Politics and Religion, **13** (2020), 719–747

doi:10.1017/S1755048320000218 1755-0483/20

Hezbollah, Neoliberalism and Political Economy

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Abstract: Hezbollah, like other Islamic fundamentalist movements in the region, professes an "Islamic way of life" as an objective to achieve and implement in society, but its actual practices can best be understood as harmonious with—and reflective of—the nature of the capitalist environment in which it operates, despite discourses appealing to the popular classes of society. Religious fundamentalist movements should indeed not been considered as fossilized elements from the past. While they may employ symbols and narratives from earlier periods, fundamentalisms are alive, dynamic, and representative of major contemporary trends. Their emergence must thus be fully situated in the political, economic, and social context of the contemporary period. In this perspective, the article analyzes the political economy of Hezbollah and its support for neoliberal policies.

Introduction

Hezbollah was established in 1985 during the Lebanese Civil War and following the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. It was established as an Islamic political group, based in the Shi'a-populated areas of Lebanon and with an emphasis on armed resistance against Israel. Over the years, Hezbollah came to be seen—in both Lebanon and the wider Arab world—as the only viable force able to resist Western and Israeli encroachment on the country and the wider region. Hezbollah has become over time one of the most important political actors in Lebanon holding a large parliamentary bloc of no less than 10 deputies since the first post-Civil War legislative elections in 1992, and a minimum of two ministers in every Lebanese government since 2005. As its recent military

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intervention in the Syrian civil war demonstrates, Hezbollah is also a crucial actor in broader Middle East politics largely because of its armed wing. However, the organization is much more than an armed group; it is a mass movement with an extensive network of charities and other institutions that provide services for the Lebanese Shi'a population.

Academic analyses on the Lebanese Islamic Shi'a movement can generally be divided into four main categories. The first one treats Hezbollah as a reactionary, "terrorist," or "jihadist" organization whose violent behavior is an inherent attribute of Islam (Klein 2013; Levitt 2013). This approach is problematic because it essentializes Islam as being anti-democratic and reactionary and understands Hezbollah simply as "jihadists who use terrorism as their tactic of choice to realize their malignant intentions" (Klein 2013). As many authors have pointed out, there is nothing intrinsic to Islam, or any other religion, which makes it inherently democratic or undemocratic, peaceful or violent. Islam can be interpreted in many different ways, and in politics, its role can be a tool for legitimization and for the preservation of the status quo just as it can be a vehicle for protest and revolution (Ayubi 1993, 60).

A second branch of the literature describes Hezbollah as anti-imperialist and constituting an Arab and/or Islamic expression of cultural and social resistance to Western encroachment, representing a sort of Arab variant of Latin American "Liberation Theology." In the opinion of many of these authors, Hezbollah provides the best manifestation of the progressive character of Political Islam. Much of this literature draws an analogy between Hezbollah, and more generally Islamic movements, and Third World nationalism. Hezbollah is described as "Islamo nationalist" and one of the few political actors enjoying popular legitimacy and representing the national aspirations of the people through a discourse linked to Arab cultural norms (Hardt and Negri 2001; Saad Ghorayeb 2002; Buck Morss 2003; Charara and Dromont 2004; Pearson and Salamey 2007; Dot Pouillard 2009; Daher 2014).

Another school of thought emphasizes Hezbollah's institutional relationship and role within the Lebanese political system and characterizes it as a pragmatic political party. These authors argue that the Lebanese Islamic movement has transformed itself from a radical and clandestine militia to a moderate mainstream political party with a resistance wing, and in the process adapted its political discourse to more effectively reach a wider public. This approach concentrates on the political program and practices of Hezbollah reflected, for example, by their

integration into a political and institutional context that they initially fully rejected. The authors supporting this approach describe Hezbollah as an evolving entity, which becomes increasingly institutionalized in the political environment, leading to a moderation of its overall politics (Harik 2004; Corm 2005; Norton 2007; Samaan 2007; Harb 2010; Qassir 2011).

Finally, a body of literature concerning Hezbollah is more critical of the party and rejects its anti-imperialist and progressive characterizations, while acknowledging some political and military achievements. This fourth type of analysis attempts to situate Hezbollah in the class and social dynamics of the Lebanese and regional contexts (Achcar and Warschawski 2006; Bayat 2010). As Achcar (1981, 3) has written on Islamic political movements prior to Hezbollah, regardless of the "progressive, national and/or democratic features of some of the struggles of various currents of Islamic fundamentalism," these movements "cannot hide the fact that their ideology and program are essentially and by definition reactionary." Accordingly, scholars have also opposed the analogy between the Liberation Theology movement in South America and Islamic fundamentalist movements such as Hezbollah in the Middle East. Bayat (2010, 50 and 83) points out that these two movements have different natures and objectives. The first is not an expression of cultural identity or self-preservation vis-à-vis a dominating Western "other," but, rather, emphasizes a discourse of socio-economic development and emancipation of the subaltern. Bayat adds that while Islamic movements aim to Islamize their society, political structures, and economy, liberation theologists never intended to Christianize their society or nation-states, but aimed at changing them in favor of the disenfranchised. Thus, Islamic fundamentalist movements, in contrast to Liberation Theology, generally prioritize moral and political objectives (such as an Islamic state, law, and dress codes) rather than helping the downtrodden. Within their worldview, issues such as social justice for the poor are subordinate to—and follow from—the establishment of an Islamic order (Bayat 2010, 83).

Grounding the analysis in this last approach, this article puts forward a historical and materialist "story" of Hezbollah with the objective of understanding and explaining the economic policies of the party while in government. This article places specific emphasis on the political economy of the party.

Firstly, the article analyzes the party's socio-economic evolution at the level of its popular bases, particularly regarding the integration of higher social classes within the movement, following the end of the Lebanese Civil War. Then, Hezbollah's attitude toward the Lebanese state, which protects the interests of the various factions of the Lebanese bourgeoisie,

and its progressive integration into it are studied. The ideology of Islamic fundamentalist movement and more particularly Hezbollah regarding the economy is then examined. Despite a rhetorical discourse challenging the capitalist system and calling for more social justice, Hezbollah's policies have been in accordance with the Lebanese neoliberal economic system and the movement, moreover, participated in its implementation and consolidation as the paper then explains. Finally, the Lebanese Shi'a Islamic movement's behavior and reactions to popular mobilizations challenging the Lebanese political system and social movements demanding for more social justice are also analyzed.

As such, this article constitutes a novel contribution to the literature insofar as the vast majority of studies on Hezbollah do not comprehensively examine this issue. In this manner, this article goes beyond the typical focus on ideology as a means of identifying and understanding the policies of Islamic political movements. The article argues that while the "Islamic way of life" may be the professed goal of Hezbollah, its actual practices can best be understood as harmonious with—and reflective of—the nature of the capitalist environment in which it operates. This is similar to the way in which Islamic and Salafi parties elsewhere deal with economic issues. What emerges from this analysis is that Hezbollah has never really been committed to social redistribution and state intervention in the economy to alleviate social inequalities in society. The contradiction between the rhetoric of the party and the reality of its policies is also addressed here.

Hezbollah and the Lebanese Economy

Neoliberalism is understood as a particular organization of capitalism guaranteeing the conditions for capitalist reproduction at a global level and as part of a ruling class offensive, which was conducted through the 1970s and 1980s recessions and resulted in the restructuring of the global economy, generating a new wave of capitalist expansion. The basic goal of neoliberalism, as Harvey (2005, 64–66) discusses, is the development of a new "regime of capital accumulation characterised by a minimal direct intervention of the state in the economy, limited to setting up the legal, political and military functions required to guarantee the proper functioning of markets and their creation in those sectors where markets do not exist."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000218 Published online by Cambridge University Press

At a general level, Lebanese neoliberalism—considered as a set of both economic policies and restructuring of class power—differs little from elsewhere in the region (Hanieh 2013, 160). In this sense, successive Lebanese governments have embraced policies such as privatization, the opening up of markets, deregulation of labor and other markets, and cuts in social spending. In this regard, the Lebanese Shi'a Islamic movement has been no different than other Lebanese political parties in power in supporting such measures.

Hezbollah's acceptance and participation, especially from 2005 following its entry in all Lebanese coalition governments, in the consolidation of neoliberal dynamics in the Lebanese economy have their roots in the expansion of Hezbollah as a mass party following the end of the Lebanese Civil War. By then it was no longer mainly constituted of young radical clerics and individuals who wanted to establish an Iran-style political system. The popular base of Hezbollah, which increasingly included the growing Shi'a bourgeoisie and middle classes, did not necessarily yearn to live in an Islamic Republic such as Iran and was satisfied with a return to peace and improvements in political representation. In Beirut's southern suburbs (known as *Dahyeh* and the stronghold of Hezbollah), for example, many wealthier families and large sectors of retailers have been joining the party (Abisaab and Abisaab 2014, 133), while Hezbollah's activities and institutions (especially those linked to tourism and leisure) provide services to middle-class Shi'a.

This socio-economic evolution of the party's popular basis can be seen in the profile of Hezbollah cadres, who increasingly came from a professional class holding secular higher education degrees, and in the growing role party members had in professional associations. Hezbollah, for instance, has dominated the Order of Engineers and Architects since 2008. Around 1,300 engineers were affiliated to the party according to a member of Hezbollah (Akhbar-Al 2006). Hezbollah's links to the Shia bourgeoisie in Lebanon—particularly in the key sectors of construction, real estate, services, and trade—and in the diaspora have been strengthened through the neoliberal period after the end of the Lebanese Civil War to nowadays.

These developments reflected the new political and economic importance of the Shi'a population in the country after the Ta'if agreement.[1] Moreover, Hezbollah has increasingly strengthened its links with the Shi'a diaspora, especially in Africa, where it now provides loans for young entrepreneurs to establish businesses (Leichtman 2010, 281). According to Hamzeh (2004, 64), in addition to the massive funding of

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the Islamic Republic of Iran (Karam 2018),[2] the party relies on "donations from individuals, groups, shops, companies, and banks as well as their counterparts in countries such as the United States, Canada, Latin America, Europe and Australia," and on Hezbollah's own business interests, which take "advantage of Lebanon's free market economy" with "dozens of supermarkets, gas stations, department stores, restaurants, construction companies and travel agencies." The Hezbollah's Foreign Relations Unit, established in 1985, is responsible for maintaining and developing relations with the Lebanese-Shi'a communities around the world. Its main objective is fundraising for the Islamic movement and managing religious and political propaganda. The Unit is mostly composed of clerics and businessmen who are known in the Shi'a communities and are publicly associated with Hezbollah. The Unit is active in Europe, Africa, the United States, and Asia (Terror Control 2014).

Similarly, the growing integration between Hezbollah and Lebanese Shi'a capitalists in Lebanon and in the diaspora can be seen in the number of businessmen being sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department. On this list, the following names can be found: Adham Tabaja (CEO of Inmaa Group, real estate company); Kassem Hejeij (former CEO of the Middle East and African Bank); Ali Tajjedine (CEO of Tajco real estate company); Husayn Ali Faour (owner of Car Care Center); Ali Youssef Charara (President and CEO of Spectrum Investment Holding Group SAL); Mustapha Fawaz and Fouzi Fawaz (based in Nigeria, majority shareholders of Amigo Supermarket Limited, owners of Wonderland Amusement Park and Resort, and Holding Kafak Enterprises); Abd Al Nur Shalan, Kamel Mohamad Amhaz, and Issam Mohamad Amhaz (owners of Stars Group Holding) (USDT 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2018).

The Lebanese Islamic movement has also been accused of making money through drug and arms trafficking, money laundering, and other criminal activities, especially in Latin America (Beauchamp 2016). In close cooperation with the Iranian secret services and the Revolutionary Guards, and with the collaboration of its supporters in Lebanese communities throughout the world, Hezbollah has created a network of companies long suspected of various types of trafficking (Meyer 2017).

From an institutional perspective, the acceptance of the Lebanese Islamic movement toward the Lebanese sectarian system was also linked to Hezbollah's regional allies, Syria and Iran, both of which supported its integration into the Lebanese political scene after the end of the Civil War. Another important feature in this integration into the

political system was the withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon, which compelled the party to participate in all Lebanese governments from that point onwards. Hezbollah's increasing integration in the Lebanese political system has had significant implications for the party's relationship to Lebanese neoliberalism. This has implied notably the party's direct responsibility for implementing many neoliberal reforms the Lebanese elite and international institutions promoted.

Regarding the Middle East, Haenni (2005, 65) wrote that Islamic political movements have witnessed an increasing "*embourgeoisement*" in the process of Islamization of society, especially among its leadership and cadres. He speaks of an "*Islam de Marché*" (market Islam) that is sympathetic to neoliberal policies while combining it with moral conservatism. Hezbollah has similarly combined these two aspects, witnessing a form of *embourgeoisement* among its membership and cadres.

Hezbollah MP Ali Fayyad actually acknowledged this trend in 2010, when he remarked that "Hezbollah is not a small party anymore, it's a whole society. It is the party of the poor people, yes, but at the same time there are a lot of businessmen in the party, we have a lot of rich people, some from the elite class" (Hersh 2010). Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah also provided indirect confirmation of these trends in a September 2009 speech, in which he urged members to quit the "love of luxury," and called on them to adopt a belief in God simply because of "fear of the end" (Insaniyyah-Al 2009).

This situation was nevertheless still present or at least felt by some sections of the population in Dahyeh as shown in an interview at the beginning of 2016 by Lebanese journalist Hanin Ghaddar of an 18 years old ex Hezbollah fighter who served as a soldier in Syria, was wounded, and left the party a few weeks after suffering his injury. He said that stark disparities in Dahyeh in the standards of living are raising serious discontent among people and that "most of the young folks in Dahyeh do not have cars or proper access to public transportation, while most Hezbollah officials' sons are driving brand new expensive cars. We see this every day. Their houses, cars, clothes etc… are all in our faces every single time we go out" (Ghaddar 2016).

No Challenge to the Lebanese State

These changes in its social basis impacted the political attitude of Hezbollah regarding the Lebanese sectarian and neoliberal state. Hezbollah adopted a rather oppositional or/and suspicious position

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000218 Published online by Cambridge University Press

toward any popular mobilization from outside parliament challenging the Lebanese political system, which preserves and promotes neoliberal economic policies. In early 2011, in the wake of the uprisings in the region, protests erupted also in Lebanon, calling for an end to the sectarian regime. Hezbollah, as well as other political forces, warned their members not to participate (Chiit 2011 and Daou 2011 cited in Daher 2016). Another example in the party's refusal to challenge the Lebanese sectarian political system was at the end of Summer 2015 around the "you stink" campaign, which originally was triggered after a waste management crisis, but quickly turned into a challenge to the Lebanese political system. Hezbollah, although rhetorically supportive of some of the demands of the protesters, declared that the movement should not be a target of the protests because the only corrupt political actors were the ones in the March 14 coalition. Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah stated that the party had espoused a "neutral position towards the ('you stink') movement because we don't know its leadership, its project and objectives" (Ahed News 2015). Hezbollah endorsed the dialogue the President of Parliament Nabih Berri advocated and called for and supported the election of Michel Aoun, head of the Free Patriotic Movement, as President of the Republic to solve the crisis (Orient le Jour 2015). These stances preserved the framework of the political system of the country in its entirety. Hezbollah, just as the other political parties of the March 8 and 14 coalitions, actually tried to co-opt the ("you stink") movement for its own political benefit and, above all, put an end to it.

The "participatory" solution Hezbollah adopted over time with respect to the Lebanese state, which preserves the interests of the Lebanese political elite, indicates both an attempt to moderate the structural contradictions of Lebanese capitalism (Amel 1986, 337–38) as well as the rivalries within the bourgeoisie between its hegemonic and non-hegemonic factions. The latter, as Lebanese Marxist Mehdi Amel has noted, reflects:

> "The consciousness of non-hegemonic layers of the bourgeoisie in their legitimatised aspiration to occupy hegemonic positions occupied by other fractions, or to rise to their level by identifying where possible with them in the political and economic domain. This non-hegemonic layer of the bourgeoisie wants the end of the hegemonic faction without removing the domination of the bourgeois class" (Amel 1986, 339).

This integration and defense of the current nature of the Lebanese state must be understood in its increasing neoliberal economic orientation. In

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the framework of neoliberalism, the State has actually the explicit role of guaranteeing capital accumulation (Harvey 2005, 2):

> "The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defence, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary."

Presence of Hezbollah in the state structure has constantly been on the rise since more than two decades, securing especially key positions in the security apparatus, but also increasingly in some Ministries. Several critical army posts are currently headed by individuals with ties to Hezbollah or its allies (ICG 2014, 13), and the General Security Director of the Interior Ministry (one of the two state security agencies), General Maj. Gen. Abbas Ibrahim, and the head of security at Beirut's airport, Wafiq Shuqayr, are known to be close to Hezbollah (ICG 2008, 3; Khoury 2013).[34]

This gradual acceptance of the sectarian political system was reflected in the new Manifesto of the party in 2009. Although it confirmed the position of the 1985 manifesto that political sectarianism was a major problem "which thwarts Lebanon's reform and development" (Manifesto 2009), the new manifesto postponed any change to the system until a non-determined future date. Until that point, "homogenous democracy"—a term used to describe the sectarian system—would remain "the fundamental basis for governance in Lebanon, because it is the actual quintessence of the spirit of the constitution and the core of the Charter of the co-existence" (Manifesto 2009).

In other words, Hezbollah has not tried to challenge the sectarian political system, but rather seeks a greater influence and position within it and therefore consolidating it. Similarly, its integration into this system as a political faction tied to the sectarian bourgeoisie demonstrates its approval and support of the current political economy framework and therefore neoliberalism. In this perspective, it has deepened its political collaboration with other sectarian bourgeois political parties such as the Maronite Christian dominated party Free Patriotic Movement and maintained its close alliance with Amal. Hezbollah never denounced or criticized loudly the numerous racist and sectarian attacks of current Foreign

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000218 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Minister, Gebran Bassil (FPM member), against Syrian and Palestinian refugees. The FPM also launched a campaign in mid-June 2019 through its youth wing to shut down Lebanese businesses that employed Syrians (Chehayeb 2019). In addition to this, despite Hezbollah's rivalry with Saad Hariri's political party and the March 14 Alliance, the Lebanese Islamic Shi'a movement has cooperated with this bloc against social and political movements from below challenging the country's sectarian and economic system and has been part of all the national unity governments since after Syria's withdrawal from the country in 2005.

Following the outbreak of the protest movement in Lebanon on October 17, 2019, Hezbollah has attempted to find solutions to the crisis within the framework of the Lebanese sectarian and neoliberal system, while denouncing protesters to be controlled by foreign powers and using intimidation and violent practices to scare off the protesters. Furthermore, Hezbollah saw these popular mobilizations in Lebanon, as well as those occurring at the same period in Iraq and Iran, as a regional plan to challenge the influence of Tehran and its allies and therefore its main objective was to end the protests in Lebanon. In a speech in mid-February 2020, Hezbollah's secretary general Hassan Nasrallah called on all Lebanese political parties to support the newly established government (mid-December 2019) led by Prime Minister Hassan Diab and achieve a form of consensus around financial and economic decisions. Hezbollah also clearly supported in May 2020 the Lebanese government's decision to seek financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund, but cautionned that the conditions should be negotiated carefully.

Ideology and Economy

Similarly, to other Islamic fundamentalist movements, Hezbollah promotes the unity of the community and the collaboration between social classes, which demonstrates its pro-capitalist stance and its refusal of class struggle rather than an anti-systemic and revolutionary nature. Ayatollah Khomeini, the main ideological source for Hezbollah, used to argue that workers should not demand more than what is provided by the bourgeoisie, which, in turn, has the obligation to be charitable toward the poor. Class struggle is perceived negatively because it divides the Ummah. During the consolidation of the new Islamic regime under Khomeini's leadership following the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, he increasingly equated Islam with respect for

private property and depicted the bazaar (market place) as an essential pillar of society, while repression of the opposition, particularly the left and progressive forces, was increasing. Moreover, Khomeini remained constant in his defense of private property throughout his entire political life (Abrahamian 1993, 51). This is reflected in Hezbollah's policies, notably toward labor struggles and movements.

There are other influential Islamist scholars who provide the party with the ideological tools to adopt the stances it does. For example, Mustapha Sibai, general secretary of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (MB) from 1945 to 1961, tried to promote "Socialism of Islam," which led to the solidarity of various social categories and not to the war between classes as in communism (1959 cited in Carré and Gérard 1983, 87). His book *Ishtarikiyya al-Islam* (Socialism of Islam) published in 1959 symbolized his efforts to articulate this perspective, in which he notably put forward the idea that social equality and elimination of poverty, hunger, and sickness could be achieved by appealing to the moral obligations of individuals and not to governmental systems or measures such as nationalization, expropriation of capital, limitations on ownership, and progressive taxation. Socialism of Islam was intended as a third way between the materialist systems of capitalism and communism (Teitelbaum 2011, 224). Historically, the Egyptian MB has long championed "capitalism and private property" and has traditionally opposed state interventions in the economy. In the 1970s, the Brotherhood's leaders supported President Anwar Sadat's policies of «infitah», opening Egypt to trade and encouraging privatization processes of the economy (Masoud 2013, 9).

Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr, the main spiritual guide of *al-Dawa* party in Iraq, promoted an Islamic economic system consisting of private and public property, while refuting both socialism and capitalism, in his two books *Falsafatunâ* (Our Philosophy) and *Iqtisâdunâ* (Our Economics) published respectively in 1959 and 1961 (Mervin 2007, 304–5). In his view, socio-economic problems are the result of the misconduct of man (Aziz 1993). The solution to the plight of the population is therefore to be found in religion, the Islamization of society, and the establishment of an Islamic state (Mallat 1988, 707). The Tunisian Islamic leader Rached Ghannouchi went in a similar direction as he noted in 1992: we (the Islamic political movements) are the guarantor of a particular social order and of a liberal economic regime (1992 cited in Toscane 1995, 95). Ghannouchi has also declared that foreign investment is welcome in Tunisia, companies must make profits, and unions have sometimes been excessive in their demands, including the General Union of Tunisian Workers (known as

the UGTT) (cited in Sereni 2014). Indeed, Ghannouchi has accused the UGTT of being a heritage of the French colonial period and of not being a natural institution of Muslim society (cited in Sereni 2014).

Along similar lines of thinking, Hezbollah's Islamization of large sections of the Lebanese Shi'a population pursued the objective of preventing class struggle and attenuating solidarities between the different religious sects, whereas the Shi'a before the Lebanese Civil War made up the bulk of nationalist and progressive parties playing a leading role in social struggles. Sectarianism has always been a tool of the dominant political parties in Lebanon, including Hezbollah, to obstruct cross-sectarian mobilization. As the leftist thinker Amel argues (1986, 323 and 326–27), sectarianism strengthened the patterns of class power within the colonially-dominated societies of the Arab world.

From all of this, it follows that the Lebanese Shi'a Islamic movement has generally professed rhetorical concern for social justice, which should be achieved through charitable means, whilst defending market-led principles and economic liberalization. In line with its belief that charity and not redistribution through the state is the way to respond to the demands of the poor, Hezbollah has managed to achieve a position of hegemony among Lebanon's Shi'a population notably through its provision of much needed services to large sections of the Shi'a popular sector. Much of Hezbollah's financial support aims at the provision of welfare to the most vulnerable and poor Shi'a populations. Cammett (2014, 16) shows that Hezbollah charities are mostly located in low-income areas. More than half of Hezbollah institutions are situated in communities that are more than 98% Shi'a, while the party is generally less eager to establish agencies in mixed areas (Cammett 2014, 105).

Hezbollah's institutional network operates as a coherent interlocked whole. There is a significant rotation of leadership among the different institutions, which also provide employment to the cadres and activists.[5] This network means that individual institutions reinforce each other's activities —the construction wing of the party Jihad al-Bina builds the organization's schools, while Hezbollah religious centers and institutions provide them with books and instructors. The party's media wing publicizes the organization's reconstruction activities and religious message. Its research unit helps to plan social interventions and provides employment for graduates from its educational institutions. In this manner, Hezbollah's institutions represent a unified and coherent intervention into Lebanese civil society.

Similarly, when occupying positions of power in ministries or in municipalities, Hezbollah privileges actors close to its ideology, reinforcing the

exclusion of others. In addition to this, the municipalities under Hezbollah's control have increasingly used companies affiliated with the movement and/or businessmen close to it for construction and other activities. The Turkish conservative and nationalist party of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) behaved in the same manner and used its control of Istanbul's city and municipality services to fund patronage networks such as AKP-linked foundations and charities, companies, pro-government newspapers, and election campaigns (Aydintasbas 2019)

One striking aspect of the coherence of Hezbollah's work is the ideological framework propagated through the organization's network of civil society institutions. The principal element of this framework is the ongoing and deepening Islamization of the Shi'a population, which has been vital to strengthening Hezbollah's hegemony. Hezbollah's socialization structures have been primarily aimed at strengthening the religiosity of its social environment, fostering the adherence of the community to the organization as the embodiment of Islamic values (understood through a particularly distinctive variant of Islam the party promotes). Islamization has been both promoted by Hezbollah organizations, while simultaneously employed as a means of disciplining elements of the Shi'a population that have resisted this process.

Different religious conservative movements in the world back the idea that faith-based organizations (FBOs) could supplant the state's public services because they are more effective. The American religious leader Marvin Olavsky, for example, stated that government-based welfare is a complete failure because it is wasteful and does not put forward personal responsibility. Therefore, he argues that welfare states should be dissembled and replaced with locally based religious systems that are financed by biblical tithes. He adds: "such programmes would not burden the federal government and would be able to sort the 'deserving' from the 'undeserving' poor" (Hackworth 2013, 104–5). Olasky's political views have wide influence in the U.S. Republican party; he was a close advisor to former President George W. Bush in the 1990s. Based on this idea of less state and more independent FBOs, Olasky promoted the idea of "compassionate conservatism" (Hackworth 2013, 105).

In the Middle East context, Islamic fundamentalist movements have also adopted this form of "compassionate conservatism," combining neoliberal policies and conservative moralism (Haenni 2005, 104; Roy 2002, 150–52). The Egyptian MB, for example, has supported increased religious compliance and the work of charity organizations (Freedom and Justice Party 2011, 9), while also advocating neoliberal policies in which the private

sector would play a leading role in the economy (Freedom and Justice Party 2011, 26). Hassan Malek, a businessman and prominent MB figure, actually went so far as to say in 2012 that the principles guiding economic policies followed under Mubarak were sound and on the right track, but corruption and nepotism marred their implementation (Reuters 2011). Khaled Shater, former Deputy Guide of the Egyptian MB and wealthy businessman, similarly guaranteed his organization's commitments to free-market capitalism in a meeting with the Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of SC, along with a group of mostly Republican lawmakers (Kirkpatrick 2012). The constitution passed by the MBs and Salafist-dominated constituent assembly on November 29, 2012 and voted on December 23 with 64% of the vote (33% voter turnout) also promoted a neoliberal vision for the economy, notably by including an article (number 14) "linking wages to productivity," forbidding the creation of independent trade unions and bounding official unions to "one per profession" (Article 53), and facilitating legal regulations on the right to strike (Article 63); and curtailing the state's long-established engagement to provide free healthcare for all, by proposing instead a pledge to provide free care only "to those who are unable to pay" (Article 62) (Masoud 2013, 10).

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey has similarly worked since its arrival to power to promote a process of neoliberalization of the economy, notably by privatizing enterprises as well as natural resources. The rhetoric of social justice used sometimes among AKP members and cadres is not intended to foster economic redistribution, but rather support microcredits and small businesses and this always in the realm of a market-driven society (Tugal 2009, 55 and 274).

Hezbollah, just as other fundamentalist and conservative religious movements in other parts of the world as mentioned above, supported neoliberal policies while advocating increased charitable work, leading some scholars to talk of "a smooth alliance between neoliberals and religious fundamentalists," which could be characterized as "religious neoliberalism" (Hackworth 2013, 100). Atia (2014) has spoken for instance of "pious neoliberalism" regarding the behavior and dynamics of Islamic charities, arguing that it

> "represents the merging of a market-orientation with faith; it is a productive merger that has produced new institutional forms, like private mosques, private foundations, and an Islamic lifestyle market. Pious neoliberalism is marked by self-regulation and entrepreneurialism, as subjects engage in a moral economy that is inextricably linked with the market, self-government, and faith."

Hezbollah did not consider support for the policies of privatization, market liberalization, and foreign investments into Lebanon as conflicting with its dedication to tackling poverty and inequality. In the perspective of reinforcing the party's political position and clientelist networks, Hezbollah has voiced limited rhetorical opposition to specific policies and their implications, but it has not defended any consistent or principled opposition to the general path of neoliberal reform in Lebanon. In 2003, Hezbollah, for example, did not oppose the privatization process of the Lebanese airline company, Middle East Airlines (MEA), which led to the laying off of several hundred Shi'a employees. Demonstrations were organized against the likelihood of 1,200–1,500 workers losing their jobs in the privatization process (Bayyan 2001; Abla 2003). "Ali Tahir Yasin" (2012), the head of *al-Wafaa* trade union linked to Hezbollah who was engaged in the discussions around the layoffs as a workers' representative, stated in an interview that the privatization process implemented was not inevitably against the interests of either the workers or the wider population.

These positions can be seen as well in the Hezbollah's development think tank Centre for Studies and Documentation's reports and in the writings of two prominent Hezbollah thinkers, Ali Fayyad (a former director of CCSD and currently an MP for Hezbollah in the Lebanese parliament) and Abd Al-Halim Fadlallah (the current director of CCSD). Despite offering criticism of some of the features of globalization and various economic agreements and frameworks, including those with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the two thinkers prioritize support for the private sector based on "non-ideological motivated choices that enjoy a general consensus and guarantee the interests of all the parties and sectors of the society" (Fadlallah 2008, 16; Fayyad 2008, 13). They state clearly that economic and social decisions should not be carried out to the detriment of the private sector (CCSD 2009). In this framework, budget rationalization (in other words downsizing budgets leading to cuts in funding and therefore most probably employment) is promoted as necessary in domains such as health and basic education (CCSD 2009, 42).

In the legislative elections of May 2018, despite a campaign during which Hezbollah emphasized socio-economic development and the fight against corruption, this same program called for controlling and rationalizing expenditures in relation to the general financial situation of the State and for the deepening of privatization processes in the electricity sector (EDL) and Telecoms (Manar-al 2018). In addition, there was

Hezbollah's support for the nomination of Saad Hariri as Prime Minister of the new national unity of government, who made several pledges to implement the policies of the CEDRE (*Conférence économique pour le développement, par les réformes et avec les entreprises*). In return for $11 billion in loans, the Lebanese government has agreed to implement public–private partnership processes in various economic sectors, reduce the debt level, and enact austerity measures.

Hezbollah's Economic Policies in Government

Hezbollah has continued to this day to present itself as the party of the "oppressed," adopting the rhetoric and vocabulary of Khomeini and officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and has voices criticism against what it called "savage capitalism" in its 2009 manifesto. Its policies have however never challenged the Lebanese neoliberal economic system, while the notion of "oppressed" should be understood not as an economic category describing the deprived masses, but instead a political label for the party's supporters, including different social classes, just as Ayatollah Khomeini made use of it following his arrival to power (Abrahamian 1993, 53). On the contrary, it has contributed to its consolidation. Since Hezbollah's involvement in successive Lebanese governments from 2005 onwards, no additional funds were allocated to sectors like education and health or the productive sectors of the economy such as agriculture and industry. The Ministry of Agriculture's budget, for which nearly 97% of its expenditures are on administration, organization, and maintenance of building and equipment and the purchase of new furniture and equipment, has a yearly budget not exceeding 1% of government spending. It was about 0.5% of the total public expenditures (World Bank 2010, 9–10; Ministry of Agriculture 2014, 7), although expenditures for agriculture cuts across different ministries should be noted. There is little coordination among them leading to significant wastes and no rationalization plan has been taken place while the party was in power. At the same time, previous neoliberal policies of earlier governments such as liberalization, privatization, and encouragement for the growth of the private sector were maintained.

The party has supported the progressive privatization processes of some key public services, including the state electricity company, Electricité du Liban (EdL). Hezbollah minister Muhammad Funayyish, as the minister of energy and water between July 2005 and November 2006, actually

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000218 Published online by Cambridge University Press

participated in EdL's process of privatization (Verdeil 2009). Funayyish promoted the complete privatization of electricity production, arguing that experience demonstrated that the "state is an unsuccessful merchant" and adding that the government "should not be involved in any commercial activity" and "that the private sector should be given a bigger role in some of the public departments' affairs which have commercial nature" (cited in Habib 2008).

During the 2018 legislative elections, Abdel Halim Fadlallah and Hezbollah once again promoted the deepening of the privatization process with the implementation of the law no 431 of 2002, which sets out the strategy of liberalization of telecoms, in particular through the establishment of a third telecom company based on a private–public partnership (Ouazzani 2018b). At the same time, like all other parties, Hezbollah supported the abolition of the subsidies on electricity prices although it wanted as a precondition the increase of electricity production and the provision of electricity 24 hours a day, while partially limiting the price increase by proposing to keep a minimum subsidy for people on the lowest incomes. However, Abdel Halim Fadlallah did not specify the amount and the details on how and to whom this subsidy would be provided (Ouazzani 2018a). Hezbollah has also defended the tax reductions on profits on all industries to boost the industrial sector. Hussein Hajj Hassan, appointed Minister of Industry in January 2017, declared that the strengthening of the tax benefits granted to the industrial sector would be one of the priorities of his new mandate (Orient le Jour 2017a). In early 2018, he insisted on several occasions on the need for the government to put in place a global economic vision to guide its economic activities with the aim of stimulating growth and enlarging the size of the economy, notably in the industrial and agricultural sectors. Accordingly, the Lebanese government, with Hezbollah's approval, entrusted the consulting firm McKinsey & Company, known for its support for neoliberal policies and reforms (Cooper 2016), to devise a new strategy for "restructuring" the Lebanese economy (Abu Nasr 2018; Orient Le Jour 2018). McKinsey & Company was an advisor in and promoter of privatization efforts in Mexico and Tanzania, in Thatcher-led Great Britain, in CA and the United States (McDonald 2013).

When it comes to the agricultural sector, which has been one of the most neglected sectors in Lebanon since independence, Hezbollah was in charge of the Ministry of Agriculture between 2009 and 2014 and it continued to accommodate the interests of large landowners and powerful clans from which it derives political and clientelist support. No consistent

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000218 Published online by Cambridge University Press

or sustainable policies and projects to improve the situation of small farmers and farm laborers were undertaken. There was Rhetorical support from Hezbollah's former Minister of Agriculture for tackling cartels and monopolies and he held meetings with agricultural trade union representatives for a comprehensive strategy to support the sector, including a project of loans, the development of appropriate national banking laws, and the modernization of insurance policies related to hazards and natural disasters, but no concrete measures were implemented. It is no surprise that large landowners and retailers continued to dominate the market (Mohieddine 2012; Mualim-Al 2012). In fact, Hezbollah has tried to marginalize and weaken the main agriculture unions during Hajj Hassan's period in the Ministry by providing more services and assistance to Hezbollah-affiliated agriculture federations and unions, such as the Federation of Farmers in Lebanon (known as INMA), while filling the administration of the Ministry of Agriculture with Hezbollah members and making Jihad al-Bina, Hezbollah's construction firm, an auxiliary institution of the Ministry (Mohieddine 2012; Nassif 2012).

Hezbollah's control of municipalities, which have significant autonomy when it comes to planning and housing, has similarly shown its commitment to a neoliberal economic logic. The municipality of Ghobeyri, where Hezbollah holds sway in the council (Harb 2010), has been a particular instructive example of the party's policies at the local level. In Ghobeyri, and Dahyeh more broadly, Hezbollah's urban restructuring policy has adhered to the main principles of neoliberal reform—the prioritization of individual private ownership of the real estate and the marginalization of existing residents. It is a policy that, according to Fawaz (2014, 922–23), has acted to "consolidate spatial segregation, the privatization of public spaces, the gentrification of its areas of intervention, and further delegation of communal or public services to private channels of provision." One of the outcomes of this policy has been the growing polarization of wealth and increasing social inequalities in the municipality. On the one hand, multiple expensive hotels and developments, including BHV-Monoprix, Mariott, Summerland, and the Coral Beach, can be found in this area (Harb 2002, 133), and on the other, large numbers of poor inhabitants live in damaged and informal housing arrangements. The Hezbollah Ghobeyri municipality has actually been increasingly targeting informal communities by destroying "illegal settlements" in order to preserve the "interests of all" (Ghobeyri Municipality 2013) and condemning them as violations of private property rights (Slab News 2013). These urban neoliberal policies have however witnessed resistance

and even small popular rebellions. In November 2017, for example, in the impoverished neighborhood of Hay Sellom, residents protested in the streets and started burning tires and blocking roads against the destruction by the Lebanese police and Internal Security Forces—with the approval and support of Hezbollah—of the stores of unlicensed street vendors, who had been operating there for years. Some of the demonstrators loudly criticized Hezbollah and its leader Hassan Nasrallah, who they blamed for the destruction of their shops (their source of incomes) (al-Hashem Nûr 2017; Hassan 2017).

Similarly, in August 2017, in the Hussaynia of Shmustar, a town located in Baalbek-Hermel Governorate, local residents blamed Hezbollah for its poor performances in successive governments and for failing to achieve their promises such as water services or better roads in a meeting with Minister Hajj Hassan. They also accused the party of putting its own interests first and letting down the people of the constituency (Amhaz 2017; Qmayha 2017). A few months later, in mid-February 2018, after the announcement by Hassan Nasrallah of Hezbollah's candidates for the legislative elections in May, banners were held on the Zahle-Baalbeck highway, signed by supporters of the party, who contested the candidacy of the current MP and Minister of Industry, Hussein Hajj Hassan, criticizing his policies in the region (Noujeim 2018). In a public meeting with Hezbollah MP Hassan Fadlallah in August 2018, a video appeared on Lebanese al-Jadeed Television showing an individual from the south criticizing Hezbollah and Amal for their policies regarding social-economic issues notably the lack of provision of public services, including education, health, and electricity, in the South of the country, and their lack of struggle against corruption (al-Jadeed Television 2018).

Broadly speaking, since Hezbollah's participation in successive Lebanese governments from 2005, there has been no challenge to Hariri's neoliberal policy legacy. The party continued to support the process of privatization of public companies and promoted a project to liberalize the house rental market, which could force more than 180,000 families out of their homes. Hezbollah has become therefore an integral part of the Lebanese ruling class, where rivalries exist but are overcome when confronted by popular revolts or mobilization that threaten the established system of power. At the same time, Hezbollah has managed to achieve a position of hegemony among Lebanon's Shi'a population through a balanced combination of consent and coercion. On the one hand, there is the provision of much needed services to large sections of the Shi'a population, and on the other, the monopoly of the military resistance against

Israel and repressive measures directed against those who step outside the norms the party established. These intertwined factors of consent and coercion are facilitated through Hezbollah's wide-ranging network of organizations, which has helped it disseminate its ideas and deepen its support base within the Shi'a population. In consolidating its hegemony on the Shi'a population, Hezbollah, much like the other political parties in Lebanon, has as well acted to prevent the emergence of a cross-sectarian popular movement in Lebanon, which would be able to confront deeper social and economic issues, especially regarding labor movements. The potential emergence of such a class dynamic could challenge the sectarian system and the position of the dominant political parties, including that of Hezbollah.

Opposition to Labor and Social Movements

During the Civil War, labor movements and trade unions were important social actors in organizing and coordinating protests and civil resistance against the war, sectarian divisions, the power of militias, Israeli occupation, and in favor of the specific concerns of workers (Baroudi 1998, 537–40; Sleibe 1999, 143–44; Bou Habib 2012; Dirani 2012). Following the end of the Civil War, the country's elites developed a clear strategy to subjugate the labor movement to the policies of the government's economic reform agenda.

They first broke the ability of the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (known by its French acronym CGTL, for Confédération générale des travailleurs du Liban; in Arabic, *al-Ittihad al-'Ummali al-'Amm fi Lubnan*) to organize and mobilize across sectarian lines. Alongside repressive actions against CGTL, the Lebanese parties, led by Amal and Hezbollah, were able to take full control of the institution by 2001 by creating rival federation and union bodies based on sectarian lines, and interfering in the internal affairs of the CGTL itself (Daher 2016, 408). In 2001, Ghassan Ghosn, affiliated with SSNP and a protégé of Nabih Berri, was elected as the President. The government and political parties close to the Syrian regime, including Hezbollah, Amal, SSNP, and the Ba'th, supported Ghosn's candidacy. Ghosn remained at the head of the CGTL until the election of a new president, Bechara Asmar, the president of the Beirut Port Employees' Union, in March 2017 (Orient le Jour 2017b).

This kind of strategy continued with the rise of the Union Coordination Committee (UCC) (*Hayà tansîq niqâbîa*), which was at the head of many

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000218 Published online by Cambridge University Press

labor struggles throughout the country between 2012 and 2014 (LORWE 2013). The UCC however became less active against the Lebanese government after the victory in the January 2015 internal elections of a list supported by all the sectarian political parties, including Hezbollah. This list defeated the one Hanna Gharib, who had been the main trade union personality in the various labor struggles of the past few years, headed. The list supported by March 8 and 14 forces won 16 of the administrative committee's 18 seats. The coalition between March 8 and 14 forces, whose common list was called the Union's Consensus, prevailed also in the February 2015 elections for the Beirut, Mount Lebanon, the South and North regional branches, and all but two seats in the Bekaa branch (Salloukh 2015, 86–87). The results of these elections and the collaboration between all sectarian political parties were reminiscent of the actions they had undertaken to subordinate the role of the CGTL a few years earlier to avoid cross-sectarian labor mobilization. In July 2017, the trade unionist Nehme Mahfoud, a former president of the Private Teachers' Union who had struggled alongside the UCC for the implementation of the salary scale, and his list "My Union" (Niqâbatî) were defeated by a list including a coalition of the principal political movements of the country. Mahfoud won nevertheless 43% of the votes despite not being backed by any major political actor (Orient le Jour 2017c; Zoghbi 2017). Hanna Gharib drew similarities with his own experience with the UCC and blamed the sectarian political parties for wanting to put an end to independent and combative trade unions promoting and defending teachers' rights (El-Hage 2017).

The possibility of cross-sectarian mobilization and the development of class-based movements present a potential threat to all the sectarian political movements in Lebanon, of which Hezbollah has become part. This explains why Hezbollah has never mobilized its constituency on the basis of socioeconomic demands with a cross-sectarian perspective, even while rhetorically supporting the CGTL and/or social demands. At the same time, Hezbollah has not promoted any policy improving workers' living standards and conditions of employment. At the end of 2011 and beginning of 2012 for instance, the government led by Prime Minister Najib Miqati, in which Hezbollah had two ministers, rejected a program by the 10 ministers of labor Charbel Nahas that would have raised wages and social benefits, including universal health coverage and transportation indemnities. Instead of Nahas' plan, an agreement called the "Consensual Agreement on Wage Reform" concluded between the leadership of the CGTL, private sector employers, and the Prime Minister Najib Miqati (LORWE

2013, 6–7) was adopted in December 2011. The two Hezbollah ministers voted in favor of that agreement rather than for the Nahas initiative. This agreement was less advantageous to workers as it did not include transport allowances and would only raise the minimum wage to 675,000 LP ($450), rather than 890,000 LP ($593) per month (Orient Le Jour 2012). By 2018, promised wage increases in the Consensus Agreement had still not yet been implemented and funding mechanisms were still under discussion in parliamentary committees and in the successive governments. Hezbollah, while supporting the Consensus Agreement, had adopted the "accounting discourse" as the rest of the other dominant Lebanese sectarian political actors, as researcher Raed Sharaf (2014) pointed out, to explain the difficulties and obstacles for the implementation of wage increases provided for in the agreement. Thus, the political parties, including Hezbollah, stated that they had to respect the current financial policy and warned about the danger of raising wages according to the adopted plan if certain sacrifices on the part of the workers were not accepted. Similarly, in mid-June 2019, Hezbollah and the other sectarian parties reacted negatively to the teachers' strike in the Lebanese University and put pressure on them to end it. The strike had started at the beginning of May and had the potential to undermine the CEDRE neoliberal program by rejecting austerity measures imposed on public universities and teachers' wages and working conditions. The sectarian political parties did not hesitate once again to send their members to infiltrate the ranks of the Teacher's League to change its politics and end the strike (al-Hajj 2019; el-Hage 2019).

Conclusion

Hezbollah's project does not present a fundamental challenge or an alternative to the neoliberal economic system in Lebanon or in the region. Hezbollah's radical discourse against the United States and Israel does not translate into policies challenging its own political context. On the contrary, it sustains it. Hezbollah must be understood in the framework of the evolution of the organization's structures and relationship within the wider political system and locating this evolution within the changing class and state formation in the country.

Hezbollah has seen the growing significance inside the party of new higher middle-class cadres involved in liberal professions, and a weakening of radical and smaller petit bourgeois elements such as the clerics. At the same time, a new sector of the bourgeoisie linked to the party through

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Iranian capital and investments was created, while the rest of the Shi'a bourgeoisie, whether in Lebanon or in the diaspora, became increasingly intertwined with Hezbollah. Hezbollah and more generally Islamic fundamentalist movements in different countries have increasingly widened their ties to the bourgeoisie when it comes to political leadership and cadres, while attempting to preserve a cross-class base of support.

In addition, Hezbollah's provision of services through its network of organizations does not differ from other political and sectarian communities in Lebanon, except in size and efficiency. It promotes private, sectarian, and patronal support or management of social risks (Alagha and Catusse 2008, 132–134). In this manner, Hezbollah's ideology, in which mechanisms of Islamization are predominant, is a "non organic" philosophy, one that has "maintained the subaltern classes in their subaltern position, glossing over or obscuring the true, fractured nature of the present by speculatively sanctifying it as the only possible present and this as eternity" (Thomas 2009, 209). It is an ideology that attempts to reconcile contradictory and opposing interests.

Any truly counter-hegemonic project requires a rupture with the sectarian and bourgeois Lebanese political system, which Hezbollah does not provide. Hezbollah's role in the various political and socio-economic processes in Lebanon and the region confirms that it does not present a fundamental challenge to the current political economy framework of Lebanon but, on the contrary, has been integrated into this system as a political faction tied to the sectarian bourgeoisie. In this sense, the early assessment Mehdi Amel made regarding the behavior of fractions of the Islamic bourgeoisie in the 1980s can be in many ways observed in Hezbollah's evolution vis-a-vis the Lebanese political system by aspiring to strengthen their positions in the power structure, in order to better share the hegemony and not to change the system. He added that their participation will lead to a strengthening and an anchoring of the sectarian political system and not to its change or its suppression (Amel 1986, 337–38).

In conclusion, Hezbollah ultimately advances the long-term interests of the hegemonic class, which are not the interests of the popular classes but rather the rising bourgeoisie with its growing Shi'a element.

NOTES

1. One indication of the presence of this growing Shi'a fraction of the bourgeoisie is its increased representation in the main business associations (see Baroudi 2000).

2. The U.S. Treasury under-secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, Sigal Mandelker, declared in 2018: "Iran provides upwards of $700 million a year to Hezbollah," while adding that

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000218 Published online by Cambridge University Press

figure is more than triple the $200 million previously estimated by the United States before Hezbollah became embroiled in the Syrian civil war (Karam 2018).

3. The General Security Director is also the one to decide the censorship of movies and on numerous occasions Iranian movies critical of the IRI were banned in Lebanon.

4. The Lebanese Army Intelligence is identified as cooperating with Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, while the Information Branch, the intelligence arm of the Internal Security Forces (ISF), is seen as being connected with the Future Movement and the March 14 alliance.

5. One prominent cadre of the party was, for example, successively the director of the party's construction wing, Jihad al-Bina, the party's research unit, and its television station. The head of the organization's Shahid association was previously the director of Jihad al-Bina. The current Mayor of the Ghobeyri municipality, Muhammad Al-Khansa, was at the head of Hezbollah social services. Dr. Hassan Fadlallah, currently a MP, has been occupying various functions in the media wing of the party, working successively in the weekly newspaper of the party *al-'Ahed*, then the radio station al-Nour, and finally in the television channel al-Manar.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000218 Published online by Cambridge University Press