

'A brilliant, erudite and welcome addition to the growing body of work on Islamic liberation theology and decoloniality. Marusek compels the reader to transcend the limitations of a 'universalistic' Western secular modernity to explore counter-hegemonic modes of resistance that center their values around Islam, faith and a commitment to justice.'

Farid Esack, Professor in the Study of Islam, University of Johannesburg

What kind of decolonial possibilities exist in today's world? Exploring the rise of Islamic activism in Lebanon and the Middle East, and drawing transnational parallels with other revolutionary religious struggles in Latin America and South Africa, Sarah Marusek offers a timely analysis of the social and political evolution of Islamic movements.

The growing popularity of Islamic movements means that many groups, which emerged in opposition to Western imperialism, are now also gaining increasing economic and political powers.

Based on more than two and a half years of ethnographic fieldwork in Lebanon, Marusek paints a picture of how resistance is lived and reproduced in daily lives, tracing the evolution of the ideas and practices of the charities affiliated with Hizbullah and the wider Islamic resistance movement.

Adopting a dialectical approach, *Faith and Resistance* discusses the possibility for resistance groups to reconcile acquiring power with their decolonial aspirations. In doing so, the book acts as a guide for liberation struggles and those engaged in resistance the world over.

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Faith and Resistance Sarah Marusek



Faith and Resistance

The Politics of Love and War in Lebanon

Sarah Marusek



MIDDLE EAST STUDIES
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PLUTO PRESS

Preface

In the novel *Invisible Cities* by the Italian writer Italo Calvino, a fictional explorer named Marco Polo describes 55 cities to an ageing emperor, Kublai Khan, to convince the latter of his dying empire's vastness. 'I speak and speak,' Marco says, 'but the listener retains only the words he is expecting ... It is not the voice that commands the story: it is the ear' (Calvino 2010: 123). This quotation beautifully captures the predicament of Western scholarship when it comes to understanding Islam and the Middle East: ever since the Age of Enlightenment, what has been accepted as knowledge is deeply biased because the ear commanding the story has been a white, bourgeois, Western Christian male. In the contemporary era, this ear wants to hear that the Islamic resistance movement in Lebanon represents hatred and terrorism, not a legitimate challenge to the dominant coloniser/colonised relation that is foundational to Western secular modernity. As somebody who sees too much violence and oppression in today's status quo, I aim to present an alternative view – that the Islamic resistance movement has comparable goals to other post-colonial movements inspired by theologies of liberation. Furthermore, it is articulating its own way forward on its own terms.

By openly embracing the enchanted aspects of modernity and challenging the hegemony of Western secular liberalism, I argue that the Islamic resistance movement is resisting the continued hierarchy of European above non-European, what Quijano (2000) calls the coloniality of power. This is because Western colonialism was not only a political and economic system to extract wealth from the Global South, but also a wider cultural and intellectual project based on the idea that Europeans have the right to colonise non-Europeans. The Western colonial mission thus required two distinct phases of colonisation: the first physical, where Europeans occupied the Global South, subjugated non-European populations and built infrastructure; and the second structural, where the ideas and practices undergirding this colonial infrastructure – be they economic, political, religious, cultural or intellectual – reproduce the coloniality of power through institutionalising a conceptual system of hierarchical binaries: West/East (the Rest), rationality/faith, reason/

religion, modern/traditional, developed/backwards, etc. In this way, Europeans have crafted a particularly misleading conception of 'self' and 'Other' to justify the enslavement of non-Europeans, a binary now enshrined under Western secular liberalism. As a result, even though the physical structures of colonialism were dismantled in the last century, the coloniality of power remains intact. And as Nandy (2009: xi) points out, while the second colonisation was instituted to legitimise the first, 'Now, it is independent of its roots.'

This means that the coloniality of power continues to be reproduced on multiple levels that go beyond the scope of world systems theory, an economic explanation for the existing core, periphery and external nations reproduced under capitalism (Wallerstein 1974). While capitalism undoubtedly continues to reproduce colonial inequalities, and often dominates debates about decolonisation, the coloniality of power extends to politics, culture, religion and knowledge production more generally.¹ Ultimately, this means that decoloniality requires more than just challenging neoliberal capitalism. As Grosfoguel points out, 'Given its entanglement with other power relations, destroying the capitalist aspects of the world-system would not be enough to destroy the present world-system' (2007: 219). He further adds that, 'The idea here is to decolonise political-economy paradigms as well as world-system analysis and to propose an alternative decolonial conceptualisation of the world-system' (Grosfoguel 2007: 212). This does not mean rejecting modern politics and the economy, but reimagining their conceptual horizons from a different social and cultural geography.

Building on almost two-and-a-half years of ethnographic fieldwork in Lebanon, spread out between 2009 and 2017, I present an alternative view of the Islamic resistance movement by asking readers to re-examine their ideas not only about Islam and resistance,² but also about themselves, something I myself was forced to do throughout the course of this research. During my first few trips to Lebanon, my aim was to understand how the Islamic resistance movement deliberately integrates faith and rationality into their ideas and practices. However, some of these ideas and practices, while looking familiar to me, were impossible to properly articulate without first breaking free from the constraints of my own knowledge paradigm, one that was deeply shaped by the project of Western secular modernity. What I saw was not a rejection of secular liberalism, but an active negotiation with this conceptual framework based on faith and religious rationality, while firmly centred

around resisting Western domination – what I call a resistance subjectivity, which I also discuss in a recent article (Marusek 2018); this is a faith and commitment to the cause of revolutionary Islamic activism. Therefore, I first had to dislocate my own world-view before being able to fully recognise the decolonial character of the Islamic resistance movement, liberating me from the limitations of what Sayyid (2003 and 2014) calls Westernese – locating the Western experience at the centre of all knowledge.

Boaventura De Sousa Santos (2007) refers to the dominant Western framework as a form of abyssal thinking, saying that: ‘Beyond it, there is only nonexistence, invisibility, non-dialectical absence.’ But these unfathomable geographies are rendered invisible precisely because they are sites of resistance to the coloniality of power. Therefore, I had to ask myself – acknowledging my own position as a white American scholar – if it was even possible for me to travel there. The concept of the hermeneutic circle partially helped me to arrive at an answer. The hermeneutic circle describes the process revealing that the position of any reader influences her interpretation of the text; therefore, knowing the cultural, historical and literary context of the text in question is necessary for any sound interpretation. As Heidegger explains: ‘The entities of *which* one is talking must be taken out of their hiddenness; one must let them be something unhidden (*alethes*); that is, they must be *discovered*’ (quoted in Packer and Addison 1989: 278). Although Heidegger’s discourse of discovery is problematic,³ when placed in the hands of liberation theologians, the hermeneutic circle becomes transformational, allowing readers to liberate texts and contexts from their colonial present and past. Esack explains that according to Juan Luis Segundo, a Christian liberation theologian from Uruguay, there are two preconditions for creating a hermeneutic circle: ‘First, profound and enriching questions and suspicion about one’s real situation. Second, a new interpretation of scripture that is equally profound and enriching’ (Esack 2002: 11).

From the start, I approached the text/context with ‘profound and enriching questions and suspicion’ about our human situation, which ebbed and flowed throughout the course of my research. However, as an American scholar researching the Islamic resistance movement, there was more that I needed to do to before trying to apply a hermeneutic circle. After all, this is a population particularly demonised by my own government, which has designated many of its affiliated charities and spiritual leaders as terrorist.⁴ Accordingly, I found that it was necessary

to integrate love into my research process. Drawing inspiration from the work of Islamic and other theologies of liberation, including 'second-wave' black feminism, I sought to adopt what Jacobs (2001) calls a hermeneutics of love in my attempt to understand others. Jacobs (2001: 12) argues that understanding the 'love of God and neighbour' is required before we can read any text with 'the law of love' in our thinking and doing. Embracing the potential that love brings to how knowledge is produced is itself a revolutionary act; as I explain in more detail in Chapter 1, the Western project of secular modernity has privatised love and faith, thus marginalising them both as ways of knowing and being by reducing them to the barest of intimate relations (Bellah 1999).

The Islamic and Christian theologies of liberation that I outline in Chapter 2 critique the Western secular sciences for privatising these essential aspects of our shared humanity. For example, the Peruvian Christian liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez (1995a and 1995b) argues that it is necessary to first struggle with the poor before finding a new language that can answer the question of how God loves the poor when they are suffering so unjustly in a world not of their own making. Gutiérrez believes that answering this question only in social scientific terms, with love and faith outside of this framework, is not enough. As he explains:

Prophetic language is to take the language of the poor, to link God and the poor and to denounce injustice. And to name the reasons of poverty is the prophetic language. Justice is a central point. But Job is employing another language, a mystical language. God loves us gratuitously. To believe in God is to believe in gratuitous love. Human love must be gratuitous also. We need to employ both languages. Liberation theology is an effort to employ the two languages. The mystical language can be too abstract. And the language of justice can sometimes be nonhuman, where people who speak about justice believe they know better than the poor. In the mystical language it becomes human again. The poor need friendship also. Friendship is gratuitous love.

(Gutiérrez 1995b)

Goizueta adds that, for Gutiérrez, the new paradigm of speaking and understanding will be 'revealed precisely at the point where the prophetic language of justice meets the silence of contemplative worship, at the

point where the revolutionary and the mystic become one' (2004: 295). This notion of gratuitous love – especially in the face of the injustices that Lebanese Shi'is have suffered and continue to suffer – frames my understanding of the Islamic resistance movement. However, gratuitous love is not uncritical; it is human solidarity stripped to its barest meaning. The questions and suspicion will always remain, continually ebbing and flowing. Accordingly, this is a decentring not only of politics and geographies, but also of human conceptions of faith, love and knowledge.

In Chapter 3, I discuss how I try to apply love to social scientific research, proposing what I call a critical ethics of love, or the love for and of the stranger, as a decolonial method. I am particularly interested in building on the work of Alfred Schütz (1944) and Zygmunt Bauman (1991), who both developed profiles of the stranger that are critically engaging with the universal claims of Western security modernity and its objectification of 'the Other'. Schütz and Bauman argued that all systems of knowledge are incoherent and inconsistent, including Western secular modernity, and that culture and ideology shape all knowledges to give them the appearance of coherence and consistency. The stranger, however, has a different culture and ideology as a starting point for making sense of incoherence and inconsistency. As a result, Schütz (1944: 504) argues that the stranger must actively de-centre herself to understand another culture, in other words, learn a new way of making sense of incoherence and inconsistency, ultimately allowing her to realise what Bauman (1991: 236) calls solidarity – a joint destiny. By acknowledging that: (1) there is a lack clarity in all knowledge systems; and (2) there is a need to de-centre before understanding another knowledge paradigm, this allows the loving stranger to have a more honest engagement with others, one that seeks to understand without judgement and only then critically assess the acts of 'making sense' from within. That said, this is not an embrace of moral relativism; only a recognition that what is universal about our humanity is contested.

My analysis of the Islamic resistance movement builds on Esack's (2002) research on Islamic liberation theology in the context of apartheid South Africa, where the struggle against an oppressive political system brought together a diverse religious population. It also draws upon Grosfoguel's (2007) insights into decoloniality and Islam, contributing to a decentred understanding of modernity. And finally, it takes inspiration from Sayyid's (2003 and 2014) pioneering work that is laying the foundations of the newly emerging field of Critical Muslim Studies, which seeks

to locate scholarship on the Islamicate, or the regions where Muslims are culturally dominant, away from the Orientalising gaze (ReOrient 2015: 5). My own aim is to apply a decolonial lens to understanding the Islamic resistance movement, demonstrating that what is supposedly hidden, or in the abyss, is very much visible and alive. The challenge is to search for decolonial praxis (Singh 2016), using decolonial theory to make sense of an empirical study of a movement that is forging its own way forward.

Considering my own positionality, my effort will be limited; however, the commitment remains. Although I am neither Muslim nor Lebanese, the field of Critical Muslim Studies overcomes the limitations of entrenched identity politics by shifting ‘from the ontic towards a more ontological inclined understanding of matters Islamicate’ (ReOrient 2015: 6). Furthermore, my own experiences of living in the Global South inform me of the desperate need for a politics of love in everyday lives, but one refracted through the dominant world system that currently privileges some over others. As Christian liberation theologians argue, there must be a preferential option for the poor; therefore, the duty to love the oppressed is non-negotiable. It is not for me to agree or disagree with the Islamic resistance movement, but to humanise its supporters and analyse its politics in a critical and loving way.

In this book, I present the result of these efforts, which I confess were lonely and difficult. I try to illustrate how the Islamic resistance movement is decolonising knowledge paradigms and proposing an alternative decolonial conceptualisation of the world-system by first locating itself as an Islamic resistance movement in Lebanon, centring its project in faith, religious rationality and a resistance subjectivity, and only then engaging with the dominant paradigm of secular liberalism, choosing its own way forward according to its own unique context. As such, the movement is not rejecting modernity, but only the idea that Western secular liberalism is universal. It does this by adopting certain ideas and practices that can be defined as secular and liberal, but substantively repackaging them as something new, thus contributing to what (Mignolo 2011: 23) calls a pluriversal epistemology of the future.

Before offering some context on contemporary Lebanese politics to further prepare the reader for what is to come, I want to briefly address my own (mis)use of language. The 1979 revolution in Iran that inspired the Islamic resistance movement in Lebanon (in Arabic *al-muqawama al-islamiyya*) is known as the Islamic Revolution (in Persian *inqalab islam-e*). These social forces are both known, and self-define, as Islamic

movements. And yet, at times I refer to them as Shi'i movements and describe Sunni Muslims according to their sectarian affiliation, rather than simply as Muslims. This is a contradictory and perhaps even unhelpful approach, reifying the recent sectarian cleavages in the Islamic world that have emerged in the wake of the US-led invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq (for more on this, see Chapter 6). Because the English language of Islam has Orientalist baggage, as discussed in Chapter 1, a decentred understanding should use the word Islamic or even Islamicate to open up the Western imagination to new understandings of Muslim societies (Hodgson 2009: 3). By sometimes using the term Shi'i to discuss the Islamic resistance movement and its supporters, I merely want to stress that it is not representative of all Lebanese Muslims and to acknowledge the politics of religious difference in Lebanon.

Because the reality is that Lebanon is a sectarian state; the French developed a confessional system during their mandate for Syria and Lebanon that privileged Christians above Muslims, while also creating internal sectarian hierarchies. This divisive system of colonial rule was entrenched with the Lebanese National Pact of 1943 and only slightly modified at the end of the civil–international war in 1989, even though the Lebanese population is diverse in beautiful ways. As is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, altogether there are 18 recognised sects in Lebanon, but under the French mandate, the two most politically powerful identities were Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims. However, more recently, Shi'i Muslims have also become economically and politically powerful (although less so socially – see Chapter 3), while the Druze often wield power as kingmaker. The distribution of power holds because the post-colonial Lebanese state continues to be politically, culturally and economically organised along sectarian lines. Although sectarianism is by no means a primordial identity, but rather something fluid, in the case of modern Lebanon, it must be taken seriously. As Salloukh, Barakat, al-Habbal, Khattab and Mikaelian explain:

The disciplinary tentacles of the sectarian system reach deep into Lebanese society, and operate to reproduce sectarian identities, loyalties and forms of subjectification. They collectively manufacture disciplined sectarian subjects who embrace what is otherwise a very modern and historically constructed 'culture of sectarianism' as their primary and primordial identity. These tentacles stretch across the different public and private spheres of Lebanese life.

(Salloukh *et al.* 2015: 4)

Lebanon's civil–international war between 1975 and 1989 largely pitted Christian militias against Muslim militias (the latter both Lebanese and Palestinian), but allegiances shifted throughout the war, especially when exacerbated by international actors. For example, Syrian forces initially intervened to assist Christian Lebanese (against the Palestinians), and yet during their subsequent occupation of the country, Lebanese Christians and Sunnis alike largely came to oppose them. Furthermore, battles were waged between Lebanese Shi'is and Palestinian Sunnis. The latter entered the country as refugees when Zionist military forces expelled them from their home in Palestine in 1948 and again in 1967. Other intra-sectarian conflicts also took place during Lebanon's civil–international war.

During the final days of the Syrian occupation of Lebanon (1976–2005), the most powerful cleavage to emerge was between Lebanese Shi'is and Sunnis, strengthened when the Sunni Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was assassinated in March 2005, a tragic crime blamed on Syria and/or Hizbullah. Since then, the Lebanese have generally been split into two factions: those who support the pro-Hariri Sunni–Christian 14 March alliance that is aligned with Saudi Arabia, France and the United States; and those who support the Shi'i–Christian-Druze 8 March alliance aligned with Iran and Syria. However, the recent civil–international war in Syria (2011–present) has disturbed even these alliances, leaving Lebanon internally fractured in precarious ways. According to the United Nations (2016), 1,011,366 Syrian refugees were registered in Lebanon as of 31 December 2016; but a UN worker told me that the number could be as high as 2 million (Lebanon's total population in 2010 was 4.25 million).⁵

Even before the civil–international war that engulfed Syria, the Sunni–Shi'i cleavage in Lebanon was building, escalating in May 2008 when the 14 March-led government moved to sack the general at the head of airport security, who was aligned with the 8 March coalition, while at the same time trying to disable Hizbullah's communication network. These provocative moves ended in large-scale street clashes between armed supporters of 8 March and 14 March, the latter reportedly supported by Saudi Arabia and perhaps even the United States.⁶ The 8 March alliance quickly established control over Beirut, but this was controversial because Hizbullah deployed its military forces internally. The group is the only non-state army legally authorised to exist in Lebanon to defend the country from Israel; however, it is not meant to attack fellow Lebanese. The stand-off ended when the 14 March-led

government reversed the two decisions that sparked the conflict. More political power was devolved to Shi'is, raising their profile, and a unity government was formed. But it fell in 2011, leading to another series of political crises. While Saad Hariri, the son of Rafik and on-again-off-again prime minister of Lebanon, further cemented political alliances by retreating to Riyadh for several years, Saudi Arabia was unsuccessful in its efforts in late 2017 to use him to overturn the current pro-8 March unity government (Wedeman 2017).

And yet despite all these difficulties, the Lebanese people have persisted. The country has remained one of deep beauty, sophistication, culture and love, albeit one that continues to bare many painful scars. Despite the shifting political allegiances after Hariri's assassination, leading to the cross-sectarian alliances of 14 and 8 March, Lebanon continues to suffer from sectarian disagreements that are exacerbated by external actors. Indeed, the internationalisation of Lebanon's struggles has perhaps been the most destabilising force of all. Even today, the country is a major site of a proxy war between international powers that are struggling to maintain Western hegemony, and those that are willing to confront it. This means that the precariousness of Lebanese political alliances cannot be stressed enough. There are multiple identities and allegiances that intersectionally pull people in various directions beyond tribe, sect and nation. In this book, I attempt to analyse the Islamic resistance movement from the inside with the recognition that I will always be a loving stranger struggling to understand, contextualising why decisions are made before critiquing them.

My inclusion of the Imam al-Sadr Foundation in my analysis of the Islamic resistance movement today is another issue to acknowledge. When speaking of the resistance charities, the Lebanese usually refer only to Hizbullah and al-Mabarrat Association. The Imam al-Sadr Foundation is decidedly more liberal and depends on the international aid community for assistance. However, Imam al-Sadr played an essential role in laying the foundations of the resistance movement in southern Lebanon, as detailed in Chapter 2. I dedicate the entirety of Chapter 5 to the Imam al-Sadr Foundation, partly due to the amazing access that the foundation granted me, which was not the case with Hizbullah and al-Mabarrat Association (for understandable reasons that I explain in Chapter 3). More importantly, however, I include a comprehensive analysis of the Imam al-Sadr Foundation because I believe that it is necessary to stress the pluralities of Shi'i activisms in

Lebanon – a population that is often homogenised into a deeply flawed caricature of Hizbullah as a terrorist militia. These misunderstandings say little about the many Shi'is I engaged with during my research and a lot about the people who seek to generate a vision of the world that is violent, unequal and centred in the geographies of Western power, reproducing coloniality.

In sum, in this book, I take seriously both the Islamic resistance movement as a counter-hegemonic force to the coloniality of power, and the wider aspirations for decoloniality in a complex, contradictory and interconnected world. Being a critical scholar researching a movement that has been named a terrorist group by my own government, thus limiting my own access to knowing, has only fuelled my desire to lovingly know even more. I have done my best to decentre this knowing, offering critique without judgement. And while there is much to critique, there is also much to admire. Sayyid argues that: 'People become without history not because they lack a past but because, paradoxically, they cannot narrate themselves into the future' (2014a: 2). My goal is to convey how the Islamic resistance movement is narrating its own future, inscribing decoloniality into the present by decentring human understandings of secular liberalism to present a counter-hegemonic force to Western secular modernity, reminding us all of the possibilities of faith, love and resistance.

Introduction

The rise of revolutionary religious activism

The Islamic resistance movement and other theologies of liberation challenge Western secular modernity, which aims to marginalise the role of faith in contemporary political struggles. The common assumption among many in the West is that religion is a conservative force, and thus religious movements are viewed as either reactionary or fundamentalist. However, this view fails to recognise the revolutionary potential of religious activism – think of Malcolm X and the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr during the American civil rights movement, or the Christian church in South Africa, which played an essential role in ending apartheid by releasing the Kairos Document.¹ In 2009, Palestinian Christians revived this strategy by declaring that: ‘the military occupation of Palestinian land constitutes a sin against God and humanity.’² Since the imperialist project is one of the foundations of Western secular modernity, this kind of radical religious activism is a form of resistance.

Nevertheless, some continue to distrust religion because Western conceptions of faith and rationality were transformed during the Age of Enlightenment, as I describe below, and then forcefully exported to the Global South through colonial systems like the bureaucratic state and capitalist free market, both of which privilege a very particular form of instrumental rationality, often at the expense of what it means to be human. Within the dominant Western secular framework, rationality is now narrowly defined and is almost always linked to science, economics and politics, while faith is relegated to superstition, emotion and the private realm.³ According to this framework, religious belief is inherently outside of reason, while secular myths about ourselves and the world are incorrectly reified as neutral and universal truths. As a result, many of today’s religious activist movements are framed as irrational, when what they are really reminding us about is the radical potential of faith and religious rationality as ways of knowing, relinking knowledge to our humanness.

Viewed accordingly, the persistence of religious activist movements across the Global South, in particular, should not come as a total surprise. As Kassab (2012) points out, when societies have been defined by the colonial other, this produces a certain kind of reaction. Although this reaction may look somewhat different according to which society is in question, the reaction is nevertheless still recognisable. The rise of the Islamic resistance movement and other religious activisms that deliberately incorporate faith into their ideas and practices is one of the many expressions of this post-colonial reaction. While religion has always framed social struggles in mythical terms, doing so today allows for the indigenisation of not only religion, but also of ideas and practices embraced by Marxism. As Lancaster (1988: xvii) observes, historicising religion and myth is a way to link the religious past to the present, so that historically oppressed peoples can achieve redemption in the present day. This process also uproots religious geographies, challenging secular conceptions of space and time.

Lancaster is writing about the experiences of Christian liberation theology in Nicaragua, which, like Islamic activism in the Middle East, is a counter-hegemonic force in dynamic negotiation with secular modernity. Marx argued that with the introduction of capitalism, 'Christianity as a developed religion had completed theoretically the estrangement of man from himself and from nature' (1844). Christian liberation theologians and Islamic activists are seeking to reconnect humans to the self and to nature, including the many structures of oppression in their daily lives. Faith, according to this understanding, is a commitment to God and all of God's creation. A similar perspective can be found in critical Marxists like Terry Eagleton, who describes faith as a set of commitments:

What moves people to have faith in, say, the possibility of a nonracist society is a set of commitments, not in the first place a set of prepositions. They must already have some allegiance to an idea of justice, and to the possibility of its realisation, if they are to be stirred to action by the knowledge that men and women are being refused employment because of their skin colour. The knowledge in itself is not enough to do it.

(Eagleton 2009: 119–120)

As Peruvian Christian liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez also explains, 'theology is not a matter of my faith – it is a reflection of my

faith. Theology is an answer to the questions of those living their faith.' Gutiérrez calls this approach, quite simply, 'doing theology' (1995a).

Liberation theologians in Latin America and Islamic activists in the Middle East seek freedom and social redemption for their communities by re-imagining the dominant ideas and practices of Western secular liberalism through a religious or mythical lens. As a result, expressions of faith are more deliberate and frequently framed vis-à-vis oppression. Or as Christian liberation theologians put it, there must be 'a preferential option for the poor'. In this way, these activists have actually transformed the liberal framework by incorporating religion. While Löwy (1988) demonstrates that neither Marx nor Engels were as anti-religion as is often assumed, he singles out the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci as being the leading thinker of the Communist movement who is most engaged with religious issues. While Gramsci was quite critical of Catholicism, he still recognised the utopian social elements of religious ideas (Löwy 1988: 7). For example, Gramsci suggested that: 'religion is the most gigantic utopia, that is the most gigantic "metaphysics" that history has ever known, since it is the most grandiose attempt to reconcile in mythical form, the real contradictions of historical life' (2005: 405).

My point here is that when activists refuse to reconcile religion with the unjust conditions of life, and instead use it to transform today's world, religion can become a revolutionary force. For example, Enayat (2011: 24) explains how Twelver Shi'is, citing several Qur'anic verses, believe that the return of the Twelfth Imam, also known as the Hidden Imam or Mahdi, will realise the ultimate victory over the 'forces of injustice'. Throughout the greater part of Islamic history, this potential was not seen as something that could happen in this world, only in the next, sanctifying 'the submissive acceptance of the status quo', because the realisation of this victory was 'beyond the reach of ordinary human beings' (Enayat 2011: 25). However, when historicised by Islamic activists in the twentieth century, 'this link between the return [of the Mahdi] and the ultimate, global sovereignty of the righteous and the oppressed' in the here and now becomes a potential tool of radical activism (Enayat 2011: 25).

Nevertheless, contemporary revolutionary projects also face contradictions. Beyond the difficulties inherent within all utopian thinking, including socialism, of becoming authoritarian and exclusionary in practice (Bauman 1976), another problem for religious activist movements today is that they must also contend with the hegemony

of neoliberal capitalism – a world where Western secular modernity pervades both the dominant systems of knowledge and the entrenched structures of economic and political oppression, rendering a theology of liberation practically impossible. Compromises will be made. And thus, as scholars, we must honestly assess their implications. Accordingly, what can we expect then from doing a theology of liberation in today's corrupted and corrupting world?

Scholars have increasingly turned their attention to how contemporary religious movements are interacting with local and global economies (Bompani and Frahm-Arp 2010; Deeb and Harb 2013; Daher 2016; Dreher and Smith 2016), showing how deliberately incorporating faith into everyday social practices is a complex and contradictory political project that can be expressed in multiple ways. My concern with some of these studies is that Western-based scholars are not always being honest about their own positionality – where a researcher stands in relation to the people she is researching (Rose 1997; Mullings 1999; and Haney 2002). Critical engagement with religious movements is often located from a position that is decidedly centred, where the contradictions of living in cosmopolitan Western capitals and railing against neoliberal capitalism, all the while enjoying its material benefits, is not properly acknowledged when criticising religious movements for doing the same. Furthermore, post-colonial activists today are struggling against many layers of oppression; this is especially true for Shi'is in the Middle East. As Augustus Norton points out:

In order to understand the Arab Shi'i it is necessary to come to grips with the social, political and, often, economic marginality which reflects contemporary patterns of discrimination and alienation, and then to see how such realities resonate within the mystical and symbolic richness of Shi'ism.

(Norton 2005: 185)

Referring to the ideas of Frantz Fanon, Hudis adds that: 'Exploitation involves being robbed of the fruit of our labour, whereas alienation involves being robbed of our very being' (2015: Kindle edn). Accordingly, adopting a lens that accounts for the intersectional forces of oppression provides a more realistic framework.⁴

Perhaps my concern is also emblematic of a wider dilemma: those opposing neoliberal capitalism are strong on critique, but weak on

offering any practical alternatives to it, all the while continuing to participate in this hegemonic system. The issue that we must all confront is this: if we are living in a historical moment where neoliberal capitalism is hegemonic, what form of engagement with this world system is acceptable for those committed to both a revolutionary politics and social justice? Especially when Albert Memmi observed in his critical reflections on the effects of colonisation on the colonised that:

The most serious blow suffered by the colonised is being removed from history and from the community. Colonisation usurps any free role in either war or peace, every decision contributing to his destiny and that of the world, and all cultural and social responsibility. The colonised ... feels neither responsible nor guilty nor sceptical, for he is out of the game. He is in no way a subject of history any more. Of course, he carries its burden, often more cruelly than others, but always as an object.

(Memmi 1992: 91–92)

Commenting on Memmi's work, Paolo Freire adds that: 'So often do [the oppressed] hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything – that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive – that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness' (2005: 63). Taking these words to heart, I do not believe it is fair to judge those who were formerly colonised merely for participating in 'the game' when it means that they are able to contribute to their own destinies. For me a more fruitful, and human, approach is to ask if there are any radical possibilities within such an engagement, and if so, what are the parameters for assessing these? Because this predicament exists across the Global South; during a meeting on decolonising knowledge at the University of Johannesburg in 2016, one audience member questioned the possibility of ever realising decolonial ways of knowing and being when we are all complicit in one way or another in the global neoliberal capitalist system.⁵ This question is precisely what I hope to further interrogate in this book by examining the ideas and practices of the Islamic resistance movement in Lebanon.

Re-Orienting 'the Orient'

Drawing upon the writings of Antonio Gramsci, Edward Said was the first to develop a sophisticated framework of Orientalism to analyse

and critique Western representations of Islam and the Middle East. Said applied Gramsci's notions of 'common sense', or the unstable repertoire of ideas in popular culture, and 'hegemony', or the rule of consent without brute force, to explain how certain ways of seeing 'the Orient' have come to dominate the Western academy, arts, culture, media and politics. In his book *Orientalism*, Said (1979) described the European post-Enlightenment project to transform the peoples of the Middle East into an object of study, using a scientific methodology to claim objectivity while distorting their social realities. Said explained that when Europeans were confronted with the Orient, the experience was always framed by comparisons vis-à-vis the West, as if (so-called) Orientals did not exist before this encounter in their own right, with their own histories and their own ways of knowing and being. Instead, colonial representations of Orientals speak on their behalf, revealing more about the West than the East: within this framework, the Orient becomes a mirror reflection of all that is contemptible about Western society.

As Gregory (2004: 42) points out, representations are constructive, not merely mimetic; thus, through the eyes of the Western 'explorer' constructing knowledge of the Orient, 'the native, the peasant is *part* of the landscape.' Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century, Said argued that Orientalism had established a certain coherence that was mostly unchallenged, where 'the word *Oriental* was a reference for the reader sufficient to identify a specific body of information about the Orient. This information seemed to be morally neutral and objectively valid' (1979: 205). Not only does this assumed neutrality position the Westerner outside of the Orient, but as Gregory (2004: 26) points out, it also spatialises difference. Over there – Islam and the Middle East – is imagined as outside of the Western universal. And yet as Said repeatedly noted, social knowledge is neither universal nor neutral: 'the general consensus that "true" knowledge is non-political (and conversely that overtly political knowledge is not "true" knowledge) obscures the highly if obscurely organised political circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced' (1979: 10).

During the twentieth century, these scientifically 'neutral' experiences of the Orientalist paradigm began to dominate the Western episteme. Subjectivity became associated with emotion, passion, religion and 'the Other', whereas objectivity was linked with the 'real' sciences and the Western secular liberal project. Note that this framework is also

decidedly gendered against women. Calling this positionality in the West that of the Default Man, the British artist Grayson Perry observes that:

Women and ‘exotic’ minorities are framed as ‘passionate’ or ‘emotional’ as if they, the Default Men, had this unique ability to somehow look round the side of that most interior lens, the lens that is always distorted by our feelings. Default Man somehow had a dispassionate, empirical, objective vision of the world as a birthright, and everyone else was at the mercy of turbulent, uncontrolled feelings.

(Grayson Perry 2014)

When Westerners scientifically evaluate themselves and others according to the position of the Default Man, it reinforces a notion of the West as technologically and culturally superior, in turn reproducing Orientalist industries of so-called expert knowledges of ‘the Other.’ Nevertheless, the West’s process of understanding the Orient remains far removed from its own self-understanding. In his follow up book, *Culture and Imperialism*, Said adds that while,

we assume that the better part of history in colonial territories was a function of the imperial intervention ... there is an equally obstinate assumption that colonial undertakings were marginal and perhaps even eccentric to the central activities of the great metropolitan cultures.

(Said 1994: 34)

This misunderstanding has long disfigured both Western self-awareness and its representations of ‘the Other’, with Said later arguing that: ‘covering Islam [in the Western media] is a one-sided activity that obscures what “we” do, and highlights instead what Muslims and Arabs by their very flawed nature are’ (1997: xxii).

And yet, as Asad (2003b) describes, Orientalism is only one of a series of interlinked projects that undergird Western modernity, the others being imperialism, secularism and liberalism. Together they forged a framework to help the powerful institutionalise principles based on Western Enlightenment and colonial experiences that create new formations of space and time. Indeed, it is only in the modern era that the division of West and East/the Rest began to conceptualise space, with the juxtaposition of modern/advanced (time) first justifying

colonialism and then authoritatively describing the stages of economic progress or ‘development’ under neoliberal capitalism.⁶ Ultimately, this paradigm determines how many of us think about everything ranging from democracy and freedom to cruelty and health. Those societies that do not embody the project of Western secular modernity are subjected to Orientalist characterisations via new technologies that are imagined to measure the Western Enlightenment principles objectively (Gouldner 1970; Habermas 1970; and Lyotard 1984). For example, Asad (2003a and 2003b) points out how questions of effectiveness and efficiency are now seen to be normative standards when determining the benefit of certain behaviours, often superseding essential ethical and moral concerns.⁷

Asad argues that, over time, many of us have socially internalised these principles, ultimately coming to believe that our modern experiences ‘constitute “disenchantment” – implying a direct access to reality, a stripping away of myth, magic and the sacred;’ this ‘is a salient feature of the modern epoch’ (2003a: 13). As Koshul (2005: 2) further explains, disenchantment signifies the rupture between religious rationalism and scientific rationalism. Up until the modern era, as is discussed below, there were intimate relations between faith and science. But under the projects interlinked with Western secular modernity, mythology and the sacred became conceptually isolated and assigned to inferiority or otherness, while faith developed into a way of knowing the supernatural only in parallel to knowledge about ‘the *real* world’ (Asad 2003a: 39). As Chakrabarty describes, secular history’s time is godless, continuous, empty and homogenous. In other words, ‘Gods, spirits and other “supernatural” forces can claim no agency in our narratives’ (Chakrabarty, quoted in Deeb 2009: 244). However, as Whimster and Lash (2006: 6) correctly point out, ‘science is singularly ill-suited to explaining the ultimate questions,’ especially what it means to be human.

Within this conceptual framework, the hegemonic Western social forces are construed to appear as objective truths, not culturally contingent constructions.⁸ And one of the most dangerous myths is that Western secular ideals are universal. Asad argues that when we ideologically disenchant liberalism by claiming that it is natural or neutral, it results in a translucent violence that is difficult for liberals to see, explaining that in order ‘to make an enlightened space, the liberal must continually attack the darkness of the outside world that threatens to overwhelm that space’ (2003a: 59). In other words, the Western

liberal must always conquer the illiberal, even justifying violence as a means-ends calculation. As Asad also puts it,

liberal politics is based on cultural consensus and aims at human progress. It is the product of rational discourse as well as its precondition. It must dominate the unredeemed world – if not by reason then, alas, by force – in order to survive.

(Asad 2003a: 61)

At the same time, the staunch belief in the neutrality of Western liberal principles and technologies eclipses this violence and the resulting pain that is inflicted in the liberalising mission.

Needless to say, as Freire pointed out, the imperialist project is intrinsically violent simply by establishing ‘a relationship of oppression’ (2005: 55). And because imperialism is foundational to Western secular modernity, this oppressive relation (the colonality of power) continues. Deconstructing the phenomenon of violence today, Žižek argues that it falls into two distinct categories: subjective or objective. The latter type of violence is the systemic violence that is inherent in the normal everyday state of affairs:

Objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent. Systemic violence is thus something like the notorious ‘dark matter’ of physics, the counterpart to an all-too-visible subjective violence. It may be invisible, but it has to be taken into account if one is to make sense of what otherwise seem to be ‘irrational’ explosions of subjective violence.

(Žižek 2008: 2)

Žižek’s point is that by focusing only on the subjective violence of individuals and groups, we are ignoring the everyday violence created by the system (the rules and knowledges created by the Western coloniser, imperialist, capitalist and secular liberal). As a result, we fail to appreciate how the subjective violence of certain individuals and groups – many of whom the West designates as ‘terrorist’, including Hizbullah – is a response to already existing violence, or a form of resistance. By failing to recognise it as such, we propagate the very system that is producing and reproducing the objective violence.

Furthermore, when Western secular liberalism claims universality, it renders subjects with different frameworks based on other cultures and histories as darkness (Said 1994). According to Western Enlightenment principles, only particular understandings of religion are compatible with this project. Sayyid (2014b: 43) argues that secularism ‘generates Muslims as permanently transgressive subjects, whose religious essence is constantly being undermined by the temptations of the political’. Here, the political is anything that challenges Western secular liberalism. As Brown adds, ‘today the secular derives much of its meaning from an imagined opposite in Islam, and, as such, veils the religious shape and content of Western public life and its imperial designs’ (2009: 10). Asad further explains that:

when it is proposed that religion can play a positive political role in modern society, it is not intended that this apply to *any* religion whatever, but only those religions that are able and willing to enter the public sphere for the purpose of rational debate with opponents who are to be persuaded rather than coerced.

(Asad 2003b: 183)

In order to be able to be persuasive, however, one’s argument must be seen as rational according to a very particular understanding of rationality that is now dominant in the West today. Of course, this conception is also widely contested. The next section explains how Western ideas of rationality are historically determined and have a direct relationship with their accompanying conceptions of faith.

The transformation of faith and rationality

Looking back to origins of Christian thought in Europe, faith is defined as that which God requires of humans in their relationship with God. According to Wolterstorff, the root meaning of the word faith in classical and Hellenistic Greek, or *pistis*, is ‘trust, reliance, belief in, or confidence’, and in certain nuances faith even means ‘to obey’ (1983: 11). In the Old and New Testaments, faithfulness means ‘fidelity, endurance and hope’, both in the hearts and on the lips of the faithful (Wolterstorff 1983: 12). But as Wolterstorff also clarifies, faith is not just belief, because belief also requires faith in the one who is trusted (Wolterstorff 1983: 13). Plantinga elaborates on this point by explaining that: ‘belief in God means trusting

God, accepting God, accepting his purposes, committing one's life to him and living in his presence' (1983: 18). Therefore, according to this understanding, the person who trusts in God also believes, and in the New Testament this acceptance is seen as a form of knowledge (Wolterstorff 198: 14). Accordingly, knowledge requires faith and the two are deeply intertwined.

However, as Said demonstrated, the Western Enlightenment and colonial projects transformed the dominant understandings of religion, faith and knowledge. Asad further points out how 'the constitution of the modern state required the forcible redefinition of religion as belief, and of religious belief, sentiment, and identity as personal matters that belong to the newly emerging space of private (as opposed to public) life' (2003b: 205). As a result, religious belief in the West became something that is privatised, personal and unconnected to the social world, whereas the 'objective' sciences started to dominate society and politics. Asad describes how the privatisation of religion in Europe accompanied the universalisation of Western conceptions of what religious belief entails, presenting 'belief as an alternative ideology from the consciousness of reality' (2003b: 46). Belief was no longer a social, relational experience, but rather something that is either accepted or rejected by the individual. Indeed, new ideas of religious conviction presupposed a certain belief system and were no longer seen as the product of lived experiences (Asad 2003b: 46). Thus, belief becomes something that is internally constructed, or private, where it is regarded not 'as the conclusion to a knowledge process, but as its precondition' (Asad 2003b: 47). Not only are faith and rationality separate according to this perspective, but faith is also a lower kind of knowing that precludes rationality.

Wolterstorff (1983) explains how the Western Enlightenment also transformed philosophical thinking, which became dominated by classical foundationalism, a theory of rationality developed by English philosopher John Locke that supposes there are two kinds of belief: what can be considered basic belief, and what is based on other beliefs. In other words, there are immediate starting points, or foundations, for all mediated beliefs. Classical foundationalism contends that basic beliefs must be either self-evident or incorrigible, the latter relating to a state of consciousness.⁹ But according to Locke, religion is neither self-evident nor incorrigible; therefore, unless religious views are supported by evidence, they are not rational. Subsequently, most Western philosophers have examined how people arrive at their belief in God's existence

according to Locke's framework of classical foundationalism.¹⁰ As a result, religion and faith are conceptually separated from scientific and rational knowledges, and relegated to the private sphere.

Critical modernists and postmodernists, however, reject classical foundationalism's claim to Absolute Knowledge (Westphal 1992). Alvin Plantinga (1993), a well-known philosopher of religion and Christian apologetics, also challenges this framework by arguing that belief in God's existence is both basic *and* can be subject to rational argument. At the same time, Eagleton adds that 'a belief, for example, can be rational but not true,' while 'claims about the world can also be true but not in a sense rational' (2009: 112–113). Furthermore, he argues that this relationship is mutually conditioned:

Knowledge is gleaned through active engagement, and active engagement implies faith. Belief motivates action, to be sure; but there is also a sense in which you define your beliefs through what you do. Moreover, because we have come to see knowledge primarily on the model of knowing things rather than persons, we fail to notice another way in which faith and knowledge are interwoven. It is only by having faith in someone that we can take the risk of disclosing ourselves to him or her fully, thus making true knowledge of ourselves possible.

(Eagleton 2009: 121)

Eagleton is suggesting that science and religion, as well as rationality and faith, are deeply intertwined. Western philosophy has simply constructed a certain type of scientific knowledge that separates them, which is known as secular reason. Although the dominant conception of secular reason has delivered Western societies from many oppressive superstitions and religious practices, it also inherits a problematic colonial history that supports a narrow definition of rationality and a rejection of faith as a way of knowing. Furthermore, as Westphal argues, secular reason's critique of religion spurred it to make false claims of being a higher form of knowledge: 'the failure of the Enlightenment lies not in its critical goals but in an uncritical, arrogant view of reason that leaves it with pretensions to clarity and certainty that it cannot support' (1992: x).

The dominant form of secular reason is centred in the Western experience, while Muslims and Middle Eastern cultures are forced into the peripheries. This understanding of rationality is linked to scientific and mathematical theories and methods that also dominate the social

sciences. And yet even for Max Weber, the influential German social theorist, the term rationality had a variety of meanings in his contemporary society.¹¹ Indeed, Weber believed there were a ‘multiplicity of rationalisation processes that variously conflict and coalesce with one another at all societal and civilisational levels’ (Kalberg 1980: 1147). Koch (1993: 133) nicely separates Weber’s different conceptions of rationality into four general categories. He believes *conceptual rationality* means ‘an increasing mastery of reality by means of increasingly precise and abstract concepts’. There is also *instrumental rationality*, or the ‘attainment of a definitely given and practical end by means of an increasingly precise calculation of adequate means.’¹² *Formal rationality* means ‘a systematic arrangement’ of particular structures and practices, or as Kalberg explains, ‘a structure of domination that acquired specific and delineated boundaries only with industrialisation’ (1980: 1158). And finally, there is *substantive rationality*, which is value-based and ‘may be applied to that process which distinguishes between valid norms and that which is empirically given.’¹³

Weber himself valued these four forms of rationality differently, believing they all worked together in concert. However, he was extremely critical of modern bureaucracies and capitalist societies, because he found that they are governed mainly by instrumental and formal rationality.¹⁴ While these two systems were initially based upon Christian religious ethics, once they were formalised and reproduced, Weber feared that they started to undermine the very values that originally legitimated them. He was thus very pessimistic about the fate of societies ruled predominantly by formal and instrumental rationality, arguing that by the twentieth century the organising systems in the West had become ‘bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production,’ constructing an ‘iron cage’ around humanity (Weber 2003: 117). Subsequent Western thinkers (Habermas 1970; Gouldner 1970; Lyotard 1984; and Hartmann and Honneth 2005) have similarly argued that the formalisation of secular modernity has mechanised humans, perceiving their value by capitalist and bureaucratic standards alone. And yet despite these criticisms, Western secular modernity continues to be perceived by its supporters as ‘the unfolding of history itself’, a necessary condition for non-Western societies to embrace in the contemporary world (Sayyid 2014a: 34). Perhaps this is why bringing faith back into fold of reason and rationality is one of the key goals of religious activists today.

In their volume on ethnographies of value, Bender and Taves (2012: 2) aim to illustrate how people around the world are complicating ‘a simple “secular–religious” frame’ in their everyday practices. Challenging this hegemonic framing, the editors argue that ‘thinking about “spirituality” and “spirits” both breaks up the limitations of the binary and puts renewed emphasis on the ways that these terms work dynamically as part of processes of valuation’ (Bender and Taves 2012: 3). The authors in the volume each show how spirituality transcends what are ordinarily considered to be secular and religious contexts. The political ramifications here are immense; as Sayyid (2014b: 74–75) reminds us, lived conceptions of the political are multidimensional; they include a decision, socialising that decision and bringing something new into the world, creating subjectivities and distinguishing between friend and enemy – or ‘us’ and ‘them’. This creative aspect of the political is of the utmost importance for any effort to decolonise knowledge, as demonstrated by those who are negotiating with the secular liberal framework on their own terms by blurring established binaries.

Charity past and present

Scholars who research the charities affiliated with the Islamic resistance movement often overlook their radical potential by reproducing Western conceptions of charity. While the concept of charity is as old as religion, the historical experiences of Christian Europe, including industrialisation and secular modernity, transformed Western ideas and practices of charity. In the modern era, Western philanthropy (elite charity) plays an important role in reproducing the capitalist class hierarchies that it depends on (Ostrower 1995), including the American imperialist project (Roelofs 2007; Arnove and Pinede 2007). Writing about the United States, David Callahan argues that the ‘big philanthropists’, who are unaccountable, are now ‘occupying a bigger seat at the table of power than at any time in the past century’ (Cottle 2017). Gutiérrez, the Christian liberation theologian, also argues that: ‘Charity is today a “political charity” ... it means the transformation of a society structured to benefit a few who appropriate to themselves the value of the work of others’ (2003: 116).

However, in the early years of Christianity, charity was not an elite project but an ordinary way of being in society defined by love. Indeed, charity was conceived as a moral requirement of the faithful. The Latin

root of the word charity, *caritas*, can be understood as love for humanity; it is a theological virtue. Williams explains that back then, charity was ‘Christian love, between man and God, and between men and their neighbours’ (1985: 54). Jackson also points out that: ‘Thomas Aquinas, for instance, considered almsgiving “a matter of precept”’ (2009: 12). As Daly further explains:

A consistent objective of the ancient covenant was to insure basic sustenance for all God’s people and to prevent accumulations of land and power that would lead to deprivation and servitude among the people. Thus the laws of the covenant combined tithings earmarked for social welfare (Deut. 14:28–29) with redistributive policies such as Jubilee. Sustenance meant more than subsistence. In Hannah’s prayer, God not only helps the poor, but reverses their fortunes: ‘He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; in order to give them a place with nobles, and have them inherit a throne of honour’ (1 Sam. 2:8).

(Daly 2009: xlii)

Importantly, this kind of religious charity included not only gifts to the poor and to the community, but also acts of human forgiveness. Jackson (2009: 12) notes that:

When construed as a trait of character ... such charity is the disposition to be patient and long-suffering. A charitable person is habitually compassionate, showing others leniency and understanding, giving them the benefit of the doubt, being slow to anger and quick to reconcile, and so on.

(Jackson 2009: 12)

With the onset of European industrialisation and the formation of modern nation states, however, the meaning of charity in the West was soon constricted from ‘Christian love’ to ‘benevolence towards the poor’ (Jacobs 2001: 130). In this way, charity became an instrument for the elite to maintain the unequal status quo. Furthermore, the Marxist theorist Raymond Williams observed that when charity is something that the rich give to the poor, it becomes stigmatised; charity suddenly becomes one directional, voluntary and ultimately only given to ‘the *deserving poor*’, not out of ‘neighbourly love’ but as a ‘reward for approved

social conduct and the calculation in bourgeois political economy' (1985: 55). As Jackson further notes, since the more politically neutral terms 'welfare' and 'aid' have now replaced 'charity' in many Christian dominated countries, this means that:

when aid to the unfortunate (private or public) is construed as morally optional, this represents a significant narrowing of the biblical and medieval meanings traditionally assigned to the term 'charity'. However much biblical and medieval contexts may have differed, both held that giving assistance to the poor and afflicted was an obligatory expression of love of neighbour, at least for Christians.

(Jackson 2009: 12)

While the modern European welfare state has rendered this new 'secularised' version of charity into a liberal right, Offe (1984) argues that the bureaucratic state paternalistically determines needs, delivering only those services that are supposed to help the individual become a productive member of a capitalist society. Here, both charity and welfare are no longer ethical imperatives, but a means of social control (see Haney 2002). One result of these developments is that Christian charity today often has toxic effects upon the worldwide poor (Lupton 2011).

Nevertheless, it is still possible that charity can be imagined and practised differently. Gutiérrez advocates that the transformative capacity of charity 'ought to be directed toward a radical change in the foundation of society, that is, the private ownership of the means of production' (2003: 116). In the age of neoliberal capitalism, formalised practices of charity may always unintentionally reproduce some of the hierarchies within this system; however, as Hankela (2017: 51) suggests, we can still reformulate charity to become an aspect of social justice praxis, as potentially demonstrated by Shī'i charities in Lebanon. Since Islam is both orthopraxic and orthodox, the correct interpretation of rituals and myths are essential. As a result, charity has always been obligatory for Muslims; the Qur'an repeatedly urges believers to give alms to the poor and to pay the poor-rate on profits or luxuries. Giving a percentage of one's income, traditionally 2.5 per cent, is known as *zakat* and comprises one of the Five Pillars of Islam. According to Aslan, *zakat* literally means purification; it is 'not an act of charity but of religious devotion: benevolence and care for the poor were the first and foremost enduring virtues preached by [the Prophet] Muhammed in Mecca' (2005: 60).

Kochuyt (2009: 104) describes *zakat* as religiously inspired solidarity; however, he points out that its recipients do not extend beyond potential Muslim converts, perhaps reflective of the needs of the small Muslim community when Islam was revealed, although this is not true of voluntary acts of charity known as *sadaqah*. Otherwise, the recipients of *zakat* are extensive: the poor and needy, elderly and sick, public service workers, converts, slaves and captives, debtors, travellers (also refugees) and those who defend the 'cause of Allah' (Kochuyt 2009: 103). But while *zakat* is obligatory, Islamic scholars stress that paying it is an act of devotion, and so the *niyya* (the donor's intention) must be good (Kochuyt 2009: 11). Kochuyt further argues that the dualistic social science models of reciprocity are inadequate to adequately explain Islamic charity, because a believer's objective is to serve God. In addition to *zakat*, Shi'ism also established the practice of *khums*, which literally means one-fifth, or 20 per cent, and is often a tax paid on certain goods. For Shi'is, both *zakat* and *khums* are based on the mechanism of *taqlid*, or the emulation of another in manners of the law, in the sense that it is a duty of the believer to pay the religious tax to a *mujtahid*, or jurist.

Another important charitable institution in Muslim societies is the *waqf*, translated as an 'Islamic trust' or 'pious endowment', which emerged about one century after the birth of Islam (Kuran 2001: 842). The Islamic justification for *awqaf* is primarily found in the *hadith*, or the recollections and words of the Prophet Muhammad. For hundreds of years, the *waqf* was the only source of regular funding in Muslim societies for the *madrasa*, a school or provider of religious education (Shatzmiller 2001: 47). The institution also financed a wide variety of public services including the building of monuments, mosques, hospitals, universities, bathhouses, soup kitchens, hospices and lodging (Layish 1995: 146). The growth of endowments in Muslim societies suggests that they acquired great economic significance as the years progressed. Kuran (2001: 849) cites a study that showed around 'one-eighth of all cultivable soil in Egypt and one-seventh of that in Iran stood immobilized as *waqf* property' by the early twentieth century, although the secularising governments of both countries would soon challenge the sanctity of the institution of *waqf*.

It is important to remember that motivations for founding a *waqf* can be religious, but they can also be philanthropic or self-serving, unlike, at least theoretically, the practice of *zakat*. One objective for founding a *waqf* is to provide public services; however, pious acts also cultivate

a favourable reputation, and in the past, endowments were generally not subject to government taxation. Furthermore, endowments also circumscribe the strict inheritance laws detailed in the Qur'an to prevent the gross accumulation of wealth; these laws explicitly outline how men and women are only allowed a 'stated portion' of what their parents and relatives leave to them (Surah IV 2005: 48–49). Thus, the potential for charity to become corrupting also exists in Islam (including Shi'i charities, although this is well beyond the scope of this book). Still, this concept of *obligatory love*, not only for one's neighbour, but also for and of the stranger, is key to my methodological approach for understanding the Islamic resistance movement in Lebanon, something I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3.

Islamic history and myth

Before going any further, I want to provide a brief history of Islam, which has two main sects: Sunnism and Shi'ism. About 90 per cent of contemporary Muslims are thought to be Sunnis, who comprise the majority in countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. This means that approximately 10 per cent of Muslims are thought to be Shi'is, who represent sizeable minorities in countries including Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey and Yemen, and majorities in Bahrain, Iran and Iraq. Shi'is in Lebanon are now thought to be the largest sect in the country; however, they do not comprise a majority of the overall population. There are also internal divisions within both Sunnism and Shi'ism, resulting in the creation of various internal subsects over time. And finally, there are Sufis, who follow Islam's mystical traditions as either Sunnis or Shi'is, sometimes even combining the two doctrines together.

The Sunni–Shi'i split emerged not long after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 11 AH/632 CE when the Muslim community became divided over the issue of succession, with Sunnis preferring a consensus candidate chosen by the learned community, and Shi'is favouring those descended from the Prophet, known as *ahl al-bayt* – literally 'the people of the house' of the Prophet Muhammad (Moussawi 2011: 19). The first three of Muhammad's successors were chosen by the learned community and were not descendants of the Prophet; however, the fourth was both chosen and a descendent – Ali ibn Abi Talib, who was not only the Prophet's cousin, but also the husband of Fatimah, the Prophet's

daughter. After Ali was assassinated, the disagreement over succession pulled the two factions even further apart. The Shi'is, which in its original Arabic form *shi'tu 'ali* means the followers of Ali, looked to his sons Hassan and Hussein for leadership, while the Sunnis looked to the Umayyad Caliphate in Damascus under Yazid ibn Muawiya. Although Hassan attempted to mediate the disagreement by signing a treaty with Yazid, he was poisoned.

In an act of resistance, his brother Hussein and 72 of his Shi'i followers were killed in the Battle of Karbala in the year 61 AH/680 CE, reportedly by tens of thousands of Sunni Umayyad soldiers. As the story goes, for six days Imam Hussein and his small army resisted Yazid's forces. However, when the Umayyad soldiers blocked off their water supply, the Shi'is slowly started to perish. Nevertheless, rather than die in retreat, on the tenth day of the battle, Imam Hussein and his remaining forces charged the attacking army and died.¹⁵ The remaining women and children, under the leadership of Hussein's sister Sayyeda Zeinab, were taken captive and held as prisoners in Damascus before finally being released. This story of the Prophet's grandson, who bravely committed to battle against all the odds, has become essential to contemporary Shi'i narratives. As a minority community in most Muslim countries, demonised by both orthodox Islam and Western powers, Shi'is often look to the martyrdom of Imam Hussein for inspiration. The relevance of this history for Shi'is today is revisited as well as critiqued in the chapters that follow.

The most popular subsect in Shi'ism is Twelver Shi'ism, which is the dominant religion in Iran and Iraq, and the largest minority in Lebanon. Twelver Shi'is continued to follow the rule of the Prophet's descendants until Muhammad ibn al-Hassan al-Mahdi, the Twelfth Imam. As already mentioned, he is referred to as the Mahdi, or the Hidden Imam, because Twelver Shi'is believe that he never died, but instead was hidden by God until the end of time. When the Mahdi reappears, Twelver Shi'is believe that he will be the saviour for all humankind. In the modern era, Twelver Shi'is have been religiously organised by a quasi-hierarchy with a *marja' al-taqlid*, or source of emulation, at the top of the hierarchy, who is recognised by the title of Ayatollah. Intensive religious training and recognition by one's students and peers is required to reach this position. Today, there are very few Ayatollahs still living; since the death of Ayatollah Fadlallah in 2010, Lebanese Shi'is have been left without a spiritual guardian living within their national borders.

Underneath or aside of the *marja'* are jurists who employ *ijtihad*, or interpretation, to craft Islamic laws based on the application of human reason and rationality (Rahnema 2005: 8). The jurist is called a *mujtahid* (from the root *jihad*, or struggle), because of his or her efforts in making religious rulings – although unusual, women in Iran and Iraq are sometimes educated at home to earn the right to be a *mujtahida* (Wiley 2001: 152). Often misunderstood, the word *jihad* means 'struggle', both inwardly and outwardly. As El-Hussein further explains, resistance is a form of *jihad*, but can be expressed in multiple ways: in the context of Lebanon, key Lebanese clerics supported both the military resistance against Israel's occupation of the country from 1982–2000, as well as *sumud*, or steadfastness, which is a more 'passive resistance manifest in a refusal to leave the land' (2008: 402–403).

Thus, despite its hierarchical structure, Shi'ism embraces a certain legal dynamism, whereas Sunni scholars have largely prohibited the application of *ijtihad* for many centuries (Rahnema 2005: 8). Nevertheless, numerous Sunni activist scholars have had similar radical visions to historicise Islam in the modern era, challenging the traditional *ulama*, or clerics, on questions of *ijtihad* and other key issues. Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), an Egyptian jurist, set out to prove that Islam is a rational religion that can serve as the basis of life in the modern world (Haddad 2005: 44). The Indian philosopher, poet and politician Mohammad Iqbal (1877–1938),

defined history as 'a continuous movement in time' that was always creative and never pre-determined. In the same vein, revelation was also a continuously evolving and creative project that despite having originated in an ancient past was spiritually invested in the conditions of the present.

(Tareen 2013: 11)

Abul A'la Mawdudi (1903–1979), a Pakistani philosopher, rearticulated Islam to respond to urgent questions of nationalism, identity and the economy during the demise of British colonial rule – his political views were formed in debate with, rather than in conformity to, Western sources (Nasr 1996: 33). And Syrian politician and thinker Mustafa al-Siba'i (1915–1964) focused on reconciling socialism and Islam by exploring the different conceptions of property rights in the Qur'an (Enayat 2011: 144–150). According to Rahnema, these expressions of

‘Islamic revivalism ultimately [aim] at the overthrow or radical transformation of a social system which it believes engenders decadence, corruption, deprivation, social injustice, repression and impiety’ (2005: 5). While in this book I focus exclusively on Shi‘i activism, this wider post-colonial context to Islamic revivalism is important to keep in mind.

Decolonial horizons

In order to counter the hegemonic representation of the Islamic resistance movement, I seek to intertwine different theologies of liberation to introduce the possibility of a broader post-secular Marxist framework, where love and knowledge are interconnected and our faith in God and/or humans commits us to action. Here, it is the duty of the faithful to resist against structures of oppression, whether conceptual, emotional or material. Through a commitment to God and/or all humans, especially the poor and those marginalised by capitalist, imperialist and sectarian structures of oppression not of their own making, humans have the potential to attain salvation not only by doing their own theology, but also through creating new social formations, a framework that transforms both the world we live in as well as ourselves. As previously noted, the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci offers a conceptual framework that resonates with this project because he takes culture seriously. Although it may be somewhat paradoxical to look to a Western scholar in any attempt to decentre knowledge, Gramsci sought to shape a new politics dedicated to overcoming marginalisation by abolishing the distinction between ‘centres of prestige and peripheries of inferiority’ (Germino 1990: 14).

Writing within the context of early twentieth century Europe, Gramsci adopted a dual approach to politics, where ‘ideas are not born of other ideas, philosophies of other philosophies; [instead] they are a continually renewed expression of historical development’ (2005: 201). Elaborating on the Marxist conception of materialism, Gramsci incorporated culture to formulate a sophisticated theory of civil society and the struggle for hegemony. He believed the power of ideas subtly elicits the tacit consent to a social order, reasoning that members of a society willingly participate in structures of domination that keep them in subordinate roles. Individuals engage in exploitative practices because the dominant ideas about life either convince them that this is the desirable outcome, or disable their critical faculties so that no other alternative appears feasible.

In Gramsci's formulation, civil society comprises both 'the political and cultural hegemony ... a social group exercises over the whole of society as the ethical content of the state' (Bobbio 1988: 10). This notion of civil society includes not only social institutions like schools, religious bodies, media and art, but also what ideas are refracted through them and how they are likely to be interpreted.

Hegemony is thus secured through civil society, offering a subtle but coercive means for the state and/or dominant class formation to preserve its social, cultural and political legitimacy (Gramsci 2005: 57). At the same time, however, Gramsci argued that civil society also provides the space for ideological struggle, where competing blocs may contest popular 'common sense' and create a new hegemony with a different history, eventually contributing to the formation of a new power (Bobbio 1988: 88). Here 'common sense' is the repertoire of popular culture. According to Gramsci, the ideologies comprising 'common sense' can be conservative or progressive and are open to multiple interpretations. These ideas are fragmentary, fluid, heterogeneous and contradictory. They are the historical accretion or sedimentation of multiple and various beliefs from religion, folklore, science, art, language and philosophy. A bloc secures hegemony by articulating the ideas and beliefs of 'common sense' in ways that resonate with the populace but mobilises them in new directions.

In this way, hegemony is never a fixed or unified position, but instead an unstable product. Legitimacy is continuously being contested in civil society by other reconstructions of popular 'common sense' with different kinds of political and social implications. This is a sophisticated way of explaining how a hegemonic group can institutionalise its power with the willing participation of the people, because Gramsci argued that hegemony is established by standardising particular ways of thinking and doing that appear to emanate from the self (Morton 2007: 93). It also illuminates how counter-hegemonic challenges can be made from within. Once a dominant group successfully wins the war of ideas, any necessary structural adjustments to secure its power are viewed as legitimate by the populace. Therefore, a new hegemony transforms not only the economic, cultural and political systems, but also the ways that people within the system perceive the world. Gramsci's synthesis of materialism and ideology is an important contribution to relational theories of power: he illustrated how ideology is integral to the political process because hegemony is a relation of consent through

ideological leadership and not brute force. Here, religious ideas can either support or challenge the ruling bloc. Later Marxists, including Ernst Bloch and Lucien Goldman, also recognised both the revolutionary and oppressive potentials of religion (Löwy 8: 1988). Gramsci's conceptual framework provides for social and political possibilities that are decentred, empowering the margins, resonating with the goals of decolonial thinkers.

As discussed in the Preface, decolonial studies seek to challenge Euro-peanness – including its predetermined binaries of faith and rationality, religion and knowledge – ‘as [the] master referent, in relation to which all things are measured and understood’ (ReOrient 2015). The goal here is to decentre both knowledge production and knowledge itself. Or as Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2016) explains, decoloniality seeks to challenge the creation of identities that lock certain people into inferiority.¹⁶ Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) points out that the epistemological disobedience of decoloniality is ‘premised on three domains of power, knowledge, and being’. In other words, questions regarding what are the appropriate constellations of social relations, ideas and practices are all up for grabs, to be determined by the non-European as she wishes and from her own location. To illustrate this point, Sayyid notes that, ‘It is not that Islamists use ideas that are themselves Western, but the description of the ideas as Western retroactively constructs them as such’ (2014a: 57).

The point of decoloniality is to decentre the West as the master referent (Sayyid 2003 and 2014a and 2014b). I argue that the Islamic resistance movement is doing this by constructing its own articulations of what it means to be human in today's world, on its own Islamic terms. This requires muddying established binaries, however unsettling – after all, destabilising Hall's (1992) conception of ‘the West and the Rest’ is the whole point. Breaking down boundaries also forces us to recognise the interconnectedness of knowledge and love. Barthes lamented that in Western societies:

the lover's discourse is today of *an extreme solitude*. This discourse is spoken, perhaps, by thousands of subjects (who knows?), but warranted by no one; it is completely forsaken by the surrounding languages: ignored, disparaged, or derided by them, severed not only from authority but also from the mechanisms of authority (sciences, techniques, arts).

(Barthes 1978: 2)

As detailed above, the dominant framework of Western secular modernity marginalises faith; however, it equally marginalises love. In response, a diverse array of radical scholars has articulated a conceptual framework to incorporate love into politics. Freire spoke of the post-colonial liberation struggle as constituting ‘an act of love opposing the lovelessness which lies at the heart of the oppressors’ violence’ (2005: 45). Building on Freire’s work to develop what she calls a methodology for the oppressed, Chela Sandoval defines love as a technology for social transformation, ‘as a body of knowledges, arts, practices, and procedures for re-forming the self and the world’ (2000: 4). Analysing the work of ‘second-wave’ black feminism, Jennifer Nash talks of love as not only ‘a strategy for remaking the self’, but also a means ‘for moving beyond the limitations of selfhood’ (2011: 3). Here, love ‘forms the basis of political communities’ and is ‘rooted in a radical ethic of care’ (Nash 2011: 14).

Throughout history, there have been a number of prominent Muslim scholars who also argued that love and knowledge are interconnected. According to William Chittick, the Persian theologian, jurist, philosopher and mystic, Al-Ghazali, ‘stresse[d] that no one can love anything without knowing it first’ (2011: 188). Ibn al-Dabbagh, the author of an influential classical treatise on love in Arabic, wrote that loving is an endless journey towards knowing:

The many attributes witnessed from the Beloved are beyond count, and they cannot enter in upon the lover all at once. Rather, they follow one another in keeping with the increase in perception. Each attribute demands a trace in the soul, so the lover is always striving to seek increase. When a beautiful form of his Beloved appears to him, he yearns to perceive it so as to enjoy it. When he perceives it, he seeks to perceive what is higher, for the Beloved’s self-disclosures have no end, and yearning drives the lover to embrace them all. In yearning to achieve them all, he suffers pain, and in gazing upon the beauty of what he witnesses from his Beloved, he lives in joy.

(Quoted in Chittick 2011: 190–191).

Proponents of contemporary theologies of liberation use similar languages of love to respond to social injustice, as is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2. For example, the Peruvian Christian liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez argues that faith is expressed by a commitment to God and a love for the poor (Lewis 2005), and that ‘poverty

is one expression of the refusal to love' (Gutiérrez 1995b). As noted in the Preface, the question for Gutiérrez is: 'How to say to the poor, God loves you?' To answer this question, he believes it is necessary to struggle with the poor, because 'how to speak about God taking into account the sufferings of the poor is not easy. This question is larger than our possibilities to answer. We need to struggle with them against injustice in order to answer the question' (Gutiérrez 1995a). The Islamic theologian and activist Ayatollah Fadlallah (2011: 40) similarly believed that a political system must be based on the three principles of love, justice and mercy. Thus, one's love of God is what saves humans from feeling weak in the face of tyranny (Ayatollah Fadlallah 2011: 29), as well as what inspires them to necessary action when others are oppressed (Ayatollah Fadlallah 2011: 53).

This framework moves beyond the imperialist dynamic of Western liberal practices of toleration (Bauman 1991; Brown 2006), because as Gutiérrez explains, 'love exists only among equals' (2003: 17). Here, love is the ultimate equaliser, while at the same time potentially making us more aware of the structures of oppression that determine our inequality in the social world that currently exists (but which can be remade). While Jackson (2009: 15) notes that, 'love appreciates the plenitude and ambiguity of the world,' our current social world does not. For Hardt, this conception of political love means a love for and of the stranger, 'a love that functions through the play of differences, rather than the insistence on the same' (quoted in Schwartz 2009: 813). I expand upon this notion of a critical ethics of love as a decolonial method in Chapter 3. But first, I want to turn to the rise of Islamic activism and other theologies of liberation in the struggle to challenge power from the vantage of the oppressed.