited young people [from the Gulf] for terrorist acts" (al Jazeera, 2016).

Hezbollah's pragmatism has gone beyond a simple Janus-faced behavior, rather, they have been able to create coherence and meaning within the contradictory actions that they have taken in Syria. The strategy in Syria displays a coordinated interaction between the political and the armed wing, where the contradiction in their ideology and actions does not represent a conflictive point in their internal organization. The use of ideological discourse is not the only factor that influences the legitimization of an organization, yet in the case of Hezbollah, it is evident that it represents a mayor instrument in this process due to the amount of resources and centralization of the media apparatus that work to reproduce the narratives.

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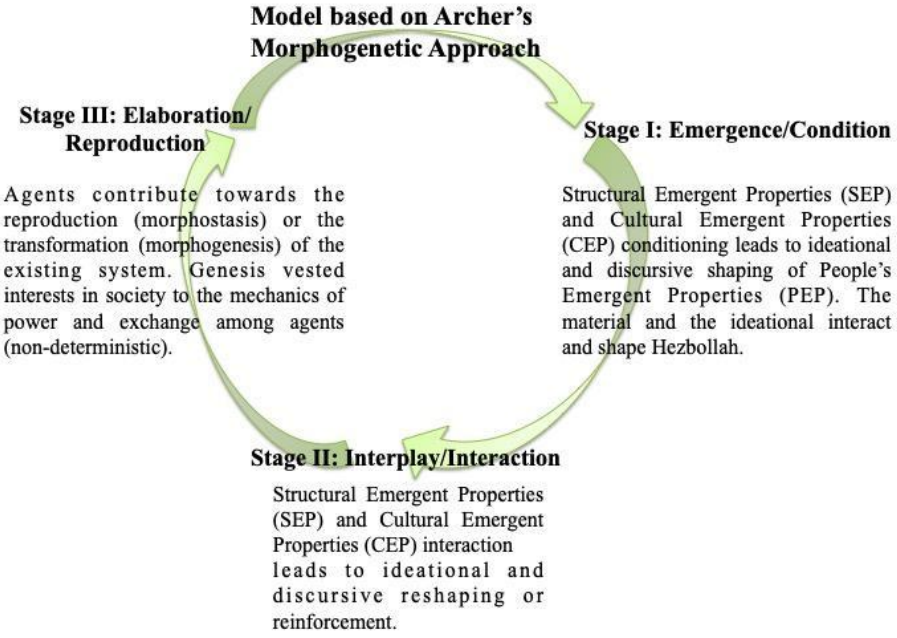
Annexes

Annex I. Diaz, Mariana. (2019) Model created by the author based on Archer's morphogenetic Approach



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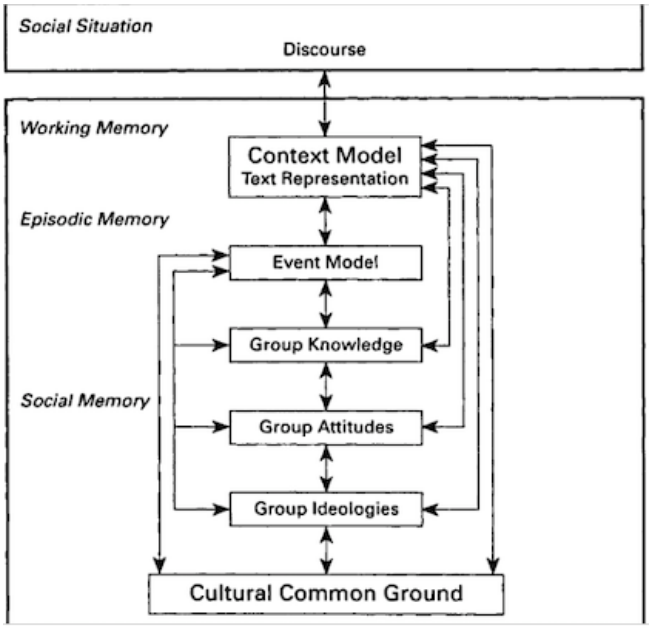
Annex II. Van Dijk, Teun. "Mental Models." Chart. In Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach, 87. London: SAGE Publications, 1998.