The Emergence and the Development of the Women’s Piety Movement (WPM) in Nablus City, A Practice Theory Approach

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Ferial B. Khalifa

School of Arts, Languages and Cultures
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<th>Term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LP</td>
<td>Liberation Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBs</td>
<td>Muslim Brothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOWARA</td>
<td>Ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSM</td>
<td>New Social Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLO</td>
<td>Palestinian Liberation Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPDOI</td>
<td>Private Poetic Discourse of Intimacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>WPM</td>
<td>Women’s Piety Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>'Ibādāt</td>
<td>Worship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dā‘iya</td>
<td>A woman preacher who voluntarily engages in da‘wa</td>
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<td>Dā‘iyāt</td>
<td>Women preachers who voluntarily engage in da‘wa</td>
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<td>Da‘wa</td>
<td>A call, a mission</td>
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<td>Dhikr</td>
<td>Supplication</td>
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<td>Du‘ā‘</td>
<td>Supplication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Al-ḥalāl</td>
<td>The licit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ḥaqq</td>
<td>Right</td>
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<td>Al-ḥarām</td>
<td>The illicit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ḥuqūq wa-wajibāt</td>
<td>Rights and duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Istikhāra</td>
<td>A type of supplication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khushū‘</td>
<td>Humility, submission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kishya</td>
<td>Fear</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mu‘āmalāt</td>
<td>The worldly pragmatic affairs</td>
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<td>Wā‘iţa</td>
<td>A woman preacher employed by MOWARA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wā‘iţāt</td>
<td>Women Preachers employed by MOWARA</td>
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Abstract

This thesis is about the emergence and the development of the current women’s piety movement (WPM), in the West Bank city of Nablus, as well as about its current momentum. The WPM is a socially diverse, non-organisation-based, women’s movement, in which, as indication of their adherence to Islamic morality, pious women embark on in-group diverse Islamic practices, including, among other activities, the memorisation, recitation, and the interpretation of the Quran, and the learning of the hadith (Prophet Mohammad's sayings). It consists of various boundary-open piety groups and networks. The beginnings of the WPM date back to the mid-1950s and 1960s. Its presence in the city over the last two decades has been compelling. Yet, to date, the WPM has attracted little or no scholarly attention; hence the need for an enquiry into the movement.

When considered, the WPM, with its various piety groups and networks, is conceptualised as an outcome of Islamist politics. In addition, the few previous studies, which by way of their attention to Islamist politics, attended to this type of Islamic women’s activism, had relied on problematic sources of data, such as security state reports and archives. Therefore, my contribution in this thesis is both methodological and conceptual. On methodological grounds, using ethnographic and oral history methods, I recover a spectrum and a social space of Palestinian women’s activism, which, despite its compelling presence, has been ignored and inadequately conceptualised as the outcome of Islamist politics. The recovery of the history of such types of Islamic women’s activism during the 1950s-1960s, and 1970s-1980s, is important and telling in both Palestinian women’s activism and theoretical terms. It is telling in Palestinian women’s activism terms, because situating the WPM on the landscape of twentieth century Palestinian women’s activism, as such, one can observe that the WPM was preceded, paralleled, and intersected with three generations and types of Palestinian women’s activism: the voluntary/charity type of activism of the middle and upper-class women of the British Mandate (1922-1948), the political activism of the lower and middle-class generation of the 1960s through to the 1980s, and the Islamist type of activism of yet another younger generation of Palestinian women, those of the generation of the late 1980s and 1990s. Such observation compels us to ask the additional question: why, in contrast to the two preceding generations, did the founding cohort of the WPM take an interest in Islamic morality, and in a non-political form of activism, as indicated in their making of and participation in the WPM? It further compels us to ask who were in social class terms those women founders of the WPM as compared to the three generations of women activists just described? Further, it is telling in theoretical terms, because, as we will see in chapter three, while the emergence of the WPM was facilitated by some male Islamist informal networks, confirms the story of the origin of most Islamist movements in interpersonal relations and informal network, the WPM's development over the years into a broad women's movement troubles the explanation of this movement's emergence as the outcome of Islamist mobilising strategies, or Islamist identity politics. It also troubles the conceptualisation of the WPM itself as an Islamist ideological domain. The recovery therefore of the historic foundational moment of the WPM and its later development into a movement that attracts women with some force, compels the analysis to advance other conceptual means to capture the meaning of this formation – we call it the WPM. I therefore argue that the WPM is a social field and is a type of new social movement (NSM). In contrast to traditional social movements, which contested the economic order of the society and how its economic wealth is distributed, NSMs’ contest the moral order of society and how its moral codes are lived in everyday life. As such, I conclude as an NSM, the WPM, in Nablus City, advances, and moves on women’s interests, and well-being,
in the city, albeit in Islamic terms, and in intentional and unintentional ways. Thus, also in line with Badran's (2009) Islamic feminist approach, I conclude that the WPM in Nablus City is an important gender empowerment means.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree of qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.
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My deepest gratitude also goes to the women whom I studied and who generously gave me access to their authentic voice and stories. My respect and appreciation for them cannot be
underestimated. My work with them gave me the opportunity to pursue my passion for research and a knowledge-making journey that I so much held dear. Most importantly, I thank them for giving me the opportunity for my first ever accomplished research project and for earning a doctorate that I have always aspired towards.
A Note on Transliteration

In this thesis, I have transliterated many colloquial and modern standard Arabic words - in order to stay as close as possible to the women's original oral narration and to better connect to the subject under the thesis' discussion - following the transliteration system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES). Therefore, because some words are transliterated from the colloquial, their transliteration does not strictly follow this system’s transliteration rules.
On Dāʿīyāt’s Names

All dāʿīyāt’s and pious women’s names mentioned in this thesis are pseudo names to protect their confidentiality.
Chapter One: Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Introduction and Rationale

The Islamic revival (al-ṣahwa al-Islāmiyya), along with its forms, expressions, and ramifications for the entire society, was not peculiar to the Palestinian case; neither were the dynamics that had led to it. It has claimed presence and momentum with increased steadiness in the Muslim and Arab world since the late 1970s. While studies that had dealt with the political forms of this revival in the Arab world in general and the Palestinian case in particular are numerous (Ayubi 1991; Abu-ʿAmr 1994; Sabri 1995; Amin and Ghalyoun 1996; Entelis 1997; Witktorowicz 1999, 2000, 2003; Mishal and Sela 2000; al-Barghouthi 2003; Mishal 2003; Pinto 2003; Robinson 2003; Hroub 2004; Knudsen and Ezbidi 2006; Tamimi 2007; Milton-Edwards and Farrell 2010), only a few have dealt with its non-state-oriented forms, particularly among women. Further, although numerous studies attended to the increased religiosity of Muslim women in the Arab world since the early 1980s (El-Guindi 1981b; Moshen 1985; Hatem 1988; Zenie-Ziegler 1988; Macleod 1992; Mule and Barthel 1992), these studies identified the Islamic revival with these women’s practice of veiling. These studies did not attend to women’s practice of veiling as part of an overall Islamic mode of life, which includes, in addition to veiling, women’s active involvement in sustained Islamic pedagogic and community activities such as learning and teaching the Quran. That is, these studies had not attended to women’s religiosity as the practice of daʿwa. Only a few studies in the last decade have attended to women’s active involvement in daʿwa (Nageeb 2004; Deeb 2005; Mahmood 2005; Bayat 2007; Bano and Kalmbach 2012).

This research aims to shed more light on this form of Islamic revival through the analysis of the case of the Women’s Piety Movement (WPM), in the West Bank city of Nablus. The WPM is a socially-diverse, non-organisation-based, women’s movement, in which, as an indication of their devotion to Islamic morality, pious women establish many piety groups and networks, through which they embark on diverse Islamic practices, including, among other activities, the memorisation, recitation, and interpretation of the Quran, and the learning of the hadith (Prophet Mohammad’s sayings).

What merits such an enquiry into the WPM in the Palestinian case is multivariate. First, Islamic revival in Palestine has been studied in mere political terms. It was mainly associated with the transformation, since the late 1980s, of the Palestinian Muslim Brothers (MBs) into the Islamic resistance movement (Hamas) (Abu-ʿAmr 1994; al-Barghouthi 2003; Mishal 2003; Robinson 2003) and the rise of the latter as a main political opposition to the Palestinian Liberation
Organisation (PLO), and later to the Palestinian Authority (PA), after the 1994 Oslo Peace Accord (Mishal and Sela 2000; Hroub 2004; Knudsen and Ezbidi 2006; Tamimi 2007).

When considered, these studies had conceptualised women’s informal piety groups and networks as the outcome of Islamist politics (Mishal and Sela 2000; al-Barghouthi 2003; Robinson 2003; Jad 2005). The theory underpinning these studies on these informal women’s groups and networks goes as follows: Through mosque-based education and preaching (da’wa), Islamists intended to mobilise women for the Islamist cause. From this mobilising intention emerged this type of Palestinian women’s Islamic activism. In other words, in these approaches, piety groups and networks, as those in the city of Nablus, are analysed as Islamist “mobilising structures”: mechanisms for sustaining popular support for an overall Islamist political movement and organisation (Singerman 2003; Clark 2003).

The WPM in Nablus city complicates these Islamist politics and resource mobilisation approaches to its explanation in several ways. As I started to discuss, women’s piety groups and networks had existed prior to institutional Islamist politics. In the city of Nablus, for example, evidence of popular religiosity, including among women, preceded and paralleled the rise of Hamas and other Islamist political groups. Many of the women’s piety groups and networks had even existed since the mid-1950s and 1960s, although their proliferation has been particularly observed during the last two decades or so. In addition, despite some overt support, Islamists are usually critical of many of these women’s piety groups and their type of Islamic activism. During my interviews, for example, I observed that some male Islamists are either ignorant of the details of these women’s activism, scornful of their pedagogy, or are critical of their apolitical stand. As many piety groups in the WPM argue that political activism leads to competition and therefore confusion and social disintegration (fitna), Islamists (both men and women) are particularly critical of this apolitical stand of the WPM. For example, a woman Islamist had criticised this apolitical stand of the WPM by describing it as “secularism in a different fashion”. Further, alluding to the fact that the WPM and the Islamist movements make up two different spheres in the city, some male Islamists had even acknowledged that the Islamist movement “compete with the WPM for the [women’s] popular base”. Such an acknowledgment points to the strong appeal the WPM has among women in the city. In fact, in the last decade or so, the WPM has come to cut across Palestinian political groups, attracting women activists from both secular and leftist groups. Although the appeal of the WPM to former secular women activists has not been on a large scale, its occurrence is significant in two ways. First, it further complicates the notion of these informal piety networks as Islamists’ mobilisation structures. Second, it highlights the gender empowerment potential of the WPM. I suggest that this is particularly the case given that the professionalisation of the Palestinian women’s political movement and the decline of Palestinian political secular activism during the late 1990s had left behind those activists, whose
education and professional skills were not sufficient enough to guarantee them a “small stake”, or a “work opportunity”, at the NGOs or the PA public sector. Thus, for these women, assuming an Islamic activist role as dā’īyat or preachers is to somehow sustain a leadership role they had once assumed but are now assuming for a different female subject, using a different language. Therefore, former secular women activists had started to take part in these piety groups and networks not because of these networks’ political mobilising prospective but because of these groups’ and networks’ gender empowerment potential.

Second, what also merits such an enquiry into the WPM is that other recent studies had attended to Islamist women’s type of activism (militant political and civil) (Jad 2005; 2008; Lybarger 2007). Thus, although in her *Women at the crossroads: the Palestinian women’s movement between nationalism, secularism and Islamism*, and in his *Identity and religion in Palestine: the struggle between Islamism and secularism in the Occupied Territories*, both Jad and Lybarger contribute to bridging an ever-existing gap in the study of Palestinian women’s Islamic activism. In general, both Jad and Lybarger did not attend to the kind of Islamic activism, which is involved and indicated by the WPM. Yet these two studies contributed with important insights to the understanding of the WPM. For example, both Jad and Lybarger’s analyses compel us to look at Islamist women’s activism in the context of the Israeli occupation. Most importantly, their analyses compel us to locate the WPM’s type of activism in a historical perspective. Historically thus, as a form of women’s activism, and on the spectrum of Palestinian women’s activism over the last (twentieth) century, one can observe that the WPM was preceded by, paralleled by, and intersected by three generations and types of Palestinian women’s activism. The first generation comprised the middle- and upper-class women of the British Mandate (1922-1948). This was a generation that embarked on charity work and some political activities, supporting the national Palestinian cause under the overall political ideology of Pan-Arabism (see Fleischmann 2003). The second was the generation of the 1960s through the 1970s and into the 1980s. This was a generation of both middle- and lower-class women; they engaged intensively in the Palestinian national liberation movement led by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) (see Peteet 1991). The third was the young generation of the 1980s and 1990s. This was a generation of lower- and middle-class women, who, at the gradual decline of the PLO, became actively involved in Islamist political groups, including Hamas and al-Jihad al-Islami. These Islamist women maintained civil, political and, later, militant activism (see Jad 2005; 2008; Lybarger 2007).

Additionally, therefore, situating the WPM within the landscape of a twentieth century Palestinian women’s movement compels us to ask the further question: Who were those women founders of the WPM? And why, in contrast to a preceding and proceeding generation of women did they
take interest in Islamic morality and in a non-political form of activism, as indicated in their making of the WPM?

Jad and Lybarger’s contextualisation of women’s Islamist activism in the Israeli occupation suggests clues to specifically answer the second question: Why, in comparison with either secular or Islamist women’s political activism, have women of the WPM chosen a non-political form of Islamic activism? The suggested answer can partially explain why participation in the WPM has become broad and compelling. Following their discussion, I suggest that the “low security risk” involved in the making of the WPM and the participation in it points towards an answer to this question. This suggested answer can be further explained and elaborated in line with Tarrow (1994). Tarrow observes that in “repressive systems, symbolic politics and collective identity build movements characterized as moral or ‘discursive communities’” (1994, 3).1

While this political contextualisation of this type of Islamic women’s activism opens otherwise missed insights as to why this type of activism is ubiquitous compared to Islamist political activism, such an approach, nevertheless, reduces the multifaceted compound processes in which this type of women’s activism has been embedded, to the type of political regime. I therefore argue that a consideration of the multifaceted compound socio-structural context (e.g. the broad structural social changes that the Middle East region was undergoing, the socio-culture setting of the city of Nablus and its modernisation, women’s social positions) from which this type of Islamic women’s activism emerged, would enhance our understanding of the complex relationships between such an informal, personal type of women’s activism, the Islamist movement, and the Islamic revival. Such a multifaceted contextual approach to the analysis of the WPM would also enhance our understanding of the significance of the WPM to women themselves and therefore enhances our understanding of these women’s agency in the creation and the maintaining of the WPM. Therefore - and third - what also merits such an enquiry into the WPM is that such approaches to women’s Islamic activism portray women as an object, a mobilisation target, but not as a subject affecting social change. These studies, for example, do not inform us as to why in the first place women had found interest and motivation in following an Islamic path and therefore come to create such piety groups and networks. They do not inform us about the dialectical relation between the external opportunity Islamists made available to these women, and the individual women who exploited these opportunities to their benefit. That is, these approaches do not tell us how the external opportunity changes the women’s subject and how the latter changes the external world. The alternative analysis I am proposing comes from Bourdieu’s description of social processes as “the internalization of externality and the

1 In Singerman (2003, 152).
externalization of internality” (1977, 89).\(^2\) For example, in their studies of similar women’s piety groups and networks in various Arab countries, Singerman (2003) and Clark (2003) argue against such a resource mobilisation approach to these women’s networks. Clark, for example, argues that these women’s networks are not the “umbilical cord” that provides the Islamist organisation with the material and human resources but are in Melucci’s (1989) terms, “networks of shared meaning”, or “communities that... promote a particular set of values” (Clark 2003, 165). Clark even dismisses the importance of the question: Why do women join these groups? Clark stresses that it is irrelevant the degree to which women join these groups for conscious, or unconscious reasons (ibid.); what matters, Clark argues, is the way Islamist organisations “reconfigure these social networks to support their values and goals” (ibid.). Likewise, Singerman observes that Islamists’ mobilisation strategies have usually relied on these kinds of “informal personal networks... to build movements” (2003, 151-153). Therefore, despite their acknowledgment of these women’s networks as “networks of shared meaning”, by focusing their analysis on how Islamists, in their struggle to support their organisation’s political goals, “configure” women’s piety networks as mobilising structures, both Singerman and Clark sustain a “contentious politics” approach to the analysis of Islamic women’s activism as indicated in these women’s making of informal piety groups and networks.

Thus, despite its compelling presence, on its own the study of the growth of Islamic popular religiosity among women in the Palestinian context has not attracted adequate attention. Tapper (1991, 1, 10) observes the same trend in Turkey where he finds much has been done on the study of the impact of Islamic revival on the “political process", but much less on how this revival had impacted the practice of religion by ordinary people; hence the need for an enquiry into this movement. In the West Bank - but particularly in the city of Nablus - many of the women’s piety groups had existed since the mid-1950s and 1960s, although their proliferation has been especially observed during the last two decades or so. That is to say, evidence of growing popular religiosity, also, among women, preceded and paralleled the rise of Hamas and other Islamist political groups. When considered, these studies conceptualised these women’s piety groups and networks as Islamist mobilisation structures. Such conceptualisation of these networks as mere Islamist configurations overlooks women's agency (i.e. role) in their making and how these structures are in the first place mere women’s arenas.

Therefore, my arguments vis-à-vis such approaches are twofold: first, that the WPM is more than a mobilising structure. In line with Yavuz (2003), I argue that it is a new social movement (NSM). I therefore argue that as the action and motion meanings of the term movement indicate, the WPM advances and moves on women's interests and well-being, in the city, albeit in Islamic

\(^2\) In Christiansen (2003, 151).
terms, and in intentional, and unintentional ways. Thus, also in line with Badran’s (2009) Islamic feminist approach, I conclude that the WPM in Nablus City is an important gender empowerment means. Second, I advance practice theory to tell, in analytic terms, the story of the emergence and the formation of the WPM into a social field and into an NSM and configure the conundrum of its consequent compelling appeal to other women in the city. I argue that by applying practice theory to the analysis of the WPM, we are able to (a) expand our understanding of the WPM from being a mobilising structure to being an arena of women’s activism, which exhibits the characteristics of a social field and that of an NSM, (b) expand our understanding of this field’s emergence and sustained appeal to women over time from being the outcome of “contentious politics” (Singerman 2003; Clark 2003) to being the outcome of the dialectical interaction of broad macro, meso local, and micro individual processes, and these processes’ anticipated and unanticipated consequences, (c) highlight how women exhibited various forms of agency in creating and sustaining this women’s social field, and (d) uncover the intentions and the motivation that have underpinned women’s participation in the piety groups and networks that make up this social field as diverse, fluid and situational, and therefore far from being ideological, or doctrinal.

In the following I discuss each of these arguments in greater detail, along with their relevance and contributions to the analysis of the WPM, the subject of this thesis.

1. The WPM as a New Social Movement (NSM)

As I started to discuss earlier, in line with Yavuz (2003), I argue that the WPM - as the movement of a broad, socially diverse body of women in the city, which does not have an organisational base, or a unifying political ideology, but which nevertheless consists of a collection of piety groups and networks, whose boundaries and membership are open to the entire women’s body in the city - is best understood in Melucci’s (1996) terms as a new social movement (NSM). In contrast with the nineteenth century social movements of Europe, which contested class-based society and how its economic resources were distributed, NSMs are forms of mobilisation that aim at the orientation of action and at challenging the dominant cultural codes of consumer society (Touraine 1977, 322, 340) - hence the term “New” in identifying these movements.

According to Melucci (1996, 102-103), NSMs are diverse and heterogeneous, covering different aspects of social life (e.g. ecological, cultural, social, religious). They are fragmented, with a weak organisation structure, having no formal political goal. They have no interest in contesting the political power of the state but are resistant and “anti-authoritarianism” (ibid.). Finally, NSMs
seek the closeness of group identity (i.e. “particularism”) against the impersonal power and “instrumental rationality” of the state (ibid.).

In his analysis of the various forms of Islamic revival in Turkey as NSMs, during the 1990s, Yavuz (2003) elucidates the quest of NSMs in an even clearer way. Based on Melucci (1980; 1996) and Calhoun (1995), Yavuz explains that NSMs aim at “the restructuring of everyday life” (2003, 271). In order to do so – to restructure everyday life – NSMs:

[]Involve personal and intimate contacts with others …to create networks of shared meaning [dependant] upon alternative cultural codes and ways of living (Yavuz 2003, 271).

In a logic of analysis that exhibits the practice-theory approach that I aspire to apply to the analysis of the WPM as a NSM, Yavuz adds that:

The creation of these networks produces new shared identities and communities of agents connected through common understanding about norms of everyday life (ibid.).

Yavuz, therefore, contends that those informal personal networks are not only “resources” or “mobilising structures” (2003, 272) but are “opportunity spaces”, forums of social interaction, which produce new opportunities for enhancing “networks of shared meaning and associational life” (ibid).

Applying those notions of the NSMs to the WPM, I shall argue that, with some reservation on their being a form of resistance, Melucci’s characterisation of NSMs as diverse, organisationally fragmented, apolitical, and with a quest for “group identity”, applies to the WPM in Nablus City. I therefore argue that Melucci’s NSMs approach is capable of accounting for the WPM as part of the general Islamic revival yet as a particular form of this revival. I argue that the WPM is a particular form of the Islamic revival in the sense of being non-ideological, non-political, and with a focus on the reorientation of women’s everyday life as a way of social change.

However, in contrast to Melucci, I suggest that agents can contest their everyday life in ways that are not necessarily resistant. Therefore, I argue that the WPM indicates a form of contesting the dominant cultural codes through what Foucault (1997a) calls “critique” and what Ortner (1989) calls “praxis”. Critique, according to Foucault, is both “a practice and a mindset that makes available possible alternatives to that which already exists” (Batters 2011, 1). Critique does not demand that one be entirely free from domination (Waggoner 2005, 253) but demands that one “adjust and control power over both oneself and others” (Batters 2011, 6).3 One can

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3 Critique, says Foucault, is “the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effect of power and question power on its discourses of truth” (1997a, 268). Thus, from the perspective of Foucault, the subject, although discursively formed, can point beyond this formation through his/her practice of critique (Bucar 2010, 678).
“adjust and control power over both oneself and others” through one’s practice of the “care of the self”: an extensive work “of the self on the self” (Foucault 1997b, 282), which takes place on the mental, spiritual, and bodily aspects of the self (Batters 2011, 5). Critique, in this sense, confirms one’s freedom and self governance and reformulates one’s relationships to the self, society, and others. In a similar manner, Ortner (1989, 195) defines praxis as a form of intentional action that changes the logic of everyday life and restructures one’s relations to the social world and others.

Further, I continue to argue that (1) considering the WPM as an NSM, predicated on groups’ solidarities and identity, does not indicate that the WPM is a form of “identity politics”: the manipulation of the women’s cause for Islamist political ends (Moghadam 1994). By the same logic of analysis, arguing that the WPM is not a mobilisation structure but an NSM, does not negate the fact that Islamists did, in fact, intend, especially during the 1970s-1980s, to facilitate the creation of women’s piety groups and networks, or manipulate existing ones to their benefit (we will see these dynamics in chapter three, when discussing the foundation of the first of such piety groups and networks by what I come to call the “first cohort” of the WPM). That is to say, the WPM had perhaps benefited since its inception in the mid 1950s-1960s, through the 1970s-1980s, from the limited space of participation which both the Jordan regime, and, later, the Israeli occupation had allowed the MBs to have, given MBs’ moral apolitical type of activism at the time. I, however, continue to argue (2) that women’s utilisation of those “opportunity spaces” (Yavuz 2003) does not indicate that these spaces had been MBs or state-sponsored ones. The main argument this thesis therefore makes is that (3) despite the intricacies that had surrounded the emergence and the development of the WPM, its continuity as a women’s movement has depended on its ability to provide its broad women’s participants, in the city, with something significant and meaningful. I, therefore, sustain the argument I have made clear in the previous section of this chapter that (4) the WPM advances and moves on women’s interests and well-being in the city, albeit in Islamic terms, and in intentional, and unintentional ways. And, therefore, in line with Badran’s Islamic feminist approach, I sustain the argument that the WPM in Nablus City has been an important gender empowerment means (Badran 2009).

4 Like critique, according to Batters, Foucault regards “care of the self” as “a practice and a mindset … in which the individual takes charge of his own identity and sense of self” (2011, 4).

5 For more on how the Jordan regime supported the MBs, see Stemmann (2010). And for more on how the Israeli Occupation policies had tolerated and allowed MBs’ activism in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, during the 1970s and early 1980s, see al-Barghouthi 2003 and Robinson 2003.
2. Practice Theory: Macro/Micro Dynamic Approach to the Emergence and the Development of the WPM

In her study, *High religion: a cultural and political history of Sherpa Buddhism*, Ortner describes her practice theory-oriented study as a study about:

[H]ow people can be both created and creators, products and producers, symbols and agents, of [their] world (1989, 3).

Perhaps Ortner’s crude but lucid introduction of practice theory as a dialectical model for the analysis of the relationship between the individual and the social (between being created and creators) encourages us to continue introducing the theory along those same lines - the individual and the social - by locating it on the landscape of the theoretical approaches that dominated the social and the human sciences up to its emergence as a paradigm of analysis during the 1970s and 1980s. Practice theory lies on the middle ground between, on the one hand, the functional and structural approaches to the social world, and the economic approach to its making, on the other. Functional and structural approaches attribute no agency to the individual in the making of their social world while the economic approach attributes to individual action all agency in that. As analytical models, which are derived from these approaches, functional and structural models of analysis stress that human action can only be understood in terms of broad social structures (structuralism) or broad social processes (functionalism). An economic model of analysis stresses that human action can only be understood in terms of individuals choices, seeking to maximise their interest (rational choice theory). Practice theory thus came as a response to this divide in the human and the social sciences. It is a theoretical initiative to combine in one analytical model the individual and the social structural, the subjective and the objective, the social and the cultural, and the current and the historical. Practice theory, therefore, refuses a dual approach to action and structure, to the social and the cultural, and to the subjective and the objective (Ortner 1989, 196). As Calhoun (1993, 74) stresses, in practice theory analysis, “the individual and the structural social are two dimensions of the social, not two separate sorts of being”. Further, practice theory, according to Ortner (1989, 11), is associated with the structuration theory of Giddens (1979) and the practice theory of Bourdieu (1977). In this thesis, however, I benefit from the latter, especially as applied by Ortner (1989; 2006). Ortner (1989) explains how those practice theory terms - practice, structure, actor, and history - fit together in one analytical model that I explain and discuss next.

6 As will be shortly discussed in the “Politics of Legitimisation”, subsection 2.3, in this chapter, Ortner explains that in her model of analysis she expands Bourdieu’s theory of practice to include Foucault’s notion of power by considering the analysis of “micro-politics” (2006, 130), or the political intention of individual action (1989, 194).
2.1. Ortner’s Practice-Theory Analytical Model

According to Ortner, practice refers to three kinds of human actions: everyday routine, intentional, goal-oriented, and praxis (1989, 194-195). In contrast to the goal-oriented actions, which actors follow with conscious intentions, individuals embark on everyday routine actions without a specific goal in mind (1989, 194). Praxis is a continuous, "sustained" action (1980, 195). By virtue of its continuity, praxis transforms actors’ consciousness and the logic of their everyday life (ibid.).

As for structure, to explain how Ortner clarifies and details its meaning in social and cultural terms, let us draw on its image as a physical building such as that of a wall or a multi-storey building. A physical building indicates several attributes of social structure. For example, a physical building indicates stability and sustainability over time. A physical building also indicates a landmark in an otherwise boundless space. In this sense, structure can indicate something that creates forms, separates forms, and makes forms visible. In this sense, structure also shapes difference and creates identities. A building can also indicate a barrier that constrains and blocks one’s freedom of mobility but also provides order and protection. Further, the fact that the building stands somewhere “there” indicates that it has endured the passage of time and in this sense is historical. That is, it has a history. In this sense structure is historical; that is, it too has a history.

Thus, in Ortner’s practice-theory analytical model, structure can refer to a relatively stable and patterned collection of everyday “routine practices” (1989, 194), which guide and give shape and order to one’s everyday life. A typical Muslim’s practice of his/her daily five prayers is an example of this kind of structure. As everyday practice, prayer breaks a Muslim’s 24-hour day into five intervals, giving him/her a feeling of order and stability. Missing one of those five prayers makes one feel at odds as when losing sight of a landmark building in a vast space.

Structure also in Ortner’s practice-theory analytical model can refer to “cultural frameworks” (1989, 195). An example of this type of structure would be the hospitality values and norms in tribal societies, which pass down from one generation to another (i.e. a monument building, in physical terms). It can also refer to “political pressures”, or “historical opportunities”, which can strain or enable individuals’ choices (ibid.). Structure also in Ortner’s analytical model can refer to a sustained collection of “social and cultural relations” (189, 196). An example of this type of social structure would be the type of relations between men and women, the young and the old, close and distant relatives (i.e. gender, generational, and kinship relations, respectively).
As for actors, (both individuals and collectives), they do not “simply internalise” structures, nor do they, as rational actors, intentionally manipulate those structures to their benefits (1989, 14). Actors, instead, are “loosely structured” (Ortner 1989, 198). They have the leeway - based on their various meaning-oriented motives - to reflect on, use, and select from various socio-cultural structures, during their different life stages (ibid). In other words, actors do not pursue their interests as free-floating individuals but as actors with interests and desires that are socially and culturally constituted (1989, 14).

As for history, historical events, in Ortner’s practice theory model, do not have ontology of their own; they are not separate from the individual, the structural or the social (society). Rather, Ortner stresses that practice theory is a “theory of the conversion, or translation, between internal dynamics and external forces” (1989, 200). Thus, individuals, groups, and communities experience external historic events as strains on their relations and/or as opportunities that expand their chances (ibid.); but actors also use their historical and inherited cultural frameworks (e.g. values, norms, schemas) to respond and mediate the effects of these external forces (ibid.). A historical change therefore, according to Ortner, is indicated in changing actors’ intentions, motivations, and choices, and in changing social structures.

2.2. Duality of Action/Structure

What comes clear in Ortner’s above notion of social structure is the duality of action/structure premise of practice theory. Like the multi-storey building, whose entity of being both a home and a place of residence depends on the collections of the families who live in its several apartments, structure depends on being practised and being lived in by individuals, or actors. Structure(s), therefore, in Ortner’s practice-theory analytical model, conveys, endures, and sustains itself over time in individuals’ intentions, motivations, and actions. In Bourdieu’s terms, structure presents itself as a historical entity in the form of habitus. Bourdieu (1977, 22) defines habitus as “systems of durable, transposable, dispositions”, which result from the “homogeneity of the conditions of existence” (1977, 80); that is from having gone through “similar formative experiences, such as family structure, quality and degree of education, and form of religion” (Rely 2004, 335). As Ortner elucidates it, habitus as a structure is present in individuals’ life as “a lived-in and in-lived structure” (1989, 196).

2.3. Politics of Legitimisation

Further, Ortner expands Bourdieu’s theory of practice to include Foucault’s notion of power in the informal and interpersonal rather than the formal institutional meaning of the term. Thus, Ortner insists that in practice theory action must be analysed in terms of its politics: its being a
means whereby actors negotiate and advance their own “authority”, “legitimacy”, and “agency”, vis-à-vis those of the others (1989, 12, 197).

To summarise, all in all, an analysis informed by practice theory cannot consider action without reference to structure, or structure without reference to action. Structure is conveyed in actions. It can constrain and enable action. But in their turn, actions can transform structure and individual actions must be considered in terms of their “micro politic”.

As succinctly as Ortner summarises it (1989, 200-2002), an analysis informed by practice theory is one that is concerned with those dynamics of (1) how structure stresses or limits and/or increases and enhances actors’ opportunities; and (2) how actors, through their socially constituted choices, mediate those structural constraints and/or use those opportunities to their benefits, using various socio-cultural resources; and (3) how actions can transform structure.

It is the effects of those macro/micro dynamics on the making of the WPM that I wish to explore in some depth through the following set of practice theory-informed research questions.

3. Practice Theory-Informed Research Questions

Informed by the analytical model of practice theory discussed above, this thesis attempts to configure the conundrum of the WPM through four broad questions: (1) why did a small number of women embark on da’wa at a point in time, when Islamic morality was in demise and national politics was at its peak? (2) Why and how have these women’s actions turned into a women’s movement, into a “social field” (Bourdieu, 1976)? (3) What does explain this movement’s development and continuity, with some force, to the present (i.e. why do women find appeal in the WPM)? And (4) as a form of Islamic revival, what sense can we make of this sustained Islamic women’s activism vis-à-vis Islamism, the Islamic revival, and the women’s subject, as such?

3.1. Further Detailed Questions

Given the premise that practice theory stands on - that neither action nor structure can be understood without reference to the other, that historical events convey themselves in one’s choices and actions, and that action is motivated by one’s “politics of legitimisation” - the first three questions become an attempt at configuring the biography of the WPM through the two questions: What had initially motivated a small group of women to embark on such kind of Islamic activism? And: How is it that these women’s choices to embark on this type of Islamic activism were socially and historically constituted? To capture the historic, structural, and “politics of legitimization” dimensions of these women’s Islamic activism, these questions can be further reformulated and detailed as follows:
First, what was particularly specific about the historic moment of the 1950s-1960s, when the first women’s da’wa activities emerged?

Second, how did this historical moment (the socio-structural conditions at the time) strain/enable, those women’s relations, or opportunities? How did these strains and/or opportunities impinge on these women’s intentions and choices? How did women respond to these strains and/or opportunities? What socio-cultural resources did these women utilise to mediate the effect of these changes?

Third, what stakes/interests had the founding cohort of the WPM found in da’wa? How had their engagement in the da’wa type of activism advanced their authority, legitimacy and sense of value vis-à-vis other women, in the city, and the community of the city, at large?

Chapters two and three in this thesis attempt to provide answers to these questions. But let us first turn to a discussion of Ortner’s approach to religious activism as “politics of legitimisation”, an approach that I propose to the analysis of the motives which propelled the “first cohort” of the WPM to embark on da’wa (the subject of chapter three in this thesis).

4. Islamic Activism of the “Founding Cohort” of the WPM as Politics of Legitimisation

In her High religion: a cultural and political history of Sherpa Buddhism, introduced above, Ortner asks a question similar to the main question this thesis asks: Why did a small number of women in Nablus City embark on da’wa during the mid-1950s to mid-1960s? Her question concerns an early twentieth century religious activism of some Buddhist monks and nuns in the Sherpa society - an ethnically Tibetan group living in the Himalayan mountains of northeast Nepal (Ortner 2004, 4). In this respect, Ortner asks:

   Why did, at the turn of the twentieth century, the Sherpa move from practising an informal form of Tibetan Buddhism, in which married priests (lama), conducted some rituals in villages and households on irregular bases, to founding formal religious institutions, in which celibate (unmarried) priests and nuns lived and practised religion on a full-time basis (1989, 3) ?

Although Ortner’s study addresses a mode of activism that led to an institutional form of religion, which is different from the outcome of the Islamic women’s activism, in the case of the WPM, her analysis of the incentives and motives that led to such kinds of religious activism, and how these were socially and culturally constituted, provides useful insights into the analysis of the motives of what I come to call the “first cohort” of the WPM - those first women whose activism was foundational to the emergence and development of the WPM (Dā’iyyāt Amal, Khawla and Nadwa, discussed in chapter three).
In her answer to this question, Ortner observes that the familial social position of the nuns and the monks, who enthusiastically participated in the founding of the monasteries, was characterised by “liminality”: a middle position between the oldest and the youngest siblings of the family (1989, 173, 175). Birth order in the Sherpa’s social system is associated with material, social and cultural values, Ortner observes. The first-born (the “big” brother) has the respect and the benefit of inheriting the parents’ property (1989, 173); the last (the youngest) has “a secure set of property expectations (the parental house)”, and he is emotionally and socially valued as the “sentimental favorite of his parents” (ibid.). The middle sibling (both daughters and sons), however, have neither of those actual material and socio-cultural symbols of value and respect (1989, 174). Historically then, Ortner observes, the sons and daughters of the first and middle brothers had made the “social division” between what the Sherpas call “big” and “small” people (1989, 55).

In terms of their choice of refraining from getting married, Ortner explains that given the little resources that the middle sons and daughters of the “big people” had, an ideal choice of marriage would have set them in a lower social position and social status. It “would have set them on the road to smallness” (1989, 173). Therefore, Ortner observes that the engagement of the middle sons and daughters of the “big people” in the building of monasteries “offered them the opportunity to be ‘morally high’ without being big on the lay scale of status and power” (1989, 175). In this sense, Ortner concludes that, for the middle sons and daughters of the “big people”, monasticism had created “the most perfect - indeed most culturally valued - form of legitimation” (ibid.). In addition, for the Sherpa society at large, monasticism was “symbolically and pragmatically the perfect solution to the contradictions of the little-big people’s positions” (ibid.).

I argue that the social position of the first and the foundational cohort of the WPM, who had found appeal in Islamic morality, had been luminal in both gender, generational and social class terms.

In generational terms, this was the first generation of lower-middle and middle-class women who had gone out from the home to formal modern institutions such as schools and colleges. Their intermediate positions lay between two other groups and generations of women in the city: an upper-middle class generational peer and a former upper-middle class generation of women. This intermediate position of the “first cohort” of the WPM meant that they had fewer social and cultural resources compared to the other two groups of women. Thus, as women of the lower-middle class and first generation of mass education - who were to leave their homes to attend formal modern institutions (e.g. schools, colleges, and universities) and take on paid work - the pressure on them to perform well in order to keep their family reputation intact was perhaps high.
In other words, as these women were testing new grounds in modern educational institutions, and as they were perhaps being tested by their significant others and communities, their best strategy to accommodate this ambivalent position was probably to maintain a high repertoire of modesty in order not to harm their reputation or risk the opportunity they were given to study abroad or work outside their homes.

In comparison, neither their peer generation of upper-middle class women, nor the parents of this class of women, experienced such a change in women's opportunity structure (an opportunity increase in women's education and paid work) as morally stressful. The parents of those upper-middle class women had already completed their advanced school education in Jerusalem and Ramallah and had studied for their university education in main Arab capital cities such as Cairo and Beirut. Those parents had also adopted a modern life style and developed professional or even cosmopolitan identities.

This is unlike the parents, particularly the fathers, of the women of the lower-middle class. The fathers of the women of the lower-middle class were either small government employees or self-employed. As we will see later in chapter three, these parents were also men whose identity was deeply shaped by the city's local culture and Islamic thoughts and values (e.g. Salafis and Sufis).

In other words, the social and cultural capital that the parents of the upper-middle class women had earned through their education had perhaps mitigated the community pressure on them to adhere to tradition and had allowed them the flexibility and the freedom to adopt a freer modern life style.

Moreover, in social class and generational terms, there had been, at the time, an older generation of upper-middle class women in the city. Those were women who had embarked on charitable type of activism since the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century. These women had inherited the social and cultural capital of their upper-middle class families, but they had also earned themselves further social and cultural capital through their hard charity work with poor families in the city. In comparison, the foundational cohort of the WPM had neither the age seniority nor the cultural capital of the upper-middle class of the old generation, which could make them embark on charity work as a source of legitimisation; nor did they have the social capital of their generational peers of the upper-middle class (e.g. parents’ support) which could have legitimated their adoption of a modern lifestyle. Thus, in terms of choice, the "first cohort" of the WPM could not undertake charity work as a means of increasing their social status; but they could not continue adopting the modern lifestyle as their upper-middle class women peers were doing, either.
I therefore conclude that women’s choice of da’wa as a form of Islamic activism was a third option that offered a solution to their social class, gender and generational ambivalent position.

In this sense, in line with Ortner’s analysis and conclusions, I conclude that Islamic activism transforms these women’s social class, gender and generational intermediate position into “a positive role that is not only of value to the individuals but to the society at large” (1989, 175).

5. Women’s Islamic Activism, Politics of Legitimatisation, and Modernisation

Several studies associate Islamic revival and increased Islamic religiosity since the 1970s with the implications of modernisation and rapid social change for the middle and the lower-middle classes. However, few explained the dynamics through which social change/modernisation affects these classes’ sensibilities and therefore adherence to Islamic morality. The practice-theory approach as advanced by Ortner’s “politics of legitimatization” (1989) and Bourdieu’s notion of “social distinction” (1979) opens a window into those dynamics. In Ortner and Bourdieu’s paradigm of analysis, Islamic morality is explained as a strategy, a choice, that in the context of social change, actors consciously or unconsciously, apply to advance the social status associated with their social positions, including gender, age, ethnicity, and social class positions. In the case of Islamic women’s activism, Christiansen (2003), Nageeb (2004), Bayat (2007), Rinaldo (2008) and Secor (2001) embrace such a practice-theory approach to its explanation, arguing that Islamic women’s piety and engagement in Islamic activism were to consolidate these women’s social class positions vis-à-vis women of lower social classes or ascend the social ladder by adopting the practices and sensibilities of a higher social class.

Most relevant to the case of the WPM in Nablus City is Bayat’s account of the women’s da’wa movement in Cairo, Egypt, during the 1990s, which he refers to as the “active piety” movement (2007, 155). Bayat’s positioning of this type of Egyptian women’s activism between the aristocratic charity activists of the 1950s-1960s and the lower-middle class Islamist militant activists of the 1980s parallels the positioning we have made earlier in this chapter. This was a positioning of the WPM between the charitable type of activism of the upper-middle class women generation of the British Mandate and the political Islamist type of activism of the lower-middle

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7 For example, based on the distinction Bourdieu (1979) makes between the “petit bourgeois” and the “sub-proletariat”, Fischer (1982, 112) explains the strict religiosity of the “petit bourgeois” (e.g. shopkeepers, clerks, teachers, and craftsmen), in the Middle East, as a strategy for “invoking” a status distinction from the chronically unemployed, or the “sub-proletariat”. Fischer expounds that the former- the petit bourgeois - would “invoke whatever status distinctions”, including adhering to strict religious morality, lest they are relegated back “into the status of the unworthy poor”, or the “sub-proletariat” (ibid.).
class women generation of the 1970s-1980s. What also cannot be more relevant to the “politics of legitimisation” analysis we take to the emergence of the WPM in Nablus City that we just explained is Bayat’s analysis of these women’s engagement in da’wa on the same analysis lines. Bayat observes that as the “New Rich” of the economic opening policy (infitāḥ) of late-1970s Egypt, these new upper-middle class women had an ambivalent social position: they suffer an imbalance between their high economic capital and their low social and cultural capitals. As women of this new class, they suffered psychological anxieties around the multiple lifestyle options that their material wealth allowed them.

In contrast to the aristocratic rich of the 1950s and 1960s, these new upper-middle class women had disdain for working with the poor and for charity work. This disdain had deprived this “New Rich” of the opportunity to earn the social and cultural capital that they needed to balance their new ambivalent social class position. Given the social value that Egyptian society attributes to Islamic morality, engaging in da’wa had become their best choice to resolve their psychological anxieties around the multiple lifestyle options that their material wealth opened for them and earn the social and cultural capital (2007, 159-160). That is, the social recognition and social legitimacy they aspired to. Further, other studies associate increased Islamic religiosity with modernisation and rapid social change that altered the patriarchal system and the anxieties associated with this change. Moghadam, for example, observes that:

[I]ncreasing female education and employment [in the Middle East] has challenged and slowly weakened the system of patriarchal gender relations, creating status inconsistency and anxiety on the part of the men of the petty bourgeoisie (Moghadam 1993, 137).

Along the same line of analysis Taraki (1995) explains, in the context of Jordan, Islamist “urgency” in addressing the “woman” issue during the 1990s. Taraki attributes this urgency to the increased visibility of women in the public space due to mass education and increased work opportunities. In the first half of the twentieth century, Taraki observes, only upper and middle-class women had access to education and paid work (1995, 643). Therefore, unlike the Islamists of those previous decades, Islamist men of the 1990s were to go through the socially troubling consequences of new forms in women’s work, education and visibility (ibid.). These changes, according to Taraki, had made the question of women’s modesty a concrete rather than an abstract matter as it was for Islamists decades ago. Taraki suggested that such a change was the “key to the explanation of the urgency through which Islamists addressed the women issue in Jordan at the time” (ibid.).

Further, along the same line of the analysis of women’s religiosity in terms of “politics of legitimisation” and anxiety over social status Macleod (1992) explains the 1970s-1980s veiling phenomenon among a new wave of Egyptian lower-middle class working women. These were
women whose work and employment opportunities were enabled by the 1960s socialist employment policy of the Nasser regime (1992, 541). Leaving the secure place of the family, with its traditional sexual division of labour, to enter the public world as lower-ranked employees, Macleod explains that these women had found themselves in an ambivalent position (1992, 547). On the one hand, their entry into the sphere of paid work, until then predominantly a male’s terrain, made them exposed to sexual harassment (1992, 549). On the other, they felt that despite the risk for sexual harassment, they had to continue working in order to support their families who needed their income (1992, 547-548). In other words, these women did not earn the sufficient income that was necessary to maintain the families they had risked sexual harassment in order to maintain. Further, Macleod expounds that these women did not do much work and therefore did not need to develop professional skills(1992,546); they consequently did not develop a professional identity that could empower them against sexual harassment, lower social status, and lower self esteem (1992, 546). As underpaid public sector employees, therefore, these women had felt that they were trading off the secure social status that was associated with their traditional family roles as mothers, wives and daughters, for an insecure, tenuous social status, now, associated with their underpaid work in the public sector (1992, 549). In other words, these women’s veiling came as a strategy and “politics of legitimisation” to curb the social and psychological effect of their insecure social position as public sector employees. Because religion is highly regarded in Egyptian society, veiling was the strategy that could grant them the social respect and value that their work status was jeopardising.8

Further, framing her enquiry of this veiling phenomenon among Egyptian women in liberal feminist terms, Macleod concludes that on a resistance/domination scale veiling for these women was not mere resistance, nor mere domination, but a mixture of both, an accommodated protest (1992, 552-553).

Despite their sound perspectives, implied in such approaches, and analyses of women’s adherence to Islamic morality, as in veiling, the liberal feminists’ assumption that women’s adherence to religious morality has been a backlash that reverted some good years, when women enjoyed more liberty and more freedom. In this sense, these perspectives associate women’s Islamic religious practices, sensibilities, and activism, with these women’s loss of freedom and autonomy. Such an understanding confirms a Western universal model of autonomy. Macleod’s location of these women’s veiling between resistance and domination,

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8 See several of these women’s accounts in Macleod (1992, 550). In these accounts, several of these women indicated or stated that veiling had made them earn more social respect and therefore more self-confidence in their status as working women (ibid.).
arguing that it is an accommodated protest, is a facet of this Western model of women’s autonomy.

In her *Politics of piety: the Islamic revival and the feminist subject* - an ethnographic study of the women’s mosque movement in Cairo, Egypt, during the 1990s - Mahmood challenges such liberal feminist approaches to Muslim women’s autonomy and agency. She contests the liberal feminist assumption that a universal human nature with a universal inclination for self autonomy exists by showing that in the “mosque movement” numerous women have willingly and heartily chosen to commit to a non-liberal movement acting on the premises of the patriarchal systems rather than on their deflation or eradication as feminist theory anticipates (2005, 12-14, 150).

Further, Mahmood questions the conceptualisation of “agency” in terms of “resistance”. She argues that women’s actions in the “mosque movement” were neither against male dominance, nor a re-inscription of it, since women were “reshaping the male practice of Islamic pedagogy and the social institution of mosques” (Mahmood 2005, 150). She thus concludes that women’s actions cannot be understood by either resistance or subordination; and that a universal meaning of agency cannot be assumed a priori. Instead, she concludes, a “historically and culturally” specific meaning of agency must be obtained from within the “discourses” and “structures of subordination” that create it (2005, 14-15). In order to get to grips with the specific meaning of agency in the mosque movement, one has to understand how women (the subject) in their pious actions aspire to live up to these norms and values rather than look at how these actions resist or re-enact these norms (ibid.).

I suggest that by separating agency from resistance, Mahmood’s analysis makes a breakthrough in liberal feminist understanding of Muslim women’s agency. Yet I argue that her analysis is predicated on the same premises of liberal feminism that she argues against: that as religious movements, the mosque movement, in Cairo, Egypt, and the WPM in Nablus City, are non-liberal movements.

In response, I argue that in order to understand the meaning and the significance of the WPM to women themselves, we need to understand that movement, not in mere religious terms, but as neither religious nor secular. That is, in order to understand the full significance of this movement from the perspective of women, we need to abandon a binary liberal approach to its analysis. Therefore, in line with Badran (2009), who rejects a secular/religious approach to Islamic women’s activism, I propose to understand the WPM as a gender development and empowerment means.

By applying a practice-theory approach to the analysis of women’s agency in the case of the WPM in Nablus City, instead of a liberal feminist one, we shift the analysis from asking how
women’s actions have been an indication of either resistance, domination, or in between the two (e.g. as accommodate protest), to asking how women’s actions, choices and agency, have been socially, culturally and historically embedded. I therefore argue that by applying a practice-theory approach to the analysis of the WPM in Nablus City, we uncover the WPM as a women’s space, which pious women had created through their various types of socially embedded intentions, actions, and agency. I further clarify this argument by briefly discussing next practice-theory approach to agency as discussed by Ortner (1989; 2006).

6. A Practice Theory Approach to Agency

Perhaps a key opening in practice-theory approach to agency is Ortner’s assertion in her *Anthropology and social theory: culture, power, and the acting subject*, that:

[A]gency is never a thing in itself but is always part of a process of what Giddens [1979] calls ‘structuration’, the making and remaking of larger social and cultural formations (Ortner 2006, 134).

Given this notion of ‘structuration’ by Giddens (1979), one concludes that agency, from Ortner’s practice theory perspective, refers to how actors create and recreate the social world through their various socially-embedded actions. Ortner’s subsequent explanation of the usefulness of a practice-theory approach to agency emphasises and expounds further this notion of agency.

Ortner (2006) summarises the usefulness of a practice-theory approach to agency in that practice theory does not postulate the primacy of either the individual over the social structure, or vice versa (2006, 133); but it instead postulates that in between the two there is a "dynamic" by which individual action can transform social structures (ibid.). According to Ortner,

[T]here is a dynamic, powerful, and sometimes transformative relationship between the practices of real people and the structures of society, culture, and history (2006, 133).

This notion of agency is similar to that of Sewell (1992). In Sewell’s approach, given their enmeshment in different social structures, all human beings are inclined to a certain degree of agency (1992, 9, 20). Further, as social structures are composed of cultural norms/schemas, and human and non-human resources, agency refers to one’s capacity to innovatively apply one’s knowledge of these schemas to new situations and manipulate one’s access to resources in order to achieve a particular end (1992, 20). Structures are multiple and vary in scope and depth (1992, 19). Therefore, different social positions give people knowledge of different schemas and access to different resources (1992, 21). In addition, these differences in people’s social positions and access to resources render their possibilities for transformative action (i.e. agency) as different (ibid.).
The usefulness of both Ortner’s and Sewell’s practice-theory approach to agency is that by assuming that agency is inherent in one’s position in social structures, they demystify agency as a “heroic” act (Ortner 1989, 14) against an abstract social structure of inequality or injustice, which only some super-human beings are capable of doing. This notion of agency makes us consider everyday actions by ordinary people even vis-à-vis their significant others as possibly agentive.

It is this notion of agency that I find most useful to the analysis of the agency of pious Muslim women in the city of Nablus, because it highlights these women’s attempts at exerting their influence on their lives and their city from within their relationships, using the various resources available to them (e.g. familial, cultural, Islamic discursive, etc.).

Finally, to further understand actors’ agency in practice theory terms, I revisit, discussed in subsection 2.1 of this chapter, Ortner’s definitions of human actions as everyday routine, intentional goal-oriented, and praxis (1989, 194-195). I suggest that based on those three types of actions, Ortner differentiates between “soft” and “hard” agency (2006, 134). “Soft” agency refers to one’s engagement in the social world through everyday routine practices without a specific intention in mind (ibid.). In Ahearn’s terms “soft” agency is “the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act” (2001b, 112).

“Hard” agency refers to one’s engagement in the world through praxis, through active intentions geared towards deliberate goals (Ortner 2006, 136).⁹

Such a range of actions captures various women’s intentions from engaging in the WPM. For some, their participation in a piety group might be regarded as an indication of a routine, everyday practice. Other women pursue a piety group as a deliberate act to fulfil their religious obligation towards God, earn social relations, or even more social respect. Still other women would pursue a piety group as indication of praxis, as a critique, that alters the logic of everyday life and alters one’s social relations.

7. Method

Given the absence of sources of data on such type of women’s activism during the 1950s-1960s, and the 1970s-1980s, I have advanced the life and the oral history methods to recover this important part and history of Islamic women’s activism. Further, I have also advanced the

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⁹ Ortner (2006, 136) states that “routine practices...proceed with little intention and planning, and agentive acts...intervene in the world with something [intentions] in mind (or in heart)”. In addition, Ortner defines intentionality as “all the ways in which action is cognitively and emotionally pointed towards some purpose” (2006, 134).
ethnographic method since many of the previous studies, considered important sources on the history of the Islamic revival, in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, had relied in their research on problematic sources of data such as state intelligence archives and army reports. To describe the Islamic movement during the 1950s and 1960s, Cohen (1982), for example, had relied on Jordan’s intelligence archives (1949-1967). To describe the changing face of the Palestinian Islamic movement during the next two decades (the 1970s-1980s) and account for the rise of Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Mishal and Sela (2000) had relied on Israeli army reports on Palestinian political parties’ competition inside Palestinian universities. In addition to their potential bias, these sources of data exclude Islamic activism among women in such informal and domestic spheres such as the homes and the schools. They also focus on politically active female Islamists, while the bulk of women participants in the WPM have been housewives and professionals.

Further, such sources of data gathered for security purposes are also far from capturing the motivation and the inner world of the women participants in this type of Islamic activism. They are also far from telling us why women have chosen to pursue Islamic morality and encouraged other women to do so. I have therefore advanced the ethnographic method to provide a close lens into Islamic piety not as documented or reported but as lived, experienced, and closely observed, on a day-to-day basis.

In An enchanted modern: gender and public piety in Shiʿi Lebanon, Deeb stresses the usefulness of the ethnographic study of the everyday practice of Islam in order to clothe terms like Islamisation and Islamism with their local contexts (2005, 5). I share Deeb’s conviction of the effectiveness of the ethnographic lens in configuring the local meaning of everyday Islam; and I have used the method to come to grips with the meaning, the women of the WPM in Nablus City, attribute to their Islamic activism.

All in all, my methodology will be informed by the historical approach of Mills and the ethnographic of Malinowski. According to Mills, social science deals with the intersections of biography and history within social structures (1995, 159). Ethnography, according to Malinowski, focuses on the “totality” of the phenomenon (1922, xvi). The life history method is able to bring together those socio-cultural, historic, and individual/subjective aspects of the phenomenon, as it “broadly depicts individuals’ [women’s] identities across time and in [their] social networks” (Bertaux 1995). With its emphasis on how individuals’ actions are both

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10 In Miller (2000, 6-7).
11 According to Malinowski, the ethnographic method "should deal with the totality of the all social, cultural and psychological aspects of the community for they are so interwoven that not one can be understood without taking into consideration the others" (1922, xvi).
12 In Miller (2000, 8).
socially and historically embedded, practice theory’s scope of analysis encompasses that of the life and the oral history methods.

Further, while I recognise the tensions between the recovery and analytic narrative approaches to the analysis of the life and oral history accounts, I also recognise the importance of a scope of analysis that would marry the two. In line with practice theory’s assertion of the duality of action/structure and the historical aspects of both action and structure, I suggest that the practice-theory approach I take to the analysis of the WPM is able to account for both the individual narrative and the historic objective in the life and oral history accounts I discuss in this thesis.

Further, in this thesis, I have alternatively used the terms life story and life history to refer to the life and oral history accounts I generated for this study. In addition, in order to generate those accounts, during the interviews, I have broadly covered the chronological history of the women interviewees, including their life stages and events such as childhood, education, and marriage; and I have thoroughly discussed these women’s family milieu and relations, before and after marriage.

In addition, in the analysis of these accounts, I have also partly applied (in chapter four) the narrative analysis framework of feminist historian Chanfrault-Duchet (1991). Connecting what some oral historians13 divorced in oral history analysis (story and history), feminist historian, Chanfrault-Duchet, proposes that life stories and the individual experience they tell can be transformed into historical data through the analysis of individuals’ narrative structures (1991, 77). Thus, the “task of the historian”, according to Chanfrault-Duchet, is to analyse those narrative structures for both the narrator’s vision of history and for “the complex social problematic” (1991, 82). The “complex social problematic”, according to Chanfrault-Duchet, refers to the female narrator’s stand from “the social models of femaleness produced and controlled by institutions such as the family, the church, etc.” (ibid.).

8. Field Work: Immersion and Reflection

Born and raised in the city of Nablus, I have always paid attention to the piety activities of the WPM. Since my teens, for example, I have heard and learned about the piety activities of Dā’iyya

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13 An example is Abrams (2010). Abrams makes a distinction between life history and life story. Life history is a “chronologically told narrative of an individual’s past” (2010, 176). It includes familiar life stages and episodes (e.g. childhood, education, marriage, etc.). Life story, in comparison, is the “subjective creation of the teller” (ibid.).
Khawla - the founder of the first piety network in the city, whose story I will discuss in chapter three of this thesis. Almost every dāʿiya I interviewed for this study had mentioned the early daʿwa activities that she has been undertaking since the late 1960s and early 1970s, and expressed respect and gratitude for her as al-ustādha al-kabīra (the grand teacher). In fact, during the late 1970s, she taught religious education at the secondary school where I studied. Her quiet and punctual mode of administering the class left an impact on students, including myself (e.g. to make students establish a daily study system, she used to randomly quiz two or three girls on the material she asked that we prepare). However, at the time, my admiration of her teaching method did not transform into a curiosity about her religious activities or about those of her female followers in the city. To me, at the time, they looked like women with a strange clothing style and outdated ideas.

It was only in the late 1990s that I started to become curious about her pious activities and those of other dāʿiyat in the city. Before then, I studied for a university degree in sociology outside the city and was shaped by the ethos of the late 1970s era. This was an ethos shaped by the critical vision of such Arabic scholars as Hisham Sharabi and Sadiq Jalal al-ʿAzim. Based on a Western, critical analysis of Arab society, Hisham Sharabi and Sadiq Jalal al-ʿAzim proposed a modernisation vision that aimed at the reformation of the entire Arab society, including the family, the political, the religious, and the education systems, among others. Underlying their critique of Arab society was a model of equal gender relations and a model of an Arab woman as an educated and socially and politically engaged working one - just like her male partner. Having compared those critics’ models of Arab woman to the community-disengaged woman, I felt that Dāʿiya Khawla and her network were advancing, I realised that there was a distance in our perspective to women that was hard to conciliate. Therefore, I had dismissed taking Dāʿiya Khawla and her network seriously (e.g. thinking about who they really were; what their claims were; or in what way or ways they understood they were advancing women's conditions, etc.).

As I said, it was only during the late 1990s that I started to take an interest in the current WPM, partially, indicated by Dāʿiya Khawla and her women followers. This was because, only then, in the mid-1990s, when I started noticing new visibilities in the city: that neighbour, dressed in an all-satin white dress and headscarf, going every Thursday to a piety group in the city; those girls - sometimes with headscarves - going in late afternoons to Quranic classes; and those new mosques and Quranic schools, accompanied by youth clubs, that were proliferating in the city’s neighbourhoods. These observations were coupled with my awareness of a growing number of women, including relatives, friends and former political activists committing to the Islamic dress

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14 An ankle-length black or dark blue jilbāb; a white, dark blue or black headscarf (knotted on the middle of the neck); thick beige socks; and comfortable low-heeled black or brown shoes.
and style of life. I was then driven by my curiosity to figure out the story that went underneath what to my gaze were new embodied visibilities, practices, discursive sites, and sentiments.

My curiosity about the movement, however, was coupled, as I have just discussed, with uneasiness over the perspective it confers on women, which made me ambivalent about its further investigation. On the one hand, I was driven to use these new women’s embodied visibilities, practices and sites to understand what was going on in the city, at large; on the other, I was discouraged from doing so because of fear of rejection. Thus, in anthropological terms, being a resident of Nablus City made me an insider vis-à-vis those pious women, research subject. In practical terms, however, my physical and emotional distance from most of these women had to some extent made each one of us an outsider to the other. Eventually, my interest to understand these pious women, their claims, and the city in which they operate, prevailed, and I started this research project.

I conducted my fieldwork during the summer of 2010 but have maintained relations with these dāʿiya and other women participants in the WPM up to the present time. During my four-month fieldwork in 2010, I conducted 15 - more or less - in-depth interviews with women dāʿiya and piety groups’ participants and another 15 semi-structured ones with informants on the movement. Those informants were both men and women, who occupy various positions in Islamic charities and organisations; and who happened to have some knowledge about the early stages of the piety movement. I also, during this period of my field work, participated in one piety group on a regular weekly basis and took biweekly observations of another two. During this time, I also took the occasion of the month of Ramadan to observe, in a nearby mosque, women’s participation in Ramadan-related activities (e.g. salat al-tarāwīḥ).\footnote{Salat al-tarāwīḥ (al-tarāwīḥ prayer) is the prayer that Muslims perform every night after the evening prayer (salat al-‘ishā’), during the month of Ramadan, following the Sunna (Prophet Mohammad’s teachings). In this prayer, Muslims, in private or in groups, at homes or in mosques, perform some eight to 20 units of prayer (rakʿa).}

In the summers of 2011 and 2012, I managed to reconnect with many of these dāʿiya and pious women. In addition to participating in their piety groups, I also accepted their invitations to several social occasions, including weddings, newly-wed celebrations, school graduation parties, \textit{Mawlid}\footnote{Mawlid or \textit{al-Mawlid} refers to the occasion of the birth of the Prophet Mohammad on the 12 of Rabiʿ al-Awwal of the Islamic calendar. It is usually referred to as \textit{al-Mawlid al-Nabawi}.} readings\footnote{Mawlid reading is usually performed by women of special religious status (often called shaykhas). Usually, one of these women narrates the event of the birth of Prophet Mohammad in a melodic fashion and festive atmosphere to celebrate various happy occasions, such as the birth of a child, the recovery of a sick person, the attainment of a new house or a university degree, and the like. As in other Muslim and Arab countries, in the Palestinian society, although \textit{Mawlid} reading was a popular practice in the past, it had been in decline since the second half of} and pilgrims’ farewell parties. These occasions took place in private homes,
During my in-group participation, I used to share with the women participants their listening to their dāʿiyāt, their practice of supplication (dhikr), and occasionally take part in the Quran recitation activity which starts every piety session and the collective noon prayer which concludes every one. This was particularly the case in the group, whose practice of the Quran recitation ceremony, I describe and analyse in chapter five. During those occasional times of participation, I felt what I can describe as the pleasure and the aesthetic of prayer and reciting the Quran. In the collective prayer, I felt the rhythm of the women’s bodies while bowing (rūkū’) and performing prostration (sujūd) as a gravity that slowed down my body and calmed my soul. In Quran recitation, I felt awe (kushū’), perhaps, from being listened to by other women in attention and silence. Also, in those groups, I felt the obligation to exchange with these women the gifts they brought to the group: chocolate, cookies or wafers.

Moreover, during the four months of fieldwork - of steady interviewing and observation at mosques, private homes, and public halls - I have listened to these women’s preaching and felt their tone of voice during the encounter, learned and closely observed their extensive “care of the self” (Foucault, 1997b), and their laborious work at creating themselves as pious “virtuosos”, by studying, learning and teaching others the Islamic tradition (e.g. the Quran, the hadith, and their scholarly interpretations, etc.). I have observed that these women do not only have interest in Islamic piety, but are also fascinated by it. As a consequence of this intensive engagement, and irrespective of what I considered to be our conflicting liberal and traditional views, I found myself developing an admiration for how these women take their lives seriously; and for how they work hard to excel in Islamic knowledge and live up to certain Islamic values; I specifically identified with them as aspiring, hard-working women, as I find myself someone with similar aptitude.

the twentieth century (see chapter two, subsection 3.2, in this thesis). However, due to the effect of women’s piety groups and networks in the city, Mawlid reading has picked up pace and retained some of its past popularity during the last decade or so.

18 A dīwān is a clan–based family forum, where occasions, such as weddings, funerals, and meetings to discuss issues of common concern, take place. Many family clans in the city now have their own forums, or dīwān.

19 For a discussion of Foucault’s notion of the “care of the self”, see section one in this chapter.

20 I have borrowed the term pious “virtuosos” from Starrett (2010), who uses the term to refer to the women participants in the WPM, in Cairo, Egypt, during the 1990s, as a “spiritual elite” (2010, 637). Starrett had originally borrowed the term from Max Weber (1946). Max Weber had used the term “religious virtuosos” (1946, 290) to refer to those “individuals who [had] chosen to enter into relationships of training and mentorship toward the end of spiritual improvement” (Starrett 2010, 637). Hence I find the term useful to describe the steady and rigorous Islamic learning and teaching initiatives pious women in the WPM in Nablus undertake.
Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed previous approaches and studies of cases of Islamic activism and piety movements, similar to that of the WPM, in Nablus. My arguments vis-à-vis these approaches have been twofold: first, that the WPM is more than a mobilising structure. In line with Yavuz (2003), I argue that it is a new social movement (NSM). I therefore argue that as the action and motion meanings of the term movement indicates, the WPM advances, and moves on women’s vision, interests, and well-being, in the city, albeit in Islamic terms, and in intentional, and unintentional ways. Thus also in line with Badran’s (2009) Islamic feminist approach, I conclude that the WPM in Nablus City is an important gender empowerment means.

Second, I advance practice theory to tell in analytic terms the story of the emergence and the formation of this NSM as a social field and configure the pieces in the conundrum of its consequent compelling appeal to other women in the city. I argue that by applying practice theory to the analysis of the WPM, we are able to (a) expand our understanding of the WPM from being a mobilising structure to being an arena of women’s activism, which exhibits the characteristics of a social field and that of an NSM, (b) expand our understanding of this field’s emergence and sustained appeal to women over time from being the outcome of “contentious politics” (Singerman 2003) to being the outcome of the dialectical interaction of broad macro structural, meso local, and micro individual changes and processes, and these changes’ anticipated and unanticipated consequences, (c) uncover the intentions and the motivation that have underpinned women’s formations and participation in these piety groups and networks as diverse, fluid, situational, and, therefore, far from being ideological, or doctrinal.

Plan of the Chapters

Each of the following chapters addresses one piece of the multi-faceted conundrum the WPM confronts us with and applies a different part of practice theory to its configuration.

Chapter two, “Nablus City, An Urbanity with an Islamic Habitus Undergoing Social Change”, discusses Nablus City as a Muslim urban locality that has been influenced by global and regional social change and modernisation processes since the late nineteenth century. The chapter therefore discusses Nablus City as the local socio-cultural setting of the WPM and the social change (i.e. the modernisation) that it started to experience since the late nineteenth century but which had adopted a faster pace during the 1950 and 1960s. The chapter argues that in global comparative terms, the social change that Nablus City experienced, especially during the 1950s-1960s, was somehow limited. Yet it has been in the gender implications of this change and the way some lower and middle-class women (e.g. the “founding cohort” of the
WPM) and men (e.g. those who had supported the WPM) had experienced this social change, that we can put in perspective the emergence of the WPM at the time.

The chapter begins with a discussion of Nablus’ historical connection to the two main capital cities in the region (Cairo and Damascus), and the making through these connections of a modern male Islamic/Islamist social field, which I argue was supportive of the WPM. The chapter then discusses the modernisation that city had started to experience since the late nineteenth century unto the present. It especially focuses the analysis on how both modern mass education and mass media during the colonial era of the 1940s and the postcolonial era of the 1950s-1960s had started shaping through modern consumption (e.g. dress, leisure), modern women’s subjectivities and quickly altering women’s mode of sociability and leisure.

Chapter three, “From Religious Habitus to Religious Field: the Making of the WPM Between the Sufi Dāʿiyāt of Damascus and the Salafi Ulama of Cairo” is a discussion of how the purposeful actions of those in the founding cohort of the WPM (Dāʿiyāt Amal, Khawla, and Nadwa), propelled by their desire to earn social status and legitimacy vis-à-vis each others and vis-à-vis other upper middle-class women in the city created the social field of the WPM. I argue that their Islamic activism at the time was the outcome of their family formative experiences, their Islamic habitus, the modernisation of the city, which was taking on a faster pace, and their supportive encounter with the male Islamic/Islamist fields, both local and regional. From the latter – from the local and the regional Islamic/Islamist fields - these women dāʿiyāt drew on various Islamic ideological and discursive resources to create their own piety groups and networks.

Chapter four, “Between the Traditional and the New Islamist of the Middle: The Making of Islamic-Islamist Feminist and Pious Modern Subjectivity” through the life story of Dāʿiya Fadia, I show and discuss the dynamics of the emergence in the WPM of a hybrid Islamic/Islamist feminist and pious modern subjectivity. I locate that emergence in the interaction of Dāʿiya Fadia’s own individual repertoire of piety, her particular gender experience, and the continuous social change in the city which has continued to alter women’s sociability and leisure modes, through the 1970s into the neo-liberal era of the 1990s.

Chapter five, “From the Aesthetics of the ‘Oud to the Aesthetics of Quran Recitation: the Aesthetics of Piety and the Leisure of the Pious” is a discussion of how the new religious field, the WPM, has over the years become itself a force advancing social change by altering women’s actions and sociability modes. Through the ethnographic analysis of a Quran recitation ceremony which takes place at one of the piety groups in the city, I demonstrate how the social field of the WPM transformed these women’s aesthetics and sociability mode. For example, I discuss how women in the Quran recitation ceremony construct the ceremony as a piety occasion as well as leisure and a sociability event, where they exchange listening and reciting
the Quran as a gift, but also exchange coffee and chocolate, jokes, and the latest news, in the city. By demonstrating that, I also argue that women were creating alternative modes to cope with social change and modernisation. In addition, I demonstrate how these women pursue aesthetic pious practices with fluid and situational intentions, thus demonstrating how the intentions of the body of women that makes up the WPM is far from being ideological, or doctrinal.

Finally, chapter six, “General Conclusion”, I revisit the subject of this thesis (the WPM), the rationale for its study, the method/s I used in its enquiry, and the theoretical framework I used in its analysis. I also revisit the research questions, the findings of the chapters, and the discussion I made all over the dissertation. I focus the discussion on the complex relationship between the piety of Muslim women, their agency, and the Islamic revival. Finally, based on the thesis’ findings and discussion, I identify and discuss future research openings.
Chapter Two: Nablus City, an Urbanity with an Islamic Habitus Undergoing Social Change

Every time I pass through the streets that surround the hills of (ʿIbal and Jarzim), I feel a longing for the face of my old city ..... What kind of a tax a small town has to pay so that it becomes a big city that walks the spirit of the age?


Introduction

This chapter discusses the socio-cultural setting of the WPM: Nablus City and the social change that it had started to experience since the late nineteenth century. This was a change that had adopted a faster pace during the 1950 and 1960s. The chapter argues that in global terms, the social change that Nablus City had experienced, especially during the 1950s-1960s, was somehow limited. Yet it has been in the ways some lower and middle class women (e.g. the founding cohort of the WPM) had experienced that social change that we are able to put in perspective the emergence of the WPM at the time. This focus of the chapter on how various women in the city had experienced social change echoes Taylor’s distinction between modernisation as a process of social change and modernity as the way people experience that change (1999, 114-116). I therefore conclude that the emergence of the WPM and the motives that propelled its women to embark on da’wa speak to these women’s experience with modernisation and their attempt at teasing out their own modernity: that is living the social change the city has been undergoing in a way that is compatible with Islamic morality.

Given the limited sources of data on women’s education and modes of sociability since the late nineteenth century and to uncover the social change the city and its women had undergone since then, the chapter has made the best of the various sources of data that it could locate on the subject, including women’s biographies, school reports, and oral accounts. I therefore observe that even with limited sources of data, the recovery of some parts of this women’s history in the city - as pertinent to their education and mode of sociability - has been paramount to the understanding of the emergence of the WPM and the development of its current moral claims against the status quo - something that we will learn more about in this chapter, and later, in chapter four.

I start the chapter with a discussion of Nablus residents’ sense of locality, followed by a discussion of the historic making of Nablus city into an urbanity with an Islamic habitus. This is in contrast, for example, to other Palestinian cities, such as Jerusalem. I then discuss the

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21 ʿIbal and Jarzim are the names of the two mountains in between which the city of Nablus lies.
emergence of a modern male Islamic-Islamist field, which I argue was supportive of the WPM - something that chapter three will later demonstrate. I then move to discuss the modernisation of women’s education and sociability modes since the late nineteenth century. In this respect, I reiterate, what I have argued in the previous chapter; that it had been in the development of modern mass education, mass communication and media, especially during the post-colonial era of the mid 1950s-1960s, that we have come to see the emergence of the “first cohort” of the WPM. It is to their experience of this social change that we attribute their adherence at the time to the Islamic mode of life - a mode of life that was in contrast to what most middle-class women had at the time aspired to.

1. Nablus City: A Distinct Local Culture and a Sense of Locality in Historical Perspective

Nablus City, which lies to the north of Jerusalem, is the second largest city in the West Bank, with a population of 126,132 (PCBS 2007, 40); and it is considered the West Bank’s main trade and commercial centre. The majority of Nablus’ population has been Sunni Muslims, with a small Christian minority and the Samaritans, a “200-300” Arabic-speaking Jewish community (Dumper 2007, 266).

Nablus City has a distinct local culture and sense of locality. Its residents convey their sense of locality in multiple ways: food, hospitality, adherence to tradition, and accent. “Nabulsis do not easily grant the Nabulsi citizenship to an outsider”, a popular jest goes, indicating Nablus residents’ strong sense of locality. Nablus’ peculiar accent indicates a “native Nabulsi”, or a Nabulsi quh. 22 Sometimes residents of other Palestinian localities would, with a combination of humour and scorn, tell a Nabulsi: “You Nabulsis pronounce the letter kh, gh, instead of calling a cupboard khazane you call it ghazane”. Although the Nabulsi accent is somehow associated with social backwardness, it is still the dominant dialect among most traditional Nabulsi families of upper-middle and popular classes.

In their attempts to confer some glamour on the history and culture of their city and ascribe some social distinction to themselves - depending on the context - often Nablus residents and politicians beatify Nablus, referring to it as small Damascus, as the city of Turkish baths, and as the city of soap and sweets. They also dramatise its political power, calling it Jabal al-Nar (the

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22 The Arabic word quh means pure, authentic, or original. In Nablus popular lingo, a “native Nabulsi”, or a Nabulsi quh, is one who comes from one of the old urban families of Nablus. A non-Nabulsi, for example, is one who comes from a rural background, or from one of the surrounding towns.
mountain of fire), or mythologise its economic importance, describing it as the *economic capital of Palestine*.

Nevertheless, these multiple representations of the city by its residents are not without some historical foundations. Its medieval and early modern history indicates that those popular narratives and mythologies of Nablus are not mere fantasies, but do have some historic truths. Thus, during the Umayyad Muslim dynasty, the city’s geographical position on the road between Damascus and Gaza on to Egypt made for its distinct relation with Damascus (Dumper 2007, 266) - a relation that had become “the linchpin” of Nablus’ economy (ibid.). In fact, according to Dumper, upon his visit to the city, al-Maqqdisi, a famous tenth century geographer, mentioned that Nablus was named “the little Damascus” (ibid.).

In addition, from the seventeenth through to the nineteenth century, Nablus City was Palestine’s chief manufacturing core and main regional trade centre (Doumani 1995, 1). It exported its olive-related products, mainly soap, to Europe and the Middle East, including Cairo, where many of Nablus’ merchants settled permanently (Kimmerling & Migdal 2003, 41; Doumani 1995, 1).

Along with these economic connections, there were also, during these same times, “extensive and frequent intellectual links with Damascus and Cairo” (Kupferschmidt 1984, 180). Palestinian ‘ulama studied, taught or delivered sermons at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, where a “comparatively large group of Hanbali ‘ulama from Nablus and its surroundings studied” (Kupferschmidt 1984, 181). Likewise, many of the Palestinian ‘ulama visited or studied at al–Azhar, in Cairo, where, they, according to (Kupferschmidt 1984, 182), lived in Riwaq al–Shwwam (the Syrian Hallway). After the Ottoman’s nineteenth century administrative reform and the Egyptian rule, 1832-1840, Nablus’ links to Cairo were to get “even” stronger (Kimmerling & Migdal 2003, 45); and its Islamic intellectual connections to Damascus continued in the same manner (Kupferschmidt 1984,181).

Further, the bulk of the modernisation processes that Nablus had yet to undergo took place during the mid and late nineteenth century, during the Tanzimat period (1839-1876). These were changes in the field of education and administration and they were to start fashioning Nablus into a modern urbanity, albeit one with an Islamic habitus. In the following I discuss these major modernisation processes and their gender consequence. First, I suggest that Nablus City has a telling modernisation course. This is because the mid-nineteenth century’s Ottoman administrative reform and the Egyptian rule (1832-1840) brought about a socio-cultural change.

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23 Since 1994, for example, the PA has presented Nablus as the economic capital of Palestine. Thus, in 2009, in his inception of the city’s 2009 Shopping Festival (*Mahrajān al-Tasawwuf*) - then, the PA initiative to rescue the city from its economic depression after its long siege by the Israeli army during the second Intifada (2000-2003) - the then Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, Dr. Salam Fayyad, referred to the city as the *economic capital of Palestine*. 
in the city that did not comply with an imagined universal course of modernity, in which the secular and the religious became polarised. Instead, the mid and late nineteenth century administrative reforms in the city had blurred the boundaries between the two - the religious and the secular. Therefore, these reforms had consequences for modernising Nablus but this was in a fashion that consolidated it as an urban locality with an Islamic habitus. As I discuss next, I suggest that these late nineteenth century changes had consequences for the emergence, during the first three decades of the twentieth century, of a modern male Islamic/Islamist field in the city. This field will support the emergence of the WPM as the discussion in this thesis will soon show.

2. The Making of Nablus a Modern Urbanity with an Islamic Habitus and the Emergence of the Modern Islamic-Islamist Field

According to Yazbak, prior to the Ottoman's administrative reform, Nablus’ local elite consisted of three distinct groups: the political-administrative; the qalamiyya, the socio-religious; the ʿilmiyya, and the mercantile; al-tujjār (1997, 73). As the reform instituted formal elections and education as a means to accessing administrative and religious positions, it compelled Nablus notables (aʿyān) to convert their socio-economic capital (in Bourdieu’s terms) into a religious one by qualifying their sons with formal education from al-Azhar. It also, in a reverse manner, compelled its influential Islamic scholars (ʿulama) to convert their religious capital into an economic one by using their lucrative religious positions to establish themselves in industries and commercial businesses. These ʿulama, then, had gradually moved to occupy positions in the economic and the political fields of the city, thus blurring the boundaries and distinction among these three types of socio-religious groups (1997, 73). In brief, these adaptations guaranteed these families’ historical continuity as privileged subjects by securing for their siblings lucrative public offices as government representatives and tax collectors (Kimmerling & Migdal 2003, 45).

These factors, as I suggested, endowed Nablus City with a socio-cultural setting conducive to the Islamic habitus. In fact, during the late nineteenth century, encouraged by its being less open to foreign cultural influence and therefore homogeneity, Sultan ʿAbd al-Hamid (1876-1909) aspired to Nablus vis-à-vis the ethnically and religiously diverse Jerusalem, for example, to advance his policy of “Pan-Islamism” (Muslih 1985, 75). Sultan ʿAbd al-Hamid’s policy contributed to consolidating the economic and the political privileges of Nablus’ notable families, whose remaining palaces, mansions, and gates, in Nablus old city, still bear witness to their past affluence.
Most importantly, these late nineteenth century administrative changes explain why many of the Nablus male Islamists have been sons of affluent merchants and business men in the city but also grandsons of former shaykhs and ʿulama.

Thus this is the story of the emergence of this modern Islamic-Islamist field, in the city. As since the beginning of the twentieth century, many Nabulsi ʿulama continued to study at al-Azhar, in Cairo. Like the previous discussion showed, these ʿulama have become influenced by the region’s Salafi reform movement, led by Mohammad ʿAbdo and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. In fact, evidence shows that during their studies at al-Azhar, many of these Nabulsi ʿulama had met Islamic scholars such as Mohammad ʿAbdo and al-Afghani and developed a close affinity with them (al-Dibʾi 2000, 45). Thus, following a Salafi reform line, most of the city’s ʿulama and scholars criticised city practices like visiting the tombs of the saints, smoking, and selling or drinking alcohol (al-Nimr 1975, 226-227); also, many of these Islamic scholars had established Islamic associations to spread Islamic education and curb immoral practices (ibid.).

By 1946-1947, the first Muslim Brothers (MBs) branch was established in Nablus, “which found appeal among its ʿulama and clergy of notable families” (Milton-Edwards 1999, 33). Hence after, MBs remained an essential part of the Islamist field in the city, albeit in different scales.25 According to Milton (1999), the Nablus MBs branch was small, and none of its leaders held a high-ranking position in the organisation in the East Bank. Yet their deep commitment to the principles of the MBs made them able to impact the city’s perspectives on religion and politics (1999, 64). In 1976, these committed men established the first West Bank Zakat committees, a quasi-government charitable organisation, which intended to help the poor women and children in the district of Nablus. The committees became a catalyst in spreading Islamist popular religiosity through its countrywide, Quran-memorisation centres. Also, since the late 1970s, MBs in the city, were also active through the Ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs (MOWARA); this was particularly the case because after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, MOWARA’s importance to the lives of Palestinians in the West Bank, “was maximized [as it was] West Bankers’ only outlet to the outside world” (Milton-Edwards 1999, 57).

In addition to the MBs, other Islamist political groups were also active and had some popular impact. During the 1950s-1960s, the Liberation Party (LP), whose origin was in the MBs, was also present. In contrast with the MBs’ individual reform strategy, the LP believed that targeting

24 See, for example, the case of Shaykh ʿAbbas al-Khammash (ibid.).
25 For example, after 1948, the MBs in the city could not compete with rising Pan-Arabism, a situation that had continued until the late 1970s. MBs had focused during those years on social reform through education. Nevertheless, since the late 1980s, several regional and local factors had made for the MBs’ gradual transformation into a popular national movement, both in the city as well as the West Bank.
the state was fundamental to changing the “entire World to Islam” (Cohen 1982, 314). In Nablus, LP members’ numbers were small, but had contributed to the Islamists’ myriad in the city, and to the Islamic revival during the 1970s and 1980s through Islamic charity. Also, there was al-Jihad al-Islami, a group, established in 1982.

Last, there was the Sufis, who historically made up an amorphous, far less organised group, compared to their counterparts in Cairo and Damascus. De Jong (1983) finds that, unlike Sufi orders in Egypt, which since the beginning of the nineteenth century were centrally authorised according to their specific names, the names of their counterparts in Palestine were neither “indicative of identical mystical doctrine or common organizational structure, but rather of a common spiritual lineage” (1983, 151). Further, Bliss (1912, 235) emphasised this lack of organisational cohesiveness by pointing out that the boundaries of Sufi orders in Syria and Palestine during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century were open, as their shaykhs could belong to more than one order at a time; while their lay-followers could share a common Sufi lodge (zāwiya) and attend each other’s meetings (ibid.). Likewise, Weismann’s observation that the development of al-Naqshbandiyya was not linear, and that at some of its retreat times, it became almost indistinguishable from any other tariqa (2003, 373), alludes to the historic amorphous character of the Sufi orders in Palestine. My interview with a Sufi man in the city consolidates these scholars’ observations about the Sufis in Palestine during the early twentieth century. My male Sufi interviewee observed that “Sufis today in Nablus are orphans, have no shaykh, no organisation, and no constant contact”.

Thus was the making in the city of the Islamic-Islamist field at the turn of the twentieth century, and its emergence thereafter. As the life stories discussed in the next chapters of this thesis show, many of the male figures in this field were supportive of women’s pious activities in the city, if not active catalysts in facilitating the turning of women’s pious activities into a piety movement - into a women’s religious field. Next, I discuss how the late Ottoman modernisation processes in the city had set off the modernisation of women by instituting women’s public education. I then discuss the modernisation of women’s education and mode of sociability during the decades that followed the end of the Ottoman rule, the decades of the British Mandate (1922-1948).

3. The Modernisation of Women’s Education and Mode of Sociability

3.1 The Modernisation of Women’s Education

Based on the Records of Nablus Shari’a Court 1893 (Sijillat Mahkamat Nablus al-Shari’iya for 1893), Yazbak (1997, 79) finds that the first government school for girls in Nablus City was
opened in 1873. Almost a decade later, by 1884, the number of girls in that school was only 100 (ibid.).

In comparison, by 1871, according to Yazbak, there were in Nablus City eight government schools for boys, with a total of 325 male students (ibid.).

Ottoman public education was divided into lower and high elementary and secondary stages. Girls would join the lower elementary stage at the age of six and complete it by 10; afterwards, they would join the advanced elementary stage at the age of 11 and complete it by the age of 14. Finally, they would move to the lower secondary stage and complete it by the age of 17.

During the British Mandate (1922-1948), modern education for both men and women expanded; for example, the total number of government schools in the country increased from 171 in 1919 to 514 in 1946 (al-Dabbagh 1990, 73). In the same period, women's enrolment in school education increased by 73.5%.

Evidence, however, shows that despite this expansion in the number of schools during the British Mandate, education in Palestine at the time was still limited to the upper-middle class and therefore was still far from being mass-based. This was even more so for women. For example, the percentage of female school enrolment to that of all students remained low (18.19%-22.7%). Further, women's enrolment in advanced secondary education was reported to be particularly low (Mathews and Akrawi 1949, 14). In addition, government education all through the British Mandate was not compulsory (ʿAbdo 2012, 844).

Further, drawing on some ethnographic data from the records of al-ʿAʿishiyya Girls' School in Nablus City at the time, we conclude that girls' education after the age of 14 faced difficulties and was perhaps mostly limited to the upper-middle class. For example, al-ʿAʿishiyya Annual report 1941-1942 expressed concern that a good percentage of girls in the sixth and seventh grades (15-16) dropped their final school year before the completion of their final year exam.

This is according to Salname-Vilayet Suriye 1302 A.H (Ottoman government yearbook: province of Syria 1886-1887 A.D). See Yazbak (1997, 79, 90).

This is according to Salname-Vilayet Suriye 1288 A.H (Ottoman government yearbook: province of Syria 1871-1872 A.D). See Yazbak (1997, 79, 90).

According to al-Dabbagh (ibid.), in 1919 a total of 2,243 girls were enrolled in schools. In 1946, this number increased to 16,506 (ibid). Hence a 73.5% increase in girls' education is concluded during the time.

According to al-Dabbagh (1990, 73-74), out of a total 19737 female and male students in 1925-1926, the total no. of girls was only 3591 (18, 19%). And out of a total of 42765 male and female students in 1935-1936, the total no. of girls was only 9712 (22.7%). Hence the 18, 19% - 22.7% increase in female education during the time.

In ʿAbdo (2012, 843).
Further, the content of *al-ʿA išiywa Annual report 1945-1946* shows the concerns of the Nabulsi school headmistress that girls were not performing well in school, and that they were, instead, actively involved in leisure social events (ʿAbdo 2012, 850). The report demands teachers to “forbid” their female pupils from attending evening gatherings (*sahrāt*) and reception days (*al-istiqbaḥāt*) and calls upon teachers to instead instil in their female pupils interest in reading (*muṭālaʿa*), music, sport, and scout activities (ibid.). The report also calls on teachers to inculcate in their female pupils an appreciation for virtue, obedience, and education (ibid.). These instructions by the school headmistress for teachers to develop girls’ individual leisure habits, such as reading and listening to music, indicates how modern education has already been fashioning Nabulsi women into modern aptitudes. These instructions also indicate the gap between a small Nabulsi women educated elite: their perspective on what makes a good female student and a future woman, and what was actually practised, preferred and accepted as such by the average Nabulsi families who sent their girls to schools at the time.

### 3.2. The Modernisation of Women’s Sociability Modes

Born in 1942, famous Palestinian and Nabulsi novelist, Sahar Khalifa, described in her unpublished biography how, in 1959, at the age of 17, she and her female schoolmates started smoking Dunhill. They had watched Hollywood movies at one of the cinemas in the city, and were fascinated by the character of one of the female movie stars, who was a smoker of that international cigarette brand. Even though, later on, novelist Khalifa renounces smoking as unhealthy and potentially fatal, the seduction that the writer describes her classmates and herself were succumbed to by the image of the movie star indulging in the pleasure of smoking - a behaviour which as yet was considered, even in the West, a man’s practice - indicates the type of modern forces that now were entering the city and changing women’s identities into modern ones. It also indicates that through the magic of the screen (i.e. mass media), women, even in a relatively small locality such as Nablus, often characterised as traditional and conservative, were not immune from global cultural effects. That was the effect of the global culture of the 1960s, which was radically shaping Western women on the other side of the globe.

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31 For example, the report shows that after *khīṭm* al-Quran (the memorisation of the Quran in full), some 19.35-59% of girls in the seventh grade dropped out of school, compared to some 24.32%-35.48% in the lower sixth and 0% in the lower fifth (see ibid.).

32 This is in the archives of the Women Study Centre in Nablus City.
Moreover, born more than 20 years earlier (1917-1919), in her biography, *A mountainous journey*, the famous Palestinian and Nabulsi poet Fadwa Tuqan takes us back earlier and deeper into the cultural milieu that encompassed women’s lives in Nablus City during the early decades of the twentieth century. The ethnographic history that the poet’s biography reveals conveys discourses of sociability, leisure and pleasure that dominated women’s lives at the time. It also speaks to the kind of modern institutions (e.g. government schools) that started to cut across the traditional power of the family, kinship, and male authority (i.e. patriarchy). On that, poet Tuqan’s biography provides sufficient ethnography of the kind of power relations and the social discourses in which the lives of women of the upper-middle and the popular classes were caught up in, particularly during the first three decades of the twentieth century.

Put together, the ethnographic history conveyed in those two biographies of poet Tuqan and novelist Khalifa speaks to the kind of modernisation processes that were shaping women’s subjectivities during the first half of the twentieth century, especially, modern mass education and mass media, the subject of this section of the chapter.

Poet Fadwa Tuqan’s biography shows that she lived in a large extended family of more than 10. At the age of six (i.e. 1923), she went to one of Nablus’ elementary schools, from where, in 1928, she took her elementary certificate; at the age of 12, her brother Yusuf made her drop out of school and forced her to the confinement of the home as a punishment for being followed by a young man on her way back from school. For her, that was a tragic event that had left her with a deep feeling of injustice for the rest of her life.

Despite this, Tuqan vividly describes the joy and the pleasures she, and the other women in her family, derived from visiting the public bath and from going to the mosque for the *ʿĪd* (feast) prayer. She also vividly describes the joy she experienced from accompanying her female mate-neighbour to picnics and religious celebrations. As an upper-middle class woman, her mother was not allowed to cross the short distance between her home in the old city and those leisure sites adjacent to it. Only women of the popular class in the city used to seek entertainment in these places. This observation echoes Flieschmann (2003, 28), whose research and oral history interviews made her conclude that “women of upper and middle-class [during the early twentieth century] were more secluded than rural and poorer women”.

Tuqan’s biography thus shows that at the turn of the century, some women in the city had their own sociability spaces; in these spaces women used to get together to celebrate such occasions.

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33 There was no official document indicating poet Fadwa Tuqan’s exact year of birth. But based on the assessment of her older family members, it was agreed that her year of birth was between 1917-1919 (Tuqan 1985, 13).
as the spring feast (ʿĪd al-Nayrūz) by taking outdoor picnics to a city site, which was rich with water springs, trees and vegetation.\(^{34}\)

Additionally, Tuqan’s biography shows that like other women in other Islamic and Arab urbanities, women’s sociability in Nablus City during the first two decades of the twentieth century centred on religious occasions, such as the birthday of the Prophet Mohammad (al-Mawlid al-Nabwī), the pilgrimage (al-hajj), and the month of Ramadan. It also centred on celebrating family-related occasions, such as weddings, the birth of children, the circumcision of male children, children’s graduation from elementary school (al-kuttāb) and children’s memorisation of the full body of the Quran (khitm al-Quran).

Further, Tuqan’s biographic ethnography partially speaks to Thompson (2003). In her disagreement that patriarchy as a cultural and a social system in Muslim societies was indicated in the physical seclusion of women to the boundaries of their homes, based on Peirce (1993) - The imperial harem: women and sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire - Thompson argues that an egalitarian segregation existed in practice more than seclusion (2003, 56). This was indicated, according to her, in that urban elite women remained active in business, trade, and charities; and that poor women worked outside their homes as peddlers, bathhouse attendants, servants, and so on (ibid.). Apparently, the poet, specifically, conveys upper-middle class women’s confinement to the sphere of their homes at the turn of the century; and she conveys males as the guardians of their female kin’s seclusion. Thompson’s argument only partially applies to women in the context of Nablus. In fact, even at this early stage of the twentieth century, so to speak, some of the poet’s biography alludes to a double-edged patriarchy. This was indicated, for example, by the conflicting powers of two of her brothers: Yusuf, who confined her to the seclusion of the home at the age of 12 as a punishment for being pursued by a young man on her way back home from school; and Ibrahim (Ibrahim Tuqan, also a famous Nabulsi poet), who helped her transcend her enforced physical confinement by teaching her to create poetry and enabling her creativity. This speaks to Baxter’s notion of patriarchy, in the Palestinian society, not as a fixed standard “code” but as an overall “sweeping honour ideology” (2007, 741), whereby male authority over his female kin takes fluid forms, including “responsibility, support, [and] voluntary compliance” (ibid.).\(^{35}\) Further, these leisure discourses, which legitimised popular

\(^{34}\) The water springs at the site were channelled in modern water pipes and the location now is fully inhabited.

\(^{35}\) Baxter argues that in the Palestinian society “honour ideology” is a more useful concept than patriarchy. This is because patriarchy suggests a fixed standard “code”, while honour suggests a “sweeping ideology” (2007, 741), which has fluid manifestations and expressions. Examples of these expressions are “responsibility, support, [and] voluntary compliance” (ibid.).
women’s presence in the public place but denied upper-middle class women their access to this place, were to undergo some changes during the British Mandate (1922-1948) and during the decades after (1950s-1960s). To these changes, we now turn.

3.3. Mass Media and the Modernisation of Women During and After the British Mandate

Prior to the British Mandate, women’s dress was consisted of millāya, a three-part dress that covered the women’s entire body, including face, arms and palms. Based on oral history interviews with both Christian and Muslim women, Fleischmann finds that “up until the first decades of the twentieth century, Christian as well as Muslim women had often veiled and dressed modestly” (2003, 28). But Zaghlul (2009a) discusses multiple changes since the British Mandate (1922-1948). According to Zaghlul, during the British Mandate, women started to replace the ankle-length millāya, including the waist-length head cover, with a knee-length coat (al- kāb), and a transparent black veil that only covered the face (ibid.). Also, some upper-middle class women started to unveil and put on European dress. Moreover, some Nabulsi women would now, on their own, travel to Palestinian coastal cities (e.g. Jaffa) for different reasons, including a medical consultation\(^\text{36}\), or even a haircut.\(^\text{37}\)

In addition, modern mass media, such as the cinema, was to henceforth start fashioning new subjectivities. According to Zaghlul (2009b), two small cinema locations were established in the city of Nablus during the late 1930s. They showed both Arabic-Egyptian and foreign movies ( aflām ajnabiyya). Henceforth, Arabic cinema did not only start playing a major role in Nabulsi people’s leisure and sociality modes, but it also started shaping their cultural preference and taste. Thus, for example, many people in the city started naming their children, stores, and businesses, after famous actors, such as the Egyptian singers Asmahan and Laila Murad, and actresses Faten Hamama and Mariam Fakhr al-Din.

Further, since the 1940s, women too had access to the cinema as a modern public space of leisure in the city. For example, according to Zaghlul (ibid.), women especially liked tragedy movies. When a woman recommended a movie to a neighbour, or another fellow woman, she would often describe the movie as one that makes a person “cry badly” (bimawwett min al-buka). Also, in their reception days, women would, like al-ḥakawātī (a storyteller), “narrate to their fellow women the movies’ events” (ibid.).

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\(^{36}\) For example, Rihan (992) reports that the famous Nabulsi charity activist, Hajja ʿAndalib al-ʿAmad (1899- 1979), travelled to Jaffa together with her female Nabulsi sewing teacher, at the beginning of the 1930s, for a medical consultation that concerned breast cancer (992, 131).

\(^{37}\) This is based on a conversation with a 75-year-old Nabulsi woman.
In addition, as the biography of the Nabulsi novelist Sahar Khalifa touches upon, the cinema started at the time shaping some women’s practices. Thus, modelling themselves on famous foreign female stars, many women in the city, including the writer, started smoking and having their hair cut short.

Along with the cinema, the women’s reception day (al-istiqbāl) was a dominant practice during the British Mandate. It also continued and flourished during the 1950s and 1960s. The reception day (al-istiqbāl) was a women’s middle and upper-middle class “structured visiting practice” (Benedict 1974). It would later become one of the main practices that the WPM was critical of.

Like many other urbanities in the Levine (e.g. Aleppo and Damascus), on a particular day of the month, an upper-middle, or middle-class Nabulsi woman would receive, cherish and entertain her female relatives, friends, and acquaintances at her home. During the occasion, through hospitality and entertainment modes, women would display to each other their middle-class status and taste. To entertain the guests, it was not uncommon for Nabulsi women during these istiqbāl occasions to play the ʿoud, sing songs, or, as has just been discussed, retell cinema stories they have watched at the cinema house in the city.

These sociability modes and discourses of women in Nablus City echo other women’s practices in the Levine. In his book, Under the jasmine trees: music and modernity in contemporary Syria, Jonathan Shannon observes that from around the mid-nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth, parallel to all-men gatherings, women used to hold their own all-women events, such as morning women’s gatherings (subhiyyat nisa), evening gatherings (al-sahra), the adornment of the bride on her wedding night (talbisa), and women’s reception days (al-istiqbālāt) (2006, 141). As evidenced from oral and document sources (e.g. the school report, discussed above), Nablus had similar women’s occasions and practices.

3.4. Faster Modernisation of Women’s Sociability Modes since the Late 1950s-1960s

Zaghlul (2009b) believes that although women unveiling in Nablus started during the British Mandate, this modernisation did not pick up pace until the mid-1960s. The rise of the television,
he asserts, played an important role in altering and modernising people’s values and traditional codes. He attributes growing tolerance for the mixing of the sexes, dress fashion and haircuts to the influence of the television; women now do not only unveil but also wear European dress, including tight and short (mini) clothes, and cut their hair short; a famous haircut was called le-garcon. He adds that although they coincided with and continued after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank in 1967, these changes preceded the Israeli occupation.

I conclude that it cannot be anything but a curious and telling juncture to which Zaghlul’s analysis leads us to. Zaghlul’s analysis leads us to infer a connection between the Western civil right, youth, and counter cultures of the mid-1960s (with its dramatic change of the gender, racial and sexual norms, that up to then, governed the lives of women, blacks and youth, in Western society) and between the fast change in the norms that during the same period governed women’s dress, hair styles, sociability and leisure modes in Nablus City.

This indicates that global cultural discourses pertinent to women and cultural processes (e.g. of the 1960s) can still have the power to impact not only women in large Arab capital cities, such as Cairo, Beirut or Damascus, but that they also have the power to alter discourses in even relatively small urban localities, such as that of the city of Nablus. Such an influence was possible through modern mass media such as the cinema and the television.

Further, I suggest that it is even more telling to note that the late 1960s was the earliest time, which my empirical investigation of the emergence of modern da’wa in Nablus could trace back to; this was the early da’wa activity of Dāʿiya Khawla, who studied at the University of Damascus in the mid-1960s. Women who attended Dāʿiya Khawla’s piety class during the 1970s remember her jeering at herself in how she even shortened her above-knee-length dress to make it reflect the prevailing style of the time - the mini-dress.

Further, by the 1970s, other changes took place. The location of sociability started to gradually shift from the home to public places. In the past, most of these celebrations took place in private homes. But since the early 1970s, as an indication of taste and social distinction, Nablus residents started to celebrate these occasions in newly-opened public halls. It is in the tension surrounding Nablus residents’ gradual celebration of private occasions in newly-opened, public places, that some of the moral claims of the early dāʿiyāt can be explained. Dāʿiyāt have not been critical of the principle of celebration as such and have been especially supportive of celebrating family-related occasions, such as those, which the Prophet Mohammad recommended that fellow Muslims practice during and before the month of Ramadan. However, dāʿiyāt have been quite critical of how other private family occasions have gradually turned into public events, in which the gender segregation code has been broken and the mixing of the sexes normalised.
Weddings have been the earliest of such sociability venues to elicit dāʾiyāt’s criticism. During weddings, the sex segregation code is extensively loosened: in her lure, the bride is unveiled; she is often dressed in a modern wedding dress that uncovers parts of her body; a male music band is present; a male photographer photographs and/or videotapes the occasion; and young single women, in fashionable, non-Islamic dresses, mingle with close and distant male family member and friends. In addition, weddings are numerous, especially during the summer.

As for consumption, although the city has always been a trade centre, with a local market that has thrived with local goods, now, and since the mid-1990s, with much more diverse shopping and leisure options, appealing to wider social groups of its residents, a hybrid consumption culture⁴⁰ has been in the making.

Since the mid-1990s, open trade with China, as well as other Arab countries, like Syria and Lebanon, has continued to make Nablus market a vibrant place, where modern and traditional commodities have been traded and consumed. During the 1970s-1980s, one could count on one hand the number of stores selling women’s clothes and beauty products, which mostly appealed to upper and middle-class women’s taste. In the 1990s, these shops proliferated. Large wholesale stores, selling clothing, home furniture, and kitchen appliances also became numerous. Fast-food places, selling hamburgers, pizzas, and American fried chicken, as well as small frozen food stores, became numerous. The number of restaurants and small cafes and other types of restaurants also grew.

Since the mid-1990s, there has also been a concurrent boom in the construction and housing sector. On the outskirts of the city, retreats with swimming pools were established. Two multi-storey shopping malls were founded in 2000 and 2007; the latest, located in the city’s main square. With a modern, large theatre, which runs Hollywood’s latest award-winning movies, several times during the day, the new shopping mall is as if intended at adding some modern urban glimmer to both the city’s landscape, and the shopping experience of its inhabitants. Further, the prospect of peace that the Oslo agreement⁴¹ promised, loans from banks and non-governmental organisations, and private investments expanded the city’s residential space in all directions. Multi-storey buildings, housing 30 to 60 families proliferated. And there has been a visible residents’ mobility, especially from Nablus old city to new-built neighborhoods at the Northern and Western slopes of the city.

To sum up, as just stated, Nablus City has always been a trade centre, with a local market that has thrived with local goods. But now, and since the mid-1990s, with much more diverse

⁴⁰ A hybrid consumption culture that combines both modern and traditional patterns of leisure and consumption.
⁴¹ The Oslo agreement refers to the 1994 Palestinian-Israeli peace agreement.
shopping and leisure options, appealing to wider social groups of its residents, a hybrid (traditional and modern; global and local) consumption culture has been in the making. There emerged in the city an out-of-home leisure and sociability culture. In addition to celebrating weddings and graduation parties (both high school and university), this out-of-home leisure and sociability culture includes an eating-out and travel-overseas culture. Three decades ago, such out-of-home leisure and socialising options were only available to the Nablus’ middle and upper-middle class, mostly abroad.

Further, I suggest that it has been in the gender implications of these changes in the sociability, leisure, and consumption modes, facilitated by free trade, in Nablus City, in which one can trace and anchor the genealogy and the continuation of the moral claims of the WPM. For, these changes in the mode of sociability and leisure opportunities had increased women’s public visibility and had increased the risk for the violation of the sex segregation code.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, in the previous discussion I have shown the three powers in which women’s lives in Nablus City were caught up in during the first six decades of the twentieth century. I have shown how late nineteenth century administrative reform consolidated Nablus as an urbanity with an Islamic habitus. I have shown how these developments had consequences for the emergence, during the first three decades of the twentieth century, of a modern male Islamic/Islamist field in the city, which, in its terms, was supportive of the WPM.

Further, I have discussed how modern education and mass media started creating new subjectivities. In the past, as section two in this chapter has shown, Nabulsi men were looking up to Arab capital cities such as Cairo and Damascus to receive religious education. Now, men look up to almost the same Arab capital cities (e.g. Cairo and Beirut) to watch the latest foreign and Arab movies (Zaghlul 2009b). As for women, we have shown how the new mass media started creating new women’s desires and needs. I have shown how women started looking to acquire and consume new things: an evening in the cinema, smoking, a modern haircut, fashionable clothes, or study at a university abroad.

I suggest that it has been in the tension between, on the one hand, a global Western model of womanhood, which the new mass media started fashioning some Nabulsi women into, and, on the other, women’s Islamic habitus, that we start to see the first beginnings of the WPM in the late 1950s and 1960s. That is, it was in the context of these modernisation and social changes to the city, which grew at a faster pace during the post-colonial era (1950s-1960s), that we start to see the emergence of the women’s da’wa field through the agency of the “first cohort” of the WPM (Dāʿiyāt Amal, Khawla, and Nadwa), the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter Three: From Religious Habitus to Religious Field: the Making of the WPM Between the Sufi Dāʿiyāt of Damascus and the Salafi ‘Ulama of Cairo

She was an artist by nature, had a supreme voice, knowledge, power of vision (ruʿya), was generous, affectionate, and had her own students.

Dāʿiya Nadwa’s account of Ḥajja Naziha (b. 1920).

That was in Jerusalem, on a day of celebration, in 1964. I was in my out of al-Aqsa mosque when I noticed a group of young women in a state of flux. Then, there, I saw her: a woman seated on a big chair. Her face was full of divine light (nūr Ilāhī). She started giving a lesson on divine love. And I started creeping amongst the women crowd until I was very close to her. She took notice of me, commended my intelligence, and, then, told the other women: ‘Take this sister of yours to your religious sessions (jalāsāt al-ʿilm) because her face is full of divine light (nūr Ilāhī)’. I was delighted. I was the youngest in the group. And this was my first time to see my Syrian shaykha and my first beginning on the road of God (ṭarīq al-ṭasawwuf).

Dāʿiya Nadwa (b. 1930).

Introduction

When I started my empirical investigation of WDM in Nablus City, the strong impression I had then was that its history in the city goes back to the early 1970s. But then I learned from the two accounts above that its history goes back to the mid-1960s, and perhaps to the mid-1950s. A 75-year-old woman Islamist referred to the fierce competition that had developed in the mid-1970s between the first generation of wāʿiẓāt (women preachers), graduates of the faculty of shariʿa, at the University of Jordan, first ever employed by the Ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs (MOWARA), and the city’s traditional, old preachers, often known as Mawlid readers.43 They were both claiming the mosque as their own exclusive floor. Rather than dismissing this traditional form of piety because it does not fit into my frame of what constitutes daʿwa, I utilised its investigation to unfold the current entangled realm of WDM, in the city, by reaching out to the

42 A wāʿiẓāt (pl. wāʿiẓāt) is a female preacher who is hired by MOWARA to preach to women several times during the week. A wāʿiẓa usually has formal education in Islamic Law. In contrast, a dāʿiya practises daʿwa voluntarily, without being paid, and might or might not have formal education in Islamic law.

43 Mawlid, al-Mawlid, or al-Mawlid al-Nabawi refers to the occasion of the birth of the Prophet Mohammad (See footnote 16 and 17). Mawlid reading has been a contested subject, with Sufis embracing the practice and Salafis criticising it as a heresy that has no foundation in either the shariʿa or the Sunna. This contestation explains the fierce competition between the traditional women Mawlid readers and the new women preachers or wāʿiẓāt, which the 75-year-old woman Islamist referred to above.
various sources that had since then fed into it. In this sense, I have pursued a “strategy of perception that is open-ended and concrete; whose dialectic seeks, not simplification and reduction to basic concepts, but elaboration and increasing complexity” (Friedlander 1975).44

The outcome was highlighting the distinctive resources that had since then fed into the WDM, often, inadequately, conceptualised as the mere outcome of MBs’ politics. On the contrary, as the oral history interviews conducted for this research show, Sufi women in the city have been preaching to women since the mid-1950s, if not earlier. It becomes evident that MBs’ influence on the emergence of the WDM, both in terms of precedence and scale, is secondary compared to that of the Sufis’. Further, the analysis also shows that, despite some male-guided da’wa beginnings, it was through the agency of some female da’īyat from Nablus City and their cumulated da’wa effects that a women’s piety field, in the city, eventually emerged.

This chapter discusses the history of the current WPM in Nablus City since the mid-1950s, based, in addition to the semi-structured interviews I conducted during the summer of 2010 and 2011, on the oral history accounts of three of its early da’īyat: Dā’īyat Amal (Umm Ibrahim), Khawla and Nadwa.

Since I argued, in the theoretical framework chapter, that the WPM is a social field, in this chapter I discuss the emergence of this field in practice theory terms. I take the notion of field, habitus and practice as a conceptual framework to highlight the dynamics of this emergence by bringing to light how these women da’īyat’s habitus and the local and regional Islamist fields were present in the emergence of that movement. I also use Ortner’s insights on the politics of legitimisation of human action, discussed in chapter one, to further bring to light what stakes had motivated these women da’īyat to embark on da’wa, and therefore highlight their agency in the creation of da’wa as a women’s social field.

Thus, although I use Bourdieu’s notion of habitus to account for the micro-level, family formative experiences, in the making of these women dāʿīyat into pious subjects and in the making of the WPM as a social field, my use of the term does not indicate that I suggest these women’s family formative experiences, or habitus, had made them “blindly” internalise Islamic norms or values. Rather, in line with Ortner’s practice theory approach, I argue that these women’s piety was after their own socially embedded choice and agency.

Rey summarises Bourdieu’s notion of a social field as a “a competitive arena of social relations in which agents and institutions struggle over the production, acquisition and control of forms of capital particular to the field in question” (2004, 332). As we discussed in chapter one, Bourdieu (1977, 22) defines habitus as “systems of durable, transposable, dispositions”, which result from

44 In Lummis (1988, 135).
the “homogeneity of the conditions of existence” (1977, 80); that is from having gone through “similar formative experiences, such as family structure, quality and degree of education, and form of religion” (Rely 2004, 335). Practice is the result of the encounter between the habitus and the field. The relationship of the habitus and the field is of “ontological confrontations” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 127). That is the field gives the habitus its content while the habitus establishes the field as meaningful to individuals (ibid.). The habitus, thus, while produced by the field, can - through practice - restructure or change the field, and vice versa.

It is one of the aims of this chapter to show how this dynamic took place in the making of the WDM. The chapter thus intends to highlight the history of the WDM, not as a sequence of events, but as an accumulated process, where the confrontational relation of women dâʿiyyāt’s habitus with the city’s and region’s Islamist fields and subfields engendered this process dynamic.

Each life history highlights an encounter with a different field, and therefore highlights the incorporation of different resources and the production of different outcomes, with the result of diversifying the emerged field. Dâʿiya Amal’s encounter was with the Salafi subfield of Cairo, the MBs’ of Amman and the West Bank, and the Sufis’ of Jerusalem, which made for a Salafi-Sufi network. Dâʿiya Khawla’s was with the Sufi-Salafi field of Damascus, which made for a Sufi-Salafi network. Finally, the encounter of Dâʿiya Nadwa was with the Sufi fields of Nablus and that of Damascus, which made for eclectic Islamist practices.

Part one of this section starts with the account of Dâʿiya Amal and the making of her mid-1980s network; while parts two and three inquire retrospectively into the history of WDM during the 1950s and 1960s through the accounts of Dâʿiya Khawla and Dâʿiya Nadwa. Each life history discusses these three dâʿiyyāt’s family formative experiences, encounters with the different Islamist fields and subfields, and their particular form of agency.

Research limitations made us focus on Dâʿiya Khawla’s network more than on her personal life history, compared to Dâʿiya Amal and Dâʿiya Nadwa. This was because, while I obtained the accounts of the latter through in-depth interviewing, I only managed to construct the account of Dâʿiya Khawla by interviewing current dâʿiyyāt and former participants in her Sufi Naqshbandi network. These interviews were especially informative, as almost every dâʿiya I interviewed for this research took part at one point in her life in Dâʿiya Khawla’s piety network, and, therefore, had direct contact with her.
1. Dāʿiya Amal and the Making of a Salafi-Sufi Network

Dāʿiya Amal (Umm Ibrahim) is a well known dāʿiya in the city. The daʿwa network she started in the early 1980s is known after her name as jamāʿat Umm Ibrahim (the group of Umm Ibrahim). Dāʿiya Amal grew up in a family, which believed its lineage went back to the house of the prophet. Her belief that she was from the “spiritual elite” that God had chosen to spread his words, inspired her devoted daʿwa activities since the 1980s. A divine attraction and a “rapture” that she had experienced in 1983, while in pilgrimage to Mecca, confirmed this perception of herself as one from the chosen. Further, in addition to her family’s formative experiences, which endowed her with an early proclivity - habitus - for Islamic piety, Dāʿiya Amal’s marriage opened to her a myriad of opportunities that helped her realise a potential compatible with her religious habitus. Thus, it was through her marriage that her encounter with the local and regional Islamist fields and subfields took place. In addition, it was through her agency utilising the resources in her husband’s Cairo Salafi links and Jerusalem’s Sufi ones that she managed to turn into a dāʿiya, with a Salafi-Sufi orientation. The following is a detailed discussion of these aspects of Dāʿiya Amal’s life story.

1.1. Family Formative Experiences and the Making of an Islamic Habitus

Dāʿiya Amal was born in Nablus to a middle-class family of an aristocratic origin. Her father was a pious man with a strong passion for learning, books and Arabic language. It is no wonder thus that he spent his lifelong career as an Arabic language teacher, and until his retirement, he was a district inspector of school libraries at the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Nablus City.

Her family believed that its lineage went back to the house of the Prophet Mohammad. Her mother and aunt used to frequently practice dhikr - a spiritual Sufi practice of repetitively and frequently mentioning God’s name aiming at purifying one’s heart from what is not God - even while preparing a meal, or doing house chores. Her father was a pious man with a passion for books and learning and would often suggest that she read, from the library they had at home, different books in preparation for evening discussions. Her father also had a passion for Arabic language - a passion often combined with Islamic piety as Arabic is the language of the Quran - which was indicated in his life career as a school teacher. During my interview with her, she, frequently, more than any other dāʿiya I interviewed used classical Arabic to express herself, which suggests that she had acquired that disposition for the Arabic language from her father. In contrast to what was socially dominant or accepted, for her father, an ideal young woman would commit to an Islamic dress code, even if partially. Thus, unlike most female students in her class, during the 1960s, the teenaged Amal would wear a long school gown and “thick socks” that her father used to bring from Damascus. By the age of 14, the teenaged Amal had accepted
the Islamic dress code as a value, and would inscribe it into her body, by voluntarily putting on the veil. She also started, at the age of 14, attending the da’wa class of Dā’iyya Khawla, which used to take place every Thursday, at a private house in the city.

Further, as she tamed herself and her body into behaving politely, school teachers and her headmistress - who, as it seems, perceived the mode of dress as constitutive of the norm politeness - greatly rewarded Dā’iyya Amal’s inclination for piety. Her notable family of origin and beauty were other assets that contributed to this respect. In other words, the three elements that garnered her respect and status at school: her notable family of origin, her reserved well-behaved manners and her beauty contributed to the making of her religious habitus. Thus were some examples of the family and socio-cultural formative experiences that contributed to the making of Dā’iyya Amal’s religious habitus, whose imminent encounter with the local and regional Islamic/Islamist fields, through her marriage, would soon turn her into an active agent in the making of a women’s da’wa field in the city.

1.2. Marriage, Active Enactment or Passive Recipient of Norms, the Embodied Agency of Dā’iyya Amal

Despite its aristocratic status, when Dā’iyya Amal graduated from high school in 1972, her family did not have the sufficient financial resources to pay for her university education. She had seven brothers and one sister, and her father was already sponsoring two of her brothers’ high education abroad, when she graduated from high school. University education was not available in the West Bank then. She applied to the Ramallah teacher training college, but was only accepted on the reserve list, as her point average was high but not high enough to grant her unconditional acceptance. Eventually, none of those accepted to the college dropped the college acceptance offer, and Dā’iyya Amal lost her chance to study at the community college. She then, with the assistance of her father, attempted to join the University of Jordan to study English literature or Islamic Law (shari’a), but was told that her application was late for the year and that she could only apply the year after. Thus was the sad end of her quest for high education.

Soon after, she was engaged, and in two months got married to a Nabulsi, an engineer from a reverent well-to-do family. Her mother-in-law, who was a close friend of her former high school headmistress, asked the latter to recommend her a beautiful, well-behaved and of a decent family, woman, for her son to marry. The headmistress proposed her. Talking about her early encounter with her fiancé, then, she said,
From the beginning of our engagement, my husband’s conditions were that I commit to the Islamic dress (libās sharʿī) and to the study of Islamic law, or shariʿa (ʿilm). 45

Dāʿiya Amal, then, would wear the Islamic dress in the morning just after her wedding, in early 1973, as she was leaving Nablus for Jordan for a honeymoon in Cairo. With a sense of excitement, Dāʿiya Amal recalled how she had two Islamic dresses (jilbāb), tailor-made, for her, as there were no shops selling them in the city; and in the same sense of excitement, she added that at the book exhibition in Cairo, in 1973, many journalists pursued her for interviews asking if “somebody had forced her] to put on the Islamic dress, as it was not usual for women to wear the jilbāb then”. Her answer was that “nobody forced [her] to put on the Islamic dress”.

A liberal feminist interpretation of Dāʿiya Amal’s life story would interpret these two developments in her life course - her inability to pursue university education and her arranged marriage afterwards, at the age of 18 - as an outcome of class inequality, since her family’s limited economic resources did not allow her to realise her individual potential through higher education. In addition, it would explain her commitment to Islamic piety, following her husband’s conditions at the outset of their engagement, that she commit to the Islamic dress and to the study of Islamic law (ʿilm), as a case of “thick acquiescence” (Scott 1990), 46 where she is a “willing partner in the fabric of [her] domination” (Dowding 2006, 137), and an “acquiescent” in her subordination (Luke 2005). 47 In brief, in liberal feminist terms, Dāʿiya Amal’s wholehearted acceptance of her husband’s conditions to commit to the Islamic mode of life is a case of “false consciousness”.

Nevertheless, one can interpret Dāʿiya Amal’s life course after marriage as one that sustains Mahmood’s (2005) critique of a liberal feminist conceptualisation of women’s actions in terms of resistance and subordination and a universal meaning of agency. Mahmood argues that a universal meaning of agency cannot be assumed a priori but has to be obtained as a “historically and culturally” specific type of agency from within the “discourses” and “structures of subordination” that create it (2005, 14-15). For example, let us discuss further how Dāʿiya Amal responded to her husband’s condition that she “commit to the Islamic dress (libās sharʿī) and to the study of shariʿa (ʿilm)”. Even though Dāʿiya Amal had the veil on since she was 14, her narration of that transformation in her body appearance by committing to a full Islamic dress code, “in the morning just after [her] wedding, in her way from the West Bank to Jordan to a honeymoon in Cairo”, indicates the excitement of having done something unfamiliar and had accomplished a mission. Thus, she says that, “because there were no shops selling Islamic

45 During the interview, Dāʿiya Amal referred to ʿilm (science) as the study of the interpretation of both the Quran and the hadith (Prophet Mohammad’s sayings).
46 In Dowding (2006, 137).
dress (jilbāb), in the city, [she] had a tailor make her two of those”; and because it was strange and unusual to see a woman wearing the Islamic dress, even in a large Islamic city like Cairo “many journalists, at the 1973 book exhibition, pursued [her] for interviews, asking if somebody had forced [her] to wear this dress”. Her answer was in the negative, indicating that by putting on the full Islamic dress, through her body, Dāʿiya Amal had acted on the world to establish herself as a Muslim woman and indicating that she was active in the incorporation of the Islamic dress code into her being rather than being a mere recipient of this code. Hence the “specific form of agency” in this part of Dāʿiya Amal’s life story which was an embodied one. This embodied agency speaks to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of embodiment as “the fundamental synthesizing agency” (1962, 234) and speaks of the body as the synthesizing agent that incorporates, improvises, and innovates the world (ibid.). This embodied agency also stands as an example of the “specific form of agency” that Mahmood (2005) believes ethnographers should look for in their study of the agency of non-Western women.

Further, one can interpret Dāʿiya Amal’s excitement and confidence at adopting the Islamic dress as indication of her taking piety as act of “freedom and self governance”, a “critique” (Foucault 1997a), and a “praxis” (Ortner 1989). Thus her adoption of the Islamic dress, among other pious practices that she would embark on later, had made her start reformulating her relationships to herself, husband, mother-in-law, and other women, in the city.

Further, as we can see next, Dāʿiya Amal’s marriage had opened up to her a myriad of opportunities that helped her realise through her husband’s Islamist networks, a potential; compatible with her religious habitus, and her choice to adopt piety as a “mindset”, and establish herself as a pious “virtuoso”.

1.3. Encountering the Regional and the Local Islamic/Islamist Fields: Utilising the Salafi Resources

The couple spent their 45-day honeymoon in Cairo among the ‘ulama, including: Abu Ishaq al-Hwaini, Mohammad Najib al-Muti’i, ʿAbd al-Hamid Kishk, and Dāʿiya Zainab, an Egyptian female physician, whom Dāʿiya Amal commended as a scholar in Prophet Mohmmad’s sayings (ʿālima fi al-hadith). The couple also visited al-Azhar and for hours listened to its ‘ulama, lecturing on various Islamic subjects.

Later, in the 1980s, they would meet the Syrians Shaykh Mohammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani and Saʿīd al-Arna ‘ūt, in addition to the Jordanian Ahmad Nofal, a professor of Islamic law at the University of Jordan. “They were all of high moral conduct”, according to her. Dāʿiya Amal took

pride in the fact that it was her husband who during the 1980s made Abu Ishaq al-Hwaini, the famous Egyptian scholar of hadith (mentioned above), meet his famous Syrian rival Shaykh Mohammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani. She recalled that as a result of this meeting, the former had spent two months in Jordan with Shaykh Albani to learn about Albani’s school of studying the hadith. Later, also, Dā’iya Amal recalled her frequent visits with her husband to many of these Salafi scholars and indicated the continuity over the years of a genuine personal affinity with them and their families. During these visits, she continued to learn about various schools in the interpretation of the hadith- a learning she would later incorporate into her in-group teachings.

1.4. Da‘wa as a Critique and a Praxis: Becoming a Sufi Subject, the Mystic Call

It was only 10 years later that Dā’iya Amal’s Islamic piety took a deeper inward turn making her believe she was from the “spiritual elite”, whom God had chosen to spread his words. In effect, she started reaching out to other women in the city through her da‘wa activities. Dā’iya Amal recalled that in 1983, while in pilgrimage to Mecca, she had experienced a “deep spiritual feeling of faith (nafṣa rūḥāniyya ‘azīma min al-īmān). In Sufi terms, Dā’iya Amal had experienced a “rapture” or “divine attraction” (Weismann 2001, 30). Dā’iya Amal interpreted this high spiritual experience as a divine call for her to follow the mystic path of God. Hence after, therefore, she “pledged that she would never get astray but would commit to spread the word of God at all times”. She then pleaded for mystic guidance from Dā’iya Khawla, who requested that she join other women in her da‘wa group in order to receive guidance. Since Dā’iya Amal had a vision of herself as one from the spiritual elite, she refused Dā’iya Khawla’s request. After that, Shaykh Hashim al-Baghdadi, then, Shaykh al-tariqa al-Qadiriyya, in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, became her alternative mystic guide. Dā’iya Amal recalled that, under the guidance of Shaykh Baghdadi, she “extensively started studying the interpretation of the Quran”, while her husband brought reference books that she “studied on her own”. After some time, she recalled Shaykh Baghdadi informing her that she was “ready for da‘wa and that she would be committing a sin if she continued to hold onto her knowledge, not giving it back to others”.

1.5. Da‘wa as a Critique and a Praxis: From the Privacy of the Interior to Da‘wa: Exteriorising the Interior and Restructuring the Local Islamic/Islamist Field

Following Shaykh Baghdadi’s warning that she “would commit a sin if she holds her knowledge from others”; Dā’iya Amal started a small study group, which was the core of her da‘wa network. They were four close friends - the wives of her husband’s friends. Each of them invited to the lesson, a relative, a neighbour or a friend, until they were 14. Hence after, the lesson was divided into public and private ones. The private study group met weekly and discussed, among
other sources, *Fiqh al-Sunna*,49 *Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal*,50 *Riyad al-sallihihn min kalam Sayyid al-Mursalin*,51 and other sources on the subjects of the interpretation of the Quran (tafsīr al-Quran) and the biography of the Prophet Muhammad (al-sīra al-nabawiyya). "Like a teacher", Dāʾiya Amal recalled, she used to “examine in writing these women and correct their answers". Then, there were more women joining and more than one private study group taking place, from which women would shortly turn into dāʾiyāt, starting their own daʿwa groups.

As women kept telling other women, attendance of the public lesson numbered in the hundreds and the room at Dāʾiya Amal’s house was getting too small for this number. Of this period, another dāʾiya recalled that:

Dāʾiya Amal’s house was getting small for the number of women taking part in the lesson, I suggested that they come to my house...my house was newly built and did not have many furniture, and Umm Ibrahim - Dāʾiya Amal - said she would ask about it; later, she said that she had made Istikhāra 52 and had found out that it was fine to move the public lesson to my house. When we started, all what we had then was a rough floor carpet and a microphone for Dāʾiya Amal to use, while delivering her lesson. Then, there were buses that used to collect women from different locations in the city to bring them to the house. Women, then, would sit on the floor of the sitting room, on the stair ways, on the guest room, and on the house terrace... they would sit everywhere. When my sisters-in-law and I used to clean and tidy up the place after the lesson was over, we noticed that the carpet, and even the walls, were wet... they were wet from the breath of the large women attendants. I believe there were around 800 women attending the lesson at the time. One woman would attend and the next time she would bring her sister, her stepsister, her friend or neighbour. You cannot believe, after each lesson, 10-15 women would turn out to the next, veiled. Then, the place was getting small for the second time and thus other shaykhs in the city offered us to use the attic of a newly established mosque. The attic was still under construction, so we decided to continue building it from our donations... women donated money and their own small jewelleries to cover the building cost, and then the place was ready for us to use.

Thus, was the story of the making of the Salafi-Sufi network of Dāʾiya Amal, which while it now has a limited prevalence, with a limited number of dāʾiyāt, its weight on the city’s daʿwa, is still visible through its dāʾiyāt’s weekly lessons inside private homes and mosques and through these dāʾiyāt’s limited but committed charity and socio-cultural activities.

49 *Fiqh al-Sunna* is a three-volume book on Islamic legal issues authored by the Egyptian, Shaykh Sayyid Sabiq (1915-2000).
50 *Musnad al-Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal* is an important reference book on al-hadith, authored by the founder of the “Hanbali doctrine” in Islamic history, al-Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (780-855).
51 *Riyad al-sallihihn min kalam Sayyid al-Mursalin* is a 15-volume book of hadith, collected and reviewed by al-Imam Yahya bin Sharaf al-Nawawi al-Dimashqi
52 *Istikhāra* is a supplication, duʿā’, which Prophet Mohammad recommended that Muslims make in times of indecisiveness. See an example of this practice in chapter five, section 3.3.
2. The Enduring Work of Da‘wa since the Late 1960s, Dā‘iya Khawla and the Making of the Female Naqshbandiyya Branch of Nablus

In the previous section, we have discussed Dā‘iya Amal’s encounter with the Islamic Salafi fields of Cairo, MBs of Amman and the Sufi of Jerusalem and her making of a Salafi-Sufi network. In this section, we discuss Dā‘iya Khawla’s encounter with the Sufi-Salafi field of Damascus and her making of a Sufi-Salafi network, the Female Naqshbandiyya Branch of Nablus.

Almost every dā‘iya I interviewed for this study mentioned the early da‘wa activities by Dā‘iya Khawla since the late 1960s and early 1970s and expressed respect and gratitude for her as al-`ustādha al-kabīra (the grand teacher). Nevertheless, to outsiders, in the city, Dā‘iya Khawla’s network and activities were a conundrum. The followers’ special dress code, their strictness in the application of their mystic path, al- tariqa al- Naqshbandiyya, and their insistence on privacy and ambiguity concerning their practices that they almost strictly refrain from talking about their religious experiences to outsiders are but examples that illustrate the puzzle. By analysing Dā‘iya Khawla’s encounter during the mid-1960s with the modern Naqshbandiyya Sufi field of Damascus and highlighting this field’s historic emergence (see discussion 2.2 in this section), I put Dā‘iya Khawla’s conundrum in perspective.

2.1. Family Formative Experiences and the Early Da‘wa Activities

Dā‘iya Khawla came from an urban Nabulsi family. Her father was a mosque reciter, a caller of prayer (mu`adh.dhin), and a Mawlid reader (qāri` al-Mawlid),53 and so was her oldest brother, who is known in the city for being a Sufi. She has a younger brother, who studied in Damascus for a four-year diploma, and had later obtained a PhD in Islamic studies and Sufism (al-taṣawwuf). A third brother of hers had a PhD degree in chemistry, and was a university professor. He was described by one interviewee as one who had a close relation to the MBs. Thus, one can infer from this socio religious background of her family members and from the fact that her three brothers were keen on various forms of Islamic beliefs and practices, including Sufis and Muslim Brothers, that her family’s formative experiences were but strongly supportive of a Sufi religious habitus. Thus, we can imagine the kind of family formative experiences that disposed her to find appeal in the Naqshbandiyya Sufi order of modern Syria.

Dā‘iya Khawla’s early and enduring da‘wa activities since the late or mid-1960s were the beginning of a da‘wa network that attracted women, across all ages and classes, in the city. It had, particularly, attracted women from families of high status, in addition to women professionals, e.g. school teachers, doctors and pharmacists. The elegant, carpeted guest halls of the private homes of many of its well-to-do dā‘iyāt have been, for many years, a place for their

53 See footnotes 16 and 17 for a discussion of the terms al-Mawlid and Mawlid readers.
weekly preaching lessons, the collective tarāwīḥ prayers,\(^{54}\) and the commemoration of Laylat al-Qadr,\(^{55}\) during the month of Ramadan. Other houses were a place for commemoration parties that would celebrate teenaged girls’ wearing the veil and turning into their network. In addition, the network of Dā’iya Khawla has established its own independent women’s charity, which administers a number of projects and community services, including a nursery house, a kindergarten, a private comprehensive girls’ school, a small sewing factory, a women’s student hostel and a women’s mosque. Also, it has been lately authorised by the PA to establish in the city an Institute for the study of shari’a.

2.2. Encountering the 1960s-1970s Islamic/Islamist Field of Damascus

Dā’iya Khawla studied at the University of Damascus during the mid-1960s, “when, in 1963, the Ba’th party had just come to power” (Weismann 1997, 133). Then, MBs were active agents in the general Islamic/Islamist field of Syria, making a strong opposition to the regime’s first attempt at reforming the constitution, in 1964 (ibid.). During the time, al-Naqshbandiyya al-Kuftariyya\(^{56}\) was coming to the fore (ibid.). According to Weismann, it was a combination of Ba’ath regime politics since 1963, coupled with the non-political stand of the rabbaniyya\(^{57}\) of Shaykh Sa’id Hawwa (1935-1989),\(^{58}\) which turned al-Naqshbandiyya al-Kuftariyya into the most vibrant Islamic movement in Syria (ibid.). Thus, it was not a mere coincidence that during her studies at the University of Damascus, Dā’iya Khawla was introduced to al-Naqshbandiyya al-Kuftariyya by her classmate, the Syrian Munira al-Qubaysi, who, during the 1970s, and, under the influence of Shaykh Ahmad Kuftaro, established, in Damascus, the Female Naqshbandiyya branch, known after her family name as, al-Qubaysiyyāt.\(^{59}\)

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\(^{54}\) See footnote 15 for a previous discussion of al- tarāwīḥ prayer.  
\(^{55}\) Laylat al-Qadr (the Night of Destiny) is a night of a high spiritual importance to Muslims. Muslims believe that during this night the first verse (sura) of the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Mohammad. They also believe that during this night God becomes very close to all fellow Muslims, listening to their complaints and grievances and forgiving all their sins. For this reason, pious Muslims usually spend the entire night in worship, making several prayers and supplications inside their private homes or mosques. Muslims usually celebrate Laylat al-Qadr during the last 10 days of Ramadan, mostly on the night that precedes the 27th of the month.  
\(^{56}\) Al-Naqshbandiyya al-Kuftariyya is the Sufi branch and organisation related to Shaykh Ahmad Kuftaro (1915-2004). Shaykh Ahmad Kuftaro was Shaykh al-tariqa al-Naqshbandiyya, the Grand Mutfi of Damascus, and the Head of the Supreme Islamic Council of Syria (1972-2004).  
\(^{57}\) The term rabbaniyya is derived from the Quranic word rabbaniyyun, which refers to the religious scholars who strictly follow the path of God (Weismann 1997, 145). For the modern interpretations and applications of al-rabbaniyya by Shaykh Sa’id Hawwa (1935-1989), see next footnote and footnote 61.  
\(^{58}\) Shaykh Sa’id Hawwa (1935-1989) was a famous Syrian MB and intellectual, who aimed at finding the “golden mean” between al-tasawwuf, or the spiritual stand of al-tariqa al-Naqshbandiyya and the MBs (Weismann 1997, 140).  
\(^{59}\) For more on al-Qubaysiyyāt, see Islam 2012. For more on Sufi women’s sisterhoods in Damascus, see Bottcher 2002, 2003; Kalmbach 2008; and Chagas 2011.
In other words, Dāʿiya Khawla’s encounter was with the rich and dynamic Sufi field of Damascus. In this field, al-tariqa al-Naqshbandiyya has been active, also among Damascene women, since the nineteenth century. For example, based on Hafiz and Abaza (1991, 681-682), Foley finds that since the nineteenth century, the wives and daughters of many prominent Naqshbandi shaykhs had started to popularise al-tariqa al-Naqshbandiyya among Damascene women by becoming teachers and preachers in the mosques and centres of the tariqa (2008, 533-534). Also, there were, during the late nineteenth century, some female Sufi lineages and Naqshbandiyya sisterhoods, some have continued to the present (see Bottcher 2002, 292-296).

A contemporary example of this type of Naqshbandiyya sisterhoods among Damascene women is the female branch of al-Naqshbandiyya al-Kuftariyya, headed by Ānisa Wafa, Shaykh Ahmad Kuftaro’s daughter (Bottcher 2003, 48). All in all, one can conclude that by the beginning and the mid of the twentieth century, many Syrian women had already been preaching to other women in their own private homes. Our oral history interview with Dāʿiya Nadwa, cited at the beginning of this chapter, testifies and confirms this presence of Sufi sisterhoods. Of those Sufi preachers and shaykhhas, Dāʿiya Nadwa says:

I cannot compare my knowledge of the path of God (ṭarīq Allah) with that of Syrian shaykhhas because they are just outstanding. My knowledge is just moderate and humble in comparison with theirs.

Moreover, al-tariqa al-Naqshbandiyya, a thirteenth century-founded Sufi order, managed since the time to sustain its continuity and coherence by modifying many of its working rules, while holding to its seventeenth century core principle: the necessity to subject the mystical Sufi experience to the shariʿa law and the Sunna.60 The milestone in these modifications, according to Foley (2008, 530, 535), was carried out, during the eighteenth century, by Shaykh Khalid al-Naqshbandi (1776-1827), who abandoned the long-time, Sufi ascetic principle for a socially-engaged, worldly one. The outcome of these modifications was a perseverance of a tradition against many age predicaments, and, as stated above, an active engagement in the contemporary cultural and religious fields of the country.

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60 Tamari (2011) observes that what had differentiated al-tariqa al-Naqshbandiyya is its followers’ devotion to the idea that “the shari’a law is at the heart of the tariqa” (2001, 123). Further, because of its emphasis on the Sunna, Weismann (2001, 30) observes that al-tariqa al-Naqshbandiyya has been also known as “tarīqat al-ṣahāba” (the path of the companions of Prophet Mohammad). Weismann (2001, 24) explains that it was Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi of India (1563-1624), who insisted on the subjection of the Sufi mystic experience to the shari’a law, to protect the Sunni Muslims of India against influences from Shi’i Hindus and the Mughal (see also Algar 1990).
A contemporary facet of these modifications to the tariqa has been present in the rabbaniyya mission of Shaykh Sa’id Hawwa (1935-1989) and al-rabbaniyya la-rahbaniyya (social engagement versus monastic detachment) of Shaykh Ahmad Kuftaro. Both of these principles have made the ethical and the spiritual foundation of al-Naqshbandiyya al-Kuftariyya in contemporary Syria. It was through the agency of Dā’i Khawla and her followers that these modern Naqshbandi principles were integrated into the emergent women’s da’wa field in Nablus City. To this agency and incorporation, we will now turn.

2.3. Restructuring Women’s Islamic Practices in Nablus City Through the Embodied and Moral Agency of Dā’iya Khawla and Her Network

As said, it was through the agency of Dā’iya Khawla and her followers, that the principles of the rabbaniyya mission of Shaykh Sa’id Hawwa and al-rabbaniyya la-rahbaniyya of Shaykh Ahmad Kuftaro were incorporated into the emergent women’s da’wa field in Nablus City. This was evident first, in the fact that Dā’iya Khawla had walked the way of da’wa from its individual, home-based activities to the making of a coherent Sufi branch, with its own strict tariqa and coherent organisation. Hence is the description of her network as a Sufi-Salafi one. The distinctiveness of such a making of a Sufi organisation becomes clearer when contrasted to the amorphous male Sufi groups in Nablus City as well as the West Bank (see discussion, chapter two, section two).

Second, along the way, Dā’iya Khawla had utilised her career as a school teacher in spreading her da’wa among young school teachers and teenaged students and had led by example through her “refined manners” as younger dā’iyāt recalled of her. Also, her early dress mode was gradually accepted by other women as a means to establish themselves as pious women thus speaking to her influencing other females through her moral and embodied form of agency.

Third, the disengagement of the network’s followers from political activities and their engagement in community work as a form of da’wa, instead, confirms the networks’ commitment to Hawwa’s vision of al-rabbaniyya as a non-political movement. The branch’s

61 According to Weismann (1997, 145-146), it was Shaykh Sa’id Hawwa who modernised the notion of al-rabbaniyya such that it has come to include faith, knowledge, and social engagement. According to Weismann, Shaykh Sa’id Hawwa (1984, 23-24) conditioned the materialisation of the rabbaniyya on his/her (1) practice of dhikr (2) attainment of ‘ilm (knowledge of the Sunna) (3) companionship of the dhikr and ‘ilm men, and, (4) propagation of knowledge (da’wa). This is because, according to Hawwa (ibid.), dhikr ensures one’s sincerity of “faith”, knowledge of the Sunna allows for one’s “specialisation”, and da’wa allows one to “be active on behalf of [the Muslim] community”.

62 For earlier attempts at the transformation and the modernisation of the principles of al-tariqa al-Naqshbandiyya by other Sufi shaykhs in “twentieth-century Syria”, see Weismann 2003.
several community projects and services (e.g. a nursery house, a kindergarten, a private comprehensive girls’ school, a female student hostel and a women’s mosque) are other illustrations of this incorporation. In addition, the sincerity of their dedicated staff at their comprehensive girls’ school, their landmark in the city, can be interpreted as an illustration of Hawwa’s calls for the modern Sufis to be the spiritual guides of their communities. Also, their new terminology, calling, for example, a woman member in their network ānisa (miss) instead of shaykha (see Bottcher 2003) speaks to one of many of the Kuftaro’s presences in this network.

Fourth, one of the other means of establishing the coherence of this female Sufi branch was through dress code. Today, one can identify banāt Sit Khawla (Miss Khawla’s girls) - as they are often called in Nablus - from their distinctive above-ankle length Islamic dress (jilbāb), the white, dark blue or black head scarves, knotted on the middle of the neck, their thick socks and comfortable black or brown low-heeled shoes. Since shops in the city do not sell such style of Islamic dress, the branch established its own sewing workshop to make available for its followers the dress items - whose use is constitutive of their distinct piety. Today, the workshop meets followers’ demands of the uniform and other dress items to use inside their homes, including black pleated skirts, small head-caps, thick socks, underwear and perfumes. Thus, one can clearly observe that dress is indicative of the identity of the piety network as much as it is constitutive of the piety of individual women followers of the branch.

3. Ḥajja Naziha and Dāʿiya Nadwa, Sufi Women Preaching to Women since the 1950s

Dāʿiya Nadwa has been delivering her current preaching lesson for more than 25 years, first at the same mosque, where her mother-in-law, Ḥajja Naziha, used to preach, and then at her private house in the old city, as her old age had gradually started impairing her physical mobility - she is currently using a walker at home. Since the age of 25, Dāʿiya Nadwa has had a long, intricate history with piety, first as a woman disciple of Ḥajja Naziha, since the mid-1950s, and second, as a disciple of Damascus dāʿiyāt and shaykhas since the mid-1960s. Her life history does not only testify to her involvement with the Syrian shaykhas, but also to other women’s involvement, including with MOWARA’s preachers (wāʿi ʿāt). This indicates that Sufi women’s preaching other women was earlier than that of any Islamists. Dāʿiya Nadwa’s agency was in her remaining open to various Sufi resources in Nablus and Damascus and her use of those resources to enrich her piety.
3.1. Dā‘iya Nadwa: Family Formative Experiences and Encounters with the Local and Regional Sufi Fields

Dā‘iya Nadwa’s upbringing shows the making of a mystic Sufi disposition. Dā‘iya Nadwa, a former staff nurse, 1955-1983, was born in 1930, in Nablus City, to an urban family who believed that it had a lineage that went back to the house of the prophet. She had three brothers and two sisters, and her father owned a grocery store, at the old city, where the family lived. Because post-elementary, government education for girls was not available at the time, after she finished sixth grade in Nablus government school, she joined the Rose al-Youssef Christian School in Nablus to continue her seventh grade. Her mother was keen on her daughter going to seventh grade - the highest education level in the city that a girl could get at the time - and Dā‘iya Nadwa recalled how her mother gave her money to buy the English-Arabic dictionary, which the school requested that she had at the time. After seventh grade, Dā‘iya Nadwa worked with a well known seamstress in town and thus learned sewing by doing. This was until the famous Nabulsi charity activist Ḥajja Ḥajja Andalib al-Amad recruited her for a four-year course in Nursing. Thus she studied Nursing in Jerusalem during the years 1951-1954. Dā‘iya Nadwa’s narration of her being veiled since she was 17, and her satisfaction in continuing to be veiled, when even more and more women were taking off the veil, during the 1950s and 1960s, can only testify to how her piety at the time was the outcome of both her family formative experiences, her habitus for piety, and her own socially embedded choice.

Further, we learn from Dā‘iya Nadwa’s narration that her first encounter with the local Sufi field of Nablus, and perhaps Jerusalem, occurred through Ḥajja Naziha, during the mid-1950s, when Dā‘iya Nadwa was only 25 years old. Thus, while on duty at Nablus hospital, Dā‘iya Nadwa had for the first time met Ḥajja Naziha, as the latter was admitted to the hospital for an illness. Ḥajja Naziha liked the young Nadwa not only because she was “a soft-hearted nurse”, but also because the young Nadwa showed inclination for piety indicated in her donning of the veil. Sometime after, the young nurse Nadwa heard that “there was some kind of religious activity by Ḥajja Naziha, taking place in one of the mosques, in the old city”; and since young Nadwa “liked religion and was curious about religious activities, she decided to attend”. She then took some hours off from her duty at the hospital and went to attend the midday activity that was taking place at the mentioned mosque. Since then, Ḥajja Naziha had become young Nadwa’s shaykh and thus was the beginning of Dā‘iya Nadwa’s long entangled trajectory with women’s piety in the city.

3.2. Charismatic Authority

In contrast with Dā‘iya Amal and Dā‘iya Khawla, whose piety included a rigorous study of shari’a (ʿilm), Dā‘iya Nadwa’s narration of Ḥajja Naziha showed that the latter’s preaching and
mystic guidance of other women utilised her personal traits and charisma. Thus, when I asked Dāʿiya Nadwa, if she had ever found herself in conflict with Hajja Naziha, while performing their Mawlid reading and preaching together, because she was an educated nurse, while Hajja Naziha learned preaching by tradition; her answer was that “Hajja Naziha performed by tradition, and she [Dāʿiya Nadwa] performed by science (ʿilm)”; she then commended Hajja Naziha as one who “had knowledge and power of vision (ruʿya)”; as one who was “generous and affectionate”; as “an artist who had a supreme voice”; and as one “who had her own students”.

Further, in 1964, she had her first encounter with her Syrian Sufi shaykhah, in al-Aqsa mosque, which marked her “beginning on the road of God” (ṭarīq al-ṭasawwuf). The narration of that encounter, quoted in its length in the opening paragraph of this chapter, which she gave at the end of my second two-hour interview with her, indicates how important and meaningful that encounter was to the enrichment of her mystic disposition and to the forging of her overall pious experience hence after. Thus, she, more than once, travelled to Damascus to learn the different mystic methods. There, her shaykhah would introduce her to other women in lessons, saying, “Look at your Nabulsi sister, she had crossed three countries to come here and learn”.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, of her impression and perception of that female Sufi subfield in Damascus, she says,

I cannot compare my knowledge of ṭarīq Allah (the road of God) with that of Syrian shaykhas because they are outstanding. My knowledge is just moderate and humble in comparison with theirs.

Dāʿiya Nadwa, added that she would then take what she learned and come to Nablus to apply it. Of how she applied the method, she said,

They [the shaykhas] would give you the key and then it will be up to each dāʿiya how hard she will work to walk the chain to the Prophet [Mohammad] and his companions (ṣaḥāba).

In brief, these were examples of the agency of Dāʿiya Nadwa. Her agency was clear in her remaining open to various resources in Nablus and Damascus to continue establishing herself as a pious subject. Today, she still preaches to women at her home; many of those attending her weekly lessons were former attendants of her mother-in-law, Hajja Naziha. They come from distant and close places in the city and are of various ages and education levels.

Conclusion

“From Religious Habitus to Religious Field: the Making of the WPM Between the Sufi Dāʿiyāt of Damascus and the Salafi ʿUlama of Cairo” is the title I have chosen for this chapter to capture the social/individual dynamics that were present in the making of the of the WPM and the type of
Islamic resources that had fed into it during its early formation years. The title also intended to capture the type of pious women’s subjectivities that these resources had enabled and shaped. The life stories of the three dāʿīyat discussed in this chapter - Dāʿīyat Nadwa, Khawla, and Amal - indicate that they share a foundational role in the making of the current WPM in the city.

They - the three dāʿīyat - share a telling, turning-to-daʿwa chronology (Nadwa, mid-1950s; Khawla, mid-1960s; Amal mid-1970s). It is a telling chronology in that it indicates that these dāʿīyat were reverting to Islamic piety at a time when not only was abandoning the Islamic tradition tolerated, but also that, at the time, this abandonment was occurring at a rapid pace.

As we discussed earlier, in chapter two, it was during those years (1950s-1960s) that the modernisation of the city, including its women, was picking up pace. This was due to the relatively rapid developmental policies (e.g. compulsory education and the promotion of postsecondary education) of the newly-independent Arab states, including the state of Jordan; and to the introduction in the city of modern mass media (e.g. radio, cinema). Modern mass media, particularly the cinema, and later the television contributed to fashioning among the city residents - including its women - new discourses of sociability and leisure. In addition, they helped fashion modern women’s identity through mode of dress, hairstyle, leisure habits (e.g. smoking, attending the cinema, watching television), and others. Thus, those three dāʿīyat (Nadwa, Khawla, and Amal) share a life course that somehow took the reverse course of that of the majority of their female school peers and classmates at the time. Therefore the chapter was an attempt at answering the question: “How is it that at this specific historic moment (1950s-1960s) a small number of women in Nablus City have come to follow Islamic morality and to conduct daʿwa activities, which in a few decades, will turn into a movement that attracts a broad, socially diverse body of women, in the city?” What has motivated these women to take that type of activism?

I have argued that several reasons contributed to this difference; these include family formative experiences, personal dispositions, interpersonal relations and relations to networks of both Sufi-Salafi networks in the region.

But most importantly, as I argued in chapter one, the theoretical framework chapter, their motivation to embark on daʿwa was propelled by their politics of legitimisation given their social class and gender positions. In generational terms, this was the first generation of lower-middle and middle-class women who had gone out from the home to formal modern institutions such as schools, colleges and universities. Their intermediate positions lay between two other groups and generations of women in the city: an upper-middle class generational peer and a former upper-middle class generation of women. This intermediate position meant that they had fewer social and cultural resources compared to the other two groups of women. As lower-middle class
women and first generation of mass education, who had left the home in order to attend formal modern institutions (e.g. schools, colleges, and universities) and take on paid work, the pressure on them to perform well and keep their family reputation intact was perhaps high. That is to say, as these women were testing new ground in modern colleges and universities, and as they were perhaps tested by their significant others, in these new grounds, they had probably felt the pressure to maintain a high repertoire of modesty in order not to sacrifice their reputation or risk the opportunity they were given by their families to study or work outside their homes.

In comparison, neither their peer generation of upper-middle class women, nor the parents of this class of women experienced such a social change (i.e. modernisation) as going to a university, or taking a paid job, as stressful. The parents of those upper-middle class women had already received advanced school education in Palestinian cities like Ramallah and Jerusalem and university education in Cairo and Beirut. Their parents had already studied abroad, adopted a modern style, and perhaps developed professional or even cosmopolitan identities. This is unlike the parents of the women of the lower-middle class, particularly their fathers, who were either small government employees or self-employed. As we will see later in chapter three, these parents were men whose identity was deeply shaped by the city’s local culture and Islamic thoughts and values (e.g. Salafis and Sufis). Moreover, in social class and generational terms, there had been - at the time - an older generation of upper-middle class women in the city. These were women who had embarked on charity work since the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century; they had tilled for and earned a rewarding social and cultural capital both from their families’ upper-middle class positions and from their hard charity work with poor families in the city. The foundational cohort of the WPM at the time therefore had neither the age seniority nor the cultural capital of the upper-middle class of the old generation to make them embark on charity work as a source of legitimisation; nor did they have the social capital of their generational peers of the upper-middle class (e.g. parents’ support) which could have legitimated their adoption of a modern lifestyle. Thus, in terms of choice, the “first cohort” of the WPM could not elect to undertake charity work as a means of increasing their social status; but they could not continue adopting the modern lifestyle as their upper-middle class women peers were doing, either.

I therefore conclude that women’s choice of da’wa as a form of Islamic activism was a third option that offered a solution to their social class, gender and generational ambivalent position. In this sense, in line with Ortner’s analysis, I conclude that these women’s Islamic activism transforms their social class, gender, and generational intermediate position, into a “positive role that is not only of value to the individuals but to the society at large” (1989, 175).
Last, their interpersonal cooperation, yet competition, in the domain of *da‘wa*, both as *dā‘iyāt*, and as heads of piety groups and networks, indicates the type of dynamics among the actors and the protagonists of a social field.

In the next chapter, chapter four, we will demonstrate some of this social religious field dynamics by showing how women’s subjectivities in the WPM since its emergence have not been homogeneous or static but in motion. This is indicated in the emergence and the making in the WPM of an Islamic/Islamist and pious modern subjectivity, a model of Islamic womanhood that is different from what the previous three *dā‘iyāt*, the “founding cohort” of the WPM, have by now developed and proposed. To this emergence and making we will now turn.
Chapter Four: Dāʾiya Fadia Between the Traditional and the New Islamist of the Middle: The Making of the Islamic/Islamist and Pious Modern Subjectivity

Narratives do not only “mirror” reality, but they assist in creating it (Bauman1986, 5-6).

For me, religion and science go together; religion alone is not enough. I do not like to be called shaykha, or be associated with those female preachers, who in the past were called darwīsha.63 In my preaching, I combine religion with science. I want to give a modern conception about religion; its diameter is science, not darwasha. Religion is not only praying or fasting, it is all life.

Senior Dāʾiya Fadia

[How]ow actors who are so much products of their own social and cultural context can ever come to transform the conditions of their own existence, except by accident (Ortner 1989, 14).

Introduction

Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Islamic thinking has had its own meta-narrative of modernity in which women are the bearers of public morality. The Women’s Piety Movement (WPM) in Nablus City is in part a local expression of this late nineteenth century to early twentieth century Islamic concern with female morality and modernity. What can the micro-narratives of some of the dāʾiyāt’s own trajectories into Islamic piety and their moral justifications for becoming dāʾiyāt tell us about their notions of modernity, piety and morality? What contours of modernity do these moral justifications convey, and what contributed to their formation? This chapter explores these questions through the analysis of senior Dāʾiya Fadia’s life story and her trajectory into Islamic piety. In doing so, as just stated in the conclusion of the previous chapter, the chapter demonstrates some of the dynamics that have been at work in the social field of women’s daʿwa and have contributed to its diversification.

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63 The word darwīsha is often associated with incivility and low social status. Historically, in Persian, “dervish” referred to a “beggar”, or a person, who “impoverishes himself for the benefit of others” (Garnet 1912, 1). Today, in the Egyptian popular milieu, darwīsha refers to a woman who is “fully devoted to the Sufi path, often to the degree of departing from common conventions of dress and behaviour” (Schielke 2008, 100).
As I started to discuss in chapter one, the theoretical framework chapter, in her *An enchanted modern: gender and public piety in Shi’i Lebanon*, Lara Deeb stresses the usefulness of the ethnographic study of the everyday practice of Islam in order to clothe terms like Islamisation and Islamism with their local contexts (2005, 5); and to “unravel” in those everyday pious practices by pious Shi’i women, their complex endeavour of living and debating various ways of being both modern and pious (2005, 6). Deeb finds that in their everyday practice of piety, Shi’i women in Lebanon were teasing out a notion of “ideal womanhood” that was both modern and pious; seeking out a notion of modernity, in which secularity and religiosity were enmeshed rather than separated; and looking for a notion of progress that was both material and spiritual. Deeb also shows that progress for these Shi’i pious women was to “move forward, away from tradition” (2005, 5) into a new kind of religiosity, which stresses community involvement. In this chapter, I restate the importance of Deeb’s emphasis on the usefulness of the ethnographic lens in configuring the local meaning of everyday Islam; and I use the method to configure in women’s pious practices, in Nablus City, these women’s notions of modern-ness.

As I show later in this chapter, as an Islamic/Islamist feminist, senior Dā’iya Fadia shows a contour of modernity similar to that of the Lebanese Shi’i women, which Deeb describes. But in addition to discussing her contours of modernity, the chapter also discusses her formation into a pious modern, highlighting the gender dynamics of that formation.

The chapter shows that like many other dā’iyyāt in the city, Dā’iya Fadia’s life story indicates that since the beginnings of the WPM, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, male figures in Nablus City have continued to influence women’s commitment to Islamic piety as a mode of life. Many of these women had fully committed to Islamic morality after the demand, or the persuasion of their pious husbands, at an early stage of their marriages. The influence of their fathers on their choice of piety, which they recognise as formative and inspirational, was also salient. Senior Dā’iya Fadia’s life story highlights this double male influence on her formation as a pious modern; but while Dā’iya Fadia refers to her father’s impact on her piety as formative and inspiring, her position from her husband’s was particularly problematic. Against the authority of her husband, Dā’iya Fadia shows ambivalence. She shows that she can divert from his authority, showing some autonomy; yet she does not sustain a wholehearted diversion from that authority. How does this ambivalent divergence of a female pious subject from the authority of her male significant other inform our understanding of pious women’s agency vis-à-vis their male partners? What kind of agency and type of Islamist subject does Dā’iya Fadia convey and advance in her ambivalent divergence from the male authority of her husband? These are additional questions that this chapter addresses.

64 I partially describe Dā’iya Fadia as an Islamist because, as this chapter will show, she embraces Islamic morality as the foundation for social reform.
The chapter broadly argues that women’s subjectivities in the WPM in Nablus City have been neither homogeneous, nor static. In their response to local structural and Islamist regional ideological changes, pious women's notions of themselves (i.e. subjectivities) have been changing and in motion. Senior Ḍāʾiya Fadia is an example that demonstrates such a motion and such a change. Before I continue discussing the arguments that this chapter makes, I first present in a synopsis the life story of Ḍāʾiya Fadia.

1. Senior Ḍāʾiya Fadia: A Synopsis

Senior Ḍāʾiya Fadia came from an urban family; she was married in her early 20s to a businessman from the city, who was sympathetic to the Muslim Brothers’ (MBs’) ideology. Upon their marriage, her husband demanded that she leave her teaching job to take care of their children. Refusing to solely commit to her domestic role, after her youngest child turned six, she negotiated with her husband to continue her studies in Islamic law; for, she “could not continue to live without a mission in her life”, she explained. Not only did she join a distance learning programme in Islamic law (shariʿa) and receive a degree in Islamic jurisprudence, but she also started to share her knowledge of Islamic law with other women in the city.

What makes Ḍāʾiya Fadia a senior one is her long years of preaching to women in both private homes and public places, through which she gained extensive knowledge of women’s social conditions in the city. For more than a decade, Ḍāʾiya Fadia had been engaged in daʿwa activities in private homes, sharing her Islamic knowledge with other women, in her area, while also volunteering for an Islamic charity organisation. Then, in the 1990s, as a sign of recognition of her activity, a businessman offered his locale for free, to help with the growing number of women participating in her home piety sessions. Senior Ḍāʾiya Fadia’s vision of how religion and science should go together shaped the type of activities her piety sessions included. Senior Ḍāʾiya Fadia believes that religion and modern science should go together; because, according to her, “religion is not only ḥaḍāt (worship), but everything related to life”. In addition to Quranic readings, a typical weekly event discussed issues that ranged from community health concerns, such as water shortages, nutrition, food safety and correct storage procedures, to issues related to personal status law, such as divorce and child custody. Ḍāʾiya Fadia was proud that more than 100 women from all social classes and professional categories, including retired teachers, practising women doctors, lawyers, and housewives, used to attend those weekly piety events.

In her justification for becoming a dāʾiya, senior Ḍāʾiya Fadia lays out moral claims against the current status of women in the milieu of Nablus City, and the public ignorance of the correct Islamic codes, as partially, also, applied to women. Among these, for example, was her rejection of women’s existing mode of sociability, including her mother’s, regarded as “aimless”, and as
one that emphasises material consumption at the expense of spirituality. Her moral claims also include a rejection of the traditional patriarchal code of honour and the traditional Islamist expectations that confine the role of women to the private sphere of the family as wives and mothers. Senior Dāʿiya Fadia’s concerns about women’s morality in the context of a changing city were not peculiar to her; they were also the concerns of the whole women’s piety movement (WPM). In this chapter, however, I extensively explore those moral claims of Dāʿiya Fadia, showing their social embeddedness, and how they have formed the contours of what I call her Islamic/Islamist feminist and pious modern subjectivity.

2. Islamic/Islamist Subjectivities

My argument in this chapter is fourfold. First, I argue that in the WPM there have been various kinds of pious women’s subjectivities, including an Islamic/Islamist feminist one, which has been taking shape since the 1990s. “Islamist feminist”, while endorsing Islam as a moral frame of reference, advances in the WPM a notion of Islamic woman, which is neither secular nor traditional Islamist, but similar to the “New Islamic woman” - one who is “educated and community and politically engaged” (White 2005, 123). I alternately describe this Islamic/Islamist subjectivity as Islamist feminist, neoliberal Islamist, and pious modern. *Islamist feminist* refers to what Karam (1998) describes as Islamist women’s promotion of a reform in women’s condition within the political project of Islamism. Neoliberal Islamist refers to the Islamists’ incorporation of economic and business neoliberal values and skills, e.g. entrepreneurship, time management, self-development, and progress, as essential components of their religiosity (see Atia 2012). The term also refers to what Bayat, in the context of 1990s Egypt, describes as the “passive piety” of the post-Islamist era, which followed the failure of militant Islamism (Bayat 2007). The most popular example has been the new preachers of the 1990s; most prominent among them was Amr Khaled (El-Houdaiby 2012). Pious modernist is the term Deeb, in her previously mentioned work, uses to describe Shiʿi women’s attempts at combining Islamic morality with modernity (Deeb 2005, 6). I therefore observe that Dāʿiya Fadia’s piety incorporates those three ethics. Within the political project of Islamism, she proposes to advance women’s conditions by her assertion of a type of pious modernity that incorporates neoliberal values. She also demonstrates these ethics in her notions of science and Islamic rights, discussed later in this chapter.

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65 According to White, Islamists in Turkey advanced the model of the “New Islamic Woman” to confront secularists “on their very grounds by presenting Islamic women as educated, and community and politically engaged” (2005, 123). White suggests that, over the years, Islamists’ continuous use of the “New Islamic Woman” model to mobilise other women during elections concluded in 2002 with the coming to power of their Justice and Development Party (ibid).


67 Bayat’s analysis of the Egyptian WPM was also discussed in chapter one, the theoretical framework chapter.
Second, I argue that the formation and emergence of Dāʿiya Fadia’s Islamist feminism took place in the dynamic interaction among the multiple contexts of the familial-interpersonal, the socio-cultural local, and the Islamist regional. Her pious modern-ness was shaped with the further changes that the city underwent, regionally with the rise of the gender discourse of the New Islamist of the Middle (al-Islam al-Wasati), and globally with the rise of neoliberal NGO and human rights culture. I specifically argue that this formation took place in the dynamic interaction between, on the one hand, Dāʿiya Fadia’s individual socio-cultural repertoire of piety, her gender experience as a young married woman, and, on the other, the broader social structural changes in Palestinian society which increased women’s education, paid work, and public visibility, and the development of a consumption culture in Nablus City itself. On the regional level, as said, Dāʿiya Fadia’s formation occurred during the 1980s-1990s in the context of the development of the gender discourse of the New Islamism of the Middle (al-Islam al-Wasati).

Third, concerning Dāʿiya Fadia’s narration of her transformation into a dāʿiya, I suggest that in her claim for agency, she undermines the impact of these structural and discursive formations on her piety. Also, she dramatises her autonomy by claiming that her choice of piety came after personal reflection and choice, and she positions herself as one who is "in quest for authentic values in a degraded world" (Chanfrault-Duchet 1991, 181). Thus she passes on a utopian, Salafi vision of history. Yet I suggest that as a pious modern and Islamic/Islamist feminist, she never describes her moral dissatisfaction with the status quo by describing it with the Salafi term (al-Jāḥiliyya). Nor does she advance the Salafi position that women should return home, or be strictly confined to its domains, in order to retain a state of public morality. She instead uses an Islamic rights language (ḥuqūq wa- wājibāt) to assess and describe the status quo in terms of

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68 The New Islamism of the Middle (al-Islam al-Wasati) is the Islamist current that evolved, during the 1980s-1990s, in response to the militant Islamism of the era. Examples of its representatives are Shaykh Mohammad al-Ghazzali and Yusuf al-Qaradawi (Stowasser 2009, 182). The New Islamism of the Middle argues that in its spirit Islam does not favour extreme positions. Rather, Islam favours the “paradigm of the middle”: the middle stand that balances itself against extreme ends (e.g. rational and emotional behaviour, strict adherence to Islamic law (shariʿa), and an utter abandonment of it). Hence the New Islamism of the Middle aims at articulating a version of modernity that is Islamic, but represents the Islamic “paradigm of the middle” (Stowasser 2009, 181). In gender terms, contrary to Hassan al-Banna, the New Islamism of the Middle advances women’s paid work and political participation (see more on this discussion in “Gender and the New Islamists of the Middle", section 4, in this chapter).

69 Al-Jāḥiliyya (fem. adj.) comes from the Arabic root jahl, which means ignorance. Al-Jāḥiliyya is the term Islam uses to describe the state of Arab society before the coming of Prophet Mohammad. It has a strong moral connotation, indicating a state of moral degradation. To refer to its morally degraded state some radical Muslim Brothers (e.g. Sayyid Qutub) describe modern Muslim societies as being in a state of modern Jāḥiliyya.

70 In Arabic, ḥuqūq (pl; sing. ḥaqqa) means rights; wājibāt (pl; sing wājib) means duties, or obligation. Ḥuqūq wa-wājibāt thus translates into “rights and duties”.

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their absences and violations. In that sense, she advances women’s conditions by advancing modern notions of piety, morality, and religion.

Fourth, in terms of gender, as I continue to unpack her Islamist feminine-ness from her narrative strategies, I observe that her gender stand against those very male constraints that she experienced in her familial and marital settings was inconsistent, even paradoxical. I interpret her inconsistency as ambivalence and attribute it to her attempts in those family and marital settings to come to terms with the emotional and moral consequence of both the application and the failure to apply the code of honour, defined as the enactment of male’s assertive control of female sexuality (Abu-Lughod 1999), as represented by her father and husband. Yet I also argue that in that emotional tension against the male power and that inconsistency, her “pious modern-ness” and “Islamist feminine-ness” emerged. Therefore, I suggest a definition of her agency in terms of dealing with this ambivalence. I also argue that the dynamic of this emergence indicates Ortner’s (2006) and Sewell’s (1992) notions of agency as an action inherent in individual relations to structures of power and social enmeshment.

The chapter discusses these arguments in a similar order. After this introduction, I discuss the gender ideology of the local traditional Islamist and the region’s New Islamist of the Middle. Subsequently, I present Dā‘iya Fadia’s life story, socio-cultural repertoire of piety, and discuss her claim for moral agency. I then discuss the contours of her Islamist feminine-ness, and pious modern-ness, followed by the conclusion.

3. Gender and the Local Traditional Islamists

As I have mentioned earlier, some local male Islamists have continued to influence women’s piety either through the power of the exemplary pious behaviour of the father, or the masculine constraints of the husbands. Who are those Islamist men, what is their position on gender relations, and how has their position changed over time? According to Robinson (2003, 120-122), in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, there have been two types of Islamists, the political-activist and the charity-oriented. The differences stem from geography, generation, ideology, and social-class (ibid.). The first kind of Islamists originated on the Gaza Strip, was younger, came from poor families, and developed their political activism on university campuses and oriented it especially against the Israeli occupation. The second kind developed in the West Bank, was older, came from urban and an upper-middle-class merchant background, and advanced a social reform approach to change. Also, the second sustained strong financial relations with affluent Arab countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Male Islamists in Nablus City have been prominent in this respect. In order to explain further this prominent charity role of Nablus male Islamists, it is useful to remind the reader of the emergence of the city’s male
Islamist elite, discussed in chapter two, and locate the emergence of this elite's gender stand in historical perspective. According to Milton-Edwards (1999, 33), the first Muslim Brotherhood (MB) branch in Nablus was established around 1946-1947. It then found appeal among the Islamic scholars (ʿulama) and the clergy of notable families. Soon after, when as a consequence of the 1948 war the West Bank was annexed to Jordan, its MB branches became part of the MB organisation in Jordan. This, I suggest, had several effects on the gender politics of the Nablus Islamists. First, unlike Egypt's brotherhood that had integrated women activists into its popular foundation and organisation since the early 1930s, according to Abu Hanieh, variations in “the social structure” (e.g. tribalism) and ‘conservative interpretation” of the shari’a by the brotherhood in Jordan did not allow for similar model of women's participation in Jordan (2008, 89). In fact, the brotherhood in Jordan argued that women's integration in the Islamic movement was against the accepted norms (Abu Hanieh 2008).

In comparison, it was only in the early 1990s that Jordanian women were integrated into the brotherhood organisation (Abu Hanieh 2008, 92). Although there have been women preachers (wāʿiẓāt) working in the Ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs (MOWARAs) in the city of Nablus since the late 1970s, it was not until the late 1990s, under the Palestinian authority (PA), that these women preachers started to be physically present in MOWARA offices. Cohen (1982) found that, with one exception, between 1949 and 1967, the MB organisation in the West Bank did not have a women's section. This suggests that early MB gender politics in the West Bank, contrary to the views of Hassan al-Banna, was not in favour of advancing party policies that could have integrated women into the party’s organisation and promoted women's public visibility. After the 1967 war, when the West Bank was occupied by Israel, West Bank religious affairs continued to be administered by Jordan's Ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs and Endowments (MOWARA). MOWARA's importance to Palestinians in the West Bank increased as it was their only channel to the outside world (Milton-Edwards 1999, 57). This meant that many MB members in Nablus were hired by the MOWARA and were therefore influenced by its policies. In 1973, Dr. Ishaq al-Farhan, the Jordanian Minister of MOWARA at the time, proposed opening up mosques to both the male and female public, not only for worship, but for educational and cultural learning "to prove that religion and life go together" (1973, 3-7). In the

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71 Hassan al-Banna was the founder of the Muslim Brother organisation, in Egypt, in the early 1920s, and was the spiritual leader of the entire MB movement in the Middle East region. According to Abu Hanieh (2008, 89-90) al-Banna was an advocate of women’s participation in the popular base of the movement, but he recommended that women only be educated in areas that would assist them in carrying out their domestic role as wives and mothers. For further discussion of al-Banna’s views on women’s participation in the public sphere, see the next subsection, “Gender and the Regional, New Islamists of the Middle”.

72 According to al-Barghouthi (2003, 57), by 1982, MOWARA had a budget of eleven million JDs and 2,000 employees, including mosque attendants and teachers at Islamic schools, who were mostly hired between 1976-1982.
late 1970s, the Ministry instituted the first ever women’s preaching programme and hired female graduates from the Islamic law department of the University of Jordan as preachers. These policies marked the beginning of a popularisation and a revival of Islamic religiosity in Nablus. There was, however, another character of the local MBs branch of Nablus, which also promoted the popularisation of Islamic religiosity. This was their profound dedication to the principles of the MBs, irrespective of the peripheral position they occupied in the brothers’ party organisation, located, then, in the East of Jordan (Milton-Edwards 1999, 64). It was perhaps this keen Islamist commitment of the Nablus local Islamist elite that made the Zakat73 committees74 that they helped establish in 1976 in Nablus City, the first of their kind in the West Bank. Funded by Islamic charities in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Zakat committees in Nablus have mainly provided welfare assistance to the poor, particularly women and children, but since their early establishment, the committees were also catalysts in popularising women’s religiosity in the city through their funding of Quran-teaching centres.75 It was the policy of the Islamic charities in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait that their Zakat recipients in Nablus City (and later, in the West Bank) convey some knowledge of the Quran, or a proof of their engagement in learning it. When charity recipients prove neither of the cases, Zakat committees give them some sections (ajzā’) from the Quran and encourage them to join a Quran learning centre in their location in order to start learning it.

All in all, to summarise how the male Islamist elite in Nablus City influenced the WPM, I suggest that as an indication of, and essential component of, the WPM, women’s growing involvement since the late 1970s in learning the Quran at Quran learning centres, funded by Islamist charity, was not an intended consequence of the politics of this male Islamist elite, but a side effect. In addition, as husbands, fathers, and city locals,76 Islamist male elite in the city supported women’s public piety initiatives but were reluctant to support these women’s rights for paid work and political participation - a stand that many dā’iyyāt in the WPM did not feel at ease with. This

73 Zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam. It compels affluent Muslims to donate part of their wealth, be it in cash or in kind, to the poor. Zakat comes from the root word zaka, which means to grow. It is believed that by donating to the poor, the wealth of the Muslim rich will blossom and grow.

74 Zakat committees are semi-governmental organisations that affluent West Bank merchants, business men, and professionals helped create all over the West Bank, during the 1980s. The committees provide social security services to the poor, particularly women and children. Its social services were recognised as the second major source of assistance for the poor, after the Ministry of Social Affairs. As stated, the first of such committees was established in Nablus City, in the late 1970s. Zakat committees’ source of funding is donations from Islamic charities in Saudi Arabia, the State of the Arab Gulf, and Kuwait.

75 The Quran learning centres are administered by the MOWARA but are funded by the Zakat committees.

76 For example, businessmen and professionals have been supporting women’s da’wa initiatives by, for example, donating (for free) their locales for women to meet as was the case with Dā’iya Fadia (see section one in this chapter, senior Dā’iya Fadia: A Synopsis).
gender stand of traditional Islamist was in contrast to the gender position of the New Islamists of the Middle, discussed next.

4. Gender and the Regional, New Islamists of the Middle

Modern Islamic gender ideology is usually associated with the late nineteenth century Islamic scholars like Rifāʿa al-Tahtawi and Mohammad ‘Abdo, who argued for a “reform in polygamy, divorce, and called for women’s education” (Ahmad 1992, 144). Their reform agenda remained at the heart of the “modernization project” of their twentieth century successors (Abu Lughod 1998, 243), the MBs. As the chief movement that represents the contemporary Islamic ideology, the MBs have continued to shape contemporary Islamic gender ideology. However, the MBs’ gender ideology was not static but has undergone significant changes. To highlight these changes, two main Islamist gender ideologies are discussed here: the traditionalist Islamist represented by the views of the MBs’ founder, Hassan al-Banna, and that of the new Islamists of the Middle, represented by the views of Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi.

As for the gender ideology of Hassan al-Banna, as discussed above, al-Banna was an advocate of women’s participation in the popular base of the movement but recommended that a woman only be educated “with that which she requires to fulfil the mission and duty that God created her for: To take care of her home and her children” (al-Banna 1988, 11).77

Also, based on his reasoning that Islam forbids the mingling of sexes, al-Banna prohibited women from work and political participation. He even preferred that women prayed at home (al-Banna, 18).78 In contrast, despite being inspired by al-Banna’s adherence to an Islamic form of modernity, the New Islamists differed from him on those very gender grounds. Based on non-textual and pragmatic interpretations of Islamic Law, al-Qaradawi allowed women’s education, work and political participation. In arguing for women’s political participation, he proposed that the Islamic principle of “guardianship” (al-qiwāma) - which dictates that men are responsible for their women - applies only to the husband’s role in the domestic sphere, not in the public or political ones (Stowasser 2009, 203). These views and interpretations by al-Qaradawi have created the gender stand of the “New Islamism”, or the “Moderate Islamism of the Middle”. As Baker observes, the New Islamism of the Middle developed from the MBs, and was shaped by both its successes and failures (2003, 3).79

The aim of the modern Islamist of the middle was to fashion an Islam-based authentic modernity that represents the “paradigm of the middle” (Stowasser 2009, 181). How did these two Islamist

77 In Abu Hanieh (2008, 90).
78 In Abu Hanieh (2008, 91).
79 Also quoted by Stowasser (2009, 181).
brands (traditional MBs and New Islamism of the Middle) influence the formation of senior Dāʿiya Fadia’s Islamist feminist and pious modern subjectivity? I contend that it was through her rejection of the traditional MBs’ gender stand, which her husband represented, that she advanced a notion of womanhood compatible with the Modern Islamist of the Middle. This formation is further highlighted in the following discussion of her socio-cultural repertoire of piety.

5. The Formation of the Pious Modern and the Socio-Cultural Repertoire of Piety

5.1. A Daughter

Dāʿiya Fadia’s first involvement with the WPM dates back to her secondary school days, when she was only 15 or 16 years old, “the age of the peak of emotions, when girls’ inclination for religiosity comes by nature (bi-l-ʾifṭara)”, as she expounded. Her first attempt at wearing the veil was modeled after her high school teacher, Dāʿiya Khawla, whom she greatly admired, and who, according to Dāʿiya Fadia, “wore a scarf and a long jacket, as the Islamic dress (Jilbāb) was not yet spread”. It was also Dāʿiya Khawla’s “refined manners of behaviour with students that made [Dāʿiya Fadia] want to wear the veil and that made [Dāʿiya Fadia] like religion”. Dāʿiya Fadia added that, “it was behaviour before religion that made [her] like the second”. However, at the time she was not sure she wanted to commit to the veil, so she “put on the scarf and removed it, put it on and removed it” until she finally committed to it after marriage. This was accompanied by several attempts at joining and dropping out of her teacher’s piety lesson.

Her high school experiences were not the only socio-cultural reference through which Dāʿiya Fadia tracked her early inclination towards Islamic piety. Dāʿiya Fadia constantly referred to her family milieu; she especially referred with immense spirituality to the character and manners of her father. Thus, in a breathless tone of voice, during the interview, she likened her father’s refined manners to those of the Prophet Mohammad. According to Dāʿiya Fadia:

During my studies of Islamic Law (shariʿa) and when I started to learn more about the Prophet Mohammad, I felt my father’s manners were similar to those of the Prophet. My father’s fear of God (makhāfet Allah) was the ultimate concern that guided his everyday behaviour and relations with others. Thus my father used to meet anger with tolerance; he would refrain from breaking a promise that he had once made; and, he would not take even a meager pay for a work that he had not fully completed. Thus, during the tight deadlines of the busy night of the feast (ʿĪd), he used to spend the entire night awake in order to complete a Samaritan’s⁸⁰ or a villager’s dress lest he broke his promise to any of them or spent what he was in advance paid for, before giving back what they had already owed him. Further, after work and early evening prayer (salat al-maghrib), he used to spend the time indoors, reading books from our large home library, to thoroughly and deeply learn about religion (yetʿammaq fi buḥūr al-dīn).

⁸⁰ The Samaritans is a small, Jewish, Arabic-speaking community (Dumper 2007, 266) that has been living in the city for centuries. Also discussed in chapter two, section one, in this thesis.
In contrast to the modest life of her father, her mother often entertained at their home with lavish parties - lots of food and drink offered for their large number of relatives, friends, and neighbours, for whom she would play the lute, the ‘oud. Her mother had full control over her own mobility; if she decided she wanted to visit a kin who lived abroad, she would travel to that location on the spur of the moment. Because of her frequent dislocations and travels, her mother was known in the vicinity as *Umm Battuta*.\(^{81}\) According to Dā‘iya Fadia:

> My mother could do anything at any time. If at one moment she decided she wanted to travel to Amman, or somewhere outside the city, she would immediately do it.

Despite his piety, Dā‘iya Fadia’s father did not impose on her mother’s mode of life order (*niẓām*), nor did he impose order on Dā‘iya Fadia and her sisters, as he “had little influence”, she regretfully noted.

### 5.2. A Wife

Dā‘iya Fadia’s husband, a businessman, who was sympathetic to the ideology of the MBs, was different from her father. From the very beginning of their engagement, her husband attempted imposing order to modify her lifestyle, albeit in a refined, non-coercive manner. He expected that she committed to Islamic dress. “His first present to me, the first a fiancé could bring to his fiancée, was a package with a scarf and a jacket inside”, she expounds. Dā‘iya Fadia, however, frames her husband’s orders as a romantic gesture from a fiancé to his fiancée, thus rendering her final (after marriage) commitment to veiling as an act of her free will.

### 5.3. Work

Soon after marriage, Dā‘iya Fadia’s husband insisted that she give up her job as a school teacher, a job that she loved and took great interest in to the extent that she used to “give students from [her] blood.” Her interpretation of her husband’s explanation for making her leave her job was ambivalent. On one occasion she stressed that her husband’s rationale was that she should take care of their children and domestic work; on another, she stressed that his rationale was that, according to his family, “Women should not be allowed to work”. After her youngest daughter turned six, Dā‘iya Fadia refused to be exclusively committed to her domestic duties; she complained that she could not continue living as a “lost person” (*shakhṣ dā‘i*) like other women lived, “without a mission in [their] life”. She also argued that in exchange for giving up her job following her husband’s desires, she would like to continue her distance-learning studies in Islamic law.

\(^{81}\) Referring to the medieval Arabic traveller, Ibn Battuta (1304-1369), well known for his extensive travel over the world of his time (Hrbek n. d.).
In her words:

My husband did not want that I work and I refuse to be like other women; I cannot be a lost person (ṣākhṣ dāʿī), I want to be a person with impact, one with influence. Thus, I said, ‘you do not want me to work, then I want to continue my studies. I cannot continue to live as a lost person’.

5.4 A Dāʿiya

Dāʿiya Fadia attributed her early 1990s trajectory into becoming a dāʿiya to her studies of Islamic law, shariʿa; she tremendously enjoyed her studies in Islamic law, because “it was about life, about everything [related to life], [and] about the rules of God, not the rules of the people”. Her studies made her aware that in her social vicinity there was a gap between what the Shariʿa dictates, and what seemed to be widely spread, tolerated practices by neighbours, relatives and friends, which she frames as a problem of these people’s ignorance of their rights and duties (ḥuqūq wa-wājibāt). Her following narration indicates that in the social vicinity she was close to, it was mainly the rights of women and children that were violated.

I came to know of many, many malpractices between husbands and wives, fathers and daughters or sons, and brothers and sisters. Fathers hindering the marriage of their working daughters in order to continue to benefit from their paid salaries; parents making their clever boys leave school and send them instead to work in order to earn some more money; divorcees with many family and inheritance problems, etc. [Thus] I became aware of the issues of rights and duties (ḥuqūq wa-wājibāt). I am so, so concerned that people understand this subject. Many women ignore their rights, why? I say; if you have a right, go for it, ask for it.

This situation made her feel she needed to take action to raise the public’s awareness of their rights. For this reason, she started her in-home piety group that attracted many women from the vicinity. When, after several years, the group had grown significantly, a businessman in the city offered them to meet in his locale for free.

6. Senior Dāʿiya Fadia’s Moral Agency: Between the Dramatised Utopian and the Real Constraints

One of the features that may strike the reader in senior Dāʿiya Fadia’s above narration of her trajectory into Islamic piety is the force by which she lays out to the reader her justification for becoming a dāʿiya. I suggest that the performative features of her narration and its temporal

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82 It is the same force I felt when I interviewed her in 2010. Thus, when I contacted senior Dāʿiya Fadia for an interview during the summer of 2010, I was surprised that she straightforwardly agreed to meet, even though this was during a hot Ramadan, in August, when I presumed talking would precipitate thirst and, perhaps, agitation. Contrary to my expectation, when I arrived on the due date, she was comfortably sitting on one of the large sofas in her bright sitting
and spatial “sequence” were a means to build and advance that moral force, conveying herself as a moral agent, whose choice of piety came after individual reflection and choice. The first thing we learn from Dāʿiya Fadia’s narration is that her beginnings with the WPM date back to her secondary school days; she was only 15 or 16 years old: “the age of the peak of emotions”, according to her. By stressing that her beginnings with Islamic piety were at the age of the “peak of emotions”, she is not only emphasising that at this age moral guidance of girls - as provided by her school teacher - is vital; but as she characterises teenaged religiosity as one that “comes by nature” (bi-Ilfitra), she is claiming that, in contrast, as an adult woman, her piety has been after reflection and choice. Then, as she quickly moves next to describe with immense spirituality the influence of her pious father on her inclination for piety, she further advances that notion of herself as a moral agent by demonstrating how she consciously weighted the correctness of the behaviours of her significant others (father, mother, and husband) against the Islamic moral standard of orderliness.

By likening her father’s manners to those of the prophet, she is not only dramatising those aspects of her father’s personality, but she is also dramatising those those aspects of herself that she wants us to know (Bauman 1986). As she eagerly recalls how her father used to spend the entire night before the ʿĪd (the feast), putting his last touch on a Samaritan’s, or a villager’s dress, that he promised he would finish on time, she is not only alluding to her father’s contrary-to-mainstream position in his pursuit of morality but also to her own. She is telling us that, for her, piety is about balancing taking and giving and about being considerate of others’ rights and fulfilling one’s duty towards them; this is even if that other is a non-Muslim like the Samaritan, or a stranger like a villager. By referring to a Samaritan and a villager as the subject of her father’s meticulous concern with morality, Dāʿiya Fadia conveys that the kind of piety she aspires to is one that breaks with religious and social prejudice for the utopian end of universalism.

Further, by putting us in the context of the festive and busy night of the ʿĪd to demonstrate her father’s piety, she makes a temporal-spatial shift in her narration that reveals the complexity of living up to those Islamic moral standards. The festive night of the ʿĪd can involve a tremendous unleash of order; it marks the end of either Ramadan, with its fasting and worshipping mood, or the eve of ʿĪd al-Adha; on both occasions, people of different social backgrounds pour in large numbers into the city centre to shop from busy stores and small businesses and get their purchases ready before the end of the evening; in this situation, breaking the rules becomes tempting and very likely; and it becomes practically beyond anybody’s capacity to orchestrate the needs, desires, and the rights, of all the enchanted revellers - which order is all about.

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room - her face radiating energy that continued all through the interview, while in a straightforward, powerful manner explaining why and how she became committed to da ṭa ʿwa.
Thus, all in all, and at a deeper, perhaps unconscious level, as senior Dā’iya Fadia locates her model of morality in her father’s past pious behaviour - which she likens to that of Prophet Mohammad - she is highlighting our current distance from such an ideal state of morality; she passes on a “vision of history”, in which the present is one of chaos and lack of morality - the antithesis of orderliness. In the narrative analysis model of feminist historian, Chanfrault-Duchet (1991, 80), senior Dā’iya Fadia conveys a romanseque vision of relationship to society; in this model, Dā’iya Fadia positions herself as one who is “in [a] quest for authentic values in a degraded world” (ibid.). Extending further senior Dā’iya Fadia’s vision of history to its end, one can observe that her vision construes the present in Salafi terms. Salafis describe our contemporary times as a state moral decay (Jāhiliyya).

However, to justify her role as a Dā’iya, nowhere in her narration does Dā’iya Fadia use the Salafi term al-Jāhiliyya to describe the status quo. Nor does she advance the Salafi position that women should return home, or be strictly confined to its domains, in order to retain a state of public morality. She, instead, uses Islamic rights language (ḥuqūq wa-wājibāt) to assess and describe the status quo in terms of their absences and violations. She particularly positions women and children as the subjects whose rights are violated.

To conclude, this dramatised notion of herself, her agency, and her utopian vision of history contradict with the actual gender constraints she faced within her marriage; these constraints influenced her mode of religiosity. Still it was through these contradictions between the utopian and the real that she developed her own Islamist feminist morality and drew the contours of her notion of the pious modern woman. Bucar (2010) discusses this dynamic tension between the real and the utopian as a locus of agency. She argues that agency is “shaped within specific conditions and yet can also point beyond them” (2010, 666); and that there is a possibility of creative compliance that is not necessarily intentional resistance (ibid.). To Dā’iya Fadia’s social real (i.e. the tension in her gender experience as a daughter and a wife) and how that gender experience shaped the contours of her pious modern-ness, the chapter will now turn.

7. The Contours of the Pious Modern and their Makings

7.1. The Gender Social Problematic and the Tensional Dynamic of Consent and Dissent

In this section I highlight in senior Dā’iya Fadia’s narration the gender “social problematic” (Chanfrault-Duchet 1991, 82). That is, I compare her gender stand to some cultural notion of gender, which might have shaped the gender stand of that of the Palestinian society at large. I

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83 For a discussion of the term Jāhiliyya, see section two in this chapter, Islamic/Islamist Subjectivities.
discern Dā‘iya Fadia’s gender stand from her narration strategies. Dā‘iya Fadia’s narrative strategies include her contrastive positioning of the female and male characters in her narration. In her narration, Dā‘iya Fadia positions her modest introvert father against her free extrovert mother; she positions her pious self against her extrovert mother, who submits to hedonist pleasures (e.g. celebrating, eating, drinking, travelling, and playing the lute); she also positions her husband’s assertiveness against her father’s passivity, regretting that her father did not impose order (niẓām) on her mother’s mode of sociability, her sisters’, and her own.

It is perhaps tempting to discern in this gender-contrastive positioning by senior Dā‘iya Fadia the classical biblical and Quranic representation of women as a threat to social order, with men being victims of women’s hedonist pleasures; and that Dā‘iya Fadia construes women as “morally inferior” ⁸⁴ to men, proposing that, for social order to prevail, men must control otherwise unrestrained women.

Yet in a detailed discussion of her narration, one can observe that Dā‘iya Fadia’s gender stand was complex. Against the male authority, she shows assertiveness but also ambivalence. She, for example, rejects her father’s lack of masculine forcefulness, but rejects the assertiveness of that of her husband; she acclaims the authority of her husband, but criticises it as one propelled by the traditional code of honour (‘ird); she rejects the assertive authority of her husband, but does not sustain a wholehearted rejection of it; she proposes that if a woman’s desire for independence from the authority of her husband will harm the family and children, then a woman must forgo that desire; finally, she claims that her religiosity is after the model of that of her father’s, but rejects her father’s religiosity as introvert and lacking social impact.

What contributes to Dā‘iya Fadia’s ambivalent stand against male authority, and how can we interpret it? I contend that, while it can be understood in terms of her personal familial settings and her lived gender experiences as a daughter and a wife, her complex gender stand needs to be further understood in the context of broader social structural changes in the Palestinian society at large. Her distance from her mother’s model of womanhood, discussed next, highlights the importance of placing Dā‘iya Fadia’s individual gender experience in the broader social structural changes that have, for decades, been affecting the gender relations in the Palestinian society in general and Nablus city in particular as I started to discuss in chapter two of this thesis.

⁸⁴ See a discussion of the notion of women as “morally inferior” to men in Abu-Lughud (1999, 166).
7.2. Daughters versus Mothers

As stated earlier in this article, senior Dāʿiya Fadia rejects her mother’s mode of sociability and regards it as “aimless”, because it emphasises material consumption at the expense of spirituality. She instead advances a model of “New Islamic woman”, which embraces neoliberal Islamist ethics; the latter stresses purposeful spending of one’s time, hard work, self-progress, voluntarism, and community work. Senior Dāʿiya Fadia’s positioning of herself against her mother calls attention to a generational social problematic: what is it that makes daughters reject their mothers’ lifestyle and to instead embrace a path of morality that limits their freedom? That is, why do daughters, in contrast to their mothers, find Islamic morality appealing? As I started to discuss, one possible answer is familial experience. Given senior Dāʿiya Fadia’s formative familial parental experiences, previously discussed, one can suggest that the incompatible characters of her parents (her autonomous, extravagant mother vis-à-vis her passive, pious father) made her experience her parents’ relationship as one that lacked marital compatibility, empathy and engagement. In comparison, married to a man, who, we conclude, asserted his male authority in line with cultural and traditional Islamist hybrid motives, she experienced her marriage as engaging and less alienating. Yet her dissatisfaction with her husband’s authority renders this micro-political explanation of her inclination towards Islamic morality incomplete. Senior Dāʿiya Fadia’s appreciation of Islamic morality can be additionally understood in the broader social structural changes in the Palestinian society, which changed women’s opportunity structure and the gender dynamic inside the family. In contrast to their mothers, daughters’ increased access to higher education, paid work and public visibility heightened the anxieties of their male partners to control their modesty in the public sphere. Because of these changes, the younger generation of Palestinian women now experiences in their marriages a gender strain that their mothers did not experience in the past. As we started discussing in chapter one, the theoretical framework chapter, several studies have addressed the impact of this broad social change in women’s opportunity structure on the gender dynamic inside the family and on the character of the social patriarchal system in the Middle East region, at large.

For example, Baxter (2007) has observed that what Caldwell (1982) and Kandiyoti (1988) conceptualise as the “belt” of classic patriarchy, a system centred on male dominance, the control of women, and the connection between female sexual behaviour and family honour, has been showing “signs” of breakdown, under the power of “tremendous economic, political, and social changes” (2007, 765).

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85 For a discussion of the neoliberal Islamist ethics, see Atia 2012, briefly discussed in section two of this chapter, Islamic/Islamist Subjectivities.
Further, Moghadam has argued that expanding female education and employment in the Middle East has gradually “weakened” the patriarchal gender relations, generating “status inconsistency and anxiety on the part of the men of the petty bourgeoisie” (1993, 137). For another example, Taraki (1995) has found that, during the mid-1990s, Islamists in Jordan had relentlessly addressed the “woman” issue. She suggested that the “key to the explanation of that urgency was that Islamist men themselves were going through the socially troubling consequences of new forms in women’s work, education and visibility” (1995, 643). These changes, according to Taraki, had made the questions of women’s modesty and conduct concrete rather than abstract ones, as was the case for Islamists decades ago; this is when only upper and upper-middle-class women had access to education and paid work (ibid.).

All in all, I conclude that a combination of factors and motives made senior Dāʿiya Fadia depart from her mother’s model of womanhood and made her advance the model of the “New Islamic woman”. This leads us to discuss another aspect of Dāʿiya Fadia’s contours of modernity: her rejection of a religiosity propelled by male anxiety over women’s sexuality (i.e. the code of honour, or ‘ird). In the following, I show how Dāʿiya Fadia’s Islamic/Islamist femininity emerged from her ambivalent stand against the authority of her husband and father but particularly against the authority of her husband.

7.3. Against the Masculine Code of Honour and the Limits of the Proposed “New Islamic Woman”

As I started to discuss earlier, when Dāʿiya Fadia reflects on the impact of her male significant others on her mode of religiosity, her narration shows ambivalence and contradictions. She says:

My religiosity is the [necessary] blend of my father’s empathy and husband’s orderliness (nizām). For, empathy alone is not enough, order is also necessary.

She then goes on to distance her mode of religiosity from either of them:

My religiosity is the after the fear of God, is more like my father’s. My husband’s religiosity is like fear for ‘ird (honour).

But she also continues:

My father used to stay indoors, reading and studying alone. He was with no influence on others, or on society. [And]I want to have impact. I want to be one who reforms society. Religion is about life, not only ‘ibādāt (worship).

From this narration, we can see that on the one hand, she forcefully speaks of her current piety (taqwa) as the outcome of the necessary blend of her father’s empathy and her husband’s orderliness, because, according to her, “empathy alone is not enough, order is also necessary”.

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On the other hand, she breaks this carefully woven narrative of how these conflicting male authorities neatly cohered into an efficient blend that she elegantly takes into her pious self. She contests that her mode of religiosity is different from either her father’s or her husband’s. She specifically distances her religiosity from her husband’s, which she perceptively asserts as a religiosity that is propelled by the fear for ‘ird (honour).

From this contradictory and complex position, we can see how she departs from both traditional male authority and traditional mode of religiosity. She shows that religiosity should be neither male’s control of female sexuality (i.e. fear for honour or ‘ird), nor worshipping in private, which her father did. Rather, she shows that religiosity must be about females asserting through da’wa their impact in the public sphere. Thus, we hear her contesting her husband’s stand that she should give up her work as a teacher:

You do not want me to work and I want to continue my education; I cannot continue to live like other women, without a mission, I cannot live like a lost person (shakhṣ dāʿī), I want to be a person with impact, one who can reform society.

In this statement, she firmly iterated her position against her husband at the time: yet she is careful that one (i.e. an audience like myself) does not interpret her assertive position vis-à-vis her husband’s will as an assertion of her individual autonomy against his authority as such. She then continues to sum up her position vis-à-vis women’s desire for education and work in a manner, whereby her position does not contradict with traditional societal expectations or Islamist ones:

If my husband insisted that I did not study I would choose my husband and my children, because educating myself at the expense of children is selfishness… and because, if you destroy a family you destroy a generation.86

I suggest that this ambivalence that Dāʿiya Fadia shows against the male authority can be understood in Bucar’s (2006) terms as a “creative dissent”: a position that rejects a particular form of male authority, but does not reject male authority as such. Dāʿiya Fadia’s creative dissent position is also clear in her notion of “Science as the Parameter of Religion”, another contour of her pious modern-ness, discussed next.

7.4. The Pious Modern and the Notion of “Science as the Parameter of Religion”

In the previous sections, I identified Dāʿiya Fadia’s second set of claims against the status quo as one that is pertinent to the public’s notion of religion. In this set of claims, she rejects a liberal

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86 To make this point clear, Dāʿiya Fadia referred to the unfortunate turn in the marriage of one of her relatives, who was recently divorced because she insisted that she take a study scholarship abroad, something that her husband did not approve of.
secular notion of religion as the mere practice of rituals, or worships (ʿibādāt), and embraces a notion of religion as "science" that concern all aspects of life. She also criticises the public’s ignorance of the Islamic grid of the licit and the illicit (al-ḥalāl wa-l-ḥarām).87

Dāʿiya Fadia uses her very notion of religion as science to distance her mode of religiosity from that of other dāʿiyat in the city. Those whose mode of religiosity she considers as traditional. 88

She states:

For me, religion and science go together; religion alone is not enough. I do not like to be called shaykha, or be associated with those female preachers, who in the past were called darwisha.89 In my preaching I combine religion with science. I want to give a modern conception about religion; its diameter is science, not darwasha. Religion is not only praying or fasting, it is all life.

This narration shows that senior Dāʿiya Fadia’s notion of how religion and modernity should go together involves combining religion with science90 and extending religion to those spheres of life that are otherwise considered beyond the religious domains: “Religion is not only worship (ʿibādāt) but is everything related to life”, she stresses.

Through her notion of religion as science, she wishes to establish a model of religiosity that will break with our modern time’s stigmatisation of piety as a backward and uncivil practice, indicated by the term darwasha. But what exactly is senior Dāʿiya Fadia’s notion of science and how does that notion help her construct herself as a pious modern against those dāʿiyat whose mode of religiosity is considered by many as backward and uncivil?

87 In Islamic law, the grid of the licit and the illicit (al-ḥalāl wa-l-ḥarām) refers to what the Quran and the hadith (Prophet Mohammad’s sayings) indicated to Muslims as permissible and impermissible. For example, Islamic law permits Muslims to incur profit from trading but prohibits it - profit - from money lending. Therefore, in Islamic law, earning profit from trading is permissible (ḥalāl) but is impermissible (ḥarām) from money lending.

88 For example, another popular and senior dāʿiya in the city, whose piety lesson has been for more than two decades attracting dozens of women.

89 See footnote 62 in this chapter for a brief discussion of the term darwisha.

90 In comparison, Dāʿiya Manal, another prominent dāʿiya in the city, considers Islam the source of all modern sciences, and she indicates that science can be reduced to religion. Lamenting the status of today’s Muslim scholars (ʿulama), she states:

Those who study the hadith learn all the sciences. In the past [the medieval Muslim physician] Sidna al-Razi ([our lord al-Razi], who even knew about cancer, did not go to school and did not study at a university. So, who had made him a scholar (ʿālim)? At the present, because our scientists lost their religion and their sincere religious commitment, they have [also] lost everything, because the Quran and the hadith teach all the sciences.
I suggest that for Dāʾiya Fadia applying science to religion means transcending *fitra* (human nature) as the main source of religiosity, because *fitra*, although natural, does not suffice to make a Muslim person know the Islamic codes. For Dāʾiya Fadia, therefore, applying science to religion indicates the need to transcend the public’s taken-for-granted, traditional knowledge of Islamic rules. This is, because, according to her, in their ignorance of authentic Islamic codes, the public “legitimises the illicit (*al-ḥarām*) and delegitimises the licit (*al-ḥalāl*)”. It is important therefore in Dāʾiya Fadia’s view that people obtain correct knowledge of these Islamic rules from authenticated sources. In this sense, Dāʾiya Fadia promotes a notion of science as the authentic knowledge of Islamic codes. Her promotion echoes what Deeb (2005, 6) finds to be Lebanese Shiʿi women’s concerns and endeavours, which we referred to earlier in this chapter, yet I suggest that Shiʿi women’s main source of Islamic knowledge is the male figure of the Imam, while in Nablus the source of this knowledge is open to both women and men who receive formal education in Islamic law (shariʿa). Dāʾiya Fadia is one of those women, who after receiving formal education in Islamic law, has for more than a decade circulated and exchanged this knowledge with a community of women believers, who she helped create.

As I mentioned earlier, Dāʾiya Fadia’s vision of how religion and science should go together shaped the type of issues that the weekly session she coordinated used to address. In addition to Quran reading, a typical weekly event included half an hour of questions and answers on women’s Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh al-nisāʿ*) (e.g. questions related to personal status law, such as marriage, divorce, child custody, etc.). This half-hour question and answer session was followed by a lecture on a community public health issue such as water shortage, nutrition, food storage and safety. As testament to her progress in this kind of knowledge, Dāʾiya Fadia pointed out that she authored *Fatawa al-nisaʿ*, a book on Women’s verdicts.

All in all, Dāʾiya Fadia’s notion of how religion and science should go together makes her break with the traditional mode of religiosity, but not with the discursive tradition of Islam itself. Her pious modern-ness, indicated in this creative dissent position from traditional religiosity, is clear in her articulation of her moral claims against the status quo in Nablus City in Islamic rights terms, discussed next.

7.5. The Pious Modern, Islamic Rights and Science

In the previous section, I argued against interpreting Dāʾiya Fadia’s narrative positionality as one that considers women a threat to social order or as morally inferior to men. In this section, I sustain this argument by showing how she articulates her moral claims against women’s status quo in the social milieu of Nablus City in Islamic rights terms. I suggest that if one is to discern in Dāʾiya Fadia’s narration a perpetrator of disorder, this will be the public’s ignorance of Islamic
rights. To understand the significance of Dā'īya Fadia’s articulation of the status quo in Islamic rights terms, and highlight what is novel in that articulation, let us further discuss what she means by those rights.

According to Dā’īya Fadia, people’s ignorance of Islamic rights makes them tolerate many morally wrong practices as, when:

Fathers hinder the marriage of their working daughters to benefit from their paid salaries; parents make their clever boys leave school, and, instead, send them to work, so that parents can earn more income; relatives deny women their inheritance; husbands deny their divorcée women the custody of their children, etc.

She expounds:

Their ignorance of those rights and duties, people legitimises the illicit (al-ḥarām) and prohibits the licit (al-ḥalāl)… I am very, very concerned that people understand their rights. Many people ignore their rights, why? If you have a right, ask for it.

In this narration, Dā’īya Fadia defines Islamic rights as duties and obligations (ḥuqūq wa-wājibāt). According to her the grid of the licit and the illicit (al-ḥalāl wa-l-ḥarām) is to safeguard those rights, but because the public are ignorant of this Islamic moral grid, there are many rights violations. She believes that mainly women and children are the subject of those violations, and she expresses disapproval, even disapprobation, that at the present time many women ignore their rights: “Why?” she passionately asks. “If you [a woman] have a right, ask for it”.

Finally, she expresses zeal about correcting the status quo by increasing people’s awareness of those rights: “I am so, so concerned that people understand this subject of rights” (ḥuqūq wa-wājibāt), she concludes. Also clear in this articulation is Dā’īya Fadia’s call for a social reform, based on advancing a credible knowledge of Islamic rights as duties and obligations among the public.

I suggest that Dā’īya Fadia’s framing of the social and moral status of women in Nablus City in Islamic rights terms parallels that of the global human rights discourse of the 1990s. This global human rights discourse was embodied in the gender discourse of many local and international NGOs (see Jad 2010; Welchman 2003). Also, locating her notion of rights in Talal Asad’s (2003) genealogical approach to the analysis of the emergence of the secular, demonstrates how her proposal of Islamic rights as a framework for social reform was an outcome of a dynamic formation, rather than the outcome of a doctrinal belief; this formation was engendered by her encounters in her weekly piety session with women’s personal problems.

To further highlight what is novel in Dā’īya Fadia’s articulation of Islamic rights as duties and obligations, let us compare her Islamic rights approach to that of the global human rights in general. In his comparison of Islamic and modern human rights conceptions of the term “right”,
Mossa asserts that Islam stresses three kinds of rights: God's rights (*ḥuqūq Allah*), individuals' rights (*ḥuqūq al-ʿibād*), and dual rights (hybrid rights) (2004, 6). The first stresses a Muslim's religious duties towards God, and the second towards individuals' (i.e. secular, civil rights), while the third emphasises a mixture of both secular and religious rights. Mossa further suggests that in Islam “devotional and civil rights have the same moral status” (ibid.).

Based on Tuck's (1979) distinction between active and passive rights, Asad (2003, 30) concludes that modern human rights are based on active rights. Active rights stress the rights of the individual as such; Passive rights stress rights as reciprocal and interpersonal obligations (*haqq* and *wājib*).

Given this distinction between global modern and Islamic notions of rights, it is interesting to note that in the above narration *Dāʿiya* Fadia defines Islamic rights as both reciprocal (i.e. passive) and hybrid rights. That is, she defines Islamic rights as a mixture of one’s religious duties towards God and one’s civil and reciprocal obligations towards others. She thus conveys a notion of rights as a moral obligation not only in terms of ‘*ibādāt* (worship), but also in terms of *muʿāmalāt* (the worldly, pragmatic affairs).

This view of Islamic rights as hybrid rights echoes *Dāʿiya* Fadia’s notion of religion as science, just discussed. In its turn, this notion of science is also the notion of the “new, moderate Islamism of the middle”. According to the prominent ideologue of New Islamism of the Middle, Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, “Islam is not only a system of religious beliefs [but also] a moral and practical guide to the improvement of life” (Stowasser 2009, 182).  

To sum up, by articulating Islamic rights as hybrid rights, *Dāʿiya* Fadia carves a pious modernness that transcends the secular/religious polarity characteristics of the liberal notion of modernity. Further, in advancing that one’s civil rights (e.g. the rights for education, health, work, and safety, etc.) are not separated from God’s rights, she stresses the enmeshment of the religious and the secular - a theme central to her Islamist feminineness and pious modernness; that is a theme central to her Islamist feminist and pious modern subjectivity.

**Conclusion**

The chapter has argued that, located in local structural and regional Islamist ideological changes, women’s subjectivities in the Women’s Piety Movement (WPM) in Nablus City have been diverse/multiple and in motion. Senior *Dāʿiya* Fadia's trajectory into a *dāʿiya* demonstrates such diversity and a motion. Through the analysis of senior *Dāʿiya* Fadia’s life story and her trajectory into piety, the chapter discussed the rise and the formation in the WPM of the

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91 Stowasser's interview with al-Qaradawi, March 2006 (ibid.).
Islamic/Islamist feminist, pious modern subjectivity. The chapter discussed the contours of this pious modern subjectivity and showed that at the heart of those contours was the authentication of Islam and its construction in modern terms as something compatible with modern science. The chapter showed that the authentication of Islam as a contour of the pious modern, which Dāʿiya Fadia’s actions exemplified, was not dissimilar to the Lebanese Shiʿi women’s authentication of Islam that Lara Deeb describes in her study, An enchanted modern: gender and public piety in Shiʿi Lebanon. They both - Muslim women in Nablus City, and Shiʿi women in Beirut - sought to carve out an authentic conception of Islam and construct their identity in those Islamic authentication terms, by propagating Islam’s correct moral codes and making those Islamic codes as the foundation of their vision for social reform. As an example of how she constructs her Islamist feminine-ness and pious modern-ness in modern yet authentic Islamic terms, the chapter showed how Dāʿiya Fadia proposes social reform in women’s conditions, based on those correct Islamic codes, which she frames - in modern human rights language - as Islamic rights (ḥuqūq wa- wājibāt). The chapter also showed that unlike other dāʿiya in the city (e.g. Amal in the previous chapter), influenced by the gender stand of the new Islamist of the Middle, Dāʿiya Fadia stresses pious women’s public role as a community activist, expressed in her phrase: “I want to have a [social] impact”. In that statement, she promoted a model of womanhood that was both Islamic/Islamist and feminist. Contrary to the traditional Islamist, exemplified by the views of MBs’ founder, Hassan al-Banna, the new Islamist of the Middle argued that the Islamic law (shariʿa) permitted expanded roles for women in the public sphere (e.g. paid work and political participation).

As for the gender dynamic in her formation, the chapter shows that Dāʿiya Fadia’s gender stand, particularly against the authority of her husband, was characterised by ambivalence (i.e. both consent and decent). This was unlike Dāʿiya Amal, discussed in the previous chapter, whose relationship to her husband showed plain consent and collaboration.

In terms of agency, thus, in line with a narrative analytical approach, the chapter demonstrated that Dāʿiya Fadia’s notion of her agency exhibited a dramatised notion of herself as one whose choice of Islamic piety was after individual reflection and choice. In line with practice theory, however, the chapter deconstructed senior Dāʿiya Fadia’s dramatised claims for agency by highlighting how her agency was socially embedded. That is, the chapter showed how her agency was bounded by her personal socio-cultural repertoire of piety, and her gender experience in her familial and marital settings. Yet in line with practice theory also the chapter demonstrated that the effect of Dāʿiya Fadia’s social embedded-ness on her choice of piety was not detrimental, but was mediated by her own powerful reflection on her experiences in those personal and familial settings. The chapter explained that what her reflective actions helped create was a model of womanhood that was neither traditional, nor modern in the liberal sense.
Yet, ultimately, the ideal womanhood she fashioned was Islamic/Islamist, feminist, pious, and modern.

All in all, thoroughly presented, discussed, and analysed, in this chapter, Dā’iya Fadia’s life story has been a rich ethnography that powerfully demonstrated the chapter’s opening theoretical statement:

[H]ow actors who are so much products of their own social and cultural context can ever come to transform the conditions of their own existence, except by accident (Ortner1989, 14).

The chapter showed that Dā’iya Fadia’s Islamist femininity, and pious modernity, not only contributed to changing the structure of gender constraints in their private family settings, but also helped, along with the practices of many other women in the WPM, to carve out a public and an autonomous women’s space in the public sphere of the city. A consequence, and a facet of this creation, has been pious women’s constitution of these piety sites as arenas for alternative modes of aesthetics. It is to pious women’s pursuits of the aesthetics and how these pursuits have been a facet and a means in the transformation of women’s cultural taste and discourses of leisure and sociability in the city that the next chapter of this thesis attends.
Chapter Five: From the Aesthetics of the ‘Oud to the Aesthetics of Quran Recitation: the Aesthetics of Piety and the Leisure of the Pious

It is in and through…that which might be sometimes termed beautiful…in which religions continue to adapt to new situations and environments (Plate 2012, 177).

Introduction: Sensational Space, Modes of Embodiments, and Aesthetic Persuasion

The room where the dāʿīya oversees women’s recitation of the Quran is bright and spacious. Its two large windows are opened wide onto an orchard, which surrounds the house, where women meet; and a free breeze enters the room with abundance.

In an upright upper posture, as if to mark her performance space and initiate her entrance into a divine realm, that she wants to seize with her voice, Nadia, a woman in her late 50s, opens the large green and gold hard-cover Quran book, placing it at a comfortable distance from her eyes; and she starts reciting loudly and beautifully.

After Nadia, the mid-60-year-old Umm Salam recites the Quran in a low-pitched voice, while deeply nodding her eyeglasses into the medium-size book, frowning, and sweating, while configuring the words on the page.

At the end of the third recitation round, when Nadia attempted at another recitation slot, Umm Salam was upset because she believed that Nadia had already recited twice, each time reciting for a longer time than other women had. When Nadia ignored Umm Salam’s complaint, and in the same authoritative manner approached the Quran book and started reciting, Umm Salam was so upset that her frowning grew more visible, and she changed her seating location close to the entrance door in a gesture that inferred she was going to leave the ceremony.

Further, during the recitation course, I heard the dāʿīya, who was sitting on a comfortable canopy, in her white satin dress, and similar head cover, intervening in the women’s Quran recitation course, which she was overseeing through her glasses:

Now you read through your tongue (al-lisān), but [to no avail] what you read does not stick in your mind (al-banān).

I hear her continue:
You need to recite slowly and correctly so that you taste the pleasure of the Quran, the pleasure of the beauty attributes (ṣifāt al-jamāl)\textsuperscript{92} of God. God treats us in his beauty attributes.

I also hear her continue:

So that [in this recitation] you please the heart and thus you become competent in 'ilm, science (ʿilm of God).

I hear her further continue:

When you feel you are close to God, you become dependent on him, not on any human being. Instead of depending on God, ignorant people (il-nās al-jāhlin) depend [seek favour] from people (al-ʿibād). This is jahl (ignorance).

From this piety site, its embodied and pedagogic modes of reciting, teaching, and circulating the Quran among its women, and its politics of otherness, I move next in this chapter to discuss in the WPM women’s pursuit of the pleasurable and the aesthetic through their various piety practices. Broadly defined, the aesthetic refers to the modes by which individuals through their senses (sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell) sense, create and reproduce their religion (Plate 2012, 163). Unlike, when defined as a “theory of art” (ibid.), this broad definition of the aesthetic includes “the beautiful” as an element embedded in the aesthetic experience of religion, but not as the feature that defines it.

Given this broad definition of the term I frame my discussion of the aesthetic in this chapter as women’s embodied and sensational experiences of Islam, and their pursuit of the beautiful and the pleasurable as an essential component of these experiences.

As indicated in the Quran recitation scene, just presented, in the WPM, women’s embodied modes of cultivating the pleasurable and the beautiful take place through their practice of various piety practices; among other things, these include reciting and interpreting the Quran, interpreting the hadith (Prophet Mohammad’s sayings), practising supplication (duʿāʾ; dhikr), telling allegories and stories of the prophets (qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ), telling the story of Prophet Mohammad’s birthday (al-Mawlid al-Nabawi), and singing religious songs (inshād). Women indulge themselves in such practices in groups and in private. What accompanies them - these practices - is a variety of aesthetic sensations, such as women experiencing the beauty of: the Quran (e.g. its verse, images, stories, and recitation), the Prophet’s wisdom (demonstrated in his

\textsuperscript{92} God’s beauty attributes (ṣifāt al-jamāl) refer to those attributes associated with love, forgiveness, and mercy (e.g. al-Raḥmān, the Merciful; the Benevolent; al-Ghaffār, the Forgiver; the Condoner). In contrast are ṣifāt al-jalāl, those attributes associated with power and might (e.g. al-Jabbār, the Almighty, the Omnipotent; al-Qahhār, the Conqueror; the Despot; al-Muntaqim, the Revengeful, the Vindictive, among others).
sayings), divine revelations (seeing in dreams the Prophet, his wives, or companions), and the beauty of faith (al-imān) and of being close to God, among others.

I suggest that such a broad definition of the aesthetic as the embodied has important implications for the study of religious experience in general and for the study in the WPM of women’s pursuit of the aesthetic, in particular. I specifically suggest that vis-à-vis an essentialist approach which homogenises religious experience, such a broad definition of the aesthetic as the embodied sets the ground for an embodied/social construction approach, which emphasises the particularity of religious experience and highlights its variations. Therefore, the overall broad argument of the chapter is that this aesthetic/embodied approach to women’s piety does not only highlight women’s various modes of embodying and constructing their religion, but, that by virtue of its focus on these women’s various modes of embodiments, the chapter also uncovers the intentions that underlie these women’s pursuit of the aesthetic as situational and fluid. This overall argument of the chapter is in line with this thesis’ main contention, that rather than being homogeneous as a synchronised outcome of a male Islamist ideology, women’s subjectivity, in the WPM, has been multiple and diverse.

In order to further understand the implications of this definition of the aesthetic for the study, in the WPM, of women’s piety practices, I turn next, in section one, to an elaborated discussion of the term, its postulated assumptions, and their repercussions for the analysis of women’s piety.

1. What is this Idea of the Aesthetic, i.e. Embodiment of Religion?

As just pointed out the aesthetic is broadly defined as the modes by which individuals through their senses (sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell) sense their religion (Plate 2012, 163), a sensation that leads to its creation and reproduction. What is involved in this definition is that religion is like a body, that this body can be sensed, and that it - the body - can be produced through its sensation by a religious subject (i.e. an actor). In his article, “The skin of religion, aesthetic mediations of the sacred”, Plate (2012) uses Meyer’s concept of “sensational forms” (SFs) to explain how religion is like a body. Meyer defines SFs as the religious means that organise individuals’ access to the “transcendental” (2009, 13); they include religious rites, texts, images, symbols, and others (ibid.). In Plate’s theory, these SFs are themselves the body of religion; they are sensational because they engage the subject’s multiple senses, leading to various forms of pleasures and transformations. For, example, in Plate’s approach, as a sensational form, the Quran has the quality of a physical object by the mere fact that it (i.e. its words, images, stories, allegories, and melodies) can enter and transform the body and the mind of its readers, reciters, and listeners, in the same manner a physical paint, displayed in a museum, can enter and transform the mind and soul of its viewers (Plate 2012). This
material/physical approach to religious sensational forms echoes Limbert’s emphasis on the material functions of words, in addition, to their symbolic values (2010, 78-80).

Thus far, the idea that religion is like a body is clarified. In the same article, by likening religion to a film, Plate explains how it is that the reality (materiality) of this body depends on its sensation by a religious subject (2012, 172): like a film, whose spectators designate its reality by their mere act of watching that film, believers designate the reality of their religion through their exchange (circulation) of its SFs (ibid.).

The assumption in this analogy - that the believers of a religion are like the spectators of a film - is that the ontology of religion depends on its being practised by an actor, or a believer. Therefore, Plate concludes that it is “methodologically inadequate to reduce the study of religion to its text, doctrine, visual arts, or ritual movements” (2012, 173). Instead, the study of religion should focus on the subjects’ practice/embodiment of their religion’s SFs.

At this point, Plate’s analysis culminates in the premise that, if there is no embodiment, there will be no religion. This is another way of stressing a practice-theory approach to religion; one that emphasises the ground-ness of social and cultural systems/structures in practice/action.

I suggest, however, that the power and relevance of this paradigm of analysis to women’s aesthetic practices is its assumption that embodiment is about social construction as a process of both creating and reproducing the social.

Further, to embody a religion’s SF (e.g. the Quran) is to integrate that form into one’s body and therefore to claim it as part of one’s mind, self, and identity. What follows from this idea of embodiment of religion is that neither are the body, the mind, the self, identity or society given a priori, nor are they once-and-for-all made entities; but, that through the body, they are always in a process of continuous construction, in which the relationship between these (body, mind, self, and society) becomes of enmeshment rather than separation (McGuire 1990, 285). This kind of analysis defies an essentialist approach which postulates that these categories are stable, fixed, or given a priori. It also speaks to the duality of action/structure premise in practice theory, discussed in the theoretical framework chapter; this premise stresses that it is not possible to understand action without reference to structure and vice versa (see Ortner 1986; 2006).

1.1. Implications for the Study of Religious Experience

What implications do these postulations have to our analysis of pious women’s pursuits of the aesthetics? I suggest that the usefulness of the idea of the embodiment of religion as an analytical approach to religious experience is that it first makes us explore the actual materiality and physicality of religious SFs. Considering, for example, the Quran as a SF makes us consider
the physical attributes of the Quran as a book (e.g. its xx small, x small, small, medium, or large sizes, the quality and colour of its hard cover, the way its title is printed on its hard cover, the font style and size of its printed words and verse, and the way these appear on the page, etc.); and it makes us consider how these attributes shape women’s embodiment of them through recitation. That is, this approach makes us focus the analysis on the ways women spell and pronounce the Quran letters, read and recite its words, and hear and listen to its recitation melodies - Nadia and Umm Salam, whose recitation modes opened the introduction of this chapter, are two examples that illustrate this point.

Second, the emphasis on the embodied nature of religious experience suggests pedagogic agency: the ability to teach oneself and others religious knowledge in a manner that is appealing to the heart (Meyer 2009, 13); that is, in a manner that is sensationally influential and “aesthetic[ally] persuasive” (ibid.). In fact, Plate (2012, 173) suggests that because of their transformative sensational (aesthetic) power, various establishments use SFs to “challenge, shape, and discipline the sensibilities of religious persons” in a process Meyer calls “aesthetic persuasion” (ibid.). Aesthetic persuasion is therefore a mode of pedagogy that focuses on the sensational as a means to cultivate understanding. According to Plate (2012, 173), aesthetic persuasion follows Montessori’s premise: “First the education of the senses, then the education of the intellect.”

Further, pedagogic agency also implies that emotions can be the subject of a religious teaching and learning project. Gade describes how for women in Indonesia, Quran recitation in the mujawwad style emerged as an open-ended project of learning, in which emotions were both a “goal and a strategy” (2004, 167). In addition, and related to this pedagogic agency, is the possibility for individual spontaneity and creativity. Because individuals’ sensual capacities (hearing, seeing, touching, smelling, etc.) differ, so will each one’s religious experience. Such a focus on pedagogic agency as “aesthetic persuasion” is particularly useful given that some Western scholars emphasised that Islamic learning as in the learning of Quran reading and recitation, did not include “any process of thinking” (Hodgson 1974, 438); while other Western-educated Muslims considered Quran recitation as a “purely mechanical, monotonous form of study” (Zerdoumi 1970,196).

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93 For more on this educational principle of Montessori’s and her other ones, see The absorbent mind (Montessori 1964a).
94 The mujawwad style, or tilāwa, in the Indonesian context, refers to the melodic recitation of the Quran according to the Arabic “melodic modes” (maqāmāt) (Gade 2004, 165).
95 In Eickelman (1978, 489).
96 In Eickelman (1978, 490).
Third, it is possible with this analytical approach to religious experience to further explore how like viewers of a film, believers designate the reality of their religion through their exchange (circulation) of its body (its SFs). It allows us to explore how the act of embodying the Quran through recitation facilitates the creation of women reciters into a community of “audience”. In this respect, this approach makes us ask useful questions of this process of creating the audience. It makes us ask in what way(s) these women’s audience construct themselves as such, in which capacities did they listen to the dā’iya, and how, given their being an audience of a multitudinous nature, do they exhibit their agency. I explore these questions in the third section of this chapter.

All in all, this embodied approach to the aesthetic makes us consider all the touching, seeing, listening, and hearing actions that take place in a typical piety group, which transform the concrete wall of the place, where women meet, into an intimate space. In the piety group that I took part in for the purpose of this research, I, for example, experienced such intimate sensations, among other things, from the touch of the velvet body of the prayer mat that covered my legs and those of other women, while sitting together on the ground, listening to the dā’iya preaching, and from the physical closeness with other women, while performing the collective noon prayer, which usually culminates the end of the piety session.

Guided by these assumptions of Plate’s social construction theory of religion, in the remainder of the chapter, I focus the analysis in the WPM on the aesthetics of Quran recitation, supplication, and leisure, the latter as an aesthetic choice of the pious.

In section two, drawing on several women’s practices of Quran recitation and supplication (duʿā’; dhikr), I unpack women’s Quran recitation experience, highlighting the sensations and the emotions it involved, their pedagogic agency, and how women cultivate these sensations through their practice. I then explore women’s various recitation contexts and purposes. In that, and in line with the broad argument of the chapter, I suggest that in addition to helping them shape a pious self (Mahmood 2005), in the case of the WPM in Nablus, women’s various embodied use of the Quran as in recitation and in supplication (duʿāʾ) helped them navigate through everyday challenges that are socially, and politically grounded. I therefore construe the intentions and the motivations that underpinned women’s practice of those aesthetic practices as fluid rather than fixed, or stable.

Further, in addressing women’s intentions, I need to refer to the methodological nuances involved in the researcher’s construction of these intentions from the actions’ of the researched. Duranti (1993) argues that the act of “assigning intentionality” to the actions of the researched is an interpretive act that indicates the power position of the anthropologist over his/her research subject (1993, 229). Dowding suggests that “intentions do not have to find conscious
expressions in the mind of the agent ... [and that] the best intentions explained may not be those reasons offered by the individuals [themselves]” (2006, 138). These observations by Duranti and Dowding indicate that in anthropological research assigning intentions to the researched is a complex act that deserves the researcher’s attention and scrutiny. For this reason, anthropologists have to be transparent about their methods of inferring and constructing the intentions of their interlocutors. I concur that these are valid methodological concerns. As such, I would like to explain that in my analysis in this chapter of the intentions that underlined women’s various piety practices, I inferred these intentions from both what these women had directly stated and from the context(s) of their pious practices. I also would like to add that I have not found inferring these women’s intentions from their piety practices a straightforward process, but have at times found it intricate and nuanced.

In section three, I draw on Anderson’s essay, “The piety of the gift: selfhood and sociality in the Egyptian mosque movement”, in which he observes that what was at “stake” in women’s various piety engagements in the mosque movement in Cairo, Egypt, was not only the creation of an ethical self (Mahmood 2005), but also the creation of non-secular sites of sociality through women’s exchanges of “divine words” as gifts; I consolidate but also ethnographically demonstrate Anderson’s observation by focussing the analysis on the ethnography of Quran recitation as practised in one piety group in the city. I highlight this group’s practice of Quran recitation as a ceremony that was centred on women’s exchange of Quranic words as aesthetic objects. I do this by demonstrating how in their alternated roles at the ceremony as reciters and listeners, women were exchanging the ethical obligation to give those aesthetic objects as a gift to other women and receiving them back, thus binding themselves together in an exchange game, which, itself, was the very game of constituting themselves as a community of believers. In doing so - by demonstrating how women were constructing themselves as a community - I discredit the essentialist view which homogenises Islamic revival with the Salafi intention of recovering an early Muslim community.

In section four, I frame leisure as an aesthetic choice and demonstrate how in their negotiation of what leisure venues they could entertain in, that is, in their negotiation of what Deeb (2012) called “sanctioned pleasures”, pious women were constructing their religiosity rather than applying it as doctrinal templates. I therefore link women’s pursuit of “sanctioned pleasures” to the subject matter of the chapter by framing these pursued pleasures as the aesthetic choice of the pious, hence the section’s title, “The leisure of the pious”.

Finally, in the conclusion, I follow the consequences of these findings to the relationship between the WPM, Islamist politics, and the Islamic revival as such. I argue that as an indication of the Islamic revival, in the city, women’s practice of Quran recitation was neither the mere outcome of
Islamist politics, nor that the motivations and intentions that propelled women to the practice, were identical with that of Islamist ideology. Instead, the chapter shows that women's intentions were fluid rather than ideological, or doctrinal.

Before I turn to an ethnographic discussion of these conclusions in the next two sections, in the following discussion, I locate the reader in the perspective of Quran recitation as an activity that accompanied the rise of the WPM and as an aesthetic practice that attracted scholarly attention.

2. Quran Recitation: An Overview

Quran recitation has been the central feature of the WPM as well as one of its major propelling factors. In fact, a Quran recitation movement has accompanied the WPM since its rise in the late 1970s. Its activities have centred on learning Quran recitation according to the elocution rules (qawā‘id al-tajwīd), its reading and interpretation, and its memorisation. While the Zakat committees in the city were catalysts in the establishment and funding of the Quran learning centres and their Quran-related activities, MOWARA has been monitoring and administering the educational activities of Quran elocution (tajwīd al-Quran).

What merits the observation that even though the subject of this movement, in addition to children, was men and women of all ages, Quran recitation have been especially appealing to women. In fact, women’s interest in learning and teaching the Quran has recently extended beyond the official sites of the Quranic centres, and the boundaries of the regular piety groups, to many informal sites, e.g. a women’s health club, and others. Thus, as such, one can observe that many women take the initiative to teach other women the memorisation, the recitation, and the interpretation of the Quran. This makes us ask what does drive women with such power into this practice?

To understand the aesthetic significance of the recitation practice, some technical knowledge is useful. Broadly speaking, one can read the Quran without a melody (i.e. tilāwa) or with a melody (i.e.tajwīd). Tajwīd thus is the art of reciting the Quran; it is one that emphasises/stresses the proper exit of the Arabic alphabet (makhārej al-ḥurūf) from different locations in the mouth, throat and tongue, to invoke various musicality and acoustic sensations. In a term that indicates the physical nature of the practice, tajwīd is described as the physical training of the tongue (riyāḍat al-lisān).

Further, in terms of pace, tajwīd can be in three modes: the slow, called taḥqīq, the quick, ḥadar, and a mixture/combination of both, tadhwīr. Each elocution style has a different aesthetic impact, and perhaps similar to the poetic recitation, the longer the line, the more visible the musicality of the verse. In their in-group recitation, however, as we will see later, women in the group did not
intend a particular recitation style, although they aimed at practising *tajwīd*, and enjoyed a melodic recitation.

All in all, the principle of *tajwīd* as the practice of reciting the Quran; its emphasis on how the words of the Quran should be pronounced or even crafted into aesthetic objects through the body of the reciter by producing certain auditory sensations and emotions alludes to Plate’s earlier discussion of how religion is materialised/constructed in the interaction between a perceiver (the reciter) and the body of religion (i.e. its SFs) - the Quranic verses in this case.

Usually, Quran recitation initiates a typical piety group session. In some groups the *dāʿiya* initiates the session with a brief recitation, followed by the interpretation of the recited verse. In others, teaching and learning Quran reading and elocution is an integral part of every session, where the *dāʿiya* in these cases allowed each woman to practise reading or reciting according to her skill and capacity. In the process, the *dāʿiya* corrected and explained mistakes, and encouraged women to go on with their learning either at home, or by joining an elocution workshop. Thus women practise Quran recitation on their own or in groups, or may join a professional learning workshop administered by MOWARA.

Further, historically, learning the “accurate memorization” of the Quran was considered “the first step in mastering the [Islamic] religious sciences” (Eickelman 1978, 489). For this reason learning the Quran was considered a mode of transmitting religious knowledge, and an “integral part of socialization” (Eickelman 1978, 494). However, as I started to discuss above, section 1.1, because the transmission of this religious knowledge depends upon memorisation, some Western scholars understood that Islamic religious education, including that of the learning of the Quran, did not include “any process of thinking as such” (Hodgson 1974, 438). And some Western-educated Muslims considered Islamic education as a “purely mechanical, monotonous form of study” (Zerdoumi 1970, 196).

Eickelman responds to this claim arguing that Islamic learning should be assessed by a student’s application of the Quran in their life settings outside the Quran learning site and therefore the learning criteria for Muslim learners should be different from those for Western students.

I suggest that Hodgson’s observations can be criticised on the basis that his critique is based on an epistemology that polarises the emotional and the intellectual, the mind and the senses.

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97 In Eickelman (1978, 489).
98 In Eickelman (1978, 490).
Therefore, I suggest that through an aesthetic (embodied) approach that considers the body and mind as enmeshed rather than separate, one can reconstruct the recitation experience as a profoundly different one; this is by highlighting in that experience women's embodied agency and other epistemic/learning aspects that Hodgson’s epistemology digresses.

3. Unpacking the Aesthetic of Quran Recitation

3.1. The Sensational, the Pedagogic, and the Moral

Now in her mid-50s, Ghada had developed an interest in Quran recitation since she was in high school. I decided to interview and explore with Ghada her interest in piety in general and in Quran recitation in particular, after I paid attention, during the Quran recitation practice in the piety group where I met her, to the meditative, melodic way in which she recited the Quran. During those sessions, I also noticed that Ghada was an introvert, who spoke in a low-pitched voice. Even though she was always smiling, her eyebrows, and some lines along her cheeks and chin displayed some permanent worry and irritation, if not sadness. Exploring with her through some in-depth interviewing what her daily Quran recitation ritual was like and what it made her feel, Ghada stated that she read and recited the Quran at various times during the day, at dawn, in between prayers, before she went to sleep; and also in the dark and even sometimes while cooking. Of her mode of reading it, she said that she sometimes read it, and at other times she recited it. Of her recitation practice, she said:

When I recite the Quran I stick to a particular melody; then after I have recited for some time, I start to feel a kind of awe (khushū’) and a kind of ecstasy (tarab) like one feels when listening to songs or music: I start to feel a kind of happiness (sa’āde) that I cannot describe. One shaykh vowed that if kings experienced this kind of happiness, they would compete for it with us (lanā aʿtnaʿ lāyhā al-mulūk). I start to feel states of revelation with God (ḥālāt tajallī maʿ Allāh), she continued.

I also like to recite in front of a group, because my awe (khushū’) increases when I recite in front of others. I have liked Quran recitation since I was in high school, as my Arabic pronunciation was good.

What is clear in Ghada’s example of the pursuit of the aesthetic through Quran recitation is how she first tunes her ears (her listening sense) by using a particular melody - one that pleases her listening sensation - and how, after the repetition of that melody through recitation, she usually managed to alter her state of mind and transform her emotional state into a euphoria (saʿāda) - an unusual state of mind that she could not describe. She describes this state as a state of revelation with God, as euphoria, a rapture that can subdue the might of kings and make them compete with the public for it.
Roughly speaking, Ghada had experienced what Shannon’s interlocutors had experienced: a kind of transformation of her sense of time, due to the positive emotion, the rapture, she usually felt while reciting.

In his article, “The aesthetics of spiritual practice and the creation of moral and musical subjectivities in Aleppo, Syria”, Shannon discussed a similar experience, referring to SFs as “aesthetic stimuli” (2004, 381). Thus, Shannon observes that, during the dhikr ritual in Aleppo, dhikr performers were able to bring their bodies and minds into a transformative experience of time in the form of ecstasy by repetitively and melodically mentioning God’s attributes (i.e. by “invoking aesthetic stimuli”, or SFs). That is in this case, through dhikr performers’ embodiment of God’s attributes (i.e. SFs) through their melodic recitations, they managed to transform their bodies’/minds’ sense of time in a state they described as ecstasy.

Ghada managed to reach this transformative state by training herself to recite in a particular melody; that is through practice, “orthopraxy”, and her attempt through recitation at “getting it [rapture, happiness] right” (Gade 2004,169). In this sense, Ghada’s practice of Quran recitation echoes Denny’s argument that Islamic learning, including that of learning Quran recitation, stresses the teaching of “orthopraxy”, practice, over the teaching of “orthodoxy”, doctrine, (1985c, 89). This is in contrast with the essentialist views which stress that Islamic learning emphasises doctrine over learning.

Salam, a remarried widow in her early 30s, and a novice to the piety group that Ghada attended, articulated the aesthetic impact of her orthopraxy/practice in Quran recitation on her emotional state, after she started learning some tajwīd skills. She stated:

When I started doing my daily practice of reciting the Quran according to tajwīd rules: knowing which letters to extend, which to emphasise, when to stop, when to carry on, I even started enjoying the Quran better. For this reason, I enjoyed this past Ramadan better.

I now feel happier, more content. Ṭab’an! ‘Alā bi- dhikr Allah taṭma’īnū al- qulūb? (Of course! ‘Is not it, in the mentioning of God’s name hearts get assured?’).

Moreover, Ghada’s practice defies essentialist views by also demonstrating that through improvisation, Quran recitation was open to her choices, spontaneity, and creativity. This is because we know Ghada did not need to be completely competent in the tajwīd style in order to

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100 Verse no. 28 from Surat al-Ra’d in the Quran.
bring herself into this aesthetic state, as she started a *tajwīd* course some months ago but did not continue, because she was too lazy to bring herself to go to the learning site during the winter. What is clear, instead, is that on her own she used to improvise and let herself “play with” various melodies in order to discover that which most tuned her hearing sensation and brought her the pleasure she described; in this respect, it is interesting to note that Ghada labelled her early interest in Quran recitation as a hobby that she picked up from high school, because she was competent in Arabic pronunciation; this means that she associates her interest in Quran recitation with the spontaneity and playfulness of a hobby rather than the rigidity of a painful duty.

Further, what we also learn from Ghada’s experience is that her interest in Quran recitation did not start with the piety group she was attending, nor with a Quran recitation centre, but that for many years she at home, and on her own, had practised reading, reciting and memorising the Quran, and studying its interpretations from various resource books. If so, if she practised on her own, why did she need to attend a piety group? The direct answer to this question that she made explicit in her description above is that reciting in front of a group maximised her pleasure and her sense of awe (*Khushūʿ*); perhaps this is to indicate that, for her, the aesthetic of recitation is better realised when it is performed as an exchange between a speaker (reciter) and a listener; that is when it is practised in a community. Ghada’s interpretation does not only consolidate Anderson’s argument on the significance of women’s practice of piety in the community of other women believers (i.e. the significance of the community of believers as a site for women’s exchange of “divine words” and a non-secular site of sociability), but it also explains in what way such an exchange was to her meaningful and therefore important; it showed that it was the aesthetic reward, maximised in the recitation exchange dynamic, of her recitation for, with, and in front of, other pious women, that motivated her to sustain her participation in a piety group.

### 3.2. *Khushūʿ* as Experience of Happiness versus Fear (*Kishya*)

Additionally, what is quite revealing and different in Ghada’s recitation experience is her experience/association of *Khushūʿ* with a state of happiness (e.g. feeling close to God, revelations with God). Other pious women (e.g. in Mahmood; see discussion 2005, 142) associated *Khushūʿ* with *Kishya*, or fear. This demonstrates that Ghada’s Quran recitation as a demonstration of her piety was motivated by her pursuit of the aesthetic and the sensational; and it shows that her commitment to the practice was expressing value more than a norm (Abu-Lughod 1999).
As they both continued unpacking what was involved in their aesthetic experience of reciting the Quran, Ghada and Salam emphasised that they experienced some moral revelations/learning. Of that moral learning, Ghada stressed:

You know the [reading/reciting] Quran changes your life, your routine, because the Quran is a way of life and conduct (manhaj ḥayā wa-sulūk). Faith changes one’s life.

She expounded:

Through Quran reading I started to know more about the licit and the illicit; and I started to feel that God oversees everything we do (Allah raqīb ‘alaynā), so I follow his rules in public and private. I started telling other women what is permissible and what is not; I started preaching to women around me, telling them that even at home putting on sleeveless dresses and make up is illicit, because one has to fear God in private and in public. I mostly care about those who are close to me, my family members, and my beloved.

The same applies to Salam, who associated the pleasure she felt in her practice to reciting the Quran according to the tajwīd rules with starting to know the licit and the illicit. According to her, this was because:

knowing the elocution rules, knowing what letters to stress, which to extend, when to stop, makes one stop to think about the meaning of the Quranic verse one recites, [and] this makes one know what is the licit and the illicit (al-ḥālāl wa-l-ḥārām).

Thus, in a case of “aesthetic persuasion”, Ghada and Salam demonstrated that Quran recitation was not only a source of pleasure, but that the pleasure facilitated the uncovering and the learning of some moral codes: the gaining of knowledge of what is licit and illicit, which created the desire to live by what they learned. Such learning for Ghada did not only make her stick to those morals herself but after their influence she started calling other women, especially those close to her, to join her in living by them. This learning generates some sort of da’wa, although this was on a limited scale, as she only started advising her relatives and friends.

As such, these aesthetic experiences of reciting the Quran resonate with what Hirschkind observed in his male interlocutors’ listening to cassette sermons: that what was involved in their aesthetic experience of listening to recorded divine words, so to speak, was not in essence a mere emotional “catharsis” (2006, 630) but that it involved an increased moral awareness, that had consequence for their actions after.

Further, these modes of embodiments and their sensational effects reaffirm what has been stressed earlier: that commitment to Islam is neither due to one’s preconceived conception of the goodness of Islam (i.e. dogma), nor to a blind sense of duty towards what it dictates. But it demonstrates that commitment to Islam was motivated by one’s desire and aesthetic sensations.
of its SFs, or is due to a persuasion mediated through the embodied and the sensational. As just cited, in his ethnographic analysis of males listening to the cassette sermons of male preachers (khatib) in Cairo, Egypt, Hirschkind (2006, 624) gives us an example of this type of persuasion, which Meyer (2009) discussed earlier, and described as the “aesthetic persuasion” of religious SFs. Hirschkind attributes the ethical power of these recorded sermons (i.e. SFs) and their ability to transform his interlocutors’ behaviour to the power of “speech to act on the heart and reform it” (2006, 624). That is in the power of these recorded sermons to be aesthetically (sensationally, emotionally) persuasive for the listener. The type of moral transformation that Ghada and Salam experienced through their Quran recitation speaks to this kind of aesthetic persuasion.

All in all, what the previous analysis of Ghada’s recitation of the Quran shows is that her aesthetic experience of reciting the Quran increased her moral awareness of the licit and illicit and increased her moral responsibility to make other women modify their modes of living in light of what she learnt. This indicates that in addition to being a moral learning experience, and a means in the ethical formation of the self (Mahmood 2005), as a piety practice, Quran recitation motivates and compels women to practise da’wa; that is, it compels them to reach out to other women, educating them with what is morally correct, however limited in scope this might be as the case of Ghada demonstrates.

Further, the example of Ghada is revealing for another reason. It suggests that there is no one interpretation of a particular Islamic value and that women can define these values in various modes. Thus, Ghada associated khushū’ with the pleasure of feeling close to God, even with being with God (rapture); and she associated that pleasure with musical ecstasy (taraq); while Mahmood’s participant associated khushū’ with fear (khashya) that leads to one avoiding what God dictates as illicit (see Mahmood 2005, 142). It is true that in both cases, constituting a moral self was the outcome, but it seems that this was more through aesthetic persuasion in the case of Ghada than was the case with Mahmood’s women.

Finally, learning further of the other modes and contexts in which Ghada had used the Quran as in her private use of it as a supplication (du ’a’ ) complicates further Mahmood’s argument by demonstrating that the intentions underlying women’s pious practices (Quran recitation in our case) were fluid and as such could not be reduced to the intention of scaffolding a pious self. Supplication (du ’a’ ), also called dhikr, is a practice that the Prophet recommended Muslims to undertake, particularly in times of need and hardship. Its content varies to include Quranic verse that the Prophet recommended to use as supplications as well as the Prophet’s sayings. Supplications can be practised in private and in public. Women, across all groups, practise du ’a’ to deal with indecisiveness, ambivalence, risk, ambiguity, and the like.
I further discuss this argument in Ghada’s and other women’s practice of supplication or *duʿāʾ* next.

### 3.3. The Aesthetic of Supplication (*Duʿāʾ*) and the Intentions of the Pious

As I have started to suggest, in this section I demonstrate how in addition to help them shape a pious self, in the case of the WPM in Nablus, women’s various situational and embodied use of the Quran as in supplication (*duʿāʾ*) helped them navigate through everyday challenges that were socially and politically grounded. This alludes to the fluidity of the intentions that underlined their pursuit of the aesthetic through their piety practices.

Thus, returning to Ghada, of the different contexts in which she used the Quran as a supplication, she stated:

I read various verses (suras) of the Quran (e.g. al-Baqara, al-Kursi, and al-Dukhan) and read *dhikr* at different times and occasions, before I go to sleep, at dawn, in the dark, even, sometimes, while cooking. [In fact] there are Quranic verses and supplications, which can treat you from fear, others from sadness, illness, and there are ones that console you. So, I sometimes read and at others I recite, and when I recite I stick to a particular melody.

From her previous description, what is different in how Ghada uses the Quran in these situations from the situation when she recites it is that when she recites, her intention was to bring herself to feel the pleasure of being close to God up to feeling a rapture. To achieve this closeness, she embodied the Quran in a melodic manner that brought her such positive feelings she expressed as intense pleasure. While, in the situations she has just described, however, she used the Quran as a means to cure her body and soul from physical illness, fear and sadness; that is to say, she uses the Quran in unpleasant situations and in the case of experiencing negative emotions. Ghada’s mode of using the Quran as a supplication conveyed pragmatic and instrumental intentions (e.g. to counter a hardship, treat a physical illness, offset the impact of negative emotions, etc.).

This demonstrates that Ghada’s primary intention from undertaking such a pious practice as that of supplication in these contexts was not “scaffolding” her pious self by bringing herself to live up to certain Islamic values that she believed she had not yet mastered enough (e.g. awe, patience, modesty, etc.). But it demonstrates that her intention was to use those Quranic words as a substance, as an object, to empower her in real life situations against that which she perceived as being hard and disempowering. But this is not to suggest that for Ghada these intentions were necessarily mutually exclusive; that is, this is not to say that Ghada did not desire to live up to certain Islamic values as in her desire to cultivate further modesty by
committing to modest dress in private as in public, which she referred to earlier. But this is to stress that her intentions can be situational and that they can vary with context and need.

Of these changing situations and needs, Ghada, for example, described how several years ago, when the Israeli soldiers constantly raided their home at night, looking for one of her sons, she used to read Quranic verses to overcome her fear. Reading Quranic verses in these situations, she stressed, had made her control her fear that she even managed to pray and feel awe (Khushū’) in the presence of soldiers.

Further, Ghada even believed that she managed to overcome her fear in these situations, because her practice of Quran recitation made her close to God; in return, God rewarded her by protecting her son from being killed. This is how she articulated that connection:

God says, 'remember me during the time of prosperity (waqt al-rakhā’) I remember you during hardship (waqt al-shidda).

She continued:

Yes, indeed, because I was a reader of the Quran and of God’s words (qāri’a, dhākira la-kalām Allah) God remembered me in my hard times and saved my son from the bullets of the Israeli soldiers. That other day, I passed by the place where my son hid with other men, and saw where the bullets had hit and left marks on the wall; I thanked God that he saved my son. I told myself this happened, because I was a reader of his speech. Thanks God, he remembered me, saved my son, and saved me from great anguish (karb ’ażīm).

Ghada’s interpretation of how God rewarded her piety, so to speak, suggests that women’s intentions of refining through their pious practices a close relation to God are complex and that these intentions can be sometimes deconstructed as instrumental and pragmatic.

To further demonstrate how the intentions that underline women’s practice of supplication are complex and nuanced, let us look next at how Najla had used supplication (duʿā’) in less dangerous but challenging situations.

Najla, the respected, mid-50 year old Islamist, and charity activist, described herself as one who applied duʿ ā’ al- Istikhāra - a supplication Prophet Mohammad recommend that Muslims make in times of indecisiveness (see chapter three, footnote 52) - almost daily and in every matter of concern. This lately was particularly the case at her voluntary work in the charity she administered, from which context she gave us the following example of her practice of this kind of supplication.
Thus, she expounded that if she needed to contact by telephone one of the officials at the city council regarding a matter that concerned the charity she administered, she would recite, in private, and before asking the secretary to make the phone call, the following:

Oh God. I seek guidance after your knowledge, and seek ability after your competence. Oh God, if in your knowledge, there will be good-ness (khayr) for my religion, my livelihood, and myself, by seeking [to speak to this official], then “ordain” it for me; you are the capable, not me. And if in your knowledge, you know it will bring me evil (sharr), then keep it away from me, and keep me away from it, and make goodness happen to me wherever is.

After that, she explained that she would let go with her worries, feel some kind of assurance and therefore carry on with other tasks until the secretary let her know if the call went through, or not.

Then, she continued to explain:

[](If I forget about the phone call, I say that was what God wanted; if the lines were busy, I say that was what God wanted; and if the call went through and I managed to talk to the official, I say that was what God wanted.

What sense can we make of Najla’s mode of embodying the divine words of the hadith as a special type of supplication, *Istikhāra*? How can Mahmood’s explanation of women’s piety in terms of being a means in the ethical formation of the self help us better understand the complex intentions that underlined Najla’s practice of this type of supplication? I suggest that Najla’s practice of *Istikhāra* conveys an element of ethical formation in that the supplication consolidates Najla’s submission to God’s will as a valued attribute of her pious self. But we can infer from the situation/context of her practice of *Istikhāra* that as a desired attribute of the pious self, as an Islamic value, giving in to God’s will was neither Najla’s primary intention, nor primary concern. Instead, we understand that such an attribute was already an established part of her pious self.

What we can conclude from her rationale of using *Istikhāra* is that she has used her special relation to God to cope with situations of uncertainties - situations, she believed, her vulnerable power position (e.g. vis-à-vis the PA, the city officials, and the like) were to make her fall prey to manipulation. This is how she explained such rationalisation:

Of course, only God has power and control over me; God makes me understand things, forget, or remember them. I do not bend [cringe] to anybody, or ask favour from anyone, except from God; because I know God is the powerful; he [is the only one who] has power over me.

When I probed Najla to give more examples of situations to which she applied *Istikhāra*, she took it for granted that she in all matters applied this type of supplication. She even referred to how her husband used to make fun of what he regarded as her excessive use of this kind of supplication. Thus she said, “he would often tease her”, saying, ‘go ahead, make *Istikhāra*. “
All in all, thus, Najla’s belief that her reliance on God eased her worries and empowered her in situations of uncertainties was not peculiar to her. And to connect again with Ghada, Ghada’s belief that her closeness to God made him “remember” her during hard times was not unique to her, nor was the understanding that through piety practices, including *duʿāʾ*, they will get closer to God, who in his turn will help them meet various ends. In fact, one of the recurrent themes that resonated with me after my empirical research of the WPM was women’s emphasis on their special relation to God, of being close to God, of God’s watching after them, and of the extent to which their letting themselves depend on God was satisfying and liberating.

When I learned that in an ideal day 50-year-old Nura practised in between her five prayers numerous supplications for which she kept a 1,000 bead rosary (*masbaḥa alfiyya*), and that she also performed another three prayers (before noon, *al-ḍuḥa*; after the evening, *al-tahajjud*; and before dawn, *qiyām al-layl*), I asked if she had not found onerous that rigorous piety schedule, she promptly responded:

> When you are close to God, God helps you, God takes in your hands (Allah *bi-yākhud bi-yaddik*) and walks you through; God makes it easy for you.

Nura also let us know that she, like Ghada, had read the Quran to treat illness, worries, and sadness; and she, like Ghada, believed that God helped her when the Israeli soldiers raided her home to look for her son. Again, these various modes of embodying the Quran by Nura assert what I started to suggest at the beginning of this subsection: that the intentions that underlined women’s desires to cultivate close relationships to God through various modes of embodying the Quran as in *duʿāʾ* were fluid and situational.

As has been clear so far, in their practice of *duʿāʾ* (supplication), women made themselves feel closer to God; and by that they empowered themselves to deal with challenging situations. That is, so far, the previous discussion has made it clear that women use supplication as a self-empowerment means. Is *duʿāʾ* then gender specific? That is, is it mainly a female practice? If so, how can we understand the practice in gender terms?

What Abu Lughod learned in the Western Egyptian desert about Bedouin women’s recitation of a traditional love poetry called “*ghinnawa*”, might give some useful insight to understand the emotions and sentiments involved in pious women’s practice of *duʿāʾ*.

Abu-Lughod found that Bedouin women in the Western Egyptian desert recited a traditional love poetry, which she called a “private poetic discourse of intimacy”, henceforth (PPDOI). Abu-Lughod explained that these PPDOI were only recited in private because they violated the tribal
system of honour;\textsuperscript{101} and she therefore concluded that the function of these PPDOIIs was to indicate intimacy between those most distant in the social system in normal circumstances” (1999, 235).

I suggest that if what is common between the pious women I studied and the Bedouin women Abu-Lughod studied is their use of words as SFs, words that are not their own creation, but belong to two discursive traditions, to articulate personal sentiments, then it might be useful to draw further parallels between \textit{duʿāʾ} and these PPDOI and ask (1) what sentiments women convey in \textit{duʿāʾ}? (2) How do these sentiments speak to these women’s positions in the larger social system of the Palestinian society? And (3) what is the overall function of \textit{duʿāʾ}; if any?

4. \textit{Duʿāʾ} and the Private Poetic Discourse of Intimacy (PPDOI), Parallels?

There are, in fact, several parallels that one can draw between Bedouin women’s recitation of love poetry and our pious women’s practice of \textit{duʿāʾ}; whose unpacking helps answer these questions.

First, despite its divine content (Quranic verses and Prophet Mohammad’s sayings), through its personal, intentional, and situational use by a particular believer, \textit{duʿāʾ} can also turn into a private discourse of intimacy as the cases of Ghada and Najla have just demonstrated. Second, both discourses demonstrate and acknowledge a relation built on inequality in that they both speak to women’s vulnerable position vis-à-vis a powerful subject. This is because both relations are built on need; and need indicates vulnerability in that it indicates a situation where one lacks material or sensational assets that are out of his/her reach but that which he/she still badly desires. Thus, in this unequal relation, a woman, for example, directs her \textit{duʿāʾ} towards God as the one who has the power to either grant or hold that which she badly needs in the same manner a lover seeks the closeness of a distant lover, who can refuse closeness.

Third, the motivation underlying women’s practice of PPDOI and \textit{duʿāʾ} is similar: they both attempt at bringing closer two distant ends. In the PPDOI, those distant ends were men and women. In the aesthetic practice of \textit{duʿāʾ}, these distant correlates were many. Thus, in their practice of \textit{duʿāʾ}, women believed that they could intervene and reduce the power gap between the divine and the human,\textsuperscript{102} between a desired ideal situation of safety and protection and that of actual threat and danger, between one’s illness and a desired state of healthiness, between

\textsuperscript{101} Abu-Lughod observes that the love content of those poems violated the Bedouin code of honour in that the intimacy they conveyed violated expectation of masculine strength and their love content violated expectation of women’s modesty (1999, 235).

\textsuperscript{102} This is as when these women feel that their recitation or prayers make them feel closer to God.
actual state of poverty and an ideal state of abundance, between one's actual capacity of reciting the Quran and an expected "ideal recitation" (Nelson 1985).103

In this sense women’s pursuit of the aesthetic (closeness to God in this case) through duʿāʾ exhibits agency in that through duʿāʾ women bring themselves to believe that their action can penetrate a space of distance between a constrained actual and a desired ideal, whose remoteness is otherwise (without duʿāʾ) hard to even imagine reducing, so to speak. In this sense, through duʿāʾ women exhibit agency because they transform their otherwise feelings of helplessness and passive attitudes against their lived constraints into a feeling of control, if not active engagement.

In conclusion, this discussion had answered the questions we started this section with. These were questions about the function of duʿāʾ; the sentiments women convey in this practice, and how this practice speaks to women’s gender positions in the Palestinian society at large. The discussion demonstrated that women used duʿāʾ as a medium for expressing personal sentiments of vulnerability and helplessness and encountering anxieties surrounding situations that challenged their capacity to cope. As to how the aesthetic of duʿāʾ relates to women’s social position in the larger Palestinian society, I suggest that Abu-Lughod’s answer to this question in the context of her study help answer our question. In her study, Abu-Lughod found that love poetry (PPDOI) helped those who benefited least from the system of honour (i.e., women). I suggest that in our case, the ethnography of women’s practice of duʿāʾ suggests that the practice was associated with these women’s roles as mothers and activists and the tenuous position they have found themselves at after leaving the private sphere of the home, as in the case of Najla, or after their private sphere was penetrated or invaded, as in the case of Ghada and Nura. In both situations women encountered social and political powers that were threatening to their roles as mothers and activists.

Further, as we started to argue at the beginning of the section, women’s practice of duʿāʾ might have consolidated these women’s desirable Islamic values, such as modesty, patience, or awe and have expressed them, but the analysis of the contexts of their practice suggests that aspiring to these Islamic values was not the primary intention that underlined their practice; the intention that we could infer from the context of women’s recitation of supplication indicates that these women aspired to supplication as a means to empower themselves against situations that were threatening and challenging.

These two intentions - crafting a pious self by living up to desired Islamic values and empowering a pious one - convey the self in two different power positions; in duʿāʾ, the pious

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self is vulnerable and is seeking empowerment, while in the case of crafting an ethical pious one, the self is decisive to empower an abandoned religious tradition by living up to its values. Although, as I started to argue earlier, these two ends do not necessarily contradict, the ethnography of supplication this section has just presented and discussed suggests that the distinction between them highlights how the intentions, desires, and needs that propel women to various piety practices can be complex and fluid; ethical formation of the self can be one of these. The fluidity of these intentions is also demonstrated and discussed in the next section.

5. Quran Recitation as a Ceremonial Circulation of Quran as a Sensational Form

5.1. The Ceremonial Occasion and the Recitation Exchange

I would like to start this section by again putting the reader in the Quran recitation scene that opened the introduction of this chapter: of the bright and spacious room where the dāʿiyya oversees women’s recitation of the Quran, of the room’s two large windows, opened wide, onto the green orchard that surrounds the house, of women’s recitation round, of how women strive and compete to recite the Quran in correct and aesthetic manners (e.g. Nadia and Umm Salam). With this piety scene again in mind I move next in this section to explore the aesthetics of Quran recitation as conveyed in this particular piety group.

I observe that in contrast to an essentialist view which homogenises Islamic revival with the Salafi intention of recovering an early Muslim community, the next analysis demonstrates that in this group, through their listening/speaking actions in the Quran recitation ceremony, women were engaged in the construction of themselves as a particular community of believers, rather than recovering an early Muslim one.

In this group, every week, 15 to 20 women meet for two to three hours to practise the elocution (tajwīd) of the Quran. Many of these women have been involved in this group for more than 25 years. Unlike the other piety groups that I participated in for some time, in this piety group, Quran recitation was the main activity that took place, which meant that there was less emphasis on Quran interpretation and much less on preaching.

Also, unlike the case in other groups, the atmosphere in this piety group was informal, and somehow ceremonial; as if women were celebrating an occasion of “special importance”. Thus, the dāʿiyya was usually dressed in white (a satin dress, and a similar head cover); and despite

104 See, for example, in Mahmood (2005, 44-45), Hajja Samira’s rationalisation to her call for women to commit to Islamic piety. In her preaching to women at one of Cairo’s mosques, Hajja Samira calls upon the Egyptian women attendees to commit to Islamic practices and values in their everyday lives, because “Muslims have forgotten about Islam that one - in everyday life - is no more able to make the distinction between a Muslim and a Christian” (ibid.).
some evidence of old-age/illness, she kept a high spirit and cheerful face while sitting on a small sofa facing the women attendant. Women sat around her on three large sofas which filled the room; but the one or two women who had known her for a long time, tended to sit close to her.

Usually, the Quran reading/recitation starts and ends and restarts again, allowing in every meeting occasion for each woman to rehearse two or three times. After the end of the first round of recitation, the atmosphere is somehow soothed by the recitation rhythm.

Towards the mid-point of the recitation ceremony (around the noon prayer), chocolate and coffee were served, while the recitation course continued. At the end of the two to three-hour meeting, women go into free conversation, sometime even exchanging jokes loudly, but most often they draw on an issue of concern: a trip for al-'umra, a recovery of a grandson from a car accident, trouble with a neighbour, a debt, or a family inheritance, blood pressure problems, and a hot news subject, to name but a few.

5.2. The Recitation Exchange

As just pointed out, women’s reading/recitation went in a repetitive cycle: the turn started and ended and restarted again, thus giving each woman the chance to have two or three rehearsals in every piety meeting. Thus, in every piety session all women took part in the recitation, except one or two, who lacked the reading skills to do so.

Each woman, during the time slot she was given, tried to rehearse precisely and melodically in accordance with the Quran elocution rules. In case of mistakes, a woman would usually feel embarrassed and would try to correct herself; also, in addition to the dāʾiya, other women would interfere to make corrections.

Thus, the duration of each woman’s recitation is managed by the dāʾiya, the reader herself, and by the group members; therefore, when feeling that she had recited for a reasonable amount of time, the woman reciter would stop and give the recitation turn to the woman sitting next to her; alternatively, the dāʾiya would thank her with a gesture that she should give the floor to the woman sitting next to her; or else the women participants did the job.

The women’s expectation was that in each meeting each had an equal number of recitation times and duration. In the case of continuous violations as was the case with Nadia, who I introduced at the beginning of the chapter, competition grew and tension crept into the atmosphere which, as I also described in the introduction, upset Umm Salam who refrained from continuing to read and wanted to leave before the ceremony had ended. Although similar incidents were not frequent, its rarity indicated the group recitation norm.
5.3 Rhythm

Since women’s recitation capabilities (e.g. literacy, technical knowledge of the rules of *tajwīd*, tone of voice, and character) were different, so were women’s modes of approaching the Quran book and reciting from it. Therefore, it was not possible to hear an orchestrated recitation rhythm for long in the group, so to speak. Rather, some rehearsed in an introvert, low-pitched voice that communicated pleading and hope, while others recited loud and clear, communicating content, in a beautiful melody that won women’s acclamation. For example, as I started discussing in the introduction of the chapter, while Umm Salam deeply nodded her head and eyeglasses into the medium-sized book in order to configure the words on the page while frowning and sweating in the process; in contrast, as if to seize her performance space and initiate her entrance into a divine realm that she wanted to seize with her recitation, Nadia, in an upright posture, opened the large green and gold hard-cover Quran book, placing it at a comfortable distance from her eyes, and started reciting loudly and beautifully.

Further, as I just pointed out, towards the mid-point of the occasion, coffee and chocolate were served, thus soothing the atmosphere. When it was time for the noon prayer, the recitation course was not suspended, but many women would start moving to the next room to perform their prayer, while the recitation course among those who remained in the main meeting room continued.

The group usually starts early, so that by 10 a.m., the room is full with the women participants. Although this did not often happen, when some women joined the group late (after they have visited a doctor or done some shopping), usually a friend or a relative accompanied the latecomer. On these occasions the newcomer was expected, when it was her turn in the recitation cycle, to pick up the recitation turn from the woman sitting to her left or right, and thus take part in the recitation ceremony. It was somehow impolite, if not offensive, to refrain from doing so; and thus a typical newcomer, myself in the occasions I attended the group, and Nadia’s stepsister at another occasion, was encouraged by the group members and the *dā‘iyya* to get into the exchange, and give it (Quran recitation) a try.

So, what are we to make of this type of in-group recitation of the Quran? To this question, among others, I now turn.

5.4. Quran Recitation, Dialogic Agency, and the Production of Audience

As I have just started to suggest, we need to ask several questions of the group’s Quran recitation performance just discussed. First, what are we to make of this mode of performance, whereby women took alternative roles as listeners and speakers (i.e. actors and audience)?
Second, how is it that when women in that performance asserted themselves vis-à-vis other group members as individual stars, can we speak of the group as a community? Third, what are we to make of this informal relation between the group participants and the dāʿiya? This is an informal relation, which, drawing on my observations, I can describe as paradoxical. The paradoxical nature of the informal relation between the dāʿiya and the group members was clear in the fact that while the group members proclaimed the dāʿiya’s authority by attending the weekly ceremony she headed, by seeking her advice, and by accepting her recitation corrections, they have also demonstrated that they were not submitting in full to her authority. Thus these women felt free to interrupt the flow of the recitation exchange, to correct other reciters’ mistakes, and not totally accept the dāʿiya’s corrections.

Analysing the Quran recitation we just described as a theatrical performance can aid in sorting out the logic that underlined what seemed somehow anomalous and chaotic in that performance.

First, considering the Quran recitation in this group as a theatrical performance focuses the attention on the speaking/listening act that establishes and shapes the actor’s/audience’s interaction. Thus, stressing the ethical obligation that underlies a typical theatrical speaking/listening interaction, Rayner, for example, argues that “[the audience’s] capacity to hear is a condition of the ability of the actor to speak” (1993, 17). Taking this perspective into the analysis of our group, we can say that in their roles as both listeners and speakers, actors and audience, and in alternating their speaker and audience roles, women participants were also alternating their ethical obligation to listen, or to speak. Gadamer calls this kind of interaction a “to-and-fro” game (1986, 94). This is a game which by virtue of entering it, one voluntarily gives in to its reciprocal exchange rules. As the women in our group demonstrated, these reciprocal exchange rules were the ethical obligation to speak and hear, to give and receive, to judge and accept being judged, etc. This act of reciprocal listening and hearing is a “game of community”, Gadamer argues, because the ethical obligation of reciprocity voluntarily binds those engaged in an ongoing interaction and relationship – Hence is the community. In a conclusion that is rather revealing to the analysis of our group interaction and to the subject of this chapter, Gadamer argues that there lies in this “simultaneity of speaking and hearing the act of creating the audience” (ibid.). Therefore, he emphasises that an audience is not a thing but is an action (ibid.).

Again, I suggest this is a rather insightful perspective through which one can locate the agency of women participants in their construction of themselves as audience, as a community, through their alternated action of reciting the Quran and listening to other women’s reciting of it (i.e. in

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105 In Rayner (1993, 14).
their alternated roles as listeners and speakers). Thus, again, from Gardener’s perspective, in their alternated roles as listeners and speakers, women’s engagement in the to-and-fro recitation game did not recover a community, but constructed one - and as described above - this was a particular one. To reiterate what I have stated, this is a rather useful analysis which insightfully discredits an essentialist approach that homogenises Islamic revival by identifying it with the Salafi intention of recovering an early Muslim community.

Moreover, and, second, considering the recitation ceremony as a theatrical performance makes us attend to the dāʿiya/audience relation addressed in the above questions. To further understand this relation, it might be useful to ask from which position the dāʿiya addressed the audience (the women participants) and from which position they as the audience listened to her. We have already pointed out that there was some anomaly in this relation in that the group participants acknowledged her authority but that vis-à-vis this authority, they also stressed their subjectivity.

To turn to this relation and put this anomaly in perspective, let us look at the pronominal terms with which the dāʿiya used to address her audience. As in the brief statement above [and as in others], the dāʿiya often addressed the women in the second-person plural Arabic pronoun antum; that is “you”, and much less often - especially when addressing an appeal to God - she used the nahnu, “we”. According to Rayner (1993), “when the audience is [addressed as] as ‘you’, the performer is also a ‘you’, designating ‘simultaneous subjectivity in which each subject is also another” (1993, 13). The use of “you” thus indicates an audience’s desire not to “fuse” with the actor, but to distance themselves from and declare themselves as parallel to the subjectivity of the actor (ibid.). In this situation the “concurrent” subjectivities make up a dialogic relation. I suggest that in our group this dialogic relation was clear in that as audience, women participants were not always fully identifying with the actor, the dāʿiya, but were also proclaiming their agency, their capacity to influence the performance vis-à-vis each other and vis-à-vis the dāʿiya. This was clear from what I started to discuss earlier, that although women participants proclaimed the authority of the dāʿiya, they also shared with her the authority of monitoring each other’s recitation, and occasionally did not take her opinion for granted.

This brings the discussion in our group to what Rayner calls the “politics of otherness” (1993, 14); this refers in our Quran recitation ceremony to the way women negotiated their recitation needs against each others’ given the group’s “limited resources” (ibid.). So, what were the resources in the Quran recitation ceremony we are analysing and how were they the subject of women’s negotiation? I discuss this next.
5.5. “Politics of Otherness”, the Social and the Religious

As I just explained “politics of otherness” refers in our Quran recitation ceremony to the way women negotiated their recitation needs against each others’, given the group’s “limited resources” (ibid.). In terms of resources, I suggest that among others, the two most visible material resources that women exchanged in the ceremony were coffee and chocolate - the latter most of the time was locally made, less often imported, and therefore was more expensive. These were subject to the exchange ethics in that each week a different woman would bring to the group the chocolate and the coffee, thus alternating among themselves taking these objects as a gift and giving them back as such.

In addition, as a ceremony focussed on Quran recitation, the Quranic words were also a resource that women circulated, exchanged, and negotiated.

This type of analysis that considers the Quranic words to be a material substance takes us back to Plate and Meyer’s consideration of religion as a material body, as a collection of SFSs, or aesthetic objects, so to speak. Yet, it also takes us to Limbert’s (2010) consideration of the political economy (material) power of words. As discussed in section one of this chapter, in her study of women’s sociality in the Omani town of Bahla, Limbert stresses the multiple tasks of words by demonstrating how they were material in that context in that like dates and coffee they facilitated the sociality among the old generation of women in Bahla (2010, 80).

Although, both Limbert and Plate share the assumption that the materiality of words refers to their psychic and social impacts, the distinction in their approaches between words as a material/physical substance and as an aesthetic one can be useful to our analysis. It can make us explore how women, if any, in our Quran recitation ceremony, approached Quranic words as both material and aesthetic substance. Below is a discussion of this exploration.

I suggest that in principle the celebratory mode of the Quran recitation event itself (the coffee, the chocolate, the smiles, the cheerfulness, the white satin dress, etc.) indicated women’s way(s) of conveying the aesthetic value of this substance. That is, the celebration was women’s modes of declaring the Quranic words as an object of the heart, as an object of love. And with each woman’s attempt at embodying these Quranic words through correct spelling, pronunciation, and recitation, women not only conveyed these words’ aesthetic value, but also created these words as an aesthetic substance. And as such, as these women created the Quranic words as aesthetic substance, women also created them as the subject of each other’s

106 In addition to the symbolic function of language, Limbert's approach stresses the importance of the material. Thus, she stresses that when analysing the function of language in a particular context, one should consider the way(s) through which words can also be material in their effects (2010, 78-80).
desire, thus increasing these aesthetic words’ circulation value, so to speak. Hence was the competition among these women for equal recitation time slots.

Yet, the fact that women in the group competed over equal recitation time slots highlights that women treated words like the material object of coffee and chocolate in that “consuming” too many words by over-reciting is like helping one’s self to an excessive number of chocolates, which violates the group exchange ethics, and therefore is considered impolite. This is in the same manner by which a guest’s refraining from accepting the host’s coffee, or chocolates, is regarded by the host as offensive. This treatment of the Quranic words as a material object was, for example, evident in that the newcomers to the group (e.g. on the occasion I described earlier, Nadia’s stepsister and myself) were expected to take part in the recitation by the mere fact that they were present in the group; or else, their refraining from accepting the Quran recitation invitation was considered a gesture of distancing themselves from the group and therefore was considered offensive.

But this incident strongly highlights how the Quranic words were also offered as an aesthetic, welcoming gift that celebrated the newcomers; and it also gestured an open-ended invitation to join the recitation at any time. Hence through the gift of the Quranic words, the group was declaring the voluntary nature of women’s commitment to the ceremony and was also declaring the fluidity of its boundaries. This is by the group declaring itself open to any woman who “would like” to join at any time its ceremonial exchange of the Quranic words as aesthetic objects.

Further, the competition among women indicates the vitality of the application of the rule of giving and receiving those substances as valuable gifts; as if in a way to declare that their aesthetic value must be equally distributed and shared. But, the competition can also allude to other things being at stake such as gaining social recognition/a social distinction motive.

5.6. The Intentions of the Pious, the Social, the Religious

This kind of analysis takes us back to the position of audience in Plate’s theory, which, according to him, creates the materiality of the film through their mere viewing/circulation of the film. Yet I suggest as the audience views a film with various intentions, women too can in various intentions listen and recite the Quran. From my ethnographic observation, women attended the Quran recitation ceremony because they believed that their embodiment of the Quran through recitation was supposed to bring them various aesthetic sensations like increasing their closeness to God; many even believed that reciting the Quran prepares the body and the mind to receive revelations, like dreaming of the Prophet, his companions, wives, etc. But women also attended the Quran recitation ceremony to celebrate a grandson’s recovery from illness, a daughter’s success in high school exams after failure, moving to a new house, etc. Again, this
alludes to how the intentions that underlined women’s piety practices and pursuit of the aesthetic as explicit in the Quran recitation ceremony varied and overlapped with the social ethics of sociality.

Thus, for example, to move to the fact that not all women recited the Quran, as we stated earlier, very few (those who were did not master reading) did not and by that virtue they were a bit distant from the rest of the group, does not only indicate that those who were socially and linguistically alike were expected to enter the exchange game, or the competition, but broadly speaking it also indicates that the piety group/site was a social segment, that embodied the larger social society, its hierarchy, its aesthetic, its ethics, and its sociality’s exchange rules.

In that sense, women’s exchange of Quranic words as a gift facilitated their construction of themselves as a community of believers; but that was a particular community of believers, one whose motives, intentions, and exchange ethics were not so dissimilar to a typical sociality event in the city.

To conclude, where do these findings take us in our analysis of the aesthetic of piety in the WPM, and how do they fit into the chapter’s overall argument? In his work, *The gift*, Mauss stresses that in gift societies, the gift pervades all aspects of that society: its politics, economics, religion, law, morality, and aesthetics. Verifying the scope of the morality of the gift in the Palestinian society, or in Nablus City, is surely beyond the limit of this chapter, but what the discussion of the Quran recitation ceremony, discussed above, had already strongly verified is that Quran recitation as a practice of piety, although in its intention to communicate with the transcendental and the divine, is different from other social actions, it nevertheless remains like any other social action, subject to the social game that created the social as such. In the following section, I demonstrate in this same piety group and others how in their free conversations women were constructing their piety through their negotiation of the morality of the leisure venues that were open to them rather than applying their religiosity as a doctrinal template.

6. The Leisure of the Pious

“If bored, hearts will grow blind.”

A Prophet’s companion’s (ṣahābi)’s advice to a devout man who complained he failed to dedicate himself to continuous worshiping (ʿibāda mustamirra) - adapted as quoted from a dā’īya’s preaching in one of the piety lessons.

As I suggested earlier, women did not perceive that their pursuit of the pleasurable and the beautiful through their sensational embodiment of Islamic SFs necessarily contradicted with their pursuit of “worldly” pleasures. Rather, one can suggest that they perceived leisure as a facet of
the aesthetic of the pious. This was evident in that in the piety groups, including the one I have just discussed its Quran recitation ceremony, many of these women raised questions about the validity of some of the leisure venues that were open to them in order to sort out the moral ambiguity surrounding them and to ensure that their leisure pursuits were in line with Islamic morality. In other words, my ethnography suggests that pious women pursued “sanctioned pleasures” (Deeb 2012). Below I discuss some incidents that demonstrate how they set out to sanction the leisure options that were possibly open to them and discuss how they created ones of their own. I conclude that, through dialogue, women demonstrated that their moral stands vis-à-vis these leisure venues were not pre-constructed, a matter of religious doctrine, or dogma, but rather were a subject of negotiation that tolerated difference in opinion; yet this negotiation confirms that what matters to these women was that their leisure had to be a morally “sanctioned” pursuit. In this respect, women were initiators not only in validating some options, but also in creating alternative, sanctioned ones.

In the summer of 2012, in an unprecedented event since 2000, and just before the events of the two Muslim feasts (al-\(\text{Fiṭr}\), and al-\(\text{Adhā}\)), the Israeli authorities granted daily permits to thousands of families and individuals to cross what people call the “green line” (the 1948-drawn borders between the West Bank and Israel) and spend some leisure time on the beaches of cities like Netanya, Jaffa, and Tel Aviv. Given the few leisure options available to West Bankers and due to the proximity of the area, thousands of Palestinian families and individuals from all over the West Bank, including the city of Nablus, took advantage of that leisure opening and took day-long trips to these locations.

Women in more than one piety group brought up the morality of this opening not only to women, but to the entire family. The Israeli permits triggered such a heated response because people understood that there were some anomalies in the principle of this opening as in the question, “why did the Israelis give permits?”, and in the logic of its application, “why were only young men given permits, while their parents, or the rest of their families were refused them?” Such questions pervaded the city and found their way to the piety groups through women’s questions.

Thus, at the end of the piety session that followed the feast after Ramadan (\(\text{Īd al-\(\text{Fiṭr}\)}\)), one woman loudly triggered a conversation on the subject, asking the dā’īya in a cynical manner:

What about those trips to the beach, we heard of great violations, young men trespassing morality and young women with bikinis underneath their long \(\text{jilbāb}\) (Islamic dress)?

Another woman intervened, asking:

Is it all right [legitimate] to go for a trip there?
Another expounded:

They [the Israeli authorities] allow them [young Palestinian men] to go to the beach where they will for the first time see women in swimming suits. They [the Israeli authorities] want to corrupt the morality of the young [Palestinian] men. It is illicit (ḥarām) to go.

Yet with disagreement, another woman responded:

No, it is not illicit (mish ḥarām), do not listen to this talk. I went with my family, and we enjoyed it; as long as you go with your family [it is safe], it is okay to go. Do not listen to such nonsense (ḥākī fāḏī).

In another piety site, the dāʿiya’s response was much more definitive:

It is our homeland (blādnā), it is not illicit to go, but one has to be careful, because in many occasions, only young men were granted permits; their parents were excluded; this is to corrupt youths’ morality.

As I just argued, what is quite revealing in this moral-configuring conversation is not only the moral complexity and intercity of seeking leisure at the enemy’s site, which is also one’s homeland site - a complex moral ambiguity that plagues a typical Palestinian, and, perhaps spoils his/her leisure pursuits - but also that it showed that there was no one answer, no one prescription to undo this ambiguity. Instead, what women demonstrated was that through dialogue, these dilemmas were subject to negotiation, not to mere religious doctrine, or dogma.

Moreover, in that piety site and on the same occasion, I heard the dāʿiya advising women that “unless it violates women’s modesty, recreation (al- tarwīḥ) is not illicit (ḥarām)”. To support her stand, the dāʿiya referred to how one of the Prophet Mohammad’s companions (ṣahāba) responded to an early devout Muslim, who believed that God was to punish him because he could not discipline himself to continuous worshiping (ʿibāda mustamirra). The dāʿiya explained that the ṣahābī warned the man that unless he - the man - balanced worship with leisure, boredom was going to blind his heart.107

The dāʿiya also criticised those piety groups who insist that women should avoid taking leisure opportunities in public places by referring to how Prophet Mohammad and his wife ‘Aʿisha used to watch horse contests. To emphasise her point, the dāʿiya, even, referred to how on one occasion, and in order to allow her a better view of the contest scene, the Prophet placed ‘Aʿisha on his shoulder.

Further, piety groups also differ as to whether it is permissible to watch television series and listen to music. The moral debate around this subject is always there but is never conclusive.

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107 The exact advice of the ṣahābī was, “sāʾa fa- sāʾa, inna al- qulūb idhā mallat ʿamiat”. This can be translated into English as: An hour for worship, another for leisure, because, if bored, hearts will grow blind (or boredom will blind the heart).
During Ramadan of 2012, for example, the television drama, Umar Ibn Al-Khattab, was a big hit. Then, one dāʿiya asked her senior colleague if it was permissible to watch television series that personalised the ẓahāba (Prophet Mohammad's companions). The dāʿiya complained that she had watched the drama, but that “something in [her] heart made [her] feel uneasy about watching it”. Her colleague’s advice was that “she should consult her heart and follow what it would suggest”. The answer of this senior dāʿiya and colleague to the woman dāʿiya in question was not definitive. It did not, for example, state that it was certainly illicit to watch a television drama that personified the ẓahāba. She, instead, left the answer open and let the woman dāʿiya decide on the matter using her own judgement.

Moreover, in her response to women’s questions regarding leisure, the dāʿiya of another piety group criticised those piety groups that consider singing as illicit. She argued that:

Songs like those sung for brides in weddings are not illicit (harām), because they do not contain obscene vocabulary (kalām fāḥish) and do not violate modesty.

Again, here, we see another example of how women’s moral stances were not based on dogmatic positions of what modesty was, or what the system of honour dictated, but that they were open to interpretation, which was mediated and shaped by women’s interests, needs, and even responsibilities. Thus, for example, the dāʿiya, who argued that singing was not illicit, was a mother of four young women, two of them were newlywed, and the last two were on their way to getting married. Likewise, the lady, who believed that taking leisure trips to inside the “green line” was not illicit, was the one who had experienced the trip herself and therefore concluded that it was not morally wrong that she pursued that leisure option.

Further, numerous examples demonstrate that women pursued sanctioned pleasures. For example, if a dāʿiya refuses to attend a kin’s wedding because she believes the wedding breaks the gender segregation norms, she would often invite the newlywed to her house in order to celebrate the occasion in a style she believes is consistent with Islamic norms. Also, usually, dāʿiyāt organise cultural and educational activities, which include, among others, Quran recitation and general information contests (musābaqāt thawāqīyya); they also organise women’s trips to al-ʿumra,108 to al-Aqsa mosque, and to inside-the-green-line. This is in addition to making

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108 Al-ʿumra, also known as “small pilgrimage”, is Muslims’ pilgrimage to Mecca but with some differences from the major hajj, which takes place during the last month of the Muslim calendar (between the 8th-12th of Dhu al-Hijja). Whereas al-ʿumra is only highly recommended by Prophet Mohammad (Sunna), al-hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam (farīda). Therefore, even though Muslims can make ʿumra as many times as they wish during their life time, this does not make up for their duty to perform the major hajj (if capable), during the last month of the Muslim calendar (between the 8th-12th of Dhu al-Hijja). In addition, whereas al-hajj culminates in standing on the mountain of ʿArafah (waqf ʿArafah), al-ʿumra does not include such “major” hajj rituals such as waqf ʿArafah and the stoning of the devil (rami al-jamarāt).
commemoration parties for young school graduates and farewell parties for women departing to and returning from al-hajj.

Leisure also extends to religious teaching and affects pedagogy. Thus, one dāʾiyya, for example, mentioned how, every week at her house, while teaching the neighbourhood’s children ablution and ṣalāa, she used to entertain those children by celebrating their birthdays, organising information contests, and serving them popcorn and birthday cakes, which she used to specially make for the occasions. Female Islamic schools, as another example, make female students compose and act out dramas using well-known fairy tales, such as Cinderella, and the like; in these dramas these female students use image, voice and body to affect their audience; they also use well-known songs and melodies (e.g. popular songs) but inject those with new religious words and meanings.

In conclusion, what I have demonstrated in the above discussion is that women’s piety did not negate their pursuit of non-religious-driven aesthetics or pleasures; I have demonstrated that these women sought pleasures and entertainment options that in their perception did not violate Islamic morality.

I have also demonstrated that neither the dāʾiyāt, nor pious women, have ready-made answers as to what in their Islamic perspective was morally valid (licit) or invalid (illicit). Instead, I have shown that these moral judgements were subject to these women’s negotiation and configurations.

Finally, the discussion in this section echoes Deeb (2012). Deeb (2012) shows how the rules of piety in the case of Shiʿi youth in Lebanon did not prohibit them from seeking leisure or entertainment. Like Deeb, I have demonstrated, in the case of the WPM in Nablus City, how pious women in Nablus have pursued what she calls “sanctioned pleasures”; and like Deeb, also, I have demonstrated how these pious women’s “discourses and practices of morality [were] complex, multiple, and flexible” (2012, 1). That is, I have demonstrated that the pious practices of the WPM in Nablus City were far from being guided by doctrinal premises.

Conclusion: On the Aesthetic of Women’s Piety, Discourses of Sociability, and the Islamic Revival

Overall, this chapter has discussed the aesthetics of piety as women’s embodiment of their religion (i.e. Islam) and as their pursuit of the beautiful and the pleasurable through these embodiments. It specifically focussed the analysis on the aesthetic of women’s practice of Quran
recitation, supplication, and pursuit of leisure. The chapter argued against an essentialist approach that homogenises women’s piety, its embodied modes, intentions, and outcome.

It argued that the intentions that underlined such aesthetic pious practices were situational and fluid - recognising the methodological complexity of inferring women’s intentions from their actions, the chapter explained that it inferred these intentions and their fluid nature from women’s immediate rationalisations in their narrations of why and how they embarked on such pious practices and from the contexts of their pious practice(s).

Further, the chapter configured in the Quran recitation ceremony how in their alternate roles as reciters and listeners to the recited Quran, women were exchanging the Quran as an aesthetic gift in a “game” of giving and receiving, which connected them in the action of constituting themselves as a community of believers. In doing so, the chapter concluded that in contrast to an essentialist view which homogenises Islamic revival with the Salafi intention of recovering an early Muslim community, the chapter showed how women, in their pious actions, helped create their own particular community of believers.

Thus, unlike the previous chapters, which mostly focussed on the analysis of how women’s pious actions were embodied in social structure, this chapter has mostly focussed on the reversed structure/action dynamic; how women’s pious actions constituted structure.

But the chapter also discussed the particularity of this community of believers by conveying that the exchange ethics that governed its Quran recitation exchange were not dissimilar to the [traditional] sociability exchange ethics in the city at large.

Yet the chapter also showed how the Quran recitation ceremony conveyed some major discontinuities with that very tradition: a discontinuity with what had started to be during the 1930s-1940 modern and novice modes of sociability and leisure. The Quran recitation ceremony showed that now women do not enjoy the pleasures of the past, that of the generation of the 1950s-1960s; that of the generation of their mothers-in-law, their mothers, or even themselves, some decades ago. Those were the pleasures of sharing lavish food at the melody of women playing the ‘oud, singing nonreligious songs and retelling cinema scenes from the latest movies they watched in the first two cinemas that were established in town.

The chapter also showed that, now, as in the Quran recitation ceremony, some women do not seek to display their social status through dress, lavish food, and hospitality modes as was the case in the occasion of the reception day (al-istiqbāl) decades ago (e.g. note in the previous chapter how Dā’iya Fadia described how her mother and her women fellows used to indulge themselves in the reception day, or the istiqbāl occasion). Instead, the chapter showed that in
the intimacy of the Quran recitation ceremony, in their exchange of the Quran words as an aesthetic gift, some women now enjoy the stark melodies of women reciting the Quran, singing religious songs (inshād), repeating God’s names (dhikr), and retelling the story of the Prophet Mohammad’s birthday (al-Mawlid al-Nabawi), etc.

In brief, the chapter showed that many women now are deriving their pleasures from the Islamic tradition; it showed that many women are now seeking and creating Islamic discourses of intimacy, sociability and sanctioned pleasures. In doing so, these women are giving life and reviving Islam as a tradition. In demonstrating that their revival of Islam was mediated by these women’s sense of pleasure and the beautiful (i.e. their aesthetic intentions), the analysis has demonstrated Plate’s chapter-opening citation, which asserts that, “It is in and through…that which might be sometimes termed beautiful…in which religions continue to adapt to new situations and environments” (Plate 2012, 177).

All in all, thus, as an indication of Islamic revival, women’s practice of Quran recitation, and supplication demonstrated how women’s piety, its modes of embodiments, its motives, intentions, and outcome were far from being universal, or doctrinal; but they were shaped by women’s everyday needs and challenges and the city’s local culture and mode of sociability. Yet one can conclude that the alternative non-secular discourses of sociability that these women helped create through their aesthetic pious practices - as in the Quran recitation ceremony - contributed to the Islamic revival, while they have been partially facilitated by Islamist logistics and resources (e.g. Quran recitation centres). In this sense, our chapter’s findings echo White’s conclusion that in the case of the Islamic revival in Turkey:

> What binds people together in the Islamist Movement is not ideology (be it political or religious) nor any particular type of Organisation (whether civil society or "tribe"). Rather, the movement is rooted in local culture, and interpersonal relations, while also drawing on a variety of civic and political Organisations and political ideologies (2002, 6).

From this powerful observation of White’s, I move next to the General Conclusion, the last chapter in this thesis. I revisit the research questions, research findings, and the discussion I have so far made all over the body of this dissertation. I focus the discussion on the complex relationship between women’s piety, Islamism, and the Islamic revival as such. I also identify and discuss future research possibilities.

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109 Also, in Henkel (2005, 488).
Chapter Six: General Conclusion

1. Subject Matter and Contribution

The subject of this thesis has been the emergence, the development, and the salient presence of the Women’s Piety Movement (WPM) in the Palestinian West Bank city of Nablus. The WPM is a space of Nabulsi women’s Islamic activism indicated in these women’s making of many piety groups and networks. Through these piety groups and networks, pious Nabulsi women undertake a multitude of Islamic practices, including among others, pedagogic practices such as teaching and learning the memorisation, the elocution and the interpretation of the Quran, teaching and learning Prophet Mohammad’s sayings (hadith), practising supplication (duʿāʾ; dhikr), telling allegories and stories of the prophets (qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ), and celebrating Islamic occasions, such as Prophet Mohammad’s birthday (al-Mawlid al-Nabawi).

The thesis has argued that, despite its compelling presence, as yet, the WPM in Nablus City has caught insufficient attention, if any. When it has been addressed, the thesis has found that such women’s Islamic activism has been insufficiently conceptualised as the outcome of Islamist “contentious politics” or “identity politics”.

The thesis has, therefore, concluded that the study of the emergence, the development, and the current compelling appeal of the WPM is of theoretical and empirical importance. On empirical grounds, the thesis has uncovered an otherwise ignored domain of Palestinian women Islamic activism. On theoretical grounds, the thesis has challenged previous understandings of this domain.

Thus, through the ethnographic and the life and oral history methods - through participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and semi-structured interviewing - the thesis has in several ways challenged the understanding that the WPM has been an outcome of Islamist “contentious politics”.

Through the life and oral history methods, the thesis has found that Sufi women had been preaching to women independently of the Muslim Brothers (MBs), and prior to their growing influence in the city, in the late 1970s. Therefore, the thesis has concluded that the history of the WPM goes back not only to the early 1970s but also to the mid-1960s and mid-1950s, if not earlier.

Through the oral history method, also, the thesis has found that, by situating the WPM on the landscape of twentieth century Palestinian women’s activism, one can observe that it was preceded, paralleled, and intersected by three types of Palestinian women’s activism. These
were: the charitable type of activism of the middle- and upper-class women of the British Mandate (1922-1948); the political activism of the lower- and middle-class generation of the 1960s through to the 1980s; and the Islamist type of activism of yet another younger generation of Palestinian women, that of the late 1980s and 1990s. Therefore, the thesis has argued that by studying these concurrent but different forms of Palestinian women’s activism, it has made an original contribution to the understanding of Palestinian women’s activism as such.

Further, through the ethnographic method, through participant observation and in-depth interviewing, the thesis has found that Nabulsi women have not only been interested in creating and participating in various piety groups and networks and embarking on a multitude of Islamic practices through these networks, but have also been fascinated with this type of Islamic activism. In analysing this fascination, the thesis has found that these women have been attracted with some force to creating and participating in various piety groups and networks because through this type of Islamic activism, Nabulsi women were, in an intimate atmosphere, coming to terms with a rapidly changing city. In particular, the thesis has found that Nabulsi women were negotiating the city’s changing sociability and leisure modes and the gender implications of these changes. Putting it differently, the thesis has observed that, through these piety groups and networks, pious Nabulsi women were learning how to live their everyday lives – in the context of this change to the city’s sociability and leisure modes – in accordance with Islamic morality as an alternative moral frame to the prevailing one. Therefore, the thesis has concluded that the WPM, with its various piety groups and networks, is a form of what some late twentieth century sociologists, such as Melucci and Touraine, have called “new social movements” (NSMs). Consequently, the thesis has also concluded that, despite some male Islamist support for its emergence and development, the WPM makes up an autonomous women’s space, a social field which women have created, developed, and sustained through their various forms of agency, their interests, and their modes of pious engagement.

By proposing that the WPM is a social field, an NSM, and by proposing a historic, practice-theory approach to its analysis, the thesis has argued that it has made a novel contribution to the analysis of the Islamic revival and to the analysis of the agency of religious women in general and pious Muslim women in particular. This is by: (1) expanding our understanding of the emergence and development of this women’s social religious field from being the outcome of “contentious politics” (Singerman 2003) to being the outcome of the dialectical interaction of broad macro-structural, meso-local and micro-individual processes and their anticipated and unanticipated consequences; (2) broadening our understanding of the various ways that pious women played a part in the creation of this women’s religious field through their piety practices; and (3) uncovering the intentions and motivations that have been underpinning women’s
participation in these piety groups and networks, as a form of Islamic revival, as diverse, fluid and situational, and therefore far from being ideological or doctrinal.

2. Questions and Findings

After the theoretical framework, each of the thesis’ chapters has addressed and attempted to answer different empirical and theoretical questions. Chapter two, “Nablus City, an Urbanity with an Islamic Habitus Undergoing Social Change”, has addressed the question of “What were the macro-structural and meso-local conditions under which the WPM has emerged?” In particular, it has answered the question: “What had been particularly specific about the historic moment of the 1950s and 1960s, when the activities of the ‘founding cohort’ of the WPM emerged?” In answering these two questions, the chapter has situated the WPM in its local modernisation context. It has specifically situated the WPM in the modernisation processes that have been affecting women in the city since the late nineteenth century. The chapter has, therefore, argued that it has been in the social change (i.e. the modernisation) which the city has been experiencing since the late nineteenth century - but which took on a faster pace during the postcolonial era of the 1950s and 1960s - that we have been able to put into perspective the emergence of the WPM in the mid 1950s-1960s. The chapter has specifically discussed how modern education and modern mass media had created new subjectivities anchored in women’s new desires and consuming needs. The chapter has, for example, shown how Nabulsi women started to desire and acquire new things: cigarettes, an evening at the cinema, a modern haircut, fashionable clothes, and higher education abroad. The chapter has therefore concluded that it has been in the tension between, on the one hand, a global Western model of womanhood into which the new mass media had started to fashion Nabulsi women, and, on the other, some Nabulsi women’s Islamic habitus, that we are able to see the first beginnings of the WPM.

Chapter three, “From Religious Habitus to Religius Field: The Making of the WPM Between the Sufi Dāʾiyāt of Damascus and the Salafi ʿUlama of Cairo”, has addressed how the macro and local modernisation processes impacted on individual women in the city. The chapter therefore addressed the macro/micro dynamics in the emergence of the WPM. Thus, in asking “what kind of agency these women had demonstrated in their adaptations to this social change?”, the chapter has also addressed the theoretical question of how women’s Islamic habitus and socially embedded intentions have created the social field of daʿwa. Through the life stories of the “first cohort” of the WPM (Dāʾiyāt Amal, Khawla, and Nadwa), the chapter has specifically asked, “how did the somehow rapid social change and modernisation during the historical moment of the mid-1950s and 1960s, strain/enable these women’s relations, opportunities, intentions and choices?” And, in line with Ortner’s “politics of legitimisation” approach to action, the chapter has also asked, “what stakes/interests did the ‘founding cohort’ find in their Islamic activism and how
had the latter advanced their authority and legitimacy, vis-à-vis other women, in the city at large?"

In answering these questions, the chapter has concluded that these women – the "first cohort" of the WPM – were motivated to embark on Islamic activism at the time not because they had “blindly” internalised Islamic piety from their family formative experiences, but rather, because, through their socially embedded choices and moral reflection, they could reason that such activism was an important means of empowerment. Thus, the chapter has demonstrated how, through their agency, through creating themselves as pious “virtuosos”, through “critique” and “praxis”, and through utilising various familial, local, and regional Salafi and Sufi Islamic discursive resources, these dāʿiyāt had started empowering themselves against their marginal social class, gender, and generational positions. The chapter has therefore demonstrated that it was through these various types of dāʿiyāt’s agency, through these dāʿiyāt’s motivation and desire to empower themselves against their social positions, that the social field of women’s daʿwa in the city had started to emerge.

Chapter four, “Between the Traditional and the New Islamist of the Middle: The Making of Islamic-Islamist Feminist and Pious Modern Subjectivity” has addressed how the constant social change in women’s sociability and leisure modes in the city has continued to alter pious women’s subjectivity as well. Thus, unlike chapter three, where we have seen the emergence of the Salafi-Sufi and Sufi-Salafi types of women’s Islamic subjectivities, through the life story of senior Dāʿiya Fadia, the chapter has discussed the dynamics of the emergence in the WPM of a hybrid Islamic-Islamist feminist and pious modern subjectivity. The chapter has located that emergence in the interaction of Dāʿiya Fadia’s own individual repertoire of piety, her particular gender experience, and the steady social change, in the city, to women’s sociability and leisure modes in the 1970s and in the neo-liberal era of the 1990s. In discussing the dynamics of that emergence, the chapter has demonstrated the practice-theory premise that, while actors are socially made, they are still able to transform the social world in which they are embedded (Ortner 1989; 2006) through what Bucar (2010) calls “creative consent”. The chapter has therefore demonstrated another way in which pious women in the WPM were agentive in the creation of the social field of daʿwa and in the transformation of their social world through this creation. Thus, as an indication of her “creative consent”, the chapter has demonstrated how Dāʿiya Fadia’s powerful reflection on her gender experiences in her personal and familial settings (e.g. her relations with her mother, father, and husband) had made her embrace a creative model of womanhood - a model that has been neither Sufi nor Salafi, neither traditional nor liberal modern, but a hybrid Islamic/Islamist model that speaks to a pious modern subjectivity. As an indication of this creativity, the chapter has thoroughly discussed Dāʿiya Fadia’s understanding of the contours of her pious modern subjectivity. Dāʿiya Fadia has shown
that, at the heart of those contours was her attempt at the authentication of Islam and its construction in modern terms as something compatible with modern science rather than with traditional mystic practices, thus indicating that modernity and piety could go together.

In chapter five, “From the Aesthetics of the ‘Oud to the Aesthetics of Quran Recitation: the Aesthetics of Piety and the Leisure of the Pious”, the thesis focused the analysis on an otherwise ignored aspect of Islamic women’s activism: the aesthetics of piety, that is, women’s pursuit, through their various piety practices, of the beautiful and the pleasurable. On theoretical grounds, the chapter is a demonstration of how the social-religious field of women’s piety has itself become a force that contributed to diversifying and somehow altering women’s existing secular modes of leisure and sociability. That is to say, the chapter is a demonstration of how, owing to the after effects, over the years, of the social field of da’wa on women’s sociability, more women in the city have come to look up to these piety groups and networks as alternative arenas of sociability vis-à-vis the existing secular ones.

Thus, the chapter has demonstrated how, in this piety group, the Quran recitation occasion has been a place for women to experiment with various modes of Quran recitation and to negotiate the Islamic morality of the leisure options open to them, but also to socialise and to exchange sweets, jokes and city news. In doing so, the chapter has demonstrated ethnographically how the WPM is a form of NSM, one of the “networks of a shared meaning” (Melucci 1989) that women have created through their various pious interests and involvements.

Further, unlike previous chapters, which mostly focused on how women’s pious actions were embodied in social structure, this chapter has focused on the reversed structure/action dynamic. The chapter has focused on how women’s pious actions, their mode of aesthetic engagement and their dialogic agency, in this Quran recitation ceremony, were constituting structure by creating a new community of believers rather than recovering a Salafi one. Further, through the ethnographic observation of women’s practice of supplication, the thesis has uncovered the intentions that have underpinned these women’s aesthetic practices as fluid and situational, and, therefore, far from being ideological. Finally, through ethnographic analysis of these women’s pursuit of leisure, the chapter has demonstrated that, for these women, an ideal Islamic code of practice has been a matter of negotiation and discovery rather than a matter of blind doctrinal application.

In brief, having focused its ethnographic analysis on the aesthetic of women’s practice of Quran recitation, supplication, and pursuit of leisure, the chapter has argued against an essentialist approach that homogenises women’s piety and its embodied modes, intentions and outcome.
3. The Islamic Revival through the Prism of the Local

The above summary of what the thesis has so far presented, argued, and discussed throughout previous chapters sets the groundwork for discussing the main broad question that the WPM had compelled the thesis to ask: "As a form of Islamic revival, what sense can we make of this sustained Islamic women's activism vis-à-vis Islamism, the Islamic revival and the female subject as such?"

In answering this question, the previous discussion makes one conclude that the WPM, as a form of Islamic revival, has been complex in broad socio-cultural, local and individual terms. That is to say, the previous discussion has demonstrated how the global and regional phenomenon of the Islamic revival in a local context, such as that of the city of Nablus, takes nuanced and peculiar forms and is therefore far from being the outcome of either Islamist ideology or politics.

For example, we have seen how the modernisation of Nablus was a force that engendered the WPM, but we have not seen a uniformed Islamist/Islamic model that dictated to women how they should live in this modernisation. Instead, what we have seen is that, for Nabulsi pious women, "Islamic womanhood" was a subject of negotiation. In other words, while some Nabulsi women had not felt at ease with a Western model of womanhood – such as that which the new mass media started fashioning some Nabulsi women into – since the 1950s, this uneasiness did not translate into a uniform, ready-to-be-taken model of an alternative Islamic womanhood.

As mentioned above, what we have seen, instead, is that women in the WPM, while they have agreed on some broad Islamic parameters of modern womanhood, they have differed as to what constitutes such modernity. This again highlights how, as a form of Islamic revival, the WPM has been far from being ideological or doctrinal. In chapter three, for example, we have observed that the “founding cohort” of the WPM has advanced a Salafi-Sufi and a Sufi-Salafi type of Islamic womanhood, so to speak. But in chapter four, we have observed the emergence of a hybrid model of Islamic womanhood, an Islamic/Islamist model that advanced a greater role for pious women as advocates of women's Islamic rights.

Further, as argued earlier, the thesis has uncovered the intentions and motivations that have been underpinning women's participation in these piety groups and networks, as a form of Islamic revival, as diverse, fluid and situational, and therefore far from being ideological or doctrinal. Thus, the thesis has found that women join piety groups and networks for a variety of reasons: to socialise, to train and hone their skills in Islamic practices, and to establish themselves as competent in pedagogic skills, or as pious “virtuosos”; to maximise the pleasure and the aesthetic reward that come from their in-group pious practice; to take the opportunity of a leadership role among fellow women in order to earn some more social and cultural capital.
and more social distinction. Other women take the opportunity of creating or joining a piety group as a means of acquiring autonomy against dominant familial relationships, or of trespassing across the boundaries of the private home and extending themselves beyond their roles in the domestic sphere as mothers, wives and housekeepers by creating for themselves, through their various modes of Islamic activism, a space of their own in the public sphere of the city. Other women join a piety group to negotiate and clarify Islamic morality concerning personal and familial matters. As a result, through such participation, women feel a sense of empowerment: their personal and social relations, their skills, their sense of identity and the horizons for their public participation and position in the city, all expand.

Therefore, the thesis’ conclusive answer to the question “what sense can we make of this sustained Islamic women’s activism vis-à-vis Islamism, the Islamic revival and the female subject as such” cannot be more adequately highlighted and brought to the fore than by reiterating White’s apt observation (cited in the conclusion of the previous chapter), concerning the Islamic revival in Turkey, that:

What binds people together in the Islamist Movement is not ideology (be it political or religious) nor any particular type of organization (whether civil society or “tribe”). Rather, the movement is rooted in local culture, and interpersonal relations, while also drawing on a variety of civic and political organizations and political ideologies (2002, 6).

4. Implications: Islamic Women’s Agency through the Prism of the Local, the Cultural Specific and the Universal

While not unlike Islamic women’s activism in other cities in the region – e.g. Istanbul, Damascus, Beirut, Sanaa, Cairo, Khartoum – the practice-theory approach, this thesis has advanced to the analysis of the WPM in Nablus City, has moved on our understanding of the agency of pious Muslim women in general through the analysis of the agency of pious Nabulsi women in particular. The thesis has advanced our understanding of the agency of pious Muslim women in general by showing the various ways, both straightforward and nuanced, in which women in the WPM in Nablus City have exhibited their agency through their various pious practices. This is in contrast to liberal and liberal feminist perspectives which usually identify Muslim women’s piety with the loss of autonomy and agency. Thus, what – from liberal and liberal feminist perspectives on Islamic women’s piety – appears as “domination”, “subordination”, “loss of autonomy”, “false consciousness”, and the unreflective, “organic” outcome of “habit”, “internalisation”, or “socialisation”, turns in our practice-theory perspective into a socially embedded choice, mediated by pious women’s interests, moral reflection, and “creative consent”.

The thesis has therefore shown pious women’s agency to be a spectrum of self-transformative and socially transformative actions. It has shown that, to empower themselves and expand their
social space, pious women in Nablus City have: utilised various Islamic discursive resources, familial relationships and local and regional Islamic networks; used aesthetic linguistic exchanges and exchanges of modest material gifts, such as chocolates and sweets; practised “praxis” and “critique”; and shown “creative consent”. Through this spectrum of agentive actions, the thesis has shown that pious women were able to expand their social space, create their own communities of believers, and alter their gender relations and the logic of their everyday lives. The implication of such approaches to Islamic women’s agency as “socially embedded”, “praxis”, “critique”, and “creative consent” (i.e. as “soft” and “hard’ agency in Ortner’s terms) is far-reaching. Such an understanding of Muslim women’s agency does not only undermine a feminist liberal approach to women’s agency as the exercise of free will or individual freedom, but also questions the adequacy of understanding pious Muslim women’s agency only in terms of its being “culturally specific” (Mahmood 2005). That it is to say, the thesis concludes that it is inadequate to speak of the agency of pious Muslim women merely as culturally specific, ignoring what pious Muslim women share with other women in different cultures and overlooking what is also universal and cross-cultural in Muslim women’s pious practices. The thesis’ findings suggest that an understanding of Muslim women’s agency from a practice-theory perspective pushes for a notion of agency that is not only “culturally specific” (Mahmood 2005) but is also “cross-cultural” and universal. This notion of agency as “cross-cultural” and universal echoes Sewell’s assertion that agency is “analogous” to language (1992, 20). This is by the mere fact that although language differs from one culture to another, all cultures are endowed with the capacity to speak one (ibid.).

Therefore, the thesis concludes that Muslim women are no exception to the fact that their agency is socially embedded; that they have to act from within conditions and structures of power, authority, or domination; and that they, through their pious Islamic actions and practices, utilise Islam as a cultural resource to empower themselves in relation to these conditions and structures and/or against them. This is because social embeddedness is a universal condition, is a condition of social life as such. Hence the thesis’ conclusion that the study of the Islamic revival through the prism of the local, attending to the indications and manifestations of the local, its peculiarities and nuances – as this thesis has done in its study of the WPM in Nablus City – does paradoxically push for a notion of pious Muslim women’s agency that is both “culturally specific” and cross-cultural or universal.

5. Future Research

Having only touched upon the WPM in the context of the Israeli occupation (in chapter five, looking at women’s practice of supplication), the thesis sets the groundwork for further research
on how that specific context might have shaped these Nabulsi women’s specific type of Islamic activism.

For example, I would like my future research to further explore how, by drawing on local and regional Islamic discursive resources (e.g. creating and utilising existent connections with Sufi dāʿiyāt in Damascus and Salafi ‘ulama in Cairo), pious women in Nablus City were in fact transforming the city from an occupied, culturally enclosed, and physically bounded locality – due to the Israeli Occupation – to one with far-reaching regional and perhaps global Islamic connections. Specifically, I would like to explore how, by envisioning the city as an imagined Islamic one – one with a far-reaching Islamic tradition and horizon – pious Nabulsi women, through their Islamic activism and networking, were in fact trespassing beyond the physical and cultural boundaries of Nablus city as a military occupied locality and were expanding their sense of geographical and cultural space.

Further, I would like in my future research to highlight in more breadth women’s choice of Islamic piety in the context of the strong popular appeal to Pan-Arabism during the 1950s and 1960s. I specifically would like to further explore why the limited modernisation of the city had made some women (e.g., “the founding cohort of the WPM”) choose Islamic piety but had made others choose a political type of activism. If pursued, such a line of research would extend the thesis’ practice-theory theoretical framework to the understanding of Palestinian women’s national political activism at an important period of Palestinian and Arab twentieth century history – the peak times of Pan-Arabism during the 1950s-1960s. In addition, having, in this thesis, focused most of the analysis on the “spiritual elite”, or the pious “virtuosos” of the WPM, future research needs to explore the piety of lay women, those who aspire to create themselves as pious “virtuosos” through their participation in the WPM. I particularly look forward to examining how the participation of poor and less educated women in the WPM allows them an “opportunity space” to acquire a “middle-class habitus” that enables them to move further up the social ladder of the city. That is to say, I would like to explore how, for some Nabulsi women, Islamic women’s activism is a means not only of gender empowerment, but also of social mobility.

Finally, with a consumption culture that has been growing with some speed since the late 1990s, and has grown even faster since this current research began in 2008, there is an apt opportunity to explore further how this steady increase in the modernisation of the location of women’s leisure and sociability from the private to the public domain creates both opportunities and challenges for pious women. As discussed in Chapter Two, “Nablus City, an Urbanity with an Islamic Habitus Undergoing Social Change”, this change to women’s modes of sociability and leisure in the city has been indicated in the proliferation of restaurants, coffee shops, shopping
malls, tower blocks, high-rise buildings and, lately, the introduction of some world-famous clothing brands and chain-stores (e.g., Zara).

Therefore, based on the findings of chapter two and as an extension of its discussion and conclusion, further research would focus on how pious women continue to negotiate the ongoing social change to the city’s local modes of sociability and leisure and would explore how pious women continue to balance their Islamic morality against their on-going changing city. The importance of this final possible line of enquiry is to highlight further how the WPM, as a local expression of the Islamic revival, is situated in historical context and social change and is therefore far from being ideological or doctrinal.

6. In Closure: Revisiting the Thesis’ Initial Rationale

Bringing this conclusion to a close, one can revisit and reflect on the thesis’ initial rationale: that today Islamic women’s activism makes up a salient feature of Nabulsi women’s social milieu and is an appealing type of Islamic activism for other women in other localities in Palestinian society. The meaning and significance of these women’s pious actions and activities, their pious desires, passion, and fascination with Islamic tradition, have been eclipsed by a focus on Islamic political activism and have been marginalised, even dismissed, from the academic study of Palestinian society by liberals, leftists, those whom we might call secularists, and even by Islamists, as backward, reactionary, traditional, or anti-modern, and therefore unimportant. As this thesis has demonstrated, knowing these women from the inside and learning about their desires, passion, and fascination with Islamic tradition, has opened an important window on the kind of social change that Palestinian Nabulsi women have been undergoing in the last century or so. It has also opened a window on these women’s attempts at negotiating this social change through Islamic piety as an “important gender empowerment means” (Badran 2009).
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