

Hizbullah's Post-Islamist Resistance Art

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Abstract

In post-Islamist phase, Hizbullah reformulated some of its central ideas and strategies. Its former top-down strategy of forcibly imposing an Islamic state against the will of significant parts of the Lebanese society has changed toward an integrative, bottom-up strategy, not only in politics but also in arts. Hizbullah's popular culture and lifestyles by discussing its 'resistance art.' Resistance art is ideologically motivated art, which aims at rectifying individuals and reforming society by portraying art as pious-moral productions that are in line with Islamic values, norms, and religious sensibilities. It is 'clean art' that portrays good deeds, as distinguished from bad deeds that characterize indecent or 'lowbrow art.' Resistance art deals with political and social issues as well as the themes of justice, *jihād*, sacrifice, and patriotism. Hizbullah exploits the concepts of cultural citizenship and cultural politics to encourage – in mixed gender spaces – purposeful performing arts: music, dancing, singing, revolutionary theatre, and satire. Probably, Hizbullah is the only post-Islamist party that has an orchestra of more than 100 musicians who play more than 44 instruments. Islam, as it is lived out by its followers, finds a necessary expression in social practices; it is the art form of bodily movement that is more controversial. Hizbullah appears to equate modernity with European art forms rather than indigenous forms. In short, in its ideology and politics, Hizbullah fluctuated between Islamism and post-Islamism. While in its performing arts, Hizbullah conveyed a post-Islamist face. Nevertheless, the party's post-Islamism remains inconsistent, selective, and pragmatic.

Keywords: Post-Islamism, Islamism, cultural citizenship, cultural politics, *infitāh* ('opening-up'), purposeful performing arts, resistance art, democracy

Introduction

The Lebanese resistance movement Hizbullah is infamous for its 'terrorist' global reach and militant face. With substantial backing from Syrian, its strategic ally, and Iran, its ideological ally, in the 1980s, Hizbullah's Islamism manifested itself in full bloom when it abducted Westerners in Lebanon and fought the Israeli army, till Israel withdrew its forces from Lebanon in 2000, after 22 years of occupation. Hizbullah reaped political capital and boosted its Pan-Arab and Pan-Islamic credentials as being the only guerrilla

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movement that forced Israel to withdraw and return occupied land, while regular Arab armies succumbed to Israeli's military might. In the wake of the 2011 Arab Uprisings, Hizbullah lost most of its accumulated pan-Arab and pan-Islamic capital since the Party was viewed as a sectarian movement aiding Shi'ites, irrespective if they were oppressors or oppressed. Hizbullah is fighting alongside the Syrian regime and lending logistical support to the Iraqi and Yemeni Shi'ite armed militias. A 'terrorist organization' in the eyes of the US, Israel, Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, and other Western countries, after almost four decades of its founding, Hizbullah succeeded in merging its domestic agenda with its regional ambitions, thus boosting its geopolitical role in the shaping of a new Middle East in the wake of the calamities and misfortunes brought about by the Arab Uprisings. So, how could such a radical Islamist organization have room for art and music, or what it calls the 'resistance art'?

2. Post-Islamism and Hizbullah's Ideology and Cultural Politics

Arguing along the lines of Asef Bayat, Olivier Roy, Farhad Khosrokhavar, Gilles Kepel, Peter Mandaville, Amel Boubekeur, and others, the researcher would like to point a general tendency of a gradual transition from Islamism to post-Islamism, from the 'old' to the 'new,' from *al-hala al-Islamiyyah* (Islamic religio-political sphere) to *al-saha al-Islamiyyah* (Islamic cultural sphere).¹ These authors traced this development through the particular case studies of Egypt, Iran, France, and the UK focusing on political openness (*infitāh*). I have analyzed similar trends and tendencies in Lebanon in Hizbullah's Islamic cultural sphere when it comes to culture, art production, and the performing arts.

Asef Bayat revised, updated, and upgraded his theory of post-Islamism.² Noteworthy, Bayat coined the term 'post-Islamism' as early as 1996 and distinguished himself from other scholars, who later on employed the concept, but apparently with different connotations.³ According to Bayat, post-Islamism represents in the first place a *condition*, a social and political one, in which the appeal and the sources for legitimacy of Islamist politics get exhausted after a phase of experimentation. The adherents become

¹Asef Bayat, "The Coming of a Post-Islamist Society," *Critique: Critical Middle East Studies*, no. 9 (Fall 1996): 43-52; Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 10-13; Asef Bayat, ed., *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7-9, 25-32; Olivier Roy, "Le Post-Islamisme/The Post-Islamism," *Revue du Monde Musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, no. 85-86 (1999): 11-30; Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam. The Search for a New Ummah*. Revised and updated edition (London: Hurst and Company, 2004), 58-99; Farhad Khosrokhavar, "Le Hezbollah, de la Société Révolutionnaire à la Société Post Islamiste/The Hizbullah: From a Revolutionary Society to a Post-Islamist Society," *CURAPP, Passions et Sciences Humaines*, PUF, (2000): 129-144; Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trial of Political Islam*. Translated by Anthony F. Roberts (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2002), 368; Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 343-348; Amel Boubekeur, "Post-Islamist Culture: A New Form of mobilization?" *History of Religions* 47, no.1 (2007): 75-94.

²Bayat, ed., *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*.

³Bayat, "Post-Islamist Society," 43-52.

aware of the anomalies and shortcomings of their system while attempting to moderate and institutionalize their movement. Post-Islamism is also a *project* representing a conscious attempt to transcend Islamism in social, political, and intellectual domains. Thus, it is an endeavour in overturning the underlying singular authoritative voice of Islamism and replacing it with a plurality of voices of authority, i.e. “emphasizing rights instead of duties; historicity rather than fixed Holy Scriptures; freedom instead of rigidity; and the future instead of the past.”⁴ Yet, it is neither anti-Islamic nor un-Islamic or secular; rather, it is an undertaking to fuse “religiosity and rights, Islam and liberty, faith and freedom.”⁵ The ideology of the Islamic social movement becomes plural in this state, not basing itself solely on Islam, but becoming capable of including other (secular) ideas and denominations. Bayat adds that post-Islamism “wants to marry Islam with individual choice and freedom (albeit at varying degrees), with democracy and modernity, to achieve what some have termed an ‘alternative modernity.’ Post-Islamism is expressed in acknowledging secular exigencies, in freedom from rigidity, in breaking down the monopoly of religious truth...post-Islamism emphasizes religiosity and rights...it accords an active role for religion in the public sphere.”⁶

Along the same lines, Rik Pinxten – a professor in cultural anthropology at Ghent University – demonstrates that art contributes to the dissemination of democracy and promotes democratic thinking. He argues that people ought to buttress a democratic society, which recognizes the diversity of its population, so that they can freely and skilfully express their own cultural identity and thus contribute towards enhancing the overall cultural sphere.⁷ Within Pinxten’s and Bayat’s post-Islamist model in art,⁸ Amel Boubekeur highlighted the important role art plays for politically engaged Muslims. She writes, “Today art is a profession possessed of a genuine force of mobilization; its politically engaged dimension has become an intrinsic part of the ethic of peace and justice in Islam.”⁹

The author’s interviewees from Hizbullah’s rank and file defined Islamists as fervent Muslim believers or pious (religious) youth, and Islamism as religiosity and strict adherence to the divine laws. They defined post-Islamism as a process of *infitāh*, or opening-up to global cultural trends while preserving indigenous values as an Islamic moral alternative.

⁴Bayat, ed., *Post-Islamism*, 8.

⁵Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, 10-13.

⁶*Ibid.*, 17-21.

⁷Rik Pinxten, *De artistieke samenleving, De invloed van kunst op de democratie/The Artistic Society: the Influence of Art on (the propagation) of Democracy* (Antwerpen: Uitgeverij Houtekiet, 2003).

⁸Asef Bayat, “Islamism and Social Movement Theory,” *Third World Quarterly* 26, no.6 (2005): 896-904.

⁹Boubekeur, “Post-Islamist Culture,” 90. Based on fieldwork, interviews, and discourses, I can fairly claim that Hizbullah embraces this dimension of art, as my interviewees repeatedly iterated and stressed.

In particular, Member of Parliament (MP) 'Ali Fayyad construes Hizbullah's opening-up (*infitāh*) as a tenet of post-Islamism. He told me that post-Islamism amounts to "the reconciliation of the Islamic vision (Hizbullah's vision) with the necessity of communication, *infitāh*, moderation (*wasatiyyah*), modernity, democracy, and reality or *realpolitik*."¹⁰ Fayyad adds, "the Islamists became less ideological and more political. Their views on power, authority, and governing shifted from crude ideology towards intellectually practical thinking, which is more open to the overall societal, cultural, political interest, while preserving religious safeguards (*al-Dawābit al-shar'īyyah*) and prohibitions." Fayyad attributes this line of thinking to the insights and impact of Habermas's theory of communicative action on the Arab and Islamic world. Moreover, Fayyad interprets the party's *infitāh* along these lines, in the sense that the Party had to 'reinvent' itself based on Hizbullah's second Secretary General Sayyid 'Abbas al-Musawi's vision of *infitāh*. From this perspective, according to Fayyad, Hizbullah's post-Islamism began in the early 1990s through its policy of *infitāh*.¹¹ *Infitāh* started on a small scale when Hizbullah began to voice the grievances of the Lebanese subaltern classes, irrespective of their religious or political leanings. This amounts to a complete overhaul in Hizbullah's political strategy in the 1980s, which mainly targeted its Shi'ite constituency, to the exception of others.

How post-Islamist, then, Hizbullah has become, if at all? Is Hizbullah on a trajectory of post-Islamism, or is its *infitāh* ('opening-up') to be understood, as Mandaville characterized, as a bottom-up Islamization in disguise?¹² How does this thinking comport with Hizbullah's views on the performing arts?

3. Hizbullah's Post-Islamist Shifts: Cultural Politics and Social Practices

Bayat argues that although post-Islamist experiences may differ, "they all point to some shift in vision... post-Islamism denotes a critical discursive departure or pragmatic exit, albeit in diverse degrees, from an Islamist ideological package characterized broadly by monopoly of religious truth, exclusivism, and emphasis on obligations, toward acknowledging ambiguity, multiplicity, inclusion, and flexibility in principles and practice."¹³ To what extent does Hizbullah exemplify that?

Hizbullah believes that cultural politics does not only mean integration in the political system by contesting legislature and municipal elections and joining the council of ministers (the main executive body in Lebanon), but that artistic production could also be viewed as a medium, as a public space for politicization and struggle. The prominent feature of cultural politics is the exercise of power within the institutional and

¹⁰Fayyad is one of Hizbullah's leading intellectuals. He is a professor of sociology at the Lebanese University, the ex-director of the Party's thinktank Consultative Centre of Studies and Documentation (CCSD), and the drafter of the first part of the Hizbullah's 2009 Manifesto.

¹¹Personal Interview, 14th May 2012.

¹²Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, 343-8.

¹³Bayat, ed., *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*, 25.

constitutional structures of the state, which may hinder or place limitations and restrictions on social actions and cultural practices of marginalized groups. From its understanding of cultural citizenship, Hizbullah clarifies that it aims at elevating the plight of the oppressed Shi'ite masses to achieve balanced development on par with the other privileged groups that make up the 18 ethno-confessional communities in Lebanon. Thus, in its generic sense, Hizbullah views cultural citizenship as a means to rid the community of its historic social injustice, alienation, exploitation, and marginalization by making their subaltern voices heard. Not only in their quest for more equitable representation and better access to the resources of the state, but also in their struggle to boost their cultural capital¹⁴ by exercising cultural resilience for the aim of obtaining empowerment (*tamkīn*) in the long run.¹⁵

Hizbullah has embarked on altering the plight of the Lebanese Shi'ites from being marginalized and oppressed, to being empowered, not only in politics but also in culture and public spaces. In addition to its integration in the Lebanese public sphere, when the party rose to fame, it resorted to the 'collective language' of art and music in order to convey its cultural face through purposeful art or 'resistance art.'

4. Hizbullah's Post-Islamist Trends: From Violence to Art

In conformity with its realist policy to change as circumstances themselves change, it is important to keep in mind that Hizbullah is not monolithic. The party's internal structure allows it to operate on a number of levels. Hizbullah is a sophisticated, complex, multifaceted, multi-layered organization, composed of at least four main divisions: (1) the 'military wing': the *jihadi* and 'terrorist' branch; (2) the social services, NGOs, and civil institutions branch; (3) the 'political wing' branch; (4) the cultural politics branch or 'resistance art.'¹⁶

The author has highlighted the latter – cultural politics or 'resistance art' – since it is neglected by many researchers who stress militancy and military aspects at the expense of other branches. Nevertheless, Hizbullah tries to convey that its four divisions are complimentary and function in "perfect harmony" in line with the party's holistic vision of founding a better and just society.

¹⁴According to Bourdieu, cultural capital refers mainly to education, culture, and related skills. Cultural resilience is a currency of social capital and networking, Pierre Bourdieu, "Genèse et structure du champ religieux/Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field," *Revue française de Sociologie*, no. 12 (1971): 295-334.

¹⁵Personal Interview with MP Nawwaf al-Musawi, Hizbullah's leading philosopher and humanist intellectual, 19th October 2009.

¹⁶Joseph Alagha, *Hizbullah's Identity Construction* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 185; Joseph Alagha, *Hizbullah's DNA and the Arab Spring* (New Delhi: Knowledge World Publishers, 2013), 226-227.

The rapid evolution of Hizbullah from a marginal splinter group to a dominant group in national and international politics enhanced its representation of cultural and artistic productions by giving them more weight and visibility in public space. Hizbullah embarked on altering the plight of the Lebanese Shi'ites from being marginalized and oppressed to being empowered, not only in politics but also in culture and public spaces. In addition to its integration in the Lebanese public sphere, when the party rose to fame, Hizbullah resorted to art in order to convey its cultural face. It propagates and encourages 'art with a mission,' 'purposeful art' or 'resistance art' (mobilization art). In line with the Iranian Spiritual leader Imam 'Ali Khamina'i – who is also Hizbullah's religious authority (*marja'*) – Hizbullah believes that art is the most eloquent and effective means of Islamic propagation.¹⁷ This forms the crux of the party's justification of purposeful art or, in the context of Hizbullah, resistance art.

5. Hizbullah's Artistic Expressions

Contrary to what most people expect when they think of Iran and Hizbullah, they are not that strict in their views on art. They have a way of reasoning, which allows for contextual interpretation. Hizbullah has moved from a more closed interpretation to what can be called a post-Islamist understanding of purposeful art or resistance art. So, they have quite some art practices that deal with: work, leisure, music, theatre, comedy or satire, and dance. Yet, they have very specific forms of art and very specific discourses on art: that it should have a purpose and advance the goals of the movement, i.e., mobilization art, purposeful art or resistance art. As such, it became the religious duty of every Hizbullah member to 'tame' (hone) a musical instrument, on par with mastering the art of war.

Concerning post-Islamist trends in popular culture and lifestyles, Hizbullah employs 'soft power' in its artistic social practices, which are viewed as aesthetics of pious arts. Indeed, Hizbullah is a strong supporter of resistance art and promotes it through specialized NGOs: (1) *Risalat*: "The Lebanese Association of Arts" that is concerned with performing arts; and (2) *Ibda* ('Creativity') that deals with plastic arts.

Founded in 2003, *Risalat* is a subsidiary non-profit organization of Hizbullah's Cultural Unit. It promotes purposeful art as an expression of the 'culture of resistance,' mainly through its audio-visual productions, as its reason d'être statement stipulates. Its aims are to disseminate the purposeful culture of arts and the media to all segments of society; perform different genres of theatrical, music, artistic, and cultural activities; hold artistic, cultural fairs and exhibitions. In 2005, *Risalat* received its license from the

¹⁷Imam 'Ali Khamina'i, *Al-Fann Al-Islami 'inda Al-Imam Al-Qa'id/Islamic Art According to Imam Khamina'i*, Compiled by Muhammad Salar, the cultural attaché of the Islamic Republic in Lebanon (Beirut: Dar Al-Mahajja al-Bayda, 2009), 6, 9, 27, 50, 83. Reiterated in personal interviews with Shaykh 'Ali Daher and Muhammad Imadeddine Kawtharini, respectively the president and vice-president of Hizbullah's Cultural Unit, 7th of August 2009.

Lebanese government and it was registered in the Ministry of Interior under number 295/AD, as published in the Official Gazette. *Risalat* implemented its three year strategic plan (2009-2012) and it embarked on a five-year plan aimed at disseminating and promoting 'committed Islamic culture' through resistance art in the Islamic cultural sphere.¹⁸ Most shows are performed at the *Risalat Theater* in the cultural centre of Hizbullah's stronghold of southern Beirut.¹⁹

Ibda ('Creativity') is also located in southern Beirut. Founded in 2011, *Ibda* adopts Immanuel Kant's motto that 'Art is Humanity.' Poet 'Ali 'Abbas, the president of 'Creativity,' is responsible for mobilizing the masses and enflaming them with vigilance on key public occasions. Beside mobilizing the constituency and the youth to participate in purposeful activities, the objectives of *Ibda* are the following: discover, encourage, and develop artistic talents through educational, cultural, and intellectual workshops and orientations; hold artistic and literature oriented lectures, seminars, and conferences in order to encourage talents and polish skills among the youth so that they will be productive and benefit from their interaction with professionals and veterans in the field; uphold cultural goods and artefacts, promote literary and artistic heritage, and encourage creative initiatives; establish clubs, literary salons, publishing houses, and public libraries as well as publish books, brochures, magazines, and promotional material that reflects and promotes the work of *Ibda*; cooperate with domestic, regional, and international associations as well as local governmental institutions in order to disseminate the culture of art, literature, and knowledge.²⁰

Following the logic and line of reasoning of Pinxten,²¹ Boubekur,²² and Bayat (2007c),²³ namely, that mobilizational-purposeful art contributes to the dissemination of democracy and promotes democratic thinking, Hizbullah seems to support a democratic society –an 'alternative modernity,' which recognizes the diversity of its population, so that they can freely and skilfully express their own cultural identity, and thus contribute to enhancing the overall cultural sphere. Within these parameters, Hizbullah acknowledges the importance of cultural politics, which helps it to promote its post-Islamist face. The party has founded three institutional centres that deal with cultural productions and artistic performances, which are headed by three leading *Shaykhs*: *Shaykh* Akram Barakat, the director of the *Cultural Islamic Al-Ma'arif Association*; *Shaykh* 'Ali Daher, the director of Hizbullah's Cultural Unit; and *Shaykh* Shafiq Jaradi, the Rector of *Al-Ma'arif Al-Hikmiyya College*, whom I have interviewed.

¹⁸Personal Interview with vice-president of *Risalat* Muhammad Kawtharani, 6th of August 2013.

¹⁹Last modified August14, 2014, <http://www.lkdg.org/node/602>.

²⁰Last modified August14, 2014,

<http://www.neswacafe.com/news.php?go=fullnews&newsid=1123>; <http://www.lkdg.org/node/67>.

²¹Pinxten, *De artistieke samenleving*.

²²Boubekur, "Post-Islamist Culture,"

²³Asef Bayat, "Islamism and the Politics of Fun," *Public Culture* 19, no. 3 (2007): 433-460.

Hizbullah rejects the notion of 'art for the sake of art' or 'art unto itself,' and employs a specific genre of Islamic art commonly referred to as 'art with a purpose,' 'art with a noble mission,' or 'resistance art.' Resistance art deals with political and social issues as well as the themes of justice, jihad, sacrifice, and patriotism. Resistance art is 'clean art' that portrays good deeds, as distinguished from bad deeds that characterize indecent or 'lowbrow art.' Thus, in line with Pinxten, Hizbullah believes that art promotes democratic thinking.

Resistance art is also disseminated in Hizbullah's weekly newspaper *al-Intiqād*, its "unofficial"²⁴ mouthpiece the daily newspaper *al-Akhbār*, and media institutions such as *al-Nour* satellite radio, *al-Manar* satellite TV, and the 'unofficial' *al-Mayadeen* satellite TV²⁵ and uses social media effectively: twitter; YouTube; facebook; etc. While the Amsterdam National Orchestra has 80 musicians, to researchers' knowledge Hizbullah is the only Islamic party that has an orchestra of more than 100 musicians who play more than 44 instruments.²⁶ Many Islamists – such as the Taliban and ISIL – classify these as "instruments of the Devil."²⁷ Resistance art legitimizes using the mosque as a medium to disseminate revolutionary songs, hymns and anthems. Noteworthy, Imam 'Ali Khamina'i allows chanting religious or revolutionary anthems (*anashīd*), with musical instruments, at the mosque, as long as they do not interfere with the duty of prayer.²⁸ Hizbullah encourages *jihad* through music as a mobilization technique of purposeful or resistance art.²⁹

6. Post-Islamism in Art: 'The Politics of Fun' or 'Pious Entertainment'

Which artistic practices are sanctioned by Hizbullah that promote fun and entertainment? The three *Shaykhs* of Hizbullah's cultural politics institutions strongly argue that resistance art contributes to polishing human abilities. They consider leisure activities, which promote 'pious entertainment' or 'fun,' important to the perpetuating of

²⁴By 'unofficial,' I mean not overtly acknowledged by the party.

²⁵A joint venture between former *al-Manar* director Nayef Krayyem and former *al-Jazeera* icon Ghassan Bin Jiddo gave birth to *al-Mayadeen*, Hizbullah's second affiliated satellite TV station: <http://www.almayadeen.net/>. *Al-Mayadeen* was founded in Beirut on 11 June 2012, while *al-Manar* was established on 3 June 1991. The name *al-Mayadeen* ("The Squares") might be reminiscent of the late Fouad Ajami's 'Public Square' argument although his ideological leanings are diametrically opposed to those of *al-Mayadeen*. *Al-Mayadeen*'s motto is 'Reality as it is'.

²⁶Such as the Violin, Countabass, Cello, Basson, Clarinet, Flute, Piccolo, Piano, Trumpet, Trombone, French horn, Tuba, Saxophone Alto, Saxophone Tenor, Percussion, Drums, Conga (*tumbadora*), Bass Drum, Cymbals, Timpani, the Xylophone, Keyboard, Percussions, Oboe, and Viola.

²⁷Based on their interpretation of the *Hadiths* (Muhammad b. Ismail Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*: Book no. 15, Hadiths no. 70 and 72; Book no. 58, Hadith no. 268; Muslim b Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*, Book no. 4, Hadith no. 1942; Book no. 024, Hadith no. 5279.

²⁸Khamina'i, *Al-Fann Al-Islami*, 83.

²⁹Joseph Alagha, "Jihad through Music: Hizbullah and the Taliban," *Performing Islam* 1, no. 2 (2012): 263-289.

a self-confident, industrious, and productive human being.³⁰ The party's deputy Secretary General, *Shaykh* Na'im Qasim adds that resistance art is sanctioned in its capacity as a purposeful mobilizational tool; as such, it is highly recommended as a cultural leisure activity.³¹ Hizbullah's *Shaykh* Akram Barakat argues that Shi'ite traditions encourage the pursuit of 'purposeful fun' and leisure activities within the domain of certain religious safeguards. According to him, art, performance, and dancing are not in themselves *haram*. Further, things that were previously *haram* could become *halal* and vice versa. In other words, prohibition or sanctioning has to do with the variables of time, place, and environment. What has to be kept in mind, is the aim, goal and purpose. From here stems the justification of purposeful art or resistance art. In line with Imam Khamina'i,³² Barakat argues that Islam calls for progress in all domains: reform in art elevates human worth and values. As such, the basis of Shi'ite jurisprudence is the call for innovation and modernity in order to be up-to-date with all aspects of life. God does not judge solely on the basis of the results, rather the intentions. This notion leaves room for jurisprudential innovations, which allow certain artistic practices that were once prohibited to become sanctioned and recommended. For instance, earlier Shi'ite jurists banned chess because it was used as an instrument of gambling. When its usage changed to an intellectual tool that promotes critical thinking, the ruling changed from prohibition (*haram*) to sanctioning (*halal*).³³

Although Ghalib Abu Zaynab – the party's officer for Muslim-Christian dialogue – stresses that resistance art expresses the will of society and addresses people's sensibilities and emotions,³⁴ the serious practical problem of gender mixing threatened to encroach upon Hizbullah's religious sensibilities. Intensive deliberations among Hizbullah's leading cadres resulted in sanctioning this social practice within the narrow confines of pious entertainment. For Hizbullah to approve gender mixing, public performance, and acting and dancing on stage during the occasion of the birth of Imam al-Mahdi, a heated debate among the three heads of Hizbullah's cultural politics institutions ensued. The deliberations centred over the legitimacy of this social practice, and what are the religious prohibitions (*al-mahazir al-shar'iyya*) that ought to be taken into account. Hizbullah's Deputy Security General *Shaykh* Na'im Qasim along with *Shaykh* Muhammad Yazbik, head of the Religio-Judicial Council were asked to pass judgment and they ruled in favour.³⁵ Thus, Hizbullah was able to cater to the religious sensibilities of its constituency by sanctioning the mixing of the sexes in artistic productions, in spite of the religious prohibitions that usually bar many Islamists and

³⁰Interviews with author, August 2009.

³¹Fadi 'Abbas, *Zaman Al-Intisarat/Days of Victory* (Beirut: Dar Al-Hadi, 2009), 6-7.

³²Imam 'Ali Khamina'i, *Ajwibat Al-Istifta'at/Answers to Questions*. Second Part (Beirut: Dar Al-Mahajja al-Bayda', 2004), 16-51.

³³Interview with author, 5th August 2013.

³⁴Interview with author, 10th August 2009.

³⁵Interview with Muhammad Kawtharani, 20th January 2010.

Islamic movements from engaging in such cultural activities. In short, Hizbullah relates interest to reform, resistance, mobilization, and political struggle. For that reason, the party considers purposeful art as 'resistance art.'

Asef Bayat explains and conceptualizes this behaviour in relation to fun. Bayat has argued that Islamists have problems with amusement, entertainment, and fun, even in what they label as 'controlled fun' or 'pious fun' because: "Fun disturbs exclusivist doctrinal authority because, as a source of instantaneous fulfilment, it represents a powerful rival archetype, one that stands against discipline, rigid structures, single discourse, and monopoly of truth. It subsists on spontaneity and breaths in the air of flexibility, openness, and critique — the very ethics that clash with the rigid one-dimensional discourse of doctrinal authority."³⁶

It seems that Hizbullah is one of the notable exceptions to this way of reason. The party justifies this reasoning by recourse to Shi'ite jurisprudence. In line with the Shi'a traditions, Hizbullah enjoins the pursuit of 'purposeful fun' within the domain of certain religious safeguards; to the extent of arguing that Islam sanctions fun and enjoins disseminating happiness in the hearts of the believers, providing for those who do so a great remuneration in heaven, as Moses, the Prophet, the fifth Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, and the sixth Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq had admonished.³⁷

7. Hizbullah as a Counter-Public

The head of Hizbullah's educational unit MP 'Ali Fayyad clarifies that Hizbullah sanctions 'fun' or pious entertainment, but not seduction (*ighwa*) and debaucheries. He adds that any artistic expression or performance that leads to negative relaxation or idleness (*istirkha*) is condemned; while the one that leads to positive vigilance (*hamas*) is praised. According to Fayyad, the party sanctions mixing of the sexes in artistic productions within the domain of the religious prohibitions and safeguards; which cater to the religious sensibilities of the audience.³⁸ Thus, Hizbullah is a 'counter-public' to other Islamic movements, which confine women to the private sphere and prohibit them from mixing (*ikhtilāt*), even for the noble purpose of resistance art.

Hizbullah's cultural politics goes beyond the Islamic cultural sphere by portraying the party's resistance art as a 'counter-public' to other Islamic movements who confine women to the private sphere of the family out of fear of encroaching upon the religious safeguards, prohibitions, and sensitivities that govern an Islamist society. In this regard, Hizbullah portrays its post-Islamist face. While Islamists are concerned with religiosity and strict adherence to the laws, Hizbullah observes these, but transcends them by pursuing a policy of opening-up (*infitāh*) to global cultural trends while preserving

³⁶Bayat, "Islamism and the Politics of Fun," 457.

³⁷Cultural Islamic al-Ma'arif Association, 6-7.

³⁸Personal interview, 6th October 2009.

indigenous values as an Islamic moral alternative. Bayat stresses that post-Islamism “accords an active role for religion in the public sphere.”³⁹ He adds:

Post-Islamism does not emerge out of nowhere; it builds against a historical backdrop... And today, in a radically different age of globalization, we seem to be entering a new era in the Muslim world where Islamism—stricken by a legitimacy crisis for ignoring and violating people’s democratic rights—is giving way to a different kind of religious polity that takes democracy seriously while wishing to promote **pious sensibilities** in society. Ours seems to herald the coming of a post-Islamist Muslim world, in which the prevailing popular movements assume a postideological, civil, and democratic character.⁴⁰ (Emphasis mine)

“Pious sensibilities” is a key term that I would like to emphasize. Following Hirschkind, I employ counter-public ‘to interrogate a set of discursive practices founded on the very different conceptual articulation of the public than that provided by the liberal-democratic traditions.’”⁴¹ According to Hirschkind, counter-public “rests upon a conceptual edifice in which deliberation and discipline, or language and power, are regarded as thoroughly interdependent... the disciplining power of ethical speech... rests...in pious dispositions, the embodied sensibilities and modes of expression understood to facilitate the development and practice of Islamic virtues, and therefore of Islamic ethical component.”⁴²

Thus, the elements of the counter-public are aesthetics, sensibilities, and “sensorium” and “modes of appraisal,” which create conditions for ethical-political listening and the moral disciplining of the body in popular culture as manifestations of soft power. (Hirschkind clarifies that the sensorium pertains to the sensibilities, affects, and embodied dispositions or perpetual habits). This seems to be Hizbullah’s strategy: by a special blend of agency and empowerment (*tamkīn*), interpreted along Islamic lines,⁴³ Hizbullah emerges as a counter-public to other Islamic movements, precisely because of its different stance on mixing, the displaying of the female body through “balanced movements” (*harakat-i mewzun*), and performance in public space. This elevates Hizbullah’s post-Islamist credentials.

8. Gender Mixing (*Ikhṭilāt*) and Performance in Public Space

Hizbullah is a counter-public to other Islamic movements who reject the distraction of music, theatre, and performance and aim at eradicating “places of pleasure and leisure” such as “cafés, video and dance clubs, cinemas and certain sports clubs.”⁴⁴ Although Hizbullah and other Islamic movements portray sensitivity towards what they

³⁹Bayat, ed., *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam Post-Islamism*, 8.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 30.

⁴¹Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 232.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 106-108.

⁴³*Qur’ān*: al-Qasas 28:5-6.

⁴⁴Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 80-81.

consider as 'the corrupting influence of Western Culture,' Hizbullah does not hesitate to engage in gender mixing in acting and revolutionary theatre on stage. Like other parts of Lebanon, café culture is booming in Hizbullah's constituencies, but with observance to Muslim sensibilities that require a certain dress code and food specificity, which should be religiously sanctioned (*halal*), thus alcohol and pork free.

Hizbullah's resistance art offers "consumable beauty, leisure, and well-being. Importantly, a population of militants is transformed into one of consumers and clients. From now on it is necessary to seduce one's public, to propose one's services through leisure... and mobilization around politically engaged art...[in order] to promote the emergence of new generations through the ethic of a 'conscious Islam'."⁴⁵ Hizbullah accords leisure activities a prominent role. Leisure time is meant to be the time in which one has no longer any social, religious and business duties. Even this free time is supposed to be refined from any deviation or any prohibited immoral deeds. In Islam extravagance is rejected because God asks man to be moderate in his needs. That is why Hizbullah encourages its followers to engage in purposeful art, resistance art, and pious entertainment, to the exception of all other forms of purposeless leisure and pastime.

As mentioned above, Hizbullah is the only Islamic party that has an orchestra of more than 100 musicians who play more than 44 instruments, while militant *Sunni* Islamists regard these as instruments of Satan. By this, Hizbullah succeeded in creating 'Islamized spaces' or 'alternative' spaces in order to practice and promote 'pious entertainment' and leisure activities. Thus, for Hizbullah, performance is viewed as a counter cultural identity against other Islamic movements' reading of the 'return to Islam,' which bars performance altogether as 'un-Islamic.'

Unlike most Islamic movements which confine women to private spaces, as a counter-public to these, Hizbullah accords women a prominent role in the public sphere and regards them as valuable assets who are becoming more visible in contesting the public space with other actors, and even dominating it in some instances. After all, a tangible number of the workforce in Hizbullah's media institutions and a predominant number of the party's educational institutions, are run by women. Moreover, Hizbullah has its own women music band (*Firqat al-Wilaya al-Nisa'iyya*). Hizbullah's women play musical instruments, sing, and perform on stage with other men and children for the noble purpose of revolutionary theatre as articulated by resistance art, within the domain of jurisprudential stipulations and religious safeguards (*al-mahadhir al-shar'iyya*). Nevertheless, a clarification needs to be made in the way Hizbullah consumes this popular culture. Upholding the "religiously sanctioned public space" (*al-masafa al-shar'iyya*) precludes gender mixing in the same music band. Thus, in order to respect pious sensibilities, the party's leadership resorted to the option of creating female bands, which might perform on the same stage with male bands, but at a distance that honours

⁴⁵Boubekeur, "Post-Islamist Culture," 91.

both *al-masafa al-shar'iyyah* and “balanced movements,” i.e., the sensitivity of the displaying the female body on stage must be in accordance with both. This is not observed in revolutionary theatre, where *ikhtilāt* is sanctioned allowing men, women and children to act and interact on stage (even if they are not *mahram*)⁴⁶ for the noble goal of resistance art or purposeful art. Thus, Hizbullah – as post-Islamist movement – is a counter-public to other Islamic movements who consider acting and dancing on stage as well as gender mixing as abominations, or taboos, which are contrary to religious sensibilities and norms.

9. Final Words

Asef Bayat argues that Islamism and post-Islamism could be juxtaposed; could exist side by side in the same social movement. This is not schizophrenia, but rather a measure of *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi* dictated by the dynamics of a world in incessant flux. In its post-Islamist trajectory, Hizbullah has indeed reformulated some of its central ideas and strategies. In response to the Lebanese national context, the country's multi-religious realities, and the new post-civil-war-possibilities of successfully operating within a democratic system, prompted Hizbullah to integrate into the Lebanese political system and public sphere. In its politics and ideology, Hizbullah oscillates between Islamism and post-Islamism, while its cultural politics demonstrates more its post-Islamism in arts. Bayat uses the term ‘post-Islamism’ to describe “a break from [the] Islamist paradigm.”⁴⁷ Islamism deploys a religious language, favours conservative social mores, espouses a patriarchal disposition, places emphasis on individual duties, shows intolerance toward different ideas and lifestyles, and, on a general note, strives to establish an Islamic state based on *shari'a* law.⁴⁸ Post-Islamism, by contrast, represents a transformation of and a critical departure from Islamism.⁴⁹ Bayat conceptualizes the term as a *project* and a *condition* wherein religiosity and faith merge with freedom, liberty, and civil rights; post-Islamism aspires to a pious society within a democratic state. In other words, the term stands for the conscious attempt to establish a new rationale that emphasizes rights over duties, plurality over singularity, individual freedom and choice over authoritarianism, and, moreover, acknowledges secular exigencies.⁵⁰ Hizbullah's shifts between Islamism and post-Islamism are conceptually warranted in Bayat's theory. Islamism and post-Islamism are conceptual constructs or categories that:

signify change, difference, and the root of change. In the real world, however, many Muslim individuals or groups [Hizbullah] may adhere eclectically and simultaneously to aspects of both discourses. The advent of post-Islamism, as a real trend, should not be seen necessarily as the historical end of Islamism. It should be seen as the birth, out of a critical departure from Islamist experience, of a qualitatively different discourse and politics. In reality we may witness the

⁴⁶A male non-marriable close relative.

⁴⁷Asef Bayat, ed., *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam Post-Islamism*, 25.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 4, 29.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 8.

simultaneous operation of both Islamism and post-Islamism... post-Islamism may be understood as a critical departure from Islamist politics. It describes transcending from the duty-centered and exclusive Islamist politics toward a more rights-centered and inclusive outlook that favors a civil/secular state operating within a pious society. [As Hizbullah exemplifies,] Post-Islamism may take the form of a critique of the Islamist self or of the Islamism that others embrace; it may historically come after Islamism or may operate simultaneously alongside of it; it may be observed in contemporary times or in the past.⁵¹

10. Conclusion

Hizbullah's post-Islamist cultural face is portrayed through promoting ideologically motivated art or 'resistance art.' Hizbullah argued that the Islamic Law, as a socially constructed phenomenon, is flexible and pragmatic to the extent of accounting for the complicities of modern life, including performing art. Hizbullah stresses the mobilizational role of art by promoting resistance art and gender mixing. The party does exploit certain forms of performing art, especially music and zealous theatrical plays, as effective means of mobilization. Hizbullah encourages *jihād* through music as a mobilization technique of purposeful or resistance art. Hizbullah stresses the need for leisure time and recreational activities since these are vital to man's well-being and productivity. Hizbullah's call in the realm of culture and art is to fill people's leisure time with purposeful artistic activities that promote high ethical stands that are conducive to elevating the moral worth of man.

Thus, not only in politics, but also in art, Hizbullah remoulded, constructed, and interpreted its authority in such a way to render legitimacy to its participation in a pluralist public space contested by many actors. Hizbullah's metamorphosis could be attributed to changed historical and social circumstances, and more importantly, to the results of interactions with other political actors. Thus, the objective, sociological and political reality of Lebanon compelled this originally-Islamist movement into the post-Islamist path, even though such post-Islamism remains inconsistent, selective and pragmatic. Although post-Islamist experiences may differ, "they all point to some shift in vision...post-Islamism denotes a critical discursive departure or pragmatic exit, albeit in diverse degrees, from an Islamist ideological package characterized broadly by monopoly of religious truth, exclusivism, and emphasis on obligations, toward acknowledging ambiguity, multiplicity, inclusion, and flexibility in principles and practice."⁵²

By embracing the Kantian notion of "art is humanity" and adopting Pinxten's argument –that art contributes to the dissemination of democracy and that it promotes democratic thinking – Hizbullah combines democracy and modernity, thus promoting an "alternative modernity", which is grounded in orchestral music, revolutionary theatre, purposeful singing and dancing, gender mixing, and "controlled fun" or pious entertainment, all within the narrow confines and norms of pious sensibilities. Thus, in

⁵¹Ibid., 29.

⁵²Ibid., 25.

arts in general, and in resistance art in particular, Hizbullah seems to be a post-Islamist movement because it appears to equate modernity with European art forms rather than the indigenous forms.

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