AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

GLOBALIZATION, COSMOPOLITANISM, AND GENDER IN LEBANESE SUNNI RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

by
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A thesis
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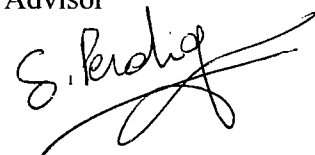# GLOBALIZATION, COSMOPOLITANISM, AND GENDER IN LEBANESE SUNNI RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

by
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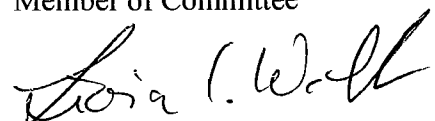Civilization Sequence Program

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Rose Ivy Khouri   for   Master of Art
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Title: Globalization, Cosmopolitanism, and Gender in Lebanese Sunni Religious Education

I have framed my research to explore the role of women in the context of *da'wa* (proselytization), religious education, and religious activities such as charity or community improvement, contributing to the larger body of work on the contemporary Middle East. My research questions focus on the revival of Sunni Islam in Lebanon and my project was guided by questions of cosmopolitanism and globalization in Lebanese society, the rootedness of their teachings, and religious education and *da'wa* as a rebirth or spiritual transformation as all four engage with social class and education level.

To research this phenomenon, I chose to study an open *ders addeen* group (religious study) based in Beirut, comprised of young Sunni women. Mostly university students, these young women live, work, and study in upper-class neighborhoods in West Beirut. My primary methodology was participant observation, in which I attended the meetings as a member would over the course of my research seeking to understand how these young women engage their community, conduct *da'wa* and study their religion. Supplementing that was in-depth interviews, which allowed me to focus on particular questions that came up during the course of my fieldwork and create a space for my interviewees to address issues they may have preferred to discuss in private.

I found three different and interesting directions of thought within this overall topic, all connected by themes of class, gender, "cosmopolitanism," globalization, and the always-adaptable Lebanese culture. These three directions of thought became the three sections of my analysis. In the first chapter I argued the idea of an "understated" *da'wa,* which I examined a style that reflected the societal restrictions of the educated and upper-class Lebanese social sphere in which these young women live. In my second chapter I explored the different pressures these young women experience as religious practitioners in the educated and upper-class Lebanon, arguing that they take an active role in initiating and building their religious lives, to the extent that many go against the wishes of their families (fathers in particular) in the pursuit of ideal religious practice. And finally in my third chapter I discussed what I perceived as an "Internet Generation," in which I argued usage of the Internet, as well as local factors, has promoted a shift towards non-traditional sources of knowledge among the young women of the *ders*.

CONTENTS

To my Jiddoo, Edward John Khouri. Who unfortunately passed away before I graduated. His memory was slipping towards the end and he never stopped being surprised and proud every time he was reminded that his granddaughter had been accepted at AUB.

All names and locations have been changed

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Every Monday evening at 6 … sometimes closer to 6:15, a group of young women, mostly university students, gather in a beautiful Beirut apartment overlooking the Mediterranean. As we watch the sun begin to set in the distance through the floor to ceiling windows and an Asian maid puts out glasses of water, a quietly-commanding woman sweeps into the room. The young women quickly stop their chatting and socializing and begin pulling out notepads and pulling up Qur'an apps on their iPhones, waiting for the lecture to start.

This is the *ders addeen*. Literally "study of religion," these lectures are a primary source of religious knowledge for many Muslims, particularly for young women. Each week they sit in a group member's apartment and listen for about an hour and a half as the group leader, the *da'iyah*, gives a lecture and an exegesis or *tafsir* of a section of the Qur'an. Depending on the season and corresponding amount of daylight, they finish with a group prayer and sweets. This specific *ders* is made up of highly-educated, predominately upper-class Lebanese women whose public religiosity sets them up as "counter cultural" in a segment of society that tends to self-fashions itself by and large as being cosmopolitan and living like Europeans – as compared to its more conservative, more Muslim neighbors. Led by a university professor with a dizzying social life and an international background, these young women do not just study religion, they seek to spread it. *Da'wa*, or

proselytization, is a heavy focus of this revivalist group as it trickles down from their enthusiastic leader.

With the rise and deposal of Muslim Brotherhood President Morsi of Egypt, and the growing protests against Ennahda's party after it secured political power through democratic elections in Tunisia, the topic of an "Islamic revival" in the Arab world has again made headlines in local and international media. The role of women in these conservative religious movements that have been steadily transforming the Arab world for decades has garnered particular interest. A revival in both religious practice and political activism (Bayat 2005), the work of Arab Muslim women in religious movements that also make claims on the public sphere has become a topic of heated scholarship. The focus of Euro-American scholarship on these "Islamist" movements has been on their increasing political strength and on the fears of their so-called "fundamentalism" or "extremism." Less attention has been paid to the more mundane and intimate aspects of the conduction of *da'wa*, or proselytization, women's participation in it, and its transnational cultural dynamics in the newly-globalized world. Furthermore, although this revival is currently facing a backlash across North Africa, the trajectories of the Islamic revival follow a different and specific course on the Lebanese scene. While studies have been conducted on Lebanese Shi'ite groups, radical groups, and middle-to-lower-class groups, little is understood and even less documented about how Islam is practiced and spread in the upper and educated classes within the context of Islamic revivalism inaugurated in the late 1970s.

This is a period of dynamic Sunni religious revitalization for Lebanon, spread via *da'wa*. In this important element of Islam, considered *fard* or a compulsory religious duty for practicing Muslims, women are currently commanding a significant role. I see *da'wa* as

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a combination of three main elements: self-transformation, social transformation, and participation in religious duties – especially religious education. Through my research, my initial goal was to understand how through the practice of *da'wa*, Muslims are involved in disciplines targeted toward creating a new self and improving and developing their *Ummah*, or Muslim community, in the globalized world. I was interested in the role women are playing in this revival, both in Lebanon and internationally, especially as modern technologies and social networking sites allow practicing Muslims to break down ethnic, geographical, and even linguistic barriers to re-connect the global Muslim community which has, arguably, not been so closely knit since the original *Ummah* of the days of the Prophet and the first Muslim community.

It is within the context of Lebanon, a country that in many ways has avoided the political shake-up of the Arab Spring, but whose recent history is no less unstable or precarious than its shaken neighbors, that I sought to explore women's participation in the process of *da'wa* and religious education. The revival of Sunni Islam in Lebanon has two primary roots. It is part of the transnational religious revival in the Arab Muslim world that has been building steadily for decades through the writings and activism of a diverse and influential group of intellectuals like Egypt's Sayyid Qotb of the 1950s and 60s or Tunisia's Rachid al-Ghannouchi of the 1980s. It is also a result of the 1979 Iranian Revolution that inspired Lebanon's significant Shi'ite population. The revival of Sunni Islam in Lebanon, over the last 30 years in particular, is also a result of uniquely Lebanese catalysts. Factors in the revival of Sunni groups, like failure to achieve balanced socioeconomic development, political and fiscal mismanagement, the rise of Iranian and Iraqi-influenced (and funded) Shi'ite groups in the 1970s and 80s, have all been exacerbated by Lebanese sectarianism

(Hamzeh 2000). Historically a religiously-diverse region, Lebanon's government structure, and therefore power division, of its 70-year Republic is based on a political sectarian system. This sectarian system was established under French colonial governance and intended to balance the different religious factions and divides Parliament and the government leadership between the Christian and Muslim sects. This has translated to a country deeply divided and destabilized by sectarianism, reflected in the multiple wars over power imbalance, which has created a context for Islamist and revivalist groups to begin making political and societal inroads (Hamzeh 2000).

Until the assassination of Sunni Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in 2005, the Lebanese Sunnis arguably emphasized sectarian divide less strongly than their Shi'ite, Christian, and Druze neighbors. This revival of consciousness has created a context for these *da'wa* groups to spread and they have so far avoided the backlash faced by other groups in countries like Egypt and Tunisia. However, with the civil war in neighboring Syria aggravating local Sunni and Shi'ite tensions and filling international newspapers with stories of al Qaeda breeding grounds and the ever-feared "creeping *Shari'a*," the overall focus of international media on Islam in this region is on religious extremism and political upheaval. Additionally a great deal of the current scholarship on contemporary Islam tends to focus on the political or the militant, which typically centers on the lower-middle-class "masses" whose religious participation is often examined through its practicality. Religious activity is often explained through the services religion and the religious community provide to their followers, which can ignore or even contradict the reasons stated by religious practitioners in their own words. This research project seeks to shift attention away from the solely political and historical focus on the hows and whys of Islamic revival

and toward an ethnographic exploration of everyday forms of women's religious participation within the context of *da'wa* in the educated or upper-class sphere of Lebanese society.

To engage this topic of *da'wa* and religious revival in Lebanon, I positioned myself in a cosmopolitan area of Beirut where a small *ders addeen* group studies and engages in *da'wa*. Through my research I sought to document the social worlds of the *ders* members and was not conducting a study on religion. Instead my research was an ethnographic study of a particular religious study group within a specific social context. This Sunni movement is made up of young women, most of whom are college students and part of Lebanon's most educated and/or wealthiest social classes. Sandwiched between private elite universities, these young women live, work, and study in upper-class West Beirut. They evolve in a historical center for a liberal intellectualism that associates discomfort with open religiosity. Contrary to what happened in, say, Egypt, where the Islamic revival is described as having taken hold amongst the middle and upper classes, the upper-class and/or educated Sunnis in Lebanon have broadly continued to fashion themselves as "cosmopolitan," often in contradistinction to lower class Sunnis or even their Shi'ite peers. In this respect the young women of this *ders* movement are in essence "counter cultural": many of them face opposition from their families or communities for their increased religiosity – especially when it comes to visible symbols like putting on the hijab. Although the *ders* group engages in and openly encourages *da'wa*, most of these young women began attending these weekly meetings on their own initiative. Many of these young women describe an inner "call" to search for such a group, and others were

invited by friends already active in the *ders* through the more understated *da'wa* style and found they could not stop coming.

Although this group of young college students can be seen as a late manifestation of the revival of Islam in Lebanon and across the Muslim world, the members do not fit easily with the kind of Islamic religious movements on which social scientists have focused in the last two decades. These women navigate the educated and upper-class sphere of Lebanese society, balancing the expectations of their families, friends and professional or academic social environments with the commandments of their religion. Their leader, a female professor from a well-educated family who lived for many years in the United States, adds to the international and cosmopolitan character of the *ders* group. The group actively engages transnational cultural dynamics, bringing speakers from different countries to discuss their conversion to Islam and reading books by non-Lebanese or non-Arab authors such as one by a white convert to Islam based in the San Francisco Bay Area. In this respect, I sought to contribute to the reassessment of the relatively-uncontested rhetoric of Lebanese cosmopolitanism. I also sought to understand how this small *ders*, a weekly religious educational program, fits and locates itself into the greater Islamic scholarly traditions. How did it construct its rootedness, for example in the traditions of the historical Sunni *madhhabs*? Or was this *ders*, with its charismatic leader and modern materials and concepts, part of something new?

This movement takes place within the context of Beiruti upper-middle and educated classes and the emergence of new Sunni Islamic movements in Lebanon. The rapid rise of Sunni Muslim movements to prominence in Lebanon is a recent phenomenon, triggered by the rise of Sunni sectarianism in the wake of the assassination of Sunni Prime

Minister Rafic Hariri in 2005 and the retreat of Syrian military rule after widespread protest later that year. Hariri, born and raised in Sidon, was a billionaire who poured money into Lebanon through his companies including the controversial Solidere. Hariri secured his rise to power by working systematically to exclude, co-opt, or neutralize other Sunni politicians (Abdel-Latif 2008). After his death a crowded field of Sunni religious figures, such as controversial sheikhs Ahmed Al Assir or Salem Al Rifai, have risen in an attempt to fill the leadership vacuum, each with their own small communities. For now they generally work together: meeting and rallying from Tripoli to the Beqaa to Sidon, encouraging *da'wa*, religious practice, and unified political goals. Furthermore, with the retreat of the Syrian military, Sunna religious leaders and Salafi groups in particular, were able to openly recruit and practice *da'wa* after decades of repression.

Simultaneously there has been a shift in mainstream Sunni public opinion to these previously-fringe groups. Until recently, conservative religious arguments did not resonate with the majority of Lebanon's Sunni Muslims (Abdel-Latif 2008) but both political and sectarian shifts in the country have forced a change. Today Sunnis in Lebanon, who long enjoyed a near monopoly on Muslim power and representation in the country, feel a deep sense of victimization in the face of rising Shi'ite power and what they perceive as Iranian infringements on Lebanon's sovereignty. Hariri's death, assumed by some segments of the general public to have been ordered by the Syrian government and carried out by its ally, Shi'ite militant group Hezbollah, deepened the sense of sectarian persecution (Abdel-Latif 2008). Additionally, the 2006 war against Israel in which Hezbollah emerged as the triumphant savior of Lebanon cemented these feelings for many. Although many Sunnis, especially the remaining leftists, remain wary of the myriad of different groups in Lebanon,

especially those considered "Islamist" or "Salafi" whose exact political ambitions are still unclear. Despite this, these more militant groups have met little local resistance from the Sunni communities in which they work (Abdel-Latif 2008). In addition, many such groups like *Jama'a al-Islamiyyeh* are active in charity and with the on-going Syrian crisis, work as an intermediary between the massive population of Syrian refugees and the local Lebanese citizens.

Yet despite the growth of *da'wa* groups and a revival of religious practice in Lebanon, one segment of Lebanese society remains somewhat hostile to open religious practice. The educated and upper classes in Lebanon that the young women of the *ders* navigate are historically cautious of open religiosity, out of both political fears in this highly-sectarian country and a self-fashioning contradistinction to the imagined conspicuous religiosity of the lower classes.

Part of the animosity towards active religiosity with regard to the young Sunni women of the *ders* is that their religious expression, such as putting on the hijab or not shaking hands with unrelated men, implicitly calls into question many aspects of the performances of "cosmopolitanism" that separates the Lebanese educated and upper classes engage in to distinguish themselves from their fellow citizens from a lower social background. To live and act "Western," however vague and imaginary the referent of this label might be, is associated with social sophistication in Lebanon. Just as the West is understood as sophisticated, the Arab countries to the East are understood as unsophisticated. Practicing Muslims, and female Muslims in particular, whose religious practices replicate that of their other Arab neighbors can be perceived as a discreet threat to the manifold practices individuals engage in to sustain the imaginary of a "Lebanese

culture" distinct from, and superior to, that of an East constructed as incompletely civilized. Although the young women of this *ders* are the very definition of cosmopolitan: well-travelled, multilingual, and well-educated, their rejection of more superficial and commercialist aspects of Lebanese society is unusual amongst their peers.

This conception of cosmopolitanism, that hinges in part on constructing as backwards members of conservative Muslim movements, ignores the very cosmopolitan elements of membership in a global Muslim community. On a global level, there is significant draw in movements that deal with the rejuvenation of the self, especially in the middle to upper classes. This is an international appeal, seen in the embrace of rejuvenating Eastern religions like Buddhism and Hinduism-fused yoga among the Californian tech elite or the spread of Scientology or Kabbalah throughout Hollywood. This *ders* movement, which takes on global dynamics through its *da'wa* outreach and its transnational, multilingual educational resources, has a cosmopolitan draw. It places these women into a larger network and embraces cosmopolitanism in its own, alternative way and in a specific social context.

In this context I sought specifically to explore the practice of *da'wa* as my thesis topic. The practice of *da'wa* is certainly not an inherently new concept; however it is not something with which the younger generation of Lebanese Muslims was raised. How *da'wa* is conducted in Lebanon seems to differ heavily depending on the class both of the person conducting the *da'wa* and those on the receiving end. Similar to the practices of Jehovah's Witnesses in the United States, a more common form of *da'wa* seen with religious communities aimed at the lower to middle classes is knocking on strangers' doors in a neighborhood to convince them to attend a religious gathering or to distribute *da'wa*

materials[1]. However, as noted above, this group of young students works in a sphere where religiosity, let alone proselytization, is viewed with suspicion. Discussions of religion with non-practicing friends, co-workers, or relatives are less acceptable or openly discouraged. Therefore these women conduct *da'wa* in an understated manner – inviting friends to come to a *ders* or an event put on by the group. It is this "understated" *da'wa* in the unwelcoming environment of Lebanon's educated and upper classes that I was interested in studying.

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[1] My initial thesis was going to be on this style of *da'wa* but due to the sectarian situation in Lebanon I was forced to go a different direction with my research. I did some preliminary fieldwork on this topic and discovered one group that utilized this style of da'wa in a southern Lebanese city to great effect. They would go out, both men and women, and knock on doors in different neighborhoods, inviting people to come later that evening to heard their sheikh give a *khutbah* or sermon. The sheikh would then give his *khutbah* that reinforced this *da'wa;* with discussions on how the lives of those brought in to this revivalist movements had been changed for the better.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH QUESTION

Through my research I sought to capture ethnographically the impact of the revival of Islam in the upper and/or educated sphere of Lebanese society through the work of *da'wa* and religious education. I focused on both the genderized and cosmopolitan nature of the *ders* as it operates in a social sphere historically hostile and suspicious towards public or conservative religiosity. In understanding the cosmopolitan nature of the *ders* and Lebanese society, I also examined the effect of globalization on this group's conception and addition to the international Muslim community, or *Ummah*. I also sought to understand this movement from its revivalist core, which requires a transformation of the self even as it seeks a transformation of society, a concept which is essential to understanding its place and role in Lebanese society.

My project was guided by questions of cosmopolitanism and globalization in Lebanese society, the rootedness of their teachings, invisibility of women's participation in religious movements and their own religious education, and *da'wa* as a rebirth or spiritual transformation as all four engage with social class and education level:

Da'wa as a rebirth or spiritual transformation: What kind of desire and possible transformations undergone lead to participation in *da'wa*? How do these women imagine ideal *da'wa* to be? What is the relationship between *da'wa* and the transformation of society and the self? Does their social class or education level relate to how they understand *da'wa* or how they understand the society they want to see? How does social class or

education level play a role in how these women engage their religion and religious practice? What is the role of religion in their lives versus the lives of other women in their social sphere?

Cosmopolitanism and Globalization in Lebanon: I also sought to explore the alternative cosmopolitanism of this group, how they work with and help build an international *Ummah* or Islamic community. How do they network with other Muslim groups around the world and how does this relate back to class and education? How do these women understand transnational cultural dynamics? How do they maintain a sense of unity among multiple social classes in Lebanon and internationally? Do they work across large spaces or cultural/class divides for common goals? How do they position themselves with respect to their Lebanese environment and its own strain and construction of what "being cosmopolitan" means? How do they relate to Muslims from other Arab countries — if at all — besides Lebanon?

Modes of anchoring in the Islamic Traditions: Adding on to my questions of the effects of globalization, I sought to understand this group as it relates to the Islamic traditions. This *ders* group with its practical teachings on how to live righteously in a late capitalist society and focus on proselytization presents some similarities to recent trends in evangelical Christianity in the US. Centered on a charismatic leader, these rapidly-growing churches often focus on building up faith and followers, and living the best life – with less emphasis on long-standing theological debates. I sought to understand what role traditional Sunni Muslim schools of thought play in this *ders*? What sources or teachings does the leader rely on to form her lessons? What does the dispersal of religious knowledge mean for the authority of the traditional '*Ulema*?

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this project, specifically women and Islamic religious movements, cosmopolitanism in Lebanon, and transnational religious movements, contributes to a larger body of work on the contemporary Middle East. I framed my research to explore the role of women in the context of *da'wa*, religious education, and religious activities like charity or community improvement. This addresses the focus of recent studies on Arab Muslim women moving away from debates over agency and towards an exploration of multiple feminisms or Islamic feminism within the overall context of the revival of Islam (Moukhlaf 1979, Abu Lughod 1990, Ahmed 1992, Weber 2001, Mahmood 2004). It also engages the growing discussions on the role and visibility of women's efforts in the revived process of *da'wa* and religious education and charitable activities (Deeb 2006, Mahmood 2004, Joseph 2000). However my research sought to complicate current accounts of female activism by focusing on the educated and/or upper class. Most studies on the revival of Islam across the Arab Muslim world and in Lebanon focus on the middle to lower classes and tend to interpret participation in religious movements in terms of their serviceability. One direction of scholarship argues that mass participation or support for these revivalist movements can be explained through the social services Islamic charitable and political groups provide (Bayat 2005, Berman 2003). Another argues for political or economic motivations, that Islam has enjoyed a revival as governments failed to achieve political or economic stability (Ottaway and Hamzawy 2008). For the student participants of the *ders* I

have studied, however, who are more likely to be running charity events than benefiting from them, their participation in *da'wa* and religious education cannot be explained out of mere practicality.

I also sought to address the work done on exploring "cosmopolitanism" in Lebanon and in its capital city of Beirut as it relates to this *ders* group and their position in Lebanese society. Scholarship on cosmopolitanism in Beirut has historically focused on Beirut's multilingual, multi-ethnic, and multi-faith society (Khalaf 1973, 2006, Kassir 2010). Any article about Beirut must inevitably utilize the rhetoric of cosmopolitanism (Seidman 2012), a cosmopolitanism that is understood as both indigenous and un-designed. I sought to contribute to a shift in understanding Lebanese cosmopolitanism as a self-fashioning performance that differentiates the Lebanese from their neighbors and introduces social spacing between the Lebanese themselves. This conscious cosmopolitanism also invokes a nostalgic and stereotypical understanding of Lebanese culture and identity (Haugbolle 2006) and is a superficial discourse riddled with exclusion and disrespect of migrant workers and non-Anglo-European ethnic minorities (Seidman 2012). Tacked onto Lebanese cosmopolitanism is the Lebanese Christian nationalistic "Phoenicianism" which emphasizes a Euro-American-facing Mediterranean identity and further seeks to separate Lebanon from its Muslim Arab neighbors (Kaufman 2004). The focus of my research covered recent discussions of the relationship of female religiosity and modernity in Lebanon (Deeb 2006) but will complicate the current theories by focusing on the less-studied upper-class and educated sphere. It is from this social class that the cosmopolitan rhetoric is both mainly produced and lived and it is this social class the *ders* group navigates.

Finally my research project engaged the recent discussions on transnational religious movements. There are excellent and recent studies done on a re-imagined and virtual *Ummah* in the globalized world (Featherstone 2002) which tackle questions of how Islam encounters newly-globalized issues of human rights (Mohammadi 2002), new media (Karim 2002), information technology as it relates to political Islam (Mandaville 2002) and the underdeveloped Muslim world (Ahsan 2002). However, after the events of 9/11 in New York and 7/7 in London, the focus of analysis shifted. Currently a highly politicized field, the work being done on these Islamic transnational religious movements almost exclusively deals with terrorism. In contrast my research renewed focus in non-violent transnational religious movements with an added shift to Muslim, not Christian, proselytizers. I studied these movements both as a uniquely Lebanese movement (Mohanty 1984) as well as through potential influences of American Protestantism with regard to the group's educational resources. Furthermore I understood this group's context within the greater Islamic traditions (Abou El Fadl 2001).

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

In order to study women in this religious movement, I used three methodologies: participant observation, interviews, and collection of documents.

A. Participant Observation

One of the primary methodologies I used was participant observation. To understand how these young women engage their community, conduct *da'wa* and study their religion, I essentially joined in this movement over the course of my research. I became involved in the movement as an active participant: attending the weekly *ders* lectures, participating in communal activities and *da'wa* work, and observing events put on or associated with the group. I was attentive to the group dynamic and makeup as well as the physical location in which the *ders* lectures are given. I was also attentive to the content of the lectures, the choice of Qur'anic passages, and the references to influential figures and ideas in the makeup of the weekly lectures. During this period of observation I took extensive field notes, recorded lectures, and conducted interviews while protecting both the identities and the modesty of the women in this conservative movement.

Participant Observation was a tricky methodology for me. I found it difficult to draw the line between friend and researcher, especially considering the similarities in age. I got along with many of the young women, whom I found bright and engaging, and developed personal relationships with several. The similarities in age and life experience

also made my research process much easier. The young women, who were either university students or recent graduates, understood the process of research and university theses and were very accommodating both for the interviews and for other help I needed. A couple gave me books they thought would help my research and many checked in with me along the way to see how my research was developing. I also found myself enjoying the weekly *ders addeen* meetings. I enjoyed talking with the young women there, and not just for my research. During the last fifteen minutes, when we stretched and ate desserts and chatted while slowly moving towards the door, it was sometimes hard to remember that I was there for research and not just out with friends for an evening.

B. In-depth Interviews

The in-depth interviews had two main purposes. The first was to focus on particular issues or questions that came up during the course of my fieldwork. The second was to create a space for my interviewees to address issues or answer questions they may prefer to discuss in private.

I used a "strongly guided conversation" format to conduct my interviews, in between a formal structured interview and a conversation. Because all of my interviewees were either busy students or had full-time jobs, I tried to keep my questions limited to 30-40 minutes. My interviews pertained to these three areas of their practice:

1. How does the *ders* fit into their lives? For this area of research I sought to understand the role of personal revival in the lives of these group members and the draw of participation in this movement. I began with these questions as a jumping off point: What led you to this group? What made you stay? How has it changed your life? Have you had to

make sacrifices or schedule changes to fit it in to your week? Have you become more religious or felt a stronger connection to God and your religion since joining this group? Did your family encourage your participation in this group?

This last question in particular was added after it came up organically in my first interview. I was surprised when my initial interviewee said her family was not thrilled about her participation in this *ders addeen* and I began asking the rest of my interviewees how their families felt. This resulted in a significant section of my second chapter on these familial reactions to participation in revivalist groups.

2. How do the members of the *ders* engage with their society? In this area of research I sought to address my question of how globalization and the rhetoric of cosmopolitanism in Lebanon interact with religious revival. I asked group members questions along the following lines: What is your purpose in attending this *ders* group? What do you believe the purpose of your life here on Earth is? Does this *ders* group fit into this purpose? Do the lessons you learn in the *ders* change or influence how you interact with your friends or family? Does the *ders* inspire you to engage in *da'wa*? Do you see *da'wa* as a necessity for Lebanon right now? What changes would you like to see in Lebanese society? What are positive aspects of Lebanese society you do not want to see changed? What makes Lebanon different than the surrounding Arab countries like Syria or Egypt? Are Lebanese women different than Syrian or Egyptian women?

Through these questions, especially the last ones, I was seeking to understand how these young women perceived themselves and their place in Lebanese society – if there is a conflict between their larger Lebanese society and their activism in a revivalist Islamic group. The responses I received from these questions were interesting and often aligned

with my own observations from living in Beirut these past two years. Their answers to the

initial questions on *da'wa* were filled with a palpable energy and enthusiasm that seemed to

have originated with their leader, which I will discuss in my first analysis chapter.

3. How does this *ders* group engage the greater Muslim community?

Through this area of research I aimed to understand how this religious group

perceives itself as part of the *Ummah* and handles transnational cultural dynamics. I used

the following questions as a guide: Does the *ders* make you feel part of the larger Muslim

community? What is it like to read books by or hear stories about Muslims from other

countries and cultures? Do you believe your participation in *da'wa* and religious education

is contributing to the global *Ummah*? What does it mean to you to be a Muslim in this

globalized world? Do you feel connected to your fellow Muslims around the world? What

led you to join a group outside of the traditional Lebanese Sunni offerings?

I also studied the influences on this *ders* group's religious teachings, particularly

how they relate to the historical Islamic traditions. Most of these questions were directed

towards the leader of the group who runs the weekly religious lessons, since she determines

the content and sourcing of these lectures. I asked her questions along the lines of: How do

you decide on topics for your weekly *ders*? Do you get lesson plans or certain *tafsir* from

specific sources? Do your teachings align with a specific *madhhab* or Islamic tradition? Are

there other groups with the same style of this *ders* in Beirut or Lebanon? How did you get

involved in leading this style of *ders*?

The responses to these questions made up the bulk of my third analysis section,

which centers on how this group deals with authority and traditions in this globalizing

world. I was interested in how many non-Lebanese or even non-Arab figures they followed

and from whom they learned. Simultaneously, I was surprised at how much they still trusted and relied on traditional, local sources.

C. Collection of documents

Through this methodology, I collected documents relevant to my research. Over the course of my fieldwork, I gathered a wide variety of interesting documents from printed verses of the Qur'an passed out to the group, to flyers for events they organized. I also gathered documents, not in the classical sense, from the Internet as part of my research. I was very cautious about privacy and maintaining ethical research, and did not reach out to the group members to add me on social media platforms or show me content they post or with which they engage. Instead I asked them about how they used Internet resources to allow them to open or limit my research at their comfort level. Several members added me on the social networking site Facebook and I was added to the group's WhatsApp group without any comment or request on my part for either. This presented a dilemma for me and I was careful not to use any information from these personal Facebook pages in my thesis. As for the WhatsApp group I did include a couple of sentences in my analysis on the content of this group but kept it deliberately vague, unidentifiable, and focused on general content without specific examples to make sure I did not cross any ethical boundaries.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS

A. An Understated *Da'wa*

In much of current global debates, discussions of Islam tend to revolve around the political or the militant, with a focus on the lower and middle class "masses," whose religious participation is often examined through its practicality and explained away through charitable services like medical assistance or food donations. Yet for the young women of this *ders*, who are more likely to lead charity events than receive aid from them, this type of explanation is hardly satisfactory. In this chapter I will argue that contrary to the widespread assumption that religious participation in Islamic revivalist groups can be explained away by the practical services these groups provide, these young, upper-class and educated women describe their religious revival in terms of highly individual motivation and as a solution to a sense of something missing in their lives. I will also explore the language used during my interviews and fieldwork that resonates with a certain neo-liberal discourse of the self. I will additionally argue that while this impetus might be expressed as a specific type of individual choice within the educated and upper-class sphere, there exists an infrastructure of Sunni Islamic revival that emerged over the years in Lebanon, and which is ready to meet such needs. I will further argue that the Lebanese diasporic experience, which has had specific effects on the Lebanese family unit, has spurred this individualistic revival and allows to account in part for the Euro-American sociocultural inflection of their language of self-fashioning.

1. The Lebanese Diaspora[1]

There are very few countries with an international diaspora as significant and as migratory as Lebanon. Four million people inside the country with an estimated fourteen million outside, the Lebanese have built communities from Brazil to Canada to Nigeria. After multiple wars and lingering instability, combined with a highly-educated and multilingual population, the Lebanese economy both relies on and is hindered by Lebanese seeking prospects abroad. There are very few families living inside Lebanon who have not been influenced by this expatriation, and its effects on religion and religious education in Lebanon have been significant. Through my research I found this a multifaceted subject. Within the *ders* group I studied, there are members who lived abroad, parents who went abroad, siblings who are living abroad, members who hope to work abroad, and, specific to this age group, members whose fiancées or future husbands will be living or have lived abroad – each with their own unique religious narratives. In this chapter I will explore the role of the Lebanese diasporic experience in religious education and *da'wa* from the members of the group to their leader.

Despite the Sunni religious revival spreading in Lebanon over the past 30 years, Sunni religious education for young women in Lebanon is surprisingly limited. Of the women I spoke to who grew up in Lebanon, only one had had any kind of formal or quality religious education as a child. Many young women who grew up in Lebanon had either no or a limited understanding of the basic rules of their religion as well as *seera*[2] and *fiqh.*[3] Typically in academic research on religious revival, mass participation or support for these

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[1] All transliterations were done phonetically and do not follow typical transliteration standards
[2] The life of the Prophet
[3] Islamic jurisprudence, human understanding of the *Shari'a*

revivalist movements is explained through the social services Islamic charitable and political groups provide (Bayat 2005, Berman 2003) or for political or economic motivations: that Islam has enjoyed a revival as governments failed to achieve political or economic stability (Ottaway and Hamzawy 2008). Yet through my fieldwork I found for the young university students who joined this weekly religious group, the initial draw of this *ders* was a personal choice; a desire to understand better their religion. There were two common themes throughout my interviews on what drew these young women to this ders: a search and an invitation. Most of the young women who joined the *ders* group were searching for some form of religious education and almost all were invited to attend by an active member.

2. Search and Invitation

> First year when I came here, I was friends with Dahlia. I was telling her I want to know about the *aqida* – the creed. I didn't really want to know the rest I just wanted to know this. And she was like 'come there is a *ders* given by Dr. Sara' because at that time Dr. Sara was giving *aqida* lessons. I didn't go. It was in Ramadan and I was very overwhelmed with summer and Ramadan so I didn't go. The following fall, I went with Dahlia. So I had that in mind. I went with Dahlia, it wasn't about *aqida* anymore (laughs). But I liked the spirit she was talking about, you know, how to perceive your relationship with God. So I really liked it, and I stayed.

For undergraduate student Lara, she was actively searching for *aqida* lessons to fill a perceived gap in her religious knowledge. Growing up in Lebanon, Lara attended Christian schools and did not have a religious childhood. When she came to university she wanted to understand fully her religion and specifically identified and sought out *aqida* as a starting point. Although by the time she began to attend the *ders* Dr. Sara was no longer teaching *aqida*, she stayed because she liked both the style of teaching and the leader herself – a

point echoed by most of the members with whom I spoke. After joining the *ders* she began to supplement her religious study outside of the weekly *ders* meetings and not only finally took a class on *aqida* but began taking online courses in Islamic subjects and is now considering pursuing a master's degree in Islamic Studies.

Salwa, a PhD candidate who grew up in a Sunni-majority city south of Beirut explained that most of her religious knowledge came from her mother:

> My mom used to talk about religion most of the time, that's where I know more about religion because my school was not religious. It gave us only one session of religion and the sheikh who gave it to us was not friendly. He was old and he used to sleep while we would recite the *sura*. He pretended to close his eyes, I don't know. So we didn't know much about our religion. Whenever I would hear something I would search about it or want to know about it more and would get small books…Here Muslims or Christians, I feel, it's something *ino* common between all sects, that if you are not in a religious school you don't know about your religion. Only if your parents put you in a summer school, which is religious, or they themselves are religious. My parents weren't religious when they were young, my mom didn't wear a veil.

Salwa uses the term "religious" here as an all-encompassing word to describe greater adherence to the ideals promoted by religious revivalists. In the context of religious revival, especially one so concerned with proper dress and pious behavior, "religious" is a combination of intention and performance. Intention, a key focus of Islamic teaching and one often brought up by my interlocutors, is the most important aspect in determining *hassanat* and *sayyi'at*.[4] When I asked Salwa to describe her parent's transformation, she told me: "My family became more religious by time. If you look at the photos of my parents from when they got married till now they look so different. Even their mentality

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[4] A group member described *hassanat* and *sayyi'at* as "like a balance that has your good deeds versus your bad deeds. The good deeds can be easily obtained, from smiling to people or helping people. Bad deeds will erase your good deeds, but they can be easily removed if one repents. There was a story told to us as kids, how a man killed 100 people and then he repented. So he asked a sheikh who told him to go to Mekka and ask forgiveness. But on his way he got very sick and died before reaching, but God forgave him."

changed." Her mother (and father to a lesser degree) did not just make physical changes as part of her religious revival but her mother's "mentality" was altered. But for Salwa, and most religious revivalists,[5] there is a relationship between the heart and the action.

Group leader Dr. Sara also framed her religious revival through a change in her appearance. As I will discuss below, she described a personal religious revival and a significant part of the story of her return to Islam was focused on what physical changes she made. She noted: "I started wearing long sleeves and skirts rather than pants and short sleeves, and I stopped going to the beach and whatever – swimming basically in mixed environments. And then one day I was driving somewhere and in a store I saw this long coat and I thought 'well you know what, maybe I'll buy it and keep it in my car in case I decided to wear the scarf.'" Although both Salwa and Dr. Sara would be the first to argue that their improved adherence to religious duties and relationship to God is the most important aspect of their religious revivals, they do not detail their religious revivals through changed actions such as increased prayer or more frequent attendance at the mosque. Instead, they focus on their physical appearance.

Like Lara, Salwa was invited to the group while she was at university and, she said, actively searching for religious education. Her cousin had invited her to a Sunni social club at her university campus, which sponsored a public *ders* given by Dr. Sara. After the *ders*, Dr. Sara told the young women who attended that she gives a weekly *ders* off-campus in the local area. Salwa noted: "I found it most suitable to my situation because I don't have

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[5] The descriptive term "religious revivalist" is one that I will use throughout this thesis to describe the young women and the larger movement they are part of. I believe this descriptive term is both accurate in terms of their own religious experiences as well as devoid of stereotypical and negative impressions that other terms used to describe Muslim movements have come to emote.

car and my parents don't like me to go around. And I wanted, like, to listen to somebody

about religion because I'm here all alone and I don't see my mom."

Typical of some Sunnis in Lebanon before the 1980s, Salwa's parents were not

especially devoted to their faith when they first married. Their personal religious revival

began when her father joined the Lebanese diaspora and left to work in Erbil, Iraq. Salwa

described this change:

> He spent like five years there so my mother had more time to spend … she listens to
> the radio most of the time and there's a channel called *Iza'at al-Qur'an al-Karim*.
> It's by Dar El Fatwa.[6] And it's really interesting, like my mom, always when she
> cooks, she turns it on. So most of the time when we are at home I listen to it, even
> sometimes when we're eating I listen to something interesting because like it's not
> only religious, it's also social, psychological, everything. They sometimes bring on
> a psychiatrist and they start asking how should they deal with their kids at this
> young age and make them listen to them and if they have a problem or something.
> Or like a sheikh would talk about his family. So there are a lot of programs that are
> like nice, I don't know. I like this.

In all these cases, there is an implicit opposition between something passé, outdated,

and the rediscovery of Islam (experienced as refreshing) through the mediation of

something that makes it hip, modern, of the times. I heard the word "modern" used quite

often during my fieldwork and when group member Salwa used it in an interview I pushed

her to explain what she meant when she used it. After reflecting for a bit she explained:

> There isn't something modern in Islam. Islam doesn't change. But we change in our
> reflection about it. Like yesterday I was watching a movie about Ibn Sina. They say
> he's an Islamic figure who started all scientific research. They depicted the Islamic
> people as they hate science, the same how the Church hates science. I hate those
> ideas that we shouldn't …. 'music is *haram*.' Who said music is *haram*? It's not
> written everywhere. Okay if you spend most of your time singing, going and
> wearing sexy clothes, okay I agree it's *haram*. But what if someone wants to sing
> and he has a message?

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[6] The top Sunni religious authority in Lebanon

Once her husband went abroad and her duties to her family lessened, Salwa's mother was able to make religious study a priority. Listening to a radio show while she did housework or while her children were in school, she was able to study religion in her own home where Salwa told me she prefers to spend most of her time. These radio shows, and other forms of audio recordings of religious sermons, were an especially popular tool for religious revivalism across the Arab World (Hirschkind 2006). For Salwa's mother's generation, audio recordings and broadcastings in Arabic were the main *da'wa* tool of religious groups and accessible across multiple levels of society. Almost everyone in Lebanon has access to a radio and can understand programs put on by Dar El Fatwa in their own dialect of Arabic. In contrast, a modern form of *da'wa* that I will be discussing in my third analysis chapter, is conducted over the Internet, and requires a computer and Internet access. To be able to tap in to the main *da'wa* and religious educational content, potential students of Islam must read English fluently. Salwa's mother became more religious over time as she listened to the radio programs and explored their teachings. When her husband returned, he too became more religious, especially after a religious pilgrimage to Mecca, but according to Salwa he never became as religious as his wife. She told me that when her mother decided to put on the headscarf her father was unenthusiastic – a hesitation common to educated Lebanese Sunnis.

Unlike the young women who grew up in Lebanon, those among my interviewees who grew up abroad had what they present as a "stronger" religious education than that typically dispensed to young people of their class in Lebanon. Interestingly, only one of them mentioned a similar "search" pushing them to seek out this *ders*. One member who grew up in Saudi Arabia told me she has found it harder to study her religion since coming

to university, saying "I used to memorize Qur'an before entering university, but after I did I didn't have enough time." This is the opposite of many group members who grew up in Lebanon and who experienced a religious revival during their university years. All of my interviewees who spent their childhoods abroad lived in the Arabian Gulf. Interestingly, many Lebanese Muslims who grew up in the Gulf prefer it to Lebanon. Safety and quality of life aside, those who lived there praised the religiosity of the Gulf Arabs as compared to the Lebanese. One member told me that while she remembers the Saudis of her childhood as lazy and unhealthy compared to the Lebanese, Lebanon has "stronger" immorality than Saudi Arabia, that "over there, people at least in their clothing – we all used to wear *abayas* – so they were conservative in one thing. *Hala' akeed* [the Saudis] live, many people cheat and lie *o heiki*." Their experiences were outside of the Lebanese Sunni religious revival as their childhoods incorporated all the changes that have been making headway in Lebanese Sunni society: consistent and quality religious education, modest dress, conservative and pious behavior as understood by traditional Islamic thinkers, and greater visible adherence to traditional sexual mores.

One of the older group members, Rayan, is a quiet and shy university alumna who grew up in Saudi Arabia. She is considerably more conservative than the other young women, particularly in mannerisms and dress. With her long skirts, loose tops, and pale, neutral hijabs, her style is very rare among young Lebanese Sunnis, who seem to embrace a love for fashion, bright colors, and expensive brands as much as their peers outside of the religious revivalist community – just with slightly longer hemlines. Similar to many in the Lebanese diaspora, she came to Lebanon only in the summers to visit relatives. Her childhood in the conservative Gulf where she attended a Saudi National School included

the comprehensive Islamic education her Lebanese peers said they were lacking. She

recalled: "They used to teach us a lot of religion, like Qur'an and *Hadith*[7] and *Tafsir*[8] and

Fiqh and *Tawhid*[9] - a lot, a lot honestly. Thus, I learned a lot from them. *Yani*, the basics,

everything I should know, really I learned them. Afterwards I moved to an international

school where we had one period of Qur'an a week. And then when we grew up [and

returned to Lebanon], no more religion."

Although Rayan returned to Lebanon for her university-level education, her father

stayed in the Gulf and continued to work there similar to Salwa's father. As with Salwa's

mother, Rayan's physical separation from her family allowed her greater freedom to

continue to continue her religious studies. Just as with all of the interviewees, she was

actively seeking a religious group to join. After Rayan graduated from university and began

working in Beirut, she felt that she was worrying about life too much. "I'm forgetting the

afterlife so I needed something like …. it's not all *duniya, duniya*[10] … I wanted to take a

ders you know? To get away from work or daily life, like something about religion. And

Dr. Sara was explaining Qur'an, she made us eventually memorize the *juz*.[11] Plus it's next

to my house….and I can walk (laughs)." Rayan enjoyed the style of Dr. Sara's *ders* which

became a religious "leaping-off" point for her. She was inspired to start memorizing the

Qur'an with help from a local mosque and she joined an additional *ders* which is comprised

mainly of family members and is led by a member of the same *al-Nisa'* group to which Dr.

Sara also belongs.

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[7] The life and sayings of the Prophet
[8] Interpretations of the Qur'an
[9] The Oneness of God
[10] The Earthly World
[11] One of the 30 sections of the Qur'an

When I asked Rayan about her family's reaction to her increased religious practice, she responded uncomfortably that while her mother encouraged it, her father did not. "*Eh, bala* [he is afraid of extremism] Honestly I don't tell him I'm going to the *ders* of Dr. Sara. I tell him I'm going out with Salwa and my friends." "'*An jad. Wallah,*" she hastened to assure me as I looked surprised at her answer, never imaging her as someone who would hide the truth from her family. "Even my mom doesn't tell him 'she's going to *ders.*' But he knows about the [other religious groups of which she is part]." Almost all of my interviewees echoed Rayan's comments about her father's fear of extremism, an English language term they specifically used, as well as his uneasiness with links to *al-Nisa'*, which I will discuss later in this thesis. However what I found interesting here in regard to the Lebanese diaspora is that although her father is not comfortable with her attending this *ders* group, he does not or is unable to stop her as he is living outside of the country. As with Salwa's mother who no longer had the same duties to her husband and was able to freely study religion on her own, Rayan is able to attend this *ders* despite the objections of her father who lives too far away to be an obstructing force.

Unlike the other Lebanese women who grew up in Lebanon, Rayan was not looking to understand the basics of her religion because she had already learned them. She was instead searching for something she felt was missing, a return to the focus on religion she had felt in her childhood outside of Lebanon. Although the motivation for her search was different, the invitation was the same. Invited by close friend Salwa, who herself began attending the *ders* at a current member's invitation, Rayan's renewed dedication to religious practice and study has not faltered. When I asked her what she would do if she

needed to move away from the neighborhood she lives in and could not walk to the *ders* anymore she responded with a laugh, "I will have to get a car."

3. *Understated* **Da'wa**

This weekly *ders addeen* group has been growing rapidly through an understated form of *da'wa*: personal invitation. *Da'wa* can have many meanings, interpretations, and forms but the most common conception of this term is "spreading Islam." For some, especially members of this *ders* group, *da'wa* is living a good life as a Muslim and leading by example. For others, particularly famous authors such as Hamza Yusuf or Tariq Ramadan as well as organized religious groups, *da'wa* is writing books or blogs or giving radio shows for non-Muslim and non-practicing Muslim audiences. One group member described *da'wa* as:

> How the religion is delivered to the people. How do you communicate religion with other people and give the best image of it. Attract the people to the religion. It's for everyone, it's not limited. Like some Muslims they don't know about their religion. Non-Muslims might know about the religion but they have misconceptions. They maybe view us as terrorists … *Da'wa* it's not limited to a country or a place. Whenever there is Islam there should be *da'wa* because we should always remember our religion because sometimes life makes you forget religion. It's not limited to people who are not very religious, sometimes religious people need someone to remind them of their religion.

For the young women of this group, their primary form of active *da'wa* is inviting close friends who they know are looking for or might benefit from religious knowledge to come and hear Dr. Sara's weekly address in hopes of sparking a greater interest. Most young women told me they had expressed a search for religious education and current group members directly invited them. These young women, and their leader, all have lives outside of the *ders addeen* and religious community. As college students or employed

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recent graduates, their religious lives must balance with their professional lives and open proselytization such as knocking on doors or passing out literature on street corners is not practical and possibly risky in a society than frowns upon open religiosity. I would also argue that this kind of door-to-door proselytization also does not fit well with the participants' class status. My introduction to this *ders addeen* was through what I'm fairly convinced was this kind of understated *da'wa*. A couple of years ago I had mentioned to my friend, a member of this group, that I was frustrated at the level of my Arabic and was hoping to improve it. She immediately suggested that I come with her to these meetings because they were studying Qur'anic Arabic at the time. She invited me several more times over the course of the semester.

Looking back, especially now having attended several month's worth of these weekly meetings, I realize I lacked the Arabic language skills to benefit from much of the lectures at the time. But I believe my friend saw an opportunity, to invite someone who was actively seeking…perhaps not increased religious knowledge but something that this *ders addeen* group could fulfill while simultaneously guiding me towards Islam through Dr. Sara's lectures and the strong community of religious young women. Certainly over the course of my fieldwork it was made very clear to me that they hoped I would see the truth of their religion and my conversion to Islam would be a celebrated moment. In my first conversation with Dr. Sara, after hearing my family name,[12] she pondered aloud about someone with that name who had converted to Islam – rather pointedly I thought at the time.

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[12] My last name, Khouri, is a very common Christian name in Lebanon. It translates to "priest".

Both the leader and the group members may have interpreted my presence and interest in studying their group, as well as Islam, as a sign that I too was searching. Anthropologist Susan Harding noted a similar experience while researching the fundamentalist Christian movement started by American Pastor Jerry Falwell, writing that it was "inconceivable to (the members of this church) that anyone with an appetite for the gospel as great as mine was simply 'gathering information,' was just there 'to write a book.' No, I was searching. God works in mysterious ways. In my case, he seemed to be letting me find my way to him through this book I said I was writing about them." (2001) At the very least I believe they hoped I would leave my time with them with some questions about my own religious tradition and a positive understanding of Islam.

This group's enthusiasm and central focus for *da'wa* originates with the group leader, Dr. Sara. When I asked a group member whether or not Dr. Sara inspires her to do more *da'wa* she immediately responded:

> Yes she does it in every step of her life, in her teachings, whenever she meets someone new. Everything in her life revolves about *da'wa*. Even when she's talking to her friends in work, she tries to turn it into something about religion. In an indirect way. And when she tells us about them she tells us something related to religion. Everything, even the beggar on the street, she talks about it as something religious. And that's what people miss. People think religion is only between you and God. It's between people themselves.

4. The Leader

Universally adored, not just by the members of this *ders* but also with the people she comes into contact in her dizzying social and professional life, I could fill an additional thesis with the compliments my interviewees poured out about Dr. Sara over the course of my fieldwork. One recent alumna told me, "Dr. Sara has something special about her

personality, her dynamics and passion. When I specifically was in college I needed that, I needed something to make me proud of my religion.[13] That was good for me. It's never routine with her, it always changes." One-on-one Dr. Sara comes across as a kind, parental figure – not only a mom to her own children but to the many students and *ders* members filing through her office who come to her with complaints, questions, or a need to vent. When asked why she loved Dr. Sara so much, one group member responded simply, "she listens." In the group setting she is quietly commanding. During her *durus* the young women sit attentively, hanging on to her every word in a manner quite different than typical university students sitting through a professor's lecture.

Dr. Sara's zeal for Islam is apparent to everyone she meets. Every interaction, every book, every movie, every group meeting: for her they are opportunities for *da'wa* and for religious education. She does not come across as someone who relaxes often or even enjoys it. Towards the end of the semester she led one memorable *ders* lecture after undergoing an eye surgery and described to us her attempts to make arrangements and contact organizers for events from her phone while lying face down on doctor-ordered "rest." She brought up this energy and focus in an interview, noting: "Everything I do, every book I read, I take some for my *durus*. Everything. So I cannot even enjoy reading a book without thinking of something in this book that could be of use. That's bothersome sometimes because it's like 'oh I just want to read the book for myself' I just don't do it, it's part of what I do. Even if I

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[13] This is a common remark, particularly attributed to charismatic religious leaders who are set apart from other religious revivalists that use fear-inducing tactics as noted by research Saba Mahmood in Egypt: "A number of participants remarked to me that she 'made people like their religion' because she did not invoke hell's fires and God's wrath to compel them into action, she tolerated the less-than-devout appearance of some of her audience; and she gave them a chance to change over time by listening to 'God's speech.'" (p. 86)

go watch a movie, I'll go 'Okay what's in this movie that I could relate to, you know, in the *durus*.'"

Many times in my interactions with her I could not tell whether she was giving me advice and information for my thesis research or if she was inviting me to see the truth of Islam. I've ultimately concluded: probably both. Although not a convert in the classical sense, she has a zeal for her religion that conveys a sense of being "born again." She described herself as growing up as a "Muslim practitioner," yet by high school she considered herself as an atheist or agnostic. She described her return to religion in the following terms:

> I did kind of what Descartes did which is a *tabula rasa*. I erased everything and started from scratch. I started reading about different religions, different ideologies and actually I remember even asking my late dad to help me with this and he said 'No, I won't help you I want you to discover this by yourself – I could let you meet people to encourage you to find your way again.' And you know, surely but slowly I came back. Convinced that this is what I wanted to do for the rest of my life and I found value, even validity, in this religion even though it is a 1434-years-old religion. I found this is something I could practice … And I came back to Islam from scratch. Almost.

My interview with Dr. Sara was actually my final interview, after talking with the group members. Most of them had expressed the idea that they had been actively searching for something (in terms of religion) and I was curious if Dr. Sara herself had a similar experience. I asked her what had sparked her described return to Islam and this was her response:

> You know I don't want to go through this cliché of 'I didn't find happiness somewhere else so I came to religion being happy you know, hallelujah and whatever' no it's not really that. It's, uh, yeah you do experience different things. You try different things. It's kind of trial and error and you still feel sometimes that there is something missing, maybe, maybe. You know when you are young you go through this exercise and I was like okay maybe there's some merit here. And I started reading.

5. A Specific Vocabulary

The language used here by Dr. Sara, which at times resonates with the language that American evangelicals use – from "hallelujah" to "there is something missing," is common among the English-language conversations I have had with the young women of the *ders addeen.* There is a uniquely American inflection to the discourse they use to describe their religious self-fashioning. As I will explore in depth in my third analysis chapter, a motif of being "born again" merges throughout my research. I use this vocabulary with hesitancy, because the phrase was not used by my interlocutors. However, I have to come to believe that it is not inadequate to capture the many resonances with the language of American Protestantism that permeates my interview transcripts and field notes of conversations with my interlocutors.

These young women (and their leader) attend or attended mostly American universities. Their studies followed the liberal, Euro-American tradition. The areas of Beirut they live in are awash in American or American-style products, clothing, and food. Their media consumption swings heavily American. They speak English constantly, to the point that one group member told me when she went home and visited with her grandparents she struggled to speak with them because she was so accustomed to using the typical mix of Arabic and English that over decades of English-language education Lebanese students have developed into a sort of semi-standardized creole. These *ders* students also interact with English-speaking foreigners constantly, not just the students studying abroad at their universities or living and working in Beirut, but through the material of their weekly *ders*. White converts and Euro-American Muslims feature heavily

in Dr. Sara's *durus* and as I will discuss in the third chapter they approach Islam using the language of the historically-Christian societies in which they live. The use of English language in the daily lives of the young women as well as in my interviews with them also limits and shapes how they can express their religion. English, which has developed a religious language for Christian societies, does not necessarily have a vocabulary apt to express and convey Islamic concepts. In addition, of course, since Arabic is also the language of the Revelation, Muslims have historically emphasized learning Arabic to a degree that vastly overshadows the importance of learning Ancient Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic to the Christian way of life.

These linguistic considerations are also to be connected to the specificity of the discourse of individualism in this movement. Virtually all of these young women are adamant that improving their religious knowledge proceeds from an individual choice that put them at odds, they say, with their families. Many of them only began exploring their religion once they left their childhood homes and moved into not only a new physical location but into a new stage of life. This movement between life stages and religion was echoed in other moments of my interviews as with Saria, who waited to begin wearing the hijab until the period between university graduation and commencing her first job.

Dr. Sara has been giving *durus* since her personal religious revival as a form of *da'wa*. Although proselytization, particularly in the Christian tradition, is typically understood as spreading a religion to a group of people who were not already members of that religion, her primary focus for *da'wa* is fellow Muslims. When I asked her how she defined *da'wa* she had the following to say: "I don't want to say marketing because that would be too materialistic but it has something to do with packaging a product - that really

might not need to be packaged - but because of everything that's happening it's required a new package. So it's re-visiting Islam, it's opening doors, opening hearts, offering a new space of discourse within the societies, particularly the Muslim society." Although she is a university professor, she considers the *ders addeen* her primary occupation. And similar to many Lebanese, she spent years doing this job abroad.

She moved to the US after completing her initial university studies, both to get married and to begin studying for her PhD. By this point she had returned to Islam and was actively teaching those *durus* and did not stop when she came to the US: "Even when I left Lebanon and went to the States, and got married, it was….I think I came there on Tuesday? On Sunday I told my husband I want to go to the mosque and start teaching the kids. It's like when you discover something interesting and you are like 'I want to tell it to everybody!'." She stayed on in the US for years after completing her PhD, starting a family with her new husband and building up her religious knowledge and religious educational work – even as she juggled a growing family and professional work. She did not attend a formal program to be a *da'iyah* but over the years has done a mix of group and personal study. On her religious education she explained: "I attended *halaqa*,[14] I took specific topics, I studied the biography of the Prophet, I did some Qur'anic *tefsirs*.[15] But I work on myself a lot. When I prepare my lesson, I don't take a lesson I heard and I give it, I prepare a lot…learned also how to do *durus* because I took *durus* myself so I attended a lot of these circles from these groups."

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[14] *Halaqa*, according to a group member, is a group of people that meet continuously to study Islam
[15] Interpretations of the Qur'an

With her multilingual and multinational educational background, her expansive

international experience from both living and traveling abroad, and her own family living

around the globe, Dr. Sara bases her teaching on her wide collection of knowledge. Her

lectures, which are primarily given in a mixture of formal and colloquial Arabics, are

interspersed with sayings in French and phrases in English. She quotes as easily from

Descartes as she does the Qur'an. Salwa, who has listened to many other Lebanese *da'iyah*,

considers Dr. Sara different from them because the content of her lectures veer

international. For her weekly lectures she blends sources ranging from ancient Muslim

Ulema like Imam Al Ghazali[16] to YouTube videos created by British Muslim converts. I

asked her where she places herself in terms of the Islamic scholarly tradition and she

responded:

> I'm *Shafa'i*, just because I grew up as *Shafa'i* – most people in Beirut are *Shafa'i*.
> The *madhhab* is just for *masalan*, whether if you shake hands with somebody you
> lose your *wudud* or whatever. It's more *fiqh* rather than something relevant to giving
> *durus*. But if I would give *fiqh* or bring somebody to give *fiqh* I would probably
> chose someone in *Madhhab Shafa'i*…You can pick and chose and I'm very
> comfortable picking and choosing. "*Ikhtilafo Ommati Raha*": the difference
> between these *madhhab* is a blessing for us. Sometime you are in Zimbabwe and
> whatever he said, Shafa'i said, about a certain situation wouldn't work there. But
> it's better to have one main one and then if you are in a certain condition where you
> have to choose, that's what I believe, go ahead and choose it.

Although she aligns herself with a specific *madhhab* as a guide to the basic duties of

religion, her *ders* is influenced by a wide array of sources that cross the same linguistic and

geographic boundaries she does. On the sources she uses to put together her *durus* she

noted:

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[16] "And the road to Allah is repentance, repentance is the start of the road, repentance, what's repentance? It's
a universal concept, under which comes *Istaghfar*, and after that comes regret and solution. Imam al-Ghazali
divides repentance into 3 stages…." Lecture by Dr. Sara, Spring 2014, specific location and date suppressed
to preserve anonymity.

I use Arab [sources]. When we did *tafsir juz ama,*[17] I used the website of a very famous scholar from Syria who does *Tafsir* Qur'an and I like the way he does it but some time I support this with older books, Arabic books, and sometimes I listen to any scholars from the US if there's a topic that I think….and sometimes I chose a topic based on if I heard from YouYube, from Noman Khan, from Hamza Yusef, from Tariq Ramadan and you know. I don't mind at all using – sometimes I think of the *ders* in English in my mind. So like I like this approach, I don't mind it.

To a certain degree this global focus reflects her own personal and educational background, but it also reflects that of her students.

Dr. Sara's personal background is very similar to that of the young women she mentors in the *ders addeen*. She grew up in a well-off family that valued quality education, as do the families of most of the young women who attend her college-aged *ders* group. Almost everyone involved in the *ders* has some direct experience of the Lebanese diaspora and the young women have a global outlook that their leader reflects in her topics. Almost all are English-educated and attend the best universities in the country, which separates these young women from their less-educated and less-wealthy peers of Tariq Jdideh or cities such as Tripoli or Sidon. Significantly, this shared English education permits them access to international material, which as I noted above, skews heavily Euro-American.

6. "Cosmopolitan" Beirut

Beirut is an ancient port city, although in some areas it can be hard to find anything older than 15 years due to the cyclical violence with periods of bombings quickly followed by periods of rebuilding. Downtown Beirut today is a series of modern apartment buildings

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[17] During the course of the spring semester, the group studied *juz ama* – the final "*juz*" or section of the Qur'an with some of the most popular verses. Each week she went over a part of the section and gave an interpretation of each *sura* or verse, many members tried to memorize the entire section and some would arrive early each week to go over their memorizations with each other or a friend of Dr. Sara who volunteered to help with the memorizing.

and shops settled next to decaying, sometimes bullet-ridden, traditional apartments and villas waiting their turn to be remodeled or fully razed and built into more buildings bought up by summering Saudi families. Due to its physical location as well as its alleged liberal character, the city has always been considered a link between the East and the West. Even in the 1960s Beirutis were proud of their unique culture in the Arab world and their strong relationship with the West – something well promoted by the Lebanese tourism industry.

Everyone from the tourism industry to political parties to Lebanese on the streets promotes the famous Lebanese cosmopolitanism as indigenous. The word cosmopolitan is always readily at hand to explain what makes Lebanon unique. During my research, I came across a small book written in 1973 by a Lebanese-American woman named Doris Abood called *Lebanon: Bridge Between East and West*. During a trip to her local public library, the author had been frustrated to find that there were no books about Lebanon and as she explains in the introduction, she put together this book for American children to learn about Lebanon and dispel stereotypes.[18] The following passage from her book, as she and her companions land in Beirut, illustrates this discourse of cosmopolitanism:

> A bus is sent from the terminal to the plane to transport the passengers from the plane to the Customs, Immigration, and Health Office. After going through the necessary formalities of luggage inspection, vaccination certification, and citizen identification (it takes us a little longer than the rest of the passengers, since we speak only English, and they speak English, French, and Arabic), we are assisted by a pretty ground hostess who aids us in finding a taxi … After entering our cab we discover that our driver speaks three languages fluently, French, Arabic, and English as do most of the people of Beirut – French being first in line, because Lebanon was a French mandate until its independence in 1948 … Our driver tells us that in April and May it is possible to swim in the morning, then drive on one of the

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[18] "Often stereotype images which give distorted views about people of other countries, such as identifying all Italians as Mafia; Orientals as untrustworthy; southern Europeans as the peasant class of Europe; the Arab, swarthy, impervious to change with little regard to veracity. These ideas formed in early childhood are difficult and frequently impossible to erase." (Abood 1973)

many spacious, modern highways and within an hour's time be at one of the many ski resorts, where it is possible to ski in shorts and a light sweater…As we drive down the many narrow streets with such names as Rue Mamari (Ma-ma-ri), Rue Hamra (Ham-ra), Souk (Sook), Tawille (Ta-wheel), we are amazed to see so many embassy buildings, but then we remember that Beirut is the capitol of Lebanon and has diplomatic relations with many, many countries. This is another reason why Beirut is such a cosmopolitan city in which one is able to meet people from all over the world … From Bab Edriss we drive to another large shopping area, Hamra (Ham-ra). This is called the American section of Beirut because English is the predominant language spoken in this area. There must be many Americans who come here because we see restaurants with American names advertising hamburgers and hot dogs. All the movie theatres are showing American films, and we pass at least three large supermarkets advertising American frozen food. It feels almost like being at home. (pp. 5, 6, 7, 8, 28)

The diaspora in particular plays an important role in the development and perpetuation of this discourse of cosmopolitan Lebanon. In creating and promoting this idealized, European-ized view of Lebanon that separates them culturally from the other Arab countries, perhaps the diaspora determines what "Lebanese" means in relationship to the societies in which they reside. Lebanese women in particular are expected to live out and fashion themselves around this cosmopolitan ethos and the beauty of Lebanese women is a source of national pride. As I will discuss in my next chapter, most of the young women in the *ders* group reject many of the more superficial aspects of being "cosmopolitan," with visible signs of piety such as looser clothing and the hijab, which puts them into an interesting "counter-cultural" position in their societal sphere.

Sociologist Samir Khalaf, who has written extensively on Beirut, notes that the city has reinvented itself multiple times, growing from a small port city to Levantine seaside playground to a site of war tourism. In his writings on Beirut, Khalaf utilizes a very common rhetoric of "cosmopolitanism" which can be found in genres going from tourism commercials to academic works to conversations with Beiruti taxi drivers. He writes of

Beirut as "a residence for consul generals, headquarters for French, American, and British missions and a growing centre of trade and services, it gradually began to attract a cosmopolitan and heterogeneous population. It is then that some of the early symptoms of cosmopolitanism, marked by elements of sophistication and savoir-faire in public life, started to surface." (Khalaf 2006) According to Khalaf, what makes Beirut "cosmopolitan" – to say nothing of its "sophistication" - originated almost exclusively from Euro-American contact. A recent article on the growth of social media sites dedicated to hijab fashion by the New York Times expresses a similar view. In describing the "cosmopolitan young Muslim women" who run these hijab fashion blogs, the author writes that they are "highly educated, well versed in global cultural trends and open to Western influences." (Seligson 2014) This specific notion of what being "cosmopolitan" means is arguably shared by many Lebanese whether they reside in their country or abroad.

7. Cosmopolitan Events for Cosmopolitan Beirut

During the course of my fieldwork I attended two different musical events put on by a group headed by Dr. Sara. Although not directly related to the *ders addeen*, the young women attended the shows en masse and many helped as volunteers. These concerts were a fascinating look at a specific layer of Beirut's Sunni elite and of its forms of religious self-fashioning. Comprised entirely of Euro-American artists (from a variety of ethnic backgrounds but with a high number of white converts and African-American Muslims), both these concerts were introduced, performed, and emceed entirely in the English language to a mostly Lebanese audience. Probably because, of course, an educated person

is an English speaker.[19] To many Lebanese, English indicates education, English indicates a future abroad, English indicates global appeal – all of which are key elements in a community impacted by an expansive diaspora and a lifetime of cosmopolitan rhetoric.

Held in a magnificent auditorium close to the Mediterranean and the upper-class area of Raouche, the second concert I attended began rather late. Overwhelmingly young, female, and *muhajebeh*, the attendees took a while to settle into their seats as they laughed with friends and said hi to people in the aisles. It was well-attended, with several hundred people present, although in the vast concert hall the impression of fullness was not as strong as at the first which was held in a much smaller venue. They had been advertising for several weeks, mostly through social connections and over Facebook, but they also had volunteers putting up posters in Beirut and even took out advertisements on the Sunni-focused television channel, Future TV. The concert began with an MC, some kind of stand-up comedienne with a loose hijab and thick American accent, who started off with a crack that one of the planned performers from the US was not able to attend because he had made the mistake of "flying while being Muslim." A crack that fell flat among the Lebanese crowd.

The concert was a mix of musical artists (mostly rap or hip-hop), spoken word, and poetry; the artists were all from English-speaking countries, although of varying ethnic origins. Some appeared to be well-known, particularly an American band comprised of African-American musicians, with whose lyrics large sections of the crowd enthusiastically

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[19] Aside from a rapidly decreasing percentage of "*Frenchies*" who attend primarily one university in Beirut, there is such an association between being well-educated and speaking English that when I joined a gym in Hamra and asked the woman behind the counter if the Pilates instructor spoke English she responded incredulously "Of course? We are all educated here!"

sung along. One song in particular was rapped in English but interspersed with Arabic Muslim phrases like "Mashallah" and "Inshallah" which the artists encouraged the audience to shout out along with them as they performed the song. The spoken word performances did not seem to go over as well among the all-Lebanese audience although I could not tell if this was due to the more subdued style, the complex English phrasing, or the newness of this art form which I initially thought seemed like something written for an American university crowd before realizing that indeed it was.

Although they were religious events, put on as a form of *da'wa* primarily targeted at the Sunni Muslim community, these concerts were clearly not intended for most Lebanese Sunnis. Aside from the (presumably unintentional) English-language barrier, with a price tag between $20-30 USD these evening concerts were outside of the price range of most Lebanese. These events were located in trendy and upper-class areas of Beirut, and not in traditionally Sunni neighborhoods. Attendees by appearance were wealthy, yet religious, Sunni Lebanese women (and a few husbands who appeared to have been dragged along). At the first event I attended, as several women swept in late, waving to their friends and chatting with each other as they slowly moved towards their seats, a group member pointed them out to me and laughed about how these women come late on purpose to make an entrance. Although they are conservative and religious, separate from the upper Lebanese social class that ranges toward and fashions itself as "cosmopolitan," these women do not appear to be immune to the same social pressures and performances that their less-religious peers experience. Although I believe the social exclusivity of these events was not deliberate on the part of its organizers, part of what made these events so exclusionary

possibly made it an effective *da'wa* tool for this upper-class group of Lebanese that has become Dr. Sara's primary *da'wa* focus.

8. The Clash of Islam and Cosmopolitanism

As I will discuss in greater detail in the following chapter, the Lebanese educated and upper classes tend to be hostile to overt religiosity, which they construct as "backwards" in contrast with the cosmopolitanism they strive to embody. These "higher class" events and Dr. Sara's reputation pull women from a sector of Lebanese society that does not typically like to associate with revivalist religious groups. Group member Zeina noted:

> This is what is interesting and unique about her *durus* compared to other *al-Nisa'* because at the end of the day she's a university professor. It gives it a twist and prestige by the way to her *durus*. You can see her other *durus* where very prestigious women and very rich families attend so you can tell what social class – middle, upper class - because she's a university professor. If she wasn't maybe people would hesitate before joining … [She is] the 'cool *da'iyah'*. The segment she's targeting, it's different than the traditional *al-Nisa'* segments. She's reaching out to a larger bunch of the community.

Sociologist Steven Seidman noted in his essay on the icon of Beiruti "cosmopolitanism," Hamra, that "the sheer repetition of the rhetoric of cosmopolitanism seemed rather too scripted to be taken entirely at face value. It's not that I thought it wrong, but I wondered why this discourse seemed so uncompromising. What especially gave me pause was that this discourse was uncritically voiced by just about everyone, despite a public reality that denigrated and often excluded non-heterosexuals, gender dissidents, migrant laborers, Kurds, and Palestinians." (Seidman 2012) I understand Lebanese cosmopolitanism as a self-fashioning performance that intentionally differentiates the

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Lebanese from their neighbors. This "conscious cosmopolitanism" also invokes a nostalgic and stereotypical understanding of Lebanese culture and identity (Haugbolle 2006) and is riddled with exclusion and disrespect of migrant workers and non-Anglo-European ethnic minorities. I believe the diaspora feeds this exclusion. As a member of this diaspora I have observed the language and anxieties of "integration" running high, especially among Lebanese who have moved to non-European countries. It is well known in Lebanon that the Lebanese who go to Africa or Asia, especially to less stable countries such as Nigeria that opened their borders to Lebanese during the Civil War, tend to cloister themselves in compounds and avoid contact with the local population whom they often view with contempt.

Although most segments of Lebanese society arguably abide by this "cosmopolitan" construction of Lebanon, the educated and upper classes in particular promote and uphold this Euro-American-centered rhetoric. With the help of French colonial gerrymandering, the Maronite Catholics dominated Lebanese politics and culture until the Lebanese Civil War. The Christians were not only the economic powerhouse, controlling the vast majority of businesses (Traboulsi 2007) but were the early prominent Arab intellectuals and writers, heavily seduced by the ideas and language of the Enlightenment. (Hourani 1983) Although the sectarian demographics have shifted significantly since the creation of the Lebanese Republic, the Lebanese upper class has retained an affinity for the West and post-colonial elevation of European culture. The upper-class and educated Lebanese Sunnis are less likely to express their faith through certain practices – especially those attempting to uphold a religious faith considered "backwards" and "dangerous" from the same standards from which the "cosmopolitan" compulsion feeds. This community is not only the least likely to

participate in religious movements or center their lives on religious practice in Lebanon, but in this period of religious revival that has affected the middle- and lower-class Sunnis in Lebanon it has been the most resistant to the message brought by religious reformers. As Zeina discussed earlier in this chapter, groups like *al-Nisa'* with their dowdy coats, tight hijabs, and bulky shoes have had difficulty penetrating a social circle in which the priority is given to the latest European fashions, international vacation spots, and imported cars. Not only does *al-Nisa'* have difficulty getting out their message, but it is much less likely to be seen as appealing to upper-class young women that associate religiosity with having to give up their social lives to stay inside and pray quietly while their friends are out in cafes. Dr. Sara, as well as the members of the *ders addeen*, has a unique opportunity to conduct *da'wa* in a social class in which she is already a member.

Dr. Sara is well-traveled, well-educated, multilingual, and well-respected – ideal for the type of understated *da'wa* that is required to navigate the upper Lebanese society. In the space of one lecture her discussions swing from watching yoga practitioners on a beach in the Emirates the previous weekend, to sneaking *koshary* into her hotel in Egypt, to a conversation she had with a white American convert on the highway between San Francisco to Berkeley, while somehow effectively tying these anecdotes back to her religious argument. Certainly Dr. Sara (as well as the young college-aged group members) is a member of this self-fashioned "cosmopolitan" Lebanese society with all of its anxieties and status-seeking preoccupations. Yet it became apparent to me from both my fieldwork and interviews that while Dr. Sara can easily navigate this social sphere, she is less caught up in the societal "rat race" than other Lebanese women of a similar age and background – a personality trait that one of my interviewee ascribed to her years abroad.

9. Set Apart

Although Dr. Sara is very much part of this upper-class, educated Lebanese sphere, her own personality as well as her years spent abroad and outside of this community sets her apart. When I asked Saria if Dr. Sara is different than other Lebanese *ders* leaders, she quickly agreed:

> She is different from other women who give *durus* because I think they have a more traditional … (paused to think). They tend to stick to the roots of religion more, she is more outgoing. So, *bss*, it's not about the Lebanese part - the Lebanese part for me is the whole lifestyle thing, the prestige stuff that the Lebanese have in their mind that it's very important. In the West it's not as important. So Dr. Sara, she has a different aspect because she's been living outside. One is that she's more liberated and the modern type of thinking. And two, she's not too "tight" on these Lebanese things …. She doesn't try to save face 'in front of one group of people I'm like that, with others I'm different'. No, she's herself with everyone, I think she's comfortable with herself …Yeah she's very different.

Similar to many Lebanese religious figures, Dr. Sara has an interest in reviving proper practice of Islam in Lebanon and removing traditions and culture that have crept into a thousand years of Islam. On traditions she elaborated:

> There is the problem of mixing Islamic principles with tradition. Some of the traditions have become associated with Islam even though they are not. *Yani* something like, let's say, a family would allow their son to go out after ten o'clock but not allow their daughter. People would think it has to do with Islam but it doesn't have to do with Islam …Women in the time of the Prophet used to pray behind the guys with no separation. And now the woman has to pray in a different room. I'm not saying, I'm not calling for the woman to go pray again, I'm just saying it became a tradition and we think it had to do with what the Prophet ordered us to do but it's not. I don't know all the examples came out to be women, but that's the issue in Islam for a long period of time the man was the one presenting the fatwa. So we kind of disappeared and we ended up with many fatwas that are male-dominated fatwas.

Dr. Sara's comment on the issue of mixing tradition with Islamic principles hardly expresses a view which is new or unique. As I will discuss in my third chapter, this is a very common type of discourse among Muslim modernists. The focus on a "pure" Islam and rejection of *bid'ah*[20] is the cornerstone of Salafi or Wahabist beliefs, which are just one example of a much larger trend towards modernism in Islam. What varies is the content of the distinction, what people, once this (modernist) distinction made between principles and traditions, will construct as examples of "traditions."

10. Charisma and Authority of the Leader

Dr. Sara has a deep interest in humanity and spirituality that draws in Muslims of all backgrounds. One *ders* member said she has tried to attend other *durus*, "*bss* not frequently because they usually, I don't know, they shout, they raise their voices … The way *khutbah* is given and sheikhs shout – they do stuff that doesn't make you feel comfortable with the religion and they don't let you *heiki* search in it or try to figure more about it. It's repulsive, media is repulsive. But the way Dr. Sara is very human about it, makes me want to share about it with people who don't know. My friends especially."

Dr. Sara's overwhelming charisma is arguably the source of her *da'wa's* success. This charisma takes many forms, including a physical element. Throughout her lectures, she uses movements and gestures to add a palpable energy behind her words. These affects she uses - tonal qualities of voice and rhythmic structure - do not just move a listener but as argued by anthropologist Charles Hirschkind, they enact the ethical attitudes and sensibilities given expression in the sermon speech. The value of a lecture is in part because

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[20] An invention. Within the context of religious practice it can be seen as something *haram* or forbidden.

of the quality of the sincerity, humility, and pious fear given vocal embodiment by the speaker (Hirschkind 2006). Dr. Sara raises and lowers her voice with dramatic intonations and repeats important words and verses of the Qur'an over and over again in a style that does not evoke the same Euro-American resonance her language does. Her physical charisma, from my perspective, evokes a more traditional stylistic manner of giving a *khutbah* and reciting the Qur'an and public prayer. This is contrasted with South African religious figure Ahmed Deedant, a popular Muslim speaker in the 1970s and 80s who "inhabited Christian rhetorical modes" and mimicked speech styles of evangelical Christians during his speeches and debates to combat the rise of Christian televangelists (Larkin 2008). Dr. Sara's physical and vocal style is aimed at a primarily Lebanese audience and reflects the style of lecture and prayer with which both the leader and her students must be most comfortable.

Dr. Sara also has a strong, authoritative charisma. The young women, who come of their own free will, typically stay very quiet and respectful during the entirety of the hour and a half lectures. Occasionally she will ask someone to be quiet or to stop texting, but typically these college-aged students are significantly more respectful during her lectures than a similar-aged group would be in the same university classrooms in which she normally teaches. Her charisma is validated through the authority these young women freely give her.[21] In choosing to attend these *durus*, the young women place their trust in the validity of her teachings, the strength of her faith, and the guidance of her teachings for their lives. When I asked group member Cyrine if she considers Dr. Sara to be a good role

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[21] "It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma." (Weber, 1947, p. 359)

model she replied, "Yes. She is not an extremist, which helps attract more girls especially the ones who are not religious." This trust is particularly essential in the sectarian world of Lebanese politics and rising fears of religious extremism, as I will discuss further in the second chapter. This personal, trustworthy charisma is also essential for the understated *da'wa* this group utilizes.

11. A Spiritual Islam

This understated *da'wa*, with a focus on God and love and humanity, is well targeted for an audience of both Muslims and non-Muslims. Dr. Sara herself acknowledges this intentional focus:

> I don't want to offend anyone who is not from an Islamic background or whatever. So I just talk about Islam in a very spiritual way. When I'm with non-Muslim that's what I do. I don't get into the Bible I don't get into the Qur'an, I talk relationship with God. That's how I do *da'wa* with non-Muslims. About spiritual which is something common among all humans. When I was in the States last time, I was in this bookstore, and I've been in the habit of buying books lately not clothes, not purses, whatever. So anyway that bookstore had like three shelves on Christianity, three shelves and a half on Judaism, one shelf and a half on Islam but 27 shelves on spirituality. And probably most of the books I bought are on the spirituality shelves. So I think it's interesting. People are thriving for spirituality, they are looking for it. And sometimes they are looking in the wrong places, sometimes the right places.

Dr. Sara's interest in spirituality is interesting in this context given its place in the linguistic medium used by the group. "Spiritual," in the context of the American bookstore section where she shopped, refers to literature aimed at the significant number of young Americans who now define themselves as "spiritual but not religious."[22] What "spiritual" means for them can vary, but typically, "spirituality" rejects uncomfortable mainline beliefs, such as the concept of hell, and is often an embrace of a loving supernatural force

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[22] George H. Gallup, Jr., "Americans' Spiritual Searches Turn Inward," GPNS (2003)

that maintains some sense of positive control over one's life. Through "spirituality" they are distancing themselves from what they perceive to be negative aspects of organized religion. They tend to pick and choose what they view to be positive aspects of one or many religions, often by appropriating from "Eastern" religions and practices such as meditation, yoga, and iconography such as small Buddha statues or portraits of Hindu gods. This "spirituality" is typically reviled among reformist Christian groups, partially because it is a rejection of more orthodox teachings, and I believe partially because it is a threat to their religious authority as this more palatable form of faith that is rapidly gaining hold among young Americans.

Unlike in the American Protestant revival, particularly the conservative Reformed Theology linked to Calvinism, which abhors the term "spirituality" and incorporations of Eastern "spiritualisms" into Christian practice and belief, Dr. Sara's embrace of spirituality arguably can draw on some aspects of the Islamic tradition. Sufiism is a mystical tradition within Islam that emphasizes a close and intimate connection to God. While I don't know Dr. Sara's view of Sufis, I do know that one of the thinkers she most admires, Tariq Ramadan, is quoted as saying that "The heart of the *Shari'a* is the Sufi spiritual tradition."[23] As long as the "spiritualism" she describes does not clash with the Islamic creed, she does not appear to fear this concept as many American Christians do or other Muslim revivalist movements such as the Salafis.[24] However interestingly she doesn't avail herself of the label "Sufi."

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[23] Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FVYf_xBz3k

[24] "Sufis came to be regarded as a major cause of the so-called decline of Islam and an obstacle to its adaptation. In the Arab world, this anti-Sufi feeling was generally associated with the Salafiyya trend …

12. Conclusion

Despite, or perhaps because of, her varied diasporic experiences, Dr. Sara comes across as a woman who very much knows her place in the world and where she is meant to be. On her *durus* she told me: "I always tell God, take anything from me, but don't take this from me … That's what I think I do for a living. What I do here at [the university] for a living that's simply for living. This here, is what I'm doing for the hereafter. I'm in Lebanon right now. But anywhere I go, you can guarantee I will wake up in the morning and I'll say 'where can I start?' *Inshallah* I will never leave what I do." Her unique style speaks with force to the young, diverse, and global group of women whom she is able to mentor and teach so successfully because she was one of them. With her family all over the world and a life traveling from country to country, she has carved out a place for herself perhaps more in mindset than in location, navigating overlapping social circles with a long-practiced ease. For the young women of the *ders* however, especially for those who are in the early stages of exploring their religion, finding a balance between ideal religious practice and engagement with their society can be difficult.

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however Salafi thinkers themselves had roots in the revivalist Sufi tradition of the previous centuries."
(Weismann, 2005, p. 39)

B. Balancing Religious Duty and Societal Pressure

"In our daily life, *yani*, in our work, we can worship God. Be honest, work from your heart, don't take money which doesn't belong to you, help others. *Kilo heyda* it goes into religion."[25]

Public discussions of Islam and the Arab world in Europe and Northern America often mobilize a discourse according to which female participation in many aspects of the practice of Islam is not just male-dominated but male-enforced. When French legislators argue for banning the niqab in public spaces, they say they are saving women whose fathers or brother force this garment upon them. When US officials and pundits justify the continued US presence in countries such as Afghanistan they say this action is dictated by the necessity to build schools for young girls who would not have a chance at a good life without such foreign, benevolent interventions. In doing so, they diminish the possibility that women take an active role in their religious practice and education, without male approval. My research with the young women of the ders group certainly belies such assumptions. In this chapter, I will argue that these young women take an active role in initiating and building their religious lives, to the extent that many go against the wishes of their male relatives in the pursuit of ideal religious practice. I will also argue that while they do face pressures from some social quarters to conform to a religious ideal, this pressure

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[25] From an interview with Rayan

originates with other women in their religious communities, in a manner that in fact restricts the import of male authority in their religious practice.

The young women of the *ders addeen* group say that they must balance a variety of demands and imperatives. Both a self-imposed sense of duty and their religious leaders direct them to follow the commands of their religion to the utmost: to read the Qur'an more, attend more *durus* lessons, focus their thoughts more strongly, keep up with their prayers and proper *wudud*, memorize more verses, and dedicate more of their lives to religion. Yet simultaneously their social environment, their peers, their professors or employers, and even their parents are pushing them, they say, to be less religious, to avoid attending *ders addeen* lectures, to dress or act a certain way – usually in line with a norm of modern Lebanese womanhood that invokes a Euro-American ideal. This ideal can be difficult to achieve for these young women, who are trying to prioritize the ideals of their religion as they interpret them. Additionally, within the current context of Lebanese political and religious turmoil, participation in conservative Sunni movements, like this *ders addeen*, provokes political anxieties. Thus in many ways the young women of this *ders* movement are "counter-cultural." Many of them face opposition from their families or communities for their increased religiosity – especially when it comes to visible symbols such as putting on the hijab. In this chapter I will explore how the young women of this *ders* attempt to find a balance between committed religious practice and engagement with their social environment.

1. Religion and Social Duty, Intertwined

For group member Rayan, religion and daily social life are intertwined. In her view, studying her religion pushes her to be a better member of society: don't steal, be honest, work hard, and help others. Religious duty is social duty. Ideally, religion and daily life and society do not need careful balancing. They should complement each other or be lived through each other. When I asked one member what was her purpose on Earth she replied: "I think that we are entrusted with this Earth. I shouldn't destroy this Earth just because I live here. And I have to take care of my health because it's a blessing from God. Because it's like a reminder. We go to the *ders*, it's a reminder that life is not just this simple little thing. It's not about money, about going out or having fun or studying. There's something larger than what we are doing." For many of the young women of the *ders*, this weekly meeting was a reminder about the importance of living religion in daily life.

Another group member also discussed this complementary relationship of religion and daily life. On marriage, a frequent topic for the young college-aged women of the ders, she stated:

> God told us to get married which we should do in this life. It's part of life and we need to give importance to the husband and the kids. If I leave my husband he will look for maybe comfort from another woman or maybe he will marry another woman – which I don't agree with – or maybe he will do something wrong – he will look at something wrong maybe because he has weird instincts sometimes. And the children they need care, especially when they are very young. We should tell them what's wrong and right. So if I fail in this part it means I fail in my religion.

It is a common argument of Islamic modernism that mass proper religious practice should lead to a properly functioning society[26]. This idea is shared by many religious

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[26] As Albert Hourani noted on Egyptian religious scholar Mohammad 'Abduh, "His imagination is fixed on the golden age of Islam, the generation of obedience and the rewards of obedience – political success and an intellectual development almost without a parallel in the speed and manner of its flowering. The early umma, the community of the elders, the *salaf*, was what the umma ought to be … this perfect society in the end

reformation movements, particularly the Sunni Islamic movements, which trace the root cause of social or political ills to society's fall from true religion. Through their religious education and adherence to Islam's principles, most of the members of this group understand their daily lives as opportunities to live out their faith. Following their religious duties does not always put them at odds with their larger society.

According to group member Zad, it is attending the *ders* and studying her religion that even taught her to respect her parents, even when it's difficult. She confided:

> [The *ders*] made me more religious because like I felt in my life I had a lot of obstacles…family-wise. There are things in my family that are weird. I sometimes like, I want to get free from my parents. Sometimes I feel like I want to run away. Like I love them but I feel I want to run away. *Ino* especially my mom. That's what I feel. And religion makes me calmer and, not obedient, but like I have to love my parents. They brought me to this life. I don't hate them *yani* but sometimes (voice begins to rise in anger or frustration) when something bad happens I wish I had different parents you know?! They used to fight a lot. Sometimes I didn't like to go home. And when I was doing my Bachelor's degree I had to have high grades and I didn't remember doing extracurricular activities because I was always afraid that I won't excel in what I'm doing. And my mom always pushes me: 'you can't do anything, focus on your studies.' From when I was in elementary school she used to do that. That's why I didn't used to do extracurricular stuff. Like you (referring to interviewer) can manage your time. Sometimes I feel like I can't manage my time because I'm not used to it. [So this *ders* was] something different. Something for me.

As I discussed in the first analysis chapter, there are themes of a specific, class-based individualism running through my interviews. Again this is reflected in her final thought, that this *ders* was something for her, which resonates with this neo-liberal discourse that one's religious choices are made by oneself.

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decayed, it was for two reasons. First there came into Islam elements alien to it: the philosophers and extreme Shi'is brought in the spirit of excess, and a certain type of mysticism obscured the essential nature of Islam." (p. 149)

2. Fears of Political Islam

Although most religious practitioners probably believe that active and correct religious practice is a social good and something beneficial for society at large, the young members navigate social worlds in which this view cannot be taken for granted. Interestingly, almost all the group members I talked to told me that their parents either actively disapproved of their participation in this religious group or were deliberately kept unaware. Even for parents who knew or encouraged their children's participation in this weekly meeting, they still had hesitations or initially investigated the group, its leader, and her teachings. Although the families of these group members are from a narrow range of religious and social backgrounds, their concerns originate in the same place. Zad's story on why her family allows her to attend a *ders addeen,* but not her young brother, sheds some light on their fears:

> When my brother wanted to go to a sheikh in Saida my dad said no. You know why? Because he's afraid like what happened with Assir. Because this happened once with my uncle. My uncle, he joined the *Jama'a, Islamiyyeh* you know? – so when Israel was here, *Jama'a* was telling the people that they should fight against Israel and they should have weapons, *yani* 'go and defend themselves.' My uncle wanted to go and do something to the Israelis and (lowers voice) he had a gun, so my family wanted to stop him and they did the best they could and flew him to the US so that he wouldn't do anything. Because they didn't want him to destroy his future. Because most of the men who did this, they went to jail or they were killed. So everything associated with the religion is scary, that's why my father doesn't like it. Before Assir, it's not related. And now that it happened [referring back to the Assir movement's collapse] my dad's like: 'You know, you see what's happened?' He never let my brother go to Assir before. Not because he doesn't like religion, but he doesn't like to be associated with religious people who are political. He's afraid of this stuff. But I don't encourage that. You can choose [to follow] somebody who's a sheikh. How can a guy learn more about religion and listen about religion? I think the *ders addeen* it's the best way to know about your religion.

This one comment by Zad suggests fascinating insights into the relationship between upper-class or educated Lebanese Sunnis and their religion. She also conveys the

first of the two major fears parents have about participation in this group, which is politics. She references two Sunni movements, *Jama'a Islamiyyeh* and that of Sheikh Ahmed al Assir, both active in the southern Lebanese city of Sidon but relevant to two different time periods for Sunni Islam and its political expression in Lebanon. *Jama'a Islamiyyeh*, an international movement, was originally associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. It moved toward militancy during the Lebanese Civil War and by the 1980s was actively fighting during the war with Israel with its militia, the *Mujahiden* (Hamzeh 1997). Zad's relatives sought to protect their family member – and probably family in the collective sense – by sending him to the US to prevent him from destroying his life because they feared the consequences of his actions. Over the years *Jama'a Islamiyyeh* has mellowed from its old militant fervor and today is associated with social welfare and vague political activism for Sunni Lebanese. In their decline, new religious movements have arisen, speaking to a widespread sense of "disempowerment" amongst Lebanese Sunnis. The controversial Sheikh Ahmed Al Assir led one of these movements.

Sheikh Assir and what happened to his movement embody the fears of these upper-class, educated Sunni parents. His recent rise and fall is fresh in the memories of parents worried about conservative religious movements. Sheikh Assir's movement was fed by a social phenomenon associated with the frustration of Lebanese Sunnis who felt disempowered by the overwhelming strength and unity of the Lebanese Shi'ite community and their participation in the Syrian Civil War next door. Sheikh Assir was able to capitalize on widespread anger and through aggressive, door-to-door *da'wa* and headline-

grabbing protests against Hezbollah, built up a significant following in Sidon.[27] Young

men, and young women, flocked to nightly lectures given by the sheikh in addition to other

religious education classes. Ultimately this anger and its sectarian undertones came to a

boiling point and. At the end of June 2013, a battle erupted between followers of Sheikh

Assir and the Lebanese army, resulting in the death of many fighters on both sides and the

dissolution of the movement. Hezbollah's role in this is still uncertain, and frankly the truth

is irrelevant: many if not most members of the Lebanese Sunni community believe

Hezbollah fighters were there alongside the Lebanese army, possibly as part of a larger,

pre-emptive plan. Although Sheikh Assir did not originally have support from the larger

Sunni community, in the aftermath, large segments of the Sunni community felt personally

targeted by a government that appeared to be colluding with a Shi'ite group against them.[28]

3. Fear of Losing the Boys

I initially assumed, based off what I thought I knew of how Lebanese families

usually view their daughters versus their sons, that parents would be far more concerned

about what their daughters are getting up to late at night. However, based on my interviews

with the women *ders* participants, I felt a stronger concern about the sons' participation in a

religious revival movement. As I noted above, my interlocutors explained that all-male

durus tend to be more political. For parents concerned about their children getting involved

in sectarian politics, this anxiety is more intensely focused on losing their sons to religious

movements with political aims. This concept of "losing" a child to a religious movement is

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[27] Fleming-Farrell, Niamh (2013, June 25). The Rise and Fall of Sheik Ahmad Assir. *The Daily Star.*
[28] Fleming-Farrell, Niamh (2013, June 25). The Rise and Fall of Sheik Ahmad Assir. *The Daily Star.*

also very interesting. The fact that it is an accepted potential effect of participation in religious movements suggests that this "loss" has happened before within the educated and upper-class Lebanese spheres and is considered a highly undesirable outcome. A story frequently evoked in discussions on this topic was the case of Fadel Shaker. Shaker, a popular Lebanese singer, joined Assir's movement, renounced singing as something haram or forbidden, participated in the events in Sidon along with the rest of Assir's movement and is now a wanted fugitive. Both in my personal life and during my fieldwork I have heard the story of Assir's movement (in particular its demise) as a referenced illustration of how Salafis are taking over Lebanon or as an example of the increasing sectarianism. This anxiety towards the male participation leaves a space available for the young women. It also complicates the idea of male domination and male freedom in Arab societies; it is arguable these young women are freer than their brothers to participate in these *durus*.

Judging from what my interlocutors told me, Lebanese Sunni families that are educated or wealthy tend to be afraid of groups such as *Jama'a Islamiyyeh* or Sheikh Assir. Revivalist groups, especially those who focus on social programs, recruit their members from the middle class rather than the lower or upper classes.[29] Arguably those from the upper class, like business owners and management at country-wide firms, have the most to lose from the rise of instability. Additionally the Lebanese upper class in particular might be apprehensive of new social and cultural restrictions being imposed on the country that

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[29] In Janine Clark's 2003 work, she argues "that Islamic social institutions are run by and for the middle class. As a consequence of both the operational dictates of the institutions and the instrumental needs of the Islamist movement of which the institutions are part, Islamic social institutions cater to and benefit the educated or professional middle class. This process not only neglects the poor, it often comes at the expense of the poor. Rather than vertical recruitment or mobilization of the poor, Islamic social institutions play an important role in the strengthening of horizontal networks binding middle-class doctors, directors, donors, volunteers, patients, and clients together." (p. 4)

can accompany Islamic revival (Ottaway and Hamzawy 2007). Furthermore they are wary of being associated with Sunni religious leaders who they believe are uniquely targeted for assassination, a belief bolstered by the almost-yearly car bombings aimed at these Sunni political and religious figures.

4. Encouragement and Involvement

Some families actively encourage their daughters to study their religion, particularly through these weekly *durus*, but they make a point of looking into them in the beginning. For group member Rania, at whose family apartment the group meetings are held, her family clearly approves of both the teacher and the subjects. However she did note that her parents had worries about conservative religion whenever these groups interfered with politics. As long as long as they know the teacher and that is, as Rania put it, someone with a "modern approach" and who is "rational," then they encourage her participation. Her parents are proactive in their children's religious education. Rania's mother has arranged for private *ders addeen* lessons for her children since they were very young and the current, open *ders addeen* for university students began when Rania's mother arranged for Dr. Sara to come and privately instruct her children and a small circle of their friends. Although Rania's parents not only support but instigated Rania's involvement in religious education, by choosing the *da'iyah* and holding the meetings in their own home they have put themselves in control of the content being given.

Group member Layal, a recent university graduate and in the middle of planning a wedding, initially had to allay her parents' concerns. Similar to most of the young women, she discovered the group through a fellow university student while searching for religious

knowledge. She loved the *durus* that Dr. Sara gave, describing her as giving the *durus* in a smooth and nice way, and most importantly she considered her trustworthy. She felt information coming from Dr. Sara was more likely to be accurate compared to searching online for information or going to another religious leader with questionable sources or without the same reputation as Dr. Sara. Her parents, however, were either not aware of Dr. Sara's reputation or like Zad's parents are inherently cautious of conservative religious movements with possible political ties. As she returned from the *ders* meetings early on, her mother would question her: "What did you learn! What did you learn?" But over time, as she discussed Dr. Sara's lectures and her mother was able to get a grasp on what information she was being given, her parents ultimately came to a neutral position: neither forcing her to go nor forcing her to stop.

Other parents, despite knowing about their daughter's participation in this group and what she is learning there, are not happy about their attendance. When I asked undergraduate student Dahlia whether or not her family encouraged her participation she immediately responded:

> No! (laughs) Our family is not religious, in a way. My dad, I guess, as the rest of the Lebanese people, they don't want you to become very religious. They are always afraid. That you might go in a different way or become very tough. So my dad raised us in a Christian school and then most of my environment wasn't really religious, I don't know. So when I came here [for university] I was interested, in making sure what is *aqida* really … what is the creed in Islam. My dad mainly doesn't encourage religious activities … My mom started to be religious lately, *yani* I wasn't raised religious … I guess because she's getting older? (laughs) I'm not sure. Look she always had this spirit. It's there but *ma ba'ref* maybe because of my dad she didn't really *ino* push us to know about religion. But now things are being different.

My biggest surprise during my research period was not just how many parents were unhappy with their daughters' participation in this weekly class but how few of them were

aware that their daughters were even participating. Again this reflects the individualism of

my interlocutors in this specific period of their lives. After my first interviewee confronted

me with the possibility that these educated and/or wealthy Sunni families might not support

their children's participation in what I had initially been tempted to compare with an

American Protestant Bible study, I added the question "do your parents support your

participation in this group?" Lara was my second interviewee and the first to firmly respond

"No." She continued, "They are afraid, specifically my dad, of extremism. He's always

afraid and I never tell them that I attend *durus*. They know (about another one that she

attends in her hometown on the weekends outside of school). And they comment

sometimes but I tell them it's a philosophy *ders* not a religious one. But actually it is, it's

intellectual. This man, he doesn't mention God during his speech. And he's very spiritual."

Again, the fear of extremism and the connection between increased religiosity and getting

into trouble are linked. Yet Lara does not allow her father's disapproval to prevent her from

attending these religious classes.

5. *Influence of the Fathers*

In my interviews I noticed that the fathers appeared to be the most worried about

their children's involvement in conservative religious groups. When I asked Zad why they

seemed more worried than the mothers she responded:

> I think the dads are afraid from their girls being more religious. Being associated
> with such groups might make them more conservative. This is not the case in [Dr.
> Sara's] *ders*. I think they are afraid they might change the way they dress, like *al-
> Nisa'* maybe. Our community wants to be open minded more and doesn't want to be
> associated with religious groups, especially Sunni … Moms actually attend those
> *durus* and know what type of influence they have. There are more *ders* for women
> than men, that is what I feel. It's related to politics too. Women *durus* tend to talk

about the basics of religion. But some sheikhs might not all be involved in politics, like Assir. So they urge the *shabab* to get so excited. Sometimes that's why my dad didn't want my brother to go. The [Lebanese government] intelligence might be watching who are the *shabab* that go to ders and might put them in prison – like what happened with Assir … Do you remember when I told you about a *ders addeen* in Qoraitem? With a sheikh? My parents didn't want me to go because they were afraid that he might be associated with politics. This is the main concern because if anything goes wrong the intelligence will capture all the people who attend *ders*.

Sunnis in Lebanon arguably appear to be significantly more afraid of being

associated with conservative religion than any other sect. From the perspective of many

members of the Sunni Lebanese community, the Shi'ites, with the overwhelming military

and political power of Hezbollah and Amal Movement seem essentially immune to the

pressures of the Lebanese government and function as a state within a state. By contrast,

they believe that Sunni religious groups are more vulnerable to government crackdowns. In

major Sunni-majority areas such as Tripoli, Sidon, and parts of the Beqaa Valley, sheikhs

and their followers who are identified as a threat to the Lebanese state are targeted by

government intelligence and routinely rounded up and thrown into prison where they can

wait years before being sentenced.[30] Although it can be argued these groups are vulnerable

to security crackdowns because they actually present a threat to the state, from the

perspective of many Lebanese there is an unbalanced targeting. There is a deep sense of

victimization and disempowerment by the Lebanese Sunnis (Abdel-Latif 2008) which was

particularly exacerbated by the assassination of Sunni political leader Rafiq Hariri, which is

generally assumed to have been ordered by the Syrian regime and carried out by Hezbollah.

Most Lebanese Sunnis do not support religious figures who advocate violence such as these

sheikhs who lead small militias. However, the frequent crackdowns on explicitly Sunni

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[30] Machnouk Warns ISIS Successes Will Inspire Homegrown Terror. (2014, July 11). *The Daily Star*.

movements, in contrast to what Sunnis perceive as the unchecked paramilitary activity of Shi'ite movement Hezbollah whose role against mostly Sunni rebels in neighboring Syria's sectarian conflict as well as their alleged role in the assassination of many Sunni political figures, lead many Lebanese Sunnis to believe that the Sunnis are uniquely targeted.

Zad notes that it is not just societal pressure that has fathers more worried than their wives about their daughters' participation in this weekly *ders*. She argues that the fathers are afraid that there will be political repercussions to their daughters' participation in revivalist religious movements. The mothers don't always share their husband's fears because many of them have participated in all-female *durus* such as this one and are familiar with the content, which is not usually politically-focused like all-male *durus* can be. Many of the fathers are not as involved in active religious participation as their wives and may be unaware of the content or format of *durus* similar to Dr. Sara's that do not discuss politics or militancy. While I do believe that the fathers would be concerned about their sons participating in any conservative Sunni religious movement in the current Lebanese political context for solely political reasons, I'm not convinced their hesitation with their daughters is fully based on political concerns. Zad mentioned off-handedly that the fathers would be concerned that their daughters might change the way that they dress, particularly that they may cover to the recognizable extent of the *al-Nisa'* members. She was not the only *ders* member to bring up this worry and in this she expresses the second major worry of the families of my interlocutors in regard to participation in religious movements: societal implications.

6. Societal Implications

A quote from anthropologist Saba Mahmood's interviews with Egyptian women actively involved in religious *durus* groups similar to the one attended by the young women in Beirut gives excellent insight into this concern. One of her interviewees complained that her husband did not like her becoming more religious and Mahmood noted:

> Given his desire for upward mobility – which required him to appear (what [the wife] called) 'civilized and urbane' in front of his friends and colleagues – [her husband] was increasingly uncomfortable with the orthodox Islamic sociability his wife seemed to be cultivating at an alarming rate, the full face and body veil beings its most 'backward' sign. He was worried, and let [his wife] know in no uncertain terms that he wanted a more worldly and stylish wife who could facilitate his entry and acceptance into a class higher than his own. (p. 176)

Achieving and maintaining upper-class status in Lebanon thus entails conforming to standards of cosmopolitan self-fashioning. In the competitive upper-class Lebanese society, where communal judgment and social standing means everything, meeting a standard developed under first a European colonial power and later a European-facing Christian authority requires Muslims to take great lengths in demonstrating and offering a continuous performance of their "modernity." "Modern" is a term in particular used by many of my interviewees and group members over the course of my fieldwork. A term with multiple meanings, it was used in both a religious and a cultural sense, but always with a positive connotation. It was used occasionally and intentionally to differentiate a traditional Muslim who carries out religious practices incorrectly or without understanding their true meaning (Deeb 2004), unlike a modern Muslim who is educated and seeks an authentic Islam ridden of *bid'ah* and *taqlid*[31] that have encroached upon religious practice over time. The word "modern" was also tossed out throughout my research to refer to the group leader, to a style

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[31] *Taqlid* means "imitation", and in the context of religious revival is used derogatorily to refer to blind imitation of authority like the Islamic schools of thought. (Hourani 1962)

of dress, or to their own *ders* style and when I pressed one speaker on exactly what she meant by "modern" she couldn't answer me. I believe "modern" is part of the vocabulary of "cosmopolitanism," functioning with terms like "civilized," "secular," "sophisticated," and its foil, "backward."

The shortest and perhaps only way to "be modern" in Lebanon as elsewhere is to set oneself against and above people designated as "backwards" by contrast. Open religious expression, like putting on the hijab or not shaking hands with unrelated men, implicitly calls into question many aspects of the performances of "cosmopolitanism" that separates the Lebanese upper and educated classes engaged in distinguishing themselves from their neighbors from a lower social background. Just as Euro-American continues to conjure up an image of sophistication, the Arab countries to the East are understood as unsophisticated. Practicing Muslims, and female Muslims in particular, whose religious practices replicate those of their other Arab neighbors can be perceived as a discreet threat to the manifold practices individuals engage in to sustain the imaginary of a "Lebanese culture" distinct from, and superior to, that of an East constructed as incompletely civilized. Although the young women of this *ders* are the very definition of cosmopolitan: well-travelled, multilingual, and well-educated, their rejection of more superficial and commercialist aspects of Lebanese society is unusual amongst their peers. This Lebanese construct of cosmopolitanism, that casts members of conservative Muslim movements as backwards, ignores the very cosmopolitan elements of membership in a global Muslim community. This *ders* movement, which takes on global dynamics through its *da'wa* outreach and its transnational, multilingual educational resources, has a cosmopolitan draw.

It places these women into a larger network and embraces cosmopolitanism in its own, alternative way and in a specific social context.

It is not just the parents (and the government) of the group members that are suspicious of, if not hostile to, conservative religion. Their university peers, even their professors, are not always supportive of the group members' religious activities or lifestyles. This hostility has more to do with issues of cosmopolitanism and the educated Lebanese "performance" of openness than it does with the families' fears of political fallout. At the private, international universities in Beirut these young women attend, almost no professor wears a hijab although sizeable populations of female students do wear the hijab. When group member Rania was a university student she was debating putting on the hijab but ultimately decided to put it on in the transitional period between university and her first job to make the social pushback easier, reminiscing:

> After I graduated from university, I put on my hijab. It's not only at my former university [that is against hijab], it's Lebanon. Mainly I was in business school, it was all like "where I partied last night" "where did I go clubbing" so it had a lot of prestige stuff … I did have it in mind, putting on the veil the last year I was in college. It wasn't very easy so I said to myself let me graduate and then, it's always easier I say to put it when you're in a transitional phase like school to college, from college to working, whatever transitional period. It's easier.

Salwa told me she too was worried about social pushback from fellow students as well as faculty members when she was first planning putting on the hijab. When Salwa was drafting her thesis proposal for her PhD research she had an awkward interaction with a faculty member: "When my thesis committee chair wanted my hobbies I told her I like to help in Islamic events. She asked me 'what?' and I said 'helping orphans.' So she told me we will say this only, without mentioning 'Islamic.'" In removing all reference to religious

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activism, the faculty member was most likely trying to be helpful. Even this well-meaning erasure conveys the environment of pervasive suspicion that surrounds open religiosity in the educated and upper-class Lebanese sphere.

Like Lara, who comes from one of these Sunni-majority cities where crackdowns on conservative Sunni groups and sheikhs happen frequently, university graduate Rayan does not tell her father that she attends this weekly *ders addeen.* As I discussed in the previous chapter, her father worked abroad and she would tell him that she was just out, spending time with friends. When I asked her what her parents and her father in particular were worried about, she responded: "they are worried *heiki* we will go and become like them. We become like 'we belong to Sahar' and they are completely against Sahar." Sahar is the head of the shadowy *al-Nisa'* group to which this weekly *ders addeen* is linked. Although the weekly lectures are uniquely planned by Dr. Sara and she chooses her topics without direct input from this group, Dr. Sara is a member of this *al-Nisa'* community and it is this connection that has concerned many parents worried both about social and governmental repercussions.

7. The Women

Al-Nisa' was not the focus of my research but came up consistently in the periphery of my field research. A Sunni religious movement, *al-Nisa'* literally means "The Women." Sahar, a polarizing and secretive figure, brought this movement from Syria to Lebanon roughly 30 years ago by the estimate of one group member. *Al-Nisa'* is mainly based in Syria today despite a small Lebanese following. One group member explained that "in Lebanon when we say *al-Nisa'* we mean Sahar. In Syria when they say *al-Nisa'* it could

mean anyone in this religious group." The women of this movement typically wear a sort of uniform: a long navy or black coat similar to a raincoat and a white or navy hijab. Not every woman wearing this style is a member of *al-Nisa'* but it began with *al-Nisa'* and is so commonly associated with this movement people would assume they are part of it. This outfit is a very common sight in Beirut, especially with its significant Syrian population due to the current crisis in the neighboring country. The group is not well known outside of the religious Sunni community because they are secretive and avoid open politics. When I brought the name up to colleagues and friends over the course of my research period, not a single one had heard of this movement, although all recognized the physical description of the group members. *Al-Nisa'* doesn't own or operate in mosques or public buildings but instead they work through a network of houses where they hold their *ders addeen* lectures. They do seem to have affiliations with schools but they are primarily known for their *durus* which Dr. Sara herself attends.

It is difficult to ascertain Dr. Sara's relationship to this group, which is reflected in the concerns of the group members' parents. While she is clearly involved in the group and attends a *ders addeen* they run, the *ders addeen* members tell me she is different than speakers from the *al-Nisa'* group that occasionally come and give guest lectures at their weekly meetings, that she is not as "strict." Despite the fears of the parents, her lectures do not contain the conservative political or ideological concepts that Lebanese and Syrians associate with *al-Nisa'*. Her lectures swing back and forth through topics. One lecture began with her discussing her children in school in the US and in Lebanon and the differences between the systems, then suddenly moved into a discussion on Rajab, the

Muslim month of forgiveness. Muslim philosophers, American converts to Islam, trips to Egypt, a movie she saw recently, and a funny WhatsApp message: these are her parables.

Her style of *da'wa* and her interpretation of Islam in a current Lebanon has gotten her into trouble before with *al-Nisa'*. One group member mentioned that the "modern stuff" that Dr. Sara uses in her *da'wa* and religious education can clash with the conservative roots of *al-Nisa'*. She observed: "They don't like singing, they are not with something modern so when [Dr. Sara] … she always go to their *ders* and it's hard for her to merge with them. Like, she has her own way. One time she did a play in their school and because she had like some dancing and singing in the play they were mad. And they didn't want her to do that. That's what she told us. She's different! Rapping style (laughs)!"

8. Never Religious Enough

While the parents and peers of the group members are hesitant in the face of increased religiosity, these young women can also face pressure to be more religious – to the detriment of their social or professional lives. Discussing how guilty she feels, one group member told me: "I try to make a good balance but I feel sometimes I don't do very much regarding religion. When I was young, we didn't have these *fiqh* studying, every rule in our religion. We just took very simple subjects." For the young women who are experiencing a personal religious revival, especially those who did not come from very religious backgrounds, they feel overwhelmed at how little they know and how much there is to learn. Discussions of converts, a beloved tool of religious revivalists, are especially convicting. One young woman told me that while she loves to hear stories about converts to Islam, particularly Euro-American converts who didn't come from Muslim backgrounds,

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because it strengthened her faith, it "makes me feel bad about myself. Look at them they are on the other side of the world and come from very different cultures and they are doing so much." It's not just their own internalized struggle to follow their religious duties more strenuously, their own religious community adds to this pressure.

One group member complained about the religious community:

They are very insisting on you. So if you ever come or attend [a *ders*] they will try to get in you in, no matter what. They will try as much as they can to make you stay and make you feel bad if you don't attend as if there is something wrong with you. They do it from good intentions but at the end of the day…." She added: "at the *da'wa* level, in Lebanon – okay *da'wa* in the three countries, it is monopolized by a few groups. Whether by Muslim Brotherhood, in Lebanon, Syria and Egypt – *Ja'miyyeh Islamiyyeh* is part of Muslim Brotherhood – whether by Salafi or the *da'wa nisaiyyeh* (*al-Nisa'*) which is very influenced by *Tariq Naqshbandiyyeh*[32] AND by Muslim Brotherhood. So basically who's left? It is monopolized. The *da'wa* market is an oligopoly. You have few suppliers and many customers. And you don't have the choice as a customer. You don't have a choice.

Sahar, the slightly mythical figurehead of *al-Nisa'*, is associated with this strain of religious activism that adds another layer of guilt and pressure to students of Islam. A group member told me, as though she was sharing a secret, "my mom used to tell me, they make the woman want to dedicate herself to religion so much that she doesn't pay attention to the home."

The anxious reaction of this group member (and her apparently horrified mother), that this religious leader was pressuring her students to prioritize religious duties like *da'wa* or religious education over their own families was very interesting. For many of my interviewees, there is a constant struggle to find a balance between what they cast as religion, on the one side, and daily life and society, on the other side, especially in the context of a religious revival that promotes increased visible adherence to faith across a

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[32] I believe here she is referring to the Sunni Sufi movement but it was unclear.

broader society. Most of the young women in this group follow the line of thought that religion can be practiced in every aspect of daily life, like Rayan talking about how she works to her fullest or Zad who tries to respect and honor her parents even when they anger her. However there are some revivalist elements within Sunni Islam that have historically separated religion from mundane daily life and elevated religion to an ideal, full-time occupation. Sahar's reported teachings to ignore your own family at the expense of the larger religious movement can taken to echo the life of another Islamic revivalist leader in Egypt, Zaynab Al Ghazali.

I am interested in the example of Zaynab Al Ghazali, not just for the similarities between her and Sahar, but because a former member of this *ders* group gave me her autobiography early on in my fieldwork as something she thought would be helpful for my research. An activist associated with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Al Ghazali was a prolific writer and a prominent voice in the mid-20th century. Her writings were aimed at women and covered topics ranging from marriage and raising children to her experiences in Egyptian prisons. Unlike Sahar, she publicly advocated for women to stay at home and dedicate their lives to their families as their primary religious duty. However according to researcher Lamia Shehadeh, Al Ghazali

> …seldom practiced what she preached. Although her public statements stressed the primary role of women as wives and mothers, and although she claims that her public life never kept her from fulfilling her marital duties, her personal life reflected exactly the opposite: she opted for a public role for herself, which inevitably led to her two divorces, albeit for different reasons, and possibly motivated her remaining childless, thus failing or violating the very principles she advocated for women (2007).

A powerful *da'iyah* like Sahar, Al Ghazali publicly advocated for women to stay at home and devote themselves to their families as their primary religious and societal duty.

However her actions, as she herself writes about them in her autobiography, demonstrate the level at which she really feels women should involve themselves in religious activism. This level may be unobtainable for women with husbands and families. It is possible she sees herself as unique (Shehadeh 2007) and that she believes other women ought to stay at home. Yet in her writing she glorifies suffering, hard work, and resistance to forces conspiring against religious activism to the extent that it is difficult to come away from her writings and her autobiography in particular (that is still being passed around as inspirational reading to young Sunni women), without the sense that it is better to do what she does than do what she says. And what she did was divorce two husbands who stood in the way of her activism. Similarly whether Sahar really instructs women to put *da'wa* and religious service above the needs of their families is not as important as the fact that the idea that she would do so based on her actions and the strictness of her teachings is considered believable. And to worried parents (and to their young daughters seeking to live out their religion correctly), the message filtering through is one that separates religion and social/professional life into two competing uses of time.

The young women of this *ders* have an alternative example in Dr. Sara. Although part of this *al-Nisa'*, she openly discusses the difficulty of maintaining a balance between professional life and religious duties, laughing: "I don't always [balance everything]. Yeah I try my best … Sometimes you are perfect and you are doing this and that and you can handle everything and sometime you might not get a 20/20 in one of them. I think the more connected to *Allah Subhana w Ta'lah* you are, the better chance you have of satisfying all of these and everybody." Certainly for the young women of the upper and educated classes, Dr. Sara's ability to maintain a well-regarded professional position while raising a family,

traveling internationally, and running three separate *durus* a week is both impressive and an inspiration. When I asked group member Rayan if Dr. Sara was a good role model, she immediately responded positively: "Yes, she's educated, she works – other than the religious part, *ino* she's a teacher, she's a professor. And she does lots of activities, she travels a lot, she's open minded. At the same time, *ino* she's religious. She's not forgetting her religion, working on daily stuff."

For the young *ders addeen* members, especially those who do not come from religious families or did not become religious until their university years, understanding how to live their faith amongst a myriad of contradicting opinions and demands can be a struggle. Some battle feelings of guilt for not prioritizing religious study and duties highly enough, especially when faced with inspirational stories of other Muslims from converts to religious leaders who are narrated as characters in a fable, without faults or bathroom breaks or petty fights with their neighbors who play loud music. All say they resist pressure from the greater Lebanese society that elevates a Euro-American-influenced culture of night life, crop tops, and beach parties that these young women must chose to modify or reject on a daily basis. However while they may be "counter cultural" in their society, there is a new and rapidly growing place for Muslims all around the world to interact with each other and form an *Ummah* more connected than it has been in a thousand years: the Internet.

C. The Internet Generation

Outside of academic discourse, the practice, political, and social thought of Islam are often described as static and homogeneous between regions, countries and even time periods. The reality is that how Islam is interpreted, practiced, and written about is a dynamic process that is heavily influenced by many factors including specific, local conditions. Thus Albert Hourani, in his classic book, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, explores four different "generations" of thinking as the Arab Muslim world began interacting with the rising European powers in the mid-1800s. A significant trend evinced by my ethnographic research with the *ders* group is the extent to which the young, English-speaking Lebanese members of this group use the Internet as part of their religious experience, from basic education to building a sense of community and inspiration. In this chapter I will argue that their Internet usage places them into what I perceive as a new generation of understanding and living Islam, an Internet Generation. I will also argue that one significant effect of the Internet infrastructure on this generation is that it might come to displace traditional centers of knowledge as a primary source of religious knowledge. While this transition is slow and still limited, the Internet's potential as a sphere for serious religious praxis and theological discussion is only beginning to make its effects felt, particularly for young Lebanese women who otherwise find it difficult to connect with their local religious leaders.

1. The "Internet Generation"

The concept of "generations" of Islamic thinking comes from the work of Albert Hourani, who in 1962 analytically distinguished four generations of Islamic thought over 150 years of interactions with the modern West. He begins in the 1830s, as scholars from the major cities of Cairo, Istanbul, and Tunis became better cognizant of and familiar with the new, industrializing Europe. These scholars did not view the West as a threat or adversary but instead wrote about the laws and institutions of modern Europe as a model to be emulated while staying true to Islamic values. As the two worlds began to interact further and Europe's power continued to grow, Hourani notes that the writings of influential scholars also began to change to take a more antagonistic tone in the face of a perceived threat. In the second generation he identified from 1870 to 1900, Hourani states that while writers still saw Europe as a model, they began to advocate for a system that allowed for changes they deemed unavoidable but maintained that they should still be able to hold onto their past in this new mold. By the third generation beginning in the early 1900s, Hourani described the burgeoning drive for nationalism, which was thought to preserve the Islamic past in imagination and heart yet allow Arab societies to become part of the modern culture which had first shown itself in Western Europe. This led into the fourth generation of both Islamic revival and broadening Arab nationalism as the Second World War ended the period of European ascendancy (Hourani 1962).

There have been additional "generations" of thinking since his book was first published in the 1960s. From the perspective afforded by my participation in the *ders* group, one might be led to argue that a new generation is coming together through the rapid adaptation of Internet technology. Previous generations, while considered fast-moving at the time, are more easily traced through books and articles produced in the period. The pace

at which the Internet evolves, as well as the rapid spread of this technology across the world, makes the social effects it enables more difficult to capture with certainty. As utilization of the Internet increases, so does society's reliance on this technology for everything from advice to shopping to socializing. The Internet's domination in daily lives also spreads to religion. A medium that allows for total or partial anonymity, at least from other users, the (mostly) free flow of information, and the ability to break down political and geographic barriers; in many ways the Internet has allowed the global Muslim community to engage in immediate dialogue that is reminiscent of the early Muslim community. With the spread of the Internet in the Muslim world, a "Muslim Internet" has been developed.

I would define this Muslim Internet as a communal space formed by those seeking or spreading information on Islam, in which issues of faith are discussed or carried out. Everything from Tumblr blogs dedicated to female Muslim fashion to joking twitter conversations about #MuslimProblems to chat sites where Muslims engage in serious discussions about the proper way to perform *wudud* makes up this Muslim Internet. This space is dominated by practicing Muslims but is also filled with a dynamic group of non-Muslims interested in learning about the religion as well as non-Muslims interested in arguing about the religion.

This Muslim Internet is also organized around virtual sectarian and ethno-religious divisions that mimic those in real life. The tensions and ruptures that currently exist in the non-virtual Muslim community are not only visible on the Internet but can also be exacerbated by the anonymity and facelessness that impacts all conversations in this medium, religious or not. It is hard these days to spend more than a few minutes moving

around the parts of this Muslim Internet that my interlocutors in the *ders* visit regularly without stumbling across ugly Shi'ite-Sunni fights breaking out underneath YouTube videos and comment sections of blogs embroiled with arguments discussing whether or not Sufis are *kuffar*. Shi'ite and Sunni divisions in particular are noticeable these days with the Syrian and Iraqi crises that have so heavily split the Arab Muslim world.

Linguistically what I find interesting about this Muslim Internet is that the *lingua franca* for possibly the first time in the history of this community could now be English instead of Arabic. I base this conclusion off the impression one would get from considering the websites and discussion forums used by my interlocutors in the *ders*. There are Arabic-language pockets to be found, and every major group of Muslims has websites and Facebook groups and forums written in their own language and targeted to their own communities. Arabic has maintained a privileged position in the history of Islam as the language of devotion, theology, and law. Even after power passed on to the Turks and government affairs were conducted in Turkish, Arabs continued to play a part in the public life of the community as their language maintained its position as the language of religious culture and law (Hourani 1962). However the dominance of English as the global language which is reinforced both in education and scholarship[33] as well as online[34] leads me to conclude that a Muslim living in Indonesia talking to a Muslim in India online about something related to Islam is more likely to use English than they are Arabic.

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[33] "Despite difficulties and discrimination, [English as an Additional Language] writers often have no choice but to write and publish in English, as English has become the lingua franca of international scholarship. This situation seems to support Phillipson's theory that the current spread of English functions as a form of linguistic imperialism. According to Phillipson, English linguistic imperialism goes hand-in-hand with economic and cultural imperialism." (Pedersen 2010)

[34] According to data pulled in 2002, half of Internet users were native English speakers yet three-quarters of all websites were in English. (Chen, Wellman 2004)

One of the most important functions of the Internet, especially for the *ders addeen* is its ability to connect people. WhatsApp, a ubiquitous application for smart phones that sends messages over the Internet, is used by essentially all active members of this *ders addeen*. The *ders* has its own WhatsApp group, to which all current members are part of and new members are quickly added. There may be an outlier or two who does not have a smart phone or has not come often enough to the lectures to be added to this messaging group, but in general it is the primary way this group communicates with each other outside of the lessons. Group leader, Dr. Sara, largely uses this group function for her *ders* as a way to coordinate. She will post times and locations of the *ders*, usually at one of two apartments in an affluent neighborhood in West Beirut on Tuesday evenings, but occasionally the details change - sometimes a few hours before the *ders* is supposed to start. She also uses it to announce other events and call for volunteers for charitable functions. The young women have also turned this WhatsApp group into a virtual community. They share religious content in the form of video clips, pictures, or quotes, they send holiday greetings or blessings during religious holidays, and even news updates on political situations relating to Muslims.

Additionally the young women use WhatsApp independently, or are part of other groups, as part of their religious lives. One group member told me she is part of a WhatsApp group with other members of her family who live all over the world. This group primarily functions as way for them to share religious content, she noted "some Islamic guy or a convert or Islamic singers or someone who memorized the Qur'an, that's what we circulate. You see every blog or on WhatsApp, everything that my aunts or uncle send, they relate it to religion."

Another popular means of connecting and sharing over this Muslim Internet is YouTube, the popular video-sharing site out of Northern California. Through both my fieldwork and in my personal life, I have observed Muslims using YouTube as part of their religious lives to upload and view a variety of genres, everything from hijab tutorials to beautiful recitations of the Qur'an, to documentation of crimes against Muslims in Myanmar, to raising communal support. One of the consistently popular themes is videos of converts, where individual videos often reach millions of views. These videos often document converts formally making their conversion or giving their story of how they came to convert to Islam. Shared over the WhatsApp group, posted publicly on Facebook, and even recommended to me by word-of-mouth (again under the guise of "for your research" but probably as part of this understated *da'wa*), these YouTube videos of and by converts kept coming up over the course of my research. This off-hand comment from a group member about American Sheikh Yusuf Estes is typical of references to YouTube clips I heard during my fieldwork:

> You know Yusuf Estes? He came once to a local university, he gave a lecture about how he converted because he was once like, 'he's from Texas.' I find him a little bit weird … Yeah but I liked how he converted to Islam. You can watch it on YouTube, they tell you how he converted to Islam and then his wife converted because of an Egyptian guy who came. There was some kind of trade with him? I don't know. And all his family used to work in the church, he was a minister I think.

Her casual mention of YouTube is indicative of the common usage of YouTube not only among Lebanese students her age, but also of its common usage as a religious *da'wa* tool. YouTube videos are a very popular source of religious content among my interlocutors – from recitations of Qur'an, to sermons by different sheikhs, to these stories by converts. YouTube videos also constitute a tool fit for understated *da'wa*.

YouTube is also a unifying tool that allows Muslims who live in societies where they have no immediate or authoritative guidance on certain issues to connect and learn. Salwa told me that when she was getting ready to start wearing the hijab, she turned to YouTube to find examples of how to wear it because she wanted to find the right style and most of her friends did not wear the hijab. She explained:

> When I was a little girl people used to not wear hijab. It was not very common at that time. I think the period of the war made people less traditional because the hijab used to be a traditional thing. Like my *teta* used to wear the hijab like that [traditional style] not modern style. But afterwards things began to make sense to them and they became more religious … Like I remember when my cousin, when she was going to put the hijab, she had a hard time finding appropriate things to wear because there wasn't fashion and clothing for *muhajebeh* women to wear. So she used to put it like my *teta* because it wasn't very common. I actually watched a lot of YouTube. There's *hijabi* girls and different styles. At the same time, me and my cousin put the veil, and we told each other tips. And by time you start knowing, what's best.

Easily accessible over the Internet or phone to phone, these YouTube videos are also popular resources for religious education. Dr. Sara has used YouTube clips as lecture examples. One that she shared with the young women before I began attending her *durus* for my fieldwork, and that she later shared with me when I discussed my interest in how they use the Internet for *da'wa*, was the story of a British convert told over a widely-shared YouTube video. Created by what appears to be a *da'wa* YouTube video channel that produces poignant religious material for Muslims and non-Muslims called "The Merciful Servant," this video is a narrated story of a non-Muslim nurse who found Islam through an online community. In a crisp British accent, she tells the story of how she went to an online Muslim chat room, trying to get information to better take care of her patient, an elderly Muslim man. As she began talking to the welcoming Muslims of this forum, she found herself asking questions not just for her patient but for her own edification. She described

finding herself longing for the sense of belonging her patient had, and when a Muslim

woman sent her a list of mosques in her local area, she visited one and was overcome with

emotion. The narration ends with her saying the *shahadah*[35] and closes with a black screen

requesting donations for further *da'wa*. The comments below the video express an

outpouring of emotion in which commenters praise God and describe how they had cried

through the video. This genre of YouTube videos is part of larger system of invitation for

those searching about Islam.

2. A Preference for Non-Traditional Sources

During my interviews I noticed a surprisingly strong inclination towards seeking

religious knowledge from non-Lebanese, non-traditional sources. What "traditional

sources" means to a Muslim is specific to the society in which he or she lives. The authority

of these traditional sources is a type of power.[36] For the modern-day Lebanese Sunnis on

which I am focused, these traditional sources range from the Grand Mufti, to the national

Sunni religious courts, to political leaders, to local sheikhs, to the far-off scholars in Egypt

or Saudi Arabia, to the traditional pre-determined *madhhabs* into which Lebanese Sunnis

are born. Some are local, all are regional, all are Arab. Although this trend toward non-

traditional sources might be influenced by the Lebanese "cosmopolitan" preference for all

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[35] The "Statement of Faith" in Islam that marks an official conversion to Islam if stated with true intention. In Arabic it reads*: La illaha ila Allah; Mohammad arrasool Allah*" or "There is no god but God; Mohammad is His Prophet".
[36] Power is defined behaviorally as an interaction between persons or groups in which at a particular moment in time one actor changes the behavior of a second actor. Traditional authority is the exercise of personalistic power accumulated through the past and present role of the influencer as provider, protector, educator, source of values, and status superior of those who have an established dependency relationship with him. (Jackson 1980)

things Euro-American, as well as the group's mostly American English educations that allow them to seek out other sources beyond the local, my interlocutors generally interpreted this choice as a dearth of local options. The different voices this group turns to ranges from YouTube videos of European converts, books by authors like American Hamza Yusuf or Swiss Tariq Ramadan, musical performers from the US and the UK, and even Hollywood films which Dr. Sara once used during a lecture around which to build a point.

In particular I have observed a strong British presence among these non-traditional Internet sources. British Muslims are uniquely positioned to take advantage of the Internet's resources for the purposes of this rapidly growing style of modern *da'wa*. Not only do lay British Muslims live in a relatively affluent society, with income levels and Internet accessibility that allow for greater ease and financial investment in *da'wa* than their fellow Muslims in developing countries, but their English-language abilities puts their opinions, ideas, and interpretations out ahead of other, non-English speaking Muslims. Additionally, British Muslims pull ahead of Muslims in other English-speaking countries in terms of their religious activism through the multicultural policies of the UK in recognizing "distinct ethno-cultural communities and promoting racial equality (Modood 2005), [which] combined with a lively civil society sector, has favoured the spontaneous creation of a number of Muslim organizations that function as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or pressure groups. These can have carious degrees of attachment (or none at all) to mosques and transnational movements." (Yilmiz & Aykac, 2012) Several of the young women in the *ders* group specifically mentioned reading books or blogs or watching YouTube debates by British Muslims as part of their religious educations, a striking choice

of non-traditional sources if we define traditional as their local and inherited Sunni authoritative voices.

As I've discussed in previous chapters, affiliation with Lebanese religious leaders can be perceived as problematic, especially for young educated women trying to avoid that their commitment be read as political or religious extremism. Due to the sectarian nature of the country's political makeup as well as its intimate relationship to neighboring Syria, currently undergoing a massive sectarian crisis of its own, Lebanese religious leaders themselves have to deal constantly with the possibility that their words and actions may be read as political no matter their intention. Even expressing a position regarding the massive humanitarian crisis surrounding Syrian refugees might be interpreted as a commitment to one side rather than the other of a political divide. Their former grand mufti, who until the recent elections that led to his replacement was the most prominent Sunni religious leader in Lebanon, was despised by many of the Sunnis he was supposed to be leading for his close relationship with Shi'ite group Hezbollah. In this regard, the religious instruction of Euro-American bloggers, sheikhs, and *da'iyahs* is arguably not surrounded with the same suspicion.

According to my interviewees, Lebanese women also struggle to connect with their local religious leaders because they have limited access to them. Most Lebanese Muslim women do not attend the Friday prayers as it is required only for men in Islam. They may never really get to know their local imam or sheikh or hear their *khutbahs* to understand what their religious or political stances are. One group member told me she likes a specific sheikh a lot, but she does not know what he preaches. She just likes his voice during

tarawih[37] and enjoys attending his mosque during Ramadan. Additionally most of these local Lebanese religious leaders do not have Facebook pages or websites, restricting the kind of access to positions and teachings on which my interlocutors readily depend. Direct access to local religious education for these young women is through the female-led *ders addeen* lectures. However for these young women in a period of personal religious revival, a couple of hours a week of religious education is not enough and many turn to the Internet to seek out greater exploration of their faith.

3. Primary Sources of Knowledge

On the basis of what they told me, I would argue that the primary source, or at least the most trusted source, of authoritative religious knowledge, for many of the young women during this period of their lives are still these locally-taught, locally-attended *ders addeen* lectures. However as I discussed in the previous chapters, meetings held only once a week are not enough for most of the group members I observed and they supplement their religious education with a variety of other sources. Only a few exclusively study their religion through local resources like mosques and *durus addeen* lectures. Those who mainly use local resources appear to be among the older members of the group; it is the younger members of the group who are more likely to use international, English-language, or Internet-based sources to fill in gaps in their religious knowledge. The young women of the *ders addeen*, educated mostly at international universities in Lebanon and therefore excellent English-speakers, are able to search effectively for and use Internet resources for their religious education.

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[37] Special prayers said during Ramadan

The issue of trustworthiness and credibility came up in multiple interviews when I asked about their usage of non-traditional sources like YouTube videos or books by Euro-American Muslims. These young women are open to these non-traditional sources but most seemed aware of the difficulty in determining whether or not a source pulled from the Internet could be trustworthy. The older members of the group, particularly those who have already graduated or are graduate students, tend to be the most wary of using online resources for religious education. One group member noted, "I use [the Internet] like anything, if I want to research something related to religion. But I'm not one hundred percent sure about it because we don't have a lot of Arabic sources, not like the English sources. We still rely on books." Here she indicates her view that most Muslim sources on the Internet are in English (or at least, not in Arabic), which renders them not fully trustworthy. Ranging from Islam-focused blogs to informational websites to social media platforms of popular religious figures, these English-language sources typically originate from Euro-American countries, especially the US and the UK. She appears to consider regional Arabic sources, especially more traditional book sources, as the more trustworthy form of religious knowledge. Interestingly, the criteria that this older member uses to determine the credibility of a source is in line with those of the older Islamic traditions and constructions of authority for these young women.

Some expressed doubts about the accuracy of the information they would be able to find through this specific medium. One group member, Leila, who is in the middle of the age range, noted about the Muslim blogs she reads that they are "not a source of religious science, it's just what people are saying. You know what I mean? It's something different. It's not something I would go to, to base my argument upon. It's not, they are not '*Ulema*.

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They are blogs at the end of the day. It's not a credible source." Many felt more comfortable with the information channeled by *ders addeen* leaders, traditional books, or accredited sheikhs. These members appear to find sources more credible if it fits within their traditional religious authorities or has been recommended to them by a traditional authority. Additionally not all of the older members used social media and the Internet to the same extent that the younger members did. Several did not have Facebook accounts let alone accounts with Twitter, Instagram, or other less popular sites. Dina, one of the Facebook-less group members, told me the only time she uses the Internet for religious purposes is to look up quickly the answer to a question. How she determines the accuracy of these answers and according to which criteria, I am not sure.

Internet in Lebanon has dramatically improved over the past few years but it lags behind much of the developed world, particularly the Euro-American world. One study published in 2006 noted: "The Arab world plays a relatively minor role in the rapidly changing geographies of global cyberspace [with the] dominance of Latin alphabet, high access costs reflecting state-owned telecommunications monopolies, low Arab literacy rates, and restrictive gender relations." (Warf and Vincent 2006) Internet access at the type of universities these young women attend is easily available with unlimited usage quotas and fast speeds. Internet access outside of university campuses and particularly outside of Beirut is significantly slower and more limited. For the older group members, especially those born before 1990, they had limited or no Internet access as children and did not have particularly solid or quick access until they arrived at their universities. The older members of the group told me they did have computer classes as part of their school curriculum,

starting around age ten or eleven, but the Internet speeds were nothing like they are today at their universities.

From what the younger women of the group, born in the early 1990s, have told me, they appear to have engaged with the Internet much longer and are more comfortable using its resources in all aspects of their lives - including religion. From Dania, who uses the Internet to take online classes on various Islamic topics to Amal, who sees it as a potential way to outreach to the international non-Muslim community, I believe these young women are indicative of the growing number of Muslims around the world who are utilizing Internet technology as part of their religious education. Additionally their access and more importantly their utilization of the Internet as a resource for religious education is much stronger and more diverse.

The younger members of this group that I spoke with had a different perspective on using the Internet as part of their religious lives. Member Leila, who initially expressed her discomfort with people using online resources as a substitute for the 'Ulema, told me she uses the Internet not just for Facebook, but to connect with international Muslims through blogs or websites. "[I] reach out to usually foreign Muslim communities because they represent this more liberal kind of Islam that [she doesn't necessarily label herself as part of]. I connect to the British Muslims more than anyone else. I don't know, it's weird…They give you just an insight on what is going on in this world, how people are acting and interacting and thinking or whatever." Although she is quick to note that she does not consider blog posts or websites to be a source of religious knowledge because they are not credible sources as she defines it, she finds their perspective and their thoughts engaging

and she relates to their way of thinking more than to that of local Lebanese thinkers and writers.

One of the youngest members, Dania, takes online courses from an Islamic program centered in Northern California in addition to an already heavy load of university coursework. On this extracurricular coursework she told me: "I'm enrolled in some online courses through Zaytuna College. I'm enrolled in three courses. There's a vast, *ino* you can chose whatever topic. I'm taking '*Halal* or *Haram*' to determine what is *halal* or *haram*. And I took before, 'Getting Married,' what is it in Islam." In addition to these online courses she takes while balancing a full university course load, Dania also goes to two separate *ders addeen* groups. Zaytuna College, the first Muslim liberal arts college in the US, is headed by Sheikh Hamza Yusuf. Based in Berkeley, California, on the outskirts of Silicon Valley, Zaytuna College uses the Internet as a major tool in fundraising, education, and *da'wa* with a distinctly American influence.

4. Whose Voice Is Dominant?

I observed many Euro-American figures given authoritative voices by members of the *ders addeen* and their leader throughout my research. Although some of these religious figures, like American sheikh Hamza Yusuf, have gained popularity through the spread of their writings, I argue that their popularity around the world and among the members of the *ders addeen* is related to their ability to mobilize Internet technology to spread their message. Not all of these popular figures have European origins, although those who are have defined their own important place in this trend, as many are members of Arab, Asian,

or African diasporas whether first generation or their descendants. As a study out of

Germany noted:

> Diaspora based groups as well as Western converts to Islam are much more likely to have the technical equipment necessary to consume the described media on a regular basis and profit fully from their increasing degree of sophistication, as well as to publish their opinions on Islam and related subjects…Online contents originating form the "classical" realms of Islam are less present than websites and platforms programmed and made accessible by Muslims in the West, may they be born Muslims or converts…Dominant authorities within the Muslim world are – compared to (newly emerging) groups in the West – underrepresented on the World Wide Web. (Scholz, Selge, Stille, Zimmermann 2008)

One of the most visible faces of this rise of Euro-American voices is Sheikh Hamza Yusuf.

Born Mark Hanson, Hamza Yusuf is a white American convert to Islam and a major

figure in the international *da'wa* scene. His books are very popular among English-

speaking Muslims and his YouTube clips (both posted by him as well as by others) amass

thousands of views from all around the world. His most recent book, the *Purification of the*

Heart, was used as a teaching tool by Dr. Sara for her *ders* last year and on a trip to the US

she hauled dozens of copies of the book back to Lebanon in her suitcase for the young

women to read. She gave me a copy early on in my fieldwork and I found his style

fascinating. The book delves into the ancient poem *Matharat al-Qulub* written by the West

African Imam al-Mawlud, who himself was a reformer. Yusuf essentially interprets this

poem for a modern Muslim audience.[38] This Imam believed the weakness of his society

was a matter of weakness of character in the heart and in his book Hamza Yusuf expands

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[38] In one section on the sin of envy, he presents the advice of Imam al-Mawlud to acknowledge that envy can only harm the envier. He then gives an example of how this advice would be lived out in the modern day, writing "For example, if a disgruntled worker becomes anxious and angry because he is passed over for a promotion, his anxiety and anger harm his soul, mind, and body, and yield nothing for his future…The Imam says that one way to uproot envy is to realize with solemn reflection that envy can never benefit its agent. One should also realize that what people attain in terms of material wealth or prestige is from God." (Yusuf, 2012, pp 31-32)

on each of these "weaknesses" (ostentation, vanity, anger et al.). The book is clearly written for an audience of Muslims with a strong understanding of American culture as Yusuf brings up examples and quotes not only from the Qur'an and *Hadith*s but from figures like Helen Keller and Mark Twain, with no background explanation.

Hamza Yusuf has used social media and the Internet to effectively spread his message, his *da'wa*, and his university's teachings internationally. His official Facebook page, with its 350,000 likes, posts almost every day with material ranging from quotes from the Qur'an to promotional posts about events held by Zaytuna or other Islam-related programs. His team even recently announced a smartphone application[39] that I downloaded. This app is aimed at an English-speaking audience, with the intent of spreading his interpretations and commentaries further through the ease of an accessible, mobile app. The app is built with pleasing, modern graphics and is centered on his teachings, with audio recordings, video clips, and photos divided between sections like "The Vision of Islam" and "The Science of Shariah." The app also has separate buttons for Facebook and Twitter, that, when clicked, show his latest tweets or Facebook posts, within the app itself.

Recently, Yusuf (or perhaps more accurately, the admin of his page) posted a link to a free livestream based out of Turkey that instructs Muslim students on what their basic religious duties are and how to conduct them.[40] Although he uses his Facebook page occasionally for fundraising or for self-promotion, it is just as likely to be used to spread his interpretation of proper religious education and knowledge without any financial or

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[39] "Eid Greetings! Sandala is happy to announce the new Hamza Yusuf App. Gain mobile access to lectures, videos and more. This App is available for both Android and iOS. Enjoy our gift to you! -Admin"

[40] "The Rihla Livestream, which provides over 100 lecture hours covering the absolute essentials of faith, will start on August 1st insha'Allah. The majority of this year's curriculum will provide students with knowledge that is both a religious duty for every Muslim to learn (fard 'ayn) and is immediately applicable in life."

celebrity interest – like this free livestream event. Even in his book he notes in the very first pages that the book was published under a Creative Commons copyright, allowing the book to be freely shared for non-commercial purposes. Hamza Yusuf is one of the many revivalists[41] using the Internet as a tool for proper education and, based in the US with protected freedom of speech, he and his team have arguably more freedom of topic, political affiliation, and instruction than *da'wa* leaders in many Arab Muslim countries. This has allowed his voice to spread freely to all corners of the English-speaking Muslim world, unlike the famous Egyptian preacher Amr Khaled, whose voice has been severely curtailed under successive governments.

There are some Arabic-language voices that have been able to successfully tap into the Internet's potential and use social media to gain large international followings. I asked one of the group members if she follows any Lebanese religious figures, and this was her response:

> I mainly follow Amr Khaled. Whatever he posts, I subscribe to his channel and I always follow his programs. But like Lebanese? I don't know, I don't know Lebanese guys, I don't know. I don't listen to their *khutbahs*. But like my mom opens the channel and she puts it on *khutbahs*. I feel that sometimes they don't have an organized *khutbah*, I'm more like *ino*, 'we are going to learn about this thing, about this theme' so you get everything about this theme. That's what Dr. Sara does, don't you feel? Like even the stories that she's talking about, they come back to one point. I like that style.

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[41] Other revivalists and speakers that came up during my fieldwork included young British speakers such as Adam Deen of the revivalist The Deen Institute and author and popular debater Mehdi Hassan (whose debates with non-Muslims have been widely shared over YouTube, including to me). Islamic musical performers, who use their music as a form of *da'wa* were also popular and their easily sharable YouTube videos made the social media rounds especially during Ramadan. American hip-hop group Native Deen are popular among the ders members and the very handsome Swedish-Lebanese singer Maher Zain, who sings religious songs with mixed pop and traditional Lebanese influences, is well-loved.

Amr Khaled, an Egyptian preacher and activist, has gained massive popularity in the Arab world through his moderate message and superior usage of media.[42] In the earlier years of Amr Khaled's *da'wa* he preached in mosques and recorded sermons on cassette tapes,[43] eventually moving into satellite television and building up an Internet presence. Currently Amr Khaled has nearly 3 million followers on Twitter and 23 thousand followers on Instagram. His verified Facebook page, the most popular medium, has 12 million followers. He smiles benevolently in his profile picture, sporting a European suit and tie, and the background cover picture of his page is an elaborate calligraphy wishing everyone a "Ramadan Karim." I "liked" his public Facebook page about a month into my fieldwork once his name began coming up in my interviews. Over a period of several months, his daily posts popped up into my newsfeed with posts of Qur'anic verses, *Hadith*s, and videos and quotes from his television show. Now, as I write this in the month of Ramadan, he posts stories about good people or the *Sahaba*[44] to inspire Muslims to behave more righteously. He also posts specific instructions. According to one group member, he instructed that Muslims should pray more and read more Qur'an during the last ten days of Ramadan. As the group member noted above, she prefers his specificity to the vagueness of Lebanese religious leaders.

Amr Khaled's posts are entirely in Arabic (both Egyptian colloquial and Modern Standard) and written in the Arabic script. This is unusual on Facebook where English is the *lingua franca* and most popular Facebook pages, even those not run by native English speakers nor aimed at an English-speaking audience, use at least some English from memes

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[42] Hardaker, David (2006, January 6). Amr Khaled: Islam's Billy Graham. *The Independent.*
[43] Hardaker, David (2006, January 6). Amr Khaled: Islam's Billy Graham. *The Independent.*
[44] The companions of the Prophet

to phrases to jokes. Lebanese Internet sites in particular reflect the country's tri-lingual heritage, but tip towards English-language dominance. One popular Facebook groups, Lebanese Memes, demonstrate this language flexibility. Lebanese Memes, whose primary writers and audience appear to be university students, has significant Arabic usage but often writes these Arabic posts or memes in the Latin alphabet and is very fluid in alternating back and forth between English and Arabic in posts.[45] This style of language is this "creole" Beiruti university students speak in their non-virtual lives, as I discussed in my first chapter.

Despite, or more probably because of his massive following and influence, Amr Khaled has not found it easy to be a religious leader under an autocratic Arab government that viewed rising religiosity as a political threat. After being banned from public speaking in Mubarak's Egypt because of concerns over his popularity and alleged ties to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Khaled enjoyed a three-year self-exile to Lebanon where he was freer to write and publish and speak openly.[46] His freedom to spread his *da'wa* under the new Egyptian government headed by President Sisi, who has yet to demonstrate that he will not follow in the footsteps of previous presidents, may now be heavily curtailed. One of the group members who has followed him on Facebook for several years told me that he has not been as active this Ramadan because of political pressure. This Ramadan she noticed that he has mostly been re-posting material from last year's Ramadan and she believes that he is afraid of being targeted by Sisi's government given its ongoing persecution of Muslim Brotherhood members and alleged affiliates. It is not just political

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[45] An example of this language flexibility is this brief post from August 10th: "Don't you miss the days when your biggest problems can be solved with *ini mini sini* and a *torra na2sheh*? #OHMYJAD"

[46] Hardaker, David (2006, January 6). Amr Khaled: Islam's Billy Graham. *The Independent.*

pressure that impacts the *da'wa* of Amr Khaled and other revivalist figures. Political instability like what Egypt has been experiencing over the last few years can also interrupt basics of *da'wa* like funding or publishing of materials. Although the Internet and satellite television allows Khaled's message to spread all over the world, while he chooses to live in Egypt, political pressure can curtail his ability to author freely messages that his government would consider subversive or threatening.

5. The White Convert, the Perfect Muslim?

An important motif during my research period is the convert. From lectures to events to videos being passed around, the young women and their leader circulated the stories of converts, especially white converts from the US or the UK. During the month of Ramadan in particular, which began near the end of my research, the frequency and emotional relation to the stories of converts picked up as did overall religious expression and contemplation. The young women shared clips of a Ramadan show called "Guided Through the Qur'an," both over WhatsApp with each other and their wider religious circles, and over Facebook to their religious and non-religious friends. I had difficulty finding any background information on this program online and asked a group member where this clip originated. She responded that it was originally broadcast on Saudi-funded channel Al Resalah but funded by Qatar Charity. However she noted that these kinds of shows are typically distributed to local channels across the Arab world to reach a larger audience. Certainly within her religious circle, this program was being circulated solely through Internet social media sites and viewed exclusively on YouTube which is indicative of how young Lebanese view and consume religious programming, unlike Salwa's mother

who listened to the radio. The full episodes were published on YouTube, piece by piece, by the well-known Kuwaiti Sheikh Fahad al-Kanderi. The program interviewed a series of converts to Islam, across England, Belgium, France, and Spain, with Arabic subtitles to allow their Arabic-speaking audiences to follow along as these converts told their stories. The videos switched into English subtitles when the sheikh spoke in Arabic to simultaneously reach an English-speaking audience.

These women can also play a more dynamic role in these convert stories. One popular story among the *ders* group members was the time an old member apparently successfully converted an American over the Internet. Samar relayed the story as best she could remember from several years back: "One time, I don't know if he's in the army (US military) or something. [The group member] said she used to talk to him, late at night online but like she made him, she convinced him to convert to Islam. But I don't know what happened, but Dr. Sara gave him once as an example." While the use of the Internet here as a medium that allows two people from different worlds to connect at such a level that deeply personal religious choices can be made is interesting, this story and its circulation are particularly poignant in the context of an Arab religious revival. This brief story picks up on so many issues of power, history, and religious insecurity. The hint to the US military is significant. A soldier, who most likely participated in the US invasions of Iraq or Afghanistan, which have been interpreted by many as a war against Islam itself, has chosen Islam as the truest path. The effort of the young woman who stayed up late at night talking to this young man for the purposes of *da'wa*. And as with every conversion story, the uplifting message that if a young American soldier was able to get past so many levels of obstruction to the message of Islam, clearly there is something so true and right about

this religion – reassuring to young Muslims with doubt and convicting to Muslims who find themselves straying from their religious duties.

This group, and I suspect many Muslims in the Arab Muslim world, have a fascination with these white or Euro-American converts. Two years ago, when I first heard about this group in what might have constituted an example of understated *da'wa* from my friend, she mentioned that the group had brought over a white American convert to Islam who had become very emotional at hearing the *azan* out loud for the first time. I believe at the time I had been complaining about being woken up at four thirty every morning by the *azan* and she may have been trying to promote a more positive view of the call to prayer. When I began my interviews with her during my field research, I reminded her of this story she had once told me and asked her to elaborate:

> Ah you have a good memory … One time in the Prophet's birthday we did an event and she invited a, he was an American who was studying in Canada. But he had doubts about his religion, I think he was Christian, and he was not very religious and he was not doing well in his university. And then he met a group of Muslim people and he started to learn more about Islam and I don't know what he did, he did something that made him get convinced about Islam, I forgot what. I don't know how he met Dr. Sara, but he came to the event as a graffiti artist and I think he lived in her house for like two three days because he didn't have a place. But every morning he used wake up so early to hear the *azan*, he was so impressed and like, he told us we were so lucky that we could wake up in our, like everyday hear the *azan* and go pray. Because, you know, in the US you can't hear it, it's, it's banned. Yeah but he came to the *ders*, one time he came with her, and he told us his story. But he told us how his relationship with his parents changed, at first his parents were afraid with what he, how he converted to Islam, but like you know in Islam, it says you have to take care of your parents, be good to your parents, so his relationship with his parents changed and they started loving the new him, you know? Because the true Islam it comes with the whole package. It doesn't come with the thing they say on TV. He changed drastically but in a good way. And his parents accepted the new him.

Again this almost "born again" concept is brought up. As I discussed earlier in my thesis, these young women use a type of language that resonates back to language used in

American Protestant revivalism. This specific example shows this linguistic fluidity. The

English religious and spiritual vocabulary has been developed to define the experiences of

its religious majority: Christians.[47] As my interlocutor explains the difference in this young

man's life after his conversion, she uses English words and phrases like "the new him" that

appear to have originated with the American speaker giving the story of his conversion, yet

have been absorbed into her own vocabulary to describe a specifically Muslim event.

This co-option of English-specific phrasing to interpret religious experiences within

her own religious tradition is not unusual in the Arab world nor is it a passive phenomenon.

As researcher Anne-Marie Pedersen noted in her work on English-language education in

Jordan, young, mostly university students at English-language institutions like the young

women of this *ders addeen*, are not non-native outsiders being passively colonized by the

English language and the Anglo-American culture being carried with it (2010). Many of

these students viewed English as the language of their culture, or cultures - especially those

who participate in academic disciplines like the sciences where English is the connecting

lingua franca. As more Americans convert to Islam and English-language education

continues to spread in the Muslim world, I believe English-speaking Muslims will continue

to use and shape the English language as the language of their culture and religion in the

manner Pedersen found in her research.

Halfway through the semester, group leader Dr. Sara went to Zaytuna College in

Northern California for a conference. One of the first stories she told to the *ders* upon her

return was of meeting a white convert named Chris. A volunteer at the conference, Chris

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[47] The opposite is true as well. Over the course of my fieldwork I found it interesting that at the Arabic-speaking church I attend, the pastor's sermons were occasionally linguistically indistinguishable from Dr. Sara's lectures.

had agreed to pick her up from the airport and, stuck in traffic on the drive from San Francisco's airport to Berkeley, they began to talk. She told us initially she wasn't sure that he was Muslim from his appearance, despite his association with Zaytuna, but once they began talking on the drive and he used "Muslim" words like *Inshallah* and *Mashallah* she realized he was a Muslim and asked about how he came to Islam. Chris had originally been an atheist and had converted to Islam under the influence of Shiekh Hamza Yusuf. She described him to us as glowing, fresh, like a baby and told her enraptured audience that these converts have a *nour*, a light you can touch. The story of her trip concluded with her discussion of the conference itself, how she was able to begin a presentation with "Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim" for the first time in her career. And to top off the emphasis in conversion, she told us, to the group's great interest, that 90% of the presenters at this conference were converts.

Stories of converts in general seem to be an important tool of *da'wa* and religious revivalism in this group. Perhaps they are reassuring to those with doubts: after all if these people surpassed convinced atheism, why can't I surpass minor doubts? If people are voluntarily choosing my faith, especially with the resistance of their families or communities, it must be a good choice to make and I have made the right choice to stick with my religion. Stories of converts are convicting to those who believe they are not religious enough or induce conviction to who were comfortable in their current level of religious practice and faith. Particularly convicting is converts from non-Muslim backgrounds or countries because their dedication to learn Arabic and studying the Qur'an often outstrips that of those who grew up in a Muslim environment. Through a single and in-depth convert's story, perhaps a religious person is able to see what their religion means

to someone experiencing it for the first time without the decades of belonging to a religious community that my interlocutors often describe as not living up to the religion's message and standards. Although all stories of converts are inspiring material for revivalist groups like this one, there is a unique fascination with white converts.

White converts have a special status in this revivalist world. They are idealized, a tool of *da'wa* that continuously came up over the months of research, and treated like a special prize in the Lebanese revivalist community. A man from Bangladesh or a woman from the Philippines converting to Islam is considered a happy event but there is something different in how the conversion of a white man or woman is received. I believe part of the draw of white converts originates from a deep-rooted complex, from the cosmopolitanism that saturates Lebanese society. In Lebanon and the larger Arab world where being perceived as "modern" relates to self-fashioning as a (white) Euro-American from the lingering effects of colonialism, it is exciting for a white man or woman to choose Islam because this indicates that their religion *is* something modern. Islam has become the superior choice, not the Euro-American religious tradition.

Additionally, within the context of this revivalist community, for white converts from non-Muslim backgrounds, their new and tradition-less experience with Islam is embodied by movements themselves seeking to return to a sense of a pure Islam. A larger trend in Sunni religious revival, Dr. Sara herself describes how much she dislikes traditional and cultural aspects that have encroached on Islam over the centuries, saying: "there is the problem of mixing Islamic principles with tradition. Some of the traditions have become associated with Islam even though they are not." A white convert is a blank slate, he embodies the kind of Muslim many want to be. They are thought to come at the

religion not only with far more enthusiasm than Muslims brought up in the faith, but with no historical traditions that deviate from the original texts. Although some white converts must join the traditional schools of Islamic thought, or *madhhabs*, I have not seen these traditions emphasized in the conversion stories.

6. A Growing Rootlessness?

What constitutes an authoritative source for religious knowledge and education for the young women of this *ders* (and their leader) is an especially interesting question with the gradual introduction of white converts and other Euro-Americans as religious leaders with their own weight and followings. It is an interesting question as the Internet technology allows these young women to access new or previously marginalized voices on issues of Islam, particularly female voices. The importance of traditional authoritative sources, like the four Sunni *madhhabs*, is also in question as how these converts from non-Muslim backgrounds interact with these traditional authoritative sources,[48] is still unclear. Through the Internet, the young women of the *ders* come into contact with some Muslim figures, particularly Euro-American, who have been rising as purely charismatic voices with limited serious scholastic backgrounds. Their voices are particularly amplified over the Internet and range from religious debaters to bloggers to sheikhs of varying qualifications using the Internet to boost their message, and their speeches or writings may become authoritative to Muslims seeking religious knowledge. They may not necessarily claim authority nor have

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[48] "A system of imperative co-ordination will be called 'traditional' if legitimacy is claimed for it and believed in on the basis of the sanctity of the order and the attendant powers of control as they have been handed down from the past, 'have always existed.' The person or persons exercising authority are designated according to traditionally transmitted rules. The object of obedience is the personal authority of the individual which he enjoys by virtue of his traditional status." (Weber, 1947, 341)

serious religious study based on the traditional scholarship of Islam, yet Muslims who follow their ideas or change the way they practice Islam from their guidance are entrusting authority to these figures which mark a clear departure from traditional, local authorities.[49]

One of these charismatic leaders is American Sheikh Yusuf Estes, well-known to many members of the *ders*. Known as "The Funny Sheikh,"[50] videos of his revivalist *da'wa* are hugely popular on YouTube, racking up millions of views with titles like "christian bursted in tears after Yusuf Estes answered his question"[51] and "Emotional Shahada with Sh Yusuf Estes".[52] He writes posts on his official website like "How to Give EZ Shahadahs"[53] and debates non-Muslims in his heavy Southern drawl in a style that still resonates from his early days preaching the Christian gospel before his conversion to Islam (or as he defines it, reversion).[54] The vast majority of the information I could find online about Sheikh Estes is related to his *da'wa* with no obvious resources indicating his own authoritative sources or rootedness in the Islamic traditions. He titles himself as a sheikh yet I struggled to find any information about his academic background, association with a particular *madhhab*, or the names of other sheikhs he has studied under in the traditional manner. Whether Euro-American voices that have captured the attention of the Muslim Internet like that of Yusuf

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[49] As Weber argues, "Charismatic authority is thus specifically outside the realm of everyday routine and the profane sphere. In this respect, it is sharply opposed both to rational, and particularly bureaucratic, authority, and to traditional authority … Traditional authority is bound to the precedents handed down from the past and to this extent is also oriented to rules. Within the sphere of its claims, charismatic authority repudiates the past, and is in this sense a specifically revolutionary force." (Weber, 1947, pp. 361-362)
[50] Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/islamnewsroom
[51] Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHFgcRGIrH0
[52] Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09I2Wq2iyF0
[53] Retrieved from http://islamnewsroom.com/news-we-need/1847-islamic-terms-in-english
[54] From Estes's personal website (http://yusufestes.com/) accessed on August 30, 2014: "Another preacher used to take me into Mexico and we would preach in the square or market to individuals about the 'salvation of Christ.' We were even arrested in the night by the Mexican Federal Police and investigated (Mexico is predominantly Catholic and does not encourage other religions)."

Estes are a growing trend and indicate a crisis of authority in Islam, I cannot answer due to the limits of my research.

However Euro-American voices, like that of Hamza Yusuf, do not necessarily depart from the larger traditional authorities – like the Islamic schools of thought. Yusuf, who spent decades in the MENA region, followed a very traditional path. Yusuf studied under Mauritanian Sheikh Murabit al-Hajj in West Africa, who follows the Maliki *madhhab*.[55] He also brings this traditional authority back to the American Muslim community he oversees – as well as the Muslims around the world reading his published works. His popular book, which I discussed above, is based on the works of a historical Mauritanian Imam, whose teachings I assume Yusuf came into contact with while living and studying in Mauritania. White converts do not necessarily originate in an environment that bestows traditional Islamic authorities, but they can make the choice to follow this traditional path.

As I discussed in the second chapter, Dr. Sara is open about her lack of concern for rooting her teaching strongly and explicitly in the Islamic authoritative traditions, and her comfort with picking and choosing between the different schools. This is not an uncommon attitude in Sunni Islam under modernity. Nor is it a new concept, Ibn Tamiyya was advocating for it in the 13th century, but it has picked up steam in the last century as a self-reflectorial criticism in the face of rising European power.[56] As I discussed earlier in this chapter, religious authorities are a variety of figures in the lives of these particular Lebanese women, ranging from the traditional schools of thought to local religious leaders

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[55] Retrieved from http://alternativeentertainment.wordpress.com/2009/04/16/another-mother-of-the-believers/
[56] This is best illustrated in the writings of late 19th century scholar Mohammad 'Abduh who argued for an ideal society based off his concept of the early, golden years of Islam before the introduction of alien elements like philosophy and mysticism that obscured the essential nature of Islam. He argued for rational interpretation of God's commandments and a rejection of *taqlid* or blind imitation of authority, which discouraged the free exercise of reason. (Hourani 1962)

to Muslim figures thousands of miles away who they connect with using the Internet. I am not able to speak to larger trends in Islam from the limitations of my small study. But for the women of this *ders addeen* I do not necessarily see a rejection of their traditional authorities. As they interact with new thinkers through the Internet, they must choose which sources they use as part of their religious education and therefore entrust authority.

For these young women, at least from what they have explained to me, it is not fair to say that the traditional authorities have lost authority in the eyes of these women, rather that their understanding of who is an authority able to speak in Islamic matters is expanding. This new technology and this shift towards non-traditional sources allows the members of this group access to new or previously marginalized voices. In particular this move towards a more rootless Islam, with a variety of competing authorities, might allow for stronger female participation in the Islamic tradition, which Dr. Sara herself considers an important change as a result of the Islamic revival of which she is part, stating:

> Women in the time of the Prophet used to pray behind the guys with no separation. And now the woman has to pray in a different room. I'm not saying….I'm not calling for the woman to go pray again, I'm just saying it became a tradition and we think it had to do with what the Prophet ordered us to do but it's not...That's the issue in Islam for a long period of time, the man was the one presenting the fatwa. So we kind of disappeared and we ended up with many fatwas that are male-dominated fatwas.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I set out to explore Sunni religious revival among the Lebanese educated and/or upper class. This was primarily an ethnographic study of a peculiar religious study group in its social context. My primary interest was to document the social worlds of the participants in the *ders addeen*, my research was not a "study of religion." Therefore there were analytical and conceptual limitations in my study. For example, I was aware that certain claims by my interlocutors about their understanding and practice of Islam would need to be analyzed, including critically analyzed, in a more sustained fashion. However I abstained from doing so as I was aware that this thesis might be read by my interlocutors and that in the anthropological tradition I have refrained my voice from being critical of the claims of my interlocutors who through welcoming me amongst them made the study possible in the first place. At the same time, I am aware that some of their claims might be taken to be very disputable by people who locate themselves elsewhere in the Islamic tradition.

After months of fieldwork and interviews I found three different and interesting directions of thought within this overall topic, all connected by themes of class, gender, "cosmopolitanism," globalization, and the always-adaptable Lebanese culture. These three directions of thought became my three analysis sections. In the first I delved into the mode of invitation around which this group of young women formed itself, and specifically on the discourse of "search and invitation" in which my interlocutors described how they became involved in this *ders addeen*. Out of analysis of this motif I developed my idea of

an understated *da'wa* which I examined as a style that reflected the societal restrictions of the educated and upper-class Lebanese social sphere in which these young women evolve. Had I more time I would have explored this point in particular in a more thorough fashion, contrasting the *ders* with other revivalist movements I have heard of in Lebanon made up of lower- and middle-class adherents who knock on doors in their local neighborhoods and directly invite them to meetings held by their sheikh.

The Lebanese diaspora was in important topic throughout my research and I covered it in my first chapter, as I argued that this diasporic experience has spurred the individualistic revival of these independent young women. As families split up and move abroad, young women whose movements have historically been controlled by their family members – especially fathers – are given new freedoms as control is lessened. I also discussed the diasporic experience of the group leader and how it has influenced how she approaches her mission. Equally important in the specific trend of individualism I noticed running through my interviews is the status of these young women as unmarried, university students in Beirut. Many of the members described their personal revival beginning after they had left their family home and began this specific phase of their lives. This was something particular to the young women who grew up in Lebanon, where religious education is limited in the absence of proactive parental action in this direction. And as I discussed in my second chapter, this *ders* is linked to a group many parents consider controversial and a number of parents are unenthusiastic about their children's participation in this religious revivalist movement.

In my second chapter I explored the different pressures these young women experience as religious practitioners in the educated and upper-class Lebanon, arguing that

they take an active role in initiating and building their religious lives, to the extent that many go against the wishes of their families (fathers in particular) in the pursuit of ideal religious practice. This chapter brought to light one of the most interesting findings of my research, in my opinion, which was how little families knew about their daughter's participation in the group, let alone approved of this participation. Until my interviews, a possible point of comparison for this form of religious study for me was the typical weekly American Protestant Bible study because, at least in terms of purpose and content, there seemed to be many similarities. However the political, sectarian, and social factors surrounding these weekly *ders addeen* lectures revealed a very different landscape. These factors elevated the actions of these young women, many of whom take lessons against the wishes of their parents, to a different level of commitment and perhaps belief than a typical American university student going to some Bible study through a church or university religious group.

I also explored how a generational difference seemed to be causing anxiety among parents towards their children's participation in these types of revivalist movements, and how Islam was "done" differently by the parents who grew up in the shadow of the Arab nationalism that once permeated the Arab world. This fear of a new way of "doing" Islam, combined with political and social fears, has paradoxically created an interesting space for young women to take a less-monitored participation in revivalist movements without the same anxiety surrounding their choices. In this second chapter I also examined the controversial larger movement to which this *ders addeen* is allegedly linked, and which fans the fears of so many parents. I was not able to talk to any of the members of *al-Nisa'*

outside of the *ders addeen*, nor did I even try, out of respect for their privacy and security due to the ongoing situation in Syria, to which I am aware that they have some kind of link.

In terms of direction for future research, it was the theme of my third chapter that I believe has the greatest potential. The subject of this "Internet Generation" of Islam and the growing "Muslim Internet" is something of which we are only beginning to scratch the surface. As I argued in my third analysis chapter, I have observed how the Internet has already begun to expand traditional sources of knowledge among the young women of the *ders*. My interviewees discussed reading blogs by British Muslims, watching debates between European Muslims and non-Muslims on YouTube and taking online courses from an American Islamic university, as significant parts of their religious study. This Euro-American emphasis in these young women's religious education has played a fascinating role in their linguistic resonance as I explored in both my first and third chapters. I argued that their linguistic choices during my interviews, which so heavily resonate along American evangelical lines, originate from the dominating American English voices in their lives. These external voices are so consistently present in their lives that one group member told me she has difficulty going back to her village and speaking solely in Arabic with her grandparents because it is such a significant switch from the language she speaks in Beirut. Their international university educations, the media by which they are surrounded, and now the online religious figures that they follow or the white converts whose stories they share; the effect of these American voices on how these young group members express their religion while speaking and writing in English is only beginning to be understood.

My research into this resonance was restricted to a specific group of English-educated young women, with strong and mostly unfiltered Internet access, and a well-

traveled leader who brings them books and ideas from all around the world. Yet I believe this resonance is not limited to this group and further research on how the Internet is playing into this specific resonance around the world is necessary. In addition to this resonance, I argued that the Internet allows Euro-American Muslim voices to spread more easily than that traditional '*Ulema*. This has created a shift in what constitutes an authoritative source for the young women of the *ders* for whom "traditional" means Arabic-language and regionally-sourced. Further research here into how the Internet is playing into this shift for other groups and populations outside of my limited area of research could produce interesting findings. Additionally I argued that it is not just the Internet pushing or promoting these non-traditional voices to these young women, but that the young women of this *ders addeen,* who struggle to connect with their local religious leaders, are reaching out for them.

My fieldwork had surprisingly few limitations. Aside from being able to explore *An Nisat* further, I was given essentially full access to the group and their extracurricular events. My interviews went smoothly, and there were almost no linguistic issues. Although my Arabic (Lebanese, Modern Standard, and Qur'anic) is not perfect, I worked hard to study the Qur'an along with the group members and to follow along with the group leader's lectures - some of which I also recorded and had professionally translated to make sure I fully understood. I also attribute my success to my sort of "guide" through this process, my friend who first invited me to this group two years ago and who helped me make connections, find interviewees and introduce me to the group leader.

In terms of future research, aside from what I discussed above, I believe the greatest potential lies with the Internet and how young Muslims are engaging with it. The Internet

moves and changes so rapidly it is difficult to pin down a theme or a direction of research and analyze it before it changes again. Yet its importance in the daily lives of young Muslims in this rapidly-globalizing world, particularly for those interested in studying the rise of rootlessness and questions of authoritative voices in the Islamic tradition, indicates that this is a key direction of study with a myriad of angles from which to focus. More can also be done on Internet *da'wa*, which I see as part of this new question of authoritative voices, especially as traditionally-dominant voices in the Arab world may feel threatened by the rise of these Euro-American religious scholars who have taken the leading role in this new technology. Whether or not these traditional voices will choose to adapt to the new technology to maintain their hold remains to be seen and explored.

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