AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

MUSLIM WOMEN NETWORKS: ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE [RE]PRODUCTION AND THE PREMISES OF EMPOWERMENT THROUGH TRANSMISSION AND DISSEMINATION

by
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A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Masters of Arts
to the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Media Studies
of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences
at the American University of Beirut

Beirut, Lebanon
September 2020

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Date of thesis/dissertation defense: [September 8 , 2020]

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my deep gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Sari Hanafi who had a print on my academic, professional as well as personal development since my sophomore year.

My recognition and gratitude are to the women working in the field of *da'wah* who allowed me to be in their everyday life taking notes and asking on every little detail. I would also like to acknowledge my sincere love and thanks to my family and friends for their unconditional love and support.

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Alaa Ali Khaled   for   <u>Master of Arts</u>
                                      <u>Major</u>: Sociology

Title: <u>Muslim Women Networks: Islamic knowledge [Re] production and the Premises of Empowerment through Transmission and Dissemination</u>.

This thesis is about some teeming social actors that operate and co-exist in a society that has contradictory features: conflictual, sectarian, hierarchical, pluralistic, and quasi-cosmopolitan. These actors lie within networks that manage their actions and provide a backbone for their activities. One of these networks is the Islamic institutions, especially that the contemporary moment witnesses a proliferation of publicly engaged religiosities. Most religious centers and institutions advanced women sections where women actively participate in shaping themselves and their perspective societies under the umbrella of *da'wah*. Women activism within/out institutional frameworks is not a new phenomenon but a marginalized one.

This research will shed light on the Islamic knowledge produced by some Lebanese Muslim women activists and the premises of their empowerment through transmission and dissemination. Underlying Muslim women activism is indeed an empowerment process that lies within the "ethical turn" and the "everyday turn" in the Islamic studies and the anthropology of Islam. Hence, this thesis will investigate the knowledge produced and the potential of this activism in engendering novel empowered subjectivities (scholars and activists).

Accordingly, the thesis will be based on a triangulation of 1-content analysis of the curricula used by the activists in the lectures and circles; 2- In-depth interviews with the heads of women sections and independent activists; 3- participant observation mostly in North Lebanon and Beirut to spot the intimacy of Islamic *da'wah*, the mechanisms of the educational system, and the production of meaning within these spaces. As a result, it will consider the sociability of Islam in the public sphere through Muslim women activists as a form of presence in the crowded Lebanese society.

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Dedication:

To women everywhere.
To my mother especially.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Introduction

In a cozy small room in an old house in Hamra Street gather ten mothers sipping coffee and eating biscuits at 10 am. One can think this is just a morning gathering, a *subhye* as used in the Lebanese dialect where women join in for a coffee and a chat, but it is actually a *halaqa* (a religious circle). Some of the women have been attending for almost 20 years with enthusiasm and interest in every *halaqa*. The first time I attended, the discussion started with one woman telling the story of a *da'ii* (one who undertakes a call towards God) who entered a church in Lebanon, without notice, to call people to Islam. She entered the church out of her fear that the Christian community would not go to paradise. The discussion was polarized between praising this woman's actions and huge sense of responsibility about Islam and questioning her sanity. Whenever a woman would join the discussion, someone would recount the story allowing the woman to be included in the discussion until one attendee pointed out that whenever something threatens the mainstream in Lebanon, insanity is used to excuse the act. This was the concluding remark about this topic that everyone, including the teacher in the *halaqa*, agreed upon without further consideration of the validity of this woman's actions. Unavailable in the news outlets, this story shows how women, being part of the Lebanese context, join together in a mundane form constructing perceptions about general topics in Lebanon along with their religious *darss* (lesson). The *halaqa* tackles issues from daily life, and women gather as part of their religious education

weekly or biweekly taking responsibility for their understanding of the general topics in light of their religion. While their gatherings are very informal and sporadic, the *halaqat* provide them with a platform of Islamic knowledge creation that is expanding in impact and scope in recent years.

This platform enjoyed an increased role with the Islamic revival sweeping the Muslim world since the 1970s. A religious ethos or sensibility developed within contemporary Muslim societies as a result. Islamic revival, according to Saba Mahmoud (2004), is comprised of three-dimensional strands: 1) state-oriented political groups and parties; 2) militant Islamists; and 3) a network of socio-religious organizations. This sensibility manifested in the publicity of Islam in different domains, including the proliferation of mosques and socio-religious organizations, the further development of Islamic education, and intellectualism as well as an increase in Islamist political activism. Along this sensibility comes a proliferation of publicly engaged religiosities, whether in the development field, consultancy, religious media, religious education, or social & political activism. Religion gained "the kind of global publicity which forced a reassessment of its place and role in the modern world." (Casanova, 1994, p3) In a reconsideration of the role of religion in the modern world, a "deprivatization" of religion manifested; religion "went public" from Islamic revival that displayed public engagement to Catholic liberation theology (ibid). Religion reengaged itself in the public space staining the traditional boundaries between the private and the public considerations. It instilled itself as a salient force with its "keepers" in the contemporary world.

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The public engagement of Muslim activists gained particular attention after 9/11 and after the Arab Spring despite their existence before. The Muslim world, especially Egypt and Tunisia, preoccupied the public opinion with Muslim groups attaining political power. This led to more attention to the role played specifically by women activists in this domain. For instance, in Indonesia, where the largest Muslim population lives, Muslim women activists played a role in "how the Indonesian nation-state is being reimagined for the 21st century." (Rinaldo 2008a) Muslim women's groups provided women with a platform to be engaged in the national debates over issues such as *Shariah* law, abortion, and pornography (ibid).

In Egypt, Muslim women activism started as Muslim women operated within the domain of *da'wah*, providing religious lessons, Quran exegesis, and hadith at first in their homes and later within mosques. The different mosques became organizational centers for women's activities on the level of dissemination of religious knowledge to the provision of a range of medical and welfare services. (Mahmood, 2004) This resulted according to Mahmoud in the Islamization of the socio-cultural landscape of Egyptian society (ibid). In India, Muslim women activists became integral social actors, despite the initial opposition from their communities, largely involved in "education, family dispute resolution, and economic survival of women in Hyderabad. (Sunneteha, 2012) They aimed for social transformation as seen by these women that the community demanded women's efforts (ibid).

Within this context, and in Lebanon, most religious centers and institutions advanced female branches where *muridin*, women who are interested in learning about Islam join, actively participate in shaping themselves and their perspective societies

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under the umbrella of *da'wah* (call towards God). Radwan al-Sayed claims that 30

female informal organizations were found to be active among 127 organizations as part

of a random sampling between 2012 and 2017.[1]

Within a country of officially 18 diverse sects, a history of sectarian system inherited

from colonialism, a 'sectarian societal mosaic structure', and disrupted sectarian

political system, Islamic movements and organizations were able to establish inroads

for their activism. Abd al-Ghanni Imad (2009) considers that the Lebanese selfsame

sectarian political system renders these movements a unique model in the Arab world in

their enjoyment of political, cultural, and media freedoms. Radwan al-Sayed (2015)

contemplates on how Sunnism witnessed religious revivalism not experienced in any

other. My interest is mainly in the Lebanese Sunni movements, particularly the female

educational movements in their knowledge production, dissemination, and impact along

this process. This revivalism is crucial in stimulating the activism of Sunnite *da'iis*, the

concerned topic of this thesis. I am intending to shed light on the Sunnite movements

that went understudied compared to one-sided studies about Hezbollah, and in fewer

degrees, Shiite activism in Lebanon studied by Lara Deeb (1974), Ahamd Khawaja

(2019), and Wajih Kan-so (2019).

Islamic women activism, especially female educational movements, were

always considered as an extension of male Islamic movements. That led to the obscurity

of the intimacy of this activism. Mostly when studied, the analysis was grounded on

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[1] Personal communication with him.

using liberal paradigms breeding theories like "false consciousness," a theory that suggests that subordinated women comply with hegemonic power out of being convinced by the inevitability of this natural state. Few studies looked deeply into women Islamic activism as women's own voice and choice within an Islamic context and framework.

Female *halaqat* (plural of *halaqa*), the locus of the *da 'iis* activism, were first drawn attention to in one of Elizabeth Fernea's documentaries: *Female in the Middle East: a Veiled Revolution*. Fernea was exploring how veiling was a conscious choice for Egyptian women when she filmed the *halaqat* in the process. However, the focus was not fully on them.

The notion of *halaqat* was first brought into the academic light by Saba Mahmoud's ethnographic account of the "piety movement" operating in Cairo's mosques. That triggered an interest in the role and perceptions of Muslim women transnationally. The transnational activism corresponded to a heterogeneous Islamic revival differing in scope, orientation, and focus while fetching a transnational female role. It picked up momentum in the early 1990s when Afsaneh Najmabadi, an Iranian-American historian and gender theorist, described women's activism as Islamic feminism. As a result, scholars got divided into two camps: one that considered Islamic activism a branch of feminism- A feminism articulated in Islamic paradigm (Badran 2002 & Cooke 2001) and the other led by Haideh Moghissi (1999) who reflected that Islamic feminism construed as a branch of Islamic fundamentalism since Islam is by default a patriarchal religion. Held between the two, Muslim women scholar-activists are engaged in new transnational discursive practices and spaces. (Bahi, 2008)

I use Muslim women activism rather than Islamic or Islamist feminism due to three reasons: 1- 'Muslim women activism' as a term reflects an engagement with the lived sociopolitical reality and an avoidance of restricting this activism to intellectual and individual terms; 2- Islamist/Islamic feminism carries with it western labeling, analytical frameworks, and history. It is unaccepted by some activists. (Asbah, Nasra, and Abu-Baker 2014) The *da'iis* I interviewed as well did not agree on labeling themselves as feminists but as activists; 3-Activism does not entail a complete focus on gender like feminism. I use activism to show the wide range of addressed issues and the motivations that drive this activism. There is no polarity between the two strands. On the contrary, there is a transcendent phase that acknowledges understanding and reconciliation between the two to a certain extent (ibid).

Further, Elizabeth Fernea (1998) in her *Search for Islamic Feminism* suggested that Muslim women activism differs in form than what is expected in the west. Saba Mahmoud (2004) offered an example in *Politics of Piety,* a study about the "piety movement" which exhibits what she calls, a non-liberal form of agency, opening by the room for women activists' voice and possibilities. In the same vein, Islamic activism, as Asef Bayat (2005) sees it, is an active piety manifested in an extra-ordinary religiosity. It can be 'political' referred to as "Islamism" or apolitical. Though nothing can be apolitical, I am interested in the active piety exemplified in the women activism, which centers on individual self-enhancement and identity. (Bayat 2005)

It became necessary to shed light on the *da'iis* in Lebanon in their intimate day to day form of *da'wah* and the *halaqat*'s character being informal yet formal, public yet private, intimate yet firm, leaderless yet leader-full, and practical yet abstract. Those *da*

'iis are transcending the boundaries traditionally demarcated for them, yet that went overlooked; and mostly if noticed, they are studied in liberal reductive frameworks. Only a few researchers attempted to implicate women activists' voices and contexts. Religion occupies the center of their life and indeed insinuates itself within the different localities and temporalities as a part of the structural body of knowledge. Knowledge, by its turn, becomes a legitimized common sense that crystallizes the subjecthood of the *muridin* and *da 'iis* and their self-identification. Hence, knowledge and worship are intertwined in their understanding and formation of "better Muslims."

Referred to by Saba Mahmoud (2012) as Islamic revival movements- piety movements, a question is posed whether these movements should be categorized as "reform" or "revival" movements. I should be clear from the beginning of the categorization of these movements. Masooda Bano (2017) noticed the same dilemma, so she studied the use of "reform" and "revival" in the scholarly studies of Islamic movements. She reached the conclusion that Islamic reform movements are seen and used to traditionally being involved in purifying the local beliefs of innovations and reform society through the seizing of state power while the revival movements centered around the promotion of Islamic education by *ulama* who stayed away from politics themselves (despite their political influence on followers). (Bano, 2017) I follow Bano in her consideration that this distinction cannot be neatly maintained as the different case studies analyzed in this thesis, as in her book, harbor within them an element of revival as well as reform. Chapter 3 shows how the case studies can be categorized and by extension, they are not one block even if they tend to be characterized as revival movements.

This thesis will study Lebanese *da 'iis'* production, transmission, and dissemination of Islamic knowledge in the field of *da'wah*. These activists are crucial social actors playing a vital role in the contemporary activism landscape in Lebanon, being part of an evolving transnational Islamic activism. They cooperate within a teaming plurality of horizontal and vertical social networks, institutions, movements, & voluntary associations. I examine these activists' circles (*halaqat*), lectures, and social & political activities as socio-religious spaces in the public space. While studying their curricula as a set of written texts produced by the activists or (oral) notes taken from attending the *halaqat*, I focus on the mundane and intimate *da'wah*. I study the premises of empowerment of the main Islamic Sunnite institutions through the transmission and dissemination of this Islamic knowledge. Empowerment will be considered thoroughly while also accounting for its potential impact on the scholars and the activists themselves. It will be looked at as a comprehensive process by which Muslim women activists support women's participation, activism, and authority in different situations and domains. (Pruznan, 2012) Accordingly, I interrogate the potential of the impact of empowerment in an Islamic framework as reflected on women themselves, their scholars, the *ummah*, and the Lebanese society. As a result, I inspect the sociability of Islam in the public space through Muslim women activists as a form of presence in crowded Lebanese society. This Islam that is continually considered irrelevant and trapped in abstracts engages in the Lebanese and the transnational contexts.

Halaqat are examined as socio-religious spaces situated in their context, by considering them a crisscross between the "external-institutional" and the "internal-personal" propagation of religious knowledge. The propagation of religious tenets occur

on two different levels depending on the intervention entry of the missionary agent; the top-down level which starts from the authoritative institutions in society called "external-institutional" and the other "the internal personal" which starts among the masses. (Poston 1992) I will begin by overviewing the rationale and benefits of the research methods used.

1.2 Methodology and Entering the Field

Developed first by Campbell and Fiske, "multiple operationism" suggests the use of multiple methodologies to study the same phenomenon (Jick 1979), i.e. triangulation. This thesis resorted to a triangulation of content analysis, interviews, and participant observation as the research methods at the same time for them to feed and complete each other. Using these methods provides depth and context to the research on *the da 'wah* of the female networks, increasing reliability and validity, and allowing the capture of the dynamism of female activism.

Content analysis is an inferential process to detect a trend in a specific text. (Weber 1990) I use content analysis to investigate what is 'salient and selected' in the curricula's texts used by the case studies in their *halaqat*. Robert Entmen (1993) defines framing as a matter of selection and salience; shedding light on some issues or obscuring others tells a lot about the issue. I describe the power of these communicating texts by influencing human consciousness through their established frames. That investigates how the text engages with reality, uses approaches to empower women, contributes to their subjecthood formation, and presents specific literature and religious scholars.

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The curriculum, with its double-guideline for both teachers and institutions, must respond philosophically to the circumstances, construct the character of the student, and form a repertoire of info. (Zainiyati, 2016) As an unobtrusive method, content analysis looks at the curricula as a set of written or oral texts produced by the activists on the micro-level and shows the line of their thoughts and objectives.

I conducted my participant observation in Beirut due to the concentration of the centers of each organization in the mentioned area in early 2019. That helped me spot the intimacy of Islamic *da'wah*, the mechanisms of the educational system, and the production of meaning within these spaces at such an important time for Lebanon. I believe that female discussions in the *halaqat* and lectures offer the entry point to examine how they reflect the applicability of the curriculum into the life of the scholars. At the same time, participant observation allows the capture of the complexity of the dynamism of *da'wah*, the process of empowerment in a mundane form, and the apparent impact of empowerment. Additionally, the structure of these *halaqat* and lectures can reveal the class dynamics within the *da'wah*, female's agency, conditions within which they are situated, concerns, aims, imponderabilia, and perspectives. This allows the "surrendering" into the social reality to use Wolff's term.

To surrender is to meet or receive the experience (with all its elements and aspects), in its originariness, and its itselfness, as best we can." (Wolff 1976)

In addition, I conducted 14 semi-structured in-depth interviews with the female sections' heads of each studied organization and three *da 'iis*. I adopted a localist approach during each interview. The localist approach allowed me to take into consideration the interviewees in their social context.

The interview is an empirical situation that can be studied as more than a neo-positivist tool for data collection and the romanticist human encounter. (Qu and Dumay, 2011) I use semi-structured interviews to diverge to pursue an idea or response in more detail. (Gill et al. 2008)

However, there are limitations to this process, interviews are conducted in Arabic thus creating a problem in translation. Where applicable, I used the same Arabic words, so I deal with the meaning with accuracy and delicacy. Access to female activists has been problematic. At the beginning of the research, I noticed the level of distrust expressed by these social actors which led sometimes to a closed access. That reflected how much these social actors feel unrepresented in social sciences and the extent of the lack of communication between them and social scientists. I have had to ensure access through an initial icebreaking as a graduate assistant for prof. Sari Hanafi working on topics related to my research and by showing them a genuine interest. This initial contact helped me, not only see how this field in under-researched especially in a mundane form, but also in being aware of my positionality to reflected trust. Another challenge was the overwhelming time frame, four months at the beginning of 2019, for the four case studies at the same time. In addition, the titles of the lectures did not always reflect the content discussed which led me to attend all the *halaqat* given during that period. Another challenge was the absence of closure at the end of interviews and that due to the friendly nature of the *da'iis* and the conception of the *da 'wah* itself. The interviews, along with the participant observation, allowed me to explore interpretatively how female scholars and activists make sense of their Islamic activism.

CHAPTER 2

FEMALE NETWORKS: A NOTE ON LITERATURE

This section provides an overview of the most relevant existing literature to this study, situating it in the broader literature of Islam and women in Islam. It is divided into different sections allowing navigation of the topic from a general outlook to a more specific one. All the data were assembled through AUB libraries' different databases and print material. That was also enriched by the suggestions of the thesis supervisor. The covered literature uses resources from three languages: Arabic, French, and predominantly English, to converge the relevant resources. The terms used mainly in the search were: "Islamic religious education, Muslim female movements, empowerment and subjectivity, Islamic knowledge, activism in Islam."

2.1 Women as Scholars

Networks are alive in their constant change forming synchronic and diachronic evolving structures. In a thorough attempt to account for female scholars and *muhaddithat* in Islam, Akram Nadwi (2006) conducted a diachronic study that expected no more than 40 women in the history of Islam. He exposed instead no less than 8,000 biographical accounts in a 40-volume biographical dictionary. He inadvertently displayed in this, the role played by women in the scholarship during the time of the prophet and throughout Islamic history, particularly in the development of hadith studies and active reform within their scholarship. These Muslim women studied and taught hadith in major mosques and madrasas; the hadith was narrated and critiqued,

disseminated, collected, and issued as fatwas. That allowed them to enjoy a public authority contributing to teaching, theology, logic, philosophy, calligraphy, and many of the crafts that we recognize and admire as Islamic. (Nadwi, 2006) Through his study, Nadwi highlights how Muslim females acquired this knowledge, played a role in preserving it by memorization and writing, and disseminated it within family & family circles, localities, and their travels, offering a collection of their work as a reference for the current scholarship.

Similarly, Nayla Tabbarah (2015) addresses the issue of the marginalization of Muslim women working in the Islamic field historically. She advocates that accounting for the historical role of women in the Islamic field through historical studies and analysis of tabaqat allows us to see the bigger picture of the transmission of Islamic knowledge by women. In her work, Tabbarah includes the modalities of this transmission and the role of institutions in the permanent contradiction in which females are encouraged to be *ulama* during this period of history, yet spatially and cognitively limited in their scope of knowledge production. (2015) She shows how women were immersed historically in the Islamic sciences playing roles as transmitters of hadith, teachers, *wa 'izat, faqihat*, and founders of institutions for Islamic education. Asma Sayeed (2013) adds a cherry on top by delving into the historical developments of females as religious scholars from the first decade of Islamic history till the early Ottoman period. The first century and half of Islamic history witnessed major female participation, followed by a decrease in their activity for two and a half centuries before they re-entered the field in the 10th century. Sayeed explores the reasons for this decline (the beginning of professionalization of hadith and the religious and cultural norms that

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limited female mobility, interactions, and travels) and compares them to the demise of female's religious transmission in other religions. She finds that this demise is predictable; it occurred in Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Judaism. Sayeed challenges, as Tabbarah does, the proposition that Muslim women are marginalized in Islamic history by reconsidering two propositions: 1) the analysis that traditionalist Sunni Islam has restricted women's mobility and active participation in the public sphere. The reconsideration is based on the idea that this strain of Islam mobilized women in the 10th-century and engaged them in the public sphere) and 2) the irreversible decline of female mobility and status after the first century of Islam. This proposition should be reconsidered since it is not denied that women suffered from a major setback from the seventh century, but they were able to reengage in the religious field in the 10th century. (Sayeed, 2013)

2.2 The Development of Female Education

Islamic education began within small circles situated mainly in mosques and houses. Throughout the classic period of Islam (the end of the sixth century until the eleventh century), a social class of *ulama* was developed. (Tarabay, 2012) The circles were held in mosques, private houses, khans, hospitals. (Gilbert 1980 & Trabay, 2012) It wasn't until the ninth century, beginning of the post-classic, that new institutions like the *madrassas* were developed. Elementary education platforms like *maktab* and *kuttab* were open for women. The *madrassa* did not allow women to be directly involved but the *tabaqat* allowed them to attend in indirect ways usually accompanying the father or

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the brother. Starting from the twelfth century, *ribat* or *zawiya* was established as a female-only space in different regions.

Throughout the classic period and the post-classic period, non-formal education continued to develop along with the roles of females within scholarship (*muhaddithat, faqihat, wa 'izat*, and knowledge-seeking travelers) continued to solidify.

By the nineteenth century, madrassas allowed women to be educated formally within its walls, thus institutionalizing the role of women in Islamic scholarship. In the twentieth century, women were given the right to issue fatwas. (Tarabay, 2012)

Since the 19760-70s, major Islamic revivalism was witnessed that corresponded to a heterogeneous Islamic revival differing in scope, orientation, and focus. Mariam Cooke and Bruce Lawrence (2005) see that Islam's heterogeneity can only be understood through the prism of Muslim networks to account for the way diverse groups "contest and rearticulate what it means to be Muslim." (p.2) In the 1990s, this revivalism picked up momentum, and women's educational movements increased significantly.

2.3 Female Halaqat

Saba Mahmoud's "piety movement" breaks new ground defying the mainstream liberal and feminist assumptions of female participation in Islamic movements. She studies the different forms of subjectivity and disciplines of self-formation of the piety movement while engaging notions of performativity, paradox of subjectivation, and habitus to complicate the conception of agency. By recognizing female's historical formation of desires, embodied practices, and ethical self-formation

she showed how agency is historically positioned and developed through particular discursive formations. By that, Mahmoud challenges the conception of *da'wah* as a collective work to make it an individual one. Women became new authoritative figures shaping the ethical sensibilities outside the conventional institutions of state and mosques.

Similarly, Masooda Bano (2017) in *Female Islamic Education Movements* questions the dominant discourses by expanding the motives of the women in joining these movements. She stresses the need to consider these as platforms for knowledge production and recognizes the complexity of knowledge-production processes. I try in this thesis to complexify this process in the same line. Elaborating on Mahmoud's argument, she suggests that Mahmoud did not recognize female's conscious appreciation of the optimality of the Islamic alternative. Women consciously prescribe to the moral framework alternative to that of western liberalism. She considers how female Islamic educational movements can unleash a massive potential in re-democratizing the Islamic knowledge. By mixing lay and specialist knowledge, historically segregated due to the isolation of Islamic elites from Islamic platforms, these movements respond to modern everyday challenges by engaging the Islamic moral and legal frameworks. Drawing on a comparative fieldwork across Pakistan, Syria, and northern Nigeria, Bano captures the diversity of these groups internationally. She investigates the roots of these movements, their meaning for women, and the potential they can generate for the future.

As a result, she sees an alternative modernity resulting from the new female modes of engaging with reality while remaining traditional.

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Importantly, Hilary Kalmbach and Masooda Bano joined efforts in organizing a conference at Oxford University in 2009 entitled: "Female, Leadership, and Mosques: Changes in Contemporary Islamic Authority" which resulted in the publication of a book on the same topic in 2011. The book aimed to analyze the dynamics governing the construction and the exercise of female Islamic authority in mosque and madrasah space with a focus on concepts such authority, legitimacy and knowledge. In the introduction, Kalmbach stresses the centrality of 'Islamic authority' due to its relation to the interpretation and application of the Islamic texts to the lives of followers and the accompanying influence beyond the religious arena. The different case studies covered in the book showed that women are gaining public space, teaching and leading prayers, and participating in activism beyond the 'religious' thus providing a spectrum of female Islamic leadership. Hilary Kalmbach (2011) describes the contemporary Muslim leadership borrowing Dale. E. Eicklman's and James P. Piscatori's concept of "fragmentation" to denote the proliferation of religious knowledge and actors. This is due to an authoritative relationship of authority to the acquisition of Islamic knowledge on both levels, the theoretical and the practical. Along these lines and within diverse contexts of emergence and expansion, there is a diversity of contemporary Islamic female leaders who play different roles (old such *'alim, mujtahida*, and *imam* also new such as revivalist instructor, speaker, and advisor) to cope with needs of their direct community.

Sherine Hafez (2003) bases her study on a fieldwork in Cairo to explain the vision of the revival of female activists who believe the Islamic paradigm empowers themselves and others. Those find in it a frame of reference and an anchor from the

concerns of the increasingly challenging world. (ibid) This activism, she explains, is neither a form of indigenous "feminism" nor a relapse into tradition. It is a type of empowerment in a patriarchal society and a service to others that "lies within the process of perfecting the self." (Hafez, 2003, p.90) Hafez describes those women as "Islamic activists" to connote the inadequacy of describing them as feminists. These activists invade the public to contribute to the wellbeing of others, not to resist patriarchy, and by extension gain proximity to God. Hafez's description goes in line with the results of my thesis as I will show in later chapters.

Similarly, Rachel Rinaldo (2008) defines female's activism as "women mobilizing other women for political and social reforms that are felt to benefit female" and not feminism due to the unpopularity of the term in Indonesia. (p.1800) Rinaldo studies how the role of Islam in public is providing Muslim female groups with a platform facilitating their involvement in national debates such as *Shariah* law, abortion, and pornography. These Muslim women are incubators of activism that is allowing them to play an important role in how the Indonesian nation-state is being re-imagined for the 21sl century. (Rinaldo, 2008b)

In view of that, I will look at Lebanon accounting for the different actors and the different case studies studied in specific in chapter 3. The subsequent chapters present and analyze the data gathered. Chapter 4 tries to understand the process of knowledge creation by looking at the different factors that contextualize this process accounting for the complexity and dynamism of this process. After that, the main topics discussed during the period of the fieldwork are presented and analyzed in chapter 5.

The sixth chapter studies the impact and the terms of empowerment at work. The thesis will end with final remarks and extrapolations.

CHAPTER 3

LEBANON: A CLOSER LOOK INTO A WIDE STRUCTURE

3.1 (Meta)- Institutions

Religion is always in movement. Armando Salvatore (2016) explains that religion should not only be looked at as an institutional notion that coincides with its authorities, practices, and creeds but rather a creative and rational meta-institutional impetus. Religion by that, is a potentially universalizable, meta-institutional, and knowledge-based type of power; a power that constantly generates forms of social knowledge. New types of human institutions are initiated and invented as a result of serving a variety of social needs. The meta-institution is then the manifestation of the articulation of the knowledge-power equation through patterns of organizations and governance. (Salvatore, 2016) In this respect, Islam is a social force that shapes social relations at different levels. Thus, the meta-institutional power of Islam provides social actors with a civilizational reservoir to creatively shape solutions to social problems. (ibid) Charles Hirschind (2006) considers that while *da'wah* provides conceptual resources grounded in a long tradition of Islamic practices and scholarly inquiry, these resources were put into novel uses within a contemporary situation shaped by modern political institutions, pedagogical techniques, and media forms as well as by notions of civic responsibility grounded in the idea and experience of national citizenship. Looking at this, Islam cannot be captured anymore in a conventional institution. "Societal functions" that used to be vested in religious institutions have now become

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differentiated between the latter and other institutions (church and state, religion and the economy, religion and education, and so forth.) (Berger, 2014)

With this differentiation of institutions comes a "subjectivization", a conscious choice taken by the individuals, for religious affirmation is not taken for granted anymore, explains Berger. Subjectivization in an Islamic context, I suggest, lies in a conscious networking of Muslim scholars in specific Islamic organizations. The development of these networks which play varied roles in the life of the Muslims, is a manifestation of this subjectivization that responds to the needs of the society. Ismail Serageldin considers this new trend of religious affirmation as "a form of networking in various forms around Islamic practices, some innovative, some revived and reconfigured to adapt to new pressures." (Lawrence and Cooke 2005)

Faith is based on a personal choice, and this choice takes a typical form of voluntary associations, modern institutions, what Arnold Gehlen calls "secondary institutions." The secondary institutions are "sort of collective entity; it is still an institution of sorts, because it provides programs for individual behavior, but these programs are precariously constructed, vulnerable to sudden changes or even dismantlement." (Berger, 2014, p. 41)

In the Muslim world, voluntary associations like religious movements and organizations, being the typical social form of religion in a pluralistic situation, developed within the Islamic context, increasing the internal groups and associations yet still be holding a lot of societal functions. They became malleable institutional forms par excellence. They work under one framework, the Islamic one, but with different

approaches to it. These are collective entities that provide Islamic programs for individual behavior that vary under an Islamic framework.

Additionally, Samuel Zwemer (1944) clarifies that Islam has no sacred religious scholars and institutions that held divine rights. Islam does not have hierarchal institutions like Christianity, which contributed to a diversified matrix of organizations. However, the differentiation of institutions did not affect the effort of the voluntary associations, specifically the Islamic ones, to reorganize the societal functions associated historically with religious institutions within a religious framework. These associations, organizations, and networks have Islamic norms, codes of conduct, information exchange, and impersonal relationships inspired and dictated by Islamic scriptures.

Radwan al-Sayyid (2015) theorizes that for almost a decade, religious institutions have been working on two issues: rehabilitation and qualification. He explains rehabilitation as an acquisition of the means of knowledge, refinement of the will and mobilization of the spirit of volunteerism and mission while qualification is a shift towards more consideration of the threat of extremism on religion, restoration of the peace in religion, saving the national state, and improvement of the relationship with the world. Even though religious institutions did not completely reach their goals, different approaches are adopted by the different organizations and associations towards such aims and for going beyond them. These approaches produce networks that generate different mediums for knowledge production, sociability, empowerment processes, and containment.

3.2 Organizations

Within this matrix, it is central to distinguish between the formal and informal religious organizations and how they feed into each other and, by extension to the matrix as a whole. This distinction helps situate female activists in the field of *da'wah* and reflect their impact. Masooda Bano (2017) differentiates between an Islamic institution and Islamic organizations and between the two types of organizations, formal and informal. She considers that Islam, with its moral and legal framework, is an institution. Being dictated by the institutional framework, the Islamic movements are organizations that participate correspondingly in (re)shaping the institution.

Formal and informal organizations are characterized by different dimensions: 1- the formality of structure that is related to the institutional framework and rules assigned to the students; 2- the tie strength that is related to the formation of a community and a network by extension. (Granovetter, 1973) Two types of bonds determine the strength of the tie: bonding ties that are the ties formed with direct enclosed networks and the bridging ties that are the ones formed with other social groups allowing "access to resources and opportunities." (Newman and Dale 2005); 3- the level of commitment (Staw and Salancik 1977); 4- the network centrality (Krackhardt, 1990) and 5- the level of engagement with the audience.

Formal organizations like Madrassa and Islamiyya schools are characterized by their structured curriculum, a requirement for full participation, bonding ties, and their issuing of formal certificates of participation. Informal ones are loosely structured, less formal when it comes to attendance, bridging ties, greater diversity with the group. (ibid) The types of ties "bonding" and "bridging" reflect the strength of the ties,

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respectively known as "strong" and "weak" ties. (Woolcock, 2001) Bano's distinction aims to provide an idea of the institutional persistence of Islam.

The studied organizations of this research show that the distinction on the five dimensions does not have clear boundaries which can be telling of the potential of these networks in attracting and actively keeping scholars within them. The blurred boundaries are a result, as I explain in chapter 4, of the mildly level of commitment rooted in an organizational framework that puts a certain commitment shown in the attendance and the following up on the *halaqat,* yet the non-obligatory character of attendance, the slight formality of structure exhibited in the assignment of curricula yet the independence of content most teachers resort to in preparing the lessons, and the diverse network centrality shown in the reference to the organization yet the loosely structure of hierarchy (in three cases as I show later.)

The case studies show a level of bonding ties and bridging ties explained in later parts in detail, which suggest a mix of ties contributing to a greater resilience. (Tompkins & Adger 2004) This resilience helps keep participants closely connected within a loosely connected network, generating different mechanisms that ensure attendance even if not formal, and resulting in a semi-centered network around the hostess of the *halaqa* (in case there is) and the teacher. These semi-formal organizations can be seen as voluntary associations that enjoy a specific type of informality under an organizational framework.

In Lebanon, diverse mosaic of movements and actors are at play. My interest is mainly in the Lebanese Sunni movements, particularly looking at female educational movements in which my sample includes four Sunni groups situated in Lebanon with

their centers in Beirut. Lebanon witnessed Sunnite revivalism that is rooted in local, regional, and international grounds. This revivalism is important to look at since it stimulated the activism of Sunnite Muslim female.

On the regional level, Lebanon felt the ripples of Islamic revival that accumulated through the writings of intellectuals and the activism of different Islamic movements during the last 40 years. This revivalism was accompanied by an increased piety among ordinary Muslims. Interestingly, the revivalists of that time were activists first, and scholars only secondarily, which emphasizes the crucial practicality of dissemination and production of knowledge of the activists. (Brown, 1996) I intend to see the Lebanese Muslim female activism as part of the transnational Islamic activism. In addition, the Iranian revolution in 1979 gave a push to the Shi'ite in Lebanon, influencing the solidification of Sunnite identity. Sunnite revivalism became part of the Lebanese scene with the increasing sectarianism in the region, the Iraqi-Afghanistan war, and the Israeli war in 2006. (Hamzeh, 1998) Islamic movements grew tremendously due to many regional factors like the failure to achieve balanced socioeconomic development, political oppression, gross maldistribution of wealth, and disorienting impact of Westernization. (ibid) These Islamic movements find their sectarian roads ready in Lebanon and they activated within these.

On the local level and within a country of unstable internal dynamics, several catalysts contributed to this Sunnite revivalism. Factors that were exhibited before the civil war broke out. These include class differences, conflicts between Israel and Palestinians, and roots of the militancy of Hezbollah. (Hamzeh, 1998) Further, the inherited sectarian political system that divided the country since the French colonialism

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contributed to a highly sectarian consciousness. This consciousness offered established grounds for Islamic movements whether these were political or not. With these movements, *da'wah* proliferated.

The assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri is the primary root that deepened a Sunnite consciousness and solidarity against the threat they felt as the Lebanon's *Sunna*. They began to act "not only as a sect among other sects, but also as a minority whose existence was threatened, whose leaders were targeted, and whose sense of victimization was deep." (Abdel-Latif, 2008b) The Syrian war exacerbated the situation offering a ground for the clashes between different countries and Islamic movements. The Sunnite sense crystallized progressively with the aggravating Sunnite-Shiite tensions. *Da'iis* played a major role in this context offering spaces for people to react to this war and to receive refugees.

On the international level, literature about the Islamic movements and the Middle East, in general, fully concentrates on the political activism and extremism of the Islamic movements. Missing is the attention to the mechanisms of dissemination of knowledge. This added to the Islamophobia advertised globally. Islamic movements found themselves obliged to produce and disseminate knowledge about Islam.

3.3 A Diversity of Groups

Due to adoption of the confessional system as the political system in Lebanon, each sect has its own reference. The Sunnite institutional Islam is represented by Dar al-Fatwa; it is "the regulatory reference for Sunni affairs within the Lebanese milieu, and it undertakes responsibility for looking after affairs of this sect – fortifying its position and

reinforcing its educational, health and social institutions." (Imad 2009) As a religious

institution, Dar al Fatwa has, according to al-Sayyed, four different tasks: maintaining

the unity of faith and worship, religious education, *fatwa*, and general guidance. (Al-

Sayyed, 2015) However, it was not immune to major institutional weakness due to

many reasons of political powers, internal conflicts, and external compromises. This

weakness was reflected in the proliferation of "ad hoc missionary, charity, and social

organizations, movements, and associations to take an active role by means of the

institutions they have undertaken to develop in towns, villages, and cities which the

conventional Sunni leadership has neglected in the post-independence years." (Imad

2009. p.143)

These institutions played a significant role in filling the gap left by institutional

Islam. Their developments can also be seen in the lens of pluralism due to modernity

unleash of all the forces that make for pluralism (urbanization, mass migration, general

literacy, and higher education, and all the recent technologies of communication.)

Pluralism increases the range of choices available for people that are further protected

and intensified by the capitalist structures. (Berger, 2014) Berger connects pluralism

with his core concept "plausibility structure," a social context in which any cognitive or

normative definition of reality is plausible.

Pluralism multiplies the plausibility structures available for people in their

environments. Pluralism by that changes the "how" of religion rather than the

"what."(Berger, 2014) In the light of the change in the "how" of the religion, a

reference to the "what" is always there to bring a more connected "how" and "why",

especially if we take Islam as the case. The "how" and "what" walk hand in hand and

cannot be separated. Any change in one will lead to the creation of different groups. Then, a change in the "how" might lead to a change in the "what" but most importantly will lead to a proliferation of groups working under different frameworks. Jam'iah al Isalmiye is a crucial example of this change in the how when it developed a political agenda and got separated from Ibad al-Rahman as explained in later section.

Sari Hanafi (2019) differentiates and provides a pictorial scheme (See figure 1 below) between 4 types of religiosity within Islamic organizations. These are 1- traditional institutional Islam that is mostly traditional with scarcity of *Ijtihad*; 2- revivalist Islam that is a response to the westernization, colonialism, and Islamic traditions adopted by the traditional Islamic institutions. This particular type developed two orientations: conservative revivalist that developed its institutions as the focal point of legitimate referencing like Ikhwan and Salafi revivalist that ended up as the Saudi Arabia; 3- post-Islamic Islam which is the type of Islam adopted by the new movements in going beyond the revivalists who aim to establish *Shariah* and overloading religion with what it cannot bear; 4- and popular Islam is the Islam adopted by different small groups and individuals in their private sphere.
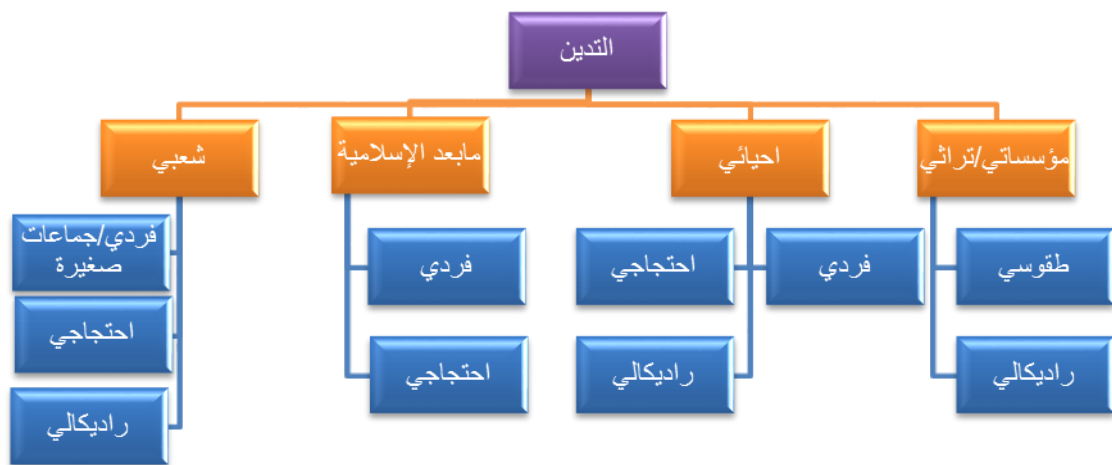
Figure 1: Types of Religiosity with Its Roles

In Lebanon, the four ideal types exist to an unbalanced extent and in different forms, which makes it extremely hard to map them in studies that focus on their topographies. Each type has a network of organizations and groups that work under it. Abd al-Ghanni Imad (2009) provides an informative topography of some Sunnite Islamic movements in Lebanon that he considers neglected, considering the attention given to Hezbollah in Lebanon in academic scholarship. He studies the origins, orientations, founding members, and various socio-political and institutional initiatives of al-Jama 'ah al-Islamia (the Islamic Group); Jabhat al- Amal al-Islami (the Islamic Action Front), Harakat al-Tawhid al-Islami (the Islamic Tawhid Movement), Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami (the Islamic Liberation Party), Jama 'at al-Da wah Wa al-Tabligh (the *Da'wah* and Tabligh Group), Jam 'iyat al-Mashari ' al-Khayriah al-Islamyah–al-Ahbaash (The Association of Islamic Charitable Initiatives), as well as the major 23 Lebanese Salafist movements.

Due to the difficulty of mapping all the Islamic institutions with their heterogeneous ideologies and political approaches, I am focusing on a convenient sample of 4 cases that I consider insightful to the diversity existing in Lebanon and I was allowed access to.

Basing my work on Hanafi's scheme allows me to establish my sample and elaborate its distinctive interaction with the 'social' and the 'political'. My sample consists of 4 organizations: 1- al-Najat as an independent organization that is considered the female branch of Jama 'ah al-Islmiyah (the Islamic Group) as part of conservative revivalist. Al-Najat is one of the most popular organizations in Lebanon especially that

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it is related to Jama 'ah al-Islmiyah and it has a political vision which adds value to the diversity of the sample; 2- Irchad and Islah as an independent Islamic institution as post-Islamic. This organization, despite having similar non-political vision of Jama 'ah al-Islmiyah, it is offering new grounds of activism which also can be telling of its choice to be in the sample; 3- al-Qubaysiyat as an informal group that has its network all over the World as individualistic popular. This organization is one of the most influential around the world and it is a salient force in Lebanon; 4- and Islah Zet al-Bayn as an independent informal organization of lawyers and psychiatrists as popular. This organization emerged out of its founders' vision of the need for such type of organizations in Lebanon. Thus, including it in the study diversifies the sample making it inclusive of different orientations and visions.

This review aims to introduce the different case studies situating them in the diverse context of Lebanon. Such examination will show how in the same socio-political context, different methods of recruitment, ideological approaches, knowledge production processes, and premises of empowerment exist for the Lebanese audiences.

3.4 Case Studies

3.4.1 Al-Qubaysiyat

Founded by Munira Al-Qubaysi in Syria, in the early 1960s, Al-Qubaysiyat is one of the most influential and largest Sunnite female revivalist groups in the world. Born and raised in a conservative family, al-Qubaysi was a student of Sheikh Ahmad Kaftaro, the highest officially appointed Sunni Muslim representative of the Fatwa-Administration in the Syrian Ministry of Awqaf at that time and Mohamad Saed Ramadan al Bouti, the dean of the *Shariah* college in the 1970s. This was the beginning

of a vast informal network that is based on the Naqshbandi Sufi Tariqa as influenced mainly by Kuftaro, the head of this Sufi order. This connection with traditional authorities gave it later on legitimacy with a certain freedom in the public sphere compared to other movements like the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis. This movement went unnoticed until the 2000s with Bashar Asad's rule. Syrian television series was the first to portray a picture of the movement through dedicating episodes to criticize its work; "*Buqeat Daw'*" (بقعة ضوء) was the first to criticize its involvement in *da'wah* by targeting only the rich families to gain economic resources. It was followed by "'*Assiy al Dam*'" (عاصي الدمع) in 2004, "*al Bakoun*" (الباقون) and *al-Barzakh* (البرزخ) in 2006. The press like <u>Al-Hayat</u> and *An-Nahar* started to notice this movement and write reports about it. The international press, like the *New York Times* and others, started to give it more attention in the line of the international Islamophobia.

Al-Qubaysiyat evolved in secrecy in reaction to the Baath regime and conducted its work at the houses of its members. However, its evolvement was rapid after the Hama Massacre, as it rose to prominence after it. (Islam, 2011) With Muslim groups in Syria forced to work in secrecy or to shut their activities down, the movement enjoyed a certain freedom unavailable to other groups. It became the sole guide for women in the period of the 1980s, especially after the Hama Massacre enjoying a monopoly over female religious education. (ibid) The group's increased growth was accompanied with an increase in the dissemination of Islamic knowledge and ethics. In the Syrian context, and with the rise of feminism, nationalism, and secularism, cautious permission of al-Qubaysiyat was normalized in the public sphere.

Al-Qubaysiyat gained this monopoly in the transmission of Islamic knowledge in Syria due to their consideration as females close to official Muslim Islamic authorities and having no apparent political agendas. That was accompanied by a tacit access to the ministry of Awqaf to regulate the curriculum of the courses taught in the mosques. Al-Qubaysiyat manage as a result fifty percent of the city's female madrasah of 75000 students, organize public sermons in major mosques with a lay audience of 25000, run charity projects, state-condoned secondary schools, and a publishing house according to daily *al-Hayat* based on a survey in 2006.

In 2006, the movement "came into the light" having readily close-knit networks of students and female leaderships and huge institutions working under them: hospitals, schools, kitchens, and houses. It was allowed to do its *halaqat* officially within mosques. In 2014, the Syrian Minister of Awqaf appointed the first woman preacher, Salma Ayyash as an assistant.

3.4.1.1 Coming to Lebanon

Al-Qubaysiyat's adherents exceed several hundred thousand in number within Syria only. The organization developed its work in twelve other countries like Yemen, the Gulf, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, Kuwait, Europe, Australia, and United States. In each country, it is known to have a different name like Sahriat in Lebanon, Al-Tabba 'at in Jordan, Bayader al Islam in Kuwait. In her fieldwork in Syria, Omar noticed that members of Qubaysiyat use both terms jama'ah (group) to refer to themselves and "*aanisah*" as a title of respect for teachers and those who above them in

rank of knowledge, as also my interviewees claimed. *Aanisah*, a title used by Syrians for teacher, was transposed to Lebanon. Sheikha Munira was "interested in reaching out to her local community so as to transform the city of Damascus to a more religiously observant one." (Omar, 2013) Thus, she established "a self-sufficient group, funded and led by women for women." (ibid, p. 349) This group did not seek knowledge from men authorities but from women themselves, which was in line with the hierarchy of the group. The group started its work in secrecy and privately at female's houses in small circles. It gave religious lessons at homes and participated in religious ceremonies like Mawlid and gave a small lesson or *duaa* in social events such as weddings. In embedding itself in the Syrian society, it created major demands for the study of Islamic texts among all the families in Syria. (Bano, 2017)

In Lebanon, it is called Sahriat in reference to Sahar Halabi, the one who took the responsibility of the movement after Amira Jibril, the sister of Ahmad Jibril, who is the founder and leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine- General Command. Lebanese members like the members from different countries do not agree on naming themselves a different name and prefer al-Qubaysiyat as my interviewees claim. The label of "al-Qubaysiyat" is not endorsed by the members themselves, but apparently, they developed a tendency to use it. Most Arab scholars in this movement are from Jordan and Lebanon, which makes them a salient force in Lebanon. In an informal discussion with a sheikh form Dar al-Fatwa, he claimed that "one can claim with confidence that every Beiruti family having girls at the age of 14- 20 once took lessons with al-Qubaysiyat. Qubaysiyat's influence on rich families is unexpected and very positive. They reached families, no one imagined a Muslim group can reach." This,

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he claims, has to do with the persona the *aanisat* (plural of *aanisah*) try to portray. One of my interviewees claimed that in the 1980s, and with the increasing religiosity in the Arab world, religious Lebanese men working in the religious field preferred to marry religious women. Only Qubaysi women at that time were religious compared to other women in Lebanon. Most religious men in high positions married women from al-Qubaysiyat, which indorsed them with access and resources. However, this view was denied by another interviewee. Whether this claim is true or false, al-Quabysiyat created a huge network in Lebanon.

From the 1970s, Qubaysi's *da'wah* started in Lebanon in the public, where the *aanisat* would do open lectures at the mosque of Beirut Arabic University. A vast crowd used to come, and that remained the case till 2000 when it started to evolve in a slower path. The organization developed different divisions of schools (Bayader for religious work and *da 'wah*), Dar al Arqam for public *halqat* and education, Bet Maamour as a kitchen, and a hospital (in the process of building).

3.4.1.2 Centralized Hierarchical Structure: Inter-Intra Mode of Operation

With al-Qubaysi guiding small circles, she divided her students into two groups. One group is responsible for teaching the students while the other one to master a specific religious field to produce knowledge about it. (Islam, 2011) The network developed progressively, spreading the circles in Damascus. The small teaching circles allowed the development of female leadership with al-Qubaysi being at the center. This

preliminary structure developed to include more female leaders and students but did not

change its form. Find figure 2 below the chart of the hierarchy.
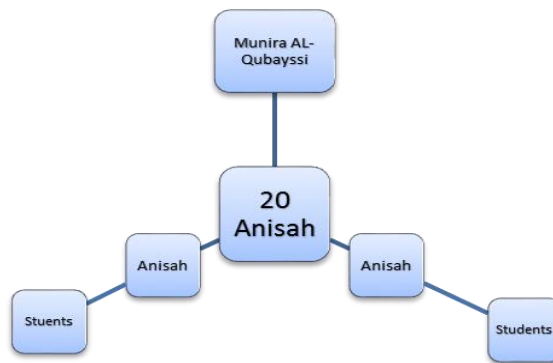
Figure 2: The Organizational Structure of al-Qubaysiat.

This structure allowed al-Qubaysiyat to develop a surplus of lay teachers who

aim to improve their acquisition and transmission of Islamic knowledge. That was

accompanied by their emphasis on the need to replicate an image of the "role model" for

Muslim students. This role model was approached through social charitable activism

that bolstered a kind of authority based on an extreme kindness with the students who

join their *halaqat* and a friendly yet robust treatment to the young students in the

schools. Al-Qubaysiyat's structure was also backed by their apolitical message and *da*

'wah that aims to increase the level of acquisition of Islamic knowledge spiritually.

Based on the fieldwork I conducted, a major attractive force for their classes is the

spiritual sense that they trigger in women during the class. There was always this

emphasis that this hour is for us to remember God and that the room reflects this sense due to its calmness.

Sarah Islam (2011) sees this movement's ranking of authorities according to three factors: 1- mastery of different fields of religious knowledge; 2- strict religious practice; 3- and possession of successful professional careers. This bottom-up system is organized according to the rank of knowledge, with Sheikha Munira at the highest, followed by her most learned student-scholars, followed in turn by their most learned students, and so forth. (Omar, 2013)

The color of the uniform adopted by the group represents the level associated with knowledge and authority. The students attending the classes look at the different colors in terms of age and experience, as my interviewee claimed. Usually, Munira al-Qubaysi wears a long black manteau and a black veil. The lower rank wears navy while the young unexperienced *aanisat* wear navy manteaux with a white veil. Even when present in Lebanon, the decision-making process is centralized in the Syrian *aanisat* as my interviewees elaborated. The legitimate reference is in Syria.

3.4.1.3 Political Controversies: Cooptation

Enjoying certain freedom compared to other groups, al-Qubaysiat, emerging with the help of traditional *ulama* who have close relations with the Syrian regime, were criticized for being in tacit political bargaining with the Syrian state. (Islam 2011; Omar 2013; Bano 2016) Syrian state actors were thought of as entering in a negotiation with al-Qubaysiyat to stabilize the public inducing a certain type of legitimacy to the Syrian regime. Wittgensetein and Oakeshott see politics as public negotiation over the rules

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and discourses that morally bind the community together. (Eickelman and Piscatori 2018)

These critics were advanced with the loosening of the regulations on al-Qubaysiyat that allowed them to establish secondary schools, run the majority of private secondary schools in Damascus, and establish post-graduate hadith school for female approved by Ministry of Waqf[2]. Al-Qubaysiyat is seen as using religious rhetoric to propagate an apolitical and pacifist Islam that can be easily controlled by the state. (Islam, 2011) One of my interviewees was part of al-Qubaysiyat for a long period of her life and she noticed that al-Qubaysiyat does not approach politics because they care about propagating Islamic *risala* (mission) without going into a topic that creates division: politics. Another interviewee expressed that this apolitical tendency is out of fear (historical as well as contemporary). The centralized authority of the movement publically expressed their support for Assad's regime[3], making anyone from the movement unable to show their political stands. Some left the movement to join the Syrian Sisterhood which is an Islamist group that opposes Assad's regime.

In the *halaqa* I attended, the topic of politics was not up for a discussion. Sometimes, a girl, who is described by the group as the funniest person they know, substitutes words from the *Sirah* by the names of politicians or their families like Asmaa al-Asad instead

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[2] (a detailed Fatwa about al -Qubaysiat): accessed through
http://www.ibnamin.com/rad_qubaisi.htm
[3] Check Women Rising: In and Beyond the Arab Spring, edited by Rita Stephan, Mounira M. Charrad2020.

of Hmaraa al-Asad (the name of a battle.) This led, at that time, to laughter and uncomfortable feeling of the *aanisah* in this situation and her attempt to change the subject. This reveals the expectations required from a teacher in al-Qubaysiyat. Those propositions and stories about the relationship between Al-Qubaysiyat and the state actors signifies a relation of cooptation and not merely of bargaining. Bargaining signifies a kind of mutual agreement and negotiations for a fair symbiotic relationship. Cooptation shows a polarity in the relationship that sets the terms of what is allowed and what is not. This means that cooptation is not based on fair terms. It is based on the absorption of the movement and diverting it to the directions the state wants. Al-Qubaysiyat aims according to two of my interviewees to spread the Islamic *risala* which diminishes their tendencies of resistance. It is a matter of survival in Syria with what is given. This explains relatively the focus on the audience from upper-class families, according to my interviewees and my fieldwork. Knowing the history in Syria and the relationship between the Sunnite bourgeoisie and the state actors, al-Qubaysiyat found a way of protecting themselves by submersing in the families of the Sunnite bourgeoisie as an alternative axis of power while trying to stay away from politics to be allowed by the regime.

In Lebanon, in addition to the need of alternative axis of powers, al-Qubaysiyat used the same strategy due to the practicality of this tendency especially with the economic capital offered in consequence and the social capital that is fuelled by the symbolic capital; The movement needs a place to give the *halaqa* or for activities that need a huge space to be conducted like *Qadar* night or *Tarawih*. "The group targets rich families because they try to spread their *da 'wah*, and they are 'self-sufficient' group

which requires them to use the resources of the participants," my interviewee claimed. In addition, they wanted to reflect an image of richness and power, according to my two other interviewees.

3.4.2 Al-Najat

Al-Najat belongs to Al-Jama'ah Islamiya (Muslim Brotherhood). This Jama'ah is a Sunni Islamist political movement in Lebanon that embarked on its activity in 1957 and was licensed in 1964. This major movement was initially part of Ibad al-Rahman founded by Muhammad Omar al-Da 'uq and then it separated itself due to major interest in going beyond Ibad al-Rahman's interests in charity, *da 'wah* and the Islamic moral teaching. It is a political development from Ibad al-Rahman. (al-Sayyed, 2011) After joining the Jama'ah, Fathi Yakan, a Lebanese political Islamic cleric at that time with a group of associates mainly Shaykh Faysal Mulawı ̄, Zuhayr Ubaydı ̄, and Ibrahı ̄m al-Masrı, being influenced by Mustafa al-Siba'I, Ikhwan general councilor in Syria, got separated from Ibad al-Rahman. This led them to collaborate and adopt Ikhwan al Muslimin's vision founding al-Jama'ah. Sheikh Faisal Mawlawi, a prominent reformist, was the leader of the al-Jama'ah. AL-Jama'ah contributed, due to its moderation, in the Sunnite revivalism experienced in Lebanon. (al-Sayyed, 2011) Al- Jama'ah rejects the idea of establishing an Islamic state as Lebanon is a multi-sectarian country. Instead, it focuses on adhering to Islamic principles and preventing the deterioration in Islam. That is why it established educational institutions: series of schools al-Iman in different regions in Lebanon, practical educational institutions in Tripoli, institutions for children, and other for health like Chifaa hospital, supporting

charity organizations, mosque boards, sports institutions, including Al-Lewaa Sports Club, and also for the establishment of religious singing teams, which established a number of them in various regions, as well as female's associations and crafts. The interest of the student side through the Muslim Students Association remains a priority for the group, as well as the scouting activity and summer camps. Al Jama'ah also has political and media sections that try to keep up with the latest political news.

3.4.2.1 Al-Najat as the Female Branch

The first division of women in the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was established in 1932 and was called "Ferqat al-akhwaat al-muslimaat" (the Muslim Sisters Group). It was mainly formed from the internal members' familial ties. This division aimed to "uphold Islamic ethos and spread virtue through lectures and female-only gatherings." (Abdel-Latif, 2008)

In Lebanon, al-Najat is an Islamic female association that is considered the female division of al-Jama'ah. It is independent as an association founded in 1994 in Beirut, and licensed by the Ministry of Social Affairs to serve as a framework for female's work on the level of education and Islamic culture. It focuses on the role of women and their ability to positively influence society and works at the level of women, family, and youth. It provides *halaqat*, workshops, lectures, and sports activities to women across ages, backgrounds, and classes. The aims is developing and enhancing women's capabilities in the field of voluntarism and education in society, the movement considers. The association aims to disseminate Islamic culture and knowledge. It has

different branches in Lebanon in Tripoli, Saida, Beirut, Iqlim, Beqaa, and Akkar. It defines its mission in terms of the cultural, intellectual, and educational affairs of the family, female, and youth.

The organization claims to seek to root the Muslim identity of the women and the family and shed light on the civilizational pioneering example of active female's participation in the development of the society. It aims for an Islamic, contemporary, and comprehensive revival that uplifts the women, family, and child to new levels of performance in society inspired by the Quran and Sunnah.[4]

Six divisions operate in al-Najat: *da 'wah*, social, educational, youth, media, and human rights sections (pictorial information figure 3)

Figure 3: Al-Najat's Divisions

It believes in the right of education and learning of the Quran through educational circles, courses, workshops, camping, and tours to develop and advance female's abilities in volunteering and educational work in society. It seeks to establish

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[4] Al-Najat: https://www.alnajat-lb.org/index.php

family counseling courses to raise awareness and disseminate the culture of coherent families away from external disputes.

The association is interested in working with different ages from 6 to 13 years, through religious and educational courses, computer teaching, trip taking, and health awareness. It guarantees tens of orphans and distributes financial, food, and clothing assistance to needy families to spread the spirit of solidarity among the members of society.

Al Najat Association publishes a monthly educational magazine dealing with family affairs, females, and children with distribution centers on all lands and Lebanese and distributed outside Lebanon by post. The current director of the association is khitam al-Hajj Chhade who is also a member of the directive board of the Jama'ah.

3.4.3 Irshad & Islah

Irchad and Islah (Islamic Charitable Guidance and Reform Society) was founded in 1984, after its separation from al-Jama'ah. It is an independent organization that organizes its work on four frameworks: Islamic *da 'wah*, charity, social activity, and educational one. It aims as it promotes on its website to guide, reform, and help the individual and the society to reach a solid, aware, benevolent, and seeking the welfare of society. This organization has centers all around Lebanon: Beirut, mount-Lebanon, Biqaa, north, and south. Its center is Mohamad Fatih Mosque in Beirut. The organization works alongside four frameworks. (See below figure 4)
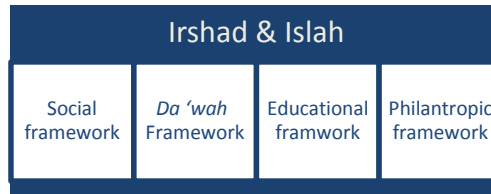
Figure 4: Frameworks of the Work of the Organization.

The organization has besides sports clubs, a technology club, youth centers and forums, medical center, a school: "Lebanese International School", Tamkeen center for Rehabilitation and Professional Development, a temporary shelter building for the displaced Syrians, a charitable kitchen for preparing daily hot meals, and a bakery. Every framework includes a section that focuses on women. I do not go to all the offered provisions as I focus on the educational dimension mostly provided from *da 'wah* and educational frameworks.

3.4.4 Islah Zet- Al-Bayn

Islah Zet al-Bayn is an independent organization that officially registered in 2007 in Lebanon. It works in the Supreme Sunni Courts throughout Lebanon. It aims to protect the individual within society through the awareness to achieve cohesion and family cooperation, organize purposeful cultural lectures and seminars that help achieve social cooperation, protect the family by strengthening its social function, encourage marriage, provide instructions for potential espouses, work to solve family conflicts, create public and audio-visual libraries, preserve the cultural specificities and religious values aimed at reforming society through individual reform, and improve the conditions of the children of the divorced parents.

It focuses mainly on the awareness of female personal laws and legal empowerment.

The court work is based on getting the two sides of the conflict on the same table to see if there is an intention of solving the problem; if not, the organization tries to find a way to reach certain compromises that keep both sides on good terms.

After introducing the case studies, the subsequent chapters constitute the bulk of the thesis. Chapter 4 tries to contextualize and understand the knowledge production process by studying its dimensions. Chapter 5 analyzes the studied materials of the four cases of study in a comparative analysis. Chapter 6 looks at the premises of empowerment that result from this knowledge production.

CHAPTER 4

UNDERSTANDING AND CONTEXTUALIZING THE PROCESS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Studying the processes of transmission and dissemination of religious knowledge is complicated due to the continuous changing modes of its transmission and multiplicity of the dimensions interplaying in its creation. Marivi Mateo (2019) , citing Eickelman, reflects on this complexity by shedding light on the need to account for how changing modes of transmission affect the knowledge system instead of emphasizing on the fixed nature of the religious knowledge. This chapter explores the different dimensions interplaying in this production to capture the changing modes of the transmission of religious knowledge. Firstly, it studies *da'wah* as the legitimate framework and medium of institutional and personal production of Islamic knowledge. Then it examines the networks' character. The potentiality of the knowledge production process, as a result, is considered in contextualizing a sustained community sense capable of prompting the learning process. After that, the chapter studies the characteristics, teaching style, and role of the lay knowledge producers to end with laying the varied audience's characteristics and their contribution to the process of knowledge production. This contextualization intends to explore the complexities of the process of Islamic knowledge production.

4.1 Da'wah: the Medium of Activism

Considered a "missionary religion," Islam is a centrifugal force that seeks to expand outward. (Poston 1992) However, this expansion would be missing its primary

value if not oriented inwardly by qualitatively developing a religious affinity among the adherents. *Da'wah* is mainly the inroad of this expansion. By that, *da'wah*, Ismail al-Faruqi considers, has a twofold aim addressing the Muslims and the non-Muslims; "to the Muslim to press forward to actualization and to the non-Muslim to join the ranks of those who make the pursuit of God's pattern supreme." (Poston, 1992) It aims to remind people about their duties towards God, whether it orients its activity inwardly or outwardly.

Da'wah conception received little systematic elaboration from early Islam until the early 20th century. It gained attention due to the onset of Islamic "revivalism" and the Mulsim Brotherhood's and Abd al-Hamid Kishk's use to define their goals in restoring the Islamic community in the face of secularization. (Hirschkind, 2006) Hassan Al Banna[5] defined *da'wah* as a mode of action by which moral and political reforms were to be brought about (ibid). This conceptualization, adopted by the different institutions and organizations, increased *da'wah's* significance being the foundational site of the different types of activism. The foundational work extended to include individual *da'wah*, which created a vast base for networks between institutions, organizations, and individuals, especially women.

In its study of 21 Islamic movements in Lebanon, Masar found that most of the 13 Sunni ones rely on *da'wah* in different practices. It elaborated that 45% of Muslim movements' work depends on *da'wah* as part of a more general program, 40% depends

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[5] Egyptian school teacher and imam best known for founding the Muslim Brotherhood

on *da'wah* as the foundation of action, and 15% relies on *da'wah* for military

organizations. *Da'wah* plays then an important role on all levels. Masar considers the

different practices of this *da'wah* to the daily work of the movements: 1- the adoption of

devices of "propagating the call" as a means of ideological recruitment. This

propagation is the foundation of the movements' work having cadres for it; 2-adoption

of *da'wah* but within a more general multifaceted activity; 3-and relying on mass

mobilization rather than *da'wa* since they prioritize military intentions. That shows the

significant role played by *da'wah* as the mode of action of organizations in Lebanon.

Women within the Sunni movements were found to be playing three roles: political,

social, and religious/ proselytizing. However, Masar concluded that women participated

in most of the movements' activities, but their primary role centered on social work and

da'wah for female audiences.

     With women being dedicated to *da'wah* of female audiences and having no

other medium to work from, *da'wah* became the medium from which they elaborate

their activism. These activists see *da'wah* as a compulsory duty of a Muslim, a

comprehensive process that considers all the aspects of life to implement Islam and

create a balanced Muslim life in Lebanon. *Da'wah*, by this sense, is the site from which

all the activism of female *da'iis* emerges.

     This conception reflects the scope of approaches used for this sake, especially

with the different types of audiences and activists who advance various topics

differently. *Da'wah* is approached by these activists in research, teaching, designing

programs that fit domains of life like economic life, social life, self, family and others,

arranging lectures, conferences, camps, workshops, and trips, issuing books, pamphlets,

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and designing projects. These consider the specific audiences and contemporary issues. Hence, this conception impacts the debate and argumentation about Islam in the public sphere.

Subsequently, the Islamic knowledge production process for these activists operates mainly within *da'wah's* medium, generating creative and varied ways for this sake. One of the informants made fun of those who think of female Islamic activism in the sense of distributing provisions or giving religious lessons; it is a reductive understanding. Lebanon's increased number of Muslim institutions, organizations, networks, and personal activists working for the aim of *da'wah*, with its different dimensions helps the account for the potential unleashed by this activism. Martin Van Bruinessen and Stefano Allievi (2013) point out that the context in which Islamic knowledge is produced is crucial for its creation process. This context, in its complexities, provides the resources needed to increase and diversify the process. *Da'wah* provides the legitimate framework and medium for institutional and personal production of Islamic knowledge. It is "the conceptual site wherein the concerns, public duties, character, and virtues of an activist Muslim citizen were elaborated and practiced."(Hirschkind 2006, p.115) From within this site, develops networks that take the responsibility of the Islamic knowledge framing. Subsequently, I will look at the character of the networks presented in the case studies in the next section.

4.2 Network's Character

Reflective of Islam as lived today is the character of the networks created within each organization and between the different organizations with all the factors

that attract and engage participants. I look at these factors and how they contribute to the complexity and potentiality of the knowledge production process.

Firstly, I consider the character of the religious spaces as experiential spaces to highlight that the spatial expressions inform the community belonging and form the primary site for examining the "social." Secondly, I look at the resilient ties participants develop with each other, and the organizations develop within local and international networks. That helps understand how the community sense is solidified, affecting the process of learning Islamic knowledge.

4.2.1 The Character of Religious Spaces

As Edward Relph (1976) writes in *Place and Placelessness*: "Places are sensed in a chiaroscuro of setting, landscape, ritual, routine, other people, personal experience, care and concern for home and the context of other places." (p.29) Places by then bestow meaning and significance to space through the sensed chiaroscuro. The concept of place is built into the idea of experiential space, and it is central to the notion of experiential space. (Weberman and Morono, 2016) The place of the religious lesson with its chiaroscuro standing in relation to a particular someone informs the experiential prerequisite of the religious space. The religious space becomes an experiential space affecting the process of knowledge production, the community's belonging, and the extension of the network. It delimits the inclusionary-exclusionary character. I am interested to know how space is experienced to shed light on how religious spaces inform everyday belonging. These spaces are experienced personally and intersubjectively.

Religious spaces gain meaning from belonging to particular places and persons. The place shows a particular "expressivist" function that "serves to express the ideals of the community and perhaps to express particular features of member groups (historical, religious, etc.) to make all groups feel included and recognized by the wider community." (ibid, p.30)

In the four cases, *halaqat* have informal settings that allow participants to set the terms of their participation. Participants choose the convenient place, time, level of discipline, attendance, and desired topics and courses. These terms play a major role in driving the network's expansion and allowing participants to benefit from the *halaqat* on their standings. Two types of *halaqat* are given: the public ones and the private ones. The public *halaqat* are more general in their content while the private ones are mostly dedicated to a specific category or certain high-level scholars; they differ in their specialization level. *Halaqat* usually take place either in the private houses of the interested participants or in the auditoriums of the mosques of the specific organizations. Lectures take place in the auditoriums of the organizations, which are usually in the mosques. For the activities, the place depends on the type of the *halaqa*. For al-Najat, the choice of the place depends on the type of *halaqa* and the audience categorization, which is discussed in details in last section of this chapter. Young people have more mobility to manage to go to the centers while old ones prefer their private houses except in the case of lectures, everyone goes to the same place. Most of the *halaqat* I attended were at the houses of the participants. The participants host the *halaqat* consecutively while considering factors like their availability, conditions, and decisions at the end of each *halaqa*. Mostly, they preferred the house of a participant

who is visually impaired what made it hard for her to go from house to house. She is financially at ease, so she had no problem having the group at her house every week. The teacher Em Ayman, a *Shari 'a* studies licensed teacher in her 60s, sits in the middle top of the room where she can see all of the attendees. The room is usually small (in the houses of the participants I attended); it only fits for the number of the attendees, and some used to sit on the chairs, forming a closed circle. There is an electric "massage chair" to the left of the room for people who have a backache. Farther, al-Najat has a nursery "Jana Care" for those mothers who are interested in attending. If a mother is financially incapable of paying for the Jana Care, the participants cover the required fees. There are no obligations concerning attendance, cellphones use, homework, interruptions, participation, or discipline.

This type of informality of the place allows participants to be the decision-makers of their conditional belonging. Participants feel at home having the freedom to take their veil, drink coffee, ask questions, express their ideas freely, and go in and out without constraints.

I also attended with Al-Najat young college groups-*halaqat* at the center in a mosque. The time for this *halaqa* was very flexible since it depends on the university schedule of students from different universities. The teacher would wait up to one hour for all the attendees to gather. She would be very grateful and appreciative that they came even after one hour despite their classes and exams. Some of them would break their fast in the class, talk about their exams and life, discuss national issues, converse on topics they like, watch videos, choose the room they want, and so on. The *muridin* communicate on a What's App group to decide the next session's focus and the

questions in mind. They plan events and initiatives, discuss personal and national issues, attend events, and spend their free time together. This type of experience informs the type of belonging to a constructed community.

For al-Qubaysiyat, the *halaqa* for school students takes place in the school of the organization during or after the classes, while for the other audiences, it is usually in the house of the participants, mosques, or an organization/house owned by al-Qubaysiyat. I attended at a private house with a group of interested participants of different ages. The hostess in her 40s offered to host the *halaqat* due to her interest in finding herself and experiencing different things. Members of her family would be present along with college students from prestigious universities in Lebanon and a group of interested *muridin*. I asked her once if she minds me bringing a friend, and she got surprised since attending means being part of the community, which accordingly means it is "my house" now.

The room has a spiritual touch with rocks all over the place and cozy relaxing lighting. The hostess welcomes the participants in a friendly way making the participants feel at ease. The *aanisah* would hug everyone at the beginning, and everyone expresses how much they miss each other. This expression of love moved to social media groups during Covid19 pandemic.

For the Islah Zet al-Bayn, due to their work in courts, they give awareness sessions to interested participants in different places. The director of the organization also offers *halaqat* related to her field of expertise in various organizations. I attended the general *halaqat* given by the organization as a whole and by the director herself in a mosque, Ibad al -Rahman. During the *halaqat*, people would come and leave, and the

number usually reaches 50-60 women. Those are of a high level of specialization since they have been attending for a long time, so the level of discussion is more into feeding into each other. Women would sit in an auditorium with the teacher on the stage and writing on the flipchart. Food would be distributed (sweets or juice.) Every month, there is a trip where those interested would go by bus to different areas in Lebanon. There is no obligation to attend, listen, and to be committed to a code of conduct. Participants have the complete freedom to interrupt the discussion, eat or drink, leave, and come at ease. People of different ages, backgrounds, and classes attend these *halaqat*.

For Irchad and Islah, the *halaqat* usually take place in the centers of the organization located in mosques, and participants go according to the courses they want to attend to the different centers. Some of the *halaqat* I attended were general for all ages, sexes, and categories, especially regarding awareness sessions concerning general topics. Some were more specialized and for specific categories. I attended four types of these *halaqat* that will be explained in details in chapter 5 and 6: 1- economic management for the widows' category in the organization; 2- critical reading of the Quran for specialized old women; 3- Quran memorization; 4- and a preparatory course for *da'iis*. Participants would order food to class, have small personal talks, exchange ideas about general topics, and plan for initiatives. Usually, a room is specified for each course, and women would change it if they don't like the place and change the setting of the room. They would sit circularly with the teacher standing up and walking in the class. Common to the four cases is the relaxed setting and ambiance where participants know each other and build relationships outside the *halaqa*. Participants would change the character of the place to make it more engaged and relaxing. They all sit circularly,

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whether in the private houses or the mosques' auditoriums. There is also the ambiance of commitment where women show their interest and eagerness to learn while also sharing personal experiences of becoming committed to learning.

The success of the *da'wah* dissemination between women is due mainly to the informal networks that engage students offering all the needed conditions to be and stay in. These networks expand hugely in different neighborhoods. Groups meet the time suitable for the different categories. Non-working women meet in the morning while the working ones at night. College students meet in the afternoon. Children, most of the time, belong to the schools managed by the organization their mothers attend. The teacher for each group is mainly of the same age as the group and sometimes in the same neighborhood. There are no obligations concerning attendance and time of arriving. They would form groups and visit each other. The obligations required from formal organizations are absent. As mentioned before, the informality of structure and the level of commitment are majorly allowing these *halaqat* to attract participants. This character leads to a certain kind of resilience of the network, making it expand to fit all the needs of the groups included. For example, one of the audience members who attend with Islah-Zet al-Bayn also attends with al-Najat and Irchad and Islah. The *halaqat* fit her schedule, and she finds in them an opportunity to educate herself about Islam while having fun and meeting friends.

A spirituality is portrayed in the *halaqa* due to the firm belief that this hour is specified for God. This spirituality gives a heterochronic character to these spaces, which makes the participants separate themselves from out time. The *halaqa* becomes an epistemological space that goes beyond time and geography. It provides women with

space where they feel connected by shared values, principles, and terms beyond the geographical dimensions.

The *halaqat* held whether at the houses or mosques, offer the primary site of conceptualizing the community of believers. They give an idea of the developing role of women in such spaces and the general culture. The mosque, the conventional site for Islamic education, became a public space playing a significant role in including women in a community. "It is not just a solid structure but can be more flexible and open to women, although this change still requires much effort." (Mateo 2019)

The religious space is by far an instrumental space for learning as much as an ideological space. It is comfortable, inclusive, available, independent, female-only, and spiritual made possible by the organization and the hostess. These allow the formation as much as the conceptualization of the domain of the social. Those present the primary site for studying the "social," i.e., *da'iis'* activism in its pristine way. Within this social, social ties are formed affecting the consolidation of the network as a platform of connections and links, which will be looked at next section.

4.2.2 Resilient Extended Ties

The religious space, whether the *halaqa*, workshop, or lecture, is a structure of assembling people producing a fabric of relations and belongings through continuity, repetition, and inclusion/exclusion. This fabric of relations establishes ties that contribute to the character of the network as a whole.

Due to the character of the organizations studied that express certain informality in education and the character of the religious space itself, the type of resulting ties enjoy a kind of resilience being bonding and bridging. Bonding ties are the ties formed with directly enclosed networks while bridging ties are the ones established with other social groups allowing access to resources and opportunities. (Newman and Dale 2005) These ties complement and influence each other. I suggest that this reconceptualizes learning not as a process of socially shared cognition that results, in the end, in the internalization of knowledge by individuals, but as a process of becoming a member of a sustained community. (Lave and Wenger 1991)

4.2.2.1 Bonding Ties

Women belong to an educational group of people in the organization who have socio-spatial relations of 'being-in-common.' (Schwarzmantel 2016) This educational group, my fieldwork convinced me, negotiates its belonging through the building of a sustained community by rooting relations, the promotion of sameness in the journey of learning religious knowledge, practicing specific rituals, benefiting from social philanthropy, and deploying media.

I will try to discuss those different factors, consequently. Bonding ties are between the participants themselves and between them and the organization they are part of.

To begin with, participants from all the organizations develop relations based on the idea of good company (*suhba saliha*), which is an Islamic guide for building

friendships based on God's orders. The different organizations facilitate these friendships by categorizing alike audiences into *halaqat*. Each organization has a different categorizing format that considers its different aims and the perspective audiences in it (discussed in later sections.)

In al-Najat, some participants know each other for more than 20 years. They have the same socio-economic background and live in a vicinity. They keep on communicating and sharing on social media groups all sorts of knowledge mediums: audio, video, pictures, documents, and websites related to Islam, etc. The college girls in the center know each other, move in the center from floor to floor, know everybody, and even develop friendships with the kids who come for sports activities. The base of the relation is that friendship follows God's orders that instill in the participants the intention of caring and asking about each other. "I always tell them how much I love them, and we go together to group studies, places, cafes. We need to tell each other that we love each other- we are *salih* companions" my informant said.

Irchad and Islah put people alike in sessions, so mothers are in a group, widows in a group, teens together, and people with specific interests together (workshops). This categorization is extremely inclusive of the particular groups, which becomes a factor of attraction. In a session with older women, the number of attendees exceeded 150 women. This session was specifically talking about medical problems this specific category usually suffers from. It provided tips to precaution from considering medical issues. It was exciting to this group who kept on taking notes and asking questions that seem trivial to the young generation.

On the other hand, I attended a session with women who benefit from a specific project in the organization, and mostly they are widows. This group had continuous sessions about how to regain self-esteem and overcome the sadness of the loss. The sessions looked at the problems of this specific group, like financial management and the positive treatment of children. The attendees had a similar socio-economic background and built through time a relation of support and understanding. They claimed that their *suhba* is for God, and because of Him, they are together. For Islah Zet al-Bayn, *muridin* attend the *halaqat* and private sessions with the specialists to solve their marital issues. They build a strong relationship with these specialists as part of the follow-up process. So two types of ties are formed: one with the specialist and one with the people they attend the *halaqa* with who have the same problems or are putting an effort not to be caught in the same problems. This similarity provides the first road towards being friends and exacerbates by the stress during the *halaqat* on the *suhba saliha*.

For al-Qubaysiyat, the categorization of audiences helps gather people who have the same characteristics. Age plays a role in separating the children who go to the al-Bayader school from the old ones who attend specific *halaqat*. One of the objectives of this categorization is the marked character of the network and how it can attract and keep *muridin* interested in staying according to my interviewees. People from a high class are interested in forming ties with people like them. Those extend the community based on the social capital provided by belonging to the community. Joining the *halaqa* allows the enrichment of social capital from the specific class. According to Brian Uzzi

& Jarrett Spiro, the strength of the network depends on the number of links an actor has with other actors and those who are also related to them. (2005)

Common between the different organizations is the friendly nature of participants who try to build *suhba saliha*. Part of being a good *da'ii* is also the formation of a good relationship with others to create a supportive and close community reflecting Islamic morality. Another aspect is having social capital monopolized by the organizations to attract more *muridin* while keeping those in. This factor is common to all the organizations but mostly explicit for al-Qubaysiyat.

I will move to discuss how the journey of learning in the *halaqat* affects the process of community sense building.

Etienne Wenger (1998) considers that three dimensions characterize a community of practice: 1- mutual engagement 2- a joint enterprise 3- a shared repertoire." Mutual engagement refers to the engagement in actions whose meanings the community negotiates with one another. A joint enterprise adds to mutual engagement doing the actions. Finally, a shared repertoire refers to the ways or tools employed for communications. This shared repertoire allows the formation of a joint enterprise based on mutual engagement. Wenger's community of practice bears on to the *halaqat* on many layers.

That is to say that the different participants have a common goal: learning about their religion. This aim is considered a process, and the teacher stresses day after day that the learning part, which becomes the center of the life of the *murida*, happens gradually. This is done after their mutual agreement on proceeding with the learning with this specific organization. Learning allows them to work toward it together,

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increases the trust and responsibility between them, and improves their morale, i.e., to employ a shared repertoire. They develop a sense of belonging when having and working for the same end. This process is shown in the conversation of the participants who ask which part they studied, how they read some sentences, and what their plans are. It also allows them to refer to the same repertoire offered by the organization to achieve it. By that, this journey of learning is related to active participation in the pursuit of knowledge. The journey of learning is a powerful instrument of socialization that allows the development of the meaning of this knowledge and the character of the community. This sustained pursuit of a "joint enterprise" by a mutually negotiating a "shared repertoire" allows the promotion of the participants' sameness. This sameness is based on having the same journey and on the fact that participants interact, learn from each other, compete, dream together, and help each other. After I showed how the journey of learning affect the character of the community, I discuss the role of rituals and how they are mobilized to develop the community sense.

My aim is to show how the rituals of, in, and out of the *halaqa* set up a context from which the process of knowledge production emerges. They imbue meaning to the process and construct an environment for the development of the community.

All the groups stress the value of the hours of Islamic education for *deen* and *dunia*. The *halaqat* is not perceived as profane educational sessions but as sacred ones specified for God. This one hour becomes itself a ritual that keeps *muridin* attached to God and eager to learn. Most of the participants prepare themselves the whole week to free their time up for the session. There is an effort put forward from the audience to attend. For instance, most of them would prepare food at night to attend the *halaqa* in the morning.

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Others would leave their children at night to attend, and they consider this a major effort. Hence, this session is a prioritized ritual itself.

Besides, every group has different rituals during the *halaqat* and the lectures and outside of them. Al-Najat group, for example, starts with reading a *surah* (chapter) together in a loud voice or each a verse with the teacher correcting the pronunciation, then moves to discuss the exegesis of the verses while discussing different topics. The young al-Najat group follows the same format but adds a part at the end of the *halaqa* that addresses part of the book assigned to them. Al-Qubaysiyat group starts with a supplication from the teacher then moves to discuss a topic to finish the *halaqa* with a verse that justifies the explanation of the topic discussed at the end.

If we move to more comprehensive rituals of Islam like praying, *wudu'* (ablution), fasting, and so on, those are common between all the groups. Those are practiced individually and collectively after being sometimes planned to be joined together like fasting on Mondays and Thursdays, reading complementary parts of the Quran, or complete a specific number of *tasbih*. This usually happens by agreement orally or on the What's App group, everyone with their groups.

So the process of knowledge production emerges from the continuation of the *halaqat*. The conception of this time is by itself a binding conception that paves the way for the development of a community. Emile Durkheim argues that "moral remaking cannot be achieved except by means of reunions, assemblies, and meetings where the individuals, being closely united to one another, reaffirm in common their common sentiments. " (Durkheim 1973) The repeated act and the emphasis on this time affirm the common sentiments about the meaning imbuing to the process. Rituals maintain

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ordered purpose, and by that, they contribute to the solidification of the community's sense. Being the enactments of collective beliefs, rituals produce social solidarity binding the community. They allow the participation by embodying a negotiated meaning within and outside the *halaqa*. Therefore, rituals extend to outside the *halaqat* to generate multisemantic personal and collective meanings that subsidize the sense of community. Another factor that contributes to this sense is the social philanthropy that will be looked at next.

Being the "buffer" between the state and the citizen, civil society seized academia's attention. 'Civil Islam' was used by Robert Hefner to connote the civil society that is Islamic, i.e., the entities developed according to Islamic teachings and values such as through mosques*, waqf* institutions, *ulama*, and Islamic organizations. (Fauzia, 2013) This civil Islam uses philanthropy, especially the provision of donations and services in all the cases that I am studying. Islamic philanthropy remains in the hands of civil Islam irrespective of the state (ibid).

Informal organizations provide donations and provisions mostly, which attract a particular type of audience to be active and engaged in the organization. As well, a sense of sameness develops between them, attaching them with each other. For instance, Irchad and Islah has programs that cater to families. It provides every family with financial and psychological support. The wives become active in attending the *halaqat* to benefit from all the services offered. My point is that social philanthropy plays a role in keeping those with specific socio-economic backgrounds interested in being part of the organization. My interviewees considered this might be the initial reason for participants to come but not the reason that keeps them engaged. However, this claim

does not deny that social philanthropy contributes to the production and solidification of a bonding tie. I will move now to stress the role of media in developing this community sense.

Crucial for the continuous development of the social dimension of the network is the extension provided by the media. This extension does not decrease the need for a community, instead it expands its conception. It expands the possibilities for community and calls for new kinds of communities based on shared practice. (Wenger 1998) My fieldwork shows that social media is used mainly to solidify the community sense on the local and transnational levels.

Firstly, it is used extensively for communication between the members of the organization. This type of communication personalizes the relations between the participants by allowing them to follow up on each other's news, i.e., it enables engagement to solidify the community's sense. Women would become friends with each other and with the teacher, support each other, share posts, and ask anything. Social media groups mostly used to build a collective sense by asking about each other's news. Secondly, this type of communication provides everyone with an equal virtual platform to participate, which is reflected in increasing participation in the actual class. In the class of critical reading of the Quran at al-Irchad and Islah, the participants were called by name after sharing their opinions a day before on the What's App group. That allowed the teacher to be sure that everyone participated and that the ideas circulated in the class were the result of a deep search and engagement with the ideas searched at home. Interestingly, this platform is segregated, creating a simulation to the actual

religious space allowing women to communicate on every matter and "at ease" as one interviewee claims.

In addition, some organizations like al-Najat and al-Irchad and Islah have websites[6], magazines like Jana Magazine for al-Najat, and radio programs that women are responsible for. Jana magazine is distributed to the participants freely, and they can even write in it. However, participants are not that interested in reading the magazines, but they surf the websites and listen to the radio, my fieldwork showed. Al-Qubaysiyat uses a What's App group mainly to check up on each other but mostly prefer the printed books and materials to transmit their ideas according to my interviewees. "Al-Qubaysiat does not find it necessary to use social media. They use printed materials to transmit their knowledge only," my interviewee claimed.

Moreover, media use is not limited to the local gathering of information and building a community locally but also to bring the international perspective to the table. Media offers people the opportunity to be engaged in the process of collective learning by bringing information and perspectives from international media. Mohamad Naeem (2019), referencing Scott, considers that among the proposed methods of knowledge and exchange related to services improvement purposes, social media and cross-platform applications are known to be one of the most emergent mechanisms.

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[6] Irchad and Islah: http://www.irshad-islah.org
Al-Najat: https://www.alnajat-lb.org/index.php

Media is bringing a transnational focus into the *halaqa*, transforming the context in which Islamic knowledge is produced. It does not only bring new perspectives and information developing the eagerness to learn but also increasing the sense of belonging to a transnational community. Participants identify with different Muslims worldwide and with different *da'iis* informing the type of community built and the mode of practice. "The normative models that inform the practice of *da'wah* today owe less to the traditional institutions of Islamic scholarly expertise, such as al-Azhar University, than to forms of authority embodied in large Islamic welfare associations, popular media-based preachers, and Islamic publishing organizations. These forms of modern power and authority define the conditions and provide the means by which the *da'wah* movement has elaborated and pursued the task of cultivating Islamic virtues today." (Hirschkind, 2006, p. 114) That aims to better develop local and transitional communities' sense being grounded in understanding, developing new competencies, and responding to people's needs, wants, and changing modes of beings.

Finally, media plays a role in the identification of the *da'iis* with the international Islamic activism immersing themselves in the transnational community. When asked about whether their activism falls under the title of feminism or international activism, the interviewees all replied that their activism falls under international Islamic activism. Two streams were identified concerning the perception of feminism.

The first one is based on accepting feminism on the base of its contribution to *da'wah*. This perception considers that feminism and activism have the same objective when it comes to pleasing God and defending Islam. The main difference is the use of

different approaches for this sake. "It does not matter where we belong as long as our work feeds into *da'wah*," my interviewee claimed. This acceptance is based on the increasing understanding of feminism that still needs much time to crystalize as my interviewees consider. *Da'iis* also believe that feminism adds richness to the Islamic world, providing platforms that can engage certain types of women that do not identify with their visions. The supporters of this perception see *da'wah* in a more comprehensive way where it does not matter the details as much as accepting Islam and finding a way from within it. In addition, two of my interviewees did not agree on labeling their activism since they considered that labeling obscures *da'wah's* aim. Based on this perception, there is an increasing acceptance of Islamic feminism, even if not in concord with it.

The other perception is rejecting feminism on the base of its foundational premises. It did not agree on feminism base in its consideration that "all problems" are caused by patriarchy and on its western origin. "Our work stems from our belief in the integration between men and women. We refuse feminism because it considers extreme measures in the understanding of the relationship between men and women, while activism is more fitting to our context as Muslims. We can't take something from other contexts and make it real in Lebanon," my interviewee replied.

Most interviewees considered that feminism exaggerates in its perception of the patriarchy. Most of them gave an example of the perception of *Qawama* (male guardianship), which is regarded as a higher responsibility on the men than an aspect of discrimination. The identification with Islamic activism reflects more positively Islamic concepts and values as my interviewees considered. Feminism is further seen as

something transposed to the Arab world, and it does not represent the principles of *da'iis* and Islam. My interviewee summarized that those principles are moderation, complementarity between men and women, a balance between family rights and personal rights, collectivism rather than individualism, and spirituality over materialism. Those principles are representative of the Islamic communities, and by extension, feminism is not relevant to the *da'iis.*

After looking at bonding ties in their solidification of the community sense, I look at bridging ties in their contribution in the resilience of the network.

4.2.2.2 Bridging Ties

Bridging ties are formed between participants from one group who have connections with actors from the other group and between organizations with each other. Those bridging ties are necessary for bridging capitals. In Lebanon, there is primary networking between the different Islamic organizations themselves nationally when needed, and with international organizations occasionally. In addition, there are strong bridging ties between the participants and actors from the other organizations locally.

Kim et al. (2006) suggest that the higher the levels of bonding ties in closed communities, the lower it might be the levels of bridging ties. This, however, contradicts my findings. The higher the number of bonding ties in those informal organizations, the higher the number of actors who have connections with other groups, and the higher the need for bridging ties. On the level of the engagement between the organizations nationally and internationally, networking takes the form of:

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1- Exchange of experts: happens when local organizations ask lecturers or workshop speakers to give sessions in their centers about their specializations. Organizations benefit from inter-organizational connections. For instance, the president of Islah Zet al-Bayn gave a lecture about the relationship between the mother-in-law and the wife and another about legal tips for prospective couples in different organizations like al-Irchad and Islah and Qout al Kouloub organizations. At the same time, she asked Omar Abdul-Kafi to give a session hosted by Islah Zet al-Bayn.

2- Exchange of information about the programs and attendees to comprehensibly meet the local community's needs without overlapping. It is the case for empowering families through the provision of services. Al-Irchad and Islah is in constant communication with Ibad al-Rahman to check if the programs the attendees benefit from complement each other rather than overlap.

3- Advocacy for a cause collectively increasing social support. It is the case with two campaigns that mostly all the Islamic organizations worked on *Tala ' al –Bader 'Alayna* (طلع البدر علينا), which is related to the *mawlid* and the *Maqdisi* female (females in Jerusalem).

For the individuals themselves, many participants attend at many organizations and many centers of the same organization. My fieldwork showed that individuals mostly know each other very well. They know *muridin* from other organizations, the sessions they attend, and the reasons behind their choices. The *da'iis* know each other across Lebanon. That was verified when they offered to connect me with people for the sake of this research. Their comments all signified that they know each other, and they even have each other's contacts. This type of connection does more than the

personalization of the network and the activism but also permits the development of relations across different socio-economic backgrounds and ages.

The religious networks in Lebanon show a combination of different degrees of bonding and bridging ties in the same line with what Nathan Todd (2012) in his study of the Christian Network and Interfaith Network cases studies in the US as networks of organizations joining for the sake of their local communities reflects: "religious networking organizations may be one type of religious organization where bonding and bridging capital complement rather than compete." (p.1)The primary network is in the process of developing, out of need, feeding to the potentiality of the network. The ties built through are resilient, strengthening the community's sense. After looking at the resilience of the network character, I study the lay knowledge producers as a key factor in the knowledge production process.

4.3 Lay Knowledge Producers

"It is part of my *zakat, zakat* of my knowledge. It feels I am providing something valuable," my interviewee said.

Da'wah is a framework under which *da'iis* deploy different approaches to improve the conditions of Muslims on different levels. They form a heterogeneous entity that occupies a plethora of organizations in Lebanon. The plurality of organizations allows them to choose the platform that suits their visions.
There exists no class of religious authorities in Sunni Islam due to the belief that leadership should be representative of the membership rather than be in a distinctive

class or status group. (Mateo 2019) Even though *ulama* are considered as a professional leadership class. (Graham and Reinhart, 1989)

In the local communities, *da'iis* have gained their status by belonging to a religious community, cumulating expertise, and acquiring experience. That means that *da'iis* not only show technical knowledge but also bring a range of knowledge and experiences within a locality to the light. Masooda Bano (2017) describes this as "the power of dispersed knowledge," which means the power dispersed in the hands of ordinary women and men. Those are lay knowledge producers who believe they have certain roles and characteristics. I will be looking at the different socio-economic and educational backgrounds, teaching styles, and notions of roles of the different female *da'iis* of the case studies. The objective is to account for how these lay knowledge producers inform the process of the production of knowledge and what the resultant form of authority is.

4.3.1 Socio-economic and Educational Backgrounds

I had the chance to interview 14 *da'iis* during my fieldwork. Three of them were the heads of their organizations or the heads of female sections of their organization while the rest were part of the body of the organization, mostly teachers or directors for a specific program in that organization. Table (1) gives a glimpse of the characteristics of the *da'iis* showing their education and occupation within their organization and outside of it.

Table 1: Interviewees' Characteristics

	Age interval	Education	Occupation within the organization	Occupation outside the organization
Interviewee Najat 1	(50-60 years)	Bachelor in business	Director of al-Najat in Beirut	Coordinator in a private school
Interviewee Najat 2	(50-60 years)	*Shariah* studies in Azhar-Lebanon	*Da 'ii*– teacher	-
Interviewee Najat 3	(40-50 years)	Bachelor in physics	Tarbieh Section director- teacher	teacher
Interviewee 1 Qubaysiyat	(40-50 years)	*Shariah* studies in Azhar-Lebanon	Former *da 'ii*	*Da 'ii*-teacher
Interviewee 2 Qubaysiyat	(50-60 years)	Ph.D. in public administration	Da 'ii	Professor at a private university
Interviewee 3 Qubaysiyat	(20-30 years)	Bachelor in sociology-AUB	Former student	MA student
Interviewee 1 Islah Zet al Bayn	(50-60 years)	Ph.D. in Islamic studies – Kulliat al-*Shariah*	Part of the committee of Islah- da 'ii	Da 'ii
Interviewee 2 Islah Zet al Bayn	(50-60 years)	Bachelor in business MA in fiqh	Da 'ii	Dar al-Fatwa *Da 'ii*
Interviewee 3 Islah Zet al Bayn	(50-60 years)	Lawyer MA in contemporary Islamic studies	Head of Islah Zet al-Bayn	Chair of the Lebanese Association for the Preservation of the Family Lawyer
Interviewee 1 Irchad and Islah	(40-50 years)	Bachelor in Biology- AUB Diploma in *fiqh*	Head of Irchad and Islah's women section	-
Interviewee 2 Irchad and Islah	(20-30 years)	MA in Finance – AUB MA in contemporary Islamic thought	Youth monitoring program coordinator – teacher	Student
Interviewee 3 Irchad and Islah	(40-50 years)	BA in business BA in political sciences	Head of *Da'wah* section- teacher	

		Diploma of *Shariah*		
Interviewee 4 Irchad and Islah	(30-40 years)	MA in sociology	Head of Aman section- *da 'ii*	-
Interviewee 5 Irchad and Islah	(30-40 years)	Psychiatrist	*Da 'ii*- teacher	-

My fieldwork showed that female *da'iis* are from different socio-economic classes. Most of them who work within Irchad and Islah and Qubaysiyat are from the upper-middle class, while those in Islah Zet al-Bayn and al-Najat are upper-middle class and lower-middle class. I want to emphasize here that the few who are from low and low-middle classes do not stay in the confines of traditionalism, as described in the literature. Literature shows them as *da'iis* who do not have access to proper resources and education. However, those confines are not valid nowadays with the media and with what the organizations offer from training to supplies. That allows access to different classes and social collectives. It also permits the bringing of the different realities into the Islamic text.

The minimum requirement for being a *da 'ii* in one of these organizations is to have a *Shariah*-related diploma. The *da'iis* mostly combine a secular education related to their professional career and another related to Islamic studies. If they don't have a religious diplomat, they usually have experience working in the *da'wah* field for a long time, and that rarely is the case in the case studies.

Mostly, the lectures contain specialist lecturers each in their field to discuss a related topic. "We get a specialist for every topic like homosexuality. We got a psychiatrist whose main work centers on homosexuality. We refer to specialists not

necessary from a religious background for counseling, but that is new only this year (2019)," an interviewee from Irchad and Islah said.

The bringing of this type of knowledge into the *da'wah* field allows more engagement and reconciliation between the Islamic text and the contemporary context. Those women have busy schedules outside the organization, choose their agenda of engagement, and change the way of the discussion of religious matters. Those modern-educated women are bringing with them a constantly updated way of living entrenched in Islamic text. Their contribution is not only based on understanding the religious text but on transforming it into a useful knowledge.

I suggest that the engagement of this type of lay knowledge from across different socio-economic and educational backgrounds allows the re-democratization as Bano does, the heuristic contextualization, and the relevantization of knowledge.

Firstly, lay knowledge producers are mixing the specialist knowledge with daily life experiences, which Bano claims, were segregated due to the isolation of Islamic elites from Islamic platforms. This mixing re-democratizes Islamic knowledge. Secondly, this type of lay knowledge allows accounting for every aspect of daily life and religious text. As a result, the engagement with the text takes into consideration the context and repetitively rethink it. Thirdly, the discussions in the *halaqat* were not using specialized terms. They were directly answering and rethinking daily life matters that the audience had suffered from in their work, school, and environment, and so on. The sense of the community developed in the *halaqat* allowed women to express their ideas and emotions freely and honestly away from any external intervention. Therefore, the knowledge produced is directly relevant to the needs, desires, and wants of the

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participants, and that was made possible by the characteristics of the lay knowledge producers.

4.3.2 Teaching Style

The teaching styles of those *da'iis* are based on relevantizing the text for the participants. The explanation of the Islamic texts is based mostly on examples from the daily lives of the participants. At the beginning of the *halaqat*, I went with the expectation that participants are the receivers of textual knowledge explained in very specialized ways. After a while, I started to see how these platforms disseminate a co-produced knowledge by blending the lay knowledge of the *da'iis* with the realities of participants. Those *da'iis* bring their expertise in the professional field and their status as modern women to the *halaqa*, influencing how they engage with the text and setting the terms for the selective acceptance of the different types of modern knowledge.

Their work revolves around creating a better understanding of Islam on all levels. *Da'iis* did not emphasize the memorization of the Quran as much as living with it. There was a call to embody the Quranic text. A lot of sessions were about living with it and making it part of daily life. Those *da'iis* reference the Quran and *sunnah* as a base when bringing the religious knowledge into the discussion, gaining their legitimate status from them mainly. The *mathahibs* are not brought to discussion except when someone asks, and rarely there is a mentioning of a religious figure. Giving examples to explain the verses or hadith were centered on books the *da'iis* have read, personal experiences, stories of other women, their daughters and sons, and stories they know

about the participants themselves. Sometimes *da'iis* used interactive techniques like PowerPoint and videos aside from sending links to videos on social media.

According to his/her field of expertise, every lecturer provides a simplified heuristic of a certain topic with no abstracted theoretical explanations. "I start with stories from our daily life, and then I move to connect it with Quranic text. Most of the time, I start with a joke to create a fun atmosphere. My aim is always to let them like religion and be connected to God. I use contemporary lexicon because I aim to connect with people of this time. We need *tjdid* of the concepts we use to modernize them. I don't use anything that has to do with *takfir*. I am here to educate people about Islam and to make them love it. I start with love," Islah Zet al-Bayn interviewee claimed. One of the most critics approached by *da'iis* is the ultra-traditional teaching styles and sermon lecturing styles. They criticized that traditional styles do not ponder about the needs and specificities of their audiences. "People, especially the young generation, need love and understanding of their needs instead of preaching them," one my informant said. They all emphasized the need to replace the traditional ways of teachings that are closed to preaching. "The new way is to conclude with the participants with only our guidance," the teacher said in a *halaqa*.

A total convincement that Islam transcends time and space with an unchangeable core is apparent. From this belief stems the idea that the *da'iis* and participants should "co-produce" Islamic knowledge to respond to their changing reality and modern demands. One of my informants who gives *halaqat* in Irchad and Islah claimed that: "our work this time is to orient people to make better decisions. That can

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only be done through building trust and love to allow them to develop an understanding of what is right and what is wrong."

Additionally, the follow-up processes are crucial for the work of the *da'iis* in showing support and embedding the participants in the community and the process in general. There is no impact measurement at the end of the *halaqat* level. *Da'iis*, however, follow up with the *muridin*. They check up on them privately and collectively during the *halaqat*. They know their news and ask about their wellness. Some of them become close friends and spend time with each other outside the *halaqat*. For Islah Zet al-Bayn and Aman Center for Women and Family[7], follow up is less intimate and more direct to the point. Even with that, my interviewee in Islah Zet al-Bayn considered that married women need someone to talk to without judgments and with enough experience to help them, which leads to friendships in the long term. Participants consider the follow-up process a friendship based on a trust and reliability relationship. Al-Qubaysiyat interviewee considered that the *aanisah* is still in touch with her after years, even though she left the whole organization and took the veil, which was considered a rebellious act.

Another critical dimension related to following up is the constant participation of *da'iis* in *da'wah* courses. For instance, Islah Zet al-Bayn *da'iis* regularly attend with Jassem al-Motawaa, a famous Kuwaiti journalist and scholar. "We always take courses

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[7] A center in Irchad and Islah, that deals with women and family issues, primarily legal personal status laws.

with Jassem al- Motawaa on being objective in solving family problems, the style, the tone, the body language, listening skills, and ways of asking open questions," one interviewee said. Al-Najat teacher I attended with attended a course with Irchad and Islah. This constant attempt to stay updated is considered a "need to be on the same page with others."

Da'iis also stressed certain characteristics necessary for being a *da 'ii*. I will focus on three of them mainly.

Most importantly, the first one, *da'iis* emphasize being a good listener and reader of the situation accurately. That comes with the need to be an active and concerned person who does not ignore people's pains or tacit intentions. *Da'iis* must know what people need and want after listening to them carefully. Delivering an answer must be entrenched in reality and directly responds to the need the *murida*. That was approached in different contexts when participants discuss matters related to *da'wah*. Another characteristic is helping the participants develop their choices and not imposing a mode of action upon them. Most *da'iis* focus on letting the participants see the impact and the greatness of following a particular path instead of asking them to start it. For instance, participants had to read about a *sahabi* and to embody his/her values and live his/her life for a week as homework.

The last characteristic is showing love, i.e., instilling a love for God and by default for knowledge and learning and vice-versa. *Da'iis* emphasized the need to love God and, by default, to love learning and, at the same time, learn to love God. Additionally, some affects are used when reading the Quran, mostly in al-Qubaysiyat groups. There is a complete enactment of the ethical attitudes and sensibilities.

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(Hirschkind 2006) The voice the *aanisah* uses when reading changes its amplitude in a tender spiritual way depending on the verse, and this is also reflected in the readings of the participants. The participants' reaction to the text also involves showing an explicit spirituality manifested in closing their eyes, looking down, or shedding a tear. The base of attracting the attention of the participants in most of the *halaqat* is "the quality of the sincerity, humility, and pious fear given vocal embodiment by the speaker." (ibid, p.12) That does not mean what Charles Hirschkind (2006), Lena Jayyusi and Anne Roald (2016) claim that this enactment drops the content from the consideration. It is on the opposite; it needs a vibrant content to deploy it. By that, the tonalities do not only play on moving the listener but also on creating an affinity towards religious knowledge. We can say that those lay knowledge producers' teaching style consists of assigning meanings to everyday life contingencies by representing knowledge as stories entrenched in subjective experiences. I move now to examine the role and resultant authority of the *da'iis*.

4.3.3 Role and Liquid Authority

The head of Irchad and Islah announced at the beginning of one of the lectures that: "women are shaqi 'q al-rijal شقائق الرجال (the twin halves of men). They offer to *da'wah* more than men, and most of the *da'wah*'s progress is due to female activism." (Mehyo, 2019)

Etienne Wenger (1998) considers that communities of practice are sustained by the negotiation of meaning, which can be telling of their attunement to emergent

needs and opportunities. Communities of practice take responsibility then for the preservation of old competencies and the development of new relevant ones. (ibid) That goes hand in hand with the dimension of "spreading information" as the communities of practice are nodes for the dissemination, interpretation, and use of information. (ibid) Considering female Islamic education movements as communities of practice is very significant in understanding how they form a locus of social learning that relevantizes and disseminates Islamic knowledge. Here comes the role of the *da'iis* and the *halaqa* itself in the process of knowledge production. They mediate between the preservation of Islamic traditions and the contemporary reality bringing the Islamic text into the daily life.

We saw how the teaching style is based on providing examples and relativizing the knowledge for the participants. For this, *da'iis* focus on including the participants in the discussion through knowing them on the personal level, encouraging them to ask, discuss, search for answers, and working on engaging the identities of the participants. *Da'iis* of al-Najat, Islah Zet al-Bayn, and al-Irchad and Islah do not consider themselves as authorities. They even criticized the use of the term "authority" in English and Arabic when describing them or any higher-level religious figures. However, this does not neglect the fact that they enjoy a level of knowledge, expertise, and legitimacy that grants them a certain type of authority. Additionally, showing a humble stance and an immersive self with the Islamic group overlaps with the conception of the *da'ii*. "We are a group who gets an education and passes it to the next group. We learn and teach, and vice versa. I don't agree with the use of "authority" as a term to describe my work," my interviewee said.

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Al-Najat's informants claimed that the aim is to make people aware of the topics they take for granted in a friendly way, for instance, "discussing how to raise kids in an Islamic way" or "knowing how to deal with your husband in an Islamic way." For Irchad and Islah, my interviewee claimed that "everything that has authority will someday have a revolution against it. We don't believe in individualism. I don't agree with the use of "authority", but if you want to use a word, use flexibility. We see what fits this country. We believe in diversity, so we have to see all the angles and explain ours." Another considered that: "there is no authority in any sense. There is only love out of trust. The new generation needs to be dealt with wisely instead of defining for them what is right and what is wrong."

For al -Qubaysiyat, however, authority is centralized in the hands of the *aanisah*. The interviewees considered authority the main reason people leave the group since they do not want to accentuate a person's status even if she is incredibly knowledgeable, legitimate, and charismatic. According to my interviewees, this authority manifests itself in different forms: 1- the need to tell the *aanisah* the different personal decisions like marriage and education choices; 2- the commitment to all the instructions. For instance, my interviewee claimed that it was hard for her to prioritize rituals over anything else. She gave the example of how the *aanisah* considered that the veil is the first step towards being a good woman; 3- and the hierarchical nature of the organization where the authority is entrenched in Syria. However, two interviewees in al-Qubaysiyat emphasized that the authority is required for advancing the condition of *da'wah* and the understanding of the uniqueness of personal experiences. They also saw this authority centralized but dynamic and new.

During my fieldwork, the teacher used to tell the group to ask and not search. This saying presents how the *aanisah* wants to keep the authority and legitimacy in the movement. I was surprised that no one raised an objection to this. Another aspect is those who usually use various social media platforms to gain Islamic knowledge need to make sure that the *aanisah* accepts the sheikhs they are watching.

Furthermore, Nico Krisch (2016) proposes a model that describes the normative and descriptive orientations characteristic of the novel transnational governance, which is representative of the authority present in the informal organizations. This model is based on two ideal types of thinking and by extension authority: solid and liquid. The solid type of thinking is based on commands and binding rules from a governing institution over the subjects traced back to Weber. That leads to a form of solidarity based on hierarchies and distinctions between the subject and the institution. By that, authority becomes based on compliance.

Liquid type, by contrast, is flexible and inclusive of multiple actors whose authority is with varying degrees of stability and consolidation. In this, Krisch's point extends to characterize liquidity type by informality and substantive authority. This type of authority fits the three cases I talked about above. Their authority and how they exercise power are not explicitly identified. The authority is dispersed between them as a group and between them and the participants. It is fragmented, shared, relative, and negotiated. Hilary Kalmbach (2011) describes the contemporary Muslim leadership by "fragmentation" to reflect on the spread of authority between the different actors, organizations, and institutions. It is not restricted to an elite historically segregated due to the isolation of Islamic elites from Islamic platforms. (Bano, 2017) This

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fragmentation is seen in the power given to every individual in this process and the impact generated as a result. Masooda Bano verified the same idea in her research to account for the power of this fragmentation-dispersed knowledge. (2017)

Another dimension that should be accounted for is the pseudo-dependence upon the organization for most of the *halaqat* given by al-Najat, Islah Zet al-Bayn, and to less degree al-Irchad and Islah while al-Qubaysiyat there was a complete dependence on the prepared curricula of the movement.

For al-Najat, for instance, the teachers prepare the lessons themselves, and mostly the teacher I attended took the opinion of the participants to prepare for the next session where she used online resources and her own research. That does not mean she did not consider the framework structured by the organization, but she maneuvered within it, leaving room for her intervention and ideas. One interviewee said that "we work within limits, yet we are free to work what we want," and another considered that "every two years the curriculum changes but I don't use it. I might look at it, but I use my background and information, general information, and what is happening around me to choose a topic. I give information from our daily life as I see Islam as life."

This same logic applies to Islah Zet al-Bayn and the non-specialized *halaqat* given by Irchad and Islah. However, for al-Qubaysiyat, the *aanisah* uses only the prepared curricula she already studied with other senior *aanisat* groups. She depends on the book *Fiqh Al Sirah Al Nabawiyyah* by Muhammad Said Ramadan al-Bouti and its explanation by the senior group of al-Qubaysiyat.

It is still a matter of significance that women *da'iis* are only giving *halaqat* to female audiences and rarely to men (only if in a lecture). That questions the concept of

authority in its concentrated and liquid forms, the concept of legitimacy, and that of the agency.

The case studies covered in this research show how women are engaging in Islamic activism on all the levels by occupying the public sphere delegated historically to men, combining their specialist knowledge with their religious one, leading their activism, and preparing the content of their lessons, and empowering themselves. The framework of the *halaqat* is mostly mildly-independent from the conventional institutional framework what adds to the independency of the *halaqat* as stand-alone female socio-religious spaces. This independence notion depends on how women understand their independence. That goes hand in hand in their perception of their authority; it is a dispersed liquid authority. Lay knowledge producers are trying to mediate between the text and the reality. After looking at the lay knowledge producers, I lay down the characteristics of the audience.

4.4 Laying the audience

The informal groups have a wider reach than the formal ones. The informal ones are attracting those interested in knowing how to live with the religious text. They do not precisely aim to specialize in religious studies but to gain practical knowledge that reconciles their daily reality with the text. The plurality of organizations secures a platform for *muridin's* belonging by categorizing the audiences according to age, socio-economic, educational, and cultural backgrounds. Mostly the *halaqat*, the events, and the workshops are specific for female-only audiences while some lectures include men, especially if the topic is general.

My fieldwork revealed that the audience is high in number, even though the organizations do not have an exact number of attendees. The average number for women in public *halaqat* held at the houses is 8-12 women. In comparison, a higher number of women between70-100 attend in mosques depending on the type of the *halaqa* and the lecturer. Those public *halaqat* held at the houses are high in number, knowing their distribution in different zones in Lebanon.

For the different case studies, the audience's categorization into different *halaqat* takes into consideration the age and the level of specialization. Age plays an essential role in demarking the lines of division due to many reasons; most importantly, the level of discussion and the need to respond to every age cohort differently. The younger groups need more focus on "introducing the Islamic concepts amid the wave of secularizations."[8] In contrast, the older ones need to be more expert in their religion rather than know their religion according to my interviewees. Another dimension is the level of specialization directly related to what exactly the participants need to know and their seniority in the organization. For instance, audiences attend the public *halaqat* at the beginning in the mosques, and then they can also take *halaqat* at their houses (still public). Those interested in knowing more they can take private *halaqat* where there is a focus on a specific topic, or they can join specific *halaqat* that are closed to certain high-level members.

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[8] One of the informants of Irchad and Islah said.

In addition to the criteria, every organization tacitly uses other criteria to categorize the *halaqat*.

Al-Qubaysiyat uses social class as a categorization criterion. This division's importance lies in how they use it as an attraction strategy, so people would be impressed that the affluent families belong to this organization. "The rich are divided from the rest; they flatter them and uniquely treat them," my interviewee claimed. Another claimed that this is for a practical reason because the organization is self-sufficient, so it needs the financial support of this class to help those who need it. The number attended varied between 8-10 persons for the *halaqa* of different ages because it was private. The young people were from AUB, Lebanese American University, and Haigazian. They speak English with each other, and they all have Syrian origins. The others are Lebanese of ages between the 40s and 50s. Some of them are relatives. They are mostly non-veiled, which is not the case in other case studies.

For Islah Zet al-Bayn, the specific audience is not divided according to any lines except interest in the matter. For instance, the lecture that discusses the rights and duties in Islam of prospective brides contains only women and their relatives who have plans to marry soon. They differ in number from one session to the other. They are usually 40 Lebanese female with 3-4 Syrians. The head of the organization gives lectures in different places and about topics that are not directly tackled by the organization, here the number exceeds 70. I attended with her at Ibad al-Rahman, where approximately 60-70 women from all ages and backgrounds attended. Those usually attend with another sheikh before the lecture, and some of them come specifically for

the lecture. Mostly they are aged non-working women from different socio-economic backgrounds. They choose a morning time for the different sessions.

For al-Najat, the audience is also divided according to the geographic area. Participants who are in the vicinity of a teacher gather weekly for a *halaqa*. It depends on the availability of the participants to specify the hour for the *halaqa*. For the public *halaqa* of the older women, the participants are either non-working mothers or freelancers, so they used to meet in the morning when their kids are at the school.

For Irchad and Islah, the audience is also divided according to considerations of the family status and the needed intervention. Some of the *halaqat* are addressed to a specific type of audience according to the project they benefit from. For instance, those who benefit from psychological support due to the loss of their husbands attend the same *halaqat*.

The hostess plays a central role in the public *halaqat* held at the houses of al-Qubaysiyat and al-Najat. She is usually extremely well-informed, educated, and highly religious. She is responsible for setting the ambiance of the *halaqa*. Everyone loves her, and she is extremely friendly. That goes round to the teacher's choice to hold the *halaqat* at her house, and vice versa, the hostess, wants to have more reward. Furthermore, the audience is increasingly well-informed, aware of the particularity of the experience, and interactive. If not aware from the beginning, the emphasis from the teachers and the senior participants that this experience of learning is very particular adds to their sense of responsibility.

When I started attending the first session, I was overwhelmed by the audience's expertise, especially with the old groups. They do not attend to get information in most

halaqat but to add to their knowledge about the topics. The details provided are extremely rich. There were participants from al-Najat and Islah Zet al-Bayn who would know details more than the teacher herself in the public *halaqat*. With the other groups, the audience is less expert in religious matters but extremely dedicated to learning. They would ask for homework and extra resources for a particular topic.

The audience is shown to be from different ages, different socio-economic, and educational and cultural backgrounds. Every organization includes different socio-economic classes within it, making it hard to catch how different classes engage specifically with the text, i.e., the engagement is mixed, causing difficulty in distinguishing and by that there is a richness contaminating the different perspectives and internalizations.

The audience and the teachers, I suggest, are engaging in what Paulo Freire calls coscientization, which is the process of developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action." (Freire, Ramos, and Shaull 1970) This process allows the co-reproduction of Islamic knowledge based on mutual engagement and the exchange of questions and expertise. Freire considers this way fundamental to changing reality. By that, the *halaqat* contributes to a learning process that uncovers the real problems and actual needs. (ibid)

This part tried to contextualize the knowledge production process by accounting for the different dimensions engaged in this production. It considered the *da'wah* as the medium from which women operate their activism. It studied the character of the networks that established the lines of a sustained community sense capable of inciting the learning process by looking at the religious space and resilient

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ties. The characteristics, teaching style, and role of the lay knowledge producers were subsequently studied to end with laying down the characteristics of the varied audience and their contribution to the process of knowledge production.

CHAPTER 5

THE "WHAT" AND "HOW" OF DAʻWAH

After shedding light on the context of the knowledge production process in its physical and social dimension, I touch on the curricula. I look at the curricula as a social and political construction that is amenable to the sociology of knowledge. Basil Bernstein (1990) expounds that "curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge, pedagogy defines what counts as the valid transmission of knowledge, and evaluation defines what counts as a valid realization of the knowledge on the part of the taught." (Scott, 2003, p. 245) Bernstein's definition outlines, as a result, three levels: the production, the transmission with its structured relations, and the impact of this production. Correspondingly, Basil Bernstein (2004) urges to start any pedagogic practice from the distinction between pedagogic practice as a cultural relay and pedagogic practice in terms of what it relays. This distinction sets the way for this chapter that tries to understand the "how" and "what" of the Islamic knowledge production.

The knowledge offered in the *halaqat* mixes everyday knowledge and school knowledge (*halqat* knowledge) or, in other words, two types of curricula, which are essential to understand the case studies, the learning curriculum, and the teaching curriculum. Jean Lave (1991) explains that the former is a field of learning resources in everyday practice viewed from the perspective of learners, which means it is situated. "It is not something that can be considered in isolation, manipulated in arbitrary didactic

terms, or analyzed apart from the social relations that shape legitimate peripheral participation." (Lave and Wenger 1991, p 97) By contrast, the latter is constructed, more complex and intensified, and mediated through an external view of what knowing is about. (ibid)

Al-Najat, Irchad and Islah and Islah Zet al-Bayn mostly depend on the learning resources that stem mostly from the needs and desires of the community of the *halaqat* as I will show in this chapter. Irchad and Islah also have courses that are written and gathered, but these are prepared by the teachers and joined in a two-book course. This curriculum can be seen as a learning curriculum and partly a teaching one. Al-Najat refers to a series of books by Jassem al Motawaa as part of the formation of the young group, where they only study 15 min from it at the end of the *halaqa*. The teacher prepares the rest of the materials.

Al- Qubaysiyat uses *Fiqh al-Sirah* by Muhammad Said Ramadan Al-Buti in the *halaqa* I attended. It usually delivers this book before the actual *Sirah* that goes to the details of the prophet's life and actions. This emphasis, I suggest, is part of how this organization approaches *muridin* in moving their heart before their mind and in emphasizing a specific reading of the events that suits the vision of the organization. AL-Qubaysiyat usually uses unified materials sometimes prepared by the organization; however, the analysis of these goes beyond this thesis. I only look at the themes that came up from the field.

This mix, however, existent in different organizations enriches the *halaqat* as they serve different social groups and different specializations.

The analysis extracted from the teaching curriculum is included in each theme.

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The studied organizations are informal, which subsequently means they do not offer official certificates, and they do not always refer to written curricula. I should be clear here that I did not study the whole curricula, only the *halaqat* I attended that were mostly not written. I will start by explaining the main themes *halaqat* focused on as an implication of the spheres that need Islamic interference. That lies in the effort of restoring or further developing Islamic principles and commands. The *halaqat* tackled mainly three types of causes that I study consecutively: the religious, the social, and the socio-political.

5.1 Religious Themes

Women tackled two recurrent themes: piety conception with stress on reading reality and "*Yosor*" in Islam.

5.1.1 Inward and Outward Piety

As a long process for the *muridin,* piety gains its generative and renewable character being directly influenced by a macro-level shaped and triggered by the international character of Islam, the Lebanese society, and the Muslim community in Lebanon, a micro one related to the characteristics of the organization and the specific lay knowledge producers, and an experiential one related subjectively to every woman. Piety, in this sense, is not something constant or fixed to be measured. Here lies the importance of how women conceptualize it in their own terms.

Charles Glock (1962) suggests that religiosity has five dimensions: 1- the ideological dimension that is the expectations that the religious person will hold to

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certain beliefs; 2- the ritualistic dimension that encompasses practices expected of religious adherents; 3- the intellectual dimension that constitutes the expectation that the religious person is informed about the tenets of his faith; 4- the experiential dimension that recognizes that "every religion places some value on subjective religious experience as a sign of individual religiosity"(p.10) ; 5- the consequential dimension that includes "secular effects of religious belief, practice, experience, and knowledge on the individual." (Hassan, 2008, p.66)

These five dimensions help understand religiosity as a resultant of a multi-dimensional interplay and a mode of dimensions' disparity. However, these are universal. Yasemin El-Menouar (2014) adapted and empirically proved the validity of Glock's dimensions in Islam by suggesting labeling of the different dimensions consequently: 1. Basic religiosity, 2. Central duties as rituals, 3. Religious experience, 4. Religious knowledge as intellectual, and 5. Orthopraxis. That is to account for the use of these dimensions in Islam. A plethora of Muslim religiosity concepts was operationalized in scales. (Berghammer and Fliegenschnee 2014) These are starting to take the direction of being context-dependent and follow a multi-dimensional approach instead of an earlier unilateral approach. I will address in this section how this multi-dimensionality of piety is approached.

Undefined by Saba Mahmoud (2004) or Masooda Bano (2017), the notion of piety for *da'iis* is perceived based on two dimensions: faith and behavior. *Muridin* attempt to be religious by focusing on 1- faith that is influenced by the ideological, intellectual, experiential dimensions and 2- behavior that includes/ influenced by the ritualistic and consequential dimensions. Caroline Berghammer & Katrin Fliegenschnee

(2011) found, in their study of everyday lived religions among migrants in Austria, that religiosity is also divided into faith and behavior. This distinction was made clear in the *halaqat*.

Piety for those activists is based on a continuous seeking to renew faith and practice on different levels. Piety goes beyond the subjective commitment to inwardly change one's beliefs and actions but also outwardly to help others change theirs through strategic interventions.

5.1.1.1 Faith

Three requirements are discussed to have a solid faith: 1- constant renewing of iman; 2- being a learner; 3- and having a role model. These are common for the four organizations yet approached differently.

Developing faith is considered a long journey that needs patience and preservance. In this process, all the case studies addressed the six pillars of *iman*: belief in the existence and oneness of Allah, belief in the existence of angels, belief in the existence of books of which God is the author, belief in the existence of messengers, belief in the existence of the Day of Judgment, and *qadar* (God's destination). However, the emphasis in the four cases was on believing in *qadar* and Quran mainly. The belief is based on the acceptance of *qada'* (predestination of things), *qadar*, and the Quran. In the Lebanese context where pluralism is expanding the choices of people shaking the certainties, *da'iis* reassure *muridin* to accept and believe, thus the emphasis on *qada'* and Quran. I do not see it as a connotation of pacifism but an acceptance that will lead to an action, a change approached differently by the cases.

I examine how this notion of faith is formulated in every case study based on the three requirements mentioned above.

For Islah Zet-Al-Bayn, the teacher explained the stories of the different prophets throughout the *halaqat* to stress the importance of getting back to Islam. "A strong belief is essential to discipline ourselves and for *jihad al-nafss* (self-jihad). We should believe in God's will and accept it for us to be stronger and for God to help us," the teacher said in one of the *halaqat*. She also reminded the groups not to exaggerate in giving tribute to prophets or contemporary religious figures since the Quran has already given them tribute. The point of mentioning them is learning the moral lessons and develop the intention of following them up in practice. In this process, the prophets are religious models that should be the reference for belief and behavior.

Concerning learning, the main focus is relegated to studying the historical context of the *ayat* (verses) to know the *maqsad* (objective) behind each. The teacher spends the *halaqa* time explaining one verse to give the students the context of its revelation. For example, in the prophet Youssef's story, the teacher explained how polygamy (Youssef's father was married to two women) affected the life of this prophet due to the upbringing of the children on grudges. *Maqasid al-Shariah* were only emphasized and talked about in Islah Zet al-Bayn. The audience is familiar with the five objectives -*maqasid* - to uphold the faith, life, intellect, progeny, and property. From this base, *tadabbur* (pondering), critical reading, and understanding the Quran's meanings were the primary emphasis of the *halaqat*. Learning is perceived as part of submitting to God's orders: "we are all here because God loves us and wants us to learn more." Mostly, the teacher encouraged being an active learner and not wait for her for

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information. The *muridin* were asked to read different opinions concerning any topic they search for, so they have a better understanding of Islam but be aware of *Isra'iliyyat*[9].

For al-Najat, and since the first *halaqa* I attended, the teacher divided the types of seeking in life into two categories: one to give others and have *taqwah* and the other to mask help and being reticent. Seeking involves in itself a constant renewing of faith. This faith has a dimension of working for the welfare that transcends the self and reaches humanity. "Believing touches everything in the world," the teacher said. Belief and change are intertwined conceptually and based on a constant renewing. The idea of renewing the belief stems from participants' acceptance of their imperfections and *dunia*'s preoccupations, which requires a constant revision of one's *Iman*. Concerning education, the teacher urged the audience to "learn everything. Do not look at one angle; look at all. Learning is part of developing your faith, and this is what gives us power." She considered that learning is the road towards glory in this life and the afterlife. The audience continuously complained about the challenges of learning. The teacher's answer centered on God's generosity of giving them the capability to progress, seek, and learn. The *halaqat* would sometimes specify a time to pray for children to help them learn more.

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[9] These are narratives assumed to be imported to Islam from other religious resources Christian and Jewish mostly.

In the young al-Najat group, a focus was on "staying on the right path even if we stumble and never reach the end of the road." Learning is perceived as "*amanah*" (devotion) that empowers in *deen* and *dunia*.

For al-Qubaysiyat, the teacher stresses on piety for reaching contentment since we are worshippers of *ihsan*. That can only be reached by holding onto the *Quran* and living with it. "It is the story of our life. *Quran* heals the body and the soul," the teacher said. There was also the glorification of the prophet's status as part of faith; the prophet is the ideal role model. The *aanisah* did emphasize *sahaba* as role models; she distributed a book نجوم في فلك النبوة *Nujum Fi Falak al-Nubua* (Stars in the Trajectory of Prophecy) written by Asmaa Tabaa'. This book examines the life of 60 *sahabi* and *sahabiya* to learn "the art of life," as the writer claims.

The teacher would claim that "who fails God fails. We are the children of our religion, not our families." Islamic duties are prioritized over everything else, even one's family. That was one of the complaints of many who left the Qubaysiyat's *halaqat* since they felt obliged to do religious work at the expense of their families. For example, one of my informants expressed that she left the organization after they asked her to leave her house to help distribute charitable boxes continually.

Another aspect that is indispensable for faith development is learning at a young age. The teacher explicitly said: "we should acquire faith at a young age, so we do not think about it at an older age. Part of having faith is showing spirituality and affection. Islam did not win by force but by love. Even love nowadays is approached mentally and not through the heart. The heart should always be occupied with God and the prophet for it not be occupied with something else." Hence, seeking to show and

showing spirituality is a significant part of having a faith. That was also apparent in the

audience's statements like "the house today is spiritual," or "it feels great just to enter

the room" and affects like twitching, looking up, and shedding tears when someone

reads *Quran*. Spirituality is, by itself, an aim towards the spirit of tranquility and peace

of reassurance. It is a prerequisite for praying and supplicating. Faith's conception is

seen in the light of Sufism as al-Qubaysiyat embraces it. This mystical conception

necessitates the purification of the heart and glorification of love to reach the essential

state of faith that can be translated into behavior. The teacher considered that "telling

the stories of invasions aims to invade our heart and reconcile with God." Therefore, al-

Qubaysiyat focuses on spiritual development for faith development, and here comes the

importance of the emphasis on the concept of love.

The teacher further claimed that learning about Islam and *sirah* is not a luxury;

it is a duty to develop faith. The prophet is a role model in every action we do; that is

why the teacher emphasized the moral lessons of *sirah* deduced from each story and

session. It was stressed that the prophet is living in the heart, so it is better not to refer to

him as absent. Learning stems from the organization which necessitates for being an

active learner the reference to the materials provided by the organization solely or

approved by the teacher. A theme that needs further analysis here is what constitutes

the "right" and "wrong" in learning and on what base these are approached.

For Irchad and Islah, the stress was on believing and living in the *Quran*; thus,

sessions were specified to how to read and critically understand *Quran*. The teacher

used to stop at every word to let the audience extracts meanings and develop a critical

reading. The focus was also on *qadar*; two types of *qadar* were discussed: 1-

unchangeable related to the things that we cannot change like our families, appearance, and voice, and so on; 2- and changeable related to behavior and management of the self. "We should believe that everything is written for us, not on us. This belief makes you change your attitude from passive people to active ones working for the future of humanity," the teacher elaborated. The problem with new generations, according to the *halaqat*, is that they are not experiencing faith in a genuine way and lack role models. The outcomes of faith, "change and happiness," are abstracts for the new generations. That can be restored by education and learning. An essential factor for faith is fear from God, and that fear is sui-generis since it depends on the true believer and not on God's words; "He does not cause them fear."

For the four cases, faith is seen as an inward seeking that will be translated in outward action. This inward seeking is to continually renew faith by living with the *Quran*, accepting *qada'* (predestination) and considering the prophet a role model. Part of developing this faith is also learning about Islam. Women express that the gradual development of faith should be translated into gradual behavioral development.

5.1.1.2 <u>Practice</u>

　　　Piety is not only an inward seeking but also an outward behavior. This behavior takes two directions: 1- the rituals like *ibadat* (worship) that did not receive much attention during the *halaqat* and 2- the development of ethical behavior that was highly emphasized.

　　　Ibadat like praying, fasting, zakat were not approached at all during all the *halaqat*. These were occasionally mentioned specifically in *duaa* (supplication) or

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private questions. *Ibadat* can be seen as foundational for the *muridin* and hence not emphasized. Nevertheless, the lack of focus reflects a shift towards ethical behavior development emerging from an awareness of the need for such a focus.

Duaa is stressed mostly as a ritual by itself, and it is even part of every *halaqa*. *Duaa* is said to change the fate, confront the problems, and offer new beginnings.

In one of the lectures, a lecturer considered the need to learn how to make *duaa*; "*Duaa* is an answered conviction. *Duaa* answer might be better for us than what we prayed for." She even talked about the concept of power *duaa*, which is a *duaa* preferred in every season. This focus on *duaa* falls in the same line of renewing faith and stressing the significance of the direction leading to God. It is perceived as an agent of change that leads to spiritual development and a humble person's character development. Sometimes, *da'iis* supplicate for newly married couples or the children. *Da'iis* encourage the *murdin* to be completely involved in the expression of the supplication, making it an empowering form driven by a genuine belief that *duaa* is answered.

Part of piety is developing an ethical self that behaves according to Islamic teachings and rulings. This emphasis was shown in the discourses, explanation of the *sirah*, life of *sahaba*, and stories of dealing with animals. For instance, most of the *halaqat* of Islah Zet al-Bayn were to learn about the different prophets for the moral betterment of the selves.

For Al-Najat, at the beginning of a *halaqa*, the teacher asked participants to count three blessings each to conclude how grateful they should be. The main problem of Muslims is the lack of ethics and morality; she elaborated. Based on this, the *muridin* and the teacher concluded that "we cannot separate ethics from religion."

The discussions in the *halaqat* for the 4 case studies concentrated on changing the behavior one step at a time and triggering change by impacting others. Participants provided examples of this change in simple terms like sending a kind message to someone instead of blocking them on What's App, treating the helper at their houses better, or helping the needy. "Everything we do no matter how small it is, it is a seed for welfare. We are seeds that will develop into trees," al-Najat *da'ii* said. However, this change does not exceed the social-ethical dimension, and it does not directly orient itself towards political aims. The development of ethical behavior (discussed in detail in the last chapter) is understood as a requirement to change oneself and, by extension, society. Women invest in themselves inwardly for outward action without considering a level at the expense of the other. Here I suggest that piety's conception is not only a matter of inward faith that translates in certain behaviors restricted to the self and the private sphere rather it is a mode of capacitation that emerges from this active understanding of faith and behavior; the subjects become self-conscious of their problems and of others making a step closer to be active agents of change or simply " better *da'iis*."

Piety, as acted upon in the *halaqat*, is understood as a gradual process that should go beyond the rituals and the duties; it goes to practical ethical behaviors and lived faith reflected in an outward action and spiritual development of the society. Piety necessitates women's activism, which itself empowers their positionalities and subjectivities vis-à-vis the general context in Lebanon, i.e., piety drives their activism, which can tell of their stance against feminism as they come from a piety perspective rather than rights one.

5.1.2 Context Reading: Potentially Engaged Piety

Since Islam is an all-encompassing religion, it is accused of living in the past and trapped in its calcified thought system. This view is backed by the absence or lack of fundamental social methods to read the context, engage with it, and evaluate necessary interventions beyond the textual learning. This reading is seen not only in the valid social methods but also in the engagement and consequence created from within modes of perceptions and interventions. I suggest that the context reading referred to by the *da'iis* is potentially promising being entrenched in preliminary social methods that are adopted from social sciences, the reference to studies stemming from social science texts mostly psychology and personal development as well as Islamic ones, and adopting interventions from different countries after its relevantization to the Islamic context. That varies between the cases. I will look at the methods in this section as the discussion of the different themes in chapter 5 will provide a better understanding of the resources and interventions used.

Since the beginning of the research, I was interested in knowing how the *da'iis* read reality, how they choose topics that respond to the demands and needs of those who attend, and what methods they employ to do that. That was also part of the interview questions with the *da'iis*. Interviews about the matter back my participant observation. I will look at every case study by itself.

For al-Najat, the *da'iis* claimed that they choose the topics of the discussions based on the demands of those in the *halaqat*, the demands of the families who visit the

centers, committees related to Muslim Students Association[10] responsible for responding to the youth needs, localities (the *da'iis* stressed on the importance to start from the place one lives at), the media mainly especially the topics that catch the public opinion (mostly *da'iis* considered social programs like *Ahmar bl Khat l Arid, Tony Khalife* and so on), short surveys on the opinions of a specific category and what they need, local and international conferences like " The Global Women Leaders Association, Islamic Forum for Women and Children تجمع قيادات النساء العالمية" منتدى الاسلامي للمرأة والطفل, topics suggested by *Ikhwan*, and a committee's suggestions that try to capture the most discussed topics in the country.

In 2019, the *da'iis* attended a national conference called Amal Bina'(Hope of Building) adopted from Jordan, where the discussion was on corrective and evaluative processes that include measurement, evaluation, diagnosis, treatment, and improvement of the general framework of the context reading. I did not have access to it; however, *da'iis* emphasized its importance in how they read reality. All these methods are preliminary in their use. In addition, in the *halaqat,* the teacher referenced texts from different sources, mostly from western psychologists and theorists of children's development and upbringing. Here, the *da'iis* never referenced the name of the theorists, only the theories.

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[10] The Association of Muslim Students in Lebanon is a student body that seeks to develop the cultural, social and intellectual life. It was established in 1975 by the Islamic Group.

For Islah Zet al-Bayn, the teacher elaborated in one of the *halaqat* that:" Islam tells us to be there with the people. It tells us to be modest, so we understand the reality we are living in. We cannot live outside reality. Everyone should know what is happening around them." The *da'iis* claimed to refer to:

1- Hearing sessions due to their presence in the court. "The couples discuss their problems, and we hear the discussions that happen in the court. We meet as a group and discuss the roots of the problems these couples suffer from," a *da'ii* said. There was also a resort to different *halaqat* to ask the attendees about the topics they need and finally, through following up with the cases after they leave.

2- Dar al Fatwa's suggestions of topics.

3- *Halaqat*, lectures, and local and international conferences.

For Irchad and Islah, the methods used are the most varied ones between the cases.

1- Conducting surveys (for instance, the organization conducted a survey on taking off the veil in Lebanon with over 1000 participants.)

2- Conducting interviews and having general discussions with the groups of students for their opinions and needs. "I consider the *halaqat* mostly as needs assessment forum where I can see the problems of the *muridin*," the *da'ii* said.

3- Following up on local media and benefiting from the topics international organizations are talking about, especially in Turkey." We educate women about the legality of their status. So we follow up with the international and national updates and do conferences and sessions about them," the *da'ii* said.

4-   Having personal meetings with participants to know their needs and the major problems they suffer from.

5- Researching and literature reviewing before starting every program. "Sometimes, the literature and research are not available about Lebanon, so we take the literature from a western research, and we make it fit the Lebanese context," the head of the *da'wah* section said.

6- Referring to expertise to know the topics that need emphasis.

7- Basing on the opinions of a health committee that tries to see what type of interventions families need. "We give each category different *halaqat* within the different programs. The type of intervention is exported as a model from international organizations," an interviewee said.

For al- Qubaysiyat, I did not receive a clear answer form my interviewees, and I believe this to be related to the strict commitments to teaching the curricula within a hierarchal system. One of my interviewees claimed that the primary method is observation of the social phenomena that are gaining increased acceptance in the society like "mixing, the creed loss, identity crises, and westernization." She stressed a phrase used "they took over him/her," which means that the western forces became the center of reference of the Muslims instead of the Islamic one. Hence, an essential reading of reality considers the normalization of the western concepts, which its impact should be mitigated.

To sum up, these methods are preliminary in their use. No explanation about them is provided to the *muridin*. "Reading reality" is approached in abstracted terms for cases more than others, yet it shows the potential of being entrenched in the reality of

the *muridin*. There was an apologetic tone during the interviews concerning the lack of research beyond the Islamic texts, nonetheless a hopeful one that there is a new trend of having counselors and specialists from different domains, not only Islamic ones. *Da'iis* expressed their awareness of the need to read the context better, but they sustained that to their lack of formation to do so correctly. That is prevalent in the absence of identification with theorists and the use of fragmented theories from social sciences, especially for preparing the lessons themselves. Talking about the context reading is gaining attention between the *da'iis* and the *muridin*.

Another aspect is the admittance of the *da'iis* of the need to take initiatives that reconcile Islamic knowledge with the daily knowledge; these should start from *tajdid* (renewal) in concepts and vocabs to reach out to perceptions and views about the world, some of the interviewees stressed. However, interviewees were not comfortable in discussing the issue with further details. Some blamed Dar al-Fatwa and male *da'iis* (two of my interviewees claimed that in a low voice) for being the reason behind this lack of *tajdid*.

5.1.3 Yosor in Islam

The international Islamophobia is putting a stress on *da'iis* to emphasize certain concepts that clearly show the non-violent and easiness of Islam. In this line, *Yosor* is discussed almost in every *halaqa* in its vital role in constructing the individual and social attitudes and behaviors of the person and society. This concept reflects more than "easiness and simplicity" of God's rules on Muslims as usually perceived. (Hadian Rasanani 2020) I will try to show how every case study perceives *Yosor*.

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Al-Najat's teacher considered that the compass for choosing among two permissible choices is always the easiest, for people should not impose on themselves what God did not. That was understood in the line of trusting God's rules to treat his worshippers in the best way there is, by consequence, worshippers should also not ask others to do more than God wants.

Al- Quabysiyat teacher added that *Yosor* includes letting go of the negativity and accept the burdens. It is a positive attitude that we see the world through and behave accordingly. The same applies to Irchad and Islah in considering *Yosor*: "God can take it if this earth cannot, and we can take it if God sends it to us."

Islah Zet al-Bayn's teacher reminded *muridin* almost at the beginning of every *halaqa* that the stories of the prophets are to learn from and develop a moral and ethical self away from any "exaggeration." "It is enough to believe and do our duties as Muslims without glorification of any religious figure or putting much strain on ourselves since these acts are not religious acts," she said.

Yosor is discussed as a deepened sense of mercy based on the trust of God's benevolence. Thinking of religious matters in terms of *Yosor* means being capable of trusting God, and by consequence, *Yosor* solidifies piety instead of diminishing it. *Yosor* becomes an expression of piety. *Yosor* goes beyond the easy and the simple in God's ruling to touch on the treatment of the self and the society in moderation. This conception of *Yosor* reflects the extent of the burden put on Islamic movements after 9/11 to stress Islam's call for moderation.

5.2 Social Themes

  Da'wah's work on the social level is mainly directed to protect the family as a significant unit of the social fabric. Considered the locus of individual formation, women stressed family as the base of building a cohesive society. Family is always approached as a unit, not as members. That is driven by the concern that the structure of the family is weakened in the modern world, especially when compared with the western model of family. "A family is one not a group of islands. There are complete integration, a strong bond, a mutual interest & responsibility, and rights," an Irchad and Islah *da'ii* in a *halaqa* considered.

  Building on this, the different case studies approached social issues in light of working on both the members to support the family as a whole or support the family itself. That stemmed from the fear that the western family values are increasingly being adopted by the Muslim world, even though these values were not discussed plainly. For instance, Irchad an Islah has different programs to support the family as a unit and as members. Different programs are offered like *Baytak Bayti* (Your home Is Mine), where female volunteers work on arranging the house of those who need and offer them supplies, a program for financial support, and another that provides fresh portions of food, fruits, and vegetables. Other programs are oriented towards the members: a program for fathers to alleviate some of the pressure they have through interventions, a program for the elderly, kids program that provides clothes, food, and psychological support, a program for youth participating in camps with Moltaka al Nour, workshops and so on.

I will look at the different themes that were discussed during the *halaqat* and the lectures that are under the umbrella of family. First, I will start with the concept of complementarity between men and women and the resultant social roles and responsibilities of each. Then I will proceed to discuss the conception of sexuality and how it is approached and understood. After that, I discuss women's conceptions and requirements of Islamic upbringing in the Lebanese context. Finally, I will look at the notion of dealing with members of the extended family.

5.2.1 Complementarity Conception

Discussions of the relationship between men and women are based on an increased negotiation with the meanings of the texts and the emphasis on the separation between cultural traditions and Islamic ones. Cultural traditions were considered by the *da'iis*, the main problem with how people perceive Islam as lacking gender equality. Cynthia Nelson and Virginia Olesen (1987) suggest that gender in the Muslim world is premised on the ideology of complementarity, as shown in my fieldwork. As a concept, complementarity was widespread as a reactionary result to western feminism and the orientalist perception of women in the Arab world as suffering from "oppression." It challenges western feminism.

Women perceive complementarity in terms of the co-constitutiveness of the concept of equality and the distinction between women and men. This distinction is believed to organize the relation between them.

This complementarity does not oppose equality, according to these women. Iman Hashim (1999) identifies two streams in theories about the perception of this

issue; The *Quran* distinguishes between two types of categories that explain this difference between women and men. One is a socio-economic category where women's status is inferior to men, and the other is an ethical-religious category where women and men are fully equal. The socio-economic category is said to belong to social relations (*mu 'amamalat*), while moral and religious equality is the category of religious duties (*'ibadat*). (Hashim 1999) This distinction is justified in the *halaqat* on two bases. Women considered that equality set by the *Quran* is genuine equality while they related every other type of inequality to cultural traditions or to a burden test on men to be more responsible.

In this light, women discussed polygamy criticizing men's consideration of Islam's acceptance of 4 marriages as the main point of the *aya* (verse) without fully understanding it. A basic understating is that there are conditions that impede polygamy. Men ignore these due to their lack of religiosity (justice between the different wives mainly.) Another theme is *'isma* عصمة (protection- the right of holding or initiating a divorce), where it is perceived as a responsibility and trust test given to men and can be given to women. "It is relegated to the man most of the time to make him more responsible not for control; he should understand this. The man who cannot be trusted with *'isma* cannot be trusted to raise the family," best put by an Irchad and Islah lecturer. The sole distinction between men and women is in piety.

Complementarity is a result of piety since "men and women compete if they are not pious and become one if they are"[11] and of the conception of women as *shaqa'iq al-rijal* (شقائق الرجال) which means sisters to men. The use of this description by itself equalizes men and women yet sets a tacit separation. That paves the way to perceive "a non-competition" and "a cooperation" as the main characteristics of the relation between men and women.

The conception of complementarity also extends to organize the family and marriage. It is the base of making the family more pious by understanding the role of each according to Islamic rulings. It starts from the moment women agree on marrying someone since it would be the time to lay the grounds for the roles, responsibilities and the terms of the relationship. This stage is the most discussed in all the cases since it is assumed to be "the base" of the relationship. The husband's choice is crucial for good dynamics in the family. "The choice of the husband is crucial; it should be based on *mawada* and *rahma*. If those characteristics are lost, the issue will lead in the future to an actual or spiritual divorce[12]," the *da'ii* said during a *halaqa*. *Mwadah* is approached as the persistence of care and a strong bond between the spouses. This persistence should be apparent in every action, no matter the extent of the spouses' problems. The concept of marriage is explained during the *halaqat* and the lectures under the umbrella of complementarity. Marriage is seen as a contract, and a covenant that

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[11] Mentioned during the *halaqat.*
[12] Spiritual divorces are defined as situations where women and men are alienated from each other spiritually.

"completes the picture for the bigger project women aim for in their life," a lecturer from Irchad and Islah considered. A woman is encouraged to choose someone she is willing to adjust her life with for the sake of the family. She is encouraged to search for a man who is responsible enough to build a family. Marriage is not by itself a project. There were calls from the different organizations for the Islamic courts to teach men and women what marriage is and how spouses can refer to Islam to solve their issues. There is also a call for the awareness about the pressures and constraints put forward by society on women to marry. Women discussed mainly: 1- socio-economic pressure; 2- early marriage; 3- and unawareness of women's rights.

The first point has many folds. It is represented mainly by *"Allah yfrhna fiki"* الله يفرحنا فيك (May God give us the happiness of your engagement) that is used by the Lebanese society to stress women to get marry "as if they only have one project." It also can be caused by the romanticized images and perceptions in the media, *da'iis* considered. In addition, sometimes, women choose someone who can sustain them financially without considering other essential characteristics. *Da'iis* expressed that it is a valid motive, but it is not enough for marriage.

According to women, the second reason is the early marriage that impedes women from building their personality and path. Al-Najat mostly emphasized this issue, putting forward many arguments related to the health of women. Al-Najat's teacher considered those who claim that early marriage is acceptable from a religious point of view are wrong since the girls are neither ready psychologically nor physically. Three participants in the *halaqat* claimed that they married from an early age, and that caused them uterine prolapse that led to involuntary urinary leakage, bladder infections, and

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back pain mainly. Different stories of their suffering were recounted with the long journey of treatment. There was an agreement between the participants that women should be educated and have a bachelor before thinking of marriage. The acceptable age was discussed to be 27 since it is the age that allows women to choose a partner according to the *Shariah* and to be fully aware of their rights in Islam. This view contradicts with Dar-al-Fatwa in their defense of early marriage. This view stems from women themselves, setting the terms of their public engagement.

The last reason is the unawareness of women's rights, which is discussed in terms of women's consideration of themselves as less than men. This view is more about the internalized social construction of women. "Women learn to be submissive because they do not know their rights," the Irchad and Islah lecturer said. Building on this conception, women should know their rights and duties in Islam on all levels to be empowered.

Masooda Bano (2017) and Sarah Omar (2013) considered that low-income women bring different concerns to the *halaqat* than the upper-income ones. I found this distinction not utterly representative of the cases. Low-income women usually discussed all the types of problems that the upper-income women did. Yet, the upper-income women also discussed the issues that are in literature relegated to the lower-income women like relations with the mother-in-law and knowing their rights in Islam, for instance, privately with each other or privately with the teacher. Hence, the exposure differs and not the concern, even if one can notice a different degree of concern. Women from the lower-income background shared one common, understandable concern that is not present among the upper-income women, which is whether their

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financial contribution to the family is a responsibility in Islam. The interpretation was that women could have their own money without sharing it, yet there is a need to support the family financially. "Women should understand that men and women are alike in their responsibilities and rights," the *da'ii* said. The discussion would move directly to discuss women's duties at the house that are the main problem for women, not outside of it. The reason behind working inside the house, women considered, is "patriarchy." Al-Najat's teacher encouraged *muridin* to raise the kids differently: "I teach my sons to wash dishes, make their beds, and cook. Women should not be responsible for all the house shores. The problem is that women are "still oriental[13]" not wanting to help financially and men are still "oriental" in obliging women to help. The first step is understanding that marriage is a relationship of giving and receiving."

It was evident in the four cases that it is up to women to help yet, there is a need to help because of the bad economic situation in Lebanon.

Relying on the Islamic understanding of concepts and perceptions is "by itself an empowered and empowering thought." (Islah Zet-al-Bayn teacher) One of the Islah Zet al-Bayn informants also claimed, "I try to let the woman know she is strong with her Islam, her creed, her cooperation with man, and her responsibilities." Complementarity is then a reflection of the deliberation of the superiority of Islamic code. Participants develop with the teacher this superiority of the Islamic code over every other code through the different conceptions and, most importantly, complementarity.

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[13] Al-Najat teachers used the term.

5.2.2 Sexuality

I rarely came across sexuality as a topic of discussion by itself when discussing gender norms in Islam. Saba Mahmoud (2005) considered that women's sexuality is a result of historical traditions rather than active reasoning and debate. (Bano 2017) She considered the failing recognition of western liberal theories to consider the active women's adherence to a Muslim framework but, at the same time, claimed that agency is constructed due to internalized historical traditions. This perception does not reflect women's voices but tries to provide a situated perception of their activism and ideas. I do not consider that women's perceived idea about their sexuality is historically based understanding but as active reasoning and engagement with the Islamic texts. (ibid) Two of my interviewees claimed that they give sex education sessions. The session gives the Islamic way of organizing sexual life in marriage. Pre-marital sex is impermissible, and for that, several *ayat* are narrated with a significant belief that it does not represent individual freedom because it can alter the family structure by disturbing the *halal* (permissible) bond between men and women.

The etiquette of intimate relations between the married spouses is gaining attention as one of the *da'iis* considered, "I teach them that foreplay is required. I tell them what the prophet used to do (having a bath with his wife sharing water.)" She claimed that going into details is necessary for women to know that romance and intimacy are integral to one's life in Islam and *sunnah*. This *da'ii* claimed that once she invited a judge who works in the Islamic Supreme court to discuss the prophet's way in dealing with his wives concerning the matter and the impact of the ignorance of this

aspect on family disintegration. Two interviewees in Islah Zet-Al-Bayn also considered that the unawareness of this aspect is one of the problems leading to divorce.

Some discussions in the *halaqat* tackled the issue of gender segregation and how difficult it is today amid the conditions of modern life. Al-Qubaysiyat teacher, for instance, said once that her neighbor used to think that she cannot take an elevator with him, and she was a bit upset from the idea. When there is a need for mixing, this does not require thinking for women. It is preferable, however, that they put effort into not normalizing mixing when not needed. In an informal conversation with a psychiatrist who works in the field of *da'wah* and who had cases from al-Quaysiyat, she claimed that women and men who attend from early age suffer from "unhealthy sexual life" due to the taboo concept developed from the "ideal" mother (who is also part of the group). The mother with her study group establish this system at their houses; it gets internalized in the kids' imagination bestowing the 'impermissible' in the dress form at the house and outside of it. The women are encouraged to wear a minimum of white shirt with half-sleeves and short pants at homes. "Men are raised to a sexuality concept of taboo. They develop problems of in their sexual lives and their wives should wear the white t-shirt with the short pants," the informant claimed. That is one of the issues the different case studies considered al-Qubaysiyat innovating in.

Based on these examples, sexuality is discussed within an Islamic framework that represents women's take from the Islamic texts and *sunnah*. Looking at other Muslim movements in Lebanon, there is a developing tendency to discuss sexual education with the parents and the young generation specifically. Women started to consider sexuality not only in the private sense but in a total one accounting for the

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social and less for the historical. This consideration stems from the engagement with the *sunnah* mainly and basing the discussions of the practical model of the prophet's life that embodies God's commendations. Sexuality is then approached as a factor of maintaining the family life that protects the sanctity of marriage. This conception stems from women's engagement with the text.

5.2.3 Islamic Upbringing

The upbringing of the children occupied most discussions in the *halaqat* and lectures. The emphasis on raising kids is not only for the sake of the community but also it is entrenched in the development of the parents as *salih* (righteous) parents. I examine the major Islamic principles discussed and the parenting requirements to conclude with the aim of the Islamic upbringing.

5.2.3.1 Islamic Principles

Women emphasized that Islam contains all the rules and the guidance necessary for the Islamic upbringing of children. Firstly, Islamic principles were stressed in different extents. The main principles discussed in all the cases are mercy development, Islamic etiquette, honesty, responsibility, and ambition.
The main principle emphasized is mercy development in the child due to the participants' consideration that the modern world lacks mercy. "We should teach children to have mercy for others, and that is what *tarbieh* means," al-Najat *da'ii* said. That stems from the conception of mercy as an essential defining attribute of the righteous Muslims distinguishing them from other religious groups. (Abu Musa 2019)

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Mercy is approached as an embodiment of the values of tolerance and kindness. It allows the development of Muslim relations, "seeking common points while reserving differences, abandoning biases, and bridging the gap when communicating with others." (Ajkerem, 2014, p.1) That was approached through different stories of the prophets that embody his merciful treatment and behavior. The prophet's stories constituted the repertoire of values entrenched in actual daily life experiences: treatment of the self, the other, the enemy, the neighbor, animals, and others. Those stories are explained in detail and considered reflective of the ideal Islamic behavior. This emphasis is considered needed for mercy to turn into reality in the life of the Islamic *ummah*.

The *halaqat* focused on the behavioral aspect of Islam in raising the children by stressing moderation, tolerance, compassion, patience, and treating others the way we would love to be treated. Thoughtfulness for the elderly was always given as an example. This stress aims to posit social cohesion in the family and, by extension, to the society as a whole. Women were concerned about the video games kids play that teach them violence and aggression. Women considered that these games prevent the development of social relations capable of making a good community based on mercy. Another principle is Islamic etiquette (*adab*), which received much attention in the *halaqat*, especially in al-Qubaysiyat, as part of the values needed for children and attendees. These include taking permissions before entering or leaving a room, having good manners, developing respect, choosing kind words, posturing in the right way, and so on. These were to organize the actions.

Honesty was also discussed through stories of the prophet, *Quranic* verses, and stories that caution of the social pressure to lie. "There is nothing called a white lie,"

da'iis claimed. That is why women were asked to stop putting pressure on the child to reply quickly to everything and instead respect their privacy.

Responsibility and ambition were also perceived as necessary to build an actively engaged member of society. "We should raise kids to become ambitious and significant for their communities. This world does not need passive people," Islah Zet al-Bayn *da'ii* said. Children were said to need to learn responsibility to have an active role in the family and, by default, society. Responsibility is the base of belonging to a community and the trigger of a change grounded in care and usefulness.

5.2.3.2 Parenting Requirements

Parents are considered the role models of their children. Along with this comes a huge responsibility, especially on the mother, "the base of *tarbieh*," as discussions revealed. The mother role was not stressed in the past, especially in the education of the child; the father was seen as the informal source of education. (Alkanderi 2001)

The mother's commitment to becoming a better person has a crucial significance on the child. The *da'iis* would call women to monitor their behavior and what they say to be aware of what their children learn. Hence, parenting necessitates being a better Muslim by disciplining oneself and learning about Islam in the first place. That is the basic requirement. The other requirements I mention are emphasized in all the cases despite being unsystematically discussed:

1- To know about the different phases of the child development and what entails that from physical and psychological satisfaction. Women were encouraged to

read and ask about the issue. Their homework would be hugging their children several times a day, for instance, in Irchad and Islah's classes.

2- To procure the needs of the children in every phase.

3- To balance the children's leisure time with their educational time (including religious knowledge as stories on a daily basis especially stressed on in al-Qubaysiyat)

4- To follow up on their news.

5- To be open, aware, and attentive to their actions.

6- To stay tuned to modern technologies.

For instance, Irchad and Islah provided an awareness session by a specialized police officer after the governmental efforts to raise awareness about cyber addictions and dangers. The session aimed to mitigate the adverse effects of the internet and, at the same time, benefit from it. The lecturer provided definitions of internet, cybercrime, cybersecurity, viruses, spyware, chat backup, What's App, Bitcoin, dark web, deep web, video games, and parents control. He taught the participants how to protect all social media accounts step by step (two-factor authorization- use of phone number instead of email account, apply parents control settings, and so on). He gave statistics on the increased cybercrimes, especially viruses, spyware, and so on. This awareness was driven by the increase in cases related to breaching veiled women's phones. The lecturer provided ways for women to protect themselves.

Here the role of parents in protecting their children was the most emphasized. Most victims for sex torture, sexual extortion, and blackmailing are children.

Parents are considered responsible for alerting their children and teaching them about the matter. Several issues were stressed in this matter related to traditions and how parents should overpass them.

A significant issue that is being cautioned against is not protecting the victims by covering up the crime. People should instead tell people to raise awareness about what happened or get help from the police. The lecturer finally provided a general definition of the riskiest games in Lebanon like Momo (suicide game), Mariam game, Blue Whale, GTA for under 18 that teaches children to steal, kill and have sexual fantasies, Fortnite that teaches children under 18 to kill. Parents should be aware of what their children play. This lecture pointed out the role of parents required in this internet age. Parents took notes and expressed how much they needed this type of lectures.

7- To be aware of how to raise children away from patriarchy and sectarianism stressed on especially al-Najat's and Islah Zet al-Bayn's *halaqat*. "Teach boys to treat girls better and teach girls their rights to be stronger for themselves," one of the *da'iis* said. Another claimed that "only in *tarbieh*, we could get out of the dilemma of sectarianism in Lebanon."

8- To deal with limitations and ask for help.

Irchad and Islah and al-Najat *da'iis* focused on the difficulty of *tarbieh*, and they asked mothers to get help and make firm decisions to continue working according to these principles.

Some women expressed their bad economic situation and incapability to procure the needs of their children. The teachers would ask attendees to each say how she

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handles issues to learn from each other; the answers varied between getting used stuff

for the children and letting them prioritize what they want. Another problem women

raised is the father's lack of responsibility; he can be "stingy, absent, and violent." This

discussion was always on helping each other rather than finding a solution.

The increased emphasis on *tarbieh* signifies how much *da'ii*s are concerned about the

family structure and Islamic identity. This emphasis aims to solidify an Islamic self and

develop a sense of community. This Islamic self is aware of its identity as a Muslim to

behave and see-through Islamic lenses, especially accepting and helping others on the

bases of mercy. The teacher in one of the *halaqat* used to call children *"Pâte à modeler"*

(plasticine) to connote how much parents have the responsibility of modeling children

through cultivating the Islamic values and principles. Women considered this Islamic

childrearing a major responsibility on them to protect the family and the health of the

social structure and produce change. *Tarbieh* is then the road to change that is paved by

Islamic education. Interestingly, the father is never brought to the discussion, which

stands in contestation to what Emile Bourdieu claims of the male-headed model of the

family. Women tacitly consider they are responsible for the *tarbieh*.

The family constitutes the sense maker of the broader structures of the social

and the ethical grounds. Underlying upbringing, is a process of transmission, taking into

account how women act, think, speak, and sit. I suggest that this upbringing is

conscious in the same line Michela Franceschelli (2017) claims in her study of the

South Asian Muslim Families in Britain that upbringing is not fully unconscious.

Annette Lareau (2011) finds that "parents use a combination of conscious practices and

unconscious dispositions (e.g., their language, the way they speak, act, walk, etc.) when

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transmitting values and beliefs to their children." (Franceschelli, 2016, p.17) Muslim women are even trying to consciously change the "unconscious dispositions" to transmit holistic Islamic values.

5.2.4 "Tango" in the Family

How to deal with the extended family? A question Islah Zet al-Bayn discussed mainly due to their work in the courts deducing it as a problem leading to divorce. "This is one of the most common reasons for divorces," the head of Islah Zet al-Bayn claimed. The other case studies did not specify as much time for it or asked Islah Zat al-Bayn to give the lecture at their centers. Lectures about the issue were given in different organizations by the head of Islah Zet al-Bayn, especially on how to deal with the husband's family and how the husband should treat the wife's family.

The *da'ii* started with the claim that "every problem is a tango; no one dances alone."

She explained that it takes two sides to be in a conflict. Here she stressed that dealing with the in-laws specifically with the mother-in-law requires "a smart behavior." After asking the participants the general reason behind the disturbing behavior between the wife and the mother-in-law, she concluded from the answers that the stereotypical images we form about each other are the main problem; "our perceptions form our relations with ourselves and with others, so we have to change our thoughts to change our feelings."

This concept of tango in the family does not only organize the relation with the mother in law but with every member in the family and outside of it in accounting for

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the dimensions of the problem and the consequences. The solution, the *da'ii* appealed, is positive thinking, the "smart behavior." Stories from different cultures were given stressing positive thinking about the other (in English and Arabic). The same lecture was given to the husbands. Spouses should also discuss matters related to tango from the early phases of marriages. On another note, Pierre Bourdieu (1998) in *The Family Spirit*, claims that family has an affective dimension that makes the social obligations into "loving dispositions." In the same line, the tango concept falls in making the social obligation as a loving disposition.

To conclude, the family is perceived as a unit responsible for solidifying the cohesion in society. Under its shadow, the relationship between men and women dedicated by complementarity organizes how women perceive their responsibilities and rights.

Women negotiate their modern demands and values while also expressing their gratifications for the Islamic core and principles. That, however, does not create a contradiction, instead, a constant reassessment of the internalized ideas and conceptions belonging to both sides of the equation. Here we can see how conformity with Islamic teaching is based on the reconfirmation and reconfiguration and not submission. *Da'iis* try to engage women with the Islamic texts to improve their knowledge about their rights and responsibilities within the Islamic framework. At the same time, the students are bringing their backgrounds and experiences to the class, influencing what needs to be reassessed and how. (Bano, 2017)

Family is the locus of the subjecthood formation of the children who will be the reflection of their *salih* parents. It is the locus of Islamic formation for better Islamic

subjects. The stress on family aims to draw the disciplinary lines of the individual

formation on the moral and social levels for society's change. It is a moral investment

leading to the morality of society where women are majorly the active agents of

education.

In conclusion, upbringing is a result of the disciplinization of women

themselves that discipline by extension the children to discipline the family. Some went

as far as considering that Islam constitutes "an Islamic capital" mobilized by parents to

inform the process of upbringing. (Franceschelli and O'Brien 2014) Family furnishes as

a result an understanding of the broader structure of relations and power.

5.3 Socio-political Themes

5.3.1 Otherness between Tolerance and Ihsan

Who is the other? Are we still caught up in the dilemma of us vs. the other?

How does this othering happen?

Da'iis and *muridin* used the phrase *al-akhar al-mokhtalif* (the different other)

to denote anyone different from them. Othering is based then on a situational perception

of being not "them." This labeling does not entail a subordinate alienation but a

prominent recognition of difference. The other is then a dissimilar us, a category that

includes everyone different in religion, traditions, political visions, sexual orientations,

and so on.

My fieldwork showed that *da'iis* approached otherness in twofold

understanding related to thinking and taking action. Firstly, they called for the

development of tolerance conception as a base of thinking of the other. Secondly, they

considered *ihsan* the base of action from a trilogy of Islam, *iman*, and *ihsan*. I will discuss each point alone. Then, I will discuss how homosexuality is looked at as an example of this dealing.

In the first place, the development of tolerance was stressed as the base of thinking of the different other. This concept revolved around three dimensions for the *da'iis*: the awareness of the prejudgments, the acceptance of others' different opinions, and the management of feelings. " Tolerance indicates a powerful, grudgingly bearing or putting up with others who are different; the Arabic term denotes generosity and ease from both sides on a reciprocal basis." (Haleem and Haleem, 2010)

I will try to study the three dimensions as approached by different case studies. Firstly, the awareness of the prejudgments one forms about the other is the first step towards promoting tolerance. In this context, the prophet's stories, accusations of his wife of adultery, and the different examples from the Islamic culture are advanced to provide a context of tolerance. Those stories are the same discussed between the different cases in different contexts but always reaching the same conclusion. Islah Zet-al-Bayn teacher appealed in one of the *halaqat*, for instance, to: "not judge people based on their environment and corrupt context or form perceptions based on prejudgments." The teacher asked women to have a pure heart that does not hate or does injustices. "This injustice is more dangerous and sinful than leaving praying," she considered. Secondly, accepting different opinions took a significant part of the discussion on all the levels: marital life, family life, the relationship between parents-daughters, friend-

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friend, Christian-Muslim, Shiite-Sunnite, and so on. Since Jamal Khashoggi[14] was

killed during my attendance at the *halaqat*, *da'iis* mentioned his story as an example of

not accepting the other's opinions. His story was mentioned in the same line of the story

of Zakariah, a prophet to Israelites killed using a saw. One of the *da'iis* of Islah Zet al-

Bayn and al-Najat considered that the saw was always part of shutting the opposition.

Participants prayed for the soul of Khashoggi and those who suffer from this

"dogmatism." The acceptance of others' opinions, if their opinions contradict with

Islam, is an acceptance followed by an action, women considered. It is not only an

expression of recognition but also an opportunity to cause change for the better.

Thirdly, showing acceptance is through the management of the feelings. This

management is an expression of patience and an attempt to change someone's beliefs

and actions if contradictory to Islamic teachings and rulings. "No one is considered a

believer if they do not treat others in a good way and be thoughtful to others," Al-Najat

da'ii said.

In the second place, *ihsan* is discussed as a reflection of tolerance in actions. It

is referred to in a triad of Islam, *iman*, and *ihsan*. "Islam, or external compliance with

what Allah has asked of us; *iman*, or the belief in the unseen that the prophets have

informed us of; and *ihsan*, or to worship Allah as though one sees Him." (Rifai, 2015)

This understanding is derived from a hadith. Edward Omar Moad (2007) argues that

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[14] Jamal Ahmad Khashoggi was a Saudi author, a columnist for The Washington Post, and a
general manager and editor-in-chief of Al-Arab News Channel. He was assassinated at the
Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018.

this categorization represents the obligation, value, and virtue components of the Islamic ethic as Carney calls. *Ihsan* becomes "the way in which one ought to do that which ought to be done- as if you see God; and the change that this entails, according to Keller, is clearly toward being a kind of person understood as "most appropriate to be"[15]." (ibid, p.138)

Ihsan becomes a virtue that determines the actions of Muslims. These actions were discussed in the *halaqa* as a manifestation of the prophet dealing with different communities and religions. Stories centered on the prophet taking advice from a non-Muslim and basing his decisions on it and how Islam has encountered and dealt with different religious communities through its history of emergence and conquest. These were in the line of what *da'iis* called *ihsan*.

Berger claims that religious pluralism must combine individual and political components and suggests what he calls "formulas of peace." Religious pluralism begets two distinct political problems: how the state defines its relation to religion, and how it sets out to regulate the relations of different religions with each other. Berger proposes that this is the dilemma Islam and Muslims are caught in. He claims that two questions concerning Islam are troubling people in the contemporary world. The first is how a believing and practicing Muslim can also be a modern person? The second is what could and should a modern Islamic society be like? The first question is mostly

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[15] Carney's definition of "virtue component."

discussed while the second one is not stressed upon in a context like Lebanon, at least before the October 17 revolt. Women discussed how Islam had dealt with religious diversity but did not touch on contemporary "peace formulas." The individual component of *ihsan* was mostly discussed as a way to cope with pluralism, not only the religious one.

For Berger, the debate revolves around the idea that *Shariah* is all-encompassing to the degree that there is no room for secular discourses. As a result, there is no comparable traditional Muslim formula of "the other pluralism" between the Islamic and modern discourses. Berger differentiates between Turkey' AKP ideas of Islamic democracy ("Islamic principles") and the Egyptian one ("Islamic rulings"). Based on this, he predicts that many Muslim-majority countries will not adopt a strict separation between the state and the mosque. Instead, the outcome will be somewhere between the two alternatives mentioned above, with the constitution being based on either "Islamic rulings" or "Islamic principles." This perception suits what women are trying to achieve and adapt to the individual and less on the political. They are bridging their modern selves and their Islamic principles. They call for *ihsan* as an embodiment of this bridging, an expression of awareness translated in action.

Ihsan becomes a peace formula with the other on the personal level and in less degree on the political one. Political *ihsan*, if mentioned, was to deduce from it personal *ihsan*. For instance, in one of Al-Qubaysiyat's *halaqat*, the teacher explained that establishing a society based on the prophet's trajectory, building a place (makan) that can be a mosque, fraternity, and establishing new terms to deal with the others are required. The terms with dealings with Jews were mentioned: 1- religious freedom; 2- citizenship

rights; 3- and no monetary contribution on anything that had to do with Muslims. The teacher moved from this point to discuss that dealing with Christians and Jews nowadays is based on caution and on what they show of behavior not based on any preconceptions. If the prophet dealt with them in this way, one should adopt the same concepts.

Ihsan is discussed in the treatment of non-Muslims as well as Muslims. Participants in one of the *halaqat* agreed that in Lebanon, there is no difference between the *tarbieh* of a Muslim and that of a Christian; "They even use the same vocab like *inchala*, *b ezn allah* (If God wills), and so on." The discussion touched on the acceptance of people without looking at their religions, especially the children's friends. Children should be taught that media and sectarianism are the roots of the stereotypical images about the different religions in Lebanon, *da'iis* stressed. Dealing with everyone on the same bases is an expression of modesty in front of God because "who are we to not act with *ihsan* where God created the human souls. *Ihsan* dictates our relationship with everything from humans to animals to plants. Words have power; we should not use any word we want, and at any minute, we should be thoughtful in our words with others," Irchad and Islah *da'ii* said.

Treating the Shia other was a marginal topic mentioned three times, in al-Qubaysiyat, Islah Zet al-Bayn, and al-Najat, in terms of the awareness that the conflict with Shia started as a political one then became a creed-related one. The discussion would be on the absence of a difference between both sects.

One particular *aya* played a major role in the discussions " أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُم مِّن

O you" :(13) ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۚ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

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mankind, surely We created you of a male and a female, and We have made you races and tribes that you may get mutually acquainted. Surely the most honorable among you in the Providence of Allah are the most pious; surely Allah is Ever-Knowing, Ever-Cognizant."[16] This verse was considered the ultimate expression of God's will to appreciate the differences and learn from each other. It reiterates that all people share common characteristics despite their division into nations and races.

Interestingly, Muslims discussed racism against their veil in this matter, considering it "a very sad illogical phenomenon"[17] caused by the perceptions of non-Muslims as well as Muslims. Women considered that those "racists" want to induce a feeling of inferiority, but they will never reach this end. The stories mentioned did not provide details as much as they were discussed in terms of surpassing the issue. The discussion would be on how one participant tried her best to find a job after being rejected due to her veil. The stories women mentioned aim to show how there is a way to deal with the limitations stressing on the success of the experience as a solidification of their Islamic self. Women cope with racism against the veil as the ultimate expression of their pride in their Islamic identity. The *da'iis* call women to act with *ihsan* with people who have these stereotypical images and to feel proud of the veil instead of inferior. A participant said: "my Islam prevents me from acting rude to anyone. The pressure from the community to make women think that the veil is causing

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[16] Translation extracted from
https://quran.com/49/13?translations=43,19,101,85,84,21,20,17,95,22,18
[17] Stated in al-Najat *halaqa* and discussed with the same lines in the different cases.

them the trouble is only a sign for us Muslims to be stronger and more religious."

Dealing with racism is then linked to the conception of *ihsan*. *Ihsan* is seen as a coping

strategy to reflect modesty to everything and everyone and a dimension of superior

subjecthood that embodies tolerance in action.

5.3.1.1 Homosexuality or Deviance?

Othering can also be a socio-economic function of gender, which is why

homosexuality is part of the discussions of the other. The young groups in collaboration

with al-Najat and the Association of Muslim Students hosted a lecture entitled

"Jurisprudence of Sex: Between Deviance and Homosexuality" by a psychiatrist who is

also a *da'ii*. The lecturer started with the question, "what is wrong with homosexuality?"

To answer, he defined the meaning of homosexuality. He elaborated that every term is

associated with meaning, and judging something is part of how it is conceptualized.

That is why there should be a distinction between deviance (*shuthuz* شذوذ) and

homosexuality (*misliyah* مثلية).

The lecturer started by distinguishing between a sexual tendency not based on

awareness and sexual orientation that defines the gender identity. This sexual

orientation can take the form of homosexuality, a painful orientation, an uncontrollable

tendency, or deviance, which is the acceptance and acting on the homosexuality.

This distinction was supported by a historical line of the development of homosexuality.

Started 10000 B.C with Greek mythology, then Roman, then Judaism, then Middle ages

and *Jahiliah* in Islam in both those times, homosexuality was spread and allowed. With

enlightenment and *Nahda*, homosexuality started to be public. In modern times,

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homosexuality increased with the proposition that there is no need for ideas that "the empirical mind accepts." In post-modernism, the lecturer elaborated that there are no constant values and that people are tired from relativism. He called people to be aware that we are in the process of normalizing conceptions and by extensions, ideas, and acts. He provided several examples of this normalization: gay marriage legality in 2015, unisex clothes, Islamic projects like "Just Me and Allah: A Queer Muslim Photo Project, Majed Nawaz," gay Muslims marriage in Canada In 2017, and claims such as the *Quran* accepts homosexuality since Lout people were basing their sexual activity on rape. "Those acts are to Islamize deviance. Everything started to be related to politics. We should not forget the role media plays in promoting homosexuality under the name of love," the lecturer said.

Some resources were referenced to show how this normalization is happening. Books like My Genes Made Me Do It 1999, Homosexuality and Civilizations 2003, Francis Colen, Peter Singer, Laurence Krauss, and Siran Oteich. The opinions of Freud, Arthur Schopenhauer, Darwin, Evelyn Hooker were also mentioned as normalizing homosexuality. Movies and programs that reflect the opposite pictures of what gays mean: Harvey Milk (Harvey Bernard Milk was an American politician and the first openly gay elected official in the history of California), Gay Mafia, Velvet Mafia and so on.

After that, the lecturer moved to discuss how to deal with homosexuality basing on his experience as a psychiatrist.

The first step in dealing with homosexuality is to show genuine acceptance instead of pretending to accept, which worsens the problem. This acceptance is based on

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being cautious of having prejudgments and on acting upon stereotypical images. The lecturer called the participants to be aware of their thoughts and how they form an image of anyone different from them. They should always keep in mind that homosexuality is a sin, and treating a sinful person needs mercy. "Be aware that homosexuality is just committing a sin that God has the mercy to forgive if one came back to him and try not to be influenced by this orientation," he said.

The lecturer also focused on how to deal with oneself if the person is gay. The first thing to do is not hating oneself instead one should think of it as a test from God. One should treat himself/herself with mercy and only mercy.

The lecturer then moved to discuss the reasons that trigger homosexuality:

- The upbringing: here, a major role is played at home concerning the mother and father relationship. If the father is cruel and unjust while the mother is weak, the child acts upon the personality of the victim's mother.

- The extreme openness or ultra-conservatism: in the former, women are available, and by that, they are not anymore a topic of interest. In the latter case, there is no mixing, and by that, there is no room to see the other sex. That usually happens in gyms and dorms mostly.

- The first experience at puberty

- Curiosity and peer pressure

- Media's normalization: Ellen, Majdi& Wajdi[18], anime, and so on.

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[18] Two funny gay characters in a popular Lebanese program.

- The vulnerability of the character like suffering from rape at a young age. The vulnerability and weak personality influence the sexual orientation control.

Other case studies also discussed homosexuality in less depth. For instance, al-Qubaysiyat discussed how society is normalizing homosexuality. They mentioned the Equity/Title IX: Non-Discrimination and Anti-Discriminatory Harassment Initiatives at the American University of Beirut (AUB) to criticize the university for implied unstated protection of the LGBTQI especially that some gay AUB students attended a party together in Beirut. The *da'ii* considered that some Muslims are even normalizing homosexuality by reinterpreting the *aya* of "we have made you races and tribes that you may get mutually acquainted." She explained that people started to misunderstand its meaning. It does not mean to accept homosexuality as an act. She called to help people instead of feeding their choices. She finished the *halaqa* with "Islam is open but not morally flawed."

Al- Irchad and Islah also considered that the increase in the homosexuality rate in Lebanon is due mainly to media and the absence of satisfaction of needs in the family that gets reflected on the life of the children. Homosexuality was seen as gaining acceptance between the youth, and that is why the lectures about homosexuality are gaining more and more attention.

The *Islamic da'wah* then distinguishes between the ethical, the social, and the human aspects of dealing with the homosexuality.

The human aspect justifies and tries to find reasons for the homosexual tendency and how to act with homosexual individuals. That does not imply the acceptance of the act itself. It calls for the perception of the homosexuality as a sin that

needs mercy to deal with. The social one is seen to call against the normalization of the homosexuality especially in the media and the calls for new laws by allying activists that normalize homosexuality. The ethical aspect stems from the reference to the religious and moral justification that can have for instance the family structure as a base or the Islamic principles of disciplinization of the self. Muataz al-Khatib (2020), in the same line, deconstructs the discourse unfolded after the suicide of a young Egyptian girl. Her death triggered multiple controversies in the Arab world especially on the social media concerning her sexual identity, her treatment from the official government, and the thoughts she expressed on her blog.

Interestingly, al-Khatib studied the ethical aspect generated by this suicide to suggest that there should be an understanding of the action in itself away from its context to evaluate it. The tendency for homosexuality differs from the acting on it which denies the concept of *tarbieh*. The religious concept of *ibtila'* (test) that is related to the understanding of life as a place of exam instead of normalizing the wrongdoing and calling for it was brought to discussion. These two points were made by the *da'iis* during the fieldwork. Finally, al-Khatib referred to Weber's concepts of the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility. The ethics of conviction for Weber stands on the Kantian ground i.e. on an unconditional and nonutilitarian understanding of the ethics as maxim or law. As the reality of the person is changing through time and space, the absolute ethics in Islam can take the form of *Sharia* that is amenable to changes with the preservation of maqasid-al-*Sharia*. The ethics of responsibility has two aspects: one that is responsibility in front of the law, including the moral law, and the consciousness. The commitment to these two aspects makes actions ethical. These two ethics

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complement to make the ethicality of an action. Thus, the calls from *da'iis* to preserve

the self and the family as part of their ethics of conviction and responsibility due to the

belief that they lack in society as al-Kahtib also implies.

To sum up, dealing with the different other was discussed as based on tolerance

that is the base of thinking of the other, and on *Ihsan* that is the base of action. These

two concepts were considered to work on two levels: the individual and the political.

The individual level is stressed more. However, homosexuality is dealt with based on

tolerance and *ihsan*. The concern is on the later stage that follows dealing with it based

on tolerance and *ihsan*. It is the stage of helping the LGBTQI community going back to

Islam. The fear of homosexuality lies in the *da'iis'* concern about the structure of

society's social and moral fabric. A considerable concern about the issue was expressed,

especially in the young groups, which goes back to the effort of the *da'iis* shown in the

family.

5.3.2 Lebanon Crisis: Prior the October 17 Revolt

Since October 17, 2019, massive protests took the streets in Lebanon, calling

for change. They called for the resignation of the country's political leaders and the

formation of an independent government. Those political leaders had been dominating

Lebanon since the 1990s. They participated in the civil war (1975 - 1990) and were not

held accountable. Those warlords built their empires in Lebanon through clientelism

and partisanship that solidified a political system based on widespread corruption in all

the sectors in Lebanon. That led to a protracted corruption manifested in crises on

different levels. The revolt was constituted by people of all ages and socio-economic

backgrounds. The Islamic movements were cautious at the beginning of participating. After 5-6 days, the Islamic movements, especially *Jama'ah Islamiyeh*, issued a statement that accepts and calls for a civil state. This statement was spread via What's App, and women shared it, accepting it and calling for it. With the protests not ending, women found themselves obliged to provide more *halaqat* on virtual platforms, mostly Zoom, about dealing with the economic crisis and managing the social, educational, and health aspects during this period. Participants would gather and pray for Lebanon or call for change.

Women discussed the general situation in Lebanon, especially al-Najat, Irchad, and Islah and Islah Zet al-Bayn when I attended the *halaqat* (end of 2018- the beginning of 2019.) Al-Qubaysiyat did not intervene or discuss anything related to politics. The former three organizations discussed three topics related to Lebanon's general situation: 1- the economic crisis; 2- *ulama*'s partiality; 3- and the lack of resistance.

5.3.2.1 Economic Crisis

        The symptoms of economic crisis, ways of managing it, and its impact were discussed majorly. Women would always discuss economic inflation, exchanging information about ways to manage it. Medicine, for instance, played a significant role in the discussions. Participants of al-Najat, al-Irchad, and Islah, and Islah Zet al-Bayn all claimed that they buy their medicine from Turkey or Syria due to the inflation in the prices of the same medicine in Lebanon. Women claimed that they do not have the right to be healthy. That stops hem from pursuing their projects, and they are not having the "choice" of controlling their lives by extension. "The government decides everything for

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us," al-Najat teacher and participants agreed on at the end of a *halaqa*. Women, for instance, used to discuss the food's prices before the beginning of al-Najat *halaqat*. In Islah Zet al-Bayn, women talked about how they cope with the inflation; some go together to get supplies and needed stuff when they know there are offers to the extent that one of them claimed never to buy something if not on sales.

Muridin considered that the main way they are managing the economic situation is through reliance on God. That does not only symbolize how much they lack trust in the government but also the state of despair they reached. They also discussed the impact of the economic crisis on the family. The family cannot play its role as an integrated unit due to the difficulty of procuring its members' needs. The participants shared stories of people they know who ended up with divorces due to the economic situation. Some participants who are not finding jobs shared their struggle to find a job while living at the expense of their families. They talked about the problems they suffer from in their personal lives and those in the whole community. They also criticized the conditions that increase their plight as women, mostly maternity leave, in not respecting women's bodies in Lebanon.

For Irchad and Islah, the economic situation is considered to be one of the main reasons people and families are suffering in Lebanon. The organization gave sessions to women on how to manage their finances. The session started by defining concepts like planning, budgeting, balancing the expenses, and prioritizing goods. Most *muridin* were not familiar with these concepts. The teacher gave the participants notebooks, so they start their monthly plans. She performed a sample on the board, and women started to do their planning. Participants discussed with each other ways to save money with the

teacher's help, like benefiting from sales and always leaving 5% savings. At the end of the session, an activity was held on how to sew and make crafts out of old objects at home. Women learned how to make oven mitts, small rugs, handbags, roses for decoration, and so on.

The blame is laid on the government in not securing the rights of the citizens. Sectarianism is blamed as being the inroad that allowed this corrupt political power. The hatred of sectarianism stems from the practical living with what the political class calls "the other" in work, schools, neighborhoods, and so on, according to the stories provided by the *da'iis*. The discussion was not in-depth or on a level of expertise. It is only a mentioning of sectarianism without going into the context or elaborating on the matter. Women discussed the economic symptoms rather than the political malaise.

5.3.2.2 Ulama's Partiality

Another issue that was crucial to the discussions is the *wasayet* (favoritism and patronage), especially in religious institutions. Women considered that in early Islam, *ulama* intervened only when necessary, now they are followers of the political class. "If they are really afraid of God, they would be independent of anything that has to do with the government," the teacher said during a *halaqa*. *Halaqat* would show how Islamic history offers examples of religious leaders not going to the sultans like these days. The critics were about how the "parliament" has a role in appointment of the *ulama* in Dar al-Fatwa with "no self-respect." In controlling the appointments, the government is humiliating the religious leaders by making them submissive to the political considerations. Knowing that the appointments are the result of an internal assembly

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nominated by Dar al-Fatwa and the prime minister put more emphasis on how the *da'iis* see corruption as extended in the system and reflect their lack of trust with any mechanism related to the government.

These critics also considered some of the organizations in less obvious terms. For instance, a participant's daughter did not get a scholarship from Iman School even though she deserved it more than the one who has a close relation to the donor. The participant considered this favoritism is getting in the way of the progress of Lebanon. For al- Qubaysiyat and knowing their history in the shadow of the Baath regime, an intense fear of politics was expressed even in Lebanon and with mostly Lebanese audience. The students made only a political joke that is remotely related to politics and does not have any political significance. The teacher commented that we need to go back home, so stop talking about politics.

5.3.2.3 A voice Against the Lack of Resistance

"We are the bad ones because we keep on electing them," the participants in one *al*-Najat *halaqat* said. Two streams resulted from the discussions concerning the protracted corruption in the country. The first one considered that the blame should be put on the people who do not take their actual rights and responsibilities in electing someone who deserves to be elected while the other considered that all the blame is on the politicians. Both streams considered that people are not putting forth any solution. Passivity was considered a characteristic of the Lebanese people in the face of the politicians. In a *halaqa* of Islah Zet al-Bayn, the teacher claimed that "no one is standing against the ministers since the times of Moses. They are corrupt and despots. We should

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know that the punishment is coherent with the type of deed we did." However, the discussion was not polarized or specialized. There was no question on the alternatives, the context, the Islamic opinion, or the agency required to get out of the situation.

In addition, parents in one of al-Irchad an Islah and al-Najat were urged to discuss with their children the international issues like the Palestinian cause and Syrian war, so they grow up knowing their identity as connected to al-Aqsa and to treat Palestinians and Syrians with no racism. In one of the *halaqat*, women discussed how the issue would never be about reconciliation with Israel as much as Palestine represents: the creed, the identity, and history.

During the revolt, the groups started to share *duaa* for the country to be safe between them in the first week. However, this did not stay for a long time. There was a timid encouragement to be part of the revolt. When things got a bit quieter, the sessions were all about managing the situation, dealing with the economic crisis, dealing with children, being spiritually recovering during the crisis time, and reaching solutions. During the revolt, al-Najat worked on defining and elaborating with the youth the type of the state needed in Lebanon: a civil state where there is a role for the senates. Lectures about entrepreneurship, protracted corruption in Lebanon and the potential solutions, managements of the crisis, psychological support, and *duaa* were provided. The organization also participated with *Chabab Li Beirut* (Youth for Beirut) where they provided political awareness about the topics that were discussed at every stage during the revolution.

Similarly, Irchad and Islah implemented campaigns that mitigate the impact of the situation, for instance, one called "We Are for Each Other" provided initiative as

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paying the rents, helping in buying tools in case of lost job, and so on. Children

benefited from intensified *halaqat* so their parents can have the mobility during the

revolution. The organization had internal meetings so the staff know where they stand

and the extent of corruption existing in the country "without interfering as an

institution". Courses about (certainty in God, religious and emotional stability, and

serenity) were provided mostly with courses on communication skills. Religious lessons

inspired from the prophet during "crises", for instance, collective support and collective

thinking were given. Schooling at home was also provided to the children.

In addition, the youth in the organization participated as individuals not under the name

of the institution; they were with *Chabab Li Beirut*. They gave lectures in the tents that

were spread during the revolution and even mentioned that one of the listeners

converted to Islam. I did not have the chance to attend but the lectures talked about how

to handle the situation collectively with certain activities like drawing.

The organization also provided a campaign called (Stay Aware, Stay

Responsible) that provided online courses mostly on Zoom and Facebook as part of

religious circles, cooking courses, crochet, sports and so on. The courses all became

online during the Covid19 pandemic in the different organizations. The parenting skills

courses were intensified during the period as well as courses about self-care and

conferences about economic rationalization, depression and suicide prevention,

awareness classes, child protection, and mental health.

Islah Zet al-Bayn worked on two aspects during the revolt while the members

participated in the revolt. Firstly, it started a radio program about the family issues

during the crisis and the personal laws through providing awareness. The discussed

topics were primarily on matters related to family conflicts during the economic crisis and how to handle them. Secondly, the organization provided therapeutic provision through providing direct hotline with psychological counsellors for any type of family problems or domestic violence.

The three organizations put more emphasis on a supportive role rather than a direct-interventional one.

All in all, one can see that women played a role in raising a voice against the status quo. They tried to mitigate the effects of the political corruption together, finding coping strategies and mechanisms from within the community. Looking at those *halaqat* before the revolt, one can easily predict a revolution where Muslim women, despite their avoidance of direct political interference, are revolting against patriarchy, favoritism, political class, and traditions. I believe these *halaqat* played a major role in solidifying a sense of us "the citizens" vs. them "the political class," and women found their way during the revolt by extension.

In conclusion, understanding the knowledge produced gives an idea about its characteristics and types of dissemination. Looking at the context of the knowledge production and the content of this knowledge, there seems to be a close-knit between charisma and knowledge dissemination. Max Weber (1947) introduced the term "charisma" into the social sciences as the power of an extraordinary individual to revolutionize authority by the force of personality, rather than the other idea types of traditions and law. (Weber, 1947)

The knowledge produced is oral in the sense that it depends on the interactive character of the *da'iis* and their teaching style. Then, charisma becomes the epistemic

mode employed to connect knowledge to authority and legitimacy. It is the main social producer and mobilizer of the knowledge production that derives meaning from the interaction and legitimizes the knowledge, especially with the reference of the *da'iis* mainly to Quran and Sunnah. There was no use of references or stated books and theories. The knowledge produced depended on the subjective use of charisma to generate useful, fragmented, and instantaneous religious knowledge about relevant topics to the audience. *Da'iis* manipulate their practical repertoire, dispositions, personal traits, and modes of beings to affect the knowledge production. This charisma is, however, dispersed in the sense that it does not stem only form the *da'iis* but also from contribution of the audience.

CHAPTER 6

EMPOWERMENT PREMISES AND CONCEPTUALIZATION

This chapter examines the premises of empowerment that underlies Islamic activism. Participants come with the perception of the superiority of Islamic ethics over any other code or develop this perception, which is considered the foundation for developing an empowerment sense from within an Islamic framework. It is itself a result and a motive. Women's motivations to join are not exclusively linked to this, but they all include this intention.

Empowerment is approached differently from different disciplines. Dini Rahma Bintari (2018) sees that social and political studies look at empowerment from the perspective of societal and group empowerment, while psychology views it from the perspective of the highly individual to the more communal. These differences focus on one level at the expense of the other. As shown from my fieldwork, I look at empowerment as a constant negotiation of binding functions between the individual and the higher social structures (family, *ummah*, and society) to attain a balance between *deen* and *dunia*.

Jose' Casanova (1994) considers that religion showed its *Janus* face, as the carrier not only of exclusive, particularist, and primordial identities but also of exclusive, universalist, and transcending ones. Empowerment then transcends the subject formation on the individualistic level to reach the Lebanese society and the *ummah*. In this sense, I discuss the premises of empowerment on four levels: the self,

the family, the *ummah*, and the Lebanese society. This allows the examination of the

aspects of the empowerment, its functionality on every level, and the relationship

between the different levels. 'Practical conduct' and the 'inward orientation' of Islamic

activism are majorly looked at to approach the understanding of the Islamic

empowerment. I will underline the premises of the empowerments on the four aspects to

conclude the aim and concept of empowerment in general.

6.1 Level of the Self

Michael Hill claims that religion is characterized by its emphasis on a process

whereby individuals are 'morally remade or empowered.' (Beckford and Demerath

2007) The Islamic self is situational and contextual in which the process of morally

remaking is itself empowerment on the level of the self. *Da'wah* empowers the self by

focusing on two aspects believed to empower Muslim women to reach self-leadership,

happiness, and satisfaction. These pertain to the emotional and rational base and the

knowledge and skills base. I will look at each to show how the premise on the level of

the self is attained and where it is in the developing stage.

6.1.1 Emotional and Rational Base: Disciplinization of the Heart and Mind

Elizabeth Weiss Ozorak (1996) studied empirically how women's beliefs and

practices changed with the participation in religious activities; women claimed that this

participation empowered them. Empowerment of the self is a significant component, the

foundational one for the rest of the levels, which deploys the disciplinization of the

heart and the mind. In this process, women should embody all the Islamic principles

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mentioned sporadically in chapter 5. This disciplinization is approached differently by every organization.

For al-Qubaysiyat, the study of *sirah* was stressed as "a combination of thought, emotion, and behavior." Al- Qubaysiyat's teacher emphasized changing one's thoughts through the awareness of the constructed images about the self and the other. Here, the starting point is awareness of the vocabulary used, the way of talking, and management of the self on all levels. *Muridin* were asked to base their actions on love and pure heart. This disciplinization accounts for the heart and the mind.

For al-Najat, the *da'ii* claimed that "behavior is acquired; people construct their perceptions. Disciplinization is developing modesty and honesty in front of God. That can be reached by slowing down our reactions and using self-talk to develop better emotional stability and by defaulting our belief systems." My interviewee claimed in the same line that change is understood to be emotional by showing and managing the feelings and conceptual by changing conceptions and mindset. *Muridin* were urged to think and search for answers for every matter. For the young group, the assigned book *In The Gardens of the Paradise* highlights three ideas that are essential to disciplinization: 1- the binary of hell/heaven where there is a focus on God's punishment; 2- the emphasis on self-observation and self-tracking in every act; 3- and the obedience of wives to their husbands without discussing the issue or giving cases on its applicability. These were presented in the book and I did not attend their discussion, however, they reflect the extent put on the disciplinization in the domain of *tarbieh* especially that the audience is young.

For Irchad and Islah, the teacher in the session of critical reading of the Quran examined the concept of sadness to consider it an exam that will end. "We should know that everything gets better with time, and every problem after the prophet's death is just a controversy. This realization allows us, humans, to know that every action has a reaction that influences us and others. Here there is a need to strive against ourselves because we hurt ourselves the most by being angry." On another note, my informant claimed that *halaqat* aim to "drive women to think of what they take for granted and pass it to their kids without doubting it." Empowerment extends to the two aspects of the disciplinization. I had the opportunity to hear from the women during an unplanned focus group how they became after attending the different sessions. Those expressed how their life was driven by anger from their social and economic situation that was reflected on their aggressive behaviors with their children, environment, and themselves. Now after attending these sessions, they stated how they cope with these challenges by managing their priorities and expenses in a way that sticking to the plan decreased their anger and improved their relations with themselves, others, and especially their children. One expressed "the sessions became my place to be comfortable and relaxed. My relation with my family became better. I stopped being angry and aggressive for the slightest reasons." This type of empowerment showed to be effective in the lives of women especially during the Covid-19 pandemic for some women, according to my informant.

For Islah Zet al-Bayn, the *halaqat* revolved on developing an ethical self that emerges from the awareness of the prejudices and taking the appropriate actions as a result and thoroughly studying the contexts of verses. The teacher proposed, for

instance, ways to manage anger and mitigate life pressures: "1- learn to ask for help; 2- seek a psychological support; 3- have hobbies; 4- build social relations; 5-and learn new skills."

The change, the *da'iis* prompt, combines theoretical and practical disciplinization. Disciplinization, in this sense, whether it aims to develop ethical rationalities and sensibilities, lies in creating better selves capable of reaching happiness and satisfaction. The self-tracking aims to self-transformation that leads to social transformation. As I showed in the previous chapter, piety is inwardly and outwardly understood, which extends to the private piety employed for public piety. The disciplinization of the self on both dimensions is part of embodying the inward piety for public piety. Then, piety, as understood by the *da'iis*, is dispensable for the creation of a moral framework that extends from the individual to reach the public. Nevertheless, the disciplinization of the heart employs the narrow-sense of the concept without going into details about the approaches or go beyond the theoretical abstracted-like propositions.

For al-Qubaysiyat and al-Najat mainly, it bears a burden on the individual failing to completely reach the level of empowerment envisioned by the organization. This is especially shown in the follow up processes that keep the individual "watched", to use one of al-Qubaysiyat's informant's terms, and the increased level of self-observation that puts strain on the self. Here, I must say, the burden one can feel from the excessive process of self-observation is a welcomed process for some students that make them proud to be changing and delving deeper in the process. Then the normativity of the disciplinization is itself acquired and relatively understood.

6.1.2 Knowledge and Skills Base: Capacitation

Da'iis try to empower women to self-lead themselves. That, however, is based on the understanding that women in Islam are inherently empowered. Self-leadership is realized by having the intention to change one's actions, knowing the rights and duties, and basing on the diciplinization of the heart and mind. The leadership called for developing the personality of the *muridin* and the capacitation through the acquirement of knowledge and skills. As I showed in chapter 5, the learning dimension is significant in conceptualizing piety. This leadership is directed mainly towards the self then towards the community. Hence, any leadership starts from the capacitation through knowledge and skills acquirement. Knowledge and skills capacitation pertains to the religious, legal, social, economic, and political levels in different degrees between the cases. Religious knowledge (*fiqh, sirah, fiqh al-sirah, aqida*, Quran, *hadith*) are all provided from the different organizations. Irchad and Islah in addition provides courses on how to pass *da'wah* through teaching the necessary skills. It focuses on the ramifications of this religion on the levels that relate to women's concerns.

Al-Qubaysiyat teacher, in one of the *halaqat*, fixated on the huge role women played in their society through the Islamic history; "it is our duty to revitalize this role." *Sahabiyat*'s stories were recounted in this line. The teacher talked about al-*Aqabah*'s pledge in which women had an opinion and played a role in taking decisions. In the interview, the *da'ii* considered that the *halaqat* allow the "empowerment of women to have ownership over their religion and awareness of their existence." Secular education is emphasized on for women independence and financial stability as much as religious education is approached for moral and ethical society and self. My interviewee claimed

that the organization works on strengthening the personality of the students by giving them support on every side of their life. That is approached by sending *muridin* on trips for socialization, assigning them roles in plays, offering them to be the hostesses to strengthen their communication skills, praising every little development they make, and providing psychological support with a constant follow up. That is, however, looked at negatively from the other groups since the overemphasis of al-Qubaysiyat on the personal development and what the conceptualization of this personal development is, reflects a picture of a classist non-modest self. For instance, the *muridin* are asked to take taxis only instead of public transportation, show an extreme positive attitude, and so on.

Likewise, Islah Zet-al-Bayn's teacher claimed that the aim of the *halaqat* is "having a space to learn and change one's self" and "women to be their own leaders." Islah Zet al-Bayn mainly targeted legal knowledge by focusing on the rights and responsibilities of women in Islam, providing legal support to women in the courts and outside of them, and working on changing their legal personal status if it is not aligned with Islam. The *halaqat* aimed to introduce women to these rights and duties and provide legal provisions to those who need them. The provisions included getting a referral to psychiatrist, having support with the different specialists in the organization, and procuring an accommodation center (currently it is worked on one called Sinad in Dannieh, North Lebanon, for women who suffer from rape, domestic violence, and physical and psychological distress.) The organization also provided awareness sessions for potential spouses (how a woman takes care of herself, completes her education, and studies the environment of the husband along with his personality cautiously.)

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Economic empowerment was not tackled specifically; it was part of the initiatives whereby *muridin* teach the other groups some skills like a cooking course they did. For al-Najat, the *halaqat*, the *da'iis* considered, aim to "develop female's capacities so they can be independent and self-leading" and "be aware of their rights; empowerment from God to know their rights." The teacher focused on correcting the concepts and teaching women the right path "help women understand themselves and be aware of their independence instead of being a follower of her father and husband. She should know her interest and responsibilities." That contradicts the finding in the young group's assigned book that poses the question of the extent and definition of obedience. Education in all the domains is stressed, and it is considered the base of empowerment: "building the beliefs and convictions of people, developing the skills, orienting the interests of people using the language of this generation, dealing with models and leaders, and setting the limits for the relations." For this aim, al-Najat's *halqat* discussed the rights of women in Islam and invited *muridin* to Islah Zet al-Bayn's lectures. Here one asks, is it enough for women to be conscious about their duties and rights to be empowered?

The organization also works with the young groups firstly on self-educational skills where they give lectures and workshops about the management of mind and the development of the thinking, types of personality and how to deal with them, the different age phases and their characteristics, time management and effectiveness, and behavioral and educational skills development (teaching and educating through games, discovering the skills, talents, and potential, enticing creativity and the decisive role of individuals in change). Secondly, it works on the media skills of the participants to deal

and manage media where they teach techniques of dialogue, body language, the impact and the convincing techniques, and dealing with social media. Thirdly, it works on the management skills where *muridin* learn how to plan, manage a meeting and an event, and work in teams and committees.

For Irchad and Islah, the *da'ii* claimed that *halaqat* help women become spiritually and mentally stronger; "a woman balances her life on the basis of the knowledge power to choose between the different approaches in life. She should know her role as a woman and his role as a man. She should know how to read reality and the time she lives in. She, in the name of Islam, must build her personality and not stop herself because of men who do not want her to flourish. She is neither a follower nor a competitor to men." Different types of empowerment are provided as a result. Legal empowerment is approached through providing awareness, yielding support in courts, offering counseling, increasing knowledge, providing workshops and lectures, and working with Lebanese Associations to open the accommodation center (Sinad) equipped with different ways for psychological support, economic skills, and social programs. This aims to make women independent. This was scheduled to open in 2020. The organization also offers radio, hotline, and social media programs along with a provision access to a support center for safe watching where kids are brought to a friendly environment. Fourteen cases benefited from counseling on the hotline in 2017 to increase to 50 in 2018 Lectures about alimony (*nafaqa*), custody (*wisaya*), and dowry (*maher*) for the widows' audience are also discussed.

The organization also offers different educational social courses, including *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey, communication skills, visual aid

engines, and extra educational classes for school students. In addition, it offers

economic support through an educational program (allows women to learn a profession

and then provides them with small loans to execute a project.) These can be makeup,

sewing, culinary and chef license, *Shariah* license, or any license in a domain that

women prefer and can do it.

For young *muridin*, three programs are provided that are resilient to any change (table

2.) Political education for the young group consists of discussion of general topics in

lectures. My interviewee provided one example in which the lecture discussed "the

election law to understand what is happening around them without interfering in their

orientation."

Table 2: Programs for the Young Groups in Irchad and Islah

A religious program	A cultural program	A volunteering program
• Basic religious concepts • Women's roles and the power they get from Islam	• Communication skills development (making speeches, public talks, and leadership skills) • Management skills, visuals learning, social media, and working in teams • Technology skills: technology club that teaches robotics and applications development.	• Conducting projects • Trigger change, so women know their objectives in life and to be pioneers.

Women empowerment is a requirement for *da'wah* spread, yet it should be guided in the channels and capacities specified by every organization. Economic capacitation is almost absent, or if present, leads to unprofitable types of jobs. A developing capacitation is seen in the technological field that would entail an outward action, away from the traditional field of capacitation.

Throughout the history, *halaqat* played a role beyond the devotional side, yet empowerment of women was not talked about. Our time, the *halaqat* are expanding their discourse to include any type of action under the title of empowerment. Therefore, they are trying to expand their function and, by extension, their role in the public discourse. Would this capacitation, then, transcend the Muslim individual to create a dialogic public sphere? Could it fortify the necessary deliberation to strengthen the public life?

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Omaima Abu Baker (2002) looks in the first part of *Women and Gender*: *Elimination of Cultural and Social Discrimination between the Sexes* at women's self-awareness as a specific awareness about their different positions as a specific group in a community and the specificity of their problems and cases. This self-awareness is associated with the development of the right to discussion. Mohja Kahaf also studied how Muslim women have developed a "gender consciousness" since the time of the prophet. (Abu Baker, 2002) That leads us to claim that women's consciousness about their roles and rights are not contradictory to Islam, which suggests that Muslim women themselves, knowing the history of Islam, are capable of facing the cultural and social fanaticism against them (ibid). This falls in the same line of what *da'iis* are eliciting: a gender awareness that allows women based on piety to gain their rights. Piety is mobilized by women to realize their power. This empowerment increases the "stock of knowledge" and the rationality and sensibilities affecting how women gain mastery over their lives intersubjectively. At last, the different approaches mobilized show the lavish potential of Muslim women scholars and activists for change and finding inroads for self-empowerment. (Pruzan-Jørgensen 2012) The question remains whether this empowerment of the level of the self is sufficient to lead to social transformation, especially with the polar emphasis it puts on the two discussed bases.

6.2 Level of the Family

The family is considered the microcosm that symbolizes society. On this base, Islah Zet al-Bayn and Irchad and Islah mostly focused on the family empowerment through programs directed immediately to it, beyond the social philanthropy.

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For Irchad and Islah, women are urged to "reach a balance to build a Muslim family that is a model not out of isolation or out of being dragged to whatever there is in the society but with consciousness." The organization provides programs that provide hospitalization, psychological support, social support, and a financial one (a committee that decides what every family needs). 450 families benefited from the organization's social contract till 2019. The *da'ii* considered that family programs aim "to dismantle the idea of receiving help and make the family productive." A committee of social workers assesses the needs of the family in total and provides in result treatment programs, social intervention, health programs, and special programs for the kids (*Rahma* programs). This type of help stems from the need to holistically look at the family as "a productive family, not a consumerist one. It is not enough to help them financially and health-wise," al Irchad and Islah interviewee alleged.

The health program has two aspects: 1- preventive that might include *halaqat* like a program called Me directed to women who lost their husbands or got a divorce 2- and therapeutic.

Me, in cooperation with UNICEF, starts with the notion that every woman should know that she "exists". "She does not know what to do. She suffers from low self-esteem, negative mood, depression, she plays many roles like being the father, the mother, and the breadwinner. She has a blaming complex that she is not doing enough. She cannot stand on her feet on the personal level, how can she help her family?" the psychiatrist who is the *da'ii* responsible of this program claimed. The second step is building confidence through intimacy activities, decision-making, and understanding of the mourning phase and how to get out of it (shock, denial, anger, depression, acceptance,

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and help). The third step includes positive parenting skills and home management. "We work with them to have positive parenting skills, as one of their homework is to hug their children at least once a day. In the beginning, no mother hugged her child before; they did not consider that important," the teacher said. Part of this program also is health awareness with the World Health Organization that dedicates a topic every month campaigning on it. "We also work with local NGOs like Makhzoumi, Red Cross, Inaya. For instance, we did a clinical detection of cancer with midwives, and those who appeared to have cancer got transferred to clinics," Irchad and Islah interviewee claimed. The organization similarly provides education support for the kids by teaching everyday homework, supporting those who have educational challenges, and providing scholarships.

Additionally, Aman Center for Women and Family, part of Irchad and Islah established in 2017, provides programs directed to the family. These are mainly three programs: family care, support in the personal law drafting (passing the nationality from the mother to the children, a law that protects her rights), and legal support for women. They center on human rights, awareness against addiction, awareness of national responsibility, volunteerism, and following up on women's legal issues. This center provides legal support and social one on how to solve problems with the family and the husband. It also provides family intervention in case the family is in the phase of divorce or in case of having a conflict where Aman can interfere by offering counseling and lawyers' appointment. It follows up, participates in adjusting the laws, procures a safe refuge and observation space. There is a direct link to the courts and the educational specialists and psychologists to follow up and raise awareness.

In the same line, lectures provided by Irchad and Islah tackle the concept of family and divorce. During the lectures, the divorce rate is looked at (4% during the late 1990s to become 34% in 2019). The lectures invited lecturers from different sects to discuss the issue of marriage and divorce each in their type of referenced courts. All the lecturers focused on the concept of divorce and its stages in their religion. They stressed that women should be aware of this concept from the early phases of marriage. A call was raised based on the claim that Islam has given fairness to women, and one of the manifestations of this fairness is *ijtihad*.

Lecturers focused on the divorce stage that should consider studying the impact of this divorce on all levels and finding solutions to mitigate its consequences. The Druze-specialist lecturer called for considering divorce based on valid reasons instead of only men's decision. This was accompanied by calls from Irchad and Islah judge *da'ii* towards pushing for 1- a public site that allows everyone to know if the man is married or not, so women are not pulled to be the second wives, and for the first wife to know; 2- a role of the ministry of social affairs that supports the NGOs' initiative to help the couple after the divorce; 3- an extension of the concept of violence to include: gender based violence (patriarchy and husband's "right" in disciplining women); 4- a publishing data about the reasons of divorce; 5- a development of personal and sexual status law; 6- a dependency on the age of children custody on every case; 7- a social worker to help the kids; 8- a nafaqa that depends on the actual capabilities of the father; 9- a change in the law in case of the death of the father; the grandparents from the side of the father take the child instead of the mother; 10- and a change the law of paid maternity leave and benefit from different experiences in this domain (the Malaysian one).

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For Islah Zet al-Bayn, the work centers on discussing the problems of the spouses who come to the courts or who reach out to the organization privately with each partner, trying to solve them, and reaching a common ground in case the couple wants a divorce. "We aim to hear both sides, and we usually work before the divorce and in a few cases after it to reach a common ground for children," my informant said.

The work of this organization aims to empower the family by helping it reach "stability that is built on the *mawada* and *rahma* and reflected on the members." The organization also works on drafting laws with the Lebanese Gathering To Preserve the Family like the law of the Penal Code and marital punishment (this work was considered by the *da'ii* to be on the family level as much as knowledge level), lobbying and drafting for laws, for instance, a law about preparatory sessions for potential spouses. Finally, the organization works with prisoners to support their family members, sometimes providing for the education of their children.

To sum up, the family's empowerment, specifically by these two cases, depends on the legal, social, and economic dimensions. The other cases, as we saw in chapter 5, try to empower the family through the process of the upbringing or through the individual. Empowerment on the level of the family then aims to create a self-actualized productive unit protected by the Islamic institutions to shape the morality and identity of the children. Here, the resources are channeled for subjecthood formation and capacitation for the well being of the public. The relationship between the level of the self and the level of the family is seen in a perfect harmony. Would the self-empowerment then reinforce inter-gender relationships as described by complementarity, and what is the extent of this complementarity?

Limited empowerment is done on the level of the family, especially if it is to lead to an action, away from helping specific categories. Islamic *ummah* and the Lebanese society levels will be looked at next.

6.3 Level of the Muslim *Ummah*

Women's increased activism in Lebanon has deeper roots; a need for women to strengthen a base for a solidified Muslim *ummah*. This *ummah* is being looked at by women themselves as a framework under which *da'wah* is organized for the sake of the public good. "[The public *da'wah*]… is less an empirical entity than a framework for a particular type of action." (Meyer and Moors, 2005, p.40) The defining lines of this *ummah* are not marked, intentionally, as my fieldwork showed, for the sake of a comprehensive inclusion and due to globalization. This lies in the same line with what Riaz Hassan (2006) considered that the concept of a differentiated *ummah* is evolving due to modernization and globalization. This *ummah*, I found, lies in the consciousness of the *da'iis* in so much as to mobilize and socialize a collective identity and prepare, as a result, specialized *da'iis*. "It is a sociological reality. It is a unique principle of social identity in Islam which acts as a basis of collective consciousness and community organization." (Hassan, 2006, p.14) *Da'wah* approached *ummah's* empowerment through accounting and depending on three notions.

Firstly, *da'iis* work towards decreasing individualism by creating a sense of responsibility through belonging to a Muslim collective. For instance, al-Qubaysiyat interviewee pointed out that "working towards creating a sense of belonging to a group instead of focusing on the individual comes in putting effort to increase the

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responsibility sense." Stories of *sahaba* were mentioned like the story of *sahabi* Safwan Ebn Al- Maatal who sleeps a lot and always stays late and behind people. So his job was to bring everything that is left on the way. Stories about the conquests in showing the importance of *jama'a*. For example, fear prayer (*salat al Khawf*) requires the army to be divided into two groups, one which will pray with the leader, and the other will face the enemy to stay tuned to any attack. This payer shows the importance of *jama'a* and praying. Similar stories were provided so to stress that "everyone has a role for the sake of all." Although these claims are substantial in the sessions, the absence of cooperation with other organizations make these claims controversial.

Similarly, Irchad and Islah and al-Najat focused on empowering the individual "to instill social work in groups so we get rid of individualism." Any work was considered to require the dimension of strengthening the community in general, not only the interest of the individual, but the whole *ummah*. These claims were seen in how the *muridin* started "personal initiatives like *iftarat al rahme* (Rahma Fast Breaking), and campaigns outside the institutional framework." The international character of the Muslim *ummah* was highly looked at in admiration in the sense of keeping a negotiated self-anchored into something bigger than the direct community, despite not discussing anything related to the interests of this *ummah* in general.

Secondly, *da'iis* referred to *ummah* and claimed to empower it by preparing leaders who will take the *da'wah* work needed for this *ummah*. The approaches and characteristics of those *da'ii* leaders differ between the cases. Islah Zet-al-Bayn, with its focus on the family, did not mention the *ummah* in the fieldwork. For al-Qubaysiyat, the teacher considered that "we have to bring the *sahaba*, so they become our models. We

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need new leaders. We need enthusiasm. Women in Islam need to reactivate their role

for the sake of *ummah*."

For al-Najat, one of the aims of the *da'wah*, according to my interviewees, is

the formation of *da'iis* to pass on *da'wah* eventually. This happens by working with

women on all levels and based on the Quran and *sunnah*. Women's activism aims to

prepare leaders. "Her self-leadership will be the mean for her to be the leader in

society." This leadership should be on all the levels and channeled into the right path.

For Irchad and Islah, the *da'ii* considered that spreading Islam is not a burden. "It is

helping us." The aim, she elaborated, is "to prepare leaders capable of dealing with daily

life problems of the *ummah* and bridge the text and the reality." The work on the

personality and the behavior of the *murida* will be also reflected on the *ummah*. The

da'wah tries to conduit, in this sense, the capacities and potential of *muridin* through

opening for them the participation option in helping *da'wah*.

Thirdly, the empowerment on the *ummah* level tries to socialize the Muslim

identity by mobilizing the collective sense. However, this does not aim to create an

alternative community as Irchad and Islah *da'ii* stressed in the interview. In this, the

identification with an entity that shares the same values and law aims to anchor the

work of the *da'iis* and their identities. That represents an opportunity for identification

and responsibility bearing.

Therefore, the *ummah* is a sociological reality that plays a role in the

solidification of the *da'wah* work by decreasing the individualism, preparing leaders,

and socializing and mobilizing the Muslim identity. Responsibilization, in the

Foucauldian sense, is at odds here. The *ummah* conception is used not to shift the

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external forces into the self but to direct the self to the external while being conscious of the external forces as external. A 'homogeneous' *ummah* that fits the conception of each organization is at play here. The mobilization of this concept for the sake of *da'wah* poses practical interrogation of whether the *ummah* is seen as the alternative to the state, in the sense, of working towards solidifying it genuinely through channeling the capacities towards bettering it while focusing on better building relationships in a diverse Lebanon. I will move to study the empowerment on the level of the Lebanese society.

6.4 Level of the Lebanese Society

Empowerment expands to the Lebanese society by forming subjects capable of appreciating the diversity while preserving their own identity. Al-Irchad and Islah's teacher claimed that "Islam is not rituals and rules. Becoming a good Muslim means being the best member of and for the society."

Firstly, the subject is urged to understand and appreciate diversity in the Lebanese society. For instance, the al-Najat's teacher claimed in a *halaqa* that "the community needs reform to raise good individuals, so they form good families capable of developing a better society that by its turn, forms better individuals. Those individuals should understand the concept of diversity and what is right and what is not." These claims were followed by the idea that being a good Muslim reflects, by extension, on having a better Lebanon. For instance, Al- Najat's teacher claimed that "having a 'mini' religious background is capable of making Lebanon a better place."

Irchad and Islah also claimed that "building a good person leads to rebuilding the society in a healthy way, so the values of a good society are instilled again." Secondly, the appreciation of diversity necessitates building relations based on Islamic principles I discussed in chapter 5. Islah Zet al-Bayn claimed that "building relations with people based on Islamic teachings organizes our relations, so Lebanon would be a better place." Similar claims were approached from the different *da'iis* except for al-Qubaysiyat.

Participants considered that, on the ground, there is not a distinction between any identity in Lebanon. Hence, when *da'iis* called for appreciating the diversity while they took it for granted. Al-Najat interviewee claimed that "we need understanding and awareness to live in this country." For Irchad and Islah, the interviewee claimed that "we should raise people capable of working with people different than themselves in one team. There is a mentality in Lebanon that we accept others, but we do not work for the good of both of us. We should have to accept diversity and work on it, not only acknowledging its existence."

Thirdly, and within a plurality of identities, the *da'wah* aimed to instill acceptance of the Islamic *Shariah* by the Muslims and Lebanese society. Irchad and Islah's interviewee considered that her main work revolves around developing the Sunni Supreme Court and Islamic laws instead of eliminating them. "We can develop and upgrade them. Our reference is the courts, and if they are dismantled, our religion is dismantled. We should focus instead on understanding the role of the courts and how to preserve this role while developing them." Al-Najat's teacher claimed in the same line that knowing the *Shariah* by the lay individual leads to work on *da'wah* through

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changes that stem from the bottom, the individuals who are convinced. This convincement will have creative manifestations as a result. Al-Quabysiyat did not tackle any issue related to the Lebanese society.

Can this consideration of the empowerment on the level of the *ummah* and the Lebanese society unfolds into interpersonal empowerment? The level of reflexivity on the level of the Lebanese society shows a simplification of knowledge and power. Then how much this empowerment departs and corresponds to the public of the Lebanese society?

To sum up, this chapter inquired about the empowerment sources that constituted the value framework for Muslim subjects' formation on all levels. It looked at how *da'wah* works on the disciplinization of heart and mind of the *muridin* and on capacitating them in terms of knowledge and skills to pave the way for the disciplinization of the higher social structures. It then looked at how the empowerment of the family is approached and understood. After this, it accounted for how *da'wah* called to decrease individualism, prepare leader, and socialize the Muslim identity by mobilizing their collective sense to empower the Muslim *ummah*. Finally, it tried to empower the Lebanese society by acting on the participants' sense of appreciation of diversity values to build relations on this base while also preserving the Islamic identity. Different types of power are in action here: "power with," "power over," "power to," and "power within." Power grows out of relational change in collaboration and partnership. Power over stems from the power of relations of domination/ subjugation. The power within stems from the sense of self-awareness and self-knowledge. Power to is the enabling power that stems from the potential of the individual without using

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relationships of dominance. (Mathie, Cameron, and Gibson 2017) Women's activism employs the four types of power to empower women. They mobilize women's power over her religion to challenge the power over. That allows her to reach power to as an enabled individual in society and power with based on an increased sense of power within. This power within, originated from the disciplinization of the heart and mind, and the capacitation through knowledge and skills acquirement, enables women to claim the power with and to.

Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) claim that "empowerment theory, research, and intervention link individual well-being with the larger social and political environment" (p. 569). John Moritsugu, Elizabeth Vera, Frank Y Wong, Karen Grover Duffy (2015) claim as Rappaport (1987) that empowerment is both a construct and a process; a construct that "links the individual strength and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviors to social change and social policies." (Moritsugu et al. 2015, p.13) and a process as a "mechanism through which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their life." (Rappaport 1987, p.3) In this sense, women's empowerment is a process and a construct. Islamic empowerment transcends the recognition of the supremacy of the Islamic codes and morals to embody this supremacy on the four levels. The sense of the self extends beyond the personal to the transpersonal that pertains to higher social structures. This transpersonal experience leads to empowerment. (Saft, 2007) Then empowerment is a function of binding the individual to the social and vice versa through what Michel Foucault (1988) defines as technologies of the self. These are techniques that allow the individuals to effect operations on themselves to transform themselves in order to attain a state of happiness.

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The disciplinization of the heart and mind, the acquirement of knowledge and skills along with the practices and strategies of the family as a unit affect how the ethical framework of the *ummah* and the Lebanese society is represented. Here lies the work of the *da'wah* in employing the technologies of the self on the level of the individual and the family to create a social change on the level of the *ummah* and the Lebanese society. Empowerment is the means through which the Islamic ethics are elaborated.

CONCLUSION

Religion has not only survived the modern world but continues to thrive. In the secularization paradigm, modernity has been seen as bringing about the decline of religion, but this faced many challenges accounting for the empirical religious resurgence and re-conceptualizing its internal premises. (Berger, 2014) The ideas of "multiple modernities" by Shmuel Eisenstadt, "pluralism" paradigm by Peter Berger, "multiple realities" by Alfred Schutz and others have provided a ground for understanding the expansion and formation of the discourses in the public. As a social force, religion includes the institutional notion (authorities, practices, and creeds) and a creative, rational, knowledge-based, meta-institutional impetus. (Salvatore, 2016) The "keepers" of this social force, the knowledge they reproduce and disseminate, the approaches they employ in transmission, the objectives of their dissemination, and the version of modernity they promote are dispensable to understand the shaping of reality and reflexivity development in this line. This thesis set out to examine Sunnite revivalism's manifestations in the development of women's activism under the umbrella of *da'wah*.

To account for such activism, it studied the wide structure of actors in Lebanon to consider and categorize four case studies Irchad and Islah, Islah Zet al-Bayn, al-Najat, and al-Qubaysiyat. These four cases' modes of transmission, context of production, views, and empowerment premises are analyzed in a comparative way throughout the thesis. The thesis then tried to understand and contextualize the process of knowledge production by looking at the dimensions interplaying for this sake and

identify the modes of transmission of the religious knowledge that constitute the base

for the production. This context aimed to account for the complexity of the production

process looking at the *halaqat* as platforms of Islamic knowledge production entrenched

in a locality and temporality. *Da'wah* was found to form a comprehensive process that

looks at the different aspects of Muslim life and by that, it constitutes the legitimate

creative site from which all the activism of female *da'iis* emerges. The network's

character was found to provide the main lenses into the potentiality of the process of

knowledge creation. It normalizes a religious space that is instrumental and ideological

for the community belonging allowing the solidification of a domain of the "social".

Bonding ties and bridging ones interplay to sustain and develop a community sense.

The bonding ties manifested in rooting relations of *suhba saliha*, the journey of learning

as an instrument of socialization that sustains the meaning of the knowledge produced

and the character of the community, the rituals within/out of the *halaqa* as generative of

multisemantic personal and collective meanings that subsidize the sense of community,

social philanthropy as a mobilized engagement technique, and media's use for building

an intimate engaged local community that is able to identify and extrapolate from

international one solidifying the community sense. Bridging ties show a primary

network between international and national organizations themselves that stem from a

need. The lay knowledge producers were found to be from diverse socio-economic and

educational backgrounds that allow the re-democratization as Bano (2017) does, the

heuristic contextualization, and the relevantization of knowledge. Their teaching styles

are based on assigning meanings to everyday life contingencies by representing

knowledge as stories engrained in subjective experience. They mediate between the

preservation of Islamic traditions and the contemporary reality bringing the Islamic text into daily life which extends to their liquid authority form. The audience was shown to be from different ages, different socio-economic, and educational and cultural backgrounds engaging in a process of coscientization allowing the co-reproduction of Islamic knowledge.

In terms of unpacking the relation between power and knowledge, Michel Foucault suggests that knowledge is locked in intimate relation with power. "There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations." (Foucault, 1977, p. 27) Knowledge does not operate outside the realm of the "social", "economic", and "political." It is inexorably linked to power. Power is not understood as centralized in the hands of the government or the state. Knowledge begets the possibilities of empowerment to have the agency to construct identities and selves; it produces the discourse that constructs people's lives. The fifth chapter's importance lies in how it attempts to understand the knowledge produced by this activism and by extension the discourse constitutive of Muslim life in Lebanon. Three major issues were found to be highlighted the most in the *halaqat* the religious, the social, and the socio-political. The religious themes tried to extend the understanding of religiosity to make it a public issue by widening the piety conception in inward and outward aspects and in calling for reading reality. *Yosor* was also seen as a way of dealing with the self and the other reflecting a reactionary aspect to stress the non-calcified character of Islam. The social themes dealt with the family on the level of the relationship between men and women, the parents and the children, the nuclear and extended family to set out the

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framework of the "ideal society." The socio-political themes looked at otherness in terms of dealing with it with tolerance and *ihsan* and on the Lebanese context in terms of economic crisis and *ulama's* partiality which contributed to raising a resistant voice against patriarchy, favoritism, political class, and traditions.

The discussion of these themes reflected the diversity of Lebanese Sunnite activism's informal organizations and at the same time the convergence under a similar framework. These movements' tackling of such themes reflects an internal change that starts from the bottom and takes daily life issues as a base of *tajdid* (renewal); a *tajdid* that goes beyond the aspect of the rituals of the behavior component of the piety to the perception and need of change on the levels that pertain to society and less extent to politics. These Themes represent the "spoken" about in the *halaqat* while the unspoken remains as salient as the spoken. The four cases I studied, being popular, post-Islamic, and revivalist depicts the Islamic field map that harbors different thought developments being conventional, progressive, and ground-breaking. Here, one can see al-Qubaysiyat as experienced in conventional traditionalist thinking and practice sustaining their religious authority and empowering women through traditional ways. Al-Najat can be identified as having a progressive thinking and practice while maintaining a traditionalist thinking and practice without blasting ground-breaking developments. Irchad Zet-al-Bayn harbors a potential in groundbreaking thinking along progressive thinking and practice. Muslim activism is then an active agent in the social fabric of Lebanese society. It is not a monolithic block (Table 3 offers a summary of the different themes studied in this thesis) , but it tries to create "a space for communal reflexivity

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and action understood as necessary for perfecting and sustaining the totality of practices on which an Islamic society depends." (Hirschkind, 2006, p.8)

As a process and a construct, the empowerment was studied on four levels: the self, the family, the *ummah*, and the Lebanese society. The study of this empowerment on the levels of the self and the family showed how the Islamic ideology is mobilized and developed. It showed how the self is being disciplined on the emotional and rational bases and the *tarbieh* as being marked in Islamic way to preserve the Islamic identity and reflect the Islamic ethics and principles. Empowerment on the levels of the *ummah* and the Lebanese society reflected a developing type of accommodation whether social, socio-economic, or political. This accommodation is seen in how these organizations put most types of action under the umbrella of empowerment, where empowerment as a term was not tackled at all until recently. Empowerment conception reflects how these 4 organizations are trying to focus on practical, yet not sophisticated, solutions to the dilemmas the audience suffer from.

Table 3: Summary of the Studied Themes

Scale:

Absent	poor	Moderate	Strong
-	+	++	+++

Themes	Dimensions	Case Studies			
		Al-Najat	Irchad and Islah	Islah Zet al-Bayn	Al-Qubaysiyat
Background	The network Centrality	++	++	+	+++
	Tie Strength	+++	++	+	+++
	Political Affiliation	+++	+	-	++
	Level of commitment	+++	++	+	+++
	Level of Engagement With the Audience	+++	++	++	++
Context of the Knowledge Production	Da 'wah Mobilization	+++	+++	++	+++
	Media Use	++	++	++	+
	High Socio-Economic Backgrounds	+	++	+	+++
	High educational Backgrounds	++	+++	+++	++
	Spirituality of the Religious Space	++	++	++	+++
	Charisma	++	++	++	+++
	Liquidity of Authority	+++	+++	+++	+
Religious Themes	The Familiarization of Information	++	++	++	++
	Tajdid Level	+	++	++	-
	Quran and Sunnah Citations	+++	++	+	+++
	Reference to Mathahibs	+	+	-	+
	Use of References (Islamic and non-Islamic)	+	+	+	++

	Call for Being Active Learner	+++	++	+++	-
	Focus on *Ibadat*	+	+	+	++
	Focus on *Mu'malat*	+++	+++	+++	+++
	Use of Social Methods	+	++	++	+
	Reference to non-Islamic Studies	+	+	+	-
	Focus of Yosar as a Concept	+++	+++	++	++
Social Themes	Focus on Complementarity as the Framework of the Relation	+++	+++	+++	++
	Focus on Sexuality	+	+	++	+
	Islamic Upbringing Focus	+++	+++	++	+++
	Dealing With Extended Family	+	+	+++	+
Socio-Political Theme	Tolerance Base of Thinking	+++	+++	+++	+++
	Ihsan as a Base of Acting	+++	+++	+++	+++
	Homosexuality Discussion on the Social Level	++	+	++	++
	Homosexuality Discussion on the Human Level	+++	+	+	-
	Homosexuality Discussion on Ethical Level	++	++	++	++
	Criticizing the Socio-Economic Situation in Lebanon	+++	++	+++	-
	Convincement in the Partiality of the *Ualama*	+++	++	+++	-

	Call for Resistance	++	+	++	-
	Revolution Participation	+	+	-	-
Empowerment	Focus on the Disciplinizatin of the Heart	++	++	+++	+++
	Focus on the Disciplinizatin of the Mind	+++	+++	+++	++
	Focus on the Level of the Family	++	+++	+++	+
	Focus on the Level of *Ummah*	++	++	++	+
	Focus on the Level of the Lebanese Society	++	+	++	-
	Empowerment as Accommodation	++	++	++	+

The challenge this activism is caught in, revolves around balancing between preserving Islam while selectively and slowly reforming. The change one can see is not crystallized in demarcated terms but it lies within the process of this slow reform. The direction of this reform is progressive, even though within every organization lies multiple patterns of thoughts: conventional, progressive, and countering, and that instead of being seen as a description and categorization of this activism, it shows the manifestations of substantial transitional phase.

The *halaqat* I attended were corrective in their approach. The young generations' *halqat* procure a better-informed space for the observation of the formation of the Muslim thought which reflects not only the thought of the organization in a structured way, but the direction of the change. Social scientists have a vital role here not only to understand these movements but to contribute to the process of change.

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Another interesting future research is the study of the impact of this activism on the participants through a longitudinal examination of this impact on the *muridin*. This thesis then showed how the informal organizations in Lebanon are taking the responsibility of their Islamic understanding responding to the evolving community needs and local environments. Taha Abderrahman (2019) presents in an interview that the struggle of the Muslims nowadays is not about the striving against the west, it is a striving against the pitfalls presented internally. A step towards this internal striving is the development of an epistemological public that is open for everyone away from the traditional concept of the audience as a receiver but as a co-scientist. Here lies the prominence of the Islamic activism of women that is not only bringing the reality of women to the text and the mixing of the different types of knowledge but also the bringing of women as a category embedded in the Islamic framework. Another aspect of this internal striving is the emphasis on the ethics and morality and the growing religious education by this category. That is shown in the development of Muslim women's movements around the world that define themselves in this line and go in similar directions with the studied cases. The Federation of Muslim Women's Association in Nigeria is involved in the national projects and debates along with providing religious lessons. Similar are the Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatual *Ulama* women wings that are playing a major role in the national debates in Indonesia. Al-Huda in Pakistan also is another major example of this development that is growing across classes and ages. (Bano, 2017) The Islamic world is then growing different responses to the dilemma it is put in, yet this needs thorough orientation and contemplation.

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