

## MOBILISATION IN *HEZBOLLAH'S* MILITARY ARM MEDIA DISCOURSE: CREATING AND MAINTAINING A PUBLIC SPHERE IN LEBANON

Hatem EL ZEIN, Ali ABUSALEM  
Central Queensland University, Australia

**Abstract:** Since its inception in 1982, *Hezbollah's* military arm, "*The Islamic Resistance*", occupied a public sphere in the Lebanese landscape. As a result of its military successes and its flow of media discourse, a virtual "*Community of Resistance*" has emerged after May 2000 to reflect the existed public sphere and maintain it. This paper examines the notion of mobilisation in "*The Islamic Resistance's*" media discourse after May 2000. It bridges the gaps in the existed studies in this field, because it seems there is no study has shown the linkage between mobilisation and *Hezbollah's* results in the last three Parliamentary elections in Lebanon.

**Keywords:** election; *Hezbollah*; public sphere; "*The Islamic Resistance*".

### 1. Introduction

The engagement of organisations that have military arms in political systems reflects the investment of this power in the democratic game. In the Middle East, "*The Islamic Resistance Movement*" (*Hamas*) in West Bank and Gaza Strip and *Hezbollah* in Lebanon, who both have a military arm, have chosen the ballot box to reach their representatives to the parliament. However, *Hezbollah* is considered an early organisation that engaged in the Lebanese parliamentary election and later it has its representative ministers in the cabinet.

This paper aims to show the impact of the discourse of *Hezbollah's* military arm, "*The Islamic Resistance*", on the popularity of the whole party in Lebanon from political perspective. Based on the last three parliamentary elections in Lebanon, this paper examines if *Hezbollah* has maintained what so called "*The Community of Resistance*."

### 2. Literature Review

Studies about *Hezbollah* and its military arm, "*The Islamic Resistance*", in Lebanon have pointed out that this organisation galvanises support of many Lebanese, particularly the Muslim Shiites (e.g. Matar and Dakhlallah 2006; El Houry 2012).

The history of *Hezbollah* is linked to different factors. However, the basic factors that led to the establishment of this organisation in early 1980s are: the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the Israeli invasion to Lebanon in 1982 and then socio-political status quo in Lebanon, including the civil war (Saad-Ghorayeb 2002). However, the end of civil war by the end of 1989 was turning point in the political life of *Hezbollah*, because it allowed this organisation to engage in the resumed parliamentary election (Hamzeh 1993). Since 1992, *Hezbollah* is participating in the election under the "*Faithfulness to the Resistance Bloc*" (Kasser 2011).

However, the popularity of this organisation in its Lebanese stronghold districts has never examined. In a similar vein, it seems that the studies have never pointed out to impact of *Hezbollah's* military arm media discourse on the public sphere of the politburo of this organisation.

This dearth in studies is attributed partially to the notion that the studies did not distinguish between the media discourses of *Hezbollah's* and its military arm. In reviewing the literature about this organisation, El Zein (2014) aimed to bridge this gap by distinguishing between *Hezbollah's* media discourse and its military arm media discourse, to conclude that "*The Islamic Resistance's*" media discourse includes the resistant speeches of its leader who is *Hezbollah's* Secretary-General and the media outputs of "*The Military Media Unit*."

Although there are number of objectives whether of *Hezbollah* or its military arm in the context of propaganda (Harb 2011; El Hourri 2012), this paper focuses on the notion of mobilisation, aiming to answer the following question: Does *Hezbollah's* military arm discourse have an impact on *Hezbollah's* politburo?

### 3. Discourse and Public Sphere

Although there are many definitions of discourse, the common denotation of this term is the use of language in a certain domain, such as media discourse (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). As result, the study of discourse has been developed to be a discipline utilised by researchers to analyse the language, particularly in humanities and social sciences (Dijk 1985, 2007).

However, the existence and maintenance of public sphere need discourse (Habermas 1962). In this regard, discourse is linked to democracy and its main assumption that citizens can create their own communicative forum (Habermas 1962, 1979).

In his analysis to the actors who occupy the public sphere, Habermas (1996) distinguishes between actors who "emerge from the public and take part in the reproduction of the public sphere itself from actors who occupy an already constituted public domain in order to use it" (364). As result, a political organisation may occupy an existed public sphere. This notion is crucial to understand how *Hezbollah* benefits from the discourse of its military arm and occupies its public sphere.

### 4. Data Collection and Limitation

This paper refers to the results of the last three Lebanese parliamentary elections in 2000, 2005 and 2009. These results obtained from Beirut Office of Statistics.

In addition, this paper refers to a number of references written in Arabic. Although the author of the paper paid attention to translate precisely, the meaning may not coincide completely with the intentions of their authors.

### 5. Data Analysis

Before proceeding in analysing the data and illuminating to what so called "*The Community of Resistance*" based on the results of the last three Lebanese parliamentary elections, this paper identifies the major objectives of *Hezbollah's* military arm, "*The Islamic Resistance*", pointing to the notion of mobilisation.

#### 5.1. The Major Objectives of "*The Islamic Resistance's*" Media Discourse

The Qassem (2008) delineates that "*The Islamic Resistance*" has achieved through the liberation of occupied Lebanese territories in May 2000 and defeating Israel in a number of objectives. Qassem (2008, 15-6) points to these objectives,

"Firstly, it has shown the hidden power of our '*Ummah*' to refuse the Occupation. Secondly, it has returned the spirit to our region to face the frustration and lack of confidence to change. Thirdly, it has revived the Palestinian resistance in the dignified and brave Palestinian people. Fourthly, it has proved the strength of steadfastness against the new Middle East project. Fifthly, it has changed Lebanon from a weak into a steadfastness state, and we need to continue to turn it into a strong state if it is Allah's will."

These objectives are significant, because it contextualises this paper and provides an idea about the objectives in "*The Islamic Resistance's*" media discourse. In this regard, the notion of mobilisation is stated clearly in Qassem's words.

### 5.1.1. Mobilisation

In her study about propaganda in *Hezbollah*, particularly its military arm, from ethnographic perspective, Harb (2011) pays little attention to the notion of mobilisation. However, the same author points out to the role of "*The Military Media Unit*" of "*The Islamic Resistance*" which cooperates with *Al-Manar* television to demoralise the spirit of Israel and its army. This provides a hint about mobilisation in "*The Islamic Resistance's*" media discourse, because the main aim of *Hezbollah* and its military arm after Israel's withdrawal from South Lebanon in May 2000 is to entrench the concept of Resistance and its continuity as a Lebanese necessity to liberate the occupied territories and defend the country (Qassem 2008).

As "*The Islamic Resistance's*" media discourse is constituted by the resistant speeches, of its leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrullah, who is *Hezbollah's* Secretary-General, and the outputs of "*The Military Media Unit*" (El Zein 2014), it is important to revisit the outputs of this identified discourse to sketch the notion of mobilisation.

Nasrullah addresses the public in different occasions, including the related occasions to "*The Islamic Resistance*" and its days (Majid, 2007). In these occasions of his military arm, Nasrullah mobilises the public, particularly the followers and supporters of his organisation (Zaiton 2007; Issa 2012). During the July War of 2006, as can be observed in "*The Islamic Resistance's*" website ([www.moqawama.org](http://www.moqawama.org)), Nasrullah addressed the public periodically via speeches through *Al-Manar* and interviews with other media outlets, such as *Assafir* newspaper and *Al-Jazeera*. As a result of his speeches, it seems that Nasrullah maintains the public sphere created by his military arm, because Nasrullah continues buoying up the morale of the followers and supporters after the July War of 2006 (Issa 2012).

Regarding the outputs of "*The Military Media Unit*", the notion of mobilisation in the military operations' videos is embedded in the images of attacking and defeating the Israeli army (Harb 2011; El Houri 2012).

In this vein and in observing a sample of fighters' testaments videos, it seems that there is an indirect enticement by the fighters to the people who hold the same religious belief - Muslim Shiites - to join the line of Resistance against Israel (*Al-Manar* 2013). Similarly, the organisation mobilises the supporters, particularly the Arab nationalists, through raising the Palestinian flag, such as observed in the video song "*The Land Narrates its Imad*" produced by "*The Military Media Unit*" to commemorate the death of "*The Islamic Resistance's*" leader Imad Mughniyeh (*Al-Manar* 2011).

In summary, one of "*The Islamic Resistance's*" media discourse aims is to mobilise the followers in Lebanon and the supporters in the Arab and Muslim Worlds against

Israel. Under the umbrella of mobilisation, the next section aims to shed light on "*The Community of Resistance*."

### 5.1.2. "*The Community of Resistance*"

Through its discourse, it seems that "*The Islamic Resistance*" has created what so called "*The Community of Resistance*", or by other words, a public sphere. This name of this virtual community is extracted from a book written by the Deputy Secretary-General of *Hezbollah* (Qassem 2008). To perpetuate its significance and continuity in the absence of outputs of "*The Military Media Unit*", Nasrullah, as noted earlier, injects periodically the created public sphere through delivering speeches to mobilise the followers and the supporters.

Although this public sphere extends Lebanon, because there are Arab and Muslim supporters to the Resistance and its actions against Israel, the main public sphere for "*The Islamic Resistance*" is the Lebanese theatre.

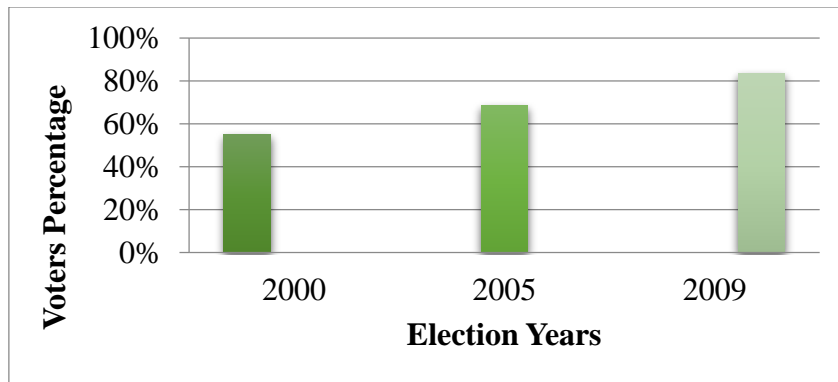
To secure the created public sphere and continuity of the Resistance, *Hezbollah* participated in the Lebanese parliamentary election since 1992 under the name the "*Faithfulness to the Resistance Bloc*" which includes a number of MPs their main aim is to protect "*The Islamic Resistance*" (Atrissi 2012). This alludes to that the elected members in the bloc reflect the idea that some Lebanese accepts "*The Islamic Resistance*" (ibid).

*Hezbollah* invests the created public sphere by the Resistance to participate in the Lebanese political system. This public sphere was created as a result of the absence of the Lebanese state due to the civil war and due to the multi-confessional and political status quo in Lebanon which translated into pluralistic public spheres (Alagha 2011).

Although *Hezbollah* provides social services can be invested to emphasise its political power (Hamzeh 1993, 2004), the party occupies the public sphere created by its military arm and utilised the continuous flow of discourse, which maintained by its leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrullah. For this leader, any power attacks "*The Islamic Resistance*" will be fought, because it will be labelled an Israeli arm (Atrissi 2012). Thus, the result of the July War of 2006, which was accompanied by Lebanese political division, obliged *Hezbollah* to secure strictly the created public sphere (Alagha 2011).

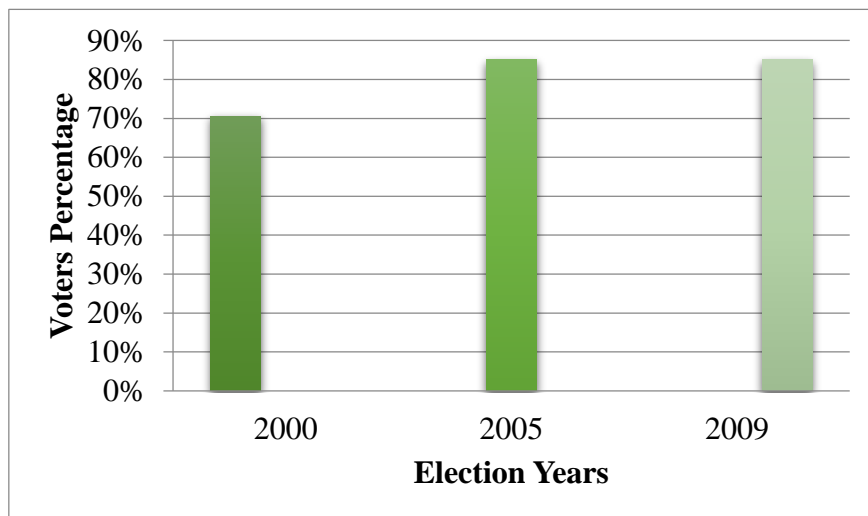
The nexus between mobilisation and the Lebanese parliamentary election can be observed through the voting percentages to the "*Faithfulness to the Resistance Bloc*." In this vein, Atrissi (2012) points out that the parliamentary election in some Lebanese districts, which the majority of its residents are Muslim Shiites, is considered a referendum on the significance of securing "*The Islamic Resistance*."

These Lebanese districts are South Lebanon (including Nabatieh) and Northern Bekaa. In reviewing the last three elections in 2000, 2005 and 2009, it seems that the political power of the party, which is generated from the power of its military arm, is in a steady progress. Drawing on reviewing the percentage of votes in these two districts to the "*Faithfulness to the Resistance Bloc*" in three parliamentary elections, it seems that the discourse to protect the Resistance is achieving its aims. Figure 1 shows the percentage of the obtained votes by *Hezbollah's* candidates in the "*Faithfulness to the Resistance Bloc*" in the last three elections in Northern Bekaa.



**Figure 1.** The Percentage of votes to *Hezbollah's* candidates in the "*Faithfulness to the Resistance Bloc*" in Northern Bekaa district (Source: Beirut Office of Statistics)

Similarly, *Hezbollah's* candidates in the "*Faithfulness to the Resistance Bloc*" in South Lebanon district, which was occupied by Israel in 1982 before it withdrew May 2000, obtained the highest votes in the parliamentary election, allying with another Shiite party "*Amal Movement*." Figure 2 shows the percentage of the obtained votes by *Hezbollah's* candidates in the "*Faithfulness to the Resistance Bloc*" in the last three elections in South Lebanon.



**Figure 2.** The Percentage of votes to *Hezbollah's* candidates in the "*Faithfulness to the Resistance Bloc*" in South Lebanon district including Nabatieh (Source: Beirut Office of Statistics)

These figures after May 2000 and after the July War of 2006 reveal the solidarity of "*The Islamic Resistance's*" followers and supporters. In addition, they reflect a certain census on the necessity of this military arm to some Lebanese. However, this consensus is among the Muslim Shiites.

## 6. Findings

The data delineates that *Hezbollah's* military arm, "*The Islamic Resistance*", mobilises in its media discourse its followers through showing the power of "*The Islamic Resistance*" and the heroism of its fighters, as can be observed in the military operations' videos, and embedding its outputs with religious implications and parables as can be noted in the content of the fighters' testaments. In this regard, it seems that this organisation intermingles between the success of the military and cultural objectives. Thus, the mobilisation of in "*The Islamic Resistance's*" media discourse has cultural implications. In their stating this notion under the clashes between Islam and the West, Khoury and Da'na (2009) consider *Hezbollah's* military arm success in its war against Israel a "failure of cultural imperialism [which] signifies a serious challenge to Western hegemony, which depended on the hegemony of its world views, the inherent assumption of the superiority of Western cultural forms, and the uncritical acceptance of its images of the self and the other" (146).

According to the results of the last three Lebanese parliamentary elections, this notion of mobilisation has a religious feature, particularly within the vast majority of Lebanese Muslim Shiites who voted to the *Hezbollah's* candidates to the parliament.

In her analysis of the political organisations, which have military arms, Berti (2013) argues that they gain domestic support, because they are "providing social services and other political and social goods, thus creating a network of supporters - clients whose political backing is not linked to their approval of the group's military activities" (6). Although this claim seems to be logical, it cannot be generalise on *Hezbollah* for three reasons. The multi-confessional structure in Lebanon, the strong electoral power of *Hezbollah* and thirdly the religious implications in "*The Islamic Resistance's*" discourse which entice the Muslim Shiites to back its military action.

*Hezbollah* benefitted from "*The Islamic Resistance's*" media discourse to maximize its domestic popularity. In this vein, the result of the last three Lebanese parliamentary election reveals that *Hezbollah* utilises the popularity of its military arm to entice the voters. This can be noticed by the name of *Hezbollah's* parliamentary bloc "*Faithfulness to the Resistance*." This name and the results of these elections suggest that *Hezbollah* has maintained and secured the existence of the public sphere created by its military arm.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has pointed to the notion of mobilisation in "*The Islamic Resistance's*" media discourse which is translated into creating what so called "*The Community of Resistance*." In this regard, the paper identified the media discourse of *Hezbollah's* military arm and pointed to the gaps in literature about the notion of mobilisation in this discourse.

The paper also pointed to the public sphere created by *Hezbollah's* military arm and how it is maintained through discourse, particularly the periodical speeches of its leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrullah. In this vein, this paper alluded to that the notion of mobilisation in "*The Islamic Resistance's*" media discourse holds religious and cultural power to entice Lebanese Muslim Shiites and face Israel and its allies.

The paper found that *Hezbollah* has occupied the public sphere created by its military arm. Thus, *Hezbollah* has invested the existed public sphere through



participating in the Lebanese Parliamentary election to secure its military arm. Thus, it reviewed the result of the election to show that the created public sphere is strong as a result of the continuous flow of "The Islamic Resistance's" media discourse.

## References

1. Alagha, J. E. 2011. *Hizbullah's Identity Construction*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
2. Al-Manar. 2010. The Land Narrates its Imad (in Arabic) [Video File]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nIARJgREF8I>
3. — — —. 2013. The Testaments of 'The True Pledge's' Martyrs (in Arabic) [Video File]. Retrieved from [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2V4nDh10\\_N8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2V4nDh10_N8)
4. Atrissi, T. 2012. "The Parliamentary Election: The Unity of the Sect and Protecting the Resistance" (in Arabic). In *The Shiites in Lebanon: From Dismissal to Active Involvement*, a Group of Authors, 313-329. Beirut: The Sapiential Knowledge Institute for Religious and Philosophical Studies.
5. Berti, B. 2013. *Armed Political Organizations: From Conflict to Integration*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.
6. Dijk, T. A. V. 1985. "Introduction: Discourse Analysis as a New Cross-Discipline". In *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. T. A. V. Dijk, vol. 1, 01-10. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
7. — — —. 2007. "The Study of Discourse: An Introduction". In *Discourse Studies*, ed. T. A. V. Dijk, vol. 1, xix-xlii. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
8. El Houri, W. 2012. *The Meaning of Resistance: Hezbollah's Media Strategies and the Articulation of a People*. Amsterdam: Rozenberg Publishers.
9. El Zein, H. 2014. Identifying and Understanding Media Discourse of Hezbollah. *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 30(2): 117-140.
10. Habermas, J. 1962. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of a Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
11. — — —. 1979. *Communication and the Evolution of Society*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
12. — — —. 1996. *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (W. Rehg, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
13. Hamzeh, A. N. 1993. Lebanon's Hizbullah: From Islamic Revolution to Parliamentary Accommodation. *Third World Quarterly*, 14(2): 321-337.
14. — — —. 2004. *In the Path of Hizbullah*. New York, NY: Syracuse University Press.
15. Harb, Z. 2011. *Channels of Resistance in Lebanon: Liberation Propaganda, Hezbollah and the Media*. London, UK: I. B. Tauris.
16. Issa, B. 2012. *Nasrullah's Media War from the South to the North (in Arabic)*. Beirut: Dar Almahaja Albaidaa.
17. Jørgensen, M. W., and L. J. Phillips. 2002. *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.
18. Kasser, K. 2011. The Story of Hezbollah from 1982 to 2011: How it has Become a Key Player in the Lebanese System (in Arabic). *Maaloumat*, (94): 11-25.
19. Khoury, L., and S. Da'na. 2009. Hezbollah's War of Position: The Arab-Islamic Revolutionary Praxis. *The Arab World Geographer*, 12(3-4): 136-149.
20. Majid, A. 2007. *Sayyed Hassan Nasrullah's Discourse (in Arabic)*. Beirut: The Sapiential Knowledge Institute for Religious and Philosophical Studies.
21. Matar, D., and F. Dakhlallah. 2006. What it Means to Be Shiite in Lebanon: Al Manar and the Imagined Community of Resistance. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 3(2): 22-40.
22. Qassem, N. 2008. *The Community of Resistance: The Will of Martyrdom and Creation of Victory (in Arabic)*. Beirut: The Sapiential Knowledge Institute for Religious and Philosophical Studies.

23. Saad-Ghorayeb, A. 2002. *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion*. London, UK: Pluto Press.
24. Zaiton, A. M. 2007. *Ashura and the Discourse of "The Islamic Resistance": A Case of Sayyed Hassan Nasrullah (in Arabic)*. Beirut: The Sapiential Knowledge Institute for Religious and Philosophical Studies.