The Hegemony of Resistance: Hezbollah and the Forging of a National-Popular Will in Lebanon

Abed Kanaaneh

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

🔓 OPEN ACCESS

The Hegemony of Resistance: Hezbollah and the Forging of a National-Popular Will in Lebanon

ABED KANAANEH 🆔

Department of Middle Eastern and African History, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel

ABSTRACT: *Drawing on the Gramscian concept of hegemony, this article examines Hezbollah's* muqawama *project within the Lebanese political arena. It provides a novel interpretation of Hezbollah's political development from force operating through a 'blitzkrieg' strategy to hegemonic politics. It examines the role that the* muqawama *concept has played in shaping the organization's changes in its latest phase, as well as its relationship with other political forces at the national and regional level. It concludes by developing a cultural analysis of Hezbollah's video-clips and songs, showing how these embody the new nature of the* muqawama *project, and its various dimensions.*

KEY WORDS: *Gramsci; Hegemony; Hezbollah; Lebanon;* muqawama*; Resistance*

President Aoun has always told those he meets that the United States and Israel only understand the logic of power, and that justice alone is not enough. While chatting with (MP Gebran) Bassil, Aoun said in front of everyone, 'Our country did not pay all the prices it paid for the mistakes of others on its soil, except because of that saying—the curse—that Lebanon's strength lies in its weakness. What is happening today is our historical opportunity to correct it and say that Lebanon's strength is in its strength.' Strength is not only in the military resistance, which Aoun rightly appreciates, but also in political and diplomatic resistance: in saying no resoundingly to the demands of the US Secretary of State.[1]

Correspondence Address: Abed Kanaaneh, Department of Middle Eastern and African History, Tel Aviv University, Ramat Aviv, Tel Aviv 6997801, Israel. E-mail: Abedkan@tauex.tau.ac.il

[1] Al-Akhbar (2022) Victory to Aoun, Bassil and Hezbollah, October 12. Available at: https://al-akhbar.com/Lebanon/346988/%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84, accessed on March 28, 2023.

These are the words of Michel Aoun, the President of the Lebanese Republic, and the leader of the largest Christian political faction in Lebanon, the Free Patriotic Movement. Despite the party's relative weakness in the 2022 parliamentary elections, it remains a significant force in Lebanon, especially among Christians. The statement underscores the importance of resistance and its role in the achievement of the maritime boundary agreement between Lebanon and Israel. It demonstrates the widespread adoption of the concept of resistance among the Lebanese people, which is—as I argue in this article—the result of Hezbollah's diligent outreach efforts beyond its traditional base. This phenomenon is not recent, but rather the culmination of Hezbollah's persistent efforts to engage with various sectors of Lebanese society.

To comprehend how we reached this historical stage, where the President of Lebanon and leader of a significant Christian party speaks in such a tone following the withdrawal of Syria from the country, it is fundamental to understand the journey that Hezbollah has undergone. Started as a radical organization outside the legitimacy of 'official Lebanon,' Hezbollah has become the main political force in the country, directly affecting the nature of the fundamental concepts of the Lebanese Republic.[2]

Most of the literature on the first phase of Hezbollah has been primarily concerned with the organization and its military capabilities, rather than with its cultural and political activities. These studies apparently have been influenced by the organization's first years in the Lebanese arena, when its main purpose was military resistance to the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon, without playing a role in intra-Lebanese politics. This trend, however, changed after the liberation of the largest parts of Southern Lebanon, and such a change became more pronounced after the Lebanon War in 2006. Some of these studies have approached Hezbollah as a terror organization mainly influenced by countries like Syria and Iran, since its independent operational ability is either limited or non-existent. The impact of the organization's early years and reference to Hezbollah's military capacities can be found in academic studies written in the 1980s and 1990s, such as Magnus Ranstrup's *Hizb'Allah in Lebanon: The Politics of Western Hostage Crisis,*[3] which emphasizes the kidnapping of Western citizens during the Lebanese civil war and the role of Hezbollah and its leaders in this regard.[4] Similarly, Matthew Levitt's *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God*[5] centers on Hezbollah as a terrorist organization with a worldwide reach spanning from Thailand to Latin America. Unsurprisingly, the book reflects the author's

---

[2] At the time of writing, this analysis of the relationship between Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement remains still valid despite the rise of serious differences between the two sides, especially after the end of Michel Aoun's presidency and the lack of an agreement over who would become new president. As Hezbollah supports MP Suleiman Frangieh, while the Free Patriotic Movement prefers MP Gebran Bassil, who has poor chances to become president, the movement has begun looking for another candidate beyond Frangieh. In such a context, the two parties have not yet announced their withdrawal from the agreement of understanding and alliance signed in 2006. On the contrary, MP Bassil, who is considered the second man in the Free Patriotic Movement, reiterated in more than one press interview the movement's commitment to Hezbollah, especially on the question of resistance.

[3] Magnus Ranstorp (1997) *Hizb'Allah in Lebanon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).

[4] See also Martin Kramer (1993) Hizbullah: The Calculus of Jihad, in: M. E. Marty & R. S. Appleby (eds) *Fundamentalisms of the State: Remaking Politics, Economies and Militance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). and others of Kramer's works, which also take the "terror" approach to the organization.

[5] Matthew Levitt (2013) *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press).

background in counterterrorism, working as a counter-terrorism analyst and advisor on the same topic to the U.S. State Department.

Other studies depict Hezbollah as a protest movement that has reconciled with Lebanese society and moved from its radical roots towards pragmatism in order to participate in Lebanese politics as a normal political party.[6] These works examine the impact of Lebanese regional and international factors on Hezbollah's development and transition to pragmatism, while also highlighting the close relationship with Iran. One important study on Hezbollah and its political nature is titled, *Hizbullah: Politics and Religion*,[7] in which the author, Amal Saʿad-Ghrayeb, analyzes Hezbollah's shift through the ability of balancing its Islamist ideologies with political pragmatism. Saʿad-Ghrayeb predicts that Hezbollah will prioritize Lebanese patriotism and nationalism over its Islamist ideologies. Ahmad Hamzeh's *In The Path of Hizbullah*[8] also aims to provide a general overview of Hezbollah, including its development, structure, and ties to Iranian religious leadership. Hamzeh argues that Hezbollah is making progress towards establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon, though this prediction has proven to be incorrect.

Rula and Malek Abisaab have written an important and unique study that deals with the relations between Hezbollah and the secular movements. The book, titled *The Shiites of Lebanon: Modernism, Communism, and Hizbullah's Islamists*,[9] traces the relationship between the Shiʿa in Lebanon and Iraq, and Communist and leftist movements. The authors argue that there has been mutual influence between these movements and the modern activist clergy, and that Shiite political Islam has not fully rejected the socialist principles of leftist movements. The development of these leftist movements is rooted in the Shiite culture and popular beliefs that associate the imams with revolution and activism for social justice.

The central focus of this article is on the concept of *muqawama* (meaning: resistance), which has its roots in leftist-secular tradition. The article highlights how Hezbollah has been able to elevate this concept and attain a hegemonic position in the Lebanese arena. Drawing on Gramscian and neo-Gramscian tools, the article provides a new explanation for Hezbollah's developmental process, from a purely military-religious organization to the main representative of a social group at the center of a unique counter-hegemonic project, which I term 'the *muqawama* project'.

Most of the studies abovementioned address the change that Hezbollah has been undergoing in different ways, and conclude that the organization has turned more pragmatic. However, they only associate the *muqawama* concept with the organization's radical and military dimension, thus divorced from intra-Lebanese dimensions and disregarding Hezbollah's social, economic, and educational activities. When referring to these dimensions, other studies also subjugate them to the organization's supreme military goal. This article aims to advance such a scholarly debate by highlighting the significance of the *muqawama* project in Hezbollah's overall program. It proposes a new perspective, according to which

---

[6] This perspective can be found in Ghassan ʿAzi (1998) *Hezbollah: From the Ideological Dream… to Political Pragmatism (in Arabic)* (Kuwait: Dar Qirttas); in Masoud Asad Allahi (2004) *The Islamists in a Multicultural Society (in Arabic)* (Beirut: Al-Dar Al-Arabiya lil-ʿOloum,); Augustus Norton (2007) *Hezbollah: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press); and in Eitan Azani (2009) *Hezbollah: The Story of the Party of God: From Revolution to Institutionalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).

[7] Amal Saad-Ghorayeb (2002) *Hizbullah : Politics and Religion* (London; Sterling, VA: Pluto Press).

[8] Ahmad N. Hamzeh (2004) *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press).

[9] Rula J. Abisaab & Malek Abisaab (2014) *The Shiʿites of Lebanon: Modernism, Communism, and Hizbullah's Islamists* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press).

the concept of *muqawama* is at the core of a national-popular will, which Hezbollah not only embodies but also operates as an independent project that shapes the organization itself.

Moving away from the 'Hezbollah as terrorist organization' approach, I suggest taking the concept of *muqawama* seriously and considering the term as a signifier that has allowed the establishment of a historical bloc composed of various forces, articulating them into a new hegemonic project led by Hezbollah. I will explain how Hezbollah is attempting to build a new Lebanese nationalism centered around Hezbollah and the Shiʿa in Lebanon by transforming the term *muqawama* into a point of connection between the various components of Lebanese society. The party promotes the idea that resistance is not exclusive to the Shiʿa and Hezbollah alone, but rather is a principle held by all Lebanese components. Hezbollah uses media and social media to promote this idea, producing promotional videos, video clips, and music videos as tools propagating this perception externally.

To present this argument, the article is divided into three main sections: First, I will present the conceptual foundation of the article, briefly reviewing the development of the hegemony concept and its consolidation by Antonio Gramsci. The second section examines the main components of Hezbollah's hegemonic project. I will argue that Hezbollah's *muqawama* project has three main pillars that have changed according to the process of change that Hezbollah has undergone. These pillars are: (a) the religious, revolutionary-resistive interpretation of Shiite Islam, (b) Hezbollah's Lebanese nationalist position and its attitude towards Lebanese religious pluralism, and (c) the organization's economic-social thinking. The third section provides an example of how the *muqawama* project is reflected in its songs and video-clips. I have chosen eight video clips that are constantly circulated on the party's websites, and have appeared regularly on *Al-Manar* TV.[10] These selected video-clips show and embody the different pillars of the resistance project that I identify throughout the article.

Hegemony, *Muqawama* and National-Popular Will

In an essay focused on the concept of hegemony as per the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, Gwyn Williams argues that a project becomes hegemonic when its concept of reality spreads throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations.[11] In other words, it informs all aspects of society, including taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, as well as all social relations, especially in their intellectual and moral connotation.[12] A hegemonic social group is one that succeeds in leading the popular, national, and patriotic struggles to attain leadership at the national level not just within the coalition (historical bloc)[13]

---

[10] *Al-Manar* is Hezbollah's television channel. It was launched in 1991.

[11] For detailed description of Gramsci's thought on hegemony (in the Lebanese context) please see Abed Kanaaneh (2021) *Understanding Hezbollah: The Hegemony of Resistance* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press), pp. 9-16.

[12] Gwyn A. Williams (1960) The Concept of 'Egemonia' in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci: Some Notes on Interpretation, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 21(4), pp. 587.

[13] According to Gramsci, the historical bloc is the force behind the hegemonic project, and it comes into being when different social groups unite around a hegemonic project. The historical bloc is a dialectic concept in that it embodies the interaction between its different components in the goal of achieving unity at a broader scale. Gramsci suggests that the social class leading the historical bloc is a dynamic one. It is not the sum of its parts but rather a new synthesis because it goes through a process of mutual influence, together with other parties and subordinate groups within the same historical bloc.

that it leads.[14] The Gramscian concept of hegemony includes the dimension of coercion, but also the acceptance of moral and intellectual leadership by subordinate groups, whose interests are partially taken into account.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe sought to free the Gramscian concept of hegemony from its class essentialism and incorporate recent insights from critical and post-structuralist theories.[15] According to them, the state of hegemony is dynamic and changeable, allowing different sorts of interconnectedness to emerge. It also enables a society to stabilize around a hegemonic project that enhances a historical bloc, which develops contingently through a process of political struggle. The historical bloc from this perspective is not supposed to develop around a sole predetermined axis of struggle (e.g. class). Rather, the axis of struggle can vary from society to society, according to the political praxis that characterizes it. A certain historical bloc occurs by building a 'chain of equivalences', which is perceived by Laclau and Mouffe as a mechanism that allows different meanings of the same signifier to be linked together, thus connecting the needs, demands, and worldviews of different social groups.[16]

In this article, I will demonstrate how the *muqawama* has become a signifier that enables the establishment of a historical bloc comprised of different forces that maintain their counter-hegemonic project. I hereby refer to the will of one group to consolidate both Lebanese society and the region in general around the resistant and anti-imperialist perspective against the United States, Israel, and their allies, as a watershed between the different projects in Lebanon and the whole region. Moreover, and from the perspective of Hezbollah and the other forces and parties that constitute this nascent historical bloc, the *muqawama* becomes an essence, a culture and a worldview that helps to define the social, political, economic, and religious arenas of Lebanon and the whole region.

The concept of *muqawama* predates the appearance of Hezbollah by several decades. For years it was used by secular movements, mainly those that belonged to the leftist camp, and it lacked any Islamic religious connotation. In the Qur'an, the word *muqawama* does not appear, and, until the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, it was not used in the Arab and Islamic world.[17] The more familiar and religious term *Jihad* was instead used, since the early days of Islam, to describe the holy wars of the Muslims under the leadership of the Prophet, and later under the leadership of the Caliphs against infidels of all kinds. After that, it was also used to describe the struggle of the Muslims against the Crusaders about a thousand years ago, as well as modern struggles such as the Libyan resistance to the Italian occupation, and the Iraqi resistance to the British occupation at the beginning of the twentieth century.

It appears that the term *muqawama* came into use in the Arab world following WWII. With the formation of the partisan forces that acted against the Nazi occupation in European countries,[18] especially in France and the Soviet Union, the term

---

[14] Roger Simon (1982) *Gramsci's Political Thought an Introduction* (London: London Lawrence & Wishart), p. 43.

[15] Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso).

[16] Ibid.

[17] Kanaaneh, *Understanding Hezbollah*, p. 26.

[18] Michael Milstein (2009) *Muqawama: The Emergence of the Resistance Challenge and Its Influence on the Perception of Israeli National Security (in Hebrew)* (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies), p. 21.

'Resistance' became common. Socialist leftist movements and Palestinian organizations later adopted it, being influenced by revolutionary and socialist forces around the world. The Palestinian organizations in Lebanon, who allied with the left-wing movements in the country even before the civil war that broke out there in the mid-seventies, are the ones who imported the concept of *muqawama* to the Lebanese arena and especially to Southern Lebanon. There, in almost the only arena of military resistance to the Israeli occupation, the concept developed its main content. It was also there that the Hezbollah organization developed—merging new, revolutionary, modern, and populist ideas with the old, religious and Islamic tradition; and this connection gave a new meaning to the idea of resistance (*muqawama*).

Hezbollah has succeeded, especially in recent years, in making the term *muqawama* synonymous with the organization, both in the Lebanese and regional arena. The organization, with its leaders, activists, and institutions, experienced a long development process under the influence of the conditions and circumstances that accompanied its emergence and shaped its multicultural and multi-sectarian activities. At the same time, its ideological infrastructure was nourished by the concept of political Islam as represented by the leader of the Islamic revolution in Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini. This is a revolutionary concept that deviates from the old conventions of Shi'a political thought, whose central tenet is the idea *intizar* representing a kind of acceptance of the existing situation and a constant demand to wait for the hidden Imam to correct the injustices of the world.

Khomeini's doctrine (and other Shiite political thinkers, such as Ali Shari'ati, Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, and others) introduced a revolutionary and activist dimension to the role of the weakened believers (*Mustad'afun*) in general and those Shiites in particular. The doctrine brought back into use religious symbols full of revolutionary and oppositional messages that challenge injustice. The combination of the precarious socio-economic situation of the Shiite community in Lebanon with the Israeli occupation was fertile ground for the growth of the new religious-oppositional concept from the school of Hezbollah.

To comprehend the origins of Hezbollah and the societal context in which it emerged, it is essential to provide a brief historical overview of the Shiite community in Lebanon and its interactions with the Lebanese system before the establishment of Hezbollah.

The Shiites on the Margins of the 'Bankers and Merchants' Republic'

Since the inception of the state of 'Grand Lebanon' in 1920, Shiites have constituted a large portion of the country's poor population, especially among the peasants in Southern Lebanon and the Beqaa. A large percentage of the downtrodden workers in the suburbs of Beirut were also Shiite. The Shiite economy in Lebanon depended for many years on a simple family-based agricultural economy. This economy contributed to strengthening familial bonds and enhancing internal unity among the Shiite families. However, Muhammad Murad maintains that it was based on *iqta'* (feudalism) as it enhanced the patron-client relations between poor families and the families of the *zu'ama'*, the traditional leaders, whose status had been inherited since Ottoman rule. As the Shiite *zu'ama'* could obtain permits to grow tobacco—the main crop in the southern areas—and owned the largest plots of land in the South and the Beqaa, they

had relations with both the peasants and the state authorities. As the conduit between the peasants and the state, the *zuʿamaʾ* represented the peasants' interests, even as they imposed the prices at which they could sell their product to the authorities.[19]

At the same time, liberal economic policies encouraged agricultural production to respond to the needs of the international market, leading to the rise of a modern banking and communication system, as well as a transportation network that connected Lebanese and Arab markets to Western production. To justify and protect this economic system, a 'confessional equilibrium' or sectarianism existed, which guaranteed the hegemony of the financial bourgeoisie—mainly Christian-Maronite—over lower social groups.

The Shiite families of Southern Lebanon, whose economy depended on agriculture (about 90% of the labor force in the South worked in agriculture until the 1950s),[20] helped the *zuʿamaʾ* to control the peasantry and impose their authority; and through the *zuʿamaʾ*, the central government controlled the South with relative efficiency. This system of dominance guaranteed the ruling hegemonic system, already in the very first year after Lebanon's independence: namely, the subjugation of the Shiite community to the dominant ruling group, especially the Maronite elite.[21] This hegemonic system preserved the interests of the Shiite *zuʿamaʾ* by maintaining their leadership within their communities without creating substantial change in the political representation in general and among the Shiites in particular. The Maronite-Sunni elite, however, kept the Shiite community, including its leaders, on the margins of the hegemonic project, away from the real centers of power, in addition to minimizing their role in Lebanon's imagined community and history.[22]

This marginalization of the Shiite community and its exclusion from the political, economic, and social center of Lebanon (Beirut) further deepened the community's social marginality and its economic subjugation. When Shiites began migrating and settling in Beirut in the mid-twentieth century, the key political positions had already been occupied by members of other communities who had arrived earlier.[23] Nevertheless, Dahyih, the southern suburb of Beirut, absorbed hundreds of thousands of Shiites over the decades who fled the dire economic situation in the South and the Beqaa, and became a new center for the Shiites. Their migration increased as the relations between Israel and the PLO forces—who dominated vast areas in Southern Lebanon—flared up in the late 1970s.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Shiite community was ready for a new and radical change from within. It had undergone an accelerated process of urbanization and migration from the periphery to Beirut, with all the accompanying implications. These included a social and economic blow and the disintegration of the traditional frameworks that had organized the social life in the Shiite villages, and of the traditional patronage relations within the community.[24] It comes without saying that all

[19] Muhammad Murad (2009) The Development of Political Options among the Shiites since the Emergence of the Modern Lebanese State to Date (in Arabic), *Shuaoun Al-Awsat*, 132, p. 157.

[20] Majed Halawi (1992) *A Lebanon Defied* (Boulder: Westview Press), p. 52.

[21] Ibid, p. 42.

[22] Saʿdun Hamada (2008) *The Shiʿite History in Lebanon (in Arabic)*, 1 (Beirut: Al-Khal), pp. 8–9.

[23] Theodor Hanf (1993) *Co-Existence Times of War-from the Collapse of a State to the Emergence of a Nation (in Arabic)* (Paris: Euro-Arab Center for Studies), p. 141.

[24] Eyal Zisser (2009) *Lebanon: Blood in the Cedars (in Hebrew)* (Tel Aviv: Kav Adom), p. 59.

these dynamics led to a deep identity crisis. As a result, the Shiite community was ripe for political radicalization by the radical leftist parties,[25] and later through cooperation and coexistence with the Palestinian resistance organizations in Lebanon.[26] It is also evident that some major events decisively influenced the Shiite community: The Israeli invasion of Beirut and subsequent occupation of Southern Lebanon; and the Islamic revolution in Iran and Khomeini's dispatch of Iranian revolutionary guardsmen to the Beqaa.[27]

The appearance of Musa al-Sadr in 1959 played a decisive role in the introduction of a 'third way.' Al-Sadr was a charismatic, independent, and political cleric. He did not hold the position or rank of a top-tier Shiite cleric, yet his strength lay in his social and political activism. Using Gramsci's terminology, Musa al-Sadr would be deemed a new kind of cleric, who embodied the 'organic intellectual.' After his disappearance, other Shiite clerics continued his legacy. In the 1980s, the revolutionary enthusiasm and the atmosphere of crisis that prevailed in both Lebanon and within the Shiite community led many youths of different ideological backgrounds to unite and create substantial and revolutionary change in their reality. These included ʿAbbas Al-Musawi and Subhi al-Tufayli from al-Daʿwa party; Hassan Nasrallah, Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyid, Naʿim al-Qassem, Muhammad Yazbak, and others from Amal organization; ʿImad Mughniyeh and Abu Hassan Khader Salameh from the Palestinian Fatah organization; and ʿAbdel Hadi Hamadah from the Lebanese Communist Party.[28]

What marked the initial years following the establishment of Hezbollah were the civil war and the Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon. Additionally, the successful Islamic revolution in Iran had a significant impact on Shiite communities outside of Iran, particularly in Lebanon. This impact led Hezbollah to adopt an uncompromising, radical Jihadist approach in its early days,[29] which was reflected in the party's official name: 'Hezbollah: The Islamic Revolution in Lebanon.' The name implied the party's intention to develop a revolutionary plan to overthrow the Falangist[30] regime, which Hezbollah deemed illegitimate. This intention was later explicitly communicated in Hezbollah's messages to the Lebanese people and the rest of the world.

But following the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1989, the signing of the Ta'if agreement, and the passing of Khomeini, Hezbollah underwent significant changes in its political and national vision. As outlined above, some scholars argue that these changes consisted of pragmatic measures taken to maintain the organization's legitimacy in the new Lebanese state,[31] while others believe they reflect Hezbollah's original Islamic-Lebanese agenda.[32] Regardless of the interpretation of these changes, it is evident that Hezbollah and its theorists have made substantial progress in transforming their vision and conception of Lebanese nationalism. This gradual shift ultimately led

---

[25] Abisaab and Abisaab, *The Shiʿites of Lebanon*.

[26] Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion*, p. 17.

[27] Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah*, pp. 15–19.

[28] Ibid., p. 24.

[29] Abed Kanaaneh (2018) From Jihad to Muqawamah: The Case of Hezbollah in Lebanon, *Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Studies of Religion*, (6), pp. 38–59.

[30] The Falange (*Kata'ib* in Arabic) party is a Lebanese far-right Christian party that played a major role in the Civil War (1975–1990).

[31] Azani, *Hezbollah: The Story of the Party of God*, p. 246.

[32] Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion;* Joseph Alagha (2006) *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology: Religious Ideology, Political Ideology, and Political Program* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University).

to the organization's rebranding: from an Islamic party for the Shiite sect to a Lebanese nationalist party with an Islamic vision, and from a party of Jihad to the *muqawama* party.

Muqawama: Hezbollah's Hegemonic Project

In their neo-Gramscian processing of the concept of hegemony, Laclau and Mouffe maintain that the historical bloc around which a certain hegemonic project is established develops by a chain of equivalences linking demands, definitions, and identities. In other words, the 'chain of equivalences' is a mechanism that, as much as it connects the different meanings of the same signifier, so it links needs, demands, and worldviews of different social groups.[33] In this section, I argue that Hezbollah's *muqawama* project was founded on three main pillars: a revolutionary religious interpretation; a new imagined community in which *muqawama* is a central mission; and a populist-economic pillar. Hezbollah has succeeded in articulating the main signifiers of each pillar of the *muqawama*, to build a coherent project that connects the central arenas of Lebanese society.

The Religious Interpretation: Karbala' as Timeless Muqawama

The Shiʿa Muslim base of Hezbollah have constituted a challenge to the organization in terms of its expansion. However, they have also enabled Hezbollah to build and expand its elements of resistance by developing a revolutionary interpretation of the Karbalaʾ paradigm. The murder of the Imam Husayn, and his family members and associates, on their way to Karbalaʾ in 680 CE[34] was the event that has shaped the Shiite history as a tragic history of the marginalized, who raise the banner of justice against the tyrants supporting evil power. For centuries, the Shiites have sought to instill this tragedy of Husayn as a founding myth in the Shiite doctrine. They released the 'martyrdom of Husayn' from the time-space chain of that concrete event, transforming it into a symbol: 'Every day is ʿAshuraʾ and every land is Karbala'. ʿAshuraʾ and Karbalaʾ have digressed from the historical context, becoming an integral part of the Shiite ideology of resistance. Nonetheless, the Shiite interpretation of the martyrdom of the third Imam has evolved over the years into two branches: one of passive and conservative repentance, and a second that is active and revolutionary.[35]

The clerics and the new activist frameworks that emerged in the mid-twentieth century sought to channel the tremendous energies of the ʿAshuraʾ ritual and the attempts to comprehend the historical and mythical death of Iman Husayn towards a contemporary socio-political activism. The activist interpretation of the events at Karbalaʾ emphasized the strong will of the Imam Husayn to reach Karbalaʾ and confront the army of Yazid. Although he knew that he and his family were destined for martyrdom and

---

[33] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.*
[34] Ibrahim al-Haydri (1999) *The Tragedy of Karbala: The Sociology of the Shiite Discourse (in Arabic)* (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi), p. 91.
[35] Kamran Aghaie (2004) *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shiʿi Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Washington: University of Washington Press), pp. 87–112.

inevitable death, the aim was to realize the divine plan that strives for 'the triumph of blood over the sword.'[36] Thus, Husayn has become a symbol of all the resistors and the wretched of the earth. Karbala¸ also has become an irrefutable myth. It provides the resistors and the revolutionists of the subsequent generations with revolutionary fuel, as defined by George Sorel, who maintains that the significance of myths lies in them being an irrational means for mass mobilization towards political activism, while replacing rational ideas.[37]

Hezbollah established its concept of *muqawama* based on this resistive interpretation of Shiʿa Islam. Therefore, the organization could easily match its religious roots and resistance project, the latter having simultaneously served as both a goal and an identity.[38] This active interpretation of Shiʿa Islam highlights the movement's shared foundations with other, non-religious, anti-imperialist forces in the region, in addition to consolidating a common discourse with other groups that support the liberation theology.

In his book, *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire,* Hamid Dabashi radicalizes the resistive nature of Shiʿa Islam and challenges Shiite activists in general, and Hezbollah in particular, with a difficult dilemma. He demonstrates that Shiʿa Islam is a resistive Islam, an Islam of the marginalized versus the tyrants. He argues that 'Shiʿism is a paradox. It dies at the moment of its success. It succeeds at the moment of its failure.'[39] Dabashi maintains that since Husayn is *mazlum* (oppressed) and symbolizes all the oppressed people worldwide, he cannot win and establish his state. However, he is capable of and obliged to continue struggling and resisting oppression, and his triumph actually represents his murder and 'his loss.' The ability of the Shiites to seize power and practice Shiʿa Islam without losing its essence is non-existent, according to Dabashi. Upon seizing power, the Shiʿa, like any other state, is supposed to expropriate the absolute legitimacy of using power. Therefore, and by virtue of this definition, Shiʿa Islam will lose its resistive essence; it will project its resistance on others and will consequently lose its Shiʿism (resistance).[40] Yet, according to Dabashi, a pluralist state like Lebanon, which has multiple ethnic and political groups (unlike Iran where 90% of the population is Shiite), has the potential of constituting an interesting synthesis that would preserve the resistive essence of Hezbollah.[41]

Dabashi does not elaborate on how Hezbollah can further develop this potential. Yet, I would argue that Hezbollah, in its transition from so-called ideological purism into a stage of 'openness' and Lebanonization, has partially attempted to develop this potential. It raised the banner of *muqawama* and built the *muqawama* project as a counter-hegemonic project, thus becoming the leading authority in a historical bloc founded by different players. This potential would be achieved by virtue of the pluralism that Dabashi noted, and without seizing absolute power, as it would (theoretically) lead to undermining Hezbollah's existence and legitimacy. The process of hegemonic

[36] Hamid Dabashi (2011) *Shiʿism: A Religion of Protest* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), p. 80.

[37] Zeev Shternhell, Mario Schneider & Maya Ashri (1992) *The Foundations of Fascism: A Cultural Dimension to the Political Revolution (in Hebrew)* (Tel Aviv: Am Ovid), p. 93.

[38] Rula el-Husseini (2008) Resistance, Jihad, and Martyrdom in Contemporary Lebanese Shiʿa Discourse, *The Middle East Journal*, 62(3), pp. 399–414.

[39] Hamid Dabashi (2008) *Islamic Liberation Theology Resisting the Empire* (London: Routledge), p. 96.

[40] Ibid, p. 71.

[41] Ibid, p. 202.

politics in the Lebanese arena is somewhat an 'infinite' process that necessitates continuous preserving of the essential balance in Lebanese society. In this regard, Hezbollah will seek to maintain its status in this arena as *primus inter pares* for a long time to come.

It has in fact attempted to maintain the built-in tension between its embodiment of the pure resistive Shiite project and its rising status as a significant political force that strives to achieve a certain form of control in the internal Lebanese arena. To achieve this, the *muqawama* signifier articulates the religious discourse on the one hand, and the economic-national discourse on the other, bringing together additional social and political forces in the pluralist Lebanese arena.

The National Aspect of the Muqawama Project

The second pillar of Hezbollah's hegemonic project is Arab-Lebanese nationalism. In this regard, and similarly to the first pillar, Hezbollah attempts to create a new imagined community, organized around the *muqawama*. To achieve this, Hezbollah must undergo a process of change and openness, reduce the intensity of its radical religious-Islamic aura, and adopt a comprehensive ideology that brings together the different ideological and religious movements that represent Lebanese society.

As Hezbollah has interwoven Shi'ism with *muqawama*, so it has sought to consolidate a new Lebanese nationalism that would disseminate Shi'ism as a central and leading component of the new imagined community. By allocating a central place to the *muqawama* ethos, it has united all the Lebanese parties into one entity. Hezbollah further developed the Islamic term jihad and transformed it into *muqawama*. By emphasizing the resistive-defensive aspect of the jihad concept, especially in the Islamic-Shiite tradition, Hezbollah could bridge the narrow and marginalizing perception of jihad with a broader and more comprehensive one, namely, of *muqawama*.[42] The main characteristics of this process can be partly observed by examining Hezbollah's two main manifestos, which not only constitute its ideological and political basis, but also reflect its worldview: The foundational 'Open Letter' from 1985,[43] announcing the birth of Hezbollah, and the 'Political Document' from 2009.[44]

During the press conference that followed the release of the 'Political Document' (*al-Wathiqa al-Siyasiyya*), Hassan Nasrallah, the Secretary-General of Hezbollah, acknowledged that the world had undergone significant changes during the organization's twenty-four years of existence. He expressed that Hezbollah aims to be perceived as an organization that has evolved over time.[45] Indeed, during the twenty-four years separating the two documents, many extensive political, economic, and social transformations took place, which directly affected the development of Hezbollah, as well as its self-understanding and position. At the international level, for example, the

---

[42] Kanaaneh, "From Jihad to Muqawamah: The Case of Hezbollah in Lebanon."

[43] For "Al-Risala al-maftuha" (the Open Letter), Feb. 16, 1985, I used the version given in Joseph Alagha (2011) *Hizbullah's Documents: From the 1985 Open Letter to the 2009 Manifesto* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), pp. 434–52.

[44] For "Al-Wathiqa al-siyassiyya" (the political document), Nov. 30, 2009, I used the copy given at Hezbollah website at: https://www.moqawama.org.lb/essaydetailsf.php?eid=16245&fid=47, accessed on March 28, 2023.

[45] Hasan Nasrallah, cited in Josef Alagha (2011) *Hezbullah's Documents: From the 1985 Open Letter to the 2009 Manifesto* (Amsterdam: Pallas Publications-Amsterdam University Press), p. 138.

Cold War ended, the Soviet Union fell, and the global unipolar system began. Regionally, this coincide with the end of the Iran-Iraq war, and the adoption of a more pragmatic position by Iran following the death of Imam Khomeini.

These changes occurred in conjunction with significant internal Lebanese transformations. The 'Open Letter' was issued in 1985, during the height of the Lebanese civil war. Five years later, the war ended, and Hezbollah entered the Lebanese political system, participating in the parliamentary elections after intense and continuous discussions within the party. These discussions, firstly, reinforced the status of the party's third secretary-general, Hassan Nasrallah. Second, they led to the gradual departure (between 1992–1997) of the party's first secretary-general, Sheikh Sobhi Tufayli and his supporters, who were considered more militant and more opposed to the process of Lebanonization of the party. Their departure further opened the door to Hezbollah's strategy of openness and soft hegemony.

Furthermore, during these years, Hezbollah intensified its military operations. It enforced the withdrawal of the Israeli army from Southern Lebanon in May 2000 and built a state of mutual deterrence with Israel, which was later confirmed in 2006 through the July War or the Second Lebanon War, as per Israeli terminology. Several months of talks between Hezbollah and the most powerful Christian political movement in Lebanon at the time, the Free Patriotic Movement, preceded the war and culminated in the signing of the 'Document of Understandings' in February 2006. These understandings not only strengthened the position of Hezbollah inside Lebanon, but also pushed the head of the National Movement, General Michel Aoun, to the presidency in 2016. They also had a significant impact on Hezbollah's ability to overcome, first, the enormous pressure it underwent after being accused, in 2005, of assassinating former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri; and second, the expulsion of the Syrian army from Lebanon. These pressures led Hezbollah, for the first time, to participate in the Lebanese government, protect its interests and defend itself from its opponents inside Lebanon. The transformation that Hezbollah underwent during this period, from a small and radical 'fringe' movement to one of the main players on the Lebanese political stage, is reflected in the juxtaposition between these two defining documents.

One of the most prominent differences between the two documents is quantitative: the term *muqawama* and its semantic derivatives are highly prevalent in the more recent document. Although in both documents *muqawama* surpasses *jihad* quantitatively, it is even more prominent in the 'Political Document.' In the introduction to the 'Political Document,' one explicitly observes Hezbollah's attempt to prepare the grounds for integrating the Left, the ancestors of resistance in Lebanon, into the new *muqawama* project, through a semi-Marxist analysis of the global economic crisis of the capitalist system and its impact on the US and Israel. Hezbollah points out the role of the different resistive movements, united in their resistance to the US imperialist hegemony and domination. Therefore, the organization defines itself not only as an Islamic or patriotic movement, but also as an integral part of the global resistive movements representing the most marginalized forces.

In this regard, Hezbollah's reference to Lebanon's foreign relations is important because the group considers the European countries with a 'resistive history' to German occupation during WWII, as being a source of legitimacy for its '*Lubnan al-muqawama*' project. Hezbollah also sketches a map of potential cooperative relationships between liberation and resistance forces worldwide, especially with Latin American countries:

We look at the experience of independence and liberation that rejects hegemony in the countries of Latin America with a lot of respect, attention, and appreciation. We see vast intersection platforms between their project and the project of resistance movements in our region, which leads to constructing a more just and balanced international system. … In this context, the slogan 'unity of the wretched' remains a major and basic pillar.[46]

Although Hezbollah's renewed identity, as reflected in its 'Political Document,' is not totally new—for it is largely based on the earlier 'Open Letter'[47]—the later document prominently features the organization's ideological institutionalization and its transformation from a small organization focused on military activism into a large one, which now enjoys considerable status at the local and regional levels.

In the 'Open Letter,' Hezbollah addressed those states opposing US hegemony and called them to join the religion of truth (*din al-haq*), namely Islam. However, in the 'Political Document,' Hezbollah abstains from such an appeal, and it calls instead those opposing US hegemony to act based on common interests and mutual respect for the ideology and unique nature of each group. The 'Political Document' introduces Hezbollah's new perception of its priorities at different levels. Opening with a chapter entitled 'Hegemony and Revival,' it analyses the current global power relations and the dominant US hegemony. The discourse is explicitly revolutionary, pertaining to the Third World, in which resistance to US hegemony and its metastasis, namely Israel, is justified not only by religious sayings and beliefs, but especially by a 'materialistic analysis' of the motives of this hegemony:

The most dangerous aspect of Western, and particularly of US, hegemony is the consideration that the world is owned by the superpower, and that such power has the right to rule out of sheer superiority at more than one level. When combined with schemes based on the economics of capitalism, Western expansionary strategies—and particularly those of the US—took on an international dimension characterized by unbounded greed. Control by the ferocious capitalist powers is primarily manifested through monopolistic networks of multinational corporations and a variety of international and particularly financial firms that are backed by military superiority. Such control has led to a further deepening of conflicts and incongruities, and of no little importance are those conflicts across identities, cultures and civilization patterns, alongside of course the battle of wealth versus poverty.

Brutal capitalism has transformed globalization into a vehicle for spreading divisions, propagating discord, demolishing identities and exercising the most perilous of cultural, economic and societal pillage. Globalization reached the most dangerous of its limits when the founders of Western hegemony transformed it into a form of military globalization.[48]

In the second part, the organization refers to *muqawama* in an expansive fashion. It proceeds from the local to the global. The opening paragraph concerns the homeland

---

[46] Al-Wathiqa.
[47] On this point see Bashir Saade (2016) *Hizbullah and the Politics of Remembrance Writing the Lebanese Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
[48] Al-Wathiqa

(Lebanon), and this text is a radical development in the organization's perception. It represents a break from the 'Open Letter,' where Hezbollah had totally disregarded the Lebanese homeland in favour of the nation of Islam, 'whose pioneers gained victory in Iran, with the Help of God,'[49] Also, the 'Political Document' refers to the *muqawama* as being interwoven in the homeland, while gaining legitimacy from its national-Arab-Lebanese base, rather than religious-Islamic-Shiite.

The Economic-Distributive Aspect of the Muqawama

According to Hezbollah, and different Islamist groups more widely, there is not one coherent and consolidated economic theory. Although Hezbollah's literature introduced the dichotomous division between the 'downtrodden' and the 'tyrants,' such a distinction is not necessarily economic or manifested through dominance over the means of production or relations of production. In that sense, Hezbollah and the populist movements worldwide have several common denominators. They do not seek to provide a rooted alternative to the dominant capitalist economic regime in the countries in which they operate. They instead attempt to introduce a reformed distribution of resources, in a way that benefits the 'people' or the less-favored communities that have not received their relative share of the local economic pie.

Ernesto Laclau defines populism as a movement acting on the popular-democratic axis; that is to say, on the axis of the people's confrontation with the hegemonic-bloc ruling a certain state. Laclau prioritizes the class struggle, and therefore maintains that the social struggle is actually a process of articulation of different components around the class essence.[50] Laclau argues, however, that the class conflict is not necessarily the dominant conflict in the modern state but rather a conflict between the dominant group and the other marginalized groups, or those alienated from the government. Laclau perceives the populist movement in its essence as a movement that broadens the scope of political participation of the masses and helps them become a political force. Rudiger Dornbusch and Sebastian Edwards propose an analytical approach to the economic perspective of populist movements. They argue that these movements highlight economic growth and renewed distribution of resources in a way that benefits the 'people,' in the sense of impoverished and marginalized communities.[51]

The different features mentioned by Dornbusch and Edwards are characteristic of Hezbollah—in its harsh criticism against the dire situation of the national economy and call for radical change. Hezbollah tries to remobilize the Lebanese masses through contemporary economic demands and reforms that benefit the 'people.' It calls for rebuilding the Lebanese economy, so that the investments benefit the productive sectors, especially the agricultural sector being the historical economic basis for the residents of Southern Lebanon and the Beqaa.[52] In the years following the Lebanese civil

---

[49] Arrisala al-Maftuha (the Open Letter)
[50] Ernesto Laclau (1979) *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: Verso).
[51] Rudiger Dornbuch & Sebastian Edwards (1991) The Macroeconomics of Populism, in: R. Dornbuch & S. Edwards (eds) *The Macroeconomics of Populism in Latin America*, pp. 7–14 (Chicago: Chicago Press).
[52] Hezbollah platform, 1996, Hezbollah website, Available at: https://www.moqawama.org.lb/essaydetails. php?eid=11253&cid=109, accessed on March 28, 2023. And Hezbollah platform, 2009, Hezbollah website, at https://www.moqawama.org.lb/essaydetailsf.php?eid=14229&fid=45, accessed on March 28, 2023.

war, Hezbollah opposed the neoliberal policies of the Lebanese government headed by Rafiq Hariri, which the organization perceived as continuing the old Lebanese regime, and prioritizing only certain areas, particularly Beirut, over the peripheries.[53]

Nonetheless, from the very beginning the organization's priority has been preserving and enhancing the *muqawama*, as stated by Nasrallah after the first elections: 'If asked to choose between the *muqawama* and the parliamentary representation, we will definitely renounce the latter.'[54] Hezbollah's economic-populist position enabled the organization to incorporate the *muqawama* discourse with one that calls for protecting all the marginalized and impoverished citizens of Lebanon, regardless of their background, but especially the Shiite community, whose members were the most disadvantaged. This common foundation allowed the organization to dialogue with leftist and nationalist forces in the Lebanese arena, without absolutely committing to a purely essentialist, socialist, or liberal position.

From the beginning, Hezbollah has defined itself as the representative of the most disadvantaged communities in the most oppressed factions in Lebanon—the Shiites. It adopted a radical Islamist position detached from the reformist discourse that prevailed in the existing Lebanese regime, the one promoted by Amal, and opposed the Shiite community's 'share' in Lebanon's existing sectarian system.[55] Rather the organization called for major changes to the Lebanese regime. Although Hezbollah's position corresponded to the radical discourse of the leftist organizations with respect to the need to essentially transform the Lebanese regime, this did not serve as a basis for rapprochement with the different leftist forces. This was mainly because Hezbollah's position was founded on a radical Islamist discourse that marginalized the other groups. This caused the leftist organizations, which could be 'natural' allies in terms of class ideology, to distance themselves from Hezbollah and even confront it when the different organizations disagreed.[56]

When Hezbollah established its civil society foundations in the late 1980s and the early 1990s and decided to run for the parliamentary elections in 1992, businesspersons who had migrated to West Africa returned, joining the organization and supporting its projects. An increasing number of middle-class members and professionals, which included physicians, engineers, and merchants, transformed the organization's economic rhetoric. This shift, however, has not changed the organization's position as the representative of the 'ordinary' Shiite communities.[57] Indeed, Hezbollah continued to present itself and be perceived by its supporters as 'the organization of the Shiite popular masses.' In a survey conducted in June 2006, out of 400 respondents who defined themselves as supporters of Hezbollah, 81% were of low socioeconomic status, with a monthly income below \$1,000; 36.8% were uneducated or had not completed primary education; 45.6% had completed secondary education and only 15.8% were academics.[58]

---

[53] *Al-'Ahd*, "The Proletariat, the Fuel of War and the Victim of the 'Taif Agreement'" (in Arabic), May 1, 1992; *Al-'Ahd,* "What Does Rafiq Hariri Want from Lebanon" (in Arabic), Mar 26, 1993; *Al-'Ahd,* "That is how Hariri Buys Lebanon … and for whom does he Buy it?" (in Arabic), April 9, 1993.

[54] *Al-'Ahd*, "Nasrallah: If we asked to choose between the Muqawama and the Parliamentary Representation, we will definitely renounce the later" (in Arabic), September 25, 1992.

[55] Muhammad Ra'd, cited in: Sa'ad Ghareeb, *Hezbollah: Religion and Politics*, p. 99.

[56] *Al-'Ahd*, "The Communist Party wants to be an instrument of sedition against Muslims and its elements assassinate the mujahid 'Ali Shehadeh in an armed ambush" (in Arabic), February 28, 1986.

[57] Abisaab and Abisaab, *The Shi'ites of Lebanon,* p. 133.

[58] Quoted in Imad Salamey & Frederic Pearson (2007) Hezbollah: A Proletarian Party with an Islamic Manifesto – A Sociopolitical Analysis of Islamist Populism in Lebanon and the Middle East, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 18(3), pp. 421–422.

Hezbollah continues to occupy this position in the Shiite community, partly because of the organization's ability to articulate between its resistive and anti-imperialist activism and slogans, as well as the Islamic rhetoric that embraces and recruits the masses, particularly the most economically marginalized populations. The organization has also had the ability to establish an 'Islamic socialism,'[59] as defined by Hamzeh, which is based on mutual responsibilities and a broad network of civil society and economic organizations that support the masses, helping them resist both Israeli attacks and the government's disregard for their needs. Hezbollah created its own social and economic institutions to aid its supporters, who were considered the most marginalized group in Lebanon. These foundations offer a range of services, such as schools and educational systems, as well as hospitals and clinics, that provide better quality healthcare at lower costs, if compared to public hospitals. They also provide scholarships for university students with a focus on natural sciences and advanced technology, water supply to peripheral areas that lack state-provided services, professional guidance and assistance, support for the families of martyrs and the injured, and reconstruction of houses destroyed in ongoing confrontations and wars with Israel.[60]

Hezbollah believes that these institutions are critical to the '*muqawama* society,' allowing members to continue supporting the resistance against the Israeli occupation in Southern Lebanon and to drive the fight forward in the spirit of continuous *muqawama*.[61] Indeed, the institutions have played a significant role in establishing and expanding the *muqawama* project. The organization prides itself on providing services to all Lebanese people in every region, without discrimination, particularly in remote suburbs.[62] For example, the organization has set up multiple colleges and institutes for higher education with the aim of helping its determined young followers to break free from poverty and backwardness that their families have endured. Access to education is essential for disadvantaged communities, including Shiites who have limited opportunities to attend private schools in other areas. Unfortunately, the quality of state school education is inadequate. To fill this gap, Hezbollah has established a comprehensive education system that meets the critical needs of a wide range of individuals. This initiative serves two objectives: empowering the marginalized communities that the organization strives to represent and securing long-term support from these communities by fostering a sense of *muqawama* and expanding its reach beyond its traditional Shiite base.[63]

In terms of its economic stance, Hezbollah can be said to have been a staunch opponent of neoliberalism inside Lebanon in the first phase of its existence, especially until 2005. Later, however, due to several reasons, it began to take positions that do not clash with neoliberal policies in the country, as some researchers argue.[64] At the same time, to balance this non-collision, Hezbollah relies internally on supporting marginalized and vulnerable groups through its civil and economic institutions. Despite

---

[59] Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah*, p. 43.

[60] Kanaaneh, *Understanding Hezbollah*, pp. 140–143.

[61] Naʿim Qasim (2008) *The Muqawama Society: the Martyrdom Will and the Production of Victory* (in Arabic) (Beirut: Maʿhad al-Maʿarif al-Hiqmiyya lil-Dirasat al-Dinniyya wal-Falsafiyya).

[62] Shawn T. Flanigan & Mounah Abdel-Samad (2009) Hezbollah's Social Jihad: Nonprofits as Resistance Organizations, *Middle East Policy*, 16(2), p. 128.

[63] Ibid, pp. 125–126.

[64] Joseph Daher (2020) Hezbollah, Neoliberalism and Political Economy, *Politics and Religion*, 13(4), pp. 719–747.

the 'softening' of its economic position, Hezbollah has remained constant in its opposition to imperialist powers and its hostile stance towards colonialism. The organization believes that this stance places it in a unique position to represent those who are against colonial influence in the Lebanese, Arab, and Islamic context, both regionally and globally.

Having surveyed the primary pillars of the *muqawama* project, I will now demonstrate how these pillars are discernible through various hegemonic mechanisms used by Hezbollah, focusing on promotional videos and videoclips.

Embodiment of the Project through the Media: Songs and Videoclips as an Example

As shown in the first section of the article, hegemony includes the articulation of different social, cultural, and economic forms of leadership into a comprehensive political project.[65] Gramsci further describes the different spaces and 'hegemonic mechanisms' through which it operates, such as the press, publishing houses, educational institutions, social organizations, and cultural networks.[66] Any historical bloc that seeks to promote its hegemonic project has to present its unique cultural profile to the masses through practices and institutions in order to attain hegemony over the society and the state. In this part of the article, I will show how Hezbollah uses one of the new media instruments, video clips, to draw together the various pillars of the *muqawama* project and to build-up the new imagined national community.

There has been very significant widespread use of video- and flash-clips on Hezbollah's TV, *Al-Manar*, and various websites during critical periods preceding and following the Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon, the 2006 Lebanon War, the May 2008 events, and the Syrian civil war. The volume has grown over time, with Hezbollah producing them *via Al-Manar*, the party's information department and other means. Those produced during the July War and the following years notably incorporated the three main dimensions of Hezbollah's *muqawama* project: the religious-resistance dimension, with a special emphasis on ʿAshura and the link made between the revolution of Husayn and the contemporary *muqawama*; the national dimension, which aims to unite different religions under Hezbollah's putative guardianship of Lebanese national unity and dignity, but also that of the Arab and Islamic worlds; and the economic dimension, with a socioeconomic focus on peasants and the poor that aligns with Hezbollah's self-perception as the representative of Lebanon's marginalized communities.

Special emphasis is placed on such content by employing terms such as *intisar*, *muqawama*, *watan*, *shaʿb* and many others that are used to associate resistance with victory, nationhood, and the Lebanese people. For example, the music video *akbar nasr inkatab* ('The Greatest Victory Documented')[67] begins with quotes from Nasrallah's speech held on 22 September 2006 at the 'victory conference.'[68] The song

---

[65] Peter D. Thomas (2013) Hegemony, Passive Revolution and the Modern Prince, *Thesis Eleven*, 117(1), p. 27.

[66] Thomas, "Hegemony, Passive Revolution and the Modern Prince", p. 28.

[67] "نشيد الكبر نصر," n.d., Available at: https://video.moqawama.org.lb/details.php?cid=13&linkid=2219, accessed March 28, 2023.

[68] Ibid.

begins with the lyrics 'the greatest victory documented in the homeland's book, and a strong nation supporting the *muqawama*.' The 'people' are first mentioned along with an image of an old, veiled woman with the buildings destroyed by Israeli bombardment in the background. The second occasion features an unveiled younger woman, along with Christian symbols, thus placing a special emphasis on national unity and attributing victory to all the Lebanese people, not just to Shiites. Most videoclips reviewed for this article feature a variety of clerics and religious symbols from Shiite, Sunni, Druze, and Christian traditions. The aforementioned videos, like *nasrak hazz al-dunya* ('Your Victory Shook the World')[69] and many others, feature the flags of Lebanon, Hezbollah and those of the other allies in the *muqawama* project, such as the Amal Movement, the Syrian Social-Nationalist Party, and the Free Patriotic Movement.

In addition to the *muqawama* military dimension, the dimension of reconstruction and revival from the ruins of war, and the participation of Hezbollah's civil society organizations in that reconstruction, is featured as integral to the *muqawama* and complementary to its military operations. The motif of national unity and the portrayal of the *muqawama* as representing all Lebanese people, not just Hezbollah, is also prominent. One very striking video, *kullu-na muqawama kullu-na lil-watan* ('We are All the Resistance, We are All for the Homeland'),[70] combines the Lebanese national anthem and the anthem of the resistance. In addition to footage of national flags and images of national and historical landmarks, such as the one at Baalbek, it culminates with a scene showing the Lebanese flag along with the screen captions 'We are all for the Homeland' at the top, and 'Together, we will be Triumphant' at the bottom. In such videos, Hezbollah's activists appear alongside the armed forces, suggesting a continuum between the *muqawama* and the Lebanese state, like in *ya waṭani! ya waṭan al-nur!* ('My Homeland! The Land of Light!')[71] In addition to these dimensions, a special emphasis is placed on the issue of social class. *Nasrak hazz al-dunya* features a young shepherd calmly playing the flute somewhere in Southern Lebanon. Hezbollah's militants appear in the fields to the applause of the peasants, and then *muqawamun* appear as a man and a woman sow wheat seed interspersed in the air with the bullets of the resistance. The deliberate foregrounding of the peasants, the poor and the working class recurs in these videos to remind us that the *muqawama* belongs to the marginalized, and protects them, their lands, and their homeland.

These aspects are complemented by a potent Shiite dimension. One of the most evocative comparisons between the Lebanese resistance and revolutionary Shiite Islam's ʿAshuraˌ imagery is made in a music video called *hayhat ya muhttal* ('We will not be Subjugated to the Occupier').[72] This is a famous statement by Imam Husayn, during his battle with Yazid's army in Karbalaˌ when he was given the option of death or surrender to Yazid's legitimacy: *Hayhat mina al-dhillah*. Hezbollah has frequently used this statement to pertain to Shiite political Islam, referring to this founding historical event to make timeless comparisons based on the famous motto 'Every day is

---

[69] "نصرك هز الدني," n.d. Available at: https://video.moqawama.org.lb/details.php?cid=13&linkid=1947, accessed March 28, 2023.

[70] "كلنا مقاومة كلنا للوطن," n.d. Available at: https://youtu.be/0ijDi4YZgCY, accessed March 28, 2023.

[71] "يا وطني يا وطن النور," n.d. Available at: https://youtu.be/fUMb7T9wkRA, accessed March 28, 2023.

[72] "هيهات يا محتل," n.d. Available at: https://video.moqawama.org.lb/details.php?cid=10&linkid=824, accessed March 28, 2023.

ʻAshuraˏ, every land is Karbalaˏ.' The organization thus assigns to itself the upholding of Husayn's legacy, while Israel is likened to Yazid.

The music for these videos is normally provided by Hezbollah's 'Al-Wilaya' band to further serve the direct dissemination of *muqawama* culture. Others feature Arab patriotic songs dating back to the Nasserite period, accompanied by images that glorify Hezbollah's leaders and warriors.[73] One recurring song, especially featured in those produced during and after the July 2006 war, is Egyptian singer Abdel Halim Hafiz's *khali al-silah sahi* ('Keep the Weapons Ready')[74] dating back to the 1960s. Another is the *allahu akbar* song made famous during the 1956 Suez crisis.[75] A direct link is made between the nature of Hezbollah in the twenty first century and the Arab nationalist, anti-colonial movement of Nasserism. An implicit link also exists between the twenty first century foremost Arab nationalist leader and the contemporary spearhead of the Lebanese *muqawama* and its 'legitimate' heir, Hassan Nasrallah. Another major campaigning song promoting the *muqawama* beyond Lebanese borders is *nasr al-ʻarab* ('The Victory of the Arabs').[76] A great number of artists from various Arab countries has recorded and performed this song, particularly from Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria. The title features wordplay focused on the term *nasr*, alluding to both the 'victory' of the *muqawama* over Israel, attributed to all Arabs, and the surname of Hezbollah Secretary-General Nasrallah (which literally means 'God's victory'). This reference implicitly positions him as the leader of the entire Arab nation, as it happened when the video was played at a rally during the 2006 Lebanon War and Nasrallah promised victory.

The extent of the *muqawama* project's penetration beyond Hezbollah's domestic environment is partly reflected in the great support the organization has gained as the leader of the resistance from many Arab thinkers and influencers. Julia Boutros, the Christian-leftist Lebanese singer associated with both the Communist Party and the Syrian Social-Nationalist Party, donated her revenue from the song *ahibbaˏi* ('My Loved Ones')[77] to the cause. The lyrics are the words that Nasrallah addressed to his fighters at the height of the July War. Left-wing patriotic poets like Syria's Omar al-Farra and Egypt's Ahmed Fouad Negm published pieces praising Hassan Nasrallah and Hezbollah's leadership of the *muqawama*. Communist musician, Ziad Rahbani, has also expressed his support of Hezbollah as the leader of the resistance. Rahbani's statement that his mother, iconic Lebanese singer Fairuz, 'loves Hassan Nasrallah'[78] provoked a controversy highly indicative of the degree of Nasrallah's and Hezbollah's status, and the simultaneously deep and controversial reach of the *muqawama* project within Lebanon and beyond it.

---

[73] Samer Abboud and Benjamin Muller (2012) *Rethinking Hizballah: Legitimacy, Authority, Violence* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.), pp. 54–55.

[74] "خلي السلاح صاحي," n.d. Available at: https://video.moqawama.org.lb/details.php?cid=13&linkid=2144, accessed March 28, 2023.

[75] "Hizballah Nasheed - الله أكبر الله أكبر - Arabic - ShiaTV.Net," n.d. Available at: https://www.shiatv.net/video/645cd7ad69525c46992a, accessed March 28, 2023.

[76] "نصر العرب - Vidéo Dailymotion," Dailymotion, n.d. Available at: https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x393ft, accessed March 28, 2023.

[77] Julia Boutros, "2006 أحبائي - بطرس جوليا," December 18, 2013. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkTqtStlBx0, accessed March 28, 2023.

[78] Quoted in *Al-Akhbar*, "Ziad: Those who attack 'al-Sayyid' and 'al-Sayyida,' defend Israel" (in Arabic), December 20, 2013.

The various videos analyzed above illustrate the multidimensional development of Hezbollah's *muqawama* project and how the paralleling between its various symbols reinforces the idea of their complementarity. They feature the chain of equivalences that the *muqawama* project has gradually established. The videoclips, for instance, reveal the religious dimension. Hezbollah goes back more than one thousand years, back to ʿAshuraˌ and Imam Husayn, to import these traditions into the present time and to provide a continual resistance interpretation of a historical event turned into a timeless myth. Hezbollah has marginalized other interpretations of Shiite Islam that endured for centuries and insisted on the necessity of *intizar* (waiting for the returning of the 12th Imam) and silence, linking instead all references to the Shiʿa with the myth of Karbalaˌ in its resistance aspects. In the process of associating Shiism with resistance, Hezbollah crowned itself the definitive representative of the Shiite community in Lebanon and worldwide. The *muqawama* concept has expanded to encompass the Lebanese people and the Lebanese state, with its different ethnic, religious, and political groups. Yet, it is not an equal *muqawama* of all parties, but rather a 'Muqawama-People-Homeland' of the peasants and the simple people who rise early to work the soil and guard the homeland, of the proud poor.

As the leader of the *muqawama* project, Hezbollah broadens the scope of the term 'people' through special rhetorical devices, from the Shiite community—the milieu from which Hezbollah emerged—outward to the Lebanese people, specifically to those who have identified with the struggle. Taking it a step further, it becomes a signifier for all the Arab people. The message of these videoclips and of the structuring of the new hegemonic project is that the 'people' as a political subject will reach ultimate self-realization once it embraces the *muqawama*.

Conclusion

Drawing on a Gramscian and neo-Gramscian theoretical framework, I have argued that Hezbollah is undergoing a process of capturing a leading role in the Lebanese arena. This role departs from its previous strategy of achieving control over Lebanon through violence against Lebanon's state institutions. Instead, Hezbollah is building, together with other players, a hegemonic project that would provide the organization with the opportunity to lead the entire Lebanese state without violently enforcing its agenda. Furthermore, due to its prestigious, cosmopolitan, and leftist roots in the Middle East, its *muqawama* conception has enabled Hezbollah to establish a historical bloc that includes different groups in Lebanese society.

Hezbollah's hegemonic project is based on three supporting pillars: At the *religious level*, Hezbollah has applied all the resources within Shiʿa Islam to support its interpretation, in which Karbalaˌ plays a major role in bridging Shiʿism with the modern world. Throughout its existence, Hezbollah's leadership sought to build a chain of equivalences between central concepts—Karbalaˌ, ʿAshuraˌ, Husayn, Istishhad, and others—and the organization's resistive attitude towards both Israel and US imperialism. Although this attitude was previously adopted by secular leftist organizations in Lebanon and the region, it has gained religious and social significance with Hezbollah.

The religious aspect of Hezbollah's resistive project is important, but not sufficient to keep together a pluralist and multi-sectarian country like Lebanon. Therefore, Hezbollah has gone through a process of *national* empowerment or, as defined by

various researchers, a process of 'Lebanonization.'. This process has deemphasized the (divisive) religious aspects of the organization, without losing them completely. Hezbollah's leaders have not only equated Lebanon's real patriots to Hezbollah's supporters and those who protect the homeland from the Israeli occupation, but also referred to them as those who protect the country from whoever attempts to impose on Lebanon its version of 'Islam' disregarding the country's pluralism and openness. In this sense, Hezbollah appropriated part of the Lebanese national ethos, which constituted an integral part of the hegemonic project of the merchants and bankers' republic and highlighted the uniqueness of Lebanese pluralism. Yet, the organization has adapted this position to its *muqawama* ethos, enabling Lebanon to incorporate Hezbollah into its mainstream while maintaining its openness and pluralism.

The third supporting pillar of Hezbollah's hegemonic project is the *populist-economic* perception. In this regard, Hezbollah adopts a position like that of other populist organizations around the world, especially Third World countries. The dominant position is the division between the most disadvantaged and poorest communities—the proletariat, the oppressed minorities or the marginalized majority deprived of their share of the national wealth, and all those exploited by the imperialist forces—and the compradors, including whoever exists on the other side of the equation.

These three pillars have been reflected in various hegemonic mechanisms, including videoclips and songs, which Hezbollah uses to disseminate a vision of the new imagined nation as based on *muqawama*. By surveying some of these video-clips, I demonstrated how this chain of equivalences has worked successfully for the organization and the historical bloc that it leads.

ORCID

Abed Kanaaneh [iD] http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9664-119X

References

'Azi, G. (1998) *Hezbollah: From the Ideological Dream… to Political Pragmatism* (Kuwait: Dar Qirttas).

Abisaab, R. J., & Abisaab, M. (2014) *The Shi'ites of Lebanon: Modernism, Communism, and Hizbullah's Islamists* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press).

Aghaie, K. S. (2004) *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Washington: University of Washington Press).

Al-Haydri, I. (1999) *The Tragedy of Karbala: The Sociology of the Shiite Discourse* (in Arabic) (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi).

Alagha, J. E. (2011) *Hizbullah's Documents: From the 1985 Open Letter to the 2009 Manifesto* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press).

Alagha, J. E. (2006) *The Shifts in Hizbollah's Ideology: Religious Ideology, Political Ideology, and Political Program* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University).

Anderson, P. (1976) The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci, *New Left Review*, 1/100, pp. 5–78.

Asad Allahi, M. (2004) *The Islamists in a Multicultural Society* (Beirut: Al-Dar Al-Arabiya lil-'Oloum).

Azani, E. (2009) *Hezbollah: The Story of the Party of God: From Revolution to Institutionalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).

Cox, R. W. (1993) Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations an Essay in Method, in: S. Gill (ed) *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*, pp. 49–66 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Dabashi, H. (2008) *Islamic Liberation Theology Resisting the Empire* (London: Routledge).

Dabashi, H. (2011) *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press).

Daher, J. (2020) Hezbollah, Neoliberalism and Political Economy, *Politics and Religion*, *13*(4), pp. 719–747.

Dornbuch, R., & Edwards, S., (1991) The Macroeconomics of Populism, in: R., Dornbuch, S. & Edwards (eds) *The Macroeconomics of Populism in Latin America*, pp. 7–14 (Chicago: Chicago Press).

el-Husseini, R. (2008) Resistance, Jihad, and Martyrdom in Contemporary Lebanese Shi'a Discourse, *The Middle East Journal*, *62*(3), pp. 399–414.

Flanigan, S. T., & Abdel-Samad, M. (2009) Hezbollah's Social Jihad: Nonprofits as Resistance Organizations, *Middle East Policy*, *16*(2), pp. 122–137.

Gramsci, A. (1992) *Prison Notebooks*, 1 (New York: Columbia University Press).

Gramsci, A. (1995) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers).

Halawi, M. (1992) *A Lebanon Defied* (Boulder: Westview Press).

Hamada, S. (2008) *The Shi'ite History in Lebanon (in Arabic)*, 1 (Beirut: Al-Khal).

Hamzeh, A. N. (2004) *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press).

Hanf, T. (1993) *Co-Existence Times of War-from the Collapse of a State to the Emergence of a Nation (in Arabic)* (Paris: Euro-Arab Center for Studies).

Kanaaneh, A. (2018) From Jihad to Muqawamah: The Case of Hezbollah in Lebanon, *Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Studies of Religion*, (6), pp. 38–59.

Kanaaneh, A. (2021) *Understanding Hezbollah: The Hegemony of Resistance* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press).

Kramer, M. (1993) Hizbullah: The Calculus of Jihad, in: M. E. Marty & R. S. Appleby (eds) *Fundamentalisms of the State: Remaking Politics, Economies and Militance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

Laclau, E. (1979) *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: Verso).

Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso).

Lester, J. (2000) *The Dialogue of Negation: Debates on Hegemony in Russia and the West* (London: Pluto Press).

Levitt, M. (2013) *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God* (Washington Dc: Georgetown University Press).

Milstein, M. (2009) *Muqawama: The Emergence of the Resistance Challenge and Its Influence on the Perception of Israeli National Security (in Hebrew)* (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies).

Muller, B. J., & Abboud, S. N. (2012) *Rethinking Hizballah: Legitimacy, Authority, Violence* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.).

Murad, M. (2009) The Development of Political Options among the Shiites since the Emergence of the Modern Lebanese State to Date (in Arabic), *Shuaoun Al-Awsat*, *132*, pp. 155–171.

Norton, A. (2007) *Hezbollah: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

Qasim, N. (2008) *The Muqawama Society: The Martyrdom Will and the Production of Victory* (Beirut: Ma'had al-Ma'arif al-Hiqmiyya lil-Dirasat al-Dinniyya wal-Falsafiyya).

Ranstorp, M. (1997) *Hizb'Allah in Lebanon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).

Saad-Ghorayeb, A. (2002) *Hizbulllah: Politics and Religion* (London; Sterling, VA.: Pluto Press).

Saade, B. (2016) *Hizbullah and the Politics of Remembrance Writing the Lebanese Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Salamey, I., & Pearson, F. (2007) Hezbollah: A Proletarian Party with an Islamic Manifesto – a Sociopolitical Analysis of Islamist Populism in Lebanon and the Middle East, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, *18*(3), pp. 416–438.

Shternhell, Z., Schneider, M., & Ashri, M. (1992) *The Foundations of Fascism: A Cultural Dimension to the Political Revolution (in Hebrew)* (Tel Aviv: Am Ovid).

Simon, R. (1982) *Gramsci's Political Thought an Introduction* (London: London Lawrence & Wishart).

Thomas, P. D. (2013) Hegemony, Passive Revolution and the Modern Prince, *Thesis Eleven*, *117*(1), pp. 20–39.

Williams, G. A. (1960) The Concept of 'Egemonia' in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci: Some Notes on Interpretation, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, *21*(4), pp. 586–599.

Zisser, E. (2009) *Lebanon: Blood in the Cedars (in Hebrew)* (Tel Aviv: Kav Adom).