The meaning of resistance: Hezbollah’s media strategies and the articulation of a people

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CHAPTER 4
SPECTACULAR VIOLENCE: FILMING HEZBOLLAH’S MILITARY OPERATIONS

“Our time is one of hypothesis rather than of thesis, a time of works in progress - unfinished, unordered, violent works made with the camera in one hand and a rock in the other” – Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, Towards a Third Cinema.

A group of militants walk through the bushes, giving a complicit smile to the camera and making victory signs; they are about to give their first show. We are in 1986 in the village of Soujoud in occupied Southern Lebanon. The camera now turns toward a structure on a hill; we see an Israeli outpost. Inside, we recognize the same militants firing their weapons and shouting “Allah Akbar.” The camera briefly catches two dead bodies, two enemy soldiers. The militants take over an enemy tank; arms are raised in a sign of victory. Their mission is accomplished; the outpost has been secured, and a first video of a military operation is now ready to be broadcast.2

This video is the first in a long series of Hezbollah videos documenting the group’s military operations in Southern Lebanon. The videos were initially broadcast on television screens in Lebanon, Israel, and the Arab world as journalistic material, establishing their indexical value, and were later also made available on VHS tapes, CDVs, DVDs, and various video streaming websites online.

Since its emergence in the 1980’s, Hezbollah has become one of the main forces in the Middle East. The movement has sparked countless controversies regarding its legitimacy, politics, and military actions. Through it all, Hezbollah has attempted to use the medium of video to influence public opinion, disseminate its message, and advance its military goals.

After the Taif Agreement3 officially ended the Lebanese Civil War in 1990, Hezbollah was on its way to being recognized as a legitimate force of resistance against the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon, even though this legitimacy remains contested to this day by parts of the Lebanese and Arab publics (Traboulsi 2008, 423).4 This newfound legitimacy was, in part, the result of a shift in Hezbollah’s strategic approach. After the end of the civil war,

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1 A version of this chapter was published as a paper co-authored with Dima Saber under the title “Filming Resistance: A Hezbollah Strategy.” in Radical History Review 106: Winter 2010.

2 This is a description of the first Hezbollah videotaped military operation: the storming of the Soujoud outpost that took place in 1986. The video can be found on DVD as part of several compilations of military operation videos.

3 The Taif Agreement, also known as the Document of National Accord, ended the Lebanese civil war and introduced amendments to the Lebanese political system along a new sectarian division of power. Whether the agreement represents a sustainable solution to the instability of Lebanon’s political system or only a temporary solution remains a point of debate (Krayem 1997, 411-35).

4 After the Taif Agreement the legitimization of Hezbollah as a resistance force followed a two-stage process. The first stage was the official recognition of the struggle to liberate the occupied southern part of the country after the July 1993 accords; the second stage was the 1996 April agreement, which recognized Hezbollah as a legitimate resistance force (Fayad 2007).
Hezbollah introduced major changes to their revolutionary and uncompromising strategies of the 1980’s. This new strategy emphasized making Hezbollah’s voice heard and advancing their own narrative in an attempt to gather support in Lebanon and the Arab world as a model of resistance (Alagha 2006; Ranstorp 1998). The filmed military operations\textsuperscript{5} discussed in this chapter represent an intrinsic and important part of Hezbollah’s media strategy in these efforts to advance its self-image (see Mohsen and Mzannar 2001; Ajemian 2008).

In addition to enhancing the public’s perception of its legitimacy, Hezbollah has also used video to promote its political message and military goals. During the 1990’s, support for Hezbollah grew immensely among the Shiite community in Lebanon, especially after the assassination of their former Secretary-General, Abbas al-Musawi, and the rise of the charismatic Hassan Nasrallah to power. The military group intensified its attacks against Israeli targets in Southern Lebanon, carrying out a new and efficient strategy of representation by videotaping their military operations and exposing these images to the public (Nasr 2006, 112-117; Mohsen and Mzannar 2001, 71-103; Alagha 2006, 38). Hezbollah exploited the power of these videos in order to reshape prevailing political, cultural, and military realities. In this sense, one cannot talk about these videos without inserting them into the larger context of a complex discourse that has been growing since the late 1980’s, a discourse that the party itself calls “the culture of resistance” and has been preaching and articulating for the last two decades. Hezbollah’s videotaped military operations, I argue, form a part of the movement’s overall strategy of resistance that seeks to articulate a hegemonic discourse.

As I argued in Chapter 2, a populist or a hegemonic discourse requires the construction of a people and the promise of order in a state of disorder or crisis. In this chapter I will show how Hezbollah’s video operations - one of the movement’s earliest media productions - have been used to exercise power and establish the movement as a force capable of defeating the outside threat - as military tools. In this way, Hezbollah’s videos present the movement as capable of hegemony. They articulate a narrative of the conflict, and create a common memory that contributes to the construction of a notion of people on the basis of the narrative of resistance against the Israeli other. In order to do so, I will look at two modes of presentation of these videos: first, as journalistic material – where the videos become an event and an act – and second, as archive. These videos play both a military role, in which the act of showing violence becomes central to the exercise of power against the enemy and the exhibition of power for the community, and a political role, in which the videos become tools to articulate a political identity and sustain a narrative of resistance.

I will start by presenting the videos, and explaining the selection of these three primary texts as typifying three modes of representation that recur in the rest of the videos. I will then suggest a genealogy of these videos, before moving on to discuss the different meanings and impacts of the images when addressed to different audiences on the two sides of the conflict: the Israeli audience on the one hand, and the Lebanese and Arab audiences on the other. Having established the differences in reception, I will suggest a reading of the videos as a military strategy

\textsuperscript{5} The filmed operations are edited video footage shot by what the party designates as their “military media,” depicting military operations carried out by Hezbollah fighters against the Israeli army and its collaborators in occupied southern Lebanon.
where the exhibition of violence will be seen as an act following Daniel Dayan’s theory of “actes de regard” or “gaze acts” (Dayan 2006). I will then argue that these operations act within the perceptual field in order to establish a new power balance, and will conclude by discussing the role of the videos – which are placed in online archives – in articulating a narrative of resistance and a memory to be shared by the “people of the resistance.”

1. Videotaping Hezbollah’s military operations

If you were to take a walk around Beirut’s southern suburbs, commonly referred to in the media as “Hezbollah’s stronghold,” you would come across several shops selling pirated DVDs. The videos available at these shops range from Hollywood’s latest blockbusters to old Arab and Egyptian movies and TV series. But they also carry a wide range of Hezbollah media productions: Hassan Nasrallah’s latest speeches, music videos, and compilations of filmed military operations. The prices are very affordable. The original releases of these videos can also be purchased through telemarketing on Hezbollah’s Al Manar Television or in Hezbollah’s memorabilia shops spread around Lebanon in towns such as Baalbek, Khiam, Nabatyeh, and Tyr. In these shops, alongside high-quality Hezbollah DVD collections, you can find party flags, key chains, and coffee mugs with a picture of Nasrallah or some other symbol of the movement.

Among the wide selection of videos in the genre, I have chosen to focus on three that can be found on some pro-Hezbollah websites as well as on YouTube and Google Video. These three videos typify three different genres of representation that can be seen operating in the totality of Hezbollah’s video operations:

(1) footage showing Israeli soldiers or vehicles falling prey to Hezbollah explosive attacks (in which we only see the other, from a voyeuristic perspective);

(2) footage of Hezbollah combatants attacking Israeli outposts (in which we only see the Hezbollah combatants); and

(3) footage of Hezbollah combatants facing Israeli or enemy soldiers (in which both Hezbollah combatants and the other are present in the image).

These three videos were all produced during the 1990’s, when Hezbollah was constructing the discourse of “resistance” that was rapidly gaining ground among the Lebanese and Arab publics. This period was central to the emergence of the Hezbollah discourse of “resistance” under the leadership of Hassan Nasrallah. Throughout this decade, Hezbollah focused on promoting a narrative of resistance and developing their media capacities by introducing Al Manar or the “Channel of the Resistance” in 1991.

Two technical similarities should also be noted in these videos: first, the music, a revolutionary rhythmic common to war themes; and second, the poor quality of the images. Both grainy and shaky, these images seem to remind us every second that we are witnessing “reality.” In this reality two actors are at play: a self versus an other. It is this motion from the representation of the other to that of the self, all the while depicting a constant confrontation between the two, that I will attempt to expose in the rest of this chapter.
1.1 The Dabsheh Tank, October 29, 1994

In the first video, the other is seemingly the object to be seen (image 1). There is an explosion, and two Israeli soldiers are killed (image 2). But one detail, a circle, tells us there is another presence to be sought: the eye of the moving camera -- the gaze of Hezbollah. Initially, the circle tells us where to look (image 3) — a first “speech act.” Then the slow motion adds a dramatic aspect to the video and shows us precisely what to look at. This meeting of fiction (with the circle and the slow motion) and reality (the grainy quality of the image) transforms all representations into what Daniel Dayan calls “monstrations” or “showing” (Dayan 2006, 165-169). At this moment, we can substitute, for Austin’s “saying is doing,” Dayan’s “showing is doing.” In this sense, reality only exists through the way it is shown.

In this reality, the self is shown as “omniscient and omnipotent.” It secretly films the other in a clear relation of power, as it is the only one who knows the other will soon die. But the circle also implies another presence: that of Hezbollah’s gaze, and that of its addressed public. This public is invited to witness a particular moment in the spectacle of Hezbollah’s war against Israel: the moment where the occupied self defeats the dominant other. In this sense, the public is drawn closer to the confrontation, invited to share the emotions of the one looking through the camera as they watch the screen. This is when the public becomes what Dayan calls an “extension or even a manifestation of an us,” composed of those who choose to identify with the man holding the camera (ibid, 183).

1.2 Storming the Ahmadyeh outpost, June 29, 1996

If in the first video, the explosion and the death of the two Israeli soldiers imply a victory of the self over the other, in the second we are invited to accompany the self on its passage toward victory (image 4). At the end of a long path filled with dust, shrieking bullets, detonations, and all the noises of war (image 5), we can distinguish a fighter making his way toward the light emanating from an explosion (image 6). Three men approach what seems to be their target. There is an explosion; a voice claims victory by shouting “Allah Akbar,” and a flag is raised (image 7). The other is absent from the picture. The semantic field of victory leaves no space for anything but the victorious self. Articulated on two symbolic layers -- the religious (“Allah Akbar”), and the nationalist (the flag) --Hezbollah’s self-representation confirms what was sensed but not seen in the first video: a self celebrating its moment of victory over the dominant other. It is a moment the public is invited to share.

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6 This video is found in one of Hezbollah’s DVD compilations. Similar videos can also be found online: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-5383573172225996233&emb=1&hl=en> or <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-6369190483326495865&emb=1&hl=en> or <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=1950883238590161118&emb=1&hl=en>

7 The video can be found following these links: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-2020361975416684750&emb=1&hl=en> or <http://video.moqawama.org/details.php?cid=6&linkid=292>
1.3 The Tallouseh operation, January 15, 1993

Now that we have seen self and other in their visually isolated presence, the third video captures the moment when the first confronts the second in the same image. The visual rhetoric allows the celebration of a dominant self, and thereby a dominant us. The militants are shown wearing arms, well prepared, confident, and severe (images 8 and 9). The enemy soldiers are, by contrast, disarmed, docile, and howling (image 10). Obviously taken by surprise on their own ground, the soldiers are seen subdued by the Hezbollah militants; the video ends with Hezbollah fighters piling the captured soldiers on the ground (image 11). The contrast is obvious and striking; it shows explicitly the meaning that the two previous videos had implied. However, there is always an absent image haunting these frames (Lambert 1986, 103): the image of a self dominated by the other, a militia dominated by an organized army, Hezbollah dominated by Israel. In these videos it is precisely this relation of power that is inverted, since Hezbollah is the one who sees and allows to see.

1.4 From home movies to military videos

The emergence of the Hezbollah videos can be read as part of the video revolution that took place in the 1980’s. The year 1982 is perhaps the most significant date in the genealogy of these videos, from both a political and technological perspective. During that year, two major developments took place, each of which was to have a great influence on the subsequent rise of Hezbollah and their media. The first was Israel’s large-scale invasion of Lebanon, which led to the occupation of Beirut and the expulsion of the PLO. The violent invasion triggered new forms of resistance that were based on religious zeal rather than leftist and nationalist ideals, leading shortly to the birth of Hezbollah as a military resistance in reaction to Israel’s 1982 invasion (Corm 2006, 32-37).

The second was JVC’s introduction of the new VHS-C video format, and later, Sony’s introduction of the Betacam and Betamax video formats. The new video technology sparked a revolution in the production of images, which were previously limited to the expensive and limited availability and flexibility of film. Its impacts were both economic and technical. Video, unlike film, is cheap and easy to handle. The video revolution democratized the production of images and led to the birth of new forms of expression that were to flourish in the 1980’s. Camcorders also led to new political uses of images. The fact that videotaping did not require advanced skills and was not subject to the financial constraints of film made it possible to transform the camcorder into a moving witness whose voice could easily be broadcast. The use of video cameras by different kinds of political protesters became more and more common; it was a form of “citizen journalism” that Hezbollah turned into “militant journalism”.

Hezbollah’s filmed operations represent the meeting point between these two developments: a rising religious discourse that introduced new strategies of communication and

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9 An account of this period is found in Robert Fisk’s book *Pity the Nation* (Fisk 2001, 160-584).
resistance, and the role of new media in providing the tools for the propagation of this discourse. Hezbollah is, of course, not the only movement to use this type of media strategy. There is significant evidence that new technologies have provided means for rebel groups, subversive movements, and activists from Chiapas to Seattle to Prague to organize actions and events on a local and global scale (Khiabany 2003; Main 2001). This was dramatically apparent in the recent demonstrations in the Arab World, where online social networking websites such as Twitter and Facebook and video streaming websites such as YouTube and Google video played a significant role in both organizing and broadcasting the events. These movements form part of a genealogy of communication and resistance, one that can be described by means of a number of overlapping tendencies and strategic behaviours.

To begin with, one thing that these dominated and resistance groups have in common, and for which video is a particularly useful tool, is the necessity of writing their own texts and narrating an alternative history. Articulating these stories is part of the process of resistance, and an inseparable aspect of revolt against the dominant group and narrative. This corresponds to an equation Edward Said points out in Orientalism when quoting Marx’s epigraph “they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” (Said 2003, 293). Representing becomes a form of power and domination that can be exercised over the represented.

This doubling of representation can be clearly seen in Hezbollah’s video productions. In each act of self-representation, Hezbollah both represents itself, and also provides a different representation of the other. A new balance of power thus arises, or at least is negotiated through discourse and discursive practices. The struggle becomes a conflict of images and narratives between two opponents trying to win the battle of representation that is taking place in the realm of media. These “exchanged” images speak to at least two audiences – the sympathetic Lebanese audience and the unsympathetic Israeli audience. As Castells claims, increasingly “the battle of the human mind is largely played out in the processes of communication.” Politics and power relations become about “the capacity to influence people’s minds” by the use of media and communication processes (Castells 2007). I will return to this point below.

In addition to sharing with other resistance groups the need to articulate a narrative of self-representation, Hezbollah’s guerrilla video tactics also present great similarities with an earlier cinema movement, the “third cinema.” Solanas and Getino, two Argentinean filmmakers, proposed the third cinema in 1969 as a new alternative to the first (Hollywood) and second (European author cinema). The filmmakers argued for an activist revolutionary cinema that would break with the modes of production, distribution, and meaning production of classical cinema and be involved directly in the struggles of liberation and anti-colonialism. In this sense, third cinema would become a tool and a weapon in the war against colonialism:

In this long war, with the camera as our rifle, we do in fact move into a guerrilla activity. This is why the work of a film-guerrilla group is governed by strict disciplinary norms as to both work methods and security. A revolutionary film group is in the same situation as a guerrilla unit: it cannot grow strong without military structures and command concepts (Solanas and Getino 1969).
This description of the “film-guerrilla” group seems to accurately describe the Hezbollah film units who produce the military videos. These units become precisely part of a disciplined military structure that contributes to the overall military effort. As Solanas and Getino write, “the watchwords 'constant vigilance, constant wariness, constant mobility' have profound validity for guerrilla cinema” (ibid). This vigilance, wariness and mobility are mirrored in Hezbollah’s guerrilla tactics, both in the strict military sense and in the production of the videos as subversive activities that are undertaken in secrecy, away from the watchful eyes of the enemy.

Third, Hezbollah’s activities have much in common with those of other revolutionary groups that have used “small media” to help promote their ideology. In their book Small Media, Big Revolution, A. Sreberny-Mohammadi and A. Mohammadi point out the close ties between “small media” and revolutionary or resistance activities. Through a reading of the use of “small media” in preparation for the Iranian revolution and other examples, the authors argue that revolutions are “communicative processes” that maintain, through the use of media, alternative histories and oppositional cultures (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi 1994, 19-26). These communicative processes have been central to Hezbollah’s media strategy. In 1986, Hezbollah used the new video technology to record its first operation and broadcast it on Lebanese television screens. By the early 1990’s, videotaping military operations was an established practice that was seen as essential to the movement’s military strategy.

The broadcasting of these images and their circulation via networks of supporters who copy and share tapes and other recording media propagates the movement’s message, and contributes to the continued expansion of the support groups. The same practice was used in Iran prior to the revolution, with the subversive use of audiotapes to spread recorded sermons and speeches by Ayatollah Khomeini and other clerics. Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi argue that this use of “small media” had a central role in creating the conditions for the revolution (ibid, 19 – 30). Similarly, Hezbollah’s use of small media was instrumental for the spread of their ideology and discourse, especially within the confines of the Shiite community in Lebanon during the 1990’s.

Solanas and Getino also argue that technological and social conditions have an important influence on the development of film as a revolutionary tool and on the delay of its emergence. The description that two Argentinean filmmakers offer about the technical developments that allowed cinema to become more accessible for amateur producers also applies to the case of Hezbollah about video technologies:

Some of the circumstances that delayed the use of films as a revolutionary tool until a short time ago were lack of equipment, technical difficulties, the compulsory specialisation of each phase of work, and high costs. The advances that have taken place within each specialisation; the simplification of movie cameras and tape recorders; improvements in the medium itself, such as rapid film that can be shot in normal light; automatic light meters; improved audiovisual synchronisation; and the spread of know-how by means of specialised magazines with large circulations and even through nonspecialised media, have helped to demystify film-making and divest it of
that almost magic aura that made it seem that films were only within the reach of 'artists', 'geniuses', and 'the privileged' (Solanas and Getino 1969).

Since the first use of the primitive VHS format, the “military media” of Hezbollah has been actively following the newest technological advancements in video and broadcasting in order to develop better and more efficient methods of media creation and distribution. In that same vein, the party has been efficient in using the new capacities provided by the Internet to promote its media products and discourse. Hezbollah’s filmed operations, along with numerous other media products, can be found on the party’s official websites, as well as on video-sharing websites such as YouTube and Google video, where they are posted by amateurs and supporters. The party’s Internet media strategy is not limited to such videos, however. Al Manar TV also broadcasts live on the Internet for free in an attempt to get around national bans on the channel in several Western countries, and to reach their audience living outside of Lebanon.

While the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon can be considered as the direct cause for the emergence of Hezbollah, the new video technology and the subsequent technological advancements introduced new ways of manipulating and using images. These more accessible and easily handled technologies would become ‘the Kalashnikov of image production’, providing the tools and conditions for the movement to grow in power and reach. The less expensive and poorer-quality video camera, like the Kalashnikov, seems particularly well suited for guerrilla action, and since their introduction, both have been associated with guerrilla warfare all around the world. Solanas and Getino also make the comparison of camera and gun in their manifesto for third cinema, where they write that “the camera is the inexhaustible expropriator of image-weapons; the projector, a gun that can shoot 24 frames per second.” Moreover, Hezbollah’s pioneering use of new video and image technologies reflects the attention the party gives to, and the awareness that the party has of, the power of small-scale media production and alternative means of broadcasting to subvert and defy the imbalance that characterizes the global mediascape (Exum 2008). Like other resistance movements, Hezbollah has used the power of new media to craft narratives of self-representation, disseminate ideology, and support their guerrilla tactics.

2. Same videos, different message

The videos discussed in this chapter have multiple modes of existence. As discussed earlier, they function in at least two distinct ways: first, as a documentation of military operations, highlighting their role as journalistic material and their indexical value; and second, as archival material, documenting events that took place in the past. As documentation of military operations, the videos concern the workings of power in a military context. They are part of a war strategy that makes use of what Virilio calls the strategies and logistics of perception in warfare (Virilio 1989; Virilio 1994). In the following paragraphs I will try to expose the different functions of the videos in different contexts of reception and broadcast, as they are read by both the hostile Israeli audience, and a Lebanese audience sympathetic to Hezbollah. I will do this by

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10 Indeed, Hezbollah’s flag features a hand holding a Kalashnikov.
arguing first, that the videos should be seen as events in themselves, rather than as mere forms of documentation; second, that the videos instrumentalize different affective frames depending on the audiences they address; and third, that they therefore perform different military functions with respect to these different audiences.

2.1 The videos as events

Before going into the idea of the videos as acts of violence, I would like to suggest that we consider these videos as events in their own right, rather than mere documentations of military events. One definition of an event is that it has the capacity to initiate and generate something new and unpredictable; in this sense the event represents a rupture. This rupture impels the reconstruction of a frame; a transition from the unpredictable possibility to a predictable possibility that perturbs the prevailing relation of power in a conflict (Foucault 2004, 410-413). In this sense, Hezbollah’s filmed operations represent an event inasmuch as they are a rupture in the course of the conflict’s representation. They do not merely record a happening, but are rather one component in this happening.

Furthermore, Jocelyne Arquembourg argues that the event opens up the indeterminacy of meaning and calls actors to try to fix one meaning over another (in Dayan 2006, 82). Read in light of the process of hegemony, this means that these videos, by intervening in and destabilizing the preexisting order, open up the field for re-articulation and thereby establish the possibility for a hegemonic contestation of the representation of the war between Hezbollah and Israel and the preexisting power balance.

Seeing the videos as events in and of themselves helps to explain their effect as part of Hezbollah’s media strategies. But these events are not freestanding or univocal. For Dayan, the event does not exist as an independent entity; rather, it is always constructed and its meaning is always the result of a certain reading (ibid, 52). In this sense, while the videos can be read as events inasmuch as they disturb the existing order and provoke a rupture in the course of events, their meaning – and therefore their impact – depends on the reading that different actors ascribe to them.

2.2 Framing the videos

Hezbollah’s videos, as events, do not speak with only one voice: they mean different things to different audiences. Distinguishing between the different audiences to whom the videos are presented is central to understanding the different – often conflicting – meanings of these videos and the events they trigger. In particular, this section examines how the videos acquire different affective frames depending on the audience they aim to address.

The conflicting meanings of the videos can be understood in comparison with what Nigel Thrift suggests about the reception of suicide bombing. Thrift argues that these acts "are playing on two intermingled audiences; their own polity, often sympathetic to some of the bombers' causes (if not necessarily the bombings) and a Western audience that tends to be mainly indifferent to these causes, but is vexed by the issue of terrorism's ability to disrupt their everyday lives, to make them vulnerable" (Thrift 2007, 282). This argument applies equally to other forms
of spectacular violence. Hezbollah’s filmed and broadcast military operations also play on (at least) two audiences. The first is the sympathetic one (the Lebanese audience), and the second is hostile, rather than indifferent to their cause (the Israeli audience). Despite this difference in the latter audience, Hezbollah’s videos resemble Thrift’s bombers both in their awareness of the presence of an audience, and their awareness that the performance of violence is as important, if not more important, than the act of violence itself.

Thrift, in his investigation of the reception of news about suicide bombing in the West, argues that the "affective framing of the general media spectacle prevents populations in Western liberal democracies from forming an idea of the suffering of the unfortunate, even when they may be in close geographical proximity. In certain senses, events like suicide bombings are simply assimilated into a particular media paratext that has already prepared a place for them - meaning that they can only figure in very limited ways as part of an already prepared affective template" (ibid, 286). In the case of Hezbollah's media practices and the events that the movement initiates, Thrift’s arguments imply the determination of a prepared affective template, whether this be in Israel or in Lebanon. In other words, the reception is always already affectively framed within a paratext and an affective template that will determine the way in which the different audiences will react to these events. Castells, helpfully, uses the notion of affective framing to talk about emotional framing in political communication, and argues that the reception of information and the way media influences people’s political decisions relies on addressing the audience’s emotional frames in order to produce specific reactions (Castells 2009).

These different affective and emotional framings lead the videos to have very different effects on their audiences. For example, the last scene in the Talloushe operation video, in which the Hezbollah fighters are rounding up their captives, will be read as a defeat – an image that provokes a range of negative feelings – in the Israeli context, while it will be celebrated as a success by the Hezbollah audience. In the first video – the Dabsheh tank – the image of the Israeli soldiers dying after their tank detonates will be framed as a terrorist attack or at least an act of aggression by the Israeli media, while the Lebanese media will present it as a successful military operation. This dual perception is the product of the cultural, political, and social positions of the two groups at war with each other, as well as the media framing within the paratext that Thrift describes or the emotional frames that Castells discusses. The role and meaning of the videos here depends on the subject positions of the receivers.

### 2.3 The dual audience of the media war

Because each audience’s subject position influences its perception of the videos, the videos are able to play multiple strategic roles in Hezbollah’s military operations. Hezbollah’s media productions are an explicit component of its war with Israel, and the party officials and speakers seem to be well aware of the power that media can provide. In fact, the party’s official discourse speaks of “psychological warfare” (al harb al nafsia), and even of “media war” (al harb el e’lamia). From this viewpoint, it is possible to argue that the videos are intentionally made for a

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11 Alagha reports that since its creation, Hezbollah has executed a total of twelve martyrdom operations, the last of which took place in 1999. In all of them, Hezbollah never targeted Israeli civilians (See Alagha 2006; 361; Alagha 2011b, 61-86; Harik 2005, 2, 168)
double purpose, with distinct impacts on - at least - two audiences with radically different frames of reference.

On the one hand, the videos address the Israeli public. Hezbollah’s strategy here is part of a specific instrumentalization of the power of the gaze, the spectacle of power and the exhibition of violence. In this context, the videos are meant to reflect a public punishment or a public exercise of punitive and warning “justice” (a public display of the power to punish). This public performance of punishment functions similarly to the spectacle of the scaffold described by Foucault (Foucault 1979, 32-69) as a practice of exhibiting power in a ceremony “by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted” (ibid, 48). For Foucault, the public torture of criminals is a “policy of terror: to make everyone aware, through the body of the criminal, of the unrestrained presence of the sovereign” (ibid, 49). The videos featuring the “execution” of the Israeli soldiers thus establish Hezbollah’s sovereignty, and the “invincibility” of their power (ibid, 63).

When it comes to the Israeli public, we can distinguish three different modes of reception of the videos that are all marked by the function of the videos as an exhibition of power, and as acts of violence. The three Israeli audiences are: the general Israeli public, the military public, and the media producers. The general Israeli public watches these images as part of the news section on Israeli TV channels. It receives the images after they have been incorporated in a large institutionalized system, an apparatus that will insert the videos into a discourse very different from that of Hezbollah. The military public sees these videos through a different lens and looks at them for their military value, studying the military and psychological effects and strategies these videos represent and expose. Finally, the media producers remediate the videos by transforming them into an event or a representation of an event when other visual support is unavailable.

On the other hand, the videos also address the Lebanese and Arab publics. Here, the military role of the videos is twofold, encouraging both empowerment and group consolidation. Because this audience is mostly already in favour of the party’s struggle, the videos exercise their force by establishing Hezbollah’s sovereignty as a hegemonic order. This empowers both Hezbollah and its constituents by demonstrating the ability to defeat a superior enemy with little resources (a point to which I will return later in this chapter). In addition, the videos consolidate the party and its supporters by rearticulating the group’s narrative of common suffering and struggle. This is particularly so when the videos address Hezbollah’s Shiite constituency, whose frames of reference are marked by the narrative of Ashura and a view of the Arab-Israeli conflict that emphasizes Shiite victimization. The videos reassemble the group around a ritual of looking at themselves and at the others and remembering the values and narrative that Hezbollah reasserts. This foregrounds a paradox often present in the discourses of movements facing larger and more powerful enemies: to show themselves as both victims and powerful at the same time.

Each of these audiences is addressed differently by Hezbollah’s videos. The videos, which function as events in themselves, utilize multiple affective frames to accomplish different military objectives with respect to their multiple audiences. In the next section, I will elaborate on these different roles and functions of the videos, starting with their role as part of the military confrontation and later with respect to their role in the consolidation of a shared memory.
3. On the strategy of showing violence

The military operations videos are part of Hezbollah’s war strategy. As such, they understand war as taking place – also – in the field of perception (Virilio 1989, 5-10). This section argues that the videos, as military strategy, function in at least two distinct ways in the field of perception. First, the videos operate by exhibiting power and violence in a strategy that can be called one of ‘terrorism’. This is not terrorism as an ideology, but rather terrorism as a strategy of perception (Dayan 2006, 11-22). Terrorism as an act of perception is the embodiment of Daniel Dayan’s equation “showing is doing.” Second, the videos instrumentalize the notion of gaze as itself intrinsic to the operation of power. In other words, insofar as the videos feature a gazing subject, they establish a new relation of power between the ones who see and the ones who are being seen in an equation that is reminiscent of Foucault’s panopticon.

3.1 Showing is doing

Hezbollah’s military videos function as representations of violent acts. In this framework, these videos can be seen as part of Hezbollah’s military effort inasmuch as they act in the perceptual field itself intrinsic to the act of war. Virilio writes that “war consists not so much in scoring territorial, economic or other material victories as in appropriating the ‘immateriality’ or perceptual fields” (Virilio 1989, 7). In order to understand the function of the videos, it is important to first introduce a notion of ‘terrorism’ understood as a strategy that moves beyond the current use of ‘terrorism’ as a term that carries strong ideological connotations (see Introduction; Asad 2007).

Daniel Dayan argues that terrorism is first and foremost a performance (Dayan 2006, 16). It is a mode of signification that requires the media inasmuch as it is about transferring a message – that is, terror (ibid, 11-18). Terrorism is, in other words, the relocation of the violent event from the physical space where the event takes place to the media space where the event is shown: the screen (ibid, 17-18). In this sense, the act of showing, in Dayan’s theory of “actes de regard” (translated in this chapter as “gaze acts” or “monstration”), is itself a doing. Dayan is thus reformulating Austin’s notion of “speech acts,” which refers to the workings of language to incorporate the act of showing as itself a doing; hence the formula becomes “showing is doing” (ibid, 6). This act of showing introduces a new subject on whom the “terror is done”. The violence of the image is therefore not only directed at the soldiers against whom the military operations are carried out, but is also directed/addressed – primarily – to those who see the outcome on their television screens – whether they be in Israel or in Lebanon.

To reiterate this idea, I will refer back to Thrift, for whom "violence is employed to create political acquiescence; it is intended to create terror, and thus political inertia; it is intended to create hierarchies of domination and submission based on the control of force" (Thrift 2007, 275). The role of violence in this framework, as I argued in Chapter 2, is about contesting pre-existing power relations, and it is precisely because violence is transferred from the physical location of the military operation to the virtual realm of the screen that we can talk about these videos themselves as acts.
The idea of showing violence as itself an act of violence can be understood in relation to the idea of war as a conflict that takes place in the field of perception as well as on the field of battle. In this sense, Virilio argues that a major component of war is the conflict over the perceptual field. War as an act of perception requires the winner not only to occupy the ground of physical confrontation, but also to instill fear in the hearts and minds of the enemy. Virilio writes that “war can never break free from the magical spectacle because its very purpose is to produce that spectacle: to fell the enemy is not so much to capture as to ‘captivate’ him, to instill fear of death before he actually dies” (Virilio 1989, 5).

Hezbollah’s guerilla military strategy demonstrates this concept. Hezbollah frequently carries out military acts that do not seek to re-occupy spaces occupied by the Israeli army, but instead to drain its resources with tactical guerilla operations. The filming of these operations aims at maximizing their effects by acting precisely on the perceptual field to instill a sense of fear in the minds of the Israeli soldiers. For example, in the second video – the storming of the Ahmadiyyeh outpost – we see that the occupation of the military outpost is meant to be temporary. The militants are not there to push out the Israeli soldiers and reoccupy the space indefinitely, but rather to temporarily occupy the outpost in what seems to be a performance for the camera. The performative aspect of the act of occupying the outpost is most obvious in the interaction between the militants and the camera. They are smiling and waving signs towards the lens, and when their mission is accomplished they raise a flag over the defeated outpost so that the camera can capture an image that will outlive the flag’s actual presence on the hill. One purpose of the operation – and its documentation – is certainly to inflict military losses on the Israeli army. But it intends also to create an image that transforms this small material victory into a demonstration of the power of Hezbollah – a big perceptual victory. Similarly, in the Dabsheh tank video, where the perpetrators are absent from the picture (occupying a voyeuristic position behind the camera), we see an exhibition of power that aims to instill a sense of insecurity among the Israeli soldiers by establishing the militant group’s omnipresence and cementing its position of power as the subject that is able to see without being seen. This position is that of a threatening gaze that can be compared to the mechanism of power at play in the panopticon as described by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (a point that will be discussed further below).

Within the Israeli media discourse, these videos are proof of Hezbollah’s violence, aggression, and animosity. They fit into the argument that Hezbollah is a threat that requires the deployment of large resources and powers. For the Israeli media, Hezbollah is the other who threatens the Israeli self. The videos become a spectacle of power in a double sense: the one who exercises this power wants to show its capacities, and the one who is subjected to the power wants to justify retaliation. The impact that Hezbollah wants to create in the minds of the Israeli public is one of fear and threat. Paradoxically, this plays into the image that the Israeli mainstream discourse tries to advance: fear and threat of terrorism, where terrorism is an all-powerful enemy. And what is terrorism if not the spectacle of violence? It is perhaps this common interest of Hezbollah and Israel in advancing the same images of violence (albeit with two opposing meanings and purposes) that made it possible for these videos to infiltrate the Israeli mainstream media and reach the Israeli audience.

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12 We can think here of the spectacle of 9/11 and the way it reflects this aspect of the spectacle of war and the justification of the war on terror.
The videos are an exhibition of power that seeks to create a sense of fear in the minds of the Israeli soldiers and army. This exhibition of power is a strategy of terrorism. Terrorism thus refers to a strategy of exhibiting power for political purposes, something that reminds us of the disciplining mechanisms used in the act of scaffolding as described by Foucault (Foucault 1979, 32-69). Terror is the way the exhibition of power and violence is perceived by the one on whom this power is exercised. It is a visual war strategy. While on the one hand it provokes terror, on the other it celebrates power. The filmed operations are thus representative of the complex opposition between terrorism and resistance. While one public sees the images as an act of terror, the other public sees them as a celebration of justice, resistance, and legitimate power. Terror is, in this case, a strategy exercised in the perceptual field of battle, where the resistance of some becomes the terror of others.

The exhibition of power is not limited to the violent content of the images. The act of filming itself establishes the subject behind the camera in a position of power over the filmed subject. This is clearly the case in the first video, where Hezbollah is the gazing subject who can see without being seen. This is reminiscent of the notion of gaze in Foucault, which is intrinsic to the discourse of power. To gaze is to enter power politics, to use a technique that allows the gazer to exercise power on the one who is gazed at (recall the example of the Dabsheh tank video, where the camera is gazing at the tank about to explode). The voyeuristic position here is a powerful and threatening gaze. The one who gazes holds a powerful objectifying look. For Foucault, the gaze can categorize, define (as an instrument of knowledge), control, subordinate, and threaten (as an instrument of power). This is the principle of the panopticon described by Foucault in Discipline and Punish. In the panopticon, the one who looks controls the one who is looked at through a mechanism that enables the watcher to see without being seen, all the while instilling the sense of being constantly watched in order to exercise a disciplining force.

This form of surveillance — as, for that matter, surveillance in any of its forms — makes it possible to qualify, to classify, and to discipline. Foucault writes that “in order to be exercised, this power had to be given the instrument of permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible, as long as it could itself remain invisible” (ibid, 214). The videos in the genre of the Dabshed tank video, where a candid camera documents roadside bombs and other military ambushes, act precisely in this way. They are surveillance videos that aim at instilling the sense of constant visibility in the minds of the enemy, and by doing so communicate that the gaze is present wherever they are. It is, in other words, a threat. Another example of this kind is a rather longer video (five minutes) of the assassination of Aqel Hashem (30th January 2000, in the village of Debel), one of the South Lebanese Army’s major officers in the South of Lebanon. The video is patched together from surveillance footage that follows the officer’s movements in his house and around his village with cameras placed to follow all his movements and security measures before the assassination is carried out. The Aqel Hashem

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13 The video can be found following this link: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=399926579074689567>

14 The South Lebanese Army – hereafter SLA – is a Lebanese militia that collaborated with the Israeli occupation of the south of Lebanon.

15 Aqel Hashem was the second in command in the SLA after Antoine Lahed. He also held Israeli nationality since 1996. His assassination was a very strong blow and less than four month afterwards the Israeli army withdrew from Southern Lebanon and the SLA disintegrated.
video is an explicit example of the panoptic relation in the act of filming the operations. It is an act of threat to the SLA officers and soldiers that tells them they are constantly watched and can be targeted at any time.

This aspect of the surveillance videos can then be understood as a disciplining power. For Foucault, “disciplinary power [...] is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those who it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. In discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in its subjection” (ibid, 187). This is precisely what is taking place in the Hezbollah videos of the first genre; the Israeli other and its agents are subjugated by the power of the invisible and omnipresent gaze behind the camera.

In the context of the panopticon, the gaze, its interiorization, and the economy of power are three elements that are fundamental to the exercise of power. Whereas in the panopticon, the gaze and its interiorization are directed toward inmates who are already subjugated to the institutional power, Hezbollah’s gaze in the filmed operations is a resistance strategy that seeks to establish this domination, or rather the exercise of power, over a stronger other, namely the Israeli army and public. The video viewpoints are telling the other’s public: “We can see you wherever you are.” This gaze thus seeks to be interiorized in the mind of the other (namely the Israeli public and the collaborators in the SLA) as a way to exercise power or counter-power. This is one of the fundamentals of psychological warfare, which is a large part of Hezbollah’s strategy.

Furthermore, surveillance in the context of the panopticon is effective, especially in terms of the economy of power and the cost needed to exercise such power. The low cost of these videos as small media productions relates directly to the economy of power in which Hezbollah attempts to leverage the little resources it has to exercise power over the Israeli other. Thus, the videos demonstrate a panoptic relation based on the notion of interiorization of the gaze as a way to ensure the exercise of power with the lowest possible material cost both in financial terms and in terms of the economy of violence. An act of violence that is shown “efficiently” can have a much bigger effect, in terms of instilling fear in the minds of the viewers, than a more indiscriminate and costly act of violence.

In short, when directed toward the Israeli public and army, these videos acquire a disciplining force. And discipline is a type of power, a modality for its exercise. It comprises a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, and targets, or, in other words, an anatomy of power (ibid, 215). The camcorder thus becomes a “weapon of perception,” and its role in the military strategy is no less important than the role of “weapons of destruction” (Virilio 1989, 6). As Andrew Exum writes: “Hezbollah soon discovered that its broadcasts had an effect not just on the Lebanese population but on the Israelis as well. “On the field, we hit one Israeli soldier,” one Hezbollah official explained. “But a tape of him crying for help affects thousands of Israelis. . . . We realized the impact of our amateur work on the morale of the Israelis” (Exum 2008).
3.2 Exhibiting power: hegemony and the promise of order

Hezbollah’s media strategy works as a military tactic to demoralize and terrorize the Israeli other. At the same time, however, it also affects a second public that is more sympathetic to its goals. The videos address this sympathetic (Lebanese and Arab) public in two ways. First, Hezbollah’s media provides a sense of empowerment and the potential for hegemony following the success of the resistance. The articulation of a counter-hegemonic discourse of empowered resistance can be seen not only in Hezbollah’s operational videos, but also in a pair of video games created by the Hezbollah Central Internet Bureau. Military media like these videos and games create emotional and perceptual ties to their authors, especially when married to historical and cultural tropes of martyrdom and justice. And it is these emotional ties that operate to empower and construct Hezbollah’s sympathizers as a people capable of resistance.

While the videos act as a disciplining mechanism on the Israeli public by exhibiting power to terrorize the enemy, when addressed to an audience sympathetic to Hezbollah, the videos have an entirely different effect. Here, they present a narrative of empowerment that acts to consolidate a hegemonic group identity around “resistance” as an empty signifier (see Chapter 2). Videos are a strategic asset in Hezbollah’s discourse of resistance and, more broadly, in a larger power structure used to subvert the domination of the other and consolidate a sense of belonging among their supporters. One of the fundamental functions of these videos is to articulate and sustain a group identity based on the idea of resistance against an Israeli other and on presenting this resistance as a potential alternative power. As we have seen above, these videos assume a position of power vis-à-vis the Israeli other. They place Hezbollah in the panoptic equation as the one who sees, watches, and shows. In addition, they assume power not only over the other but also over their own constituency by representing the movement as a hegemonic force.

The videos fulfil this role by propagating a discourse of empowerment to those sympathetic with Hezbollah or its opposition to Israel. This sense of empowerment and its message relate to a discursive shift that breaks with the 1967 defeat. The defeat of Nasser in 1967 was not only the defeat of an army. As I argued in Chapters 1 and 3, 1967 was the end of a discourse which provided a sense of hope and self esteem to Arab peoples in the wake of the colonial experience. Nasser’s discourse was based on propagating a belief in the power of Arabs to defeat Western imperialism and Israel as an imperialist project. In this sense, the Nasserist discourse broke the self-defeating discourse that dominated the Arab world notably after the declaration of the State of Israel and the defeat of the Arab armies in the 1948 war. However, the defeat of Nasser in 1967 announced the return of this self-lamenting Arab discourse based on beliefs in Israeli invincibility and Arab incapacity (made more pronounced by the presence of dictatorial regimes all over the Arab world that suppressed people’s belief in their control over their own destiny). Arguably, the interests of the Arab dictatorships – whether of the “moderate” or “axis of refusal” camp – coincided with Israeli interests in this regard. They all depended on nourishing the sense of popular incapacity and Israeli invincibility to justify the status quo and repressive laws. It was only with the rise of movements like the Palestinian Liberation...
Organization and leftist movements in Lebanon to the religious groups of the like of Hezbollah which flourished in the 1980’s\textsuperscript{16} that these images and discourses began to be broken.

In this context, Hezbollah’s emerging discourse was based precisely on reviving the sense of empowerment that characterized the Nasserist period and breaking with the dominant self-defeating discourse of incapacity and Israeli invincibility. Hezbollah’s video operations and other media productions must be read in this framework in order to understand the message they are communicating to the Arab and Lebanese publics and the reason they succeeded in addressing the desires of their Arab viewers. When Hezbollah show images of an Israeli tank exploding and its soldiers dying, or when their militants raise their flag over a defeated Israeli outpost, or when they capture enemy soldiers, they are primarily demonstrating the ability to defeat the Israeli army and the ability of a small group of militants to defeat the massive military might of Israel. This visual rhetoric – this exposition of an inverted power balance – is “our” power. And the “us” here refers to all those who see Israel – and other oppressive regimes – as an enemy that cannot be defeated. The “us” who are the target of Hezbollah’s discourse of empowerment that seeks precisely to invert this belief and promote a sense of the power of the oppressed (a notion that is essential to Shiite cultural frames of references and to Hezbollah’s ideology, as seen in previous chapters).

The representation of power is therefore part of the conditions for Hezbollah’s hegemonic discourse. The visual rhetoric that portrays Hezbollah as the powerful victor, or the dominant force, or a force able to defeat the enemy, allows the movement to present itself as a potential order and a potential hegemonic force. The potential to provide order in a state of disorder is, according to Laclau, an important and essential condition for the construction of a hegemonic political identity in times of crisis. By presenting itself as powerful, Hezbollah is able to promote itself as an alternative political identity. In Laclau’s Lacanian perspective, this relates to the promise of fulfilling the lack at the heart of the social and the desire for the lost real (Laclau 2007a). The videos thus offer the sympathetic viewers an image of power with which they can identify.

### 3.3 Playing the military operations

Hezbollah’s media strategy for empowering the Arab public is not limited to the distribution of video-taped operations. Hezbollah Central Internet Bureau has also produced the video games Special Force (2003) and Special Forces 2 (2007). The two war games are set in a specific place and time. The first one tells the story of the 2000 liberation, and players are invited to execute military operations that took place in reality. The second game is set during the 2006 war with Israel, and players are again invited to undergo training and then fight specific battles that took place during that war. The documentary aspect of the games is represented by their settings in historical moments and the re-enactment of real events. In a sense the video games – as first person shooter games – allow the players to enact and create their own military video operations in a virtual environment. And since it is a game, the only successful outcome in order

\textsuperscript{16} Arguably, the most important impact of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions in 2011 was precisely to break this sense of the incapacity of Arab peoples towards their own governments, and provide a sense of power of peoples over their governments – in other words, to re-establish the notion of the people as a historical agent.
to pass a level must be victory, otherwise the player must keep trying. In the two games – like in
the case of similar American Army games where the player can only be the American soldier
fighting the evil other\textsuperscript{17} – the players can only chose to be the Hezbollah fighters and the other is
always the Israeli army or its collaborators. The video games become not only re-enactments of
the video operations but also a chance for the players to actually be and not only identify with the
Hezbollah militants.

Sisler offers an insightful analysis of representations in video games, especially when it
comes to Arab and Muslim representations and self-representations. In doing so, he uses
Reichmuth and Werning’s term ‘neglected media’ (in Sisler 2008), which refers to media that have
“strong popular appeal and economic relevance” but little “cultural prestige and scientific
coverage”. He claims that these games present very explicit examples of mainstream
representations and stereotypes. Sisler argues that “in the digital age, video games have
established themselves as a form of mainstream media that shapes our comprehension and
understanding of the world by constructing, conveying and iterating various representations”
(Sisler 2006). According to Sisler, the enemy fighters in war games, deprived of any background
or individuality, can be compared to the Agamben’s notion of Homo sacer: “an individual
foreclosed from the political space proper, whose resistance is regarded as a criminal act” (Sisler
2008).\textsuperscript{18}

Hezbollah’s Special Force and Special Forces 2 mirror the dynamics and relations that
are found within the mainstream American first-person shooter games set in Arab or Muslim (-
like) environments. However, it inverts their roles, making the Muslim and Arab Hezbollah
fighter the hero and the Israeli soldier the enemy. Sisler argues that:

[The game] constructs two basic types of Arab and Muslim hero. The first is
a figure controlled by the player, a fearless warrior winning against the odds
despite being outnumbered by Zionist forces. The second is the fallen
comrade. Throughout the game these 'real fighters of the Hezbollah' are
consistently referred to as martyrs (\textit{al-shuhada’}), and the player character
finds their photographs at various points throughout the game (Sisler 2008).

I will come back to this notion of martyrdom as it appears in the video operations and
in the overall military narrative of Hezbollah later in this chapter. Even though the Hezbollah
games are, in Sisler’s words, “blatantly ideological and propagandistic” (ibid), they remain
nonetheless an example of a counter-hegemonic articulation of the conflict between the two
groups. As such, they essentially offer the players the possibility of becoming the Hezbollah
fighter and identifying with a game character that is not the American soldier killing Arabs or
Muslims. In this sense, the Hezbollah video games offer an alternative narrative that corresponds

\textsuperscript{17} For a discussion of the use of military video games by the American army and their influence on the
representation of war, see Pisters 2010. On the development of Arab and Muslim counter currents to these
American games see Sisler 2006 and Sisler 2008.

\textsuperscript{18} Sisler argues that one reason for the “simplification and schematization” of the enemy in video games is
 technological: “Non-player characters are depicted often by a limited number of reiterating textures, models and
other visual signifiers. Thus technological limitations intrinsically promote schematization, which leads to social
stereotyping” (Sisler 2008).
to the one we see in the military video operations in general where empowerment and the values of brotherhood and martyrdom are all explicitly articulated.

3.4 Perception and emotions: framing victory and showing martyrdom

The Hezbollah videos can perhaps be better understood in light of what Patricia Pisters has called the “logistics of perception 2.0”. In comparison with the aesthetics of disappearance and the de-humanized representation of war found in Virilio and Baudrillard’s accounts of WWI, WWII, and the first Gulf War (Virilio 1989; Virilio 1994; Baudrillard 1983; Baudrillard 1991), Pisters notes that with the emergence and spread of new media technologies has come a different aesthetics of war, in which amateur images are taken by phones or webcams (Pisters 2010). Furthermore, unconventional means of broadcasting these images provide a new way of representing and documenting war. Pisters constructs her argument using a number of examples taken from films made about the Iraq war. In these films, the convergence of different mediums and points of view allow for a different narration of the war, one that is in strict contrast to the single point of view satellite representations of the first Gulf war. “At the heart of its new logistics of perception” she writes, “there is a battle of different screens that translates into a conflict of points of views” (ibid).

The question of points of view is one of the fundamental aspects of the media war; the hegemonic struggle in which each party seeks to fix its own point of view and its own narrative. The technical possibilities of new media technologies allow less prominent parties to acquire the potential to create images, present a point of view through these subversive images, and broadcast them to different publics. This is where the affective dimension of such media texts becomes essential to the meaning they offer to different audiences. As Pisters writes:

The media has become a gigantic networked battle of screens where perceptual and psychological effects become affectively entangled. We can say that in this new logistics we are not passive spectators captured by institutional or ideological power, even though this remains a power that needs to be taken into account. What the Iraq War films of the logistics of perception 2.0 show us is that contemporary culture is traversed by multiple desires that are for a large part social, collective and unconscious (ibid).

The images of war that Hezbollah creates and broadcasts offer the viewers access to the point of view of the fighters and establish an emotional experience of war in its grainy virtual reality, rather than the distanced oral description limited to numbers of casualties or satellite images that made up the coverage of the first Gulf war. Pisters concludes that: “By making new images, or simply by being affected by these images, we can participate in bringing back reality to the heart of the vortex of our multiple screens. Paradoxically, it is possible to conclude that in the face of the multiplication of ever increasing screens, reality does not disappear but returns with an affective vengeance”(ibid).

The emotional and affective power of the images can be understood in terms of Castells’s argument about framing and the way power relations and politics are decided more and
more in the realm of the media and communication (Castells 2009; Castells 2007). In his book Communication Power, Castells uses research in cognitive science and neuroscience to explain the way in which media and framing operate, using the American media and the war on terrorism as examples. Castells argues that it is not so much logic and rationality that guides our understanding and political decision-making, but rather our affective and the emotional frames. In this sense, efficient media strategies rely on the emotional framing that appeal to people’s cognitive and affective frames (Castells 2009, 154-178). He writes that “when emotional mechanisms are triggered in the brain’s surveillance system, higher-level decision capacities are activated, leading to more attention to information and a more active information search. This is why deliberate framing is typically based on the arousal of emotions” (ibid, 156). This argument is related to the idea of populism inasmuch as the emotional framing that Castells talks about can create the link between the viewers and the message that Laclau argues is central to the modes of identification and inclusion in the category of “people.” The emotional frames that define the relation between the videos and their viewers (whether sympathetic or not) determine the identification of the viewers with the Hezbollah combatants or the Israeli soldiers and therefore their inclusion in or exclusion from the “people of the resistance.”

Hezbollah’s videos are the work of a special unit of militants whose role is to accompany fighters on military missions and film them. What we see – or the videos that we eventually get to see – are the videos of successful missions, or at least those that otherwise serve the agenda of the producers. In this sense, the videos that are publicized are the ones that successfully show the victory of the resistance and have gone through a process of filtering prior to their broadcast. The message is therefore pre-determined by the producers to be one that precisely shows the ability of the resistance to defeat its enemy, and the form in which the confrontation takes place. In other words, the videos show military success, and frame military failures (when they are shown) in a narrative of martyrdom that fits into Hezbollah’s overall resistance narrative. The importance of martyrdom in this case becomes about framing death, and relates back to the importance of emotional framing in Castells. In this sense, the videos are intentionally framed to provoke a specific emotional reaction according to the cultural and emotional frames of reference of their respective viewers.

The videos portray not only victory over death, but victory in death. This is where the narrative of Ashura becomes central to the understanding of the messages conveyed by the videos. Ashura is not simply a ritual enacting the tragedy around which the Shiite identity is constructed, but also represents the fundamental system of values that Hezbollah keeps reasserting in its media discourse. The meaning of martyrdom, honour, defiance, resistance, and self-sacrifice all appear in both Ashura and Hezbollah’s narratives. Shiite political ideologies have often used the Ashura narrative as a metaphor for their present suffering. The case of Iran is perhaps the most significant example in modern times (Nasr 2006, 132-134). According to the traditional narrative, Hussein, son of Ali and grandson of the Prophet Mohammed, willingly encountered death when outnumbered in the battle of Karbala. His act resonates in Hezbollah’s portrayal of its own struggles against an enemy much larger both in number and equipment (ibid, 119-145). The men we see in the filmed operations are all “soldiers of Hussein” who chose death rather than humiliation, as expressed in the famous Shiite motto that the Hezbollah adopted as theirs, “Hayhat menna el zolla” (literally, “Away from us is humiliation”). This fundamental
aspect of the frame of reference of Hezbollah’s audience is of utmost importance in understanding the meaning that these videos convey to the party’s public.

It should perhaps be noted that images from the filmed operations are very often used in Hezbollah’s music video clips (which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5) and other visual genres as a constant reminder of the successes of the party’s military wing and of the power that they try to show to their audiences in Lebanon, the Arab world, and Israel.

Comparing the way in which the Israeli soldiers encounter death and the way the Hezbollah fighters do becomes an essential component in the construction of the group’s identity. The representation of the Israeli soldier screaming in pain is juxtaposed with the broadcast images of Hezbollah militants delivering their last words before going to a battle from which they are aware they might not come back alive. In fact, compilations of these “martyrs’ messages” are also available on DVDs and other media. In these videos, Hezbollah militants who have died in battle say their last words to their families, the community, and the world before departing on their potentially final missions. This notion of a honourable death is one that is common to military discourses and does not derive from a specifically Islamic context. In this sense, the juxtaposition of videos showing Israeli soldiers wounded in battle crying for help with the video messages of the calm and serene Hezbollah fighters provides the basic comparison and the essence of the movement’s message about death on the two sides of the war: the cowardly enemy versus the courageous resistance fighter.

What can be concluded in terms of the role of the videos when it comes to the sympathetic audience is therefore twofold: First, the videos act as a confirmation of the movement’s potential to be hegemonic, and by doing so provide the conditions for political identification with the movement, and legitimate it as a possible alternative order in times of crisis. Second, the videos articulate a narrative of resistance around the notion of martyrdom and death by employing the visual rhetoric of death to sustain the association of Hezbollah’s struggle with the cultural recognition of the Ashura narrative and the just struggle against occupation.

4. The videos as archives

The effects of the videos on sympathetic audiences are not, however, limited to their presentation as journalistic material. The videos also confirm these narratives of empowerment and consolidation as a people when they are placed in archives and re-broadcast in different contexts as re-used footage in new media texts. In their role as archival materials, as in their role as journalistic and military materials, the videos help to articulate a shared memory and a narrative of Hezbollah’s resistance. This section focuses on the videos’ second form of existence as archives, focusing on their contribution to the construction of a narrative of resistance.

4.1 From the event to the archive

Every act of speech implies the construction of a self-image, and it was the starting point of my analysis to look at these three videos as “speech acts” through which Hezbollah constructs its own self-image. I have argued that by showing these videos, Hezbollah is engaging in what Dayan calls “gaze acts.” Furthermore, the shift in the presentation of the videos — from
being broadcast on TV as part of the news section to being “relegated” to online archives — corresponds to a shift of meaning and function of these videos within the discourse of Hezbollah.¹⁹

As archival materials, the videos are no longer seen for their newsworthiness, but as proof that this happened at one time and can happen again. In other words, they function as a constant reminder of Hezbollah’s narrative of empowerment and resistance. The videos thus construct and sustain a common memory and a visual rhetoric that consolidates Hezbollah’s narrative of constant self-empowerment (Mohsen and Mzannar 2001, 71-103). The videos thereby become a representation of a reality that contends for the dominance of the prevalent discourse, a site of the struggle over discourse (and truth) and within discourse. In other words, the filmed operations are meant to break this inability of self-representation by acquiring an “eye,” a “gaze,” and a power to contest the domination of the other. Furthermore, the sense of empowerment that the videos provide to the supporters of Hezbollah and the threatening impact on the Israeli public shows the affective dimension of and the role of emotional frames in the process of identification.

4.2 The political function of images

Patricia Pisters argues “that images as images (documentary, fiction, analogue, digital) operate on the mind, can change our perception and as such are a “political player,” with consequences that range from imperceptible to global, from the most liberating to the most destructive” (Pisters 2012, Chapter 7). In this sense, producing images is always a political act that disrupts or influences the political sphere. Chapter 2 argued that resistance is an attempt to be heard and seen. In this sense, producing images is essential to the process of resistance or transgression. Solanas and Getino reflect this idea in their description of the revolutionary third cinema. The two filmmakers state that “the image of reality is more important than reality itself. It is a world peopled with fantasies and phantoms in which what is hideous is clothed in beauty, while beauty is disguised as the hideous.” In this context, they claim that a “cinema of the revolution” must be both a cinema of “destruction and construction” (Solanas and Getino 1969). Such a cinema must destroy the dominant images propagated by neo-colonialism and construct new images: “a throbbing, living reality which recaptures truth in any of its expressions” (ibid).

¹⁹ By discourse, I mean the various elements from institutions to texts and spaces. In other words, I understand discourse with Laclau and Mouffe, who (as mentioned in Chapter 2), break with Foucault’s distinction between the discursive and non-discursive, and redefine ‘discourse’ in a way that might more productively be compared with Foucault’s notion of ‘dispositive’. Foucault defines a dispositive as “an absolutely heterogeneous assembly which involves discourses, institutions, architectural structures, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific enunciations, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions; in short: as much the said as the un-said, these are the elements of the dispositive. The dispositive is the network which is arranged between these elements (...) with the term dispositive, I understand a type of—so to speak—formation which in a certain historical moment had as its essential function to respond to an emergency. The dispositive therefore has an eminently strategic function...” (Foucault Œuvres Écrits Vol III, qtd. in Bussolini 2010). The dispositive itself is the net that can be woven between these elements. In this sense it is the shell that envelops both discursive and non-discursive practices and materializations (Wodak and Meyer 2001, 29-30). In the case of Hezbollah, the dispositive groups the party’s military, social, and political institutions (hospitals, schools, universities, scouts, parliamentary bloc, services, media, research centres, etc.) alongside the discursive elements present in media, such as these videotapes and other productions (music videos, songs, posters, political statements, etc.), and their institutionalized archiving.
The cinema of the revolution, like the Hezbollah video operations, is an act of creating new alternative images that challenge and contest the dominant ones. Such an act is essentially about proposing new ways of showing and narrating reality – or providing a new reality and new meanings. The idea that resistance is about being heard is also apparent when Solanas and Getino write that:

This cinema of the masses, which is prevented from reaching beyond the sectors representing the masses, provokes with each showing, as in a revolutionary military incursion, a liberated space, a decolonised territory. The showing can be turned into a kind of political event, which, according to Fanon, could be 'a liturgical act, a privileged occasion for human beings to hear and be heard' (ibid).

This brings us back to the practice of videotaping military operations and their broadcast. This practice becomes a means to act politically upon the dominant narrative of reality to establish new images and new meanings of the struggle and its actors by attempting to articulate and broadcast a message that will become a shared memory. Hezbollah’s practice seems to be loyal to Solanas and Getino’s statement that “every image that documents, bears witness to, refutes or deepens the truth of a situation is something more than a film image or purely artistic fact; it becomes something which the System finds indigestible” (ibid).

The importance and function of the production of such videos and images by Hezbollah reflects the initial imbalance in the mediascape (Mattelart 1995), in which the dominant narrative is the one propagated by the Western media. Hezbollah’s discursive and media strategies are thus aimed at establishing a balance in this field by providing access to new ways of meaning and image production and propagation (videotaping, producing content and broadcasting this content via various official and unofficial media networks from DVDs and VHS tapes to their satellite TV channel), as well as by archiving as an institutionalization of a shared memory.

I want to emphasize one final link between Hezbollah’s media strategies and those proposed by the third cinema as a practice that is part of the revolutionary process. It is interesting to note that Solanas and Getino insist that a revolutionary movement must be invested in all layers of social life in order to prepare for or sustain the revolutionary process. It is essential for every aspect of life to serve the needs of the revolution: from the work of art, to agriculture, industry, and the organization of society. This aspect of the revolutionary process can be also seen in the way in which Hezbollah as a social and political movement has been preoccupied not only with propagating a message to an audience, but also with organizing their social constituency in a way that can empower and serve their struggle: archiving, education, agriculture, production, economy, urban planning and other layers of life are all touched by specific institutions run by the party (Harb and Leenders 2005; Fawaz 2009; Early 2006).

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20 And, as I argued earlier in the Chapter following Dayan, reality exists only through the way it is shown.
4.3 Re-articulating the archive

In this vast “dispositive” of the revolution mass communication will occupy a special place inasmuch as it is considered, in the words of Solanas and Getino, as “more effective for neocolonialism than napalm.” However, the efficiency of communication and images can also be made to benefit any movement of counter-colonialism or resistance: “The capacity for synthesis and the penetration of the film image, the possibilities offered by the living document, and naked reality, and the power of enlightenment of audiovisual means make the film far more effective than any other tool of communication” (Solanas and Getino 1969).

Within this framework of the image and communication as means of resistance and transgression, the archive is a place where past, present and future are articulated. It therefore has a central function in the process of acquiring a voice and articulating a hegemonic discourse that fixes a narrative of history and institutionalizes a specific system of power and knowledge. In his famous work on the archive, Derrida writes that “there is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory” (Derrida 1996, 4). The archive is a location where power imagines itself, its past, its present and its future: “The archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future” (ibid, 68). The archive is by no means a rigid or fixed collection of documents, rather it is a space open to re-articulation, where meanings are constructed on all levels of the archiving process. From the organization, physical and thematic, to the exhibition and the access to a database and its subsequent use in new media texts, the archive is a living political being. As Ketelaar argues in relation to Derrida, “archives not merely serve to preserve an archivable content of the past. No, life itself and its relation to the future are determined by the technique of archiving” (Ketelaar 2001).

In the same logic, James Scott argues that "the archive reflects realities as perceived by the ‘archivers’ ” (Scott 1998; in Ketelaar 2001). The archivers, in this case Hezbollah, present reality as they perceive it and want to show it. By building an archive of their images and texts, the group actively constructs an archive of the movement’s memory and its perception of reality – an archive that challenges the dominant representation of the war. In this sense, Hezbollah operate like a state that builds its own history and identity by fixing a specific perception of history and present and making it hegemonic. The archives are certainly not fixed, and are subject to a constant process of re-articulation in various new texts with different meanings. This is evident in the use of these videos as archival material in new videos that demonstrate either the power and legitimacy of Hezbollah, or their aggression and terrorism. YouTube is filled with such amateur editing of these videos.

Derrida writes that “the archivization produces as much as it records the event” (Derrida 1996, 17). The events depicted in the video operations are re-produced in a different guise by the archivization and their subsequent re-articulation produces new events. The archive thus produces new spaces of meaning and memory, spaces where these images can be revisited and re-read and where new meanings can be produced. Pisters writes of this process that “each future use of the archive will change all of its previous meanings, and new meanings will continue to be added” (Pisters 2012, Chapter 7). In fact, as Ketelaar concludes, “once we no longer assume that there is only one reality or meaning or truth, but many, no one better than the other, we can try to find these multiple meanings by interrogating not only the administrative context,
but also the social, cultural, political, religious contexts of record creation, maintenance, and use” (Ketelaar 2001). Whether online or on various recording media, the images acquire a new function as documents to be incorporated in narratives of the war and the community and in the construction of a common visual memory that Hezbollah will attempt to make hegemonic by re-using and re-articulating these images in other media forms.  

Technological advancements – most notably digital video and the Internet – have provided a new space for archiving as well as for the re-articulation of archives. The limits of VHS and other analogue video formats when it comes to the possibilities of editing and broadcasting or distributing have been overcome by new video and internet technologies. Hezbollah’s video operations and other archival material are available online and on DVDs of varying qualities. Furthermore, the ease and accessibility of digital amateur video editing software and individual broadcasting potential on websites such as YouTube and Google Video opened up the way for the re-use of the archives in new ways and to deliver new messages. These technological advancements thus open up the archive for re-articulation by various actors, making the internet itself a sort of open and accessible archive where meanings can constantly be contested and reframed, while also allowing the movement to create and institutionalize a shared memory and articulate its own narrative of resistance.

In sum, what the videos discussed in this chapter show is that the strategies by which Hezbollah transgresses the prevalent dominant power build on the strategies of the very power it is transgressing: the exhibition of power and the institutionalization of memory. The Israeli portrayal of their own military power or the American exhibition of military force in the Iraq war, for example, can both be compared to Hezbollah’s filmed operations inasmuch as they aim at exhibiting power and military capacities.

In addition to being acts of showing in the military context, the videos are instrumental in advancing new systems of values and truths and in articulating a narrative and an identity of what Hezbollah calls “resistance.” The most important aspect of this discursive conflict over meanings and hegemony is the differing definitions and meanings of empty signifiers according to the social, cultural and political positions of the receivers. In other words, the conflict becomes one that pertains to advancing new meanings and chains of equivalence to empty signifiers such as freedom, justice, martyrdom, and so on. For example, within liberal democracies, the notion of ‘freedom’ is understood as individual social freedom, whereas within the nationalist and Islamic discourses it is understood as the group’s freedom from foreign influence (Dawisha 2005, 70 – 71). The same goes for democracy, which is a notion that Hezbollah adopted in their narrative as being the free choice of people to be represented by what the West calls terrorist groups. In these videos, we see that the meaning of violence depends on its reception by audiences sympathetic or opposed to Hezbollah and its struggle and the function of the videos depends on the address and the political and emotional position of the receivers.

The issue then becomes one of understanding the relation between resistance and terrorism. The videos themselves are reminiscent of this opposition. Their reception, following

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21 See Chapters 5 and 6.
22 Pisters argues “the interpenetration of film’s archival function and its instantaneity and contingency is even more evident in contemporary image culture, where anything can be filmed at any time and uploaded to the internet—now a giant open archive (or “viral archive,” as opposed to institutional archives which in their openness tend to offer more mediation” (Pisters 2012, Chapter 7).
the cultural recognition of the two targeted groups, is exemplary. The videos have a double discursive power and are addressed to two publics whose understanding of the visual message is opposed by the very opposition of terrorism and resistance and the “cultural recognition” of each targeted group (Lambert 1986, 95) or their emotional frames (Castells 2009).

Furthermore, the videos operate as a common imaginary that sustains and reaffirms the group narrative of identity by advancing an image of a powerful self that pertains to a system of values proper to the party’s community of supporters and sympathizers. These videos provide the visual confirmation of Hezbollah’s discourse of “resistance,” which is constantly trying to give the Arab audience a sense of empowerment within a conflict in which they have historically seen themselves as the incapable victims. This promise of order provides the conditions for Hezbollah’s discourse of resistance to become hegemonic precisely by demonstrating its capacity as an alternative power. Finally, inscribing the videos as events in an archive creates a new space for memory and new possibilities of articulation and re-articulation. The next chapter will return to this re-articulation aspect, examining music videos as examples of media productions that re-articulate both Nasrallah’s speeches and Hezbollah’s military operations.