The Role of Lebanese Women in Hezbollah

by

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Abstract

This paper discusses how Lebanese women significantly promoted Hezbollah’s efforts on a local level to gain public support for their campaign against Israel and what motivates these women to become enablers. The research focuses on how Hezbollah exploits existing female support to soften their public image in the media, promoting Hezbollah’s influence. Any interviews referenced in this thesis are drawn from the compilation of detailed information found in articles and books published on Hezbollah. Data drawn from literature (Tracy, 2013, p. 36) on Lebanese women and Hezbollah describing symbolism, relationships and patterns using first hand narratives provides thick description. A qualitative methodology with diverse sources was used to identify connections and themes between words (Tracy, 2013, p. 23) that point to specific behaviors of both Hezbollah and female supporters. Research revealed Shi’ite Lebanese women as power brokers within close-knit neighborhoods being courted by Hezbollah, in contrast to the restrictions that neighboring Iranian women receive from Hezbollah’s cleric. When Hezbollah created social programs that imitated government services in communities severely impacted by intense fighting, Shi’ite women mobilized in mass. Portraying mainstream women in the media allows Hezbollah to soften their image, despite their xenophobia towards Israel and all Jewish people (Alagha, 2006, p. 195). The thesis also suggests that the impact of historical alliances between ethnic and religious groups such as the Christians and Shi’ites in Lebanon may be underestimated and merit more consideration in current Middle Eastern strategic analysis.

Keywords: Women and Hezbollah, Lebanese women, Shi’ite women, Lebanese women and media, Al Manar, Hezbollah media, southern Lebanon, working women, Shi’ite public mourning, AMAL, public piety, Isolation of Shi’ites, Hezbollah social programs, Lebanese social courts, Hezbollah NGOs, Lebanese NGOs, Lebanon Civil War.
WOMEN AND HEZBOLLAH IN LEBANON

Chapter 1

Introduction

Acts of terrorism during war devastate civilian populations, changing the politics and perceptions of the impacted communities, leaving behind psychological scars. Perceptions of injustice, frustration and feelings of shame are themes that are associated with terrorism (Moghaddam, 2004-2005, p. 162). The attention given to Middle Eastern women becoming suicide bombers, women supporting terrorism within their family and women being victimized during violent conflict creates an image problem for terrorist groups like Hezbollah. Terrorism is supposed to shape politics, just as Algerian insurgents received international sympathy for demanding independence from France, Hezbollah relies on public support to further their political sphere of influence in Lebanon. The inclusion of women, known for their independence in this process softens the group’s image and serves as a distraction from Hezbollah’s anti-Israeli rhetoric.

The crucial role that women play in Sub-Sahara African terrorist groups by offering hiding places, shelter and food and raising the children of terrorists is vital, but not publicized (Forster-Towne, 2010). An image of women being more vulnerable than men is a propaganda tool for favorable media which reaps public support (Forster-Towne, 2010). There has been immense attention given to Hezbollah in Lebanon for providing healthcare programs and other services (Romney, 2008) to women. Hezbollah exploits female participation in Lebanese media to legitimize their regional presence. As Hezbollah leaders refuse to recognize Israel’s right to exist, their ideas and images must appeal to masses of people in order for their violence to be overlooked. If the public can identify with at least one aspect of a terrorist agenda, they achieve success as Hezbollah finds common ground outside their inner core of supporters of men.
Hezbollah gains public support for their anti-Israeli positions by courting women using welcoming rhetoric (Shehadeh, 2003, p. 203) and popular programs.

With women representing half of Lebanon’s population, (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2012) it is interesting to study if Hezbollah either weakens their mission or benefits their goals by using women to soften their image. So far, it appears that the financiers of Hezbollah from Iran are careful about pressing women in Lebanon to be more conservative, without first offering them leadership positions in both media and social organizations (Firmo-Fontan, 2007, p. 168). As thirty-eight percent of Lebanese of judges are women, (UNICEF, 2006) it would not be logical for Hezbollah to ask women to give up these jobs as Lebanese women still cannot preside over any religious courts (Khalaf, 2010, p. 255). As long as Hezbollah uses TV or radio to promote anti-Israeli sentiment, they require outreach to women to produce favorable media images. This paper provides an explanation as to why Hezbollah’s female supporters won popular support among local Lebanese families and became major influencers to deliver symbolic messages. Hezbollah’s propaganda efforts using women are evaluated by reviewing the history of Lebanese Shi’ite women, their culture and media campaigns before and during wartime. This research describes how Shi’ite women’s strong family role in southern Lebanon made them powerful advocates for Hezbollah.

**Scope and Focus of Research**

The scope of the paper first describes how specific communities of Lebanese women made a difference for Hezbollah garnering local support to blame Israel for regional violence and destruction. Next, the paper describes how Hezbollah recruited female support to include offering basic services to fill the void of a neglectful government. Finally, the paper describes how women in the media promoted Hezbollah’s goals. Examining where and how Hezbollah
targets female populations impacted by war violence and comparing with examples of anti-Israeli rage found in Lebanese media reveals Hezbollah’s trademark.

What programs and support has Hezbollah offered to women in Lebanon in exchange for their support? How does Hezbollah help women in Lebanon and how does the media reflect this? The focus of this paper is to identify the female enablers of Hezbollah, how they operate in the Lebanese media within social and non-governmental organizations. Hezbollah’s goals found in their anti-Israeli rhetoric and their quest for an Islamic state pertains to Lebanon in this paper with no reference to similar goals in Syria or Iran.

Outside the Scope of Research

The international activities of Hezbollah are not considered here with the exception of media that pertains to Lebanese women. Female suicide bombers and acts of terrorism are not included except when describing activities like hiding military arms and concealing known insurgents as part of historical solidarity among Shi’ite Lebanese during conflict. Translation challenges limit interpretation of phrases commonly used from the Koran in Hezbollah’s statements, explanations of these significant connections are addressed in this research.

Why is this thesis important to the field of Strategic Security? Understanding what role women play in theocratic extremism is a worthy topic as the status of female populations in the Middle East can change global foreign policy strategies. Local influences are significant for strategic strategists as civilian populations cannot be analyzed without considering first, what is currently important to families living in that region. Lebanese women promoting Hezbollah’s social programs fueled a local shared ideological belief that Shi’ites had to protect their communities from oppression; women delivered strategic communications in support of Hezbollah’s counterinsurgency efforts (Strategic Studies Institute [SSI], 2012, Chapter III) as
local messengers. We can learn more about Hezbollah operations by identifying their social services delivered by women directly to local families, which created a symbolic, substitute government in Lebanon. Religious extremists within Hezbollah’s power structure had to soften or silence their social views regarding women or risk alienating their Lebanese base of support, which has implications on how an Iranian sphere of influence will operate in northern Lebanon and in Syria.

In response to regional conflict, Iran and Saudi Arabia use military and humanitarian strategies to compete for dominance in the Middle East. The recent civil war conflict in Syria has forced as many as 11,000 refugees to relocate in Lebanon’s northern regions (Osman, 2012, p. 5) which have a Hezbollah presence, (p. 6) making it difficult for both international and Lebanese government agencies to respond to humanitarian emergencies. Outreach to women and their respective families on a local level in these destabilized regions is critical given the challenges of water and food shortages, spread of disease and lack of basic services. Access to education and the availability of medical training and equipment are programs that made Hezbollah based support so popular following conflict in southern Lebanon. How the Lebanese government and the international community reacts to the mass migration of refugees from Syria affects the stability of the entire region, Hezbollah has demonstrated the ability to network with women to distribute humanitarian aid.

Lebanese women in Hezbollah are neighborhood power brokers because their outreach efforts focus on the well-being of families which carries significant local influence. Too often security strategists focused on a strategic level miscalculate the importance of local effects. For example, the funding of electricity, water filtration efforts and farming initiatives in Lebanon
present an alternative to Hezbollah controlled areas because quality of life issues are addressed (USAID, 2012).

Although the total political seats held by women in Lebanon doubled in 2010, (USAID, 2012) Hezbollah’s political party did not include any female candidates to run on their political party line. It is worthy to evaluate if Hezbollah can engage local women in Syria and in northern Lebanon after choosing to exclude women from holding political office. Bolstering community initiatives weakens insurgency campaigns and military options can fuel tensions. When Israel responded to rocket attacks with cluster bombings, Hezbollah attempted to publicize the removal of bombs by local working women. The use of female imagery in the media is a strategy that intensifies the public perception that Israel is a continued threat to the safety of Lebanese communities.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

This thesis researches how women made a difference in Hezbollah at a local level by first considering the history of how and why Lebanese females became crucial for Hezbollah’s regional base of support. Hezbollah does not recognize the State of Israel; Hezbollah mobilized the female population to win support in neighborhoods enduring significant violence in exchanges between the Palestinian Liberation Army, Hezbollah and Israel. This literature review defines what void Hezbollah fills by reaching out to Lebanese women and what Hezbollah gains by answering several questions:

1. How and why did Shi’ite women help enable Hezbollah in Lebanon?
2. How did Shi’ite women become a symbol for Hezbollah in Lebanon?
3. How does Hezbollah use women in the media?

Shi’ite Women Enablement of Hezbollah in Lebanon

Isolation of Shi’ites. Initially a minority in Lebanon, Shi’ites did not have representation as a political group until Lebanon’s independence in 1943 (Holt, 1999, p. 173) and the Shi’ite community experienced feelings of isolation and inferiority (Mackey, 1989, p. 79). Western women writers based in Lebanon’s Shi’ite communities like University of California Professor Laura Deeb and journalist Sandra MacKay have shown sympathy to Lebanese insurgencies, giving them intimate access to Shi’ite women close to Hezbollah. Calling Israel “treacherous” for civilian casualties, is the type of rhetoric that gave Sandra Mackay more access to Shi’ite groups associated with Hezbollah and resulted in more detailed research (Mackay, 2008). Laura
Deeb describes in her book on modern Shi’ite piety how political underrepresentation and economic marginalization (Deeb, 2006, p. 73) bonded Shia Lebanese women together as community volunteers. In her book about Lebanon, Sandra Mackey (1989) describes how Shi’ites were treated like second class humans. “They bring in as many children as possible. They care nothing about educating them. They just send them to the government school.” (Mackay, 1989, pp. 78-79) This demeaning quote referencing the high Shi’ite birth rate and calling Shi’ites “those people” (Mackey, 2007, p. 78) are examples of prevailing condescending attitudes that built up Shi’ite resentment. As their population swelled following Lebanon’s independence, Shia Lebanese made up most of the lower peasant neighborhoods in the south, many fled extreme poverty and settled within slum neighborhoods in Beirut (AbuKhalil, 1989, p. 62). Enduring life without hospitals and irrigation systems, Shi’ites relied on local leadership (Deeb, 2006, p. 73) to fill the void of a government that ignored them.

The two Civil Wars in Lebanon (1958 and 1975-1990) between Christians and Muslims not only magnified sectarian tensions, but also fractured the family structure with lost lives and forced migrations to avoid war violence. Many Lebanese widows became working mothers and the heads of households, (AbuKhalil, 1989, p. 52) and Shi’ite women experienced the highest rate of illiteracy while accepting the lowest wages to survive (Abisaab, 2010, p. 100). The Shia community experienced unique isolation from Lebanese politics as Sunnis identified with the growing Arab nations and Christians linked their business and culture to western super powers. During conflict, Syria and Iran became frequent Shia places for migration and refuge instead of Lebanon, as religion and familial connections were often key to obtaining jobs.

Before and after the independence of Lebanon in 1943, a political system to balance power between religious groups referred to as confessionism, was intended to quell religious
tensions (Harb, 2006). With over fifteen religious sects, power segments in Lebanon between a Maronite Christian President, a Sunni Muslim Prime Minister and a Shi’a Speaker of the Parliament. Still, allowing political representation by local religious and ethnic affiliation, never resolved ethnic and religious differences within Lebanon (Harb, 2006). Instead, confessionalism magnified the local community’s disconnection from the Lebanese government. The decentralized and unresponsive government caused Shi’ites to identify more with other Shi’ites living in Syria and Iran than (MacFarquhar, 2012) other Lebanese.

**Economic disparity.** Lebanon’s tobacco industry, which replaced much of the silk industry after the 19th Century, provided management jobs to unskilled single women made up of Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims. (Abisaab, 2010, p. 29) According to Dr. Malek Abisaab, Associate Professor of history at McGill University, the labor force in Beirut is made up of migrant families tied through religion from impoverished rural regions. As Shi’ite families were forced to migrate into Beirut’s city slums, they began to replace Maronite workers in Beirut who had advanced economically ahead of them. Following independence in 1943, the Shi’ite community’s population swelled to be the largest ethnic group in Lebanon still without the proportionate political representation or adequate governmental services allocated (Alagha, 2006, p. 23).

As Shi’ite women spent more time at work than at home, strong relationships based on religious ties and shared poverty were cultivated (Abisaab, 2010, p. 114-115). In his thesis, Dr. Alagha describes how Beirut began to prosper in the late 1950s, but Shi’ite slums were overwhelmed with famine, illiteracy and overcrowding despite their majority demographic status. As a matter of survival, the Shi’ite community desperately needed emergency medical and food necessities and deeply affected women as they struggled to raise large families with
limited resources. To overcome economic disparity, Lebanese Shi’ites adopted neighbors in need, providing community outreach in what author Laura Deeb describes as Shi’ite women’s public piety, or religiousness (Deeb, 2006, p. 174).

**Civil war and female employment.** The Civil Wars in Lebanon of 1958 and 1975-1990 were economic turning points in Lebanon where women were further thrust into Beirut’s urban workforce (Shehadeh, 1999, p. 57). After the brief 1958 Civil War between Arab nationalists and Christians, women doctors, nurses, midwives and lawyers continued to graduate from the American University of Beirut (Shehadeh, 1999, p. 41). The second Civil War which began in 1975 and raged for 15 years, demolished over half of Lebanon’s industrial sectors and more than one quarter of Lebanese families lost their homes. This loss required many women to look to ways of ensuring familial financial support. As in the past, more women turned to professional education and training. In fact, professional careers for highly educated women doubled in the medical, pharmaceutical, engineering and education fields by 1993 as the age of women entering the workforce increased to 40 years old (Shehadeh, 1999). Following the devastation of two major civil wars, mass migration to Beirut compelled women to seek economic opportunities as a means for survival; and then there was the war with Israel.

**PLO influence on Shi’ites to join Hezbollah.** Geography placed Palestinian camps along the border of Israel, making southern Lebanon ripe for guerilla activity and fighting so intense that Shi’ite families were forced to flee into poor, urban neighborhoods (Mackay, 1989). The resentment and rage over the destruction imposed on Shi’ite families quickly turned to anti-Israeli sentiment, a sense of betrayal towards the PLO and absolutely no tolerance for moderates. Fighting between the PLO and Israel displaced Lebanese Shi’ites into Beirut with accusations that the PLO did not extend humanitarian support to Shi’ite sympathizers. “But once in Beirut
the Shi’ites quickly learned that the Sunni political bosses of the capital were unwilling to integrate them into their patronage networks” (Mackay, 1989, p. 77). Shi’ite women who once supported AMAL with a secular outlook now regarded the PLO as having deserted them, distrusted anyone perceived as being un-Islamic and began to embrace a more religious and less tolerant attitude towards the west (Alagha, 2006).

Female wartime roles as enablers. Maria Holt interviewed Lebanese women who described their wartime role against Israel; the smuggling of firearms under female clothing as women worked as neighborhood lookouts to alert others about approaching Israeli soldiers. Women supporting insurgents used their children as props; the image of a proud mother with a baby and a gun surfaced among all militias groups; PLO and Hezbollah alike (Holt, 1999). Holt interviewed women involved in AMAL who stated that it was not uncommon for men to support and marry independent women completely consumed by the resistance movement; that the women told her they never imagined they could be that independent in a hundred years (Holt, 1999, p. 181). Both Hezbollah and AMAL women exploited the reality that Israeli men were reluctant to search Shi’ite women with oversized, conservative clothing that easily concealed weapons underneath (Holt, 1999, p. 185). “We started to raise our voices; as women we started forming groups in which women were educated and encouraged to rebel against unfair conditions” (Holt, 1999, p. 181). These statements articulating revolutionary activities reflect the political role that Shia women embraced in a military campaign against Israel.

Al Sadr’s Amal and Fadlallah’s Hezbollah. The first popular and compelling leader of Shi’ites known for reaching out to both Orthodox Christians and women (Deeb, 2006) was Iranian born Shi’ite Imam Musa al-Sadr, a Lebanese Shi’ite political leader that preceded Hezbollah. A charismatic figure, Al-Sadr was known for his outreach protection to Lebanese
Christians through Orthodox Greek Catholic archbishop Grégoire Haddad; forming the Movement of the Deprived (Alagha, 2006, p. 29). According to Hezbollah expert, Dr. Joseph Elie Alagha, Musa al-Sadr established and organized a Lebanese Shi’ite base of support with Orthodox Christians seeking increased political representation, with better economic opportunities, to match their growing population (Alagha, 2006, p. 27). Al-Sadr unified Lebanese Shi’ites during the second Civil War after founding a Shia religious establishment (AbuKhalil, 1989, p. 63) in Lebanon that was inclusive to women. A spiritual leader, al-Sadr further provided inspiration to the thousands of displaced and homeless Shia civilians who fled to Beirut (Alagha, 2006, p. 31) and to Syria where the Prophet Mohammed’s granddaughter Sayyib Zaynab died as a martyr (Deeb, 2006, p. 130). Al-Sadr’s establishment of Shia social societies that substituted for an absentee government, led to many clashes with nationally elected Shia Lebanese officials (Alagha, 2006) while his female support mushroomed his local credibility (Deeb, 2006).

First addressing social injustices against Shi’ites and engaging the female population with humanitarian services to the poor, Al-Sadr later united with the Palestinians against Israel (Alagha, 2006). As his movement became more violent with his ability to gather mass supporters, Al-Sadr formed AMAL (Afwaj Al-Muqawama Al-Lubnaniyya) or the Brigades of the Lebanese Resistance. Al-Sadr’s group AMAL which means hope in Arabic (the Movement of the Deprived or Disinherited) started a female militia wing supporting PLO efforts against Israeli occupation (Alagha, 2006, p. 30). The PLO’s strong rhetoric against Israel influenced all Lebanese Muslim communities impacted by violence with a powerful media message to defend Islam. Although there is division among American scholars and Middle East commentators as to where the blame for Lebanon’s violent sectarian conflict over the Palestinians should be
assigned, most scholars like Dr. Alagha believe that the Palestinian conflict in Lebanon fueled the radicalization of Shi’ites who became Hezbollah.

It was not just a vacuum of power that empowered Iranian funded Hezbollah to establish a terrorist base of operations in Lebanon and a political party. Since the 16th century, solidarity existed among Shi’ites as key Iranian clerics hailed from southern Lebanon. (Hokayem, 2010, p. 178). Fed up Iranians identified with Imam Musa al-Sadr in Lebanon, who lost his Iranian citizenship after speaking out against the Shah’s corrupt monarchy. (Alagha, 2006, Chapter II). Hezbollah’s future leader Fadlallah established orphanages in conjunction with Al-Sadr’s cultural and vocational center for orphaned girls (Deeb, 2006, p. 88). These desperately needed social welfare organizations expanded rapidly with the support of Fadlallah’s funding from Hezbollah using significant female involvement to run hospitals, day care centers, distribute food and facilitate employment for women (Deeb, 2006, p. 91). The flow of funding from Iran and female participation in family social programs was in place before the arrival of Hezbollah as part of a larger religious duty to protect the Shi’ite community from devastation (Deeb, 2006, p. 91). AMAL activism gathered the Shi’ite community together by delivering social programs, demanding fair representation, and mobilizing an insurgency militia against Israel.

Hezbollah mobilizes and recruits female supporters. In 1978, Shi’ite al-Sadr disappeared during a visit to Libya; the circumstances of his death remain unknown as his remains have not been recovered ("Body handed by Libya Not Sadr’s," 2012). Following Sadr’s disappearance, Sheik Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah continued al-Sadr’s charitable programs, rescuing the Shi’ite community as their new spiritual leader. Continued fighting between the Sunni based Palestinian Liberation Army and Israel forced Shi’ites to desert their southern Lebanese homes (AbuKhalil, 1989) worsening Shi’ite poverty and isolation (Deeb, 2006, p. 88).
Women already active in delivering these programs, looked to Fadlallah’s financial support from Iran to continue the delivery of flour, rice, gas for stoves and medication to families lacking electricity and clean water (Deeb, 2006, p. 174) during survival mode. Global humanitarian assistance in Lebanon became a priority but help never reached the isolated Shi’ite families in need, instead terrorism dominated Lebanon.

After a series of brutal kidnappings of Americans and French citizens depicting the ruthlessness of Hezbollah militants, (Mason, 1989, p. 230) Hezbollah was successful in pushing the U.S. military and other countries out of southern Lebanon and Beirut, consequently emptying out the region’s humanitarian resources. Israel initiated humanitarian projects (Roberts, 1989) and armed several Shia groups to facilitate a buffer zone, mistakenly thinking the Shias would become natural allies because of their isolation from the Lebanese government (Mason, 1989, p. 213). Along with the United States, major western countries poured millions of reconstruction dollars into Lebanon in order to stabilize its economy (Roberts, 1989, p. 133).

A significant amount of Saudi Arabian funding was suspended following the Israeli invasion so (Roberts, 1989, p. 130) the Multinational Task Force (MNF), The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (http://www.unicef.org) and the World Bank worked together to rebuild the crumbled city of Beirut along with China and Hungary. British energy industry and political writer John Roberts reported on Lebanon during the second civil war and throughout the first Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, working for both Reuters and the Middle East Economic Digest (J. Roberts, personal communication, January 23, 2013). Roberts explained how over 100 million dollars of needed reconstruction funding ceased following the death of 241 Americans in the 1983 Marine barracks suicide bombing along with over 50 French peacekeeping troops murdered; the security situation dictated withdrawal despite the growing
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humanitarian crisis (Roberts, 1989, p. 96). The international relief did not last long as the formation of Hezbollah and a series of terrorist attacks led to significant withdrawals of international support and aid which never filtered down to help devastated Shi’ite neighborhoods.

Hezbollah, also called the Party of God, was inspired by Iran’s Ayatollahs Ruhollah Khomeini and Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr to establish an Islamic State in Lebanon and to demand Israel’s immediate withdrawal. (Holt, 1999, p.184). Hezbollah is both a Lebanese political movement and a state sponsored terrorist organization. Hezbollah accused the U.S. Marine Peacekeeping presence in Beirut of being part of a larger conspiracy to support an Israel occupation (Alagha, 2006, para. 1.2). Despite atrocious acts of terrorism to include the bombing and murder of 214 U.S. peacekeepers at the U.S. Marine barracks in 1983, brutal kidnappings with prolonged torture and murder and a hijacking that included public assassinations, Sheik Fadlallah was welcomed with open arms in the Shi’ite community as he continued humanitarian aid.

As Hezbollah in Iran denied Israel’s right to exist, denied that the Holocaust occurred and publicly declared Israel their enemy, (http://www.almanar.lb/english) Fadlallah mesmerized Lebanese? (or Shi’ite) families in speeches asking communities to rebuild their lives. Fadlallah completely denied that he was Hezbollah’s spiritual or political representative in Lebanon as he addressed Islamic principles and became a political fixture, attributing his connections to Hezbollah in Iran as unsanctioned (Alagha, 2013, p. 21).

Hezbollah’s strong financial ties to Iran funding locally based community humanitarian activities often overshadowed their violent activities, giving Hezbollah strong Shi’ite support among females distributing these programs (Norton, 2007, p. 78). As Fadlallah pledged in
Lebanon to modernize the Shi’ite community with electricity, food, water and healthcare, Hezbollah’s Open Letter (1985) in Iran displayed their contempt and rage towards the United States, Israel and France, referencing the Koran (Alagha, 2006, Preface 1.2). “We have prepared for the wrongdoers a Canopy whose fire encompasses them all. If they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like molten brass which scars the faces. Wretched is the drink and wretched is the resting place!” (Alagha, 2006, Appendix B; Qur’an Interpretation18:29). Shi’ite Lebanese women overlooked Hezbollah’s extreme anti-Israeli statements originating in Iran because they considered Lebanon’s Fadlallah to be “open-minded” (Deeb, 2006, p. 93). Shi’ite women actively participated in humanitarian projects (Deeb, 2006, p. 94) and were invited to play a religious role that permitted intellectual discourse. From their perspective, it was irrelevant to be asked to cover themselves in public, being encouraged by Fadlallah to think for themselves, challenge their religious views and “don’t take it for granted,” (Deeb, 2006, p. 92) was exciting and provocative.

Sheik Muhammad Fadlallah created a publicity campaign that allowed him to stray from Hezbollah’s strict party line, appear more progressive among women and deny violent activities tied to Hezbollah. Educated in Iraq and politically active in Beirut, Fadlallah always declared himself loyal to Iranian Ayatollah Sayyid Rullolah Musavi Khomeini but managed to use half-truths in Lebanon about intent to establish an Islamic state. Fadlallah often modified his religious rhetoric in Lebanon to appear progressive as Khomeini declared his desire for Lebanon to become a neighboring theocratic Islamic nation. Khomeini’s radical anti-western agenda coincided with French and American journalists, clergymen and CIA officials being seized as hostages and used for propaganda purposes (AbuKhalil, 1989, p. 162). Sheikh Fadlallah completely denied his involvement, (Coughlin, 2010) publicly pleading for their release and
humane treatment, (Hijazi, 1987) yet journalists like Con Coughlin insist that they were nearly kidnapped right outside Fadlallah’s office (Coughlin, 2010). Con Coughlin also emphasized how charming Fadlallah could be in person and women often defended him to include Britain’s ambassador. Following Fadlallah’s death, Britian’s ambassador, Frances Guy, called Fadlallah a decent religious man stating that “…the world needed more people like him” (Black, 2010, p. 1). Even Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor defended her, despite the outrage. “Sheikh Fadlallah was behind hostage-taking, suicide bombings and other sorts of wanton violence, but Ambassador Guy said he was a man of peace, and Ambassador Guy is an honourable woman.” This statement demonstrates how easily a popular female figure such as the ambassador from Britain can temporarily shield a group like Hezbollah from criticism.

**Humanitarian programs.** Shi’ite women in southern Lebanon personally affected by intense fighting and the suffering of families were ideal candidates to deliver humanitarian assistance because of the existing neighborhood bonds. Taking a page from modern counterinsurgency methods, Hezbollah began to build a base of support by launching social programs to address the basic needs of those most likely to be allies; marginalized populations caught in the crossfire within the slums of southern Lebanon and Beirut (Hokayem, 2010, p. 180). Hezbollah targeted their support into specific neighborhoods, known as the misery belts (Shadid, 2006) in southern Beirut, recruiting from families who lost close relatives in the war or had their homes crumbled to the ground. These devastated areas had many civilians who lost relatives through either PLO or Israeli violence; Hezbollah’s outreach was meaningful for traumatized communities seeking a sense of justice.

With a unifying goal to launch a jihad against Israel and the west, (Holt, 1999, p. 184) Hezbollah recruited women already associated with the resistance movement to assume
leadership positions to rebuild the community by working in shelters and distributing food, clothing and water to families (Deeb, 2006, p. 91). Laura Deeb spent significant time with women community volunteers who distributed food, ran low-cost day care centers and orphanages and did fundraising. Women were put in charge of projects from beginning to end as a volunteer explained in Deeb’s book on Shi’ite piety. “You would see what people trapped in the shelters needed: cleaning stuff, medicines, food, drink, supplies. You would be in charge of a shelter” (Deeb, 2006, p. 91). Women assumed leadership roles by providing direction in humanitarian activities.

Beirut’s Shi’ite al-dahiya neighborhood never received assistance from the Lebanese government and with no social services or governmental response to the extreme suffering, Hezbollah assumed a caretaker role (Norton, 2007). Filling the gap of no governmental relief, Hezbollah launched significant social programs that empowered the Shi’ites with their charitable and spiritual initiatives. Hezbollah created vocational schools for women and the Hezbollah Women’s Committee, and Iran supplemented all medical and hospital initiatives, exceeding past funding (Norton, 2007, p. 110). Boston University International Relations and Anthropology Professor Augustus Richard Norton is a former US army officer who served as an unarmed military observer with the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNIFIL) in Lebanon, establishing close relations with members of the Shia community in southern Lebanon (Norton, 2007, Acknowledgements 1). Also an advisor to the Iraq Study Group (Baker-Hamilton Commission), he is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations (http://www.bu.com).

Richard Norton has studied poverty and conflict in the Middle East and advocates for negotiation with civilian populations supporting Hezbollah and Hamas (Norton, 2007). Richard Norton described the transition among Shi’ites from their acceptance of a deprived life to a
confident sense of activism and strong identity. This was accomplished by the transformation from Shi’ite activism to institutionalism that volunteers described as organizations with assigned jobs and roles documented on computer databases (Deeb, 2006, p. 91).

The Martyrs Foundation financially and symbolically supports the families of suicide bombers or martyrs; reaching out to widows who suffer financially and emotionally after losing their husbands in war. Smaller organizations started by local women activists used the same financial connections from Hezbollah to run fundraising activities to support public school fees and generalized food to local family initiatives (Deeb, 2006, p. 91). Hezbollah aid programs like The Campaign for Reconstruction and the Resupply Committee not only houses, feeds and rebuilds communities, (Holt, 1999, p. 185) but also provides jobs to the unemployed and alienated segments of Lebanon’s Shi’ite divisions. One woman that Holt interviewed explained that if the enemy (Israel) enters the country, women may fight like men and become martyrs (Holt, 1999, p. 187). This activism mentality was transformed into Hezbollah’s bureaucratic employment of women to run humanitarian missions; empowering female players from grassroots political movements into a substitute governmental structure.

In her book *An Enchanted Modern Gender and Public Piety in Shi’i Lebanon*, Deeb describes how Shi’ite women practice Ashura through Hezbollah’s community service, quoting the words of a volunteer she met.

See where your country is, it is occupied! See how the people of the south are suffering, how people from all sects are fleeing, are being bombed, their homes are being destroyed. What is going to be your position on this? This is the school. This is Ashura (Deeb, 2006, p. 163).
Deeb references the Koran urging the feeding of the poor and describes the importance of kindness as a part of Shia piety, extended to include the entire community (Deeb, 2006, p. 169). Her interview with an administrator at the Martyrs’ Association hospital revealed the hospital hired the best and the most educated for their skills to boost the quality of service to the community. Religious piety was not the main hiring consideration which makes Hezbollah social programs part of a larger community of more educated with diverse religious backgrounds (Holt, 1999, p. 171).

Hezbollah recruited women by to perform many of the community jobs because their help was needed. In 1983, the World Health Organization declared Beirut’s public healthcare chaotic and ineffective, with 1 doctor for every 1,250 residents and very few nurses or midwives and during this crisis, Hezbollah’s medical programs were very popular (AbuKhalil, 1989, p. 84). Hezbollah women personalized their social services by regularly visiting the clients at home, following up with support for food and clothing. Volunteers immediately identified gaps in service such as babysitting needs; they took on close relationships with the community like family, calling women their sisters, and men, their brothers (Deeb, 2006, p. 176). Fadlallah combined the need for women volunteers with reformist rhetoric on gender and the Shi‘ia religion (Deeb, 2006, p. 94) calling women “…equally responsible for the advancement of society…” (Koran Sura interpretation 9:71) and emphasizing that women proved themselves in business and politics (Shehadeh, 2003, p. 201).

**History of women’s rights in Lebanon.** The history of women’s rights in Lebanon is relevant to how Hezbollah verbally courted Lebanon’s Shi’ite female population and provides an example of how Hezbollah built credibility among women in Lebanon by modifying their rhetoric in response to Lebanese politics. Key Hezbollah officials in Lebanon never refers to
women as intellectually inferior as some Imams in other regions do, reinforces her right to education and encourages community involvement (Shehadeh, 2003, p. 199). Lebanese women have a history of feminism that according to Dr. Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, dates back with female poets in the 19th century (Shehadeh, 1999, p. 36).

Dr. Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, a Harvard doctorate graduate, is a professor of cultural studies at the American University of Beirut who edited multiple articles on Middle Eastern feminism. Early reformers like Butros al-Bustani in 1849 fought for women’s access to education but never for equal legal status (Shehadeh, 1999, p. 39). Dr. Shehadeh describes women’s labor unions starting in 1924 with demands for better wages and working conditions (Shehadeh, 1999, p. 40) while Lebanese men left home for work in thriving Persian Gulf countries (AbuKhalil, 1989, p. 74). During the Renaissance Period in Lebanon called Nahda, which began in Egypt after Napoleon’s invasion, (Traboulsi, 2007, p. 67) a Protestant convert named Butrus al-Bustani challenged the strict religious hierarchy in the Ottoman Empire (Abu-Manneh, 1980). He argued for women’s rights to work, become educated, choose their husbands, and apply for divorce (Traboulsi, 2007).

Hezbollah recognized these very public causes for education and working rights for women as significant and influenced how the teachings of the Koran were explained in Lebanon. The leaders of Hezbollah in Lebanon would later choose their words carefully by acknowledging the past unjust suppression of women by “backward” men (Shehadeh, 2003, p. 120). Although never agreeing to complete equal rights for women, but publicly praising women as significant players would make Hezbollah appear progressive to Shi’ite women (Shehadeh, 2003, p. 195).

Hezbollah’s rhetoric to recruit female supporters. It is not what Hezbollah said to women in Lebanon that resonated so much, Shi’ite women were verbally treated like treasured
pears instead of what Sandra Mackey stated was “…an unmistakable disdain reserved more for creatures than for humans” (Mackey, 1989, p. 78). Ayatollah Hussein Fadlallah 1 was the leader of Hezbollah in Lebanon who distanced himself from Iran’s Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini 2 strict interpretations of the Koran and Sharia Law that strictly controlled the activities of women (Shehadeh, 2003, p. 193). Although Fadlallah declared allegiance to Khomeini, he articulated why women in Lebanon were entitled to holding positions in “…business, politics and leadership positions…” (Shehadeh, 2003, p. 201) referencing how the Queen of Shiba 3 (Qur’an translation 27:32) was mentally superior to men.

Fadlallah believed that his “campaign of persuasion of which he was a master” (Shehadeh, 2003, p. 195) was more practical than to rush Lebanon to become an Islamic state. Fadlallah addressed discrimination in Lebanon’s legal system against women and as Judith Miller explained, he promoted a strict interpretation of Islam against western values by using western issues as his arguments (Shehadeh, 2003, p. 195). Judith Miller is a former New York Times investigative journalist who covers the Middle East and received a 2002 Pulitzer Prize for her research on global terrorism. Fadlallah carefully chose how he spoke about women’s equality, often referring to the future modernization of Islam and past male dominated Islamic movements that exploited the Koran to justify treating women as inferior (Qur’an 2:228 translation). Being political correct in Lebanon, he once stated that true Islamic principles guarantee women absolute equality with men but with different assigned duties (Shehadeh, 2003, p. 200).

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1 Ayatollah Hussein Fadlallah is considered to be the most articulate spokesman of Hezbollah in Lebanon (Shehadeh, 2003) who was born in Iraq in 1935. He reportedly had his own following of Shi’ites in Lebanon and although loyal to Iran’s Revolution, he created his own dialogue in Lebanon as a spiritual leader separate from Iran.
2 Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini is a prominent religious and political leader who emerged from the Iranian revolution and preached absolute theocratic rule with a strict interpretation of the Koran.(Shehadeh, 2003, p. 77)
3 Queen of Shiba, also spelled Sheba, is both a Persian and Ethiopian legend and a reference in the Old Testament and the Koran. A wise queen from southwest Arabia, she tested the intelligence of King Solomon using riddles.
Religious courts for Muslims and Christians handle social issues in Lebanon on a sectarian basis (AbuKhalil, 1989, p. 55), and although Shia Lebanese do not strictly follow Sharia Law, (United States Institute of Peace [USIP], 2010) men have superior inheritance (Koran translation 4:11) and divorce rights in Lebanon’s social courts. Creating a positive perspective, Fadlallah minimizes this issue by stating that men need to compensate for their duties and responsibilities, there is only room for one manager in a family and women have more rights to receive privileges (Shehadeh, 2003, p. 200) in the form of kindness (Koran translation 27:32). Although there were over 100 honor killings of women reported and tried in court since 1995, (Khalaf, 2010, p. 262) men still receive legal favoritism by reducing sentences for these murders (Khalaf, 2010, p. 253).

Mona Chemeli Khalaf is a former assistant professor at the Institute for Women’s Studies at the Lebanese American University who advocates for justice and economic issues concerning women in the Middle East (Khalaf, 2010, p. 177). The Lebanese Muslim courts impose tremendous discrimination against women in honor crimes, adultery and rape as the testimony of one man is equal to that of two women (Khalaf, 2010, p. 8). Fadlallah once rationalized that even though women are more emotional and forgetful than men, if a female witness is “virtuous, just and truthful, the testimony of one woman may be sufficient” (Shehadeh, 2003, p. 200). In response to NGOs and women’s groups calling for the repeal of Article 562 which reduces honor killing sentences, Fadlallah issued a well-received fatwa against honor killings which he called “a repulsive act banned by Islamic law” (Khalaf, 2010, p. 253). However, he never went on record to support the repeal and the Speaker of the Parliament responsible for law making is a Shi’ite. On the United Nation’s “Eliminating Violence Against Women Day,” (Nayouf, 2007/2007) Fadlallah declared that women should retaliate against
abusive husbands if they are physically injured, but that women could withhold sex from their husbands as an alternative to hitting back (Nayouf, 2007/2007). These contradictory positions demonstrate how Hezbollah softens religious doctrine originating in Iran to a more politically popular version in Lebanon, appeasing and wooing women.

Fadlallah and Shi’ite Shams al-Din⁴ wrote extensively on women and Islam, favoring women’s right to an education and working as a professional, but they always emphasized the priority of being a good mother and housewife. Fadlallah consistently uses the words “freedom of truth” when discussing women’s rights which connects to Shi’ite piety and the powerful belief that Islam will liberate a person. Both men cited examples of the Prophet Muhammad’s granddaughter Zaynab in addition to the Prophet’s favorite daughter, Fatima as female protagonists (El-Husseini, 2008, p. 275). El-Husseini, the former speaker of the Parliament once pointed to Zaynab portraying the Lioness of Karbala [emphasis added] (El-Husseini, 2008, p. 275) in a famous Islamic history book, The Women of Karbala, (Aghaie, 2005) to distinguish Lebanese women as being more independent. In Lara Deeb’s book, An Enchanted Modern Gender and Public Pity in Shi’i Lebanon, (Deeb, 2006) a young woman named Hajjeh Khadija Hammond describes how she believes that Islam helped her obtain an education and how she donned a Hijab in Hezbollah after years of wearing short skirts and tank tops. “Even if we go back further, the truth is that Islam gave us the right to education, before anyone else. Islam gave us rights to women before any other movement, whether communist or capitalist” (p. 76)

Women joining Hezbollah are rebelling against the marginalization of Shi’ites, being able to

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⁴ Shaykh Muhammed Mahdi Shams as Din (also known as Chamseddine) wrote doctrine for the behavior of women and Islam in Lebanon on behalf of the Shi’ite community and replaced Al-Sadr following his disappearance. Shams as Din believed that women should wear the veil but also supported women working and getting an education, as long as it didn’t interfere with raising children or life at home. Shams as Din was often overshadowed by Husayn Fadlallah and was not known to be very charismatic or capable of taking a leadership position within Hezbollah. (El-Husseini, 2008)
express themselves more openly represents more political representation to women who are accustomed to being more discreet about their opinions in public.

Fadlallah use of words like full integration and self-expression when discussing women’s rights detract from his true belief of an Islamic state, he eloquently compliments women and modifies strict interpretations of Sharia policy in efforts to appease them in his speeches. Although women hold administrative judgeships in Lebanon, they are forbidden to do in a religious court which handles social issues like domestic violence, property issues and divorce (Khalaf, 2010, p. 255). Fadlallah’s statement that women are intelligent and capable enough to be judges and using the example found in the Koran where the Queen of Shiba (Shehadeh, 2003, p. 201) is mentally superior to men (Qur’an 27:32 translation) is how Fadlallah operated within his political reality in Lebanon (Azani, 2009, p. 97). “Furthermore, jurisprudence relies on wisdom, learning and faith. If these qualities are to be found in a woman, she may, indeed, become a judge, albeit with reservations, and interpret the Qur’an just like men” (Shehadeh, 2003, p. 201).

Although women are forbidden to preach as Imans, Fadlallah states they are allowed to do so over other women (Shehadeh, 2003, p. 201). Fadlallah’s public courting of women is how Hezbollah’s politics play out in Lebanon, separate from Iran’s strict enforcement on women’s movements. In Eitan Azani’s book *Hezbollah: The Story of the Party of God: From Revolution to Institutionalism*, Hezbollah deputy leader Qassem is quoted saying that they were “…working within the framework of the political situation…” when Hezbollah made decisions to participate in elections previously considered morally unjust (Azani, 2009, p. 97).

**Women as Symbols For Hezbollah in Lebanon**
**Shi’ite women as family symbols of strength.** Feminist Lebanese writer Emily Nasrallah covered the devastation women faced as she remained in Beirut throughout all conflicts, capturing a popular theme of independent women in Lebanon in her books (Mackay, 1989). Considered a pioneer of Arab women’s literature, Emily Nasrallah is a women’s rights activist who avoids religion as a topic (Salem, 2009). She uses the picture of endless devastation and destruction ripping apart communities, with women fleeing rural communities to deliver a story of survival for Lebanese women. Shi’ite women who historically faced persecution, sought justice for all the bloodshed in their community and found answers through Hezbollah’s calls for action. (Manganaro, 1999) Ultimately, fighting Israel became the cause celebre; as Israel was held responsible for all the war carnage. Those caught in the crossfire became potential recruits for Hezbollah with women willing to share their compelling story of a husband or brother captured or killed by Israeli troops in media interviews (Deeb, 2006).

Female Shi’ite political activism in Lebanon began with AMAL, then bloomed into a more institutional form with Hezbollah. University of Westminster Lecturer Dr. Maria Holt has studied the effects of violent conflict on Shi’ite and Palestinian women in Lebanon, publishing on Islamic political movements in the Middle East as both a researcher and a lobbyist (http://www.westminster.ac.uk). As Holt explains, Musa al-Sadr used his sister to involve Lebanese Shi’ite women publicly, to increase their visibility to recruit others (Holt, 1999, p. 180). Medical Institute for Neuropsychological Disorders Dr. Elie Karam, who initiated the first study of mental health in the Middle East, (http://www.mindclinics.org) found that women in Lebanon experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorders as often as men, with associated adjustment issues such as severe depression and nightmares (Karam, 1999, p. 277).
Shi’ite women use volunteerism as a way to express their piety, or religious devotion (Deeb, 2006, p. 36) and this mobilization gave Shi’ite women a sense of purpose and self-worth. Associate Professor of Anthropology at Scripps College Lara Deeb has written extensively about Southern Lebanese Shi’ite women, specifically their religious and community participation (http://www.yadaliyya.com). Deeb describes this faithfulness as public piety; giving up your personal time and money to the Shi’ite community. Persecution against Shi’ites can be traced back to their original story of suffering and courage when the Prophet Mohammed’s grandson, Husayn revolted against a corrupt religious establishment. As the story of inspiration and courage goes, Sayyib Zaynab, Husayn’s sister bravely resisted her captors in Damascus along with helpless, captured children, following the murder of her brother who was hailed as a martyr (Deeb, 2006, p. 130). Considered a female protagonist among Shi’ites Zaynab is a woman who exercised fierce heroic bravery against the forces of evil and oppression. Her name is a role model for women struggling for justice to never give up hope.

Public mourning and female participation. Sayyib Zaynab remains a symbol of bravery and suffering for Shi’ite women who assume the role of a martyr enduring centuries of oppression, she is remembered and honored during Ashura services. The commemoration of Ashura marks the day of Imam Husayn’s death and involves public mourning events that involve self-wounds; producing blood drippings down the face (Deeb, 2006, p. 135). Some Shi’ites and mostly Sunnis level accusations of backwardness ("Bloody Ritual Ashura," 2012) against those who continue the practice today as children as young as nine years old can be seen violently whipping themselves with sharp knives attached to chains (Mark, 2012). The fierce acts of self-flagellation have historically attracted extremist attacks, resulting in dozens of deaths from bombings and attacks ("Deaths in Ashura," 2012). Women wearing traditional face veils and
chains march through Lebanon to represent the suffering of the Prophet’s family, with Hezbollah flags draped in the background (Deeb, 2006, p. 141).

**Hezbollah Use of Women In The Media.** Hezbollah modernizes their rhetoric for wider appeal. In response to modern media broadcasting sound bites, Hezbollah has adapted their past aggressive anti-Israeli speeches by substituting with more appealing phrases like “the right to defend” and “freedom, human rights and equal rights” (Alagha, 2006, Appendix B). Hezbollah has declared the State of Israel a terrorist while referring to their own politics as peaceful; pointing out their humanitarian services to restore infrastructure, electricity, medical care and education to all sectarian groups. Hezbollah often equates sacrificing human lives for political freedom and human rights in their lectures, (Alagha, 2006, Appendix B) yet their use of language has been adapted for a global audience. The Lebanese weekly current affairs magazine Ash-Shiraa reported that Hezbollah operatives offered veiled woman fifteen dollars and unveiled women thirty-three dollars a day to make public appearances at a sit-down with media coverage (Aussie Dave, 2010). American University of Beirut Professor Dr. Hilal Khashan pointed out that the unveiled women in a public event creates the perception that Hezbollah has many Christian women followers, making their protests seem national rather than sectarian driven (Aussie Dave, 2010).

The public relations shift for Hezbollah began in 1998 as the Internet and electronic media propagated and their female support was translated into mass media images. With their new image makeover, no longer would Hezbollah call the United States or France enemies, instead their talking points spoke to a wider audience discussing how international embargos violate human rights. Hezbollah never strayed from calling Israel the enemy of Lebanon, but sound bites would have phrases associated with a commitment to human rights and tolerance for
other religions, targeting the Christian and Druze communities in Lebanon as potential allies (Alagha, 2006, Appendix B).

Using women, Hezbollah’s messages resonate with all women by removing Hezbollah’s stigma of a male dominated religious movement. Christians and Druze border communities in Lebanon who share Hezbollah’s anti-Israeli sentiment are targeted on women’s shows. First, Israel is blamed for all violence and destruction in Lebanon and second, Hezbollah uses women broadcasters to declare respect for progressive Lebanese women who seek equality, irrespective of their religious affiliation. Having an articulate speaker like Fadlallah discuss the modernization of the Islamic world and relate this to social reform and political activism is a powerful tool to gain interest from women. Addressing women directly about human rights makes Fadlallah appear compassionate and progressive, even with anti-Israeli messages inserted in his sound bites (Alagha, 2013, p. 198).

*Al Manar TV.* Lebanese media is organized by confessional, religious or family association and Al-Manar TV is 100 percent Shia owned, significantly representing the politics of Hezbollah which funds the station’s operations (Sharp et al., 2006, p. 24). Women’s groups often reflect the divisions among Lebanon; that is, they advocate for their confessional group rather than for women as a rule (Firmino-Fontan, 2007, p. 162). Al-Manar TV employs women as journalists, programmers and producers supporting an anti-Israeli message with political segments and family shows for children (Firmino-Fontan, 2007, p. 178). According to Victoria Christine Firmino-Fontan, Hezbollah’s Women’s Association (HWA) plays a major role in Al-Manar TV, publicizing all Shia influenced NGO activity.

Dr. Victoria Christine Firmino-Fontan, is an expert in Conflict Resolution and Humiliation Studies (http://www.humiliationstudies.org) who conducted field research in Lebanon on
Hezbollah and later published an article on relationships between the media, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Lebanese women. The Hezbollah Women's Association has publicized their discipline in not turning women into objects as other stations do, and refusing to hire the equivalent of foreign female child slaves, a practice common in the parts of Lebanon (Firmo-Fontan, 2007, p. 172). Advocating for the fair and equal treatment of the Shi’ite community is a major part of Hezbollah’s political platform in Lebanon (Azani, 2009, p. 101).

Women on al-Manar are presented as intellectuals who also believe in family values and they represent the political views of Hezbollah as related to Lebanese Shi’ites. Supporting the concepts of the resistance movement and the return of displaced persons (Azani, 2009, p. 101) are topics that women can present in a compelling and persuasive format on TV. The past victimization of Shi’ites as mothers, sisters and daughters and the will to fight back are some powerful themes delivered by women on al-Manar TV (Firmo-Fontan, 2007, p. 178). It is useful to note how Hezbollah as a political force, elicits emotional public responses to war and violence by specifically referencing the safety concerns of women children which is relevant to Lebanese families. Recently, the leadership of Hezbollah accused the United States of not wanting the violence in Syria to end on Al Manar TV as they offered prayers to end violence against women in Syria and Bahrain (http://www.almanar.lb/english).

On Al-Manar, TV anchorwomen wear the Hejab instead of the more constricted Chadoor, which Firmo-Fontan concludes is more appealing to a larger Lebanese audience. Al-Manar tries to appeal to a broader audience of women outside by allowing topics that women’s groups publicize already. One issue addressed by NGOs is domestic violence being underreported and the reluctance of local courts to handle these cases in place of religious courts (Cheng, 2013). Some topics of discussion to widen audience participation was blaming women for crimes
WOMEN AND HEZBOLLAH IN LEBANON (Baylouny, 2009, p. 7) or stigmatizing those women. Another program discussed silence (negative silence, al-samat al-salbi) about domestic abuse and rape (wijhat nathr, 4/10/08). “In this, an Eastern country, if you breathe in the north,” an unveiled woman stated, “they are listening in the south.” The south refers to the Shi’ite community who has mobilized as activists. Hezbollah benefits from these shows as the crimes are not ignored and the spin is how local Hezbollah figures are listening and responding to these concerns. The overall message is that the Shi’ite community respects women, will not ignore these issues and keeps up with current women’s issues in Lebanon with an activist community unafraid to help.

Al-Manar TV is banned from broadcasting on United States and Great Britain soil or from using satellite or cable (Sharp et al., 2006, p. 23) because of alarming programming with Holocaust denial and references to Israel as part of a world conspiracy ("France pulls Al-Manar," 2004). In 2004, the U.S. State Department added Al-Manar to the Terrorist Exclusion List. Available for viewing on the Internet, Al-Manar declared its programming to be a form of psychological warfare against their Zionist enemy (Firmo-Fontan, 2007, p. 177). Openly calling Israel a Zionist enemy is commonplace on Al-Manar, but in response to public outrage, the rhetoric has been tweaked. Denying there is any hatred against Israel; Hezbollah spokesmen retort that there is a difference between Zionism and Judaism ("U.S. Israel Oppose Al-Shatat," 2003).

*Hezbollah’s women removing cluster bombs.* A recent major story featured on Al-Manar TV is the removal of hundreds of cluster bombs in southern Lebanon by females hired by various NGOs (Al Jaz, 2007). The story portrays working women wearing their hijabs under helmets, trained to remove Israeli’s 2006 unexploded cluster bombs re-airs in several media outlets (Stevenson, 2011). Reported initially in 2010, Hezbollah asked humanitarian demining teams
from Great Britain to leave, not allowing the international groups to work in southern Lebanon ("Hezbollah de-mining," 2010). A short time later, the same news story with different perspective surfaced featuring local Lebanese women from several religious backgrounds working for a Norwegian NGO bomb removal organization (Stevenson, 2011). Hezbollah media portrayed the women as local heroes, willing to sacrifice their safety to clear the bombs before children can accidently set them off. The female bomb squad worker interviewed by the Guardian emphasized that they receive equal treatment and earn the same salaries as their male counterparts (Al Jaz, 2007). When interviewed by the Guardian, Shia women removing cluster bombs as local caretakers (Stevenson, 2011) stated that their work made them feel liberated. Words like liberated and equal treatment are central to Hezbollah’s political sound bites, these messages resonate with families bitter over cross-fire fighting.

The story of women removing cluster bombs reinforced a topic repeatedly raised by Fadlallah who had a completely different version of events than Israel did. In a series of interviews, Fadlallah denied that Hezbollah had fired rockets into Israel unprovoked and insisted in each case, Hezbollah only returned fire (Azani, 2009, p. 114). In 2006, Hezbollah kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and fired thousands of rockets at civilians in Israel. When Israel retaliated to the rocket attacks with cluster bombs, the result became a humanitarian crisis for the civilians who were co-located near Hezbollah ("Hezbollah Times Topics," 2012). Hezbollah’s base of operations was located in residential neighborhoods with families living doors away.

Experts on Hezbollah debate whether Hezbollah intentionally fired upon Israel to provoke attacks against civilians close to their base of operations. Pictures of exploded Israeli munitions provoke anger and never answers questions over what notification civilians had to evacuate. Richard Norton, in his book on Hezbollah compared the number of Lebanese civilians
as being 30 times the number of Israeli civilians. Yet he ignores questions regarding PLO bombings adding to those statistics and avoids discussion on the civilians living close to Hezbollah’s operations. There is agreement among historians regarding the unnecessary number of civilian casualties and bombings in Lebanon’s residential neighborhoods, and it is established that Hezbollah considers Israel to be an enemy to be loathed (Norton, 2007, p. 88).

The risks of living near a warzone is also a component of the psychology found in Hezbollah’s writings that demands loyalty to love God and the prophet Mohammed, willing to be part of the jihad in the four senses of martyrdom which includes innocent Muslim civilians (Alagha, 2006, p. 106-108). Even Norton states that Israel underestimated the will of Lebanese civilians to refuse to evacuate their homes (Norton, 2007, p. 87) in 2006. The willingness of mothers to defend and accept some risk as part of a continued resistance is a process that Alagha describes as mobilizing (Alagha, 2006, p. 108). Characterizing the State of Israel as a terrorist re-establishing colonialism with U.S. help (Alagha, 2013, p. 174-175) justifies Hezbollah’s concept of resistance. This movement motivated Hezbollah to appoint a woman to their political council in 2004 to head the Woman’s Organization to engage families through the female population (Alagha, 2013, p. 159).

**The Women of Hezbollah Show.** The Women of Hezbollah Show portrays key Hezbollah activists and interviews local women active in Hezbollah resistance and humanitarian activities. Teacher Zeinab Al-Safter, who is also a reporter for Al-Manar TV, gives a tour of her former home and neighborhood, destroyed during conflict with Israel. One of her younger female students who is dressed in western clothing on a coeducational campus, discusses how attending Zeinab Al-Safter’s class has given her vision for the future. Rima Fakhri from the Hezbollah Political Council discusses fundraising programs, leading other women participants to discuss
their workshop activities. Maher Abi Samra, who was part of the Lebanese Communist Party and an activist in the Palestinian resistance, produced the program through Icarus Films (Salas, 2012). Despite being atheistic, pushing for the independence of Palestine (Collelo, 1987) and other revolutionary causes that regard the U.S. or the west as enemies is beneficial to communists. Hezbollah of Women conveys a deliberate and compelling image of Hezbollah feminist militants protecting their land from Israel and engaging in community activities involving local women.

*Women of Hezbollah* is being promoted on other venues like the Internet and Al Jazeera TV to English speaking global audiences using different versions. Al Jazeera TV has a popular weekly show for women with a modernized, attractive and fashionable anchorwoman called the *Every Woman Show* (Women of Hezbollah, n.d.). There are variations of excerpts that broadcast on the Internet in English, mentioning events like the Grapes of Wrath conflict which happened six years after the 2000 copyright of the original film release (Women of Hezbollah, n.d.). A widow describes her ordeal losing a son-in-law following her husband’s death, both men martyred as suicide bombers for Hezbollah. Both her and her daughter show pictures of their loved ones killed and discuss their future commitment to the resistance. The show interviews women who lost their homes, pointing to piles of rubble that was once their neighborhood. One woman from southern Lebanon states that she wants to confront or go “face to face” with Israel and another woman comments that she fears her son will be the next target of an air raid. Broadcasting an emotional series similar to *Women of Hezbollah* on Al Jazeera TV (Al Jazeera [Al Jaz], 2007) has created favorable public support in academic audiences as far as the University of Buffalo in New York.

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5 A copy of the complete, unedited video is offered from a Brooklyn address at a cost of $348, copyright 2000. Versions of the video appear in another show titled Every Woman: Women of Hezbollah which makes reference to the Grapes of Wrath conflict which occurred in 2006, after the copyright date.
The tone of this documentary is clearly one of providing a historical perspective from which the viewer can distill a clearer picture of the nature of the Islamic Party of God, the Hezbollah. The voice-over narration explains the major historical and political events of the last forty years that have contributed to the emergence and sustainment of the Hezbollah and relates them to the lives of two women, Zeinab and Khadige (Hajje Khadige Hirz), thus putting a face of human emotion to a topic often foreign to Western, non-Muslim audiences (Dykyi, 2000, npn, para. 2).

This film review demonstrates that the emotions elicited from the stories on Women and Hezbollah influenced what people in the U.S. believe about Hezbollah. Themes used in Hezbollah’s propaganda and messaging exist in *Women and Hezbollah*: Lebanese Shi’ites right to self-defense and Israel as an aggressor singling out Lebanese civilians without cause are ideas that mirror the speeches of Hezbollah leaders like Fadlallah.

Because of its expansionist policy, Israel poses a perpetual existential danger to Lebanon…The Zionist entity, being a racist state, represents a peril…The perpetual Israeli military threat to Lebanon requires the founding of a national defence strategy (Alagha, 2013, pp.171-172).

Women play a passive role supporting Hezbollah’s activities with the repeated use of the words “This is women’s jihad” which means struggle. As many practicing Shi’ite women insist, struggle does not translate into meaning violence or fear, (Deeb, 2006, p. 204) but the word does indicate participation in a movement. Women and Hezbollah carefully promotes Hezbollah’s propaganda by taking a military stance against Israel, portraying women passively defending their homes as justification.

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6 Defence is the British spelling of defense and is not a spelling error.
Anti-War movies. Lebanese movies often portray women using compelling images of war, survival, and protecting families. Anti-war movies produced in Lebanon share themes involving a country weary of indescribable destruction and suffering, anger towards an Israel presence and a healing relationship between Lebanese Christians and Muslims. These popular themes from the images of multiple wars and conflict resonate among Lebanese and global viewers alike; the concepts are redesigned in Hezbollah’s Al-Manar programming and other public relation venues. Al-Manar refers to itself as the “station of resistance” and has a stated mission of conducting “…psychological warfare against the Zionist enemy” (Sharp et al., 2006, p. 25).

Syrian Bride, (See Figure 1) produced by Israeli Eran Riklis, depicts the tragic tale of a beautiful young bride from the Druze community in the Golan Heights trying to cross the Syrian border to marry her musician husband, but is bullied by Israeli border soldiers and Syrian counterparts alike (Riklis, 2004). Despite the film’s neutrality on the politics of the Golan Heights, the sentiment against Israeli presence is strong and full of inferences about mistreatment, jail and political suppression. The bride’s father risks arrest by Israeli soldiers because of his ties to insurgent activity; traveling to the border to see his daughter off for the last time triggers a dramatic confrontation with Israeli soldiers. Syrian Bride captures the frustration of ongoing regional conflict, resentment towards Israeli occupation and the bonding with Syrians across the border.
Anti-war film, *Under the Bombs* by Philippe Aractingi is filmed against real raw footage of the 2006 destruction in southern Lebanon with real refugees as actors and news videos filming Israeli soldiers patrolling (Chabalier, Cohen-Seha, Raphael, & Aractingi, 2008). The film is a gripping tale of a progressive Shi’ite woman named Zeina from Beirut, desperately searching for her son and sister within the ruins of southern Lebanon. (See Figure 2). Zeina, hires the only cab driver willing to travel the dangerous and impossible route to find her family; a theatrical Christian man named Tony who inappropriately flirts with her. Despite the friction, they develop a bond as they pass bomb-crater roads and homes once familiar to them, in complete chaos with all the infrastructure destroyed. The scenes are heart wrenching as Zeina shouts to her dead sister that this is not their war. Christian relatives of Tony ask if Israel understands that they are bombing Christians by asking “Do the Israelis think we are all Arabs?” (Chabalier et al., 2008).

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The winner of a human rights film award by the Venice International Festival, the movie captures the anguish of war in southern Lebanon with Shi’ite women working in groups for NGOs to aid and comfort other survivors. When Zeina realizes that her sister has been killed, she is comforted by a Hezbollah woman local who informs her that her sister is a martyr and in paradise. Zeina rejects this explanation from Hezbollah as billboards with pictures of the leaders of Hezbollah splash the background with messages of hope. “They have destroyed our bridges. We have mended their hearts. Hezbollah” (Starfield Productions, 2008, Scene billboard depicted 3). Even though Zeina does not identify with the Hezbollah’s invitation to see her ordeal as a reason to become more religious, the images of cloaked women moving around peacefully in groups is powerful as they appear in control and unafraid.

In a sad conclusion at a Christian monastery, Zeina finds out that her son was killed during an emotional scene with a little boy who describes the details of her son being buried under the bombs (Starfield Productions, 2008). *Under the Bombs* has compelling scenes of families running for cover during bombings and shows lost children frantically searching for

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their relatives at refugee camps and hospitals; Shi’ite and Christians alike. The movie has gruesome scenes of bloody mass graves being opened for identification, followed by emotional demonstrations during the funerals. “Israel, Israel, the enemy of Hezbollah! America, America, the greatest Satan! Who are you? Hezbollah! Who are you? Hezbollah!” (Starfield Productions, 2008, Funeral mass grave scene 5). The demonstrations in the movie are accompanied with relatives engaged in emotional scenes of mourning which seem to soften their angry shouting. Even though Zeina seems appalled at the public displays of rage, the chaos during the search among bodies for her sister’s remains dooms her to accept their wrath.

Major motion pictures have embraced the reconciliation between Christians and Muslims, in humorous movies like Caramel (Les Films Des Tournelles, 2007) which lightens up discussions about independent Lebanese women irrespective of religious affiliation and complicated and adulterous relationships with men. Serious commentaries, like the movie Where Do We Go Now? (Les Films des Tournelles, 2011) dramatize the tragic impact war has had on relations between Christians and Muslims using light humor with women conspiring against their men to stop petty fighting. Where Do We Go Now depicts a serious scene with women marching through a cemetery with Christians and Muslims killed in war buried on opposite sides; and a controversial situation of a Christian woman and Muslim man’s deep attraction for each other. The Christians and Muslims in Where Do We Go Now portray a rural community which mimics some isolated regions where local alliances overcome religious differences.

Hezbollah and Christian women in the media. The Christian Free Patriotic Movements already had an existing relationship with Shi’ites in locally based regions, despite their alliances with the western world ("Christians of Hezbollah," 2012). In the past, Hezbollah’s alliance with Maronite Christians required conversion to Islam (http://www.standwithus.com). Today, this
rhetoric has changed to a message of tolerance, except for Israel. Hezbollah has welcomed images with Christian women (See Figures 3, 4) to gain more support outside of the Free Patriotic Movement. Take the case of Randa Gholam, (See Figure 4) a Christian female who publicly supports Hassan Nasrallah (Zirulnick, 2012).

![Figure 3. Randa Gholam.](image1)

![Figure 4. Gholam at public forum.](image2)

Hezbollah has been persistently trying to gain strongholds in Maronite neighborhoods, offering services when the Lebanese government fails their constituents. Positive images in the media involving women can help bolster support for major land purchases that Hezbollah seeks to make such as the Balaa Dam in Batroun ("Batroun Dam," 2011). Coverage on Al-Manar TV by female hosts (See Figure 5) who are aggressive enough to interrupt male Sheiks (Baylouny, 2009, p. 4) can appeal to a wider female audience in Lebanon (Sharp et al., 2006).

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Figure 5. Zeinab al-Saffar

Chapter 3

Methodology

Qualitative methodology identifies connections and themes between words found in literary research and narrative stories (Tracy, 2013, p. 23) that form a pattern of expected behaviors. A thick description of context is how qualitative methodology expert Dr. Sarah Tracy would describe the document analysis needed to research first hand narratives (Tracy, 2013, p. 28) about Lebanese women involved with Hezbollah. Although Lebanon does not have a credible census to draw accurate statistics about women from (Shehadeh, 1999, p. 48) and Hezbollah’s social programs and participation of women is not systematically documented, there is detailed information in articles and books published on Hezbollah. This cultural approach or narrative inquiry uses data drawn from literature (Tracy, 2013, p. 36) on Lebanese women and Hezbollah to describe symbolism, relationships and patterns. Diverse sources representing multiple points of view were used (Tracy, 2013, p. 40) to evaluate the public attitudes surrounding social outreach to women by a terrorist organization to gain credibility as a political alternative.

Handling controversial viewpoints. There is no shortage of opinionated experts on Hezbollah, this paper describes Hezbollah as a state-sponsored terrorist group and presents “the other humanitarian Hezbollah” by identifying and naming specific programs; any statement regarding the goals of Hezbollah are attributed to their own statements.
Hezbollah – Who They Are. The first step in the research is to consider the history of Hezbollah and identify who their members are, past and present. The research performed a close review with detailed consideration of Shi’ites in Lebanon, their political struggles, and their history of oppression. The research considers economics of women in Lebanon and their family structure before and after multiple violent conflicts in relation to the Shi’ite population, particularly in Beirut and in the southern regions. The social aspects of Shi’ite women were studied and considered as a major influencer for political, religious and spiritual participation of Hezbollah activities; especially in local humanitarian missions.

Dr. Col. Eitan Azani is a senior researcher at the Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), in Herzliya, Israel. In his book, *Hezbollah: The Study of the Party of God: From Revolution to Institutionalization*, Dr. Azani describes social movements as operating with four circles of involvement, the center has the key, charismatic leaders and core, trusted members and the outside fourth circle has passively interested individuals who will benefit from the movement’s goals or activities (Azani, 2009, pp. 1-2). This paper seeks to define how and why Hezbollah recruits all the way to engage women in the outer and fourth circle of involvement.
Foreign Aid and NGOs. This thesis researched the consequences of a vacuum withdrawal of international support in regions which Hezbollah dominates. Social programs that emerged with strong female leadership were looked at from a religious perspective, examining how Hezbollah filled a psychological need following the complete chaos and devastation from both the civil wars and the PLO’s subsequent war with Israel. The concept of Hezbollah assuming a role of a substitute government for the Shi’ite community was considered.

Women in the Media and Hezbollah. Media sources considered included propaganda from the banned *Al-Manar TV* station, global newspapers and major motion pictures; all to evaluate how Hezbollah can and does use women as a public relations tool. This paper examines how women in the media by both Shi’ites and Christians could further the goals of Hezbollah. The past rhetoric compared Hezbollah to the public image they project today, especially with women.
Chapter 4

Analysis and Discussion

The research found that Shi’ite women activists helped enable Hezbollah in Lebanon by administering humanitarian activities and providing a positive media spin. Hezbollah’s campaign to win public support extended well past their inner circle of followers. Lebanon’s Shia female population, marginalized politically and economically, mobilized to support Hezbollah’s community projects that mimicked government. Hezbollah modified their extreme rhetoric in Lebanon and postponed their goals for a Lebanese Islamic State. In response to their political reality in Lebanon, Hezbollah has adjusted their rhetoric and public interpretation of religious views regarding women. Hezbollah helped promote the transformation of a historically oppressed Shia population in Lebanon to a formidable political force with a credible reputation. Motivating women by a spiritual need to help others, public recognition of worthiness and job opportunities. Hezbollah’s public rhetoric about Shi’ite oppression and humiliation fueled rage towards Israel, their emotionally charged campaign using women is effective and compelling.

The research demonstrated how words become a powerful political force as Hezbollah’s campaign against Israel is not confined to violence, the media is used as a key tool to circulate their ideas, changing public perception of what the truth is.

The concepts of helplessness, frustration and shame resonated in Hezbollah’s psychological justification to wage war against an enemy that calls to fight back with sacrifice and bravery. In their Open Letter (1985) Hezbollah blamed the U.S. for Lebanon’s catastrophes as a co-conspirator with Israel, and Hezbollah calls for the complete destruction of Israel, mentioning sacrifice and battle. “Israel is to be completely obliterated/wiped [sic] out of existence. We have no alternative but to confront all aggression by sacrifice” (Alagha, 2006,
Appendix B). The goals of Hezbollah never changed but the rhetoric and choice of wording became selective in Lebanon as Sheik Fadlallah recruited outside his inner circle. His well-orchestrated speeches excited and flattered a population of previously marginalized women existing for centuries. His speeches not only addressed specific emotional needs they brought the audience into his social movement. Fadlallah enticed Shi’ite women to build the foundation of Hezbollah’s community organizations, doing what Dr. Azani calls the passively interested human capital supporting the inner circle (Azani, 2009, p. 16).

**Figure 6. Transformation of Shia women in Lebanon with AMAL and Hezbollah activism**

- Marginalized politically
- Lack of economic opportunities, poverty
- Relocation to slums
- Isolation, men work away from home
- AMAL mobilizes Shia population

- Hezbollah declares the west and Israel their enemy
- Terrorist attacks, kidnap/torture Americans
- NGOs flee Lebanon, foreign aid departs
- Women mobilize to support insurgency
- Shia women deliver food, healthcare
- Humanitarian aid expands basic services; women run refugee camps

- Hezbollah programs expand women’s education, medical jobs opportunities
- Women assume jobs for Hezbollah’s political party and Association

**Figure 5. Themes of Hezbollah’s engagement with Shia women in Lebanon: marginalization to empowerment.**

**Hezbollah and Lebanese Women.** The research demonstrated that women on a local level can persuade civilians traumatized by war to direct their frustrations against an enemy if they deliver basic community services accompanied with emotional themes of courageous

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12 The story of Hezbollah’s empowerment of Shia women in Lebanon, transforming an oppressed Shia population in Lebanon to a political power with women involved in humanitarian projects, their media campaign against Israel.
Women and Hezbollah in Lebanon

sacrifice within the family. (See Figure 6) Not only did women yield tremendous influence as local power brokers, they became symbols for Hezbollah in subsequent media campaigns. Memories of Sayyib Zaynab, the Prophet Mohammed’s granddaughter are kept alive as a female protagonist who was willing to endure torture and a painful death as a loyal Shia worshipper. Hezbollah projects this victim turned brave avenger role in the statements they make, paraphrasing the Koran to declare a just war on evil with bravery and sacrifice needed to triumph (Alagha, 2006, p. 223). In their literature, Hezbollah draws associations between the United States, France, and the United Kingdom and their own wealthy, ineffective rulers by dividing mankind into the oppressed and the oppressors with the western world playing a role in perpetrating evil (Alagha, 2006, p. 141).

Hezbollah duplicates in their propaganda the familiar socialist and communist concept of the haves and have-nots, placing these concepts into a powerful, religious context that calls for an Islamic Jihad to defend against their oppressors (Alagha, 2006, p. 143). Similar to other terrorist groups in the Middle East, the leadership base of Hezbollah began with religious activists rebelling against a corrupt monarchy responsible for human rights violations and calling for an Islamic government to settle perceived injustices. Hezbollah’s distinct difference is their choreographed speeches that address a wider demographic of women, not calling for violence but instead mobilizing a volunteer force to later transform into a government.

Women provide visual symbolism to Hezbollah’s propaganda campaign that resonates in the Shi’ite community such as enduring political marginalization and rampant discrimination. Isolated from other Muslims, the Shi’ite community rallies together in their public religious practices. Public self-wounding on the Commemoration of Ashura represents the Shi’ite’s long endured societal torment and the blood drippings suggest a powerful willingness to accept the
pain, anguish and the burden of being related to the Prophet Mohammed himself. The Shi’ite religious traditions dutifully executed, express feelings of victimization and humiliation in violent self-flagellation during the emotional and public celebrations of Ashura that intensified in Lebanon (Deeb, 2006). Despite public criticism from other Muslims and Shi’ites linking self-beatings to backwardness, (Deeb, 2006, p. 136) at least an authenticated form of celebration (Deeb, 2006, p. 133) takes place to remember the tortured history of struggling Shi’ites.

A growing political force, frequent extremist attacks were inflicted during these ceremonies to incite tensions between Shia and Sunni Muslims ("Deaths in Ashura," 2012). These attacks solidified the Shi’ite community’s expectation of oppression and suffering, embracing misery and humiliation as part of an obligation as practicing Muslims to endure and overcome adversity. Hezbollah embraces the concept of oppression as a religious role, one of most frequent words used in their writings (Alagha, 2006) and later championed by Hezbollah to justify a jihad against Israel and the west. In the name of self-defense, oppression is a compelling call to save the world against western evils and to stop Israel’s expansion in the Middle East.

Women are effective role models for Hezbollah because they publicly express these feelings of persecution, inciting public emotions as mothers and sisters.

When poverty driven circumstances drove entire Shia communities to relocate to the slums of Beirut, strong bonds developed within Lebanon’s misery belts, (AbuKhalil, 1989) forming a tight political base where women carried influence. Hezbollah’s plan to promote women to high profile positions of power in humanitarian projects and in media clearly demonstrates their independence from Iran. This distance from Hezbollah in Iran reduces concerns of Hezbollah operating as a proxy, micromanaging Lebanon’s affairs. Migration factors favor Hezbollah, further easing concerns about Iranian influence being imposed on Lebanon as
WOMEN AND HEZBOLLAH IN LEBANON

Shi’ites traveled between Iran and Lebanon for generations, building local alliances. Hezbollah’s membership was built upon AMAL’s motivated base of supporters in Lebanon, with women who were politically significant as activists. Fadlallah’s modern rhetoric towards women is a component of Hezbollah’s political strategy to gain regional clout, as AMAL’s support for a secular government that tolerates non-Muslims is a threat to a future Islamic State.

Musa al-Sadr’s mysterious unsolved disappearance occurred exactly when Hezbollah began initiation meetings of their new effort in Lebanon. Lacking any evidence to conclude the identity of Sadr’s perpetrators, his willingness to work with the Orthodox Christian community could have marked him as capable of negotiation when extremism was overwhelming. Every account of Libya being responsible for Musa al-Sadr’s fate is hotly contested and multiple conspiracy theories plague Hezbollah leaders based in Iran from avoiding the appearance of a proxy. What is significant about Musa al-Sadr is how Fadlallah duplicated and imitated al-Sadr’s outreach to women announcing Fadlallah’s interest in what women were thinking about religion. This appears to be no mistake: Hezbollah’s provocative process of encouraging women to think for themselves and assume leadership positions as Imams with other women is a direct recruitment of Musa al-Sadr’s base of secular thought.

Just as AMAL founder Musa al-Sadr included women in his political activism, Hezbollah engaged women to become major community influencers in their new base of support. There was clear understanding that women in Lebanon had become local power brokers, given the significant number of Lebanese men facing economic hardship and spending extended periods of time away from home for work. The economy compelled many women to work in Lebanon as a necessity and Hezbollah embraced the strong female leadership in Lebanon (Abu-Manneh, 1980). This reality implies that the decision makers of Hezbollah in Lebanon who were locally
based fully understood that they faced an independent, female population. Lebanon’s history of
decentralized government enabled Lebanese family and close neighborhood associates to assume
positions of authority in Hezbollah operations which promoted the popularity and clout of
Hezbollah.

The social outreach from women filled a psychological need to restore dignity among a
population suffering from the humiliation of poverty and sustained violence. Orphans were
housed in private homes as committed Hezbollah volunteers tried to break the cycle of poverty
(Deeb, 2006, p. 183). Deeb explains how the elite and wealthy segment of Shi’ites in Lebanon
rarely visited the homes of the poor but contributed financially instead, leaving field work to the
most religious and devoted believers. Deeb quotes Hajjeh Umm Ali to describe how Shia women
ask themselves what Sayyida Zaynab would have done in difficult situations (Deeb, 2006, p.
205). “Whenever I am faced with a problem, I ask myself, am I going to act like Zaynab or not?
If someone knocks at my door am I going to help him or not”? (Deeb, 2006, p. 205) Hezbollah
gave women an opportunity to restore their community and in return, women gave Hezbollah
public images of courage and emotion that served as their recruiting tool.

When Hezbollah creates social programs that imitate government services and target the
concerns of women, the result is favorable. Having women represent Hezbollah had a profound
psychological effect on communities devastated by war and destruction by giving meaning to
their suffering. Women have not only played a role in implementing Hezbollah’s social programs
at the local level, but also in softening the image of Hezbollah in the media with drama that is
familiar to Lebanese impacted by violent military action. The research demonstrated that Shi’ite
women have credibility in local communities as eyewitnesses and as the caretakers of the family
carrying out the duties of those with the fiercest piety and determination to help the poor as
devout Muslims should (Deeb, 2006). Placing women in Hezbollah’s political committees put a face of reliability and trustworthiness on their platform which holds Israel responsible for all regional violence. This seems to be the primary reason for Hezbollah’s mass hiring of Lebanese Shia women to work for Al-Manar, bringing women closer to their organization to become spokeswomen that outreach further into other communities.

A film like The Women of Hezbollah (Dykyi, 2000) provides a sympathetic viewpoint of women personally impacted by fighting in war, blaming Israel for the death of a close relative or complete destruction of their homes. Having women use verbiage that asks why Israel is attacking them while standing in front of demolished houses, reinforces Hezbollah’s language of propaganda with words like self-defense. Hezbollah specifically states that true believers will declare Israel an oppressor of the oppressed Shia Muslims and other Lebanese victims. Having women who appear to be from local neighborhoods defend Hezbollah’s ideology is effective and convincing to communities profoundly traumatized by war’s cruelties of death and destruction. Research indicated that women are captivating messengers as they appear authentic and genuine with emotions of outrage and sacrifice tied to their vocal testimony and statements.

Table 1.

Hezbollah’s Media Campaign Rhetoric: Past and Present

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past Media Phrases Used by Hezbollah</th>
<th>Current Media Phrases Used by Hezbollah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Death to Israel!</td>
<td>Right to defend ourselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. as Satan!</td>
<td>Why are we being attacked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racist Zionist Jews</td>
<td>Judaism, not Zionism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Israel, there are no civilians</td>
<td>Equal Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America is behind all catastrophes</td>
<td>Oppose embargos against Iran</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Copyright 2006 by Joseph Elie Alagha, Amsterdam University Press
Portraying mainstream women in the media allows Hezbollah to soften their image, despite their xenophobia towards Israel and all Jewish people (Alagha, 2006, p. 195). In the anti-war movie *Under the Bombs*, (Starfield Productions, 2008) powerful images of war tear children away from their mothers and Shia women working for Hezbollah peacefully circulate through the neighborhood. Reading the emotional rhetoric on a poster from Hezbollah to mend hearts contrasts with calls of death to Israel at a panic-stricken funeral, but messages of hate can be portrayed as a brave act if women are the presenters. *Al-Manar* broadcast are banned in the United States because of racist speech towards Jews, but the legacy of humanitarian aid with the involvement of women receiving healthcare, jobs and an education compels outsiders to acknowledge the other social service branch of Hezbollah. Women being selected to serve political committees and work for media organizations are mechanisms for Hezbollah to alter their image as a terrorist organization that kidnaps, tortures and attacks with suicide bombs.

Women fulfill Hezbollah’s goal to build a foundation for their social movement in Lebanon, Hezbollah has compromised their rhetoric and departed from enforcing Sharia Law in Lebanon. Yet, the agenda of Hezbollah never changed their goals and this compromise was meant to be temporary, just a starting point for Hezbollah to get established. What needs to be considered is the influence of former AMAL supporters who are a political group just like Hezbollah. As Hezbollah recruited AMAL supporters, similar efforts can happen to Hezbollah’s base. As long as there other Shi’ite organizations like AMAL with a strong identification to past oppression and struggle, political bases like Shi’ite women can prolong Hezbollah’s compromise to wait for an Islamic State.

Movies in Lebanon capture themes of oppression, helplessness, outrage and sacrifice outside of the Shi’ite community. A movie like *Syrian Bride*, (Riklis, 2004) portrays the heart
wrenching tale of Druze woman (See Figure I) being bullied by occupying Israeli forces who make it impossible for her to get married over the border. The film solidifies resentment against Israel in the Golan Heights and a film like *Caramel* (Les Films Des Tournelles, 2007) reflects efforts between Muslims and Christians to work together. Hezbollah’s political efforts to spread their influence are demonstrated in their hiring of non-Muslims in social programs and publicly using images of Christian women. (See Figure III and IV) Well paid, independent women removing unexploded mines from the last Israeli conflict on the news (Stevenson, 2011) are precisely the constituents that Hezbollah seeks to use in their propaganda efforts.

The research demonstrated how Hezbollah’s public discourse with women or media events with female images were timed with the initiation of projects or major events that carried influence, such as the building of a dam or the assassination of Prime Minister Harari. Hezbollah’s use of women in media is not spontaneous, it is well-planned and part of their larger strategy to expand their sphere of influence. In 2007, Shi’ite cleric Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah issued his fatwa against honor killings just when the media began intensive coverage on Hezbollah’s role in Sunni President Harari’s assassination. Hezbollah’s leadership responds quickly when ideas or stories that either support or malign their movement become newsworthy. When Fadlallah told the Al Arabiya News that women had a right to hit abusive husbands back, he did not have to answer questions about a U.N. investigative team connecting Hezbollah to the Prime Minister’s assassination. Being associated with women’s rights issues receive enough attention to divert from other stories during a news cycle in Lebanon but even more important, the research showed a pattern of phrases, attitudes and issues that resonated outside Hezbollah’s close inner group.
Overall, themes of oppression used by Hezbollah and words such as bravery, sacrifice and empowerment are used to recruit a stronger female base that reaches into Lebanese family structures with a far reaching influence that is generational. The organizational model did not track Hezbollah’s activities as closely as the social model did. Instead of using the organizational structure of Hezbollah to measure their activities, tracking media stories, speeches and community engagements was key to learning how far Hezbollah’s ideas had spread. In order to properly analyze a terrorist organization, the focus cannot only consider the inner circle and their flow of funding and conversations. Evaluating the engagement of groups outside a terrorist organization is a worthy strategy and Shi’ite women were ideal to observe as they were not part of a male dominated organization and actively recruited.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

The research indicates that Hezbollah has been successful building a Lebanese political base on localized levels to exert regional influence in Lebanon to mobilize against Israel and later, to establish an Islamic State. Hezbollah proved that a terrorist organizations has more to do with a campaign of ideas than the organization itself. Terrorist groups should be evaluated as social movements and not just organizations as media campaigns can promote regional influence and control public perception. When Hezbollah used women as local power with personalized community activities they engaged outside their organization and cyclically pitched their ideas, gaining levels of acceptance. Giving women key positions of responsibility to implement outreach programs and represent Hezbollah in the media softened Hezbollah’s image and appealed to the masses. Washington Post Middle East reporter Babak Dehganpisheh described Hezbollah as being the champion of the downtrodden, (Dehganpisheh, 2012) providing the basic essential services of life that the Government of Lebanon failure to deliver. Data demonstrated that women can be publicly convincing and that a religious cause can unite fractured communities to displace anger, freely accepting extreme positions such as the belief that Israel should not exist. Hezbollah’s well-planned media campaigns (Stewart, 2010) using provocative rhetoric with women not only energizes support, but also serves as a distractor from events like the Hariri Tribunal where several Hezbollah operatives are on trial for murder, and the recent October Beirut bombing that is associated with Hezbollah ("Beirut Bomb," 2012).

Hezbollah’s social programs alone was not what resonated with Shia civilians, the ideas behind the resistance movement provides direction and inspiration to the Shi’ites who seek
validation and representation. The devastation from fighting first in successive civil wars, then in the crossfire between Israel and the PLO became an opportunity for Hezbollah to unite a fractured and battered Shi’ite community. Hezbollah not only recognizes how independent Lebanese women are, following years of working as single mothers and male heads of households working away from home, they also directly communicate to women.

The strict cultural norms that exist in Iran would not translate well, but Lebanon’s decentralized government failures in specific communities were (maybe a better word is ‘are’) of major concern to women. Recognizing that women were influential power brokers within tight knit communities is what connected Hezbollah to local family networks. Hezbollah’s goal for a Lebanese Islamic State was suspended to prevent alienation from both women and Christians alike, allowing Hezbollah to retain their anti-Israel rhetoric and pitch radical religious doctrine as being progressive.

Although there are research gaps in the quantity and quality of Hezbollah’s individual programs, it is clear that embracing the image of independent Lebanese women in the media has worked for Hezbollah to gain traction in the political sphere. Hezbollah has not strayed from their position not recognizing Israel’s right to exist, but their rhetoric has become more sophisticated as a broader base of support is sought. (See Table 1). Lebanese media images portray women as trustworthy and credible using gripping emotion that describes the horrors of war and the unforgiving blame directed at Israel is unmistakable. Hezbollah used communicated with Lebanon women using praise and recognition, and made references to the modernization of Islamic thought. Sound bites directed to women like “realizing full potential” and self-expression” are words that connect to specific community activities like administering women’s schools.
Hezbollah needs a wider recruiting net to gain support among Lebanese outside the Shi’ite community in order to retain power as an electable political power and to unite against Israel. Hezbollah’s courting of Christians should not be surprising as the research found that the leadership of AMAL historically worked closely with Christian communities to cope with the Government of Lebanon’s inability to provide basic services. Furthermore, the Lebanese people have worked together for centuries and lived in adjoining neighborhoods with decentralized local governments that cannot be ignored. These alliances are significant given the current conflict in bordering Syrian, with thousands of refugees fleeing to Lebanon and requiring immediate humanitarian assistance (Osman, 2012, p. 5). Just as Hezbollah imitated the propaganda of AMAL with women using a message of tolerance, Hezbollah will seek to gain regional influence where Christians worked with groups like AMAL and the Shi’ite community, mostly where Lebanese government services fail.

The Lebanese government will not enter the Bekaa Valley to assist Sunni refugees because of Hezbollah’s domination in that region (Osman, 2012, p. 6). Once neglected by the Lebanese government, what is significant is that Hezbollah runs the projects supporting refugees because they first recruited support outside their circle of influence. Hezbollah’s skill to promote their ideas to women and orchestrate news outside the Shi’ite community can be applied to their efforts to support the Syrian government against rebels inside Lebanon’s borders. A Shi’ite member of the Syrian Social National party was quoted in a New York Times article defending Hezbollah as protecting the region from Sunni extremism. “Marx was right…Religion is terrible for society” (Barnard, 2013). Hezbollah’s outreach to a secular demographic, is why Hezbollah as a social movement and not just an organization spreads their ideas to maintain regional influence and respect.
More attention should be directed towards how the Middle East is using mass media images of women to promote agendas electronically with global distribution. (See Figure 7) Significant emphasis has been placed on Hezbollah’s strategic goals because of the growing nuclear aspirations of Iran but ethnic alliances and female influences should not be underestimated in regional security considerations because Hezbollah has a social movement to promote regional presence. Historic ties between the Shi’ite community and Orthodox Christians in Lebanon is critically important when evaluating spillover violence from Syria. Hezbollah has been courting support from Maronite ("Batroun Dam," 2011) and Druze communities close to the Syrian border (Dehganpisheh, 2012) in order to continue supporting Syrian President Bashar

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al-Assad, their projects change public perception in these communities. Tracking the public perception and exchange of ideas is critical to knowing what influence Hezbollah establishes.

Another example of why Hezbollah’s social movement can be more important than their organizational structure is to consider the farming industry in Lebanon. Women are heavily active in thousands of rural cooperatives (Traboulsi, 2011) in the farming industry and Hezbollah’s humanitarian projects in farming can spread across Lebanon. As the neighboring Syrian farming industry is currently being destroyed from intense fighting over the border (Hornby & Dziadosz, 2013) with mass refugees pouring into Lebanon, Hezbollah’s ideas of oppression and community volunteerism should be considered. As Hezbollah struggles with more funding sources, blocked as international criminal enterprises, (Sharp et al., 2006) strategists should not ignore Hezbollah’s historic success regarding local community mobilization and humanitarian enterprises that increase political strongholds. Tracking women activities in these volatile regions could shed information on what types of propaganda prevails in relation to the Syrian conflict.

Ultimately, strategic strategists should evaluate the terrorist organizations as social movements that spread ideas and not just organizations. When assessing regional civilian populations, analysts should consider the female population which makes up half of a community demographic, evaluate their local economies and make determinations if state sponsored terrorist organizations can benefit those communities more efficiently than established governments. The lesson of Hezbollah successfully using women on a local level is a tool in mass media propaganda, changing public perception to influence the viewpoints and motivations of civilian populations. Instability spillover from Syria into Lebanon can shape the political landscape if public perception changes, engaging the female population can reveal how far
Hezbollah’s influence has spread. Regional acceptance of Hezbollah increases the threat against Israel and Sunni Muslims, promoting crisis in the Middle East.
References


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