**Introduction**

This book is concerned with the activism of Hezbollah toward strengthening its status in the Lebanese arena and its contribution to the development of the *muqāwama* (resistance) into a cultural and a counter-hegemonic project in the Lebanese arena.The resistance of Hezbollah has become a *weltanschauung*, a cultural and a political tool that efficiently serve the interests of both Hezbollah and Lebanon, as perceived by the former.

Hezbollah is a relatively young organization, compared to other players in the Lebanese arena. The organization started operating shortly after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. This was preceded by a conceptual land reclamation carried out for several years by different revolutionary political streams and modernist clerics like Musa as-Sadr, Mohammad Husayn Fadlallah, and others. Despite the organization’s young age and the complexity of the Lebanese arena, Hezbollah succeeded within two decades in realizing considerable achievements in the social and military arenas in Lebanon. Hezbollah’s ability to credit itself with the Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon has enhanced its prestige and increased interest in this organization.

By means of Gramscian and Neo-Gramscian tools, this book will attempt to follow up on Hezbollah’s development and on the organization’s “Lebanonization”—the process of openness—as defined in the scholarly literature, which occurred at the end of the twentieth century and in the first decade of the following century. The book will provide a new explanation for Hezbollah’s developmental process, from a purely military-religious organization into the main representative of a social group standing in the center of a unique counter-hegemonic project that I call the “*Muqāwama* project.”

It is evident that Hezbollah provides support mainly in Shiite regions; however, one cannot underestimate the willingness of Hezbollah and the organizations affiliated with it and with the *muqāwama* project to provide services to all of the poor population residing in these regions, regardless of their ethnic, religious, and even national background. For example, charity organizations are listed among the main supporters of the Palestinian refugees in the refugee camps in Lebanon.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Hezbollah’s unique *Muqāwama* project could not have developed without the cultivation of the ideological foundation by thinkers like Mohammad Husayn Fadlallah, Ruhollah Khomeini, and Ali Shariʿati. The significant contribution of Fadlallah was his definition of *al-muqāwama* as a large-scale project that was not only limited to resistance operations against the Israeli occupation in Southern Lebanon. He presented the *muqāwama* as an Islamic and universal project within which all Muslim and non-Muslim disempowered populations could act as single unified actor.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Fadlallah's perception integrates with the contemplations of Ruhollah Khomeini and Ali Shariʿati who maintained that Islam is the real comprehensive and revolutionary ideology, through which one can liberate the disempowered populations wherever they are. This perception allowed Hezbollah at a later stage to shape the *Muqāwama* project, which has addressed many actors within the Lebanese arena, and not only the Shiite, although it has grown up under the influence of the revolutionary stream of Shiʿa Islam.

In this book, I will argue that comprehending Hezbollah and its development will remain deficient unless we perceive the inter-Lebanese politics (and to a certain extent, the regional politics in general) as politics of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects that compete with each other. This perception will solve some mysteries and will provide a new and different explanation for the alliances and the coalitions that Hezbollah established during its second and third decades.

Hezbollah’s *Muqāwama* project is counter-hegemonic at multiple levels: firstly, it is directed against the Shiite elites that had dominated the community. Secondly, and more importantly, it is directed on behalf of all marginalized groups in Lebanon against the Maronite-Sunni hegemony that deprived most Lebanese citizens – especially the Shiites who are perceived as a “proletariat” in Lebanon and are marginalized at the political and economic levels – of the opportunity to enjoy the available political and economic resources. Thirdly, it is directed against the Israeli and US hegemony in the region and in the whole world.

Through a special reading of the organization’s history, the book attempts to provide answers to the relevant questions that concern the researchers of the Middle East. For example, how could Hezbollah enter into negotiations and dialogues with Lebanese, regional, and international groups and authorities with whom it apparently does not have a common ground? What was the impact of this dialogue on the organization itself? What is the essence of the *Muqāwama* project established by Hezbollah? What mechanism does the organization use to establish it, and so forth.

This book attempts to continue the work by Hamid Dabashi on the boundaries of the “liberation theology” discourse worldwide and in the Middle East. It will also examine the challenges, the barriers, and the opportunities that affected the development of Hezbollah as a potential embodiment of the *muqāwama*, which pushes the dualities of the East-West and the Islam-West toward a resistive discourse that crosses ideological and geographical borders both inside and outside Lebanon and the Middle East.

**A Note on the Literature**

Most of the first phase of the literature on Hezbollah has been primarily concerned with the organization and its military capabilities rather than with its cultural and political activities. These studies have been apparently influenced by the organization's first years in the Lebanese arena, where its main purpose was military resistance to the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon, without playing a role in the inter-Lebanese political arena. This trend, however, changed upon liberating the largest parts of Southern Lebanon, and the change became remarkable after the Lebanon War in 2006.

Some of these studies have perceived Hezbollah as an organization mainly influenced by countries like Syria and Iran since it does not have an independent operational ability, or it has a limited one. The impact of the organization’s early years and reference to Hezbollah’s military capacities can be found in academic studies written in the eighties and the nineties, such as Ranstrup Magnus’ *Hizb’Allah in Lebanon: The Politics of Western Hostage Crisi*s (1997), which emphasized the kidnapping of western citizens during the Lebanese civil war and the role of Hezbollah and its leaders in this regard.

Waddah Sharara’s *Dawlat Hizballah: Lubnan, mujtama’ Islamiya* (The State of Hezbollah: Lebanon, an Islamic Society), published in 1996, is an important book that deals with the historical development of the Shiite society in Lebanon, and broadly addresses and highlights the organization’s plan to render Lebanon an Islamic society and to reproduce the Iranian experience in Lebanon. Sharara maintains that all the changes that Hezbollah has undergone are only cosmetic in achieving its desired goal.

Other studies described Hezbollah as a protest movement undergoing a process of reconciliation with Lebanese society. According to this approach, Hezbollah is remarkably distant from the radical dimension that had characterized the organization in its beginning. It has moved into a more pragmatic phase, which has enabled it to integrate into the inter-Lebanese political game and become an ordinary party.

This category includes *Al-Islamiyun fi mujtamaʿ taʿadudi* (The Islamists in a Multicultural Society) written in 2000 by the Iranian scholar Masoud Asad Allahi, and the study by Itan ‘Azani published in 2005 called *Hizballah: The Story of the Party of God: from Revolution to Institutionalization*. This research perceives Hezbollah as a protest movement and examines the impact of the different Lebanese, regional, and international systems on the organization’s establishment and developmental process. The research emphasizes the close relationship between Hezbollah and Iran but it simultaneously demonstrates the decisive influence of the inter-Lebanese events (such as the civil war, the Taif agreement, and so forth) and of other regional players (Syria, Israel) on the development of Hezbollah and on the transition from radical revolutionism into pragmatism.

Hezbollah’s developmental process is depicted in the book by the Lebanese scholar Ghassan Azi, which was published in 1998 and entitled *Hizballah: Min al-hilm al-idioloji… ila al-waqi’ya al-siyasiyya* ( Hezbollah: from the Ideological Dream… to Political Pragmatism) and in Augustus Norton’s book *Hezbollah*: *A Short History* (2007).

In her book *Hizbullah: Politics and Religion* (2002), Amal Sa’ad-Ghrayeb analyzes the development of Hizballah’s pragmatic attitudes and its ability to navigate in a changing reality between its Islamist ideological basis and the political pragmatism that characterized it at a later stage. Sa’ad-Ghrayeb foresees that Hizballah will further emphasize its Lebanese patriotism and nationalism at the expense of its Islamist ideological foundations.

One of the most important books that attempted to a build a general profile for Hezbollah was *In The Path of Hizbullah* , published in 2004 by the Lebanese researcher Ahmad Hamzeh. In it, Hamzeh outlines the organization’s development, its organizational structure, and ideological-religious basis and especially emphasizes the relationship between Hezbollah and the Iranian religious leadership. Hamzeh argued that Hezbollah is largely progressing towards establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon, even faster than he had expected. Nowadays, this prediction seems to be wrong; but still, this has not diminished the book’s value and Hamzeh’s argument that Hezbollah serves as a role model to other organizations and movements in the Arab and Islamic world, mainly among the Palestinians.

Eyal Zisser from Tel Aviv University allocated a considerable part of his book *Lebanon: Blood in the Cedars* (2009) to the discussion of Hezbollah’s historical, ideological, and conceptual development and highlighted the organization’s forms of action within the inter-Lebanese political arena and its attempt to utilize and redirect its military achievements toward dominating and remodeling the inter-Lebanese arena.

It is worth referring to the monograph of Michael Milstein about the *muqāwama* dating back to 2009, *Muqawama, the Rise of the Resistance Challenge and its Influence on the Perception of National Security in Israel.* Milstein’s research has indeed referred to *muqawama* from an Israeli strategic-military perspective, but he has greatly addressed the uniqueness of the term in the Middle Eastern context and sketched the changes that the term has undergone over the past years with the emergence of a “new resistance,” according to Milstein, which is more Islamist and fundamentalist. Milstein has integrated into this category different parties, which, in my opinion, should not be put together (for example, the Mujahidūn in Afghanistan and Hezbollah in Lebanon).

In the past few years, the Lebanese researcher Yousef al-Agha has written two books about Hizballah and its ideological development: *The Shifts in Hizbullah’s Ideology: Religious Ideology, Political Ideology and Political* *Program* (2006), and *Hizbullah‘s Identity Construction* (2011). Al Agha discussed the important contribution of resistance to the development of the organization’s unique identity; however, al-Agha did not analyze the *muqāwama* as a meeting point between the organization and the other movements. Nor did he analyze it as the most important point for the organization (as I will suggest in due course) through which it could integrate into a process of negotiations and development of a joint political project with the different players in the Lebanese and regional arena.

In their book *Rethinking Hezbollah: Legitimacy, Authority, Violence*, published in 2012, Samer Abboud and Benjamin Muller attempted to analyze Hezbollah in terms of international relations. They have also tried to challenge the key elements of the presumptions present in international relations, which they regard as a discipline dominated by a western prism that disregards the uniqueness and the contribution of Middle Eastern research efforts to the discipline. They presented the case of Hezbollah as a sort of challenge to the Weberian perception of the state monopoly on over the use of force.

A more recent study, *Hezbollah:* *From Islamic Resistance to Government,* which waspublished in 2016 by a group of researchers led by James Worrall, attempts to provide a broader picture of Hezbollah’s development toward the organization’s openness and the complexity of its position, in light of its involvement in Syria and given the Arab Spring that started in Tunisia and spread to other places in the Arab world. These researchers, who specialize in the study of terrorism and armed groups, put into perspective the reference to Hezbollah as a terrorist organization versus its transition to different methods and politics, as a result of the organization’s enhanced self-confidence and its central position in the intra-Lebanese, regional, and even international politics.

An important work by Rula and Malek Abisaab, published in 2014 and entitled *The Shiites of Lebanon*: *Modernism, Communism and Hizbullah’s Islamists*, included an attempt to trace the relational dialectics between the Shia in Lebanon and Iraq on the one hand, and the Communist and leftist movements on the other. They maintain that mutual impact has occurred between the new modern movement of activist clergymen and the communist movements and leftist organizations, both in Iraq and Southern Lebanon. They add that Shiite political Islam has not fully denounced the socialist revolutionary principles of the leftist movements, which are not completely secular, nor have they denounced religion. Their development process has been somewhat based on the Shiite culture and on popular perceptions and beliefs that relate the Imams, especially Ali and Husayn, to revolutionism and activism that aspire to establish social justice worldwide.

Joseph Daher in his book *Hezbollah: The Political Economy of Lebanon’s Party of God* (2016) sought to give a new Marxist analysis for the phenomenon of Hezbollah. Daher argues that Hezbollah, like “Islamic movements in general, are neither revolutionary nor progressive groups, but are parties led by political interests that can be explained through a materialist approach, and not simply by a focus on ideology.”[[3]](#footnote-3) While Daher’s argument regarding the usage of Marxist approach is correct, he did not take all the other factors into consideration. The mechanical equation between Hezbollah and the other Islamic movements is extremely problematic, as I will show in this research. Moreover, to perceive a country like Lebanon as a total independent state without sufficiently considering the regional situation and the anti-colonial circumstances of Lebanon and the region is a very dubious approach.

In contrast to Daher, in terms of the understanding the development of Hezbollah from the “radical” phase to a new “lebanonized” stage, Bashir Saade, in his book *Hizbullah and the Politics of Remembrance: Writing the Lebanese Nation* (2016) argues that change has not affected Hezbollah’s ideology, writing that “the politics of remembering has enabled Hizbullah to develop and to defend the main project to which it owes its existence: resistance against Israel.”[[4]](#footnote-4) He adds elsewhere that “Hizbullah has managed to negotiate its political presence in Lebanon and beyond through a thorough reworking of national narratives. In so doing, it has set new political frameworks within which Lebanese actors are to relate both to each other and to external enemies.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

While Daher has ignored the ideological development of Hezbollah, Saade’s approach overlooks the economic and the infrastructure dimension of the party’s “main project to which it owes its existence.” In contrast to Saade, I do believe that Hezbollah has gone through an important change in his political, economic, and even religious views. I will show later on the main changes that moved the party from a small group into a vast movement in the core of a nascent “historical-bloc.”

Several studies have referred in particular to the organization’s media image and strategies. Lina Khatib, Dina Matar, and Atef Alshaer, in *The Hizbullah Phenomenon: Politics and Communication*, published in 2014, examine the development of the organization’s political strategy and its reflection in the organization’s communication strategy. A special emphasis is placed on the central position that the secretary general occupies in the organization’s communication strategy.

An earlier study is the work of Zahraa Harb based on her doctoral thesis, entitled: *Channels of Resistance in Lebanon: Liberation Propaganda, Hezbollah and The Media* and published in 2011*.* Harb examines how Hizballah’s Al-Manar channel surveyed the late period of the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon between 1997 and 2000, comparing it to the review conducted by the Lebanese Channel Télé Liban of the 1996 war (the Grapes of Wrath operation, according to the Israeli terminology).

Most of these studies differently address the change that Hezbollah has been undergoing, sharing the conclusion that Hezbollah has embarked on a process of rendering its radical positions more pragmatic. While examining Hezbollah’s development, they associate the *muqawama* concept with the organization’s radical and military dimension, and not with its inter-Lebanese action that relates to social, economic, educational and other aspects. Studies that refer to these aspects also subjugate them to the organization’s supreme military goal.

These studies do not sufficiently highlight the cultural, historical, and social dimensions of Hezbollah’s activism and do not refer to the hegemonic politics that Hezbollah is trying to bequeath to the Lebanese society, sometimes successfully and sometimes less. Most of these studies are limited to Iran’s influence on Hezbollah and its military nature.

However, I will argue later on that the Lebanese arena, which is replete with different streams and forces, affects Hezbollah’s ability to reproduce the Iranian model in Lebanon. I will also argue that the *Muqāwama* project, around which Hezbollah is trying to establish a historical-bloc in Lebanon, will be independent and cannot be controlled. This project will be different from what most reviewed studies have depicted as the organization’s original goal; it will constitute a new and relatively open arena that allows a deeper understanding of Hezbollah’s development, at least in the last two decades.

The theoretical part of the study will be based on the analytical definitions and tools of Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci that have been developed in his different works, mainly in the *Prison Notebooks*, and on later developments of the Gramscian terms “hegemony” and “counter-hegemonic project.” In this context, it is worth referring to the article of Gwyn Williams on Hegemony.[[6]](#footnote-6) Another important book serving as a basis for the theoretical part of the research is Laclau and Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985), which develops the Gramscian concept beyond its class essentialism in Gramsci’s meditations.

**Theoretical Framework**

I suggest considering the term *muqāwama* (resistance) as a signifier allowing the establishment of a historical-bloc composed of various forces and articulating them into a new hegemonic project led by Hezbollah. This historical bloc is comprised not only of political parties and forces but also includes different social organizations and forces, such as civil society organizations that serve large sectors beyond their “natural” target groups. This serves as an act of establishing a “*muqāwama* society.” This society depends mainly (not merely) on the poor or “oppressed” populations, which are the backbone of this counter-hegemonic project.

In this book I refer to hegemony as a non-final and a non-closed project. It is a mode of thinking, organization, and life perception in a given society. Still, a certain hegemonic project would include within it its own culture, a world view that unites different social groups, a common language that reflects and molds the different social groups, movements, political parties, and institutions that consolidate and design the nascent hegemony.

**Hegemony and other Theoretical Concepts**

The concept of hegemony first emerged in the Russian socialist philosophy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, following the debate of the social-democratic movement on the ability of the proletariat – still weak and numerically limited to lead the awaited revolution where capitalism was still in its infancy. The debate also concerned the role that the proletariat should play in the struggle to establish a liberal democratic regime that would constitute a basis for the proletarian and socialist revolution, according to Marxist orthodoxy.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The debate generated two main responses. The orthodox response, supported by Plekhanov, was that each social class was responsible for the establishment of the socialist revolution and that each ‘social class’ had a main role. The bourgeoisie had to lead the democratic revolution against the imperial authority. The proletariat then had to assume responsibility for the next stage – the socialist revolution – and take over the reins of leadership in the country, leaving the bourgeoisie behind, and establish the socialist phase of human development.

In contrast, Lenin’s response referred to the concept of hegemony as a socialist strategy. Lenin opined that the proletariat should fulfil a dual historical role, through the representing political party. The proletariat should replace the weakened Russian bourgeoisie and lead the democratic revolution that the people of the Russian Empire had longed for. Then the proletariat would be able to pursue its revolution and reach the socialist stage.

Lenin assigned the proletariat an unprecedented role that had not existed previously in Marxist orthodoxy; however, being both a socialist philosopher and strategist, Lenin was fully conscious of the numerical weakness of the proletariat in a country like Russia. He believed that in order for the proletariat to fulfil its assigned role, the struggle should move from the economic dimension to a political one. It should recruit the masses to gain the support of the majority, representing the majority of the people who would rebel against both exploitation and the country that enslaved its ‘people’.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Lenin believed that the main revolutionary subject was the proletariat; however, he believed that they should align with the peasantry and become a ‘hegemonic’ party in this alliance, and lead the ‘people’ in their revolution against the Russian tsarist absolutism.[[9]](#footnote-9) Lenin believed that another force existed in the transition to the political dimension, which was mainly comprised of various possible alliances between different social classes.

**The Gramscian Approach**

The Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci is most associated with the concept of hegemony and its transformation from a tactic into a means of comprehending contemporary society’s historical development. Imprisoned during the fascist period, Gramsci wrote his famous ‘Prison Notebooks’, a series of 33 notebooks in which he analyzed the reasons behind the collapse and failure of the revolutionary movement in Italy especially and in Western Europe in general. In these Notebooks, Gramsci developed his own concept of hegemony. Through this concept, one could analyze the existing capitalist structure and the methods of action that the social class seeking hegemony within the society should adopt.

Gramsci’s notion of hegemony has numerous innovations. The main innovation is the transformation of hegemony from a strategy of the proletariat, as suggested by Lenin, into a tool that allows comprehension and analysis of the capitalist country and its mechanisms, mainly in the ‘West’.[[10]](#footnote-10) According to Gramsci, hegemony is both a state and a process. Hegemony can emerge in both state institutions and civil society and by means of the process of struggle of the ‘historical-bloc’, which will be discussed below, comprising different forces.

**Blitzkrieg Versus Trench Warfare**

According to Gramsci, tsarist Russia was a centralist state, in which the tsar and the ruling group held all the power. In 1917, the Russian government had become totally isolated and used force and violence to exert control. Thus, the revolutionary movement could easily attack the tsar’s palace to deliver a fatal blow to the tsarist regime. Gramsci named this tactic ‘blitzkrieg’. In contrast, the Western countries were more developed than the tsarist Russia and had a more complex state structure comprised of the standard state institutions, in addition to a diverse and complex civil society, in which the bourgeois hegemony was also instilled, or as stated by Gramsci himself:

‘…at least in the case of the most advanced states, where ‘civil society̓ has become a very complex structure and one which is resistant to the catastrophic ‘incursion̓ of the immediate economic element (crises, depressions, etc.). The superstructure of civil society is like the trench-systems of modern warfare. In war it would sometimes happen that a fierce artillery attack seemed to have destroyed the enemy's entire defensive system, whereas in fact it had only destroyed the outer perimeter …’[[11]](#footnote-11)

ian concept of Hegemony as emed, as opposed to Lenin'ccess.nin, into and a perception and a tool that allows compehensionTherefore, the revolutionary strategy in the more developed countries required a ‘trench warfare’ – in the sense that the struggle of the proletariat and its political representative would be long-lasting – so that they could organize a ‘historical-bloc’ that would lead the struggle. This would enable gradual control over all positions, in order to instill the alternative proletarian hegemony in the society. According to Gwyn Williams, in his classic essay on Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, a project becomes hegemonic when its:

‘…concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotation’[[12]](#footnote-12).

**The Historical-Bloc**

According to Gramsci, the main subject was not the social class but the historical-bloc. This term was borrowed from the French philosopher George Sorel, the father of the revolutionary syndicalism, who attempted, together with others in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to understand ‘why the socialist revolutions [was] hindered from spreading in the world’.[[13]](#footnote-13) Sorel moved the focus from the social classes to the ‘blocs’ that develop around a given myth. He chose the ‘general strike’ as the myth that consolidates the historical-bloc in its constant war against the bourgeois decadence and culture.

As for Gramsci, he combined both Sorel’s ‘bloc’ with Lenin’s ‘hegemony’ and uniquely presented the historical-bloc as the active subject in contemporary human history. According to Gramsci, the historical-bloc is the force behind the hegemonic project and forms when different social groups unite around a hegemonic project. The historical-bloc is a dialectic concept in that it embodies the interaction between its different components in the goal of achieving unity at a broader scale.[[14]](#footnote-14)

According to Gramsci, the social class that leads the historical-bloc is dynamic; it goes through a process of mutual influence, together with the other parties and the other subordinate groups within the same historical-bloc. Hence, the historical-bloc is not the sum of its parts; rather, it is a new synthesis. Here lies the major innovation suggested by Gramsci: As opposed to the orthodox Marxists before him, he does not consider the social class as the ultimate subject; rather it is the historical-bloc comprised of not only social classes and political parties but also social movements and different subordinate groups.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Gramsci moves the focus from the economic dimension to the ethical, cultural, and political. He explains that the intellectuals that should lead the ‘general will’ of the historical-bloc. An intellectual and ethical leadership would formulate a more exalted synthesis, which the ideology helps to transform into an organizational mortar that consolidates a historical-bloc. Gramsci defines the intellectual differently than as truth pursuer, he maintains that:

‘…Social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, create together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields…’[[16]](#footnote-16)

Organic intellectuals are therefore a historical product associated with the emergence of new social groups. Gramsci considers these intellectuals as integral to the hegemonic project and as its main architects, alongside the crowd taking part in the joint historical-bloc. Moreover, Gramsci maintains that in the modern era, one does not refer to the individual intellectual but rather to the collective intellectual, like a political party, a newspaper editorial team, or a university.[[17]](#footnote-17) This matches Gramsci’s distinction that in the modern era, one does not refer to the Machiavellian prince but rather to the ‘new prince’.

‘The modern prince, the myth-prince, cannot be a real person, a concrete individual. It can only be an organism, a complex element of society in which a collective will, which has already been recognized and has to some extent asserted itself in action, begins to take concrete form.’[[18]](#footnote-18)

Gramsci designated a major place for the intellectuals in the formation and design of the historical-bloc and in disseminating its worldview and transforming it into a collective popular-national will.

By moving the focus from the economic to the ethical and political dimensions of society, Gramsci highlights that the social class needs to be ‘leading’ before its rise to power. He even deems it a prerequisite to the rise to power:

‘…a class is dominant in two ways, namely it is "leading" and "dominant". It leads the allied classes, it dominates the opposing classes. Therefore, a class can (and must) "lead" even before assuming power.’[[19]](#footnote-19)

He adds elsewhere that:

‘There can and there must be a “political hegemony” even before assuming government power, and in order to exercise political leadership or hegemony one must not count solely on the power and material force that is given by government’[[20]](#footnote-20)

The social class can establish its leadership so that it can integrate into the debate and synthesis not only other social classes but also different groups in society. Together, they should build and enhance a common popular-national will, around which more forces will gather to occupy the hegemonic position of power, not only in civil society but also in the political.[[21]](#footnote-21) Gramsci accentuates a leadership that helps the masses to express, deepen, and strengthen their self-engagement for socio-political transformation.[[22]](#footnote-22)

In conclusion, a hegemonic social group is one that succeeds in leading the popular, national, and patriotic struggles, for the purpose of attaining leadership at the national level and not only within the historical-bloc.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Although Gramsci’s understanding of hegemony is the foundation, this book represents a reading of his main ideas as further developed by Laclau and Mouffe.[[24]](#footnote-24) Laclau and Mouffe attempted to liberate the Gramscian concept of hegemony from its class essentialism and to instil in it more recent insights of the critical and poststructuralist theories.

From the perspective of Laclau and Mouffe, a subject’s position is not determined by a sole axis (for example, the class axis, according to the Marxist tradition). Instead, other axes can define a subject’s position, such as ethnicity, gender, nationality, class, and others. To build a collective subject (historical-bloc), a process of articulation is needed. Articulation means that relationships between the different social groups are not a necessary consequence of a common essence but rather of a praxis and a political struggle leading to different consequences: ‘any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice’.[[25]](#footnote-25) Laclau and Mouffe perceive hegemony as a special kind of articulation.

According to Laclau and Mouffe, the state of hegemony is changeable and dynamic and enables different sorts of connectedness to emerge. It also allows a society to stabilize around a hegemonic project that enhances a historical-bloc, which develops contingently through a process of political struggle. The historical-bloc from this perspective is not supposed to develop around a sole predetermined axis of struggle; rather it could emerge despite different axes of struggle, according the political praxis that characterizes every society. A certain historical-bloc occurs by building a ‘chain of equivalences’, perceived by Laclau and Mouffe as a mechanism that allows linkage between different meanings of the same signifier, thus connecting between the needs/demands/worldviews of different social groups.[[26]](#footnote-26) As we will see in this book, the *muqawama* plays as model of such a signifier.

**Hegemony in this Book**

The question whether the theoretical development of Gramsci can be applied both beyond the European countries and the context of the early twentieth century has been discussed recently by researchers who have rediscovered the Gramscian approach and its relevance to the Middle East. In the introduction of their book,[[27]](#footnote-27) Srivastava and Bhattacharya emphasise that the Gramscian analysis served as a basis for the development of Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism and for the emergence of the sub-altern studies that have prevailed in South America, India,[[28]](#footnote-28) and elsewhere.

Thomas Butko[[29]](#footnote-29) has made an interesting attempt to analyse political Islam using Gramscian tools, by comparing between Islamic intellectuals – Hassan al-Banna, Abul Ala Maududi, Sayyid Qutb, and Khomeini – and Gramsci.

A prominent weak point in Butko’s analysis is his perception that the Islamist ideology could be a unifying ideology of the historical bloc that would replace the existing hegemony. The Gramscian notion of building such a hegemonic project emphasizes that the leading group must be open to joint negotiations and articulation with other forces, so that together they can create a broader and new general will. This was not proposed by the intellectuals discussed by Butko.

While the ability of certain Islamist movements to lead a historical-bloc that promotes a certain hegemonic project should not be negated, to achieve this, these movements should either detach themselves from their ‘religious essentialism’ or undermine it and join another signifier, like the ‘*muqāwama*’, around which they can build the desired counter-hegemonic project.

Building on the concept developed by Chalcraft,[[30]](#footnote-30) this book is ‘unconventionally Gramscian’ because it does not build on the capitalist metanarrative that occupied Gramsci as a philosopher and a political activist.[[31]](#footnote-31) Rather, I borrow from Gramsci part of his analytical concepts and tools and use them to sharpen our understanding of the Hezbollah phenomenon.

In due course, I will demonstrate how the *muqāwama* has become a signifier that enables the establishment of a historical bloc comprised of different forces that maintains its own counter-hegemonic project. I hereby refer to the will of one group to consolidate Lebanese society in particular, and the region in general around the resistance as a watershed between the different projects in Lebanon and the whole region. Moreover, and from the perspective of Hezbollah’s and the other forces that constitute this nascent historical-bloc, the *muqāwama* becomes an essence, a culture, and a worldview. Through it, the social, political, economic, and religious arena of Lebanon and the whole region can be redefined.

The development of Lebanese history can be understood more explicitly if one adopts the perspective of hegemonic action and struggles. Within this arena, the socioeconomic dimension is one of several axes that unite competing hegemonic historical-blocs and projects, while the sectarian-religious and social-democratic axes also intersect and separate at different historical points.

My use of hegemonic politics as a tool for analysing Lebanese politics and history suggests a new understanding of the popular slogan ‘Lebanon’s strength lies in its weakness’. Until the Arab Spring, Lebanon had been the weakest state in the Middle East according to the Weberian notion of the state and has been the site where hegemonic politics have developed and succeeded in subjugating the citizens (probably due to state’s weakness).

Given its diverse centres of power and multiple players on the one hand, and its developed civil society, relative to the other Middle Eastern states, on the other hand, the Lebanese state has facilitated hegemonic politics. It requires the political-social player to integrate into alliances and continuous negotiations with other groups. The aim is attaining control; broadening the impact; and taking over more positions in the long-term ‘trench warfare’, and not through the ‘blitzkrieg’ that is more common in other Middle Eastern states, where the civil societies are not well developed and the power is concentrated in the hands of the ruler.

**Division of Chapters**

In the **first chapter**, I will focus on the development of the muqawama concept worldwide, but particularly in the Middle Eastern context. The concepts that I will refer to in this chapter will include *jihad, istishhād, fidāʾ, ṣumūd*, and *mumānaʿa*, and of course, *muqāwama*. Later in this chapter, I will conduct a historical review of the development of *muqāwama* in Palestine, before moving to Lebanon, the focus of the book.

**The second chapter** will conduct a historical review of Lebanon. The uniqueness of this chapter lies in the use of Gramscian perspectives in the attempt to understand the history of Lebanon. In addition to the historical, social and political review, I will attempt to draw the history of Lebanon as one of hegemonic projects that dominated Lebanon at the political and conceptual levels throughout the first decades following the establishment of the Lebanese state, up until the collapse of the first hegemonic project, called the project of merchants and bankers. The project’s review will include an analysis at the economic, social, and symbolic levels, and will involve, inter alia, in-depth reference to the ideas of two intellectuals leading this project, namely Michel Chiha and Charles Corm. This part of the chapter ends with an analysis of the reasons behind the collapse of the merchants and bankers’ hegemony, and the one headed by the Maronite elite, leading to a bloody civil war.

I then move to a brief review of the historical roots of Hezbollah in Lebanon and to the history of Shiites in Lebanon, especially within the dominant state of hegemony in Lebanon at its very beginning. At the end of this chapter, I will briefly review the personal history of recent young clergymen who started to flourish among the Lebanese Shiʿa in the late sixties to early seventies, and who later will become the organic intellectuals leading and establishing Hezbollah and the organization’s hegemonic project.

The **third chapter** will analyze the conceptual basis on which Hezbollah’s young leadership developed. In this chapter, I chose five outstanding intellectuals of the political Shiʿa from the twentieth century, who have directly affected the establishment of the ideas on which Hezbollah is based. These thinkers are Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr, Ayatollah Khomeini, Ali Shariʿati, Musa as-Sadr, and Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah.

In this chapter, I will review and analyze part of the writings of these intellectuals, highlighting the breaking point between their philosophy and that of the classical Twelver Shiʿa that placed a special emphasis on the taqiya[[32]](#footnote-32) and the distancing from direct political activism, as long as the twelfth Imam is concealed. I will also refer to the convergence and divergence points between their thought and that of other secular, socialist, and revolutionary movements of the Third World.

In the **fourth chapter**, and based on the precedent chapters, I examine the main components of Hezbollah’s *Muqāwama* project in Lebanon. I will argue that this project has three main layers that have undergone changes in the same way that Hezbollah itself has transformed. These layers are the religious layer and the revolutionary-resistive interpretation of Shiʿa Islam; the Lebanese nationalist perception of the organization and its reference to Lebanese and Arab nationalism, in addition to its relations and perceptions of Lebanese religious pluralism; and the organization’s socio-economic layer and its economic and status- based social positions.

In the **fifth chapter** of the book, I review the mechanisms for the dissemination of Hezbollah’s alternative hegemonic project. To achieve this goal, I will review the books that Hezbollah publishes, in addition to the educational system, youth movements, novels, TV channels, press, social media, internet sites, and even computer and internet games that the organization disseminates to implement its *Muqāwama* project among the public in Lebanon and the whole region. At the end of this chapter, I present examples and quotes of the current secretary-general, Hassan Nasrallah. Through these quotes, I present the organization’s development since the early eighties up to the second decade of the twenty-first century and the organization’s transition from a state of introversion into an organization that establishes an alternative hegemonic project, which is integrated in the debate and in the negotiations with other parties in the Lebanese arena.

The book culminates with a **conclusive chapter** in which I attempt to combine all the main insights of the book. I will also address the interaction and the impact of the recent events, especially the Syrian war and the organization’s involvement in it alongside the ruling regime, on the progress or the disintegration of its *muqāwama* project inside and outside Lebanon.

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