

Introduction

In February 2009, the Hizbullah-affiliated Waad organization issued a new song called “Tammuz” in memory of Imad Mughniyya, a top Hizbullah cadre assassinated on 12 February 2008 in Damascus. The video clip pushed to unprecedented levels a genre that uses certain nationalist symbols that the party’s media policy began to employ intensively following the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon in 2000. Among other scenes, the video showed an old woman sitting calmly and sewing a Lebanese flag as a young boy carried a ball of thread and an old man helped them by holding the slowly assembling flag. This image was preceded and succeeded by images of soldiers and children solemnly walking and raising the Lebanese and Hizbullah flags.

In the mid-1980s, when Hizbullah did not even have a flag and had a much less developed organizational structure, *al-‘Ahd*, the underground weekly newspaper of this newly forming organization, occasionally published pictures of the aftermath of battles, with resistance fighters posing on conquered territory. The only flag visible in these scenes was that of the Iranian “Islamic revolution.”¹ These visions of the beginnings of Hizbullah have had a tremendous influence on different perceptions of the party as well as on the party’s image of itself. The Lebanese civil wars that took place from 1975 to 1990 had accustomed readers to the notion that new groups emerged only when they had a foreign “sponsor.” The flag, pictures of Iranian Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini, and various Iranian Islamic revolutionary slogans, including Khomeini’s key call to liberate Jerusalem, testified to a new political entity on the Lebanese arena, but fixed, so to speak, the terms of speeches that helped frame that organization.

The decade that followed the end of the civil wars in Lebanon witnessed a process of official political reconciliation between the different protagonists. This period, dubbed the “reconstruction era,”² solidified

¹ See for example the front page of *al-‘Ahd* 131 (27/12/1986).

² This was owing to the politics of then prime minister Rafic Hariri and his project to rebuild the main infrastructural elements of the country as well as the downtown area of Beirut.

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the legitimacy of the resistance as a national or simply political project sanctified by the state of Lebanon, and enabled Hizbullah to become a complex web of institutions and organizations. Apart from the main and essential military section named the “Islamic resistance,” and along with having a parliamentary coalition, and since 2005 being part of the cabinet, Hizbullah performed a number of functions more akin to mainstream party work, developing an impressive array of institutions that provide all types of social benefits. This is paralleled by media production, a prolific publishing industry, and the organization of countless events, commemorations, seminars, conferences, public speeches, and rallies of all sorts.

Today, most of the revolutionary slogans are still present alongside newer ones. Hizbullah’s current secretary general, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, in a 2008 speech to that effect, promised that today’s generation would see the liberation of Jerusalem.³ Although he did not mention by whom or how Jerusalem would be liberated, Khomeini’s slogan has been repeated countless times over the years in all types of rallies and ceremonies. For example, as with other commemorations throughout the year, Jerusalem Day is celebrated every year at the end of the month of Ramaḍān, with banners invading the streets of the southern suburbs of Beirut and the main highways to the south of Lebanon or the Bekaa, and rallies taking place during that day in all those regions, during which Nasrallah most importantly, but other officials as well, give speeches. Looking back at this periodic display of symbols and ideas, Hizbullah has very much stuck to these early slogans, not abandoning a single one of them. Indeed, it may be said that Hizbullah deliberately had not departed from any that had circulated since the founding of the organization. Yet, something had changed. What was the order of that change? Where was it located?

A concern over the allegiance or affiliation of Hizbullah and this fear of its intentions both within and outside of Lebanon informed the production of a prolific literature set to “frame” Hizbullah. This was among the prevailing questions one could ask: Is Hizbullah a Lebanese political organization? Or at least, does it have a Lebanese agenda? Hizbullah’s display of symbolic production has been interpreted in various ways by political actors, media, and academics at large. It has informed the creation of categories of analysis in order to classify the phenomenon of Hizbullah. As part of a market of symbols and ideas, these attempts were closely interlinked with Hizbullah’s efforts as an organization to export specific images of itself to the world at large.

³ Hassan Nasrallah, speech on Jerusalem Day, 26/9/2008.

Tracking the agenda of Hizbullah, and the various meanings available to the organization, caused the views of scholars to diverge in several directions. Some tended to think of Hizbullah as having changed its political agenda, whether gradually or not, and undergoing what has been dubbed a “Lebanonization” process: taking part in the legislative process, expanding relations with other political parties, and, lately, holding ministerial portfolios. These scholars thought of the party as becoming “Lebanese” in the sense of conforming to the “rules of the game” of the different political players: The “revolutionary” Hizbullah of the 1980s was associated with a pan-Islamic political drive, oblivious of the presence of local issues, whereas the “pragmatic” or “realist” Hizbullah became a symbol of national coexistence. This shift has been widely debated, not just by Western or Lebanese scholars, but also by intellectuals close to the party, as well as by party members.⁴

A second trend of thinking saw Hizbullah as adopting various strategies in order to push forth the same agenda it had had since its early inception. Its proponents write about the Iranian link or alliance as proof that Hizbullah will always have an “external” agenda. They claim that the party diligently follows its plan to install an Islamic republic in Lebanon, as its main writings and declarations have claimed since its founding, or at least that it has, at best, a remote interest in state building, mainly using the existing confessional system in order to expand its “state within a state.”⁵ So the absence of change in slogans here is taken as proof that Hizbullah owes no allegiance to the politically and morally sanctioning entity called Lebanon, which dictates the way “things should be said.”⁶

Far from being clearly distinct, however, these two ways of thinking the politics of Hizbullah actually meet in many ways. Arguing that Hizbullah as an organization uses the confessional system either “pragmatically” or “wholeheartedly” presupposes in both cases a clear analytical distinction between the beliefs, discourse and practices of the party and a “cultural sphere” that has some kind of symbolic importance that can be denominated as the confessional system, the Lebanese state, or the nation. It assumes that Hizbullah has a clear-cut, self-conscious set of interests and chooses to engage in this or that political practice. Above all

⁴ In the larger academic sphere see for example Joseph Alagha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology: Religious Ideology, Political Ideology and Political Program* (Leiden: ISIM/Amsterdam University Press, 2006); Masood Asadollahi, *al-Islāmiyyūn fī mujtamā' ta'addudī* (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, 2004), and Fayyad's papers (examined in chapter 4).

⁵ See for example Walid Sharara, *Dawlat Hizbullah: Lubnān mujtamā'an Islāmīyyan* (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 1998).

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Ce que parler veut dire: l'économie des échanges linguistiques* (Paris: Fayard, 1982).

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it assumes that, for example, the notions that make up understandings of the Lebanese confessional system are not actually altered by the way Hizbullah conceptualizes itself, a point on which this study differs.

A Note on the Literature

This book attaches special importance to the writings on Hizbullah not only to acknowledge what has been covered but also because it departs significantly from what has been written so far. Scholarship on Hizbullah, especially Western, has responded to the demands of its policy makers. This is not a fully exhaustive account of the literature on Hizbullah, but it focuses on particular conceptual highlights that inform the overall literature, thus I apologize in advance for those who do not find their works featured here.

Thus, Hizbullah started as a problem that only “political scientists” were interested in, mostly those focused on “security questions,” and “security” here refers to Western security. This drove scholars to engage in a kind of “intelligence-gathering” work, and to focus on the hypothetical structure of the organization, as well as finding out the identities of the people who made up the organization. The basic question underlying this approach was: Who was killing Western troops (referring to the blowing up of the American Marines’ barracks in October 1983)? Who was taking Americans (and other foreigners) hostage? And who was conducting suicide operations against Israeli troops? Were all these operations by the same organization? Knowing more about the group(s) meant simply gathering “intelligence.” As an illustration, during the 1980s one concern (among others) was whether Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah, a leading Shi’i cleric who supported the resistance against the Israelis through his speeches and constant presence at martyrs’ commemorations, was in fact part of the organization. However, in this process, the writings of Martin Kramer⁷, and later on Magnus Ranstorp, who was mostly concerned with such questions of security, relied heavily on information produced by Israeli intelligence services.⁸

⁷ See Martin Kramer, “Hezbollah: The Calculus of Jihad,” in *Fundamentalisms of the State: Remaking Politics, Economies and Militance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Martin Kramer, “Redeeming Jerusalem: The Pan-Islamic Premise of Hizballah,” in *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990); Martin Kramer, “The Moral Logic of Hizbullah,” in *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Martin Kramer, “The Oracle of Hezbollah, Sayyid Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah,” in *Spokesmen for the Despised: Fundamentalist Leaders of the Middle East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

⁸ Magnus Ranstorp, *Hizb’Allah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997); Magnus Ranstorp, “Hizbollah’s Command

Up until 1997, when Hala Jaber published her book *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance*, the most important subject was still the taking of Western hostages and the early part of Hizbullah's (or affiliated groups') history. Although by that time, Hizbullah-affiliated intellectuals had already published several biographies of the movement in Arabic, none would be consulted by English-speaking scholars.⁹ Jaber's journalistic account included unprecedented testimonies shedding light on the early phase of hostage-taking and related activities of the 1980s from the viewpoint of the party members. In this justificatory vein, two other papers written in 1998 and 1999 by Augustus Richard Norton aimed at showing the pragmatism of Hizbullah to a Western audience.¹⁰ But the prevailing climate of inquiry at the time was still around security questions: Ranstorp published his first study on Hizbullah as part of general studies on "Terrorism."¹¹ Ranstorp also argued that the "Lebanonization process" was part of an overall strategy followed by Hizbullah to implement long-term plans for controlling the state. This went hand in hand with Waddah Sharara's long and intricate study that the gradual Islamization and clericalization of Lebanese Shi'i community was the result of an "Iranization" process of which Hizbullah was the proxy.¹²

It was not until 2002, almost twenty years after the appearance of Hizbullah, that a book would attempt to address the issue of ideology more directly: Amal Saad-Ghorayeb's *Hizbullah: Politics and Religion*. Saad-Ghorayeb's book was a full-blown theoretical discussion of the ideology of the party based on interviews with senior party officials: Mohammad Fneish, Mohammad Raad, Nawaf Moussawi¹³. Thus far, Saad-Ghorayeb's book has been a notable exception, dealing with the phenomenon of Hizbullah in the most direct way – that is, eschewing the moral argument of whether the movement is "revolutionary" or "pragmatic," "Lebanese" or "Iranian." The merit (and the limitations) of Saad-Ghorayeb was to take at face value the various ideas party members

Leadership: Its Structure, Decision-making and Relationship with Iranian Clergy and Institution," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 6:3 (1994); Magnus Ranstorp, "Terrorism in the Name of Religion," *Journal of International Affairs* 50:1 (1996); Magnus Ranstorp, "The Strategy and Tactics of Hizbullah's Current 'Lebanonization Process'," *Mediterranean Politics* 3:1 (1998).

⁹ See Hassan Fadlallah's works, for example *al-Khayar al-akhar* (Beirut: Dar al-Hadi, 1994).

¹⁰ Augustus Richard Norton, "Hizbullah of Lebanon: Extremist Ideals vs. Mundane Politics" (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1999); Augustus Richard Norton, "Hizbullah: From Radicalism to Pragmatism," *Middle East Policy* 5 (1998).

¹¹ Ranstorp, *Hizb'Allah in Lebanon*.

¹² Sharara, *Dawlat Hizbullah*.

¹³ Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbullah: Politics and Religion* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

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agreed to discuss with her, thanks to her privileged access to senior members of the organization.

To be fair, these earlier works were mostly concerned with “classical political science” questions, which involved attempts to capture a “formal” ideology of the party or its worldview, its political strategies and choices, and its various military practices and how they evolved over time. Studying change in this case meant looking at overarching ideological shifts, choices and strategies, political priorities that depended on the particular context that the organization faced. The quintessence of such approaches is Alagha’s *Shifts in Hizbullah’s Ideology*, which groups together concerns with political strategy and ideological visions, and Nizar Hamzeh’s *In the Path of Hizbullah*, which aimed at breaking new ground in terms of information on the organization of Hizbullah, published in 2006 and 2004 respectively.¹⁴ Whereas Hamzeh argued that Hizbullah implemented a “gradualist pragmatist” politics that involved engaging with the Lebanese political system, Alagha was more keen on arguing (albeit confusingly) that Hizbullah has drastically changed from a pre-1992 revolutionary politics to a coexistence-motivated “Lebanese” agenda. Even though there was a slight difference between the two arguments, it did not stop some scholars arguing about Hizbullah’s political strategy using both works.

This strategy of writing about the party remains prevalent. Most recent books published about Hizbullah, such as Lina Khatib, Dina Matar and Atef Alshaer’s study of the “politics and communication” of the party, fall into the same methodological trap, which assumes a particular understanding of “political strategy” or ideology, doctrines, etc. from which it has been working meticulously since its inception, even if these understandings are never fully explained and illustrated.¹⁵ This study aims to shed light on this precise question: How to understand the ideological in Hizbullah.

There are several interlinked problems with traditional political science approaches. The first is the implicit theorization of the existence of a “Hizbullah mind.” This tends to essentialize what is being studied, by assuming that there is something (a substance in philosophical terms, a truth, etc.) hidden inside the actor or the organization, something more or less static that possibly escapes social and historical context. A prominent example of that is Alagha’s thesis of an alleged overall shift

¹⁴ Alagha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah’s Ideology*; Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004). Hamzeh had previously written an article joining Norton’s concern with the contrast between the ideal and pragmatic politics of Hizbullah. See Nizar Hamzeh, “Lebanon’s Hizbullah: From Islamic Revolution to Parliamentary Accommodation,” *Third World Quarterly* 21:5 (1997).

¹⁵ See Lina Khatib, “Hizbullah’s Political Strategy,” in Lina Khatib, Dina Matar and Atef Alshaer, *The Hizbullah Phenomenon: Politics and Communication* (London and New York: Hurst & Co. and Oxford University Press, 2014).

in Hizbullah's ideology, as if a coherent one had existed in the first place.¹⁶ But a completely different one is Sharara's insistence that Hizbullah is an Iranian satellite on Lebanese soil.¹⁷

Subtler but still similar in effect is the reification of certain concepts which are taken out of their actual everyday and polyvalent uses: examples are infamously used terms such as *jihād* and less well-known ones such as *wilāyat al-faqīh*. These terms seem to have a built-in epistemological life of their own, somehow outside not just the variations given to them by the different ideologues who articulate them, but also the practices of the organization. This is linked to a conceptualization of culture as made up of static symbols somehow floating above social actors. Kramer's formulation is quite revealing in this regard when he states that "the calculus of politics is not driven by a universal logic."¹⁸ It is conditioned by cultural values. Hizbullah did not simply seek power; it sought power in order to implement Islamic law." But what is a universal logic of politics? Aren't representations of politics always culturally laden in the sense of being determined by meaning-making practices? And what are these Islamic laws that seem to stick out from any other kind of rules and regulations that pervade the different forms of human action? It seems that Kramer assumes that there is a universal mode of conduct that is superior in importance to something called a "cultural" or "Islamic" mode. Kramer continues: "submission to Islamic law freed Hizbullah from non-Islamic moral constraints. Hizbullah felt no need to justify its acts by other codes. Its struggle was a jihad, a form of sacred warfare regulated solely by Islamic law." Here again, there is something very frustrating about these statements: Is warfare labeled sacred just because it is regulated by Islamic law? How are these different from other laws? And when people go to war or engage in militant activities, can their actions be explained by having internalized uniformly this monolithic package of rules and regulations?

In reality, the "*jihād* concept" – just like any other notion or term – cannot be extracted from the many different interpretations given by the various social actors engaged in that intellectual production. More importantly, the struggle to define this term is at the heart of the political process. What Kramer says about *jihād* will find an echo in Hizbullah's own theoretical formulations. In sum, looking for formal definitions of

¹⁶ In 2011 Alagha replaced his concept of ideological shift with identity construction, although still referring to the same dynamic. See Joseph Alagha, *Hizbullah's Identity Construction* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011).

¹⁷ Most of Sharara's work is plagued by this implicit idea. See Sharara, *Dawlat Hizbullah*. Despite all the complexity of the media analysis deployed by Khatib, Matar, and Alshaer, the conclusion there seems to be similar.

¹⁸ Kramer, "Hezbollah."

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what *jihād* stands for and how it is related to an epistemological body of rules and regulations does explain what Hizbullah officials, clerics, and intellectuals want to show to the world, but does not describe the actual social process taking place.¹⁹

This leads us to the second problem: the adoption of what in Bourdieu's terms can be called a "phenomenological approach."²⁰ This consists of collecting what the party verbalizes as its perception of reality and elevating it to a description of actual political reality; the latter is then regarded as a self-explanatory "understanding" of Hizbullah. This intellectual practice, symptomatic of political science approaches to culture, takes what is being said at face value and treats it as a concrete analytical reality stripped of the social context in which these meanings are produced.²¹ This is less easily escapable than it would appear, as it involves a drastic reconsideration of what is meant by "ideology," as argued in this thesis. For example, according to Saad-Ghorayeb, the Huntingtonian "clash of civilizations" thesis holds because Hizbullah party members she interviewed do say that the party is engaged in a "civilizational struggle with the West."²² However, this is still taking for granted what the Hizbullah actor says without grounding it in its social context, or at least in the reason that drives him to say this. This makes it seem as if everything a Hizbullah-affiliated intellectual says is structured, coherent, and fits into the overall puzzle that constitutes its ideology or worldview.

The Politics of Remembering and Readdressing the Notion of Ideology

The present inquiry starts from the simple intuition that Hizbullah's own representations of politics inevitably changed prevailing representations of Lebanese politics, and have been significantly changed by them. In "political science" jargon, the term that this study evokes is the one of "interest." I adopt a constructivist approach that rejects the idea that representations are just "epiphenomenal" and have no power on more material variables.²³ A constructivist approach understands that concepts

¹⁹ Hamzeh also attempts to do that in his chapter on "Islamic Juristical Ideology." See Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah*, 36–39.

²⁰ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique, précédé de trois études d'ethnologie Kabyle* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972).

²¹ As argued in Lisa Wedeen, "Conceptualizing Culture: Possibilities for Political Science," *American Political Science Review* 96:4 (2002).

²² Although she rejects the idea that this civilizational "struggle" can be called a "clash." See Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbullah: Politics and Religion*, 88–89.

²³ For a formulation of this methodological trend in international relations, see M. Finnemore and K. Sikkink, "Taking Stock: The Constructivist Research

and notions are constantly renegotiated and change in tandem with social reality. Even if Hizbullah-related actors move pragmatically, make “rational” decisions, may have an elaborate political plan, and show, voice, and produce clear intent through their various political practices, these intents are “framed” through prevailing signs and symbols, which in turn shape and thus inform political action. These signs and symbols have a polyvalent use, are changing, and replete with meanings constantly making up different understandings of Lebanese imaginaries, perceptions of population, and representations of the state, writing of histories, and so on, that in turn inform – and thus have a direct bearing on – political and social action. But taking ideas seriously does not discount how embedded they are in material variables, or how they actually produce action on the ground and are in turn produced by it. The point is to understand the dialectical process that inextricably links ideas and materiality.

Thus, I found that scholarly, media, and political interest in a specific “nationality” of Hizbullah or the nature of its affiliation are interesting points of departure to observe a phenomenon that links ideas to materiality or political action on the ground. Looking for an answer to the affiliation of the party led me to delve deeper into the symbolic production of its affiliated intellectuals, party members, journalists, scholars, and other related producers of texts. But as I searched for concrete outspoken theoretical formulations that endorsed visions of the nation or condemned it in other ways, I noticed that theoretical constructions were ceding the space to another process which involved specific writings on history or what I grouped under the general practice of “claiming the past.”

How do Hizbullah-affiliated intellectuals produce texts, and thus meaning, shaped by prevailing political practices? These processes of identification by Hizbullah involve a constant rewriting of the past that directly affects the various political actions of the party. The only way Hizbullah, and for that matter most political organizations in general, can set different political objectives is through a constant reappraisal of the past. It is only through this process that Hizbullah writes the theoretical background, the political agenda, and the visions of the party. But these “visions” or “agendas” are never complete at different points in time. Every attempt at fixing them will involve delving into the past through some archiving practice.

This activity of reclaiming the past can only take place through a specific “textual practice,” a particular use of available texts and the

Program in International Relations and Comparative Politics,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 4:1 (2001).

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creation of new ones written either by Hizbullah-affiliated intellectuals or by others. The past is not comprehended or represented just as a set of historical narratives, but also as a succession of texts used, dropped, and reappropriated in different ways. This takes place through the ways Hizbullah-affiliated intellectuals decide to engage in a process of archiving, of marking down, and constantly reusing that symbolic material in order to make sense of reality.

Because of this practice, I argue that the past is translated into successive ideological templates that are used and reused to project a unified doctrine. Instead of having a coherent overarching ideology, the reality of time and that of the interpretability of texts forces writers and speakers affiliated to Hizbullah to constantly engage in an archival process that inscribes the past in the form of text in order to make sense of their present. In other terms, this “presence” of ideological material in the media and other discursive repositories, or projection of an overall ideology, is always contested in so far as the party always needs to jump back in the past, either through commemorations (recalling martyrs or a more general human legacy) or through confronting historical narratives of its political environment, or still, reclaiming the history of its territory, in order to make sense of its political presence or vision.

This is why the production of meaning happens with the backdrop of other symbolic productions that are more or less established or legitimized. Politics in this sense represents the study of the prevailing form of certain understandings, categorizations, and writings that contribute to the strengthening or weakening of a movement by legitimizing or putting it on the wrong side of “logic” or sense. The struggle to fix meaning and to project a coherent “identity” or “ideology” is a political process, as it involves being pitted against certain sanctioning and legitimizing entities such as the state and the myriad institutions related to it. For example, it is not just the fight against the appellation of “terrorist” with which Hizbullah has struggled fiercely almost since its emergence as an organization,²⁴ but all the other terms of speech – such as modernity, secularism, citizenship, pluralism, liberalism, and so on – all the other signifiers that intellectuals affiliated with Hizbullah had to deal with at one point or another that occur in media, academic settings, or any other information-producing site. In effect, as Hizbullah-affiliated intellectuals elaborate different ideological constructions they are also constrained by cultural imperatives that cannot be “consciously” put into question.

²⁴ See Mona Harb and Reynoud Leenders, “Know thy Enemy: Hizbullah, ‘Terrorism’ and the Politics of Perception,” *Third World Quarterly* 26:1 (2005).