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Realist Constructivism: The case of the Lebanese Amal Movement (1975-1991)

Tsousis, Charalampos

þÿœaster in International Relations, Strategy and Security, School of Soci
Humanities, Neapolis University Pafos

Neapolis University Pafos

School of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities

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CHARALAMPOS TSOUSIS

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School of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities

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CHARALAMPOS TSOUSIS

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Examiners' Committee.

First Supervisor (Neapolis University Pafos) Zakia Aqra [rank, signature]

Committee member Sotirios Roussos [ranks, signatures]

Committee member Marina Eleftheriadou [ranks, signatures]

DECLARATION

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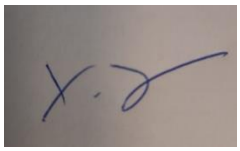

Summary

This dissertation aims to analyze the case of the Amal Movement during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1991), in the context of Realist Constructivism. It will present the theoretical framework and the basic characteristics of Realist Constructivism as a concept (and not a paradigm). Also, a brief reference to the historical context regarding the Shia community in Lebanon at the time. Further, it will analyze how Amal formulated its dynamic intersubjective identity, from a Constructivist viewpoint, as a statelike actor. It will present how this identity has developed and been amended, adapting to the circumstances. It will elaborate on the international relations that Amal developed during the period with regional national states (Israel, Syria, Iran) as well as with the Palestinian Liberation Organization, highlighting the power politics that guided the Movement's decisions, from a Realist aspect. Finally, within the context of Realist Constructivism, it will offer an assessment on whether Amal as a civil war militia achieved its objectives (or not) and refer to Amal's path of decommissioning and becoming a legitimate political party.

Amal local office in downtown Beirut. In the middle, the phrase “Amal Movement” and the party’s logo. Musa Sadr on the left, Nabih Berri on the right *(photo taken by the author, March 2019)*.

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Especially, I would like to thank the supervisor of this dissertation, Ms. Zakia Aqra, for the numerous hours she invested for review, for her crucial comments and corrections and most of all, for her precious guidance on the structure of the study.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation:

To my brother, who taught me the beauty of studying different academic fields.

To my father, who taught me the value of self-studying late in the evening.

And to my mother, who taught me that it is never too late in life to get another university degree.

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1. Introduction

This dissertation aims to examine the Amal movement in Lebanon within the context of Realist Constructivism in International Relations. The basic research questions of this dissertation are: First, to what extent can Constructivist characteristics be attributed to Amal, considering not only its published objectives but also the way it operated in practice? Second, how Amal's Realist characteristics, although itself not a national state, were manifested in its relations with key regional national states and other international actors? And finally, can the Realist Constructivist concept explain the transformation of Amal from a militia to a mainstream parliamentary party and, by extension, how can the success (or failure) of Amal's corresponding aims can be assessed?

To these ends, I will examine the emergence and development of Amal's identity as an Arab, Shia and - above all - a distinct Lebanese entity in the highly fragmented and sectarian environment of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1991). Also, I will examine Amal's interaction with Israel, Syria and Iran, as well as with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), since all those have played a significant role for the general development of Lebanon.

This dissertation aims at enriching the very limited, if not non-existent, application of the concept of Realist Constructivism to case studies referring to entities other than national states. To the best of my knowledge, it is perhaps the first time that this particular theoretical approach is employed on a militia in general and for Lebanon in particular.

Similarly, the academic literature has largely covered mostly Hezbollah, when researching the case of the Lebanese Shia. Amal has been covered to a much lesser extent, although in my opinion both entities have provided serious input in the development both of the specific community and of Lebanon in general. I hope this paper provides some input to filling this gap.

I will investigate the ways and extent to which Amal functioned as a statelike actor, in some ways as a national state in all but in name, in the sense of entering into its own international relations in clear distinction and at times in contrast with the ones of the official Lebanese government. This is quite common for many local actors (political parties and militias) in Lebanon, during the period under consideration.

I argue that despite Amal's inherently sectarian character its primary aim was to safeguard the unity and the sovereignty of the Lebanese state in general but even more (although implicitly),

to promote the interests and advance the internal position of the disinherited Shia populations residing in the country. Further, Amal's efforts towards these aims crystallized in the context of making amends in, but not utterly toppling, the existing Lebanese status quo.

The scope of this study is to present evidence that the critical theory of Constructivism in International Relations is valid. At the same time, to substantiate that Constructivism can well be seen at times as being at work in conjunction with Realism, contrary to the belief that many may hold that one paradigm of International Relations can be viewed as absolutely valid by itself and its elements in principle as mutually exclusive with the ones of other paradigms.

The research method I will adopt is the qualitative one. The type of my research will be descriptive, meaning that it will aim to present specific core ideas and after that, certain vital details that are structured on those. It will be also correlational, explanatory and evidence based, i.e. it will proceed to a syncretical analysis of various academic books and articles to corroborate my conclusions.

The first main part of this dissertation will briefly cover the theoretical premises behind the research exercise. The second one will analyze Amal's identity, on the basis of its founding Charter (1975) and through its conduct during the civil war. The third one will sketch the frame of Amal's relations with regional states (Iran, Syria, Israel) and the PLO. The last part will comprise the conclusions of my research, arguing to integrate the case study in the concept of Realist Constructivism.

2. Theoretical foundations

Realist Constructivism as proposed by Prof. Samuel Barkin (Barkin 2010) bridges two schools of thought in International Relations, namely, Realism and Constructivism. Even though these two schools may be viewed as opposing, Prof. Barkin suggests that insights from both theories can complement each other, particularly in examining the interplay between power structures and ideational factors. In simple terms, Realist Constructivism refers to the potential co-existence of basic elements of the Realist and the Constructivist approaches within the same case of International Relations.

a) Realism

Under Realism, in principle it is the national states which are the reference objects of International Relations (Hough et al. 2021). Further, national states are seen to operate in an essentially anarchic international environment, in the sense that there is no higher authority above them that could exercise force and impose a status-quo with a sort of universal mandate or rules to be respected by everyone.

Rather, all Realists agree that it is power politics that guide the actions and relations of states. Realism sees states as rational entities which are in a constant quest of accumulating power, so as to pursue their individual interests. These interests are pre-determined and already known to a state before it proceeds to any relevant action.

In this sense there appears the concept of self-help, which in a few words means that a state can truly rely on none other except itself to safeguard and promote its interests. Apart from that, the best a state can hope for is to benefit from an alliance with any other party only circumstantially, and only to the extent that its interests coincide with the interests of that other party.

Generally, Realists tend to adhere in the material notion of power in International Relations. Namely, to those processes that lead to the maximization of military power of the state. This core idea emanates from the intellectual work of a long row of thinkers, such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes and Von Clausewitz. Their work is considered part of the Classical Realist variant of Realism, which claims that International Relations are articulated on the less-than-perfect human nature that is characterized by egoism, aggression and the will to impose oneself to others.

b) Constructivism

A first basic understanding of Constructivism can be expressed by the recognition of the human tendency of forming groups, as it has clearly been manifested throughout history (Sterling-Folker 2021). Forming these groups, human beings obtain specific identities. Each respective identity comprises certain core ideas, which from their part project patterns of thought and behavior to the members of the group, leading them to a specific conduct in several walks of their life. Identities pave the way for certain actions from the people that bear them. These actions, although not absolutely programmed and reinforced, in general have to be compatible with the core ideas that establish the identity under consideration (Katzenstein 2019). Thus, identities create norms, and any incompliance can have different consequences for the individual, the most obvious being that they be expelled from the respective group (or even defamed).

Further, Constructivism understands reality as a totality of social structures. Material power of course still plays a role, but it is the ideological perception of each observer on such material power that finally matters. To paraphrase a well-known example from a pioneer Constructivist theorist (Wendt 1995), both France and the DPRK retain nuclear warheads. From the aspect of pure, "objective" material power, France's armament of 290 warheads is much more powerful than DPRK's of estimated 90. Strangely enough for a purely "materialist" perspective, a US politician most probably considers the latter much more significant in the context of International Relations than the former, due to the way he/she has socially structured their loyalties and overall understanding. For a Chinese politician, the corresponding consideration most probably is exactly the opposite.

Another basic feature of the Constructivist theory is the concept of agency. In brief, agency is mainly the ability of an entity to act (Theys 2018). In Constructivism in particular, agency has to do with the interconnectedness and the mutual influence between the material and ideological structures from the one side and the individual, which is considered, by itself and by others, as a member of a structure. The respective individual is at the same time both the recipient and the emitter of information and input. The structure leads the individual in adopting a specific identity, while the individual reverts by exerting influence. In this way, the individual member reinforces and may promote gradual changes on the identity under consideration. In the example presented above regarding the France and the DPRK, the material power of their respective nuclear armaments is the given. Agency has to do with how the US and Chinese politicians referred to in our example view their relationship with the other actors involved,

from an ideological perspective, and the ways this relationship can be transformed by actions that the two agents may take, leading either to détente or enmity, accordingly.

As a result, Constructivism claims that intersubjective identities are created. An intersubjective identity is a structure that has been mainly formulated by the ideas, norms or shared values that not only its members hold, but also the connected or rival parties involved acknowledge them as belonging to its members. It is thus an identity that is understood as such by both the entity that bears it and by those interacting with it, either friends or foes, alike.

c) Realist Constructivism

To understand Realist Constructivism we have to note first that it does not operate as a theoretical "paradigm", but rather as a "concept" (Barkin 2010, p. 6). Any "paradigm" considers its underlining assumptions as mutually exclusive with the ones of other paradigms, labelling any research conclusion as fitting in the paradigm or being out and beyond of it.

A concept is something different and more complex. First, it does not attempt to be an all-encompassing method of viewing reality. Rather, it implements a minimalistic approach of encompassing only particular core elements of two paradigms, viewing other elements as orthogonal. In this sense, the core elements that can be attributed to Realism on the one hand and to Constructivism on the other that will formulate the concept of Realist Constructivism, are power politics and intersubjective identities, respectively.

Second, a concept is looking for points of tangency among different paradigms. It gives substance in the identifications of relations that have been developed in practice, even if these relations do not comprise everything that the implementation of the corresponding pure paradigms would anticipate. As regards in particular the concept of Realism Constructivism, Prof. Barkin explains the basic point of tangency as follows: Realism is providing the political aspect in International Relations, highlighting the centrality of power. Constructivism on the other hand is providing the sociological aspect, highlighting the way the participating entities are socially constructed. Therefore, the Realist element of the centrality of state, for example, may or may not be relevant on an ad-hoc basis when analyzing certain case studies.

The above characteristics of the two paradigms, however, constitute their limits as well. Each of them may be seen as giving answers to different questions, and this is exactly the fact that brings forth the need of synthesis.

It has also to be noted again that Realist Constructivism does not have the ambition to be seen as a perennial, transhistorical model of interpreting all the realities of International Relations.

Rather, it claims to be one of many potential syntheses that can arise and can be useful on an ad-hoc basis (Barkin 2010, p. 12).

Scholars adhering to either Realism or Constructivism can see certain points of opposition between the two paradigms. But, if these points are analyzed within the concept of Realist Constructivism, they are proven not to create such a tension that could defy the validity of the concept itself.

The first has to do with the antithesis often presented between materialism and ideas, attributing the former to Realism and the latter to Constructivism. There also lies the view that many Realists adopt, that Constructivism is connected in many of its theoretical foundations with Liberalism (if not being directly an offshoot of the latter). To the contrary, Realist Constructivism is of the view that in any form of material power structure there are ideas that are embedded therein, which serve as explicit or implicit guidelines on how these structures operate and develop in time.

Another relevant aspect has to do with the seeming incompatibility between the rationality which characterizes Realism and the adoption of identities which characterizes Constructivism. Realism and more specifically its Classical form truly claim that human thought, whether individual or collective, makes rational choices in their best interest after an express or unconscious cost-benefit analysis of the data at hand. This is a fixed pattern in Realist thought, which can be also directly related to the Classical Realist assumption that human nature is basically egoistic and inherently flawed to a certain extent. Realist Constructivism does not disagree with the above arguments, and this is why it can be seen as corresponding more to the Classical than to other forms of Realism. Nevertheless, it poses a crucial additional claim, regarding what can be finally perceived as the real or best interest of a structure, which although based on power, it is also socially constructed. In a practical example, Realist Constructivism for sure would agree that the US as state is operating under a Realist grand strategy against China, throughout the last decades. However, the way this strategy has been pursued by different US administrations (Khan 2024), had primarily to do with the way each respective intersubjective identity regarding the US external policy had been socially and politically constructed.

In addition, it is worth noting that both Realism and Constructivism refer to the element of social interest, whether that may be the national one (for Realists) or the public one in general, in the sense that it serves the purposes and ambitions of the intersubjective identity that has been formulated (for Constructivists). This is a point of tangency, while the fact that each

paradigm may define the respective interest in different terms, can be seen by Realist Constructivists as something orthogonal (i.e. not relevant) for the implementation of their concept. From this understanding stems the argument that power politics cannot be pursued only by states, but also by other actors that are the products and bearers of intersubjective identities but may develop international relations with national states, as if they were states themselves. This is a very useful conclusion that is a core idea behind the subject matter of this dissertation.

d) States and Statelike Actors

According to Weber, an entity can be considered a "state" when it retains the right of monopolizing the use of physical force in a particular territory (Weber 1919). Also, this monopolization has to have a continuity in regard to time and a relative coherence in its programming objectives before the corresponding political organization can be recognized as a state (Weber 1922).

Another generally acknowledged criterion of statehood has to do with the capacity of the entity to enter into international relations with (other) states.[1]

It is apparent that Amal cannot be seen as fulfilling the Weberian prerequisites to be seen as a "state" actor, irrespective of the fact that a query might arise on whether the official Lebanese government itself could be so seen, during the respective period of the Lebanese civil war. Nevertheless, Amal and other militias have been able to monopolize the use of physical force in an organized way in certain parts of Lebanon for specific periods. Also, in the case of Amal the criterion of being able to create international relations with national states had also been fulfilled.

Thus, there comes up the concept of "statelike" actors. These entities can be seen as bridging the gap between the states and the armed non-state actors (Aqra 2022), since they clearly present elements of a statutory kind but of a more limited nature as regards space and time.

[1] For example, see the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States (1933), art. 1.

3. Literature review

The academic community, so far, when engaging with the international relations of Lebanon in general and the role of its Shia community in the civil war, seems to have placed much more interest in the analysis of Hezbollah. This may be due either to the latter's enhanced military capabilities or to the implications of its relations with Iran, and it is evident if one listed the secondary resources and documentaries dedicated to Hezbollah and the quite less in number dealing with Amal. Amal's relationship with Hezbollah, Lebanon's other prominent Shia faction, is a major area of study. Scholars like Shanahan (2005) present the different approaches adopted by the two entities in terms of strategy. It thus becomes evident how Hezbollah adopted a Pan-Islamic Shia approach using the Iranian revolution of 1979 as a prototype, while Amal adhered to the Lebanese nationalist element aligning closely with Syria in a win-win exchange of a Realist nature.

Nevertheless, both Hezbollah and Amal could be seen as equally influential for Lebanon and its Shia community, despite the varied prioritization they gave in armed conflict. One must not forget that it was Amal that was the pioneer in the awakening of the Lebanese Shia community and that Hezbollah started as its offshoot, crystallized as a more religiously centered version when the "parent entity" decided for good to adopt a secular political strategy.

Scholars like Ajami (1986) and Norton (1987) describe in detail the emergence of Amal, initially as the armed wing of the Movement of the Deprived, the first years of the Movement and the fundamental role that its founder Musa Sadr played and continued to play as an icon and a metaphysical element after his disappearance in 1978. It is presented how Sadr succeeded in mobilizing the marginalized Shia community of Lebanon for the first time under their own distinct banner, by addressing existing socioeconomic grievances. Another characteristic concerning Amal that is highlighted by Norton has to do with Sadr's approach to combine a message of Shia empowerment with a Lebanese nationalist ethos, differentiating it both from existing Pan-Arabic and pro-Palestinian as well as from Pan-Islamic movements that would later emerge.

In this context, Nir (2011) delineates the role played by Nabih Berri, the second most prominent personality related to Amal and the way the Movement changed its strategy in the 1980s with the decision to go secular and to actively take part in the ongoing civil war. These developments are crucial for the understanding of the evolvement of Amal's intersubjective identity and the relation of this development to a Realist conduct in the international relations promoted by the Movement.

Bonsen (2020) provides a very thorough analysis on the elements and the stages of development of Amal's identity, throughout the years of the civil war. The intersubjective and dynamic character of this identity become perfectly clear from a Constructivist point of view.

Amal has also been the subject matter of academic editions that refer to the episodes of the Lebanese civil war. Researchers such as O'Balance (1998) examine how Amal proceeded on the practical path throughout the armed and political conflicts. Also, they investigate its interaction with specific regional state actors as well as their proxies operating within the Lebanese soil.

4. Historical context

The Shia presence in Lebanon dates from the 10th century. Their ethnic origins are considered to stem from Yemenite tribes that relocated then to the area known as Greater Syria (which includes Lebanon, Palestine and parts of Jordan). Lebanon was established after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and its borders included the Beqaa valley and the Jabal Amil district, areas densely populated by Shia. After the 1950s, many Shia relocated to the outskirts of Beirut in their quest for a better living, thus creating a Shia zone in the city's south suburbs. Historically, the Shia in Lebanon have been marginalized and living in conditions of severe poverty (Shanahan 2005).

The social and political awakening of the Shia community in Lebanon started in the 1960s, developed in the following years and met its climax in the second part of the 1970s. It appears that there were specific reasons why their awakening did not happen earlier. First, the physical split of the Shia populations in different geographical parts of Lebanon, namely the Beqaa Valley and the Jabal Amil district. The distance created by this split, considering the less developed technical capabilities of the era, led to hampered communication and decreased possibilities of social interaction and organization. Second, the Lebanese Shia community's organization historically. The community was dominated by its own "Zuama" (Chiefs), the particular class of bosses that in essence hegemonized not only the Shia but all the distinct religious communities of the sectarian-torn country. The clientelist system that the "Zuama" were leading was based on bribery, coercion and brute force, and did not leave any room whatsoever for alternative social or political structures to be established. In this regard, one has also to consider the particularly low levels of education and household income that the Shia community was suffering back then. Further, the Shia Zuama were antagonizing one another in their quest for votes, acquisition of financial privileges and concentration of para-military force in the form of armed bands of thugs that were answering to them and them only (Siklawi 2012).

Musa Sadr was a charismatic Iranian Shia cleric of claimed Lebanese origin. He arrived as a "mufti" (religious judge) from the city of Qom in Iran to the coastal Lebanese city of Tyre at the end of 1959. He had studied in length, both in secular and religious academic centres. The high echelons of the Shia faith located in Iran and Iraq had provided him with the needed credibility and legitimacy, which were prerequisites upon his arrival in Lebanon if he were to obtain a first level of local leverage (Ajami 1986, p. 35). Before founding the Mahroumin Movement (Movement of the Deprived, later renamed to Amal) in 1974, Sadr had created the

Supreme Islamic Shia Council (SISC) in 1967 and had taken several local initiatives to promote religious faith along with the structuring of a social movement for the poor and neglected Shia population of Southern Lebanon (Siklawi 2012). His presence in Lebanon truly shaped the until then headless Shia community in a new political perspective and a militant revival.

It has to be noted here that at that point in time, not only the Lebanese civil war but also the Cold War was still a reality and at one of its highest points of tension. In Lebanon, several left-wing formations of varying dynamics were operating and bearing the ambition of increasing the number of their members and their general leverage in the political landscape of Lebanon. These formations, not only "orthodox" Marxist-Leninist like the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) that was answering to Moscow but also various other of even more radical agendas, like the Organization of Communist Action in Lebanon (OACL), had endorsed militant political activism in universities, in trade unions and in working-class neighbourhoods of Beirut and other major cities. The downtrodden Shia population of Lebanon, especially before the emergence of Amal, had been proven fairly prone to endorsing left-wing ideological currents and claiming membership in the corresponding formations. From the beginning of its existence, the Movement of the Deprived had to antagonize the left-wing forces operating in the country, since both sides aimed at the same pool of potential clientele. Thus, Amal had to develop an identity which would include such elements so as to give answers to the queries and address the anxieties of the poor and often alienated Shia citizens, especially those of a young age who historically are considered more willing to mobilize in a militant way for social and political causes (Abisaab 2015). The reality of adopting general left-wing slogans and populist rhetoric as a means to win popular support to the expense of the Lebanese left does not negate the genuine aspirations that Amal's members may have had towards a more balanced and just societal structure. Rather, the two parameters may very well have existed concurrently, providing evidence of the element of agency that the members themselves may have exerted in the formulation of Amal's identity.

At the time, a similar ideological current, that of Pan-Arabism, had become one of the dominant ones in the Arab world including Lebanon. The Pan-Arabist ideology manifested itself in diverse ways, the strongest of which were the Baathist parties of Syria and Iraq (Seale 1989), and the ideology formulated and promoted by the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser (Nasser H. 2020). Two of the most prominent organizations belonging to these antagonistic ideological branches of Pan-Arabism were the Independent Nasserite Movement (INM or "Al-Murabitoun") and the Popular Nasserist Organization (PNO). Both organizations had

substantial Shia recruitment, especially the INM with an estimated 45% of Shia in its total membership (O' Balance 1998, p. 36).

Finally, at the time of the Shia awakening, Lebanon had a large Palestinian community. This community comprised mostly of refugees who had been obliged by force to leave historical Palestine since the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948 and onwards. Most Palestinians in Lebanon were located in Shia-populated areas in the Southern regions of the country, and thus, the interaction between the two communities was inevitable. Shia and Palestinians in South Lebanon shared the same economic and social conditions of deprivation, insecurity and minimal possibilities of social advancement even at the individual level. This fact, coupled with a general ethical predisposition towards a persecuted Arab population, made the Shia a political target for the various fractions of the Palestinian liberation movement operating in the area at the time.

5. The identity of Amal as framed in its official Charter

The basic characteristics that played a key role in constructing the identity of the Lebanese Amal Movement were presented in its official charter issued in 1975. The Charter served as the foundational document of the Movement and since then, despite the fact that during Amal's political course several other elements have emerged and included in its identity, it has not been revoked or officially altered. As such, the 1975 Charter continues to serve as Amal's basic mission statement and strategic document.

a) Islamic faith

The Charter of the Amal Movement opens with the so-called "Bismillah al-Rahman al-Raheem," which is the opening phrase in Arabic in 113 of the 114 chapters of the Quran. The Arabic phrase literally translates to "In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful." The "Bismillah" is also the traditional Muslim exclamation that the believers in Islam state before undertaking any significant day-to-day task or a prospective practical pledge.

Amal considers itself a part of a universal movement led among others by prophets, holy men and pious defenders. Amal, as a distinct movement itself, is portrayed to emanate from belief in God, and more specifically, in its true meaning and not in an abstract understanding. The depth of Amal's connection with Islam is further made manifest with the claim that it is this belief in God that guides the Movement's daily activities and its members' relationships.

The first principle included in the Charter's main body makes an analysis referring to the existence of God and His attributes. It also takes a stand among others against faith based on rituals, which is seen as adhering to practices void of revolutionary substance. Furthermore, it goes against the argument that religion is something separated from social life and politics. In this argument, Amal embraces the traditional Muslim approach according to which Islam as a religion covers all realms of human life, including social life and politics.

The Charter does not claim that it is written for the Shia community, at least not explicitly. Nevertheless, implicitly one could fairly pinpoint the Shia ideas since the wording used in the Charter regarding religion can be well seen as being outside the scope of the orthodox Sunni tradition. There are particular concepts and phrases used in Shia Islam that are different from Sunni. The charter refers to "authentic" religious sources and so it implies that Amal clearly takes a certain side in the spiritual divide concerning the proper way of believing in one God. Another element that implies a Shia background is the reference the Charter makes to "holy men", which clearly is an element of the Shia and not the Sunni religious tradition.

Further, in the Second Principle of the Charter, explicit references are made to the life and works of Imam Ali, which is a central figure in the Shia religious tradition. Words and sayings attributed to Imam Ali appear also in other parts of the document.[2]

On the practical side, the Charter clarifies that the Movement is in favor of imposing restrictions to the financial practice of usury. It has to be remembered that this argument is not restricted to the structuring of the economy but has a clear religious aspect, since the Quran and the Islamic traditions in general are strictly opposed to usury, which they consider an unethical, if not a sinful practice.

b) Perennialism and social conservatism

Although there is no universally accepted definition, Perennialism acknowledges common patterns, principles and values that have arisen in human thought during the distant past, as regards the individual, society and nature in general. These, irrespective of the technical progress of civilization, are considered still to be valid throughout the centuries and will remain so in the future.

In this sense, Amal sees itself as an extension of a timeless human movement which bears perennial values and the constant hope of humankind for a better life. It considers itself as a link in the overall chain of the universal movement of man in history, having strong historical bonds with social manifestations of the same core features that existed in the past, currently operate and will arise in future, in other times and places of the globe.

Coupled with the elements of religion, nationalism and the acceptance of the existing social order one could fairly state that, by invoking perennialism, Amal had from the beginning adopted a conservative social outlook. Such an approach clearly did not aim to promote ground-breaking changes in the way of civil life or radical political and economic experiments in the Lebanese society in general.

c) Humanism

The Charter of the Movement recognizes humanism as one of its basic features, claiming that it is founded on its belief in man, his freedom, dignity and nobility. It also views Amal as an undertaking that will drive man to resist anything that may undermine his life, dull his talents or threaten his future. Also, the Charter reads that Amal believes in the unity of human family and that any gains made by a part of humanity belong and are available to the service of all.

[2] For example, in The Third Principle – Paragraph 1.

The concern for man, his wellbeing and his fate is directly linked with the divine law. God is seen as having a plan regarding humankind which emphasizes the encouragement of virtuous deeds, while faith in human existence has the faith in God as a prerequisite.[3]

Further, it is being clarified that Amal favors humanitarian values, such us the promotion of human dignity and freedom and the safeguard of human rights. In addition, adherence is given to the freedom of belief and is acknowledged that in the matter of religion no type of coercion can be acceptable. The relevant part ends with a general call to peace.[4]

In another part of the Charter, it is made clear that Amal believes the right to life, the freedom to work and of thought, the right to join unions and organizations and the acknowledgement of "political rights". The latter is not clarified in detail; thus, labelling Amal as outspokenly "democratic", apart from humanist in general, may be problematic.[5]

d) Lebanese nationalism

The Charter clearly acknowledges the Lebanese character of the Amal Movement. It claims that the Movement is a legitimate part of the nation's history. It also champions Lebanon's heritage, which is considered full of heroism, struggle, values and cultures and recognizes its national genius.

In addition, Amal characterizes itself as patriotic, mentioning that it adheres to the principles of national sovereignty and the integrity of the Lebanese soil. In this context, Amal opposes imperialism and all the aggressive schemes directed against Lebanon by alien forces.

Special reference is made in the Charter to the South of Lebanon, the safeguarding of which Amal considers as the basis and substance of Lebanese patriotism. This reference can be quite well understood since the south parts of the country were being constantly under the threat of invasion by Israeli military forces. Also, there lay one of the major places where the Lebanese Shia population of Lebanon are living and whom Amal had the ambition of representing.

e) Populism

Amal clarifies that its mission is the complete freedom of the Lebanese people. It underlines that it is against despotism, feudalism, authoritarianism and discriminations of any form. Also, the Movement is expressly against economic injustices, including the formations of

[3] First Principle, paragraph 5.
[4] Second Principle, paragraph 2.
[5] Third Principle, paragraph 1.

monopolies in the national economy, while it also opposes the exploitation of man and the blindly consumerist society.

Further, Amal believes in equal opportunities for all citizens considering it as everybody's most basic right. At the same time, it considers that the state's primary obligation is to ensure social justice.

It is not a coincidence that the original name of Amal was "Harakat al-Mahrumin", which in English is translated as "the Movement of the Deprived". This indicates the deliberate adoption by Sadr of a leftist jargon for Amal, in order to antagonize the various left-wing organizations aiming to Shia membership.

Nevertheless, it must be made clear that the Charter of the Movement did not make any reference whatsoever to anything more than the generic values of social justice, the will to fight against privileges and special interests in general, and for the emancipation from oppression. Thus, Amal deliberately excludes from the elements that may constitute it a part of the leftist movements in the Lebanese political spectrum. Moreover, the Charter neither includes any reference at all to ideological elements such as those of communism or socialism, or even to the concept of the "working class" as such (unlike its left-wing political competitors). On the contrary, Amal was fairly clear in its founding document that as a movement it stood in principle against the division of the globe in two opposing ideological camps (i.e. Capitalist and Socialist in the context of the Cold War of that time), since such a division was seen as serving only to discount the will of smaller nations and break the unity of the entire human family.

f) Anti-sectarianism

In Lebanon, at the time the Charter of the Amal Movement was published (1975), there existed more than a dozen different confessions referring broadly to several types of Islam and Christianity as well as a more distinct one referring to the Druze faith. The Lebanese National Pact of 1943 had already institutionalized sectarianism, by giving certain benefits to each of the Lebanese communities on a confessional basis. The Lebanese civil war was a symptom of the dysfunction created by the sectarian system and the lack of centralized power of the Lebanese government. The country was operating in a civil war environment and several of the aforementioned sects had already formed militias that were engaged in deadly fights against each other. At the same time, most if not all of these militias bore also political identities and have joined conflicting ideological fronts, a fact that worked as a multiplier of tension and enmity among the torn parts of the Lebanese nation.

The Movement's Charter clarifies Amal's position against political sectarianism, which is considered a backward situation. Sectarianism is acknowledged to upset social life, lead to divisions of Lebanese citizens and to prevent the development of the country in the path of progress and effectiveness.

In addition, it is expressly stated that Amal does not aim to monopolize the struggle for a better Lebanon. Rather, the Movement is willing and ready to cooperate on a basis of equality with any Lebanese citizen and group sharing the same objective.

g) Pan-Arabism

The Charter sets as one of the clear objectives of the Amal Movement the liberation of all the Arab lands and the freedom of the Arabs, which it considers as "one people". This ideological element was also in principle against religious sectarianism and local national divides in the Arab world, striving to unite the totality of Arab nations in one coherent force.

As already mentioned, the ideology of Pan-Arabism had already been spread to a certain extent in the Shia population in Lebanon before the emergence of Amal. Political organizations, parties and ultimately militias referring to the ideology of Pan-Arabism had already recruited and were striving to recruit more Shia members.

Considering the historical context in which Amal operated in 1975, it is evident that the Movement had to include references to the core concepts of the Pan-Arabist ideology in its own identity. Its objective was as at least not to alienate and at best to recruit as members those of the Shia community that adhered to these perspectives.

h) Pro-Palestine

In the Charter the Palestinian issue was central. Similarly, the reference on Palestine signaled Amal's stance on the Israeli-Arab conflict. Palestine is characterized as "the holy land". It is acknowledged that the Palestinian people have suffered all kinds of injustice and violation of their rights and that the struggle for Palestinian liberation lays in the center of the heart and mind of the Movement. Not only in a theoretical sense however, since it is explicitly stated that Amal has the primary duty to defend and support in practice the Palestinian people's dignity and resistance.

i) Anti-Zionism

Zionism is characterized in the Charter as a constant and serious danger not only for the Palestinian people but also for the values and life of Lebanon itself. Amal also holds Zionism

responsible for igniting rivalries against what it considered as an otherwise peaceful coexistence of the various religious sects of Lebanon, with the utter aim to destroy the country. Finally, the Charter expressly views Zionism as a threat to the whole Middle Eastern region and even to humanity itself.

The references against Israel are included in the sixth principle of the Charter. The Anti-Zionist element, considering that the Movement dedicated six paragraphs to analyze it, can be seen as a quite significant element of the identity of Amal.

Nevertheless, it has to be noted that the Amal's stance against Israel stems less from the Palestinian cause of liberation and more for the threat Israel is seen to pose against the Arab world (in general) and Lebanon (in particular). Thus, this element can be matched primarily to the Lebanese nationalist element and secondarily to the Pan-Arabist and the Pro-Palestinian ones.

6. Tracing additional elements of Amal's intersubjective identity

During the years, the elements of Amal's identity mentioned explicitly in the Movement's founding Charter have been reinforced in practice. Of course, such reinforcement took place to a different extent per element and on the basis of prioritization, depending on the specific political objectives of Amal's leadership in each period. Certain details on some further elements that have appeared in the Charter in the form of secondary references or in an implicit way have been crystallized and championed further, to play a vital role in Amal's intersubjective identity.

a) Militarism

Militarism emerges as a central element in Amal's mandate. In the Charter it is framed as a fight against imperialism and aggression executed against Lebanon.[6] Amal's program of political action aims to continue the struggle against Israel and imperialism in all forms. Amal considers the necessity of a continued armed 'Jihad' (holy war in English), which will bring an end to imperialistic plans in the Arab world, so weapons have to be used towards the latter's liberation.[7] It should be noted that the Charter's referencing to Jihad does not correspond to the internal one that every believer is obliged to execute in their struggle against sin, according to Islamic theology. Rather, it is the external one that is connected to the spread of religious values (such as piety and justice) and thus it has a clear relevance to the international relations that Amal developed.

The Charter expressly states that the South of Lebanon has to be transformed into an armed fortress, where the Movement of the Deprived, in full cooperation with the Palestinian movement for liberation, has to execute a popular armed struggle against Israel. Amal, defined with the issue of the Charter as the armed forces of the Lebanese resistance loyal to and directed by the Movement of the Deprived, are an expression of this popular armed struggle.

In this regard, Sadr shortly after the announcement of the establishment of Amal until his disappearance in 1978 often presided in armed rallies of Amal members and sympathizers, having publicly claimed that "arms are the adornment of men" (Ajami 1986, p. 159). He had also claimed that the people in the South owning a gun and learning how to use it is an obligation of a higher level, compared to reading the Quran or fasting for religious purposes (Bonsen 2020, p. 168).

[6] Fifth Principle, paragraph 2.
[7] Fifth Principle, paragraph 3.

At the same time, the Movement attempted to balance its discourse between humanist values and peace on the one hand and this militant identity on the other. It did so by verbally opposing the proliferation of armed groups within the country for sectarian purposes and speaking against the cult of violence in general. At the same time, it continued to justify its own military organization on the theoretical basis of Lebanese nationalism and the objective of safeguarding the whole Arab nation against Israeli aggression (Ajami 1986, p. 168).

b) Martyrdom

The Shia faith had traditionally retained strong references to martyrdom. Sadr had clearly let his Shia audience know that they had one and only choice to make, that between tyranny and the path followed by Hussain ibn Ali (Bonsen 2020, p. 169). This latter path referred to the battle in the Iraqi town of Kerbala, where the third Shia Imam was brutally killed by the enemies of the Islamic faith in 680. In essence, Hussain is considered to have been turned into a willing martyr to safeguard the holy values and duties of the pious Muslims, knowing beforehand that the army he and his followers opposed was far greater in force (Ajami 1986, p. 140). Considering the fact that this story is a hallmark in Shia heritage of faith, Sadr sought to substitute any implications of lament and sorrow it bore with enhancing the features of bravery, grandeur and political choice. The remembrance of the battle of Kerbala became, in the context of the identity of the Amal movement, the celebration of the Shia as an elite minority which constantly defies the oppressor and refuses to bow to injustice (Ajami 1986, p. 142).

There appear to be a few references to martyrdom in the Charter of the Amal Movement. For example, it is mentioned in the Preamble that Amal is a part of a perennial movement that is comprised of martyrs, among other types of personalities.

Also, the oath that a person had to take to become a member of Amal had also to invoke "martyrs" as witnesses confirming the sincerity and integrity of the member's vow.

Further, in the Second Principle of the Charter there is a paragraph entitled "Our legacy of heroic acts and sacrifices", which reads that the path taken by noble martyrs and heroes is the one that the members of the Movement must follow if they are resolved to make advancements towards their enemies. Certain names of persons that have become martyrs in the fight against "the enemies of truth" are listed from the religious traditions, with Moses, Jesus and Muhammad among them.

In 1977, Al-Risala, a newspaper issued by the Movement, was published with a title claiming that Amal's martyrs will fill the gaps of the nation with their bodies, pouring with blood the soil of the South (Bonsen 2020, p. 174).

After the disappearance of Sadr in 1978 and throughout the 1980s, Amal under the leadership of Nabih Berri claimed to have provided more than 6.000 martyrs from its ranks. The largest part of those, around 2.000, are claimed to have died in Amal's resistance plight against the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon (Bonsen 2020, p. 190). It is also notable that between 1982 and 1985 Amal also claimed four "martyrdom operations" (in essence, suicide bombings) against Israeli military forces.

The remembrance of martyrs, apart from a psychological need and a genuine sentimental expression, was from the beginning a major tool for Amal to spread its political discourses particularly to the Shia and in general to the Lebanese citizens. Commemorations, memorials, posters, marches, local social centers directed by the Movement and each named after a specific martyr, pamphlets narrating the martyrs' achievements and sacrifices are common means for Amal to communicate the element of martyrdom included in its intersubjective identity, throughout the years (Bonsen 2020).

c) Personality cult

The Amal Charter clearly presents certain historical and religious figures as role models, the heritage of whom the members of the Movement must consider in depth and follow.

From the beginning of the Movement, as already seen, Musa Sadr was the crucial factor to its establishment.

Once he disappeared forever in Libya at the end of August 1978, up to one million protesters were gathered at the center of Beirut holding his pictures, asking rhetorically "where is our Imam, Arab nation?" and blaming the Arab neighboring regimes which were seen as indifferent at best or involved at worst in Sadr's disappearance (Norton 1986, pp. 56-58). In any case, the objective reality was that a charismatic Arab leader had been perished, one who had already and could further in the future antagonize the other ones for political leverage.

The hosting Libyan authorities were considered by many in Lebanon responsible for the loss of Sadr and provided at best controversial details trying to deny their role in their visitor's disappearance (Al Jazeera 2018).

For Amal, the persona of Sadr has continued to play a vital role even after 1978 and for the whole period of the Lebanese civil war. Whenever relevant, Amal leaders and officials referred to him, his deeds and ideas, to obtain legitimacy for themselves by being presented as his true followers and disciples. His speeches and writings were widely printed and circulated. Posters and banners depicting his face and name were raised across Lebanon, not only where Amal had a presence and retained membership but also to all places of the country populated by Shia. His persona has been de facto elevated to the one of a martyr for many in the country, since clerics of other religious sects and members of different political organizations have in various cases taken part in commemorations of his legacy or have praised his heritage in public (Bonsen 2020, p. 194).

Finally, a rather obscure feature of Sadr's cult of personality has to do with the metaphysical matching of his story with the Shia tradition of the Hidden Imam. This is a millenarian type of doctrine, which claims that the last Shia Imam (12th in the row of heritage) will appear at an unknown point in time to reward the pious and impose justice in the world. Amal has sketched a metaphysical parallel with this dogma, to borrow further authenticity and credibility for its discourses and political agenda. For many years, a lot of Amal's members and followers kept retaining hope, praying and asking each other when Sadr is finally going to return to properly lead the Movement and the nation (Norton 1986, p. 56).

d) Social security

As already seen, the Charter includes many references to general humanist values and to the members' obligation to act for the public interest. Although primacy appears to be given to the national Lebanese and Arab public (although not explicitly to the Lebanese Shia community), this primacy does not preclude others, considering the references to the entire human family that can be found therein.

In the preamble of the Second Principle of the Charter, the Amal member is called to overcome self-interest and to put the interest of society in general above his private gain and ambitions.

In the preamble of the Fourth Principle of the Charter, it is acknowledged that a practical development plan is needed for Lebanon to ensure opportunities for a decent social life, housing, education and culture. However, the Charter makes it clear that the design and implementation of such a plan is an obligation of the Lebanese state. So, the Charter is not referring only to what Amal will do but also to what it believes the state should do.

Nevertheless, both for the practical purpose of advancing the social existence of the Shia population and as a means to gain more political credibility, Amal almost from the beginning started paying moderate attention on establishing institutions that would add security to the Shia community. In this regard, Sadr re-organized a since 1948 defunct local benevolent institution in Tyre. He also established many social organizations to support educational needs and promote ethics, as well as youth clubs to assist the poor and help them find work in their areas and avoid urban migration to Beirut (Siklawi 2012).

This tendency continued after Sadr's disappearance, under the leadership of Nabih Berri. For example, starting in 1990, the project of "Amal's Educational Centers" was launched. These centers were part of a network designed and ran by the Movement and were named after Amal militants who had lost their lives in battle. Most of these schools provided both academic and practical professional programs. Finally, although these educational initiatives aimed in general to promote the Shia values, morals and worldview, their theoretical orientation was not strictly adhered to religion but rather to the concepts of Lebanese nationalism, entirety and sovereignty (Nir 2011, p. 141).

7. Amal's international relations under the leadership of Musa Sadr (1975-1978)

a) Relations with the PLO

The initially amicable disposition of the Shia towards the Palestinian community in Lebanon started to change when many Palestinian guerrillas came massively from neighboring Jordan in 1970. On that year, a Palestinian armed uprising in Jordan had led to their defeat by the Jordanian army and their expel from the country. The Palestinian guerrillas arrived in vast numbers and retaining their armament in the South of Lebanon, where they tried to substitute the local security authorities (Norton 1986, p. 43). Further, they established their own military bases and started sporadically shelling Israel with heavy artillery fire.

Israel responded with heavily bombarding Lebanese villages, without properly discriminating between the Palestinian fighters and the local agrarian population (Shia in its greater percentage). Sadr had clearly declared since 1973 that the Shia community of Lebanon sympathized with the Palestinian liberation cause, but it will not tolerate any actions from their part that would expose the Lebanese people to additional misery and suffering (Ajami 1986, p. 162). This approach clearly indicates that Amal was ready to develop its intersubjective identity, making amends that would serve its power politics in favor of the Lebanese Shia.

Sadr did not share the fervors of the Left and the Palestinian movement for liberation, forces that shared revolutionary ambitions for Lebanon. On the contrary, Sadr believed from the beginning that Lebanon's political and social order had to be preserved by any means necessary. Thus, he was not at all willing to let the Shia community be tuned into such radical approaches and courses of action (Ajami 1986, p. 172).

This approach is connected to the perennialist and social conservative element of Amal's identity, which championed the values of political stability and Lebanese patriotism. Any left-leaning rhetoric used by Amal in general and Sadr in particular was liquidated in the populist element of their identity, which, although it may have reflected genuine grievances of the Shia population for social justice, at the same time it served as a means of attracting members and supporters from antagonistic identities.

On 5 July 1975, a huge explosion took place in Baalbek, a town in the mostly Shia populated area of the Bekka valley. It resulted to over 42 men dead and approximately 80 wounded. It was soon revealed that members of Sadr's "Movement of the Deprived" (the civilian movement not yet renamed to Amal) were being trained in explosives and arms handling by Palestinian PLO officers (O' Balance 1998, p. 16).

Thus far, the Movement had been engaged in activities like sermons, protests, strikes and promoting social and communal matters. It had not been yet engaged in the carrying of arms or the use of violence. But in a war-torn country, actions going as far as civil disobedience could only have a limited impact. Therefore, right after the explosion in Baalbek, Sadr publicly acknowledged that the Movement of the Deprived had created its own militia, bearing the name "Amal" (an acronym referring to the words "Detachments of Lebanese Resistance", in English). As a distinct word Amal also means "hope" in Arabic, and it is the name that has been used thereon for the whole of Sadr's movement, by friends and foes alike. Sadr claimed that Amal was not a militia like the others flourishing in Lebanon at that period and taking part in the civil war. On the contrary, the Shia militia was supposed to be training with the aim of going to the South to fight against Israel. He clarified however that in such a type of fighting, Amal could only be auxiliary to the Lebanese regular national army and not operate on its own, or under any other command structure (Ajami 1986, pp. 168-169).

The establishment of a Shia militia had several implications for the Movement and Sadr. First, Amal objectively decreased the leverage that the "zuama" retained in the Shia population since their customary authority, from then on, had to antagonize an armed entity claiming to represent the community as a whole. Second, it served the long-term aim of the Movement to take over military control in as many places in the South they could, at the expense of the Palestinian movement or any other actor (Saklawi 2012).

Sadr's stance on the Palestinian cause, far from being transparent and steady, was expressed with a rather equivocal and overall pragmatistic approach. Sadr was at ease with exploiting its connections with the Palestinians to create a Shia military force, but ready to withhold his allegiance to the Palestinian national cause if the latter was contrary to his Realist political strategy. In private conversations, Sadr claimed in 1977 that the Palestinian movement is not a revolutionary one but a terrorist military machine, operating against the Arab world in a quest for the extortion of money and sympathy (Ajami 1986, p. 178). He claimed also that the PLO, not sharing the sense of martyrdom, was nothing but an element of disorder and chaos in the South of Lebanon (Norton 1986, p. 43).

It was then, approximately two years since the issue of its Charter, that a first reverse in Amal's political discourse took place. Such a reverse gave clear precedence to Shia interests and the primacy of the Lebanese national sovereignty, ranking the Palestinian cause of liberation as secondary at best.

b) Relations with Syria

Hafez al Assad, Syria's leader and member of the Alawi sect, had come to power in 1971 following a military coup one year earlier. In 1973, his government attempted to change the Syrian national constitution by deleting the provision that Islam is the official religion of the country. An uprising of the majority Sunni population broke out in several major cities and Assad had to mobilize the military to subdue it. The Alawi sect in general was considered an outsider in Islam, both for Sunnis and for most of the Shia alike. The Assad regime therefore desperately needed to be somehow religiously legitimized so as to gain leverage and be able to subdue more easily the rebels. Sadr provided legitimacy to the new Syrian regime by issuing a "fatwa" (legal opinion of Islamic jurisdiction) that recognized the Alawi sect as an official branch of the Shia pillar of Islam.[8]

The engagement between Amal and the Assad regime was therefore a mutual investment by both sides, in a Realist reading of the regional reality. Sadr, from his part, viewed the new developments in Syria as an opportunity. By setting bedrocks for future plans between Amal and the Syrian regime, he aimed both for the advancement of the Lebanese Shia community and the stabilization of Lebanon (Ajami 1986, p. 174).

It has been argued that the Assad regime viewed Lebanon as a client state, the ultimate purpose of which was to absorb friction with Israel (Deeb 2003). In the climax of the Lebanese civil war in 1976, the PLO along with its allies had taken control of most of Lebanon to the determent of its rival block led by Maronites. Such a development would lead to radical changes in Lebanon's social life, with internal and external implications that no one could foresee in advance. The Maronite population had reached the point of considering the possibility to declare a partition of Lebanon, so as to maintain control at least in the north. In June of the same year, the Syrian army occupied large parts of the country.[9] This intervention clearly aborted both the possibility of a partition as envisaged at that time by Maronites and the potential control of the country by the PLO and its allies. In these critical circumstances. Sadr sided with the Syrian regime, although not actively in military terms. Amal did not engage in any battles against the invading Syrian army, while Sadr himself referred to the alliance of the

[8] Musa Sadr was the head of the SISC, an acknowledged religious leader by the Shia religious center in Qom and representative of the Lebanese Shia community, thus was able to issue Fatwah's that concerned all the Shia community that had a "marja" to Qom.

[9] It was the Arab League that gave the Syrian army the mandate to enter the soil of Lebanon, as the basic part of the "Arab Deterrent Force" (with Syria providing 30 thousand soldiers out of the 35 in total), with the explicit aim to restore order in the country. The Syrian engagement in reality had as its objective to hamper the defeat of the Lebanese Christian establishment, and so it was seen as a foreign military invasion by the Palestinians and their allies (O'Balance 1998).

PLO and the Lebanese Left as the "new feudalism" that threatened Lebanon (Ajami 1986, pp. 173-175).

Once again, Sadr prioritized the element of Amal's identity that gave primacy to Lebanon's sovereignty and stability, which he considered to be at risk with what Amal saw as an adventurist power game set-up by the PLO and its allies.

c) Relations with Iran

In the 1970s, when the revolutionary movement in Iran against the Shah had already crystallized, Sadr openly sided with Ayatollah Khomeini (Nir 2011, p. 10).

After the Arab Israeli war in 1973, Sadr viciously denounce the Shah labelling him an imperialist lackey, an oppressor of religion in his own country and a collaborator with Israel (Norton 1986, p. 41).

Sadr, although he had his own aspirations, recognized that Amal could not be utterly detached with Iran. That argument holds true at least for the revolutionary period, when the struggle against the Shah, bearing significant religious connotations, was considered the epicenter of change for the Shia globally.

d) Relations with Israel

In 1978, Israel invaded Lebanon in the so-called "Litani Operation". Their aim was to destroy the PLO infrastructure in the South to protect northern Israel from artillery attacks. This invasion had a severe cost for Lebanon, both human lives and infrastructure. The Shia inhabitants blamed the PLO fighters and their allies for causing civilian suffering. The alienation that followed between the Shia and the Palestinian fighters led to the increase of Amal's ideological power and military force. Many Shia inhabitants started supporting the Movement in several ways, aiming to protect their families and villages from what they considered a calamite for which they had no responsibility (Norton 1986, p. 51).

In the aftermath of the "Litani Operation", Amal and the PLO engaged in ferocious fights that spread to from the South to the capital Beirut. The quarrel between the two eventually stopped provisionally, after the second invasion of Israel in 1982 (Saklawi 2012).

Amal's leadership saw the PLO and its guerillas as a factor of liquidation against the Lebanese state and as a permanent risk for the Shia inhabitants in the South. Thus, Amal prioritized its own benefits and objectives and took advantage of the situation both for creating a first bust

for its militia and for letting both its then adversaries (PLO and Israel) to fight each other and mutually decrease their powers.

8. Amal's international relations under the leadership of Nabih Berri (1980-1991)

a) Relations with Syria

In 1980, Nabih Berri was elected as the new leader of Amal. He was a lawyer and a historical persona both in Shia Lebanon (as a member of a wealthy "zuama" family) and for Amal (as a senior member of personal acquaintance with the founder of the Movement). It was Berri that and rendered Amal a key player in the Lebanese civil war (Nir 2011, p. 29). The first two years of his leadership can be seen a quest for orientation regarding Amal's foreign relations.

The basic decision that Amal's leadership had to make at that time was whether it would be oriented to Iran or Syria. With the outcome of this decision, several connotations would be exerted on Amal's intersubjective identity. The most critical of those was whether Amal would align itself with a Shia Pan-Islamic doctrine or with a secular nationalist ideology and practice. The choice was made and eventually, from that time onwards, it was mainly Syria that provided Amal with weapons and military training. In 1982, Berri openly embraced the Syrian plan for Lebanon requesting explicitly for a special political, military, economic and cultural alignment of the two countries. For Syria the benefit from this relation was that it could have an ally on the ground, basically to help it control the PLO and its allies by blocking them from taking control of Lebanon and bringing into reality their radical visions for the country. For Amal, Syria was a strong senior partner in an unfriendly political and military environment (Norton 1986, p. 68).

In a public speech in Baalbek in 1985, which at the time was occupied by Syrian troops, Berri requested Syria to integrate Lebanon under its sovereignty. The strategic views of Assad and Berri on Lebanon's future almost coincided, while each of them sought to strengthen its position against their adversaries (Norton 1986, p. 76).

It is no coincidence that in the respective matter Amal's approach was again similar to the one held by Syria, while Hezbollah's identical to the one of Iran (at least in theory).

b) Relations with Israel

Amal's stance was controversial towards the Israeli invasion in 1982. In the South, the Shia saw the Israeli army as a benevolent (or at least, indifferent) force that eventually would save them from PLO's turbulence providing Israel an unspoken approval for their operations. Nevertheless, Amal could by no means embrace Israel openly given the fact that they are considered outsiders by the Sunni's in the region (Ajami 1986, pp. 200-201). It should be

mentioned that due to the Shia discontent with the Palestinians, Israel attempted to exploit them in cooperating with the IDF, to no avail (Norton 1986, p. 109).

Nevertheless, in 1983 the Shia could no longer tolerate the Israeli army in the South. On 16 October, during the Shia celebration of Ashura (an annual remembrance of Imam Hussein martyrdom in Kerbala) the Israeli army attacked the town of Nabatiyeh, killing two and injuring numerous Shia commemorators, triggering an unprecedented resistance against the Israeli army.

The number of Shia attacks against Israeli targets in Lebanon reached approximately 100 per month during 1984 alone, especially in in the South of Lebanon (Bonsen 2020, p. 211). In December 1984, Yitzhak Rabin[10] stated that Amal was anticipated to be responsible for 80% of the armed attacks against the Israeli army in the South (Norton 1986, p. 118).

Resistance against Israel continued and became part of Amal's struggle. As Berri had claimed, although the Arab world greatly invested in the Palestinians, it was the Shia and their resistance in the South of Lebanon who taught the Arabs what courage and martyrdom meant (Ajami 1986, pp. 202-203).

c) Relations with the PLO

The PLO, both leadership and most of fighters, were expelled from Lebanon in August 1982 as a result of the Israeli invasion. However, many refugees who were left behind particularly in the refugee camps of Beirut and other major towns and to a lesser extent in the Southern villages of the country, took up arms again already by 1984 (Nir 2011, p. 64).

Amal perceived such developments as potential triggers for another round of hostilities. In 1985, Amal attacked Palestinian refugee camps with the objective of defuncting the PLO's military capabilities, in what came to be known as the "War of the Camps". The first phase ended in June 1985 with a ceasefire agreement signed by both sides in Damascus, under the aegis of Assad. The second phase ended in December 1986 with a ceasefire signed with Iranian meditation, after Amal had finally suffered critical defeats from the PLO and its allies in Beirut, Sidon and other places (Nir 2011, p. 65).

In February 1987, 7.000 Syrian soldiers entered West Beirut to tackle the civil unrest. In essence, it is considered that the Syrian intervention saved Amal from a total military defeat and subsequent defunction (O' Balance 1998, p. 174).

[10] Israeli Prime Minister (1974-1977) and Minister of Defense (1984-1990).

For the remaining 1987, Amal continued to seize Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut leading to events of humanitarian crisis, in certain cases. The siege was totally lifted and the "War of the Camps" ended in January 1988, with Berri arguing that Amal refrained from hostilities to pay tribute to the first Intifada that had started in the West Bank about one month earlier. The outcomes of the "War of the Camps" included the political isolation of Amal in the Lebanese arena and the Movement's increased reliance on Syria (Nir 2011, p. 65).

d) Relations with Iran

After Sadr's disappearance in 1978, the Amal movement lacked a living religious supreme guide and political leader. This gap was filled for a few years by the Iranian Revolution and its leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. Apart from the natural feeling of spiritual proximity among the Shia in the Middle East, the Amal members particularly identified with Khomeini. Living in a hostile and insecure environment, they sensed a feeling of community with their fighting religious comrades in Iran. Soon after the breakout of the Iranian revolution, about 500 Amal members volunteered to go in Iran to enlist in the revolutionary military forces (Saklawi 2012). After the win of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran, Amal tried to engage with the regime under Khomeini by accepting them as a hallmark for the Shia in Lebanon. This was a fairly anticipated stance from a Realist perspective, since it was evident at that time that the revolutionary Iran could play a fundamental role in supporting their interests, both from an ideological and from a material aspect.

Amal volunteers contributed both in the revolution and in its aftermath. For instance, Amal member, Mustapha Shumran,[11] of Iranian origin was a case in point. In February 1979 joined the revolution, Later, he became Deputy Prime Minister and Civil Defense Minister of the newly found Islamic Republic without however discarding his Amal membership. He died in Iran in June 1981 under controversial circumstances, but Amal embraced the official Iranian narrative that Shumran died on the battlefield fighting against the Iraqi military forces. He continued to be celebrated as a martyr of the Movement in Lebanon (Bonsen 2020, pp. 249-254).

Amal's ambiguous stance vis-à-vis the Israeli invasion of 1982 caused an irreversible commotion within the Movement. More specifically, its more religious members, such as Amal's deputy Hussain Musawi, along with other dignitaries and rank-and-file openly blamed

[11] The most prominent of those 500 men, an Amal member of Iranian origin. Shumran had obtained his PhD in engineering in the US but left for Lebanon to become a leading Amal personality in several fields, such as academic, organizational and military.

Berri openly of tacit collaboration with Israel. In addition, in the Movement's fourth congress in April 1982 in Beirut, they requested that Amal became directly and explicitly connected with the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Berri's majority group rejected such a perspective. Subsequently, approximately 500 members split from Amal, adopting the name "Islamic Amal" and relocated to the city of Baalbek. There, Islamic Amal received political and military training by 1.500 members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, deployed there by Iran with the objective of promoting the Islamic Revolution in Lebanon. By the end of 1983, Islamic Amal under the leadership of Musawi had already started using the name "Hezbollah", which in English translates to "Party of God" (Siklawi 2012). Hezbollah officially thereon paved their own way as a militia within the Lebanese civil war, having in parallel the explicit aim to utterly destroy Israel (Hezbollah 1985).

This can be considered the second main difference between Hezbollah and Amal as regards ideology. Amal never envisioned to extinguish the Zionist state. and engaged in serious military confrontations with the Israeli army only to the extent that the latter had invaded and occupied Lebanese soil.

In the context of the Shia resistance against the Israeli army in the South of Lebanon, Hezbollah started rising as the second political and military power of the community. Aligning itself with Iran, it sought to challenge Amal's primacy.

In the so-called "War of the Brothers", the two organizations fought against each other in a truly vicious way. The fact that both Amal and Hezbollah, although both nested in the same Lebanese community, acted to a significant extent as the proxies of Syria and Iran respectively served only to increase cruelty by both sides (Siklawi 2012).

The conflict can be viewed as having three distinct phases. The first (April-May 1988) ended with Amal achieving marginal gains on the control of the ground. The second phase (January 1989) ended with a loss for Amal in Dahiya, the densely Shia populated Southern suburbs of Beirut. Again, it was the mobilization of Syrian army units that saved Amal from a potential strategic defeat. The third phase (March-September 1990) took place in South Lebanon villages and ended when the two sides signed an agreement in Damascus in November 1990, with the presence of the Syrian intelligence commander and the Iranian ambassador (Nir 2011, pp.72-76).

9. De-militarization and entrance in the Lebanese political establishment

As regards the decommissioning of Amal, scholars like Nir (2011) legitimately argue that it was to a great extent the outcome of its fighters' exhaustion, as well as their disaffection for the Movement's involvement in fratricides with the PLO and Hezbollah (forces with which at least in principle, Amal should be cooperating and not conflicting with). Also, the military defeats it had suffered and the repeated reliance on the Syrian military forces both for its equipment with arms and in order to avoid an utter destruction of its forces have also manifested the limits of Amal's fighting capabilities.

Another reason was the emergence and steady rise of Hezbollah as the main competitor of Amal within the Shia Lebanese community. Considering the former's rhetoric, ideology and practice Amal could not antagonize Hezbollah except if it were willing to undertake a huge cost on resources and a dramatic change of its strategy, ideology and identity. Considering the already established secular character of Amal, as well as its moderate and conservative views in the economy and social structure, it would be much promising for it to antagonize Hezbollah by participating in the Lebanese political establishment. This was a preferential playing field for the Movement, giving it the potential to lure its clientele in the Shia community with the benefits that very establishment at least theoretically could provide.

The document that led to the gradual end of the Lebanese civil war was the "Taif Accord" of October 1989, a constitutional document signed by most of the political and military organizations of Lebanon that were of some significance. The document included provisions such as the recognition of Lebanon's Arab identity, the highlight of the country's sovereignty and unity, the acknowledgement of strong political and military connections between Lebanon and Syria and marginal gains as regards the political representation of Muslims in general and Shia in particular, in the structure of the national political apparatus. It also provided for the decentralization of social institutions and services, such as those of administration, education, justice and others, a development that some saw as an opportunity for parts of the Shia population to escape from marginalization, take positions in the establishment and receive their share in the social and economic benefits (such as jobs in the public sector, funding for enterprises, infrastructure projects and facilities in Shia districts). Initially, Amal did not sign the document but gradually it proceeded to its acceptance, with Berri finally becoming one of its main advocates (Nir 2011, pp. 63-64).

In March 1991, the Lebanese government ordered the decommissioning of all the militias located in the Lebanese soil, which were requested to deliver all their heavy weaponry to the state (finally only Hezbollah was excluded). Amal agreed to decommission and according to Nabih Berri, it delivered to the Lebanese state approximately 45 tanks and a vast number of cannons, heavy weapons and military munitions. However, light weapons were unofficially agreed to be kept, for the possibility of an eventual future need for popular resistance against Israel. In return, part of Amal's fighters was integrated in the Lebanese army and part of its membership took offices in the public service (Bonsen 2020, pp. 216-218).

Amal thereon became a legitimate political party with elected members in the Parliament, while Nabih Berri in October 1992 became the Speaker of the Parliament of the Lebanese Republic, a post traditionally attributed to a Shia politician, in which by consecutive re-elections every four years he holds even to this day.

One may argue that Amal had managed to achieve the core objective of its power politics. Realist as they were, Nabih Berri and the other members of Amal's leadership had understood that considering the circumstances, what the "Taif Accord" delivered was the best that they could get, not only for Amal itself but for their vision of the Shia community and the structure of Lebanon in general.

10. Conclusions

This dissertation examined Amal's foreign relations and intersubjective identity during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1991) within under the prism of Realist Constructivism. I consider the case of Amal as fitting in the concept since it clearly bears its two main elements, namely. power politics and intersubjective identity.

The way Amal implemented power politics has been described in the part of the dissertation regarding its relations with Syria, Israel, Iran and the PLO. Amal, although a militia nested in and representing of the Shia minority community in Lebanon, acted as a statelike actor since it monopolized the exertion of force in certain areas for given period of time and developed its own international relations with regional states, relations that did could or could not be coinciding with the official ones developed by the Lebanese government.

Amal promoted its own agenda and did not hesitate to change sides several times and alliances, to refrain from taking part in certain events or to ignite others. Although its alignment with the Syrian regime was at times strategic and the Movement relied on the Assad regime for logistics and infrastructure, it cannot be said that Amal was a subsidiary of the Syrian Baathist regime. Even when Amal seemingly acted as Syria's proxy, it did so based on its own agenda for Lebanon and the Shia community, serving its own developed intersubjective identity. Amal at a decisive point, irrespective of the ideological and religious proximity with the Islamic Iranian Revolution, decided deliberately to cut off its ties with Iran and rejected the latter's aspiration of establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon.

As regards to Israel, it can be said that Amal followed a pragmatic approach. Since its beginnings, Amal had never manifested an aspiration to eliminate Israel but adhered to resisting its presence and influence in the Lebanese soil and people. In cases where Amal showed a silent tolerance on Israeli actions (the most prominent example being in 1982), it did so not in a collaborative mentality but to serve other purposes of its own strategy. As regards to the PLO, Amal never openly denounced its sympathy for the Palestinian national cause but again, once the corresponding PLO struggle seemed to conflict with the Movement's primary objectives, Amal did not hesitate to fight it both in political and military terms.

In terms of its intersubjective identity, some may argue that Amal failed to follow its mandate as set by its Charter. However, as I have argued throughout the dissertation Amal just prioritized

the elements of its identity on the basis of their criticality, subduing the less to the more critical ones. An intersubjective identity is not something written in stone, instead, its dynamics and fluidity is shaped by different circumstances and evolves in time. The main elements that championed in Amal's intersubjective identity, as it crystallized in the 1980s, were the ones of Lebanese nationalism, secularism and conservatism. Others, such as the Islamic Shia faith (as represented by revolutionary Iran) and Pro-Palestine, have not perished but have been silently ranked as secondary.

Overall, the Movement did everything it could to stymie plans of partition for Lebanon as well as radical experiments that would put at risk the existing reality of a secular society, with a market economy and more or less traditional values. Moreover, Amal's undeclared objective of promoting the security and the political and economic interests of the Shia community in Lebanon were served to the best possible extent, when the opportunity presented itself either on a local and international level. This prioritization of the Shia community's interests ranged from the protection of Shia population in the South from what it saw as an unethical Palestinian adventurism or the Israeli military occupation, to the enhanced inclusion of the Shia in the political, social, economic, administrative and security Lebanese establishment.

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