Hezbollah’s Media
Political History in outline

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ABSTRACT
Since 1985, the Lebanese Hezbollah has developed a centralized communications apparatus which was a major instrument in building its leadership in the Shiite community. My contribution intends to explore the main media of this party as both cognitive and political resources for mobilization and as spaces for the involvement of its activists, sympathizers and cadres. In doing so, it revisits the social history of this political formation and examines its modes of organization and related tensions.

KEY WORDS
Al-Manar ■ An-Nûr ■ Hezbollah ■ Lebanon ■ media

On 16 February 1985 Lebanese Hezbollah held a press conference in a Shiite place of worship (husayniyya) in the southern suburbs of Beirut – its first completely open public appearance. On that occasion the organization presented its programme, the ‘Open Letter’, and its chief spokesman, Amin al-Sayyid, to the national and international media. The event marked the beginning of a new political communications strategy for this new force in Lebanon at a time of civil war and occupation of part of the country’s territory by the Israeli army.

Emerging from three years of clandestine existence (1982–1985), Hezbollah would thenceforth constantly be mobilizing diverse cognitive resources and multiple media outlets in order to make itself visible and put across its message. It was so successful in doing so that today the party has the most organized and wide-ranging media structure of any Islamist grouping, Shiite or Sunni, in the Arab world. Terrestrial and satellite television channels, radio, newspapers, magazines, publishing houses, production companies, internet sites, not to mention theatre...
companies, musical ensembles and representational iconography: all these are tools deployed in its quest to occupy and control a space of representation and meaning defining what it has dubbed the Society of Resistance.

Hezbollah’s distinctive dramatization of politics is no accident. The reasons behind it are firstly historical. The passionate use of images, symbols and dramatization theorized by Khomeini and embraced by the Iranian revolution was certainly a source of inspiration to Hezbollah, which has always acknowledged the influence.\(^1\) This influence was even stronger from the late 1980s, as resistance to the Israeli occupation became central to the organization’s discourse and political activity and it grew convinced of the strategic importance of images as visual proof of its military exploits. There were also political reasons. The comparative freedom of the press enjoyed in Lebanon during the civil war (1975–1990), as well as the prevalent custom of using iconography to mark political territory, encouraged all political forces to employ these tools.\(^2\)

Two main questions arise, nonetheless, with regard to the durability of Hezbollah’s media institutions and how crucial these have been to its process of creating hegemony. The first concerns the *modus operandi* of these institutions, while the second relates to the development of its media outlets and the way these have been deployed both to mediate Hezbollah’s own identity and to interact with the rest of political society.

In attempting to answer these questions, researchers immediately find themselves facing specific conditions of access to the research subject and needing, from the start, to clarify their methodology. For there is no doubt that this means getting to grips with media structures that hide themselves from curious eyes, even those of scholars, especially since they have been classified -as terrorist organizations as the radio and television stations have -by the US administration and defined by the State of Israel, since the war of Summer 2006, as military targets. Hezbollah has maintained a culture of secrecy indispensable to its survival, encompassing both its central structure and relations with its satellite organizations.\(^3\) This culture imposes fixed limits on what may be observed or analysed, so that any general sociological approach to forms of activism within the party becomes a rather uncertain enterprise. Moreover, it means that caution is required in dealing with this complex social reality where it is not always easy to separate internal factors from external, civil affairs from military or representation from illusion.

My aim here is by no means to reconstruct the organizational methods of Hezbollah’s media institutions, still less to present the links controlling the different hierarchical structures around it. Such a study
would be useful, but is not feasible, given the current political situation in Lebanon, except by means of fanciful extrapolation. I shall, however, attempt, by developing a two-fold approach, both cognitive and sociological, to throw new light on the social history of the party, reconstructing this through its media structures. Consequently, we shall be depending here on the subject's own image of itself, as constructed through the sounds, representations, words, aesthetics, narratives, production and circulation of its frameworks of perception. This image sketches the contours of Hezbollah's own universe of meaning and highlights the social dynamics this reflects. We will thus come to grips with Hezbollah's media structures as scenes of 'self-presentation', employed both as cognitive and theatrical resources for mobilization and as spaces for the involvement of its activists, sympathizers and cadres.

A centralized apparatus

We cannot establish precisely when Hezbollah was founded. Although all sources agree that it made its first official appearance in February 1985, it remains difficult to establish precisely what organizational forms, military and political actions predated this. The same applies to the party's media. The only fact we can be sure of is that the first weekly publication openly affiliated to Hezbollah, the paper *al-Ahd* (The Promise), appeared on 28 June 1984, or about eight months before the party itself. The paper is thus an essential source for anyone seeking to understand the design behind Hezbollah's media activity and reflecting its strategic vision of political mobilization and relations between the party and its grassroots (its *Umma*, or Community of Believers, to use its own terminology). Two major characteristics emerge. First of all, since 1984, the party appears to have designed its communications activity on an explicitly centralized model, extremely hierarchical and compartmentalized, but nonetheless able to encompass the activity of all its associated public institutions. In November 1985, *al-Ahd* reported the holding of the party's first 'Congress on Communication', attended by 'leading representatives of all information sectors in Lebanon, as well as by the Central Committee for Information and by delegates of the Islamic institutions'. By organizing such an event Hezbollah, from that date, demonstrated that it had established specific internal organs responsible for managing and controlling its media activities. The party thus provided itself with structural means of controlling and producing its own image, employing horizontal demarcations, hierarchies of status and geographical divisions...
which all recalled some aspects of the Leninist organization model. In her recent book on political posters in Lebanon during the civil war, Zeina Maasri (2008), drawing on a series of interviews with officials of the party, reports that from 1985 it had a department dedicated to producing posters and murals. She also asserts that this activity benefited from logistical support from Iran. Hezbollah’s leaders themselves maintain that from 1987 onwards all the party’s communication activities were directed by an internal body called the Central Information Unit. The members of the Unit are appointed by the Political Bureau and its director is a member of Hezbollah’s Central Council. The Unit is overseen by a member of the Executive Council (considered to be one of the party’s highest bodies). It encompasses the regional directorates responsible for communication in each of Hezbollah’s important strongholds (Bekaa, the Beirut region and South Lebanon), the External Relations Office responsible for relations with Lebanese and foreign media, the Committee for Information Activities in charge of graphics, banners, songs and posters, as well as the directors of all the party’s media outlets (television, radio and the weekly newspaper).

This centralized structure is also reflected in the way the management of Hezbollah’s principal media outlets is configured. The television station, like the radio station, the weekly newspaper and the major public structures concerned with the party’s communications, is managed today by professional political cadres who are appointed by members of Hezbollah. These men, all in their fifties, belong to the generation that has lived through a number of political and social upheavals – as the Lebanese sociologist Wadah Sharara has usefully pointed out – and all, to a greater or lesser extent, played a role in the foundation of Hezbollah.

This extremely centralized approach to political communication was reflected in the launch in 1984 of *al-Ahd*, the party’s first weekly newspaper, which until 1988 remained its only official media outlet. The newspaper was printed regularly throughout that period, in black and white, carrying articles that were rarely signed and an editorial signed by the editors. The content and the various sections of *al-Ahd* were carefully constructed. The newspaper appeared to be designed in every way as a tool of control, demarcation and mobilization. It reported the analyses of Hezbollah and its activities (public meetings, new initiatives), publicized the party’s identity (in particular through sections devoted to education in political theory) and gave a platform to its leaders. But, although from the outset Hezbollah gave strategic importance to its own media apparatus, and devoted the necessary human and material resources to this, it also encouraged and sustained numerous media outlets that were
not completely under its control, when these were considered to emanate from Islamist circles that supported Hezbollah’s activities.

One of the first and most significant examples of the latter was certainly the radio station ‘Voice of Islam-Mustadh’afin’, established in June 1982 in the wake of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, in the city of Baalbek, a Hezbollah stronghold in the north of the country. It was considered by some to be close to the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, Hezbollah, while promoting the station as an Islamist institution, never claimed any formal connection with it. Later, moreover, the party launched its own radio station as well as continuing to support the ‘Voice of Islam’ until it ceased to exist in the early 1990s.

The second major characteristic of Hezbollah’s communications strategy reflects the fact that the organization is a military as much as a political one. Its media operations have been determined, from the beginning, by this double identity. It is impossible, of course, to be precise about the methods employed. Nonetheless, it is obvious that Hezbollah’s armed wing has had, from very early on, its own parallel structures, responsible for publicizing the actions of its emblematic ‘Islamic Resistance’. As early as 1984, *al-Ahd* acknowledged the existence of a War Information Unit, a clandestine structure whose imprint would be carried from that time by all film sequences of Hezbollah’s military operations. This body would be responsible, moreover, for waging a war of information against Israel and for recording the testaments of all combatants and future martyrs before their departure for the front. It was modelled on the Iranian body, of the same name, established during the war with Iraq (1980–1988). On 22 November 1986, it was responsible for recording an assault by the party’s combatants on an Israeli army position in South Lebanon at Tellet Sejoud. This was the first recording in both sound and image by the participants themselves of an armed action against an occupying force. Over the years, Hezbollah has developed an increasingly complex communications organization involving numerous different bodies, becoming ever more professional in its practices and adapting these to target different audiences. The War Information Unit remains attached to the armed wing, authoring recently a documentary on the organization’s military leader, Imad Mughniyye, who was assassinated in Damascus in February 2008, but new structures, enjoying complete public visibility, have also been established. These include in particular the Bureau of Information and the Artistic Activities Unit.

The former, with a public headquarters in the southern suburbs of Beirut, is an essential port of call for every researcher or journalist wishing to make contact with Hezbollah. This is Hezbollah’s shop window.
Employing a team that includes women as well as men and directed by Hajj Hussein Rahal, this body is responsible for publicizing the statements and positions of Hezbollah via Lebanese and international media. It also arranges meetings between media representatives and various party officials, with due regard for the security needs of the latter.

The Artistic Activities Unit, meanwhile, is more or less responsible for the ‘rich panoply of symbols’, as Jacques Lagroye has described it, that accompanies every ritual of recognition. Directed by an unturbanned cleric, Hajj Ali Daher, the Unit’s mission is to ‘transmit the party’s message and to cultivate the culture of resistance in Lebanon’.

It oversees Hezbollah’s artistic activities (theatre, popular entertainment, exhibitions, production of short films), popular information (general direction of religious and political demonstrations, including the choice and production of banners and the distribution of flags), songs (religious and educational songs and musical training), festivals (such as the Festival of Iranian Films organized in Spring 2007) and finally museums and the ‘resistance tourism’ which the party has recently been attempting to develop. This body has also established a company, Messages (Resalat), responsible for producing banners for Hezbollah’s celebrations and political and religious commemorations.

**Hezbollah’s media: outline of a social history**

It would be almost impossible to draw up a list of all the communications outlets mobilized nationally or locally, directly or indirectly, by Hezbollah. One of the most recently published encyclopaedias produced under its auspices cites only four. The weekly newspaper *Al-Intiqad* (*Criticism*, earlier named *al-Ahd*), the radio station Al-Nûr (*The Light*), the terrestrial and satellite television channel Al-Manar (*The Beacon*) and the monthly magazine *Baqiyatu Allah* (*What stays with God*) are there presented as the media outlets officially affiliated with Hezbollah. These four organs do not represent the complexity or the reach of the party’s communications structures, but examining them will serve to illuminate its development by revealing the principal stages in its political history.

1 *al-Ahd, Hezbollah’s Iskra*\\n
*al-Ahd* began life as an ‘Islamic political weekly’ of 8 pages in black and white, dated in accordance with the Hejirian calendar. It made no explicit mention of affiliation to Hezbollah and was published by the ‘Centre for Culture and Information’, as mentioned in the front-page
headline of the first issue in 1984. In 2001 it was renamed Al-Intiqad. The appearance of this newspaper is concrete evidence of when Hezbollah’s was founded. It reveals the multiple forms of legitimacy originally invoked and reveals the dynamics of the party’s domination.19 It was the newly-founded party’s major platform for displaying its symbols, asserting its doctrinal and ideological foundations and publicizing its political line.

al-Ahd was firstly the platform from which Hezbollah staked a national claim to a new model of charismatic leadership whose icon was the Islamic holy man battling the state of Israel. Mohamad Hussein Fadlallah, who played an increasing role in the Shiite Islamic world from the late 1970s onwards, was the figurehead.20 Fadlallah is considered to be one of the founders of the Lebanese section of the Iraqi party, Al-Daawa,21 a historical model for Hezbollah. From 1984 until the early 1990s, Fadlallah appears as the central figure behind the newspaper. Although never at any time overtly linked with Hezbollah,22 he was presented as the ‘great guide (Murshid), the great teacher (ustadh) and the great scholar (alim)’.23 The newspaper systematically reported interviews with Fadlallah in which he called for resistance to the Israeli occupation, his sermons in the al-Ghubavri mosque in which he denounced communal politics and the pro-Israel ‘Phalangist regime’, and speeches at religious commemorations and public meetings of the party in which he praised military actions and their martyrs. From its fifth year, al-Ahd devoted a separate column to Fadlallah’s ‘Speech of the Week’ (hadith al-usbu). This cleric fulfilled in every way the role of spiritual guide, providing a young party which had no well-known leaders with a charismatic Islamic and Shiite religious legitimacy. Furthermore, Fadlallah was to some extent Hezbollah’s equivalent of the historic figure of Imam al-Sadr, claimed by the rival Shiite organization Amal and seen as the symbol of Shiite revival in Lebanon.24 Fadlallah symbolized Hezbollah’s place in a scholarly, militant Shiite tradition.

al-Ahd reveals the doctrinal bases of Hezbollah through a two-fold structuring discourse: ‘Islam as the global point of reference for a better society … and the Guidance of the theologian-lawmaker (wilayat al-faqih) as legitimate leadership’.25 But although it is Islam that is invoked as the ultimate framework of perception, allowing events to be ‘localized, perceived, identified, classified’, to paraphrase Goffman, it is Shiism specifically that becomes the code for transliterating politics. The historical tragedy of Karbala,26 the basis for the Shiite cult of martyrdom, provides a matrix of values and an ultimate religious motivation for the political commitment preached by Hezbollah. The ‘revolutionary
memory’ of Hussein and his sacrifice is acclaimed as a doctrine of solidarity, a model of devotion to the common good.

The teaching of the Guidance of the theologian-lawmaker goes back to a theory of power drawn up by Khomeini and included in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which endows the theologian-lawmaker with both spiritual power and political leadership. *al-Ahd*, in its early years, repeatedly presented and defended this teaching which encapsulates the many and evolving historical models linking Hezbollah and Iran. It is firstly a political model, since Hezbollah proclaims its allegiance to the Iranian model of mobilization and invokes Iran as an unfailing ally against Israel. Then, too, it is an ideological model, since this teaching serves as both strategic context and doctrinal demarcation line.

We must also note, however, that although Islam – especially in its Shiite form – and the Guidance of the theologian-lawmaker are much vaunted, this is above all in the service of a political ‘cause’: resistance to Israeli occupation. This last was presented from the very first issues of *al-Ahd* as Hezbollah’s ultimate *raison d’être*. The newspaper saw its primary role as reporting armed resistance operations through images and narratives of its ‘heroic’ actions which were covered more and more intensively as the years passed. It subsequently took on the task of dramatizing and consecrating martyrdom as the ultimate symbol of struggle. The martyr, killed at the front or in a suicide operation, progressively became the spectacular illustration of Hezbollah’s legitimacy, founded, just as in the Iran–Iraq war (1980–1988), on ‘the fitness of the young to sacrifice themselves’ at the front in defence of Islam and of the fatherland.

### 2 Seeing and hearing Hezbollah

While *al-Ahd* was the principal media outlet of Hezbollah’s early period, the radio station Al-Nûr stands in the same relation to the period when the party began to move into a political territory where its physical presence symbolized real power. Launched on 9 May 1988, the new radio station was based in the southern suburbs of Beirut, a majority Shiite area of 17 square kilometres which is home to half a million people, or one-third of the Lebanese capital’s inhabitants. Al-Nûr was clearly presented as a tool in the fratricidal struggle for territory between Hezbollah and the Shiite organization Amal, which had been going on in this area since 1987. According to Hezbollah’s official version, this conflict began on 5 April 1988 when Amal decided to disarm Hezbollah in the South of the country and expel all its combatants from the areas of Lebanon under Israeli occupation. A month later, the conflict spread to the southern
suburbs of Beirut. It was ended by Hezbollah’s victory, at the beginning of November 1990, and the signature of a final ceasefire agreement between the warring sides under the auspices of Syria and Iran. Al-Nûr then became the mouthpiece of a party enjoying hegemony within the Shiite community. Its function evolved. At first transmitting mostly religious programmes for a few hours each day, from 1989 onwards it was broadcasting for 15 hours a day: the definitive, omnipresent message of Hezbollah to its grassroots. The programme schedule became more diverse as befitted a party with mass support. The party’s religious discourse was starting to be mixed with political strategy and debate and this diversification was equally apparent in Al-Nûr’s radio output. The social services established by Hezbollah became a new way in which the party was gaining legitimacy in the context of building a ‘Society of Resistance’ a concept which was the party’s own creation never formally codified. It called for the establishment of a homogenous space combining social action and various forms of political mobilization to promote the resistance.

Dubbed ‘Resistance Radio’, Al-Nûr was committed from the mid-1990s to addressing an interfaith audience transcending its existing Shiite sphere of influence, from which the traditional solid support for its cause was drawn. It was aided in this mission after June 1991 by the television channel Al-Manar, enabling a new and dramatic combination of word and image. This new addition to Hezbollah’s media stable was also based in the southern suburbs of Beirut. Its launch symbolized a new stage in Hezbollah’s development, and its editorial line emphasized the adjustments required in order to deal with the new political situation in the country and the region. In Lebanon itself, the Taif Agreements which ended the country’s civil war led to the implementation of Syrian control in the country and the establishment of the Third Republic, as well as the disarmament of all the militias except that of Hezbollah. In the Arab world as a whole, the Madrid Conference and the PLO’s commitment to peace negotiations with Israel were harbingers of a new era of ‘normalizing’ relationships with the Jewish state and the undermining of armed resistance. Finally, the death of Khomeini and Iran’s failure to win the war with Iraq presaged an end to that country’s impulse to export the model of Islamic revolution and weakened Hezbollah’s major supporter. The party took on board all these changes and opted for a two-fold strategy. On the one hand it moved towards integrating itself into political life in Lebanon and on the other it committed itself to winning over a new, interfaith audience to its option of military resistance. Its media outlets and especially its television channel, not without some false starts, went along with and gave substance to this new position.
Al-Manar firstly began to centre its journalistic discourse on the theme of South Lebanon’s liberation from Israeli occupation. It made every effort to cover the party’s exploits and provided direct coverage of its military operations against Israeli army positions and those of Israel’s ally, the South Lebanese Army. It worked to build the martyr into a familiar figure, transmitting the testaments of combatants. It gave coverage to the destruction caused by occupation. The major clashes with Israel in 1992 and 1996 enabled Al-Manar to establish itself as the television channel of Lebanese resistance. All this was consolidated in May 2000 thanks to the channel’s continuous, exclusive coverage of the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon, a retreat experienced by the whole Lebanese population as a victory.

Simultaneously, Al-Manar embarked on a process of opening itself up. Increasingly, it invited other political movements to take part in its programmes, introduced subtle changes in its programming and new terms into its discourse. Drama serials and entertainment occupied an increasingly significant place and expressions like ‘political reconciliation’ and ‘national unity’ were no longer taboo.

One eloquent sign of this new direction was the establishment in 1997 of a limited company, the Lebanese Communication Group (LCG), bringing together the radio and television stations of Hezbollah. The company’s Board of Directors included Christian figures and the party held only 55 per cent of capital. The party had previously had no legal status and establishment of the company made its two principal media outlets subject for the first time to the Lebanese law of 1994 governing audio-visual media.

In 2000, the end of the occupation of the south of the country gave Hezbollah a credibility that went beyond Lebanon’s borders. This was the first time the Israeli army had been forced to retreat from Arab territory it had captured, with no *quid pro quo* and moreover as a result of armed resistance. This was the context in which Al-Manar’s satellite channel was launched. It was under the same management as the terrestrial channel, with 16 correspondents around the world, and its objective was identical to that of Hezbollah: to make itself known internationally. The new station was broadcast via seven satellites and emerged as the media voice of a consensus-building Arab and Islamic doctrinal identity, whilst remaining resolutely nationalist in its approach to the Arab–Israeli conflict.\(^{33}\) This was evident in its coverage of the second Palestinian Intifada, which began in September 2000, and gained the channel recognition and sympathy in the Palestinian occupied territories.\(^{34}\) The 33-day war of summer 2006, meanwhile, gave the channel an opportunity to make itself felt for the first time as a source of news in the Arab world.\(^{35}\) It came into its own simultaneously as a significant force in
time of war. Although its headquarters was destroyed by the Israeli army on the fifth day of the war, Al-Manar only stopped transmitting for two minutes. Moreover, it achieved the coup of showing an attack on an Israeli warship, announced by the Secretary-General of Hezbollah in a statement carried live.

This transnational dimension, sustained by Hezbollah’s strategic involvement in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, was to have direct repercussions on Al-Manar. The banning of the channel in France in 2004 was followed by similar measures in most other Western countries. To compensate for this new situation, Hezbollah took action to strengthen its online apparatus. It developed a number of websites and mobilized sufficient resources to give itself visibility in this way in the countries where its TV channel was no longer available. The TV website, almanar.com.lb, was the first vehicle of this new strategy. In the last four years it has developed significantly thanks to the strengthening of its human resources and diversification of its services. When the website was launched in 1999, it offered only recordings of some speeches by Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah against a background of religious and patriotic songs. In 2004 the staff was increased from 4 to 13. The site is now bilingual, providing on average some 100 news items every day. It carries articles and the main programmes transmitted are not encrypted. The 2006 war provided additional justification for this investment since the site was Hezbollah’s main channel of visibility in the West and experienced high numbers of hits despite hacking attempts. According to its director, the site receives an average of 55,000 hits every day (Google’s estimates vary from 26,000 to 30,000). The channel’s most significant achievement has turned out to be its continuous internet transmission since 2006.

Conclusion

The assassination in February 2005 of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the withdrawal some months later of Syrian forces from Lebanon for the first time obliged Hezbollah to take a full part in domestic political affairs. Inter-communal tensions and the end of Syria’s role as broker between the different Lebanese forces have somewhat changed the balance of power on which Hezbollah had relied. Resistance remains a rallying point in terms of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, but serves less and less to unite the various forces. The new scenarios of negotiation and mediation faced by Hezbollah since 2005 have obliged it constantly to adjust and readjust its many identities. This has resulted in an increasingly marked tension between, on the one hand, the party’s
character as a hegemonic organization within the Shiite community – which may be the largest single community in Lebanon, but remains a minority in the mainly Sunni Arab world as a whole – and, on the other, its pan-Arab and pan-Islamic ambitions.

It is the party’s media outlets that today show these tensions most clearly. Whether they continue to intensify or find some resolution will no doubt depend on how the political situation develops in the region, of which the small country of Lebanon is only the sounding board.

The most recent Israeli war against Gaza has perhaps militarily weakened Hamas. But in the short term it appears to have vindicated Hezbollah’s position: the strategy of ‘normalization’ of relations with the State of Israel seems more unrealistic than ever to an Arab public opinion, outraged by the images of destruction from this last war.

On 13 January 2009, a recording was broadcast on all the Arab rolling news channels. Its source was the television station Al-Aqsa, ‘the cathode weapon of Hamas’,39 as the only French-language Lebanese daily has dubbed it. The sequence shows an Israeli soldier being shot down by a Palestinian sniper and his panic-stricken comrades taking to their heels. Thus, despite the destruction of its five-storey headquarters by the Israeli army on the second day of the war against Gaza, Al-Aqsa followed in the footsteps of Al-Manar by continuing to broadcast from clandestine or mobile studios. Its broadcasts presented an endless parade of images of dead bodies and flattened buildings, to an accompaniment of patriotic songs.

Where Al-Manar led others follow.

Notes

7 All have experienced a break with their original political affiliation, usually Amal, a severance from their long-time homes (most came from South Lebanon and were forced to move to the southern suburbs of Beirut), a break with a stable way of life. See Charara, W. (2006) Dawlat hizb allah, lubnan mujtam’an islamiyyan. Beirut: dar An-Nahar.
8 We only need to recall, in this connection, that the so-called ‘events of May 2008’ which led to armed confrontations in some quarters of Beirut and in the majority Druze
mountain areas, stemmed from the decision of the government led by Prime Minister Sanoura to criminalize Hezbollah’s clandestine unofficial communications system.

9 The exhibition organized by Hezbollah in Nabatieh in memory of its military leader Imad Mughniyye, assassinated in Damascus in 2008, included cameras belonging to martyrs from the War Information Unit dating from the 1990s.

10 On 25 May 2009, the occasion of his historic speech on the day after the liberation of areas occupied by Israel, the Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, announced that 1,286 martyrs had died for the party in combat against Israel between 1981 and 2000. No more than 38 of these were suicide volunteers.


12 All the leaders of Hezbollah are known as Hajj, which means they have been on pilgrimage to Mecca.

13 Interview with Ali Al-Dahir, southern suburbs of Beirut, July 2008.

14 The Unit has even organized mass marriage ceremonies.

15 For example, the most recent banner exhibited in Achoura in December 2008 carries the signature of Rissalat and hardly mentions the name of Hezbollah. Nonetheless, its calligraphy and layout leave no doubt about its provenance for an audience accustomed for years to reading these messages.


17 Inspired by the Sura Houd: ‘That which stays with God is better for you, if you are believers’ (XI, 86). This journal, which we will not deal with in the present article, first appeared in 1991. It is a bulky (often 80 pages) theoretical publication, mostly intended for internal use and essentially covering theological questions.

18 Newspaper founded in 1900 and directed by Lenin.

19 Understood, according to Max Weber, as the product of a desire to obey.


22 From October 1984 he was, moreover, at some pains to deny any ‘organizational’ link with Hezbollah. See al-Ahd No. 15 of 5 October 1984: p.10.

23 This is how the newspaper presented him. See al-Ahd No. 54, 17 Shawwal 1405 (5 July 1985).

24 ‘Amal emerged from Moussa Al-Sadr’s creation of the Movement of the Deprived in March 1974. It was not a political party as such, but a mass protest movement aimed at forcing the government to address the lack of services for the Shi’a (…) this was in fact the Shi’a first attempt to organize themselves politically along sectarian lines and independently of the traditional zu’ama.’ See Shanaham, R. (2005) The Shi’a of Lebanon. Clans, Parties and Clerics. London, New York: Tauris Academic Studies, p. 107.


26 The martyrdom of Imam Husayn in 680 in the city of Karbala, celebrated by all Shiites on the tenth day of the month of Muharram. On this point, see Mervin, S. ‘Les larmes et le sang des chiites: corps et pratiques rituelles lors des célébrations de ‘ashura (Liban, Syrie)’, REMM, 113-114, Le Corps et the Sacré dans l’Orient musulman, pp. 153-166.
Photos are published on such subjects as liberated areas in Lebanon, assaults on military positions, spoils of war. Cf, for example, No.131 of the journal.


Harb, M. p. 23.

Speeches, statements and literature of Hezbollah have made systematic reference to this since around the year 2000. Recently the Deputy Secretary of Hezbollah has published a book on the subject. See Muftama’ al-myqawama. Iraadat al-chahada wa sina’t al-intisar, Beirut: Dar al-maaref alhikmiah, 2008.

This conference, which took place in October 1991, was the first attempt at negotiation publicly involving Israel and Arab countries including Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians. It led to the signature of the Oslo Accords in 1993 and to the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan in 1994.

In 1992 the party took part for the first time in the legislative elections that followed the end of the war. It did so again in 1996. In 1998 it assumed the leadership of a number of municipal councils.

References to Shiiism on the Al-Manar satellite channel thus tend to be very unobtrusive.

A number of opinion polls carried out by Palestinian centres confirm this. Cf in particular the websites of the Opinion Polls and Surveys Studies Centre (OPSSC) in Najah University; the Development Studies Program (DSP) of Birzeit University; the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) and the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre (JMCC).

Ali Shaib, the channel’s well known correspondent in the South, has chosen not to comply with the restrictions followed by all the other correspondents on all channels, including Al-Jazeera. He consequently takes risks, venturing into villages isolated from the rest of the country by the destruction of bridges and roads. He works alone, serving as cameraman, reporter and editor.

Barely a week after the French decision, the US added Al-Manar to its list of terrorist organizations by reason of its ‘incitement to violence’. Al-Manar was to be subjected to similar restrictions in the Netherlands (March 2005) and in Spain (July 2005). These measures meant that the channel almost disappeared from the whole of Europe and Latin America (where it had been transmitted via the Hispasat satellite). The operators of Intelsat (based in Pembroke) followed suit, withdrawing Al-Manar from its transmissions to Canada and the US. Tarbs (based in Australia) cut off its signal to Australia and South East Asia. In August 2005, Asiasat (based in Hong Kong), which belongs to Globesat (a subsidiary of France Télécom) stopped transmitting the channel in Asia.

Interview with Youssef Wahbi, manager of Al-Manar’s website, November 2007. 6

On 8 September 2008 the site was showing 37905525 visits since 07/08/2006.

L’Orient Le Jour, Thursday 1 January 2009.

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