

# The Rhetoric of Power in Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah's *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa*

Bianka Speidl

MTA-SZTE, Migration Research Institute, Hungary

**Abstract:** My paper aims to investigate how rhetoric supports a theory of empowerment, conveys the call to action and justifies violence. To date only a few articles have analysed rhetorical devices frequently used in modern Arabic religious and political discourses. Against this background, I will identify the rhetorical patterns and devices applied by Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah in his *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa* (Islam and the Logic of Power). Fadlallah in the 1970s attempted to construct a coherent system of force and a project of empowerment for the Lebanese Shi'ah. In my presentation I plan to examine the rhetorical strategies by which he persuaded his mainly quietist audience and analyse how the various rhetorical tools transmit his philosophy of power. The use of rhetoric in Fadlallah's *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa*, as well as in his other writings and speeches, are manifold and predominant. They include arguments from scripture, necessity, virtue and instrumentality. Fadlallah has recourse to rhetorical questions, antinomy, metaphors as well as repetition to make his discourse convincing and effective. Moreover, he uses master narratives to frame his project of power in Shi'ah Salvation history. He supports his argument by Qur'anic references as an ultimate authority and quotes it widely to legitimise power and the use of force.

In my analysis I am going to prove that Fadlallah's discourse constructs a religious ideology in which force is understood as virtuous, instrumental and inevitable. Each element of his rhetoric is aimed mainly at reassuring the quietists that the quest for power is justified, and at mobilizing the Shi'ah to take action, even if it implies violence.

Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah's *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa* was written in 1976 at the outset of the Lebanese civil war while the Phalangist forces bombarded Fadlallah's constituency. The book is best described as a manual for the ideologues and leaders of Islamic movements of, and beyond the awakening Shi'i community. In the following I highlight some of the rhetorical strategies employed by Fadlallah in order to convince the quietist Shi'ah that the quest for power is justified, and at mobilising them to take action even if it implies violence.

The present article intends to detect how a Muslim scholar uses rhetorical devices to make an argument. In the following I describe the structure of Fadlallah's reasoning then I outline the internal logic of his arguments and his understanding of logic. Third, I identify the rhetorical patterns applied by him - such as arguments from scripture, necessity, virtue and instrumentality, rhetorical questions, antinomy, metaphors and repetition and master narratives -, and I study the way the various rhetorical tools transmit Fadlallah's philosophy of power. My aim is to prove that Fadlallah's rhetoric constructs a religious ideology in which force is understood as virtuous, instrumental and necessary.

As J. Charteris-Black rightly observed, '[p]ersuasion is a multi-layered discourse function that is the outcome of a complex interaction between intention, linguistic choice and context.'<sup>1</sup> Fadlallah's aim was to prove that under certain conditions a violation of a moral rule is not immoral but morally justified and even required by the religious law. Accordingly, Fadlallah's *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa* endorses a specific rhetoric of violence.

### *The Structure of the Argument*

The various chapters of the book deal with the aspects of power such as the Islamic doctrine, the problematic of standing up to tyranny, faith, spirituality, social strength, the question of numerical majority, the means of change, the link between *da'wah* and power, and the ethics of force. Fadlallah's method of presenting a topic follows a stable pattern. First, he presents his hypothesis regarding the issue in question. Second, he provides quotes from the Qur'an and the *hadith*. Third, he summarises the content of the quotes. Fourth, he relates their content to his hypothesis. Fifth, he draws the conclusion in which he paraphrases the hypothesis.

Fadlallah bases his reasoning on a combination of human experience and the contextual interpretation of revelation and tradition. He takes human experience as a starting point for any analysis and claims that this approach guarantees the realism of his reasoning.<sup>2</sup> Then he looks for a simi-

---

1 Jonathan Charteris-Black. *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor*. Basingstoke, 2005, p. 30.

2 Fadlallah. *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa*. Beirut, 3rd ed. 1985, p. 286.

lar situation in the sacred texts of Islam and highlights the parallels between the two contexts. His focus at this stage is on the divine intention as unfolded in the particular situation. Finally, he assesses the present experience in light of the divine message. He considers his argument as realistic but without aspiring to mundane rationalism.

Through this process he aims to uncover the transcendental goal inherent in any given situation. As a result he designs a new reality of potentials constructed through a novel way of interpretation and argumentation, however, inseparable from the Islamic perception of life and politics, and embedded in the Shi'ī experience.

### *The Internal Logic of the Argument*

Through a set of arguments, he justifies an internal logic of power in the Da'wah Islamist political perspective. Fadlallah wants to convince the quietist Shi'ah that the Da'wah tradition, which is committed to justice and peace, has in fact always promoted power – as well as the means to acquire it. He repeatedly states that peace is the priority for Islam,<sup>3</sup> while the resort to violence is an exception. However, when a peaceful attitude appears as a sign of weakness and compromise, Islam 'prefers confrontation'.<sup>4</sup> The variable that links nature (power pervades human existence) and norm (Islam shall bring in peace) is God. It is God who created nature as power and chose Islam to bring it to peace.

In Fadlallah's thought, a resort to war is legitimized by its purpose, which is to halt unlawful practices. In this system, any act is nothing but a mere means to achieve divinely set goals, and its value is determined by its intention. This makes Fadlallah's divine command ethics purposeful, and places his Machiavellian concept in a frame controlled by religious law. Similarly, the notion of transgression is evaluated in light of the Islamic principles and the actual situation on the ground. In this framework Fadlallah states that both violence and peace can be exercised and legitimized in view of the challenge the Muslim community faces.<sup>5</sup>

---

3 Ibid. p. 210, 265, 283, 299.

4 Ibid. p. 204.

5 Ibid. p. 205.

## Rhetorical Tools and Strategies

### 1. Argument from scripture

In *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa*, the Qur'an stands as the primary reference in Fadlallah's argumentation. The most effective way of citation is when the verses are embedded into the author's train of thought. Thus, the theme evolves through the Qur'anic passages carefully selected by Fadlallah. The Qur'anic quotes interweave and saturate the author's discourse to an extent that the readers feel as if the Qur'an was directly addressing them through his own ideas. As a result, the narrative contains intermittent exhortative passages, and the audience gets carried away by the flow of the Scripture, while being indoctrinated by Fadlallah.

Fadlallah draws on thematic exegesis to cement his rhetoric. At the beginning of the chapters and sections, he identifies the theme to be elaborated on and selects verses or group of verses that are linked to the selected theme. Subsequently, he comments on the idea present in the citations rather than engaging in an analytic exegesis of the terms and sequences, or giving details about the circumstances of revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*). This technique establishes an artificial coherence between the quoted verses and the author's interpretation, providing the reader with an assumed unity of meaning all through the passage or section.

From the frequency of the Qur'anic quotations, we can infer that he gives preference to the Qur'an over the *hadith*. As explained by Stephan Dähne, the rhetorical device called 'equivalence of contexts' in classical Arabic literature meant the use of the Qur'anic text with the aim of creating an intellectual, emotional setting in which the idea or the situation depicted in the Qur'an echoes the experience of the audience. Thus 'one finds the object of the speech subtly interconnected with the object of the respective Qur'anic passage'.<sup>6</sup> For Fadlallah, the Qur'anic milieu provides a context equivalent to the up-to-date situation of Shi'ah. Another reason for Fadlallah's preference of the Qur'an to *hadith* is that Qur'anic statements are general, rich in rhetorical elements and open to a wide range of interpretations.

---

6 Stephan Dähne. 'Qur'anic Wording in Political Speeches in Classical Arabic Literature.' *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*. 3. 2001, p. 7.

Studying the views of Fadlallah (along with Khumayni's and Muṭahhari's), an assumption can be made that the rejection of *qiyas* in Da'wah Islam prompted the activist thinkers to identify the general rules, and infer opinion from universal ethical principles as revealed in the Qur'an. This conceptualization gives much less scope for 'scripturalist absolutism'<sup>7</sup> and, at the same time, grants the natural presence of a teleological perspective in activist Shi'ism. Without this teleological perspective, activism could never win over quietism, because the former, traditional restrictions (rooted in a sort of doctrinal absolutism) had to be unwaveringly overwritten. Based on this analysis, it can be said that, with the help of extrapolated general principles, activist Da'wah thinkers – among them Fadlallah – attempted to dissolve tension between deontology and teleology, and mobilised their followers to resort to – even violent – action.

## 2. *Argument from necessity*

Elizabeth Frazer and Kimberly Hutchings claim that in processes of the justification of political violence, rhetorical tools are strategies that make certain conclusions inescapable by demonstrating that there are no acceptable alternatives.<sup>8</sup> One such tool is called 'necessity arguments'. Agents justify political violence by claiming that it is a necessity and what is necessary should be done for the survival of the individual or the community. Thus, the argument from necessity appeals to the human instinct of survival. This is a captivating rhetorical strategy in an Islamic context, all the more so given that it is justified by the Qur'an and the *shari'ah*. The Qur'an supports the permission to fight non-believers on the basis of the necessity to defend the community of believers. As for Islamic law, it allows forbidden acts in case of necessity, *al-darurat tubih al-mahzurat*.

In Chapter 6 (on 'the moral dimension of power in Islam') of *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa*, Fadlallah argues for the right of the weak and oppressed to use force in confronting the oppressors. Here, the use of force is a legitimate right of self-defence. Besides, confrontation can serve to prevent greater destruction. Fadlallah insists that, without permission to use force in cases of necessity, no moral principles or nothing sacred could

---

7 A term used by Daniel Brown in 'Islamic Ethics in Comparative Perspective'. In: *The Muslim World*. 89. 1999, p. 190.

8 Frazer and Hutchings. 'Argument and Rhetoric.' p. 193.

have survived.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, he adds that the legal permission addresses pious people who, having resorted to fight, are not accountable for the harm they cause. The exposition is designed to deal with the major concerns of the quietist Shi'ah in order to convince them that fighting is not only allowed but also a duty imposed by the circumstances. In Chapter 7 (on 'the call and the logic of power', while examining whether *jihad* is a means to call to Islam or not, Fadlallah concludes - referring to the early Islamic history - that 'force is one of the means to protect the Call and defend it from the challenges posed by its infidel adversaries'.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. *Argument from virtue*

Virtuous violence is defined by the values that motivate it and by 'the character of those individuals engaged in it'.<sup>11</sup> As a rhetorical tool, virtuous violence helps to avoid the conclusion that all kinds of political violence are necessary and rational. The argument from virtue is reasoned in two ways. The first one is the assumption that, in specific instances, force is virtue and since virtue must be realized, it follows that using force in specific instances is unavoidable. The other way focuses on virtuous agents. It assumes that everything done by virtuous people is good. Since virtuous people use force, it follows that using force is good.

Fadlallah differentiates between virtuous and evil uses of force: between killing and 'fighting in the path of God',<sup>12</sup> between the violence of the oppressors and the violence of the oppressed.<sup>13</sup> It is God who reveals the right use of force to Man through the *shardya*, which is the base of ethics.<sup>14</sup> Fadlallah asserts that 'The use of power that does not contradict Islamic values is a moral virtue that helps to establish a decent life.'<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the use of force is justified only if it reflects and embodies the virtues and values of Islam.

---

9 Fadlallah. *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa*. p. 61.

10 Ibid. 228.

11 Frazer and Hutchings. 'Argument and Rhetoric.' pp. 181-182.

12 Ibid. p.198.

13 See e.g. *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa*. p. 61.

14 Ibid. p.195.

15 Ibid. p.196.

Besides the focus on virtues, Fadlallah's discourse is centred on prominent figures who embody these characteristics. Fadlallah claims that the Imams refrained from action only when there was no leadership that possessed the necessary religious competence to lead the community to victory.<sup>16</sup> However, he stresses that the Imams supported all movements that acted according to the Islamic principles. The reference to the Imams as ultimate models of action is an affective argument through which he secures the legitimacy of his own discourse.

Fadlallah dedicates two chapters to the ethics of power and several sections to interpreting 'commanding right and forbidding wrong', because his ultimate aim is to convince the quietist Shi'ah that fighting for Islamic goals is virtuous. He reconstructs the meaning of violence as virtue in as much as it means righteous use of force. Through his references to virtuous figures such as the Prophet and the Imams who called to power, Fadlallah urges the Lebanese Shi'ah to take action and expects a 'keen response' from his audience.<sup>17</sup>

#### *4. Argument from instrumentality*

Fadlallah's repertoire of arguments contains end-oriented justifications that Frazer and Hutchings describe as arguments from instrumentality. Such substantiations evaluate violence as "instrumental" for politics because it is an effective means for achieving political ends'.<sup>18</sup> However, this kind of justification leaves two major concerns un-addressed: the relationship between means and ends, and the unpredictability of the outcome. This is why supplementary arguments<sup>19</sup> such as arguments from necessity and arguments from virtue are applied. This phenomenon points to the fact that various types of arguments cannot be clearly separated even inside the same text and in most cases they are present simultaneously.

In the *Introduction* of the book, Fadlallah radically identifies power as the essence of life without which no self-esteem or progress is possible. His assertion is that 'the weak and oppressed were not able to win battles in support of their principles, thoughts and interests until they eventually

---

16 Ibid. p. 272.

17 Frazer and Hutchings. 'Argument and Rhetoric'. p. 189.

18 Ibid. p. 181.

19 Ibid. p. 181.

got hold of the means or were in a position of power'.<sup>20</sup> At this point, he carefully mixes arguments from necessity and arguments from instrumentality. Although Fadlallah's argument is seemingly built on existential necessity, it is a goal-oriented ethics of existence. The implementation of Islam is the ultimate aim of human life. Thus, mere survival, or refraining from action, renders existence futile. Muslim life has a unique value only because it is instrumental to the victory of Islam. If the instrument is endangered, the supreme goal is imperilled as well. The use of force, therefore, is based on the necessity to secure the existence of the instrument and, consequently, on the realisation of the supreme Islamic goal.

In the conclusion of *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa*, Fadlallah asserts that Muslims are expected to be strong in order to realise the major Islamic objectives, and to prevent the aggression of its enemies. For this, military, economic, political, and scientific power is needed, and force serves as a deterrent. Therefore, violence is justified in as much as it opposes and destroys oppressive systems and secures the necessary stability for implementing the Islamic order. Therefore in Fadlallah's thought power is both a value in itself and an instrument and none of the aspects of power can be isolated from the rest.

### 5. Rhetorical questions

Fadlallah opens each chapter with a few rhetorical questions. This rhetorical tool is 'an assertion in the form of an interrogative statement (...) characterised by (...) aggressive and polemical content in which two hostile voices are dialogically opposed'.<sup>21</sup> A rhetorical question calls on the reader to choose from among two alternatives the one suggested by the author. Muhammad A. Badarneh identified four main functions of rhetorical questions in Arabic prose: 1. to confer a dialogic quality upon the text, 2. to launch a hidden polemic against those who have a differing view, 3. to question the foundation of differing views, and 4. to speak for and create identification with the reader.<sup>22</sup>

---

20 Fa Fadlallah. pp. 17-18.

21 Badarneh, Muhammad A. 'Exploring the Use of Rhetorical Questions in Editorial Discourse: a Case Study of Arabic Editorials,' *Text & Talk - An Interdisciplinary Journal of Language, Discourse & Communication Studies*. 29. 2009. p. 639.

22 Badarneh. 'Exploring the Use of Rhetorical Questions.' p. 639.



In the first page of *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa* Fadlallah asks:

If Islam believes in force, is it blind force that justifies everything including aggression? Or is it the force that does not reach the point of aggression (*'udwan*)? (...) How does all this comply with Islamic morals such as forgiveness, tolerance and patience? Are the latter regarded as weaknesses that encourage Muslims to be submissive? Or are they aspects of strength that is in line with the Islamic concept? And [if so], how could this be the case?<sup>23</sup>

In these questions, Fadlallah addresses some of the essential issues dealt with in the book, and right at the outset makes his style polemic. The first two questions are in fact clauses of one single statement in which the opinion of those who promote unrestricted violence is presented in the subordinate clause, and as such it is undermined by the rhetorical question in the main clause asserting that Islam does believe in force but not in a blind one. The following four questions embrace another topic, the problem of morality with respect to strength and weakness. Here, the answer is provided in the concluding question that refers back to his preferred interpretation, thus disqualifying any differing views. In these questions, Fadlallah summarizes the essence of the book, declares his opinion, and addresses both the quietist and those who opt for spontaneous and limitless use of force. The cogency of the concluding rhetorical question lies in the fact that it contains the ideologically and rationally<sup>24</sup> viable alternative that is in line with the cultural code of the readers who are, therefore, expected to take it as self-evidently true.<sup>25</sup>

In Chapter 7, where Fadlallah examines the relation between the call to Islam and the Islamic concept of strength, he poses a rhetorical question where he applies the technique of double voicing.<sup>26</sup>

Are violence, force, compulsion, fighting and the like considered as acceptable ways to bring people into Islam? Was there no other option for those who refused conversion but submission regardless of their beliefs? And can we consider that the force used in the Islamic conquests was the prime means of spreading Islam across the world?<sup>27</sup>

Here, Fadlallah expresses ideas that are associated with critiques of Islam. He takes these questions as opportunities to present critical opinions and at

---

23 Fadlallah. *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa*. p. 13.

24 Badarneh. 'Exploring the Use of Rhetorical Questions.' p. 650.

25 Ibid. p. 652.

26 Ibid. p. 643.

27 Fadlallah. *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa*. p. 217.

the same time reduce their weight through the interrogative form. Later on, he dedicates the whole chapter to denying these statements and bases his argument on primarily Islam-friendly Western sources. With this, his aim is to question the very foundation upon which critical discourse is built, to attack and cast doubt on the legitimacy and integrity<sup>28</sup> of their argument.

Fadlallah's consistent resort to rhetorical questions – characteristic of *khutba* style rather than of a well-thought written treatise – proves his determination to further bolster the contrast between 'us' and 'them'. He sets the scene for two antagonistic discourses: that of his readers and that of his opponents inside and outside of his community. As the two types of rhetorical questions demonstrate, his aim was to persuade the insiders and to discredit those who are adversaries of Islam. This polemical tone is reflective of the style of *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa* generally, and makes the book similar to a chain of extended *khutbas*.

In each case, Fadlallah dedicates the entire chapter to answering the rhetorical questions posed in the introduction. As Badarneh terms it, he speaks for the reader.<sup>29</sup> Fadlallah skilfully creates the illusion that there is space for the reader to interact with the text, but in fact he establishes false dichotomies and designs the discourse in a way to leave only one option to the reader.

## 6. Repetition

One of Fadlallah's most important rhetorical tools is repetition. He follows and makes use of a long tradition of Arabic prose in general, and religious-political discourse in particular, in which redefinition of an idea is considered as a logical proof. As Barbara Johnstone indicates, the linguistic forms and expressions that provide the argument with cogency 'are at the heart of the [Arabic] language, the discourse, and the rhetoric'.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, she claims that 'persuasion is a result as much, or more, of the sheer number of times an idea is stated and the balanced, elaborate ways

---

28 Ibid. p. 656.

29 Ibid. p. 654.

30 Barbara Johnstone. 'Presentation as Proof: The Language of Arabic Rhetoric.' In: *Anthropological Linguistics*. 25. 1983, p. 56.

in which it is stated as it is a result of syllogistic or enthymematic 'logical organisation'.<sup>31</sup>

Johnstone's remarks apply to Fadlallah's argumentation in *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa* as well. He uses diverse tactics for repetition that include repetition of certain expressions, parallelism (repetition of form), and paraphrasing (repetition of content) in various ways. Out of the many examples of repetition that pervade the text and interconnect the various chapters, highlight only showcases. The first one illustrates Fadlallah's use of syntactic parallelism, both 'listing' – repetition of entire clauses cited to provide examples or details<sup>32</sup> – and 'cumulative repetition' – in which semantically each one builds on the previous one and thus has a kind of cumulative effect.<sup>33</sup> In Chapter 6, on the moral dimension of power, Fadlallah lists the reasons why Muslims need to resort to force in 5 points.

1. Making efforts to construct a life based on faith in God (*al-'amal 'ala bina' al-hayat*) (...) makes the movement stronger and faster (...) provides the actors with the feeling of confidence (...)
2. Protecting (*himaya*) religion against the persecution of its enemies (...)
3. Supporting (*intizar*) the oppressed, exploited, and helpless groups against the oppressors (...)
4. Weakening (*id'af*) the power of the nonbelievers, so that disbelief cannot hinder Islam from progressing (...)
5. Defending (*difa'i*) ourselves, and stopping all kinds of aggression against people, lands and sacred places, and fighting oppressors.<sup>34</sup>

In the passage quoted above, the goal of using force is emphatic, placed at the beginning in each statement, and put in *masdar* form. The use of verbal nouns provides the required action with a somewhat abstract sense – describes it as a value – but without depriving it of its dynamism, and thus presents it as a tangible duty for the reader.

In the same section, applying the same pattern gives the passage an internal rhythm. Two of the *masdars* are synonymous (protect, defend), the rest – 'making efforts to construct', 'weakening the nonbelievers' and 'supporting the oppressed' create an intellectual context in which the use of force appears as constructive, purposeful and value-based. The explanations that follow the introductory statements cited above repeat the very same values and tasks: protecting Islam and the oppressed and weakening

---

31 Ibid. p. 52.

32 Ibid. p. 50.

33 Ibid. p. 51.

34 Fadlallah. *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa*. pp. 201-202.

disbelief and oppressions. This common motif is present as a central idea in each of the five statements, however extended with a particular additional aspect in each instance.

The second example from the Introduction to Chapter 3 on spiritual strength, illustrates Fadlallah's use of reverse paraphrase 'in which the same action or event is described from two opposing perspectives'.<sup>35</sup>

It is spiritual strength that generates the sense of value in the human soul and detaches life from feelings of fear, sadness, anxiety, loss and laxity, and fills it instead with feelings of confidence, happiness and resoluteness in order to provide it with confidence, steadfastness, and clarity [of vision] in planning and stance. It is through spiritual strength that Man possesses power to confront his enemies. Lacking this would cause a sense of weakness, uncertainty that leads to internal destruction, fills the soul with terror, and crushes all preparations for resistance (...)<sup>36</sup>

The extended paragraph combines reverse paraphrase with cumulative repetition. Fadlallah makes the same statement twice to emphasise importance of spiritual strength. In the first half of the passage, Fadlallah states that possessing spiritual strength generates further values, while lacking it leads to the reverse of those values (fear vs. confidence, happiness vs. sadness etc.). In the second half of the passage, he repeats the same features and broadens the perspective with the anticipated consequences of both attitudes. This method carries away the reader's attention and creates an emotional identification with the message in which happiness is inherently linked to the capacity of resistance. Linking instinctive human desires to political stance through their connection to the identical source actually creates an imprinting in the reader's mind.

Fadlallah uses paraphrase on a large scale and in diverse ways. One of them is summarizing preceding statements.<sup>37</sup> Another means is applied in the case of some ideas that pervade the texture of the book such as the obligation of 'commanding right and forbidding wrong' and its interpretation as a call to force. Fadlallah deals with the topic in three chapters: in Chapter 2 on 'the use of force against tyranny', in Chapter 4 on 'social strength' and in Chapter 8 on 'change and force'. In each case, the core message is repeated and broadened with new elements corresponding to the main theme of the respective chapter. Thus, the idea becomes domi-

---

35 Johnstone. 'Presentation as Proof.' p. 51.

36 Fadlallah. *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa*. p. 73.

37 See e.g. Fadlallah. *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa*. p. 45.

nant in the book and provides a legal perspective to Fadlallah's arguments for power and force.

Finally, it is necessary to mention some key expressions in the book such as 'realistic vision / perception', 'corresponding to Islamic goals', 'standing up to tyranny / oppression', 'Islamic morality', 'defending the oppressed', 'resisting exploitation' and 'complying to responsibility'. These words and notions and their synonyms are repeated in each chapter countless times and gradually wear away the readers' intellectual defences against debates and arguments on the use of force.

With Johnstone's words in mind – 'repetition... is the key to the linguistic cohesion of the texts and to their rhetorical effectiveness'<sup>38</sup> – we can assume that repetition guaranteed the coherence of Fadlallah's system of thought. Also, it provided the book with a logic based on the internal coherence of the text. Although sometimes annoyingly repetitious, the text is able to fulfil its primary goal: to inculcate in the reader a sense of identification with the author's point of view.<sup>39</sup>

## 7. *Master narratives*

As Halverson [et al.] explained, narratives 'provide every society with its own sense of rationality'.<sup>40</sup> To understand how a narrative gains this logic-constructing capacity, its rhetorical organisation needs to be studied. Fadlallah's narrative is based on coherent scriptural master-narratives of empowerment. To reassure the contemporary Shi'ah that their battle now is a continuation of past struggles, Fadlallah provides analogies that help them reinterpret the experienced reality. By reinterpreting master narratives he provided a frame within which his audience could evaluate events and attitudes through their relation to the desired strength and power. Moreover, this perspective presented acquiring power as a sacred obligation and even inevitable for salvation.

---

38 Johnstone. 'Presentation as Proof. p. 47.

39 See: Johnstone's reference to Deborah Tannen's 'Spoken and Written Language and the Oral literate Continuum.' In: Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society. Berkeley, 1980, p. 7.

40 Halverson, Jeffrey R./ Goodall, Jr. H. L./ Corman, Steven R. Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism. Basingstoke, 2011. p. 17.

In my attempt to study the elements of Fadlallah's narrative of Da'wah history, I rely on the categorization of J. R. Halverson [et al.].<sup>41</sup> They define master narrative as a comprehensive and 'culturally embedded view of history' that provides a systematic understanding of the past, the present and the future of a community.<sup>42</sup> It shapes the communal as well as the individual identity and merges them into a coherent whole through ideology and required action.<sup>43</sup> Any master narrative is made up of narratives, a 'coherent system of stories'<sup>44</sup> that aim to provide a solution for a problem in the present by creating 'a narrative trajectory'<sup>45</sup> of conflicts, participants, actions, and events. Narratives employ archetypal characters – set in binary oppositions – relationships – alliances or conflicts – and 'standard actions' required from the agents of the story.<sup>46</sup> The solution to the ideological problem exposed in the narrative can only be found through the resolution of the original, real life conflict.

Fadlallah evokes all the key elements of the Da'wah master narrative: the Karbala' event, history as a venue of salvation from corruption, and the problem of occultation. The elements of his master narrative convey one message, that of the Manichaeic perception of history that permeates Fadlallah's discourse. The basic conflict to be solved is the prevailing injustice and oppression in the contemporary reality versus the desire to change the state of affairs in accordance with the divine law that grants righteousness. For this Fadlallah constructed a new, universalistic master narrative of power as an essential means of realizing justice that ultimately brings about salvation. It is based upon the 'narrative trajectory' that presents inner strength and tangible power as inevitable in order to wipe out injustice, as part of the divine mission assigned to human beings.

### 7.1 The account of Karbala' in Fadlallah's narrative of power

Fadlallah claims – contrary to the prevailing perception – that al-Iusayn engaged in the fight not only 'to carry out the Imam's divine duty' with

---

41 Halverson et al. Master Narratives.

42 Ibid. p.12.

43 Ibid. pp. 21-22.

44 Ibid. p.23.

45 Ibid. p.19.

46 Halverson et al. Master Narratives. p. 24.

full awareness of his destiny, but he was above all determined to restore 'the just Islamic rule'.<sup>47</sup> In Fadlallah's narrative, Karbala' took place as a result of circumstances that are 'familiar' (*ma'luf*)<sup>48</sup> to his readers, an act of resistance to be repeated by all the faithful. Put in the new frame, Karbala' is not only an open-ended conflict, but also a manifestation of power, courage, and hope. It is about accepting the allotted mission as well as about transforming the reality. The reinterpreted Karbala' is the symbol of 'noble sacrifice'<sup>49</sup> but also that of determined action. As such it appears as part of the obligation of 'commanding right and forbidding wrong'.

Furthermore, Fadlallah does not linger on portraying Mu'awiya and Yazid as archetypes of oppressors in order to describe the nature of evil. His narrative focuses on mobilisation and change. The inner conflict between weakness and strength is resolved by al-Husayn the warrior, whose figure takes primacy over the archetype of al-Husayn the martyr. Fadlallah provides a new direction to the trajectory of the master narrative of Karbala' in which martyrdom and resistance are not values in themselves, but only means leading to the final goal: power and justice.

## 7.2 The role of the Mahdi in Fadlallah's narrative of power

Fadlallah asserts that true change is never detached from the Islamic path and the final victory of the movement is realized with the return of the *Mahdi*.<sup>50</sup> However, he tackles the issue from a de-mystified and pragmatic perspective and insists that 'the need for an order and state'<sup>51</sup> is not restricted to the era of the Prophet and the Imams. He inserts two brief sections on the problem of the absence of the *Mahdi* in the context of the necessity of Islamic governance ('Islam – a call and a state')<sup>52</sup> and the permitted means of change ('Change by leniency and violence').<sup>53</sup>

This framing renders the problem of occultation secondary and deals with it simply to deny any views that oppose activism in the absence of

---

47 Fadlallah. *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa*. p. 269.

48 Ibid p. 270.

49 Halverson et al. p. 92.

50 Fadlallah. p. 274.

51 Ibid. p. 263.

52 Ibid. p. 260.

53 Ibid. p. 264.

the Imam. It is power and authority put at the service of implementing the *shari‘ah* that ‘lays the foundations of justice in life,’<sup>54</sup> and as such they are detached from the requirement of infallible leadership. With this statement Fadlallah echoes the Sunni position and puts aside a basic Da‘wah condition of legitimacy. Power inasmuch as it serves justice is legitimate, it enjoys priority over infallibility, and it is accessible to every committed Muslim.

### 7.3 Salvation history in Fadlallah’s narrative of power

In Fadlallah’s narrative the events of salvation history as described in the Qur’an – and thus preserved in the collective system of belief – are to prove the legitimacy and necessity of resorting to violence in certain situations. The first Muslims did not use force out of mere habit but fought for the just cause, in the same way as the contemporary Lebanese Shi‘ah are expected to do. He invokes relevant episodes of this salvation history and interprets them as necessary manifestations of the legitimate use of force. Thus, Fadlallah provides a constant moral framework of using force for his audience.<sup>55</sup> This connection between the narrative of the past and the mobilisation in the present is a crucial aspect of Islamist discourse.

## 8. *Antinomy (tibaq)*

In the justification of the use of force, Fadlallah’s argument is based on the claim that it is Islamic as opposed to other non-Islamic forms of power and aggression. This approach necessitates the perception of a bipolar world in which what is Islamic is by essence good, and what is non-Islamic is essentially bad. Maintaining the constant tension between the two is indispensable for the internal logic of his reasoning. Therefore, in order to preserve the coherence of the argument, Fadlallah depicts the world through mutually exclusive antinomies (*tibaq*), a prominent rhetorical feature extremely popular in the current and past Arabic political and religious discourses. In this rhetorical figure, concepts with irreconcilably op-

---

54 Ibid. p. 263.

55 Hume, Mo. ‘Questioning Violence: Meanings, Myths and Realities.’ *Bulletin of Latin American Research*. 28. 2009, p. 50.



posing meaning are juxtaposed in the same sentence or paragraph and shape the style and the argument of Fadlallah's discourse.<sup>56</sup>

The most prevalent *tibaq* pairs in *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa* are the following: positive (*ijabi*) vs. negative (*salbi*); goodness (*khayr*) vs. evil (*sharr*); falsehood (*batil*) vs. righteousness (*haqq*); strength (*quwwa*) vs. weakness (*da'f*); faith (*iman*) vs. disbelief (*kufr*); right (*ma'ruf*) vs. wrong (*munkar*); leniency (*lutf*) vs. violence (*'unf*); realistic (*waqi'i*) vs. idealistic (*mithali*).

However, with a double twist, Fadlallah sometimes reconciles binary oppositions.<sup>57</sup> For example, he asserts that 'strength is neither the tolerance in times of peace to preserve life, nor is it the violence in times of war that demolishes life (...) Islam advocates both peace and war to preserve freedom, as well as all the virtues and principles it believes in'.<sup>58</sup> Thus, he presents Islam as a comprehensive system in which the seemingly mutually exclusive means can be equally legitimate by rendering them Islamic.

Fadlallah's division of the world into 'us, the believers' and 'them, the infidels' exempts the believers from the burden of rationally defining what is right and what counts as wrong. In H. L. Goodall's words, this approach 'serves to simplify a complex world that is otherwise threatening, unknown, ambiguous, different, and often unfair, so much so that it becomes the duty of all true believers to rid the world of "them" [even] by force.'<sup>59</sup> This observation fits Fadlallah's emphasis on the inevitable clash between the opposing forces of corruption and righteousness, and the inherent moral aspect of this combat. In this the 'Islamic system / order' (*al-nizam al-islami*) appears as 'righteous',<sup>60</sup> as opposed to the 'order of disbelief' (*al-nizam al-kafir*).<sup>61</sup> Through dichotomies - Fadlallah establishes a new - political - myth in which collaboration, quietism and compromises are associated with decay and deviation, while resistance, revolt, and activism

---

56 Heinrichs, W. P. 'Tibaq.' In: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. P. Bearman et al. (Eds.). O. Leiden, 2000, pp. 450-452.

57 Fadlallah. *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa*. p. 243.

58 Ibid. p. 205.

59 Goodall, Jr, H. L. 'Blood, Shit, and Tears: The Terrorist as Abject Other.' (a paper presented at the conference on 'Managing and Legislating Workplace Abjection.' University of York, United Kingdom, 23 September, 2009). Quoted in Halverson et al. 22.

60 Fadlallah. p. 272.

61 Ibid. p. 257.

are the inevitable constituents of the Islamic revolution and equal life force.

### 9. *Metaphors of battle(field)*

Among the rhetorical tools applied by Fadlallah, metaphors have a special significance. In the following, I will look at one of the most recurrent of them in *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa*: the notion of *ma'raka* battle(field). As Jonathan Charteris-Black observed, the systematic nature of metaphor choices informs us how social relations are perceived in a given context, and how beliefs 'are conceived and communicated'.<sup>62</sup> In Fadlallah's use, the metaphor of battlefield is ascribed to various actions suggesting an underlying 'conceptual metaphor' that life is conflict. The conceptual (underlying) metaphor, 'life is a battlefield' determines the choice of words such as 'submission', 'collaboration', 'destruction', 'subjugation', 'destruction', 'confrontation', 'escape', 'neutral' and 'steadfast'. Acts of the believers are described with the terminology of warfare, leading to either victory or defeat as if they were part of a military campaign.<sup>63</sup> Inherently related to this perception is the idea that religion was revealed to guide Man in the ongoing mythic cosmic clash of the good and bad.

Fadlallah imbues the book with the notion of *ma'raka*, insinuating that life in its all aspects is a battlefield where violence can be a basic and natural human response to the various challenges and dangers posed to the individual and to the community. His use of the notion 'battlefield' both metaphorically and literally (references to Hittin,<sup>64</sup> Badr,<sup>65</sup> Uhud,<sup>66</sup> al-Ahzab,<sup>67</sup> and Hunayn<sup>68</sup>) connects the two realms into a coherent unity. Fadlallah's technique is based on reification, the reference to abstract phenomena – such as tensions and confrontations characteristic to human existence – by the concrete notions of battle and battlefield. Battle(field) as a metaphor can refer to acts of resistance as well as the social, economic,

---

62 Charteris-Black. *Politicians and Rhetoric*. 3.

63 *Ibid.* p. 90.

64 Fadlallah. *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa*. p. 236.

65 *Ibid.* pp. 293-296.

66 *Ibid.* p. 270.

67 *Ibid.* p. 270.

68 *Ibid.* pp. 175-8.

political, and intellectual fields of life, and to the psyche of the believer. Accordingly, the enemy can be all those who criticize Islam in any form, who cause a rift in society, who resort to quietism, and those who act without self-restraint.

Terming every aspect of human life as a potential or actual battlefield, Fadlallah made use of the power of metaphors in binding the 'conscious and unconscious means of persuasion – between cognition and emotion – to create a moral perspective on life'.<sup>69</sup> Thus, through the use of metaphors, Fadlallah managed to influence the emotional associations of the Lebanese Shi'ah and re-interpret the Da'wah ethos. Charteris-Black claims that metaphors relate abstract notions and 'ideologies' to daily experience and thus make them affective and accessible.<sup>70</sup> The use of a particular metaphor, which in turn legitimates a proposed ideology or policy is embedded in a particular social and cultural value system that can transform a metaphor into a myth. By myth, I mean 'a narrative that embodies a set of beliefs expressing aspects of the unconscious [and] provides an explanation of all the things for which explanations are felt to be necessary'.<sup>71</sup> 'Political myths' are created by binding novel modes of action to traditional values through metaphors. The evaluation implicit in figurative language, thus, appeals to the emotions of the audience and the resulting political myth provides a new perception of a given problem.

The historical battles mentioned carry a political meaning as well. Considering the context in which the book was published – 1976 Beirut – the early battles of the Muslim community are supposed to recall the potentials of the righteous minority – the Shi'ah- and the importance of faith and organisation. In this discourse, the problems and enemies of the past are re-materialized in the present, with the same significance although in a different setting.

In Fadlallah's argument, we can also detect 'a slippage from a metaphoric relation of association to a logical relation of causation'.<sup>72</sup> In the 'metaphor frame', the political establishment, the quietist Da'wah tradition, and non-Islamic ideologies are related as causes to the social-economic problems, and to the political weakness and deprivation of the community as effects.

---

69 Charteris-Black. p. 13.

70 Ibid. p. 22.

71 Ibid. p. 22.

72 Charteris-Black. *Politicians and Rhetoric*. p. 100.

### Concluding remarks

The present article is intended as a contribution to our understanding of Islamist discursive practices. Accordingly, special emphasis was paid to the relationship between the author, his text, and the reception of his intended audience, in particular, by analysing the rhetoric and ideas that he employed to persuade them. Many of the studied features use or create a binary opposition to create and cement the notion of 'us' vs. 'them'. References were made to certain aspects of intellectual and social history to situate the author's discursive practices in relation to the values of his intended audience.

In sum, we can assume that Fadlallah's rhetoric constructs a religious ideology in which force is understood as virtuous, instrumental and necessary to promote the interests of the Shi'ah minority. In this framework any act is nothing but a mere means in achieving divinely set goals, and its value is determined by its purpose. Fadlallah's use of scripture and master narratives served to prove that a tradition committed to justice always promoted power and the means to acquire it. The various tools constitute a coherent rhetorical strategy due to their interrelatedness in serving the underlying idea: the justification of power and legitimizing the means that lead to it.

### Bibliography

- Fadlallah, Muhammad Husayn. *al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwwa*. [Islam and the logic of power]. Beirut, 1985.
- Badarneh, Muhammad A. 'Exploring the Use of Rhetorical Questions in Editorial Discourse: a Case Study of Arabic Editorials. Text & Talk - An Interdisciplinary Journal of Language, Discourse & Communication Studies. 29. 2009, pp. 639-659.
- Brown, Daniel. 'Islamic Ethics in Comparative Perspective.' *The Muslim World*. 89. 1999, pp. 181-192.
- Charteris-Black, Jonathan. *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor*. Basingstoke, 2005.
- Frazer, Elizabeth and Kimberly Hutchings. 'Argument and Rhetoric in the Justification of Political Violence.' *European Journal of Political Theory*. 6. 2007, pp.180-199.
- Halverson, Jeffrey R/ Corman, Steven R. / Goodall, H. L. *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism*. New York, 2011.
- Heinrichs, W. P. '*Tibaq*' In: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. P. Bearma/ Th. Bianquis/ C. E. Bosworth/ E. van Donzel/ W. P. Heinrichs (Eds.).10. Leiden, 2000, pp. 450-452.

- Hume, Mo. 'Questioning Violence: Meanings, Myths and Realities.' *Bulletin of Latin American Research*. 28. 2009, pp. 22-51.
- Johnstone, Barbara. 'Presentation as Proof: The Language of Arabic Rhetoric.' *Anthropological Linguistics*. 25. 1983, pp. 47-60.
- Lusthaus, Jonathan. 'Religion and State Violence: Legitimation in Israel, the USA and Iran.' *Contemporary Politics*. 17. 2011, pp. 1-17.

