

Living with the AK-47

Living with the AK-47

Militancy and Militants in Hezbollah's Resistance Movement

By

Younes Saramifar

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Living with the AK-47:
Militancy and Militants in Hezbollah's Resistance Movement

By Younes Saramifar

This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2015 by Younes Saramifar

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-7552-X
ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-7552-3

To my mother who made the path of enlightenment possible for me
And, to her who stood with me in my pursuit of a homeland

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ix
Introduction	1
Part One.....	27
Living on the Edges	
Part Two	71
A Life Woven into the Life	
Part Three	115
Life Told into Life	
Appendix One.....	135
The Curves and Turns of Scheherazade	
Appendix Two	161
When Life is the Stage and Gunshots the Background Music	
Appendix Three	165
In His Own Words ...	
Bibliography	171

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sociology is my cult of mysticism and I believe ethnographers of this discipline are the wandering dervish of our era. My path to recognize myself became possible only when I left theology for the enlightenment of sociology. This shift became possible when maestros like the late Dr Sharmila Rege and Professor Deepak Mehta allowed me to see through their eyes. I doubt that merely mentioning Dr Mehta's name will express the full extent of my gratitude. He patiently listened to my ponderings in the land of obscurity and theory. I can only describe him as he who is a father-figure to none but teacher to many. I must confess that my book could not be read with ease without my partner who infused felicity into my broken and exhaustingly long sentences. This book is the result of my affection for a few and my hatred for many. My undying gratitude for Bram Fauconnier who listened to my ways of theorizing respectfully, for Rahman who made me smile as darkness overwhelmed Iran, for Professor Benedict Anderson who showed me humour in a troubled world, for the kindest sociologist Professor Jean-Luc Maurer, finally, for those who allowed me to hate them and their hate became my motivation to find better ways of being a sociologist. At the end it is only fair to say this book has gathered its meaning and integrity only because of the people who lent me their stories to tell and I wonder if I could offer any tribute to the idea of life without their stories!

INTRODUCTION

For me the love of anthropology has turned out to be an affair in which when I reach bedrock I do not break through the resistance of the other, but in this gesture of waiting I allow the knowledge of the other to mark me. In this sense this book is also an autobiography. (Veena Das 2007, 17)

The reality of this research became apparent to me only when I began the task of theorising almost two years of fieldwork and ethnographic experience. This introduction is an attempt to explain what I have done and how I have done it. This is painful to articulate because it is difficult for me to narrate my own experience—it is easier to convey and comprehend the narrations of others who have been the partners and informants of this study. I have tried to maintain the integrity of field notes and ethnographic experiences by using the communicative power which the potentiality of narration and narratives lend to any research.

Seeking answers to questions such as who is a militant and how they translate violence in their domain led me to training camps and the neighbourhood of Dahiya, Beirut's southern suburb. I divided my time during each journey between Dahiya, the main Hezbollah constituency, and their training camps (for basic and advanced training, as well as Mahdi scouts).

The people who were my guides in these areas often tried to navigate me towards a world of their own, but I needed to extend my view. Therefore, I slipped into the layers of society using my own identity as an Iranian Shi'a. I could move smoothly among the community of Shi'a believers as my identity and social ascriptions made decoding the regime of perception and culture easier. I learnt where the people affiliated with Hezbollah interacted with each other and hung out, and I could identify the associations attached to famous mosques and visited them frequently. These locations were the places where I could strike up conversation and link my identity with others—links that were consolidated when I became a regular at these places. I frequently checked the mosque's announcement board to gather information about important gatherings like demonstrations and memorial processions for martyrs. In turn, these gatherings and occasions presented the chance to seek fresh links and trace stories.

My navigation of Hezbollah's society of control became easier as methods and techniques of propaganda became clearer to me. I could talk to ordinary people as I recognised where people felt safer; their conversations became further paths to meeting new people and to continue travelling in their world. Each person was a world unto themselves for me which I could enter through language and shared commonalities. Sometimes, I deliberately debated with them to bring out their passion and anger, and many times I just listened as they rode the chariot of their own imagination.

I did not credit any of the initial conversations as ethnographic evidence, but I subsequently followed these up while people were engaged in some form of everyday practice in the routine of their lives. For instance, I befriended a taxi driver who offered his unique services to foreign journalists at a food stand on a busy street. He was very talkative and most of his conversations were full of clichés or were repetitions of the usual propaganda slogans. I finally requested that he allow me to accompany him on a work day. Then, at the end of the day when both of us were exhausted by the traffic and noise, he let me into his world and the conversation with him formed a wealth of ethnographic evidence. I recognised the permission for entry when the language used and the speech patterns became different and grew more colloquial and the marks of the user were visible on the body of language. Each person was a bridge to another and I just needed to find the occasion or allow my peculiar associations to draw them to me.

I was familiar with research students who were engaged as volunteers in the area during the war of July 2006. They introduced me to Dahiya as “the world of small pleasures,” and their guidance took me to the corners where the society of control had not yet extended its influence. These corners were the places where subtle evasions were visible and the walls were not a canvas for any political party's emblems. These places lived on the borders of shadows, where idle old men sat sharing water-pipes.

The act of collecting ethnographic narratives was based on the open secrets of the people in Dahiya. They know resistance means combat, subversion, militia and war but they do not express them. This open secret permits convoluted conversations, and my ethnographic task was to decode them. I asked each person if they had family members or friends in the organisation, to which they often replied with silence or rejection, while at other times they welcomed the questions. My questions took me to the people who were in the service of the political party in various local capacities, like those attached with the health and welfare desk—doctors

and nurses who worked on the battlefield—as well as those employed in the information unit.

The technique of my ethnography was simply based on detecting the patterns of life and the ordinariness of the everyday in people's lives. I then tried to link myself to that pattern and gather narratives and ethnographic stories. I did not hesitate nor fear any interaction and this empowered me to travel into people's lives and journey into their worlds, even if only for a short time.

This study is simply a tribute to “life”—life we know and do not know; life which is narrated so that it does not vanish into the pages of unspoken history, because human life is the site of that which is lasting and impossible to ignore if it is represented by narratives and shared with others; life not merely engaged in *beate vivere* and *summum bonum*¹ but rather that which is “specifically human.” Hannah Arendt portrays it beautifully:

The chief characteristic of this specifically human life, whose appearance and disappearance constitutes worldly events, is that it is itself full of events which ultimately can be told as a story, establish biography. It is of this life, *bios* as distinguished from mere *zoe*, that Aristotle said that it “somehow is a kind of praxis.” (Arendt 1998, 97)

Narrative is also the method of expression of this research. It is the configuration which enables the comprehension of the life of a selected collective instead of being a mere ephemeral story. The narrative carries within itself the life which enquires into meaning and action due to the revelatory character of action, as well as “the ability to produce stories and become historical together” (*ibid.*, 324). Each narrative exposes the link between life and politics, and to discover this link one has to establish its historicity and emphasize the political nature of life and its associated praxis.

Applying narrative as the method of structuring a research is not license for sociological anagogy—it has been applied so as to examine the experiential approach in the study of conflict and violence. “The experiential approach views violence as not necessarily confined to the realm of the inter-group but as something related to individual subjectivity, something that structures people's everyday lives, even in the absence of war” (Schroder & Schmidt 2001, 1). Such an approach is the

¹ These Latin phrases were coined by Saint Augustine—*beate vivere* means “living happily” and *summum bonum* implies the supreme good from which all others are derived.

anecdotalist of evoked memories that weaves together each and every second as well as all the practices of everyday life. This approach turns a collective into an organisation of constant creativity which offers memory and history. On the other hand, narratives also form praxis which is bound up with actions and initiates the political conditions within the state of appearance to demonstrate “who I am,” and not “what I am.” The narratives are verbalised thoughts that can be shared as long as they are not fixed into the categories of memories and commemorations. Memorisation as an act is inherently detached from lived experiences and must be resolved for narratives to be shared in the context of political action. In other words, the opportunity to interrogate and query the categories is the momentum of resolving memorisation which surfaces in the practices of everyday life within the state of appearance or living space.

For Arendt, tragedy begins when there are no minds which think, question and remember the stories. “Narratives are the matter of ‘completion’ which indeed every narrative (an enacted event) must have in the minds of those who are there to tell the story and convey its meaning” (1998, 6). My research employs stories and narratives to push towards such a “completion” by invoking the acts of thinking, articulation and remembrance, because without completion there simply would not be any story to tell. Moreover, in such a case the practices of everyday life would vanish into robotization and finally result in a near-death experience for subjectivity.

However, the narratives and stories of my research are not necessarily lived or narrated history. They comply with the Arendtian narrative art that harnesses the ability to condense experience into an exemplary moment and extract action from the continuous flow of time and reveal a *who* (Kristeva 2001, 17). The “who” in the narratives of this project comprises the subject and the subjectivity that I try to arrive at. Ethnography and living with people in the field have enabled me to recognise the moment of ending and closure as well as identify the agent of the story who is sometimes located in the blurred borders between the subjected persona and the subjectivity of the persona. The “who” is central to the political thoughts which influence practices of everyday life, and as Julia Kristeva explains: “It is through narrative ... that essentially political thought is realised” (ibid.).

In other words, narrative as method simply means the extension of its boundary as well as juxtaposing narratives so that it can lead towards the revelation of a social mechanism. This method unravels the moment of truth that is produced through clashes and conversations, generating

further metamorphosis.² I have contained this method within the practices of everyday life to maintain the suggestive plurality and realities embedded in the “manifold” or “multiplicity” within them. The manifold and its other similar connotations can evolve only through the life of the “who.” Life is carried into the narratives with structural potentiality, which further opens up avenues for infinite political action. Therefore, it is not incorrect to detect the direct linkage between the practices of everyday life and political actions or to dare say that the practices of everyday life are actually political actions.

There is a particular “everydayness” in daily practices which may appear catalogued and habitual in nature. However, the narratives are also a platform to disaggregate and examine the unevenness of everyday life and its contrarities. For instance, resistance, weapons, *hejab*, faith, martyrdom, victory and enemy have become the objects and components of everyday life of the people mentioned in this study. However, there is more to these objects than the banality or melancholy that people have to deal with. Thus, I have chosen to investigate the practices of everyday life as companions to narratives to theorise and comprehend (to some extent) spontaneity, desire, subjectivity, spectacle and fetishism.

Everyday life implies a double essentialism through its practices: “It implies banality but it is the site of authentic experience of the self, of the body and of the engagement with others” (Shield 1999, 70). It is the site of negotiation for people in a space like Dahiya, which Hezbollah and the Lebanese state struggle to appropriate as their stronghold, to colonise and ultimately influence its practices. Interestingly, such negotiations in the arena of everyday life prevent the transformation of banality into alienation, which Henri Lefebvre suggests we can see “but cannot understand”; can look at “but cannot comprehend” (ibid., 78). The emphasis on the practices of everyday life refers to their ability to resist the imposed reality. This imposed reality is merely a projectile of perception or a kind of configuration which is already subjugated through the displacement of objects of desire.

This pursuit equipped me to study the everyday practices in the southern suburb of Beirut—an area where the majority of the Shi’a population lives and which is assumed to be the stronghold of Hezbollah, along with and parallel to the militant camps and training grounds. These practices can be studied through Michel de Certeau’s science of singularity. His method avoids turning a set of practices (which do not

² Metamorphosis is a biological process which suggests a marked change a living organism undergoes in the course of growth.

necessarily produce anything and could seem illusory) into a set of hollow symbols. If practices of everyday life are granted their ontological status, then one may be able to identify the flow of life and detect subjectivity and its dynamic ongoing construction.

The stories and narratives from the lives of people of Dahiya are the conceptual area in which I explored the subtle movements of escape and evasion of authority and power with regard to the intricacies of subjectivities, instead of limiting them as simply patterns of resistance. The story about the gaze of old men and their suggestive reading of the way a *Masool* performs his duties; the tale of how a taxi driver explains the reconstruction campaign after the war; or the way people choose to understand the noise and disturbance in their lives are not merely forms of resistance: “They are evasions from the authority which signifies a reality that is difficult to determine” (de Certeau 1984, 73). It is in these gazes and in these acts of nagging, cribbing and choosing that the struggle to express the life of the “who” or the trajectory of subjectivity is configured.

Gilles Deleuze and Michel de Certeau tried to contrive an analysis of culture from: “the mute perspective of body which does not need to be identified with a specific body or knowable individual in order to be apprehended” (Buchanan 2000, 107). I have used a similar perspective about everyday life and the practices performed as part of it. These practices overwhelm the inner lived experiences as well as outer sensory experiences, but they are usually incorrectly treated as mere rhythm and routine. However, I investigated them through singularity to prove otherwise. The main element which supports this attempt is speech. Speech and particularly language demonstrate the power of narratives and stories told³ by people, and not their rhythms. In fact, rhythm causes an unmediated involvement and totality in the cycle of life which destroys the social world of speech: “Rhythm limits and defines people and does not let them unfold and materialize” (Bakhtin 1993, 35). The practices of everyday life simply cannot happen through the rigidity of rhythm because of the clashes and interactions which they have with each other. Therefore, not only could they be identified as strategies and tactics,⁴ they should also

³ I do not imply the literal narration of a story with the term “story told.” A story and narrative are sometimes told through performance and performed when people, with the knowledge of the fact that an ethnographer is a researcher and shall write about them, let the voyeur, ethnographer, researcher, sociologist or writer in and permit him the view. It is important to note that the people I encountered got to know that I was not a “tourist” passing through.

⁴ “Strategy postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serves as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats can be

be seen as social actions. For instance, if the portrait of Hezbollah's martyr on the street light does not signify to the bystander what the imposed regime of signification demands of them, it is a tactic. Tactics as forms of negation create a new understanding, and may even be new forms of intersubjectivity that push the enforced foreground into the background and serve as a new foreground, even though it is undesired by Hezbollah but chosen by the subjects. Homaira of the "Pissing on One's Own Image" story, and Za'er of the "Halal Pepperoni" story, both invent and formulate strategies in calculating a relationship with power, but the taxi driver of "Sentimental Wheels" formulates a tactic since he assumes the absence of power within the domain of his vehicle which permits him this autonomy. These examples are the play and interplay of subjectivities in the paradigm⁵ of the practices of the everyday lives of the militants and the people of Dahiya. The implementation of strategy and tactic may imply the specific projection of duality in mannerism, but it is simply the reflection of a paradigmatic case; moving from singularity to singularity, passing an event and arriving at the other, or simply masking an experience with the gradient of another experience.

The paradigmatic behaviour of the practices that the people of Dahiya or militants assert in their everyday lives is an explanation of, first, why violence, pain and transgression never completely make sense or are confusing to the actors, or not easily explicable by them, and second why such behaviour could not be seen as a totally isolated act. These narratives and stories demonstrate how they may sometimes seem senseless but are certainly not meaningless to either the victims or to the observers. This paradigm is about the ways of seeing rather than what is seen, and the very fact that it is taken for granted on any given day gives it the potential which can be further explored by the author-performer who locates subjectivity⁶ in them.

managed and when tactic has no delimitation of an exteriority, then it provides the condition necessary for autonomy" (de Certeau 1984, 36).

⁵ According to Giorgio Agamben, paradigm is a form of knowledge that is neither inductive nor deductive but ontological. One must trace the elements and components in a paradigm through their singularity and ontological status to be able to arrive at a meaning (Agamben 2009, 9–20).

⁶ Using narratives and practices of everyday life as the method of detection and portrayal of subjectivity threatens ethnographers in two ways: first, it may influence the ethnographer's emotions and scholarly sense which can result in taking sides, prejudices and can cloud the judgement. Second, the influence of theoretical learning could push ethnographers to over-read beyond what is implied by an action or narrative. I have tried to overcome this problem through constantly interrogating myself and my research. One of the specific examples is the

The initial part of my research deals with Dahiya and starts with the basic question “what is Dahiya?” I have tried to answer this question through narratives that portray social actions and practices that happen in the domain of the Shi’a community and people who live in Dahiya. These actions and practices appear to be collective and communal in the arena of the resistance movement, but they carry the significance of the larger picture of Lebanon beyond the flag of Hezbollah. The very first indications that distinguish Dahiya as a space, apart from its physical signification, are the immaterial social gestures and entities that are impossible to localise because of their ontological statuses as the owners of testimonies, narratives and stories of Dahiya.

As such, Dahiya has traversed the category of geographical place by moving beyond being only a formal classificatory concept. In Merrifield’s reflections on the nature of space, it constitutes: “the basic frame of reference for the physical component of actions and possibilities related to the performance of action” (Merrifield 2006, 16), in this case within the limitation of Beirut and its suburbs. Such a perspective does not exhaust the corporality of the subjects and permits the bodies which perform the actions in this space to be seen. Thus, Dahiya is the very signifier which is materialised in the physical world known as Beirut by endowing the possibility of meaningfulness to a particular action, social behaviour or symbol. For instance, a rose⁷ drawn on the walls of the streets of Dahiya

testimonial of Miguel Lawner, which made me believe in subjectivity more than ever. He was an architect imprisoned in a forced labour camp after the 1973 Chilean military coup which brought Pinochet to power. He continuously measured every aspect of the camp through steps and drew them later in exile by using the memorised measurements. He published his drawings in a book called *Isla Dawson, Ritoque, Tes Alamos ... La vida a pesar de todo* [Life Despite Everything]. His interview and the demonstration of his method can be seen in a documentary called *Nostalgia for the Light* by Patricio Guzman (2010).

⁷ Red Rose, Red Glaucium, Red Tulip and Ranunculus are flowers appropriated by martyrdom propaganda machinery in Iran and were later adopted by Hezbollah. These flowers imply martyrdom more than any other symbol among the people of the community. The famous phrase “Az khoone shahidan alale damide” (“Ranunculus is grown over the blood of martyrs”) is known to children even today, thirty years after the revolution. The name of the flower in the phrase changes according to the region where posters and banners were distributed—Dahiya was given the Rose, southern Iran the Red Tulip, the western part of Iran the Ranunculus and Glaucium. Each area had a familiarity with one of these flowers more than the others because of their topography and environment; therefore, the phrase was manipulated accordingly.

never suggests the conventional meaning because it has been appropriated by the regime of signification which dictates it differently.

Within this space known as Dahiya, narratives and subjectivities could be discovered in the theatre of its mutual life, with the residents and their bodies as the players. The spatial competence which reproduces the genesis of Dahiya could help in resolving the question of whether it is a space of representation or a representation of space. Such competence is constructed by sarcastic remarks (like “Dahiya Khomeini”) which refer to the affiliations of the place. It has also been labelled the “misery belt” by the Lebanese government and the name, for Beiruties, implies a place where people do not pay their electricity bills. Thus, “spatial competences ensure some extent of societal cohesion and continuity” (Merrifield 2006, 57), which point towards inter-subjectivity and the gathering of manifolds and multitudes within a single conceived space.

Dahiya, as a geographical and physical reality, expresses an abstract existence for its residents and others through the resistance movement known as Hezbollah or political Shi’aism. On the other hand, for some people it is a maze of narratives about the common birthplace of needs and desires. For instance, Hala, of the “Pissing on One’s Own Image” story, is an example of reciprocity between an abstract space and the body, because the authority of abstract space imposes a certain commonality and socialises everybody as a spatial body. The ending of the story may offer the hint of a subjectified body, but reading the action of the narrative as a singularity suggests otherwise. I see the action within the paradigm of practices of everyday life, and a paradigmatic gesture moves not from the particular to the whole or from the whole to the particular, but from singular to singular (Agamben 2009, 28).

After I postulate answers to the question of what Dahiya is, I move on to examine the constituting elements of the area. Visuality is attempted as the first element, comprising landscape, images, signs and symbols or the general portrait of the area, all of which are treated not only as a part of the regime of signification but also as the regime of perception. As Lefebvre writes: “Every kind of appeal, incitement and seduction is mobilized to tempt them with the double of themselves” (Lefebvre 1991, 98). Strategies and tactics of everyday life constitute the methods of evasion and reconfiguration of subjectivity whenever the temptations emerge to resist the doubling. It is not senseless to say, metaphorically speaking, that the over-production of shouts, noises and sounds constitutes instruments at the people’s disposal to distance themselves from the temptation enforced on them by the realm of visuality, and thus attempt to wake themselves up!

Further on, when flesh and thought are introduced, the body becomes the return point in the study of space because the body and the narratives which articulate subjectivity (at the heart of space where discourses of power are irreducible and subversion is a difficult choice) are the units of analysis of the fragmented quality of the individuals who have given in to the symptoms of what the-other-wants-to-be⁸ and those who walk different paths. This multiplicity, seen in the example of the body and practices which are subjected to or defined by it, is the vessel of reading space in all its dimensions. We treat space as a system and multiplicity becomes its dimension, following which it is comprehended through “the degree of freedom (or relevant ways of changing)” of each manifold and multitude (DeLanda 2005, 87). This degree of freedom in the story “Which Sand to Lay Over and Which Sun Ray to Feel” is exemplary for comprehending Dahiya as the space studied parallel to the training camps and understanding the life of a community distressed by war and militancy. “The virtual or abstract multiplicity that one assigns to the system is not something transcendent but should be conceived as immanent to the material world where it is treated as the system” (ibid., 85).

Dahiya is taken forward by the use of different degrees of freedom (as much as could be gained in the social arena despite the enforced authority) by individuals who want pepperoni but keep it *halal*, or hang out with friends in cafés and restaurants under the influence of growing consumerism and higher purchasing power but reconfigure the strict localisation of needs and desires, even though some may assume them to be forms of “sanctioned pleasure.”⁹

The landscape and the body, as the two general elements which embrace each other and highlight other elements such as gestures, self-fashioning, identity formation (if any), and regime of signification, defy the idea of representation and defend the multitude. This is the point that breaks the kernel of the space of representation in leftist theory, and particularly in that of Henri Lefebvre. It elucidates the contradiction in what he proposes as fluidity and the qualitative state of the kernel because of the monolithic implications embedded in the very idea of representation in both uses of the phrase, i.e. space of representation and representation of space.

⁸ I have to make that distinction because of the new generation of pious believers which Hezbollah tends to produce, despite the fact that de Certeau sees submission as a form of subjectivity. I do not share his optimism to such an extent.

⁹ “Sanctioned pleasure” is a term borrowed from the title of an article written by Harb & Deeb (2007, 1).

The second part of the research continues into the arenas of training camps and militia grounds in order to examine the other side of the parallel configuration. In the case of the militia camps, it is difficult to start with a question like the one asked at the beginning of the first section, i.e. “What is Dahiya?” Posing the question “What is a camp?” is not easy due to the lack of similar formal classificatory concepts like those associated with Dahiya, despite the geographical and physical existence of the camps. This is because the camps are the frames of reference for the physical components of action but they are qualified by a transitory element as well. They do not exist in one geographical location constantly, they travel and change their landscapes and surroundings. Thus, my research concentrates more on investigating the possibility of placing the bodies of trainees with regard to this question, and how an imposed character is given to them through a system of visibility, a system which enforces generality and similarity on all the camps, regardless of setting. Thus, the camps are the training grounds where life is pushed to become a form-of-life; where life is defined through the events and possibilities offered.

The sovereignty and separation enforced in the camps are rebellions against social life and life in societal spaces. This is because the new regimes (of the camps) not only recognise life as the threat to the governance of death but also interfere with the cycle of conversion of thought into life, and further into human intelligence (a potential character of life). Thus, discipline, training and corporal enforcement are different forms of equipment that target life to reduce it to what Agamben calls “naked life” (2002, 4).

The Hezbollah training camps propose martyrdom as the state of salvation, but they also value the life given to the trainees and the militia because trainees are held responsible for the investment and trust invested in them by the resistance movement. The life of *Dawtalb*, *Manaheen* and *Shabab u Almoqawamah* has meaning only by “exposure to the events” (Agamben 2000, 15). The whole wealth of life is placed in the service of resistance and it produces a world of death, that is nothing but death; a world reduced to a certain ideological and biological functionality. This is what Mikhail Bakhtin sees as the natural world without subjects: “The ragged landscape of trench warfare” (quoted in Beasley-Murray 2008, 66). An error could overwhelm the method if one centralises the idea of power and studies the training camps by approaching authority as the only form of exercised power (drills, discipline, propaganda and reveille). This error leads to what could be called the study of afterlife, because it focuses on the progress of the removal of life from individuals through the promise of

the impending future on the other side.¹⁰ Such an approach disregards the principle of reciprocity in the procedures of subjectification, and without resistance no subjectification could be initiated. Further, it is an underestimation of the power of character, commonly known as the ego.

Thus, to be able to investigate training camps and the camp in general, one should traverse beyond the narrow point of view of the camp as “an absolute biopolitical space.”¹¹ Then, the role that the naked life performs to maintain its vitality and continuity would become more visible; simply “to be,” regardless of the worth and values which associate attributes and adjectives to life. To paraphrase Walter Benjamin, subjectivity is impenetrable because the imposed experience is expressionless and un-hanging like a mask (quoted in *ibid.*, 73).

The paradigms of practices of everyday life and the main elements which constitute the training camps permit us to understand the lives of many individuals who refuse to be displaced and emptied of their subjectivity through simple acts like keeping chewing gum in their mouths.¹² I place these apparently disjointed practices of the spaces known as the training camps and join them together to indicate an intelligibility which generates a paradigm through the exploration of the camp’s everyday life. Applying this principle of paradigm formation helps to achieve a “whole” which is not in conflict with the phenomenon.

These practices are formulated by trainees in response to the authority which is imposed on them, but the trainees also appropriate and reform these to be able to live with them. On the one hand, this appropriation, as the function of the paradigm, is the above-mentioned intelligibility which stands next to routine and helps the trainees and militants make sense of the camps. On the other hand, the enforcement of discipline and routine by the authorities over the practices of everyday life is an attempt to contain life and spontaneity through systematised and repeatable experience. The enforcement of homogeneity through discipline and training struggles to displace the trainees and create an absolute break with their histories,

¹⁰ Militants have bridged life (as others know it) at the very moment when they treat their life as a possible sacrifice and submit to the power and ideology. However, some may argue that this is their truly radical solution to completely subjectify themselves in the face of conflict, war, politics of resistance, the glory of martyrdom and the promise of afterlife: “All power assumes the resistance of the subject; without that, there is no subjectification in the first place” (Fernando 2010, 109).

¹¹ Agamben (2000, 39).

¹² See the story of Ali, a 32-year-old ladies’ tailor from Nabatiya, narrated in “A Life Woven into the Life.”

narratives and the possibilities of communicable experiences. However, the enforcement actually backfires due to the main idea which is embedded in the fabric of militancy—camaraderie, or *esprit de corps*. This camaraderie becomes the platform of shared experiences and narratives where militants can transform the drill instructors and training officers into the “other.” In addition, the multitude in the landscape of life in the camps is another obstacle towards the fulfilment of homogeneity; for example, in the toilets, showers, kitchen and chow halls, where formalities are lesser and hierarchy and discipline are more relaxed in comparison to the training ground. Such multitudes slow down the process of overloading the sensory apparatus of the trainees through enforcement, routine, discipline, ideological instruction and the literal gaze of expectation maintained on them by the trainers.

The experience of training does not gain any concretised form for the trainees, despite the rigorous instructions, because every one of them continues to maintain a personal narrative. However, this is not to deny the fact that there are those who become exhausted and suppress their narrative and accept the imposed form. This form erases difference and always represents one thing to the militant, who by giving in accepts categorisation and hates the other along the dictates of ideology. The individuals who were the subjects of this study may have accepted the form with less guilt because they had already configured their lived experiences under *Hala al-Islamiyya* and *Mujtamaa al-Moqawama*¹³ even

¹³ Hezbollah administers a large network of charity and educational organisations, NGOs, hospitals and religious institutions forming the society of resistance (*Mujtamaa al-Muqawama*) through services offered to the people of the community, and many participate in the services by volunteering their time and making donations. The society of resistance is the foundation of the Islamic sphere (*Hala al-Islamiyya*) which recognises no geographical boundaries. However, it enjoys its centrality in Dahiya. The Islamic sphere is the environment that a Shi'a community provides under the leadership of the jurist through commitment to the cause and piety as a Muslim. An environment where a strong sense of belonging is generated through the collective identity and fulfilment of the sphere is recognised by the individual's choices according to the given religious knowledge. The mentioned twin concept is the attempt at propaganda designed by Hezbollah, as a legitimate Lebanese political party with a militant faction, to create the idea of solidarity and community through religious narratives like *Ashura* and symbolic reference like martyrdom. It is an attempt to colonise the everyday of people of the community, believers and followers of the party, and which has not yet failed entirely. It has infiltrated all aspects of life and harvests its cultivation in the training camps. The controlled circularity that the twin concept dictates over the life of the individual, to redirect their creativity and subjectivity, is similar to the

before entering the camps. The twin concepts influence the worlds of these individuals at all times towards maintaining strict order and repeatability (for example, structuring the routines of everyday life around the timings of prayers). Thus, their lives have already been militarised without weapons and they are more vulnerable to enforcement, and consequently their forms of resistance and evasion are more subtle and restrained.

For instance, a trainee may debate with themselves when they face a statement like “The word of your DI¹⁴ is the word of Nasrallah”¹⁵ to be able to defy the authority of the camps and transform them into the other. Nasrallah, as the constant reference for the resistance movement and an embodiment of the twin concept, is the nodal point that intervenes and unifies all the floating signifiers in the ideological construction. He is the figure who uses his position as the father of a martyr¹⁶ and employs his charisma to perfection; he is the metonymy that makes the contiguity of all the signs and symbols affective. The metonymy forms an emotional attachment with the individuals, particularly the believers and followers. The effects and emotions work to align the individual with the twin concept and further the progress of subjectification. However, the practices of everyday life open up a paradigm where they are not static but rather use even the banality of routine to their advantage and are able to live the dynamic life of a subject. This subject neither confirms any universal principle which could be proposed by the idea of “normal” nor complies with the idea of a *muselmann*,¹⁷ even if one stretches the borders of the theory. Thus, life in the training camps and joining the militia are struggles to extend and revive the belief and hope for “impending” victory, which is in fact the yet-to-come victory. This is found to be a common

attempt of any fascist regime to create an absolute space, which Newton says is the sensorium of God. This attempt has failed in the arena of geographical placement but the other wing of the twin concept (*Hala al-Islamiyya*) tries to create that space within the minds of individuals by using the principle of “Qalb al-mo'men arsh ul-Rahman” (this is a quotation from Prophet Muhammad which means “The believer’s heart is the court of the God”).

¹⁴ Drill instructor.

¹⁵ Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah is the current Secretary General of Hezbollah. Militants offer their allegiance to him and accept his spiritual guardianship and military command over the resistance movement.

¹⁶ Hadi Nasrallah is the late son of the Secretary General, having joined the ranks in absolute anonymity, who was killed in combat. Nasrallah refused any deal when the IDF (Israel Defence Forces) and proposed the exchange of his corpse in exchange for the release of IDF soldiers.

¹⁷ The untestifiable, that to which no one has borne witness (Agamben 2002, 41).

trend, despite the fact that it is individually reproduced and not a given package by the propaganda machinery.

The belief in and seeking of that which is “yet-to-come” are the distinctive characters of the subjects who name this as truth; this assumed truth then takes the form of knowledge for them which is manipulated and used as an apparatus of control. The subjects restrain this knowledge through a finite configuration because of the trauma of war and intensification of hatred, and as a result they are unable to extend the boundaries of imagination. In other words, their imaginations are caged because of the constant warnings given to them about the real and sometimes unreal threat of the other. Such subjects have faced and lived war even in its absence because of the theatres of war which are re-narrated and re-enacted for them until actual history and narrative are lost.

However, subjectivity questions this truth in a variety of stimulations, rebellious actions, relationships and languages. It is subjectivity that governs the three major constitutive elements of the camps in competition with the DI and discipline; these elements are speech, weapons and the enemy. These three elements differ in kind but are woven together conceptually. Speech is the vehicle of communication between the DI and the trainees and the instrument of indoctrination. However, this speech is also the language that determines the *langue* and particularly the proverbs that dominate the manners of expression in the camps. Therefore, two forms of speech are noticed: speech as a monologue expressed and enforced on the trainees and speech as dialogue between the trainees in the everyday life of the camps. Thus, speech introduces the weapon long before it becomes a tangible and physical reality for the trainees, and the weapon determines the enemy.

In this part of the discussion, the weapon is not only demonstrated through the words of the DI, it is also seen as a product for the user. The weapon is initially a simple symptom that implies non-knowledge on the part of trainees, even though they may have some fragmented understanding of it in their lives outside the camps as non-militants. At this stage, trainees are yet to discover the meaning of this symptom known as the weapon. Treating the weapon as a symptom is important for this study because its analysis exposes the cognitive relationship a militant constructs with their weapon. Such analysis leads to the understanding of the signifying frame which gives meaning to the symptom in its symbolic order and frame of reference.

It is not difficult to detect how the first speech of the DI before issuing weapons to the trainees pushes them to the symbolic order which transports the past to the present and constructs a historical tradition

without revealing any trace of the appropriated past. “The lack of trace justifies the manipulation and changes imposed on the network of signifiers, it provides a privilege over the narrations of the past” (Žižek 1989, 16–20). The weapon belongs to such a network of signifiers which moves beyond its lethality by providing “a privilege” over the image of martyrs, such as the event of Karbala and Israel’s invasion of southern Lebanon. Thus, the weapon is the missing part of an image and visibility that trainees have already lived with. After receiving one, they achieve a completion of this fantasy wherein they too can be admired as martyrs, their images framed as photographs to be admired by “those who have been left behind.”¹⁸ In such a scenario, the writings of snipers and marksmen are the key points for identifying this complex relationship which is beyond the usual subject-object explanation because the subject here is neither a result nor an origin—it is the local state of the procedure.

For instance, when Emran refers to himself and his weapon as the “we who watch the fall of the enemy like the fall of leaves in autumn,” his is a configuration that exceeds the situation and the usual subject-object relationship because the border of distinction between them is absolutely unclear. Is he the object joined with the weapon? Or is the “we” the subject which is a result of the subjectification through enforcement and training? If it is so, why is there no homogeneity in the products of this subjectification? The weapon is similar to a wife for Saber, but for Ehsan it is the unity that targets and kills.

There are a number of ways in which the relationship between a weapon and a militant can be explained. The first view accepts the vibrancy of subjectivity and announces it as the time when a militant becomes themselves. In this case, the weapon is the initial step in the passage of the imaginary and symbolic identifications where the ideal ego is traversed and the need for an external point of identification is satisfied. They have identified with themselves (become themselves) and the relationship is finally established. The militant becomes an autonomous personality and is ready for battle without regret or fear.

¹⁸ However, this fantasy is a mere melodramatic daydream when they are issued weapons for the first time. Once they face the hardship of carrying the weapon during training or in battle, then other priorities like survival and performing as “a militant should do” come into the picture.

The second approach views the relationship as a period of struggle for the militant when they try to discard the gaze¹⁹ maintained over them by the symbolic order as well as their own upon themselves. They have to suffer the gaze of the symbolic order which constantly demands who they are in the order and how they identify themselves within it; basically, it demands that they locate themselves in the order as per commands. As a result, they as an individual or a “who” struggle and form an enquiry and a gaze on themselves to be able to answer or even evade the confusion and the lack. The rise of subjectivity is most clear when the relationship with the weapon is established through language (metaphor, proverb, etc.) and experience is at their disposal. Finally, the unspoken is spoken through the subjective archive of the militant’s life.

It is simplistic to limit the established relationship within the Lacanian theory of “going-through-fantasy” because it is not just the ever-lacking object-cause of desire that configures it. One must include the fact that a militant is a user of the weapon who relates to this ordinary but lethal object through a practical approach of usage and consumption. It is not a coincidence or a worldwide conspiracy that a particular weapon is used by almost every militia group.

An AK-47 is not an object elevated to the level of a *das ding*; it is an assault rifle which privileges its user with certain ergonomics so that they choose it in preference to other weapons that could be issued to militants, like the M-4 carbine or the M-16. Concentrating on this aspect offers an analysis of the relationship of the militant with the weapon beyond the category of militia; it elucidates the cognitive relationship of the warrior (soldier, army, infantry, gunman, terrorist, marine, et al.) as the user with a certain product beyond the symbolic order and any regime of signification. The weapon formulates a relationship with the body which overwhelms the subject and threatens the bodily borders of the self. These bodily borders are realised every time the weapon connects and stimulates; the threat accompanied by the realisation is a reminder to maintain the border and is part of the process of “maintenance-through-transgression” (Ahmed 2005, 102).

The context which the weapon in its utility aspect forms with the body is about an object which is pleasing as well as beautifully disgusting to it, whose “imaginary uncanniness” and real threat appeals but also overwhelms. This is the threshold where subjectivity concerns this study

¹⁹ Kierkegaard relates the gaze to subjectivity through the act of naming. For him, a living being is subjective [act of being a subject] when he or she names everything to resist the subject’s purely theoretical gaze (Kierkegaard cf Agacinski 1991, 12).

in a different way. It is not the authority or external force of manipulation (i.e. DI, Hezbollah or ideology), rather it is the individual who permits such a unity and recognises the bodily extension. The AK-47 becomes a pragmatic element which gains its privileges through the uniquely original design beyond its function as a tool of offence or defence. However, speech as the vehicle of communication which is used to introduce the weapon (the symptom) in the symbolic order endangers the intensity of training and preparing trainees for the actual battle. If the fluidity of perspective and view in this particular element of aggression is challenged, then trainees would be able to ignore the noumenal realm and withdraw from the pressures of overload in the phenomenal realm. This is the main period when the basic DI is observed by the senior DI and when they may intervene and reduce the enforcement.

The emphasis on language as a constitutive element has been demonstrated throughout in the stories told about the camps and the people inside and outside them. People treat language like a tool used for the articulation of jokes, the creation of proverbs, unusual utterances and the peculiar processing of words. As such, language is marked by its users and their usage is certainly influenced by the environment in which they are located, be it Dahiya or the training camps. The study of the language used in these environments can be analysed as the imprints of the acts or the processes of enunciation, and more importantly they signify the operations whose objects they have been. "These operations, expressed and articulated through language, indicate a social historicity whose process of fabrication no longer appears as a normative framework but also as tools manipulated by users" (de Certeau 1984, 21).

The application of de Certeau's point of view and of cognitive linguistics becomes necessary to investigate the language of the camps when the same weapon is given several names or compared to some other living element; when metaphor and metonymy reproduce each other constantly during the speeches of the DI; when the trainees experience the gaze of the posters and slogans all around the camps; and when they write and formulate their experiences of everyday life in the camps. This involves "the application of linguistics not as the method of study of the formal structure of language as an autonomous formal body but rather as a repository of world knowledge; a structured collection of meaningful categories that help the user to deal with the new experiences and store the information about the old ones" (Geeraerts & Cuychens 2007, 9).

This cognitive use of linguistics helps to develop an understanding of proverbs and the exercise of naming. Such an approach enables us to detect an epistemological trend in the vocabulary of the militants and trainees. What does a Jew stand for and how do they differ from an Israeli or a Zionist? What is the conceptual contiguity between martyrdom and weapon? Who determines when a weapon should be called a rifle, a carbine or “we”? Language, as the very basic link between the objects and subjects, reveals the answers to these questions in the examples given in the second and third parts of this book.

The embodiment hypothesis²⁰ identifies single-word utterances as pragmatic requests to establish joint attention between the parent and the child through the process of learning through imitation. The application of the same model in the camp is not irrelevant when it comes to terms of command and discipline—a single utterance like “formation” is one of the first pragmatic requests established between the trainees and the DI. The embodiment theory suggests that keen attention should be given to the directionality of metaphors, statements and utterances as it is linked with physiology, temporal development and organism-environment interaction. For instance, the camps are not mentioned by their names or geographical locations but are mentioned as the places “above.” The highest decision-making office is similarly called “heaven.”

Thus, space and body are redefined through the elements of articulation and language becomes the grammalogue for all-that-cannot-be-said-openly. The interpretation of indirect speech operates the directionality of semantic change in language and is assumed as the metonymic principle. The militants and trainees interpret these tautologies on the basis of shared metonymic models (stereotypes). “The basis becomes stronger and more consolidated in cases of the names given to the Other because the stereotypes about human are conceptually more enriched than stereotypes about things” (Panther & Thornburg 2007, 256). However, this is not to say that language only operates in the domain of cognition and the noumenal realm.

At this point, the scrutiny of the language of the camps enables us to comprehend how properties of language and concepts are created as a result of the way the brain and the body are structured and how they function in interpersonal relations and the physical world. For example, the militants and trainees with rifle-training experience have a different

²⁰ The embodiment hypothesis talks about how image schemas and conceptual metaphors structure adult cognition. It also develops the idea of acquisition of metaphorical structure as humans develop from infants to adults (Rohner 2007, 50).

bodily response when the command “dress right” is uttered; a rifle-trained militant senses tension in the anterior head of the shoulder as well as the usual tension in the lateral part and in the long head of triceps brachii muscles because of the weapon kick-back during the shooting exercises. Clearly, a body subjected to long and arduous systematic training tries to produce responses through perception. Subsequently, perception is overcome by the neural system engaged with the phenomenal realm and this could prevent its conception in the mind. Therefore, it is possible that the “very mechanisms responsible for perception and object manipulation could be responsible for conceptualization and reasoning” (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 37–38). The subjectivity and autonomy of the militants and trainees are threatened at this point, but the proverbs and the detection of autonomy in the production of linguistic markers highlight a different path. The target domain of each metaphor and metonymy may be similar but the source domain and what it actually means to the user constitute the line of distinction which increases the possibility of maintaining subjectivity. So, Hezbollah as the metonymy has a similar target domain, but as a source domain means something different to the trainees, the militants and the people mentioned in the stories.

A DI is not able to fix the metaphor of the weapon and the militant, which reproduces a new source domain for the metaphor through sensory exposures and life experiences. “Martyrdom,” “martyrs,” “sons of Hezbollah” and “sons of Nasrallah” are the instances of such a metaphor and are ubiquitous in the language of the camp. This is tangible in the narrative of Hanni Asm’a as well as other followers of Hezbollah in the third part. Subjects maintain their own existence against the bombardment of metaphors with a fixed source domain through the reproduction of metonymies. These metonymies display paths of evasion from the finite configuration of a generic procedure that tries to conclude a truth for them. In this way, the metaphors, idioms and terms televised and used incessantly for the campaign slogans lose their enforced connotations as they acquire new meanings, and the subject and subjectivity become the authors of the directionality of semantic changes. *Almufajat* is not used in the sense of a strategic military combat plan when the term is reproduced by a barber in Nabatieh to name a new hairstyle or by a café in Dahiya for unexpected items on their weekly menu.

The emergence of subjectivity inside and outside of the camp is inevitable. Subjectivity is found to resurface as the force that infuses eroticism into language and the expressions articulated during the excitement and fear of training, combat and operation. A trainee considering an RPG grenade as similar to a cucumber with reference to a