

Article

Hizbullah's Post-Islamist Trends in the Performing Arts

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Abstract: This article outlines Hizbullah's shift to post-Islamism and its various cultural activities in Lebanese society that underpin this shift. The Party's involvement in these activities is integrated in current research on post-Islamism and its various social, political, and cultural manifestations. In its Islamist stage, Hizbullah anathematized the Lebanese political system and state institutions. In its post-Islamist phase, Hizbullah became pragmatic by embarking on a policy of opening-up (*infatih*) in politics along with cultural and social practices. This article studies Hizbullah's popular culture and lifestyles by focusing on its purposeful art or 'resistance art', which is a cultural resistance against oppression, domestic deprivation, disenfranchisement, and repression, as well as foreign aggression, invasion, occupation, and subjugation. Hizbullah exploits the concepts of cultural citizenship and cultural politics to encourage, in mixed gender spaces, purposeful performing arts: music, dancing, singing, revolutionary theater, and satire. Hizbullah appears to equate modernity with European art forms rather than indigenous forms. In its ideology and politics, Hizbullah fluctuated between Islamism and post-Islamism. While in its performing arts, Hizbullah conveyed a post-Islamist face legitimized by the principle of *maslaha* (public interest).

Keywords: post-Islamism; purposeful art; cultural politics; performing art; resistance art; democracy

1. Introduction

The Lebanese Hizbullah evolved in the 1980s from a militant organization with a well-defined exclusivist Islamist ideology—based upon the Iranian principle of the 'Guardianship of the Jurisprudent' (Islamism)—to a political party in the 1990s engaged in the democratic process via parliamentary and municipal elections, but without stopping its struggle to liberate occupied land from Israel (Post-Islamism). After two decades—in May 2000—Hizbullah's military wing, the Islamic Resistance, succeeded in pushing the Israeli army out of Lebanon via its instrumental role in making occupation costly, both in terms of human and material resources. When the Arab Spring Uprisings erupted in late 2010, Hizbullah gradually grew up from a domestic actor to a regional fighting-force alongside its coreligionists in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen (Islamism).

Hizbullah subscribes to the parallel-track theory of regional militancy and domestic integration, i.e., it employs Hawkish and Dovish policies based on its calculus of jihad. When the so-called Arab Spring Uprisings and the Arab-Israeli conflict end, Hizbullah will revert internally and domestically since it loses its *raison d'être* for regional intervention that becomes very costly in times of peace. Regionally, Hizbullah's active military engagement in the Arab Spring Uprisings on the side of its coreligionists in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen boosted its radical Islamist face of the 1980s at the expense of its post-Islamist *infatih* theory of the 1990s. As Asef Bayat argues, Islamism and post-Islamism could be juxtaposed; could exist side by side in the same social movement. This is not schizophrenia, but is rather a measure of *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi* dictated by the dynamics of a world in incessant flux and a continuously changing domestic environment.

By heavy reliance on its reading and interpretation of *maslaha*—a secondary principle of Islamic jurisprudence—Hizbullah’s post-Islamist shift or trajectory took place; not only in ideology and politics, but also in its perception and practice of the performing arts by way of establishing professional institutions that cater to the needs of its constituency in engaging in pious entertainment and leisure activities. The Party’s purposeful Resistance Art caters to these needs since it is in accordance with Hizbullah’s religious sensibilities under the watchful eyes of its institutions, which are run by leading shaykhs who stress the notion of Islamic piety that allows performance in public space for mobilization and propaganda purposes.

Most research on Hizbullah’s post-Islamism is based on discourse and content analysis of secondary sources. The novelty of this article is not only basing it on primary Arabic sources, but also grounding it on empirical research that studies the Party’s Islamic cultural sphere. How and why Hizbullah’s cultural productions are central to the construction of revolution is something that has received little attention, and the literature on it remains scant and speculative. For over a decade, I have conducted ethnographic research in Beirut, the South, and the *Biqā’* in east Lebanon. My fieldwork focused on both watching a spectrum of cultural productions and carrying out formal face-to-face research interviews: mainly in-depth or semi-structured personal interviews, and sometimes, causal chats over tea or coffee, with Hizbullah’s rank and file who are conversant with the Party’s performing arts, or what they call ‘Resistance Art’.

The article is divided into three sections. ‘Section 2’ provides the background on the shifts from Islamism to Post-Islamism. ‘Section 3’ portrays the findings on the performing arts and their production and use. ‘Section 4’ discusses and analyzes the findings in relation to the shifts from Islamism to post-Islamism vis-à-vis Hizbullah’s ‘Resistance Art’.

2. Background: Shifts from Islamism to Post-Islamism

In order to provide background information and context on Hizbullah’s shifts from Islamism to post-Islamism, an overview on the current debates and political contestations that Hizbullah is facing in the regional and international arenas is necessary. While this is neither the topic of the article nor its focus, the importance of doing so lies in framing Hizbullah’s cultural productions on the performing arts within its construction of the cultural revolution and the overall picture of its ideology and politics.

2.1. Hizbullah’s Regional Islamism: Militancy in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen

Does Hizbullah’s buttressing of the Syrian regime and the Iraqi and Yemini Shi’ite militias undermine its post-Islamist trajectory and its ideological commitment to supporting the oppressed? Does it damage its propaganda image as protector of minorities? It is noteworthy that Hizbullah gave arms and supplied logistical training to Lebanese, Syrian, and Iraqi Christians who were facing danger from the “Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant” (ISIL) and similar radical Islamist mindsets such as the “Victory Front” (*Jabhat al-Nusra*) in Lebanon and Syria. In addition to the regional struggles and the continuation of the ‘Arab-Israeli’ conflict, which boosted its argument for keeping its arms, domestically Hizbullah portrays itself as the defender of Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity, by using the pretext of the land-border conflict with Israel and the maritime border disagreement over the oil and gas blocks. This might explain why Hizbullah’s military capabilities and modern weaponry eclipse those of the Lebanese Army by a great margin. It is notable that Hizbullah’s deterrent policy seems to have borne fruit—on 14 October 2020—with the beginning of the indirect negotiations between Lebanon and Israel in the border town of Naqoura, under the auspices of the UN and the

mediation of the US, with the physical presence of David Schenker—the U.S. State Department’s Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs—in the opening ceremony.¹

2.2. Hizbullah’s Islamism and Global Reach

From a regional actor, Hizbullah became a global actor to be reckoned with by being accused of closely associating with the Iranian Regime in targeting its dissidents and enemies abroad. Thus, Western countries such as the US (1997, 2001, 2015),² Canada (2002); Australia (2003); New Zealand (2010); the Netherlands (2004); Lithuania, Serbia, Kosovo, and Estonia (2020); South American Countries such as Argentina and Paraguay (2019) as well as Honduras, Colombia, and Guatemala (2020); Middle Eastern countries such as Israel (1996) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (2016)³ and Sudan (2020)⁴; classify Hizbullah a “terrorist organization”.⁵ Up until 2019, the UK differentiated between Hizbullah’s “political wing” and its “military wing”, dubbing the latter a terrorist organization. On 26 July 2013, the European Union (EU) followed the UK’s classification. However, in March 2019, the UK revised its policy and categorized Hizbullah in its entirety as a terrorist organization.⁶ On 29 April 2020, Germany followed suit and classified Hizbullah a “terrorist organization” and censured any Hizbullah-related activity on its territories.⁷

In response, David Schenker encouraged other European countries to follow suit, arguing that the move ‘erodes Hezbollah’s legitimacy in some quarters in the world and the fiction over differences between military and political wings’.⁸ In turn, Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, Hizbullah’s Secretary General, contended that this move was expected and is politically motivated as it aims at exerting pressure on the Europeans by the US Administration; and also it intends to please Israel. Nasrallah anticipated more countries to heed US demands. He challenged German Intelligence Services⁹ to give hard

¹ *The Associated Press*, ‘Lebanon praises US mediation in maritime border talks with Israel’, (16 October 2020), <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/lebanon-praises-us-mediation-maritime-border-talks-israel-73651550>; *Al-Akhbar* 4173 (14 October 2020): 2; *Al-Akhbar* 4178 (20 October 2020): 4.

² On the 2015 US Treasury ‘Law on preventing the flow of External Funds to Hizbullah’, see *al-Akhbar* 4151 (18 September 2020): 3; In 1997, ‘The Department of State designates Hezbollah as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act)’; In 2001, ‘The Department of State designates Hezbollah as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (under Executive Order 13224)’, <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/hezbollah>; See also ‘Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Bureau of Counterterrorism’: <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>.

³ (Levitt 2016) The GCC was founded as a regional organization in 1981 and includes the following six countries: Saudi Arabia (KSA), United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Bahrain. See also, ‘GCC declares Lebanon’s Hezbollah a ‘terrorist’ group: Gulf countries announce the decision amid an ongoing row with the Lebanese group over involvement in regional conflicts’ (2 March 2016): <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/gcc-declares-lebanon-hezbollah-terrorist-group-160302090712744.html>.

⁴ Jacob Magid, (24 October 2020), ‘US official: Sudan to designate Hezbollah a terror group as part of Israel deal’, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-official-sudan-to-designate-hezbollah-a-terror-group-as-part-of-israel-deal/>; Souad Lazkani, ‘Estonia Just Issued Sanctions Against Hezbollah’, <https://www.the961.com/estonia-sanctions-hezbollah/> (both Accessed: 26 October 2020).

⁵ <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/hezbollah> (Most reliable source).

⁶ Home Office, ‘Proscribed Terrorist Organisations’ (22 pages). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/869496/20200228_Proscription.pdf; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2>; <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/hezbollah>; <https://www.ajc.org/news/setting-the-record-straight-on-hezbollah-full-report> (Accessed: 30 April 2020).

⁷ Leah Carter, ‘German government bans Hezbollah—Interior Ministry’: <https://www.dw.com/en/german-government-bans-hezbollah-interior-ministry/a-53287126>; Madeline Chambers, ‘After U.S., Israeli Pressure, Germany Bans Hezbollah Activity, Raids Mosques’: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-lebanon-hezbollah/germany-bans-hezbollah-activity-raids-mosques-idUSKBN22C0LC?il=0> & mirrored by the *NY Times*: <https://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2020/04/30/world/middleeast/30reuters-germany-lebanon-hezbollah.html>; Agence France Presse, ‘Germany bans Hezbollah activity, raids mosques’, as mirrored by the *Daily Star* <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2020/Apr-30/505151-germany-bans-hezbollah-activity-raids-mosques.ashx>; Lahav Harkov, ‘Germany outlaws Hezbollah, raids mosques and local leaders’ homes’: <https://www.jpost.com/international/germany-bans-hezbollah-conducts-police-raids-on-possible-members-626364>. (All accessed: 30 April 2020).

⁸ ‘Schenker: Lebanon’s IMF request a necessary first step’, <https://www.lbcgroup.tv/news/d/lebanon-news/517768/schenker-lebanons-imf-request-a-necessary-first-st/en> (Accessed: 1 May 2020).

⁹ It is not clear whether Nasrallah was referring to all three or a specific agency: Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND)—Federal foreign intelligence and security service; Bundeskriminalamt (BKA)—Federal criminal intelligence and security service; Amt für den Militärischen Abschirmdienst (MAD)—Federal military intelligence and security service.

evidence confirming that the raided associations were Hizbullah's. Narallah repeated the mantra that denies Hizbullah has any "Global reach", arguing that these associations have no organizational link to the Party; neither in Europe, nor in Latin America.¹⁰ Do these accusations amplify Hizbullah's Islamist militant face and undermine its potential post-Islamist credentials? Hizbullah's important geopolitical role cannot be understood unless all three dimensions are closely examined: the domestic, regional, and the global role, something that is beyond the scope of this chapter, and is discussed elsewhere (Alagha 2011a; Alagha 2011b; Alagha 2013).

How could such a busy geopolitical actor as Hizbullah shift from Islamism to post-Islamism by allocating time and space to cultural politics, let alone the performing arts, or what the Party labels as 'Resistance Art'?

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

Arguing along the lines of Bayat (1996, pp. 43–52), Roy (1999, pp. 85–86; 2004, pp. 58–99), Khosrokhavar (2000, pp. 129–44), Kepel (2002, p. 368), Mandaville (2007, pp. 343–48), Boubekeur (2007, pp. 75–94), and others, there is a general tendency of a gradual transition from Islamism to post-Islamism, from the 'old' to the 'new' (Mandaville 2007, p. 348), from *al-hala al-Islamiyya* (Islamic religio-political sphere) to *al-saha al-Islamiyya* (Islamic cultural sphere). These authors traced this development through the particular case studies of Egypt, Iran, France, and the UK focusing on political openness (*infatih*). I analyze 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 (Bayat 2013). Notably, Bayat coined the term 'post-Islamism' as early as 1996 (Bayat 1996, pp. 43–52) and distinguished himself from other scholars, who later on employed the concept, but apparently with different connotations. In this article, I follow his lead, relying heavily on his interpretation of the concept. 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 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 endeavor 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' (Bayat 2013, p. 8). 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' (Bayat 2007a, pp. 10–13). The Islamic social movement's ideology 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 (Bayat 2007a, pp. 17–21).

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 skillfully express their own cultural identity and thus contribute to enhancing the overall cultural sphere (Pinxten 2003). Within Bayat's (2007c)

¹⁰ Al-Akhbar 4042 (5 May 2020): 4–5. On Hizbullah's "Global Reach", see (Levitt 2015).

post-Islamist model in art, 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’ (Boubekeur 2007, p. 90).¹¹

MP ‘Ali Fayyad¹² construes Hizbullah’s opening-up (*infatih*) as a tenet of post-Islamism based on *maslaha* (public interest). In an interview, he argued that post-Islamism amounts to ‘the reconciliation of the Islamic vision (Hizbullah’s vision) with the necessity of communication, *infatih*, moderation (*wasatiyya*), modernity, democracy, and reality or *realpolitik*.’ Fayyad adds that ‘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‘iyya*) 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 *infatih* 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 *infatih*. From this perspective, according to Fayyad, Hizbullah’s post-Islamism began in the early 1990s through its policy of *infatih*.¹³ *Infatih* 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 *infatih* (‘opening-up’) to be understood, as Mandaville characterized, as a bottom-up Islamization in disguise? (Mandaville 2007, pp. 343–48). How does this thinking comport with Hizbullah’s views on the performing arts?

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’ (Bayat 2013, p. 25). To what extent does Hizbullah exemplify that? The shift from Islamism to post-Islamism could not be possible without the mediating role of the jurisprudential concept of *maslaha* (public interest), as the next section shows.

2.4. Mechanism of Choice: The Seminal Role of Maslaha (Interest)

In ‘acknowledging ambiguity, multiplicity, inclusion, and flexibility in principles and practice’, as a mechanism of choice among conflicting *prima facie* duties, Hizbullah resorts to a secondary source of Islamic law: the jurisprudential concept of *maslaha*. Hajj Muhammad Ra’d—the current head of Hizbullah’s parliamentary bloc and *Shura* (Consultative) Council member—told me that there is no conflict between Hizbullah’s Islamic identity and its cultural productions since there is no big practical difference between the two. Ra’d adds that Hizbullah bases itself on the following precept: what falls within the domain of the legally prohibited (*haram shar‘i*), Hizbullah endeavors to prevent from coming into being or tries to abort it; what falls within the domain of the ‘permitted’ (*mubah*), Hizbullah does its best to find the most just implementation in conformity with its religious vision. Thus, according to Ra’d, Hizbullah’s cultural politics are based upon two basic principles which offer the movement a great margin of leeway in public performance and performativity: (1) keeping away

¹¹ Based on fieldwork, interviews, and discourses, I can fairly claim that Hizbullah embraces this dimension of art, as all my interviewees repeatedly iterated and stressed.

¹² Fayyad is one of Hizbullah’s leading intellectuals. He is a professor of sociology at the Lebanese University and the drafter of the first part of the Hizbullah’s 2009 Manifesto.

¹³ Personal interview, 14 May 2012.

the vices (*al-mafasid*) has precedent over advancing interests (*al-masalih*); (2) balancing between interests and vices in order to determine a person's actual duty.¹⁴

After this theoretical account, it seems appropriate to discuss some practical cases, which fit the above categorizations, in order to see how Hizbullah engage with particular issues in everyday life.

3. Findings on the Performing Arts and Their Production and Use

In order to clarify how Hizbullah categorizes the performing arts, their production and use, this section presents the empirical research finding in relation to the shifts from Islamism to post-Islamism. In summary, my 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 *infatih*, or opening-up to global cultural trends while preserving indigenous-authentic values as an Islamic moral alternative. Then, how post-Islamist is Hizbullah in its production of the (cultural) revolution and its consumption of the performing arts?

3.1. 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, multilayered organization, composed of at least four main divisions: the 'military wing': the *jihadi* and 'terrorist' branch; the social services, NGOs, and civil institutions branch; the 'political wing' branch; the cultural politics branch or 'resistance art' (Alagha 2011a, p. 185; Alagha 2013, pp. 226–27).

I highlight 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.

Notions of *maslaha* (public interest, human interest, common good) and 'the good-pious Muslim' are translated into ideas about authentic Islamic cultural heritage and pious art and entertainment (fun) within the normative, foundational domains of local customs, sound reason, sense of justice, social and community cohesion, and peace and order (Masud 2000–2001, pp. 24–28; Masud 2005, pp. 107–8). In line with Shi'a traditions, Hizbullah, enjoins the pursuit of 'purposeful fun' within the domain of certain religious safeguards (*al-dawabit al-shar'iyya*) and jurisprudential stipulations (*al-mahadhir al-shar'iyya*).

Following the logic and line of reasoning of Pinxten (2003), Boubekour (2007), and Bayat (2007c), 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 skillfully 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 centers 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*.

¹⁴ Interview with author, 18th of July 2020.

Hizbullah rejects the notion of ‘art for the sake of art’, arguing that art is a purposeful endeavor of expression and creativity that constitutes an important pillar of society, culture, and civilization.¹⁵ As such, Hizbullah 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 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. 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-Intiqad*, its ‘unofficial’ mouthpiece the daily newspaper *al-Akhbar*, and media institutions such as *al-Nour* satellite radio, *al-Manar* satellite TV, and the ‘unofficial’ *al-Mayadeen* satellite TV and uses social media effectively: Twitter; YouTube; Instagram, Facebook; etc. While the Amsterdam national orchestra has 80 musicians, to my knowledge Hizbullah is the only Islamic party that has an orchestra of more than 100 musicians who play more than 44 instruments. Many Islamists—such as the Taliban and ISIL—classify these as ‘instruments of the Devil’.¹⁶ Resistance art legitimizes using the mosque as a medium to disseminate revolutionary songs, hymns and anthems. Hizbullah encourages *jihad* through music as a mobilization technique of purposeful or resistance art (Alagha 2012).

3.2. Post-Islamism in Art: ‘The Politics of Fun’ or ‘Pious Entertainment’

Which artistic practices that promote fun and entertainment are sanctioned by Hizbullah? 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 a self-confident, industrious, and productive human being.¹⁷ 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 (‘Abbas 2009, pp. 6–7). 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*. Furthermore, 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. Barakat stresses 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*).¹⁸

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,¹⁹

¹⁵ Interview with Muhammad Kawtharani. See the program entitled *Al-Majalla* on *Al-Manar* TV (13 August 2018, 8:30 p.m. local time). In conformity with Hizbullah’s rotation policy, Kawtharani became the Director of Information and Relations for Municipal Work.

¹⁶ Based on their interpretation of the *hadiths* (Sahih al-Bukhari: Book no. 15, Hadiths no. 70 & 72; Book no. 58, Hadith no. 268/Sahih Muslim: Book no. 4, Hadith no. 1942; Book no. 024, Hadith no. 5279).

¹⁷ Interviews with author, August 2009.

¹⁸ Interview with author, 5th of August 2013.

¹⁹ Interview with author, 10th of August 2009.

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 centered 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 favor.²⁰ 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 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 behavior 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 fulfillment, 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 (Bayat 2007b, p. 457).

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 (Cultural Islamic Al-Ma'arif Association 2007, pp. 6–7).

4. Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Shifts from Islamism to Post-Islamism

In studying how and why Hizbullah's cultural productions are central to the construction of revolution, it seems that one of the most significant findings is Hizbullah's notion of counter-public to other Islamic movements and its sanctioning (allowing) of gender-mixing in the production of performing arts. I include these here as other levels of abstraction.

Counter-Public, Gender-Mixing, and Pious and Religious Sensibilities

The concept of *maslaha* dictates to Hizbullah to give due caution to 'pious sensibilities' or 'dispositions'. Hirschkind employs 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' (Hirschkind 2006, p. 232). 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 components (Hirschkind 2006, pp. 106–8).

²⁰ Interview with Muhammad Kawtharani, 20th of January 2010.

Thus, the elements of the counter-public are aesthetics, sensibilities, ‘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, affectations, and embodied dispositions or perpetual habits. As a counter-public to other Islamic movements and state institutions, Hizbullah adopted the Kantian notion of ‘Art is Humanity’ and resorted to the ‘collective language’ of art and music in order to convey its cultural face through didactic Resistance Art. Hizbullah’s *maslaha* allows teleological fun or pious entertainment, but not seduction (*ighwa*) and debauchery. As such, any artistic expression, performance or performativity, which lead to unconstructive relaxation or idleness (*istirkha*) is condemned. Nevertheless, Hizbullah extols positive relaxation that results in vigilance (*hamas*). Hizbullah sanctions gender mixing in artistic productions as long as they abide by the norms of decency and contain no debauchery, thus catering to the religious sensibilities of the audience.²¹ Thus, 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’ (Boubekur 2007, p. 91).

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 *maslaha* policy of opening-up (*infatih*) to global cultural trends while preserving indigenous values as an Islamic moral alternative. Bayat stresses that post-Islamism ‘accords an active role for religion in the public sphere’ (Bayat 2013, p. 8). 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 (Bayat 2013, p. 30). (My emphasis).

Nevertheless, a clarification needs to be made in the way Hizbullah consumes this popular culture. Again, the concept of *maslaha* takes center stage as 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 honors 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 *ikhtilat* is sanctioned allowing men, women and children to act and interact on stage (even if they are not *mahram*),²² all in the service of resistance art.

²¹ MP ‘Ali Fayyad, Personal interview, [6 October 2009].

²² A male whom the woman cannot marry since he is a close relative. In other words, a family member of a degree of relationship that prohibits marriage to a *mahram* of the other sex; otherwise, that amounts to incest.

In short, my findings on the counter-public and gender-mixing are inconsistent with what other investigators have reported. Most researchers have reduced Hizbullah to a militant-Islamist organization, without giving due attention to its post-Islamist, often open and 'liberal', views on the performing arts or 'Resistance Art' as a mobilization technique aimed at promoting the Party's vision in the construction of revolution. In this way, my findings were unexpected. Well, how do the findings fit into the bigger picture? Discussing how leading Shi'ite thinkers have declared that cultural production has to be central to the construction of revolution has far-reaching implications that most scholars in the field have yet to consider and reckon with. By demonstrating how Shi'ite thinking is at the forefront of the changing Islamic attitude towards the performing arts, this article pointed out the very different ways that Hizbullah conceives of both culture and the role of religion in public life.

5. Conclusions

This article has demonstrated that in its politics and ideology, Hizbullah oscillates between Islamism and post-Islamism, while its cultural politics demonstrates more its post-Islamism in the performing arts. Bayat uses the term 'post-Islamism' to describe 'a break from [the] Islamist paradigm' (Bayat 2013, p. 25). Islamism deploys a religious language, favors 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 (Bayat 2013, p. 7). Post-Islamism, by contrast, represents a transformation of and a critical departure from Islamism (Bayat 2013, pp. 4, 29). 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 (Bayat 2013). 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 (Bayat 2013, p. 8). Hizbullah's shifts between Islamism and post-Islamism are conceptually warranted in Bayat's theory since 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 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 (Bayat 2013, p. 29).

Hizbullah's post-Islamist cultural face is portrayed through promoting ideologically motivated art or 'resistance art'. The Party 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. By embracing the Kantian notion of "art is humanity" and adopting Pinxten's argument, Hizbullah performs a holy matrimony (ties the knot) between democracy and modernity, thus promoting an 'alternative modernity', which is grounded in orchestral music, revolutionary theater, purposeful singing and dancing, gender mixing, and 'controlled fun' or pious entertainment, all within the narrow confines and norms of Muslim sensibilities and religious prohibitions. Thus, in arts, in general, and purposeful performing arts or Resistance Art, in particular, Hizbullah seems to be a post-Islamist movement because it appears to equate modernity with European art forms rather

than indigenous forms. After all, as Bayat noted, the *raison d'être* of post-Islamism is to be 'selective', 'contextual' and 'pragmatic', which distinguishes it from the rigid social, moral, and political vision of Islamism (Bayat 2013, pp. 240–54).

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