

The Lebanese Shia Community and Media Initiatives and Weapons



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A Cross Section of a History The Shia Community in Lebanon

تواریخُ مُتْقَاطِعَة حِصَّة الشیعة منها فی لبنان

UMAM Documentation and Research (UMAM D&R) is undertaking a history project in Lebanon entitled A Cross Section of a History. This project will create a space to explore and deepen understanding of the socio-political histories of specific communities within Lebanon - including the Shia, among others - to trace and explore their historical dynamics until today. Micro-level histories of individuals, families, and towns in Lebanon will be addressed, out of the belief that examination of these various histories will show the mosaic of personal and collective experiences of communities in Lebanon over history.

The title of the project "a cross section of a history" embodies this mission: by focusing on specific elements of Lebanon's collective, cacophonous history, we aim to illuminate unique and collective dynamics, identities, and transformations that help to explain the Lebanon we are seeing today. This project aims to directly engage with community members around Lebanon and in the diaspora, as well as academics and experts. The outputs of the project will be a research report and collections of archival material.



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Introduction

On February 5, 1909, Ahmad Arif al-Zayn published the first issue of the magazine Al-Irfan as an entirely Shiite product from a Shiite religious scholar. On June 4, 1991, Al-Manar TV Channel, affiliated with Hezbollah, a Shiite political and military party, began broadcasting. These and other sources, institutions, and personalities well-known in Lebanese media have left their mark on Lebanese media, in different forms and visions. Therefore, the objective of this research is to present the history of the Shia in media in Lebanon by presenting Lebanese Shiite media institutions and their stated goal, and by narrating the working method in order to reach results and recommendations related to this sector in Lebanon.

This research is divided into a preface and four sections. At the outset, it presents a historical introduction that provides a general overview of the state of journalism in Lebanon and key milestones. The first section of the research transitions to delineating the narrative of the Shia in written media. This section includes a discussion of their history in the press, particularly in political and partisan journalism, highlighting notable figures. As for the second section, it is dedicated to radio and the position of the Shia within it. The third section then focuses on the presence of the Shia in visual media and

the television channels, while the fourth section provides space dedicated to showcasing the presence of the Shia online and on social media platforms.

This research employs a narrative methodology due to its capability to cover various chronological periods, and primarily relies on open sources, including books, newspapers, magazines, websites, and social media platforms. The difficulty with this approach appears in the fourth section, as it is a contemporary subject that requires careful selection and diversity of sources.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the twentieth century, members of the Lebanese Shia community entered the arena of journalism and media. Despite not being pioneers in this sector, they faced challenges well; some excelled in various fields within this sector, assuming leadership positions, while some others distinguished themselves with innovative ideas and creativity.

However, what can be clearly inferred is that the largest Shiite media system established in the last century is the "Hezbollah system." It has provided Hezbollah with the tools capable of influencing and managing public opinion within the Shiite community, and, more broadly, influencing public opinion across Lebanon, as well as the creation of awareness and the construction of knowledge intended to be conveyed to the Shiite environment that Hezbollah is aiming to control. Hezbollah's ownership and systemic management of media has given rise to significant influence of the group as it has placed substantial power in the group's hands in the realm of soft and intelligent warfare, both domestically and internationally. Furthermore, Hezbollah has excelled in leveraging imagery to counter their adversaries, notably in actively documenting their military operations against them as part of a formidable psychological warfare.

In light of these findings, it is necessary to delve deeper into Hezbollah's systematic media experiment and to

further analyze it in order to understand it more deeply and accurately, and to identify the sources of its success, especially due to the fact that its media has played a significant role in the mobilization, attraction, military, and even security success of this group. Its media has also contributed greatly to concealing fundamental aspects of the group, and presenting it as a moderate faction that advocates for the deprived and the vulnerable in the face of "arrogance" and Western audacity, while monopolizing the term "resistance" as a registered trademark exclusively for itself. Furthermore, this experiment has generated new concepts and objectives for the media, particularly in the fields of war and security. In short, it can be said that the beginnings of Shiites in the media in Lebanon were enlightening, intellectual, nationalistic, and liberating, but today they have turned into a focus on achieving intelligence, power, and military priorities.