

# Women's Role in the Islamic Resistance media in Lebanon

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**Abstract:** Lebanon has been considered a sample of Europe in the Middle East, and it is surprising to have an Islamic resistance against Israel in this small modern country. The Islamic Resistance was, at the beginning, portrayed as having a very different ideology from that of the neighboring countries of the Middle East. This Resistance was established on the basis of being a resistance model for the free world, especially the Palestinians; women were the main partners in the resistance especially in the media. Therefore, the resistance established three media forms: radio, television, and newspaper, to work simultaneously with military resistance operations. This could not have been achieved without the Lebanese women's support. Women in resistance media had a role of sustaining the resistance when no one could help. In this article the focus is on this role after it has being found out that there is not much study done about it, so we chose this topic to highlight the importance of women in this field. In a country like Lebanon, the appearance of veiled women on TV, was an opportunity to show that the veil is not an obstacle to be active.

The article goes back to the history of Lebanon and has spoken about the many resistance movements experienced in the Arab world showing the role of women in these movements, with details about the role of women in the Lebanese resistance and its media. Women's participation in the Islamic resistance was an important step forward in facing the Israeli aggressions against Lebanon to reach victory.

Developing a specialized media for the resistance was an important step forward; first, in facing the Israeli as well as international media in which women were the role models, and second, in showing the people of the region with different ideologies the right side of the resistance, therefore winning acceptance and respect for Islam and for Hijab.

**Key words:** Middle East, Lebanon, Resistance Media, Women.

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## **Introduction**

Throughout the history, resistance groups worked on their own propaganda in order to reveal their reasons and rights for resisting. In Lebanon, the Islamic Resistance was, at the beginning, portrayed as having a very different ideology from that of the neighboring countries of the Middle East and North African (MENA) region, making the Islamic Resistance goals incomprehensible. The Islamic Resistance was established on the basis of being a resistance model for the free world, especially the Palestinians; therefore, it established three media forms: radio, television, and newspaper, to work simultaneously with military resistance operations. The Resistance televised media, called "Al-Manar TV," was launched in 1991 as a local TV and began influencing the local Lebanese community, especially after the Resistance had two military battles against Israeli army in 1993 and 1996. In the year 2000, and after Al-Manar TV was aired internationally through satellite; the true image of the Resistance was beginning to be revealed to the MENA region. During the July War in the year 2006, Al-Manar TV had become a source of information. They used video clips, flashes, live images of operations (portraying the defeat of the Israeli army), and most importantly, the speeches of its Secretary General Sayyed Nasrallah throughout the war. As a result, the victorious image of the Lebanese Islamic Resistance, with the help of the media, not only gave hope to the MENA region to get its land back, but also created a deep ideological connection between nations. This could not have been achieved without the Lebanese women's support who were considered as main partners in the resistance media.

## **Theoretical Framework**

There are many topics that have been studied on media and women, but with respect to the Media of the resistance and the role of women, not much literature and research have been found. Therefore, this study takes into account the role of the media as a whole in the resistance, especially in the July 2006 war, in addition to the women's contribution in the resistance media alongside men, leading to its success. In addition, the media's picture of veiled women in the media was a motivation for many people which assured them that the veil is not an obstacle to women's participation in any field of public affairs.

## Methodology

There has not been much literature and reference on the importance of media or women in the history of Lebanese Resistance. As a result, the author has relied on some historical sources; in addition, the research is directed by depending on interviews as one of the tools in the research. Hence, the method employed in this study is the historical analysis method; starting with the primitive media means used by the resistance in the past, reaching the modern technological means. The use of personal charisma of some leaders in the resistance, both past and present, is seen as being quite significant as well. The present study has found that the most prominent charismatic leader is Secretary General of Hezbollah, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, who has become a role model for women and men alike.

## Case Study: Lebanon

During the French colonization (1920-1943), a Lebanese religious leader by the name of Sayed Abdul Hussein Charafeddin led a Resistance Movement in Lebanon. Sayed Charafeddin held a conference called the Al-Hujeir , which gathered noble men and women in order to reach a strategy for resisting the French occupation (Khoshman, 2008). Sayed Charafeddin used an additional approach which was spreading representatives throughout the southern villages in Lebanon, of which were the leaders, Adham Khanjar and Sadik Hamza, for informing people on the religious component of resistance, relating their resistance to the Ashoura uprising<sup>2</sup>. In addition, Sayed Charafeddin managed to give "fatwa" for legalizing the resistance movement (Khoshman, Ibid). Sayyed Charafeddin called on the women in south Lebanon to help the men in their battle, and gave women the most important role which is the Media. A woman by the name of Fatima Abbass from a village called Ramia, in southern Lebanon, who used to work in trade between Lebanon and Palestine, once revealed a secret to her granddaughter, that she had a mission given to her by Sayyed Charafeddin whom went to the Palestinian territories during her trade to gather information about the movement of the British and French soldiers

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2- Ashoura is a commemoration of a famous ten-day battle of 680 AD in Iraq near Karbala on the Euphrates river-bank between the troops of Yazid Ben Mu'awiya and imam Hussein the great son of prophet Mohammad, who refused to swear the oath of allegiance to Yazid and submit to his authority because Yazid was not qualified to be Khalifa, at the end imam Hussein was martyred for defending his divine goals and beliefs.

at the border, so that the resistance can move and easily get weapons. "Once I was about to be captured by the French soldiers, but my little son Ali who was with me caught the soldiers' attention, they liked him very much, and so rather than searching me they let me pass the border. They had no idea that the ammunition was in his diaper!"

### **Development of the Lebanese Islamic Resistance**

When the allied troops took over the ottoman lands after winning the war in 1945, they divided the one-state land into many states (according to The Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916). Palestine and Lebanon were part of these states which were authorized by the British and French forces, respectively. In 1948, Palestine was handed over to the Israelis (according to the Balfour promise), its closest neighbor – Lebanon – began suffering, and the never ending story of the Middle East crisis began (Sirois, 2008); however, during that time, the mainstream media in the west was fabricating and reversing the true story into a fiction story, distracting the viewers into believing the Israeli side of the story (Sirois, 2008).

Handing Palestine over to the Israelis was done according to Balfour's promise, and this was followed by forcing the non Jewish Palestinians to leave their lands and homes. Part of the Palestinians took refuge in Lebanon, yet because of their sad feelings of departure from their lands, and their strong will of returning to their homes, these Palestinians decided to build organizations of guerrilla fighters which they called "Fidaiyeen" and afterwards uniting these organizations into the "Palestinian Liberation Organization" (PLO) (Sirois, 2008). From 1948 to 1967, clashes arose between the "Fidaiyeen" and the Israeli army, followed by the 1978 Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon. In 1982, another Israeli invasion led by Ariel Sharon reached Beirut city, the capital of Lebanon, and was destined to eliminate the PLO (Sirois, 2008). During that time of struggle with the Israeli army, women participated with men in all battles, especially the "Media battle". Even though the media at that time was very primitive, it was nonetheless very affective among the Palestinian people. Women used to explain the goal and reason for establishing the "Fidaiyeen" group, to fight with Israel in order to return to their homeland. One famous woman among those women was called Layla Khaled. She used another way of Media which was hijacking planes so that the world can hear about the

Palestinian case. After the hijacking, the whole world started to know that there are Palestinians who were forced to leave their homeland by Jewish terrorist groups.

Before the 1982 Israel invasion to Lebanon, and during the time when the Palestinians were building their organizations, a religious leader named Sayed Moussa Alsader came from Iran to Lebanon with his sister Rabab and built a fighting group, after studying the needs of these under-class Shiite Lebanese to resist the Israeli aggressions. The establishment of this resistance group was done by the assistance of an Iranian professor in physics by the name of Mustafa Chamran (called Shamran in Arabic)<sup>3</sup>, who left the USA in order to help Sayed Moussa Alsader on his quest. By the year 1982, Sayed Moussa Al-Sader had already been kidnapped and Dr. Chamran had been martyred; however, they left behind themselves a group of young men and women who were still willing to continue their resistance. These young men, with the help of women, resisted the Israeli Army at the time of the 1982 invasion, by intercepting its expansion from south Lebanon towards Beirut. At the entrance of Beirut, and to the Israeli's surprise, the resistance fighters were able to delay the entrance of the Israeli Army into Beirut for about one week. Most of these fighters were martyred as a result of these clashes. These young fighters were the starting point of the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon, specifically Hezbollah (Sirois, 2008). And from that date we started to hear the concept of the ability of defeating Israel, and all of the Lebanese society with the help of women started to educate the next generation to be ready for the final victory over Israel.

The resisting quest did not stop there, for only six months after the 1982 invasion, another resistance operation took place. On November 11th in 1982, a young man by the name of Ahmad Kassir conducted a suicide bombing, which led to the destruction of an 8-story building and the death and injury of about 250 Israeli soldiers (Sirois, 2008). The resistance kept the information about this operation secret, even the name of the conductor of this operation was not revealed. His mother, however, had the feeling that her son was martyred, but she did not mention it. It was not until the Israeli withdrawal from a part of south Lebanon that the leadership of the resistance revealed the information about Ahmad Kassir's operation. His mother then acted as a happy mother, she did not mourn or show any

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3- Dr. Mustafa Chamran later on was assigned as the Minister of Defense in the Islamic Republic of Iran right after the revolution, and during the Iraq-Iran war was martyred.

sorrow because her son had a sacred aim. She believed that every mother should do the same to encourage her son. Before the establishment of modern media tools such as radio and television and newspapers, women like Kassir's mother were helping the resistance in explaining to the population the reasons behind resistance and martyrdom.

### **Development of the Lebanese Islamic Resistance Media**

This newly emerging resistance worked on spreading its news among its population by mere talks and conversations that arose among their people after any operation took place, because of their lack of specialized media; however, because of the strong Israeli media, some Lebanese still believed that resisting was useless and defeating the Israeli army was doubtful. Because of their insistence on continuing their resisting quest, the Islamic resistance sought to include media tools as assets in their military operations. The first step in doing so was the inclusion of the Ashoura values by using posters, paintings, and brochures in order to link the sacrifice of Imam Hussein with the resistance sacrifice (A. Mozanar, Personal Interview, September 9th, 2008). This step found its way in the Shiite community, yet it was ineffective in other communities in Lebanon and the region because of the different ideology between the Shiite and others, making it difficult for the resistance to be accepted.

The Israeli media played a successful role in portraying itself as undefeatable, and portraying the resistance as being an enemy to the free world. As the historian Abedulwahab Al Massiri said "The Arab-Zionist struggle is a struggle where ideology and metaphor play an important role". Because the Arab world is of a heterogeneous nature, the Israelis took advantage of this difference in ideology and tried to alienate the Islamic resistance in Lebanon. But the resistance's goal is to be a model for the free world as well as for the Palestinians; therefore, it realized that media is as strong as weapons, and decided to go further in developing its media tools (Kh. Dirani, Personal Interview, September 9th, 2008). Consequently, they established three ways of communicating their stories: radio, television, and newspaper. Since then, the rise of a new era in the Lebanese - Israeli conflict began, and the rules of the game changed (A. Kasir, Personal Interview, September 27th, 2008).

Um Habib, the first woman with Hijab, appeared on screen. She was a news

anchor and at the same time, a show host. Um Habib made a big difference in changing the idea about Muslim women in Lebanon where there was an assumption that all Muslim women who put scarves on their head were uneducated and uncivilized. The appearance of an educated woman wearing the Islamic Hijab shocked most anti-hijab groups and gave them no choice but to recognize Muslim women with Hijab as important contributors in the society.

### **Islamic Resistance Television**

The resistance's idea of establishing a television station developed after viewing the effects of the Israeli media. At first, the resistance faced difficulty in finding a medium to show the operations that took place (Head of resistance media, Personal Interview, September 24th, 2008). For example, in 1983 the Islamic resistance media began taping the military operations, and in 1986 a very important operation called "Sujud Operation" was taped and sent to the Lebanese local televisions (Head of resistance media, interview communication, September 24th, 2008). Showing this tape on the Lebanese television led to a shock among the Lebanese viewers, and was effective enough to encourage many Lebanese to join the resistance (Head of resistance media, Personal Interview, September 24th, 2008). In the same year, a second tape of an important operation was sent to the Lebanese National Television; however, this time, before showing the tape, the Lebanese authority interrogated the resistance media because of their doubts on seeing the Israeli army being defeated (Head of Resistance Media, Personal Interview, September 24th, 2008). Since then, the thought of forming a television station to show the truth about the resistance began. Women here were also a major contributor in achieving this goal (Head of Resistance Media, Personal Interview, September 24th, 2008). In an interview with Fatima, a former anchor at Al-Manar TV, she explains how she was among the first ones who started work at the Islamic Media. They started at a time when no one accepted the image of a veiled woman appearing on TV, but she was brave enough to prove herself as a Muslim woman in the Lebanese society, and she worked hard with high performance as a message for everyone who underestimated the role of veiled women in the society (A Former Anchor at Al-Manar TV, Personal Communication, December 1st, 2012). Monira is another woman who was working for the resistance as a media representative in

the villages of South Lebanon. She finds herself lucky to have had the opportunity to take part in the resistance through her work in the media and she also considers this role as a lifetime honor. (A Former Anchor at Al-Manar TV, Personal Interview, December 1st, 2012).

### **Al-Manar Television**

The television station, called "Al-Manar" TV, was launched locally in 1991 offering news (where women were a main part of), commentaries, and entertainment to serve the goals of the resistance. Al-Manar was first called "the resistance channel" (Qanat-al-muqawama) and was a tool to assist the resistance spread its message locally and later on to the entire region. From the beginning, Al-Manar focused on communicating directly with the Arabs including Muslims objectively, trying to wake up the societies in order to form a better world for the generations to come (Kh. Dirani, Personal Interview, September 9th, 2008). This was accomplished by focusing on the common religious values ensuring communication and cooperation between the different religions and human civilizations (Sayed Hassan Nasrallah, September 7th, 2008).

### **1993 War**

Al-Manar's main concern in the 1993 war was making flashes and video clips, because of lack in resources and the fact that two of their camera men were martyred in the battle fields (Head of resistance media, Personal Interview, September 24th, 2008).

### **1996 War**

During the 1996 war, otherwise known as the "Grapes of wrath"; the Israelis began their aggression against the Lebanese people after their inability to reach the headquarters of the resistance (Head of resistance media, Personal Interview, September 24th, 2008). For the first time in history, the Islamic resistance reached the occupied Palestinian lands, such as Kiryat Shmona (Head of resistance media, Personal Interview, September 24th, 2008). The resistance media, with the help of women, worked on counter propaganda against the Israeli propaganda. For the first time, the resistance was going through a war against the Israeli army as well



as the Israeli media, and it was a success since the resistance was able to show the real motion pictures, and thus, the Israeli media failed (Muhsin et al, 1998, p.135). In his book on the resistance media, by Dr. Mohammad Muhsin (Ibid) believes that the main issues which helped in the counter propaganda through Al-Manar TV are as follows:

The resistance denied the news that Israel hit the resistance headquarters in Beirut (southern suburbs) and revealed the truth that the area that was hit by the Israeli army was actually a civilian target. One house was hit causing the injury of a young girl.

The Israelis tried to form an equation whereby they threatened to bomb the capital Beirut in retaliation to the bombing of Kiryat Shmona. But the resistance would not let that happen, and showed that the bombing of Beirut would be equivalent to the bombing of Tel Aviv which the Israelis take as their capital. Through Al- Manar TV, the head of the resistance Sayed Hassan Nasrallah stressed on three points: the resistance would respond to the Israeli aggressions by hitting northern occupied Palestine. However, if Israel bombards Beirut, the resistance would expand its response to all the occupied Palestinian territories, revealing that the resistance has a variety of weapons to retaliate any attack. This live speech on television was the beginning of the psychological warfare against Israel.

The speech mentioned above was transformed into flashes which would be repeated several times a day on Al-Manar TV. This helped in mobilizing the Lebanese population while the resistance announced a military mobilization.

Al-Manar revealed the fighters who were prepared for martyrdom in the presence of Sayed Hassan Nasrallah, while they were saying their oath, and also showed the Lebanese women stay behind their men, such as mothers and wives who were sending their men (husband & sons) with love and prayers. This event was also formed into flashes and was repeated on Al-Manar TV. As a result, the Israeli television used it in its news broadcasts several times, resulting in a 65% rate depression among the Israel soldiers.

Al-Manar TV repetitively showed the launching of the Katyosha missiles and it also distributed the video tapes to other broadcasting televisions.

They aired flashes depicting the geographical areas the resistance can reach into occupied Palestine. They called it the width line 33 and width line 32.5. They

made the flashes in three languages: English, Arabic, and Hebrew. This step was a direct warning to the Israelis.

For the continuation of the psychological war and counter propaganda, a press conference was held by the secretary general Sayed Nasrallah few hours after ceasefire where he announced that the Israeli aggression goals failed, and that the resistance military capabilities were not hit.

In order to affect the course of the counter propaganda, the resistance media gathered about 100 different broadcasting representatives and took them on a main field visit to the areas that had been hit by the Israeli army, all of which were revealed to be non-military.

### **The Year 2000**

In April 2000, Al-Manar TV was granted the approval to launch a satellite channel, just one month before the southern occupied parts in Lebanon were liberated in May 2000 (A. Kasir, Personal Interview, September 27th, 2008). The 2000 liberation was the first victory to occur since the start of the Israeli-Arab conflict, and was a result of the resistance operations as well as its media which revealed the truth to the Lebanese and Israeli public. This effect began in the Israeli society when the mothers of four Israeli soldiers killed during an operation by the resistance, asked for the withdrawal of the Israeli army from Lebanon because they were not willing to have all of their children killed in Lebanon (A. Kasir, Personal Interview, September 27th, 2008). On the other hand, the mothers of the Lebanese martyrs were very proud, announcing their sons as martyrs, and women in the media increased in numbers such as in Al-Manar TV and Al-Nour radio station. This was another victory for the resistance military as well as its media, and it made the resistance stronger. Furthermore, because the resistance media embodied by Al-Manar TV became a satellite channel, the MENA region began to see the true side of the Lebanese resistance. The hope of liberating one's land began to appear clearly to the Arabs as well as others (A. Mozanar, Personal Interview, September 9th, 2008). The Lebanese resistance was no longer viewed as having a different ideology, but now it had the same aim, which is to liberate all occupied lands, especially occupied Palestine while disregarding different ideologies.

Starting from this point, the resistance media began broadcasting songs, video

clips, talk shows, documentaries, and special programs about the martyrs, which had such a substantial effect on the Arabs, particularly the Palestinians where the second Intifada (uprising) began in September 2000 (A. Daher, Personal Communication, September 13th, 2008). Moreover, the Lebanese southern areas became touristic, where many Lebanese, as well as foreigners, head to explore the liberated sites, such as the "Alkheyam" prison which was converted into a museum showing the brutal story of the prisons and how the Israelis treated the prisoners there (A. Daher, Personal Interview, September 13th, 2008).

Even with the fact that the southern lands had been liberated, there were still Lebanese men and women war prisoners in Israeli prisons. After liberating all women from the Israeli prisons, the resistance had made its promise to help to release all the rest of the prisoners as repeated by the resistance's secretary general. They conducted a plan where they captured three Israeli soldiers in order to swap them with the Lebanese. In addition to the three soldiers, the resistance succeeded in accomplishing an intelligence operation whereby an Israeli retired commander was captured after entering Lebanon. The swap did not take place till the year 2004 after indirect negotiations took place through a German mediator. However, the swap was incomplete because three other Lebanese prisoners were not released. The secretary general of the resistance stated that the Israelis would regret not having them released, and promised again that these three would be released. This swap process also had a great effect on the MENA region (Sayed Nasrallah Speech, October 2005).

### **July 2006 War**

On the 12th July 2006, the resistance fulfilled its promise and captured two Israeli soldiers in order to release the three remaining prisoners. The secretary general of the resistance held a press conference where he explained about the operation. He directly stated two sole ways where the Israelis could retrieve their soldiers: indirect negotiations, and a prisoner swap; however, because of the Israeli's insistence on demolishing the Islamic resistance and its media, the Israelis launched a war on Lebanon and its resistance. A couple of years ago, Israel had launched two organizations called "Mimery" and "Simon Wizantal" which established websites to face the Islamic resistance and its media (A. Kasir, Personal Interview, September

27th, 2008). This step came specifically after Al-Manar broadcasted a talk series about the Israeli history, proving the falsification of Israel's claim that Palestine is their promised land (Ibid).

On the second day of the 2006 July war, Al-Manar's main building was bombarded and entirely demolished, yet there was no condemnation by the UN, USA, or France. Surprisingly though, Al-Manar TV kept on broadcasting because of its precautions and anticipation that the Israelis would try to hit it someday, and it only stopped broadcasting for two minutes before reappearing (Ibid). During the 33 days of war, Al-Manar TV kept broadcasting its news which was done by well-known anchors like Batoul, Zainab, Mounira and Fatima who faced a lot of trouble in order to keep the TV running. Zeinab Awada, one of these anchors said that she was pregnant during that time, but she still went to the alternative place for broadcasting which was under the ground. She remembered how she used to go down into a hole to reach the studio for broadcasting the news and show the Israelis that the resistance is triumphing. During the 33 days of war, with the help of women like Zeinab and her friends, the resistance was able to present about 60 flashes and video clips, which is a big number for a 33 day war (Ibid). It also aired talk shows and interviews by Batoul Ayoub, and became a source for the news on war and on the resistance for other channels (Ibid). For example, whenever the Israeli army destroyed a building, it would claim to have hit the resistance's leader and others with him; however, Al-Manar would prove otherwise. Therefore, many claims that the Israelis make will not be ascertained by other channels until the resistance media ascertain or deny it (Ibid). Moreover, the speeches of the resistance's secretary general were exclusively shown on Al-Manar TV, and this would shock the Israelis since they would claim they had hit him. The result was that the Israeli people believed what Al-Manar and the resistance's secretary general said more than their own leaders as mentioned several times on the Israeli televisions. On its website, Palestinian "Ma'an" News Agency published a report entitled "Al-Manar succeeds over Fox news". This report included surveillance on the Israelis' TV watching practices during the second and third week of the war, and the result was that the Israelis were viewing Al-Manar TV more than Fox news because they considered it more trustworthy when it comes to showing real stories (Ibid).

Al-Manar TV was also successful in forming a team of men and women

specialized in sociology and psychology to work on facing Israel, using both TV as well as the internet in order to counter the Israeli media's effects which were also working on the internet through many different websites. As the general director of Al-Manar puts it, the job done in 33 days was a year's work and this was because of the staff members' loyalty to their country and beliefs (Ibid).

All what was mentioned above had two effects: a negative effect on the Israeli society as well as military, and a positive effect on the Lebanese as well as the MENA region. One of negative effects on the Israeli side, and according to the Israeli media itself, the Israeli soldiers began refusing to go to military service, and their parents demonstrated against the war and asked for the return of their troops (A. Mozanar, Personal Interview, September 9th, 2008). As for the positive effect in the region as well as internationally, many phone calls and emails were sent to Al-Manar, praising the resistance's victory over Israel and expressing their admiration for the resistance's beliefs, many of which changed their ideology to that of the resistance (A. Kassir, Personal Interview, September 27th, 2008).

## **Conclusion**

The Lebanese Islamic resistance was the result of the gathering of a group of men and women who were willing to resist the Israeli aggression and occupation even with the few resources they had, leading to their success after many years. Developing a specialized media for the resistance was an important step forward; first, in facing the Israeli as well as international media of which women were the main role models, and second, in showing the people of the region with different ideologies the true side of the resistance, and therefore winning acceptance and respect for Islam and for hijab. The resistance television and the field cameras were major contributors in revealing the true side of the resistance and also played a critical part in reaching victory. In addition, the resistance's secretary general's speeches and appearance on TV was a further morale boost. These all affected the main vision of the people in Lebanon and the MENA region, where the Lebanese resistance was recognized as a legitimate resistance in the world, and women with hijab were accepted to appear on TV, and everybody had the chance to know Islam and its duty towards freedom. The role of women, in precise, in this Islamic resistance media was powerful and led to the victory in many stages.

The aforementioned helped to clarify that this group of people, seeking resistance and free media, is part of the whole Islamic sphere, even if it has a different ideology.

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