



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

WOMEN AND AGENCY: (RE)EVALUATING COLLECTIVE  
IDENTITY THROUGH SHI'A RITUAL PERFORMANCE

by  
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for the degree of Master of Arts  
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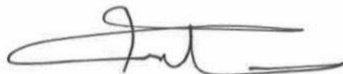
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Anyone who writes might be convinced to accredit the achievement primarily to their own resilience. Today, I propose that this work took much determination and endurance. However, solely granting my own persistence would only manifest insolent recognition.

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# AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Rayan Issam Jaber for

Master of Arts

Major: Sociology

Title: Women and Agency: (Re)evaluating Collective Identity through Shi'a Ritual Performance

When it comes to exploring Ashura rituals of the Shi'a sect of Islam, many misconceptions seize the literature, focusing chiefly on the spiritual, pietistic, and soteriological aspects. As an embodiment of a culture of death and salvation is realized, restricted to breast-beating, self-flagellation, tomb visitations of martyrs, mourning processions, lamentation, and theatrical/poetical representations of the battle of Karbala, another side reveals a social and political revival through the reinforcement of social/religious events that unify, empower and reinforce the collective Shi'i identity. Hence, a shift has been noted moving from a traditional collective identity of shared sorrow, to collective social activism. My topic of research focuses on the gender-dynamic transformation that has occurred which accordingly revitalized and re-evaluated the role of women in society. I want to explore how pious Lebanese Shi'a women are finding agency and empowerment through their participation in Ashura commemoration in both the private and public sphere and how there came about a transformation of the marginalization of women visibility to their appearance. Additionally, as any other socially-connected rituals, the rituals of the mourning of Ashura helps the Shi'a from all parts of Lebanon to reconnect with one another as one community united together in the face of any challenge they encounter in their daily lives. My research will contribute to the literature by addressing two leading questions. Initially, I want to explore what the content of the rituals is that is actively being practiced by women in the mourning events. Accordingly, I intend to investigate how the active actors or participating women are attaining collective power which is elevating their empowerment and agency through their participation in the rituals.

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## GLOSSARY

*Adab Al-Ziyara*: formal etiquette and customs of the Holy Shrines visitation

*Ahlul Bayt*: the household of the prophet Muhammad and a designation in Islam for the holy family including his daughter Faṭīma, her husband Ali and their descendants

*al-Dahiye*: a Shi'a Muslim Suburb South of Beirut

*Arba'in Visitation*: annual visitation to the shrine of Hussain in Karbala, Iraq on the fortieth day after the martyrdom of Hussain

*Ashura*: the tenth day of Muharram and the day of Hussain's martyrdom in Karbala

*Chadors*: a long, black piece of cloth, leaving only the face exposed

*Diyafa*: hospitality in terms of services including food, water and shelter

*Hadith*: record of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, revered as a major source of religious law and moral guidance

*Hawza*: a seminary where Shi'a Muslim clerics are educated

*Hay'aat*: female social institutions accountable for organizing Islamic events

*Hezeb*: political party or affiliation

*Hezbollah*: a Shi'a Islamist political party based in Lebanon

*Hidana*: child custody

*Hijab*: veil worn by Muslim women in the presence of any male outside of their immediate family

*Hussayniya*: a congregation memorial hall for Shi'a Muslim commemoration ceremonies

*'Idda*: a time period where women cannot remarry after divorce or death of husband

*Ijma*: a consensus of the community of Muslims

*Imam*: successors to the Islamic prophet Muhammad in the Twelver branch of Shi'a Islam

*Latm*: chest-beating as an expression of grief and sorrow

*Mahr*: a mandatory payment in the form of money or possession after marriage offered by the husband

*Majlis* (plural *majalis*): special meetings or gatherings where commemorative narratives are recited

*Marja'iyya*: the supreme religious body of Ayatollahs in Shi'ism

*Masafa Shar'iyah*: a physical distance between men and women who are not considered to be related by blood

*Nafaqa*: financial support provided by husband to his wife

*Niyaha*: rhythmic lamentation poetry

*Radoud/Kari'e*: reciter of the narratives or lamentation poetry/chants

*Taa'bia*: a mobilization

*Takiyah*: expedient dissimulation

*Taklif Shar'i*: a religious duty

*Ta'zieh*: scripts and narratives read in the commemorations to mourn death

*Ummah*: the Muslim community

*Wilayat al-Faqih*: a theory in Shi'a Islam which holds that Islam gives an Islamic jurist custodianship over people

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## DEDICATION

*To the Oceans of Knowledge.*

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

"Perhaps no other single event in Islamic history has played so central a role in shaping Shi'i identity and communal sense as the martyrdom of Husayn and his companions at Karbala"  
(Nakash, 1993)

In the year 680 A.D., a significant event occurred, in modern-day Iraq, and was a turning point for what has become the Shi'a Muslim community. Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and the son of Ali and Fatima, was martyred during the Karbala battle against the ruling caliph Yazid ibn Muawiya, one of the Umayyad caliphs, on the 10th day of the Islamic month of Muharram, which came to be known as Ashura. This event took place in Karbala, which is in modern-day Iraq, and is today an important pilgrimage site for pious Shi'a Muslims with the holy shrines of Hussain, his family and companions. In contemporary time, Ashura not only marks a religious observance marked annually by pious Shi'a Muslims, but rather has transformed into an event of social and political activism. Thus, Ashura became a day where pious Shi'a still mourn Hussain's martyrdom, practicing rituals that are not merely emotional; these will be discussed in the coming sections of this thesis. This is not minimizing the event's religious importance, nor its emotional holdings. However, the research goes beyond the religious purpose and focuses on the mourning rituals of Ashura as it contributes to the social, political, and individual life of pious Lebanese Shi'a Muslims.

The Ashura event is not *only* approached from a spiritual angle nor is it a representation of a culture of death. Rather, it calls for a spiritual awakening that,

through practice, builds up the faith of the participants. Hence, this spiritual awakening marked through the commemoration of Ashura has a crucial role in unifying the collective pious Shi'i identity as well as empowering it. This is also to note that with years of practicing the rituals and the commemorations, the rituals have undergone an evolution and a shift has been noticed, moving from traditional practicing that focuses on a collective identity merely based on shared sorrow and mourning, to a collective identity that is constructed beyond mourning; one of a shared social activism.

My topic of research focuses on the gender-dynamic transformation that has occurred simultaneously with a revitalization and re-evaluation of the role of women in the Shi'a community. I want to explore how women are finding agency and empowerment through their participation in Ashura commemoration in both the private and public sphere and how a transformation came about changing the status of women visibility to their activism. My research will contribute to the literature by addressing two leading questions. Initially, I want to explore what the content of the rituals is that is actively being practiced by women in the mourning events. Accordingly, I intend to investigate whether the active actors or participating women are attaining collective power, and if so, whether this power is contributing to their empowerment and agency through their participation in the rituals.

## **A. Literature Review**

In this section, I will review the existing literature on Shi'a ritual performances and outline the assumptions of its practices. When it comes to exploring Ashura rituals of the Shi'a sect of Islam, an embodiment of a culture of death and salvation is realized



involving breast-beating, self-flagellations, visitations of martyrs' tombs, mourning processions, lamentation, and theatrical/poetical representations of the battle of Karbala. Nonetheless, another side reveals a social and political revival through the reinforcement of social and religious events that unify, empower and reinforce the collective Shi'i identity.

The 680 A.D. Karbala tragedy of the martyrdom of Hussain and its annual commemoration are at the core of shaping pious Shi'a identity where the event's allegory has emerged into a 'cultural fixation' of Shi'a life touching on the religious, social, and political milieu (Elbadri, 2009) and thus have become a part of a designated paradigm in Shi'ism. Although the annual mourning practices that are eminent throughout the months of Muharram and Safar, the first two months of the Islamic Lunar Calendar or *Hijri*, are the climax of the rituals, these mourning rituals are still commemorated throughout the course of the whole year, specifically on other religious occasions apart from Muharram and Safar. These practices are examined in the literature from different perspectives; however, the lens of gender has been overlooked (Afshar, 1982; Aghaie, 2005; Bard, 2002; Cole, 2002; Deeb, 2006; Hamdar, 2009), while there is strong focus on the central procession of male participants. Thus, what was clear was the under-emphasis and marginalization of the involvement of women, while other studies have shown that Shi'a women have always been present and active in the public sphere in addition to the private sphere. But it was not until the past few decades that the presence of women has become highly visible (Deeb 2006; Milani 1992).

Contemporarily, a shift has been noted moving from a tradition of focusing on a collective identity merely based on a shared sorrow and mourning, to a collective

identity still based on sentimentality, but leaning more toward social activism. It was not until the twentieth century when the public participation of women became politicized and institutionalized that it has intentionally appeared visible (Deeb, 2006; Milani, 1992). Thus, the exploration of the gender dynamics of these rituals can make other factors apparent that are related to gender dynamics in the pious Shi'a community. Prior to women visibility in the public sphere, women were regarded as passive victims or passive mourners. Nonetheless, the gender-dynamic transformation that has occurred revitalized and re-evaluated the role of women in society (Bard, 2010; Deeb, 2006). The reinterpretation and re-evaluation of the persona and role of Sayeda Zainab, the sister of Hussain, was a chief constituent in this transformation. The transformation in the nature of gender construction of Zainab's character is functional in the way pious Shi'a women tend to employ and utilize their agency to reformulate their roles in their communities (Bard 2010; Deeb 2006).

From the linguistic angle, the ritual is expressed through a language (El-Karanshawy, 2012). Samer El-Karanshawy argues that the two elements of belief and ritual cannot be conceivable unless through language. How also adds that every doctrine has roots that is related to the verbal aspects of expression (How, 2004). Thus, it is evident that concepts that are abstract such as agency or spiritual concepts need some sort of symbolization that supposes a 'linguistic articulation' (Goody, 2004). Ritual is also presumed to be a key component of religiosity and can be dissected in four different dimensions including content, frequency, intensity and centrality (Verbit, 1970). The content of a ritual may vary from ritual to ritual, as does the frequency of its practice, the intensity and impact of the ritual on the practitioner, and the centrality of the ritual in that religious tradition. In this context, the meaning of the abstract concepts

of Ashura and its rituals, is constructed through reification of its practices. In other words, the abstract is being transferred into a material value where remembrance of a figure is reconceptualized through lamentation or mourning. The common practices that are being employed annually seek to reconfirm the shared values among the Shi'a in their communities through reconceptualizing the remembrance of Ashura through self-flagellation, lamentation, among others that will be explained at length in the coming chapters, and tend to have an impact on the cognitive material of the pious Lebanese Shi'a communities.

Apart from the linguistic approach, the sociology of religion has provided some thoughts on decoding Shi'ism and the variation of its practices. Islamic movements such as the 1979 Iranian Revolution contributed to "opening the field for the sociology of religion to deal not only about them but also about all aspect of religion and religiosity shaping many domains of our life" (Hanafi, 2019). In Lebanon, the connection with Shi'a regions around the world started in the 14th century. Jabal Amil, in South Lebanon, was a center for scholarship where scholars from Iraq and Bahrain had a role in the installation of Shi'ism before the Persian cities of Mashhad, Shiraz, and Qum in addition to Al-Najaf in Iraq, became major sites of Shiite scholarship. Until today, Jabal Amil continues to be valued by Shi'a as an important site for Shi'a (Norton, 2005). Apart from Jabal Amil, vital public commemorations have also amplified in different areas and cities in Lebanon including Beirut Southern Suburbs or *Al-Dahiye*, Biqaa, Tyre, and other villages in the South. Although the commemorations are highly active across these cities in Lebanon, more research is needed to be built up in the literature through the lens of the intersectionality, including gender and class. The majority of the studies that focus on the intersectionality are found mainly in Iran, Iraq

and Pakistan, taking into account their large Shi'a population, active participation in the rituals, sites of Holy Shrines of Shi'a Imams, and important *Hawzas* of clergyman and scholars.

Revolutionary scholars including Ali Shariati and Morteza Motahhari are high frequent names that appear when seeking matters related to identity and social activism. As these prominent figures were able to mobilize masses through their continuous questioning of the passivity of women as mere mourners, the character of Zainab was re-energized and was instrumental in constructing novel female identities (Milani, 1992). Due to the high restrictions on women visibility and agency in Pakistan, a well-built literature is found on Pakistani Shi'a communities. Their women faced restrictive gender boundaries, but they were able to find self-expression, self-definition, personal empowerment through Ashura rituals and questioning the gender ideology (Hegland, 1998). Lebanon's literature on the other hand needs to be built in terms of the intersectionality, specifically the gender dynamics of rituals while Ashura commemorations have experienced a change within recent years; starting at a traditional one and developing toward a social activism (Hamdar, 2009; Norton, 2007; Deeb, 2006). Although Lebanon has a different political, culture and social context than the other Shi'a countries, a common denominator is found in the nature of the gender transformation based on the revised role of Zainab, as a result of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The reinterpretation of Zainab's character as an activist instead of a passive mourner inspired by Iranian revolutionary leaders and other prominent figures has an influence on the way pious Shi'a women perceive themselves as actors with full agency in their respective communities that promotes their visibility in the public. This is noted

specifically through female associations or *hay'aat* which are central social institutions responsible for organizing Islamic events.

In terms of function, sociological theory puts forwards that rituals have dormant social functions where they assist social cohesion and reproduce some sort of social order (Scheve, 2011). These social functions are signified in Emile Durkheim's concept of *collective effervescence* where it entails a shared emotional arousal and reinforcement of group ties and social solidarity (Durkheim, 1915). Durkheim suggests that this collective effervescence contributes to a collective conscience that leads to having solid group ties (Scheve, 2011). Randall Collins's work, which is built on Durkheim's social ritual theory, discussed the same concept but terms it *ritualized interaction* where emotional energy, or the emotional arouses that Durkheim suggests, emerges when participants collectively engage in different forms of 'interaction ritual chains' (Scheve, 2011). Hence, Collins's emotional energy concords with and contributes to the reproduction of social solidarity as Durkheim proposes. Collins's schematic diagram of ritual theory, based on Durkheim's social ritual theory, dissects how knowledge transforms into belief and membership into belonging. This schematic diagram can be applied to the context of Shi'a rituals as it feasible in portraying how a group cohesion is brought about through the starting points of knowledge and membership.

## **B. Research Questions/Sub-Questions**

As the two factors of gender and power need to be built on in the literature with regards to Shi'a mourning rituals, my study will focus mainly upon these factors to

build on to the literature. The research is constructed with two leading questions that dominate the study:

(1) What is the content of the rituals that is actively being practiced by women in the mourning events?

(2) Are the active actors/participating women attaining collective power and is it elevating their empowerment and agency through their participation in the rituals?

As the questions above are the two main questions of this study, other inquiries are derived. I am interested to inquire about the most ritually active women and whether social networks/ties are prerequisites for women's approval of participation. Since a chief factor of the study is women's agency, how are women finding power through their employment within a male-controlled framework? Accordingly, as collective emotions and emotional energy is examined, how are the collective emotions stimulated and transmitted between the participants and how are these emotions leaving an impact on the collective pious Shi'a identity?

### **C. Significance**

The significance of this study is that it tries to re-evaluate the commonalities that are at the boundary of Shi'a rituals, taking into account the socio-political and cultural aspects rather than merely its soteriological side which is foremost pervasive in the literature. I aim to fill the gap in investigating how the present day socio-political conditions shifted and transformed, which have contributed to the transformation of

religious belief into a social ideology that had a major impact on the role of women in Lebanon. I aim to further explore the consequences of such a transformation as it holds several inferences for the future presence of Shi'a women in the public sphere and further build on the literature.

#### **D. Methodology**

A qualitative methodology was adopted based on submission of different approaches including an ethnographic collection of data through participant observation and interviews as it allowed first hand collection of data. I believe that such methods were sufficient to reach good understanding of the ritual practices and women empowerment in their respective contexts.

Concerning the interviews, they were semi-structured and the targeted population were active participants in the rituals and commemoration events, both men and women, in addition to religious scholars, women associations, and other personalities that are involved in organizing the events. As the goal of qualitative research is the attainment of saturation, this study's sample size included 15 male participants and 30 female participants for the interviews, between the ages of 20 and 60. Initially, the questions of the interview were predetermined to initiate the conversation, however the discussions eventually in the interviews were open-ended and continued in a form of a conversation with the interlocutors sharing their experiences and knowledge. The interviewees included religious scholars, reciters, members from women networks and associations (Women's Martyr Associations), academic researchers, travel agency in corporation with religious guides for Holy

Shrine Pilgrimage, market distributors of Ashura commodities (Bakery and Shops), and school faculties involved in organizing the commemoration events.

For the participant observation, field trips were taken to Shi'a cities and towns to observe at first hand local practices of the rituals and Ashura preparations including Beirut Southern Suburbs (al-Dahiyeh), Nabatiye, Tyre, small villages in the South, in addition to a visit to Al-Najaf and Karbala, Iraq. I closely examined commemoration events and women participation over a period of six months as the Ashura commemoration is continuously active throughout the course of the year and not restricted to the month of Muharram (the climax of the event). Through these observations, ethnographic material was collected including video records, audios of lamentation, photographs, *Ta'zieh* scripts and narratives, and poems used in the commemorations, in addition to references to historical books related to the subject of the study. Women's memorial services and associations were also visited as they are central institutions and important milieus to extract data.

Collins's schematic diagram of ritual theory, based on Durkheim's social ritual theory, is the theoretical framework used to show how Ashura rituals may be related to group cohesion and solidarity of the women in their communities through transforming knowledge into belief and membership into belonging, taking into account factors including practices, behaviors, co-presence, subjective state, among others. Other academic frameworks were incorporated including the sociology of religion, anthropology of religion, history of religion, in addition to Islamic texts and literature.

## **E. Positionality**



As a Lebanese Muslim residing in the Shi'a community of al-Dahiye, I am aware and acknowledge the roles and practices that take place during the active months of Muharram and Safar and other times of the years where the Ashura commemorations are celebrated and the *Majalis* are organized. Being veiled and coming from South Lebanon facilitated my entrance and presence at sites including mosques, women associations, *Hussayniya*, Holy Shrines, and other forms of religious institutions. My Southern dialect also eased my conversation with getting permission to enter such sites and removed some barriers of being an "outsider".

Because my study is targeting the gender factor, I continuously visited sites where there is a high presence of women who organize the events and are active practitioners. For the purpose of my research, my aim was to understand and study the relationship of the ritual experiences with the factor of agency which is gradually changing or transforming over time. My profile and background information eased the process in evaluating and interpreting the collected data and information as I am familiar with the topic in addition to the cultural heritage. Not only did it have an impact on the way I perceive the experiences, but it also played a vital role in the manner I was interpreted in the Shi'a local sites, being from the part of religious scholars, networks and associations, or other areas in the Shi'a community. Thus, my personal positionality facilitated my research inquiries. On the other hand, regarding my academic or professional positionality, coming from an American University and conducting a research for later publication caused frequent interrogations, especially from religious institutions who inquired further into my purposes and aims of the study.

As for the contextual nature, my positionality recognized intersectional notions of differences including different socio-economical classes, ages, languages,

educational background, and gender. My exposure to different cultures (the Lebanese, Iranian, and Iraqi ones), sites of practices, and being multilingual eased my interaction with different languages (English, different Arabic dialects and French), age groups, in addition to varying educational backgrounds of women and men.

## **F. Thesis Structure**

As previously mentioned, I argue in this thesis that pious Shi'a women have experienced a change in their position in their communities through their active participation in the community and commemoration events. To get a deeper understanding of the practices in their contexts, I first provide an overview on the historical background of the Ashura event where I dissect different involvements that took part in its transition. I then tend to offer thick descriptions of the content of the Ashura rituals in order to perceive and acknowledge what is being engrossed in the event. Accordingly after developing these two sections, I approach the subject with a theoretical framework. Due to the nature of the topic, the findings will be integrated with the description and discussions of the Chapters rather than a separate chapter.

In Chapter Two, I start with establishing a clear understand of the representations of the character of Hussain and his martyrdom, considered by most of the Shi'a community as a turning point in the Shi'a Islam history. Throughout this historical account, I go further into unpacking the Shi'a-Sunni Schism and the emergence of a separate identity, dating back to the Karbala tragedy. The event of Karbala is approached from a historical perspective as well as from a pietistic perspective. The last section of this chapter discusses the changes that were brought

about after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and the impacts and contributions it held on Shi'a Lebanon. I cultivate two fundamental aspects that have taken part in the transformation of pious Shi'a women identity in Lebanon being the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the role of political party *Hezbollah* (Party of God) in Lebanon.

Chapter Three offers a thick description of the Ashura ritual content which is closely examined in the context of al-Dahiye, among local villages in South Lebanon. This section is divided upon two main constituents of the rituals; the rituals related to the linguistic aspects and the performative ones. The former is relevant to all practices that require a rhetoric, which are highly identifiable in mourning councils (*Majalis*) and transcribed on slogans and banners in streets, homes, and institutions. On the other hand, the latter entails all practices that require physical actions including visitation to holy sites, street processions, self-flagellation, and chest-beating. The chapter will dissect each ritual at length.

A theoretical framework will be investigated in Chapter Four. A thick literature review on what empowerment is will be brought forth, following its contextualization in Lebanon and its limitations. It will offer an explanation of the impact of the rebirth of the Shi'a community in Lebanon. This chapter further brings into conversation the pious Shi'a practice of the annual Ashura commemoration through the lens of Social Ritual Theory, mainly Randall Collins's Schematic Diagram of Ritual Theory based of Emile Durkheim's 1915 seminal work. Furthermore, an inquiry into performance and performativity will be discussed alongside.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

#### **A. Introduction**

The martyrdom of Hussain in the Karbala battle, modern-day Iraq, was a defining turning point in the history of Islam that constructed the core of pious Shi'a identity. The occurrences in the tragedy made a visible impression in the Muslim community, and eventually became a determining root of Shia-Sunni separate identity (Aghaie, 2005). The tragedy's symbolism transcends merely the martyrdom of the Prophet's family by a military group that was at their opposition, but further sets an ideological confrontation between a religiously devoted family, who are known as the descendents of Prophet Muhammad or *Ahlul Bayt*, and a powerful military force and political establishment (ElBadri, 2009). The martyrdom of Hussain which fell on the 10th of Muharram (first month in the Islamic Lunar Calendar), came to be known as Ashura, which derives from the Arabic word *A'asher* meaning 10th. This fundamental event in the Islamic history cannot be approached as a secluded event in the history and references of the Shi'a Islamic community. This is to say, Hussain's martyrdom and stance holds a religious awakening instead of a basic historical event, which is why it is found to be still commemorated until the present day.

As this chapter provides a historical background, I will bring forth an account of the Shi'a-Sunni Schism with some focus on legal and political systems, as well as ritual practices. Accordingly, this chapter will also render the Karbala battle from its historical and spiritual angles examined by Shi'a references and historians.

## B. The Shi'a-Sunni Schism

The purpose of this section, the schism between Sunni and Shi'a Islam, is not aimed at highlighting the differences between the two sects, but rather aims at bringing up the main vexed points of the two divisions in terms of its practices and systems.

Islam, being one of the world's most populated religions, is distinguished with inner divisions; the Shiites and the Sunnis. Narrowing down to Lebanon, a population census has long been a very sensitive matter due to the delicate balance among the religious groups and sectarian divisions which could lead to further pressure if statistics displayed a major demographic shift.

Semantically, the term Shi'a means 'followers, associates, or supporters' according to the Merriam Webster dictionary (Merriam Webster, 1828). Although the term previously related to a 'follower' or 'associate' in general, the term shifted in the context of the succession of Hussain's father, Ali Ibn Abi Taleb, who is regarded as the rightful successor to Muhammad by Shi'a Muslims. The term is mentioned several times in different verses of the Qur'an: *As for those who divide their religion and break up into sects (Shi'a), you have no part in them in the least: their affair is with Allah. He will in the end tell them the truth of all that they did* (Qur'an 6:159).

The term was attributed directly to Imam Ali's followers. Hence, the starting point of the Sunni-Shi'a schism initiated with the rise of the succession crisis after Muhammad's death in 632 A.D. The Muslim community faced a struggle on rightfully naming the successor to Muhammad's leadership and the dichotomy launched. The Shi'a believed that the rightful successor was chosen through the process of *Imamate*, which requires lineage within the family line of Muhammad, thus Ali. On the other

hand, the Sunnis believed in *Caliphate*, which was not related to lineage of *Ahlul Bayt* but rather chosen through *Ijma*, or a consensus of the *Ummah*, the community of Muslims among the companions of the Prophet.

Prior to the Karbala battle, religion was not the key that drove struggle or the dichotomy between the Shiites and Sunnis. Rather, the division was chiefly political and a matter of leadership. Nonetheless, the occurrence of Karbala and its aftermath caused greater divergence in political and legal systems as well as in ritual practices. In terms of the political and legal systems, the division as mentioned earlier was through the Caliphate or Imamate belief. Shi'a justify that the devotion to the direct descendants of the Prophet as the *Imams* are rightly-guided figures to be political leader and simultaneously religious guides. On the other hand, religious authority through interpreting Islam in the consensus (*ijma*) or collective judgment of the community was what the Sunnis found more appropriate (Pinault, 1992).

Along legal and political systems, ritual practices also take room. The martyrdom of Hussain is still being commemorated annually in the Shi'a world. These intense commemorations still cause tension and division between Sunnis and Shiites as the Sunnis strongly hold to their beliefs of the first three caliphs, Abu Bakr, Omar, and Uthman, while the Shiites do not consider them the successors of the Prophet (ElBadri, 2009). Further distinction was apparent in the aftermath of the Karbala tragedy. In Shi'a theology, the Karbala battle is regarded as the fundamental event that shaped the whole Shi'a history. Mahmoud Ayoub claims: "The martyrdom of Imam Hussain has been regarded by the Shi'a community as a cosmic event around which the entire history of the world, prior as well as subsequent to it, revolves" (Ayoub, 1978).

## **C. Karbala Tragedy**

Historians and different references have approached the martyrdom of Hussain with different degrees of objectivity. As previously mentioned, Ashura is not considered solely a historical event, especially for the pious Shi'a. In this section, the battle of Karbala will be approached from two perspectives; a historical and a spiritual one.

### ***1. A Historical Perspective***

The focus of examining the historical aspect of the event is not aiming at giving a historical accuracy of the narratives nor retelling the features of the Ashura event. Instead, the aim of touching on its historical angle is to delineate what the Shi'a inspect to be the precise representation of the Karbala event.

Pre-eminent references and historians have passed on various recitals of the Karbala event. However, the traditional narratives of the battle initiates with the Hussain receiving letters from Muslims in Kufa, Southern Iraq, demanding for his forthcoming to assist in expelling the tyrannical rule of the caliph Yazid (ElBadri, 2009). Hussain, residing in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, received the letters with the impulsion to guide the Kufans into rebelling against Yazid (Jafri, 1979). The importance of Kufa is idiosyncratic as when Ali became the forth caliph, there was a transference of the capital from Medina to Kufa, and the city became the residence of individuals who declared partisanship of *Ahlul Bayt*.

Hussain left Mecca with his family members, relying on the support of the Kufans, or the people of the Kufa in Iraq. His entourage were thirty-two horsemen and forty-foot soldiers (Ayoub, 1978). Hussain's arrival to a desert called *Naynawa*, the land of *Ghadiriya*, or commonly known as Karbala, located alongside the Euphrates River in

Southern Iraq was in the beginning of Muharram in 680 A.D. Under the orders of Yazid, the governor of Iraq sent four thousand men to obstruct Hussain and his followers (Ayoub, 1978). Umar Ibn Saad put on duty five hundred cavalry on the route to the river before the massacre. Hence, Hussain and his companions suffered from thirst as it was commanded to prevent *Ahlul Bayt* from reaching the river. Being put under such conditions, Hussain declined to pledge allegiance to Yazid (Ayoub, 1978). As Hussain did not pledge allegiance to Yazid, he soon received orders on the evening of the ninth of Muharram from governor Ibn Saad, conveying a final request to Hussain. Thus, Hussain demanded for an interlude for one day where he gathered his relatives and followers, delivering a speech on the night of Ashura, or the 9th of Muharram saying:

*I give praise to God who has honored us with the Prophethood, has taught us the Qur'an, and favored us with His religion...I know of no worthier companions than mine; may God reward you with all the best of His reward. I think tomorrow our end will come. I ask you all to leave me alone and to go away to safety. I free you from your responsibilities for me, and I do not hold you back. Night will provide you a cover; use it as a steed. You may take my children with you to save their lives*  
(Jafri, 1979).

The loyal followers of Hussain supported him, despite their suffering from thirst. The last night was spent in prayers, reciting the Qur'an, and worshiping God. On the morning of the day of the massacre, the 10th of Muharram or *Ashura*, Umar Ibn Saad mobilized his troops while Hussain did not show any signs of compromise (ElBadri, 2009). Hussain recited:

*O God, you are my only Trust in every calamity; you are my only hope in every hardship; you are the only promise in the anxiety and distress in which hearts become weak and (human) actions becomes slight, in which one is deserted and forsaken by his own friends, and in which the enemies take malicious pleasure and rejoice at his misfortunes. O God, I submit myself to You; my complaint is to You alone against my enemies, and to You alone is my desire and request. Who else other than you can relieve*



*me from grief. You alone are the custodian of every blessing and the  
Master of every excellent and the last resort for every desire  
(Jafri, 1979).*

On the 10th of Muharram, Hussain's family and supporters were martyred during the fighting in the battlefield. Thousands of enemy fighters entourage Hussain and attacked him following his beheadedness. The women, including Zainab and Hussain's relatives, watched the dreadful scene (Ayoub, 1978). The tragedy since then became known as Ashura, the tenth of the month of Muharram when the massacre took place and Hussain was martyred. Following the battle, Hussain and his supporters were beheaded, and were taken as trophies to get rewards from Yazid in Damascus, while the females were taken captive along with Hussain's son, Ali, who did not take part in the battle due to severe illness (ElBadri, 2009). On the way to Damascus, the females passed by the corpses of their male counterparts and supporters, on the grounds of Karbala for three consecutive days. It was then Zainab initiated a lamentation and uttered different discourses:

*O my Muhammad, on you the angels of heaven prayed. Behold Hussein  
naked under the sky, soiled with his blood and dismembered. O my  
Muhammad, your daughters are captives, and your male descendants lying  
dead blown about by the wind  
(Ayoub, 1978).*

## ***2. A Pietistic Perspective***

The Karbala event has a dominant significance to the Shi'a theology. Although historians have provided details of the event, further details and features were elaborated with abundant non-historical ornamentation. This is to say that while Shi'a historians and references provided much details of this history, only pious believers can refine the emotions with a spiritual dimension.

Pious Shi'a consider the Battle of Karbala as a divinely pre-destined occurrence. Since the foreknowledge was predetermined, the meaning of the event becomes different. This is to say, instead of being a battle aimed at power and leadership, it becomes a moral allegory with a higher truth intention (ElBadri, 2009). This can be seen when Hussain confirmed to his loyal supporters that their cause was significant that it was even crucial to die for (Ayoub, 1978). In addition, Hussain's voluntary coming to Kufa and Karbala provides credibility for coming generations of Muhammad's chief teachings in Islam: piety being a key principal instead of leadership and power. Hence, piety became an important factor that revolves around Shi'a teachings and practices.

The consistency of the Ashura commemoration and ritual practices ensured that the Karbala tragedy is not limited to the seventh century but transcended throughout Shi'a history. Ayatollah Khomeini considered the symbolism of Karbala not limited to a period of time, but rather a continuing struggle in the "Eternal Now" (Akhtar, 1996). Khomeini states in one of his lectures during the nights of Muharram:

*From among the factors of integrity of Muslim nation in general and Shi'a school of thought in particular the great and most important factor is incident of Karbala of the grandson of Prophet. It is a fact that the son of Zahra has got the religion insured forever. Brother of Zaynab has got Islam insured with his deed. He has given protection to Islam from all aspects. The uprising and the movement that you [Imam Hussain] initiated and the battle in which he himself was martyred but overthrew Umayyad concepts, the protection of this battle, movement and uprising is necessary. If we want to make our state and its freedom permanent then we have to protect this secret*  
(Khomeini, n.d).

It is notable that the pious Shi'a believe in the essential virtue of freedom for it was what Hussain was fighting for. Karbala was fought for the freedom of all humanity

encompassing poverty, tyranny, exploitation and injustice. Choosing death for a cause is evident in Hussain's speech which was delivered before his arrival to Karbala. He reveals his choice in the following utterances:

*O God, You know that we did not seek, in what we have done, acquisition of power, or ephemeral possessions. Rather, we seek to manifest the truths of Your religion and establish righteousness in Your lands, so that the wronged among Your servants may be vindicated, and that men may abide by the duties laws and Your ordinances*  
(Akhtar, 1996).

#### **D. Islamic Revolution of 1979**

This section highlights the changes that were brought about after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and the impacts it held on Lebanon and the Shi'a world more generally. The 1979 Iranian Revolution played a crucial role in Islam Middle Eastern politics. Khomeini who was the symbolic leader of this revolution, specifically with a religious and political rhetoric, gave political legitimacy to Muslim clergy beyond Iran (El Horr, 2012). Scholars such as Gilles Kepel gives a description of the political Islam and it is evident that in his work *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, he seeks to provide a systemic understanding of the intellectual history of political Islam. Kepel affirms:

*These events [Iranian Revolution] overturned all preconceptions and the common wisdom about Islam. What had previously been viewed as conservative somewhat retrograde religion, whose social and political relevance was declining in the face of progress and modernization, suddenly became the focus of intense interest, hope, and dread. The radical Islamist movement itself, whose very existence had been unknown to all but a very few, was now associated with a revolution whose contours were vague but whose essential nature appeared to be as radical as it was virulently anti-Western*  
(Kepel, 2002).

The conversation on women had been approached with subservient roles as being domestic supervisors and were dismissed from the larger society believing that they were intellectually incompetent in political decision-making (Hosseini, 2002).

Thus, women were downgraded to the private sphere as they did not have the potential to act independently of men. Although the concern of women was highly visible in the classical Shi'i religious text of *Nahjul-Balagha*, women were regularly disregarded and marginalized. With the forthcoming of the Iranian Revolution, prominent figures were re-energizing and questioning this passivity to awaken and draw attention to a gender-dynamic that needed a re-interpretation of what women's role authentically was in different areas. Through this context, the question of women and their roles entered the political discourse of the twentieth century (Afary, 2009; Hosseini, 2002; Afshar, 1998) and it was then that the Karbala narratives were re-interpreted and underwent a significant change involving the reconstruction of Ashura practices and meanings.

During the Shah time and prior to the Iranian Revolution, the symbolism of Karbala was used to mobilize the masses (Afary, 2009; Hosseini, 1998; Afshar, 1998). A constant analogy was clearly portrayed that drew a connection between the Shah and Yazid to illustrate the struggle between the Iranians and their oppressor. Iranian scholars including Ali Shariati and Morteza Motahhari were often questioning the passivity of women as being mere mourners and dismissed it as a wrong practice (Shariati, 2001). Shariati habitually criticized Muslim women who uncritically accepted their traditional role, in addition to criticizing Westernized women that became 'puppets of Western agenda' (Shariati, 2001). In his famous work *Fatima is Fatima*, he initiates with the following words:

*It is 1971, just the beginning of the end of the Pahlavi regime and the monarchial system in Iran. The words of Ali Shariati, the great teacher, the man who redefines Islam as it has been and not as it has become, ring out at the Husayniyyeh Ershad on the night which marks the anniversary of the birth of the daughter of the Prophet of Islam - Fatima. He cries out the question which is upon all women's lips, "Who am I?" "Am I a mother?", "A wife?", "A daughter?", "A friend?", "A biologist?", "A chemist?", "A doctor, nurse, mid-wife, laborer, writer, human being...?" "Who am I?" It is the very*

*first time that an Iranian woman is confronted with this question. She knows, feels, senses the question with her innermost being but she has never had it expressed for her before. Once expressed, the question, of necessity, begs for an answer which is a genuine and authentic part of that person*  
(Shariati, 1971).

It is identifiable that the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution outreached many Muslim women across the Middle East who were convinced with anti-Western points of views in terms of gender dynamics. The Ashura narratives, which had centrality around the character of Zainab, were re-interpreted, mainly approached with the factor of agency, and were consequently provided as an alternative to the Western ideals of women regarding the genuine roles of women in their respective Muslim communities (Afshar, 1982; Hosseini, 1999). It is evident that after the Iranian Revolution, this Islamic Regime was utilizing the Ashura narratives to influence the roles of social and political women behavior (Chelkowski, 2005; Hosseini, 1999). This led to re-energizing the character of Zainab as it was instrumental in constructing new female identities through the same Ashura narratives that were previously approached traditionally, but with a re-interpretation and a narrower focus from the agency angle. Hence, the 'Zaynabic way', as Milani terms it, became the ideal for all pious Shi'a women beyond Iran (Milani, 1992).

### ***1. Determined Lebanon***

Lebanon underwent a similar situation as the one of Iran. Ashura commemorations in Lebanon altered drastically in recent years, from rituals oriented toward mourning to one that manifestly calls attention to social activism (Hamdar 2009; Norton 2007; Deeb 2006). Ashura has become crucially 'modernized' in Lebanon, which affected the shift in the gendered Karbala understandings (Deeb, 2006). Besides

the marginalization of the position of the Shi'a in different milieus, which was a motivating factor, an important point that is involved in the modernizing process was an emphasis on religious reform, mostly focused on the Ashura commemoration, in addition to the connection between the Ashura history and a contemporary activist discourse. This includes several significant events that took place in Lebanon including the 2006 Israeli war, the 1978 disappearance of Musa al-Sadr, and the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran (Norton 2007; Deeb 2005). Alongside these fundamental occurrences, much opposition to traditional forms of Ashura commemorations emerged among the Shi'a. As the Shi'a have always been approached with a stereotype of 'backwardness', an initiative was taken to re-define gender roles and modernity in the contemporary world (Norton, 2007; Deeb, 2005). Hence, women became more active and engaged within their communities to make their voices heard and seek pious ways of being 'modern' (Deeb, 2006).

As for the political angle, with the sectarian civil war that took place in 1975, the Iranian Revolution succeeded in establishing the political party of *Hezbollah*, or the Party of God, in Lebanon to intensify the resistance against Israel and Western domination (El Horr, 2012). The political party was founded in 1985 following the Iranian Revolution and was receiving funds from Iran. After Iran's revolutionary victory, academics closely examined the concept of political Islam. Moghadam states:

*The revolutionary zeal of what Khomeini called the Mustazifin, or downtrodden, helped produce stubborn images of Shiite fanaticism—images that were fortified by venomous anti-Western rhetoric, and at times underscored by acts of defiance and violence against the West such as the seizure of the US embassy in Iran on 4 November 1979. These events, coupled with images of angry Muslim mobs transmitted by Western television channels on an almost daily basis, contributed to a widespread perception in the West that the new tone emanating from Iran was openly hostile to them*  
(Moghadam, 2012).

Following 1979, Middle Eastern political spectators realized the power of an Islamic political, social, and cultural identity that did not go hand in hand with the Western world's *raison d'être* (El Horr, 2012). Khomeini accordingly gave a crucial role for political Shi'ism in the region, which was the driving factor to the emergence of two leading Shiite political movements in Lebanon, Amal and Hezbollah (Norton, 1987). It is important to trace back the establishment of the political parties as it is notable that much of the Ashura rituals and event organization has sponsorship from either or political parties. This is recognized in different emplacements as Amal sustains Nabatiye and the city of Tyre, among other rural villages of Southern Lebanon and the Biqaa valley. However, in this study, the Biqaa valley is not emphasized as one of the limitations of the data collection was approaching the intersectionality notions of this area. On the other hand, Hezbollah is omnipresent and dominant in Beirut's Southern Suburbs, al-Dahiye. This gives evidence that Ashura is not merely a religious remembrance, but further developed into a political practice. Amal supporters attended Ashura commemorations in their respective communities to strengthen their political party. Hezbollah boycotted attending the Ashura commemoration in Nabatiye in 2003, and it was further noticed that *al-Manar* television channel, affiliated with Hezbollah, were not covering the Amal commemorations, specifically the *Tatbir* ritual, where there exists inquiries depending on what their respective *Marjaiyah*, religious reference, passes as a religious law. Hezbollah majorly follows Iran, hence the *Marjaiyah* of Khamenei does not approve of the *Tatbir* ritual, while Amal, following the *Marjaiyah* of Sistani, permits. Hence, the practicing of the rituals is also a matter of religious-political affiliation.

It was distinguished that many factors have had an impact on Lebanon's pious Shi'a identity transformation. Specifically, Ashura rituals in Lebanon encountered a transformation at the end of the 1991 Lebanese civil war, marking a change from a commemoration that was focusing on mourning to one that was focused on Shi'ite social activism (Deeb, 2005; Norton, 2007). Ashura has shifted as a whole, starting from its practices, to the content of the speeches and lectures, to the ideology.

Shiite scholars continuously deliver lectures, speeches and sermons particularly in the month of Muharram, and on the first ten days of the month (Norton, 2005). Figures such as Muhammed Mahdi Shams al-Din, former President of the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council, frequently gave speeches that are aimed at the mutual understanding between the various religious sects in Lebanon, having a communal sense and social awakening through religious events, usually gender-neutral. His approach was more focused on understand the ethical dimension of sacrifice. Thus, the dimensions of Ashura have changed into mainly Islamic activism with the emergence of Shi'a movements, mainly Hezbollah. (Deeb, 2005; Norton, 2005). Norton asserts, "In Lebanon contemporary Ashura rituals, however, exemplify, and indeed encourage, a heightened and widespread sense of politicization" (Norton, 2007). He further claims that through Ashura commemorations, Shi'a politicians put much effort to control people's sentiments for the benefit of their political group (Norton, 2007).

Evidently, two fundamental aspects have taken part in the transformation of the interpretation of gender social roles. Initially, the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and succeeding it, the establishment of the Hezbollah party in Lebanon. The consistency of Hassan Nasrallah's speeches, the Secretary General of Hezbollah, which started in the 90's until the present time, specifically on the first ten days of Muharram, focuses



majorly on unpacking the authentic meaning of Ashura with reference to gender social roles, in addition to a political approach where he analyzes regional politics and Israel and United States affairs and policies in the Middle East (Norton, 2007).

### CHAPTER III

## THICK DESCRIPTION OF ASHURA RITUAL CONTENT

*Walking down the streets of al-Dahiye, various public spaces, signs, and discourses offered more than speech. August 2019, a month prior to Muharram was getting ready to take part in the event. It was notable in its black dressing, lamentation across streets, and tent set-ups in the streets that were offering services related to Ashura. All the streets seemed to be identical in the manner of the commemoration. Women, men, youths, all hand in hand, organizing the different set-ups. What was this organization of the commemoration all about? Was it only something habitually done every year, with the same routines, structures and functions? I felt it was more than that the moment I cruised the streets, for the first time ever. More and more inquiries were stimulated in my head as I was observing a variety of practices.*

*A man in his 50s, standing behind his cart with lamentation audios loudly playing on a stereo. He was selling eulogies, poetry books, posters, stickers, flags, among other items, all of which having Ashura imagery, slogans and texts in bold, mainly of the colors red, black, and green. As I understood from him, they were the colors that symbolized sacrifice, mourning and the sacred color of Islam.*

*A few meters across the street, a group of ladies in their late 40s were setting up tents, each organized for some specific purpose. As I came near, I showed interest to know more about what they were doing, as it was a practice done every year in the same place. A conversation ensued between myself and the ladies to know more about the*

*tasks they were doing, the purposes behind them, and how they could relate them to their roles in their community.*

*As I was further interested in the different communities that were commemorating the event of Ashura, I did not want to limit my visits merely to my local town, al-Dahiye. I visited large cities in the South that took part in the event. Heading South to Nabatiye and Tyre, Muharram symbolism was omnipresent. Prior to Muharram, shops were getting ready to start displaying clothes, flags, and other items that would be purchased during Ashura. The famous square in Nabatiye was being emptied and prepared for the Ashura play to be acted and for self-flagellation, where it is famous in attracting thousands of people from across Lebanon annually. In Tyre and its neighboring villages, it was normal to find women knocking at doors, usually sent from the women associations, raising awareness of the event and selling items with Ashura slogans. I asked a few women I encountered on the way about their circulation and they explained that they came from The Martyr's Association (Mua'sasit al-Shahid), where they would sell Ashura narratives to expose people to the cause of Hussain, in addition for the symbolism to be highly visible in every quarter, every house, every balcony- ultimately, every private and public space. As it was an act of fundraising as well, no fixed price was put on the item; whatever the purchaser would like to offer would be accepted, as it would be returned to the Association for the expenses of organizing other events.*

*Something about the event had a common denominator. Whether it was taking place in al-Dahiye or in the South, it was a matter that needed closer examination of its structure and other angles.*

## **A. Introduction**

I began this chapter with this narrative to show different encounters of ritual-related discourse as I was conducting fieldwork. I aim to show in this section how through the change in the interpretation of the practices and role of women, women became empowered through the roles they held that reoriented the meaning of Ashura and its practices which consequently gave them an empowered stance. As Deeb asserts when speaking of the ideal modern woman, it could be recognized through the representation of three elements including showing knowledge and practice of authenticated Islam, being committed to self-improvement, and being active in the public life for the betterment of the community (Deeb, 2006).

The commemoration of the battle of Karbala is the most important symbolic event for the practicing Shi'a Muslims. The majority of the Shi'a rituals are derived from the turning point of Ashura. However, the Ashura ritual-related events underwent an evolution from 680 AD to contemporary time. This chapter will explore in depth a thick description of the content of the rituals that entail many activities and practices that are categorized into two parts; a linguistic approach, and a performative one. The former includes the linguistic constituents of the rituals such as the re-enactments of historical narratives through poetry, dirge singing and chanting, in addition to lamentation while the latter encompasses performative elements such as visitation to holy sites, self-flagellation, chest-beating, black-wear, and public mourning processions/marches in the streets. These rituals are performed annually among different Shi'a communities worldwide during the months of Muharram and Safar and play an important role in reinforcing Shi'a distinct identity as well as collective memory.

## **B. Linguistic Constituent of Rituals**

This section sorts out the verbal or the linguistic gradient of the ritual content. I will offer a description at length of three sides of the linguistic rituals including the mourning ritual or council which encompass the narrative scripts, poetical representations, dirge singing and chanting, in addition to slogan set ups and banners that brings forth linguistic vitality in different contexts.

### ***1. Mourning Councils***

When invoking the term *majlis* or plural *majalis*, I refer to a meeting or a gathering where the Ashura narratives are recited and a lecture is given on a designated topic related to the practice. Attending different *majalis*, pious Shi'a participants gather to read and listen to *ta'zieh* (narratives) to mourn the martyrdom and cause of Hussain. These mourning councils are usually done in a *hussayniyah* or a congregational memorial hall, or also in salons or home gatherings. When performed in memorial halls, the councils are always gender-segregated, having a curtain that separates the room. At other times, the setting allowed for men to sit in the front rows, while women filled the back ones. However, when the mourning councils are practiced in home gatherings, they are respectively homogenous in terms of gender where it is an absolute single-sex gathering. The Karbala narratives are recited by a *radoud/kari'e* or a reciter, and are uniform in most Shi'a historical books and references. Hence, the reciters are found intensely occupied on the first ten days of Muharram, moving from home gathering to memorial halls with their stereos and narrative reference books.

The narratives are read following the chronological order of the events that happened on the Karbala battle field. Each day is dedicated to one of Hussain's

companions that took place in the Karbala battle to explore in details the characteristics of that figure, as it is essential to have a deep understanding of who that person is instead of merely Hussain's supporter. The last night is the most intense night which ends with the recitation of how Hussain and his supporters spent the last night in repentance and determination to fight for a cause. On the 10th day of Muharram or *Ashura*, the recitals of Hussain's martyrdom and the beheading of Hussain is omnipresent in streets, congregational memorial halls, and homes, as it is the climax of the Karbala tragedy and the last occurrence on the battle field.

*Niyaha* or rhythmic lamentation poetry is habitually read as an opening of the gathering or as a closing after the Karbala narrative has been recited. Poetical lines are reread from collected works of different scholars that express renewing the allegiance to Hussain and a symbol of loyalty and devotion, and contribute to bringing the pious Shi'a together with a common feeling of belongingness. Poetry, as one of the linguistic approaches to the rituals, is an effective method used in Ashura rituals because of its direct impact on the participants. Using the Arabic language in poetry shows high eloquence since they come from the depth of history and are effective in taking the listeners from the present to the original time of the Karbala battle. This holds a firm connection between the poetry and the participants and consequently builds an emotional impact on the audience which results in more interaction with the rituals. Moreover, using the Arabic language in poetry and *Ta'zieh* shows a strong ethno-linguistic vitality where the Shi'a as a group are collectively able to maintain and protect their existence throughout time as a collective entity using the distinctive identity and language of the original past time.

*On the night before the 10th of Muharram, the eve of Ashura, the largest gathering was held in one of the biggest assembly location in a public square in al-Dahiye. Lines and slogans were uttered repeatedly after the reciter and the attendees began chanting in lament with the words of "Ya Hussain", "Ya Zainab", "Ya Abbass", along other members of the Prophet's household. The reciter in the assembly initiated with the following poetical lines in Arabic. He reads the famous lines of Sayeda Zainab, sister of Hussain, on the eve of Ashura simultaneously with the attendees:*

*[Ya Layl, Tawel Sa'atak]  
O night, lengthen your hours. O night, carry your sighs  
When I farewell to my protectors, my enemies will take over my affairs  
O night, prolong the farewell, however long you may be, I will remain awake with you  
O night have mercy on my heart. Hussain is only with me on this night  
(Reciter A.S)*

It is common that in all the mourning council gatherings, *ta'zieh* is recited, which places emphasis on reading the Karbala scripts and poetry, while the second part of the gathering contains a lecture on a designated topic, usually on religious or social-oriented matters. The narratives are centered on a unified subject matter, the Karbala tragedy, while the content of the lectures that are delivered after the narratives depend on the setting they are occurring in. This is to say, when the attendees are solely women, the lectures are oriented fundamentally on the legacy of Zainab, and include some references to Fatima (mother of Hussain), and daughters of Hussain (Ruqaya and Sukaina) to point at the role of an ideal women in society. Nonetheless, when there is the presence of both sexes, although segregated in the setting, the lectures are usually gender-neutral, and rather have a direction on communal awariness and social/religious duties.

*After reciting a Majlis on the 7th night of Muharram in a memorial hall in al-Dahiye, I opened a conversation with the reciter regarding the speech he had just delivered. A conversation ensued in Arabic:*

*Me: Sayed, as today's designated topic was related to the family as an institution and its significance in the wellbeing and maintenance of the Islamic society as you mentioned, on what basis do you choose your topics of discussion?*

*Reciter A.S: As you might know, each night is dedicated to an event that happened in Karbala. We [radoud] tend to approach topics that raise awareness of the cause of Hussain, which is beyond just crying and weeping for his loss. We want to follow his example, his morality, and his ideals of a well-structures society and community. Doing so, these lessons discuss Islamic duties that people might take for granted.*

*Me: How does the topic of family have an impact?*

*Reciter A.S: For the Muslims, the role of the mother and father in keeping the family united has lots of implications and purposes. This is learnt from the legacy of Zainab. She played the role of a mother, sister, and a warrior in protect and maintaining the unity and legacy of the Prophet's household after the death of her brother. Women today should idealize her role, especially in our contemporary context of most Shi'a households who have lost a brother, father, or uncle as martyrs.*

As previously mentioned, in home gatherings, same-sex participants are found, as segregation of the sexes is required for religious purposes. Hence, in women gatherings at home, the content of the lectures is oriented towards the revised role of the characters of Zainab and Fatima, while in mixed-sex gatherings, such as on the 10th of



Muharram procession in the streets, known figures deliver lectures and speeches after the rituals have been practiced, usually neutral of gender or sex, but instead have a communal sense and awareness for the Shi'a collective identity through using references to occurrences and companions of Hussain in Karbala.



Photograph 1: A mourning council gathering in a *Hussayniya* in al-Dahiye (Muharram, 2019).

Hospitality is another important component that takes place in the mourning rituals beside recitations and lectures. Women collaboratively work in setting up the *diyafa* or providing hospitality as a custom usually after the *majlis* is over. Food and water are offered to people as a symbol of offering good deeds for the love of Hussain and a remembrance to when the Umayyad army blocked Hussain's family's way in reaching the river to drink water in Karbala. The water bottles and food packaging have texts, names, slogans and quotes imprinted on them that are lessons from the cause of Hussain that one can practice in their daily lives or quotes said by inspirational figures that teach about the characteristics of Hussain and his companions as presented in Photograph 2 and 3 below with my encounter with suppliers and organizers that contributed in the event.

*An open conversation with one of the prominent bakeries in al-Dahiye organizes goods annually during Muharram and discussed his initiative during this time of year:*

*Me: How are your transmitting the message through texts and symbolism and how are you reaching out to people to teach them about the cause through this means, including the ones who are not attending the Majalis?*

*Bakery Owner: We, as a bakery, distribute annually to people organizing Majalis either at universities, schools, associations, homes, and streets, with names of Ahlul Bayt imprinted on them to bring up names that are often not heard of in the Majalis.*

*Hussain's household and cause should be revitalized through different means. In our case, putting quotes on water bottles and food packaging is a creative way of reaching out to different people, even to the ones who are not Shi'a. We found this to be a creative initiative as the message is spreading even to the ones who cannot attend the Majalis. Hussain is for all of humanity and not only for the Shi'a. So people who are not Shi'a and do not attend Majalis could have the chance to learn from Hussain's cause just from being exposed to his name, quotes, and life-lessons.*



Photograph 2: Bakery in al-Dahiye with Ashura slogans/texts for a University event for Ashura Commemoration Awareness (Muharram, 2019).



Photograph 3: Water distribution with Hussain's cause expressing Hussain's famous words and teachings in English. (Muharram, 2019).

## ***2. Slogan and Banners***

Slogans and banners are the most notable symbolism that can be noted before the start of Muharram. Roads, clothing, houses, cars, balconies and memorial halls quickly change in appearance a few weeks prior to the start of the month of Muharram. Black material is hung on different building entrances, billboards hold slogans and texts of religious phrases honoring martyrs who followed Hussain's cause. Most popularly, the roads of Shi'a designated sites such as al-Dahiye and different villages in the South portray a major exhibition for diverse slogans with quotations. Not only can religious quotations be identified, but furthermore, the roads become a site of concurrence of the political, economic, and social issues.



Photograph 4: Shop in al-Nabatiye, South Lebanon, selling banners and flags with Ashura imagery and slogans (Muharram, 2019).

During the months of Muharram and Safar precisely, entrepreneurs reside on roadside stands and display some Ashura-related products including tapes and books with narratives and poetry, in addition to CDs of mourning lamentations, banners, and posters. Different stands have different items. Others are found to be selling clothing such as T-shirts and caps with Ashura symbols and slogans. As for the banners, they are

found draped on buildings, street signs, shops, and cars. The banners hold different quotations, usually using religious phrases with an awakening for the cause. Some banners I have encountered through my tour proclaimed, "*Everyone is calling for Hussain*", "*Everyday is Ashura and every land is Karbala*", and "*Crying for Hussain is a victory of the oppressed over the oppressor*".



Photography 5: Procession on the 10th day of Muharram in al-Dahiye with women in full-black wear and head banner proclaiming "*Ya Zainab*" (Muharram, 2019).

### **C. Performative Constituent of Rituals**

"The emotional intensity of the mourning rituals and ceremonies continues to distill complex, conflicting and sometimes intangible components of the Karbala into something touchable, tasteable, visible and audible for the mourners" (Bard, 2010).

This section sorts out the performative or the non-verbal gradient of the ritual content. I will be emphasizing some acts that are practiced throughout the Ashura commemoration that are visible and most common among the pious Lebanese Shi'a. These performative behaviors include full-black wear, visitation to holy sites and

shrines of *Ahlul Bayt* and martyrs, in addition to street processions, self-flagellation, and chest-beating.

### ***1. Visitation to Holy Sites***

Pilgrimage to the Holy Shrines of the Shi'a Imams during occasions to renew vows of devotion to the Shi'a *Imams* is of great significance to the pious Shi'a Muslims, which can take place in Muharram or on other special occasions throughout the course of the year. Numerous Lebanese Shi'a pay several visits every year to the holy shrines of *Ahlul Bayt* where some of their visitations are ordinary ones that can be done at any time of the year apart from Ashura, including the month of *Rajab* and *Shaaban*, *Laylat Al-Qadr* toward the end of *Ramadan*, on the two *Eids*, and on the day of *Arafat*. The visitations are done in Iraq, where the shrines of Hussain and his brother Abbass are found, along some of Hussain's descendants. In addition, other visitations are done in Mashhad, Iran, where one of Hussain's descendant is buried. Equally important, some pay trips to Syria, where the shrine of Sayeda Zainab, sister of Hussain, is found. During Muharram and Safar, the visitations to these places are on the rise. Intensely, people head to Karbala, Iraq. Nonetheless, the ones who cannot make it to Iraq visit the other Holy Sites to convey servitude to Hussain and his descendants.

As these sites welcome visitors during any occasion of the year, there are important occasions where gatherings in the Holy Shrines are found most popular. Among these are the Ashura and *Al-Arb'ain* visitations where they receive wide participation from pious Shi'a around the world, notably a large number of Lebanese Shi'a. Travel agencies and religious groups from Lebanon organize these trips to head to

the visitations in collective walks as a sign of condolence and renewal of vows of loyalty and devotion.

*During my visitation from Lebanon to Iraq prior to Muharram in a few weeks, I observed how preparations for the visitations took place, both locally and in Iraq. I discussed the organization of the collective journeys with a travel agency manager I have travelled with. Our conversation flowed as the following:*

*Me: Regarding the visitation to the shrines in Iraq, why do people take part in the pilgrimage collectively instead of doing the practice individually.*

*Travel Agency Manager: Although it is costly to go on a pilgrimage as a group than going individually, year after year, I only realize that people prefer going on this journey with a group. It is not a matter of getting lost, or having adequate food and shelter. It is beyond that.*

*Me: How would practicing the rituals differ if one was to do it on his own. I realize that many people, on other occasions of the year apart from Ashura and Al-Arba'in go on their own instead of being with a group.*

*Travel Agency Manager: That is true. The climax of our work is during these two months, Muharram and Safar. It is not because of the services that include food and shelter. During these times, on the way to Karbala, free food, shelter and services are offered. People do not worry about those. What they are concerned about is practicing*

*the rituals collectively which has an impact on the emotional arousal that does not equally come from doing it individually. These groups or the 'Mawkab walk to Karbala' walk collectively, enter the shrines and salute the Imams as a group, and practice all the Adab al-Ziyara simultaneously, which leaves a huge mark to their memory and is not the same if it was to be done individually.*

The significant walk of *Al-Arba'in*, or the Visitation of the Fortieth Day, falls annually on the 20th day of the month of Safar where pious Shi'a from around the world gather in Al-Najaf, Iraq, starting at the holy shrine of Ali, father of Hussain, and then walk collectively to the city of Karbala, to the shrine of Hussain, which is a 76 kilometer walk. *Al-Arba'in* refers to the number forty in Arabic, which marks the 40th day after the martyrdom of Hussain. It is of great importance, as the 10th of Muharram, since it was the day when the head of Hussain was brought back from Damascus with his sister Zainab to be buried along with his body.

This on-foot pilgrimage to Hussain's shrine encompasses a large Lebanese Shi'a population from different cities in Lebanon along other Shi'a Muslim from around the world. However, this collective walk usually includes *Mawakib* or groups of people who come from different countries to visit the shrines. The *Mawakib* are sometimes homogeneous in terms of nationalities where they walk, lament and chant in their native language, receive guidance for the pilgrimage or visitation in their native language. However, during the walk toward Karbala, everyone is walking together and united on the same roads, and can take part in the ritual practicing of the other *Mawakib*. A remarkable feature of this walk is that a sense of social solidarity stems out where pious Shi'a from around the world provide all needed necessities for the millions of pilgrims



coming from around the world during their journey to Karbala city. This walking ritual has evolved and the Lebanese Shi'a have contributed to this ritual by establishing their own permanent tents on the road to Karbala where they offer free shelter, food, water, among other necessities while walkers are on their journey to the shrines.

*Moudif Thar Allah is one of the networks that was established in Kfarkila, South Lebanon by a small community of Shi'a women and men and has expanded to have a large number of women and men helping in providing necessities to the visitors. As I visited the network in the South, I questioned this initiative and the purpose of the network.*

*One of the members of this network asserts: This establishment was an initiative that I came up with among a group of friends because we wanted to offer something that represented us as a Lebanese Shi'a community. We wanted something distinct from the other stands provided by the Iraqis where the Lebanese could find belongingness once they arrived to our stand. Other than being physically present in Iraq on the road of al-Najaf to Karbala, we have assemblies in South Lebanon where we offer assistance and regular meetings where we discuss how we can enhance this community and network and help pay for people who cannot afford to go on the pilgrimage through fundraising.*



Photograph 6: *Moudif Thar Allah* in Najaf, Iraq offering pilgrims necessities on the way to Karbala (Safar, 2019).

The visitation of Hussain's shrine in Iraq is a fundamental ritual that is practiced annually to commemorate the anniversary of this day for the Lebanese Shi'a community and Shi'a Muslim world. The rituals that are practiced on the occasion of *Al-Arb'ain* are associated with the rituals that took place during the return of Hussain's family from Damascus to Karbala. Sayid Ibn Tawoos contends:

*When Hussein's women and children returned from Sham and reached Iraq, they asked their guide to take them to Karbala. When they reached the spot where their Imam was killed, they found there Jabir bin Abdullah Al-Ansari and other Hashemites who had come to the place to visit the tomb of Al-Hussein. They all gathered to mourn the martyrdom of their Imam with crying and latm, and started to hold funerals, attracting other people who came to them dressing in black which lasted for few days*  
(Ibn Tawoos, 1992).



Photograph 7: Women Visitation or *Ziyara* to Imam Ali's holy shrine in Al-Najaf, Iraq; the starting point of *al-Arba'in* walk. (Safar, 2019)

Many Shi'a sources of *Hadith* declare the importance of Ashura and *Al-Arba'in* visitation. *Hadiths* in Shi'a references endorse pious Shi'a Muslims visits the shrine of Hussain specifically on these two occasions. A famous *Hadith* states that "Whoever visited the shrine of Al-Hussein and stayed over, he would be like one of his martyrs" (Al-Qomi, 2012). Noteworthy Shi'a scholars including Sheikh Al-Kulayni and Sheikh Al-Tusi dedicated several chapters in their works on the methodology of carrying out these visitations. Sheikh Jaafar bin Quluweh Al- Qomi's famous work *Kamil Al-Ziyarat* describes the methodology of the visitation of the shrine of Hussain, precisely during Ashura. The content of the rituals of Ashura visitation in Karbala includes practices such as standing at the shrine or the tomb and reciting greetings. This is a practice that all Shi'a references agree on since martyrs are believed to be alive in God's kingdom. Verses in the Holy Qur'an also offer an understanding of the aliveness: Do not think of those who are slain in God's way as dead, Nay, they live, finding their sustenance in the Presence of their Lord (Qur'an, 3:169-70).

*It was my third time visiting the shrines when I learned the Adab al-Ziyara or the certain etiquette of the visitation.*

*The travel agency manager I have travelled with for the visitation was giving us all the teachings and customs, referring to Al-Qomi's Kamil al-Ziyarat. He explained that we, as shrine visitors, should address the Imam as if he is an active listener to our greetings. Moreover, Adab al-Ziyara, or the customs of the visitation entails individuals entering the shrine with clean hygiene of both their bodies and clothing. We had to make sure to always have clean clothing on before entering the shrine. As we reached the shrine of Hussain, we had to take permission before entering the shrine. He explained that it was a custom that shows humbleness and respect for the Imam and his shrine, as if we were to enter someone's house, entering in our best forms. The permission was to be taken from Allah (God), the Prophet, and the Imam we are visiting by reading a special request that is found on a big board next to the entering gates. After we read the permission statement at the gates of the shrine, we put much effort to reach the tomb as it is always crowded and not all are able to stand in front of the tomb and touch it. Touching the tomb was only an act of getting the blessings. The ones who could not reach it due to the crowd could stay at distance and pray, recite some verses of the Qur'an, or repent.*

The act of visiting the shrines during these two occasions have been stressed on as important dates in accordance to many Shi'a references. Nonetheless, other references propose alternate methods to do the visitation if one could not be physically present at the shrines. One can practice the visitation rituals from the roof of their house

or any other location that is high (Al-Qomi, 2012). This practice is not less than being physically present at the shrines as it permits Shi'a, despite their location or circumstances, practice the rituals, even when the distance is unreachable. This shows the importance of a collaborative practicing of a memory that is still present among the pious Shi'a until the present day, regardless of place. From different parts of the world, even if one cannot be physically at the shrine, practicing the ritual is always reinforced.

## **2. Street Processions**

*Processions and marches are popular ritual practices that Lebanese Shi'a practice like the rest of the Shi'a world. The 10th of Muharram march (done locally in Shi'a communities) and Al-Arba'in walk (in Iraq) are two chief walks marked by the history of the Shi'a and continue to be practiced until the present day. Mourning processions are performed in main Lebanese Shi'a cities that hold enough space for all Shi'a participants to actively be present in the marches collectively. The two main street processions are held on two important occasions in Muharram and Safar. The first one being on the 10th of Muharram. On this day, any Lebanese Shi'a from anywhere around Lebanon can join their local processions to parade the streets, raise banners and slogans, and carry models that symbolize the martyrdom of Hussain. Men and women both take part of these marches, however on segregated parts of the streets, separating the male participants and the female ones for conservative reasons.*

*On the 10th of Muharram in al-Dahiye, groups of people who are taking part in the marches hold models that are wrapped in black cloths that portray mourning, in addition to green material which represents the color of virtue and the turbans of Ahlul Bayt. Throughout the marches, banners and flags are held up while the participants are*

*chanting and reciting laments repeatedly after chanters who recite over loudspeakers. The huge banners and black flags dominate religious phrases. Additionally, youths are gathered in distinct groups in terms of sex, playing drums and tambourines with different rhythms according to their leading chanter. These youths belong to a religious scout, al-Mahdi Scout or Kashafat Imam al-Mahdi being the dominant scout for the Shi'a communities across Lebanon. This religious Shiite scout takes part in Ashura marches annually, having the girl youths on one side of the street repeating lines where they show devotedness to Zainab, while the boy youths on the other side, playing the drums, marching, and chanting with the names of the male companions of Hussain. After the participants have finished the march, they reach a meeting place where they all gather to listen to religious authorities and political figures delivering speeches that contain religious, social, and political stimulus.*



Photograph 8: Largest gathering point on the eve of Ashura for a *Majlis* in al-Dahiye (Muharram 2019).

*Women in these marches hold up slogans that are related to a conservative Shi'a Islamic ideology. These slogans have quotations where women pledge their allegiance to their ideal model Zainab. They are dressed in full black chadors, or long, loose cloaks that are worn over their garments with head banners that affirm "Labaiki ya Zainab", pronouncing their devotion, commitment, and fidelity to Zainab as being followers of piety.*



Photograph 9: Group of pious Shi'a women wearing *chadors* and head banners in a procession with slogans proclaiming "Labaiki ya Zainab" in al-Dahiye (Muharram, 2019).

*On the other side of the streets, men are also in full black uniformed attires, with slogans printed on their finery with "Ya Hussain", "Ya Abbas", "Ya Ali", "Ya Abal Fadl" on them, referring to Hussain's family members and companions who were loyal on the day of Karbala and took place in the battle of Karbala for Hussain's victory.*

### **3. Self-Flagellation**

*Whenever I intended to open discussions regarding the issue of self-flagellation, I would, most of the time, encounter controversial debates. The issue of self-flagellation is always the first issue to be pinpointed when the topic of Ashura is brought up. Throughout the history of the Shi'a, self-flagellation has always been a matter that is seen as hostile towards Shi'a, from different religions and sects. Even within the Shi'a sect, some view this ritual practice as offensive or an 'anathema' (Ende, 1978), while others perceive this practice as a self-expression of feeling the pain inflicted on Hussain in Karbala.*

*The practice of self-flagellation is not identifiable in al-Dahiye as much as it is famous to be practiced in al-Nabatiye. The ritual is habitually performed in group ceremonial places instead of being done privately or individually. It is practiced to a rhythmic beat of drums while the participants strike chains or bladed tools on themselves, usually the chest, forehead or back. Once there is blood flowing from the lacerations, the practitioners wrap their heads with a white cloth and wear it throughout the Ashura procession. This ritual is not popular in al-Dahiye since it is rejected among most of the Lebanese Shi'a who follow the fatwa or legal pronouncement of Sayed Khamenei. When I asked some practitioners in al-Dahiye about self-flagellation, they expressed to me that in this area, they followed the Fatwa of Sayed Khamenei who pronounces this act of being unjustifiable and prohibits it. Hence, it is not observable in this area. Nonetheless, it is omnipresent and well-known in al-Nabatiye, where the Shi'a in that area follow the Fatwa of Sayed Sistani and believe it to be a rightful act of sacrifice and is permitted. Women, men, and their children are found to be striking their foreheads with a blade.*



*The different discourses I have encountered showed that this ritual still causes controversies among the Lebanese Shi'a Muslims and is not among the highly practiced rituals in Lebanese cities. Nonetheless, al-Nabatiye became the prominent city where this ritual is attributed to for its attraction of many people who go there for this practice annually.*

#### **4. Chest-Beating**

*In contrast to self-flagellation as it causes less harm, chest-beating or Latm is a widely practiced ritual where the practitioners hit on their chests using only the hands. It does not require much force or harm to the body. This ritual is comprised of groups of women and men who hit on their chests collaboratively on the beat of the reciter who is reciting a lamentation. The intensity of the beating varies between the groups and the rhythm they are following. This practice is much less debatable than the ritual of self-flagellation as it is less physically exhaustive. Like self-flagellation though, it is practiced in a group setting instead of individually. A specific rhythm is done while the latm is being performed, usually resolved on the chanting of a lamentation poem.*

#### **D. Discussion**

The given accounts of the Ashura rituals practiced among Lebanese Shi'a communities focus on popular and main rituals. The attempt of the section above was to recount the different manifestation of rituals practiced in Lebanon in different sites, in addition to beyond the Lebanese borders where Lebanese Shi'a are collectively practicing the rituals. However, there still exists some differences in the way the rituals are practiced based on different ethnic groups, religious and political affiliations

(*Marja'iyya* and *Hezib*), social groups and communities, as well as within the same communities themselves.

In women gatherings, more politicized and modernized lectures are delivered after the Karbala narratives have been read, which hinge on the female figures of Fatima and Zainab, Hussain's mother and sister. The narratives stress on Fatima's character as being prominent since she is the driving force behind Zainab's agency in Karbala (Aghaie, 2005). Although Fatima did not take part in Karbala due to her death, she is always referred to as a prime example for the importance of female model of piety in Shi'a Islam due to her piousness and mourning for her family that 'will continue until the Judgment Day' (Shariati, 2001; Momen, 1987). Fatima's intellectual legacy is omnipresent throughout different narratives such as in Shariati's lectures and speeches, who often refers to her. In Shariati's famous *Fatima is Fatima*, he focuses on the 'deep and revolutionary influence Fatima's memory evokes in breadth of transformation in the Muslim societies' (Shariati, 2001). Furthermore, the construction of Fatima's character highlights her take in publicly demanding for her rights (Shariati, 2001). This shows that women, by idealizing Fatima, should be taking part in their societies to demand for their rights and to have a voice, being social, political, or religious rights.

Deriving from Fatima's character, Zainab's character plays a crucial role in the Karbala narratives as she was present in the Karbala tragedy and observed the whole massacre. However, there is a qualitative difference in the way her character is portrayed in contemporary scripts. The role of Zainab holds much agency and is approached as a 'protagonist par excellence' (Chelkowski, 2005). Nonetheless, in the contemporary narratives, her character was more oriented at heroism while encountering challenges. Putting stress and giving equal importance to Zainab's

character with Hussain's role reformulated how Zainab is perceived and approached, and further showed a connection between what had occurred in history can be approached and applied in contemporary time (Bard, 2010). Hence, Zainab's stance in Karbala as having self-expression in the public sphere is a main element that has currency in the present day.

Contemporary lectures and narratives emphasize her role as 'an educator of the public', 'a spokesperson for the Ahle-Bayt', 'an orator exposing the atrocities of the Umayyad dynasty' and revealing the "truth about the Karbala tragedy" (Deeb, 2006; Aghaie, 2005; Shariati, 2001). The sermons Zainab gave upon her arrival to Kufa and Damascus after the battle of Karbala were perceived as the extensions of Hussain's fight and had a fundamental effect on the public and political climate (Hamdar, 2009). As a result, her character and role became an important catalyst in the construction of 'a full-fledged Shi'a movement' after Karbala (Hamdar, 2009). Thus, the transformation of Zainab's role has been re-visited and re-evaluated while shedding light on the activist parts of her character. Her earlier passive role has been 'misinterpreted' (Deeb, 2005) while the new and 'authentic' views regard her as being 'defiant in defeat' (Pinault, 2001). Hence, this shift in Zainab's character's interpretation is linked to a 'rhetorical strategy' where "feminine dimensions to practices are more typically legitimized by patriarchal Islamic authority" (Bard, 2010).

The characteristics that are focused upon when reconstructing the role of Zainab include the strength of mind and speech, dedication, and courage, which are key points that reshaped the roles of Shi'a women, either as mothers, wives, sisters, or foundational components in their communities, using Zainab's 'outspokenness as an

ideal for public activism' (Deeb, 2006). Consequently, women's role and participation in networks and other structures in their communities became readdressed with those reinterpretation and further left impacts on the ramifications for their public participation, which elevated their responsibility for public commitment with their male counterparts. Hence, this transformation is calling for a modernization and authentication of the Karbala narratives, and as Bizaa puts it, it is 'over intellectualizing' the narratives (Bizaa, 2011). There became a slight division between the sentimental aspects of the narratives and the rationalized ones where the traditional ones merely aim at stimulating emotions for weeping, while the authenticated ones are directed more on the manifestation and life-long lessons (Deeb 2006).

This split is seen as problematic to some Shi'a as it is observed as splitting the political from the spiritual which can hinder the original spiritual meaning of the Karbala tragedy. However, most women seem to be unaffected by this division as they still held on to their spiritual identity (Bard, 2010). In other words, although pious Shi'a women are modifying their roles that hold more agency and self-expression in the public milieu, they still deny on giving up on the spirituality side since it completes their identity. An effort in maintaining a balance between the spiritual and political aspects is what is trying to be practiced in the Lebanese Ashura commemorations while women are being criticized for the 'emotionalism' and 'sentimentality' in the practices (Bard, 2010; Deeb, 2006).

As realized, these rituals have an impact on how practitioners are bringing a shift in their social status in and beyond their communities. These changes include spiritual and social changes as they strengthen the symbolism of the pious Lebanese

Shi'a. They further build a solid relationship between the participants of the rituals. Through the reinforcement of these practices, the religious experience is nurtured into a socio-cultural system that contributes to the concept of identity. Ultimately, the symbolism found in Ashura experiences and practices is a fundamental mode that crystallizes the acknowledgment of the messages these rituals are passing on.

## CHAPTER IV

### ASHURA RITUALS: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

"Ashura is the embodiment of the highest of sublime human and social values and ideals which has always summoned the people to the understanding of those values and ideals and to commit themselves to them and to live in accordance with them. The content of the Movement of Husayn Ashura is an objective manifestation of a guiding model for the revival of religion at the level of thought, spirit and life, as well as for a human education, man-making, and the ordering and reconstruction of society"  
(Aakuchakiyan, 1995)

#### **A. What is Empowerment?**

Reviewing the existing literature on women empowerment, there exists different conceptualizations and measures. Some studies have faced difficulties in measuring women's empowerment, while others found challenges in distinguishing what the different indicators are. To have a closer look at the existing literature regarding the above, it is fundamental to establish a comprehensible understanding of the concept of *empowerment* and *women's empowerment*.

As the term empowerment has been given much focus from scholars and academics, there exists a variety of conceptualizations. The very concept of empowerment holds a variety of meanings which also has many branches associated with it, encompassing the term *women empowerment*. This section investigates the origin of the concept and some perspectives will be approached to present how there is a substantial need for women empowerment in the contemporary world. Hence, the dimensions that fall within the conceptualization of women empowerment include women in the public sphere, women in the labor force, women in politics, and women's

rights for equality with men which brings into conversation the notion of individualism and pluralism in the context. The sub-dimensions that will be approached under these dimensions include agency, power, resources and achievements.

Agency denotes in this context public participation, activeness, self-improvement and development, decision-making, and self-reliance. It is fundamental to discuss Deeb's claim in the conceptualization of an ideal modern woman as it goes hand in hand with women empowerment and holds the three elements of knowledge and practice of authenticated Islam, being committed to self-improvement, and being active in the public life for the betterment of the community (Deeb, 2006). Empowerment in this context is directed at being actively present in society for the development and betterment of the public sphere in addition to the self. Through public participation in the public sphere, Deeb argues that there is a correlation between participation and the increase of empowerment. Similar to the concept of empowerment, the concept of women empowerment is brought into conversation as a situation where women have the opportunity to be active agents in the public sphere including social, political and economic milieus (Sushama, 1998). Being active participants in the public sphere enables women to establish an environment where they are able to implement organizational policies (Chattopadhyay, 2005; Aspy and Sandhu, 1999; Patricia et al, 2003), which further helps in shifting their state of being oppressed to having equal social, political and economical opportunities (Chattopadhyay, 2005). Hence, agency and power are interrelated.

The conceptualization of women empowerment further becomes comprehensible when putting into context the social, economic, political and psychological aspects. Social and educational opportunities for women are fundamental

in the decision-making process since they extend to bigger decisions in society (Pathak, 2003). Thus, public participation has an impact on the decision-making factor since more knowledge and more activeness in the community pushes women into higher-order thinking and essential decisions for their society with their male counterparts. As for the economic area, it enables the process of women in becoming self-reliant through their public participation and establishment of networks and associations (Elliot, 2008). In other words, self-reliance is the foundation of the developmental process which pushes women to found essential networks and build on them. The political element is also significant as it is a process that promotes political interests (Pam Rajput, 2001; Tiwari, 2001). This goes hand in hand with the concept of agency as promoting political interest results from appropriate decision-making that has been enabled and proceeded towards. Finally, the psychological element is not devalued as it is a crucial aspect referring to the process of enrich women self-interest to become involved in projects and networks, be it educational, political, or other forms of developmental programs (Pam Rajput, 2001; Tiwari, 2001).

Another emphasis in the existing literature is on the factor of power. Empowerment in the light of power was approached from different perspectives. Nonetheless, a common denominator is found as the concept is seen as a process of power relations accompanied with other concepts including marginalization, oppression, and deprivation of rights. To trace back to the historical origin, the conceptualization of empowerment finds roots in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* where he also suggests that the constituent of society is made out of two bodies; the oppressor and oppressed (Freire, 1974). His argument was explicit that it was the teacher's responsibility to alert the students of the social injustices to push them



to discover ways for liberation (Freire, 1974). Empowerment also has origins associated with Feminism, Freudian Psychology, the Black Power Empowerment, and Gandhism (Simon, 1994; Cornwall and Brock, 2005), where principles of well-being, participation in decision-making, and social intervention among the marginalized populations (Simon, 1994) were emphasized. Barbara Solomon, in the 1970s, with the publication of *Black Empowerment: Social Work in Oppressed Communities*, used the concept in the context of social protest movements. Nonetheless, it eventually was used in research and intervention regarding marginalized groups including the African Americans, women, gays and lesbians, and people with disabilities (Calvès, 2009).

Different perspectives in varying academic fields also approached the concept through the power dimension. Political scientist Joseph Alagha defines empowerment as a process where a marginalized group experiences an accumulation to its power (Alagha, 2011). In other words, his interpretation of the marginalized group equate the oppressed group in society where the interpretation of empowerment in this context also finds relevance to Qur'anic verses mentioned repeatedly: We wish to favor the downtrodden [oppressed] in the land and make them leaders and make them the inheritors; And establish (humankind) them firmly in the land (Qur'an 28:5-6).

Closely examining the above verse, favoring the downtrodden or the oppressed is equivalent to the Arabic concept of *Tamkeen*, which is referring to human empowerment. Mohammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, also uses Qur'anic interpretation to decode *Tamkeen* as it is referring to favoring the people who had been weakened in the land (the marginalized), either through oppression, exploitation or deprivation of their rights and freedom, in addition to making them leaders and inheritors through giving them

governance and power in the land (Tahir-ul-Qadri, 2005). Hence, the understanding of empowerment in this context shows emancipating the marginalized and oppressed.

More commonly, the concept of empowerment has been proposed as a process with regards to power relations. Empowerment being 'an interactive process', Whitmore suggests that people experience personal and social change that enables them to take action in order to influence organizations and institutions that affect their lives and their communities (Whitmore, 1998). Similarly, people through this process acquire different powers, including social, economic and political ones where they can liberate themselves from the injustices of society (Wallerstein, 1992). Being a situation, people and their communities can acquire the control they need over the problems they believe are affecting them through this process (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 1995).

Through the discussion of power relations, it is essential to incorporate gender relations and gender equality as they are other forms of women empowerment. In contemporary times, women work towards gaining equal opportunities to minimize the barriers that hamper them from their participation in culture, education, or politics (Backhans, 2007). Commonly, gender inequality is realized as a result or product of the power relation between women and men in society (Rahman, 2013) and it is through the concept of power, as Luke demonstrates, that women empowerment leads academics and policy-makers in studying the underlying social and cultural structures that give meaning to those gender relations (Luke, 1974). It is evident that the aspects of gender equality are used to account for the strategies employed to empower women (Lipset, 1959; Rostow, 1960; Bell, 1999). In this context, the Beijing Declaration (Section 13) is the most suitable as it describes the empowerment of women as the *sine qua non* of social, political and economic development globally (Fourth World Conference on

Women 4, 1995). Women's empowerment and equal participation in all areas of society are crucial for the 'attainment of equality and development' (Fourth World Conference on Women 4, 1995). Hence, attaining knowledge and education (Maslak and Singhal, 2008) enabled women the ability to rise against cultural practices that placed them in oppressed positions in society (Murphy and Graham, 2008). Therefore, there is a connection between women empowerment and cultural practices-building through education and development (Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Inglehart and Wezel, 2005). In Figure 1 below, the power relation perspectives that influence women empowerment in society are drawn.

Type of power relation	An 'agency' approach to empowerment	Changing structures for empowerment
<b>1. Power over:</b> The ability to influence and coerce the actions and thoughts of the powerless	Change in power relations within households and communities and at micro level, e.g increased role in decision making and bargaining power.	Respect equal rights of others, challenge to inequality and unfair privileges.
<b>2. Power to:</b> The capacity to act, to organise and change existing hierarchies	Increased skills, access and control over income and resource, and access to markets and networks.	Increased skills and resource to challenge injustice, and inequality faced by others.
<b>3. Power with:</b> Increased power from collective action, social mobilisation and alliance building.	Organisation of the less powerful to enhance abilities to change power relations and increased participation of the less powerful.	Supportive organisation of those with power to challenge injustice, inequality
<b>4. Power from within</b> Increased individual consciousness, self-dignity and awareness.	Increased confidence and awareness of choices and rights, widened aspirations and ability to transform aspirations into actions.	Changes in attitudes and stereotypes; commitment to change.

Figure 1: Power Relations Perspectives Table extracted from Rowlands (1997) and Mayoux (2003).

Figure 1 displays that the power relation of 'power to' permits women access to decision-making in political, social and economic spheres while the power relation of 'power within' helps women acquire psychological empowerment by constructing self-

esteem (Rowland, 1997; Mayoux, 2003). As for the concept of agency with respect to empowerment, it refers to the ability of self-reliance and control over their fate (Rowlands, 1997), either in the public or private spheres. Furthermore, as for the structures of empowerment, they are related to different aspects in society including norms, rules, religion, gender, and ethnicity which can motivate or hinder women from practicing essential roles in their communities (Rowlands, 1997; Mayoux, 2003).

Building on Rowlands, Kabeer (1999) also approaches women empowerment as a process which is related to power relation. As Rowlands discusses self-awareness and consciousness when exploring power within, Kabeer places more emphasis on enabling women to communicate their aspirations and 'strategies' for change. Additionally, Kabeer expands the aspect of power to beyond changing existing hierarchies, but further allowing women to evolve their skills to access resources to achieve their aspirations. As for power with, as Rowlands focuses on collective action for an increase in power, Kabeer is similarly interested in the collective interests and organization of ways to achieve them. Last, power over, like Rowlands claims that it helps influence the actions and thoughts of the powerless, Kabeer suggests that it helps change inequalities in power which compels women's aspirations and their ability to achieve them. Nonetheless, Kabeer's framework adds more dimensions to the power relations including agency, resources, and achievements, where women are able to expand their ability to make strategic life choices where it was formerly denied to them (Kabeer, 2001). He discusses resources as important elements since they are occupied by the individual, and can be either materials, social or human (Kabeer, 2001). Agency also acts as the process of empowerment since it encloses a variety of willful actions, including negotiation, resistance and reflection (Kabeer, 2001). Hence, putting

resources and agency together show outcomes of empowerment as they constitute the potential that people have for living the life they want. Having the ability to have a choice is the central idea of the concept of power according to Kabeer. Although power holds negative connotations or can be associated with threat, empowerment plays a crucial role in changing the negative sense to a positive one. Ultimately, empowerment reflects change at an immediate level, where it is recognized by individual agency and achievement, at an intermediate level, such as in relationships in personal and socio-political spheres, and finally at deeper levels which changes, distributes, and reproduces resources and power in society (Kabeer, 2001).

It becomes visible that there is not a fixed conceptualization for women empowerment as it has been established and approached in different manners. A third element proceeded towards in the existing literature is the element of resources. Commonly discussing the concept as a process, Keller and Mbwewe (1991) argue that it allows women to organize themselves for increasing self-reliance and asserting their independence for choices and for the control over resources which challenges and eliminates subordination. Hence, resources and agency are intertwined in this context. Rowlands (1995) understands the relation of resources in the light of power where she argues that empowerment is beyond allowing access to decision-making, but rather a process that leads to perceiving women as being authorized to occupy the decision-making space through personal, close and collective relationships. Using relationships as resources, Rowlands finds importance of the individual and collective empowerment as she approaches it as a process in which individuals move on their own pace and eventually raise their confidence and self-esteem (among marginalized people) where they will enhance their ability in taking charge of their own needs (Rowlands, 1995).

Although individual empowerment is essential, the individual is not 'enough' (Rowlands, 1995) as it will help raise levels in achieving empowerment at collective levels where changes are needed in the collective abilities of individuals in different areas such as the household, communities, organizations, and institutions.

Resources in the sense of gender biasness and development is emphasized by Dreze and Sen (1995) as women empowerment defines self-interest and choice, and hence pushes woman to become entitled to take decisions in order to improve their level of empowerment and reduce gender biasness in access to education and professional training, employment, ownership of property, household, and decision-making as these areas can enhance their ability to exercise agency, or the process to empowerment. The quality of life, as a form of development, is also associated with education as women develop themselves to become politically active, economically productive, and independent individuals who are able to make good decisions that leave impacts on them and their nations (Lillykutty, 2003). Hence, to become empowered, women should have a good command over different resources including wealth, education, social status, and have access to different services, which can be done by creating an environment with distribution of power and resources, opportunity to engage in productive work, and opportunities to access education and other services (Lillykutty, 2003). Ultimately, a positive relation is realized between education and empowerment as education enhances women's status in society and leads to more input in the family and community. Education not only plays a role in gaining knowledge and avoiding ignorance and dependence, but also empowers women to claim their right to good quality of life, which acts as a strong tool for the attainment of power and status, and a

source of mobility, equality, and empowerment at the individual and social level (Lillykutty, 2003).

The last element to be unpacked is the concept of achievements. As empowerment is perceived by academics, scholars and policy-makers as a human quality and a 'multi-dimensional phenomenon' (AlKire, 2002), it helps the individual or a group participate in developmental processes in the private sphere, such as the household, as well as the public sphere including the community or country. According to the Human Development Reports which reports on developmental outcomes, research proved that empowerment is highly associated with developmental outcomes, although there isn't a universal measure of empowerment since it is found difficult to quantify the level of empowerment (HDR, 2010). Nonetheless, different studies in varying regions have endeavored to quantify empowerment in varying means. As the essence of empowerment is influenced by culture, studies offered different indicators for its measure including change, welfare, access, conscientization, participation, and control.

The United Nations states that enhancing empowerment equates to increasing people's capability to change (Human Development Report, 2010). UNICEF's 1993 framework offered five components of women's empowerment including welfare, access, conscientization, participation, and control (Verma, 2009). Welfare addresses the basic needs for improving women's conditions while access involves the equality of access to resources and opportunities among women in their communities. Furthermore, women are conscious of such gender inequalities, specifically structural and institutional discrimination, hence conscientization is addressed. By participation, women are able to organize and work collectively to gain high participation and

representation along their male counterparts equally, which leads to empowerment. Finally, control, being the utmost level of equality and empowerment, permits women to take decisions in different aspects and have significant and active roles in the development process with their contributions being fully acknowledged and rewarded. In the coming section, the pious Lebanese Shi'a communities will be contextualized in order to explore the dimensions dear to this study.

## **B. Contextualizing Lebanon**

*"Koulo Ma Ladayna Min Ashura"* - Everything we have has derived from Ashura (Ayatollah Khomeini).

With different conceptualizations of empowerment, this crystallizes the fact that the very concept of women empowerment should not be understood within one context with one fixed dimension. Rather, empowerment should be approached in terms of the needs of the individual's 'yearning for empowerment' (Kabeer, 2005) and the suitable context. In the context of my study, my conceptualization is in fact approached with a dialectic of the different dimensions of women empowerment. A synthesis among the different dimensions is necessary as they are interrelated and they overlap in many areas. In consideration of my context, the pious Shi'a communities in Lebanon, I would conceptualize women empowerment with the sub-dimensions of power and agency first and foremost. This is not to disparage the significance of the resource and achievement as they are intertwined and meet on some points.

Based on my fieldwork and the review of the existing literature on its conceptualization, the concern with the Shi'a communities around the world including



Lebanon in different historical eras shows a marginalization on political, economic, and social levels. Within this marginalization, gender, specifically women, were disregarded units in society although their presence and appraisal in society was highly visible in classical Shi'i religious texts of *Nahjul-Balagha*, among other religious texts and curricula. As discussed in the historical section and the aftermaths of Karbala and Iran's revolutionary impacts, much impression has been placed on these Lebanese Shi'a communities to revive and re-evaluate the marginalization of the collective Shi'a group, putting emphasis on the significant roles of women in their respective communities. In Figure 2 below, a table is presented to approach and compare the different dimensions alongside contextualizing Lebanon. Following Figure 2 below, statistics collected by The World Bank will be displayed to present the different percentages and rates of the women empowerment dimensions.

Dimensions	Women Empowerment	
	Before 1980s	After 1980s
<b>Women in the Public Sphere</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Absent from leisure life</li> <li>*Did not hold administrative positions in educational institutions</li> <li>*Reached certain level of education and were found in limited fields of education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Omnipresent in different parts of leisure life</li> <li>* Attained higher degrees in education; right to benefit from higher education to the highest level (Female literacy rate increased)</li> <li>*Right to acquire skills &amp; expertise at the highest levels;</li> <li>Participated in international conferences for personal development</li> <li>*Found in scientific &amp; medical fields</li> </ul>

		(Enrollment rates increased & gender gap decreased in literacy) *Percentage of female faculty/ staff members increased
<b>Women in the Labor Force</b>	*Found in household *Absence of State Labor Laws for women *Gender discrimination and inequality in positions, benefits, and services	*Beyond household *Rapid growth in economic participation & achievements with women movements * Set State Laws with equal benefits, maternity leave, health benefits, & equal rights in employment, position & occupation
<b>Women in Politics</b>	* Passive agents with minimal or no rights to vote *No seats for women *Women fighter with leftist group but in small quantity	* Took part in elections *No seats for women *With geopolitics interests & controlled political parties, members/supporters of party obtained services
<b>Women's Rights for Equality</b>	*Limited social rights *No political rights *Limited economic/employment rights	*Granted equal social rights (personal status law, child custody...) *Granted certain political rights *Granted equal economic/employment rights
<b>Pluralism</b>	*Individual liberty in dress code *Limited religious conservatism	*Heavy influence of patriarchal norms & traditions/culture *Repression of political parties *Influence of religious customs *Consolidation of the autonomization of individualization *Tendency to homogenize dress code, and culture.

Figure 2: Table summarizing dimensions to women empowerment in Lebanon before and after the impact of the Iranian Revolution on the Shi'a community and the Lebanese Civil War.

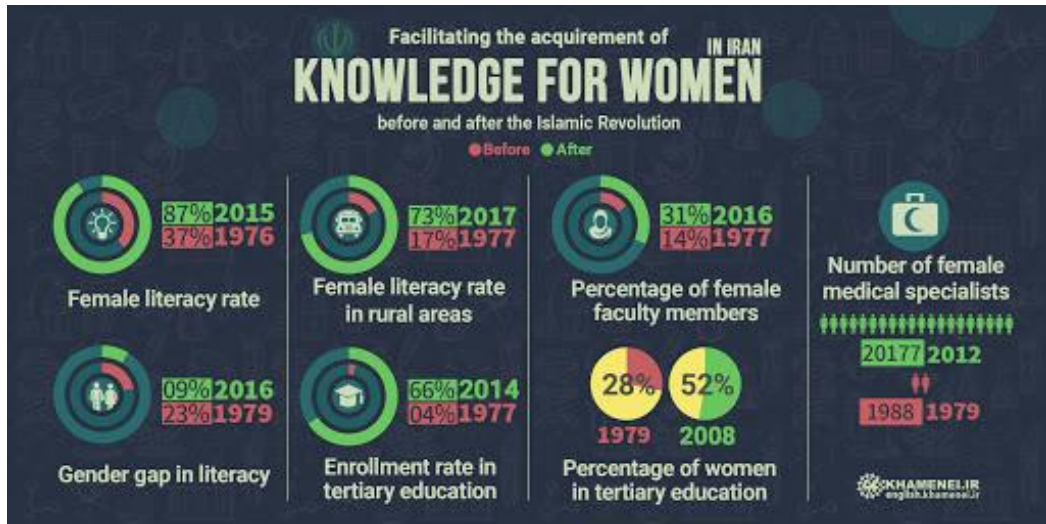


Figure 3: Literacy rates for females in Iran pre/post-Iranian Revolution.  
Source: <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/7263/Public-literacy-in-Iran-before-and-after-the-Revolution> (Retrieved in March, 2020).

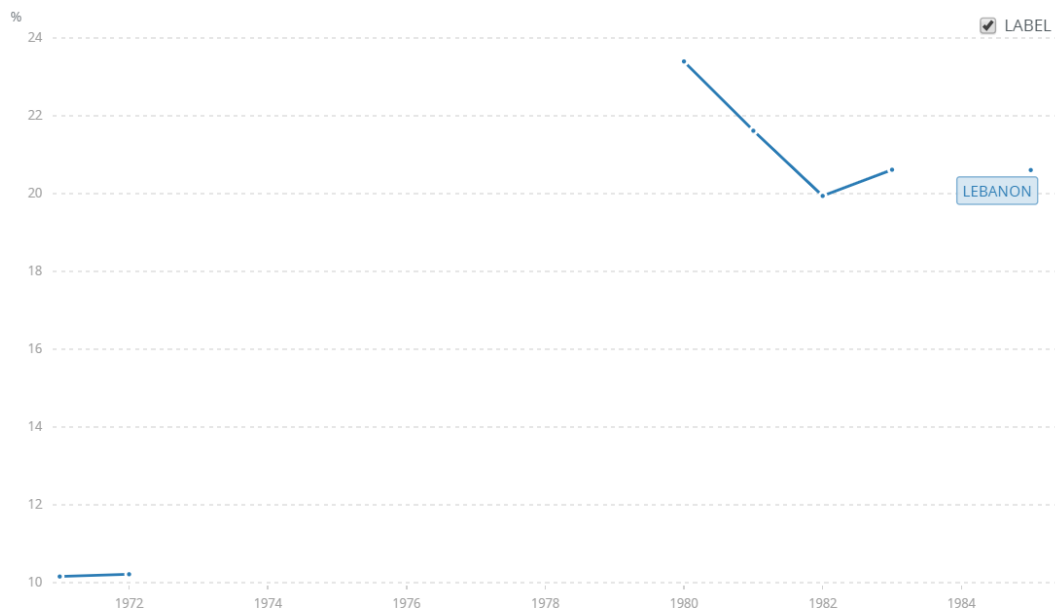


Figure 4: Female enrollment rates in tertiary education in Lebanon.  
Source: worldbank.org

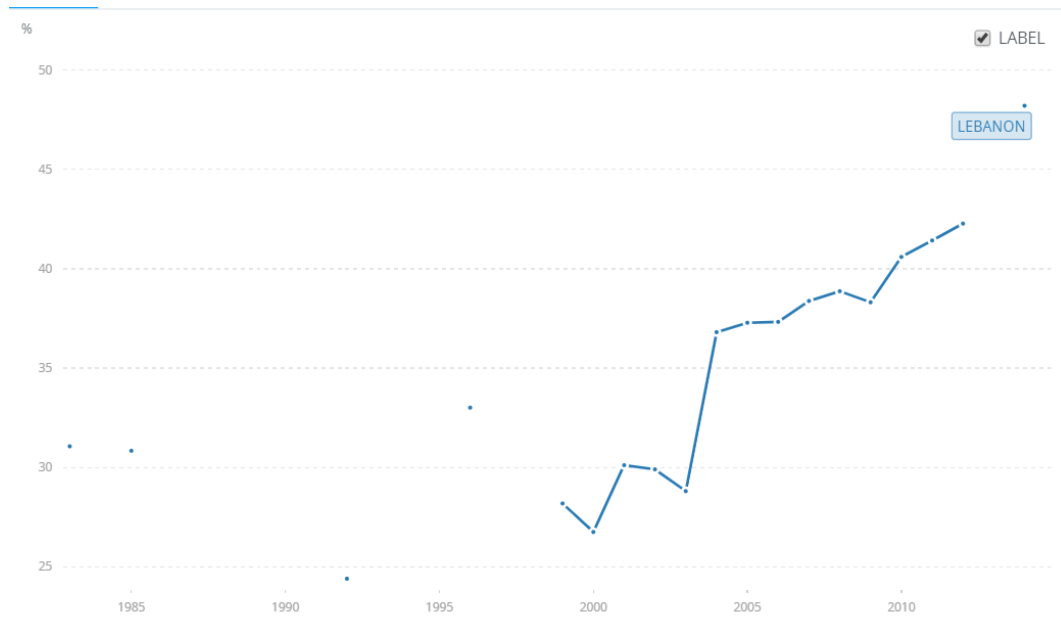


Figure 5: Female enrolled in tertiary education and academic staff in Lebanon  
 Source: worldbank.org

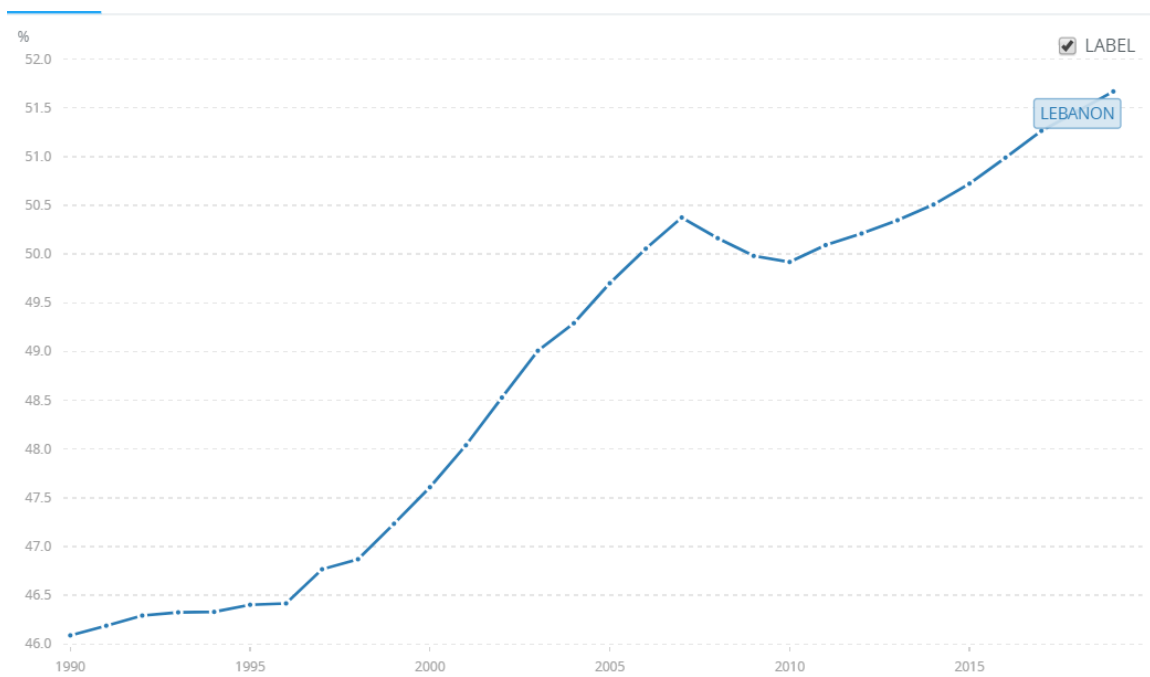


Figure 6: Labor force female participation rate ages between 15-64  
 Source: worldbank.org

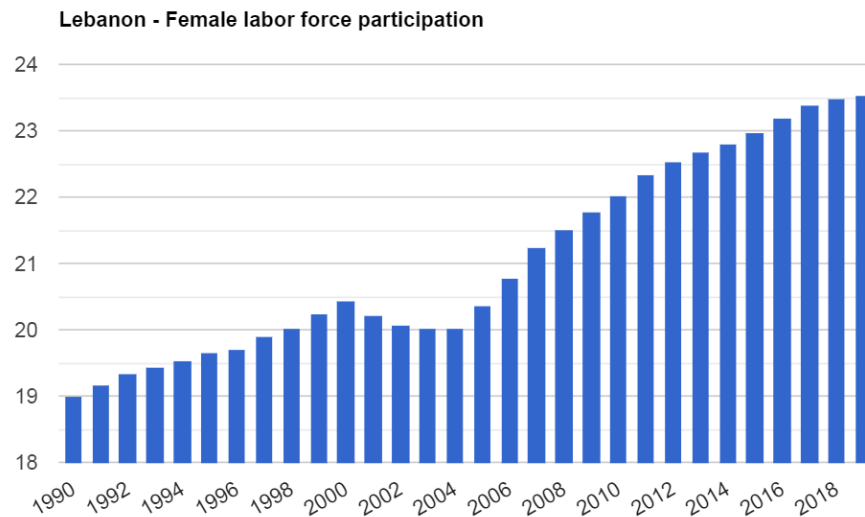


Figure 7: Female labor force participation rate in Lebanon from 1990 to 2019  
Source: worldbank.org

When exploring women in the public sphere, education is one of the key criteria to investigate in a society to study its growth and development. Formerly, women majorly attained basic education. They were not exposed nor expected to hold high degrees or be found in universities pursuing degrees and knowledge as they were associated to other duties in society. In fact, when the minority were privileged to attend universities, there were certain fields of education that were open to enrollment, which excluded the scientific ones. Hence, this further restricted women from holding decision-making positions including administrative positions in educational institutions. The time era of the late 1970s is a crucial time to closely examine. Noting that the Iranian Revolution took part during this time and left impacts on Lebanon, it is crucial to mention that between 1975-1990, Lebanon also marks the rise of the Lebanese Civil War, where there was the emergence of women’s movements and organizations were on the rise. This initiated major historical changes in the Arab World including Lebanon where education and working rights were privileged and have witnessed developments

over the past few decades, contributing to the advancement of women's rights throughout the country.

Examining educational developments, some factors such as educational resources and planning, educational system budget, literacy rate, facilities and services, much achievements have been made, promoting women's literacy as a significant feature. Women's literacy percentages (See Figure 4) not only witnessed a growth in terms of quantity, but it has further enjoyed more geographical diversity and a fairer geographical distribution after the Islamic Revolution, Lebanese Civil War, and rise of different women movements. In regard to educational management, women's role after these occurrences is incomparable to that of the pre-revolutionary era. Women were realized in attaining higher degrees in education where rates in enrollment in higher education was higher than basic education. Furthermore, women obtained their rights to acquire skills and expertise at the highest levels where it permitted them to participate in international conferences for personal development and not only locally. As for the educational fields, they were also filling in scientific and medical fields where the gender gap realized a decrease in the percentage of literacy.

More female access to higher education has made it possible for many more women to take managerial posts in the milieu of education and has led to an increase in the number of female professors, faculty in universities, and scientific fields. In its report on the number of females enrolled in tertiary education and academic staff, the World Bank states that the number of female members has witnessed at least a two-times increase from 1996 to 2016 (The World Bank, 2016).

In regard to leisure life, pre-revolutionary era, Shi'a women in Lebanon were absent or minimally found in social spaces for conservative matters and social norms. Mixed-sex segregated places were taboos for women to be present on their own, or with their male counterparts. Nonetheless, during the late 1990s, as Deeb claims, the *hala Islamiyya* or the Islamic environment for the Shi'a without geographical boundaries had begun incorporating leisure sites such as cafes, private beaches for women, private gyms for women, exhibitions, public gardens, and summer youth camps. It is crucial to note that among these spaces, political parties, mainly Hezbollah-affiliated ones have their interests, or a political entertainment. For instance, youths summer camps or exhibitions are directed at celebrating the Islamic Resistance. Nonetheless, restaurants and cafes welcome a diverse audience, regardless of their religious identity. For instance, Al-Saha restaurant and hotel, founded by Sayed Mohammad Hussain Fadlallah, is an attractive site for a diverse clientele, both in generation and lifestyle, where sex segregation, age groups, social identities, and socio-economic backgrounds is fully realized. Thus, leisure life became accessible to the public and it minimized much social norms and taboos that were previously implemented, specifically on women.

As for the labor force and politics in Lebanon, the 1990s saw more rapid development of women's movements and achievements. Formerly, it was globally agreed women belonged to the household and was responsible of tasks that were related to raising children, house chores, and hand-crafts. With the coming of the 1990s, specifically in 1993, women were granted their rights in testifying in issues relating to land registry and married women were granted the right to trade without their husband's approval. Moreover, in 1994 female diplomats were able to pursue their careers despite their marital status or being married to foreigners. In 1995, the law of women not being

allowed to enter life insurance contracts was amended. As of that year, only judiciaries were able to decide about their own insurance, restricting husbands from legal competence. In 1997, Lebanon took a significant step by signing the 1981 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) where women's rights in social, civil, and political spheres were given, emphasizing the right to nondiscrimination and equality. In the year 2000, Article 26 of Lebanon's Labor Law was amended to state that male and female government employees are entitled to the same provisions, including benefits, services, and education grants for themselves and their family members. It also abolished the prohibition of women from partaking in night work shifts. Women could sue their employers for gender discrimination. Moreover, maternity leave with full pay was extended from 40 days to 60 days for women employees in the public sector (Article 38) and 7 weeks for female employees working in the private sector (Article 28). In 2001, maternity, health benefits, family allowances were equalized between men and women. Hence, rapid growth in economic and political participation was realized. Women were able to participate equally in existing markets, had access to productive resources, had access to decent work, control over their own time, increased voice, agency and meaningful participation in economic decision-making, and elections.

After having explored the different dimensions of women empowerment, an account in Figure 8 below will be made that shows the impact of the rebirth of Shi'a community in Lebanon on the different dimensions.



<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Impact of the rebirth of the Shi'a community in Lebanon on Women Empowerment Dimensions</b>		
	<b>Direct Impact</b>	<b>Indirect Impact</b>	<b>No Impact</b>
<b>Women in the Public Sphere</b>	✓		
<b>Women in the Labor Force</b>		✓	
<b>Women in Politics</b>			✓
<b>Women's Rights for Equality</b>		✓	
<b>Pluralism</b>			✓

Figure 8: Summary of the impact of the rebirth of Shi'a community in Lebanon on women empowerment dimensions.

Exploring the above dimensions shows that the Ashura commemorations had direct impacts, indirect or no impacts depending on the dimension. When discussing Ashura commemorations, it does not imply the rituals practiced in the event in the sense of the annual practices but rather the whole rebirth of the Shi'a community in Lebanon. Bringing into conversation the Public Sphere, the rebirth of the Shi'a community in Lebanon post-Iranian Revolution shows that the re-evaluated approaches and teachings was an endeavor to initiate the transformation of women's presence in the public sphere. For instance, Shi'a Lebanon was receiving funds and scholarships in educational programs, enrollment fees support, and resources from Iran to enrich the Shi'a society in different education fields. As for the leisure life, much touristic spaces was established and financially supported by Iran or political parties such as Iran Garden in Maroun alRas, in addition to Mleeta, also known as Hezbollah's Disneyland, and Al-Saha restaurant, affiliated with Sayed Mohammad Hussain Fadlallah, among others.



Photograph 10: Iran Garden in Maroun al-Ras, a village in South Lebanon found on the Lebanese borders.



Photograph 11: Mleeta, Resistance Tourist Landmark, in South Lebanon established by Hezbollah.

Moreover, during the same time era, other events were occurring that had impacts on the education and leisure life of women. In fact, the League of Lebanese Women's Rights was legally recognized in 1970 for women's rights in Lebanon, mainly

focusing on lobbying for women's rights, promoting women's participation, and enhancing the debate between different social groups. Collaboratives were also enhancing the debate about women's rights, including the World Conference on Women, encouraging the debate on equality between Third World feminists and their Western colleagues. Hence, many occurrences were taking place during the time era that was a rise for women's participation in the public sphere in Lebanon. This shows that with the Iranian Revolution being founded and based on the Ashura framework and having a direct impact on the public sphere, other factors brought women empowerment to the rise simultaneously.

As for the Labor Force, the context in Lebanon during the 1990s was the establishment of the Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Women (LECORVAW). Although aimed at a feminist civil society to institutionalize their practices into NGOs, women's rights was the trend demanding for gender equity, fighting stereotypes, strengthening women's economic empowerment, participation in civil society, and fighting gender-based violence. Hence, the concept of women belonging in the household restricted to raising children and domestic tasks were vanishing gradually. In addition, state laws were passed that helped in the rise of economic growth through women participation including signing the 1981 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1997 where women's rights in social, civil, and political spheres were given, emphasizing the right to nondiscrimination and equality, in addition to Lebanon's Labor Law that entitled same provisions, including benefits, services for men and women. Beside state laws that was a factor in the rapid growth of economic participation and achievements of women along men, religious speeches were directed at women being active agents in

their societies as they are religious duties for the betterment of the Islamic community. Whether it was in administrative, educational, managerial positions, women are continuously influenced to participate in sharing their knowledge, potentials, and skills where possible in order to up bring a productive generation. These guidance and teachings were saturated in religious speeches during Friday prayers in Shi'a mosques, political figures' speeches during Muharram in the different *Hussayniya, Majalis* gatherings in homes, and Islamic talks and speeches revolved around the social role of women in contemporary times. Thus, the rebirth of the Shi'a community was not only affected by the Islamic Revolution but from different occurrences taking place. The only factor that marked a direct impact on women empowerment was women entering the labor force in the field of tourism to holy sites in the light of the Ashura commemoration. This is to say, women were guiding trips and travels to Holy Sites where shrines were present. It is not only restricted to the month of Muharram and Safar, the 10th and 40th day of Ashura, but further to different occasions throughout the year. Some travel agencies were founded by women and established by women networks who had connections in the countries where the Holy Shrine visitations continuously take place, including Iraq, Iran and Syria.

In Politics, Shi'a women were previously passive agents in the sense that they did not have rights in political decision-making nor have seats as representatives. Before the establishment of *Hezbollah* nonetheless, they were present in different political groups including the Leftist Assembly for Change or *At-Tajamo' Al-Yasari Min Ajli Al Taghyeer* which held a Socialistic political position and was secular instead of affiliated to a sect or ethnicity. Hence, Shi'a women have been present in participating in politics to a certain extent, although minimally with limited rights and activeness. During the

90s, international organizations put efforts to bring the Lebanese government to form a partnership with women's organizations to give social welfare services and design the future of gender relations in the country. Hence, the National Commission for Lebanese Women was established and it further encouraged feminist civil society organizations which not only helped fight for gender equity and fight stereotypes, but further strengthen women's economic and political empowerment and participation. As these events that were taking place during the 90s helped women become politically active, geopolitics interests and controlled political parties played crucial roles in the political field. The Figure below (Figure 9) shows the General Structure of *Hezbollah*.

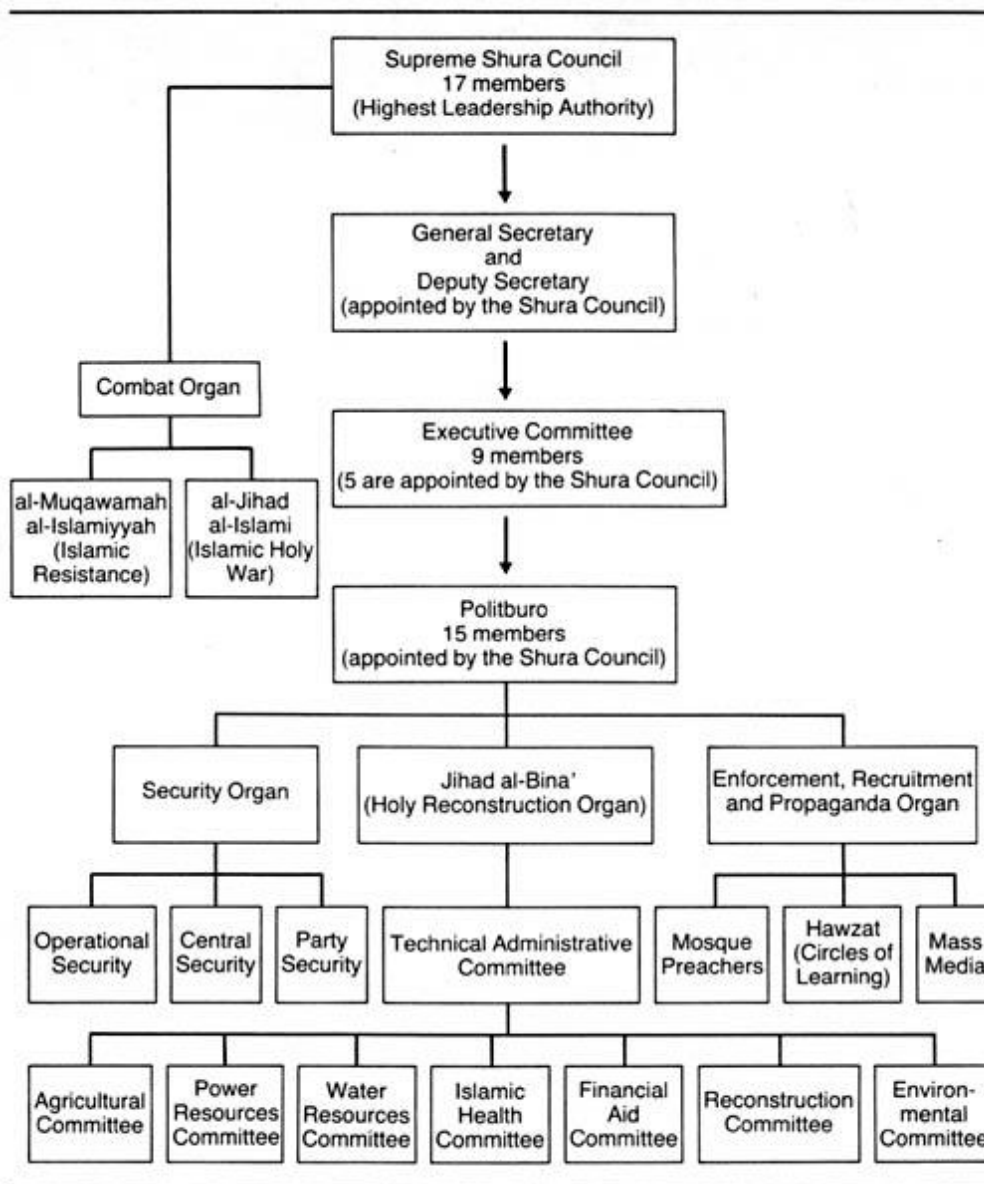


Figure 9: General Structure of Hezbollah reported by Al-Ahed between 1988 and 1992. Source: Nizar Hamzeh, Third World Quarterly (1993).

Of all the committees and heads, it is clear that positions that required authority were restricted to men, initiating from the Supreme Shura Council to the mosque preachers, Hawzat, and different committees in the Shi'a communities, being the Financial Aid Committee, among others. The connection between Iran and the Lebanese Shi'a communities, taking into consideration the geostrategic importance of

Lebanon and its proximity, shows that Lebanon is a regional platform for the international goals and rhetoric of the Islamic revolution (Ataie, n.d). Hence, although the Islamic Revolution did play a role in the establishment of a powerful political party in Lebanon for the Shi'a, it nonetheless focused on patriarchal notions of empowering and giving authority to male figures solely. As women were voting and taking part in the elections, they still were absent from representation in terms of being members in councils or committees with authority. This highlights the fact that the rebirth of the Shi'a community did not have any impact on empowering women in the dimension of Politics.

This brings into conversation the fact that individualism or pluralism should be further explored in the context. With the aftermath of the events taking place during the 90s in Lebanon and post-Iranian Revolution, it becomes evident that a lack of pluralism in the rights for equality exists. Although some rights are granted for women including human rights, social rights, economic rights, other rights are to a certain extent politicized and repressed. This encompasses the dress code, personal status laws, and child custody. Following the Iranian Revolution, Shi'a women were politicized and expected to follow a certain Islamic conservative dress code, or the *hijab*, in addition to custody laws and personal status laws, which restricts civil marriage and only permits religious marriages with certain laws being put into the marriage contracts in the *Mahkama al-Jaafariya*. This is notable since although religious women are granted their rights in marriage and divorce and have an equal say, as stated in the Qura'anic teachings, political parties' hegemony hindered individualization process by restricting the contestation of the mainstream with patriarchal social norms being enforced, leaving room for the consolidation of the autonomization of individualization of women. Thus,

the rebirth of the Shi'a community showed no impact on empowering women in a pluralistic society with certain interests of the religio-political controlling hegemony.

Not only taking into account the Iranian Islamic Revolution on Lebanon as an influence but other factors played fundamental roles and exerted power on Lebanon before Iran's revolutionary impact, where the effects of the Iranian-Hezbollah hegemony did not just come in place smoothly. Occurrences including Iraqi's power of Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani before Iran and Hezbollah relations were highly present and active across Lebanon. This is to say, despite Hezbollah's power in Shi'a communities, Lebanon's Shi'a communities referred back to the Iraqi city of al-Najaf for religious guidance and leadership. Even though the city of al-Najaf did not interfere politically in Lebanon the way Iran is involved, Shi'a institutions were the only religious and social reference for pious Lebanese Shi'a. Hence, Hezbollah's shift to turn towards Iran's Supreme Leader for guidance was for further power relations. Taking notable Lebanese religious figures including Muhammad Mahdi Shamseddine, Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, and Hani Fahs shows that prominent Lebanese figures had strong connections to al-Najaf, and their Iraqi-influenced institutions and legacy still hold considerable sway over Lebanon's Shi'a communities.

As for political stances, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has clearly avoided taking any stance on Lebanese politics, and only adhered to issues that were religious and social. In 2006, after the Lebanese-Israeli war when Hezbollah faced pressure to disarm, al-Sistani issued a *Fatwa* about abstaining from political office where Lebanese Shi'a should take responsibility in choosing their own future without yielding to Iran. This shows the comparison in interference between Iran and Iraqi power impacts in and on Lebanon. The Amal Movement, Hezbollah's coalition partner, showed agreement with



al-Sistani's point, and other anti-Hezbollah Shi'a leaders had no doubt on this point. Overall, prominent leaders believed that their ineffectiveness for change in Lebanon is rooted in al-Najaf's *hands-off* strategy during decisive incidents. Contrary to Qom's politically-oriented clerics, they believe that al-Najaf has maintained a conservative attitude where religion has a moral and ethical function instead of a political one.

Apart Iraqi Shi'ism, in contrast to the complex case of Shi'ite religious activism in Iraq, which shows a "cultural-essentialist" pattern (Khashan, 2019), Shi'ite religious activism in Lebanon before the rise of Hezbollah emanated from a sense of communal disenfranchisement and a desire for recognition and political integration (Khashan, 2019). Thus, Amal Movement leader Musa al-Sadr's powerful appearance in Lebanon weakened the traditional Shi'ite political leadership in favor of pragmatism and acceptance of adhering to the rules of politics. It is crucial to examine the Lebanese political party, Amal Movement or the Movement of the Dispossessed, associated with Lebanon's Shia community during 1974, before the emergence of Hezbollah. The movement obtained much attention from the Shi'a community, specifically after the disappearance of Musa al-Sadr and observed a need for a renewal in popularity after Israel's invasion of Lebanon during the late 1970s. As its name entails, The Movement of the Deprived, Dispossessed or the Disinherited, was founded by Musa al-Sadr and Hussein el-Husseini in order to reform the Lebanese system. Al-Sadr's attempt was to call upon peace and equality between all Lebanese confessions and religions in order to abolish or minimize the "deprived" in any Lebanese region noting that the Lebanese Shi'a community was the most neglected and marginalized by the Lebanese government.

Hence, acknowledging its support base to be the "traditionally under-represented politically and economically disadvantaged" Shi'a community, the Movement was aimed at seeking social justice for all deprived Lebanese through the influence of Islamic ideas, but as a secular movement uniting people along communal instead of religious or ideological factors.

Additionally, other prominent religious Lebanese figures including Sayed Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah had crucial roles. His leadership's presence on Shi'a communities in Lebanon was crucial as he was not only a religious figure but further a *Marja'a* or a religious reference for Shi'a authority. There exists a debate nonetheless on the self-proclaimed appointedness and declaration of himself being a *Marja'a* in 1995 which was opposed by the Iranian religious establishment and saw Ayatollah Khamenei as the proper source of emulation for the Shi'ite world. Hence, Fadlallah's ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran was distanced, specifically from the Ayatollah Khomeini's legacy of *Wilayat al-Faqih*, or the rule of the jurisprudent, as theocratic rule by Islamic clerics and further argued that "no Shia religious leader, not even Khomeini...has a monopoly on the truth" (Norton, 2006). Fadlallah however endorsed Iraqi Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani rather than Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as the *Marja'a* for Shi'a in issues of religion, before claiming the role for himself (Wilfried, 1995) which is also mentioned in a 2009 interview when Fadlallah claims that he disbelieves *Wilayat al-Faqih*'s role in modern Lebanon (Pollock, 2009). Hence, the relationship of Fadlallah and his followers changed with Iran. Accordingly, Fadlallah did not fully embrace the Iranian revolutionary concept of *Wilayat al-Faqih*, which led to much debates and controversies among the Shi'a communities in Lebanon. On an important note, Hezbollah believes that the return of the Twelfth Imam who went into occultation in

874 is not only inevitable, but also contingent upon the existence of the interim office of Iranian Supreme Leader, which explains not only power relations, but also ideological ones. Hence, its visionary foundations tell about Hezbollah's apocalyptic revolutionary creed which is dictated by religious dogma (Khashan, 2019).

Developments since the late 1970s served the mobilization of Lebanese Shi'a and the rise of their distinct political identity. Putting emphasis on the narrative and counter-narratives of religious, social and geo-political influence, the final outcome, after much debate and ongoing discourses shows that Shi'a Lebanon in contemporary times has highly active Iranian-Hezbollah hegemony in the way it had been founded, established, supported and is continuously conducting Shi'a practices. As Khashan argues that the story of Hizbullah with Lebanese Shi'ites has evolved from marginalization and neglect to empowerment and a predominance in the country's national life (Khashan, 2019), my argument supports his claim in terms of Shi'a empowerment to serve geo-political and local interests. Khashan adds:

*The appearance of Hizbullah and its growth cannot be separated from the broader phenomenon of Shi'ite evolution from quietism to militancy. Shi'ism has built-in revolutionary incentives that enabled it to survive historical persecution...Shi'ite militant activism since the late 1970s can best be understood when analyzed with the awareness that the objective of celebrating 'Ashura and commemorating Karbala' is the mobilization of emotions against tyrants to bear fruit in due time...The strong showing of Shi'ite activism in recent decades has hinged on detailing Hussein's suffering that obviously exercises a powerful attraction for all Shi'i movements challenging the established order. The dissemination of a religious culture predicated on grief, bereavement, and collective lamentation facilitated the emergence of an extra-territorial Shi'ite religious structure that does not recognize state boundaries*  
(Khashan, 2019).

Thus, the Iranian Islamic Revolution and its effects were crucial threshold of the shift which opened ways beyond Iranian borders for the reinterpretation of the curricula, including the proactive role of women figures, which was fundamental for the

revelation of women in Lebanon to volunteer their vitality for the welfare of their communities, however not in all the dimensions of women empowerment. The triumph of the Islamic Revolution in Iran of 1979 has given a great impetus to Shi'ite efforts to reassert themselves after centuries of social neglect and marginalization. Shi'a today in the Shi'a world including Kuwait and Saudi Arabia dare to defy the authorities and participate in Ashura processions where they contested their countries' rules regarding its performativity.

The notion of individualization is fundamental when discussing empowerment. Implementing the *Shari'a* following the succession of the 1979 Revolution of Iran has stimulated and consolidated the autonomization and individualization of women. As mobilization existed, it opened ways for women to establish their own authority in the institution of the family, in addition to politics, religion, and other institutions. Moreover, women's struggle in the social sphere, specifically against gender segregation caused change in the way they perceived themselves. Noting that the Iranian Revolution was the first Iranian social movement that drew active participation of different social categories of women with varied cultural and ideological aspirations. Hence, through their collective political involvement, to a certain extent, women were able to attest to Western influence and authoritarian modernization which regarded Shi'a women as anti-modern and traditionalist due to their veils and subordinate roles.

*I came to the conclusion that I should do something else to prove my social identity... As a woman jurist, I have always been sensitive to the issue of gender... I thus started to write books and articles...*  
(Ansari, 2002).

The act of written discourse and writing has given strength to the position of women which further made them role models for other women in the other generations (Ansari, 2002). As they presented their own readings and interpretations of the laws and other written discourses, there was a proposal of the implementation of change. Women *Mujtahids* (learners of jurisprudence) led other Shi'a religious women to establish religious seminaries where all genres of topics were covered including religious, social, political, among others (Ansari, 2002). One head of an independent seminary gives an account about women's position in this milieu:

*Fatima: As much as our communities need professionals like doctors and engineers, they are in great need of Mujtahids. According to the Qur'an, men and women are equals. So, by following this, we are educating women Mujtahids in enhancing their social skills and their professional lives to help in contributing to their development to enhance their self-independence and boost their self-esteem by becoming more active in the social, cultural, economic, religious and also the political areas.*

As education has become an integral part of women's lives, working and economical participation in the public sphere became a chief component of their identity. Women established social relationships through their practices and activities beyond the household, which built on their autonomy and self-esteem. Women are tending to challenge traditional impediments by embracing modern social behaviors, which has an influence on their autonomization and their individualization.

*Through a meeting, 35 year-old working Zahraa expresses her daily routine in working in an Islamic institution:*

*Zahraa: I have been in this job for 10 years. It has become a great part of me. I cannot bear staying at home anymore since I'm used to coming to work and being productive every day. It gives me a sense that I am really providing something to my community and that I am an important component of society. Besides that, I feel that I am financially independent which gives me a sense of autonomy to myself where I am also the decision-maker at home. This also gave me respect where my husband and surroundings look at me as a source of productivity to my family and community instead of being a passive dependent person.*

Although the Shi'a world context differs from the one of Lebanese Shi'a women, the re-interpretation of specifically the Iranian women was offered as an exemplar to Lebanese Shi'a women encompassing the *Wilayat al-Faqih* that a good part of Shi'a Lebanon follow. Through this lens, women are taking on the characteristics of prominent women figures, i.e. Zainab, as outspoken activists in order to push the boundaries of what is 'expectable' for a pious Shi'a woman to expand their roles within their religious communities and national politics (Afary, 2009). The Lebanese Shi'a formerly did not have any representation in political areas nor in socio-economical aspects of society, and this elucidates what is meant by *Tamkeen* in the Qur'anic verses or different conceptualizations of the power dimension in terms of empowerment.

It is also crucial to explore women in the labor force sphere as it fared between 1972 and 1975 where economically active women accounted for 17.5% of the female

population and 18.4% of the total labor force in Lebanon (Khalaf, 1993). As their participation steadily increased since the 1970s to the 1990s, a study on the occupational distribution of the work force, carried out by ESCWA, indicated that, in 1987, a large portion of the economically active women were holding governmental jobs or working with educational institutions and banks. The overall female labor force in the Beirut region amounted to over 45% of the total Lebanese female labor force, including Shi'a women. Khalaf explains that the features of the Lebanese female labor market reveals that 1) the rate of participation of women in the labor force fundamentally increased during the war period 2) the activity rates of women in all age groups have increased since 1950 and 3) more than half of the economically active women are middle level employees in both the public and service sectors (Khalaf, 1993).

Hence, as Rowlands (1997) and Kabeer (1999) examine the power dimensions to empowerment, my conceptualization accords with their conceptualization as there existed a marginalization of the Shi'a sect throughout history in different areas in the public and private spheres. Through marginalization, the aspects of deprivation of rights and oppression are brought into conversation where different involvements came into place to shift the state of oppression and injustice to its liberation. The aftermaths of Karbala, in addition to the Iranian Revolution played a role in modifying and alternating the understanding of the role of women in the public sphere and private sphere beyond the traditional role. The aftermaths of the Iranian Revolution, inspired by Karbala, drove the Shi'a to re-vitalized the *Taklif Shar'i* or religious duty of being responsible to be bold, face oppression with truth, have a voice, and become self-reliant (agency) in the community in different positions for self-improvement and

development. Thus, having the knowledge and acknowledging the practices, curricula and culture as a whole is not enough if not brought into context through its performativity.

According to the Gender Gap Index, which reports countries according to calculated gender gap between women and men in four key areas: health, education, economy and politics (WEF, 2016), it is crucial to explore the indicators of gender equality and women's empowerment in Lebanon within an evaluation of socialization. Studies on the impacts of socialization in Lebanon show that society gives males entitlement over females, whether on a familial level or broader societal contexts. Feeling of authority is the norm where perceptions of the ideal woman is associated with the household or lower status positions and domains. This shows how much cultural patterns are not only interrelated, but are influenced by the intersectional systems of society including race, gender, class, and ethnicity (Hamieh & Usta, 2011).

Seeing that cultural patterns have a great impact on the concept of gender equality, the aspects of religion and ideology take space in the context of the Lebanese Shi'a communities as it is embedded in cultural patterns and behavior. As sociologists define ideology as being cultural beliefs which explain particular social arrangements such as patterns of inequality, the organization of Ashura commemoration through networks, associations and organizations shows a shift in how the rituals and active participation in the aftermath of Karbala and the Iranian Revolution, along other occurrences, and their impact on Shi'a Lebanon played a role in modifying and alternating the conceptualization of the role of women and empowerment in the public sphere and private sphere beyond the traditional role. Whether being a religious duty, or a social one for the betterment of the society, or a socio-economic one for



developmental purposes, collective performativity shows how women empowerment in the Lebanese Shi'a communities are being acquired through the different practices and through exhibiting agency in different forms.

Power to, power with, and power within have also been noted in this transformational process as the existing hierarchies proved to be dynamic where Shi'a Lebanese women exerted agency through their involvement and establishment of foundations, organizations, associations, and networks. Furthermore, they have been entitled to managerial positions, which improved drastically their coordination and developmental skills which gave them access to bigger projects and decision-making in their communities that caused a shift in their social status and was different from traditional roles restricted to the house. Additionally, as individuality is important in this context, collective action, social mobilization and alliance is more substantial in attaining power as it motivates a wider range of participation and achieve sustainable development. Ultimately, this collective action increases individual consciousness and awareness of choices, rights which transform basic aspirations into actions that change stereotypes. Pious Shi'a women who are aware of what their proactive role is in society are working toward changing the traditional role of being a mother, sister, or wife, to more responsive roles and duties that serve to develop their community, whether skills, needs, demands, knowledge, and other aspects.

As for achievements and resources, they are not independently sufficient in the context of my study, although they are complementary to power and agency. Change, being a crucial component of development, is the purpose and objective of the transformative process. The subsets including control, conscientization, welfare and access to opportunities in the community are part of the change procedure in the

conceptualization of women empowerment in this context. Participation in the sense of representation in contributions to be rewarded has a different understanding than the participation that the Shi'a women entail in their communities. Participation in this context is referring to social, political and economical participation for the betterment of the community, whether in its development in educational, religious, access to social services, and other areas, and not only on political and legal matters for representation.

Coming to resources, gender biasness as discussed by Dreze and Sen (1995) is not how I conceptualize it in this context as it refers to access to professional training, ownership of property and employment, hence, not what I merely refer to in the conceptualization of women empowerment in this study. In the nature of the conceptualization of the element of resources, it is directed more at having a good command over wealth and other services that distributes and redistributes more resources, which is not the centre dimension that is dear to the understanding of empowerment in the context of the Shi'a women empowerment. This is to say, although the four sub-dimensions of women empowerment have intersecting points, they diverge at certain focal points in their conceptualization in the context of this study, putting more emphasis on the dimension of power and agency.

This transformational process that has occurred in the Lebanese Shi'a communities is definitely one influenced by a revolutionary Iranian model that has led the main Shi'a party religio-political Hezbollah's participation in Lebanon's different systems as previously presented in Figure 9. As the four indicators of this shift entail the educational, health, economical and political sectors, each will be discussed in the context at length.

Historically, the connection between Iran and the Lebanese Shi'a communities, taking into consideration the geostrategic importance of Lebanon and its proximity made it a natural regional platform for the international goals and rhetoric of the Islamic revolution (Ataie, n.d). The constitution showed an interest in the international rhetoric through its emphasis on a single world community which portrayed the Islamic revolution as "a movement aimed at the triumph of all the *Mustad'afin* (deprived) over the *Mustakbarin* (oppressors)" (Algar, 1980). Ayatollah Montazeri, head of the Constitutional Assembly, displays the rationale in 1979 as "our government was Islamic, and Islam recognizes no border." Hence, the figures who were advocating for exporting the revolution further claimed that Lebanon was pivotal to their goal (Ataie, n.d). "Syria and Lebanon were the springboard for promulgating the revolution," (Muhtashami, n.d), who had essential roles in founding Hezbollah years later. "If it were not for those activities in Syria and Lebanon, exporting the revolution might have been left unmaterialized as a chimerical aspiration" (Muhtashami, n.d).

The Islamic dimension of the 1979 Revolution was a model of resistance *per se* for the Muslims and specifically for the dispossessed Shi'a in Lebanon (Boulder, 1987; Norton, 1987). After the revolution, speeches on its regional role was the focal point. For instance, Mustafa Chamran's public speeches emphasized himself as arriving from Jabal Amil "whose people throughout the 1,400-year history of Islam have been under constant suppression" (Chamran, 1999).

From the political milieu, Lebanese Shi'a's main party Hezbollah clearly showed that it has focused on the political side beyond military victories. This is visible in the change that took place in Lebanon's parliamentary elections in August and September 1992. These were the two first open elections and they led to high

representations for Hezbollah with women being involved and able to vote. The rise of Islamic revivalist movements, and Shi'a party Hezbollah in particular, has been tied to crises including Arab defeats by Israel, failure of balanced socioeconomic development, pervasiveness of political oppression, misdistribution of wealth, and the disorienting psycho-cultural impact of Westernization (Hamzeh, 1993). These crises have shaped the political dynamics of Islamic activism in Shi'a Lebanon, which got further reinforcement from the victory of the Muslim cause in Iran. Moreover, Hezbollah's formation was certainly tied to the Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon in June 1982 where there was a dispatch of 1,500 Iranian Revolutionary Guards to the Syrian-controlled Biqa' region in 1982 that brought Iran into Lebanon. Accordingly, Hezbollah was formed under the sponsorship of Iran and still receives funds and sponsorship in different sectors.

Since Hezbollah's founding in 1984, it called for the integration of Lebanon in a greater Islamic state. Its ideology was formulated by Sayed Muhammad Hussain Fadlallah and other religious figures, and was derived from the political discourses of Ayatollahs Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and al-Khomeini and the experience of the Iranian Revolution. In its very nature, Hezbollah accedes to the theory of the Governance of the Religious Jurist, or *Wilayat al-Faqih*, which was elaborated by al-Khomeini in his famous tract on Islamic government (Hamzeh, 1993). Its fundamental teachings were the Shi'i Islam curriculum and emphasized the passage of authority to the Just Jurisconsult or *Wali al-Faqih* in the absence of the Twelfth Imam. In this context, Sayed Fadlallah and other leaders of Hezbollah theoretically worked on establishing an Islamic Republic in Lebanon where they defined it as a state ruled by Islamic law (Hamzeh, 1993).

*Below is an account of my visit to Islamic school networks in al-Dahiye:*

*As I entered two networks of Shi'a private schools in al-Dahiye, the discourses, curriculum, imagery and slogans were overflowing. At these schools, Al-Mahdi school network and Al-Mustafa school network established in 1993, ten years after the establishment of Hezbollah, students are indoctrinated with radical Shiite concepts based on the Shiite Islamic ideology. This indoctrination includes glorification of Ayatollahs Khomeini and Khamenei, support for Hezbollah and the path of the "resistance".*

*Me: How is the school network operated?*

*Staff Member Z: The school network is operated by the Islamic Education Foundation and is headed by Dr. Hassan Yusuf, who is the director of the foundation. He works on professional departments like human resources, administration, supervision, finance, educational supervision, and culture and religious education. Also, you find women and men having equally distributed opportunities in the different departments of the schools...Females are not only teachers, but you can also find them in the administration, monitoring rooms, and financial offices.*

*Me: What is the mission or objectives in the education sector of this network?*

*Teacher F: Al-Mahdi School Network is an education association where our objective is oriented at the young generation to create a new generation of people with a mission,*

*awareness, and education. We do this through establishing schools, training teachers and writing a specific curriculum where it includes the values of Shiite Islam and knowledge in practical and areas. Our students study the events of the different occurrences around the world that are unique to Shi'a Islam including the Islamic Revolution in Iran and we really emphasize the concept of Wilayat al-Faqih with Imam Khomeini's teachings. Other content-areas are given as we want our students to excel and enter universities with important majors that could later reflect and enhance our Shi'a communities. We also give grant scholarships for our high achievers in recognizable universities.*

*Me: What does the curriculum entail? What about some memorials or activities that are commemorated or celebrated throughout the course of the year?*

*Faculty Member M: Around 96 activities are organized annually. 41 of those are related to the courses studied like sciences and language while the other 28 activities are on Shiite Islam. They include commemoration dates such as birthdays of the Imams or their martyrdom or Shahada. Some activities are dedicated to Hezbollah and Iran such as commemorating the date of Israel's withdrawal from Southern Lebanon and the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. We also expose our students on Shahid Leaders Day to guest speakers of wounded operatives, and pay them visits to painting exhibition of religious figures. Besides such activities, we highlight emphasizing on integrating social values in the curriculum such as Lebanese Teachers Day, safe use of the Internet, and management skills and priorities. Also, towards the end of the year, we have*

*activities that are very essential to strengthening the bond between families, children and their parents to reinforce family values as it is also fundamental teachings of Islam.*

Coming into existence by Iranian military and financial patronage, Hezbollah has used abundant Iranian support to transform from chiefly a military group to an armed political party that has had an enduring effect on the Lebanese Shi'a social, economical and political life. In the education sector, schools and institutes have been constructed since the 1980s, and Iran has helped equip with educational centers where it has established its own parallel institutions in the Shiite areas of Lebanon, which work in cooperation with the organization with more than ninety schools that have been established in Lebanon with Iranian funds (Khalaji, 2006). Thus, the focus on empowering and enhancing the education sector with women having status and managerial positions among men serves as a means of spreading Shi'a ideology and strengthening its position among the Shiite community in Lebanon, which also shows a change in the existing power relations and hierarchies. These institutions are providing the Shi'a community with services and skills that in other countries are provided by the state while exploiting the weakness of the Lebanese administration and its long-standing neglect of the Shiite community.

Iran, establisher and financier to Hezbollah had a pragmatic course in politics, economy and health after the death of Khomeini. *Jihad al-Bina'* or the Holy Reconstruction Organ, which has eight committees, provides services to members and supporters of Hezbollah. These services range from medical care to housing and public utilities with women having positions in the institute including nurses, medical assistants, therapists, and techs (Hamzeh, 1993). Shi'a communities and its different sectors supported with Hezbollah's profile shows clearly Iran's impact aimed since 1989

through its guidance within the system which has massively improved, enhanced and empowered deprived Shi'a in Lebanon through its dynamic and energetic force.

### **C. Limitations of Empowerment**

It becomes clear that Hezbollah and Iran did a good job in bringing women to the public sphere. As much as there were changes that were brought about, there remains restrictions or limitations in a way or another regarding the expression of issues that were different than the mainstream. Regarding the dimensions that were discussed previously, each will be explored alongside its limitations.

As for the public sector, the education milieu shows that women made significant gains in education specifically after obstacles were put to specialized fields. Women were found in different faculties, departments, service offices, and administrations. However, what still was visible was that head members with higher authority in schools and educational institutions were always associated with male figures and lacked women within these positions. Apart from the education sector, leisure life also notes some barriers that go hand in hand with conservatism and tradition. As women are omnipresent in different public spaces, in accordance to Deeb's (2007) arguments, social interactions in these sites usually are expected to abide by a moral expectation of conservative behavior that is established through self-discipline and external enforcement. In other words, unrelated men and women are not expected to sit too closely to one another in restaurants (*Masafa Shar'iyah*), while other places are still sex-segregated including some cafes and beaches. Lebanon, specifically during 1998-2000 and the 2006 Israeli war underwent chronic warfare which further led Hezbollah to prioritize cultural production, encouraged investment in al-Dahiye and



vitalized a desire among the youths to embrace the leisurely aspects of life. Nonetheless, in agreement with Deeb, Hezbollah itself is involved in promoting the development of the pious recreational sector and in defining the relationship between leisure and morality, which is a limitation in its nature as the party had notions of moral standards that should be abided by. Moreover, Hezbollah exerted control over the establishments of recreational spaces and the defining of "appropriate" sites in different neighborhoods in the al-Dahiye.

Politics is another the chief sector that is recognizable as a limitation. Starting in the 20th century, generally women in Lebanon garnered their rights to vote fairly. Nonetheless, there still exists a lack of their presence in Lebanon's political sphere. The political field in Lebanon is male dominated with minimal women actors. Following the 1989 Taif Agreement which put an end to the Lebanese Civil War, Ayatollahs Muhammad Hussain Fadlallah and Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din published their first works on women issues where the development of this novel gender discourse in Lebanon was chiefly the result of international interest in women's issues on the heels of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) in addition to a reaction to events occurring in Iran after Ayatollah Khomeini's death and where a new discourse on gender had emerged. The shift in Iranian gender discourse was to a certain extent mirrored in Shi'a communities in Lebanon. In agreement with Roba el-Husseini's (2008) claims, insofar, as religious rituals are concerned, Muslim women and men have the same obligations. However, this equality is challenged when it comes to civil rights with regard to rights and responsibilities. Although Shi'a thought has a potential advantage to create the foundation for the revision of the status of women and women's rights in Islamic jurisprudence, Shi'a legal scholars are still conflicted by conservative

thinking and many reformists consider the status of women in Islamic society to be a great challenge to the interpretation of Shari'a and its modernization in order to protect women's rights and modify religious laws relating to women. Thus, the role of women or the social status of women is directly influenced by the social and political environment in addition to the local traditions, beliefs and collective conscience such as its epic history that has a direct impact on behavior and traditions, which leaves women absent from the political sphere including positions in the parliaments, cabinets and higher-decision makings.

From another point, the repression of Shi'a political parties, mainly Hezbollah and Amal Movement, is another limitation as these entities control the Shi'a communities for political reasons and interest, where women and men are restricted or prevented to take part in the political life of the society, hence reducing their standing among their fellow citizens. As Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at the Lebanese American University, Imad Salamey, claims, "Hezbollah has always prioritized its strategic alliance...at the expense of the public interests of the larger Shiite community" (Nashed, The Daily Dose, 2019). Until recent days, outspoken critics of Hezbollah during the 2019 October Revolution have expressed to reporters that the group has repressed protests in Southern Beirut, while Amal has attacked protesters in the South including Tyre and Nabatieh (Nashed, The Daily Dose, 2019). As the political parties gave insights and commands to participate in the protests or not, many members abided and restricted their participation while others pulled themselves out. Thereby, repression of political parties is a visible barrier that is placing crucial restrictions on active actors participating in the community for different causes.

Bringing into conversation the lack of pluralism in the rights for equality cannot but be discussed. This encompasses the dress code, personal status laws, and child custody. Following the Iranian Revolution, Shi'a women were politicized and expected to follow a certain Islamic conservative dress code, or the *hijab*, in addition to custody laws and divorce laws. Hence, Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah hegemony hindered individualization process by restricting the contestation of the mainstream. Moreover, patriarchal social norms are enforced. One of the problems of Islamic jurisprudence is based on the influence of patriarchy, which in turn was influenced by different social traditions throughout the history of Islam. Insofar, as the issue of heritage is concerned, it is very well known that this is a case of inequality between men and women in Islamic jurisprudence.

In Islamic Marital Laws, it shows that there exists patriarchal notions that are integrated in the Islamic jurisprudence and not a matter of culture or tradition. It is crucial to differentiate that the religion of Islam and people's cultural traditions are two separate factors, majorly being a major pitfall for practitioners as cultural practices and religious beliefs are confused. Approaching different aspects in marital law, women's right is realized as her consent is mandatory in the process of marriage. Nonetheless, as patriarchal notions are saturated in the process of marriage, it is in fact for the perseverance of the women. For instance, a *Mahr* or a mandatory payment in the form of money or possessions should be paid by the groom to the bride at the time of marriage, or the *Nafaqa*, or the financial support of a husband that must be provide for his wife even if she is financially stable. Moreover, during the *'idda*, a woman must observe a certain period after the death of her husband or after divorce, during which she cannot not marry another man which is also to maintain the family structure in case

pregnancy has taken place during the period of time. These being brought into conversation, it is realized that although the matter could be seen as restrictions in the religion's legal status law that might put women at a confined position, marriage laws are mutually confirmed to from both sides. As for divorce, there are some limitations alongside the honoring of women's rights. Either a man or woman can initiate a divorce, which leaves the '*Osma*' for any of the two where they can pursue a divorce or they can pursue a divorce jointly and amicably. Nonetheless, a limitation is that under personal status laws, the husband is permitted to revoke a divorce within the waiting period or the '*Idda*' without his wife's consent and without the need to conclude a new marriage, leaving the authority in his hands. Moreover, child custody or '*Hidana*' after divorce is another element that has brought much debate regarding parent accountability. As the custody of a male child is the right of the mother until the child is capable of taking care of his own self, approximated at the age of seven years of age, and a female child declared at the age of nine, the rights of the mother will be taken away under some conditions such as re-marrying a non-relative, where the child will be affected, among other conditions. Thus, women do not have full rights regarding the upbringing of their children with respect to the legal laws.

The Shia's experiences of its exclusion, marginalization or alienation drove to the accumulation of power through geopolitics and ideological concerns that was a common denominator that proceeded towards minimizing the barriers that hampered participation in different areas in the public sphere. With the discussion of the different power relations offered by Rowlands (1997) and Kabeer (1999), power to is effective in this context as a change was exercised in the power relation in the household and communities which increased the role of Shi'a women in becoming breadwinners,

financially supporters, educated, earn equal or fair incomes, own property, vote and custody rights, among other rights. Hence, a challenge of the inequalities or unfair privileges was faced and challenged, and worked towards its amelioration. Although there still remains gaps in rights in regards to gender equality, the very aspect of change from traditional roles to being active participants in the public spheres of life was highly noticed.

Lebanon has built limited progress in assisting gender equality, empowering women, and making room for women to have roles in achieving sustainable development (Avism, 2017). Nonetheless, the limited progress noticed is related to legal and constitutional reforms which evidenced Lebanon when it became among the first countries in the Arab region to give women equal rights in participating fully in politics during the 1950s. Hence in 1996, Lebanon confirmed the Convention on the Elimination all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). As recognized in the first report, the term gender is a confusing concept in the region and is utilized interchangeably with women and women's affairs (Avism, 2017). The Arabic translation of gender is *al-Naw'a al-Ejtima'ai*, or the social type of men and women, which does not represent its conceptual meaning (UNDP, 2012). Despite the progressive step of giving women full participation, women continue to be excluded from some areas, such as the Parliament, until 1991. Nonetheless, ministries and public agencies still fail to notice gender dimensions in their work (IWSAW, 2016).

Lebanon confirmed the Convention on the Elimination all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1996 but still refutes the objectives of CEDAW with articles that are related to personal status laws and nationality rights of women citizens. In the reservations, the Lebanese state rejected to give women the same

rights as men in areas including marriage, divorce, and custody matters. Although many acquired rights, Lebanese women still encounter discrimination, leaving gender equality in Lebanon a shifty objective.

#### **D. Ashura Rituals**

Before linking Ashura rituals to a theoretical framework, a discussion will be made to account what rituals initially function for. Rituals are realized as “repetitious and stylized symbolic bodily actions that are centered on cosmic structures or sacred presence” (Zuess, 1987). Rituals further function for various purposes ranging from the fulfillment of a religious duty to extending into serving as a fulfillment of a spiritual and emotional need that enhances social bonds and further establishes a social acceptance of an event. In Durkheim's terms, he identified specifically religious rituals as being "used by people to sacralize the social structure and bonds of the community and to ensure the unconscious priority of communal identification” (Bell, 1997).

The continuous practicing of the rituals of Ashura has played a crucial role in the crystallization of Shi'a religious concepts and meanings. As these mourning rituals are not static in nature but have rather developed, they have further established ideological and social significance within the pious Shi'a identity that transcend merely an emotional and psychological nature. This does not belittle its emotional and psychological nature since these are the starting points of the practices' development. Meanings, as Storey suggests, are not applied in social interaction, but rather are an essential aspect of the interaction itself where meanings are constitutive parts of the nature of social interactions (Storey, 1950). The practices of mourning rituals are thus constructed from social interactions where meanings are being generated that assist 'its

taken-for-grantedness' (Storey, 1950). This is to say, intertwining the material life and social life, the human-to-human or human-to-object interactions is what builds a foundational society with practices, actions, and interactions. In sustaining an everyday life, it is essential to look at the relation between structure and agency. Hence, every day practices is what enables human interactions (Storey, 1950).

Throughout my fieldwork, I encountered a researcher who was studying Shi'a culture and writing on the concept of empowerment in the sense of *Tamkeen*. He elaborated with the following words:

*Researcher Jay: When I am asked about women empowerment in an Islamic framework, I base it on the Qur'anic concept of Tamkeen found in Chapter 28, verses 5 and 6. In Islamic history, women did not have a leading role, rather a marginal one. This all changed after Karbala, where women of the household of the Prophet took a leading role in informing the Muslim community about the severity of what has happened including challenging the ruler or the appointed caliph himself. Zainab, sister of Hussain, challenged Muawiya and uttered the powerful words that are repeated until the present day: "Lan Tamhu Thikrana", translated You will never erase our heritage, memory and legacy. Hence, memory referred to the heritage and legacy that is practiced until the present day by pious Shi'a to revitalize the memory.*

It is clear that women's position was habitually attributed and confined to the household. Nonetheless, the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, being one factor, drove and re-vitalized the *Taklif Shar'i* or religious duty of being responsible to be bold, face oppression with truth, and have a voice in the community through different positions. Thus, agency is not merely having the knowledge and acknowledging the practices and

culture, in addition to being self-reliant, but further through performativity. As agency stems out of a religious duty as a starting point in this context, the two main elements that came with the Islamic Revolution showed a transformation of *Takiyah* or an expedient dissimulation to *Taa'bia*, or a mobilization. Ayatollah Khomeini left no room for an expedient dissimulation which characterizes practicing the rituals in private and hiding them. Rather, the stress upon performance in public was fortified as performativity and is initially a religious duty in Shi'a Islam.

*My interlocutor further added that Tamkeen was a religious duty and explained the different domains it could be found in society:*

*Researcher Jay: Taa'bia or mobilization extended to many sector in society. It is identified that the word Taa'bia is attributed to any association that is in charge of mobilizing society. Taa'bia Tarbawiya, or the Educational Youth Association, for instance, shows how mobilization extends to many sectors in society, including the one of education. So, even education is a religious duty. Expanding their knowledge and skills to develop the individuals in society to become productive citizens is chief in every society and community. This is also a standard in Shi'a Islamic belief.*

The role of women in their respective societies can be interpreted from these observations which go beyond the household. As a religious duty, standard of Shi'a Islamic belief and responsibility holds true, they have a role in mobilization in continuing the legacy of the coming generations, which was alluded in women religious figures' call. This brings into conversation that following the Iranian Revolution which



called for development and responsibility of women in their communities, women became more responsible to take part in their communities, become members of associations and networks, and developmental programs, whether on social, political, or economic levels.

*Recounting my visit to one of the Women's Martyrs Association, I opened a discussion on the women's roles and participation as they took part of these networks.*

*Hajje Fatima: Shi'a social networks and associations are good examples that when women's sons, husbands or brothers are martyred or injured (physically cannot sustain their families anymore), those networks which are operated and monitored by women stress on the Kafala which binds the community together. So these associations, whether helping orphans, families of martyrs or the injured transforms the duty to the community. As the breadwinner, usually the father, is no longer present in the family to sustain it financially, the whole Shi'a community becomes the breadwinner, or in other cases the mother who is educated, financially capable of raising the family, knowledgeable and skillful. So different elements such as their education and personal needs are satisfied. The roles of the networks and associations helped in mobilization, or else the Shi'a community will go back to Takiya...*

*On one of the billboards in the main entrance of the Women's Association, the sign states, "Every day is Ashura and every land is Karbala. This is a common slogan used among pious Shi'a scholars. When I asked about its origin, it did not seem to have a specific history of its usage. However, the ladies working at the Association explained*

*its usage by Ayatollah Khomeini, commonly within a political understanding to accompany the religious duty of these networks and associations, which share fate with the community. In other words, these associations having several functions in society are oriented to make the pious Lebanese Shi'a community "well-off".*

Discussing religious duty does not swell on the pietistic and soteriological aspects of a culture or religion. Rather, a religious duty offer individuals and contributes in the whole community which elevates bundle dimensions. This reference to religion or religious duty serves as a preserver of identity. Taking Hezbollah as an exemplification, it becomes understandable that this political party has become more institutionalized than any other political party because of its religious duty that is eventually mobilizing Shi'a society, with its plentiful resources and strong base in society due to their massive followers. One *mokhtar*, or neighborhood official, in al-Dahiye claims:

*Mokhtar Ali: The doctrine [Ashura legacy] took almost 1000 years to crystallize. It took time to institutionalize these networks and associations through economy, political, social and cultural dimensions.*

From the social dimension, this same religious duty has further taken effect on the positionality of women in their communities. The position of women in Shi'a communities today in comparison to their position prior the emergence of Shi'a political parties and movements realizes an empowerment deficiency.

*Researcher Jay: It was a religious duty to come out from the ground. As Franz Fanon describes it, "they were crushed". Also, if we look at the Qur'anic verses, we come across the word Mustakbirin, which is referring to the well-off people in a society. When Imam Khomeini used it in his speeches, it came from Qur'anic reference; Mustakbirin as the rulers and oppressors while Mustad'afeen, the oppressed.*

As the Qur'an makes an observation on *Mustakbirin* and *Mustad'afeen*, it is realized that due to an unjust distribution of economic power, the consequence will be the emergence of those two distinct classes. The former relates to an economically powerful and corrupt people that are oppressing the weaker in that society, while the latter involves economically weak and oppressed people who are satisfied with their fate.

In the coming section, Social Ritual Theory will be approached from Durkheim's collective effervescence, where there is a mutual shared emotional arousal and reinforcement of group ties and social solidarity. Randall Collins's work, based on Durkheim's Social Ritual Theory, discusses ritualized interaction through emotional energy, which will be explored through the schematic diagram of ritual theory to show how Ashura rituals relate to group cohesion and solidarity of the women in their communities through transforming knowledge into belief and membership into belonging, taking into account factors including practices, behaviors, co-presence, subjective state, among others. This will also open way to elaborate on how the performance of the practices transforms into a performativity aspect.

## **E. Social Ritual Theory**

This section investigates a sociological and anthropological approach to ritual theory. As previously mentioned, the emotional and psychological natures are the starting points of understanding mourning rituals. Nonetheless, the ideological and social significance will be the constituents examined closely, hence a brief account will be given on that milieu.

From a psychological lens, Sigmund Freud determines the concept of mourning to be a "reaction to the loss of a beloved person or an abstraction taking the place of the person, such as fatherland, freedom, an ideal and so on" (Freud, 2000). This depicts that loss is the driving factor for emotional arousal which is accompanied with grief and establishes a psychological readiness to mourn an event or person.

Accordingly, the loss of the Shi'a *Imam*, Hussain, was the starting point where the pious Shi'a had a collaborative cause to mourn a common loss. Furthermore, mourning is a process that has the ability to entail a healthy ritual which comes from phases of emotional reaction and the purpose of these rituals is in organizing and practicing the stages of mourning (Freud, 2000). Ashura commemoration events display a similar notion of preparedness for the organizing of the months of Muharram and Safar, the months of mourning and remembrance that elicit the practicing stages of mourning.

From another lens, the sociological and anthropological literature brings forth the social system rather than the individual one. When investigating collective mourning rituals, memory is clearly an essential factor for the social construction of any community. As sociologist Maurice Halbwachs explores, memory, even if perceived on an individual stage, is not merely related to an individual, but further belongs to a social system in terms of its interaction with social environment in society (Halbwachs, 1992).

Durkheim argues that mourning is not associated to express an individual's manifestation, but rather a reaction to traditions that society inflicts (Durkheim, 1961). Consequently, the annual commemoration of Hussain and his martyrdom or cause portrays that the process of mourning is not a personal matter restricted to an individual's natural provocation towards a loss, but further a duty that the whole pious Shi'a community thrusts. It is apparent that Durkheim connects the force to a social strand instead of an individual one. Thus, when Durkheim investigates the concept of society, he claims that it is the core of all other constituents of the world (Durkheim, 1961). Due to his view, mourning Hussain is one constituent that focuses on the vitalization of the Shi'a societies where the events of commemorations become the driving factor that joins individuals together through the strengthening of their networks and relations via an emotional state that leads to obtaining a 'compensation for the loss' (Durkheim, 1961). Accordingly, the collective ritual practices by the pious Shi'a in Ashura intensifies the strength of the Shi'a groups with the cohesion they are advocating to. Moreover, this collective communication through emotions is fundamental in showing the re-establishment of the Shi'a society where the pious Shi'a participants are perceived as member of the whole Shi'a society that shares in mourning to defeat a common cause or loss. As ethnographer Arnold van Gennep discusses the function of mourning, he focuses on the reintegration of society which occurs through practices of mourning rituals (van Gennep, 1960). Hence, the reintegration of pious Shi'a members, either through networks, associations, or other means, are being reproduced with their roles of agency in their respective societies.

Coming to Collin's Schematic Model or Ritual Theory, the event of Karbala and the Ashura rituals that ensued support this theory. Before investigating the different

elements of the model, it is essential to obtain a translucent definition of the terms within the diagram (see Figure 10). This section gives an account of what is meant by the two end products, belief and belonging, in their respective context, in addition to the initiating points of the emotional state of anxiety, uncertainty and transition, which show intersecting points along other elements that lead to the end products.

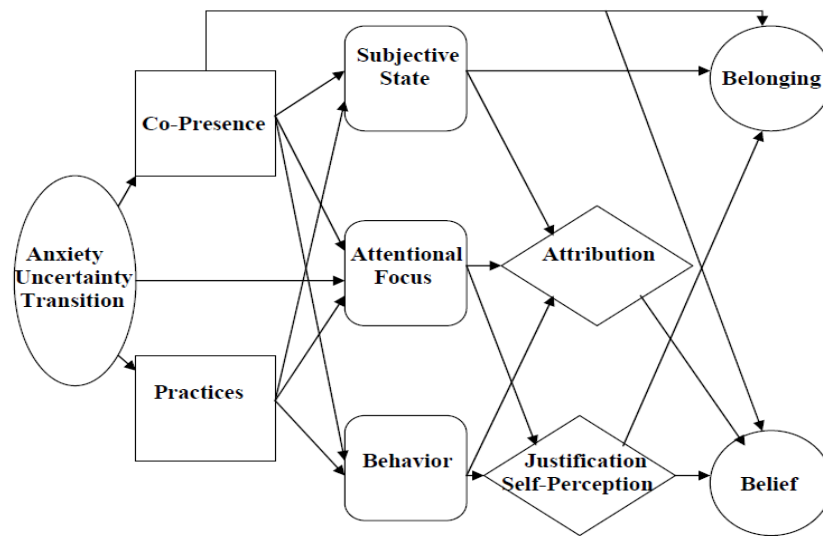


Figure 10: Randall Collins's Schematic Diagram of Ritual Theory extracted from Douglas A. Marshall's "Behavior, Belonging, and Belief: A Theory of Ritual Practice" *Sociological Theory* 20, no. 3 (2002).

Belief, in its nature, refers to holding true of a concept with acceptance despite having any evidence. In the context of Ritual Theory, belief does not denote simplistically having knowledge, faith, or confidence in its accuracy. To a further extent, beliefs exceed knowledge where processes, analysis, and sense-making of the information received is more of the basis of the individual. The characteristics of these beliefs are unconditional and fixed against 'doubts and challenges' (Marshall, 2002). The other end product, belonging, similarly transcends the shallow definition of 'being' within a group. Rather, the concept of belonging transcends the aspect of membership

and implicates the desirability, recognition, and solidarity that drives the individual to be pledged to be a member of a certain group.

As the figure depicts, there are elements that are interacting simultaneously which have an impact on each other. As a psychological and emotional account was provided earlier, it is evident that an emotional state is at the starting point where all the elements depart from. Specifically, the emotional state is marked by the elements of anxiety, uncertainty, and transition. Initially, it is those elements that provoke co-presence and practice, which eventually construct belief and belonging. When defining co-presence, the term strictly refers to "the simultaneous presence of individuals in the same physical location, not necessarily engaged in face-to-face interaction with each" (Oxford Reference, 2019). This is ensured by Durkheim's claim when he argues that "under great collective shock...social interactions become much more frequent and active...individuals seek one another out and come together more" (Durkheim, 1995).

The martyrdom of Hussain and the tragic occurrence of Karbala is the emotional state that stimulated and provoked the pious Shi'a to respond to the event through different reactions including creating meaning to the memory and safeguarding the memory for future generations to preserve the tragedy. Hence, the members of the group exhibit such responses due to their 'collective sense of guilt' (Saturen, 2005) of the loss. They showed unity in safeguarding the memory by initiating networks where the memory was always brought up, commemorated, and passed on from generation to generation. The loss of the Shi'a *Imam* thousands of years ago was the collective shock that provoked the Shi'a to respond and react to the commemoration through different means; ultimately, keeping the rituals and tradition alive and relevant to the spiritual, social and individual phases of the group's lives.

Stemming from the emotional state, co-presence is one of the main blocks that lead to belief and belonging. What is co-presence invoking in this context? As Durkheim asserts, in times of stress, uncertainty, and doubt, individuals who have passion will seek “the company of those who feel and think as we do” (Durkheim, 1984). Hence, individuals who are getting together during a tragic event, in this case Ashura, they are not doing it for the sake of getting some sort of accurate information about the event but rather want to reduce their uncertainty and elevate their belief (Marshall, 2002). In this context, the aftermath of the Karbala tragedy gave people a subject of conversation to gather and recount to events of Karbala and solidify their beliefs. In the lights of belonging, Marshall declares:

*Simple contact between individuals is a powerful source of liking and cohesion, playing as it does upon multiple mechanisms of attachment, including mere exposure, closeness, similarity, and mere categorization. Moreover, both the developmental and ethological evidence indicate that such proximity-attachment linkages have strong biological underpinnings.*  
(Marshall, 2002).

From this point, the gatherings of the pious Shi'a who have sympathized with the Ashura tragedy constructed a sense of cohesiveness and likeness among the members of the group. Frequent meetings of these individuals, whether in mourning councils or other forms of practices, enhanced the bonds and sense of belonging among the members of the group. These increased social interactions among the pious Shi'a groups made the pious Shi'a commemorators distinct to other groups in society with clear boundaries. It further stimulated the establishment of associations and networks where each had its own purpose and goal, including educational, social, or religious services.



The other main block in the Model is practices, which also leads to belief and belonging. A group's gathering during times of stress, uncertainty, and doubt, is not solely aimed to reinforce a belief and solidify belonging, but rather come together for a cause. In other words, practitioners actively participate in common practices that turn into developed behaviors in order to focus on the beliefs and belonging to solidify their union (Marshall, 2002). Pious Shi'a women developed feelings of responsibility for the loss and the tragedy. Hence, throughout the gatherings and mourning councils, practitioners cultivate their feelings and implant with them remembrance as an institution. A series of common mourning practices were expressed, reinforcing pious Shi'a belief and belonging.

As co-presence and practices were the two main blocks of the Model that stimulate belief and belonging, this does not underrate the other elements in this model. The other constituents include subjectivity, attention focus, and behavior. Active participants have become more task-oriented, as they consider themselves fundamental units rather than subjects, and enact behaviors.

In the Ashura event and practices, reciting narratives and weeping is not done on individualistic levels. Street marching and processions are also done collectively and require group influences that help in group focus attention on the rituals. After going into the different elements of the Model, it becomes apparent that the tragedy of Karbala was an event that triggered the development and evolution of Ashura rituals. Through elements such as co-presence and practice, along other elements, Ashura rituals have developed from basic or traditional rituals into full-fledged rituals. Each Ashura ritual practice, whether linguistic or performative, plays a vital role in reinforcing pious Shi'a

identity and collective memory due to the further shift from a ritual being based on performance, into a ritual of performativity.

## **F. From Performance to Performativity**

As the performance of the practices was expressed to keep the tradition alive and for the future generation's revival, performance further led to the transformation of performativity. Because the Shi'a were marginalized throughout Islamic history, the performance went undergone, however did not die. In the context of Saddam Hussain's rule in Iraq, public practices of the rituals, such as processions and *al-Arba'in* walk, were prohibited. Nonetheless, it reappeared again after the rise of the Islamic Revolution of 1975 and after Saddam's execution. This enabled the performances to take place back in public and private spaces. This marks a transmission of a tradition. Erving Goffman describes actions and interactions as a matter of acting where performances give a meaning to a purpose in order to obtain an 'impression management' (Goffman, 1990). Through interactions, individuals give meanings to those interactions in aim to control the impression others make. Goffman ensures that the chief element in all social actions and interaction is "the maintenance of a single definition of the situation, this definition having to be expressed, and this expression sustained in the face of a multitude of potential disruptions" (Goffman, 1990).

Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement suggests that "one is not born a woman, but rather, becomes one" (de Beauvoir, 1986). Accordingly, gender is thus an element that is constructed, produced and reproduced in culture rather than being fixed by nature. Butler's theory of performativity also assists that gender is constructed in culture and not a synonym for biological sex (Butler, 1993). This is to say, the reality of

gender is constructed through "sustained social performances" (Butler, 1993). It is apparent that individuals do not have a 'born' identity that directs and performs the self but rather it is every day practices that produces and reproduces people. Consequently, identities become the accumulation of beliefs that expresses the inside and outside of the human nature which is expressed by Butler:

*Performance is not a singular act or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not determining it fully in advance*  
(Butler, 1993).

Thus, the transformation from performance to performativity brings into conversation how women, being carriers of the tradition, reproduce their identity and redefine their agency.

It is also crucial to note the impact of repetition. Ibn Khaldoun discusses in his *Al-Muqaddima, The Introduction*, the importance of repeating a practice as it allows the participants to acquire a new trait (Ibn Khaldoun, 2005), which is only possible through repeating it. Hence, the repetition of mourning rituals renders it into a trait, and helps it become a status or fixed trait. Ibn Khaldoun, stresses on repetition leading to faculty, whereas Pierre Bourdieu explains practices as leading to 'habitus', being a "system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as matrix of perceptions, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks" (Bourdieu, 1977). This could be seen as a result from a relation between a practice and the social actor's structure that reproduces the reorganization of the physical and spiritual society, which brings change in the normal

system. Hence, the annual commemoration of the Ashura rituals and practices is guided by a *habitus* that would shape social actors' behaviors.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The discussion above provided an in-depth examination of Shi'a rituals to explore the following questions:

- (1) What is the content of the rituals that is actively being practiced by women in the mourning events?
- (2) Are the active actors/participating women attaining collective power and is it elevating their empowerment and agency through their participation in the rituals?

The Ashura rituals that arose after the Karbala tragedy were intended to first and foremost safeguard the sacredness of the event. The consistency of the Ashura commemoration and ritual practices ensured that the Karbala tragedy was not limited to the seventh century commemoration but continued throughout Shi'a history as it holds social, religious, and political significance. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 had a significant impact on the pious Lebanese Shi'a communities and practices, but not that smoothly. This Revolution was the threshold of the shift which opened ways for the reinterpretation of the proactive role of women figures, including Sayeda Zainab, which influenced women's vitality for the welfare of their communities in Lebanon. Discourses and narratives were re-interpreted by prominent Muslim intellectuals and scholars to redefine the characteristics of women figures, including Zainab, as outspoken activists in order to push the boundaries of what is expectable for an ideal

pious Shi'a women to expand their roles within their religious communities and national politics. Iran left fundamental traces in Lebanon to re-define gender roles and modernity in the contemporary world. Hence, women became more interested in being active and engaged within their communities to make their voices heard and seek pious ways of being modern in certain domains. Besides the motivating factors of the need to put an end to the marginalization of the Shi'a for a long period of time throughout history in different milieus and the stereotypes of their backwardness, which were motivating factors, part of the modernizing process was based on emphasis on religious reform focused on the Ashura commemoration and creating a connection between the Ashura history and a contemporary activist discourse. This further pushed women to be agents in their respective communities which encouraged their active engagements in networks, associations, organizations and institutions.

When it comes to women empowerment, different conceptualizations of empowerment are brought into conversation as the concept of women empowerment should not be understood within one context with one fixed dimension. Rather, the dimensions that fall within the conceptualization of women empowerment include women in the public sphere, women in the labor force, women in politics, and women's right for equality with men. Through those dimensions, pluralism was further explored in that context to assess the individualization factors with respect to agency. The sub-dimensions that were under study included agency, power, resources and achievements. Through field work and reviewing the existing literature, Ashura commemorations show some direct impacts on some dimensions, while indirect impact and no impacts on other dimensions. Hence, depending on the dimension, women empowerment varies.

It is fundamental to add that there existed other motives and causes that were occurring during the same time era that had an impact on women empowerment that were not related to the rebirth of the Shi'a community in Lebanon and the Ashura commemorations. Rather, women movements taking place around Lebanon and in the Arab countries pushed the boundaries to promote women's rights and participation in different areas. It is also important to note the end of the Lebanese Civil War, which was another endeavor that pushed women to be active participants to revitalize the economic growth and development in the country. State laws were also being implemented as they permitted women to gain their rights, socially, politically, and economically.

During the field work, the Ashura-related ritual practices, whether linguistic or performative ones, included memorial services, visitations of shrines, mourning processions, self-flagellations, or chest-beating among others. These practices played a fundamental role in reinforcing the pious Shi'a identity and collective memory. Based on Durkheim's Social Ritual Theory and Randall's model, it was evident that through co-presence and practice, Ashura rituals were essential in uniting the Shi'a, minding that the event took place over a millennium. Hence, reinforcing beliefs and sense of belonging distinctly gave the Shi'a their own rituals, and more broadly, their unique identity.

Consequently, the event of Ashura and its annual commemorations do not portray a culture that values death and martyrdom, but rather an embodiment of a depiction of struggle for justice in the face of oppression and injustices, regardless of space and time. It is essential to closely examine the evolution of the Ashura rituals as they are not static. The evolution of the rituals has encountered change in the nature of

form and content, which shows that the rituals are not solely rituals of lamentation and salvation, but rather a stimulating force to make use of to influence changes in the socio-political realm.

Limitations to women empowerment were realized when investigating the different dimensions. It cannot be denied that the Iranian-Hezbollah hegemony had a great impact in bringing women to the public sphere. On the other hand, as much as there were changes that were brought about, there remained restrictions or limitations in a way or another regarding the expression of issues that were different than the mainstream. The education sector noted that head members with higher authority in schools and educational institutions were always associated with male figures and lacked women within these positions. In addition, the repression of women by Shi'a political parties, mainly Hezbollah and Amal Movement, was part of controlling the Shi'a communities for political reasons and interest, where women and men were restricted or prevented from taking part in the political life of the society, hence reducing their standing among their fellow citizens. This further had an impact on the lack of pluralism in the rights for equality as it encompasses the dress code, personal status laws, and child custody. Again, the political parties' hegemony hindered individualization process by restricting the contestation of the mainstream with patriarchal social norms being enforced, leaving room for the consolidation of the autonomization of individualization of women.

This study contributed to the exploration of Lebanese Shi'a mourning rituals that take place during the months of Muharram and Safar that mark the martyrdom of Hussain in Karbala, the first two months according to the Islamic Lunar Calendar, in addition to other occasions throughout the course of the year where the mourning rituals



are continuous and omnipresent. These ongoing practices have a distinctive influence on individuals' lives on many levels including the religious, social, political and emotional/psychological ones. The effects of mourning rituals differ in their different practices, but fundamentally have a prominent influence on Lebanese Shi'a lives as a whole. This study was further able to find relations between religious and social aspects, in addition to political and psychological ones which have a strong symbolism in showing how rituals structure the individual and the group. The findings were also able to crystallize how rituals assisted in showing how pious Lebanese Shi'a have a commonality that distinguishes them from their surroundings, and give them a chance to state their solidarity and manifest their collective strength, which consequently directs toward the maintenance of a social existence. Moreover, historical events that took place in Lebanon, or Iran, have illustrated how the rituals were initially emotional rituals that have developed to acquire political interests and purposes.

The importance of gender as drawn up in the contemporary Ashura narratives and specifically in the character of Zainab, which is rooted in the factor of agency, reveals pious Shi'a women's transformation of self-perceptions that are directed at 'a shifting multi-sited authority' in their roles (Bard, 2010). The Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 was the threshold of the shift which opened ways beyond Iranian borders for the reinterpretation of the proactive role of Zainab, which was fundamental for the revelation of women in Lebanon to volunteer their vitality for the welfare of their communities. Iranian women were an example to Lebanese Shi'a women through taking on the characteristics of Zainab as an outspoken activist in order to push the boundaries of what is 'expectable' for a pious Shi'a woman to expand their roles within their religious communities and national politics (Afary, 2009).

Practicing these rituals annually has become an essential function in forming features of pious Lebanese Shi'a. The rituals that are being practiced contribute to bringing Shi'a together with a common feeling of belongingness. Poetry, as one of the linguistic approaches to the rituals, is an effective method used in Ashura rituals because of its direct impact on the participants. The use of Arabic poetry of high eloquence that come from the depth of history has the ability to pull the audience from present time to the original past time of the Karbala battle. This process holds solid connection between poetic address and participants and eventually brings an emotional impact on the audience which results in more interaction with the rituals.

While Karbala narratives were formerly approached as hindering women agency as they involved gender segregated practices, mainly focusing on male participation, the re-evaluated narratives presented a circumstance for women to hold crucial roles in the public and private spheres through reinforcing their vitality. Hence, the re-evaluation of the narratives and rituals helped in assisting the social status of women through establishing considerable social networks in the communities. Accordingly, the transformed rituals gave various social, psychological, and spiritual functions for the pious Shi'a women. It was then remarkable that spaces contained women with agency who further set out a visible position in the public sphere. Thus, the re-interpretation held a long-lasting impact on the pious Shi'a women's role in their respective societies, which could be further interpreted as a means for women's emancipation.

As for the repetition of the rituals, Ibn Khaldoun explores the importance of repeating a practice as repetition of a practice renders it into a trait. While repetition leads to faculty for Ibn Khaldoun, the repetition of a practice as Bourdieu discusses

leads to the habitus, where a relation comes about between the mourning ritual practices and the social actor's structure that reproduces the reorganization of the physical and spiritual society, leading to the change to the normal system. Consequently, the endurance and repetition of Ashura rituals is an attempt to change the reality and social status of the Shi'a in the world.

## APPENDIX I

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### **Unstructured Interviews in English and Arabic**

#### **Women and Agency: (Re)evaluating Collective Identity through Shi'a Ritual Performance**

All the information discussed in this interview should be kept confidential. Please refrain from stating any information that is sensitive of that may identify specific incidents and/or individuals.

#### Interview Questions

Background:

Name:

Age:

Sex:  Male  Female

Marital Status:  Single  Married

Nationality:

Education level:

Position:

Institution:

Affiliations:  Yes  No

If yes, mention:

- 1) What is women empowerment in an Islamic Framework in your opinion?
- 2) What are the objectives of the lectures and scripts read, publically and privately?
- 3) Do you think that women participation that has become an activism reflects a new type of religious authority that is different from a traditional one?
- 4) What is the framework (pietistic, economic, political...) you characterize by your activism?

- 5) Are religious or political affiliations a prerequisite to be an approved participant in private institutions (home gatherings)/ public institutions (street processions, congregational hall, mosques, and associations)?
- 6) What traits do you think characterize you as a pious Shi'a individual that makes you belong to pious practicing Shi'a community?
- 7) How do you see the position of women in the Shi'a community today in comparison to their position prior the emergence of Shi'a political parties and movements.
- 8) What practices are being practiced by women publically and privately. Do you differ from the ones of men?
- 9) What is the relationship in your opinion between collective power in the community and representation with the concept of women's agency in society?

ورقة جمع البيانات

المرأة والقوة: (إعادة) تقييم الهوية الجماعية من خلال أداء الطقوس الشيعية

يجب الحفاظ على سرية جميع المعلومات التي تمت مناقشتها في هذه المقابلة. يرجى الامتناع عن ذكر أي معلومات حساسة قد تحدد حوادث و / أو أفراد معينين

اسئلة المقابلة

خلفية:

اسم:

عمر:

أنثى  ذكر  :الجنس

متزوج  أعزب  :الحالة الاجتماعية

:الجنسية

:مستوى التعليم

:موضع

:المعهد

لا  نعم  :الانتماءات

:إذا كانت الإجابة نعم ، فذكر

1) ما هو تمكين المرأة في الإطار الإسلامي برأيك؟

2) ما هي أهداف المحاضرات والنصوص التي تمت قراءتها ، علانية وخاصة؟

3) هل تعتقد أن مشاركة المرأة التي أصبحت نشاطاً يعكس نوعاً جديداً من السلطة الدينية يختلف عن السلطة التقليدية؟

4) ما هو الإطار (التقوى ، الاقتصادي ، السياسي ...) الذي تميزه بنشاطك؟

5) هل الانتماءات الدينية أو السياسية هي شرط أساسي لتكون المشاركة المعتمدة في المؤسسات الخاصة (التجمعات المنزلية) / المؤسسات العامة (المواكب في الشوارع ، والقاعة الجماعية ، والمساجد ، والجمعيات)؟

6) ما هي الصفات التي تعتقد أنها تميزك كفرد شيعي تقي يجعلك تنتمي إلى مجتمع شيعي ممارس متدين؟

كيف ترى مكانة المرأة في المجتمع الشيعي اليوم مقارنة بوضعها قبل ظهور الأحزاب والحركات (7) السياسية الشيعية.

ما هي الممارسات التي تمارسها المرأة علنا وخصوصية. هل تختلف عن الرجال؟ (8)

ما هي العلاقة في رأيك بين القوة الجماعية في المجتمع والتمثيل بمفهوم الوكالة النسائية في المجتمع؟ (9)

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