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**Intra-Sunni contestations in contemporary Lebanon: A framing-theory approach to
the analysis of political divides within Lebanon's Sunni demographic (2005-2016)**

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to examine how the Lebanese Sunni political actors frame intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon. The research draws on Max Weber's "interpretivist" approach of understanding (*Verstehen*), which denotes that reality is socially constructed. The research does not offer a causal explanation of the Sunni politics. Rather, it seeks to interpret the subjective understandings and socially constructed ideas articulated by the Lebanese political actors on the political contestations of Sunnis. The operationalisation of framing theory in this research aided an understanding of how intra-Sunni political divides are constructed, manifested and narrated by the Lebanese political actors. The research used a single case study research design with a qualitative approach. The data were collected from Lebanon using semi-structured interviews and analysis of documents. A purposive sampling was employed to select twenty-three respondents including party and religious leaders, rank-and-file members, ministers and MPs.

The findings of this research suggest the interconnectivity between external and internal factors in shaping the framing construction of Sunnis. Externally, the rivalry between Saudi Arabia on the one hand and Syria and Iran on the other hand is essential for shaping Sunni narratives on intra-Sunni contestations. Regional players namely (Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia) have been able to break through Sunnis either through financial or political support or through propagation of slogans such as resisting Israel and defending Palestine. Internally, the research reveals that Sunnis differ in their frames of identity politics, Lebanon's confessional politics, Islamisation

of Lebanon, the stance on Hezbollah and the leadership of Sunnis. This research is the first theoretical-based study involving framing theory on intra-Sunni political contestations in Lebanon. The thesis concludes with some recommendations that collective national efforts are needed to enact laws that strengthen state institutions, prevent foreign funding and abolish confessionalism in order to reduce political tensions.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
List of Figures and Tables	vii
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms	viii
Acknowledgment	ix
Dedication	xi
Chapter One	1
Introducing Sunni Politics in Lebanon	1
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Background and Rationale of this Research	1
1.2 Research Question	5
1.3 The Overarching Argument of this Research	6
1.4 Justification/Contribution to Knowledge	9
1.5 Literature Review	10
1.5.1 Contextual Definition of Sunni Muslims in Lebanon.....	10
1.5.2 Mapping out Sunni Groupings and Organisations in Lebanon	11
1.5.3 Confessionalism in Lebanon.....	29
1.5.4 The Taif Accord.....	31
1.6 Structure of this Thesis.....	35
Chapter Two	38
Research Method and Methodology:	38
An Interpretivist Approach to the Analysis of Intra-Sunni Political Division in Lebanon	38
2.0 Introduction	38
2.1 Research Method and Research Design	38
2.2 Research Approach	39
2.3 Research Sampling and Selection Criteria.....	43
2.4 Data Collection Method	45
2.4.1 The Use of Interview Materials.....	45
2.4.2 Pitfalls of Using Interview Materials	48
2.4.3 Analysis of Documents	49
2.5 Instrumentation and Illustration of the Interview Guide	49
2.6 Establishing a Link to and Discussion of Semi-Structured Interview Questions	50

2.7 Data Analysis and Interpretation	50
2.8 Ethical Considerations.....	55
2.9 Framing Theory: Assumptions, Applicability and Method.....	56
2.9.1 The Concept of Framing Theory.....	56
2.9.2 Functions of Framing Theory	58
2.9.3 Limitations of Framing Theory	60
2.9.4 Framing Processes.....	63
2.9.5 Collective Action Frames.....	66
2.9.6 Political Opportunity in the Context of Framing Theory.....	68
2.10 Conclusion	69
Chapter Three	70
Intra-Sunni Contestations:	70
Understanding and Framing of Intra-Sunni political Division in Lebanon at the Domestic Level	70
3.0 Introduction	70
3.1 Identity Politics.....	71
3.1.1 National Identity Mantra among the Lebanese Sunnis	75
3.1.2 Examining the Perceptual Stance of the Sunni Community on Issues of National Identity	78
3.1.3 The Ideological Stance of Religious-Based Sunni Groupings in Lebanon.....	80
3.1.4 The Duality of Affiliation among Sunni Groups.....	81
3.1.5 The Desire to Establish an Islamic Order in Lebanon.....	82
3.1.6 The Desire to Implement the Islamic Principles in Lebanon.....	85
3.1.7 The Pan-Arab Oriented Individuals	88
3.1.8 Sectarian Perspective Identities.....	89
3.2 Leadership of the Sunni Community in Lebanon	91
3.2.1 The Leadership of Rafik Hariri and Issues of Intra-Sunni Political Divides	91
3.2.2 Diversity in Sunni Political Leadership	99
3.2.3 The Political Leadership of the Future Movement	104
3.2.4 Radicalisation of Sunnis as a Result of the Perceptual Absence of Sunni Leadership	109
3.2.5 The Absence of Sunni Militias as a Result of the Moderate Approach to National Issues.....	112
3.2.6 Frame Resonance and Inadequate Trust for the Political Leadership of the Future Movement.....	115
3.2.7 Declining Popularity of the Future Movement	118

3.2.8 Frame Consistency of Sunni Leadership	122
3.2.9 The Religious Leadership of Dar al-Fatwa	125
3.2.10 The League of Muslim Scholars in the Leadership Struggle of Sunnis in Lebanon	131
3.3 Situating the Sunni Politics in the Context of Supply and Demand	135
3.4 Conclusion	139
Chapter Four.....	141
Intra-Sunni Contestations:	141
Understanding and Framing of the Role of External Players in Intra-Sunni Political Division in Lebanon	141
4.0 Introduction	141
4.1 Framing of Iran’s Role in Intra-Sunni Political Division in Lebanon	141
4.1.1 Iran’s Perceived Role of Liberating Muslim Lands, Resisting Israel and Defending the Palestinian Cause	142
4.1.2 Iran’s Role in Interfering in the Lebanese politics and the Syrian Conflict	147
4.1.3 The Clash between Hezbollah and the Future Movement	150
4.1.4 Perceived Killing of Sunnis in Syria by Shia Allies.....	153
4.2 Iran’s Role in Dividing Sunnis in Lebanon	156
4.2.1 Iran’s Network with some Sunni Leaders and Organisation	156
4.2.2 Materialistic Interests for Sunni Political Alignment with Iran	158
4.2.3 Iran’s Interests in Perpetuating the Division of the Lebanese Sunnis.....	159
4.3 Framing of Syria’s Role in the Intra-Sunni Political Division in Lebanon.....	161
4.3.1 Contextualisation of Syria’s Presence in Lebanon	162
4.4 Syria’s Role in Dividing Sunnis.....	163
4.4.1 Al-Ahbash as an Implant of Syria in the Sunni Politics	163
4.4.2 The Activities of Syria and the Weakening of Dar al-Fatwa.....	169
4.4.3 Syria’s Tactics of Countering Rafik Hariri	172
4.4.4 Frame Saliency of Syria’s perceived pan-Arab Stance	175
4.5 Framing of Saudi Arabia’s Role in Intra-Sunni Political division in Lebanon.....	176
4.5.1 Saudi Arabia’s Role in Dividing Sunnis	184
4.6 Situating the Frames of Alliance-Building in the Context of the Sunni Politics	187
4.7 Framing the Competition between Sunni Movements and Leaders in Lebanon	193
4.8 Conflicts as an Attendant Consequence of Intra-Sunni Competition in Lebanon	197
4.9 Conclusion	200

Chapter Five	201
Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations.....	201
5.0 Introduction	201
5.1 Summary of the Key Findings of the Research	201
5.2 Conclusion	218
5.3 Recommendations (Exploring Avenues for Reducing Intra-Sunni Political Tensions in Lebanon)	225
5.3.1 Solidarity as a Means of Reducing Political Tensions and Violent Conflicts	225
5.3.2 Managing Intra-Sunni Political Dissensus	226
5.3.3 Effective Laws and State Institutions to Reduce Political Tensions and Conflicts ...	227
References.....	231
Appendix One.....	267
Interview Questions	267
Appendix Two.....	268
Ethical Approval	268
Appendix Three	270
Affiliation with the American University in Beirut Lebanon	270

List of Figures and Tables

The 18 Officially Recognised Religious Groupings in Lebanon	2
Pre- and post-Taif Division Seats in the Lebanese Parliament	32
The Research Respondents Affiliation List	44

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

Fourteenth March Alliance	FOMA
Eighth March Alliance	EMA
The Future Movement	FM
Dar al-Fatwa	DF
The League of Muslim Scholars	LMS
Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya	JI
The Union Party	UP
The Tawheed Movement	TAM
Hizb ut-Tahrir	HT
Special Tribunal for Lebanon	STL
United Nations Security Council	UNSC
Independent International Investigation Commission	UNIIC

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Dedication

I dedicate this research to my parents (Mariam and Mostapha) for their endless patience, love and support.

Chapter One

Introducing Sunni Politics in Lebanon

1.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the background and rationale of this research will be presented. Following will be an illustration of the research's question and argument as well as the justification or proposed contribution of this research to knowledge. In addition, the chapter will provide a review of the literature on the Sunni politics and thereafter the confessional political system in Lebanon as it helps to understand the context under which Sunni groupings and organisations frame intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon. The chapter will end with an outline of the structure of this research.

1.1 Background and Rationale of this Research

The state of Greater Lebanon was established in 1920 (Salibi 2003). Within its boundaries various religious communities exist, all with different cultures, different political affiliations and different identities (Khalidi 1979; Gilmour 1987). Lebanon as a nation is made up of plurality of sects and sub-sects (see figure 1.1). Though Lebanon had been an example for co-existence between Muslims and Christians for long time, external influences, internal disputes and opposing identities have often intensified religious and political divides in Lebanon (Milton-Edwards and Hinchcliffe 2008). Lebanon has suffered from long-standing political tensions which have affected its national cohesion since its independence in 1946 and indeed prior to this. This

situation has raised the question of the intent of the way in which colonial powers and other actors shaped and mapped Lebanon (Owen 2004; Fieldhouse 2008).

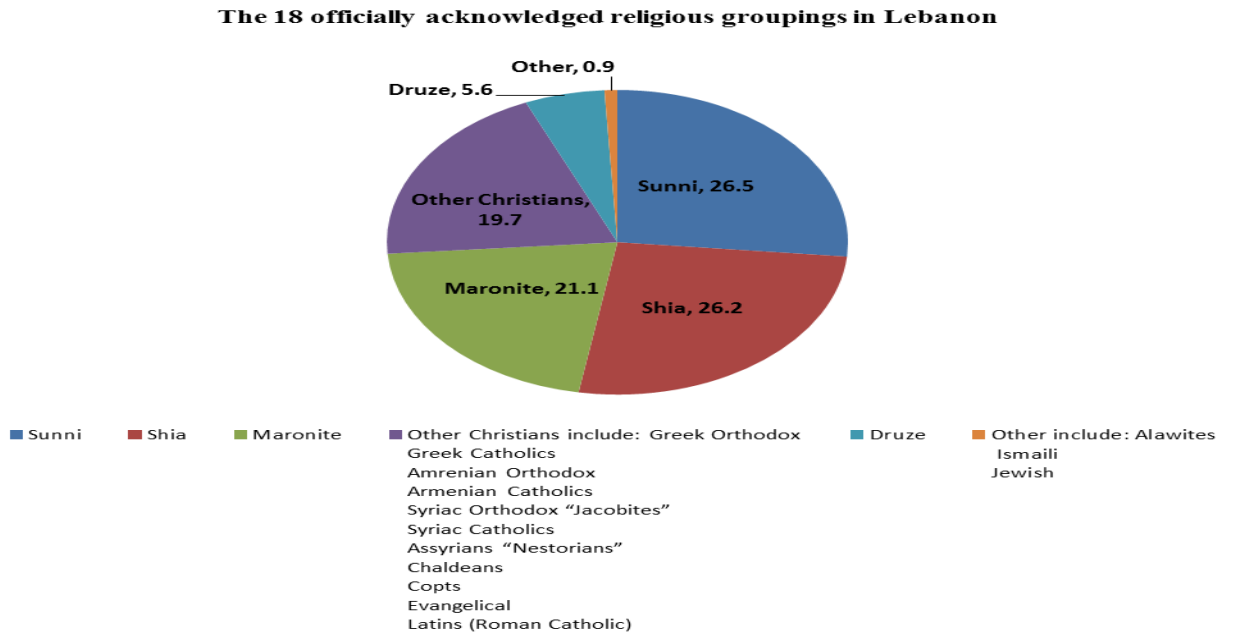


Figure 1.1: The 18 Officially Acknowledged Religious Groupings in Lebanon.
Source: (Salamey 2014).

The aim of this research is to examine the issues that politically divide the Lebanese Sunnis, externally and internally, during the period from 2005 to 2016, and how they are understood, framed and narrated by the Lebanese political actors. The research draws on Max Weber’s interpretivist approach of “understanding” (*Verstehen*) (see Hollis and Smith 1991; Bryman 2008), which denotes that reality is socially constructed. For the purpose of this research, the focus is on “understanding” not on “explanation” of the political contestations of the Lebanese Sunnis. The research does not aim at offering a causal explanation of intra-Sunni political divides in Lebanon but aims at understanding it from the stand point of the Lebanese political actors. It seeks

to interpret the subjective understandings, perceptions and frames of the Lebanese Sunni political actors engaged in the Sunni politics on issues of intra-Sunni political divides in Lebanon. The operationalisation of framing theory (see Goffman 1974; Snow and Benford 2000) as a theoretical tool will enable this research to understand better how the Lebanese Sunni political actors differ in their frames and articulations of the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon.

By Sunnis, this research refers to “the orthodox sect in Islam, so-called after the “Sunna” or lifestyle and rules of conduct of the Prophet Mohammad” (Khalidi 1979:26). As the intra-religious disunity within the Sunni community in Lebanon is deepening, it is threatening Sunni solidarity, national cohesion and security in Lebanon (see Abdel-Latif 2008; Rabil 2014). In a multi-confessional society like Lebanon (see figure 1.1), the state is often characterised by deep political, religious and cultural divisions, having confessional affiliations divided based on representative groupings rather than being embedded in a single national identity (Lust 2011; el-Husseini 2012). Arguably, the Sunni community in Lebanon represents an exceedingly complex case in an extremely divided region, as they are religiously, socially and politically divided. The Middle East region itself is extremely divided along religious, ethnic and ideological lines and Lebanon therefore represents an extreme case in an extreme region. The Lebanese Sunnis find themselves in a political structure through which confessional divisions as well as contested identities and ideological affiliations are embedded in the political structure, including the constitutional order (Lust 2011).

Whilst it is important to understand the political divides within the Sunni composite in the light of the domestic sphere and interest, it is equally important to understand it from the perspective of Sunni ties with regional actors (e.g. Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia) (Osoegawa 2013:149). Salamey (2014) indicates that the post-Rafik Hariri era from 2005 marked a growing confessionalism in Lebanon at inter- and intra-confessional levels, making it difficult to comprehend the compartmentalisation of Sunni groupings in Lebanon without referring to the ideological and geopolitical competition between Saudi Arabia on the one hand, and Iran and Syria on the other hand; and their frequent interferences in the Lebanese domestic affairs. Lebanon has been described by Zubaida (2009:170) as “a stage for forces and allegiances of other regional states and ideologies”. Indeed, regional states (e.g. Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia) have played an influential role in backing their respective Sunni allies in Lebanon against other Sunnis to increase their dominance in Lebanon and equally importantly, to shape the framing construction of their Sunni allies.

The intra-Sunni division in Lebanon is also a reflection of the perceptual failure of Sunni political and religious leadership to identify with the Sunni community, to improve their socio-economic conditions and to counter Hezbollah’s supremacy in the Lebanese state (Zelin 2016; Meier and Di Peri 2017). It is also a reflection on the perceived inability of the Lebanese government to completely protect the sovereignty of the state, dismantle armed militias, control non-state actors and maintain its legal authority on the whole Lebanese territories (see Salloukh et al. 2015). It is arguable that the various Sunni movement organisations and leaders in Lebanon receive support from external players, and that this support is often not confined to financial

funding, but includes political-cum-theological support. This in turn could arguably shape the narratives of Sunni movements; in effect reinforce separation rather than integration and undermine the influence of Sunnis on the political arena (see Khashan 2013). The present research therefore has not only academic interest but immediate policy implications as well.

1.2 Research Question

In this thesis, I pursue the following research question relating to intra-Sunni political contestations in Lebanon with the hope to examine issues of political divides within Lebanon's Sunni demographic:

 **How do the Lebanese Sunni political actors frame intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon?**

This research question offers “framing” as a way to understand, not to explain the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon. It aims at understanding how the Lebanese political actors frame and articulate intra-Sunni political divides within Lebanon's Sunni demographic through two key dimensions: domestic dimension and foreign dimension. At the domestic dimension, the research includes themes such as multiplicities of Sunni politicised identities, the stance on the state of Lebanon, the stance on Hezbollah and the stance on the political and religious leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon; and how they are understood, framed and contested between Sunni groupings and leaders in Lebanon. At the foreign dimension, the research examines how the role of external players (e.g. Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia) is framed, understood and articulated by the Lebanese political actors.

1.3 The Overarching Argument of this Research

For many decades, the Sunni community in Lebanon has been at the core of the Lebanese politics, as demonstrated by its involvement in the 1943 National Covenant, which laid the foundation for Lebanon's independence from France, and the 1989 Taif Accord, which ended the Lebanese civil war (Salem 2011). It has been at the heart of the Lebanese political game by virtue of it being granted the position of Lebanon's Prime Minister, which was captured in the 1943 National Covenant between Muslims and Christians (el-Husseini 2012; Meier and Di Peri 2017). The position of Sunnis as a community weakened during the devastating Lebanese civil war (1975-1990). The defeat of Sunni militias (e.g. the Tawheed Movement and the Independent Nasserite Movement) by Syria and its proxies and the assassination of key Sunni figures such as the Mufti of Lebanon Hassan Khalid and the former Prime Minister Rashid Karami, left the Sunni leadership in a much weaker position than at the beginning of the civil war (Sovgaard-Petersen 1998; Rougier 2007).

Even though the Sunni politics witnessed the emergence of various Sunni groupings, leaders and prime ministers, the emergence of Rafik Hariri signalled a change in the status of the Lebanese Sunnis. Promising to reconstruct the conflict-ridden state and to embark on state-building, Hariri presented himself as a trans-confessional leader for all the Lebanese people irrespective of their political and religious affiliations (Khashan 2013). Hariri's presence in the Lebanese politics marked the creation of a new socio-political phenomenon known as "Harirism" (Meier and Di Peri 2017:40). Harirism rested upon the establishment of moderate and unified Sunni political leadership in Lebanon in hand of the Hariri family. Rafik Hariri as Sunni Prime Minister and

billionaire with close ties to Saudi Arabia was able to solidify the role of the Sunni community in the Lebanese politics (Meier and Di Peri 2017). His assassination in 2005 altered the situation dramatically (Lefevre 2014; Rougier 2015). With Hariri's assassinations, the Sunni community in Lebanon was left without unifying, strong and charismatic Sunni leader with influence at the top level of the Lebanese state. Sunnis in Lebanon were unable to fill in the vacuum left by the death of Rafik Hariri and to accept their gradual disempowerment within Lebanon, which is also resulted from the rise of their main Lebanese opponent: Hezbollah (Meier and Di Peri 2017:48).

The absence of strong and credible Sunni leadership to unify Sunnis, to counter-Hezbollah and to preserve the political legacy of Rafik Hariri have significantly weakened Sunni power positions within the Lebanese political system and contributed to their perceptual marginalisation and disenchantment (see International Crisis Group 2010; Daher 2015; Khashan 2015). Hezbollah's attack on Sunnis in 2008 and the subsequent Doha Agreement signalled a shift in the balance of forces in Lebanon in favour of Iran, Syria and Hezbollah (Osoegawa 2013). In addition, Hezbollah's decision to militarily support the Syrian regime in the on-going Syrian conflict against the mostly Sunni Syrian rebels has produced a new wave of confessionalism, which has spilled over to Lebanon and deepened the inter-confessional division between Sunnis and Shias (Khashan 2015). The perceptions (among some Sunnis) that the Lebanese army cooperates with Hezbollah and mainly hunts Sunni radicals whilst turns a blind eye on Hezbollah's activism in Lebanon and abroad, highlighted a transformation of Sunni perceptions as "victims and threatened category within Lebanese society" (Ranstorp 2016:40; Meier and Di Piri 2017:49).

In reality, these recent developments affected the unity of the Lebanese Sunnis. Arguably, mainstream (pan-Arab, religious and national) Lebanese Sunni political actors and official religious institutions, such as Dar al-Fatwa, the highest religious Sunni office in Lebanon, have failed to channel rising Sunni discontents (see Lefevre 2014). The eclipse of Dar al-Fatwa has been linked to its politicisation and financial scandals (Lefevre 2015). In addition, the Future Movement (the largest Lebanese Sunni grouping, which was set up by Rafik Hariri, and is currently led by his son Saad) has been criticised for not doing enough for the Sunni community in Lebanon (Lefevre 2014). This gradual disempowerment of the inheritors of Rafik Hariri (i.e. the Future Movement) and their loss of power to Hezbollah and their regional patrons resulted in Sunnis to abandon moderate narratives and left space for the rise of Sunni radicalism and anti-statist sentiments (Haddad 2017).

Collectively, the weakness of the Lebanese Sunni leadership, both political and clerical, created a vacuum within the Sunni environment, and resulted in some Sunnis to drift apart and resort for other political alternatives (Haddad 2017). This situation encouraged regional players with interest in Lebanon such as Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iran to fill in the gap in the Sunni leadership either through financial or political support or through advocacy or propagation of slogans such as pan-Arabism, resisting Israel or supporting Palestine to break through the Sunni politics and to maintain their influence on Sunni power dynamics (see Goodrazi 2009; el-Husseini 2012; Pall 2013).

The interconnectivity between domestic and regional developments associated with the Sunni politics in the aftermath of Rafik Hariri's assassination in 2005 has deepened the disunity amongst Sunnis, but more importantly, shaped the ways in which they

construct their narratives on issues of intra-Sunni political divides in Lebanon. Therefore, the main focus of this research is to understand better how the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon is interpreted, framed and manifested by the Lebanese political actors during the period from 2005 to 2016. The research is a theorised one, and hence, in constructing the theoretical basis of this research, the framing theory is operationalised, with the hope to gain nuanced and deeper understanding of internal and external dynamics associated with the Sunni politics in Lebanon. The use of framing theory enables this research to understand better how the Lebanese political actors differ in their articulations of the political contestations of Sunnis. It shows how the “politics of representation” and politicised identities of the Lebanese Sunni political actors shape their framing construction.

1.4 Justification/Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis has the potential of making a contribution to knowledge because of the scarcity of literature on intra-confessional political divides in Lebanon as compared to inter-confessional political divides. Secondly, it brings into analysis the key roles of regional players such as Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia in shaping the framing construction of the Lebanese Sunni political actors. Thirdly, it challenges the assumptions that the Lebanese Sunnis are undifferentiated monoliths and hence, the operationalisation of framing theory will allow the research to look deeply into how the Lebanese Sunni political actors are divided in terms of their understandings and narratives of the Sunni politics and the Lebanese politics as a whole. Fourthly, this thesis, whose theoretical foundation relies on framing theory, has the potential of becoming the first theoretical-based research on the political division of the Sunni

community in Lebanon since the bulk of researches on the Sunni politics in Lebanon are not theory-based (see for example Abdel-Latif 2008; Imad 2009; Meir and Di Peri 2017). Finally, this study is relevant to policy makers, since it would provide them with information on the perceived division of the Sunni community and how to mitigate the challenges. The study will contribute to the knowledge base in the area of academia and hence serve as a guideline for scholars who intend to carry out similar researches in the future.

1.5 Literature Review

In this section, the literature is reviewed to provide a contextual definition of Sunni Muslims, Sunni politics and Sunni groupings in Lebanon in an effort to contextualise their framing construction. Following the research reviews literature on the Lebanese confessional political system and the Taif Accord in order to understand the political structure under which the Lebanese Sunni political actors operate in Lebanon.

1.5.1 Contextual Definition of Sunni Muslims in Lebanon

Sunni Muslims are the branch of the religion of Islam that follows the orthodox tradition and acknowledges the first four Caliphs (Abu Bakr, Omar, Othman and Ali) as legitimate successors of the Prophet Mohammad (Khalidi 1979). The term “Sunni” is derived from the word “Sunnah”, which means the exemplary behaviour or rule of conduct of the Prophet Mohammad (Khalidi 1979). Sunni Muslims constitute the majority of all followers of Islam and differ from Shia Muslims in their understanding of the Sunna, their conception of religious leadership and their recognition of the first three caliphs (see Rabil 2014). Sunnis are the largest religious community in Lebanon

(see figure1). They constitute 26.5% of the Lebanese population (see Najem 2012; Salamey 2014). In addition, they are key players in the Lebanese politics as evidenced by the 1943 National Covenant and the 1989 Taif Accord, which indicated that the Lebanese president would be a Christian Maronite, the prime minister would be a Muslim Sunni and the speaker of the parliament would be a Muslim Shia (Lust 2011). The Lebanese Sunnis have two leaderships: the first one is the political leadership, as represented by the Prime Minister Office, the highest political Sunni position in Lebanon. The prime minister is the head of the Lebanese government and is the operational head of the executive branch (Salem 2011). The other one is the religious leadership, as represented by a state institution known as Dar al-Fatwa, the highest religious Sunni position in Lebanon (Skovgaard-Petersen 1998). Dar al-Fatwa is responsible for managing Sunni religious and legal affairs (Skovgaard-Petersen 2004:89). In the following, the research maps out the various Sunni groupings in Lebanon and their political activities.

1.5.2 Mapping out Sunni Groupings and Organisations in Lebanon

In Lebanon, there are Sunni groupings and organisations which aim at leading the Sunni politics (see Imad 2009; Rabil 2014; Rougier 2015). The Future Movement is the largest Sunni grouping but there are other Sunni groupings which do not want to operate under the leadership of the Future Movement (see Abdel-Latif 2008:1). These groups are divided in terms of their identity and political stance. The following headings and sub-headings will provide an outline of the literature on the dynamics of the main political Sunni groupings in Lebanon and their political activities. The literature of groupings within the Sunni community in Lebanon will focus on Sunni

groupings, which are politically active in the Sunni politics in Lebanon. These groupings include: the Future Movement, the Arab Liberation Party, the League of Muslim Scholars, the Lebanese Salafists (Purist, *Haraki* and Jihadist), al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, the Islamic Action Front, the Tawheed Movement, Hizb ut-Tahrir, al-Ahbash, the Union Party and the Popular Nasserite Organisation. All the dynamics of these Sunni groupings will help shaping the focus of this research by providing an entrancing lens to the analysis of data on intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon and how it is framed by the Lebanese political actors.

1.5.2.1 The Future Movement

The Future Movement is a national Sunni grouping founded by the Hariri family in Lebanon (Cammett and Issar 2010:400). The former Sunni Prime Minister Rafik Hariri established the political machine of the Future Movement in the 1990s but it was not until 2007 that the political party was formally established (Cammett and Issar 2010:400). The Future Movement is currently led by Rafik Hariri's son, Saad Hariri, the current Prime Minister of Lebanon and is considered as the largest Sunni grouping in Lebanon (Cammett and Issar 2010:400). The movement pursues anti-Syria and anti-Iran policies in Lebanon (Osoegawa 2013:155). This includes its support for the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSC) 1559, which calls for the withdrawal of foreign troops (i.e. Syria) from Lebanon and the disarmament of non-state militias (i.e. Hezbollah) (Fakhoury 2015). In addition, the Future Movement strongly supports the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) on Rafik Hariri's killing (Osoegawa 2013:155). The STL is regarded by Syria and Iran as a means to reduce their influence on Lebanon (Osoegawa 2013:155). The Future Movement holds good relations with Saudi Arabia,

whose support for the movement is understood in the context of countering Iran and Syria's role in Lebanon (International Crisis Group 2010; Osoegawa 2013:155). The movement is an ally with the United States and France (Osoegawa 2013:155). The relations between the Future Movement and these states are legacy of the former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, who established deep relations with the Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia and the West, especially France (International Crisis Group 2010; Osoegawa 2013:155).

1.5.2.2 The League of Muslim Scholars

The League of Muslim Scholars is a scholarly committee which was established in 2012 (the League of Muslim Scholars 2012a). It consists of approximately 500 Sunni religious scholars, who are categorised as independent or representatives of religious-based Sunni groupings in Lebanon such as al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and the Lebanese Salafists (the League of Muslim Scholars 2012b). The main objective of the League of Muslim Scholars is to strengthen the role of Sunni religious scholars in Lebanon and to play an influential role in issues pertinent to the Lebanese Sunnis (Lefevre 2015). The League of Muslim Scholars' policy line is anti-Syrian and anti-Iran whereby it vocally supports the revolution against the Syrian's president Bashar al-Assad and opposes Hezbollah's military intervention in Syria to protect him (Lefevre 2015). While the League of Muslims Scholars consists of diverse members with various worldviews, it is unified in its opposition to Syria, Iran and Hezbollah (Lefevre 2014:10).

1.5.2.3 The Arab Liberation Party

The Arab Liberation Party, which is also known as (*Hizb Taharrur al-'Arabi*), is a national Sunni grouping, which is associated with the Karami family, the well-known

traditional political leaders (*zuama*) of Tripoli, north Lebanon. The Arab Liberation Party was established in 1952 by the former Prime Minister Abdul-Hamid Karami and is currently led by the Sunni Member of Parliament Faisal Karami, the heir to the Karami family (see Lefevre 2014). The Arab Liberation Party's influence on the Sunni politics in Lebanon is based on the political legacy of its founder Abdul-Hamid Karami and his two sons Rashid and Omar, the former prime ministers of Lebanon. The party is highly critical of the Future Movement and is politically affiliated with Syria, Iran and Hezbollah as the latter relies on its support in its political struggles with Sunni opponents in Tripoli (the Arab Liberation Party's stronghold) (see International Crisis Group 2010; Osoegawa 2013).

1.5.2.4 Salafism in Lebanon

The term Salafism was coined from the Arabic expression "the virtuous ancestors" (*al-salaf al-salih*), who lived in the first three centuries of Islam, "namely companions of the Prophet Muhammad (*Sahaba*) and the first two generations of their followers" (Pall 2013:17). It refers to the orthodox trend of Sunni Islam, which strictly abides by the Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet Mohammad and rejects human reasoning and all other types of innovation (*bid'a*) (Wiktorowicz 2006; Lauziere 2010). In Lebanon, Salafism is considered as the oldest religious-based Sunni movement in Lebanon (see Abdel-Latif 2009). In 1947, the Salafist movement was established in Tripoli, northern Lebanon, by shaykh Salim al-Shahhal, a Lebanese Salafist, under the name of the Association of Muslims (*al-Jama'a Muslimun*) (Khashan 2011a: Rabil 2014:4). The Salafist Movement in Lebanon is labelled as a network of organisations and educated clergy (*sheikhs*) who run Islamic centres and charity endowments in the

pursuit of spreading the creed of the virtuous ancestors (*al-salaf al-salih*) (Imad 2009). In the 1980s, Lebanese Salafists maintained their presence following the spread of Salafism in the Islamic world (Pall 2013). Salafist clerics, who have the support of Saudi Arabia and some Gulf states, launched various Islamic and social centres in Lebanon, particularly in Tripoli (Rougier 2015). Yet, many of those centres were closed by the government, as they were suspected in endorsing sectarian narratives (Khashan 2011). In 1995, the Lebanese judiciary prosecuted and arrested dozens of Salafists after being accused of the assassination of Nizar Halabi, the pro-Syrian head of the Sunni grouping al-Ahbash (Khashan 2011). In 2000, the Dinniyeh Mountain (east of Tripoli) witnessed bloody clashes between the Army and radical Salafist group, who had aimed at establishing an Islamic emirate (Zelin 2016). The army uprooted the group, killed its leader and arrested dozens of Salafists (Khashan 2011). As a result, the vibrancy of Salafists remained seriously weakened until the withdrawal of Syria's troops from Lebanon in 2005. Following the Syrian's withdrawal from Lebanon, Salafists re-opened many of their institutes and regained some freedom to practise their Salafist preaching and to engage in political activism (al-Shahhal 2010).

Classification of Salafism in Lebanon

Salafist factions in Lebanon can be classified in terms of their political orientations into three categories: purist apolitical, *haraki* political and jihadists (see Wiktorowicz 2006; Pall 2013). These classifications are discussed in turn.

Purist Salafists

Purists concentrate on teaching Muslims the authentic creed (*'aqidah*), eschewing politics and submitting an unconditional obedience to the Muslim rulers unless they are apostates (Rabil 2014). Pall (2013:26) identifies two purist categories within the framework of the Lebanese Salafists. The first pertains to the “rejectionist” faction, which rejects any kind of political participation and forbids taking part in the parliamentary elections because they may corrupt Muslims’ creed (*'aqidah*) (Pall 2013). The second category pertains to the “purist-politically oriented” (Pall 2013:59). A clear example of this category is Jam'iyyat Waqf al-Turath al-Islami, which was founded in 2004 by shaykh Safwan al-Zu'bi in Lebanon (Shayya et al. 2009). These Salafists are supported by the Kuwaiti foundation Jam'iyyat Ihya' al-Turath al-Islami, which primarily supports purist Salafists (Shayya et al. 2009; Pall 2013). This category believes that the state of Lebanon is not repressive in that all the Lebanese religious communities are allowed to practise their own beliefs and therefore, it is not in the interest of the Salafist preaching (*da'wa*) to oppose the Lebanese state (Pall 2013:60). This types of Salafism urges Muslims to participate in the Lebanese political system and does not reject supporting non-Muslim candidates as long as they serve the interests of the Muslim community (Pall 2013:60). In addition, this category is less hostile to Shias, as compared to *haraki* Salafists.

Haraki Salafists

The *Haraki* or political brand of Salafism believes in the importance of engaging in politics as a means to disseminate the Salafist’s creed (Wiktorowicz 2006). *Haraki* Salafists, unlike their purist counterparts, believe that Muslims need to engage in

political affairs and openly criticise rulers who do not govern in accordance with Islam and its principles (Wiktorowicz 2006; Pall 2013). A clear example of this category is Jam'iyat al Hidayah wa al-Ihsan, which is led by shaykh Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal (Shayya et al. 2009). Whilst abiding by Salafism, this category is of the view that Islam should not be restricted to matters of purification and opposing *bid'a*. Rather, political affairs pertinent to Muslims should be thoroughly discussed (Wiktorowicz 2006; Pall 2013). *Haraki* Salafists criticise purists' emphasis on matters of *'aqida* and *da'wa*, whilst avoiding comments on key political issues that have a huge influence on the Muslim community (see Lacroix 2005). In Lebanon, this type of Salafism concentrates on two key elements: first, promoting unity among Muslims at the external level; second, resisting the Syrian-Iranian alliance and the rising influence of Hezbollah and their Sunni allies on Lebanon at the internal level (Pall 2013:54).

Jihadist Salafists

The term jihad or "struggle" has different meanings depending on the context in which the term is used. In the contemporary context, the term jihad refers to those who seek "to change the reality by force" (Pall 2013: 38). In Saab and Ranstorp's (2007:826) expression, Salafist jihadists are a "small minority strand within Salafist thought". This type of Salafism holds the view that peaceful strategies of Islamic da'wa and political reforms are not viable; only jihad will result in the formation of an Islamist state (Saab and Ranstorp 2007:826). In Lebanon there are different jihadist groupings but it is difficult to determine whether or not these groupings are truly Salafists. Care should be taken in classifying particular groupings as a Salafist jihadist, since not all Salafist groupings are jihadist and vice versa. Yet, there are jihadist groupings, which are

perceived to have links with Salafism. A clear example of this trend is the radical Salafist grouping the League of Partisans (Usbat al-Ansar) (see Haddad 2010). This grouping was accused of assassinating the political leader of al-Ahbash shaykh Nizar al-Halabi in response to the intra-Sunni disputes between Salafists and al-Ahbash which overshadowed the Sunni politics in the mid-1990s (see Haddad 2010). Another example of Salafist jihadists is the grouping of al-Takfir wa al-Hijrah, which emerged in the late 1990s (see Pall 2013). The aim of this grouping was to establish an Islamic state in Lebanon but they were defeated by the Lebanese army in 2000 (Rougier 2007). This incident had negative impacts on haraki Salafists, many of whom were arrested by the Lebanese authorities due to suspicion of collusion with al-Takfir wa al-Hijrah (Rougier 2015:16). A third example is the case of Fatah al-Islam grouping, which was thought to have links with al-Qaeda and some Salafist networks in Lebanon (Abdel-Latif 2008). This grouping recruited hundreds of Sunni fighters from Lebanon and abroad, operated in Lebanon from 2006 to 2008 and was perceived as one of the most dangerous militias operating in the domestic arena in Lebanon (Zelin). The grouping was defeated by the Lebanese army after a long battle, which lasted for approximately three months (Zalin 2016:51).

1.5.2.5 Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya

The Islamic Group (al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyya) is a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria and it is influenced by their teachings (Hamzeh 1997). It proposes an "Islamic order based on the *Shari'a* (Islamic sacred law) through *jihad* of the heart (spiritual struggle), *jihad* by word (education and propaganda), and *jihad* by hand (economic, political and military action)" (Hamzah 1997). The origins of al-Jama'a al-

Islamiyya go back to 1956 when it launched its mission under the name of “Worshippers of the Most Merciful” (*Ibad al-Rahman*). Later on, in 1964, it was transferred into the name of The Islamic Group (al-Jama’ah al-Islamiyya) (el-Husseini 2012; Imad 2013). In principle, the group began as an apolitical and charitable movement. Nevertheless, the ramifications of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the rise of political Islam and the Lebanese civil war, pushed the movement towards political activism (Imad 2006). The movement was officially recognised by the Lebanese state after it was issued with a license from the then Lebanese Minister of Interior Kamal Joumblat (Imad 2013). It became the first religious-based Sunni grouping to be officially recognised by the Lebanese state (Imad 2009:144). Al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya is centrist in its political affiliations (see Shayya et al. 2009). Following the assassination of Rafik Hariri in 2005, the grouping cooperated with the Future Movement in the parliamentary elections in 2005 and 2009 (Rabil 2014). The purpose was to maintain the unity of the Sunni front in the face of internal and external threats. Yet, unlike other Sunni groupings such as Salafists or the Future Movement which engaged in political struggles with Hezbollah, al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya’s approach has been less hostile towards Hezbollah. The grouping strongly affirms the role of Hezbollah’s resistance against Israel but decries its military involvement in Syria and its involvement in domestic conflicts in Lebanon (El-Husseini 2012:81; Choucair 2015).

1.5.2.6 The Islamic Action Front

In 2006, the Islamic Action Front was established by Fathi Yakan, the former secretary general of al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya (Shayya et al. 2009). Yakan withdrew from al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya because of his disagreement with its political alliance with the Future

Movement (Abdel-Latif 2008; Shayya et al. 2009). The Islamic Action Front is a Sunni coalition consisting of the Tawheed Movement and other smaller religious-based Sunni groups such as the Down Forces, Islam without Borders, and al-Imam Ali Association (Abdel-Latif 2008; Imad 2009; Shayya et al. 2009). The Islamic Action Front is a pro-Syria, pro-Iran Coalition (Imad 2009). It was established in order to mobilise the Lebanese Sunnis against the Future Movement (Rougier 2015:250). Soon later, the Islamic Action Front faced two serious challenges. In 2008, several members defected from the front and joined a rival grouping with almost the same name: “the Islamic Action Front-Emergency Committee” (Imad 2009; Rougier 2015:75). The defection was attributable to their opposition to Hezbollah’s influence on the Islamic Action Front. Hezbollah managed to recruit a number of the Lebanese Sunnis who had thought that they were trained to fight against Israel. Later on, it seemed that that they were used as a tool by Hezbollah in their internal conflicts in Lebanon (see Rougier 2015). The unmasking of these military trainings undermined the influence of the Islamic Action Front on Sunni power dynamics and led to frequent defections (see Imad 2013; Rougier 2015). The second challenge was the death of the Islamic Action Front’s founder Fathi Yakan in 2009 (Imad 2013). Much of the Islamic Action Front’s influence was based on Yakan’s network, charisma and organisational and political experience (Imad 2009). The Islamic Action Front capitalised on Yakan’s high profile as an influential Sunni political leader to appeal to Sunni followers (Abdel-Latif 2008:10). Following Yakan’s death, the front’s influence on the Sunni politics considerably weakened despite Hezbollah’s support (Imad 2013).

1.5.2.7 The Tawheed Movement

The “Unification” or Tawheed Movement was established in Tripoli in 1982 under the leadership of Said Sha’ban, a famous yet controversial figure in the Islamic arena in Lebanon (Deeb 1986). It is thought as a “more of a coalitional setting than an organizational one” (Deeb 1986). During the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), Tripoli witnessed the existence of diverse leftist, pan-Arab, Islamists and Palestinian militant groupings with different ideologies, objectives and indeed, political orientations. These groupings included among others Soldiers of God (*Jund Allah*), the Arab Lebanese Movement (*Harakat Lubnan al-Arabi*) and the Popular Resistance (*al-Muqawwamah al-Sha’bia*) (Deeb 1986; Imad 2009). The erstwhile three groupings held various meetings with shaykh Said Sha’ban whereby they agreed to “unify” their armed activism under the rubric of the Tawheed Movement and the leadership of Said Sha’ban. The purpose was to fight Syria and Israel’s presence in Lebanon. In 1985, the movement was militarily destroyed by Syria and its proxies, following a massacre of hundreds of Sunni in Tripoli (Hanf 1993). This instance resulted in a perpetual schism between Tripoli and Syria and served as an impetus for the subsequent rise of radical Sunni groups in Lebanon (Khashan 2011:87). Following the death of Sha’ban in 1998, the movement was split up into two wings: “Board of Trustees” (*majlis al-Umana*) and “Leadership Council” (*majlis al-qiyadah*) (Imad 2009). It is thought that the split up was for logistic rather than ideological motives (Imad 2009). However, the movement does not hold a clear-cut Islamic project and its agenda remains ambiguous. Indeed, in post-2005 era, the movement was affiliated with the Iranian-Syrian axis in Lebanon; a decision seems to contradict the general ethos of the Sunni community in Lebanon (Imad 2009).

1.5.2.8 Hizb ut-Tahrir

Hizb ut-Tahrir is a transnational political party (Osman 2012; Karagiannis 2013) whose ideology is based on Islam and whose main objective is to re-establish the historical state of the Caliphate (*dawlat al-Khilafah*), which existed during the leadership of the four Caliphs (Abu Bakr, Omar, Othman and Ali) (Rashid 2003; International Crisis Group 2003). This era is perceived by many Muslims as “the only time in Islamic history when a true Muslim society existed” (Rashid 2003:116; Osman 2012:90). In Lebanon, Hizb ut-Tahrir was established by Taquldin al-Nabhani (1909-1977), an Islamic scholar and judge in the Islamic law in 1953 (Karagiannis 2006; Yilmaz: 2010; Hanif 2012). Following al-Nabhani’s settlement in Lebanon, particularly in 1959, Hizb ut-Tahrir applied for a licence often known as “Appraisal and Notification” (*‘ilm wa khabar*) from the Lebanese state and informed the Ministry of Interior about its intention to commence its modus operandi (Ghareeb 2014). The movement got a licence to practise its activities in 1959 but in 1961, the movement was banned by the Lebanese authorities on the ground that its ideology “contradicts the Lebanese Constitution” (Shayya et al. 2009:116). In the aftermath of the Syrian’s withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, Hizb ut-Tahrir gained more freedom to practise their activities. The turning point occurred in 2006 when the Lebanese government legalised Hizb ut-Tahrir and was no longer banned (Abd-Latif 2008; Shayaa et al. 2009). Lebanon has been the only state in the Arab world that legalised Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Relations with Hezbollah

Hizb ut-Tahrir’s relationship with Hezbollah, the most powerful grouping in Lebanon is described as “antagonistic” for several reasons (Karagiannis 2010:53). The first reason

pertains to the fact that Hezbollah has a mass following in Lebanon, whereas Hizb ut-Tahrir has a small but growing membership in the country (Karagiannis 2010:53). The second reason suggests that the two groupings have considerably different political methodology (Karagiannis 2010:53). Hezbollah, for instance, has a military wing which often engages in armed struggle against Israel and simultaneously holds seats in the Lebanese parliament while Hizb ut-Tahrir rejects electoral politics except under strict conditions and favours peaceful non-violent methods for political change (Chaudet; 2006; Karagiannis and Mccauley 2006). The third reason indicates that Hezbollah “aims at transforming Lebanon into an Islamic state, whereas Hizb ut-Tahrir aims at incorporating Lebanon into the proposed Caliphate” (Karagiannis 2010:54). The fourth reason is that Hezbollah has been logistically, financially and militarily supported by Iran, while Hizb ut-Tahrir is mainly a Sunni grouping with “no state openly providing any support to it” (Karagiannis 2010:54). The fifth reason shows that Hizb ut-Tahrir is against Hezbollah’s involvement in the Syrian conflict to support Bashar al-Assad. In April, 15, 2011, Hizb ut-Tahrir called for a demonstration in Tripoli to support the Syrian revolution against the Assad regime, making the party one of the earliest Lebanese groupings to publicly support the Syrian revolution against the Assad’s regime (Ghandour 2014).

Re-establishment of the State of the Caliphate

Hizb ut-Tahrir clarifies the required three stages for the revival of the state of the Caliphate. The first stage is known as the stage of culturing (*tathkeef*) (Osman 2012:97), which involves finding and cultivating people who are really convinced and influenced by the ideology of Hizb ut-Tahrir. This stage is essential in order to establish

a group of people who are able to carry out the movement's ideology. The second stage is known as the stage of interaction (*tafa'oul*) (Osman 2012:97), which involves interacting and engaging with the Muslim *umma* in order to convince them to embrace the religion of Islam, hence they work to Islamise state, society and life. The third stage is known as the stage of "accepting power and ruling" (*istilamu al-hukm*) (Osman 2012:97), which involves re-establishing an Islamic state, the state of the Caliphate, which implements the religion of Islam not only generally but comprehensively and carries out its message to the whole world in the forms of military struggle (*jihad*) against the disbelievers or revolutionary takeovers (Hizb ut-Tahrir in Britain, 2000: 32 as cited in Karagiannis 2006: 266).

1.5.2.9 Al-Ahbash

It is commonly known as al-Ahbash "the Ethiopians", due to the ethnicity of its founder shaykh Abdullah al-Habashi, a Sufi leader from Ethiopia (Rougier 2007). Al-Ahbash is a Sufi-oriented Sunni movement, which belongs to the Rifaiyya Sufi order (Kabha and Erlich 2006; Pierret 2010). The creed of al-Ahbash is based on acknowledging the teachings of the virtuous ancestors (*al-Salaf al-Saleh*) with particular emphasis on theology (*Ilmu al-Kalam*); a tradition of the Mu'tazila sect, which puts an emphasis on dialectical reason (*'aql*) over literal interpretation of the Islamic holy texts (*naql*) (Hamzeh 1997). Indeed, al-Ahbash's understanding of Islam has been widely criticised by other Sunnis because of its emphasis on critiquing the discourse of other Sunni groupings rather than formulating a thorough, clear-cut project to unify them (Imad 2006). In addition, the movement often indulges in the analysis of some complex and dialectical theological issues that the mainstream Sunnis

in Lebanon tend to avoid due to its sensitivity such as the thorough engagement in the exegesis of the divine attributes (*ta'wil al-sifat*) of God (Allah) (El-Husseini 2012).

Al-Ahbash began as a charitable movement and did not engage in confessional conflicts during the civil war. In the 1980s, al-Ahbash became popular in the Islamic arena by advocating pluralism, political passivity and tolerance (Hamzeh 1997). However, in the 1990s, al-Ahbash engaged in political activism, supporting the Syrian regime and their allies as well as fiercely opposing anti-Syrian Sunni groupings such as Salafism (Imad 2006). Al-Ahbash, during the 1990s, was an important player amongst Sunnis but did not maintain good relations with neither Dar al-Fatwa, the highest religious Sunni office in Lebanon, nor with the Lebanese Salafists and al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya due to political and religious differences (Pall 2013).

Disagreements with Dar al-Fatwa

In the 1990s, al-Ahbash attempted to take over Dar al-Fatwa in order to religiously lead the Sunni community (Rabil 2011). This coincided with an absence of an elected grand Mufti in Lebanon following the assassination of the Grand Mufti Shaykh Hassan Khalid in 1989 (Rabil 2011). Al-Ahbash, given its ties with Syria and its allies, believed that its political leader Nizar al-Halabi could exercise power over Dar al-Fatwa, hence being the Mufti of the Republic (Skovgaard-Petersen 2004). However, the problem was that al-Ahbash has carried out a different interpretation of Islam making its theology unacceptable by mainstream Lebanese Sunnis. Moreover, the movement maintained bad relations with Dar al-Fatwa as the latter did not provide it with a licence to officially operate (Abdel-latif 2008). The rivalry between the two-sides deepened as al-Ahbash took over several important mosques in Beirut some of which were said to be

belonging to Dar al-Fatwa (Pall 2013). Al-Ahbash justified its actions on the ground that Dar al-Fatwa was unable to virtually protect mosques from what it called “extremist” groupings referring to al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya and the Lebanese Salafists (Pall 2013).

Disagreement with Salafists and al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya

Not only did the al-Ahbash engage in an intra-Sunni struggle against Dar al-Fatwa but also against political Islam groupings such as Salafist and al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya. In principle, the movement was identified with political passivity and religious spirituality, portraying itself as a moderate Sunni voice in the face of what it often describes as radicalism or extremism affected by political Islamism (Hamzeh and Dekmejian 1996; Kabha and Erlich 2006). Whilst the movement was initially perceived as religiously quietist, given its Sufi-oriented background, its practises with Sunni rivals were the antithesis of its mottos based on moderation. Al-Ahbash repeatedly described specific Sunni counterparts as infidels thus excluding them from Islam (Kabha and Erlich 2006). These groupings were influenced by the writings of various Muslims figures such as Ibn Taymyya, Mohammad ibn Abdul Wahhab and Hassan al-Banna. The movement rejected their thesis by stating that their philosophies were contradictory to the Holy Quran, the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad (Nassif 2001; al-Ahbash official website 2015).

Al-Ahbash in the aftermath of Syria’s Withdrawal from Lebanon

Syria’s withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005 gradually weakened the political influence of al-Ahbash on the Sunni politics (Imad 2006). Following Hariri’s assassination, more

Sunnis tended to have intolerable sentiments toward al-Ahbash because of its identification with the Syrian intelligent agency (Kabha and Erlich 2006: 523). The severe blow that al-Ahbash received was in October 2005, when the United Nations released reports alleging that members of al-Ahbash were implicated in Hariri's assassination; hence two members of al-Ahbash were arrested before they were released in 2009 (see Report of the International Independent Investigation Commission Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1595: 2005). This led to al-Ahbash's reputation being damaged to a very great extent. Whilst the movement was described as one of the major Sunni parties in the pre-Hariri's assassination period, it hardly has had any political influence on the Sunni spectrum much less the national spectrum in the post-Hariri's assassination period.

1.5.2.10 The Union Party

It is commonly known as *Hizb al-Ittihad*. The Union Party is a pan-Arab based Sunni grouping, which adheres to pan-Arabism. It was established in the late fifties under the name of *Baath al-Thawra* before it was officially metamorphosed into the name of the Union Party in 1990. Much of the influence of the Union Party on the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon is based on the charisma, financial capacity and regional links of its leader, the former Minister Abdul-Rahim Mourad, who served as a minister of education and higher studies (1995-1998) and (2000-2003), minister of state (2003-2004) and minister of Defence (2004-2005) in the Lebanese government. He also served as member of the Lebanese parliament in 1991, 1992, 1996, 2000 and 2018. The Union Party, under Mourad's leadership established several universities and charity centres in Lebanon, which improved Sunni conditions, especially in West Bekaa

(the Union Party's stronghold) and strengthened its influence on the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon. The Union Party is aligned with Syria, Iran and Hezbollah its leader is known to be a Sunni rival of the Hariri family and one of Syria's key Sunni allies in Lebanon (see International Crisis Group 2010:6).

1.5.2.11 The Popular Nasserite Organisation

The Popular Nasserite Organisation was inaugurated in 1970 in Sidon, under the leadership of Maarouf Saad (The Popular Nasserite Organisation 2014). Initially, Maarouf Saad established the Popular Forces Organisation in Sidon (*Tanzim al-Qiwa al-Sha'biya fi Sayda*), which later metamorphosed to the Popular Nasserite Organisation (*Tanzim Asha'bi Annasri*) in 1973 (The Popular Nasserite Organisation 2014). The core objectives of the Popular Nasserite Organisation have been to support the Palestinian cause, pursue pan-Arabism and help deprived communities in Sidon (Arnaout 1981; El-Khazen 2000; Khalaf 2002). The organisation's involvement in the civil war (1975-1990) shaped its trajectory and constituted its political identity and alliances, making it one of the domestic actors in Lebanon (The Popular Nasserite Organisation 2014). In 1975, following the assassination of Maarouf Saad, his son, Mostafa (1951-2002) succeeded him. Mostafa was elected as the general secretary of the Popular Nasserite Organisation, through which he pursued his father's legacy. During the civil war, the organisation engaged in frequent struggles against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1978 and 1982 respectively. Presumably, the organisation's role, under the leadership of Mostafa, infuriated Israel and thus he was detained (twice) by them (Fisk 2001). He was subjected to several assassination attempts; in one attempt, he lost his daughter and lost his sight (Fisk 2001). In addition, the

organisation engaged in inter-confessional struggles against Rightist Christians. In 2002, Mostafa passed away and was succeeded by his brother Osama, who pursued the family's conviction entrenched in its pro-Palestinian, pro-Nasserite political orientation; an on-going legacy, which made them popular in Sidon (Soussi 2007). Ossama Saad is currently the general secretary of the Popular Nasserite Organisation and is allied with Syria, Iran and Hezbollah (Soussi 2007).

1.5.3 Confessionalism in Lebanon

In the following, a review of the literature on confessionalism is presented as it is the current political system operating in Lebanon. This is important to understand the context of the political activities of the Lebanese Sunni actors.

Confessionalism is a system of government that proportionally distributes political power among a state's communities, whether ethnic or religious, according to their percentage of the population (Harb 2006). It is often perceived as a solution for multiple religious and deeply divided communities like Lebanon (see figure 1.1). Since 1943, the political system in Lebanon has been confessional, the purpose of this kind of confessionalism has been to ensure representation to all the religious communities in Lebanon (Khalaf 1987; Faour 2007). The Lebanese political system has also been considered as semi-presidential because it holds elections for three office bearers: the president, the prime minister and the speaker of the parliament (Salamey and Payne 2008; Mollica and Dingley 2015). Both confessionalism and semi-presidentialism are often criticised as systems that cannot work in highly divided societies (Lust 2011).

The political system in Lebanon has emerged as a result of the National Covenant between Muslims and Christians, which laid the foundations for Lebanon's independence from France in 1946 (Lust 2011; Salamey 2014). The covenant reinforced the confessional system of governance, which operated under the French rule in Lebanon by "formalising the confessional distribution of the highest public offices and top administrative ranks according to the proportional distribution of the dominant communities within Lebanon" (Salamey 2014:30). The covenant indicated that the president of Lebanon would be a Christian Maronite, the prime minister would be a Muslim Sunni and the speaker of the Parliament would be a Muslim Shia (Khalidi 1979). In addition, it mentioned that the seats in the Lebanese parliament would be distributed by six-to-five ratio, which favoured Christians to Muslims, as they were the dominant religious community in the last census, which occurred in 1932 (el-Husseini 2012).

Rather than protect the interest of the Lebanese religious communities, the confessional arrangements intensified political tensions between them (Lust 2011). During the 1960s and thereafter, the Shia community had increased in size to become the largest, but not the prevailing community, equivalent to one-third of the population, but this increase was not coincided with political power; rather, Muslims, especially the Shias remained underrepresented (see figure 1.2). Whereas Muslims demanded a new census to accommodate new demographic realities in Lebanon, Maronites refused to conduct another census or to amend the constitution to reduce their share of power (Barakat 1979; Evron 1987). In addition, the Israeli existence in Palestine resulted in the displacement of approximately 700,000 Palestinians into

neighbouring states including Lebanon (Salamey, 2014). The Palestinian presence in Lebanon, predominantly Sunnis, changed the demographic balance in favour of Muslims and intensified confessional tensions between Muslim advocates of pan-Arabism and Christian nationalists, and this is one of the reasons why the Christians Maronites refused to conduct another census (Salamey 2014).

The seeming failure of the confessional political system and power-sharing had aggravated confessional tensions and led to a devastating civil war in Lebanon (Salamey 2009). Milton-Edwards (2011:130) notes that the “civil war in Lebanon was the product of the failure of confessional and consociational arrangements in state and politics to account accurately and fairly for [the interests of] religious minorities”. Yet, she understates the problem, in that all communal groupings are minorities in Lebanon, which is a country that has no overall majority (see figure 1.1). Rather, the essential conflict derived from larger minorities being more disadvantaged relative to smaller minorities that were privileged. Undeniably, the civil war (1975-1990) proved the vulnerability of the confessional political system. The civil war was not predominantly an internal affair; it was triggered by the Palestinian armed existence, which deepened confessional tensions and attracted the external intervention by Syria (1976-2005), Israel (1982-2000) as well as Iran and other state and non-state actors each pursuing domination over Lebanon (Cleveland 2004).

1.5.4 The Taif Accord

In October 1989, the Taif Accord which was convened in Saudi Arabia, under the support of the Arab League and the United Nations led to the end of the Lebanese civil

war which started in 1975 and eventually ended in 1990 (Osoegawa 2013; Salamey 2014:70). The accord approved a decrease in the power of the Lebanese (Maronite) president, placing it on equivalent ground with the government and the parliament (Osoegawa 2013). It empowered the power positions of the Sunni and Shia communities in Lebanon. The privileges that the Maronites held in pre-civil war era were reduced so that Muslims (Sunnis and Shias) would hold equal positions in the parliament and more powerful positions in the Prime Minister Office and parliament speakership (see figure 1.2). Therefore, instead of the Lebanese president having a full power as it was the case in the pre-civil war period, the Taif Accord maintains that power and decision-making are to be shared between the Lebanese religious communities.

Pre- and post-Taif division of seats in parliament

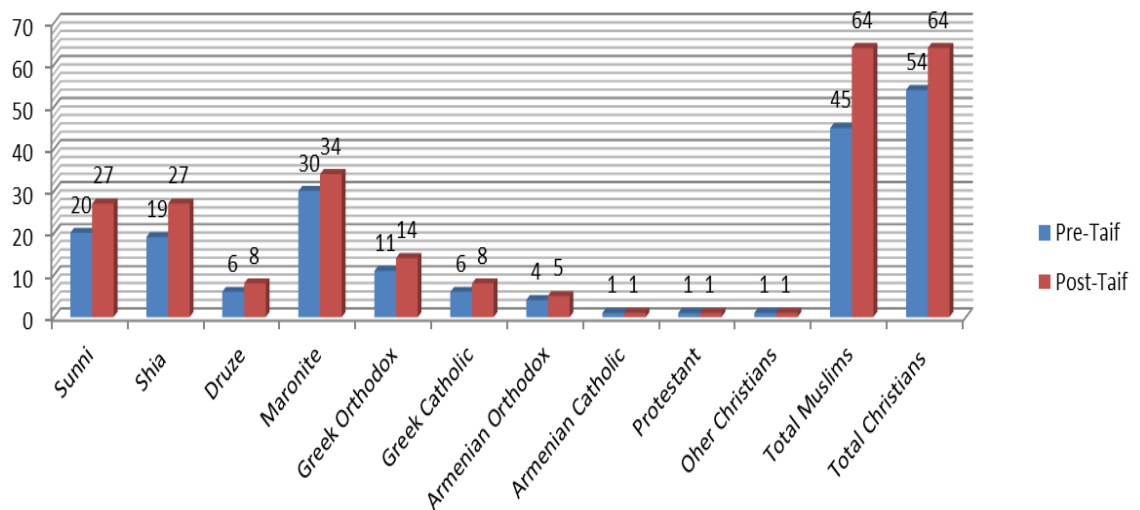


Figure 1.2: Pre- and post-Taif division of seats in parliament
Source: (Krayem 1997 as cited in Salamey 2014).

1.5.4.1 Abolition of Confessionalism

The Taif Accord stipulates that the abolition of confessionalism is a national goal (see The Taif Accord 1989; Shields 2008). A number of works (see el-Hoss 2008; Salloukh et al. 2015; Di Peri 2017) suggests that the Lebanese political system should move beyond confessionalism in order to maintain the national cohesion and unity between the Lebanese religious communities. The former Prime Minister of Lebanon Salim el-Hoss (2008:155) indicates in his article “Peace in Lebanon and the Middle East” that “stability [in Lebanon] will be consolidated and the recurrence of national crises will cease permanently once the ill of sectarianism is remedied”. In Lebanon, confessionalism often reinforces confessional identities at the expense of national identities and exposes Lebanon to geopolitical contests, perpetual crises and external manipulations (Weiss 2009). Despite its shortcomings, the confessional political system in Lebanon is still largely functional and efforts to go beyond the self-perpetuating confessionalism in Lebanon have been defeated (Salamey and Payne 2008:461). Confessional politics remains enshrined in the Lebanese political system (Milton-Edwards 2011:130-1).

1.5.4.2 Disarmament of Non-State Actors

The Taif Accord called for disarmament of Lebanese militias, restoration of order and imposition of state’s power throughout Lebanon (Osoegawa 2013). Under the influence of Syria, some non-governmental actors such as Hezbollah, the pro-Iranian Shia movement, which was established in 1982, were exempted from the accord’s disarming order on the ground that it is an anti-Israel’s resistance (Norton 2007; Salem 2011:538). Hezbollah refused to hand over its guns until the full liberation of Lebanon

from Israel was achieved. Moreover, Hezbollah prevented the Lebanese army from deploying its troops to south Lebanon near Israel and therefore, Lebanon's sovereignty was not completely established after the Taif Accord (Salem 2011). In 2000, the Israeli troops withdrew from Lebanon in what was considered as a victory for Hezbollah (Haddad 2005). Hezbollah remained armed despite the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon (el-Husseini 2010). It has become the most powerful political party in Lebanon by virtue of its military might and its alliance with Iran and Syria (Shanahan 2008; DeVore and Stähli 2015).

1.5.4.3 Legitimisation of Syria's Role in Lebanon

The Taif Accord formalised Lebanon's "special" relations with Syria, which permitted the latter to maintain the presence of its army in Lebanon (Lust 2011). By the end of the Lebanese civil war, Syria managed to neutralise its rivals in Lebanon (e.g. Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation), leaving it as the sole arbitrator in Lebanon (see Hinnebusch 1998). The accord identified the role of Syria's army in helping the Lebanese state to maintain its authority in Lebanon (Najem 2012). Therefore, the Taif Accord, which was endorsed by the Lebanese government, the United Nations and the Arab League, enabled Syria to gain an internationally and regionally recognised formal basis for its existence in Lebanon (Osoegawa 2013). Syria's position in Lebanon was further solidified by the Taif Accord. In the post-civil war period, Lebanon was under Syria's control. Syria maintained the presence of its troops in Lebanon as well as a "heavy hand" on the Lebanese politics.

In 1991, Syria signed the “Treaty of Brotherhood, Coordination and Cooperation” and the “Agreement of Defence and Security” with the Lebanese state (Harik 1997). These agreements institutionalised Syria’s influence on Lebanon in the areas of foreign policy, defence, security and economic affairs (Harik 1997). From 1990 to 2005, the organs of the Lebanese state were under the influence of Syria. Lebanon's pro-Syria policy was felt in the parliamentary and presidential elections, which brought many of Syria’s allies to power (el-Husseini 2012). Syria did not hesitate to request from its allies in Lebanon to adjust the Lebanese constitution in order to enable pro-Syria candidates become presidents (el-Husseini 2012). Collectively, Syria’s role in Lebanon brought stability but it was at the expense of Lebanon’s sovereignty, unity and national cohesion. The Syrian troops remained in Lebanon until 2005.

1.6 Structure of this Thesis

As outlined above, the main focus of this research is to understand better how the Lebanese Sunni political actors frame and articulate intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon. The thesis itself is organised into five chapters. The first chapter has laid out the background and rationale of this research with the resultant research question, argument and statement of justification/potential contribution of this research to theory and practise. It has also provided a review of the literature on groupings within the Sunni community in Lebanon and thereafter the confessional political system in Lebanon in order to contextualise the framing activities of the Lebanese Sunni political actors.

Chapter two discusses the research’s approach, which relies on Max Weber’s interpretivist notion of “understanding” (*Verstehen*), and provides the procedures

employed by the researcher to collect and analyse the data. The research draws on the Webarian approach to interpret the subjective understandings, perceptions and frames of the Lebanese political actors on the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon because the aim of this research is to “understand” not to “explain” the Sunni politics in Lebanon. In addition, the chapter examines the theoretical underpinning of this research, which relies on framing theory. The thesis deploys framing theory in order to understand better how the Lebanese political actors construct their narratives on intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon.

Chapter three examines how the Lebanese political actors understand and frame intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon at the domestic level. The operationalisation of framing theory concepts such as “frame alignment processes”, “counter-framing” “frame credibility” and “frame consistency” enables the research to interpret contested frames among the Lebanese political actors on key domestic issues including identity politics, the Lebanese confessional politics, Islamisation of Lebanon, the stance on Hezbollah and the political and religious leadership of Sunnis. The concepts of “injustice frames”, “supply and demand” and “collective action frames” aided an understanding of how the Lebanese Sunnis differ in their claims and attribution of blames for the problematised Sunni state of affairs and accordingly, the solution to the problems facing the Sunni community in Lebanon.

Chapter four examines how the Lebanese political actors understand and frame the role of external players (e.g. Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia) in intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon. The concepts of “frame salience” are operationalised in this chapter to show how Sunnis interpret the role of external players in the political

division of Sunnis. External players (e.g. Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia) have been able to shape the framing construction of various Sunnis through financial and political support or through advocacy of popular slogans among Sunnis such as pan-Arabism, defending Palestine and resisting Israel. The chapter shows how some of the Lebanese Sunni political actors capitalise on these slogans to appeal to the Sunni public and to justify their alliance with external players. Concepts such as alliance-building, competition, cooperation and conflict in the context of framing theory are also featured in this chapter.

Chapter five, the final chapter, provides an overview of the summaries of this research, conclusions and recommendations. It contextualises the findings of this research in relation to the research question, research methodology and the role of the Sunni community in the Lebanese politics. In addition, the chapter explores avenues for reducing intra-Sunni political tensions and promoting unity among Sunni groupings and organisations in Lebanon. These avenues include the call for maintaining the solidarity of Sunnis and managing intra-Sunni political dissensus, as well as the need for enactment of laws that strengthen state institutions, prevent foreign funding and abolish confessionalism in order to minimise intra-Sunni political tensions.

Chapter Two

Research Method and Methodology:

An Interpretivist Approach to the Analysis of Intra-Sunni

Political Division in Lebanon

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the research methods and the procedures employed by the researcher for the collection and analysis of the data will be presented. Following will be a description of the research's methodology, namely the framing theory, and how it will be operationalised in the context of this research.

2.1 Research Method and Research Design

Research design is a framework within quantitative, qualitative and mixed method approaches that offers a direction for the collection and analysis of data (Bryman 2012; Becker, Bryman and Ferguson 2012; Creswell 2014). This research uses a single case study research design with a qualitative approach. The use of case study as a research design is justified when an empirical analysis is required to investigate "a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context" (Yin 2014:16). The case that this research seeks to investigate is the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon and how it is understood, narrated and framed.

A single case study like this one helps the researcher to deeply engage with the roots, understandings and frames of a particular phenomenon (e.g. the division of the Sunni community in Lebanon) and the context under which the phenomenon occurs (see Bryman 2012; Yin 2014). It enables the researcher to incorporate various perspectives and opinions (Nueman 2011) ranging from the responses of political and religious leaders to those of political and religious groupings and organisations. Also, a single case study allows the researcher to use multiple sources of evidence such as interview materials and analysis of documents, hence, enhancing the research reasoning and the development of a thorough understanding of the case (Creswell 2014). In addition, a single case study allows the researcher to investigate in-depth political affiliations and issues of identity within the Sunni community in Lebanon. It also enables him to look deeply into the Sunni politics from various perspectives and help him to construct his understanding of how intra-Sunni political divides in Lebanon are framed.

2.2 Research Approach

This research uses the Max Weber's interpretivist approach (see Hollis and Smith 1990; Baert 2005). Interpretivism is a dominant philosophical approach that requires researchers to understand "the subjective meaning of social actions" (Bryman 2012:30). It seeks to understand how people, through their involvement in social processes, enact their realities and endow them with meaning, and to interpret how these meanings help them to constitute their action (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991:13; Bryman 2012; Chowdhury 2014:436).

Interpretivism asserts that reality is a social construct and therefore, it is difficult to be understood independently from social actors who construct and re-construct reality and make sense of it (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991). Social reality cannot be portrayed or captured objectively because there are competing and different understandings and perceptions among social actors (Ormston et al. 2014:12). Meanings are often formed, negotiated and used; hence, peoples' interpretation of social reality might change over time in line with shifting contexts and circumstances (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991). An interpretivist researcher would therefore interpret the social world by accessing the subjective meaning that people assign to it (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991:5; Goldkuhl 2012:138).

The intellectual heritage of interpretivism includes the "hermeneutic phenomenological tradition", "symbolic interactionism" and Max Weber's notion of "Verstehen" (Bryman 2012:30). Of relevance to this research is the Max Weber's notion of *Verstehen*. *Verstehen* is a German expression for "interpretivist understanding" (Flick 2009:475). It refers to a philosophical approach to understanding a particular phenomenon more comprehensively than limiting it to a single explanation in the form of "cause-effect" relationship. *Verstehen*, to put it in the description of Havorka and Lee (2010:3), is "the interpretive understanding of the subjective understanding" of acting individuals. Interpretivist researchers employ the notion of *Verstehen* in order to understand the subjective meaning expressed or intended by people (Chowdhury 2014:435).

The goal of understanding the subjective meaning of people in social sciences is important in the interpretivist philosophical paradigm (Goldkuhl 2012:137). Indeed, this is the fundamental claim of the Max Weber's notion of *Verstehen* (Goldkuhl 2012:137). For Max Weber, social actors are "purposive individuals", in the sense that they are able to assess and understand information, and reflect on different possibilities (Baert 2005: 48-49). People may get involved in certain actions, which are not the resultant of their own making. However, this does not necessarily mean that they are passive receivers to external elements. Rather, they often assess the situation and use information to select between various options (Baert 2005: 48-49).

Weber, in this context, distinguished between two philosophical approaches which are referred to in the native German as "*Erklären*" (causal explanation) and "*Verstehen*" (interpretivist understanding) (Hollis and Smith 1990: Bransen 2001:16165). *Erklären* is associated with the positivist approach to the study of social sciences, while *Verstehen* is associated with the interpretivist approach to the study of social sciences (Bryman 2012). *Erklären* focuses on the *explanation* of peoples' behaviour and the laws that govern it, while *Verstehen* focuses on the *understanding* of peoples' behaviour and the ways in which a phenomenon seems to be relevant and meaningful (Bransen 2001:16165; Bryman 2012:28). The adoption of *Erklären* for the study of social sciences implies that the description of an action is to be inferred from the description of the behaviour. On the contrary, the adoption of *Verstehen* implies that the description of an action is to be understood from the subjective understanding that acting individuals attach to it (Hollis and Smith 1990: 78).

Individuals select among different alternatives in accordance with their calculations, interpretations and understandings (Hollis and Smith 1990). Hence, the main concern of Weber's appeal for *Verstehen* or interpretivist understanding is to understand actions and decisions from the stand point of acting individuals, by re-constructing their reasoning, and understanding how they analyse and perceive different situations (Hollis and Smith 1990; Bryman 2012). The Weberian notion of *Verstehen* or understanding has two key ingredients (see Hollis and Smith 1990; Baert 2005). First, *Verstehen* has a sense of direct or empathic understanding, which informs the researcher about what kind of actions are being performed (Hollis and Smith 1990), and how these actions are understood or interpreted by people. Second, *Verstehen* offers an "explanatory understanding" through which the inquirer attempts to attach actions to the correct "complex of meanings" (Hollis and Smith 1990:78).

This thesis uses the Max Weber's interpretivist lens of *Verstehen*. Ontologically, reality is socially constructed. Hence, this research is not offering a causal explanation of the Sunni political division in Lebanon but a way to understand socially constructed ideas about the Sunni political division in Lebanon. Epistemologically, the research attempts to understand the main issues of intra-Sunni political divides in Lebanon from the stand point of the Lebanese Sunni political actors. The aim of this research is to interpret the subjective understandings, perceptions and frames of Sunni political actors engaged in the Sunni politics on intra-Sunni political divides in Lebanon. In line with this Weberian approach, the experiences and views of Sunni political actors are relevant for the understanding of intra-Sunni political divides and their ways of making sense of their political actions (see Giddens 1993; Outhwaite 1975; Chowdhury 2014).

2.3 Research Sampling and Selection Criteria

Purposive sampling was used to select twenty three (23) participants including party leaders and political leaders as well as ministers, members of the Lebanese parliament, Islamic clerics, politicians, lawyers, academics and movement supporters. The main goal is to sample participants strategically so that the unit of analysis is relevant to the research question, goals, focus and criteria (Bryman 2012). Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that enables researchers to investigate a particular case of a specific population for a specific purpose (Neuman 2011). Drawing on Bryman (2012:416), the development of research objectives and questions offer the researcher a guideline on the selection criteria of the participants.

The 23 participants were selected strategically to reflect the variety of political alignments among the Lebanese Sunnis. One criterion used in this research was derived from where the participants stood on the issues of intra-Sunni political divides in Lebanon both internally and externally. The sampling strategy allowed the researcher to select his participants “purposively” to ensure that they reflect the diversity of opinions within the Sunni politics in Lebanon. The participants are representatives of key national, pan-Arab, religious and centrist Sunni groupings and organisations in Lebanon. These groupings are divided in terms of their identity and political alignments. The researcher also selected representatives of the two main opposing alliances in Lebanon: the pro-Syria, pro-Iran the Eighth March Alliance and the anti-Syria, anti-Iran the Fourteenth March Alliance. The diversity of participants and their ostensible groupings enabled the researcher to address contested framings

among the Lebanese Sunnis. In addition, the researcher selected non-Sunni participants to examine the framing of intra-Sunni political divides from a national perspective, as the intra-Sunni political divides in Lebanon do not only have an impact on the Lebanese Sunnis but on the national cohesion of Lebanon as a whole. In table 2.1 below, the researcher provides a description of the participants' affiliations and the coding used to identify them.

The Respondents' Affiliation List

Affiliation	Coding
The Future Movement	FM1, FM2 and FM3
Dar al-Fatwa	DF1
Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya	Ji1
The Tawheed Movement	TAM1
The League of Muslim Scholars	LMS1
Hizb ut-Tahrir	HT1
<i>Haraki</i> Salafists	<i>Haraki</i> Salafists1
The Union Party	UP1 and UP2
The Fourteenth March Alliance	FOMA1 and FOMA2
The Eighth March Alliance	EMA1
Minister	Non-Sunni1
Minister	Non-Sunni2
Journalist	Non-Sunni3
Journalist	Non-Sunni4
Religious Leader	Non-Sunni5
Sunni MP	MP1
Sunni Political Leader	Centrist1
Sunni Lawyer	Centrist2
Sunni Historian	Centrist3

Table 2.1: The Respondents' Affiliation List
Source: Field Work, 2015

2.4 Data Collection Method

Using a qualitative approach, this research collected data from the field by the use of semi-structured interviews and analysis of documents. In the following, the researcher will provide a summary of the use of interview materials, the pitfalls of using interviews and how they are remedied in the context of this research.

2.4.1 The Use of Interview Materials

Semi-structured interviews are thought to be vital sources in gathering evidence and data about a particular phenomenon (Yin 2018). They help the researcher to uncover perceptions, frames and discourses which might not be accessible through other techniques such as observations, questionnaires and documents (De Vaus 2001; Blaxter, Hughes and Tight 2006). Highly informative respondents can provide key insights into the issues that divide the Lebanese Sunnis. Such responses help the researcher to identify contested frames among the Lebanese Sunnis and gather relevant information and evidence (Yin 2014).

In this research, the use of interview materials enabled the respondents to voice their opinion on the Sunni politics in Lebanon and to clear any misconceptions surrounding their activism and political choices. Interviews provided the Lebanese Sunni groupings and leaders with a platform to correct these misconceptions, to convey their messages, to rationalise their political stance and to express their views on intra-Sunni political dynamics in Lebanon. Interviews showed how the research respondents are deeply divided in terms of their perceptions, affiliation and identities. Moreover, they

showed how intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon is understood, and how it is framed and counter-framed.

The field work in Lebanon (from April to September 2015) helped the researcher to closely examine the lines of fissures within the Sunni body politics in Lebanon. Working on the ground enabled the researcher to learn more about the Sunni cultural, religious and political milieu. It helped him to interview the key political actors and decision makers in the Sunni community including Sunni movement leaders, rank-and-file members and movement supporters. The opportunity to conduct these interviews in Lebanon was significant for the contextualisation of how Sunni groupings understand, interpret and frame intra-Sunni political divides, how they counter-frame their Sunni opponents, how their actions resonate with the Lebanese Sunnis, how they draw on their own experiences and concepts, and what issues were at stake for them when they construct their narratives on intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon.

Interviews were a useful strategy for the articulation of differences among the Lebanese Sunnis and how these differences are politicised. These frames would not have been easily accessible or obtainable had the researcher relied solely on one data collection method (e.g. documents), hence missing the opportunity of gaining a nuanced understanding of the research problem. Sunni groupings and leaders are key players in the Sunni politics, and hence, it is essential to understand intra-Sunni political division from the stand point of these Sunni groupings and leaders. Their views might not have revealed the actual problem facing the Sunni politics but they surely reflected its contemporary manifestations and how these groups would like intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon to be framed, narrated and understood. Their

framing of intra-Sunni political division is at large a reflection of their political affiliation, experiences, perceptions and direct engagement in the Sunni politics in Lebanon.

The purpose of conducting semi-structured interviews, as opposed to fully structured interviews, is to widen the opportunity of getting further information and asking further questions in response to interviewees' comments (Savin-Baden and Major 2013). Indeed, some interviewees did not hesitate to provide the researcher with important information on the research topic. Other respondents, however, seemed to obscure some information. This is arguably because they did not want to have a political dispute with other Sunni parties or they did not have the willingness to upset their internal and external allies. This might also be attributable to the awareness of the interviewees that they were being recorded hence they did not feel comfortable to reveal their honest perception on the interview topic. The characteristics of the researcher (e.g. religious and cultural background) were cause for concern for some research respondents. For instance, in one interview, the researcher was asked about his religious background, whether he is Muslim or Christian or whether he is a Muslim Sunni or a Muslim Shia. On other occasions, some research respondents asked the researcher about his motives behind conducting a research about the Lebanese Sunnis and whether or not his motives were purely academic. This kind of questions may indicate that some of the responses of the respondents might be shifted or manipulated depending of the identity and background of the researcher. In the following, the researcher provides a summary of the pitfalls of interviews.

2.4.2 Pitfalls of Using Interview Materials

The responses of the research respondents might be manipulative or subjected to misinterpretation, misunderstanding, self-censoring or bias (Neuman 2011:347; Edwards and Holland 2013:91; Yin 2018:121). Some respondents may provide manipulative views to suit their goals, frames, desires or political agenda on the one hand (see Hoyle et al. 2002:102; Neuman 2011:347), and on other hand, they may build their responses on the basis of what the interviewer expects or would like to hear (Hofisi, Hofisi and Mogo 2014). Moreover, the traits of interviewers such as race or religious background could have an impact on the responses of the respondents (Bryman 2012). In any case, the validity and reliability of such responses may be questionable (Alshenqeeti 2014:43; Hofisi, Hofisi and Mogo 2014) and the ability to gain a complete understanding of the situation in question may not be fully achieved. Another pitfall related to the use of interviews is that they could be anecdotal (see Edwards and Holland 2013:91). The respondents may potentially express their views on certain issues on the basis of their own personal experience rather than serious examination. Respondents in this instance might have a faulty memory or at least incomplete knowledge of the interview topic (Alshenqeeti 2014:43).

It is important to mention that there is often a bias element in conducting interviews (see Neuman 2011; Bryman 2012; Yin 2018). The possibility of bias in the context of this research is not a big issue because interviews are much more than just a data collection method. They reveal the ways in which the framing construction of the Lebanese Sunni groupings and organisations occur. Interview materials are an essential source of framing. However, the over-reliance on interviews, as the only data

collection instrument, would not serve the purpose of gaining valid and reliable results (Alshenqeeti 2014:43). Interviews, on their own, are not sufficient to account for a complete interpretation and understanding of how intra-Sunni political dynamics are framed. It would therefore be useful to incorporate interview materials with data from other sources (Yin 2018:121). In the following, the discussion dwells on the analysis of documents, which is also an essential component of this research.

2.4.3 Analysis of Documents

To remedy the deficiencies in using interview materials, this research did not only rely on interviews as a source of data but also relied on other data sources. These sources include press materials, newspaper materials, documents, published party programmes and secondary literature. In this research, the analysis of data was systematically drawn from a comprehensive examination of interview materials and documentary sources. The “triangulation” of data collection methods alongside the theoretical reasoning enhance the research argument, leading to the contextualisation and theorisation on how Lebanese Sunni groupings and leaders frame and understand intra-Sunni political divide in Lebanon.

2.5 Instrumentation and Illustration of the Interview Guide

Interview guide was used as an instrument to collect data from the field. It refers to the “list of questions” and areas which need to be covered during interviews (Bryman 2012:471). The development of interview guide was helpful for both the interviewer and interviewees. It helped the interviewer to plan his interviews and to identify the focus of the questions in line with the research question and research methodology.

Moreover, it helped the interviewees to know interview questions in advance. This was important to establish rapport and to create a relaxed interaction between the interviewer and interviewees. It also helped to clear misunderstanding about any aspect of the interviews.

The Interview guide consisted of open and close-ended questions, which aimed at understanding how the Lebanese political actors frame, perceive and narrate the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon at the internal and external levels (see figure 2.2). At the internal level, the researcher asked the research respondents several questions, which pertain to their perceptions on identity politics, the Lebanese confessional political system, the stance on Hezbollah and the political and religious leadership of the Lebanese Sunnis. At the external level, the questions focused on how the research respondents frame the role of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Syria in the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon.

2.6 Establishing a Link to and Discussion of Semi-Structured

Interview Questions

This section provides a discussion on interview questions and how they are linked to framing theory. As the methodological underpinning of this research relies on framing theory, it is useful to employ semi-structured interviews to facilitate the operationalisation of framing categories and to help unfolding contested frames among the Lebanese Sunni political actors. For the purpose of this research, interviews were not only considered as an essential source of framing but also as an important tool, which shows how the Lebanese Sunni political actors construct their narratives,

articulate their differences and manifest their understanding of the Sunni politics and the Lebanese politics as a whole. The construction of this link is important to highlight the path that led to the successful completion of this research.

The items of the interview guide (24 in number) consisted of 15 open-ended questions and 9 close-ended questions (see appendix one). The open-ended questions offered the research respondents a free hand to frame their political activities and to justify their political stance. Semi-structured Interviews enabled the researcher to extract frames, themes and phrases which are essential for analysing the data in line with the research question.

For instance, items 1 and 2 in the interview guide highlighted the Lebanese Sunni frames on identity politics and their perceptions on the state of Lebanon. Item 1 read as follows: “which identity do Sunnis prefer in Lebanon?” Item 2 indicated as follows: “what is your perception regarding Lebanese Sunnis loyalty to the Lebanese state?” The application of framing categories such as “frame amplification” and “frame transformation” or “re-framing” show how the interviewees aimed at constructing/re-constructing their narratives on identity politics in ways that fit with their political affiliation and public agenda.

Another example which establishes the link between semi-structured interviews and framing theory is shown in item 6 of the interview guide where the research participants expressed their views on the political and religious leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon. The question in item 6 was: “what is your opinion on the

political leadership of Sunnis as represented by the Future Movement and the religious leadership of Sunnis as represented by Dar al-Fatwa?” This question offered the research respondents the opportunity to engage in framing activities such as “frame credibility” and “frame consistency” in order to examine the extent to which the frames of Sunni leaders “resonate” with the Sunni public. The researcher compiled the responses of the research respondents in “framing” and “counter-framing” format to contextualise their views and to deepen the understanding of what is “in-frame” and what is “out-of-frame” for the interviewees when they construct their narratives on Sunni leadership.

The questions on Hezbollah’s role in the Sunni politics, as shown in items 9 and 10 of the interview guide, highlighted an aspect of how semi-structured interviews are closely interconnected with the theoretical foundation of this research. The questions were: “what is your stance on Hezbollah?” and “why do some Sunni groupings support Hezbollah?” On the one hand, these questions brought other framing categories such as “injustice frames” to light whereby some of the interviewees attributed Sunni disempowerment to injustices unleashed on them. On the other hand, interview excerpts showed that there are Sunni actors who are strategically allied with Hezbollah. These excerpts enabled the researcher to discover the intricacies of Sunni relations with Hezbollah.

Furthermore, interview questions examined how the Lebanese political actors frame the role of external players specifically Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia in the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon. Questions from 13 to 17 focused on how

the role of Syria and Iran in the Sunni politics is perceived by the Lebanese political actors whilst questions from 18 to 24 focused on how the role of Saudi Arabia in the Sunni politics is perceived by the Lebanese political actors. The substantial contribution of interview questions to framing theory is that it showed the variation of Sunni accounts on external players. For instance, the use of “frame salience” in this research showed how Sunni perceptions on external players may not necessarily correspond to the objective reality pertaining to their role in the Sunni politics. Rather, it shows that on several occasions the “politics of representation” and Sunni affiliations with external players have an enormous impact on their framing construction.

In a nutshell, this section has succeeded in establishing a link to and discussion of semi-structured interview questions used in this research. The creation of this vital link was useful in showing how the interview questions were relevant to the theoretical stand point of this research. Every research, most especially a case study like this research, should be anchored on a theory. Ball (1995: 265-266) stated that “the absence of theory leaves the researcher prey to unexamined, unreflective pre-conceptions and dangerously naïve ontological and epistemological *a priories*”. Drawing on this, this research used selected framing theory and relevant empirical works to explore the epistemological and ontological constructions which relate to how the Lebanese Sunnis frame their political contestations (Interview questions are fully illustrated in appendix one).

2.7 Data Analysis and Interpretation

In the analysis and interpretation of data, framing theory has been helpful in the understanding of the dynamics of movement organisations and leaders (Snow and Benford 2000). The study of Karagiannis (2009), for example, shows that the framing theory provides a useful analytical tool for the understanding of Hezbollah's mobilisation strategies. Using the core framing characteristics (diagnostic, prognostic and motivational), Karagiannis (2009) attempted to understand how Hezbollah manages to transmit its messages to selected audience. Also, the study of McAdam (1996) shows how the processes of frame elaboration and articulation help to understand Martin Luther King's arguments and speeches. The framing activities of Luther King included conventional democratic theory, Christian themes and philosophy of non-violence. The diversity of themes provided the public with multiple points of ideological attachment to King's civil rights movement (see McAdam 1996:347-8; Snow 2007).

In this research, framing theory has been very essential for the analysis and interpretation of the data. The data from the field was organised into meaningful sections. Firstly, the transcription of the data was done systematically to facilitate data management (Bryman 2012). The transcription was translated from Arabic to English by the researcher. Following was the coding of transcription (Bryman 2012). The coding of the data was done based on the categorisation of themes, terms and phrases. Thirdly, thematic analysis characterised the analysis of this research. The researcher was able to categorise data, to put them in chronological or thematic

order, to link them with the research question and methodology, and to build on the codes recognised in the transcript (Bryman 2012; Yin 2014).

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The research involves human participants and hence some ethical considerations are likely to emerge. However, key ethical principles such as confidentiality, anonymity and privacy of individuals, organisations and information are of crucial importance to this research (Denscombe 2010; Neuman 2011). Specifically, there is a moral duty upon the researcher to protect participants' interests and rights by ensuring that their contribution will not cause any physical, personal, legal or financial harm (Denscombe 2010; Neuman 2011; Bryman 2012).

The data collected was used solely for research/scientific purposes so as to generate positive values and to contribute to knowledge base by providing key insights on how the Lebanese political actors frame the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon. To be sure, interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. All responses were coded and anonymised so that participants cannot be identified. The destruction of this interview sheets and recorded messages took place after the analysis and interpretation of the data.

This research has been reviewed by Keele University Ethics Review Panel and consequently, this research has been granted an ethical approval (see appendix two). In addition, the research has also been reviewed by the Center for Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies (CAMES) at the American University in Beirut, Lebanon. Accordingly,

the researcher was permitted to conduct interviews as part of his affiliation at the American University in Beirut, Lebanon (see appendix three).

2.9 Framing Theory: Assumptions, Applicability and Method

In this section, I put forth this thesis' theoretical framework, namely framing theory (Snow et al. 1986; McAdam et al. 1996; Tarrow 1998; Snow and Benford 2000). Framing theory has been used to examine how Sunni political groupings and leaders frame/articulate intra-Sunni political divides in Lebanon. Key among this process has been the framing processes, various factors promoting or constraining framing processes, collective action frames and the concept of political opportunity within framing theoretical orientations. All the explanations of these concepts are linked to show how they are operationalised in the analysis and interpretation of the data. In the following, the research explains the key concepts of framing theory and how they are operationalised in this research to achieve the main objective of offering a critical analysis and interpretation of the data regarding the Sunni politics with special emphasis on how intra-Sunni political divides in Lebanon are framed.

2.9.1 The Concept of Framing Theory

Goffman (1974) offers a classic understanding of the concept of framing. He indicates that frames are observed "as rendering what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful" (Goffman 1974:21). The key idea behind framing is to contextualise events and to provide a certain understanding of a particular phenomenon (Ryan 1991; Snow and Benford 1992; Ihlen and Nitz 2008:1). In Goffman's (1974:21) expression, framing allows people to "locate,

perceive, identify and label” issues and events within their own world (Goffman 1974:21). Framing, to put it in the description of Gamson (2007:245), is a thought organiser. It organises and makes coherent a seemingly various array of images, arguments, symbols by linking them through an organising idea like narratives, symbols and artefacts (Gamson 2007:245). When people label a phenomenon, they produce a meaning to some aspects of what is observed, whilst omitting other aspects, because they seem to be counter-intuitive or irrelevant (Snow and Benford 1988; Kaufman, Elliott and Shmueli 2003; Soule 2007).

For the purposes of this research, the concept of framing is used to analyse the perceptions, ideas, narratives, events and understandings of key Sunni political actors in Lebanon. The nature of the focus of this research, which relies on understanding (*Verstehen*) of the perceptions of Sunni political actors on key political events in Lebanon and an understanding of what appears to be a historical circumstance is interpreted by these political actors. This framing concept is an essential activity of political organisations and movement leaders (Staggenborg 2016:23) as it seeks to appreciate the construction of meaning engaged by movement supporters and adherents whether they are leaders, rank-and-file members or activists or other actors such as media, adversaries and counter-movements (Snow 2013:470). This process is pertinent to the goals and interests of political groupings and organisations and the challenges they face in the pursuit of those goals and interests (Snow 2013:470). In this research, framing has been used to construct deep and nuanced understanding of Sunni political events in Lebanon.

Framing amount to what is called “structure of expectations” (Ross 1975 as cited in Tannen 1993:16). This implies that on the basis of individuals’ experiences and perceptions of the social world in a given community, they organise their understanding and use it to interpret events, information and experiences (Tannen 1993:16). Frames are constructed upon a different underlying structure of values, beliefs, ideas and experiences, and hence, Sunni disputants in Lebanon, usually construct frames, which differ in various ways (Kaufman, Elliott and Shmueli 2003). Each Sunni political actor in Lebanon has their own understanding and perceptions of their agenda, political alignment/de-alignment, priorities, choices and the opportunities and risks associated with their choices (Kaufman, Elliott and Shmueli 2003). This assemblage of understanding can be considered as filters or possibly, as a set of lenses, through which the various Lebanese Sunni groupings and leaders perceive and interpret political issues; this is called conceptual frame (Kaufman, Elliott and Shmueli 2003; Snow et al. 2007). In the following, the research discusses the functions of framing theory.

2.9.2 Functions of Framing Theory

Having established the understanding of the concept of frame in the above, this section presents the functions of frames and how they are used in this research to analyse the perceptions, articulations and events in the Sunni political arena. The following are the core three functions of frames.

First, frames, like a picture’s frame, “*focus attention*” by punctuating or bracketing what in our sensual field is relevant and what is irrelevant, what is “in frame” and what

is “out-of-frame” in relation to the issue in question (Snow 2007:384; Snow 2013:470). The relevance of the frames in this context is much reliant on the perceptions of Sunni political leaders, organisations, supporters and bystanders (Johnston and Noakes 2005; Tarrow 2011). This key function allows an effective interpretation of what Sunni actors deemed relevant/irrelevant in the context of the intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon.

Second, frames function as “*articulation mechanisms*” (Snow 2013:470) in that sense of linking together the wide range of punctuated themes and counter-themes of the issue in question “so that one set of meanings rather than another is conveyed, or, in the language of narrativity, one story rather than another is told” (Snow 2007:384; Snow 2013:470). The idea of articulation and how it is framed is essential for movement existence to justify its political stance, to convince its adherents and potential supporters and to counter-frame and de-mobilise its opponents. This kind of articulation mechanism allows for an effective movement coherence, mobilisation strategies, counter-framing and collective action.

Third, frames frequently carry out “*a transformative function*” (Snow 2013:470) in the sense of re-constituting, re-conceptualising or re-interpreting the ways in which certain phenomenon is seen or understood (Snow 2007:384; Snow 2013:470). In this instance, some political groupings or leaders may transform misfortune, indignation or grievances existing in certain communities into mobilising grievances or injustices (Snow 2007:384; Snow 2013:470). The contextualisation of this function is seen in this research in instances where some Lebanese Sunni political actors attribute their

misfortunes into injustices unleashed on them by Hezbollah. In some cases, the attribution of issues to Hezbollah is perceptual.

The direction of the argument in this section is that framing theory assists in understanding the collective discourse of the Lebanese Sunnis regarding events and how they construct meaning out of them. This is very critical in the construction of their identity and assisting their adherents to articulate and frame their activism in line with their identity. In the following, the research discusses the limitation of the framing theory.

2.9.3 Limitations of Framing Theory

This section engages with the limitations of framing theory, while explaining how it seeks to mitigate them. Some researchers, for example Benford (1997) Fisher (1997) and Steinberg (1999) offer a disturbing critique of framing theory. It is significant to recognise these limitations of frame as a theory for analysis. This is what this section seeks to achieve. The study of framing theory enables researchers to understand a certain phenomenon but does not enable them to make “prescriptive suggestions” (Fisher 1997:21) regarding this phenomenon. Indeed, framing enables researchers to examine how people understand and perceive an issue, and to comprehend the ways in which their understanding may change over time (Fisher 1997:21). It is a tool to understand the actions, articulations and discourses of groups as well as the context under which their actions take place.

Another shortcoming in the framing theory concerns issues of “reification” (Benford 1997:418). Reification in this research refers to “the process of talking about socially

constructed ideas as though they are real, as though they exist independent of the collective interpretations and constructions of the actors involved” (Benford 1997:418). Indeed, framing is criticised of creating an ambiguity between what reality is, and what its representations are (Steinberg 1999:738).

Framing theory has the tendency to deal with frames in a “singular fashion as though there is a *single* reality” (Benford 1997:422). In the context of this research, Sunni political actors in Lebanon have different versions of what reality is and how it is constructed and negotiated. They differ in their perception and framing of intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon. Each Sunni political actor brings a repertoire of contested identities and socially constructed frames to movement encounters with the hope to fit it within their own “constructed versions of reality” (Benford 1997:422). “Reality” is never simply there. It has to be mediated, interpreted and framed. As such and for the purpose of this research, what count is not what “reality” is regarding intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon, but how the key Lebanese Sunni political actors interpret it.

Another limitation in the framing theory is the tendency to concentrate on framing of movement leaders and to neglect the framing of rank-and-file members, potential adherents and bystanders (Benford 1997:421). This top-down bias approach partly reflects the ways in which some researchers study movements (Benford 1997:421). They often over-rely on interviews with movement leaders and analysis of media accounts and movement-generated documents to study social and political movements (Benford 1997:421). Yet, the data they obtain tend to only reflect the perceptions of movement leaders (Benford 1997:421).

Frame researchers also assert the need for movements and leaders to develop frames which are empirically credible; that is they can be tested and verified by current and potential supporters (see Snow and Benford 1988; Fisher 1997; Snow and Benford 2000). However, they often overlook the question of how to test the validity and reliability of frames (Fisher 1997).

Despite the limitation in framing, it has the potential to contextualise events and to conceptualise the construction and reception of meaning (see Carragee and Roefs 2004). Frame theory depicts framing processes as a kind of “representational contest between actors” (Steinberg 1999:739). Frames are usually depicted and understood in cognitive terms (Benford 1997). However, we need to keep in mind that frames are “modes of interpretation that are socially constructed” (Benford 1997:418). Hence, this research uses the framing theory’s “interpretivist” lens to understand the views of movement members, events and issues regarding intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon. The research did not only rely on the views of leaders and newspaper analysis but also relied on the views of the rank-and-file members, current and potential adherents of Sunni groupings in Lebanon. This has been very essential in understanding how these issues are framed in the context of the Sunni politics in Lebanon. In keeping with these principles, the framing theory is very important for this case study research. As a qualitative case study research, a theory is very fundamental to aid in the issues of generalisability of their frames to this specific theory (see De Vaux 2001; Bryamn 2012; Yin 2018). In the following, the research examines the framing processes in the context of this research.

2.9.4 Framing Processes

In this section, the research examines the framing processes within the context of this research. Framing processes result in the identification, development and operation of frames (Snow and Benford 2000). Drawing on Snow and Benford (2000), three framing processes have been identified. In the following, the research presents these processes and how they have been operationalised in this research to analyse how Sunni political groupings and leaders frame intra-Sunni political divides in Lebanon.

2.9.4.1 Discursive Processes

In this part, the first type of framing processes is examined in the light of its relevance to this research. This process is used in the analysis as critical part of the process of connecting movements' frames to the present and potential supporters (Snow and Benford 2000; Johnston and Noakes 2005). Discursive processes include the oral discourse and textual documents (e.g. placards, pamphlets, books, and speeches) of movement members and leaders (Snow 2007:400) in the context of movement activities (Snow and Benford 2000). These discursive processes are in two part; frame articulation (Snow and Benford 2000; Snow 2007; Snow 2013) and frame amplification (Snow and Benford 2000) or frame elaboration (Snow 2007; Snow 2013). Of relevance to my analysis is the frame amplification (Snow and Benford 2000) or frame elaboration (Snow 2007). This kind of discursive processes refers to the processes whereby various ideas, beliefs or happenings are accented or highlighted as being more important than others (Snow and Benford 2000; Johnston and Noakes 2005; Snow 2007; Snow 2013). This framing process involves carrying out some sort of

meanings, symbols, images or catchphrases, which are essential to be used in order to effectively and successfully garner public support and guide collective actions (Johnston and Noakes 2005). This framing process facilitates the process of communication between the movement and its present or potential adherents. Amplifying a frame in this context could be seen in framers using certain symbols, slogans or metaphors that are linked with peoples' glorious history or congruent with their beliefs, cultures, struggles, social conditions or conventions (see Ryan 1991; Johnston and Noakes 2005).

In the context of my research it is used to analyse the various ideas, slogans and activities of Sunni groupings in articulation of their views to win public support and sympathy. For example, the national-based Sunni grouping the Future Movement used the slogan "Lebanon First" as a tool to win public support. These discursive processes would help the researcher to unmask the agenda and appreciation behind these slogans, metaphors, symbols and ideas of these organisations.

2.9.4.2 Strategic Processes

Strategic processes are described by Snow and Benford (2000:624) as "framing processes that are deliberative, utilitarian, and goal directed". That is their goal is to convince potential adherents, to gain public support and to mobilise audience (Williams 2016). Strategic processes are key concepts used in the analysis of this research to understand the framing processes, which Sunni groupings and leaders employ to organise public support and audience regarding their interest and activities. These strategic processes can be achieved through the development of the concept of "frame alignment processes" (Snow et al. 1986), which seeks to understand how

claims are formulated by movement leaders and activists to mobilise adherents and gain public support (Williams 2007). In the following, the framing alignment processes are examined in the way they are operationalised in this research.

Frame Alignment Processes

The frame alignment processes (frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, re-framing or frame transformation) (Snow et al. 1986; Benford 1993a; Snow and Benford 2000; Tarrow 2001; Smith 2007; Williams 2007; Coley 2015) in the context of this research are used to analyse the ideologies, claims, beliefs, activities and interconnected individual, organisational and external (i.e. Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia) interests associated with Sunni movement organisations in Lebanon. Frame alignment processes encompass the effort of these political organisations and leaders to link their goals and interests with those of potential supporters and resource providers with the hope to gain their contribution and support (Snow 2013:472). These processes link organisations and individual interpretive orientations so that some set of individual values, beliefs, interests and movement activities, ideology and goals are complementary and congruent (Snow et al. 1986:464).

2.9.4.3 Contested Processes

Snow and Benford (2000:625) indicate that researchers in framing agreed that the identification and development of collective action frames are contested processes. Contextually, collective actions do not only appear from the interactions of members within a certain movement organisation, but also from the interactions and contestations between protagonists, antagonists and bystanders (Hunt and Benford

2007). These interactions are conceptualised as “counter-framing” (Hunt and Benford 2007:447) which is essential in this type of framing processes (Snow and Benford 2000). Counter-framing is the process to counter opponents’ frames (Gallo-Cruz 2012). A number of Sunni political forces engage in the process of counter-framing against other Sunni movements in order to challenge their existing frames, weaken their influence, damage their reputation and de-mobilise their adherents (Hoyle 2016). In the following, the research discusses the concept of collective action frames.

2.9.5 Collective Action Frames

In this section, the research examines the collective action frames and their applicability to the research context. It shall combine the above mentioned framing processes to deal with the collective interest and mobilisation strategies of Sunni movements in Lebanon with the hope of helping to understand the construction of values, ideology alignment and development of slogans and their articulation. In the following, the research provides the understanding of the concept of collective action frames as espoused by framing researchers.

The resultant outcomes of framing processes are known to be “collective action frames” (Snow and Benford 2000:614). Collective action frames are “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization” (Snow and Benford 2000:614). The objective of collective action frames is to enable movements to identify their problems, attribute responsibility for these problems and construct “vocabularies of motive”, that provide rational for collective action (Snow and Benford 1988; Snow and Benford 2000;

Williams 2007; Snow 2013:472). This frame will be used to analyse aspects of Sunni movements in Lebanon that deal with how constituents are mobilised and inspired to achieve their objectives.

Contextually, there are three important mobilisation functions of collective action frames. First, they mobilise followers or adherents to achieve their goals, or metaphorically, as Snow (2013:471) puts it, to move “from balcony to the barricades”. This function is often referred to as “action mobilization” (Klandermans 1984:586). Second, they broaden movements’ base by converting bystanders into followers or adherents (Snow 2013: 471). This function is often referred to as “consensus mobilization” (Klandermans 1984:586). Third, they demobilise or neutralise opponents (Snow 2013:471). This function is often referred to as “counter mobilization” (Snow 2013:471). Consensus mobilisation, action mobilisation and counter mobilisation strategies will be significant in this analysis so as to appreciate the framing activities of Sunni groupings and leaders in Lebanon.

The variable features of collective action frames (diagnostic, prognostic and motivational) framing (Snow and Benford 1988; Gamson 1992; Snow and Benford 2000; Allen 2000; Mcveigh et al. 2004) will be featured in the analysis to examine the distinguishing features of Sunni movements and their approach to mobilisation issues. Of great importance to this research is the concept of diagnostic framing, often referred to in this research as “injustice frames” (Gamson et al. 1982; Gamson 1992; Snow and Benford 2000). The operationalisation of injustice frames in this research will enable the research respondents to construct their narratives on “what is or went

wrong?” and “who or what is to blame?” regarding the perceived Sunni disempowerment in Lebanon (Snow 2013:472).

2.9.6 Political Opportunity in the Context of Framing Theory

The concept of political opportunity (McAdam et al. 1996; Gamson and Meyer 1996; Tarrow 1998; Stanbridge 2000; Tarrow 2011) is examined in this section in the light of framing theory. Political opportunities constitute one of the key factors that help to facilitate or constrain framing processes (Snow and Benford 2000). Hence, it might be difficult to treat framing processes such as discursive, strategic and contested processes without taking into account the inherently various political contexts or political opportunity structures that determine, shape or influence the way in which framing processes are embedded (Stanbridge 2000; Snow 2007). Stanbridge (2000:513) drawing on McAdam (1996) notes that linking both political opportunities and framing processes help to account for the impact of political environment on frame processes and framers. At the same time, it prevents what Stanbridge (2000:531) calls a “static, reifying, monolithic interpretations” of frames by means of exploring the dynamic interaction between framing processes and political opportunity structures.

The dynamics of the Lebanese Sunni groupings and leaders’ mobilisation and development is a critical aspect of this analysis. This is because as my methodological approach is interpretative in nature, critical consideration of key dynamics will help in this direction. For instance, the Sunni grouping al-Ahbash’s alignment with Syria and their activities in the Sunni politics in Lebanon will be part of the instances where the

concept of political opportunity will be used to analyse the critical dynamics associated with framing their mobilisation strategies.

McAdam (1996:32) identifies political opportunity structures as “changes in either the institutional features, informal political alignments, or repressive capacity of a given political system that significantly reduce the power disparity between a given challenging group and the state”. Moreover, political opportunities provide “the incentive for collective action by affecting expectations for success and failure” (Gamson and Meyer 1996 as cited in Tarrow 2011: 163). They could either facilitate or constrain collective actions (Stanbridge 2000). The linkage, relationship and interaction between framing processes and political opportunities offer an understanding of the way in which frames are constructed, developed and mobilised (McAdam et al. 1996).

2.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, the research’s methodology and methods were examined to demonstrate the actual steps the researcher has taken in order to answer the research question. In the following chapter, chapter three, the research examines how the Lebanese political actors frame and understand intra-Sunni political contestations in Lebanon at the domestic levels.

Chapter Three

Intra-Sunni Contestations:

Understanding and Framing of Intra-Sunni political Division in

Lebanon at the Domestic Level

3.0 Introduction

The research focuses on how the Lebanese Sunni political actors understand and frame intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon. There are overlapping internal and external factors, which contribute to the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon. It is therefore difficult to understand the framing of intra-Sunni political divides in Lebanon without taking into consideration the interconnection between external and internal dimensions. The role of external players especially Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia is essential for understanding the ways in which Sunni political actors frame and narrate issues of political affiliation, contested identities and rival leadership among the Lebanese Sunnis. The classification of data into external and internal does not imply that they are isolated from each other. Rather, the classification is employed for analytical purposes so as to simplify data analysis and to help the researcher unfold the main frames emanating from each level. In this chapter, the research presents the frames and understandings of the research respondents regarding the main issues that divide the Lebanese Sunnis at the domestic levels and how they are perceived, interpreted and narrated by Sunni actors in Lebanon.

3.1 Identity Politics

The discussion in this part focuses on issues of identity politics and the politicisation of Sunni multiple national, religious and pan-Arab identities. The contextual understanding of the concept of identity politics (see Bernstein 1995; Alcoff and Mohanty 2006; Hunt and Benford 2007) will be useful to appreciate the dynamics of this kind of politics in the Sunni context and its impact on the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon. The multiplicity of Sunni (pan-Arab, religious and national) identities, on their own, do not constitute a threat to the Lebanese state but the politicisation of these Sunni identities could lay the foundation for external influences on Sunnis thus affecting their unity and loyalty to the Lebanese state.

Identity politics is deep-rooted in the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon (Rabil 2011; el-Husseini 2012; Rabil 2014; Salamey 2014). It has a strong attraction because it appeals to the desires of some Lebanese Sunnis for meaning, recognition and belonging (Orjuela 2014:754). It is also an essential component for the formation of Sunni groupings as it provides them with the toolkit for mobilisation and collective actions (Alcoff 2000:263; Bernstein and Taylor 2013:580). The need to understand identity politics is critical in multi-confessional societies like Lebanon where identity politics have taken violent expressions. Most especially in situations where people hold multiple identities and the options for politicisation are many including domestic dynamics and foreign interferences. These identities are often the contextual expressions of the masses in many societies which political activists rely on for framing, mobilisation and collective actions.

Yet, identity politics has not been viewed as a positive concept as critics deem it “reverse racism” (Lloyd 2005 as cited in Bliss 2013:1013), risky political activity (Giugni 2007) and “harmful institution” (see Knouse 2009:761-2; Samek 2016). It inhibits the making of “politics of commonality” among diverse Sunni groupings and leaders in Lebanon (see Gitlin 1994; Kimmel 1993; Phelan 1993; Bernstein 2002:84). On several occasions, identity-based Sunni groupings in Lebanon were labelled as having an “agenda” and their leaders were often portrayed as “opportunists uninterested in, even opposed to, the common public good” (Alcoff and Mohanty 2006:2). What is worrying about identity-politics is the tendency of identity-based Sunni groupings in Lebanon to overemphasis on the politicisation of Sunni differences at the expense of their solidarity. Hence, the Sunni politics could fail to appreciate diversity and the unity of the Lebanese Sunnis could be sacrificed for narrower political gains (Bernstein 2002:84).

In this research, the data shows the research participants’ awareness of how Sunnis position themselves in terms of their identity in the Lebanese multi-confessional political system. The variation in Sunni perceptions regarding their preferred identities is often contingent on the existing political environment, which influences Sunni decisions to carry out national, pan-Arab or religious identities. By national identity, this research refers to Sunni groupings, which claim that their national Lebanese identity is more important than their Sunni or pan-Arab identities (see International Crisis Group 2010). By pan-Arab identity, this research refers to Sunni groupings, which call all the Arabs to establish one single nation united in one Arab state (see Salamey 2014). It refers to the foundation of an Arab nation that advocates Arab unity and

espouses solidarity against perceptual enemies of Arabs (see Salamey 2014). By religious identity, this research refers to Sunni groupings, which embrace Islam as the cornerstone for their recruitment, activism, mobilisation and collective actions (see Abdel-Latif 2008).

This research argues that Sunni multiple identities could be a reflection of almost irreconcilable ideological divides but they could also be a reflection of Sunni understanding of the Sunni politics as a “game”, in which their identity may be shifted or manipulated in line with the prevailing political environment. As one of the research participants (Non-Sunni3) puts it, the predominant political mood in Lebanon determines which identity prevails: sectarian or national. On several occasions, the politicisation of Sunni identities resulted from the perceived intimidation practised by dominant groupings in Lebanon (Taylor and Raeburn 1995:269). For instance, Hezbollah’s (Shia) armed supremacy on the Lebanese politics made sectarian Sunni identities significant, contributed to identity transformation (from national to sectarian), triggered collective action frames and paved the way for the politicisation and radicalisation of Sunnis (see Klandermans 2014).

Given the multiplicity of Sunni identities in Lebanon, the main concern is to unmask which identity among pan-Arab, religious and national identities is able to correspond with Sunni personal identities and the way in which these identity correspondences are understood, narrated and contested (Hunt and Benford 2007; 445). A former minister (Non-Sunni1) and one of the research participants, argues that in times of political crises in Lebanon, sectarian identities prevail over national identities. Another respondent from the Fourteenth March Alliance (FOMA1) indicates that when the

Lebanese Sunnis feel that their Sunni identity is threatened and the state is unable to protect them they resort to sectarian identities. Collectively, all these respondents are of the view that identity politics especially Sunni identity is manifested when Sunnis perceive themselves as being abandoned by the Lebanese state and feel that they are threatened by dominant groupings/communities in Lebanon. Some of the views of the respondents are shown in the following quotes.

Non-Sunni3 *“The predominant political mood would determine which identity prevails: sectarian or national.”*

Non-Sunni1 *“We hold multiple identities. We are Lebanese, Arabs, Christians and Muslims. In times of political crises, sectarian identity prevails over national identity. In times of peace, national identity prevails.”*

FOMA1 *“In case Lebanon is unable to protect Sunnis and wants to abolish their autonomy, Sunnis will prefer their Sunni identity to their Lebanese identity.”*

The above excerpts show that narratives on identity and constructing an identity that corresponds to the Lebanese individuals may be debated and contested not only at the inter-confessional levels (e.g. Muslims and Christians or Sunnis and Shias) but also at the intra-confessional levels (e.g. Sunnis and Sunnis). Intra-Sunni contests may have implications for and influence on these national narratives. The Sunni community in this context engages in frequent frames and counter-frames about how they “perceive”, “imagine”, “construct” and “identify” the Lebanese nation and the place of pan-Arabism and Sunni identity in it (see Amin 2014).

Collectively, Sunni movements in Lebanon that aim at sustaining commitment over a certain period of time need to make the construction of a “collective identity” one of their most central tasks (Gamson 1991:27). Frame alignment processes (frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extensions and frame transformation or re-framing) (Snow et al. 1986) are essential tools for bringing together shared identity and group focus to specific collectivity at specific historical times (Cerulo 1997:394). The resultant outcomes are collective identities, which are then considered as a source of mobilisation and movement participation (Cerulo 1997).

3.1.1 National Identity Mantra among the Lebanese Sunnis

The bulk of the Lebanese Sunnis, regardless of their affiliations, consider the Lebanese national identity as their preferred identity. This is the stance of Dar al-Fatwa, the highest religious Sunni office in Lebanon and the Future Movement, the largest Sunni grouping in Lebanon. One of the research respondents from Dar al-Fatwa (DF1) indicates that for the first time in the political history of Lebanon, Sunnis put their national affiliation over their religious or pan-Arab affiliation. In his opinion, the Lebanese Sunnis seek to protect their homeland and to solidify their presence in Lebanon.

Similarly, another research participant from the Future Movement (FM2) states that Sunni’s identity is firstly Lebanese. The Future Movement, as part of its “frame amplification” strategies (Snow et al. 1986), constructed the slogan “Lebanon First” in its manifesto (see the Future Movement 2015) to appeal to non-Sunni communities in Lebanon and to demonstrate to the Lebanese public that its national Lebanese identity

is more important than its Sunni or pan-Arab identities. The slogan shows that the Future Movement appears to portray a national identity and express national solidarity with non-Sunni counterparts. This discursive process, as constructed by the Future Movement, involves the development of frames and narratives that identify with the Lebanese multi-religious society and includes a sense of national solidarity and mutuality.

A former Christian MP (FOMA1), and one of the research participants, perceives the Future Movement decision to use the framing “Lebanon First” as a “great step” showing how the Lebanese Sunnis are loyal to Lebanon. Likewise, two Christian and Shia journalist respondents (Non-Sunni3 and Non-Sunni4) praise the Future Movement’s construction of the framing “Lebanon First”. They perceive it as a “historic” step made by the Lebanese Sunnis to confirm their national identities. They also consider it as a symbolic gesture made by the Lebanese Sunnis to reassure the Lebanese non-Sunni communities that Sunnis are loyal to Lebanon. The perceptions of the participants are shown below.

DF1 *“For the first time in the history of Lebanon, the Lebanese Sunnis are Lebanese first and Sunnis second. Sunnis want to protect their homeland and solidify their presence in Lebanon. This is happening for the first time in the history of Lebanon.”*

FM2 *“Sunnis’ identity is firstly Lebanese.”*

FOMA1 *“When the Hariri family propounded the slogan “Lebanon first”, in my opinion, it was a great step showing that the Lebanese Sunnis are loyal to Lebanon.”*

Non-Sunni4 *“Sunnis since 2005 have proven that their national identity comes before everything else. In my opinion, this is historic.”*

Non-Sunni3 *“The Future Movement adopted the slogan “Lebanon first”. The posture was a clear message to the Christians that Sunnis are loyal to Lebanon. It was a message to confirm their Lebanese identity.”*

Historically, the Lebanese Sunnis were identified with pan-Arabism and used to seek external support from Sunni and Arab states (International Crisis Group 2010). They sided with the Palestinian armed presence against rightist Christians in the Lebanese civil war (Gilmour 1987; Hanf 1993; Salem 2011). The collapse of pan-Arabism in the late 1960s eroded its ideal but the desire of the Lebanese Sunnis to belong to a wider Sunni and Arab affiliation lingered (International Crisis Group 2010). However, the killing of the Sunni Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005 changed the perceptions of the Lebanese Sunnis. Sunni demands of the withdrawal of Syria from Lebanon echoed that of the Lebanese Christians, which opposed Syria’s dominance of Lebanon and blamed them for the assassination of Hariri (Cammett and Issar 2010). The mutual opposition to Syria laid the foundation for an alliance-building between the Sunni community and anti-Syria Christian groupings in Lebanon. This re-orientation of the Sunni identity was epitomised in the Future’s Movement propagation of the slogan “Lebanon First” to emphasise their national credentials and to appeal to the Christian community in Lebanon.

3.1.2 Examining the Perceptual Stance of the Sunni Community on Issues of National Identity

The discussion (in 3.1.1) shows that the Lebanese Sunnis naturally prefer national identity. However, the “Lebanon First” slogan as propagated by the Future Movement appears ambiguous in that it does not reflect the opinion of all Sunni groupings and organisations in Lebanon. The ambiguity of the slogan is manifest in instances where Sunni preference of national identity might be shifted in line with the prevailing political circumstance. For example, one of the respondents from the League of Muslim Scholars (LMS1) contends that the Lebanese Sunnis do not see the Lebanese national identity as contradicting their Sunni identity but if they feel that national or regional issues are threatening their Sunni identities, they will prefer confessional Sunni identities over national identities. Likewise, another respondent from the *Haraki* Salafists (*Haraki* Salafist1) indicates that Sunnis believe that Lebanon is their final homeland, but there are other Sunnis who would sacrifice everything to protect their Sunni identity. Some of the views of the participants are shown in the following excerpts.

LMS1 *“Salafists do not see that the Lebanese identity as contradicting their Sunni identity but if they feel that national issues are threatening their Sunni identities, they will prefer Sunni identity over national identity.”*

Haraki Salafists1 *“Sunnis believe that Lebanon is their final homeland. But there are Sunnis who believe that if we ignore the principles of Islam, we will lose our identity.”*

Their main concern is to protect the Sunni identity and that they would sacrifice everything to protect their identity.”

The above excerpts show that “protection” from internal and external threats is the main element pushing some of the Lebanese Sunnis towards collective Sunni identities. Conceptually, the notion of collective identity resides in an interactive and shared “sense of “we-ness” and “collective agency” among individuals (Snow 2001:1). It is derived from individuals’ solidarity and common interests (Taylor 1989 as cited in Gecas 2000). Therefore, collective identity requires individuals’ perceptions of themselves as being part of a community and political consciousness that identify their aims, means and fields of collective actions (Gecas 2000).

In light of the perceptual failure of the Lebanese state to counter-Hezbollah and to maintain its control over Lebanon (Daher 2015; Zelin 2016), the tendency toward national dis-integration will increase among the Lebanese Sunnis. In addition, the deepening of Arab divides along the Shia-Sunni lines as signified by the rising confessional conflicts in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere will amplify collective Sunni identities and enhance the sectarian narratives among the Lebanese Sunnis (see Felsch 2016). The construction of a collective Sunni identity gradually grows among the Lebanese Sunnis as they witness Hezbollah’s perceptual role in the sad conditions of their co-religionist in Syria, and Iraq and compare it to their domestic situation in Lebanon as Iran and their Shia ally Hezbollah dominate the Lebanese politics (see Khashan 2015:4).

3.1.3 The Ideological Stance of Religious-Based Sunni Groupings in

Lebanon

Another issue, which constitutes a challenge to the “Lebanon First” national slogan, is the ideological stance of religious-based Sunni groupings in Lebanon. For instance, al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya, the largest and most well-organised religious-based Sunni grouping in Lebanon, has been influenced by the school of thought of the Muslim Brotherhood, whose objective has been to resurrect Islam and to implement it in all shades of life (Teitelbaum 2011). One of the research respondents from al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya (JI1) indicates that their ideology is “Islamic-based” but at the same time indicates that the movement is “part of the Lebanese society”. The statement, as it stands, does not contradict al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya’s affiliation with Lebanon. Yet, the “duality” of their ideological stance, of being affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, and of being affiliated with the Lebanese state, could affect their loyalty to Lebanon when their identity is politicised.

JI1 *“Our project is Islamic-based. We are part of Lebanese society. We seek to progress the entire Lebanese society and not just the Sunni community”.*

The duality of al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya’s ideological stance was manifest in the aftermath of Rafik Hariri’s assassination in 2005. There were two factions within al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya: One is closer to the pro-Syria, pro-Iran Eighth March Alliance (EMA) and the other is closer to the anti-Syria, anti-Iran the Fourteenth March Alliance (FOMA) (see Abdel-Latif 2008). The differing ideological stance led to a fracture within the leadership of al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya. For instance, Fathi Yaken, the primary co-founder

of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, was critical of the FOMA's policies. According to Rabil (2014:174), "Yakan has made supporting the Islamic Resistance [of Hezbollah] a priority of the association's political programs". This ideological stance infuriated some members, who expressed sympathy with the FOMA and antipathy with the EMA. Thus, intra-organisational ideological contests between al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya's leaders led to the withdrawal of Yakan from the grouping. Soon later, Yakan established a pro-Hezbollah movement known as the Islamic Action Front (*Jabhat al-'Amal al-Islami*).

3.1.4 The Duality of Affiliation among Sunni Groups

The duality of affiliation is another issue concerning Sunni national identities. One former minister (Non-Sunni1) indicates that Sunni relations with external players (Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia) could serve Lebanon's national interests on the one hand, and on the other hand, could serve the interests of their patrons. The Sunni movements are likely to be influenced by their supporters to engage in regional conflicts and ideological rivalry (e.g. between Saudi Arabia and Iran) on the Lebanese ground, in which they may explicitly or implicitly serve the agenda of their regional supporters at the expense of Lebanon's national identity. The views are demonstrated in the following excerpt.

Non-Sunni1 *"There is a difference between those who use relations with external players to serve their patrons and those who benefit from these relations to serve the interests of Lebanon."*

In the process of developing the interest in their survival and progress, Sunnis who are aligned with the EMA and Sunnis who are aligned with the FOMA compete against

each other for support from external sponsors (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iran). In this instance, these competing alliances may pursue polarising and inflexible strategies that target their constituencies and abandon the prospect to offer understanding among Sunnis (see Rucht 2007). These issues demonstrate how Sunni links with external players could divide them and affect their solidarity (see Meyer and Staggenborg 1996:1656; Miceli 2005:589)

3.1.5 The Desire to Establish an Islamic Order in Lebanon

In addition, the challenges facing Sunni preferences of national identity are manifest in issues related to the establishment of an Islamic rule in Lebanon. Whilst some religious-based Sunni groupings in Lebanon (e.g. *Haraki* Salafists, the Tawheed Movement and al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya) expressed a pragmatic receptive attitude toward Lebanon, other parties (e.g. Hizb ut-Tahrir) expressed a hostile attitude toward the Lebanese state. One respondent from the *Haraki* Salafists (*Haraki* Salafists1) indicates that it is difficult to establish an Islamic order in Lebanon as long as Lebanon has various religious communities. He clarifies that it is a duty on Muslims to create an Islamic order if they can but if they cannot, then, they are not supposed to isolate themselves. Sunnis accepted to join Lebanon and to be part of the Lebanese political system and in his view, this is not contradicting Islam. Likewise, one respondent from al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya (JI1) indicates that the principles and rules of Islam have to be applied everywhere. Yet, this does not necessarily imply that the political order in Lebanon has to be Islamic. In his view, if the principles of Islam are implemented then the ruling is Islamic even if it does not carry out the name of Islam. The views of the participants are shown in the following excerpts.

Haraki Salafists¹ *“In Lebanon, we cannot establish an Islamic order as long as we have various religious communities. Sunnis accepted to join Lebanon and to be part of its political system. They share with their fellow Lebanese citizens their concerns, dreams, pains and hopes. This is not contrary to Islam at all. It is a duty to create an Islamic order if you can. But if you cannot, then you are not supposed to isolate yourself and live in the mountains or in the caves.”*

J11 *“The group's definition of Islamic rule is that the rules of Islamic law should be applied. If it is applied under any titles, the ruling is Islamic even if it does not have this name and attributes of Islam. We consider that the bulk of the laws governing the Lebanese community are not contrary to the rules of Islam.”*

The above excerpts show that some religious-based Sunni groupings in Lebanon engage in the process of “frame transformation” or “re-framing” (Snow et al. 1986) to win Sunni public support in Lebanon. Frame transformation or re-framing refers to the process through which framers change their existing frames and abandon old values or meanings, (which may contradict people’s conventions or tradition) in order to get their public support (Snow et al. 1986; Williams 2016).

Prior to the Lebanese civil war, various religious-based Sunni groupings in Lebanon most especially the Tawheed Movement and al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya had the desire for the establishment of an Islamic order in Lebanon (see Gambil 2007; Imad 2009; Rabil 2014). For example, during the period from 1983 to 1985, the Tawheed Movement established “a crypto-Islamic republic” in Tripoli, north Lebanon, and imposed a strict “Islamic rule” on Tripolitan citizens (see Hanf 1993:306; Lefevre 2014:11).

Yet, in the post-civil war period, the new political dynamics in Lebanon as exemplified by Syria's control of Lebanon together with the Taif Accord compelled religious-based Sunni groupings in Lebanon to engage in the process of re-framing.

In this research, the narratives of one research respondent from al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya (JI1) show that the group "consider[s] that the bulk of the laws governing the Lebanese community are not contrary to the rules of Islam". This phrase as framed by al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, demonstrates the grouping's willingness to de/re-construct its prior perspectives and narratives on the state of Lebanon and among Lebanese individuals and collectivities so that things are understood differently than before.

The frames of the Tawheed Movement and al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya metamorphosed from the call for the establishment of Islamic orders and the rejection of non-Islamic ones to the call for full engagement and participation in the Lebanese multi-confessional political system. These groupings realised that participation from within the Lebanese confessional political system does not mean approving any legislative position contradicting Islam. Rather, it could be seen as a gateway to Islamic preaching through dialogue and conversation (Yakan 1996 as cited in Rabil 2014:157). It could also enable these groupings to take part in shaping political actions and decisions; raising awareness about Muslim issues; and using the parliament as a venue for disseminating their ideology (Elsässer 2007).

The motives of these groupings behind engaging in frame transformation might be pragmatic to reassure their non-Sunni counterparts that their identity is Lebanese and that they are part of the Lebanese society. It could also be attributable to the fact that these groupings aimed at protecting themselves from Syria's tightened grip on

Lebanon by effacing their desire for the establishment of an Islamic order. Moreover, it could be a reflection of the gradual development of the Lebanese religious-based Sunni groupings, which realised the difficulty of establishing an Islamic order in Lebanon due to its impracticality in the Lebanese multi-religious society (see Hamzeh 2000; Elsässer 2007; Gambil 2007).

3.1.6 The Desire to Implement the Islamic Principles in Lebanon

Hizb ut-Tahrir, on the contrary, explicitly clarifies its aim at establishing an Islamic order in the forms of the caliphate. The ideology of Hizb ut-Tahrir consists of two main principles. The first principle is the prominence of the Islamic law, which is based on the conviction that the Islamic laws shall regulate and indeed govern all aspects of individuals' life (Karagiannis 2006; Karagiannis and Mccauley 2006). The second principle is the importance of the re-establishment of an authentic state of the caliphate (i.e. the Islamic state), which implies that the existence of the ideal Muslim society is contingent on the establishment of an Islamic entity, which conjoins of politics and religion, i.e. does not separate between the religion (*deen*) and the state (*dawla*) (Karagiannis 2006:275; Karagiannis and Mccauley 2006).

Hizb ut-Tahrir opposes democracy because in its opinion, democratic systems are disbelief (*kufur*) systems, which are not based on the Islamic divine rules (see Karagiannis 2006: 267; Osman 2012). Hizb ut-Tahrir's argument against democracy is built on the basis of its laws, which are considered as "man-made" as opposed to the Islamic divine rules, which are ordained by God for all human beings (Osman 2012:94). The state of the caliphate that Hizb ut-Tahrir hopes to re-establish would not be

democratic because democracy, the movement argues, is un-Islamic (Osman 2012), Western and contradicts the Quran (Chaudet 2006:116). In this research, one respondent from Hezb ut-Tahrir (HT1) states that “Lebanon is invalid to be a state whether Islamic or non-Islamic”. In his opinion, Lebanon is a “failed state”, and his party is not working to establish an Islamic state or a caliphate in Lebanon but is working to make Lebanon part of the caliphate state that they hope to establish. The view of the respondent is shown in the following quote.

HT1 *“Lebanon as an entity is not only invalid for the caliphate project; it is invalid to be state whether Islamic or non-Islamic. Lebanon is a failed state. We are not working to establish an Islamic state in Lebanon or a caliphate in Lebanon. We are working to make Lebanon attached to the state of the caliphate which we hope to be established.”*

As part of its frame alignment processes, Hizb ut-Tahrir engages in the process of “frame amplification” (Snow et al. 1986) to gain Sunni public support. Frame amplification refers to the invigoration and clarification of a frame that bears on specific problems, issues and set of events (Snow et al. 1986:469). The ability of frame articulators to amplify and clarify the claims and values of their framing activities could facilitate the dynamics of movement participation (Snow et al. 1986; Coley 2015; Williams 2016).

Hizb ut-Tahrir frequently amplifies the frames of the “re-establishment of the Islamic state of the caliphate” as a means to garner the support of the Lebanese Sunnis. The embellishment of the frame of the “caliphate” as constructed by Hizb ut-Tahrir appeals to some Lebanese Sunnis who believe that Lebanon’s shortcomings could be remedied through the restoration and revival of Islam as a comprehensive way of life (see Yilmaz 2010:501). For Hizb ut-Tahrir, the re-establishment of the Islamic state of the caliphate is seen as an essential step for the revival of Islam.

Hizb ut-Tahrir does not recognise the boundaries within the Islamic and Arab world because it strongly believes that these boundaries are colonial constructs which are designed to weaken and divide the Muslim’s community of believers (*umma*) (Hizb ut-Tahrir 1997:25 as cited in Osman 2012:95). Hizb ut-Tahrir believes that Lebanon was carved up from the Muslim *umma* in the aftermath of the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate by the Anglo-French Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916 in order to weaken the Lebanese Muslims and empower the Lebanese Christians (Imad 2006; Rougier 2007; Imad 2009). It considers nationalism and the nation state to be a source of division because they are antithetical to Islam’s concept of a unified *umma* and Hizb ut-Tahrir’s concept of the caliphate (Hanif 2012; 206).

As for Lebanon, Hizb ut-Tahrir does not take part in the Lebanese political system because it is not ruled on the basis of Islam (Shayya et al. 2015). As for the Lebanese parliament (legislative), Hizb ut-Tahrir rejects to take part in parliamentary elections except under strict conditions (International Crisis Group 2003:6): Hizb ut-Tahrir’s candidates consider the current political system in Lebanon as a disbelief system and that it is rejected in essence; they neither propose a civil law nor vote for it; they do

not take part in the election or vote for the Lebanese president as long as the president is a disbeliever (*kafir*); they do not grant confidence to any Lebanese government; and finally, they do not form an alliance with non-Muslims because this may result in Muslim voters to vote for non-Muslims (Imad 2009).

3.1.7 The Pan-Arab Oriented Individuals

The ambiguity of the Lebanese Sunni affiliation to national identity is also seen in the ideological stance of pan-Arab-based Sunni groupings and leaders in Lebanon. The researcher interviewed two members from the pan-Arab Union Party. The focus of these members was on cultivating past or tradition-oriented narratives (e.g. pan-Arabism and Arab unity) to appeal to the public masses. These pan-Arab members, as part of their frame amplification activities (Snow et al. 1986), promote the notion of “pan-Arabism” as a framing construct and frame their pan-Arab identity as being “more important than their Sunni identity”. They are of the view that that pan-Arabism is framed as a “unifying ideology” because it unifies the Lebanese Muslims with Christians on the basis of shared culture and language. The views of the participants are shown in the following quotes.

UP1 *“Pan-Arabism partisans would consider themselves as pan-Arab first and Muslims second. There is no contradiction between pan-Arabism and Islam. Both unify people. Pan-Arabism would unify Muslims with Christians. My pan-Arab identity is more important than my Sunni’s identity.”*

UP2 *“Pan-Arabism is a unifying ideology. It is the solution for Lebanon’s problems because it unifies the Lebanese people regardless of their religious affiliation.”*

Collectively, the understanding of pan-Arab Sunnis is that the long-standing political disorder and communal tensions that currently take place in Lebanon is linked to the way in which the confessional political system in Lebanon has been constructed and shaped, leaving Lebanon inherently riddled with fragility. For these pan-Arabs, the solution of the Lebanese problems is for the state to adopt pan-Arabism. The frame amplification of pan-Arabism as a collective identity could minimise sectarian tensions and factionalism among the Lebanese religious communities. Yet, Pan-Arab Sunnis are often criticised of being led by transnational agenda rather than national agenda, of being pan-Arab on the exterior and pragmatic on the interior and of using pan-Arabism as a tool to appeal to Sunnis and to solidify their political status. They often manipulate pan-Arabism to capitalise on concerns over some overriding Arab and Muslim issues (Hinnebusch 2005; Humphreys 2005).

3.1.8 Sectarian Perspective Identities

Sunni perceptions on the confessional political system in Lebanon are another issue affecting their national identity. One will notice that Sunni opinions on the confessional political system in Lebanon are illiberal. They are to a greater or a lesser extent a reflection of their religious background. Some participants interpret the political system in Lebanon through a “confessional lens” in the forms of what it has given to the Lebanese Sunnis vis-à-vis other religious communities. One of the respondents from the *Haraki* Salafists (*Haraki* Salafists¹) indicates that Sunni political status in the post-Taif Accord era is better than their status in the pre-Taif Accord era. In his view, the fact that the head of the executive is a Sunni is perceived as an advantage for the Sunni community in Lebanon. Likewise, one respondent from the

League of Muslim Scholars (LMS1) frames the Taif Accord as a “good” agreement for the Lebanese Sunnis although on the ground, the accord was not in favour of Sunnis due to Syria’s influence on Lebanon. The responses of the respondents are shown below.

Haraki Salafists1 *“We know the importance of executive posts at any given state. When the head of executive is a Sunni, this would serve Sunnis interest. Sunnis status in the pre-Taif era was less than their status in the post-Taif era.”*

LMS1 *“The Taif Accord was good for the Lebanese Sunnis, though on the ground the balance of forces was not in favour of Sunnis following Syria’s presence in Lebanon.”*

The spirit and the letter of the Taif Accord were intended to abolish confessionalism, which in fact is the current issue regarding the politics of the Sunni community and the Lebanese nation as a whole. Yet, in the Sunni context, “politics of representation” are essential in shaping Sunni perceptions on the confessional political system in Lebanon. National-based Sunni groups hope to end confessionalism in order to establish a secular Lebanese state (The Future Movement 2015). Pan-Arab Sunni groups aim at ending confessionalism for the pursuit of Arab unity, whilst Religious-based Sunni groupings aim at ending confessionalism with the hope of establishing an Islamic rule in Lebanon (Rabil 2011; Rabil 2014; the Popular Nasserite Organisation 2015). Yet, there are Sunnis, who prefer the confessional political system to remain intact because it guarantees a fairer share of power for all the Lebanese communities and does not allow the stronger party/community to impose its control over others in Lebanon (Shayya et al. 2009).

3.2 Leadership of the Sunni Community in Lebanon

The political and religious leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon is an essential complicated phenomenon, which affects not only the origins but also the outcomes of Sunni groupings and organisations (see Morris 2004:241). Political analysis, which neglects the dynamics of the Lebanese Sunni political and religious leadership, fails to shed the light on one of the key sources of intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon at the domestic levels. In the following, the political and religious leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon and how they are understood, framed and counter-framed by the research respondents are presented in the following sub-headings.

3.2.1 The Leadership of Rafik Hariri and Issues of Intra-Sunni Political

Divides

The emergence of one the most prominent Sunni political leaders in Lebanon, the former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and his perceived over-monopolisation of the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon constitute one of the issues that politically divide the Lebanese Sunnis. Sunnis in this instance are divided into two opposing camps: anti- and pro-Rafik Hariri camps. The pro-Hariri camp is framed as being influenced by Saudi Arabia and Western states especially the United States and France due to Rafik Hariri's close relations with them (see Najem 2012; Salamey 2014). The anti-Hariri camp is framed as being influenced by Iran, Hezbollah and Syria. This classification is important to contextualise the responses of the research respondents regarding the leadership of the Hariri family.

In this research, some respondents claim that Rafik Hariri “monopolised” the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon and did not allow any Sunni political grouping or leader other than him to lead the Sunni community in Lebanon. The framing of Hariri as “monopolising” the Sunni politics, would suggest, as my participants indicate, that Hariri either “ignored” or “eliminated” the role of traditional Sunni political leaders in Lebanon often known in Arabic as “*zaim*” (leader) or “*zuama*” (leaders).

3.2.1.1 The Replacement of Traditional Sunni Zuama in the Sunni Community in Lebanon

In multi-confessional communities like Lebanon, clientelism is frequently considered as a common characteristic of the political process (Collelo 1987). This system existed in Lebanon in the pre-independence era, wherein feudal lords used to permit peasants and their family members to use their lands in exchange for their loyalty (Collelo 1987; Gilmour 1987). In the post-independence era in Lebanon, these pre-existing social systems metamorphosed into political systems (Collelo 1987). The feudal leaders became political leaders, and the peasants became their constituents (Collelo 1987).

The Sunni community in Lebanon was largely dominated by communal political leaders or *zuama*, who belong to powerful lineage (e.g. the Salam family in Beirut, the Saad family in Sidon, and the Karami family in Tripoli) (Johnson 1986). The era preceding the civil war in Lebanon witnessed power struggles between two notable traditional Lebanese Sunni families (the Salam family and the Karami family) over the political leadership of the Sunni community. Sunni traditional *zuama* used to have a network of clientele often inherited from their descendants to increase the number of

their followers (Collelo 1987; Skovgaard-Petersen 1998). Their leadership was based on their ability to manipulate the urban masses through ideological appeal (e.g. pan-Arabism and the Palestinian cause) and financial support (Najem 2012).

The influence of Sunni traditional *zuama* on intra-Sunni power dynamics was affected by the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in the sense that it led to the collapse of state institutions, the defeat of Sunni militias by Syria and its allies (e.g. the Tawheed Movement), the rise of religious-based Sunni groupings (e.g. the Lebanese Salafists and al-Ahbash) in the late 1980s (el-Khazen 1994; Khashan 2013) and the emergence of the Sunni political leader Rafik Hariri. All these factors weakened the influence of Sunni *zuama* regarding Sunni power dynamics (Johnson 1986; Skovgaard-Petersen 1996; Vloeberghs 2015).

Rafik Hariri's rise to power came at the expense of Sunni *zuama*. The fractionalisation and power vacuum within the Sunni milieu in the post-civil war period together with the financial wealth made by Rafik Hariri in Saudi Arabia enabled the Hariri family to dominate the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon and to build close networks with Sunni political and religious establishments in Lebanon and regionally (Cammett and Issar 2010:400). Rafik Hariri was originated from a non-political family but had become a billionaire businessman in Saudi Arabia and returned to Lebanon to become a Prime Minister in 1992 (Abdel-Latif 2008). Hariri's power was manifest in his media empire (e.g. Radio Orient, the Future Channel and al-Mustaqbal Newspaper) (Vloeberghs 2015), extensive media networks (e.g. a shareholder in the prestigious An-Nahar Newspaper), political alliances (e.g. Hariri's alliance with the Druze leader Walid

Jumblatt and the former Sunni Prime Minister Najib Mikati) (Gambill and Nassif 2000) financial capacity (e.g. a billionaire) and external links (e.g. Hariri's relationship with the Saudi Arabia's royal family and the former French President Jacques Chirac) (Vloeberghs 2015).

Hariri's generous support for Sunni students to pursue their education in Lebanon and abroad, and his economic plan to re-construct the war-torn Lebanon and re-develop its economy and infrastructures, overshadowed Sunni rival *zuama* and solidified his dominance over public opinion and the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon at large (Vloeberghs 2015). Rafik Hariri gradually established himself in the Sunni politics so much so that the identification between Rafik Hariri and the Sunni politics in Lebanon became exceedingly stronger (Meier and Di Peri 2017:40).

3.2.1.2 Framing of the Political Leadership of Rafik Hariri

In this research, some respondents hold the view that Rafik Hariri had problems with the traditional Sunni *zuama* in Lebanon. For example, one respondent from the League of Muslim Scholars (LMS1) states that it was a "mistake" for Rafik Hariri to co-opt these Sunni *zuama* who had a long-standing political history in Lebanon. In his view, Hariri could have accommodated them under his leadership. Other respondents including a member of the Fourteenth March alliance (FOMA2) and a journalist (Non-Sunni4) also believe that Hariri could have cooperated with these leaders or gave them a political platform so as to make the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon more diverse. Collectively, these respondents are of the view that Rafik Hariri worked in the

direction of excluding other Sunni leaders to remain the sole political leader of the Sunni community in Lebanon. The views of the research participants are shown in the following quotes.

EMA1 *“Hariri did not accept any Sunnis other than him to lead the Sunni community. He worked to eliminate others.”*

LMS1 *“Hariri ignored Sunni families whose political influence was felt prior to his arrival and did not give them a role; this was a mistake. He could have accommodated them under his leadership.”*

Centrist2 *“Rafik Hariri worked in the direction of eliminating other Sunni leaders to solely remain the leader. Was it his decision? Was it Syria’s? I do not know.”*

FOMA2 *“Hariri eliminated Sunni traditional Sunni leaders. He eliminated the Salam family. He could have left a place for them.”*

Non-Sunni4 *“In politics, Hariri monopolised the Sunni scene because he was the most powerful Sunni leader. He could have co-operated with other Sunni leaders. He could have made the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon more diverse.”*

UP2 *“Hariri had a problem with all the traditional Sunni zuama in Lebanon. Also, he opposed the former Prime Minister Salim al-Huss.”*

The above excerpts show that the main focus of some research respondents is Rafik Hariri’s perceptual role of dividing the Lebanese Sunnis. This has been understood through Hariri’s “monopolisation” of the Sunni politics and his “alliance with the West” namely the United States and France. The research participants indicate that prior to

the arrival of Rafik Hariri, Sunni *zuama* used to disagree and compete against each other but their disagreements did not lead to intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon. What is relevant to these respondents to narrate is that, Hariri's arrival to the political scene laid the foundation for intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon. In their understanding, intra-Sunni political division began when Hariri sought to monopolise the leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon. In addition, the data of this research shows that Hariri antagonists' critics primarily focus on his alignment with Western powers. This is significant to show how Hariri's opponents would like the story of Hariri to be constructed, narrated and understood. One of the strategies that Hariri's opponents employ to de-legitimise Hariri's supporters is to frame him as a "pro-United States" leader and servant of their interests, hence portraying his policies as contradicting the Sunni ethos. The views of Hariri's opponents are shown below.

UP1 *"Hariri divided the Lebanese Sunnis... Hariri's project gradually started to go in the direction of the United States and Saudi Arabia projects, which contradict pro-Syria, pro-Arab policy line."*

EMA1 *"The internal Sunni divide was mainly limited between the Sunni Leaders. They competed to win the Sunni support as much as they could. Of course, there were other disagreements but it did not lead to confrontation. It was an acceptable disagreement until Hariri arrived."*

Other research respondents, on the contrary, counter-frame the frames that Rafik Hariri monopolised the political leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon. In their opinion, Hariri did neither impose his leadership on the Sunni community in Lebanon nor deliberately eliminate or marginalise the role of Sunni *zuama*. Rather, the

gradual replacement of Sunni *zuama* is attributable to the dynamics of the Lebanese politics, which outweighed their political relevance. The respondents indicate that Hariri was a giant leader with a modernised economic vision and was considered as the most powerful, dynamic and influential Sunni politician. Collectively, these respondents are of the view that Rafik Hariri's political presence overshadowed Sunni *zuama*'s presence and his role transcended their role. Sunni *zuama* were unable to compete against Hariri as a result of Hariri's solid political presence. The views of the participants are shown in the following excerpts.

FM3 *"Hariri did not impose himself on the Sunni community but surely he was the most productive, dynamic and influential Sunni politician."*

Non-Sunni3 *"Some Sunni groupings and leaders were marginalised as a result of Hariri's powerful political presence."*

Non-Sunni2 *"It was the rule of the militias not Rafik Hariri that eliminated the influence of Sunni traditional leaders, if we talk about Salam family, the militias ruled them out... Rashid Karami was killed by the militias... some may say that Hariri eliminated other. Hariri was a giant. Others were unable to be compared with him... When Hariri arrived, he had a modernised vision. The Sunni community was in the process of replacing the old political faces with new ones... It was in the process of creating a new political class."*

Non-Sunni1 *"Hariri did not deliberately eliminate Sunni za'ims. His presence overshadowed their presence and his role transcended their role. He did not marginalise them. He was ready to build relations with them and indeed he managed*

to do so; other Sunni leaders allied themselves with him because they felt that if you cannot beat him then you should join him.”

The above excerpts show that a very significant feature of the dynamics between pro- and anti-Rafik Hariri camps is that they often debate each other over the same issues from completely different angles of politics. The pro-Hariri camp, in their framing activities focus on the national politics, whilst the anti-Hariri camp situate their framing activities within the context of morality politics. The discussion shows that Sunni groupings often seem to be narrating past each other rather than truly involving in political dialogue that leads to the reconsolidation of the Sunni front in Lebanon (see Miceli 2005:591). Collectively, when these Sunni rivals argue in their adversaries' political context, they may lose the ideological credibility and mobilisation strength of their strategies and hence weaken their political position (Miceli 2005:591).

3.2.1.3 Rafik Hariri's Cooperation with the Saad Family in Lebanon

The data (in 3.2.1) shows that Rafik Hariri was ready to build relations with the Sunni *zuama* and indeed managed to achieve this (see non-Sunni1). Rafik Hariri's cooperative politics was manifest in his relationship with the Saad family. The two families later became prominent actors in the local scene. Both are Sunnis but are politically and ideologically divided (pan-Arabism and national Sunni groupings). The political division between the two families is not only based on ideological ground but on securing influence on the political scene in Sidon.

In the Lebanese parliament, there are two seats allocated to Sidon; both are held by Sunni candidates. In 1992, both Mostafa Saad (the former leader of the pan-Arab Popular Nasserite Organisation), and Bahia Hariri (sister of Rafik Hariri) swept two

seats representing Sidon in the Lebanese parliament. Both sides were seen as having the upper hand in the local politics. While the Saad's family popularity was restricted to Sidon to a great extent, Hariri's popularity and wealth extended beyond Sidon to include wider and indeed diverse Sunni spectrum in Lebanon. In 1996, amidst overwhelming growing fame of Rafik Hariri, the Saad family was unable to politically and financially challenge Hariri. Yet, Hariri's prominence did not lead him to monopolise the politics of Sidon although the Saad family strongly opposed his policy line (International Crisis Group 2010; Baumann2017). A gentleman's agreement was reached between the two sides, which led to Sidon being equally represented in the parliament by both the Saad family and the Hariri family. The agreement remained until the assassination of Hariri in 2005.

3.2.2 Diversity in Sunni Political Leadership

The politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon is not exclusively led by the Hariri family and the Future Movement although they are the largest Sunni grouping by virtue of the last three parliamentary elections in 2005, 2009 and 2018. Sixteen (16) out of twenty-seven (27) Sunni members of the Lebanese parliament are affiliated with the Future Movement (Perry, Bassam and Francis 07/05/2018). This implies that the Future Movement possess approximately 60% of the Sunni street in Lebanon. Yet, the Sunni community in Lebanon is not monolithic but rather diverse and multi-directional. One former Lebanese minister (Non-Sunni¹) holds the view that a key feature of the Lebanese politics is pluralism within religious communities. It is difficult to assume, the minister indicates, that the Sunni community in Lebanon could be represented by one grouping. Even the Shia community in Lebanon, which is perceived

as pro-Hezbollah, is not only represented by Hezbollah. Some Lebanese Shias oppose Hezbollah's policy line. The views of the interviewees are presented below.

Non-Sunni1 *"The prevalent feature of the Lebanese politics is... pluralism within sects. Some people assume that a whole sect can be reduced to one grouping but this is unfair. Some people tended to assume that the Sunni community is monolithic under the leadership of the Future Movement. This is untrue. And the first to admit this is the Future Movement itself."*

J12 *"The Sunni community in Lebanon remains diverse and multi-directional."*

Non-Sunni2 *"There are some groupings and leaders who are looking for political role. They cannot be completely under the leadership of the Hariri family such as the Karami family and Najib Mikati. This led to Sunni disagreements."*

The above quotes show that "diversity" and "pluralism" characterise the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon. There are other Sunni leaders who compete against the political leadership of the Hariri family and aim at leading the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon. These leaders include for instance the former centrist Prime Minister Najib Mikati, the anti-Iran former Justice Minister Ashraf Rifi and the pro-Syria former Defence Minister Abdul Rahim Mourad. These leaders do not want to operate under the "umbrella" of the Future Movement and the Hariri family (see International Crisis Group 2010; Salamy 2014). This kind of competition in the Sunni context is manifested between pan-Arab, religious and national Sunni leaders in Lebanon in an effort to gain control of the masses in the Sunni community in Lebanon.

This has in many instances led to leadership clashes, conflicts between Sunni leaders in Lebanon and in some cases has generated some issues of cooperation and alliances.

3.2.2.1 Framing and Counter-Framing between Najib Mikati and Saad Hariri's Adherents

The competition between the Prime Ministers Najib Mikati and Saad Hariri over the leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon is one of the issues that divide the Lebanese Sunnis at the domestic levels. One research respondent from the Fourteenth March Alliance (FOMA2) states that Najib Mikati could not take over the leadership of the Sunni community from the Hariri family. In his view, Saad Hariri is framed as the strongest Sunni leader in Lebanon.

Another senior member from the Future Movement (FM1) indicates that the comparison between Najib Mikati and the Hariri family is "illogical". In his opinion, the majority of the Lebanese Sunnis used to rally around the Hariri family but this has never been the case with Najib Mikati. He claims that Najib Mikati is only popular in the city of Tripoli, whilst the Hariri family is popular in the whole Lebanese territories.

As part of its framing strategies, the Future Movement frames Najib Mikati as a "pro-Syria leader" who was supported by Syria to create intra-Sunni political divides and to "counter the leadership of the Hariri family". In addition, the framing construction applied by other interviewees show that Najib Mikati is framed as an "ally" with "Hezbollah". These interviewees think that it was mainly through Hezbollah's alliance with Najib Mikati, the latter was able to counter the leadership of the Hariri family and to become the prime minister of Lebanon in 2011. The views of the participants are shown below.

FM1 *“The comparison between Mikati and the Hariri family is illogical. All politicians and political groupings used to rally around Rafik Hariri, but this has never been the case with Najib Mikati. Hariri is popular in all the Lebanese cities, whilst Mikati’s popularity is only limited to Tripoli... Mikati is a pro Syria leader.”*

Non-Sunni3 *“There is a power struggle between the Hariri family and Mikati over the leadership of Sunnis.”*

FM2 *“Syria supported Najib Mikati to counter the Hariri family.”*

Non-Sunni4 *“Hezbollah has Sunni allies like Najib Mikati.”*

FOMA1 *“Mikati could not take over the Hariri family leadership of the Sunni community.”*

In 2011, the tensions between the Eighth March Alliance (EMA) and the Fourteenth March Alliance (FOMA) over the Special Tribunal of Lebanon Regarding Rafik Hariri’s assassination (STL) resulted in the collapse of the Lebanese unity government, which was led by the Prime Minister, Saad Hariri (Saab 2013; Fakhoury 2016). Hezbollah’s ministers and their allies withdrew from the government as an objection to the way in which the STL was operating compelling Saad Hariri to resign (Fakhoury 2016). In June 2011, Najib Mikati formed a new government largely dominated by Hezbollah and their allies (see BBC 2014; Wahlisch and Felsch 2016).

Collectively, the above frames as constructed by the Future Movement’s adherents focus on Sunnis being victims of Shia power as a result of Najib Mikati’s perceived pro-Hezbollah’s policies but other research respondents are of the view that although Najib Mikati was an ally with Hezbollah, he did not abandon the Lebanese Sunnis. On

several occasions, Najib Mikati stood against Hezbollah (Centrist 1 and Non-Sunni4). For example, in 2005, Najib Mikati, during his first term as a prime minister, oversaw the parliamentary elections which resulted in the victory of the Hariri family and the Future Movement (Salamey 2014). In 2012, Najib Mikati, during his second term as a prime minister, refused to stop the funding for the STL despite Hezbollah's objection to it (Centrist 1).

In 2012, and within the context of the Syrian conflict, Najib Mikati's government, approved the "Dissociation Policy" and "B'aabda Declaration", which cement Lebanon's formal stand point to remain neutral regarding the war in Syria (see Baabda Declaration 2012; Wahlisch and Felsch 2016:1; Knudsen 2017). These declarations ban military support for either side of the Syrian conflict but allow humanitarian solidarity and political expression (see B'aabda Declaration 2012 as cited in Hazboun 2016). One Sunni political leader (Centrist1) indicates that during Najib Mikati's premiership, Hezbollah could not explicitly declare their military involvement in Syria. Rather, they declared it two weeks after the resignation of his government. The responses of the respondents are shown in the following quotes.

Non-Sunni4 *"Mikati in the three years he spent as a prime minister stood against Hezbollah on many occasions. He did not abandon his Sunni street. We have to be fair."*

Centrist1 *"When Mikati did not stop the funding of the STL, he did not stab Hezbollah, he was honest with himself. Two weeks after the resignation of Mikati government, Hezbollah explicitly and officially declared its involvement in the Syrian conflict. In*

2005m in the aftermath of Hariri's assassination, in the darkest circumstances, Mikati oversaw the elections and hand power to the FOMA."

EMA1 *"Saad Hariri is like his father Rafik Hariri who thought that he could monopolise the political leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon but there are other Sunni leaders apart from the Hariri family."*

In a nutshell, the above frames and counter-frames are indicative of the competition between Najib Mikati and Saad Hariri over the political leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon. As part of its framing construction, the Future Movement puts an emphasis on Najib Mikati's perceived pro-Hezbollah, Syria and Iran policies as a means to counter-mobilise and de-legitimise his followers, while Najib Mikati's adherents, as part of their counter-framing activities focus on the Future Movement's perceptual "monopoly" of Sunni politics as a means to de-construct its narratives and to challenge its leadership.

3.2.3 The Political Leadership of the Future Movement

Rafik Hariri was the most influential Sunni political leader in Lebanon. His assassination in 2005 resulted in a shock to the Lebanese Sunnis, who interpreted it as an attack on the entire Sunni community in Lebanon (Gambill: 2007; Abdel-Latif 2009; Baumann 2017). Sunnis, irrespective of their affiliations, felt that their existence was threatened and that the assassination was meant to weaken them and to reduce their influence on the Lebanese politics. Therefore, they rallied around the Future Movement and the Hariri family to maintain Sunni solidarity (Baumann 2018). It is in this context that the Future Movement became the largest Sunni grouping in Lebanon and this consensus

building in the Sunni milieu happens for the first time in the modern history of Lebanon.

Recently, the support of Sunnis for the Future Movement has decreased. This has been mainly attributable to the failure of the Future Movement's leadership to counter-balance Hezbollah. The rising influence of Hezbollah on state machinery following the events of May 2008 (see 4.1.2) together with the overthrow of Saad Hariri's-led government by Hezbollah and its allies triggered the emergence of "injustice frames" among the Lebanese Sunnis. Hezbollah's involvement in the killing of Sunnis in Syria together with their perceptual "partisan immunity" (Zelin 2016:62) enhance the narratives of Sunnis that they are being targeted by the Lebanese state (Van Vliet 2016; Meier 2016; Zelin 2016:50). Some Sunnis criticise the Lebanese state of being used to hunt Sunnis whilst turning a blind eye on Shias' armed activism in Lebanon and elsewhere (Daher 2015:219).

3.2.3.1 Injustice Frames of the Lebanese Sunni Actors

The responses of the research respondents show that Sunni actors use different "injustice frames" to attribute what went wrong and who is to blame regarding the perceptual grievances of the Sunni community in Lebanon. They construct injustice frames such as Sunni "anger", "oppression", "frustration", "vulnerability", "humiliation" and "marginalisation" as modes of interpretation for the gradual disempowerment of the Lebanese Sunnis.

Injustice frames are labelled as a "mode of interpretation—prefatory to collective non-compliance, protest, and/or rebellion—generated and adopted by those who come to

define the action of an authority as an unjust” (Gamson 1992; Snow and Benford 2000:615). As the definition suggests, injustice frames are socially constructed beliefs that an identifiable authority (e.g. groupings, states or people) are operating in ways that result in suffering and harm to certain community and/or collectivity (Gamson 1992; Picket and Ryon 2017: 580).

In this research, the operationalisation of injustice frames highlights how the Lebanese Sunnis attribute their perceived weaknesses to injustices unleashed on them by certain groupings (e.g. Hezbollah) or states (e.g. Iran or Syria). Others might occasionally attribute it to the absence of firm and visionary Sunni leadership that is able to empower Sunnis and defend them. These Sunni actors attribute their anger and frustration to Hezbollah's influence on Lebanon and feel vulnerable and humiliated because of the perceptual weaknesses of the Future Movement to preserve the political legacy of Rafik Hariri and to defend Sunnis in the face of Hezbollah.

Contextually, injustice frames result in the Lebanese Sunni actors to adopt mobilising frames aimed at rectifying the perceived injustices on them (Gamson 1992; Picket and Ryon 2017). It carries personal identification with the Sunni collectivity as being a victimised category within the Lebanese society and blames specific domestic and/or foreign actors for the perceived unjustifiable suffering of the Sunni community (see Gamson 1992). The importance of injustice frames in this research is that they collectivise Sunni apparent victimisation and possibly inspire collective action frames

(Gamson 1992; Picket and Ryon 2017). The views of the respondents are shown in the following excerpts.

Haraki Salafist1 *“Sunnis are being oppressed, humiliated and marginalised by Hezbollah. Neither Dar al-Fatwa nor the Future Movement rose up against the injustices facing the Sunnis community.”*

HT1 *“The Lebanese Sunnis are in a state of frustration because they feel that they have no leadership to protect them.”*

J11 *“There is a growing anger in the Sunni community. They feel like they are oppressed in Lebanon.”*

Some respondents go further in their framing construction to describe the Lebanese Sunnis, metaphorically, as a “minority” despite being the largest religious community in Lebanon (see figure 1.1). The using of the metaphor “minority” might not objectively correspond to the situation of Sunnis in the Lebanese political system but it shows how some Sunni actors would like the story of the Lebanese Sunnis to be manifested and narrated. There is a growing perception among some Sunnis that they are threatened and overwhelmed by the influence of Hezbollah on Lebanon. One respondent from the *Haraki Salafists* (*Haraki Salafist1*) argues that the policies of the Future Movement resulted in Sunni problematized states of affairs and led to a number of Sunni supporters to leave them. He further indicates that the Future Movement is in denial regarding Sunni disempowerment and lacks a comprehensive strategy on how to confront Hezbollah.

Collectively, some Sunni actors are of the views that the Sunni community in Lebanon lacks a credible Sunni leadership that identifies with Sunnis, protects them and lives up to their expectations. In their opinion, the Future Movement is losing connection with Sunnis by falling “silent” on the perceptual injustices of Hezbollah against Sunnis. The views of the respondents are shown in the following excerpts.

Haraki Salafist1 *“The Future Movement practises led to Sunni bad conditions in Lebanon. Their inability to defend the oppressed Sunnis, led to a gap between them and their supporters.”*

FM3 *“The physiological impact [of May 2008] on the Lebanese Sunnis has been massive to the extent that Sunnis, though a major sect in Lebanon felt like they are a minority sect... they felt frustrated; they felt vulnerable.”*

FOMA2 *“Meanwhile, there is no leadership that could live up to the aspirations of the Lebanese Sunnis.”*

HT1 *“The Future Movement are silent on the oppression against the Lebanese Sunnis.”*

The above analysis shows that some Sunni respondents re-constitute the ways in which the political struggle between the Future Movement and Hezbollah is narrated and framed. For these Sunnis, the struggle between Hezbollah and the Future Movement is not framed in political terms as a struggle between two rival parties within the Lebanese political system. Rather, it is framed through “sectarian lenses” as a struggle between Sunnis and Shias. This explains why one respondent from the *Haraki* Salafists frames Hezbollah’s project as “targeting the existence of Sunnis”, referring to the sectarian nature of Hezbollah’s activism and transforming Sunni

political weaknesses into a sectarian threat unleashed on them by Hezbollah. The view of the respondent is presented below.

Haraki Salafist1 *“The Iranian project... is targeting the existence of Sunnis in Lebanon.”*

Collectively, the great strength of the *Haraki* Salafists’ framing strategies lies in their ability, in times of sectarian tensions between Sunnis and Shias to develop a sense of Sunni solidarity and to embrace anti-Shia political and religious narratives (Abdel-Latif 2008). The perceived Lebanese Sunni injustices, as a result of Hezbollah’s dominance over Lebanon, might serve as a catalyst for recruitment, mobilisation and collective action frames (see Klandermans 1984:586; Johnston 1994). The collective articulation of anger could link personal Sunni identity with collective Sunni identity and trigger the emergence of a “collectivity-cum-movement” (Johnston 1994:284). For instance, Hezbollah’s military involvement in Syria against the mostly Sunni Syrian population resulted in the Salafist cleric Salim al-Rafi’i to call Sunnis to wage jihad against Hezbollah inside Syria (Alami 2014). In response, an approximately 200 Sunni fighters went to Syria to fight against the Syrian regime, Hezbollah and their allies (see Alami 2014).

3.2.4 Radicalisation of Sunnis as a Result of the Perceptual Absence of Sunni Leadership

Hezbollah’s rising influence on Lebanon and the lack of credible and strong Sunni leadership to counter-balance Hezbollah contributed to Sunni disenchantment and frustration (Daher 2015; Zelin 2016). In addition, the self-imposed exile of Saad Hariri (the leader of the Future Movement) from Lebanon for security purposes in 2011 left

the Lebanese Sunnis feel abandoned and vulnerable to new perceptions and narratives (Daher 2015). These three factors primarily resulted in identity crisis among the Lebanese Sunnis and precipitated the emergence of radical Sunni groupings and leaders who criticise the Future Movement's failure to act and alternatively, introduce themselves as guardians of the Sunni community in Lebanon (Rougier 2015; Khashan 2015; Meier and Di Peri 2017).

One of the research respondents from the League of Muslim Scholars (LMS1) indicates that the events of May 2008 strengthened the role of religious-based Sunni groupings in Lebanon because the Future Movement was unable to defend Sunnis. In his opinion, the events of May 2008 left Sunnis vulnerable to sectarian narratives and opened the door to the rise of Sunni radicalism and anti-statist narratives. Another respondent from the Future Movement (FM2) admits that as a result of Hezbollah's dominance in Lebanon, some Sunnis have given up national moderate narratives and resorted to sectarianism and radicalism under the pretext of defending "Sunnism". He indicates that the Future Movement has been able to control the Sunni arena. Yet, he suggests that Hezbollah's continuous dominance over Lebanon might radicalise Sunnis. The views of the interviewees are shown below.

LMS1 *"The May events were shocking for the Lebanese Sunnis. They strengthened the role of Islamist Sunni movements because the Future Movement, the guardian of Sunnis was unable to do anything in the face of Hezbollah, this justified Islamist stance to play a greater role in the Sunni arena."*

FM2 *"Some Sunnis have given up national postures and metamorphosed to sectarian postures. We should control these sentiments before they turn into "a Sunni solidarity"*

in the face of Shias and the Lebanese state. Until now, the political leadership of the Sunni community the Future Movement managed to control the Sunni street to a great extent. But if the same condition exists for three, four, or five years, Sunnis will resort to armed activism.”

The case of Ahmad al-Assir (see Rabil 2014; Zelin 2016; Wilkins 2016) exemplifies how Hezbollah’s dominance over Lebanon radicalised some Sunnis. The purpose of al-Assir’s movement was to denounce Hezbollah’s military involvement in Syria and to criticise Iran’s growing influence on Lebanon (Zelin 2016; Meier and Di Peri 2017). Al-Assir’s movement appealed to disfranchised Sunnis who had lost confidence in the ability of the Future Movement to defend Sunnis, to unify them and to counter Hezbollah politically and militarily (Meier and Di Peri 2017).

In 2011, al-Assir’s struggle against Hezbollah was non-violent and mainly political. It focused on the demand for national consensus against Hezbollah’s intervention in Syria. Later on, his struggle turned violent as a result of the intense involvement of Hezbollah in Syria. In June, 2013, the city of Sidon, South Lebanon witnessed deadly clashes between Ahmad al-Assir’s movement, Hezbollah and the Lebanese army. The Lebanese army in cooperation with Hezbollah entered ‘Abra (al-Assir’s stronghold) and defeated him. Collectively, al-Assir’s movement has become a symbol of the Lebanese Sunni grievances which have been translated into political tensions and violent conflicts in order to be recognised and heard (Rabil 2014; Zelin 2016; Meier and Di Peri 2017).

3.2.5 The Absence of Sunni Militias as a Result of the Moderate

Approach to National Issues

As part of its frame amplification strategies to appeal to Sunni and non-Sunni constituents, the Future Movement's participants state that they are "unarmed organisation" and their leadership approach to national issues is "moderate". In their opinion, neither the Future Movement nor the bulks of the Lebanese Sunnis are convinced about establishing a Sunni militia because of its negative impact on Sunnis. Moreover, the respondents indicate that Hezbollah's armed activism is wrong but it is also wrong to respond by militarising Sunnis. The views of the respondents are presented below.

FM2 *"We are unarmed organisation."*

FM1 *"Firstly, neither we the Future Movement nor the bulk of the Lebanese Sunnis are convinced about establishing a Sunni militia. How can I throw people into destruction? Secondly, do not compare me with Hezbollah. Our rivals say: look at Hezbollah. If you are convinced about Hezbollah, join them! What Hezbollah is doing is wrong. So if I do exactly like them by creating a militia does it make it right? It is illogical."*

One respondent from the Future Movement (FM1) admits that all seeds of frustration, extremism and hatred are growing amongst the Lebanese Sunnis because of Iran's dominance in the region (Iraq, Syria and Lebanon). Yet, he claims that the number of the Lebanese Sunnis who supported or joined radical Sunni groupings is insignificant as opposed to Hezbollah, which sends thousands of people to fight inside and outside Lebanon. The view of the respondent is shown in the following excerpt.

FM1 *“All the seeds of frustrations, extremism and hatred are growing amongst the Lebanese Sunnis... when Sunnis are being oppressed for the last 8 years; Iran has dominated Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Palestine and Yemen, Sunnis would resort to deadly options. Yet, we managed through our moderate approach to control the situation in Lebanon so far and the number of Sunnis who joined radical groupings is marginal unlike Hezbollah which sends thousands of people to fight inside and outside the Lebanese borders.”*

Collectively, the above narratives as constructed by the Future Movement are meant to convince the Sunni public that it was only through its “moderate approach” to national issues, the Sunni arena was controlled and Sunnis refrained from resorting to extremism, radicalism and armed activism. Some respondents are of the view that the strength of the Future Movement’s frames in the Lebanese politics lies in its ability to transcend religious affiliations. In their opinion, the Future Movement’s moderate narratives to national issues are essential for inter-communal co-existence in Lebanon because it puts national affiliation over religious affiliation. Other respondents agree with the Future Movement’s frames on the “de-militarisation” of Sunnis. They are of the view that resisting Hezbollah militarily is impossible due to Hezbollah’s power.

One Shia religious leader (Non-Sunni⁵) indicates that the Future Movement’s leadership decision regarding the de-militarisation of Sunnis is not framed as a sign of “weakness” but rather as a sign of “wisdom” because the military confrontation with Hezbollah will lead to civil unrest in Lebanon and jeopardise the coexistence between Sunnis and Shias. Another respondent from the *Haraki* Salafists (*Haraki* Salafists¹) claims that the militarisation of Sunnis is far from Saudi Arabia’s thinking and

accordingly, the Future Movement. In his view, Saad Hariri is “one of the most supportive” and “believers of state in the face of militias” despite his disagreement with the Future Movement’s approach to the Sunni politics. The views of the participants are presented in the following excerpts.

FM3 *“The power of the Sunni community is to be part of the Lebanese society... therefore, on the national level, we identify ourselves as a Lebanese national non-sectarian grouping.”*

FM1 *“If the Future Movement had not been moderate, Sunnis would have resorted to deadly options.”*

FOMA1 *“The Future Movement is a guarantor for Muslim Christian co-existence because its national affiliation prevails over its religious affiliation.”*

Non-Sunni1 *“Resisting Hezbollah was neither possible nor desirable.”*

Non-Sunni5 *“What the Sunni community did was extremely wise in that they did not resort for confrontation, had confrontations occurred, we would have ended up like Iraq... It is not weakness, because weakness would have occurred if they had been drifted to a Sunni/Shia conflict.”*

Haraki Salafists1 *“We have realised that militarising Sunnis is very far from Saudi Arabia’s thinking and Hariri’s policy. Hariri has been one of the most supportive, most believers of state in the face of militias.”*

Collectively, the above phrases show that as part of its frame amplification strategies, the Future Movement institutionalises its narrative techniques as a means to win

inter- and intra-communal public supports. These narratives are achieved through the movement's advocacy of state legitimacy in the face of militias. They are also achieved through the movement's construction of the "Lebanese-First" national identity, "moderation" and its repugnance to "sectarianism" and "militarisation". It is on these wheels that the Future Movement frames its activities with the hope to move beyond religious rhetoric to the marketization of moderate narratives that can bring about national cohesion in Lebanon.

3.2.6 Frame Resonance and Inadequate Trust for the Political Leadership of the Future Movement

The use of "frame resonance" in this research enables the researcher to examine the effectiveness of the Lebanese Sunni leaders' frames and the extent to which their framing construction "resonate" with targeted Sunni audience. Drawing on Snow and Benford (2000: 619-20), two interacting dimensions which account for resonance of frames have been identified: "credibility of the proffered frame" and "its relative salience". In this section, the research examines the concept of frame credibility and how it is applied in this research.

3.2.6.1 Frame Credibility

The credibility in this context according to Snow and Benford (2000: 619-20) is affected by three factors: "frame consistency", "credibility of frame articulators or claims makers" and "empirical credibility" (Snow and Benford 2000:619-20). Of

relevance to this section is the concept of “credibility of frame articulators or claims makers”.

As the data (in 3.2.2) reveals, the Future Movement is the leading Sunni grouping in Lebanon. The research examines the credibility of the Future Movement frames on political issues pertaining to the Sunni public as perceived by their Sunni rivals and other Lebanese political actors. Clearly, these issues of frame credibility are contestable and open to debates and differential interpretations among the Lebanese political actors (Snow 2013).

The credibility of Sunni leaders’ frames in Lebanon is contingent on their ability to unify Sunnis and to understand their grievances, problems and struggles (Einwohner 2007:1310; Robenett 2013:690). Sunni leaders with close links to constituents and followers can generate frames that are credible to the Sunni population (Morris and Staggenborg 2007:184).

In this research, two Sunni respondents from the Tawheed Movement (TAM1) and *Haraki* Salafists (*Haraki* Salafists1) indicate that the Future Movement’s frames are not credible. They hold the view that the Future Movement is not serving the interests of the Lebanese Sunnis. Rather, it uses them as a tool to serve its political interests. Another respondent from Hizb ut-Tahrir’s (HT1) indicates that the Future Movement is “in hostility with Islam” and it is false to frame it as a movement that represents the Lebanese Sunnis.

Collectively, all these respondents are of the view that that the Lebanese Sunnis have made a mistake when they trusted the Future Movement; and therefore, they appeal for a change in the political leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon. The views of the respondents are shown in the following excerpts.

Haraki Salafists1 *“The Future Movement is secular par excellence... it does not want to see religion outside the mosque... it seeks to stay away from Islamists... and does not deal with them except for what it serves its interests.”*

TAM1 *“The Future Movement... wants to use the Sunnis majority to serve the interest of its political project and not the interest of Sunnis. I swear to God, if their project had been based on serving people... I would have had no problem. The project is built on the basis of investing in people for political purposes.”*

HT1 *“The Future Movement is a secular current that is in hostility with Islam to a great extent. It is false to classify them as a grouping represents the Lebanese Sunnis. Those who are committed to Islam would believe that the Future Movement is far from Islam.”*

MP1 *“Sunnis trusted the Future Movement but they were wrong. We need a change. We need to find out an alternative leadership to advance Sunnis and reject the current situation.”*

The above analysis shows that the Future Movement’s framers are often criticised for being totalitarian or driven by *realpolitik*, for using the sectarian card – Sunni in this case – as a means to achieve political gains (International Crisis Group 2010; Rabil

2014). For instance, the Future movement capitalised on Salafists' anti-Hezbollah narratives and their ability to mobilise Sunnis against Shias during its political struggle with Hezbollah (Abdel-Latif 2008). Salafists' votes enabled the Future Movement to achieve decisive triumphs in the parliamentary elections in 2005 and 2009 (see Abdel-Latif 2008; Abdel-Latif 2009; Rabil 2014). However, the problem is that some religious-based Sunnis feel that they are being used by the Future Movement in its political conflicts with its rivals but when these Sunnis face problem with Hezbollah or the Lebanese state, the Future Movement abandons them or remains silent (Abdel-Latif 2009).

3.2.7 Declining Popularity of the Future Movement

The Future Movement, as said earlier (see 3.2.2) is still the largest Sunni grouping in Lebanon. However, a comparison between the results of the last two parliamentary elections in 2009 and 2018 shows that the Future Movement lost over a third of its parliamentary seats. The number of the Future Movement MPs in the Lebanese parliament decreased from thirty-three (33) in 2009 to twenty-one (21) in 2018 (Perry, Bassam and Francis 07/05/2018).

Some respondents think that the declining popularity of the Future Movement is attributable to its perceptual unwillingness to cooperate with others. They claim that the Future Movement does not want to cooperate with other Sunni groups and rather seeks to monopolise the Sunni politics. This perception leads some Sunnis to think that the Future Movement's frames are not credible. One Sunni respondent from the Fourteenth March Alliance (FOMA2) states that despite his support for the Future

Movement, the latter does not like to cooperate with other Sunni counterparts. In his view, for the Future Movement to maintain its leadership of the Sunni politics, it should “cooperate” with other Sunni groups and leaders.

Similarly, one former Shia minister (Non-Sunni2) indicates that Saad Hariri does not seem to be interested in cooperating with other Sunnis especially religious-based Sunnis. In his view, the presence of religious-based Sunni groupings in Lebanon cannot be ignored, and therefore, he suggests that Hariri should back religious-based Sunni groupings in Lebanon to maintain his leadership of the Sunni community.

These frames, however, are counter-framed by one respondent from the Future Movement (FM3) who states that “we [the Future Movement] have never thought at any moment to monopolise the Sunni street”, and “those who want to compete against us can do so”. He further indicates that unlike Hezbollah, the Future Movement has no armed power to monopolise Sunni politics and abolish its rivals, and if the movement had monopolised the Sunni politics, Hezbollah would not have been able to drive Saad Hariri out of the government and bring his rival Najib Mikati as a prime minister in 2011. The responses of the respondents are shown below.

FOMA1 *“I had the impression that I could coordinate with the Future Movement and be an ally with them because of Hariri’s legacy and the Future Movement’s policy line. But what I found is that the Future Movement does not like to co-operate. Nowadays, if you want to lead the Sunni street you need to coordinate with other Sunnis.”*

Non-Sunni2 *“You cannot ignore in the presence of Islamists in Sunni scene... The main support in the Sunni street is for Saad Hariri but Hariri does not seem to be interested in co-operation with other Sunnis. Hariri should back Islamist. If he did that, he would possess 90-95% of the Sunni street.”*

FM3 *“we have never thought at any moment to monopolise the Sunni street, those who want to compete against us can do so. I have neither armed nor political power to abolish others. When Hezbollah drove us out of the government and brought Mikati as a Prime Minister.”*

The above analysis shows the concerns of Sunnis about consolidating their identity and unity in opposition to a recalcitrant self-image. It also shows that religious-based Sunni groups do not oppose the political leadership of the Future Movement *per se*, but they want the letter to be attached to the Sunni milieu and to cooperate with other Sunni groups and leaders in Lebanon.

3.2.7.1 Frame Bridging between the Lebanese Salafists and the Future

Movement

Flowing from the above discussion (in 3.2.7), it seems that there are some religious Sunnis who are willing to engage in the process of “frame bridging” with the Future Movement. Frame bridging refers to “the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem” (Snow et al. 1986:467). The effectiveness of frame bridging is synonymous with the ability of Sunni actors to act as brokers and to bring together previously unconnected networks in order to generate new understandings and guide collective actions (Snow et al. 1986; Goodwin and Jasper 2009:94).

As part of their frame bridging narratives, one Sunni leader from the *Haraki* Salafists (*Haraki* Salafists1) indicates that “it is not in the interest of the Lebanese Sunnis to “confront the Future Movement”. He further indicates that despite their considerable disagreements with the Future Movement, they will not miss any chance to “cooperate with them.” The views of the research respondent are shown in the following excerpt.

Haraki Salafists1 “We still believe that it is not in the interests of the Lebanese Sunnis to confront the Future Movement... whilst Iran is mobilising against Sunnis. Despite arrogance... which characterises some of the Future Movement’s leaders, we will not miss any chance to cooperate with them.”

On several occasions, the *Haraki* Salafists expressed their willingness to cooperate with the Future Movement irrespective of their ideological differences (Imad 2013; Rabil 2014). The cooperation is understandable, among other things, in the context of maintaining a collective Sunni identity and re-consolidating the Sunni rank under the leadership of the Future Movement (Abdel-Latif: 2009). The necessity of a united Sunni defence against Hezbollah’s threat on the Lebanese Sunnis appeared to transcend ideological differences between the Future Movement and *Haraki* Salafists (see Zald and McCarthy 1979:23-24).

3.2.8 Frame Consistency of Sunni Leadership

The second factor which accounts for the credibility of framing construction is the concept of frame consistency (Snow and Benford 2000). In this research, the “consistency” between the Future Movement articulated claims, beliefs and their actions are examined. The research examines how the Lebanese political actors perceive the consistency of the Future Movement frames and whether or not there are contradictions between what it says and what it does.

The usage of framing theory shows that the inconsistency between what the Future Movement believes or claims and what it actually does could possibly affect the resonance of its frames. The mobilising potency of frames is contingent on the congruency between the framers’ articulated beliefs and their actions (Snow and Benford 2000). In this research, some of the research respondents are of the view that the Future Movement’s cooperation with Hezbollah contradicts its anti-Hezbollah’s framing construction. They indicate that it is unacceptable for the Future Movement to take part in Lebanese governments which cooperate with Hezbollah, serve their interests and accuse Sunnis of terrorism. The responses of the respondents are provided in the following excerpts.

FOMA2 *“It is unacceptable to take part in governments that co-operate with Hezbollah and accuses Sunnis of terrorism.”*

MP1 *“Why did the Future Movement form a government with Hezbollah? Hezbollah kills the Syrians and brings terrorism to Lebanon. Sunnis in Lebanon are lost. They are waiting for a true leadership.”*

Sunni framings came as a reflection of the Future Movement's concessions to the Eighth March Alliance (EMA) by nominating their candidates (Suleiman Franjeh and Michel Aoun) in the presidential elections; by taking part in the Lebanese governments with Hezbollah; and by cooperating with the EMA in the municipal polls in Beirut and Tripoli (e.g. the AMAL Movement and al-Ahbash) (Rida 09/07/2016; nna-leb.gov.lb 21/09/2016; Kechichian 30/05/2016; An-Nahar Newspaper 30/05/2016). Similarly, in 2005, Saad Hariri, the head of the Future Movement, accused Syria of the assassination of his father (see Milton-Edwards 2011, Najem 2012; Salamey 2014). Yet, in 2009, as part of the Saudi Arabian and Syrian reconciliation, Saad Hariri visited Syria and withdrew his accusations against them of having arranged the assassination of his father (Salamey 2014). The inconsistency between the Future Movement's anti-Syria and anti-Iran articulated beliefs and its actual practises may affect the resonance of its frames and result in a sense of inauthenticity among its supporters (Gecas 2000).

3.2.8.1 Hezbollah's Cooperation with the Future Movement

Hezbollah's dominance over Lebanon together with the spill over of the war in Syria on Lebanon deepened Sunni and Shia tensions and constituted serious challenges to the Future Movement's leadership and Hezbollah. These developments prompted the two parties to engage in mutual understanding and dialogue in order to mitigate sectarian Sunni and Shia tensions in Lebanon and to minimise the impact of the war in Syria on Lebanon (van Vliet 2016). One respondent from the Future Movement (FM1) indicates that despite its opposition to Hezbollah, it engages in a dialogue with them to maintain stability and coexistence in Lebanon. In his view, the dialogue with

Hezbollah helped Lebanon to avoid the worst case scenarios that the Lebanese people were afraid of. The view of the Future's Movement respondent is shown below.

FM1 *"The Future Movement despite opposition to Hezbollah, engages in a dialogue with Hezbollah to maintain stability and coexistence in Lebanon... we took part at the current government with Hezbollah because we want stability and I think we succeeded because the worst scenarios that people were afraid of did not happen."*

The Future Movement's cooperation with Hezbollah has been linked to the new developments in the Sunni arena. On the one hand, the Future Movement feared that the rise of radical Sunni leaders and groupings in Lebanon in response to Hezbollah's dominance in Lebanon may contest their monopolisation of the political leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon (van Vliet 2016:98). On the other hand, Hezbollah acknowledged that they made a mistake in their approach with the Future Movement (Noe 2014). The displacement of Saad Hariri's-led government in 2011 resulted in the weakness of the Future Movement and the rise of Sunni radicalism and anti-statist narratives. It also exposed Hezbollah to serious threats (Noe 2014). The cooperation between the Future Movement and Hezbollah was vital for ending years of sectarian tensions between the two sides (Wahlisch and Flesch 2016:7).

This dialogue has been proven temporarily effective in maintaining political stability in Lebanon and preventing terrorist attacks from radical groups (Zelin 2016). Yet, Zelin (2016:62) argues that this cooperation "does not address the root causes of Sunni radicalisation and violence: the negative perception of Hezbollah's "expansionism" and the assistance to the Assad regime in fighting radical Sunnis next door in Syria" (Zalin 2016:62). These issues are indeed important to be addressed in order to

maintain a long-lasting co-existence between Sunnis and Hezbollah. The Future Movement's dominance of the leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon could be at stake as long as it is unable to craft a strategy to counter Hezbollah's dominance in the Lebanese politics.

3.2.9 The Religious Leadership of Dar al-Fatwa

Sunni religious institutions and leaders often play an important role in Lebanon's public life due to the nature of Lebanon's confessional politics, where commitment to the Lebanese nation often comes after loyalty to one's religion or sect (el-Husseini 2004). Sunni religious leaders in this context have a great say on Sunni religious affairs and their role in the Sunni community in Lebanon is not restricted to religion but extended to politics (Skovgaard-Petersen 1996).

The Sunni religious establishment in Lebanon has been officially represented by a state institute known as Dar al-Fatwa, which is recognised by the Lebanese state as the highest religious Sunni office in Lebanon for managing the Lebanese Sunni religious and legal affairs (Skovgaard-Petersen 1996; Rougier 2007:36). This institute is responsible for issuing formal legal and religious opinions (*fatawa*) relating to the Sunni community, overseeing religious Sunni scholars and mosques and providing Islamic teaching and guidance (Lefevre 2015). Dar al-Fatwa is led by the Grand Mufti of the Lebanese Republic, who is recognised as the main religious leader of the Lebanese Sunnis in Lebanon and their representative before the Lebanese state (Dar al Fatwa 2015).

3.2.9.1 Influence of the Future Movement on Dar al-Fatwa

An essential leadership skill is the ability of Dar al-Fatwa to articulate the multi-layered and at times opposed social and political interests of Sunnis in Lebanon (Morris and Staggenborg 2007:184; Mische 2003:272). One respondent from al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya (JI1) frames Dar al-Fatwa as the "umbrella", which protects and unifies the Lebanese Sunnis when they are divided. Yet, he indicates that Dar al-Fatwa should remain neutral regarding intra-Sunni political contestations in Lebanon.

The politicisation of Dar al-Fatwa, of being under the Future Movement's sphere of influence has affected the credibility of its proffered frames. This is because not all of the Lebanese Sunnis are identified with the Future Movement. The narratives of Sunni participants attribute the weaknesses of Dar al-Fatwa to the influence of the Future Movement. One research participant from the Future Movement (FM1) admits that the movement has an influence on Dar al-Fatwa. Another research participant from Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT1) goes further to frame Dar al-Fatwa as an "echo" of the Future Movement. Collectively, these respondents are of the view that both the Mufti and Dar al-Fatwa are completely "under the control" of the Future Movement.

Flowing from the above, it appears that some Sunni actors have the perception that the frames of Dar al-Fatwa are not credible. This is because they think that Dar al-Fatwa in the articulation of its frames does not correspond to the expectations of Sunnis and would not be able to resonate with them as long as its framing activities are influenced by Sunni political leaders. The understanding of some participants is that the Hariri family selected a weak Mufti in order to maintain their influence on Sunni power dynamics. One respondent from the Eighth March Alliance (EMA1) indicates that the former Lebanese Mufti Mohammad Qabbani was a close ally with

Rafik Hariri and used to get his approval before making political statements. In his opinion, the Mufti Qabbani is not framed as the “Mufti of the Lebanese Sunnis” but rather as the “Mufti of the Future Movement”. The views of the participants are presented in the following excerpts.

FM1 *“The Future Movement has an influence on Dar al-Fatwa.”*

HT1 *“Dar al-Fatwa is an echo of the Future Movement.”*

Haraki Salafists1 *“Hariri’s dominance on Dar al-Fatwa is complete.”*

Non-Sunni2 *“Dar al-Fatwa is under the control of Hariri. The Mufti is under the control of Hariri.”*

LMS1 *“Dar al-Fatwa’s weaknesses are attributed to political dominance over the mufti office. Dar al-Fatwa shall be an independent authority.”*

MP1 *“Dar al-Fatwa should not be dictated by political leaders.”*

EMA2 *“If the Mufti Qabbani wanted to make a statement, he would phone Rafik Hariri to get his blessing and approval. Qabbani was a close ally with Hariri. Unlike the Mufti Khalid who did not allow the turban of the Mufti to be under the influence of anybody even Syria... Qabbani was a close ally with Hariri... He used to be called the own Mufti of the Future Movement instead of being called the Mufti of the Lebanese Republic.”*

J11 *“Dar al-Fatwa is the official religious Sunni institution. It is wrong when Dar al-Fatwa takes part in Sunni politics... it should not take sides in the intra-Sunni political affairs. Dar al-Fatwa is the umbrella that unifies Sunnis when they are divided.”*

UP1 *“Hariri, therefore, brought a weak Mufti, Muhammad Rashid Qabbani, in order to maintain his influence on Dar al-Fatwa.”*

The weakness of Dar al-Fatwa is mainly attributable to the dominance of Rafik Hariri, who seemed to prevent the potential of electing a strong Mufti, who could challenge his power over the Sunni community (el-Husseini 2004; Skovgaard-Petersen 2004). Dar al-Fatwa had been under Rafik Hariri’s sphere of influence since Qabbani’s election in 1996 until Hariri’s assassination in 2005 (Choucair 2015). During Hariri’s era, the role of Dar al-Fatwa was in line with Hariri’s policy line and it seems fair to suggest that the impact of the post of the prime minister as a Sunni authority exceeded that of the Mufti not only in politics but also in legal, administrative and financial affairs pertinent to the Sunni community in Lebanon.

3.2.9.2 Influence of External Players on Dar al-Fatwa

The impact of external players is another issue affecting the credibility of Dar al-Fatwa’s frames. The data (in 4.2.1) shows that Iran broke through Dar al-Fatwa during the leadership of the former Mufti Mohammad Qabbani. In addition, the data (in 4.4.2) indicates that following the assassination of the Mufti Hassan Khalid in 1989, Dar al-Fatwa was under the control of Syria until its withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005. Moreover, Saudi Arabia had an influence on the elections of the current Mufti of Lebanon Abdul Latif Derian (Lefevre 2015; Choucair 2015). The objective was to marginalise political Islam groupings (e.g. al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya) and to re-shape the role of Dar al-Fatwa to adopt a politically and religiously moderate discourse in the face of growing “radical” tendencies in the Sunni community in Lebanon (Lefevre 2015; Choucair 2015).

3.2.9.3 Politicisation of Dar al-Fatwa's Elections

The weakness of Dar al-Fatwa has also been attributable by some participants to the dominance of current and former Sunni prime ministers on the elections of Muftis. Two respondents from the League of Muslim Scholars (LMS1) and *Haraki* Salafists (*Haraki* Salafists1) indicate that the politicisation of Dar al-Fatwa's elections weakened Dar al-Fatwa and made it susceptible to Sunni political leaders' rivalry and interests. In their views, the election of Muftis should be democratic and religious leaders should be allowed to take part. The views of the interviewees are shown in the following excerpts.

LMS1 *"Dar al-Fatwa's weakness is attributed to political dominance over the mufti's elections... appointing a mufti is subjected to politicians. This would generally weaken Dar al-Fatwa. The mufti shall be elected by people of religious knowledge not by politicians."*

Haraki Salafists1 *"The selection of the current Mufti Derian was purely political. The League of Muslim Scholars tried very hard that there should have been a free choice/democratic elections... However, Sunnis leaders refused the request of the League of Muslim Scholars and insisted to select Derian."*

The current Mufti of Lebanon Abdul Latif Derian was elected by an electoral body consisting of 109 members including (the Sunni prime minister, former Sunni prime ministers, Sunni ministers and Sunnis MPs) (Lefevre 2015). The election of Derian was criticised by some Sunnis due to the interference of Sunni political leaders in religious matters (Lefevre 2015). This means that if political rivalry within Sunni political leaders

exists, the process under which the Mufti is selected would be politicised and Dar al-Fatwa's autonomy would be at stake (el-Husseini 2012).

3.2.9.4 Consequences of the Perceived Failure of Dar al-Fatwa to Oversee Sunni Affairs

The failure of Dar al-Fatwa to manage Sunni religious affairs will give other Sunni groupings and leaders the opportunity to emerge, to grow up and to challenge the leadership of Dar al-Fatwa. One Sunni respondent (MP1) notes that Dar al-Fatwa's responses on the problems facing the Lebanese Sunnis remains inadequate. He indicates that Sunnis are being detained by the Lebanese government and Dar al-Fatwa is not able to end the injustices on them. Indeed, one respondent from Dar al-Fatwa (DF) admits that Dar al-Fatwa was "absent" for approximately quarter a century. This is due to external interferences namely from Iran and Syria (see 4.2.1 and 4.4.2). In his opinion, the ability of Dar al-Fatwa to defend Sunnis will restore its role and minimise the role of its Sunni rivals. The views of the participants are presented below.

Non-Sunni5 *"When official religious institutions from all sects do not play their supposed role in guidance, religious education and overseeing religious affairs, Islamist parties will grow."*

DF1 *"The absence of Dar al-Fatwa or the inability of the Mufti to play his role for approximately 25 years, gave other parties roles to play. Now we have a new Mufti. So this does not mean that others Sunnis party will no longer play a role but their role will be minimised."*

MP1 *"It is unacceptable that Dar al-Fatwa witnesses how the Lebanese Sunnis are being arrested and targeted while its response remain inadequate... instead it talks about..."*

Christians' rights in Iraq... How about Muslims rights in Lebanon? I think there is a problem. The priority is to end the injustice of Sunnis who are detained in a suspicious manner."

The above analysis shows that the legitimacy of Dar al-Fatwa is counter-framed by some Sunnis, who see it as a subservient to the Future Movement. The weakness of Dar al-Fatwa left many Sunnis without a religious leadership to follow. In addition, Dar al-Fatwa has no supervision over all religious groupings and organisations in Lebanon (Rougier 2007; Lefevre 2014). Thus, Dar al-Fatwa, through its politicisation and weak leadership has been implicated in the emergence of more divided and radicalised Sunni groups and leaders in Lebanon (see Abdel-Latif 2008).

3.2.10 The League of Muslim Scholars in the Leadership Struggle of Sunnis in Lebanon

The League of Muslim Scholars emerged in response to the failure of Dar al-Fatwa to manage Sunni religious affairs. It is the embodiment of how the failure of Dar al-Fatwa to defend Sunnis contributes to the emergence of rival Sunni bodies, which claim to champion the Sunni cause. The external and internal interferences in Dar al-Fatwa's leadership has not given the latter the opportunity to independently make decisive decisions on crucial issues facing the Sunni community in Lebanon (International Crisis Group 2010; Lefevre 2014; Rabil 2014). This includes the stance on Hezbollah, the issue of Islamic detainees in the Lebanese prisons and intra-Sunni contestations in Lebanon.

These developments led to some Sunnis to lose trust in their religious leadership, and equally importantly, gave the League of Muslim Scholars and similar Sunni organisations the opportunity to challenge the leadership of Dar al-Fatwa and to play a greater role in the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon (Lefevre 2015). The League of Muslim Scholars seeks to fill in the vacuum left by Dar al-Fatwa at the national and Sunni levels and hopes to build a political identity that resonates with the Sunni community in Lebanon (Lefevre 2014:10).

The League of Muslim Scholars has established itself as an important player in the Sunni politics. It was able to gain the trust of several Sunnis due to its close links with Sunni concerns and problems and its quest for finding solutions that would restore Sunni's dignity and enhance their role in the Lebanese political system. The perceived autonomy of the League of Muslim Scholars of not being affiliated with political parties or funded by external forces (the LMS 2012a) has arguably strengthened the credibility of its frames (see 3.2.4).

In this research, one respondent from the League of Muslim Scholars (LMS1) indicates that their presence in the Sunni arena is not welcomed by some Sunnis who think that they are competing with the Future Movement and Dar al-Fatwa over the leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon. He also indicates that other religious communities in Lebanon do not welcome their presence on the ground that they are not secular but rather representing the actual mood of the Lebanese Sunnis. The respondent clarifies that the role of the League of Muslim Scholars is not to challenge Dar al-Fatwa but to "complement" it. He also clarifies that Dar al-Fatwa is the main institution for the

Lebanese Sunnis. However, in his view, the League of Muslim Scholars would only emerge when Dar al-Fatwa fails in its duties regarding the Lebanese Sunnis.

Likewise, a *Haraki* Salafist research participant contends that if Dar al-Fatwa had played its supposed role in defending the rights of the Lebanese Sunnis, the League of Muslim Scholars would not have been established. He states that there are restrictions on Dar al-Fatwa because it is a politicised state institution and is linked with Sunni political leaders. However, the participant claims that, since its inception, the League of Muslim Scholars has committed itself to remain independent.

Collectively, these respondents are of the view that the League of Muslim Scholars' perceptual "scholarly" and "apolitical" nature enable it to operate more freely as opposed to Dar al-Fatwa, and this explains why its framing construction are credible and resonate with the Sunni public more than the Future Movement or Dar al-Fatwa. However, the respondents indicate that the League of Muslim Scholars' articulated frames about the Sunni community in Lebanon shall be translated into actions (See JI1). The views of the respondents are shown in the following excerpts.

LMS1 *"The Future Movement thinks that the League of Muslim Scholars is competing with it. Dar al-Fatwa may see that the League is competing with it. Some Sunnis find the League's presence undesirable because it is competing with them. In the non-Sunni arenas, its presence is also undesirable because it expresses the Sunnis mood. The League of Muslim Scholars complements Dar al-Fatwa. The League would appear in case Dar al-Fatwa failed to fulfil its duties... Dar al-Fatwa is the main body."*

Haraki Salafists¹ *“Had Dar al-Fatwa... done their duties, there would not have been any need for the formation of the League of Muslim Scholars. People know that Dar al-Fatwa failed to do their duties and this prompted the League to respond. There are restrictions on Dar al-Fatwa because it an official body and its linked with the political leadership...However, the League of Muslim Scholars since the beginning has committed itself to be independent.”*

J11 *“Sunnis look for people who voice their demands. The League of Muslim Scholars can play this role because it is a scholarly body and not a political body. Therefore, it can articulate the anger of the Sunni street more freely than any other political groupings and this explains why the League of Muslim Scholars represent the mood of the Sunni community. That is true. However these postures shall be translated into political actions.”*

The League of Muslim Scholars consists of leaders from different backgrounds (e.g. Salafists and al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya) and this may result in conflict of interests and lead to disagreements between its members (Zelin 2016). It thus remains to be seen whether the League of Muslim Scholars has the institutional ability and capacity to establish itself as a credible actor at the Sunni level (see Lefevre 2014:10; Zelin 2016). What is certain, nevertheless, is that its stance on issues pertinent to the Lebanese Sunnis is gradually gaining popularity, credibility and trust of the Lebanese Sunnis, and on several occasions, its influence on Sunni dynamics superseded that of Dar al-Fatwa (Lefevre 2014:10).

3.3 Situating the Sunni Politics in the Context of Supply and Demand

The discussion in this chapter shows that in the process of framing their activities to gain public support and mobilise the masses in the Sunni community in Lebanon, Sunni groupings' claims and articulations are projected in the organisational ideologies and slogans. Mobilising Sunnis for collective action is contingent on the availability of large pools of followers or constituents to the frames of Sunni groups and organisations (Edwards and McCarthy 2007:140).

Successful mobilisation gradually brings supply and demand together. The metaphorical "supply and demand", which Klandermans (2007) borrowed from economics is important for the context of this research as it helps to explain issues of movement participation in the context of framing theory. Demand in this research refers to the potential in a given community for protest (Klandermans 2007:360-1). A demand for change or protest often occurs when a given community feels a sense of moral indignation, injustice or frustration about some experiences, grievances or state of affairs (Klandermans 1997). Supply in this research refers to the opportunity staged by protest organisers (Klandermans 2007:361). Mobilisation in this sense is the process that bridges demand with supply by bringing "a demand for political protest that exists in a society together with a supply of opportunities to take part in such protest" (Klandermans 2007:361).

In the Sunni context, demand or "diagnostic framing" refers to the attributions of the problems of the Sunni community in Lebanon to certain groupings or states and the

formation of collective Sunni identity (Snow and Benford 2000; Klandermans 2007). Supply or “prognostic framing” in the Sunni context refers to the framing construction and ideologies Sunni groupings and leaders in Lebanon stand for, and the kind of identifications they offer to the Lebanese Sunnis (Snow and Benford 2000; Klandermans 2007).

The data in chapter three and four shows that Sunni actors are divided in terms of their understanding and attribution of Sunni problematized state of affairs in Lebanon. Some Sunni actors attribute Sunni grievances in Lebanon to the injustices practised on them by Iran (see 4.2.1, 4.2.2 and 4.2.3) and Syria (see 4.3, 4.4, 4.4.1, 4.4.2, 4.4.3 and 4.4.4). In their framing construction, Syria and Iran are framed as “colonial powers” and “occupiers”, which seek to “divide-and-rule” the Sunni politics in Lebanon (see 4.2.3 and 4.3). Other Sunni actors attribute Sunni disempowerment to the “declining Saudi Arabian’s support for the Lebanese Sunnis” (see 4.5); the “monopolisation of the Hariri family over the Sunni politics” (see 3.2.1 and 3.2.2); “the inability of the Lebanese state to impose its legitimacy over the whole Lebanese territory” (see 3.1.2); “the dominance of Hezbollah over Lebanon” and “the failure of the Future Movement to counter balance them” (see 3.2.3).

The kind of identification or prognostic framing that Sunni groupings offer to the Lebanese Sunnis as a result of their perceptual gradual disempowerment varies. The variance in Sunni articulations of the proposed solutions to the problems facing the Lebanese Sunnis results in “frame disputes” within Sunni groups and organisations in Lebanon (Benford 1993a). For instance, the Future Movement’s frames focus attention on its “moderate approach” to national issues as a means to appeal to

Sunnis and to solve their problems. It describes itself as an “unarmed organisation”, whose identity is “Lebanon First”, whose ideology is “moderate”, and whose presence is essential to maintain inter-communal co-existence and to prevent Sunnis from radicalism and sectarianism (see 3.2.5). The strength of the Future Movement’s framing construction lies in its ability to craft national non-confessional narratives to the Lebanese public.

On the contrary, some religious-based Sunni groupings in Lebanon refute the Future Movement’s prognostic framing to Sunni issues. They focus attention on the construction of sectarian religious narratives to win Sunni public support. As part of their framing strategies, these groups amplify the severity of Sunni problem as a result of the Shia dominance and the failures of the Lebanese state and Sunni leaders to counter them. They interpret the struggle with Hezbollah through sectarian terms, as a struggle between Sunnis and Shias by framing Hezbollah’s activities as “targeting the existence of Sunnis” (see 3.2.3). They call for Sunni “solidarity” (see 3.2.4) in the face of Shias; they identify themselves with the Sunni identity to “protect” (see 3.1.2) Sunnis from the perceived threats of Iran and Hezbollah; they criticise the Future Movement’s perceived detachment from the Sunni collectivity and their failure to provides prods to actions against Hezbollah (see 3.2.3); and finally, they call for “a change in the leadership” of the Sunni community to alter the perceived disempowerment of Sunnis (see 3.2.6). The identification of the struggle with Hezbollah through sectarian lenses serves as catalyst for recruitment, mobilisation and collective action frames.

Collectively, the above analysis shows that the dynamics of movement participation in the Sunni politics are noted to be built around three core factors. The first factor is “instrumentality”, which refers to the willingness of the Lebanese Sunnis to change their circumstances (see Klandermans 2007). The second factor is “identity”, which refers to the willingness of the Lebanese Sunnis to act as members of Sunni groupings or organisations to change their circumstances (see Klandermans 2007). The third factor is “ideology”, which refers to the willingness of the Lebanese Sunnis to join Sunni groupings or organisations in order to be able to express their feelings, emotions and views regarding the Sunni politics (see Klandermans 2007).

National, pan-Arab and religious-based Sunni groupings in Lebanon supply the opportunity of leading the Sunni politics to fulfil these demands of members of the Sunni community in Lebanon for a strong and credible Sunni leadership. These Sunni groupings, irrespective of their political affiliations, claim that they can change the existing Sunni state of affairs to their benefits through their actions; hence, the enthusiastic demand for movement participation. Some Sunni groupings in Lebanon by their actions convey a certain understanding that they are an effective Sunni political force to reckon with. They do this by trying to frame the kind of identities they offer (pan-Arab, national or religious) and the kind of power alliances they have with external players (Syria, Iran or Saudi Arabia).

After all, Sunnis are angry and morally outraged as a result of their disempowerment vis-à-vis Hezbollah. Sunni groupings provide the opportunity for Sunnis to communicate and express their feelings and emotions (Klandermans 2007:369). The link between ideological frames of the organisers of Sunni organisations and that of

participating members of the Sunni community could be constructed in order to generate a shared meaning of the situation and guide collective action frames (Klandermans 2007).

3.4 Conclusion

The main focus of this chapter was to examine how the Lebanese Sunni political actors understand, interpret and frame intra-Sunni political divides in Lebanon at the domestic levels. The findings of this chapter showed that the multiplicity of Sunni politicised and at times contested (pan-Arab, religious and national) identities are important for the understanding of intra-Sunni political divides in Lebanon at the domestic levels. In addition, the multiplicity of Sunni various ideological stances ranging from moderate to radical coupled with their opposing political affiliations ranging from pro-Syria, pro-Iran to anti-Syria, anti-Iran are also essential for the understanding of political divides within Lebanon's Sunni demographic.

Furthermore, the chapter showed that the political and religious leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon constitute one of the main issues that split up the Sunni political front at the domestic levels. The Lebanese Sunni actors differ in their understanding of the political leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon as exemplified by the Hariri family and the Future Movement, and the religious leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon as represented by Dar al-Fatwa. The chapter showed how the inadequate trust for the political and religious leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon resulted in a shift in Sunni perceptions and narratives and contributed to the emergence of rival radical Sunni groupings and leaders in Lebanon.

In the following chapter (chapter four), the research focuses on how the Lebanese Sunni political actors understand and frame the role of external players (Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia) in the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon.

Chapter Four

Intra-Sunni Contestations:

Understanding and Framing of the Role of External Players in

Intra-Sunni Political Division in Lebanon

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the research presents the frames and understandings of the research participants regarding the role of external players: Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia in the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon. The use of framing theory (see Snow and Benford 2000; Johnston and Noakes 2005; Snow et al. 2007) will enable the researcher to unmask contested frames and differential interpretations among the Lebanese Sunnis. It will also help him to look into how Sunni political actors understand, frame and narrate their political division in line with the external involvement in their political affairs. In the following, framing of Iran's role in the Sunni politics is presented in line with the interpretations of the research participants.

4.1 Framing of Iran's Role in Intra-Sunni Political Division in

Lebanon

The ideological stance on the Islamic Republic of Iran (Shia) and its affiliated Shia and Sunni organisations in Lebanon constitutes one of the main issues that affect the relationship between Iran and the Lebanese Sunnis. These relationships draw Sunni

Muslims to either support or oppose the activities of Iran and its Shia and Sunni allies. Sunnis who are aligned with the Eighth March Alliance (EMA) support Iran and Hezbollah, whilst Sunnis who are aligned with the Fourteenth March Alliance (FOMA) oppose Iran and Hezbollah. The EMA developed their ideology and message on issues of Hezbollah's resistance against Israel and the support for the Syrian's presence in Lebanon (making them pro-Iran and pro-Syria), whereas the FOMA developed their ideology and message on opposing the Syrian's role in Lebanon and calling for the demilitarisation of Hezbollah (making them pro-Saudi Arabia and pro-West). The FOMA was developed mainly as a result of the assassination of the former Sunni Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. Eventually, these two alliances successfully organised demonstrations for and against Iran and Syria's influence on Lebanon. The struggle between the FOMA and the EMA defined the political order in Lebanon in the last decade. The following subheadings will support how the research participants frame the role of Iran in the Sunni political division in Lebanon¹.

4.1.1 Iran's Perceived Role of Liberating Muslim Lands, Resisting Israel and Defending the Palestinian Cause

In this research, the understanding of some research respondents is that Iran has been able to appeal to the Lebanese Sunnis and to break through the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon by the perceived activities of liberating the Muslims lands,

¹ The Eighth March Alliance is led by Hezbollah and consists of other political parties such as the Shia party AMAL and the Christian party the Free Patriotic Movement. It also includes Sunni groupings like the Tawheed Movement, the Islamic Action Front, the Union Party and the Popular Nasserite Organisation. In contrast, the Fourteenth March Alliance is led by the Future Movement, the largest Sunni grouping in Lebanon, and consists of other key parties in Lebanon such as the Christian Phalange Party and the Lebanese Forces and the Druze Progressive Socialist Party.

resisting Israel and defending the Palestinian cause. In their opinion, the strength of Iran and Hezbollah in the Sunni arena lies in their ability to propagate these slogans in the one hand, and on the other hand, the inability of the Arab Sunni states to defend the Palestinian cause or to counter-balance Israel. The absence of an organised Sunni resistance against Israel enabled Iran and Hezbollah to develop a resistance project that resonated with the Sunni street in Lebanon. Some informants claim that Sunni states, unlike Iran, abandoned the Palestinian cause and engaged in peace treaties with Israel. They indicate that when Iran carried out the postures of fighting Israel, they were “credible”. Hezbollah fought different wars against Israel (e.g. in 2000 and 2006) and in their opinion, Iran helped Lebanon to counter-balance Israel. The responses of the respondents are provided in in the following excerpts.

MP1 *“Iran would use the postures of defending the Palestinian cause in order to attract Sunnis. Iran capitalises on Arabs impotence to defend the Palestinian cause...”*

FOMA1 *“Iran used to say that they carry out the Palestinian flag after the Arabs threw it following peace treaties with Israel...”*

UP1 *“I do not blame Iran. I blame ourselves; our weakness and divisions which gave them the chance to play a role in our communities. It is our mistake we are not trying to be united and protect ourselves.”*

UP2 *“When Iran raised postures of fighting Israel, some people claimed that these were false postures but in reality Hezbollah were credible and achieved two important victories in 2000 and 2006. These victories created a balance against Israel.”*

Non-Sunni3 *“The Iranians used the rubric “resistance” to appeal to the Lebanese Sunnis. When you use the term resistance against Israel nobody would be able to challenge you...”*

Collectively, these research respondents are of the view that the Lebanese Sunnis should not blame Iran but rather themselves and their Arab patrons for their impotence and bitter divisions which have offered Iran and its allies in Lebanon (most especially Hezbollah) the opportunity to break through the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon.

4.1.1.1 Frame Salience in the Context of the Iranian Role in Lebanon

One important dimension that affects the resonance of frames is its “salience” to targets of mobilisation. Drawing on Snow and Benford (1988:205), three factors of frame salience have been identified: “centrality”, “narrative fidelity” and “experiential commensurability”. Contextually, the relevance of frame salience to this section is the “centrality” and “narrative fidelity” as they highlight how essential the values, ideas and beliefs associated with Sunni movement frames are to the lives of the Lebanese Sunnis.

It is arguable that there are some sets of action-oriented meanings which are traditionally conceptualised as ideologies and are perceived to be central to the beliefs of some of the Lebanese Sunnis such as “support for the Palestinian cause”. The operationalisation of frame salience in this research demonstrates how the Lebanese

Sunni actors construct their narratives out of these meanings to mobilise their constituents and de-mobilise their antagonists.

Hezbollah's frequent engagement with Israel on different occasions enabled it to gain the support of various Sunni groupings and leaders who have the impression that Iran and Hezbollah are defending the dignity of Arabs and Muslims. One Sunni participant from the pro-Hezbollah's Tawheed Movement (TAM1) holds the view that the movement "supports any resistance against Israel" irrespective of its ideological or religious affiliation, even if it belongs to their opponents the FOMA.

Another Sunni participant from the pro-Hezbollah Union Party (UP1) denies that the party receives financial support from Iran and Hezbollah to be allied with them and insists that the party does not need financial support from anybody. He asserts that their alliance with Hezbollah is based on the principles of "resisting Israel" and "supporting Palestine". In his opinion, the main enemy of the Lebanese Sunnis is "Israel" not "Iran". The participant's justification for siding with Iran, which is a Shia-oriented state and not siding with Saudi Arabia, which is a Sunni-oriented state, is that Iran through its allies in Lebanon and elsewhere is fighting against Israel whilst Saudi Arabia is not fighting against Israel. He contends that the Union Party will not side with Saudi Arabia unless it fights against Israel. Collectively, these Sunni respondents are of the view that the Lebanese Sunnis, whether or not they agree with Hezbollah, cannot stand against them when they call for the resistance against Israel. The views of the participants are presented in the following quotes.

Non-Sunni3 *“Some Sunnis support Iran because of Hezbollah’s role in fighting against Israel. They keep supporting Hezbollah because they think that Hezbollah is honest in fighting against Israel.”*

TAM1 *“We are with the resistance against Israel whether Palestinian, national, pan-Arab, Islamic, Sunni, Shia or Christian... even if it belongs to the Fourteenth March Alliance...”*

UP2 *“Our alliance with the EMA is based on principles: that is the resistance against Israel. You know that we do not need financial support from anybody. Let Saudi Arabia fight against Israel and I will definitely side with them... Our main enemy is Israel. Iran shall not be our enemy.”*

Centrist1 *“I cannot stand against Hezbollah when they call for the resistance against Israel...”*

The above excerpts show that there are certain frames that are resonant with the values, beliefs and ideas of the Lebanese Sunnis. These framing constructions include: “defending the Palestinian cause” and “supporting the resistance against Israel”. Sunni groupings and leaders in Lebanon notwithstanding their affiliation appreciate the fact that these “frames” are important to get them accepted as legitimate actors in the Sunni politics (see Williams 2007). The discourse of supporting Palestine and resisting Israel may not be fundamental to these groupings but it is an essential toolkit to attract Sunnis and to consolidate their presence in the Sunni politics (see Williams 2007).

4.1.2 Iran's Role in Interfering in the Lebanese politics and the Syrian

Conflict

Other research respondents, on the contrary, approve Hezbollah's struggle against Israel but disapprove Iran and Hezbollah's frequent interferences in the Lebanese politics and the Syrian conflict. They hold the view that resisting Israel and supporting the Palestinian cause do not compensate Iran's involvement in the events of May 2008 and their involvement in Syria against Sunnis.

The events of May 2008 emanated from the Lebanese government's decision to inspect Hezbollah's communication network; and to dismiss the pro-Hezbollah's director of security at Beirut International Airport (Salem 2011; Rabil 2014; Salloukh et al. 2015). Hezbollah blamed the Future Movement-led government for these decisions and interpreted them as a declaration of war against them (Najem 2011). In May 2008, Beirut, the capital city of Lebanon, witnessed deadly clashes between Hezbollah and the Lebanese Sunnis for the first time in what was considered as the worst inter-communal violent conflict in Lebanon since the civil war (Wehrey et al. 2009; Najem 2012). It was indicated that nearly a hundred people were killed before Hezbollah and their allies pulled back their fighters to enable the Lebanese army, which remained "neutral" in the conflict to enter the areas that they had attacked (Wehrey et al. 2009).

In this research, some Sunni respondents indicate that the Lebanese Sunnis used to support Hezbollah but following their perceptual sectarian-inspired military attack on the Lebanese Sunnis in 2008 and their contribution to the killing of Syrian people in

the Syrian conflict; they lost their public appeal and were no longer framed by Sunnis as a “resistance” group. One Sunni leader from al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya (JI1) indicates that the relations between Hezbollah and al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya were strong and coordination between the two parties to fight against Israel continued, but when Hezbollah changed the direction of its struggle from fighting against Israel to fighting against Sunnis (i.e. to the domestic arena), the relations between the two sides deteriorated.

Other research participants including a member of the Future Movement (FM1) and an anti-Iran Sunni MP (MP1) contend that the events of May 2008 exposed the “lie” of framing Hezbollah as a “resistance” group. They argue that Sunnis have done a mistake when they thought that Hezbollah is a Lebanese group. In their opinion, Hezbollah is a grouping whose loyalty is to Iran. Similarly, an anti-Hezbollah *Haraki* Salafist respondent (*Haraki* Salafists1) indicates that Sunnis used to stand with Hezbollah because they thought that the purpose of their weapons was to resist Israel but when Hezbollah suddenly turned their weapons in the face of the Lebanese Sunnis in 2008, they lost Sunni support. Collectively, all these respondents are of the view that the priority of the Lebanese Sunnis is to counter-balance Iran’s role in Lebanon. The responses of the respondents are presented in the following excerpts.

JI1 “The relations between Hezbollah and Al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya were strong. Coordination between Hezbollah and Al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya to fight against Israel continued... When Hezbollah changed the direction of its struggle the gap between Hezbollah and the Al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya increased.”

FOMA1 *“We all support the resistance against Israel. But now, what we observe is no longer a resistance. The resistance practically lost its appeal when Hezbollah entered Beirut in May 2008. Hezbollah’s involvement in Syria made everything clear. You cannot say to me that this is resistance. No, it is not.”*

FM1 *“Let us look at 7 May from a positive point of view. It exposed the lie of Hezbollah...”*

MP1 *“Sunnis have done a mistake when they had thought that Hezbollah is a Lebanese party. Hezbollah is loyal to Iran and its decisions are taken by Iran...”*

Haraki Salafists1 *“Hezbollah’s weapons, which had many Sunnis stood with because they thought it was for the purpose of Israel... suddenly turned in the face of the Sunni community in Lebanon.”*

The crisis of 2008 ended following the signing of the Doha Agreement in Qatar (Salem 2011; Rabil 2014; Salloukh et al. 2015). The agreement was a victory for Hezbollah, as it enabled their allies (i.e. the Eighth March Alliance) to gain the veto power in the Lebanese government, hence blocking any governmental decisions that may threaten their interests in Lebanon (e.g. disarmament of Hezbollah and the STL) (Salem 2011; Najem 2012; Rabil 2014; Salloukh et al. 2015).

The significance of this agreement in Doha is that it cemented Hezbollah’s power position in the Lebanese political system (Najem 2012). The agreement ended the violent conflicts between Hezbollah and the Future Movement but resulted in confessional tensions between Sunnis and Shias in Lebanon. It also contributed to the

emergence of radical Sunni groupings and leaders who criticised the inability of the Future Movement to counter Hezbollah and to protect the Lebanese Sunnis.

4.1.3 The Clash between Hezbollah and the Future Movement

The clashes between Hezbollah and the Future Movement in May 2008 and their attendant impacts on intra-Sunni dynamics in Lebanon and Sunni relations with Shias constitute one of the issues that divide the Lebanese Sunnis. Whilst these events occurred for political purposes, the bloodshed generated a sectarian climate between Sunnis and Shias in Lebanon, and therefore, the Sunni “political” struggle against Hezbollah shifted into a “sectarian” struggle. Some participants claim that these events paved the way for inter-communal divides between Sunnis and Shias. One Shia religious scholar (Non-Sunni³) indicates that the events of May 2008 are considered as a “black spot” in the relations between Sunnis and Shias. He blames the Eighth March Alliance (EMA) for the deterioration in the relationship between Sunnis and Shias in Lebanon. The views are shown in the following quotes.

Non-Sunni³ *“The 7 May events deepened the Sunni-Shia tensions in particular. It was a slap on Sunni’s face by Iran and Hezbollah.”*

FM2 *“The invasion of May 7 was the basis of the Sunni Shia tension in Lebanon.”*

Non-Sunni⁵ *“I feel the pain whenever I remember the events of 7 May. It was a black spot in the history of the relations between Sunnis and Shias. It did not occur according to the will of Sunnis and Shia. It occurred because of the actions of the Eighth March Alliance.”*

At the intra-communal levels, some Sunnis who are allied with Hezbollah did not endorse Hezbollah's attack on Sunnis in May 2008 but still endorse their resistance against Israel. One Sunni respondent from the pro-Hezbollah Tawheed Movement (TAM1) indicates that what unify Sunnis with Hezbollah are two types of brotherhood: "Islam" and "resistance against Israel". Yet, he indicates that the Tawheed Movement is against any weapon that is directed at the domestic arena even if it belongs to their ally Hezbollah.

Other Sunni respondents, however, completely justified Hezbollah's actions in May 2008. Two respondents from the Eighth March Alliance (EMA1) and the Union Party (UP2) indicate that the Lebanese government wanted to dismantle Hezbollah's communication network and that Israel wanted to take revenge against Hezbollah following the war between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006. These Sunni respondents think that Israel feared a new defeat and therefore they resorted to groupings in Lebanon, some of them were Sunnis, to use them as a tool to weaken Hezbollah.

Collectively, these Sunni respondents are of the view that dismantling Hezbollah's network could have eliminated Hezbollah's power against Israel and therefore, Hezbollah's military actions against the Lebanese Sunnis were justifiable to protect their arms. These opinions are shown in the following claims of the respondents.

TAM1 *"What unifies the Tawheed Movement with Hezbollah is two types of brotherhood: first, religious, because we consider all those who say that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah as Muslims; and second, resisting Israel... but we are against any weapon that is directed to the domestic arena even if it belongs to Hezbollah."*

UP2 *“The government wanted to dismantle Hezbollah’s communication network. The Zionist enemy failed to take revenge against Hezbollah. It feared a new defeat. Hence, Israel resorted to Lebanese groupings from within the Sunni community to weaken Hezbollah.”*

EMA1 *“Honestly, what happened in May, 2008 should have happened before. The Future Movement was preparing to crack down Hezbollah. The Prime Minister Fouad Siniora was loyal to the United States...The Future Movement serves the interest of the United States. The cabinet’s decision to dismantle Hezbollah’s network came as a result of external command and was implemented to eliminate Hezbollah. Everybody knows that if you dismantle Hezbollah’ network, you will eliminate Hezbollah.”*

UP1 *“Hezbollah had to attack the Future Movement in order to protect its weapons...”*

The above explanations show that Sunnis who are aligned with Hezbollah seek to re-frame the way in which the clashes between Hezbollah and the Future Movement is framed and narrated. For these Sunnis, they focus on Hezbollah being the only force in the Arab World to counter Israel (see Najem 2012; Khashan 2013). This was manifest in the Israeli-Hezbollah’s War in 2006 in which the latter claimed a “divine victory” despite heavy losses in human lives and infrastructures (Khashan 2013:70). As for the events of May 2008, these Sunnis do not frame it as an attack by Shias on the Lebanese Sunnis. Rather, they accuse the FOMA of attempting to weaken Hezbollah’s resistance against Israel by cooperating with the United States and Israel (Khashan 2013:70). In their views, the Future Movement is “loyal” to and “servant” of the United States’ interests.

4.1.4 Perceived Killing of Sunnis in Syria by Shia Allies

The impact of the civil war in Syria, which started in 2011, on Lebanon is enormous and devastating (Wahlisch and Felsch 2016; Fakhouri 2016). Hezbollah's military involvement in Syria to support the Assad's government together with the clashes near the Lebanese borders with Syria, internal divisions, sectarian tensions, political assassinations, refugee problems and suicide bombings gradually pulled Lebanon into the maelstrom of the war in Syria (Wahlisch and Felsch 2016:1).

Hezbollah's military involvement in Syria to support the Syrian government has worsened security situation in Lebanon and intensified sectarian tensions between Sunnis and Shias in Lebanon (Ranstorp 2016; Knudsen 2017). Besides, it caused frequent retaliatory car and suicide bombing attacks by extremist groupings affiliated with the so called the Islamic State and the al-Qaeda in Shia areas in Lebanon. These militant groupings vowed not to stop attacking Hezbollah's stronghold until the latter pulls back its combatants from Syria (Wahlisch and Felsch 2016).

In this research, some research respondents think that Hezbollah is "killing Sunnis" in Syria and is being used by Iran as a tool to confront Sunnis in Lebanon and Syria. They indicate that the purpose of the Dissociation Policy (which was implemented by the Lebanese government in 2011) is to prevent the Lebanese political groupings from taking part in the Syrian conflict. Otherwise, the conflict would spill over to Lebanon.

However, the realities on the ground were different. As the crisis in Syria has grown, the Lebanese religious communities were unable to dissociate Lebanon from the spiralling war in Syria (Knudsen 2017). The Lebanese religious communities did not

only side with their Syrian counterparts but rather covertly or overtly supported warring factions (Knudsen 2017). Hezbollah has been military involved in Syria, hence, violating the Dissociation Policy, which represents the official stance of the Lebanese government (Fakhoury 2016; Hazboun 2016; Wahlisch and Felsch 2016).

Some Sunni respondents justify Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian conflict on the ground that if Hezbollah had not intervened in Syria, extremist groupings would have entered Lebanon and destabilised its political system. Therefore, in their opinion, Hezbollah takes part in the Syrian conflict to protect the sovereignty and security of Lebanon. The views are presented in the following statements.

Haraki Salafists1 *"Iran intervened to back the Syrian regime and... Hezbollah went to kill Sunnis in Syria."*

HT1 *"Hezbollah has been used as a tool by Iran to confront Sunnis in Syria and Lebanon."*

Centrist1 *"I am against getting involved in conflicts outside Lebanon."*

UP1 *"Hezbollah has been to Syria to defend Lebanon. If Hezbollah had not intervened in Syria, extremist groups would have entered Lebanon."*

The above excerpts show that some of the Lebanese Sunnis are divided in terms of their perceptions on the conflicts in Syria. Sunnis who are allied with the FOMA support the revolution against the Syrian government and hopes that its fall would help Lebanon to be independent from external duopoly, especially from Syria and Iran (Hazboun 2016; Wahlisch and Felsch 2016). By contrast, Sunnis who are allied with the EMA interpret the revolution against the Syrian government as an international ploy

targeting Syria for its support for Palestine and Hezbollah's resistance against Israel (Wahlisch and Felsch 2016).

4.1.4.1 Situating the Alliance between Iran and Syria in the Lebanese Context

From 1980 to 2005, Iran's influence on Lebanon was highly determined by the dynamics of its alliance with Syria (Najem 2012:114). The key strength of Hezbollah in the Lebanese politics has been attributable to the Syrian-Iranian alliance, which has provided substantial military and financial support for Hezbollah (Haddad 2013:18). With the support of Syria and Iran, Hezbollah was able to recruit fighters, to challenge Israel, to advance its ideological programme and to maintain its influence on the Lebanese politics (Salamey and Pearson 2007:432). The alliance between Iran and Syria has been based on strategic interests and interdependence (el-Husseini 2010:811). Syria needed Iran and Hezbollah so as to retain its relevance in the Middle East region and to maintain its influence on the Lebanese politics, while Iran and Hezbollah relied on Syria for the transitions of the Iranian missiles to Hezbollah in Lebanon (el-Husseini 2010:811; Samaan 2017:161; Wiegand 2009: 671).

The Syrian war, which began in 2011, re-emphasised the Iranian role in Lebanon. Iran's proxy in Lebanon, Hezbollah, got militarily involved in the Syrian war against the mostly Sunni Syrian inhabitants in order to protect the interests of Iran and Syria. The survival of Syria has been essential for Iran. Iran's fundamental reasons to get involved in the Syrian war have been to retain the influence of the "Resistance Axis" consisting of Syria, Iran and Hezbollah on the Middle East (Sullivan 2014 as cited in Wilkins 2016). For Iran, Syria has been considered as a key transient route for financial and military support from Iran to Hezbollah in Lebanon, and therefore, the fall of the Syrian

government may prevent Iran to easily transfer supplies to Hezbollah in the struggle against Israel (Wilkins 2016:158). It is also in the interest of Iran to preclude the rise of a Sunni-dominated leadership in Syria that could potentially undermine its interests in Syria and Lebanon (see Samaan 2013; Wilkins 2016; Sullivan 2014).

4.2 Iran's Role in Dividing Sunnis in Lebanon

The respondents' interpretive understanding of Iran's role in dividing the Lebanese Sunnis can be highlighted under the following sub-headings.

4.2.1 Iran's Network with some Sunni Leaders and Organisation

In the context of the Sunni politics, Iran has developed some networks with religious-based and pan-Arab-based Sunni movements and leaders in Lebanon. This has been one of the sources of the political Sunni division in Lebanon. Iran is believed to be an influential actor in the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon (see Rabil 2014; Rougier 2015). Hezbollah, which is politically and ideologically affiliated with the Iranian state created the Resistance Brigades (*Saraya al-Muqawama*), which includes some Lebanese Sunnis (Rougier 2015). The Resistance Brigades are perceived as pro-Iranian Sunni militias which have been used as a tool to divide the Sunni community, whilst other frame them as a resistance grouping backing Hezbollah in its struggle against Israel (see Rougier 2015). In Sidon, south Lebanon, the Sunni cleric Maher Hammoud holds close relations with Iran and Hezbollah (Goodarzi 2009:146). He established an organisational body consisting of Shias and Sunnis who embrace the Iranian ideology in Lebanon (Goodarzi 2009:146).

The research respondents were clear in their mind about the role of Iran, a key allied of Syria, in dividing the Sunni political front in Lebanon. This form of division has been manifest in breaking through Dar al-Fatwa during the leadership of the former Grand Mufti of the Lebanese Republic Shaykh Muhammad Rashid Qabbani (Lefevre 2015). The Mufti Qabbani was initially an ally of the Future Movement but he had fallen with them over accumulating financial disputes in which he was accused of embezzlement from Dar al-Fatwa (Qassem 16/08/2012; Choucair 2015; Lefevre 2015). In order to retain his position, the Mufti Qabbani allied himself with Hezbollah. This resulted in a sharp split in Dar al-Fatwa between a faction close to the Future Movement, which oppose the mufti's authority and a faction close to Hezbollah, which support Qabbani's authority (Lefevre 2015).

The disagreement undermined Dar al-Fatwa's credibility and enabled Iran to break through the Sunni politics (Lefevre 2015). One respondent from the Future Movement (FM1) holds the view that the Mufti Qabbani was aligned with Iran. Another respondent from Dar al-Fatwa (DF1) admits that Hezbollah under the Iranian's influence was able to break through Dar al-Fatwa and to take it over from the hands of the Future Movement. The responses of the respondents are shown in the following excerpts.

FM1 *"In the last three years of the former Mufti's term, he was aligned with Hezbollah."*

DF1 *"Hezbollah – under the Iranian guidance – was able to penetrate DF and to take it from the hands of the Future Movement".*

Another form of dividing the Sunni front has been through Iran's ideological, financial and political supports for some religious and pan-Arab Sunni political organisations (e.g. the Tawheed Movement, the Popular Nasserite Organisation, the Union Party and the Islamic Action Front) and Sunni political leaders and clergies (e.g. Abdul Rahim Mourad; Oussama Saad, Fathi Yakan and Saeed Shaaban) (see Shayya et al. 2009; Rabil 2014; Rougier 2015). These Sunni groupings and leaders are politically affiliated with Iran and Hezbollah.

4.2.2 Materialistic Interests for Sunni Political Alignment with Iran

Some respondents frame Sunnis who are allied with Iran as “minorities”, claiming that the majority of the Lebanese Sunnis are politically against Iran. Moreover, these respondents hold the view that Sunnis who are allied with Iran know that they are wrong but are driven by materialistic interests. They receive money and salaries from Iran. The research participants believe that Iran is generous with its allies, albeit they are Sunnis, and does not mind to finance them as long as they serve its interests in Lebanon. In their opinion, pro-Iran Sunnis follow Iran blindly no matter whether or not their actions are against Sunnis. Their views are presented below.

LMS1 *“There is a group of Sunni clergies and politicians who support Hezbollah but they are a minority. They do not represent the standpoint of the majority of the Lebanese Sunnis.”*

Haraki Salafists1 *“Sunnis who support Iran are driven by interests. Iran has been paying their salaries since the eighties. They cannot go against Iran. They follow Iran blindly.”*

Non-Sunni2 *“Iran pays money to some Sunni political leaders. Do you think that the Krarami family do not get money from Hezbollah? Surely they get. Sunnis who support the Eighth March Alliance receive salaries. Iran is generous in this respect. What is important for Iran is to protect its influence on Lebanon.”*

Centrist2 *“Sunnis who support the Eighth March Alliance are driven by interests. They are tempted by money. Those Sunnis know that they are wrong.”*

MP1 *“Sunnis who support Hezbollah receive financial support from them.”*

FOMA1 *“When I see a Sunni supports Hezbollah, I would think of their bank account.”*

Collectively, these respondents are of the view that Sunni alliance with Iran is not based on Hezbollah’s resistance against Israel. Rather, it is used as a means to counter the Hariri family’s perceived monopolisation of the Sunni politics (see 4.4.3), to solidify their political status (see 4.1.1) and to serve their materialistic interests (4.2.2). This is how Iran breaks through the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon.

4.2.3 Iran’s Interests in Perpetuating the Division of the Lebanese Sunnis

Some Sunni respondents frame Iran’s role in Lebanon in the same way they frame Syria’s role in Lebanon (see 4.3). For these respondents, Iran’s role in Lebanon is based on “dividing communities”, and creating problems within these communities. Iran is framed as a threat to the Lebanese Sunnis, an “occupier” and a “coloniser”, which seeks among other things, to use some Sunni groupings, militias and leaders to break through the Sunni politics. The pro-Iran Muslim Scholars Gathering (*Tajammu’ al-Ulama’ al-Muslimeen*), which consists of Sunni and Shia clergies, is the epitome of how

Iran broke through the Sunni politics in Lebanon (see Rabil 2014). In addition, pan-Arab-based Sunni groupings (e.g. the Popular Nasserite Organisation and the Union Party), whose pan-Arab ideology is at odd with the ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran are allied with Iran (see International Crisis Group 2010). These groups and leaders could be employed by Iran to serve its interests at the expense of the unity and solidarity of the Lebanese Sunnis. These claims by the participants are shown in the following excerpts.

LMS1 *“The role of Iran in Lebanon is occupation and colonialism.”*

Non-Sunni2 *“Iran surely divides Sunnis.”*

Non-Sunni3 *“The Iranian project is based on dividing communities, creating problem within these communities... Some Sunnis are marginalised in their communities. Hezbollah capitalise on this by either recruiting them or financially supporting them.”*

MP1 *“Iran of course seeks to divide the Lebanese Sunnis. You see the Resistance Brigade, the Muslim Scholars Gathering... they are all tools to divide the Lebanese Sunnis as the Syrian regimes had done before.”*

Collectively, the above analysis shows that Hezbollah capitalises on their popularity in the Sunni community as a resistance grouping to appeal to some Sunnis who are weak or marginalised in their communities and therefore, Hezbollah either support these Sunnis financially, politically or recruit them in the forms of militias under the guise of resisting Israel.

4.3 Framing of Syria's Role in the Intra-Sunni Political Division in Lebanon

In this research, the majority of Sunni actors in Lebanon were emphatic in their voice that Syria plays a major role in the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon. They attribute intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon to Syria and describe its presence in Lebanon from 1976 to 2005 as “the worst thing” that Lebanon has ever experienced in its political history. Some respondents employ injustice frames to frame Syria as “a colonial power”, which seeks to “divide-and-rule” the Lebanese religious communities. Others go further in their framing construction to describe Syria as an “occupier” or an “oppressor”, which is accused of conspiring against the Lebanese Sunnis by “killing”, “imprisoning”, “persecuting” and “humiliating” them. The participants in this instance attribute the responsibility or the blame for Sunni problematized state of affairs to the perceptual injustices practised on them by Syria. The views of the participants are presented below.

J11 *“Syria, which oppresses its own nations, will not hesitate to oppress the Lebanese nation. Syria dealt with us as a colonial power.”*

Haraki Salafists1 *“Syria implemented a divide-and-rule policy in Lebanon.”*

Non-Sunni4 *“The worst thing that Lebanon had ever witnessed in its ancient and recent history was the Syrian dominance over Lebanon.”*

FOMA1 *“Syria occupied Lebanon, persecuted, imprisoned and killed Sunnis. Syria laid the foundation for the political division in the Sunni community in Lebanon.”*

DF1 *“Lebanon would have no longer existed had Syria remained in Lebanon.”*

LMS1 *“Syria was an oppressor. They were unjust with all Lebanese parties. They humiliate their opponents. Everyone was looking forward to the day when they get rid of Syria.”*

Flowing from the above quotes, it can be argued that Syria was concerned about the socio-political and religious dynamics of the Sunni community in Lebanon and was apprehensive about any Sunni-based Islamic activism that could jeopardise its rule in Lebanon (Rabil 2014). It was in the interests of Syria to divide the Lebanese Sunnis in order to maintain its influence on Lebanon (see Rabil 2014). Syria’s relations with the Lebanese Sunnis were primarily shaped by its interests in Lebanon (Osoegawa 2013). When Syria realised that the behaviour of Sunnis challenged its interests, it sought, through its allies in Lebanon to weaken and/or to divide them.

4.3.1 Contextualisation of Syria’s Presence in Lebanon

The main reason for Syria’s troops to remain in Lebanon in the post-civil war period was understood in the context of its struggle with Israel and its aim to regain its territories (i.e. the Golan Heights), which it had lost to Israel in the Six Days War in 1967 (Hinnebusch 1998; Najem 2012:55; Osoegawa 2013). It is in this context Syria sought to exert its complete influence on Lebanon, especially in the realms of politics, security and defence (Najem 2012:55). Syria’s influence on Hezbollah (an ally of Syria), enabled it to “play the Lebanese card” (Osoegawa 2013:96) as a bargaining chip in the struggle against Israel. Hezbollah, in return for Syria’s backing of its armed presence in Lebanon, tailored its operations to serve Syria’s interests in its struggle with Israel (Hinnebusch 1998; International Crisis Group 2017).

Syria's influence on Lebanon broke when Rafik Hariri was assassinated in February 2005 (Wieland 2016). Hariri's assassination was largely blamed on Syria (Milton-Edwards 2011). In April 2005, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed the resolution 1595, which called for the formation of an Independent International Investigation Commission (UNIIC) to assist the Lebanese state in its investigation in the Hariri's killing (Salamey 2014:65). The UNSC 1595 reiterated the demand for the respect of Lebanon sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity under the exclusive and sole authority of the Lebanese state (Salamey 2014). Syria's troops, under international pressure and massive domestic anti-Syria's protests, withdrew from Lebanon in April 2005. Syria withdrew its army but its intelligence apparatus have remained active in Lebanon since (see Milton-Edwards and Hinchcliffe 2008:71; Salem 2011; Salamey 2014). Syria's role in Lebanon was retained through its Lebanese allies, especially the EMA under the leadership of Hezbollah and Iran.

4.4 Syria's Role in Dividing Sunnis

The respondents' interpretive understanding of Syria's role in dividing the Lebanese Sunnis can be highlighted under the following sub-headings.

4.4.1 Al-Ahbash as an Implant of Syria in the Sunni Politics

From 1990 to 2005, Lebanon was under the Syrian's sphere of influence. Syria was able to control all major appointments and decisions in the Lebanese state from the President down through the Prime Minister, the Council of Ministers, and the various army and security branches (Salem 1998; el-Khazen 2003). Freedom of political parties in Lebanon was restricted and indeed, political parties were compelled to co-operate

with the Syrian regime in order to be represented in the cabinet or the parliament. Otherwise, they could be banned from actively taking part in the political process (Salem 1998; el-Khazen 2003).

In this research, one respondent from the *Haraki* Salafists (*Haraki* Salafists¹) indicates that during Syria's role in Lebanon, it was difficult to witness the emergence of an influential Sunni grouping in Lebanon unless it is linked with Syria. He further states that Sunnis used to be suspicious about Sunni leaders and groups which were allowed to freely operate in Lebanon during Syria's role in Lebanon. The views of the respondent is shown below

Haraki Salafists¹ *"When Syria ruled Lebanon, it was impossible to witness the emergence of powerful Sunni groupings. We used to be suspicious about any Sunni faction that would be allowed to freely practise its activities during the Syrian presence in Lebanon. A clear example of this is al-Ahbash."*

Syria used some Sunni groupings in Lebanon as a tool to counter other Sunni groupings and to create intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon. The relationship between the Sufi-oriented Sunni grouping al-Ahbash and Syria epitomises how the latter broke through the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon. The movement capitalised on the political opportunity structure of Syria being the main player in Lebanon and constructed its narratives in line with Syrian policies in Lebanon. It established deep connections with the Syrian intelligent agency (Nassif 2001; el-Husseini 2012) and was classified by Rougier (2007:117) as Syria's party in Lebanon.

Al-Ahbash's Sufi-oriented brand of Islamism, which was perceived as moderate, plural and tolerant, appealed to the interests of the Syrian regime (Hamzeh 1997). In general, this Sufi-oriented grouping, i.e. al-Ahbash, (unlike al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Lebanese Salafists and the Tawheed Movement), did not constitute a threat to Syria because al-Ahbash and some other Sufi-oriented groupings are often portrayed as "politically quietist"; hence serving Syria's interests in Lebanon (Jansen 1986 as cited in Hamzeh and Dekmejian 1996:218). Al-Ahbash, in this instance did not call for the establishment of an Islamic rule in Lebanon. The movement's postures were not built on the basis of confronting the confessional political system in Lebanon so as to Islamise Lebanon; rather, it endorses the confessional system in Lebanon and asserts that any political changes should be attained from within the political system and not imposed from outside (Hamzeh 1997; Imad 2006; Rabil 2011).

4.4.1.1 Counter-Framing al-Ahbash's pro-Syria's Frames

In this research, some research respondents indicate that al-Ahbash have "deceived" Sunnis under the guise of "Sufism". In their opinion, al-Ahbash is not framed as a Sufi grouping but rather as a "tool", used by the Syrian intelligence to "divide-and-rule" Sunnis and to "stab" them in the back. They are disliked among mainstream Sunnis, as one research participant from Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT1) indicates, due to their affiliation with Syria. Some participants go further to deny that al-Ahbash's identity is Sunni and rather frame them as a group used by Syria to counter Sunni institutions and groupings in Lebanon especially Dar al-Fatwa, al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya and the Lebanese Salafists. The views of the respondents are shown below.

LMS1 *"Syria used al-Ahbash as a knife to stab Sunnis in the back."*

Non-Sunni1 *“Al-Ahbash’s are linked with the Syrian intelligence. It was a Syrian tool inside the Sunnis community. They are said to be Sufis. I cannot see Sufism reflected in their behaviour... Al-Ahbash is not seen as a Sunni movement.”*

Non-Sunni2 *“Al-Ahbash became part of the Syrian intelligence. Al-Ahbash grouping are gangs. They deceive people... Al-Ahbash was created by Syria to face Sunni groupings that oppose Syria.”*

Centrist2 *“Syria was worried about the presence of the JI. Syria was also worried about the rise of Salafism. They therefore, backed al-Ahbash against these groupings.”*

HT1 *“Al-Ahbash sees anyone who is not with them to be against them. Al-Ahbash is still disliked among mainstream Sunnis.”*

FM2 *“Syria put al-Ahbash mainly to infuriate DF. They put them as a threat to DF and this happened in Beirut. They took over several mosques that belong to DF and they were protected by the Syrian intelligence at that time.”*

Some respondents deny that the struggle between al-Ahbash and Sunni groups in Lebanon is an intra-Sunni struggle and rather frame it as a “struggle between Syria and the Sunni community”. Al-Ahbash, in this instance, is employed by Syria as a tool in the struggle against the Lebanese Sunnis. Unlike mainstream Sunnis whose main opponents are Shias, al-Ahbash’s main opponents are “Sunnis who oppose Syria”. Some respondents think that al-Ahbash is more hostile toward Sunni counterparts (e.g. the al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya and Salafists) and less hostile toward non-Sunni counterparts (e.g. Hezbollah and Amal) reflecting the ambiguity of its political and religious formation. The views of the participants are shown below.

J11 *“It is a grouping used by the Syrian intelligence... We cannot say that the existence of al-Ahbash is seen as a Sunni-Sunni struggle. It is a struggle between Sunnis and the Syrian intelligence.”*

Non-Sunni4 *“Al-Ahbash was created by Syria. Al-Ahbash’s postures were not directed against Christians, Druze or Shias. Sunnis are against Shias... Their main enemy is Shias. Al-Ahbash, however, wanted to create problems in the intra-Sunni scene but they also failed.”*

Collectively, all of these respondents are of the view that the political presence of al-Ahbash was “orchestrated” by Syria to justify the fears of other religious communities in Lebanon that if the Lebanese Sunnis cannot co-exist with each other, how could they be able to co-exist with other religious communities in Lebanon? The understanding of some respondents regarding Syria’s role in the Sunni politics is that Syria, through its support for al-Ahbash, sought to break through the Sunni politics and to discredit the Lebanese Sunnis in the eyes of other religious communities in Lebanon.

4.4.1.2 First Intra-Sunni Violent Conflict in Lebanon

Flowing from the excerpts presented (in 4.4.1), it can be said that Syria managed to employ al-Ahbash as a tool to counteract other Sunni movements, to weaken the internal Sunni arena and to keep it in a perpetual conflict so as to tighten its grip over the Lebanese Sunnis and to prevent any potential anti-Syrian camp emerging from within the Sunni community to challenge its influence on Lebanon (see Nassif 2001; Rougier 2015). The contentions between al-Ahbash and its Sunni counterparts reached

a climax when in August 1995; the political leader of al-Ahbash Nizar al-Halabi was assassinated in Beirut. It was said that the culprits were a radical Sunni Salafist grouping known as the League of Partisan (*Usbat al-Ansar*) (Pall 2013). In this research, two respondents are of the view that the struggle between the Lebanese Salafists and al-Ahbash is described as “the first violent intra-Sunni contestation” in Lebanon. They were emphatic about this assertion in the following excerpts.

FM2 *“The intra-Sunni division turned into a violent one in the case of the contestation between the Salafists and al-Ahbash. Apart from that, Sunni disagreements were under control.”*

Non-Sunni1 *“The presence of al-Ahbash marked the first violent intra-Sunni contestation.”*

The above analysis shows that intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon has the potential to lead to violent conflicts resulting in loss of life and properties. It also shows that the Sunni politics is characterised by political tensions, which might be significant enough to lay the foundation for intra-Sunni violence (see Oberschall 1997; Diani 2013). Collectively, intra-Sunni political divides, which are the focus of this research, could lead to assassinations. The dire consequence associated with these developments is worrisome hence the need to find appropriate means of dealing with political issues associated with violence or assassinations.

4.4.2 The Activities of Syria and the Weakening of Dar al-Fatwa

Syria's policy in Lebanon, led by the Syrian intelligence focused on co-opting individuals, groupings and parties in exchange for political and/or economic gains (see Rabil 2014). If co-optation did not work, then assassination of opponents was carried out (see el-Husseini 2012; Pall 2013; Rabil 2014). Moreover, Syria did not only seek to divide and weaken the Lebanese Sunnis. They sought to weaken and divide other religious communities in Lebanon (Osoegawa 2013). The main point here is that Syria made almost all religious communities in Lebanon to serve its interests in Lebanon. Syria would support the unity of the religious communities in Lebanon as long as they are allied with Syria. Otherwise, Syria would divide or at least weaken these communities so that they would not be able to challenge its influence on Lebanon (see el-Husseini 2012; Salamey 2014). The research respondents indicate Syria considers individuals and communities in Lebanon as its enemy if they challenge its rule in Lebanon. For instance, one Sunni MP (MP1) claims that Sunni leaders who challenged Syria's role in Lebanon were assassinated. The views of the respondents are shown in the following excerpts.

TAM1 *"Syria made almost all the Lebanese sects serve their interests."*

FOMA2 *"Syria classified people into allies and enemies; you are either an agent to Syria or an enemy."*

Non-Sunni3 *"If you are with Syria, then Syria would back the unity of your community as a whole. If Syria suspects that you are not loyal to them, they would prevent the unity of your community."*

Haraki Salafists1 *“To be honest, Syria did not only divide the Sunni community. They created divisions in all sects.”*

FM2 *“Syria divided Sunnis that is correct. They also supported some Christian groupings against other Christian groupings. They supported some Shia groupings against other Shia groupings. We shall be precise.”*

LMS1 *“As for Syria, it is either you are loyal to them or you are their enemy.”*

MP1 *“Syria would kill those who do not abide by its orders. We know who killed the mufti Hassan Khalid.”*

The above excerpts showed one of Syria’s strategies to deal with its opponents in Lebanon. Syria aimed at co-opting Dar al-Fatwa, the highest religious Sunni office, which oversees Sunni religious and legal affairs in Lebanon. However, Dar al-Fatwa, under the leadership of the Grand Mufti of the Lebanese Republic Hassan Khalid did not cooperate with them (el-Husseini 2012). In May 1989, the Mufti Hassan Khalid was assassinated. The understanding of some participants is that the Mufti Hassan Khalid was assassinated because of his political stance against the Syrian influence on Lebanon. In their opinion, the assassination of Khalid occurred in series of assassinations that deliberately targeted anti-Syria Sunni political and religious leaders (e.g. shaykh Subhi al-Salih, shaykh Ahmad Assaf and the MP Nazim al-Kadri), who carried out national postures and called for the withdrawal of Syria’s troops from Lebanon. The views of the participants is shown in the following quotes.

Non-Sunni3 *“Hassan Khalid was assassinated because of his political stance against Syria.”*

Non-Sunni1 *“Both Hassan Khalid and Subhi al-Salih were known for their critical stance against the Syrian influence on Lebanon and this may be the cause of their assassination.”*

MP1 *“Khalid’s role infuriated Syria. They were worried of the Sunni influence. They wanted a weak mufti who does what they wanted.”*

LMS1 *“Khalid opposed the Syrian regime.”*

DF1 *“Syria killed political and religious Sunni leaders...”*

Syria during its presence in Lebanon was in control of Dar al-Fatwa (Gambil 2007). One respondent from Dar al-Fatwa (DF1) indicates that in the aftermath of the assassination of Hassan Khalid, Dar al-Fatwa was unable to play an active role in defending Sunnis due to Syria’s presence in Lebanon. Likewise, one Sunni respondent from the Fourteenth March Alliance (FOMA2) indicates that during Syria’s role in Lebanon, some Sunni religious clergies were appointed by Syria. The views of the participants are shown in the following quotes.

Non-Sunni5 *“The inability of Dar al-Fatwa to play its role in guidance and overseeing religious affairs will give Islamist parties the chance to grow.”*

DF1 *“The inability of the Mufti to play his role for approximately 25 years during the Syrian presence gave other parties roles to play. Syria put pressure on Dar al-Fatwa.”*

FOMA1 *“The Syrian intelligence during its presence in Lebanon used to appoint religious clergies and to create different religious groupings.”*

Collectively, Dar al-Fatwa holds a substantial importance in the Sunni community in Lebanon due to its position as the highest religious office for the Lebanese Sunnis notwithstanding their political affiliations. However, due to its lack of grassroots popularity – in comparison with religious-based and national-based Sunni groupings - Dar al-Fatwa built up closer relations with Sunni political leaders and external players; hence it has become - to some extent - affected by their interests (International Crisis Group 2010). This, again, had an influence on its position as an arbiter between Sunni groupings because theoretically, Dar al-Fatwa is supposed to be non-aligned. The failure of Dar al-Fatwa to challenge Syria has given other religious-based Sunni groupings in Lebanon the opportunity to proliferate and to challenge Dar al-Fatwa's leadership (see Rougier 2007; Abdel-Latif 2008). Hence, Syria, through weakening Dar al-Fatwa, contributed to intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon.

4.4.3 Syria's Tactics of Countering Rafik Hariri

Rafik Hariri's ability to promote Lebanon as a hub for banking, tourism and investments was contingent on political stability in Lebanon (Salem 2011). Syria's influence on Lebanon together with Hezbollah's frequent clashes with Israel in South Lebanon weakened Hariri's ability to fully achieve his objectives. In 1998, tensions between Syria and Rafik Hariri started to surface (International Crisis Group 2010). This was attributable to Hariri's rising political and financial power. In Salem's (2011:540) view, Hariri "had gone well beyond his businessman profile to emerge as the most influential political leader in Lebanon" (Salem 2011:540). This development infuriated the Alawi regime in Syria, which feared the rise of a Sunni leadership in Lebanon that may counter its influence on Lebanon (Salamey 2014). Therefore, in November 1998,

Syria arranged the election to the Lebanese presidency of the pro-Syria head of the Lebanese army Emile Lahoud (International Crisis Group 2010; Salem 2011; Salem 2012). Lahoud placed himself in direct opposition to Hariri, and therefore, the latter, was pushed out of government (Salem 2011:540).

In 2000, tensions between Syria and Hariri reached an alarming level following Hariri's overwhelming triumph in the parliamentary elections, which enabled him to return to the Prime Minister's Office (International Crisis Group 2010; Salem 2011). This development deepened the political tension between Hariri in the one hand, and Syria and Lahoud in the other hand (Salem 2011). In 2003, Rafik Hariri, under Syria's pressure, was compelled to form a mostly pro-Syria government and soon later the Lebanese parliament extended Emile Lahoud's presidential term in what was considered as a violation of the Lebanese constitution (International Crisis Group 2010). In Hariri's view, this was a turning point that pushed him to resign from the Lebanese government and join anti-Syria Lebanese opposition (see International Crisis Group 2010:5).

In the context of this research, one respondent from the Future Movement (FM2) indicates that Syria did not want Rafik Hariri to dominate the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon. Syria, in as much as they needed Hariri's economic and political capital to re-build Lebanon, they feared his rising influence on the Lebanese politics may threaten their rule over Lebanon. The respondent further indicates that Syria did not only rely on leaders from other religious communities to counter Hariri. Rather, they resorted to leaders from within the Sunni community in Lebanon such as Abdul Rahim Mourad and Omar Karami to counter-balance Hariri. Syria, through its

support for Mourad and Karami did not only seek to weaken Hariri. It also sought to deepen intra-Sunni political division among Sunni leaders, hence affecting the solidarity and cohesion of the Sunni community in Lebanon. One Sunni MP (MP1) indicates that it was in the interest of Syria to prevent unity between Sunni leaders. The views of the participant are shown in the following excerpts.

FM1 *“Hariri’s dominance would not serve Syria’s interests in Lebanon. This explains why Syria supported al-Ahbash and other Sunnis such as Abdul Rahim Mrad and Ossama Saad to weaken Hariri or to counterbalance him.”*

FM1 *“If Syria was unhappy with Hariri, they would not resort to Christians to counter him; there are other groupings from within the Sunni community, which hold good relations with Syria that could irritate Hariri.”*

MP1 *“I remember one day, I told one of the former PM Omar Karami’s advisors: why do not PM Rafik Hariri and PM Omar Karami unify with each other? He said: Syrians would not accept that. It serves their interests to keep Sunnis divided.”*

Syria’s tactics in countering Rafik Hariri were felt in its support for his Sunni rivals. For instance, Omar Karami, a former Sunni Prime Minister and head of the Arab Liberation Party, was an opponent of Rafik Hariri and a close ally with Syria (International Crisis Group 2010; Osoegawa 2013; Lefevre 2014). The Karami family are considered as one of the few Sunni families who are aligned with Syria (Osoegawa 2013). This is attributable to the long-standing relationship between the Karami family in Lebanon and the Assad family in Syria (Osoegawa 2013). Abdul Rahim Mourad, a former Sunni minister and head of the Union Party is a rival of Rafik Hariri and one of Syria’s key

Sunni allies in Lebanon (see International Crisis Group 2010:6). Syria backed Mourad in the face of Rafik Hariri in order to constrain the Hariri family's perceived over-monopolisation of the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon.

4.4.4 Frame Salience of Syria's perceived pan-Arab Stance

The role of Syria in Lebanon is not always framed in the context of its manipulation to divide and rule the Lebanese religious communities. For some Sunnis, they do not focus on Syria's perceptual role of divide-and-rule in Lebanon. Rather, they focus on what they think a Syrian's contribution to the end of the civil war and stability of Lebanon.

Pan-Arab based Sunni groupings in Lebanon such as the Popular Nasserite Organisation and the Union Party are allied with Syria (International Crisis Group 2010). For these Sunnis, Syria is framed as a "supporter of the Palestinian cause" and a "resistance force" whose alliance with Iran and Hezbollah helped Lebanon to counter-balance Israel (see also a Pamphlet Published by the Popular Nasserite Organisation 2014). Similarly, Syria's depiction of itself as a "pan-Arab" state, or more accurately, as "the beating heart of Arabism" (Hinnebusch 2001), seems to resonate with the narratives of the pan-Arab Sunni groups. The views of the respondents are shown below.

UP1 *"We maintain good relations with Syria... Syria ended the civil war and re-built state institutions. The stability of Lebanon is contingent on maintaining good relations with Syria. Lebanon should have good relations in Syria. This is stipulated in the Taif Accord."*

UP2 *“We find in Syria a pan-Arab resistance leadership. Syria supported Palestine and created a resistance force against Israel.”*

The ability of pan-Arab Sunnis to strike the Sunni public as legitimate actors or to neutralise oppositions is contingent on the resonance between their ideology, frames and actions (see Williams 2007:105). The resonance between pan-Arab Sunni frames and the existing cultural narratives within the Sunni milieu is important for mobilisation and collective actions. The Lebanese Sunnis are generally supportive of the Palestinian cause and the idea of supporting Palestine and resisting Israel is central to the beliefs and values of various Sunnis. Similarly, Syria’s evoking of pan-Arabism resonates with the cultural narration of various Sunnis who aim at the unity of the Arab states. Hence, pan-Arab Sunni groupings, by using salient frames to the Lebanese Sunnis such as “defending Palestine”, “resistance against Israel” and “pan-Arabism”, they make their message meaningful in the eyes of their Sunni followers.

4.5 Framing of Saudi Arabia’s Role in Intra-Sunni Political

division in Lebanon

Some Sunni respondents indicate that the Lebanese Sunnis have always relied on Saudi Arabia to protect them against several internal threats. In their opinion, the Sunni community in Lebanon has been loyal to Saudi Arabia, and Saudi Arabia is framed as “the guardian for the Lebanese Sunnis”. One Sunni political leader (Centrist1) indicates that “as the prayer direction of all Muslims is to the city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia, the political direction of all the Lebanese Sunnis is to Saudi Arabia”. Some respondents go further to assert that the influence of Sunni political leaders and

groups on the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon is dependent on having good relationship with Saudi Arabia. This shows the impact that Saudi Arabia has on the Lebanese Sunnis. It also shows how some Sunni political leaders are craving for external patronage to solidify their political positions. Even pro-Syria, pro-Iran Sunni leaders in Lebanon, who disagree with Saudi Arabia's policy line, acknowledge the importance of Saudi Arabia, as a Sunni state, for the Lebanese Sunnis. They have no options but to at least co-operate or maintain a moderate discourse regarding Saudi Arabia to maintain their leadership in the Sunni community in Lebanon. The views of the participants are shown in the following excerpts.

FM1 *"We Sunnis feel like we are loyal to Saudi."*

Centrist3 *"Saudi became the guardian for the Lebanese Sunnis."*

FOMA1 *"If you want to be a Sunni leader, you have to be an ally with Saudi."*

Centrist1 *"As the prayer direction of all Muslims is to Mecca, the political direction of all the Lebanese Sunnis is to Saudis."*

UP2 *"We are not opponents of Saudi Arabia."*

Saudi Arabia has established a long-standing relationship, not only with the Lebanese Sunnis, but with all the Lebanese religious communities including the Lebanese Christians, Druze and Shias. Saudi Arabia's financial support for Lebanon has not been limited to the Lebanese Sunnis. Rather, it has been extended to include other religious communities as well as state institutions (e.g. the Lebanese army and the Lebanese Central Bank). Saudi Arabia's key role as a mediator between the warring factions in the Lebanese civil war increased its impact on the Lebanese politics (el-Husseni 2004;

Salamey 2014). In 1989, Saudi Arabia hosted the Taif Accord which ended the civil war in Lebanon (el-Husseini 2004). The accord solidified Saudi Arabia's political presence in Lebanon but its influence on the Lebanese power dynamics remained limited as compared with Syria, which dominated the Lebanese politics until its withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005 (Berti 2012; Najem 2012).

Non-Sunni1 *“Saudi Arabia established relations with all the Lebanese people not only with Sunnis but with Christians, Druze, and even with Shias.”*

LMS1 *“In fact, most of Saudi Arabian's spending went to non-Sunnis. Saudis were very generous with Christians and the Lebanese army.”*

MP1 *“The Lebanese Shias, Christians and Druze benefited from Saudi Arabia's support. We appreciate that.”*

From 1990 to 2005 the role of Saudi Arabia in the Lebanese politics was felt through its funding to the re-construction of post-war Lebanon and its financial and political support for the Hariri family (Salamey 2014). Saudi Arabia's support to Lebanon was channelled through its main Sunni ally in Lebanon the former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri (Perti 2012; Perti 2016). The close relations between the Hariri family and the Saudi royal family have become an essential factor for explaining the role of Saudi Arabia in the Lebanese politics (Berti 2012). It is in this context that Saudi Arabia maintained its influence on Lebanon during the 1990s whilst trying not to upset or challenge the Syrian's influence on Lebanon (Perti 2012; Perti 2016).

In 2005, the assassination of Rafik Hariri shocked and infuriated Saudi Arabia (Berti 2012). Saudi Arabia saw that the assassination of Hariri was a strike against its main

representative in Lebanon and therefore it insisted that the Lebanese state should work hard to unfold the truth behind Hariri's assassination (Safa 2006; Osoegawa 2013). Saudi Arabia suspected that Syria was behind the assassination of Hariri and therefore, it pushed for the withdrawal of Syria's troops from Lebanon (Berti 2012; Osoegawa 2013). It is therefore unsurprising to note that Saudi Arabia supported the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) 1559, which demanded the Syrian's troops to withdraw from Lebanon (Safa 2005). Saudi Arabia began to explicitly abandon its endorsement of the Syrian role in Lebanon and gradually started, along with United States and France to put pressure on Syria to withdraw from Lebanon (Berti 2012).

The withdrawal of Syria from Lebanon enabled Saudi Arabia and Iran to deepen their involvement in the Lebanese politics (Osoegawa 2013). The rising influence of Iran on the Lebanese politics worsened the Iranian-Saudi Arabian relationship and alternatively strengthened the Syrian-Iranian alliance (Osoegawa 2013). Saudi Arabia's involvement in Lebanon was understood in the context of countering its main regional rivals in Lebanon: Iran and Syria. Saudi capitalised on its shared religious Sunni identity with the Lebanese Sunnis and increased its funding for non-state Sunni actors such as the Lebanese Salafists and the Future Movement in order to counter the influence of Iran, Syria and Hezbollah on the Lebanese politics (see Aarts and van Duijne 2009; Lefevre 2014).

However, the current situation of Saudi Arabia regarding their influence on Lebanon as compared to Iran is discouraging for some Sunnis. Some research participants think that it is not enough for Saudi Arabia to support Lebanon financially in order to counter-balance Iran. Rather, they think that for Saudi Arabia to safeguard its

influence on Lebanon it should combine its financial investments with political investments. The views of the research respondents are shown below.

Haraki Salafists1 *“Why does Saudi Arabia leave the Lebanese Sunnis struggling against Iran? For Saudi to safeguard its influence and interests in Lebanon, aids shall also be accompanied with political investment”.*

Saudi Arabia, which is considered as the main supporter of the Lebanese Sunnis, has decreased its financial and political support for its main Sunni allies in Lebanon (e.g. the Future Movement), while Iran financially, ideologically and politically supports its Shia and Sunni allies in Lebanon. For instance, the 2009 financial crisis of the Future Movement was attributable by the research respondents to the lack of Saudi Arabia’s financial support. Indeed, two respondents from the Future Movement (FM1) and (FM3) admit that Saudi Arabia has curtailed its support for the Future Movement regardless of the Future Movement alliance with Saudi Arabia. Another respondent from Dar al-Fatwa (DF1) indicates that Sunnis are surprised about Saudi Arabia’s reluctance to support the Lebanese Sunnis. This might be attributable to the fact that Saudi Arabia’s support to the Future Movement did not enable Saudi Arabia to counter Iran’s dominance over Lebanon. However, the participant indicates that Iran is playing a role in the Lebanese politics and it is not expected from Saudi Arabia to decrease its support for the Lebanese Sunnis while Iran is heavily supporting its allies in Lebanon. The views of the respondents are shown below

FM1 *“We generally agree with Saudi’s policy line. Saudi used to support Sunnis most of the time. However, in recent years Saudis have stopped to assist us.”*

FM2 *“The Future Movement is politically in line with Saudi. Saudi still trusts the Future Movement. As for financial issues, Saudi has curtailed its financial support to the Future Movement since 2009.”*

Centrist2 *“The current financial crisis in the Future Movement is because of the lack of the Saudi’s support.”*

DF1 *“We are surprised about Saudi’s reluctance. Saudi did not explain to us why it stopped financial support. They may think that their project in Lebanon has not been completely successful. Saudi has been neutral in a time neutrality is unacceptable because Iran is playing a role in the Lebanese arena.”*

Non-Sunni1 *“The Future Movement has been recently deprived from Saudi’s support, whilst Iran ideologically, politically and financially supports Hezbollah.”*

Some participants think entirely in sectarian terms in that they criticise Saudi Arabia for not helping Sunnis to counter Iran. In their views, Iran has a clear and consistent long-term ideology, which is aiming to achieve in Lebanon. Iran seeks to abolish the nation-state Lebanon through de-confessionalising the Lebanese political system and establishing an Islamic order in line with the Shia interpretation of Islam (Haddad 2013:18). For Iran, the establishment of Islamic order in Lebanon represents the realisation of the “Shia Crescent” campaign to convey the message of the Iranian Islamic revolution and the adherence to the Khomeini’s conceptualisation of the notion of “wilayat al-faqih” guardianship of the jurist (Norton 2007; Shanahan 2008:45).

According to the research respondents, Iran knows how to choose reliable Shia and Sunni allies in Lebanon in order to export its ideology in Lebanon. Since the 1980s, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been considered as Hezbollah's main patron (Najem 2012). Iran supported Hezbollah's rise from a disorganised faction to an irregular power capable of challenging states' military powers through providing all category of help that countries can offer to non-state actors (DeVore and Stähli 2015: 350-351).

On the contrary, some research respondents claim that Saudi Arabia seeks to protect the nation-state Lebanon and assist the legitimacy of the Lebanese state. They indicate that Saudi Arabia does not aim at establishing a theocratic Sunni Islamic rule in Lebanon. However, the respondents note that Saudi Arabia's policies toward the Lebanese Sunnis are "ambiguous" and "inconsistent" and its role and influence on Lebanon cannot match that of Iran. In their views, Saudi Arabia's Sunni allies in Lebanon are weak, unreliable, and are unable to counter-balance Iran. The ambiguity and inconsistency of Saudi Arabia's policies regarding the Lebanese Sunnis weaken the power position of Saudi Arabia vis-à-vis Iran and pave the way for an increasing Iranian influence on Lebanon. The responses of the research respondents are shown in the following excerpts.

UP1 *"The Iranians know well how to choose their allies, unlike the Arabs. Iran not only built alliances, they built strategic relations with their allies. Saudi dealt with Sunni allies but those allies are weak and unreliable. That is why Iran succeeded."*

Non-Sunni1 *“Whoever observes Saudi’s policy toward Sunnis in Lebanon would feel buzzled. There is ambiguity and inconsistency...”*

Non-Sunni3 *“Saudi Arabia as compared to Iran did not have the interest to build a Sunni rule in Lebanon...”*

Non-Sunni2 *“Saudi assists the Lebanese state whilst Iran assists militias. Saudi role seeks to protect nation-state while Iran’s goal is to abolish nation-state.”*

The Syrian war, which began in 2011, signalled a shift in Saudi Arabia’s foreign policy in Lebanon. Saudi Arabia’s infuriation of Iran’s dominance over Lebanon and its involvement in Syria to support the Assad regime led to Saudi Arabia to reduce its political presence and support for Lebanon (Bahout et al. 2016; Bernard 02/03/2016). For example, in 2016, Saudi Arabia decided to cancel billions of dollars of aid to the Lebanese official army (Hannah 2016). The Saudi state urged its Saudi citizens to avoid travelling to Lebanon and declared Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation (Bernard 02/03/2016).

In addition, Saudi Arabia reduced its financial support for the Future Movement (Vloeberghs 2015). The declining Saudi Arabian support for the Future Movement resulted in the failure of the latter to craft a truly convincing vision that responds to Sunni socio-economic and political needs (Vloeberghs 2015). It also resulted the weakening of the Future Movement’s patronage of its Sunni constituency (Vloeberghs 2015).

The disempowering of Saudi Arabia’s main Sunni ally in Lebanon (i.e. the Future Movement) resulted in the rise of rival radical Sunni political leaders, who contested

the Future Movement political leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon and its inability to counter Hezbollah. It also increased Iran's political and financial influence on Lebanon, because Iran, on different occasions, has offered to support the Lebanese army. In addition, Iran provided its ally Hezbollah with various forms of financial, ideological and political assistance, which proved invaluable for the party's development (DeVore and Stähli 2015:351). These development further undermined Saudi Arabia's influence on Lebanon in comparison with Iran (Perti 2016).

4.5.1 Saudi Arabia's Role in Dividing Sunnis

Some Sunni respondents frame Saudi Arabia's role in Lebanon as "unifying", indicating that Saudi Arabia does not seek to divide the Lebanese Sunnis but rather seek to strengthen them and unify them. Saudi Arabia's shared Muslim "Sunni" religious identity with the Lebanese Sunnis has played a key role in the former's willingness to unify the Sunni political front in Lebanon irrespective of their affiliations and political alignments. The involvement of Saudi Arabia in the Sunni politics is understandable in the context of backing the stability of Lebanon, strengthening the solidarity of Sunnis and countering the influence of Iran on the Lebanese politics. Therefore, it would be in the interest of Saudi Arabia to have a unified political Sunni front than a divided one.

Haraki Salafists1 *"Saudi does not want to divide Sunnis. It is not in Saudi's interests to divide Sunnis. They want the Lebanese Sunnis to be strong."*

FOMA2 *"The role of Saudi in Lebanon is unifying. Saudis invited me to and I met with King Salman. I went alone and I did not feel that the role of Saudi was exclusionary."*

FM2 *“Saudi Arabia does not play a role in dividing the Lebanese Sunnis. On the contrary, they try to unify opposed Sunnis grouping the Future Movement and the Union Party.”*

MP1 *“Saudi Arabia does not play a role in dividing the Lebanese Sunnis. Its role was to unify Sunnis. There was a Saudi tendency to unify Sunnis and not to exclude anybody”*

Centrist2 *“Saudi Arabia does not seek to divide the Lebanese Sunnis... on the contrary what I have observed from Saudi Arabian’s sayings and actions is that that they are concerned about the unity of the Sunni community...”*

Saudi Arabia’s support for Sunni leaders who are in leadership positions (i.e. the Future Movement) is an issue of concern for the participants. The Future Movement is Saudi Arabia’s main Sunni ally in Lebanon (see International Crisis Group 2010; Khashan 2013; Rougier 2015). Yet, Saudi Arabia’s relations with the Sunni community in Lebanon are not restricted to a particular Sunni grouping or a leader. Saudi Arabia holds good relationship with other Sunni political leaders and organisations in Lebanon notwithstanding their various ideological orientations (e.g. the centrist former Prime Minister Najib Mikati, the pro-Syria former Minister Abdul Rahim Mourad, the leader of the pan-Arab-based Union Party and the anti-Syria, anti-Iran former Minister of Justice Ashraf Rifi). The research participants note that Saudi Arabia adopted the Future Movement because its policies were in line with Saudi Arabia’s interests in Lebanon and they do not mind adopting other Sunni leaders or groups as long as they support Saudi Arabia’s policies in Lebanon. The views of the research respondents are shown in the following excerpts.

Centrist2 *“Saudi Arabia adopted Rafik Hariri. After Hariri’s death, Saudi Arabia adopted Saad Hariri. But it is clear and I heard this directly from the Saudi officials that Saudi does not restrict its relations in Lebanon to a particular Sunni grouping...”*

FM2 *“Within the Sunni community in Lebanon, Saudi’s relations are not confined to the Hariri family. They hold good relations with Najib Mikati. They also have some sort of relations with Abdul Rahim Mourad...”*

On the contrary, three Sunni participants including a Sunni member of the parliament (MP1), a *Haraki* Salafist (*Haraki* Salafists1) and a member of the League of Muslim Scholars (LMS1) counter-frame the narratives that Saudi Arabia supports all Sunni groups in Lebanon. They claim that Saudi Arabia does not support any Sunni groupings other than the Future Movement. Moreover, they doubt that the current Saudi Arabian’s policies in Lebanon would lead to the unification of the Lebanese Sunnis. In their opinion, Saudi Arabia has limited their support for the Lebanese Sunnis to the Future Movement regardless of the perceived inability of the latter to empower the Lebanese Sunnis. These participants further claim that the Future Movement is not doing anything for the sake of Sunnis. The views of the respondents are shown below.

HarakiSalafists1 *“Does Saudi Arabia’s policy in Lebanon unify Sunnis? I doubt it. We would have wished that the Hariri family has led Sunnis to ensure their power, dignity and to really become influential in Lebanon... we disagree with the Sunni leaders and their backers Saudi in that the Hariri family and the Future Movement are doing nothing for Sunnis sake. We appeal to Saudi to re-consider its options. Does that option serve the interest of the Sunnis?”*

LMS1 *“Saudi Arabia as a state with respect to supporting Sunnis only supports the Future Movement. Saudi Arabian supports Sunnis through the Hariri family.”*

MP1 *“Politically speaking, the Future Movement is the only Sunni grouping that gets support from Saudi Arabia.”*

The perceptions that Saudi Arabia limits its support for the Lebanese Sunnis to the Future Movement lead to “intra-Sunni political division”. This is mainly because there are some Sunnis, who disagree with the policies of the Future Movement. Collectively, some Sunni respondents indicate that Saudi Arabia needs to re-consider its support for the Future Movement, and more importantly, to clarify whether or not its support for the Future Movement serves the interests of Saudi Arabia as well as the interests of the Lebanese Sunnis.

4.6 Situating the Frames of Alliance-Building in the Context of the Sunni Politics

In this part, alliances between external state actors specifically (Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia) and its attendant impact on the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon is examined with the hope of exploring potential challenges that have explicit or implicit implications on the unity of the Lebanese Sunnis. These state actors as the data has revealed (see 4.1, 4.4 and 4.5) built these alliances with the Lebanese Sunni groupings with the possibility of exporting their ideological standings to Lebanon and maintaining political influence on Lebanon. These external state actors, by exporting their ideologies, have weakened the sovereignty and autonomy of the Lebanese state and

generated tensions and conflicts at the inter- and intra-communal levels to the point of drawing Lebanon to the risk position of a failed state.

Contextually, Iran became the main player in the Lebanese politics to replace Syria as the leading force in Lebanon and to continue to employ Hezbollah as a key tool in its struggle for power against its main rivals in the Middle East region: Israel and Saudi Arabia (Wiegand 2009: 671). The rise of the Iranian influence on Lebanon worsened the Iranian-Saudi Arabian relationship and consolidated the Syrian-Iranian alliance (Osoegawa 2013). The configuration of power dynamics between these key regional states Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iran has influenced the Lebanese politics and nurtured sectarian tensions, domestic polarisation and violent conflicts (see Osoegawa 2013; Wahlisch and Felsch 2016). Saudi Arabia, in this context, considered the strength of the Sunni community in Lebanon as an echo of its influence on the Middle East region (Osoegawa 2013). On the other hand, Iran, likewise Syria, considered the strength of the Shia community in Lebanon as an echo of their influence on the Middle East region (Osoegawa 2013). The relationship between these regional powers (i.e. Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iran) and Lebanon was not limited to the state level but was extended to include relations with non-state sectarian-based Lebanese actors (Osoegawa 2013). For example, Saudi Arabia's support for the Future Movement and the Lebanese Salafists was understood in the context of countering the Syrian-Iranian influence on Lebanon, whilst Iran's support for the Hezbollah was understood in the context of countering Saudi Arabia's influence on Lebanon and the Middle East (Osoegawa 2013).

It is understandable that a set of state and non-state actors within shared aims solidify their position when cooperating or allying their activism or even joining coalitions or forces (Rucht 2007:202). This is true in the case of the Sunni politics in Lebanon. This research suggests that there are instances where Sunni organisations and leaders form alliances with governments, regional states and international agencies to pursue social change objectives and advance their interests. The data of the research are indicative of the fact that some Sunni groupings and leaders in Lebanon build ideological alliances with regional state actors (e.g. Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia). These external actors often share the same religious ideology or political agenda with these Sunni movements in Lebanon. It is believed that the development of these relations could serve as catalyst for socio-economic development of the Lebanese state and hence serving Lebanon's national interests but could also be used to serve the political interests of Sunni movements to counter-mobilise and to counter-frame their Lebanese Sunni opponents. In this sense, the reliance on external powers may not bring about solidarity between Sunni movements; rather, it could threaten national cohesion and nurture intra-Sunni political divides.

For Sunni movements and leaders in Lebanon, it is believed that alliance-building is often a costly and risky operation (Diani 2003:118). It implies the recognition of commonalities and points of convergence between actors with distinct agendas, often competing, and sometimes positively distrustful of each other (Hathaway and Meyer 1994; Melucci 1996; Rochon and Meyer 1997). In this context, the risky nature of alliance-building between Sunni movements in Lebanon and external actors is manifested in the forms of conflict, tensions and distrust between Sunni movements

and leaders. The issues promoting these kinds of challenges are based on commonalities and divergences between these organisations and external actors: Saudi Arabia (Sunnis), Iran (Shias) and Syria (Alawis). The different and sometimes opposing ideological standings of Sunni movements are manifest in the Lebanese case. The transnational movement Hizb ut-Tahrir, for instance, seeks to re-establish the Islamic state of the caliphate (see 3.1.5), al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya's ideology is influenced by the school of thought of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was established in Egypt in 1928 (see 3.1.3), al-Ahbash's ideology is influenced by the Rifaiyya Sufi order and is politically affiliated with Syria (see 4.4.1), the pan-Arab Sunni groupings the Popular Nasserite Organisation and the Union Party are ideologically affiliated with pan-Arabism in its Nasserite form and consider themselves as pan-Arab first and Sunni second (see 3.1.7), the national Sunni grouping the Future Movement is politically affiliated with Saudi Arabia (4.6) and the Lebanese Salafists have arguably advocated three ideological positions in Lebanon ranging from "purist" apolitical, to "*haraki*" political and to "jihadist", and have been influenced by different Salafist school of thoughts in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, Kuwait and elsewhere (Pall 2013; Rabil 2014). In this context, some of the Sunni movements in their framing and counter-framing activities claim to be more Sunnis than the others (see 4.4.1). What is more worrying is the fact that the claims of some Lebanese Sunnis that some of the Sunni movements and leaders in Lebanon are not Sunnis because of their affiliation with Iran (a Shia state) and their affiliation with Syria (an Alawi state). The data in (4.4.1) shows that some Sunni actors deny that al-Ahbash's identity is Sunni and rather frame it as a "tool" used by Syria to divide the Lebanese Sunnis. Likewise, the data in (3.2.6)

indicates that some Sunni actors think that it is false to classify the Future Movement as a grouping that represents Sunnis. The negative aspect of ideology is that it may help to sustain the self, but sometimes at the expense of intra-Sunni tolerance, understanding and solidarity (see Gecas 2000: 99).

The tensions associated with these claims and counter-claims regarding ideology and ideological importation may not end soon if serious efforts are not taken in order to secure the future of Lebanon. This research explores the possibilities of ending these intra-Sunni political tensions that seem to threaten the Lebanese national cohesion and democratic credentials. The ability of Sunni movements in Lebanon to transcend their ideological differences and to coordinate is therefore critical to their potential for success in achieving national goals and improving the lives of their constituents.

Alliance-building is also expected to arise from the necessity of coordinating with a monopolistic or powerful financial provider (Zald and McCarthy 1979). The data from the field demonstrates that Hezbollah's frequent engagement with Israel on different occasions has served as a source of interest for some Sunni groupings and leaders (e.g. the Tawheed Movement, al-Ahbash, the Popular Nasserite Organisation, the Union Party, the Arab Liberation Party and the Islamic Action Front), which think that Iran and Hezbollah are defending the dignity of Arabs and Muslims (see 4.1.1, 4.1.2 and 4.1.3). Hezbollah is perceived as the most influential player on the Lebanese politics. Therefore, these Lebanese Sunni movements capitalised on the political opportunity of Hezbollah being the arbitrator of the Lebanese politics and built an alliance with them in order to be able to actively take part in the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon.

The above analysis is suggestive of the fact that alliance-building is influenced by environmental circumstances in that it has the potential to be built when either political threat or opportunities emerge (Staggenborg 1986). When Sunni movement organisations sense that environmental conditions are suitable for achieving their goals, they may share the willingness in joining forces in order to be able to gain victory (Zald and Ash 1966; Zald and McCarthy 1979 as cited in Staggenborg 1986). Similarly, when Sunni movement organisations are in crisis or when they face a hostile counter-movement, coalitions and alliances are likely to be built (Staggenborg 1986).

The data (in 4.5) shows how some Sunni actors are craving for an alliance with Saudi Arabia in order to counter-balance Iran and to solidify their political status. They frame Saudi Arabia as “the guardian of the Lebanese Sunnis” and indicate that the Lebanese Sunnis are “loyal” to Saudi Arabia (see 4.5). In addition, the data (in 4.5) shows how some Sunni actors encourage Saudi Arabia to increase its financial and political support for the Lebanese Sunnis in order to challenge Iran (see 4.5).

Core state actors like Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia may intervene in the domestic political process so as to support groupings that are favourable to their ideological and economic interests (Smith 2007:313). These activities are usually legitimated or justified on the ground that those core states are helping to support the processes of democratic development in the country in question (Smith 2007:313). The data from the field are indicative of the fact that the Future Movement receives external funding from Saudi Arabia (see 4.5). The data also reveals that the former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was supported by Saudi Arabia, France and the United States, which contributed

to his dominance in the Sunni politics (see 3.2.1). The reliance on external support may result in these Sunni groupings and leaders to be influenced by external actors whose policies may affect Sunni unity. It could also weaken Sunni autonomy and independence because decision-making, in the case, may be imposed from external actors. These decisions may serve the interests of the core states but not necessarily the interest of Sunni movements or the Lebanese state at large.

The analysis in this section has revealed that these external alliances have led to polarisation, tensions, conflicts and sometimes political turmoil in Lebanon. The idea that resources are extended to Sunni movements in Lebanon for purposes of mobilisation and de-mobilisation of Sunni movements, adherents and activities goes far beyond mere support to mobilising special movements and movements' leaders to creating a fertile ground for their ideological positions and to have an influence on Lebanon. These kinds of positions do not benefit Lebanon as a state. Lebanon has the potential and leaders to carry out their religious activities without relying on external agents; home grown ideas and resources can help minimise these tensions and conflicts.

4.7 Framing the Competition between Sunni Movements and Leaders in Lebanon

In this section the competition between Sunni movements and leaders in Lebanon which has been generated by the activities of the external players to gain influence on Sunni power dynamics in Lebanon would be the focus of the analysis. The struggle to gain greater influence on Lebanon by the external players (i.e. Iran, Saudi Arabia and

Syria), which this research has argued (in 4.7), has generated conflicts, tensions and affected national cohesion and unity in Lebanon. These kinds of challenges as the data has revealed (in 4.1, 4.3 and 4.5) partly emanated from this kind of competition. My analysis is not against democratic competition or diversity as they are the hallmark of the political realm in Lebanon (Grzymala-Busse 2007; Jones 2013) but it examines the extremist tendencies and the kind of competitions, created by external players, which are generating tensions in Lebanon and are potentially affecting Sunni's unity, national cohesion and democratic credentials of Lebanon.

The establishment of party competition is essential for effective governance and democratic consolidation (Grzymala-Busse 2007; Jones 2013). A long-standing conviction in the fields of politics suggests that competition "hinders elite opportunism and the seeking of excess to profits or private benefits" (Grzymala-Busse 2007:91). It is associated with greater levels of service providing, accountability, transparency in governance and lower levels of corruption. The existence of various competing political actors is likely to enhance representation, "both by encompassing wider constituencies and by providing all voters with alternatives to the government program" (Grzymala-Busse 2007:92). The analysis in this section considers competition amongst Sunni movements in Lebanon in the context of the framing theory. This research argues that diversity, pluralism and healthy competition are required amongst movements in order to achieve the goals of democratic development and democratic competition in Lebanon.

The Sunni politics in Lebanon is characterised by the existence and coexistence between various pan-Arab, national and religious Sunni leaders in Lebanon. These

leaders differ in their social bases, political orientations, external links, political experiences and strategic preferences (Rucht 2007). Sunni leaders often engage in framing and counter-framing activities to appeal to the Sunni public and to gain control of the Sunni masses. The case of the Sunni Prime Ministers Saad Hariri and Najib Mikati is the epitome of competition between Sunni political leaders in Lebanon over the leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon (see 3.2.2). As part of their framing activities, Saad Hariri adherents frame Najib Mikati as a “pro-Syria” and an “ally with Hezbollah” in order to de-mobilise his supporters (see 3.2.2). On the contrary, as part of their counter-framing activities, Najib Mikati’s adherents accuse Saad Hariri of seeking to “monopolise” the political leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon (see 3.2.2). Collectively, the above framings and counter framings are suggestive of the fact that the Sunni politics in Lebanon is diverse and is not monopolised by the Hariri family, regardless of their prominence in the Sunni milieu. There are several Sunni leaders, with various backgrounds, who compete against each other for the leadership of the Sunni politics in Lebanon (see 3.2.2).

Competition between movement organisations is the pursuit of outcomes and rewards in a mutually exclusive way (Tilly and Tarrow 2007:216; Tilly and Wood 2013:135). In the Sunni context, competition often inhibits the pursuit of control of Sunni groupings over the Sunni politics, governmental activities and financial resources. Even though Sunni movements in Lebanon could be perceived to share the same general goal(s), it is clear in this research that they may have different ideological and organisational needs which may contribute to differences over certain tactics as well as competition for resources (Staggenborg 1986:388). The level to which

Sunni movements would compete or cooperate with each another is indeed problematic.

Many Sunni movement organisations in Lebanon in their attempt to fund their activities resort to external players for external support. Smith (2007:320) argues that “we increasingly find that national groups are participating in more informal transnational networks or coalitions as they discover that achieving their organizational aims requires engagement at the transnational level” (Smith 2007:320) but noted that building transnational alliances is more costly and difficult than localised activism (Smith 2007:324). Sunni movements in Lebanon resorted to regional states, which are ideologically opposed to each other, as it is the case between Iran and Saudi Arabia, to gain their support (see 4.5). The external support by these regional powers may not be used as a means of ensuring a healthy competition between these Sunni movements in Lebanon, as they pursue their goals in improving the democratic credentials of the Lebanese state. Rather, this support by regional powers may increase their influence on Sunni power dynamics. These Sunni movements are likely to be influenced by their supporters to engage in regional conflicts and ideological rivalry (e.g. between Saudi Arabia and Iran) on the Lebanese ground, in which they may explicitly or implicitly serve the agenda of their regional supporters at the expense of Lebanon’s national interests. This kind of unhealthy competition may therefore affect the loyalty of Sunni movements to the Lebanese state, lead to political unrest and fuel sectarian tensions between the Lebanese religious communities.

The struggle among these Sunni movements in Lebanon for support from external players could be a source of competition and means of counter-framing the activities of their competitors in this context. Survival among Sunni movement organisations in Lebanon in this context is contingent on their financial viability. As Zald and McCarthy (1979:4-5) suggest, movement organisations need financial resources if they seek to pursue their control more than the localised context, in others words, movement organisations “must appeal for support” to survive (Zald and McCarthy 1979:5). This kind of competition between Sunni movements in Lebanon is fiercely increasing as a result of the declining availability of resources (see 4.5) and the increasing external intervention in Sunni political affairs. The data in chapter four shows how the Lebanese Sunnis compete against each other to gain the attention and trust of external players (Iran, Saudi Arabia and Syria). It is arguable that these Sunni movements are competing for the same Sunni audiences hence the need to increase their resources, mobilisation strategies and framing and counter-framing techniques. In this context, as this research has argued above that localised resources could better serve the need of these Sunni movements and reduce conflicts. Lebanon as an independent state must be supported to carry out activities as an independent democratic sovereign state devoid of external control and influence; Lebanon must be managed by the Lebanese.

4.8 Conflicts as an Attendant Consequence of Intra-Sunni

Competition in Lebanon

In any democratic political processes competition cannot be avoided. However, the concern of this research has been that existing intra-Sunni political divisions coupled

with the struggle to gain influence on Sunni power dynamics in Lebanon by external players (Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia) turned competition between Sunni actors into violent conflicts and political tensions, and therefore, weakened unity and national cohesion among them. As Rucht (2007:207) puts it "competition can easily turns into conflict when the interests of the allied partners diverge or the alliance faces a bifurcation that does not allow for a compromise". Diversity in Sunni public opinion in Lebanon is a healthy development that enhances the democratic credential of the Lebanese state. The Sunni community in Lebanon is free to have its own judgement on issues pertinent to the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon and have the right not to comply with any particular standing point in Lebanon whether pan-Arab, religious or national (Jensen-Lee 2004:553-554). What is crucial, nevertheless, is to keep potentially divisive and controversial issues out of Sunni interactions and organisational agenda (Jensen-Lee 2004: 553-4) in order to avoid political tensions and violent conflicts.

Conflicts are introduced as key element for the conceptualisation of movement organisations in which frame articulators get involved in religious or political claims which have the potential to either oppose or promote social change (della Porta and Diani 2006 as cited in della Porta 2013:357). What is worrying about conflicts in the context of the Sunni politics in Lebanon is that Sunni actors in Lebanon tend to seek monopoly, whether religious, political or economic over the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon, and in the process, they make negative claims of other Sunni counterparts, which if realised, would possibly damage the interests of these Lebanese Sunni actors (see della Porta and Diani 2006 as cited in della Porta 2013:357).

The internal struggles between various ideological tendencies within the Sunni milieu ranging from moderate to radical could have the potential for intra-Sunni political conflicts (Hamzeh 1997; Imad 2006). The politicisation of Sunni pan-Arab, national and religious identities could lead to intra-Sunni split ups, factionalism and infighting. Conflict in the Sunni context could also emerge from theological-cum-ideological struggles over claims, power, values and resources, in which the aims of conflict groupings are not to gain the desired ends but to injure, neutralise and to eliminate their Sunni rivals (Coser 1967 as cited in Oberschall 1997:39).

The data (in 4.4.1) reveals that the struggle between the Lebanese Salafists and al-Ahbash exposed the fissures within the Sunni community in Lebanon. It signalled the first violent intra-Sunni contestation in Lebanon in that it resulted in the assassination of the political leader of al-Ahbash shaykh Nizar al-Halabi in 1995 and led to further fractures in the Sunni arena (see 4.4.1). These worrying developments cannot be ignored as they show that framing and counter-framing activities in Lebanon are serious enough to the extent that they could lead to violent conflicts, hence threatening national cohesion and security of Lebanon. Competition is not only restricted to Sunni groupings in Lebanon internally, it also applies to competitive relations with external actors which has been one of the sources of tension sometimes violence and political turmoil in Lebanon.

This research does not only involve how Sunni movements and counter-movements issues have influenced the process of framing and counter-framing activities but also their effect on the unity of the Lebanese Sunnis. The concern of this research has been the political division in the Sunni community in Lebanon and its attendant tensions and

conflicts and the overall impact of these happenings on the political stability in Lebanon. Indeed, this research has confirmed my concern and apprehension to be the reality in Lebanon hence the need for this research.

4.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, the analysis focused on how Sunni political actors understand, narrate and interpret the role of external players (Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia) in the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon. Sunni political actors in Lebanon have various political affiliations with external players and hence, the linkage between these Sunni actors and external players could affect the way in which they frame and perceive the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon. In addition, the chapter showed the interrelations between external and domestic factors in shaping intra-Sunni political dynamics in Lebanon. The involvement of external players in the Sunni politics is essential for the understanding of domestic issues such as political affiliations, rival religious and political leadership and multiplicity of Sunni politicised pan-Arab, religious and national identities.

Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the summary, conclusion and recommendations are presented. The main goal of this research is to examine how the Lebanese Sunni political actors understand, frame and interpret issues of intra-Sunni Muslim political divides in Lebanon. These issues were examined through the operationalisation of framing theory concepts such as frame alignment processes, frame resonance, frame credibility, frame consistency and injustice frames (Snow and Benford 2000). The data analysis in chapter three (3) and chapter four (4) laid the foundation for the last chapter, chapter five (5), which contextualises the findings of this research in relation to the formulated research question. In addition, this chapter seeks to explore avenues for reducing intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon and promoting unity among the Lebanese Sunni groupings and leaders. In the following section (5.1), the research provides a summary of the main findings of this research.

5.1 Summary of the Key Findings of the Research

The data were collected from the field in Lebanon through the use of semi structured interviews with twenty three (23) research respondents including (Sunni groups' representatives, political and religious leaders, rank-and-file members, Lebanese ministers, members of the Lebanese parliament, journalists, academics and lawyers). Yet, the researcher did not only draw on interviews to examine the politics of the

Sunni community in Lebanon. Other sources including (secondary literature, press materials and documents) published by Sunni groupings and leaders in Lebanon were consulted to widen the scope of the research, contextualise the responses of the research respondents and support the researcher's own argument and reasoning. The use of interview materials and analysis of documents was important to help the researcher gain a better understanding of how the Lebanese Sunni political actors frame and articulate intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon. In the following, the research presents a summary of the main findings of this research in accordance with the research question.

❖ **How do the Lebanese Sunni political actors frame intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon?**

This research question aimed at “understanding” not “explaining” intra-Sunni political divides in Lebanon. It sought to interpret the ways in which the Lebanese Sunni political actors frame, understand and narrate issues of intra-Sunni political divides in Lebanon at the internal and external levels. The focus was not on the validity of their narratives when they frame the Sunni politics in a particular way. These issues are summarised in the following headings:

Identity Transformation

- I. The data of this research shows that the Lebanese Sunnis exhibit different identities (pan-Arab, religious and national). The belonging to one or more of these identities could shape the way in which the Lebanese Sunnis construct their narratives on issues of intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon (see 3.1). The multiplicities of the Lebanese Sunni identities could be a reflection of irreconcilable

ideological divides but they could also be a reflection of Sunni understanding of the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon as a “game”, in which their identities and frames maybe be shifted or manipulated in line with the prevailing political circumstance (see 3.1).

- II. It emerges from the data analysis (in 3.1) that the politicisation of Sunni identities in Lebanon could lead to “identity transformation” within the Sunni composite from embracing national identities to embracing religious identities and vice versa. In addition, the perceptions that Sunnis are under threats from internal or external actors could be considered as a significant factor pushing some Sunnis towards embracing religious identity in the name of protecting Sunnis and maintaining their solidarity (see 3.1.2). On the whole, understanding the existing political context in Lebanon is important for interpreting the frames and narratives of Sunni groupings and leaders on the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon.

The Ambiguity of Lebanon’s National Identity

- I. The findings of the research show that the multiplicities of politicised Sunni identities could result in disagreements among the Lebanese Sunnis regarding which identities they would like to embrace (see 3.1.1). These identities include pan-Arab identity (e.g. the Union Party and the Popular Nasserite Organisation), religious identity (e.g. Salafists, Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Tawheed Movement) and national identity (e.g. Dar al-Fatwa and the Future Movement). The construction of these kinds of identities was identified through the operationalisation of frame alignment processes (frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extensions and

frame transformation or re-framing) as theoretical and methodological tools of analysis.

Islamisation of the State of Lebanon

- I. The findings (in 3.1.5) show that intra-Sunni framing disputes on the nation state Lebanon are not only confined to the category of pan-Arab, religious and national Sunni groupings. They are also manifest within each Sunni category especially religious-based Sunni groupings. For example, the Tawheed Movement and al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya engaged in frame transformation processes or "re-framing", to transform their old frames from the call for the establishment of an Islamic rule in Lebanon (prior to and during the civil war period) to the call for full adaptation and engagement in the Lebanese confessional political system (in the post-civil war period). In contrast, Hizb ut-Tahrir, through engaging in frame amplification processes, disregarded the state of Lebanon and alternatively called for the re-establishment of the Islamic state of the caliphate as a means to regain Muslims' glories (see 3.1.6).

Participation in the Lebanese Confessional Political System

- I. The analysis of the data (in 3.1.5 and 3.1.6) reveals that there is a disagreement among the Lebanese Sunnis on how they perceive the Lebanese confessional political system, which distributes institutional and political power proportionally among the Lebanese confessional communities. Whilst some religious-based Sunni groupings in Lebanon (e.g. the Tawheed Movement, the Lebanese Salafists, and al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya) accept to participate in the Lebanese confessional system although it is not ruled in conformity with Islam, other Sunni groupings (e.g. Hizb

ut-Tahrir) reject to participate in the Lebanese confessional political system except under very strict conditions (see 3.1.6).

The Leadership of the Former Sunni Prime Minister Rafik Hariri

- I. It emerges from the data (in 3.2) that the political leadership of the Hariri family (Rafik Hariri and his son Saad) constitutes one of the issues that divides the Lebanese Sunnis at the domestic levels. The pro-Hariri camp is classified as being aligned with Saudi Arabia, France and the United States. The anti-Hariri camp is classified as being aligned with Syria, Iran and Hezbollah (see 3.2.1). This classification is important for the conceptualisation of the “framing” and “counter-framing” activities of the Sunni actors regarding the political leadership of the Hariri family. The data (in 3.2.1) reveals that the framing activities of the anti-Hariri camp focus on Rafik Hariri’s perceptual “exclusion” of traditional Sunni *zuama*, his “monopolisation” of the Sunni politics and his “alliance with the West”, especially the United States and France. This camp frames Hariri’s policies as “dividing” the Sunni front and “serving” the interest of the United States and Israel, hence contradicting the Sunni ethos (see 3.2.1). Conversely, the narratives of the pro-Hariri camp focus on Hariri’s “cooperative politics” with Sunni rivals and his alliance with external players as being in favour of Lebanon’s national interests.

Rivalry in the Political Leadership of the Sunni Community in Lebanon

- I. The findings (in 3.2, 3.2.1 and 3.2.2) show that the Sunni politics in Lebanon is not solely led by the Hariri family, or by the Future Movement, irrespective of the fact the Future Movement is the largest Sunni grouping in Lebanon by virtue of the last three parliamentary elections in 2005, 2009 and 2018. The data (in 3.2.2)

shows that the Future Movement possess approximately 60% of the Sunni street. It also shows that the Sunni community in Lebanon is not homogenous but rather multi-directional. The data (in 3.2.2) indicates that “diversity” and “rivalry” characterise the political leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon. The Sunni politics consists of various leaders with various political affiliations. These Sunni leaders compete against each other for the political leadership of the Sunni community and do not want to operate under the umbrella of the Hariri family (see 3.2.2).

- II. The data (in 3.2.2) shows that the rivalry between the Prime Ministers Najib Mikati and Saad Hariri over the political leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon is one of the issues that divide the Lebanese Sunnis at the domestic levels. As part of their framing activities, Saad Hariri’s adherents frame Najib Mikati as a “pro-Hezbollah”, “pro-Iran” and “pro-Syria” leader in order to delegitimise and counter-mobilise his adherents, whereas pro-Najib Mikati, as part of their counter-framing activities, perceive Saad Hariri as a power-hungry leader, who seeks to “monopolise” the Sunni politics. This shows an aspect of how Sunni political actors frame their divides at the domestic levels.

Inadequate Trust for the Political Leadership of the Future Movement

- I. The operationalisation of “injustice frames” (see 3.2.3) as constructed by the research respondents shows that some of the Lebanese Sunni political actors attribute Sunni problematized state of affairs to Hezbollah’s dominance on

Lebanon and the failure of the Future Movement to defend Sunnis in the face of Hezbollah. The Future Movement is the most dominant Sunni party in Lebanon.

- II.** Regarding “frame credibility”, the narratives of some Sunnis, especially religious based Sunnis show that the Future Movement is not serving the interest of Sunnis but rather uses them as a tool to serve its political interests (see 3.2.6). What is worrying is that some Sunnis invoke strong phrases such as “hostility with Islam” to encapsulate the Future Movement (see 3.2.6). Some go further to indicate that Sunnis have made a mistake when they thought that the Future Movement’s frames were credible; hence, the emotional appeal for collective actions against the political leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon (see 3.2.6).
- III.** In line with the findings (in 3.2.6), the data (in 3.2.7) demonstrates that the popularity of the Future Movement in the Sunni politics has declined. A comparison between the results of the Future Movement in the last two parliamentary elections shows that the number of the Future Movement MPs in the Lebanese parliament decreased from thirty-three (33) in 2009 to twenty-one (21) in 2018 (see 3.2.7). The understanding of some Sunnis is that the declining popularity of the Future Movement is attributable to the Future Movement’s “monopoly” of the Sunni politics and its unwillingness to “cooperate” and “communicate” with other Sunni groupings and leaders in Lebanon (see 3.2.6).
- IV.** The Future Movement dispels these claims by insisting that it has no armed or political power to monopolise the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon (see

3.2.7). It constructs itself as a non-sectarian and non-armed organisation. Moreover, the movement criticises Hezbollah's armed activism but indicates that it would not react by militarising Sunnis. Clearly, all seeds of frustration, extremism and hatred are growing amongst the Lebanese Sunnis because of Iran's dominance in the region (Iraq, Syria and Lebanon). Yet, The Future Movement claims that its "moderate" approach to national issues led to the control of the Sunni arena and prevented a large number of Sunnis from resorting to extremism, radicalism and armed activism (see 3.2.5).

- V. Regarding "frame consistency", the research establishes the "inconsistency" between the Future Movement's articulated beliefs and its actual actions. The findings (in 3.2.8) show that the Future Movement's cooperation with Hezbollah and its allies in the Lebanese government as well as in the presidential, parliamentary and municipal elections encapsulates the pragmatic nature of the movement and contradicts its anti-Hezbollah's frames. The ability of the Future Movement's to resonate with Sunnis is contingent on the "consistency" and "credibility" of its proffered frames. The operationalisation of "frame consistency" and "frame credibility" helps to unmask key aspects of Sunni disagreements with the Future Movement.

Radicalisation of the Lebanese Sunnis

- I. The narratives constructed by the research participants (in 3.2.3 and 3.2.4) show that the rising influence of Hezbollah on state machinery following the assassination of the Sunni leader Rafik Hariri in 2005; Hezbollah's takeover of

Beirut in May 2008; and the overthrow of the Saad Hariri-led government in 2011 by Hezbollah and its allies triggered the emergence of different kinds of “injustice frames” amongst the Lebanese Sunnis. Hezbollah’s involvement in the killing of Sunnis in Syria and the perception that the Lebanese state is either silent, implicated or at least, unable to prevent Hezbollah from killing Sunnis, has given the latter the impression that they are being treated unfairly by the Lebanese state.

- II. Moreover, the lack of strong Sunni leadership to counter-balance Hezbollah and to voice Sunni concerns before the Lebanese state has created a division within the Sunni community and given the impression that Sunni leaders are unable to defend Sunnis. All these factors left the Lebanese Sunnis vulnerable to new discourses and opened the doors for the rise of Sunni radicalism and anti-statist narratives (see 3.2.3). The findings (in 3.2.4) reveal that as a result of Hezbollah’s gradual dominance in Lebanon, some Sunnis have given up national “moderate” narratives and resorted to “sectarian” and “radical” narratives under the pretext of maintaining a Sunni solidarity in the face of Hezbollah.

The Religious Leadership of the Sunni Community in Lebanon

- I. The politicisation of Dar al-Fatwa (the highest religious Sunni office in Lebanon) of being under the control of the Future Movement, affects the “credibility” and “resonance” of its frames. This is because not all of the Lebanese Sunnis agree with the Future Movement’s leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon. The findings (in 3.2.9) suggest that Dar al-Fatwa in its current status does not

correspond to the expectations of Sunnis and would not be able to represent them so long as its frames are influenced by the interests of Sunni political groupings or leaders. The influence of external players (Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia) on Dar al-Fatwa on different occasions has been another issue undermining the resonance of Dar al-Fatwa's frames (see 3.2.9).

The Emergence of the League of Muslim Scholars

- I. The analysis of the data (in 3.2.10) shows how the absence of credible religious Sunni leadership resulted in the emergence of rival Sunni bodies, which claim to champion the Sunni cause. The League of Muslim Scholars was able to gain the trust of several Sunnis due to its attachment with Sunni problems and its desire for enhancing their role in the Lebanese political system. The narratives of the research respondents (in 3.2.10) indicate that there is a framing dispute within the Lebanese Sunni actors regarding the way in which they understand the rise of the League of Muslim Scholars. The presence of the League of Muslim Scholars is unwelcomed by some Sunnis, on the ground that the league might be competing against the Future Movement and Dar al-Fatwa for the leadership of the Sunni community. On the contrary, some Sunnis indicate that the League of Muslim Scholars would not have been established had Dar al-Fatwa played its role in defending Sunnis.

Framing of Iran's Role in the Politics of the Sunni Community in Lebanon

- I. The findings (in 4.1) show that the narratives constructed by the Sunni actors on the role of Iran and Hezbollah (the Shia-oriented organisation) are ones that

project the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon. This stance draws the Lebanese Sunni actors to either support or oppose the activities of Iran and Hezbollah. Sunnis who are allied with the Eighth March Alliance (EMA) support Iran and Hezbollah, whereas Sunnis who are allied with the Fourteenth March Alliance (FOMA) oppose Iran and Hezbollah. The pro-Iran, pro-Syria EMA and the pro-Saudi Arabia, pro-West FOMA were developed mainly as a result of the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. The EMA, as part of its framing activities, supports Hezbollah's militarisation and endorses Syria's military presence in Lebanon, whereas the FOMA, as part of its framing activities, opposes Syria's role in Lebanon and calls for the de-militarisation of Hezbollah. This classification is significant for the contextualisation of Sunni frames and narratives regarding the role of Iran and Hezbollah in the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon.

- II. The usage of frame salience (in 4.1.1) show that Iran and Hezbollah have been able to break through the Sunni politics by the activities of "liberating the Muslim lands", "resisting Israel" and "defending the Palestinian cause" (see 4.1.1). These frames have been central to the beliefs of large number of Sunnis. It is on this wheel that some Lebanese Sunni actors justify their alliance with Iran and Hezbollah (see 4.1.1). The findings (in 4.1.1) reveal that the strength of Iran and Hezbollah in the Sunni milieu lies in their ability to stand by the slogans of resisting Israel and defending the Palestinian cause on the one hand, and on the other hand, the failure of the Arab states, collectively or individually to defend Palestine or to counter-balance Israel (see 4.1.1). This is demonstrated by Hezbollah's

frequent engagement with Israel on different occasions, which enabled it to gain the support of various Sunnis who have the impression that Iran and Hezbollah are defending the dignity of the Arabs and Muslims.

Iran's Perceived Role in Dividing the Lebanese Sunnis

- I. The narratives of the Sunni respondents (in 4.2.1) show the role of Iran in dividing the Sunni political front in Lebanon. This has been manifested by the activities of the pro-Iranian Sunni militias “the Resistance Brigades”, which have been used as a tool by Iran to divide the Sunni community in Lebanon (see 4.2.1). Moreover, Iran’s role in dividing Sunnis has been manifested in breaking through Dar al-Fatwa, the highest religious Sunni office in Lebanon, during the leadership of the Mufti Muhammad Rashid Qabbani (see 4.2.1). Another form of dividing the Lebanese Sunnis has been through Iran’s financial and political support for some religious and pan-Arab Sunni organisations (e.g. the Tawheed Movement, the Islamic Action Front, the Popular Nasserite Organisation and the Union Party) and leaders (e.g. Abdul Rahim Mourad; Oussama Saad, Fathi Yakan and Saeed Shaaban) (see 4.2.1).

- II. It emerges from the findings (in 3.2.3) that some Sunni actors frame the role of Iran (and Hezbollah) in the Sunni politics through sectarian lenses as a struggle between Sunnis and Shias. These Sunnis see in Iran an existential threat to the Lebanese Sunnis, an “occupier”, and a “coloniser”, which seeks to use some Sunni groupings, militias and leaders to break through, divide and weaken the Lebanese Sunnis (see also 4.2.2 and 4.2.3). Collectively, these Sunnis frame “other” Sunnis who are allied with Hezbollah as “minorities”, claiming that the bulk of Sunnis are

anti-Iran. In their understanding, Sunnis, who are allied with Iran, are driven by materialistic interests and are not concerned about Hezbollah's resistance against Israel (see 4.2.2).

Framing of Hezbollah's Involvement in Internal and External Conflicts

- I. The findings (in 4.1.2 and 4.1.3) show that the stance of the Lebanese Sunni political actors on Hezbollah's involvement in domestic and foreign conflicts can be classified into three categories. The first category consists of Sunnis, who approve Hezbollah's military struggle against Israel but disapprove its military involvement in domestic conflicts (see 4.1.2). The second category consists of Sunnis, who used to support Hezbollah but following their military attack on Sunnis in 2008, they lost their public appeal and were no longer considered as a resistance grouping (see 4.1.2). The third and final category consists of Sunnis, who endorse Hezbollah's violent attack on the Lebanese Sunnis in 2008. This category does not interpret the clashes between Hezbollah and the Future Movement through sectarian lenses as a struggle between Sunnis and Shias. Rather, they interpret it in political terms as a legitimate reaction made by Hezbollah against the Future Movement's attempt to dismantle its communication network.

- II. Regarding the conflicts in Syria, the data (in 4.1.4) shows that the Lebanese Sunni actors differ in the way in which they frame Hezbollah's military involvement in the Syrian's conflict. Sunnis who are allied with the Fourteenth March Alliance (FOMA) support the revolution against the Syrian government and hopes that its fall would help Lebanon to be independent from external influence, especially from Syria and

Iran (see 4.1.4). They are of the view that Hezbollah is “killing Sunnis” in Syria and is being used by Iran as a tool to confront Sunnis in Lebanon and Syria. By contrast, Sunnis who are allied with the Eighth March Alliance (EMA) interpret the revolution against the Syrian government as an international ploy targeting Syria for its support for Palestine and Hezbollah’s resistance against Israel (see 4.1.4). They are of the view that Hezbollah’s involvement in the Syrian conflict is justifiable on the ground that if Hezbollah had not intervened in Syria, extremist Sunni groupings would have entered Lebanon and destabilised its political system (see 4.1.4).

Framing of Syria’s Role in the Politics of the Sunni Community in Lebanon

- I. The majority of the Lebanese Sunni actors were emphatic in their assertion about Syria’s key role in the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon. The data (in 4.3) reveals that on several occasions, the role of Syria in the Sunni politics has been framed in the same way as the role of Iran in the Sunni politics. The Sunni actors, in many instances, employed the same exact phrases to frame Syria and Iran’s role in the Sunni politics. For example, the data (in 4.3) indicates that Syria is framed as a “colonial power”, which seeks to “divide-and-rule” the Lebanese religious communities. Moreover, the empirical research (in 4.3) indicates that some Sunni actors attribute the blame for Sunni problematized state of affairs to the perceptual injustices unleashed on them by Syria.

- II. The findings (in 4.4.1) indicate that Syria used some Sunni groupings as a tool to counteract other Sunni groupings in Lebanon in order to keep the Sunni arena in

perpetual conflicts and to prevent the emergence of anti-Syrian camp from within the Sunni milieu to challenge its role in Lebanon. The relationship between Syria and the Sunni grouping al-Ahbash exemplifies how Syria broke through the Sunni politics in Lebanon. Al-Ahbash was associated with the Syrian intelligence and used to inform them about the activism of anti-Syria Sunni organisations and leaders in Lebanon. Moreover, the data (in 4.4.1) shows that the struggle between the Lebanese Salafists and al-Ahbash signalled the “first violent intra-Sunni conflict” in Lebanon as it led to the assassination of the political leader of al-Ahbash shaykh Nizar al-Halabi by a radical Salafist grouping known as *Usbat al-Ansar* in 1995.

III. The data (in 4.4.2) shows that the former Mufti of the Lebanese Republic Hassan Khalid was assassinated because of his opposition to Syria’s role in Lebanon. He was an influential Sunni leader whose call for the withdrawal of foreign intervention from Lebanon infuriated Syria. The findings (in 4.4.2) reveal that the assassination of Hassan Khalid occurred in series of assassination that deliberately targeted anti-Syria Sunni religious and political leaders. The purpose of these assassinations was to weaken Sunni political and religious leaders and to prevent the emergence of powerful Sunni leaders who may challenge Syria’s role in Lebanon (see 4.4.2). Indeed, the assassination of the Mufti Hassan Khalid weakened Dar al-Fatwa and led to the opening up of the occupants of Dar-al-Fatwa’s leadership to external pressures and internal influences.

IV. It emerges from the narratives (in 4.4.3) that Syria did not only rely on leaders from other religious communities to counter Rafik Hariri’s leadership of the Sunni

politics in Lebanon. Rather, they relied on leaders from within the Sunni community to counter him. The empirical research (in 4.4.3) reveals that Syria supported the pan-Arab Sunni leaders Abdul Rahim Mourad, Omar Karami and Ousama Saad to counter Rafik Hariri and to prevent unity between Sunni political leaders in Lebanon. Syria, in this instance, hit two birds in one stone: it did not only seek to weaken Rafik Hariri, the strongest Sunni leader in Lebanon. It sought to deepen the political division among Sunni leaders, hence weakening the solidarity of the Lebanese Sunnis.

- V. The operationaliation of frame salience (in 4.4.4) reveals that there are some Sunnis who are still allied with Syria. These Sunnis do not frame Syria's role in Lebanon in the context of weakening or dividing the Lebanese Sunnis. Rather, they frame Syria as a "supporter of the Palestinian cause", a "pan-Arab advocate" and a "resistance force", whose alliance with Iran and Hezbollah served Lebanon's national interests and enabled it to counter balance Israel. Hence, pro-Sunni organisations and leaders in Lebanon, by invoking these frames, they justify their alliance with Syria and make their messages resonant and meaningful in the eyes of their Sunni followers (see 4.4.4).

Framing of Saudi Arabia's Role in the Politics of the Sunni Community in Lebanon

- I. The data (in 4.5) reveals that Saudi Arabia's shared Sunni identity with the Lebanese Sunnis coupled with its position as one of the main players in Lebanon and the Middle East, have an impact on the way in which the Lebanese Sunnis construct their narratives on Saudi Arabia's role in the Sunni politics. Sunnis, who

are allied with the Fourteenth March Alliance (FOMA) frame Saudi Arabia as “the guardian of the Lebanese Sunnis” and consider the Lebanese Sunnis as “loyal” to Saudi Arabia (see 4.5). Yet, Sunnis, who are allied with the Eighth March Alliance (EMA), are wary in their criticism of Saudi Arabia. They acknowledge the importance of Saudi Arabia’s role in the Sunni politics and consider that the influence of Sunni political leaders on the Sunni politics is contingent on maintaining good relations with Saudi Arabia.

- II. It emerges from the data (in 4.5) that the current situation of Saudi Arabia regarding its influence on the Lebanese politics as compared with Iran is discouraging. The narratives of some Sunni actors show that it is not enough for Saudi Arabia to support Lebanon financially in order to counter-balance Iran. For Saudi Arabia to safeguard its interests in Lebanon; it has to combine its financial investment with political investment (see 4.5). These narratives show that some Sunni actors think entirely in sectarian terms in that they criticise Saudi Arabia (Sunnis) for not adequately helping the Lebanese Sunnis to counter Iran and Hezbollah (Shias). It also shows that some of the Lebanese Sunni actors are craving for external support from Saudi Arabia and have no apparent regard for Lebanon’s sovereignty or autarky.
- III. The analysis of data (in 4.5) shows that Saudi Arabia, which is considered as the main patron of the Lebanese Sunnis, has decreased its financial support for its main Sunni allies in Lebanon (e.g. the Future Movement), while Iran financially, ideologically and politically supports its Shia and Sunni allies in Lebanon. This might

be attributable to the fact that Saudi Arabia's Sunni allies in Lebanon are "weak", "unreliable", and "unable to counter-balance Iran" (see 4.5). Nevertheless, there is a counter-narrative among some Sunni actors that Saudi Arabia's policies toward the Lebanese Sunnis are "ambiguous" and "inconsistent" and this explains the weakness of Saudi Arabia's allies in Lebanon as compared with Iran's allies (see 4.5).

- IV. The findings (in 4.6) shows that it would be in the interest of Saudi Arabia, as a Sunni state, to have a unified Sunni front than a divided one. Yet, some of the Lebanese Sunni actors doubt that the current Saudi Arabian's policies in Lebanon lead to the unity of the Lebanese Sunnis (see 4.6). The understanding of some Sunni actors is that Saudi Arabia does not support any Sunni grouping other than the Future Movement (see 4.6). They have the impression that Saudi Arabia has limited their support for the Lebanese Sunnis to the Future Movement regardless of the perceived inability of the latter to empower the Lebanese Sunnis. This issue has led to intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon because there are other Sunnis who disagree with the policies of the Future Movement and think that the movement is incapable of serving the interest of Sunnis.

5.2 Conclusion

The goal of this thesis is to understand how the Lebanese Sunni political actors frame the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon. The thesis' approach draws on Max Weber's interpretivist lens of understanding (*Versthen*), which ontologically denotes that reality is socially constructed. The thesis does not offer a causal

explanation of intra-Sunni political contestations in Lebanon but aims at understanding it from the standpoint of the Lebanese political actors involved in the Sunni politics in Lebanon. Epistemologically, the thesis seeks to interpret the subjective understandings and socially constructed ideas articulated by the Lebanese political actors on intra-Sunni political contestations in Lebanon. The thesis' theoretical orientation relies on framing theory. The operationalisation of framing theory enables this thesis to understand better how the Lebanese Sunni political actors construct their narratives on the political division of the Lebanese Sunnis.

The research shows that there are issues of political agreements and issues of political disagreements within Lebanon's Sunni political demographic. The main focus of this research, however, is on the issues of political disagreements or the issues that politically divide the Lebanese Sunnis, externally and internally, during the period from 2005 to 2016, and how they are constructed, framed and manifested by the Lebanese political actors. The research deploys framing theory concepts such as "frame alignment processes", "frame resonance" and "counter-framing" to understand how internal and external dynamics associated with the Sunni politics are seen from the standpoint of the Lebanese Sunni political actors. The operationalisation of "injustice frames", "supply and demand" and "collective action frames" is instrumental for understanding how the Lebanese political actors differ in attributing the blames for Sunni problematized state of affairs and the collective actions required for unifying and empowering Sunnis.

The findings of this research suggest the interpenetration between domestic factors and external factors in shaping Sunni frames, understandings and perceptions on the

political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon. It is difficult to examine internal Sunni dynamics such as political affiliations, contested Sunni identities and rival religious and political Sunni leadership without taking into consideration external dimensions. The role and influence of external players, most especially (Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia) on Lebanon, coupled with the ideological rivalry between Saudi Arabia on the one hand, and Syria and Iran on the other hand, are essential for contextualising Sunni narratives on intra-Sunni political divides in Lebanon. The interpretivist lens of understanding (*Verstehen*) aided an understanding of how the politics of representation among Sunnis shape the ways in which they frame their political contestations in Lebanon internally and externally.

At the internal levels, the empirical research shows that identity-based Sunni groupings in Lebanon are classified in terms of their affiliation into three categories (pan-Arab, religious and national). The multiplicities of Sunni identities (pan-Arab, religious and national) could be a reflection of irreconcilable ideological divides but they could also be a reflection of Sunni understanding of the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon as a “game”, in which their identities and constructed narratives maybe be shifted or manipulated in line with the prevailing political circumstance. This research concludes that understanding the prevailing political context in Lebanon is important for interpreting the frames and narratives of the Lebanese Sunnis on the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon.

As the research reveals, the Future Movement, the largest Sunni grouping in Lebanon considers the identity of the Lebanese Sunnis to be firstly Lebanese as the slogan

“Lebanon First” portrays. The adoption of the slogan “Lebanon First” demonstrates the prevalence of the Future Movement’s national identity over its religious Sunni or pan-Arab identity. Yet, the ideological stance of religious-based Sunni political actors (e.g. Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Tawheed Movement, al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya and the Lebanese Salafists) and pan-Arab-based Sunni groupings (e.g. the Union Party and the Popular Nasserite organisation) constitute a challenge to the “Lebanon-First” slogan as framed by the Future Movement. The duality of the ideological stance of some of the religious-based and pan-Arab based-Sunni actors, of being affiliated with Lebanon, and at the same time, of being affiliated with transnational ideologies, states or social movements could affect their narratives on the Lebanese national identity, their framing construction and their political activities.

The research shows that the Lebanese Sunni actors differ in their frames on the Lebanese confessional political system in Lebanon. Whilst some religious-based Sunni groupings in Lebanon (e.g. the Tawheed Movement, al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya and the Lebanese Salafists) accept to take part in the Lebanese confessional political system, other Sunni groupings (e.g. Hizb ut-Tahrir) reject to take part in the confessional political system except under strict conditions. Regarding the Islamisation of Lebanon, the bulk of religious-based Sunni groupings (e.g. al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya and the Lebanese Salafists) have expressed a receptive attitude to the state of Lebanon and realised the difficulty of establishing an Islamic rule in Lebanon but other Sunni groupings in Lebanon like Hizb ut-Tahrir do not recognise the Lebanese state. The only state they recognise is the Islamic state of the caliphate, which they seek to re-establish. Thus, this research concludes that intra-Sunni framing disputes on the

nation state Lebanon are not only confined to the category of pan-Arab, religious and national Sunni groupings. They are also manifest *within* each Sunni category especially religious-based Sunni groups, which differ in their framing construction of Lebanon as a state and accordingly the role of the Sunni community in the Lebanese confessional political system.

The research reveals that another critical issue that divides the Lebanese Sunnis is the religious leadership of the Sunni community in Lebanon. The politicisation of Dar al-Fatwa, the highest religious Sunni office in Lebanon, of being under the influence of foreign and domestic players, has undermined the resonance of its frames. It has paved the way for the emergence of rival religious Sunni bodies, which claim to champion the Sunni cause. For example, the League of Muslim Scholars was able to gain the trust of several Sunnis due to its attachment with Sunni problems. Moreover, the perceived independence of the League of Muslim Scholars, of not being under the sphere of influence of Sunni political leaders or organisations in Lebanon, has given the impression that it is able to operate more freely as opposed to Dar al-Fatwa, and this explains why its frames are credible and resonant with the Sunni public more than Dar al-Fatwa.

As for the political leadership, Some Sunni actors are of the view that the Future Movement's leadership of the Sunni politics is essential for preventing Sunnis from radicalism and sectarianism. This is due to its advocacy of national identity, moderation and its reluctance to sectarianism and militarisation. However, other Sunni actors are of the view that the Future Movement is not serving the interest of

Sunnis but rather using them to serve its political interests. They attribute Sunni disempowerment and problematized state of affairs to the failure of the Future Movement to craft a strategy to empower Sunnis and to counter-balance Hezbollah. This research therefore concludes that the absence of strong and credible Sunni leadership that represents Sunnis, communicates with them and identifies with their problems may result in the Lebanese Sunnis to give up moderate narratives and to resort to radicalism, sectarianism and anti-statist narratives.

The stance on Hezbollah is one of the main issues that fracture the Sunni politics in Lebanon. Hezbollah's frequent military engagements with Israel on different occasions enabled it to gain the support of various Sunnis who have the impression that Hezbollah is defending the dignity of the Arabs and Muslims. Yet, following Hezbollah's military takeover of Beirut in 2008, Sunni frames of Hezbollah have changed. First, there are Sunnis, who still approve Hezbollah's struggle against Israel but disapprove its involvement in domestic conflicts. Second, there are Sunnis, who used to support Hezbollah but following their attack on Sunnis in 2008, they lost their public appeal and were no longer considered as a resistance grouping. Third, there are Sunnis, who endorse Hezbollah's attack on Sunnis in 2008. These Sunnis do not frame the clashes between Hezbollah and the Future Movement through sectarian lenses as a struggle between Sunnis and Shias. Rather, they frame it in political terms as a legitimate reaction made by Hezbollah against the Future Movement's attempt to dismantle its communication network.

At the external levels, the research further reveals that Iran has been able to break through the Sunni politics by promoting the slogans of "liberating the Muslim lands",

“resisting Israel” and “defending the Palestinian cause”, which are central to the beliefs of various Sunnis. Yet, there are Sunnis who are of the view that Iran (a Shia-oriented country) and an ideological ally of Hezbollah in Lebanon is in existential struggle with Sunnis and is responsible for their division and weaknesses. The creation of pro-Iranian Sunni militias (e.g. the Resistance Brigades), the breakthrough of Dar al-Fatwa and the financial and political support for various pan-Arab and religious Sunni groups and leaders in Lebanon exemplifies Iran’s role in dividing Sunnis.

The research reveals that the standpoint on Syria is another issue of concern among the Lebanese Sunni political actors. For some Sunnis, Syria used some Sunni groupings (e.g. al-Ahbash) to counter other Sunni groupings (e.g. Salafists) so as to keep the Sunni arena in perpetual conflicts and to prevent the emergence of anti-Syrian camp from within the Sunni milieu to challenge its role in Lebanon. Another form of dividing Sunnis, as constructed by the narrative of research respondents, has been the perceived role of Syria in killing Sunni leaders, weakening Dar al-Fatwa and preventing unity among Sunni leaders. Yet, for other Sunnis, Syria is framed as a supporter of the Palestinian cause, a pan-Arab advocate and a resistance force, whose alliance with Iran and Hezbollah helped Lebanon to counter-balance Israel.

Drawing on the findings, the thesis concludes that it would be in the interest of Saudi Arabia, as a Sunni state, to have a unified Sunni front than a divided one. There is a growing perception among the Lebanese Sunni political actors that Saudi Arabia does not support any Sunni grouping other than the Future Movement. This has led to intra-Sunni political division in Lebanon because there are other Sunnis who disagree with

the policies of the Future Movement and think that the movement is weak, unreliable, and not credible.

5.3 Recommendations (Exploring Avenues for Reducing Intra-Sunni Political Tensions in Lebanon)

Drawing on the analysis presented in chapter three and chapter four; this section explores avenues for reducing intra-Sunni political divides and promoting solidarity among the Lebanese Sunnis. The data of this research shows that protracted political tensions between Sunni organisations and leaders in Lebanon factionalise the Sunni politics, destroy trust among Sunni actors, invite external intervention and bring to leadership and power positions radicals, extremists and hard-liners. The research therefore calls for the Lebanese Sunni movements and leaders to quickly engage in an intra-Sunni dialogue that puts national interests over self-interests. The following points are critical in reducing political tensions among Sunni organisations in Lebanon.

5.3.1 Solidarity as a Means of Reducing Political Tensions and Violent Conflicts

In a bid to contribute to reducing these political tensions between Sunni organisations and leaders in Lebanon, a sense of group “solidarity” or commitment is essential for overcoming political dissents. The fostering of a deep persistent commitment to the unity of the Lebanese Sunnis is likely to exist when Sunni actors overcome their differences and identify with the problems of the Lebanese Sunnis. Solidarity is an essential ingredient of Sunni collective identity and its absence from Sunni narratives

in Lebanon may deepen intra Sunni political divisions and conflicts. Collective Sunni identity that unifies Sunnis in the forms of a shared definition of their cause emanates from their solidarity, experiences and interests. In this sense, a culture of Sunni solidarity (Roth 2000:302) is important to exist in order to develop not only a collective Sunni identity but also a political consciousness, which enables Sunni actors to realise the negative impact of their political tension on their unity, role and influence on the Lebanese politics (Gamson 1992a; Owens and Aronson 2000; Passy and Giugni 2000; Taylor 2000).

5.3.2 Managing Intra-Sunni Political Dissensus

The concept of “Political dissensus” should not be considered as a conflict of different opinions, interests or values, but rather as a “manifestation of a gap”, which constitutes the “essence of politics” (see Rancière 2010). In this research, a key challenge that Sunni groupings and leaders in Lebanon face is to find out a strategy that enable unity amid diversity. In this context, it is incumbent for Sunni leaders and institutions in Lebanon to function as unifying and guiding forces without repressing differences or opposing commonalities and connectedness between the Lebanese Sunnis. This implies that recognising dissensus and differences within the politics of the Sunni community in Lebanon should not lead to intra-Sunni contestations. Rather, when employed effectively, dissensus and differences might become valuable tool for re-alignment and renewal within Sunni political leaders and organisations in Lebanon (see Painter-Morland 2002; Rancière 2010).

5.3.3 Effective Laws and State Institutions to Reduce Political Tensions and Conflicts

The following recommendations focus on establishing and strengthening national institutions in Lebanon so as to deepen the democratic credentials and national cohesion of the Lebanese state. It is hoped that it would make the state of Lebanon the shining example of a democratic state in the Middle East. The discussion is done under the following headings:

5.3.3.1 Independent Electoral Commission in Lebanon

An independent electoral commission is required in Lebanon so as to make elections more credible. This independent electoral commission the research recommends is to be made up of five or seven commissioners and shared by one of these five or seven people. A parliamentary committee made up of all the political parties is to be established to appoint credible Lebanese men and women to serve as commissioners of this commission. The appointment needs to be guaranteed by the constitution and cannot be revoked unless death or stated misconduct is established on the part of these commissioners, which contravenes provisions in the constitution of the Lebanese Republic or the commissioners leave office upon mandatory retirement.

These commissioners are appointed because of their professional credentials and autonomy with the understanding that irrespective of their partisan sympathies or ideological orientations, once selected, they should act with impartiality and fairness. In addition, this independent electoral commission should consist of a balanced

representation in that it should represent all the major political groupings and religious communities in Lebanon (see Schedler 2000; Hartlyn et al. 2008).

This research recommends that the establishment of a credible and independent electoral commission in Lebanon is important to strengthen state institutions and deepen the democratic credentials of the Lebanese state (Graham 2006; Koopman 2007; Kriesi 2007). This commission should have the ability to oversee the electoral process and to propose electoral laws that truly represent the Lebanese people (El Mashnouk 2017). The establishment of this commission would arguably lay the foundation for the emergence of a form of rule of law in the electoral realm which is essential for strengthening state institutions in Lebanon (see; Makulilo 2009; Magaloni 2010; Nwatarali and Dim 2015).

Electoral independent commissions are often considered as the “cornerstone of representative democracy” (Hyson 2000:174). They are believed to be especially significant in condition of low administrative state capacity where there is a high potential of distrust among political actors and few, if any, alternative mechanisms to help ensure honest and impartial elections (see Hartlyn et al. 2008). This is often the case in Lebanon. Hence, the function of electoral commissions is to achieve complex administrative and regulatory activities, propose fair electoral laws, oversee relationships with political groupings in a balanced manner, adopt an image of professionalism, efficiency and neutrality and adjudicate political tensions and violent conflicts fairly. This research therefore believes that electoral commissions in Lebanon should have their budget approved and funding voted directly to them by the legislative assembly (parliament) in Lebanon.

5.3.3.2 Prohibition of Foreign Funding of Political Parties and Leaders in Lebanon

This research recommends drawing on the views of the research respondents that foreign funding of Sunni movement organisations and leaders in Lebanon affect Sunni solidarity, ideological standings and framing activities. If these foreign funding issues are not checked, Sunni political parties and movement organisations' involvement in political activities will always be associated with sectarianism, political tensions and violent conflicts. One of the means of checking these funding issues is to standardise accounting practises within Sunni organisations. Sunni movements in Lebanon should be made to have corporate accounts, and their books audited periodically to check their incomes and expenditure status. This is essential for determining the source of funding and how the money was utilised. It would also encourage Sunni movements in Lebanon to seek funding from their members or constituency in the forms of contributions, which can help broaden mass participation in their political activities.

5.3.3.3 Enactment of Laws Disbanding Political Parties Forming and Contesting Elections on Confessional Interests

Another issue that is of concern as the data suggests is confessionalism. It is clear that the Lebanese religious communities live in a state where institutionalised confessionalism obstructs all possible efforts to genuine political reforms. However, The Taif Accord, which has ended the Lebanese civil war, provides solutions to some of these historically un-democratic institutionalised characteristics of the Lebanese constitution. The spirit and the latter of the accord were intended to abolish the politics of confessionalism, which in fact is the current issue affecting the Sunni politics

and the Lebanese politics as a whole. The research believes in this direction that for a stable and credible democratic future of Lebanon, immediate steps should be taken to end political confessionalism, therefore, saving the democratic credentials and future of Lebanon. The Lebanese leaders are encouraged to propose institutional reforms in compliance with the Taif Accord in order to liberate parliamentary elections from confessional affiliations.

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Appendix One

Interview Questions

1. Which identity do Sunnis prefer in Lebanon?
2. What is your perception regarding Lebanese Sunnis loyalty to the Lebanese state?
3. What is your opinion on the confessional political system in Lebanon?
4. When did the political division of the Sunni community begin and why?
5. Do you think that the Future Movement represent Sunnis in Lebanon?
6. What is your opinion on the political leadership of Sunnis as represented by the Future Movement and the religious leadership of Sunnis as represented by Dar al-Fatwa?
7. In May 16th, 1989, the Grand Moufti of Lebanon Hassan Khaled was assassinated? Was he assassinated because he was a Sunni? Was the assassination meant to silence and weaken Lebanese Sunnis?
8. The post-Taif Accord era witnessed pronounced intra-Sunni divides, what was the reason behind the emergence of various Sunni groupings in Lebanon at that time?
9. What is your stance on Hezbollah?
10. Why do some Sunni groupings support Hezbollah?
11. What impact have the events of 2008 had on the Lebanese Sunnis?
12. It is noted that some Sunni groupings and clerics support the Eighth March Alliance? Are those Sunni allies or followers? Do they receive funding from Hezbollah? Is their support to Hezbollah driven by interests or principles? If Saudi Arabia backed them, would they shift their alliance with Hezbollah?
13. How do you evaluate the Syrian's involvement in the Lebanese political affairs?
14. What impacts have the Syrian presence had on the Sunni community in Lebanon? Was there any intention to weaken or divide the Sunni community in Lebanon?
15. What is the role of Iran in the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon?
16. Has Iran supported some Sunni groupings in Lebanon against other Sunni groupings?
17. Do you think that the assassination of Rafik Hariri in 2005 marked a decline in the power of Sunnis in Lebanon?
18. How do you evaluate the Saudi Arabian role in Lebanon?
19. What is your opinion on Lebanon's relations with Saudi Arabia? What are the cost and/or benefit of this relation?
20. Is the Future Movement the only channel through which Saudi Arabia supports Sunnis? Why?
21. Does Saudi Arabia influence the Sunni discourse in Lebanon?
22. Which project does Saudi Arabia adopt for Sunnis in Lebanon? Which political Sunni grouping(s) does Saudi Arabia support? Does Saudi Arabia support religious groupings (e.g. Salafist groupings)
23. What is the role of Saudi Arabia on the political division of the Sunni community in Lebanon?
24. Has Saudi Arabia supported certain Sunni groupings?

Appendix Two

Ethical Approval



RESEARCH AND ENTERPRISE SERVICES

Ref: ERP327

25th March 2015

Moaz El Sayed
Research Institute for Social Sciences
Keele University

Dear Moaz,

Re: The Politics of the Sunni Community in Lebanon

Thank you for submitting your application for review. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved by the Ethics Review Panel.

The following documents have been reviewed and approved by the panel as follows:

Document	Version	Date
Summary Document	1.1	24/02/2015
Letter of Invitation	2.1	24/02/2015
Information Sheet	3.1	24/02/2015
Consent Form	4.1	24/02/2015
Consent Form for the use of quotes	5.1	24/02/2015
Interview Topic Guides	6.1	24/02/2015
Affiliation with the American University in Beirut, Lebanon		24/02/2015
Correspondences between the student and the American University in Beirut Lebanon		24/02/2015

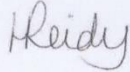
If the fieldwork goes beyond the date stated in your application, you must notify the Ethical Review Panel via the ERP administrator at uso.erps@keele.ac.uk stating ERP3 in the subject line of the e-mail.

If there are any other amendments to your study you must submit an 'application to amend study' form to the ERP administrator stating ERP3 in the subject line of the e-mail. This form is available via <http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchethics/>

Research and Enterprise Services, Keele University, Staffordshire, ST5 5BG, UK
Telephone: + 44 (0)1782 734466 Fax: + 44 (0)1782 733740

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me via the ERP administrator on uso.erps@keele.ac.uk stating ERP3 in the subject line of the e-mail.

Yours sincerely



pp

Val Ball
Vice Chair – Ethical Review Panel

CC RI Manager
Supervisor

Appendix Three

Affiliation with the American University in Beirut Lebanon



Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Office of the Dean

كلية الآداب والعلوم
مكتب العميد

www.aub.edu.lb

Mr. Moaz El Sayed
CAMES

October 15, 2014

Dear Mr. El Sayed,

Reference to your application and upon the recommendation of the Director of the Center for Arabic & Middle Eastern Studies (CAMES), I am pleased to appoint you in the position of "Affiliate" in CAMES, Faculty of Arts & Sciences, on non-remunerative basis, for the period extending from April 1, 2015 until September 30, 2015. This appointment terminates on the aforesaid date unless renewed in writing.

This appointment does not carry any stipend or any other benefits.

Patrick McGreevy
Dean, FAS

c.c. Mrs. Samar Diab, Interim Director, Human Resources
Dr. Waleed Hazbun, Director, CAMES
Dr. Lokman Meho, University Librarian
Mr. Saadallah Shalak, Protection