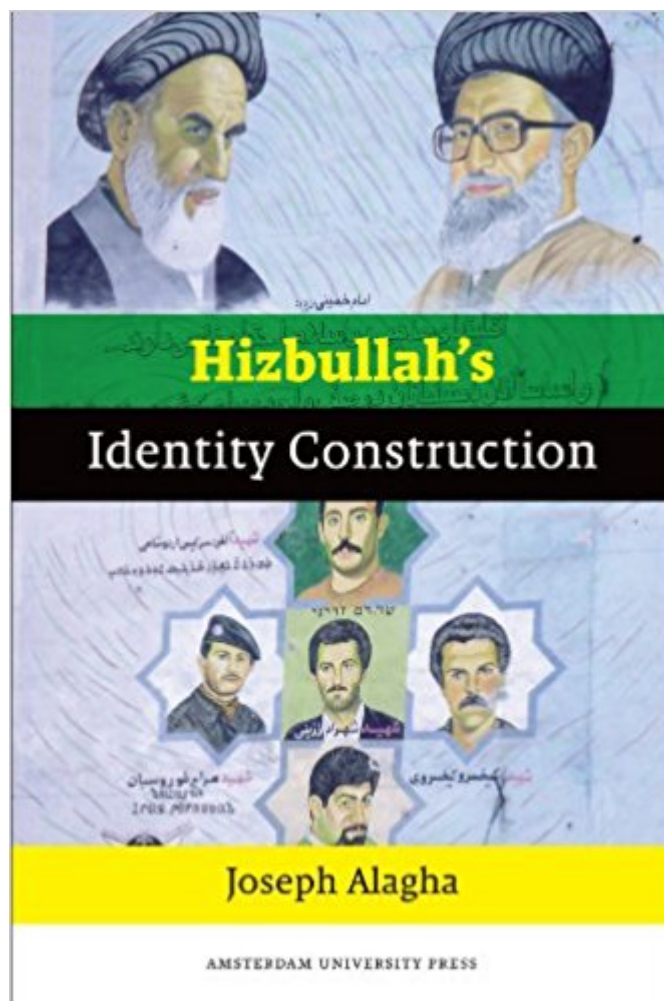


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# Hizbullah's Identity Construction



## Synopsis

As the dominant political force in Lebanon and one of the most powerful post-Islamist organizations in the world, Hizbullah is a source of great controversy and uncertainty in the West. Despite the significant attention paid to this group by the media, the details of Hizbullah's evolution have frequently confounded politicians and even scholars. In this important study, Joseph Alagha, a scholar with unprecedented access to the organization, exhaustively and objectively analyzes Hizbullah's historical evolution and offers a revolutionary new perspective on the political phenomenon of the organization. Hizbullah's Identity Construction is a timely examination of one of the world's most turbulent regions; a major contribution to the study of contemporary Islamic political movements in the Middle East; and a refreshing departure from the bland hagiographies and ad hominem attacks that are all too common in studies of Hizbullah's murky history. Superbly documented and argued, and rooted in broad knowledge of contemporary Islamist political thought, this study brings much-needed clarity to a hot-button subject. Joseph Alagha remains one of the most thorough and careful analysts of Hizbullah's political ideology and practice. Scholars, analysts, and policy makers will find in this work a veritable treasure trove of research and insights into this complex organization. —Michaëlle Browsers, Wake Forest University

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Alagha offers a nuanced and sophisticated look at how Hizbullah's ideology and political tactics have evolved. His work sheds light on an important, but to Western audiences mysterious and opaque, political force in Lebanon. —Daniel L. Byman, Director of Georgetown's Security

Studies Program and the Center for Peace and Security Studies and Associate Professor at the School of Foreign Service (Daniel L. Byman)"Hizbullah's identity construction is an intelligent contribution to the academic debate on the dynamics of change in the political identity of Islamist movements; a process which is far from being concluded. Alagha's reliance on a robust empirical basis and his analysis also of the most recent events make this study a valuable addition to the literature on the subject". -- Filippo Dionigi, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK. *International Affairs* 87.5 (September 2011): 1262-1264. (Filippo Dionigi) "Joseph Alagha's book is to date one of the most scrupulous and meticulously researched works on Hizbullah. Articulate, and devastatingly accurate, Alagha's work is a refreshing departure from the bland panegyric hagiographies that have defined the canon of those plodding the marshes of Hizbullah's murky history. "Franck Salameh, Assistant Professor of Near Eastern Studies, Arabic, and Hebrew, Boston College, USA. Author of *Language, Memory and Identity in the Middle East: The Case of Lebanon* (2010) (Franck Salameh) "Joseph Alagha has written the most up-to-date study of the Shi'i organization, Hizbullah. Through an analysis of Hizbullah's identity, Alagha carefully follows the evolution of the organization's political ideology as it has changed to respond to the challenges of the time. His book underscores the dynamism of Hizbullah and demonstrates the extent of the organization's successes as well as predicaments and possible future challenges. To the best of my knowledge, there is no work that covers the evolution of Hizbullah's ideology all the way to 2010 so extensively and meticulously. "Professor Asher Kaufman, a leading specialist on the tri-border area of Israel, Lebanon and Syria, and a Lebanon Identity expert, Notre Dame University (Asher Kaufman) "This is a fascinating and innovative exploration of one of the most controversial religio-political movements of the last half century. Alagha's deep knowledge of Hizbullah and complete command of his sources provide new insights into both the theological uniqueness of Shi'i Islam in Lebanon, and the complex relationship between Islam and nationalism that is used to justify the movement's extreme violence, particularly through suicide bombings. A sure must-read for any scholar or policymaker looking better to understand Hizbullah's history and possible futures. "Mark Levine, Professor of Modern Middle East History at the University of California, Irvine (Mark Levine) "Alagha's book on Hizbullah's ideology and history is a must-read for anyone interested in the politics of Islam and the modern Middle East. Based in part on fieldwork among Hizbullah's members, the author offers a nuanced and original reading of the movement's inner workings and ideological developments as well as the unvarnished views of many Hizbullahis. "Bernard Haykel is Professor of Near Eastern Studies and Director of the Institute for

the Transregional Study of the Contemporary Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia (TRI) at Princeton University (Bernard Haykel)â œThis is a thorough analysis based on deep knowledge of Hizbullah and Lebanese politics in its regional context. Hizbullahâ™s transformation and performance undergoes a rigorous critique that debunks main myths about the Party and demonstrates its phenomenal influence in Lebanese politics and its significant regional role. The work points out Hizbullahâ™s structural limitations despite its proven adaptability to changing circumstance. The methodology that the author employs and his painstaking research, allows him to reach conclusions that make the work a corrective to previous scholarship on

Hizbullah.â •â” Ibrahim G. Aoude, Professor and Chair, Department of Ethnic Studies, University of Hawai’i, USA, and Editor of Arab Studies Quarterly (Ibrahim G. Aoude)â œSince its birth in the early 1980s, Hizbullah has emerged not only as the preeminent Shia organization in Lebanon and the Arab world, but also as the most effective link in the chain of â^resistanceâ™ to Israel and pro-Western Arab forces. For an organization that is so outwardly radical, it is extraordinary that it also behaves so pragmatically â “Â joining the Lebanese government, on the one hand, and cultivating close links with militant Lebanese Maronite elements, on the other. Hizbullah then is an enigma, and its ability to successfully navigate the Middle Eastâ™s complex power relationships is mystifying. Hence the importance of Joseph Alaghaâ™s new book on Hizbullah, for in this major new study he provides the most comprehensive account of the rise and staying in power of Hizbullah to date. This is a compelling read which demystifies Hizbullah and also the Middle Eastâ™s apparently contradictory relationships. A must-read.â • Anoush Ehteshami, Professor of International Relations, Durham University (Anoush Ehteshami)â œJoseph Alaghaâ™s latest book is a major contribution to the understanding ofÂ Hizbullahâ™s position not only in Lebanon or the Shiâ^ite world, but also in world politics. It combines the mastery on Hizbullahâ™s ideology through its major thinkers and its relation to the Shiâ^ite intellectual production in Iran and elsewhere. It shows in particular the change within Hizbullahâ™s major political and ideological stances and their flexibility in terms of modernization, opening up the Islamic views to many modern ones, which were once thought as antagonistic to Islam. Alagha displays a rare mastery of ideological and socio-political analysis, combining them in a scholarly view that makes this book indispensable for understanding this movement within the Muslim world.â •â” Farhad Khosrokhavar, Professor of Sociology at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), Paris; Yale and Harvard Visiting Professor. Author of Inside Jihadism: Understanding Jihadi Movements Worldwide (2009) and Suicide Bombers: Allahâ™s New Martyrs (2005) (Farhad Khosrokhavar)â œJoseph Alagha remains one of the most thorough and careful analysts of

Hizbullah's political ideology and practice. Scholars, analysts, and policymakers will find in this work a veritable treasure trove of research and insights into this complex organization.

• "Michaëlle Browsers, Associate Professor of Political Science, Wake Forest University, North Carolina, USA. Author of *Political Ideology in the Arab World* (2009) and *Democracy and Civil Society in Arab Political Thought* (2006) (Michaëlle Browsers) • Joseph Alagha's *Hizbullah's Identity Construction* is a fresh perspective on Hizbullah, whose hydra-like nature has perplexed and confounded laymen and scholars alike. Based on an expansive, impressive use of primary and secondary sources, the study offers an in-depth analysis, in theory and practice, on Hizbullah's construction and reconstruction of its identity unrivalled in its minute details and exposition.

• "Robert G. Rabil, Associate Professor of Political Science and Director of Graduate Studies, Florida Atlantic University, USA. Author of *Syria, the United States and the War on Terror in the Middle East* (2006) and *Embattled Neighbors: Syria, Israel, Lebanon* (2003) (Robert G. Rabil) • The political landscape of Lebanon is remarkable in its constant flux which keeps the country and its citizens in an enduring "emergency" mode, while at the same time maintaining an equally remarkable stability in its political groupings and their internal dynamics. The exception to this rule has been Hizbullah which introduced a new and powerful factor into Lebanese politics in the 1980s and which has also undergone extensive internal evolution in the three decades since its formation. This new book by Joseph Alagha continues his earlier work in carefully dissecting Hizbullah's inner workings and transformations as well as its impact on the wider Lebanese public sphere. Meticulous in its detail and documentation, this is a must-read for anyone interested in Lebanon and in socio-religious movements in general.

• "Seteney Shami, Director of the Program on the Middle East and North Africa at the Social Science Research Council of America (SSRC). (Seteney Shami) • Joseph Alagha's portrait of Hizbullah reveals an organization that has gradually changed its identity and its policies, becoming more Lebanese and more political as it has had to cope with the harsh realities of the environment in which it operates. His discussion of "wilayat al-faqih" and the "New Manifesto" of 2009 will be particularly enlightening to most Western readers.

• "William B. Quandt, Edward R. Stettinius Professor of Politics, University of Virginia (William B. Quandt)

Joseph Alagha is associate professor of Islamic studies at Radboud University Nijmegen in the Netherlands.

This is the most comprehensive academic analysis of Hezbollah yet published. Written by an author

who has already made several contributions to this field of study, the book offers an in-depth and developed understanding of the evolution of the party, and of its religious and political ideology. I have read every other book written in English on Hezbollah pre-2011, as the party is the focus of my postgraduate study. As such, I can say with some modicum of authority that this particular publication is the best of the bunch - much of what is available is either journalism (informative and interesting but devoid of rigorous academic analysis) or exists merely to provide a mouthpiece to an interested party (the USA, Israel or Hezbollah). There is a small selection of other decent works on Hezbollah, but Alagha's latest book has several significant advantages. The first is that it is the only one which follows Hezbollah right up until the beginning of the 'Arab Spring' - many of the others are simply out-of-date for such a dynamic subject. The second advantage is that the book does not suffer from many of the basic factual, chronological and terminological errors to be found in other works. The final major advantage is that it displays a profound cultural and ideological understanding, a factor shared with perhaps two other works I can think of. This is not 'easy reading'; it is an academic text, written and laid-out in 'thesis' style - if you are looking for an introduction to the party this is probably not the best place to start. However, for students and researchers (and I would suggest journalists and policy-makers), this is by far the best option to date.

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