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**“Mind Forged Manacles”: Hamas, Hezbollah and Orientalist Discourse**

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In a world where the predominant power explicitly pursues the spread of its ideological virtues, both to safeguard its interests and out a self-perceived sense of “manifest destiny”, it is little wonder that counter-hegemonic movements have arisen to challenge both its physical dominance and desired ideological hegemony. In particular, political Islam has been singled out and essentialised in a quintessentially Orientalist manner, both throughout academia and the mass media. The abstract concept of “Islam”, complete with its billion plus believers stretching from Indonesia to Morocco and beyond, is transformed into a monolithic entity hostile to the West (Ayoob 2004:1). Militant Islamist groups are homogenised, conflated with al-Qa’ida’s amorphous and ill-determined global franchise, and characterised as “new terrorism” driven by religious zeal and metaphysical aims, rather than concrete real world goals or desires. This homogenisation all but precludes the possibility of negotiation, accommodation and, ultimately, peaceful reconciliation with Islamist actors. In short, mass collective consciousness is carefully constructed to perceive Islam as an irreducible “other” from which to differentiate the virtues of “us”. Moreover, not only is this representation of the other consciously constructed, but a collective *unconscious* of latent associations is internalised as well. Both of these consciousnesses act in a symbiotic manner to institutionalise these (mis)representations.

In this way, Islamist movements are deemed irrational, diametrically opposed to Western values and, as such, deviants from the institutionalised perception of “common sense”. Deviation from this “common sense” is then explained in eschatological terms rather than the explanation provided by Occam’s Razor pertaining to the traditionally exploitative nature of Western interactions with the Muslim world. In essence, the rhetoric surrounding the “war on terror” is characterised by a set of reductive generalisations based on institutionalised stereotypes.

This paper will focus on two militant socio-political movements subject to such characterisations and deemed implacably rejectionist or “terrorist” in the Western parlance: Hamas of the Palestinian Territories and Hezbollah of Lebanon. These reductive representations are employed to justify a myriad of political, economic, and armed actions used to coerce recalcitrant actors which resist Western/American hegemony (that is to say, not only the rejection of the global North’s physical and economic dominance but its “normative” and “universal” ideological ideals as well). Such exercises in coercion can be explained as Foucault’s (1995) “punishment” or Gramsci’s hegemonic (potentially tyrannical) “common sense” (Butko 2004:43) in attempting to mould the Middle East to fit Western material needs and desired ideological hegemony. In essence, this entails traditional physical coercion and the institutionalisation of certain ideas through other mechanisms. This is a reflection of the distribution of power and the legitimisation of values and norms (Femia 1975:47). Effectively, the “common sense” of the hegemon entails the assumption that it is correct. In such processes one can witness the “twining of power and legitimacy, one force obtaining in the world of direct domination, the other in the cultural sphere... a characteristic of classic imperial hegemony” (Said 1994:291). Historically, Western

interactions with the Middle East are replete with such “corrective” actions, most recently evidenced by the invasion of Iraq on tenuous grounds, United States’ (US) prevarication prolonging the 2006 July war between Hezbollah and Israel, and most poignantly, perhaps, the treatment of the democratically elected Hamas. The 2006 July War and the siege of Gaza are classic punishment campaigns aimed at destruction of infrastructure and disruption of daily life; that is, collective punishment of the whole population for supporting certain actions or actors (Mearshiemer and Walt 2007:314; Reinhart 2006:53).

As Robert Fisk (2005:378) points out, “‘Terrorism’ is a word that has become a plague on our vocabulary, the excuse and reason and moral permit for state sponsored violence.’ In this light, it is hardly surprising that the universality and sincerity of Western values are met with scepticism and in some cases outright rejection. Indeed, the principle of otherness or difference from the West has become a primary source for counter-hegemonic movements resisting “a globalising economy and its homogenising cultural accoutrements” (Pasha 2005:544). In opposition, within Islam, “purification/modernisation, on the one hand, and the re-affirmation of a putative old *local* identity on the other can be done in one and the same language and set of symbols” (Gellner 1981:5).

Hamas and Hezbollah are two such movements who have adopted Islamic guidelines and idiomatic language as a means to rearticulate modernity within an endogenous framework. It is ironic that far from being the anti-thesis of these Islamist movements, democratic representation and social justice for traditionally marginalised communities are exactly the goals for which they strive. Moreover, these localised, politically driven movements are in fact bulwarks against the Islamic extremism of al-Qa’ida inc. rather than its confrere (Angram 2007:27; Alagha 2006:219; Yousuf 2007). These actors need to be approached, engaged, and socialised as they are not simply militant rejectionist bodies, but highly sophisticated and efficient socio-political movements deeply embedded within the everyday lives of their respective communities. Far from being essentialised political Islam or implacable religious “terrorists”, these movements are, in a sense, institutional cultures unto themselves born of very particular social, economic and political circumstances. Paradoxically, Hamas and Hezbollah are products of both secular incompetence in providing social services and political freedom for its constituents and authoritarian secular efficiency in terms of eliminating potential secular challenges and depriving them of political space (Ayoob 2004:3). Thus Islamism has become the best spoke-person for malcontents, even among those groups traditionally secular or of the left, such as students (El Alaoui 2008:10). Hamas and Hezbollah are a reassertion of local identity in the face of what Esposito (2000:9) calls “militant secular fundamentalism” which has led Western culture and secularism to be equated with de-culturalisation, colonialism and exploitation in much of the Muslim world (Said 1994:224; Nusse 1998:15; Burgat 2003:127).

### Orientalism and Political Islam

In the popular imagination of the West today, the term Islamism conjures up backwardness, the subjugation of women, corporal punishment, and masked terrorists perpetrating suicide bombings in an effort to reject modernity. According to this narrative, Islamists hate “us” for our freedom and the supposed universal values to which the Western world subscribes. Thus, in the eyes of US President George W. Bush (2001) and the White House, the US “was targeted for attack because we’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world.” Media experts, academics, politicians and other institutional forces reinforce and propagate this view. Indeed, in the wake of September 11 sixty prominent academics led by Samuel Huntington, Theda Skocpol, Michael Waltzer, Francis Fukiyama and Amitai Etzioni ‘signed a 10 page petition endorsing the “war on terrorism” on the grounds that it defended “American values”, “our way of life” and “the achievements of civilization [sic]”

(Abrahamian 2003:533). This rejection of Western “values”, “freedom” and “civilisation” is equated to a rejection of modernity, thereby giving the idea that Islamists want to return to the time of the prophet Mohammed, complete with the implementation of archaic sharia law. In this manner, Islam is portrayed as essential and unchanging and the rejection of “modernity” is deemed to be at the “roots of Muslim rage” (Lewis 1990). The al-Qa’ida phenomenon, held to be some kind of loosely unified network despite its ambiguity, is deemed to be the apex of this movement.

All of this apparently leads to an inevitable “clash of civilisations” between Islam and the West following from the old adage of the “barbarians at the gate” or, even more insidiously, inside the gates for some European countries (Huntington 1996). Images of barbaric violence targeting civilians, most vividly portrayed in the September 11, Madrid, Bali and London bombings, appear to reinforce this view. Given that “our” (secular) values are being attacked, the West is therefore engaged in a battle for civilisation against religious fanaticism. In other words, an atmosphere of perpetual conflict surrounds the “war on terror” to the end that terrorist attacks, specifically those motivated by “radical” Islam – notwithstanding whom, where, or what the goals of these Islamists are – are portrayed as the number one threat to an individual’s life. In effect, Islamism is associated with overwhelmingly negative characteristics, especially those groups which, legitimately or not, possess an armed wing of some description.

There is a schizophrenic view of the Muslim Middle East whereby the West, paradoxically, fears another civilisation that it feels overwhelming superiority over (Said 2003:59); disdain for perceived Arab incompetency on the one hand, and fear of “super villains” that defiantly elude the West, like Bin Laden, on the other. Israel shares a similar complex regarding Hamas, Hezbollah and the still belligerent Arab states, despite maintaining an overwhelming military superiority over each.

To this end, Islamism is subject to sort of “ideological criminalisation” in Western eyes (Burgat 2003:177). Moreover, as the concept is so abstract, this popular criminalisation or de-legitimation can be directed against almost anyone expressing themselves politically within an Islamic idiom. The power imbalance between Western institutions - military, economic, and cultural – and their powers of dissemination, in contrast to their Muslim counterparts, is such that, in a sense, these institutions create, define and project what Islamism is and is not, irrespective of tangible real world contexts and experiences (Said 2003:40). Hence, the idea that militant political Islam is deviant from “true” peaceful Islam and warped (Rudy 2007:45); that is, the idea that “political Islam” is propagated by “a minority exploiting the faith of their fellow-Muslims for political ends” (International Crisis Group 2005:1). Western politicians speak of the “true” Islam of being a religion of peace and groups which resort to violent actions or Islamic activism are therefore, by implication, not “real” Muslims or “un-Islamic” (ICG 2005:17). In a speech following the September 11 attacks, President Bush (2001a) stated that “The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That’s not the true faith of Islam. That’s not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace.” Thus, al-Qa’ida, Hamas and Hezbollah, and a myriad of other groups and organisations which resort to violence are deemed not to be “true” Muslims. In this fashion, the West is defining what “Islam” really is, and this is the essence Orientalism. In other words, Orientalist discourse ascribes characteristics and attributes to Islam and Islamism rather than describing them.

Conversely, politicians and the media speak of highly unpopular dictatorships, autocracies and monarchies aligned with the West as “moderate” Muslim regimes. In practice this means ‘distinguishing between those with whom Western governments feel that can “do business” (the moderates) and those with whom they cannot or will not’ (ICG 2005:2). Laughably enough Saudi Arabia, with all its depredations against women, human rights abuses, and

worldwide propagation of the Wahhabi branch of Islam which spawned al-Qa'ida, falls into this category. As Said (1997:54) points out, Muslim peoples and regimes are defined in terms of whether or not they are for or against the US, not for who they are, or what political processes or values they subscribe to. Western endorsement of dictatorial regimes, such as Saudi Arabia or Egypt under Mubarak, promising “democratic reforms” yet effecting little, has caused the word “democracy” to become synonymous with hypocrisy, especially following the election and subsequent boycott of Hamas (El Alaoui 2008:11). Thus, in much of the Muslim and Arab world, legitimacy conferred by the US is cynically equated to be dependent upon subservience to US policy. This, in turn, delegitimizes secularism, Western policy in the Middle East, and further confirms Islamist accusations.

“Symbolic power is the power to construct a hegemonic version of reality” (Tuastad 2003:591). Political discourse effectively equates modernity with the West, its values, institutions and processes; whereas political Islam is portrayed as its anti-thesis (Deeb 2006: 4-5). Present is the ‘implied notion that “political Islam” represents a deviation from an apolitical norm and the tacitly understood (but concealed) notion that it is a deviation from a pro-Western political norm. In effect, “Islam” [is] only seen to be political when it [is] seen to be a threat’ (ICG 2005:2).

Western discourse, therefore, allows modern political movements to be deemed as regressive, resistance as fanaticism, and repression as progression (Khalidi 2005:28). To this end, resistance to national, regional or international orders are drowned in waves of emotion and irrationality, no matter how legitimate the opposition to such orders might be (Burgat 2002:177). According to Israeli journalist Amira Hass (2003:16), “The concept is that the historical, political and geopolitical connections, the sociological and psychological ramifications, none of it is relevant.” In the context of the “war on terror” only Islam (or perversion thereof) is deemed to be of primary importance because an essential unchanging Islamist type abrogates the West of any responsibility for Islamist violence.

The apparent convergence of Islamist religiously idiomatic rhetoric and common reference points (especially Palestine) gives these claims of a “clash of civilisations” or unified political Islam a certain prima facie credibility. However, political motives are often left unexplored - indeed, unmentioned - in favour of reductionist views pertaining to religious fundamentalism. Instead, complicated and often confusing political, cultural, social and economic events are reduced to “Islam” (Said 1997:9). This abstract notion of religion is then juxtaposed against Western enlightenment values derived from “rationality” rather than metaphysics and religion. Corollary to this is the firmly entrenched Eurocentric idea that the West somehow has a monopoly on rationality (Bourdieu 1995:25). In other words, a conscious distinction is made between the “irrational” peripheries in contrast to the “rational” (Western) centre (Tuastad 2003:597). By reducing Islamist actions to perverted religion, defence of such thought becomes almost unthinkable, for according to Pierre Bourdieu (1998 cited in Burgat 2003:xiii):

“Who could possibly declare their support for butchers, rapists and murderers? Especially when those murders are ‘Islamic crazies’, a description which brooks no consideration of history? Cloaked by the term ‘Islamic extremism’, they are hidden beneath this atavistic symbol of oriental fanaticisms. It is a term well suited for providing racist prejudice with an inscrutable alibi of legitimacy founded on ethical and secularist grounds.”

All of this, of course, elides and ignores the diversity of Islamist actors around the globe. It also marginalises the role of local politics and functioning secular institutions in the Muslim world; not to mention intellectual contest between Islamists and nationalist opponents, let alone the internal debate within Islam itself (Said 1997:xxix; Moaddel 2002:375). In essence,

there is an ethnocentric ignorance of local political processes, and Islam is deemed only important insofar as it affects the Western world. Effectively, entire periods of Middle East's cultural, political and social history are merely considered to be response to the West or how it fits into the greater scheme of Western domination (Khalidi 2005:25; Said 2003:109); that is, as an adjunct rather than having any independent force of its own. In addition, real world experiences and actual events and conditions on the ground are ignored. In reality, however, there are several processes at work, most importantly that of internal contestation within the Muslim world and external confrontation with what is perceived to be an encroaching West (Burgat 2003:183).

In place of a more nuanced approach, politicians and the media engage in reductive polarisations of the world into pro and anti-Western/American forces. This is most vividly illustrated by George W. Bush's (2001b) crude "You're either with us or with the terrorists" speech in the wake of September 11. In a similar vein, Hamas and Hezbollah are usually referred to with the epithet as Iranian or Syrian-backed, thereby conflating localised regional actors with the received view of Iran and Syria as "hubs of global terrorism". In this manner, these movements are portrayed as simply puppets and machinations of the anti-Western, anti-Israel "axis of evil" driven by their own self-interests. As such, it denies the widespread grassroots support, domestic legitimacy and independent agency exhibited by these actors. In other words, the West is denying their constituents of the right to choose their representatives. Instead, these movements are being represented and local manifestations of resistance are derided as outside machinations. In short, the West claims to know these movements and their constituents better than they know themselves.

These representations are constructed to be suitable for prevailing dominant cultures and exigencies (Said 2003:153). By speaking of Al-Qa'ida (transnational Wahabbi Sunni), Hamas (Arab Sunni Nationalist Quasi-State), Hezbollah (Arab Shi'a Sub-state Actor), Syria (Arab Alawite Secular Dictatorship), and Iran (Iranian Shi'a Theocracy) all in the same breath, the lines between each is blurred, and the clearly manifest differences, backgrounds and political contexts of each actor are conveniently packaged under the all encompassing rubric of the "war on terror". Thus, not only is the West representing these actors to fit certain exigencies, but it is also designates who is and is not the legitimate representatives for the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples. If indeed there is a conflict with these actors or a "clash of civilisations", then a situation arrives where one party effectively arrogates itself the right to choose each set of "legitimate" representatives. In addition, by failing to differentiate between such actors there is the possibility of turning the "clash of civilisations" into a self-fulfilling prophecy (Bottici and Challand 2006; Pintack 2006:24). By reinforcing reductive polarisations in this manner, it also implies by the precedents of Afghanistan and Iraq that each of these actors could be subject to actions similar to those undertaken against al-Qa'ida (Khalidi 2005:123). Orientalism, "modernity" and rationality, therefore, become the intellectual justification for Western policy, domination and interventions in the Middle East (Said 2003:3; Moaddel 2002:362).

### Institutionalisation

An impressive array of institutional forces reinforce, reify and legitimise such a view including, the media, politicians, "experts" (both self-styled and those linked to government and corporate funded think tanks) and academia. These are what Gramsci calls "experts in legitimation" (cited in Said 1992:59). These institutions provide support and legitimacy to reductive representations and tap into latent, internalised, antagonism felt towards others deemed as alien and threatening. These internalisations entail an acceptance of sorts and this consent allows the institutionalisation of orthodox or hegemonic thought (Femia 1975:32). The problem is that this hegemonic thought is often constructed and manipulated by those

who have the means. This is what Herman and Chomsky (2002) call “manufacturing consent/content” or by extension “manufacturing consciousness” (Reinhart 2006:3).

### The Media

The global media is for most people in the Western world their primary source of news and information. As such, it is an important factor when it comes to shaping perceptions and attitudes. However, in the competition for ratings and capital, the media has a tendency to focus on sensationalism (Herman and Chomsky 2002:xiv; Burgat 2003:5). In consequence, extremist fringes are given undue prominence. It would seem evident that the image of a firebrand cleric denouncing the “Great Satan” in religious idiom and calling for a global jihad possesses far more media appeal than a nuanced spokesman explaining a group’s motives or grievances. This stereotypical image of the bearded cleric is then used as “proof” of religious fanaticism (Burgat 2003:167). “News frames” simplify and prioritise the news to fit existing societal concepts, values and knowledge and put it into a context that the audience can understand, that is, the prevailing mainstream narrative (Entman 1993); a narrative which has been long reified by Orientalist associations with the Muslim Middle East. Thus, Islamists with the bombs not ballet papers are made more visible (Burgat 2003:167). In a similar vein, defectors who have “seen the light” are also given undue prominence so that an “insider’s” view lends credibility and support to the prevailing orthodoxy (Herman and Chomsky 2002:30); for what could be more effective than a dissenter acknowledging the failings of their “native” way of life? (Said 1994:189). In addition, as the media is effectively striving for the same audience, the selection of what counts as news is not so much dependent on reality as it is on serving this function (Said 1997:49-52). This all leads to the symbiotic relationship between acts of terrorism and the media, whereby violence is given undue prominence due to its media appeal.

The format of news programs also contributes to simplistic renditions of complex phenomena. Thirty second snippets tell, for example, of Hamas firing rockets into Israel but fail to explain why, thereby giving the impression that these acts are *sans* precedent and Israel merely responding to unwarranted provocation; that is, as opposed to a brutal 40 year occupation of the Palestinian Territories. In this light, the actions of Hamas, stripped of their context, appear to be acts of wanton murder. More to point, file footage of frenzied mobs at the funerals of “martyrs” and Kalashnikov wielding masked militants help to build both conscious and unconscious associations with Islam, mobs, violence and radicalism. The result is a set of simplified easily digestible stereotypes. Hollywood representations of Western agents slaughtering, or acting in concert with and teaching, their incompetent Arab counterparts to thwart hundreds of terrorists only serve to reinforce such unconscious associations. A recent Hollywood production *The Kingdom* set in Saudi Arabia propagates exactly this image. In essence, fragments of knowledge are presented and taken to represent the whole (Said 2003:129). As Said (1992:143) points out, there is a “generalizing tendency of the media and minds to simply, dramatize, resulting in gross political rhetoric, inflating, italicizing and theologizing issues and actions [sic].”

The media also has a penchant for utilising connotative language to convey judgement and allocate legitimacy. So, for example, Palestinians engage in acts of “terrorism” and perpetrate “murder”, with the death of 8 students at a settler yeshiva in Jerusalem branded as a “massacre” (see for example *The Age* 08/03/08). Conversely, sanitised language is applied to the actions of Israel. Thus the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) engages in “strikes” and “incursions” in Gaza despite the far greater death toll and loss of civilian life. According to the *Washington Post*, an Israeli “incursion” killed 60 Gazans on a single day in March 2008 (Witte 2008). Likewise, the Israelis build seemingly benign “settlements” to expropriate Palestinian land, rather than, say, colonies. In a similar vein, for the White House the deaths of 3 IDF soldiers and the capture of 2 more on a cross-border raid by Hezbollah was

apparently ample justification for a full-scale war and death of over 1100 mostly Lebanese civilians (during which another 400 Palestinians were killed in Gaza, including 75 children) (Fisk 2006; Carter 2007:198-201). This is especially the case in light of US' stonewalling of European efforts to bring an immediate halt to hostilities at the UN (Roberts 2006). The polarity between Israel as a "the only democracy in the Middle East" and the almost absence of democratic freedoms in the Muslim Middle East heightens Western identification with Israel because Israelis subscribe to "our" values. Thus, according to *The Atlantic* editor Robert Kaplan (2000:42), Israel represents "a fortress amid a vast and volatile realm of Islam." Indeed, in the wake of September 11, then Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and other Israeli officials were quick to assert the "common struggle" faced by Israel and US in the declared "war on terrorism" (Mearsheimer and Walt 2007:205; Fisk 2002:xii).

The intent of this extension of the "war on terror" is to a) disassociate the violence of Hamas and Hezbollah with Israeli policy in the Palestinian territories and Lebanon and b) associate the violence of Hamas and Hezbollah with that of al-Qa'ida. This is despite the fact Hamas only operates on a military level inside Israel and the Palestinian Territories and Hezbollah generally attacks "hard" military targets. Moreover, Hamas has never targeted the US (although some US citizens have been killed) and nor has Hezbollah since the end of the Lebanese civil war. This suggests that violent measures taken by Hamas and Hezbollah against Israel have more to do with local conditions in Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories than a global jihad against the West. Mearshiemer and Walt (2007) contend that, in actuality, US hostility towards Hamas and Hezbollah is driven by Israeli interests and domestic political pressures in the US. Supporting this proposition is the fact that pro-Israel lobby groups wanted Hamas and Hezbollah included on the executive order against al-Qa'ida in the wake of September 11 (Norton 2007:74). The idea was to discursively link the regional Arab-Israeli conflict - particularly the conflicts concerning Hamas and Hezbollah but also extended to the late Yasser Arafat - to the global "war on terror"; an idea that more or less was achieved with Hezbollah added to the US list of terrorist organisations with a "global reach" in 2001 and Hamas having been largely boycotted since its election in 2006.

The media also allocates time to experts from think tanks which often have financial and other ties to the government, corporate interests or lobby groups, especially in the US. The purpose is to provide supposedly "objective" and learned viewpoints to support the prevailing orthodoxy or political needs. In fact, the media is heavily dependent on government officials, sources and documents (Herman and Chomsky 2002:19). Furthermore, many of these experts are often former government officials. Additionally, many such think tanks receive funding or are directly commissioned by the government, corporate entities or lobby groups, which has clear implications on the neutrality of the work produced, especially as these ties are often obscured (for example the links between General Electric and the American Enterprise Institute or those between the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy) (Herman and Chomsky 2002; Mearshiemer and Walt 2007:175-176). The result is a one sided biased discourse engineered to serve a particular purpose - that is the dissemination of "correct ideas" - masquerading and presented as objective or neutral information (Bourdieu 1998:106; Herman and Chomsky 2002:23). Accentuating this trend, is the concentration of media ownership and the diversification of their holdings (for example GE, Time Warner, Westinghouse) meaning that news providers are often subject to the ideological prejudices and corporate interests of their owners. The incentive to engage in such activities is heightened by the convergence of neo-liberal capitalist ideology and the corporate interests of large multinationals which benefit from the "opening up" of overseas markets (Herman and Chomsky 2002:14).

Politics and Politicians

The impact and influence of politicians in regards to political Islam is clear given that they are the leaders of the community who legislate a society's laws, institutionalise certain values through schools, courts and other state apparatuses and, most pertinently perhaps for this paper, formulate and implement foreign policy. Yet politicians are also people holding a variety of personal ideological beliefs and personal interests. In addition, the power to manage interactions with foreign entities is concentrated within a small group of people. The perceptions and discourse of the political elite are especially important as, according to Bourdieu (1982:149), politicians have an intimate knowledge of the environment within which they operate and, thus, through discourse, can apply this knowledge to:

“make or un-make groups – and, at the same time, the collective actions which they can undertake to transform the social world to conform to their interests – by producing, reproducing or destroying the representations which render these groups visible to themselves and to others” (my translation).

In addition, politicians have internalised the concept of threat meaning that opposition is designated as being “soft” on terrorism (Herman and Chomsky 2002:29). Critics of the war in Iraq or Israeli policy in Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories are derided as being against the troops, “apologists” for Islamic terrorism or, in the case of Israel, “anti-Semitic” (Judt 2008:34). Simplistic but appealing political clichés and euphemistic language, such as “making the world safe for democracy” and “spreading freedom and democracy”, are employed to mobilise the public for action based both on security and ethical grounds. This is what Bourdieu (1977:191) described as “euphemised” “socially recognised violence” embedded in hegemonic practice in a “disguised and transfigured” form.

It is also worth noting the domestic audiences to which politicians address themselves in Western democracies. Thus following events such as the September 11, Bali and Madrid a leader's need to be seen to doing *something* results in populist demagoguery which taps into latent stereotypes driven by emotional outrage and non-comprehension. In times of crises, politicians exacerbate “otherness” and difference to designate a suitable scapegoat (Bourdieu 1982:151; Butzer 2001:392). In the case of the “war of terror” political Islam fulfils this role, regardless of the role that Western policies may have played in fostering its emergence.

### Academia

Finally, academics feed into this Orientalist discourse through the propagation of supposed learned and considered views. Indeed, the complicity of academia with those in power to engage in imperialist adventures were the initial target of Said's 1978 critique of Orientalism. In a similar vein, Levi-Strauss once called anthropology “the handmaiden of colonialism” (cited in Said 1994:149). In short, Orientalist discourse provides intellectual and moral justification and/or rationalisation for the subordination of others in the name of the British “White Man's Burden”, the French *Mission Civilisatrice* or the American “Manifest Destiny”, whereby the West brings light and civilisation to the world. Echoes of this clearly resonate in the current themes of bringing “democracy” and human rights to the Middle East in the name of “freedom”. Moreover, there is a tendency to approach the subject – the militant movement or “terrorist” organisation – as an adversary to be defeated, not as socio-political phenomena to be explained or understood (Brannan et al 2001:4).

First, this Orientalist “terrorist” discourse stems from the Weberian state-centric view of the international system which accords the “nation-state” a priori legitimacy in regards to other actors. This is despite fact that the state is the biggest killer in history and concentrates power in the hands of the elite. In fact, much of literature regarding “terrorism” takes the legitimacy of the “status quo for granted without questioning its origins, premises, and the extent to which it contributes to violence” (Gunning 2007:13). Conversely, “terrorism” studies render the violence of non-state entities “illegitimate” in spite of the many international resolutions

and conventions stipulating the right to self-determination and the right to resist occupation. In other words, it is a rationalisation for state violence.

Second, this can be explained by the links between academics, think-tanks, corporations and policy makers, with all of the associated funding considerations. In the US, critics of Middle Eastern studies believe that funding should be withheld from those pursuing such studies which do not further the “national interest” (Kramer 2001; De Atkine and Pipes 1995). In such a case, it becomes evident that one would have a vested interest in producing work which conforms to the views of policy makers controlling such funding. In addition, there are institutional pressures to conform to the “right” or “acceptable” hermeneutically sealed approaches to research and its outcomes (Smith 2002; Bilgen 2006:576). Moreover, self-representation of others is subordinated to the supposed scientific rigorousness of Western scholarship. Thus, this “Western way of knowing” and epistemological authority allow the Orientalist to depict the Middle East irrespective of perceptions and beliefs of the subject supposedly being studied (Said 2003:19; Bilgen 2006:577). It is also indicative of the predilection in the study of international relations with grand paradigms indulging in mass generalisation whilst marginalising specific historic, cultural, economic or political contexts. Instead, “terrorism” and Islamism should be treated as multi-faceted social phenomena.

### “New Terrorism”

An example of this predilection towards ahistorical generalisations is the idea of a “new” or “fourth wave” of religious terrorism which has taken hold throughout academia (Hoffman 1998:94; Rapoport 2004; Laqueur 2003:9). This “new” or “fourth wave” is supposedly different from previous manifestations of terrorism because of their belief in some kind of Millenarian conflict. Due to metaphysical goals these movements are supposed to be driven purely by religious creed rather than concrete goals. In contrast with the previous anti-colonial or separatist nationalist movements, the religious wave is unconcerned with acquisition of territory or governance. Unimpeded by a constituency and convinced of the “truth” of their claims, the violence of these groups is more deadly and indiscriminate. Since September 11, there has been a penchant to apply this label liberally to militant Islamic movements, including Hamas and Hezbollah. I would contend that the idea of “new terrorism” is an extension of essentialist Orientalist discourse; in essence, the religious fanatic or barbarian threatening civilisation.

The “new” terrorist is supposedly separated from the political sphere and the structural sphere, which means they are not dependent on or interested in public support (Hoffman 1998:95; Brown 2007:39). The practical applications of these labels are clear: policy-makers, faced with supposed religious irrationality and an enemy which possesses an innate inability to compromise, have little other option but force. Thus the characterisation of Hamas as “zealots” ideologically incapable of compromise and intent on wrecking the peace process through violence’ (Darby 2001:48), legitimises Israeli violence and the siege of Gaza.

However, “new terrorism” overlooks the relevance and saliency of national liberation and resistance in its analysis (Brown 2007:37). This is especially pertinent to the cases of Hamas and Hezbollah, both of which were born of resistance to Israeli occupation. Hamas and Hezbollah are also clearly constituent based movements. Moreover, Hezbollah generally only attacks “hard” targets and, since Hamas’ takeover of Gaza, Israeli officials acknowledge that Hamas has, for the most part, aimed at military rather than civilian targets<sup>1</sup> (Norton 2007:77; ICG 2008:7). As Mark Juergensmeyer (2001:5) points out, “‘Terrorism’ has more frequently been associated with violence committed by disenfranchised groups desperately attempting to gain a shred of power or influence.’

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<sup>1</sup> Although for other smaller groups firing rockets this is not necessarily the case.

## Hamas and Hezbollah

### Ideology vs. Political Programme and Practice

As mentioned above, there is a penchant for the institutional forces such as the media and politicians to sensationalise and indulge in simplistic polarisations of “us” and “them”. In the case of Hamas and Hezbollah there is a tendency to focus on their charters or the often vitriolic and populist statements made at mass public rallies rather than their actions and hints at compromise. This is then used as “proof” of religious fanaticism as if the West and its political leaders do not indulge in public hyperbole about the Muslim Middle East; hyperbole that Muslims also hear. Such examples include “the axis of evil” and frequent charges of “appeasement” with all its Hitler-esque connotations of the Shoah and the Second World War (Pintak 2006:183). Indeed, the media and politicians dutifully inform us that there are Hitlers everywhere in Syria, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon and Gaza (Judt 2008:34). Implied is the notion that there is a world war and a second Shoah on the horizon.

However, it is important to distinguish between ideology and intellectual platforms in contrast to political programmes and practice, all of which diverge in many instances. This is variously described as the “tension between fundamental and operative ideologies”, the difference between material and symbolic lenses, and the intellectual structure and political programme (Seliger 1970; Harb and Leenders 2005:191; Klien 2007:443). The distinction is necessary because dogmatic ideologies do not necessarily lend themselves well to everyday life. In essence, for Hamas and Hezbollah there is a juxtaposition of intellectual with the political which allows the preservation of principles, as well as the ability to deal with everyday needs and exigencies relating to political/institutional survival (Mishal and Sela 2000:13; Saad-Ghorayeb 2002:159). It is this reconciliation of intellectual and political thought that allows Hamas and Hezbollah to function as pragmatic actors able to act according to circumstance and in seeming contradiction of their principles or charters.

Whilst the charters of Hamas and Hezbollah stress uncompromising stances against Israel and ideally seek an Islamic state, their political platforms run on policies of social justice, anti-corruption, and efficient governance. Indeed, much of support for Hamas and Hezbollah is derived from extensive networks of social services including hospitals, schools, housing, and subsidised goods and services (Denooux 2002:78). More to the point, Hezbollah won a UN Best Practices Award for its administration of the suburb of Ghobeyri in Beirut (Harb and Leenders 2005:188). One American television commentator even opined that Hezbollah did a better job cleaning up and rebuilding in the aftermath of the 2006 July War than the US did after Hurricane Katrina (Norton 2007). These social policies challenge and fill the gaps of inefficient, corrupt, patron-based states, which are perceived by their constituents to be fundamentally unjust.

Hezbollah’s main supporters, the Shi’a, share a profound sense of victimhood in the face of a perceived corrupt and unresponsive political system (Norton 2007:153). Traditionally marginalised, Hezbollah is an assertion of the Shi’a’s place in the political system (Norton 2007:13). In this sense, Hezbollah is an assertion, reconstruction and reclaiming of a stigmatised Shi’a self-identity (Harb and Leenders 2005:185; Deeb 2006:12). As such, Hezbollah is an outgrowth of the Lebanese state’s complete and repeated failures to protect and provide for the Shi’a (ICG 2007:4; Alagha 2006:166). Corollary to this is the connection of resistance with ideas of empowerment and the fight against oppression (ICG 2007:3; Alagha 2006:155).

Hamas also runs a variety of social services and has a proven record of efficient governance at a municipal level, but is constrained by Israeli occupation and PA antagonism in the West Bank. At the heart of its political programme are concerns for social justice, leadership accountability and democratic participation (Gunning 2004:241). In essence, its party

platform focused on Palestinian society's current circumstances. Hamas' "Change and Reform" platform ran on promises of tackling poverty, crime and corruption; administrative reform; stronger local government; and a reduction of the central government's powers (Klein 2007:451). These were aimed at the failures of Fatah which failed to improve the standard of living in the post-Oslo peace process and was widely perceived to be corrupt and mired in cronyism (Khalidi 2007:151-152). Similarly, Hezbollah's 2000 election platform ran on proportional rather than sectarian representation, the strengthening of civil society and a greater role for women in public life (Hoigilt 2007:126). Below I will briefly explore some basic conceptions and misconceptions pertaining to Hamas and Hezbollah: the idea of an Islamic State, their attitudes towards al-Qa'ida, Israel and the West, and their commitment to democracy.

### The Islamic State and Democracy

The common conception of an Islamic state in the West consists of archaic laws enforced by bearded Mullahs with corporal punishment - such as death by stoning - and women hidden away from public life. On paper, both Hamas and Hezbollah are intellectually committed to an Islamic state. In reality, however, both movements have stated that the implementation of such a state is a utopian ideal (Hoigilt 2007:125; Klein 2007:450). In Lebanon, Hezbollah has accepted the idea of multi-confessional politics (Ayoob 2004:8). Due to the diversity of Lebanon, the idea of an Islamic state in Lebanon is deemed impossible because Hezbollah's conception of an Islamic state must be entered into voluntarily (Saad-Ghorayeb 2002:36; Norton 2007:40). With Lebanon's large denominations of Christians, Sunnis and Druze, this consent is not likely to be forthcoming. For Hezbollah the forced implementation of an Islamic state would void the principles upon which it is founded. Hamas shares a similar conviction in the Palestinian territories where the population is quite heterogeneous and of moderate religiosity (Klien 2007:452; Daoudi 2006:1). As mentioned, Hezbollah wants to de-confessionalise politics and move to proportional representation (Hoigilt 2007:126). In essence, both the political platforms and programmes of Hamas and Hezbollah are reformist rather than revolutionary (Mishal and Sela 2000:8; Alagha 2006:169).

Indeed, the electoral and political programmes of both Hamas and Hezbollah omit or background Islamist agendas in favour of the aforementioned social policies (Klien 2007:450; Hoigilt 2007:126). Neither Hamas nor Hezbollah mentions the concept of an Islamic state in their political platforms (Klein 2007:450; Alagha 2006:183). Similarly, the charter of Hamas is not mentioned in any of its political texts, whereas Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah and deputy Na'im Qassam have hinted that its 1985 Open letter/Charter is now obsolete (Klien 2007:450; Norton 2007:46). However, both Hamas and Hezbollah actively work for the Islamisation of the population from the grassroots up.

In addition, both Hamas and Hezbollah have a demonstrated ability to strike pragmatic alliances with other denominations and factions. For Hezbollah, its alliance with former anti-Syrian general Michel Aoun, a Christian, and his Free Patriotic Movement accords Hezbollah some legitimacy and deflects from the charge that it purely a sectarian movement. Similarly, Hamas has engaged in pragmatic alliances and co-operation with leftist forces, politically and most poignantly, perhaps, in the area of women's rights (Gunning 2004:257). Moreover, Hamas, in contrast to the Western backed Fatah, prides itself on internal consultation and holds regular internal elections. Hamas emphasises the inclusive, egalitarian aspects of Islam and equates proper leadership with consultation (Gunning 2004:244). Hamas and Hezbollah are also *au courant* and responsive to public opinion through their everyday contact with the public via their social networks (Norton 2007:45; Gunning 2004:244). It is also worth noting the Western backed factions in Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories are the factions

resisting the “national unity” governments called for by Hamas and Hezbollah (although whether or not this is a tactic or real concern for unity is of course debateable).

Nevertheless, critics charge that Islamist political participation and alleged acceptance of plurality and democracy is merely a tactic which they will abandon in favour of an Islamic state once in power (Burgat 2002:137; Piscatori 2007:i). The violent takeover of Gaza in June 2007 and the May 2008 clashes between Hezbollah and rival factions, at first glance, seem to be evidence that Hamas and Hezbollah are willing to use force to obtain power but this analysis strips the actions of their context.

Since the 2005 “Cedar Revolution” and the subsequent withdrawal of the Syrian army, Hezbollah sought a greater political role and entered the government for the first time. The Syrian withdrawal meant that Syria no longer exerts the overarching control over Lebanese politics that it once did and, with that, Hezbollah lost its guarantor of the resistance against Israel (Saad-Ghroyeb 2007:44-46). Ironically, the Western-lauded “Cedar Revolution” prompted Hezbollah to seek more political influence in order to obtain a vetoing third in cabinet and thereby guarantee the “resistance” (Saad-Groyeb 2007:46). Hezbollah resorted to the very same measures of the “Cedar Revolution”, including a tent city sit-in and mass rallies to protest against the government, yet was roundly condemned by the West, again highlighting Western double standards (Norton 2007:157). The pro-Western government’s attempts to curtail “the Resistance”, Hezbollah’s *raison d’être*, and a prolonged political impasse led to clashes on the streets culminating with Hezbollah’s brief armed seizure of parts of Beirut in May 2008. Hezbollah recently obtained its desired veto power in Qatari brokered talks to end the impasse (Worth and Bakiri 2008). This resort to violence was seen as “proof” of Hezbollah’s true nature. However, the recent violence demonstrates that Hezbollah is not looking to seize power by force of arms even though it was quite clear it could have. Instead, Hezbollah sought and obtained a guaranteeing third for the resistance rather than the ability to implement its policies (Gresh 2008:10). Following the crisis, Nasrallah has sought to reaffirm Hezbollah’s commitment to democracy in Lebanon, explicitly stating that Hezbollah does not seek a governing role (*Le Monde* 26/05/08).

Hamas’ violent takeover over of Gaza in June 2007 also seemed to indicate that Hamas was willing to exercise force in order to obtain power and prompted a wave of condemnation. These condemnations, of course, myopically seemed to forget that Hamas was overwhelmingly elected in January 2006 and Fatah had refused to hand over control of the security forces to the interior ministry. In this light, and despite its brutality, the armed takeover of Gaza by Hamas was less the “coup” disparaged by Western media, than a legally and democratically elected government enforcing its writ within its territory, especially given US’ policy of arming Fatah.

Moreover, according to a recent International Crisis Group (2008:15) report, there are no overt signs of Islamisation of the courts and schools in Gaza since its takeover, insofar as neither the Palestinian Authority curriculum nor its law code or constitution has been modified. Furthermore, in accordance with PA practice but controversial within Islamic tradition, Hamas appointed a woman judge and promoted another to the head of the Appeals Court in January 2008 (ICG 2008:15). Also, since August 2007, Hamas has been recruiting policewomen (ICG 2008:15). As mentioned, Hezbollah’s political platform calls for the greater participation of women in public life (Hoigilt 2007:126). In other words, these actions would seem to fly in the face of Western “received views” of Islamism and its attitude towards women.

### Vis-à-vis Israel

Officially, Hamas and Hezbollah deny legitimacy to Israel and are committed to its destruction. Indeed, resistance to Israel and the liberation of Palestine, especially Jerusalem are intellectual pillars and ostensible *raison d'être* for each movement. For critics, this struggle is driven by rampant anti-Semitism (a misnomer in itself given that Arabs are a Semitic people) and so-called "Islamofacism". In reality, however, hostility and resentment towards Israel does not take place in a vacuum but is the result of long history of injustices visited upon the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples in the name of fighting "terrorism" and Israel's perceived existential threats. A short list includes the displacement of some 750,000 Palestinians from what is now Israel in 1948, continuing through the 1967 Six Day War, to the numerous invasions, bombings, and the occupation of Lebanon from 1978 to 2000, complete with massacres of civilians at Sabra, Shatila and Qana, as well as the 2006 July War. When coupled to the continued occupation of the Palestinian territories with all of the associated daily humiliations, the systematic denial of Palestinian identity, assassination campaigns, ever expanding colonies, the current siege of Gaza and almost daily killing of civilians by the IDF, it is fairly gruesome litany of injustices and grievances that might better explain the animosity, and even hatred, felt by Palestinians and Lebanese towards the Israeli state. One would think that real world grievances might be enough to account for violence against Israel without adding charges of anti-Judaism, which is no doubt present in some shape or form but exacerbated by Israeli policy. Recognition of Israel is demanded as a start to negotiations and legitimisation but in reality it is largely irrelevant because, even if there is a genuine desire to "push the Jews into the sea", neither Hamas nor Hezbollah have anywhere near the capability to effect this, and probably never will given the vast superiority of Israeli arms in the Middle East.

However, there is a need to differentiate between symbolic recognition and co-existence. The behaviour and practice of Hamas and Hezbollah suggest somewhat more flexibility and pragmatism than an implacable hatred driven by anti-Judaism. Both Hamas and Hezbollah have abided by lengthy ceasefires in the past. Freed from Israeli occupation, Hezbollah can afford to take a harder line than Hamas, who has to contend constantly with the Israeli army. However, Hezbollah generally has a policy of restricting its attacks to "hard" military attack along the border and disputed Sheeba Farms still under Israeli occupation (Norton 2007:77). It has also managed to negotiate with Israel over the fate of captured soldiers and prisoners. Nasrallah also seems to have noted, that whilst retaining a resistance identity, Hezbollah will not try to liberate Jerusalem following an Israeli withdrawal from the disputed farms (Alagha 2006:214-215). In this case, Hezbollah would become a purely "defensive" resistance to protect against Israeli actions that the Lebanese army is incapable of stopping (Saad-Ghorayeb 2007:46). This suggests that, whilst never recognising Israel, it could co-exist with Israel should a just agreement be reached with the Palestinians and normalisation with the rest of the Arab world. Echoing this is Hezbollah MP Muhammed Fnaysh's assertion that the stand vis-à-vis Israeli-Palestinian negotiations "need not be a case of everything or nothing" when "there are political and security conditions which compel one to deal with reality" (cited in Saad-Ghorayeb 2002:153).

Operating under a more laborious set of circumstances punctuated by helicopter gunships, Hamas has more pragmatic considerations to take into account. As such, Hamas has abided by many ceasefires with Israel in the past, including a unilateral ceasefire prior and after the 2006 legislative elections, even in the face of ongoing assassinations against its members and leadership (Reinhart 2006:17-20; Gunning 2007:52). More to the point, Hamas has made repeated offers of a permanent ceasefire and to stop targeting civilians in a quid pro quo regarding Palestinian civilians (Gunning 2004:241). Most poignantly, perhaps, is the longstanding policy of Hamas dating from the 1990s to enter into a *hudna* (often translated as

ceasefire) and let future generations resolve the conflict. Before his assassination, Hamas founder “Sheikh”<sup>2</sup> Yassin spoke of a 10 year *hudna* which would be automatically renewed (Klien 2007:445). But a *hudna* is more than a ceasefire. In an op-ed piece published in the *New York Times*, Ahmed Yousef (2006), a political aide to Ismail Haniyeh and Hamas spokesman, described a *hudna* as

“typically cover[ing] 10 years and recognised in Islamic jurisprudence as a legitimate and binding contract. A *hudna* extends beyond the Western concept of a ceasefire and obliges the parties to use the period to seek a permanent, nonviolent resolution to their differences.”

Hamas has also repeatedly and publicly committed itself to accepting a popular referendum on any peace agreement reached by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (Carter 2007:213). It has also publicly supported the realisation of partial goals based upon a two state solution (Klien 2007:444). Instances of this can be found in the Prisoner’s Document drawn up by all of the Palestinian factions and Hamas’ acceptance of the Arab League initiative, entailing full normalisation with Israel in return for a withdrawal from the Arab territories captured in 1967 and the establishment of a Palestinian state (Chehab 2007:201-202; Carter 2007:198).

However, these overtures and concessions on the part of Hamas have been ignored by Israel and the Western powers or dismissed as a tactic. The preconditions for negotiations - recognition of Israel, renouncing violence, and respecting previous accords between Israel and the PLO – are essentially impossible for Hamas. In essence, it calls upon Hamas to surrender all of its negotiating chips without demanding reciprocal conditions from Israel; all the while as Israel continues to build colonies and consolidate its hold on the West Bank. In this light, it is hardly surprising that that Hamas is not willing to submit to the fate of the PLO now discredited by 15 years of failure following the “peace of the brave” Oslo accords and the “Road Map”, (even if Hamas was at least in part to blame for the failures of such initiatives). As such, Hamas reserves the right to pursue resistance to occupation in conjunction with any peace talks.

Whilst Hamas may never commit to recognise Israel, if one looks beyond the virulent and often uncompromising political rhetoric and mass rallies, it has already publicly committed itself to coexistence with Israel (Agha and Malley 2008:58; McCarthy 2008). Symbolic recognition of Israel is largely an abstract concern. There are also groups within Israel which will never relinquish their claims to “Greater Israel” as defined in the Torah but these groups are still allowed to participate in the political system.

### Vis-a-vis Al-Qa’ida and the West

As argued, the discourse of the “war on terror” has polarised the world and homogenised Islamist movements. Through this discourse Hamas and Hezbollah are presented as the equivalent to al-Qa’ida’s anti-Western global jihad (Khalidi 2005:123). This is illustrated by recent speech by President Bush to the Israeli Knesset proclaiming that “al-Qa’ida, Hizbollah [sic] and Hamas will be defeated, as Muslims across the region recognise the emptiness of the terrorists’ vision and the injustice of their cause” (cited in Fisk 2008). This speech in fact failed to mention any of the depredations that the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples have suffered from Israeli policies over the past 60 years. Moreover, during an interview on CNN, US Under-secretary of State, Richard Armitage (2003), opined that Hezbollah “made the A-Team of terrorists and maybe al-Qaeda is actually the B-team.” This is despite the fact that Hamas has never specifically attacked Western targets and neither has Hezbollah since the

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<sup>2</sup>In Palestinian society the honorific Sheik is not necessarily a religious title but rather a designation of respect. Indeed, Yassin was not religious clergy as one might assume but a teacher.

end of the Lebanese civil war. Indeed, both movements insist that their operations are limited to the Lebanese-Israeli-Palestinian theatre and not some al-Qa'ida style global jihad against the West (Harb and Leenders 2005:180; Ayoob 2004:8). Moreover, each movement has explicitly disassociated itself with al-Qa'ida style ideologies and actions, routinely condemning attacks against Western civilians abroad (Chehab 2007:190-192; Alagha 2006:189).

In this vein, both the assassinated founder and spiritual leader of Hamas, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, and Secretary-General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, condemned the September 11 attacks (Pintak 2006:100; Rodenbeck 2008:18; Harb and Leenders 2005:180). Indeed, in response to the attacks, Yassin, in a Spanish paper, advised US President "Bush not to unleash a religious war. We [Hamas] are against what happened" (cited in Pintak 2006:100). Prior to these attacks, Hezbollah also had a policy of condemning attacks against civilians, such as the November 1997 killing of Western civilians at Temple of Hatshepsut in Luxor, Egypt (Saad-Ghroyeb 2002:101).

And yet, despite this Hamas and Hezbollah are collated in the same sentence as al-Qa'ida. Allegations are routinely made about Hezbollah's links with al-Qa'ida on the flimsiest of evidence, from "security sources" that becomes reified and accepted, regardless of its dubious provenance (see Harb and Leenders 2005:176; Saad-Ghroyeb 2002:96). One piece of evidence, for example, originally appeared on a pro-Israeli blog site, smoothly found itself in *Die Welt*, before being adopted by the Washington Institute think tank and printed in a quasi-scholarly publication with mostly respectable sourcing (Harb and Leenders 2005:177). In other cases, the connection between Hezbollah and al-Qa'ida is simply asserted. For example, one journal article written by accredited, presumably "dissident", Iranians in the *Journal of Democracy* published by John Hopkins University, asserts that "Hezbollah has been working with bin Laden on international operations since the early 1990s" (Boroumand and Boroumand 2002:11). The accompanying endnote – one would have thought ostensibly a reference – states "On 22 March 1998, the *Times of London* reported that bin Laden and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards had signed a pact the previous February 16 to consolidate their operations in Albania and Kosovo" (Boroumand and Boroumand 2002:19); as if this somehow provides credence to the original statement. When these assertions are published in supposedly refereed journal articles it lends institutional credibility to these claims. The assertion that the Sunni "purists" like al-Qa'ida would have a links to a Shi'a organisation is dubious a proposition to say least, especially given that these "purists" do not even recognise the Shi'a as Muslims at all (Norton 2007:124).

In addition, Hezbollah does not deny the legitimacy of the Western states in manner it does to Israel (Saad-Ghroyeb 2002:107). Nor does it have an ontological and immutable aversion to Western states as evidenced by Hezbollah's generally favourable views of French foreign policy under Chirac and its connections with other Western states and NGOs (Saad-Ghroyeb 2002:108; Alagha 2006:195). France also recently admitted contacts with Hamas (Eranger 2008). Hamas and Hezbollah do however resent Western influence and interference in Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories, as well as the assistance which allows Israel to continue its oppression of Palestinians.

Whilst Hamas and Hezbollah may reject aspects of Western values, both respect and admire many Western achievements, in particular its educational systems and technological know-how. Indeed, many supporters of Hamas and Hezbollah send their children abroad or to Western backed institutions for this reason (Saad-Gharoyeb 2002:110; Gunning 2004:247). In addition, both Hamas and Hezbollah study Western concepts and political practices borrowing certain ideas that they find appealing, in the same manner that all cultures do (Saad-Ghorayeb 2002:108-109; Gunning 2007:69). Hamas, for example, borrows from Western political and legal systems in its proposal for an alternative form of government,

including its commitment to freedom and democracy (Gunning 2007:69). To this end, Hamas Spokesman Ahmed Yousef explicitly declared that Hamas has “no ideological arguments with the West” in a December 2007 open letter to US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

### Conclusions

This paper has demonstrated that much of the discourse surrounding the “war on terror” leads to facile typecasting and easy ahistorical explanations for complex socio-political situations. In the case of Lebanon, external commentary often leads to confessional stereotyping eliding the complexity of relations among Lebanon’s diverse population and the effects of external interventions. In the Palestinian Territories, Hamas is mired in the political and moral minefield of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Overhanging each of these conflicts is Western guilt and the shadow of the Shoah, which allows the uncompromising rhetoric of Hamas and Hezbollah to be presented as an existential threat to Israel. Both movements have been discursively tied to the global “war on terror” where, in reality, each is a localised actor with very specific local aims. As Yousef (2007) points out in the Israeli daily *Ha’aretz* “The West should ask itself whether it wants the moderation and realism of Hamas or the dogmatism of radical groups that subscribe to the clash of civilizations theory.”

Moreover, whilst not ignoring the many structural problems, political stagnation, and cronyism which plague the Muslim Middle East, the role that Western policies have played in retarding political development and fostering the rise of Islamist groups is systematically elided. This myopic vision of the West leads it to see what it wants and ignores a long history of Western dominance and exploitation. In essence, Western commentary often excludes what “we” do and instead highlights what Arabs and Muslims by their flawed nature *are*’ (Said 1997:xxii). In reality, however, and despite all of the fear mongering in the Western world, it is not a Muslim army at the gates of New York, but a Western one in Baghdad and a perceived Western proxy in Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories.

Hamas and Hezbollah are not simply armed rejectionist “terrorist” organisations, but pragmatic grassroots activist movements deeply embedded in the social and political structures of their respective communities. The narrative of Hamas is embedded with religious authority and familiarity (Mishal and Sela 2000:15). In effect, Hamas took the political dynamism of the first generation “secular” nationalist PLO and turned it into a symbolic, cultural force (Burgat 2003:117). For a Lebanese Sheik not affiliated with the party, Hezbollah is “more than just a party. It is a general environment in which we live” (cited in ICG 2007:5). Indeed, according to Harb and Leenders (2005:187) Hezbollah’s institutions make up “a holistic network” providing for its constituents.

Yet Hamas and Hezbollah are essentialised and discursively linked to the global “war on terror” with all of its connotations of existential, metaphysical jihad. This essentialist view is not only delusional but dangerous. The inability of the Western powers and Israel to recognise hints of compromise and co-existence not only misses opportunities for a cessation of armed hostilities, but risks exacerbating the problem by perpetuating injustices and creating unnecessary conflict (Carter 2007:253). These conflicts and injustices will then create further grievances which in turn will be seized upon by al-Qa’ida type entities. In the case of Gaza, the isolation of Hamas has been counter-productive as lack of outside interaction and increased hardship are causing the Strip to become more conservative and patriarchal (ICG 2008:16).

The application of religious fundamentalist/Orientalist labels to Hamas and Hezbollah obscure real world grievances and conditions on the ground. In effect, the essentialised

religious label delegitimizes each movement as irrational, extremist and threatening in Western secular eyes (Gunning 2007:11; Esposito 1999:257-258). As such, this irrationality means that there is no imperative to engage with these movements or consider the legitimacy of their grievances and the role that Western policies played in these. However, through resistance to armed occupation, a reassertion of local identity, and the provision of goods and services, Hamas and Hezbollah are institutional cultures and everyday fixtures in the lives of their constituents. In contrast to being regressive fundamentalists, each movement is a rearticulation of modernity within an Islamic framework. In short, it needs to be recognised that democracy and modernity do not necessarily need to be defined in Western/ “secular” terms (Esposito and Piscatori 1991).

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