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Citation: Harb, Z. (2015). Al Manar and Hezbollah: Creative instances in Propaganda Warfare. In: Hamdar, A. & Moore, L. (Eds.), Islamism and Cultural Expression in the Arab World. (pp. 189-205). Routledge. ISBN 041552184X

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Harb, Zahera (2015). 'Al Manar and Hezbollah: Creative instances in Propaganda Warfare'. In Hamdar, A. and Moore, L. (2015), *Islamism and Cultural Expression in the Arab World*. London: Routledge.

Chapter Nine

Al-Manar and Hizbullah: Creative Instances in Propaganda Warfare

Zahera Harb

Al-Manar TV is a Lebanese channel affiliated to the Lebanese Shi'ite party Hizbullah (the Party of God). Al-Manar was the first media organization to be put on the US list of terrorist organizations. Between 1996 and 2000 (the year Israel withdrew from south Lebanon) al-Manar channel conducted a creative and organized media campaign against the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon.¹ This campaign continued to operate during the first Palestinian Intifada which erupted in September 2000 and, later, during the 2006 July war.

This chapter explores these media campaigns and their creative elements, as well as the relationship between al-Manar (the media organization) and Hizbullah (the political party). It argues that al-Manar, like Hizbullah, has successfully transformed itself from an 'Islamist' channel into a national resistance outlet and charts some of the ways in which it has done this. A categorization of al-Manar within the context of religious broadcasting in the region would be problematic. Anders Strindberg's and Mats Warn's identification of Hizbullah as a movement that belongs to the 'Islamico-nationalism' set of movements is more apt. They define Islamico-nationalism as:

a term that seeks to describe a movement that, despite a claim to solidarity with a transnational *Umma*, nevertheless confines its main area of operation to demarcated national territory. Rather than being a purely Islamic agenda, it consciously and overtly blends the Islamic and the national – religious and secular concerns – that resonate with people far outside the Islamist sphere.²

Al-Manar's broadcasting fits within this Islamico-national model, if we extend the national beyond Lebanon to Palestine and wider Arab nationalist aspirations to resist neo-imperialist influences in the region.

The chapter focuses on what I call creative moments in the field of political communication, which included the introduction of professional camerapeople to accompany resistance fighters in their military operations against Israeli soldiers in occupied south Lebanon; the production of video clips addressed to Israeli soldiers in and outside Lebanon, and the use of speeches by Hassan Nasrallah (the Secretary General of Hizbullah) during the July 2006 war as a campaigning tool to show the ability and credibility of the Hizbullah fighters against the Israeli attack on Lebanon.

I start by contextualizing how al-Manar came to exist and its relationship to Hizbullah, and then discuss Hizbullah's media strategy in relation to the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon and the ways in which al-Manar fits into this. The chapter assesses the role Nasrallah's televised speeches and appearances played during the July 2006 war, with reference to the leader-symbol role that had come to identify him in the media campaign that Hizbullah and, subsequently, al-Manar conducted through the latter half of the 1990s. This media

performance transformed Nasrallah, at the time, from a Lebanese leader-symbol into a Pan Arab one.

Al-Manar: The ‘Channel of Resistance’

Al-Manar started its transmission on 4 June 1991 from a small apartment in the southern suburbs of Beirut. According to al-Manar’s former head of news, Hassan Fadlallah, they started transmitting to a maximum of six hours a day through a small transmitter that covered the southern suburbs of Beirut.³

The channel was brought to life by a group of enthusiastic young men,⁴ with the aim of spreading the message and accomplishments of Hizbullah as a resistance movement among the Lebanese public. As stated by both Nayef Krayem and Muhammad Haydar, former chairmen of al-Manar, they had conceived such a project as early as 1986:

In the late 80s the Islamic resistance carried out operations that proved painful to Israeli positions in south Lebanon. The media coverage of these operations was weak, and the Israelis kept the killing of their soldiers in south Lebanon away from the Israeli and international media. They used to announce these killings after a day or two, saying that the soldiers had, for instance, died in a car accident. It was then that we decided that we needed our own publicity tool to uncover the Israeli lies. Thus, we started thinking of establishing our own television and radio stations.⁵

The first resistance videotape was broadcast on Lebanese state television Tele Liban’s Channel 7 in 1986. However, as soon as al-Manar was launched, the tapes were sent to the

newly established channel. From then on, al-Manar gained its reputation of being the 'resistance channel'⁶ although, at this early stage, this reputation was confined to the small area which its broadcasts reached.

Between 1991 and 1996, al-Manar developed its technical abilities and transmission powers. In September 1996 the government granted al-Manar a temporary licence as 'the resistance station'. The duration of the al-Manar licence was tied to the ending of the Israeli occupation. According to Krayem, this was an official admission by the Lebanese government of the role al-Manar was playing and of the need for such a channel to portray the heroism and achievements of the 'the Islamic resistance'⁷ up until the liberation of the occupied territories in south Lebanon:⁸

There had to be a TV station that committed itself to bringing out images of the suffering of our people in the occupied territories, the victims of Israeli arrogance, and that of those living in areas bordering the occupation who suffer its semi-daily aggressions, besides focusing on the resistance activity and establishing its role, hoping to formulate a resistant nation governed by justice and equality. Thus, al-Manar saw the light of day.⁹

The al-Manar mission statement indicates that it was founded on the basis of propagating resistance activities and displaying images of Israeli atrocities in south Lebanon. Thus al-Manar television was established as the resistance's media tool in its fight with the Israeli army. Al-Manar, as its mission statement signifies, wanted the resistance struggle to be part of people's everyday lives. As Farah Dakhllallah puts it, al-Manar was used to cultivate the

‘community of the Islamic resistance’ within and outside the Shi‘ite constituency in Lebanon.¹⁰

Meanwhile, al-Manar worked on fulfilling the legal, structural, financial and technical demands needed to obtain a licence to operate as a privately owned commercial general television station. The Lebanese Media Group (LMG) was established, with shareholders from different Lebanese religious sects (both Muslim and Christian).¹¹ In July 1997, al-Manar and Radio al-Nour¹² were granted full licences under the name of LMG, although they were not legally registered until November 1998.¹³ After they were granted full official licences, al-Manar’s offices were turned into several training workshops to equip the staff with the most developed techniques in media production. Many al-Manar journalists and technicians were sent on training courses in France, Syria, Iran and Egypt. The television station later signed an agreement with the French Thomson Company to equip al-Manar with the latest technologies.¹⁴

By 1997, al-Manar’s terrestrial channel was able to reach Lebanon in its entirety, as well as parts of occupied Palestine and Syria, and it broadcast for 18 hours a day. It was preparing to launch a satellite channel, which came on air on 25 May 2000, the day south Lebanon was liberated.¹⁵ Since obtaining its licence from the government in 1997, the channel has increased its audience share to more than fifteen percent of the Lebanese population, from all social strata and sectors. Krayem and other Lebanese officials have stated that the channel is declared the third most-watched television channel in Lebanon.¹⁶ Victoria Fimo-Fontan explains that:

By welcoming speakers from all sectors of the Lebanese population onto its programmes, al-Manar has tried to identify itself as a television channel fostering inter-sectarian collaboration. Of importance when taking into account the television ratings for the whole of Lebanon is the predominance of al-Manar as a substitution channel, not constantly watched by non-Hezbollah viewers, but frequently consulted for specific programmes, especially the news.¹⁷

Al-Manar succeeded in achieving this position by portraying a television message of inter-sectarian collaboration against a common Israeli enemy.¹⁸

Accordingly, the government granted al-Manar a licence as a 'national resistance channel'. Its satellite channel was oriented towards widening the scope of its transmission to a global Arab and Muslim audience and stressing the role of 'military resistance' in attempting to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. It focuses on pan-Arab and pan-Muslim issues.¹⁹ The coverage of the second Palestinian Intifada boosted al-Manar viewership to almost ten million viewers.²⁰ During the July 2006 war al-Manar, despite being bombed several times, was ranked among the top ten most viewed channels across the region.²¹ In other words al-Manar can no longer be identified as a Hizbullah television station; it is, rather, a station affiliated to Hizbullah.

Hizbullah's Media Strategy: Aiming at Liberation

According to Professor Muhammad Mohsen,²² an expert on propaganda and public opinion at the Lebanese University, Hizbullah had had a clear and organized media plan since the early 1990s, but this plan was reinforced after the events of April 1996:²³

In 1996 Hizbullah realised the importance of a professional and organised media performance and also recognized the importance of building on the people's consensus around the resistance. I believe that the 1996 war was a turning point in Hizbullah's media performance and conduct. They became more organized and precise in the content and style of the messages.²⁴

Mohsen pointed out that there was a clear change in Hizbullah's media policies in the wake of the events of 1996, because they had new audiences that they needed to address – beyond their natural constituency, their party members and close supporters. Thus they had to consider the shift in character of their audiences from local and sectarian to national and multi-denominational.²⁵ They institutionalized their media operation in units and centres (discussed below) and welcomed some 1200 foreign reporters into their offices during the 1996 events alone.²⁶ They granted interviews with Hizbullah's political figures and employed dedicated English-and French-speaking personnel to explain the position of Hizbullah (and Lebanon) in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Hizbullah's media performance had developed dramatically since the party was formed. Hizbullah came into existence in 1982, following Israel's invasion of Lebanon. However, its existence was not made official until 1985, when Israeli occupation troops retreated into south Lebanon and established what they called their 'security zone', which constituted ten percent of Lebanese territory.²⁷ According to Mohsen, Hizbullah's media management reached its climax in 2000, the year in which Hizbullah fighters were able to celebrate the defeat of the Israeli army in south Lebanon and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the territory that Israel had occupied for 22 years.²⁸

The core principle of Hizbullah's media strategy was to counter Israeli false messages against the Lebanese resistance and its people. Importantly, for Mouafak al-Jammal, former head of Hizbullah Media Relations, credibility was the primary aim of Hizbullah's media policies and strategies:

We faced the necessity of confronting Israeli propaganda – that was full of lies and hatred against all Arabs, and especially against us [Hizbullah and the resistance]. We were aiming to try and persuade media organizations worldwide to change the term 'terrorists' to 'fighters seeking to liberate their own occupied land', to replace the word 'gangs' by 'resistance groups', to change the phrase 'terrorist attacks' to 'resistance operations'.²⁹

Hizbullah's media personnel were convinced that the real motives and causes behind their struggle were distorted by the Israeli public relations machine and that they therefore had to disseminate their side of the story. They needed to tell the 'truth about their struggle', said an expert who preferred to stay anonymous.³⁰ The words 'truth' and 'credibility' were emphasized when talking about Hizbullah resistance military operations in south Lebanon, particularly in reporting the military losses Israel was suffering in the occupied territories. Importantly, Hizbullah considered deception to be a flaw that would affect its cause negatively.

Naif Krayem, Chairman (1997-2001) of al-Manar and the Hizbullah-affiliated radio station al-Nour (1997–2001) and former head of Hizbullah's Central Media Unit (1996-1997), is

identifiable as the man behind the development of this political propaganda. He told the *Daily Telegraph* in April 2000 that:

For 40 years the Arab media were useless. But we have learned from the failures of the past and the success of the Israelis in this field. Of course, the Israelis are stronger than us worldwide, but in this conflict there is no doubt we have the upper hand.³¹

Krayem refers here to what Rugh categorizes as ‘mobilizing’ and ‘loyalist’ media systems in the Arab world. The first is characterized by the almost total subordination of the mass media to the political system and state regimes, and the second consists of privately owned media organizations that are loyal to the state regime.³² These media systems tend to exaggerate the strength of the state. One of the examples cited by Krayem is the case of the Egyptian broadcaster Ahmad Sa‘id, of Sawt al-Arab.³³ During the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Ahmad Sa‘id kept telling his Arab listeners that the Arabs were winning the war – even as the residents of Jerusalem were watching Israeli tanks taking up position near their homes. This version of events became known as the ‘Ahmad Sa‘id war’. To many Arabs, the defeat came as a shock; indeed, many commentators believed that the Arabs lost the 1967 war not just because of their limited military capacity, but also because of Ahmad Sa‘id’s misleading information and exaggeration.³⁴ The late head of the Journalists’ Syndicate in Lebanon, Riyad Taha, wrote a book – *al-‘Ilaam wa-l-Ma‘araka* (The Media and the Battle) – about the Arab media’s failure to present the Arab side of the story to the international community and the way in which the Zionist movement had succeeded in propagating its cause. He argues that world leaders viewed the Arab-Israeli conflict through the prism of Israeli eyes.³⁵ Supporting this, Edward Said writes about how Israel’s version of the history of its conflict with the

Palestinians and the Arabs is the one widely circulated in the West. Said also asserts the need to foreground facts and realities which support the Arab and Palestinian cause of liberation and independence.³⁶ Greg Philo and Mike Berry similarly point to the effectiveness of the Israeli public relations machine in building contacts with journalists and influencing their coverage of issues related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.³⁷

Due to close media monitoring, Hizbullah's media people were aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the messages Israel tended to circulate to the international community and started developing strategies to counter it. Hizbullah media's main aim was to counter Israel's 'false' messages, which aimed at demonizing the motives and abilities of resistance fighters, and claimed that Israel's was the army that could not be defeated.³⁸ Hizbullah media people and consequently al-Manar journalists took this to a more strategic level and applied organized counter-propaganda policies. As Kobi Maroun, commanding officer of Israel's Golani Regiment serving in south Lebanon, said in 1998: 'We are less qualified in one respect: the propaganda. They are trying to hit our weak points and we have to hit back'.³⁹

At the end of 1997, al-Manar brought together all media production related to 'the resistance' in a new unit, calling it in Arabic '*Qsem al-Di'aya al-Siyasia*', which translates literally as the 'Political Propaganda Unit'. Husayn Hmayed, head of the unit at the time, explained that, after the 1996 events, al-Manar felt the need to develop its performance in promoting 'the Islamic resistance'. This unit was solely responsible for producing patriotic video-clips and newsflashes that praised 'the resistance' fighters and sought to demoralize Israeli soldiers and military institutions. Some of these were broadcast in Arabic, some in Hebrew; others were translated into both languages.⁴⁰

The unit lasted until the liberation of south Lebanon, when it became part of a new department called 'the Resistance Department'. Illustrating a creative instance in political communication, Hizbullah media personnel interviewed for this research talked about the 'media traps' they planted on several occasions for the Israelis. One of these took place in 1994 when Hizbullah resistance fighters attacked and destroyed an Israeli position called Debshe, in occupied south Lebanon, and raised Hizbullah and Lebanese flags there. Hizbullah initially distributed a press release about the operation without showing any pictures. However, the Israeli army denied the operation, saying that none of their soldiers had been killed and that nothing had changed in Debshe. The Hizbullah media people thus released the videotape of the operation, showing dead Israeli soldiers and the way in which Hizbullah fighters had climbed the hill and planted their flag.⁴¹ The Israeli press then attacked the Israeli Army for 'lying' to the Israeli public, using such sentences as 'Hizbullah media humiliated the [Israeli] military institution'.⁴²

This directly led to the idea of including a cameraperson as a fixture of every Hezbollah operation. Video footage started to be routinely distributed to local television stations, as well as to the offices of international and Arab media organisations and news agencies in Lebanon. An embargo on the timing of the release of such footage, however, remained in the hands of Hizbullah's media people. The inclusion of camerapeople had started in the late 1980s, but was not particularly professional until after 1996, when trained personnel started to accompany the groups. These latter had the ability to film day and night, with equipment that was able to catch detail from a great distance. As the then head of the Military Media Unit, Haj Maitham, has said, it became a priority for the fighters to keep the camera safe and to keep the tapes with them:⁴³

Before 1996 there was no specialized unit responsible for filming operations. We used to depend on volunteers and not professional, trained and equipped personnel. In 1996 an organized formation was introduced that was given hi-tech equipment and a specific space. [Also,] the problems the unit faced were studied and solutions were sought. For example, at the beginning, we did not have a person dedicated to looking after how this unit was operating, but after 1996 a small section was introduced within the resistance to take care professionally of this issue.⁴⁴

Films shot by Military Media Unit cameramen would first be broadcast on al-Manar, and then distributed to local and international news agencies and television stations in Lebanon. One of the aims of showing these films, besides documenting Israeli losses, was to tell young Lebanese: ‘If these guys can do it, you can do it too.’⁴⁵

Tel Zalmnobites, of the Israeli magazine *Bmsehneih*, wrote a report about the effectiveness of the filming of Hezbollah’s operations, headed: ‘A film directed by Hassan Nasrallah.’ The report revealed how the footage of Debshe (see above) had left its imprint, since ‘[an Israeli] soldier has been always told that the Israeli army never leaves its position and the Israeli army could not be defeated.’⁴⁶ Alan Philips of the *Daily Telegraph* wrote in 2000:

So successful has the Hezbollah campaign been that the Israelis are about to withdraw from Lebanon – a practically unheard of example of the most powerful army in the Middle East retreating before Arab guns. Israeli losses in Southern Lebanon are not enormous – about 25 killed a year – but the fact that Hezbollah cameramen have caught the moment when Israeli mothers’ sons are killed has had a

fatal effect on public opinion, making it impossible for the [Israeli] army to continue.⁴⁷

Similarly, the Israeli daily *Yediot Ahronot*, in an article in April 1997, discussed the power of ‘Hezbollah’s propaganda war’ against Israel, saying ‘they have succeeded in driving us towards despair.’⁴⁸ The paper quoted an Israeli military psychiatrist as saying that ‘Hezbollah’s propaganda war’ had had far more impact on the Israeli soldiers than had the military one. Elihu Katz, an Israeli media scholar, told Saad Hamad, Jerusalem correspondent of the pan-Arab newspaper *al-Hayat*, that the images al-Manar broadcast, which were then re-transmitted on Israeli TV (Channel One), drew Israeli attention to what exactly was happening in south Lebanon. He believed that these images had strengthened Israeli public opinion about the pointlessness of staying in south Lebanon, especially after the ‘April Understanding’ that confined Israeli army’s freedom of movement. These pictures were seen as ‘bloody clear evidence on the situation’.⁴⁹

Katz was referring to the fact that the Israeli military occupation of south Lebanon was not bringing security and strength to Israel, but rather images of death and humiliation. However, Tamar Liebes, Professor of Communication Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, pointed out that it was very difficult to define how far these images affected Israeli public opinion in favour of immediate withdrawal from south Lebanon. She explained that no surveys had been conducted within Israeli society on this issue and that, if this shift of opinion happened, it would be difficult to identify what exactly influenced it. Nonetheless, Liebes did not exclude the possibility that the Israeli audience’s discovery of what was happening on the battlefield (watching wounded soldiers at close range and hearing their

moans) contributed to a cumulative process that led Israeli society to conclude that staying in Lebanon was futile and too costly.⁵⁰

In 2000 Israeli forces withdrew unconditionally from the land it occupied in south Lebanon. Al-Manar and Hizbullah media personnel have consistently spoken of their 'media traps' with a sense of pride. Their success in undermining the credibility of the Israeli army underlined Hizbullah's victory in a war of morale.

The July 2006 War: Achieving a Pan-Arab and Pan-Islamic Identity

The only thought that came to my mind on 24 September 2006, standing on the rubble of the al-Manar complex in Haret Hreik in the southern suburb of Beirut, was: 'This is the evidence that al-Manar's media campaign or psychological warfare against the Israeli army was effective.' Whilst a speculation, it was one shared by many journalists in Lebanon.

Israel, by bombing al-Manar's headquarters as well as the transmitters of the Lebanese Broadcasting Company (LBC) and Tele Liban, declared its military war on the media in Lebanon. However, with the aid of technical support from most of the other Lebanese television stations, al-Manar's broadcasts were interrupted for less than two minutes after the Israeli F16 jets flattened the complex to the ground. An al-Manar statement in response to the attack carried a message of defiance:

They have targeted al-Manar because of its commitment to credibility, objectivity, and its beliefs in the just causes of the *Umma*. This aggression will not stop us from

fulfilling our message. Al-Manar will remain the voice that defends the *Umma* and the Lebanese people and their just causes.⁵¹

Journalists from al-Manar had reassured me that, because of earlier threats from the Israeli army to bomb their station, they had prepared an evacuation plan and an alternative centre to broadcast from, should the station management feel danger was imminent. Only two technicians were wounded in the attack on al-Manar. Soon after Beirut airport was attacked,⁵² the evacuation plan was put into action. Not long after, Israeli jets hit al-Manar's top floors, 'clipping off its antenna with a missile, but failing to put the station off air'.⁵³ A few hours later, the station's headquarters was demolished.

Avi Jorisch, of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, published a study on al-Manar entitled *Beacon of Hatred: Inside Hizballah's Al Manar Television* which refers to al-Manar ('beacon' in English) as the beacon of hatred. He accuses al-Manar of inciting hatred against Israel and the United States.⁵⁴ However, inciting 'hatred' against the enemy is one of the key aims of propaganda techniques. Al-Manar and, in related fashion, Hizbullah wanted to channel 'hatred' in one direction – at 'the enemy' – Israel. The resistance sought domestic and Arab support to achieve its aim of liberating south Lebanon. Jorisch makes his study look as if he had achieved a breakthrough with his discoveries inside al-Manar. However, as revealed in his study, al-Manar's staff and personnel received Jorisch and gave him full access to the television offices. He conducted interviews with al-Manar journalists and administrators, who were clear about their aims and targets: they were trying to influence the public, both inside Israel and in Lebanon, in order to achieve the ultimate goal of liberation of Southern Lebanese territory.⁵⁵

After the liberation of south Lebanon, the target audience of al-Manar's satellite channel became the Palestinian public and wider Arab audiences and the aim was to gain support for the ongoing Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation. This al-Manar campaign also focused on the US military and financial help that made it possible for Israel to maintain its occupation of the Palestinian territories. As a result, Jorisch recommended that the United States put al-Manar on its list of terrorist organizations,⁵⁶ which is what happened in 2004. The first media institution to be placed on this list, Jorisch's rationale was that al-Manar's planned and structured campaigns influenced the Lebanese public to unite and support Hizbullah in its fight to end the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon.

A unified mass society or group and a feeling of togetherness are essential elements in the kind of 'liberation propaganda' that al-Manar was trying to achieve. Its media campaign tried to 'undermine the occupation forces' ability and credibility using images of killed and wounded Israeli soldiers, as well as with its media traps' (as I discussed earlier). What al-Manar successfully produced were campaigns that solicited, and achieved, national public support for a cause or a mission, with the mass media being a core tool in disseminating political, social and patriotic messages. Al-Manar's 'media campaign sought to bring national unity and support for the resistance groups fighting the occupation forces within the sovereign, independent state of Lebanon'.⁵⁷

Al-Manar followed the same pattern of coverage during July 2006. Its coverage of the 33 days of war emphasized the ability, capability and credibility of Hizbullah resistance fighters and leaders and demonized the 'enemy's' ability, capability and credibility. The coverage reflected the public support that 'the resistance' fighters enjoyed and emphasized people's

steadfastness in their towns and villages in the face of ‘the Israeli attempt to oust them from their land’.⁵⁸

Al-Manar coverage used widely circulated Israeli TV analysis of the situation in south Lebanon, mainly in cases where the Israelis were questioning the rationale of waging such a war on Lebanon.⁵⁹ Al-Manar also re-broadcast Israeli television news analysis of the ability of Hizbullah fighters and expressed its pride in how ‘the enemy is admitting the superiority of the resistance fighters over their soldiers’.⁶⁰ Al-Manar kept an eye throughout the 33 days on the Israeli television coverage (mainly Channel 2 and 10) and highlighted what it identified as ‘the political and military crisis’ Israel was facing and ‘the call within Israel for it to reconsider its operation against Lebanon and Hizbullah’.⁶¹

The same pattern of coverage could be observed as in the years of the pre-2000 Israeli occupation of south Lebanon. Reports on the lives inside the villages and the towns in south Lebanon were given prominence in the coverage. Steadfastness was a message put forward by those interviewed.⁶² In its coverage, al-Manar worked towards channelling defiance among the Lebanese public against one common ‘enemy’, Israel. Transmitting via satellite, they were also speaking to a collective Arab sentiment and memory, claiming that ‘we are the voice that defends the *Umma* (nation) and the Lebanese people and their just causes’.⁶³

As identified in the channel’s pre-2000 coverage, a deep sense of patriotism, nationalism and, to a certain extent, Shi’ite Islamic religious commitment guided al-Manar’s journalists in their July 2006 reporting.⁶⁴ This became evident in the coverage of what became known as Qana Massacre Two, in which 53 people, including children, died as a result of Israeli shelling of a residential building. ‘Ali al-Mismar opened the news programme with a very

emotional, indeed emotive, passage remembering the Qana Massacre of 1996 and relating it to the Qana massacre of 2006:⁶⁵

Tonight in Qana he [the little child] sleeps alone, with no dreams ... before dawn blood was mixed with blood, the innocent peaceful smile faded ... and loved ones were not able to say goodbye to each other, but Qana will kill its killer ... Qana hit [Shimon] Peres in 1996 and Qana will hit [Ehud] Olmert in 2006. Qana of Galilee, the cave of Jesus Christ, symbolises Lebanon today, Lebanon that has become victorious through the resistance fighters heroism and unified by Qana tragedy. Lebanon is unified ... Qana the martyr and the witness, ten years ago you had your bloody wedding and you kept your promise of achieving martyrdom. Qana peace is upon you...⁶⁶

Al-Mismar broke into tears several times while reading the passage. Qana once again unified the Lebanese people and political elite, as it had in 1996.⁶⁷ Al-Manar coverage on that day and the days that followed reflected that unity. It broadcast statements of support and solidarity by different Lebanese political leaders and different sectors of the general public.⁶⁸ The 'hatred' was again channelled towards one enemy, Israel.

As discussed earlier, the coverage followed the same pattern as that of the pre-2000 Israeli occupation of south Lebanon. However, two dominant features distinguished the 2006 war coverage: the pride expressed in the ability of the resistance to fire missiles that could hit cities inside Israel as far as the coastal city of Haifa and beyond, with images to show the impact of those missiles; and the televised appearances of Nasrallah, which operated as a mobilizing tool. Nasrallah gained leader-symbol status among a large number of the

Lebanese public at this time. Jacques Ellul speaks of symbols as one of the two most favourable elements of propaganda that emerge from mass society.⁶⁹ As David Wilseman writes: ‘A speech by Hizbullah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah is always an event’.⁷⁰

Nasrallah as National and Pan-Arab Symbol

‘Hassan Nasrallah is nothing if not a man of his word,’ wrote Wilseman.⁷¹ Pratkanis and Aronson point to the importance in propaganda terms of an authoritative figure (usually a man who claims a kind of sovereign authority to speak on behalf of the state/society) whom people are willing to believe. Nasrallah as a symbol was used to instil a massive wave of patriotism and heroism among a national audience in order to achieve a common objective.⁷² The objective here was to prevent the ‘enemy’ from meeting its military operation aims and targets and to stop it from re-occupying south Lebanon.

Nasrallah’s discourse during the 2006 war – which was in the form of direct appearances, letters or interviews⁷³ – was exclusively broadcast on al-Manar. His speeches and addresses to ‘the Lebanese and the *Umma*’, were timed to provide evidence that the Israelis were not able to achieve what they set themselves to achieve – to kill Nasrallah and hence destroy Hizbullah as a cohesive unit. Psychological warfare was taking place and Nasrallah’s speeches and appearances were a core component of this. Nasrallah referred to this fact in his ‘Divine Victory’ speech on 22 September 2006, which marked his first public appearance since the start of the July war:

For days now a psychological war has been waged on this festival just as they were against the resistance. They said they will bomb this ground and this rostrum will be destroyed to frighten the people away. Today on 22 September and by your crowning of this victory celebration, you are more courageous than you were on 12 July and 14 August. Yes, I stand before you and among you, this puts you and me at risk, and there are other options, but we were debating this issue until half an hour ago. However, my heart, mind and soul did not permit me to address you from a distance nor via a screen display. The most a person expects from an enemy is to commit an error or a crime, but doesn't this enemy know who we are? We are the children of that Imam, who said: Is it with death you threaten me? Death to us is normalcy and martyrdom is dignity offered from God.⁷⁴

Thousands of people from different religious sects and with different political affiliations attended the rally celebrating what Hizbullah identified as the 'July Divine Victory' against the Israeli army.

Throughout the July War, Nasrallah, as Commander in Chief, briefed the Lebanese people and the Arabs on battlefield developments.⁷⁵ As Dina Matar puts it, 'his televised appearances have made him a household name ... a revered icon...'⁷⁶ Nasrallah's televised appearances became a mobilizing tool for solidarity with and support of Hizbullah fighters and the act of resistance. Al-Manar made Nasrallah's appearances a media event: they advertized them beforehand and people would be waiting with anticipation. Nasrallah made more than ten televised appearances during the war and every time his speech would carry newsworthy material. For 33 days, al-Manar broadcast interviews with Lebanese citizens emphasising their steadfastness and sending their support to Nasrallah. One news report from

al-Hibariya⁷⁷ on 21 July demonstrated the prominence that Nasrallah achieved in the public consciousness. Villagers compared Nasrallah to historical Muslim leader Salah al-Din (Saladin), the Kurdish general widely seen in the Arab world as a great Arab hero for his liberation of Jerusalem from the Crusaders in 1187.⁷⁸ Messages were sent through al-Manar reassuring Nasrallah that they would protect him with their lives.⁷⁹ Other news reports presented citizens addressing Nasrallah directly and telling him they would stay steadfast and never abandon him, in response to his calls for people to stay steadfast in their villages, towns and cities ‘as steadfastness shortens the life of the Israeli aggression’.⁸⁰ One citizen in Nabatiya⁸¹ equated the well-being of Nasrallah to that of the resistance.⁸²

In short, Nasrallah and Hizbullah became one in the Lebanese and wider Arab people’s everyday narrative. Once more Hizbullah had the upper hand over the Israeli army in media warfare, this time equipped with Nasrallah’s accuracy and credibility in summing up the day-to-day developments in the battlefield. In his famous speech of 14 July 2006, Nasrallah addressed ‘the people of the Zionist entity’, saying: ‘your opinion poll says that you believe me more than you believe your officials... listen and believe me... you wanted open warfare and we are going to go into an open warfare...’ He then set a precedent in the history of the conflict with Israel, broadcasting that: ‘Now, out at sea off the coast of Beirut an Israeli military vessel that transgressed on our infrastructure, struck the homes of our people, our civilians; you can see it burning and sinking with dozens of Zionist Israeli troops’.⁸³ Images of the burning vessel accompanied this. Hizbullah achieved a moment of superiority – not only militarily, but also superiority in the psychological or propaganda warfare that had been taking place between Hizbullah and Israel – which was shared with the Lebanese and the Arab public through al-Manar. According to Thanassis Cambanis, following the July 2006

war, ‘the secretary-general and charismatic supreme leader of Hezbollah, command[ed] more popularity in the Middle East than any other Leader’.⁸⁴

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how al-Manar (like Hizbullah) has successfully transformed itself from a channel dedicated to a small constituency, sharing the same sectarian affiliation, into a pan-Arab pan-Islamic television station. It has evolved into a channel of national and Arab resistance. The evolving history of al-Manar mirrors that of Hizbullah. Al-Manar successfully conducted a psychological war against the occupier – ‘the oppressor’ – and built a wide base of audiences across religious and political affiliations. As it was for Hizbullah, the driving force behind al-Manar’s media campaign of the 1990s was the fight to free Lebanon from Israeli occupation. In 2000, and with the advent of satellite broadcasting capability, the priority shifted to campaigning for a free Palestine. The audience has grown to encompass a pan-Arab and pan-Islamic constituency.

In the last two years, the pro-nationalist, pan-Arab, pan-Islamic identity of Hizbullah portrayed via al-Manar has been ‘doubted’, as Hizbullah fighters have joined forces with the Syrian regime. Accusations of sectarian-led support have tainted the victories Hizbullah and al-Manar achieved in their fight against the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon. This is despite the fact that sectarian discourse has not been advocated via al-Manar news or programming. The role and performance of al-Manar in covering current Arab revolts is one that merits a separate study.

Notes

¹ Passages in this chapter have been published in Zahera Harb, *Channels of Resistance in Lebanon, Liberation Propaganda, Hezbollah and the Media* (London: IB Tauris, 2011), of which I am the copyright holder. I thank the publisher for permission to reprint these passages.

² Anders Strindberg and Mats Wärn, *Islamism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 123-124.

³ Doha Shames, 'Al-Manar: From the Southern Suburb to the Southern Suburb, a Channel that Disturbs the Israelis and the Americans', *As-Safir*, 24 December 2004, 4.

⁴ Nayef Krayem, 'Al-Manar: Qusat al-Ta'assis...' ['Al-Manar: the Story of its Establishment ...'], *As-Safir*, 28 December 2004, 5.

⁴ Zahera Harb, Interview with Muhammad Haydar, Personal Interview, Beirut, 1 September 2004.

⁶ Shames, 'Al-Manar', 4.

⁷ Hizbullah military resistance operations in south Lebanon are conducted under the name of 'Islamic resistance'. Hizbullah changed its motto in 1989 from 'the Islamic revolution' in Lebanon to 'the Islamic resistance' in Lebanon. It is usually referred to in the Lebanese media, including al-Manar, as 'the resistance'.

⁸ Krayem, 'al-Manar', 5.

⁹ 'Al-Manar', www.almanar.com.lb (accessed 2 May 2000). The statement was changed shortly after the liberation of south Lebanon on 25 May 2000.

¹⁰ Farah Dakhlalah, 'Al-Manar and the Islamic Sphere in Lebanon: An Evolving Agenda', Paper presented at the *Religious Broadcasting in the Middle East Conference*, Cambridge UK, 30-31 January 2010.

¹¹ Al-Manar, according to its licence application, is run by an independent board of directors. This board has members (mainly business people and bank managers) who have no organizational ties to Hizbullah. However, they support the resistance's operations in south Lebanon.

¹² Al-Nour, a radio station established by Hizbullah, was later run by a separate board of directors.

¹³ Krayem, 'Al-Manar', 5.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Zahera Harb, Interview with Muhammad Haydar, Personal Interview, Beirut, 1 September 2004.

¹⁶ Victoria Firmo-Fontan, 'Power, NGOs and Lebanese television' in Naomi Sakr, ed., *Women and Media in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 162-179 (177-178).

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 178.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 179.

¹⁹ Farah Dakhlalah, 'Al-Manar'.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Mohsen is one of a handful of researchers who have conducted studies on the media performance of Hizbullah.

²³ In April 1996 Israel launched a military operation against Hizbollah and Lebanon, code-named 'Grapes of Wrath'. The operation lasted 16 days, causing hundreds of Lebanese civilian casualties and infrastructural destruction. The operation ended without achieving its objectives. It was mainly aimed at rooting out the resistance from south Lebanon. Hizbullah and the Islamic resistance gained huge public support in response to the Israeli assaults.

²⁴ Zahera Harb, Interview with Muhammad Mohsen, Personal Interview, Beirut, 1 August 2004.

²⁵ According to Strindberg and Wörn, Hizbullah explicitly endorsed political and religious pluralism. They argue that ‘such a thoroughly localized Islamism has allowed Hezbollah to criticize, even excoriate Islamist groups who see diversity as a threat’ (*Islamism*, 130).

²⁶ See Muhammad Mohsen, ed., *Al-Harb al-‘Ilaamiya: Al-‘Ilaam al-Moukawem fi Lubnan* [‘Media War: The Case of the Resistance Media in Lebanon’] (Beirut: Dar al-Nada, 1998).

²⁷ See Amal Saad Ghorayeb, *Hizbu’llah: Politics and Religion* (London: Pluto Press, 2002); Naim Qassem, *Hizbullah: The Story from Within* (London: Saqi Books, 2005); Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born With a Vengeance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

²⁸ See Mohsen, *Al-Harb al-‘Ilaamiya*.

²⁹ Zahera Harb, Interview with Mouafak al-Jammal, Personal Interview, Beirut, 15 April 2000.

³⁰ Zahera Harb, Interview with Author, Personal Interview, Beirut, 3 January 2004.

³¹ Alan Philips, ‘Hizbollah is Winning the TV War’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 12 April 2000, np.

³² William Rugh, *Arab Mass Media* (London: Praeger, 2004).

³³ Sawt al-Arab was an Egyptian state-run radio station.

³⁴ Nabil Khoury, *Haret al-Nasara* [‘The Christian Neighbourhood’] (Beirut: Riyad al-Rayyes, 1995).

³⁵ Riad Taha, *Al-‘Ilaam wa-l-Ma‘araka* [‘The Media and the Battle’] (Beirut, Dar an-Nahar, 1973).

³⁶ See Gauri Viswanthan, ed., *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward Said* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004).

³⁷ See Greg Philo and Mike Berry, *Bad News From Israel* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

³⁸ Krayem in Mohsen, ed., *Al-Harb al-‘Ilaamiya*, 49.

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- ³⁹ General Kobi Maroum, *Yediot Ahronot*, 5 January 1998.
- ⁴⁰ Zahera Harb, interview with Husayn Hmayed, Personal interview, Beirut 9 January 2004.
- ⁴¹ Zahera Harb, Interview with Mouafak al-Jammal, Personal Interview, Beirut, 15 April 2000.
- ⁴² 'Israeli press comments on filming the resistance operations', *As-Safir*, 21 September 1996, n.p.
- ⁴³ Zahera Harb, Interview with Haj Maitham, Personal Interview, Beirut, 1 August 2004.
- ⁴⁴ *ibid.*
- ⁴⁵ Zahera Harb, Interview with Nayef Krayem, Personal Interview, Beirut, 4 December 2000.
- ⁴⁶ Tel Zalmnobites, 'A film directed by Hassan Nasrallah', *Bmsehneih*, 20 September 1996, n.p.
- ⁴⁷ Philips, 'Hizbullah', n.p.
- ⁴⁸ 'We are Less Qualified than Hezbollah in Propaganda', *Yediot Ahronot*, 5 January 1998, n.p.
- ⁴⁹ Saad Hamad, 'A storm hit the soldiers' families when informed about their children's death by TV footage', *Al-Hayat*, 16 April 2000, n.p.
- ⁵⁰ *ibid.*
- ⁵¹ Al-Manar, Prime Time News, 16 July 2006.
- ⁵² Beirut airport was re-named Hariri International airport after the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in February 2005.
- ⁵³ Robert Fisk, 'From My Home, I Saw What the "War on Terror" Meant', *The Independent*, 14 July 2006, n.p.
- ⁵⁴ Avi Jorisch attached a CD-ROM at the end of his book, *Beacon of Hatred: Inside Hizballah's Al-Manar Television* (Washington D.C.: Washington Institute of Near East Policy, 2004), containing what he called 'real al-Manar footage'.

⁵⁵ See Harb, *Channels of Resistance*, 222-223.

⁵⁶ Jorisch, *Beacon of Hatred*, xvi.

⁵⁷ Harb, *Channels of Resistance*, 223, 224.

⁵⁸ Al-Manar, 20-31 July 2006.

⁵⁹ Al-Manar, 21 July 2006.

⁶⁰ Al-Manar, 20-21 July 2006.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² Al-Manar 20-31 July 2006.

⁶³ Al-Manar, 16 July 2006.

⁶⁴ See Harb, *Channel's of Resistance*, chapter 6 and chapter 7 for full analysis of the pre-2000 Israeli occupation of south Lebanon.

⁶⁵ For further reference on the Qana massacre of 1996, see Harb's *Channels of Resistance*, Chapter Six.

⁶⁶ Al-Mismar, al-Manar, Prime Time News, 30 July 2006.

⁶⁷ See Harb, *Channels of Resistance*, 140-166.

⁶⁸ Al-Manar, 30-31 July 2006.

⁶⁹ See Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Vintage, 1965).

⁷⁰ David Wilseman, 'Nasrallah and the compromise and rehabilitation of Hizbullah's reputation', *Arab Media and Society Journal*, 2009, <http://arabmediasociety.org> (accessed 30 April 2012), 1.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, 4.

⁷² As was the case pre-2000: see Harb, *Channels of Resistance*, Chapter 7.

⁷³ Nasrallah gave an interview to the Lebanese daily *As-Safir* on 24 July 2006.

⁷⁴ Hassan Nasrallah, ‘Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah speech at the divine victory rally held in Beirut’, moqawama.org, 22 September 2006, <http://www.english.moqawama.org> (accessed 25 April 2012).

⁷⁵ See al-Manar, 24 July 2006.

⁷⁶ Dina Matar, ‘The Power of Conviction: Nasrallah Rhetoric and Mediated Charisma in the Context of the 2006 July War’, *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 1 (2008): 122-137 (130).

⁷⁷ Al-Hibariya is a village in south Lebanon, 110 kilometres south of Beirut. Its inhabitants are mostly Sunni Muslims.

⁷⁸ See Richard, Norton, *Hezbollah, A Short History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁷⁹ Al-Manar, 21 July 2006.

⁸⁰ Al-Manar 22 July 2006.

⁸¹ Nabatiya city is one of the largest cities in south Lebanon, 57 kilometres from Beirut.

⁸² Al-Manar, 25 July 2006.

⁸³ Hassan Nasrallah, al-Manar, 14 July 2006.

⁸⁴ Thanassis Cambanis, *A Privilege to Die: Inside Hezbollah’s Legions and Their Endless War Against Israel* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 5.

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