

Know thy enemy: Hizbullah, 'terrorism' and the politics of perception

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ABSTRACT The labelling career of the Lebanese armed group and political party Hizbullah is an interesting case with which to investigate the epistemological consequences of the politics of naming. Having found itself since its inception in the mid-1980s on the receiving end of mainly US and Israeli policy makers' and analysts' scorn for being an archetypical terrorist organisation, Hizbullah has been surprisingly successful in achieving its stated aims and in enduring the verbal and military onslaught against it. Although it is not the intention here to reduce explanations for Hizbullah's durability to discursive politics, this article suggests that both the labelling of Hizbullah as terrorist and, conversely, its identification as a 'lebanonised' political force that is about to make its conversion into an unarmed political party are misleading and incapable of grasping this organisation's complexities. In fact, both 'terrorist' and 'lebanonised' labels produce a quality of knowledge inferior to that produced by Hizbullah's own conceptualisation of its enemies. But most importantly, the debate on Hizbullah's alleged terrorist nature has obscured several of its traits that many should register before passing judgement on it. Our analysis shows that the variety of institutions Hizbullah has been carefully elaborating and readapting over the past two decades in Lebanon operate today as a holistic and integrated network which produce sets of values and meanings embedded in an interrelated religious and political framework—that of the wilayat al-faqih. These meanings are disseminated on a daily basis among Shi'a constituencies through the party's institutionalised networks and serve to mobilise them into 'the society of the Resistance' (mujtamaa' al-muqawama), which is the foundation of the hala al-islamiyya (Islamic sphere) in Lebanon. Accordingly, any prospect of Hizbullah's transformation away from armed 'resistance' should be firmly placed in an analysis of its hegemony among the Shi'a of Lebanon and of the tools it uses to acquire and sustain this status.

Caricaturing one's opponent in terms that justify or call for its elimination is as old and common as political conflict itself. Yet few notions have provoked

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as much disagreement as that of ‘terrorism’. While those chastised by their opponents may still take some pride in—and indeed adopt—principally derogatory labels like ‘rebel’, ‘bandit’, ‘insurgent’ and even ‘enemy’, terrorism has few self-professed practitioners. Therefore, by the rediscovery of the notion in the post-9/11 ‘war on terrorism’, discursive battles have been fought as intensely as military ones, with all contestants and their sympathisers rejecting and placing their mutual characterisations at the core of their disputes. Especially when it comes to the Middle East, the debate tends to concentrate on the (il)legitimacy or (im)morality of applying the terrorism label in individual cases of political agitation and violence or on exact ways of defining ‘terrorism’. Yet much less attention has been paid to the epistemological implications of waging a war against an enemy essentialised as terrorist. Evidently, labelling the enemy as such may have direct political advantages, in that it rationalises state-endorsed violence, mobilises support for state policy and communicates a threat to opponents of being treated like its namesakes elsewhere. But for knowing, understanding and predicting the opponent’s intentions and actions, the term’s merits are far less certain. This should not be a concern only for academics aiming to understand and explain political behaviour *per se*. Regardless of what one thinks of their own agendas, policy makers will have to consider the epistemological implications of how they label their opponents and conceive of the real or perceived threats the latter pose. If doubts are cast over the quality of knowledge their labels may generate, so will these labels question policy makers’ ability to influence, transform or neutralise their ‘terrorist’ adversaries.

The labelling career of the Lebanese armed group and political party Hizbullah is an interesting case in point. Having found itself since its inception in the mid-1980s at the receiving end of mainly US and Israeli policy makers’ and analysts’ scorn for being an archetypical terrorist organisation, Hizbullah has been surprisingly successful in achieving its stated aims and in enduring the verbal and military onslaught against it. Although it is not the intention here to reduce explanations for Hizbullah’s durability to discursive politics, this article suggests that the labelling of Hizbullah both as terrorist and, conversely, as a ‘lebanonised’ political force about to make a conversion into an unarmed political party, is misleading and incapable of grasping this organisation’s complexities. In fact, both labels produced a quality of knowledge inferior to that produced by Hizbullah’s own conceptualisation of its enemies. But, most importantly, the debate on Hizbullah’s alleged terrorist nature has obscured several of its traits that anyone, including policy makers, should register before passing judgement on the organisation. We argue that the variety of institutions Hizbullah has been carefully elaborating and readapting over the past two decades operates as holistic and integrated networks which produce sets of meanings embedded in an interrelated religious and political framework. These meanings are disseminated on a daily basis through the party’s policy networks and serve to mobilise the Shi’a constituency into a ‘society of Resistance’ in order to consolidate the foundation of an Islamic sphere (*al-*

hala al-islamiyya). Accordingly, any prospect of Hizbullah's transformation away from armed 'resistance' should be firmly placed in an analysis of its hegemony among the Shi'a of Lebanon and of the tools it uses to acquire and sustain this status.

Hizbullah, the 'terrorist' villain

The 11 September attacks on the USA and the world's ensuing preoccupation with stemming the tide of terrorism boosted a consensus about the alleged terrorist nature of Hizbullah. While Israel and the USA had already classified Hizbullah as a terrorist organisation since the late 1980s, several other governments, including Canada (December 2002) and Australia (June 2003), now added the Lebanese organisation to their own lists of terrorist entities.¹ On 3 November 2001 the USA refined its categorisation of Hizbullah by officially labelling it a 'Foreign Terrorist Organization' possessing a 'global reach', thereby authorising the imposition of sanctions against any third party that failed to freeze its assets or extradite its operatives. In addition, three individuals, whom the US considers to be Hizbullah agents, were branded by the FBI as 'Most Wanted Terrorists'. The UK followed suit, albeit by distinguishing between Hizbullah's domestic and political operations within Lebanon and what it considers its 'External Security Organisation', specialising in terrorist attacks abroad. Senior US officials and law makers added their voice to the formal labelling of Hizbullah as 'terrorist' by fiercely denouncing its perceived involvement in global acts of terrorism and hinting that it might be next on the list of US targets. Perhaps most strikingly, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage asserted that 'Hizbollah made the A-team of terrorists [but] maybe al-Qaeda is actually the B-team'.² An equally harsh judgement was passed by US Senator Bob Graham, the chairman of the Senate's Intelligence Committee, who described Hizbullah's purported military training camps in the Lebanese Biqa' region as places 'where the next generation of terrorists are being prepared'.³ In a similar vein former CIA director George Tenet told the US Congress in 2003 that 'Hizbollah, as an organization with capability and worldwide presence, is [al-Qaeda's] equal, if not a far more capable organization. I actually think they're a notch above in many respects'.⁴

The indictment against Hizbullah relies on the organisation's suspected involvement in a series of activities that are deemed terrorist or are terrorism-related. Among the steadily growing number of accusations the following feature.

- Responsibility for the bombings of the US embassy and the US Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983 and the embassy's annex in 1984, and for having kidnapped several US and other Western citizens in Lebanon in the 1980s.⁵ Three alleged members of Hizbullah, including Imad Mughniyeh, are held responsible for the hijacking of TWA flight 847 in 1985.⁶

- Orchestrating the attacks on the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires in 1992 and the bombing of a Jewish community centre in the same city in 1994.⁷ In 2002 the organisation was also accused of having recruited Singaporean nationals in a failed plot to attack US and Israeli ships in the Singapore Straits and of having plotted to blow up the Israeli embassy in Thailand.⁸
- Teaming up with al-Qaeda. Hizbullah officials are alleged to have met a group of al-Qaeda members who visited Hizbullah's training camps in south Lebanon, and to have provided shelter to al-Qaeda fugitives in Lebanon.⁹ Moreover, Osama Bin Laden purportedly met Imad Mughniyeh in Sudan.¹⁰ Press reports cited unnamed US intelligence sources and a 'senior law enforcer' as having uncovered ties between al-Qaeda and Hizbollah that were 'ad hoc and tactical and [involved] mid- and low-level operatives'.¹¹
- Running international criminal networks to finance terrorist activities. These networks allegedly raise funds from the illicit trade in drugs and other goods in the tri-border area of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, and from trade in so-called conflict diamonds in the Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone.¹² Fund-raising activities by Hizbullah members in North Carolina fed speculation about the organisation possessing 'dormant cells' in the USA.¹³
- Providing advice, arms and logistical–financial support to Palestinian groups, including Hamas, the al-Aqsa Brigades and Islamic Jihad, who are equally classified as terrorist organisations.

While referring to undisclosed security sources and citing largely anecdotal or circumstantial evidence, Hizbullah's critics found confirmation of some of their accusations in the party's own public discourse. 'Our slogan is and remains death to America', Hizbullah's secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah told a cheering crowd of supporters in a Beirut suburb in April 2003.¹⁴ Seemingly corroborating suspicions about Hizbullah's support for Palestinian suicide attacks against Israeli civilians, Nasrallah explained in an interview on Arab Al-Jazeera television that he regarded his party as the 'vanguard' (*at-tali'a*) of the Palestinian armed struggle.¹⁵ At the annual 'Day of Jerusalem' commemoration on 14 December 2001, Nasrallah expressed the party's full support for the Palestinian intifada, while justifying suicide attacks against Israeli civilians by pointing out that 'there are no citizens [*madaniyin*] in the Zionist entity [as] all of them are aggressors and participants in the onslaught against the [Palestinian] people'.¹⁶ He later added: 'We will provide the intifada with money, weapons and people'.¹⁷

In all these assessments Hizbullah emerges as a formidable, if not the most dangerous, exponent of the terrorism that the US State Department believes to constitute 'a fundamental feature of the Middle East political landscape'.¹⁸ Leaving the merits of the individual accusations aside, as a threat the overall classification as a terrorist organisation certainly had a curbing effect on those of Hizbullah's activities that are mostly *not* strictly regarded as 'terrorist' in nature. Although far from being considered legitimate or

desirable, Hizbullah's military operations against the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon until May 2000, and its subsequent armed attacks on Israeli troops in the Shab'a farms, have been less frequently portrayed as being terrorist, and when so, mainly by Israeli policy makers and military commanders. Yet the escalated labelling of Hizbullah as a terrorist organisation in the US-led 'war on terror' and hints that it might be Washington's next target clearly helped reduce Hizbullah's actions on the border. In May 2003 a Hizbullah official admitted the party was 'lying low'.¹⁹ Another party official, who is also a member of parliament, described Hizbullah's policy as a 'temporary, tactical retreat'.²⁰ Ever since, the organisation has shunned any spectacular actions on the border while instigating only minor incidents designed to remind Israel that its front with Hizbullah is still very much alive. Arguably, intimidating Hizbullah via the terrorism label may also have restrained the organisation from becoming active in Iraq by, for example, joining or supporting the Iraqi resistance against US troops—assuming that this intention was there in the first place and that Iraqis would have welcomed Hizbullah's involvement.²¹

From an Israeli and US point of view, labelling Hizbullah as a terrorist organisation had its pay-offs. Yet, in producing a cognitive map, the labelling of Hizbullah as a super-terrorist proved to be much less fruitful. The production of knowledge about and understanding of Hizbullah has suffered as a result. In academia, in journalism and in Western and Israeli intelligence circles, discussing terrorism appears to dispense with even the rudimentary onus of proof that is usually expected in the production of knowledge about virtually any other phenomenon, including those equally abhorred or rejected. For example, highly questionable and unsubstantiated information disseminated by a pro-Israeli website about a high-level '*jihadist*' meeting between operatives of al-Qaeda, Palestinian Islamist groups and Hizbullah in Tehran smoothly found its way via the Israeli media to the mainstream international press.²² Washington-based think-tanks routinely adopted the information without much questioning and soon the allegation was printed in quasi-scholarly work with more-or-less respectable sourcing.²³ While in other instances an academic work based entirely on evidently biased sources is likely to be laughed off as deeply flawed, a study of Hizbullah's terrorist activities derived from interviews solely among Israeli intelligence officers and with no fieldwork in Lebanon has been widely regarded as an authoritative piece of research on the organisation.²⁴ Official Israeli guesses on Hizbullah's rocket and missile threat from south Lebanon are routinely mistaken for facts—despite the widely varying numbers suggested and notwithstanding that these estimates go far beyond conceivable possibilities.²⁵ Similarly testifying to the high degree of misinformation circulating about Hizbullah, one US official agreed to discuss the issue of the organisation's terrorism with the authors by indicating which press reports US intelligence deemed plausible and which it did not.²⁶

One could argue that it has simply been Hizbullah's secretive nature that prevented the gathering of accurate knowledge about the organisation. Such is indeed a complicating factor, given Hizbullah's highly effective regime of

internal discipline and concealment and given that it has never produced talkative defectors. Judging from the limited successes of Israeli Special Forces in targeting Hizbullah leaders, Israeli intelligence and its allies have for long failed to penetrate the organisation to any threatening degree.²⁷ Yet, for a convincing explanation for the dismal record of ‘terrorism studies’ in actually ‘knowing’ their subject and producing decent analyses of Hizbullah, there seems to be more at play. Rarely have the critics of Hizbullah’s ‘terrorism’ produced thorough analyses of the organisation in its domestic settings or in a historical perspective, not even in an attempt to contextualise their accusations regarding its terrorist agenda.²⁸ Accordingly, publicly available information is customarily ignored or dismissed as irrelevant at best, resulting in the constant reproduction of factually incorrect assertions, including naming Sayyid Fadlallah as the Spiritual Guide of Hizbullah²⁹ and firmly dating its foundation to before its actual inception in 1984.³⁰ The mounting allegations about Hizbullah’s internationalist efforts in general—and its ties or similarities with al-Qaeda in particular—systematically do injustice to historical facts and the political stances taken by the organisation, or completely ignore them. For instance, the accusation regarding the supposedly cosy relations between Hizbullah and al-Qaeda conceals the outrage expressed by the party over atrocities jointly committed by the Taliban and its Arab allies in Afghanistan years before the Twin Towers collapsed.³¹ Al-Qaeda’s second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, also received vicious condemnation from Hizbullah when in November 1997 his Gama’at al-Islamiyya committed a massacre among civilians in Luxor, Egypt.³² Hizbullah also blamed the Egyptian Islamists for launching an armed campaign against the Egyptian state without having exhausted the route of dialogue and reconciliation, while diverting resources away from what it sees as the real and legitimate struggle against Israel.³³ Even leaving aside the numerous religious and doctrinal differences between the two organisations,³⁴ terrorism experts never explained or substantiated their claims that this past of clear animosity has been miraculously overcome, to the extent that the two now perceive their struggle as a unified *Jihad* against a common enemy.

The study of Hizbullah’s terrorism not only conveniently ignores historical data; it also lifts events and developments out of their historical contexts anachronistically to serve as proof for its contentions. Al-Qaeda’s use of suicide attacks evidently prompted memories of Hizbullah’s similar tactics in the 1980s. Yet to subsequently equate the two organisations as being part of one and the same terrorist onslaught against the West ignores and can not account for the fact that Hizbullah has not carried out such suicide attacks since 1985.³⁵ A similar anachronistic approach underlies the argument that Hizbullah today is essentially a mere tool, or even a derivative, of the Iranian regime. Iranian Revolutionary Guards undoubtedly played an instrumental role in the establishment of Hizbullah in the 1980s. But simply to transpose this historical given in order to account for its subsequent terrorist career and its current status pays no heed to Hizbullah’s strenuous and for itself often politically costly efforts to reconcile its Islamist agenda with a form of

Lebanese nationalism. It also discards Hizbullah's highly sophisticated catering for the needs of a Lebanese Shi'ite constituency and ignores its growing reliance on donations from the Lebanese diaspora, reinforced by strong indications of dwindling financial support from Iran.³⁶ Finally, to mention another and related example, assertions that Hizbullah remains committed to establishing an Iranian-style Islamic state in Lebanon and that all its actions are instrumental to this ultimate goal suffer from a similar hiatus in understanding or even registering Hizbullah's evolution. Its 1985 manifesto or 'open letter' did indeed call, *inter alia*, for the establishment of an Islamic state in Lebanon and rejected participation in Lebanon's confessional system.³⁷ To be sure, the party's leaders still contend that an Islamic state is a goal that deserves to be aspired to when conditions allow and depending on the emergence of a consensus on its desirability. Yet, since the party acknowledges that in pluralist Lebanon this condition can not be fulfilled today or in the near future, it has become a 'legal abstraction'.³⁸ Accordingly, since Hizbullah's subsequent participation in Lebanon's post-war political system since the early 1990s (see below), it has never mentioned the establishment of an Islamic state in its election programmes, nor have its members in parliament or in elected positions of local government called for an Islamic state or striven towards legislation or policies suggesting an opportunistic strategy towards this presumed goal.³⁹

In their ability to know, understand and correctly predict their subject's behaviour, students of terrorism have been seriously hampered by systematically resorting to factual incorrectness regarding what can be known, by skipping relevant historical data, by anachronistic arguing and by relying on philological essentialism. Yet those labelling Hizbullah as a terrorist organisation have had few qualms about these methodological flaws. In this respect the hypothesis should be considered that the inability to know and understand terrorism is inherent to their approach. As one British diplomat said, 'you and I can not know about Hizbullah's terrorist activities because there is no way we can have access to the dossiers about what is going on in its external security wing. But we know for certain it is engaged in terrorism.'⁴⁰ This uninformed certainty even produced its own jargon, wherein Hizbullah's 'threat' is said to originate from its 'global reach' and its 'capabilities', as opposed to the organisation's actual operations, political outlook and plans. Indeed, the very terror supposedly spread by Hizbullah is portrayed as so effective exactly because of its unpredictability and the secrecy in which the organisation operates. The labelling exercise consists of imagining Hizbullah as the ultimate alien who *can not be known* or understood. In this sense study of Hizbullah's terrorism appears as the very antipode of both academia and intelligence.

Hizbullah's reply and perception of its enemies

The barrage of accusations undoubtedly put Hizbullah on the defensive. Especially after the events of 11 September 2001 the organisation made increasing efforts to shrug off the terrorism label applied by its opponents. Its

officials and various media outlets responded to the individual charges by strongly denying its involvement in the Argentine bombings and by rejecting responsibility for the US embassy and marine barracks bombings and the kidnappings in the 1980s.⁴¹ Hizbullah also fervently denied any links with Al-Qaeda and repeatedly condemned the bombing of the Twin Towers.⁴² Strong denials were also expressed regarding its sending members to Iraq.⁴³ It refuted allegations that it is running training camps for Palestinian militants.⁴⁴ In more general terms the organisation emphasised that its operations are not 'global' but confined to Lebanon and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, while it denied that it 'at any point of time went to the US to fight them there or in any part of the world'.⁴⁵

Hizbullah's denials indicate that it is acutely aware of the dangers of being implicated by the labelling exercise on terrorism and that it understands that the US 'war on terror' has put it under closer scrutiny. Yet at the same time it has also tried to capitalise on the allegations by deliberately leaving a degree of ambiguity so as to reinforce its opponents' beliefs. This clearly shows from the organisation's response to Israeli accusations over its vast military capability in south Lebanon. Commenting on reports about Hizbullah possessing a large arsenal of long-range missiles, Secretary-General Nasrallah said:

If we had them, we won't say so because we don't want to reveal our capabilities to the enemy. If we don't have them, we won't say anything either as this would reassure our enemy for free. So we leave them guessing.⁴⁶

Taking this logic a step further, Hizbullah complemented its strong denials of being involved in Iraq with equally strong hints to the contrary. For example, during the US siege of Najaf and its holy shrines in May 2004, Nasrallah told thousands of participants in a protest march in Beirut that Hizbullah's battle against Israeli occupation and Iraqis resisting the US occupation were intrinsically linked and part of a larger battle against US–Israeli designs for the region. In his speech Nasrallah left little doubt that he saw Hizbullah as a major player in this larger battle.⁴⁷ Likewise, Hizbullah routinely shrouded its denials of responsibility for the US embassy and barracks bombings in the 1980s by adding praise for the acts and by expressing admiration for their perpetrators.⁴⁸ Hence, although it explicitly denied the charges of terrorism, both generally and on a case-by-case basis, Hizbullah skillfully manipulated these same accusations in order to fuel its enemies' suspicions. Consequently, it derived some sort of a deterrence capability from the terrorism label itself; enough to intimidate its opponents and mobilise its own supporters, but within certain bounds to prevent immediate retaliation.⁴⁹

Beside its denials, Hizbullah's positive answer to its critics consisted of a consistent discourse constructed around the notion of 'resistance' (*muqawama*) against occupation. The organisation's mission and identity are rooted in its founders' belief that the Israeli invasion of Lebanese territory in the 1980s ought to be beaten by armed resistance. Even following the low-intensity war in the 1990s and the Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon in May 2000, the notion of resistance has remained central to Hizbullah's self-proclaimed

mission. This is done both by claiming that Lebanese territories (the Shab'a farms and various other 'flashpoints') continue to be occupied and by increasingly intervening in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.⁵⁰ Underlying this 'fixed and invariable dossier'⁵¹ are a complex set of notions and interpretations derived from Shi'a law, Ayatollah Khomeini's theory of the 'rule of the Islamic jurist' (*wilayat al-faqih*), Shi'a history, hagiography and related beliefs that render resistance and holy struggle (*jihad*) essentially a religious duty for the disempowered (*al-mustad'afin*).⁵² What is striking is that Hizbullah's broader discourse contains views and characterisations of its enemies that, qualitatively speaking, are poles apart from those offered by the converse discourse on terrorism.

For Hizbullah oppression has been a central element to the experience of the 'Muslim community' (*umma*) with the West. Colonialism and imperialism are singled out as the major constants of how countries like France, Britain and, more recently, the USA have trampled on the Muslim peoples and approached the latter with contempt, double standards and brutal force in order to impose their hegemony. According to the party's ideologists, these battles over subjugation have been reinforced by and interwoven with a major clash between Islamic and Western civilisation. Thus not only is Hizbullah's antagonism against the West phrased in political or ideological terms but by means of a strong rejection of Western culture and its impact on Arab and Muslim society.⁵³ In this respect Israel stands out as the greatest perpetrator of crimes against the oppressed and the 'greatest evil' (*as-shar al-mutlaq*), to the extent that Hizbullah vows never to reconcile itself with Israel's existence.⁵⁴ Recent instability in the Middle East triggered by the US invasion of Iraq and heightened Israeli repression of Palestinian rights only confirmed the party's conviction that its two main enemies—the Israeli state and the US government—are preparing for a showdown against the Muslims of the region. Yet for Hizbullah its antipathy towards Israel remains centre stage in its understanding of and animosity against US policies in the region:

Today their main aim is Palestine—both before Iraq and after it. When we talk about the occupation of Iraq their aim is Palestine via the gates of Iraq. When Syria, Iran and the Islamic movement are targeted, their aim is Palestine.⁵⁵

What emerges is that, in Hizbullah's view, the latest manifestation of colonialism and imperialism is found in an 'American–Zionist project' that threatens to usurp the entire region, impose its hegemony and complete the destruction of Palestine.⁵⁶ Hizbullah's leaders insist that this conspiracy calls for a maximum effort of resistance and *jihad*.

Of course, when taken at face value, nothing in this fierce discourse appears more subtle or sophisticated than the discourse on terrorism. In its views on its enemies, Hizbullah even appears to invite the terrorism label by invoking trepidation and hatred. Yet, despite all its demonising content, Hizbullah's discourse still makes some important distinctions and qualifications, while the terrorism label suffices by presenting a one-dimensional adversary. Saad-Ghorayeb points in this respect to several traits of Hizbullah's discourse that suggest a much more multidimensional perception

of its enemies.⁵⁷ The organisation may seek the destruction of both Israeli state and society but it conditions the active pursuit of this ultimate aim to its feasibility, as dictated by Israeli military superiority or an eventual peace agreement with Israel by its host Lebanon and its ally Syria. A similar sense of pragmatism is evident in Hizbullah's evolving positions on the US occupation of Iraq. Although it lambasted the invasion and pointed at the excesses of occupation, Hizbullah leaders fine-tuned their discourse to the fluctuating willingness of Iraqi Shi'a leaders to negotiate with the USA.⁵⁸ Moreover, even when it expresses animosity towards the West at large, Hizbullah does not aim for the eradication of Western states. It simultaneously expresses admiration for certain aspects of Western culture, including US culture. Neither does it hold a grudge against Western states *per se*, as illustrated by its general approval of France's policies in the region.⁵⁹ Hizbullah's leaders also tell both the outside world and their supporters that their conflict is not with the US people but with the US government. In fact, just before the invasion of Iraq, Nasrallah called on fellow Arabs and Muslims to 're-evaluate' their attitude towards Europeans, given widespread anti-war demonstrations in London and other European capitals.⁶⁰

This is not to deny the morally dubious aspects of Hizbullah's views on its enemies or indeed the world at large. The organisation's discourse could be rightly accused of spreading a message of anti-Semitism and racism while evoking violence and hatred, as most of Hizbullah's opponents maintain. Yet, however despicable its views may be, its efforts to conceive, characterise and analyse its enemies show a much greater degree of stratification, diversity and adjustability than the label 'terrorism' is capable of producing. Indeed, Hizbullah's eagerness to know and understand its enemies' history, mentality and plans stands in sharp contrast to the representation of the 'terrorist' as the ultimate alien who can not be known. Examples abound. Hizbullah's media outlets daily broadcast programmes aimed at informing viewers about the nature of Israeli and US societies and politics. Its satellite TV channel, al-Manar, frequently broadcasts footage of Israeli politicians and journalist discussing the latest in Israeli politics. In-house commentators explain the workings of the Knesset in voting for or against Israeli policies *vis-à-vis* the Palestinians. The channel's recent broadcasting of the Syrian-made drama series 'The Diaspora' (*as-Shattat*) may be rightly dismissed as a false and distorted account of the history of Zionism,⁶¹ yet it exemplifies Hizbullah's obsession with the historical evolution of its main enemy. One of its prime time game shows, *al-Muhimma* (The Mission), has for its objective to virtually enter Jerusalem by answering a series of questions dealing with resistance operations, Islamic thought, the Palestinian cause, Western conspiracies, Israeli plots, etc. In this show, the Israeli enemy is challenged through the audiovisual presentation of the merely virtual possibility of conquering Jerusalem, while knowledge about this enemy (and other oppressors) is celebrated and rewarded. This knowledge is also materially re-channelled into promoting the cause of armed resistance since 25% of the monetary award granted to the winning candidate is sent to the Palestinian intifada.

In a similar fashion, the organisation's weekly *Al-Intiqad* (critique) devotes large sections to themes like 'religious aspects of US policies', analyses of Israeli Prime minister Ariel Sharon's intentions and strategies behind his proposed pullout of Gaza and views within the Knesset on the Sharon plan.⁶² Hizbullah's websites provide listings of articles in several languages on issues like the influence of Christian fundamentalism on US policies towards Israel, the Jewish lobby in Washington, Israel's evolving notion of national security, Jewish political philosophy, interviews with Israeli academicians and political activists taken from the Israeli press and, indeed, investigations into how the notion of terrorism shapes US foreign policy.⁶³

Hizbullah's emphasis on education and research is similarly steered towards knowing the enemy. Anyone visiting its affiliated Consultative Centre for Studies and Documentation in Beirut (see below) will find in its library students reading books and articles by Israeli and US authors about US and Israeli foreign policy, Zionism and Western political science. Thousands of Hizbullah sympathisers have completed their education at the American University in Beirut, often after receiving generous financial support from the organisation. In all these endeavours Hizbullah demonstrates a capability to analyse and predict its adversaries' behaviour and intentions that is far superior to that offered by those insisting on the terrorism label. As a result, both the researcher and the policy maker who is stuck in the paradigm of terrorism finds him or herself in a permanent position of epistemological disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the 'terrorist' he hopes to analyse or, ultimately, to defeat.

The counter-view: the 'Lebanonisation' of Hizbullah

Several researchers have become discontented with the terrorism label and have sought to analyse Hizbullah differently. Hizbullah's participation in the Lebanese political system prompted a set of studies arguing that the party is becoming 'lebanonised'—a reference to the process of 'normalisation' of its political activities and its gradual transformation into a purely civilian political party accommodated by the Lebanese political system. This process, labelled 'the phase of political *jihād*', substitutes the notion of Islamic revolution with that of political accommodation.⁶⁴ Authors agree that Hizbullah has given up its radical agenda and is integrating into national politics with a pragmatic strategy. The 'lebanonisation' of Hizbullah would be a change from the principles of 'rejectionism and violence' towards those of 'domestic courtesy and accommodation'.⁶⁵

This alternative approach to understanding Hizbullah has the merit of producing knowledge about the social base of the party that is largely overlooked by students of terrorism. The 'terrorist' label equates the social base of Hizbullah with poor individuals needing the services provided by the party, and passively dominated by its propaganda activities.⁶⁶ The 'lebanonisation' literature introduces a distinction between the armed activities of the party and its social and political action, focusing on the latter and analysing Hizbullah's service delivery success and efficiency among

Lebanese Shi'a. We are told that these activities are organised into formal and less formal institutions, under the jurisdiction of the party's central decision-making structures, and that this 'welfare system' improves 'the daily life of thousands of deprived Shi'a in Lebanon' who have not been getting proper services from the government.⁶⁷ Accordingly, Hizbullah is distinguished by two components: the social and political versus the armed branch, suggesting that the latter is bound to be dismantled after the struggle for liberation has been completed.

The party reveals two complementary aspects. It has committed itself to the militant pursuit of its goals, while working extremely hard to build and sustain a political constituency. . . In recent years, Hizbullah has been transforming itself, preparing for life after resistance while simultaneously exploiting its commitment to liberate the South in order to gain political support.⁶⁸

The gradual transformation of Hizbullah is explained by a host of factors, including political changes occurring in Iran, and the victory over the conservatives of the Iranian reformers, who encouraged Hizbullah to 'demilitarize its identity and build a broader base in society'.⁶⁹ Other external regional strategic factors are also cited as prompting this conversion.⁷⁰ In addition, the change is also related to Lebanese domestic politics, which are not in favour of an Islamic revolution, even among Shi'a ranks. The Hizbullah of the post-war era is conceived as being less driven by ideology than by political considerations related to the consolidation of its existence.

The 'lebanonisation' analysis highlights the effectiveness and efficiency of Hizbullah's activities on two levels. First, as a political party managing an array of social services to Shi'a, who have been historically disregarded by the Lebanese state. This perspective looks at Hizbullah from below, and examines its grassroots actions from a political economy perspective. It urges a revision of the party's labelling as a terrorist group, as it introduces evidence of its operation as a typical political party. Thus, implicitly or explicitly, the 'lebanonisation' literature critiques the dismissal of Hizbullah as an extremist or terrorist group by the West.

While it may be tempting to dismiss Hizbullah as an extremist or terrorist group, this sort of labeling [by the USA] conceals the fact that Hizbullah has managed to build an extremely impressive social base in Lebanon.⁷¹

Second, the 'lebanonisation' literature reveals how Hizbullah is able to operate successfully as a political party, negotiating its position within the complex arena of Lebanese politics: 'Hizbullah has been transforming itself into a political party [whose decision makers] are little different than the [other Lebanese] leaders [and] have exemplified a sophisticated understanding of Lebanese politics'.⁷² This argument fits into the claim made by other authors about the decline of radical Islamism.⁷³ Like most other Islamic movements, Hizbullah's ideological ambitions are said to be being re-channelled into and somehow neutralised by domestic politics. Hizbullah is not only 'being gradually absorbed by the political system', it has also

'jettisoned its commitment to establishing a system of Islamic rule in the country'.⁷⁴ The approach essentially concludes that Hizbullah, as a radical movement, is being caught up in the game of conventional politics: Hizbullah's 'lebanonisation' entails a gradual dismissal of the party's pan-Islamic horizon in favour of what is termed 'Islamic nationalism'.⁷⁵

Hizbullah's participation in the Lebanese political system was indeed the outcome of fierce internal debates in the party. In 1992, before the first Lebanese parliamentary elections after the end of the war and the signing of Taif agreement, Hizbullah's Shura Council was divided into two camps. The first argued against political participation, which was seen as an inevitable compromise with Hizbullah's revolutionary ideals. The second justified this participation by a re-interpretation of the 1989 Taif agreement (which forms the Lebanese post-war constitution); it was argued that participation in the political system would allow the party to change it from within.⁷⁶ Eventually, the latter view prevailed, resulting in Hizbullah's participation in the parliamentary elections of 1992, in which it won eight seats (out of 128). Ever since, Hizbullah has participated in both parliamentary and municipal elections, gaining considerable numbers of votes. However, Hizbullah has insisted on qualifying its participation in Lebanon's political institutions while it maintained a certain distance from Lebanese politics in general—thereby allowing its denunciation of the government's practices while ensuring its role as an opposition party. As one of Hizbullah's leaders put it succinctly:

We distinguish between participation [in the legislative elections of 1992] and our vision of the actual political system that we consider to be the basis of confessional, economic, administrative, and political problems because it is built on a confessional basis and on the basis of *muhassasa* [allotment] that hinders development and impedes people's rights.⁷⁷

Compared to the terrorism approach, the 'lebanonisation' approach certainly has its merits. Yet, by sharply distinguishing between the two sorts of activities of the party—the social and the military—it fails to acknowledge or explain the interactions between them, at least on an ideological level. Harik notes a relationship between Hizbullah's 'success' and its construction of Shi'a 'self-identity', but she does not explain the ramifications or nature of this correlation.⁷⁸ In this context Alagha argues that the Islamic state ideology of Hizbullah in the post-Taif era remains 'a political ideology, but *not* a political program'.⁷⁹ Saad-Ghorayeb explores how the political evolution of Hizbullah reconciled its core beliefs. She argues that the party is sustained by skillfully negotiating its intellectual and religious commitment to pan-Islamism and its Lebanese sociopolitical role.⁸⁰ However, none of these authors explains how these linkages between ideology and programme translate empirically into the party's structures and agency.

Instead of providing clear answers to these questions, the debate about the 'lebanonisation' of Hizbullah is almost entirely focused on the future of the party against the background of its pragmatic transformation. Accordingly,

the liberation of the South is viewed as having placed Hizbullah in a 'strategic dilemma'⁸¹ caused by a host of questions: what would its role be after the Israeli withdrawal from the South of Lebanon in May 2000? How would the party sustain its legitimacy as the bearer of the resistance now that there are no Israelis to resist? How would this affect Hizbullah's social and political activities? And how could Hizbullah justify to its constituencies the party's possible further integration into a Lebanese political system it had often lambasted for being corrupt and unworthy?

Hizbullah's own answers are clearly at odds with the 'lebanonisation' thesis.

The basis of our objectives is related, on one hand, to the national environment governed by the theory of prevention and defense [*rade' wa difaa*], and on the other, to the liberation of the occupied Lebanese territories. Thus calling for the demilitarization of Hizbullah is equivalent to calling for the removal of all security measures from Lebanon and for its deadly strategic exposure.⁸²

Accordingly, Hizbullah views its military activities as an integral part of its *raison d'être*. Even if the party is not actually engaged in combat, it still reserves the *right* to use armed force for 'prevention and defence'; a right, which, in turn is constantly reiterated and disseminated through the party's social and political activities. This further explains why Hizbullah refuses to participate in the Lebanese government. Indeed, since Hizbullah's military activities remain a key priority, integrating into the government would put the party in a position which would be difficult to sustain internationally:

If, for example, we take the position of speaker of Parliament [now held by its rival Amal], we would become part of the Lebanese state. As a result, the whole country would be held responsible for our operations against Israel.⁸³

Consequently, the literature dealing with the transformation and the accommodation of Hizbullah into Lebanese politics has contributed to presenting it as 'a fixture of Lebanese politics, not simply an armed and violent faction'.⁸⁴ This way, it has moved beyond the 'terrorism' label and contributed to producing knowledge about Hizbullah: the 'lebanonisation' literature acknowledged and described the functioning of the party's social activities. However, it has incorrectly situated these social activities as separate from Hizbullah's other functions, whereas Hizbullah leaders conceive resistance as much as a military undertaking as a social and political one. 'A close inspection of the party's internal dynamics reveals that it is virtually impossible to extricate the military from the political or vice versa.'⁸⁵ Moreover, the 'lebanonisation' approach has not been able to shed much light on the nature and organisation of the party's social and political activities. More importantly, it has assumed that the reasons behind the mobilisation of thousands of Shi'a individuals by Hizbullah could simply be explained by material interests and the comfort of depending on the party's social network.⁸⁶ We believe that other reasons stand behind the process by which large groups of individuals, often not poor at all, *choose* to be mobilised by Hizbullah.

Hizbullah's institutions: a holistic network

A different way of looking at Hizbullah's social and political activities is to consider the possibility that these activities are successful because they operate as an integrated and holistic network. This network produces individual and collective meaning to its beneficiaries, which, in turn, explains how and why Hizbullah is legitimised as a dominant order among Lebanese Shi'a. Our analysis of Hizbullah's actions thus aims to go beyond the two-leg description of the party and hopes to produce more knowledge about its social networks as well as about their political and religious paradigms.

Hizbullah manages a dozen institutions delivering an array of services to Shi'a groups residing in the southern suburb (al-Dahiya) of Beirut, in the South of Lebanon and in the Biqa' area. All these institutions depend administratively on a Social Services Central Unit, located in al-Dahiya. Two categories of institutions can be identified: those providing services related to the armed resistance, and those delivering services to a wider group of users needing social, economic and urban services. These institutions have autonomous boards of administration and have a specific margin of manoeuvre but have to follow a minimal 'political and cultural orientation'—formulated and set by Hizbullah.⁸⁷ Before analysing their broader significance in terms of networks, it may be worth looking at the institutions in more detail.

Of the first category of institutions, the associations of the Martyr (al-Shahid, founded in 1982) and of the Wounded (al-Juraha, established in 1990) are two ngos that depend administratively on Hizbullah. Al-Shahid looks after 2500 relatives of martyrs, prisoners and missing individuals. The association manages schools, a hospital, a dispensary and ensures access to a variety of resources through a network of relationships for 'stabilizing the family in its environment'.⁸⁸ Al-Juraha takes care of more than 3000 wounded along the same lines.⁸⁹

Of the second category, two Hizbullah ngos propose educational and micro-credit services. The Educational Institute (al-Mu'assasa al-Tarbiyya, founded in 1991) supervises the education sector and aims at 'redefining the structure of [Shi'a] society' through Islamic learning. It manages nine schools in Lebanon, grouping around 5300 students.⁹⁰ The Good Loan (al-Qard al-Hassan, opened in 1984) specialises in providing micro-credit and administers an average of 750 loans per month, at sharply discounted interest rates.⁹¹

In addition, four other institutions are presented as administratively autonomous from Hizbullah's Central Unit of Social Services, although they are directed either by members or by party cadres, and their employees are affiliated with Hizbullah. Three of these institutions are actually branches of Iranian associations. The Help (al-Imdad, founded in 1987) distributes social services to the poor and the deprived. The Islamic Society for Health (al-Haya'a al-Suhiyya, established in 1984) operates in the medical sector and in public health. It runs 46 medical centres and a hospital, catering for more than 283 000 cases counted in 1995.⁹² And the Jihad for Construction (Jihad

al-Bina'a, established in 1988) works in the building and management of urban services, especially in the South of Lebanon where needs were and still are particularly high because of the Israeli occupation until 2000. The fourth institution, the Consultative Centre for Studies and Documentation (CCSD, founded in 1988), is a research centre that prepares reports and studies on a variety of social, economic, political, financial, administrative and development topics. It has published more than 300 such reports and conference proceedings; it has organised tens of conferences, and set up a database of more than 500 000 articles.⁹³ In addition, Hizbullah also operates in the fields of sports and youth, and of women's mobilisation and it owns a number of media institutions: *Al-Intiqad* magazine, the radio station al-Nour (The Light), and al-Manar television, which became available via satellite in 2000.

Hizbullah's institutions manage a diversity of policy sectors: social, educational, medical, urban, economic, cultural and religious. Their organisational structure obeys a strict hierarchy. These institutions operate autonomously but also co-ordinate their actions, exchanging information and expertise, in the aim of strengthening their outputs. The institutions' directors rotate on a regular basis, ensuring a steady administrative turnover, and building their managerial capacities across policy sectors. They are thus knowledgeable of the whole array of services provided by different institutions, and they capitalise on these resources in defining their plans of action. These plans are subject to the approval of the central party unit, but they conserve a good margin of manoeuvre, as long as they respect the overall sense of Hizbullah mission. Over the years Hizbullah's institutions have worked diligently on improving their policy agendas in the objective of higher efficiency and effectiveness in their service provision. Their actions are driven by concerns over performance, professionalism and progress, which explains their reliance on expertise and scientific know-how. A prime example can be found in the municipal work developed in the suburb of Beirut, which has capitalised on participation and community development paradigms, leading to significant progress in local governance, as illustrated by the UN Best Practices Award given to the Ghobeiri municipality.⁹⁴ Another illustration is the research work developed by the CCSD and its scientific contributions to policy literature in Lebanon, as well as to Islamic–European dialogue.⁹⁵

In addition, Hizbullah's institutions are characterised by their holistic approach: they form a network of organisations that provides a comprehensive set of policies framing diverse components of daily life. This holistic package supplies its beneficiaries with all their material needs, efficiently and with a relatively good quality of service. Thus, it presents an attractive alternative to the unreliable public services, and to the high cost and uncertainty of private services.

Nevertheless, the material and professional characteristics of Hizbullah's networks are not the only explanation of its significant success. Hizbullah's institutions also disseminate codes, norms and values that produce what has been designated by the party as the 'Resistance society' (*mujtama' al-*

muqawama). We now turn to the symbolic meanings contained in the services provided by these institutions to further explain the holistic nature of Hizbullah. ‘The Islamic party [ie Hizbullah]. . . carries a methodology of living in its holism [*manhajan li al-hayat bi shumuliyiyatiha*] and its mission does not focus on one aspect or the other, even if the priority of *jihad* is apparent.’⁹⁶

Hizbullah and the production of meaning: *al-Hala al-Islamiyya*

Resistance as society

In Hizbullah’s view, resistance is a mission and a responsibility for every Shi’a in his or her everyday life. Thus resistance is military, but it is foremost political and social: it is a choice of life, or a ‘methodology’, as recently emphasised by Nasrallah.⁹⁷ The resistance society is the product that Hizbullah’s holistic network aims to achieve. This society serves to disseminate the concept of spiritual *jihad*, which is complementary to military *jihad*: ‘The prophet told us: combat is a small *jihad*, the biggest *jihad* is the spiritual *jihad*.’⁹⁸

Both forms of *jihad* are essential in building a resistance society unified around specific meanings with which it identifies, revolving around issues of social and moral responsibility, and of commitment to a cause. Hence, resistance goes beyond combat and becomes an individual process, carried out through daily practices related to body, sound, signs and space, transmitting ‘religious and community knowledge’.⁹⁹ Resistance becomes a priority guiding the individual in his/her choices, more so a ‘humanitarian and moral duty’.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, resistance is a religious duty (*fard shar’i*) pious Shi’a are expected to adhere to. Pious Shi’a are expected to emulate a religious leader or reference (*marja’iyya*) who defines the licit and illicit symbolic, social and material practices according to his interpretation of Shi’a rule. The pious Shi’a is said to be a *multazem*, which means literally ‘committed’.

According to Hizbullah, the power of resistance is that it is a righteous combat, supported by God, which inevitably leads to victory. The greatest evidence is the liberation of the South of Lebanon in May 2000 and the defeat of the Israeli army by the resistance. Another supporting evidence is the liberation of Lebanese prisoners detained in Israel following long negotiations mediated by Germany about the fate of Israelis captured by the Resistance. Both these pieces of evidence attest to the justness of resistance as a strategy. And both serve Hizbullah in presenting this choice as an honourable option generating a sense of pride, of which Shi’a have been deprived for centuries.¹⁰¹

Therefore, the resistance society modifies the perception of the Shi’a individuals as ‘disinherited’ (*mahrumin*) to one of being ‘disempowered’ (*mustada’afin*). The nuance is essential, as the latter invokes an opportunity for transformation and change, whereas the former involves stagnation. Through its holistic approach Hizbullah transforms the typical Shi’a victimisation complex into meaningful values of justice, solidarity, commu-

nity, sacrifice, progress, etc—which, in turn, instigates high self-esteem and a solid sense of pride.

Empirically, the intertwining of the social and military, of the spiritual and the material, are embedded in the policies implemented by Hizbullah's institutions. For instance, the educational policies of the Islamic Institute for Teaching and Education aim at 'redefining the structure of society'¹⁰² (*i'adat siyaghat tarkibat al-mujtama'*) and at erasing the victimisation approach inherent to Shi'a constituencies. Through education the party is able to produce a new 'mentality'—that of a society participating actively in its own reconstruction, in resistance and in economic rebirth.

The specificity of the Islamic Institute's schools is their particular spirit (*ruhiya khassa*) and their ambiance (*jaww*), which produce mobilization through all the studied topics. We want to disseminate the culture of religious commitment (*iltizam*). We insist on culture, because this is what makes identity. Resistance is not an aim, it is the result of a culture.¹⁰³

The resistance 'identity' and 'culture' are thus essential products of Hizbullah's institutions. Note that their dissemination is carried out by a wide network of less formalised channels than the above-mentioned ngos, divided mainly around women volunteers and local clerics. Through these vehicles Hizbullah has grounded its social action in kinship and family networks. It has also developed a grassroots approach to policy making, based on a participatory methodology: 'making people participate' (*ishrak al-nass*) is a recurrent Islamic rhetoric which has strengthened local community development. Hizbullah institutions have direct contact with the neighbourhoods they service. Two levels of administration actually overlap. One subdivides the territories into quarters administered by 'geographic leaders'; one divides space into zones managed by 'service leaders'. These leaders are informed by networks of volunteers (mostly women who live in the neighbourhood) about potential beneficiaries. Hence, the need is matched with the concerned institution. The dual administrative subdivision—spatial and functional—maximises the outreach efficiency of Hizbullah's networks.¹⁰⁴

Several other strategies consolidate belonging to the society of resistance on a daily basis: regular commemorations, such as Ashura, and media strategies, as we have seen with al-Manar television, but also a carefully designed iconography. This iconography exhibits in the streets and in public spaces images of martyrs, of religious leaders' images, as well as Palestinian symbols. It depicts physically the core elements of Hizbullah's resistance society: martyrdom, Shi'ism, and the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Hizbullah's Information Unit, which manages the display of this 'popular information', aims to disseminate a message (*rissala*): 'We want to transmit *al-hala* [*al-islamiyya*] that exists in the streets, and that says what is this city, what are its characteristics, and that conveys the identity of this *hala*'.¹⁰⁵

Hence, through these territorial markings of space, Hizbullah has managed to bring into being an environment, more so a milieu, for the resistance society found in the suburbs of Beirut, which has become referenced as

Dahiyet Hizbullah—the suburb of Hizbullah. In this environment Hizbullah regularly reminds its constituency that it belongs to a *hala islamiyya* and of its mission of resistance. We see how Hizbullah views and carries out its actions through a material lens—the delivery of services and resources, but also through a symbolic lens—inscribing these services in a framework of meanings relating the Shi’a individual to an identity and endowing him/her with a sense of belonging. Consequently, we cannot understand Hizbullah otherwise than through the interplay of both its material and symbolic actions.

Giving meaning to life: Al-Hala al-Islamiyya

We mentioned before that Hizbullah is the official representative of the *wali al-faqih* (Imam Khomeini) in Lebanon. The *wilayat al-faqih* doctrine was established in an Islamic government with Imam Khomeini in the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. We will not discuss this complex political–religious set-up here, but what is important to note is that the association with the Iranian *wilayat al-faqih* endows Hizbullah with a distinct religious identity, which is also translated politically. Hizbullah’s leaders strongly believe that the organisation of the daily life of individuals around the system of the *wilayat al-faqih* will assist the establishment of a collective identity conducive to a better society. It is against this background that the organisation of the daily lives of Shi’a by Hizbullah’s holistic networks should be viewed. The *wilayat al-faqih* allows Shi’a Islam to exist as a coherent system of government capable of carrying out its actions.

The *wilayat* is necessary to maintain and apply Islam. It is impossible to realize the great Islamic project with punctual and isolated operations. We need a guiding axis that links the *umma* together. This is what is achieved by the *wilayat* direction and management...[The *wali*] preserves the rules and the system [of Muslims], ensures justice, prevents injustice, and guarantees mechanisms for progress, as well as cultural, political and social evolution, and prosperity.¹⁰⁶

This *wilayat* is materially translated by the holistic network of Hizbullah. It is also accomplished by the resistance society, in its military and social components. Both the holistic network of Hizbullah and the Resistance society it produces form what is commonly designated in Shi’a circles by *al-hala al-islamiyya*—the Islamic sphere. This *hala* groups the adherents (*multazimin*) to two major religious references (*marja’iyyat*): Fadlallah and Khomeini (or his Lebanese delegate, Nasrallah). We will not dwell here on the existing tensions between both poles.¹⁰⁷

Adhering to the *hala islamiyya* produces a collective identity generating a strong sense of belonging, which gives meaning to the individual. Indeed, for the *hala islamiyya* to be fully accomplished, each person is responsible for carrying out informed choices based on religious knowledge.¹⁰⁸ The *hala islamiyya* is thus conceived as a collective product, and solidarity as well as volunteering become keys to its development. Hizbullah’s institutions make

sure to promote the significance of solidarity and community work through a variety of religious narratives and symbolic references.¹⁰⁹ Accordingly, Hizbullah's policy networks not only provide material resources to their beneficiaries, they also give recognition and belonging to a world of meanings. Building on Bourdieu's view of society 'as a mechanism for the generation of meanings for life', we argue here that Hizbullah's *hala islamiyya* has succeeded in giving social importance to Shi'a individuals, and in providing them with reasons for life and death, thus endowing their lives with meaning.¹¹⁰ Hizbullah's holistic institutions offer a pragmatic and meaningful alternative to Shi'a groups.

By providing Shi'a groups with meaning to their lives, Hizbullah's power is hence strongly and durably entrenched. In short, Hizbullah is a dominant and accepted authority today because it has succeeded in building a solid legitimacy among a majority of Shi'a. The commitment (*iltizam*) to Hizbullah's *hala islamiyya* has become, in many ways, the norm for a majority of the community.

Conclusion

Labelling Hizbullah a terrorist organisation has seriously hampered the production of knowledge about this organisation. Even when it may have curtailed Hizbullah, as a practitioner of armed operations in the short run, it placed researchers and analysts alike in a permanent position of epistemological disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the 'terrorist' they hoped to analyse or ultimately defeat. Strikingly, Hizbullah itself presented a perception of its enemies that is much more conducive to 'knowing' its opponents. Partly as a result of the shortcomings of the terrorism label, various analysts of Hizbullah developed a counter-view emphasising the organisation's gradual but unavoidable transformation into a conventional political party that will be fully accommodated by the Lebanese political system. Yet, while having the merit of focusing on Hizbullah's grassroots activities, the thesis of the organisation's 'lebanonisation' fails to acknowledge or explain the interactions between the armed and the civilian activities of Hizbullah. We therefore suggested a different approach wherein Hizbullah's social and political activities operate as an integrated and holistic policy network, disseminating the values of resistance while constructing a collective identity derived from the notion of the *hala al-islamiyya*, or 'Islamic sphere'. In this holistic approach and its large degree of embeddedness in Shi'a Lebanese society, Hizbullah distinguishes itself from many militant Sunni-Islamist organisations. The latter tend to see themselves as a 'vanguard' that is at odds with a society regarded as un-Islamic and hostile to their non-negotiable goal of establishing an Islamic state.¹¹¹

This is not to say that Hizbullah's hegemony and intricate network of institutions, and the values these disseminate have remained unchallenged within Lebanon's Shi'a community.¹¹² Yet apart from some pockets of dissent, it is against the background of Hizbullah's holistic approach that its popularity and success in mobilising a large and loyal constituency should be

understood. Accordingly, any prospect for Hizbullah's transformation away from armed 'resistance' should be firmly placed in an analysis of its hegemony among the Shi'a of Lebanon and the tools it used to acquire this status. In this respect the terrorism approach will have to acknowledge that the 'war against terror' will be a much more difficult endeavour than the simple liquidation of a group of individual militants largely dissociated from their social environment. In fact, in Hizbullah's case, the 'war against terror' would easily escalate into a war against an entire society in which the organisation has immersed itself. In turn, the proponents of the 'lebanonisation' thesis are likely to remain frustrated about Hizbullah's desired transformation into a fully fledged and accommodated political party merely by reinforcing its existing services and local networks. These service-oriented networks, as we have shown, are part and parcel of Hizbullah's notion of resistance and broader notion of the *hala islamiyya*, and cannot be seen in opposition to the organisation's military agenda. Where this leaves the question regarding Hizbullah's future evolution remains uncertain. Yet it is clear that any trigger for the organisation's transformation would have to come from within Lebanon's Shi'a community. This, of course, would require the rise of alternative currents that will have to match Hizbullah's powerful approach based on holistic networks disseminating services and values. For now, the likelihood of such a counter-hegemonic challenge remains remote indeed.

Notes

- ¹ The European Union has not listed Hizbullah as a terrorist entity. Yet there is recurring debate in the European Council of Ministers to do so and recent events in Lebanon and UN Security Council Resolution 1559 (*inter alia* calling for the organisation's disarmament) may prompt the EU to classify it as 'terrorist'. Authors' interview with European diplomat in Damascus, 27 October 2004.
- ² Cited by Reuters, 9 September 2002.
- ³ Cited in US Council on Foreign Relations, *Collateral Damage: Iraq and the Future of US–Syrian Relations*, New York, 24 April 2003.
- ⁴ Cited in D Byman, 'Should Hezbollah be next?', *Foreign Affairs*, November–December 2003.
- ⁵ See US Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001*, Washington, DC.
- ⁶ These individuals are Imad Mughniyeh, Ali Atwi and Hassan Izzidine.
- ⁷ See Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2002*, Washington, DC.
- ⁸ See Byman, 'Should Hezbollah be next?'; and US Council on Foreign Relations, at www.terrorismanswers.org.
- ⁹ See the US Congress Bipartisan Committee on the events of 9/11, findings related to Hizbullah at <http://www.insightful.com/products/infact/911/organization/hezbollah/b.html>.
- ¹⁰ See D Benjamin & S Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror*, New York: Random House, 2002, pp 127–128.
- ¹¹ See D Priest & D Farah, *Washington Post*, 30 June 2002. Secretary of State Colin Powell said he was taking the reports 'very seriously'. Cited in *Al-Nahar* (Beirut), 3 July 2002.
- ¹² See D Farah, *Blood From Stones: The Secret Financial Network of Terror*, New York: Broadway Books, 2004.
- ¹³ US Deputy National Security Advisor Steven Hadley, cited in *The Daily Star* (Beirut), 15 February 2002. Hadley's statement was prompted by the arrest, and later conviction, of 11 Lebanese American sympathisers for cigarette smuggling. See *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 July 2002; and N Blanford, 'Hizballah and Syria's "Lebanese card"', *Middle East Report*, 14 September 2004.
- ¹⁴ Cited by NewsMax.com, 18 April 2003.
- ¹⁵ Al-Jazeera transcript of interview with Hassan Nasrallah, 30 November, 10 and 12 December 2000.
- ¹⁶ Cited in *al-Safir* (Beirut), 15 December 2001.
- ¹⁷ Statement by Hassan Nasrallah, 30 March 2002, at www.moqawama.tv/arabic/f_report.htm.
- ¹⁸ Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2002*.

- ¹⁹ Authors' interview with Hizbullah members in Beirut, May 2003.
- ²⁰ Authors' interview with Muhammad Fnaysh in Beirut, 7 July 2003.
- ²¹ One UK diplomat said that Hizbullah 'definitely' has sent its operatives to Iraq. Interview with the authors in Beirut, August 2004. Such claims appear to be mainly based on Hizbullah's pro-resistance discourse, combined with historical ties between Islamist militants and members of the *hawza* (Shi'a religious institute) in Najaf with Shi'a in Lebanon. Yet apart from some degree of admiration for Hizbullah among Iraqi Islamists and a remote analogy between Iraqi resistance to occupation and Hizbullah's fight against Israeli occupation, there is little to substantiate these claims. Hizbullah officials gave strong denials. Authors' interview with Hizbullah official in Beirut, May 2003. See also *Al-Nahar*, 31 March 2003.
- ²² See, respectively, M Kahl, 'Terror meeting in Iran', at <http://www.free-lebanon.com/LFPNews/terr/terr.html> and *Die Welt*, 28 February 2002.
- ²³ See Michael Rubin, 'No change: Iran remains committed to Israel's destruction', *National Review Online*, 1 July 2002, at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/media/rubin/rubin070102.htm>.
- ²⁴ See M Ranstorp, *Hizbullah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis*, New York: St Martin Press, 1997.
- ²⁵ For a discussion, see International Crisis Group (ICG), *Old Games, New Rules: Conflict on the Israel-Lebanon Border*, 18 November 2002, p 16, available online at: www.crisisgroup.org. Pro-Israeli sources even warned that Hizbullah might use biological and chemical weapons against Israel once the USA attacked Iraq. See J Goldberg, 'In the Party of God', *The New Yorker*, 14–21 October 2002.
- ²⁶ Authors' interview in Beirut, August 2002.
- ²⁷ An important exception to Israel's inability to penetrate Hizbullah's leadership is the February 1992 assassination of its secretary-general, Sheikh Abbas al-Musawi.
- ²⁸ The work by Martin Kramer is an important exception. See, for example, M. Kramer, 'Hezbollah: the calculus of jihad', in E Martin, E Marty & R Scott Appleby (eds), *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Politics, Economics and Militance*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- ²⁹ On Fadlallah's relations with Hizbullah, see ICG, *Hizbullah: Rebel Without a Cause?*, 30 July 2003, pp 12–14, available online at: www.crisisgroup.org.
- ³⁰ See A Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbullah. Politics and Religion*, London: Pluto Press, 2002, pp 14–15. This is not to deny that Hizbullah's leaders were politically active or indeed involved in acts of violence before establishing the party in 1984.
- ³¹ See Nasrallah's statements in *Al-Massira* (Beirut), 24 August 1998, *Al-'Ahd* (Beirut), 6 November 1998, *Al-Anwar* (Beirut), 16 September 1998 and *Al-Mujahid al-Siyyasi* (Beirut), 21 May 2000.
- ³² See Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbullah*, pp 101–102.
- ³³ *Ibid*, pp 23–24.
- ³⁴ ICG, *Old Games, New Rules*, p 21, n 181.
- ³⁵ Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbullah*, p 133.
- ³⁶ ICG, *Hizbullah: Rebel Without a Cause?*, p 14.
- ³⁷ See the Open Letter of Hizbullah (*Nass al-Risala al-Maftuha allati wajahaha Hizbullah ila al-Mustada'fin fi Lubnan wa al-'Alam*) in *al-Safir*, 16 February 1985. For an English translation, see http://www.ict.org.il/Articles/Hiz_letter.htm.
- ³⁸ Joseph Alagha, 'Hizbullah's gradual integration in the Lebanese public sphere', in *Sharqiyyat*, 13 (1), 2001, p 47. For more details, see Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbullah*, p 34ff.
- ³⁹ Hizbullah's original party flag carried the slogan *at-Thawra al-Islamiyya fi Lubnan* (The Islamic Revolution in Lebanon). Yet recently versions have appeared in Lebanon without it.
- ⁴⁰ Authors' interview in Beirut, July 2004.
- ⁴¹ See, respectively, Nasrallah as cited in *Al-Massira*, 24 August 1998, Hizbullah politburo member Shaykh Hassan Ezzedin as cited in *The Daily Star*, 3 October 2002 and Nasrallah on *Al-Jazeera*, 14 February 2002.
- ⁴² ICG, *Old Games, New Rules*, p 21.
- ⁴³ Authors' interview with Hizbullah official in Beirut, May 2003. See also *Al-Nahar*, 31 March 2003 and (Hizbullah MP) Muhammad Raad, cited in *The Daily Star*, 30 September 2003.
- ⁴⁴ Interview with Nasrallah in *Al-Watan* (Beirut), 19 March 2002.
- ⁴⁵ Respectively, interviews with Nasrallah in *Al-Majalla* (Beirut), 30 March 2002 and *Al-Watan*, 19 March 2002.
- ⁴⁶ Interview with Nasrallah on *Al-Jazeera*, 14 February 2002.
- ⁴⁷ 'Let the entire world hear, in case we are needed in some other arena, that we will not only bear our mantle but we will bear our mantle and our weapons. At your service, oh Husayn!'. Speech by Nasrallah in Beirut, as cited in *Al-Safir*, 22 May 2004.
- ⁴⁸ See Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbullah*, pp 100–101.
- ⁴⁹ In intelligence circles, such tactics of sending back propaganda to the messenger with the aim of confusing or intimidating is known as 'blow-back'.

- ⁵⁰ For a discussion of Hizbullah's claims regarding Shab'a and other contested territories on the Israeli–Lebanese border or 'Blue Line', see ICG, *Old Games, New Rules*, Appendix B.
- ⁵¹ Cited in Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbullah*, p 112.
- ⁵² The best exploration of Hizbullah's ideology can be found in *ibid*.
- ⁵³ On this point see *ibid*, pp 102–111.
- ⁵⁴ Cited in *ibid*, p 134.
- ⁵⁵ Nasrallah, cited in *Al-Intiqad* (Beirut), 2 May 2003.
- ⁵⁶ Speech by Nasrallah in Beirut, as cited in *Al-Safir*, 22 May 2004.
- ⁵⁷ Most of the following examples are taken from Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbullah*, pp 153–156, 108–109, 140.
- ⁵⁸ See ICG, *Hizbullah: Rebel Without a Cause?*, pp 11–12.
- ⁵⁹ For example, during a conference held by the movement for francophonie in Beirut in October 2002, Nasrallah hailed what he called 'political francophonie' as a possible 'alternative' to US hegemony in the United Nations. Cited in *The Daily Star*, 15 October 2002.
- ⁶⁰ Cited by Robert Fisk in *Dissident Voice*, 18 February 2003.
- ⁶¹ See the commentary by the Middle East Media Research Institute, *Al-Shatat: The Syrian-Produced Ramadan 2003 TV Special*, 12 December 2003.
- ⁶² See *Al-Intiqad*, 30 October 2004.
- ⁶³ See 'Views on Zionism' (*ara'i fi al-sahyuniyya*) and 'About terrorism' (*hawl al-irhab*) at <http://www.moqawama.tv/>.
- ⁶⁴ See N Hamzeh, 'Lebanon's Hizbullah: from Islamic revolution to parliamentary accommodation', *Third World Quarterly*, 14 (2), 1993, pp 321–337.
- ⁶⁵ See M Warn, 'Staying the course: the lebanonization of Hizbullah—the integration of an Islamist movement into a pluralist political system', unpublished masters thesis, Department of Political Science, Stockholm University, 1999.
- ⁶⁶ See, for instance, Goldberg, 'In the Party of God'.
- ⁶⁷ See Hamzeh, 'Lebanon's Hizbullah', p 335.
- ⁶⁸ See AR Norton, *Hizbullah of Lebanon: Extremist Ideals vs Mundane Politics*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1999, p 2.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pp 34–35; and Hamzeh, 'Lebanon's Hizbullah', pp 323–324.
- ⁷⁰ J Harik, *Hizbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism*, London: IB Tauris, 2004, p 47.
- ⁷¹ Norton, *Hizbullah of Lebanon*, p 1.
- ⁷² *Ibid*, p 35.
- ⁷³ G Kepel, *Jihad. Expansion et Déclin de l'Islamisme*, Paris: Gallimard, 2000.
- ⁷⁴ Norton, *Hizbullah of Lebanon*, p 9.
- ⁷⁵ O Roy, 'Le post-Islamisme', *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 85–86, 1999, pp 1–2.
- ⁷⁶ Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbullah*, pp 26–28.
- ⁷⁷ Interview with Naim Qassem, cited in *Al-Nahar* (Beirut), 5 July 1996. The term *muhassasa* (literally 'allotment') in the Lebanese political vocabulary means the division of political powers between the Maronite presidency, the Sunni executive and the Shi'a legislative—also referred to as the 'troika'. The term is stigmatising as it implicitly indicates the corrupt practices that regulate this division of interests between the three political community groups. For more details, see R Leenders, 'Nobody having too much to answer for: 'laissez-faire', networks and post-war reconstruction in Lebanon', in S Heydemann (ed), *Networks of Privilege: The Politics of Economic Reform in the Middle East*, New York: Pelgrave–St Martin's Press, 2004.
- ⁷⁸ See Harik 'Between Islam and the system', p 53.
- ⁷⁹ See Alagha, 'Hizbullah's gradual integration', p 38 (emphasis added). Alagha shows, through the analysis of Hizbullah's leaders' discourses, how the doctrinal principles of the party have been adapted to its transformation, without compromising ideology.
- ⁸⁰ Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbullah*.
- ⁸¹ Authors' interview with (Hizbullah MP) Muhammad Fneish, 7 July 2003. See also H Muzahem, 'Hizbullah's future in the wake of the Sep 11 Events', (unpublished), 2003, p 8, who argues that the military role of Hizbullah against the Israeli occupation in the Shab'a farms 'requires an independence of the resistance from the regime while the participation of Hizbullah in the government coalition would probably promote some problems for Lebanon at the international level'. Note also that Hizbullah's refusal to participate in the government is also justified by the latter's corrupt practices. The party's vice-secretary emphasises: 'The central authority is known for its confessional system and its corrupt methods that reproduce it. . . It is natural that we do not participate in this authority because we do not agree with its rationale, its performance and its methodology.' Interview with (Hizbullah Vice-Secretary) Naim Qassem, cited in *Al-Nahar*, 16 August 2004.
- ⁸² See Ali Fayyad, 'Mixing between the objective basis and the strategic extension', *al-Safir*, 21 August 2003—this is an excerpt from his reply to the ICG 2003 report. In another reply by Hizbullah's Foreign

Relations Director, Nawaf al-Musawi, the party lists a number of 'causes' Hizballah has still to 'rebel' for, including the plight of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails and Lebanon's access to the Wazzani river's water resources in the south of Lebanon. See N al-Musawi, 'If Hizballah did not exist... it would have to be created', *al-Safir*, 21 August 2003.

⁸³ Authors' interview with (Hizballah MP) Muhammad Fneish, 7 July 2003.

⁸⁴ See Norton, *Hizballah of Lebanon*, p 10.

⁸⁵ See Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizballah*, p 116.

⁸⁶ See, for example, Harik, *Hizballah*, pp 93–94.

⁸⁷ See (Hizballah Vice-Secretary) N Qassem, *Hizballah: The Methodology, the Experience, the Future (Hizballah: an-Nahj, al-Tajriba, al-Mustaqbal)*, Beirut: Dar al-Hadi, 2002, p 83.

⁸⁸ Authors' interview with *as-Shahid* director, 12 September 1998.

⁸⁹ Authors' interview with the public relations director of *al-Juraha*, 4 September 1998.

⁹⁰ Authors' interview with *al-Mu'assassa* director, 8 September 1998.

⁹¹ Authors' interview with *al-Qard* director, 2 March 2000.

⁹² See *Al-Haya'a al-Suhiyya* brochure, no date.

⁹³ See CCSD brochure, 2002.

⁹⁴ See M Harb, 'Pratiques comparées de participation dans deux municipalités de la banlieue de Beyrouth: Ghobeyri et Bourj Brajnef', in A Favier (ed), *Municipalités et pouvoirs locaux au Liban*, Beirut: CERMOC, 2001, pp 157–177.

⁹⁵ In February 2004 the CCSD organised a conference in Beirut entitled 'The Islamic World and Europe: From Dialogue to Understanding'. Various European and regional partners were involved: the University of Birmingham, the German Orient Institut, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, as well as the *Confluences* French journal, l'Harmattan French publishing house, and the embassy of Austria. In the conference brochure, we read: 'It is a crucial moment to organize a conference on the theme of dialogue between Europe and the Islamic world. Europe has a dual position with the Islamic world, after September 11. It is important for us to discuss with Europeans who are more open to listen to us.

The conference grouped major scholars and experts, regional and international, and positioned the CCSD as a prominent contributor on the policy and academic research scene in Lebanon.

⁹⁶ See Qassem, *Hizballah*, p 376.

⁹⁷ See speech by Nasrallah on the occasion of the liberation of Lebanese prisoners from Israeli jails, 25 January 2004.

⁹⁸ Qassem, *Hizballah*, p 99.

⁹⁹ See L Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety among Islamist Shi'i Muslims in Beirut*, PhD thesis in Anthropology, Emory University, 2003, forthcoming at Princeton University Press, pp 33, 62.

¹⁰⁰ Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizballah*, p 126.

¹⁰¹ The political history of Shi'a is known for having produced representations in which Shi'a are persecuted, marginalised and abused by oppressors. The conspiracy theory still remains in the perceptions of the community and is regularly played out in religious celebrations, notably during the mourning of Ashura. There is always an oppressor who wants to prevent the Shi'a from realising their capacities, from practicing their faith, from claiming their rights: the Sunni imam, the Ottoman emir, the feudal landowner, the political patron, the government, Israel, America, etc. Shi'a enemies willingly maintain Shi'a in a precarious and deprived situation, to prevent them from developing, as they form a potential for rebellion and change that cannot be controlled. These beliefs are common to the members of the resistance society.

¹⁰² Authors' interview with the vice-president of the Islamic Institute, 8 September 1998.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Authors' interview with Hizballah's social services director, 25 August 1998.

¹⁰⁵ Authors' interview with Hizballah director of the Information Unit, 7 October 2004.

¹⁰⁶ See Qassem, *Hizballah*, pp 70–71.

¹⁰⁷ It is difficult to document the conflicts between Fadlallah and Nasrallah, or more accurately between Fadlallah and Khamenei. They are related to antagonisms about Shi'a jurisprudence and religious law, which are beyond the scope of this article. See S Mervin, 'La *hawza* à l'épreuve du siècle. La réforme de l'enseignement religieux supérieur chiite de 1909 à nos jours', in M Al-Charif & S al-Kawakibi (eds), *Le courant réformiste musulman et sa réception dans les sociétés arabes*, Damascus: IFPO, pp 69–84.

¹⁰⁸ See Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern*, p 77.

¹⁰⁹ References to solidarity and social work are common across Hizballah's institutions, where leaders and members mention the importance of volunteering, giving and sharing. The narratives are punctuated by references to Islamic quotes praising social work and participation with the people. During the month of Ramadan these references abound and the concept of '*takafful*' (sponsorship) is widely disseminated, encouraging Muslims to sponsor orphans and needy children.

- ¹¹⁰ As summarised by G Hage, “‘Comes a time we are all enthusiasm’: understanding Palestinian suicide bombers in times of exiphobia”, *Public Culture*, 15 (1), 2003, pp 65–89, esp p 78.
- ¹¹¹ The writings of Abdul Salam Faraj, an ideologist for the Egyptian Islamic Jihad organisation, are highly illustrative in this respect. See JJG Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat's Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East*, New York: Macmillan 1986.
- ¹¹² Internal contestations within the Shi'a community against Hizbullah's domination are not exceptional. They are, however, mostly effectively marginalised or co-opted. For example, attempts to use Hizbullah's paradigms (for example, the *wilayat al-faqih* or resistance) for interests that are not operated under the party's tutelage are rapidly brought to a halt. This was the case when a Shi'a entrepreneur began independently from the party to publish a children's magazine propagating the resistance ideology and an understanding of the *wilayat al-faqih*. He was quickly intercepted by Hizbullah's members, who politely informed him that either party members co-partner with him and supervise the publication of the magazine or he would have to put an end to the publication of his magazine—he chose the latter. Also Hizbullah's role in the Elyssar reconstruction project—a state-led effort to redesign and rebuild the southwestern sections of al-Dahiya—has raised serious questions among Shi'a residents. In negotiations with Elyssar, Hizbullah helped facilitate the displacement of residents to allow for the construction of a highway to Beirut airport. Many felt abandoned and let down or expressed doubts about the opaque bargaining done on their behalf by Hizbullah. See M Harb, 'Urban governance in post-war Beirut: resources, negotiations, and contestations in the Elyssar project', in S Shami (ed), *Capital Cities: Ethnographies of Urban Governance in the Middle East*, Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2001, pp 111–133.

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