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Ignorance is the Mother of Pride:
Decentring EU Discourse on Hezbollah

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Abstract

Orientalist and colonial logics consistently shape EU prejudices surrounding its so-called Southern neighbourhood. The region's hybrid actors, and in particular Hezbollah, are often treated as the 'dangerous other,' with persistent suppositions about their nature seeping through in contemporary EU foreign policy. The intricate nature of Hezbollah's identity is difficult to grasp within Eurocentric cadres; therefore, its nuances are largely passed over, and an affiliation with terrorism remains. This underestimates Hezbollah's influence as a layered organisation fiercely driven by postcolonial *and* political aims while adhering to its occupation struggle against perpetual domination dynamics. Simultaneously, it cripples the EU in responding adequately to unfolding developments in the region. Therefore, drawing on postcolonial theory and decentring approaches, this study asks how the EU discourse on Hezbollah reflects Eurocentric tropes. Through a discourse-historical approach complemented by a contrapuntal reading, focusing on regional perspectives, EU discourse is analysed across four critical junctures. The findings reveal how Eurocentrism transpires across time in the EU's polity, normative, and temporal assessment of Hezbollah amounting in a strong 'us versus them binary' where Europe as a 'collective' has to fight the 'terrorists', as well as opportunism in the EU's approach to Hezbollah depending on the state of EU-Lebanon relations. Moreover, normative superior sentiments prevail, as well as the EU's 'colonial amnesia' when assessing the continuum of violence the region endures, opting for neoliberal 'solutions' to what the EU regards as ad hoc eruptions of animosities, thereby ignoring Hezbollah's resistance as an interconnected occupation struggle.

Keywords: Hezbollah, EU foreign policy, MENA region, Eurocentrism, Orientalism, occupation, resistance, decentring

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1. Introduction

Eurocentrism and its avatars lie deeply embedded in what the West considers universal knowledge (Wallerstein, 1997). As Europe appears to accept that “the victor writes history” (King, 2017, para. 1), it simultaneously takes these writings as all-encompassing through universalist convictions (Cebeci, 2021; Wallerstein, 1997). Consequently, it deprives history’s ‘vanquished’ of agency as local voices are largely overlooked (Cebeci, 2021; Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021). This results in ‘universal narratives’ being myopic, fostering perpetual domination dynamics, but at the same time opposing Europe itself, as the EU often struggles to approach its so-called neighbourhood adequately (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2021; Keukeleire et al., 2021; Wallerstein, 1997).

This is especially true for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, home to varying actors responding to a rich, multifaceted, yet simultaneously complicated and repressive history, shaped by European powers that colonised the region (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Keukeleire et al., 2021). Said (1977) has been pioneering in his explanation for the specific relation Europe holds to the ‘Orient’, a name embodying the Western construction of the MENA and which early monks used to lock their perception of the region’s ‘mystical’, ‘exotic’, but also ‘primitive’ character of the ‘other’ which laid the foundation for subsequent coloniality, but additionally continues to manifest in EU-MENA relations (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Keukeleire et al., 2021; Said, 1977). Further, the region’s largely Islamic essence intensifies a constructed ‘us versus them’ binary, for Europe treats the religion as inferior to Christianity and in doing so reduces it to a subject that can be appraised, and even homogenised with violence and terrorism, which has resulted in a securitised stance towards the region at large, where in turn, the actual *insecurities* [emphasis added] of the non-West remain unknown (Barbieux & Bouris, 2024; Bilgin, 2010, 2018; Cebeci, 2021; Said, 1977; Springer, 2009).

It is here where this study intersects, as it features one of many examples that belong to the EU’s terrorist heap: Hezbollah (Council of the European Union (CoEU), 2013). Born in the early 1980s, Hezbollah is characterised as a resistance movement against Israeli occupation and broader Western interferences in the region (Alagha 2019; Paterson & MacQueen, 2020). While its initial manifesto was fashioned after the Iranian model, thus following a strict Islamist path, over time, Hezbollah has transformed its structure (Alagha, 2019). Gradually, it departed from its rigorous Islamist objectives, as it proclaimed its social cause and embedded itself in Lebanese politics. Yet, all the while keeping its armed wing intact, which has been on the EU’s

list of terrorist organisations since 2013 (Alagha, 2019; CoEU, 2013). Hezbollah mirrors an interesting case, as it reflects the EU's incomprehension of actors responding to larger occupation struggles through diverging normative frameworks, contrasting the neoliberal playbook. While the EU renders 'colonial amnesia' (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021, p. 297), it proves self-crippling as it is unable to acknowledge the influence of perpetual domination on contemporary circumstances in the region (Alagha, 2011; Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Keukeleire et al, 2021).

This study argues that there lies an opportunity to tackle this incomprehension by raising consciousness on Europe's permeating colonial past and creating space for marginalised narratives. Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis (2021) carve out this space as they provide an analytical approach known as the decentring agenda. This study adopts the provincialisation and engagement aspect of this agenda as well as three categories developed by Keukeleire and Lecocq (2018, 2021) to establish Eurocentrism in EU discourse on Hezbollah, aiming to create awareness as well as highlight alternative perspectives through a contrapuntal reading of EU discourse on the topic (Chowdrey, 2007; Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021).

The objective lies in pluralising biased (hi)story-telling, while enriching the (academic) literature with a multi-angular lens. In doing so, it built on the works of Lecocq (2020a, 2024), who has extensively studied hybrid actors Hamas and Hezbollah. This research complements her work by deepening the understanding of the EU's misapproach to Hezbollah specifically, arguing that this comes forth from an Orientalist rationale and broader colonial traces in EU-MENA history. In addition to polity decentring, it adds normative and temporal decentring to underscore Lecocq's argument of the EU's difficulty in approaching hybrid actors at large. Subsequently, it is an effort to fill the gap in understanding how the EU's difficulty in grasping Hezbollah should be understood in a broader context of the EU's perpetual 'othering' and 'colonial amnesia' towards the region (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Said, 1977).

Yet, to be sure, this research is not an effort to defend Hezbollah, the EU, Lebanon, or any other actor analysed. It is meant to show the academic relevance of determining Eurocentrism in discourse that discusses topics far from the European realm. Subsequently, establishing that the difficulty European bodies encounter in grasping these topics comes forth from a stance heavily influenced by its colonial legacy while it societally shows that the uncovering of Eurocentrism is a necessary step towards a more inclusive and effective approach to the MENA region in practice; therefore, through a discourse historical approach, this research answers the following question: *How does the EU's discourse on Hezbollah reflect Eurocentric tropes?*

It does so by providing an conjoint literature review and theoretical framework which explains the concept of Eurocentrism, and Orientalism as a part of postcolonial theory while it features the decentring debate as an effort to go against homogenic story-telling as well as an outline of the state of the art regarding EU-MENA relations, and the position of hybrid actors in this dynamic specifically. Furthermore, it presents a conceptual framework breaking down the exact decentring categories and subsequently, the decentring steps deployed. This functions both as an effort to further deepen the decentring approach as well as a guide in which it concretises the application of the decentring agenda on this research specifically. This is followed by a research design featuring Hezbollah's relevance as a case study, discussing critical discourse analysis (CDA), and in particular the discourse-historical approach (DHA) and Said's contrapuntal method, after which the data selection and the exact operationalisation are outlined, as well as a reflection on personal positionality to optimise transparency. Following, it delves into a synthesis of diverging perspectives on Hezbollah as well as the EU's position towards Hezbollah specifically. Subsequently, the analysis is done, featuring the key findings, in order to answer the research question in the conclusion.

In essence, this study argues that Eurocentrism lies embedded in the EU's discourse on Hezbollah, surfacing in its polity, normative, and temporal assessments of the respective critical junctures spreading from the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon to the ongoing Israel-Hezbollah violence. The presence of Eurocentrism is reflected in Orientalist appraisals of Hezbollah, while it securitises the actor accordingly. Moreover, it surfaces in the application of the EU's normative framework as a 'one-size-fits-all' model to the region, while it fails to recognise the nuances of resistance in a context of occupation. Lastly, it illustrates the EU's assessment of the junctures as ad hoc events rather than conceding them as links in a continuum of violence, and failing to grasp Hezbollah's fight as an interconnected battle with broader occupation in the region.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The following sections delve into the perils of Eurocentrism, where the assumption of European superiority is dissected and placed into a context of Orientalism and racial hierarchy (Said, 1977; Wallerstein, 1997). Subsequently, the dominant debates and initiatives within decentring scholarship are discussed, showcasing how mainstream International Relations (IR) is increasingly abandoned in favour of more inclusive approaches to contemporary issues. Eventually, the ramifications of Eurocentrism for EU external action and foreign policy towards the MENA region and its hybrid actors are outlined.

2.1 Eurocentrism and Colonial Legacy

2.1.1 *The Sun Revolves around Europe*

Since its genesis the EU has portrayed itself as the bearer of ethical and normative power based on liberal values which it expects to be adhered to by its members, and additionally actively distributes across its so-called neighbourhood through external action, and foreign policy (Aggestam, 2008; Del Sarto, 2015; Wagner, 2017; Wolff et al., 2022). However, over time scholars have questioned not only the effectiveness of this ‘one size fits all’ model, but emphasized the lack of consideration for alternative perspectives outside of the European realm (Acharya & Buzan, 2007; Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021; Wallerstein, 1997; Wolff et al, 2022). This straitened approach is referred to as Eurocentrism, which places Europe at the epicentre of all civilisation and, therefore, as the *only* [emphasis added] departure point for pursuing righteousness (Bhambra, 2023; Wallerstein, 1997).

In their quest to open up a debate surrounding the exclusive and narrow nature of IR as a field based on Eurocentric outlooks of the world, scholars like Acharya and Buzan (2007), Bhambra (2023), and Wallerstein (1997) opened the door to a reconfiguration of Western perspectives as the dominant threat in social sciences. In doing so, they elucidated the disregard of Europe’s colonial past as detrimental to the uphold of power asymmetries still discernible in Western superior sentiments, and foundational to Eurocentric approaches from which heavily narrow and biased views transpire (Acharya & Buzan, 2007; Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021; Wallerstein, 1997). These views have materialised into a deficient attitude towards non-European spheres and to internal issues on the European continent itself (Barbieux & Bouris, 2024; Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021).

To answer these shortcomings, it is important to fathom the dominant debates surrounding the topic and understand that Eurocentrism as an approach is both a *consequence* of Europe's colonial past, while simultaneously is a *benefactor* from the upholding of power asymmetries developed in this past. Therefore, the acknowledgement of the historical context in which present-day institutions have emerged is vital to grasp the racial hierarchies these bodies keep in a (conscious) deadlock and their ramifications for the entire world system.

2.1.2 Orientalism and Racial Hierarchy in Eurocentric Approaches

Eurocentrism manifests in numerous intertwined aspects, which Wallerstein (1997) recites as historiography, universalism, civilisation, orientalism, and progress. As postcolonial studies have uncovered, Eurocentrism lies deeply entrenched in the Orientalist discipline (Bhambra, 2014; Wallerstein, 1997). From decoloniality onwards, Orientalism as a seemingly harmless or even attentive curiosity of Christian monks eager to unravel the 'mysteries' of the non-West was reconsidered in its actual innocence (Said, 1977). The eclectic foundation the discipline had claimed to work from turned arbitrary when postcolonial theory increased the consciousness of 'the Orient' being studied from first, a solely positivist lens, and second, appraised by exclusively European perceptions of the non-West (Bhambra, 2014; Said, 1977). The travels that were conducted for the sake of 'learning about the unfamiliar' did not add any alternative perspectives, as they were set up in an inductive attempt to validate prior established Western assumptions about the 'barbarians' that inhabited the European hinterlands (Said, 1977).

These assumptions are discernible in Eurocentric approaches in which Orientalism remains a substantial part, as the European hinterland, now known as the so-called European neighbourhood, is analysed from a largely Western lens (Acharya & Buzan, 2007; Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Wallerstein, 1997). What is equally -if not more- problematic is the attitude towards the populace of the so-called neighbourhood. While often framed differently -however, not always- Europe has not been able to shake its tendency to label non-Europeans, and especially people native to the MENA region, as at least primitive to Western civilians (Barbieux & Bouris, 2024).

This is explained by Said (1977), who underscores how territory is strongly interrelated with identity and functions as a benchmark for classifying the self as part of the in-group *based* [emphasis added] on the out-group. The border of a territory then serves as the fence separating -or even shielding- those who are part of a certain identity cluster from those who are not. This

is directly discernible in the words of former EU High Representative (HR) Josep Borrell who emphasised that “Europe is a garden” (European External Action Service (EEAS), 2022, para. 4) after which he follows “Most of the rest of the world is a jungle, and the jungle could invade the garden” (EEAS, 2022, para. 5) only to conclude with “The gardeners have to go to the jungle. Europeans have to be much more engaged with the rest of the world. Otherwise, the rest of the world will invade us, by different ways and means” (EEAS, 2022, para. 6). The appropriation of space thus implies a constructed division between ‘us’ the in-group and ‘them’ the out-group. What follows are assumptions about the ‘other’ and labels such as the ‘jungle’ or the ‘barbarian’ (Barbieux & Bouris, 2024; Borell, 2022; EEAS, 2022; Said, 1977; Springer, 2009).

The way identity is assumed, truths about the ‘others’ society are as well (Barbieux & Bouris, 2024; Said, 1977). Howell and Richter-Montpetit (2019, p. 8) underline how society has been widely appraised based on its ‘civilised degree’, which is determined by assessing whether it fits the Western idea of what civilisation constitutes. Therefore, all societies and traditions that are ‘foreign’ to the Western model fall prey to Orientalist assumptions, resulting in non-Western societies being labelled ‘primitive’ and ‘dangerous’ (Howell and Richter-Montpetit, 2019; Said, 1977; Springer, 2009).

A crucial and still relevant illustration of this is how Islam, as the dominant religion of the MENA region, has not been regarded as a separate faith but as an inferior imitation of Christianity (Said, 1977). Regarding Islam as a plagiarised form of Western beliefs rules out a determination of the religion as legitimate (Said, 1977). The lack of recognition for Islam as equal to Christianity is an ongoing topic in European society, which has led to a deadlock of inferior and violent appraisals of Islam, causing it to be broadly feared and securitised (Barbieux & Bouris, 2024; Springer, 2009).

Bilgin (2018) adds to this how security in the postcolonial era has transformed from a realist urge to protect the in-group from the ‘dangerous other’, towards a cosmopolitan endeavour entailing a shared responsibility over security. However, in practice, this amounts to North-South securitisation following European standards, regarding only the Western populace’s insecurities rather than committing to understanding the non-Western fears too (Bilgin, 2010, 2018). This comes forth from the West *assuming* [emphasis added] what these non-Western insecurities entail, causing them to be widely understudied. Cebeci (2021) adds to this how the EU even contracts insecurities originating from divergent realms with the security domain amounting in a flawed categorisation, and an ‘over-securitised’ stance towards the MENA region (Bilgin, 2010, 2018; Cebeci, 2021).

This over-securitisation is a product of the EU's construction of the MENA, materialising in the 'othering' of the MENA's individuals, society, and territory (Cebeci, 2021; Said, 1977). This, in turn, is consequential for world dynamics at large, as contemporary issues such as irregular migration flows, but also the so-called War on Terror, have been *directly* [emphasis added] linked to MENA instability as a breeding ground for terrorism (Cebeci, 2021). This comes back to Said (1977, pp. 175-176), who compared the enclosing of space and the labelling of the out-group in a specific way to a theatre play. In this, the in-group witnesses the out-group as they are directed, meaning constructed by the West. Even though theatre can easily be distinguished from reality, spreading fiction *in* [emphasis added] reality becomes much more complex to recognise and detach. The people of the in-group are unaware of where truth stops and construction begins (Said, 1977). Therefore, composing the MENA region through a contraction with danger and instability while warning of a possible spill over to the 'safe haven of Europe' is extremely determining in people's perception of the MENA in practice (Cebeci, 2021; Said, 1977).

Moreover, in this construction lies an ingrained racial element in which coloniality/modernity, as contracted by Quijano (2007), as he argued to be interconnected to such an extent, one cannot be thought of without the other, which underlines the European idea of race classification. By accepting European truths as universal, Europe's perception of race is projected onto non-European cultures allowing for the labelling of the 'other' as dangerous due to its *seeming* [emphasis added] difference from Europe, shaping racial hierarchies and allowing Europe to dominate in such a systemic way that still at present a clear distinction can be made between the formerly colonised and the coloniser (Bhambra, 2014; Lugones, 2007; Said, 1977).

Additionally, Lafi (2022) underscores what Quijano (2007) argues, as she discloses that the start of colonial domination in the Middle East flowed from the European idea of civilisation, from which racial hierarchies were constructed as illustrated above. On top of this, anti-colonial accounts reveal how Europe turned a blind eye to the atrocities, especially by the French and the British, even when several whistleblowers in the region urged the League of Nations to stop the violent repressions (Lafi, 2022). The ignorance of Europe led to an eventual interplay of European colonial consciousness and a growing anti-colonial push-back, which, after the initial 'decolonial' wave, would remain as the early colonisers, France and Britain, made way for American and Zionist interference, which would in retrospect form the figurehead of modern-day colonial continuity (Lafi, 2022).

Both Western imperialism and Israel, as the settler-colonial power in the region, have fuelled resistance movements embedded in Islamist/Jihadist ideology, such as Hamas and Hezbollah (Alagha, 2011, 2019; Lecocq, 2020b). They are born out of -and still fight- an anti-colonial battle in the name of especially Palestine, but also against broader perpetual occupation structures and domination dynamics such as the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon, and Western meddling in the region (Alagha, 2019; Paterson & MacQueen, 2020). This shows how coloniality is not concluded, as even in the postcolonial era, the skewed hierarchy between the global North and the global South remains. The West and specifically the EU functions as a normative beacon where, in its self-baptised ‘force for good’ image, lies a perpetual sense of Western superiority which is embedded in colonial logics as a force for good can only exist against the contrast of the ‘evil other’. Coloniality not only continues in the EU’s self-perception but actively materialises in its top-down approach to the global South and its veiled contempt for regional ideologies (Sen, 2022).

Postcolonial theory addresses the continuation of the colonial past and has, according to Bhambra (2014), evolved from a quest to highlight only perspectives outside of the West to incorporating these perspectives into coloniality narratives. In doing so, it aims to close the chapter on Western endogeneity of universalism and progress, which should, in turn, counter existing racial hierarchies (Bhambra, 2014; Wallerstein, 1997). This evolution has been adopted and manifests in the decentring debate.

2.2 Decentring Approaches

2.2.1 *Transcending Eurocentrism: Towards a Postcolonial Prism*

Decolonisation and, subsequently, postcolonialism increased European political awareness and demanded a reconfiguration of the system toward a stance that conforms to the existing multiplex world order (Bhambra, 2014; Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Wallerstein, 1997). Consequently, the incomplete scope of Eurocentric approaches came under scrutiny, and many scholars since have lobbied for a structural dissection of Eurocentrism (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021; Wallerstein, 1997) as according to Wallerstein (1997, p. 22) “it is a hydra-headed monster and has many *avatars*”. This metaphor encapsulates the complexity of tackling Eurocentrism, as if not done through the uprooting of *every* [emphasis added] aspect of the approach, one might dissect from a Eurocentric foundation or, as Wallerstein (1997, p. 32) calls it, “anti-Eurocentric Eurocentrism”.

Similarly to Wallerstein, Bhambra (2023) is foundational in critiquing the West for its dominance and short-sightedness within the IR discipline and its disregard for the implications modernity and the colonial period have had on the present. She builds on Wallerstein's work, amongst others, while simultaneously critically engaging with his warning for anti-Eurocentric Eurocentrism. She highlights how even Wallerstein is guilty of Eurocentric assumptions, in particular, when discussing the exceptionality of modernity as a European achievement. Bhambra (2023) notes that by regarding modernity as exceptional and opting for evaluating the period in terms of 'positive' or 'negative', Wallerstein argues from a Eurocentric stance himself in accepting the exceptionality of modernity regardless of the appraisal that is attached to it. Moreover, approaching modernity as an ad hoc exceptional period in time disrupts the recognition of hierarchy as a continuum, which is problematic as it downplays the systemic and perpetual nature of European domination (Bhambra, 2023). The necessity for caution surrounding Eurocentric outlooks is also translated by Acharya and Buzan (2007), who opt for the inclusion of non-European IR perspectives in the discipline. However, they prove to be careful in their appraisal of what constitutes non-European, as they argue most scholars from (in this case) the Asian continent are educated in the West, which begs the question of whether these voices can be classified as indeed alternative perspectives.

While Acharya and Buzan (2007), Bhambra (2023), and Wallerstein (1997) are foundational to grasping the importance of uprooting Eurocentrism and reconfiguring the IR discipline, they remain within a purely recognising stage of dissecting the approach and do not move towards a systemic framework for the incorporation of non-Western perspectives. This is where Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis (2021) and Keukeleire and Lecocq (2018, 2021) break ground as they introduce the decentring agenda, complemented by a conceptual guide to operationalising this agenda. They deepen the far-reaching ramifications of Eurocentrism and equip the researcher with an analytical toolbox to anticipate these ramifications and to, in turn, avoid them effectively.

The toolbox is focused on including non-Western perspectives rather than re-inventing the Western researchers' stance based on recognising the existence of strands outside of the European scope alone. Thereby, they argue for a postcolonial approach to studying and executing EU external action. In this approach, a major emphasis lies on the 'post' as aforementioned, the colonial period left a tenacious trail of asymmetrical power dynamics (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021). Consequently, the colonial past remains in the present as it continues to manifest in EU foreign policy not only due to an overlong disregard of colonial legacy, but because of the presence of these

asymmetries on the European continent itself, discernible in amongst others the marginalisation of immigrants (Barbieux & Bouris, 2024; Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021).

Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis (2021) and Keukeleire and Lecocq (2018, 2021) argue that by acknowledging and including non-Western perspectives, EU external action and foreign policy can be reconstructed. Evidently, decentring does not only entail, the internal reorganization of IR, but is optimised if focused on active external inclusion aiming to overcome existing blind spots, for the sake of European resilience, but most importantly to develop an all-encompassing approach, that is naturally reflexive, and reimburses agency to *all* [emphasis added] (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021).

Practically, the decentring agenda is operationalised through three steps: Provincialisation, engagement, and reconstruction. First, provincialisation entails the recognition of multiple perspectives outside of the European scope. This includes challenging civilisation, universalism, and modernity as anchors for Western superiority, as well as accepting that Europe itself is a construct constantly influenced by European *and* [emphasis added] non-European involvement (Barbieux & Bouris, 2024; Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021). Second, engagement entails actively delving into non-European perspectives, both historical and contemporary, to pluralise the scope of Eurocentrism and create awareness of these diverging narratives (Barbieux & Bouris, 2024; Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021). Last, reconstruction is the incorporation of this newly acquired pluriform approach into EU policy.

To break down the process of decentring, Keukeleire and Lecocq (2018, 2021) developed a conceptual guide to operationalise the agenda. Within this guide, they differentiate between six different categories, namely, polity, normative, spatial, temporal, linguistic, and disciplinary decentring. This conceptual guide will be further deepened in the conceptual framework of this research, but for now, it is ample to understand that the three-step approach of the decentring agenda can be done systemically within each of these categories (Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021).

The decentring agenda and occasionally the conceptual guide (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021) have been adopted by increasing scholars varying in their focus however, all aiming to yield findings that add onto the emphasis on the existing space for reimagining the narrow scope of Eurocentrism and transforming this into an all-encompassing approach (Barbieux & Bouris, 2024; Wolff et al. 2022). Many of them have applied the framework to EU-MENA relations, with some scholars developing enhanced analytical frameworks by adding different theories and methods to the agenda. Barbieux and

Bouris (2024) do this by adopting Cebeci's dimensions of politico-cultural, socioeconomic, and security strands, in which they explain EU-Algeria dynamics as a clear illustration of hierarchical dynamics flowing out of the idea of European superiority over the MENA region (Barbieux & Bouris, 2024). Cebeci's strands function as groupings, under which certain categories of Keukeleire and Lecocq (2018, 2021) are identified to eventually provincialise EU-Algeria relations (Barbieux & Bouris, 2024).

Moreover, Wolff et al. (2022) manage to demonstrate how reconstruction, as the most challenging step of the decentring agenda given the institutional interests that are in play, can be operationalised through Said's contrapuntality, which was developed as a means of reading discourse, while remaining conscious of the incompleteness of narratives due to the systemic marginalisation of voices outside of the West (Chowdhry, 2007; Wolff et al. 2022). Wolff et al. (2022) show how dissonance can be mediated through this method, which transforms diverging perspectives into a whistleblower for the identification of areas where dissonance might spiral out of hand. They illustrate this through migration, religion, and neighbourhood governance as intersections of the internal and external affairs of the EU. The study underscores how the awareness of differences can create room for pluralising and eventually reconstructing policies, moving away from a hierarchical approach and toward horizontal cooperation (Wolff et al., 2022).

In turn, Keukeleire et al. (2021) demonstrate how a decentring lens is especially effective when approaching the EU's so-called Southern neighbourhood, which is particularly prone to Eurocentrism due to the prejudiced outlooks flowing from the Orientalist discipline (Barbieux & Bouris, 2024; Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Keukeleire et al., 2021). Even Europe has had numerous occasions in which it was affected by its own exclusive and therefore parochial attitude, as some crucial developments unfolded in the MENA states like the 2011 Arab Uprisings, without the EU being able to properly anticipate them. From a European perspective, the protests transpired 'out of the blue'. Only in hindsight, the events could have been foreseen if the EU had broadened its scope for different analyses, and most importantly, if it had been receptive to alternative voices coming from inside the region. To comprehend the complexity of EU-MENA dynamics and ultimately improve the EU's relationship with the MENA region, a postcolonial prism helps to grasp the layers that surround it. (Barbieux & Bouris, 2024; Cebeci, 2021; Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021).

Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis (2021) do so by explaining how the EU expunges its colonial legacy through 'convenient' amnesia towards its often violent practices during the

colonial period. This amnesia is projected onto the MENA, as the EU expects the region to follow in its forgetful tendencies, urging them to basically ‘get over themselves and move on’. This stance is not only misplaced, as the EU does not get to dictate when the clock runs out on processing its inflicted trauma, but it creates a deficiency in the EU’s ability to predict dynamics in the region, as demonstrated by the ‘surprise’ of the Arab Uprisings (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021).

Moreover, Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis (2021) point to the EU’s mission to democratise the world, which as a top-down endeavour does not only reimburse the aforementioned hierarchical position vis á vis the MENA region, but has brought forth “power political instrumentalism” (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021, p. 298) reflected in the EU’s conscious trade-off between democracy and stability, and in this favouring the most stable option. This highlights the EU’s affected piety, and shows the EU moves within neo-colonial dynamics by remaining what Said (1977, p. 170) calls “a genuine creator” of its so-called direct neighbourhood. Additionally, the latent content of this trade-off passively shows the depiction of the MENA region as the ‘problematic other’ against the backdrop of its ‘stable’ EU neighbour (Barbieux & Bouris, 2024).

2.2.2 Between Resistance and Terrorism: Eurocentrism towards Hybrid Actors in the MENA

The intricacy of the EU-MENA dynamics becomes especially profound as the classification of the EU as *at least* [emphasis added] normatively superior to the MENA states naturally results in an ideological clash with the predominantly Islamic region and with actors functioning from a divergent ideological stance (Cebeci, 2021; Said, 1977; Wolff et al., 2022). In present-day context, Sen (2022) notes, how this outset is perpetual in the EU’s approach towards the MENA region as even securitised matters such as migration and the global ‘War on Terror’ are built on the assumption that the ‘southern other’ is dangerous, exemplifying how contemporary security issues which increasingly include hybrid actors, echo racialised suppositions originating from the colonial past (Howell & Richter-Montpetit, 2019; Sen, 2022). Through these racialised assumptions, the classification of these actors is done by slapping on labels such as the ‘terrorists’, which, therefore, should be understood as a construct of Eurocentric logics treating Europe as the only righteous normative departure point (Cebeci, 2021). Any form of resistance outside the neoliberal framework is then often affiliated with violence, echoing an Orientalist rationale (Said, 1977; Springer, 2007), feeding into EU contestation and

incomprehension of statehood in the region while it maintains skewed hierarchies through its approach (Barbieux & Bouris, 2024; Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021).

Reasonably, scholars have progressively picked up on the stratification of hybrid actors, and alternative analyses have challenged the grounds and effectiveness of the EU's ambiguous stance towards them (Lecocq, 2020ab). One of the most prominent scholars in this regard is Lecocq (2020a), who explores the EU's attitude towards Hamas and Hezbollah. She states that given the world has become increasingly multiplex, the EU is forced and has indeed acknowledged that it should be aware, as well as engage with players outside of the state model, if it wants to partake in the MENA's geopolitical arena. Besides, hybrid actors often form alternatives to failing governments, therefore influencing the EU's relationship with its so-called Southern neighbour directly (Lecocq, 2020a). Yet, Lecocq (2020a) confirms how the increasing influence of hybrid actors such as Hamas and Hezbollah since the 2011 Arab Uprising is at odds with the EU's stagnated approach towards them, which she explores through EU foreign policy discourse. This research has indeed confirmed how the actor's (partly) terrorist status withholds the institution from engaging accordingly. Given its emphasis on the security dialogue, the EU remains paralysed, while other powers in the region, such as Iran, increase their influence as they do not experience the same type of contestation but rather contest the EU in turn (Huber, 2024; Lecocq, 2020a).

Furthermore, Lecocq (2024) builds on her work by exemplifying how interactions with hybrid actors in the field are determined by dimensions beyond the security level. Diplomats working on a mission cannot cherry-pick aspects of these actors they would like to deal with, as they are heavily intertwined with life on the ground. This lack of choice mirrors the importance *and* [emphasis added] necessity of challenging Eurocentric boxes through decentring approaches carving out space to look beyond the EU's security horizon which is focussed on combatting 'terrorism' in the region (Cebeci, 2021) and into the drivers of these actors coming back to the effort of *understanding* [emphasis added] non-Western insecurities (Bilgin, 2010, 2018; Lecocq, 2020a, 2024). If this understanding can be achieved, labels such as terrorism are not as easily imposed, for the EU learns that resistance does not only exist within liberal cadres, but sometimes even (rightfully) emerges *against* [emphasis added] these liberal cadres. Therefore, through decentring approaches, a potent attitude can be accomplished by going beyond Eurocentric prejudices, opening up to the different facets and layers of diverging polities.

2.3 Positioning of Research vis-à-vis Existing Literature

This research revolves around the uncovering of Eurocentrism in EU discourse on Hezbollah, specifically, and is located at the intersection of the decentring debate and Orientalism as a part of postcolonial theory. By operationalising the decentring agenda of Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis (2021) based on the categories polity, normative, and temporal decentring of Keukeleire and Lecocq (2018, 2021), it builds on Lecocq's (2020a, 2024) work surrounding polity and spatial decentring of the EU's specific approach toward hybrid actors Hamas and Hezbollah. In addition to Lecocq's (2020a) polity decentring, this research adds normative and temporal decentring to deepen the understanding of the EU's stagnation in dealing with Hezbollah's complex nature while demonstrating how this stagnation comes partly forth from its sense of normative superiority flowing from an Orientalist rationale (Said, 1977; Wallerstein 1997) as well as its incomprehension of regional insecurities, thus mal-approaching the ongoing violence (Bilgin, 2018).

In due course, it aims to underscore the by Lecocq (2020a, 2024) made argument how the EU, on the one hand, struggles to interact with hybrid actors in the geopolitical arena while, on the other hand, revealing how this struggle can also be understood as a broader manifestation of perpetual Eurocentric myopia. By deploying a critical discourse analysis and specifically a DHA, this research conveys through a contrapuntal reading how the EU's approach to Hezbollah should be understood as an extension of Europe's colonial past, demonstrating how there has not been a true cutoff of coloniality as its logics remain in present-day policy (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Wodak, 2001ab).

3. Conceptual Framework

As touched upon briefly in section 2.2.1, Keukeleire and Lecocq (2018, 2021) developed a conceptual guide consisting of six categories to operationalise the decentring agenda of Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis (2021). These six categories constitute polity, normative, spatial, temporal, linguistic, and disciplinary decentring and are used as tools to concretise the decentring agenda. From these six categories, three are extracted, namely, polity, normative, and temporal decentring, to uncover Eurocentrism and, in turn, provincialise and engage EU discourse on Hezbollah (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021). Additionally, a combination with Said's contrapuntal method allows for a conscious reading, keeping the influence of the European Empire and coloniality on remaining power asymmetries in mind (Chowdhry, 2007).

First, polity decentring constitutes a reimagination of polity forms outside the Westphalian model that predominantly focuses on state actors and extensions of state actors such as international organisations, ingrained by modernity principles. The modernity aspect in this sense determines the threshold for what Europe regards as a legitimate enactment of polities, which is accentuated in concepts such as individualism, secularism, and citizenship. Assessing polities by these standards implies a blind eye to any deviating forms. This becomes problematic as alternative forms of polities prove increasingly influential as the 'modern state' becomes more and more fragmented. In turn, these fragments are formed by polities that do not comply with the idea of the modern state (Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021). At least, the recognition of their increasing influence in the international arena is of importance, to keep abreast of the latest developments, and what stirs rapid change in non-Western spheres. Provincialising polity thus entails an opening towards alternatives to state actors, and detaching polity forms from the European idea of what constitutes a modern state. Engagement means interacting with these alternative polities, grasping their diverse nature, and by doing so, capturing their essence for the sake of international dynamics (Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021).

Second, normative decentring composes the recognition of varying norms, and therefore, a departure from regarding norms as universal. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998, p. 891) define norms as "a standard of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity"; however, historically, Europe has assumed 'appropriate behaviour' to be a European invention (Wallerstein, 1997). Claiming specifically Western norms as universal not only places European normative frameworks as the starting point of behaviour, but also deprives non-

Western frameworks of normative agency (Huber, 2024; Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021). Provincialising norms constitutes an awareness of European norm prioritisation and what this entails for the diffusion of the European normative model. This model not only favours certain norms over others, but within this favouritism, selectively applies the norms, seen in, for instance, the promotion of democracy, which is encouraged, until the EU benefits from stability over democracy (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021). Engagement involves broadening the scope in constituting what appropriateness deems, and subsequently, exploring differing normative frameworks from non-Western regions. Keukeleire and Lecocq (2018, 2021) argue that engagement in normative contexts can be optimised when regarding norms in continua rather than detached concepts that are solely adhered to in specific societies. A relevant example in the so-called Southern neighbourhood would be the continuum that ranges from secularism to religiosity. In the MENA region, religion is much more ingrained in society. Engaging with these values enhances an overall understanding of where this continuum holds overlapping features and where the variance is the strongest (Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021).

Third temporal decentring is meant to move away from European generalisations of key dates or periods in history (Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021). Eurocentric approaches assume a universal idea of time in which crucial events for the European context are, in turn, translated to be crucial for other contexts as well (Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021; Wallerstein, 1997). One of the most prominent examples of this is how modernity is seen as the start of the intellectual awakening and how it constitutes the threshold for European superiority over other regions (Quijano, 2007). Yet, it is not said that progress should be a linear endeavour, nor that progress comes in only one 'European guise' (Wallerstein, 1997).

However, Eurocentrism in temporal assessments goes beyond consequential periods such as modernity, and is even hidden in Europe's evaluation of specific dates (Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021). This is where this research intersects, as the starting point of wars forms an excellent illustration of the above-mentioned. Western-driven logics on the ongoing Israel-Hezbollah violence translate into the war incepting on 8 October 2023 (Reuters, 2023). Provincialising entails an awareness that this might not be a universal starting point and that the ad hoc recognition of this war is, in essence, a sole European view (Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021). Engagement means exploring what other narratives might prescribe about this conflict. The emergence of Hezbollah in the 1980s (Dandashly, 2022) can be viewed as directly related to any animosities playing out today, and the ongoing Israel-Hezbollah violence is a link in a sequence of violence, thus regarding it as a part of a continuum. Or, one might

conclude that an actual judgment on the start of this becomes much more obscure as diverging collective memories on either side tell different truths, which again can be uncovered through a contrapuntal reading (Chowdhry, 2007).

Taken together the most important take away from Keukeleire and Lecocq's (2018, 2021) conceptual guide is that the assumption of homogeneity for all the above categories is a construct of European thinking, whereas, embracing the heterogenous nature of societies not only benefits non-European spheres in reimbursing agency and understanding, but enables European anticipation on developments occurring in its so-called direct neighbourhood, and beyond.

4. Research Design

4.1 Case Study Justification

Hezbollah is a product of a reciprocity of domestic Shia marginalisation, regional occupation, and a broader pushback against Western interference (Alagha, 2011, 2019; Paterson & MacQueen, 2020; Saouli, 2003). This interplay has brought forth an intricate hybrid actor that has initially been stirred by radical religious affiliations, but is simultaneously capable of transforming internally, moving towards a post-Islamist social movement and a political party while keeping sight of its resistance objective (Alagha, 2011, 2019; Paterson & MacQueen, 2020).

Hezbollah's layered identity makes for a relevant case study within the decentring debate, as it not only demands a heterogenous lens to grasp its multidimensional nature, but also uncovers specifically the EU's troubles in approaching the MENA adequately in light of its tenacious attitude towards regional actors, largely produced by the Orientalist rationale (Said, 1977), and therefore, its incapability of appreciating Hezbollah in accordance to its influence as an actor on the geopolitical stage beyond its terrorist label (Lecocq, 2020a, 2024).

4.2 Methodology

This research will be conducted using Hezbollah as a single case study. The benefits of case studies lie mainly in the space for in-depth research through which a thorough understanding of a particular case can be developed (Flyvbjerg, 2006). This research underpins this understanding by deploying CDA, which is a qualitative method grounded in critical theory, treating ideology as the driver for power asymmetries embedded in language (Wodak, 2001a). According to this method, ideology is visible through symbolic forms, which are examined in certain social contexts, after which the researcher is obliged to determine these symbolic forms as indeed the driver for the continuation or even the creation of certain skewed hierarchies. From the assumption that discourses are historical and that a relationship between language and society exists, CDA involves the hermeneutic analysis of the language used by the individuals (or representatives of an ideology) who essentially function as the catalyst for the sustainment of certain dynamics of domination (Meyer, 2001; Wodak, 2001a).

Within CDA, different branches exist, from which the DHA by Wodak is adopted. In her approach, she acknowledges that our ever-globalizing world and subsequently, the melting pot of societies this brings about, begs for a multiangular approach in which the departure

points from *all* [emphasis added] societies are taken into consideration to assess certain (puzzling) outcomes. To do so, Wodak opts for ‘conceptual pragmatism’ (Wodak, 2001b, p. 64) over grounded theory as the former allows for flexibility in approaching layered problems by leaving space for adapting concepts accordingly and applying them to the problem at hand (Wodak, 2001b).

DHA and, therefore, CDA consider three aspects to ensure a multiangular and critical approach to both the data and the researcher. The three steps include first, ‘immanent critique’ where the researcher assesses possible inconsistencies in the data itself, second, ‘socio-diagnostic critique’, where the researcher goes beyond the primary data and places the inconsistencies into socio-political context, and third, ‘prognostic critique’ which is meant to translate the findings into recommendations in the practical sense (Wodak, 2001b, p. 65). These steps, in turn, can be seamlessly applied to the decentring agenda of Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis (2021). As seen in the conceptual framework, operationalising the decentring agenda demands a similar approach to the data at hand; only the so-called inconsistencies are flagged as Eurocentrism and rethought by broadening the scope through provincialising and engaging the discourse (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Keukeleire & Lecocq, 2018, 2021).

Additionally, to optimize this process, Said’s contrapuntality is adopted to guide the DHA in offering a unique lens to retrospect discourses and make space for marginalised narratives that have thus far been neglected by mainstream IR. As even Said’s Orientalism has been under scrutiny for its focus on Europe as the oppressor without including the perspectives of the oppressed in the same context, Said himself developed the contrapuntal method, which underscores indeed European encroachment *and* [emphasis added] colonial resistance to form an interplay that shapes the status quo. While the European Empire forms the basis for current power asymmetries, a contrapuntal method highlights how the influence of the colonised on the Empire in turn should be acknowledged, for both the sake of narrative completeness as well as agency (Chowdhry, 2007).

This way, Said explains that the interplay elucidated by contrapuntality is deeply inspired by classical music. Symphonies reflect the same reciprocity of contributions. When a part of the contribution is ignored, the music is incomplete. Let it be clear that the emphasis in contrapuntality as a method does not lie on pluralizing history for the sake of abundance, but on specifically *completing* [emphasis added] narratives to level skewed hierarchies as a result of partial storytelling (Chowdhry, 2007).

The necessity of the method is further clarified in Said’s differentiation between ‘Manifest Orientalism’ and ‘Latent Orientalism’. The former refers to the conscious assumption

of the Orient coming forth from a ‘blank space’ on what the Orient exactly entailed. As aforementioned, these assumptions have amounted to the appraisal of the West as inherently superior to the Orient. Subsequently, Latent Orientalism builds on these assumptions and thus departs from a distorted stance of Western presuppositions and truths. This makes Latent Orientalism much more challenging to deconstruct as the developed assumptions have gradually been adopted as given facts rather than disputable findings (Marandi, 2005). Contrapuntality allows for a dissection of Latent Orientalism by rereading discourse diligently and reimbursing the narratives of the ‘neglected other’ (Chowdhry, 2007; Marandi, 2005). This research does so through a theoretical awareness of the EU’s initial construction of the Orient, in which it has -and still- approaches the MENA top-down, while taking into account non-Western perspectives on Hezbollah’s evolution, setting this off against EU-Hezbollah dynamics in practice.

4.3 Data Selection

To argue how Eurocentric tropes in EU discourse on Hezbollah are present, multiple junctures from the birth of Hezbollah are analysed to triangulate this research. The junctures have been selected, ranging from Hezbollah’s early objectives to the present, and focus on larger eruptions of violence, as well as key moments in EU-Lebanon relations. The analysis is, in turn, interpreted while remaining conscious of the ‘in-between’ stages to minimise bias and to make sure the socio-diagnostic critique is not abandoned.

The following junctures will be analysed and are termed how they are referred to within regional outlet Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera Staff, 2024; Salhani, 2023) which will be used throughout the document as well as the time delineation of these junctures: the ‘Israeli occupation of South Lebanon’ (1985-2000)¹, including the ‘April Aggression’ (1996), the ‘July War’ (July 12, 2006-August 14, 2006), the designation of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization by the EU (July 25, 2013) (CoEU, 2013), and lastly as there has not been a formal announcement of a name for the ongoing violence, the last juncture will be referred to in this research as the ‘ongoing Israel-Hezbollah violence’.

To analyse the junctures, official documents, as well as statements, speeches, and press releases from EU officials, are retrieved through the EUR-Lex website, the website of the

¹ Important to note is that the 1982 Israeli Invasion (1982-1985) is not directly included in the empirical analysis, as this triggered the formation of Hezbollah, but did not *include* Hezbollah directly (Paterson & MacQueen, 2020). The Israeli occupation of south Lebanon is analysed from 1985 onwards as this marks Hezbollah’s consolidation and the start of its material resistance against Israel (Al-Aloosy, 2023).

European Union External Action, and the website of the European Council. Subsequently, the data is systematically gathered through a deployment of filters using the keywords ‘Hezbollah’, ‘Hizballah’, and ‘Hizbullah’ and timeframe delineation depending on the respective juncture that is assessed. This accumulated to a total of 127 documents from the EUR-Lex website, 59 from the website of the European Union External Action, and 6 from the European Council website, where the latter two websites only yielded results for the last juncture.

Subsequently, this research adopts the following strategy for optimal data selection for the method deployed: “When preparing the corpus for analysis, the collected data are downsized according to specific criteria such as frequency, representativity, (proto)typicality, intertextual or interdiscursive scope/influence, salience, uniqueness and redundancy” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 99) After reading through *all* available data, a selection of 13 documents is made based on the richness and completeness of the content, as many documents iterated the same topics, just differing in depth, with most documents only mentioning Hezbollah briefly. Therefore, the sample consists of the data that provided the most insight, noting that *if* another document added additional relevant information on the matter, it was naturally added to the selection. Moreover, as the appendix reflects, there is a significant difference in data volume depending on the juncture. This is due to document availability, where archived data on the earliest junctures yielded notably fewer results. From the 2013 designation onwards, the data availability increased exponentially, leaving the ongoing Israel-Hezbollah violence the most represented.

4.4 Operationalisation

As outlined in the previous sections, the decentring agenda by Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis (2021) and subsequently, three of the six categories developed by Keukeleire and Lecocq (2018, 2021) form the overarching conceptual framework which through a contrapuntal reading assesses EU discourse on the above junctures using the outlined discursive strategy derived from Wodak’s DHA (Chowdhry, 2007; Wodak, 2001b). The contrapuntal reading is done by taking regional perspectives on Hezbollah into account as extensively outlined in chapter 5, which additionally optimises the engagement aspect of the decentring agenda. Moreover, epistemologically, the DHA connects seamlessly to the contrapuntal objective as this demands a thorough reading of historical documents on the matter, providing a rich context in principle (Chowdhry, 2007; Wodak, 2001b).

Besides, the junctures are placed in the context of the juncture(s) prior to them, naturally assessing the latest escalation, namely, the ongoing Israel-Hezbollah violence, in the context of *all* junctures analysed. Once more, the consideration of all contexts is to maximise the objective of both contrapuntality and of decentring as well as to adhere to the prescribed framework of DHA and Said's contrapuntality (Chowdhry, 2007; Wodak, 2001b). By shedding light on the neglected context, Eurocentric tropes in the EU's approach to Hezbollah are explained and placed in a broader understanding of postcolonial theory, outlining continuing domination dynamics to be embedded in and manifested through EU discourse.

4.5 Reflection on Personal Positionality

As a daughter to a Dutch mother and a Lebanese father, I carry on the love as well as the troubles of both cultures. I always had a strong connection to my Maronite family, and I visit them as often as possible, depending on whether the security situation allows me to. My mother taught me the importance of an open mind and the power of kindness and forbearance, especially in the absence of my father, who gave me my Lebanese roots, allowing me to remain close to my Lebanese origins.

Yet, it is a tale as old as time; nature versus nurture, where in academia it is best to reason from the latter, and ensure transparency, particularly when aiming to add to the decentring debate. Even though the MENA runs through my DNA, I visit the region regularly, studied Arabic language and culture, and continued to specialise in the Middle East, *all* of the academic knowledge I obtained comes from a Western education. While I aim at pluralising my worldview as much as possible, I have to come to terms with the fact that while my genetics hold an honest duality, my rationale cannot be anything but biased. In fact, in my case, this bias goes both ways, as on the one hand, my Dutch upbringing has imprinted an inevitable Eurocentric logic, while on the other hand, my Maronite family has been heavily impacted by both Israel *and* Hezbollah which fuelled my interest in the latter, but also adds an emotional layer to my research.

However, I like to think that *on the condition* of a reflexive stance, these biases can be a driving force for the synthesis of both sides, which is, in essence, what decentring is all about. To conclude with the wise words of my favourite American-Lebanese poet Kahlil Gibran (2008, p. 50): "Say not, "I have found the truth," but rather, "I have found a truth"".

5. Regarding Hezbollah

This chapter features diverging perspectives on Hezbollah, functioning as the engagement component of this research through which contrapuntality is optimised (Chowdhry, 2007; Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021). It exhibits Hezbollah's evolution as well as the EU's ambiguous stance towards it, therefore underscoring the aforementioned case study justification.

5.1 Hezbollah's Rationale: Early Objectives and Gradual Transformation

Since Lebanon's independence from France in 1943, Shia marginalisation came under a magnifying glass as the Lebanese political landscape, determined by its confessional model, mirrored the dismissive stance toward the mostly rural and impoverished Shia population (Paterson & MacQueen, 2020). This inferior stance was naturally picked up on by various (secular) movements such as the Syrian Nationalists. Yet, secular activism was gradually replaced by Lebanese Shia representation in the late seventies and early eighties. Musa Al-Sadr, leader of what would later transform into the *Amal* 'hope' movement, was the protagonist in this regard. However, an interplay of Al-Sadr's disappearance, the 1982 Israeli invasion, which caused severe civilian casualties, and the presumed negligence towards Israel by Nabih Berri, Al-Sadr's replacement as parliament speaker, cemented the Shia community. Former leaders, amongst them Hassan Nasrallah, united and, with Iranian backing, established Hezbollah, a *muqawama* (resistance) movement fiercely driven by postcolonial aims of freeing Lebanon from Western interference and specifically Israeli occupation (Alagha, 2011; Barhouche, 2024; Paterson & MacQueen, 2020; Saouli, 2003).

Even though Hezbollah's ideology has evolved, its earliest objectives were a clear response to the aforementioned; they were determined by a dichotomy of religious and nationalistic aims laid down in the 1985 'Open Letter' (Alagha, 2011; Paterson & MacQueen, 2020). Religiously, it rejected the Lebanese confessional system, stating it should be replaced by an Islamic state conforming to the Iranian model (Paterson & MacQueen, 2020; Saouli, 2003). Nationally, it was the struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor that was mostly emphasised. The oppressed in this sense is any (culturally) marginalised group (Alagha, 2011; Paterson & MacQueen, 2020), and the oppressors are most prominently the United States (US), and Israel as featured by Alagha (2011, pp. 47-48) in a translation of the 1985 Open Letter: "Concerning Lebanon and Palestine, we are mainly engaged in facing America because it has the biggest influence among the world's colonial powers, and also Israel which is the product

of global Zionism...” and later on “We consider Israel the spearhead of America in our Islamic world... Israel is a rapist enemy that we will continue to fight till the raped land is returned to its [Palestinian] rightful owners...” (Alagha, 2011, p. 48).

Hezbollah’s earliest resistance against the US and Israel was done through jihad, in which arguably, its religious and nationalist aims come together. In the Open Letter, it distinguishes between greater and smaller or ‘defensive jihad’ in which greater jihad, the personal battle within, should always precede defensive jihad, which is deployed in the case of actual military confrontation against foreign and domestic enemies of Islam (Alagha, 2011). Martyrdom in this context is legitimised only if confronted with “superior invading” (Alagha, 2011, p.21), and should be undertaken only if defensive jihad is unable to achieve the same end (Alagha, 2011).

However, Hezbollah’s recognition of the Ta’if Agreement; Lebanon’s constitution, presented a turnaround from its purely Islamist drive, along to establish an Islamic state, towards a post-Islamist stance defined as Hezbollah’s *infatah* (opening-up), which produced Hezbollah’s political branch recognising the equal rights of Lebanon’s sectarian communities as written in its 2009 manifesto (Alagha, 2019; Haddad, 2002). In doing so, Hezbollah managed to maintain its military branch *while* [emphasis added] being allowed into Lebanese politics, which went directly against the Ta’if Agreement. The dichotomy was solved by placing Hezbollah’s military wing under the banner of a resistance movement, after which Hezbollah, as a political party and a social movement with a working army, was voted into government in 2011 (Alagha, 2019; Saouli, 2003).

What unfolded was a dual development: The political branch showed a flexibility in its ideological devotion while Hezbollah’s military wing kept its rigorousness vis-à-vis Israel (Saouli, 2003). Saouli (2003, p. 74) explains this as follows: “In both cases, Hizbullah was reacting to political realities. In the former, it was Lebanese sectarian pluralism; in the latter, the Arab-Israeli conflict”. The fact that Hezbollah reacts to multiple realities exhibits its layering beyond its early Islamist aims (Alagha, 2019), yet, its priority remaining in resistance against the oppressor to liberate the oppressed (Alagha, 2011), as comes forth from the words of deceased Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah in context of the Arab Uprisings and featured by Alagha (2019, p. 116):

“This is the true path when people believe in their resolve... this is the new Middle East created by its own people.” He concluded, “Your Spring has begun; no one can lead you to

another winter. Your belief, vigilance and resilience will overcome all difficulties and make you triumphant”.

5.2 Perpetual Construction in EU-Hezbollah Dynamics

As demonstrated, from a regional gaze, Hezbollah is not and *cannot* be reduced to a sole terrorist organisation, as over the years, the group has converted from an ultra-conservative Islamist group to additionally a social movement, and a political party elected into the Lebanese parliament in 2011 (Alagha, 2019; Saouli, 2003). Yet, Hezbollah’s initial 1985 Open Letter has resulted in the West equating its ideology largely with terrorist acts, such as the abduction and hostage taking of Westerners, but additionally numerous suicide bombings that caused hundreds of deaths. Hezbollah diligently rejects all syntheses of resistance and terrorism by the US in particular, but also by some EU member states such as the Netherlands (Alagha, 2011, 2019). Alagha (2011, p. 31) features the following position of Hezbollah towards the EU in its 2009 Manifesto:

Europe holds responsibility for the damage it has caused due to the colonial “inheritance” it has left behind – of which our people still suffer the consequences and results.

Since some European people have a history in resisting the occupier, Europe’s ethical and humanitarian duty – in addition to being a political duty – is to acknowledge the right of the people to resisting the occupier, on the basis of distinguishing between resistance and terrorism.

This attitude had been voiced before the EU designated Hezbollah’s military wing to the EU’s list of terrorist organisations (CoEU, 2013). It reveals Hezbollah’s persistence in showing the world and especially the ex-colonisers that Islamic resistance should not be regarded in a heap with terrorism, as well as calling on the EU to acknowledge the colonial damage it has done to the region.

Indeed, the EU decided four years after the publication of the 2009 manifesto to differentiate between Hezbollah’s branches only regarding the military wing as a terrorist organisation (CoEU, 2013). However, Lecocq (2020) argues this is surprising given Hezbollah runs a tight ship, keeping track of all its branches, and indeed EU objectives have surfaced showing the EU’s resolution to break down Hezbollah into categories does not seem to come forth from an urge to acknowledge the colonial repercussions in the region as a result of EU

interference (Alagha, 2011). Dandashly (2022) notes how the eventual decision to only designate the military wing rather is a result of Hezbollah's presumed operations on EU territory showing once more Bilgin's (2018) and Said's (1977) notions on realist securitisation where the 'in-group' protects itself from the 'out-group', as well as exemplifying the EU's precaution not to shoot itself in the foot considering Hezbollah's large Shiite support in Lebanon. In light of the latter, a total blacklisting would seriously trouble EU-Lebanon relations (Dandashly, 2022).

Still, Lecocq (2020a) argues in her study how even in the EU's differentiation, internal contestation causes its foreign policy to be mal-sufficient towards the MENA, illustrating how its divergent -and seemingly less rigid stance (when contrasted against the policies of the US towards hybrid actors such as Hezbollah) (Alagha, 2019), do not correlate with a true *understanding* [emphasis added] of its drivers per se as the EU in practice approaches the *entire* [emphasis added] actor based on its terrorist stamp rather than its legitimate branches (Lecocq, 2020a, 2024). In fact, Lecocq (2024) exposes how there exist discrepancies between EU foreign policy as laid down in EU discourse and the approach of EU practitioners in the (regional) field. The latter proves to be far ahead in their ability to grasp hybrid actors' influence, as well as to be able to move beyond the security horizon in appraising these actors (Lecocq, 2024). Therefore, the EU needs to catch up with the understandings obtained from field experiences, considering regional stances, rather than remaining in its Eurocentric boxes, risking losing its relevancy and thus influence over the present-time geopolitical game (Lecocq, 2020a, 2024).

6. Analysis and Findings

6.1 Eurocentrism in the EU's Assessment of Hezbollah on the Polity Level

The following sections feature Eurocentrism in the EU's approach to Hezbollah on the polity level, illustrating how historically it has 'Othered' Hezbollah systemically, highlighting its Islamist affiliations, while inconsistently, placing it in a 'bulk of terrorism' depending on the political climate of EU-Lebanon relations.

6.1.1 The West versus Terrorism: Hezbollah as the 'Incomprehensible' and 'Dangerous Other'

During the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was stationed in South Lebanon to fulfil its peacekeeping mission (European Parliament (EP), 1987; United Nations, 2019). In this context, a questionnaire stresses the necessity for navigating the animosities between the pro-Israeli army and "Hezbollah radical Shiite party" (EP, 1987, p. 34). The abundant name suggests that polity-wise, indeed, Hezbollah was still a relative newcomer to the international stage; therefore, apparently incomprehensible by just naming the group ad hoc without an additional explanation of its nature. Attributing 'radicalism' (EP, 1987) is not surprising in this context, as the question was posed in 1986, which meant Hezbollah still pursued its earliest objectives, which adhered to the 1985 Open Letter, indeed conforming to Islamist aims (Alagha, 2019; Paterson & MacQueen, 2020). Yet, integrating both 'radicalism' and 'Shiite' while the pro-Israeli army does not get defining words attached to it (EP, 1987), renders an 'us versus them' binary in which an appraisal is done, in disadvantage of the latter as Hezbollah as a polity seems to be apprehended solely based of its religious and Islamist affiliations. In framing the group as such, the EU fails to grasp Hezbollah's premise of resistance, therefore also falling short in its understanding of the broader essence of the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon.

In the answer to the posed question, there is no mention of Hezbollah by name, only nods to Hezbollah as a militia, although only in the context of its illegitimate presence vis-à-vis the Lebanese authorities and presumably its non-cooperation in adhering to the Security Council's request on respecting the UNIFIL's mandate. The latter is not stated specifically, but it reads as follows:

The Security Council, which has sole authority to decide on all matters concerning UNIFIL's mandate, has consistently urged all the parties concerned to cooperate fully with the force

in the fulfilment of its mandate. The Twelve have repeatedly stressed their support for the force and made clear their regret that the necessary cooperation has not in all cases been forthcoming. (EP, 1987, p. 35)

The so-referred to ‘cases’ (EP, 1987) that are present in the context of the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon could be a number, as apart from Hezbollah, both Israel and Syria were heavily involved in (southern) Lebanon at the time (Barhouche, 2024). However, a breakdown is necessary as the likelihood of the EU referring to only Hezbollah is plausible, given US support of Syrian presence as a result of its involvement in the 1990 Gulf War (Barhouche, 2024). Moreover, the answer continues by stating “Israel could not agree to complete withdrawal of the forces from Lebanese territory” (EP, 1987, p. 35). The use of the word ‘could’ (EP, 1987) in the context of Israel suggests that Israel had no other choice but to remain. Moreover, ‘cooperation’ (EP, 1987) would be a conscious decision, and in light of ‘could’ (EP, 1987) suggesting Israel’s hands were tied, a probable argument can be made that the case that did not cooperate (EP, 1987) referred to Hezbollah. In the EU’s allocation of choice between the different polities, regarding Israel as the actor that cannot change its attitude (EP, 1987), it seems ignorant to the conditions in which Hezbollah operates as arguably in the context of an occupation struggle (Alagha, 2011), resistance is not optional, whereas occupation of territory is an actual choice.

Roughly ten years later, a clear difference in the designation of Hezbollah from a “radical Shiite Party” (EP, 1987, p. 34) to an affiliation with terrorism can be noticed as the EP (1996, D. section) states: “the acts of terrorism that have provoked this conflict”. Moreover, the EP (1996) urges Hezbollah to quit its battle, as well as governments that it presumes have influence on the group, to seize their support. However, in this request lies an ignorance towards Hezbollah’s resistance as a driving force and its adherence to the protection of the oppressed (Alagha, 2011; Paterson & MacQueen, 2020). The EU shows its incapability of grasping the influence of Hezbollah, as illustrated by its regional political support (Paterson & MacQueen, 2020), exhibiting strong Eurocentrism in the incomprehension of power embedded in marginalisation, growing stronger the more it is oppressed top-down, as illustrated by the anti-colonial push-back, which Hezbollah is also a result of (Alagha, 2011; Lafi, 2022).

During the July War, the Orientalist foundation the EU departs from remains reflected in a press release of former Common Foreign Security Policy (CFSP) High Representative (HR) Solana to the at the time Israeli Foreign Minister Livni in a context of proportional warfare, stating that “we are in a battle against terrorism” (CoEU, 2006, p. 4). While Hezbollah

is not mentioned directly, it is placed in a ‘bulk’ of terrorism, emphasising how this fight is between the Western civilised collective and the ‘terrorist other’. This is not only an instance of Orientalist skewing (Said, 1977), but the statement lacks a recognition of the region’s agency as the EU claims to fight a broader battle between ‘we’ the West as a whole and the ‘terrorists’ (CoEU, 2006), while it deprives Hezbollah from agency too by not recognising its essence as a resistance movement against broader oppression (Alagha, 2011).

The lack of understanding of Hezbollah’s essence in the context of resistance is also reflected in the ongoing Israel-Hezbollah violence. When regarding the EU’s response to the animosities between Israel and Hezbollah, HR Borrell frames this as follows: “Lebanese people are suffering a lot today due to the Israeli attacks as an answer to the Hezbollah attacks” (EEAS, 2024d, para. 2). This statement mirrors the EU’s one-sided assessment of Hezbollah’s cause. Within the context it provides, there is no mention of Hezbollah’s motivation for firing rockets out of solidarity with the Palestinians (Reuters, 2023). Interestingly, news outlet Reuters (2023) was able to underscore this background already on 8 October 2023. Moreover, the phrasing in this statement seems to imply, Israel is merely an intermediary of human suffering due to Hezbollah’s provocation.

Moreover, Borrell is asked the following: “What is your message against the 8.000 missiles from the Hezbollah that fell on Israel last week?” (EEAS, 2024d, 8.000 missiles from the Hezbollah section). His reaction stands out as he makes some inconsistent comparisons. On the one hand, he states the link between the ongoing Israel-Hezbollah violence and the war in Gaza (EEAS, 2024d), which is accurate given that Hezbollah has stated its attacks out of solidarity with the latter (Reuters, 2023), as exemplified, the EU’s refraining from pointing out (EEAS, 2024d). However, HR Borrell additionally emphasizes Hezbollah’s ties to Iran, which he does not explain in-depth but seems to only ‘disclose’ ad hoc (EEAS, 2024d). Without a clarification of the purpose of this statement, the mention of Iran comes across as an effort to underscore the situation as a battle between the West and the non-West. Moreover, it evokes an impression that Hezbollah and Iran have some sort of clandestine relationship, which becomes especially apparent when HR Borrell emphasises that the EU is “very well aware of that” (EEAS, 2024d, Q. 8,000 missiles section). By needing to highlight the EU’s awareness of Hezbollah’s relationship to Iran, it further deepens the Orientalist rationale, as it reads as though Iran and Hezbollah are ‘plotting’ together. However, the group’s strong ideological as well as financial ties to Iran have not been kept discreet, by Iran nor Hezbollah itself, as especially its 1985 Open Letter openly mirrored the Iranian model (Alagha, 2019; Paterson & MacQueen, 2020).

Additionally, a European Commission (EC) report features some texts throughout the document in larger fonts. One of the highlights reads: “Rocket attacks by Hezbollah must stop” (CoEU, 2024b, Lebanon section). Yet, all other accentuated texts read: “International humanitarian law must be respected by all parties and the dangerous cycle of attacks and retaliations must end” (CoEU, 2024b, Iran/Israel section) or “The European Council recalls that all actors have an obligation to take necessary measures to ensure the safety and security of UN personnel and property and to respect the inviolability of UN premises at all times” (CoEU, 2024b, Lebanon section). Therefore, only outlining Hezbollah explicitly while depicting other actors collectively evokes Orientalist logics where only the ‘dangerous other’ is singled out, rendering an ‘us versus them’ binary.

6.1.2 Harmful Inconsistencies and Political Opportunism

The EU officially designated Hezbollah’s armed wing on its list of terrorist organisations in July 2013 (CoEU, 2013). In doing so, it distinguishes between Hezbollah’s political and social status and its military branch (Alagha, 2019). In a document a few months before the designation of Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation, the EC and HR of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2013) brought forth a report on the EU’s 2012 newly established EU-Lebanon European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). In light of Hezbollah’s designation as a terrorist organisation, only four months post-publishment of this report (CoEU, 2013), the content is particularly remarkable:

As for the democratic control over the armed forces, the re-launching of the National Dialogue in June and the discussion on the proposal for a National Defence Strategy presented by President Sleiman in September is a significant development. The proposal seeks to reinforce the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). Hezbollah’s arms are to be used upon the request of LAF, ‘via a decision from the political authority’. (EC & HR of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2013, p. 6)

This section does not iterate the radical or terrorist aspect of Hezbollah as a polity, while in prior documents from the course of 1987 onwards, this was attributed (CoEU, 2006; EP, 1987). Moreover, it is striking that the EU would label the proposal by the Lebanese government to keep Hezbollah’s arms intact only to resort to it ‘on request’, as a “significant development” (EC & HR of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2013, p. 6). Certainly, as

aforementioned, Hezbollah was elected into government in 2011, while it got to keep its arms under the banner of resistance (Alagha, 2019). In this light, the proposal by former president Suleyman is not particularly surprising. However, as the EU has underscored Hezbollah's radical/terrorist nature before and would four months later designate exactly the armed wing on its list of terrorist organisations (CoEU, 2013), the lack of condemnation in this proposal seems counterintuitive.

A year after the official designation (CoEU, 2013), an Official Journal of the EU came out, with the following question: "Why has the Commission decided to include only Hezbollah's presumed military 'wing' in the list of terrorist organisations? When will the Commission include the entire organisation in the EU's terrorist list?" (EP, 2014, p. 439). The questionnaire justifies this by stating that Hezbollah itself does not distinguish between its so-called branches (EP, 2014, p. 439).

The EU's conscious differentiation is reflected in the answer given by HR Ashton, stating: "Regarding a possible inclusion of the entire Hizballah organisation on the list, this would require a new decision by the Council" (EP, 2014, p. 439). The conscious breakdown of Hezbollah as a polity is Eurocentric, as it shows the EU cannot grasp the essence of Hezbollah as a hybrid actor entirely. By differentiating the EU fragments, a polity that regards itself as a front, and by doing so, disables itself from comprehending the actions of this polity within the region. Moreover, one can wonder whether, apart from the EU's apparent difficulty, there might be an additional political intention behind this decision, as designating Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation entirely would complicate the EU's partnership with Lebanon (EC, n.d.).

The EU's inconsistency has remained during the ongoing Israel-Hezbollah violence. The following statement stands out: "EU leaders condemned in the strongest terms the Iranian attacks on Israel on 1 October and Iran's destabilising actions in the Middle East through terrorist and armed groups such as the Houthis, Hezbollah and Hamas" (CoEU, 2024b, Iran/Israel section). The EU's self-proclaimed differentiation of Hezbollah's branches proves troublesome in practice (CoEU, 2013; EEAS, 2024d). There seems to be a discrepancy as the EU generalises Hezbollah with terrorism. This generalisation becomes even more problematic in the following statement: "Lebanese people are not all of them members of Hezbollah. So, the international community has to put pressure in order to get a ceasefire" (EEAS, 2024d, What is your message to the international community section). This lack of nuance has major consequences, as being a member of Hezbollah politically is not a reason to be stripped of the right to be a civilian casualty. This too, comes forth in an EC's statement reading: "The EU reiterates its strong support for the state institutions of Lebanon" (CoEU, 2024a, para. 3). Once

more, the EU shows how it stands with Lebanon's state institutions as if Hezbollah is not *also* [emphasis added] a part of the government (CoEU, 2024a, Alagha, 2019). The EU's decision to break down Hezbollah as a polity seems to be self-crippling when having to respond accordingly to violence in which Hezbollah is involved.

6.2 Eurocentrism in the EU's Assessment of Hezbollah on the Normative Level

The following section features Eurocentrism in the EU's approach to Hezbollah on the normative level, illustrating how it consistently regards its support based on neoliberal ends as beneficial to the ongoing violence, showing its superior normative sentiments while it simultaneously utters a fear for 'losing' people to non-Western ideology (CoEU, 2006).

6.2.1 *Islamic Resistance versus Liberal Support: Assuming Security Concerns*

In light of UNIFIL's presence during the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon, a question arose, less or more rhetorically, stating that Western interference, or as the questioner phrased it, "western European contribution" (EP, 1987, p. 34) would be justified given Lebanon's weak state of government (EP, 1987). Subsequently, in a joint answer, the Foreign Ministers of the European Community state the following: "UNIFIL is playing a useful role in providing protection for the people of Southern Lebanon and is contributing to peace and stability in the region" (EP, 1987, p. 35). Regarding the stated question, appraising Western interference in a non-Western conflict as specifically a 'contribution' (EP, 1987) implies a clear sense of normative superiority as well as a Eurocentric assumption of Western 'help' being beneficial regardless of the outcome of the occupation struggle. This is further reflected in the uttering of UNIFIL being 'useful' in protecting civilians while spreading peace and stability (EP, 1987). The EU fails to recognise that stability and peace belong to a neoliberal framework, which is not preferred in every region or context (Keukeleire et al., 2021), and as resistance against Israeli presence on Lebanese soil, Hezbollah adheres to a completely divergent normative foundation founded in Islam (Alagha, 2011).

Moreover, both the question as well as the answer echo an obliviousness to the role UNIFIL embodies beyond its peacekeeping objective (EP, 1987). It comes back to Bilgin's (2018) postcolonial critique on cosmopolitan efforts of security, where she notes how indeed the global North, the EU, regards security as a collective responsibility, but in its approach departs from a domination stance in which it *assumes* [emphasis added] what the global South, Lebanon, needs. In this supposition, the EU is deaf to the regional voices and blind to the

colonial roots from which cosmopolitan organisations have arisen (Bilgin, 2018). This crystallises further in the earlier outlined quote in section 6.1.1 concerning the EU's regret that not all parties involved in the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon have cooperated with UNIFIL's mandate (EP, 1987, p. 35). This suggests that the EU² assumes all parties would regard UNIFIL as a positive presence on the ground. Yet, as aforementioned, this comes forth from neoliberal norms, which are not considered the most favourable per se (Keukeleire et al., 2021). This is underscored by a different report reading that the EP is "profoundly convinced that there exists no alternative to the continuation of the peace process to secure stability and security in the region and to guarantee the safety of the people living there" (EP, 1996, E. section). Even though this is in line with the EU's 1993-established CFSP serving as a protagonist for neoliberal values (Malovec, 2025), both the EP's statement as well as the CFSP assume that the Western model for peace is the only working model reflecting normative superior sentiments. In this lies a double irony, as Europe has substantially meddled in the past, more often than not only increasing the instability in the MENA region, without even starting on the damage it inflicted as a consequence of its colonial endeavours (Bouris et al., 2022; Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021).

On the other side of the scale, Hezbollah's 1985 Open Letter revolved heavily around freeing South Lebanon from Israeli occupation, through an entirely diverging normative stance. Ideologically, its Islamic foundation justified its armed struggle as it followed a defensive jihad towards Israel and Western imperialism in a broader sense (Alagha, 2011; Paterson & MacQueen, 2020) as illustrated by Wiegand (2009, p. 672):

The Open Letter put the concept of jihad into practice by stating that "each of us is a combat soldier when the call of jihad demands it and each of us undertakes his task in the battle in accordance with his lawful assignment within the framework of action under the guardianship of the leader jurisprudent."

As this section features, Hezbollah's call for sacrifice is lawful within jihadist cadres, therefore leaving no room for normative compromise, only a push for freedom and the protection of dignity (Alagha, 2011, 2019).

² At that time still referred to as the European Community until the Maastricht Treaty came into force in 1992 (Tizzano, 2023).

The incomprehension of Islamic norms materialised further during the July War. CFSP HR Solana voices that proportionality should not be measured in absolute numbers (CoEU, 2006, p. 3). He states the fight against Hezbollah should rather be proportionate towards civilians as it is closely tied to “the hearts and minds of people” (CoEU, 2006, p. 4). He notes that “we have to conduct it in such a manner that the hearts and minds of the people are not separated from what we would like them to be” (CoEU, 2006, p. 4). This statement shows how CSFP HR Solana does not regard the danger of going overboard in military action as lying in the material and human harm it causes, but rather the normative consequences a people's drift from Western ideology involves. In doing so, he not only appraises the Western normative framework as ideal, but also assumes that people in the MENA region are functioning within this framework as of now, therefore, ignoring the vast number of MENA civilians responding to diverging normative values (Keukeleire et al., 2021). Additionally, he implies that a non-Western ideology in this sense is a disease that could spread if not acted appropriately towards the innocent, disregarding that disproportionate military action is not the *only* reason why people adhere or turn to a non-Western ideological rationale especially in light of remaining colonial damage (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Keukeleire et al., 2021).

In another normative light, the Commission of the European Communities (CEC) (2007)³ underlines the prominence in guiding humanitarian assistance, in which it makes sure to emphasise its central role while exemplifying Arab donors, as “non-traditional” (CEC, 2007, p. 15). Even though in the same breath the Arab donors are applauded for their efforts (CEC, 2007, p. 15), it is a top-down hail, especially since it attributes ‘non-traditional’ to their character (CEC, 2007), therefore, reinforcing the differentiation between European *coordination* of Arab *help*. The discourse shows how the EC in this context functions as the ‘normative omniscient’ and thus, as the ‘puppet master’ in “engaging” (CEC, 2007, p. 15) Arab countries. The European sense of competence in deciding on involving regional help exhibits a hierarchical dynamic rather than a horizontal effort (Cebeci, 2021). Especially in light of the EU calling the July War a “protection crisis” (CEC, 2007, p. 16), thus portraying itself as a guardian to its ‘helpless Southern neighbour’. In this frame, the EU not only appraises itself as normatively superior, but arguably as able to protect Lebanon better than regional actors can.

The EU’s appraisal of itself as the ultimate humanitarian aid supporter during the ongoing Israel-Hezbollah violence is further underscored in a statement made in an EC report,

³ Now known as the European Commission (Tizzano, 2023).

reading: “EU member states have a long tradition of supporting Lebanon. Now that the country is facing dramatic moments, the Lebanese people can rest assured that member states and the EU will continue supporting them” (CoEU, 2024a, para. 3). This manner of speech produces an image where the Lebanese ought to be ‘grateful’ for the help that the EU is still willing to give, arguably regardless of the ‘terrorism’ that is happening from their territory.

To conclude with a normative evaluation of the previously quoted segment in section 6.1.2 where the EU refrained from any form of condemnation to the use of Hezbollah’s arms on request of the Lebanese government (EC & HR of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2013, p. 6) while it would classify these arms as terrorist equipment only a few months later (CoEU, 2013), can be aligned with the EU’s contrariety in abiding by its normative framework where it adheres to neoliberal values, until stability is at stake (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021). The selective application of its normative foundation can be explained in light of the EU’s newly established ENP in Lebanon. One can wonder whether the EU foresaw possible contestation, if not worse, coming from Hezbollah if it was forced to disarm, therefore, prioritising stability, and thus safeguarding its partnership (CoEU, n.d.).

6.3 Eurocentrism in the EU’s Assessment of Hezbollah on the Temporal Level

The following section features Eurocentrism in the EU’s approach to Hezbollah on the temporal level, illustrating how it systemically treats the ongoing violence as ad hoc occurrences (CoEU, 2024a; EC, 2006; EP, 1996). Furthermore, it displays its ‘colonial amnesia’ (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021) as it utters a wish for the region to go back to a normal state through neoliberal ends (CEC, 2007), and fails to connect Hezbollah’s resistance to broader occupation struggles in the region (Alagha, 2011).

6.3.1 *Perpetual Violence: A Status Quo*

During the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon, an Official Journal of the European Communities responded to the April Aggression. The report reads as follows: “attacks by the terrorist movement Hezbollah and the military response by Israeli forces have escalated in the last few days” (EP, 1996, A. section). By regarding Hezbollah as the cause of the April Aggression, the EP fails to recognise that this is an eruption within a broader continuum of violence, at least within the cadres of the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon, yet in effect stemming from a perpetuity predating even the French mandate in Lebanon (Barhouche, 2024).

The lack of recognition for this continuum remains in the EU's discourse on the July War, which was marked by Israel's alleged response to the abduction of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah through a month-long raid on Lebanese civilian infrastructure, resulting in over a thousand civilian deaths only on the Lebanese side (Borneman, 2007). This brought forth mainly humanitarian concerns voiced in several reports by the EC as well as in a statement by former CFSP HR Solana (CEC, 2007; CoEU, 2006; EC, 2006). The reports by the EC are mainly focused on humanitarian aid to Lebanon, while emphasising how the abduction of Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah and the subsequent violence was an unforeseen reality:

The 35-day conflict that affected Lebanon in July-August 2006 caught the Lebanese as well as the international community by surprise. Although internal tensions had been ongoing following the assassination in February 2005 of former Prime Minister Hariri, the subsequent withdrawal of Syria from Lebanon and the international enquiry into the assassination, no one expected that a kidnapping by Hezbollah of two Israeli soldiers on 12 July would trigger a large scale conflict between Hezbollah and the Israeli army with a significant human toll. (CEC, 2007, p. 14)

The CEC (2007, p. 14) states, "no one expected" this to erupt the way it did is Eurocentric as it does not assess possible regional expectations on the matter. Moreover, Eurocentrism seeps through in the classification of the July War as a 'surprise' (CEC, 2007), especially since the EU was able to determine the context of the intensified violence accordingly. Regarding the climate, a weary stance would be expected in the face of an already tense situation in the wake of Hariri's death as well as the Syrian withdrawal in 2005 (Barhouche, 2024; CEC, 2007). Another report reads "The one-month long conflict (12 July – 14 August 2006) between Israel and Hezbollah" (EC, 2006, Middle East section), illustrating how the EU is incapable of addressing the intensification of violence according to its perpetuity, but rather approaches it as an ad hoc conflict.

Additionally, CEC (2007) states that the EC emergency reserves need to be deployed in an attempt to "return to normality" (CEC, 2007, p. 18). Yet, both 'returning' as well as 'normality' are arbitrary frames in a region where returning to a non-oppressive, and non-interference scenario is a vague aim, if even an aim that can be based on a recollection of 'normality' whatsoever, as the MENA has rolled from the prelude of coloniality into actual colonial domination to the battles against ongoing regional occupation struggles (Barhouche, 2024). Uttering a wish for a normal state of affairs shows once more the EU's amnesia of its

colonial past in the region (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021), in which a suggestion to deploy emergency reserves as a constructive strategy (CEC, 2007) might benefit from rethinking neoliberal objectives in a context of continuing violence.

However, the EU has yet to see the light when it comes to assessing the intensification of violence as a perpetuity rather than an ad hoc occurrence. This can be argued against the backdrop of the ongoing Israel-Hezbollah violence. Since the War in Gaza erupted and the subsequent plausible genocide followed (International Court of Justice, 2024), Hezbollah answered in solidarity with the Palestinians by firing rockets into Northern Israel on 8 October 2023 (Reuters, 2023). Hezbollah's action that day has sparked widespread debate, as since then, animosities between Israel and Hezbollah have flared up significantly (EEAS, 2024d). Yet, HR Borrell voiced in a press release the lack of consideration of the ongoing Israel-Hezbollah violence after a question was posed on the EU's support for the LAF in April 2024 (EEAS, 2024a). His exact response reads as follows: "I cannot answer your question because we have not been discussing deeply the situation in Lebanon" (EEAS, 2024a, Q. Le Liban section). Before this, he notes that after six months of border violence between Israel and Hezbollah, the EU's attention had mostly been on Iran and Gaza (EEAS, 2024a).

In another press release, two days after the former, Borell once again touched upon Iran, stating the following:

Yes, on 13 April, Iran's attack against Israel was unprecedented. It never happened before. It is the first time that Iran directly attacks Israel from its territory, with hundreds of drones and missiles. All this without forgetting the Israeli attack [on Iranian consulate building in Damascus] that preceded it and that we also condemned, when this happened.

This aerial attack [by Iran] represents a major escalation of an already very tense situation in the region, where we have witnessed dangerous games of attacks and retaliations, retaliations and attacks. (EEAS, 2024b, Check against delivery! section)

The above section is outlined extensively as it shows how one attack by Iran has the EU's attention, while the six-month-long border violence between Israel and Hezbollah is minimally, if at all, recognised, as Borrell states the Lebanese situation was not touched upon at the time (EEAS, 2024a). The peculiarity of the lack of mentioning, is even more shrill against the backdrop of Borell's answer to a question posed in September 2024 asking: "Do you see escalation potentially happened in Lebanon with the ongoing situation?" (EEAS, 2024c, Q. Do you see escalation section) to which he answered: "The risk of a spill-over is not from

yesterday, it is from the beginning” (EEAS, 2024c, Q. Do you see escalation section). In light of his underscoring of the severity of the situation, his answer begs the question of why the EU did not address the border violence sooner.

Only one year after the initial attacks started HR Borrell voiced how the EU is “extremely concerned with the military confrontation between Israel and Hezbollah” (CoEU, 2024a, para. 1). By highlighting it specifically as a military confrontation or as the title states a ‘military escalation’ (CoEU, 2024a), with another report even reading “dramatic military escalation” (CoEU, 2024b, Middle East section) it still underestimates the severity as it refrains from going beyond the mere military aspect of the war while Beirut was already under siege, and the controversial pager attack by Israel injured almost 3000 people as the explosions happened amid crowded civilian spheres (Amnesty International, 2024). The EC proves knowledgeable on the civilian matter as it goes on by stating that the so-called military confrontation “started on 8th of October and escalated in the recent strikes in densely populated areas. We deplore the heavy price paid by civilians, including children and UN staff, and urge the respect of International Humanitarian Law in all circumstances” (CoEU, 2024a, para. 1) while another report reads: “The EU is deeply concerned about the military escalation in Lebanon, the unacceptable number of civilian casualties, the forced displacement caused by the escalating violence and the persistent use of military force” (CoEU, 2024b, Lebanon section) The EU shows how it regards the violence to have a definitive starting point, while it is aware of the intensity, but withholds an appraisal by these standards, refraining from terming it as an actual war.

Another press release goes on by stating, “Everybody is pushing in order to make a ceasefire [happen], that could be the basis for ensuring the security in Israel and the peace for Lebanese people” (EEAS, 2024d, How can we end it? section). It goes without saying that a ceasefire is of importance, as Borrell states, Israel is beyond any proportional warfare (EEAS, 2024d). However, through the European gaze, the eventual result of this ceasefire should bring about conclusions in Israel’s security and Lebanon’s peace (EEAS, 2024d). In this summary, the root of the problem is not touched upon. Believing that a ceasefire would fix the continuing violence is a Eurocentric expectation. Even without Israel occupying Lebanon, Hezbollah’s solidarity lies embedded in its loyalty towards *all* [emphasis added] oppressed and thus towards the Palestinian struggle too; therefore, if this struggle is not lifted, nor will Hezbollah’s armed resistance (Alagha, 2011).

7. Conclusion

Throughout Hezbollah's genesis to its consolidation as an influential hybrid actor on the geopolitical stage (Alagha, 2011, 2019; Lecocq, 2020a, 2024), the EU has failed to supersede its Eurocentric boxes. The approach emanating from these boxes affirms a constructed narrative as embedded in the Orientalist discipline from which EU prejudices flow (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2021; Said, 1977; Wallerstein, 1997), yet it does not do justice to the deep layers that are to Hezbollah (Lecocq, 2020a, 2024). This research asks how these Eurocentric tropes surface in the EU's approach to Hezbollah, which it finds comes forth within the cadres of polity, normative, and temporal assessments. The analysis uncovers trends as well as variances in the EU's stance across the respective junctures, yet even in its variances, the EU remains within its Eurocentric outset.

On the polity level, Eurocentrism surfaces across all junctures and lies mainly in the Orientalist skewing of Hezbollah as the 'dangerous Other' which Europe as a 'collective' has to counter, constructing a clear 'us versus them' binary. As time progresses, the EU increasingly generalises Hezbollah into a bulk of terrorism, which shows an incomprehension of the essence of the actor in its unique position as a resistance movement in the region, while simultaneously depriving it of agency. Additionally, the EU shows an inconsistent differentiation of Hezbollah's branches after it designated only Hezbollah's military wing to the EU's list of terrorist organisations (CoEU, 2013). This contradiction has materialised as the EU at present continues to struggle with the consistent application of its distinction between Hezbollah's legitimate and terrorist actions, arguably due to its political ends.

On the normative level, the EU largely assumes all Western interference is a contribution as well as beneficial to achieving peace and stability in the region. The EU fails to recognise that the intensification of violence lies in an occupation context in which resistance strives for freedom and dignity (Alagha, 2011, 2019) rather than prioritising neoliberal ends. This incomprehension is in line with the EU's ignorance of the Islamic essence the region adheres to, as it suggests that certain actions by the West hold the risk of 'losing people' to non-Western ideology. Together with the EU occurring as the 'humanitarian omniscient', it establishes a normative hierarchy resulting in an asymmetrical cooperation with regional support.

On the temporal level, the EU appraises the junctures as ad hoc occurrences rather than respecting them as links in a continuum of violence. This becomes apparent as the EU is surprised by certain intensifications, as well as voicing the commencement of certain conflicts.

Moreover, in its wish for a “return to normality” (CEC, 2007, p. 18), the EU exhibits amnesia towards the region’s repressive history *and* present in which ‘normality’ is more of a distant dream than a realistic aim. Lastly, in its final opting for a ceasefire, after it refused to look into the ‘Lebanese situation’ for over a year, the EU failed to voice Hezbollah’s motives, and in doing so opted for an unsustainable solution to a battle that is done in solidarity with Gaza displaying it cannot see the violence in Lebanon as a part of a larger, interconnected occupation struggle in the region (Aagha, 2011).

Inspired by Lecocq’s (2020a, 2024) studies, this research adds an empirical case study to the decentring debate, deepening the understanding of the EU’s incomprehension of Hezbollah as an intricate and influential hybrid actor in the MENA region and beyond as an extension of lingering colonial tendencies manifested in the Orientalist skewing of Hezbollah and (temporal) amnesia towards violence in the region at large. Yet, following Acharya and Buzan (2007), I am aware that the actual degree of regionality in perspectives from scholars who pursued Western education is a valid question to raise, and that the scope of this research did not allow for a complete assessment of all available regional perspectives, as many demanded a translation from Arabic. I am not a native speaker; therefore, this would need a broader timeframe to accomplish. Having said that, I did consciously integrate regional perspectives, including sources that translated Hezbollah’s manifestos firsthand. Lastly, while the DHA has been carefully executed, it would be beneficial to add additional junctures to optimise the continuity of Eurocentrism in the EU’s approach to Hezbollah even further.

Future research might include investigating additional decentring categories, as well as deepening the understanding of EU contestation vis-à-vis Islamic normative frameworks, possibly through a comparative analysis between the EU’s stance towards hybrid actors inside and outside the MENA, which can deepen the notion of the specific Orientalist skewing of the EU’s so-called Southern neighbourhood. Moreover, building on Huber (2024), who shed light on Iran’s increasing contestation as a post-colonial state and challenger to EU normative frameworks, it could be of value to deepen research on Hezbollah by actively considering the role of Iran in EU-Hezbollah dynamics.

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Appendix

List of Primary Sources Critical Discourse Analysis

Documents on the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon

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