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Rebel Governance and Self-Determination: The Cases of ISIS and Hezbollah

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I would like to thank all the people that supported me across the best and worst moments of this journey, and most importantly my friend Giacomo, who welcomed me as a brother and made all this possible.

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Introduction

In the international system, ISIS and Hezbollah are non-state actors involved in the power struggle characterizing the Middle East. These groups developed their apparatuses differently, and they found themselves opposed in the Syrian Civil War since 2011. Although they are different by virtue of their confessional identity, they share multiple similarities. Both are the product of the international intervention respectively in Iraq/Syria and Lebanon; both share, until recently, a powerful military apparatus as well as a functional organizational system allowing them to build a power base in the territories they control; both are recognised as terrorist or criminal organization by part of the international community. They share another characteristic too: the pursuit of the Islamic State, a utopia rooted in the teachings of the *Qu'ran* and Mohammad that calls for the demise of the Western-type of state in the Middle East. Although they are committed to its achievement, their ideals of Islamic State are essentially different, and different are their historical and political contexts as well as their ideological motivations. One group has declared the Islamic State whereas the other has not. Given this interesting variation, this work aims to unravel what reasons and conditions lead to self-determination.

Under what conditions do non-state armed groups claim territorial sovereignty?

In this context, ISIS and Hezbollah are two main cases subjected to deep analysis to answer this question. First of all, building on the concept of rebel governance I display how the self-determination can be favoured by multiple conditions. Whereas the non-state actor exerts its power supplanting the legitimate state and gaining recognition, I argue that rebel's strategies are affected respectively by the place and time-frame but mostly by the group's relationship with the population, other armed groups, and the international community. These conditions are preparatory to

comprehend the reasons for claiming or avoiding self-determination. However, I claim that ideology is the building block of the rebel's approach. Whether extremist or not, ideology is the glue around which non-state actors cement their agendas. I argue that historical and political developments have structured the actors' ideologies which in turn have affected their approaches when dealing with the above-mentioned conditions. Following a certain historical path, the ideological formation of the NSAGs always ends up affecting their strategies and consequently the self-determination claim. The difference in the outputs then lies in the ideological and socio-political divide between ISIS and Hezbollah. The contrasting developments of these groups, which replied differently to national and international menaces, and their different regional priorities, as well as their distant ideas of Islamic State, allow us to understand what led to the creation of the "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" and the "Party of God". *Inter alia*, how the refusal of any compromise and the creation of a new Sunni identity rejecting the nation-state favoured the self-determination, whereas the entry into politics to gain resilience from a *plethora* of confessional realities has suggested the suspension of the Islamic State.

With these considerations in mind, this introduction is structured in four parts: first, it discusses the debates on the interaction with the state and the strategies of survival of NSAGs. Second, it expands and clarifies the argument, third, it explains the methodology adopted to construct this argument. Finally, it outlines the organization of the contents.

Non-State Armed Groups and the Question of Self-Determination

There is a prolific literature on non-state actors. However, only a few scholars explored the reasons for gaining international legal personality or achieving the self-determination. Whereas many articles treated non-state actors as capable of affecting the international community, less have unravelled this interaction and the effects that the group's actions have on international law as well as countries' agendas. Moreover, given their floating condition between recognised and

unrecognised entities, the study of these groups has been questioned several times: should we put non-state actors and recognised states on the same level?

Regarding how to treat non-state entities, the common frame of reference is to be found in Worster's (2016) functionalist analysis, that assesses if a non-state actor can enjoy international legal personality or the capacity for international rights and obligations. However, the main problem is that, apart from the states, it is not easy to find a law capable of identifying international legal personality (Portmann in Worster 2016: 207-208). That is why the State, as the original legal entity, has the discretion to recognise the non-state actor. The state, or the international community, serves as a guardian of the international legal order by admitting international personality for new participants (Ibid.: 3). The same argument is sustained by Ker-Lindsay (2017) who debated about the constitutive school of thought in international law, which claims that recognition is the main character of statehood. Entities aiming for international personality cannot exist if they are not recognized by peers (Ker-Lindsay 2017: 3). In line with this statement is Lynch (2002), who argued that the non-state entity becomes a legal person in international law only when it intertwines relationships with other peer states (Lynch 2002: 837). For Nina Caspersen and Gareth Stanfield (2011: 130), external recognition constitutes external sovereignty by states that are legitimate international entities. Oppositely, many scholars abiding by the declaratory school of thought such as Chen (1951) saw statehood as independent from recognition. The non-state actor becomes a state when it is able to control the population, exert governance practices and having the capacity of conducting or affecting international relations. In this context, as international lawyers sustain, when actors meet the condition for statehood we should not even refer to these entities as "non-state" (Ker-Lindsay 2017: 4). This opposition presents how the field of inquiry concerning non-state actors is relatively new and unstructured. However, given the international community's power to grant international legal personality according to different criteria, it seems important to abide by this position to demonstrate how ISIS and Hezbollah considered the international role and decided

to challenge or align with it. This is reinforced by the fact that the constitutive theory gained attention after the decolonization processes and the end of Soviet Union (Ibid.: 3).

Besides the literature on self-determination, a different angle which helps clarify the interaction between NSAGs and states is referred to as rebel governance. Rebel governance has been described as “guerilla governance” and “counterstate” respectively by Vega (1969) and Wickham-Crowley (1987), whereas other scholars such as Kasfir (2002; 2005) emphasised on how non-state actors make use of their political bodies and form consultative structures to administrate and rule. Mampilly (2011) focused on the factors affecting the rebel’s decisions to offer and distribute welfare services to the population, such as their organizational structure, the domestic-coalition building and the penetration of the state into the society. Moreover, the burden and the influence of rebel’s ideology is a common theme recurring in different works. Keister and Slantchev (2014) have incorporated the role of ideology as pivotal to structuring governance strategies, whereas Arjona, Kasfir, and Mampilly (2015) talked about how symbolic processes affect the entity in its relationship with the contested state, the population, and the international community. One thing is clear, that rebel governance occurs when a group manages to administrate both territories and populations under its control. A point further sustained by Martinez and Eng (2018) in their study about the Syrian state counter-action against rebels: the organization of people through welfare provision is one of the main features of rebel governance. Despite the amount of disposable data about rebels, there is still a lack of knowledge about how their strategies can affect or improve their position within the international scenario. That is why my research frames itself in this missing link between governance strategies motivated by ideology and the value of the self-determination. Notably, the above-mentioned implications for international recognition revolve around the ideological set-up of the group, which affects the actor’s decision regarding how it has managed certain conditions such as the population under control, the competing militias, and the international community.

The Weight of Ideology for Non-State Actors

Historical and political developments have a huge impact on the formation of non-state actors. According to the time-frame and the socio-political situation of the area, NSAGs develop differently their ideologies and the symbolic processes they choose to enact. Ideology then structures rebel's strategies, and it is exerted when dealing with different conditions of governance such as the population under control, competing militias, and the international community. Inevitably, ideology leads to confrontation, and thus it has a huge role in shaping the regional and international destiny of the group. There are mainly two strategies that a non-state actor can adopt when acting under a strong ideology: the "power ideology trade-off" and the "extremist discount" (Keiser et al. 2014: 13-16). The former suggests that the group is willing to sacrifice part of its ideological-political agenda when this is distant from the preferences of the population under control and of the international community. The latter indicates that despite rebels may offer services and infrastructures, coercion and violence will always be preferred because the actor does not want to compromise ideologically its position and wants to pursue its aim. These strategies end up affecting the self-determination when a group is aiming for recognition or a role in the international system. That is why these dynamics enlighten us on how non-state actors approach the conditions that may favour the self-determination. Particularly, these strategies are exerted in this work to show how ISIS has profited from coercion and violent methods to impose its role within Iraq and Syria, whereas Hezbollah has rather opted for the sacrifice of different religious and cultural traits to gain resilience inside the Lebanese state. Showing the relevant examples of these approaches, it will be possible to draw a dividing line between the two groups to show their differences and understand what conditions favoured ISIS's self-determination and Hezbollah's denial of the Islamic State.

Methodology

Given that few studies investigated self-determination coming by Islamist armed groups, I have developed a qualitative method based on multiple case studies. Particularly, I used within-case studies to assimilate the experiences of each actor. This approach provided me with in-depth knowledge about the chosen subject and it made me think about several implications. However, the within-case study was not enough and after developing distinct cases, I implemented a between-case study to compare the group's experiences and unravel certain involvements replying to the research question. This allowed me to interpret the findings and connect them to the rebel governance theories used in the thesis, together with enlightening the role of non-state actors in the international scenario. On the other hand, not having the opportunity of interviewing and conducting surveys is a clear limitation in this study. Moreover, the non-state actors' position is subject to change in the jeopardized context of the Middle East and this condition could affect my results.

To conclude, I have mainly explored the available literature on rebel governance and rebel strategies, with an eye for works treating ideology as one of the main variables. In addition, I deepened on works that explained the self-determination's value for violent actors. For the analytical chapters, the literature on ISIS and Hezbollah gave me a better overview of their historical and political formation. I have read these works to find a connection between certain behaviours and the governance strategies addressed in this work. Specifically, I have analysed the data by tracing examples of ISIS's extremism in relation to different dimensions of governance, whereas I have tried to point out Hezbollah's pragmatism relatively to the same dimensions. Through the narrative analysis thus, I managed to look at the groups' historical, political and ideological contexts, to interpret the meaning of their strategic choices and finally achieve an understanding of the reasons behind the self-determination.

Thesis Overview

The thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter one functions as a theoretical framework to explain the concepts used throughout the work. Starting from rebel governance, it will deepen on the main strategies that non-state actors exert on territories and people. Its core will be the explanation of the relevance of ideology and its role in the "power ideology trade-off" and "extremist discount". Furthermore, the modalities with which the international community assess self-determination claims and attacks from armed entities aiming for international legal personality will be explained.

Chapter two will be a within-case analysis of ISIS. Particularly, it will start with a historical overview that shows the actor's ideological and political formation. It will then develop its ideological path with emphasis on its extremism, and continue by showing how this extremism is exerted on the population under the caliphate's control. The next paragraph will deepen on the relationship of ISIS with its ally al-Nusra and consequently with its "parent" organization al-Qaeda, whereas the last will display the implications and the relationships of the group with the international community. These categories will show how ISIS adopted the "extremist discount" logic and how this together with Iraqi and Syrian context encouraged the self-determination.

Chapter three regards Hezbollah's case and it will be structured in the same way as chapter two. Starting from the historical and ideological contexts to understand what socio-political conditions led to the creation of the "Party of God", I will unfold its relationship with the Lebanese population, the Lebanese Armed Forces and the international community. In this way, the "power ideology trade-off" will be displayed to unravel the conditions that made the entrance into politics more profitable than declaring the Islamic State.

Chapter One

Rebel Governance and Self-Determination in the International Political Arena

To understand how NSAGs approach the self-determination, we must consider how they are affected by the time frame and the challenges they face during their formation period, and how they exert power until the decision to declare, or not to, statehood.

Nonetheless, when we investigate non-state actors, we must refer to a series of theoretical implications. These are represented by theories of rebel governance or how a *de facto* state exerts power whereas competing with the state authority. These theories shed light on the actor's strategies and what ideological and symbolic processes (Arjona et al. 2015: 74) are exploited when they come to terms with the population, the state authority, other competing groups, and the international community (intended as the number of states being part of the UN). Indeed, ideology represents the starting point for the group's agendas and approaches. For this reason, it is necessary to analyse how certain behaviours can be considered the product of two main ideological strategies: the "power ideology trade-off" and the "extremist discount" (Keister et al. 2014: 13-16).

The interest is seeing how these strategies affected the choice to proclaim, or not to, the Islamic State. Indeed, self-determination plays the main role because of its implications for international law. In the current state of affairs, after the decolonization processes, the self-determination, whether it is for total independence or economic reasons (e.g. Hong Kong in China which entered the WTO before its patron state), must be taken into consideration by the international community. Thus, how does the international community react to a group's self-determination? What are the criteria for recognizing it as a state? How should the community intervene if the *de facto* state is exploiting violent methods? Understanding these dynamics, before analysing the single cases in the

next chapters, can be useful in investigating the calculus made by the two non-state actors when entering the power games of the international arena.

1.1 Rebel Governance: Coercion or Service Provision?

Different studies in International Relations focused on the state and the government as the overarching subjects, whereas others have emphasised non-state actors. In this context, only considering non-state actors as much important as governments will allow having a more comprehensive framework. This paragraph aims to explain the concept of rebel governance, to then focus on the main strategies which compose rebel rule and allow non-state actors to exert authority justified by compliance: coercion and service provision.

To start with a broad definition, rebel governance means "organization of civilians within rebel-held territory for a public purpose" (Kasfir in Arjona et al. 2015: 24). Thus, governance implies one of three different rebel activities: encouraging civilian participation, organizing civilians to obtain a material gain, and providing civilian administration. The definition is nuanced, but the term is used to indicate how non-state actors administrate a territory and the population under their control. Indeed, according to Kasfir (Arjona et al. 2015: 27):

> "Rebel Governance can occur only after an insurgent organization gains control over territory that contains civilians and decides to create or encourage civilian structures".

The control of a territory is crucial to exert power and to gain legitimacy. However, compliance is also pivotal to the life of rebels because it implies that the population is prone to rebel rule. Indeed, as pointed out by Kasfir (Ibid.), the other basic aspect which produces rebel governance is civilians. When a population is living in a territory held by a rebel organisation, rebels must decide how to act, and if include civilians into processes of governance. While there can be insurgents that occupy an unpopulated area for security reasons, the most of them usually chose populated areas because

they need to “increase their resources by organizing civilians” (Kasfir in Arjona et al. 2015: 29). However, encouraging civilian participation does not exclude violence. As it will be outlined, participation and compliance can be gained through coercion or voluntary involvement (Ibid.: 34).

Once we have defined the basic dimensions of rebel governance, we should think about the main rebel strategies. As a relevant part of the literature supports, these are coercion and service provision. When we talk about coercion, we refer to an obligation imposed on someone with the use of force. Still, “coercion need not to [always] involve the direct application of violence” (Keister et al. 2014: 6). Indeed, the rebels may develop their coercive apparatus, but not using it, preferring to obtain compliance through a demonstration of strength. As Richards states (1996), this happened with Sierra Leone’s Revolutionary United Front (RUF), that was mutilating the population to show its capability to use violence against non-compliant civilians. Although this practice seems attractive, even coercion has its costs and rebels must always calculate that violence is most likely to create discontent throughout the population. Indeed,

> “coercion always increases the rebel’s ability to stay in power but the more coercive they become, the less effective each additional increase of coercion becomes in generating compliance” (Keister et al. 2014: 6).

That is why when a group takes advantage of coercion, it means that it has a strong power-base and finances. This should make us think about why some groups keep coercing when they know it is risky.

To this end, even scholars such as Gramsci supported the importance of the civilians’ “spontaneous consent” (Gramsci in Storey 1994: 214), and that the rulers should not rely entirely on coercion. In fact, the other strategy pursued by rebels is service or welfare provision, intended as a wide range of activities devoted to someone, in exchange for something else. Service provision often makes rebels more palatable for the population, and this can increase their compliance and

consequently the rebel's legitimacy. Despite this, even service provision is quite costly: providing hospitals, educational resources, food, and water imply a large-scale organization that most rebel groups do not have. Still, even smaller-scale services "have a meaningful impact on civilians' wellbeing" (Keister et al. 2014: 7). What matters about service provision is that it generates voluntary support for rebels (Ibid.: 8), so that if they need to use violent methods (e.g. in cases of menaces from the state authority and international intervention), these could create less resentment within the population.

Although it can be argued that coercion and service provision are not useful to investigate self-determination claims, this does not mean that they have an impact only inside the actor's regional sphere of influence. Indeed, when these strategies come from an entity wishing to become a state, they are always put under scrutiny by the international community. In this context, regional strategies affect the decision about self-determination, and consequently the international response. However, contextualization is necessary when interpreting rebel's actions because the time frame, the disposable income, and the type of territory and population under control have a great impact on the strategic calculus. Nevertheless, the main aspect when dealing with non-state actors is their ideology, because it eases the decision about what agenda to pursue.

1.2 The Role of Ideology: The "Power Ideology Trade-off" and the "Extremist Discount"

Ideology has always been entrenched with sovereign claims to gain legitimacy from the population. When dealing with ideology, we need to consider all the symbolic processes that constitute governance strategies. Indeed, the

> "use of symbolic processes by insurgents is often systematic and can serve both instrumental and normative purposes by entrenching and legitimizing the insurgent political authority" (Mampilly in Arjona et al. 2015: 76).

As well as coercion and service provision, “the importance of symbols in propagating a political authority hinges on two central concepts relating governments to their publics: compliance and legitimacy” (Ibid.: 79). Thus, symbolic processes create consent derived from “coincident preferences of the political authority and the governed” (Ibid.). However, we are referring to symbolic processes as a result of the group’s ideology. Indeed, a movement’s creation must refer to some ideological premises affected by certain historical and political contexts. Why do non-state actors decide to compete with the state? Ideology is the building block of rebel’s strategies, and it influences them regarding the management of territories and populations but also with respect to other militias and the international community. Consequently, ideology affects the outputs of the rebel’s strategies. Particularly,

> “ideological distance makes civilians [and not only] skeptical about the rebel’s intentions and thus leery of cooperating with rebels too readily” (Keister et al. 2014: 10).

Thus, we need to consider how much rebels care about the ideological position they choose to enact because they are “neither ‘realpolitikers’ willing to sacrifice all ideals for compliance, nor ‘ideologues’ who pursue ideology at the expense of pragmatic power considerations” (Ibid.: 14). Indeed, it is unlikely that non-state actors have the chance to stay completely loyal to their ideology while obtaining compliance and legitimacy. In this light, they face, as it is called by Keister and Slantchev (2014), the “power ideology trade-off”. This means that they must compromise ideologically because it is convenient. Non-state actors must calculate if their ideas are far from that of the population (and from that of the international community), and if their ideology is too extremist, they should be willing to change their agendas.

Rebels who want to maximize compliance are supposed to implement policies that are ideologically near to civilians’ preferences, whereas ideological rebels want to pursue ideology, and

they need to exert coercion. Consequently, "the more extremist the rebels, the fewer services they provide, the more coercive their rule becomes, and less compliance they generate" (Ibid.: 15). This output is the "extremist discount" that makes services less efficient when the actor's ideology is far from that of the population (and from international laws). The result is that, even when the extremist rebels provide services, they need to coerce more to gain what they could have gained with co-option.

> "Extremists are coercive in this model not because they have a taste for violence but because their ideological distance from civilians means that in order to make service provision effective, rebel's policy concessions have to be fairly significant, which makes non-coercive rule unattractive to the rebels" (Ibid.).

Radical groups know that when service provision is ineffective and costly, coercion may be the only solution available. To make an example, we can look to the situation in Syria before 2013 self-determination of ISIS: at the beginning, to oppose the Assad regime, jihadists were used to offer services in the city of al-Raqqa. However, given the ideological distance of the Syrian median civilian, and the worsening of the crisis, the "group compromised less and less" (Hassan and Dettmer in Keister et al. 2014: 18) and by 2014, the "ISIS's platform clearly diverged from civilian preferences, and the group's rule was increasingly brutal […] demonstrating both their ideological position and their willingness to use coercion against civilians" (Lister and Mendelsohn in Keister et al. 2014: 18).

These choices, altered by ideology, affect the non-state actor's image to the eyes of the international community. Every action by the *de facto* state is weighted and it corresponds to a reply by the international community. Ideology then plays a pivotal role in structuring the rebel's policies and consequently the calculus of the self-determination.

1.3 Explaining the Concepts: Statehood, De Facto States, and Self-Determination

Understanding the rebel's strategies and the self-determination means that we must be aware of the debates regarding the concept of statehood for actors aiming for international legal personality.

Given the lack of consensus about what can be considered a state, usually, we must refer to the Article 1 of the 1993 Montevideo Convention on the Right and Duties of States (Radan in Caspersen et al. 2011: 130; Longobardo 2017: 11). This is useful for assessing self-determination claims because it sets different criteria for statehood, namely "(1) a permanent population; (2) a defined territory; (3) a government; and (4) the capacity to enter into relations with other states". This fourth criterion is important because, according to the constitutive theory of international law, the entity joins statehood when it is recognized by other states (Oppenheim 1905: 110; Kelsen in Longobardo 2017:11). Another theory, the factual one, states that "territory and the population are [...] the spatial and personal scope in which the government normally exercises its powers and fulfils its duties" (Quadri in Longobardo 2017: 12-13). In this context, no authority can decide if an entity is entitled to be a state. However, nowadays it is impossible to assess rebels' strategies without considering the international community's role. Thus, the framework to which international law scholars refer is the "legalistic theory" which states that, despite exercising sovereign powers, the entity may not enjoy international personality if it does not respect the rules of international laws.

As for statehood, there is confusion about the non-state actor aspiring to be a state. Above, I used the term *de facto* state because it seems the most reliable in international law[1]. Nonetheless, for some international lawyers, the *de facto* state cannot exist because "if a territory meets the conditions of statehood, it is a state" (Ker-Lindsay 2017: 4). Alternatives are concepts such as "unrecognized states" and "contested states", while "separatist states" and "breakaway states" have

1 See Caspersen et.al (2011), *Unrecognized States in the International System,* Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group; Ker-Lindsay (2017), Secession and Recongition in Foreign Policy, World Politics, Oxford University Press; Longobardo (2017), The Self-proclaimed Statehood of the Islamic State between 2014 and 2017 and International Law, Anuario Espanol de Derecho Internacional 33, p.205-228; Worster (2016), Relative International Legal Personality of Non-State Actors, Brooklyn Journal of International Law, Vol.42, No.1.

been used, making more difficult to frame the *de facto* state (Ibid.). Other scholars such as Kolstø sustained the idea of an "unrecognized quasi-state" (Kolstø in Caspersen et al. 2011: 131) which exist when the declaration of independence has been discarded by the international community. Consequently, it is difficult to understand if non-state actors have the characteristics to enjoy international legal personality. As different works states, these entities enjoy right and duties under international law[2], although the debate about international legal personality depends on the involvement of the non-state actor in the international sphere (Klabbers in Worster 2016: 211).

The same theoretical debates regard self-determination because its rhetoric was a product of decolonization processes after World War II. Most of scholars "would agree that self-determination is a loaded term often identified closely with secession and thus [...] extremely destructive" (Gardner 2011: 10). Nevertheless, looking to a basic definition, we could say that "the principle of self-determination can be defined as freedom from alien domination and freedom to choose a form of government" (Ibid.: 8). Stilz (2016), resuming Cassese's (1995)[3] theory, distinguishes between two aspects: the "internal" which refers to people's right to choose a government that reflects their ideologies, and the "external" that denotes people's right to be free from outside interference. These aspects are entrenched with the popular sovereignty's role in self-determination claims. However, it is debatable if people share a will with these declarations, given that in the modern state it is not usual to see citizenry contracted together to form a political community. Moreover, "every citizenry is riven with diversity. And since groups rarely agree on anything in politics, it is unclear how 'the people' can share a will" (Stilz in Sobel et al. 2016: 101). That is why we must consider the non-state actors' elites and their ideologies to understand governance strategies and the calculus of self-determination.

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2 Worster (2016) elaborates this information according to several works. See Jan Klabbers, (I Can't Get No) Recognition: Subjects Doctrine and the Emergence of Non-State Actors, in J. Petman & L. Klabbers, eds., Nordic Cosmopolitanism: Essays in International Law for Martti Koskenniemi 369 (2003); Wolfgang Friedmann, The Changing Structure of International Law 213-15 (1964); G. Schwarzenberger, A Manual of International Law 48 (1st ed., 1947); Hersch Lauterpacht, The Subjects of the Law of Nations, 63 L. QTRLY REV. 444 (1947).

3 A. Cassese (1995), Self-determination of Peoples: A Legal Reappraisal, Cambridge University Press, p. 5-12.

1.4 The Criteria for Assessing Self-Determination Claims

The criteria used for assessing the self-determination need to be developed to unravel the strategic calculus behind the declaration, or demise, of territorial sovereignty.

The aforementioned criteria set by Article 1 of the 1993 Montevideo Convention[4] cannot explain how the international community decides to recognize the non-state actor's sovereignty. Indeed, after the Cold War-era "state behavior on a variety of fronts appears increasingly linked to norms of human rights and democratic governance" (Gardner 2011: 4). Thus, even if political agendas are still relevant, democratization is strictly entrenched with the community's vision when assessing self-determination claims. Fostering democratization through democratic state-building strategies seems to be the priority for securing international peace. Consequently, one of the main criteria is the democratic capacity of the non-state actor. Precisely, the self-determination is assessed according to how much the rebels resemble the internalized standards of governance typical of recognized State entities (Ibid.: 6). The international recognition and the non-state actor's empowerment are explained in figure 1.1.

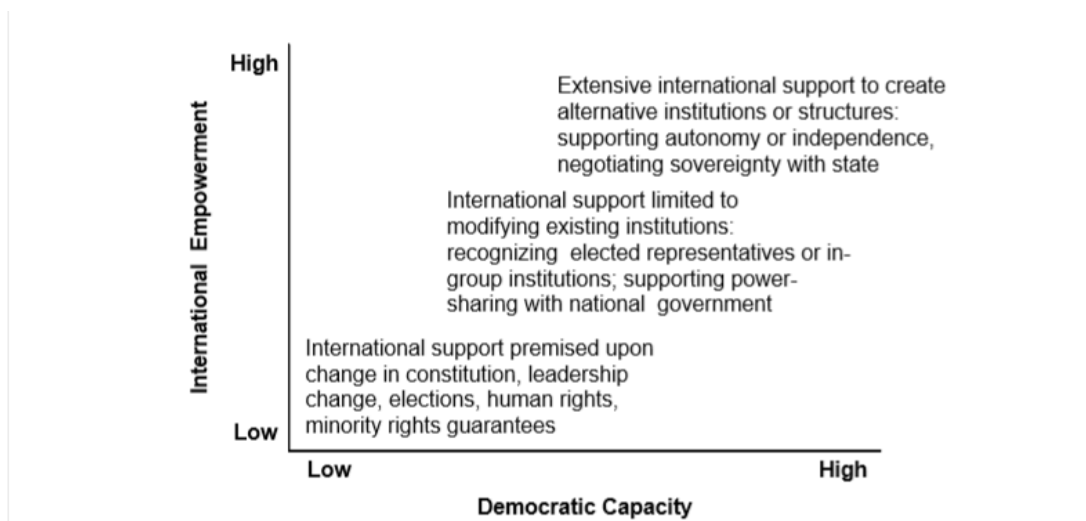

Figure 1.1 Democratic Capacity and International Empowerment

Gardner, A. M. (2011), *Democratic Governance and Non-State Actors,* Palgrave Macmillan, p. 7.

4 The criteria are described in paragraph 1.3 Explaining the Concepts: Statehood, *De Facto* States, and Self-determination.

It must be said that the international community's behaviour does not represent a shared consensus among all the members. As a matter of fact, it reflects the view of legitimacy in the eyes of dominant states in the community. Indeed, if we refer to the community as the states being part of the United Nations, we can see that the latter reflects "asymmetries in global power, privileging the views and interests of the West" (Kymlicka 2007: 11). Thus, this collective legitimation crafts the strategies of the international community because it represents the views of the "respected" part of the global community of states (Sills in Krasno 2004: 47-76). Consequently, the response to self-determination claims is weighted according to international (more "Westerners") norms developed in the framework of human rights standards and democratic governance.

As for rebel strategies, the international community has different ways of replying to self-determination claims. Namely, it can exert coercion, persuasion, or social influence (Gardner 2011: 28). Some examples of these strategies can be seen in figure 1.2.

Level of International Empowerment	Approaches to Empowerment	Examples
Low	Coercion	Use of sanction, conditionality to pressure claimant group to follow democratic norms
Medium	Persuasion	Appeal to claimant group's self-interest to link norm-following behavior to other rewards, such as economic
High	Social Influence	Appeal to claimant group as member of democratic community

Figure 1.2 International Empowerment and Approaches

Gardner, A. M. (2011), *Democratic Governance and Non-State Actors,* Palgrave Macmillan, p. 28.

These strategies aim to make the non-state actor follow international rules and internalize forms of democratic governance. The community has different ways to verify if rebels have internalized certain norms. Particularly, it values representation and popular participation; mechanisms to solve

conflicts without violence; toleration of minorities. In this way, the community assesses if there is a low or high level of capacity in internalizing democratic standards (Gardner 2011: 33-36). Figure 1.1 can be reformulated according to these new pieces of information in figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3 Democratic Capacity and International Empowerment

Gardner, A. M. (2011), *Democratic Governance and Non-State Actors,* Palgrave Macmillan, p. 39.

The contested state’s authority is the last entity to keep in mind when theorizing self-determination. Indeed, it may be possible that high levels of oppression and discrimination could lead to the empowerment or even recognition for the rebels. This risk is correlated to the self-right to defence when someone does not respect the basic principles of international law in armed conflicts. However, it is difficult to understand how the international community assesses claims by actors who exert violence for their agendas. That is why we need to make some considerations about rebels involved in violent conflicts.

1.5 The International Response to Belligerent Non-State Actors

The debate regarding NSAGs operating in violent conflicts is problematic because we lack the means to identify who has the right to exert violence and who has to be stopped for causing harm, even beyond the regional context[5]. Gardner (2011) talks about the international law's ineffectiveness in fostering a resolution to conflicts arising from self-determination claims, and consequently the failure of the international community in the face of geopolitical interests.

The problem of recognition is even more articulated if one considers the UN Charter[6]. Indeed, its prohibition on the use of force set in Article 2(4) is related to states in any event, while non-state actors such as liberation movements are not mentioned (Chadwick in Saul 2014: 303). Thus, it is not possible to determine whether non-state actors have any legal rights in exerting violence to achieve self-determination, or if violence is justified by the state's oppression. Even terrorist actions cannot be properly assessed when the militia is competing with an oppressive patron state. For this reason, Chadwick exposes that "legal prohibitions against force cannot prevent force being utilised" (Ibid.: 313). Moreover, if actors are denied any membership in the international community, then they are not bound by any conflict-reducing mechanisms and "[n]o international conventions can be applied on their territory and no effective monitoring is possible" (Kolstø in Caspersen et al. 2011: 110). This lack of transparency becomes attractive for criminal business and violent actions. Consequently, the "unregulated status of the unrecognized states affect the lives of their citizens, [and] it may also represent a danger to the outside world, in particular - but not limited to - their immediate neighbours" (Caspersen et al. 2011: 110). This should make us think about the logic of non-recognition and its advantages. Although non-recognition is the input for *de facto* states in

5 e.g. Think of terrorist actions to enforce self-determination claims such as the 1972 massacre during the Olympic Games in Munich by the Black September Organisation.

6 Charter of the United Nations, Preamble, Arts 1(2) and 55. See UN General Assembly Resolutions 1541 (XV) (15 December 1960), 2625 (XXV) (24 October 1970), and 60/145 (14 February 2006). See also the two 1966 UN International Human Rights Covenants, Common Art. 1.

internalizing democratic practices, it can create the opposite effect: leading the actor to exert extreme violence knowing that the international community is compelled by certain loopholes. Legitimacy indeed does not come only from external sources, but it comes also from who tacitly accepts the rebel's rule. Therefore, pursuing the "extremist discount" could be the right strategy to gain compliance and appeal at an international level. However, as stated above, if the group manages to internalize democratic practices, it could at least gain some insurances about its rights and role in the international scenario. Given this uncertainty, the elite's pragmatism must be considered when dealing with entities who weigh self-determination claims based on their ideological, historical and socio-political contexts.

Another issue regards how the international community exploits the violent policies that rebels apply to the populations. Indeed, the only mechanism is extending the application of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to increase the personality of non-state actors and bound them to certain legal regulations (Worster 2016: 233). In this framework, the international community wants the non-state actors to be covered by humanitarian law, despite it does not want the rebels to enjoy "benefits of statehood or […] ignorance of *jus cogens*[7] violations" (Ibid.: 238). This strategy falls in the so-called "equality of belligerents", for which combatants must be treated equally to the states against whom they are fighting for an effective application of a code of the law of armed conflict (Somer in Worster 2016: 238). The main issue is that non-state actors are now treated as if they enjoy international legal personality to the eyes of the international community. Hence, actors who do not care for external recognition but rather aim for international resonance may benefit from being treated as a state entity, reinforcing their position *vìs a vìs* the various opponents. If a group is treated as a state by virtue of the crimes it perpetrates, then the international community ends up legitimizing its power base, which sees the actor as an international personality, for better or worse. Moreover, not recognizing a violent group does not prevent it from affecting the policies of the

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7 In international law, *jus cogens* norms are set to protect fundamental values to which one cannot in any way derogate. The jus cogens is perceived by members of the international community as an absolutely mandatory right.

international community. Whether it is exploiting violence or more democratic means, it will always be engaged with the community's response, thus showing itself capable of bearing international pressure.

With these considerations in mind, it should be easier to analyse ISIS and Hezbollah, contextualizing how their ideologies affected the strategic choices, and the result of declaring, or not to, territorial sovereignty to the eyes of the international community.

Chapter Two

ISIS's Extremism: The Self-Determination Path

Understanding the conditions for ISIS's self-determination implies a within-case study. To do so, I need to to show examples of its extremist ideological project regarding multiple dimensions of governance. The analysis must be related to the governance strategies enacted and to the criteria for assessing self-determination claims by the international community. Nonetheless, it must be kept in mind that the group's formation is not independent of the international intervention in Iraq and Syria as well as the incapacity of Arab states to "represent the interests of their citizens and to construct an inclusive national identity strong enough to generate social cohesion" (Gerges 2016: 5).

Firstly, it is necessary to start from a historical framework that could lay the basis to understand what damages have been inflicted on the Iraqi and Syrian social fabrics. This will show the development of the new global Salafi-jihadism and how the group reinvented itself by handling a socially and religiously fragmented situation through an extremist approach.

The historical context introduces ISIS's ideological development, and how it has applied the "extremist discount" to become the new vanguard of worldwide jihadism. This framework displays how certain dynamics were reproduced even before Baghdadi declared the Islamic State. Moreover, the troubled relationship between ISIS and its "parent" organization al-Qaeda Central[8] is pivotal to understanding ISIS's jihadist project.

The other dimension under scrutiny concerns ISIS's relationship with the Iraqi/Syrian populations. Governance strategies involve the organization of people, thus it is not possible to evaluate the self-determination without knowing how ISIS manages its territories. Governance

8 "Central" is the definition given by Gerges (2016) to distinguish between the leadership of bin Laden and Zawahiri from that of Zarqawi and his successors as leaders of al-Qaeda in Iraq.

strategies are always assessed by the international community when they come from an actor that aims for recognition. Thus, I claim that ISIS's way of ruling empowers the extremist approach, as it is different from other Salafi groups seen until now.

Moreover, the plurality of armed actors within Iraq and Syria must be taken into account. The relationship between ISIS and its counterpart al-Nusra offers interesting examples of an extremist approach. This adds another piece to the puzzle about the reasons for declaring territorial sovereignty.

Finally, non-state actors are often the products of international intervention in troubled and poor areas, and their willingness to oppose both states and the community comes from a rejection of international law and its imposition on Middle Eastern states. Thus, I state that analysing the group's behaviour in accordance with its ideology and in opposition to the dictates of the international community clarifies the value of the self-determination. Indeed, ISIS proposes violent jihad against the "near enemy", but at the same time, it is capable of protracting actions against the West, changing the asset and responses of the international community. This influence can explain the modalities with which the group seeks legitimation through the self-determination.

2.1 ISIS's Historical Path

Understanding ISIS's formation implies accounting for the international intervention and the state-building processes in Iraq. "Nation-building" processes implied the state as the only provider of security and stability, therefore, the Weberian ideal kept spreading. This led to the failure of western projects to stabilize the Middle East (Calculli 2019: 2) and contributed to increasing sectarian tensions since the 2003 invasion of the country. In this fragmented context, armed groups took advantage of divisions within the population, developing their anti-western and Islamist logic. The devastation of state institutions as well as the establishment of a sectarian-based political system, contributed to the polarization along Sunni-Shia divide, preparing the state to a never-

ending struggle moved by identity politics (Gerges 2016: 68). With the deposition of Hussein and the dismantling of Iraqi security institutions, the country found itself in political, economic, and social chaos. In the absence of a nationalist framework to rebuild the country, the new politics of exclusion of prime minister Nuri al-Maliki exacerbated the sectarian divide. His Shiite government treated Iraqi-Sunnis as second class citizens, despite the collaboration with Sunni groups to counter the developing hegemony of Salafi actors. This relationship deteriorated because of the government's authoritarian tendencies, reaching an end after the Arab Springs between 2010 and 2011 (Spencer et al. in Gerges 2016: 106). In this context, ISIS rebranded itself, gaining authority and showing how "the proliferation of irregular armed groups is mainly seen as the unintended consequence of an ill-conceived policy" (Calculli 2019: 2) by the international forces.

How did ISIS take advantage of the Iraqi socio-political situation? This happened well before Baghdadi declared the Islamic State. Precisely, it started with the growing influence of al-Qaeda in the area. Growing sectarianism gave the most powerful Salafi group at that time the opportunity to blend in with local Sunnis, who were convinced that the order left by the U.S. empowered the Shias and neighbouring Iran (Gerges 2016: 69). Moreover, with 9/11 al-Qaeda's legitimacy had already been grown within Islamist circles. Therefore, before ISIS's birth, one of al-Qaeda most influential men, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, was developing an extremist rhetoric that would have caused further affliction to the country. Trained in Afghanistan and imprisoned by the U.S., Zarqawi developed his ideals through a harsh interpretation of the *Qu'ran*. When he moved to Iraq, he found himself at a time when al-Qaeda's top leaders needed support while wanted and dispersed throughout the Middle East. Thus, Iraq provided Zarqawi with "a stage and a social base of support that allowed him to charts his own vision, a path that marked another radical twist in the journey of the global jihadist" (Gerges 2016: 59). Despite this, he swore *baiya* (loyalty) to bin Laden, changing the name of its jihadi group in al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2004 (AQI). However, his relentless actions against both Sunnis and Shias ended up affecting his relationship with al-Qaeda Central. Indeed, Zarqawi's logic

of "total war"[9] almost ended the jihadist project in Iraq, although it succeeded to survive attacks from the U.S. supporting Maliki's government. When Zarqawi was killed by the U.S. in 2006, AQI was rebranded as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), and his successors continued to implement extremist methods. Moreover, ISI resilience lied in the failed project of creating a Sunni-moderate militia by the government. Although this Sunni Sawha project backed by the American Awakening program initially punished ISI, its growing influence became an alarming issue for Maliki, hostile to the empowerment of Sunnis (Burns et al. in Gerges 2016: 105). The mistrust erupted when the Iraqi government was put in charge of the Sawha militias by the U.S., now considered a betrayer by several leaders who harshly criticized Maliki's Shiite government (Gerges 2016: 106). Consequently, the total absence of national social cohesion as well as of a leader reinforced the climb to power of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who managed to make of ISI the most powerful jihadi group in the international arena.

Baghdadi, as well as Zarqawi, started his jihadist path after being released from Camp Bucca, an American prison. Baghdadi took control of ISI after the death of his predecessor, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, and from the beginning, he started to restore the group's logic around seventh century-old Islam. His vision made him capable of recruiting desperate Iraqis who were attracted by glory and salaries, managing to "transform a fragile organization on the brink of collapse into a mini professional army, an army capable of waging urban and guerrilla warfare as well as conventional warfare" (Gerges 2016: 143). Strategic conquers allowed the group to attract local Sunni militias that saw in ISI's project a solution to Maliki's sectarian governance. With plenty of suicide bombers and a good centralized operational infrastructure, ISI survived American and Iraqi attacks, rebuilding its ranks and slowly penetrating Syria from 2011 on.

In Syria, Hafez al-Assad and his son Bashar crafted the country's socio-economic context along sectarian lines. Social, political and economic power was distributed strategically to favour

9 War against any religious community or government that does not abide to the Caliphate's rule.

who followed the Alawite's[10] rule. Despite the majority of businessman and politicians were Sunni, the rulers managed to secure a strong political base, which enjoyed the economic liberalization, whereas people in the suburbs, small cities, and especially rural areas were affected by poverty and displacement (Barout in Gerges 2016: 171). However, the Arab Uprising allowed ISI to overthrow the established order, as well as to sneak into the country. The growing violence of the Syrian security forces against peaceful protesters ended up radicalising the uprising. Moreover, the presence of radicalised personalities within the protesters was the result of a strategic calculation by the Assad regime, that issued an amnesty to release Islamist prisoners from the Sednayya prison on 26 March 2011 to justify violent security methods (Lister 2015: 55). At this point, "Islamist armed groups and the Islamist rhetoric of jihad were empowered [and] their existence becoming somewhat justified in the eyes of a significant proportion of Syrians" (Gerges 2016: 174). Despite ISI did not promote any participation, the group recruited Syrian Sunnis, tribal and local coalitions, together with foreign fighters and skilled Iraqi lieutenants. This led to the designation of Abu Muhammad al-Joulani as the leader of the Syrian "branch" of ISI and al-Qaeda Central, Jabat al-Nusra. The group, heavily supported, penetrated the country building relationships with influential personalities and businessmen, indoctrinating Islamists with the opening of the al-Dawa[11] office (Ibid.: 181). Nevertheless, al-Nusra's and Joulani's surge, favoured by a nationalist/moderate vision[12], ended up threatening ISI's unity and Baghdadi's ambitions. Thus, in April 2013, the "caliph" decided unilaterally to dissolve both ISI and al-Nusra, officially declaring the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Ibid.: 188). This led to a power struggle between Baghdadi and Joulani, who consequently

10 Alawism is a branch of Shia Islam, although its theology and rituals differs from it. They are significantly present in Syria, Turkey, and Lebanon.

11 Literally "the call to religion"-Al Dawa offices are religious proselytization offices used to propagate a particular religious ideology.

12 Joulani was contrary to the logic of "total war" against Sunnis and innocents. Moreover, the presence of Syrian combatants inside its ranks reinforced the idea that al-Nusra was becoming a counter-Assad movement with different priorities than ISI.

defied ISIS by swearing allegiance to Zawahiri (who had taken the place of bin Laden in al-Qaeda Central's leadership). This defiance turned into a war inside Syria, ended with ISIS consolidating its conquests and taking control of al-Raqqah (Ibid.: 192). With further strategic conquers, ISIS imposed its rule on part of Syrian territory, applying the extremist logic against whoever opposed its jihadist project.

The context in which Zarqawi and his successors found themselves posed multiple threats. From the confrontation with Sunni U.S.-baked militias to the war against al-Nusra, ISIS's extremist project had the precedence over moderation and alliances. Although the group had to compromise at the beginning, the "experience it acquired in the decade-long battle against the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq" allowed it to form "a solid military command and control in both Syria and Iraq" (Ibid.: 194). This reinforced its powerful image both to the eyes of Arabic countries and the international community. Moreover, profiting from the failed Arab Uprisings and the international conflict of interests regarding the Syrian issue, ISIS's force lied in exacerbating the sectarian and ideological divide, proposing a "solution" to all the sidelined Sunnis who perceived Shias as the power holders.

2.2 The Ideology of the Islamic State

> "O Muslims, Islam was never for a day the religion of peace. Islam is the religion of war. Your Prophet (peace be upon him) was dispatched with the sword"[13].

By stepping in a void left by sectarian policies and the ambiguities of the international community, ISIS reconstructed "Iraq's supra-state identity (Arabism and nationalism) along sectarian terms (pan-Sunni), challenging the very foundation of the separate nation-state as well as the norms and rules that underpin international society" (Gerges 2016: 12). Ideology is essential because it structures governance strategies and binds together Salafi-jihadist combatants as well as activists, giving legitimacy to the group.

13 Baghdadi, "March Forth Whether Light or Heavy".

ISIS has a totalitarian world-view that refers to seventh-century Arabia, brutally punishing whoever opposes its rule based on the *Sharia*. While the political pluralism is eliminated, the group successfully presents as the only movement capable of resurrecting the caliphate and gaining salvation for young Muslims betrayed by their governments (Adnani in Gerges 2016: 46). However, its extremism is to be found in the movement's first footsteps, when Zarqawi took the leadership of al-Qaeda in Iraq. As previously mentioned, he learned the *Qu'ran* during the detention, and his poor background made him develop a thought more extreme than the one of the jihadist "grandmasters" such as bin Laden. Indeed, he theorized the "total war" against Shias, Sunnis and Arabic governments prone to the international rule, entering a new wave of jihadists with different priorities ideologically opposed to the ones of al-Qaeda Central (Gerges 2016: 87). For Zarqawi and its followers, "shock value, slaughter, and blood speak louder than words", waging a war without limits (Ibid.: 90), a tendency that further alienated al-Qaeda's top-leaders and its mullā.

Al-Baghdadi did not change the approach. He exerted violence against Shias and Sunnis who tried to oppose its rule, reinforcing the "extremist discount" logic and his image to the eyes of competing groups. In this way, thanks to its ideological cohesiveness, ISI sustained itself between 2006 and 2011, profiting from the troubled development of the Sunni Arab identity, and co-opting even officers from Hussein regime, making them migrate from Baathism to Salafi-jihadism (Ibid.: 158). The absence of solid national identity and security allowed the group to fill the governance and ideational voids (Barnard et al. 2015: 1) that attracted more support than ever before. Notably, the migration of Baathist and nationalist officers into ISI's orbit "is a testimony to the breakdown of Iraq's state institutions and the transformation of the new ruling elite and social classes" (Gerges 2016: 160). Nevertheless, the relationship between the newborn ISIS and its skilful lieutenants rapidly changed. After capturing Mosul in 2014, the group purged its ranks by arresting and killing many of the former Baathist and nationalist personalities. "Mosul was purged not only of "deviant" Baathists but also of its cosmopolitanism and cultural diversity" (Ibid.: 128). This purge displays the extremism and the ideological distance of ISIS from al-Qaeda, which never supported violence

against Sunnis willing to collaborate, despite its economic conditions constrained its top-leaders to maintain the alliance with Baghdadi (Ibid.: 238). The disdain for compromise ultimately affected ISIS's relationship with its "patron" group and with al-Nusra in Syria. Their conflict goes beyond the dispute for territory and authority: it is rather a philosophical and ideological war that is fought along tribal, ethnic and nationalist lines (Adnani 2014: 1). I support that the "extremist discount" heavily affected ISIS's strategies when dealing with its allies. As soon as the group gained authority and legitimacy, it has started a civil war which culminated in a two-pronged action in 2013 to take the control of the jihadist movement and transform its identity (Gerges 2016: 247). Moreover, ISIS aims to replace Zawahiri and win the war of narratives against its old allies by trying to take possession of al-Qaeda's logic of war against Western powers (Ibid.: 251). The clarity of ISIS's ideological and strategic message helped it in replacing al-Qaeda leadership because it reached a wide portion of Arab Sunni, especially with the self-determination in 2013. Indeed, the power of ISIS's messianic ideology lied in the transnational effect of this message, which attracted many foreign fighters and Islamist militants from all over the world.

ISIS fighters are known for being committed to their cause, blindly posing their faith in the Hakimiyya's principles[14], and denouncing whoever does not follow the caliphate's rule. ISIS depicts its fighters as "soldiers of the caliphate" (al-Dalimi et al. in Gerges 2016: 274) and the saviours of the Sunni community. In this way, they are invested with a sort of divine mission that can only bring them fame and fortune. For many ISIS fighters, whether they are foreigners or jihadist veterans, "ideology is the superglue that cements their commitment to the group" (Ibid.: 274) and reinforces ISIS's military apparatus and its appeal to Islamists. Moreover, undercover fighters in Europe or the U.S. seem to share an ideological commitment to ISIS's cause. Suffering from discrimination, especially the youth is vulnerable to ISIS's resilient image and violent logic. People find a safe place in it because they are empowered by the "sanctity" of the mission, and thus

14 It represents the unrelenting value of God's rule on earth, opposed to the will of people.

create a bridge allowing the group to strike in the earth of Western countries with "far-reaching political and social consequences" (Ibid.: 231).

This context should make us aware of the weight of ideology in ISIS's strategies. The logic of "total war" affected its relationships with al-Qaeda and other Salafi-jihadist groups, whereas its ideological commitment attracted flows of fighters and skilled professionals. By developing a strict ideology and exerting power through violence ISIS challenges both the statehood of Arab countries and the Weberian state imposed by the international intervention. Furthermore, it is attracting as much Islamists as possible, filling an ideational void to create a state legitimized by its population, despite being addressed as a terrorist organization. Besides, declaring the Islamic State without al-Qaeda's permission or other affiliate militias is relevant to understanding the value and the purpose of the group's self-determination.

2.3 Rebel Governance and Population

The entity who aims to supplant the state authority must define how to manage the population and the territory under its control. Democratic or not, governance strategies require the political, social and ideological organization of people. The Islamic State is not exempt, and its governance outlines the value of ideology while adding another piece to the puzzle of the self-determination. Indeed, challenging the international community, ISIS developed a Gianus approach prone to extremism, as a consequence of governing multiple confessional realities within Iraq and Syria. It is also worth to mention how, in contrast with the international precepts regarding democratic governance, ISIS first developed a rudimentary infrastructure of administration, and then it has eradicated any form of dissent, proving its violent feature.

Regarding infrastructures, ISIS filled the void left by Iraqi and Syrian administrations, by creating a rudimentary but functional bureaucracy together with institutions in cities such as al-Raqqah, Mosul, Fallujah and Deir al-Zour (Gerges 2016: 265). Jihadists improved security and

order creating jobs in the fragile economy of the area and they delivered services such as bakeries, hospitals, garbage collection and day-care centres (Arango 2015: 1; Shubert 2015: 1; Karouny 2014: 1; Mroue 2015: 1). ISIS even established a Consumer Protection Authority Office in al-Raqqah, which forced shops "to close for selling poor products in the *suq* (market) as well as regular supermarkets and kebab stands" (Zelin 2014: 1). The group also runs an electricity office that handles the repairs of older power lines and the installation of new ones, together with rehabilitating roads and make them aesthetically pleasant (Ibid.). In this way, ISIS handled the population, making it dependent on its service infrastructure and thus prone to its rule. Moreover, if ISIS managed to implement these governance systems, it was because of a significant portion of former Iraqi Baathist officials, who were aware of the steps to take in the formation of the caliphate (Smith in Oosterveld et al. 2017: 11).

These services proved efficient, but they need economic support and thus are very costly for the population. Despite strategic conquests rewarded ISIS with oil, gas, and salt, one of its main financial resources is the taxation system (Solomon 2015: 1). According to IHS Global Strategies, almost 50% of the group's revenue comes from taxes and fines (Gerges 2016: 268), which are collected mostly from Shias and Christians. The *Zakat*[15] is heavily implemented, and whoever avoids it, ends up being killed or severely punished. As reported by people living under the caliphate's control, no one dares not to pay ISIS's bills because of the religious police's punishments. The *hisbah* is mainly composed of Sunnis living in rural areas who are empowered by the Islamic State and thus even more loyal to it (Abdul-Ahad 2018: 1). Coercion and fear represent ISIS's main tools, and despite dissent within the civilians, the reality left by previous governments deeply deluded both Iraqis and Syrians. Although ISIS shows commitment to providing services, it carries massive killings which reify its ideological distance from the confessional realities it controls. I assert that the Shaitat tribe's massacre in Abu Hamam (Eastern Syria) is a striking

15 Taxation system imposed in seventh/eighth century Arabia to people of different religions in order not to get purged from Islam conquered territories.

example of how the "extremist discount" favours the use of violence. In less than three days, ISIS fighters killed, beheaded and even crucified hundreds of the tribe's members who tried to oppose the caliphate's governance. The massacre constrained the population to accept ISIS's rule, whereas the silence of the international community further reinforced its sense of invincibility (Sly 2014: 1).

Besides, the regulation of daily life is dependent on the religious interpretations of the *Qur'an*. In every place conquered by the Islamic State, diversity and culture have been erased to leave space to a totalitarian religious system displaying ISIS's adhesion to its ideology. This approach is aimed to "change the political culture of Iraq and Syria so that the ISIS model would continue indefinitely" (Gerges 2016: 272). Indeed, by empowering Sunnis living in rural areas, ISIS has linked its interests with agrarian and tribal elements, building a power base that supports the group and reinforce its extremist methods (Ibid.: 273).

ISIS's two-folded approach mitigates extreme violence with the provision of basic services and primary goods. Nevertheless, the group has rarely invested social capital in governance's infrastructure, a common character to the Salafi-jihadist actors who prioritize "warfare over welfare" (Ibid.: 280). Discarding democracy, ISIS challenges the precepts of the international community and displays its preference for violence when it comes to regulating governance issues. Through these examples, I insist that the group does not seek legitimacy within the international community because it does not follow their criteria or regulations to governing people democratically. Rather, its jihadists are imposing a new personality both to the populations and the territories they control, creating a new identity that transcends the progress made in international law and frames itself in in the utopia of seventh-century Arabia. This new constituency, reinforced by foreign supporters, may have favoured the self-determination.

2.4 The Troubled Relationship Between ISIS and al-Nusra

Non-state actors operating in the same area cannot prevent from dealing with each other. ISIS stands as an example of how extremist ideological and political projects can lead to violent confrontations. Its relationship with al-Nusra serves to interpret the irreconcilability between the new jihadist project and that theorized by al-Qaeda. Moreover, understanding how the growing influence of al-Nusra alarmed Baghdadi and his circle can further enlighten the reasons behind ISIS's self-determination.

Syrian socio-economic and political situation was characterised by growing sectarianism that affected the uprisings in 2011. In the same year, Osama bin Laden's death boosted Baghdadi's intention to fill the power vacuum left by the al-Qaeda's leader as well as expanding its influence over Iraq. Profiting from the uprisings, Baghdadi and his circle sent two lieutenants in Syria, Abu Muhammad al-Joulani and Mullah Fawzi al-Dulaimi, to create a jihadist cell that could counter the Assad regime and take over the country (Ali 2015: 1). Without announcing ISI's and al-Qaeda's presence, Baghdadi and Zawahiri provided al-Nusra with skilled combatants, money, and arms (Gerges 2016: 176). However, Joulani presented its group as a continuation of the Syrian mujahideen opposition to Assad, gaining confidence from several radicalised militias. The new organization stood as a defence movement for Sunnis persecuted by the Assad regime by relying on Syrian Sunni recruits. The name chosen by Joulani indicated the desire to be seen as a nationalist group rather than a Salafi militia (Ibid.). Among multiple armed factions in Syria, between 2012 and 2013, al-Nusra positioned the military asset in poor and rural areas, where the majority of the Sunni population was illuded by Assad's governance. By siding ideologically with Zawahiri and al-Qaeda, Joulani developed a moderate approach toward the Sunni constituency, showing sensitivity to the public feeling of displacement, improving the group's image and gaining more support (Ibid.: 182). In this context, al-Nusra was perceived as a liberation movement acting with a different approach than ISI's extremist one. This opposition is clear in the words of one of al-Nusra's spokesman, Abu

Adnan, who stated that the group was nothing as AQI/ISI (Abouzeid 2012: 1), and in a group's pronouncement that claimed the intention not to enforce the Sharia law in Syria (Gerges 2016: 184). What is stunning about al-Nusra's is that Joulani gained notoriety and power by defending the Sunni population, appealing to them through a nationalist logic, and allying with different militias to replace the Assad regime. Despite resorting to violence, al-Nusra became one of the most powerful actors in the area, being active in eleven of the thirteen provinces in Syria (IHS 2013: 1).

This surge alarmed Baghdadi who wanted to restore its control over what was perceived as ISI's project. Through an audio statement, Baghdadi claimed that al-Nusra's ultimate goal was to pave the way to ISI, dissolving unilaterally the two entities and announcing the birth of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (Gerges 2016: 188). Applying the "extremist discount", Baghdadi warned every Islamist group that avoiding allegiance would have meant to be treated as enemies. Joulani's response outlined how he was neither aware or agreed with the decision. Even Zawahiri stated that the Islamic State's declaration was a violation of al-Qaeda's order not to announce an official presence of the jihadists (Zawahiri 2014: 1). However, when Joulani pledged allegiance to Zawahiri, he showed how the Islamist project of taking over Syria was becoming a power struggle between powerful allies. Zawahiri asked Baghdadi and Joulani to preserve the divide, but by doing this, he outlined his support for the Syrian leader (Gerges 2016: 190). Joulani's position was considered a threat by Baghdadi, as it was clear that al-Nusra was the most powerful Islamist organization in Syria. This meant that ISIS had to settle itself in the area, starting a brand new project and changing its agenda. To re-establish its role, ISIS co-opted former militants of al-Nusra, who saw better prospects in Baghdadi's project. Sticking to its extremist ideology, ISIS prioritized the war against al-Nusra rather than against Assad's forces (Ibid.:191) to take back the control of important strategic zones such al-Raqqah and the Deir al-Zour province. Although al-Nusra's resistance together with other Syrian/Islamist factions was fierce, by the summer of 2014 ISIS had captured 95% of the Deir al-Zour province, which is known for being a resource-rich zone (Associated Press 2014: 1). The number of resources at ISIS's disposal, allowed it to seize the

control of other areas, making the people living there dependent on the group. This shows again the ideological divide with al-Nusra, that had built its constituency through popular support. However, the main consequence was that Islamist factions saw in ISIS a powerful ally and the only group capable of countering Assad. This led to recruiting more combatants and professionals from all over the Middle East, thanks to the group's huge finances.

In the end, after the "victory" against al-Nusra, ISIS switched again its interests into Iraq conquering more areas and dissolving the international border which was separating the two countries. At this point, ISIS was a reality, and the group demonstrated that its tactics of breaking down the border through violence had worked (Gerges 2016: 196). By declaring the Islamic State, ISIS showed that it needed to take back control of its project. Both Joulani's and Zawahiri's reactions say a lot about the extremist logic implemented by the "caliphate". By openly disobeying to its "parent" organization, ISIS showed the incompatibility of its ideology with the old jihadist project of countering the far-enemy. I argue that this need to re-establish the role in Syria, together with taking the reins of the global jihadist project, it is useful to understand why Baghdadi decided to declare statehood and to pursue the "extremist discount", openly attacking al-Nusra and covertly threatening Zawahiri's moral and political leadership.

2.5 Challenging the International Community

ISIS challenges the neighbouring Arab states and the international society by conquering strategic areas, exerting violence and cementing its Salafi-jihadist ideology within the Sunni constituency. Therefore, it is impossible to assess the self-determination without analysing ISIS's relationship with the international community. The failure of the liberal sovereignty project and the international discordance in addressing the problems of Iraq and Syria created the perfect scenario for ISIS's proliferation and reinforcement. In this context, the Islamic State considers itself as a legitimate

actor who can challenge any authority that steps between the group and its ideological/political project.

ISIS draws a dividing line with past Salafi-jihadist agendas. Since its birth, it has developed a "total war" logic that prefers the war against Shias and the Arabic governments that allowed for the penetration of the liberal state into the Middle East, independently of religious identity. However, the group aims to replace al-Qaeda's leadership of the global Salafi-jihadist project. The necessity to absorb the logic of war against the "far enemy", as it was theorized by bin Laden and Zawahiri, has led ISIS to incorporate the typical strategies of a terrorist movement. This switch of priorities resulted in a series of violent actions against members of the international community. Among them, on October 31st, 2015, the group placed an explosive device into a Russian jet directed to Sinai, killing 224 people. Again, less than a month after the plane crash, ISIS carried out seven suicide bombings in Paris, cooperating with its cells in Belgium and France, killing plenty of civilians and spreading fear in the heart of Europe (Gerges 2016: 250). At this point, the distinction between the "far" and the "near enemy" has been erased, although the group's number one priority is to consolidate its rule in Iraq and Syria. Nevertheless, there are other reasons for attacking outside the Middle East. It should be noted that ISIS suffered different setbacks starting from 2015, the same year in which they attacked the West. This tactic is supposed to divert the attention from the group military losses in Iraq and Syria, to reinforce its image of invincibility (Ibid.: 6). As the group suffers setbacks in territories under its control, it organizes attacks on foreign targets, instilling fear and discouragement within the countries of the international community and reinforcing its legitimacy to the eyes of "wannabe" jihadists.

This point unravels how the relationship with the international community is built upon a tug-of-war given by the historical, political and ideological conditions that led to ISIS's development. Indeed, although the international community lacks a proper framework for addressing non-state actors, it is known that democratic governance is still considered the common reference point[16].

16 Look at the criteria for assessing self-determination claims from violent actors in Chapter One.

Thus, if one refers to ISIS's governance strategies both at home and abroad, it is clear that there is no possibility for its recognition. In this case, what does the group aiming for? It seems that ISIS aims at reinforcing its image to the eyes of Salafi militants and professionals from all over the world through violent displays of power. This is reinforced by data displaying how many foreign fighters and skilled professionals left their country to reach the Islamic State after the caliphate's declaration (Dilanian 2015: 1). Moreover, the group connected regional and international politics by exerting violence and declaring the Islamic State (Gerges 2016: 143), gaining international legal personality by virtue of the crimes it has committed. This happened because addressing a militia with the violation of the International Humanitarian Law (Worster 2015: 233) is a double-edged sword that ends up reinforcing and legitimating ISIS, invested with an international personality to its follower's eyes. Also, foreign fighters and professionals from Western countries imposed a change in international agendas, because people do not feel safe any more (Gerges 2016: 45).

ISIS screens its status outside of its territories by challenging the international community and the Arab states. Thus, I affirm that the self-determination becomes the means through which discarding the democratic Weberian-state imposed by the international influence, offering an alternative to all the displaced Sunnis in the world. This displacement brought by the international intervention, together with the failure of the Arab states to construct a stable national identity, allowed ISIS to increase its authority across the Middle East and abroad. Furthermore, the gap between the targets of the international community's members has bolstered ISIS's surge. Indeed, at the beginnings of the Syrian Uprisings, the distance between the members has expanded the development of the Salafi-jihadist identity. Despite entering the conflict these countries are unwilling to deploy a significant number of troops because they fear to enter the group's apocalyptic narrative (Ibid.: 49). Thus, the creation of the Islamic State has stood between these implications, at a moment when the immobility of the international community and the failure of the state system in the Middle East allowed the group to develop its extremist narrative. Profiting from the negative image of the U.S. to the eyes of the Sunni community, ISIS exerted international

divergences and weaknesses to create a power base that poses hopes and finances into the caliphate's work.

To conclude, one may argue that ISIS's conquers in the Middle East might not affect international responses. On the contrary, the negotiations between ISIS and Turkey, in 2014, show how the group has managed to be treated like a state without being recognised as such. After capturing Mosul, ISIS has negotiated for the liberation of Turkish citizens working in the state's embassy, whereas Erdoğan allowed for the transnational flow of fighters and weapons crossing Turkey to Syria. This attracted criticism from the members of the international community accusing the president of allowing ISIS's reinforcement. Oppositely, Erdoğan insisted on prioritizing the war against Assad in Syria (Ibid.: 285). The gap between the various states' agendas again allowed ISIS to enter international politics without being recognized. Indeed, the deal with the Turkish government represented a huge diplomatic breakthrough for the Islamic State, because it had shown that its violent approach could have been merged with political slyness. Eventually, the "extremist discount" logic prevailed and led the group to bring on terrorist attacks against Kurdish-Turks, ultimately triggering Turkey and losing an opportunity to legitimize its role (Ibid.: 286).

Nonetheless, it is interesting to outline how ISIS survived despite being considered a menace by almost every state and militia across the world. Although the group has suffered setbacks and has lost almost all of its territory until now (Myre et al.: 1), the power and the resilience of its message should make us reflect on the value of its self-determination. Despite being conscious of the risks of being targeted as a terrorist organization, ISIS pursued its extremist vision of politics and governance, challenging the international community and affecting the policies and the agendas of different powerful countries. The self-determination then is a consequence of the socio-political formation of Iraq and Syria, which favoured the development of ISIS's ideology and created the conditions to apply the "extremist discount". Moreover, it serves the purpose of rejecting the structure of state sovereignty imposed by the West, whereas offering an "alternative revolutionary model based on Islamic identity" (Gerges 2016: 286).

Chapter Three

Hezbollah's Pragmatism: Becoming the "Party of God"

Hezbollah is well-known for its pragmatic leadership. The Shia movement – labelled as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by part of the international community – survived years of pressures from the U.S., Israel, the Lebanese army and other militias. Still willing to create an Islamic State in Lebanon, the group reinvented itself becoming active in the country's political system. Understanding what allowed it to this change is the base for an in-depth case-study analysis. For comparison purposes, the dimensions analysed will be the same in chapter two. The argument is supported by examples of the events that favoured Hezbollah's pragmatism, together with strategies related to the "power ideology trade-off". Opposite to ISIS, the study must elucidate the conditions for not declaring the Islamic State, despite the latter is Hezbollah's ultimate aim, described in the open letter of February 16th, 1985. However, the role of the international intervention cannot be set aside as well as the clash for power between political leaders and armed movements.

The historical framework emphasizes how Lebanon was divided along sectarian terms, and how the international community has interfered with the state's sovereignty, favouring the proliferation of armed groups. I assert that this is helpful to analyse the conditions which convinced Hezbollah to re-shape its *modus operandi* to include a wider portion of the Lebanese population into governance strategies, avoiding the spread of sectarianism and appealing to a sense of national unity.

Understanding Hezbollah's history leads to a nuanced description of its ideological and political formation. *Inter alia*, Hezbollah developed an ideology that rejects the confessional state in Lebanon, whereas it has sacrificed part of its Shia political programme. Furthermore, the logic of

"resistance" (*muqawāma*) allow us to understand Hezbollah's political project and the reasons not to declare territorial sovereignty.

The way in which Hezbollah replaces the state authority when dealing with the Lebanese population exposes how the group is aligned with the democracy advocated by the international community. Indeed, Hezbollah proved its inclusive logic to Sunnis and Christians who suffered years of conflicts creating an efficient system of infrastructures and showing the government's weaknesses.

Dealing with conflicts leads us to consider how Lebanon's history is characterised by the succession of a *plethora* of militias that aimed for recognition and socio-political redemption. Despite there have been several confrontations, I analyse how Hezbollah improved its cooperation with different militias. Particularly, the group has sacrificed part of its identity to manage national crises and avoid violent conflicts. In this context, the "power ideology trade-off" has played the main role when dealing with groups such as the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), the Shia counter-movement Amal, and even the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) of Michel Aoun.

To conclude, I analyse Hezbollah's relationship with the international community. Indeed, despite the tug-of-war with multiple countries and the refusal of the American and Israeli influence in Lebanon, Hezbollah has incorporated the logic of international law through measures that resemble the ones of the war on terror and the defence of state's borders, whereas being compliant with the norms and institutions of the international community (Calculli 2018: 136-139). Profiting from certain developments in the jeopardized situation of the Middle East, the group has gained resilience and has avoided fatal confrontations through the "power ideology trade-off". This enlightens us on the value of the self-determination and displays the conditions that dissuaded Hezbollah from declaring territorial sovereignty.

3.1 Hezbollah's Historical Path

To understand Hezbollah's creation I must deepen on the relationships among various religious identities in Lebanon, as well as the governments that allowed for the penetration of foreign interests into Lebanese affairs. The country obtained independence from France in 1943, and given its confessional pluralism, the government's roles were divided between Maronites, Sunnis, and Shias. However, the Pact resembled the interests of the Maronites, so that few political spaces were given to Muslim communities (Harb 2006: 1). The confessional divide erupted in 1958 when Arab nationalists started to contest the Christian president Chamoun. Whereas the Christian administration was entering the sphere of influence of the U.S., the nationalists (mainly Muslims) asked for joining Syria and Egypt in the "United Arab Republic" (Calculli 2019: 11). The confrontation was settled with the American intervention on July 25th, 1958. The "Operation Blue Bat" was intended to restore the stability of Lebanon, although the real purpose was to defend the pro-Western and Christian identity of the state (Ibid.).

Still, the Civil War (started in 1975) led to a second intervention. The confrontation between the Christian forces of Bashir Gemayel and Saad Haddad, and the joint forces of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Muslim militias, led to the creation of UNIFIL[17] in 1978 through two UN Security Council Resolutions (425; 426), and the Multinational Force (MNF) in 1982, whose members are Italy, France, Britain and the U.S. (Ibid.). UNIFIL aimed to restore the country's peace, reinforcing the government's authority, and limiting PLO's anti-Israel activities. Nevertheless, the impression that UNIFIL was empowering Christians and Israel reinforced the sentiment of Muslim actors in Lebanon. This led to the development of a logic of *muqawāma* (resistance) against the international intervention, theorized by Imam Musa al-Sadr, the founder of the Shia movement Amal (Calculli 2018: 66). However, with his disappearance in 1978 while travelling to Libya, the group ended up being co-opted by the Christians, whereas its revolutionary

17 United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

force ended with the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon in 1982 (Operation "Peace for Galilee") (Ibid.: 74).

The invasion was not deterred by UNIFIL, which complemented the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and the Christian militias of the "South Lebanon Army" led by Saad Haddad (Calculli 2019: 11). Moreover, the MNF instituted to reinforce the U.S. brokered ceasefire between Israel and PLO served as a cover of international neutrality, while its members were pursuing their agendas. Notably, the U.S. completed the reinforcement of the Christians, backing the election of Bashir Gemayel as the new president of Lebanon on August 23rd, 1982 (Ibid.: 12). Gemayel's intention, as the leader of the "Lebanese Forces", was to sign for peace with Israel, whereas expelling the Palestinians from Lebanon and reiterating its neutrality (Ibid.). Eventually, as soon as the MNF left the country, Gemayel was killed on September 14th, 1982. Without the international presence the Phalanges, perceiving the PLO as responsible for Gemayel's assassination, massacred more than three thousand Palestinian refugees in Beirut's camps of Sabra and Shatila, backed by the IDF (Ibid.). Consequently, armed Islamist organizations emerged in a context where southern Lebanon was reduced to displacement because of the attempts to integrate it into Israeli administration. As stated above, Amal was challenging the disparity between Christians and Muslims, although it lacked an ideological commitment after al-Sadr's disappearance. Moreover, with the co-optation of its leader Nabih Berri by the Maronites, the group avoided open confrontations with Israel. This immobility led to a break between the leader and its military chief, Husayn al-Musawi, who laid the foundations for the creation of Amal al-Islamiyya, that eventually became Hezbollah thanks to the participation of other Shiite militants and Communists (Qāsim in Calculli 2018: 74; Calculli 2019: 12). Further reinforced by the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Hezbollah emerged as a force challenging the Christians and their confessional government, together with American and Israeli influence. This position culminated in two infamous attacks against two MNF units, American and French, in Beirut on October 23rd, 1983 (Calculli 2019: 12). Despite the repudiation of the

international community, the future events concerning Lebanon proved that the group had to rely on more pragmatic methods, not to be erased by enemies and circumstances.

With the end of the Civil War and the implementation of the Ta'if agreement in 1989[18], the group was in danger because of the Syrian protectorate on the country. Whereas the protectorate served as a stabilizer, it was not willing to give power to Islamist factions. At that time, Syria was entering the American influence maintaining the confessional feature of Lebanon by putting aside both Christians and Shias (Calculli 2018: 84). The need to choose between radical opposition and the acceptance of the new "Lebanese State" posed a threat to the movement, because of the dialectic between purist and pragmatic Islamists. Despite this, Hezbollah adopted a compliant approach, ousting extremist personalities such as its first designated Secretary General Subhi al-Tufaiily (Ibid.: 92). Thus, its leadership established a political party that could counter the government's decision from a legitimate position, although Hezbollah continued to define itself as a "movement" (Calculli 2019: 13). I claim that the concept of "movement" of resistance (*muqawāma)* is important to unravel what conditions led the group not to declare the Islamic State mentioned in the *risala al-maftuha*[19]. Moreover, the death of Khomeini in Iran and the succession of Khatami as president of the country boosted Hezbollah's transition from militia to a political party. The new Iranian government was trying to reform its position through a moderate approach and was thus unwilling to support Islamist armed militias (Calculli 2018: 90). Consequently, in 1992, Hezbollah entered politics, although it gained few votes because of the Syrian influence and its support to Amal. Despite the fierce opposition, the group reinforced its ranks asking for a major role for the Shia communities of the South.

Again, as a consequence of the war on terror, Hezbollah was targeted by the American bill *Syrian Accountability Act and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act* in 2003 (Calculli 2019: 13). The U.S. implied the annihilation of actors challenging the legitimate state, by appealing at the

18 The Agreements involved the dismantling of all the militias and the de-confessionalisation of the state's political system.
19 It is the "Open Letter" with which the movement presented itself to the world. It contains the ideological positions of the group, together with part of its agenda at the time of writing.

debate on legitimation and sovereignty typical of the international law. Despite Hezbollah was presented as a menace to Lebanon's sovereignty, it continued its operations also against Israel in the south. This was possible thanks to improved Syria's relation due to the new leadership of Bashar al-Assad, who understood the importance of the Damascus-Hezbollah ties (Calculli 2018: 104-105). Although Hezbollah's political influence in the South was growing, the Lebanese political situation changed again when the Syrian protectorate started to be contested. Popular tensions culminated in the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on February 14th, 2005, triggering the so-called Cedar Revolution, which gave birth to two political coalitions: the anti-Syrian March 14 Alliance, and the March 8 Alliance. The confrontation led to the victory of the pro-international forces and the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon.

Despite the group's future seemed to be full of perils, the 2006 war against Israel allowed it to recover its *status quo*. Hezbollah resisted the Israeli invasion, triggered by the group's attacks into Israeli territories (Myre et al. 2006: 1), thanks to the improvement of its military apparatus, and to the creation of a *liaison* with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). This gave the group the strength to face national crises as well as the intervention into the Syrian Civil War (Calculli 2018: 109). To handle the situation, Hezbollah had to come to terms with its ideology to enter the government in 2005, one year before the "July War". In the end, despite the LAF only furnished logistical support during the conflict, the Israeli withdrawal defined the ultimate political, military, and social consecration for Hezbollah. The logic of "resistance" was now perceived as the logic of the Lebanese state (Calculli 2018: 115). Moreover, with the acceptance of the UN Resolution 1701, which presupposed the return of the LAF and UN peacekeepers in southern Lebanon since 1982, the group further demonstrated its pragmatism. In this context, Hezbollah could count on a trans-confessional and trans-national legitimacy, showing to be the only entity capable of maintaining Lebanon's sovereignty, a point further reinforced as Lebanese politicians had plotted against Hezbollah during the War (Ibid.).

Until now, Hezbollah reinforced its *status quo* without triggering the *plethora* of confessional and political realities in the country. To conclude, Hezbollah's pragmatism can be found even in the justifications for entering the Syrian Civil War in 2011. Although the intervention triggered both Sunnis and Shias who saw a moral contradiction in the support of a regime that was violently repressing the Arab Uprisings altering them in a sectarian war, Hezbollah appealed to different concepts to avoid losing its power base. Particularly, it incorporated the logic of the preventive war/ war on terror, as a conflict against the *takfiris*[20], as well as the need to protect the Lebanese plural confessional reality, appealing to a sense of national unity (Ibid.: 134-136). Incorporating the international narrative[21], the group collaborated with international forces whereas exerting influence over the Lebanese socio-political landscape. This framework displays how certain conditions suggested the "power ideology trade-off" and affected the decision not to claim the Islamic State, rather reinforcing a pragmatism that allowed for Hezbollah's survival across the years.

3.2 The Ideology of the "Party of God"

> "...Friends, wherever you are in Lebanon, and no matter which thoughts you entertain […] we share with you our primary strategic goals […] of making Lebanon the burial place of American and Zionist projects. You [our friends] carry ideas that do not conform to Islam...but this does not preclude cooperation with you in order to achieve these goals..."[22].

On February 16th, 1985, Hezbollah presented itself to the Lebanese Muslim community. Years of international presence ultimately triggered Muslim militias against oppression, socio-political inequalities and the integration of southern Lebanon by Israel. Since the beginning, Hezbollah showed commitment to cooperation and pragmatism, given by the awareness of its leadership of

20 Radical Islamists who kill without distinction every Muslim who does not share their ideology – ISIS's rhetoric is an example.

21 These alignment with concepts typical of the international community will be deepened on later, relatively to the relationship between Hezbollah and the community.

22 J. Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents from the 1985 Open Letter to the 2009 Manifesto*, p. 44.

being a developing movement. As Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the current Secretary General of the group stated[23]: Hezbollah was still developing and was unable to act freely in the Lebanese context (Calculli 2018: 72). However, I state that the analysis of the fracture within the Shia movement Amal during the Lebanese Civil War is needed to understand Hezbollah's political vision. Amal's leader Nabih Berri was co-opted by Bashir Gemayel when he decided to take part in the "National Salvation Committee" not countering Israel. Consequently, his military chief, Husayn al-Musawi, mustered southern Shias calling for resistance (Qāsim 2010: 48-50), as Imam Musa al-Sadr did before him. Thus, Amal al-Islamiyya was born, but the fracture was not simply due to the decision not to counter Israel. Rather, it was a division between elitist and non-elitist, implying that Amal was compliant with the hegemonic design of the Christian state (Calculli 2018: 75). This reinforced the idea that the group's creation was a social and political necessity rather than a religious one. Protecting the south further reinforced Hezbollah's commitment to providing welfare, showing how the previous government empowered certain communities profiting from sectarian tensions. Also, the protection of the Lebanese territory displays a pragmatism that accommodated who was not moved by religious justifications. Particularly, this dialectic convinced a part of ex-communists that, despite being wary of its religious commitment, saw in Hezbollah the only entity capable of resisting the Israeli invasion (Ibid.: 76).

So far, Hezbollah's ideology calls for the demise of the international intervention, whereas appealing to a sense of unity by protecting the South and its communities. However, given the group's Shiite identity, its approach to religion must be properly analysed. In fact, to understand the decision not to declare the Islamic State, I assert that, besides historical and political contexts, it is important to consider how the state itself was theorized. To this end, the origin of a *modus operandi* which calls for the compromise can be seen again in the *risala al-maftuha* of 1985:

23 From an interview given to the newspaper "al-Safir" on 27 February 1992.

> "...We are an *umma* that abides by the message of Islam. We would like the oppressed and all the people to study this heavenly message because it is conducive to establishing justice, peace and tranquillity in this world […]. From this perspective, we do not want to impose Islam on anyone, like we do not want others to impose upon us their convictions and their political systems. We do not want Islam to govern Lebanon by force, as political Maronism is governing now"[24].

Although Hezbollah had been influenced by the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Khomeini's revolutionary model impacted differently in Lebanon, as the socio-political landscape diverged from the Iranian one. That is why the idea of the Islamic State remained vague and without proper references, rather becoming an ideological opposition to the confessional state sustained by the Christians and the international forces (Ibid.: 72).

The changes in the Lebanese socio-political landscape reinforce this position, as well as Hezbollah's commitment to the Islamic State and its "marriage" with the *muqawāma*. Indeed, after the implementation of the Tai'f agreements in 1989, the group adjusted its agenda, becoming a political party in 1992, despite before it had to convince its most extremist members. Among them, the first Secretary General, Subhi al-Tufaiily, was not compliant with the order emerging from the Tai'f agreements, and he was unwilling to accept any compromise, inviting the group not to enter politics and rather pursue the project of the "Islamic State" (Ibid.: 92). As a result, the Secretary was relieved of duty, and his successor Abbas al-Musawi adopted a more pragmatic approach. The fact that a militia was entering politics, displayed the need for survival in an adverse context. However, it also emphasised the value of sacrificing part of the ideology to carve out a space in politics and survive. Al-Musawi stated that Hezbollah was going to co-exist with the state, although without legitimizing it. In this way, the group could have changed what it perceived as a corrupted system working from an institutionalized position (al-Musawi in Saad-Ghorayeb 2002: 28). Moreover, al-Musawi contextualized the move as a sort of accommodation to gain a stronger position in the

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24 J. Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents from the 1985 Open Letter to the 2009 Manifesto*, p. 44.

future, a move that frames itself into the logic of the “power ideology trade-off”, reinforced by the claim that “an oppressive government is preferable to chaos” (Ibid.).

The Tai’f agreements allowed Hezbollah to reinforce the logic of resistance gaining more legitimacy. Indeed, Hezbollah stood among the other movements by linking its interest with that of southern Lebanon. Moreover, although initially, it preferred to help only Shias and its financiers, Hezbollah ended up providing services and security to the other religious communities in the area (Szekely 2012: 1). I argue that this shows again the intent to spread the logic of *muqawāma* rather than imposing the Islamic State: as ‘Ali Fayyad claimed, “the base of legitimacy of the “resistance” is not exclusively Islamic, rather it can be claimed by every religious confession or even from a secular perspective. Indeed, the “resistance” is perfectly consistent with international law” (Fayyad in Calculli 2018: 97). This resistance implies the security of the Lebanese population, whereas appeals to religion are scarcely referred to. Particularly, Saad-Ghorayeb claimed that Hezbollah presented ideological elements tied to the Lebanese nationalism (Saad-Ghorayeb 2002: 78). This gives birth to interesting implications, although the Islamic identity has always been strong in the group’s ideology. Thus, more than casting aside religion, Hezbollah’s leadership renounced to representing only the interests of the Shia population, adopting a much more inclusive logic that refuses the confessional state, and aims for a fairer national order not prone to the international influence (Calculli 2018: 98).

Hezbollah reinforced its position *vis a vis* the state and the international forces by appealing to a bigger Islamic *umma. T*hrough the logic of *muqawāma*, the group presented itself as the only defender of the Lebanese population. Through sacrifices and revisions of its ideology, Hezbollah survived and legitimized its position within the state, despite competing against it. This strategy paid well in the future challenges of the group.

3.3 Rebel Governance and Population

Countering the governance of the Lebanese confessional state as well as gaining support from the population, are the main reasons that led Hezbollah to develop a functional welfare providing system. The necessity to survive in an adverse context affected the leadership's decision-making processes that opted for the implementation of democratic governance practices. Thus, is interesting seeing how Hezbollah has incorporated several features sustained by the international community, providing services to the displaced communities of Lebanon while protecting the country's borders. The governance's model proposed by the group sees in welfare provision its main characteristic, showing how years of misgovernment by the Maronites led the country on the brink of collapse and contributed to spreading sectarian tensions.

Since its electoral participation, Hezbollah adopted a pragmatic approach proving its interests for the Shia population in southern Lebanon, competing against the state and Amal, that was delivering services to the poor (Szekely 2012: 1). Developing a strong reputation providing welfare to displaced citizens, building schools, hospitals, and distributing money, the group enlarged its power base, that became not limited to the Shiite community. The resonance of its social-service network allowed Hezbollah to mark itself as a "Lebanese" organization, willing to remove religious material where different confessional communities were living, or rebranding its means of communication to resemble other Lebanese parties (Ibid.). This approach, marked by the "power ideology trade-off", provided the group with popular support, which proved vital when facing internal and external menaces.

In this context, Hezbollah organizes its services arranging financial aid to its affiliates and families in need; providing medical care as well as an educational system based on Islam that supports the youth; using dedicated media to spread its message and contribute to the creation of the myth of an Islamic Lebanese population opposed to Israel (Azani 2013: 904-905). To exert these strategies, the group counts on a highly organized system of health and social-service organizations.

Particularly, this system is composed by the Social Unit, the Education Unit and the Islamic Health Unit (Hamzeh in Flanigan et al. 2009: 124). The Social Unit represents an umbrella for other social organizations, including the Jihad Construction Foundation that proved indispensable, after the 2006 Israeli attacks, in assessing the conflict's damages and rewarding reconstruction compensations to the population of Beirut and the south (Flanigan et al. 2009: 125). Moreover, the Islamic Health Unit became so effective that was asked to handle operations of several hospitals in the South and the Bekaa valley previously run by the government (Ibid.). Regarding culture, the group offered primary and secondary education at lower fees than their private counterparts, providing students with scholarships, financial assistance and study materials (Ibid.: 126). Besides, despite services were originally targeted for the Shiite community, the group's staff claimed that there were no restrictions especially in the South, where different sects, as well as political parties, lived in the same mixed areas (Ibid.: 128).

Hezbollah's appeal lied in a service system that was better structured compared to Lebanon's overtaxed one. People could rely on it because they did not have to seek favours from local politicians (Ibid.: 132). This allowed reinforcing the logic of resistance by intertwining the group's interests with the population's ones through the struggle for equality, and through the politicization of charity and welfare organizations to create a resistance movement (Ibid.: 133). Thus, it seems that service provision's ultimate goals are control of the population, support, and recruitment. However, welfare provision is not entirely based on the exchange of services for support. The logic of resistance implies the achievement of social justice, which can be reached only changing the sectarian system and providing social assistance (Cammett 2014: 1). When welfare is well distributed, it produces a sense of belonging to a community, which in turn leads to psychological benefits and stability (Ibid.). For this reason, Hezbollah's welfare system members tend to outline how services were provided on the basis of need rather than confessional identity (Flanigan et al. 2009: 129). I argue that this aspect further reinforces the idea that sacrificing part of the identity could have lead to better outputs.

To conclude, Hezbollah's pragmatism revolved around the combination of its informal diplomacy and its service provision system. After the Israeli withdrawal in the 2000s, the inclusion of a wider portion of the population into the logic of resistance was one of the main commitment of its leadership. Testimony to this, Christians living in the districts of Jazzin, Bint Jbeil, and Hasbaya among others, were fearing for punishment for having supported Israel. Surprisingly, the chiefs of the Party went door to door to reassure them that Hezbollah would have treated everyone in the same way, whereas they were Shiite, Sunnis, or Christians, reinforcing in this way the logic of protecting the Lebanese identity (Calculli 2018: 99).

Through the management of the population and the sectarian divide, Hezbollah's ideological path changed over time and it has been reframed to get socio-political support. Sacrificing part of its own identity, the group was legitimized by a power base that profited from its ideological and financial commitment. At this point, I support that these conditions display the inconvenience of declaring the Islamic State after years of politics of inclusion.

3.4 The Relationship with the LAF and the Alignment with Michel Aoun

An understanding of the political project of the "Party of God" cannot be divided from its relationship with regular and irregular actors operating in Lebanon. The group had to compete with multiple militias, but examples of Hezbollah's pragmatism are well seen in its alignment with other groups. Despite this was the result of accommodations during challenging periods, Hezbollah intersected a relationship with the LAF and other intelligence and armed actors by adopting features typical of the state while renouncing to part of its agenda. This connection proved vital when Israel invaded Lebanon in 2006 as well as for aligning with the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) of Michel Aoun.

This approach was imposed by the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, after the Cedar Revolution and the confrontation between March 14 and Mach 8 Alliance. The situation was

potentially fatal for Hezbollah, affected both from the loss of a fundamental ally and from the pressures of the U.S. in the context of the "war on terror". Thus, as Nasrallah stated[25], when the group entered the government in 2005, it was mainly to counter these pressures as well as to protect the resistance from possible attacks by the government (Calculli 2018: 110). Furthermore, Hezbollah was trying to extend its idea of state free from the international influence to the other Lebanese institutions, among which there was the LAF. While doing this, the group re-invented its logic erasing the religious valency of its concepts, connecting them to the coexistence of different confessional realities, intending to gain support from Shias, Sunnis, and Christians as well as people from the leftist realm of Lebanese politics (Ibid.: 110-111). The group even gave a new meaning to the concept of *jihad*. What was theorized as a religious struggle towards the Islamic State, was now being reshaped as a right to the self-defence of the country's displaced communities. In this way, Hezbollah appealed instead to universally recognized concepts such as borders' and people's defence. By entering politics, Hezbollah disposed of the means to expand its influence, appointing public officials and new alliances with which the group could overcome the confessional reality of Lebanon (Ibid.: 112).

With the "July War" in 2006, the alignment with other national forces provided the possibility to expand the influence on the LAF. Although the latter did not have any major role in the confrontation[26], it experienced the divide between supporters of Hezbollah's plan of national defence and supporters of the March 14 Alliance (Ibid.: 115). Israeli withdrawal and Hezbollah's "victory" proved that the group was finally legitimized by the population and the militias that believed in the logic of *muqawāma*. Still, is with the acceptance of the UN Resolution 1701, welcomed by the government, that Hezbollah showed that it could handle challenges to its authority without resorting to violence by accepting the return of the LAF and the UN peacekeepers in southern Lebanon (Ibid.). Moreover, starting in 2005 and reinforced by the 2006 victory, Hezbollah

25 Interview for Russia Today, 17 April 2012.
26 Partly because sidelined by Hezbollah, partly because the Government wanted to outline how the conflict was more a war between Israel and the "Party of God".

designated several personalities into the main institutions of Lebanon and the LAF, appointing its public officials by patronage relationships and sects. Among them, Abbas Ibrahim, chief of the General Directorate of General Security, proved that through the logic of resistance it would have been possible to align with intelligence and armed actors (Ibid.: 117).

Weighting ideology whereas rebranding the *jihad* proved vital for Hezbollah when it came to intertwining strategic relationships. Nonetheless, the alignment with the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) of Michel Aoun further reinforced its tie with the LAF. Aoun was the Lebanese army's chief during the Civil War, but it was constrained to exile because of the Syrian role in the conflict and the post-war protectorate. With the Tai'f Agreements, the reconstruction of the Lebanese Defence forces saw the inclusion of several personalities loyal to Aoun (Ibid.: 119). With the Syrian withdrawal in 2005, the ex-leader came back to Lebanon and a new Christian constituency was created around the FPM. However, the March 14 Alliance was contrary to his return. Conscious of this position, Aoun decided to ally with Hezbollah through the "Memorandum of Understanding" on February 6th, 2006, characterized by the *muqawāma* as the connecting point between Hezbollah and the FPM (Aoun in Calculli 2018: 118). Consequently, officials still loyal to Aoun within the LAF greeted the return of their chief and the Christian-Shia alignment (Calculli 2018: 120). Finally, the penetration of *muqawāma* into the LAF assured a new position for Hezbollah, that was capable of managing national crisis and future pressures. After entering politics and due to the 2006 victory, the group managed to build a constituency that was trans-confessional and extended both to Defence and intelligence forces. I argue that Hezbollah profited from challenging conditions by trading the Islamic State project for power and resilience within the Lebanese state, whereas the exportation of the *muqawāma* facilitated the process. In this framework, the inclusion of multiple political and confessional realities united against the Israeli presence not only avoided confrontations with other armed actors. They also implicitly discarded the benefits of self-determination.

3.5 From Resistance to Agency: The Relationship with the International Community

Until this point, Hezbollah re-framed its ideology to survive and being legitimized by the Lebanese population. Entering politics led the group to tacitly renounce, or at least postpone, the project of the Islamic State theorized in the *risala al-maftuha,* leaving space to a logic that could provide support once it had shown the discrepancies of the Maronite's government. However, although Hezbollah has shown commitment to trading its ideological and political programme for power, it has made clear its position by rejecting the American influence and the Israeli presence in southern Lebanon. The MNF bombings in 1983 are the first violent actions that opened a long-lasting tug-of-war between different countries and the group. Moreover, the confrontations with Israel are practical examples of how Hezbollah refused any influence inside Lebanon's border, despite the group exerted the Israeli pressure to build up its strategic relationships whereas gaining legitimization.

Notwithstanding, the group's logic ultimately cut out a space for it in the international scenario, especially if one refers to the justifications for the intervention in the Syrian Civil War. Despite Lebanon's economic recession and the harsh criticisms both from Sunnis and Shias following the intervention, the group proved once again capable of upgrading its concepts to justify the backing of a regime that was violently repressing the population's demands. Particularly, it did so by reconstructing the concept of *muqawāma* along with the need to counter the *takfiris* that threatened Muslims and Christians living near the Syrian border and by appealing to the defence of the multi-faced confessional reality of Lebanon (Calculli 2018: 137-139). Through the discourse of the extremist threat opposed to the Syrian and Lebanese populations, Hezbollah was trying to connect its interests with that of different confessional realities, adopting a rhetoric that was common to that of counter-terrorism, and reinforced by several attacks of anti-Assad rebels backed by the Islamists. However, with ISIS's terrorist attacks abroad, Hezbollah found the perfect condition to finally reinforce its position within the international community. When in 2015 Europe began to experience

the violence of the Islamic State, multiple countries had to change their agendas and this led to an alignment between the U.S., Europe, and Russia that aimed for the demise of ISIS and its allies (Ibid.: 140). By switching from countering Assad to facing the Islamic State, the international community reinforced the logic that Hezbollah was developing. Indeed, Hezbollah outlined the need to protect the people from the menace of terrorism and managed in this way to align with the international community by exerting the pillars of the "war on terror". Opposing itself to the extremists, the group reified the demise of the Islamic State project, because it was entering a rhetoric that implied the defence of multiple religions and especially the state's sovereignty. Hezbollah was now perceived as a regular force rather than an unrecognised actor, or even a terrorist movement. Indeed, the "internationalist" language chose by the group led to a collaboration with Russia on behalf of Hezbollah's capacity of conducting guerrilla warfare against the Islamic State (Lieber 2016: 1), as well as cooperation with western intelligence services such as the CIA (Calculli 2018: 141).

In conclusion, despite still being countered by several countries such as the U.S., Hezbollah was now perceived as an entity capable of defending the state's borders as well as its sovereignty by participating to the global counterinsurgency strategy (Ibid.). The interesting fact is that these traits are typical of the international community, and are sought when it must assess the democratic commitment of the entity that wishes for international legal personality. Moreover, the demise of the sectarian project further reinforced the impression that Hezbollah was fostering a democratic vision of the confessional realities living in Lebanon, trying to create a link especially between Muslims and Christians against the *takfiris*. Although the history of the group is studded with tensions with the international community, the adoption of several of its traits cannot fail to raise certain considerations. It is clear that Hezbollah's elites have traded their ideals in exchange for compliance, and that this strategy has extended to the relationship with international entities. The group has continuously re-negotiated its position between the state and the movement of resistance by becoming part of the government and building a new *status quo* given by the sacrifice of its

ideological and political agenda. Without seeking recognition openly, the same strategy has been adopted with the international community and has led to a proficient collaboration with different countries in the context of the new war on terror. I state that, besides the aforementioned ones, these conditions explain why the "Party of God" has renounced to the project of the Islamic State, rather becoming part of the Lebanese one.

Conclusion

This work aimed to interpret what conditions may favour or not the self-determination for non-state armed groups. The cases of ISIS and Hezbollah have been used to ease the analysis, whereas rebel governance has demonstrated how the insurgents counter the state by showing its weaknesses. I argued that, in line with its ideology, the actor chooses its approach towards the population, armed groups, and the international community. According to the "power ideology trade-off" and the "extremist discount" (Keister et al. 2014: 13-16) armed militias decide if sacrificing ideology to gain compliance and align with the international community, or if exerting violence challenging the practices advocated by the UN. The latter is pivotal because it assesses the self-determination claim and it weights the actor's strategy as well as its commitment to democratic practices of governance.

Understanding how the "power ideology trade-off" and the "extremist discount" influenced the self-determination implied the same analysis for two chapters. Using the same criteria, I argue that is possible to compare the strategies enacted by ISIS and Hezbollah, always considering how much their different regional and political contexts affected the creation of these armed militias and facilitated or not the self-determination. Thus, retracing their approaches can further shed light on what reasons led Baghdadi to declare the Islamic State, and what led Hezbollah to be incorporated into the state's structure.

Firstly, the historical context proved how the Iraqi/Syrian and Lebanese social fabrics were dismantled by the international influence and the immobility of the Arab states in generating national cohesion. The succession of weak and sectarian governments led to the failure to export the Weberian-type of state theorized by the West, and consequently to confrontations for power and authority. In this context, both ISIS and Hezbollah reinforced their ranks exerting two different types of pragmatism. For ISIS, the "fragility of the state structures in Iraq and Syria" as well as "regional and global rivalries" were the keys for its surge (Gerges 2016: 49). I state that jihadists

exerted the “extremist discount” taking advantage of this situation by infiltrating and exasperating the sectarian divide within Iraq and Syria. Learning from multiple oppositions since its formation, the group has grown in a context that favoured the rhetoric of *jihad.* The adoption of violence was somewhat justified to the eyes of the displaced Sunnis who were disempowered by Shiite governments backed by part of the international community. Moreover, the actor profited from the clash of interests between countries backing Assad and the ones backing the rebels in Syria. Even when several states took the arms against the group, their scarce commitment to deploy a contingent against the Islamic State ended up bolstering ISIS’s “narrative of invincibility”, allowing it to draw more recruits than ever before (Ibid.). Oppositely, Lebanon’s context was characterized by Maronite’s domination which triggered the Muslim communities and especially the Shiite one, who felt persecuted by the consensus between the U.S., the Christians, and Israel. Instead of exasperating the situation, Hezbollah’s ideology became the mean to reject the confessional state and rather create a “nationalist” logic. Although the conflict between the various actors was favouring the sectarian divide, Hezbollah’s pragmatism lied in developing the logic of *muqawāma* as the need to defend the Lebanese borders as well as the totality of the Lebanese population (Calculli 2018: 98). In this way, it has managed to act as a state entity whereas entering the state’s institutions by sacrificing part of its ideology. This approach is mainly consistent with the “power ideology trade-off”.

Regarding ideology, ISIS’s extremism paved the way for the self-determination, whereas Hezbollah has opted for a pragmatic approach. ISIS has been clear on the steps to achieve the caliphate by offering a strict interpretation of the Sharia and outlining the clarity of its ideological and strategic message. The laws of the Islamic State are framed within the *Qu’ran* and the interpretation of its Imams, whereas every action is justified by an ideological explanation that goes back to seventh-century Arabia (Gerges 2016: 34-41). Moreover, the ways in which ISIS abandoned al-Qaeda Central’s orbit are clear examples of how the “extremist discount” impacted on the group’s leaders and the purge of opponents of the caliphate’s resurrection. I assert that ISIS rejects

peaceful coexistence together with the rules of international society, and in doing so it aims to gain legitimacy from the Sunnis who see in the caliphate the last guardian of their identity, a position that reinforces the ideological cohesiveness of its ranks and erases the need to be integrated in any kind of system. Conversely, the "Party of God" has been created as a rebel movement, indeed a movement of resistance, which uses religious ideology as a sort of shield against the confessional Christian state backed by the international forces. Religion serves as the counterpart of the Christian-U.S.-backed state but is not the heart of Hezbollah's ideology. Indeed, although the aspiration to the Islamic State is mentioned on the *risala al-maftuha*, the group's elites were conscious of the vagueness of this project, whereas the references to religion were designed to develop a sense of cohesion based on nationality rather than sect (Calculli 2018: 72). I assert that the group's pragmatism is in line with the "power ideology trade-off", especially if one considers the deposition of the first Secretary General of the group, Subhi al-Tufaiily, because of its extremist vision of the Shia/Sunni divide and its project to develop the Islamic State.

As I have argued, depending on the ideological commitment, the popular will is managed through coercion or service provision. On one hand, ISIS proved capable of using violence when it came to govern and organize people. Although offering better services than the ones of the previous governments, taxes' collection has proved vital for the group which exerts punishments when the *zakat* is not paid. Its ideological distance from the Iraqi/Syrian average civilian ultimately facilitated the "extremist discount", the competition with democratic practices of the international community and the massacres of innocent people. Furthermore, the scarce resonance of these acts within the international debate reinforced the "invincibility" of ISIS and allowed it to change the political culture of its territories prioritizing "warfare over welfare" (Gerges 2016: 280). The Islamic State linked its interests with that of agrarian and tribal elements by empowering Sunnis living in rural areas and building a power base that reinforces its uncompromising dialectic. On the other hand, entering politics allowed Hezbollah's governance to be based on welfare provision and inclusion affected by the "power ideology trade-off". Providing more efficient services than the Lebanese

Government's ones, Hezbollah showed its willingness to face social problems as well as to sideline its Shiite identity by adopting a welfare system that provides support to every religious community, especially in southern Lebanon. As ISIS did, Hezbollah has built a strong power base by showing the state weaknesses from a legitimate position, although with a different approach given by the sacrifice of its ideology. I claim that this approach is significantly in line with the practices advocated by the international community, and given that it is built on the inclusion of different sects, it makes the return to the Islamic State highly dangerous for the group's resilience.

The analysis of the group's relationships with other militias supported an inner understanding of the reasons for declaring, or not, territorial sovereignty. The clash for power in Syria indicated an ideological and political divide between ISIS's project and that of its "parent" organization al-Qaeda, bolstered by the death of bin Laden. Moreover, al-Nusra's unexpected surge proved that ISIS feared to lose its authority and the chances to expand the caliphate. The bridge between al-Nusra and al-Qaeda represented a menace to ISIS's integrity and legitimacy, that tried to re-knit its ranks by stating that al-Nusra was an extension of ISI in Syria. Consequently, Joulani's and Zawahiri's positions stood for the incompatibility of ISIS's extremism with their slower project of reinforcement. I support that for Baghdadi the declaration of the Islamic State was a way to reify the group's *status quo*, taking the control of the jihadist global movement and replacing Zawahiri's leadership, showing even more that the conflict between al-Qaeda and al-Nusra was philosophical and ideological and not just a power-struggle for territory and authority (Adnani 2014: 1). On the contrary, the Lebanese political landscape gave Hezbollah the conditions to prove capable of intertwining a relationship with the LAF by continuously re-framing its projects. The need to get stronger when the international forces were threatening its resilience, led the group to enter the government and develop the logic of resistance by linking its interests with that of the Lebanese army as well as the intelligence. Hezbollah exported the *muqawāma* as the necessity to defend the Lebanese population and the country's borders by renouncing to the first concept of *jihad*, legitimizing itself and adopting traits typical of the state without being recognized as such. When

the group allied with Michel Aoun, it proved capable of going beyond the sectarian divide and convinced part of the LAF about the legitimacy of its project. Entering politics represented a socialization of the armed group inside the institutional and regulatory system (Dionigi in Calculli 2018: 94), preventing the party's enemies from hampering the movement. Thus, when Hezbollah obtained a trans-confessional constituency, the pursuit of the Islamic State might have become undesirable.

Finally, the relationship with the international community is the last relevant category in understanding the self-determination. As I have mentioned, the total war waged by the Islamic State refers to the “near enemy”. However, the group exerted violence outside of its borders by absorbing the logic of the “far enemy” typical of al-Qaeda. The attacks on Western soil have been perceived as a strategy to divert the attention of military and strategic losses. Nevertheless, this outreach campaign indicates that ISIS reinforces its worldwide constituency by challenging the international community, attacking powerful countries while bringing terror to the heart of Europe and the U.S. (Gerges 2016: 46). Indeed, ISIS reinforced its appeal towards displaced Sunnis and wannabe jihadists throughout the world, entering the international scenario by affecting the agendas of many countries. I argue that pursuing the “extremist discount”, in a context crafted by wars and power struggles, is for ISIS a way to display its capability of gaining international personality by virtue of the menace it poses. Thus, the self-determination is meant to gain trust from the power base and to recruit thousands of potential militants and skilled professionals who believe in ISIS’s project. Regarding Hezbollah, the group has always been involved in countering the American and Israeli influence over Lebanon. Nevertheless, profiting from the Syrian Civil War, Hezbollah incorporated the dialectics of the war on terror and the state’s sovereignty. By connecting the logic of resistance with the defence of the confessional pluralism of Lebanon, the group proved capable of incorporating the traits advocated and assessed by the international community (Calculli 2018: 137-139). In this respect, Hezbollah managed to be perceived as a regular force rather than a violent militia, tacitly showing that the pursuit of the Islamic State was sidelined in its political and

ideological project. The actor also profited from the terrorist attacks on Western soil in 2015 by addressing the *takfiris* as the main menace to counter, showing closeness to Christians and reinforcing its logic of inclusiveness (Ibid.). I state that the "power ideology trade-off", affected by the particular historical and socio-political contexts of Lebanon and Syria, provided the "Party of God" with the means for being legitimized both to the eyes of the state and several members of the international community.

Understanding the conditions to claim or not territorial sovereignty implied a deep case-study analysis that has shown how ISIS's and Hezbollah's approaches are guided by different variables, respectively the historical/political context of their countries as well as their ideologies. The creation of Baghdadi's caliphate occurred at a moment when the Arab state system was facing internal and external trials. The pragmatism of ISIS's leadership lied in exasperation of the sectarian divide within the already torn Iraq and Syria and in the creation of an image that provided a large constituency composed by displaced Sunnis worldwide (Ibid.: 228). ISIS rejects any peaceful coexistence and the norms of the international community by resorting to violence and avoiding compromises, seeking legitimation within its power base and especially rural and abandoned areas, using religion as the tool to maintain power. Othman bin Abdel Rahman al-Tamini, one of ISIS's ideological theorists, stated that this military and political control facilitated the declaration of the Islamic State because ISIS's jihadists are better acquainted with the circumstances they found in Iraq and Syria by eliminating agency and popular will (al-Tamini in Gerges 2016: 216). The ideological clash with al-Nusra and al-Qaeda further paved the way for the self-determination. I assert that by adopting the extremist approach, ISIS has united plenty of enemies against, whereas it has rejected the "international"-state system by offering a revolutionary alternative that is based on the Sunni Islamic Identity, not on the state sovereignty (Gerges 2016: 286). That is why ISIS is the only jihadist group to have declared territorial sovereignty. Oppositely, Hezbollah faced well different conditions in Lebanon. The leadership's pragmatism lied in trading part of the Shiite identity and political agenda to develop a logic of resistance and inclusion adapting to the state's

role. Hezbollah contested and entered the fractures of the Christian government from a legitimate position by adopting the rhetoric of power typical of the state while reinforcing its military wing (O'Brien in Calculli 2018: 44). The leverage on the defence of the Lebanese sovereignty gave Hezbollah the possibility to negotiate its position rather than imposing it through the self-determination, building a *status quo* that balanced the ambiguity of a group that was moving from the political realm to the armed one. In this context, I claim that the self-determination would have had a negative value for the group's stability, given that the Islamic identity was rather sacrificed to construe the logic of resistance, profiting from the Lebanese socio-political context. Eventually, Hezbollah managed to be part of the state, achieving the complementarity between the state and the non-state entity (Calculli 2018: 142). The legitimacy and the resilience then do not come from the international community, but rather from being part of a concept (the state) that is already sovereign. Beyond what is said about Hezbollah and its ideology, the group will always act more as a rational (and political) actor rather than a religious one (Norton 1998: 147-158; Norton 1999: 1-35), floating in a position that facilitates the "power ideology trade-off" and allows the reinforcement of its trans-confessional power base, besides erasing the need to be incorporated as a state entity in the international system.

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