ISLAM, RESISTANCE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
The Case of the Southern Suburb of Beirut City

by

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ABSTRACT

This study is centered around the relationship between a cluster of Islamic NGOs and the local community in the southern suburb of Beirut. These NGOs were organized around a strong religious Islamic identity and were openly supportive of Hizb'Allah's resistance activities. They were all established on a foreign (Iranian) initiative and largely dependent on Iranian funding. Overtime, these NGOs became the backbone of service provision of the southern suburb of Beirut, enrolled a large number of local residents, at all levels of their organizational hierarchy, and cut down their Iranian funding. The organizations managed this shift through (i) targeting urgent community needs such as drinking water and garbage collection, (ii) including residents within the NGOs at all levels from director to social worker, and (iii) adopting a language that would appeal to residents by validating their frustrations and struggles for social justice and national liberation.

In the process of attracting local residents into the organizations and building ties with the rest of the community, the NGOs in the southern suburb of Beirut have relied on two complementary processes: agency and ideology. First, in terms of conception, design and implementation of projects, many roles within the organizations were designed for residents to play themselves. Second, the organizations used the Islamic political ideology and the spirit of resistance that they adopted from the political movements behind their creation to generate a mission statement and a new language for themselves. The mission and language brought these NGOs closer to the community, created an aura around their work, and motivated people to join them. These two processes were carried out simultaneously and together allowed the organizations to build the relationship of trust and cooperation it was able to achieve with the community.

This thesis is based on qualitative data, in particular interviews with NGO workers, local residents, and public and private sector agencies who have been involved in the southern suburb's system of service provision. They are also based on various documents and studies developed around this zone over the past two decades.
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I dedicate my thesis to my family, Mom, Dad, Sahar, Salma, and Ali, and to my little family in Boston, primarily Alan and Maysa without whom this whole work would have never happened.
# Table of Contents

1. **Introduction** ................................................................. 9  
   - The case study ................................................................. 12  
   - Methodology ................................................................. 17  
   - Thesis argument ............................................................. 18  
   - Thesis structure ............................................................. 19  

2. **The top-down finding its way down** ................................ 20  
   - Introduction ................................................................. 20  
   - Part I: NGOs and residents ............................................. 21  
     - Islamic resistance NGOs ............................................... 20  
     - Residents ................................................................. 25  
     - The first encounter .................................................... 26  
   - Part II: The transformations ............................................ 28  
     - The city scale projects ............................................... 29  
     - A first impact ........................................................... 33  
     - The targeted initiatives ............................................... 36  
     - The impact of targeted initiatives ................................... 40  
     - New vision, new language ............................................ 44  
   - Conclusion ................................................................. 48  

3. **Agency and ideology** ................................................... 51  
   - Introduction ................................................................. 51  
   - Part I: Structure ............................................................ 51  
     - Spreading and decentralizing ....................................... 51  
     - Opening up the organizations ...................................... 53  
     - Reaching out ............................................................ 55  
     - Organizations’ transfer .............................................. 58  
   - Part II: The political mobilization ................................... 61  
     - A prestigious image ................................................... 61  
     - A sense of mission ..................................................... 62  
     - A language ............................................................... 63  
   - Part III: A new culture and a new identity ......................... 66  
     - The organizations ..................................................... 66  
     - The city level ........................................................... 69  
   - Conclusions ............................................................... 71  

4. **Conclusions** .............................................................. 72  

Bibliography ................................................................. 77
### Political Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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### Political Parties

- AMAL: Iran
- Al Jihad Al Binaa
- Al Amrousiiah

### NGOs

- Al Shaheed
- Relief Work
- Schools
- Sewing and Training
- Al Jareeh (The Wounded)
- Al Hay'ah Al Sahhyyah
- Relief
- Public clinics (health and dental)
- Bank Sadarat Iran (loans)
- Al Imdad
- Income generation
- Bread Initiative
- Training: Hair dressing
- Schools
- Jihad Al Binaa
- Garbage collection
- Water provision
- Public Piazza

Sources: Harb El Kak (1996), BTUTP (1990), The Research and Documentation Center (1990 and 1993) and personal interviews.
Figure 1: Map of Beirut and its Suburbs
Figure 2: Schematic Map of Beirut and its Suburbs

Source: Yahya 1994
Introduction

For almost twenty years now, Islamic organizations have made the front pages in the worlds’ media, particularly in mainstream western news agencies. Deploying words like “terrorism” and “fundamentalism,” these media often portray the activities of Islamic organizations such as Hizb’Allah, Hamas as singularly extremist and violent acts executed by brain-washed members. This negative assessment has not only diffused into popular culture but has also colored academic works, including the development literature, which has in general neglected to document any of the projects, working mechanisms, or approach to poverty alleviation pursued by Islamic NGOs. It has instead focused on whether they fit within definitions of “civil society” or not, and commonly blamed them for the destruction of this “civil society” in the countries where they have operated. In these works, if Islamic NGOs are mentioned, whether in Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan, or Palestine, their projects and services are often described as “political co-optation.” Ironically, the following definition taken from CNN, a mainstream US news agency, is a good description: “Hezbollah3 (Party of God) -- an Iranian-sponsored Shiite Muslim faction based in Lebanon [...] has sowed support in Beirut’s Shiite Muslim, southern suburbs by creating a social welfare system.”

Throughout the countries where they have worked, and as their growing popular support indicates, arrays of Islamic NGOs have spread in large numbers and developed often intricate and complex networks of service provision. In Lebanon, where Islamic movements have been significantly present since 1982, Islamic NGOs have provided arrays of services that encompassed health care, education, drinking water provision, garbage collection, income generation initiatives, and many others. They have also placed local resident members, often largely demobilized previously, into positions where they can actually act on their poor living conditions by shaping their own process of service provision and organizing for their rights.

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1 This literature is extremely abundant in American mainstream media, for example the New York Times, the Boston Globe and many others. For other sources, check Barsky 1995, Lamchichi 1995, or Miller 1997.
2 For example, see Lesch, 1996.
3 There is no one way of writing Hizb’Allah’s name, the reason why I adopted this orthography is because of the two parts that suggest clearly the world Allah (God in Arabic) as separate from Hizb (party, in Arabic).
4 CNN, “Struggle for Peace” Homepage (emphasis added) (http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/struggle_for_peace/key_players.html#palestinians)
Despite their record in Lebanon, these NGOs have received the same dismissive treatment mentioned above. For example, the 1997 UNDP (United Nations Development Program) Lebanon report does not carry a single mention of these NGOs in its list of Lebanese service providing NGOs. This paper attempts to provide a dose of correction to this strong bias by building an understanding of the process of community development initiated by Islamic NGOs in Lebanon, specifically in the southern suburb of Beirut, and in terms of community mobilizing and service provision.

This study does not aim to look at the role of Islamic Organizations in their political struggle with Israel. It focuses on the activities of Islamic NGOs in their role as service providers. The study is centered around the relationship of a number of these NGOs—all founded by an Iranian initiative and openly supportive of Hizb’Allah’s resistance activities—and the local community in the southern suburbs of Beirut. Drawing lessons from this interaction, it seeks to understand how and when a foreign heavily politicized intervention can effectively strengthen the locally weak physical institutions of a community and help local residents generate their own system of service provision while they mobilize for their own rights. The thesis also looks at the various tools and transformation processes that led to the above mentioned type of organizing.

In the choice of Islamic NGOs in my case study, I also aim to highlight and challenge another bias in the development literature. Indeed, in its choice of case study and the description of NGOs, the literature has often emphasized a particular class of NGOs that are not, or which claim not to be politicized. It has therefore traditionally excluded a large class of service providers such as, besides Islamic NGOs, the Liberation Theology groups in Latin America, a number of African-American churches in the US and probably many other similar cases. However, all these groups have at times been efficient service providers and community organizers over the past decades all around the world. Thus, in defining the organizations I am studying as NGOs, I make a conscious choice to challenge the existing definitions, and apply, in

---

5 UNDP report on Lebanon, August 1997.
6 Since 1982, the year Israel occupied Beirut, Lebanon’s capital-city, and as a direct reaction to this occupation, Hizb’Allah, a local Lebanese political group and resistance guerilla has been leading a military resistance to the Israeli occupation in Lebanon. Since Israel has now retreated to the South of the country, the resistance activities of Hizb’Allah’s are confined in South Lebanon. However, the political group is present throughout the country. For an excellent definition of Hizb’Allah, read Fadl’Allah 1984.
my case study, some of the same analytical lenses usually applied to NGOs while I also introduce other frameworks that in my opinion would often be useful in less visibly politicized groups.

**The Puzzle**

Because there is more than one breed of Islamic NGOs in Lebanon, and since this study is limited to the Islamic NGOs that explicitly support *Hizb'Allah's* resistance in South Lebanon, I will refer to these NGOs as "Islamic resistance NGOs" in the rest of the paper. Islamic resistance NGOs in Lebanon differ from the rest of NGOs reported in the literature in two key aspects.

First, these NGOs have an openly political and religious identity. These NGOs are "Islamic," i.e. they are part of the "Islamic condition," the current political Islamic revivalism spreading around the Arab World. This movement calls for the reintroduction of Muslim values in most aspects of daily life as well as the implementation of some of the most important principals of Islamic governance, i.e. social justice. These NGOs also portray themselves as "resistance organizations." They support openly the military resistance to Israeli occupation led by *Hizb'Allah* in South Lebanon. In fact, they perceive their task as complementary to *Hizb'Allah's* resistance in sustaining the civil population in times of war, and strengthening its capacities. They claim therefore to be building a "resistance society."

This open politicized identity differs from the more common representation of NGOs in the literature as non-politicized autonomous service providers who do not get involved in (corrupting) political activities (Berg 1987). In fact, this politicization goes against some of the basic perceived relative advantages of NGOs over the State: NGOs are independent from voting processes and are therefore able to provide "non-clientelistic" and more "dedicated" services. Instead, Islamic NGOs in the southern suburb of Beirut have used their political affiliations in order to strengthen the beneficiary community itself. They have developed the political ideology that they carry in innovative forms in order to generate prestige for their institutions, a sense of mission for their workers and a new language for the community they reached out to. These three attributes were, as will be relayed in the paper, behind a large part of the organizations’ capacity to appeal to the community and encourage its mobilization.
Second, these NGOs did not stem from a local residents’ efforts. Instead, they were generated by an Iranian foreign initiative and were implanted in a top down manner in the southern suburb of Beirut. They reproduced locally copies of already existing NGOs in Iran as local branches of the Iranian based “mother” NGOs or as independent local clones of the Iranian based initial model. Furthermore, all these NGOs carried a political ideology that was imported from a foreign country, Iran, and applied to the southern suburb of Beirut. Yet, from this process, the NGOs have produced a process of service provision which has included residents in the choice of projects, their conception, design and implementation. In fact, they have achieved today a participatory process with local communities that would be applauded by any of the proponents of participation, yet based on their origins, their apparent success could not have been predicted from the literature on participation. This fact raises several questions for students of development and especially proponents of participation. Indeed, the NGOs successes stand against tenants of participatory development which point to grassroots initiation of organization, locally generated models and, above all distance from local political (corrupting) movements as prerequisites for success (Edwards and Hulme 1992).

1.1 The Case Study

The Southern suburb of Beirut City is a zone of 16 sq. km extending on the outskirts of Beirut city, between the Beirut International Airport, the Mediterranean sea, and the large industrial zone of Shoueiffat. No clear physical boundaries separate Beirut City from its southern suburbs. However, an aerial view of this zone shows a clear physical break between these two zones translating a sharp increase in the population density.

The large concentration of residents and the poverty of the area are relatively new features of the southern suburb of Beirut. Indeed, less then fifty years ago, the majority of this area was still agricultural land and had a very low density. Moreover, until the early seventies, this area housed a middle class, religiously mixed population who had been locally rooted for decades.

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7 Beirut Municipal area is 17.2km2 (for the same population).
8 Although the overall density of Beirut is similar to that of the suburbs, the distribution of this area is uneven and most of the residents are concentrated on few very high density spots, up to 1100 inhabit/ha. (Source: BTUTP, 1991).
The civil military conflict that started in 1975 and the Israeli invasion of parts of South Lebanon in 1978 precipitated the rural to urban migration, the concentration of residents of the same religion and sect, and their marginalization from the rest of the city’s neighborhoods. Indeed, during the civil war, Lebanon was divided into homogeneous sectarian religious enclaves controlled by militias of the same sects. At that time, the southern suburb of Beirut was controlled by subsequent Lebanese Shiite militias. Furthermore, compared to other Muslim neighborhoods in the city, the southern suburb offered relatively cheaper land prices and unregulated access. The southern suburb of Beirut thus became the logical area to host Lebanese Shiite refugees. During the years of civil war, most of Beirut City’s growth was contained in this enclave (BTUTP 1993, Nasr 1985).

By 1985, ten years after the beginning of the civil war, the population of the southern suburb of Beirut had more than doubled and became almost exclusively Shiite. It went from 140,000 inhabitants in 1969 to around 526,000 in 1993, accounting for at least 1/6th of the Lebanese population\(^9\) (excluding the Palestinian camps)\(^10\). It also became almost exclusively Lebanese of the Shiite sect, thus moving from 32.8% in 1973 to above 90% in 1998.

Simultaneously, during these years of war, the per income capita of Lebanese citizens dropped by 2/3\(^11\), especially after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Beirut that heavily damaged the economic

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\(^9\) This figure represents roughly 1/4th of the Beirut Metropolitan area residents. Some statistics affirm that the Southern Suburbs contain 700,000 people but since there has been no official census in Lebanon since 1932, there is really no definite figure.

\(^10\) I have excluded the Palestinian camps from this study because they have until lately related to the jurisdiction of UNRWA, the United Nation Relief and Works Agency and do not closely relate to services provided by these NGOs in the Southern suburb of Beirut.

infrastructure of the country. Since the southern suburb of Beirut city is a visibly poorer then the rest of Beirut City, one expects its indicators to be even sharper. According to one study done in 1997 in a particularly poor neighborhood of the area, today’s per income capita is the area (US $ 410) is barely 14% of the country’s (US $ 2,970).12

One of the main causes of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) was the religious discrimination adopted by the ruling classes towards the population. In 1975, the country was almost entirely run by a Christian Maronite elite. Discrimination was translated in an unequal regional development. Long before and during the years of civil war, and in compliance with the discriminatory policy it had been implementing, the Lebanese government has kept the minimum possible involvement in the system of service provision of some of the poorest rural areas of the country. Since a large majority –80% of the Shiite community was rural at that time, it was vastly included in these poor areas. As of the mid-sixties, various movements, notably Islamic, had rocked the country and spoke of Islam as and social justice. The main achievements of this earlier mobilization was the dismantling of the traditional feudal Shiite leadership in the area.

Between 1965 and 1982, Public Agencies did not initiate any major public project in the southern suburb of Beirut. In fact, with the exception of a few decrees relative to enlarging streets, not a single public intervention was even planned in the area. Furthermore, during the years of the civil war, especially in the eighties, this policy was further accentuated with a series of attempts initiated at the Central State level to evict informal residents from the area (40%)13 and reduce its density (El Kak Harb 1996, Sharafeddine 1985). The absence of the Lebanese State in providing services opened a space in the suburbs for various political parties to win the support of residents by providing these missing services. Between 1975 and 1991, over a hundred different political groups entered the lives of residents of the southern suburbs of Beirut city (e.g. Amal, Ba’ath, Progressive Socialist Party). Most of them provided at some point or another services to the community. Similarly, international and national, secular and religious NGOs attempted at various phases to fill up this need. The Islamic NGOs I am describing were part of

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12 Source: The Consulting Center For the Studies And Documentation.
13 This is a controversial figure presented by Sharafeddine. This percentage in fact depends on the definitions and types of informal processes in place.
these service providers. This research reports on how, over the past years, they have materialized their interventions with actual community mobilization and civil involvement.\(^{14}\)

Over the past ten years, the service provided by Islamic NGOs in Lebanon have had strong positive impacts on the life of residents of the southern suburb of Beirut. Indeed, the NGOs have systematically targeted some of the basic urgent needs of the local community as well as some of the most needy of the community members and provided them sustainable regular and responsive services over the past decades, especially since 1989. For example, between 1988 and 1992, one of these NGOs (*Jihad Al Bina'a*) collected a yearly 300 tons of garbage throughout the area, for a population of 500,000 people. This same NGO has also provided, since 1991, drinking water through water tanks that have served, first, 10% of the needs of the area and has come to serve, over the past years, between 15% and 20% of the local needs. Other NGOs (*Al Imdad, Al Shaheed*) have provided training programs (e.g. sewing, hairdressing, and others). These same NGOs have also generated a series of income generation projects (e.g. bread-making, cooking, sewing, grocery stores and others) that have reached a large number of beneficiaries.\(^{15}\) Furthermore, through these projects, the Islamic NGOs have mobilized the local community in service provision and encouraged the residents to penetrate the NGOs at all level, including them in the conception, design and implementation phase of the community. Through these phases, the NGOs have also fostered a critical understanding of poverty, religion, the structure of oppression and the political power of residents, strengthening both the voices and the will of residents.

\[\textbf{A Bias In Perception}\]

Despite these achievements, the NGOs, as I said earlier, have not received the expected recognition in Lebanon and were not given the proper attention they deserve in the development literature. This could be potentially due to three main factors.

The first is related to perceptions. In the minds of most Lebanese citizens, the southern suburb of Beirut has been a poor neighborhood for the past two decades. In fact, it has been a

\(^{14}\) I reconstructed most of this history through interviews with residents and planners who've worked in the area.
space widely advertised as deprived, unserviced and in sum, mainly composed of extremely poor residents. This perception has been further strengthened by the political discourses that emerged since the late 70’s, to denounce this area’s neglect notably by State service providers. These discourses have thus described an image of poverty and deprivation that was often used for advocacy by the various political groups who pretended to represent the community, before and during the Lebanese military civil conflict (1975-1991). However, the resulting negative perception of the southern suburb of Beirut has impregnated the space of the area and prevented many from trying to challenge it.\footnote{15}

The second potential explanation for this biased perception is related to the types of projects that have been implemented in the area. These projects do not fit the scales and measures that local planners expect to see. The fact that most of the projects I will discuss happened in the informal sector and that they are small scale individual initiatives rather then large scale infrastructure projects prevented many Lebanese planners from appreciating their impact. In their minds, planning and development happen through enlarging roads and installing pipes and sewers, i.e. through an investment in the infrastructure of the area that could heavily changed its face. They were however unable to appreciate the NGOs smaller success stories that often relied on informal networks to carry their tasks.

Finally, a last potential explanation of this bias is political. The close connection between the role of these NGOs as service providers and the entire Islamic/ resistance in terms of political action movement (particularly their relationship with \textit{Hizb'Allah}) has provided an often easy excuse to dismiss their work. For example, many of public officials I have interviewed during my field work repeatedly insisted that the process initiated by these NGOs in Lebanon is “political co-optation,” and not “service provision.” Even more prominently, foreign media has repeatedly talked about exchanges of political support for “terrorist” activities and social welfare. Since I have developed this argument in the beginning of the thesis, I will not dwell on it here anymore.

\footnote{15} I do not have exact data on the number of people enrolled in programs in these NGOs. The only figure I could get was the current 85 micro-credit loans disbursed by \textit{Al Imdad} Beirut. These are independent from the other NGOs and the training program figures that are not available.

\footnote{16} For a great explanation of this process of bias in perception, see Hirshman 1971.
1.2 Methodology

This study focuses on some aspects of the Islamic NGOs development projects in the southern suburb of the capital city, Beirut. It focuses on the evolution of these NGOs from foreign top down organizations into locally rooted organizations largely run by local initiatives. It also looks at the use of political ideology in service provision, particularly, at the way these NGOs have used the political message they carry in order to define their role in the area and improve and facilitate the task of service provision. Drawing on personal interviews with residents, NGO members, political party members, government officials and employees and planners who have worked on the area, I attempt to combine their often conflicting perceptions to develop a more accurate perception of the work of these NGOs. My analysis is also based on documents and evaluations carried primarily by the Research and Documentation Center, a research center located in the southern suburb of Beirut, informally affiliated to Islamic NGOs and Hizb’Allah. The center carries surveys of Lebanese areas populated with Lebanese Shiite communities and maintains a library and archives compiling data related mainly to the same areas. I also use the evaluation reports and pamphlets of these NGOs themselves in order to draw figures and details of their work. Finally, I use the figures and stories compiled by a private planning office, BTUTP, based on the boundaries of Beirut City and its southern suburb which has undertaken a number of projects in my study area, especially a large scale study to improve the infrastructure of the southern suburb of Beirut, at the end of the civil war, between 1991 and 1993. This papers’ conclusions are mainly tested through my personal observations of the area over the past years, as a resident of Beirut City.

In my examination of Islamic resistance NGOs, I mainly document only two of these NGOs, Jihad Al Bina’a (Struggle for Construction) and Al Imdad (support) organizations. Since these NGOs are part of two different clusters, and through my less accurate survey of the other NGOs, I could easily trace which conclusions could be generalized. In terms of projects, I will focus mainly on garbage collection and drinking water provision at the city level and income generation at the family level for the following reasons. First, I focus on the city level projects because they are highly visible and non-targeted large projects that proved to be successful. They have thus been essential to establish the NGOs in the area and to foster their acceptability by residents. In contrast, income generation is an innovative initiative in the southern suburb of
Beirut. Income generation projects are low visibility and highly targeted initiatives that involve large popular participation and directly clash with the general understanding of residents about NGOs, i.e. service providers and subsidizers, not loan givers. 17 I believe that covering these very different projects will reveal different yet interesting aspects of the NGOs. Second, the projects I have chosen to describe were among the most popular in the community. They also involved a high number of local poor residents in the NGOs. They therefore reflect best my points about the NGOs’ participatory processes. The study does not attempt to measure the success of each project, nor to identify these NGOs main achievements. Instead, I focus on some of the outcomes of their work and the lessons we can learn about politics, participation, community empowerment, agency and ideology of NGOs from the type of interventions they have undertaken. I also look at the tools they used to increase the involvement of residents in their own neighborhood to ultimately create the institutions that became a base for communities to mobilize and improve their own living conditions.

1.3 Thesis Argument

In this thesis I will show that the Islamic NGO’s operating in Beirut’s southern suburbs were able to evolve from their foreign-run, top-down, locally unpopular origins into organizations involving residents’ participation in the conception, design, and implementation of service delivery by (i) targeting urgent community needs such as drinking water and garbage collection, (ii) including residents within the NGOs at all levels from director to social worker, and (iii) adopting a language that would appeal to residents by validating their frustrations and struggles for social justice and national liberation.

I will also show that the politicization of NGOs that is often condemned in the literature had several positive effects in this case by challenging stigmatizing perceptions of poverty and by instilling a sense of pride in the community’s resources and capacities. Furthermore, the political ideology of the NGOs was a useful tool for local mobilization as it gave workers enthusiasm for

17 Most if not all the national and international NGOs who have provided services to the residents of this area, throughout at least the past twenty years have just given subsidies to the residents and not involved them in processes of income generation.
their work, imbued the organizations with a prestigious image in the community, and provided an analytic framework which empowered the community “to take what is rightfully yours.”

1.4 Thesis Structure

The thesis is organized as follows. In this chapter, I have introduced the case-study though its geographic background, major players and projects’ main facts. I have explained the Islamic NGOs’ special role in Lebanon and the importance of studying their structures and initiatives. I have also introduced the thesis’ main arguments and the methodology behind my research. In the second chapter, I describe in further details the community and the NGOs. I describe the origins of these NGOs, how they first interacted with the community and dwell on their evolution over time through the projects they undertook in the southern suburb of Beirut. I also elaborate on the perceived outcomes of these projects, in terms of service provision and community mobilization, the potentials of these tasks and their limitations.

In the third chapter, I highlight the various methods these NGOs have adopted to approach the community, attract residents in their institutions, create a new image of their institutions and generate an new Islamic and politicized culture for the space. In will look particularly at the tools these institutions used to mobilize and empower the community, in terms of NGOs’ structure and political ideology. I argue there that the political build-up these NGOs have generated and the openness of their institutions to local residents created institutions were responsive to local needs. I also argue that this same political build-up has repeatedly acted as a serious impediment to the inclusion of other residents who did not want this politicized image.

Finally, in the conclusion, I summarize my main points and touch on the particular “political dimension” that these NGOs have introduced to the southern suburb of Beirut. I also look at the shortcomings and limitations that these institutions have to overcome. Particularly, what is the impact of having an NGO with a “sense of mission”, in other terms a direct open political agenda to carry through? Where does this mission place the people in the community who do not share the mission of Islamic and resistance mission of these organizations? I will finally conclude on the possible directions further research in the field could take.
Chapter 2
The Top-Down Finding its Way Down

Introduction

To a newcomer in the southern suburbs of Beirut, two main features are strikingly different from the rest of the city and its suburbs. One is the congestion, the very high density. Indeed, this area houses at least 500,000 persons, approximately 1/6th of the entire Lebanese population. These residents are congested in few clusters which density reached up to 1100 inhabit/ha (BTUTP report 1993). The other feature is the overt Islamic character that this area flaunts to the rest of the country. Dress codes, language, monuments, signs and imagery all reflect a strong religious character of the neighborhoods. Above all, this character suggests to the observer a strongly united and mobilized community.

From the accents, dressing habits, language, and traditions, an informed observer quickly realizes that this population is not as homogeneous as it first seems. In fact, the population is a composite of long time residents and several waves of rural immigrants and refugees who started coming to the area since the early 1960's. A quick overview of these residents' history reveals that only 14% originally lived in the area. These are economically better off and historically more endowed than the others. The rest of the population (86%) is composed mainly of displaced residents and refugees coming from South Lebanon (53%) and the Bekaa Valley (21%). They have moved in primarily because of the Israeli occupation and the poor economic conditions of the rural areas. The last 10% are displaced people from Mount Lebanon who moved in during the civil war. This population is predominantly Shiite, one of the Muslim sects that is historically considered as disfavored by the Lebanese system and are often referred to as the “deprived” (al

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18 This figure represents roughly 1/4th of the Beirut Metropolitan area residents. Statistics for the number of residents vary from 450,000 to 700,000 people, and, since no official census has been carried in Lebanon since 1932, there is no definite figure.
19 This survey excludes the 25,000 Palestinian refugees living in Bourj El Barajneh, and Sabra camps, within this area. Indeed, they relate to the jurisdiction of UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Work Agency) and not to Lebanese Authorities regulations and service provision. These figures are from a report on “The Conditions in the Southern Suburb of Beirut,” executed by the “Consulting Center for Studies and Documentation” in the Southern suburb of Beirut, Haret Hreik, 1993.
Going inside the southern suburbs of Beirut, our observer immediately notices a large array of non-governmental organizations, associations, and other forms of neighborhood groupings springing in most of the neighborhoods. A number of these organizations (Islamic resistance NGOs) operate as a cluster of NGOs who all share a common “Islamic” religious and political character that explains to our observer the unity in imagery he had first perceived when he entered the area. Islamic resistance NGOs are led by local residents, especially the refugees themselves, and have been involved in the provision of services needed by the local community. These services include health and educational facilities, income-generation projects, drinking water provision, subsidies of daily food, and others. Some of these services reach the entire community whereas others target only restricted groups. Over the years, these projects have shifted and changed according to the needs of local residents. In the next sections of this chapter, I will look at these organizations, their origins and evolution over time after they first interacted with the community. I will also dwell on the impact of their politicization on service provision. Throughout this chapter, I hope to shed more light on the nature of the relationship between the organizations and the residents as it transformed and developed over the past years.

PART I: NGOs AND RESIDENTS

1.1 Islamic Resistance NGOs

Over fifteen Islamic resistance NGOs, all based in the southern suburb of Beirut, have been active in various aspects of service provision. Over the past ten years, these NGOs have closely cooperated, overlapped, and complemented each other’s tasks to tangibly improve the area’s services and living conditions. In the following paragraphs, I place the NGOs in one of three categories in terms of the type of services they provide and the communities they target. The key relationships among the organizations are also mapped in Figure 3 (Appendix I).\(^{21}\)

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\(^{20}\) For a history of the Shiite community in Lebanon in English, see Norton, 1987.

\(^{21}\) The list I am presenting here is in no way comprehensive. It represents only the most visible among these NGOs.
(i) The first category of NGOs targets specific needs of the entire community. For example, *Jihad Al Bina'a* (Struggle in Construction) is a “development and construction NGO.” This organization has organized drinking water distribution and garbage collection, among other services, in the southern suburb of Beirut. More recently, it has initiated an “environmental branch” that seeks the “embellishment” of the area by designing public piazzas and other common open spaces in the suburb. There are many other NGOs in this category. For example, *Al Haya’a Al Sahhiyyah* (the Health Committee) provides health care services through a hospital it runs in the southern suburb and through various dental clinics and health care centers spread around the neighborhoods. Another example is *Jam’eyat Ta’aleem Al Dini Al Islami* (the Islamic Educational Organization), which runs a number of schools as well as educational and training programs.

(ii) The second category of NGOs targets specific beneficiary groups in the community with a variety of services ranging from health care and food subsidies to education and micro-credit. The three NGOs in this category have large outreach among the poorest segment of the community, who have been most severely impacted by the 16-year civil war (1975-1991) and the continuing Israeli occupation (since 1978). The oldest among these is *Al Shaheed* (the Martyr), which works with the families whose “heads” were killed in the civil war or the Israeli-Lebanese war. Another NGO, *Al Jareeh* (the Wounded), works with people wounded in these conflicts. Finally, *Al Imdad* (the Resource), targets those who have no source of income besides the NGO.

(iii) The third category of organizations completes the sphere of service provision and constitutes financial organizations. They are *Beit Mal Al Muslimeen* (the Muslim’s House of Money) and *Bank Sadarrat Iran*. These organizations provide credit and banking to local residents according to the precepts of Islamic banking. In general, these organizations provide marriage and housing loans, among other loans.

**Islamic Resistance NGOs’ Origins**

None of the above listed NGOs have origins inside the local community. In fact, they all grew out of the Iranian foreign policy in Lebanon of increasing the role of the Lebanese Shiite community in Lebanese politics, primarily by improving their living standards and strengthening their military resistance in South Lebanon. Since 1982, Islamic NGOs were gradually established
to help bring this change about, under the authority of Ayatollah Khomeini, the now deceased
director of the Iranian Islamic revolution and the former head of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
Invariably, the advertisement pamphlets of these organizations include a picture of Khomeini and
an acknowledgment of his central role in their inception. Moreover, in their initial phase, all of
these NGOs depended entirely on Iranian funding to operate.²²

Furthermore, these organizations were created by “mother” or model NGOs based in Iran.
In fact, Islamic NGOs have reproduced locally, inside the southern suburb of Beirut, a cluster of
organizations that had developed earlier in Iran, in the years after the Iranian revolution (1979),
and especially during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). The NGOs in Lebanon reproduced the
division of tasks, the classification of beneficiaries, and even carry the same names of the Iranian
NGOs. The NGOs are thus duplicates of an existing sophisticated model of service provision
adapted to local circumstances.

The Lebanese Islamic NGOs are officially registered non-governmental organizations or
“charities.” They all have operational permits from the Lebanese Ministry of Interior and abide
by Lebanese laws and regulations. In their funding, all of these NGOs depend on the same
sources. They are partly subsidized by Iranian funding and receive a variable percentage of their
budget from Iran. These NGOs also rely on the Zakat and the Sadaka, the money that individual
Muslims are religiously mandated to give yearly to the poor.²³ Through these religious channels,
Islamic NGOs receive donations from within the local community but also from rich Lebanese
expatriates and other Arab donors.²⁴ The money is either directly raised from donors to the NGOs
or collected in a central local office, the “Office of the Official Representative of Ali Khamenee”
from which it is redistributed to NGOs.²⁵

Within this general notion of foreign creation and funding, the relationships between
NGOs and the model NGOs they follow vary. Some of these NGOs, such as Al Shaheed and Al

²² If this situation has shifted considerably today, a significant portion of their funding still comes from Iran.
²³ The Sadaka is a benevolent and unspecified amount of money. The Zakat is a mandated percentage on income
surplus.
²⁴ Despite my efforts, I was never able to determine the relative percentage of these sources. I only know that this
percentage varies across NGOs.
²⁵ A clarification is here due: Sayyed Ali Khamenee is considered in Iran as the Leader of the Muslims –Shiites- in
the world and has thus jurisdiction in deciding for their matters. The Sayyed’s representative in Lebanon is appointed
directly by the Iranian Sayyed himself. He is Lebanese and has jurisdiction over the distribution of money. My
efforts to know how the money was distributed, what were the basis and whether Iran was consulted in the matter
were vain.
Imdad are secondary branches of mother NGOs in Iran. They report to their respective base in Iran and adopt policies from their own Iranian-based mother NGO. The Lebanese branches of this group of NGOs are also partially funded by the Iranian mother organization. At the same time, another group of NGOs have no administrative attachments to or financial dependence on their respective “model” organizations in Iran. In their creation, they have adopted the name and experience of the Iranian organization but, in their tasks and policies, they do not follow the same projects or the same structure as the Iranian institution they were modeled after. These are, for example, Jihad Al Bina’ā and Al Hay’aa Al Sahia. The General Director of the Lebanese Jihad Al Bina’ā explained to us that their relationship is that of sharing experiences and development lessons.

In their identity, the organizations are strongly imbued with the Iranian Islamic revolution and its values. These organizations have adopted the strong Islamic political ideology that they share with Hizb’Allah, the Lebanese political party leading the Lebanese military resistance to Israeli occupation in South Lebanon. In fact, the establishment in 1982 of the first of these NGOs, Al Shaheed (the Martyr), coincided with the first military resistance operations of Hizb’Allah. All Islamic NGOs openly support the political message of Hizb’Allah calling for military and civilian resistance to the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon. In fact, they describe this call as the religious duty of all Lebanese citizens, especially the Muslim ones.

Furthermore, beyond sharing the same ideology, a number of the NGOs mentioned above are directly affiliated with Hizb’Allah and abide by its decision making. Hizb’Allah does not interfere directly in their tasks of service provision. It only looks at the general NGO strategy to shift to new services or create new branches, for example. Hajj Kassem Eleik who was the head of Jihad Al Bina’ā until last summer explained: “Hizb’Allah won’t interfere in our projects, only in our vision. We report to them on the general strategies as, for example, stopping garbage collection.” Throughout the interview, this director had emphasized the limited interference of the political party in their activities.

Finally, the NGOs also share the antagonistic attitude that Hizb’Allah has adopted against the Lebanese State, blaming it for discriminatory development policies that exclude the poorest

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26 Source: Al A’taa (Giving): A brief glance at the activities of the Islamic Iranian organizations in Lebanon, 1990.
27 This call for resistance is “the Jihad,” the religious duty of every Muslim to refuse and resist oppression in all its forms.
residents, corruption and incapacity. “The Government,” one NGO director told me, “is acting like a private company. Civil servants contract their own companies to develop the projects that could generate profit for them and not for the citizens.” Another social worker complained: “Instead of a keeper of justice, the state only interferes here and there to evict residents at the fringes of the southern suburbs, whenever they are in the way of a projected infrastructure plan or other development projects.” Throughout my interviews, these comments were very recurrent. NGO workers often blamed the State for its lack of presence, for neglecting the poor Lebanese residents and for excluding them from the Lebanese post-civil war reconstruction process.

In sum, despite some variations among them, all these organizations were not initiated by local residents. Instead, they were implanted in a top down manner carrying a political ideology and reproducing a model that were both imported from a foreign country (Iran) and applied to the southern suburb of Beirut. This fact strongly contradicts central tenants of NGOs’ good performance, especially in terms of participatory development, which repeatedly point to grassroots initiation of organizations, locally generated models and, above all, distance from local political (corrupting) movements as prerequisites for success (Berg 1987, Edwards and Hulme 1992, Clark, 1991).

1.2 Residents

The history of the community, as described in the introduction, does not explain the successful mobilization of residents either. Indeed, their earlier struggles for more equitable Lebanese development policies had not improved their conditions. Most of them were unwilling to try more. They had been evicted from their villages either directly by the Israeli military, or by the economic destitution brought by continued Israeli bombardment of the region and by the lack of Lebanese rural development policies. AMAL, the political party most of them had followed earlier had degenerated into a militia fighting with other factions a bloody civil war. Furthermore, throughout these years of military conflict, they had been subjected to the presence of hundreds of political groups and parties that all tried to mobilize them and gather their support. They therefore had reached a state of deep despair. Perhaps the description of Norton best represents the conditions at the time. “Today,” he wrote in 1983, “a malaise hangs over Lebanon, a sense of
hopelessness that is reflected in people’s faces, in a heavy pessimism, and in a ruined economy” (Norton 1987: 126). This description is well in line with what many of the interviewees had told me about this period. For example, Ali, an old-time resident and worker in the Ministry of Social Services told us that “there were a million political parties and organizations who came here in the war, these parties varied from the full fledged Marxist ideologies to the smallest neighborhood sectarian factions. By the time Islamic groups came, people were weary and tired. In short, we were all unwilling to get mobilized.”

1.3 The first encounter

The first encounter between the community and the Islamic NGOs was very negative. Suspicious of any political propaganda and particularly antagonistic to outsiders, local residents did not receive the Islamic NGOs positively. Instead, people perceived any intervention by these organizations as “Hizb’Allah,” that is “Iranian interventions in Lebanon.” I still remember my grandmother, at the time totally hostile to even the thought of these organizations, saying repeatedly: “They even created a party for God! What next?” This was in fact common rhetoric in the suburbs of Beirut. At that time, most people did not distinguish between the NGOs and Hizb’Allah, the political party, and refused to deal with either of them. Some residents even refused to resort to the services. Hussein, one such resident, explained that “in the early months after the installation of the water tanks by Jihad Al Bina’a, we did not trust the sustainability of this initiative. Many people here [in the southern suburb of Beirut] were unwilling to use the drinking water they provided since they did not want to depend on them.” Hussein explained this behavior through the weariness of residents and their unwillingness to get involved with any new political activity.

Similarly, members of these Islamic NGOs were initially overtly opposed to anything they did not agree with. “In the beginning, one of the residents told me, they believed that whoever did not support them and their ideology was necessarily against them. They thus adopted an aggressive attitude to anyone or anything that did not follow their lines.” People told me stories that recalled my own earlier memories of the first years of Hizb’Allah’s interventions in Lebanon. Members of the organizations stopped women on the streets to tell them to cover
their hair and they distributed flyers with their teachings. One of the residents said “they sought to impose an ideology they imported uncritically and so, they openly challenged the local habits.” In that sense, the NGOs and Hizb’Allah saw themselves preaching the Iranian teachings to the population. The obvious result was to alienate the residents especially when, in Salmon’s terminology, they acted as missionaries coming to uplift the residents from their own sins (Salmon 1987: 29-49).

In terms of projects, the early initiatives were meant to support and specifically target the families of fighters wounded in the war through the first of these NGOs created in Lebanon, Al Shaheed (the Martyr). These projects were perceived by residents as targeting the needs of the families wounded fighting for Hizb’Allah, i.e. their “own” people only. All these activities lumped Hizb’Allah and the service providers together in the eyes of the residents, and labeled them as another political short-term interference that should not be credited more than it deserves.” In that much, the story seemed well in line with the literature. Indeed, the potential of a foreign model imposed from the top to mobilize a largely demoralized population is very low. Yet, as time evolved, a major transformation occurred within the organizations’ approach that modified the dynamics of the interaction between these two groups to produce a more positive outcome. This change in organizational policies was probably triggered by the popular resistance to the first Islamic resistance NGOs’ interventions. This resistance was manifested in the residents’ initial rejection of the NGOs’ teachings and, at times, their refusal to use the NGOs’ free services. Although the top-down leadership of these NGOs did not change, its strong presence was reduced as it stepped back to open the space for local residents to penetrate Islamic resistance NGOs. This change in these NGOs could be perceived at two levels, the NGOs’ projects and their language. Soon, residents were enrolled in the NGOs, running projects and providing their own services. They were also gradually adopting the ideology and imagery they had so much resisted in the beginning.

In Chapter three, I will come back to the origins of Islamic resistance NGOs and dwell on the impact of their politicization on service provision as well as on the lives of local residents in the southern suburb of Beirut. I would however first like to describe the process of transformation that happened as it manifested itself in the projects these NGOs have carried out during the past ten years.
PART II THE TRANSFORMATION

It is hard today to determine what first changed in these NGOs. How the transformation first manifested itself is still unclear to me. But, by 1985, three years after the first of these NGOs came to Lebanon, Al Mustapha High School, the first Islamic School, was inaugurated in the southern suburb of Beirut and Al Hay’a Al Sahiyya (the Health Committee) had opened its first clinic dedicated to the general public. By 1987, this organization was also inaugurating dental clinics. (Before that date, the organization only ran a first aid civil defense corps.) It was at that time that Al Imdad and Jihad Al Bina’a were also founded. Although they were built on a similar approach and copied foreign models, the organizations undertook projects that had no direct relationship to the resistance agenda of the political party. Al Imdad, for example, does not treat war victims and the like. It only caters to development projects targeting “the poorest of the poor, those who have no other sources of income.” While Jihad Al Bina’a still implements some of the main post-war reconstruction initiatives, the organization’s daily tasks in Beirut are geared towards the provision of basic services required by a majority of the residents and available to all, including garbage collection in the late 1980s and drinking water provision later.

Simultaneously, the language of the NGOs was changing. If the ideology of Islam and the political message of resistance remained the same, the process of imposition was completely annihilated. Unlike the earlier slogans that attacked the local residents for not being “religious enough,” the new ones took the stand of the community and adopted a discourse that clearly understood its struggles and sufferings. They spoke of social justice, of dispossession and displacement. As I mentioned earlier, this discourse was particularly appealing because it supported the military resistance in South Lebanon, a cause very likely to resonate with local residents since a they all considered the Israeli aggression as one of the sources of their plight.

In the following section, I will elaborate on this transformation further, tracing some of the projects these NGOs undertook in the years where they appealed to the community and explaining their role in the history of service provision. Through this project description, I hope to shed more light on the nature of the relationship between the Islamic resistance NGOs and the residents during project choice, conception, design, and implementation, especially in terms of inclusiveness and responsiveness. Indeed, I believe these two attributes of the NGOs have
considerably facilitated the NGOs’ entrance in the community and allowed for the transformations I am discussing in this section of the paper. I also hope to show how the city-scale and targeted scale approaches of the NGOs have been complementary in respectively shaping a positive image of the NGO and fostering close ties between residents and the NGOs. In my description of the projects, I also highlight some of the interactions with the State, as they happened, since its role often explains the evolution of projects, their success or failure.

2.1 The City Scale Projects

**Garbage collection**

Islamic NGOs, notably *Jihad Al Bina’a*, have been involved in a number of urgent tasks that are considered vital by the community but were not provided by either the public or private sector throughout the years of war. One such service is garbage collection. During the years of the military civil conflict (1975-1991), as the population in the area was rapidly increasing, the five local municipalities in charge of garbage collection were unable to cope with the rising demand. Their archaic structures in terms of administrative capacity and equipment, and the absence of financial resources paralyzed their activities to a large extend. Furthermore, two of these municipalities had (and still have) no presidents.

Stacks of garbage were left on the streets, and occasionally burnt in the open air. The presence of garbage on the street and its open-air incineration were perceived by local residents as a threat to health and therefore a cause of major worries. When *Jihad Al Bina’a*, one of the Islamic NGOs described above specializing in development and construction, launched a

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28 The five concerned municipalities mentioned here are Bourj El Barajneh, Ghobeiri, Haret-Hreik, Mreijeh, and Shiah. These are the municipalities that fall under the area of operation of the Islamic resistance NGOs. (Only the first four of these municipalities are entirely in the area of the southern suburb of Beirut). Unlike the common rhetoric on municipalities however, some of the municipality workers I interviewed were very dedicated to their services and very motivated to do good work to their neighborhoods. They however complained of the lack of funding in public institutions and their physical incapacity to change things in the area. Furthermore, the absence of municipal elections in Lebanon since 1963 are a strong impediment to good performance of these Municipalities, especially those left without a mayor.

29 According to one study done in 1993 on Haret Hreik Municipality, 80% of the Municipality budget is generated by legalizing infractions to building codes and 65% of the Municipality budget is allocated to operation costs and salaries. (Harb El Kak, 1996).
cleaning campaign in 1988, the area was asphyxiating under loads of garbage. Therefore, residents welcomed this initiative gladly. Many local residents joined the NGO as workers simply because it responded to their basic health concerns. Here is one resident’s accounts: “When they [Jihad Al Bina’a] came in 1986, the neighborhood where I live was so dirty that it had become unbearable. When they started collecting garbage, I immediately joined. I worked on this project for three years.” Abu Ali is now the doorman in the Beirut office of Jihad Al Bina’a. Over the past ten years, he has been working in this organization. Deterioration in his health conditions had forced him to stop working on garbage collection three years after he started and he has since then worked as the doorman of Jihad Al Bina’a. Like his quote suggests, Abu Ali’s motivation for joining the Islamic organization is that he values the major service provision role the organizations played in responding to his family’s basic needs. “I think that the work we did then and they still do in the neighborhoods is amazing.” he told us. “Providing free water, clearing blocked sewage and other daily basic needs of the people have been essential for us to survive.” Between 1988 and 1991, during the three years the NGO collected garbage, workers raised over 300 tons/year from the 500,000 residents of the southern suburb of Beirut. This task was especially important during the civil war when municipalities and other public service providers largely suspended their involvement in the area.

**Drinking Water Provision**

Another task initiated by Jihad Al Bina’a a few years later is drinking water provision. Drinking water has always been a problem in Lebanon generally, in the southern suburbs of Beirut more so. Indeed, even before the civil war, the scarcity of water sources in the country and their mismanagement by the National Public Water Companies had lead to frequent water shortages in the poor areas of Lebanon. This problem was gradually exacerbated by the rural to urban migration that began in the 60’s and peaked with the Israeli invasion and the civil conflicts, after 1975. Drinking water in the Southern suburb of Beirut has always been provided by Ain El Dilbeh Water Company, a government owned Water Company located in the eastern suburbs of Beirut. During the civil war, the eastern suburbs of Beirut were controlled by Christian militias. In 1990, as relations degenerated even further amongst the belligerents in the two parts of the city, the Ain El Dilbeh Water Company cut off water provision from the southern suburbs.
completely, as a coercive measure. During this period, it was almost impossible for residents to access drinking water from any nearby source.

It was at that critical time, in 1990, that *Jihad Al Bina’a* initiated a rapid study to determine the drinking water needs of the various neighborhoods in the southern suburb of Beirut. It then proceeded to install 52 water tanks of 2 sq. m capacity each. “We surveyed the available services in the area and placed the water tanks accordingly,” Abu Ali Khalil, the water project director told us. Moreover, the NGO is constantly re-evaluating the location and number of tanks. Thus, since the first survey was executed in 1990, many tanks have been replaced or displaced. There is a process of negotiation that happens between residents, local shop owners, the NGO and the municipalities. The main actors in this process are local water vendors who insist on moving away tanks from their stores in order to avoid competition. “We had one complaint last week,” the project director said. “It claimed residents were unhappy with the location of a particular water tank. We asked the people at the local bakery and hairdresser and everybody insisted they actually needed the tank. We have however moved it a hundred meters away because the local water vendors are essential in this system of water provision. We can’t keep up with the pressure alone.” At the Haret Hreik municipality, one of the engineers explained they also often interfered to relocate the tanks. He gave us the following example: “There was a couple of water tanks that were placed next to garbage collection tanks and we had to call up the NGO offices and follow up until they moved them away.” Over the past years, the number of tanks placed by *Jihad Al Bina’a* has also increased. Today, there are 96 water tanks and the NGO is planning to enlarge again the scope of the project. “We have lately had many requests from people in the local community to increase the number of tanks,” he said, “that’s why we need to do it now.” Thus, the presence of the water tanks has created a process of negotiation at the neighborhood level where local residents, public authorities, and the NGOs reshape the NGO’s project to improve its performance.

The water project was entirely funded through a grant from the Iranian Embassy in Beirut and has been sustained yearly by grants from the same source. These costs were estimated to have reached US $600,000 in 1994 (*Jihad Al Bina’a* 1994 pamphlet). According to *Jihad Al Bina’a* Beirut branch’s director, the yearly costs of running the projects have risen to around US
$350,000. The Iranian Embassy also covers all the costs of upgrading and enlarging the project based on proposals presented by *Jihad Al Bina’a*.

Over the past ten years, the NGO has distributed water regularly throughout the southern suburb of Beirut. It has filled the tanks daily, once during the winter and twice during the summer. Six truck drivers who operate at the very early hours of the day insure this distribution. *Jihad Al Bina’a*’s drivers fill up their trucks from the Beirut Public Water Company and distribute it on the tanks. Initially, during the first years of the project, water was provided for free from water standpoints in Beirut down-town, but since 1994, this access is restricted. Instead, the NGO buys the water from the Beirut Public Water Company. Thus, *Jihad Al Bina’a* pays for the costs of water to the Water Company but distributes it to residents for free.

A large controversy lies around the water costs. On the one hand, the NGO considers it is doing a public service and should not be charged for water costs. On the other, the Water companies question the relevance of the water project and assure the NGO is only paying a minimal amount in comparison to the amount of water it is pumping. According to the water project director, the Water Company had first asked the NGO for a very high price in exchange for the water but this price was later reduced when the *Hizb‘Allah* deputies interfered on the side of the NGO. The price was then determined in negotiations between the political party and the public Water Company. None of the parties is however happy with this settlement. Hamwi, an engineer at the Beirut Water Company complained: “The state is not a charity. If we give them water for free, we will have hundreds of charities at our door tomorrow, asking for the same services.” Similarly, at *Jihad Al Bina’a*, a worker on the project described the national water companies as “part of the state Mafia.”

According to my estimates, the water tanks currently supply 15 to 20% of the water needs of the 500,000 residents of the southern suburbs. A questionnaire survey I carried out indicated that the poorest segments of this population are the main beneficiaries of this project since they do not have access to any of the other sources of water (home pipes ~40%, bottled water, public water companies, private wells). It seems that the NGO had identified a major bottleneck in water provision in the area and successfully met that need and reached the neediest groups. Yet,

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30 Since 1993, *Hizb‘Allah*, like other political groups in Lebanon, runs for parliamentary seats and has representative deputies in the parliament.
the NGO's contribution is not universally recognized by everyone. Indeed, it has drawn divergent responses from the state and the community. In the government-owned water companies, the efforts of Jihad Al Bina’a were always dismissed as political propaganda. For example, at the Beirut Water Company, the vice-president explained to us that “this whole work [water tanks] is political, that these tanks are just propaganda images, and that they serve 0% of the local needs.” In the Ain El Dilbeh Water Company, the answer was somewhat similar. The director explained that these water tanks were dangerous as they could easily transmit germs and that, anyhow, they did not serve beyond 1% of the needs of the entire southern suburbs community. In contrast, the residents have come to appreciate this service. Some of them assured me that up to 60% of the residents definitely rely on Jihad Al Bina’a’s tanks for their drinking water.

The importance of the water sources to the local community is also evidenced in the way they also protect the water tanks from abuses in usage. At Jihad Al Bina’a, the director of the water project explained that the organization had reduced considerably the number of project supervisors as the community was itself looking after these tanks. “People guard them and make sure there are no abuses such as a resident using the water to clean his car or a street vendor cleaning vegetables,” he said. “We do not need to interfere for the residents are quick in responding and defending their sources of water.” During the time I spent in the southern suburbs, I observed this behavior a number of times.32

2.2 A first impact

The NGOs and the Community

The two examples cited above highlight the appropriate choice of projects that Islamic resistance NGOs succeeded in making as they first entered the southern suburb of Beirut. As we saw above, the projects they undertook responded to the needs of the local community and filled in real gaps in the services it was receiving. The importance of garbage collection and drinking 31 I based this estimate on the estimated population figures, the daily need of people (average 2 liters/ person), and the capacity of the 96 tanks of 2m2.
water provision should however only be evaluated in as much as they responded to an emergency case and filled a gap in service provision left by the insufficient public system of service provision. For example, water tanks are appropriate in the southern suburb only as a temporary solution. They can not be evaluated as an ultimate solution for water provision. Indeed, neither the residents nor the service provider for that matter considered them as a long term ideal solution. When I asked residents filling water gallons on the street why they used this water, many replied that it was because they did not get municipal water at home. Similarly, the workers often blamed the government for forcing them into this task instead of providing an appropriate piping network to the area.

Through these projects, Jihad Al Bina’a shaped a positive public image of its organization and gained the trust of the community. These achievements were particularly important to the NGO in its early stages. Since Jihad Al Bina’a is a foreign intervention in the southern suburb of Beirut, the NGO needed to achieve visible good performances to win the support of local residents and their cooperation. This cooperation was manifested in the growing number of residents who were willing to enroll in the NGO as workers or volunteers and participate in its projects.33 Thus, the projects undertaken by Islamic Organizations became channels to enroll residents and include them in the process of improving their own living conditions. Abu Ali, Jihad Al Bina’a ’s doorman's account is only one example of a resident joining the NGO because he believed it was improving his own family’s life. In parallel, even the residents who did not enroll in the process of service provision are still informally mobilized in the protection of their new assets as in the case of the drinking water tanks, where residents themselves monitor the appropriate usage of water. Simultaneously, the projects reflected the responsiveness of the NGO to the community’s needs and countered its top-down imposed initial entrance.

32 This in fact is a remarkable achievement for the NGO. Indeed, the literature on water provision has often spoke of the difficulty in protecting sources from abuses, particularly coming from the users themselves. (See Bahl and Linn 1999)
33 I do not have estimates of these numbers, however, since the NGO is only constituted of local residents, its growing size testifies of its popularity.
The NGOs and the State

The relationship between Islamic resistance NGOs and the state is more ambiguous. Since the end of the civil war, in 1991, the government has been active in the southern suburb of Beirut. In 1992, garbage collection was contracted to Sukleen, a private company that also collects garbage in the rest of Beirut City, and Jihad Al Bina’a does not collect garbage anymore. Similarly, municipalities took back the task of cleaning sewer pipes. These transfers were done peacefully. At Jihad Al Bina’a, the director of the main branch explained they were relieved the state took over these projects and he claimed the NGO workers helped to ease the transfer as much as they could. “When the State came in after the war,” this director said, “we handed in many of our projects to private or public companies that were hired by the government. We switched our activities to other services. We are now working on building a cultural center, for example, in the [southern] suburb.” This project is due in 1999 and is supposed to house a library and other facilities.

In 1993, the government also launched a vast infrastructure operation in the southern suburb of Beirut. The operation includes water piping for all the houses. Works are currently under execution and are due to finish by 1999. “The main problem is however not solved,” the Ain El Dilbeh Water Company director explained. “It is the absence of water sources that causes the biggest dilemma and we have to find a solution for this problem before we can really provide an efficient solution.” In the meantime, the service provided by the NGO, partly because it is the one available, remains crucial even if the Water companies would rather think it is not.

A Strategic Entrance

In sum, the choice and evolution of city wide projects underline a consistent strategy in Islamic resistance NGOs’ choice of projects. These NGOs have consistently picked some of the most urgently needed services in the community in order to shape a positive image of the NGOs and simultaneously encourage residents to participate in their activities and get involved in the provision of their own needs, as workers inside the NGOs. The NGOs have thus initiated a participatory process of service provision from within the NGO structures instead of consulting with beneficiaries outside the organizations. Later, once the State or other contracted private companies took over a particular task, the NGOs moved to other sectors that had become acute
needs for the community. Over the past five years, whenever the state has penetrated a sector with a large scale, comprehensive initiative such as garbage collection, the NGOs have peacefully switched gears and even facilitated its entrance. However, whenever the state constrained their activities without providing a convincing alternative, the NGOs have used their political leverage to keep their own systems running and made a case of the state’s “negligence” and “incapacity.” Throughout the choice and execution of these projects, the number of residents inside Islamic resistance NGOs increased and the image of these NGOs became increasingly more positive. They were therefore able to counter their negative earlier experiences and elaborate a different relation with the community.

2.3 The targeted initiatives

Besides the generic service provision projects at the city level, Islamic resistance organizations have been running a number of more targeted training and micro-credit programs. These projects do not have the high visibility of the city-level projects that can be used to draw an image of the Islamic resistance NGO for the community. They however generate a tighter relationship between residents and organizations because of their personalized approach. Targeted projects are income generation initiatives referred to in organizations such as Al Imdad and Al Shaheed as [financial] self-sufficiency projects. They include tasks like bread-making, cooking, sewing, carpet making, hairdressing, mini-stores and many more. These projects are usually initiated at the demand of a local family who either has a special skill that its members believe they could use, or alternatively, have an idea that they need to develop or fund. Over the past years, the organizations have come to provide them with the loans, the tools and/or the training they require to develop that income generating capacity. In the following paragraphs, I will detail some of these projects and their relationship to the community they serve.

The bread-making initiative

A good illustration of “self-sufficiency” projects is the “bread making initiative.” The bread initiative was started with Al Imdad, one of the Islamic Resistance NGOs, who sought to provide a means of livelihood for Oum Hassan, a woman whose husband was in jail. She was
identified by the organization through a report from her neighbors. Oum Hassan wanted to work while staying at home with her newborn. When Abu Fadi, the self-sufficiency representative from Al Imdad, asked Oum Hassan what she could do, she said she could bake bread. She was referring here to the rural Arab bread which is baked using traditional methods. The NGO gave her the oven for free and provided her with a loan for gas and raw materials. There is no interest on this loan because charging interest is forbidden by the Islamic law, the Sharia'a. The woman had to repay her loan over a period of ten months. The NGO did not require a financial collateral since NGO workers consider the social informal ties they have with members of the community as sufficient to guarantee the loan. Over the past two years, Oum Hassan has been baking bread daily. In the beginning, a social worker from the organization helped her distribute it in local restaurants. Since then, she has agreed with a neighbor to distribute the bread for her. At the time of our visit, a social worker form the organization was training her eldest son to do the distribution himself. The bread gave Oum Hassan the money to sustain her family and to further repay her loan on time, which she did. Abu Fadi, the self-sufficiency representative, explained to us that the organization had allocated part of its yearly budget to do local small-scale projects. After seeing Oum Hassan’s success, the organization had been able to replicate it in a number of other cases where women with similar skills were also able to earn a living.

**Sewing projects**

Other examples of income generation initiatives are “sewing projects.” In these projects, the organizations give families a sewing machine for free. A large body of literature argues for the distribution of non-perishable assets and durable goods such as land or equipment as a longer term and more sustainable solution to poverty alleviation, unlike food distribution and income transfer programs, which are generally seen as an emergency relief solutions. This approach recognizes the importance of developing the capacity of poor people to generate their own source of living instead of relying on subsidies (Sen 1987 and 1996).

A sewing machine is considered a durable good and a useful tool to generate income. Therefore, the organizations seek to distribute it to residents as a way to encourage them to work and attain financial self-sufficiency. As in the bread-making initiative, the organization grants the family the necessary loan to buy its first round materials necessary for start up. Here too, loans
are interest free and time of return is generally spread around 10 months. Sometimes, this grant is
combined with training for one or more family members to develop her sewing skills\textsuperscript{34}. Sewing
projects are particularly interesting because the organizations have managed to create, within the
Islamic schools in the country, a market for the families’ products. Thus, for example, the
schools and the summer training center run by \textit{Al Imdad} use children’s school costumes sewn by
the beneficiary families of the organization. Through this process, the organization has included
indirectly the beneficiary families in the web of its own activities without having them be directly
affiliated to the organization. It has provided them with a real niche inside the NGO itself and
allowed them to become suppliers of the organization, and therefore, an integral part of its
structure. Through this process, the NGO has considerably enlarged its outreach and support
base.

\textbf{Other Initiatives}

There are many other types of self-sufficiency projects. Over the past ten years, the NGOs
have funded a number of mini-markets and local grocery stores spread around the area. I visited
four of these stores initiated by \textit{Al Imdad}. Three of them began as small cigarette stands and grew
into stores either located in an old shipping container inside an informal settlement or in the front
room of a family’s house. The measures to grant credit and the loans were similar to the other
cases. However, in these projects, the families often needed larger loans to start up a store. In
order to receive this loan, both of these organizations placed some conditions on their
beneficiaries: They had to start up with a regular small loan with which they would put up a
cigarette stand. Only after they have proved their credentials and repaid this first loan will the
NGO grant them the larger one. Through this process, \textit{Al Imdad} gave the families an incentive
for repayment. Behind each of these cases was a story. The self-sufficiency representative of \textit{Al
Imdad} who accompanied us in the visits to these stores knew them all. While he worked with the
family to overcome its difficulties, the representative sought personal relationships to better
understand their conditions and needs.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Al Shaheed} runs a training center in the Southern suburbs of Beirut. The center provides particularly young women
the proper training for sewing. (to be completed)
What is remarkable about these projects is how the organizations have managed to build on existing skills in the community and help its members generate their own income and attain financial self-sufficiency. “It is very important for us not to impose on a family any type of work,” explained Abu Fadi, the head of the Beirut branch self-sufficiency unit of Al Imdad. “Instead, we encourage the families to choose something themselves. We would rather build on their own skills whenever we can rather than compel them to learn additional things.” Unlike some of the employment generation projects, where families are dragged into long training programs to be able to fit the structure of formal organizations or find employment in a factory or enterprise by developing new skills, Al Imdad’s income generation projects build on the existing indigenous capacities of the families they support. Besides respecting residents’ decisions, the development literature has pointed to other positive aspects of these types of projects. For one, the practice generates faster results in income generation since families do not have to undergo a phase of training in a fresh skill at a time when they are struggling for survival. In this context, training only makes sense if it has an immediate application and could open up new channels of income generation. Therefore, the organization only resorts to training when residents want it themselves, and if this new skill has proved to be needed in the market.

The hairdressing initiative is such an example. In the southern suburb of Beirut, a number of young women, frustrated by inactivity and seeking a way to improve their incomes, were interested in this new skill and reported their interest to the organization. Al Imdad funded and organized a local small scale temporary training center in the house of one of the beneficiary families and provided the program for free. A volunteer worker in the organization, a hairdresser herself, took it upon herself to train the seventeen young women who enrolled in the program. She and other volunteers had generated the idea in the community and thus developed and supported it inside the NGO. For eight weeks, the volunteers in the NGO ran the training program for six hours a day. When this training was through, only six of the enrolled trainees were still interested in hairdressing as a business. Two of them applied for loans at Al Imdad and received them to start up their businesses. Now, they are both running successful businesses and one of them has even her own hairdressing salon.
2.4 The impact of targeted initiatives

Assessing Income Generation Initiatives

The economical assessment of income generation projects offers ambivalent results. When describing the success rate of the self-sufficiency initiatives, the General Director of Al Imdad said that only 25% of the projects "made it". By success, the director meant that the family had achieved financial self sufficiency irrespective of whether it had managed to return its loan or not. The director’s calculations did not include the cost of labor and the many grants the local NGO had made to the projects. It did not include the costs of medical services that the NGO also covered either. Taking the bread making initiative for example, Al Imdad's calculations excluded the price of the oven and the costs of distribution and monitoring that were all incurred by the NGO. Yet, this project is considered among the NGO's most successful initiatives. Al Imdad self-sufficiency projects’ loan default rate was not more successful since it is as high as 80%. Many of the local grocery stores, for example, continued to expand until they reached the point when they could not return their loans anymore. Only then did they stop and settle on a stable revenue that could cover their living costs without ever returning the loan. In all these cases, the NGOs did not include the costs of following-up, training, conducting the initial feasibility studies it had led, or even the loan deficit the family accumulated in assessing its success.

To those accustomed to working in or reading about income generating projects, the results of these Islamic NGOs do not come as a surprise. Indeed, it is generally agreed in the field that it is unusual that such projects yield significant income increase to the participants and that it is even more rare that true economic benefits cover the costs of these projects; especially when they target the poorest residents (Tendler 1982, Vivian and Maseko 1994, Adams and Pischke 1992). However, to the residents, many of the projects present invaluable assets that the economic success or the efficiency of the projects do not reflect. Indeed, in generating the initiatives they have undertaken from within the community, the organizations challenged the status quo of dependency the residents had been forced into for over a decade and these residents were happy to finally have the opportunity to change it.
In this context, self sufficiency should not be read as just an increase in financial means but rather an important step towards empowering the community. *Al Imdad* has viewed them as a way to increase the community’s control over its own means of survival. The effect is to reduce the family's dependence on anyone, whether state or NGOs. “It is because we refuse to be insulted and oppressed anymore that we pursue these [self-sufficiency] projects,” a social worker explained. “We are looking for our communities’ self-sufficiency so we can build a real alternative where we are recognized as equals and truly respected.” Indeed, as long as it relies on external charity to survive, a community is unable to reclaim and enforce its own rights. On the one hand, people preoccupied with basic survival are often unable to think beyond their daily food. On the other hand, there are little chances that they can actually revolt against their scarce sources of survival (Salmon 1987, Abers 1996). In the next section, I will elaborate further on this notions of “empowerment.” However, and before we look more at the impact of these self-sufficiency projects, let us look at the various impediments to their success and the way the NGOs have approached these impediments.

**Challenging Hopelessness**

According to Hajj Ali Zreik, the hardest barrier to overcome in self-sufficiency projects is the “culture of the space.” In elaborating on this statement, the director of *Al Imdad* explained that the southern suburbs’ history has established a particular identity to its residents. Indeed, the refugee constituency entails in the first place an imagery of poverty and deprivation that was politically used for advocacy purposes but which then permeated to incapacitate residents and freeze them into their own trap. Soon, the image and label of “refugees” became their sole representation. “They [local residents] lived mostly on charity, whether coming from local or international NGOs,” the director of *Al Imdad* asserted to me. “Furthermore, international NGOs have often provided them with more or less regular food allocations instead of helping them develop their own skills. They are therefore often largely dependent on charities.”

In order to encourage local residents to take up income generation projects, *Al Imdad* organizes social events where successful families are celebrated and visited by other families as role models to follow. The NGO also advertises success stories in its pamphlets. The NGO therefore generates a sense of pride for the family who is encouraged to sustain its efforts and the
NGO workers who have raised this challenge. It also motivates other members of the community since they can more readily relate to a success story when it is achieved by their friends and neighbors who share their same problems and yet succeeded in making it through. Finally, the NGO has cast its income-generation projects in a supportive structure that monitors residents closely and accompanies their first steps in self-sufficiency.

**A Structure of Support**

The structure of support provided by some of the Islamic resistance NGOs, notably *Al Imdad*, *Al Shaheed* and *Al Jareeh*, equips the beneficiary family with a safety net that consists of technical, emotional and financial support and helps the family achieve its goals. First, the NGOs do not separate between their respective self-sufficiency and social help wings. Most poor families often have health problems along with their financial problems and could hardly make it if they had to bear all the costs of medication and daily needs together. Therefore, as a first step, the NGOs provide them with health care while they insure their own daily subsistence. Second, the NGOs provide vocational training to their beneficiaries when needed. Training could be directly supplied by one of the organizations, like the hairdressing program lead by *Al Imdad*, or through covering tuition fees in local institutes. Most of these training programs teach simple trades and skills such as sewing, cooking, rug making, embroidery, and others. Building skills also includes guiding the first steps of the family in running a business. Therefore, when *Al Imdad* provides a family with credit, the self-sufficiency representative who approves the credit monitors also the progress.

To illustrate how the support structure operates, I will use the example of one of the small grocery stores I described earlier. When *Al Imdad* helped one of the residents, Zeinab, and her family open a grocery store, Zeinab was just recovering from a long disease and could not go back to the factory where she worked. The IRO gave her a small loan ($350) to open a store in a space she borrowed from her brother. When her loan was approved, Zeinab did not receive any money directly from the organization. Instead, the self-sufficiency representative who approved the loan accompanied her to buy supplies and materials and build up the store displays. “We spent three days here, he told me. We built these shelves ourselves and I helped them stack food and organize the store conveniently.” Once the store was set up, the self-sufficiency
representative taught Zeinab how to keep her accounting books, how to order her papers, and how to deal with her credit. Within ten months, she had returned the first credit and was eligible for a larger one. The family has so far returned two credits and is now working on the third. From the money generated by the store, they are able to pay the house’s rent and sustain a living for the first time since the father died, ten years ago. Thus, the importance of self-sufficiency projects does not lie in their capacity of changing the community’s economic conditions as much as in challenging people’s hopelessness and supporting them when they take up income generation projects.

Building Close Ties

Behind the self-sufficiency programs, the same operational patterns of inclusiveness and responsiveness that Islamic NGOs adopted at the city scale reemerge. Here too, the NGOs’ social workers systematically chose some of the neediest families and provided them key services they urgently needed. In addition to listening to these beneficiaries’ needs and providing adequate services, social workers also involved them in the design and implementation of projects. It soon became a working strategy to include in every project the largest number of local residents possible. This approach echoes in many ways the literature on participation that was developed over the past twenty years and focused on responsiveness to people’s needs and the inclusion of their opinion in the development processes. According to this literature, responsiveness is a central feature of project success and is only achieved when organizations are able to work with the community, ascertain local needs and preferences, and involve their target population in the planning of activities (Edwards and Hulme 1992, Clark 1991). However, many development projects import “specialists” into an area they are not familiar with. These workers usually build on previous experiences and personal biases and have therefore a tendency to implement the projects they know instead of the projects residents need. The implemented projects are therefore incapable of responding to local needs (Vivian and Maseko 1994, Chen 1996). Since, in this case, NGO workers were also part of the NGO beneficiaries, they could act as a channel of information to indicate the locally most needed projects and therefore initiate process of participatory decision making from within the NGO instead of outside it.
Not only did these NGOs succeed, as I show above, in raising this challenge, but they also included in their operating processes many of their own beneficiaries as trainers, sewers or others. They thus insured the presence, inside the NGOs, of members across the class structure of the community and considerably widened its beneficiary base. This achievement is particularly important since it allowed the NGOs to escape one of the most frequently cited pitfalls of NGOs— that is supporting middle income poor residents instead of the poorest and using local elite channels to learn about the communities’ needs (Abers 1996, Tendler 1982). Instead, Al Imdad, for example, along with other Islamic organizations provided the poorest residents with a job and integrated them, through their work, in the web of the organization. In short, the whole process brought residents and organizations closer.

Through all these projects and the major initiatives undertaken by Islamic resistance NGOs, already by the early nineties, the memory of the top-down imposition and the earlier imposed ideology were forgotten and many of the local residents had accepted the NGOs as their own institutions and joined them in their projects. “If it was not of the services of these NGOs,” one of the beneficiaries told me, “we would still be waiting for a charity. Instead, now my family has its own store and my mother, sisters and I will never have to beg again.” Thus, the true importance of this cluster of NGOs is not in the financial self sufficiency of the projects they have done or in the uniquely effective way they have provided water to the community. Instead, they are in the way the NGOs managed to build strong supportive ties in the community and establish its presence on the side of the community, fighting the same struggles, and challenging its hopelessness.

2.5 New Perceptions, New language

Throughout the process of building ties and challenging residents’ hopelessness, Islamic resistance NGO workers not only physically supported residents, as described in the previous section, but also used a language and an approach to poverty alleviation that complemented the supportive structures with an appealing conceptual framework. NGO workers therefore spoke of social justice, of dispossession, and displacement. They placed financial self-reliance in the context of challenging existing power relationships in the city and redefining the control of resources among residents. This definition of financial self sufficiency as a means and not a goal,
and the position of such projects in the context of strengthening the communities’ capacities to stand for its rights is at the heart of the NGOs success. Indeed, and as recognized increasingly in the literature, most NGOs that are thought of as committed to equitable development have typically used words such as “empowerment” to mean “financial self-reliance.” This idea is perhaps best documented by Vivian and Maseko in their assessment of rural NGOs in Zimbabwe. The authors argued that many NGOs have adopted uncritically this definition of “empowerment” from the political right wing, and have consequently reduced “empowerment” to “enrichment of individuals.” These NGOs have therefore missed the more fundamental definition of “empowerment” as a change in power and an increased control over one’s own resources. (Vivian and Maseko 1994: 14-15).

In the southern suburb of Beirut, the Islamic Resistance NGOs have placed empowerment back in its original political context. While they encouraged residents to penetrate the organizations and use its resources to improve their daily living, the NGOs invested a large part of their energy in developing a critical understanding, among the residents, of the reasons behind their dispossession. All the workers I have interviewed in the organizations had an elaborate and comprehensive analysis of their conditions. They spoke of the historical negligence of the Lebanese State, the Israeli oppression and the regional conditions which they felt affected their daily lives. They also described progressive concepts of social justice that they ascribed to their Islamic ideal. Finally, they all understood they had a role to play if they were to achieve better living conditions. Similarly, many of the residents on the streets had a resembling elaborate image of their conditions. Consequently, many local inhabitants enrolled in Islamic resistance NGOs. They joined as volunteers or hired labor and they all worked numerous extra unpaid hours. Residents too joined the NGOs and adopted many of the habits, ideas, and images they had so much resisted in the earlier days of NGOs’ interference.

35 Perhaps I should clarify here that this language could not be attributed to these Islamic NGOs alone. Indeed, many of the residents who are motivated today inside these organizations lived only an earlier period of mobilization before the civil war and many of them developed their political discourse then. However, the role of these organizations is undeniable in reviving this language and enlarging its scope. For more on these issues, see Norton, 1987.
Spill Over Effects: Mobilization at the City Scale

As expected, the mobilization for service provision spilled over other aspects of residents’ community life. Encouraged and supported by the NGOs, many of the residents have claimed back their refugee pensions and other benefits they were entitled to get from the State but were never able to reclaim. They also mobilized for their rights and forced the State to hear their voices on many occasions.

Perhaps the most powerful –and violent- instance of this newly revived mobilization was the incident of Al Amroussieh dump. In the early nineties, and at the end of the civil war, the government reactivated an old and decaying waste incinerator that was located in Al Amroussieh, one of the poorest neighborhoods of the southern suburb of Beirut City. This incinerator did not abide by any environmental protection safety codes and emitted noxious fumes into the adjacent residential areas. On the map, Al Amroussieh is an empty space; however, in reality, it is a congested neighborhood where informal squatters and houses have found a refuge from the expensive land market in the City.

By the mid nineties, many local residents were increasingly disturbed by the smell, and the smoke generated in the incinerator and perceived it as a serious health hazard. At that time, a number of environmental international and national NGOs had been mobilizing to close down another garbage incinerator located in the Eastern suburb of the city. They had exposed on public TV the damage caused by the incinerator and the danger to which it was exposing the nearby populations. Mobilized residents of the Southern suburb of Beirut wrote petitions and repeatedly asked for the closing of the incinerators. For over a year, their efforts remained unheard. The tension culminated when the Minister of the Environment explained on a TV show that he was not ready to succumb to residents’ demands. That night, local residents (identified later as those living in the close and surrounding neighborhoods of the incinerator) got together and burnt the incinerator. By damaging this required service and attracting the whole country’s attention on their case, residents thus forced the State and the Environment Ministry to build a new center, further away, which complied more closely to health requirements.
Service Provision and Political Struggles

In other words, the work of the NGOs transformed the task of service provision into a political struggle for social justice. The NGOs used income generation as a means to strengthen residents’ voices and challenge their hopelessness—not as an end by itself. They also fostered a critical understanding of poverty among their beneficiaries, raised consciousness in the community, and encouraged residents in many instances to stand for their rights. According to Van Wicklin III, development can not be "granted" as "charity" from outsiders. Instead, it requires a change of the thinking framework of a community (Van Wicklin III 1987). Similarly, through the projects and the tasks they have undertaken, the Islamic NGOs have placed the necessary structures for the development of a new thinking framework in the space of the southern suburb of Beirut.

Not all residents however feel the same. Indeed, the strong politicization of the NGO carries with it an symbolic image and a strong political affiliation that many residents still reject. One resident told me: “I’ve been here [in the southern suburb of Beirut] forever. They [Islamic groups] are all ephemeral political parties and religious factions. I drink their water but I will never take them up as my representatives.” I had met him getting water from one of Jihad Al Bina’a’s water tanks. Indeed, at the city level, even those who most resent the political identity and the presence of these NGOs can still use their services without any form of commitment. However, the targeted initiatives induce a tighter relation between beneficiaries and NGOs, and therefore shun back many of the residents who do not want the political affiliation to Hizb‘Allah. I most often heard this commentary in state offices. Nadia Tawtal, the president of the local Ministry of Social Services said: “These NGOs’ work is organized and efficient, but it is political and religious. Although I’ve seen them help any needy resident whose approached them, many people prefer to come to us [state offices]. People are afraid to commit politically to their ideology and prefer not to build tight relations with them.” Another worker at the same ministry office described to us this same dynamic of political services provision and insisted on the political identity of Islamic resistance NGOs. “In sum, he said, we got used to them and they have been doing good work. We almost feel the differences between us are superficial now that we do some of the same projects [e.g. training, micro-credit, etc.], and that we see them treating
all citizens the same way. However, they have a political orientation, what do you expect? They are not the state, they are affiliated to a political party.”

In conclusion, although the NGOs advertised their projects to entire community and sought to help all those who approached them, the participatory process that was initiated remained limited in the sense that a process of auto-selection always prevented many groups from the local community to actually accept their services.

The political dimension of these organizations is not limited to these aspects. It had many other impacts and we will return to these in the coming chapter. In the meantime, let us go back to conclude on the most important strategies used by the NGO in changing its image inside the community and succeeding in a wide-scale mobilization process.

Conclusion

Three main characteristics explain the success of these organizations in terms of the way they approached the residents and rooted their top-down structures into the community. These are (i) language, (ii) responsiveness and supportiveness, (iii) sustainability and accountability.

(i) Language

First, all the Islamic NGOs took the stand of local residents in defining poverty as the outcome of oppression and policies of exclusion notably adopted by the Lebanese State instead of blaming them for their own fate. They thus conceptualized poverty in terms of injustice and understood poverty alleviation as a political class struggle. With such a language and approach, the NGOs escape one of the main pitfalls of the voluntary sector: “philanthropic paternalism.” According to Salmon, there is a self defeating sense of dependency on the part of the poor that is created when their own resources are spent on their behalf and aid is provided as charity, not a right. In this vision, the poor are seen as being responsible for their own destitution and need to be uplifted religiously and morally through the work of sectarian organizations (Salmon 1987).

Even though Islamic resistance NGOs support an Islamic religious doctrine and provide financial

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36 That particular resident had worked in a small grocery store since 1963. He later explained he was affiliated to another political party, a secular Pan-Arab party that strongly opposes Hizb’Allah’s non-secular ideology.
help via grants, they escape the trap of philanthropy because most of their members are from the community and thus understand its history and approach to poverty. The NGOs thus placed themselves on the side of the community and countered their initial top-down approach with a good understanding of residents at the grass-roots level. They did not entirely adopt the community’s language but they built on the communities’ aspirations to link it to their own ideology.

(ii) Responsiveness and Supportiveness

The organizations also undertook an array of projects which responded to people’s specific needs and targeted wider audiences, including non-supporters. They collected garbage and provided drinking water at a time when people were suffering from health problems related to these issues. They also opened the sewers, repaired electricity poles and largely took over the role of the absent municipalities whenever it was needed. The organizations also provided schools, hospitals, clinics and other such services vital to the residents. In targeting these projects, the organizations made sure to include the largest variations in their Shiite audience, they appealed to those who did not appreciate their political agenda and tried to always include them in their beneficiary community. The organizations thus hoped to enlarge their base of support. Furthermore, the projects were designed according to the residents capacities and skills and used people’s creativity to generate such initiatives. For example, bread baking could allow residents to generate income without forcing them into exhaustive training programs and other processes that require long term investments from them, at a time they are struggling to survive. Instead, the income generation projects, the organizations initiated, were always cast in a supportive structure designed to fit the needs and problems of every beneficiary family. These structures provided technical, emotional and financial support to the residents and facilitated their initiatives throughout the project duration. Thus, in undertaking these projects, the NGOs served basic needs and built close and strong ties with the residents. They were therefore likely to counter their top-down efforts.
(iii) Sustainability and Accountability

What distinguished the service provision of Islamic NGOs, as time passed by, was their sustainability and accountability. Islamic resistance organizations have been operating in the Beirut southern suburbs since the early eighties. As time passed by, they have shown strong evidences of a methodological systematic structure of service provision and earned the respect of the residents. Many of those who had initially discarded their services have since then changed their mind. “Today,” one resident said, “even those among us who first rejected their services today us rely on their water tanks for our daily needs.” Thus, the organizations have gained the trust of residents and have made proofs of their accountability.

With the help of Islamic resistance NGOs, residents were able to develop and spread a proper understanding of their conditions. They were also given the chance to participate in projects where they could cooperate and build their own structures of service provision. It is in fact these two simultaneous processes that organized their efforts into successful projects. Throughout this process, the role of the Islamic NGOs operating was key to understanding the success story. They developed numerous strategies to reach out to the community and encourage it to mobilize. The entry and trust of the residents to these organizations was however conditional to internal operational parameters of these NGOs. In the following chapter I will describe the ideological and practical tools and strategies these organizations have developed to achieve their goals.
Chapter 3  
Agency and Ideology  

Introduction  
In the process of attracting local residents into the organizations and building ties with the rest of the community, the NGOs in the southern suburb of Beirut have relied on two complementary processes: agency and ideology. First, in terms of conception, design and implementation of projects, many roles within the organizations were designed for residents to play themselves. Second, the organizations used the Islamic political ideology and the spirit of resistance that they adopted from the political movements behind their creation to generate a mission statement and a new language for themselves. The mission and language brought these NGOs closer to the community, created an aura around their work, and motivated people to join them. These two processes were carried out simultaneously and together allowed the organizations to build the relationship of trust and cooperation it was able to achieve with the community.  

PART I: STRUCTURE  

1.1 Spreading and Decentralization  
One of the most important factors explaining the successful interaction between residents and NGOs is the decentralized structure of service provision at the area level. Instead of a centralized body providing these multiple services to local residents, the process of service provision is spread in an array of smaller-scale organizations each specializing in one particular task or focusing on one particularly disfavored group. These are the NGOs I have introduced at the beginning of the chapter. All together, these organizations have operated like a cluster of institutions who cooperated and established among each other a multitude of linkages, benefiting from each others’ information systems but also helping in the implementation of each others’ projects. While we will return to this cooperation later, it is important here, when talking about
the relationship of the NGOs and their beneficiaries, to understand the impact of decentralization on this relationship.

Spreading in a larger number of NGOs meant, at the city level, the distribution of a multitude of small-scale visible units of service provision around the southern suburb of Beirut. While each of these units reaches out to its set of beneficiaries, the combination of these units increases the occasions for and forms of interaction between NGOs and residents. Furthermore, this dispersion visually exposes the NGOs around the city in a more accessible way to local residents. Spreading therefore allowed the NGOs to increase their contacts with local residents and render their institutions more accessible.

This decentralized structure was particularly efficient because the NGOs cooperated among each other. The directors of Al Shaheed, Al Imdad and Al Jareeh, for example, meet regularly to discuss the projects they are undertaking, the share the successful initiatives they were able to carry out and the problems they are facing. Because the structures of these three organizations is identical in terms of the positions and hierarchy they have, workers can easily communicate with their homologues and share information. “We constantly communicate across the organizations, almost on daily basis” Kassem, a social worker at Al Imdad explained. “Since we have divided beneficiaries in groups, we often have to transfer applicants from one NGO to another. For example, if an orphan who’s dad was killed during the war comes here [to Al Imdad], I have to send him to Al Shaheed whose in charge of his case. Thus, we often call each other and relay cases and information.” Therefore, this cooperation allowed the NGOs to present a united front to the community and never to compete over constituency. Furthermore, NGOs encouraged residents to enroll in several different ways and often encouraged a worker to transfer from an NGO to another, whenever they felt he could be more helpful for the other NGO. “Many of the hired engineer,” the vice-president of Jihad Al Bina’a explained, “move cross the NGOs depending on who is carrying a construction project and where he is urgently needed. Although we keep independent administrations, we thus avoid duplicating tasks when we don’t need to.” This spirit of cooperation was also visible in many other aspects of the NGOs operations such as always praising each others work and encouraging us to interview a worker enrolled in a different NGO. It derived from the feeling of residents that they were all indulged in one same task and the
openness of the inter-NGO relationship that allowed residents to move flexibly between these organizations.

### 1.2 Opening up the Organizations

Another important factor explaining the closeness of NGOs and residents was the NGOs' attempt to include as many residents as possible in each task of service provision. Therefore, every NGO provided hundreds of jobs and positions within its own structures for residents to occupy and every NGO insured a variety of opportunities for residents to enroll in its institutions. Interestingly, the available positions inside the NGOs ranged across the organizations' hierarchy from general directors to project managers, social workers or volunteers.

This openness of the NGOs is remarkable because it takes the concept of participation a step further. Unlike foreign NGOs, which usually appoint foreign directors as highly paid “expert” personnel and expect local residents to volunteer, working mainly in menial jobs, as a link with the community, and creating some sort of information system about the communities' needs, the organizations have opened up all spaces in their institutions for local residents. Inside the organizations, however, high positions like General Director have been allocated mostly to the more formally educated members of the community. It should be noted, though, that even those educated members are local residents of the area who suffer from the same economic disadvantage as many other residents, including the absence of income opportunities. They are not, in any form, part of a local elite.

Another interesting aspect of this openness is that all the positions in the NGOs were adapted to fit the time and priority constraints of many community members. Inside these NGOs, residents can choose to work as full timers, part timers or volunteers. Some of them are expected to have regular office hours and abide by the organizational schedule, while others have no time constraints and work at their own convenience. For example, to include the women of the community who can not abide by stringent office hours, the organization has created a flexible position for women. Therefore, the organization has reserved them for a flexible volunteer position in which they can follow up in visits to the beneficiary families at their own
convenience. "Indeed," the head of the social work unit explained, "women have many duties within their own homes and can not keep up with the organizations' regular schedule."³⁸

Remarkably, volunteerism (for men) within these organizations is often the result of the financial endowment of workers rather than status. Many of the high ranking residents have worked for years without any financial reward. For example, the director of the Al Imadad, Hajj Ali Zreik, has chosen to volunteer in the organization for the past ten years. Zreik owns a computer store in the neighborhood and he therefore decided not to take a salary from the organization. Many other workers have done the same. Abu Fadi, the head of the Beirut branch self-sufficiency unit, volunteered for three years in the organization without any financial compensation. He and his brother own a small fishery in the neighborhood that provided for their living. It was only when he got married that Abu Fadi started taking a salary from the organization.

Another intricate structure that Al Imadad has introduced is the linkage between "self-sufficiency" project beneficiaries and the organization. In Chapter 2, I described how the organization has indirectly enrolled a number of beneficiaries in the web of its activities by providing a market for their products. I mentioned how the NGO buys the clothes sewn by some of these beneficiary families and uses them as costumes in the schools they run. Similarly, the NGO has enrolled beneficiary families to fix meals as part of a "cooking initiative." In fact, the more I asked questions, the more I realized the infinite linkages the organizations have generated between their own activities and those of the families. These linkages are all informal positions inside organizations. Furthermore, these linkages have combined to strengthen the relationship between Al Imadad and its beneficiaries.

Thus, by decentralization of services, opening up the NGOs, and creating flexible positions inside them, it became possible for thousands of local residents to penetrate the NGOs or at least be affiliated with them. The presence of these local residents inside the NGOs' own structures increased their acceptability among residents and brought them closer to the community. It also opened up for them a real information channel to assess more closely the real

³⁷ For example, the General Director of Jihad Al Bina'a is a Graduate of the University of Texas.
³⁸ As a footnote to this story, I was puzzled to hear that Al Imadad did not offer any work opportunities for women aside from the volunteer structure. That was particularly disturbing because many of the volunteer sisters had regular jobs in the area, aside from this activity. This structure seems illogical given the fact that over 80% of the organization's beneficiaries are women.
needs of the community, and to learn of previous successful experiences and projects which they could reproduce or at least derive lessons from.

A good example of this sensitivity to local needs is the drinking water project that I described earlier. When I carried my interviews to assess the usage of drinking water tanks inside the suburbs, only local residents of the southern suburbs confirmed the real need for these tanks, including the local municipality and ministry social office workers. It was revealing to me that the employees I interviewed in the Water Companies for example, precisely those who downplayed the need for alternative drinking water sources, were not residents of the southern suburbs themselves. Thus, it was largely the presence of workers among residents that explained their good understanding of the residents' needs and hard living conditions.

It is reciprocally the presence of residents inside the NGOs that allowed them to build on the history of previous locally successful projects and earlier experiences. Indeed, some of the projects the NGOs undertook reproduced initiatives that were earlier carried out by national or international NGOs in the area. One such example are mini-grocery stores opened in the old shipping containers inside informal settlements, as part of the income generation projects. I later learned that the same projects had been carried out by UNRWA - The United Nations Relief and Works Agency - within the Palestinian camps located inside the southern suburb. These projects were advertised heavily at that time – ten years earlier – and appealed to many residents. From its close interaction with the local community, the NGO learned of the success of this previous success and the responses of local residents and built some of its income generation initiatives on these experiences.

1.3 Reaching Out

Through the various structures of the NGOs and from their position as insiders, the NGO workers/residents were able to reach out to a wider audience in the community and develop linkages between NGOs and communities. This was made possible through the intricate structure of outreach, particularly the structure of “volunteer sisters” which I will now describe.

39 cf. the water projects pp. in Chapter 2.
The structure of "volunteer sisters" is particular to the organizations which provide services to specialized groups of beneficiaries, i.e., *Al Imdad*, *Al Shaheed*, and *Al Jareeh*. Each of these NGOs enrolls approximately 125 volunteer sisters. These volunteers' tasks consist of visiting the beneficiary families in their own houses weekly, as long as the families are receiving subsidies from or returning a loan to the NGO. The weekly visit's purpose is to learn of the family's conditions in terms of health problems, proper reception of allocations, or any other matter that could pertain to the family's well-being. Thus, the role of a sister is to insure a good connection between each beneficiary family and its donor NGO, and to coordinate the correspondence between the two.

Within the NGOs, volunteer sisters are part of the network of social workers whose task is monitoring the NGO-beneficiary relations. This network is composed of six full-time social workers who keep regular hours inside the NGOs and approximately 125 volunteer sisters who have no offices or specified working hours. Whereas the social workers inside the NGOs fill up applications and agree on loans or grants for families, the sisters outside these organizations act as informal liaison between the social workers and the families by transferring information between the NGO offices and the families.

In the process of their work, the volunteer sisters also inquire about the beneficiary families' other needs and capacities. They collect project suggestions and have eventually initiated programs with the community. One example of this process is the *Al Imdad's* hairdressing training program. Earlier in my thesis, I had explained how *Al Imdad* funded and organized a small training program that was initiated at the demand of local residents. The role of the volunteer sisters in this story was central. Indeed, it was the sisters who developed this idea through conversations with young women in the local community. It was also the sisters who reported to *Al Imdad* the desire of the community members to start the project. Finally, it was also the sisters who lobbied the self-sufficiency representative inside the NGO to get the training program funded and started.

Through their weekly visits, sisters build a special relationship with the families, even those who do not receive services from the organizations. They learn about their daily problems and struggles, even those problems that do not relate to the NGOs' services. Volunteer sisters get involved with the families and often develop a personal relationship with them. Some sisters
have helped children in their schoolwork while others have solved romantic or professional problems. They have thus somewhat customized the relationship between the NGOs and the families as they have adapted and catered for the specific needs of beneficiaries. During the execution of self-sufficiency projects, the role of a volunteer sister becomes even more important since she is to insure the family’s good conditions and help it overcome any impediments to the success of its income generation initiative. The sisters have thus formed a real support network to the families by providing them with the proper social support and relating rapidly to the NGOs any problems the family encountered.

In their personal lives, volunteer sisters are necessarily local residents of the southern suburbs of Beirut City. Besides facilitating the interactions with residents who are their “neighbors,” the sisters are supposed to know the whereabouts of the neighborhoods where they live. They should be able to locate families with no resources, learn their stories, recognize their problems and report them to the NGOs. Therefore, the volunteer sisters along with with the other workers in the NGOs have facilitated the difficult task of targeting benefits by developing a cheap and easy way of identifying potential beneficiaries. Many targeted programs have struggled with identifying beneficiaries. In fact, this is one of the main shortfalls of targeted initiatives Besley and Kanbur among others, point out when they argue it is virtually impossible to determine the incomes of residents accurately, particularly because of high administrative costs. The authors illustrate their claims with examples taken from Sri Lanka and Brazil to show that such targeted initiatives have often failed because of the expensive and cumbersome task of checking who is really in need (Besley and Kanbur 1988). Through the informal networks, volunteer sisters have provided this relative security cheaply since they simply know their neighborhoods and can easily check on the residents using social channels of information.

In many ways, the structure of volunteer sisters recalls other examples of bodies of social workers described in the literature. Even if they worked within radically different conditions, the health agents of the Ceara (Brazil) preventive health project reflected the same phenomenon (Tendler 1997 : 21-45). Indeed, health agents in Ceara were also selected members from the local community who visited beneficiary families regularly, followed up on the proper projects execution, and built close ties across the community. Similarly also, this flexible body of agents played a large role in the success of the projects they were serving especially in their flexible
capacities to modify specified tasks and customize them to local needs. However, unlike the State-hired health agents of Ceara who were required not to canvass for a political candidate or wear or distribute political propaganda, the volunteer sisters in Islamic NGOs inform residents of Hizb'Allah public events, such as political rallies or dinner banquets. “We act as a two ways information channel,” a volunteer sister explained. “We inform the NGO of the beneficiaries’ needs and we inform the families we visit of Hizb'Allah’s activities.”

In sum, the inclusion of local residents inside the organizations became a real asset and a strong counter to the top down origins of the NGOs. Soon, Islamic resistance NGOs became familiar with the terrain, knew the main entanglements and the best assets to build on. Furthermore, through the structures of volunteers, the inclusion of residents inside the organizations established a real customized link between some of the NGOs and their beneficiaries. The reach-out program of the NGOs also put in place a two way information system, where families could inform NGOs of their needs and learn of their programs. Because NGO workers are also members of the community themselves, the dialogue that is initiated between organizations’ workers and local residents is actually a dialogue between members of the community themselves. Yet, the structures of the institutions through which these residents interacted are still heavily impregnated by the foreign structures they borrowed, the foreign money they relied on, and the foreign ideology they gradually accepted.

1.4 Organizations’ Transfer

The adoption of Islamic NGOs by the local community and the presence of local residents within the organizations themselves modified gradually the NGOs’ own structures and forms of operation. This change was manifested in a number of regulations that NGOs adopted in the beginning from their Iranian model institutions and dropped over time. It was also manifested in the gradual transfer of NGO ownership to local residents by encouraging them to achieve financial self-sufficiency and move away from the dependence on Iranian funding. “A strong community owns and runs its own institutions,” one of Hizb'Allah’s deputies told me.

In terms of structural changes, the most remarkable change inside Islamic resistance NGOs is the body of volunteer sisters itself. When Al Imdad launched its operations in 1987,
social workers, including volunteers, were all men and no woman was allowed to join the NGO's social workers' section. The head of the self-sufficiency unit explained that when they started going around houses, in the beginning of 1989, the NGO needed women who could relate more readily to fellow mothers, sisters, and friends. "Women could more easily penetrate houses," Abu Fadi said. He also added that enrolling women was not immediately accepted by the Iranian Mother institution. "Asking women to leave their homes and go around houses is against the Iranian [mother] Al Imdad teachings. It took us a year to convince them it was totally appropriate, within our society, to have women work as volunteer sisters." Today, the NGO has recruited over 125 volunteer sisters in Beirut and relies considerably on them. Thus, from its interaction with the local community, Al Imdad had to reevaluate its model and reshape many of its structures according to local needs, such as the way it readapted the volunteer sisters body.

Along with such structural changes, the most obvious condition for the community to achieving ownership over these NGOs is to stop relying on Iranian funding and instead, start generating its own income. Over the last years, many of the organizations have started raising their own funding by soliciting contributions from individuals and undertaking development projects on the market. The director of Al Imdad, Hajj Ali Zein, told me that "to make self-sufficiency our culture, we have taken it up upon ourselves to achieve financial self-sufficiency for the organization itself."

In terms of fundraising, the NGOs are attempting to reduce reliance on Iranian funding, and have sought to increase their other fundraising revenues as well as generating new incomes themselves. For example, Al Imdad has moved from getting 100% of its budget from its Iranian mother organization in 1987, to receiving only 30% in 1997. The general director of the organization told me: "Little by little, we have built our own channels to raise funds and generate income. Today, whereas the our budget has considerably increased, the Iranian funding has considerably shrunk. We only get 30% of our total budget from Iran."

As they established their name as recognized charities working in poverty alleviation, the organizations have increasingly tapped on the Sadaka and the Zakat, the money that individual Muslims are religiously mandated to give yearly to the poor. The Sadaka and the Zakat have been major sources of income for most of these organizations, especially after they reached out to

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40 Khoums is 20% of one's yearly income. While Zakat is...
rich expatriate Shiite Lebanese communities in Africa and other rich Arab donors. In addition, Al Imdad has thousands of donation boxes distributed around the country which ask for “donations to orphans.” These boxes are so spread in the southern suburb of Beirut that you find them in almost every building lobby and every store. They have created an informal and accessible way for the local community to contribute in funding the NGO. These donations have become a steady income for the NGOs.

Apart from relying on donations, Al Imdad and Jihad Al Bina’a, among other Islamic resistance NGOs, have generated parts of their own funding in development projects on the market. The two organizations own a number of small contracting companies that bid for profit-generating projects from both private and public clients. Another large controversy lies around these NGOs contracting companies. All the NGO members I asked about contracting companies said they would rather not talk about this subject. “Once it is known that a contracting company is somewhat affiliated to us, it is never contracted out by the government again,” explained Hajj Ali El Zein, the VP of Jihad Al Bina’a. He described how one such company, Mimar, lost all its contracted jobs once the government learned it was affiliated to them. “We had to shift Mimar’s activities to building low income housing units and selling them on the local housing market. No one would contract it again!” Through these housing projects, Jihad Al Bina’a has tapped into highly demanded low income housing market of the southern suburb of Beirut. The NGOs have sold these units at market price. However, all the Islamic NGOs workers I interviewed declared they did not want to talk about the other contracting companies anymore. “We do not want to lose all our contracting companies,” Jihad Al Bina’a’s director explained.

Looking back at the origins of these NGOs, we can now trace how, in the southern suburbs of Beirut, foreign NGOs originating in a top-down approach have been able to decentralize their work, open up their institutions, reach out to the community, and gradually transfer ownership to residents. However, while the indigenization of these organizations relied on their flexible structure, it also relied heavily on another mechanism, the power of their political ideology, to which I now turn.
Aside from the craft of their own structures, and throughout the process of opening up and providing spaces for residents to get involved, the organizations have laboriously used to their advantage the political ideology of the foreign policy behind their implantation. One of the main claims the literature has made on the comparative advantage of NGOs over public agencies as service providers is their de-politicization. A number of authors have argued that, unlike state officers, who are always using service provision as a way to carry on their clientelistic politics and exchange votes for favors, NGOs are independent of election constraints. Nevertheless, the NGOs we are discussing were spawned by politics. Indeed, as I mentioned earlier, these NGOs have political affiliation to the “Islamic condition” in South West Asia and North Africa and the notions of resistance to oppression presented by Hizb’Allah. These notions echoed some of the southern suburb of Beirut’s residents’ experiences and attacked the actors whom many local residents perceived as their oppressors: Israel particularly, and the Lebanese State to a narrower extent. Therefore, these political affiliations became powerful assets for the organizations to build on. The NGOs have used them to generate a prestigious image for their institutions, a sense of mission for their workers and a new language for the community. These elements were crucial to the success in the NGOs projects.

2.1 A Prestigious Image

First, the NGOs have used their affiliation with political bodies to elaborate a prestigious image of their organizations as fighting structures of oppression on the side of the community. Therefore, the NGOs have particularly emphasized their participation in the political process of resistance lead by Hizb’Allah and framed many of their activities in the same mold of resistance and social justice. They made it their task to build a “resistance society,” and they legitimized their existence as “fighting oppression.” The NGOs also filled their offices with pictures of

42 As explained earlier in Chapter 2, resistance for Hizb’Allah is defined as the refusal of all forms of oppression implied on people, including the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon and the discriminatory policies of the Lebanese government.
martyrs, resistance fighters killed in the line of duty. "The resistance society," Hajj Kassem Aleik, head of Al Shaheed, told me, "is our vision. It is the task to build a society that will refuse oppression and fight for its rights. All the rest - water provision, garbage collection, agricultural training - is only a working strategy."

Over time, it became desirable for many residents of the area to enroll in these NGOs and their institutions, since workers could share the pride of belonging to this admirable resistance. Many of the workers confirmed this idea. One of them, Hajj Ali Zein, in Jihad Al Bina'a told us "the highest form of commitment is military resistance. It then trickles down to us in all these organizations. We all try to help as much as we can." Another worker in the same organization told us "the presence of resistance is psychologically important to us employees in Jihad Al Bina'a. It definitely energizes us." In short, the notion of resistance has helped these NGOs to switch from their image of one of many charities to an organized structure of resistance that appeals to members of the local community precisely because it fights their same perceived oppressors.

2.2 A Sense of Mission

Besides a prestigious image, the political ideology has generated inside the NGOs a sense of mission that has attracted many residents inside the NGOs and encouraged them to perform well within their institutions. The sense of mission is a common rhetoric in the development literature. Authors like Wilson, Stinchcombe, XX, have argued that a sense of mission provides an organization with the basis for recruiting and socializing new members and relieves administrators from the burden of creating incentives. In short, the sense of mission generates commitment and enthusiasm for the employees and a strong incentive for good performance (Wilson 1989, Stinchcombe).

Islamic resistance NGOs are a good illustration of this practice. Indeed, as I described earlier, they have mobilized a large array of volunteers and low-paid workers. Many of these volunteers and workers would have never enrolled if it were not for a sense of mission that pushed them in this direction. When asked about their reasons behind joining the NGOs, many residents explained that they felt it was their duty to do so. They saw themselves as supporting
the military activities against Israel, fighting oppression, or, more simply, being religiously committed to helping others. They also said that the NGOs provided them with an effective space to channel their sense of mission. Thus, for example, Hajj Ali Zreik, the head of Al Imdad, explained to us that “There is a religious commitment, which is the mission dictated by Islam. There is the daily commitment to resistance. It stems from our condition as occupied people. There are finally social conditions that stem from the weakness of the State and the miserable conditions which people live in. All these factors serve to mobilize us here.” Many workers articulated similar ideas. Siham, one of the volunteer sisters, said, “I love the idea of giving and sharing and I feel the urge to do it. This is why I got enrolled. I will never leave the organization unless I feel I am personally unable to fulfill my tasks dutifully.” These statements show how the sense of mission has been very useful in attracting residents inside the organizations. They also reflect how these residents have exhibited enthusiasm for the projects in which they are involved and commitment and loyalty to the organizations in which they work.

2.3 A Language

Finally, the NGOs have used the political ideology to generate a new language for the community and a new perception of poverty. I discussed earlier how these NGOs labeled poverty as the outcome of discriminatory policies and returned to the poor much of their lost dignity by representing them as victims of oppressive structures rather than untalented failures. However, these victims are not hopeless, “deprived” individuals (the Shiite were earlier called the deprived) but rather active subjects who are resisting oppression—they are only “perceived as weak.” They therefore can enroll in organizations, and in doing so join a “resistance society” which “fights” the “oppression” and misery heaped on them by unjust social structures. This new language is above all challenging people’s perceptions and hopelessness consciously through rewording and redefining their position and role in the society. “If Israel leaves,” one NGO member told me, “we might have to change some of our titles and accommodate new logos […] always according to the same spirit.”

43 For Arabic speakers, the difference between “mahroumeen” and “mustad’afeen” is clear.
The new language has allowed the NGOs to generate a new respect for poor residents. This achievement is particularly important because it has allowed the organizations to target specific groups inside the community and maximize the efficiency of its projects without the usual pitfalls of such initiatives (e.g. stigma, marginalization, etc.). The development literature has often dwelled on the problems of targeting specific groups in the community. Whereas accurate targeting is often a potential way of attacking a problem directly and thus catering to the best form of support, it also is problematic. Many authors among whom particularly Sen, Scokpol, Besley, Kanbur, and Wilson have elaborated on the psychic costs of the social stigma and marginalization that are attached to participating in projects targeting specifically the poor. Indeed, these authors argue, singling out a community is very likely to generate resentment within the stigmatized community and political rejection from other groups whose money is invested in programs that don’t benefit them (Sen 1995, Scokpol 1991, Besley and Kanbur 1988, and Wilson 1987). By building an aura around the notion of resistance and then linking directly these NGOs’ beneficiaries to this resistance, the organizations have made of the task of service provision an absolute necessity. Speaking of the civil war benefits in the US, Scokpol describes how these benefits were portrayed as earned by the community. “It would have been a public scandal to do less for those whose valorous services preserved the government,” the author explained (Scokpol 1991: 422). Just like the civil war program which targeted a specific group without a particular gender or class obvious bias or stigma, the organizations here, with a somewhat similar idea or repaying war heroes, were able to legitimize and gather support for the targeting process.

As discussed above, the use of the political ideology in the NGO has therefore been a major asset to the organization. It has allowed Islamic resistance NGOs to build a sense of mission for their workers, a prestigious image for their institutions, and a new language for their beneficiaries. The political ideology has therefore helped these NGOs overcome major difficulties in the task of service provision. The combination of political ideology, mission, imagery and language soon fed into building an alternative culture and a strong identity for both the organizations and the community. Before I move to describe this process of building a culture, I would first like to elaborate on many of the impediments of this task. The same literature that praises the sense of mission and the organizational culture often elaborates on the
difficulties of instilling a sense of mission and an organizational culture. Wilson, for one, describes particular examples of organizations such as the FBI and the trouble they went through for instilling this mission (Wilson 1985 : 91-110). Islamic NGOs did not have to through the same process. They have received this culture and mission from an elaborated existing political ideology. If this political ideology facilitated the process of culture building, it however also had major drawbacks. Indeed, and as I described in chapter 2, many residents refused to receive the NGOs services, precisely because they had such an obvious political image. Even more pronounced then this voluntary self exclusion is the explicit process that excludes from the web of the NGO workers all the people who are not willing to abide by the religious commitments of the NGOs which include clothing, language, and other restrictions. It also includes anyone whose had previous relations with Israel.44 These residents are explicitly not allowed in any of the Iranian based NGOs (Al Shaheed, Al Imdad, and Al Jareeh). In the other NGOs, the administrations assured me their openness to all but in fact, rarely included any non-Muslim resident. In fact, the homogenization of the city during the civil war has allowed to suspend this problem currently, since the areas where these NGOs provide services are populated only by Shiite residents. There is therefore no real pressure from local residents who are explicitly excluded. However, if the situation was to change, the strong and exclusive ideology of these NGOs could become a serious impediment to their relations with the community. Before we move however to conclude on this discussion, let us look, a little more, on what constitutes this new culture, and how despite its positive outcomes, it could be inclusive to outsiders, including me.

44 It is worth mentioning that I’ve never heard, in my entire life, of a resident of this area supporting Israeli occupation of Lebanon.
PART 3 A NEW CULTURE AND A NEW IDENTITY

When I introduced the southern suburbs of Beirut in the beginning of the paper, I had mentioned how a newcomer to the southern suburbs of Beirut is taken aback by the strongly visible religious character of the community. Similarly, I still remember the first time I entered the hallway of an Islamic organization. It was Jihad Al Bina’a, almost a year ago. I was struck by the banners, calligraphy from the Koran and images of martyrs filling the room. All the personnel in Jihad Al Bina’a was male. They all had long beards and were dressed in neutral or dark colors. I immediately felt like a stranger. The ambiance was not hostile, it was rather a space where a bond between everybody but me made me feel uncomfortable. The space did not include me, it included them. Neither was I later comfortable in the hallways of Al Hay’a, Al Sahhiyya, or Al Shaheed, for example. It was only later that I combined the many small elements to understand the powerful mobilization tool used by these NGOs (and the political party, Hizb’Allah) to engage local residents. I then understood how, over the past eighteen years, Hizb’Allah and the same NGOs have developed elaborate methods to appropriate the space of the southern suburbs of Beirut. They have used Islam and resistance to create a culture and an identity in a space that was previously only a poor, common suburb of the city, a first stop for refugees coming from the South and the Beka’a Valley to Beirut. This same ideology was also used to generate inside the organizations a culture and a particular identity that enhance the sense of belonging for workers.

3.1 The Organizations

Inside the NGOs, the new culture was instilled through many implicit and explicit forms of behavior. First, there is a ritual of gender segregation and gender differentiation. Inside the NGOs, members of opposite sex do not occupy the same roles and rarely share the same tasks. Through my visits to Jihad Al Bina’a, I never met a single woman. In Al Imdad, women are volunteers only and have no allocated working space. In fact, the only women I could meet regularly in all these NGOs were the beneficiaries. The volunteer sisters were sometimes present, reporting on their activities, but since they had no offices and no allocated schedules, they had no reason to be present.
Second, a dress code distinguished the organizations’ workers from the rest of the residents of the southern suburb. All women working in these NGOs are supposed to wear the veil in a specific way. “This was the jurisdiction (fatwa) of the late Khomeini,” Soad explained to us. “We all wear the veil this way since he said we need to cover chin and the forehead.” When I interviewed people inside the organizations, I was often veiled myself. “This method of wearing the veil, Soad later added, is not imposed on us. We all felt convinced and then endorsed it.” Women are also supposed to cover arms and legs and thus often wear long, formless, dark-colored dresses. Men are required to cover their legs and arms and wear long shirtsleeves and long pants.

This dress code is particularly important for the volunteer sisters who are highly visible in the society. Indeed, through their dress code, they already embody a visual symbolic representation of the political ideology they promote. The volunteer sisters are particularly aware of this aspect of their task and proudly endorse it. “We constitute a main branch within the large [Islamic resistance] movement. The way we are dressed, the way we look, the way we talk are all indicators of our political commitment. When people see us, they often ask about Hizb’Allah’s resistance operations in the southern suburb of Beirut, for example.”

Third, the NGOs have their own methods of personal greetings. Men and women do not shake hands, in accordance with their interpretations of Islam. Instead, members of the opposite sex salute each other deferentially by placing the right hand on their chest when greeting each other. The workers also use the formal Arabic salute, “salam alaikum,” (Peace be upon you), instead of the casual formulas used elsewhere in the city.

Fourth, as part of strengthening the NGOs’ mission, all men in Al Imdad, Al Shaheed, and Al Jareeh are required to participate in a daily noon prayer and a lesson in religion. “The noon prayer time is a common ritual that we all abide by. It brings members of the organization together, every day, in a common space where we share perceptions on religion.” The common prayer time is the only regular ritual. However, the organizations arrange trips and all sorts of social outings to increase the connections between the members of the NGOs.

Throughout the organizations, the same imagery prevails. Everywhere, images of the late Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic revolution in Iran occupy the space of the organization.
Furthermore, every organization has in its lobby and in the offices the images of resistant fighters killed in the South of the country\(^{45}\).

It is not rare to hear about NGOs attempting to create a culture that would form an identity for the organization. In trying to dig out lessons from the success of the Grameen Bank, Jain described the strong role ascribed to social structures and the importance of a training program whose main task was the “development of pride in the work of the Grameen Bank.” This training, according to the author’s report, “was modeled after ‘tablique’; the Muslim practice wherein an individual is immersed in prayers and scriptures to get out as a cleaner mind…. ” The author also describes the regular daily routine at the center meeting, “which, among other things involved reciting slogans in praise of the Grameen Bank” (Jain 1995: 79-89). In fact, this practice is a common discourse in business corporations around the world. Over the past decade, an increasing body of literature has developed around notions of organizational and corporate culture and the ability of organizations to control their space and generate an environment conducive to work. In probably one of the most notorious books on corporate identity or organizational culture, Schein lists a number of observed characteristics that he thinks reflect the character of organizations (Schein 198x). These are rituals, customs, traditions in individual and group norms, shared meanings, habits of thinking, rules of the game, and many others. Most of these characteristics have a parallel in Islamic resistance NGOs.

However, what is different in Islamic resistance NGOs I am describing is the absence of a direct relation between the mission and the type of work. The daily rituals built in the organization are not related to the organizations or their tasks but rather to Islam and the political message of religion. This culture often becomes a spiritual motivation to work, it does not however show a clear operational link to the NGOs. This observation is important because it brings back the issue of mission and its generation. The organizations did not elaborate themselves the mission statement they have. Instead, they built it on historical facts. If this motivated the residents to join and work, it did not always provide the type of discipline in their operations that the mission is often sought to grant. This was revealed to me in one of my interviews when the director of Al Imdad explained that whereas he could clearly say that at least 90% of the NGOs’ employees were totally motivated, barely 50% were entirely disciplined. “The

\(^{45}\) These images are the same in all the organizations and suggest a central advertisement unit that distributes this
mission which undeniably has a large bearing on the commitment of workers goes not mean they will do the job well, or that they will be disciplined and organized,” the director said. “In fact, I’ve seen some of them use this very argument of faith against me saying: ‘come on brother, we are among Muslims here and we share the same goal, don’t you trust me?’” Thus, and despite what one is first brought to believe, although the organizations’ culture and the sense of mission have motivated many employees to work for free long overtime hours, and has built a strong loyalty to the NGO, it has not necessarily replicated such organizational patterns as the severe discipline that Wilson describes for the FBI or Jain describes in the Grameen Bank (Wilson 1989, Jain 1995).

In conclusion, the organizations have been successful in instilling a real culture for the organizations using dress codes, language, gender segregation and common rituals. This culture has given the organizations a distinct character that has allowed organizations to strengthen the sense of belonging of workers, and thus their loyalty to the organization where they work. It however is not an organizational culture that will foster necessarily efficient work or discipline but rather commitment and encouragement.

### 3.2 The City Level

At the city level, the same patterns occur in a more diffuse way and with different implications. Many residents have taken up the new dress codes, at least the veil and the long dresses that we saw earlier in the organizations. More and more, people greet each other with the traditional “salam aleikum” message. Hospitals, schools, clinics, and also smaller objects such as images spread on all the walls, water tanks painted in the colors of the Iranian flag or large scale posters of the political party leaders or the resistance martyrs fill out the city. Over the course of the past eighteen years, the city has gradually changed shape: The new dress code, new stores, and new imagery characterize the area in a way that “exposes” Islam and resistance. From a common suburb, a transitional non-space that shares many of the problems poor suburbs share around the world (congestion, characterless, etc.), the southern suburb of Beirut has developed an identity of its own. This identity made of the space an area where many residents identify and material to all organizations.
recognize their belonging, a space where middle-income residents do not leave even when their financial conditions improve, because they identify with the culture of the place. It has thus countered to a large extent the absence of roots that these residents suffer from being mostly refugees, and has granted them a home.

Not everybody, however, accepts this culture of the space, especially when it is developed at the expense of basic rules of urban design. One good example is the spread of so-called “public piazzas,” an array of narrow small isles that Jihad Al Bina’a has designed and executed as part of the “environment/ pro-greenery projects.” Some of the local Municipality engineers were angry: “In order for them to place pictures of some ‘heroes’, they congest circulation and called it an environment embellishment policy.” These engineers were referring to a narrow roundabout that Jihad Al Bina’a had placed in one of the streets. Other people see this intervention as the result of the political backlash to the organizations: “These are political gestures. They are not designed for any other purpose,” one of the residents told me. What these controversies actually indicate is the additional struggle that is born when a new culture is imposed on an urban environment. Indeed, this process translates into a territorial fight played between groups who use the public piazzas or buildings and transform them into landmarks that establish their ownership over the space of the suburbs. In the southern suburb of Beirut, this struggle has been particularly acute. Indeed, the organizations represent in their physical spread the religious and political dimension of the movements behind their creation. Thus, their imagery is bound to clash with those of other political competitors who are also engaging in the same process, including the state and other political parties, such as Amal.

Since 1997, the state has grown increasingly sensitive to this imagery and has carried many “cleaning campaigns” where images and banners are removed from the streets. Yet, and whether true or enforced, the new identity of the space, “visible Islam” is still undeniable in the southern suburb of Beirut. It strengthens many residents’ positions and encourages them to participate in the social life of the community, particularly religious celebrations held by the
political party in the area\textsuperscript{46}. It also clearly plays a role in “rooting” the refugee community and mobilizing it in the task of service provision.

Conclusions

In short, what has emerged from the above process is a new dialogue. This dialogue was generated through the organizations, between members of the community inside the organizations and those outside the organizations. This dialogue also used the language crafted by the organizations as method of communication that allowed residents to define their own needs. Thus, the process involved the largest possible number of residents in their own service provision. It is important here to step back and look at the processes in which these organizations were created. In chapter 2, I had elaborated on the processes that generated these organizations. I had explained that they were created after a foreign model. The structures of the organizations through which the dialogue is occurring today, i.e. volunteer bodies, social workers, and the specific tasks of service provision were largely copies of the Iranian model. More importantly, the language elaborated by these organizations is very similar to that used by the political discourses and the mission statements of their Iranian counterparts. Thus, by comparing the booklets of the Iranian and Lebanese 

\textit{Jihad Al Bina’a} branches, I found many of the same words and ideas. Yet, the problems the organizations are tackling and the people who are undertaking these initiatives are Lebanese members of the local communities. Thus, it is my contention that the process of decentralizing and including the residents inside the organizations happened through the dialogues that occurred between all the local and foreign experiences, through the structures of the organizations. This process modified the organizations that, for example, included women volunteers in their structures without, however, completely reforming the initial ideology and structures of the NGOs. In fact, it is the overall original character of Islamic organizations that has penetrated the southern suburb of Beirut and reshaped its space and culture.

\textsuperscript{46} The most famous of these celebrations, Ashoura, is a ten days morning period where believers revive the memory of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the grand-son of the Prophet Mohamed and the founder of the Shiite community.
Conclusions

The story of Islamic resistance NGOs and the community of the southern suburb of Beirut told in this paper is an attempt to understand the conditions and organizational processes that allowed the NGOs to transcend their original top-down structures and permitted this poor community to mobilize, work through the organizations, and get involved in the provision of its own services and the advocacy of its own rights. At the city level, this community, and through the structures and resources of the NGOs, was able to run for three years a successful garbage collection system that eased the lives of many local residents. The community has also run for the past seven years a system of water distribution that does not cover all its unmet needs but eases many of the poorest residents' demands. On a smaller scale, the community has run a number of more targeted initiatives that reached specific families in need and sought to improve their financial conditions through income generation projects. Through all these efforts, the community has been able to strengthen its own institutions, develop its critical understanding of processes of development, strengthen its voice, and improve its living conditions.

In contrast to the view that politicization is a serious impediment to organizations' success, these NGOs relied heavily on a political ideology to build their positive image and improve their own performance. Furthermore, in contrast to the view that public participation in projects will be seriously confined when NGOs are initiated by foreign and top-down decisions, Islamic resistance NGOs were established without consulting residents, through an Iranian centralized decision. Yet, these NGOs succeeded in mobilizing this Lebanese community and achieving a rather participatory process of service provision. What are then the lessons which come out of this study for community organizing and participatory processes in other areas?

The organizations and the community grew close despite the adverse conditions in which they existed. The NGOs were built despite public demobilization and despair, and in the midst of the residents' loss of faith in political mobilizing. Moreover, the cooperation between residents and NGOs did not grow from a unique coincidence where the residents and the organizations found themselves in total agreement immediately. Instead, the organizations and the community learned to work together by trial and error, through an initial phase of heavy friction where both
residents and organizations clashed with each other, learned from each other and transformed each other in order to work together.

The transformations of the NGOs and the community, as well as the impact of local politics and the history of organizing of the community, led to the existing spirit of cooperation and responsiveness that explains the ability of the NGOs to provide reliable and adequate services. It also allowed them to introduce new ideas and adopt an inclusive system of service provision, which encouraged residents to participate in the tasks of service provision and accounted for their own understanding of poverty and their own capacities when it undertook poverty alleviation projects. For these transformations to occur, the organizations have relied on two strategies - agency and ideology. I have detailed these strategies earlier, in chapter 3.

(i) The first strategy of these organizations is structural. It relates to the design and structures of the NGOs' own institutions and consists mainly of the decentralization of the NGOs, their openness and flexibility. Islamic NGOs spread inside the southern suburb as a decentralized array of service providers that each target a specific audience (e.g. families of martyrs, wounded residents, and residents with no financial resources) or specific needs (e.g. health, education, infrastructure and reconstruction, and others) within the community. As they diffused throughout the neighborhoods, the organizations also attracted many local residents as workers at all levels of their hierarchy, even as NGO directors. These residents often worked with low salaries and volunteered free overtime hours. Furthermore, a number of these NGOs developed a volunteer corps whose main charge was to increase the outreach of the NGOs to the wider community.

(ii) The second strategy Islamic NGOs is ideological. They used the political ideology of Islam\(^47\) and the local resistance to Israeli occupation in order to generate an aura around the organizations that made participating in the work of these NGOs a source of pride inside the community. The strategy also developed a mission statement for workers that motivated them tremendously, and a new language for the community of the southern suburb, which countered the common negative perception of the poor with an empowering terminology that sided with the poor in their understanding of the oppressive social and economic structures. This strategy of the
NGOs and the perception of poverty alleviation on these terms tangibly recalls other religious movements such as the Latin American Liberation Theology. Indeed, both of these groups have invested a large part of their efforts fostering such political build up, using religious metaphors to simplify political messages, and render them appealing to the community.

(iii) The ideological build-up was accompanied by a parallel process of creating and instilling an alternative culture for both the NGOs and the community of the southern suburbs of Beirut. The new culture instilled new traditions, such as dress codes, greeting formulas, and pictures in the community and inside the organizations. It also brought new rituals, habits, and celebrations that are particular to the southern suburb of Beirut. The new culture has strengthened the sense of belonging for residents and transformed considerably the space in which they live. From a transitory place that acts as a satellite to the city, the southern suburb of Beirut became a place with its own visible and distinct identity.

The closeness and cooperation between local residents countered the original top-down origins of the NGOs and allowed for a smoother relation between the two groups. This new relationship materialized through the following processes.

First, the NGOs adopted a discourse on poverty that took the stand of the local community in defining poverty in terms of injustice and as the result of exclusive policies adopted by the Lebanese State. The organizations also stood by the community in blaming the Israeli occupier for the miseries of the residents and their dispossession. Since they shared the struggles of local residents, the NGOs could also speak their language and adopt the same perspective as them about the living conditions in the southern suburb of Beirut City. It therefore appealed to people and attracted them inside the NGOs. Simultaneously, the residents also adopted the NGOs political discourse and culture. They therefore gradually accepted the language they earlier rejected. Nonetheless, throughout this process, the language was undeniably modified.

Second, the residents' presence in the NGOs made these NGOs responsive to the true problems of the community and helped them provide services that were urgently needed by residents but were not always visibly identified from the outside (such as the water tanks). Since

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47 This understanding of Islam is not a universally accepted definition (there are no universally accepted definition
local residents ran the NGOs, they could best identify the major needs in their own neighborhoods and sharpen the NGOs sensitivity to local demand. Residents benefited from the decentralization, openness, and flexibility of the NGOs to include their voices in the NGOs’ process of decision making and its phases of project design and implementation, and to produce the NGOs’ responsiveness.

Third, the NGOs simultaneously learned from their experiences with the community of the main impediments to the community’s development, the culture of dependence, and the absence of positive forces to counter it. They therefore emphasized self sufficiency as their main target in the projects they undertook and developed supportive structures to balance these weaknesses. They provided residents with emotional, social, technical, and financial assistance in order to provide a safety net for residents throughout the phase when they were seeking self-sufficiency. The supportive net was entirely constituted of social workers and volunteers who were all area residents and could follow up on residents weekly, visiting them frequently and insuring their good performance. This was the condition for the success of these initiatives. The NGOs also advertised their successes to build a feeling of “achievement” for the family, to encourage other families, and to demystify the idea of financial independence for everybody.

Fourth, and finally, the NGO workers, beneficiaries, and other residents in the community found themselves engaged in a common process they considered their mission. Workers felt proud to be associated with the organizations and wholeheartedly volunteered non-paid extra hours and extra efforts. Beneficiaries also felt empowered by the NGOs, for some were proud to be achieving self-sufficiency, or more simply proud to be part of a movement that did not perceive them or treat them as inferior people to be uplifted. The large part of the community was considerably mobilized and advocated its own rights in several instances.

This strategy had nonetheless a number of limitations and many issues still remain to be investigated in this story. One important and legitimate question relates to the nature of the NGOs and their potential evolution. Throughout my field work, I always sensed the role of these organizations as mini-political cells that are diffusing messages as they provide services (Islam, Resistance, Pro-Iranian ideas). The impact of this politicization was the process of implicit and

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\(\text{It is the particular approach to religion developed by the Iranian revolution.}\)
explicit self-selection of workers and beneficiaries that I described earlier in the paper. This is a major limitation to the NGO since its own politicization obviously created a polarization between the community members it serves, dividing them into those who are part of the movement and those who are not. If this differentiation remains subtle in many areas within the southern suburb of Beirut, since the NGOs are more or less widely accepted, it is however very powerful when one compares the area to other neighborhoods inside Beirut or its other suburbs. Thus, what the NGOs ended up creating are not institutions that could bridge the disconnected spaces of an already fragmented city, but rather institutions that reinforce the sectarian belonging of residents. This disconnection, nonetheless, can only be understood as the complement of the policies of exclusion that the Central Lebanese State, represented by the city, adopted towards these residents.

A large body of literature has elaborated on these ideas. It has shown how phenomena of exclusion often produce counter effect in communities where marginalized residents start refusing to engage with the city themselves and generate instead their own separate space and culture (Haumont 1996). Applying this double logic of exclusion/inclusion, we understand that the culture of the southern suburb of Beirut City stems, on the one hand, from a centralized decision making process of the Lebanese State that excludes the poor residents from the rich markets of the city. On the other hand, this culture stems from a local effort to dissociate oneself from the city by generating one’s own institutions, organizations, and culture: “We do not seek to infiltrate the system,” a local worker explained, “we need to create our alternative.”

Although the purpose of this paper is not to speculate on such outcomes and I do not have sufficient evidence to determine what will eventually happen in the community, I cannot resist envisioning here two potential processes. The first consists of strengthening and building temporarily Lebanese Shiite organizations that could spill over to other poor communities and get to the point where it generates a powerful enough structure that could engage and mix with other communities forcing the others to treat them as equal. This process was adopted by many currents in the civil rights movements in the US and is in line with the teachings of the early stages of the mobilization of the Shiites’ early uprising in the 70’s.48 Another potential direction these organizations could take would be that of voluntary exclusion and the perpetuation of their

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“exclusive identity.” In this case, the organizations could turn into dangerous tools that would institutionalize in the long run the division and clashes of Lebanese residents and form a serious long-term threat to the unity and security of the country. In their current state, they could evolve towards a certain communal and religious supremacy that competes to create enclaves where one can lead a true “Muslim life.” If there are no clear answers to these questions, I think further research and policy lessons should be developed to understand this process and build on its strengths.

The study of these institutions and the potentials entry points of the State and other actors will be the focus of my future research. I will look particularly at the percentages of residents excluded and included in the organizations and investigate their perceptions of the process.


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ISLAMIC RESISTANCE NGOS
IN IRAN

Al Imdad
(The Resource)

Created: 1987
By: Mother Institution in Iran
Location: Main branch in the Southern suburb of Beirut, secondary branches throughout most of the country
Affiliation: Mother institution in Iran
Mission: Providing basic needs for families who have no source of income
Projects: Schools, health services, training and credit projects.

Al Jareeh
(The Wounded)

Created: 1984
By: Mother Institution in Iran
Location: Main branch in the Southern suburb of Beirut, secondary branches throughout most of the country
Affiliation: Mother institution in Iran
Mission: Providing basic needs for residents wounded during the war and their families (includes anyone killed during an Israeli raid or during the Lebanese civil war)
Projects: Schools, health services, training and credit projects.

Al Shaheed
(The Martyr)

Created: 1982
By: Mother Institution in Iran
Location: Main branch in the Southern suburb of Beirut, secondary branches throughout most of the country
Affiliation: Mother institution in Iran
Mission: Providing basic needs for the families of war martyrs (excludes anyone killed during an Israeli raid or during the Lebanese civil war)
Projects: Schools, health services, training and credit projects.

Iranian Based NGOs

Mother Institution funds partially the NGO, decide on its structure and influence the choice of projects.

Hizb'Allah
(The Party of God)

Created: 1982 (allegedly, started projected since 1979)
By: Lebanese Muslim clerics, with financial and military Iranian support
Location: Main branch in the Southern suburb of Beirut, secondary branches throughout most of the country
Affiliation: Iran
Mission: Providing active resistance against all forms of oppression facing the poor Lebanese community (primarily Muslim Shias)
Projects: Military resistance against Israeli occupation of South Lebanon. Local political opposition to the Lebanese current government, especially against its lack of concern for the poorer communities.

Al Hay'ah Al Sahhiyyah
(The Health Board)

Created: 1984
By: Hizb'Allah, after a model institution in Iran
Location: Main branch in the Southern suburb of Beirut, secondary branches throughout most of the country
Affiliation: Iran
Mission: A health care and first aid relief organization
Projects: Until 1985, the NGO has a first aid relief project. Since then, it has also spread with clinics, dental and health care labs as well as other health support infrastructure.

Jihad Al Bina'a
(The Construction Struggle)

Created: 1988
By: Hizb'Allah, after a model institution in Iran
Location: Main branch in the Southern suburb of Beirut, secondary branches throughout most of the country
Affiliation: Iran
Mission: A construction, physical development NGO
Projects: Garbage collection, drinking water provision, building schools, hospitals and others in the southern suburb of Beirut. In the rest of the country, the NGO rebuilds destroyed houses by Israeli raids, develops agricultural training programs and other projects.

Hizb'Allah
Based NGOs

Model Institutions, provide training, transfer of technology and the like