Faith and Resistance: The Politics of Love and War in Lebanon

Sarah Marusek
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Faith and Resistance: The Politics of Love and War in Lebanon by Sarah Marusek is a brave, timely, and innovative investigation that not only introduces readers to the historical development of Lebanon and Shi'i Islam in the modern era but also challenges scholars to question how they study religious activism. The volume is based on over two years of intermittent fieldwork in Lebanon and Iran spread out from 2009 and 2017. The gist of Marusek's argument is that the religious activism of Lebanon's Hizbollah, and the wider Islamic resistance movement, can be examined through the lens of liberation theology. This analytical move is grounded in her desire to push the boundaries on how Shi'i activism is conceptualized and studied by Western scholars—to show us that there are multiple ways of making sense from fieldwork experience and archival research. This openness to experiment with new theoretical frameworks, research methods, and, perhaps most importantly, to engage in comparative studies of the Middle East makes the volume a significant contribution to different fields of study.

Marusek's comparison of Shi'i activism with liberation theology, however, may unsettle those experts who wish to examine Hizbollah as a terrorist organization, as well as scholars who are uncomfortable with comparing Shi'ism with liberation theology due to the latter's roots in Christianity. However, Marusek responds persuasively to these criticisms with grace and precision. Citing Frantz Fanon in chapter 3, Marusek argues that violence against oppression can be "a cleansing force that frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction" (67). In other words, one person's "terrorist" may be another's "freedom fighter," and as academics it is not our place to make value judgments but rather to understand the dynamics that forge these categories for the people we encounter during fieldwork. With this reminder regarding the inherently political nature of research, Marusek reinforces the work of other scholars of the Middle East who have refused to study Hizbollah with a lens that is colored by the US-Israeli military alliance. She illustrates that, like countries in the Middle East, Latin American countries also experienced Western colonization, and their resistance movements were viewed with a terrorist lens. She states:

"Indeed, much like Shi'i activism, liberation theology is a post-colonial response to entrenched systems of dependent capitalism, where ruling elites benefit from local peoples being economically and technologically reliant upon the West" (54). Moreover, in chapter 2, Marusek gives a detailed description of how influential Shi'i leaders in Lebanon and Iran were in fact influenced by, enchanted by, and engaged with wider political movements and philosophies of the "East and West" (34). For instance, she recounts Ali Shariati's (the Iranian revolutionary and sociologist) criticism of capitalism and his alignment with Marxist ideas. Similar attention is given to personal conduct in society and support of the oppressed and exploited in Marusek's investigation of Ayatollah Fadlallah and Imam Musa Sadr. It is the focus on alleviating poverty, living with the poor, and remaining focused on liberating the exploited that makes a comparison between Shi'i activism and liberation theology revealing and plausible for Marusek.

The book makes several empirical and theoretical contributions which are undergirded by a methodological approach Marusek describes as "a critical ethics of love, seeking to understand 'the Other' in her full humanity" (75). However, she emphasizes that we must frame love as love "for and of the stranger" to remain critical by recognizing our own positionality as outsiders, but also the broader implications of the empirical research gathered during ethnographic fieldwork (77). Marusek joins other critical scholars, particularly in literary studies, who have stressed the importance of "leaning in" as we analyze archival research and interview material. The aim of this methodological approach is to understand people's agency within the confinements of their own social settings, institutional boundaries, and aspirations, instead of comparing them to a real or imagined standard which is confabulated from our own experiences.

Another significant methodological intervention that Marusek makes is through her use of secondary sources. There is often the misconception that those who carry out field research are routinely given access and generally conduct useful interviews. This is rarely the case. Most researchers are forced to develop creative ways for engaging with their questions once faced with real-time barriers on the ground. Marusek discusses some of the difficulties she encountered during fieldwork work due to US foreign policy in Lebanon, but also demonstrates the insight she nevertheless gathered on the interplay between rational thought, liberalism, and faith in Hizbollah through explorations of Islamic charities. Yet what brings all of these points together is her excellent use of secondary sources, which demonstrates

how field research not only results in the gathering of "data" in the form of quotes and archival documentation, but also generates anew the reading of secondary sources. With this creative methodological approach, Marusek sets a welcoming tone for alternative ways that academics can examine hard-to-access movements that are understood as liberating by the people who work within them.

Following the introduction and a discussion of methodology, the chapters that focus more on archival and ethnographic research continue to challenge normative approaches for studying Islamic resistance movements in Lebanon, such as Hizbollah. For instance, in chapters 4 and 5, Marusek stresses the importance of recognizing faith as one of the motivating factors that pulls pious Muslim volunteers towards Islamic charity organizations, as well as the role of faith in the institutional framework of charities. Institutionally, Islamic charity organizations, such as Al-Mabarrat, care about the "cohesion of the community" and not only meeting individual needs (110). Piety during everyday life, understood to be an internal commitment to religious values, is posited by Marusek's interviewees to be central for their collaboration with these charities. The charities that Marusek studied include organizations affiliated with the Al-Mabarrat Association, the Imam Al-Sadr Foundation, and Hizbollah-affiliated charities. With the interplay of faith but also with a commitment to international standards, these charities endorse the resistant subjectivities of their volunteers and of the communities that they serve. This resistive subjectivity, however, is not one that is committed to military violence, but instead is rooted in "a counter-hegemonic state of mind that centers its values around faith, Islam, and a commitment to the margins" (155). These two chapters together contribute to studies of charities in the Middle East that mostly draw attention to the economic significance of these organizations for the poor.

Chapter 6 completes the book's empirical discussions by addressing the drawbacks associated with a resistive subjectivity. Marusek recognizes that a resistive subjectivity does alienate some as it is firmly held in place by identity politics, and that caving in to global capitalist norms does not always result in an original approach to resistance. She discusses the problems associated with Hizbollah's support of the Syrian government and the ways in which this left many Lebanese and Hizbollah affiliates unsettled. There also exists tension for the neoliberal international partners that some of Islamic resistance charities have developed. For instance, in 2011, the Imam al-Sadr Foundation hired Booz & Company for consulting work that

avoided references to religion and instead moved the foundation towards neoliberalism through international standards on "impact" and "recognition." Chapter 6 continues the book's global-level analysis that explores the complexities of Islamic activism and presents the exclusivist tendencies that exist in Hizbollah as being in conflict with liberation or the fight against oppression. Chapter 7 concludes by arguing that "only by adopting a decolonial approach to the Islamic resistance movement, where faith and love are openly embraced in the process of our human efforts to understand others and construct knowledge, do religious rationality and loving strangers become revolutionary agents that widen decolonial horizons, expanding the possibilities for realising a more just world" (181). The chapters together push the reader to consider the following: What does freedom mean to you? What does freedom mean to us? Readers are forced to grapple with these questions—a task that is rarely addressed collectively in the politics of the Middle East or Islamic studies.

Marusek demonstrates the importance of quietness, care, and sensitivity to the production of knowledge. She also recognizes the contradictions that exist in resistance struggles which may be problematic but are nevertheless completely human. The volume will be of interest to researchers and students, but also to policy-makers who are committed to revising their approaches to studying and engaging with Lebanon's Islamist resistance. Marusek's *Faith and Resistance* is a welcomed contribution to the limited body of critical scholarship that exists on Lebanon's Hizbollah and its place in national, regional, and global politics. This book is a carefully thought out and timely contribution to decolonial studies that connects love and humanness to Islam, Christianity, and other theologies of liberation.

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