RESEARCH ARTICLE

"No One Is Prophet in His Own Land"? Hezbollah and the Transnational Constitution of Non-State Armed Organizations

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ABSTRACT:

This paper deals with the transnational relations of non-state armed organizations. The question is why the organizationally more successful armed groups tend to revolve around transnational networks. The hypothesis is that it has to do with the way in which they generate cohesion within their combat units. Armed groups, especially clandestine ones, tend to co-opt parochial micro-solidarity networks for the purpose of maximizing small-unit military cohesion. At the level of the wider organization, however, this entails a significant risk: societal micro-cleavages between local networks tend to create rifts within the wider organization. This is especially the case for groups that initially have no access to centralized bureaucracies able to arbitrate local struggles through anonymous rule. The paper argues that their leaders can in this context harness transnational relations to distance themselves (physically and symbolically) from these struggles, thus allowing them to arbitrate these struggles from a position of "neutrality". The article focuses on Lebanese Hezbollah and its transnational clerical networks. In developing the argument, it highlights that the religious nature of these clerical networks was only indirectly a source of organizational cohesion. What matters is that their long-distance character allowed weaving together previously opposed shortrange networks.

KEYWORDS:

Hezbollah; Lebanon; organizational cohesion; religious networks; transnational relations

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Introduction

This paper deals with the transnational relations of non-state armed organizations. Focusing on Lebanese Hezbollah, it makes two interlinked claims.

The first has to do with the impact of transnational relations on armed groups. It has previously been argued convincingly that foreign state-sponsorship, transborder safe-havens, transnational smuggling networks, and diaspora-support might facilitate the militarization of political conflicts (Salehyan 2009; Salehyan, Gleditsch and Cunningham 2011; Checkel 2013). What has been highlighted less often is how transnational networks impact the organizational trajectories of the groups involved. This article argues that under certain conditions, the long-distance solidarities that develop in transnational networks can be instrumental to the emergence of hierarchical organizations from more fluid groups[1]. Indeed, these networks might allow armed factions to overcome local micro-cleavages that threaten to undermine them. This idea is rather counterintuitive since transnational relations are often presented as centrifugal and polycentric in nature (Bigo 2016), and rightly so. This is especially the case in the context of civil wars in which multiple state-patrons might increase fragmentation by manipulating social boundaries between and within armed factions. What I show, however, is that "transnational brokerage" (Adamson 2013) can also, in some cases, facilitate bureaucratic control and organizational coercion, and as such can play an important role in transforming lose networks of combatants into consolidated organizations.

The second claim pertains to the role played by religious affiliations in political-military mobilization. Tilly and Tarrow have observed that "reproducing a disciplined military organization depends on extensive brokerage and internal coordination. Religion and religious affiliations often serve to solder this internal coordination" (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 171). This observation describes rather well the emergence of Hezbollah during the Lebanese civil war. The question is, however, why religious affiliations are ideally placed to play this role. The answer is far from evident. Standard narratives focus on particular theologies, the purported primordial nature of confessional solidarity-groups, or the role played by powerful state-patrons. Of course, the complexity of religions—connecting solidarity networks, theological doctrines, collective rituals, and behavioral rules—implies that they might operate in different ways. Existing explanations, however, do not address the core of Tilly and Tarrow's observation: the role played by religious affiliations in soldering internal coordination and facilitating brokerage. I therefore focus on the role played by the structural properties of Shia networks in setting up Hezbollah, and the transnational and long-distance nature of these networks will play a crucial role in my explanation.

At the theoretical level, my argument is rooted in Michael Mann's analysis of social power networks (1986). Mann has highlighted that the organizational importance of (proto-)ideologies is not only linked to their content but also to the networks that they establish and reproduce through material circulations (of texts, rituals, objects, messages). As Mann claims, "we must make central the *infrastructure of ideological power*" (Mann 1986, 310). He highlights, for example, that the rapid rise of Christianity as a political force was linked to the fact that it allowed for the Roman empire to overcome its original inability to integrate politically the diverse groups over which it ruled. Not only did Christianity explicitly appeal to all human communities, but the long-distance circulations of its written message created a transversal human infrastructure that cut across the fragmented power networks that divided the empire. In particular, "specific networks of *literacy* were of great importance" (Mann 1986, 310). The political importance of Christianity was hence primarily linked to its network properties (and these cannot be entirely disconnected from its content as a proselytic religion).

[1] Transnational and long-distance relations are of course not the same thing. They are however here linked since we are here interested in symbolic distance rather than geographical distance *per se*. To the extent that a transnational connection transcends an international border, its transnationality symbolically establishes or accentuates its long-distance character.

Drawing on a similar intuition, Daniel Nexon's "relational-institutionalist" analysis of transnational religious dynamics in early modern Europe brings us closer to our case. Nexon highlights how the Reformation offered new opportunities for radical contention of central authorities in the composite states of Europe. To do this, it did not need to create new sites of political contention. The fact that it established transversal and trans-local connections between previously parochial contestations was enough. Once a movement of contention adopted the reformist precepts circulating throughout Europe, its leaders were able to coordinate their actions within the extended framework of exchange thus created. Transnational networks of literacy provided the connective tissue drawing together diverse, geographically disparate, movements of resistance, thus potentially defeating the authorities' divide-and-rule policies that had previously prevailed (Nexon 2009). Similar processes can be shown to have operated in the emergence of Hezbollah, dynamics that on large can be understood without referring to the content of any particular belief system.

This article's hypothesis is that in the wider Middle East, for reasons that will be detailed, transnationalization and the organizational consolidation of armed groups have tended to go hand in hand. I do not believe this to be a feature peculiar to the wider Middle East, however I do not wish to generalize without the necessary research to back up the argument. For the time being, my claim is therefore limited to this macro-region. Moreover, the structural factors involved are not universal either. They are linked to the existence of strong micro-solidarity networks that, on the one hand, constitute an asset for armed groups pursuing small unit cohesion (Shils and Janowitz 1948; Malešević 2017; Malešević and Dochartaigh 2018); on the other hand, can become a liability since the micro-cleavages between them can undermine large-scale political cohesion (Kalyvas 2003). Under these scope conditions, transnational factors however often have the opposite effect of exacerbating conflicts between pre-existing groups. It is hence important to trace the processes through which the integrative, rather than disintegrative, effect came to prevail in the case of Hezbollah.

Empirically, the analysis in this article is based on a process-tracing of the role played by long-distance relations in laying the foundations for the emergence of Hezbollah as a bureaucratized political-military organization. Three social mechanisms are involved in this process. First, political-religious leaders use long-distance relations to break away from local micro-cleavages and refocus on broader alliances. In Tillyan terms (Tilly 2003), this mechanism can be described as local "boundary de-activation". Second, the charisma the leaders build up throughout the networks of transnational Shiadom allows them to engage in brokerage (the action of connecting previously disconnected or opposed sites; see: Tilly and Tarrow 2015) between local communities and thus overcome potentially paralyzing micro-cleavages. This is the mechanism of transnational brokerage. Third, the ability to combine the abovementioned two mechanisms leads the armed group to outcompete or absorb its less cohesive rivals. This is the mechanism of (interorganizational) competition. If I manage to establish how the transnational relations of a select few Lebanese Shia leaders enabled them to broker power between diverse sites of mobilization in Lebanon, and thus ultimately to outcompete like-minded armed formations, the objective of my process-tracing will be achieved.

In this regard, my empirical study of the emergence of Hezbollah needs to trace how the transnational circulation of religious elites built charismatic authority far beyond shortrange networks, thus allowing to overcome the micro-cleavages that beset the emerging "front of resistance". The "combatant-clerics" (*ulema mujahedeen*) who engaged in brokerage will be of particular interest here. Their charismatic authority is ultimately what contributed to the transformation of the emerging "network of networks" into an increasingly bureaucratized organization.

Process-tracing is here a particularly apposite methodology since I am dealing with one single case-study. Indeed, I do not argue that there is a general causal relation between transnational circulation and the consolidation of armed groups. Rather, I hypothesize that the case of Hezbollah involved a causal process of

this type because of the contextual and contingent concatenation of the three aforementioned mechanisms. I also identify the contextual factors that were important in this regard. Occasionally, however, I draw on examples from other organizations in the Middle East and Central Asia. From a methodological point of view these examples serve to highlight that my hypothesis was not induced from the exploratory study of Hezbollah. It was rather proposed on the basis of the theoretically informed discussion of these other organizations and of the wider literature on them. Given its limited scope, this article focuses on the formative years of Hezbollah, roughly from the beginning of the 1980s until the party's active involvement in electoral politics in 1992, although some examples are also drawn from the later period. I focus on the facts that are deemed uncontroversial in the relevant scientific literature.

The demonstration proceeds as follows. In the first section, I set out the puzzle. The development of many clandestine armed groups is hampered by a central dilemma. Their cooptation of pre-existing local networks into their military units is a factor of combat-efficiency. This initial asset, however, rapidly becomes an obstacle for organizations seeking to expand beyond the local level. Indeed, micro-solidarity networks tend to be in competition with one another. Any resolution of the resulting feuds needs to be brokered by third parties that are seen as neutral (Dorronsoro 2021). The relative exteriority of leaders emerging from transnational clerical networks can come to play a crucial role here. In the second section, I highlight how Hezbollah emerged from a terrain that was beset by the dilemma mentioned above, with strong but small-scale solidarity networks, numerous micro-cleavages, and a resulting difficulty to mobilize largely in the face of the Israeli invasion. In this context, "transnational brokers" (Adamson 2013) would prove very useful. In the third and final section I show how the early organizational development of Hezbollah highlights the implementation of transnational brokerage as a way of overcoming internal divisions.

1. Military micro-solidarities and political organizations: the dilemma of organizational cohesion-expansion

Fiona B. Adamson has highlighted how "transnational brokerage" played an important role in the advent of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey in the 1980s (Adamson 2013). Here she is referring to the involvement of actors who come from "inside the people" ("fellow Kurds") but "outside the state" (residing outside of Turkey, mostly in Europe) in political brokerage to create a relatively unified organization out of distinct sites of contention. Focusing on the role of detribalized Pashtun refugees schooled in Pakistani madrassas, Barnett Rubin made a similar argument to explain the Taliban victory over other Mujahedeen groups in Afghanistan in 1996, only two years after the emergence of the Taleban (Rubin 2002). The present article develops a comparable argument in relation to Hezbollah. In order to understand the causal process involved, two questions need to be focused on in this section: First, why is brokerage such a crucial factor to explain the success of some non-state armed groups? And, second, why and under what conditions might transnational circulations improve the ability of political-military entrepreneurs to act as brokers?

1.1. From military units to large-scale political organizations: When micro-solidarity is a double-edged sword

So-called "primary group associations", i.e. small-scale groups based on face-to-face relations and strong affective bonds, are generally considered a crucial asset for military units. Many sociological studies highlight that the willingness on the part of combatants to fight and die is at least in part linked to the strong emotional bonds that develop within such groups (Shils and Janowitz 1948; Collins 2009; Malešević 2017). "Primary groups" can to a certain extent be crafted by military commanders amongst their recruits. It is, however, more

cost-efficient to co-opt pre-existing micro-solidarity groups: people who have known each other for a long time, from school, their village, or family-reunions. This is very much the case for modern armies. It is even more the case for clandestine armed groups for which the recruitment of micro-solidarity networks has the additional advantage of helping to prevent infiltration from government agents (Parkinson 2013; Della Porta 2013; Malthaner 2018).

In this regard, Hezbollah has historically shown a pragmatic ability to make use of the particularly strong bonds within different Lebanese Shia families when this has been deemed militarily useful. Clans such as the Mugniyeh or the Hamadi, have been made to overlap with segments of Hezbollah's Special Security Apparatus in order to increase operational security (Ranstorp 2007, 308). More broadly, and according to the few studies available on this topic, its general combat forces are also organized in a way that put members of same families, localities and/or villages in the same units. Military training not only maintains pre-existing micro-solidarities but also strengthens them by socializing fighters into small and intimate groups (*majmua*) (Malthaner 2011, 213). Fighters martyred during the same operation often carry the same family name and/or come from the same village (Eisenstadt and Bianchi 2017). Originally the defensive nature of the resistance against Israeli occupation could explain the importance of local solidarity networks. However, even in the context of the war in Syria—an external war—the role of family connections and village recruitment plays an important role (Eisenstadt and Bianchi 2017). This suggests that this type of recruitment is designed to maximize small-unit cohesion.

What is an advantage for small-scale tactical units might, however, be a drawback for organizations seeking to expand and reach a critical mass in the face of an overwhelming enemy. Frequently, there are conflicts or rivalries between pre-existing "primary groups" over land, power-positions, or other matters. This is what Kalyvas refers to as micro-cleavages (Kalyvas 2003). The more such networks are co-opted into the military organization, the more infighting risks undermining organizational cohesion. There will then be a trade-off between co-opting micro-solidarity networks to ensure small-unit (military) cohesion, on the one hand, and an organizational growth compatible with large-scale political and organizational cohesion on the other. This is especially the case in societies in which micro-solidarity networks are based on kinship, historically inherited characteristics or are territorially bound. Indeed, such networks tend to give rise to closed groups with collective interests, rather than open-ended and cross-cutting individual networks. Any political-military organization aspiring to become more than a militarized "primary group association" will in these conditions face a major dilemma. The acuteness of this dilemma varies with context. In rural or peri-urban societies, where geographical mobility is reduced and micro-cleavages are historically embedded, it becomes especially acute.

In some of the Shia-majority regions of Lebanon where Hezbollah recruits, especially in the rural areas of the Beqaa valley, the fragmentation of the partly clan-based society runs counter to Hezbollah's attempt to pacify social relations and mobilize the population broadly (Hamzeh 1994; Daher 2012). Hezbollah's approach is two-pronged in this regard. On the one hand, it maintains the best possible relations with the clans in the Beqaa. It is for example careful to recruit both from the rival Jaafar and Shamas clans in order not to vex anyone of them. It refrains from forcefully disarming them despite the significant arsenals they hold outside of Hezbollah control, and sometimes use against each other. On the other hand, Hezbollah-linked Sharia courts have largely superseded the clan-based jurisdictions in the non-violent arbitration of local feuds. Since Hezbollah has the capacity to coercively enforce its Sharia courts' decisions, its military capacity most likely contributes to its ability to arbitrate social conflicts (Hamzeh 1994). In the 1980s, however, feuds and factionalism represented a formidable problem.

How can the same social configuration, that of local micro-solidarity networks, be simultaneously used and defused? This is the question that political-military entrepreneurs need to ask themselves. A longstanding

practice for overcoming this dilemma is to bring in rulers from outside. Complex chiefdoms have historically been able to constitute large empires, sometimes in a very short time span and without major battles, because subjection to "foreign" rulers can be a relatively cost-efficient way of overcoming fratricidal struggles for the protagonists of the latter (Baechler 2005). Having no history of competitive infighting, external rulers might be more likely to reconcile local communities than the leaders directly involved in internal strife. In the modern world dominated by the norm of national sovereignty, any legitimation of external rule is, however, unlikely to succeed (Olsson 2013). Other ways of turning "exteriority" into a resource for internal coordination then need to be found. Evans-Pritchard has noted how the Nuer in Sudan in the first half of the twentieth century brought in charismatic prophets from peripheral and remote lineages to unify diverse clans against external dangers (Evans-Pritchard 1987 [1940]). Such prophets were unknown to Nuer history prior to the advent of these threats triggered by European colonization. Based on Evans-Pritchard's description, it does not seem far-fetched to hypothesize that the Nuer prophets' sociological position—both above and external to the mundane rivalries between the main lineages—meant they were ideally placed to pacify intra-Nuer relations and lead the wars against external invaders. Exteriority, remoteness (or marginality) and transnationality have all in common to represent a potential asset when relatively closed communities need to overcome internal strife.

1.2. Micro-cleavages and the importance of "transnational brokerage"

In contemporary civil wars, it might be difficult for organizations emerging in a bottom-up fashion in rural or peri-urban settings, to find a solution to the organizational cohesion-expansion dilemma. Modern states deal with this dilemma through bureaucratic principles: rational-legal principles lead to authority based on abstract, anonymous and general rules that in theory transcend small group interests because they are extraneous to them. The question and puzzle addressed in this article is: how do non-state armed organizations that are not born out of governmental bureaucracies emerge incrementally from small scale networks? And, through what principles of extraneity can they arbitrate conflicts and establish trans-local connections? Of course, rebel leaders can try to solve the problem through a mix of personal charisma, political narratives and economic patronage. Armed groups adopting this path, however, tend to remain bogged down in patrimonial rule (Sinno 2011; Verweijen 2018).

The hypothesis I suggest is that transnational long-distance networks can play a pivotal role in overcoming this dilemma. The transnational circulations throughout such networks allow for leaders to emerge who are "of the people" (fellow Kurds, Afghans, Lebanese…), yet whose individual trajectories are not enmeshed in local feuds. Such networks make it possible to establish symbolic positions from which local struggles can be solved with a certain extraneity and/ or neutrality, even in the absence of bureaucratic rules. Moreover, transnational mobility tends to transform social capital in ways that facilitate brokerage. One researcher, for example, described how "villagers" emigrating from the East of Turkey "discovered" in Germany that they "in fact" were Kurds, suddenly connecting to Kurds from other villages, cities, regions and countries (Adamson 2013). When migrants return to their village of origin, their new networks imply an ability to broker connections between previously unconnected sites, something that has had great value for armed groups like PKK. It is through this ability to bridge micro-cleavages and to leverage trans-local connections that the mechanism I am postulating operates.

The transnational clerical networks I am interested in here are, however, religious-ideological rather than primarily of a diasporic nature. They involve long-distance and multisecular circulations in a geographically extensive region, reaching from Lebanon to the Eastern confines of the Persian-speaking world (and beyond). These networks' historical significance lies in their ability to concretely connect people over long distances and over a long time period. This also implies that their "transcendent ideologies" (Mann 1986) typically have

had enough time to penetrate all layers of concerned societies or communities. What defines transcendent ideology is indeed that it "cuts right across existing economic, military and political power networks, legitimating itself with divine authority but nonetheless answering real social needs" (Mann 1986, 301). The transactions involved in the resulting long-distance relations need not concern all those who share in the ideology. They will typically only involve the ideologues, intellectuals or clerics who specialize in codifying and interpreting the ideology's explicit content. Ultimately what is important is not as much the ideational content as the social relations that set it in motion (Malešević 2017).

2. From long-distance ideologization to military mobilization: The emergence of Hezbollah

During the wars of decolonization, many anti-colonial armed movements were led by internationalized elites from colonized societies. Several explanations have been given for this, often focusing on the role of Western revolutionary ideologies, foreign logistical support, and/ or the transformative agendas that might be fueled by the familiarity with diverse societies (Connelly 2002). In this article I rather advance an organizational hypothesis. Indeed, rebel organizations often use pre-existing micro-solidarities to strengthen the internal cohesion of their combat units. However, as political organizations, they also need to build bureaucracies able to transcend the cleavages resulting from these micro-solidarities. This is important with regards both to horizontal (keeping armed units together) and vertical integration (establishing a chain of command) (Staniland 2014). Transnational networks, provided they are deeply rooted and historically embedded in the concerned communities, can here become an asset.

2.1. The Shia of Lebanon: Between micro-cleavages and long-distance solidarities

Hezbollah showcases how transnational relations based on "transcendent ideologies" might not simply be a contingent factor, but a structurally significant enabler, when setting up armed organizations. The Kurdish PKK, Palestinian Hamas and PLO factions, and the Taliban in Afghanistan, are all bureaucratized organizations for which similar mechanisms can be shown to have operated. Hezbollah is, however, a particularly interesting example because it is often presented as a mere Iranian proxy with very little local or transnational input. While this does not necessarily make Hezbollah a "hard case" in relation to my hypothesis, it serves to highlight that this hypothesis applies more easily to the Taliban, or to the PKK.

Although part of a branch of Islam reaching from Lebanon to Iran, through Bahrein and Iraq, the Lebanese Twelver Shia were divided at the independence of Greater Lebanon in 1943. They constituted three very diverse sociological ecosystems corresponding to three non-contiguous regions:

- The Beqaa valley along the Syrian border, a region that is hardly under the control of Beirut, with widespread poppy and hashish cultivation;
- the rural farming communities ruled by quasi-feudal lords (*zaïm,* plur. *zuema*) of South Lebanon, in particular Jabal Amel and its surroundings;
- the slum-like suburbs of Beirut gathering Shia from the two above-mentioned regions.

There are stark oppositions both between and within these "enclaves". Cleavages between landowners and peasantry in the South are strong. In the Beqaa region, there are violent feuds between the different clans[2]. Traditionally, civil and Sharia courts left clan-based jurisdictions to deal with the permanent cycles of vengeance in the Beqaa countryside (Hamzeh 1994). In these circumstances it was unlikely from the outset

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[2] Hamadiyeh, Zaiter, Meqdad, Jaafar, Haj Hassan, Noon, Shreif, Shamas, Nasreddine, Allaw, Dandash,…

that a cohesive Shia-wide organization would emerge. Even the existence of the Shia as a distinct confessional group in the Lebanese context was still contested in the 1950s. At the time they were considered part of the generic Muslim community and represented by Sunni institutions following the Ottoman tradition.

Several phenomena would shatter the status quo. Firstly, social structures rapidly changed over the twentieth century as farmers from the South and Beqaa migrated to the poor suburbs around Beirut, often maintaining the same family clusters in the city as in the countryside. This, in conjunction with the emergence of a Shia urban middle class—some of whom were returning migrants—led to an increasing contestation of their historical relegation to the periphery of Lebanese society (Azani 2009). Secondly, these new urban classes neither felt represented by the *zuema*, nor by their conservative and quietist[3] Muslim scholars (*ulema*). The mostly local reach of the *ulema* did not predispose them to become engaged in the advancement of wider community interests (Mervin 2012). Many Shia urbanites joined extreme left movements in the 1950s and 1960s, as the only movements willing to integrate them.

It was in this context, that a new group of Shia *ulema*, many of whom schooled in Najaf (Iraq) or in Qom (Iran), emerged in Lebanon in the 1970s. Their religious studies with Shia scholars known amongst co-religionists throughout the Middle East allowed them to build charisma beyond their respective localities of origin. Studying abroad at prestigious seminaries was a way to build a national (as opposed to "local") audience for oneself following a logic of social promotion that is not very different from what happens on the current internationalized "academic market" (Basaran and Olsson 2018). These new clerics were less inclined to accept Shia relegation, had little relations to the *zuema*, were wary of secular extreme left formations, and had close relations with one another despite coming from non-contiguous regions.

They were influenced by the growing social and political activism of the clerics at the *Hawza* (religious seminary) of Najaf, in particular by Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr. The latter's Islamic *Dawa* party rapidly spread to Lebanon, and a new radical form of contention of Lebanese interconfessional hierarchies emerged from these newly schooled clerics. One of the first, Imam Musa Al-Sadr, was an Iranian cleric of Lebanese descent, part of the same prestigious transnational Shia family as Muhammad Baqir of the Najaf *Hawza*. Musa settled permanently in Tyre (South Lebanon) in 1959 and was very active in building intra-Shia and interconfessional networks in Lebanon. He launched a political movement in 1974, the "Movement of the Dispossessed". When the Lebanese civil war started in 1975, the Lebanese Resistance Regiments—or AMAL—was created as a military branch of the Movement of the Dispossessed. Amal soon became the generic name of both militia and party.

In fact, as highlighted by what precedes, what was new in this new generation of clerics was not the long-distance connections as such, since the latter were multisecular. Rather it was the speed with which a growing number of clerics from different regions could move, and the resulting network-density between them. In spite (or rather because) of their multiple interconnections, many in this new generation of clerics were in competition, rivaling each other for charisma at the local, national, and transnational levels, the game becoming increasingly competitive the further their fame spread (Mervin 2012). In this context, a silent competition between Imam Al-Sadr and another influential Shia cleric, Ayatollah Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah, led the latter to radicalize his positions following the well-known mechanism of competitive outbidding (Toft 2007). Fadlallah was born and raised in Najaf from a Lebanese father and was more clearly influenced by the *Dawa* party of which he informally headed the Lebanese branch.

In part thanks to Al-Sadr and Fadlallah, a whole new generation of Lebanese *ulema* schooled in Najaf (Sheikh Abbas Al-Musawi, Sheikh Mohammed Yazbek, Sheikh Ragheb Harb) and Qom (Sheikh Ibrahim Amine Al-Sayyed) or both (Sheikh Subhi Al-Tufayli, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, Sheikh Hashem Safi Al-Din)

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[3] Here refers to a religious stance in favor of a spiritual withdrawal from politics.

returned to Lebanon in the 1970s to head religious institutions and seminaries. Many of them fled Saddam Hussein's repression after 1974. It was largely from the resulting network that Hezbollah was to emerge after the Iranian revolution. In 1982, this network connected a multitude of separate organizational initiatives. It was largely formed by *ulema mujadeen*, combatant-clerics. This network formed the human infrastructure that took on organizational expression first as an umbrella organization between 1982 and 1986, and then a much more centralized one: Hezbollah.

2.2. Conjunctural triggers: War, revolution, invasion

Although many factors concurred towards the formation of militias in Lebanon in the 1980s, in particular the civil war, the proximate triggers of Hezbollah are rather to be found in the Iranian revolution and the Israeli invasion of 1982. While the former saw the ascent of an Iranian regime providing military training to Lebanese militants through the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (henceforth IRGC) present in the Beqaa valley from 1982 onwards, the latter provided a cause to rally around, namely unconditional resistance against foreign occupation.

The rallying effect of the Iranian revolution was not obvious at the outset. Shia militants in Beqaa were by far the most enthusiastic when it came to Khomeini's revolutionary ideology based on the concept of *Velayet el Faqih* ("Guardianship of the religious jurist") (Daher 2019). In the Jabal Amel and the suburbs of Beirut the quietist version of Shia Islam initially dominated, looking towards Najaf rather than Qom, and loyal to Musa Al-Sadr and Amal. In 1978, before the Iranian revolution, Musa Al-Sadr however mysteriously disappeared during a trip to Libya. Quite rapidly, layman Nabih Berri took over Amal. In 1982 Berri decided to give political backing to a US mediation in the crisis triggered by the Israeli invasion.

The religious elements within Amal refused this move and Berri's deputy, Hussein al-Musawi, broke away and founded a splinter group, *Amal Al-Islami,* in the Beqaa. The latter organization, after commandeering the local Gendarmerie base, invited in the Iranian IRGC, with Syrian help. The IRGC, rather than fighting Israeli troops directly, trained militants from the *Ulema of Beqaa, Amal Al-Islami* and Lebanese *Dawa* (and possibly also from Palestinian factions) under the heading of the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon (henceforth IRL) but without any centralized command (Avon and Katchadourian 2012, 23). Iran played an important role in supporting the IRL logistically, militarily and economically through Ali Akbar Mohtashami, the Iranian ambassador to Syria. However, the creation of Hezbollah, as an organization representing the IRL politically, was only officially announced in 1984 and 1985 (Daher 2018).

The Israeli invasion of 1982 ("Peace for Galilee") was initially very divisive for Lebanese Shia. The South of Lebanon had for years borne the brunt of the Israeli bombardment of Palestinian camps and positions. As a consequence, the   Israeli troops were welcomed by some Shia in the South who reasoned that an Israeli ground invasion uprooting the PLO was likely to put an end to their hardships. Skirmishes between Palestinian *fedayeen* and Amal combatants became increasingly frequent (Avon and Katchadourian 2012, 19). Others within the Shia community saw support for Israel as treason towards fellow Muslims and Arabs. The Shia fighters engaging Israeli forces did so with very little internal coordination in loosely-structured groups using diverse monikers: "Believers", "Young Believers", "Islamic Committees". While highly motivated, these groups were no more than militarised "primary group associations". In the face of Israeli occupation, it was therefore far from evident that the most cohesive armed group would hail from the Shia of Lebanon.

The first formalized armed network arising after the Israeli invasion brought together fighters from nationalist and leftist—all militantly secular—groups. Many social and political fault lines ran through this formal if loose network which adopted the name "Lebanese National Resistance Front" ("JAMOUL"). A more

unified leadership seemed both strategically necessary and politically impossible. Any unifying impetus risked activating tensions between the heterogeneous networks and ideological affiliations involved in JAMOUL. Hezbollah wholeheartedly embraced the resulting struggle to monopolize the fight against Israeli occupation, seeking to muster a simultaneously revolutionary and religious charisma in the endeavour (Avon and Katchadourian 2012, 26).

2.3. The combatant-cleric and military mobilization

Intra-Lebanese factors linked to the sectarian nature of national politics played a significant role in the emergence of Amal and later Hezbollah as Shia organizations. However, while Christian formations underwent many splits and realignments throughout the war. Hezbollah avoided such divisions. This is all the more noteworthy as Hezbollah's social bases, especially in the Beqaa, combine predisposing factors for internal strife (inter-clan feuds…). Moreover, Hezbollah was not able to massively recruit jointly socialized senior officers and high-ranking officials from state bureaucracies like many Christian formations. It is here that long-distance solidarities are likely to have played a crucial role.

To a certain extent this implies that the reasons why the politically rewarding "niche" of all-out resistance against Israel was ultimately occupied by a radical Shia movement are rather structural than linked to ideology *per se* or to Iranian sponsorship alone. There is nothing inherently inevitable about this link: as already mentioned this niche had previously been coveted by mostly secular groups as part of JAMOUL. Some of the initial "martyr operations" against Israeli troops were launched by the latter (Malthaner 2011, 221). There is no essential link between religious radicalism and the agenda of all-out resistance (Pape 2005). What makes Hezbollah different from these secular movements is that it succeeded in monopolizing this "niche" and avoided splintering following geographic or ideological lines.

In a sense, Hezbollah out-competed rival organizations focusing on the same external enemy. From Hezbollah's point of view, the aim was as much to monopolize the political benefits of "resistance" as to avoid the errors the PLO committed in 1982 when it failed to coordinate its factions (Sayigh 1997). It is worth noting that many of the militants who joined Hezbollah, and sometimes even participated in its creation, came from these very factions. Even some of the Iranian operatives that played an important role in the early days had been trained by Palestinian Fatah. While Iran played a crucial role in bringing in military resources, Hezbollah hence also integrated networks from other armed formations.

The transnational network of combatant-clerics played a crucial role in enforcing military discipline from the start. All of the *ulema mujahedeen* had an active combat function in the 1980s. What remains of this today is their important command function. The concept of *Taklif Shari* here plays a crucial role. "*Taklif Shari' is a religious command or order issued by Nasrallah* [the current Secretary General of Hezbollah] *as a non-negotiable order, often perceived as a holy request*" (Farida 2015, 174). It is a tactical device used sporadically but decisively at times of war or crisis to enforce strict combat discipline (Daher 2019, 147-148). Although issued by the Secretary General (henceforth SG), it is seen by the militants as a direct order emanating from the *Faqih*, the Supreme Leader in Iran. It is less the personal charisma of Khamenei (the current Supreme Leader in Iran) that is invoked by the SG than the functional charisma of the *Faqih*, seen by Hezbollah as the symbolic embodiment of world Shiadom. The geographical remoteness of the Supreme Leader is in this instance an asset. It creates what Tilly and Tarrow call an "upward scale shift"[4] (2005), if only at the symbolical

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[4] What Tarrow and Tilly call an "upward scale shift" sees the diffusion of a social movement to new destinations translate into a higher level of mobilization, for example from the national to the *supra*-national level. It leads to a "higher" geographical scale of mobilization. The notion is analytically problematic since it takes the cartographic gaze at face

level: when supreme leadership is invoked, the combatant is no longer committing towards Lebanese Shia but towards universal Shiadom and Islam. Tilly and Tarrow's analogy with cartographic scales is here revealing. It highlights that to look at things from the point of view of long-distance relations is, at least symbolically, to look at them from upwards (Basaran and Olsson 2018). In this sense, the transnational command structure symbolically enacted through *Taklif Shari* enables Hezbollah's SG to invoke a higher sense of commitment, a chain of delegated authority that goes ever "higher" up.

3. Horizontal and vertical integration: Transnational dynamics in Hezbollah's consolidation

The diffuse power of a transnational ideological network laid the foundations for the ability on the part of Hezbollah's leadership to broker power between different social bases in Lebanon. It is noteworthy that these networks were tied outside of Lebanon through Lebanese religious students gathering in Najaf and Qom. What this analysis implies is that from the start, the organization was pervaded by horizontal networks tying together a collegial leadership. However, these ideological-religious networks were not geared towards political and military activism from the start. Rather, the dual context of the Israeli invasion and the Iranian revolution offered the opportunity for them to use the resources of the latter to respond to the former.

3.1. From transnational network to nationally cohesive organization

The transnational clerical network described here, although based on long distance solidarities, is not devoid of clerical factionalism and political infighting (Ranstorp 2007). On the contrary. The opposition between Amal and Hezbollah at the end of the 1980s was connected to the struggles between the "Qom school"[5] of Shia theology and the "Najaf school"[6] (Mervin 2008). Most Amal members followed the "Najaf school" and most Hezbollah members (with the noticeable exception of Fadlallah[7]) the "Qom school". Another such cleavage is that between conservative "hardliners" and "reformers" in the Islamic Republic of Iran (henceforth IRI) after Khomeini's death in 1989. In Hezbollah, it took the form of the opposition in the beginning of the 1990s between the "hardline" partisans of an Islamic revolution in Lebanon (following Al-Tufayli) and those favoring political participation within the existing institutions (following Fadlallah, Abbas Al-Musawi and Hassan Nasrallah). These are not simply two national contexts impacting one another. Rather we are dealing with a cross-cutting cleavage running through a transnational field encompassing Hezbollah's leadership and the ideological-clerical core of the IRI. The notion of field is here quite apposite because, just as for Bourdieu's concept of social fields, we are here dealing with a space that is unified rather than fragmented by the struggles between its social agents (Loughlan, Olsson, and Schouten 2014). The latter tend to agree on their disagreements: on what to disagree, how to disagree...There is a common understanding of what is at stake in the field: in this case, the definition of legitimate transnational authority over Twelver Shia Islam. Indeed, all agree to a certain extent and in principle on the transnational nature of this authority. It is this "agreement on disagreements" that fuels the struggles (Bourdieu 1998).

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value. It is however symbolically enlightening: the notion of looking from afar (to see the "bigger picture") and the notion of looking from higher-up are conflated in diverse social contexts.

[5] This "school" is revolutionary and favors clerical guidance in political matters.

[6] This "school" is rather quietist, accepting of secular power and national power-structures.

[7] Fadlallah however never formally occupied a position within Hezbollah.

For Hezbollah, this transnational field allowed defusing internal tensions. This became apparent at the end of the 1980s when the longstanding cleavage between the regions of Jabal Amel and Beqaa nearly created a deep rift in the Lebanese organization. Since the IRGC had entered Lebanon through the Syrian border in 1982, most of the people involved in setting up the military training program of the IRL were from Beqaa: Subhi Al-Tufayli, Abbas al-Musawi, Hussein al-Musawi (Eisenstadt and Bianchi 2017). In 1989, the death of Khomeini and the end of the Lebanese civil war strengthened the position of Lebanese and Iranian "reformers" in their respective countries. In the beginning of the 1990s, Hezbollah even embraced the possibility of participating in national elections (Berti 2013). Since the "old guard" was mainly from Beqaa, it was easy to frame the reform-minded "new guard" as representing the interests of Jabal Amel. This is precisely what the first SG of Hezbollah (1989-1991), Sheikh Subhi Al-Tufayli, did. In 1992, having lost his position as SG, he officially entered dissidence and lashed out at ascending political leaders, who happened to have connections to Jabal Amel, in particular the new SG Sheikh Abbas Al-Musawi (1991-1992) and SG Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah (from 1992 onwards). Al-Tufayli denounced the purported corruption of "Southerners" (reference to Jabal Amel) and called on his troops in the Beqaa valley to actively oppose the party's new reform-minded leadership. The risk of mass defections in the IRL in favor of Al-Tufayli following the long-standing Jabal Amel-Beqaa cleavage suddenly became very real. The "political" leadership, however, with the support of Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei, managed to contain and finally isolate and exclude Al-Tufayli's faction of conservative "hardliners" towards the end of the 1990s (Daher 2019). In a sense al-Tufayli, who now only enjoys a small and local following, got "parochialized" within the field by the transnational coalition facing him.

Supreme Leader Khamenei's intervention made it possible to defuse the tensions stirred up by Al-Tufayli's political maneuvers. It would, however, be misleading to present this simply as an Iranian arbitration. The crisis was transnational since it also corresponded to a moment of strong oppositions in Iran after the most conservative faction had lost steam[8] and a "reformer" in the person of Rafsanjani had become president in 1989. The resulting tensions, at the time, between the Hezbollah SG (al-Tufayli) and the Iranian president deepened the rift between "reformers" and "conservatives" in both countries. The fact that it was a "conservative hardliner", in the person of Khamenei, who endorsed Al-Musawi (and then Nasrallah) as SG rather than al-Tufayli shows that it was less about imposing the Supreme Leader's will than about defusing tensions by accepting that power relations in the transnational field were shifting. Ultimately, since the Lebanese actors of (what was framed as) the corrosive cleavage between Jabal Amel and Beqaa sought out transnational alliances, respectively with Iranian "reformers" and "conservatives", the conflict got framed in terms of a more manageable doctrinal macro-cleavage and ultimately resolved. While religious ideology certainly plays a crucial role, subjectively, for Hezbollah militants (Nilsson 2018), this example shows that the way in which its clerical networks operate also makes it a more structural factor of cohesion.

It is worth noting that transnationalization as such does not explain the ability of the combatant-clerics to broker alliances in Lebanon and beyond. It is the type of transnationalization, based on "transcendent ideology" as previously defined, and involving a transnational field, that explains this ability rather. The point is important because competing economic networks linked to the Lebanese Shia diaspora often remain linked to one or the other clan rather than leading to the emergence of cross-cutting, transversal networks.

The political-military cohesion of Hezbollah is based on an organizational model that harnesses the strengths—while mitigating the weaknesses—of fragmented societies with both strong shortrange and long-distance solidarities, interconnected through mobile clerics. This interpretation is by no means specific to

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[8] This is symbolized by the ousting of Mohtashami from the Lebanon desk at the Iranian ministry of foreign affairs in 1989, after he already lost much of his political autonomy in 1986.

Hezbollah. Different, but structurally comparable dynamics, emerge from Barnett Rubin's analysis of the organizational strength of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Rubin, for example, highlights how the *mujahedeen* groups emerging from the Pashtun heartland in the 1980s were largely incohesive and parochial. The mass displacement of populations from rural Afghanistan to Pakistani refugee camps throughout the 1980s would progressively undermine the fragmented territorial authority of the chieftains of these *mujahedeen* groups (Rubin 2002; see also: Giustozzi 2009). Simultaneously, Afghan-wide solidarity networks were being bred in Deobandi madrassas in Pakistan that recruited from these refugee camps. These dynamics created the networks from which the detribalized Taliban organization emerged once the madrassa students returned to their respective localities (Dorronsoro 2005). Their Afghan-wide and transnational connections allowed them to organize and to overrun the more parochial "warlords" controlling Afghanistan in 1994.

Because the "local" *mujahedeen* leaders were locked in divisive struggles, micro-cleavages could only be overcome by a collegial leadership of commanders interconnected through cross-cutting transnational networks. These were often clerical since networks based on "transcendent ideologies" tend to be simultaneously long-distance and transversal. In civil wars beset by territorial fragmentation, organizations that can reconcile trans-local recruitment with small-unit cohesion gain the upper hand. This largely explains why both Hezbollah and the Taliban (at least initially) emerged as a "network of networks" (Giustozzi 2019). In a context in which many authors ponder over the strategic advantage of "religiously radical" groups hailing from the wider Middle-East and Central Asia (Toft 2007; Walter 2017), this structural-organizational argument needs to be taken seriously.

3.2. From umbrella organization to hierarchical command structure

An important aspect of process-tracing is to determine to what extent the evidence provided is consistent with alternative hypotheses (Checkel 2013). In this regard, the most frequent interpretation competing with our hypothesis, and that overlaps with part of the empirical elements here considered, explains Hezbollah's organizational strength by the support provided by Iran. The preceding analyses suggest answering to this objection in a nuanced way, by disaggregating the notion of "support".

On the one hand, although the IRI trained and armed the IRL, this does not as such explain Hezbollah's organizational consolidation. After all, the resources provided to the Party of God were previously bestowed on the PLO and Palestinian factions. This did not prevent the latter from imploding during the Israeli invasion of 1982 (Parkinson 2013). The massive stockpiles of weapons in the hands of the Palestinian groups in the South of Lebanon were to no avail in the face of the Israeli onslaught. Massive logistical support can only be useful provided it can be processed by relatively robust political-military structures. In the absence of a pre-existing organizational capacity such support can even backfire (Staniland 2014). This was arguably the case during the first years of the Afghan uprising against the Soviet presence. The massive provision of weapons from state sponsors led many *mujahedeen* groups to re-sell their surplus on the black market, rather than boosting their ability to train and arm more recruits. Ultimately, rent-seeking, infighting and turf-wars rapidly got entrenched within the still emerging insurgency (Rubin 2002; Sinno 2011).

On the other hand, although the full extent of organizational support on the part of Iran is difficult to assess, much seems to indicate that any such assistance is likely to fail in the absence of an ability to connect it to grass-root mobilization through transnational networks. This was recently (re-)learnt the hard way by the "Friends of Syria". This group of Middle Eastern and Western states participated in the structuration of the "Syrian National Coalition"[9] (SNC) amongst the external political opposition on the one hand, and, on the

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[9] The National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces.

other, the Supreme Military Council (SMC) amongst the military defectors in Turkey. For a time, this setup sustained the narrative on the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Many of the military factions in Syria, however, had no long-term connections either to the SNC or the SMC. Both were essentially seen as foreign controlled bodies. The fact that several regional powers courted the insurgency, pushing it in different directions, undermined the little political cohesiveness there might initially have been among the FSA factions (Baczko, Dorronsoro and Quesnay 2018). This observation is important as far as my case-study is concerned. Although Hezbollah's organizational cohesion cannot be explained by Iranian support alone, the fact that only Iran provided significant and consistent aid was a crucial factor in avoiding further factors of division. Syrian facilitation and help did play a significant role, but it was never fully independent from Iran (except for its assistance to Amal).

An additional element is that all evidence seems to indicate that, to the extent that Iran tried to control Hezbollah politically, this was counterproductive. The suspicion that Hezbollah might only have been designed to serve Iranian interests has always been the main line of criticism against it in the Lebanese context. Eitan Azani writes about the proto-Hezbollah groups in the beginning of the 1980s: "The rapid growth in the number of activists and areas of operation caused the appearance of embryonic organizational systems, which controlled, to a certain degree, the activities of the movement. However, under the organizational umbrella, extremist groups with affinity to Islam operated independently or in direct activation of radical elements in the Iranian leadership" (Azani 2009, 73). This general impression prevented Hezbollah from enjoying broad popular support amongst the Lebanese Shia until the end of the 1980s (Malthaner 2011, 225). In this sense, Iranian involvement was also a liability in the early days. This is not to deny that parts of Hezbollah are extremely close to Iranian organizations still today. After all, the name "Hezbollah" has come to describe a multifarious set of organizations that support the IRL in one way or another. Some of these are indeed very tightly linked to Iranian associations. These organizations are however not part of the IRL or of the political party.

It is true that the Party of God tried to "Lebanize" its image in the second half of the 1980s, presenting itself as a distinctly Lebanese organization. To the extent that this move coincides with the establishment of a centralized leadership embodied by the SG[10], "Lebanization" must however not be interpreted as targeting any "real" Iranian control. It rather transformed a collegial leadership of Lebanese combatant-clerics interconnected through transnational Shia Islam (that also percolates through parts of the IRI), into a more centralized leadership supported by a robust bureaucracy. "Lebanization" sees the "network of networks" morphing into a centralized bureaucratic organization. In Weberian terms (Weber 1978 [1921]), with the creation of the function of SG, the personal charisma of the revolutionary combatant-clerics is routinized into a more functional charisma (Daher 2012; Mervin 2012). This shift of focus from transnational networks and personal charisma to routinized national structures, however, was not a shift in objectives: transnational networks were seen from the start as instrumental to the project of building a Lebanese Shia movement (Daher 2018, 2019).

Overall, the important role played by the IRI in supporting Hezbollah is hence not an alternative explanation to my own. It is at best a complementary one. More accurately, it does not as such explain organizational consolidation, only the creation of logistically favourable conditions.

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[10] This was officially announced in 1989, but it is widely believed that Al-Tufayli already played this role in 1987.

Conclusions

It is fully possible to analyze Hezbollah as a unitary rational actor evolving in between the tight constraints set by Syria (before 2011) and Iran and largely linked to the geopolitics of the region. Such an analytical framework, however, does away with what I was precisely interested in here: the processes, relations and networks through which a non-state armed group has evolved into its present incarnation. This has entailed analyzing the emergence of Hezbollah through networks that have been transversal to the geopolitical actors, cutting "*right across existing economic, military and political power networks*" (Mann 1986, 301). This article highlights how the national mobilization of a marginalized social group occurred by tapping into the dense, short-range relations of its local communities and micro-solidarity groups. This was only possible, however, because, at the same time, these small-scale solidarity groups could be woven together in a single organization by harnessing the long-distance relations interconnecting a select few of their members to one another as well as to international resources. Ultimately, it appears that political enterprises undermined by micro-cleavages and lacking access to their own national state-resources, can successfully use transnational relations and resources to build up their organization in a bottom-up fashion..

In more general terms, the purpose of this article was to highlight how political military organizations overcome their foundational problem: how to make use of pre-existing shortrange networks while at the same time overcoming the inherent limitations of such networks in terms of horizontal integration and organizational extension. The point was not to argue that Hezbollah is structured around religious networks, which would be merely to state the obvious. Rather, the aim was to show why some networks come to play a political role. In this case, the transnational clerical network provided a ready-made, low-cost, and highly efficient connective tissue allowing rival short-range networks to connect and engage in institution-building despite lacking access to state bureaucracies. Transnationalization paved the way for bureaucratization by interconnecting and ultimately transcending shortrange networks of a more interpersonal nature. It represented an alternative source of military modernization to the state-centred one, one that soon gave access to state power.

In developing the argument, I have tried to show that the religious nature of some of these relations is only very indirectly the root of their success. What matters are the long-distance networks that, in the right political circumstances, can trigger political alignments between previously opposed social groups. This explanation also sheds light on what otherwise would have been a mystery: why previously "secular" or "leftwing" combatants (a tiny minority it is true) join or ally with a religiously radical group. They simply made an opportunistic use of networks that, given the context, became a priceless political asset.

Notwithstanding the likelihood that some of these conclusions can be applied to other armed organizations with both a national base and transnational connections, I would argue that this framework also is of importance for the understanding of regional dynamics. Indeed, while in geopolitical terms Hezbollah might be portrayed as a junior partner of Iran, in network terms its current Secretary-General, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, has an unrivaled charisma in the transnational network of actors adhering to Khomeini's doctrine of *Velayet al-Faqih*.

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