

UNIVERSITA' CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

MILANO

Dottorato di ricerca in Rappresentazioni e comportamenti politici

Ciclo: XIX

S.S.D: SPS/04

FORESEEING POLITICAL CHANGE.

**Structure, System and Agency in the Making of the Lebanese *Intifadha*
*al-Iqtad***

Tesi di Dottorato di: Alessandro Quarenghi

Matricola: 3280133

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Coordinatore: Ch.mo Prof. Lorenzo ORNAGHI

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Abstract

The thesis aims to answer the question ‘could the Lebanese *Intifadha al-Iqtad* have been predicted?’ In order to do so, it first of all tries to define the political event, in terms of features, dynamic, and outcome, and to assess if it could have been explained by a theoretical or comparative approach. Secondly, it outlines the epistemological assumptions on which a scientific prediction of the future could be based. As a result, it argues that an anticipation of the future (which is named ‘foreseeing’) is the combination of two different activities: on the one hand, ‘proscribing’, which is conditional negative anticipation according to a methodological criterion of scientific knowledge; and, on the other hand, ‘predicting’, which is an activity of free and non-scientific positive anticipation of the future based on shared human nature. Thirdly, it puts forward a framework for foreseeing the future organised on different levels and divided into macro-categories according to the role of agents in the making of human history. Finally, it analyses the ‘Political Independence Revolution’ according to the proposed framework.

Sommario

La tesi cerca di rispondere alla domanda: ‘la libanese *Intifadha al-Iqtad* poteva essere prevista?’. La risposta si sviluppa attraverso alcuni passaggi. Innanzitutto, l’evento politico è definito in base alle sue caratteristiche, alle sue dinamiche, ed ai risultati raggiunti. La tesi esamina in seguito le condizioni epistemologiche di scientificità predittiva. Il risultato dell’analisi propone la scissione dell’attività predittiva complessiva (che è denominata ‘prevedere’) in due: la ‘proscrizione’, che è una previsione condizionale negativa svolta e giudicata secondo criteri metodologici di razionalità scientifica, e la ‘predizione’, che è una libera e non scientifica anticipazione positiva del futuro che si basa sulla natura umana. In terzo luogo, la tesi propone uno schema di previsione organizzato in livelli e macro-categorie analitiche in funzione del protagonismo degli agenti nella creazione della storia umana. Infine, analizza la ‘Rivoluzione politica d’indipendenza’ in base allo schema analitico proposto.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Some these carefully analyse, by following a specific approach, a particular phenomenon, with the aim of providing new findings. Others rearrange already available knowledge in a new fashion in order to offer a possibly newer and fresher interpretation of some phenomena. This thesis belongs to both categories: the phenomenon it tries to understand is so recent that the literature on it is not extensive, but the framework it follows merges quite different approaches, combining them in order to produce a different analytical perspective. This latter characteristic of this work has required, more than the former, that I employ all the knowledge accumulated during my career as a student. This work certainly represents a step on the path that I began a few years ago, involving everything I have come across since I started being interested in the question of power, at the end of my law degree. At that time, my poor high school English was all but forgotten: that I attempted to write this thesis in that language is evidence of my journey, sometime enjoyable and sometimes, more often than I like to remember, hard and tiring.

First of all, I have to thank all of my fellow students in Italy, Wales and Lebanon, who have helped me to bear the time spent away from Kerstin and my family. Among them, Nuria, Nadia and Maria made the almost two years spent in Beirut a lot more agreeable than they could otherwise have been. The experience at ASERI was of major importance: without the expertise of all the international professors teaching there I would have been blinder and certainly without the ability to feed my always feeble intellectual curiosity; without its grants I could not have followed my just-blossoming interest in international economics and, some time later, international politics and political science in general. Roberto Brambilla, the director at ASERI, helped me during some delicate moments of my life, in his own discrete but dedicated personal style. My stay at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, where I attended the Masters in Postcolonial Politics, taught me – even if by contrast, the danger of both too specialised a discourse and academic conformism; however, it definitely helped me to develop research skills and analytical precision, and made me aware of the requirements of scientific endeavour. Of course the stay in Beirut, while attending the Masters in Médiation Interculturelle at Université Saint-Joseph, made

this work possible. Witnessing the start and whole trajectory of the political event that this thesis tries to assess was of paramount importance. I have met some kind people in Beirut: Professor Père Louis Boisset S.J., whose kindness cannot be fully appreciated without knowing him; Professor Father John Donohue S.J., Professor Annie Tabet, and Jihad Nammour, with whom I have always been in disagreement about Lebanon's political and social situation but whose arguments I have never made the mistake of dismissing.

I also remember all of the professors I was fortunate to have as teachers; from all of them, I have learned something – I have used here some of their teachings, maybe a lot more than is reasonable. The Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore has funded all the steps of this journey, maybe believing it was worth it: I hope this work will not prove them wrong.

Professor Vittorio Emanuele Parsi has been the best supervisor I could have wished for, leaving me the time and the freedom I needed to pursue my research, without loading my time-table with other tasks. I find it bizarre how we, more often than not, agree on the political analysis and not on its conclusions.

My family have provided, as usual, all the support they could, both when I was abroad and when I was in Italy, in their own peculiar style.

Most of all, I have to thank Kerstin, clearly not just because she edited and proofread this thesis and all the other documents I asked her to, but because she has enlightened my life and completed me in a way that couldn't possibly be better. Every now and again, I needed to be pushed to work, and somehow she managed to do it gently and firmly. We have been through difficult times, hard moments for both of us: I firmly believe not many other couples could have faced them better than we did. It is long overdue that we join our lives. No other moment in my life has been more looked forward to.

And, finally, I have to thank myself. It has been difficult, and tiring. I have moved from studying one discipline to another (Law, Sociology, International Economics, International and Postcolonial Politics, Cultural Mediation and Anthropology), and lived in different countries (Italy, Wales, and Lebanon) in just a few years. Has it been worth it? I am not so sure, especially when I think of the time spent away from Kerstin. Yet, I have to recognise my 'journey' has granted me more freedom, knowledge, and maybe even wisdom. Mostly, however, I have to thank myself because I would like to believe this thesis is a bit different

to others. Last summer, a friend of mine came to Beirut for a month in order to finish researching her PhD, which was about Lebanon. Her thesis was basically ready, and she just wanted to interview a few Lebanese policy-makers in order to add a qualitative touch to it. On her first day, I introduced her to some Lebanese researchers and walked her around. She was not able to recognise Saad Hariri or President of the Republic Emile Lahoud, or the Free Patriotic Movement's General Michel Aoun, just to name a few of the most important political leaders. I have read a preliminary draft of her work, which was a relatively well-researched analysis of the implementation of the Taëf Agreement, but of course well below the standard of the best explorations/analyses provided by Lebanese researchers. Completed at the end of the *Intifadha al-Iqtad*, it did not include any scrutiny of it. I wondered what contribution that effort, even if well presented, could make to knowledge. It was conservative, and terribly so.

I have tried to work differently, to take risks, and to accept the possibility of making mistakes; I believe this is what a PhD, and a young researcher, should attempt to do. I am not sure I am entitled to write about a country I do not speak the main language of. In fact, despite the availability of a relatively extensive amount of literature in both English and French, I know I am missing an important part of Lebanon. However, I have tried to do something new. I do not claim any originality in any part of this work; I have simply tried to arrange some of the available knowledge in such a way as to answer the thesis' basic question. Of course, I am solely responsible for any incorrect interpretations and mistakes made in this thesis. I am not satisfied with the final result, and I am aware that every paragraph, and every sentence, should have been better researched, thought out, and written.

INTRODUCTION

While witnessing the beginning and development of what would later be called, because of its source and its political aims, the *Intifadha al-Iqtad* (Independence Upheaval, or Revolt) or Beirut Spring, Cedar Revolution, or Gucci Revolution (among others), I was struck by a simple question: whatever the nature of the sequence of events taking shape before my eyes, could have it been foreseen?

In my limited knowledge, nobody had attempted, let alone succeeded, in doing it. Sophisticated socio-political analysis, a certain historical knowledge, and common sense could have melted together to remember the recurrence of civil wars and to point out the nature of the Lebanese political system, as an equilibrium between coexistence and armed conflict. As early as 1994, in what is probably the most precise prediction I have come across, which could have been describing, unfortunately, the political situation at the time of writing (November 2006, after the Lebanese-Israeli war of the summer), Ghassan Salamé anticipated that “any attempt to reconcentrate it [power] to a single confession’s advantage will bring about a new civil war” (Salamé, 1994, p. 85). As opposed to, during a prior period, precisely on 3 December 1981, Talal Hussein, remarking in the daily *Al-Nahar* that the civil war the country was experiencing was a surface phenomenon which was bounded to vanish once all the confessional elements in Lebanese society would become equally adapted to the modern world (quoted by Salibi, 1998, 232). However, such predictions are quite generic and do not predict the precise moment and the features of such future civil wars, or peace. Certainly, they did not mention the beginning of a season of peaceful demonstrations and confrontations on 14 March 2006.

Yet, they came close to what scientific knowledge can actually offer in terms of predictions. Social and political predictions are possible, and being attempted, at two distinct levels: a ‘high’, theoretical level that involves, through history and statistics, discerning the presence or lack of conditions that can allow the phenomenon to take shape; and a ‘low’, practical level that sketches out the ‘scenarios’ that are likely to occur if those or other conditions, in terms of the actors’ strategic and tactical choices, exist. On both levels, the knowledge employed can be two-sided: ‘objective’, in terms of trends and numerical data, and

‘subjective’, in terms of judgements of experts who are better acquainted than others with the relevant issues.

Social and human sciences, as much as natural sciences, do, or attempt to, offer predictions. Despite being contested and sometimes refused, both ‘understanding’ and ‘explaining’ appear to have different focuses in the search for knowledge that can help to elucidate the past, the present, and therefore the future. As much as a physical phenomenon can be explained in order to be recreated, a social and human phenomenon can be understood in its uniqueness, and despite of and through it, be compared to other more or less dissimilar experiences. The two leading social disciplines of the modern era, which have influenced all others and marked their developments, economics and history, exemplify this well. Economics, still based on a certain concept of *homo economicus*, despite recent attempts at overcoming its limitations, is in itself a science of prediction, dedicated to understanding the future behaviour of markets and consumers (whether successfully or not is a completely different matter). History by definition looks into the past, not at the future, but it does so in order to compare past experiences to each other or to the present: understanding the past is the key to understanding the present and, therefore, the future (in spite of the forceful rejection of positivism and historical linearity, trends have been very highly rated in the last fifty years, at least from the work of Fernand Braudel).

However, admitting that social and human sciences should predict phenomena brings about a series of epistemological problems that are difficult to overcome. Those who choose to refuse this task do well. In this work, I have chosen not to devote much space, and certainly not all the necessary space, to epistemological issues. Not only because I share Gellner’s view (Gellner, 1992) that those who want to properly argue about the philosophy of social sciences should go and work in a Department of Philosophy, but because the answer to the question that guided my research has been, basically, negative. After trying to find a way to scientifically engineer an approach that could make it possible to precisely anticipate an event, I had to conclude that it is not possible. Actors, I have discovered – with some relief I must to say – do have freedom and responsibility in the making of history.

Science can offer proscriptions (negative predictions), or it can tell us what cannot happen according to logic, past experiences, and comparisons. I have called science’s contribution to anticipating the future as ‘proscribing’, while I have named the activity of positively

anticipating the future as 'prescribing'. 'Foreseeing' is the combination of proscribing and predicting. Therefore, foreseeing builds on, and includes, predicting but it is not a scientific activity. Anticipating what is going to happen, in the political realm, is not a matter of science; it is a matter of human nature. Political events are human events, and it is this common nature, which is shared by the researcher and the 'history-makers', that provides a link through which the former can aim to understand what the latter will create.

However, despite the non-scientific character of the whole enterprise, I have realised that available approaches can be 're-arranged' in order to provide a more precise anticipation of the future: 'objective' and 'subjective' approaches to prediction, and theoretical and practical levels, could be joined together. In 'building' such a framework, I was therefore more interested in finding the categories employed by each theoretical approach that could provide a better understanding of the future, than being true to any one approach.

This does not mean that epistemological and methodological precision is not necessary. On the contrary, the need for precision is very marked, especially in this historical phase, still marked by the conceptual and methodological 'free for all' that has characterised political science and especially international relations theory during the 1980s and 1990s (Halliday, 2005), partially resulting from the failure of anticipating some events (such as, for instance, the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the collapse of the USSR) and a more general denial of the possibility of 'objective' scientific knowledge. Coupled with an obsession with speculating about the future, this 'freedom' has resulted, in the field of international relations, in a multitude of images of the political future of the world. The end of bipolarity and the resulting weakness of, particularly though not exclusively, realism, opened the gate for proposals of not theories but 'images' of the world political future that was taking shape before our eyes. The most widely known of those were of course Fukuyama's 'end of history' and Huntington's 'clash of civilizations', but they were in good company: as summarised in *Contending Images of World Politics* (Fry and O'Hagan, 2000), we were heading towards an 'international society', a 'borderless world', the 'end of sovereignty', a 'new medievalism', a 'coming age of regionalism', a 'world of tribes', an 'endangered planet', a 'gendered global hierarchy', a 'postcolonial world', the 'end of modernity', etc. It was a fierce battle for academic supremacy among scholars and academic parties. Not many of those images have so far materialised.

All of the works that created these images are excellent pieces of scientific research and knowledge. What was somehow surprising was not only the attention those ‘images’ received but also the effort some academics seemed to put into proposing a ‘banner’ image, instead of the silent work necessary for relating variables and creating theories. It is hardly surprising that the academic world has not been immune to one of the defining features of our times, which the respected American philosopher Harry G. Frankfurt calls, quite strongly, the ‘scientific production of bullshits’, in other words, of ‘lies’ that are completely disconnected from the realm of truth. A simple lie is still a negation of truth; it is also created as a cover for a truth. Today’s ‘bullshits’ are ‘fabricated’ and then believed without having any relation whatsoever to the truth, because it is not important if they are true or not: after their creation they assume a life of their own (Frankfurt, 2005). The clearest and most famous example is that of the presence or the imminent acquisition of Weapons of Mass Destruction by Saddam’s Iraq that was offered by the US and UK governments as one of the justifications for the 2003 Fourth Gulf War¹ (incidentally, the presence or the very real likelihood of their presence in a near future was consistently pointed out in the specialised academic literature of the time). Undoubtedly, Frankfurt refers more to ‘the fabrication of bullshits’ as a social than an academic process. However, in my opinion some researchers appeared to enjoy the exercise a bit too much.

Somehow related to this is the problem of ideological accounts of events masked as pretences at scientific rigour. The whole history of Lebanon, but in general of any social and political group, is related to and shaped by actors dedicated to setting communal identity borders through the misuse of history and, more generically, science. Too often, instead of being agents of peace via intellectual integrity, intellectuals have served more parochial interests, sometimes for ideological but well-intentioned aims, and sometimes for less admirable reasons.

Among all of the above images, Huntington’s ‘clash of civilizations’ needs particularly careful consideration, not only because it has been the most successful of all but also, and especially, because it seems as though the future has proved him right, at least as far as relationships between the West and Islam are concerned. In spite of its nature of being a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ and the conceptual inaccuracies and factual mistakes, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* is based on solid research. It is, therefore, not so easy to dismiss its thesis, at least as regards the relationship between the West and Islam, as

completely wrong: in both of those ‘civilisations’, identity discourses and ethical concerns related to culture and religion are gaining ground as forces capable of defining political interests and allegiances. As a scientific theory, his thesis is simply incorrect. However, it shows that maybe there is still some hope for predictions in social sciences.

Trying to evaluate if the *Intifadha al-Iqtad* could have been anticipated requires a preliminary enquiry into what it is we were actually dealing with: it could have been a social or a political revolution, or a step in a process of democratisation, or a democratic revolution, a counter-revolution, or simply a peaceful mobilization, or maybe simply a peaceful revolt. It would have been somehow odd if such political event had fitted perfectly into an analytical category: it seems to me that such an expression of clearly political mobilisation shares many features from different phenomena. Naming the political phenomenon, in other words, what actually took place, requires assessing the definitions its participants regarded as the most appropriate. Even for those who ‘made’ the event, naming it was not so immediate, or easy, because of the contemporary presence of different political aims and ‘trajectories’. Among all the groups and individuals that made up the movement, it was a hotly-debated issue (and not the only one).

In many respects, but not in all, the popular reaction to Rafiq Hariri’s killing came as a surprise to many, as well as its trajectory and its inability to achieve all the results participants and sympathisers had wished it to. I believe such surprise could have been avoided if the event had been viewed through an appropriate framework. I do share Huntington and Harrison’s (2000) view that ‘culture matters’. However, I do not share their modernist, behaviourist, and positivist approach, being more inclined to follow more anthropological and sociological sensibilities. Yet more properly cultural approaches suffer severe shortcomings in not dealing enough with ‘rougher’ expressions of power and economic factors. Historical sociology has tried to relate ideal and material factors, and that is the approach I believe is closer to what I propose in this work. However, I do not share its refusal to consider culture an analytical category. Beliefs and values are taken into consideration by historical sociology, and at some length, but through the device of resorting to the notion of ideology, which is supposed to cover the whole field of ideal constructions. From a certain perspective, ideology and political culture are related concepts, both appearing to be interpretative systems, or ways agents give meaning to reality. The difference between the two is that ideology is not limited by the principle of

reality, while culture is. However, as interpretative symbolic systems (Geertz, 1973, 193-233), they share a similar nature. If this is the case, then culture is a much wider category, and could, even if maybe in only certain cases, be given analytical primacy.

The first chapter deals with the question: 'Why was the wave of demonstrations, its results and dynamic, not predicted?' The main answer that will be proposed is because it was a political event that did not clearly fit in any theory of social and political change. Also, it will be suggested that social science is excessively specialised, and that this specialisation is a result of the necessarily conservative character of scientific knowledge. In order to conclude this, I will start by looking for a general definition of the Lebanese political event under consideration by testing if the definitions that were proposed during its development by protesters and commentators, which refer to theoretical and comparative concepts, are really able to describe that political event. If, in fact, a definition could describe its nature, results, and dynamic, then the political event could have been predicted by analysing the pre-event situation and individuating the presence, in 2004 Lebanon, of the conditions set by the applicable theory. My analysis, which will be conducted at a very general level, will point to two different and relatively comfortable definitions.

However, neither suits the event perfectly. This could be explained quite easily by arguing that a definition needs to be relatively general, and therefore it cannot perfectly fit any specific event. Of course, any scientific definitions, and more generally, any scientific enquiry, simplifies reality by regarding certain variables as being more important than others. However, it seems to me that this explanation is, in this case, mistaken: the features not captured by the definitions are not secondary, but very much essential to the political event. More generally, it seems to me that if definitions are essential for scientific knowledge, modelling is slightly over-valued. I would argue much more in favour of processes and general frameworks. It could be suggested that such a choice is almost necessary when dealing with a country and political and social system that escapes definition; this assessment would be correct. Yet Lebanon cannot be outside of science; if a theory and model fail to understand or explain it, then they cannot be regarded as scientific. In truth, every theory of social conflict and social and political change explains some features or stages in the progression of the waves of demonstrations. A combination of theories is required in order to give a full account of what happened in Lebanon from

August 2004 to January 2005. It is this need of a combination of approaches and theories that leads me to argue in favour of a general framework in order to anticipate political futures.

The second chapter takes a step back. The question it deals with is whether it is actually possible to scientifically predict the future. Ontologically, the question is fairly easy to answer, because predicting is one of the essential goals of science; and predicting the future is not so different to studying the present, or the past. The question is therefore more general, being about how it is possible to know or how it is possible to regard a statement as true. The problem is clearly epistemological, and I am not a student of epistemology - or of philosophy, for that matter. However, general epistemology has dealt with the question at length. By recalling the main steps in the development of the theoretical discussion about scientific knowledge, I argue that the last century has seen a move in theoretical reasoning from a focus on rationality to a concern with power, starting with Karl Popper's solution of locating rationality of science in the method (which is a technique), and ending with Paul Feyerabend's refusal of rationality and effort to both denounce the role power has had in scientific history and to disentangle power from science.

If it is possible to keep the two focuses separated, then a solution could be found. Epistemology of human sciences could help, because it has dealt with the more specific problem of proposing criteria of scientific knowledge that are suitable for an object of enquiry, the human being, that is unique and cannot be compared either to past or contemporary experiences. Clearly, political events are human events, and are therefore impossible to anticipate because human beings 'make' them. However, it is precisely the common nature of all human beings that represents the only possibility for anticipating political future events: 'intuition', arising from the shared human bond, can allow the flourishing of a correct forecast. In the end, it will be proposed that a solution needs to maintain power separated from rationality and that, in order to do so, two specific activities compose the anticipation of political (human) future. Firstly, 'proscribing', which is the scientific anticipation of what cannot or is not likely to happen; science, in other words, is a rational endeavour, judged according to methodological criteria, and concerned with stating negative anticipations. And, secondly, 'predicting', which is 'creative intuition' based on common human nature, shared by the researcher and the object of knowledge. 'Foreseeing', the combination of the two, finds its source in and includes 'predicting', but is

different from it because, as a whole, it is not scientific; 'foreseeing' is positive anticipation, and is an activity without power. The problem here is whether 'foreseeing' is a completely free and therefore not comparable activity or if it could flourish better within a certain 'structured' thinking, which could help, to a certain degree, to make comparisons. Because the human being is a 'totality', and therefore requires a holistic approach, and because it is necessary to include prediction in order to be able to foresee, it will be argued that anticipating the future requires a general framework.

How is it possible to organise such a framework? The third chapter suggests it needs to be both complex and elegant. The need to include a range of different theories, because all approaches and related theories could help to 'foresee', creates the problem of needing to engineer a framework capable of including different epistemological premises. In order to do so, theories and approaches need to be 'deconstructed' in their basic categories and re-arranged through inclusive macro-categories. I have sketched the framework on three levels, organised according to the level of actual human involvement. Indeed, the human being is the very focus of the whole effort; in a certain way, the multi-faceted role of human beings in making history has been split into a few dimensions in order to be better understood. For this reason, dividing them is just an analytical device: the relationships and cross-interactions among all of them are so complex and multi-faceted that it is sometimes difficult to disentangle them from one another. In other words, each level, and macro-category, interacts with all others. The framework is analytical, and therefore simplifies reality; interaction is nonetheless the constant theme bonding all categories.

Aiming to foresee political change, the framework should include both diachronic and synchronic transformations; these two axes are placed within each macro-category and across all of them, as a result of their reciprocal interaction. In addition, it should be able to accommodate long, medium and short-term anticipation of the future, according to the researcher's aim. In general terms, long-term foreseeing assigns primacy to the level of 'structure'; medium-term anticipation focuses on the 'systemic' level; and, finally, short-term foreseeing needs to concentrate the analysis on the 'agency' level.

The first level includes 'material' aspects of social life, which constrict human action, are perceived as 'external' to human intervention, and 'channel' social life; I have decided to call these three macro-categories 'structures'. The choice is intended to mean that, even if they are transformed by human beings' actions, the change requires a plurality of actions

that are simply unlikely (but the possibility should always be left open) to happen in a short time. There are three of these: economics, institutions, and technology. On this level, special attention is devoted to emphasising inequality in economic development and features, institutional access to power, and technological level and accessibility. The second level is organised in terms of 'systems'. In this dimension, the human being acts as a member of groups. In the first macro-category placed on this level he/she acts through political groups; in the second, through social groups. Analytically, the first macro-category focuses on the internal dynamic of a political system, understanding them as following some 'logic': behavioural patterns that follow certain rationalities. The meeting between pluralities of 'logics' represents a system's equilibrium; however, the reaching of equilibrium is not a system's necessary requirement, but simply a possible and actually not so frequent characteristic. In fact, in order to understand change within a system, equilibrium is not a relevant analytical category. The second 'systemic' macro-category tries to include social dynamic as intra- and inter-group interactions. Groups are understood as 'cultural' organisations, whose continuous transformation derives from contact between members. Contacts among members imply identity exchanges, and therefore they are power-games; cultures, and identities, are in fact hierarchically organised. Exchanges are impossible to trace, and it is a mistake to define the cultural characteristics of a group because doing this creates borders that, even if analytically sound, are both exploited by power and mistaken because continuously changing. In order to foresee political change, what it is possible to do is to focus on border-lines, 'fault-lines', so to speak, dividing 'cultural groups'. It is indeed from border-lines, the 'points' where cultural groups meet, that change can flourish, out of conflict or out of agreement. The third level is for 'agents', in other words individuals but also groups understood as a single entity (therefore, the state, as 'government', is included in this category). Agents exercise their autonomy through acts, which are single decisions that shape political change. Roughly speaking, if the first two levels constrain agents' autonomy, this latter level shapes the previous two; indeed agents have autonomy in making their own choices and taking responsibility for them. A sequence of individual acts constitutes a process, which is not understood as an impersonal succession of acts; on the contrary, processes are very much personal.

I would like to note however, that in developing the framework, I am not interested in 'being true' to every approach. On the contrary, the aim is to include as many approaches as possible; this effort requires, clearly, a level of generalisation in 'deconstructing' an

approach that could hardly be accepted by an advocate of orthodoxy. From this perspective, the equilibrium to be aimed for within the framework is between flexibility and theoretical accuracy.

The final chapter attempts to ‘apply’ the framework to Lebanon in 2004. In order to do that, it places itself in that time, and analyses the Lebanese political, social, and economic situation as it was before the beginning of the dynamic that was going to create the *Intifadha al-Iqtad*. However, the exercise is not about history, but about understanding whether some ‘signs’ of the future were discernible; to a certain extent, it consciously analyses the past according to the future. As a result, some features of Lebanon in 2004 will be granted more attention, in an effort to discern whether the necessary conditions for certain theoretical explanations exist.

Yet, foreseeing cannot be limited to looking for conditions. On the contrary, the analysis should maintain a certain degree of both generality and specificity, depending on the researcher’s knowledge and judgment. The analysis is consequently not particularly concerned with reaching maximum objectivity; on the contrary, it reclaims the subjective mediating role of the researcher, who is relatively free not only to define the analytical ‘borders’ of the Lebanese system, but also to choose the very facts, and even data that are the most likely to lead to foreseeing what is going to happen; in other words, to foresee the future.

¹ The First Gulf War was the sustained but not particularly intense border conflict between Iran and Iraq which started in 1969 and ended in 1975; the Second Gulf War, again between Iran and Iraq, started in 1980 and lasted for eight years, becoming the bloodiest war in Middle Eastern history; the Third is the Iraq – US-led multinational force war in 1991; and the Fourth Gulf War is the recent 2003 Iraq – Coalition of the Willing (in fact a US and British force) clash which resulted in the occupation of Iraq and Saddam Hussein’s being ousted from power, imprisoned, and sentenced to death (at the time of writing, an appeal is under way).