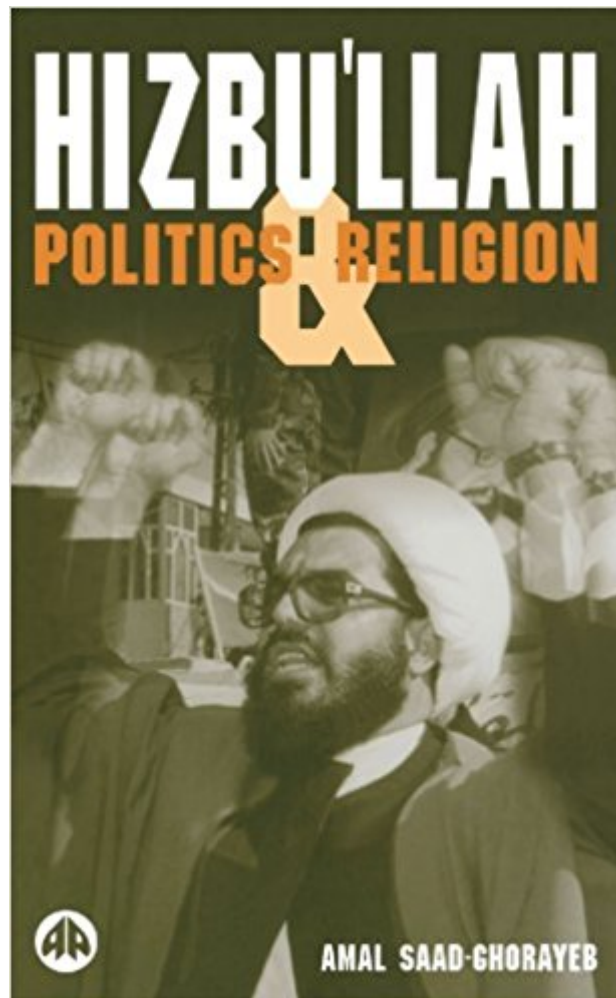




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Hizbu'llah: Politics And Religion (Critical Studies On Islam)



Synopsis

Hizbu'Allah is the largest and most prominent political party in Lebanon, and one of the most renowned Islamist movements in the world. In this book, Amal Saad-Ghorayeb examines the organisation's understanding of jihad and how this, together with its belief in martyrdom, brought about the withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces from Lebanon in May 2000. Saad-Ghorayeb explores the nature of the party's struggle against the West by studying its views on the use of violence against Westerners. Crucially, she also addresses the question of whether Hizbu'Allah depicts this struggle in purely political or civilisational terms. The existential nature of the movement's conflict with Israel is analysed and the Islamic roots of its anti-Judaism is unearthed. The author explores the mechanics and rationale behind the party's integration into the Lebanese political system, and sheds light on how it has reconciled its national identity with its solidarity with the Muslim umma.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Until the emergence of bin Laden's al-Qaeda network, Hizbu'llah was probably the most reviled Islamic organization in the world, blamed for everything from kidnapping Americans in the 1980s to the bombing of the Israeli embassy in Argentina. This, the first book-length treatment of Hizbu'llah, tells a somewhat different story of the radical political party. It is something of an against-all-odds tale: a radical political group comprising a religious minority (Shi'a Muslims) manages to drive an occupying force of overwhelming military superiority (the Israelis) out of southern Lebanon. It's the

story you are not likely to hear in the West, and Ghorayeb's analysis of Hizbu'llah's political and religious development, and its current structure, is often fascinating. The book was developed from Ghorayeb's doctoral thesis, and unfortunately, with dry writing and the presumption that the reader has a working knowledge of the contemporary Islamic world, it reads like one. Still, more readers are likely to wade into such daunting prose since September 11, making this an appropriate choice for larger collections. John GreenCopyright Â© American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

CHOICE 2002 OUTSTANDING ACADEMIC BOOK"Saad-Ghorayeb has written the most detailed and scholarly analysis to date of the ideology of the Lebanese Shi'a radical Hizbu'llah (literally, Party of God). He presents Hizbu'llah's reasoning with understanding rather than condemnation. That said, he tackles head on the issues that Westerners may find least attractive in Hizbu'llah's politics. For instance, he shows that Hizbu'llah sees democracy as, in the end, a less valid form of government than the guardianship of the religious jurisprudent, as preached by the leader of the Iranian revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Much of Saad-Ghorayeb's book is devoted to Hizbu'llah's struggle with the West and Israel. He explains its rejection of Western culture and its resistance to Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and analyzes in detail its rejection of the very existence of Israel. Further, he explains that "Hizbu'llah's anti-Judaism [is] as intrinsic a part of its intellectual structure as is its anti-Zionism," with Jews regarded as deceitful, treacherous aggressors cursed by God, following a counterfeit and deviant religion, to use its leaders' words. Saad-Ghorayeb's account is about ideology, with relatively little about Hizbu'llah's activities and structure. Recommended for upper-division undergraduates and above." --- P. Clawson, Washington Institute for Near East Policy in CHOICE"The value of this book lies in the author's reconstruction of Hezbollah ideology as gleaned from interviews, party speeches, publications, and the daily press. Readers will find especially compelling chapters on the underpinnings of Hezbollah's anti-Western and anti-Israeli stance." -- Foreign Affairs" A young Shiite scholar named Amal Saad-Ghorayeb has advanced what in Lebanon is a controversial argument: that Hezbollah is not merely anti-Israel but deeply "theologically" anti-Jewish. Her new book, Hezbollah: Politics and Religion" dissects the anti-Jewish roots of Hezbollah ideology. Hezbollah, she argues, believes that Jews, by the nature of Judaism, possess fatal character flaws. In her book, she argues that Hezbollah's Koranic reading of Jewish history has led its leaders to believe that Jewish theology is evil. (She) is hesitant to label Hezbollah's outlook anti-Semitism, however. She prefers the term "anti-Judaism," since in her terms anti-Semitism is a race-based hatred, while anti-Judaism is

religion-based. Hezbollah, she says, tries to mask its anti-Judaism for "public relations reasons," but she argues that a study of its language, spoken and written, reveals (the) underlying truth." -- The New Yorker

"Saad-Ghorayeb's brilliant study on Hizbullah is a must read for any serious student of the Lebanese "Party of God." Most notably (the author) gives an exceptional perspective of Hizbullah's world vision." -- Middle East Quarterly

"considers the political evolution that the Lebanese Islamist political party, Hizballah has undergone" -- Journal of Palestine Studies

"Amal Saad-Ghorayeb's recently published and extensively researched study of the Lebanese Islamist group Hizbu'llah is a welcome addition to the literature on Islamist groups, especially given the present global climate& Saad-Ghorayeb offers us rare but thorough glimpse into "the political mind of Hizbu'llah," & [Saad-Ghoryeb] offers a more nuanced understanding of the organization's political thought that stresses both its moral consistency and its political flexibility, what she call it's 'artful' yet 'precarious' balancing act, in which political concessions are interpreted as 'calculated measures' designed to preserve its overall intellectual foundation."--American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences

I really liked the author's neutral tone throughout the work. I didn't feel the author was picking sides, but instead trying to lay out the bare, objective facts as they are. This gave the book a greater authority in my opinion. What the reader must understand is that the author is simply relaying Hizbu'llah's ideologies as they themselves see it, so the book is very much from the Hizbu'llah perspective but with a critical look into their beliefs as well. This is an important perspective to have for anyone hoping to fully understand this complex group and where it might be headed in the future. The book mainly deals with the leadership and other pivotal figures such as Fadlallah. This approach allows readers the chance to see into the minds of the people who not only lead this group but also define its ideology. This is a unique and probing look into the mind of this group which allows the reader to understand where they come from and where they may be headed in the future. I was very pleased to see the author delve into the concept of velayet faqih. He does a great job discussing this, and while I was surprised that Hizbu'llah does accept this concept, the book does well in explaining the reasons why Hizbu'llah accepts it. After reading this section it made much more sense that this group would accept the idea since they are closely aligned to Iran, but the contradictions inherent in the concept for Shiites and Hizbu'llah is something that has not been fully rationalized. What was very enlightening was the discussion on democracy and the Islamic state. In some ways I think this group is an important bellwether for the possibility of Islamist groups ability to integrate into a representative form of government. While this group may seek to set up an

Islamic utopia, if they continue to do so through democratic means rather than through force I think they could be a possible example for other groups to follow. I only wish the author could do another edition that incorporates the many developments that have occurred since this book was first written. The main problem I had with this work is that it was mainly a top down approach with very little focus on those on the ground level. This creates a picture of a group that is monolithic and rigid, and while this group is a very disciplined organization, I have serious doubts that this group doesn't have its own rebels who act on their own initiative. In the end the book was bound to have a problem such as this though because it is impossible to encompass fully such a large and complex group as this one is, so I don't take off for what was inevitable. I also don't think it was intentional, but more of a by-product of the approach the author took. This should not be used as a definitive book for the Hizbu'llah, instead it should be used to further one's understanding as they look at this group from many angles. The author provides a perspective that adds greater depth. I recommend this book.

Not an outsider's misrepresentation or caricature of this foreign group, 'Hizbu'llah' is an empathetic perspective of the Islamist socio-political-religious worldview. However this bias is not disguised, so the reader is on alert to use discernment and doublecheck its assertions. Though the focus is Hizbu'llah in particular, the book more broadly valuable to understanding the Islamist movement at large, clarifying distinctions and interrelations between Shi'a Islam and Sunni (for instance, different ways of dividing the world: Muslim/nonMuslim or oppressed/oppressors). The writing is engaging, comprehensive, and not vague--specific religious bases are given to explain hostility to Israel, the different types of jihad are detailed, etc. This book has greater global significance than its title portrays. For example, understanding Hizbu'llah's concern for oppressed peoples helps the reader to realize the inroads being made by Hizbu'llah (and thus Iran) in outreach to nonIslamic or at least non-Shi'a groups and nations perceived as oppressed by the West. Furthermore, the Hizbu'llah model serves as an example to recognize when observing the transformation (at least external) of other Islamist groups. (Don't like Hizbu'llah?--this book's still helpful: "know thy enemy.")

In her well-written book Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion, author Amal Saad-Ghorayeb explains the historical and contemporary development of Hizbu'llahs' political, social, and religious ideologies. Though she shows pro-Hizbu'llah, pro-Shiite, pro-Lebanese bias she attempts to present a fair and balanced study of an extremely controversial organization. Gleaning her information from an assortment of articles, interviews, newspapers she argues that since it's inception, the party has

evolved and changed to meet the challenges political and social challenges both in Lebanon and throughout the Islamic world. She focuses primarily on the a close examination of the parties theological arguments concerning its purpose or role in the conflict against the West and the "Zionist/Jewish entity." Ghorayeb begins her study with a brief, but thorough discussion of the formation and early development of Hizbu'llah from a Jihadi or "resistance force" to a major political power in Lebanon. She argues that myriad Shiite political movements in Lebanon originated in the 1960s and 1970s, but failed to merge until the 1978 and 1982 Israeli invasions and subsequent occupations of Lebanon by Israel. She states that Shiites suffered the greatest number of casualties in the Lebanese civil war and Israeli occupation. Within that claim she also asserts that one third of those killed in Sabra and Chatila were Shiites who had fled the Israeli occupation. In fact, her claims might be true. Regardless, she presents a convincing argument for the existence of an organization like Hizbu'llah in Lebanon. However, biased or objective her argument, Ghorayeb offers an intimate glimpse into mind of Islamic fundamentalism. She stresses the predominately Shiite theology that defends the protection and defense of the weak and oppressed peoples, both Muslim and non-Muslim, as a central to the ideology of Hizbu'llah. The concept labels the United States, Britain, and France as the primary European oppressors under the subtle control of Israel. Essentially the conflict between Islam and the West lies phenomenon of globalism and the effects of Western hegemony, primarily American, in Middle Eastern politics and Muslim culture. The two chapters on Hizbu'llahs' anti-Westernism and anti-Americanism offer a glimpse into Islamic socio-religious thought and are essential in understanding today's world. Unfortunately, many who read this book will condemn it based solely on Ghorayeb's constant condemnation of Israeli actions and the American blockade of United Nation censor of Israel. Though she addresses Hizbu'llah's terror activities, she refuses to label the group as a terror organization. However, she demonstrates a profound understanding of the Islamic jurisprudence and reasoning concerning violence against civilians. In that sense, this book is an apologetic that defends the legitimacy of Hizbu'llah and the organizations right to struggle against Israeli oppression. She explains the party's view that Israel remains illegitimate and Jews are evil and cannot be trusted. Some reviewers argue that she needs to include a section explaining the Zionist argument for the legitimacy of Israel. I disagree; this is a book about Hizbu'llah written by a Lebanese Shiite who returned to live in Lebanon. We should accept it and try to learn from it. There are plenty of books that come from the other end of the spectrum.

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