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### The meaning of resistance: Hezbollah's media strategies and the articulation of a people

el Hour, W.

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## INTRODUCTION

*"Human history is made by human beings. Since the struggle for control over territory is part of that history, so too is the struggle over historical and social meaning. The task for the critical scholar is not to separate one struggle from another, but to connect them despite the contrast between the overpowering materiality of the former and the apparent otherworldly refinements of the latter."*  
Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 331-2.

On May 25<sup>th</sup> 2000, the Israeli army withdrew from most of Southern Lebanon after more than two decades of military occupation. Hezbollah's leading role in the liberation transformed the Shiite group into a symbol and a model of resistance in the Arab world. A few years after the liberation, during the war with Israel in the summer of 2006, the portraits of Hassan Nasrallah, the movement's General Secretary, could be seen in demonstrations in major capitals in the Arab world. Hezbollah's declared victory in 2006 consolidated its role as a regional force and established Nasrallah as an Arab icon. The emergence of Hezbollah as a regional resistance movement was the culmination of decades of struggle where military, political, social and economic strategies were carried out alongside a complex and efficient media performance.

In this dissertation I will draw on theories of discourse to analyze Hezbollah's media strategies as a major element and a central component in the success of their resistance efforts. In order to elucidate these strategies, I will first investigate the emergence of Hezbollah in a genealogical study that will place this Islamic movement in relation to Gamal Abdel Nasser's post-colonial Arab nationalist experience (1952 – 1970). I will show how technological, social, and political conditions influenced the transformation and expansion of the movement's complex identity narrative in relation to Shiite Islam, Lebanese nationalism and Arab nationalism. This project, while it relies on much historical contextualization, in no way pretends to be a historical document about the movement, nor does it claim to offer an extensive description of the historical development of Hezbollah. Much more extensive, accurate and insightful works on the history and development of Hezbollah are available, most notably the work of Judith Palmer-Harik (Harik 2005), Amal Saad-Ghorayeb (Saad-Ghorayeb 2002), and Joseph Alagha (Alagha 2006; Alagha 2011b). Rather, my aim is to trace the development and transformation of Hezbollah's media strategies and the way in which this movement articulates a complex popular identity and advances its hegemonic project. In my analysis of specific media practices, I will trace the introduction of new layers to the movement's political identity. These layers correspond to the transformation of the political context which allowed Hezbollah to move from a religious militia into a political movement with Lebanese, Arab and Islamic dimensions.

I will argue that Hezbollah's political Islam is partly an outcome of the failure of Nasser's Arab nationalist project after its spectacular defeat in the 1967 war with Israel. Hezbollah, in this context, represents one of the outcomes of the subsequent rise of political Islam as an alternative within the Arab post-colonial liberation movements in the 1980's.

Furthermore, Hezbollah's discourse re-articulates many aspects of the narrative that Nasser turned into the basis of a shared Arab identity. In this sense, the genealogy of Hezbollah's discourse is part of a longstanding desire of liberation in the Arab world, a liberation tightly linked to the colonial past, the Israeli occupation, and the crises of political identity that have never ceased to fuel conflicts and political projects since the fall of the Ottoman Empire.

The choice of Hezbollah as a subject for my research was a somewhat obvious one. As a Lebanese interested in the politics of the Middle East and the politics of resistance in this region, I found in Hezbollah a challenging example that was able to articulate a successful and complex discourse. As my research was progressing, new events triggered new challenges: to write about current issues that are in constant transformation was a task that required making choices to limit the scope of my research. Therefore, this dissertation does not tackle the media texts produced and events that took place after the parliamentary elections of 2009. However, throughout my analysis, I will sometimes refer to the current period and most notably the major popular uprisings that have been taking place in the Arab world since the end of 2010 (in Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria to name a few).

The choice of Hezbollah necessarily entails a challenge in political positioning especially because the movement is involved in an ongoing conflict on both a regional and the local level. This makes political interpretation and positioning a difficult and often controversial task. While I will often use the movement's own standpoints and vocabulary in order to translate their message from the cultural framework in which it is constructed and to which it is addressed, I will also attempt to judge their failure or success according to their own interests and expressed goals in specific moments. In this sense, resistance as a process of challenging and changing the prevalent system is understood not as necessarily liberal or progressive, but as any movement that acts against a dominant force in order to establish new hegemonies and fix new meanings regardless of its actual content (Mahmood 2005, 1-39). Thus, the assessment of a resistance strategy should be done by looking at the success of this particular movement in advancing its own values, meanings and narratives.

Hezbollah is a movement whose discourse, when looked at from a critical perspective and beyond the Western media's depiction, exemplifies many of the ethical dilemmas concerning resistance and its strategies. It is a movement whose strategies and political discourse provide insight into both the rise of political Islam as a new global force as well as the growing counter-hegemonic political movements in the world in general. It is a socially conservative movement that succeeds in presenting a model of resistance that appeals to a strikingly wide range of people with a variety of political views. The boundaries of what Hezbollah articulates as the "people of the resistance" thus shifts according to transformations that I will attempt to demonstrate by analyzing the development of their media discourse. My aim will be to show that resistance in this case – and in many cases – is precisely the act of articulating a people around empty signifiers that become the name of this people. In order to do so, I will use the concept of hegemony as developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantalle Mouffe (Laclau and Mouffe 2000), as well as Laclau's definition of populism as the articulation of a people around empty signifiers that join hitherto scattered groups and individuals in a common frame and within an exclusive boundary (Laclau 2007a).

While Hezbollah as a religious movement clearly advocates socially conservative views when it comes to the organization of state and society, it has often advocated – at least verbally – a more socially egalitarian economic project. However, as an active political party in Lebanon they have often failed to actually advocate these views in the institutions where they could make a difference, namely in the Lebanese state institutions. In other words, Hezbollah as a political party, while it voices its concerns for the dispossessed, has been consistent in giving priority to preserving the status quo and stability in the Lebanese sectarian system. Since its first participation in Lebanese political life in the early 1990's, and especially since its participation in the government after 2005, Hezbollah has refrained from taking any assertive steps in order to advance a radically different economic project from the one adopted by the consecutive Lebanese governments since the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1990.

Such a challenge to the status quo entails a political battle with major political forces – some opposed to, and others allied with Hezbollah. In this sense, the movement, which can be characterized as revolutionary in some fields, has proven to be not only a proponent of socially conservative views but has gradually become part of the mainstream conservative establishment in the country. Indeed, Hezbollah has silently espoused the liberal economy in stark opposition with its discursive and ideological frames which promote the struggle against oppression and support of the downtrodden<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, Hezbollah's political performance in Lebanon since the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005 has focused on staying on the defensive in the face of growing international and local pressure to disarm.<sup>2</sup> The movement has been concerned with preserving its weapons and military means to fight Israeli aggression and threats, while often ignoring other aspects of the political debate altogether. This singular focus has led many – especially on the left – to be disappointed by some of the party's positions - or lack thereof - especially when it comes to corruption, the economy, and social and legal reforms (we can think here of the party's position against civil marriage, domestic violence laws, gay rights, and privatization).

These positions, however, do not necessarily alienate Hezbollah as a Lebanese political party from its social and cultural base. The party remains one of the most popular and successful in the Lebanese democratic system, presenting an interesting model of a religious movement that has succeeded in moving from a guerilla group into a political party in an – imperfect – democratic system. This point is made by Youssef Choueiri who argues that it is possible for political Islam to accommodate to democratic systems. He writes: "There is evidence of this in the case of Hizb Allah in Lebanon. This resistance movement, founded on radical Shia revolutionary principles has undergone an ideological evolution in respect of its lived experiences not only as part of the national resistance project against the Israeli occupation, but perhaps just as importantly, as a political player in Lebanon's highly confessional and consociational state. In this imperfect democracy Hizb Allah – as a Lebanese political player – has demonstrated that faith is an important player in the political life of modern nation-states" (Choueiri 2005, 459).

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<sup>1</sup> The agreement during the 1990's was that Hezbollah will be allowed to perform its resistance operations in the South and in return the movement will leave the Future movement and PM Rafik Hariri to deal with the economy and the management of the state.

<sup>2</sup> This refers to the adoption of the controversial UN Resolution 1559 that calls among other things for the disarmament of all militias in Lebanon. While some would call Hezbollah a militia, others refuse to include Hezbollah as a militia and rather define it as a legitimate armed resistance movement.

Along the same lines it is important to note that as opposed to Al Qaida for instance, Hezbollah's ideology, albeit universalist in essence, is rooted in a Lebanese nationalism and is not based on the categorical rejection of otherness.

In my dissertation, I try to lay down an understanding of resistance as a hegemonic practice where what is at stake is the articulation of new meanings. By looking at the specific case of Hezbollah, a political movement that is engaged in what they themselves call resistance, I examine a model in which resistance is carried out not only by force but also by means of media and discursive practices where the articulation of new political identities and the hegemonization of new meanings is a fundamental task.

Resistance as a category thus becomes a conceptual frame in which the content and the form change according to contingent variables in specific situations. When I speak about Hezbollah as a resistance movement, it is the very definition of resistance that is at stake – the meaning of resistance. In this sense, resistance as a category includes anything practiced by extremist right wing movements to progressive queer movements as each of them lays down strategies – similar or different – in order to advance meanings in a contested space.

Following the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe where politics is understood as a process of hegemonic contestation (Laclau and Mouffe 2000) and Laclau's theory on populism as a form of hegemony (Laclau 2007a), I will argue that Hezbollah's resistance strategies are part of a hegemonic discourse that aims at articulating a people. Hegemony and resistance are in a constant dialectic relation in all Hezbollah's discursive practices and strategies. The two authors break with the economic determinism of previous Marxist theorists and instead offer useful theoretical tools for understanding the emergence of new political subjects beyond class. Furthermore, Laclau re-claims the term populism from its use in reference to a content of a discourse and instead suggests a definition of populism as a form of political subject formation. The discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe will therefore guide my analysis of Hezbollah as a populist movement and its resistance as a hegemonic project that produces new political subjects as it appears in its media strategies.

In the first chapter, I present a historical context to the emergence of Hezbollah's political Islam as a discourse that is part of a genealogy of liberation movements in the Arab world. I will present a critical historical analysis that aims at understanding Hezbollah as a movement that builds on a long cultural memory of Arab nationalism, anti-colonialism and liberation struggles. This chapter is essential in understanding Hezbollah's media discourse in its complex cultural, social and political context. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War and the advent of colonialism, the Arab world was faced with a crisis of identity. Colonial divisions created new political identities based on agreements between the British and French governments to allocate their influence over the Arab areas of the former Ottoman Empire. This event is still at the root of many conflicts in the Middle East.

In this chapter, I describe the conditions of the emergence of Gamal Abdel Nasser's Arab nationalism as a political movement and a discursive force leading to its consequent failure and the rise of Islam as an alternative political force. Understanding the rise and fall of the Nasser's discourse, I will argue, is essential for understanding Hezbollah's political Islam which, as it will appear in the analysis of their media, often builds on and re-articulates some of the imagery of the Arab nationalist epoch. I will then place Hezbollah's official birth in 1985 in its

historical, social, cultural and political context, relating it to the transformations that occurred in the region, most importantly the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the Lebanese Civil War, and the Israeli invasion of 1982.

In the second chapter, I will present a theory of resistance in relation to the concepts of hegemony and populism in order to place Hezbollah's discourse within a theoretical framework and a larger debate about resistance and political struggle. The Lacanian framework that Laclau and Mouffe employ in their political theory establishes political identification as a constant act of articulation that aims at partially fixing meanings in order to fill an unbridgeable lack that is constitutive of the social (Laclau and Mouffe 2000). I will argue that hegemony and populism as defined by Laclau (Laclau 2007a) provide relevant tools for the analysis of power relations and political identity formation in conflicts beyond the binary division of domination and resistance. Therefore, I will argue that resistance cannot be taken as an act that is not hegemonic in essence. Resistance and hegemony, or resistance as hegemony, will become a guideline for my analysis of the use of Hezbollah's media as a strategy with the aim of articulating a people around an empty signifier. By doing so, I will provide a definition of resistance where liberation, occupation, space and self-representation play an essential function in the process of producing political identities. Resistance will be understood as an attempt at articulating one's self by acquiring a voice but also as a spatial act, where space itself, as discursive construct, is a mode of resistance.

The analysis of Hezbollah's media productions and strategies in the later chapters takes into consideration the complexity of dealing with the reception of these media texts since they are addressed to a dual public: on the one hand, a sympathetic public of supporters or potential supporters (in Lebanon and the Arab world), and on the other hand, an unsympathetic public of opponents or others (the Israeli and, to a lesser extent, the Western publics). In this framework, the mechanisms of power in conflict and war will be understood as a contestation of the discursive field, as struggles over narratives and meanings but also, following Virilio, as taking place in the field of perception where media technologies allow for strategies of showing to become part of the military power struggle (Virilio 1989).

In the third chapter, I analyze the speeches of Hezbollah's Secretary General, Hassan Nasrallah. I will focus on three forms of speeches: religious sermons, political speeches, and war speeches, in order to demonstrate how the movement acquires the ability to narrate through the voice of its leader. Nasrallah's oratory skills have allowed him to establish himself as the face, the voice and the name of the movement. The speeches, aside from being a narration, draw an image of a people based on resilience, devotion and most of all empowerment of the oppressed. Nasrallah's speeches thus allow for the emergence of a resistance mythology around the values of martyrdom, struggle for justice, and devotion to a legitimate cause of liberation. The charismatic leader promises and delivers a sense of victory and salvation demonstrating the intrinsic link between the discursive and military performance in the success of the movement.

In the fourth chapter, I analyze another important media form within Hezbollah's military strategy and psychological warfare: the videos of Hezbollah's military operations. These videos address simultaneously sympathetic and hostile audiences and by doing so deliver two intrinsically different messages. A selection of three videos will be analyzed following Daniel Dayan's notion of "gaze acts" (Dayan 2006), where showing becomes an act and a perceptual strategy in war. The position of Hezbollah behind the camera allows the movement to challenge

the power balance in the military equation on the ground by acquiring the power to see and define their enemy and hence exercise discipline and punishment (Foucault 1979). This refers to the notion of terrorism not as an ideology but as a strategy of showing violence that pertains to the economy of violence (this definition of terrorism will be discussed further below where I suggest to re-claim the term terrorism, as Laclau does with populism, to refer to a form and a perceptual strategy rather than a content and an ideology). Terrorism, in this sense, aims to cause fear and thereby deter the enemy at the lowest possible cost for the attacker. Furthermore, I will argue that the act of archiving these videos on various recording media and online allow for these images to become a shared memory that serves the narrative and political identity of the resistance and their re-articulation in new media texts.

In the fifth chapter, I will analyze a media form in which the two previous ones are re-articulated: Hezbollah's music videos. By analyzing a selection of six music videos produced in three periods, I will focus on the multidimensional aspect of Hezbollah's political identity and its transformation from a strictly Shi'ite one to one that includes Lebanese and Pan-Arab dimensions. I will show how the boundaries of the "people of the resistance" change according to the political and social contexts. While I do not contend that Hezbollah's articulation of a Lebanese national or Arab identity means they give up on their religious one, I do argue that the result is a complex and hybrid political identity that reflects the way in which hegemonic struggles, inasmuch as they are a re-articulation of meanings around empty signifiers, are never truly sutured or one dimensional. What the music videos reflect is precisely how a political discourse re-articulates various signifiers and images into new hegemonic ones according to the transformations of the political and historical context.

In the sixth chapter, I will focus on resistance as a spatial practice where the transformation, configuration and inhabitation of space are part of the struggle over meaning and power and central elements in any conflict. Politics of appropriation and inhabitation of space form an essential hegemonic strategy on both sides of the conflict in the Middle East. In this perspective, I examine scenes from everyday social spaces as media that expose the transformation of Hezbollah's discourse and political communication as well as the commodification of political signifiers in the Lebanese sectarian system. The study of everyday life, I will argue, offers indications about the hegemonic forces in a specific social space inasmuch as space itself is a discursive construct (Lefebvre 1974).

Finally, I will trace the connection between Hezbollah's discourse and the popular uprisings that have been taking place since later 2010 in the Arab world. I will suggest a comparison between these movements and evaluate the performance of Hezbollah in relation to these events. Can we speak of a line that connects the resistance discourse of Hezbollah to the organic movements that swept the Arab streets? And can we understand the events in the Arab world and most notably the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia using the same theoretical framework used to analyze Hezbollah?

### **Terrorism, an adjective**

"Translating" Hezbollah's message and analyzing their discourse entails a fundamental break with the common perception of the movement as terrorist. I will argue that terrorism as a

qualification in both news media and academic discourse is counter-productive to say the least. When it comes to understanding the other, the notion of terrorism has hindered much of the understanding of Hezbollah as a complex political and social movement that had a deep impact on Lebanese and Arab politics. This point is made by Mona Harb and Reinoud Leenders in their article "Know thy enemy" (Harb and Leenders 2005). Harb and Leenders argue that "discussing terrorism appears to dispense with even the rudimentary onus of proof that is usually expected in the production of knowledge about virtually any other phenomenon, including those equally abhorred or rejected" (ibid). The authors argue that both academic and intelligence work about Hezbollah that assigns the term terrorism to the movement have failed to achieve an understanding of this complex movement. Instead, such works have sustained and re-affirmed their own preconceptions by failing to acknowledge and by dismissing available information, relying on often "factually incorrect assertions" about the movement (ibid).<sup>3</sup>

The two authors argue that Hezbollah's perception as a terrorist organization both in the Western mainstream media and in much of the literature about the Middle East and Islam presents a dual challenge. Any researcher who seeks to present another picture and a different understanding of this movement is faced with the initial need to counter-argue the prevalent perception of this movement. In other words, if one wants to analyze Hezbollah as a social, political, and cultural movement away from the politically charged and ambiguous notion of "terrorism," it is necessary to begin by challenging this notion and deconstructing the arguments that have made it an accepted term (ibid). Doing so requires a closer look at the epistemological limitations that the common notion of terrorism as an ideology imposes when we attribute it to our object of research. Terrorism comes with a set of preconceptions about the terrorist. Thus terrorists are seen as simple and de-humanized subjects. Their actions are either derived from a blind motivation to destroy anything that is different (*us*), or a mechanical reactions against *our* culture. In the next few paragraphs I will briefly demonstrate how terrorism when attributed to our object of research as an ideological content hinders our understanding of this object and instead deprives it from any ability to speak back. I will then suggest to re-claim the term terrorism by limiting its meaning to a strategy or a form of political action with a specific aim (this discussion of terrorism as a perceptual strategy of showing violence will be discussed further in Chapter 4).

In his history of madness, Foucault's mad represents the necessary negative according to which the attributes of the reasonable person can be defined in a given society or in a given system of power (Foucault 2004, 114-126). As long as normality can only be defined in opposition to its pathological disorder, the mad becomes the only proof of the reasonable person's sanity. The mad person's identity - as mad - is thus imposed by a superstructure, be it psychoanalysis, psychiatry or other institutions that have the power and authority to judge who is mad in different moments of history. Madness becomes a necessity for any notion of normality. The mad functions as a Lacanian other, a negative image that helps sustain an illusion of unity and an image of the self consistent with the demands of the dominant system of

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<sup>3</sup> Hezbollah also employs the term terrorism to designate Israel's violence against Palestinian and Lebanese peoples, as well as the violence of the United States of America in Iraq and Afghanistan (amongst other places), however, the movement does not fail to distinguish between governments and peoples. Hezbollah's discourse presents a great deal of nuances and as Saad-Ghorayeb argues, the group's discourse presents a "multidimensional perception of its enemies" (Harb and Leenders 2005).

power/knowledge. The political value of madness in society mirrors another 'pathological disorder': terrorism.

The mechanisms through which the terrorist identity (as the negative image of the non-terrorist) gets formed are similar to those of madness both in terms of their subjection to the dominant discourse (medical in the case of madness, and political/cultural in the case of terrorism) and in terms of their role as proof of the self's sanity or normality in accordance with the dominant system of values. The terrorist becomes a 'constitutive other' (Žižek 2006b, 258). Like madness, terrorism is always negative otherness; the self is never terrorist, nor can it be mad. Following Žižek and his reading of Lacan, nationalism, and it would be possible to extend the definition to include any form of identification to a group, is a domain of eruption of enjoyment into the social field. The aim of the nation becomes the organization of a given community's enjoyment through myths of identity or national myths. The other is rejected for its excess of enjoyment ('it wants to steal our enjoyment. By ruining our way of life') and/or for its access to a secret, perverse enjoyment. The terrorist could be the object of hate for either its excess of enjoyment, or its strange and inaccessible way in which it organizes this enjoyment (Žižek 1993, 202-3).

Furthermore, terrorism negates dialogue and seeks neither communication nor understanding. It is a barbarian other in the sense that it has no language nor is it able to articulate and enter into a dialectical relation with *us*. In this sense, we can say that terrorism is an epistemological notion used in order to classify or categorize or even designate a group and by doing so hinders our possibilities to understand this other in its complexity and prevents us from "listening to our object" since we allow it neither language nor speech. In other words, the notion of terrorism as ideology when used in academic literature and research about Islamic movements is often a barrier for any real understanding of these movements.

In the last decades the term terrorism has been often coupled with Islam. As Asad shows in his book *On Suicide Bombing*, terrorism is seen by mainstream theorists such as Bernard Lewis and Michael Walzer as the outcome of the "failure of Muslim countries to modernize" (Asad 2007, 17). Furthermore, terrorism is seen as an act that is done against a state – by individuals or groups outside of the state rather than an adjective to a particular form of violence, regardless of the perpetrators, that seeks to instill terror in the minds of the enemy (ibid, 24-29). This was not always the case and I will argue that the use of the term terrorist should refer to its original meaning as a strategy and a practice, rather than an ideology. Gerry Kearns writes that the term terrorist referred to states as well as persons in the early 19th century. He refers to the use of the term to describe the Jacobins of 1793 – it was a term they themselves used to describe their political strategy. Kearns argues that it was the use of dynamite by Russian nihilists to kill Tsar Alexander II in 1881 that brought about the transformation of the term to designate almost exclusively violence used by individuals rather than by states. The Fenian bombing campaigns by the Irish nationals in 1861-6, Kearns continues, "defined for the British a domestic figure of the individual terrorist that almost entirely displaced the earlier notion of state terror." Kearns's argument is that this designation of individuals as terrorists lead to their treatment as what Agamben calls "bare life" (Kearns 2007, 22-3; Agamben 1998).

The coupling of terrorism and Islam has made terrorism the absolute other of another set of empty signifiers: the West, democracy and freedom. The way in which Hezbollah - and

other Islamic militant groups - are represented in much of the academic, media, and political discourse as strictly terrorist reveals the similarities in terms of their treatment - or potential treatment - as bare life and the failure to see these groups as more than blind violent networks. I will argue that the term terrorist should refer not to an ideology but to a strategy of using violence in order to terrorize the other. A terrorist, Asad writes, "is someone who creates a sense of fear and insecurity among a civilian population for political purposes" (Asad 2007, 26). Therefore, when a group is considered terrorist it is inevitable that we read their actions as pertaining to this one strategy of terrorism, and the same should be valid when a state employs similar strategies in order to instill fear.

Hezbollah's "terrorism" is then a political predicate as it can be described using the term in its original meaning as an adjective for an act of showing with a political goal. If we use the term terrorist to designate Hezbollah's military actions against the Israeli army, it is not terrorism as ideology that is meant, but as an instrumental action in war used both by states and by subversive groups (Badiou 2005, 108-115). Terrorism refers to war as it pertains to a conflict over the field of perception (Virilio 1989) and to violence as both a physical and a symbolic act (Zizek 2008b). The latter notion can be understood on the one hand in terms of the economy of violence, where terrorism seeks to maximize the effects of a violent act, and in terms of terrorism as the transference of the location of the act from the ground onto the screen since terrorism is first and foremost an act of showing violence (Dayan 2006).

### **Empowerment and pragmatic politics**

Hezbollah's politics are often described as pragmatic. In fact, the movement's position towards Israel in particular is defined by an ultimate and absolute animosity. While it does not recognize the State of Israel and considers it an illegitimate occupation of Palestinian land, its actual policy towards Israel is marked by an awareness of the material conditions of the conflict and the inevitability of an eventual agreement between the different conflicting forces (Israel, the Palestinians, Syria and Lebanon). That being said, the movement's mission in this context is to provide the best grounds for any negotiation and preserve a balance that guarantees the agreement is not completely in favor of Israel but protects the rights of Palestinians, Syrians, and Lebanese.

This pragmatic approach to politics by Hezbollah also appears in their position towards the West in general. Contrary to what is often said in literature that sees Hezbollah as a 'terrorist organization' or as equivalent to Al Qaida in its desire to destroy the "western way of life," Hezbollah leaders often "express their admiration for certain aspects of Western culture, including US culture" (Harb and Leenders 2005). The movement's recurrent distinction between the people and the governments of countries such as the US and Israel (and the distinction that is often made between Jews and Zionists) reflects its efforts to present a discourse that can be accepted by much larger groups than its Shiite supporters and introduce its discourse into a global movement of dissent. It is in the same framework that we can understand the efforts made by the movement's institutions and research centers to understand its enemies.

Hezbollah has thus invested greatly in the understanding of its enemies. In fact, this is one of the conditions of its success. Whether this is in research centers or in the media,

Hezbollah's efforts to understand and share this understanding of the enemy with its network of supporters is visible in the programs produced and broadcast on Al Manar TV channel (for example, translations and reports about the Israeli media or Israeli politics are very common) and in the research done and published by the movement's research centers and publications. Harb and Leenders write that "in all these endeavours Hizbullah demonstrates a capability to analyse and predict its adversaries' behaviour and intentions that is far superior to that offered by those insisting on the terrorism label" (Harb and Leenders 2005).

Another less counter-productive but still insufficient way to analyze Hezbollah, according to Harb and Leenders, is to treat it as a Lebanese party that provides social and economic services to its constituency thus consolidating their support and extending their influence and appeal among the historically marginalized Shi'ite community in Lebanon. This perspective which they call the "Lebanonization approach" is also limiting, as it correlates Hezbollah's success in Lebanese politics and especially among the Shi'ite community to its role as a provider of services to a poor marginalized group (ibid). While Hezbollah's social service network is a very influential and highly efficient one in the movement's political and popular development, this explanation does not provide any convincing answers and often does not even address deeper questions and phenomena about the regional success of its discourse. Furthermore, this approach does not provide any answers to the party's success among the Shi'ite upper classes nor among those non-Shi'ites who do not profit from Hezbollah's services in Lebanon and abroad. It also disregards the deeper influence of Hezbollah as a movement that provoked a fundamental transformation in the self-perception of Shi'ites in Lebanon by transforming a society that relied on a discourse of self victimization into one that sees itself as the vanguard of resistance and defiance. Hezbollah's social and cultural impact in this sense have transformed the Lebanese Shi'ites from a marginalized group to one that is both active in the political struggle and an economically and culturally influential force in the country as a whole (ibid).

The analysis of Hezbollah as a Lebanese political actor often falls in the impasse of separating the movement's political and social efforts from its military ones. In this sense, Hezbollah has succeeded in constructing a Shi'ite self by articulating various demands into one overarching discourse revolving around the notion of resistance and empowerment. However, it is important to realize the links between the party's discursive strategies which include its political and social articulations and the institutions that make this discourse possible. In this case, the social institutions as well as the media and military infrastructure constitute a set of irreducible elements. The development of Hezbollah's political discourse is a consequence and a cause of its expanding military success and social influence. The articulated identity - Shi'ite in essence but Lebanese, Arab and Muslim as well – combines, depending on the context, a negotiation of religious commitment to the Shi'ite faith with a Lebanese national identity as well as a pan-Arab and pan-Islamic dimension.

Resistance in Hezbollah's discourse is not merely a military endeavor. Rather, following the speeches and sermons delivered by its General Secretary on various occasions (see Chapter 3) and according to the party's media and teachings, it is a complex balance of military, social, cultural, and political strategies that aim at building a "society of resistance." This is the logic that guides Harb and Leenders' criticism of much of the literature about the movement, and gives

meaning to their affirmation that in the case of Hezbollah, it is "virtually impossible to extricate the military from the political or vice versa" (ibid). Accordingly, I argue along with the two authors that it is both misleading and wrong to reduce the support that Hezbollah has gained among the Lebanese Shiite community to the social and economic services provided by the party's network of institutions. Harb and Leenders suggest an analysis of Hezbollah as a "holistic network" whose different aspects (social, political, military and cultural) are all parts of a discourse of resistance. I will therefore suggest looking at Hezbollah's media strategies not as an independent component of the movement's power structure but as part of this holistic discourse.

Perhaps what constitutes the essence of resistance in Hezbollah's discourse is the notion of empowerment in both military and political terms. In military terms, empowerment is the belief in, and demonstration of the power to defeat the superior military force of Israel. Since the 1967 defeat, the belief in the invincibility of the Israeli army had been almost unshaken until Hezbollah demonstrated the opposite in 2000 and then in 2006. Empowerment would be the development of new inventive military tactics and constant readiness to face the enemy.<sup>4</sup> In political terms, empowerment refers to the empowerment of the dispossessed and marginalized groups in Lebanon and the Arab world. Hezbollah succeeded in providing a sense of political potential for its Shiite supporters in Lebanon to become active members in the Lebanese political life by giving them a voice and a powerful representative. The movement also promoted a notion of political empowerment in the rest of the Arab world, especially in Palestine where it claimed that people must take their destiny into their own hands. Empowerment is expressed in the media and discursive strategies of Hezbollah in its efforts to understand its enemy, its inventive military tactics, and the articulation of a narrative of resistance by actively producing new meanings and challenging old ones. Its ability to articulate a people and redefine its boundaries provides the grounds for calling Hezbollah a resistance movement, one that seeks to achieve the most difficult of tasks, namely acquiring a voice and a language for self-representation and definition. It is precisely this voice and language, and the messages it delivers, that this dissertation will shed light on by examining four of Hezbollah's most widely spread media forms and the way they articulate a people named "resistance".

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<sup>4</sup> This refers to a verse from the Quran often used by Hezbollah: "And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and of steeds of war by which you may terrify the enemy of Allah and your enemy and others besides them whom you do not know [but] whom Allah knows" (8:60).