AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

INTIMATE ALLIES: FAMILIAL BECOMINGS IN BEIRUT

by
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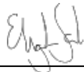

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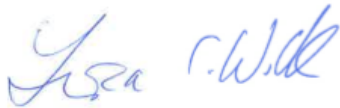

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ABSTRACT

OF THE THESIS OF

Rabea Youssef Hajaig for Master of Arts
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Title: Intimate Allies: Familial Becomings in Beirut

This study explores the intimate worlds of families and their queer kin in, and around, Beirut. Worlds, which despite being framed by legal and social homophobia have fostered the emergence of supportive family members. My thesis examines their departure from the cultural orthodoxy, and asks what the work of becoming, and acting as, an ally entails. My analysis focuses on three dimensions: forms of support, modes of becoming supportive, and the role of the non-profit sector in producing allyship.

The multiple ways family members capacitate their queer kin include; explicit statements of support, indirect acts of communicating normalcy, the use of language to reshape contexts, visible acts of solidarity, relief from dissimulation, protective lies and truth manipulation, as well as other unelaborated acts that reinforce comfort and safety.

The various resources that family members draw from to become capacitators of their queer kin include; kinship affects and intensities (love, fear of loss), transposable dispositions (rebelliousness, openness, empathy), transformative discourses (autology, nature), moralities and ethics (kinship, religion, tolerance), other "voices" (online articles, loved ones, queer friends), respect (financial success, independence), and normative performativity (masculinity, respectability).

Through the NGO-led "family support program" pilot, mothers were offered a space for relief and supportive friendships. They negotiated with new forms of discourse (aligned with a liberal social imaginary), to produce new possibilities of advantage suited for their social worlds. The impact of the latter was on the scale of the intimate, helping to ease anxieties around having a queer son and reshaping certain unhealthy dynamics with family and neighbors.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the intimate worlds of families and their queer kin, in and around Beirut. Worlds that, despite being framed by legal and social homophobia, have fostered the emergence of familial allies. I examine these departures from the cultural orthodoxy, to understand what the work of becoming, and acting as, an ally entails.

Before I continue, I'd like to introduce a few key concepts that will be used throughout the thesis. First, and for the sake of practicality, I deploy the word "queer," from here on, as an umbrella term to encompass a diverse group of non-normative sexual subjects, who do not all self-identify as such.

In regards to my understanding of support, here I take it to mean a “perception of support” emerging from a willful effort to contribute to the physical and/or emotional well-being of queer- acknowledged men, by family members. It should enable queer kin to live the life they want and reinforce their sense of interests, despite their being-otherwise. This support can take a myriad of forms and fall on different spectrums of visibility. It is important to highlight that in Lebanon familial support is key to individuals’ survival from birth to adulthood, given the country’s economic, social and urban particularities.

Finally, the terms ally and allyship: one of the most commonly cited definitions describes an ally as “a person who is a member of the ‘dominant’ or ‘majority’ group who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate for, the oppressed population.” (Washington & Evans 1991, 195). Locally, Lebanon Support’s Gender Dictionary translates allies as *hulafa*

and defines them as “heterosexual and cisgender supporters of LGBT rights” (Gender Dictionary 2016, 43-44). My usage of the terms resonates more with the former than the latter, particularly because my research focuses on matters of the intimate and quotidian, rather than the structural and legislative.

A. Background

The configurations of life I examine have been situated, produced, and negotiated in various domains over the last thirty years; these include the legislative, the socioeconomic, as well as in popular culture imaginaries and academic literature. I will unpack key aspects of these domains that are the most relevant to my thesis below.

1. Legislature

A common experience shared by queers in Beirut today, is that they are often received by their surrounding society with much contradiction, obliging them to navigate complex legal, political and social relations legitimized by Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code that prohibits “sexual acts against nature.” Lebanese authorities have interpreted this law in a way that has allowed them to police sexuality, and incarcerate those convicted of same sex relations for up to one year (Moussawi 2016, 50). According to a 2017 shadow report submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee, 315 individuals had been arrested under article 534 between 2012 and 2016, some of whom were subjected to torture including forced anal examinations, with society’s most vulnerable (such as refugees and trans-individuals) usually experiencing the worst of this (Helem, 2017).

In July 2018, a district court of appeal delivered a groundbreaking ruling that consensual sex between same- sex individuals was not illegal. This followed four similar judgments from lower courts declining to convict gay and transgender people under article 534 since 2007. However despite this promising turn, Human Rights Watch cautioned that, "despite the positive developments in the courts, the reality is that same-sex couples can still face jail time in Lebanon" (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

2. Socioeconomic Factors

Scholars have described sexual relations in the Arab world as relations of power linked to rigid gender roles ultimately serving in the (re)production of family as a fundamental social unit (Dunne, 1998). Those who do not visibly conform to gender and sexuality norms face the threat of social sanctions including stigmatization, and family estrangement (Human Rights Watch, 2019). This was echoed in the following 2012 post titled "On dependence," from the ohmyhappiness blog:[1]

> Most young people I meet today, who are still in school or in university, say the same thing: "I can't come out. I still live with my parents." "My father would cut me off if he knew I was gay." "There's no way my parents can find out about me. They'd kick me out." Because they were dependent on their parents, they could not be who they wanted to be (ohmyhappiness, 2012).

Dependence on family can also be understood as being entangled with state failure; in writing about the political economy of the Lebanese state in 1993, Suad Joseph describes the state as weak and failing to provide basic needs to its citizens, including social services and security, which had to be negotiated both outside and through the state. "Economic instability left increasingly larger portions of the population unemployed, underemployed, and impoverished, with neither the state nor

[1] The blog's author is based in Lebanon and describes himself as "gay, atheist, activist, pacifist, Arab. Among other horrible things."

private agencies able to subsidize the needy. In all these processes, the family, natal and extended, was the person's primary source of security" (Joseph 1993, 478). Thus in Joseph's Lebanon of the nineties, the social and the economic produced a world where survival was dependent on family support, and being acknowledged as queer threatened an individual's ability to thrive within that world.

Today, in the wake of the deepening economic crisis, the devaluation of the local currency, soaring inflation, and the elimination of subsidies for medicine and fuel have made it difficult for many to meet their most basic needs. A 2021 nationwide survey conducted by Human Rights Watch revealed that the median household monthly income was just US$ 122, with nearly 70% of households reporting difficulties in making ends meet or being behind on basic expenses. The findings underscore the failure of the current social protection system to mitigate the crisis for many people (Human Rights Watch, 2022) and also the necessity of familial support for survival.

3. Cultural Production

The majority of public discourse, news headlines and NGO reports around queerness in Lebanon often revolve around abjection, yet even there, the figure of a family member supporting their queer-acknowledged kin occasionally emerges. To argue for why this figure should not be overlooked and is more than a curious exception, I offer a few examples from the domain of cultural production.

In the world of NGO reports, for instance, family is often ignored or factored a threat. These texts often invoke support either in terms of self-organizing for activism, advocacy and care, or as services provided by organizations. This glorifies individuality by consequence (through a frame of recuperating victims). However even in these

accounts a glimpse of supportive family members can be gleaned. The following is an example:

> LGBT people face tremendous social pressures to remain in the closet, or even LGBT people whose immediate family members were aware and accepting of their sexuality or gender identity told Human Rights Watch that family members urged them not to share this aspect of themselves with the extended family, the community, or the general public (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

In an interesting turn of events, I discovered a recent exception to the above. Midway through the write-up of my thesis, I learned that a new NGO program addressing the families of queers was being piloted in Beirut, I will say more about this in chapter four.

In ethnographic works such as *Queer Disruptions*, we come across the supportive mother of Sirine, a 29-year-old Lebanese-Armenian genderqueer individual:

> The only thing I am worried about is your safety, I have known for the longest time, I have known." I then spent two hours crying and she was laughing at me and now it's a running joke. For example, when my aunt is trying to set me up with the next hunk, she [my mother] gets a kick out of it, when there is a cute girl she makes a gesture to me to check her out, and two weeks ago she asked me how is it on the heart front, so I said it is dry, she said we should set you up and I am like do you have anyone in mind. It is funny. This is the relationship I have with my mom. (Moussawi 2016, 91).

Similarly, in *Queer Beirut*, we are introduced to the supportive sister of Elio, a gay man, "barely one year his junior, who periodically teased him about his possible escapades on the 'queer' beach (…) north of their house (…). Elio's (…) sister, who could have been his twin in more ways than one, shared her brother's quick wittedness, and (…) teased him about what she knew was his homosexuality" (Merabet 2014, 52-53).

Traces of these supportive family members also exist in non-ethnographic resources as well, such as *Bareed Mista3jil* (express mail), where one voice recounts:

> With my brother things were very different… So I took the chance and came out to him. He immediately said to me: Inti ikhti ou ana b7ibbik keef ma kinti. It was the dream response anyone wishes for when coming out: I love you unconditionally. This was over a year ago. I saw him more recently when he visited Lebanon and we talked more about it. He was still supportive but he asked me not to tell people because we live in a ruthless society. (Meem 2009, 158)

In the autobiographical break-up song, *Shim el Yasmine* (2009) – written by the openly gay lead singer of the Lebanese indie-rock band *Mashrou' Leila*, Hamed Sinno (Elkamel, 2015) – the band's jilted frontman laments not being able to introduce a love interest to his family; singing, "*Kan biwiddi khalik bi'irbe, `arfak `a ahli* (I would have loved to keep you close, introduce you to my folks)." The song in which Sinno's openly supportive parents are invoked, had significant cultural currency and forced the image of allyship into many listeners' minds, both queer and non-queer.

A gay character called Mohammad inhabits Lebanese- American author Rabih Alameddine's novel *Koolaids* (1998), set between San Francisco and Beirut during the Aids epidemic and the Lebanese civil war. His supportive sister Nawal takes care of him as he battles AIDS. Of Nawal (and her friend) he writes, "They were my girls, staunch defenders against a country which wanted to obliterate me from its collective conscious" (Alameddine 1998, 76).

While there is a dearth in anthropological literature describing familial allies in Lebanon and at large, Suad Joseph's work on kinship in the region provides a starting point to think about these allyships. Joseph positions families as "one of the most powerful social structures throughout the Arab world" (Joseph 2018, 1) around which the social, political, economic, and religious pivot. Still, Joseph discourages an essentialized understanding of the term, as families are constantly "invented and reinvented" (Joseph 2010, 47).

Joseph proposes the term patriarchal connectivity to describe the interplay of gender, selves and identity in the general understanding of family in Lebanon. Patriarchal connectivity is a system that produces selves with "fluid boundaries organized for gendered and aged domination in a culture that valorizes kin structures, morality, and idioms" (Joseph 1999, 12). She sees persons as entrenched in relational networks that shape their deepest sense of self. However, these selves are distinctive, with each having its own initiative and agency, whose autonomy is nonetheless constrained by the confluence of patriarchy and connectivity.

Here Joseph understands patriarchy as a set of cultural constructs and structural relations that place men and elders in a position to direct the lives of others. Meanwhile connectivity is a set of cultural constructs and structural relations where individuals invite and require an involvement with others to shape the self (Joseph, 1999).

Accordingly, Joseph's familial self can best be described as a non-essentialized active agent, always in flux, and distinct from the figure of the "western homogenized individual- bounded, self-contained, and autonomous separative" (Joseph 1999, 15).

Joseph has also examined both brother-sister and brother-brother relationships (where one brother defers to another). In regards to the former, Joseph argues that while brother-sister relationships in the Arab world are vastly diverse, they are similar in that they tend to form connective relationships between each other based on love and nurture, but also power and violence. This love/power dynamic is mediated by patriarchal connectivity, as described earlier.

Joseph believes that this connectivity allows cross siblings to use their relationships as a testing ground to learn and practice socially conforming conceptions of masculinity and femininity, dominance and submission. As such, her model

emphasizes the contribution of both brother-sister and parent-child relationships to the construction of culturally appropriate gender roles. This is a divergence from Western psychodynamic theory, which pays little attention to siblingship in these processes (Joseph, 1994).

In regards to brother-brother relationships, Joseph maintains that these are fundamental in the reproduction of patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal culture. They often entail competitive dynamics that develop into strong brotherly solidarity, one which can eclipse other supposedly intimate relations within the family or domestic community (such as those between husband and wife).

Joseph proposes that these relationships are mediated by patriarchal connective mirroring. This is a process that starts when a subordinate brother recognizes components of his self *mirrored* back at him from the dominant brother, particularly those that have assimilated patriarchy.

For the subordinate, the part of his self that yearns to be a patriarch sees the dominant brother as a symbol of that self, and a symbol of the system which makes that self possible. This is the part of the junior brother that is willing to defer to the senior brother. The junior brother defers because his patriarchal self is "in" the patriarchal brother. He defers because the patriarchal brother enables the self.

Thus the subordinate’s submission to the authority of the patriarchal other serves to reproduce the system which promises the subordinate that he will become a patriarch himself. A system which also supports his authority elsewhere. His deference to his dominant brother's authority, for example, helps teach and model his children's deference to his own patriarchal authority.

Because the relationship is not one between two opposites but rather one between a self and a reflection that shares the same patriarchal credo, the subordinate submits to the patriarch with love and respect rather than engaging in a power struggle (Joseph, 2001).

B. A Note on Fieldwork

My fieldwork started in the fall of 2020, and lasted for a year. My plan to recruit interlocutors for this undertaking involved sharing a call for participants on my social media accounts, in Arabic and English. The posts invited the participation of queer men who had at least one supportive family member that would be willing to be interviewed anonymously. I was sure that my intended target group would be well represented in this outreach since many of my contacts included queer men that I had met through deejaying in queer-friendly spaces in Beirut over many years.

I was also conscious that my announcement would limit the diversity of my sample, but I had little other choice, given that other forms of outreach would have restricted the participation of many queer communities because of homophobic social norms and anxieties around safety.

Following through with this tactic, however, only enabled me to connect with one person. The rest of my interviewees were recommended to me by people in my social circle, reiterating the traction of informal networks in Lebanon.

By the end of my fieldwork, I had succeeded in reaching out to nine queer men, most of which happened to also be previous acquaintances. These, in turn, put me in touch with their supportive family members, who came from diverse social worlds, and

differed in age, domiciliary, profession, educational attainment, marital status, religious affiliation, religiosity, and in how they supported their loved ones.

My interlocutors included four sisters, three brothers and two mothers. With the exception of one serendipitous in-person conversation with a supportive sister, the rest of the interviews with queer kin and their family members took place remotely. In addition to the ally/kin pairs, I also interviewed six institutional informants, this comprised two psychologists and four NGO personnel. I have used pseudonyms (unless otherwise requested) in my write-up to protect the privacy of all the people that agreed to talk to me.

I interviewed each of my informants only once, taking into consideration the hardships and disruptions they (and large swathes of the population), had to contend with in the wake of the Pandemic, the Port Explosion, and the Economic Crisis. In fact, during the year that I conducted the interviews, two of my interlocutors lost their jobs, four moved back to live with their families, and seven were in various stages of leaving the country.

I have organized the findings of my inquiry into three streams of analysis, giving each one its own chapter; the first looks at forms of support, the second touches on modes of becoming supportive, and the third examines the role of the non-profit sector in producing allyship. They are titled Worlding, Becoming and Intervening, respectively.

CHAPTER II

WORLDING

When her brother was outed, Ghada, a 33 year-old salesperson that lived just South of Beirut, had a hard time dealing with the news, both as a practicing Muslim and as a protective older sister. Eventually, after some quiet introspection and research, she made peace with the situation, and, as much as she could, became an advocate for her brother, and for others like him. During my interview with her, she described some of the advocacy content she shared on her social media account, one particular post stood out, "these people are trying to find their place in society, and as big as the world is they cannot find a space."

This chapter will examine the ways in which family members capacitate the lives of their queer kin to "find a space" in the world, as Ghada put it. In the Human Condition, Hannah Arendt argues, "With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth" (Arendt 1998, 176). It is not merely through biological birth, that we are *in and of the world*, where being in and of the world refers to a general ontological robustness, a rootedness in the world. Arendt implies that there are certain forms of being (e.g., the refugee) that will not meet a world that is ready to make room for them. For Arendt, this stems from a constrained capacity to speak and act, to have one's voice heard and to attain what one intends or desires to accomplish.

While Arendt's words are a reflection on the refugee position, I see resonances with the experience of sexual and gender non-normative minorities in Lebanon. These groups navigate patriarchally organized worlds, in which the power to disclose one's

being otherwise to oneself, and to others, is often constrained by the real or anticipated fear of violence and exclusion. By being relegated to the abject, the lives of many such groups lack dimensionality and fullness.

However, in some instances, affirming engagements with accepting kin mitigate the effects of this ontological thinning of sorts. In this chapter, I have deployed the notion of *worldliness* as an analytical tool to explore this. Building on Arendt and Perdigon, I take worldliness to refer to "the practical, material, semiotic entanglements by way of which human and other beings, upon 'appearing' into the world, extend and anchor themselves in it" (Perdigon 2018, 566). I will attempt to understand what being in and of the world means for these family members and their queer kin, referring to this state of embeddedness as 'worldhood.' Worlding, the title of the chapter, is a verb that I use to describe the work from which worldhood emerges from.

Owing to the physical isolation as a result of the lockdowns and the unreliable communication networks in the country, I often had to be content enough with my target group's voices and words conveyed to me through the digital ether. As such, my approach took on a dimension of semiotic analysis, requiring me to pay attention to what was being communicated in our charged conversations, both explicitly and otherwise.

Multiple levels of meaning and function can be ascribed to a single utterance, making it difficult to neatly classify and bracket-off each of the relevant semiotic moves my interlocutors have made towards worldliness into a tidy and exhaustive typological framework. My goal for this chapter was to capture a Polaroid snapshot, rather than produce a 10K high-resolution image, of support through semiotics. Accordingly, I have

committed to shedding light on what is the clearest and most representative example of what it is I am trying to say.

I also attended to my own embodied experiences throughout these conversations. Doing so proved fruitful in adding a layer of thickness to my description. One of the earliest of these embodied experiences happened while I was preparing to launch the call for informants on my social media, I had a hunch about the would-be respondents, particularly in regards to their age and gender. To clarify, I expected that tracking down supportive kin that were willing to speak to me was not going to be an easy task, however, I also predicted that, within those willing, connecting with siblings (young) would be less tricky than encountering supportive parents (old). Moreover, in regards to the younger participants, I anticipated that finding supportive sisters (female) to interview would be relatively easier than locating supportive brothers (male). This gendered expectation also extended to the level of parents, where supportive mothers would be more accessible than supportive fathers.

One way to extract meaning from these hunches is to think with Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1990, 52-65). After Bourdieu, Ghassan Hage defines habitus as the sets of internalized patterns of thinking and practice that we have unconsciously attained to guide our behavior, belief, thoughts, interests, taste, and ways of being in the world, in order to maximize our social being (Hage, 2013). If these sets of dispositions, or structuring structures, are acquired through evolving in a social milieu, and are adapted to participate in this milieu, it follows that my expectations about the interlocutors stemmed from a certain understanding, a sedimentation of knowledge over the years that had helped my queer body deploy itself efficiently in the world. This embodied knowledge guided the organization of this chapter, prompting me to arrange

the sections by kinship position. Following this logic enabled me to cluster my interlocutors according to their gender and age, factors that I believe shape allyship differently.

A. Sisters

Each of the four sisters that I interviewed inhabited distinct sociological positions. For example, Ilham was the only one of them that was married, had a child and lived in the city. However, there was also a certain degree of overlap, as in the case of Ilham and Diana, who were both mid-career professionals, in higher education and media respectively. Fatima was unique in that she was in her early thirties, a retail worker and the only self-identified religious participant (the others generally foregrounded spirituality). Ola, who worked in nightlife, was the youngest, in her mid-twenties. In the next sections, I will described my experience with the sisters and their queer kin, and shed light on the relationships between them.

1. Ilham and Tarek

Like myself, Ilham was an AUB employee. Despite being in her early forties, she looked and dressed like she could be younger. There was no sign of gray in her dark hair, and her face was smooth and taut. Ilham had a postgraduate degree and had spent part of her life living in the USA. Her younger brother Tarek, who was in his mid-thirties, happened to be an acquaintance that I had met almost a decade ago while deejaying in a queer-friendly bar in Beirut.

I often saw Ilham on campus, and made small talk, instinctively avoiding bringing up my relationship with Tarek in any of our conversations. I was not sure if he was out

to her, and I feared that she might ask how we knew each other. However, even if he were out, it still would have *felt* appropriate to stay away from the topic. Perhaps I was channeling a certain kind of habitus, shaped by (and shaping) my experiences as queer person in Lebanon. It was a habitus associated with concealment and dissimulation, with knowing what information to withhold that enabled me to navigate intricate social fields adeptly. Effectively, it entailed being different people at different times. This is an interesting juncture, as it demonstrates that queerness puts the concept of habitus under tension: if habitus is understood to contribute to the accumulation of social being, why does it, paradoxically, in the case of queer people in Lebanon, become associated with a fragmentation of social being?

The absence of Tarek from our conversations changed one day, after she asked me about my thesis and what it was about. She surprised me by disclosing that her brother was gay, and she also volunteered to be interviewed, and to check if her brother would be willing to participate. We agreed to organize it when both of us were next at AUB. Due to COVID restrictions and employee rotations on campus, it took quite some time before we were able to do this.

We eventually made it happen one quiet sunny afternoon in the early fall of 2020, but we kept it short since she had to leave to tend to her baby. We sat across from each other, diagonally, on an outdoor picnic bench in an isolated corner on campus and talked for half an hour. She was wearing a gray t-shirt and jeans, and unlike me she had no mask on.

Ilham had previously always spoken to me in American-tinged English, and our conversation that day was no exception. However, unlike her usual friendly demeanor, this time she looked me steadily in the eye and spoke with a flat emotionless cadence,

which was unreadable to me. Perhaps she too was tapping into a habitus associated with concealment.

I felt uneasy in the first few minutes of the interview. Maybe it was jangled nerves, after all this was my first thesis interview with a family member. I suspect it also had something to do with the fact that on my end, different ways of being in the world, that were often compartmentalized, were now in a state of unfamiliar and uncomfortable tangle. In essence, my dispositions were at odds with the social environment they were designed to operate in. Successfully navigating the field of the professional, the social, the familial, while being queer requires the deployment of different sets of sedimented knowledge, but it also involves a lot of dissimulation. Here I was, at my workplace, with a colleague I didn't know very well, breaking an unspoken cultural rule by calling attention to her brother's queerness, and effectively divulging my own otherness.

The unease soon gave way to a different, more moving, emotional state, as she described her dedication to her brother and how she foregrounded her love for him:

> Before marriage I decided that my husband needed to be okay with this, we talked about it and he surprised me by being super supportive; he doesn't look at him any differently because 'If you can't accept my brother I'll kick your ass.

Ilham used semiotic nuances to boost her brother's worldliness, operations that are contingent on the fact that, as Bateson showed, human verbal communication always operates on multiple levels. For example language can be used to explicitly say something about the world (such as the sky is blue). On the other hand it can also do the work of *metacommunication*, where the object of communication is the relationship between the speakers, which is also to say the context. A Batesonion example is the

meowing cat that is communicating a relationship (or context) of dependency in order to be fed (Bateson, 1979).

Iman used language to explicitly say something about the world by saying to Tarek "I'm here and you can confide in me." This utterance straightforwardly communicated support to her brother.

She also used language indirectly to say something about context, to communicate a context of normalcy, a relationship of kinship-as-usual after Tarek came out:

> If he comes without Khaled, his partner, I say 'where is Khaled?' I treat him like he was anyone else. It's normal; how are you and Khaled? Where is Khaled? How are you guys? I used to do more because I wanted him to feel comfortable, now no, I treat him like my other brother and his wife.

By enquiring after Tarek's partner in the same casual way she would her sister-in-law, Ilham is indirectly conveying that Tarek being openly queer, and dating another man means nothing out of the ordinary. That is to say, Ilham anchors Tarek in the world using metacommunicative strategies that express her alignment without explicitly stating it. She does this at the expense of other more explicit affirming utterances that might make him feel othered. In essence, it is a worlding strategy of not having a strategy.

Ilham also alluded to other forms of support whose mechanics were vague, she described them in terms of their *impact*. For instance, when I asked what her support entailed, one of her responses was, "he has my back when he needs it." These unarticulated mechanics of support involved the production and reinforcement of a general sense of safety and integrity.

They communicated that Tarek had someone on his side. I will refer to these here as *scaffolding*, a term I borrowed from the realm of civil engineering. It is fitting since a scaffold is a framework used in construction sites to provide support to a building's structure, enhancing its strength and stability. I employ it as a placeholder for acts that produce a sense of being anchored in the world, which my interlocutors have not elaborated upon.

Soon after the interview, Ilham obtained Tarek's consent to be interviewed and shared his number. Since he had a job in marketing that required him to travel to the Gulf frequently, it took about a month for us to finally be able to set time aside for a Zoom conversation. He was very jovial during our call, which he took from his parents' home right before a family lunch, preferring it to be audio since he wanted to pace as we spoke.

Tarek articulated another way Ilham thickened his worldliness, relief from dissimulation. This had repercussions in various realms. On a personal level, he reflected, "I'm very anxious, coming out eased the anxiety, not hiding anything (…) gave me courage and made things feel very natural." On an interpersonal level, he claimed,

> It enables me to have a healthy relationship, and to get out of toxic ones; if I were closeted, and in an abusive relationship, I'd have no one to talk to. It enabled me to have open and honest relationships. It has been three years with my partner. It's amazing, we moved in together, we have a dog, our families know each other, and I know that even if he breaks up with me, I'll be able to find comfort.

He also recognized that the support he received from his sister, and his family in general, in that regard, rippled out into his social circle "it gives others a sense of

courage, when I tell friends who haven't come out, it has the effect of 'that's a positive story, I could have that too,' there are good stories out there."

My conversation with Ilham and eventually Tarek, also passed through some unexpected junctures. For instance, Ilham expressed a reluctance to be political about her support:

> I advocate for it outside of my circle only as needed, I'm (…) not intentionally going out there and screaming it out, it's not my position, it doesn't sit right, it's not me (…) it's not my fight, I wouldn't go to a parade. I don't have it that deep; it's not a cause I am willing to advocate for out loud, maybe because it went smoothly with the family, maybe I would have if my dad or anyone in the family were not accepting. So maybe I'm like this because it was easy for us to accept.

In such statements, Ilham seems to channel an unwillingness to partake in an act Jacques Rancière identifies as *dissensus.* For Rancière, dissensus is a political act that involves a collective effort of people that are considered to be unequal in a particular set of social arrangements acting together with those that are in solidarity with them, to challenge and disrupt the perceptual and epistemological underpinnings, the naturalness, of that social order (Rancière, 2007).

What was even more perplexing to me was Tarek, who echoing the same attitude as Ilham, also implied that experiencing discrimination was the fault of the victim and not the perpetrators;

> I've never been in a situation where someone is uncomfortable with me, but I don't come out and say it, it's none of their business, as long as you have the support of your inner circle. I'm pretty successful (…) if I wasn't successful, I'm sure that's where you'd get judgment from the family. When you are not doing a good job, they directly assume that it's because of your sexuality. I don't want to look like I'm failing, that's what they look at first. I once had a CEO that used to hire women and queer men across the board, maybe it's because he felt that they are all trying to prove themselves. I see myself there as well (…) for me I don't want to say I'm ok with how society is, I only care for my family.

Their stances on being political about homophobia surprised me. This was probably due to some unexamined simplistic assumptions I harbored around class and queerness. I had expected that social and material capital went hand-in-hand with the will, and ability, to speak up against the cultural orthodoxy. However, while the resources Ilham and her family possessed expanded Tarek's worldliness, they also seemed to streamline it. This notion that capital was directly proportional to allyship, was also challenged by Ghada, another interlocutor whose situation was the opposite of Ilham's. I will speak more about her later in the chapter.

I also found it interesting that Tarek linked values normally associated with success in the labor-market, to his success in kinship and other social relationships: "If I wasn't successful, I'm sure that's where you'd get judgment from the family (...) they directly assume that it's because of your sexuality." This suggested a transposing of the dispositions required to thrive in business into kinship and love. This raises troubling questions about what the adoption of these practices can mean for solidarity. The most obvious of which being whether those who are not financially successful are worthy of being in and of the world?

My interview with Ilham and Tarek was unique for a few reasons. First, this was the only opportunity I had to conduct an in-person interview with supportive kin. This was also the one time that a family member referred me to their queer kin, it was usually the other way around.

2. *Diana and Leo*

When I met him, Leo was a short and stout thirty-four year old PhD student, with a face half-hidden behind a dark beard and a thick mop of unruly black hair. He spoke with a cheerful everything-is-under-control attitude, code switching between

Lebanese and Levantine-tinged English and French. His sister, Diana, who was in her late thirties, held a master's degree in Cinema, as well as sixteen years of experience in Television work. They both resided in the same building in a suburb on the northern edge of Beirut. Diana lived with their parents while Leo stayed at his Grandmother's place next door, shuttling between Lebanon and France when his academic program demanded it.

I was introduced to Leo late in the fall of 2020, by a friend of mine who he happened to be dating at the time. We spent the day by the beach together, which gave us ample time to get to know one another. When the subject of my thesis came up in our conversation, Leo volunteered to be interviewed, sharing that his sister Diana was very supportive of him, and would most likely be willing to participate as well.

Owing to both our busy schedules, the interview with Leo took place a few months later. We met on Zoom, late one mid-December night and talked for about an hour. He was in France finishing up his thesis, and still spoke with the same cheerful everything-is-under-control attitude as when we first met, even as he described the difficulties of being queer in Lebanon

At the end of our call, Leo shared Diana's number with me, and gave me the green light to start coordinating with her. Soon after, I communicated with her through WhatsApp to organize our meeting. I found her candid and eccentric voice-note responses to my texts quite endearing.

Diana's anchoring of Leo into the world involved a great deal of what I have previously called scaffolding, in the form of being "always there" for him, claiming "he can always count on me for emotional support." She also aspired to enable him to "reach a place where he is happy" in addition to helping him "reach a place where he is

able to let things that hold him back go. For me life is not about getting jobs or certificates, it's about getting happiness, it's the most important thing."

Paying attention to Diana as she described the scaffolding she afforded Leo, shed light on a divergence from the popular narrative around non-biological family in the Western Anglosphere which glorifies the intentional, healthy families formed by queers to replace those that rejected them. Diana mentioned that she helped Leo "be grounded" since, "grounding has to do with family. Even if you have friends, if the family isn't supportive it's like a tree with no roots (…). The family knows, but they don't talk about it, so it's important for him to have his sister's support."

Leo had alluded that things were more complicated when it came to his parents. He had inadvertently come out to them a few years ago, after having had too much to drink. The next day, much to his surprise, they proceeded about their lives not acknowledging what he had revealed. He reflected that he had always had a good relationship with his parents, and his coming-out didn't change that. They continued being supportive of him in the ways that they used to, but they never brought up his sexuality. Unlike Ilham's metacommunicative efforts by omission to convey to Tarek a context of "so what? This means nothing," their silence communicated that his coming out would not be a new context for them to engage within.

This divergence was echoed in my conversation with Leo, as he acknowledged Diana's scaffolding, "I wouldn't be the person I am today, it helped me accept myself (…). If family doesn't accept it, no one will, it will be terrifying." He also pointed out,

> She knows that growing up like this in Lebanon is hard, her support gives me acceptance, it gives confidence, you can trust best friends but blood relations are people who know you your whole life…when I need to vent, when I am feeling down and I need support she is there. It is precious for me to have this support system. I would not have been confident without this.

I found it interesting that both Diana and Leo harbored an ambivalent attitude, at the very least, towards the value of chosen family. They flipped the script on the contemporary discourse popular in the West that emerged in response to the violence inflicted upon queer people when they choose to disclose their sexual and/or gender identities to their biological family. This most likely speaks to the traction that biological kinship holds in Lebanon, a notion I will explore deeper in chapter four.

Leo also pointed out another form of support that Diana had afforded him, one that was centered once again on the multiple ways that language operates, particularly its ability to speak about itself, following John A. Lucy's concept of explicit metapragmatic statements, or statements in which people use language to speak of how to use language appropriately in a particular context (Lucy, 1993).

We use metapragmatics to tell each other how to speak, in order to produce socially acceptable meaning. However, in doing so we are also shaping and patterning social relations, since language itself contributes to defining context. For instance, saying to a child, "her name is Aunty Sarah, not Sarah," is a use of language to speak about the correct use of language. It conveys to the child that the correct word to use when addressing this person is "aunty," and also guides the addressee to identify context, inviting them to put themselves in a position of respect and submission.

The above example illustrates how metapragmatic discourse contributes to the ordering of social reality. We can see similar dynamics in Leo's account of how his sister supports him:

> My mom used to be really homophobic, and when you least expected it, she would say things like 'God help us' when she would see two men kissing. Once my sister yelled at her; after I left she said 'don't talk about these things in front of him', my mother asked her 'will he ever change?' She said 'no.'

Diana's statement on the use of language "don't talk about these things in front of him," is an explicit metapragmatic statement in that she uses language to talk about how to and not to use language around Leo. As such, it also indicates an awareness on the stakes of speaking negatively of what is considered abject in society (for one, that it reaffirms the abjectness of the referent). But we are left with the question of why Diana stopped short of asking her parents to not speak in a homophobic manner at all. Perhaps her metapragmatic intervention was guided by a knowledge of what was effective. Drawing from a hierarchy of feasibility, Diana may have felt that homosexuality was more difficult to be pedagogical about, leading her to aim for the more easily attainable target of getting them to stop talking like this in front of Leo.

Leo's earlier statement "when I need to vent (...) she is there" also points to worlding through metapragmatics (but in reverse), since certain therapeutic uses of language which were not possible before are now available to him. I imagine that Leo saying something like "my boyfriend cheated on me," to the wrong person, would probably elicit a scandalized "don't say that!" which is the use of language to talk about the use of language (it is inappropriate to say you are in a relationship with another man), that also reinforces the social practice of homophobia. Now that his sister is an ally, things go from "you cannot say that" to "of course you can say that."

Further examining Leo's account of Diana rebuking their mother for her homophobic statements sheds light on the many nuanced functions of language in the realm of worlding. Firstly, it shows us that some metapragmatic interventions also serve metacommunicative functions, such as Leo's interpretation of the above conversation between Diana and their mother as a sign of his sister's support (she is communicating a context of "I've got your back," a relationship of allyship with him). However, there is

also another very complex and strategic metacommunicative intervention being deployed. I will elucidate this through Bateson's notion of unearned fish (Bateson, 1979).

In observing typical dolphin training, Bateson observed how whenever the trainer saw behavior that was deemed desirable for a dolphin to replicate in front of an audience, it was given fish, so that it would learn to associate specific behavior with reward. However, things changed when the trainer wanted to take the relation of learning and performance to another level, one that encouraged creativity, or "surprise me," on the part of the dolphin — the performance of unpredictable attitudes or tricks. To do this, the trainer would stop rewarding the dolphin as soon as the behavior was mastered. This would cause the dolphin some annoyance, and perhaps as a response, it might accidentally produce a new behavior that the trainer would then reward, and reinforce.

Bateson also observed that it was necessary for the trainer to give the dolphin 'unearned fish,' a reward that the trainer did not use to reinforce a desired behavior but to maintain the relationship between them and the dolphin. The unearned fish can be thought of as having a metacommunicative function; balancing out the dolphin's annoyance, tension or even confusion, and reaffirming the relational nature of the context, to avoid threatening the success of the training (essentially communicating a context of trustworthiness-we can trust each other, here is a fish to prove it). Similarly, Diana's conversation with her parents can be thought of as a kind of training (unlearning homophobic language), and her ignoring another problematic use of language (do it as long as it is not in front of him), could be considered a

metacommunicative move to avoid threatening the success of the training (unearned fish).

My engagement with these siblings highlights the complexities involved in allyship; on the one hand Diana finds ways to engage with her brother supportively, and on the other she tries to negotiate the process of learning and unlearning for the rest of the family, with an understanding that it is difficult and takes time.

3. Ghada and Nabil

Nabil's profile picture on social media was a shirtless two-dimensional illustration of himself against a pink background. The muscular avatar's face sported an earring, a black quiff that tapered into a fade, and a neat beard. In the physical world, he was a 27-year-old graphic designer, and a graduate of the national Fine Arts university program who lived alone in a suburb north of Beirut.

He had first connected with me on Social Media four years ago. I did not know who he was at the time or why he followed me, but I did not think much of it since I was accustomed to receiving online follow-requests from unfamiliar people. Beirut is a small city, and I had been deejaying in several venues for years, some of which were openly queer-friendly. This exposure increased the number of my followers.

Nabil also happened to be the only queer informant with a supportive sister that reached out to me after seeing my online call for thesis interviewees. He suggested that it would be particularly interesting for me to speak to his older sister, Ghada, because she was both veiled and a practicing Muslim, and he volunteered to contact her on my behalf.

After a few months passed with no news from Nabil, I contacted him to see if he had any updates. He informed me that Ghada was on the fence about being interviewed because she was worried about her identity being made public. After I reassured him that everything would be completely anonymous, he checked in with her and got back to me with her number, urging me to conduct the interview with her in Arabic.

I was curious whether there was more to his request than just a concern for listener accommodation. It felt strange to limit myself to Arabic while discussing queerness. Firstly, speaking about sex and sexuality in Arabic felt somehow wrong. This could stem from a cultural silence around the topic: I can't recall ever having heard sexuality being discussed or referred to in Arabic, socially or in television and film. This likely emerged from a culturally internalized disposition that enabled speakers to more skillfully negotiate heterocentric contexts that rewarded gender conformity. Perhaps by "speak in Arabic," he meant predominantly in Arabic with a reasonable amount of code-switching; the Arabic terms coined by NGOs for this purpose have not taken root in the consciousness of the general public. I had a feeling that someone like Ghada would be more familiar and comfortable with the term "gay" than *mithli*.

I eventually spoke to Ghada over WhatsApp one evening in early 2021, a month before officially interviewing Nabil. Speaking almost entirely in Arabic, she told me that she was a 33 year-old salesperson in a print and stationery shop who also lived in the family home just South of Beirut. It was palpable how much she worried about and loved Nabil, expressing this more explicitly and indirectly than all of my other informants had. I noticed that she did not use any Arabic terms for sexuality. Rather she used vague quotidian expressions, with an expectation that I would understand what she was implicitly referring to. For example, instead of queer men, she spoke of "people

like that." I will say more about the tension between the use of everyday spoken Lebanese and NGO vocabulary in chapter four.

At the beginning of the call, Ghada answered my questions quietly and carefully, taking care not to reveal any names or information that could potentially reveal her or her brother's identity to me. Sensing that she was anxious, I made a metacommunicative move of sharing some of my own complicated family dynamics with her, to relay that we were in the same boat, and to hopefully earn her trust. This seemed to work, and she sounded more at ease, eventually abandoning her attempts at anonymity as the conversation progressed. In a touching move, at the end of the conversation she even offered me an invitation to call her if I ever needed to talk.

The kind of support she offered me was also afforded to help Nabil be in and of the world, considering how harsh it could be towards him: "this case is not accepted in Eastern societies. It's important to give him moral support when it comes to society, and to life in general." However, Ghada's support while being abstract and open-ended for the expansion of "life in general," was also wrought for its extension:

> I heard through another family member that my brother was having suicidal thoughts. When I found out, I had to be closer to him than the rest of my family, because people like him are different. I stand by him more… it's also about offering emotional support; When he is fighting with someone he calls me. I make him feel safe, safety is the most important thing, I'm sure he's not safe in society.

Nabil acknowledged his sister's scaffolding as well, expressing that it helped engender self-confidence and protected him from a myriad of harms:

> Support and love are useful, they help build self-confidence… queer people feel different, they feel persecuted, it's straining, and leads some people towards things like drug or sex addiction… I feel like whatever happens she will always be on my side, even when I am loud on social media, there is always someone there that I can talk to if anything goes wrong. Sometimes people don't have anyone to talk to, it's nice to have people that love you unconditionally.

He also directly referred to forms of material support she afforded him after he was outed, while also underscoring the importance of family scaffolding through imagining the impact of its loss on his mental health. "If she was totally against it, and I was kicked out of the house, I would not have finished my education, she also supported me financially while I was in university. Now if they don't support me it won't affect my daily life because I'm independent, but it would affect me mentally."

Ghada also made use of metacommunicative and metapragmatic gestures towards Nabil's worldhood. The former was evident in the way she offered him gifts or compliments that reinforced his ability for self-expression through aesthetic choices that would be controversial in some of the social worlds that he navigated: "if he wants something, like a t-shirt in an unconventional color, I get it for him. It helps him feel more comfortable, or I say to him "it's nice, get it, if you like it". Like Ilham she is conscious to not make a big deal of his atypical choices as she acknowledges his non-conformity to social norms, communicating a context of validation (do what makes you happy) and a relationship of attunement and camaraderie (I get you and I support you). In terms of metapragmatics, Ghada reported, "When the other brothers speak out of line I shut them up, for example when he wears rainbows, they mock him and say this is for girls, and they laugh (…) on the family WhatsApp group they used to sometimes send things about gays that were not nice, I told them to stop, but not in front of him so he isn't bothered."

Here, like Diana, Ghada has used metapragmatic interventions to support Nabil. The move to "shut them up" when her brothers mock his clothing, is a use of language to talk about the use of language - it is not appropriate to use this kind of (chauvinistic) language — which is also an attempt to fashion a social reality free from bigotry and

bullying. Similarly, telling them to stop sending homophobic messages on the WhatsApp family group is also a commentary on language (it is not appropriate to use homophobic words), that aims at reordering the social to enhance Nabil's worldliness.

It is interesting that unlike Diana, Ghada has a more ambitious demand; in regards to using bigoted language, she wants the brothers to change how they speak with no exception. This is interesting considering that she comes from a more conservative background. Perhaps because she is older than the brothers, she has more influence on her addressees than Diana, who was dealing with parents. Ghada's ask might also be different than Diana's due to the generational disparity between both sisters' addressees (Ghada's young brothers versus Diana's middle-aged parents). Staying in theme with Bateson, it's hard to teach an old dog new tricks.

Speaking to Ghada was a very emotional experience. Of all the other siblings I interviewed, it felt like she was the one that most navigated social worlds that did not extend resources to help her engage with her kin's queerness supportively. Despite this, she succeeded. Nabil commented on how exceptional she was in that regard when reflecting on his queer friends "I can only think of one other person whose family is supportive versus ten others who aren't."

4. Ola and Ghassan

The last time I saw Ola and her brother Ghassan in person was at a drag show many months ago where she emceed and I deejayed. Prior to that, I had only seen them sporadically at a few of my DJ gigs around the city. They both stood out in my mind, firstly, because I was not used to seeing siblings together in queer-friendly nightlife venues, and also because they each had alluring yet distinctive social presences. Ola, despite being short in stature, had a commanding, larger-than-life personality. Ghassan,

on the other hand, while strikingly handsome, was much more reserved. As such, he and I never really engaged beyond an acknowledging nod during our brief nightlife encounters.

I knew Ola as a rap performer who also embodied hip-hop artist archetypes in her mannerisms, accent, vocabulary and fashion style. She and I connected over our mutual love for the genre, and whenever she was in a venue where I was playing music, she would pass by to compliment my set or make a song request, to which I gladly obliged. As a musician, she also covered other American artists, not shying away from using explicit language in a manner that felt like a reclamation of sexual agency and a disruption of gender norms.

However, our acquaintanceship was not what prompted their participation in the thesis. One evening in the fall of 2021, as I complained to a friend about how challenging it had been to find enough informants, he proposed that I interview the siblings, who he happened to know well, and offered to contact them on my behalf to see if they would be interested.

Within a fortnight, he confirmed their consent and I reached out to them on social media. Ghassan's responses were formal and polite, whereas Ola used emojis and a playful tone "I am super interested! … You been knew that I wasn't going to say no, come on now. Sign me up, anonymous or not".

My calls with them gave me greater insight into their lives beyond our brief encounters at night. I learnt that they were both university graduates in their twenties living together in the family home northeast of Beirut. Ghassan, who was a few years older than his sister, was an engineer, while Ola worked in nightlife.

Ghassan took my call midway through his workday in a busy-sounding street below his office, which led me to assume that he was not comfortable having this conversation from his workplace or home. The interview didn't last too long owing to his short and direct responses. I called Ola later the same day and she was as affable as I remembered her to be, and unlike Ghassan, very much at ease.

Ola offered Ghassan relief from dissimulation, for him to succeed in "being his true self without having to think twice about anything". She scaffolded him: "the biggest form of support is someone coming to speak to you without judgment… if he needs anything I'm the one he calls." Ghassan echoed this sentiment with the added dimension of allyship, solidarity and comfort,

> It is important to have an ally at home; I do not need any more stress in my life, I don't want to have to lie, and keep up with excuses and scenarios. I have someone to talk to at home (…) like during breakups (…) I can vent to her, this is a huge relief (…) I have someone at home, who was raised the same way I was, and has the same values that I do, that can give me their advice.

Ola's gestures to greater insert Ghassan into the world also included metacommunicative moves, an example being her deliberately blasé reaction to his coming-out "he had taken me out to lunch, he said 'I have something to tell you… but I don't know if I should', I was like… just say it, then he went 'I'm gay.' I was sitting back and chill 'that's it?' I didn't want him to feel stressed about who he is." Ola's "that's it?" was calibrated to communicate a context of normalcy (so what? this is not a big deal), a relationship of kinship-as-usual.

Outside the realm of the private, Ola also used metacommunication to fortify Ghassan's worldhood as he pursued controversial endeavors that challenged traditional masculine gender stereotypes. She did this by doing "little things that don't matter that much," such as "if he has a modeling gig, I support him by posting his pictures." In

addition to communicating a context of supportiveness to Ghassan, this was also an act of dissensus, a visible move towards normalizing non-conformity to a social order that was repressive: after all why shouldn't she be proud of her brother's work, and why shouldn't she highlight this the same way others celebrated their loved ones' achievements?

In fact, it seemed like deploying dissensual and metacommunicative as a means towards worldliness was something Ola did not shy away from, such as when she firmly declared that "everyone sees us together, we are a package deal," communicating a context of support and allyship to her brother, while also turning the social order upside down by demonstrating solidarity instead of shame. I found out that this tactic even extended beyond sticking by her brother's side in their social circles, when I accidentally came across an old online article in a popular local website where she was quoted describing herself as being (among other things) an "LGBT supporter".

She also made another dissensual move, one that none of the other supportive kin I spoke to had made. Ola spoke to me about her support with the most matter-of-fact "yeah, so?" attitude (sometimes even coming across as slightly irritated at my questions), as if it were nothing out of the ordinary to be supportive of her brother while acknowledging his being-otherwise. By not making a fuss about her efforts to anchor Ghassan into the world, it felt like Ola was using this opportunity to challenge the epistemological basis of my questions, reinforcing a sense that queerness, and the act of supporting queers were normal things, non-events; why did they need to be discussed? In this way, the interview exchange itself became the continuation of a dissensual tactic of worlding.

Ola deployed metapragmatic interventions in the public sphere as well, “Back when I was at school we would get a ten minute discussion at the end of French class, someone would always open the LGBT issue and I would stand up and say ‘I’m ready. Who am I going to fight with today?’ I understand that not everyone is not the same as us, but louteh is not an insult.”

Telling her classmates how not to use the word louteh is an explicit metapragmatic statement: it guides the addresses to not use the word in the context of bringing someone down, since negatively deploying a word for what is deemed socially contemptible, reinforces its abjectness.

Ghassan also picked up on the metacommunicative and metapragmatic moves his sister made: “let’s say I want to wear something that isn’t conventional, she is supportive ‘you look good, slay’ if I get a side eye somewhere, she will give a side eye back and be ready to fight.” This quote demonstrates how Ola simultaneously communicated a context of supportiveness and allyship, to her brother, while letting others know (through being “ready to fight”) that it was not appropriate to communicate negatively in the context of a person expressing themselves in a non-conforming manner.

B. Brothers

Two of the three brother interlocutors I interviews were engineering students at AUB, they were both friends that participated in similar extracurricular activities at the university. The third, who was in his thirties had opted to drop out of university and work in the family business.

1. Zack and Hatem

A mutual friend introduced me to Hatem a few years ago when we were both still taking classes on campus. He was in his mid-twenties and identified as bisexual. He lived together with his younger brother, Zack, an engineering student, in a residential neighborhood within the city. After hearing about my thesis, Hatem checked-in with Zack to see if he would be willing to participate, and fortunately he did. I ended up interviewing both of them in the fall of 2020.

It was a sunny afternoon when Hatem and I Zoomed. This made his face appear slightly overexposed. He wore a black tank-top and bulky headphones. He confided in me that his mental health had greatly deteriorated after losing his job in the wake of the Pandemic, forcing him to become financially dependent on his overbearing Gulf-based family. His melancholy tone, blank expression, and somber responses to my questions reflected this dejected condition.

My conversation with Hatem revealed that Zack afforded him scaffolding and relieved him from dissimulation. Hatem recounted that after he was outed to his family a few years earlier, he de-escalated the ensuing conflict with his distraught parents by claiming that it was just a phase of experimentation, and assuring them it was over:

> I still suffer knowing that my family and extended family wouldn't support knowing who I am, he helps me reinforce the fact that the thoughts everyone else has about me shouldn't be validated. Having someone on your side helps you feel like you are not doing something wrong (…) It makes me feel more comfortable being myself and letting other people in.

Moreover it allowed him to resist buckling under the pressure "to go back into the closet," particularly since he sometimes dealt with "the shame of not taking that option," rationalizing that " it would be better off for everyone in my family."

I Zoomed with Zack a few weeks later on an evening with particularly poor internet connectivity, which disrupted the flow of the conversation several times. Lit by orange-hued overhead lights, he spoke animatedly, ignoring the two dogs occasionally vying for his attention.

I was surprised and impressed by his eloquence and thoughtfulness, considering he was only twenty years old. It became clear to me that his interventions of support were predominantly guided by metacommunication, metapragmatics, and dissensus.

Zack started the conversation indicating that he engaged in an outlook of empathy, rather than sympathy to help root his brother in the world,

> I feel like people confuse empathy and sympathy, it's a problem when people think they are sympathetic; they end up like 'I'm straight, but I need to be a queer person to be able to relate', while there are others that are like "as long as someone is facing discrimination, it's all along the same line whether its skin color or whatsoever.

Like Ilham before him, Zack also adopted a metacommunicative strategy of not having a strategy;

"I'm not doing anything different, a lot of people go into this thinking 'they are a minority group, I have to be extra supportive.' I don't have that, he's my brother, he's with someone that makes him happy… I don't want to make him feel like 'hi you are this alien and I'm trying to understand you''

Hatem also picked up on metacommunicative gestures made by his brother, noting (like Ilham did for Tarek) that Zack was "indirectly letting me know that he's comfortable with me having my boyfriend over at the house" by asking "how come Sami isn't coming over, why doesn't he come over more often?" Zack referred to this tactic in his conversation with me, claiming that "I want him to know there are no red flags, its just life we are dealing with here."

I learned from Zack that he had a friend (Kareem) who is also supportive of a queer brother. I asked if he and Kareem ever spoke about their experiences around homophobia. His answer revealed an interesting tactic they deployed on campus aimed at queer worlding. This tactic had both a metacommunicative and a dissensual dimension; "we've never talked about this stuff, but we are very touchy feely so whenever we are in the same room we are always hugging each other, so in a sense our actions convey that we might be supportive." I understood this gender-nonconforming act of being openly affectionate with each other (flipping the script on the trope that "real men" do not display affection to one another, and are certainly not tactile while doing so) as simultaneously communicating a context of safety to queer others in their orbit (you can be yourself around us, we are not like the rest of them), while also visibly enacting another form of sociality that is at odds with the norms — opening a space for being-other as a political act of dissensus.

Zack's commitment to strengthening his brother's worldliness also involved him making high-stakes interventions that were once again tactically multidimensional, which he kept hidden from his brother (speaking to his metacommunicative gesture of not wanting to make Hatem feel like an "alien.")

> He doesn't know about this, there is a huge group of friends that I used to be close with, and they were making very homophobic, disgusting statements… I don't know how I missed this. I made a speech talking about this and left the group and cut all communications… I lost a great big chunk of friends I was very close with since freshman year until the end of second year, they were my primary friend group.

This gesture was both metapragmatic and dissensual: we see the former in Zack telling his friends ("making a speech") how (not) to use (homophobic) language, an instance of language reflexivity that also invites a reordering of the social to exclude

homophobia. The cutting of friendship ties, on the other hand, dissensually materializes a reality where homophobes are the social pariahs; they are the ones rejected by society, and not queers.

Zack proved to be semiotically adept, as he sought to anchor his brother into the world, carefully code-switching when useful, and paying attention to the contradictions in the logic of his friends' metapragmatic interventions:

> It depends on the community, I can't speak good Arabic but (...) if they have the old Arab mentality I try to use their kind of words (...) because I'm actively thinking I have to debate with these people so I keep these things in my mind, otherwise I'll use the Arabic English mix they use, to convey 'I'm literally like you, we are part of the same community' (...) I'll say things like 'ħtirim ħalak [have some self-respect]it's embarrassing for you.' (...) They are the same people that say 'Mafik tistaʕmil kilmet ayr laʾanno fi banet [you can't use the word dick, there are girls here]' in a WhatsApp group, but then they say 'louteh [faggot].'

Zack's strategic echoes Reem Bassiouney's framing of code-switching in Arabic-speaking countries as a form of stance-taking, in which speakers mobilize linguistic resources (such as the register of Standard Arabic or foreign languages) and their multiple associations. Taking a stance, in turn, enables speakers to associate themselves with different positions, appeal to different ideologies, and ultimately, different facets of identity (Bassiouney 2012).

The metapragmatic and dissensual stances taken by Zack towards others (including their mother) were not lost on Hatem, who interpreted them as a sign of support,

> He has spoken to me about friends that had zero exposure to members of the LGBT society, he would challenge their world view about sexuality, in the Arab world you don't get too much of a chance to experience people that are more open about their sexuality… He's not exactly an activist of LGBTQ rights, but he's very outspoken about his support for the community in his social circles, in his involvement with university clubs… in the past he tried to help mom understand the flaws in her worldview.

Echoing his brother, Zack reflected: “if it comes up in a social gathering, I’ll say ‘yeah I support them.’ On WhatsApp groups too, I call them out on this. When it comes up I address it.” However, Zack also acknowledged that there were limits to this practice, “with family it’s a tough situation, because my family ‘know-don’t know-are in denial’ I have to be more secretive about it. I don’t know how to deal with it, I would if I knew how to approach this.”

Zack illustrated how conservative his family were when it came to the sons flouting conventional norms: “even with things like piercings, my dad doesn’t know I have one. He once said to me, ‘are you trying to be an American girl?’’ It seemed that Zack was hesitant to explicitly speak ill of his family, linger on difficult thoughts, or appear disempowered. He immediately followed his previous statement with a funny anecdote, as if to refocus the conversation on his worlding achievements, but while recounting these, he once again brought up the complexities of dealing with family,

> It’s weird, because sometimes friend’s parents ask if I’m like that because I have a piercing and walk funny, I make a joke about it ‘yeah I think I am, can I hang out with your son or daughter?’ I do it with friends, parents of friends, older generations, but with family its tough (…). There are so many interwoven threads… because it’s so sensitive. It’s hard to approach this, I don’t understand why exactly, it's... it’s... those are your parents man (…) if you call out a person at the mall for being homophobic you are not going to see them again but if you hit a sour chord with your parents, it’s forever.

Prior to tackling the issue of family, Zack had spoken with well thought out words and palpable conviction. However at this juncture his tone faltered as he struggled to verbalize why it was difficult to confront his family without directly condemning their homophobic stance. Where Zack adopted an almost apologetic stance towards family, Hatem had less reservations about being critical of them. Perhaps this

was because he and I knew each other better than Zack and I did, or maybe this was due to the fact that the stakes were higher for him.

The nature of the family dynamics were made more obvious to me when Hatem addressed a vital practical form of worlding that his brother extended to him in that regard; withholding and fabricating truths, "keeping my secrets from the extended family" and "lying to parents, allows (…) me to have a relationship with my family." The preservation of this family relationship was particularly important at that moment considering the constraining events unfolding in Lebanon. Since Hatem was dependent on them for survival, he feared that they might not "help me financially if they find out that I'm not inching forward to erase that part of me."

My conversation with the brothers further highlighted the complexities of allyship, underscoring that it is not a one-size-fits-all undertaking. For Zack, it was unique in that it involved the production of lies for Hatem to be in and of the world (an interesting departure from the much-circulated Western liberal mantra of living one's truth), while also providing a space where "being myself" for Zack was possible, lifting the burden of dissimulation.

2. Kareem and Fady

Fady had been a friend of mine for a couple of years at the time of this study. We were introduced by a mutual friend on campus. He was in his mid-twenties, openly (and unapologetically) queer and of large character (and stature). His hair was often messy, he wore earrings, and he was almost always in shorts and t-shirts, exposing the multiple whimsical tattoos on his body. He was funny, quick-witted and popular on campus, so much that our discussions were often interrupted by the many people he

knew that wanted to greet him, and catch-up. Whenever we would run into each other, Fady and I would enquire about each other's progress on our theses, since he too was working towards a master's degree at AUB. He volunteered to be interviewed and he offered to ask his supportive younger brother Kareem, an engineering student at AUB, if he would be interested in participating as well.

We were able to make the interviews happen on Zoom in the winter of 2020. By that time both brothers had moved from their small furnished apartment near AUB to live in the Emirates, where their family had been residing for many years. It was halfway through the day, and in the middle of the week, when we spoke. I'm assuming this was to ensure that the parents were not at home so they could express themselves freely.

The brothers took the call from their shared bedroom in the family home, and I met with them one on one, starting with Fady first, who was his usual boisterous self. Our conversation was predominantly in AUB-sounding English. At the end of our talk, Fady muted the mic and went to fetch his younger brother, who looked slightly discombobulated upon arrival, as if he had just found out that the interview was happening. I had never met Kareem before. In contrast to Fady, he had a subdued demeanor, a smaller and more athletic frame and a tendency to switch between English and Arabic. He was also unlike his brother in that he spoke in a more vernacular and unassuming manner than Fady who used academic terms and sophisticated sentences liberally.

"I grew up in a conservative Christian Lebanese household with the idea that being queer is wrong and I'm going to hell, I didn't want to go through this alone," Fady explained. This prompted him to come out to his brother, whose reaction, like

Ola, was an unenthused: “oh, I thought you were going to say something important.” Through downplaying the announcement, Kareem had used metacommunication as a form of worldly insertion, relaying a context of normalcy (what difference does it make?) and a relationship of kinship-as-usual.

The motif of not making a fuss also appeared in my conversation with Kareem, who reported a worlding strategy of not having a strategy. He offered Fady relief from dissimulation, “making him feel comfortable with himself.” Like Ilham and Zack, he too was careful to not make his brother feel othered in the process: “if he wasn't gay, or even if he were something else, there wouldn't have been a difference, I don't do anything specifically extra, I allow him to be in his own space and do his own thing.”

For Fady, his brother's positive response to the coming out “strengthened our relationships, made us closer and allowed for more fluid conversations about a lot of different topics.” This is a case of worlding through metapragmatics or new uses of language and contexts. As with Diana and Leo, new uses of language that were not available to Fady before were now possible, since with “more fluid conversations about a lot of different topics” they went from a context where “we cannot say this and that” to one where they could. This dynamic of support was also echoed in the interview with Kareem in reference to the habit of using homophobic speech: “knowing he is gay, I'm more aware of my language.” In this situation however, it is a matter of going from a context of “it's appropriate to say this” to one where it is not.

Where Zack produced lies to support Hatem, Kareem's support facilitated his brother's production of safe truths as a worldliness tactic. According to Fady, Kareem was a “liaison between my true self and the self I presented to my family.” A testing ground where he experimented with “slowly trickling in some elements of my true self

into the self I portray to my conservative Christian family." Fady was thus able to try out different permutations and combinations of disclosure safely and comfortably, confident that his brother would "be there in case something doesn't work out," reassured that "I'll always have his support."

Fady also indicated that the spaces his brother offered for him to let down dissimulation turned into spaces of becoming and experimentation, where Fady could "be more of myself, experience and experiment more (…) fucking around with gender and gender expression was easier because he was there."

Kareem did not shy away from offering support in the form of dissensus which ranged from "having intimate conversations with friends and acquaintances all the way to showing support on social media, to protests and feminist rallies (…) aligned with the queer agenda." Meanwhile, Kareem acknowledged that not only was he uncomfortable being around homophobes ("especially straight homophobic guys, the kind that are always paranoid other men might be attracted to them, when they're not even good looking to begin with"), he actively avoided them, and would not hesitate to berate anyone in his friend groups that acted in that manner: "you are filthy, I don't want to hear one more word from you," he once yelled at a friend of a friend upon finding out that he "used to go by gay bars and scream 'fag.'"

Our conversation was unique in that out of all the queer interlocutors I had, Fady was the most critical of the limitations of his brother's allyship: "I think having not been queer makes him unaware of certain things, although he tries, it can never be as inclusive as I'd like it to be or as thoughtful." One example that Fady gave to illustrate this was Kareem's internalization of respectability politics: "sometimes I find that the way I live my life is too extreme for him (...) and it doesn't make sense; one example is

hookup culture, for him it's like 'how are you hooking up with people you barely know and just met off an app?' (...) it's not easy for him to fully understand."

3. Amine and Ibrahim

I first met Ibrahim over a decade ago when he was dating a friend of mine. We slowly got closer over the years as we engaged socially through the mutual friends that we had, and through regularly encountering each other at the venues where I played music.

Ibrahim was of average height, slim and well groomed. He dressed more conservatively than most of the other queer men I knew (his friends often teased him about this), perhaps a side-effect of the many years he had spent working in multinational corporations, before joining the family business in Beirut.

Having grown up in the USA, and spent time there to complete a master's degree, he was just as comfortable speaking English as he was Arabic. Ibrahim is someone I would go to for practical advice: he was the kind of person that knew useful things, from who to call for a plumbing emergency to where to go for spare printer parts to how to make a modem work to the best time to exchange currency.

I had only met his younger brother, Amine, once before when Ibrahim and I joined him and his wife for a picnic in a nearby forest during lockdown. He was a reserved man of very few words, tall, bespectacled and in his mid-thirties. He was dressed casually in blue baggy jeans, a loose blue graphic t-shirt and gray converse sneakers. He seemed very much at ease around his older brother, unbothered by the gay references during the playful banter between Ibrahim and his wife.

I interviewed both brothers over WhatsApp. Both the brothers responded to my questions with short succinct answers. The conversations were thus relatively short. I spoke to Ibrahim in the winter of 2020, a few months before his thirty-ninth birthday, and he put me in touch with Amine six months later.

According to Ibrahim, his brother afforded him "comfort and safety," reflecting on the risk of being arrested for being caught having sex with men: "I know I can rely on him if I am ever in a jam because of this, if I'm ever picked up by the police I'll call him before dad." Being in and of the world by means of scaffolding, here, a reassurance that someone would come to his aid should he be targeted by law enforcement officials for his queerness.

Amine afforded Ibrahim new forms of language that were not previously available to him: "when someone has relationships, they need someone to vent out to." As such, when it came to communicating with his brother, Amine was careful to not "let his orientation affect his ability to talk to me."

Amine also described the occasional dissensual support he offered on social media, sharing "a bit of social justice posts, but I don't generally do that," and in real life, partaking in "verbal defense or arguments" if someone were to say something homophobic "in front of me because, it's kind of my job to soften the impact for people."

At first glance it would seem that Amine also employed the metacommunicative strategy of not having a strategy that Ilham, Zack and Kareem had similarly deployed, but in his case it seems to be an incidental communication of a context of normalcy. As soon I kicked off the interview with a question about support, Amine indicated there was no reason to provide any special support for something that was perfectly ordinary.

He frustratingly exclaimed; “I don’t subscribe to the idea that he needs to be ‘supported’, the sky is blue, Ibrahim is gay, support would come when he’s under fire.”

I was initially taken aback by Amine’s response: how could he not be aware of the complexities queer people have to contend with in their daily social engagements? But the more I thought about it, the more I got a sense that it was probably a defensive knee-jerk answer, possibly even a resistance to acknowledge his brother’s vulnerability, and as such a form of protection or… support? Maybe my questions felt accusatory to him, as if I was casting doubt on how well he looked out for his brother. Perhaps it was even irritation at my explicit and intrusive questions about such a delicate topic that everyone knows not to bring up: he was possibly angry at my open disregard of the social disposition of keeping silent about queerness.

The ambiguity of offering no support, or support when needed that Amine alluded to, was picked up on by Ibrahim, who described that his brother offered him “passive support.” As he explained: “he wants me to be happy, yet he doesn’t actively remove discomfort, he just doesn’t create it in the first place.” Ibrahim illustrated this with an example, “If we were sitting with grandma and she said something homophobic, he won’t say anything unless I do. He doesn’t take the initiative if I’m there, yet if he were alone with her he’d make a remark. Mom once asked him if I was gay, he said ‘it doesn’t matter.’”

We can see that as an act of worlding through the production of selective truth (in contrast to Zack’s lies to his own parents), and through metacommunication (after all, telling Ibrahim about the conversation with his mother communicates a context of “I’ve got your back”).

Despite the fact that neither Amine nor his brother described it explicitly as such, I interpret this stance of minding-one's-business-until-needed, or "passive support," as an act of metacommunication, unique amongst my interlocutors and distinct from the other brothers in that it communicated an additional context of deference, of not taking up space, allowing Ibrahim to set the agenda of the conversation rather than speaking for him. Here, Amine's worlding for his brother, did not seem to be correctly recognized by Kareem, who took it to mean "passive support" instead of deference,

Finally, the siblings were also unique in that they both framed support in utilitarian terms. According to Ibrahim: "we have a lot tied together, we have a business to run together, if he wasn't supportive, our future would come crumbling down." For Amine he was supportive because if he was not, "we wouldn't be able to work together, our job is our main form of sustenance, why would I put that at risk?" Worlding through cooperation for shared livelihood.

C. Mothers (and Father)

Connecting with the siblings of queer kin proved to be easier for this study than connecting with their parents. During the time I had allocated for my fieldwork (which coincided with pandemic restrictions), I was only able to reach out to two mothers, Maya and Iman. I will only focus on my experience with Maya in this section, and will discuss the conversation with Iman in another chapter, since the conditions around which I conducted the interview with her were somewhat unique.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, I was not successful in directly connecting with any fathers. Through my social experiences in queer communities, I instinctively knew that

this was going to be the hardest category of informants to reach. This hunch was also reflected in the work experiences of the institutional informants I had spoken to.

Doctor Umaima, a clinical psychologist that has supported several queer men and their families in her practice, had told me: “I have worked directly with some mothers and siblings. But in terms of parents, fathers are less inclined to come to therapy.” I will speak more about Umaima in the next chapter.

Daniella, a Beirut-based social psychologist in the NGO sector, reflected that in her research findings “children of divorced parents often have one family member supportive of the child, I’ve never heard it being the dad.”

Felix, an HIV activist whose work with local and regional NGOs included working with queer communities to navigate family acceptance and rejection, believed that when it came to supportive family members, “Fathers are usually the last to do so, it is more difficult for fathers to accept a gay son; who is gonna carry the family name? My son is not a man; he is getting fucked. For men and fathers it’s different, power plays a role, I used to know refugees whose fathers were in the army, and they tortured them.”

Interestingly, Felix’s observations echoed academic insights on kinship in the Arab world, namely Suad Joseph’s notion that gender dynamics are generally shaped by systems of patriarchy and patrilineality, with family lying at the core of society, as well as Bruce Dunne’s argument that sexual relations can generally be understood as relations of power linked to rigid gender roles ultimately serving in the (re)production of family as a fundamental social unit. His insights made a compelling case for why finding fathers to participate in the study was especially difficult.

Despite my limited access to parents of queer kin, I was still able to peek into the worlds of supportive mothers and fathers in Beirut through my conversation with Maya and her son, and a few online resources that I will outline below.

1. Maya and Louay

I had known Louay for many years. He was a cultural worker that I often ran into during plays, film festivals and nightlife venues. He was friendly, funny and easy to talk to. Our conversations often ended with a promise to do something together soon, that neither of us followed through with. This changed when a mutual friend suggested that I speak to him for my thesis on account of his openly supportive mother, Maya.

When I reached out, he was open to participate, and confident that Maya would be as well. I ended up having two back-to-back Zoom interviews with this ally-kin duo in late December 2020. The first call was a call with Louay alone, immediately followed by a joint conversation with both Louay and Maya. This was possible given that they both lived in the same building (in separate apartments), in a suburb east of Beirut. The second call which took place at Maya's place, was particularly noteworthy since it was the sole opportunity I had to interview a queer/ally interlocutor pair together while conducting.

As soon as my solo interview with Louay began, two things caught my attention. The first was his completely shaved head, a look I had never seen him sport before. The second was an arresting print on the wall behind him. It was a simple black and white graphic rendering of the Burj El Murr building set against a baby blue sky, dotted with white puffy clouds, framed in white.

He was wearing a dark hoodie that evening, updating me on his life between cigarette puffs with an accent that reflected an American education in Lebanon. I learned that he had turned thirty not too long ago, and had recently quit his teaching job because he was getting ready to leave Lebanon. He was waiting for the UK embassy to issue him a visa so that he could marry his fiancée, whom he had met a few years earlier while pursuing a master's program in London.

On the subject of familial support, Louay reported that he had a close relationship with Maya, but that it hadn't always that way: "when I first came out to mom, she was not cool with it, then I retracted it, I told her I was bi, and that I would phase out being attracted to men, I then un-retracted it after she was cool and clear minded."

He recounted that a turning point in their relationship was in 2015, when Maya accompanied him to one of the city's regularly occurring queer-friendly parties, telling him: "I want to know, I want to see what your world is like." This participation was a metacommunicative move that conveyed a context of acceptance and enabled him to be "blatantly gay," shedding dissimulation completely. Louay offered another notable example where Maya intervened to metacommunicate a context of normalcy: "recently when my fiancée came to meet the family, she invited us to lunch, and we did tourist stuff together." This is a life event that is afforded to most heterosexual couples, yet not conceivable, let alone feasible, for the overwhelming majority of queer men in Lebanon.

According to Louay Maya's support also eliminated the threat of estrangement and isolation, offering scaffolding that allowed for connectedness and kinship-as-usual despite the not-so-usual circumstances,

> I didn't have a familial relation with anyone else, she was my only familial tie. Despite having friends, family is important, they should be there to support you.

> I was cut off from my dad, he was really backward… If I hadn't received this support I would have definitely been estranged from family from all sides, and maybe not even had had such a strong relationship with my brother. It tied-in the family.

This kinship-as-usual afforded him an experience of the ordinary, one that inserted him in the world in such a way that he was able to have healthier romantic engagements, "I think there is a lot of normalcy to being able to share the things that are going on in my life, to bring someone home and have dinner with the family. Having a sense of acceptance from the family also helped in my relationships as well."

Moreover, Louay indicated that nowadays Maya refused to hide his sexuality from others, a dissensual move that other families with queer kin would most likely shy away from: "she's very open about it now to her circle of friends, to her extended family, my grandparents, her sister and brother."

After we had gone through all the questions I had prepared, Louay logged off the call and reconnected soon after from Maya's home. She sat to his left, with their faces and the top part of their chests almost completely taking up the dim and grainy screen. It looked like they were either seated side to side or lying prone on a bed, propped up on their elbows.

Maya was an outgoing and spirited paralegal in her fifties. She has a dark complexion and wore her dark wavy hair loose. She explained, in Brazilian-inflected English, that she was born and raised in a Muslim community in Brazil and had gotten married to "a strict Muslim," whom she divorced not too long after Louay was born. By the age of twenty-seven, Maya had remarried and moved to Lebanon with Louay, where she eventually had two other children.

Maya did most of the talking while Louay quietly occupied his corner of the screen, gazing downwards, coming to life every now and then to crack a joke, give a quick opinion or light a cigarette for himself or his mother. It was clear that they both seemed very comfortable with each other, engaging more like friends than family. There was palpable love and respect between them, but without any hierarchical underpinnings. I too felt at ease with them. The initial awkwardness that I had experienced with most of the previous interviews with supportive kin was absent. Perhaps I was charmed by the musicality of Maya's accent, one that is common to most romance languages, and the warm associations it carried.

Despite the deeply personal affairs I touched upon, Maya was forthcoming. Echoing Louay, she confessed that coming to terms with his sexuality was difficult for her: "I fainted, I started telling him that you are confused, it's because you never had a relationship with men where you go to play football, and you are always reading," to which Louay jokingly responded "those gays and their books."

Worrying about how society would accept Louay, Maya needed some time to process his coming out, a period during which she remarked that he "was very closed up." She felt profound guilt when she finally came around, "thinking how much he had suffered since I don't know when, all alone in this." As such, one of her first priorities was to communicate a context of normalcy, and a relationship of support. She deployed metacommunicative moves to this end: "I would ask about his friends 'is that one straight or gay?' I wanted to make it normal until it became very natural. I embraced all his flirts, his boyfriends, his life and it became a normal topic slowly, before it was something we don't talk about."

She eventually took this metacommunicative worlding to more explicit levels, going from speaking about safe sex ("I sat him down with my husband and said 'we want to talk to you, it doesn't matter if you are straight or gay you have to use protection'") to demanding grandchildren: "his fiancée came to our house twice, he came to Lebanon (…) I tell them adopt."

Maya concluded our conversation on a touching note that also revealed the dissensual move of normalizing her son's being otherwise publicly: "I'm so proud of him, the long road he came through, the beautiful person he is, I don't give a damn, I don't go and say my son is gay, but if someone asks I'll say it. I'm tired of hearing 'is he not going to get married?' 'He will but he's homosexual.'"

2. Zuħal and Imm Zuħal

One night in December 2021, Zuħal, a publically known Lebanese drag queen, appeared on a television show known for engaging with controversial social issues. The episode was themed around sexual identity and sexual orientation. Prior to finding out about the episode through one of Zuħal's social media posts, I was only vaguely aware of the program. I went to the host's social media post to look for clips of the episode, finding it after scrolling through a sea of video thumbnails with bizarre titles like "I married my sister," "My husband and I share our bed with the maid," and "the dog has taken over my husband's marital duties."

In one of the clips I found, Zuħal (who I will refer to using she/her pronouns) was seated alone on a red velvet couch against a Mondrian-esque background in a brightly lit space. She was out of drag, sporting closely cropped hair and stubble, and wearing an all-black casual outfit that accentuated her slim build. The lean bespectacled host, in contrast, was dressed formally in a suit and tie and remained vertical. There appeared to

be no audience, or other guests. It was just Zuħal on the right of the stage, and the host standing to the left. The camera panned between them as they conversed, settling on the person speaking, such that they almost never appeared in the same frame together.

The interview was predominantly in Lebanese. Zuħal spoke candidly in a deep voice, with inflections suggesting a Francophone education. Gesticulating, she vigorously addressed the shame projected onto her by society for being openly queer and refusing to conform to heterosexual norms. While doing so, she made a shrewd semiotic move that increased her ability to communicate experiences that would normally be illegible to most members of her speech community. Similar to Zack's tactic of code-switching, and reflecting the logic of Nabil's request for me to speak to his sister "in Arabic", this move entailed limiting her use of foreign terms and buzzwords drawn from the hermetical Arabic social justice lexicon. However, when she needed to convey a concept that did not exist, or was not commonly known, in Lebanese, she spoke in such a way that these unfamiliar concepts would be accompanied by colloquial statements that gave context clues. For instance "leh (...) badde ʕish double life" (why should I live a double life) was followed by "w kazzib" (and lie). "Ana privileged inno ʔdirit koun out" (I'm privileged to be able to be out) was followed by "ken ʕande hal ʔuwweh, ahle mneḥ maʕe" (I have this strength, my family were good to me).

Zuħal's strategic juxtaposition of these terms and reiteration of others (*mithliyeen* instead of *shuzooz*), served as a metapragmatic nudge, using language (colloquial) to describe language (appropriate). This contributes to the absorption of the meanings represented by these terms to become part of the norm of the language. The process of naming fundamental experiences that shape the lives of LGBTQI+ communities

(double life, coming out, privilege… etc.), serves to reorder the epistemological framework from which viewers engage with queerness and expands the space for new forms of self-expression and communication, complementing Arendt's concept of self-insertion "with word (...) into the human world ."

Zuħal's verbal maneuvers reminded me of another insightful linguistic experience I had in the fall of 2020 as I headed to work in a shared taxi. It was a sunny morning, and despite the restrictive impact of the Pandemic and economic collapse, it almost felt like a typical pre-2019 Beirut morning, but with less traffic and noise. There were two other passengers with me in the car, a masked young-looking man with a dark complexion and black hair, to my left and an older man sitting in the front seat that occasionally turned back to speak to him gruffly. I couldn't tell what they were saying, but it was evident that they knew each other. The toolbox on the younger man's lap gave me the impression that they might have been repairmen heading towards a job.

Lost in my thoughts, I was vaguely aware of the radio in the background, but not actively listening to it. As my stop approached, the broadcast suddenly grabbed my attention, and I realized that this was because I was hearing a woman talk about homosexuality and non-gender conformity in Arabic on the air. She spoke in a bored-sounding tone, without the sensationalism that I expected. I looked at the driver and the other passengers inconspicuously, expecting some sort of outrage, but nobody reacted. I wasn't sure if they had heard what was being said and didn't care enough to make a big deal out of it, or if they hadn't been actively listening and not noticed. It all felt a little surreal to me, this was most likely due to how out of tune the previously outlined dissimulative habitus was in that social context.

The female voice was enveloped in a muffled hiss typical of radio, and was explaining that homosexuality was not a disease, pointing out that there were many people hiding it from their loved ones and suffering in silence, sometimes even resorting to suicide. The woman used formal-sounding Arabic neologisms like *"mujtaaʕ meem", "mithliyya jinsiya", "hawwiya jandariyya"* that I imagine would sound awkward to the vernacular ear. Yet she knit them together with everyday colloquial utterances like "hayda mish marad" (it is not a disease) that served to smooth their edges and made the conversation sound less jarring. Perhaps a linguistic foreshadowing of a process that might one day render queerness itself less culturally discordant.

Returning to Zuħal's last statement prior to my digression above, in which she explained that because her family was supportive, she did not have to "live a double life, and lie," it is obvious that her parents anchored her in the world through easing the burden of dissimulation. However, the impact of this worldliness extended beyond the family circle, triggering a domino effect of sorts that worlded others, in more than one way. Firstly, this is evidenced by the fact that she was on a television show, publicly advocating for personal freedom and disrupting the perceptual social order with her unapologetic presence as an openly queer person unafraid to claim space not usually afforded to many queer communities. "Why should I change who I am, live a double life and lie, just because it scares people," she defiantly exclaimed. When the host offered, "you are living in an eastern society where everyone knows everyone, in an environment where everyone talks about everyone else, and any action a person takes affects him, his family and his extended family," Zuħal made it clear that she refused to let this hinder her: "If people are so fragile about something very intimate I do, why

should I have to bear the burden of this fragility?" Moreover, Zuħal revealed that the privilege of having familial support also empowered her to practically assist others in her queer social circle that were facing conflicts with their families: "it's my duty to help others… to this day I have friends calling, asking for a place to spend the night, because these things still happen."

Zuħal chose to disclose herself to the show's public despite the backlash that would certainly follow. The algorithmically mediated "most relevant" comments on her video that was posted on the host's Facebook page offer insight into the viewers' overwhelmingly hostile opinions. From Hadiths about the virtues of hiding sin, to cliché religious expressions decrying moral decadence. From incitements to violence ("you should be whipped (…) so with every stroke you say, God, have mercy on me") to dehumanizing comments ("what is this thing, why are you bringing creatures like these onto your program?"). From frustration at the content ("we are sick and tired of these inane topics") to advice aimed at the host ("we know that you mean to expose these things to the world, but some people might be influenced by it, so it's better to stay away from these things.")

I was able to dig deeper into Zuħal's story because she also happened to be an acquaintance, one that I had met during my DJ gigs. As such, I reached out to her on WhatsApp and sent her my questions. She responded to each of them through a series of terse voice-notes. I learned that her mother was the most supportive of her parents. I also learned that it took Zuħal's parents some time to be supportive. She had alluded to this on the program, claiming: "my family did not have a problem with homosexuality per se, they have a problem with the way I live my life in general." I assumed that their reservations were about Zuħal being public about her queerness, and being a drag

performer. According to Zuħal, when they eventually came round, "it healed me, we've gotten somewhere, you aren't resisting anymore," adding that family support "gives confidence and safety and makes you feel more grounded." Statements that speaks to the worlding power of accepting to engage with kin in a new context of transparency.

Reflecting on their current relationship, Zuħal offered: "my mother has been to my performances, and has become more familiar with this part of my life, she has accepted that I am homosexual, I can now speak to her about boyfriends and things like that." This statement sheds light on the metacommunicative and metapragmatic ways in which her mother helped her be in and of the world. Showing up to Zuħal's shows communicates a context of support, moreover making the effort to "become more familiar' with Zuħal's life has allowed for new uses of language (such as discussing her love life with her mother) that were not possible before.

In my voice note engagement with Zuħal, she seemed ambivalent about the family's support. The uncertainty was mainly in relation to visibility. "Mom still isn't very public about it," she exclaimed, giving the example of how this was lacking "in front of the extended family," explaining that this was "because she still cares what people say." As Zuħal discussed her mother's support, it seemed like she was discovering its contours in real time: "she might defend me now I guess, because she is stronger than before, but she'll always still be somewhat discreet about it, it's not like she is outspoken and she supports me as LGBT." Revaluating her last statement she added; "but at least whenever she feels she is safe, she does support me and she's outspoken about it like in the Jumana Haddad event," an event that I had also found out about through a short reel that Zuħal shared on Instagram.

The video in question was titled “MOM WATCHING ME FOR THE FIRST TIME.” When I first saw it in the fall of 2020, it had been viewed almost 5,000 times. The scene was filmed a few months after the Beirut Blast, at an event where Zuħal had performed a drag number and given a talk about the cultural history of drag. The grainy clip began with Zuħal seated in an orange chair on the left side of the room, dressed in black plain long-sleeved dress and a turban. She was also wearing black lipstick and eyeliner against a pale shade of foundation. Zuħal’s was positioned on a low white-colored stage, with a red walled-background, around which roughly twenty people sat in a 360 formation. The audience was mainly made up of young-looking men and women, dressed casually for warm weather, half of which were masked. A few stood out to me, including a couple of faces that I recognized from Beirut’s queer nightlife, a woman wearing a hijab (the only one), and a man whose baldness made him seem older than the younger looking crowd.

The camera panned right to Zuħal’s mother who was seated facing her across the room. Imm Zuħal had turned to address someone standing above her on her left as everyone else watched on. Slim and more younger-looking than I expected, she could have been in her early thirties. She too was dressed in all black, looking stylish in a sleeveless knee-length body-hugging outfit, with a black purse on her lap. She was minimally accessorized and wore her straight coiffed hair in a long layered bob that faded from dark to blond tones.

Zuħal’s mother was describing her journey towards accepting her son’s being-other. She spoke loudly with a slightly raspy voice, and in a matter-of-fact tone: “when he was a lot younger, we had a feeling that his character was not like a typical boys” (to which the crowd reacted with laughter). The camera followed her gaze as she turned to face

Zuħal, with a mischievous look on her face. They smiled at each other, and someone shouted out "show us some pictures." The camera panned back to Imm Zuħal, as she continued addressing the person on her left: "we took him to a psychologist for a long time… although it took some time, I eventually understood, he was suffering because of us, because we wanted him to be the way we wanted him to be, and he wasn't able to be that way." She concluded: "the psychologist made me realize that it is not a disease, that I cannot cure him…we had to accept him the way he was."

Her final statement in the clip reflected that it was through a discourse of depathologization that Zuħal's queerness was finally able to make sense to her, "*the psychologist made me realize that it was not a disease, that I cannot cure him (…) we had to accept him the way he was,*" this was followed by loud applause. I found it noteworthy that the turning point for Imm Zuħal to accept supporting Zuħal as she was, was the notion that homosexuality was not a pathology, and by extension untreatable.

This also came up in my interview with Iman (the mother that I will discuss in chapter four). Some of the institutional informants also shared that this was a major tactic they used in order to help parents navigate acceptance. This reflects the power of medical discourse to shape social contexts beyond the sphere of medicine, and processes of *becoming*, a framework I will explore in chapter three.

However, it also represents, an interesting tactic of worlding through metapragmatics, in the sense that what she is doing is saying to the crowd around her that while homosexuality had previously been referred to as a disease, it is now wrong to continue to use this term as such. What is noteworthy about this is that she manages to do so without explicitly using the term homosexuality. This form of communication with omission is another point that I will explore in chapter four.

The video ended with the camera panning left to Zuħal as she stood up and walked towards Imm Zuħal and embraced her. Imm Zuħal's public support of Zuħal represents worlding through dissensus, and also through the metacommunication of a relationship of allyship. I subsequently discovered a fact that made that particular hug more poignant than it already was from a later video that Zuħal shared on Instagram. Tearing up, she described how her mother's embrace, after watching her perform in drag for the first time, marked a turning point in their relationship. That particular embrace was the one captured on her Instagram reel. Prior to that moment, Zuħal had never heard any of her parents admit any responsibility for the depression and suffering she endured when she was younger. Hearing her mother take accountability for this allowed Zuħal to heal, and to embrace her. This represented a third mode of worldly insertion that Zuħal's mother deployed, acknowledging the trauma she had caused and validating Zuħal's pain.

Earlier in this section I had alluded to an ambivalence that Zuħal expressed towards her mother's support as a result of her selective willingness to be public about it. Later that same year, I had a brief online interaction with Zuħal and asked her how things were at home. She explained that "a lot had changed" with her mother since our last WhatsApp exchange, implying a positive development. A few months after that Zuħal shared another video. This time she had adopted a de rigueur meme format, where she addressed the viewers saying, "everyone keeps asking 'you have no shame, who raised you?'" to which Imm Zuħal appears in the frame, and stands by Zuħal declaring: "I raised him" — before adding menacingly "why don't you tell me how you raised your kids?"

3. The Podcast with Imad and Wendy

A friend was setting-up an online queer support platform funded by the Dutch embassy around the same time that I was conducting the fieldwork for my thesis. The website contained many helpful resources, one of which was a podcast series that candidly engaged with the everyday experiences of queer communities in Lebanon. One day, as we caught-up over dinner, he recommended that I check-out the episode on supportive families of queer kin in Lebanon.

The website was easy to navigate. The landing page featured six sets of white bold titles arranged horizontally against a plain shimmering background that slowly morphed into hues of purple. Each title was in Arabic and English; SHARE, LEARN, ASK, LISTEN and WATCH. I clicked on LISTEN and scrolled through the various links until I eventually found what I was looking for.

The episode was around thirty minutes long, and in Lebanese colloquial Arabic (for the most part) with participants occasionally code switching to English and (to a lesser degree) French. The program began (and ended) with a short and nondescript jazzy tune, followed by an introduction by the host, Kristopher, in a deep and affective voice that would have been perfect for the radio. After welcoming listeners, he announced that it was going to be a remarkable episode on account of the "very special guests" who were joining, adding: "while all our guests are special, it's rare to be able to bring together guests like these for an episode about this matter."

The guests included two openly queer men, each accompanied by a supportive parent. Both of the queer sons, who happened to be acquaintances of mine, surprisingly used their real names on the show, as did their parents. One ally-kin unit included Jamil, a British-born (and wed) father of three in his seventies, and his only son Salim, a

cultural worker in his thirties. The other one included Wendy (who did not volunteer her age), and her only son Fouad, a make-up artist and drag queen in his twenties.

Kristopher kicked-off the conversation by asking about the circumstances surrounding Salim and Fouad's coming out. He followed this with questions that encouraged the guests to reflect on what their reactions, fears and concerns were at the time, and on how their relationships had changed since then. Kristopher concluded the show by inviting each speaker to offer the listeners any advice they might have around coming out. The general tone of the conversation was positive, both parents spoke loquaciously and animatedly, and even cracked a few jokes and teased their sons, who, in comparison, were more subdued.

Before examining the content of the podcast, I would like to comment on the process. Appearing on a public (albeit not widely known) show about supporting one's queer kin is in itself a form of support, and a multilayered one at that. One dimension is metacommunicative, as it conveys a relationship of support to the sons. Another aspect of it is a dissensual disruption to the norm, a showcasing of parents that are openly accepting and loving of their queer sons.

The parents' dissensual move was acknowledged by Kristopher during the interview; "I can tell you that it was very difficult to find parents that knew in the first place, did not have a problem with it, and were willing to discuss the matter" adding that even "families that do not have a problem with it, still don't want anyone to know, or talk about it." Jamil was not surprised by this, responding "maybe the issue is that Wendy and I are not representative of Middle Eastern parents that have gay children."

This acknowledgement revealed another form of worlding that both Imad and Wendy deployed, one that began with *a recognition of the fact of their sons' queerness*,

and an acceptance of it as *a new context for their relationship*. This is evident in a reflection by Jamil ("I don't hide from this thing and go 'no I am a father, I know what's best,'") and in Wendy's advice to other parents "to face reality, nothing stays hidden… me and my son live like that, we are an open book."

The parents' statements above bring to mind Veena Das' idea of the "birthing of culture." Das recounts a short story by Urdu author Saadat Hasan Manto, in which in the midst of Partition a father rejects archetypical motifs and recognizes the pain of a daughter who has been brutally raped, instead of casting her aside as a stain on the family honor. Das believes that new forms of culture are birthed when a person can view another "in the uniqueness of her being rather than through the categories enjoined by tradition." Moral being, then, "is not a mechanical application of rules of culture but stems from the recognition of the other's pain" (Das 1995, 167).

As such, Jamil and Wendy's recognition of their sons' uniqueness of being can be understood as a form of worlding through *birthing new culture*. However, this process was harder for Wendy than it was for Jamil. She needed more time to process her son's coming out: "I was afraid of society and family. I know the price of this, I know what they would say, I was afraid for him." Jamil had similar fears, but overcame them sooner because of his son's troubled state. One night, after Salim's parents reprimanded him for coming back home drunk, he got disproportionally angry, and in a state of near hysteria, blurted out that he was gay before locking himself up in the bathroom all night. For Jamil, "his rage was the problem, why? Why? Maybe we weren't able to understand him (…) I did not try to deny it, doing that causes a lot of pressure and stress. He's already going through a lot."

Jamil and Wendy's support relieved the burden of dissimulation their sons were carrying. It also improved their interpersonal relationships, lessening their isolation from family. According to Salim, "as a teenager we went through a phase where my dad and I didn't talk to each other much (...) when I came out to them I felt that I could make them be a part of my life, and be more involved in it because that barrier is gone, they know." For Fouad, it had the added effect of improving his self-confidence and self-acceptance: "I have become a lot more at ease, it feels like there is a weight that came off my shoulders, like a heavy burden. I became more sociable (...) I don't care anymore, I am very happy with who I am, and I am very proud of myself because she is by my side."

Wendy brought to light two other moves she made to amplify her son's worldliness that were unique to their case. In the first instance, she *distanced herself from her family* with whom she and Fouad lived, because they were unable to accept his being-otherwise. Wendy tried to change their position on the matter for a whole year before giving up and moving on, saying: "I had to start with my family at least, before thinking about society… after I was sure that nobody would accept him (...) I took my son and we lived alone." Wendy's uncompromising position, a foregrounding of one kinship tie over others, is reminiscent of Ilham's willingness to break-off the engagement to her future husband if he would prove unable to embrace her queer brother.

The other move that Wendy made involved participating in her son's interests, namely his drag persona Nathalie DeVille. Fouad reflected: "my relationship with my mother greatly improved after Nathalie. She is the one that made the effort to be closer, she would ask me many questions (...) I started feeling that she really loved me and accepted me. Now we are the best of friends." Kristopher asked Wendy if she ever

attended Fouad's shows, to which she responded in an incredulous tone "do I go to her shows? Yes, front row!"

I was fortunate enough to witness their bonding through drag first-hand a few years ago. During a DJ gig at an event that featured drag performances, Wendy arrived early with Fouad to help with costume and make-up as he transformed into Nathalie. In the seven years that I had played music in queer-friendly spaces, I had never seen a mother show up for her son quite like that, or at all really. Watching her tenderly apply eye shadow to her son's closed eyelids in a quiet corner of the club, and watching her cheer him on during his performance was very moving. It metacommunicated a poignant context of devotion, and dissensually disrupted the Lebanese business-as-usual kinship paradigm.

The conversation ended on a touching note, as the parents presented final words to their sons on air. Reflecting on how Salim had helped him grow as a person, Jamil offered: "I would like to say thank you Salim, I love you." Wendy concluded: "I would also like to say what I've said before and what I'll say till the day I die. I am proud of my son and love him a lot"

Many months later, I went back to check the listenership of the episode, but sadly, it had been taken down. However, of the few episodes that were there, each had an average of around seventeen listens. I reached out to the organization in charge of the channel, who were unaware it was missing, and promised to look into it with their IT department and get back to me. I haven't been contacted by anyone regarding the matter to date, and the episode still remains offline.

D. Conclusion

In this chapter, I shed light on the multiple ways family members capacitate their queer- acknowledged loved ones to be in and of the world. To this end, I deployed the concept of "worldliness" as an analytical tool to guide my work. I understand this term as a general ontological robustness, a rootedness in the world.

On the one hand, some of these tactics were specific to specific cases. These include explicit statements of support, eliminating the threat of estrangement and isolation, and cooperation for shared livelihood. The first strangely only came up when Ilham reflected that she had explicitly said to her brother "I'm here and you can confide in me." Louay was able to retain his only meaningful remaining kinship tie. Amine and Ibrahim ran the family business together: Amine's continued cooperation on this enabled Ibrahim's livelihood.

On the other hand, certain forms of support overlapped amongst the different informants, in different permutations and combinations. These include scaffolding, metacommunication, metapragmatics, dissensus, relief from dissimulation, and the manipulation of truth.

However, this typology is actually an oversimplification of a much more complex set of dynamics. For instance, a particular act of support can contribute to worldhood in multiple ways. Moreover, the same tactic to insert others into the world may vary in appearance across contexts.

Scaffolding was a theme that was more common amongst the sisters. Through unelaborated means, siblings created and reinforced a general sense of loyal support and safety. For Ilham this meant invoking a sense of "he has my back when he needs it." In Diana and Ola's case, it was about communicating that "he can always count on me for

emotional support." Meanwhile Ghada was careful to “make him feel safe.” Amine’s brother reported feeling “comfort and safety,” especially from the threat of arrest.

Metacommunication was universally employed by all my informants to indirectly convey a context of support. First and foremost, the very process of kin agreeing to be interviewed about how they looked after their queer loved ones, or making this care known to others via media dissemination, certainly accomplishes that.

However, there is more to be said about metacommunication. Some of my informants preferred to sometimes do this, while not seeming to be doing it, to avoid othering its intended recipient. This means was employed by the brothers. Zack and Kareem didn’t change the way they engaged with their brothers after they came out. The former shared “I’m not doing anything different (...) I don’t want to make him feel like ‘hi you are this alien and I’m trying to understand you.’’’ The latter revealed “I don’t do anything specifically extra, I allow him to be in his own space and do his own thing.” Amine expressed a similar sentiment, taking it even further by even deferring the defense of his brother, until absolutely necessary, “support would come when he’s under fire.”

On other occasions, some of the siblings engaged in more conspicuous metacommunication. Ilham and Zack nonchalantly asked about the whereabouts of their brothers’ boyfriends. Ilham explained: “If he comes without Khaled (...) I say ‘where is Khaled,’”. Zack asked “why doesn’t he come over more often?” Ghada casually indulged her brother’s desire for clothing that would mark his queerness: “I get it for him (...) or I say to him “it’s nice, get it, if you like it.” Ola and Kareem downplayed their brothers’ apprehensive coming out, the former with a blasé “that’s it?” and the latter with an unenthused “oh, I thought you were going to say something important.”

Amine recounted to Ibrahim how he outmaneuvered his mother's questions about Ibrahim's sexuality: "It doesn't matter." Maya demanded grandchildren from her son and his fiancée: "I tell them adopt."

Metapragmatics (using language to speak about how to use language) were deployed among most of the supportive kin. Diana policed her mother's use of language: "don't talk about these things in front of him". Ghada acted when the family shared homophobic content: "I told them to stop." Ola argued with her classmates that "louteh is not an insult." Zack "made a speech" chastising a group's bigoted statements. Kareem berated an acquaintance's homophobic utterances: "I don't want to hear one more word from you." Amine afforded his brother new forms of language that were not previously available: "when someone has relationships, they need someone to vent out to." Imm Zuħal recounted "it is not a 'disease'."

Dissensual stances involving visible solidarity were taken by many of the interlocutors. Ola declared herself an "LGBT supporter" in an article. Zack, Hatem and Amine doled out public sanctions to homophobes in their social circle. Zack "left the group and cut all communication". Hatem lambasted a bigot: "you are filthy." Amine engaged in "verbal defense or arguments." Maya refused to hide her son's sexuality: "if someone asks I'll say it." Imm Zuħal appeared by her son's side in a video post defiantly declaring; "I raised him." Salim and Wendy declared love and support for their sons on a podcast.

Relief from dissimulation was a form of worlding that came up often in the conversations, often with a restorative and/ or integrative effect. For Tarek, it eliminated anxiety and "made things feel very natural." It reduced Ghassan's stress levels: "I don't want to have to lie, and keep up with excuses and scenarios." Hatem reported: "It makes

me feel more comfortable being myself and letting other people in." Fady claimed it helped him "be more of" himself. Zuħal did not have to "live a double life and lie." It was integrative in Salim's case: "I felt that I could make them be a part of my life." Fouad was relieved: "I have become a lot more at ease, it feels like there is a weight that came off my shoulders, like a heavy burden."

The manipulation of truth was a tactic used primarily by the brothers. Hatem's brother produced lies that enabled him to "have a relationship with my family." Fady's brother produced safe truths, helping him decide what "elements of my true self (...) I portray to my conservative Christian family" and what not to. Ibrahim's brother produced selective truths: "mom once asked him if I was gay, he said 'it doesn't matter."

CHAPTER III

BECOMING

In this chapter, I will explore how family members of queer men account for and situate their divergence from the cultural orthodoxy, towards becoming supportive. The term "becoming" recalls João Biehl and Peter Locke's similarly titled approach to ethnography (inspired by the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari), that seeks to "trace people's trajectories as they grow out of themselves, fold in exteriorities, and become other." I will attempt to detail how the study's' allies have achieved a stage in life that is open to new relations and pathways, being attentive to "the microdynamics of living and the new configurations of thought, affect, solidarity, and resentment that create tears and exclusions—but also openings, however minor—in macro-level realities and scaling projects" (Biehl and Locke 2017, XII).

To retain a sense of narrative coherence, this chapter will use the same kinship-position sequencing as the previous one, however the mode of analysis will be different here, as it will be structured around the same three fixed axes for each interlocutor. One attends to what the supportive kin themselves explicitly identified as the crossroads that opened up possibilities for becoming supportive. Another looks at any direct or indirect reference to transformative moments during the rest of the interview. The third considers what others who had been close to these familial allies had to say about these becomings. As such, while my focus will be on the words of the allies, I will also include the voice of my queer interlocutors, and other informants whenever relevant.
It must be said that developing a simple conversational mechanism with which to query about trajectories of becoming was as straight-forward as I had anticipated, it felt

syntactically awkward enquiring about "becoming," using the term itself. Moreover, I did not anticipate that my informants would formulate their responses around it either. As such, I settled on imply asking, "What guided your decision to be supportive?" Finally, it is important to keep in mind that my interlocutors found themselves having to produce an account of complex and intimate processes to a practical stranger on the spot, processes they had maybe never thought about, or at least not like that, before. As such, some of their narratives were most likely pieced together as we spoke, shaped by what they were willing, and able, to share at that particular moment. I think of their stories as tentative storylines still being written.

A. The Psychologists

I ran towards Umaima's office, mortified, one late morning, in the fall of 2020. There had been a misunderstanding about timing and I was late to our scheduled interview. I arrived panting, thirty minutes late, apologizing profusely.

Umaima, a friend that I had not seen in a long time, was dressed in white, and wore her dark shoulder-length hair down. She was in her late forties, and had practiced psychotherapy in diverse socioeconomic configurations within Lebanon for over a decade. I was aware, from previous conversations with her that she worked with queer patients and their families. I thought that interviewing her would offer unique insights into my interlocutors' worlds.

She ushered me in and asked me to give her a moment as she finished a task. I sat by her desk as she typed, clacking at her keyboard in quick intermittent bursts, all the while squinting at her desktop screen. I felt unpleasantly warm, and dismayed at the

realization that the air conditioning was off, the last thing I wanted was to drip with sweat as I interviewed her.

I soon grew uncomfortable sitting silently across from her as she worked, so I got up and walked to her bookcase, pretending to look at the books. About five minutes later she summoned me back with a "yalla," indicating that she was done, and I returned to my seat. I made some small talk about the art on the wall, because it felt awkward to jump right into the interview without some sort of phatic exchange. I briefly recapped what my research was about, and asked her if she would like to look at the verbal consent form. As I began to describe what it included, she interrupted me with a smile, saying that there was no need, and gave me her verbal consent. We spoke for about an hour, during which she responded to my questions in a gentle and engaged tone.

Umaima's views on what family support should involve were largely consistent with those of my ally interlocutors, as outlined in the prior chapter. She believed it was: "offering emotional, social, psychological, financial, support and acceptance to a person. Being there for you, to support you when you are facing challenges, feeling supported is not feeling rejected."

When asked about the profile of the family members that she had engaged with, Umaima reflected,

> I have worked directly with some mothers and siblings, fathers are less inclined to come to therapy (...) I've never seen a father because I haven't seen others dare to involve them. When I don't have access to the family I examine with patients the pros and cons of coming out to their moms and siblings.[How these deliberations normally go?] There have been variable results, some choose not to, but those that do are usually for the most part supportive, [this can be] either inclusively through engaging siblings and their partner in outings or asking about partners, they incorporate their sibling's lifestyle into their own. The other option is not outspoken, I love and accept you but I don't want to see too much of this.

These scenarios had also popped up in my other interviews. The former brought to mind Ilham's casual metacommunicative move of asking Tarek about his partner's whereabouts. The latter resembled the reaction of Leo's parents to his coming out.

I was curious whether Umaima considered family members, such as Leo's parents, who affirmed love but did not want to engage in the "taboo side" of their kin's lifestyles supportive. She reasoned: "for some people it is good enough, but 'not rejection' is not support. It's the difference between 'I accept, I understand that my son is gay' versus 'I offer my son emotional support.'"

I asked if Umaima thought there were any factors that increased the likelihood of family members being supportive of their non-heterosexual male kin. After deliberating for a moment, she offered responses from her work experience that did not particularly surprise me: "I would say middle upper class, comfortable, pretty high education level for child and parent." It made sense that being part of the socioeconomic configuration that Umaima described would probably afford a person more access to material and cultural resources that could contribute to normalizing queerness, including access to a therapist like Umaima.

However, she did not linger on these elements. Instead, she expounded on what she considered a key factor that guided her patients towards becoming supportive:

> Many identify as religious but they don't appear to me as such. The more fundamentally religious the person is, the more difficult it is to be supportive. Religious values are critical, the higher the religious identification the higher the internalized homonegativity. Usually, higher identification with religiosity and spirituality correlates to lower levels of psychological stress, but it is not the case with homosexuality. Accepting parents have more liberal lifestyles, in the sense that they are more open religiously, and don't adhere to a rule-driven doctrine of religion.

As an example, she described two of her patients that had diverging experiences while negotiating a similar double bind. Both mothers found themselves in a situation with the mutually exclusive choice of either being a good mother or a good believer. In the words of Umaima, "the dissonance between loving a child, and being a heretic if I accept homosexuality.'" The first mother, seemingly progressive, "had gay friends and was divorced," yet because of her rigid approach to religion, "struggled to come to terms with her sons' sexuality." The other patient, conversely, found a way to resolve the situation through a shift in logic: "she came to terms with this through deciding that 'God will judge me on how I loved my child' instead."

Moving from the realm of the spiritual to the realm of the social, Umaima highlighted that a desire to conform to social norms was another barrier to becoming supportive: "while some parents may not want to alienate their sons, they are pushed and pulled by the values of society." Shame frequently permeated this conundrum. Umaima's patient, the divorced mother, for example felt "shame, for her and for him, it could have been about the reputation, the honor of the family."

The most likely family members to be supportive, according to Umaima, were usually mothers and sisters. She explained:

> A mother's maternal instinct to not lose connection with the child. They struggle to accept. Moms are more open to asking questions about sexuality-about their religious values and their son's sexuality, grieving the loss of their dreams of their son getting married and having children, and managing society's expectations of their children and the mother's acceptance of their children.

In an interesting tangent, Umaima told me that coming out is "smoother with women" since "communities, siblings, parents are gentler, and more accepting of a daughter," when it comes to queerness, "although it is a temporary acceptance, as if it is a phase, they probably believe she's going to want a child someday." This leaves us

with a question: does Umaima's observation reflect the profound cultural currency of patriarchal kinship, so much so that Umaima's patients could not fathom their daughters settling for anything other, or did it imply that there was more at stake for men to reject masculine patriarchal norms than for women to embrace them?

When parents struggled to embrace their sons' coming out, Umaima resorted to discourses that she believed fit their dispositions better. She said, "The only way to get at the more difficult parents is to argue that sexuality is biological and not a choice, versus the argument that sexuality is a spectrum." Here, she shifted the conversation around queerness from the realm of culture (calculated choice, identity politics) towards the realm of nature (biological reality, binaries), moving the discourse of sexuality away from variegation, towards binaries.

Nader, a clinical psychologist Umaima recommended I speak with had a different approach, which I will detail after briefly introducing him. He was in his late twenties and in the middle of closing down his practice in Lebanon and relocating to the Gulf when we spoke. His expertise was child and adolescent mental health, but he also had experience working with queer communities, with more of a focus on women and trans youth.

In his five years of practice, seven of the ten cases he had dealt with that involved families of queer kin "were not accepting." Despite having a different patient demographic than Umaima, he echoed most of what she had to say. However, there were a few differences, one of them being his approach to difficult families. Where Umaima had engaged families in discourses around nature and culture, his approach with recalcitrant parents involved negotiating between a different set of discourses,

which I will describe below using a conceptual framework developed by Elizabeth Povinelli.

In the Empire of Love, Povinelli argues that within late liberal nation states, self-making always occurs within two discursive frameworks: the autological subject and genealogical society. The former refers to the multiple discourses and practices that fashion the autonomous and self-determining subject. The latter relates to the discourses and practices that limit the free-willed subject through construing her, and above all imagined illiberal others, as acquiescent to social constraints and kinship inheritances (Povinelli, 2006).

Explaining his strategy, Nader reflected, “I try to emphasize ‘what matters more, people's opinion of you, or your daughter’s opinion of you?’” His tactic attempts to orient parents away from the gravitational pull of social constraints towards a more agential horizon. Nudging them from the genealogical towards the autological.

Another contrast, which was most likely due to his queer patients' younger age, was their parents’ corrective approach:

> Normally when parents of a non-heterosexual child, adult, or young adult come in, the first thing they want is to fix their child. We tell them that we don’t provide conversion therapy, we inform them, educate them on psychology, on how it is illegal, we don’t practice it, it is unethical, and that it’s not just my perspective but it’s also from the literature on homosexuality.

I asked what the general reacted to this was, he offered, “when I try to educate them they don’t come back if what I have to say does not fit their agenda.”

After that brief tangent, I now return to my conversation with Umaima. Responding to my queries on the role of institutions in worlding for queer men, she generally painted a pessimistic picture: “The judiciary, the clergy are in a conspiracy, and the extended family as well, not just the nuclear,” explaining that supportive

families “are going up against a society with very conservative cultural norms.” I asked her about progressive clergy, which she dismissed with “I have patients that attempted to access progressive clergy and that failed.”

With respect to educational institutions, she offered:

> Society is not ready, as such school systems are not ready. Even in the more progressive schools in the country. There was an uproar in Wellspring recently because someone found that some of the donated books were about gay kids. Pressure from families had them taken out of the libraries. There was a recent foreign senior staffer at IC that was openly gay, and as a result didn’t last longer than two years.

I asked her about universities, to which she responded, “There are things like the sexuality and gender program at AUB, but even then, there was an uproar on the faculty listserv, after a queer mixer was shut down a couple of years ago, between conservative and progressive members, around the fact that it was wrong for them to do it off campus where they couldn’t be protected.”

On the key mediating bodies in her field of work, the Lebanese Psychological Association (LPA) and the Lebanese Psychiatric Society (LPS), she declared:

> The LPA and LPS put out official public announcements that homosexuality is not a disease. This should force clinicians to not engage in conversion therapy, and engage in more gay-friendly therapy. But I don’t know if this is happening, since people may not have the capacity and nuance to do this effectively, particularly when it clashes with their personal values. You need exposure and experience, not many have that. People here can start to practice with only an MA.

Umaima was more hopeful about the role of Non-Governmental Organizations and the private sector: “these offer normative support, and normalize things for society over time.” For the former, she cited “NGOs like HELEM, MARSA, and Proud” as examples (I will discuss this in the next chapter).In the case of the latter, she referred to technological commodities, “apps like Tinder" and “other assets like (…) financial

success." The latter was in reference to a patient whom she described as, "a very financially successful gay man." His conservative parents were supportive of his lifestyle. Umaima explained: "Maybe the respect gained from the parent can assist the parent in accepting and embracing their child's sexuality, the way being black and wealthy might compensate for you being black in the US." This mirrored Tarek's beliefs that I discussed in chapter two.

In summary, Umaima shed light on several factors affecting families' supportive becomings. These include class positionality and resources, education, gender, and discourses of naturalness. She cited the desire to conform to social norms as a key barrier to these processes. Nader, a second psychologist interlocutor, echoed most of what Umaima said, despite mostly working with parents of queer women and trans youth.

Before concluding, I would like to account for the sizeable portion of this chapter allocated to the perspective of psychologists. It seems relevant, given my conviction that anthropological storytelling should seek to destabilize conventional hierarchies of expertise. It all comes down to the fact that COVID constraints substantially limited my access to interlocutors. In light of this, I was obliged to adopt unconventional strategies that deviated from the prescribed norms of ethnography. As such, the inclusion of Umaima's voice stemmed from a need to "thicken" the description of my interlocutors' worlds, and not to enact hierarchies.

B. Ilham

As described in the previous chapter, I first met Ilham at the AUB, where we both worked. She was a young-looking woman in her forties that had lived in the USA for some time and held a postgraduate degree. After hearing about my thesis in a casual

conversation one day, she volunteered to be interviewed, given that she had a queer younger brother, Tarek. During our interview on campus, I first asked her how she reacted when her brother came out. She responded calm and steady tone, “I knew about four years before he told me. Many of my friends and classmates in the USA (...) during my masters were gay. These two years prepared me for tolerance, breaking stereotypes, and acceptance of this group. To support and feel more empathy towards my brother.”

While her reply said little about her reaction, it disclosed that the exposure to openly gay others in a normalized context helped her become supportive. This exposure was a resource, itself made possible by other material and cultural resources. These include the funds for an international education, an undergraduate degree, a good grasp of the English language and unrestricted mobility. She also later revealed the barriers she faced in becoming an ally when I asked her about what made being supportive difficult. She responded, “The society we live in, but I live in a bubble and there are people you can’t change. My in-laws don’t know about my brother, they wouldn’t get it, my father-in-law wouldn’t get it, byistaɣrib leish ʕam biʔillo heik, ma bihimneh yaʕrif.” The fact that she ended her response with a reflection in Lebanese —which translates as “he would find it bizarre if I said this to him, I don’t need him to know” — was relevant, as I will explain later.

I asked her to account for what guided her support, to which her tone wavered, “I love him even more, I see him as a free soul. He’s my brother at the end of the day, do I throw him out? Supporting him helps me grow as a better person, I could lose him (…) as a mother, what if my daughter chooses to be with another woman?”

Ilham’s response told me four things. First, her becoming was guided by notions of love, kinship moralities, a fear of loss, and narratives of self-actualization. Secondly,

her shift in tone as she responded, almost sounding disoriented, gave me the impression that either this was a thought she hadn't articulated before, or that it was an aggregation of several responses, each for a particular audience. Thirdly, I got the sense, from her pauses and intonations, that she was gauging how the words felt as she spoke them into the world, as if she were not very familiar with them herself. She soon confirmed my suspicions by admitting that she had never spoken about her brother like this to anyone before.

Finally, Ilham's response emerged in three general registers. One was colored by discourses of autonomy and individuated selves: "I see him as a free soul (…) supporting him helps me grow as a better person." Building on Povinelli, I refer to this tone as being autological because of its reverence of freedom and personhood as an independent project. The other evoked notions of moral obligation rooted in kinship: "he's my brother at the end of the day, do I throw him out?" Referring to Povinelli again, I see this as being oriented genealogically. The third stream seemed to be somewhere in-between, perhaps represented by the rhetorical question she posed: "as a mother, what if my daughter chooses to be with another woman?"

I made sense of these shifting tones through Ghassan Hage's notion of *lenticularity*, a term usually denoting a social and affective connection to a multiplicity of geographical locations (Hage, 2021). While Ilham had indeed lived abroad, I argue that there is another form of lenticularity also at play, one that I call lenticular kinship, denoting a social and affective connection to a multiplicity of kinship ontologies. After all, Ilham navigated diverse social worlds: one where she hid her brother's sexuality ("my father-in-law wouldn't get it") and another where many of her friends and classmates were gay.

Going back to the third stream, when Ilham asked the rhetorical question "as a mother, what if my daughter chooses (…)?" I could not help but wonder if it emerged from a new space of discourse, a topography with distinct borders, carved from the realms of both the autological and genealogical. This was fragile region where certain elements of either, to a certain degree, could exist comfortably enough for the space to not collapse. A space resembling the intersection of two circles in an ontological Venn diagram of sorts (see figure 5 below), an autogenealogical region perhaps? Partly autological because there is a recognition of the daughter's prerogative to choose whatever sort of partner she wanted. Partly genealogical because it reflects Ilham's imaginary of herself as a matriarch tasked with negotiating a break in kinship tradition. She had also alluded to this space in other instances, such as, in reference to disclosing Tarek's queerness "my husband needed to be OK with this."

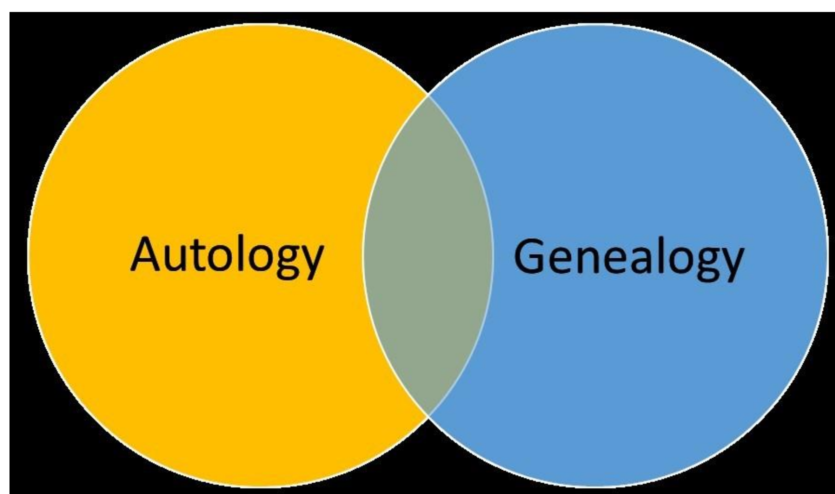

Figure 1: Ontological Venn Diagram. Design: Rabea Hajaig

Thinking of this through Joseph's siblingship theory, the circles of this Venn diagram can be thought of as being implicated with modes of selving that are at odds with one another: one form that speaks to patriarchal connectivity, where Ilham upholds

patriarchy by obscuring its subversion from her father-in-law, and another one where the sentiment she harbored towards her husband-to-be was: “If you can’t accept my brother I’ll kick your ass.”

The ethos of the overlapping Venn model also animated the way Ilham moved between languages. She code-switched to Arabic when she spoke of her affiliations with the genealogical: “byistaɣrib leish ʕam biʔillo hek.” Here, the circles would represent languages, with each having its own register. Arabic represents the traditional, the genealogical, with its dearth of mainstream linguistic tools to discuss social taboos neutrally (note her use of the indexical hek -“telling him this,” versus spelling it out “telling him Tarek is gay”). English, was contemporary, flexible enough to accommodate otherness positively, ideal for the autological.

This was not a solitary incident. There were other moments of register-switching in her language during our interview. Reflecting on Tarek’s coming out, Ilham said: “I wasn’t like deʕanak" (the Arabic word here means what a waste). Continuing in English, she said “I was like are you happy, comfortable? Then I’m happy for you.”

In short, lham’s experience with lenticularity, from which emerged a new territory forged between two ontological states and their associated subjectivities, was central towards her becoming supportive.

In conclusion, Ilham’s supportiveness was guided by notions of love, kinship moralities, a fear of loss, and narratives of self-actualization. Shifts in subjectivity also contributed to this.

C. Diana

The first question on my interview script for supportive kin was usually an inquiry into how they reacted to the coming out of their queer loved one. I found it to be a useful starting point particularly because it offered them a quick and handy reference point from which to plot out and narrate their journeys of becoming. None of the other siblings made use of this narrative springboard as expansively or as effortlessly as Diana had, during our call. Perhaps this rich description was linked to dispositions she had acquired having written for television and cinema for many years. I also got a sense that this was a story that she had told before.

In quaint (Levantine) French-tinged English, with the occasional French and Arabic interjection, she reflected,

> When I was seventeen I had my second boyfriend, who was my first love. I was depressed when we broke up after eight months, so I traveled to get over him. After a year he called and (...) told me I'm bisexual, and he was dating my friend who was in our friend group, that was a shock. I was relieved that he hadn't cheated on me with another girl. It was difficult, he was lost between boy and girl, en plus, he was not low profile, he needed to hide from his family. He spoke to me a lot of psychology, you can turn gay because of social things, I don't believe it now, I believed it then. In Abidjan when I was in a spiritual session, I thought, 'Diana what are you saying?' You are either born gay or straight.

After a momentary pause, Diana proceeded with the next part of her account. "Living alone at twenty-one, I wanted to be different, not a photocopy of Lebanese conformist, I listened to Jim Morrison, I was more open minded to life, I acted with the Raħabne" The former, a rebellious figurehead of American counterculture during the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. The latter, an influential Lebanese family of musicians, composers and playwrights who were pioneers in modern Arabic performing arts. She continued,

> I was the black sheep of the family. It was shocking, we were three girls, best friends, always going out dancing and drinking." My best friend's sister told me I think I'm bisexual, I said I'm cool, now she turned trans, Joanne became Joe, a few months later Leo came and told me. My first reaction was 'yeah that's cool, I have a cool brother,' I like it when people are different, but at the same time I don't want anything to distress him.

Diana's storytelling was so scopious that I almost did not notice that she echoed a point Umaima had made. Despite not saying it explicitly, she had implied that understanding sexuality was biological and not a choice was a relevant difference. Relevant enough that it had caused her to chastise herself.

What she did say explicitly though, when I asked her to tell me what guided her decision to be supportive, was: "I don't like conformity and I love and respect my brother. He is a piece of me. I cannot bear to see him upset. We are very connected, we are like twins, I am always there for him and vice versa. I asked for him in the war, I cried until my mom brought him and I chose what we were going to call him."

In this account of her becoming supportive, she cited non-conformity and siblingship as factors that enabled the worldhood of Leo. The former implied a rejection of heteronormativity and patriarchy. It also involved an active and conscious effort to constitute a self that was otherwise. Among the cultural tools she used for this was music, particularly Jim Morrison. The Doors, Jim Morrison's band, belonged to a cadre of American rock artists who established a strong foothold in postwar Lebanon. I found it notable that she identified with an artist who sung about the fluidity of the self (Rothchild, 1991), and gave expression to the oedipal complex in rock and roll (Fong-Torres, 2006). Motifs linked with her processes of supportiveness: the elimination of patriarchy, and permeable boundaries of self that allowed her brother to be, as she put it, "a piece of me."

I was curious as to what the limits of Diana's non-conformity were like when it came to her belief system. As such, I asked her how she identified religiously, to which she responded, "Christian yet open minded, I believe in spiritual paths, yoga, meditation, energy of group prayer. All religions are made to help out. I do art of healing, reiki, tarot."

Returning to the matter of Diana's brother being a metaphorical a part of her, her description initially brought to mind patriarchal connectivity, with its fluid boundaries of self. Following a deeper look, I was not as confident about my analysis anymore. The elements were all there: the fluid boundaries of self "he is a piece of me," and the patriarchal tinged "I respect my brother." However, it felt like I was observing Joseph's patriarchal connectivity paradigm through a funhouse mirror, flipped and stretched to unfamiliar limits.

While in Joseph's account the sister's self is indeed fluid, it is oriented towards patriarchy, and not towards its rejection, ("I don't like conformity"). Moreover, the reverence of the brother-patriarch "I respect my brother," is present, but eclipsed by the dominance of "I asked for him in the war (...) and I chose what we were going to call him."

The above sheds light on two aspects of kinship, its susceptibility to dispositions and its elasticity. Diana's refusal to become a "photocopy of Lebanese conformist" produced a siblingship that was able to embrace a queer brother. This refusal emerged from a disposition of nonconformity, a disposition evidently transposable enough to structure a diversity of fields Diana navigated, including the social, religious, and artistic. I argue that this disposition also played a part in distorting the kinship

orthodoxy Diana was embedded in (with its default patriarchal and homophobic underpinnings), warping it enough to accommodate her brother's otherness.

Diana's responses to other interview questions revealed another factor that guided her allyship, protecting his well-being. This including being wary of people that might hurt him, and a desire to keep him grounded. The former was evident when I asked her what, if anything, made being supportive hard, to which Diana declared, “In gay relationships people are more promiscuous and my brother is very faithful, it’s important that the person you are with helps bring the best of you, so my support depends on who he is in a relationship with.” The latter was demonstrated when I asked her what the stakes of not supporting Leo were. Using arboreal metaphors, she maintained, “Grounding has to do with family. Even if you have friends, if the family isn’t supportive it's like a tree with no roots.”

In summary, Diana’s supportiveness was undergirded by a disposition of non-conformity, siblingship, and a concern for his well-being.

D. Ghada

As I recounted in the earlier chapter, Ghada was a retail worker living outside the city, a practicing Muslim who donned a hijab, and someone who was more comfortable speaking in Arabic. Because of these social realities, her world, compared to the other siblings, was probably the least conducive to allyship that I could imagine. Her younger brother was also aware of this uniqueness, recommending her as an interlocutor. Pointing out her adherence to Islam, and to supporting him.

She was very guarded at the beginning of the interview, wary of exposing her, and her brother’s, identity. However, she eventually opened up and shared her journey

towards accepting Nabil's otherness with me. She offered very personal details that even he did not know, and invited me to call her if I myself needed a sympathetic ear.

Ghada's transformation during the conversation, from being closed and fearful to open and generous, mirrored her account of negotiating with Nabil's queerness. Her experience with his coming out was one of the most painful of all the family members I interviewed:

> I was shocked, I withdrew from society, I changed 180 degrees, I kept thinking, how will society accept this? I even thought of suicide because I couldn't bear the thought of seeing anyone hurt him or react negatively to him, including the family. I thought of suicide, I was in shock, I cried, I took this as my problem, as if it was happening to me, and I kept wondering about how I could get over this.

Her brother, however, perceived the situation very differently to how she had described it. According to Nabil, "When they found out, dad and mom were aggressively against the idea, despite the fact that mom and I were close. She took me to a therapist. My older brother was against it too but he wasn't aggressive about it. My sister was calm and peaceful about it, but her thing was that she accepted, but believed I could change."

I was perplexed at Nabil's obliviousness to Ghada's distress. It seemed like not only had she not disclosed her emotional pain, she had also put up a "calm and peaceful" front. Ghada hid her pain from Nabil to protect him, because she worried that he too would feel what she was feeling. It was as if, à la Joseph, the boundaries that contained and separated each of their individualness were blurry. Her utterance of "I took this as my problem, as if it was happening to me," reflects this, after all, if his problem was hers, as if it were happening to her, it follows that he is inside of her and/or she is inside of him. That is to say they are part of each other.

This situation evokes Marshall Sahlins' understanding of kinship, where "relatives live each other's lives and die each other's deaths." Put plainly, Ghada wanted to shield Nabil from her pain, so he wouldn't "die her death" (Sahlins 2001, 2)).

As with his sister, Nabil also suffered after he was outed, except that his experience played out publicly in the family arena. As such, he too decided to put up a false front, because, as he claimed, "Since I love my family, and I understand their religiosity and where they come from, I realized that I couldn't expect them to change overnight, so I told them that I was changing the way I was."

Nabil, like Ghada, put up a facade to protect his loved one. He pretended to stop being queer, staging the death of his queerness as it were, to protect his family from a situation they would not understand or accept (and plausibly to protect himself from their disdain). Borrowing from the register of Sahlins, we could say that Nabil's kinfolk couldn't live his life, so they lived his death instead.

Protecting Nabil from the truth put Ghada in a singular position of isolation, not only was she not able to share her feelings of distress with Nabil, she could not open up to her family, who "don't talk about it (...) like it's a secret." Neither could she to anyone outside her domestic sphere, "because our society is dangerous." Ghada had been alone in her pain, with no horizon of victory in sight. At one point Ghada had reflected "loneliness is an ugly thing, nobody should have to feel alone," in reference to the plight of closeted queers, but she might as well have been describing her own suffering.

During the interview, as Ghada let her guard down, it felt a sense of relief in her tone. I got the impression that I was one of the few (if not the only one) to whom she had mentioned this. It felt like I had offered her a rare safe space in which to express

and process her experiences of "living" and "death." In a sense, I had become an ally of the ally.

Ghada's circumstances reflected the social isolation involved in familial allyship, but it also spoke to the resources (or lack thereof) available to her, and others in her social world, to relieve this loneliness. When Ghada traced out the sources that she had engaged with in order to move towards becoming supportive, it painted a grim picture, "I read a lot, I Googled many things, even religious topics about it, I tried to check every book that speaks about it. I read stories about people that like this in other societies like in Egypt and Saudi Arabia that committed suicide or had to immigrate. I didn't want this for him."

I asked her about the role of organizations in promoting allyship. In her reply, she reflected on another bleak experience in her quest for help in dealing with her brother's queerness, "There was once a lecture about this in a university that I attended, but most of the lecture was about how they would be condemned by God, I went in thinking it would be about how to deal with the situation, there is a long way to go if this is what Universities are doing."

Here Ghada, like Ilham, is essentially explaining that information on queerness was a factor that helped her come to terms with her brother's sexuality. However, in Ghada's case it entailed narratives of damnation, suicide and exile in the region, while for Ilham it involved the exposure to a more worlded queerness abroad. Despite engaging with two extremes, they both emerged as supportive sisters.

To better understand how Ghada was able to move forward from the anguish surrounding the discovery of Nabil's queerness, I prompted her to describe what guided

her to be supportive. Her response revealed that this process involved negotiating with two forces, society and religion:

> I realized that this is not wrong, this is what God wants. Initially I was convinced that God would immediately condemn him, and he would go straight to hell, without any of his other deeds being considered. After thinking about it, I realized that he would be judged as a person, this is not within his control, and I need to support him. I used to be preoccupied by what people would say, about his manner of dressing and speaking, now I don't care.

Ghada's account of her transformation fit well with Umaima's description of the obstacles to queer acceptance and support, namely adherence to "a rule-driven doctrine of religion" and being "pushed and pulled by the values of society." It also spoke to another key difference between hers and Ilham's line of flight, a move towards integration versus separation.

Where Ilham's process seems to have focused on producing split and compartmentalized subjectivities (that intersected in certain areas), Ghada's did not. Instead, it was more oriented towards a reframing of her religious beliefs, to make sense of Nabil's situation.

Perhaps this difference could be attributed to the fact that Ghada inhabited a less lenticular world than Ilham did. The fact that Ghada did not find herself moving between social configurations where queerness was normalized and others where it wasn't, meant that she was not in a position to internalize dissonant habitus (and by extension inhabiting contradictory ontologies). Since Ghada was navigating other avenues, she acquired other dispositions in order to become supportive. These were ones that did not involve oscillation, but rather pushing forward in new ways, or rather, in new old ways, growing "both young and old at once" (Deleuze 1995, 170).

My conversation with Ghada was not the only source of insights on what facilitated her support. Nabil's account of the current, less contentious, relationship with the family also offered some interesting revelations: "things calmed down… I was hard working and got good grades in university, I moved out, and I was helping them out financially." Apologetically on their behalf, he explained, "they thought gays were like what they saw on TV or social media, like Majdi and Wajdi." These were two recurring gay male characters on a mainstream televised comedy show. As a result of their hypersexual and exaggeratedly feminine portrayal, the show was criticized by some for contributing to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes about homosexuality in Lebanon. Nabil continued:

> Now my sister is supportive, so are my brother and mom, but we don't speak about it. It's because I am independent, and when I visit I try to keep things positive. I try to make them see me as a human not as a gay person. My theory is, because I am independent, and I showed them another side of being gay, different than what's on TV or social media. [He described these representations as] being shallow, talking about sex, prostitution-not that I have anything against prostitution-or different than being super feminine. They saw me in a different way.

I had come across the notion of financial success as a driving force towards becoming supportive during my conversations with other interlocutors, such as Umaima and Tarek. However, Ghada and Nabil were the only ones to suggest that homonormative representation might also enable that end.

Nabil's previous statements implied that exposure to more straight-acting gay men in the media might have softened the blow of his queerness on the family. This was such a big deal for him that while recounting his efforts to not appear gay in front of his family, Nabil went as far as to imply that being perceived as such, was akin to being seen as inhuman.

Ghada alluded to homonormativity too, when I asked her what made being supportive difficult, “society is ugly, people like to judge based on appearances, before getting to know him, even though he’s not as flamboyant as others.” By adopting this position, Ghada and Nabil are essentially indicating that in their social worlds, same-sex acts as private incidents are not as bad as being publically perceived as feminine or camp, which is to say, not reproducing masculinity.

Ghada also revealed protectiveness as one of the forces propelling her supportiveness, a fear for his very life, “I heard (...) that my brother was having suicidal thoughts. When I found out, I had to be closer to him than the rest of my family.”

To conclude, Ghada’s supportiveness was capacitated by a fear for her brother’s well-being, a flexible religious belief-system, and resources on homosexuality framing it as abject. She also alluded to homonormativity as a factor that would make it easier for society to accept queerness.

E. Ola

Ola and her older brother Ghassan, who I’d met and gotten to know during my DJ gigs, were a memorable pair. This was not just because they always showed up with each other to nightlife venues that were queer-friendly, they also had uncommon pursuits, she rapped and he modeled. During our conversation, it was evident that Ola idealized Ghassan and was fiercely protective of him, describing their relationship as us-against-the-world situation. She also established there had never been a time when she was not supportive of him, both before and after he disclosed his queerness. Taking this into account, perhaps it would be more useful to think of this section as an exploration into what intensified her supportiveness instead.

In her response to my question about what guided her decision to be supportive, she revealed that from early on she had a fascination for, and curiosity about, queerness. Recalling her forays into queer nightlife, which was where she and I first met, Ola reflected:

> Remember that I used to go to PC party at fourteen, my brother had already gone to one, and he kept saying let's go and me knowing that it was majority queer, I was very intrigued to find out what they liked, judgment free, to appreciate who they were, since I was fourteen I was really integrated into the community, it just seems like they can do whatever and I can do whatever.

It is interesting to compare his response to the question to hers (here and elsewhere), since it tells a different story. While he acknowledged that his sister did indeed have a quality of openness, he also pointed out that he too had a hand in his sister's supportive disposition. Ghassan credited the social experiences that he exposed her to as being transformative, "Honestly, it was the milieu. She is younger, so it really was about what I got her used to as she grew up (...) she is an open person, but I take full responsibility. I slowly introduced her to this [queerness] throughout the years. A sibling plays a huge role, I made her more open indirectly."

Ghassan claimed that he had operationalized his position as the older brother to build on and expand her disposition of openness, which, while responding to a different question. These dispositions would eventually intensify her ability to undermine the patriarchal structures that governed both their lives. Essentially, he had turned patriarchy (or patriarchal connectivity, as per Joseph) against itself.

This divergence in their accounts, extended to their views on kinship as well. Ola believed that siblings were by default allies, while Ghassan had a different take on the matter. For Ola, it was inconceivable to be siblings and to reject queer kinfolk, provided that their relationality was built on a sound version of siblingship, one that

valued solidarity. Responding to my question about what the stakes of Ghassan not having her support, she replied, “I can't imagine a scenario where my brother has to hide himself every time just because I am not supportive. We were raised being told that we have to take care of each other, whatever it is in life, nothing should break us up (...) it's us against the world. Not every house is taught that.”

Where this notion of siblingship-done-right appeared to intensify Ola’s allyship, it held less currency in her brother’s book. Ghassan adopted a more cynical stance, as evidenced to his response when I asked him if being an ally had changed how Ola engaged with the world around her, “No, it did not, as much as I hate that word, she is woke, and she already had it in her. I think some family members are supportive because it is about [supporting] their family, but they are not OK with it. Those siblings have two split personalities, they have to change around others.”

In his view, families were obliged to take care of one another, but this did not necessarily mean they were allies, echoing Umaima’s claim that “‘not rejection’ is not support.”

The siblings also gave different accounts when I asked each of them about the barriers to Ola’s allyship. Ola, like Diana earlier, reported that it was the company that Ghassan sometimes kept “honestly to me, it's just when he undervalues himself and hangs out with people that don’t cherish him for what he is. Regardless, I have to support him one hundred percent.” Ghassan, however, had a different opinion: “Dealing with other non-supportive family members, and there are a lot of those. Particularly if she wants to take my side. If this wasn’t the situation, it wouldn’t be as hard. It gets to her if anyone makes comments that are unacceptable, it can get heated.”

Despite the discrepancy between these two accounts, a common thread existed, Ola's protective disposition. While she did not explicitly say it, it was clear that her concern for her brother's well-being reinforced her allyship.

It was noteworthy to me that the sibling's connection failed to neatly map onto the traditional imaginary of Lebanese siblingship that I had experienced. This was also the case for the siblingship model posited by Joseph, where women defer to their older brothers and to heterosexual norms. To complicate things, Ola sometimes acted in ways that were traditionally associated with masculinity and machismo.

It is because of all of this, I contend that the conversation with these unique siblings offers a particularly interesting peek into trajectories of kinship becoming in Lebanon. To this end, I argue that, first, it sheds lights on the evolution of the relationship between gender and kinship among siblings, in genealogical contexts, when confronted with autological understandings of queerness. Secondly, it reflects how, within these new configurations of life, other fundamental social structures persist as blueprints for these seemingly divergent becomings.

To set the scene, I reiterate first that Ghassan, by his own account simultaneously embodied the role of an enforcer and subverter of patriarchy, when, in regards to queerness, he says, "I made her more open." To approach this from an angle informed by both Joseph and Povinelli, Ghassan is both a patriarch (in the sense that he is the figure of the older brother that loves/has power over his sister in a genealogical society) and an anti-patriarch (in the sense that being "more open" to queerness, undermines the patriarchy and traditional norms. In other words he is encouraging her to foster an autological sense of self).

Next, I move to Ola, and highlight that she did not fall in line with traditional expectations of a Lebanese girl. This is evidenced by aspects of her pursuits and persona (such as her macho rap performances that included strong and sexual language and her aggressively dissesnsual allyship), thus in a world organized by obligatory heterosexuality with rigid gender roles, she too had crossed into autological territory.

I read their relationship essentially as a reciprocal love-survival relationship “it's us against the world,” organized within a hierarchy of fraternal authority, with Ghassan in charge, “she is younger, so it really was about what I got her used to as she grew up.” This is closer to how Suad Joseph describes brother-brother relationships, than brother sister relationships in the region, as I demonstrate below.

Joseph’s "patriarchal connective mirroring" model describes siblingship as a psychodynamic process in which brothers understand their sense of self within the power structure of patriarchy that they both uphold. The younger brother accepts the authority of the older one, deferring to this patriarch with love and respect because the younger sees a reflection of his patriarchal self in that patriarch. There is no struggle for power because the dominant brother reflects the self that the younger brother wants to become, as well as the system which makes that self possible.

By casting Ola as the “subordinate brother” in Joseph’s model, in addition to substituting the structure of patriarchy with the logic of autology, the dynamic that emerges captures her relationship with Ghassan fairly accurately. In this case of autological connective mirroring, Ola perceives components of her self reflected back at her from Ghassan, parts that have assimilated autology. Moreover, the parts of Ola that yearn to be autological see Ghassan as a symbol of that self, and a symbol of the system which makes that self possible. After all, in describing her affinity towards gay men

(gay women are a lot less visible in Lebanon), she claimed "it just seems like [if] they can do whatever [they want] then I can do whatever [I want]."

Finally, in Ola's case these transformations in kinship were also implicated in, or associated with a flexible belief system. When I asked Ola about her religious identification, she responded "I'm Christian, but I don't go to church every Sunday. Good energy, behavior, peace, I focus on that, the universe rewards you, they all fall under God." I found it interesting that each of the sisters were "religiously open," as Umaima put it, in different ways. Diana had adopted elements of Eastern religious practices such as Yoga and meditation. Ghada had maintained her religious beliefs yet recentered aspects of it to allow more room for queerness. Ola integrated Christianity with New Age discourse. Even Ilham, while not explicitly addressing her religious beliefs, spoke in the register of esoteric spirituality.

In conclusion, Ola's trajectories towards supporting Ghassan were intensified by virtue of their siblingship ties and her dispositions of openness and curiosity, as well as protectiveness.

F. Zack

Zack was still a university student when Hatem, his older brother, put us in touch for my thesis. He was in his early twenties, pale, tall and lanky with a mop of dark curly hair. He described himself as a non-practicing Greek Orthodox Christian. The brothers, who grew up in the Gulf, only made summer trips to Lebanon before relocating there to attend university.

Zack did not make a big deal of his brother's queerness, enabling a sense of relative normalcy in their shared lives. Zack's no-fuss approach saved Hatem from having to dissimulate when they moved to their vacant family house in the mountains

following the Beirut blast, where they lived alone for several months. This lightened the burden of quarantine on Hatem, and afforded him the comfort of having long phone conversations with his boyfriend who lived in Beirut. Furthermore, when lockdowns were lifted, Hatem would sneak away to see Sami, and Zack would cover for him in case the family called. This lying was important for Hatem's survival, because he was unemployed, and his homophobic parents supported them financially.

During our call, Zack was pleasant and responding to my questions thoughtfully and articulately. I got the impression that he had never struggled with accepting his brother's sexuality. Accordingly, as with Ola, this section will explore becomings that intensify sibling allyship.

When I asked Zack about his reaction to Hatem's coming-out, he told me that he only realized that his brother identified as bisexual when Hatem happened to mention that he had a boyfriend. This disclosure had also taken somewhat of a comedy-of-errors twist, since, apparently, Hatem had already come out to him, and on more than one occasion, "He would hint at it in the past, I recall one moment, he told me straightforwardly 'I'm bi' I thought he was joking, I didn't take it seriously (...) I was excited, it was like if a close friend told you they found a girl. It was more like 'they met a person' not 'they are bi,' the shock factor was realizing that he was serious when he hinted at it in the past."

I observed that Zack adopted dispositions of logic that enabled him to frame queerness as a non-issue in our general conversation. For instance, his foregrounding of practice over identity earlier, "'they met a person' not 'they are bi.'" This disposition, and another which I will touch upon below, was spelt out more explicitly in his response to my question about the factors that guided his decision to be supportive:

> To me it's like I'm not doing anything different, a lot of people go into this thinking 'they are a minority group, I have to be extra supportive,' I don't have that, he's my brother, he's with someone that makes him happy. Even when I remove the boundaries of him being my brother, it doesn't affect me [much] if I support him or not, but it affects him [greatly]. I've dealt with a lot of trouble, saw a psychiatrist, did therapy, a lot of that was because of the way I was being treated, I was unsupported in my environment and I was a quote-unquote normal kid, but I still felt that way. That was a factor because I know what it feels like to be unsupported. As strong as you are, there is a threshold to these things, you need support. [I support him] Just because he's human, a person, it wasn't "do I have to or not?" if you see someone bleeding out after the blast you don't "go should I help them or not?" it's an impulse.

Here, Zack described an empathic disposition as being a key intensifier of his support, one that was shaped by his own psychological trauma. He revealed more about this process in his response to my query about why he deemed his support important, and what the stakes of not providing it would be:

> A lot of people have this process where they are like 'so what, it doesn't affect my life so whatever," but (…) there are active calls to incite harm towards this community, radical ideas are spreading like wildfire. These are actual people, some more resilient than others, if they fear for their lives and nobody does anything, this goes into multitudes of psychological trauma, its draining. Even after dealing with anxiety or depression stemming from lack of support, you are left with chronic lack of self-esteem. I'm sure that a lot of people can identify with this. That's no easy thing to deal with. Even after you can say "I am no longer depressed" it's still a not normal life, what now? What steps do you take to move forward? You are at odds with your head, and identity. You have to actively fight yourself to find that your value is worthless. When the only thing you see right now is the fact that you see yourself lacking worth, that's a battle that takes years. I recently went into depression, I think that I'm over it now, from early 2019 to April 2020, I'm constantly feeling a lack of self-esteem and blaming myself. I feel like people confuse empathy and sympathy, it's a problem when people think they are sympathetic, they end up like "I'm straight, but I need to be a queer person to be able to relate", while there are others that are like "as long as someone is facing discrimination, it's all along the same line whether its skin color or whatsoever, I can be empathetic. You have to actively listen and proactively respond to situations where people are being discriminated against.

Zack's response was as much about unpacking his experience of suffering, as it was about empathy. Using the language of Western psychiatry, he described his anguish as being a consequence of the inadequate support he received during his depression, and afterwards while coping with self-esteem issues. Because he was able to project this pain onto his brother and anticipate Hatem's emotions, he emerged as an ally.

Despite not saying it explicitly, it is fair to surmise that the empathy Zack described was rooted in a fear for the well-being of his brother and queer communities at large. Moreover, Zack articulated his solidarity differently from that of the prior interlocutors. Where Ola, for instance, described hers as being part and parcel of her kinship experience with Ghassan, Zack explicitly pointed out that his was a matter of principle.

It is notable that Zack also used vocabularies of intersectionality. This framework, whose roots are in Black feminist thought, revealed the exclusion of black women from conventional understandings of feminism and anti-racist policies, because of the unique intersecting forms of discrimination that they faced. It is likely that this term trickled down to Zack through academic channels and/or transnational social movements, whether virtual or real. Zack's response also demonstrates the ability of medical discourse to reorganize disparate social realms and institutions, such as allyship. Here, it offered Zack a framework for discussing and comparing psychological dimensions of suffering, enabling him to support his brother, and others living on the margins of society.

I asked Zack what he thought would be at stake if support was generally confined within the family instead of being scaled up. He replied, again, in the register

of intersectionality, and went off on a tangent that revealed another intensifier linked to allyship:

> If the LGBTQ community is being discriminated against, then any point from now on when there are two opposite sides of the spectrum, like race, we won't evolve past this and it will be a vicious circle (…). A lot of old people who lived in the sixties, seventies, eighties and such, they said 'everything back then was better. We used to have community, now nobody says hello anymore. This is because it was easier to have a community, in the village all you were surrounded by were people from the same background, now people all the way in Australia know what people in the UK are doing, there is the internet of things. Things evolve and the way we think of community has changed, the way you treat mental disability was different, back then they even thought that smoking was good for you.

His response indicated that he believed that there was a generational aspect to being an ally. He implied that the disposition that emerges from adapting to a less homogenous and familiar world, was transposable to the context of adapting to queerness.

In terms of what made being supportive of a queer sibling difficult, Zack maintained, "I don't find it difficult. I don't feel like I have to compromise to be supportive. No one has to compromise anything to be supportive. It's a day-to-day thing, it's the words you say. It's calling people out when they are being negative to certain groups."

Hatem, however, thought otherwise, "he has to bear the weight of keeping a secret from his parents although he doesn't have to." This represented a transposition of dissimulation from one brother to the next: to protect Hatem from dissimulating, Zack had to partake in dissimulation himself.

Zack and Hatem's love-survival relationship complicates patriarchal connective mirroring. This process is supposed to happen when a subordinate, usually younger,

brother recognizes components of his self mirrored back at him from the dominant brother. Specifically the parts that have assimilated patriarchy. But if Hatem represents a subversion of patriarchy, then what exactly is reflected back at Zack? I suspect, like Ola and Ghassan, the reflection looks more autological than patriarchal.

G. Kareem

Kareem, Fady's straight younger brother, was a clean cut athlete with an unassuming guy's guy disposition. When we spoke, he was an engineering student at AUB who was completing his coursework remotely at the family home in Dubai. We had the call when his parents were not home. I suspected that it was because they were struggling to accept his queerness, particularly since Fady had alluded that the debilitating bouts of depression and suicidal ideation that he suffered from were due to family tensions.

On the day of the interview, I spoke to Fady first, after which he summoned Kareem and left the room. Kareem appeared discombobulated, as if Fady had ambushed him into taking the call. Despite this, he was open and forthcoming. At the end of the call, he even shared his number and invited me to call if I needed more information.

When I asked him how he reacted to his brother's coming out, Kareem recounted, "He called me into the room 'I need to tell you something really important,'" after pausing he continued "ah, ok, I thought it was going to be a bigger deal 3ade, I didn't overly think about it." Like Ola and Zack, he too did not make a big deal about it.

Kareem responded to my question about what guided his support by saying, "I think it was kind of who I am as a person, as long as you are a good person, what you do in your private life is your business. I don't think it's a choice for everyone, it's

natural, animals practice it too, it definitely exists in nature why would I be non-supportive? It doesn't matter."

His response indicated that his support was rooted in two notions, a discourse of liberal tolerance, and conceptions of the natural. Like Ilham, his disjointed reply either hinted that this was a thought he had not fully articulated before, alternatively, it might have been a set of responses, each intended for a different audience.

When I asked what made being supportive difficult for him, he offered

> I think for me I'm okay with someone being gay, but just not one hundred percent flamboyant, when he is overly flamboyant it makes me uncomfortable. "It's [just] too much noise, when someone is overly flamey or too much, it shows [some sort of] a lack on their side, 'bro you don't need to try so hard. Just do you.' That's the only thing that makes it difficult. I'm a very calm person.

The first half of his reply echoed Ghada and Nabil's homonormative sentiments, but the rest of his response rooted this discomfort elsewhere, in decorum. Kareem was essentially naming an adherence to respectability politics as another intensifier of his allyship.

Elsewhere in the conversation, Kareem revealed more about becoming supportive. When I asked why he thought his support was important, he replied, "I think it's important for his mental health, more than anything. I love the family relationship, the first people who stand by you are family, they are bound to you, so I think my support is important for his own sake, I think it's important for his mental health, I don't like him to be sad."In the same breath, Kareem had cited both his concern for Fady's well-being as well as kinship moralities, as factors that enabled his support.

There were many similarities between Kareem and Zack's responses to my questions, but they also diverged at certain junctures. I found this interesting because they were friends that navigated very similar social worlds and circumstances. They intersected when it came to their Gulf-based homophobic family situation, age group,

university and academic program, social activities, as well as religiosity and religious background.

For instance, they both claimed that their capacity for support was guided by ethics, but for Kareem a discourse of the natural figured into the equation, whereas Zack was capacitated by empathy. While they both worried for their brothers' wellbeing, for Kareem kinship and its associated moralities was key, whereas for Zack it was a matter of principle not limited to blood.

Mental health trauma was another theme that came up in both interviews, however, they both drew from it differently. Where Kareem was a bystander, for Zack it was a lived experience. Zack made it clear that this had been a cause of suffering in his life that, with his empathetic disposition, enabled him to protect his queer brother. Kareem had seen his brother suffering and, as per Sahlins, had "died his death." this prompted him to look out for Fady's well-being.

While these differences shed light on the fact that there is no universal equation for becoming an ally, they also underscore the importance of the Anthropological tradition. Here, we find that through asking the same question, each configuration of life, despite great commonalities with others, has its own dynamic. Other traditions of research could have easily missed the nuances in these brothers' journeys.

H. Amine

Amine was the son of an industrialist in his early thirties, and a self-identified Atheist. Despite his large stature and deep voice, he carried himself in a gentle, non-threatening, manner. The few times I had seen him in person, he tended to be silent, but when he did speak, it was usually in a flat tone. While he was generally polite, he did not invite phatic chit-chat.

His recollection of Ibrahim's coming out was interesting because he described it as a moment that rebooted their fraught relationship positively. One day, Amine had decided to share his use of cannabis with Ibrahim, to which Ibrahim offered back the truth about his sexuality:

> I remember when he told me, and it wasn't because of what he told me, it was what it symbolized. We weren't very close for a long time. I decided to visit a friend in New Jersey and I ended up spending two weeks in Boston with my brother who happened to be in the States at the time. I chose to tell him something about myself, I told him I smoke up, and he said by the way I'm gay I didn't expect its disclosure (...) it didn't stick because it was negative but because it was a new chapter.

New relations of trust had been forged between them through the exchange of secrets. For many queers, visibility and vulnerability go hand in hand. In opening oneself up to others, there is always a real risk of rejection or harm. Coming out to someone is essentially metacommunicating a relationship of immense trust. In some cases it backfires, but in others, like Ibrahim's, it invites the other to become an ally.

Elsewhere in the conversation, Amine alluded to a protective impetus, a fear for his brother's well-being that intensified his supportiveness. When I asked him what he wanted his support to enable, Amine offered, "It's just [that] when someone has relationships they need someone to vent out to, I [don't want to] let his orientation affect his ability to talk to me. If he has issues or problems he can talk to me, to hear that kind of support."

When I asked Amine what guided his decision to be supportive, he irritatedly conveyed that there was no reason to provide any special support for something that was perfectly ordinary, exclaiming, "I don't subscribe to the idea that he needs to be 'supported', the sky is blue, Ibrahim is gay, support would come when he's under fire.

In this specific scenario it doesn't affect my life in the least bit, why would I be aggressive about it? It's a selfish reason that happens to be the most ethical."

Here Amine's response, similar to Kareem's, offered a liberal ethic of tolerance as an enabler of his support, but it also said something about the way he articulated love. My familial interlocutors generally expressed the love they had for their queer kin in a variety of ways. Some did not shy away from explicitly stating it, particularly the women. Others, chiefly the brothers, were not so direct. Amine, in particular, seemed to struggle to admit love the most, using different discourse strategies to dress it up. In one breath wanting to be there to protect, while in the other claiming that his support was selfish."

As for what made being supportive difficult, Amine curtly responded "nothing." Ibrahim's response to the same question echoed the same sentiment, but in a more elaborate manner, "It's not, I don't know, his nature is that he is non-judgmental. If something went against his moral compass he might have a problem with it, he definitely wouldn't be supportive if I were a pedophile."

When I asked Amine why he deemed his support important, and what the stakes of not providing it would be, he revealed other enablers of support:

> He's family, it's a very normal thing and if people have a problem with what's normal they need to be educated, it's just the way it is. [After a brief pause] We wouldn't be able to work together, our job is our main form of sustenance. Why would I put that at risk? When I have kids who else can I rely on its brother its family. It's in my interests, it's selfish.

Amine framed his supportiveness in a moral language distinct from the other allies, weaving kinship, rational capitalism and their shared source of livelihood into his narrative of allyship.

I closed my interview with Amine by asking him what he thought would be at stake if allyship were confined within the familial instead of being scaled up. His response shed light on a key enabler of allyship, education,

> I think it has a positive and tangible effect on their lives, but I don't think it's enough. It'll take more time for it to be more widely accepted and understood as normal, the reach is much smaller, [which] reduces the speed at which change happens. A few good marketing campaigns, [like the seatbelts] it took fifty years and now everyone wears a seat belt, it's the same kind of principle.

In conclusion, Amine described an ethics of tolerance, a fear for his brother's well-being, kinship, and rational capitalism as factors that intensified his allyship.

I. Maya

Maya, my friend Louay's mother, who was a Brazilian-born paralegal in her fifties, moved to Lebanon around twenty-five years ago. They both lived in the same building east of Beirut, each in their own apartment, which allowed me to interview them both in the same evening. Louay first Zoomed with me, then we had a joint interview together with Maya. During the conversation, they seemed more like good friends than mother and son, sharing inside jokes and cigarettes. Louay said little, with Maya doing most of the talking in her accented English.

When I asked her how she reacted to Louay's coming out, she spoke passionately and candidly about the experience:

> People say the mother always knows when a child is gay, but she denies it subconsciously. At the time it never occurred to me that he wasn't straight, although when I look at videos now I think 'how did I not see it?' it was not out of denial, maybe because it didn't cross my mind, that one of my kids would be gay. I was very misinformed, I lived in a society where people think it's not normal, it's a shame it's disgusting, it's not acceptable, it's a choice, since I was small. Because you're not educated enough, and it's not discussed openly, especially in the Muslim family in Brazil. I grew up with [the epidemic of] AIDS, it was pointed out as [being connected to] monkeys, homosexuals, [and] dirty, weird, very wrong feelings. But on the other side I had homosexual friends, they

> were not very open but we knew. For me it was not ‘he was homosexual so I won't be his friend. ‘When I was twenty-seven, I was remarried and moved to Lebanon. I found out in two stages, first he told me and I denied it. I really told him “what's wrong with you, why were you drinking so much last night?” he told me that he was in love and was suffering because of a break up. I asked ‘who is she?' and he said ‘it's not a she, it's a he,’ and I fainted, I started telling him that ‘you are confused.’ I was [so] ashamed [of my reaction], ‘it's because you never had a relationship with men where you go to play football, and you are always reading.’ I told him give it time, I think you are confused.’I didn't tell anyone. His dad is in Brazil he is a strict Muslim, Henry my actual husband raised him since he was seven, and was his first big brother figure. His dad called when he was sixteen, when Louay went on vacation to his dad's house in Brazil, his dad calls and says ‘I was looking through the browsing history and found lots of homosexual things’, when I told Louay, he told me that ‘these were pop ups from when I opened porn sites.’ I had a big fight with his dad and told him he's not [gay]. When he was eighteen I started to have some doubts, my first reactions made him close up, he would say ‘it's nothing.’ I went through his Facebook accounts [she teasingly added], because he's stupid and uses the same passwords. I saw a conversation with him and a gentleman. I was pregnant, I was like I am a completely changed person. I felt at that time disappointed, scared, lost, didn't know how to deal with that, but I knew that I need to talk to him, I took him to a parking lot in Spinneys Jnah, ‘tell me the truth, are you homosexual?’, he said no, I told him I know that you are, from Facebook. He went crazy. We had a big fight. I told him things were okay, but they weren't really, all the things in my mind was the way society thinks, my father's voice in my mind was [saying] ‘what will your society think? What will your neighbors think?’ I thought that his father is going to kill me and him, saying it's my fault because I divorced him and moved to Lebanon. I told my husband crying, he looked at me and said something very simple that flipped my mind, he told me ‘you didn't know?’ I said, ‘why? Did you?’ he said ‘I thought it was obvious, I thought you didn't want to talk about it. Maya his sexuality doesn't change who he is, what does it change what he does with his body, does this change who he is?’ That hit me so strongly, from that moment it was a process that I completely accepted as a normal thing in life, kids are born with brown eyes or blue eyes, straight or gay. It does not change who he is, it's so simple, but it changes everything. [After that] I went on a guilt trip, crying and suffering thinking how much he had suffered since I don't know when, all alone in this (...) I would ask about his friends. ‘Is that one straight or gay?’ I wanted to make it normal until it became very natural. I embraced all his flirts, his boyfriends, his life and it became a normal topic slowly. Before it was something we don't talk about.

Her response revealed four key things about Maya. First, it indicated that queerness had no place in her imaginary of parenthood. The thought of mothering a gay child was so beyond the realm of her reality, that she was blind to it when Louay was

growing up. Later, when he was a teenager, confronting the possibility of his homosexuality was so overwhelming that Maya even lost consciousness when she heard it spelt out explicitly. It was such an impossible thought that when she came to, she immediately rationalized it away as a temporary glitch that would eventually be resolved, "I told him 'give it time, I think you are confused.'"

Secondly, despite having a few gay friends, the notion of having a gay son seemed terrifying to her. Maya's conservative upbringing, in addition to the AIDS epidemic that claimed countless lives in her lifetime, most likely played a part in this, as well as her anxiety over her ex-husband's reaction. However, even though she was in great distress, her husband Henry was able to remedy the situation with a few simple observations. The restorative power in his words seemed to lie in making a distinction between homosexuality as an identity and a practice, and a hierarchization of this difference.

In Henry's perspective, the value of identity is elevated over that of practice. By saying, "His sexuality doesn't change who he is, what does it change what he does with his body?" He has made a split between being and doing, equating Louay's "sexuality" with "what he does" and relegating it outside the realm of Louay-ness. In other words, mind over body, spirit over flesh. Thanks to Henry, Maya now had a new voice in her head to replace that of her father.

As such, for Maya to be able to accept her son, a unique third party had to intervene. It is conceivable that it was because of Henry's singular position that he was able to facilitate this process. Perhaps Maya was able to be receptive to him because he represented an autological heterosexual man that she loved, and trusted, enough to marry. Maybe if it was her ex-husband that had said the same words, she would not

have been able to hear them. Similarly, perhaps Henry himself was also only able to say those words because Louay was not his son. That is to say, in this situation, the genesis of allyship was made possible by a complex and distinctive love triangle.

The persuasiveness of this being vs. doing argument potentially complicates our understanding of allyship and kinship. In regards to the former, by querying whether Maya need to obscure Louay's queerness in order to love him, or if she capable of unreservedly loving him the way he is, queerness and all, we are querying if the work of allyship requires a splitting of being from doing, or if it can go beyond, and encompass more. Furthermore, whether Maya must turn a blind eye to Louay's homosexuality in order to embrace him, or whether she loves him regardless, is effectively a question of whether Maya loves Louay or whether she loves his queerness. By extending this logic into the realm of motherhood at large, we are left with an unexpected and challenging question, put simply, does a mother love her child or his sexuality?

Thirdly, another notion also helped transform Maya's despair, a discourse that accounted for and normalized same-sex attraction, in addition to placing it outside of the realm of choice. Her argument of, "kids are born (…) straight or gay. It does not change who he is," creates a dichotomy between natural being (biologically born) and cultural being (socially forged). Maya was able to move forward supportively by recognizing the latter to be what was most valuable to her.

This view would seem to be the inverse of Henry's "identity/being over practice/culture" argument. However it could also mean that she made a distinction between forms of being born, in the same way that Hannah Arendt did, a biological birth and more importantly, a worldly birth. In the latter, it is Maya that recognizes Louay as her son, "in the uniqueness of his being," and that is all it counts. Perhaps by

embracing this position Maya felt comforted by the knowledge that Louay's homosexuality was not her fault and that there was nothing she could do to change him.

Discourses of the natural that depathologize and normalize same-sex attraction, held currency among other mothers as well. Nadia, Amir's mother, for instance, revealed "the psychologist made me realize that it was not a disease, that I cannot cure him (…) we had to accept him the way he was." Iman (a mother that I will discuss in the next chapter), reflected "it doesn't feel like a problem or an abnormality anymore, it's natural," in regards to the acceptance of her queer son. Furthermore, Umaima, shared that this was a tactic she used in order to help parents (mostly mothers) support their queer kin "the only way to get at the more difficult parents is to argue that sexuality is biological and not a choice." Kareem also alluded to this when I asked him what guided his decision to support his brother, replying "it definitely exists in nature why would I be non-supportive?" Interestingly, this process of normalization through essentialization, was also adopted by Ghada, but she presented it as a function of divine will, rather than as biology, "I realized that this is not wrong, this is what God wants (...) this is not within his control."

It is worth pointing out the strange tensions that allyship puts between forces that are supposedly liberational and others that constrain. For example, the language of the normal, in a Foucauldian sense, encloses people in boxes, whereas, here it opens up paths and key pivots towards allyship. Moreover, essentialism is a position that certain queer theorists have criticized for ignoring the social forces that shape selves, and obscuring the political relationship of individuals to the prevailing modes of power. However, in Maya's case it is a pathway to uniqueness of being.

Finally, Maya also revealed that after the shock of the realization had worn off, a desire to protect her son's well being shaped her trajectory towards becoming supportive, "thinking how much he had suffered (...) I wanted to make it normal."

After Maya shared her experience of becoming supportive, I was interested in what she thought guided other families' decisions to be supportive. She offered her opinion on what the key barrier that families faced was, as well as the way this barrier could be overcome:

> I don't know any parents of gay kids. But in Arabic society independently of religion, Muslim and Christian are the same, I think that our society lives to please the neighbors and the society. We are too worried to make others happy that we forget what makes us happy and our family happy, we end up wanting ourselves and our kids to do things because we fear [a lack of] acceptance from our society, I think there is no mother in the world that would, if she had the option to be free from the society (...) reject a gay kid (...). There is not one solution, it's a lot of things. Maybe it starts with the way you start raising your family, [it has] a lot to do with education. It's not a choice, if it were, nobody would choose to be discriminated [against]. A lot of people think it's a choice. It starts with education. It starts with the way you see life. I am still growing and developing as a human being, my growth started with his situation. Why didn't I see it? Why do I have these feelings? Why am I afraid my family will know, my boss will know? What will my boss and neighbor think about me? Human beings are lost because they do not seek happiness (...). My happiness should not be subject to what anyone is thinking. As long as I am not hurting someone else, I should be able to do anything I want that makes me happy, as a mom, seeing my kids happy makes me happy.

Maya's reply was built around two key notions, education and autology. In regards to the former, she believed in the importance of education in eradicating homophobia. Once again, revisiting the notion of choice, she prescribed that asserting homosexuality was not a choice might be an effective tactic "nobody would choose to be discriminated [against]. A lot of people think it's a choice. It starts with education."

In relation to autology, she made the argument that society's adherence to genealogical ideologies hindered familial support of queer kin. The implication was that placing the interest of the in-group above individual happiness quells the realization of

non-normative hopes and desires, and costs people their happiness. In Maya's eyes, the ability to shift towards a more autological disposition, not caring what society thought, represented evolution and liberation.

In her response to a later question about how she thought society at large saw their relationship, Maya implied that not only was this autological enlightenment a key factor in her becoming supportive, but it was also something she placed moral value on, and took pride in, "I think they envy us a lot, a lot of people cannot reach this point because there are these obstacles and to free yourself of those is not an easy task (…)."

In conclusion, for Maya, the path towards supporting Louay's otherness was mediated by three key arguments. One was between being and doing, another was between nature and nurture, and the last was between autology and genealogy.

J. The Podcast with Salim and Wendy

A podcast on the Dutch embassy-funded LGBTQI+ support platform featured an episode on supportive families in Lebanon. I will examine the episode in this section, not to provide an exhaustive analysis, but rather to highlight some of the guest's transformative experiences.

The program lasted for half an hour, and was mostly in Lebanese Arabic. It addressed the circumstances and reactions around the coming out of Imad and Wendy' sons, and how this affected their relationships with one another. While the host did not use the same questions that I asked my interlocutors, I was still able to learn a great deal about their becoming supportive.

Each of the parents had a different experience with their son's coming out. Wendy, like Maya, had difficulty processing the disclosure, and for many of the same reasons, "when he told me, I felt nothing, I felt numb, then it hit me, family, society,

and people, how will he live? At the end of the day we are in Lebanon, our society is difficult, how will people accept him, that is what upset me."

Imad had a very different reaction, particularly because the disclosure helped him make sense of his son's distress, "when Salim came out, it really was a relief, I don't think we ever hid it, I'm not the kind of person that hides, on the contrary (...) I did not try to deny it, doing that causes a lot of pressure and stress. He's already going through a lot."

Both parents had the same initial fears for their sons, Wendy claimed:

> I was afraid, not because it was a problem, on the contrary, it was because I was afraid of society and family. I know the price of this, I know what they would say, I was afraid for him, but later on I was fine. What can you do? You cannot do anything, at the end of the day this is your son, whatever he is, this is his private life, he is free to do whatever he wants, neither me nor anyone else has a say in this.

Wendy found herself in a difficult situation, having to choose between either distancing herself from her homophobic family or preventing her son from leading the life he desired. She spent an entire year trying to persuade her loved ones to change their mind before giving up and moving on, claiming "after I was sure that nobody would accept him (...) I took my son and we lived alone."

Imad initially shared her concerns, but these were quickly replaced by another, more markedly different anxiety, "I can repeat what Wendy said, word by word, 'family, society' but my biggest fear was fear from myself." Imad recognized his son's precarious position in the world, and recognized that he needed to be there for him, however he did not feel equipped as a father:

> I did not know how I was going to deal with this. Maybe this goes back to the fact that I was in boarding schools since I was three years old and I don't have the family background that people rely on to be able to deal with their children. Until now Salim says you are not a father, you are a father figure, and I agree with him

> totally (...) I don't have it. Maybe the thing I learned the most was how to be father-like to my kids.

Unlike Maya, both parents had alluded to the fact that when their sons were children, they had picked-up on signs of queerness. The podcast host asked them why they had both been silent about this and hadn't taken any action to help their sons come to terms with their sexuality at an earlier stage in life. This was essentially a question about what made it difficult to be immediately supportive. Imad and Wendy seemed similarly afraid that any intervention in their sons' journey of self-discovery might be detrimental to their development. According to Imad, "this holds you back from bringing the issue up, because you have children still developing and starting to come to terms with their sexuality (...) let him find out who he is, it's not for me to tell him who he is or how he is. For Wendy, "you also have this fear of traumatizing him, maybe he is not like that and you are suggesting it to him, Salim's dad is right, we cannot, even if I had a feeling, I could not bring it up, I had to wait for him to do it."

A shared element that guided both Imad and Wendy's decision to be supportive was a protective instinct. Imad showed this as he recounted his reaction to Salim's coming out, an event which finally shed light on the source of distress his son was experiencing, "when Salim came out, it really was a relief (...) I did not try to deny it, doing that causes a lot of pressure and stress. He's already going through a lot."

Wendy's protectiveness was evidenced in her response to the host's question regarding whether she had ever considered throwing out her son after learning he was queer:

> You cannot throw him out into the streets and allow him to take paths that you wouldn't want him to take. Taking drugs, resorting to selling his body, let us be frank here. I don't want this for my son. So for that it was never an option, I would

> like to always be able to keep an eye on him and to know what's going on, so there is no way I would have thrown him out and lost contact with him.

The rest of Wendy's answer to the question above shed light on other factors guiding her supportiveness, Moral convictions and an inspiring example of courage. The former were rooted somewhere between kinship and religious values. She explained, "I needed a little time to make sense of the issue, to deal with the shock. I then realized that, no you can't throw your son out into the street, God will hold you accountable in the end, a child is a blessing from God, whatever he is."

For the latter, Wendy was inspired by her son's non-apologetic will to pursue his life the way he wanted to. This capacitated her to break away from the homophobic community that they both lived in, so that he might thrive, "you asked how a woman was able to take the decision to leave with her child, I got the strength from him. When I saw how brave, honest and committed to living his life he was (...) it made me brave and resilient."

Imad, in turn, disclosed another factor fueling his supportiveness in response to a question posed by the host. After the host asked the guests to describe their current relationships with one another, Imad responded esoterically, describing the reward of evolving as a father and son as an intensifier of his support, "it's not like 'oh I accepted Salim,' Salim also accepted me. You have a very beautiful experience of a father and son growing together. It's a wonderful feeling. Don't get me wrong, it's not like there aren't any challenges, or fights, you mature together."

K. Conclusion

In this chapter, I shed light on the multiple ways family members became capacitators of their queer-acknowledged loved ones to be in and of the world. To this

end, I deployed the concept of “becoming” as an analytical tool to guide my work. I based this on João Biehl and Peter Locke’s similarly named ethnographic approach (inspired by the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari), that seeks to “trace people’s trajectories as they grow out of themselves, fold in exteriorities, and become other.”

I grounded my focus in the words of the allies, which included four sisters, three brothers and two mothers. My analysis followed three streams. The first observed what the supportive kin explicitly described as the crossroads that opened up possibilities for becoming supportive. In the second stream, I paid attention to indirect references to moments of transformation throughout my interviews with the familial allies. Lastly I listened to what others that had been close to the parents and sibling interlocutors had to say about these becomings, these include, queer kin and psychologists, as well as excerpts from viral videos and a podcast.

My interview with Umaima, a psychologist, revealed that the supportive family members she encountered tended to be middle upper class, comfortable, highly educated and open religiously. They were also more likely to be mothers and sisters, motivated by maternal instinct to maintain links with their queer kin. Nader, another psychologist with similar experience, echoed most of what she had to say. However, while he and Umaima both cited a desire to conform to social norms as a barrier to families becoming supportive, they addressed this differently. The former emphasized the importance of the parent-child relationship, over what society thought. The latter argued that sexuality was biological and not a choice. The key notions that Umaima touched upon were also reflected in my interlocutors' stories.

When I questioned the family members themselves about what guided their support, they provided me with a range of responses, some of which were specific to particular interlocutors while others were shared by a number of them. All in all, eight key themes emerged in their responses to the question. They are as follows: fear of loss, self-evolution, dispositions, values, external resources for understanding queerness, and normalizing discourses. I will unpack these below.

When it came to fear of loss, Ilham was the sole interlocutor that touched on this, among other concerns that guided her becoming supportive. In her case, it spoke to a fear of rupture in their relationship.

Self-evolution was another process that some of the interlocutors expressed as implicated in supportive becomings. Ilham described self-improvement as a motivational factor and Maya had to experience an autological awakening of sorts to move forwards. During the podcast, Wendy described that folding in of some of the courage and resilience her son embodied, gave her the strength to remove herself and her son away from the influence of her homophobic family. Imad valued the reward of evolving as a father together with his son.

In terms of dispositions that enabled the worlding of queer kin, these varied from person to person. For Diana, it was one of rebelliousness. In Ola's case, it was a disposition of openness and curiosity, which her brother described as being "woke". Zack possessed a mindset of empathy, having experienced being unsupported during periods of poor mental health. He also referred to other dispositions elsewhere in the conversation. These included a generational disposition that emerged from adapting to a less homogenous and familiar world thanks to "the internet of things." Moreover, he deployed a particular logic that intensified his capacity for support. This logic

foregrounded practice over identity, de-essentializing queerness. Adopting a similar disposition helped Maya too, indicating that making a distinction between homosexuality as doing and being enabled her transformation as well.

Values structured many of the family members' trajectories of support. Kareem and Amine presented theirs in the register of liberal tolerance, following an ethic of live and let live. Ilham invoked kinship moralities, framing them in terms of sisterly duty. Kareem and Amine similarly referred to kinship values: elsewhere in the conversation, both put forward family duty in response to why they thought their support was important (amidst other reasons).

The siblings also alluded to other values elsewhere in the interview. Zack referred to solidarity ethics, rooted in empathy, that were not limited to only family. Amine described an ethics of mutual benefit since they both ran the family business. Wendy upheld values that were rooted in religion, believing that she would be held accountable to God if she rejected her child.

Resources for understanding queerness were a factor that helped Ghada come to terms with her brother's sexuality. She read-up on homosexuality and attended a lecture. These however, were narratives of divine damnation, as well as suicide and exile in the region. Ilham, on the other hand, drew from a different, more positive resource to accept her brother's sexuality, an exposure to a more worlded queerness abroad. Finally, Maya's husband, offered her a new autological voice that supplanted the one of her father, and culture, in her head.

Arguments of normalization bolstered Kareem's supportiveness, particularly the naturalness of homosexuality, as in its existence in nature. This was also evident in Maya and Diana's reaction to their loved ones' coming out. Maya indicated that

biological discourse accounting for and normalizing same-sex attraction transformed her. Diana implied this in a more subtle way, sounding apologetic as she described having believed that sexuality was a choice, and not biological.

My interlocutors revealed other factors that influenced familial support as they responded to other interview questions in the conversation. These included the well-being of their loved ones, financial success, homonormativity and being flexible in their religiosity.

A fear for the well-being of their loved ones was perhaps the only theme that all of my interlocutors, in one way or another, alluded to as an intensifier of supportiveness. Ilham desired happiness for Tarek. Diana sought to ground her brother since she was the only supportive blood kin he had. Ghada was afraid for her suicidal brother's life. Ola was concerned about the burden of dissimulation her brother bore. Zack empathized with his brother's suffering that no one else in the family would alleviate. Kareem worried for his brother's mental health. Amine wanted his brother to be able to come to him in times of need. Maya sought to decrease the pain of her son's far-reaching alienation and fear. During the podcast, Wendy expressed a determination to protect her son from the perils of disownment, drugs and sex work, whereas Imad wanted to relieve the emotional turmoil his son was experiencing around the time of his coming out.

Professional success being a factor that enabled familial support was proposed by two of the queer brothers, Tarek and Nabil, as well as Umaima. They considered that respect gained from having a successful and independent child could assist parents in accepting and embracing their child's sexuality.

Homonormativity was a notion that Nabil and Ghada alluded to as somehow softening the blow of having a queer family member. He argued that Lebanese media presented homosexual men as shallow, overly sexual and feminine. He believed that because he did not acting like that, his family would be more inclined to accept his lifestyle. Ghada implied this as well, highlighting how despite her brother's relatively inconspicuous queerness, society was still cruel. Kareem cited respectability politics as a factor that could hinder his capacity for support particularly when it came to overly flamboyant or loud people.

I found that several of the supportive interlocutors adopted flexible belief systems. Diana had adopted elements of Eastern religious practices such as Yoga and meditation. Ghada had maintained her religious beliefs yet recentered aspects of it to allow more room for queerness. Ola integrated Christianity with New Age discourse. Even Ilham, while not explicitly addressing her religious beliefs, spoke in the register of esoteric spirituality.

Finally, when I asked the familial allies to account for what made being supportive difficult, there were no universal answers. Overall, the responses to this question revealed two themes: society and toxic company. A third element, limited knowledge, emerged from the podcast.

Regarding fear of society, Ilham, Ghada, and Maya pointed this out in one form or another. Imad and Wendy also echoed this in their interview.

The company that their brothers kept was sometimes an issue of concern for Diana and Ola. The former worried about her brother being cheated-on by his lovers, believing that most gay men were too promiscuous to be faithful. The latter was wary of some of the people that her brother spent time, and not specifically boyfriends.

Finally, Imad was concerned that he would be ill-equipped to support his son as a father. He implied that this was due to his limited direct experience with parental care, having been sent to boarding schools as a child.

CHAPTER IV

INTERVENING

Kevin, an informant referred to me by a mutual friend, surprised me during a WhatsApp interview in the late summer of 2021. He took my call as he walked home from an evening class, and right before pausing to buy a pack of Cedar cigarettes, he casually alerted me to the existence of an initiative supporting family members of queer kin. After a quick exchange with the shopkeeper, he started telling me about the support group, informing me that it was organized by a local non-governmental organization (NGO) with whom he volunteered, and that his mother Iman regularly attended the program's meetings. The program had probably not shown up on my radar a year ago as I conducted research for my thesis proposal due to its recent launch as well as the little fanfare around it, sexual minority rights NGOs generally tended to go about their work quietly in Lebanon.

The idea of a support group hadn't crossed my mind at the time, perhaps because I hadn't really heard of any in Lebanon before (aside from a small Alcoholics Anonymous chapter that a friend of mine frequented), but also because the practice is not something I would expected to have currency in the local context. This is not to say that there are no social support networks in the country, on the contrary, these are an integral part of the local culture, often compensating for absent state-mandated functions. However, I had only witnessed these networks emerge in situations of closeness, among kin, friends or neighbors for instance, or in the wake of major traumatic experiences, like the Beirut Explosion, which saw hundreds of volunteers

mobilizing to clear out rubble and broken glass from the homes of victims. Support groups just did not feel like a natural part of the cultural fabric to me.

As far as I knew, this was the first time in the country's history that an NGO had officially intervened to catalyze the crystallization of this form of support system. As such, I chose to take a look at this experiment to uncover perhaps, some of the possibilities that local NGOs are able to offer in the production of networks of familial support.

A. The Website

I logged on to the implementing NGO's slickly designed website to look for any mention of the program. As I browsed through the exclusively English content on my desktop, I quickly noticed a particular attention to power and agency. The home page referred to the local region as "South West Asia and North Africa." Arabesque patterns and imagery from local protests containing Placards in Arabic, together with rainbow flags framed the English text. I read this configuration of elements as reflecting the discursive fields and debates in the local scene of which the NGO was a part of, particularly those around identity and decolonization.

After browsing through several of menu sections I eventually found information on the program nested within the activities implemented at the NGO's community center, which according to the site,

> works on addressing homophobia and transphobia within the home by holding support groups for parents of LGBTQIA+ youth to meet and engage with one another in a safe environment. The Family Support Program is designed for parents of queer children, especially mothers, to build and access supportive networks and information that is not available anywhere else, including in their own households. The meetings are moderated by a family therapy specialist and are geared towards the needs and concerns of mothers as women who are also coming out and experiencing adversity, and not as

> extensions of their children. It is a unique space for them to speak, heal, and bond and eventually mobilize to join the fight for equality across Lebanon.

It is worth mentioning that in addition to describing the program, this section of the website also channeled the program's imaginary of the local configurations of state, society, family, and gendered and sexualized discourses of identity in which it was embedded. In doing so, it revealed an interesting aspect of the program's logic, particularly the line, "mothers as women (…) not as extensions of their children." This caught my eye for a couple of reasons, first, it is a "remix" of Suad Joseph's notion of patriarchal connectivity. Here, a woman's sense of selves is constrained by something other than the patriarch, her children. Secondly, "mothers as women" indicates an investment in the fashioning of autological subjectivities. In other words, an allegiance to a liberal social imaginary.

After I realized that I had navigated the website and the vocabulary of its mission and vision with ease (a result of having worked in the NGO sector for over a decade), I began to wonder about who it would who would have access to it and who wouldn't. If the website were meant as a vehicle for outreach and information dissemination, the English layout—which promised to unveil "more sections and initiatives in both English and Arabic as the year progresses"—together with its NGO-speak and sexual-citizenship discourse, would complicate this.

Michael Warner argues that a "public" is a form of social being that comes into existence as a group only after it has been, and by virtue of being, addressed. As such, publics are created through attention rather than through being members of a social institution. While they present themselves as open to indefinite strangers, embedded in them are implicit boundary making devices--language, vocabulary, tone, discursive

elements of habitus… etc. --that both shape that public and limit membership to it (Warner, 2002). Thus, the website as a medium, along with its content, risked rendering the program only legible to a limited public, one which it produced

During an interview with one of the NGO employees (which I will detail later) I learnt that the NGO relied on word-of-mouth outreach for the pilot. Perhaps this was a deliberate move to mitigate the exclusionary nature of the website, while leveraging its generative powers to propound the formation of new sexual rights-bearing subjects and their supporters. Two different modes of communication that address and shape two different, although maybe intersecting, types of subjects.

B. The Team

During my conversation with Kevin, he generously offered to put me in contact with his mother and the program management team. Within days, he sent me the phone numbers of both the center coordinator and the program manager after he obtained their consent. He also apologetically informed me that he still had not been able to organize the call with Iman, his mother. This was because we would have to wait until she was able to visit Kevin, since she preferred to speak to me from the privacy of his own home.

After some texting and coordination, I was soon able to WhatsApp call two members of the management team separately to learn more about the program. The forty-five minute long conversation with each of revealed that despite the fact that neither of them directly participated in the program’s closed meetings, they still had valuable perspectives to offer on the program.

I spoke to the program manager first, and the majority of our conversation took place in English. I am not sure if this was because of her preference, or if she picked up on my struggle to sound academic in Lebanese Arabic. Despite the poor network connection, she maintained a steady and formal cadence as she patiently answered all my questions, echoing much of the institutional narrative found on the website, in addition to offering me some behind-the-scenes insight. For instance, she explained,

> We believe that one of the main pillars of a successful queer movement is an exponential capacity for people to be visible; the more they come out others will follow. In 2019 we asked a lot of community members what the main obstacle to their coming out was. Surprisingly it was not the law, the fear of abuse, or the fear of being economically or socially marginalized, it was their parents. They do not wish to hurt and ostracize their family by asserting their queerness.

The manager told me that leading up to the program, there had been no institutional resources available in the region to help parents in their journey towards the acceptance of "LGBTQ children." As such, the program was conceived to help these families better understand issues pertaining to sexuality and gender, and to help them respond to any questions or challenges they may have in relation to having a queer child.

Through the initial word of mouth outreach for pilot participants, organizers soon found that people in their network were mostly only out to mothers and siblings. The NGO ultimately decided that it would be more impactful to start the pilot with mothers since, unlike siblings, none had been participating in any of the organization's other community activities. This pattern of being out was also echoed in my interviews with queer subjects and their supportive family members, of which none were fathers.

In terms of operational paradigms, the manager told me that the program aspired to function as a peer-to-peer support group, moderated by a psychologist, while allowing the participating mothers and subsequent family members to decide how it evolved in the future. In the first phase, the group, composed of five mothers, met weekly in a community center funded by the implementing NGO; the center was closed to the public for the duration of the meetings to protect the mothers' wish for privacy.

All in all, the manager considered the pilot a success, evidenced by the fact that some of the five participating mothers had volunteered to participate in a new phase together with the psychologist, this time expanding it to include the wider family, and using social media for outreach.

The subsequent call with the coordinator, who identified as non-binary, had an altogether different flavor than that of the manager. The conversation which took place in Lebanese and English, felt more casual and personal, almost like a catch-up with a friend. While I did not learn anything new about the program during our conversation, three interesting things happened.

First, I was able to glean a little bit of insight on the participants. Outside of the closed meetings with the mothers, the coordinator often joined them during coffee breaks, observing the changes that had taken place among them since the program started. "When they start getting supportive, they tend to want to do more and be more involved, they've grown so much, they've taken each other's number, and they go out for coffee." This seemed to indicate the successful emergence of social support networks, a key objective of the program.

Secondly, the coordinator invited me to visit the Community center where the meetings took place, offering me an opportunity that I could not pass up; instead of

joining the mothers, I would be reading the space where they usually met. While this was not ideal, I had to adapt my approach to ethnographic investigation in a manner that was different from typical fieldwork, to mitigate the constraints of COVID restrictions, and having to accommodate concerns-for and anxieties around privacy and trust.

The need for this indirect approach reflects a double bind the NGO is trapped in. On one hand, it is aware of how the high the stakes are for the mothers to be open about their family situation to strangers. The manager even informed me “they have all signed a consent form to make sure no information gets out of the group; they are not ready to come out as families of LGBTQ persons.” On the other hand, allyship is commonly understood as a practice predicated on public support.

Finally, the center coordinator, weighing in on the program, exclaimed “it's quite amazing to see; it's like a PFLAG here in Lebanon” (PFLAG, an acronym for ‘Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays’ is the United States' first and largest organization uniting parents, families, and allies with people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer). This prompted me to explore the migration of this paradigm to Lebanon, and what it said about the program as a social and cultural phenomenon. A matter I will tackle in the next sections.

C. The Roots

After I enquired if the program was based on a pre-existing model, the project manager responded that while it was inspired by PFLAG, it was adapted to the Lebanese context. At first glance, the program did indeed resemble the work done by PFLAG; they both rely on network building and the dissemination of information as key tactics. However, despite these parallels, some key differences exist.

The first is evidenced by the contrast in visibility of participants in both paradigms. As mentioned earlier, the mothers' involvement in the program is predicated on anonymity. Whereas PFLAG's work, with events like national conventions, regional meetings and public sponsorships, is centered on visible and active engagement.

Another divergence is a matter of history and geography; unlike the contemporary local NGO-led program, Jeanne Manford, a teacher in the USA, founded PFLAG in 1973 during a time when the social and political climate was hostile to homosexuality. She engaged in marches, gave press interviews, and wrote letters to newspaper editors after her son was physically assaulted during a protest in New York, criticizing police inaction while identifying herself as the mother of a gay protester While marching in a 1972 Pride Parade, she carried a placard reading "Parents of Gays Unite in Support for Our Children." The crowd's enthusiastic response led her to start organizing meetings for gay and lesbian-supportive parents, which eventually evolved to become PFLAG (Murphy and Brytton, 2018).

An additional difference is rooted in discursive politics; PFLAG's work is directed at challenging the hegemonic discourse of traditional family values**,** a discourse PFLAG suggests is dependent on narrow interpretations of kinship and religious values (Broad, Crawley, and Foley 2004). On the other hand, my conversation with the management indicated that the program moved towards countering local hegemonic discourses on sexuality and gender.

Perhaps the program's divergence from discourses that challenge kinship is an acknowledgement of the sway family holds in the local context. The NGO's methods of engaging with the community show that it is aware of this currency (despite the website's autological biases). As such, it might also benefit from the implied advantages

that kinship offers; after all, it is possible to harness the cultural importance of family solidarity, and deploy it to reinforce the ties and obligations families have towards their queer kin, in the same way Ilham declared "He's my brother at the end of the day, do I throw him out?"

D. The Journey Over

The emergence of the program must be contextualized within multiple interwoven and interdependent global and local histories. Two key threads are represented by the evolution of civil society in relation to the Lebanese state, and the encounter between homosexuality and legislature.

While the term *NGO* is frequently used by development practitioners, there is no clear consensus on the criteria that define it. This is at least partly because NGOs represent a vague category that is neither of the state nor the market (Paul and Israel 1991). As such they are characterized more by what they are not, than what they are. NGOs that are active in sectors, linked to either public service delivery, advocacy, or both, along with a plethora of other institutions are an integral part of Lebanese civil society today. However, the practices of Civil Society predate the state, reaching as far back as a hundred and seventy years.

Before this historical starting point, local political and economic mediation were traditionally framed around either cooperation between prominent semi-feudal families or village representation by prominent family appointees before the authorities. In the late nineteenth century Western missionaries, encouraged by the Ottomans, introduced a new tradition that organized civil society in new ways, through the establishment of private learning institutions and social welfare associations. This new convention took

root as local populations embraced westernization, and saw civil society evolve through five historical phases.

The first three phases spanned the period from 1840 to 1990 against the backdrop of significant social and political change, most notably the emergence of an independent Lebanon, reforms introduced by Lebanese President Fouad Chehab and the Civil War respectively; the first, 1840 to 1958, brought about family associations during Ottoman times, and the subsequent criminalization of homosexual practices to comply with Napoleonic Code. The second, 1958 to 1975, witnessed the rise of associations that worked with government institutions to develop the state. The third, 1958 to 1975, coincided with the collapse of state institutions during the Civil War, leading to a proliferation of organizations offering emergency relief services.

The end of the civil war heralded a new phase between 1990 and 2005, and civil society shifted focus from relief to development and the strengthening of citizenship. In this era, activist-oriented Associations that organized social movements and called for structural reforms emerged (Haddad, Haase and Ajamian 2018), and with them the first NGOs working for LGBTQI+ communities materialized "after a decade that saw the opening of the debate on sexuality and sexual orientation in the region" (Makarem, 2011).

This phase also marks a key change in the structure and ethos of NGOs at large, as they shifted from a horizontal grass-roots structure to a vertical one, through the process of NGOization; a term that is "a shorthand for neoliberal processes of professionalization and managerialism, both important prerequisites for receiving and keeping funds" (Roy, 2014). This funding from International donor agencies, was now supporting service delivery and advocacy campaigns in other countries.

In the latest historical chapter of Lebanese Civil Society, ongoing since 2005, Associations reappeared to respond to events such as the 2006 war and the Syrian refugee crisis. It is in this timespan that the program emerged, amidst critique of the work done by LGBTQI+ NGOs as being “middle-class LGBT activism that adopts a non-confrontational and/or accommodationist approach to the state” rendering these organizations politically unthreatening to the Lebanese state” (Chamas, 2021).

E. The Center

Taking up the coordinator on their invitation, I took an Uber to visit the community center that hosted the program one warm fall morning. With COVID transmission in mind, I opted for the private ride-share to avoid the cheaper yet more crowded shared taxis. The ride to the center was quick and pleasant because traffic in the city was significantly lighter than what it used to be prior to the financial crisis and the Pandemic.

I got off in a part of the city that prior to the Beirut explosion had been undergoing a rapid process of gentrification. I walked towards the center through empty side streets while enjoying the sunny weather. Despite following directions, the absence of any identifying signage made finding the location somewhat challenging. My bewilderment caught the attention of a nearby café employee; the young man eyed me curiously, almost suspiciously, as he went about cleaning. Not being familiar with the dynamics between the local community and the center, I refrained from asking him for directions.

After some fruitful guesswork I finally reached my destination. The young and friendly community center coordinator welcomed me and ushered me into an office area

to for a brief conversation. The coordinator, who has spent time with the mothers outside of the closed meetings, believed that the program offered the mothers a space for relief. The coordinator impressed on how liberatory and impactful it was "to have a mom cook for her husband, then say to him 'I have to go see a friend,' and come [to the center] for two hours where no one speaks shit about LGBT." The coordinator thought that this sort of experience contributes to the "normalization of everything" (in reference to de-stigmatization of queerness).

Once again I was faced by the paradox that normalization represented in the realm of allyship. On the one hand, as per Foucault it is meant to enforce constraint in the form of disciplining social norms that squeeze things into narrow boxes (Foucault, 2007). However, the coordinator deploys it as a means of expansion and freedom, evoking a scenario where the social hostility towards queerness is suspended.

After our conversation, the coordinator led me into a clean and bright open space with high ceilings, traditional patterned tiles, and bare off-white walls, indicating that this is where the community center's general social and cultural activities, such as film screenings and art lessons, took place. Grey couches lined the walls to my left and right, a thermometer gun, hand sanitizer dispensers, COVID-prevention brochures and a jar of condoms rested on coffee tables and shelves by the entrance.

The space was flanked by a wide balcony on one end, and a long conference table on the other; the coordinator told me that the balcony area is where the personal bonds between the mothers visibly solidified, starting with the participant mothers taking smoke breaks together, until they eventually exchanging phone numbers. The coordinator also pointed out that the five mothers came from different religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

While I was not able to observe these friendships blossom firsthand, or question the mothers about them, contemporary scholarship understands friendship as more than just a relationship among equals based on free choice and affection. It can be an empowering channel to formulate alternatives to, or critiques of, dominant social structures, and it can also facilitate self-realization and the formation of identities (Schut, 2020). Moreover, support offered by social networks generally enhances the well-being of the network members and mediates the effect of stressful events and their anticipation (Cohen and Wills 1985).

> We eventually made our way to a small adjoining room to the left of the large communal activity area where the program meetings took place. Aside from a small stool, a black sanitizer bottle, and a handful of blue lecture chairs crowding one corner of the space with their backs scuffing the wall, there is not much else here. I imagine that closing the doors and window shutters would make this secluded zone feel safe and private. A space of refuge within a space of refuge.

F. The Beneficiaries

When I asked about the impact of the project on the families, the manager indicated that there had been a spectrum of progress claiming that some of the participants' kin had been "able to lead a normal life in the presence of their family, having a healthy relationship with themselves and with their partners, and others are still working on it." Since I am unable to attend the meetings, or spend time with any of the mothers to observe firsthand how the program has affected them, I will rely on my conversations with Kevin and Iman to shed some light on what these transformations can look like.

Kevin was a 24 year-old master's student. He was financially independent and lived alone with his cat in Mar Mkhayel. Being the son of an undocumented father, he was also a stateless person, and an advocate for the cause. He was eloquent, opinionated and well versed in issues of social justice, gender and sexuality (In both Arabic and English), while willing to be open and vulnerable, as such the insight he offered was thoughtful and nuanced.

After years of emotional distancing, he came out to his mother Iman in 2018, expecting rejection. To his astonishment, the opposite happened, and their relationship flourished. Eager to be more engaged in his personal life, she learned that the local queer NGO he volunteered with was working with families like hers. Iman signed up for the program, and devotedly attended weekly closed meetings with other mothers.

When I asked Kevin how Iman had been able to break away from the cultural orthodoxy and be supportive of a queer son (a move that surprised even him), his responses mainly centered on her particular experiences of religion and sociality. Regarding the former, he told me that despite being a practicing Christian, she interpreted religion flexibly; "she believes in hermeneutics." In the case of the latter he believed that her support emerged from the intersection of multiple factors,

> It is guided by her struggle as a woman, and as a woman from a Maronite family. Mom never saw herself as beautiful growing up; all her sisters were blonde with white skin, she was tan with beautiful black hair, they would call her the black one, or 'Bangladesh.' She never received the affection that girls would have as a kid.

Kevin's account brought to mind Veena Das' notion of *cultural birth*. In Voice as Birth of Culture, Das recounts a famous story by Urdu author Saadat Hasan Manto, in which a father rejects archetypical motifs and recognizes the pain of a daughter who has been brutally raped, instead of casting her aside as having violated the family honor.

Das believes that new forms of culture are birthed when a person can view another "in the uniqueness of her being rather than through the categories enjoined by tradition." Where moral judgment "is not a mechanical application of rules of culture but stems from the recognition of the other's pain" (Das 1995, 167). For Iman, being a woman bearing the patriarchal burdens of religion, and the "ugly duckling" of her family, put her in a position to recognize Kevin's pain, having experienced being marginalized herself.

My access to Iman, a 48-year old mother of two residing in Burj Hammoud, was a lot more limited than my access to her son. She was not readily reachable by phone (in part due to her preference to take my calls when she was in the privacy of Kevin's home), and when I did connect with her, I sensed that she might not be entirely comfortable with our discussion, so I shortened the interview and omitted many personal questions. Consequently, I have borrowed Kevin's words to introduce her; he fondly described her as "a working class mother married to an unregistered man (…) swimming against the current, going against the grain (…) even though she is working class and a self-identified village girl, she has horizons that are expansive."

In Kevin's opinion, participating in the program had offered Iman a clearer understanding of gender, sexuality, and homophobia. It has also provided her with linguistic tools and strategies to engage with queer support publically. In addition, she had become more attuned to the nuances of the patriarchal dynamics that play out at home, and had been increasingly taking more stands against them. Iman echoed her son's opinions; she had positive things to say about the program, and how much it helped her and the other mothers. According to Iman, the program was,

> very important, it helped me understand what the LGBTQ community is. I benefited from it a lot, I had a lot of questions on my mind, and their answers to these questions were nice and convincing and scientific. I was comfortable (...) with the guide, with the parents. We benefited from each other (...) and it brought me peace, it doesn't feel like a problem or an abnormality anymore, it's natural. I recommend it to all mothers and parents.

It must be said that Kevin was also ambivalent about the impact of what Iman has learnt from the program in her daily life; he thought it was difficult for her to be openly supportive without this, as he claimed, "causing too much trouble for herself" since she lived in a very conservative area. As such, these instances of support tended to occur in the realm of the domestic and the intimate, more than in the wider public sphere. He gave me an example, recounting,

> She was sitting with neighbors on the balcony and one of them said that they had seen two guys in an apartment at the end of the street naked and hugging each other, "that's weird yeah?" the neighbor asked. Her response was "they are in their own space; don't look if it bothers you". She stood her ground for a gay couple, with her husband and others around (...) I'm glad my mom is trying to get into quote unquote "public discourse" but it's still in NGO spheres, I don't know what she would do in the public sphere, she is putting herself at risk as an ally parent.

However, despite the limits he recognized on her capacity to openly show support in her community, Kevin considered her participation in the program as a vital first step to a very important process:

> On the public scale, in our context in Lebanon she is one of the people that are setting a precedent, within her limitations, (...) forget activists; parents are the cornerstone of litigation, it's only when parents go against the government that you have effective change. Family is very important in Lebanon, when the police arrest queers they threaten them with 'we are gonna tell your parents', when parents know, they have no leverage anymore.

To conclude, participating in the program enhanced Iman's capacity for worldliness. She had exercised this capacity to greater root herself, her son and the four other program mothers in their local communities, into the world; whether through the

new domestic dynamics in her home, or in the support she and the other mothers are receiving from the program and from each other. This is also obvious in Kevin's comment about Iman setting a precedent with significant social and legal ramifications for queers, and in a more concrete and personal reflection. According to Kevin,

> Her support means my loneliness as a queer person, I believe that queers are the loneliest social animal, can be mitigated by a family member, one who also who litigated for me to have papers in this country as a stateless person. (…) My horizons expanded after I found out that my mother was supportive.

Setting aside the importance of emotional support, obtaining citizenship for the undocumented in Lebanon is a long and arduous process, one which Kevin embarked on many years ago to no avail, if Iman had turned her back on Kevin, his ongoing fight to obtain legal documents would have been nearly impossible.

G. New Possibilities of Advantage

Unlike my call with Kevin that was almost entirely in English, my conversation with Iman was almost entirely in Arabic. This difference mirrored another one; the ease of my conversational immersion. I felt more self-aware and disoriented speaking with Iman than with Kevin. Reflecting on this led me to three possibilities; first, it could have been due to the fact that I had gone off-script and had to improvise. Maybe it was also because somehow because she represented a mother, a moment of transference occurred between us, agitating my own unsettled family issues. Finally it could have been the 'shock of the new' which I will detail below.

While referring to Lebanese society, Iman exclaimed in Arabic that "they don't understand what '*queer*' is", admitting that she had previously been in the same position, "in the past, when I used to see *them* in the street," referring to queers, "my

reaction was ‘why the hell are *they* acting like that.’” She also fervently emphasized that society needed to be more informed, “They have to know why you are *like that*.” In her choice of phrasing she made two interesting moves.

The first involves omission, and this is something I had come across in many interviews, and in Arabic conversations at large; the only words available to describe non-normal sexualities in colloquial Lebanese are often negatively charged, this puts speakers that do not want to offend in a tricky situation. Some resorted to more neutral foreign words, while others constructed sentences without explicitly referring to sexuality, as Iman did, with her use of vague placeholder terms, indexicals such as “them”, “they”, and “like that” instead.

The second move was the deployment of the term queer; I believe that this speaks to a particular and strategic engagement with awkward-sounding NGO neologisms; a deliberate picking and choosing of particular words (or identities) to embrace, and a rejection of others. This move could also explain why terms like *mujtamaʕ meem* generally appear more frequently than *ħaleef* in the family interviews I had conducted*;* the former offered an innocuous term to fill an uncomfortably real linguistic gap, while the latter does not. In the local kinship context, there are multiple reasons to not foreground queer supportiveness as an identifier for oneself; the most obvious being the taboo around homosexuality. However I argue that there is another just as compelling reason, which is captured by Samir Khalaf’s edict, “kinship has been and is likely to remain, Lebanon's most solid and enduring tie” (Khalaf, 1971).

In Iman’s case, when confronted with autological understandings of identity, she engages in processes of negotiation, assimilation and revision to create new possibilities of advantage that suit her cultural context. This speaks to postcolonialist critic Homi K.

Bhabha's notion of hybridity; a cultural practice that challenges and revises colonial dominance, opening up a space for meaning making that is "neither the One (…) nor the Other (…) but something else besides which contests the terms and territories of both" (Bhabha, 1994).

By claiming a buzzword typically deployed in very specific sociopolitical discourse bubbles, and operationalizing it within the grit of daily life, Iman has assimilated meanings that serve her communication and sense-making needs. Listening to this hybrid use of language took me off-guard; I have heard academics and NGO employees use the same terminology in Arabic before, yet when uttered by Iman, it felt like I was hearing it for the first time.

I have come across evidence of hybridity in more ways than just the assimilation of language; when I ask Iman what her advice would be to someone queer having a hard time feeling accepted by family she said, "Confront them, don't be weak, create boundaries, say 'I exist and I'm not harming anyone,' if they reject you, at least you tried. Don't let it discourage you, stay strong; if people are afraid of confronting their loved ones, we'll regress. Face them and keep looking ahead."

Her words defied implicit expectations I had of what a Lebanese mother would say in this situation, and are also at odds with what Iman herself would have said prior to the program "in the past, when I used to see them (…) my reaction was why the hell are they acting like that." This evidences the shift in logic Iman seems to have made as a result of the program, towards a new understanding of the self in relation to family, one that is more autologically foregrounded.

H. Horizontality

Both the NGO‘s website and management highlight that the program contributes to the well-being of the mothers through offering information, and the facilitation of peer-to -peer support network formation. I interpret the choice of means as an attention to issues of power, which I will unpack below.

Foucault coined the term governmentality to describe forms of state control that emerged from the shift of “sovereignty” to “bio-power” in eighteenth century Europe. The former operated through restriction and removal (of property, taxes, life... etc.) to enshrine the ruling class. Bio-power, in contrast, aims to promote the health of individuals and populations, through processes of knowledge and management. Governmentality is not exclusive to the state, and does not work by suppressing the freedom of subjects; instead, it is a form of power that molds subjectivities using intimate forms of knowledge and management, internalized in both the facilitators and the targets of its interventions. It essentially animates ways of thinking and acting aimed at guiding the behavior of individuals or groups toward specific ends, through acting on their hopes, desires, or environments (Wallenstein and Nilsson. 2013).

By eschewing the workshop model, a ubiquitous NGO practice, I see the program as attempting to replace explicit practices of top-down governmentality with a more horizontal power structure, through placing decision-making power in the hands of the community. To elucidate this, I will refer to Kosmatopoulos' critique of conflict resolution trainings delivered by NGOs in Lebanon, particularly since I imagine that the ethos of these trainings would similarly undergird a workshop tailored for family conflict resolution.

Building on Foucault, Kosmatopoulos described the workshop as an assemblage of specific technomoral configurations aimed at organizing (and disciplining) the ways that bodies behave and express feelings, opinions, and attitudes. Technomoral arrangements refer to a set of embodied technical skills, and embodied values that signal forgiveness, civility, and tolerance. Thus, the workshop as a modality, is implicated in the production of new power relations through processes of professionalization (affording specific capital to some, such as academic titles and employment opportunities), and through creating new subjectivities; the binary of the *expert* and *the other* in need of education (Kosmatopoulos, 2014).

The intention to eschew verticality in the program design, was alluded to during my conversations with the manager, but was also evident in the NGO's choice to appoint a temporary moderator instead a trainer, one that was set to be replaced by participating family members in the future. According to the manager, these would steer the direction of the program "to do what they deem is necessary."

However, despite the best intentions of the NGO, a fully horizontal distribution of power is not likely possible. Thinking with Foucault, when Iman explained that the program helped her "understand what the LGBTQ community is," she was referring to a distinct type of knowledge. One that was rooted in Arabic linguistic resources framed around liberal understandings of sexuality and gender. Foucault conceptualizes knowledge as discourses composed of "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak (...) they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in doing so, they conceal their own invention" (Foucault, 1972). That is to say that through the program, Iman confronts an unfamiliar discursive framework aiming to reshape her notion of who she was, and place here within a hierarchical system of governance.

A concrete demonstration of this is the program's ethos, as captured in the website (and I suspect in funding proposals and donor reports) which makes reference to the mothers as "women who are also coming out and experiencing adversity." By doing so, it is implicated in naming and producing new categories of subjects in need of assistance, and embedding these in global networks of intimacy governance, and NGO funding. A clear instance elucidating Foucault's claim that the exercise of power always creates knowledge, and knowledge always expresses the effects of power (Foucault, 1975).

Before I conclude this section, and while we are on the topic of discourse, I would like to make a final discourse-related reflection on my conversation with Iman. It is worth considering that part of Iman's hesitation to speak to me could also have been because she had to contend with the issue of which register of discourse to occupy with me, having to figure out whether I had to be addressed in the language of the NGO, or something else.

I. Subjectivity: From the International Gay to the International Ally?

The NGO's website lists the program as one of the activities of its community center, which is characterized as "one of the only non-commercial spaces for LGBTQIA+ individuals in the entire SWANA region. It welcomes individuals and allies regardless of their sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, language, education, profession, religion, sect, age, disability, health, and status."

I am particularly interested in the deployment of the term *ally.* While it might bring to mind the political associations of World War two, the first use of the word as a noun reaches back to 1598, denoting a sovereign entity associated with another by a

treaty, with etymological roots tracing back to the Latin *alligare*, meaning “to bind to” (Merriam-Webster, 2021). However, the use of the concept of an ally as a supporter of a minority group’s struggle for rights and freedom, despite not experiencing the same systems of subjugation, is a relatively new trend originating in the multicultural education initiatives of the early 1980s in the US.

During the 1980s, American universities adapted human resource practices from the corporate world. These were put in place to reinforce equity and compliance, and led to the development of new institutional cultures such as diversity programs, targeting both scholars and staff. However, this corporatization focused on representational diversity, instead of tackling the structural issues that led to underrepresentation in the first place.

The policies of this multicultural paradigm were also built on earlier historical efforts by the government to address racial injustice, such as the fourteenth amendment and the Civil Rights Act. Through employing race as a metaphor for injustice at large, multiculturalism assimilated the moral power of the civil rights movement, and provided the blueprint for the emergent *ally* that is rooted in the same historical moment, in the figure of the white student activist from protest groups such as the SNCC.

The term *ally*, in its social justice sense, first appeared in print the US in a 1991 manual titled *Beyond Tolerance: Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals on Campus,* and incidentally the term has since faced critique and evolved in a way its Arabic counterpart has not; by equating the *heterosexual ally* with the white advocate for anti-racism, the manual offered a racially limited understanding of the term. As the new “social justice education paradigm” replaced multiculturalism, the *social justice ally*

replaced the *straight ally,* offering a more flexible identification encompassing the diversity of allies and the groups they support. The *social justice ally* was also critiqued by some for being paternalistic, choosing to align with the suffering of others or take distance from it, whenever convenient. More recently, activists have been calling out for *accomplices* in social justice work, rather than allies (Pavlic et al, 2019).

The migration of the term ally from the USA, and its deployment locally, in both Arabic (as *haleef*) and English as an identifier, is entangled with the logics of governmentality and NGOization mentioned earlier, but also with the logic which, in Massad's argument of the *International gay* (Massad, 2008), posits that in the Arab World gays and lesbians are produced and named where they do not exist. Massad suggests that same-sex sexual relations are not new in Arab Society, but that their contemporary association with essentialist sexual identities is. That reasoning can also be extended to the production of the local *ally/haleef* subject.

While the program may be a site where new subjectivities are produced, I contend that the program mothers do not see themselves as such subjects. Empirically this is evidenced by the near-absence of the word in the interview data that I have accrued; in my engagements with Iman, she always foregrounded kinship when identifying herself or the other mothers, and *the doing of allyship*, but never used the term ally. This was also consistent with the conversations I had with the NGO staff, and with other non- program supportive family members that I interviewed.

It is important to note that my claim that the program mothers do not identify as allies in the social justice sense, is not underpinned by Massad's theoretical framework. I believe other factors are at play, factors which are also prominent in critiques of

Massad. These include the agency of the mothers and the kinetic nature of culture, points I touched upon earlier in this chapter

J. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the role of NGO's in creating webs of familial support through taking the family support program pilot as a case study. The program's website, showing an allegiance to a liberal social imaginary, indicated that it aimed to facilitate the creation of a peer-to-peer support network for families of queer kin, and to provide resources on sexuality and gender that were not accessible to them.

To a certain degree, the pilot was similar in function to the work of PFLAG; however, they diverged historically and in scale and scope. A key difference between them is that the program challenged discourses on sexuality and gender, while PFLAG contests traditional family values. Historically speaking, the program emerged from the confluence of a myriad of factors, key of which are the evolution of civil society in relation to the Lebanese state, and the encounter between homosexuality and law.

In terms of impact, the program offered mothers of LGBTQI+ individual a space of refuge and relief, in addition to the possibility of forming supportive friendships. It enhanced their capacity to have a place in the world, and greater root themselves and others within it.

The program also enabled mothers to negotiate with new forms of discourse, and engender new possibilities of advantage that suit their cultural context, these reshaped their family dynamics.

Despite being introduced to Liberal identitarian discourses around sexuality, mothers foregrounded kinship and the doing of allyship, but never used the term ally. This is likely a testament to the currency of kinship in the local context.

Finally, in its attempt to foster supportive networks, the program attempts to eschew vertical power dynamics through a horizontal community-led approach; however, it exercises vertical discursive power.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Despite not being able to "hang out" with my interlocutors, I learnt a lot during our brief calls; I frequently found myself, within a matter of minutes of speaking to, what were effectively, complete strangers, plunging deep into personal stories that touched on sensitive, and complex issues; shame, fear, guilt, self-harm, despair, love, faith and transformation. I also learned that the majority of the familial allies had never spoken to anyone about how *they* processed the queerness of their loved ones, and had to figure out how to move forward largely on their own, and without any roadmap.

As allies they were often in a singular position of isolation, with no horizon of victory in sight. They held back from opening up to their queer kin for fear of upsetting or othering them. They could not speak with the rest of the family either, since the others were either unaware of the circumstances or, even if they were, it was a matter that was usually swept under the rug and no longer acknowledged. Talking to those outside of their domestic sphere, of course, was also out of the question. I got the sense that our short time together had offered them a rare space of relief to discuss aspects of their lives that they couldn't share with others. In a sense, I had become an ally of the ally.

All of the family members I interviewed feared for the wellbeing of their queer kin, and strategically took action to foster their worldhood. However, it was unclear to me where the work of kinship ended and allyship began. The mechanisms that supportive families deployed towards allyship were generally not any different than those that they used in day to day care. These included offering explicit statements of

support, using actions or statements to indirectly communicate that things were normal and they were still loved, deploying language—policing it—to reshape bigoted contexts, performing visible acts of solidarity, relieving the burden of dissimulation, as well as manipulating truths as a form of protection. Having said that, there was no universal formula for allyship, each configuration of life had its own unique dynamic.

Further blurring the line between allyship and kinship, hardly any of the supportive kin defined themselves as allies; allyship was a practice, not an identity. Queer allyship was in a sense part of kinship, which paradoxically was an institution to which queerness is typically understood as an existential threat. However, allies harnessed the culture of kinship as a means of subverting it. Kinship ended up propping up the arguments that allies made in support of queer acceptance. The same was true for religion.

There were seven key resources that facilitated allyship, these included; kinship affects and intensities (love, fear of loss), transposed dispositions (rebelliousness, openness, empathy), transformative discourses (autology, nature), moralities and ethics (kinship, religion, tolerance), other "voices" (online articles, loved ones, queer friends), respect (financial success, independence), and normative performativity (masculinity, respectability).

It is hard not to argue that material resources were also implicated with the emergence of allyship, after all exposure to several of the transformative experiences, discourses and voices, mentioned above, would not have been possible without access to material and social capital. However, as Ilham and Ghada demonstrated, possessing resources, does not necessarily facilitate allyship, and vice-versa.

Perhaps one of the most insightful things I discovered about allyship was its implication with discourse. When the interviewees described their, or their loved ones', queer disclosure, the consequences were mostly in the form of strained family relationships. There were no radical reactions such as abandonment or disowning (contrary to what some of my queer interlocutors feared). Queerness emerged as a disturbance of discourse which, once disclosed to the family, changed the context of communication, with the issue becoming “how are we going to talk, or not talk about this?” Allies tended to be the ones that set the tone for the new context. One could say that allyship is, in a sense, an intervention in the order of discourse.

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