***Al-Akhbar* and *Al-Mayadeen* as Platforms for Hizballah's Development of *al-Muqawamah* ("Resistance") as an Alternative Hegemonic Project in Lebanon and the Middle East**

Over the past few years, my research has focused on the development of the Lebanese Shi'ite organization and political party Hizballah, and its adoption of the concept of *muqawamah* (resistance) as an integral part of its identity and that of its supporters. I have argued that the concept of *muqawamah*, as it is interpreted by Hizballah, is one of the main reasons that the organization has been able to thwart various attempts by its enemies to target it. This concept has also enabled Hizballah to reach other groups that differ from it intellectually, religiously, and ethnically. Hizballah’s development of its own concept of *muqawamah* and its activism could not have been possible without the flexibility that has characterized the organization. This flexibility developed over many years, partly as a result of Hizballah's Shi’ite ideological roots: the process and concept of *ijtihad* ("independent reasoning") is permitted within Shi’ite jurisprudence, unlike in Sunni jurisprudence. Moreover, Hizballah has developed within the Lebanese framework, which despite its many imperfections is arguably the most democratic and pluralistic framework in the Arab world.

My previous research provided a new explanation for the process of Hizballah's development from a purely military-religious organization into the main representative of a social group that is at the center of a unique counter-hegemonic project. I have termed this process "the *muqawamah* project." This study proposes to build on the research undertaken in my master’s thesis and my doctoral dissertation, in which I examined the development of the concept of *muqawamah* in the Middle East in general, and by Hizballah in particular.

Within the proposed study, the term *muqawamah* constitutes a signifier that allows the establishment of a historical bloc composed of various forces. This historical bloc did not only comprise political parties and actors, but also included various social organizations, including civil society organizations that serve large sectors beyond their "natural" target group of the Lebanese Shi'ite population.

The proposed study focusses on two significant media channels that play a central role in the production of this hegemonic *muqawamah* project. While these media channels are led by Hizballah, they are not directly controlled by it. Their relative freedom from Hizballah's control is central to why a study of these two media channels can make a significant contribution toward helping us understand the new phase (a "Lebanonization" or openness phase) into which Hizballah has entered in order for it to build and re-instill the *muqawamah* project into Lebanese, Arab, Islamic, and global collective awareness. Moreover, this study will contribute to an understanding of how Hizballah's roots and its new interpretations not only make change possible within the party, but also allow it to develop its ideology to facilitate openness and cooperation with the "Other," towards a liberation theology that exceeds the Iranian model. This study will build on work by Hamid Dabashi, particularly in his 2008 book *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire,* which I began to address in my dissertation. It will also build on work by other scholars, including Khatib, *et al* (2014)[[1]](#footnote-1) and Harb (2011).[[2]](#footnote-2)

No previous studies have examined the *Al-Akhbar* newspaper, which was first published in Lebanon in August 2006; or the *Al-Mayadeen* television channel, which was launched in 2012. Therefore, an in-depth study of the roots, impact, and role of these two media channels in building the new and remodeled *muqawamah* project is of utmost importance for understanding the new open and pluralistic project of Hizballah in its twenty-first century phase, especially since the Arab Spring.

In analyzing Hizballah, I develop a theoretical framework that builds on the theoretical basis formulated by Gramsci, and which was later developed by others, mainly Laclau and Mouffe (1985).[[3]](#footnote-3) I show how this frameworkcouldshed light on different aspects of the historical and political research on Lebanon in particular, and in the wider Middle East more generally. These aspects have not been highlighted in previous studies, and they constitute an introduction to new research concepts that could contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of contemporary Middle East politics.

My training from my undergraduate studies until my Ph.D. has thoroughly prepared me in the fields of journalism and media, political science, and Middle Eastern politics. I am also fluent in the three languages required for this research -- Arabic, Hebrew, and English. Therefore, I believe that I am qualified to carry out the proposed study, which would open new research horizons in this field.

**Methodology**

I will examine a broad sample of *Al-Akhbar* editions, as well as the history of the newspaper, the writers and their backgrounds, and the journalistic articles and reports published since the newspaper’s launch. This will help shed light on the nature of the opposing and allied streams and forces inside the newspaper that have come together to construct *muqawamah* as an alternative hegemonic project in Lebanon and the wider region. The study will demonstrate how *Al-Akhbar* has become a platform for intellectual and ideological interaction between the various movements that constitute the *muqawamah* project in Lebanon. In analyzing the data, this study will use qualitative methods, alongside some quantitative methods that will help examine the types of texts published in the newspapers and those broadcast on *Al-Mayadeen* television.

I will use a similar methodology to examine the *Al-Mayadeen* television channel, but on a broader scale, because of the unique nature of this electronic means of communication and its large audience in the Arab world. I will examine the channel’s broadcasts and history, as well as the backgrounds of the channel’s leading staff and main journalists, in order to clarify the relationship between *Al-Mayadeen* and the *muqawamah* project. In addition to the analysis of written journalistic texts and of broadcasts, this study will also include interviews with staff members working for *Al-Akhbar* and *Al-Mayadeen*, in order to shed light on their interpretation of some articles and broadcasts and their contexts.

The theoretical framework that I will use in this study will examine Hizballah’s transition from the Gramscian concept of a "War of Maneuver "to that of a "War of Positions." Through this framework, one can see how Hizballah has used long-term activism to establish a "historical bloc," in which it occupies a central position, alongside various allies (Leftists, Arab Nationalists, and others) who together lead the *muqawamah* project. However, the *muqawamah* project is incomplete. Rather, it is a constantly shifting project that is influenced by encounters between the various groups that together constitute it, as well as the political, social, economic, and intellectual interactions between and among them. These groups are influenced both separately and collectively by these interactions, the impact of which is reflected in, and expressed by, each group’s culture and political program. The *muqawamah* project is constantly remolded through these interactions, and the *Al-Akhbar* newspaper and *Al-Mayadeen* TV are among the most important platforms that play a major role in the constant formation and reformation of this project.

This proposed study breaks new ground and will contribute greatly to the understanding of Hizballah and how it differs from other Islamic political movements in the Middle East. Many have argued in recent times that the field of Middle Eastern Studies should engage in new research areas, in order to keep pace with the rapid changes that are taking place in the region. My proposed study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the allied and conflicting forces in politics and in the contemporary history of the Middle East, especially in the wake of the Arab Spring and against the background of the ongoing Syrian civil war.

1. Khatib, Lina. Dina Matar & Atef Alshaer. *The Hizbullah Phenomenon: Politics and Communication*, London: Hurst & Company, 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Harb, Zahera. *Channels of Resistance in Lebanon: Liberation Propaganda, Hezbollah and The Media,* London: I.B. Tauris, 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Laclau, Ernest and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics.* London: Verso, 1985 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)