

## Neo-Weberian Reading of Violent Non-State Actors: The Case of Hezbollah

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### Abstract

*Multiple-actor reality and the impact of different units, except the states in stratified structural relations, have become more apparent in recent international relations. Specifically, the rising role of Violent Non-State Actors (VNSA) in regions like the Middle East and North Africa, and their challenges to the sole and central position of states, reinforced this idea. Hence, comprehending the possible actorhood of these groups within the structural relations consisting of internal and external realms necessitates alternative concepts and challenging arguments. The Neo-Weberian approach, inspired by historical sociology, offers a grounded and balanced analysis of actors. This approach puts state-society at the center of attention and, thus, looks at all dimensions (both actor and structure) of social relations as ingrained in the theory of structuration. In this way, it seems to capture the complex interactions between actors and structural dynamics, as well as the dynamic transformation of both ontological realities. Along this line, this study intends to illuminate the intriguing aspects and certain advantages of the structuration approach by scrutinizing Hezbollah's agency, which is a critical VNSA in the Middle East, and its impact on structural relations, as well as its evolution over time. In other words, as a modest contribution to the structuration literature, the mutual interaction between agent and structure is explored via a unique case. This study argues that Hezbollah emerged as a result of the preexisting structural realities and, during the process, it proved its agency and influential role on these stratified structural dynamics. To substantiate these theoretical arguments, the permissive structural conditions in the region and in Lebanon will be explained, and then Hezbollah's impact as an actor on these structural realities will be surveyed with a special emphasis on Hezbollah's role over two regional dynamics: Arab uprisings, particularly the Syrian internal war, and its now hegemonic position in Lebanese politics.*

**Keywords:** Hezbollah, Violent Non-State Actors (VNSA), Neo-Weberian Approach

### 1. Introduction

Arab uprisings have clarified the increasing role and salience of violent non-state actors (VNSAs) in the Middle East. Hezbollah (Lebanon), Houthi militias (Yemen), Khalifa Haftar-led forces (Libya), Hamas (Palestine), and several Muslim Brotherhood-inspired organizations, as in Syria, are just some of the prominent VNSAs that need to be explored

within historical and social contexts.<sup>1</sup> The analytical and theoretical concepts in international relations shaped mainly by (neo)realism and (neo)liberalism, namely mainstream approaches, have been limited to analyzing the considerable resurgence of these phenomena in recent years. Most literature in international relations (IR) privileges non-state actors (NSA), which arguably contributes to the embodiment of economic liberalization, international peace, and law. Added to the (neo)liberal underestimation on the agency of states, these perspectives also imperfectly explain VNSA's impact over domestic and regional affairs. Furthermore, other mainstream approaches, such as (neo)realism, which defines states as the only actors within the international arena, disregard VNSA's obvious role within domestic and regional contexts.<sup>2</sup>

Current empirical and theoretical challenges could overcome this prevalent impasse within IR. This historically- and socially-oriented literature led by Weberian scholars affected, to some degree, the ongoing actor-structure debates within IR. In particular, a second wave of the Neo-Weberian approach, a current branch of historical sociology, largely contributed to this process. This approach opposed defining states or NSAs as the only actors within social relations while accepting the central role of states both as actors and institutions/structures. It also refuses to define states as rigid, unitary, and fixed as "state-centric" realist approaches do by recognizing the partial autonomy of each actor, including VNSAs and NSAs.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, scholars developed the VNSA as an analytical object in order to analyze these "armed non-state" organizations. Examining the "black box (state)" and focusing on "state-society relations" increasingly enabled the recognition of the relevance of these actors.<sup>4</sup>

The Neo-Weberian approach locates the autonomous actors within the context of social and historical relations and, by extension, scrutinizes the mutual (actor-structure) interaction between these actors and social-historical structures as suggested in the structuration method.<sup>5</sup> These structures have stratified and multi-dimensional character, thus incorporating domestic, regional, and international realms into actor debates.<sup>6</sup> In this way, this perspective contributes to the analysis of non-state forces like Hezbollah as autonomous actors within stratified social and historical structural realities. Whereas some actor-led studies neglect the structural

<sup>1</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş and Tuncay Kardaş, eds., *Non-state armed actors in the Middle East: Geopolitics, Ideology, and Strategy* (Springer, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive study on the emergence, role and agency of the VNSAs and their increasing power in the Middle East and North African region, see Kledja Mulaj, ed., *Violent Non-State Actors in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). For the actor-structure debates in the literature, see Robert Jackson and George Sorenson, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith, eds., *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Scott Burchill et al., *Theories of International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Hassanein Ali, "Post-Arab spring: the Arab world between the dilemma of the nation-state and the rise of violent non-state actors (VNSAs)," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 14, no. 1 (2020): 68-83.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed study on the arguments, concepts, and the new alternatives improved by historical sociology studies, see Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson, eds., *Historical Sociology of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Kledja Mulaj, "Violent Non-State Actors: Exploring Their State Relations, and Operationality," in *Violent Non-State Actors in World Politics*, Kledja Mulaj, ed., (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010): 1-27; Ersel Aydınli, *Violent non-state actors: From Anarchists to Jihadists* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Ersel Aydınli, "Assessing violent non-state actorness in global politics: a framework for analysis," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 28, no. 3 (2015): 424-444; Murat Yeşiltaş, Tuncay Kardaş, and Tim Jacoby, "Rethinking non-state armed actors and sovereignty," *International Politics* 60, no.1 (2023): 1-6.

<sup>5</sup> This approach is widely used by constructivist approaches and specifically by Alexander Wendt as well, who drew on historical sociology studies and brought historical-social perspective to the discipline. Alexander Wendt, "The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory," *International Organization* 41, no.3 (1987): 335-470.

<sup>6</sup> In other words, non-reductionist and non-realist theory of state rejects asking the question of state or non-state forces, as in traditional reductionism, but calls for an analysis "of state and non-state actors." Thus, in bringing non-state forces back in, the state should not be kicked out. See John M. Hobson, *The State and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 205.

aspects of Hezbollah's emergence and increasing power,<sup>7</sup> other structure-led studies privilege the structural factors by dismissing the agency of Hezbollah. The mentioned arguments of the Neo-Weberian approach, however, allow us to overcome this actor-structure "duality" and to survey the trajectory of Hezbollah by locating it within these stratified structures.

In this sense, in line with the structuration approach, the main focus of this article will be to elucidate the impacts of evolving internal and external structures on the emergence and transformation of Hezbollah and, also, the agency of Hezbollah on these structures. Therefore, to comprehend how and why Hezbollah was formed by the 1980s and has transformed since then, and whether it has shaped the local-regional developments, this paper will briefly reveal the mutual interactions between Hezbollah and the regional-domestic structures through the structuration approach. To illustrate these points further, the paper will involve the following parts: the first section will brief the actor and structure debates within IR and present the alternative arguments of the Neo-Weberian approach summarized in the structuration approach. The second section will trace the structural impacts on the trajectory of Hezbollah, and the subsequent section will concentrate on the transformative role of Hezbollah on Lebanon's domestic affairs and regional events as an agent.

## 2. Actor-Structure Debate within IR: Towards a Neo-Weberian Structuration Approach

*"There are different types of political units in different epochs and in different places that act according to their historically situated, particular logic." Michael Mann, 2006.<sup>8</sup>*

All extant approaches in international relations have certain ontological stances involving structure and actor premises, which means mainstream and dissident theories alike have advanced certain ontological arguments in the discipline.<sup>9</sup> Against this background, realist paradigms generally opposed questioning the principal assumption within IR, which defines states as the only actors in the ontological reality of IR. For realists, these rational and sovereign units should be identified as the "sole power" representative of their societies.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, this approach equates the state with the nation and dismisses inherent struggles within states and the alternative actors that challenge their monopoly.<sup>11</sup> Daniel Chernilo claims that the "fixed" and "given" definition of states within the realist tradition caused the "territorial trap" by ignoring the relevance of state-society relations, which illustrates partial autonomy of the other actors.<sup>12</sup> Due to such negligence on the analysis of domestic policy and, by extension, the presence of alternative actors, realists overemphasized states' autonomy from their own societies and analyzed the impact of an anarchical system on the actions of the states. Not only realist, but also some liberal approaches have recently considered primary realist assumptions as practical in analyzing international relations, that is, states

<sup>7</sup> Fariboz Mokhtari, "Countering Terrorism: Could Hezbollah and Hamas Show the Way?", *Contemporary Security Policy* 27, no.3 (2006): 376-396.

<sup>8</sup> George Lawson, "The Social Sources of Life, the Universe and Everything: A Conversation with Michael Mann," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 34, no.2 (2006): 500-501.

<sup>9</sup> For a better capture on the ongoing discussion regarding the ontological issues, see Colin Wight, *Agents, Structures and International Relations: Politics as Ontology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> John Agnew, "The Territorial Trap: The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory," *Review of International Political Economy* 1, no.1 (1994): 59.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Chernilo, "Methodological Nationalism and Domestic Analogy; the Classical Resources of Their Critique," *Cambridge Review of International Relations* 23, no.1 (2010): 89.

<sup>12</sup> For a normative and empiric debate on spatial differences throughout history, see John Gerard Ruggie, "Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations," *International Organization* 47, no: 1 (1993): 148-160.

as dominant actors and international structure as an anarchical order.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, neo-liberalism privileged peacefully and economically motivated non-state actors as the principal actors in global affairs. In this way, neo-liberalism omitted the analysis of violent and armed non-state actors since it considered them as possible threats towards the foundation of a peaceful and stable world order.<sup>14</sup> For this approach, unlike VNSAs, the NSAs contributed to the transformation of an anarchical international structure into a stable and law-based order. Overall, while the realist and liberal approaches have recently reconciled on certain aspects in the explanation of international relations, they still differ specifically with regard to the basic units within IR and the possible transformation of anarchical structure.<sup>15</sup>

However, neither theory has advanced a comprehensive framework to investigate the role and impact of the violent/armed non-state actors on international relations. In other words, neither theory has recognized the multiple-actor approach, which is the central aspect of the recent historical-social approaches and intends to balance state-led analysis with its incorporation of other actors, including VNSAs. Such negligence is also present in the discipline's several "dissident" approaches, especially in the classical Marxist perspective and its various sub-branches. Classical Marxism regards the classes as the basic actors that shape social relations. It thus ignores the role of said non-state actors and, more importantly, states' transformative impact on social-historical developments.<sup>16</sup> In brief, in line with their one-actor model, mainstream theories and some "dissident" approaches merely privilege the role and impact of the units that they designate as basic actors.

The ahistorical, given, and fixed approach of the said theories is visible not only within their actor definition, but also within their structure definition and structure-led perspectives. Additionally, they only focus on the one aspect of the complex structural realities, as exemplified in the realist over-emphasis of the international structures and liberal concentration on the domestic structures. Furthermore, these theories prioritize a one-factor reality of international relations, like ideational, economic, or political, and one-level analysis, such as international, regional, or national. This perspective, embedded in the discipline, neglects the complex realities of the social world by overlooking the intensive interaction between actors, multi-level structural realities, and divergent impacts of various factors. Therefore, the actor-structure definition of these perspectives has been criticized by the recent waves of historical sociology. According to these criticisms, structural and actor-based developments should be put *inside* history rather than *outside* history to proceed with an objective approach pertaining to social relations.

To them, this historical-social definition of both actors and structures necessitates rigorous

<sup>13</sup> Neo-liberalism agreed upon, to some degree, the realist premises, especially states as the key actor in world affairs. For this reason, Weaver describes these two approaches as "neo-neo" synthesis. See Ole Weaver, "The Rise and Fall of Inter-Paradigm Debate," in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, eds. Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 162-165.

<sup>14</sup> G. John Ikenberry, "The Liberal International Order and Its Discontents," *Millennium Journal of International Studies* 38, no.3 (2010): 517-518; Tim Büthe, "Governance Through Private Authority: Non-state Actors in World Politics," *Journal of International Affairs* 58, no. 1 (2004): 282-290.

<sup>15</sup> For realism along with its leading figures and strands, see Jack Donnelly, "Realism," In *Theories of International Relations*, eds. Scott Burchill et al. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 30-53.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Linklater, "Marxism," In *Theories of International Relations*, eds., Scott Burchill et al. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 110-137; Benno Teschke, "Advances and Impasses in Fred Halliday's International Historical Sociology: A Critical Appraisal," *International Affairs* 87, no. 5 (2011): 1091-1093; Fred Halliday, *Rethinking International Relations* (London: Macmillan Press, 1994), 59-73; John M. Hobson, "Debate: The 'second wave' of Weberian Historical Sociology-The Historical Sociology of state and the state of historical sociology in international relations," *Review of International Political Economy* 5, no.2 (1998): 289.

analysis of mutual interaction between them. To illustrate intensive relations between actors and structures, these approaches contend that the structural mechanisms acquire objective reality and turn into the “*thing*” through the actions of human agencies like states, NSAs and VNSAs. Accordingly, such approaches presuppose that while structural mechanisms become stable and autonomous over time, which has remarkable influence on the actors’ behaviors, they still have historical, social and stratified character and, therefore, are liable to change as a result of their interaction with the actors as in Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory,<sup>17</sup> Fred Halliday’s methodological internationalization,<sup>18</sup> John M. Hobson’s structurationist theory, Michael Mann’s polymorphous state,<sup>19</sup> and last but not least, Joel S. Migdal’s state-in-society approach.<sup>20</sup> In this way, Neo-Weberian studies propose an analysis of social realities by refining the abovementioned weaknesses, and they privilege the structuration method to avoid the actor-led and structure-led trap by capturing the complex dynamics of international relations.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. Hezbollah between Structural Realities and Actorhood

#### 3.1. Briefing of Hezbollah’s Story

Hezbollah’s increasing state-like power in Lebanon reinvigorated actor discussions in the literature and the impact of VNSAs as agents in domestic and regional affairs.<sup>22</sup> While some scholars underestimated their actorhood by, for instance, identifying Hezbollah merely as a “terrorist,” “proxy,” or “non-class-based” organization, some others recognized the increasing agency and actorhood of Hezbollah as well.<sup>23</sup> Statist ontology in realism, the focus on peaceful NSAs in liberalism, and the class-based approach in Marxism led to such negligence in regional studies. Given that Hezbollah has, for some time, played a determinant role in Lebanon’s internal realm and has some influence over the regional affairs, incorporating Hezbollah as an actor into the analysis of local-regional studies became inevitable. This seemingly simple effort enjoys essential openings for both regional and international studies, as most literature privileges long-criticized “myths” in the discipline. In this sense, as the Neo-Weberian perspective suggests the historicization of the state and the location of that history within international context, its consequent focus on state-society relations and the enduring struggle between states and non-state forces enables the recognition of a multiple-actor reality.<sup>24</sup> In light of these arguments, analyzing Hezbollah in terms of its agency over

<sup>17</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>18</sup> For Halliday, internationalism incorporates both analytic and normative concerns and points out erasing the sharp differentiation between the domestic and international realms exemplified by the empirical events. In sum, it is related to how the world works and how it should work. He divides the internationalization process into three realms: Liberal, Hegemonic, and Revolutionary Internationalism. Fred Halliday, “Three Concepts of Internationalism,” *International Affairs* 64, no.1 (1988): 188-198.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Hobden, *International Relations and Historical Sociology: Breaking Down Boundaries* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 122-124.

<sup>20</sup> Joel S. Migdal, *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> For detailed info on the leading arguments of the historical-social return in IR, see Thierry Laponinte and Frederick Guillaume Dufour, “Assessing the Historical Turn in IR: An Anatomy of Second Wave Historical Sociology,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 25, no.1 (2011): 97-121; Steve Smith, “Historical Sociology and International Relations Theory,” *In Historical Sociology of International Relations*, eds. Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 229-232.

<sup>22</sup> Karim Knio, “Structure, Agency and Hezbollah: A Morphogenetic View,” *Third World Quarterly* 34, no.5 (2013): 862.

<sup>23</sup> Mulaj, “Violent Non-State Actors,” 8; James Worrall, “Reading Booth in Beirut: Is Hizbollah an Emancipatory Actor”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36, no.3 (2013): 235-254; Knio, “Structure, Agency and Hezbollah,” 856-872.

<sup>24</sup> Benjamin De Carvalho, Halvard Leira and John M. Hobson, “The Big Bangs of IR: The Myths that Your Teachers Still Tell You about 1648 and 1919,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 39, no.3 (2011): 5-10; Stephen Hobden, “Historical

Lebanon and the wider regional context would not only be possible, but an interesting effort as well.

To start with its brief background, Hezbollah evolved over time as an adaptive actor within the stratified structural mechanisms. Emerging initially as a local actor in 1985 with its so-called political manifesto, that is ‘An Open Letter to the Downtrodden in Lebanon and the World (Nass al-Risala al-Maftuha allati wajahaha Hizballah ila-l-Mustad’afin fi Lubnan wa-l-Alam),’<sup>25</sup> Hezbollah adopted Islamist revisionism against both local and regional dynamics. Before its official foundation, it already structured its organizational and ideological basis as a result of intensive consultation with its regional “patrons,” Syria and Iran. The implications of this consultation were deeply reflected in the formation of the “Document of the Nine” towards the end of the 1970s and became the principles of the subsequent open letter. Afterwards, it initially rose to be the unchallenged actor in Shia populated areas by combining most Shia factions. Then, following the end of the Cold War, it embarked on the *Lebanonization* process, which allowed Hezbollah to shape general Lebanese politics as well given its historical decision to join the Lebanese elections. During its brief journey as such, Hezbollah always attempted at *reading* both local and regional structural dynamics and modified its policies and “resistance discourse” in line with these dynamics. Its staunch resistance to Israel and position as protectorate of Palestinian rights, as well as its rejection of the sectarian system in Lebanon, increased sympathy for this actor in Shia populations and Lebanon as a whole. After the end of Israel’s invasion of Lebanon and the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel, this sympathy and support for Hezbollah reached its peak, and Hezbollah’s standing military capability has been less questioned since then. Indeed, Hezbollah already preserved its privileged position in the Ta’if agreement in 1989 by exempting itself from the disarmament of all Lebanese militias. On the other hand, this peak in 2006 also reinforced its status as the new power center in Lebanon and its evolution into a status-quo actor. Later, Hezbollah consolidated its hegemonic position with the May 2008 Doha agreement, which gave the opposition critical leverage over the successive Lebanese cabinets. By considering these changes in the region and domestic politics, Hezbollah declared its second political manifesto in 2009, which again revealed its adaptive posture pursuant to contextual mechanisms. Since then, moderating even its discourse based on the new realities, Hezbollah became the “king-maker” on the determination of Lebanese cabinets and upgraded its power with its effective outreach to non-Shia political players in Lebanon, which resulted in its direct impact on the elections of the Lebanese presidency as well.<sup>26</sup>

Sociology: back to the future of international relations?,” In *Historical Sociology of International Relations*, eds. Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 42-59; John M. Hobson and Stephen Hobden, “On the Road towards an historicized world sociology,” in *Historical Sociology of International Relations*, eds. Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 268. For better understanding of the insights held by historical sociologists on concepts like state, international context, and causalities, see Fred Halliday, “For an International Sociology,” in *Historical Sociology of International Relations*, eds., Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 245; Hobden, *International Relations and Historical Sociology*.

<sup>25</sup> Its Arabic spelling and writing are as following;

ملأ العالمون أيديهم من غضبتهم لملأ أولئك الأبرح أهجوز يتلأه حتى تنفجلاً قلاً سزل  
*and Hamas: A comparative study* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2012), 35. This text was published in *al-Safir* newspaper in 16 February 1985.

<sup>26</sup> For a detailed and comprehensive analysis on Hezbollah’s emergence, its transformation and impact on Lebanese politics, see Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, “Factors Conducive to the Politicization of the Lebanese Shi’a and Emergence of Hizballah,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14, no.3 (2003): 273-307; Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007); Augustus Richard Norton, “The role of Hezbollah in Lebanese domestic politics,” *The International Spectator* 42, no.4 (2007): 475-491; Filippo Dionigi, *Hezbollah, Islamist Politics, and International Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Magnus Ranstorp, “The strategy and tactics of Hizballah’s current ‘Lebanonization process’,” *Mediterranean Politics* 3,

### 3.2. Structural realms

This brief history until the Arab uprisings proves Hezbollah's gradually growing agency within the state-society relations in Lebanon. Yet, the other aspect of a complete analysis using structuration theory is to look at the constraints and possibilities of structural realities. As underscored previously, the Neo-Weberian approach maintains that pre-determined structural realities initially dominate the fate and trajectory of all actors, and these actors may affect these realities over time as well. These stratified structural realities bring various obstacles and possibilities for the emergence and the subsequent influence of all players, including non-state forces.<sup>27</sup> Considering these arguments, Lebanon, or the internal context and regional-international context, can be identified as over-arching mechanisms for the existence, advancement, and transformation of Hezbollah as an actor.

In terms of domestic context, Lebanon resembles a collapsed state that has been ravaged by long-term internal conflicts and regional interventions and that lacks administrative and coercive power. Therefore, unlike the realist premises on the inside-outside separation, there is always much interaction between Lebanese domestic politics and regional developments. As a matter of fact, regional events mostly determine the course of internal developments and the rise or fall of certain local groups in the Lebanese system. To illustrate, with the impact of French colonialism between 1920 and 1943, Maronite groups, as Catholic Christians, controlled central state mechanisms in Lebanon in contrast with the supremacy of Muslim groups during the Ottoman period. And later, during the Cold War, there emerged some powerful leftist and Arab Socialist groups in Lebanon, threatening the regime as a result of a pro-Nasser regional environment.<sup>28</sup> Turning back to state-society relations, which constitutes another main aspect of Neo-Weberian approaches, Lebanon's constitution and state structure is based on a consociational (sectarian) democracy,<sup>29</sup> which institutionalizes an anarchic system by granting an autonomous position to the sectarian groups.<sup>30</sup> There are indeed different definitions, like failed state, collapsed state, or no-state reality, to explicate the anarchic nature of the internal system in Lebanon. Accordingly, the non-state challenge becomes the regular reality of Lebanese politics that validates Migdal's following opinions on state-society relations: "neither state nor any other social force has established an overarching hegemony; domination by any one social force takes place within an arena or even across a limited number of arenas but does not encompass the society as a whole."<sup>31</sup> Therefore, Lebanon can hardly be identified as a unitary, homogenous, or modern territorial state with

no.1 (1998): 103-134; Shimon Shapira, "The Origins of Hizballah," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, Vol. 46 (1988): 115-130; Mustafa Yetim, "Şiddet Eğilimli ve Direniş Temelli Şii Aktivizmi: Hizballah'ın Fikirselsel ve Örgütsel Zeminini [Violent resistance-based Shia activism: Hezbollah's ideational and organizational ground]," *Türkiye Ortadoğu Çalışmaları Dergisi* 2, no. 2 (2015): 59-88.

<sup>27</sup> John M. Hobson, "Two Waves of Weberian Historical Sociology in international relations," In *Historical Sociology of International Relations*, eds. Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 122-123; Stephen Hobden, "Theorizing the international system: perspectives from Historical Sociology," *Review of International Studies* 25, no.2 (1999): 257-271.

<sup>28</sup> Oren Barak, "Lebanon: Failure, Collapse, and Resuscitation" In *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg (Washington: The Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 305-340; Brenda M. Seaver, "The Regional Sources of Power-Sharing Failure: The Case of Lebanon," *Political Science of Quarterly* 115, no.2 (2000): 247-271.

<sup>29</sup> Arend Lijphart improved this approach to make sense of the power-sharing mechanisms between the demographically powerful groups in divided societies and to offer alternative, albeit fragile democracy. For the details of this theory and the problems with its usage in Lebanon, see Arend Lijphart, "Consociational democracy," *World Politics* 21, no.2 (1969): 207-225; Richard Hrair Dekmejian, "Consociational Democracy in Crisis: The Case of Lebanon," *Comparative Politics* 10, no.2 (1978): 251-265.

<sup>30</sup> Karam Karam, "An Analysis of Political Change in Lebanon in the light of Recent Mobilization Cycles," In *The Arab State and Neo-liberalization; The Restructuring of State Power in the Middle East*, eds. Laura Guazzone and Daniela Pioppi (UK: Ithaca Press, 2009): 47-70; Boaz Atzili, "State Weakness and 'Vacuum of Power' in Lebanon," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no.8 (2010): 757-782; Bryan R. Early, "Larger Than a Party, Yet Smaller Than a State," *World Affairs* 168, no.3 (2006): 115-128.

<sup>31</sup> Migdal, *State in Society*, 129.

its anarchic nature where non-state forces are very active and powerful.

In such an environment, some territories of Lebanon are almost linked with certain sectarian actors. To illustrate, the South is led by Shia groups while the North is dominated by Sunni communities, with the mountainous region being historically shaped by Druze and Maronite groups. In other words, geographical, sectarian, and even family-based divisions overlap in Lebanon, which further obstructs the territorial integrity and the reconciliation of the required symbols for the constitution of a modern state-society structure. Accordingly, this “anarchic condition” leads autonomous sectarian actors to safeguard their own spatial-territorial power and to use the state as the legitimate mechanism to enhance their capabilities. What is worse, these groups perceive the state as simply a distributive mechanism through which they allocate required resources to their affiliates. In this way, each autonomous actor intends to build state-like socio-political, economic, and military mechanisms in their alleged territories and to mobilize the people via different symbols.<sup>32</sup>

Hezbollah emerged in this domestic environment as the last and the most powerful Shia organization. From the beginning, the Lebanese state was shared between the sectarian groups, involving Shia groups as well. Yet, unlike the Sunni and Maronite groups, this French-imposed confessional anarchy subordinated Shia and Druze communities in Lebanon, which generated pervasive resentment among these groups. Accordingly, both Druze and Shia groups adopted a revisionist position against the existing local balance of power in Lebanon, thus backing revolutionary ideas like nationalism and socialism. With the rise of Islamist revisionism towards the 1960s and 1970s, Shia groups rediscovered Islamism as the basic ideational force to challenge the sectarian nature of the Lebanese state and the subordinate position of the Shia groups in this system. Specifically, the groups like the Amal Movement (Afwaj al-Muqawamah al-Lubnaniyyah), which was a military wing of the Deprived Movement (Harakat al-Mahrumin-1974) were founded in 1970s, and they initially mobilized Islamist revisionism. Following the turbulent period in which the anarchical environment further crystallized with the intertwined internal clashes and foreign interventions between 1975 and 1989, Hezbollah rose as a new Islamist non-state actor. It benefited from and further pushed the Islamization of Shia groups in Lebanon and was galvanized by the emergence of the Islamist regime in Iran in 1979. In other words, Hezbollah thrived in its fertile internal realm, which eventually advanced its non-state actorhood.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to domestic context, external context may shape state-society relations, and this manifests the intensive interaction between the inside and the outside. This interaction has occasionally been observed in the radical changes in Lebanese internal politics.<sup>34</sup> Mostly with regard to war and revolution-based events, the regional (external) context alters not only the power equilibrium in Lebanon’s domestic politics between sectarian groups, but also its socio-economic patterns. Of great importance among these external dynamics are the Israeli invasion (1982-2000), the Islamist (Shia) revolution in Iran in 1979, and finally, the Syrian internal war.<sup>35</sup> In this context, in addition to leading realist factors like wars and conflicts, as

<sup>32</sup> Anthony Vinci, “Anarchy, Failed States and Armed Groups: Reconsidering Conventional Analysis,” *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2008): 295-314.

<sup>33</sup> Saad-Ghorayeb, “Emergence of Hizbullah.”

<sup>34</sup> Hobden, *International Relations and Historical Sociology*; George Lawson, “Halliday’s Revenge: Revolutions and International Relations,” *International Affairs* 87, no. 5 (2011): 1069-1071.

<sup>35</sup> As Saouli stated, “The more intense the regional conflict, the more unstable Lebanon has tended to become, and vice-versa.” See Adham Saouli, “Stability Under Late State Formation: The Case of Lebanon,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 19, no. 4 (2006): 705; Saad-Ghorayeb, “Emergence of Hizbullah”; F. Gregory Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*



eventuated in the impacts of Israel's long-term occupation in Lebanese internal dynamics, regional revolutions affect the distribution of power and the rise or fall of several local actors in Lebanon. Some scholars have further claimed that Israel's invasion and its unconditional support for the brutal attacks of several Christian-Maronite groups like South Lebanese Army (SLA) were the basic regional impetus for the emergence of new resistance mobilization under Hezbollah's leadership. Israel used these groups as proxies and even collaborated with them in several massacres against Palestinian-populated camps in Sabra and Shatila in 1982. Therefore, it was not only domestic conflicts between different local actors, but also the invasion and involvement of the regional actors that reconfigured the local dynamics in Lebanon.<sup>36</sup>

Unlike the wars, the impact of the revolutions on the reformulation of the other countries' domestic politics was less investigated. In fact, in addition to the impacts of the revolutions on the course of international relations, these events brought new constraints and opportunities to the regional actors, including local players as well. The regional implications of the Nasser-led revolutionary discourse and its reflections on the domestic relations of the individual countries in the region has been studied sufficiently for the most part. Nasser-backed pro-Arab and leftist groups in the region and several Shia groups were emboldened by the increasing regional role of Nasser during this term to challenge the power equilibrium in Lebanon. There was even such a pervasive proverb as *Shi'i Shuyu* (a Shia a Communist) manifesting the widespread impact of Arab Socialist revisionism among Shia-populated areas. Not only Shia groups, but also Druze organizations were attracted by the Arab Socialist revision as they felt similarly marginalized in Lebanon.<sup>37</sup> As for Hezbollah's case, the Iranian revolution deserves much attention as one of the main external stimuli behind the emergence and the rising power of Hezbollah. The Iranian revolution challenged Western-backed countries in the region as this revolution adopted anti-Western and anti-Israel discourse. This revisionism also bolstered some local actors, like Hezbollah, in the region, which intended to establish an Iran-like system in their own countries.<sup>38</sup> Even before the eruption of the Islamist regime in Iran, some pro-Khomeini groups were very active in Lebanon and had intensive collaborations with Islamist actors in Lebanon, firstly with the Amal Movement and its Iranian-born leader, Musa al-Sadr, and then with other Islamist actors, which finally signaled the embodiment of Hezbollah as a new umbrella organization. The Iranian revolution and previous contacts between pro-revolution groups and Islamist actors in Lebanon completely shaped Hezbollah's ideational, organizational, and political realities, which proved the transformative impact of the external context and, more importantly, the revolutions on the emergence of non-state forces.<sup>39</sup>

Another apparent example of the transformative impact of the revolutions was the Arab uprisings, which engulfed the region for several years and shook the internal-external dynamics, including Lebanese politics. With this process, local actors in Lebanon modified

(UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 45-88.

<sup>36</sup> Augustus Richard Norton, "Hizballah and the Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30, no. 1 (2000): 22-35.

<sup>37</sup> Rodger Shanahan, *The Shia of Lebanon: Clans, Parties and Clerics* (London: Touris Academic Studies, 2005), 103; Omri Nir, "The shi'ites during the 1958 Lebanese crisis," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 6 (2004): 109-129.

<sup>38</sup> Maridi Nahas, "State-systems and revolutionary challenge: Nasser, Khomeini, and the Middle East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17, no.4 (1985): 507-527.

<sup>39</sup> Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: politics and religion*. London: Pluto Press, 2002; Rola al-Husseini, "Hezbollah and the Axis of Refusal: Hamas, Iran and Syria," *Third World Quarterly* 31, no. 5 (2010): 803-815.

their discourses and strategies to enhance their internal status. This change became further visible with another wave of Arab revolutions, the Syrian internal war being an example. As a matter of fact, the local actors adopted a “dissociation policy” with the Baabda Declaration in 2011 to avoid the destructive impact of the Syrian events, which indicated their awareness in regard to the greater interaction between state-society relations and the regional realm. However, Hezbollah-allied actors sided with the Bashar Assad regime, and the anti-Hezbollah axis in Lebanon backed the Syrian opposition, thus deepening the political crisis and bipolarization in Lebanon.<sup>40</sup> This two-bloc politics, which indeed dominated Lebanese dynamics since the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005, further sharpened in the earlier periods of the Syrian internal war.

Accordingly, there emerged unstable cabinets as a result of serious conflicts between pro-Syrian and anti-Syrian Lebanese groups, and the Lebanese parliament failed to elect a new president until 2016. In other words, the Arab uprisings and Syrian internal war became the external factors shaping Lebanese internal dynamics for some time, despite the fact that this country still did not fall into complete internal war, probably owing to the Lebanese people’s vivid and embedded memory of the realities of internal war.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Hezbollah’s transformation into a hegemonic non-state force in Lebanon and sub-regional power again followed the changing dynamics of the Syrian internal war. That means that with the clarification of the resilience of the Assad regime and its consolidation of power, Hezbollah compensated for its earlier losses and translated this shifting external context into several local gains. These empirical details on the Arab revolutions and the Syrian internal war, along with their impacts on the actorhood of Hezbollah, once more underscore the intensive interaction between the actors and the external mechanisms, which proves our theoretical argument on the *thicker* interaction between inside and outside developments.<sup>42</sup> In other words, initially, Iran’s revolutionary outreach to Lebanon and Israel’s previous invasion, along with its lasting military assaults on Lebanon, shaped the state-society relations in Lebanon and political-military positions of Lebanese sectarian actors. More recently, the transformative impacts of the Arab Revolutions and, in part, the Syrian internal war were also observed over the shifting domestic preferences. As a result of this interaction between outside and inside dynamics, Hezbollah became a “state-like” actor and even a “regional sub-power” by shaping Lebanon’s policies and forging different “foreign relations.” Therefore, starting its journey by dint of the pre-existing structural conditions, Hezbollah proved its actorhood over time and, thus, increasingly responded to and affected these conditions as well.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Joseph Bahout, “Lebanon at the brink: The impact of the Syrian Civil War,” *Middle East Brief* 76 (2014): 1-7; Bassel F. Salloukh, “The Syrian war: spillover effects on Lebanon,” *Middle East Policy* 24, no.1 (2017): 62-78; Nayla Tueni, “Lebanon’s Baabda Declaration, a national necessity,” *Al-Arabiya*, June 26, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Mustafa Yetim, “Post-Election Dynamics in Lebanon: From Bi-Polar to Tri-Polar Political Structure,” *Al-Sharq Strategic Research*, July, 2022.

<sup>42</sup> Bahout, “Lebanon at the Brink,” 62-78; Tamirace Fakhoury, “Do power-sharing systems behave differently amid regional uprisings? Lebanon in the Arab protest wave,” *The Middle East Journal* 68, no.4 (2014): 505-520.

<sup>43</sup> Hezbollah, like other violent non-state groups, uses “welfare” policies to strengthen its situation in South Lebanon. Alexis G. Grynkewich, “Welfare as Warfare: How Violent Non-State Groups Use Social Services to Attack the State,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31, no.4 (2008): 350-370. Indeed, not only Shia ideology, but also political Arabism have, to some degree, affected the course of action Hezbollah pursued. In this context, the claims that announced the death of “Arab nationalism” can hardly be practical. Morten Valbjorn, “Arab Nationalism (s) in Transformation,” In *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level*, eds. Barry Buzan and Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez (UK: Palgrave Studies, 2009): 160-167. Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, “Challenging the sponsor-proxy model: the Iran–Hizbullah relationship,” *Global Discourse* 9, no.4 (2019): 627-650.

#### 4. Proving Agency: Hezbollah in Internal and External Affairs

Structural mechanisms in the internal and external contexts present both opportunities and constraints for each actor, identified by Hobson as ‘realms of opportunity’ and ‘realms of constraints.’<sup>44</sup> Actors, in return, read these structural stimuli and adjust their policies pursuant to them, which indicates their adaptive character and dynamic evolution in the social-historical process. Hezbollah is one of the critical actors that utilize structural possibilities as a way to reinforce their actorhood.<sup>45</sup> This idea is better captured by structuration theory. Hezbollah, which is itself the result of the intersection of multi-faceted structural patterns, seems to modify itself in accordance with the shifting external and internal dynamics. Besides that, it affects these dynamics, which eventually brings the transformation and evolution of both ontological realities during the process.

To begin with, the Arab uprisings, as a new regional/external dynamic, urged Hezbollah to revise both its earlier political-military goals and discursive strategies. Hezbollah backed the initial waves of Arab uprisings with both new discursive and political-military strategies to weaken West-backed regimes. Therefore, it extended its foreign policy understanding from merely the Israel-Palestine conflict to the entire region by adapting allegedly revisionist policies. In this way, it largely allied with opposition groups that stood against the Western-backed regimes, such as those in Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain and Yemen, by stating that “your Spring has begun; no one can lead you to another winter.”<sup>46</sup> Hezbollah claimed that this new shift in its discourse was in line with its long-held revisionist and revolutionary position as it stood by the “oppressed (mustazafin)” communities in the region. In this discourse, Hezbollah always positioned itself within the camp of “oppressed” groups to defy the local and the regional “oppressors (mustakberin),” which is the indication of its Karbala Narrative based on the oppressed and oppressor dichotomy.<sup>47</sup> In this sense, the external context initially played “a realm of opportunity” for Hezbollah to assert itself as a regional actor and to consolidate its character of resistance in local politics.

In line with these political adjustments, Hezbollah’s discursive strategies shifted as well. While the Israel-USA alliance regionally and their allies in Lebanon locally were previously regarded as the major oppressors, this was partially modified with the Arab uprisings, which clarified the impact of the regional context on Hezbollah’s discursive orientation and the context-based nature of its resistance discourse. In this manner, Hezbollah used this discourse to motivate several popular movements in the larger region, including North African countries. Yet, the radical change in this discourse came with the Syrian internal war, where this time, Hezbollah allied with an “oppressor” and intended to legitimize its policies again with resistance discourse. In that event, this discourse adopted more status-quo policies and served the interests of the embattled Assad regime, which refused similar reform calls raised all over the region.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> John M. Hobson, “The ‘second state debate’ in International Relations: theory turned upside-down,” *Review of International Studies* 27, no.3 (2001): 395-414.

<sup>45</sup> For a better understanding of Hezbollah’s organizational and societal dimensions, see Lara Deeb, “Hezbollah: A Primer,” *Middle East Report Online*, July 31, 2006; Martin Rudner, “Hizbullah: An Organizational and Operational Profile,” *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence* 23, no.2 (2010): 226-246.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph Alagha, “Hezbollah and the Arab Spring,” *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 1, no.2 (2014): 193-194.

<sup>47</sup> Shahram Akbarzadeh, “Why does Iran need Hizbullah?,” *The Muslim World* 106, no.1 (2016): 127-140.

<sup>48</sup> For detailed information on Hezbollah’s changing political priorities and discursive strategies during the Arab uprisings and Syrian internal war, see Mustafa Yetim and Ridvan Kalayci, “Tracing the Political Origins of The Hezbollah’s Resistance Discourse: From Revisionism to Status Quo,” *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 16, no.2 (2022): 209-224.

Hezbollah's unwavering commitment to the survival of the Assad regime and the adjustment of its resistance discourse with the new regional environment can even be linked to the earlier structural factors that enabled its emergence and shaped the subsequent journey of Hezbollah. From the beginning, Hezbollah became the key non-state actor of the "Axis of Resistance (Jabhat al-Muqawama)," which consisted of Iran, Syria, and the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas/Harakat Al-Muqawama Al-Islamiya). The Palestinian Islamist faction and only Sunni actor in the axis of resistance, Hamas, temporarily left this bloc following the Syrian internal conflicts, but afterwards, the relations were put on a similar track with the emergent regional dynamics such that the Assad regime managed to sustain its resilience.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the survival of this anti-Western and anti-Israel regional bloc can indeed be seen as much more important than Hezbollah's local position, as Hezbollah considers the survival of this bloc existential to sustaining its resilient status in local politics. Thus, when the Assad regime was threatened, Iran and Hezbollah perceived the possible collapse of this regime as a major concern as Syria geographically links Hezbollah to Iran via its strategic position. This time, regional dynamics played a constraint role on the preferences of Hezbollah, and Hezbollah felt it necessary to get involved in the Syrian quagmire, even to the detriment of its local status and purposes. This was a radical rupture in terms of Hezbollah's traditional position as it now became obvious that Syria-based concerns were more central than its alleged concentration only on the "Eternal Enemy, Rapist Entity," that is "oppressor" Israel. Thus, its pro-Palestine (oppressed) ideological stance and the related non-sectarian and pro-oppressed discursive aspects evolved in the face of perceptual threats from Syria.

After the Assad regime, with support from its allies (Iran, Russia, and Hezbollah), regained its power in Syria, Hezbollah started to announce the end of the Syrian internal war and focus more on local politics, particularly since 2016. With this new regional dynamic, Hezbollah turned into a hegemonic local actor, as it already proved its regional capacity with its successful advance and its militia groups standing inside Syrian territories, which removed geographical barriers between Iran and Hezbollah.<sup>50</sup> Thus, in response to the contextual changes throughout the region, Hezbollah, along with its allies, attempted to change the regional environment as an actor in its favor, which is another manifestation of the dialogue between actors and structural realities, as well as evolving agency.

In addition to the impacts of regional events on Hezbollah's preferences, these events determined the local strategies of Hezbollah and its relations with other local actors. This empirical reality once more highlighted the mutual interaction between the outside and the inside, the complex and dynamic relations between the actors and the structures, as well as the reciprocal transformation of both ontological realities. While externally aligning with Syria and Iran, Hezbollah defended them internally by preventing any local decision to weaken the Assad regime and allying with local actors that would not bring into question the Iran-Assad alliance. This caused a new escalation in Lebanon between the Hezbollah-led alliance involving the Nabih Barri-led Amal Party and the Michael Aoun-led Free Patriotism

<sup>49</sup> Rola el-Husseini, "Hezbollah and the axis of refusal: Hamas, Iran and Syria," *Third World Quarterly* 31, no.5 (2010): 803-815; Benedetta Berti, "Hizbullah, Hamas, and the 'Arab Spring' - Weathering the Regional Storm?," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 6, no.3 (2012): 21-29.

<sup>50</sup> Massaab al-Aloosy, "Hezbollah in Syria: An Insurgent's Ideology, Interest, and Survival," *Middle East Policy* 29, no.1 (2022): 125-138; Alagha, "Hezbollah and the Arab Spring"; Berti, "Weathering the Regional Storm?"; "Is Hezbollah heading for an early exit from Syria?," *TRT World*, September 15, 2020; Sirwan Kajjo, "Hezbollah Leader: We Have Reduced Our Military Presence in Syria," *VOA*, July 14, 2019.

Party, and the anti-Hezbollah camp composed of the Saad Hariri-led Future Party, the Samir Geagea-led Lebanese Forces Party, and the Walid Jumblatt-led Progressive Socialist Party. Some clashes between pro-Assad groups and anti-Assad opposition groups were even observed in the northern parts of Lebanon. Accordingly, there emerged successive cabinet crises, government resignations, and systemic deadlock in Lebanon, which fanned the flames of political polarization.

In this way, Lebanese politics resembled the Cold War reality, and two blocs dominated Lebanon's political affairs for some time.<sup>51</sup> This meant that regional events not only impacted the policies of Hezbollah as an actor, but they also reconfigured the complete internal politics in Lebanon. In other words, while the initial Arab uprisings did not radically trigger the chaotic situation in Lebanon, the events in Syria complicated Lebanon's already fragile environment. Hezbollah unconditionally supported the regime by getting deeply involved in the Syrian conundrum, while other anti-Hezbollah groups refused any compromise with the pro-Assad position. Accordingly, Hezbollah intended to legitimize its pro-Assad position by claiming that the elimination of the DAESH-led "Takfiri" terrorists should be the most urgent issue of the "resistance," as they insult the Shia Shrines like Sayyida Zeinab and threaten the existence of Shia groups in Syria. This signaled the shift in Hezbollah's discourse, and the group was criticized for advancing a regionally sectarian and oppressive position with its rising emphasis on Shia symbols and solidarity with the Assad regime. Besides this, Hezbollah considered the pro-reform Syrian protests as a Western-backed conspiracy by reversing its initial pro-revisionist support for the popular demands made during the Arab uprisings.<sup>52</sup>

Starting its journey as a revolutionary actor that challenged Lebanon's confessional-sectarian structure and pledged the foundation of an Islamist system instead, over time, Hezbollah turned into a principal status-quo actor. This can indeed be a brief story of the evolution of any actor as a result of its interaction with contextual realities, and Hezbollah is no exception to this general argument. Hence, it did not transform the essence of the state structure (sectarian anarchy), it merely altered the balance of power in its favor. Especially with its political-military achievements in Syria, Hezbollah rose to become the hegemonic force in Lebanon. To illustrate, Hezbollah played a certain role in the election of Michael Aoun, Leader of the Patriotic Movement party, as Lebanese President in 2016 following more than two years of stalemate in the election of a new president. And it has also been one of the leading actors in determining the foundation of most cabinets since the 2010s. In this way, rapidly overcoming the earlier surprise that the Syrian internal war caused, Hezbollah consolidated its local power as well via its new achievements in Syria.<sup>53</sup>

Hezbollah's dominance and its hegemonic position in Lebanon's political system were further observed during the "WhatsApp Intifada" protests in Lebanon, which started in October 2019 and demanded radical reforms in the sectarian system and "real democracy" in Lebanon. During this event, both the shift of resistance discourse again towards status-quo strategies and the determinant impact of Hezbollah on local politics became further

<sup>51</sup> Yetim, "Post-Election Dynamics in Lebanon."

<sup>52</sup> Adham Saouli, "Hezbollah's intervention in Syria: Causes and consequences," In *the War for Syria*, eds. Raymond Hinnebusch and Adham Saouli (New York: Routledge, 2019), 69-85; Randa Slim, "Hezbollah and Syria: from regime proxy to regime savior," *Insight Turkey* 6, no.2 (2014): 61-68.

<sup>53</sup> Mustafa Yetim, "Blok Siyaseti Üzerinden Lübnan Protestoları [Lebanese Protests via Bloc Politics]," *Ortaoğru Araştırmaları Merkezi* 239 (2020): 1-29.

noticeable. During this process, in contrast to its previous revisionist position against the sectarian structure, Hezbollah accused protestors of having linkages with “foreign countries” and intended to intimidate pro-reform groups, thus radically adopting a status-quo position.<sup>54</sup> Most protestors targeted not only the traditional powers controlling the system, they also severely criticized Hezbollah by yelling, “All of them means all of them (kullun yaani kullun).” In other words, large communities in Lebanon began to consider Hezbollah as another and much more powerful status-quo actor that controls the current system and presents a major obstacle to possible change.<sup>55</sup> Some even identified the government as the “Hezbollah government” and Lebanon as “Hezbollah-land.” Therefore, perception and reality fostered each other regarding Hezbollah’s evolution from the once pro-aggrieved and “oppressed” position to its staunch commitment to the anarchical and sectarian system in Lebanon, which still harbors oppression and discrimination. Furthermore, it severely criticized the investigation of the Beirut Explosion, which took place on 4 August 2020 and caused massive destruction in Lebanon, revealing once more the dysfunctionality and abyss of the sectarian anarchy in Lebanon.

Not only in domestic affairs, but also in foreign relations, Hezbollah evolved into a “king-maker” as exemplified by the latest Israel-Lebanon maritime deal on the long-disputed maritime zones between the two countries, and its changing agency can also be observed in this realm. Hezbollah implicitly veiled its position by not resisting this deal and tried to legitimize its stance by claiming that this deal protected Lebanon’s rights. When considering that Hezbollah traditionally defined Israel not as a state but as an entity that should be destroyed, its evolution over time while responding to the contextual dynamics showed the complex interactions between the actors and the structural changes. Furthermore, Hezbollah regionally extended its foreign policy to several areas like Yemen and Iraq, where pro-Iranian groups have become more powerful recently as a consequence of the internal wars in these countries. Despite its partial reluctance concerning the excessive regional extension, Hezbollah collaborated with Iranian-backed Houthi groups in Yemen and Hashd al-Shaabi forces in Iraq, which enabled a geographical connection between the central power of the regional axis of resistance, Iran, and its regional non-state allies. This process also consolidated Hezbollah’s transition into a non-state regional actor, which is still one of the exceptional cases of exporting the Iranian system to the region. However, even though Hezbollah gained dominant local and critical regional actor status, there remain many local and regional challenges to its current position, which indicates the dynamic interaction between the structures and the actors.<sup>56</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

In contrast to actor-led and structure-led approaches, some alternative approaches like the Neo-Weberian one underline the importance of the multiple-actor and multi-level reality of social relations and the intensive interactions between actors and structural dynamics. This argument, embodied in the structuration theory, brings new possibilities to understanding

<sup>54</sup> Sunniva Rose, “Protests in Hezbollah stronghold continue despite intimidation,” *The National*, November 7, 2019; “All of them means all of them’: Lebanon protest slogans,” *France24*, October 21, 2019; Mersiha Gadzo, “Lebanon protests: ‘difficult, delicate’ situation for Hezbollah,” *Al-Jazeera*, October 27, 2019; Robert Fisk, “Hezbollah threatens the peaceful and non-sectarian protests in Lebanon,” *Independent*, October 25, 2019.

<sup>55</sup> Hamid Dabashi, “Arab Spring exposes Nasrallah’s hypocrisy,” *Al-Jazeera*, June 22, 2011; Mersiha Gadzo, “All of them.”

<sup>56</sup> Yetim, “Lebanese Protests via Bloc Politics.”

the journey of alternative actors like VNSAs as well. In this context, the impact of stratified structural realities on the emergence of such actors and the visible role of these realities on the success or failure of these actors over time constitutes one aspect of the romance of these actors. Another aspect is related to the agency of these actors, meaning their possible influence on the structural relations that initially enable these actors to emerge and gain power. These theoretical premises help us make sense of the emergence, transformation, and the recent actorhood of Hezbollah as a VNSA. Hezbollah emerged as a result of the certain structural dynamics consisting of internal and external mechanisms, presenting a case mostly adaptive to the shifting contextual realities as explained above via Neo-Weberian arguments.

In this context, the enduring domestic anarchy in Lebanon and the conflicted regional environment, along with several revolutions, have always impacted the socio-political dynamics in Lebanon. These structural dynamics shaped the emergence and the increasing actorhood of Hezbollah in the process. Locally, complicated internal wars between 1975 and 1989 further triggered the internal anarchy in Lebanon, and regionally, Israel's invasion of Lebanon, lasting until the 2000s, along with the Islamist revolution in Iran determined the fate of Hezbollah. Considering these structural changes as a "realm of possibility," Hezbollah carved a state-like control over some territories in Lebanon like South Lebanon and the Beqaa Valley. In these areas, Hezbollah consolidated its military capacity and mobilized its economic instruments along with its ideological appeal based on the constitution of the resistance of society. After some time, it evolved into a dominant actor in the Shia community and led this community to challenge the existing state-society mechanisms in Lebanon.

Gaining more local power with its revisionist discourse challenging the Maronite-Sunni hegemonic and sectarian power-sharing model in Lebanon, Hezbollah further reinforced its internal autonomy over time and turned into a hegemonic force in Lebanon. Moreover, with the new dynamics unfolding as a consequence of the Arab uprisings and, in part, the events in Syria, Hezbollah utilized the new conflictual and revolution-prone regional environment to empower its regional actorhood. In this manner, proving its military power in the Syrian internal war and eliminating the geographical rupture between itself and Iran by locating its forces in Syria and enabling the Assad regime to defy the collapse, Hezbollah shaped the regional dynamics and the course of the Arab uprisings to the advantage of the resistance bloc.

Afterwards, Hezbollah used its now sub-regional power status to control the Lebanese system by altering the balance of power in Lebanon in favor of the once marginalized Shia groups. Possibly even in contrast to other sectarian actors, Hezbollah gained a stronger hierarchical and hegemonic position in Lebanon, as demonstrated in its reaction to the pro-reform and revisionist demands resonated all over Lebanon with the "WhatsApp Intifada" protests. Whereas Hezbollah was once a revisionist actor challenging the structural dynamics which enabled it to flourish, it has recently turned into a status quo actor that strives to repel any revisionist claim. In other words, the mutual interaction between structural realities and Hezbollah as a non-state actor transformed its actorhood along with its political purposes, discursive strategies, and military capability. In conclusion, as succinctly underlined by Neo-Weberian approaches, there is a continuous interaction between the actors and the structural dynamics, and both dynamics can affect each other in the process. The essence of this interaction can take different shapes over time, and VNSAs like Hezbollah can also have various impacts on the internal and external realities as elucidated in the mentioned empirical realities.

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