

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN THE FORMATION OF SHIA
SCHOLARS IN LEBANON.

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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In a turbulent, global and postmodern Middle East, religion stands as a persistent, potent and salient social force. Men of religion, its keepers, propagators and leaders, are pivot figures of its modern reality. This research seeks to shed light on the training of these religious scholars. Religious knowledge in general has not been, historically, on the best of terms with the social sciences. This is especially true of Islamic knowledge where the “Social sciences” are perceived as “Western,” sometimes “Impure.” This paper will investigate the extent to which the social sciences are incorporated into the programs of religious education. It will be based on a triangulation of 1- content analysis of the Curricula of religion schools in Lebanon: Both traditional Hawzas (the Muslim Shia religious establishment responsible for the formation of intellectuals, researchers and preachers) as well as “Islamic universities”; 2- in-depth interviews of 15 of the stakeholders of such an education; 3- fieldwork conducted in Qom, Iran. I suggest that the Shia Islamic Seminary is making steps toward the inclusion of the social sciences within its curricula in the aim of producing scholars engaged with modern forms of social knowledge as well as producing a “more humane model of the social sciences.” This, hypothetically, is meant to alleviate the dichotomy between religious knowledge and the social sciences. A part of a larger process of Modernization/Westernization, the religious educational institution has so far not managed to render these fields of knowledge essential elements in its curricula.

Outline

| | |
|--|-----|
| Glossary: | x |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Methodology | 9 |
| Literature review..... | 22 |
| Religious education | 22 |
| Establishments | 29 |
| The scholars | 33 |
| In Lebanon | 35 |
| The Hawza | 44 |
| 1. Al-Rasoul Al-Akram Hawza..... | 52 |
| 2. Al-Maahad Al-Sharii..... | 69 |
| 3. Al-Imam Al-Baker Hawza | 77 |
| 4. Imam Ali Hawza | 81 |
| 5. Baqiyatollah Hawza | 82 |
| 6. Al-Imam Al-Montazar Hawza | 85 |
| Conclusions | 86 |
| University Islamic Studies in Lebanon | 88 |
| Islamic University of Lebanon | 91 |
| Al-Maaref University | 108 |
| Azad Islamic University..... | 117 |
| Conclusion..... | 118 |
| Analysis of eight Master theses produced by the Islamic Studies department at the Islamic University of Lebanon | 120 |
| Objective..... | 121 |
| Methodology and data | 122 |
| Analysis..... | 127 |
| Conclusions | 130 |
| Interviews with Stakeholders: | 132 |
| 1. Sayyed Ali Hijazi..... | 134 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 2. Sheikh Akram Baraket..... | 136 |
| 3. Sheikh Amin Termos..... | 140 |
| 4. Sayyed Hussein Majed..... | 144 |
| 5. Sheikh Hussein Al-Kheshn..... | 148 |
| 6. Sayyed Jaafar Fadlallah- Son of Sayyed Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah..... | 150 |
| 7. Sheikh Khanjar Hamieh..... | 152 |
| 8. Sheikh Abdl-Hassan Fayyad..... | 154 |
| 9. Sheikh Mohamad Choukeir..... | 157 |
| 10. Dr. Farah Moussa..... | 160 |
| 11. Dr. Kamal Lezzek..... | 162 |
| 12. Sayyed Ali Makki..... | 163 |
| 13. Sheikh Naji Taleb..... | 166 |
| Conclusions..... | 169 |
| Conclusion..... | 172 |
| Annex 1: Interview Guide:..... | 179 |
| Annex 2: Guide to Hawzas in Lebanon:..... | 181 |
| Annex 3: Distribution of credits at “Shia Islamic universities” in Lebanon:..... | 183 |
| Annex 4: Distribution of credits/courses at Hawzas covered:..... | 186 |
| Annex 5: “Modernizing the Hawza” by Sayyed Jaafar Fadlallah:..... | 190 |
| Annex 6: Overview of the Qom Hawza based on fieldwork observation there:..... | 193 |
| Bibliography:..... | 196 |

Tables:

| Table | | Page |
|-------|--|------|
| 1 | Summary of fieldwork | 22 |
| 2. | Overview of Islamic studies at Shia Islamic universities in Lebanon | 63 |
| 3 | Summary of Social Science classes at IU's theoretical Islamic studies program. | 65 |
| 4 | Summary of Social Science classes at Al-Maaref University's Islamic Studies program. | 75 |
| 5 | Summary of data collected based on 8 theses produced by the Islamic Studies department of the Islamic University of Lebanon. | 85 |
| 6 | Interview with Sayyed Ali Hijazi | 90 |
| 7 | Interview with Sheikh Akram Baraket | 109 |
| 8 | Interview with Sayyed Hussein Majed | 98 |
| 9 | Interview with Sheikh Abdl-Hassan Fayad | 103 |
| 10 | Interview with Dr. Farah Mousa | 106 |
| 11 | Interview with Dr. Kamal Lezzek | 107 |
| 12 | Interview with Sayyed Ali Makki | 109 |

Glossary:

Ahl Ibayt: The prophet, his daughter, Imam Ali and the twelve Imams after him (all believed infallible by the Shia).

Dahieh: Common name of Beirut's southern suburb.

Hawza: the religious institution where Shia religious scholars are trained.

Ikhabri School: School of jurisprudence which refuses Ijtihad and calls for the reference to the *riwayat* (retellings) told of the prophet and his household only.

Marji': (source of emulation) a status reached by Mujtahids where they have legitimacy to issue religious rulings for others. Anyone who is not admitted as a Marji' does not have the right to issue religious rulings.

Muballigh: the Islamic version of a preacher, with a number of annexed social duties.

Mubahatha: a sort of study circle whereby students take the role of the teacher and explain the lesson to each other. Essential to it is the usage of sources beyond those covered in the classroom. It is usually comprised of 3-4 students and is expected to take place on a daily basis.

Muqadimat, Sutuh, Bahth Kharij: phases of the Shia religious training.

Mujtahid: A status reached by students by which they are capable of extracting religious rulings and issuing their own religious opinions.

Fikh, Usul, Diraya, Hadith, Rijal and Kalam: fields of traditional religious study.

Khums: yearly alms given by Shia believers to Ayatollahs to spend on religious education and societal needs.

Sayyed: the same title as sheikh given to those whose lineage goes back to the Hashimites.

Sheikh: title given to someone who has reached a specific stage, varying according to country, and indicating scholarly status.

Sunna (For the Shia): reference to everything known about the life of the Prophet and the Imams.

Wali: person in charge, usually in reference to authority granted through religion.

Wilayat Al-Fakih: theory of governance, developed by Imam Khomeini, stating that governance should be in the hands of jurists who replace the Infallible Imam during his occupation.

Dedication:

To Mahdi, without whom I would not be.

To my mother and father, without whom I would not be here.

Introduction

In Lebanon's southern suburb, where I grew up, it is quite difficult to imagine daily life without the presence of *Sheikhs* and *Sayyids*. Indeed, pictures of spiritual leaders emanate throughout the city; an iconographic salience of religion and its frontrunners is part of this suburb's delineation. Truly, religion, economics and politics are one and the same for a vast portion of Al-Dahieh's populace. With a religious system that holds Islam as an all-encompassing life-governing world-view, religion and religious leaders are the community's pivot social agents. Sabrina Mervin identifies a Shia elite composed of three elements: clerics, religious intellectuals and military men. (Mervin, 2007) Yet, these intellectuals are not ivory-tower philosophers, they are people in continuous engagement with their community. Further, the rulings and opinions of Muslim clerics and religious intellectuals in our modern day, according to scholars such as Khaled Sindawi, still hold "a greater legitimacy among the faithful than the civil laws passed by the state."

(Sindawi, 2007, p. 3)

One of the three oldest professions on earth, alongside Medicine and law, notwithstanding vast variations, religious training leads to the formation of an occupational class of professionals with a set of joint interests, pledges and duties.

(Ranson, Bryman, & Hinings, 1977) Since the work of Max Weber on religion, it became clear that creed cannot do without a body of trained leaders. Their social roles crisscross from alleviating the skepticism of the laity, a skepticism on the rise in our post-modern world, to supporting the codified body of knowledge upon which religion stands as well as disseminating thoughts and beliefs through various forms of instruction, rituals and incitements. (Weber, 1963) This is where legitimacy, and capital in its various forms, are

often acquired. Social capital, for example, is one type of capital accumulated through such a training. There, students form social networks and build relationships with other future scholars and leaders. As in other religious traditions, this religious capital is obtained through the mastery of a number of theoretical and practical knowledge fields and rituals. (Finke & Dougherty, 2002)

As Michel Foucault has well explained, knowledge and power are greatly intertwined. Indeed, the knowledge adopted by the power “not only assumes the authority of 'the truth' but has the power to make itself true.” (Foucault, 1977, p. 27) Knowledge then is the source of discourse and discourse, by consequence, is the constructor of the people’s ideologies, of the people’s lives. Elsewhere, Antonio Gramsci had explained that religious institutions are a form of power capable of manufacturing consent and legitimacy: begetting hegemony. (Heywood, 1994, p. 100) For the Shia population of Lebanon, Hezbollah is the ultimate form of power, the ultimate embodiment of what ought to be whereby social, political and economic command are all in the hands of a religious movement, led by religious leaders. Here, clerics, religious intellectuals and military men are one and the same. When the religious institution becomes the birthplace of political, economic, military as well as social leaders what Gramsci spoke of exponentially grows. Thereof, an understanding of these actors, the knowledge they produce as well as the knowledge which produces them, would offer an understanding of much relevance of both the noble and the callous, the present and the future.

Examining a sample of Friday sermons delivered in Lebanese mosques, as part of the study by Sari Hanafi, (forthcoming) posed serious remarks as to the ability of Lebanon’s Muslim preachers to comprehend, interact and engage with their respective societies. All

over the world, Islam is being accused of being a religion out of touch with reality, trapped in history and incompatible with a postmodern global actuality. In retaliation, Islamic religious institutions, throughout the Islamic world, have made efforts to “modernize,” both in shape as in content. For the Shia world, with Iran at the forefront, “modernization” has become the keyword for many actors. Yet, modernization risks of becoming westernization. Modernization often threatens the loss of history as well as the loss of authenticity in times which are changing, in realities which are mutating. This modernization comes in various forms and touches upon various aspects of the Shiite religious formation. A major debate within the Hawza world of today, within the larger debate of modernization versus tradition, is the debate over the social sciences. This covers their validity, their use-value as well as their role within a religious education. The social sciences are, no doubt, extremely relevant to the formation of a mindset and a worldview: their inclusion is certain to influence the training of religious intellectuals and the basis on which they construct to answer, direct and instill. The investigation of this training would fall under the sub-fields of sociology of knowledge as well as that of the sociology of religion.

Yet, with an Iranian rule aware of the pressing need of change within the religious institution, change seems underway. Some changes occur much more complacently than others do. An example would be that of the inclusion of modern technology within these establishments. On the other hand, changes influencing curricula, for example, are significantly more complex. In regards to the inclusion of the social sciences, the attempts to study human behavior through the application of the methods of the natural science, the issue is extremely contentious. (Gordon, 2002) The social sciences can be,

for practical purposes, divided into theory and method. Theory mainly refers to the corpus of literature and knowledge mainly produced by the “West,” as that is where these disciplines flourish. Method refers to the practical tools the social sciences offer; the empirical techniques of understanding reality. Elsewhere, Islamic studies have often claimed that the experimental method of modern science was born in the Islamic world and exported to Europe and the west. Islamic scholars have made identical claims. Thereof, the usage of experimental methods by Islamic scholars to understand reality should not pose ideological issues. Further, the usage of such methods is a pressing need as scholars should not engage a society they poorly know: impressions and opinions should not be the basis on which such essential social actors operate.

As to social theory, the question becomes intricate. First off, it should be recalled that social theory, as stated above, is the body of work that attempts to understand human social behavior. Since Islam claims that it is an all-encompassing religion, it claims that it has its own social theory. Admitting and advocating universalism, Islam does not claim that western societies are inherently different from Islamic ones. Yet, “Western” social theory is generally not accepted, accused of being founded on misguided ontological and philosophical assumptions. The relevance of social theory to Islam and Islamic societies, especially in a globalized world, is not a black-and-white question. Fortunately, solving this debate is beyond the scope of this thesis. Yet, it is enough to say that if western social thought is relevant, then it is to be taught. Nevertheless, even if it is not, one can still strongly argue that it should be given to students of religious studies. Western social theory cannot be reduced to one philosophical tradition nor to any single ontological view. To the contrary, it is a field of knowledge filled with contradicting beliefs. Even if

such theory is incompatible with the Islamic ideology, it is a theory which emanates throughout Islamic societies. Therefore, learning *it*, quite different from learning *from it*, becomes essential. As the social fields of knowledge are evidently much more developed in the West than they are anywhere on the planet, engagement presents itself as the only reasonable option. Further, realizing that religious scholars should not be dogmatized men who have not been exposed to any type of knowledge beyond traditional Islamic text, an engagement with these views is clearly of value. Exposure to a larger corpus of knowledge, with what that entails in terms of awareness and criticality, is certainly a crucial and added value. It should be kept in mind that the social sciences are not limited to theory and method. Broadly speaking, they may be divided into five categories of knowledge; theory and method being two of the five. Structural information and understanding, modes of perception of both individual and community as well as proposals for intervention are the other constituting elements of what is known as “social science.” While this paper will focus on theory and method, the other elements, as difficult as they may be to assess and as contested their definitions are, should not be neglected.

It is worthy to note here that the value of engaging Hawza students, non-western seekers of the Islamic field of knowledge, with the “social sciences” does not stem from a position claiming or accepting the universality of this corpus of knowledge. Further, in searching the Hawzas’ acquisition of certain “academic” traits, such as those relating to program structure or teaching methods, does not stem from any conviction of the model’s supremacy. As Ramón Grosfoguel has clearly elaborated, the “Westernized University” is a particular and situated model of education which operates under the supposition of

“Uni-versalism where ‘one (Western men from five countries) defines for the rest’ what is truthful and valid knowledge.” (Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 89) This is not assumed here, to the contrary, the belief is that the knowledge production of the “West” is very much Eurocentric, colonizing and lacking (Said, 1979) Nevertheless, this does not mean that this knowledge is irrelevant, nor, in our current day and time, that the rest of the world can do without it. Further, there is no assumption of an inherent faultiness or an incompatibility with non-Western societies. While these are thoughts to engage with, critically, one can confidently claim that the body of knowledge produced by the West is one of theories not to learn, but to learn from; a knowledge not to project but to break down and use as brick, chisel and hammer.

Therefore, two elements, missing from the traditional education, might be claimed as being essential to the training of successful and apt Islamic scholars, especially with the belief in a jurisprudence which must account for space and time. Sayyed Mohamad Bakir al-Sadr, Ruhollah Khomeini, Sheikh Mortada Mutahari and Sayyed Tbatabei, perhaps the most prominent Shia scholars of the past century, claim that the production of rulings should take into consideration the elements of temporality and locality.¹ The first element is the training in research as fieldwork: the ability to read one’s society in order for one to issue suitable rulings and the ability to diagnose social problems in order to instill attuned policies. The second element is the introduction and the engagement with social theory, western as well as non-western, offering a better understanding of the modern world, of human self and society, as well as critical non-dogmatic leaders.

¹ Refer to Sayyed Mohamad Baker As-Sadr (2003).

Yet, this does not appear the case. Investigation of the knowledge produced by the majority of such scholars suggests that they are limited to studying religious texts: they rarely read their society and they seldom read non-religious texts. Launching from here, this thesis will investigate the training of religious scholars in Lebanon, covering both *Hawzas* and Islamic studies programs in “Islamic academic universities.” Mainly, I will investigate the element of the social sciences. Additionally, I will search for changes relating to the structure within the Hawza program, changes of learning methods as well material alterations. The purpose of this is two-fold. Firstly, it will draw an iconography of the changes within the Lebanese Hawza, from structure and educational model to new subject-matters and topics. Secondly, it will allow a substantiated statement as to whether religious scholars are introduced to, engage with and make-use of the body of knowledge termed as the “social sciences,” both theory and method. Additionally, it will attempt to shed insight as to the backdrop of the current debate, within the Hawza, in regards to the introduction of the social sciences. Naturally, this research is limited by the approach adopted, as it is limited by the time and space in which it is produced. Most importantly, whether the religious training of scholars in places other than Lebanon, or any other time, is different is a question not addressed here.

The geographical coverage of the thesis is that of the Lebanese territory. Lebanon is a small country located on the Mediterranean. A country with huge religious diversity. Home to eighteen official sects, it has often been the setting for war and conflict. Nevertheless, the small nation has also been, historically, a center of knowledge, art and culture. The last census was conducted in 1932. Its results have been debated and

Lebanon's demography remains unclear.² Common knowledge claims that the nation houses an approximate 4.5 million citizens, out of whom around two-thirds identifies as Muslim. Of these Muslims, around half are said to be Shiite, distributed mainly across the Lebanese South, the Bekaa Valley and Beirut's southern suburb. It is there where this thesis and its producer are located.

I will begin by describing the research methods used, their rationale and their limitations. A literature review follows in which the most relevant work is outlined. The subsequent chapters present the research data and their interpretation. The first of these chapters presents the data collected regarding Hawzas in Lebanon, as outlined in the methodology section. The second presents the data collected regarding Islamic universities, also as outlined in the methodology section. The third of these chapters presents summaries of thirteen in-depth interviews with policy makers and curricula planners: the stakeholders of an Islamic education in Lebanon. Following is a chapter analyzing the master theses produced by the Islamic studies department at the Islamic university of Lebanon. At the end of each of these chapters, conclusions are stated. The thesis closes with deductions, patterns and extrapolations.

² For more information, refer to Rania Maktabi's "The Lebanese Census of 1932 Revisited. Who Are the Lebanese?"

Methodology

In order to unfold the formation of religious scholars, which is itself a dynamic process, qualitative research was chosen to provide, in line with the calls of Max Weber, an interpretive understanding of action. Qualitative research allowed an understanding of the current state of affairs by the collection of data from people in their natural settings. This is especially relevant as little information on the inner-workings of the establishments under study is available. Two qualitative research methods were used to generate data: in-depth interviews and observation, both direct and participant, with an ethnographic tone. Additionally, content analysis was used to understand specific courses of relevance being offered to students. This research involved the investigation of two universities and six Hawzas, four of which are in the greater Beirut region, one in the Bekaa and one in the South. I will begin by retelling how this research began and then to discussing the scope of coverage. Then, I speak of why I chose a qualitative approach and go on to a discussion of each research method used. The order I follow in explaining these methods throughout this chapter does not reflect a sequential ordering of methods; I was applying all three methods throughout the fieldwork.

As a graduate assistant, and a research assistant, with Prof. Sari Hanafi I was involved in his project inspecting the gap between the social sciences and the religious fields of knowledge. This research spans discourse, knowledge production, institutions as well as agents. Personally, I was most interested in investigating the background; the training. Taking this up as a master thesis hence became a compelling option. While the thesis was meant, initially, to cover the entire Islamic religious scenery, both Sunni and Shia, I found such a task unattainable in terms of a master thesis. Preliminary research revealed

over seven Lebanese universities offering degrees in Islamic studies, in addition to a much larger number of more traditional establishments. A pilot investigation of the curricula of the Beirut Arab University and AL-Jinan University showed a huge difference between the Sunni and Shia schools of thought in terms of training religious intellectuals. Thereof, the scope of my own research was limited to the Shia school, covering both academic institutions and Hawzas. This decision was meant to provide depth, complementing that offered by the very nature of qualitative research.

The first step, after having defined the scope of coverage, was to determine how many university Shia Islamic studies programs, and how many Hawzas, were extant in Lebanon. In terms of universities, it was clear that the Islamic university of Lebanon was the only well-established university adhering to Shiism and offering a complete Islamic studies program. Al-Maareef University, a university newly born, was offering an Islamic studies program as well, but it was only in its first year of implementation. This meant that participant observation would only be possible for first-year courses. Further, the ambiguity of professors to teach and textbooks to be used for non-first-year courses presented another impediment. These facts rendered a study of Al-Maareefs' program quite inept.

Nevertheless, the Islamic university is highly affiliated with the Higher Shiite council, a council that may be claimed to have its divergences with the Khomeinist school of thought. It was clear, from the onset of preliminary research, that University professors and Hawza scholars belonging to the Khomeinist school of thought did not consider the Islamic University as representative of how they viewed an Islamic studies program. A number of university professors, mostly of the Lebanese university, affiliated with

Hezbollah, raised objections to the Islamic University's method of work. Therefore, I decided to include Al-Maaref University to elevate representativeness and present the fuller scenery as this University is affiliated with Hezbollah and should represent these agent's vision of education. This decision was empowered by the fact that I am interested in understanding the future headings of the formation of Islamic scholars in Lebanon.

In regards to Hawzas, it was clear from the beginning that the number of Hawzas in Lebanon would be too large to cover, especially considering their geographical distribution. Further, the fact that the majority of these Hawzas are small personal enterprises rendered an attempt to cover all the Hawzas unnecessary. In the country, there are two Hawzas which are renowned and well established. These are Al-Rasoul Hawza³ and Al-Maahad Al-Sharii. Both of these Hawzas were covered. To increase representativeness I later decided to include one of Beirut's smaller Hawzas. The choice of which Hawza to include was made over two stages: the first stage was a random inquiry within the Shiite religious community of Beirut to identify the most well-known of the Hawzas. Three main names appeared repeatedly. Amongst these was Al-Baker Hawza. As this Hawza was the most responsive and accessible one, it was the one investigated. Then, as research progressed, I realized that none of these Hawzas are "traditional Hawzas" and that such "traditional" Hawzas do exist in Lebanon. The largest and most well-known of these is the Imam Ali Hawza in Beirut and the Baqiyatollah Hawza in the Lebanese south. Both of these Hawzas were covered, widening the geography treated. Lastly, I decided to include Al-Montazar Hawza, the largest Hawza of

³ Which has transitioned, over the past few years, to become a branch of the Qom based Al-Mustafa International University; the Iranian attempt at transforming the Hawza studies into an academic and recognized field of education.

the Bekaa region, to offer full geographical coverage and increase both depth and validity.

Being myself a Shiite who was born and raised in Beirut's southern suburb, understanding and interacting with religious scholars, institutions and students was not a difficult task. It can confidently be said that my religious affiliation, evident through trivial things such as name and village of origin-something the Shia of Lebanon customarily ask whenever they meet someone- played a significant role in acquiring trust and, by consequence, inside information. Indeed, the background information I had at the beginning of this research on the social role of religious scholars and their interaction with their community was essential in directing the research and assuring representativeness. Nevertheless, this affiliation may, on the other hand, jeopardize objectivity. I was conscious of such a bias and I took much care to preserving reflexivity throughout the research process, from reporting to analyzing. The main purpose of this research is to understand the training of religious scholars to determine the position of the social sciences within such a formation. This objective is a nuanced one that cannot be understood through the usage of statistical approaches. In Qualitative research, the researcher seeks to understand, interact and objectively analyze happenings. Therefore, I approach the question through three main research methods: participant observation, content analysis and semi-structured in-depth interviews.

The first research method used was participant observation. I attempted to attend as many classes possible at all studied institutions, regardless of course subject or year. This was important as it allowed me to understand the inner-working of the establishment as well as the educational system. This was an attempt to acquire an insider-sense as to the

molding of the students. Observations were not limited to class participation but they were extended to spending time in the Hawza or at the university, mainly conversing with students. This is important for the research question being asked because it allowed me to understand the vision of the students: the topics they discuss, their interests, their interaction and other facets of their inner and social selves. Lastly, observation by wandering around facilities, in libraries and through the administrative building for example, revealed valuable information as to the nature and identity of the institution at hand. A major example was with one Hawza which had *Hadiths* (Sayings by the prophet or by a member of his household) plastered all over the walls of its administrative building. Noting these *Hadiths*, and the topics they cover, brought insight as to the way this establishment was running and gave depth to what I was uncovering in interviews.

Most of the participant observation done was at Al-Rasoul Hawza, as it is the biggest Hawza, the most influential (in terms of its clear affiliation with Hezbollah) as well as the most dynamic (as a result of its relationship with Qom.) Observation at other Hawzas indicated similar patterns, especially in terms of student-teacher interaction. This allowed confidence as to the generalizability of the results (with no claim of statistical representatively or firmly generalizable results) to other Hawzas without necessitating the same quantity of participation. Throughout, I attempted to document all observations as “everything is pertinent” when one is conducting social research. (Wolff, 1976)

Naturally, such observations only provided a general sense and overall impressions, their validation would require a number of different works of research.

The in-depth investigation of both Hawzas and academic Islamic Studies programs began by launching contact with the administration of the establishment. As this research

component is part of the ongoing research by Prof Sari Hanafi it is covered by the IRB approval already obtained for said research. Then, I attempted to sit with the dean/head, as bureaucracy ordained, to ensure that professors were both available and cooperative. As to the curriculum map (i.e. set courses to be taken to complete the program) it was mostly the dean/head who referred me to an administrator that provided a detailed account of all courses offered and their distribution over the years of study as well as, upon request, syllabi and course descriptions. In some cases, deans and faculty members themselves provided such content, sometimes after repeated interactions and visits. Once I had received the curriculum map, I looked for the courses of relevance and inquired to identify the professors who have been teaching them. Once done, I established contact and, then, an interview.

Content analysis is often defined as the research method “that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text.”(Weber, 1990, p. 9) It provided a non-obtrusive and accessible research method which provides access to social actualities that would have been otherwise unreachable. (Berg, 1989) Defining a curriculum is no easy task. Indeed, Kelly (2004) argues that the problems of curriculum definition are serious and complex and it may be that they are best avoided by not attempting to offer close definitions. Nevertheless, Beauchamp (1968) argues that "a curriculum is a written document which may contain many ingredients, but basically it is a plan for the education of pupils during their enrolment in a given school." (Beauchamp, 1968, p. 6). Operationally speaking, for all ends and purpose of this research, a curriculum is understood as being instructional content; the courses to be followed in acquiring an education. Objectives, means, assessment and the variety of other elements which may be included in the definition, as

suggested by different theorists of education, would present little operational value for this research and were hence left out of the analysis.

On the ground, after having received the curriculum map from the institution, I looked for the courses that could contain a social science component; sociology, psychology political science and the like. It is to be noted that there are other courses that are not social science courses but which may contain a social science component; such as history. These courses were not investigated as thoroughly as the courses on the social sciences but were nonetheless looked at. After having identified the courses of relevance, the syllabus/outline/description was obtained and the professor of the course was contacted for an interview. For each of the said courses, the interview with the professor was followed by obtaining the textbook or material being given to students. In the case where there is no textbook and no material given to students, I obtained the class notes of students and used them as material. In the case where such notes were not available, I looked at the reference books specified by the instructor or the syllabus. Naturally, full content analysis was only possible in the case where there was a clear textbook or material given to students.

Lastly, I decided to perform a content analysis of a sample of the knowledge produced by such institutions. Such an analysis should shed light as to the audience, topics, approach and literature used by the student. The Islamic University of Lebanon, being the only academic institution which offers Masters and PhD programs in Islamic studies of concern, was chosen. After preliminary investigation, I found that the PhD theses produced by the department since its foundation (nineteen) were too detailed, too specialized, and too difficult to access. Therefore I decided to limit this section of the

research to the master theses of the department. The master theses were rendered available through the University's central library, where I often had to physically be to perform the analysis as most of them were not available in soft copy. Then, I chose the theses which covered topics of non-purely religious nature and performed content analysis. Drawing conclusions, I connected what I found in these theses to my findings in the other sections of the research, corroborating or disclaiming.

The third research method is that of interviews, from which I can confidently say I had obtained the most valuable of knowledge presented in this thesis. Non-standardized and survey-like interviews are often criticized as being incapable of offering objective accounts and significant scientific data. Positivists have always argued that methods such as ethnography and in-depth interviews are, at the most, governed by the interactive context of the interview. Generally, an objectivist-constructivist divide is offered: interviews are either local accounts or expressions of underlying realities. I build on the work of scholars such as Jody Miller and Barry Glassner,(2011) arguing that such a dichotomy is itself erroneous. The belief is that interviews reveal underlying realities just as they are constructed interactions.⁴

Interviews are considered retellings with a number of inherent lacks. First, the subject cannot be fully covered in a few paragraphs or pages, they and their views are much more complex. The language also fractures the interviewee's story and the recording, coding and reporting of the interview only exacerbates the dilemma. The identities and affiliations held by the researcher are also to be considered. For this research,

⁴ A detailed argumentation may be found in "The inside and the outside: finding realities in interviews by Jody Miller and Barry Glassner.

interviewing in Arabic and transcribing in English may be considered as a major limitation. The academic affiliation held to the American University of Beirut, investigating a community deeply conspicuous of the West, is another handicap. In regards to language, immediate-translation (as the interview was going on) was often done, with much care. Immediate translation was done by having the person speak in Arabic and recording, on my Laptop, their saying in English. As complex and risky as that may be, it was the safest way to go. In regards to affiliation, the issue was mitigated by focusing on my personal and familial belonging to that community. It appeared that the fact I am affiliated with AUB was negligible once people knew my name.

Despite these limitations, the open-ended interview was chosen as it is the only means by which the collection and examination of narratives that would allow an understanding of these institutions and of the governing mindsets and outlooks within them may be achieved. (Rubin & Rubin, 2011) The investigation of the curricula provided information that needed to be contextualized and such could not be done unless the curricula planners were interviewed and given voice. Further, this is the best approach allowing me to predict the heading of these establishments. It is here that the strength of these interviews lays: they allowed me to understand how the administration and the professors see and approach the training of future scholars. To allow for an optimal representation of reality, the greatest number of interviews possible were conducted and all patterns, conclusions and remarks presented in the thesis were based on a comparative analysis of the collected data. To limit human error and bias, I wrote down the conversation as it took place and ordered, organized and summarized, in most cases, immediately after the interview was done.

This research involved interviews with deans, professors and students. For the chapter covering interviews with stakeholders the method followed to choose interviewees is developed at the beginning of that chapter. For the analysis of curricula, the choice was made based on courses being taught: professors teaching subject-matters deemed of relevance were interviewed. As for students, snowball sampling was used. Starting with one or two contacts at a given institution, I would ask these students to refer me to other students. This was the method used because I had no access to full lists of students from which I could have randomly chosen a representative sample. Therefore, the technique used only allows me to reflect part of the scenery, giving a holistic view of the institution and the courses under investigation. The overwhelming majority of students contacted showed high cooperativeness and provided data. It is to be noted that some students were only interviewed via mobile contact whereby I asked specific questions and recorded their answers. Despite this, the results found may be claimed as significantly reliable. The community bias usually faced when doing snowball sampling seems insignificant for this study as the population of students being sampled is quite small as well as deeply interlocked. Investigating a community with high religiosity, with what that entails in regards to the powerful social fabric and interconnectedness of its members, snowball sampling was a very efficient method. Moreover, its high efficiency and low cost allowed me to access the social web of students in a relatively short period of time.

On another note, Howard Becker (1967) advances the claim that researchers often assume a hierarchy of credibility; they tend to believe that those higher-up provide a better telling of reality. Much care was taken to avoid such an assumption, giving students, professors and deans equal credibility. This was especially prominent when

accounts conflicted and the faculty claimed things students denied. In such instances, both accounts were provided and, as the faculty is deemed as having interest in marketing itself and telling me what they believed I wanted to hear, the accounts of students were considered as more likely representations of reality. To increase representativeness, I attempted to have student vouchers, instead of vouchers from the administration, whenever possible. This was valuable as it meant students interviewed were not picked by the establishment to offer a specific reflection of happenings.

During the interviews, an interview guide, provided in Annex 1, was used. The guide was meant as a reminder, not as a rigid set of questions to be asked in a defined order. What may be found in the Annex does not strictly corresponds to the information covered during the interviews as the interviews were left to flow, revealing all that they could. This was especially important as allowing the people interviewed to talk and express their views, without significant intervention, revealed much about their perception of the Hawza, western sciences and current realities. Further, there was no need for an exhaustive guide as I conducted all the interviews myself. Also, it is to be noted that I attempted, throughout interviews, to give limited information about the aims and approach of the study while providing the overarching themes and topics under study. This should increase the validity of the results by minimizing response bias. Lastly, I must state that, as the first few attempts at using a recording machine were met with dismay, I decided not to record the interviews. Rather, I took my laptop with me and wrote down the interview as the interviewee spoke. This must be kept in mind when looking at quotes or reporting on ideas.

Below is a table which summarizes the fieldwork done covering both Hawzas and Islamic Universities.

| | Interviews | | | Participant observation | Content analysis | | Analysis of Master and PhD thesis |
|----------------------------------|------------------|----------|----------|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| | Adm inistr ation | Facul ty | Students | | Textbooks /Handouts | Student notes | |
| 1. Al-Marraef University | 1 | 3 | 10 | Yes | Three | None | None |
| 2. Islamic University of Lebanon | 2 | 5 | 10 | Yes | Four | None | Eight master theses. |
| 3. Hawza Al-Rasoul | 3 | 5 | 20 | Yes | Six | Two | No |
| 4. Hawza Al-Maahad Al-Sharii | 3 | 3 | 7 | None | Four | None | No |
| 5. Imam Ali Hawza | 1 | 1 | 8 | None | None | None | No |
| 6. Hawza Al-Baker | 1 | 0 | 11 | None | None | None | No |
| 7. Hawza Baqiyatollah | 1 | 1 | 13 | None | None | None | No |
| 8. Hawza Al-Montazar | 1 | 0 | 7 | None | None | None | None |

Table 1: Summary of fieldwork.

Taking this triangular approach allowed me to look at the happenings holistically; not reducing the people or the processes to variables. This allowed significant induction about the realities within these educational establishments. Nevertheless, I do not claim objectivity nor pure induction, but merely the simple reflection of perceived social

realities. Content analysis is a non-obtrusive research method, with zero influence on people or institutions. Interviews and participant observation are also minimum-harm methods which, to the best of my knowledge, did not cause significant harm or discomfort. The voluntary nature of participation was made clear to participants. Further, anonymity was sought out whenever possible. When there was significant interest in mentioning names, such as the case of interviews with professors or stakeholders, their approval was sought out. Further, these are names of public intellectuals or establishment administrators: they hold publicized positions. Hence, mentioning their names poses no ethical concerns.

Clifford Geertz, the renowned anthropologist of Islam, claimed that the validity of qualitative research can be measured by assessing whether the tale it tells would make sense to those of whom it tells. (Sallaz, 2011) Using Interviews, content analysis and participant observation, I claim that this tale would make good sense to most of those of whom it speaks, once the language barrier is overcome. The triangulation of methods used allowed me to look at phenomena from multiple perspectives, increasing reliability and internal validity. There is no claim of generalizability of results to the training of Islamic scholars in other countries. To the contrary, it was clear, throughout the research, that such curricula were Lebanon-specific. In Iran, Iraq and Pakistan, for example, the situation is believed to be quite discrepant. The Hawza in Lebanon is a specific phenomenon, highly influenced by the country's demographic, political and ideological variety. An understanding of it certainly does not offer a complete understanding of other Hawzas in other regions of the Muslim world, although it does offer many insights.

Literature review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary of the main, and the most relevant, literature to this study. The structure of the chapter is thematic: it is divided into sections, based on topics, each relating to the investigation from a different angle. The literature review was compiled mainly through the usage of the AUB libraries, both print and electronic databases. The investigation covered work in three languages: Arabic, French and English. The overwhelming majority of literature found, covered, reviewed and used was in English. In Arabic, I looked at three databases: Al-Manhal, E-Maarefa and Shamaa. Additionally, French resources through the “*Institut Francais du Proche Orient*” were made use of. With all databases, the terms searched for were along the lines of “Islamic education, Islamic religious studies, *Hawzas*, social science and religion, Religious curricula and Islamic scholars.” Finally, the review was injected with references suggested by Professors from AUB as well as Professors who were interviewed during the study.

Religious education

In the West

Jackson W. Carroll, Barbara G. Wheeler, Daniel O. Aleshire and Penny Long Marler (1997) joined efforts and presented an ethnographic investigation of two theological seminaries in the United States. Looking at seminaries as vocational schools, they present vital points of analysis for the way by which training and preparation for the tasks ahead takes place. Similarly, Daniel O. Aleshire has written extensively on theological schools,

albeit his writings are rarely based on grounded sociological research. Importantly, Aleshire (2012) discusses seminaries in the post-modern world, focusing on challenges. The author lists a number of important points to be taken into consideration in response to the changing times. The first of these is the critical attention to changed religious realities that must be taken into consideration within curricula. The second is multi-faith understanding, understood by Aleshire as being the ability to deal with other religions growing around the world, as well as with the growing number of people with no religious preference. In Lebanon, especially in light of the country's multi-ethnic and multi-cultural reality, similar threats sturdily exist.

Elsewhere, Roger Finke and Kevin D. Dougherty (2002) base on fieldwork as well as text analysis to tackle the issue of seminary training and its output. Launching with a history of Christian seminaries from the colonial days onward, the authors begin by discussing how seminaries credentialize clergy; it is by controlling entry that seminaries advance and guard religion and religious education. The main argument of the text is that seminary education is a form of education that "cultivates capital" and allows an accretion of "knowledge, skills, experiences and relationships." The authors speak of two forms of capital acquired by seminary students: social capital and religious capital. Social capital is defined as being the resources acquired by actors through their "interpersonal attachments." Religious capital, on the other hand, is defined as being "the degree of mastery of and attachment to a particular religious culture." The authors then delve into a description and analysis of how each of these two forms of capital is developed within seminaries. They test their hypothesis using surveys to claim that seminary education effects its student far beyond a limited theological acquisition of knowledge, to conclude

in the affirmative. The value of this work becomes especially prominent once one realizes the efforts of the Qom Hawza to control entry into all Hawzas of the world, such as by having a secondary Baccalaureate, or its equivalent, as an admission requirement.

In the Islamic world

The birthplace of Islamic education was mosques, where subject-specific study circles appeared with Islam's appearance, growing ever since. Throughout the ninth and tenth centuries, a boom was noted and the mosque underwent alterations to become an educational institution. (Haskins, 1965) This boom was followed, throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries, by deep reforms and organization. In 1067, The Nizamiyah School in Baghdad was established. It presented what is claimed as being the model of the Islamic equivalent to both the western school and the western university. (Dodge, 1962) This model quickly spread throughout the Islamic world to investigate various fields of knowledge: from experimental sciences and philosophy to theology and linguistics.(Tutkun, 1998)

Mark Halstead (2004) uses historical documents to state that Islamic scholarship led the world for hundreds of years in virtually every known academic discipline, and universities in the Islamic world pre-dated western universities by several centuries. The reasons for this are numerous with some scholars, such as Sophie-Gilliat Ray (2010), claiming that it is the Quranic approach and the actions of the early Muslims that set Islam as a worldview that greatly values all types of knowledge and inquiry; from legal issues to natural phenomena. Gilliat-Ray also claims that a crucial feature of education In Islam is the fact it is all encompassing. Using experiment and observation early on, it provided a new approach to knowledge. Further, according to her, Islam requires that

teachers not only transmit knowledge and information but also act as guides and exemplars in all aspects of personal conduct. While of great value, such claims do not go unchallenged as they often provide simplistic views lacking clear definitions.

Ahmad Shebli (1993) explains that, in the years of the Ottoman empire, there were two stages to an Islamic education: the first is the general stage, meant to mold the student as a true Muslim with a strong understanding of his religion and his responsibilities towards both religion and society. The second is the specialized stage during which the student is expected to choose a certain sub-field, perhaps subject, and become a specialized expert. Interestingly, Shebli states that Islamic education once had a very large spectrum of subjects being taught, all considered as being essential. At a certain point in history, a point the author leaves unclear, a large number of subject-matters began disappearing from Islamic education while certain fields, such as those of *Hadith*, gained larger prominence. Shebli mentions, amongst others, the examples of comparative religions, civilizations and subjects that could be classified as experimental sciences.

Historian George Makdisi (1981) outlines the evolution, as well as provides vivid descriptions, of educational institutions within Islam while relating them to the “westernized” university of our modern day. Looking at Islamic colleges in the Eleventh century, George Makdisi states that the curriculum of these schools involved the following subjects: Quranic sciences, *Hadith*, *Usul al-din* and *Usul al-fikh* in addition to dialectic. Makdisi provides detailed descriptions of education at such institutions stating that, for example, the schools consisted of a ring whereby students sat on the floor in a circle, the closer to the teacher the higher their scientific rank and their progress. Based on a charitable trust, Islamic education, Makdisi explains, the purpose of this self-

governing Islamic education. He states that, as Islam is a monotheistic religion claiming the existence of only one legislator, education seeks to produce experts that can interpret and transmit God's law. Makdisi writes that end goal of an Islamic education "is to educate in God's law, encompassing all facets of life, civil as well as religious."

(Makdisi, 1981) All other fields of study were henceforth placed at the service of legal studies.

Makdisi delves into the developmental stages of any student at the madrassa, from his first day to the time he becomes a *fakih-muddaris*, i.e. a scholar-Professor. The author outlines the similarities, and the differences, the institution carries in view of modern education. Importantly, he speaks of how a student becomes entitled to teach and issue fatwas: an oral defense of a thesis he brings forth. Such a system largely persists today, in both religion schools as well as academic universities. The Masjid, a college very early on in Islam, Makdisi states, was a hub of education and learning.

As to fields other than Law, the author asserts that they managed to persist, despite the fact they were visibly disclaimed and set outside the realm of orthodoxy. In regards to subjects such as philosophy, Makdisi claims that they were in a situation not too different from that of the sciences; only persisting through *suhba*: the master-disciple relationship. It was *suhba*-prolonged companionship-which compensated for the lack of institutionalization of these sciences, with the exception of Medicine. Such claims by Makdisi do not go uncontested as the field of philosophy was institutionalized, at least in Shia seminaries, from their very early days.

Sheikh Mohamad Al-Taher Ibn-Ashour historically grounds and explains the roots of the various Islamic fields of study and then goes on to explain the structure of Islamic

educational institutions. Ibn-Ashour (2010) states that there are different stages that a student must successfully pass to become a scholar. According to him, some form of examination or another has always existed. Speaking of students, he says that the students possess a large spectrum of freedoms, allowing them to choose their teachers at will. He then states that teachers have a wider spectrum of freedoms, allowing them to choose the content of their courses at will. With all the changes that have taken place, akin to a bureaucratization, such is unlikely to be the case today. Ibn-Ashour also speaks of a cornerstone of Islamic education, saying that one cannot be a scholar if one has not memorized a great deal of knowledge and is capable of reproducing it at will. The author also discusses how scholars go about issuing fatwas, explaining that *Istinbat* (inference) is a complicated process requiring much information, analysis and reflection.

Doing sociological fieldwork, Jonathan Porter Berkey (1992) clarifies that the student-teacher relationship within Islamic educational institutions was one of great intimacy as well as authority. He states that in an Islamic education, it is the personal which matters much more than the institutional when a student seeks out educational choices. Such a statement, as it applies to Medieval Cairo can confidently be said to apply today in the large Madrassas of Egypt, as well as the Hawzas of Iran and Iraq. Berkey also makes valuable statements regarding the relationship between religious education and the military elite, albeit these no longer apply.

Today, Islamic education has underwent a number of significant changes. The process of modernization, with all its controversies, is an ongoing one. With time, it has gained growing attention. Hazem Rashed writes on Islamic religious education in the twenty-first century. Rashed (2015) declares that the task is that of modernizing both teaching

and learning of the Islamic religious education without westernizing it. Looking at Islamic education today, Rashed calls for a pedagogy that allows students to reflect on that which they study and read, to go beyond memorization and to relate the contents of *Hadith* to other Islamic sciences, as well as to present life. While Rashed's investigation does not cover the Shia instruction, he makes a noteworthy claim about reform, concluding that it should focus on five challenges: (1) understanding Islam (2) thinking skills (3) Islamic identity (4) the relationship with modernity and (5) curriculum support.

Helen N. Boyle (2006) has written an engaging investigation of the teaching methods deployed in modern higher religious education. Based on fieldwork in Nigeria, Yemen and Morocco, Boyle explores the role of memorization and its relationship to understanding, as means of achieving and embodying the Islamic Holy text. Her investigation sheds light on the teaching methods used and describes how, opposite to the predominant view in modern academia, "rote memorization" is being successfully implemented. Nevertheless, Boyle does not offer an in-depth discussion of the relationship of this memorization to critical thinking amongst graduates.

Elsewhere, Khalid Sindawi (2007) investigates the modern Shiite institution of religious higher education. Sindawi presents a vivid and detailed, description of both educational and social lives in such establishments and attempts to draw out the daily life of Hawza students. Sindawi states that "their studies are of a purely religious nature, and in the course of study they develop a warm relationship with their teachers, which sometimes extends beyond the classroom and may even result in marriage into the teacher's family." (Sindawi, 2007, p.21) The author describes how students receive a stipend from the Marji' and mentions giving sermons, teaching, running religion schools and doing

missionary work as a non-exhaustive list of skills students acquire. The author delves into the analysis of political influences and happenings on the Hawza and speaks of the role Hawzas play in exporting Shia scholars to western countries.

Establishments

The Madrassa

In recent years, especially after 9/11, the Sunni religious school has received considerable attention, although more often political than academic. One academic fieldwork study of these institutions was conducted by Adeline Delavande and Basit Zafar (2015).

Delavande and Zafar conduct a study on Madrassa students in Pakistan to investigate trust as a decision-making factor. Employing an indirect method of investigation they study the interaction between Madrassa students with university students. They include both liberal universities as well as Islamic Universities. Taking into consideration factors such as religiosity and socio-economic status and background, they conclude that Madrassa students possess the uppermost altitudes of other-regarding conduct and expect such a level of trust to be reciprocated.

Tahir Butt (2012) conducts two focus group studies with 16 Madrassa teachers to answer key questions revolving around the controversial institution. Butt makes a number of interesting conclusions. First, corroborating the findings of Khalid Saleem (2008) and Masooda Bano (2007), he finds that madrassas do not equip their students with skills to meet the needs of a given job market. Madrassa graduates are meant to dedicate their lives for religion, work is not a concern. Such is the expectation of both the institution and society. Also, Madrassas, an independent and sovereign sort of safety valve for

society, have a strong relationship of trust with their surrounding environment. It both exists through philanthropy and functions to serve its society; it involves both the poor and the rich of its community.

Charlene Tan (2011) takes two Islamic schools, one in Singapore and one in Britain, as illustrative case studies: from history to curriculum and pedagogy. She attempts to understand the role of “modern knowledge” within such establishments. She begins by discussing the term “modern knowledge” and explains that a large portion of “modern knowledge” fields are not foreign to Islamic education. Nevertheless, there exists a number of fields which are completely extraneous for institutions like madrassas.

Madrassas, as Tan explains, are like Muslims: they are divided in regard to their views on the incorporation of “modern knowledge” in their curricula. Tan examines her two case studies and tries to understand the motives behind their positions, both generally positive, vis-à-vis modern subject areas.

The Hawza

The Shiite world has two main seminaries: the one in Najaf, Iraq and the one in Qom, Iran. A large number of auxiliary seminaries, some quickly growing, exist in countries like Lebanon, Bahrain, and Kuwait as well as in a large number of western countries like Britain and the United States. Roy P. Mottahedeh (2016) historically traces the history of the Shia religious establishment back to its roots. He states that before the nineteenth century, very little is known. The author then begins a detailed list of subjects and levels of study given at the Hawza in Najaf, stating that every student begins with “*muquadimat*”. During this phase Arabic, logic, and theology are covered. After this stage students move on to *Sutuh* where they learn a practical manual of law issued by a

Shia *Marji'* in addition to a number of books of *Fikh*. Then, the students begin taking *Usul Al-Fikh*, which are the grounds on which *Fikh* is based. Arithmetic as well as the science of transmission of *hadith* are also well covered by this point, according to Mottahedeh. Philosophy is also covered, often through the works of Mulla Sadra. Lastly, students enter a stage of *baht Al-Kharij* where a specific topic is taken and all views, arguments and counter-arguments in relation to the topic are discussed by the teacher and the students. The discussions are usually heated and the students are in the custom of trying to contradict the professor. This is to such an extent that the professor would often need to call for quiet to restore order, all according to Mottahedeh. Also, the text notes a crucial custom in Shia Hawzas called *mubahatha (study circle)*, in which students pair up after classes to discuss, expand using sources not covered by the teacher, transliterate and review what had been studied.

On another note, it should be made clear that *Hawzas* have a different objective than *Ma'ahed* (Institutes). While the *Ma'ahed* seeks to spread knowledge amongst people, the *Hawza* seeks to form *Mujtahids*, as the Shia believe in emulation. In this sense *Hawzas* become the forming ground of *Mujtahids*, from which a *Marji'* (Emulated Ayatollah), is chosen. This is done based on a number of set criteria, such as depth of knowledge, mastery of certain subjects as well as piety. Although meticulous, lengthy and tedious, this election of the *Marji'* is never done through “a specific and strict selection method.” (Gielsing, 1997, p. 1)

Muhammad Al-Gharawi (1994) focuses on the Hawza of Najaf, through a historical lens. The scholar describes the educational system and compares it to that of the west. Similarly, The *Hawza* of Qom has received much attention and is being labeled by a

number of scholars, such as Wyrmutto Rasiah, as a “city of knowledge” with comparisons to places such as Oxford and Berkley where “the institutions dominate the town culturally and economically, lending prestige, providing employment and raising rents.” (Rasiah, 2007, p.1) In fact, it may be said that the literature covering the Qom Hawza, in light of the Islamic revolution in Iran and the changes that have taken place in Qom, is more substantive than the one covering the Najaf Hawza.⁵ This is very important for a cross-national comparison of the results of this work, despite the discrepancies.

Beyond this, especially with the rise of the Iranian regime, scholars have directed their attention to the Hawza as a political entity. Fariba Adelkhah and Keriko Sakuri (2011) investigate the Afghani Hawza, as an arena of geopolitical struggle. Claiming that it is the arena where the struggle between the Muslims and the rest of the world takes place, the so-called clash of civilizations, as well as the arena where the struggle between “the most religious” with “who define themselves as secular,” the authors draw out a new approach in which to understand Islamic institutions of learning. (Adelkhah & Sakurai, 2011, p.1) They advance a Shiite religious education in Afghanistan, one which is central in the formation of a Shiite identity and political role within the Afghani state as within the Afghani war, dependent on Iranian backing. The authors claim that this backing, covering the fields of the organizational, the theological, the financial as well as the symbolic, does not lead to the disappearance of the Afghani identity. Rather, they argue that the Afghani leaders are working towards the formation of an Afghani Shiism, with Kabul as a capital city, which interacts and engages with the other Shiites of the world.

⁵ For an overview of the Iranian Hawza, refer to Adel, Elmi, & Taromi-Rad, 2012.

The scholars

A few studies have been done to investigate religious scholars within their social setting. Kamel Ghazzi (2002) performs such a fieldwork investigation whereby he claims that Islam is an organized religion without a rigid hierarchical religious apparatus. Viewed in that light, Ghazzi examines religious scholars in terms of a sociological look at resilience and decay. The author takes the Al-Zeitouna Tunisian Ulema Association and the Iranian Ulema association and attempts to understand the reasons that led to the Iranian Ulema association achieving its goals while the Al-Zeitouna association ended up being dismantled. Ghazzi argues that three factors offer Ulema institutions power. The first is group consensus, understood as being ideological harmony that provides protection against both internal and external hostilities. The second is institutional autonomy and the third is personal charisma. The researcher concludes by stressing that Ulema groups must be understood in terms of their history, social milieu and individual character.

With a psychological approach, Üzeyir Ok (2009) investigates the inner well-being of a sample of 178 men of religion in Turkey using survey packs. Ok begins by outlining the practice and life of a Muslim man of religion, such as a mosque Imam, and claims that the role of such men is perhaps the most linked, amongst modern professions, to the identity of the followers. The role of mosque Imams, for example, is extremely demanding and exhausting, especially with what they face of social and psychological trouble and the expectations of them. Ok investigates the various parameters that feed into poor psychological well-being. Noteworthy, he states that well-being prevails among the older and the more educated members of the religious order.

Doing something both theoretical and grounded, Nabil Mouline (2014) studies the system inspired by Sheikh Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab and the religious movement he founded. Mouline claims that the representation of the divine, the systematization of belief, and the regulation of social behavior to achieve salvation all require an autonomous and skillful priesthood, perpetually engaged with the cult and the concrete problems being faced. Thus, scholars must always be at the forefront, at the service. Mouline, although providing interesting views on the role of scholars, often projects a laden Christian heritage upon Islam. Islam, as explained by Samuel Zwemer (1944), has no priesthood, no clergy. Instead, it has men of religion, a category which has arisen out of need. Yet, the functions of these men are ones any other believer can carry out. Religious scholars and experts hold no special sacredness to them, they hold no divine right.

For Shia Islam, the apex of scholarly achievement means reaching the state of *Marji'ya*; becoming a source of emulation for believers. It is only then, after a very rigorous path that one must follow, that a scholar gains the right to issue rulings. This path, as described by Linda Walbridge (2001) is a very long one that takes decades to fulfill. Talib Aziz, (2001) after explaining the institution of *Marji'ya* itself, delves into the discussion of the modern Hawza and its happenings. Throughout, the author presents a detailed description of the various educational phases through which a student must pass to reach *ijtihad*. The first is called *Mokaddimat*, followed by *Sutuh* (junior and then senior). After these, the research phase begins, a phase with no time-limit. This educational system is one in which students freely attend lectures, where examinations and homework are non-existent and where course duration is unlimited. Therefore, it is a

system where accountability lacked. Aziz takes lead figures, such as that of Sayyed Muhamad Baqir As-Sadr, and explains their attempts at renewal within the ancient establishment. As-Sadr's calls were precisely to treat these lacks: put in place specific requirements and a system of accountability to the Marji'. The impact of As-Sadr was not addressed, but it might be said that he had minimal impact on the Hawza of Najaf where he taught, studied, lived and died. Rather, his impact appeared far away, in the city of Qom.

The Marji' is responsible for issuing fatwas and rulings: the codebook by which observant Shia Muslims live their lives. Morgan Clarke (2007) attempts to look at the relationship between one field of modern academia, medicine, and its influence and the fatwas of the current Iranian Supreme Leader, Sayyed Ali Khamenei. Clarke's paper begins by explaining the Shiite religious establishment of *Marji'ya*. Then, a discussion of Sayyed Khamenei's *Marji'ya* leads the way into a discussion of his fatwas, mainly as to a variety of medical issues. Clarke describes his fatwas as 'liberal' and compares them with those of other renowned scholars, both Sunni and Shia. Further, the author points out a conference held in Tehran where medical doctors, religious scholars and lawyers came together to debate issues related to medical ethics: a coming together of medicine and law, academic disciplines, and religious *Ijtihad*. Fatwas relating to issues of a social nature were not found.

In Lebanon

Tamara Chalabi (2006) draws out the formation of the Shia population within modern Lebanon. According to Chalabi, Jabal Amel is a region difficult to locate geographically. Rather, it is usually used in reference to a specific socio-religious history. Chalabi draws

out a historical investigation of the specific population inhabiting that region throughout the past years in an attempt to explain their relationship with Lebanon as a nation state, throughout the different stages the latter had went through. According to Albert Hourani (1986), little is known about the spread of the Shia population in this region of the world until the tenth century. By then, Hourani estimates that the majority of the Syrian population might have been Shia. This is estimated to have remained so until Salah El-Dine's conquest of the area. By the fourteenth century, the Shia were no longer a majority. Indeed, by then, Imami Shiites were confined to two geographical regions: Jabal Amel and the Beka Valley.

Mohamad Jabel Al-Safa divides the history of Jabal Amel into three sections. The first is the tribal movement from Yemen to Mount Lebanon. The second is the fall of the Mamluk Empire and the entry of greater Syria under Ottoman rule. The third is the rule of greater Syria until the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Then, the author delves into the political history of the region, retelling the tale of governors and governed, royalties, nobles and the lay. Indeed, the author retells the history of the various wars "the Shia undertook defending their independence." (ال صفا, n.d., p.79) In this regard, the author draws out an image of a small population, historically oppressed, historically revolutionary and resistant. In terms of religious history, the author claims that Shiism began in this region when it received Aba Zar Al-Ghaffari, one of the prophet's exiled companions; in Islam's early days. In terms of education and establishments, the author claims that these had all been there but, due to political and security reasons, there were times when they were rarely spoken of. Al-Safa speaks of the various schools, from the Jizzine first school and onward. Further, he delves into a description of the various

institutes, listing around 20 different villages where seminaries of religious education existed.

For a number of these colleges, Al-Safa describes subjects taught, listing calculus, natural sciences, geography and philosophy, in addition to Arabic language, *Fikh*, Quran, logic and a number of other fields of Islamic specialty. Accompanied by the foundation of multiple libraries, he states that a multitude of great scholars emerged over the years from this small geographical province. Further, the author speaks of the travelers of the first-generation scholars and their participation in learning at grand Sunni schools, such as those of Egypt, where they obtained certificates that would allow them to teach according to all five admitted Islamic schools of jurisprudence. Ending his section on knowledge, the author lists a large number of scholars, notable and renowned until this day, who have graduated from Jabal Amel. The historian ends his investigation speaking of the literary life in Jabal Amel, with much emphasis on poetry writing.

Religious education in particular, and education in general, seem to have accompanied this Shia population all along. A high tradition managed to persist despite all odds in small market towns and villages. Albert Hourani (1986) attempts to outline the circumstances that contributed to the persistence of such an educational tradition in that specific region. The first, he suggests, is the protection and refuge the geography presents. The second is the lack of a clear division between the Sunni and Shia education at that time and the influence some Shia scholars had on Sunni thought. Yet, persecution existed and the educational tradition in the region was at great risk as it lacked the support of the rulers as well as the economic support of the cities.

Hourani claims the Persian Shah's adoption of Twelver Shiism as official state religion as being the nub which allowed Jabal Amel to become the education center it did. The empire needed a large number of scholars: mosques, schools, courts and a number of new establishments could only be run by specialized men of religion. The lack of sufficient specialists, and the political situation of the newly-forming empire, pushed the Persian rulers to export scholars from the Arab regions: Iraq, Bahrayn and Jabal Amel. A large number of scholars from Jabal Amel attained high-standing positions in the new empire, mainly as Mosque Imams, teachers and as "Shaykh al-Islam" in major cities. The eminence of these scholars and their renown, throughout the Islamic and Shiite worlds, despite the presence of a much greater Shia population in Iraq and significant populations in Kuwait and Pakistan, is not addressed.

The migration of the Shia of Jabal Amel and their interaction with the Safavid Empire is an issue on which major debates have risen. These will not be delved deeply into as they are not central for this paper. Rula Jurdi Abisaab (1994), does probe the issue and explains the mechanisms of marginalization, taking into consideration politics, kin relations as well as tutorship that led the scholars of Jabal Amel to Iran. Therefore, it is worthy to note that there was never an exodus of Shiites from Jabal Amel to Iran. Rather, what happened was a class-based movement of specialized preachers, jurists and scholars who found themselves marginalized under the various empires of their time (mainly the Mamluk and the Ottoman). The value to be taken out of this historical section, in terms of answering the research question of this thesis, is that Lebanon is a country with an ancient and rooted history in terms of religious education. Indeed, the Shiites of Lebanon often boast the fact that they "exported" Shiism to its current capital, Iran.

With the foundation of modern Lebanon, in 1943, the Shia emerged as a constituting element of Lebanese society; a population which was disadvantaged in many regards, foreign to the newly-founded state of greater Lebanon. Fouad Ajami (2012) draws out the Lebanese scenery in the second half of the twentieth century. He explains that the Shia of Lebanon were a community where *Mujtahids* had fallen out of fashion and succumbed to “Beys;” the nobles with the money, the guns and the land. The issue was an issue of power where the religious establishment had set limits it had to obey. Moreover, Ajami describes a society where “men with peasant cunning mocked the religious professionals” as the cleric was seen as “a parasite, that he lived off the toil and the land of other men.” (Ajami, 2012, p. 74) With a tradition which no longer related to the life of their flock, according to Ajami, scholars in the 1960s were in a very disadvantaged position as it was “the making of a cleric that doomed the custodians of the religious institution.” (Ajami, 2012, p. 75)

Due to a number of circumstances, including economic, political and intellectual ones, Sayyed Mousa came to Lebanon at a much advantaged point in time. In 1959, Sayyed Musa returned to Lebanon from Iran, founded the “Higher Shiite Islamic Council” and began a movement that sought to awaken and grant rights to this segment of Lebanese society. He was perceived as “a reformer, an enlightened man of religion” who “entered the political arena, elbowed his way into it” and shoveled power to the hands of religious professionals: a sort of embodiment of history, as dictated by the Shia doctrine. Giving sermons at churches and traveling to Europe, the charismatic man stirred much debate. Nevertheless, Ajami explains, this was “a cleric, a Sayyid and the son of a cleric” whose discourse was “suffused with religious symbols and metaphors.” His sermons, the author

explains, claimed that the sexual, the psychological, the social and all other facets of life were connected to the religious. Ajami quotes him as saying “Our (Islamic education) connects heaven and earth, connects man, as an individual, as a social being, to his creator.” Working with existing material, the new leader managed to tap into Shia sources of power and enforce a new reality in which men of religion reclaim centrality in all social and political realms. The political dynamics, especially those relating to the everyday life of the Lebanese people, were weakly covered, despite the huge insights they could offer.

With the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1989, bringing forth the religious establishment to official power and launching a revolutionary awakening, especially amongst the Shia, the situation in Lebanon further shifted in favor of the religious establishment and religious scholars. Indeed, with the Iranian government’s revolutionary guard coming to Lebanon and founding what later came to be known as Hezbollah, the circumstances in the country greatly changed. (2004, عبد الرحمن, Bakinam Al-Sharkawi (الشرقاوي), n.d.) explains that Iran went through much turbulence in the twentieth century. In regards to religious scholars, they were often involved. The Pahlavi rule, attempting to limit the role of scholars, had taken a large number of steps towards restricting the influence of the religious establishment: from restrictions on speech to seizing endowments. With the Islamic revolution, the religious establishment reclaimed power in Iran, and beyond. In Lebanon, the Shia celebrated the revolution and all legitimacy was granted to the religious leaders. The significant portion of religious scholars who were prone the Pahlavi rule were found often missing in this literature, despite the fact their political role, or the lack of it, cannot be dismissed.

Khaled Al-Abadi (2008) explains the Iranian influence on both Lebanon and Syria, conducting a political study investigating power relations in the region. He speaks of Hezbollah and how it self-identifies as an entity which is under the “religious *Marji'ya*” present in Iran, as stated in the words of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah. Al-Abadi does not cover the section of Hezbollah’s discourse which seeks to solidify its “Lebanese” character, simplifying and reducing a complex identity. Further, the author explains the current Shia reality in Lebanon in light of the Islamic revolution in Iran and Hezbollah’s presence. The author writes: “Hezbollah is connected to Iran by Fundamentals and determinants, intellectual and ideological, as each party members of the Lebanese Shiites considers the *Wali al-Fakih* in Iran as both a religious and a political reference.”

Lara Deeb’s *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shiite Lebanon* (2006) presents her ethnographic study of Beirut’s Southern Suburb, in our modern day. She claims that the suburb has gradually underwent a process of bureaucratization and institutionalization, which she compares to Weberian rationalization. She advances a theory of “authentication” in which she claims that belief and knowledge, within the Shia community of Al-Dahieh, are constantly being questioned in search for the correct ones; with all the implications that holds for the religious establishment. Deeb explains how Al-Dahieh is a community defined by symbols: from images of religious leaders to sacred sounds, such as the call for prayers. She describes the setting as one of public piety, where religion is the most salient element of daily life. Ethnographically, she recounts a number of occurrences that reveal the powerful relationship between religious scholars and the wider community. This is extremely important in revealing the value of this study: the investigation is one regarding the most salient, pervasive and influential social

agents. Such a reality cannot be understood without an understanding of the chief political party for the Shia in the nation: Hezbollah.

Dominique Avon, Anaïs-Trissa Khatchadourian and Jane Marie Todd (2012) present the history and the foundation of the party through a timeline divided into three temporal phases: 1982-1991, 1992-2000 and 2000-2009. The authors define Hezbollah as a “politico-religious entity” with a “dual ideological component: Shiism and Third Worldism- arising from the “Khomeinist revolution and the extreme violence of the Lebanon war.” (Avon et al., 2012, p. 2) Throughout their description, although the book is mainly concerned with the political, the elements of the religious, from the fact that Hezbollah’s leaders have always been religious scholars to the fact that its self-definition is one of a spiritual echo, the religious is pervasive. For example, the authors speak of how Lebanese Shiite clerics received “attractive financial offers to attend seminaries in Qom” in line with Hezbollah’s attempts at rendering the Islamic Republic of Iran reference. (Avon et al., 2012, p.24) Indeed, Shiite Islamic activism and political engagement had begun very early on, as Shia Islam is originally “a politico-religious movement.” The clergy has not been foreign to this, from Qom and Najaf and to Lebanon where “Shiite clergymen [were inspired] to found the Hizbullah in the Bekaa Valley.” (Steingerb & Hartung, 2010, p. 691)

Much of the work focusing on Shiite Lebanon is, one way or another, work on Hezbollah. This becomes slightly more reasonable once one understands that, in view of Shiite doctrine, the clergy “have an authority that carries directly into the political sphere.”(Ende, 2010, p. 64) Yet, it seems that the Lebanese Shiite scenery is reduced to Hezbollah, neglecting the still-present Amal Party, as well as the dwindling communists

and nationalists. Augustus Richard Norton (2014) explains how, early on in the days of the resistance, Hezbollah secretary general Sayyed Abbas El-Moussawi established a Hawza in Baalbeck where current Hezbollah secretary general received part of his seminary training. Norton explains the relationship between Lebanese scholars-in-training and the seminaries of Qom, Iran and Najaf, Iraq. With politics at the center stage, the author delves into the reasons for which Iran is now the chief destination for those seeking religious education. He explains how the Iranian government has taken steps to facilitate the study of foreign students in its seminaries, from establishing institutions to care for these students to funding their stay in the country. Further, Norton focuses on two main factors which have greatly contributed: the first is the situation of Iraq (wars, instability and economy); the second is the attractiveness of Qom, despite the fact it is non-Arab in terms of history, culture and language. Nonetheless, the author fails to fully explain how strong ties of culture, geography, language and an Arab identity were overthrown in such a short period of time to render Iran the supreme reference and model.

Of all the literature, there was none which investigated the curricula and the scenery of Hawzas in modern Lebanon in an attempt to understand the dynamics and the changes taking place. Further, no work investigating the reality of “Islamic Universities” in the country was found. This is where this research is meant to fill a gap found in the literature covering the training of Islamic scholars in the modern Middle East.

The Hawza

In “Keepers of the tradition: religious professionals and their careers,” Paula Nesbitt (2007) explains how the “criteria, process and outcomes of selecting, training and grooming future leaders” is pivotal in the development of religion as both tradition and organization. (Nesbitt, 2007, p. 1) Nesbitt claims that the rise of institutions where religious leaders are trained, basing on the classicworks of Weber, was the means of legitimating religious leaders to separate them from the laity. Different religions have institutionalized different bodies where scholars are trained. Within Islam, the two major sects of Sunni and Shia have each developed distinct establishments for said function.

“Al-hawza al-‘ilmiyya,” translated by scholars such as Khalid Sindawi (2007, p. 4) as “the enclosure of learning,” is the traditional and persisting institution of Shiite religious higher education. According to Sabrina Mervin (2003) the main characteristic of the Hawza is regarding the student-teacher relationship: a relationship of complete liberty. Mervin explains that this system is based on mutual acceptance: the student must choose the teacher and the level of class, and the teacher must accept the student in his study-circle. Thereof, the teacher and the students become united by a bond of privilege. In terms of history, the institution is quite blurred. In different stages of time, the Shiite religious establishment underwent different phases of rise and fall leading to the ascendancy of the twelve Shiite Usuli, to which most Shiites of the world today ascribe,

in multiple regions throughout the Islamic world.⁶ According to Abdl-Hassan Al-Salihi, the Shiite Hawza, which started in mosques and then became an independent establishment, was very limited up until the time of the occultation of the twelfth Imam. Beginning with this occultation, the *Ikhbari* School (which refuses *Ijtihad*) was predominant until, around two to three decades later, it receded in favor of the now dominant Usuli School. (2004, الصالحي)

Traditionally, Hawzas were independent establishments of higher education where study runs for a period of nine to twelve years after which students begin the *Bahth Al-Kharij* phase, reaching *Ijtihad*. *Ijtihad* is defined by Georges Makdisi as being, “literally, the exertion of one's efforts to the utmost limit.” (Makdisi, 1989, p.3) Hawza study was not previously coded in terms of time but rather in terms of textbooks and subjects. In other terms, scholarly level is not measured in number of years of study but rather in terms of textbooks and subjects covered. The time allocated to a given textbook can significantly vary to fit both students and professors. No examinations were held and most did not require any academic qualifications beyond literacy. Generally speaking, the traditional Hawza education can be divided into the following four phases:

- Phase 1: *Muqadimat* running from three to five years in traditional Hawzas. This phase is where a student learns the basic tools and builds the various facets of his religious knowledge.

⁶ This statement is based on the progression and description the Shia sect both historically and today by Heinz Halm in “Shi’ites: a short history.”

- Phase 2: Lower *Sutuh* running from two to three years during which a student delves into their specialty and begins to acquire the tools of *Ijtihad* (extracting a religious ruling from its sources)
- Phase 3: Higher *Sutuh* running from three to four years during which a student continues learning the tools of *Ijtihad* and studies challenging books of *Fikh* such as *Kifaya* by Sheikh Ansari and *Makaseb* by Sheikh Akhond Al-Khurasani.
- Phase 4: *Bahth Al-Kharij* phase, with no time limit. Often, it is viewed as a life-long process which scholars continue throughout.⁷

It is to be noted that, before the 1990s, Hawza education in Lebanon was limited to preliminaries and, at most, the phase of *Muqadimat*. After a few years of study in Lebanon, usually beginning at a very young age, students were sent to the Hawza of Najaf to continue their education. Traditional Hawzas did not offer tracks of specialty; their purpose was to produce *Mujtahids* capable of offering religious rulings to people. No other functions were seen as part of the Hawza's objective and, therefore, no other elements of training were included. With the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the very identity of the Hawza might be said to have begun a process of change. In Qom, the Hawza currently offers over 160 different fields of specialization, including various social and human fields of knowledge.⁸

In Lebanon, Hawzas function under the "Board of matters of the Hawza Ilmiya in Lebanon." This board, established as a cooperation between the various factions of

⁷ This description is based on the Interview with the administration of Al-Rasoul Hawza.

⁸ Annex 6 presents a brief and general introduction to Hawza in Qom based on fieldwork I performed there during the month of March 2016.

Lebanese Shiism, has elaborated a vision of the Hawza and specific guidelines to govern Hawzas, directors and students. According to its guidebook, a Hawza is an establishment that seeks to train and graduate both *Mujtahids* and *Muballighin*. To achieve this, different Hawzas in the country have chosen to take different paths with some Hawzas following a more traditional system than others. Nevertheless, following the footsteps of the Iranian seminary, the nation's major Hawzas may all be termed relatively progressive, with structures comparable to those of Westernized academia.⁹

As part of its work, the Board has issued a guidebook presenting, in brief, each of the various Hawzas in the country. The guidebook lists 22 Hawzas distributed geographically as follows:

- Two Hawzas in the Bekaa region¹⁰
- Twelve Hawzas in the Greater Beirut region
- Eight Hawzas in the Lebanese south

Clearly, this distribution of Hawzas is incompatible with the demographic distribution of Shiites in Lebanon. Analyzing the conditions behind this distribution is beyond the scope of this paper, but historical, economic and political factors may be said to have played significant roles.

For each of the Hawzas, the guidebook presents the following information:

⁹ The strong ties between Lebanon and Iran, especially with a largely significant portion of the Shia population ascribing to Wilayat Al-Fakih, may help in understanding the reasons for which changes within the Iranian Hawza resonate in Lebanon. Economic reasons, on the other hand, seem unlikely as Hawzas in the country run through khums donated by Lebanese.

¹⁰ Sheikh Mohamad Wehbe, professor at Al-Montazar Hawza claimed that there are over ten Hawzas in the Bekaa region. According to Sheikh Amin Termos, founding member of the board of trustees, only two meet the criteria for accreditation and these are the ones mentioned in the guidebook.

- Date of foundation
- Address/contact information
- Founder's full name
- General supervisor
- General Director
- Academic director
- Managerial director
- Website
- Location of dormitories
- Outline of Curriculum
- Conditions of admissions
- Academic calendar (holidays, registration dates, schedule...)

Probing the guidebook, one can clearly note stark differences between the various Hawzas.¹¹ The starkest differences noted were those in the admission requirements listed by each Hawza. As some of these differences are crucial to understanding the dynamic of change and the nature of the institutions being studied, I list a summary of the main discrepancies found:

- Age: The minimum age of admission ranges from 15 to 18 and the maximum ranges from 20 to no limit.

¹¹ The guidebook provides a scope of information which is beyond the interest of this research. Part of this information is provided in Annex 2.

- Political engagement: some Hawzas state “no political affiliation or involvement” as part of their admission requirements whilst other require “righteousness under *Wilayat Al-fakih*.”
- Ethics: good manners and Islamic ethics are required by 16 of the 22 Hawzas as an admission requirement.
- Academic credentials: Thirteen out of the twenty-two Hawzas require that their students be secondary school students or have a secondary degree that would allow them admission into a university while others do not specify any academic credentials as part of their admission requirements.
- Examination: Twelve out of the twenty-two Hawzas have specific examinations (written or oral) without which students may not be admitted.
- Trial period: Four out of the twenty-two Hawzas specify a trial period, ranging from two months to one academic year, before final admission.
- Tafarogh (full-time status): Only one of the 22 Hawzas specified *tafarogh* as a condition of admission. (In contrast to traditional Hawzas where students were required to have no other engagements.)
- Holidays: All the Hawzas observe the major Islamic holidays, such as the Birth of the Prophet. None observes official Lebanese holidays.
- Academic Year: Some Hawzas follow a traditional system where their study is ongoing whilst others have a 9-month long academic year divided into two semesters.

On another note, three of the twenty-two Hawzas have agreements with Islamic Universities by which their students receive academic degrees from the Islamic

University in Lebanon. These are ones which do not admit students with no academic degree allowing them entry into accredited universities. Al-Maaref University, newly established, has also established such agreements. This is not included in the guidebook as it was published before the University's inauguration.

Most Hawzas in Lebanon may be classified as small, with a student body not exceeding 50 students. Three Lebanese Hawzas stand as exceptions to this rule, these are:

- Al-Rasoul Al-Akram/Al-Mustafa International University
- Al-Maahad Al-Sharii
- Baqiyatoullah/Toul

This research will cover these three Hawzas, the largest Hawza in the Bekaa region and one of the smaller Hawzas as not to leave out that element of the setting. The smaller Hawza was chosen on the basis of responsiveness and availability. From observation and the guidebook, it may be said that, generally speaking, the smaller Hawzas exhibit very similar patterns. To be kept in mind is the fact that Hawza charge no tuition fees, to the contrary, they all reimburse their students.

The methodology used for the investigation of these curricula will be based on a mixed methods experimental design to allow optimal confidence when it comes to drawing conclusions, as elaborated in the methodology section of the thesis. For all three Hawzas, three research methods will be used:

1. Content analysis of curricula plan and coursework, if available.
2. Interviews with administration and professors.
3. Interviews with students.

In presenting the information on the curricula plans, tables where the courses of relevance are presented in the body of this chapter. A more detailed description of the curriculum is offered in annex 4.

With these establishments, two main obstacles were encountered. The first obstacle was the bureaucratic organization of the universities which made access tedious. The second obstacle was the discrepancy between what was on paper and what was found on the ground. As elaborated by other research on Lebanese institutions of higher education, some courses could be found on curricula plans despite the fact they have not been offered for many years. Thomas Haase and Tania Haddad (2015, p. 272) made similar conclusions about the “coding of the course title and description” at AUB and explained that it is not be fully representative of course content. Additionally, the unavailability of students and professors was a source of concern. For example, scheduling interviews often required multiple contacts, phone calls and visits.

For each of the Hawzas covered, I will begin by describing the establishment and listing key facts of relevance. Then, I will list the six subjects which receive most weight and then move on to discuss, in detail, the courses of relevance. The value of identifying which courses are the ones receiving most weight is huge as it allows me to make conclusions as to the nature of these establishments, to compare and to identify the main elements of formation. An outline of all the main knowledge fields, as presented by the institutions themselves, is offered in the annexes. The order with which these courses are offered was not taken into consideration.

1. Al-Rasoul Al-Akram Hawza

Al-Rasoul Hawza is the largest Hawza in Lebanon. It is considered as the most prestigious for a number of reasons. Its history, setting and funding play a role. More importantly, its teachers are the grand public religious intellectuals of the religious community. Further, it often boasts fellows from the Qom seminary as visiting professors. It is located in the southern suburb of Beirut and is composed of multiple buildings. Its student body is of around 300 learners. Currently, a large complex is under construction to which the Hawza is expected to move within the few coming years. The Hawza offers tracks for both males and females, with some differences in curricula (which will not be investigated in this thesis.)

The Hawza was established in 1983 by a group of scholars, whose names are unclear today, and has been growing, under the patronage and close links with the Islamic republic in Iran, ever since. In its view of itself, the Hawza identifies the *Marji'ya* of Sayyed Ali Khamenei and the compliance with its views as its overarching supervision. The Hawza is headed by Sheikh Ali-Reda Benyaz, an Iranian scholar (as has been the case since its inception).

The Hawza houses a significant Library, in comparison to other Hawzas and institutions of higher learning in Lebanon, including academic universities. Within this library, there is a section dedicated to the social sciences and social thought. This includes sociology, psychology, political science as well as a number of other fields. Books covering western thought and works by major European and American thinkers were found.

Its program runs over eight years, making it shorter than the traditional system of education. Indeed, the Hawza is considered as having a more compressed program than other Hawzas following the more traditional system of ten to twelve years. Its teaching days are Monday to Friday and it observes a three-month summer vacation. The Hawza does not observe official Lebanese holidays. Its classes begin early on, at 6:50 A.M, ending at around 11:30 A.M (this varies according to year). It has adopted the model of chairs, desks and boards.

In terms of admission requirements, the Hawza does not admit students who have not acquired an academic degree (such as the Lebanese Baccalaureate) entitling university-level entry. Al-Rasoul is known for its cooperation with the International Mustafa University based in Qom. Over the past few years, it has transitioned to become a branch of the International University. Nevertheless, it has not been accepted by the Lebanese Ministry of Higher education as a university. Due to this fact, it continues its agreements of cooperation with the Islamic University of Lebanon.

Al-Rasoul, in an attempt to emulate the academic organization, divides its program into three phases. The first of these is the equivalent of a Bachelor's degree, the second the equivalent of a master's degree and the third the equivalent of a PhD. *Baht-al-kharij* may be seen as a sort of post-doc training.

In the second and third stages, the student's education is limited to a number of Usul and philosophy classes, the Hawza student's real "specialty." No social sciences classes are taken during these phases. It is during the first four years of a student's training that the "general" courses are given. The organization of study at the Hawza is as follows:

- 1- A BA phase which is four to four and a half years long
- 2- An MA phase which is two to three years long.
- 3- A PhD which is three to five years long.

Currently, two MA tracks are available in Lebanon:

- 1- MA in Islamic *Fikh* and bases.
- 2- MA in Quranic explanation and sciences. (Introduced in 2015)

All of the courses offered are mandatory for all students, there are no electives and no choice of classes, in stark contradiction with the traditional *Hawza* model. Nevertheless, there is a choice of professors where more than one section of the same class is offered.

General remarks regarding the curriculum map:

This analysis is an analysis of the current curriculum being offered by the Hawza, it is not an analysis of the theoretical curriculum found in the Hawza guidebook. This distinction is important as there are significant differences between the curriculum in the guidebook and the curriculum on offer. The major differences can be summarized in the following points:

1. Four social science subjects are stated as part of the curriculum but are not offered, and have not been offered for over 8 years in the track of *Fikh* and *Usul*, by the Hawza. These include:
 - Introduction to sociology
 - Introduction to psychology
 - Educational psychology

- Child developmental psychology
2. Classes on computer literacy, modes of preaching and foreign languages are part of the curriculum but are not offered by the Hawza.

The curriculum runs for eight years, after which the student begins the *baith Al-Kharij* stage. The subjects are distributed in terms of courses and credits. Each course is around 4 months long, equivalent to a one-semester course in academic universities. The six subjects receiving most weight and credits are, in decreasing order, listed below:¹²

- 1- *Fikh and Usul*
- 2- Arabic Language¹³
- 3- Quranic studies
- 4- Islamic doctrine
- 5- History
- 6- Philosophy

Critique of western social thought Course

This course has not yet been offered at the Hawza. It is meant to be offered for the first time during the academic year 2017-2018. Interestingly, this course does not figure in the official list of courses the Hawza offers. The course is meant as an introduction to

¹² For the entire list of courses offered refer to Annex 4.

¹³ The books used to teach Arabic grammar are mostly ones written by scholars belonging to the Sunni denomination. During one of the classes attended at the Hawza, the professor, Sheikh Khodor Amer, stated that knowledge is to be sought after “regardless of the personal views of he who holds it.” This came as a reaction to a student inquiring as to why they study books authored by Sunna scholars, leading to a class debate on Islamic unity. The sheikh claimed, in class, that students should not view the Sunnis as “others.”

western theory, society and civilization, alongside a critique of it. It is organized along three main sections:

- Section 1: Introduction to Social theory and social science.
- Section 2: The historical phases that led to the appearance of a Western civilization.
- Section 3: A study and a critique of Western social thought.

The course begins with crucial definitions, and a questioning of definitions, such as defining the “West.” Then it draws out a historical evolution, from the Greeks, through the dark ages, Protestantism and the enlightenment and to our current humanism and post-modernity.

The course syllabus, as provided by the administration of the Hawza and affirmed by the professor giving the course, runs as follows:

Concepts and Definitions:

- Defining “the west”
- Westernization
- The concept of social thought and a critique of goals and motives
- Methods and approaches in evaluating and knowing the west

Historical overview:

- The formation of western culture and civilization
- The roots of contemporary social thought in ancient Greece
- Indications from the middle ages and the current age

Roots and characteristics:

- The originality of man
- Secularism
- Basis of knowledge (science and reason as pivot)
- Liberalism
- Multiplicity

Postmodernism:

- Globalization and postmodern globalization
- Stances from the Islamic world vis-à-vis postmodernism
- Interactions between Islamic world and western social thought
- The permeation of western culture into the Islamic world

Overview of stances and reactions:

- Consent
- Refusal
- Selective approval
- Formation of groups and parties

Results:

- Political complications, identity crisis, vandalism, civil society, expansion and partisanship.
- Cultural and social complications, the family system, exaggeration of the centrality of man, fall of social values, robotic view of man, crisis of morality and spirituality.
- Economic implications: supremacy of market and economy, colonialism, imperialism.

In regards to the resources the courses are based upon, resources which the students are expected to make use of and engage with, the syllabus lists the following:

1. The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism by Anthony Arblaster.
2. Masters of Political Thought by Michael Beresford Foster and William Thomas Jones.
3. Orientalism by Edward Said.
4. Islamic culture in Europe and the West by Sigrid Hunke.
5. Westernization by Ahmad Rahenmai.

Arblaster's book does not mention Islam, but rather choreographs the emergence, development and decline of Liberalism, covering its main theorists: from Descartes, Locke and Spinoza to Mill, Keynes and beyond. *Masters of political thought* is not a critical engagement as much as it is a descriptive development of political theory in the West, from Machiavelli to Bentham. *Orientalism* is a distinguished and very well-reasoned book highly in criticism of both the west and its approach to the East. Sigrid Hunke's book is the oldest one, and the one with the most "Islamic" element amongst the books. Although Hunke is not a Muslim, she is known for her very positive views of Islam. One of her books, *The sun of Allah shines on the West*, advocates that it was Arabic and Islamic influence which freed Europe from its Christian legacy. Rahnemai's book is a critical engagement with the Westernization of the globalized world of today. These books have not been from a rigidly "Islamic viewpoint," they do not claim that the Islamic ideology is the ultimate truth and they do not campaign for Islamic superiority.

More importantly, these books do not reduce the west to one entity and reject all that it has to offer. Upon inquiry, the designers of the course claimed that the course does not seek to say that the west is reducible to complete error but rather seeks to adopt that which is accurate and refute that which is not in western theory.

Instructor

The instructor who is going to give this course is an Iranian religious scholar and academic, Dr. Sayyed Mahmoud Al-Moussawi, holder of a PhD of social science from Iran. In terms of coverage, Al-Moussawi said that the course is only one-semester long; it is a start, a very crucial and useful introduction. In regards to the name of the course, Al-Moussawi explained that the Arabic word '*Nakd*' does not mean criticism. For him, *Nakd* can be of two types: constructive and destructive. Both of them are to be covered in this course. In this sense, the course is a critical engagement with western theory, realizing that much of it is truth, as much of it is falsehood. Here, he stressed the value of not reducing the west and understanding its current reality in light of its theorists, its conduct as well as its history.

In terms of objective, he said that the objective of the course is to “know the ideas of the West which have invaded Islamic communities so that we can treat that which, according to our view, is bad and make use of that which is positive.” Explaining the approach of the course, Al-Moussawi said that it aims at “encompassing ideas, not negating them.” The professor then moved on to explain how Islam is a religion of sociality and these western ideas have entered society. Therefore, they must be studied, their history and locality must be understood, and their influence both on the west and on other communities must be addressed and assessed. Once this is understood, the men of

religion can work “to convince our communities and protect them from the dangers, not from everything but only from the dangers, of western thought.”

Giving examples from the course, Al-Moussawi declared that students must understand that Freud is a psychologist with plenty of accurate and important things to say. An objective evaluation of this western thought would help the students, according to the professor, understand why the West has progressed and why the Islamic world has not. This, he stressed, should happen while not forgetting to contextualize, localize and understand, in depth, western ideas. Lastly, Al-Moussawi spoke of the need to change how the religious community views the West, saying that the west should not be demonized as a godless other, but studied, understood and objectively approached as it has plenty to offer.

Students

As this course has not yet been offered, no student feedback is yet available.

Nevertheless, three students from the class which is meant to take this course next year expressed a preference for a more detailed course on the west, to be followed by a critique.

“The Political thought of Imam Khomeini” Course¹⁴

General remarks

This course is one semester long course given to third year students. It is usually given by Sheikh Hussein Zeineddine, in lecture form. Sheikh Hussein Zeineddine is a sheikh

¹⁴ Around three years ago, according to one student, this subject was preceded by a one-semester course on general political science and political theory. For a variety of reasons, mostly unclear, it was cancelled.

trained in Lebanon and in Qom. He has also studied at the Lebanese University and has a master's degree in Philosophy from the Lebanese University.

The course does not have a particular book or coursework given to students. Rather the structure is divided into two halves. The first half of the course is a general introduction to politics and political theory. During this time, the Sheikh lectures and the students take notes. The second half of the course is a discussion around Imam Khomeini's book *Wilayat Al-fakih*. This segment of the course is also divided into two parts: one during which the sheikh explains Imam Khomeini's theory and its religious grounding and one during which the various counter-arguments to the theory are discussed.

Instructor

Sheikh Zeineddine, someone who is clearly very involved in Islamic Philosophy as well as Shia mysticism (Orfan), explained that this course is not a course in Political science but rather one in "Political jurisprudence." The difference between the two, the sheikh pointed out, is the fact that political science, usually, is an objective form of attempting to describe and understand external reality while political jurisprudence is an engaged form that seeks to present what ought to be. In other terms, the sheikh explained, this is a course that seeks to foster a sense of belonging and belief, not a course that seeks to allow students to understand things such as political movements and change.

Further, an essential objective of this and similar courses is to allow students to realize that religion has covered such dimensions of life, that Islam has a theory and that this is their arena of work, he stressed. Reflecting on the state of the social sciences at the

Hawza, the sheikh held that new programs are making efforts to include the social sciences in the training, but this has not yet seen the sought after results yet.

Student notes

Due to the fact that there are only class notes, there were no references available.

Nevertheless, it was clear from student notes that Sheikh Zeineddine was not giving a course on “political theory.” Rather, he was giving a course that presents the major differences between the way Islam views politics and the way academia presents politics.

The course begins by a general introduction into politics, as would be found in any academic class, but then quickly delves into an explanation of why such a view is lacking (according to the course designer). The claim is that politics in Islam is a politics of monotheism (al-Tawheed), and political thought must stem from monotheism for it to be truly Islamic. One of the student’s notes says:

“We, as Shia, must search for monotheism in all of our world-view. There is nothing in this world-view which is not a manifestation of God.”

The course then went to on to discuss the Shia view of Imams and the current condition of “positive preparation for the reappearance of Imam Mahdi.”

Sheikh Zeineddine then went on to explain the key terms of politics, such as liberalism, capitalism, socialism, communism, democracy and the like. He then claimed that these are all theories which have many elements incompatible with Islam. Expressing this the notes state that the Shia Islamic political view is that of *Imamat* and, during the time of the Imam’s absence, *Wilayat Al-Fakih*.

“*Wali Al-Fakih* is someone who becomes *Wali Al-Fakih* by acquiring the characteristics of *Wali Al-Fakih*. The people then discover him and give him legality, not legitimacy.”

The course then moves to a discussion of the Iranian system and governance. It ends with a number of discussion questions left open for the students, some of which are listed below:

- Islam and Globalization: what are the similarities?
- Are there drawbacks to an Islamic governing regime?
- Was there, at any point in time, *Shura* in Islam?
- Why did Imam Hussein not revolt against the Caliph Muawiya (a ruler during his time)?

Students

Students interviewed said that the course was “extremely enlightening and beneficial.” They claimed that it ended by arguing for *Wilayat Al-Fakih* in a “reasoned scientific way.” Further, students expressed that the course did not engage western political thought but it allowed them to understand the basis of Islamic political thought in a manner that renders them capable of engaging western political thought. Some students classified the course as political theory, others as Islamic theory and others claimed that there is no difference: Islamic theory is political theory. Further, one student claimed that this course was vital as one needs to decide “is Islam an issue of personal affairs or an issue which engulfs the various aspects of man’s life where the basis of Islam is the political and where the personal later follows that political.”

Research methods course

Curriculum and Book

This course is the only course students take as research methods. Upon inspection, the course revealed itself as a course in academic writing and not in research methods. What the administration seems to mean by saying “research methods” is presentation of research.

The course is one semester long and is mainly based on a book titled “The methodology of scientific research” by Dr. Mahdi Fadlallah, a professor of logic and research methods at the Lebanese university’s Philosophy department, titled “Principles of writing a research and rules of investigation.” The first edition of the book was in 1993. It covers the following topics:

1- Defining a research: p. 12-19

Nature of the research and the kinds of approaches

Types of research (university)

Purpose of research

Scientific characteristics of a researcher and his ethical qualities.

2- Conditions of choosing a topic: p. 36-43

Duties of the student

Duties of the supervisor.

Opinions of Muslim scholars as to the student-teacher relationship.

3- Outline and elements: p. 53-55

Title

Introduction

Chapters

Conclusion

References

4- Preparing a research: p. 58-73

Preparing preliminary cards

Preparing references and sources

Interviews, communications and special fieldwork

Referencing and gathering information

Adjusting the plan or the thesis

5- Writing the research: p. 76-120

Thinking about writing

How does a researcher write?

The mode of a researcher writing

Rules of successful writing (word choice, grammar, punctuation, paragraphs, size, graphs...)

6- Physical aspects of the paper: p. 122-129

Introducing the paper and its author

Dedication

Acknowledgments

Introduction

Chapters

Conclusion

Annexes

References

7- Printing the paper and discussing it: p. 132-137

Printing and copies

Discussion and results

8- Manuscripts and modes of investigation: p. 140 to 156.

What are manuscripts?

Students and manuscripts

Principles of researching manuscripts

As can be noted from the above, there is very little room in this course for research methods. Indeed, the section on interviews, communication and special fieldwork is one page long. This section speaks of how a researcher might need to go places to reach sources or collect data. In a seven line paragraph, it describes how certain types of researchers, such as social psychologists, need to go to the fieldwork and study phenomena up-close. No further information about how this is done, why it is done or who is to do it is provided. The section then moves on to speak of the need a researcher might find to contact other researchers and the need for clarity and precision when one does so.

It seems that the book is not very interested in the formation of a good researcher but rather in telling how one properly writes, references and presents a good research paper. It tells of how one should give thanks to those who contributed to the research and to those who presented data. It states how one should present graphs and figures. It speaks of the style the research paper should be written in, including punctuation and the size of

the research letter. It is therefore not a book of research methods but rather a book of how a research paper is written and prepared.

In terms of references, the book uses 18 Arabic sources, two English sources and one French source. These are all academic sources. The Quran, the *Sunna* and Islamic scholars are absent from the book's bibliography. Nevertheless, once the book is read, one finds a very large number of quotes by major Islamic scholars, the Prophet and *Ahl lbayt* (the infallible members of his household) as well as philosophers, such as Aristotle. These were all not mentioned in the bibliography.

Instructor

There are different instructors that teach this course. Amongst these are Sheikh Ghassan Al-Asaad and Sheikh Hussein Siblani. Both of them are graduates of the Hawza itself, and both have academic degrees in the humanities from either the Lebanese university or the Islamic University of Lebanon.

Sheikh Ghassan stated that the course is designed to teach students how to write and present “a research according to the scientific modern techniques.” Nothing else is part of the course's objectives. This is important as it allows the students, according to the Sheikh, to write in a “methodical way, especially as we are not writing for one another.” Writing to spread and present ideas to the scientific community, he stressed that Hawza students must therefore write in the appropriate manner.

Students

Students held the course in positive light. Especially of note was, for them, the fact that the course instructor took them to the Hawza's library and introduced them to it; its

organization and the ways one goes about finding literature on any given topic. One student said that the course was good as an introduction, but that it was “certainly not enough.”

Notes on History course

With multiple students stating that the history class was the one containing the most social science, the course was clearly worthy of investigation. The course is centered on three books authored by Sheikh Kazem Yassine, the course instructor at the Hawza.¹⁵ The books cover the *Sira* of the Prophet, of *Ahl Al-Bayt* and of the Shia. The first of the books, discussing the *Sira* of the Prophet, is the one I focus on here as it is granted the most time at the Hawza, and as it is the first one to be given. It begins by discussing the tribes, the cultures, the customs, the norms and the various facets of Arab tribes existent at the time of the Prophet. 35 pages out of 273 are devoted to the social history of the Arabs. Indeed, analyzing historical events, it appears that the author consistently connects events to the circumstances, the place and the time. Yet, the salience of social history greatly decreased once the book began discussing events during the time of the prophet.

The following features were noted:

- The book does not center dates, while usually mentioning them. The book is organized around major events and incidents, there are periods which are not covered in the book.

¹⁵ These books are:

تاريخ السبطين, تاريخ خاتم الأنبياء و تاريخ الشيعة والطوائف في لبنان

- The book lists, numerous times, the aims and purposes of certain events. For example, military formations used by the prophet are justified by listing their military advantages.
- There is an analysis of the factors that led the Muslims to victory or to defeat (examples page 115, 155).
- Additionally, it presents a series of lessons at the end of every major event it retells (example page 191, 244).
- The book presents, in multiple points, an analysis of the components of the society it speaks of (example pages 91).
- The book does not present any psychological analysis of the prophet or the people surrounding him but does present a sociological one.

2. Al-Maahad Al-Sharii

Al-Maahad Al-Sharii is a significantly large Hawza, with around 200 students, located in Beirut's southern Suburb. It is part of a large complex affiliated with the institutions of Sayyed Mohamad Hussein Fadlallah, such as a television station and a radio station. The Hawza itself is composed of multiple buildings, including gardens and a library.

The Hawza's Library is not a large one, encompassing around 3500 books, according to the Hawza administration. Its main themes are those of *Hadith*, *Fikh* and *Quran*.

Nevertheless, one can locate sections designated for psychology, political sciences and contemporary issues/sociology.

The Hawza was established in 1983 by Sayyed Mohamad Hussein Fadlallah. Its current general supervisor is Sheikh Hussein Al-Kheshn and its general director is Sayyed Hussein Mohamad Al-Majed with Sheikh Dr Khanjar Hamiyeh acting as the academic supervisor.

The academic year is structured along the lines of western academic universities. The Hawza runs its classes early on in the morning, starting at around 7 a.m. and ending at around noon. It encompasses a dormitory and runs its programs for both males and females, segregated. It has adopted the model of chairs, desks and boards.

In the year 2000, significant changes were introduced to its structure to adopt a model very similar to that of western academia. Its official curriculum runs for nine years, after which the student begins the *bahth Al-Kharij* stage. Throughout these nine years, a total of 115 courses are offered, with varying weights. Each course is around four months long, equivalent to a one-semester course in academic universities. The six subjects receiving most weight, in decreasing order, are listed below:¹⁶

1. *Fikh* and *Usul*
2. Arabic Language
3. Philosophy
4. Islamic Doctrine
5. Quranic Studies
6. Logic

¹⁶ For further details on credit distribution at the Hawza refer to Annex 4.

Of these courses, four out of the 16 subjects taught may be classified as social sciences.¹⁷

These are the scientific research and the Methods of thinking (Manahij Al-tafkir) classes.

Together, these make up 80 credit hours out of around 5100 credit hours.

A more detailed investigation of these courses follows.

Methods of thinking

Curriculum and student resources:

This course is based on a book titled “Modern reason and modes of reasoning” by Dr. Mahmoud Kassem.¹⁸ The course covers it in all of its chapters and sections.

The author of the book is a PhD in philosophy with substantial work in the social sciences, according to the Hawza, especially through translating books such as “The foundations of the sociology of religion” and “introduction into social psychology.”¹⁹ (Note that the original authors of these books remain unclear.)

The book begins by discussing logic, its history and its modern forms, to progress to a sub-section titled “The crisis of necessity in the modern world.” In doing so, the book presents a historical progression that does not display any sort of preference: i.e. it does not attempt to claim logic, as a discipline, to any particular civilization, all the while tracing its roots to Aristotle. Then, the book tackles the issue of observation and experimentation to discuss the scientific method, giving much focus on hypothesis making and validation.

¹⁷ It was made clear, through interviews, that courses titled “Introduction to psychology” and “introduction to sociology,” as well as other social science courses, were introduced to the Hawza a number of years back. These were later removed.

¹⁸ For the upcoming year, the Hawza general director said that they will begin using the book “Theories of science” by Alan Chalmers.

¹⁹ These two books were mentioned in the book under investigation with no original author name.

At that point, the author discusses the value of Mathematics, progresses to the natural sciences and then to the social sciences to explain how each one of them has its methods and yields its own type of results. Below are the titles of the section regarding the social sciences.

Research in social science:

- Introduction.
- The attempts of the old age.
- The attempts of the middle ages.
- The attempts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
- Nature of social phenomena.
- The independence of sociology from psychology and biology.
- The rules of reasoning for Durkheim.
- Modes of research in sociology.

The section titled “Modes of research in sociology” is around 65 pages long. It starts by discussing the birth of sociology in Europe, as “the last of the social sciences to be born” and traces the roots of the study of society to Aristotle and Plato. The author discusses Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Farabi, Ibn Khaldun, Jean Baptiste Vico, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Saint Simon and Comte. All of these authors are discussed as “attempts” at doing sociology.

Then the author goes into discussing modern sociology and its relationship with other fields of knowledge, such as psychology and biology.

Then the author discusses the reasoning of sociology to end with a discussion of “research methods” in sociology. The research method section is 10 pages long; it is limited to a very brief discussion of work done by Durkheim and Comte. Some other research methods are very superficially told of, with no discussion. The author gives an example of the “roman social institute” and its work sending researchers to understand different forms of social organization.

The section, therefore, does not introduce students to research methods in modern sociology, but merely introduces them to the research methods used in sociology during the first half of the twentieth century. On the other hand, the book does offer a strong description and historical overview of the birth of sociology and the main theories of the early twentieth century.

Instructor

The main instructor for this course is Sayyed Hussein Majed, a Saudi scholar with studies in both Qom and Najaf. Sayyed Majed said that this course is a very important one in shaping the way students reason. Yet, he admitted that students do not usually take this course, as well as other similar courses, that seriously. Success, according to Sayyed Majed, is based on the mastery of *Fikh*, *Usul* and philosophy. Subjects such as these do not grant status and are not seen as a pivotal element of a student’s training.

Nevertheless, he stated that the Hawza is giving the course standing and focus. The course is meant to teach students to think and read phenomena and, in that regard, he specified that he always gets students research papers and asks them to comment, to

engage. Further, Sayyed Majed stated that he bases much of this course on analysis through the usage of real-life examples whereby students are asked to evaluate phenomena, such as that of divorce.

For Sayyed Majed, one of the most important aims of the course is to get students to realize that they are not specialists in everything. For him, Lebanese people, regardless of study or its lack, have a tendency at being psychologists, sociologists, medical doctors and a myriad of other professions at once. Hawza students and graduates, “being people like all others, have this tendency.” Therefore, they often assume and act based on this tradition. The director affirmed that this is quite dangerous; it can only be stopped when the students understand that there are whole fields which study “applied research in the community” to read that community. Hence, it is the “moving from books to social phenomena” that this course seeks to inculcate in its students.

Students

Students held the course positively and considered it as being “broader than the social sciences.” Further, one student stated that the course was not very useful because it covered broad issues and was patch-worked in a lot of instances.

[Scientific research course](#)

Curriculum and student resources

This course is the same course offered at Al-Rasoul Al-Akram Hawza whereby scientific research is understood as meaning “the know-how of writing scientific research papers.” Therefore, it is the course in academic writing, analyzed for the Islamic University and

using the book “Scientific research” by Dr. Mahdi Fadlallah. There are no differences in terms of textbook, nor in terms of reading material or sources.

Instructor

The main instructor for this course is Dr. Hussein Jammoul. Dr. Jammoul stated that this course has a two-fold objective. On the one hand, it seeks to teach students the “techniques of writing a scientific research and on the other it seeks to give them the mentality of a scientific researcher.” This “mentality” is vital, as students must acquire values such as those of objectivity and preserving intellectual rights. Indeed, students must become researchers, i.e. they must not “have pre-determined conclusions which they seek to prove” but rather be open to accept whatever research proves.

With time, the professor said, this course aims at taking the Hawza students “out of randomness” in research and promote research as a value within the Hawza sphere. Noting that the introduction of this course is still new, and that multiple Hawzas have still not introduced it, the instructor explained that the material is currently limited to the technicalities of a scientific research, without covering anything such as fieldwork or research methods. In the future, this should change, especially for those scholars “who are going to work with people and their problems.” For the dr., the stereotype of the scholar is someone locked-up in a library, surrounded by books and away from the people. This should, and is, changing toward a scholar with much more contact and engagement with reality. As this progress, research methods and the study of society and external reality are expected to “evolve with time” and gain more recognition and space within the Hawzas. This is important as if the scholar is to work with society “it is only normal that he know these tools.”

Students:

Students did not classify this course as one in the social sciences and were unclear as to the objectives of some of its section. Nevertheless, they stated that it allowed them a better understanding of academic writing, which could play a role in allowing them to read academic writing.

World religions

The religions class is one designed “to introduce, define and describe” the largest religions of the world with a slight touch of critical engagement. To do so, the Hawza bases its work on four books. These include:

1. Ancient eastern philosophy by John Koller. Translated by Kamel Youssef Hussein and issued by the Alam Al-Maarifa series.
2. Before Philosophy: the intellectual adventure of ancient man by Henri and Groenewegen-Frankfort, John Wilson, Henriette Antonia, and Thorkild Jacobson published originally in 1946 by the University of Chicago Press.
3. Al-Nasraniya by Mohamad Abou Zahra.

These books are not used as references but rather as textbooks. According to the administration, the entire books are to be taught.²⁰

The books are not originally written by Islamic authors and they, therefore, are not expected to be an Islamic critique of these religions. Nevertheless, the books are also not written by western authors who belong culturally to those respective religions under

²⁰ These are not large books, none of them exceed 100 pages.

study. Such a trend in the Hawza is noteworthy, as American professors, for example, are used to tell students of the Middle East about Eastern religions.

Beyond the curriculum

In addition to the above, the Hawza administration stated that it has two continuous weekly events: a general discussion every Wednesday and a gathering every Thursday where a selected student gives a speech. The purpose of these is, according to the administration, to get students to improve their social skills. Particularly of interest, the general discussion takes up a different topic every week and discusses it. There is no pre-assigned list of topics but issues in contemporary thought and in social theory have often been debated.

Investigating with students, these claims were corroborated. Yet, students stated that attendance of these meetings is not mandatory and it is usually only the students living in the Hawza who participate.

3. Al-Imam Al-Baker Hawza

In Lebanon, there exists a number of small Hawzas distributed throughout the nation's geography. Most of these are personal initiatives taken by religious scholars, with discrepant motives and intents. For the representativeness of this research, this small Hawza was included.

While Hawzas such as that of Al-Rasoul are spread over a complex of over six buildings, and growing, smaller Hawzas such as Al-Baker are limited to single apartments in residential buildings. In the case of Al-Baker, this is an apartment with no more than six

rooms, located in the Rweis region, in Beirut's southern suburb. The Hawza's student body does not exceed forty. It has adopted the model of chairs, desks and boards.

The Hawza was established in 1999 by a group of independent scholars who saw the need for such a foundation. In terms of admissions requirements, the Hawza does not admit students who have not acquired an official degree (such as the Lebanese baccalaureate) entitling university-level entry. Its teaching days are Monday to Friday. It observes a three month summer vacation and does not observe official Lebanese holidays.

Al-Baker, for a number of practical reasons, is currently not offering classes beyond the fifth year of study. Theoretically speaking, the Hawza presents the stages of its curriculum in a manner similar to other Hawzas, yet not identical. The number of years it allocates for each stage is significantly less than those of traditional schools.²¹ Also, the Hawza uses the traditional classification of stages, unlike the larger Hawzas which have adopted the terms of academia. It may also be noted that the time taken to finish the entire program is shorter in length than that of the larger more progressive Hawzas, also shifting away from the traditional model.

Over around seven years of study, students undergo a program which is somewhat divided into seven academic years, each split into two semesters. The Hawza measures the progress of its students in terms of books and there is no rigidly set time for the

²¹ Phase 1: Two years during which a student is to finish Moqaddimat.

Phase 2: Three years during which the student is to finish the lower Sutuh.

Phase 3: Three years during which the student is expected to finish the higher Sutuh.

Phase 4: Bahth Al-Khariij stage: unlimited time.

achievement of any single book. The topics covered are the same as in any traditional Hawza, from Arabic language, to *Fikh* and *Usul*, Logic, Islamic doctrine, Quranic studies and philosophy. Nevertheless, some textbooks covered in the traditional Hawza are left out here. Due to the absence of any accurate and clear curriculum map, especially since the Hawza is constantly mutating, both adding and removing subjects, a specific statistical analysis of the courses offered would be impossible. Nevertheless, it may be confidently said that the six subjects receiving most weight, in decreasing order, are listed below:²²

1. *Fikh* and *Usul*
2. Arabic Language
3. Logic
4. Philosophy
5. Quranic Studies
6. History

In addition to these, the Hawza's published curriculum-map states the following as courses to be given:

- Principles of sociology
- Principles of psychology
- Principles of Islamic economics
- Principles of Islamic education
- Introduction to Law

²² For further details on credit distribution at the Hawza refer to Annex 4.

- Theory of knowledge
- Teachings methods

Currently, and for more than five years now, none of these courses has been on offer. The Hawza administration said that it has recently instilled a program by which the contents of these courses, complemented by other subjects which may be classified as general requirements, have been shaped into workshops to be given to students, distributed over the years of study. The Hawza was not cooperative in providing references or material for these workshops. Six students of Al-Baker Hawza were interviewed for this research, covering the various levels of study in the Hawza. Based on the above, complemented by these interviews, the following can be said regarding Al-Baker Hawza:

1. The greatest weight in training is given to subjects of *Fikh*.
2. The Hawza's educational model carries significant variations from the traditional one.
3. The Hawza does not offer any training in the social sciences.

Eight students from Al-Baker were asked as to whether the Hawza offers them any training in the social sciences and as to whether they think the social sciences are essential to their formation. All eight of them said that there are no direct subjects in the social sciences on offer as they all also stated that they would have "liked to learn" about the social sciences in the Hawza as these are topics which they deem "important" for their formation.

4. Imam Ali Hawza

Imam Ali Hawza is known as being the most traditional Hawza in the nation. The Hawza is composed of a building located near the Iranian Embassy, although it is not affiliated to the embassy. It houses a significant library and a dormitory, where the majority of its students reside, including students whose original place of residence is nearby (such as being in Beirut's southern suburb). This is meant to create a certain "safe environment of learning" where the student only focuses on acquisition of knowledge, away from life's daily distractions. It houses a significant library, mainly focused on issues of Islamic studies and lacking in coverage on the social sciences.

The Hawza was established around the year 2000 by Sayyed Jaafar Mortada, a renowned scholar. Currently, its general director is Sayyed Ali Hijazi. It currently has around 55 students and over 25 professors. It has adopted the model of chairs, desks and boards.

The study year is not officially structured along the lines of western academic universities, the Hawza does not identify a sharp or determined set of years or semesters over which the curriculum has to end: this mainly depends on the students of a given year. Normally, the Hawza takes around eleven or twelve years before the beginning of the *Bahth Al-Kharij* stage. It follows the system of *Muqadimat*, *Sutuh* and *Bahth Kahrij*. The Hawza runs its classes early on in the morning, starting at 6:30 A.M. Classes end before noon. The Hawza does not offer its program for females and places huge emphasis on full-time status (*tafarogh*). Additionally, the Hawza obliges its students to present reports on every class period they attend. These reports must include what the professor had presented and a deeper explanation using multiple sources treating the topic.

As the Hawza does not officially follow the academic model of credits, comparison based on credit distribution is not possible. The *Muqadimat* phase at the Hawza is given around four years, followed by around 7 years for *Sutuh*. Based on the Hawza's curriculum, it covers around 30 textbooks. The time it takes to cover each of these books is not strictly defined. The five²³ subjects receiving most weight and credits, in decreasing order, are listed below:²⁴

- 1- *Fikh* and *Usul*
- 2- Islamic doctrine
- 3- Arabic language
- 4- Philosophy
- 5- Logic

Imam Ali Hawza does not offer any courses which may be classified as social sciences. Its curriculum is more traditional, focusing on *Fikh* and *Usul*.

Seven students from the Hawza were interviewed. All seven of them generally agreed to the idea that Islamic scholars must be aware of, learn and engage with the social sciences. Whether such a duty is the responsibility of the Hawza or not was not agreed upon, with 2 students stating that it is not.

5. Baqiyatollah Hawza

Baqiyatollah Hawza is the major Hawza of the Lebanese south. The Hawza is composed of multiple buildings over a significantly large piece of land located on the edges of the

²³ There is no sixth subject given weight. All are subjects given in great briefness.

²⁴ For further details on credit distribution at the Hawza refer to Annex 4.

southern village of Toul. With multiple dormitories, the majority of its students live on campus. The Hawza has three libraries, with huge collections of books on issues of *Fikh*, *Hadith*, Quranic studies and philosophy. The social sciences are not fully absent from the libraries, but they are very weakly represented.

The Hawza was established in 2006 by Sheikh Hassan Sweidan, Sheikh Moussa Swaidan, Sayyed Hussein Atwi and Sheikh Hisham Hammoud. Its current general supervisor is Sheikh Hassan Swaidan and its general director is Sheikh Hisham Hammoud. The study year is not officially structured along the lines of western academic universities, but it is practically so. It follows the system of *Muqadimat*, *Sutuh* and *Bahth Kahrij*. The Hawza runs its classes early on in the morning, starting at around 7 A.M. Classes end at around noon. It encompasses multiple dormitories and only runs its programs for males. The Hawza reimburses all of its full-time students. It has adopted the model of chairs, desks and boards.

Its official curriculum runs for nine years, after which the student begins the *Bahth Al-Kharij* stage. As the Hawza does not officially follow the academic model of credits, comparison based on credit distribution is not possible. The *Muqadimat* phase at the Hawza is given around three years, followed by three years for primary *Sutuh* and four years for secondary *Sutuh*. Based on the Hawzas' curriculum, it offers 63 courses, with varying weights, over the nine years of study. Each course is around four months long, equivalent to a one-semester course in academic universities. The six subjects receiving most weight, in decreasing order, are listed below:²⁵

1. *Fikh* and *Usul*

²⁵ For further details on credit distribution at the Hawza refer to Annex 4.

2. Arabic language
3. Ethics
4. Quranic studies
5. Islamic doctrine
6. Philosophy

Baqiyatollah does not offer any courses which may be classified as social sciences. Its curriculum is more traditional, focusing on *Fikh* and *Usul*.

11 students from Baqiyatollah Hawza were asked as to whether the Hawza offers them any training in the social sciences and as to whether they think the social sciences are essential to their formation. All 11 stated that the Hawza does not offer any such training. Five students said that a slight element of the social sciences could be found in the Ethics class and three said that such elements could be found in the History class, although indirectly. Nine of the 11 students said that the Hawza should cover such topics, while two said that the Hawza should not as doing so will shift it off-course. Such topics should be covered through reading, which the Hawza could play a guiding role in but without it becoming an issue of courses and classes.

It was also noteworthy that three students referred to the speeches of Sayyed Ali Khamenei when justifying (a sort of legitimization) why such knowledge is to be taught at the Hawza, echoing his calls for the scholars to engage with these fields.

6. Al-Imam Al-Montazar Hawza

Al-Imam Al-Montazar Hawza is the most renowned Hawza in the Bekaa region, and one of the most distinguished in the nation. The current head of Hezbollah, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, is a graduate of Al-Montazar Hawza; a fact the Hawza prides itself of. It is located in the city of Baalbeck, composed of multiple buildings with a large campus and much greenery. Its student body is around 100 learners and its faculty stands at around 15 professors. The Hawza was directed by Sayyed Abbas Al-Moussawi in the early days of the Islamic resistance's rise. Currently, it is headed by Sheikh Mohamad Yazbeck, the head of Hezbollah's Sharia council.

Its program runs anywhere between eight and twelve years, making it slightly longer than most Hawzas in Beirut. Its teaching days are Monday to Friday and it observes a three-month summer vacation. It runs its classes, like all the other Hawzas investigated, early on in the morning. It has adopted the model of chairs, desks and boards.

In terms of admission requirements, the Hawza does not admit students who have not reached the secondary level of education (approximately no less than nine years of schooling). Al-Montazar has a cooperation with the International Mustafa University based in Qom. It has not, nevertheless, transitioned into becoming a branch of Al-Mustafa University as Al-Rasoul did. At the moment, it offers two tracks: its own and that of Al-Mustafa University. Students are free to choose which track they wish to take.

For the traditional Hawza track, there are no Social Sciences, no research methods, and no techniques of writing scientific research. Indeed, there is no focus besides that on the

subjects of *Fikh* and Usul and their associate fields. The six subjects receiving most weight, in decreasing order, are listed below:²⁶

1. *Fikh* and *Usul*
2. Arabic language
3. Islamic doctrine
4. Logic and Philosophy
5. History
6. Ethics

Seven students from Al-Montazar Hawza were interviewed. All seven of them stated that Hawza students need to learn the “social sciences” with 5 stating that it is an obligation.

Conclusions

The following are the patterns and the conclusions based on the above analysis and supplemented with the participant observation at the Hawza.

- I. **Hawzas in Lebanon are relatively new** and the training of full-fledged scholars in Lebanon only became mainstream in the 90s.
- II. **All Hawzas investigated have made physical changes in terms of abandoning the model of rugs and introducing that of chairs, desks and boards (all absent in the traditional Hawza).**
- III. **The social sciences are slowly making their way** into becoming part of the Hawza curricula. At the moment, they exist, feebly and with little recognition, in some Hawzas. **The Hawza is currently in dynamism, with courses being**

²⁶ For further details on credit distribution at the Hawza refer to Annex 4.

- added and removed.** Social science subject have been introduced and removed, multiple times.²⁷
- IV. **What is being introduced is social theory**, and no Hawza has any course offering training in social research methods. **Students have not been exposed to grounded research methods in the social sciences:** they are not familiar with the concept of fieldwork.²⁸
- V. **Where it is introduced, social theory is being done in an investigative way.** Multiple viewpoints are being advanced, room for interpretation is being left open and critical thinking, to a certain extent at least, is being encouraged.
- VI. **There is no one model of the Hawza;** competing models exist. The most traditional models do not offer any sort of introduction to the social sciences. The more progressive ones offer courses and introduce their students to social theory.
- VII. **All models of the Hawza place most effort into *Fikh* and *Usul*.** Logic/Philosophy also heavily figure in the various models.
- VIII. **Students expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that the Hawza places the greatest emphasis on traditional fields of knowledge.**
- IX. **Students do not know what the social sciences are.** Most of them classified ethics courses as social science courses.
- X. **Students asserted that the social sciences:** sociology, psychology, political science and their associates, should figure, at least as introductions, in the Hawza

²⁷ The reasons for this are explored in the interviews with stakeholders.

²⁸ Al-Maaref cultural association (with no direct relationship to Al-Maaref university) has established a department, headed by Sayyed Abdallah Taher, to introduce and train scholars in issues of the social sciences: from sociology and psychology to Education and political science. Hezbollah has, in recent years, required all member religious scholars to undertake these courses at the association, including courses in fieldwork. Sayyed Abdallah, the head of the department, stated that the purpose of the institute is “to fill the gap” currently present in the training offered by the Hawza as society “can no longer wait.”

and expressed an appreciation of their importance in allowing them to engage society. They expressed dissatisfaction with what they were offered in terms of social science.

XI. **Hawzas do form, to a certain extent, critical thinkers as the Shia believe in**

Ijtihad: students are exposed to various opinions and they engage with these opinions. Further, engaging with Sunni Islam is also an essential component of the training as much of the doctrine courses deal with such questions.

Nevertheless, **the degree to which this critical thinking is thinking “outside the box of Islam” is extremely questionable.** The question remains beyond the scope of this research.

University Islamic Studies in Lebanon

Alongside Egypt, Lebanon is considered as the country with the “longest history of modern higher education in the region.” (Kriener, 2011) Lebanon has around 49 officially

accredited universities, as well as a number of university institutes and colleges.

Although scholars have claimed that the current model of universities is a direct product of Middle-Age Europe, past years have witnessed the emergence of what has come to be known as Islamic universities. Amongst the majors offered at such universities is the major of Islamic Studies; a specialization in Islam and its various branches of knowledge. Throughout the past years, the number of Muslim students who have chosen to follow a double track, studying both at the Hawza and at academic universities, is on the rise.

(Mervin, 2007) Amongst the academic majors such intellectuals choose is that of Islamic studies. In Lebanon, there are seven universities that offer Islamic studies. These are:

1. Al-Jinan University
2. Islamic University of Lebanon associated with Dar Al-Fatwa
3. Beirut Islamic University
4. Tripoli University
5. Makased University of Beirut (MU)
6. Islamic University of Lebanon
7. Al-Maaref University

Out of these seven universities, the last two self-identify as following the Shia train of Islamic thought. Additionally, there is Azad University, a branch of the Azad University based in Iran. So far, Azad has not been accredited by the Lebanese authorities but its degrees are officially recognized by the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The students of these universities are, to a large extent, homogenous in terms of religious

affiliation and principal political views. Further, all of these universities are co-ed, not segregating male students from female ones.

Henceforth, for the research question of this thesis, the curricula of the three “Shia” universities will be investigated. The methodology used for the investigation of these three curricula, as explained previously, will be based on mixed methods in an attempt at offering optimal confidence when it comes to drawing conclusions. For all three universities, three research methods will be used:

1. Content analysis of curricula plan and coursework, if available.
2. Interviews with administration and professors.
3. Interviews with students.

The obstacles encountered upon the investigation of Hawzas were also encountered for the investigation of these universities. Particularly, bureaucracy was an obstacle that required much work to overcome.

The general features of these three universities are provided in the below table:

| | Islamic University of Lebanon | Al-Maaref University | Azad University |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Main Campus location | Khalde | Bir Hassan | Beirut |

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Number of campuses | Five | One | Two |
| Year of establishment | 1996 | 2014 | 1994 |
| Faculties | Nine faculties: 1. Engineering 2. Humanities 3. Tourism 4. Islamic Studies 5. Arts and Sciences 6. Economy and Business 7. Law 8. Nursing 9. Political science | Three faculties: 1. Mass communication and fine arts 2. Business administration 3. Religions and Humanities | Six faculties: 1. Philosophy 2. Theology 3. Education 4. Political science 5. Business administration 6. Human resources management |
| Student Body in Islamic studies | 200 | 40 | - |
| Faculty in Islamic studies | 20 | 7 | - |

Table 2: Overview of Islamic studies at “Shia” Islamic universities in Lebanon.

For this section, all professors teaching the courses investigated were interviewed. As to student interviews, 9 students from Al-Maaref and 11 students from the Islamic university were interviewed. Unlike the Hawza, classes here hold both males and females. With snowball sampling, only two female students were reached for interviews.

Islamic University of Lebanon

The Islamic University of Lebanon is an accredited Lebanese institution of higher education established in 1996. The university self-identifies as a Lebanese institution of higher education that seeks, as stated on the university’s official website, to:

“Contribute to the solution proposed by the Supreme Shiite Council in Lebanon which deals with the national coalition and consolidation of the different sects and religions in the Lebanese civil community, where one political framework

encompasses an equitable state for all its citizens. Therefore, this institution is committed to providing faith and knowledge as an inspirational source for the nation, the citizen, the state and the Lebanese society as a whole.”

Amongst the university’s stated goals (which are six in total), is “paying close attention to Arabic and Islamic studies.” The university has five campuses on which nine faculties operate. Amongst these is the faculty of Islamic studies. The faculty of Islamic studies was one of the University’s first faculties, established in 1996. It offers B.A., M.A and PhD degrees. The faculty offers a single major: Islamic studies. The current dean of the faculty of Islamic studies is Dr. Farah Moussa, himself a graduate of the university’s Islamic studies program. The curricula plan of a B.A. in Islamic studies at the Islamic University of Lebanon covers 96 credits, distributed over four years of study. The six subjects receiving most weight, in decreasing order, are listed below:

- 1- *Fikh and Usul*
- 2- Islamic studies
- 3- Philosophy
- 4- Islamic culture and civilization
- 5- Arabic Language
- 6- Islamic doctrine

Nevertheless, it must be clear that these courses are balanced with the other courses on offer. The IU offers more than 25 subject areas of study over which its credits are distributed. *Fikh and Usul*, for example, is covered over 58 credit hours while Philosophy, Islamic culture, Arabic and Islamic doctrine all have less than 20 credits

assigned for each. This may be claimed to form a well-rounded individual with an overall knowledge in a variety of disciplines and subject areas.²⁹

Amongst these credits, there are four courses which are classified, according to the university administration, as social science classes. These are:

1. Islamic Civilization.
2. Matters in Islamic economics.
3. Sociology.
4. Forms of governance and rule in Islam.

Such a classification was noteworthy as there were other courses that could be classified as social sciences, such as that on Islamic media. Upon investigation, it appeared that a number of courses, mainly those considered as general requirements, were not on offer. These were found to include the following courses:³⁰

- 1- Islamic Media
- 2- Introduction to Psychology
- 3- Geography of the Islamic world
- 4- Islamic Education

These courses, while officially on the curriculum map, have not been offered for years. Multiple students said they did not know such courses existed. Miss Malakeh Karaouni, the faculty's administrator, said that these courses have not been given in recent years

²⁹ For a detailed account of courses to be taken for an Islamic studies degree refer to Annex 3.

³⁰ The reasons for which these courses were not on offer remained unclear. Administrative reasons seem the most plausible.

and it does not appear that they will be given any time soon. This is, according to Miss Karaouni, because the organization of the curriculum is an either-or organization. For example, it is either sociology or psychology and the department has chosen sociology. Hence, it is a choice of four out of the eight courses. The basis of such choices remained unclear while indicators point to the availability of professors being a decisive factor.

The responses of the 11 students interviewed are distributed over the various courses, according to relevance.

| Institution | Islamic University of Lebanon |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Type of diploma | MA |
| Total No. of credits | -- |
| No. social science | 48 |
| Scientific research | 10 |
| Political thought | 3 |
| Sociology | 2 |
| Psychology | 2 |
| Economics | 9 |
| Education | 2 |
| Media studies | 2 |
| Islamic culture and Islamic civilization | 16 |
| Geography | 2 |
| Forensics | 0 |

Table 3: Summary of Social Science classes at IU's theoretical Islamic studies program.

Islamic Civilization

This is a culture and Islamic one-semester mandatory course given to all students, during their first year, at the Islamic university.

Curriculum and student resources

This course, according to the curricula of the university, has the following objectives:

- 1) Introduction and definition of civilization: concept, basis, characteristics, comparisons.
- 2) Islam and faith: definition and pillars.
- 3) The consequences of faith in terms of action.
- 4) Islamic values and principles: Justice-Freedom-Equality-Brotherhood-Peace.
- 5) Islamic ethics.
- 6) The family at the core of society.
- 7) The rights of women in Islam.
- 8) The rights of children in Islam.

The course has a specific book. The book is authored by Sheikh Akram Baraket and is titled "Islamic culture." The book does not cover all the stated objectives of the course, as these are then covered by the teachers. The book is divided into the following chapters:

- 1) Introduction: Culture and Islamic culture
- 2) Religion's role in human life
- 3) Stages of a human's life
- 4) The leaders to perfection
- 5) Revolution for religion
- 6) Humanity's perfection
- 7) Return to the creator
- 8) Individual perfection
- 9) The Other in Islam
- 10) Ethics of communicating with people

11) Manners of communicating with people

12) Public order

As can be seen, the book carries great dissimilarities to the course objective. Upon investigation, the book appears as a general introduction to an Islamic worldview and to Islamic ethics. Overall, in cliché terms, one can say that the book is loaded with Quranic verses and *Hadith* in an attempt to offer students the guidelines on how “a righteous Muslim behaves.”

While the book contains interesting sections on the environment, public order, obedience to civic law and acceptance of others with which one ideologically disagrees, it lacks any type of social research. Further, the last two sections on “rights” are not included in the book. Hence, Chapters 7, 8 and 9 are not covered in the book. Rather, the course instructor is expected to offer an overview of the way Islam perceives these, mostly based on the “Treatise of Rights” by Imam Ali Zainalabideen (the Shia 4th Imam.)

There is no extra-reading material provided to the students to further advance the concepts 1 to 6(of the outline above); the book is seen as sufficient. The book does not significantly use academic sources and does not appear to use any social research as data. Out of 102 references listed by the author, three were non-Islamic and none were produced by social scientists.

Instructor

The main instructor of this course is Sheikh Mohammad Hijazi. Sheikh Hijazi is himself a graduate of the Islamic Studies program at the Islamic University. His research is

mainly focused on education. Sheikh Hijazi is a Professor at multiple Hawzas and a preacher at a mosque in the southern Kharayeb village.

Sheikh Hijazi explained that this course is offered by the university to provide its students with an Islamic foundation. It is, according to the instructor, “an introduction to Islam.”

Overall, sheikh Hijazi stated that Islamic Studies, as an academic major, is very important for every Hawza student:

“As students of the Hawza, we all need the deep and thorough Hawza content as well as the academic methodology and structure. This will allow us to place the information we learn at the Hawza in its proper slot. Without this [academic Islamic studies] one cannot be successful. Academia also gives skills that are much greater than those given by the Hawza: it is a much greater factory for the social formation of individuals. Further, the quality of research in academia is very special and the Hawza must learn from this.”

Sheikh Hijazi said that such objectives are not fully covered by the curricula of Islamic Studies today, and there is a wide range of knowledge produced by social scientists that students must, but are yet not, making use of.

Students

All students asked expressed their general satisfaction with the course. All students asked were surprised that this course would classify as a social science class and rather expressed that they would classify it as an Ethics class, or a “General culture” class. The

purpose, according to one student interviewed, is the establishment of “Islam as a life governing system and as the greatest culture.”

According to the students, the course did not feed much into enhancing their critical thinking skills, nor did it build any type of relationship with academia. Students said that the course “had no academic content” to it.

Systems of governance in Islam

Curriculum and student resources

The course uses a specific textbook: Sheikh Mohammad Mahdi Chamseddine’s *The order of governance and management* but “does not limit itself to it.” Dr. Ali Fadlallah, the course instructor, said that the book is used as a guide, but the lectures do not limit themselves to it and the students are required to refer to multiple other sources.

The course is classified as a social science by the department. It covers issues of governance and governments: their qualities, their shapes and their functioning. It surveys the various opinions regarding governance and their forms for the different schools of Islamic thought and theology.

The course is structured according to the following:

A. Historical overview:

1. The prophet’s government
2. Government after the Prophet (Islamic parties)
3. Modern State

B. Islamic views on governance:

1. The governor (the imamate)
2. Imamate
3. Proof for Imamate
4. The necessary characteristics of an Imam (governor)
5. Reasons leading to the isolation of the Imam

C. Divine Islamic governance:

1. Infallibility
2. Scripture
3. Imam and Caliphate

D. Management in Islam:

1. The basis of managerial authority
2. The limits of managerial authority
3. Management during the time of the Prophet
4. In Mecca: tasks and the characteristics of the Mecca society
5. In Medina: choice of executive.
6. The judiciary and *Ifta'*
7. Financial management
8. Administrative divisions
9. Military management

10. Economic management
11. Foreign relations
12. Comparison between management in Islam and Management in modern states.

The above mentioned book, which was written in 1954, was not meant to be a textbook used for teaching purposes. Rather, it was meant to be Sheikh Chamseddine's contribution to the developing Islamic theories on governance in Islam. (Abdul-Jabbar Al-Rifai, 2015) Indeed, as stated in the book, the work aims at clarifying the fact that Islam has “an order for governance and for management” which is capable and meticulous, functioning under an authority which is both religious and contemporary.

The book has 105 references. Out of these, there is no more than five references which may be classified as “western academia.” The course delves deeply into both Shia and Sunna schools of political thought. It does not touch upon western ones. In terms of references, the course uses plenty of Islamic references, both Sunna and Shia. Students are referred to these references throughout the course, mainly:

- الاحكام السلطانية-الموردي
- الممل و النحل-شهرستاني
- في ظلال القران-سيد قطب
- معالم الطريق-ابو الاعلى المودودي
- الحكومة الاسلامية-امام خميني

- دراسات في ولاية الفقيه-الشيخ منتظري
- تسع نظريات في فقه الحكم-الشيخ محسن كديفار

Instructor

This course is offered by Dr. Ali Fadlallah. Dr. Fadlallah is a Hawza graduate and professor. He has a PhD in Political science from the Lebanese university and is currently a lecturer at the Islamic University, AUB and others.

Dr. Fadlallah explained that the purpose of the course is to introduce students to political thought in Islam, not to political thought per say. He said that the course surveys the various opinions amongst the Shia and the various opinions amongst the Sunnite, both old and recent.

Dr. Fadlallah stated that students are not offered answers, rather questions and options. They are required, at the end of the course, to choose an opinion and argument for it in essay form. In his words, “the course is one that plays a major role in developing the critical thinking skills of the students. Critical thinking is automatic in this course since there are so many opinions on everything: the very fact that you have so many options alone leads to critical thinking.” He continues “Structurally, there is a difference between western and Islamic views on governance: west focuses on the shape of governance, Islam focuses on the person of the governor (with differences between Sunni and Shia as the latter say that governance is for the infallible or his deputy).”

For him, this means that one cannot simply compare proposed modes of governance as one must go back and investigate the roots they stem from.

Students

The students that I interviewed expressed high satisfaction with the course. They said that the course would definitely classify as a social science. Its main value, appears to be its survey of different opinions and approaches to governance within Islam. Nevertheless, none of them said that the course improved their ability to understand and engage with academia.

On the other hand, all students said that the course played a role in developing their critical thinking skills. This is especially so through the numerous class discussions. A number of students mentioned a strong element of memorization within the course and stated that the course surveys a huge number of Islamic theories which have gone extinct without touching upon modern theories despite their much greater relevance to contemporary life. Memorizing these theories, their authors and their influence were things students thought of as somewhat useless.

Sociology

Curriculum and student resources

The course is designed as an introductory elective course for Islamic studies students. The professor usually offering it is Dr. Ali Chami, a sociologist teaching at the Lebanese university.

The course does not make use of any single textbook and no reading material is provided to the students. The students are expected to take notes in class, forming the basis of what they are required to study. The course does not cover any type of research methods used

in sociology. According to the information provided by the faculty administration, the course is divided into two main sections:

The first section covers the birth of sociology, “as influenced by the social, economic and political transformations accompanied by the advances of the natural sciences.” It also contains a historical descriptive overview of the stages through which the discipline has passed, focusing on its main pillars.

The second portion of the course covers the following objectives:

- 1- The problem of “subject-matter and objectivity in sociology.”
- 2- Main concepts and principles of sociology.
- 3- The idea of sociology: its fields.
- 4- Social change
- 5- The construction of social research:
 - (1) Formulating a problematic
 - (2) Choice of appropriate and accurate research methods
 - (3) Choice of a representative sample
- 6- The social construct.
- 7- Social relations in an Islamic society.
- 8- The Islamic proposal for an Islamic theory in sociology
- 9- Social conduct and its influence on human beings.

What is offered by the instructor usually covers most of the points outlined as course objectives, with varying weights. For example, there is significant focus on the issue of “objectivity” and accuracy when it comes to the results of social research.

No academic references were offered to students. When the professor giving the course during the academic year 2015-2016 was asked, he said that such references were used in the construction of the lectures. The course covers a significant number of western sociological theories through the works of Islamic thinkers and sociologists.

Instructor

The main instructor for this course is Dr. Ali Chami. Dr. Chami has a PhD in sociology from the Lebanese University. The Professor said that the course has very specific objectives, and these are simple ones: it aims at getting students to know what sociology is and who its main thinkers are.

Upon inquiry, the professor said that the course certainly stems from a belief that there is much that western sociologists have said which is incompatible with an Islamic worldview. This is pointed out throughout the course, but the course does not seek to offer an “Islamic sociology.” In terms of research methods and techniques, they are not within the course’s objectives.

Students

Students’ interviews labeled the course as “interesting.” The course was classified as a social science and it was said to increase their exposure to “western academia.” The course did feed into critical thinking, but students did not feel that critical thinking was a priority for the course as they sensed the course had too much emphasis placed on memorizing theories and theorists.

Students mentioned that the course, after introducing what sociology is, turned to focus on Ibn-Khaldun and what he had said in sociology and then on Marx and what he had said in sociology. No other theorists or sociologists were significantly present in the course.

Matters in Islamic economics:

Curriculum and student resources:

The course does not use a specific book but rather uses selections from Sayyed Mohamad Baker Al-Sadr's *Our Economics*, written in 1960 and re-published in 1982.

The course contains a general introduction to economics and economic systems and then the presentation of the differences between the current proposed economic systems and an Islamic one. In terms of references, *Our economics* does not use or have any academic references.

The selections given to students are the following ones:

1. The economic problem.
2. Basis of distribution.
3. Labor.
4. "Need" in Islam and "Need" in communism.
5. "Need" in Islam and "Need" in capitalism.
6. Private property.
7. Exchange.

The book is not, originally, meant to be a textbook for the course. Throughout the book, one can note a clear engagement with Western scholars, especially in terms of economics and especially in terms of communism. The call of the book is to turn within to solve the modern crisis of the Islamic world: Islam is capable of offering an alternative to both capitalism and communism.

The book is very much a book of theory, often discussing the philosophy behind the theories presented and offers much abstract argumentation. Indeed, much emphasis is placed on the philosophy of Islam and its worldview as “they represent the foundation for his [the author’s] socioeconomic thought.” (Reda, 2014) It does not use nor refer to any type of empirical research. Further, the book was published over 35 years ago, and therefore does not engage the post-1989 developments, trends and matters of economics. This is a major lacking that the course does not seem to address.

Instructor

The instructor for this course is Sheikh Dr. Ali jaber. The professor explained that this is a one-semester course in which the teacher is asked to offer a general introduction. A course in what may be loosely termed economic theory, it is hindered by time and resources. Ideally, the sheikh explained, students should be taking two courses: one in which they are “introduced to capitalism and communism as well as any other possible economic model” and another in which they are offered a critical engagement and an Islamic theory. Unfortunately, this is not the case and a comparative study begins too soon, well before the students have understood the models at hand. Yet, the teacher

explained that he does his most to present ideas objectively, as it is the duty of anyone presenting an idea they which to critique to “present it fully with all its arguments” before any critique is advanced.

Dr. Jaber explained that this course is divided into two sections: the first section is the one where the grand characteristics of Islamic economics, based on the works of Sayyed Mohamad Baker Al-Sadr, is presented. Sayyed Al-Sadr’s work was chosen because it is the “deepest thing written on the topic by Islamic intellectuals, especially on a theoretical level.” Further, it presents both capitalism and communism with much objectivity and argumentation, making-up for the lack of a previous course. Then, selected issues of contemporary economics are taken up as discussion topics to allow students to relate and apply what they had learnt. In this section, specimens of economic matters are offered, discussed and evaluated, advantages and disadvantages are put forth and the students are asked to critically evaluate. Normally, the three topics being taken-up are those of Banks and Islamic banking, the meat industry and copyright issues (including the rights to patents).

Students

Students expressed that the course was “enlightening” and very relevant to modern life. The course was classified as a social science. The course, according to the students, did not link with western academia. Nevertheless, they said that it did feed heavily into developing their critical thinking skills and understanding the basics of economics.

Note on scientific research class

The research method class was not classified as a social science by the department. Upon investigation and inquiry with the students, the course revealed itself as being a course similar to courses on academic writing offered in westernized universities, as it is similar to the courses covered during the analysis of Al-Rasoul Al-Akram Hawza curriculum, but with less emphasis on referencing and plagiarism. In addition to issues such as format and presentation, the course covers topics such as choosing one's research topic, phrasing a research question and a hypothesis.

Al-Maaref University

Al-Maaref University is a private university established in 2014. It is located in Bir-Hassan, Beirut. The academic year 2015-2016 was its first running academic year. Before its opening, the university had established agreements with the Hawzas in Lebanon in regards to its Religions and Humanities department. According to the university's official and updated records, 50% of the students of the Islamic Studies program are Hawza students.

The language of instruction at the department is Arabic. The program is three years long. In regards to its "Islamic" nature, Associate Dean of the faculty of Islamic studies said:

The student is to be open, objective, listening to others being scientifically critical without bias. The faculty of Islamic studies seeks to study Islam in its various opinions and open up to other religions and civilizations to discuss what they have in a scientific approach. There is no distinction between what is Islamic and what is human: the term Islamic is misleading.

The Religions and Humanities department at the university offers six tracks. All students take the same courses for the first four semesters and they then divide into the following specialties:

1. [General] Islamic studies.
2. Quran and *Hadith*.
3. History and civilization.
4. Philosophy and *kalam*.
5. Comparative religions.
6. Translation.

Out of these, Islamic studies and Quran and *Hadith* are considered as being specialties in Islamic studies; they will be the two specialties looked at.

Class attendance is mandatory for students and an absence of nine sessions automatically leads to the student being dropped from the course.

To graduate with a degree in Islamic Studies, the students must take a set of general courses and a number of specialized ones. The student takes, in total, 99 credits to graduate. The courses with the greatest emphasis vary with the change in specialty students decide to take. Nevertheless, the following subjects may be said to be significantly present throughout the specialties:³¹

- 1- *Fikh* and *Usul*
- 2- Quranic Studies

³¹ For a detailed account of courses to be taken for an Islamic studies degree refer to Annex 3.

3- Ethics and culture

| Type of diploma | Al-Maaref University | |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| | B.A. in Islamic studies | B.A. in Quran and Hadith |
| Total No. of credits | 106 | 106 |
| No. social science | 15 | 12 |
| Scientific research | 3 | 3 |
| Political thought | 3 | 0 |
| Sociology | 3 | 3 |
| Psychology | 3 | 3 |
| Economics | 0 | 0 |
| Education | 0 | 0 |
| Media studies | | 0 |
| Islamic culture and Islamic civilization | 3 | 3 |
| Geography | 0 | 0 |
| Forensics | 0 | 0 |

Table 4: Summary of Social Science classes at Al-Maaref University's Islamic Studies program.

Of interest to this thesis are four course offered at the department. These are:

1. Research methods.
2. General Culture.
3. Sociology.
4. Psychology.
5. Foreign texts in Islamic Studies.

Overall, nine Islamic studies students were interviewed. Their responses are distributed over the various courses, according to relevance.

Research methods

Curriculum and student resources:

This is a one-semester long mandatory course offered to first year students in their first semester.

The course is based on the book “Research methods” by Dr. Mahdi Fadlalah. The course gives emphasis to the technical aspects of writing and presenting a research paper. From finding literature to referencing, the book does not delve into research methods. This book is covered in depth in the chapter on universities, section on Al-Maaref University p. 46.

Instructor:

Dr. Hadi Fadlalah is the chair of the Islamic studies and Humanities department at the university. Amongst other courses, such as that on Logic which is the professor’s field of specialty, he teaches the course titled “research methods.” Dr. Fadlalah stated that this course begins with broad definitions to allow the students to understand what research is, what methods is and what scientific inquiry is. The course mainly aims at raising awareness amongst the students to the existence of various research methods and how these methods may be used to reach different forms of knowledge. Further, the course aims at teaching students how one goes about writing a research paper and presenting it along the internationally agreed upon criteria. Stating that the course is only one-semester long, addressed at first year students and given to people “who are freshly out of high-school,” the Dr. stated that it is only reasonable for the course to have limited objectives.

Teaching other things, such as how one goes about doing research and gaining knowledge, is important and must be given but beyond the scope of this class.

Students:

Students expressed that this course was “bewildering.” The course, supposedly on research methods, began with a substantial introduction on ethics and manners between a pupil and their teacher. The course then progressed to a purely theoretical explanation of how one goes about writing a research paper. Another note made by students was the fact that the course seemed to aim at introducing them to a number of technical terms rather than training them in writing research papers.

When asked about whether this course taught them social research, they all asserted that it did not. The only form of social research they could think of was textual.

General culture

This course is a one-semester long mandatory course offered to first year students in their first semester.³²

Curriculum and student resources:

This course does not use a textbook. Rather, the professor emails reading material to the students. This material is structured around the following questions:

1. What is religion?
2. What is innate in human beings?
3. What is culture?

³² While attending classes, Dr. Lezzek was obviously making huge efforts to incite the participation of the female students. Repeatedly, he chose and asked female students to go to the board, present and answer questions.

4. What is civilization?
5. What are the characteristics of an Islamic civilization?
6. What are the characteristics of the western civilization?
7. What are the points of conflict between Christianity and the western civilization?
8. What is secularism?
9. What is rationalism?

The structure of the course is a discussion after which the lecturer gives his presentation.

The handouts are very well-argued as well as well-referenced. The references cover both Islamic thought (Ibn-Khaldun, Mutahari, Tabtabaei, Khomeini, Shirazi, Yazdi, Al-Sadr...), Arabic academic ones (Omar Faroukh, Mohamad Abd el-Menem Khafaji, AbdIjabbar Al-Rifai, Ahad Karamelky...) as well as western ones (Marx, Heidegger, Gaddamer, Giddens, Honderich...) Clearly, this is a huge scope of coverage and the course only offers a broad sense of the issues at hand.

Instructor:

Dr. Lezzek is an academic whose work focuses on the philosophy of Mulla Sadra. He has a keen interest in the social sciences and considers the Hawza as being in institution with one great fault: it has not engaged properly with modern knowledge and academia. He is holder of a PhD in Islamic Studies from the Islamic University of Lebanon.

Dr. Lezzek said that this course, and the entire faculty, seek to offer students a sense of belief in their own identity. It uses all sources to introduce students to the reality that is out there, objectively. The associate dean said, speaking of the social sciences, “what

does religion have to do with them? It may only come into play as the background with which one perceives the results.”

Dr. Lezzek said that critical thinking is vital to the class. He claimed that such is evident from the discussions held during every class session. My personal observation during my participation in the classes corroborated his claim of class discussions and intellectual “free inquiry.” Students are asked to present proof that Islam is correct, to argue for their beliefs and to see, as Dr. Lezzek stated in one of his lectures, that “every philosophy in the world has a segment of truth to it.”

The professor identified one of the course’s objectives as being the ability to offer students a better understanding of their contemporary world and to allow them to “regain their identity” in the face of an Arab civilization that feels inferiority and therefore is only listening and receiving.

Students:

Students expressed high satisfaction with the course. The course was classified as a social science course by the students and it was said to have highly contributed to their critical thinking skills. Students did not think that the course aimed at establishing one body of thought as the superior one, although the Islamic point of view was evident throughout.

Lastly, the course was said to have introduced them to western academia and increased their interaction with it as a body of work.

Sociology

This course has not yet been offered. According to the department, the upcoming Fall semester of the academic year 2016-2017 will be the first semester during which it will be offered.

Currently, the department is in the final stage of recruiting the course's instructor. The department head made it clear that no single textbook will be used since none of the existing ones can present the full picture. Rather, a number of different sources will be used to construct an Islamic understanding of sociology.

Upon further investigation, I came to know that there are currently two main candidates for the position. These are Dr. Mohsen Saleh and Dr. Ali Krayem, both PhDs in sociology. Dr. Saleh holds a PhD from the United States and Dr. Krayem holds a PhD from the Lebanese university. Interestingly, none of them has a Hawza training, both have a purely academic background.

Further, it appears that the department has asked its candidate professors to author an entire book on sociology from an Islamic perspective. It is that book, in addition to the professor's background and teaching potential, which will be the main factors in deciding who will teach the course.

Thus far, the only thing that could be obtained was the general objectives of the course, as set by the department.

These are:

- 1) The birth of sociology: definition, subject-matter and relationship to the other sciences

- 2) Sociologists: From ancient Greece (Aristotle and Plato), through the Islamic age (Al-Farabi and Ibn-Khaldun) and to the current West (Comte, Durkheim, Marx, Weber)
- 3) Sociology of religion and its lead figures
- 4) Islamic thinkers and the sociology of religion(Murtada Mutahari and other Islamic intellectuals)
- 5) Introduction to research methods: how to study a social phenomenon.
- 6) Application from contemporary reality.

Educational psychology

This course has not yet been offered. According to the department, it is still not clear when it will be offered.

The general objectives of the course are:

- 1) Introduction to the principles of Educational psychology
- 2) Introduction to the main schools of educational psychology
- 3) Main theories of Learning
- 4) Teaching and evaluation
- 5) The establishment of educational goals: ends, objectives and skills.

No information could be obtained as to the instructor of the course. Similarly, no information could be obtained as to whether the course will be using a specific textbook.

Foreign texts in Islamic Studies

This course, meant to be offered to senior students, is a course on western academic production in Islamic studies. It is divided over two semesters (six credits, two courses) and is meant to introduce students to “what the west has to say about us.” It will be, according to the department, a critical investigation and thorough exploration of how the west studies and views Islam and Islamic studies. The course is expected to carry high elements of the social sciences.

Azad Islamic University

Azad Islamic University is a university established in Lebanon in 1994. It is a branch of the Islamic Azad University found in Qom, Iran. The university currently has two campuses: one in Beirut and one in Nabatiyeh, South Lebanon. As per the date of writing this thesis, the university had not yet been accredited by the Lebanese ministry of higher education. Its degrees are, nevertheless, accredited within Iran, as they are considered degrees granted by the Azad university located in Qom. Therefore, the university has been functioning, teaching and graduating students, for the past 22 years. Since its inception, the university has enrolled over 10,000 Lebanese citizens within Lebanon.

Currently, its running majors are those of Political science (BA and MA), Educational Management (BA and MA), Human Resources (BA and MA) as well as Philosophy (BA). The university does not have a degree of Islamic Studies, unlike the mother university in Qom. As to why an Islamic University does not offer Islamic studies, Shekh Mohamad Sebaiti, the general director of the University in Nabatieh, declared that there

is no Islamic Studies major because there is no interest for such a major at academic universities in Lebanon. Those interested pursue Islamic Studies at Hawzas.

Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, the following conclusions may be drawn:

- **Islamic Studies is a major that self-defines as one which seeks to graduate scholars and researchers of Islam.** This is clear from the websites and the interviews conducted.
- **Islamic Studies at the universities investigated does not offer its students training in research methods;** they are not taught to read their social realities.
- **Islamic Studies at the universities investigated focuses on teaching students to read and extract information from text.** The great majority of subjects at the university were similar to those of the Hawza.
- **Islamic Studies at the universities investigated offers a number of social science courses: 15 % of the total number of credits required for graduation.** Introductions to psychology and sociology and courses in economic and education, with an Islamic title, were offered.
- **Islamic Studies at the investigated universities frames the social sciences as a product of the materialistic west:** the claim of these institutions is that they are to be known and engaged with but they cannot, at least in their current state, be applied to Muslim societies. The claim of “humanizing the social sciences” launched by Sayyed Ali Khamenei or of “Islamizing the social sciences” launched by a number of other Islamic scholars resonated deeply within these faculties.

- The future of Islamic studies at Islamic universities in Lebanon seems toward **increased engagement with academia and social theory, whereby students are exposed to this body of work and its production, with no apparent directions towards the formation of researchers capable of conducting fieldwork.**

Analysis of eight Master theses produced by the Islamic Studies department at the Islamic University of Lebanon

The analysis of written texts to understand their nature and their generators is an area of study on the rise. Many researchers have worked on the discourse analysis of master and PhD theses, with a large variety of methods and objectives. On the local level, Hala Awada (2015) produced a PhD dissertation analyzing and assessing knowledge production at the Institute of sociology at the Lebanese University. From her work, it is clear that knowledge production in the social sciences is not at its best in the nation, where the formation of researchers is, by excellence, sub-par. Indeed, she states that the educational approach of the institute is built in a way as to have students suffice themselves with passive listening where critical thinking is stifled. It is in such a context of social science that these master theses have been produced. Jacques Kabbanji (2010) had attempted to draw out the state of research and the research community of Lebanon. He concludes that the research community in Lebanon is fragmented and divided, drawing out a dark scenery in regards to knowledge production in the country.

More recently, Sari Hanafi and Rigas Arvanitis (2015) have discussed the quandary of Arab research, as well as its complicated relationship with policy-making. The authors conclude that the Arab world is one where research has not yet reached a state of social

and political legitimacy, stuck between the influence of the global and the problems of the local. Thereof, it becomes clear that the social and academic conditions of knowledge production in the nation pave the way for mediocrity and stifle criticality. Thereof, based on the approach of the studies mentioned above, investigating the form, the content and the characteristics of master theses produced by Islamic studies students should shed some light on modes of thinking, training and future headings in the discipline. It should indicate whether the same patterns as those found in the wider research community of the country and the region are present.

In Lebanon, the Islamic University of Lebanon offers both Master and PhD level formation. Al-Maaref University currently only offers a Bachelor's degree. Azad University, the Lebanese branch of the Iranian Azad University, does not offer an Islamic studies or a religious studies program despite its self-identification as an "Islamic University." The master program at the Islamic University of Lebanon is a two-year program composed of two main elements: coursework and a thesis. The thesis is viewed as the culmination of the program and its defense entitles its author the title of Master in Islamic Studies.

Objective

The objective of this chapter is two-fold: first, to identify the presence of the social sciences, as methodology, theories and/or literature. This would reveal the scope of non-religious work the students are exposed to. This becomes especially relevant in light of claims, made by both professors and students of the Hawza, stating that "personal reading and research" make up for the lack of a serious social science component. Second, to

investigate the structure and the nature of knowledge produced by the Islamic Studies Department at the Islamic University of Lebanon.

The categories under search, detailed in the Methodology section below, are constructed to inform as to the abovementioned objectives.

Methodology and data

The Islamic University has, up until the time this chapter was written, granted 31 master theses in Islamic studies. These theses cover a large variety of topics. The majority are related to theological or philosophical issues that are of no interest to this study.

Examples of such theses are ones discussing the conceptualization of *Heaven and Hell in light of Mulla Sadra's philosophy*; *Divine knowledge according to Shirazi* or *Icon and numerical calculations in the Qur'an*.

Nevertheless, a significant share covers issues which are not purely theological or philosophical in nature. Some of these touch upon social issues while others touch upon other fields of contemporary knowledge, such as medicine. The method used here was the content analysis of the eight master (out of 31) theses produced by the IS department at the IU tackling issues covering fields of knowledge that may engage with the social sciences. The eight theses analyzed (seven hard copy + one soft copy) were obtained through the Islamic University of Lebanon's central library. To generate data, four categories of analysis were identified as being of relevance:

Category 1: Identifiable research question/objective.

This is understood as having a distinct section for the research question/objective as well as the formulation of a clear research question (or set of questions.) If there is no clear

research question/objective the very classification of the work, as scientific research, becomes questionable.

Category 2: Identifiable Methodology.

This is understood as having a separate section where the methodology is presented. This includes the rationale of choosing the methodology, the actual work done as well as the discussion of limitations. The value of this section is that it reveals whether the researcher took up thought-out methodological work or whether they were merely story-telling.

Category 3: Discussion of previous studies.

This is understood as having a separate section or sub-section where the literature on the issue is reviewed. The value of this section is that it reveals the body of work on which the researcher is building.

Category 4: Academic citing of source.

This is understood as the usage of any academic citation style where sources are clearly identifiable. The value of this section is that it reveals whether the students have been exposed to academic writing. If they have not, their engagement, and the degree to which their work may engage in the future, with the academic world becomes somewhat questionable.

In addition to the above categories, a further division in regards to the cited literature, between Arabic and International non-religious work, is of worth. The main value of this category is in the fact that it reveals the literature and the work to which the students of the university have been exposed to or have engaged with. As most work in the social

sciences has been produced by the west, it is worthy to see whether these students engage with this work using its primary sources. Citing work produced by social scientists when tackling issues of relevance would be the crucial indicator of engagement with the social sciences as a knowledge field. This category is important because it would indicate the shift from mere oration to scientific research. Indeed, it would indicate the transition from using terms such as “as research has shown” or as “scientists have found” when presenting evidence to using proper citation of specific work. This leads to the addition of the following two categories:

Category 5: Usage of Arabic academic/mundane sources.

This category is identified through the investigation of in-text citations (if present) as well as the bibliography. It is an indicator of the student’s engagement with academic scholars from Lebanon and the region. It also indicates the student’s exposure to the non-religious corpus and their relationship with non-religious fields of knowledge.

Category 6: Usage of Western academic/mundane sources

This category is identified through the investigation of in-text citations (if present) as well as the bibliography. It is an indicator of the student’s engagement with international scholars. It also indicates the student’s exposure to the non-religious corpus, through primary texts, and their relationship with non-religious fields of knowledge.

The table below summarize data collected based on 8 theses produced by the Islamic Studies Department of the Islamic University of Lebanon.

| Category Thesis title (year of publication) | Identifiable research question/obje ctive | Identifa ble Method ology | Discussi on of previous studies | Academic citing of sources | Usage of Arabic academic/ mundane sources | Usage of “Western” academic/ mundane sources |
|--|--|------------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|---|--|
| 1) Religious marriage in Lebanon and the problem of the proposed Civil marriage (1999) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.5 | 1 | 1 |
| 2) A comparative study: Sharia Banking and law (2000) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.5 | 0 |
| 3) Governance between democracy and Shura (2001) | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0.5 | 1 | 0.5 |
| 4) Rights and the legitimacy of Power in Islam (2006) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.5 | 0.5 |
| 5) Prisoners of war in Sharia and in International law (2009) | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0 |
| 6) The prophet’s state in Medina (2012) | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0.5 | 0 | 0 |
| 7) Freedom of opinion and surveillance in Islamic Sharia (2012) | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0 |
| 8) --- | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9) The usage of social media in religious preaching and criteria of its evaluation (2015) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Coding scheme: 0 = Absence, 0.5 = Weak presence, 1= Significant presence.

Table 5: Summary of data collected based on 8 theses produced by the Islamic Studies department of the Islamic University of Lebanon.

Analysis

The lack of a clear research question (or objective/purpose) is, perhaps, alongside the lack of any research methods section, the most prominent structural problem with the majority of the theses analyzed. For example, one thesis states:

“ ان لهذا البحث اهدافا كثيرة اهمها بيان ميزات و خصائص حرية الراي من حيث عموميته و شموليتها و
... انها نابعة من احكام الشريعة الاسلامية ”

“This research has a large number of objectives the most important of which is to show the characteristics and the traits of freedom of expression in regards to its generality, inclusiveness and the fact it stems from the rulings of Islamic sharia...”

It is on such and similar ground that I claim that these theses do not have a clearly formulated question that can be methodologically tackled.

Further, only one of the theses analyzed discussed previous studies covering their topics. This potentially indicates that the authors of these theses might not believe in the necessity of building on the work of others or that they are incapable of doing research to locate such work. At the level of content, the lack of engagement with the social sciences was prominent throughout. The thesis discussing Islamic banking (thesis number two),

for example, limits itself to a surface description of the differences both amongst the various Islamic schools and with “civil” legislation. Further, despite the fact that the thesis tackles an issue on which plenty of academic literature exists, the author does not engage this literature.

The thesis on prisoners of war in Sharia and International law (thesis number five) presented both Islamic and international law and critically engaged both, going beyond juxtaposition and claiming the superiority of Islamic law over the International one. Nevertheless, it did not significantly enter the debate of the knowledge fields on which international law stands. I.e. it assumed international law as an agreed upon and uniform system, not markedly engaging the social theories of relevance.

Similarly, the thesis The Prophet’s state (number 6), although pointing out to issues in political thought, did not engage the theories on governance, state and related concepts. Like the thesis on religious marriage in Lebanon (number 1), conceptualization was very weak. Further, the very usage of the term “state” for what the prophet established in Medina is, to say the least, debatable. Unfortunately, such a debate was not tackled.

Nevertheless, the author of the thesis number 6 did display an awareness of the influence of social factors and what has come to be known amongst academics as “localized knowledge.” In other words, the author appeared to take into consideration social, economic and similar elements when analyzing a given scenery, such as a scholar issuing a religious ruling. For example, he analyzes, in great length, the social fabric of the Arab people, throughout the different phases of time. When discussing the birth of the Forbidden months-the four month in Islam where fighting is forbidden-the author speaks of the huge role economics and exchange played in getting the Arabs to declare these

four months as months of peace. The thesis on war prisoners (number 5) displayed similar trends.

Similarly, the thesis on education in the Holy Quran speaks of the Islamic veil and engages in a prolonged discussion as to the social effects of this Islamic duty. Further, the author speaks of the effects on interaction between males and females and how Sharia was looking at a psycho-social system when instilling such a law. Nevertheless, the author does not ground in, make use of or even mention any research work done on the veil as a social artifact in our modern day, despite the great abundance in this literature. Although the author appears aware that different social realities require different approaches, he does not engage with work, or suggest that such work must be done, to understand the veil in the social setting of his particular society.

Further, some theses did present theories in the non-religious field and did engage with them. For example, one thesis covering the issue of power (number 4) took up the various theories of power, classical and contemporary, and discussed them. The author engaged with the theories and attempted to offer alternatives. Similarly, discussing media (thesis number 9) involved, for the author of the thesis, discussing sociological theories as to the role of the media in society and its potential. Conflicting theories were noted and a synthesis was present.

Also, there does not appear to be a significant difference in the usage of Arabic or non-Arabic academic sources. The theses either ignored academic sources altogether or made use of both Arabic and non-Arabic ones.

On the level of academic writing, the gateway to engaging the international community, only two theses had fully abided to a clear referencing and citation system, with two having no referencing. When ordered according to date of publication, a trend towards an increase in proper referencing and improving structure was evident. Indeed, a trend whereby the engagement with other fields of knowledge and with academia also appeared. Yet, none of these conclusions can be generalized and they remain as indicators awaiting further investigation.

Conclusions

First of all, it must be noted that the number of theses is too small to allow for any definitive statement. Nevertheless, the data produced indicates the following conclusions:

- I. **The works investigated lack any type of fieldwork or grounded social investigation.** Research, when found, is limited to textual analysis and no other research method was applied in any of the theses found.
- II. **Most of the work by this academic Islamic Studies Department is religious knowledge.** The number of works on “non-religious” topics is small, revealing a potential lack of interest or lack of exposure to a large number of issues which may be claimed to be of great timely priority.
- III. **There is weak usage of non-religious types of knowledge, especially the social sciences.** Although some thesis, especially the more recent ones, did discuss and seek to conceptualize their topic in light of social theory produced by non-Muslims, such was not the dominant trend. The usage of academic sources was weak and, when present, it was not always a usage of social science research. The

theses did not build on research in the social science, nor did it refer to it, discuss it or substantially engage with it.

IV. **There is a sense that Islamic Sharia has placed emphasis on the role of time, space and socio-economic factors, amongst others, in forming religious rulings.** Yet, the authors, admitting and sometimes mentioning and elaborating on this, never mentioned how such effects may be read and assessed. None of them referred to social science investigations to understand the effect of religious ruling in a given setting.

V. **The theses authored by the students suggests that their training lacks the elements of academic writing.** There is no unified format and it appears that much is left to the student's own taste and effort. No single format was followed and the order between theses appeared haphazard at times. Further, some theses, especially the older ones, left complete sections missing. This weakens the scientific nature of their studies and hinders them from engaging with the academic research community, both national and international.

Interviews with Stakeholders:

As developed in the Methodology section of this thesis's introduction, interviews will be used as a tool to understand, describe and portray social processes. In this chapter, interviews with the stakeholders and the gatekeepers of both Hawzas and academic Islamic studies departments will be presented. The administrative board, alongside the lead faculty members, of the religious educational institution are understood as being the interpreters, gatekeepers, disseminators and guardians of religion and religious tradition.³³ These are the people whom I identify as the Stakeholders of the Shia religious education in Lebanon. Based on renown, and restricted by availability, scholars were sought-out.

The interviews in this chapter serve four main objectives:

- 1- To form a sketch profile of the stakeholders of religion schools in Lebanon in terms of training and educational background.
- 2- To relay their understanding of their establishments and the changes it is undergoing.
- 3- To relay the views of such stakeholders as to the placing of the social sciences, as a field of knowledge.
- 4- To identify the reasons for which a debate is currently found in the Hawza in regards to the inclusion of the social sciences, while there is no such debate in regard to any other field of knowledge.

³³ The theoretical foundation of such a statement comes from work done on American Seminaries. Major examples include "Religiously Based Politics: Religious Elites and the Public" by Daniel V. A. Olson and Jackson W. Carroll. (1992)

To achieve this, a semi-structured open-ended in-depth interview was conducted, either by myself alone or with Sari Hanafi, with a number of administration and faculty members of the various Hawzas and universities under investigation. The interview was divided into two parts: the first part consisted of an open-ended conversation on religious education, Hawzas and its contemporary state. The second part consisted of five open-ended specific questions on issues deemed as being of high relevance. As some of the people interviewed were involved in both academia and Hawzas, they were asked regarding both institutions. For those who were only involved in one of the two institutions, they were only asked regarding the said institution. An outline of the questions asked is provided in Annex 1. These questions do not necessarily correspond to the data provided in this chapter as the interviews and the interviewed were left to speak, to reveal, with minimum intervention. In total, 13 interviews were conducted, representing the different institutions covered in the research in addition to two interviews with the general directors of two Hawzas not included in the research.³⁴

The theoretical objective was to interview, for each of the institutions covered, the dean/head/general director, committee members, high-standing professors or any intellectuals; either influential or capable of providing insight into the inner-working of the Hawza. Such interviewing would allow an optimal understanding of the establishment's view on each of the four points specified above. Overall, such an objective was achieved. Nevertheless, due to issues of unresponsiveness, unavailability, geography and bureaucracy not all those who could provide insight or add to the

³⁴ Habboush Hawza, located in the South and Imam Hadi Hawza, located in the Mrayje region of Beirut's southern suburb.

reflexivity of the data were included and interviewed. For example, I was forced to substitute deans/heads/general directors with their associates and certain committee members with some of their peers. In the following pages, a summary of each interview is presented. The chapter ends by drawing out common patterns based on a comparative scrutiny of the dialogues held. For the general directors, deans and associate deans, as they represent an institution's official discourse, a table summarizing some main points is presented after the interview summary.

1. Sayyed Ali Hijazi

Sayyed Ali Hijazi is the general director of Imam Ali Hawza, the Hawza renowned for its traditional approach. In terms of study, Sayyed Hijazi is an established scholar of the highest standing. In terms of academic study, the sheikh has not had any beyond middle school. Early on in his life, he travelled to Qom and received his religious education, as well as teaching, there.

Launching the interview, the sheikh made it clear that Imam Ali Hawza is a traditional Hawza. Making distinctions with the other Hawzas in the country, he criticized their adoption of the academic model of semesters and years stating that Imam Ali measures progress based on textbooks studied, not on time.

When asked as to why the Hawza has chosen to stick to the traditional model the Sayyed said that he is not ashamed of being labeled as traditional since this model is the productive one. He detailed: "This is what creates a man of great scholastic merit. This is what formed our greatest scholars throughout history." Later on, the Sayyed said that this model has been "tried and has proven successful while the new model, although it has

been running for around 30 years now, has not proven anything yet. Why go to an untested model and leave a well-established one?" Listing names of renowned scholars, some dating around 1000 years back, the scholar said that the Hawza has a heritage with which it cannot and should not break. The Hawza should build and progress, but this is not done by breaking as knowledge is not constructed by destroying one's legacy.

Speaking of the aim of the Hawza, he said that it is to produce scholars, men of great knowledge capable of understanding religion in its depth and of answering all questions people have to ask in regards to religion. While stressing that the purpose is not only producing *Mujtahids* capable of giving jurisprudential rulings, the Sayyed said that preaching, writing and giving lectures is not the main function of a man of religion.

When asked about the social sciences, he said that one must define what is being spoken of. If one is speaking of a collection of definitions and notions with Latin and Greek word roots, then one can use any language one wishes in presenting ideas. This would not be of relevance for Shia scholars. If one is speaking of what the west has produced in the realm of understanding society, he went on, then "I claim that what we as Shia have in our legacy is greater."

The sheikh then said that an understanding of society is essential for the religious scholar as he is to work with that society, to build it. Based on this notion, a man of religion is "to study society, to understand it to know how to deal with it." When asked as to how a scholar is to do this and what are the tools which will allow him to read his society, he said that this is not an issue which requires tools, specific methods or calculations.

Rather, the Sayyed said that "living with people, living not as an elite but as one of the people" is what a man of religion must do and this will automatically grant him an

understanding of the society he is working with. The below table summarizes the answers on the main questions asked.

| | |
|---|--|
| | Hawza |
| Theoretical Objective | Producing scholars of Islam. |
| Institution's view on the social sciences | Good to know, can be acquired after a student has finished his Hawza studies and has become a scholar (through personal effort.) |
| Basis of recruitment of Professors | Scholastic ability is the base. |
| Assessment of textbooks being used | These textbooks are what produced the greatest scholars. One can only move on when better and deeper ones are available, not when easier ones are available. |
| Assessment of research | Present and active. |

Table 6: Interview with Sayyed Ali Hijazi.

2. Sheikh Akram Baraket

Sheikh Akram Baraket holds a PhD in Islamic Studies from the Islamic University of Lebanon and a M.A. degree in Philosophy from the Lebanese University. He has also studied sociology at the Lebanese University. Sheikh Baraket has reached the highest stages of religious Hawza studies, and many within the Hawza claim he is a *Mujtahid*. He has held numerous administrative roles at the Hawza and currently teaches two courses: the last two courses offered before students begin *Baht Al-Kharij*. He also teaches at the Islamic University, at the Lebanese University and at Al-Maaref University.

Throughout the interview, the sheikh clearly displayed a strong focus on grounding his statements in history. Speaking of religious scholars he said:

“The relationship between a Shiite man of religion and the people is an extremely powerful one of emotion and mind. It has historical roots in the role the scholars of the past played, such as during the First World War and the time of famine. Sheikhs always played a social role and worked to alleviate the suffering of the people. Sayd Abd-lhsen [Sharafeddine] even began establishing things very similar to social institutions that seek to provide, support and help the people. The Shia man of religion is viewed as a social reference: a sociologist and a psychologist.”

Additionally, throughout the interview, the sheikh stressed the role of “the mind and logical inquiry.” He said that once one accepts reason-based intellectual inquiry, one can enter into all fields of knowledge through that gateway. This, according to him, extends to the social sciences which are a “reading of reality.” Accepting the mind means, for him, accepting that knowledge does not only stem from religious text. The sheikh here made a distinction between confident knowledge and guesswork; confident knowledge must be accepted but guesswork is not binding. The sheikh then said that the issue of the mind is one of disagreement amongst the different schools of thought in Islam and explained the historical progressions, and the reasons behind, the various currents of thought which appeared within Islam. Shiites, for him, grant human intellect full freedom and take what it produces, if grounded and confident, as truth to be followed and built upon. In case this contradicts with scripture, the scripture must be understood differently. The sheikh said that work toward change in the Hawza is underway, yet it is slow. To treat that problem, he revealed that Hezbollah has established an institute where sociology, psychology and other “modern” fields of knowledge are taught to sheikhs and

scholars (in reference to the department established in the Al-Maaref Cultural Association mentioned on p. 59). This, according to him, was an attempt to mend the gap while radical change progresses.

Commenting on the social sciences, Sheikh Akram stated:

“Religious text is a text that has its arenas. It does not seek to interfere in the smallest details of life and plenty is left for human intellect, for reality, for the current time and day. We should not seek to take all decisions based on religious text; that is impossible. Social sciences offer an important way to understand reality that must be used, a way that religion accepts and embraces. The Hawza seeks to take-in a human form of the social sciences, not to take western ideas and veil them. Thoughts cannot be, and should not be, “veiled.” Rather they should be humanized. ”

Speaking of the Islamization of knowledge the sheikh said that “the leader of the revolution [Sayyed Ali Khamenei] is calling to humanize the sciences, not to Islamize them.” Further, he quoted Sayyed Khamenei and said that in a speech, after speaking of nuclear energy as a power source and saying if the nation does not enter into the field of nuclear energy it will be cursed by the generations of the future, he spoke of the social sciences and said that if the nation does not enter the fields of the social sciences it will also be cursed by the generations of the future. Sayyed Khamenei was quoted as saying that it is the social sciences that will determine whether the revolution will persist or fall.

As to the reasons for which a debate in regards to the inclusion of the social sciences has appeared within the Hawza, the sheikh claimed that the issue is not simply that of a view

whereby there is an epistemological difference between the social sciences and other fields of modern knowledge such as medicine or engineering. The sheikh began by saying that no one can contain all fields of knowledge. What is to be learnt, then, is that which serves the objective. The objective is guiding people and, therefore, that which is required to guide is that which the Hawza is required to offer. Once one realizes, according to the sheikh, that there are two levels, the approach becomes clear. The first of these levels is the one which can be taken from any specialist, as it relates to direct experimentation, and the second is the one which can only be taken from someone who has studied the religious fields in-depth since it always comes with objectivity and personal interferences. Since the social sciences are so important, and since they are of the second type, and since they are related to the entire worldview of a human being, not simply limited to particulars, the debate has arisen. What the biologist does, for example, is experiment to extract laws which the *Mujtahid* can take and apply.

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| | Academic Islamic Studies | Hawza |
| Theoretical Objective | Produce people informed of Islam. | Originally, to produce <i>Mujtahids</i> . |
| Institution's view on the social sciences | Considered as part of the training. | There exists a large number of varying opinions. |
| Basis of recruitment of Professors | Professors with academic training and a Hawza foundation are usually preferred. | With a few exceptions, academic training is not considered essential. |
| Assessment of textbooks being used | Generally good, and are constantly being updated. | Generally, old textbooks are being used. Many of these textbooks hold great worth and once better ones are available then one can call for their usage. Nevertheless, some old textbooks require changing and such work is being done. |
| Assessment of research | Insufficient, work is being done. | To be ameliorated. |

Table 7: Interview with Sheikh Akram Baraket.

3. Sheikh Amin Termos

Sheikh Amin Termos is currently the “Manager of educational and cultural affairs” at Al-Rasoul Hawza. He is also a professor at the Hawza, teaching subjects of *Fikh* and *Usul*. The Sheikh is a graduate of Qom, with no academic study at the university level.

Launching the interview, Sheikh Amin stressed on the importance of a university study and the value it brings to the Hawza.

The Hawza, according to the sheikh, is an establishment with a very clear purpose: it seeks to graduate *Mujtahids* and researchers; people capable of extracting religious ruling from texts. It certainly does not seek to “produce intellectuals, that is what a cultural establishment is, not what the Hawza is.” The sheikh stated that the Hawza seeks to prepare, first and foremost, scholars and “seekers of knowledge.” To prove this, the sheikh swiftly referred to the Hawzas’ definition, a definition he stressed one can find in the Hawzas’ message (which he showed me on the Hawzas’ website listed in annex 2).

A *Mujtahid*, according to the sheikh, is someone who seeks to understand Islam. Islam’s rulings can be divided into two sections: the constant and the variable. For example, the five daily prayers are a pillar of Islam, a pillar which is not prone to *Ijtihad*. In this sense, the scholar is “governed by some basics” that he must work under. Yet, this does not mean that there is not a large area which is subject to change with the change of time and space, for instance.

The sheikh here spoke of what has come to be known as “the theory of time and space” as factors figuring into the production of fatwas, a theory “presented elaborated and advocated for by Imam Khomeini.” The sheikh said that much work is being done to develop this theory, especially by Sayyed Ali Khamenei and much research is being produced in the Hawza to present and ripen this concept. In this sense, the sheikh said that “a scholar certainly must read time and place” but that reading is not an absolute one where he produces his ruling based solely on his reading of society, for example. The

duty of the scholar is precisely bringing the text and the social together, producing a fatwa that stems from both at the same time.

Speaking of the social sciences, the sheikh said that it is impossible for the *Mujtahid* to keep up with the age “without a knowledge of, not a specialty in, the social sciences” and their production during his time. Therefore, the Hawza had developed a number of courses covering the social sciences and has begun teaching them.

When asked as to why the Hawza stopped teaching a number of the courses on the social sciences, the sheikh specified that part of this was due to the merge with Al-Mustafa International University. The merge meant that the Hawza had to follow the university’s curricula “with a 20% margin left for maneuver” by the Qom-based university’s administration. The international university has specialty tracks in the social sciences and that is where these subjects are mostly found. Due to the lack of students, and a number of technical factors, such tracks are not on offer in Lebanon and these courses have weakened. Overall, the sheikh stressed that the social sciences are “essential” for the formation of scholars and they still exist in the curricula of the Hawza, with work being done to advance their presence.

Speaking of the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the man whose pictures plaster the Hawzas’ walls, he asserted that “the leader has counselors and specialists in the various fields of knowledge and science.” His fatwa on organ transplant or those on the environment, as illustrations, were not issued till after he had received and engaged with a number of specialists. This, the sheikh advanced, is the model in formation.

Tackling the issue of the curricula and the textbooks, the sheikh said that the Hawza “believes in that which is old as it believes in that which is new.” In this sense, he said that it seeks to mix both old and new, preserving the tradition as it is important and essential in understanding the text and advancing modern and contemporary texts. The sheikh gave a number of examples, such as that which is being taught in Usul classes or Quranic studies classes, where both the old books and the new ones are taught to students.

The Hawza, according to the director, holds a number of characteristics that must be preserved. One of the most important of these is the multiplicity of opinions and the acceptance of multiple views. This is, in the words of Sheikh Termos, “a feature of Hawza study” where students can choose professors, choose textbooks and listen to multiple viewpoints. The Hawza and *Ijtihad* mean that there are different views and this is a sources of richness and a means of progress. Such a situation should not be changed and the Hawza must preserve itself as an enclosure which houses varying, even opposing, viewpoints.

Lastly, the sheikh said that work to advance the cooperation between Hawza and university must and is being done. For example, a number of PhDs, who have no relationship to the Hawza, have been recruited to teach specific courses in the Hawza. Further, there is a weekly seminar which brings together all the students of the Hawza and which is part of Sheikh Termos’s direct duties. A large number of academics, he professed, present a variety of topics, from ancient to the most contemporary issues in the various intellectual fields.

4. Sayyed Hussein Majed

Sayyed Hussein Majed, the general director at Al-Maahad Al-Sharii, quickly delved into a recounting of the Hawza's history and explained how it was, originally, both school and university: the provider of both the highest levels of philosophical knowledge as well as the most basic levels of language. Yet, and with the advent of western systems of education, this changed.

It is for this reason that the curricula in old Hawzas is quite different from that of new ones. Nevertheless, the current Hawza is the old Hawza's gist and this has a number of implications as "the past governs the future." In this sense, a number of subjects have been completely removed, such as those of mathematics and geometry, while another set of subjects has been introduced, such as those of the social sciences.

Further, the Sayyed explained that the pupil of today is quite different from that of days past. On the most basic of levels, the students entering the Hawza today are people who have finished high school: their approach to life and their social responsibilities are very different from the child the Hawzas of old admitted. This has been accompanied by a decrease in the number of students and the increase in the number of Hawzas. Attempting to explain these phenomena, the civil war, economic factors and the Lebanese socio-political realities of today were mentioned. It was clear that the Sayyed was disappointed with the state of religious education in Lebanon and felt that the future of religious training was in danger.

Speaking of the quandary of Lebanese Hawzas, the Sayyed stated that there is no "Hawza atmosphere" in Lebanon. For him, a Hawza is an entire social system and, unfortunately,

Hawzas of the periphery (i.e. Hawzas besides those of Qom and Najaf) fail to provide this. From social relations to choosing professors and textbooks, the situations in the “cities of knowledge” is quite different.

Particularly missing are two pillars of Hawza education: *Mubahatha* and *Muzakara*.

Mubahatha is understood as being a study group/circle where students come together and explain lessons to one another. “*Muzakara*” refers to the sessions held in mosques, holy shrines or the homes of scholars (In rooms often referred to as *baranis*). During these sessions, students quiz each other, orally, working on their mastery of chosen topics.

Further, in the Hawza, as soon as the student has finished the first few years, they begin teaching newly admitted students beginning their Hawza studies. This is known to play a great role in the formation of future scholars and teachers and is unavailable in Lebanon.

Speaking on the relationship between the Hawza and modern sciences, the Sayyed began by addressing the relationship between religion and science. He said that religion does not and cannot, if it is to be true to its pillars, oppose science and its findings. Religion is a group of thoughts and rulings, it has no problem at all with knowledge and science. To the contrary, rulings are things that have to do with the outside world, and modern science is a way of understanding the outside world. Science can be the one to provide an understanding of the outside world on which religious rulings will stand.

According to his view, Hawza students are graduates of schools and universities, and they have a basis within the various fields of modern knowledge. The Hawza is no specialty in such sciences yet it has a duty to teach its students the language of the sciences, the basis on which they stand and their approach, as well as a bit of their history. Nevertheless, the director of the Hawza stated that there are many remarks to be

made in regard to modern sciences, and their findings might be mistaken or disproven. Yet, he said, chances at accuracy are much greater with the usage of these sciences than without them and this, for by all means and measures, is enough. On a different note, he explained how one should not attempt to measure the Hawza to the university. The Hawza, for him, was not parachuted into society. In addition to its attempts at “modernity” the Hawza is linked to its history, a very long, valuable and rich history.

In regards to the issue of textbooks taught at the Hawza, Sayyed Majed clearly stated that old books still need to be taught. Their contents set aside, they are needed to train students and give them the capacity to return to original texts and main sources. An essential source of extracting rulings is *Hadith* and understanding this text requires understanding the language, the way, and the various realities of the past. Old books cannot be simply set aside in favor of new ones. Giving the example of Arabic grammar, he said that there is a huge difference between what a university student studying Arabic wants if compared to what a Hawza student studying Arabic wants. The university student wants to learn correct speech while the Hawza student is like an archaeologist who wants to go back in time and understand what was going on, what was meant, what was asked. Nonetheless, the Sayyed stated a problem with a number of textbooks and their content, calling for betterment.

In regards to the state of research at the Hawza, the Sayyed rated it as sub-par. He said that there is a system of research for *Bahth Khairj* but it is a weak one, far from where it should be. In an attempt to mend this, small research tasks have been incorporated within specific subjects throughout the curriculum. Attempting to understand this phenomenon, the Sayyed said that it is a cultural issue whereby the spoken culture is very strong and

society is not into reading and researching. Research is considered as surplus, not as a building block of knowledge.³⁵

Answering as to why there is a debate in the Hawza as to the inclusion of the social sciences, while there is no such debate as to the inclusion of hard sciences or medical sciences, the Sayyed said that the issue is complex and, while there is an epistemological difference between the hard sciences and the social sciences, “the issue does not stop there.” To start with, it must be clear that the various fields of human knowledge have greatly expanded, rendering it impossible for an establishment to offer everything, be it medicine or “the social sciences in their wholeness.” The Hawza as an establishment, the Sayyed explained, can no longer encompass these fields. Based even on specialization, the Hawza seeks to produce scholars capable of generating a jurisprudence: it must offer the fields of knowledge which can serve this. Closing, the Sayyed said that this is all an analysis, and studies need to be undertaken to realize why such a division had occurred.

³⁵ It is unclear as to how the culture of the people became so influential within the religious establishment. Historically speaking, the Hawza had always had its own culture of scholarly work, within the religious fields of knowledge, and engagement, even in time when illiteracy was the norm. The Sayyed may be alluding to an interesting phenomena: the collapse of the scholarly community into that of the masses.

| | Hawza |
|---|---|
| Theoretical Objective | To graduate a group of scholars capable of producing religious knowledge compatible with their age, capable of proposing both criticisms and visions. |
| Actual Objective | To graduate preachers, religious teachers and knowledge spreaders. |
| Institution's view on the social sciences | There are a few subjects that introduce these sciences, and these fulfill the minimum needs. |
| Basis of recruitment of Professors | Academic study is part of the system, even in terms of remuneration, the professor's academic degrees are taken into account. Yet, the relevance of academic training differs from subject to subject. |
| Assessment of textbooks being used | There are many problems, but preserving the original works and the classical books is a must. |
| Assessment of research | Weak. |

Table 8: Interview with Sayyed Hussein Majed.

5. Sheikh Hussein Al-Kheshn

Sheikh Hussein Al-Kheshn is the general director of Al-Maahad Al-Shar'i. Sheikh Al-Kheshn finished his secondary education in Lebanon and then traveled to Qom where he received his Hawza training, reaching the highest level of training. Later on he pursued

his academic education to obtain an M.A. in Islamic studies from Azad University and a PhD in Islamic studies from the International University in London.

Speaking of the Hawza's history and its relationship to other fields of study, the Sheikh said:

“Historically, the Hawza was the center of knowledge within an Islamic community. This means that medicine and Math and all other types of knowledge were taught at the Hawza. With the progression of time and the appearance of academia, this situation changed and the Hawza became more and more focused on the science of *Fikh* and *Usul*.”

Defining the Hawza, the sheikh said that it is the establishment that seeks to preserve Islam and works on the “the rectification of deviant phenomena.” The sheikh then explained that a major problem in the Hawza of today is that it ignored other sciences and became “encompassed within the theoretical and abstract.” Stating that the social sciences are “free sciences without a religious or a doctrinal identity,” he claimed that they must be incorporated as they are essential to the formation of a successful man of religion. The sheikh stressed that “there is a rift between these sciences,” with historical grounding. This rift is, in the sheikh's eyes, dangerous and it “must be removed.” Yet, he admitted that within the establishment, there are two views: one sees these sciences as part of a man of religion's specialization, and another which does not.

Sheikh Al-Kheshn then made an interesting statement, resonating with what had been said by the directors of multiple other Hawzas, regarding the relationship between Sheikhs and the society. He stated:

“There is a problem with the mindset of the people: they think that a sheikh is the answer to all problems. People need to begin going to specialists and not to sheikhs at every turn. The Hawza seeks to give its students the keys by which they can understand the other sciences but it does not seek to make specialists in those sciences. Sheikhs normally receive questions of medicine, of psychology and of various other fields and they are expected to know.”

Despite this, when asked about why the Hawza is not offering substantial introduction to the social sciences, he claimed that the issue is mainly practical. The first problem is an issue of time, capacity and low student enrollment.³⁶ Justifying, he added that a Hawza student is one which has received the Lebanese secondary degree: they have a minimum level of general knowledge and consciousness and they have been exposed, at high school, to these social sciences. The sheikh also said that lectures and seminars on topics of the social sciences or of medicine, which are periodically held at the Hawza, contribute to filling the gap. Further, noting the attempts underway by Al-Mustafa International University, the sheikh said that providing students with sources and acquainting them with knowledge which is not strictly religious is also essential and being worked on.

6. Sayyed Jaafar Fadlallah- Son of Sayyed Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah

Sayyed Jaafar Fadlallah is the son of Sayyed Mohamad Hussein Fadlallah. He has reached the highest stages of Hawza studies and has recently obtained a PhD in sociology

³⁶ In a 2007 Interview, published In Al-Safir Newspaper, Sheikh Al-Kheshn had stated that the number of Hawza students had tremendously risen during the 80s as a result of the appearance of political Islam. (هوارى, 2007)

from the Lebanese University. He is involved in the administration of Al-Maahad Al-Shar'i, the Hawza previously headed by his father.³⁷

Sayyed Fadlallah spoke on the Hawza scenery and said that Sayyed Ali Khamenei has taken up a promising project with the Al-Mustafa International University: a project to bring the Hawza and the university together. This project certainly includes social sciences. Currently, work is being done by launching cooperation agreements with over one hundred Hawzas around the world, including the Al-Maahad Al-Sharii. Further, he said that there is an international shift in the fields being researched in *Bahth Al-Kharij* and in *Fikh* classes. Explaining why, historically, Hawzas limited themselves to issues of personal worship (such as prayers and fasts) he said the issue is that of government: the Shia had been oppressed, with no power and no government. Today, with the Iranian state, this is no longer the case and entry into the various arenas of life is now possible, now necessary.

Sayyed Fadlallah then spoke of the Najaf Hawza, saying it is “the Hawza which links to the Arab world” and it is quite behind. He claimed the presence of two currents of thought in Najaf: the official current which is not too welcoming of progress and an undercurrent calling for change and reform. He explained that the situation in Najaf is quite complicated and the *Marji'ya* must maneuver in a way which prevents any form of clash.

Sayyed Jaafar called for an approach that refuses enclosure and takes *Fikh* into the real world: “the phenomena must be understood by the experts, and the *Fakih* comes in” and

³⁷ A document titled “Modernizing the Hawza,” authored by Sayyed Jaafar and presented to the Maahad as part of the project of reform it is undertaking, is presented in Annex 5.

works on rulings. Sayyed Jaafar also spoke of administrative problems that prevent the Hawza from swiftly introducing social science classes, as well as the opposition of some Hawza professors.

Speaking of the Islamization of knowledge, Sayyed Jaafar claimed that there is no such thing. He said that “the need is to humanize these sciences and not Islamize them.”

Sayyed Jaafar then spoke of fatwas and rulings saying that “there is no ruling which is 100 percent positive or 100 percent negative, you must take into consideration the effects of the fatwa on society.” Further, Sayyed Jaafar stated that “for religious discourse sociology is indispensable, whether it is *Fikh* or guidance.”

7. Sheikh Khanjar Hamieh

Sheikh Khanjar Hamieh is a scholar, professor and director at Al-Maahad Al-Sharii. He is also a professor and the head of Philosophy department in Saida campus of the Lebanese University. He has written a multitude of books amongst which are books on philosophy and Mysticism.

The sheikh said that the policy of the Maahad is teaching Islamic studies, not a Maahaad of pure Shariaa. The sheikh said that this renders two things as part of the Mahaad’s responsibility: knowing religions and sects, and the social sciences.

This, according to the sheikh, means that students must learn social theory, as well as social methods of reading society as “these methods have proven their vast efficiency in reading society.” In teaching students religions and sects, the Maahad has been effective in teaching its students and granting them substantial knowledge of the various cultures and religions of the world. In teaching the social sciences, both theory and methods, the

sheikh said that the situation is more complex: students do not feel the need nor do they have the desire to learn these sciences. Despite this, the sheikh said that the Maahad has been working and seeking to get students interested in these sciences and many subjects have been introduced into the curricula of the Hawza. Yet, unfortunately, the non-responsiveness of students rendered it very difficult to continue teaching these topics and the Hawza reduced them into introductions offered through a very small number of courses. Yet, the sheikh said that attempts are still underway.

As to students, he held that the vast majority of these students are university students, mostly in the fields of philosophy, sociology, psychology, Arabic literature and English literature. Further, the Maahad has a twin relationship with the Islamic University of Lebanon whereby all students are required to attend courses there, an agreement that has been, and that is, very successful. This stems from the necessity of studying at the university, even if it is a material sense that calls students to obtain university degrees and provide a source of income. Therefore, the issue is not a feeling that ulterior forms of knowledge are not of worth but rather a feeling that they are not to be received in the Hawza as it has other fields of knowledge to offer.

In regards to the reason for which there is a debate within the Hawza as to the inclusion, or exclusion, of the social sciences, the Dr. was clear. For him, there is an “epistemological difference” whereby the hard sciences give facts while the social sciences are within the realm of the intellect where there are no facts but rather opinions. Medicine, for example, “is not a field of knowledge related to

understandings/interpretations.” The social sciences, on the other hand, are in the realm of opinion, and is it the realm of the intellect and theory, it is the realm of the Hawza. Therefore, it is only normal for such sciences to figure in the Hawza while fields such as physics and medicine do not belong.

Concluding, the director defined the Maahad’s purpose as “not graduating religious scholars but graduating a man knowledgeable in religious sciences capable of speaking understanding and relating to his community.” The purpose is, therefore, producing a religious intellectual capable of speaking to these sciences.

8. Sheikh Abdl-Hassan Fayyad

Sheikh Abdl-Hassan Fayyad is a graduate of the Lebanese Al-Maahad Al-Sharii, with no substantial study in either Qom or Najaf. In terms of academic study, the sheikh has studied psychology at the Lebanese University. He is currently, and has been since the institute’s establishment, the general director of the Al-Baker Institute.

Launching the meet, the sheikh began by distinguishing between a man of religion (Christian model) and a scholar of religion (Muslim model). In Islam, the sheikh explained, there is no clergy. Further, an Islamic scholar is someone whose work and research is based on understanding the holy Quran, the Sunna of the Prophet and that of his household. It is from there that he forms his worldview.

The sheikh then explained that such scholars are responsible for issuing Islamic rulings. These rulings can be divided into two types. The first type is that of immutable rulings; rulings which transcend space and time such as fasting and praying. Other rulings are not

like this: what is found in text and scripture are the overarching principles whose practical applications can greatly vary with the variation of time and space. This, the sheikh claimed, is a challenge and much work must be done to understand and present these segments of religious law. This, according to the general director of the Hawza, becomes especially relevant once one realizes that a number of rulings currently found and considered as essential elements of religion have greatly been influenced by culture and local circumstances. Giving examples, the sheikh spoke of the relationship between men and women, where many things are considered as being great violations while, speaking in terms of *fikh*, they are Halal. The sheikh repeatedly stressed that religious rulings must necessarily take culture, time and space into consideration.

Here, the sheikh spoke of the basis on which religious rulings are issued. He said that extracting religious rulings is not a haphazard process, it is “an accurate process involving a number of different knowledge fields such as *Diraya, Hadith, Usul, Rijal...*” When a *Mujtahid* enters such a process he must take into consideration the overarching principles which govern fatwa production, such as seeking benefit and preventing harm. Further, his work must be based on the four basis from which religious rulings stem: the Quran, the Hadith and the Sunna, reason and the unanimous agreement of scholars as a revelator of the Infallibles’ command.

On another note, in regards to the current state of religious education, the sheikh said that there are two types of Hawzas: traditional ones and ones which are keeping up with the age. Stating that a man of religion is one whose entire work is in his community, the sheikh said that the Hawza that keeps up with time and change is one which allows its students to have a different mentality, a different approach to society and rulings. Being

specific, the sheikh specified fields such as psychology and sociology as being ones at the core of a religious scholar's realm. Further, the sheikh stated that religious scholars do not know everything and they should not present themselves as experts in all fields, nor should their community view them as such.

This, he then explained, is theoretically clear but bringing it to practice and integrating these sciences has not, and is not, easy. From practical and financial constraints to theoretical ones, he said that the Al-Baker Hawza has not yet been capable of integrating a number of significant sciences. In an attempt at mending, a number of workshops have been introduced to the Hawza and its program. These include the various fields of the social sciences and the humanities: from business and education to sociology and psychology. Throughout, the sheikh stressed that students in Lebanon do not acquire knowledge the same way their peers in Qom or Najaf do. Explaining the quandary of the Hawza, the sheikh spoke of economic, social and political issues, amongst others, as barriers.

Speaking on the relationship between the Hawza and western knowledge, the sheikh spoke of such encounters in a very positive light and said that much work is being done on these regards within Iran. He quoted Imam Ali's saying: "Know that people are of two types: they are either your brothers in religion or your equals in creation." (*Nahjul Balagha*, Sermon #53) On this basis, the sheikh said that religion must engage with the world as there is much to learn and explore. The sheikh said that such a principle applies to the whole world and such dialogue is essential for humanity.

The below table highlights the main points of the interview.

| | Hawza |
|---|--|
| Theoretical Objective | A leader in society, a successful <i>Muballigh</i> (preacher) within the needs of society or a <i>Mujtahid</i> . |
| Institution's view on the social sciences | Central to a successful scholar. |
| Basis of recruitment of Professors | Depends on subjects. When it is social sciences it is the academic criterion. |
| Assessment of textbooks being used | Must always be in progress. There are no holy books and change is always required. |
| Assessment of research | In Lebanon, things are extremely far from where they are. |

Table 9: Interview with Sheikh Abdl-Hassan Fayyad.

9. Sheikh Mohamad Choukeir

Sheikh Mohamad Choukeir is the former Dean of the Faculty of Islamic studies at the Islamic University of Lebanon and a current professor at the faculty, as well as at the Lebanese University. He is heavily involved in the formation of curricula and the choice of teaching material at the Islamic University. Prof Chokeir holds a PhD in Philosophy from the Lebanese University and has studied the highest stages in the Hawza of Qom. He has also taught at a number of different Hawzas and has held multiple roles as both a professor and administration member of a number of Hawzas.

Interviewed, Sheikh Choukeir pointed out a number of key ideas that are crucial to understanding the relationship between the conditions of the social sciences within institutions that seek to train religious scholars. The sheikh presented a descriptive framework of what Islamic studies are, and offered a deep comparison between Islamic

studies and Hawza education. Sheikh Choukeir also said that Islamic studies in the west, albeit probably an extension of Orientalism and the need to understand this part of the world, hold a large number of major advantages and advancements. He stated that Islamic Studies departments in Western universities are “worthy to learn from and much can be taken and developed from there.”

The sheikh said that the theoretical objective of the Hawza is to train experts in both religion and society; people capable of guiding people. This is no different from what is expected for academic Islamic studies. Distinguishing between the two institutions, the sheikh said that a Hawza seeks to form *Mujtahids* while academic Islamic studies may have one of three purposes:

1. Training an Islamic scholar
2. Training a *Moubaligh* (preacher)
3. Training a teacher: an academic that has sufficient knowledge of the Islamic sciences to teach them.

Speaking of the social sciences, the sheikh said that there is an agreement within Islamic studies that such sciences are essential components for successful training. When the social sciences are absent, it is mostly a practical issue. As to when the social sciences are present without any significant contribution, the sheikh made no comment. In the Hawza, on the other hand, the sheikh said that there are different currents with deep discrepancies. Some view these fields as essential and others view them as the plague. Discussing the issue of professors, he said that the Islamic University usually prefers to recruit “professors with academic training and a Hawza foundation.” This is unlike the

Hawza where “academic training is hardly ever taken into consideration.” This, in the sheikh’s views, comes with the fact that the Hawza is still using old textbooks; causing serious problems. The “lack of research” accentuates this, rendering the Hawza an institution in need of much renewal. The sheikh was clearly dissatisfied with the Hawza and considered it as being an establishment in dire need of reform.

In terms of research, the sheikh said that academic Islamic studies is progressing. Currently, no major trend in research topics: some are pure *fikh* and Philosophy (theoretical) while others deal with social issues. No comment was made as to the methods used in the research that dealt with social issues.

In terms of why this is a debate within the Hawza, the sheikh said that fields of knowledge have become extremely complex and it is now impossible for anyone to have knowledge in all fields, not even in multiple fields. Hence, the Hawza decides on including or excluding fields “based on relevance.” For him, the social sciences are involved in the very act of engaging with the world and producing fatwas, and that is why they need to be included. Other fields of knowledge do not pose such a relevance to scholars. Medicine, for example, is only needed in applying the Fatwa, not in producing it. There, the people who want to apply the fatwa can get the fact from the medical expert. But for the social sciences, this is not the case and the issue is not one where the people can simply refer to experts to apply the fatwa.

Asked as to whether there is an epistemological difference between the social sciences and the hard sciences, the sheikh said there isn’t. “We believe that the social sciences give facts just as the hard sciences do,” he said.

10. Dr. Farah Moussa

Dr. Farah Moussa is the current Dean of the faculty of Islamic Studies at the Islamic University in Lebanon. He holds a PhD in Islamic Studies from the same establishment. Dr. Moussa does not have significant Hawza training and is generally seen as an academic.

Dr. Moussa, explaining his views in regards to western sciences, said that Islam does not ask its followers to blindly take and apply what others have produced. Rather, Islam tells you that these others, as you are, are humans. This means that their findings apply to you and relate to all human beings. Islam calls for you to make use and learn from all others but you must give these forms of knowledge “a new spirit, a spirit of Islam that relates to your own society.”

Dr. Farah stated that no text can be understood in separation from reality. The holy text deals with human beings and it must be understood as such. He explained that there are rules that govern the proper approach to text. Despite this, Dr. Farah claimed that “the basic Islamic texts include all aspects of human life” and made it appear as if the religious corpus contains all forms and types of knowledge that both the individual and society could ever need. After explaining how and what *Usul al-Fikh* is, and stating that it represents the set of rules which govern the process of thinking, Dr. Farah summarized his view and said “We need the west, we need the sciences, we need the theories but we need to know the rules that should govern the process of thinking to make them relatable and use them.”

Contemplating on the relationship between the Hawza and the University the dean said that one of the most important features of any university are its rationale and its methodology. Lacking at Hawzas, Dr. Farah said that the Hawza offers the depth of knowledge, the depth of understanding and information. He mentioned a number of notable textbooks taught at the Hawza and said they are ciphers; nearly impossible to understand, “imagine how they would be had those scholars used the organization/approach academia offers.” In this, he said that this is one of the important factors that stress the need of coming together, of combining and cooperating between the Hawza and modern academia. The below table highlights the main points of the interview.

| | |
|---|---|
| | Academic Islamic Studies |
| Theoretical Objective | To preserve Islam and to seek the rectification of deviant phenomenon that appear within Islam. |
| Institution’s view on the social sciences | There is no problem and they are viewed as part of the training. |
| Assessment of textbooks being used | Knowledge is present in the old books but they are incomprehensible. That is why the university is always seeking to offer new books. |
| Assessment of research | Scientific research is more organized than the approach |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <p>of the Hawza, this is what we are doing: giving order and comprehensibility to the knowledge of the Hawza.</p> |
|--|---|

Table 10: Interview with Dr. Farah Moussa.

11. Dr. Kamal Lezzek

Dr. Kamal Lezzek is the current associate Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Islamic Studies at Al-Maaref University. He holds a PhD in Philosophy from the Lebanese University with a dissertation on Mulla Sadra. He has taught at a number of Lebanese universities, including the Lebanese International University.

Summarizing the current scenery of Islamic higher education, Dr. Lezzek said:

“The Hawza is a disputed concept: for some it is a rug where we gather and teach. For others it is something completely different. Imam Khomeini claims a disease in the Hawza, and a disease in the university. He called for a relationship between the two, he did not call to cancel either one. Academic universities are not established as an opposite to the Hawza, rather it is among of the institutions of civil society; each with its own role. It is not an alternative, nor an antipode to the Hawza, it is a complement, a part of the whole scenario.”

He then added that the weight in Hawzas today is to form *Mujtahids*, while in academic Islamic studies it is to form men of thought and researchers.

Dr. Lezzek also mentioned that there is no distinction between Islamic and human and the usage of the term Islamic, such as in the faculty name, can be misleading. Speaking of

the university and the department, he said that is it an arena of education and provide the environment for the meeting of thoughts, characterized by its objectivity and openness.”

The below table highlights the main points of the interview.

| | Academic Islamic Studies |
|---|--|
| Objective | To graduate “Callers to Islam.” To train specialized experts, researchers, in the fields of Islamic Knowledge. |
| Institution’s view on the social sciences | There is no problem and they are viewed as part of the training. |
| Basis of recruitment of Professors | Academic. Without a PhD one cannot teach but certainly having a Hawza background is a huge asset. |
| Assessment of textbooks being used | - |
| Assessment of research | Currently unsatisfactory. The purpose is to become a research institute that produces knowledge. |

Table 11: Interview with Dr. Kamal Lezzek.

12. Sayyed Ali Makki

Sayyed Ali Makki is the founder and general director of the Haboush Hawza, located in the city of Habboush, near Nabatiyeh in southern Lebanon. The Hawza is a complex, housing sections for both males and females. The Hawza runs its program using the traditional division, without an organization based on semesters or courses but rather on textbooks and subjects studied. It offers both morning classes and night classes and runs from the beginning of Hawza study up to the *Bahth Kharij* stage. Self-identifying as a

non-politicized independent foundation of Islamic education, the Hawza is mostly administered by Sayyed Makki and his family, from sons to relatives.

Beginning the meet, Sayyed Makki inquired about the research and when the methodology was briefly explained he advised that the study should not focus on one-geographical area, as it should not only take “politicized Hawzas” as objects of study. Further, he stated that the interview of my research could have been done in correspondence whereby I send him the questions written and he would respond. This, he said, would grant me a document authenticating his sayings and preventing any possible future attempts of claiming that certain things were never said.

In terms of the purpose of the Hawza, the Sayyed said that every student of knowledge at the Hawza has two roles. The first role is, given that the student “has the potential to reach a stage where he can extract religious rulings” from their origins, then this is what he should do. This is so as the “*Ummah* (the Muslim community-surpassing boundaries) is in dire need of *Fukahaa* (plural of *Fakih*) *Mujtahids* as these are the *Wali* and the governors.” In a time where both nation and people are expanding, this need becomes ever-more pressing. The second role is “spreading the Islamic message, called religious Tabligh, as this is a vital character of prophet-hood.”

Reflecting on the state of the Hawza, it was clear that the Sayyed considered progressing, changing and developing all as being important elements to a successful Hawza in our modern day. The Sayyed stated that:

The Hawza does not live outside of society and human sociality is quickly evolving. The old means, although expert and pertinent during their days, are not

fully compatible with modern data. No Hawza student today has not passed through academia, at least at the school level and this same Hawza student is being prepared to speak to an academic nation.

This, in the director's views, means that the social sciences are not only something that may be given to the students of the Hawza, but that they are "a necessity." Psychology, sociology, History, politics and the other social sciences all need to be introduced into the curricula, alongside the traditional subjects. Further, there are other changes that must be made at the Hawza including the introduction of some subjects which are not social sciences but which were not previously part of the Hawza training, such as fields within Arabic language or in literature.

In terms of the social sciences, the Sayyed said that many attempts have been made to introduce these topics. History, for example, has been introduced and other subjects, such as sociology, have also been introduced during certain times.

Lastly, the Sayyed said that the legacy of the Hawza must not be degraded and its big names must not be placed on the side. Nevertheless, this does not mean that things do not need updating. With the old textbooks, for examples, the original books must be preserved but they need "to be re-written using a contemporary expression."

The son of the Sayyed, in charge of the academic program of the Hawza, was shortly conserved with and it was felt that the interview was filled with allegations and word-play: it was clear that the Hawza did not hold many of the things it had claimed it holds.

The interview with the Sayyed was cut mid-way as a family member passed away and he was required to perform certain duties. I did not succeed in scheduling a follow-up

interview before the end of the research. The below table highlights the main points of the interview.

| | Hawza |
|---|---|
| Objective | To graduate <i>Mujtahids</i> and <i>Muballighin</i> . |
| Institution's view on the social sciences | Essential for a successful graduate during this age. |
| Basis of recruitment of Professors | - |
| Assessment of textbooks being used | - |
| Assessment of research | - |

Table 12: Interview with Sayyed Ali Makki.

13. Sheikh Naji Taleb

Sheikh Naji Taleb is a well-established scholar, founder and current general director of Al-Hadi Hawza, located in the Mrayje region of Beirut's southern suburb. The Hawza, plastered with the images of both Sayyed Ali Khamenei and Sayyed Ali Sistani, is a medium-sized Hawza with around 100 students, 95% of whom are also university students. The sheikh is a graduate of both Najaf and Qom, beginning his studies in Najaf and then moving to Qom, with no academic study. Clearly a conservative, in both issues of theory as well as of conduct, the sheikh's personality appeared rather intriguing.

The Sheikh began by stating that there is a huge amount of people producing knowledge and if one is to spend his time learning their names and their theories then one will waste his life. For him, knowledge in the fields of society is to be taken from the Quran and the Sunna; no other source is deemed acceptable. The multitude of people theorizing and claiming knowledge are mostly producing mistakes, hallucinations, dreams and myths. This production is not knowledge, and it holds no weight.

Here, the sheikh said that a distinction must be drawn, here he is speaking of knowledge within “humanities.” Mathematics and the raw sciences are, according to him, a different story where “one plus one gives two and things are clear, constant and true.” Further, here, the sheikh was clear that learning from the West, from academia, from technology, is important and essential. The problem is learning “in the humanities.” In these fields, the general director said, the Hawza has its own Islamic view, based on the Quran and the *Hadith*, which it offers. Giving an example, the sheikh said that *Fikh* deals with a multitude of social issues, such as labor and marriage.

In regard to writing and researching, the sheikh said that learning academic writing is very simple and anyone can do it. As to researching and learning the tools of the social sciences, the Sheikh said that, through the accumulation of experience, every scholar will know how to conduct research. For him, these are not essential things that the Hawza needs to include in its curriculum. Yet, students at this Hawza and at other places, did not seem capable of writing in an academic manner, nor of referencing. Further, these students appeared sometimes as detached from their social reality. It appeared that the Sheikh was unaware of the notion that social reality is far too complex to be understood and related to through the simple observation of untrained men of religion.

Claiming that the Hawza does not settle for anything except “the best,” the sheikh said that the Hawzas of Lebanon are numerous but, for all practical end, undistinguishable. For him, there are no differences, only a geographical and administrative distribution “and this is good.” This statement was extremely surprising, as it was clear that the Hawzas were radically different. When this was said to the Sheikh, he insisted that this is not the case; something the results of this research clearly disprove. By this point, the engagement of the scholar with the outside world and his awareness of daily happening became an issue I had serious doubts of.

Commenting on the introduction of the social sciences in some of the country’s Hawzas, and on the establishment of Al-Mustafa International University, the sheikh said that this stemmed from a feeling of the need for legitimacy: the title of a PhD gave credit and power for those “outside of the Hawza.” Hence, the decision was taken to take up the titles and the structure, of the western model while “offering what we have to offer.” Hence, a Hawza in university dress was born. When asked as to the introduction of subjects which were not there in the traditional Hawza, such as research methods and courses in social theory, the Sheikh gave no direct answer and said that the Hawza “gets what the west has and directs it, cleans it from its error and presents it.” Nevertheless, he was clear that there are numerous mistakes in these courses, and that the Hawza he ran taught no such thing. The below table highlights the main points of the interview.

| | Hawza |
|---|---|
| Objective | To graduate <i>Mujtahids</i> , preachers, <i>Ashoura</i> reciters and <i>Muballighs</i> . |
| Institution’s view on the social sciences | Islam has its own view on these and this is what the Hawza needs to offer, not western social theory. |

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Basis of recruitment of Professors | Scholastic ability and mastery of material to be taught. |
| Assessment of textbooks being used | There is nothing better than the traditional books capable of producing true scholars. Nevertheless, some textbooks need changing. |
| Assessment of research | |

Table 13: Interview with Sheikh Naji Taleb.

Conclusions

From the above, reinforced by observation, the following patterns may be drawn out:

- I. In regards to the background of stakeholders, most of them have received an academic training.** Out of 13 stakeholders, 9 have an academic training with 7 having academic PhDs.
- II. There seems to be an epistemological divide, separating the “hard sciences” and the “social sciences.”** The hard sciences give facts, and they are off-hands for the Hawzas. The “social sciences” give opinions, and they are within the Hawza’s realm of the intellectual. Yet, this was not agreed upon and the claim that the “social sciences” also give facts was found. None of those interviewed claimed that both social sciences as well as hard sciences do not give facts.
- III. Stakeholders do not consider the “West” as being an “Other” with a different epistemology.** For them, the social sciences are based on rational reason and, on that basis, they may, and should, be included. **Why such an approach**

- was found amongst professors and students, while it is absent here, stands as an interesting fact.**
- IV. There are claims of a need to humanize the “western social sciences.”**
- V. There is an apologetic tone whereby the lack of the social sciences in curricula is justified by referring it to circumstances, the need for time and unpopular demand of it.**
- VI. The Hawza is dynamic, but it appears that the courses on “social sciences” have not gained recognition and legitimacy.** They are not, as of the moment this research was conducted, considered weighty and valuable elements within the training of a scholar.
- VII. There is a unanimous call for change within the Hawza.** Out of thirteen stakeholders, eleven insisted on the need for curricula changes and endorsed the current changes taking place. The two others stated that change is necessary but disagreed with the way it is currently being done.
- VIII. There is an appreciation of academic study and its role in shaping scholars of Islam.**
- IX. There is an affirmation of the value of specialization,** both in terms of training as well as in terms of occupation, and a refusal of the notion that a Sheikh is someone people should refer to in all matters.
- X. There is a call for a scientific research approach to religion.**
- XI. There is a claim that “progress” within the religious establishment and the integration of modern sciences is underway and is led by the Hawza in Qom,**

Iran. This was found amongst those affiliated with Hezbollah, as well as those affiliated with other factions of Lebanese Shiism.

Conclusion

Bernard Lewis (2010) explains that the majority of binaries emerging from the Christian tradition, the forebear of modern Europe, are foreign to Islam. Khomeini, with his theology and revolution, Lewis claims, reminded the world of that fact: Islam's objective is not merely the formation of a community, but rather the formation of a "polity, a society and a state." (Lewis, 2010, p. xiii) For this region of the world, religion today permeates social life and prevails as a potent, if not the most potent, social mobilizer. Understanding Islam, understanding its keepers, understanding its knowledge, both theoretical and applied, are henceforth vital tasks ahead of any social scientist, east or west, seeking to understand what colonialism has dubbed the "Middle East."

The Hawza is an old establishment of religious learning, central to the preservation, the development and the production of Shiite religious knowledge. Its parallel is the Madrassa in the Sunni tradition and, according to the claim that Islam has no clerical order, it has no equivalent in the Christian or Jewish communities. As all other institutions of this region of the world, the Hawza is a traditional establishment bombarded with modernity. In the classic literature, the transition from "traditional" to "modern" is claimed as being a rigid, clear-cut and drastic measure. Critical reassessments have made it clear that no such transition can take place. Reinhard Bendix, for example, has called scholars to "de-ideologize" the Weberian ideal-types of "modern" and "traditional" as not to fall into a "spurious, deductive simplicity." (Bendix, 1977, p. 397) The option of a dialectical relationship between that which is traditional and that which is modern seems much more fitting.

As an educational institution involved in issues of politics, economics and conflict the Hawza was the hub of the Islamic revolution of 1989 just as it is playing a pivot role in physical combat in today's Iraq. Unfortunately, it is certainly an institution under-searched. From historical reports on Islamic education, as scarce as they are, it is clear that the Hawza curriculum, akin to its other features, has drastically changed over the decades. From including medicine and astronomy to excluding all natural sciences, the Hawza is hard to draw-out as it is hard to define. In 2016, in Lebanon, the Hawza has no unified model. The number of Hawzas is estimated at around 23, geographically distributed over the south, the Bekaa and the Greater Beirut region. The majority of these are small schools, with the two largest ones being Al-Rasoul Hawza and Al-Maahad Al-Sharii.

By and large, the Hawza is an educational institution which seeks to train preachers and scholars with the aim of producing *Mujtahids*: religious scholars capable of issuing religious rulings. In terms of modernization, a number of Hawzas have adopted the western academic model of set years, semesters and credits. Physical changes, as well as the introduction of technology into classrooms, have also taken place. To achieve its self-identified purpose, the institution mainly offers preparation in *Fikh* and *Usul*, Arabic language, logic and Philosophy, Quranic studies and History. In past years, and for a number of "progressive" Hawzas, courses in the social sciences have been introduced and removed, at multiple cycles. These have only covered theory, ignoring the other four elements of knowledge within the social sciences. Currently, a small number of such courses is on offer at some of the Hawzas. Academic writing, in an effort to engage with the world, has also been introduced. Yet, these Hawzas seem to be losing what Mervin

claims as the defining characteristic of the establishment (that of the student-teacher bond of privilege.)

Al-Rasoul Hawza and Al-Maahd Al-Sharii, the two largest Hawzas, are clearly the two most progressive. It appears that the Hawzas of the South seem more conservative than the Hawzas of Beirut while the Hawza investigated in the Bekaa has opted to take a middle ground and offer two tracks: a traditional one and a conservative one. Hawzas such as those of Imam Ali, Al-Hadi and Habboush pose themselves as hubs of graduating scholars detached from the reality of their liquid world. Yet, it appears that student attraction towards these Hawzas is quickly declining. While the political and the scholarly are certainly intertwined, it appeared that there is no one model of Hawzas endorsed by Hezbollah: from the progressive Al-Rasoul to the conservative Imam Ali, Hezbollah seems to be standing on the side in regards to the question of modernization.

The Hawza is an institution where knowledge is held in the utmost regard; demanding respect. Memorization, for example, is still, even in the most progressive Hawzas, a crucial element. Respect to professors and an “acquisition approach” are key in the Hawza, particularly in the first years of training. The approach, broadly speaking, might be one of acquire now (*Muqadimat*), discuss next (*Sutuh*), contest last (*Bahth kharij*). In terms of critical thinking, it is not clear what this model produces just as it unclear as to when it becomes a legitimate act. Contrasting the Hawza and the westernized university, one student said that the Hawza is a rigid, frozen and paralyzed institution while the University is a fluid, runny and skeleton-less one. The university, a place where the only revered is criticality and where knowledge has no sacredness, is a place where the very notions of knowledge production, transmission as well as acquisition are in serious peril.

A more in-depth look at curricula of the country's two largest Hawzas allows one to note that they have both made steps, often feeble and uncertain ones, toward the inclusion of courses on the social sciences. They have also both increased the allocation of time for History and Ethics, compared to more traditional Hawzas. None of them has attempted to train their students in fieldwork or grounded research. The other Hawzas studied were found to be more traditional. Students of the Hawzas seem to have a very blurred image of what the social sciences are. Nevertheless, they were clear in asserting that these disciplines should figure in their training. They expressed dissatisfaction with the courses they were currently offered, calling for change.

Islamic Studies, as a field of specialty in Islamic universities, is a major that seeks to graduate researchers and scholars of Islam. In reality, it appears that the majority of its students are Hawza students, rendering it a complementing element within the training of scholars-to-be. In Lebanon, for the Shiites, it is only offered by two universities. These establishments offer a more holistic training, compared to the traditional Hawza, shaping aptitudes where Jurisprudence is an element amongst many. Yet, this many does not include fieldwork as a research method, although it does include social theory. With a cautious approach to this social theory, and attempts at offering more "humane" or more "Islamic" ones, these departments seek the formation of critical thinkers. Further, these departments appear somewhere between academia and traditional religious education. The findings of this thesis suggest that graduates research and write without the usage of fieldwork and with weak engagement with modern social concepts and work. Professors generally agreed upon the importance of introducing their students to the social sciences, stressing the value of engaging present reality. Students, similarly, uttered belief in the

value of learning social theory, judged that their education lacked it and appeared confused as to how such a task may be fulfilled.

The stakeholders of an Islamic education in Lebanon are certainly not limited. Their roles are many and varied: from Hawza directors, to deans and associate deans and then to notable professors, scholars and public intellectuals. Despite this kaleidoscope of characters and roles, there was general agreement as to the value of introducing students to modern social theory. Further, there was unanimous agreement as to the need to better the state of research within Hawzas. This included an inclination toward the production of grounded knowledge, using, perhaps amongst others, the research methods of the social sciences. Indeed, as the majority of this class of elites had itself received academic training, often in the fields of the social sciences, the value of such knowledge seemed evident. With an apologetic tone, the progressive side of this intelligentsia showed a trend toward claiming a need for more time and struggle to achieve the inclusion of social theory and, sometime later, social research methods.

It appears that the Islamic field of knowledge is home to three trends in thought: a traditional, a progressive and a revolutionary one.³⁸ Based on the findings, change and development are certainly taking place, yet at very slow and, it appears, weakly calculated, steps. Nevertheless, these may be labeled as some sort of dawdling evolution. Speaking of improving educational curricula, Kelly (2004) states that evolution has proven more successful. She continues to assert that “the process of evolution can be

³⁸ The revolutionaries are mostly the professors of social science topics, such as Dr. Hassan Banna, who taught psychology and sociology courses at Al-Rasoul Hawza, and Sheikh Hassan Al-Hadi, who is the head of the committee responsible for the non-traditional subjects at the Hawza. They call for radical mass change and stress the importance of the inclusion of a variety of courses in the social sciences.

smoother, quicker and more effective, if it is not left to chance but implemented according to carefully thought-out strategies.” (Kelly, 2004, p. 18)

Both on the institutional level and at the level of students and professors, things are no longer as they once were. Yet, the direction this change is taking is, at the moment, unclear. Between a Hawza manacled by its heritage, encapsulated in the yellow books and the drained methods of old, and a Hawza which has become a “Westernized university” in Islamic dress, the threats are huge. Yet, so is the potential. From a student claiming that “all the courses are antiquated” to a professor claiming that the “institution is blind,” it is clear that torpor is not a viable option.

As Malek Bennabi had explained, around 50 years ago, the Islamic world is certainly in a dilemma. Caught between dead ideas and deadly ones, it is a civilization that will certainly fail to reconstruct if it chooses to tread along the paths of others. (Bennabi, 1970) In a world where knowledge has turned into a means of justifying imperial rule, objectifying the non-West, constructing unfounded binaries and reducing the “rest,” Westernized models are certainly not to be blindly emulated. (Chua, 2008) Much of the knowledge labeled as belonging to the social sciences, while often Eurocentric, holds much potential and offers plenty to the formation of Islamic religious scholars. From theory to methods and, most importantly perhaps, to rationale they are certainly of value if Islam, the Middle East and the disenchanting world are to advance.

Annex 1: Interview Guide:

Interviews with stakeholders:

Part 1: conversation covering:

- The background of the interviewee, especially in terms of education (covering the social sciences or not).
- The contemporary world and social order (globalization, political situation, economic reality...).
- The role of religious scholars.
- The situation of religious education.
- Universities and educational models.
- Discuss a topic of relevance to the social sciences (divorce, drugs, polygamy, female employment, social media...)

Part 2: Specific questions:

- 1- What is a Hawza/Academic Islamic studies and what is their purpose?
- 2- What is the institution/department's views on the social sciences? How is this view being projected into curricula?
- 3- What is your assessment of the textbook being used in the various subjects within your curriculum/Subject?
- 4- Is research an essential component of a religious scholars' life? If it is, what is your assessment of research within the institutions/departments of religious training?
- 5- What are the reasons, the backdrop and the instigators of the current debate within the Hawza as to the inclusion/exclusion of the social sciences? Are economic factors involved?

Interviews with Hawza students and university students majoring in Islamic Studies:

- 1- Do you think that the social sciences are important for religious scholars and leaders?
- 2- Have you taken any courses that you would classify as social sciences at your Hawza/university? If you have, please name them.
- 3- *[This question is course specific. If the student has taken more than one course they must provide specific answers for each.]*
- 4- Did these courses offer something (approach, reasoning, skills...) you felt were different from what you were offered in the classes of traditional subjects (*Fikh*, language...)? For example, did this course feed into developing your critical thinking skills or improve your relationship with academia or introduce you to a body of work you were unfamiliar with?
- 5- *[This question is specific to students studying both at the Hawza and doing Islamic studies at an academic university]*

Did you feel there was anything different in terms of approach, reasoning or skills between the Hawza and Islamic studies department?

Annex 2: Guide to Hawzas in Lebanon:

The Guide to schools and institutes of religion in Lebanon was issued by the committee for the Affairs of the Hawza in Lebanon. The committee is an agglomeration of scholars representing the various fractions of Lebanon's Shiite population. The guide begins by outlining the covenant of Hawzas in Lebanon. It is composed of five chapters, as follows:

- Introduction: Why the committee was formed and the covenant put in place.
- Chapter 1: The foundation of the Hawza.
- Chapter 2: Coordination between Hawzas.
- Chapter 3: Wearing the dress of the scholar.
- Chapter 4: Violations.
- Chapter 5: Board of trustees.

Then, the book displays statements from major Lebanese scholarly figures endorsing the formation of the committee and its covenant after which the guide lists the Hawzas in Lebanon,³⁹ with varying details and information regarding each of the Hawzas. The Hawzas listed are as follows:

| Name of Hawza | Year of establishment | Founder's name | Location | Website |
|---|-----------------------|---|----------------------------------|--|
| Najaf Ashraf University for religious sciences | 1990 | Sheikh Mohamad Moufid Ali Al-Fakih | Haris-Nabatiyeh (Lebanese South) | www.al-najaf.org |
| Imam Sadek Institute | 1992 | Sheikh Afif Al-Nabulsi | Sidon | www.nabolsi.org |
| Al-Hawza Al-ilmiya Al-diniya-Ahlulbet institute | 2004 | Sayyed Ali Khamenei's representative | Bint Jbeil | None |
| Hawza of Baqiyatoullah | 2006 | Sheikh Hassan Sweidan-Sheikh Moussa Swaidan-Sayyed Hussein Atwi-Sheikh Hisham Hmoud | Toul | None |
| Al-Hawza | 1987 | Sayyed Ali | Haboush | None |

³⁹ It later appeared that there other Hawzas, especially in the Bekaa region, which the council did not recognize as legitimate establishments.

| | | | | |
|---|-------|--|-----------------|--|
| Al-Diniya | | Hussein Makki | | |
| Imam Hujja Hawza | 1991 | Sheikh Ibrahim Alsheikh Ali Sulayman | Bayyad-Sour | None |
| Al-Bashir Hawza for Islamic Studies | 1998 | Sheikh Jamal Hussein Fakih | Toul | none |
| Al-Maahad Al-Sharii Al-Islami Al-Jaafari | 1960 | Sayyed Nasim Atwi | Arabsalim-Ansar | None |
| Al-Mostafa International University | 1983 | A group of scholars | Haret Hreik | www.miu.lb.org |
| Ahl-lbayt Fikh center of Islamic Studies | 2003 | Sheikh Abdl-Amir MOhamad ali Kabalan | Haret Hreik | None |
| Institute Al-Sharii Al-Islami | 1983 | Sayyed Mohamad Hussein Fadlallah | Haret Hreik | None |
| Institute of Al-Shahid Al-Awal for Islamic Studies | 1978 | Sheikh Mohamad Mahdi Chamseddine | Chiyah | None |
| Al-Thakalayn Institute for Islamic Studies and sciences | 1988 | Sayyed Abdl-Karim Fadlallah | Haret Hreik | www.elhawza.com |
| Imam Jawad Institute | 1993 | Sheikh Youssef Hassan Sbeity | Hay Al Abyad | None |
| Hawzat Al-Imam Al-Hadi | 2000 | Sheikh Naji Taleb and Sheikh Mohamad Taleb | Mrayje | None |
| Imam Baker Institute for Islamic Studies and sciences | Rweis | A group of scholars | Rwes | www.hawzatalimalbaker.org |

| | | | | |
|---|------|--|---|------|
| Imam Askari Hawza | 2003 | Sayyed Haidar Jamil Al-Moussawi and Sayyed Youssef Mohamad Arzouni | Haret Hreik | None |
| Imam Rida Institute for Islamic Studies | 2003 | Sheikh Hassan Rmeity | Ghobeiry | None |
| Al-Albayt Hawza for religious sciences | 2004 | Sheikh Yehya Ali Reslan | Haret Hreik | None |
| Imam Hassan Mujtaba Hawza for Islamic Studies | 1997 | Baalbek | Sheikh Mohamad Mahdi Sulyyman Al-Yahfoufi | None |
| Imam Montazar for Islamic studies | 1979 | Baalbek | Sayyed Abbas Moussawi | None |

Annex 3: Distribution of credits at “Shia Islamic universities” in Lebanon:

Islamic University of Lebanon:

Approximate course distribution at Islamic University of Lebanon, over six years of study, based on the curriculum provided by the university administration:

| Topic | Number of credit hours |
|--|------------------------|
| Logic | 3 |
| Quranic Studies | 37 |
| Islamic doctrine | 13 |
| Ethics, Sufism and Irfan | 4 |
| Fikh and Usul | 58 |
| History/ Sira | 8 |
| Arabic Language | 14 |
| World religions and Islamic sects | 6 |
| Hadith | 10 |
| Scientific research | 10 |
| Political thought | 3 |
| Sociology | 2 |
| Psychology | 2 |
| Economics | 9 |
| Education | 2 |
| Islamic Media | 2 |
| Islamic culture and Islamic civilization | 16 |
| Geography | 2 |
| English language | 4 |
| Preaching | 2 |
| Civil law | 6 |
| Philosophy | 18 |
| Manuscripts | 10 |
| Graduation paper | 30 |

Al-Maaref University:

Approximate course distribution at Al-Maaref University, over three years of study, based on the curriculum provided by the university administration:

| Topic | Number of credit hours for Islamic studies | Number of credit hours for Quranic and Hadith studies |
|--|--|---|
| Logic | 3 | 3 |
| Quranic Studies | 9 | 24 |
| Islamic doctrine | 0 | 3 |
| Ethics, Sufism and Irfan | 6 | 3 |
| Fikh and Usul | 15 | 15 |
| History/ Sira | 3 | 3 |
| Arabic Language | 6 | 6 |
| World religions and Islamic sects | 3 | 3 |
| Hadith | 6 | 3 |
| Scientific research methods | 3 | 3 |
| Political thought | 3 | 0 |
| Sociology | 3 | 3 |
| Psychology | 3 | 3 |
| Economics | 0 | 0 |
| Education | 0 | 0 |
| Islamic Media | 0 | 0 |
| Islamic culture and Islamic civilization | 3 | 0 |
| Geography | 0 | 0 |
| English language | 6 | 6 |
| Preaching | 0 | 0 |
| Civil law | 0 | 0 |
| Philosophy | 3 | 0 |
| Manuscripts | 0 | 0 |
| Foreign texts in Islamic studies | 6 | 0 |
| Approach to thought | 3 | 0 |
| Mathematics | 0 | 3 |
| IT | 3 | 3 |
| Persian Language | 3 | 3 |
| Graduation paper | 3 | 3 |

Annex 4: Distribution of credits/courses at Hawzas covered:

Al-Rasoul Hawza:

Approximate course distribution at Al-Mustafa International University, over around eight years of study, based on the curriculum provided by the Hawza administration:

| Topic | Number of credit hours |
|--|------------------------|
| Logic | 160 |
| Quranic Studies | 352 |
| Islamic doctrine | 272 |
| Ethics | 48 |
| Fikh and Usul | 2032 |
| History/ Sira | 176 |
| Arabic Language | 512 |
| World religions(Christianity, Judaism and Eastern religions) | 0 |
| Hadith | 32 |
| Research Methods | 32 |
| Political thought of Imam Khomeini | 32 |
| Philosophy | 192 |
| Civil law | 64 |
| Graduation paper | 32 |

Imam Ali Hawza:

Approximate course distribution at Imam Ali Hawza, over around 11 years of study, based on the curriculum provided by the Hawza administration:

| Topic | Number of books covered |
|---|-------------------------|
| Logic | Three books |
| Quranic Studies | One book |
| Islamic doctrine | Five books |
| Ethics | One book |
| Fikh and Usul | Around fifteen books |
| History/ Sira | One book |
| Arabic Language | Five books |
| World religions (Christianity, Judaism and Eastern religions) | 0 |
| Hadith | 0 |
| Scientific research | 0 |
| Political thought | 0 |

| | |
|------------------|-------------|
| Philosophy | Three books |
| Civil law | 0 |
| Graduation paper | 0 |

Al-Maahad Al-Sharii:

Approximate course distribution at Al-Maahad Al-Sharii, over nine years of study, based on the curriculum map provided by the Hawza administration:

| Topic | Number of credit hours |
|---|------------------------|
| Logic | 272 |
| Quranic Studies | 320 |
| Islamic doctrine | 336 |
| Ethics | 112 |
| Fikh and Usul | 2550 |
| History/ Sira | 128 |
| Arabic Language | 544 |
| World religions (Christianity, Judaism and Eastern religions) | 64 |
| Hadith | 176 |
| Scientific research | 16 |
| Methods of thinking | 64 |
| Philosophy | 480 |
| Civil law | 0 |
| Graduation paper | 32 |

Al-Imam Al-Baker Hawza:

Approximate course distribution at Al-Baker institute, over seven years of study, based on the curriculum provided by the Hawza administration and complemented by interrogation of students.

| Topic | Number of credit hours |
|------------------|------------------------|
| Logic | 165 |
| Quranic Studies | 157 |
| Islamic doctrine | 121 |
| Ethics | 69 |
| Fikh and Usul | 1811 |
| History/ Sira | 132 |
| Arabic Language | 244 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| World religions (Christianity, Judaism and Eastern religions) | 51 |
| Hadith | 70 |
| Scientific research | 35 |
| Political thought | 0 |
| Philosophy | 158 |
| Civil Law | 0 |
| Graduation paper | 0 |

Baqiyatoullah Hawza:

| Topic | Number of years of study |
|---|--------------------------|
| Logic | Two years |
| Quranic Studies | Five years |
| Islamic doctrine | Four years |
| Ethics | Five years |
| Fikh and Usul | Nine years |
| History/ Sira | Six years |
| Arabic Language | Four years |
| World religions (Christianity, Judaism and Eastern religions) | 0 years |
| Hadith | One year |
| Scientific research | 0 years |
| Political thought | 0 years |
| Philosophy | Three years |
| Civil Law | 0 years |
| Graduation paper | 0 years |

Al-Montazar Hawza:

| Topic | Number of years of study |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| Logic | Two years |
| Quranic Studies | Three years. |
| Islamic doctrine | Two years. |
| Ethics | Three years. |
| Fikh and Usul | Twelve years |
| History/ Sira | Two years |
| Arabic Language | Four years. |

| | |
|---|------------|
| World religions (Christianity, Judaism and Eastern religions) | 0 years |
| Hadith | 0 years |
| Scientific research | 0 years |
| Political thought | 0 years |
| Philosophy | Five years |
| Civil Law | 0 years |
| Graduation paper | 0 years |

Annex 5: "Modernizing the Hawza" by Sayyed Jaafar Fadlallah:

Source: This document was obtained from Sayyed Jaafar Fadlallah during mid-August 2015. It represents a preliminary vision of renewal and reform.

تحديث الحوزة

الهدف: إعداد علماء يفتحون على الإسلام كلّه: عقيدةً وشريعةً وحركةً، عبر الانخراط في الواقع في خطّ المسيرة النبوية والإمامية؛ على قاعدة أنّ دور النبي هو الانفتاح على كلّ قضايا الواقع في خطّ الإسلام بحيث يكون لله الحجة على الناس.

لتحقيق هذا الهدف لا بدّ من تجديد منهج الدراسة الحوزوية:

1- دراسة واقعية مثمرة؛ وهذا يتطلّب:

a. إزالة المطالب التجريدية التي لا علاقة لها بالاستتباط والواقع.

b. ملء الفراغ بالأفكار الغنية التي تستجيب إلى حاجات الإنسان الواقعية.

2- تجديد بعض الأبحاث.

3- المحافظة على العمق.

4- دراسة العقيدة بعمق عبر:

a. الإحتكام إلى المنهج القرآني في البناء العقدي.

b. الإحاطة بالمناهج الفلسفية في القضايا المضادة في عملية حماية العقيدة، على

قاعدة "وجدتُ علم الناس في أربع....".

c. الإبتعاد عن ذهنية التفكير الكلامي ومطالب القدامى وتقديمها كتراثٍ للدراسة

والمناقشة على ضوء ما توفّر في العصر من ذهنية جديدة في فهم القضايا

العقلية.

- d. الإبتعاد عن المنهج اليوناني اذي فرض فهماً على القرآن في تقديمه للعقيدة بدلاً من العكس.
- 5- دراسة القرآن بكل ثقافته وعلومه وتفسيره.
- 6- الأخذ بأسباب العلوم الإنسانية (النفسية، الاجتماعية، التربوية...) التي تهتئ ذهنيّة الطالب للدراسات المقارنة، ويهدف زيادة الوعي للعالم وإلقاء الضوء على تصوّره للمفاهيم الحياتيّة من خلال الإسلام أو غيره، باعتبار أنّ المجتمع يمثّل للإنسان الحوزوي المساحة التي يتحرّك فيها.
- 7- إختصار مدّة الدراسة المطلوبة لتحقيق الإجتهاد.
- 8- دراسة النصوص القرآنيّة والحديثيّة دراسة مستقلّة عن فهم الآخرين، وجعل فهم الآخرين في عرض فهم الطالب للحديث والآية (تدريب الطالب على الفهم المستقل).
- 9- دراسة الظروف المحيطة بالروايات والنصّ الديني عموماً (تشكيل خلفيّة تاريخية اجتماعيّة).
- 10- دراسة معمّقة لموضوعات الأحكام.
- 11- دراسة الفقه السنّي وعدم الإنغلاق على الذاكرة المذهبيّة في شخصيّة العالم، بما يؤدّي إلى إعداد الفقيه الموسوعي، فقيه الإسلام، لا فقيه المذهب.
- 12- إعداد العالم الحركي، وذلك ضمن الأمور الآتية:
- a. تفعيل الجوانب الحركيّة والجهادية والدعوية وعلى مستوى الحكم واقعياً وتنفيذياً (امتلاك القابليّة والأدوات لتحويل النظريّات إلى تطبيق).
- b. وعي القضايا الكبرى وفقهها.
- c. وعي مشاكل الناس وفهم قضاياهم وعيش غاياتهم، بما يؤدّي إلى فهم عميق لخلفيات الأحداث، والنتائج الإيجابيّة الحاصلة منها، والتطلّعات المستقبليّة التي يُخطّط لها

- 13- الدراسة الأدبيّة للغة، وعيشها وتنمية ذوقها.
- 14- الإبتعاد عن الإجتهد التبريري للتوفيق بين الإسلام والأفكار الأخرى.
- 15- عدم الإقتصار على البُعد الفردي للفقّه = دراسة فقّه النظريّات الكُبرى.
- 16- فتح إمكانيّات التخصّص الدراسي.

Annex 6: Overview of the Qom Hawza based on fieldwork observation there:⁴⁰

Historically, the center of Shia religious learning has gone from one location to the other, always having one metropolis. During the first half of the 20th century, this metropolis was Al-Najaf, Iraq. By the turn of the century this metropolis had, in large part, shifted to the “Holy city of Qom” in Iran. Today, Qom is a large urban city that houses the shrine of Sayeda Fatima Al-Maasouma, sister of the 8th Shia Imam Ali Al-Rida.

In terms of religious education, Qom is not one single Hawza, rather it has a large number of Hawzas, of varying sizes, standings and programs. In general, different Hawzas are headed by different major Ayatollahs, each directing one establishment, typically with the help of his own students. In accordance with the reputation of its head, the Hawza gains credibility and renown. When the head Ayatollah passes away, the position is usually transferred to his most notable student.

Hawza instruction in Qom can be said to have two different tracks: one for Iranian students and one for non-Iranian students. Iranian students do not have to enter a strictly rigid program, their relationship is usually with the specific Hawza they choose to enlist in. All non-Iranians, on the other hand, cannot do this. Upon arriving to Iran, these students are first required to learn Farsi for a period of at least 6 to 8 months. They must also enlist with Al-Mustafa International University; the overarching organization that will manage their religious education. By the end of the first year, they undergo exams and, if successful, they can begin their religious training. Most students, nevertheless, do not spend the first year only learning Farsi but begin attending classes. This is possible as the policy of Hawzas in Qom is an open-door policy; anyone can attend any class of any level at any time.

Al-Mustafa International University is a sort of conductor that manages the affairs of all non-Iranian students. It has established agreements with the vast majority of traditional Hawzas located in Qom. Once it admits the student, it will offer them the choice of choosing any Hawza, or any combination of lessons within different Hawzas, appropriate to his/her level. The university will also complement these Hawza classes with some secondary coursework of its own.

At the completion of Hawza instruction, Al-Mustafa will give its students an official academic degree, equivalent to a PhD in Islamic Studies. This degree is officially recognized by the Iranian state. Interviews with students of the Hawza revealed that they consider this as being the reason for which the overwhelming majority of Hawzas in Qom have accepted to become affiliated with Al-Mustafa International University, despite the restrictions it places on them. Nevertheless, there remains a small number of Hawzas that refuse to do this, mainly those opposed to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. According to a

⁴⁰ This Annex present some notes based on observations and conversations with students in Qom in March 2016. It does not claim representativeness or exactness.

student living in Qom, these Hawzas are gradually dying, as less and less students enroll in them because they do not offer any sort of recognized degree.

In terms of language, different Hawzas have different languages of instruction, usually based on the nationality of the head Ayatollah. These include Iraqi, Yemeni and Kuwaiti ayatollahs, amongst others. Students often ascribe to Hawzas corresponding to their nationalities. This is due to a number of factors, one of which is language. Both the language of communication and of teaching in the “Arab” Hawzas is Arabic, unlike the rest of Qom where it is Farsi. Nonetheless, a mastery of Farsi is perceived by students as being essential, especially as a large number of the major Ayatollahs give their lessons in Farsi. In the words of a student interviewed there, the purpose of coming to Qom was “learning under the best there is” and this normally requires a mastery of Farsi.

It is to be noted that the city is usually buzzing with conferences and seminars, involving scholars from all around the world. This was claimed by the students and personally observed. The students there consider attending these as an essential and obligatory part of their training, although they are not officially required to.

The students of the Hawzas usually live in dormitories located around the shrine or within the Hawzas. There, everything is communal (Kitchen, dining room, bathroom...) and the bedrooms usually hold between 6 to 8 students. The students that are married normally live in the villages surrounding Qom, in residential projects affiliated with the major Ayatollahs. For these married students, life is simple. The majority of their time is spent studying. The average home is composed of two rooms, or three if the student has children. Homes visited displayed the same general organization: a living room, which becomes a bedroom at night, and a study room, where most time is spent. On a financial level, the students live a modest life, where their sole source of income is the “gift” offered to them by the various *Marjaa*. The sum total of these gifts is something between 100 and 150\$ per month. They spend this on food, in addition to other essential living expenses.

Classes are regularly held between 8 and 11 A.M., after which all students head home to begin studying. All the Hawzas that are under Al-Mustafa University organize their courses in parallel. Students are informed of all the courses being given at all the Hawzas, with their times and their professors. Transportation is not an issue as all the Hawzas are within walking distance from the Sayyeda Maasuma’s shrine. Most of them sleep after noon prayers and then resume their studies. None of the surveyed students (Lebanese residing there) studies for less than 7 hours on a regular day, most of them studying between 8.5 and 10 hours per day. Hawza instruction runs from Saturday to Wednesday, with Thursday and Friday being the weekly holiday. Two months during the summer are also often taken as holiday where the students return to their home countries or cities.

The number of Lebanese students there is estimated as being around 200 to 300 students, scattered over the different stages. Regularly, students remain in Qom for around 10 to 15 years, with some of them leaving by year 8 and some remaining for more than 15. Most

Lebanese students do not begin their training before age 18 while most Iranian students there begin their training many years before this.

Most of the Lebanese students there finish their studies and return here, and it is rare to find someone that takes Qom as a permanent residence. Often, they return to become public intellectuals, distinguished teachers at Hawzas, religious leaders and Mosque Imams. The reason for which they do not remain there, and teach for example, is blurred. When asked, one student said that “Qom is somewhere to gain knowledge and leave, it is not somewhere we can permanently live in.” It is unclear whether there is a similar trend with other nationalities.

Hawza studies are very much a lifestyle for the students. The places at which they spend their time are usually the same. Their recreation, for example, is usually arranged around the same parks and restaurants. Further, it is worth noting that many students, as a family outing, go with their families to the shrine of Sayyeda Al-Maasoma and spend their time, even dining, in the Shrine’s courtyard. Also, many students go out with their families to parks where their wives sit together and converse, perhaps study, while their children play and they engage in study circles. Indeed, studying in Qom is very much a social act whereby study groups are an essential part of any student’s life. After morning prayers one can easily notice the great number of study groups spread around the shrine. Also, the relationship between the students and their professors is a very intimate one, where the professors consider themselves responsible for the students as individuals. I.e. they intervene in every detail of the student’s formation, not only in the issues related to their education. Home visits and extensive personal conversations between students and professors are the norm. As to the wives of these students, many become Hawza students themselves. Several of these women reach the highest levels of Hawza education alongside their husbands.

Qom is certainly a hub of Islamic knowledge and its attractiveness is on the rise. Political, economic and cultural factors are all in favor of the city growing as the center of Shiite learning. An investigation of its curricula and the training of its students, especially in light of the ongoing changes instilled by Al-Mustafa International University present an extremely interesting, and extremely valuable, uncharted field of research.

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بيروت.