# CONCLUSION: ISLAMISTS AS (WORLD) POLITICAL ACTORS AND CO-PRODUCERS OF GLOBAL ORDER

## The Global Order in Ennahda's and Hezbollah's Discourse: More Recognition than Resistance

This study set out to explore Islamists' position on the Western-dominated global order. It aimed to move beyond the position of rejectionism that is sometimes ascribed to all Islamists by universalising a stance that is particular to Salafi jihadism. In the course of the 'global war on terror' (GWOT), groups belonging to this latter strand have hegemonised the public imaginary of 'Islamists' as 'terrorists'. This shortcut glosses over two important distinctions: the one between Islamists and terrorists, and the one between Islamists and Salafi jihadists. The findings of this book confirm that sustaining these conceptual differences is important. It has found that Ennahda and Hezbollah, two – albeit unique – representatives of statist Islamism, do not engage in the type of politics of rejectionism that al-Qaʿida or the ISIS organisation do. They do not even strongly resist, that is, object to or aim to transform, elements of order that mark the boundaries with Western world order discourse. Rather, their Islamism manifests in the nuances given to conceptions of sovereignty and legitimacy and, more prominently, in their understanding of the unfolding and *telos* of history. But what is just as important for their take on the Western-dominated world order as their Islamism is their anti-colonial identity and positionality in a postcolonial political context. It is from this point of view

that they criticise, denounce and reject practices of ordering, especially when these deviate from or even clash with the principles and norms upheld in the discourse of powerful actors in the global order. This is the (modest) resistance part of the story.

But recognition is much more prominent in both Islamist discourses. Ennahda and Hezbollah argue (from) within the epistemological and normative universe spanned by Western world order discourse. In their own respective versions, they recognise the principles of global order as posited by at least one, and more often a combination of several, of the strands of Western discourse. They also both seek recognition within the global order. In Ennahda's case, this translates into a discursive strategy of foregrounding categories of identity (similarity, comparability, translatability, consensus). It thereby hopes to prove worthy of being considered as equal. The method Ennahda employs for gaining recognition as part of the global order is to visibly and explicitly signal recognition of the order's principles. For Hezbollah, however, the recognition project seems a bit more complicated. Its self-proclaimed 'resistance' is not directed against the foundations of Western world order discourse. Although its behaviour may appear deviant to others, Hezbollah tries to show that, upon closer inspection, its actions do not even infringe upon a given normative principle of global order, or it attempts to make a convincing case for why an exception is appropriate. This discursive practice, then, confirms the respective norm or order principle at hand.[1] Its resistance targets specific actors and their practices (which are illegitimate according to Hezbollah's own standards) and some strands of Western discourse. Hezbollah's position on global order is far from one of rejectionism and is resistant in limited respects. What is more, while Hezbollah demonstratively performs 'resistance' (self-defence, protection, alertness, steadfastness), it actually seems to seek recognition of its legitimacy according to the standards of a Western-dominated global order, or even for being a morally superior actor who defends the powerless and disenfranchised. Its strategy is thus geared towards being recognised as different but not radically different, as being an equal in a struggle that is inescapable. It thereby reproduces the antagonisms to which two decades of GWOT rhetoric have given rise: the West versus the Muslim world. In contrast, Ennahda is able to offer a transforming and, therefore, resistant impetus to this structuring of global conflict and mutual Othering. For both Tunisia and itself, it claims a

bridge-building role: between Islamism and secularism, between Europe and Africa, between Western and Arab-Muslim models of political (or rather, democratic) order, for a future that can unite in diversity.

*Ennahda: The Muslim Democratic Role Model for Living in Harmony*

As the previous chapters demonstrated, Ennahda's discourse on global order is best described as the consensus-oriented navigation of an unstable yet promising domestic situation in Tunisia. The country was, on the one hand, in the very process of transitioning from authoritarianism to democracy. For Ennahda, this created a window of opportunity to leave behind its shadowy existence as suppressed opposition and emerge as a regular part of Tunisian political life. But both Tunisia's transition and Ennahda's transformation were precarious and preliminary, threatened by the danger of authoritarian backsliding and societal polarisation. On the other hand, Ennahda was aware of the external conditions required for this change to succeed and the risks that might undermine it. Among these risks were the contagion of coups and civil wars, transnational terrorism and the misrecognition of Tunisia as an inferior country rather than a free and equal state, and of Ennahda as 'radical extremists' (Ennahda 2014i) rather than a legitimate political party (for a discussion of misrecognition of non-state actors, see Clément, Geis and Pfeifer 2021). Ennahda's world order discourse between 2011 and 2016 is, therefore, a dual survival strategy. The international audience is approached as the producer of a global order the structure of which will determine the persistence of Tunisian democracy and Ennahda's (thin) recognition as part of the domestic and regional political game.

Ennahda's conception of sovereignty is marked by an insistence on both popular and absolute sovereignty and a negotiation of the tensions between them. But, in the end, for Ennahda, there is 'not much to say' about sovereignty, because it has firmly internalised the idea that the world order consists of equal states inhabited by self-determined peoples. Its rejection of external intervention by third parties is a confirmation of these two sovereignty principles and equates to a stance taken against conditional sovereignty. While Ennahda tentatively formulates ideas on supranational and, more importantly, subnational versions of shared sovereignty, the conception does not play a prominent role in its discourse. If Ennahda's sovereignty discourse is

connected to the hope of Tunisia being recognised as an equal member of the world order, its legitimacy conception mirrors its struggle for recognition as a normal political party whose right to participation in Tunisian democracy is irrevocable. The addressees of this quest are Tunisian and international secularists who are suspicious of Islamists and convinced that Islamic democracy is a contradiction in terms.

Ennahda's methodology of consensus is the party's way of demonstrating that it is radically unradical. Its model of Islamic democracy is presented as a version of realising community-based legitimacy which is easily reconcilable with individualist, liberal values and deliberative democracy. When this was found to be insufficient to prove the harmlessness of its Islamist project, Ennahda discursively sacrificed its self-identification with political Islam. From then on, it promoted itself as a party of Muslim democrats, the North African version of a 'normal' (read: familiar to Europeans) conservative party. Both its sovereignty and its legitimacy discourse were meant to smooth the bumpy road to a utopia in which a democratic Tunisia, inhabited by a prosperous and free people and enriched by a thriving civil society, would enter international relations in the spirit of cooperation and recognition as equal in difference. As its discourse on *teloi* showed, however, the party was acutely aware of the dangers that could stand in the way of it fulfilling this normative vision. Ennahda's discourse on world order is couched in a language fully intelligible and accessible to Western audiences. Where there are frictions, Ennahda offers to solve the underlying contradictions or to adapt its conceptions and even its identity. It is open to such change because history has demonstrated that the Islamic movement needs to work through reality as it asserts itself, which includes large-scale transformations from colonisation to dictatorship to revolution to terrorism. Ennahda wants Tunisia to become a model for the region, and it wants to be a shining example itself. It believes that this can inspire change in others, too.

### Hezbollah: Husayn's Choice and the Duty to Resistance on Behalf of the Oppressed

While Hezbollah's discourse pushes the boundaries of Western conceptions of global order more tangibly than Ennahda's, it does so in ways that cannot simply be ascribed to its 'Islamism'. Religion plays a role but in ways that

are much more subtle. Hezbollah's discourse between 2011 and 2016 is also far from inaccessibly irrational, as vulgar versions of securitised secularist discourse would have it. The ideological framework within which Hezbollah has to act and present its arguments is determined by the party's adherence to *wilāyat al-faqīh*. As Naim Qassem explains, Hezbollah sees 'Sharia's verdicts and judgments' as revealed by the jurist-theologian as 'the spiritual authority of last resort' (Qassem 2010, 113) and complies with the 'general political commandments' (Qassem 2010, 119) defined by him. These include the rejection of hegemony, the common pursuit of unity, the fight against Israel and caring for the needy. This commitment does not, however, 'limit the scope of internal work at the level of forging relations with the various powers and constituents of Lebanon' (Qassem 2010, 121). Qassem goes on to claim that Hezbollah is also free 'in the sphere of regional and international cooperation with groups with whom the Party's strategic direction or concerns meet' (Qassem 2010, 121). But this already hints at a distinction between two logics of operation that are more manifest in Hezbollah's political discourse, those being internal and external affairs. The former realm mainly refers to Lebanon but is sometimes extended to the Arab-Islamic world. In it, Hezbollah strives for unity. The latter works through difference or, rather, antagonism. Here, Hezbollah is concerned with 'resistance' understood as (collective) self-defence.

Hezbollah is a strong advocate of both popular and absolute sovereignty. But it adds a notion of shared sovereignty to the conceptual mix which creates tensions in its overall sovereignty discourse. The party tries to solve this problem by applying its 'two worlds' logic. It distinguishes between a domestic and an international realm as 'scope conditions' for the applicability of sovereignty principles. For Hezbollah, absolute and popular sovereignty are permanently put in jeopardy by scheming third parties and external forces. As both principles need to be upheld, the 'army–people–resistance formula' comes in as a type of auxiliary conception of sovereignty. Only by supplementing the weak state and military capacities can the Lebanese borders be secured and the people remain free. Because absolute and popular sovereignty are threatened and weakened from the outside, they need to be defended with additional means from the inside (support from the armed resistance) – which actually further undermines the two principles. This is an element of resistance in Hezbollah's discourse on global order. For while it reproduces notions of

absolute and popular sovereignty, it innovates upon and pushes the boundaries of the conceptions of shared sovereignty articulated in Western discourse. The transformative impulse with regard to sovereignty is the claim that non-state actors have sovereignty, too.

This is mirrored in Hezbollah's conception of legitimacy, which follows the 'two worlds' logic, too. For Lebanese society, a dialogue-, compromise- and cooperation-oriented political process (the 'budget version' of deliberative legitimacy) and a community-based political system (doing justice to the sectarian composition of Lebanese society) are adequate. They are intended to bring about a fairly peaceful coexistence and enough cohesion for the Lebanese to stand as one 'society of resistance'.[2] Only then will Lebanon be equipped to confront a hostile outside world and a global order in and through which great powers seek to impose hegemony and heteronomy on the Arab-Islamic world. For Hezbollah, any consideration of legitimacy is inextricably linked to the question of violence. It is completely preoccupied with legitimating and delegitimating acts, forms, perpetrators, victims and structures of violence in its discourse. It tries to argue that non-state actors can resort to violence in legitimate ways that are similar to state practices. This is another instance of resistance to Western discourse.

However, it also seeks to be recognised as acting in accordance with the standards and norms regarding the legitimate use of force as established in international norms (and Western discourse) and as being different from other, illegitimate, ANSAs: 'Takfirists' or 'terrorists'. It understands its resort to violence as a necessity to counter schemes of domination and hegemony devised by Western powers, Israel and their allies for the region. The legitimacy of Hezbollah's violence derives from the blatant injustice and illegitimacy of the violence committed by the oppressors. Hezbollah claims that it is one of the few groups that resist and defend the oppressed. It thereby fulfils its religious duty and follows Imam Husayn and his companions, the antetypes of steadfastness in the face of humiliation. The underlying structure of the conflict between the oppressors and the oppressed is unchangeable but its concrete manifestation varies throughout history. The task for Hezbollah and the Arab-Islamic world, then, is to reveal and uncover the disguise of new plans and schemes. This essentialised image of an inescapable conflict is simultaneously the motor of history. It is as evocative of the clash-of-civilisations

imaginary as it is reminiscent of the dystopia of Western hegemony. In this sense, Hezbollah's discourse echoes Western dystopias of the global order and thereby also reproduces enemy images. Rather than resisting hegemonic discourse, Hezbollah reifies, reproduces and, counterintuitively, recognises the basic parameters which Western discourse sets for the interpretation of conflicts in MENA and their future evolution. But within this structure of conflict, the party ends up on the opposite side from the West. The resistant part, then, is the religious legitimation, the evocation of Shiʿi tradition and the application of Husayn's story as a script for contemporary conflict, which all justify Hezbollah's choice of sides and militant action. The group believes that necessary change or rather the prevention of evil plans can only be achieved through (violent) intervention in regional and global politics.

## Widening the Space–Time of Islamist World Order Discourse: Other Cases and Contexts

This book has presented an in-depth study of two statist Islamist actors after the Arab uprisings. It has shown that there are large overlaps between what has been presented as Western conceptions of sovereignty and legitimacy, and utopias and dystopias, on the one hand, and both Ennahda's and Hezbollah's discourse on global order, on the other. But the scope conditions of these findings are a particular place and world time: the first hopeful years of the 2010s. Over time, euphoria gave way to disappointment about what, for proponents of the liberal world order, should have been the fulfilment of the liberal promise for the last democracy-free zone. What finally prevailed was despondency about the crisis of the world order the West itself had caused (see Chapter 2). At the latest since the 2016 election of Donald Trump as president of the United States of America, the main debates in IR have revolved around the transformation and contestation of the liberal international order from within and without (Acharya 2017, Duncombe and Dunne 2018, Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2020, Zürn and Gerschewski 2021), the 'end of American world order' (Acharya 2018b), the decline of the West and 'rise of the rest' (Zarakol 2019) and a 'post-Western world' (Wæver 2018, 75).

The age of a global order under Western hegemony, and therefore the context in which Ennahda and Hezbollah articulated their world order conceptions, may be time-bound. This means that the two Islamist discourses

were studied under particular world-political and domestic conditions. This section will, therefore, first provide an outlook on the unfolding of events in and beyond MENA after 2016. This allows an appraisal of Ennahda's and Hezbollah's (discursive) practices of the early 2010s in a larger temporal context and a rough assessment of the consequences they had for Tunisia's and Lebanon's future. Second, it relates the findings on Ennahda and Hezbollah to the broader phenomenon of Islamism, asking what we can learn for other cases and what the limits to this are.

*Beyond the Aftermath of the Arab Uprisings: Ennahda and Hezbollah in Tunisia and Lebanon at the Turn of the Decade*

While a strategic shift had already occurred under President Barack Obama with the US's 'pivot to Asia' in 2011 (Campbell and Andrews 2013), the early 2010s still drew Western attention and resources to MENA. Only three years since withdrawing from Iraq, the US returned with the GCAD in September 2014. Following his 'America first' ideology, Donald Trump made the end of the US presence in the region a priority and radicalised both the support of allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia and the pressure on American 'enemies' such as Iran. In early 2019, Trump declared ISIS '100 per cent' defeated and announced a full US withdrawal from Syria (Lister 2019). By January 2021, shortly before Joe Biden took office as president, the US had also reduced its presence in Iraq to 2,500 troops. The US military announced the end of its combat mission later that year, after the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan had captured attention and shocked the global public (Arraf 2021). While the failure of this twenty-year military mission briefly sparked intense debates, the world was preoccupied with the COVID-19 pandemic from early 2020. The global health crisis entailed myriad additional problems for MENA (Lynch 2022). Finally, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 resulted in existential economic and food crises for many people living in those countries (Süß and Weipert-Fenner 2022). But it also further distracted attention away from MENA even though none of the crises and conflicts had ended, some having been exacerbated by these global (political) developments, others having entered a phase of de-escalation, at least temporarily.

At the time of writing, in autumn 2023 and more than ten years after the beginning of the Arab uprisings, Lebanese and Tunisian society are

facing dire political and economic circumstances. Not only have these two countries, like so many others in the world, struggled with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war. They have both also witnessed other severe, country-specific crises since 2017. For a long time, Tunisia was seen as the exceptional case in terms of the outcomes of the Arab uprisings that began in 2010 and 2011, having achieved 'a tenuous transition towards democracy' (Weipert-Fenner 2021, 566), while all other states either experienced an authoritarian backlash or descended into armed conflict. Lebanon was the only Arab country that had been classified as a democracy prior to the Arab uprisings, more precisely since the Syrian occupation ended after almost thirty years in 2005.[3] This does not mean that the political systems in the two countries were without flaws. Lebanon has been notorious for foreign involvement in its domestic politics, the paralysing effects of sectarian politics and the corruption of the political elite as a whole, resulting in neglect in the provision of public goods and services. As for Tunisia, even though the transition and constitutional process exceeded the expectations of many observers of political transformations, the country suffered from terrorist attacks and a severe economic crisis. The process of transitional justice that accompanied the political transition and was lauded for its inclusivity and comprehensiveness grew increasingly contentious (Salehi 2022). The year 2019 can be seen as the turning point for the worse in both countries.

Lebanon was among the countries of the so-called second wave of Arab uprisings. Mass protests erupted in Algeria, Sudan, Iraq and Lebanon, leading to the ousting of a dictator in the first of these two cases and forcing the governments out of office in the second two. Protests in Lebanon were motivated by socio-economic grievances and directed against the corrupt political class as a whole, as 'condensed in the overarching slogan "*Killun ya'ni killun*" (All of them means all of them)' (Della Porta and Tufaro 2022, 7). What was special about these protests was the cross-sectarian mobilisation. Among other things, it led to the demand to abolish the ethno-religious quotas from the political system and electoral law, thereby breaking with what used to be known as the most divisive conflict line in Lebanon (Bou Khater and Majed 2020, Pfeifer and Weipert-Fenner 2022). Such protests were not without precedent. In 2015, for instance, the garbage crisis and political stalemate had triggered protests led by the 'You Stink' and '*Isqāṭ al-Niẓām al-Ṭā'ifī*' ('Downfall of

the Sectarian System') movements, denouncing the corruption of the political system and the collusion of private companies and demanding an end to the sectarian system (AbiYaghi, Catusse and Younes 2017). But in 2019, the scale and effects of the protests reached a level that was indeed unprecedented – and so, too, did the economic crisis. It deteriorated from a recession that began in 2017 into what the World Bank calls 'one of the world's worst economic and financial crises in the last 150 years' (World Bank 2021). It is also considered a 'deliberate depression', having been 'orchestrated by the country's elite that has long captured the state and lived off its economic rents' (World Bank 2022). The inflation rate skyrocketed from 3 per cent in 2019 to roughly 155 per cent in 2021.[4] The Lebanese middle class virtually vanished, with an estimated '75% of the population . . . struggling to put food on the table' (Gallagher 2022).

The resignation of Saad al-Hariri's government in October 2019, which had been in a coalition with several parties, came as a shock to Hezbollah. As one of the ruling parties, it had advocated not giving in to the protestors' demands (Reuters 2019). In January 2020, what was seen as a technocratic government took office. It was suspected of being 'exclusively beholden to a parliamentary coalition led by . . . Hezbollah . . . and in fact affiliated with the political establishment that drove the country into its current critical condition' (Maksad 2020). In August 2020, a massive explosion in the Port of Beirut killed over 200 people, wounded more than 7,000, destroyed large parts of the city and forcibly displaced over 300,000 people.[5] Investigations conducted by, among others, the investigative art collective Forensic Architecture found that the explosion had been caused by improper storage of chemicals, explosives and contaminants in a warehouse (Hilburg 2020). Leaked documents showed that the authorities had been warned on multiple occasions about the dangers of the situation but chose to ignore it.

The Beirut port blast was followed by the resignation of the technocratic government under Hassan Diab, which had acted as a caretaker government until September 2021. Moreover, a domestic investigation into the government was launched. As several Lebanese and international NGOs documented, it had a 'range of procedural and systemic flaws . . . including flagrant political interference, immunity for high-level political officials, lack of respect for fair trial standards, and due process violations' from the beginning.[6] When some of their MPs became subjects of the investigation, Hezbollah tried to undermine

the process, including by threatening judges. Supporters of Hezbollah and Amal, the other main Shi'i party, took to the streets in 2021 to protest against the investigation, triggering massive street violence in Beirut (Chulov 2021). It was not until May 2022 that new elections took place, with the aim of putting an end to yet another interim government under Najib Mikati (El Dahan and Bassam 2021). The formation of a new cabinet is still stalled at the time of writing in autumn 2023. But it is clear that Hezbollah and its allies have lost their parliamentary majority. According to the annual report published by the V-Dem Institute in 2022, Lebanon is now considered an electoral autocracy (V-Dem Institute 2022).

Beyond these domestic developments, Lebanon struck a historical deal with Israel in October 2022 when, with the help of US diplomacy, a new line was drawn to redefine the two exclusive economic zones in the Mediterranean. This solved the question of who was permitted to exploit the gas fields – and is considered by some observers as a step towards the normalisation of Lebanese–Israeli relations (Byman 2022). Hezbollah had still sent drones to Israel when the country was about to start gas production a couple of months earlier. But it did not stop the two governments from negotiating the deal and 'eventually even praised it' (Byman 2022). While Hezbollah is still caught up in engagements abroad, believed by many to be on direct Iranian orders, it has all but ended its military mission in Syria, even though the conflict there is far from over (Ghaddar et al. 2022).

Hezbollah's strategy of keeping everything calm on the Lebanese domestic level to provide room for manoeuvre for its resistance projects must at this point be considered as having failed, at least for the time being. Hezbollah has for a long time prioritised transnational projects and, along with virtually all other parties, neglected social and economic grievances in Lebanon. The mass protests show that this strategy no longer works. Hezbollah has also lost reputation in recent years, as part of the political elite but also because it resorted to violence against protestors. Being caught up in Lebanese politics may threaten its domestic position, which has thus far been stable, and, as a consequence, place restrictions on its external agency. While it developed into an important regional and even global player in the 2010s,[7] Hezbollah may now have to redirect its resources to the Lebanese domestic context, at least for a certain amount of time. Should this be the case, the 'two worlds' strategy Hezbollah

pursued in the past may have contributed to its own downfall. By focusing on trans- and international conflicts, Hezbollah may have hindered the reproduction of necessary resources for the resistance project at the domestic level.

It is too early to tell whether Hezbollah's role in regional politics will be diminished. Its accommodation of the gas deal is astonishing and will be hard to reconcile with the resistance image. However, only a couple of days before writing these words in October 2023, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict escalated to a degree that is considered unprecedented by many observers. Hamas, the Islamist Palestinian faction ruling in Gaza and part of the 'axis of resistance', together with other militant groups in Gaza assaulted Israel, killing around 1,100 Israelis and foreigners, more than 750 of them civilians, injuring several thousand and abducting more than 200 persons in a series of guerrilla and terrorist attacks on 7 October. Israel responded with a massive military operation, including not only air strikes but also ground forces. A couple of weeks into the war, the death toll among Gazans is already estimated to have reached 8,000, about 40 per cent of them children.[8] There were also clashes at the Israeli–Lebanese border between Hezbollah and the IDF, which caused the death of dozens of fighters on both sides. But it also seems that both sides are currently still trying to contain the violence and avoid full escalation (Bassam and Perry 2023). At the moment, it is hard to predict whether the war will expand regionally or whether this can be avoided. What is clear, however, is that regional politics and in particular alliance politics are crucial for understanding the dynamics of escalation – and will be severely affected by this war. This includes the 'axis of resistance'.

Hezbollah's relationship with the Iranian regime has been close since its inception. But the degree and quality of Iranian influence on Hezbollah has been a subject of debate. Some claim the party is a mere extension of the Islamic Republic's regime in Lebanon and that Hezbollah acts as an Iranian proxy. Others, however, have suggested that Hezbollah has significant freedoms or has sometimes even reversed the power relations with Iran. There have, for instance, been reports of commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps taking 'many of their operational decisions . . . after consulting Hizbullah' (Leenders and Giustozzi 2022, 629). The popularity and success of its 'golden formula' or the '"resistance" template' in other contexts like Iraq and Yemen may have 'allowed Hizbullah to enjoy some autonomy towards

Iran' (Leenders and Giustozzi 2022, 629). Nevertheless, it is clear that any drastic political change in the domestic politics of Iran (like a revolution, or far-reaching reforms in response to the massive protests the regime has kept facing since 2021) or in its organisation of alliances would also have a profound impact on Hezbollah financially in terms of weapons supply and transnational support from other non-state actors and Shi'i communities. Such developments would certainly limit its room to manoeuvre. They would also further alter the regional political game. While it is impossible to predict how Hezbollah would react to such changes in terms of its strategies and tactics, its world order discourse might be affected less strongly and more indirectly than we would expect. It is conceivable that its interpretations of regional politics would change slightly according to its own perceived agency. But Iran and *wilāyat al-faqīh* do not feature prominently in Hezbollah's discourse. What is more, Hezbollah has created its own trademark of Islamic resistance and an original Shi'i outlook on the unfolding of history and what the future holds. Even if major changes were to occur in the Iranian political system, I would, therefore, expect a high degree of continuity in Hezbollah's world order discourse. What would change rather dramatically, however, is the power of its speaker position and its material capabilities, which, in turn, might significantly alter its take on world order in the long run.

As for Tunisia, drastic change in the form of authoritarian backsliding has already occurred: at the time of writing in autumn 2023, President Kais Saied was slowly but surely consolidating his rule, systematically shutting down democratic institutions and repressing those who had become the opposition, from leftists to Islamists (Agence France-Presse 2023, Yee 2023). The 2019 legislative elections had seen Ennahda emerge as still the strongest party in parliament but had left the legislature fractured, with 'no political force gaining more than 20% of the votes' (Sebei and Fulco 2022, 12). There were several failed attempts to form a government, which led to a short period of rule by Prime Minister Elya Fakhfakh (February–September 2020) and his deposition through a vote of no confidence initiated by Ennahda. Fakhfakh had not responded positively to several of Ennahda's requests. Among other things, he had not included a secular and a Salafist party in the cabinet. The latter had not 'backed President Saied in the second round of the 2019 presidential elections' (Sebei and Fulco 2022, 13). Its exclusion from government enraged Rached

al-Ghannouchi, who also served as the parliament's speaker at the time. In this tense situation, Hichem Mechichi succeeded Fakhfakh as the new head of government. He was simply appointed by President Saied against the will of the political parties represented in parliament.

In the coming months, none of the bills issued by the 'president's government' were passed by the parliament. The country had now not only been hit heavily by COVID-19. It also faced further economic decline, with the GDP growth rate having dropped to minus 8.7 per cent in 2020 and public debt hitting 87.6 per cent (Meddeb 2022). Tunisia also faced a fiscal crisis, given that the deadlock between government, parliament and president prevented the necessary reforms to secure a new loan. Mechichi tried to solve the impasse by reshuffling his cabinet and appointing new ministers that would be backed by the Assembly of the Representatives of the People. While he managed to gain the parliament's support, including Ennahda's, President Saied blocked the process in January 2021. Saied also started introducing reforms without involving the government or parliament. As no agreement had ever been reached on how to staff the Constitutional Court, it had never started work. This meant that questions of authority could not be solved. Meanwhile, anti-Ennahda sentiment continued to grow in parliament and among the public. When the chairman of Ennahda's Shura Council 'publicly demanded financial reparations for the victims of Ben Ali's dictatorship while the country was experiencing the deadliest phase of the epidemic' in summer 2021, mass protests erupted against the government, corruption and 'the looting of public money' (Sebei and Fulco 2022, 15). Many of the protestors directly attacked Ennahda buildings, as the stalemate was mainly blamed on the party. Ennahda was also accused of political manoeuvring in an escalating health and economic crisis.

In July 2021, President Saied announced the enforcement of Article 80 of the Tunisian Constitution – or rather, his interpretation of the law (Ben Hamadi 2021). He suspended the parliament, fired the prime minister and deprived the members of parliament of their immunity from criminal prosecution. While protestors initially welcomed his move, it soon became clear that Saied was leading the country back into authoritarianism. Saied rapidly tightened his grip on power. He restructured the ISIE in April 2022, having dissolved the suspended the parliament a month earlier (Middle East Eye 2022). In June 2022, he sacked several dozen judges (Reuters 2022). In winter

2022, the country saw its first elections since the de facto coup d'état of Kais Saied. They were boycotted by almost all opposition parties as they took place under a new constitution that the president had himself designed and put to a referendum in July 2022. His draft constitution had been passed with 97 per cent of the vote, but only 30 per cent of Tunisians participated in the referendum (Amara 2022). And still, the opposition did not manage to unite against Saied, even when the parties and civil society had long realised what was going on. Ennahda and a few other groups had immediately called the July events a coup, though others were more reluctant to do so. What most parties agreed on, however, was that Ennahda was to blame for the stalemate that had preceded the president's dismantling of democratic institutions and the constitution. Moreover, when Ghannouchi reached out to Saied to try to prevent him from abandoning the 2014 constitution, internal rifts within the party deepened. When the president declined the offer to negotiate, Ennahda returned to its firm stance against his actions. And yet, the party remained isolated. It was not until shortly before the constitutional referendum that it was 'allowed' to join the National Salvation Front, which mobilised against the vote (Sebei and Fulco 2022).

Despite the 'methodology of consensus' it had practised for almost a decade in post-revolutionary Tunisia, Ennahda found itself in a marginalised political position at the beginning of the 2020s and, at the time of writing, the Court of Appeal in Tunis has just extended Ghannouchi's prison sentence from twelve to fifteen months, confirming that he is guilty of terrorism and incitement charges (Associated Press 2023, Middle East Eye 2023a). It seems that not only has Ennahda's fear of authoritarian backsliding become reality but the other political and civil society actors sided against Ennahda once the dialogue- and consensus-oriented formats failed. In a situation where they could agree on barely anything else, what united them was 'their will to sideline Ennahda' (Sebei and Fulco 2022, 26). This shows that antagonism did not transform into agonism and Ennahda did not manage to establish itself as a normal political actor recognised by others even in times of disagreement. In its own perception, then, Ennahda is still demonised as an Islamist danger and it seems that the increasingly authoritarian regime under Saied is indeed reviving the terrorism narrative. This may exacerbate the party's fears for survival. In this sense, the moment in which Ennahda reached out to Saied can be inter-

preted as an attempt to avert renewed repression or a ban. But this move was immediately punished within the party. The party is still struggling with the legacy of the Ben Ali regime's strategy of managing the opposition by dividing it. In case of doubt, the rest of the opposition still unites against the Islamist party, the UGTT being its most outspoken critic and opponent. Meanwhile, Ennahda's attempts to negotiate with the regime were not only fruitless, they were also unacceptable to many Nahdawis who vividly remember the repression the party experienced under the old authoritarian regime.

The consensus methodology was Ennahda's attempt to mitigate these tensions. However, 2021 made the limits of this strategy painfully clear. Moreover, by lulling the party into a false sense of security, striving for consensus may even have contributed to Ennahda finding itself in a precarious position again. Following the line of argument of radical democratic theorists (Mouffe 2000), Ennahda's attempt to replace antagonism by consensus is dangerous in two respects. First, it can make difference disappear by formulating a consensus that strives to be as encompassing as possible. This may lead to actually existing difference articulating itself through other channels than the legitimate political game. The emergence of violent forms of Salafism and terrorism could then be interpreted not only as a reaction to exclusion but also as an expression of consensus being too pervasive in the political realm. Second, there is a danger of the political struggle remaining antagonistic, where hegemony can become deadly for the opponent that is still perceived as the enemy. In the democratic game, the inevitable moment of closure constituted by the political decision is meant to be temporary. Thus, striving for consensus may be an understandable strategy of survival, given Ennahda's historical experience, but it may prove dangerous, assuming antagonism is not transformed into agonism. Ennahda's instinct to seek recognition can, then, be interpreted as one way to pursue such a transformation.

As the events between 2019 and 2022 show, however, Ennahda has failed to achieve this in Tunisia – or internationally. While European countries and the EU were not happy about Saied's power grab, they also found reasons for not taking a stance against it. They wanted to avoid allegations of neocolonialism and the EU being replaced as one of the main international partners by other powers like China. But their laissez-faire attitude also reflected wishful thinking that 'Saied's popularity and determination would lead to

more effective governance and facilitate overdue economic and administrative reforms' (Werenfels 2022, 4). As in the past, the West seems to favour (the illusion of) stability over a serious commitment to democracy. There were expressions of support from the far right in the European Parliament, celebrating Saied as an ally in fighting Islamists (Middle East Monitor 2022). Similar calls to finally ban Ennahda came from the UAE in support of those Tunisian politicians who portray the party as a dangerous Muslim Brotherhood disciple (Werenfels 2022). Beyond Qatar, Ennahda cannot really count on external support. As the party comes under increasing domestic pressure due to Saied's repressive measures against his opponents, the international community has remained audibly silent. The failure of its recognition project on both the domestic and the international levels will strengthen those within and outside the party who were critical of Ennahda's path of compromise and consensus-seeking to begin with.

*Beyond Ennahda and Hezbollah, Recognition and Resistance: What Lessons Can Be Learned for Other Islamists and for Rejectionists in the Global Order?*

As the recontextualisation of the results of this book in another phase demonstrates, Islamist discourses are fundamentally context-bound. This holds for not only temporal but also spatial contexts. The analysis in this book has shown that, like other political actors, Islamists need to react to the political structures and constraints of which they are part, both domestically and globally. They face enemies and opponents, crises and problems, the opening and closing of windows of opportunity in the here and now. This is reflected in their utterances. Islamists have unique ways of processing their reality through language. Consequently, if we were to analyse another Islamist discourse, or Ennahda's and Hezbollah's discourse at another point in time, we would get different results. This does not mean, however, that more general conclusions cannot be drawn. There are some commonalities between Ennahda's and Hezbollah's discourse which may be representative of larger evolutions in Islamist politics and prove valid in other contexts. But generalisable conclusions are limited.

First, this is linked with the similarity of the two parties. They consider themselves part of the Arab-Islamic world. The relations of closeness and remoteness, of identity and difference found in their discourses have important overlaps. But ultimately, Hezbollah is an actor in the Mashreq oriented

towards the East and the Gulf, whereas Ennahda is rooted in the Maghreb and conceives itself as a bridge between Africa and Europe. These geographical orientations and the parties' self-positioning within them are distinct, even though they share a (problem) horizon and both revolve around the notion of an Arab-Islamic world. Ennahda and Hezbollah also share the rejection of Western intervention, interference and hegemony in this space. Where Ennahda tentatively develops a concrete positive vision of what a global order without hegemony could look like, Hezbollah calls for action and self-defence against the unchangeable invasiveness of the West. This anti-colonial impetus will certainly be found not only in other Islamist discourses but also more broadly in world order discourse in formerly colonised areas.

Second and relatedly, Ennahda and Hezbollah both have deeply internalised conceptions of absolute and popular sovereignty. Divine sovereignty plays no practical role in their political discourse. Similarly, with regard to legitimate forms of authority, neither of them still seeks to establish an Islamic state. This is evident in their official platforms as well as their discursive interactions as observed in this book. Both, then, are truly post-Islamist (Bayat 2013, Boubekeur and Roy 2012b) in the sense that they no longer strive for a top-down Islamisation of society through the state or make strong truth claims about (political) Islam. Rather, they emphasise intra-religious pluralism and that different interpretations of Islam are possible and desirable. And still, both have their own way of bringing Islam into their (world) order political discourse. For Ennahda, the constant reinterpretation of religion and politics, as well as renegotiation and adjustment of the line between them, is at the core of its conception of Islamic democracy and community-based legitimacy. In Hezbollah's discourse, Islam features as a practised cultural form of conflict interpretation and moral guidance from which it draws its repertoire and legitimation of action. The ways in which Islam feeds into Ennahda's and Hezbollah's discourses is both specific and complex. It exceeds mere 'cultural' traces or 'value' orientation. Islam is still constitutive of Islamist politics and discourse – but no more than other identities, political circumstances and the position Islamists occupy in a world-political and domestic context. Islamists' Islam moves with time.

Third, this separates the two parties from Salafi jihadism. This book clearly demonstrates that such a distinction makes sense, in terms not only of

ideology but also of ordering practice. Ennahda and Hezbollah have entered a global discourse on world order, or rather, they are part of it and articulate their positions in ways that are accessible and contestable for other speakers rather than opaque or otherworldly. Neither group positions itself outside the (hegemonic discourse on) world order but rather both are deeply entangled in it, sometimes stretching and pushing its boundaries, but mostly accepting it as so 'normal' that they do not even feel the need to reaffirm certain standards. In this regard, they also position themselves on the side of a global order which depicts Salafi jihadism as its Other. Ennahda had to walk the line between engaging the Salafist spectrum and credibly distancing itself from these 'radicals'. At the same time, as part of the government, it also needed to deal with and respond to the terrorist attacks in Tunisia. This has made emphasising difference from Salafi jihadism even more pressing. As for Hezbollah, the enemy image of 'Takfirism' is a core part of the legitimation of its intervention in Syria. Both Ennahda and Hezbollah, therefore, reject Salafi-jihadist rejectionism. They characterise the 'Jihadi' (Ennahda) or 'Takfiri' (Hezbollah) project as distorting the meaning of Islam, misusing religion for the legitimation of excessive and appalling violence and eliminating difference within and beyond Islam. They explicitly make use of the Salafi-jihadist Other to articulate their identity by setting themselves apart from these 'terrorists'. While actors such as the ISIS organisation or al-Qaʿida may be considered an 'easy' target to agree on, the rejection of these groups still marks common ground between 'Islamists' and 'the West'. At the same time, Ennahda and Hezbollah are also careful to maintain a clear-cut enemy image. They warn against equating Salafi jihadism with non-violent Salafism (Ennahda) or stylising it as a Sunni form of extremism, thereby exacerbating sectarian tensions (Hezbollah). As the analysis in this book has shown, this degree of differentiation is important for both Islamist parties in their respective contexts because a wrong discursive move could escalate conflicts.

Fourth, Ennahda and Hezbollah also share their scepticism towards Saudi Arabia's role in MENA. While Ennahda formulates its concerns more indirectly (referring to 'views from the Gulf', Ennahda 2012d), Hezbollah openly shames the kingdom: 'The entire world is now . . . well aware that all the terrorism in this world and in any corner in the world is due to the intellect and money of the [Saudis]' (Hezbollah 2016n).[9] These positions certainly involve

both a real concern with Wahhabi ideology and a regional rivalry perspective. But one important dimension of the relationship with Saudi Arabia is the kingdom's long-lasting and proactively pursued ambition to provide the only model of an Islamic polity (Darwich 2016, Hegghammer 2010). With its Muslim Brotherhood legacy and closeness to Qatar and the Turkish AKP, Ennahda sides with actors that propose a competing model of Sunni Islamic political order. Hezbollah's *wilāyat al-faqīh* commitment, closeness to Iran and key role in maintaining (and extending) the axis of resistance make it a thorn in the kingdom's flesh. The antagonism increased when Saudi Arabia had reason to fear that Iran's isolation would come to an end with the JCPOA nuclear deal under the Obama administration (Stein 2021, 183–208). Ennahda and Hezbollah offer ideas on how to calibrate the relationship between Islam and politics in the twenty-first century that strongly diverge from the Saudi-Wahhabi system. In contrast to Islamists, however, Saudi Arabia does not have to struggle with Western securitisation and demonisation, it enjoys the privileges of being a state actor, and its regime does not have to engage in 'risky' democratic politics. The kingdom is simply not met with the same amount of scepticism and enjoys recognition as a strategic partner of the West in the region – in spite of despicable violations of humanitarian law in its war on Yemen.

This points to a final finding that applies to both Ennahda and Hezbollah: enmity towards them is based on interests rather than their alleged radicalism, fanaticism or religious irrationalism. Their discourse is largely conducted within a discursive space spanned by Western conceptions of world order, albeit sometimes pushing the boundaries of the latter. But, based on their utterances, they are also clearly identifiable as (post-)Islamists, as both have specific ways of bringing Islam into politics. And yet, nowhere did the reference to religion render their normative and epistemic universes irreconcilable with the Western equivalent. The results of this book, therefore, refute the unintelligibility or inaccessibility of religious reasons that is sometimes formulated as a central argument in favour of political secularism and against talking to Islamists. No good reasons to refuse cooperation with Islamists can be found in their 'Islamism'. Rather, it seems that Western Othering practices are grounded in a habitualised and generalised suspicion of 'Islamists' in the case of Ennahda. The West may also hope to benefit from cooperation with

known 'secularists' for the sake of 'stability'. When it comes to Hezbollah, the West pursues divergent, sometimes diametrically opposite interests. Not only does the West not accept the self-authorisation of a non-state actor to conduct military interventions and other sovereign practices reserved for states. Hezbollah's calls for Israel to be eradicated make even thin recognition inconceivable to Western states committed to the non-negotiability of Israel's right to exist. And finally, Hezbollah is simply on the 'wrong side' of regional conflict dynamics from a Western perspective in which the 'axis of resistance' is seen as an 'axis of evil'.

## What Islamists Tell Us about Global Order (Discourse) – and Vice Versa

This book demonstrates that the clichéd view on the position of Islamists towards the world order is too simple. Divine sovereignty does not play any practical role in Ennahda's and Hezbollah's discourse. Neither of the two Islamist parties question the state-based system or seek to establish an Islamic state. The afterlife does not extend into their very realistic and this-worldly assessments of political developments and their room for manoeuvre. They do not hold up irrevocable truth claims that make certain positions non-negotiable. Hezbollah does use an epistemic and ethical apparatus derived from religious tradition to interpret conflict and determine acceptable behaviour. But what results from this are tactical decisions and tangible actions to best pursue its interests in the here and now. Ennahda does try to transform democracy to make it more fitting for a society of Muslims and Islamic tradition. But it privileges and is ready to make concessions for the sake of consensus. Ennahda is deeply recognisant of the global order and strives to be recognised within it and by powerful speakers in the world order discourse. Its position is one of restraint and leading by example. Hezbollah is moderately resistant to the global order and more recognisant than it might wish to appear. Its position is one of imposition and intervening to actively bring about or prevent change.[10]

 This book also provides strong evidence that Islamists must be taken seriously as (world-)political actors – rather than be conceptualised as primarily religious-ideological or rational-opportunistic. They are not, as some have suggested, in principle and *a priori* actors who show a moderate, compromising face until they are in power, only to reveal their true, radical selves. Nor are they

in principle more irrational or prone to violence than other actors. By qualifying them as political, I mean, first, that Islamists have ideas about how the global order should be designed and how we should live together in this rather than the next world. Second, Islamists, like other actors, are context-bound. This implies that their goals and means are subject to change and adaptation. They are actors who respond to different interests addressed to them by various Others. They must negotiate and strike compromises, they sometimes act pragmatically, and must reconcile competing ambitions and interests. In this sense, seeing Islamists as political actors also opens up spaces for negotiation and, potentially, cooperation. Finally, they are actors deeply embedded in and aware of the (world-)political context to which they must relate. Importantly, this means that they need to legitimise their action vis-à-vis different audiences and in relation to different normative structures and standards. This is why they formulate their conceptions and positions in a language that is accessible, give reasons that are comprehensible and provide justifications that are acceptable to a global audience and within a normative structure born out of Western hegemony. This normative structure includes liberal elements that both actors accept and a secular settlement that both actors challenge – not least because it positions Islamists outside legitimate global politics and the Western-dominated world order. Both actors are aware of the normative power of secularism (Pfeifer 2019), and make concessions and adapt to it by downplaying their Islamism. But they also use the global normative structure to delegitimise Salafi-jihadist actors, to demand equal rights and to condemn Western practices that run counter to this structure: (military) interventions in other states, influencing the outcome of elections, favouring interests over norms that are claimed to be universal.

If Ennahda and Hezbollah do indeed reproduce many of the conceptions and norms of Western world order discourse, we can consider this finding as reaffirming the pervasiveness of Western power. A critical interpretation of this would claim that Western hegemony is inescapable and its structures significantly constrain agency for other world-ordering practices. A more practical take on this would be that utterances articulated in a global discourse on world order have to be intelligible for others who speak in it. These utterances have to be expressed in a normative and epistemic lingua franca and they are formulated in a context which has been shaped by centuries of Western

dominance. But neither interpretation precludes actors' ability to push boundaries and transform structures. The fact that Islamists recognise but also resist is a sign that hegemony is not total (Deitelhoff and Daase 2021). In this sense, the study of Ennahda's and Hezbollah's world order discourse is one way of detecting the room for agency in and potential for the transformation of the global order under Western hegemony. The fact that non-state actors adopt a position on a global order underlines the importance of an emerging research agenda that aims at studying external – international, regional, global – relations of (armed) non-state actors (Huang 2016, Darwich 2021a, 2021b, Geis, Clément and Pfeifer 2021). And finally, for a long time it was assumed that 'non-Western states and peoples are . . . without international politics or an interest in the world at large' (Zarakol 2022, 7), but this book shows that the global order shapes everyday politics in the MENA region and, conversely, actors from the region actively try to engage and transform the (discourse on) global order. The analysis of Ennahda's and Hezbollah's discourse, then, reveals that world ordering takes place beyond the state and beyond the West.

## Notes

1. A similar argument has recently been made in norms research with regard to the question of how contestation affects the robustness of norms: as long as contestation concerns the application rather than the validity of a norm, it does not weaken and can even strengthen norm robustness (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2020).

2. For an interpretation of this term, coined by Naim Qassem, see Saade (2016, 138).

3. It had been classified as a democracy by the Polity data series since 2005, see http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/Lebanon2010.pdf (accessed 16 October 2023). V-Dem provides the indices for different conceptions of democracy, but all indicators rose sharply in 2005 as well, see https://www.v-dem.net/data_analy sis/CountryGraph/ (accessed 16 October 2023).

4. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG?end=2021&location s=LB&start=2018 (accessed 16 October 2023).

5. https://english.legal-agenda.com/joint-letter-to-the-human-rights-council-calling-for-an-international-investigative-mission-into-the-beirut-blast/ (accessed 16 October 2023).

6. https://english.legal-agenda.com/joint-letter-to-the-human-rights-council-calling-for-an-international-investigative-mission-into-the-beirut-blast/ (accessed 17 October 2023).

7. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/hezbollahinteractivemap/# (accessed 17 October 2023).

8. https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/gaza-3195-children-killed-three-weeks-surpasses-annual-number-children-killed-conflict-zones-2019 (accessed 7 November 2023).

9. Square brackets in original.

10. For the distinction between restraint and imposition, see Sørensen (2006).