

**FEMALE RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY IN MUSLIM SOCIETIES:
THE CASE OF THE *DĀ'ĪYĀT* IN JEDDAH**

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*To those who taught me the most,
my mother, Noura and my father, Mansour,
with love and gratitude*

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Statement of Authorship

This thesis is the result of my own work, except where otherwise indicated. All other sources are acknowledged. It contains approximately 94,558 words.

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Note on Transliteration

- Transliteration of Arabic words into English was performed in accordance with the method adopted by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.
- The same method was also used to determine the spelling of proper nouns, with the exception of well-known places names such as Jeddah, Riyadh, etc. for which the common spellings were used.
- Arabic words that occur in the *Oxford English Dictionary* are not treated as technical terms, whereas others are italicised.
- Transliteration of Arabic words from spoken discourses recorded during the observations and interviews takes into account, where relevant, colloquial Hijazi dialect pronunciation.

Female Religious Authority in Muslim Societies: The Case of the *Dā'iyāt* in Jeddah

Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore how uninstitutionalised female preachers, or *dā'iyāt*, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia construct authority in a context in which male ulama dominate the production of religious knowledge and represent the apex of the religious and social hierarchy. The study was broad, descriptive, and explanatory and drew primarily on the framework known as 'accountable ethnography'. Data collection occurred between June and December 2009 and consisted of observations, interviews, and collection of literary artefacts, which were reviewed alongside literature published internationally. A flexible mode of inquiry was employed, partly in response to constraints on public religious discourse imposed in Saudi Arabia after September 11, 2001. The study concludes that the *dā'iyāt* construct authority predominantly by relying on male ulama as *marji'iyya diniyya* (religious frame of reference) when issuing fatwas, as pedagogical models, as sources of charismatic inspiration, and as providers of personal recommendations. The dissertation also addresses a set of 'alternate' strategies of authority construction employed by Dr Fāṭima Nāsiif. Almost uniquely, this *dā'iyā* is found to construct authority that goes beyond reproduction of institutionalised views by developing scholarly arguments to support interpretations of Islamic texts that are responsive to women's perspectives and needs. In doing so, she expands the parameters of religiously permissible practice while remaining, for her part, within the confines of orthodox practice. Thus, although her society and most researchers perceive knowledge as a masculine attribute in the Saudi religious sphere, in matters relating to women, as well as through active leadership in ritual practice, Dr Fāṭima demonstrates that the *dā'iyā* can become the authority. Nevertheless, for her and for the other *dā'iyāt*, the study finds that legitimatising female religious authority depends upon maintaining the established social order, including the hierarchy that places women in a subordinate position to men.

Chapter 1

The Salience of *Da'wa* and the Role of the *Dā'iyāt* in Contemporary Saudi Arabia: An Introduction

1.1 Introduction

There is an established tradition in the writings of Western scholars where the image of the Muslim woman has been romanticised and orientalised (Said, 2003). The image characterises her persona to be living under the continuous regulation of oppression and of submission to patriarchy. Indeed, according to Zayzafoon, the 'Muslim woman' has become 'essentially a semiotic subject that is produced and reproduced by Orientalist, Islamic, feminist, and nationalistic discourses' (2005:2). Zayzafoon, moreover, places this obsession with the 'Muslim woman' within the wider context of power relations and colonial-driven identity formation that marks the relationship between the Orient and the West (ibid).

In modern scholarship on the Muslim world, the negative image of the Muslim woman's social and emotional oppression masks alternative perceptions that challenge attempts to generalise her status as a reflection of the institutions that 'allegedly constrain' her freedom and mobility (Abu-Lughod, 2008:xv). Thus, the scholarly imagination has over-politicised the status of Muslim women while taking a reductionist approach to the impact of wider social factors in shaping their roles and identity. This approach has been based on blanket assumptions that present Muslim women as a homogeneous group that has always been subordinate in its social, political, religious, and economic status.

In addition to these erroneous assumptions about Muslim women, Western scholars have long held the misperception that Islamic society represents an intrinsically static value and legal system (Abu Khalil, 2008). By contrast, Chatty and Rabo assert that 'the position of women in the Middle East cannot be attributed to the presumed intrinsic properties of Islam' (1997:13). Nevertheless, the effect of this perception on the study of gender in the Muslim Middle East has been to perpetuate the notion of a static and constrained social configuration and of a generalised and undifferentiated status quo for all Muslim women (Abu Khalil, 2008). In a country like Saudi Arabia, which professes a commitment to the institutionalisation of religion in all its various systems and where religion defines the most basic and intimate personal relationships, the assumption of uniformity and homogeneity in religious matters is untenable.

The establishment in 1940 of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (*Hay'at al-Amr bi al-Ma'rūf wa al-Nahī 'an al-Munkar*), commonly known as *al-hay'a* (members are referred to as the *muṭawwa'*, or religious police), is part of Saudi Arabia's commitment to religious compliance according to the Saudi interpretation of sharia. The *muṭawwa'* enforce sharia prescriptions regarding such matters as prayers and fasting and moral codes, such as proper veiling for women and the strict segregation of the sexes (see 'A Brief About *al-Hay'at*', n.d.). However, the enforcement of sharia's prescriptions by the *muṭawwa'* differs according to the cultural practices of each region. For example, in the city of Jeddah the *muṭawwa'* have adopted a relatively lax approach towards women's veiling, while in the capital Riyadh the *muṭawwa'* are more strict in their execution of this and other sharia prescriptions. This inconsistency in the application of sharia, along with other

religious and social institutions discussed in this dissertation, plays a vital role in defining the status of women in Saudi society.¹

Rassam (1984) has asserted that religious knowledge operates under a patriarchal monopoly in Muslim societies. Contrary to this view, however, women in contemporary Muslim societies are continuously reinterpreting religious traditions within what Zaman calls the 'culture of *'ulama*' (2002:56). As a corollary to Rassam's assertion, a prevalent stereotype portrays Saudi and other Muslim women as beasts of burden – constrained by their families' reproductive pursuits and subordinated to patriarchy. Conversely, the present study attempts to challenge the presumed submissive position of Muslim women while acknowledging that Muslim women have used the perceived need to 'save' them from institutionalised patriarchy as means to gain political visibility.² As a result, as women have aspired to achieve recognition in the public sphere, issues such as attire and public performance have come to be seen as fundamental expressions of religiosity in Saudi Arabia.

¹ I use the term 'Saudi women' cautiously. Rather than generalise their state or status, I use this categorical designation of diverse individuals in order to 'allow us to comprehend some of the ways in which large structural events and ideological trends intersected with gender definitions in the region' (Meriwether and Tucker, 1999:18).

² See n. 1 above. Despite their generic tone, I use terms such as 'Muslim women,' 'Saudi women' and '*dā'iyyāt*' in a rather circumspect manner. Such terms are used throughout this study not as labels for 'subjects' for the purpose of generalisation but rather as a broad term for the community of women under study. The *dā'iyyāt* are constructed as a social 'category' (see Chatty and Rabo, 1997) for the purpose of understanding the formation and legitimatisation of their authority within the contexts examined in the fieldwork presented here. The term *dā'iya* is not static. It is flexible in its function, and it exists beyond the limits described within this study. A few of the informants rejected the use of this term. One explained, 'I don't like to call it *da'wa* 'cause my friends and I have this opinion where every Muslim is born a *dā'iya*. You don't have to call a person a *dā'iya* for him to be a *dā'iya*. God *subhānahū wa ta'ālā* [exalted and glorified] commanded you to spread [Islam]. It's just like...praying and fasting and everything; you have to just spread the word. It comes with the profile as a Muslim.'

1.2 Saudi Women: Context and Key Actors

The women of Saudi Arabia are among the most frequently misrepresented women in the Muslim world, and their status and roles in the complex fabric of Saudi society have rarely been critically addressed and assessed. Most of the research on Saudi women has lacked either empirical evidence or a thorough understanding of their position, participation and performance in the predominantly patriarchal world of Saudi society. Frequently, Saudi women have been portrayed as socially oppressed and as lacking in both the basic privileges and the mobility that their male counterparts enjoy. In light of these perceived limitations, the social status of Saudi Arabian women has often been used as a 'barometer' of progress, social change and cultural identity in local and international discourse. As Peirce explains, 'The debate about women was thus not always about women; rather, they were often a metaphor for order' (1993:272).

In a classical patriarchal social system, in which the 'collective adult maleness' upholds the status quo (Arebi, 1994:273), Saudi Arabian women are placed at the vanguard in maintaining a prescribed degree of socio-religious morals. In this climate of heightened morals and enforced ideological purity, the activities of Saudi women often remain concealed from all but other women of their own society. Thus, their physical and ideological concealment become part of a wider social and traditional regime of male authority that exercises its monopoly by upholding the virtue of female modesty. A concrete and recent example of this phenomenon is the prohibition against the nation's first appointed female minister appearing on television without official permission ('Saudi Woman Minister', 2009). This proscription reinforces social tradition by replicating the institutionalised 'male guardianship' system (*walī al-amr*), which requires women to obtain permission from

their guardians to conduct basic tasks, such as working and studying, or to receive basic services, such as health care. This system is consistent with the rubric of common social tradition and attitudes that religious authorities support and propagate on allegedly religious and moral grounds.

Nevertheless, there are gradual social and religious reforms taking place in Saudi Arabia that have significantly influenced the status of women. In the light of the changes, it is not tenable for researchers to make blanket assumptions about their role in Saudi society. In the social sphere, women's influence has increased as social controls over expressions of piety have been mildly relaxed and, therefore, the range of women's mobility has widened. In addition, the Saudi government's adherence to gradual reform has curtailed the stringent enforcement of conformity to strict religious interpretations, thus relieving some of the institutionalised restrictions that have constrained women in the past. For example, in November 2006, article 160, which banned women from 'mixing with men' (*'ikhtilāṭ*) in the workforce, was removed from the 1969 Labour Codes, thus allowing women to share workspaces with men. Furthermore, old labour codes restricting women's career options have been revised to allow women more opportunities for careers in 'fields that are considered compatible with their nature' (see 'Employing the Woman', n.d.:78; 'Women's Labour Codes', 2005). In addition, Shaykh Aḥmad al-Ghāmdī, head of *al-hay'a* in the Mecca province, has made a bold statement by rejecting the notion of forbidding *'ikhtilāṭ* on the grounds of a lack of concrete canonical evidence for its prohibition (al-Mufdhali, 2009).

The role of women in Saudi society has also been influenced by the transformative changes in the Arab world in 2011.³ In April 2011, Saudi women initiated campaigns on Facebook and Twitter called *Baladī* (My Country) and The Saudi Women's Revolution to proclaim their right to vote in municipal elections. As a result, King 'Abd Allah announced in September 2011 that women would be allowed to vote and to run in municipal elections and for appointment as members of the *Majlis al-Shūrā* (Consultative Council), which lacks legislative powers. Saudi women, moreover, have been campaigning enthusiastically for their right to drive. Following their first demonstration in 1990, women petitioned in 2007 and 2008 for their right to drive, and in June of 2011 Saudi women established a media-based campaign entitled Women2Drive that has attracted thousands of followers. On their website, the campaigners state, 'We are not here to break the law or demonstrate or challenge the authorities, we are here to claim one of our simplest rights.' In this way, Saudi women are taking advantage of social networking websites as platforms to engage in public debate about their state and status, and they are utilising the language of religion as a platform of legitimacy. The use of religious discourse as a means to legitimise expression and to gain power reflects Foucault's (1980) power-knowledge dynamic whereby Saudi women, as key actors in social change, utilise the language of religion to empower themselves to communicate their social needs.

Saudi society remains highly patriarchal, and this structure is supported by religious institutions. However, women today are attaining more prominent roles within the family. Women are part of the state's collective effort to promote religiosity through media and education (M. al-Saif, 2003:158-9). Conversely, the

³ This is not to say that their appeals did not emerge from a genuine need for change based on perceptions such as inequality in opportunities, oppression and inferiority to men. Women have intermittently protested and campaigned for their rights since their first public protest to drive in 1990.

status of women in Saudi society has been increasingly used to measure social progress and as a proxy for society's piety in an era of mass media, in which 'religious leaders perceive women to be the floodgate to Western influence' (Arebi, 1994:273). Indeed, Deputy Minister of Women's Education Nūrā al-Fāyiz, who has been labeled 'the Westernising Minister', has been at the vanguard of this public discourse in Internet discussion groups, forums and YouTube postings. The prohibition preventing her from appearing on television and freely discussing her views without prior permission coincides with an emerging conservative backlash against her reform policies in women's education. More recently, activists Manāl al-Sharīf and Wajihā al-Ḥuwaydir received similar criticism for campaigning for women's rights.

The conflict between the aforementioned social forces in Saudi Arabia has created several unique attributes that will influence this research. One such attribute is the allocation of space for women's segregated prayer rooms in public mosques in the 1970s due, in part, to the shift in society's notions of piety (F. Nasif, personal communication, March, 19, 2008; Le Renard, 2011). Saudi Arabia, moreover, has experienced a great share of the wave of religiosity that hit the Muslim world in the 1980s – a share that has seen the inclusion of Saudi women in the (re)production and dissemination of religious knowledge and that has challenged Saudi men's self-righteous religious certainty and the religious monopoly of the ulama.

1.3 Saudi Female Preachers: The Saliency of *Da'wa*

In Saudi Arabia, God's divine rulings are believed to be represented in sharia (religious knowledge embodied in the Quran and Hadith), which, it is further believed, should govern all aspects of Muslim life. Consistent with this belief system,

the 'formal textual' meanings represented in the sharia provide the basis for any 'authoritative expression' in Muslim discourse (Messick, 1993:1-3). If one were to approach sharia more comprehensively as a type of 'total' discourse wherein 'all kinds of institutions find simultaneous expression: religious, legal, moral, and economic' (Mauss, 1967:1), then *da'wa* (preaching and proselytising) in Saudi Arabia becomes the platform from which to exercise such discursive power in contemporary Muslim society. Consistent with this view, the status of *dā'iya* (female preacher) may be viewed as a medium for this authoritative expression. Furthermore, following this interpretation, the *dā'iya*'s authority in the (re)production of religious knowledge ceases to exist without the social appropriation and value of such knowledge. This study will inquire into whether this discursive formulation is the basis for the *dā'iya*'s (religious) authority.

With the increased social mobility of Saudi women, there is an increased demand on women to demonstrate appropriate behaviour in the public sphere. In a society such as Saudi Arabia, which depends more heavily on moral values than on executive ones, it becomes the social responsibility of women to uphold these values. In the present study, the practice of *da'wa* is examined in terms of how this practice draws women to uphold religious ethics and accepted codes of conduct.

In Saudi society, women are perceived as inherently emotional and vulnerable; therefore, they are regarded as easily influenced and '*mustahdafīn*' ('targeted') by the 'West' in an alleged 'emancipatory' project that aims to distract women from Islamic values (see e.g., Zayn al-Abidin, 1984a; Nasif, 1999, 2006b; Badahdah, 2009). Accordingly, activities, that take place in women-only spaces require constant supervision by women who possess valued religious knowledge and who are therefore equipped with the skills required to solve women's problems. The *dā'iyyat* are

believed to be capable of solving women's intimate religious dilemmas, which are presumed to be incomprehensible to male ulama (Badahdah, 2009). In fulfilling this moral duty, the role of the *dā'iya* enables women to participate in representing Islam (Zayn al-Abidin, 1984b). Thus, the Minister of Islamic Affairs, *Da'wa*, Guidance and Endowment, Shaykh Ṣāliḥ Al al-Shaykh, has equated the role of the female *dā'iya* with that of the male in performing *da'wa*, and he has placed upon the *dā'iyyāt* the burden of 'solving societal problems' ('Minister of Islamic Affairs', 2004b).

The religious ulama represent the apex of the social hierarchy in Saudi Arabia (Bin Sunaytan, 2004). Although female religious authorities do not share equal status with their male counterparts, their influence is far from insignificant (Zahid, 2005a, 2005b). This study examines whether the presence of female authority – as embodied in a *dā'iya* – has shifted the boundaries of control in this patriarchal context, and it will attempt to probe the manner in which these female preachers have served informally as mediators between formal religious authority and Saudi women. Despite widespread antagonism among the male religious establishment toward female preachers (see e.g., al-Hakim, 2008a; al-Ghurwi, 2008, 2009), these female preachers and educators have contributed to the dissemination of religious doctrine since the advent of education for women. However, this research also asks whether these women subordinate themselves to male dominance even at home and within the tightly enclosed women's circles, where they are the de facto authorities (see Altorki, 1986). It is true that female preachers have frequently acted in deference to patriarchy and have served as conduits for its expression at various levels of society (see e.g., al-Hakim, 2008b; al-Jasir, 1980; Arebi, 1994:233-245); nonetheless, their influence on Saudi women should not be perceived as stagnant or insignificant.

The significance of the role of the female preacher is explored in this study in relation to how it concretises the notion of an Islamic state and of the pious Muslim woman. This is significant in the context of Saudi Arabia's strict adherence to Islamic law in everyday religious practice. Accordingly, the Saudi regime depends on collective institutional adherence to observable Islamic practices – such as prayer in the mosque for men and hijab, the epitome of piety, for women – to maintain its political legitimacy. The regime therefore espouses adherence to legal and moral codes of conduct in accordance with Islamic values and laws (Hirschkind, 2006).

Saudi female preachers share with their male counterparts the responsibility of maintaining the observance of correct Islamic practices (Othman et al., 2002; Mudhwi, n. d.). However, the female preachers are probably more conscious of the role of women as embodiments of piety, and therefore they realise the significance of their role in producing and maintaining a religious ethos. In a society in which men and women are segregated, the social practices of women are largely visible to women only. The cloistered lives of Saudi women allow certain women to explore new approaches to their role as perpetuators of Islamic values and tradition in a context that is only accessible to women and, therefore, less susceptible to state control.

The role of female preachers as vehicles to uphold religious and social morality comes to prominence in a time in which public discourse, as frequently expressed in the media and in sermons, emphasises the protection of the community's traditional religious ethos from the 'negative' effects of globalisation (*'awlama*) and Westernisation (*taghrīb*) (see e.g., al-Sa'ad, 2008; Zahid, 2005a, 2005b; Salih, 2007; Nasif, 2006). Since the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001 and the subsequent attacks on governmental buildings and foreign housing in Saudi

Arabia since 2003, the role of the *dā'iyāt* and female leaders has come to prominence in the state's effort to 'combat terrorism.' In this role, nine Saudi women participated in the second National Dialogue meeting in 2003 in Mecca, which addressed the question of how to tackle religious extremism. The women selected for participation in the meeting represented various professional and ideological backgrounds, including the *dā'iya* Dr Fāṭima Naṣīf, the Islamic writers Dr Nūrā al-Sa'ad and Suhayla Zayn al-Ābidīn, and Su'ād Abu al-Sa'ud (a notable Shia public figure from the Eastern province).⁴ The women participants were rejected by many of the male ulama, who insisted on maintaining segregation. However, their inclusion in this and subsequent meetings is indicative of the significant role that Saudi women play in societal change and in maintaining the state's security.

In a classical patriarchal society, women play a crucial role in the social, moral and religious upbringing of children. Following this model, women in Saudi society have appropriated the role of the preacher in that they instruct women in proper behaviour, act as role models for women and insure the maintenance of their pious image. Therefore, within this context, male religious authorities do not oppose allowing female preachers a measure of freedom in the practice of *dā'wa*. Contrary to their traditional ethos of denying women full authority in the exercise of fatwa (response), the exercise of *dā'wa*, according to preliminary findings, is one that maintains a certain level of support from both the institutionalised and non-

⁴ With regard to the presentation of names in this study, I use pseudonyms for persons who chose not to share their real names, and I present the names of participants and female religious authorities in the manner in which they are addressed in everyday life. For example, Dr Fāṭima Naṣīf is commonly addressed as Dr Fāṭima. In using first names, I concur with Arebi (1994: 309: n. 49) that this practice allows for 'personal recognition'. The title before the first name confers respect upon the person, while the use of the first name represents approachability. Moreover, it is uncommon in Saudi culture to use last names except in reference to popular male ulama – such as 'Abd al-Azīz Ibn Bāz, who is typically called 'Shaykh Ibn Bāz', or Muḥammad bin 'Uthaymīn, who is called 'Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn'.

institutionalised male religious authorities (see e.g., Al-Hakim, 2008a; '186 *Dā'iya* Commence *Dā'wa*', 2003). However, one final question addressed in this study is whether Saudi society is comfortable allowing women to exercise *dā'wa* but not fatwa, since fatwa is involved in the production of sacred knowledge while much of *dā'wa* is involved in its reproduction.

1.4 Historical Overview

This section traces Muslim women's participation in the dissemination of valued religious knowledge, locating the origins of *da'wa* in the Islamic activity of seeking knowledge.

1.4.1 *Da'wa* in divine revelation

In Islamic theology, knowledge is believed to have existed even before creation (al-Zahhar, 2003). Since the creation of man, God has been the first educator and taught Adam the names of everything (Quran 2:31). Furthermore, there is canonical evidence in the Quran and Hadith that reveals the value of *'ilm* (knowledge) in Islam. In the first verse revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, God ordered him to 'read' (Quran 69:1-5); following this first instruction, the practice of contemporary *da'wa* is rooted in Islam's concept of 'seeking knowledge' (*ṭalab al-'ilm*). Mahmood also places the *dā'iyyāt's* social and religious appropriation of the exercise of religious authority in the wider context of the acquisition of religious knowledge. This acquisition is elaborated in the practice of *da'wa* and in the principle of *al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahī 'an al-munkar* ('to enjoin others in the doing of good or right, and the forbidding of evil or wrong'). According to Zahid (2005a), canonical affirmations

of this principle serve as the bedrock for the legitimization of authority in Saudi Arabia. The Hadith, '*ballighū 'anī walaw aya*' ('deliver from me even if it's one verse'), is commonly circulated to demonstrate religious authority.

Da'wa literally means 'call, invitation, appeal, or summons' (Mahmood, 2005:57). The triconsonantal root is d-ʿ-a (د - ع - ا), and the use of the term in the Quran is associated with various expressions such as proselytisation, supplication, calling, preaching and inviting to Islam, and *da'wa* and its derivatives appear in the Quran over one hundred times (see Racijs, 2004:31). The most common use of the word is associated with 'inviting' non-Muslims to Islam (Duval, 1997). God declares 'Invite (mankind, O Muhammad) to the way of your Lord [i.e., Islam] with wisdom [i.e., with the Divine Revelation and the Quran] and fair preaching, and argue with them in a way that is better' (Quran 16:125). Among the Abbasids in the eighth century and the Ismailis from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries, *da'wa* also came to be used to describe instruction that was directed toward Muslims from other sects (Racijs, 2004). Following this usage, in contemporary society *da'wa* is used to denote a religio-political ideology, such as among propagators of *al-Da'wa al-Salafiyya* and the Muslim Brotherhood (Racijs, 2004). The word *dā'iya*, although it has 'no explicit lexicographical association with religion', is used to describe the one who performs *da'wa* (Gaffney, 1994:33). Moreover, Gaffney adds the notion of 'propagandist' to the definition of *da'wa* (ibid.), and in contemporary Muslim society *da'wa* has been elevated to a 'sacred duty' (Racijs, 2004:11). Hirschkind provides a more practical definition of *da'wa* that represents its modern use to denote 'a sphere of religious activity claiming responsibility for the moral direction of...society' (2006:59).

1.4.2 Historical track of Muslim women's religious authority and participation

This section addresses the various forms of religious participation available to women in the production and reproduction of religious knowledge from the advent of Islam. It also assesses the canonical evidence in the Quran, Hadith and in Islamic history that demonstrates women's legal and religious competence (see Nadwi, 2007:7-16).

As argued in the previous section, knowledge is the basis of authority in Islam. Therefore, in theory, constructs such gender and social status should not influence the perception or legitimacy of one's authority.⁵ Female scholars throughout history have capitalised on valued religious knowledge and contributed to the production and reproduction of this knowledge in the advancement of ideological beliefs. Muslim women have contributed to Islam as narrators of Hadith and as saints, scholars, jurists and shaykhs, and Muslim women have even fought in battles. In these various roles, women have been described as 'pious, virtuous, deeply learned, intelligent, [and] generous with their time and wealth' (Nadwi, 2007:149).

The most prominent model for the participation of Muslim women in political and religious life is 'Ā'isha, the Prophet Muḥammad's wife. 'Ā'isha is the prototype of morality among Muslim women, and several aspects of her life are idolised as symbolic of femininity, religiosity, piety, and spirituality (Spellberg, 1994). The companions (*ṣaḥāba*) sought out 'Ā'isha for her opinion on various religious matters, and she was respected as a religious authority by men and women in her time. In addition, she was known for having 'unique preferences' on various religious matters that conflicted with the views of the companions (Nadwi, 2007:284). However, even

⁵ 'And their Prophet (Samuel) said to them, 'indeed Allah has appointed Saul as a king over you.' They said, 'How can he be a king over us when we are fitter than him for the kingdom, and he has not been given enough wealth.' He said: 'Verily, Allah has chosen him above you and has increased him abundantly in knowledge and stature' (Quran 1:247).

when others disputed her views, she held a strong judgment on 'women's right to independent reasoning' (ibid). The female companions (*ṣaḥabiyyāt*) Fāṭima bint Qays and Um al-Dardā' were also known to have had independent religious opinions in such matters as women's rights after divorce and women's prayer positions – opinions that were criticised by some of the *ṣaḥāba* at the time.

Women such as 'Ā'isha and Um Salama held positions as jurists, and their opinions were sought by both men and women due to their knowledge in fiqh. Several of the Prophet's wives were sought for their legal religious opinions, and the issuance of fatwas was based on an individual's knowledge in fiqh and not on his or her gender.

A record of female scholarship and religious participation in Islam is compiled in Nadwi's *al-Muhaddithat* (2007), in which he traces 8,000 female scholars of Hadith from the seventh century to the present. According to Nadwi, women's participation was not confined to transmitting Hadith, which was the most common and recognised form of female scholarship. According to Sartain (1975), women's role as transmitters of Hadith was recognised in tradition due to the role that the Prophet's wives played in transmitting of his words and actions. However, Nadwi highlights examples in which female scholars were not limited to their role as *muhaddithāt* (Hadith transmitters). Muslim women also contributed to the sciences of fiqh and *tafsīr* (Quran exegesis) as well in the issuance of fatwas. Indeed, in the first three centuries of Islam, women who studied the Quran and Hadith thoroughly and who were 'proficient' and 'devoted to *dīn* [religion]' became muftis and jurists (2007).

Like men, Muslim women have attended mosque circles (*ḥalaqa*) both to learn and to teach. Women learned from men and men learned from women within the

boundaries set by Islam for the proper code of conduct. For example, Mamluk women participated actively in attending 'public instructional sessions' at mosques, and they were able to attend these lessons without their husbands' permission so long as their husbands were unable to provide them with religious education at home (Peirce, 1993:).

Women have also served as *shaykhas* (singular, *shaykha*), a title used for an educated senior woman in the tradition of Hadith. It has been recorded that the Shāfi'ī scholars Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) and Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (d. 1497) were educated by female *shaykhas* (Sartain, 1975; Nadwi, 2007), as were such prominent Muslim scholars as Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), Abū al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597), and Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728). Ibn Taymiya, in particular, praised female Hadith narrators for their knowledge and piety (Nadwi, 2007). Transmission of Hadith granted women prestige, and several women gained the recognition of male scholars (Sartain, 1975; Peirce, 1993). However, women were not only known for the narration of Hadith (*al-riwāya*), but have also been considered authorities in critiquing the Hadith (*al-dirāya*).

1.4.3 *Al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmīyya* and the emergence of female religious authority

The Islamic Revival (*Al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmīyya*) that took place in the 1970s and 1980s in many countries of the Middle East produced a variety of social, political and religious ideologies. However, the major groups that emerged out of the religious discourse of this period shared a common interest in what was termed the 'woman question' (Graham-Brown, 1996:7). The emphasis that these groups placed on women's modesty and piety served two main purposes: to reject the perceived moral decadence of the West and its values, which had infiltrated Muslim society in the

post-colonial era, and to anchor society's Islamic identity.⁶ While this process was primarily initiated by male religious leaders, the perceived need to control women gave rise to the emergence of female leaders who could reflect the values of chastity and domesticity.

In Egypt, for example, women's roles were limited to performing household chores as wives and mothers. In addition, religious sanctions enforced public demonstrations of piety such as wearing the hijab and confining women to the home – in both instances limiting women's public visibility. The archetype of female religious authority was Zaynab al-Ghazālī (d. 2005), who formed her own religious group *al-Akhawāt al-Muslimāt* (Muslim Sisterhood), which was associated closely with the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Ghazālī preached to crowds of women and conducted religious education as well as engaging in various philanthropic activities.

The other dimension to the woman question was the use of women to anchor society's Islamic identity and to combat 'western cultural imperialism' (Hegland, 1999:183). In Iran, for example, the Ayatullah Khomeynī used women to demonstrate social piety by enforcing codes of dress and by segregating them from men. However, women also served the Iranian Revolution's agenda to combat the opposition by participating in demonstrations and by recruiting other women and even their own sons to serve in the religious movement. Female religious leaders served as icons to bring other women in to influence women into behaviour that was considered appropriate in an Islamic society.⁷

⁶ Controlling women has been one of the ways of demonstrating religious adherence and social control throughout Islamic history. For example, during the Ottoman and Mamluk rule, the ulama exerted strict restrictions on women's public mobility and conduct, thus reflecting the government's religious adherence (Peirce, 1993).

⁷ The role of women in Iranian religious life has progressed since the time of the revolution, and participation in the dissemination of religion is no longer an exclusively male domain.

1.4.3.1 Ideology and the prominence of female religious authorities in Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, successive events gave rise to institutionalised Islamisation of the state, which in turn led to a shift in women's status and in their contribution to public religious discourse. The country witnessed an economic boom in the 1970s that has had dramatic implications for Saudi society. With access to wealth and increased mobility came more open contact with the outside world and a resulting rise in social tensions. During this time, *al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islamiyya* emerged as a group consisting of university students, professors and shaykhs who contested the state's lack of commitment to Islamic values (Lacroix and Hegghammer, 2004).⁸ According to Zahid (2005b), women were not involved in this movement politically, but they contributed through religiously-inspired literature.

The seizure of the Grand Mosque and the ideological threat of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 triggered a defensive reaction from the government. The ruler's religious legitimacy was questioned, and in order to profess its religious commitment to Islamic ideals, the state invested in religious institutions both inside the kingdom and outside. 'Religious discourse' (*'al-khiṭāb al-dīnī'*) came to prominence in public debate, and the names of public institutions were Islamised even though their functions still remained secular.⁹ The state increased its funding for *al-*

Facilities for formal religious education have been established where women preachers can acquire credentials in various religious sciences and can advance their religious ranking among other women. Religious seminaries have opened their doors to women where they stand shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts (Hegland, 1999).

⁸ The term *al-ṣaḥwa al-dīniyya* (religious awakening), a term synonymous with *al-ṣaḥwa al-islāmiyya*, has been rejected by *dā'iyyāt* such as Dr Nawāl al-ʿId, associate professor in the science of Sunna at Princess Nūra University in Riyadh. She stated in a newspaper interview that 'the majority of the Saudi populace is *'mutadayyin bi al-fiṭra'* ('religious by predisposition')' (al-USaymi, 2010). In other words, the notion of a religious awakening is something of a misnomer, since Saudi religiosity has been a continuous presence.

⁹ For example, the 'central bank' was given the name '[Saudi] Monetary Agency' and 'The Basic System of Governance' replaced 'constitution' (al-Dakhil, 2007).

hay'a, Islamic universities, Quran schools and religious publications, and the number of students enrolled in these institutions increased dramatically. Members of *al-hay'a* even exercised their authority to provide impromptu advice on religious matters and conduct to passers-by on the streets (Steinberg, 2005). The ulama and those speaking in the name of religion became the 'saviors' of society from moral decadence (al-Nugaydan, 2012:117). Moreover, society began to exert greater control over women in order to demonstrate its commitment to Islam.

During this period, the state demonstrated its religious commitment by funding and supporting the Afghans against the Soviet Union in the early 1980s and by declaring that it was a 'collective duty' for Muslims to participate in the war (Nasif, 1999:153; Lacroix and Hegghammer, 2004:3). As a result, during this 'state supported religious awakening' (al-Nugaydan, 2012:124), many Saudi men traveled to Pakistan and Afghanistan to participate in this jihad. Saudi women accompanied their husbands and participated in various philanthropic tasks, such as opening schools for orphans and providing nursing and aid to the families of the mujahidin (Zahid, 2005b). Among these women were the *dā'iyāt* Dr Fāṭima Naṣīf and Dr Samīra Jamjūm, who were actively preaching during that period (see also Chapter 5). In *Women in Islam*, Dr. Fāṭima declares that women's participation in jihad, in capacities that are harmonious with their nature as women, is a right granted to them in Islam (1999:152-6). Furthermore, she reminds women that in certain circumstances they are allowed to leave the home for jihad without their husband's permission in order to fulfill their collective duty.

Prior to their participation in Afghanistan, Dr Fāṭima and Dr Samīra were actively involved in preaching in Jeddah. Contemporary *da'wa* among women

flourished with the opening of women's sections at universities in the 1970s and 1980s (al-Muharib, n.d.; Le Renard, 2011). The opening of a mosque exclusively for women at King Abd al-Aziz University in Jeddah in the late 1970s gave Dr Fāṭima an opportunity to relocate her preaching from private homes to a public space – although it was still one confined exclusively to women. In effect, the participation of women in the dissemination of religious knowledge and in the public religious-political debate was socially appropriated as a necessary form of Islamic activism in the highly charged political climate of the late 1970s and early 1980s (Zahid, 2005a, 2005b). The various political, social and economic transformations allowed religious discourse to surface as a response to a need for total Islamisation of the public and private spheres, while the establishment of women-only spaces facilitated the 'opportunity' for women to participate in universities in the 1970s and 1980s, both as students and as teachers (see Le Renard, 2008, 2011).

1.4.3.2 The role and status of the dā'iyāt in the twenty-first century

After several incidents, beginning with the attacks in New York City in 2001, the Saudi state was forced to revise its policy toward religious discourse. The Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003 also triggered a wide regional response from the Arab public, who demonstrated their anger in various ways. Men volunteered to perform jihad in Iraq against the coalition. The state prohibited jihad in Iraq while prominent jihad shaykhs encouraged it (Hegghammer, 2006). Male and female religious authorities in Saudi Arabia and other Arab counties called for the boycotting of American products to protest the invasion. Moreover, the homegrown attacks in Riyadh, Jeddah and Yanbu in 2003 and 2004 and the subsequent raids on local extremist groups were the major influences on the state's initiatives to control

religious discourse. Other factors included deflecting international criticism and discouraging jihadist ideology (Abd al-Aziz, 2005). Preaching in homes was banned and was not allowed in public spaces such as mosques, welfare organisations, schools and Islamic centres without a permit, and many prominent male and female *dā'iyyāt* were accused of making hate speeches that triggered *taṭarruf* (extremism) and were banned from giving private or public lectures (al-Muflih, 2007). Despite the restrictions, many, according to a *dā'iyā* interviewed for this research, continued to give lessons in private at the request of their followers and as a gesture of resistance against U.S. pressure on the government regarding religion.

As the Internet became increasingly accessible in Saudi Arabia, many *dā'iyyāt* began to use it to continue in their religious activities and to circumvent restrictions. *Da'wa* websites aimed at female audiences were initiated and supervised by prominent *dā'iyyāt*, with examples including lahaonline.com (started March 2002 by Dr Ruqayya al-Muḥārib), muslimat.net (2002, *Ustādha* Anāhīd al-Sumayrī), asyeh.com (2005, Dr Asmā' al-Ruwayshid) and alwa7at.net (2008, Dr Nawāl al-ʿId). These websites offer sections that provide social, familial and marriage consultations and give advice on how to deal with children, as well as posting articles and blog entries by the *dā'iyyāt* and keeping the followers up-to-date on the *dā'iyyāt*'s activities. Some, such as those provided by *Ustādha* Anāhīd and Dr Nawāl, even feature live streaming lessons from the *dā'iyyāt*.

In this market, however, the *dā'iyyāt* had to compete with more tolerant male preachers such as the Egyptians ʿAmr Khālīd and Khālīd al-Jindī and the Kuwaitis Dr Ṭāriq al-Suwaydān and Jāsim al-Muṭawwaʿ. These figures were welcomed by the state and became popular and widely known for promoting peace and coexistence with the 'West'. At the same time, the concept of 'renewing religious discourse'

(*'tajdīd al-khīṭāb al-dīnī'*) was promoted by senior ulama such as the Minister of Islamic Affairs, Shaykh Ṣāliḥ Al al-Shaykh, and the prominent scholar Salmān al-ʿAwda in Saudi Arabia as well as in neighboring countries such as Kuwait and Egypt (see 'Shaykh al-Azhar', 2003; 'Minister of Islamic Affairs', 2004b; al-Bishi, 2006). *Abla* Ḥanīn al-Sudayrī, however, a *dā'iya* whom I observed for this study, expressed her rejection of this notion, stating 'Now people want to renew the religious discourse! Isn't *al-tajdīd* [the renewing of religious discourse] the return to *al-aṣl* [the origins of Islam]?'¹⁰

Shaykh Ṣāliḥ Al al-Shaykh recognised the role that the *dā'iyāt* play in influencing women and urged *dā'iyāt* who preach extremism to expound a more tolerant position. The Shaykh even met with the *dā'iyāt* in Riyadh in December 2003 to discuss their role in combating extremist ideologies and highlighted the importance of the role of women as mothers and of the *dā'iyāt* in ensuring society's stability ('Minister of Islamic Affairs', 2004a). The *dā'iyāt* responded to the minister's call and stepped forward as role models for women to maintain national stability and security. For example, Dr Asmā' al-Ruwayshid, a prominent and influential *dā'iyāt*, and Islamic writers in Riyadh highlighted the important role of positive Muslim role models in such difficult times of *fitna* (sedition, guile) for the Muslim nation (al-Ruwayshid, 2003a, 2003b). She condemned those who participate in acts of 'destruction' and blamed them for ruining the image of righteous Muslims and Islam. She placed Muslim figures of authority such as the ulama and *du'āt* (a generic term used for male and female preachers) at the vanguard of efforts to bring people along the righteous path. This responsibility allowed the *dā'iyāt* to surface and gave them

¹⁰ *Abla* means elder sister in Turkish. It has been used in the Hijaz since the Ottoman Empire to address an older sister or an older woman to confer respect on them. It is also used in Saudi Arabia in academic circles to address teachers.

pride in sharing accountability for the security of the state, which used to be the exclusive province of male dominated government institutions (see also Bedi, 2006).

In early 2006, government officials began to speak earnestly about institutionalising the *dā'iyāt* as a necessary mechanism to control religious discourse that was linked to the triggering of extremist activities. This strategy was also taken by other countries in the region to demonstrate religious tolerance, including Morocco, Syria and Turkey (Rausch, 2011; Islam, 2011; Hassan, 2011). Shaykh Ṣāliḥ Al al-Shaykh announced an official decision in this regard together with an announcement regarding the need to put a stop to unauthorised collection of donations in segregated women spaces, which had been reportedly linked to funding for extremism (al-Zahrani, 2006).¹¹ In 2008, the print media announced that the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, *Da'wa* and Guidance had issued *taṣārīḥ* (permits) in order to legitimatise the *dā'iyāt's* preaching and to organise *da'wa* activities among women (al-Utaybi, 2008). One the *dā'iyāt* whom I observed and interviewed during the fieldwork, *Abla* Fāṭima al-Rifā'ī (*Abla* Fāṭima R. not to be confused with Dr Fāṭima Naṣīf), informed me that to gain permission from the Ministry to give a lecture, a formal request for approval is usually sent by the centre that is hosting the *dā'iyā*. The request contains the name of the *dā'iyā*, the topic of discussion or the title of the series of lectures and details of the time and location. She also informed me that gaining approval from the Ministry to give lectures is considered among the *dā'iyāt* to constitute approval of the preacher's authority to communicate valued knowledge. This means that her discourse and pedagogy are

¹¹ Hayla al-Qusayyir, a woman activist who was also actively preaching at a women's college in Burayda as well as in Quran schools, awakened concerns regarding controlling women's activities and religious discourse in women's enclosed spaces. In 2010, she was arrested for reportedly having links to extremist groups and for inciting extremist ideologies among women and collecting funds for such a group.

approved by the state, which functions as a status symbol that distinguishes such a *dā'iya* from her peers and adds further legitimacy to her discourse.

These permits, however, do not formally institutionalise the *dā'iyāt* within the religious establishment. The undersecretary for mosque affairs, *da'wa* and guidance at the Ministry indicated in October 2011 that the *dā'iyāt* were '*mu'tamadāt*' ('authorised') by the Ministry to be actively involved in *da'wa* throughout the kingdom but not yet fully institutionalised into the system ('*Dā'iyāt Working in Hajj*', 2011). In 2010, a representative of the *Lajnat al-Munashaḥa* (Advisory Committee) for extremist rehabilitation announced the inclusion of the *dā'iyāt* in its efforts to combat extremist ideology among women (al-Shalahi, 2010). This meant that their role as communicators of valued knowledge was recognised, but not necessarily their status as figures of religious authority.

The ambivalent attitude toward the institutionalisation of the *dā'iyāt* in the Saudi religious establishment is perplexing, and it stands alongside the similar and perhaps not unrelated fact that there are no female employees at the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. Nonetheless, there is recognition of the salient role of the *dā'iyāt* in mobilising behaviour among women and a conduit for the stability of the state. Despite still not being formally institutionalised, the *dā'iyāt* continue to actively support the government's agenda.¹² In the Eastern Province, where the majority of Saudi Shia reside and the most responsive area in Saudi Arabia to the Arab Spring, the *dā'iyāt's* influential role in *da'wa* has been used to counter the effects of the transnational uprising, which has leveraged the Internet as a platform for mobilisation. Efforts by male and female religious authorities have been channeled into minimising

¹² According to the Ministry of Islamic Affairs' annual report for 2007-2008, more than 600,000 *da'wa* activities were held throughout the kingdom, ranging from lectures to workshops and lesson series (the number excludes the activities held for expatriate workers) ('Follow up Report', 2007-2008).

sectarianism and promoting national unity through various grounded activities, including lectures ('A Forum Appoints', 2012; see also 'Follow up Report', 2007-2008:51-52).

1.5 Understanding Gender Exclusion: Defining the Private and the Public Space for Social Order

Gender roles are defined as a result of the relationship between the public and the private domains, where women are more confined to the private space and men to the public. However, Altorki and El-Solh note that the segregation of women in Saudi Arabia

varies in its intensity and also fluctuates between, on the one hand, isolation of women from public life and the exclusion of men from female activities, and, on the other hand, a less stringent bifurcation of social life, whereby women venture into public space and participate in numerous 'male' spheres but must nevertheless observe real or decorous distance from men. (1988:5)

This observation is also true in the realm of *da'wa* and its practice. Women hold no official positions in the religious domain, and this exclusion is believed to be an extension of historic tribal practices and to be rooted in religious text. Nevertheless, this dissociation from positions of official authority allows the *dā'iyāt* more independence in their religious practice and more freedom of opinion than their male counterparts.

The formal institutions of official religious authority derive their legislative power from sharia and from its application and administration. Such bodies include the Ministry of Islamic Affairs; the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice; the Council of Senior Scholars (*Hay'at Kibār al-'Ulamā'*), established in 1971 and headed by the Grand Mufti (jurisconsult); and the General

Presidency of Scholarly Research and *Iftā'* (*al-Ri'āsa al-Āmma li al-Buḥūth al-Ilmiyya wa al-Iftā'*). These male-run institutions represent legal authority in Saudi Arabia as opposed to the traditional informal religious authority that is represented by the *dā'iyyāt*. The former offer interpretations of religious texts that Arebi (1994), Yamani (2008) and others would refer to as phallogentric – that is, organised around a systematic though not necessarily conscious assumption of the superiority of men. Representatives of these institutions and their viewpoints provide a variety of supposed rationales for their belief that women are in no position to uphold any form of political or religious authority. According to a fatwa by the former Grand Mufti (sometimes called 'mufti *al-dawla*'; i.e., 'the nation's mufti'), Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azīz Ibn Bāz (d. 1999), posted on the presidency's website, women 'lack' (*nāqishāt*) both physical and mental capacity (Ibn Baz, n.d.). Moreover, Ibn Bāz asserted that a woman's place is in the home because a position in the workforce would divert her attention from her primary familial obligation: the Islamic upbringing of children. Fatwa number 11780 on the official presidency's website states that 'according to sharia, Sunna, *ijmā'* ([religious] consensus), and reality, a woman is not allowed to uphold judiciary or political authority following the Hadith narrated by Abū Bakrah: 'Such people as are ruled by a lady will never be successful' (Ibn Baz, et al., n.d.).¹³ This Hadith is often invoked as a general guideline due to its perceived generic tone in dismissing women's authority. Out of this ideology emerged the concept of *wiṣāya* (guardianship), which allows men control over many aspects of women's lives, such as the right to provide or deny permission to study, travel, marry or work.

¹³ Narrated by Abū Bakra: 'During the days (of the battle) of al-Jamal, Allah benefited me with a word I had heard from Allah's Messenger [peace be upon him] after I had been about to join the companions of al-Jamal (i.e., the camel) and fight along with them. When Allah's Messenger [peace be upon him] was informed that the Persians had crowned the daughter of Kisra (Khosrau) as their ruler, he said, "Such people as are ruled by a lady will never be successful"' (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Volume 5, The Book of al-Maghāzī, Hadith 4425).

Consistent with the perception of the need to maintain social order, the curriculum for girls' education, which was introduced to Saudi Arabia in the 1960s, was initially run by institutionalised ulama and not by the Ministry of Education. This was a salient strategy that was intended to help gain public acceptance for girls' education by helping to support the impression of consistency with cultural norms and to suggest to the public that it remained within a 'framework of Islamic values and social practices' (Hatem, 1990:80). The ulama's control of education was, in turn, legitimatised on the principle that 'education' meant 'religious education' in the Saudi cultural context and on the basis of the belief that political and social order are maintained by submission to upholders of sharia.

To maintain this social and political order, moreover, the ulama also commonly refer back to the time of *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* (Righteous Predecessors) of the first three centuries of Islam and state that 'women who were then knowledgeable in religious knowledge and were sought after for Quran knowledge, Hadith and rulings, never sought any position of authority whether it be political or general authority' (ibid.). For example, another fatwa forbidding women from taking charge of hajj was also supported by the same Hadith quoted above. According to Ibn Bāz, this exclusion of women from positions of authority is an extension of the teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad. However, not all *dā'iyyāt* accept the interpretation of this Hadith promulgated by the official scholars; rather, at least one has put forward a subtle challenge to this interpretation, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, which also includes a description of a hajj experience in which a *dā'iyā* was the leader.

1.6 The Researcher's Personal Trajectory

In recent anthropological studies, the act of positioning or situating one's self within the societal context under study has come to be acknowledged as necessary in order to assess one's perceptions of the knowledge produced and, ultimately, of the construction of 'reality' attempted or engaged in within the context of the study. What is referred to here as the 'self' extends beyond the individual to include 'the cultural and social interests that those individuals carry with them, deliberately or in spite of them' (Dwyer 1982:xvii as cited in Altorki and El-Solh, 1998:4). The researcher's subjectivity in the process of inquiry is no longer debatable. Therefore, in the process of knowledge acquisition, 'to present not only knowledge obtained but also the process through which such knowledge was gained and the circumstances in which such processes become operative' are conditional to understanding the construction of reality (Goulet and Miller, 2007:6).

What follows, therefore, is an outline of my personal experience with the *dā'iyāt* and *da'wa* in women's circles. In order to illuminate the inherent subjectivity of my experiences, I intend to follow Abu-Lughod's (2008) humanistic approach and to 'leave traces of myself' in the research and in my account thereof. That is to say, I intend in this dissertation to position myself within the wider societal and cultural context of the *dā'iyāt* phenomenon and to reflect upon my personal experiences and interpretations.

The pilot study that I conducted in April 2008 was designed to examine the feasibility of conducting research on female religious authorities in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. As a teenager, I was exposed involuntarily to the *dā'iyāt*, who often lectured us in school, in college, at public gatherings such as funerals and on occasions such as Ramadan and hajj season. At that age, I did not dare to question the saliency of their

activities or the knowledge that they shared, particularly since my peers and I were constantly reminded of the importance and selflessness of their endeavours. Nor did we question the values that they preached, such as women's subordination to men; women's lack of mental, religious and physical capacities; the importance of the wife's obligations to her husband (but not the husband's towards his wife) in her entrance to Paradise; and domesticity as the ideal arrangement for women. Rather, my peers and I regarded the lectures as a sacred and noble act performed by selected pious women whose ultimate goal was to elevate the society's religiosity to a level that would please God.

I was, nevertheless, perplexed and unable to fathom how women accepted what I personally believed was unfair, misogynist, and irrational, and during my final years as an undergraduate I did begin to question the teachings of the *dā'iyyāt*. As I matured intellectually, I found that I could no longer accept uncritically everything that I was told. I started to find answers to my religious queries on my own rather than having them answered by others, such as a female *dā'iya* or a male shaykh. Eventually, I parted ways with the *dā'iyyāt* for many reasons. In addition to my perception at that time that they desired to control other women, I found that I could no longer accept their self-proclaimed ultimate 'truth'. In fact, I refused to accept that there was only one truth, so I set out to discover my own.

During this early process of self-discovery, I had an unpleasant encounter with a prominent *dā'iya* who taught one of the two mandatory Islamic Education courses at my college and who exercised a palpable influence over many of the students and staff. I will call her *Abla S.* to maintain her anonymity. During a lecture in which this instructor was sharing her views on the unlawful mixing of men and women in public spaces (*ikhtilāf*), I openly questioned her interpretations. My rationale was based on

the premise that in the most sacred and ultimate form of *'ibada* (worship) – while performing umrah (and hajj) and prayer in the Holy Mosque in Mecca – men and women are not completely segregated. I argued that our daily worship was an extension of the worship performed in Mecca. Unfortunately, my insight was not appreciated. A few weeks after this incident, I received a call from a close friend – one who did not attend my college and could not have been present during the incident – questioning me about the encounter I had had with *Abla S.* I was surprised to find that the *dā'iya* had shared an account of my critique, including my name, with a group of women who attended one of the lessons she conducted in a private home. Moreover, despite my high exam scores in Islamic Education, my final grade for the subject was much lower than I had expected. Eventually, I learned that my unorthodox views on *ikhtilāf* and/or my audacity in sharing these views in the context of a lecture had been taken as demonstrating a deficiency in religious ethics. This incident greatly shook my trust in this individual's sincerity, religious ethics and values as a *dā'iyāt*, and I had to wonder whether *Abla S.* derived a bit too much pleasure from having a large number of young followers and whether her authority over them was appropriate in light of her strict and intolerant pedagogy.

I have consciously avoided participating in *da'wa* or other forms of socio-religious education for almost ten years, but some of my peers have remained devoted attendees. Therefore, when I made the decision to return to Jeddah, my hometown, for a few weeks to conduct a pilot study on the *dā'iyāt*, I was not sure what to expect. However, I could not escape the suspicion that the discourse and religious knowledge being disseminated had remained stagnant during this time.

As I entered the field, I was battling a myriad of emotions. On the one hand, I felt defensive because I had been absent from the scene for nearly a decade. I did not

want to lose either the 'cultural competence' (Abu-Lughod, 1993) that I had developed or my legitimacy as a local. On the other hand, I struggled (and continue to struggle) with feelings of both empathy and sympathy. I felt the need to be true to my research and to remain open to and accepting of the choices that people make in order to 'improve' their lives; nevertheless, I wanted to come to terms with the negative emotions that continued to influence my perception of the *dā'iyāt* (see also Mahmood, 2005: n. 56).

Thus, my journey would serve as voyage of both personal and academic inquiry. At the personal level, this inquiry would contribute to my quest to find my own answers to religious questions. In addition, having been away from home, I wanted to re-establish a relationship with various segments of my own society. I did not want to become a product of the growing political tensions between Islam and the 'West'. Rather, I wanted to contest many of the Western generalisations about Saudi women – or, in the words of Abu-Lughod, to 'intervene in the perception' of Saudi women (2008:xiv). At the academic level, I wanted to better understand the role of the *dā'iyāt* within Saudi society. I was also driven by the quest to understand how the *dā'iyāt* and their discourse mobilise women toward religion and influence their behaviour. Unfortunately, little has been done to record Saudi women's 'participation in [the] traffic of words' (Arebi, 1994:1), and I wanted to explore the rise of particular women to positions of religious authority and to recognise their contributions to Saudi culture beyond their role as conduits of the stringent ideologies of male religious figures.

1.7 The Question for the Present Research

The present study attempts to trace the aforementioned changes in women's sphere of influence and, in particular, in their role as repositories of religious knowledge in Saudi Arabia. It rejects the traditional generalisations regarding women's place in this society while recognising that Muslim women are largely confined within a patriarchal social structure. It does not make claims in this regard about resistance or submission. Rather, it focuses on a descriptive account of Saudi female *dā'iyāt* in Jeddah and on their roles as products of a diverse and complex array of social, religious and ideological factors that demand a non-reductionist scholarly approach.

Religious authority represents the apex of the Saudi social hierarchy. This authority operates in both male and female domains, and the recognition of centralised figures of authority within these spheres is consistent with the region's tribal traditions. Indeed, the practice of *da'wa* is not unique to women, but among women the practice has developed distinctive attributes that are not shared among male preachers. Thus, contrary to Merriam's injunction to allow 'the 'voices' of...[research] participants to be heard' (2001:414), the *dā'iyāt* are by no means voiceless. Rather, they are selective regarding to whom they choose to expose their voices. They employ their segregation from the male world in order to negotiate the formation of their own authority and to exercise this authority in front of a different type of audience – in this case, women.

The construction of this authority is the subject of this dissertation, and the novelty of this research lies in its unique access to Saudi female preachers, a factor that has created obstacles for previous researchers (see Chapter 2). The significance of this research, moreover, lies in the unique context within which it unfolds, wherein

physical boundaries exclude the physical presence of men but do not preclude men's ideational presence as a crucial authority that exerts an undeniable influence over the female domain. This controversial subject has generated a great deal of interest in academic circles. The fact that women and women's culture in Muslim societies have been concealed from scholars has produced both curiosity and confusion regarding their activities and their experiences within a male dominated society. Several scholars have expressed a sincere desire to learn more about the lives of these women, and I am often approached in academic settings as an insider who will help these women, as one told me, to 'come out of the closet' and present themselves to the world. Indeed, gender has become a highly charged issue in Islamic culture, particularly in the context of religious debate. However, media reports and policy-oriented research have been narrow in their focus and are often ill-informed, and this shortcoming has created an ethical imperative for researchers who enjoy access to the world that these women inhabit to contribute to a better understanding of their actions and of the meanings that they attribute to their acts.

Thus, although media accounts have focused on the religio-political role of the *dā'iyāt* in relation to state security, there are other aspects of the *dā'iyāt's* activities and discourse that are worth examining, such as the social, political and institutional conditions in which their authority operates. In this regard, the present study does not presuppose the inevitable emancipation of women's religious performance from the control of men, nor does it apologise for their practice. Rather, this research employs a draws upon a multilayered ethnographic account that avoids traditional, single-sided perceptions of the performative and discursive traditions of female religious authority in Saudi Arabia. This study, moreover, aims to address the *dā'iyāt's* collective participation in Islam as locally produced and interpreted and to examine their role as

contributors to the national agenda of Islamisation. It treats *da'wa* as a form of popular expression, historically situated, among women in Saudi Arabia and as a discursive social and religious tradition that is rooted in Islamic history. It does not, therefore, limit the understanding of female religious authority to the context of ensuing controversies such as those discussed earlier in this chapter. It intends, rather, to look at this phenomenon from a perspective that goes beyond the attendant political agenda, which tends to reduce the understanding of other relevant social factors.

In this study, moreover, I attempt to avoid mainstream notions of authority that are commonly associated with coercive power. Rather, I opt for a notion of authority that is context-specific, religiously appropriated and socially constructed in accordance with a given value system. Thus, authority is perceived as a 'relational phenomenon...[that] must be understood within a particular framework of shared values' (Gunning, 2007:96). The religious authority addressed here is understood 'in the sense of having the capacity and the right to transmit knowledge and educate members of the community' (Jouili and Amir-Moazimi, 2006:637). The primary goals of my research are to address religious authority as a construct and to explore how it operates in women's lives. In this regard, I am inspired by Abu-Lughod's humanistic approach in that I attempt to understand the construction of authority through women's words and performative actions in their representative context. In order to utilise alternative modes of inquiry that do not limit the scope of this research and in light of the aims discussed above, the authority of the *dā'iyāt* will be addressed through the following research question:

How is the authority of the dā'iyāt constructed in the male dominated religious context of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia?

1.8 Thesis Outline

This dissertation is divided into four parts. Part I includes this introduction (Chapter 1) along with a review of the literature (Chapter 2). In Part II (Chapters 3 and 4) I discuss the methodological premise and methods used to collect data on the *dā'iyāt* in Jeddah. In Chapter 3, I address the logistics of the fieldwork in terms of access and location. I reflect on the narratives and field encounters and on how they shaped the process of data collection. In Chapter 4, I address the strategies that I used to analyse the data collected in the field. Part III contains two chapters that illustrate the findings of my research. In Chapter 5 I address conformity to the ulama as the most significant contributor to the construction of female religious authority in Jeddah. This chapter elaborates on the prevalent fieldwork narratives that elucidate the salience of contemporary and medieval Muslim ulama in justifying the *dā'iyāt's* fatwa and solidifying their discourse. In Chapter 6, I present an alternate discourse. I present the different avenues of authority through which contesting male authority has contributed to the legitimation and appropriation of the *dā'iyāt's* authority. This chapter focuses on contesting the institutionalised fatwas of the ulama on women's issues. It will also include a unique demonstration of female leadership during hajj. Finally, Part IV includes the concluding chapter, Chapter 7, in which I revisit the research question and summarise the findings. It also revisits the assumption that the *dā'iyāt* represent an extension of male domination that supports the institutional subordination of women, and it concludes with a discussion of the limitations of this research and of possible directions for future study.

Chapter 2

Theological, Theoretical, and Empirical Constructions of Authority:

A Review of the Literature

2.1 Introduction

Until recently, Islamic women's participation in the religious realm has been buried under the shadow of the male contribution, such that 'any claims for power on women's part were either ignored or misinterpreted' (Mernissi, 1996:10). Today, however, the religious authority of women is becoming regarded as a subject worthy of study. Moreover, various movements attempting moral reform have been led by women and have emerged as influential social phenomena. This dissertation aims to contribute to the emerging field of the study of female religious authority, in particular to how authority is constructed and maintained in a male-dominated context. Although this study is concerned with how female preachers in Jeddah construct their authority, literature addressing various social, political, and religious contexts helped inform the understanding of this issue. In surveying the literature, the research question *'How is the authority of the dā'iyāt constructed in the male dominated religious context of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia?'* and the descriptive and explanatory nature of the study served as the basis for selecting material.

Few scholars have succeeded in overcoming the methodological restrictions inherent in the study of Muslim women's culture. As such, it has been necessary to survey literature representing several fields – such as anthropology, theology, Islamic studies, mission studies, women's studies and politics – in order to obtain sufficient data. Conversely, to target the elements that contribute to the construction of female religious authority, it was necessary to narrow selection to sources that could both

allow a thematic, analytical premise and contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon. With this in mind, I identified and surveyed a range of literature addressing the roles of female religious authorities in their various manifestations – *dā‘iyāt*, saints, teachers etc. – in Sunni, Sufi, and Shia contexts.

This chapter begins by addressing the theological and theoretical understanding of authority from Islamic and Western perspectives. It follows by addressing the various manifestations of religious authority in Saudi Arabia as a frame of reference for locating the social and religious significance of the informal authority of *dā‘iyāt* in Saudi Arabia, whose contemporary representations in scholarly literature are then addressed.

2.2 Perspectives on Authority

This discussion traces the understanding of the construction, appropriation and meaning of authority in the Islamic theological context, supplemented with perspectives based on Western theoretical premises. The theological inquiry demonstrates how authority is justified based on Islamic scriptures, yet it neither assumes nor denies a causal relationship between the canonical justifications and the findings of this study.

2.2.1 Interpretations of authority in religious scripture

Before addressing theological interpretations of the notion of authority in Islam, we must note that the notion of inherent objectivity in the Quran has been debated. Many authors argue that Quranic interpretations are not infallible and are impacted by human subjectivity, including patriarchy, as well as by their political,

social and historical context (Abou El Fadl, 2001:3-4; Barlas, 2006a; Mernissi, 1996; Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996:57). Indeed, the conceptions that have emerged throughout Islamic history reflect Foucault's power/knowledge continuum, and the various manifestations of religious authority in Islam (particularly among women) have been influenced by power structures that grant, deny, limit and expand authority.

The pattern of authority in Islam, which means submission to the divine and supreme authority, is one in which Allah represents the pinnacle of legislative power and control. The term *tawḥīd* (literally, the declaration of the oneness and sovereignty of Allah) refers to the application by Muslims of this supreme authority in the social, legal and political realms. For the believer, Allah's rulings, codified in the Quran and represented in sharia provide, in principle, an ethical and moral framework for governing all aspects of the life of a Muslim. As a result, any Islamic figure of authority derives her/his legislative power from sharia.

Kadi (n.d.) states that there is no single term equivalent to the Muslim notion of authority in the Quran, but that this notion has also been associated with empowerment, such as when God declared the vicegerency of Adam on earth (Quran 2:30-34).¹ The authority of those whom God made vicegerent is divinely sanctioned and, therefore, 'they can demand obedience from others' (ibid.), as in the verse 'He who obeys the Messenger (Muḥammad), has indeed obeyed Allah...' (Quran 4:80). The ulama, for their part, anchor their legitimacy by upholding God's laws, sharia (Abou El Fadl, 2001:13). Thus, although authority is vested in God, His book, and the Prophet (ibid.:23), the authority of God is 'exercised through human agents who act

¹ 'And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels: "Verily, I am going to place (mankind) generations and generations on earth." They said: "Will You place therein those who will make mischief therein and shed blood, – while we glorify You with praises and thanks and sanctify You." He (Allah) said: "I know that which you do not know." And He taught Adam all he names (of everything)...' (Quran 2:30-34).

on God's behalf' (ibid.:27). These *khulafā'* (viceregents) remain 'restricted agents' in the sense that they can exercise their authority within the established principles of Islam.

Ultimately, acting as vicegerents for God on earth is a task assigned to every Muslim (see for example Quran 6:165, 7:69 and 7:74).² However, submission to the elite figures of authority who are well-versed in Quran and Hadith has become an extension of submission to God (Mernissi, 1996). For example, the members of the *hay'a* are among those agents who act on God's behalf in Saudi Arabia. As they maintain the moral code of the state, they are often given the title the 'moral police'. The Muslim scholar Sayyid Qutb has distinguished this sort of authority from that which is associated with *da'wa*: 'no power (Arabic سلطة, *sulṭa*) is needed for performing the act of *da'wa*, implying that *da'wa* is no more than preaching. While for "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong," power (legal, political) is, in fact, necessary' (Qutb, 1967, I: 444; quoted from Racijs, 2004:38). Qutb describes *da'wa* as missionary activity directed at non-Muslims, which is an obligation for every Muslim.

On the notion of leadership, the Islamic feminist Amīna Wadūd has stated that 'The general principle for leadership in the Qur'an is similar to the rule for fulfilling any task, that it should be filled by the one "best suited"' (1999:88). Her interpretation of the Islamic text is gender-neutral, which also sheds light on her understanding of the concept of *imāma* (religious or political leadership, with imam often used to designate a leader of congregational prayer). She further states: 'there is nothing

² 'And it is He Who has made you generations coming after generations, replacing each other on earth ...' (Quran 6:165), 'Do you wonder that there has come to you a Reminder (and an advice) from your Lord through a man from amongst you to warn you? And remember that He made you successors after the people of Nūh ...' (Quran 7:69), 'And remember when he made you successors after 'Ād (people) and have you habitations in the land ...' (Quran 7:74).

implied or stated in the Qur'an which supports the opinion that males are natural leaders' and 'The Qur'an does not restrict the female from being in authority' (ibid).

The Saudi *dā'iya* Dr Fāṭima Naṣīf's book *Women in Islam: A Discourse in Rights and Obligations* (1999), has a chapter dedicated to women's political rights in Islam. In this chapter, she elucidates her interpretation of women and positions of authority. She defines authority as 'assum[ing] religious as well as civil responsibilities' (ibid.:159), and she denies women the right to hold this authority based on the principle of 'division of duties and responsibilities' (ibid). She echoes the rationale for this position commonly provided by the ulama in differentiating between men's and women's physical and psychological dispositions, stressing their complementary roles for the 'benefit of the nation' (see also Chapter 5). She uses women's emotional and biological bases to locate women's authority in the home. In her view, if a woman takes up a position of authority that will divert her attention from her primary role as a mother and wife, this will have negative impact on the welfare of the nation. One exception to the rule, according to Dr Fāṭima, are the knowledgeable and virtuous women. She cited the example of the female Companion al-Shafā' bint 'Abd Allah al-'Adawiyya, whom Caliph 'Umar delegated decision-making in the management and administration of the market.

Dr Fāṭima, however, does not assign men a superior authority over women. Her interpretation of the text reflects a gender-neutral understanding of the position of authority. The person who is considered worthy to be in the position of authority is expected to demonstrate certain characteristics worthy of that position. Some such traits are knowledge and virtue. Dr Fāṭima in the popular perception demonstrates these traits in her exercise of authority and leadership (see Chapter 6). In order to be in a position of political or religious authority, women must possess exceptional

skills, knowledge, and virtue, which are well-known attributes among early Muslim women leaders as discussed in Chapter 1. This recognition of the value of knowledge and virtue among women is consistent with biographies and historical accounts of Muslim women predecessors, particularly the female Companions of the Prophet (*ṣaḥābiyyāt*).

2.2.2 Theoretical interpretations of authority

Authority is an abstract concept that represents a voluntary relationship (Pilger-Strohl, n.d.). The relationship between the subservient and the superior is hierarchical, and the power manifested in the superior authority is regarded by the followers to be legitimate. Although authority carries with it prestige and power, it should not be equated with the latter. Power is a construct that comes with any position of authority, but it is not in itself always legitimate. Contrary to notions of power, authority, in Islamic political philosophy and Western politics, is rationalised as a legitimate exercise of power and as a form of earned social control (Gunning, 2007). Kramer and Schmidtke draw upon Max Weber's definition of authority to distinguish it from power, defining the former as 'the ability (or "chance" as Weber put it) to have one's rule and rulings followed, or obeyed, without recourse to coercive power' (2006:1). Authority and leadership are sometimes treated synonymously. Consistent with Wadūd's understanding of leadership in the Quran in 2.2.1, Bouzar defines it as 'limited to group contexts' and common goals (2011:281).

For the present dissertation, Rose's question is pertinent: 'To what extent does the authority of authority depend upon a claim to a positive knowledge, to wisdom and virtue, to experience and practical judgment, to the capacity to resolve conflict?' (2000:316). Eickelman and Piscatori, however, pose an even more fundamental

question in their book *Muslim Politics*: ‘why does authority exist’? (1996:58). These authors address the existence of authority from the perspective of the relationship between the ‘carriers’ and the ‘followers’ of authority, and they offer several levels of explanation. One level of analysis is the ‘ideological’ one, at which they ‘recognize that authority is invested in individuals and institutions because they are thought to incorporate and exemplify the moral order’ (ibid.). Such figures assume authority because they ‘appear to embody cherished values and represent the symbolic reference points of society, including sacred texts’ (ibid.). Another level of authority is the ‘functional’ level, at which figures assume authority by virtue of their ‘performance’ in guiding people toward “‘proper” Islamic discourse and practice’ (ibid.).

Other theorists have distinguished between being ‘in authority’ and being ‘an authority’ (Abou El Fadl, 2001; Gunning, 2007). This distinction is important when addressing the formation of authority in informal and subordinate groups such as the one under study. In practice, a person is perceived as being ‘in authority’ due to being part of an institutionalised system or hierarchy. In Weber’s tripartite classification of types of authority, a person in authority usually upholds a ‘traditional’ and/or a ‘rational-legal’ order (1962). Indeed, traditional authority ‘is derived from the “sanctity of the [traditional] order”’ (Gunning, 2007:96). On the other hand, ‘Rational-legal authority is derived from occupying a position in a bureaucracy that is ruled by formal rules and hierarchies’ (ibid.). Obedience to those in authority is mandated by virtue of their position as well as by the rules that they uphold. Additionally, one can be perceived as being ‘an authority’ as a result, for example, of a charismatic personality that ‘engages emotions’ – a characteristic found in many spiritual leaders and prophets (ibid.). This dual nature of authority creates a potential

conflict for members of Saudi Arabia's religious establishment, who simultaneously derive their power informally from being 'an authority' and formally by being institutionalised as 'in authority'. This distinction challenges the prevalent views on the formation of authority among *dā'iyāt* in Saudi Arabia. This is especially important because the category of *dā'iyāt* falling under the rubric of 'an authority', lacks official recognition.

People with charismatic authority usually capitalise on what Bourdieu has termed 'symbolic capital', which represents the valued goods specific to the context in which they exercise their authority, to legitimatise their informal authority. Charismatic authority based on 'personal capital', represents the 'personal characteristics' exemplified by the person in authority. 'Cultural capital' includes the valuable features that are determined by a particular cultural group. For example, piety and religious knowledge are valued characteristics in a religious authority. Moreover, figures of informal authority also leverage social capital in terms of their 'social standing, family connections [and] social networks' to anchor their authority (Gunning, 2007:97), examples of which practice were encountered in the present research.

Charismatic authority represents the third leg of Weber's tripartite categorisation of authoritative models – the other two being traditional and rational/legal. Unlike the other two, charismatic authority is not institutionalised. In fact, in many ways it is contradictory to the bureaucratic and patriarchal systems institutionalised in the other forms (Weber, 1991). In Saudi Arabia, male religious authority may represent a hybrid of the three types of authority. By contrast, the reliance on charismatic traits – which are 'qualitatively particularized' (ibid.:247) for the female religious authority – is salient to the stability and maintenance of authority

in a female-exclusive context, wherein women's perceived inherent 'emotional nature' becomes an advantage for the *dā'iya* seeking to draw in followers. In this context, the present inquiry considers the validity of this type of authority and the manner in which its status varies in terms of 'market power' (Jones, 2003:84), as well as on the meaning of her discourse, her instructional style, and recitation process (Messick, 1993:89).

2.3 The Role of the *Dā'iyāt* in the Context of Existing Authority

There is a prevalent view in Islamic studies that Islam lacks a religious clergy.

Gaffney clarifies that this:

does not mean that Islam lacks persons who variously claim to represent its authority. Rather, there is an abundance of such representatives and no little controversy among them over their relative prerogatives. It is not, therefore, the absence of authoritative religious specialists that is refuted by this declaration but merely a rejection of any single hierarchal definition of what entitles one to exercise authority. (1994:33)

Due to the all encompassing significance of Islam in Muslims' private and public lives, the various representations of religious authority – such as a shaykh, *ʿālim* and *dā'iya* – serve a wide range of social needs, and their functions and authority are somewhat malleable and overlapping. Moreover, due to the 'complexity of the instructions' in Islam, there is a need for 'specialists who study and analyse these instructions' (Abou El Fadl, 2001:68). The phrase *rijāl al-dīn* ('men of religion') is a generalised term used for 'public spokesmen of religion who validate this identity primarily through the teaching of religion, its administration, or leadership of its ritual expressions' (Gaffney, 1994:33). In turn, the definition of a *ʿālim* in medieval Islam, according to Berkey, was 'loose' and 'flexible' (2007:46). Berkey goes on to say that 'The *ʿulama* in the premodern period...represented an extraordinarily heterogeneous group, one that includes famous scholars well versed in jurisprudence and other

religious sciences, but also lesser scholars, preachers, and other minor religious figures' (2007:47). The transmission of religious knowledge was, from this standpoint, informal and not the prerogative of the educated elite (ibid.).

In Saudi Arabia, due to strong inflection of Islam in matters of governance, there are many avenues through which to exercise religious authority. The various authoritative figures are believed to be 'bearers of sacred authority' (Eickelman and Piscatori, 2006:59) and see themselves as upholders of 'true Islam' (Zaman, 2007b:253). In his book *The Saudi Elite*, Bin Sunaytan (2004) defines the elite as consisting of various influential social groups with authoritative leverage in society. He breaks down the 'Saudi elites' ('*al-nukhab al-Sa'udīyya*') into seven main groups: (1) the elite ministers ('*al-nukhba al-wazārīyya*'); (2) the elite advisors ('*al-nukhba al-istishārīyya*'); (3) the elite shaykhs ('*al-nukhba al-mashāykhīyya*'); (4) the 'intelligentsia' ('*al-nukhba al-muthaqqafa*'); (5) the bureaucratic elite ('*al-nukhba al-buruqrāṭīyya*'); (6) ('*al-nukhba al-Sa'udīyya wa al-ḥīrāk al-ijtima'ī*') Saudi elite and social oppositional groups; and (7) ('*al-nukhba al-muḍāḍḍa*') the oppositional elite group. The third group, the elite shaykhs ('*al-nukhba al-mashaykhīyya*'), is the one to which the ulama belong. Eickelman and Piscatori, on the other hand, define a shaykh as a 'religious teacher and leader' (ibid.:73). In the religious context of Saudi Arabia, shaykh is the common title used to describe various figures of religious authority. However, the '*ālim*' represents an official position in the hierarchal religious ladder, and the term denotes a person who upholds valuable religious knowledge.

Bin Sunaytan also categorises the Saudi religious elite into nine levels according to their social, religious and political significance, as well as according to

their position in the official hierarchy.³ The Grand Mufti represents the apex of this religious elite, and his verdicts stand above all other religious opinions. The Grand Mufti also runs *Dār al-Iftāʿ*, which consists of influential ulama who participate in the production of what constitutes valued religious knowledge in the state, primarily religious opinions that are consistent with the state's political, religious and social agendas. Through issuing fatwas, the ulama act as an 'instrument to promote governmental objectives, but... that power [could also] thwart governmental objectives' (Niblock, 2006:27). Indeed, the ulama have great influence in altering social behavior; however, their autonomy remains constrained by virtue of their position as civil servants (Bin Sunaytan, 2004:110). Their influence depends on their position in the hierarchy as well as on their conformity to the state's wider social, religious and political agendas. In order to maintain and enjoy the status that comes with their position, the ulama interpret the religious text in ways that 'maintain the patriarchal ideology of the state as a socio-political frame of reference based on the ruler's [i.e., the king's] absolute [*muṭlaqa*] rule' (ibid.).

The ulama maintain their authority as long as they conform to the state's socio-political agenda. The state, in turn, maintains its legitimacy as long as it demonstrates its commitment to Islamic principles and maintains the influential position of the ulama (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996:60). In this regard, the 'Salafī doctrine' (*al-fikr al-salafī*) of the Ḥanbalī school of jurisprudence constitutes the primary ideological frame of reference for religious understanding and authority legitimation (al-Khidr, 2010:45).

³ (1) *Dār al-Iftāʿ* headed by the Grand Mufti; (2) the head and members of *Hayʿat Kibār al-Ulamā*; (3) *Majlis al-Qaḍāʿ al-Aʿlā* (Supreme Judiciary Council); (4) *Maḥākim al-Tamyīz* (Cassation Courts); (5) '*ruʿasāʿ al-maḥākim*' (heads of courts); (6) '*al-quḍāt fī al-maḥākim wa dīwan al-mazālim*' (judges in courts and Cassation Courts); (7) mosque imams; (8) '*muʿaẓẓin*' (caller for prayer); and (9) '*khadam al-masājid*' (mosque servants) (Bin Sunaytan, 2004:109).

The significance of the religious elite in Saudi Arabia is evident in the various educational, administrative and legislative institutions that produce as well as institutionalise and formalise their authority. For example, there are sharia universities and colleges and other governmental bodies throughout the kingdom. These governmental institutions produce ulama who serve the state religious, political and social agenda (Zaman, 2007b:242). Moreover, the religious elite includes male preachers who are trained in *da'wa*, i.e., trained to proselytise or call (*da'wa*) non-Muslims to Islam (ibid.:253). The Islamic University of Medina, for example, was established for the purpose of:

the formation of scholars ('ulama) specialized in the Islamic and Arabic sciences...and equipped with the forms of knowledge that would enable them to call others to Islam and to solve the problems that confront Muslims in their religious and worldly matters in accordance with the Book [of God], the normative example [of the Prophet] and the practices of the pious forbears. (al-Madani, 2004:196; cited in Zaman, 2007b:253)

The *dā'iyāt* acquire formal religious education primarily from Islamic universities and through degrees in Islamic sciences that are provided at universities across Saudi Arabia. Religious education, according to Le Renard (2011), is a primary contributor in the recognition of their authority, although many *dā'iyāt* in Saudi Arabia come to prominence through acquired experience in *da'wa* and by presenting themselves as role models in piety, as in the case of the Swiss female religious authority studied by Bouzar (2011).

The term *dā'iya* is applicable to both male and female religious authorities. It is used to represent a 'propagandist' who 'calls' or 'invites' others to Islam (Gaffney, 1994:33), especially 'those who preach in the spirit of contemporary Islamic resurgence' and those 'advocating a totalistic application of Islam' (ibid.). 'From its etymology the term [*dā'iya*] primarily signals the oratorical and persuasive aspects' of preaching (ibid.). Both the *dā'iya* (male and female) and mosque imams preach;

however, the role of the former ‘entails explaining the application of the values, principles, practices and moral lessons found in these central sources, and therefore encompass[es] some level of interpretation’ (Rausch, 2011:76).

Al-Khidr classifies the female *dā‘iyāt* as a ‘religious elite’ (2010:306) in light of their influential role in shaping women’s religious awareness, particularly during the religious awakening in the 1980s. However, the female *dā‘iya* falls outside of the hierarchal classifications discussed above because the role of the *dā‘iya* ‘is not centralised’ (Racius, 2004). Female religious authorities are not part of the formal hierarchal structure of ulama because they cannot hold a title of ‘*ālima*’ (Le Renard, 2011:112; see Chapter 5). Moreover, there are limited institutions to produce qualified female scholars compared to those available to men. Unlike the Syrian Sufi Qubaysi movement, in which a woman can receive the title of ‘*ālima*’ by virtue of her acquired religious knowledge (Islam, 2011), female religious authorities in Saudi Arabia are limited to the title of the *dā‘iya*, although they exercise various religious prerogatives, such as the right to issue fatwas and to deal directly with text.

The spaces where the *dā‘iyāt* preach are not limited to mosques and religious centres. In fact, many do so in private homes, and many take opportunities wherever they may be to correct what they see as deviant behavior, such as girls or women not wearing proper hijab or going on dates with boys or men in public places. Schools, colleges, universities, malls, hospitals, prisons, orphanages and welfare societies can thus be among the places where they exercise their *da‘wa* activities (see Chapter 5), which include not only preaching but also advising Muslims on what is right and wrong, as well as interpreting text. In fact, the *dā‘iyāt* are, for other women, more approachable than the ulama in terms of providing guidance on social, spiritual, religious and familial matters. The *dā‘iyāt* are often treated as family and

psychological counselors (see Chapter 5), in which role they give advice on child rearing (*tarbiya*) and on marital issues, hold charity events and collect donations.

2.4 Sources of Legitimacy for Female Religious Authority

This section reports the results of the literature review with respect to how female religious authority is established despite prevailing male dominance. In selecting material for review, I prioritised studies and data in the post 2000 period that reflect the current state of women in the Muslim world. This period encompasses trends in Islamic activism today, which is becoming more inclusive of women as key actors in the wider process of Islamisation (*aslama*). Although the population under study represents an informal structure of authority, I did not exclude studies of groups or individuals whose authority is recognised by the state. In either case, the agency of female religious authority is realised from within existing dominant structures, and the agency of women in the context of a patriarchal social structure is understood as a manifestation of ‘the capacity to realise one’s own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will or other obstacles’ (Mahmood, 2005:8). Hence, as the literature showed, whether these women work under an official umbrella or exercise their authority informally, there is consistent male domination that the women develop strategies to circumvent. It is these strategies that are of significance to the study at hand.

The selection of literature was, moreover, not limited to a particular locality, denomination or religious function. For the purpose of understanding how women construct religious authority across political, social and cultural boundaries, evidence was drawn from various regions, from Sunni, Shia and Sufi contexts and from studies

of religious authority that went beyond that of preacher, including those of *wā'iza*, *'ālīma*, leader etc.

2.4.1 Knowledge and authority

A predominant theme in almost all of the literature surveyed for this study relates to the significance of knowledge (religious and secular) in establishing and maintaining female religious authority. In this section, I address three main themes: (1) the role of knowledge as an imperative constituent in the construction of religious authority; (2) what constitutes valuable knowledge in the surveyed literature and how this in turn influences the legitimation of authority; and (3) the difference between the production and reproduction of knowledge in authority formation.

2.4.1.1 Knowledge as prerequisite in the making of authority

‘From the earliest times, the transmission of knowledge from teacher to disciple also created the network of religious leaders who...came to exercise religious authority in Muslim community’ (Hefner, 2007:5). Furthermore, Hefner traces the significance of ‘ethical education’ in Islamic communities in terms of the creation of a ‘virtuous’ Muslim and ‘the maintenance of common good’ (ibid.). In addition to other key characteristics that contribute to a preacher’s authority, such as charisma, performance and piety, empirical research has shown that demonstration of knowledge (religious and secular) be an the most important requisite for establishing of one’s religious authority in Muslim communities (see e.g., Hafez, 2003; Mahmood, 2005; Jouili and Amir-Moazimi, 2006; Rouse, 2006; Torab, 2007; Kalmbach, 2008; Rausch; 2011). Indeed, Rashid Rida (d. 1930), who is considered among the ‘founders of the Salafi movement’, maintained that *da‘wa* needed to encompass, in

addition to classical religious sciences, ‘modern forms of knowledge’ such as ‘history, sociology, psychology, and political science’ (see Mahmood, 2005:61).

Bano (2011) studied the case of a Muslim woman in Pakistan whose role extended beyond the communication of valued religious knowledge. The woman under study served as a religious authority and as head of a madrasa, where she anchored her authority in her knowledge of religious text as well as in her piety and charisma. However, in her role as an Islamic activist and a military leader of resistance against the Pakistani government, elements of everyday life such as sacrifice were more important than education. Bano found no evidence of resistance among followers to the authority of this female religious leader. What can be inferred collectively from these findings is that in a context in which one’s authority is exercised in a traditional pedagogical setting, knowledge surfaces among the most important requisites in establishing legitimate religious authority. However, when religious authority is exercised outside the traditional setting, such as in the form of military leadership, embodied attributes supersede knowledge.

2.4.1.2 What constitutes valued (religious) knowledge?

Torab (2007) conducted an ethnographic study of Shia female preachers in Tehran and indicated that the content of a preacher’s lessons is significant in the assessment of her authority. Furthermore, the study concluded that the audience judged the preacher’s authority based on ‘what ordinary [Muslims] perceive to be knowledge that is worth transmitting’, which varied depending on the demographic of the audience (ibid.:48). For example, older audience members with limited educational background who attended the religious circles of Mrs Omid acknowledged her authority because she communicated ‘knowledge that helps them

make sense of their daily lives' (ibid.:48). This preacher did not delve into theological analysis, presumably in recognition of her audience's limited educational background; rather, her pedagogical style was primarily didactic and focused on examples of 'spiritual merit', 'sin' and 'rewards in Paradise' (ibid.).

In a similar vein, Saba Mahmood argues in *Politics of Piety* that Cairene Sunni women who preach in mosques anchor their authority primarily by communicating 'practical knowledge' (2005:62). These preachers engage with their audience in addressing jurisprudential aspects of Islamic practice and in 'performance of religious rituals and observance' (*ibādāt*) as a response to their audience's limited religious knowledge (ibid.). Mahmood also observes the ubiquity in this context of booklets covering an array of jurisprudential subjects that served collectively as a religious 'manual' in simplified language. Many of these publications were written by male authority figures. What can be inferred from this study is that female preachers in an oratory culture such as Egypt capitalise on their ability to communicate directly with their female audience and thereby to convey practical knowledge. This advantage allows the preachers to compete with existing male authorities while contributing to the dissemination of valued knowledge.

In her study of female *wā'izāt* in Morocco, Rausch (2011) highlights the importance of acquiring both religious and modern education in establishing the authority of preachers among their followers. This dual education allows these authorities to handle the various tasks that are expected of them, including providing social, spiritual and moral guidance and helping to solve familial problems. Rausch also indicates that this strategy helps to 'solidify' women's status as legitimate figures of authority in a context that has been, until recently, dominated by men. Indeed, the state has only recently formally institutionalised these preachers to help disseminate

its current, more tolerant interpretation of Islam – a strategy also taken by the state in Iran (see Torab, 2007). These female preachers acquire formal authority by learning modern sciences and establish authoritative legitimacy among the people based on their ability to apply this acquired knowledge. The various sciences enable their formal institutionalisation as well as enabling them to exercise the various roles addressed above. Similarly, in the process of acquiring formal religious education, female preachers in Egypt gain proximity to male ulama and establish scholarly networks, a fact that helps to augment the impression of their authority (Minesaki, 2011:410).

Institutionalised female religious authorities in Turkey are also establishing recognition as credible sources of religious knowledge by virtue of their formal religious education as well as their education in social sciences and languages (Hassan, 2011). Informal preachers in Turkey pioneered establishing authority through charisma and through informal religious learning at a time when formal religious education was unavailable for female preachers (ibid.).

Conversely, in a study of a Muslim women's religious association in Switzerland, Bouzar showed that the informal setting in which women gathered to share valued religious knowledge allowed them to 'become sources of authority' even if they lacked formal religious education (2011:294). The author explained that the emergence of female religious authority in the context under study was relatively new, which allowed women to pioneer new strategies in the religious realm. Moreover, men have dominated the religious realm for so long that the lack of female sources of authority to address women's needs and to answer women's questions left a vacuum in which new authorities could emerge to fill women's social and religious needs. Similarly, Minganti's (2011) study on female Islamic religious authority in

Sweden showed that the lack of formal religious education for Muslim women in Europe had created a space for informal religious authorities to emerge and capitalise on informally acquired religious education and on their own religious experience to establish authority among communities with relatively limited religious knowledge.

What constitutes valued religious knowledge is dependent on the educational background of the followers, as well as on their everyday needs. The studies reviewed here demonstrated that in order to acquire formal recognition by the state, women who aim to establish authoritative leverage ought to be equipped with both secular and religious knowledge. At the same time, demonstration of knowledge of the various religious and secular sciences enables female religious authorities to cater to the various social, psychological and familial needs of their followers. It also allows them to establish authoritative leverage against existing dominant structures, whether male or female religious authority. At the same time, in the context of emerging Islamic minorities or enclaves, where formal religious education is not available but the need for sources of religious reference increases with the increasing Muslim population, females have latitude to pioneer the dissemination of religious knowledge and to cater to this growing need.

2.4.1.3 Production vs. reproduction of knowledge

In the context of the female preacher's subordinate position in relation to male religious authority, one source of authoritative legitimacy is through communicating established ideas and norms by means of existing dominant bodies. Thus, in their edited volume on formal and informal groups in the Middle East, Chatty and Rabo conclude that 'Women in informal groups are only acceptable when they conform to cultural ideas established by the state' (1997:7). In Iran and Pakistan, for example, the

jalaseh Shia preacher gains religious authority and certification not only through her communication skills and charisma but also by remaining scrupulously within the boundaries of the orthodox religious language of the male clerics (see Hegland, 1999; Torab, 2007). Through orthodox language, moreover, such women find means to advance or improve the state and status of other women (ibid.). Hegland has further demonstrated the negative implications of acting outside the boundaries of male-sanctioned religiosity based on the manner in which female preachers in Peshwar, Pakistan suffered repercussions and lost their authoritative leverage if they crossed certain implicit lines (1999:191). Still, many of these women ‘used the enforced Islamic framework to their own advantage’ (ibid.:190). Both Hegland and Torab concluded that the more the women conformed to established norms, the more they became part of the system.

Jouili and Amir-Moazami (2006) confirmed similar findings in their study of Sunni Muslim women in France and Germany. These authors conducted a series of interviews with Muslim women who collectively and publicly participated in local Islamic organisations. Their results demonstrated that while men maintain their monopoly over the production of religious knowledge, women established the legitimacy of their religious authority by disseminating context-valued religious knowledge. This socially sanctioned trajectory maintains the women’s conformity to the status quo. In other words, women were unable to use this knowledge to assert their own religious interpretations. Rather, in order to maintain their religious authority, women must exercise their power cautiously, within the boundaries of the established patriarchy, and must have recourse to men as well as to the religious canon in order to authorise their opinions. Concluding their analysis, Jouili and Amir-Moazami propose that Muslim women exercise religious authority ‘in the sense of

having the *capacity* and the right to transmit knowledge and educate members of the community’ (2006:637; italics mine).

Spielhaus, by contrast, studied what she called the ‘special case’ of Ḥalīma Krausen, a well-known female Islamic religious authority in Germany (2011:453). Krausen is often referred to as imam in honour of her exemplary leadership skills and religious knowledge. Spielhaus’s study brought out that the ‘production of religious knowledge through Qur’an hermeneutics’ was among the strategies for legitimising her authority (ibid.:445). Moreover, she found that the spacial arrangement, in which men and women were not segregated, allowed Krausen to demonstrate her acquired religious knowledge and skills to both men and women, making her authority more pronounced. In serving as assistant to a male imam, who later identified her as his successor, moreover, Krausen was able to establish a solid reputation – perhaps aided by her avoidance of any feminist agenda or trajectory – which enabled her to exercise authoritative leverage when the imam passed away.

2.4.2 The agency of female religious authority

The concept of agency is central to any discourse that addresses women’s negotiation of power, particularly in a male-dominated realm. According to Ardener, ‘*Dominance* occurs when one structure blocks the power of actualisation of the other, so that it has no ‘freedom of action’’ (1975:25; emphasis in original). Mahmood defines agency as the capacity that enables action, even within such a context (2005:212). In this regard, she presents Judith Butler’s understanding of agency in that ‘social norms are the necessary grounds through which the subject is realised and comes to enact her agency’ (Mahmood, 2005:19).

In addressing what enabled the women discussed in many of the articles in the volume entitled *Women, Leadership and Mosques*, edited by Bano and Kalmbach, which encompasses a variety of Muslim communities in the West and East, Bano concludes that women's agency in exercising the right to communicate religious knowledge unfolded in a space initially 'created by men' for these women (2011:509). However, from within this space of male dominance, women eventually established authoritative leverage to assert their power and authority through 'complex manoeuvring' (ibid.). The authors conclude that this agency should be understood not as a way to reject norms but rather as inhibiting their impact while maintaining the established male hierarchy.

Hegland defines agency as 'how individuals act to serve their own interest' (1999:191). In this regard, she states in her study of Shia preachers in Iran that agency operates in expanding their options by subtly contesting misogynistic religious interpretations and policies concerning women and developing their own interpretations. The enclosed and segregated women's spaces offer a safe space for women to exercise this agency without jeopardising their authority. This exclusive space becomes 'a metaphor for rights which in turn need to be actualized through women's leadership' (Hammer, 2011:471) and offers a space for women to develop their own agency.

Hammer (2011) discusses the case of Amīna Wadūd, a popular female religious authority in North America whose agency operates *outside* the established male hierarchy. Wadūd anchors her understanding of the religious text in principles of gender justice and spiritual and religious equality within Islam, which contributes to the legitimacy of her 'social' and 'spiritual' leadership. The American context in which Wadūd operates is different in its socio-political attributes, which differ from

those that typify the Muslim world, including the presence of a longstanding discourse on gender equality in the wider societal realm. As such, the agency exercised by female religious authorities in America – such as Asrā Nomanī and Zarqā Nawāz, in addition to Wadūd – is fortified through a discourse that communicates a gender-egalitarian exegesis. Hammer does not state that the religious networks of these women are connected; however, she demonstrates an awareness of an egalitarian religious discourse among these women and a collective attempt to implement egalitarian interpretations of the Quran in Muslim daily practice.

In her study of female religious authority in Switzerland, Bouzar (2011) states that the women's religious association established agency through limiting its links with the mosque, which is dominated by men, and establishing its own spiritual and authoritative space. Although the mosque serves as a link between other women and the women's religious association (through their husbands, who are linked to the mosque), the latter asserts its independence and circumvents male dominance through various strategies. Distance from the mosque enabled women's autonomy in defining the criteria for the imams and shaykhs whom they invite to speak in their lessons. Segregation enabled female religious authorities in this women's association to select the male religious authorities who 'conform to their own interpretation of the women's status in Islam' as well as to decide the topics to be addressed (ibid.:288-290).

On the other hand, even while asserting their agency from inside the context of male dominance and thus maintaining the established hierarchy, female religious authorities in various Muslims communities have exercised their right to provide interpretations of the canonical texts that edify women's state and status. These efforts arise from the emerging need among educated Muslim women for interpretations that

are more compatible with ‘the realities of modern life, which is not provided [for] in orthodox religious interpretations’ (Bano, 2011:531). Bano, however, maintains that resistance to these alternative interpretations is inevitable (ibid.).

Minesaki’s study of Egyptian preachers, who preach inside and outside the traditional mosque space, highlights the role of acquiring formal religious education in enabling women to gain authority and establishing agency vis-à-vis popular male ulama. The author provides the example of a preacher who directs her students to seek male ulama for fatwas rather than expressing opinions herself. While reifying the ulama’s monopoly over religious interpretations, the preacher exercises agency ‘in the creation of Islamic discourses that meet their needs as Egyptian women’ (Minesaki, 2011:401). This is done through her careful selection of ulama, and the preacher’s knowledge of each ulama’s ideological orientation enables her make judgments that cater to women’s needs and that are also in line with her own ideological orientation. Her formal religious education enables her to make judgments about the ulama’s ideological orientation, and, as she exercises judgment in selecting which ones she advises her students to consult, she is indirectly communicating knowledge of which she approves. At the same time, she deflects potential criticism by not asserting her authority to interpret the text directly, for which reason Minesaki refers to this as one of a number of ‘accommodating strategies’ employed by female preachers operating in a male dominated realm.

Anthropological studies of female religious authority among various Muslim communities have shown how ‘the religious teachings are the very source of their agency in the world in which they live’ (Torab, 2007:247-8; see also Hafez, 2003; Minesaki, 2011; Hammer, 2011; Krünkler and Fazaeli, 2011). Yet exercising this agency ‘involves the process of “compliance” and “resistance” by individuals

positioned in relation to powerful structures and discourses' (ibid.). Women comply by maintaining established cultural values and hierarchies while seeking to negotiate egalitarian interpretations of scripture. However, several of the studies reviewed here demonstrated that such agency cannot be mobilised without a comprehensive knowledge of and demonstrated facility in working with Islamic text (Hirschkind, 2006; Minesaki, 2011; Rausch, 2011; Hassan, 2011).

2.4.3 'Feminine virtues' as cultural capital

Studies have shown that female religious figures who lack institutional recognition derive their authority informally, despite exclusion from the formal chain of religious hierarchy, claiming their right to transmit religious knowledge primarily by leveraging what Pierre Bourdieu has termed 'cultural capital' (see Jouli and Amir-Mouazimi, 2006). In this respect, as demonstrated by Hegland (1999), Mahmood (2005), Deeb (2006), Kalmbach (2008), Krünkler and Fazaeli (2011) and Rausch (2011), 'feminine virtues' may provide a crucial ingredient. In a study of *dā'iyyāt* in the UAE, Krause (2008) also found that demonstrating outward piety and knowledge were key factors in developing the authority to influence social change.

In her study of the women's mosque movement in Egypt, Mahmood found that demonstrating 'feminine virtues' served as the precursor to acquiring religious or political authority (2005:6). In the religious context, such virtues include wearing the hijab, prayer, sincerity, humility, modesty and obedience to one's husband. Kalmbach, who reached a similar conclusion in her study of Sufi female religious authority in Damascus, also elaborates on the performative aspect of maximising female authority. She states that while female instructors attempt to subtly limit the boundaries of patriarchal control, they maintain the feminine 'ideals' in order to

anchor their authoritative leverage and to legitimise their endeavour (2008:52). For example, Kalmbach points out that while al-Ḥabash, a noted female religious authority, always asked her husband's permission to leave the house for education or to visit her family, she nevertheless 'insisted' that he granted such permission. In this way, while maintaining a socially acceptable level of morality that upholds men's superior position, al-Ḥabash pushes the boundaries of such dominance sufficiently to contribute to her own authority in the realm of informal religious education for women. Similarly, in Islam's (2011) study on the apolitical Sufi movement of al-Qubaysīyyāt, teachers in Syria within the movement maintained an attitude that supported the wife's obedience to her husband. Preaching culturally appropriate religious interpretations, among other strategies, contributed to the Qubaysīyyāt teachers' ability to maintain their prestige and establish a position of authority.

Rausch's (2011) study of female Moroccan preachers locates in the emphasis on culturally and religiously inscribed feminine virtues not only a means for negotiating the preacher's authority in a context dominated by men but also a way of demonstrating to their followers their commitment to maintaining virtue and public piety, as prescribed by Islam. This piety is demonstrated through proper observance of hijab, personal demeanour and tone, particularly when communicating with male administrators at the mosques where they teach. Islam (2011) also highlighted the importance of the Qubaysīyyāt teachers' attire in authenticating their authority among students, stating that it is a vital prerequisite in establishing authoritative leverage to demonstrate proper attire and behaviour, which the students often emulate.

Indeed, female religious figures not only establish authority by demonstrating virtues themselves, they authenticate their authority by cultivating feminine virtues among their followers, and they legitimatise their role as preachers through helping

other women to achieve piety. Hegland, for example, found that among Shia women preachers in Peshwar, Pakistan that ritualistic performance and contribution to the flourishing of Shia religious and political identity contributed to legitimising their authority in the eyes of male religious scholars (1999:181-182). Minganti, in her study of female religious authority in Sweden, locates the importance of women's compliance with feminine virtues in the rising role of women in the 'propagation of Islam' in Europe and elsewhere (2011:377). This rise is causing a shift in traditional perceptions of gender roles and of the division of labour between the sexes, which has traditionally associated women with domesticity. However, the perception of the woman as *fitna* remains (see Abdo, 2000:158). Therefore, by virtue of their socially appropriated task and in order to venture outside their culturally ascribed gender roles, women must conform to particular codes of conduct and attire, particularly in their participation in Islamism, in order to avoid causing 'temptation in men and their [own] exclusion from the formal sphere of religious authority' (Minganti, 2011:376-377; see also Abdo, 2000:139-143).

Minganti concludes that for women to maintain their leadership of Muslim women's organisations and to contribute to the re-interpretation of text in order to promote egalitarian Islamic gender perspectives, women must subscribe to such ritual practices as wearing the hijab as an embodiment of their commitment to Islam. The hijab not only grants women autonomy from male guardians – particularly in their access to the mosque – because it denotes 'decency' and piety (Minganti, 2011:381), it thus allows women to negotiate power in providing alternate interpretations of misogynistic text and in pushing forward the debate on women's rights (see Abdo, 2000:149). To highlight such strategies for legitimatising women's Islamic leadership, Minganti uses the term 'tactical orthodoxy', which she defines as making 'temporary

allusions to one's own perceived higher degree of piety in order to realize personal preferences' (ibid.:384).

2.5 Scholarly Representations of the *Dā'iyāt* in Saudi Arabia

With a few notable exceptions (e.g., Altorki, 1986; Arebi, 1994; Yamani, 2000), little scholarly work has been carried out that examines women's discourse in Saudi Arabia. Even historical accounts of women's religiosity (e.g., al-Jasir, 1980; al-Harbi, 1999, 2001) consist merely of concise biographies that fail to elucidate the wider social and religious contributions of their subjects. For example, al-Jasir's monograph, published in commemoration of Shaykh Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb after the seizure of the mosque in 1979, notes in a rudimentary way that women supported their husbands, brothers or fathers in following the puritanical Wahhābī doctrine. Moreover, much of the scholarly work on the role and status of Saudi women in the religious domain relies on assumptions based on their historical status rather than on an informed understanding of their current roles and activities, and thus cannot escape a reductionist interpretation of the diverging social institutions that govern women's lives (e.g., Doumato, 1991, 2000). With the exception of works by Cooke (2001), Doumato (2000), Zahid (2005a, 2005b) and Le Renard (2011), who address in various degrees the scope of female religious authority as well as the ways in which they establish authority and how it operates, existing contributions typically fall short of addressing the role Saudi women as authorities in the religious domain.

Other notable contributions to the understanding of the role and discourse of Saudi female religious authority can, however, be found in the works of al-Khidr (2010) and Abugideiri et al. (2011), as well as in some of the offerings of such media outlets as Ambah (2006) and (Salih, 2007, 2011). Al-Khidr provides a summary

account of the influence of the *dā'iyāt* on women and addresses their emergence during the Islamic awakening of the 1980s. However, due to direct observation limitations on al-Khidr by virtue of his gender, his account on the *dā'iyāt* is based on secondary data published mainly in newspaper and magazine articles that discuss their ideology. Arebi (1994) conducted an ethnographic study on Saudi female writers in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including Suhayla Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn. Suhayla's activities are not directly pertinent to those of the *dā'iyāt* addressed in the present study. Nonetheless, Arebi's discussion, which includes literary analysis and in-depth interviews, is an important contribution to the understanding of the dynamics of the relationships between men and women who are contributing to wider Islamic discourse. Moreover, Arebi investigates the relationship between Suhayla and the state religious apparatus, concluding that her subscription to patriarchal discourse granted her prestige and recognition among the male ulama in the 1980s and 1990s. Suhayla, whose father was a religious scholar, is an example of one of the oldest and most prominent female Islamic writers in Saudi Arabia who acquired her literary religious authority by endorsing the status quo and supporting the classical patriarchal system (Arebi, 1994). At the time, Suhayla's explicitly endorsed women's moral, social and political inferiority to men and called for their domesticity while attributing to men the task of controlling women.

According to Zahid's (2005b) extensive magazine report, the *dā'iyāt's* authority is exercised predominantly in the limited sphere of verbal communication through sermons. These discourses generally promote a stringent application of Islam – irrespective of the individual speaker's own religious interpretations – and seek to legitimatise the speaker's authority through repeated appeals to prominent male authority figures. The *dā'iyāt*, moreover, are often believed to be the demonstrable

embodiments of the morality that they profess. Indeed, secondary sources suggest that the *dā'iyāt* are confident, charismatic and well versed in Quran and hadith and that they dedicate much of their time to preaching 'correct Islam' and to elevating society's level of religiosity (Zahid, 2005a, 2005b). The literature also suggests that the majority of the *dā'iyāt* emerge from academic institutions such as sharia colleges and from non-profit organizations such as *jam'iyāt tahfīẓ al-Qur'ān* (the Quran learning societies) (Zahid, 2005b; Le Renard, 2011). Their audience, as followers and receivers of valued knowledge, continuously assesses the preacher's code of conduct and confers the status of authority on her. In the context of religious authority – a context that has also been a battleground for political mastery – the manipulation of religious interpretations and the embodiment of religious morals have always been the privilege of the male clergy. In this regard the *dā'iyāt* represent an important and fascinating exception, albeit one for whom authority remains limited and provisional.

Le Renard's (2011) study of the Saudi *dā'iyāt* is the result of extensive ethnographic work carried out in Riyadh and Jeddah between 2005 and 2009. In understanding the formation of authority among the *dā'iyāt* in Saudi Arabia, Le Renard theorises that gender segregation opened an opportunity for the emergence of exclusive female religious spaces (in mosques, Quran circles and universities) that enabled the *dā'iyāt* to exercise authoritative leverage without direct interference from male ulama (2008, 2011). The author also demonstrates how the Internet has created a wide space for the *dā'iyāt* to overcome segregation boundaries and disseminate their knowledge to a wider audience. In addition, she highlights the importance of the *dā'iyā's* religious knowledge in establishing their authority, in which regard she provides details of the academic backgrounds of Dr Ruqayya al-Muḥārib, Dr Asmā' al-Ruwayshid, Dr Nūrā al-Sa'ad and Suhayla Zayn al-'Ābidīn (2011:114).

Despite the value of her contributions to the understanding of the emergence of female religious authority, however, Le Renard's work is marred by a number of methodological shortcomings. As she herself notes, prominent *dā'iyāt* in Riyadh refused to be interviewed by her because she was a foreigner, which meant that she had to supplement her first-hand observations from secondary data in the form of interviews posted on the Internet (Le Renard, 2011:106). Zahid's (2005a, 2005b) articles are based on more secondary data rather than first-hand encounter. This is evident in these publications and in the telephonic interviews that I had with her on 23 April 2008. Similarly, Hudā Ṣāliḥ, a Saudi journalist who has published several newspaper articles addressing various aspects of the *dā'iyāt's* roles and discourses, indicated in a telephonic interview conducted on 5 March 2012 that her work was based primarily on material available on the Internet and on widespread social perceptions of the *dā'iyāt*.

The reliance on secondary sources and on general impressions has led to a number of shortcomings and misimpressions in previous research, which the present study seeks – subject, of course, to its own limitations – to supplement or emend. Thus, for example, in her generalised assumptions about how the *dā'iyāt* construct and maintain their authority, Le Renard rightly highlights the fact that family background is not a necessary condition. However, she fails to capture the important role that familial connections play in certain cases, such as the fact that Dr Fāṭima's brother, Dr 'Abd Allah Naṣīf's close ties to King 'Abd Allah aided in the new freedoms that Dr Fāṭima exercised during his reign as compared to that of King Fahd (see Chapter 5). Furthermore, Le Renard states that 'Saudi men are generally not aware of female preachers, either as institutional religious authorities or challengers to these authorities' because their 'leadership is virtually invisible' (2011:121). This

statement demonstrates a shortcoming in the author's understanding of familial and male-female dynamics within Saudi society. In fact, female religious leadership is not invisible. As is discussed in Chapter 6, the leadership of Dr Fāṭima and other female religious authorities during hajj and in certain ritualistic practices associated therewith occurs in spaces in which maintaining gender segregation is impossible. Indeed, it is notable that during this sacred practice, in which women are expected to demonstrate a heightened level of piety – which ordinarily entails or implies concealment from men – their leadership is the most clearly articulated because the 'mixed' setting makes their authority and leadership visible. Moreover, although the *dā'iyāt* do not enjoy institutionalised recognition, they manage various philanthropic and educational centres that are recognised by the state. Men are aware of the influential role of the *dā'iyāt* in this regard, since their permission is often requested for women to attend lessons that are held at these centres. In fact, because Saudi women are not allowed to drive, many women rely on male family members not only for permission but also for conveyance to these lectures, the nature of which they are thus not likely to be unaware. Finally, with regard to awareness among the official state ulama of the authority and activities of female preachers and of the challenges that they might be thought to pose to state security, I refer to Chapter 1 where I describe the increasing influence of female preachers in Saudi Arabia in the twenty-first century. Despite the state's reticence to institutionalise these figures or to grant them formal recognition, the state is aware of their influence among women as well as their impact, as teachers, on the younger generation, and statements have been made to the effect that the state is in the process of finding ways to institutionalise their role. This might, of course, be considered a strategy to control women's religious discourse so that it conforms to the state's moral, social and political agendas – as Rausch (2011) found to be the case in

her study of female preachers in Morocco. It does, however, demonstrate men's awareness of the influential role of these preachers in the political and social arenas – as does Shaykh Ibn Bāz's banning of Dr Fāṭima from lecturing at university because she has suggested interpretations of hijab that differ from orthodox teachings (see Chapter 5). Thus, even though the *dā'iyāt* preach in spaces that are segregated from men, their discourse is not isolated and is disseminated outside the physically exclusive women's realm.

The present study attempts to leverage the advantages of the author's status as a cultural 'insider' in order to avoid reliance on secondary sources and to overcome some of the shortcomings of previous research, which have resulted largely from failure or inability to establish a rapport with the *dā'iyāt* or to interview them first-hand. Indeed, in the course of carrying out the research reported in this dissertation, several *dā'iyāt* expressed to me their reticence to be interviewed by journalists or researchers, particularly foreigners, due to concerns regarding the misrepresentation of their incentives and activities and regarding the danger of blanket association with extremist activities. Therefore, not having a common cultural and religious bond with the *dā'iyāt* can be said to hinder the process of attaining an informed understanding of their activities and discourse. This is not to claim that the research reported here incurred no obstacles or limitations in the process of data collection or analysis. However, various aspects of my identity and socialisation into Saudi society reduced the limitations that many researchers face when conducting studies on Saudi women, and I have tried to make use of this apparent advantage in measured, cautious and responsible ways that will enable this study to contribute positively to the body of knowledge and understanding in the field.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter began by identifying various interpretations and constructions of authority from both religious and sociological sources. It highlighted the difference between notions of authority, power and leadership, tracing them in religious text and perspectives in social sciences. It also highlighted the position of the *dā'iya* within existing frames of reference in Saudi Arabia in an attempt to further the understanding of the role of these women as disseminators of valued religious knowledge in the context of male religious and socio-cultural dominance.

This chapter also examined a range of scholarly studies that address both formal and informal manifestations of female religious authority. The findings demonstrate that one cannot make blanket assumptions or assertions regarding the conditions that enable female religious figures to construct, maintain or exercise authority (Bano, 2011:529). Although there are predominant themes, there are many exceptions and variations in differing contexts, and these differences suggest the need to study female preachers in Saudi Arabia carefully, with all possible attention to their socio-cultural context and with every effort to understand and relate to the sources of information –both textual and human – first-hand and on their own terms.

The studies also brought out that, through various avenues of legitimacy for female religious authority, women have carved their way carefully toward the goal of establishing agency through constant negotiation, often involving the interpretation of religious texts in ways that widen their sphere of influence and circumvent male dominance. Despite the resulting contribution of Muslim women to the production and dissemination of religious knowledge, men remain the monopolisers of this domain. However, gender roles and gender norms are constantly evolving, and classical notions of domesticity and patriarchy, which have limited women's roles in

Saudi Arabia and in other societies, are changing in response both to globalisation and to a process of Islamisation that is rooted and justified in the interpretation of religious text. Thus, even ‘current’ research such as that reported and discussed in the present study can represent only a cross-section of the development of particular roles and contributions, and it will be up to subsequent researchers to evaluate and continue the work represented here.

Chapter 3

Methodological Considerations and the Conduct of Fieldwork

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodological considerations, approaches, and instruments relevant to data collection for the present study of the construction and significance of female religious authority in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The chapter draws heavily on Snyder's notion of 'accountable ethnography' (2005:130) while exploring '*how we claim to know what we know*' (Altheide and Johnson, 1994:496 as cited in Snyder, 2005:130; emphasis in original).

Data for the study were collected during fieldwork, which occurred between June and December, 2009. The socio-political climate in Saudi Arabia at the time still showed effects of the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11th, 2001. In 2003-2004, a series of violent attacks, including suicide bombings, had targeted government buildings and foreign housing in Jeddah, Riyadh, Yanbu, and Khobar. These events spurred a global reaction against religious beliefs prevalent in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the *dā'iyāt* had only recently begun to appear in public after having been banned from public speaking until recently (see Chapter 1). Thus, even for a researcher who shared cultural background as well as many religious beliefs and values with the community under study, gaining access to vital persons and spaces within that community was not unproblematic. Moreover, understanding how the authority of the *dā'iyāt* had been renegotiated and how their activities had spread despite governmental control required a flexible mode of inquiry that often involved treating the superficially familiar as something rich and strange. This unique, context-

specific methodological premise provided a platform for understanding the narratives and activities presented and discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

As a teenager and young adult who had grown up in Saudi Arabia, I had naturally imbibed popular stereotypes about gender and the status of women. In conducting this research, I did not want to influence my conclusions through assumptions based on stereotypes or to impose preconceived categories on my observations. Rather, following the precept that '*Islam is or means everything*' [emphasis in original] (Said, 2003:279), I began by approaching the performative act of preaching as a moral act that follows a religious imperative. This approach allowed me to leave aside the premise, often expressed through the media, that religious authority represents the exercise of coercive power (see e.g., Bashatah, 2005; al-Khamees, 2008; al-Salmi, 2008).

Both as a Saudi Muslim and as an ethical researcher, I felt obliged to be sensitive to the perspectives of the women treated in this study, many of whom expressed the view that their status and intentions have been misrepresented by both the local and the international media. Therefore, I have attempted, to the best of my knowledge, not to allow my own experiences to overshadow their opinions. After all, most of these women will have no opportunity to respond to what I write, and they have placed an implicit trust in me to represent their lives appropriately to the scholarly community.

Throughout data collection, as part of my routine contact with Saudi Arabia, I followed printed articles, Internet blogs and television news stories that related to Saudi women. I cannot ignore the fact that I considered many of these portrayals to be

biased, particularly the allegations that Saudi pedagogy is outmoded or archaic, and I encountered similar feelings of discomfort and anger among my participants. Nevertheless, rather than play the ‘judgmental professional’ (Narayan, 1993:681) and to judge these women myself after addressing these negatively charged accusations, I have tried to be like Okely, who ‘moved from “facts” to representations’ (2008:71) with as little mediating interpretation as possible.

At the same time, in developing a conceptual framework that would be sensitive to the manner in which female preachers in Jeddah construct their authority, I drew on the anthropological truism that a researcher cannot stand apart from his or her participants’ practices. I therefore employ a ‘multi-voiced’ participant perspective that emphasises their viewpoint (Snyder, 2005:133) while ‘leav[ing] traces of myself’ (Abu-Lughod, 2008) in the resulting discourse. Primarily, however, I follow a constructivist paradigm that reconstructs an understanding of my participants’ knowledge based on their narratives, and I try to remain as faithful as possible to their choice of language and their interpretations of their own performances by using direct quotes in conjunction with descriptions of the observed context.

As a participant observer in the field, my encounters with the *dā‘iyāt* and their audiences enabled me to recognise some of the various meanings that they attached to their words and actions, meanings that would not all have been evident from their narratives alone. Indeed, much of the inherent power in their words, as they speak the language of God, depends on the dynamic relationship between each *dā‘iya* and her audience and cannot be fully understood unless one observes performative practices.

By approaching the understanding of authority not only performatively but also both rhetorically and symbolically, I adopted a methodology that combined those of two anthropological disciplines. From a symbolic standpoint, I focused on

understanding the cultural institutions, meanings, and values associated with the personality of the *dā'iya*, as well as on the dynamics of communication between *dā'iya* and audience (see e.g., Kalmbach, 2008). This mode of inquiry unfolded through interviews with the *dā'iyāt* and with members of their audiences and through observations of their interactions and of the context in which they took place. My approach to the rhetorical meaning of authority, in turn, involved deconstructing the discursive traditions performed in certain lessons and expressed in certain written works produced by the *dā'iyāt*. These spoken and written discourses are treated, in Arebi's words, 'as a form of "intellectual activity"...by which consciousness is institutionalised into specific culturally defined themes, forms, and goals, regardless of the "objective events affecting culture"' (1994:5).

All in all, I approached my fieldwork with the aim of understanding the totality of the authoritative tradition and its social appropriation as: (1) performed in the discourse and style of lessons and related literature; (2) embodied in the charisma and persona of the *dā'iya*; and (3) realised and legitimised by the audience in the context in which the authority is performed. I used these varied conceptions of authority as flexible guidelines in order to explore rather than to limit the expressions of Islamic authoritative traditions studied in this dissertation. Moreover, I applied a heuristic approach through interviews, observations, and exploration of the written texts.

Following Mahmood's (2005) approach, I tried to write down everything I saw and experienced without imposing my analytical categories or social, political, or ethical perspectives on the process of understanding. In keeping with this approach, I strove to treat my participants with flexibility and openness (see Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Fetterman, 1998), as well as with respect for their humanity and for

our various mutual relationships. I thus allowed my academic self to be confronted by the *reality* of the real world. Moreover, drawing on recent trends in ethnographically-oriented research (see e.g., Okely, 1996, 2008; Abu-Lughod, 2008), I allowed myself to become immersed in the situation without preconditions. As such, my methodology was refined retrospectively based on my experiences in the field. As Geertz has pointed out, ‘Anthropologists don’t study villages (tribes, towns, neighbourhoods); they study *in* villages’ (Gupta and Furgeson, 1997:15; emphasis in original). I thus allowed my experiences in the field and the interplay between my social and academic selves to influence the decisions that I made, as will be shown below.

My reluctance to apply a monolithic methodological approach was also influenced by my desire to maintain my status as a cultural ‘insider’ in the fieldwork environment. Such an approach would have hindered the process of blending into the local community and associating with my participants. Thus, I approached my fieldwork with a deliberate intention to ‘just be there’ rather than to arrive with a fixed or developed blueprint. The belief and intention in this regard were that this attitude would allow me to be open to possibilities and ideas that could inform a deeper understanding of the *dā‘iyāt*’s rather than limiting myself to ideas or issues that had already been discussed (see Okely, 2008). Recognising that my participants had not been subject to much academic scrutiny, moreover, I approached them with openness and empathy and with respect for the moral and religious values that they attached to attending lessons. Rather than employ a systematic method of inquiry (Saville-Troike, 1989), I opted for ‘listen[ing] to the content of what people say [and] to what this content implies for the actions that follow’ (Gergen, 2009:69).

3.2.1 Conceptualising female authority

Abu-Lughod defines ‘indigenous anthropology’ as a ‘discipline of the self studying others’ (1990:16). Particularly when conducting research in one’s own community, the researcher should situate herself vis-à-vis that community and clarify her stance on her subject. As a female researcher conducting a field-based study of women in Saudi Arabia, then, I must consider the values and views of the participants, how these perspectives contributed to their understanding of authority formation, and how my understanding might align with or deviate from theirs.

A number of female religious authorities in Saudi Arabia have written on issues associated with gender equality, political representations of gender, women’s rights, and the ‘culture of gender’ (see Al-Sa’ad, 2008). As a male-dominated society, in fact, Saudi Arabia is an ideal site from within which to address such issues as gender discrepancies and the institutional subordination of women, as well as how these social factors contribute to a dichotomous view of the private/public spaces that Saudi women occupy. Nevertheless, as Saudi society allows only women to have access to women’s religious practices, one could just as well see in these practices a reverse or mirror exclusion (i.e., of the male); hence, gender segregation cannot, in and of itself, be automatically postulated as ‘anti-feminist’. By the same token, my study of these segregated practices and gender disparities cannot automatically be assumed to only take the form of a feminist discourse, even though I am aware that feminist critiques have contributed to the academic understanding of gender biases and women’s issues.

Nevertheless, the asymmetry in gender relations in Saudi society must be acknowledged not only as part of the methodological background to the study, but also as part of the socio-political context within which the discourses and activities

studied in this dissertation were produced and unfolded. Hence, the masculine monopoly over the production of religious knowledge in Saudi society is highlighted frequently in the chapters that follow, as it is part of the context within which female religious authority seeks to manifest. In fact, many of the *dā'iyāt* whom I interviewed routinely referenced the words and deeds of men – in particular, the interpretations of scripture offered by prominent Saudi male clerics – as a means to justify a fatwa or advocate a particular practice; it was typical, moreover, for these women to explicitly acknowledge the social, political, and religious authority of men over women. Indeed, in Saudi Arabia, women's efforts in the sphere of religiously acceptable Islamic knowledge have been mainly in dissemination – a practice to which both men and women are expected to contribute – rather than in production. In this regard, both the oft-cited model and (insofar as she is herself cited as an authority) the exception is 'Ā'isha, the wife of the Prophet described in Chapter 1, who played a pivotal role in the production and transmission of the Hadith.¹

From a methodological standpoint, it is important to point out that Saudi society is not unique in having what Ardener (1975) has called 'separate realities' for men and women. Notably, however, Ardener ignores the possibility of multiple realities within each gender, realities that might call into question any discourse that treats gender in broad, sweeping terms. In such a context, what is most important is to be open to various perspectives on the manner in which religious authority may shift between men and women – as well as among women – and not always without rivalry. An example of the latter is examined in Chapter 6, in connection with observations of Dr Fāṭima Naṣīf leadership during hajj, when she found herself in the

¹ Historically, female contributions to Islamic theology have not been entirely lacking, but they are not routinely acknowledged (see Nadwi, 2007).

somewhat uncomfortable position of sharing a platform of authority with one of her former students, Dr Sanā', who by that time was also a bona fide *dā'iyā*.

Such peer-to-peer rivalries should not, however, overshadow the fact that gender disparity and gender hierarchy is most conspicuously constitutive of the context for the construction of religious authority in Saudi Arabia. Thus, for example, as also discussed in Chapter 5, Dr Fāṭima explained to me that she needed and sought the consent of the late Grand Mufti, Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azīz Ibn Bāz, in order to establish a centre that could produce *'ālimat* (the female equivalent of ulama) whose training would be sufficiently acknowledged to allow them to share in the production of religious knowledge. Dr Fāṭima did not receive Shaykh Ibn Bāz's consent, and therefore she was unable to execute her plan.

My approach to the study of female religious authority in Saudi Arabia is expected to contribute to the making of an alternative discourse or presentation of knowledge. However, I do not foresee that this discourse will be universally applicable to constructs of resistance or submission or to confrontational power struggles for religious mastery only on the basis of gender. In presenting this discourse, I realise that there are multiple manifestations of power struggles that are both exclusive and inclusive of the gender principle. Therefore, I imagine a study of women by a woman in which the idea of 'woman' is not limited by gender imagination or hierarchy. Rather, in this research, gender, along with many other factors, contributes to a privileged access to an exclusively female domain and offers *one* way, but perhaps *not* the only way, of understanding female religious authority in Saudi Arabia.

3.3 Context, Concepts, and Narratives Associated with Fieldwork for the Study

3.3.1 Jeddah as fieldwork location

Jeddah is a significant location for the study of female religious authority in Saudi Arabia for many reasons. First, it is religiously significant due to its proximity to the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina. As such, it is a transit hub that receives millions of pilgrims every year. Moreover, it is also known for being the most relatively ‘liberal’ city in Saudi Arabia, a fact that offers an interesting dimension to the study of religious authority.

Jeddah is also important because it was here, in 1956, that Şaddīqa Sharaf al-Dīn, one of the few learned women in Islam at that time, opened *al-Madrasa al-Naṣīfiyya*, the first private school to offer Islamic education and academic instruction in subjects such as math and Arabic to girls. Şaddīqa relied on family acquaintances to gain access to the homes of women in her community, and she performed *da’wa* in the form of informal talks to educate women about their religion. Her daughter, Dr Fāṭima Naṣīf, who is now herself known to many as the ‘mother’ of the *dā’iyāt* in Jeddah, followed in her footsteps and set a precedent for contemporary *da’wa* practice in Jeddah and throughout Saudi Arabia. Dr Fāṭima taught many other *dā’iyāt* in Jeddah; her daughters, too, are following the tradition and, in the process, are reshaping contemporary *da’wa* practice in Jeddah.

Jeddah is also my home, a fact that facilitated my acceptance as an ‘insider’ and ensured a familiarity with the culture of the city that would not have been the case had I conducted this study elsewhere. Moreover, the *dā’iyāt* in Jeddah are reputed to be less stringent in their approach to Islamic pedagogy than, for example, those in Riyadh, and when conducting my pilot study in these two locations I found it easier to

communicate with the *dā'iyāt* in Jeddah than with those whom I encountered in Riyadh.

3.3.2 The local setting: Researcher's home as research 'field'

A six-hour flight took me to from London to my 'field' location: the city of Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. For me, 'entering the field' was not the dichotomous experience described in many ethnographic works. Nevertheless, I was obliged to adopt (or re-adopt) certain subtle measures of adaptation and comportment upon arrival, such as wearing my hijab.

I arrived in Jeddah in June 2009 to conduct the seven months of fieldwork for the study. It was my first summer spent at home for as long as I could remember, and I had almost forgotten how it felt to spend these months in the heat of Jeddah's summer. However, I wanted to re-instate myself in Saudi culture in all of its religious, political, and even environmental dimensions.

For this reason, my 'academic self' had to be marginalised for the first three weeks after my arrival to make room for my 'social self'. My return after five months' absence from home created certain familial obligations that had to be addressed. In this respect, my 'insider' status was a mixed blessing. Should I have failed to fulfil these obligations and this failure become public knowledge, my research could have been hindered given the emphasis that Saudi society places on family. As these obligations prevented me from immediately beginning my observations and interviews, I took this opportunity to re-familiarise myself with my surroundings and to become better acquainted with *da'wa* practices through conversations with friends and acquaintances.

In this process, I did not share Altorki's (1988) sense of distance from her own society because, unlike Altorki, I had not been entirely absent from Saudi Arabia for very long, as I had been accustomed to visiting Jeddah for short stays at least three times each year. Thus, I was not struck by the 'contrast between cultures' (Okely, 1996:22). In addition, a great deal had changed since Altorki's study, with globalisation and the Internet profoundly impacting Saudi society (see Altorki et al., 2006). Indeed, increased awareness of events in other parts of the world had reduced opportunities for cultural misunderstanding, so that my three years spent living away from home did not make me feel like a stranger or isolated from my own society. Video images and pictures sent immediately through email or by telephone, along with television programmes and newspaper articles, had facilitated my close contact with family and friends at home.

Another significant change in Saudi culture since the 1960s, when Altorki conducted her research with elite families in Jeddah, was that mobility for women was no longer a major problem. Like many of the women who attended the lectures that I observed, I had the liberty to travel within and outside the city unaccompanied by a guardian. Indeed, I observed many of the women arriving by taxi, unaccompanied by a male guardian, or being dropped off rather than 'accompanied' as such by other male drivers. Hence, although the proscription on women driving left us dependent on male drivers (who were not always punctual), we faced no greater obstacle in this regard.

As noted, however, my return to Jeddah did require certain measures of adaptation. In particular, I had to adopt a particular form of hijab as the quintessential act of religious adherence. I had to put on my *'abāya* (black cloak) and wear my *ṭarḥa* (head scarf) as soon as I arrived in Jeddah. To be lax in this respect would be

perceived as a flagrant violation of my religion. In addition, the *‘abāya* that I wore during my observations and interviews had to be plain black and completely closed in the front. Wearing an open front *‘abāya* with coloured trimmings and linings would be inappropriate in the context of *da‘wa*. However, adapting to this form of attire was an act of respect for the people who were allowing me access to their world, and it provided me with a greater understanding of the culture that I was researching. As Okely did, during her research on Gypsy women, ‘I adjusted my clothing, posture and speech. From outer performance to eventual internalisation, I came to understand otherwise elusive perspectives’ (2008:59). Indeed, women’s identities are partly articulated in the appearance that they assume in public, and the adoption of the Saudi version of Islamic garb facilitated my understanding of my participants and their community.

Throughout my stay in Jeddah, I had to pay meticulous attention to my hijab even when I was not attending *da‘wa*. Although the manner in which I am accustomed to wearing the *‘abāya* and *ṭarḥa* differed greatly from the way in which I wore them during my fieldwork, whenever I was in a public place where I ran the risk of encountering my participants, I made sure that I conformed to their use of the hijab, as the *dā‘iya* had advised them. For the sake of my research, as well as to better understand my participants, I wanted to accustom myself to their public practices in hopes of achieving a better understanding of the women in question and of their relationship to their religious tradition.

3.3.3 Snowballing networks for research: Background stories from the field

In reflecting on fieldwork methodology, Fetterman has argued that ‘the most effective strategy is, paradoxically, no strategy’ (1998:46), which means that one

must allow the incidents to unfold naturally. My entry into the field was therefore not systematic. It was rather a fluid process that depended on locating the prominent *dā'iyāt* and utilising a gatekeeper to introduce me to them. Every access to a performative space had its own story; however, I will elaborate below only on the early stage of my fieldwork and on the intricate web of relationships that subsequently created a snowball effect, allowing me access to other *dā'iyāt*.

My entrance to the realm of women's *da'wa* in Jeddah was greatly facilitated by, *Khāla* Laylā, who is my friend Sāra's aunt and a volunteer public relations officer at the Jeddah *Da'wa* Centre, which is located in an upper middle class residential neighbourhood.² Sāra had phoned her aunt from London and told her that I would be calling her upon my arrival in Jeddah. I am highly indebted to *Khāla* Laylā, who opened many doors for me although she lacked any religious authority.

When I first called *Khāla* Laylā, she sounded hesitant, until I reminded her of my friendship with Sāra. She then welcomed my call and asked me about the motives for my research. I told her that I was exploring current trends in *da'wa* practice among female *dā'iyāt* in contemporary Saudi Arabia and to understand how their discourse relates to the audience. She insisted that I meet Dr Fāṭima (whom I've known informally for years, but with whom I needed a 'gatekeeper' to lend me more legitimacy to my reintroduction) and asked me to accompany her to a dinner that was being organised in honour of Dr Fāṭima's return from Canada, where she had spent several months with her daughter and grandchildren. The dinner was held at the house of the family who runs the Dār al-'Imān hajj group (see Chapter 6).

Khāla Laylā also introduced me to the Jeddah *Da'wa* Centre, which is run by Dr Wafā' al-Ḥamdān, who frequently lectures there. I arranged to attend the lesson of

² *Khāla* means maternal aunt in Arabic. It is also used as a sign of respect when addressing a significantly older woman.

Dr Wafā' at the *Da'wa* Centre on Monday afternoon. I arrived early to allow time to socialise with members of the audience and to establish a rapport with them. I also used this time to survey the most popular *dā'iyāt* and other spaces where *da'wa* is performed. With the centre's receptionist, I registered my mobile number in order to receive text message alerts about future lectures by Dr Wafā'.

Dr Wafā' was sitting on a raised pedestal with two microphones, a tape recorder and a video camera in front of her to allow the audience in another room to view the lesson. During prayer break, I went to *Khāla* Laylā's office, where she offered me tea with mint. She informed me of a four week workshop commencing the following week, titled *Himmatī Da'watī* (My *Da'wa* is My Endeavour); intended to instruct children and young adults in how to become *dā'iyāt*. I decided that it would be pertinent to attend these workshops although I did not fit the age category; however, *Khāla* Laylā did not have the authority to permit my attendance.

I had to seek permission from *Abla* 'Abīr al-Thaqafī, a highly self-confident and pious woman in her early thirties, who is considered Dr Wafā''s right hand at the centre. She practices *da'wa* herself informally in various mosques around Jeddah, and she accompanied Dr Fāṭima for umra in Ramadan during my fieldwork. When I sought permission from *Abla* 'Abīr, she asked me about my academic affiliation and the purpose of my study. I reiterated the reasons I had shared with *Khāla* Laylā. In both cases, it seemed to help to lend my project legitimacy when I stressed my affiliation with the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies and mentioned my supervisor, Dr Muḥammad Ṭālib, who is a Muslim. In any case, I was granted permission to attend as a participant observer. At *Himmatī Da'watī*, I met the *dā'iyāt* *Abla* Ḥanīn al-Sudayrī and *Abla* Fāṭima al-Rifā'ī, who lead the lessons for senior students. Later, through socialising with *Abla* Fāṭima R. at the workshop, I was invited to her

religious lessons at al-Wilada Hospital and consequently came to be introduced to *Abla* ‘Ā’isha there. Similarly, *Abla* Ḥanīn also invited me to her young girls’ club at the World Assembly for Muslim Youth (see Chapter 5).

After the lecture, I accompanied *Khāla* Laylā to Dr Fāṭima’s honorary dinner. *Khāla* Laylā and I arrived at the prestigious event during ‘*ishā* (night) prayer before the guest of honour had arrived. We entered a spacious and luxurious living room, where we were received by the host family’s two daughters. A large, round table at the centre of the reception hall was full of opened gift boxes with dates and chocolates, which were served to the guests throughout the event. On the left of the entry hall was the living room, where the guests were performing ‘*ishā* prayer in *jamā’a* (congregation). The daughters offered to take off our ‘*abāyāt* (singular ‘*abāya*), but I held on to my ‘*abāya* until I joined the women in performing ‘*ishā* prayer. Performing Islamic rituals in congregation was not only a practice of faith, it also allowed me to reintegrate myself into this social network and to share a spiritual bond with possible participants.

Khāla Laylā was kind enough to introduce me to some of Dr Fāṭima’s friends who were also active *dā’iyāt*, such as Dr Nūrā al-Sa‘ad, head of the Department of Islamic Studies at King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz University, and Bayān al-Ṭanṭāwī, the daughter of the late and prominent Syrian Shaykh ‘Alī al-Ṭanṭāwī. Although Dr Nūrā was a desirable participant for my research by virtue of her popularity in the realm of *da’wa*, she avoided speaking with me when *Khāla* Laylā informed her about my research; Bayān, on the other hand, showed an interest in my work but did not become a participant because she soon left to study in Malaysia.

I observed everyone sitting patiently, awaiting Dr Fāṭima’s arrival. There were at least 50 women, most of whom were age 35 or older. There were also two

teenagers and an extremely elderly woman in a wheelchair. Someone received a telephone call informing her of Dr Fāṭima's arrival, and everyone expressed joy. I had underestimated the intense respect that they had for her.

I was not sure whether I should rush to the door to greet Dr Fāṭima like everybody else or wait a little longer. My hesitation had triggered doubts in her regarding my intentions, as I learnt when I first interviewed her during my pilot study. I did not want her to think of me as a burden or, in light of ensuing controversies about the purpose and sincerity of *da'wa* practice, a spy – nor did I want to fake my emotions.³ As I observed the other women kissing her head – a sign of utmost respect in Arab tradition – and hugging her, I felt that I had been converted to a mindset close to theirs but not to the degree that allowed me to emulate their greeting. However, I was empathetic to their emotions in the sense that 'the transmutation of sensibilities was sufficiently thorough that it made me actively question how to comport myself' (Csordas, 2007:109). I decided to greet Dr Fāṭima and to re-introduce myself as a 'friend' and 'not in my formal capacity as a researcher. [S]o I acquired some of the rights as well as some of the obligations of an insider' (Milroy, 1987b:66 as cited in Saville-Troike, 1989:111).

As I was greeting Dr Fāṭima, I attempted to talk to her; however, she was distracted by the crowd that flocked to greet her as well. After the dinner, which was filled with *anāshīd* (Islamic songs without musical instruments) and with speeches by prominent male scholars and female *dā'iyāt* from Saudi and around the Arab world, I had the chance to sit and catch up with Ālā', Dr Fāṭima's eldest daughter, whom I had known when I was an undergraduate in Jeddah. Ālā' knew I was studying at Oxford

³ The Saudi government has been known to send undercover female agents to report on the *dā'iyāt*'s discourse and activities – particularly those of popular *dā'iyāt* who exert a notable influence on women. During my fieldwork, I had to be careful in my activity and note taking because I did not want to be perceived as such an agent.

through her uncle, Dr Fāṭima's brother, whom I had met along with his family. Ālā's uncle informed Dr Fāṭima and Ālā that I had helped them to find their way around when they visited Oxford in the summer of 2008. This gesture helped to earn me a positive reputation and provided a degree of personal leverage through which to approach someone whom I viewed as one of my most valued potential participants. Soon after, Ālā, who was also kind enough to advise me on the locations where Dr Fāṭima gave her lessons, secured for me an interview with her mother and an invitation to accompany Dr Fāṭima to Mecca during Ramadan.

3.3.4 Positioned knowledge within the 'insider'-'outsider' continuum

In my researcher role, I attempted to encompass both 'insider' and 'outsider' positions, but I often vacillated between the two extremes. The interplay and 'enactment of hybridity' (Narayan, 1993:681) between these aspects of my identity and how they were perceived within the *habitus*-field dynamic defined my relationship to my participants. This fluid status, I felt, sufficiently disrupted the typical hierarchy that I did not consider it necessary to replace or problematise the terms 'insider', 'outsider', 'native' and 'indigenous', although these terms carry 'condescending colonial' connotations (ibid.:678). I do not, however, claim to have embodied the status of an 'insider' in the conservative and exclusive realm of *da'wa* practice, despite having prior familiarity with this community. I did need to strive somewhat to attain such status in the course of the fieldwork in order to attain access to my participants. Sometimes I failed, but sometimes I succeeded.

My status as an 'insider', such as it was, hinged on several factors, including my gender and its implications within Saudi society, my religion, my language, and my nationality. It should be noted, however, that significant contributions to the study

of Muslim women and their religious practices have been made by women who were not insiders in some of these other respects, such as Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* (2005) and Kalmbach's *Social and Religious Change in Damascus* (2008). Nonetheless, I have been reminded through conversations with both academics and journalists that access to participants would have presented a greater challenge had I lacked such status. For example, a male reporter from a popular Arabic news channel told me by telephone that one of my participants, a leading *dā'iya* who has hosted me in her house and invited me to her office on several occasions, had refused to be featured in a documentary on female *dā'iyāt* (see Ismail, 2008). When I asked her about the documentary, she told me that she had refused to participate due to the channel's biased reporting style and anti-Islamic rhetoric.

In a religiously conservative society such as Saudi Arabia's, 'insiders' enjoy advantages in any investigation of religious practices and discourse (Altorki, 1988). The Saudi emphasis on upholding 'correct' Islamic practice puts a premium on adherence in all institutions. This attitude has created a climate of heightened morals and enforced ideological purity, in which social attitudes and rhetoric must be consistent with Islamic tradition. The constant scrutiny of Islamic practices – and, particularly, of the religious institutions of Saudi women and of the *dā'iyāt's* authority to speak the language of God – helps to explain the *dā'iyāt's* reticence to participate in research conducted by a perceived 'outsider'. Given their tenuous position, having their opinions misrepresented could easily jeopardise these women's authority and ability to speak in public. For similar reasons, a doctoral candidate whom I met at a conference in France informed me that she had experienced difficulty contacting female *dā'iyāt* in Riyadh. In fact, she told me that they had refused to meet with her.

When I asked her why she had encountered such difficulties, she told me that it had been because she was a foreigner and was not a Muslim.

My ‘insider’-‘outsider’ status was further influenced by my use of the Arabic language – the vehicle of traditions and values and the primary means of knowledge acquisition and of identification with my participants – as well as my use of the Ḥijāzī dialect by virtue of my upbringing in Jeddah, which put me ‘on the same linguistic “wave length”’ (Saville-Troike, 1989:204) as my participants. However, as Gumperz (1977) has argued, an individual’s communicative repertoire includes ‘all varieties, dialects or styles used in a particular socially defined population, and the constraints which govern the choice among them’ (as cited in Saville-Troike, 1989:49), in addition to ‘different occupational codes [and] specialised religious language’ (ibid.). I was, in this regard, able by virtue of my familial background to switch when necessary to a Najdī accent and to speak in the informal dialect used by orthodox Najdī religious oligarchs (see Chapter 5).

I was also reminded that communicative repertoire extends beyond the use of verbal language to include physical actions and behaviour. For example, on one occasion as I entered a *Da’wa* Centre I encountered Sāra, one of the students learning to become a *dā’iyā*. I had known that handshaking was the preferred method of greeting in many religious circles, consistent with the sunna of the Prophet Muḥammad. However, I had not known that the quality of the handshake could also be regarded as an extension of the language of religious adherence. As customary, I extended my hand to Sāra and she reciprocated with a very firm grip. I said to her, ‘*Mā shā’Allah*, you have a very strong grip’, and she replied, ‘The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to greet with a firm grip. This is [what is told in] the sunna.’

In addition to my ‘insider’ status in the community, access to participants was further facilitated by the belief among many of these participants that the *dā‘iyāt’s* discourse needs to evolve beyond its current archaic style. Thus, many of these women saw me as a medium to express their hopes for improving and elevating the substance and content of this discourse. In their eyes, I have been entrusted to represent their views to an outside world to which they will most likely not have access. Had I not come from a similar religious background as these women, it would have been very difficult for them to relate to the academic and personal motives behind my inquiry. In fact, some of the participants asked me when I would come back from abroad, and they expressed their interest in seeing the outcome of my research.

While my gender, religion and nationality all facilitated my ‘insider’ status, my residence abroad presented a challenge while I was conducting my fieldwork. Although my status as a doctoral candidate gave me prestige (see Altorki, 1988) and credibility, this status was often overshadowed by my affiliation with a ‘Western’ university.

3.5 Methodological Framework and Field Data

3.5.1 Nature of field notes

In writing field notes, I was aware of an ethical burden to represent the participants in the manner in which they wished to be represented according to culturally specific Islamic practices. As such, I tried to record actions and utterances as accurately as possible without allowing this practice to jeopardise my status, my access to information, or my communicative repertoire. However, there were times

when it was not possible to take notes without calling attention to myself, which was incompatible with my aim of blending in with the community that I was observing. In these instances, my desire to fully embody an ‘insider’s’ persona overshadowed my academic self. As a result, when reconstructing events, I often had to rely on memory or on key words that I had jotted down. Unfortunately, this process created its own ethical dilemmas when I had to reconstruct a particularly informative conversation or incident, and I had only my own imperfect memory on which to rely.

Data collected from observations and interviews and my own comments were recorded mainly in a written format. Only rarely did I enjoy the liberty to use my voice recorder in interviews and observations. Although I constantly carried recording devices in my bag, I made sure not to reveal them due to the stigma attached to voice recording. In addition to recording events in writing, I often recorded my reflections on a given day’s events on audio tape, usually in the privacy of my car or at home.

In the instances in which I obtained permission to record interviews, the participants were usually either my friends or acquaintances who had been introduced to me through people with whom I am close. The trust that had been built up in these relationships was transferred to the participants, who allowed me to record them. However, in most cases participants specified that they did not want the recordings to be shared with the academic community. In addition, during interviews I was occasionally asked to stop recording or to refrain from including some of the information in my research. ‘Beyond [this] performative moment’ (Csordas, 2007:111) of subtle power negotiation between the researcher and the researched, I was ‘seen as a confidant for much unrelated information’ (Merriam, 2001:408).

In general, I used my prior knowledge of the culture not only to understand the construction of the *dā‘iyāt’s* authority but to also understand its relevance and the

constituents of meaning surrounding their activities as grounds for an ‘empathetic bond’ and understanding (Csordas, 2007:111; Okely, 2008). In an oratory culture or in ‘speech communities’ such as Saudi Arabia, members often fear possible ‘after effects’ of shared information (Saville-Troike, 1989:128). However, knowledge may be abstracted from the nature of the communicative interaction between the researcher and researched (ibid.:130).

In accordance with government security measures, all public lectures in Saudi Arabia are recorded. Thus, the lessons that I observed were audio taped by the centres hosting them. However, I was only able to obtain audio copies of *Ustādha Anāhīd*’s series at *Fayṣaliyya Women Welfare Society* due to my acquaintances with the women at the society, who were kind enough to entrust me with the recordings. In return, I promised not to expose the *da‘iya*’s voice to anyone and to provide the centre with a copy of my transcript of the lessons. However, obtaining copies of the recorded lessons at other centres where I conducted observations was out of the question. Whenever possible, I attempted to record the lessons on my own using a digital recorder. This was done in order to remain truthful to my participants’ words as well as to the manner in which they were communicated, for which reason I also made field note comments describing the behaviour and the context whenever possible (see Josephides, 1998:138-139). These recordings proved useful in taking me back to the ‘atmosphere’ in which the interviews and observations took place as well as allowing me to pay close attention to the participants’ tone (Wulff, 2008:86).

Taking notes during interviews while also trying to engage in an empathetic conversation with participants was challenging. However, securing a comprehensive account of their discourse was more important than participants’ comfort, so I wrote everything as they spoke while trying to maintain eye contact. Naturally, some gaps in

this record occurred simply because I could not keep up with what was being said, and some of these are marked as ellipses in the passages quoted from interviews and lectures.

At times I refrained from taking notes in situations that seemed mundane to my participants because the audience was also observing me (see Arebi, 1994). Indeed, I was asked on more than one occasion if I was a reporter. In light of the controversies surrounding *da'wa* practices, taking notes in a context in which the majority of the audience perceives nothing for one to write about was a legitimate cause for suspicion. My familiarity with Saudi society and what I learned from trial and error in such situations informed my decisions regarding when to take notes and when not to. For example, writing field notes in certain spaces, particularly in intimate social settings such as someone's home, can be regarded as invasive and as disrespectful to the socialisation process. So I opted not to take notes during lessons in private settings, but I recorded and/or wrote my reflections later in private.

At times, my participants commented sarcastically on my note taking. One summer Monday evening in the early stages of my fieldwork, the students of the *Himmatī Da'watī* gathered together on a floor mat around an abundance of food on which to break their fast. The teacher of the *da'wa* lessons and another student were puzzled by the fact that I was taking notes rather than eating. I was too embarrassed to share with them the fact that I had forgotten to fast. I apologised and decided to immerse myself in the social context and have some food. After the meal, I wrote down my notes from memory while the girls were preparing to perform *maghrib* (sunset) prayer.

Sometimes even the presence of pen and paper were invasive to the ethos of a given environment. At the dinner hosted in honour of Dr Fāṭima, I found myself in a

space in which many moral tales were being told. My academic self was tempted to grab my notepad and pen and to start taking notes. I was not hiding the fact that I was a researcher, but in addition to the invasive nature of the pen and paper in this intimate social context, it did not seem appropriate for me to explain the demands of my research to the hosts, who had unconditionally welcomed me into their home, nor to the guests. I also did not want to risk not being invited to such events in the future when there were many potential participants and much knowledge to acquire. In respect to the nature of the event and to the guests' reluctance to feel that they were being observed, I opted to record my account of the event later, from memory. In fact, to reconcile the expectations and needs of the people occupying the space with my desire to tell these women's stories, I often relied on taking notes on my mobile telephone. It was impossible as well as inappropriate and antisocial to be constantly typing into a telephone, so at certain moments I had to pause and engage in conversation. I also took advantage of the opportunity to jot down keywords during trips to the bathroom, and these hasty notes were later expanded into proper field notes.

Audio recordings were later transcribed along with the written notes taken during observations. The length and depth of the notes varied depending on the type of recording permitted by the social conditions. Verbatim accounts were transcribed in my notes in the language in which they were spoken, which was predominantly Arabic, with occasional passages in English.

3.5.2 Observations and (non)verbal acts

The observations in my fieldwork served four main purposes: (1) understanding the moral systems that govern the *dā'iyāt* and their audience; (2)

contextualising authority and locating the *dā'iyāt* and their audience in a representative context; (3) observing the verbal and non-verbal communicative action of the *dā'iyāt* and their audiences; and (4) observing the interplay between pedagogical style and religious authority. Observation was also the first step of the data collection process, and it took place prior to the interviews for several reasons. First, this sequence allowed me to become involved in the *da'wa* activities and provided opportunities to reflect on the new experiences that I encountered, thereby reducing any personal biases that had developed during my encounters with the *dā'iyāt* in high school and college. This sequence was, moreover, grounded in my decision to participate in the lives and to 'become embedded in the intersubjective encounters and engagements' (Rose, 2007:99) of the participants, as well as to follow an 'approach that gives priority to the individual experiences of others and in which I try to use my own experience as a basis for better understanding theirs' (Meintel, 2007:136). This experiential embedding, in turn, allowed me to generate new questions to ask the *dā'iyāt* and other participants, as well as to locate additional interview candidates.

One of the main purposes of my observations was to locate the *dā'iyāt* in their representative context. The rhetoric of the interviews and lessons' could not have been fully understood without realising that they are 'linguistic, as well as social and psychological, event[s]...that can be better understood by taking into account the characteristics and styles of the group being studied' (Gluck and Patai, 1991:9). This can best be achieved through exhaustive field observations. Moreover, attempting to reach a state of empathy and understanding requires an expansion in focus from a one dimensional process of knowledge acquisition through lessons and interviews into a

multifaceted ‘interactive process’ that captures both verbal and non-verbal aspects of field knowledge and the meanings behind them (Anderson and Jack, 1991:23).

Beginning my fieldwork with participant and context observation allowed me to negotiate an ‘insider’ status by re-familiarising myself with a practice from which I had been absent for a very long time. Banking on the familiarity principle, which suggests that the familiar is more acceptable in social interactions, this process also allowed me to render myself familiar to the attendees of the lessons in the hope of gaining their acceptance and willingness to be interviewed. My attempts to come closer to a state of *epoché* were also beneficial in that exposure to the context and practice of *da’wa* and its followers provided me with both greater familiarity with my participants and greater acceptance of their life choices.

As a member of the community that I was observing, I had been ‘born into that role’ (Saville-Troike, 1989:119). Therefore, my process of observation was one in which I immersed myself in the field as a *participant-observer*, allowing myself to become part of the ‘natural setting’ and to ‘begin to identify the rules that govern relationships in the setting and discern patterns in members’ behaviour’ (Fielding, 2001:148-9). Indeed, attending the lessons as a participant observer provided me with an opportunity to identify with the audience and thus allowed me to better understand the authority of the *dā’iyāt*. Participating in the interaction between *dā’iya* and audience, and not defining my role solely as that of an observer, facilitated my acceptance and made my presence seem less judgmental. In addition, it would have been awkward for me to define my presence as that of an academic observer within my own society (Saville-Troike, 1989:108). Thus, the practice of observation operated on two levels: internally, as I attempted to embody the context specific practices and ethos, and externally, in the act of taking notes on the lessons and in the

dynamics of the communication between the *dā'iyā* and her audience. Internal observations conducted as a participant observer were embodied in such acts as wearing the acceptable version of the hijab and greeting 'according to the sunna' (see above), with the anticipation of developing an empathic understanding of the choices taken by the audience.

Observations and immersion as participant observer allowed the researcher to internalise the moral systems of the group under study and to empathise with the meanings attached to them. This experience, in turn, has guided the process of approaching verbal communication with both the *dā'iyāt* and their audience while greatly reducing the hierarchical discrepancies in power relation between researcher and audience. Moreover, the internalisation of the moral systems through prolonged observation has served as a normalisation apparatus through which I felt at times that my mind set had become reciprocal with that of the audience (see Csordas, 2007). Mirroring Csordas, I felt that 'my upsurge of empathy and intuition was clothed in the immediacy of appropriate cultural form because I was immersed in the charismatic *habitus*' (ibid.:109). Thus, for example, I experienced a heightened sense of awareness regarding my own religious practices, and I began to pay more attention to my prayers and became more engaged in reading the Quran.

In other words, a 'transmission of sensibilities occurred in my religious consciousness, and by sensibilities I am not referring only to empathy and intuition, but to language and expression as they are evoked in an intersubjective setting of bodily being in proximity to others who are simultaneously open to inspiration' (ibid.). The feeling of being dominated and stirred by the prosodic features of my participants' speech and the feelings of guilt that I experienced about my own religiosity were responses to their authoritative personae and discourse. Csordas

claims that such feelings or performances ‘spontaneously manifest in a culturally appropriate form’ (ibid.:112) and thus create empathy with the observed. The internalisation of the moral systems served as grounds for establishing a communicative repertoire with my participants.

What I earlier termed ‘external observation’ was the rigorous process of taking notes on all things observed. Data observation and making observation notes was a continuous process throughout the process of fieldwork even outside the context of the lesson. Consistent with the approach taken in many ethnographic endeavours, I attempted to record ‘everything’ in order to be able to present the *dā‘iyāt* in their representative context. Observation notes thus included but were not limited to the following: (1) how the *dā‘iyāt* conducted themselves before, during, and after the lesson and interviews; (2) speech style, behaviour attire, how the audience behaved around a *dā‘iya*; and (3) how they interacted around each other. The observation process was not, with respect to such contextual factors, a systematic one. Whenever possible, I attempted to record things as they happened and without allowing the act of recording to hinder my socialisation process.

3.5.3 Interviews and their nature

In this section I describe, through specific incidents, how I came to conduct interviews with the *dā‘iyāt* and their audience. Each interview session had distinct features, as there was no standardised way in which to approach the participants.

The interviews were informal and semi-structured in nature, reflecting the intention that they should flow in the form of conversations (an approach common in ethnographic studies; see Fetterman, 1998:39-40). As my fieldwork progressed, I realised that meeting my participants, particularly the audience members, with pen

and paper in hand and exposing the questions often discouraged their honest participation. I adopted several approaches to try to help them overcome their fear, such as hiding the questions on the back of my notepad or memorising some while allowing others to emerge as the conversations flowed.

Although most of my interviews were conducted individually, some were easier to conduct in groups, as many audience members found this approach less invasive and less threatening than one-on-one interviews. Additionally, this approach encouraged audience members, particularly the young girls at *Himmatī Da‘watī*, to open up, generate new discussions, and share ideas with each other while allowing me to collect more data.

I prepared tentative questions not to limit the scope of inquiry but mainly to establish initial rapport with the audience and encourage further discussion. The general and open-ended nature of the questions allowed the participants to assist in structuring and informing the interview process (see Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:117). It allowed them room to ‘weave in’ their personal stories in the interview process (ibid.). In addition to asking biographical questions, some of these questions were as follows:

1. *What did you think about today’s lesson?*
2. *What are your reasons for attending these lessons?*
3. *What particularly interests you in them?*
4. *What is your opinion about the relationship between what was said in the lesson in your own life?*
5. *Is the dā‘iya a factor in your reasons for attending the lessons? If so, how and why?*
6. *Who are the dā‘iyāt whose lessons you attend?*
7. *Do you prefer certain ones over others? If so, why?*

I realise that some of these questions limited what the audience could share with me about the manner in which the *dā‘iya*’s authority was perceived and legitimatised. Indeed, rather than telling me how they felt, they sometimes told me what they

thought I wanted to hear. Moreover, sometimes my questions were treated with apprehension and perceived as unethical in that I was scrutinising the *dā'iyā* and the content of her lesson. To overcome these obstacles, I had to abandon certain lines of question and allow new ones to emerge in the process of the conversation, depending on how much information the participants were willing to share. I dealt with each case individually, attempting to reassure the participants that one of my goals was to assess how *dā'iyāt* differ from each other in their authority rather than to challenge any individual's authority. One technique that I used was to begin the conversation with questions about the lesson, then to gradually allow the conversation to shift toward discussions about the *dā'iyā's* pedagogy and contents of her lesson.

The interviews varied in length, depending on how receptive each participant was. Most of the interviews with audience members were conducted in the performative and sacred space of *da'wa*, in which extended conversations would have disturbed the participants' personal and religious space. Whenever possible, I obtained telephone numbers of audience members and conducted lengthy telephonic interviews with them at a more convenient time. Interviews with the *dā'iyāt* were scheduled in advance and usually occurred in the centres that they run.

I was welcomed into the home only of Dr Fāṭima, and that came partly through the help of her daughter, Ālā'. During a series of conversational interviews, I had the privilege of sharing a few meals with Dr Fāṭima and with her other daughter, Dāniya. However, there were times when the mere act of taking a pen in my hand imbalanced the horizontal reciprocity that we had previously shared. I was torn between my eagerness to record my participants' articulated knowledge and to simply experience the moment. Although I was eager to put down my fork and take up the

pen, I decided to embrace ‘indirect observations where I didn’t write anything...and use [them to help me] understand the totality of the experience’ (Okely, 1996:23).

During one interview session in Dr Fāṭima’s living room, as I was heavily engaged in writing, Dr Fāṭima said, ‘*Yā bintī* [my daughter], stop writing. This is not important. Try to understand what I’m *telling* you *now* and then I will dictate all this information later.’ She then suggested that I bring a tape recorder, which I already had in my bag but was hesitant to use in order not to jeopardise my access to her home. Her attitude in this regard was contrary to that of the other *dā‘iyāt* whom I interviewed, all of whom refused to be recorded.

My efforts to approach the *dā‘iyāt’s* audience were often influenced by the type of power relationship that existed between them and the *dā‘iya*, and at times I relied on the authority of the *dā‘iya* to help me gain access to participants. For example, during one of my earliest attempts to conduct interviews at the summer lessons of *Ustādha Anāhīd*, when I was still a stranger in a space in which many of the women were familiar with each other, I requested the help of *Ustādha Anāhīd* to recruit participants to be interviewed. I was uncertain how she would react to my invasion of her space or to my scrutiny of her authority. However, *Ustādha Anāhīd* was very responsive and sympathetic to my request.

Obtaining my first interview, in addition to getting the blessing of *Ustādha Anāhīd*, triggered a snowball effect in which the participants whom I had interviewed referred me to other potential participants. In addition to granting me legitimacy in the eyes of the audience, the presence of this referral network also gave me the courage to talk to other members of the audience and to encourage them to participate. From the students’ perspective, this snowball effect was triggered by their desire to gain more blessings from God and as a response to *Ustādha Anāhīd’s* request. Given that I was

conducting research on the *dā'iyāt*, some rationalised my research as a contribution to the benefit and betterment of *da'wa* practice among women. To some members of these audiences, my work was an extension of that of the *dā'iyā*, and their participation in interviews was an extension of their religious commitment.

When approaching the *dā'iyāt* and their audience, I shared with them one of the most important goals of this research, which was to 'intervene in the perception' (Abu-Lughod, 2008) of Saudi women through their participation in religious activities. To some extent, however, this was what Ranson has called 'shallow cover' (2005:109), since I chose not to reveal all of my goals. Indeed, I rarely felt comfortable making explicit the fact that I was putting the authority of these idolised religious figures under scrutiny. Moreover, many of my interviews, particularly with audience members, were not long enough to allow me time to elaborate on my research. Nonetheless, even though many were initially treated with suspicion, my attempts to elicit interviews were rarely rejected.

3.5.4 Published literature and material culture

In the realm of religious practice, Saudi Muslims consider women's voices to be *'awra*, i.e., a part of the body that should not be exposed to the opposite sex. Therefore, the *dā'iyāt* exercise their authority largely through writings. The dissemination of these texts provides the *dā'iyāt* with a means of reaching a wider segment of society, particularly men. Their written work is a powerful tool to negotiate their authority within a male-dominated realm while still remaining within the religiously and socially proscribed boundaries of visibility (Arebi, 1994). For this reason, I examined much of the material published by the *dā'iyāt*, which exists in many forms, including books on religious matters, educational curricula, and

pamphlets and articles. Most of the latter I obtained through the Internet. However, some of the books were given to me by the *dā'iyāt* themselves; others were distributed by the *Da'wa* Centre, and others I bought from local bookshops. I also obtained many of the books and materials that formed the basis of the lessons, which were written primarily by prominent male religious figures.

Whenever appropriate and possible, I also collected relevant material objects, which ranged from exchanged gifts such as copies of the Quran, flowers, key chains with prayer pendants, prayer beads, magazines, and *miswāk* (a short twig used as a natural toothbrush in the manner ascribed to the Prophet).

3.6 Ethical Issues

When conducting research with human participants, ethical considerations are imperative. In the context of my research, my ethical stance was determined both by my relationship with my participants and by my awareness of their needs and concerns, as well as by my religious trajectory as a practicing Muslim. In the former regard, the following questions became relevant: (1) How will this knowledge be presented to a predominantly western audience, and what will they make of it? (2) How will I translate the complex and dynamic lives of these women and our interactions into a meaningful text? (3) What information should I include, and what should I omit? Although, to the best of my knowledge, I adopted a humanistic approach in writing about the lives of these women, as a researcher, I cannot forget that power relations are at stake whenever one group claims to represent another (see Narayan, 1993). In light of the disparities in these power relations, I cannot assume to speak on behalf of the women observed and interviewed for this study.

In addition, as noted, there were limitations on my use of recording technologies and on my ability to secure certain information or responses that might have helped to shed light on the construction of authority among the *dā'iyāt*. In an oratory culture where authority is capitalised through discursive traditions (Said, 2003), an ethical contract is elicited in reference to the culture's socio-religious traditions. 'Listening to [the] moral language' (Anderson and Jack, 1991:19) of the *dā'iyāt* and their audience entails an awareness not only of spoken statements – such as 'Are you going to include my name in this?' 'Where are you going to present this information?' 'You only want my *opinion*, correct?' – but also of unspoken statements that are communicated through such acts as not returning calls or avoiding eye contact. The need to omit any data that might be considered harmful to my participants or to the *dā'iyāt*'s status as authority figures (Saville-Troike, 1989:112) is implicit in this social contract. The need to conceal certain data not only stems from respect for my participants' choices regarding which facets of their lives they wish to reveal, it also acknowledges the invasiveness of my presence as an observer in their moral space. Despite my best efforts, however, I still exercised a degree of power in selecting what information I believed my participants desired to be included or omitted when they did not explicitly address this issue (Snyder, 2005).

The observer paradox, as defined by Saville-Troike, is 'the effect of the observer's presence on other participants [in that] the observer cannot observe what would have happened if he or she had not been present' (1989:113). Indeed, there is an implicit authoritative presence attached to the persona of the judgmental observer that shapes behaviour and discourse. I do not wish to cast doubt on my participants' sincerity, but I believe that their requests to see me and to maintain contact with me during and after completion of my research were triggered, at least in part, by their

need for reassurance concerning my intentions in conducting a judgmental academic inquiry. Moreover, I am also aware that, as Marshall and Rossman have argued, ‘When people adjust their priorities and routines to help the researcher, or even just tolerate the researcher’s presence, they are giving of themselves. The researcher is indebted and should be sensitive to this’ (2006:81).

Another ethical dilemma arose from my status as an ‘insider’ examining religious practices in a society in which religion is a part of everyday life. As such, fieldwork represented more to me than just field notes, observations, and interviews. Similar to Okely, I ‘could not compartmentalise the fieldwork/personal life divide’ (2008:63) because I was also participating in the observance of my religion in these spaces of *da’wa*.

Finally, my attendance at the lessons served as a religious awakening for me. Like Csordas, ‘I respected the authenticity of inspiration, whether the source was actually the human imagination or misrepresented as divine intervention in human consciousness’ (2007:109). Indeed, I cannot ignore my heightened sense of adherence to principles of Islamic practice that was inspired by my return to Saudi Arabia and by my presence in the performative religious field. As a result, I found myself constantly navigating between worldly/academic concerns and a heavenly/religious consciousness. The challenges of reconciling my academic and religious selves while observing my participants’ religiosity were at their greatest when I accompanied Dr Fāṭima to perform hajj, a journey that was motivated in my case mainly by my research. Understanding the spiritual essence of Islamic pilgrimage entails total devotion of the mind, body, and heart in an attempt to gain proximity to God and to seek forgiveness for one’s sins. Throughout the five days of hajj, my consciousness was in constant conflict between the act of worship and the process of note taking. I

constantly questioned both my sincerity in this spiritual performance and my academic integrity. Could I consciously separate myself from my performance of religious practices in favour of methodological rigor? And, if I did so, would I be able to comprehend the meanings attached to my actions?

I have not yet resolved this internal conflict, either in my fieldwork or in the process of writing this dissertation. However, upon leaving the field and reviewing my notes, I was overwhelmed by the enriching quality of this experience, in which my self-awareness proved to be essential in achieving a much-needed empathy toward those who had welcomed me into their world.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explicate various moments in the analysis of the data related to each stage and phase of the research. The purpose of the data analysis was to extract the themes discussed in the chapters that follow and to facilitate a discussion of what these themes represent or suggest in terms of the study's research question (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:207). In the research process, the initial analytical techniques discussed in section 4.3.1 were used to make sense of the material in the form of ideas, comments, and observation notes; this process was not limited in scope by the research question, as was the more rigorous formal analysis that occurred after my return to the UK.

The goal of the analysis was to allow meanings to emerge from the intellectual discourse and communicative action in the field and not to force meaning onto these phenomena. In other words, the method used here was induction based on unique context (see Saville-Troike, 1982), not deduction. Similarly, the themes that emerged from the study are discussed in subsequent chapters in light of previously conducted research, but the analysis was not guided by earlier findings. Moreover, data analysis was carried out manually to ensure that the data examined were context specific (see further section 4.3.2). The following general account of what was actually a more involved analytical procedure demonstrates how the method used drew upon those addressed in Saville-Troike (1982), Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), Miles and Huberman (1994), Creswell (2007), Gibson and Brown (2009), and Richards (2009).

4.2 Thematic Analysis

The goal of the research was to obtain a holistic understanding of the construction of authority among the *dā'iyāt* as well as of some of the distinctive factors that contribute to the formation of each *dā'iyā's* authority. Thematic analysis helped to describe and interpret how the *dā'iyāt* construct their authority in the context under study. Thematic analysis is data-driven and looks at 'commonalities, relationships and differences across a data set' (Gibson and Brown, 2009:127); the techniques discussed below were enlisted to assist in this purpose. In this respect, thematic analysis facilitated cross-case as well as within-case analysis of the data (ibid.). In other words, each *dā'iyā's* data (her interviews, her writings, my observations, and audience member interviews) were treated as a case, and thematic analysis allowed me to address the emerging themes within and across these cases.

Given the relatively unstructured nature of data collection, as well as the uniqueness of this academic inquiry in the context of Saudi Arabia – a society marked by cultural sensitivities, thematic analysis provided broad orientation rather than strict rules for data analysis (Richards, 2009). Because thematic analysis is not strictly systematic and is primarily inductive, it allows room for the researcher to utilise her/his intuition and acquired social knowledge in order to provide a culturally-sensitive aggregation of the themes that emerged in the research. Through the thematising process of this data-driven method, meanings emerge, change, and evolve. Due to the dearth of literature on Saudi female *dā'iyāt*, thematic analysis offered the flexibility that this research needed in order to allow themes and concepts to emerge from the collected material. The scarcity of literature in the context under study prompted the general nature of the research question, and this, in turn, led to the decision for this research to be primarily driven by data in terms of the dominant and

unique themes. In this respect, this research is interpretive and descriptive in order to allow a deeper understanding of this newly addressed phenomenon.

4.3 Stages of Data Analysis

4.3.1 Data management

The purpose of the data management phase was to prepare for the work of data analysis itself. This phase occurred in the early stages of fieldwork and consisted of data transcription and organisation.

4.3.1.1 Data transcription and description

In this phase, I followed a pattern similar to what Richards describes as ‘descriptive coding’ (2009:99). During this phase, data collected from fieldwork are transcribed as well as described. The data collected were primarily in audio or written format. Audio data in Arabic were transcribed verbatim. Interviews were transcribed verbatim in English and/or Arabic, as uttered by the participant. I also elaborated on my field notes describing the setting and the participant’s behaviour, tone, and interactions and appended these elaborations to the transcribed document. I took the liberty of transcribing the audio recorded lessons and wrote down comments to relate these later to the sequence of the communication. One reason for this was to ensure that I detailed the audience members’ participation and interactions, which could not be captured by the recorder.

4.3.1.2 Data organisation

The data organisation process was intended to categorise all collected material from the field, including audio recordings, transcribed lessons, recorded and

transcribed interviews, presentations, and the *dā'iyāt's* literary contributions (books, pamphlets, and articles), as well as other publications distributed at lesson venues and my notes. I created a file for each *dā'iya*, as my intention (and primary organising principle) was to identify the mechanisms that each uses to construct authority. However, when audience members' made comments regarding *dā'iyat* other than the one whose lecture they were attending, I transcribed these comments into the files for both *dā'iya* to capture both the substance and the context of the comment. For some of the *dā'iyāt*, I created a separate file for her publications and for other items collected or gifted during the field research. I made a list of collected items and wrote down the information pertaining to when, where, why, and how each was given.

4.3.2 Data orientation

This stage involved familiarising myself with the data collected; it therefore began during fieldwork, as often I re-read, referred back, and/or reflected on the collected data in order to guide and inform each new step. For example, the interviews conducted with the *dā'iyāt* usually occurred only after I felt I had a reasonable grasp of each one's pedagogical style. Referring back to the transcribed lessons, I allowed this knowledge to inform the interview process. After I returned to the UK, however, I re-examined the material and further developed my understanding of the data. In this process, I followed multiple reading strategies in order to allow the formation of new ideas/themes and to maximise the possibilities for extracting commonalities and differences across cases. Re-reading the material was also accompanied by revisiting my notes and comments and making additional notes and extracting key words together with common and unique themes.

First, I read my data from each case individually (*dā'iya* by *dā'iya*) and began adding comments and notes to each set of collected material. I re-familiarised myself with each *dā'iya* by reading all the collected data chronologically to try to reconstruct her thought process and to provide a wider and deeper perspective on the context. In addition, however, I sought to develop further insight into the material by cross-reading the *dā'iyāt's* lessons, observations, and publications, and by doing the same with the audience member interviews. In the latter case, as noted, some of the audience members for one *dā'iya* commented on another *dā'iya* during their interviews, and these cross-references often provided useful paths for reading. It should be noted, however, that reading the material was on the whole not a rigidly systematic process but a fluid one in which I constantly allowed myself to oscillate between different cases and various types of materials whenever it seemed necessary or useful. The chronological and cross-reading techniques, in other words, were merely general guidelines to support the formation of new ideas.

4.3.3 Finding patterns and describing phenomena

This stage involved locating themes and patterns in the data. Richards refers to this phase as 'topic coding', in which the main purpose is to review the material in order to 'develop analytical categories' (2009:101). This was the phase in which I thematised my research material (including my observation notes) into meaningful categories and provided 'thick descriptions' of emerging constructs (Creswell, 2007:194).

Answering my research question did not guide this initial phase of the analytical process. Instead, I followed Creswell in seeking first to answer the question 'What is going on here?' Sensitising themes was performed manually because, as

Miles and Huberman state, the ‘analyst is more open-minded and more context sensitive’ (1994:58). As these authors also predict, locating patterns and identifying themes was a continuous process that went on throughout analysis and even during the writing phase. Overall, however, the process of thematising the data fell naturally into two broad phases: conceptual and detailed. In each phase, I utilised different techniques to assist me in locating patterns and categories in my participants’ speeches, behaviour and literature from my data which eventually created the themes and sub-themes discussed in the chapters that follow.

4.3.3.1 Conceptual thematising

The purpose of this phase was to identify patterns in the data and to provide an initial ‘conceptual structure’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994:63) for subsequent analysis. I used two qualitative inductive techniques or identifiers: *word repetition* and *words and phrases in context*. I began by reading all of the data and identifying key words and categories. Rather than being guided by theories or preconceived categories, I allowed the data to guide the inductive process (ibid.:65). In this phase, I included all patterns that appeared to me to be relevant to the understanding of how the *dā‘iyāt’s* authority is constructed or maintained in a particular context, regardless of whether there was enough evidence in my data to support this theme. Moreover, I also extracted patterns that did not seem to address my research question directly.

As in my re-reading, I began by extracting patterns for each *dā‘iya* separately. I then moved on to dealing with the material as a whole, in which regard I found many themes reoccurring across cases and discovered that the inductive techniques I used in this phase and the next were more insightful when utilised across cases.

The first of the identified techniques, looking for *word repetition*, was implemented by scanning and rereading all of the material and marking repeated words. For example, I noticed that the *dā'iyāt* and the audience members often referenced the male ulama, so I created a general theme category that included all such references. Similarly, the word 'fatwa' and its derivatives were heavily represented, so I identified concepts related to the notion of fatwa and included them as sub-themes under this category.¹ For example, I located words associated with the act of giving fatwa such as '*ḥalāl*' (religiously permissible) and '*ḥarām*' (religiously forbidden), and '*ḥukum*' (religious ruling). I included all instances in which the *dā'iyāt* either independently issued fatwas or whether they supported their fatwa by referencing male ulama. Similarly, I traced references for fatwas and its associated terms and their importance among audience members regardless of whether they discussed it with reference to the male ulama or to the *dā'iyāt* themselves.

The second technique, known as *words and phrases in context*, involved identifying words and phrases with particular social significance in the context under study and given the subject of inquiry. Thus, in light of the wider socio-religious discourse on women in Saudi Arabia and the framing of the dissertation within the study of Saudi women's social and religious experience, terms like 'women's rights', '*ḥuqūq*' (rights), '*mukarrama*' (honoured), 'feminism', and 'feminist' were highlighted. My own socialisation as a Saudi woman and my understanding of the social, political, and religious relevance of such terms informed my decisions as to which of these phrases should be traced as patterns relevant to the overall theme of 'women's rights' (see Chapter 6).

¹ E.g., '*fatawā*' (plural), '*iftā*' (formal act of giving fatwa), '*yaftī*' (give fatwa masculine second person), '*taftī*' for feminine), '*aftī*' (give fatwa first person), 'mufti' (jurisconsult), and '*istaftī*' (to consult).

Within the *words and phrases in context* framework, I also scrutinised the data for notable ‘local’ terms and attempted to understand their local significance. For example, under the identified general theme that I termed ‘gender perceptions’, I included patterns or experiences in which disparities in ideas about men and women appeared to be expressed. For example, one sub-theme was titled ‘ideology of women’s lack’. This sub-theme encompassed phrases that indicted patterns of thinking and behaviour associated with the notion that women are characterised by a ‘lack’ or shortcoming (*naqiṣāt*) in physical, spiritual, and/or mental terms (see Chapter 5). Although this ideology is not unique to Saudi Arabia, I attempted to frame and treat the theme in the context of Saudi attitudes and social institutions, since these are the most relevant to how this ideology impacts the *dā‘iyāt*’s authority.

The themes and sub-themes that emerged at this stage were conceptual categories that allowed scope for change and expansion. Having an initial conceptual understanding of the data allowed me to include additional perspectives on religious authority as I continued the analysis, as well as to encompass other relevant constructs, as in the preceding example.

In this early phase of inductive analysis, I created note cards representing key data points (discourse quotes or observational notes) so that I could cross-reference these points in terms of the pattern or patterns to which they belonged. On each card, I included the relevant quote (sometimes excerpted) or point of observation, as well as its communicator or context and source in the collected data. Arranging and rearranging these cards into piles that represented various patterns and duplicating cards that belonged to more than one pattern was the initial step in addressing relationships between the various emerging themes. This technique was also applied in the thematising phase, which is described in the following sub-section.

4.3.3.2 Descriptive thematising

After initially extracting themes as described above, I wanted to extract any additional patterns and to narrow the definitions of the identified themes and sub-themes. I was also eager to further examine the relationships among these themes. Moreover, since many of the themes had emerged in the conceptual phase as a result of looking at similar patterns, I proceeded at this stage to look also at differences across patterns and to address relationships of contrast among them. Thus, I added two new techniques to assist the process of extracting patterns and themes: compare and contrast (Glaser and Strauss, 1999) and locating patterns of relationships in light of existing descriptive theoretical frames of reference—that is, comparing the patterns and relationships identified to the literature reviewed for the study.

Comparing and contrasting patterns allowed for a more thorough and rigorous analysis of the collected discourse and observations. For example, I created a theme titled ‘piety’ and aggregated all relevant data corresponding to its various perceptions. In chapters 5 and 6, I addressed orthodox ulama’s perceptions of piety with regards to hijab and women travelling without a male guardian. After conducting a rigorous and thorough comparison of the data, these perceptions appeared to be different from those expressed by Dr Fāṭima. The data showed that Dr Fāṭima expands the parameters of piety beyond those prescribed by the ulama. This warranted a closer investigation of the various perceptions of piety and how they correspond to the making of her authority.

The second step in this phase was to locate patterns of relationships that could be understood in light of existing descriptive and theoretical frames of reference. The literature examined for this dissertation provided a wealth of insight into perspectives on authority. As discussed in Chapter 2, various authors have elucidated how women

in subordinate groups exercise charisma in order to gain power. In particular, Weberian notions of authority, which encompass charismatic authority, can be used to shed light on the construction of female religious authority within the male dominated religious context of Saudi Arabia (see Chapter 5).

4.3.4 Data interpretation

The purpose of this stage was to try to make sense of the various themes that emerged as part of the thematising process. Thus, I sought at this stage to ‘personalise the interpretation’ in order to answer the research question (Creswell, 2007:162). This was achieved by exploring ways in which to link the various themes with the research question. Many of the patterns within the themes or sub-themes overlapped with other themes. The notecards became useful here because they allowed me to physically model the links among the themes as well as the links between various themes and the research question simply by shuffling and reshuffling the cards.

Informed by the previous emergent themes and in light of the research question, which inquires into the construction of female religious authority in a predominantly male-informed religious domain, I decided to allow the interpretation process to be guided by two prominent, overarching themes that linked the context of an hierarchal relationship among authorities and the two general approaches to working within – or against – this hierarchy: ‘establishing legitimacy through male ulama’ and ‘contesting male ulama’. Under these two themes, I included all themes for which I was able to explicitly detect or infer conformity with or contestation of the decrees of male ulama. Interpreting the data according to the overarching themes of conformity to and contestation of the rulings of the male ulama was guided primarily by the implicit nature of the research question, which attempts to understand female

religious authority in a context in which the male ulama have the prerogative of the production of religious knowledge and the determination of religious orthodoxy. While the data revealed a prevalence of female conformity to the religious interpretations and decrees of the male ulama, the incidences of female contestation of such authority, though less frequent, had significant ramifications.

This finding was consistent with those of my pilot study, which revealed that reliance on the views of the male ulama was a prevalent technique of pedagogy of persuasion in the lessons of the *dā'iyāt* that I observed. Moreover, the present study was conducted in the knowledge of the present hegemony of the male ulama and of their views in Saudi society, as well as of the governing hierarchal structure that places them at the apex of the social and religious authority in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, it was understood from the outset that the themes that emerged from data analysis would need to be interpreted in light of the presence and influence of this hierarchy.

4.3.5 Data selection for presentation

The selection of study data to be presented in the dissertation was guided by several criteria. In selecting the *dā'iyāt* to discuss in detail, the most important factors were her social prominence and the observed and recorded devotion of her followers, as well as their affirmation of her communicated knowledge. In other words, the *dā'iyāt* examined in the following chapters are those whose authority was clearly demonstrated not by reputation but in the numbers and responses of their followers.

Secondly, I intended that the presented data should be representative of the events and people observed. In other words, I wanted to ensure that the data were sufficiently broad to support reasonable inferences about the phenomena under study,

and I avoided drawing inferences about *dā'iyāt* to whom I felt my exposure was insufficient to allow a thorough understanding of their authority construction (see Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Instead, I focused on providing thick descriptions of the *dā'iyāt* to whom I did have the opportunity to be exposed at length—which depended on factors such as the extent of their activities during the fieldwork, my connections to them, and the rapport that I was able to develop with them and/or with their followers. The latter depended to a large extent on the degree to which they saw my role as a researcher as invasive. However, there was also a natural selectivity toward more popular *dā'iya*, since those who were more popular gave more lessons during my seven months field research period and had larger pools of audience members to serve as potential interview participants. Moreover, because my fieldwork covered the month of Ramadan as well as the time of hajj, many of the *dā'iyāt* in Jeddah informed me that they postponed their lessons and dedicated this time to personal religious observance.

With respect to such limitations on available data, it should be noted that it was not the intention of this research to establish a general principle regarding how the *dā'iyāt* in Jeddah construct their authority, but to identify some of the mechanisms by which this takes place within the wider realm of female *da'wa* practice. Hence, I worked most with the data that were richest—which meant, in practice, a focus primarily on certain *dā'iyāt* who embraced Ramadan and hajj as contexts within which to conduct lessons in order to spread and enhance religious knowledge and practise. For these and for all participants, I treated their communicative actions as ‘social documents’ and their involvement in religious discourse and activities as ‘socially situated’ rather than as socially representative (see Arebi, 1994:5).

Consistent with the conceptual framework described in Chapter 3, I have omitted information and concealed individual identities wherever requested by my participants. I also exercised judgement in selecting information that would not have negative repercussions for my participants. In ‘speech communities’ such as Saudi Arabia, participants often worry about the ‘after effects’ of their speech (Saville-Troike, 1989:128). Thus, I strove to select information that can be considered representative of my participants while adhering to the principles of ethical scholarly writing in respecting the manner in which participants wanted to be represented.

My identity as a researcher had implications with respect to how the *dā‘iyāt* conducted themselves in my presence. Indeed, the observer paradox discussed in Chapter 3 must be assumed to have impacted all data; however, I excluded data only from contexts in which it appeared that my presence was perceived as hostile. For example, in a series of lessons by the popular *dā‘iya* Dr Fātin H., the speaker frequently drifted from the topic of discussion to address the lawfulness of spying on fellow Muslims. Her comments were directed at me as a result of her observing me transcribing her lessons rather than listening. From such a situation, I considered myself to be unable to extract valid inferences because there was no reciprocal trust between us. Although Hammersley and Atkinson argue that the researcher should still account for information where the observed deliberately alter their actions to cater to or counter the interpretation of the researcher (1995:229), Creswell (2007) highlights the importance of building trust as a significant validation strategy.

Although I collected numerous booklets, pamphlets, and books by and related to the *dā‘iyāt* whose lessons I observed, only one publication ultimately figured prominently in the data selected for detailed discussion – Dr Fātima’s book *al-Ifrāzāt al-Ṭabi‘iyya ‘ind al-Mar’a: Bayna al-Ṭahāra wa al-Najāsa* (The Natural Discharge in

Women: Between Purity and Impurity) (2006a). This work is discussed in Chapter 6 in terms of its role in a debate that exemplifies matters relevant both to Dr Fāṭima's somewhat unique construction of authority and to Saudi women's religious participation.² In the main, however, although literature pertaining to the individual *dā'iyāt* was typically available for sale wherever they performed lessons, audience members rarely bought these books or booklets, apparently preferring to save their money and absorb the information communicated in the lesson. Indeed, in an oratory culture such as that of Saudi Arabia, spoken words are generally held to have a greater impact on behaviour than texts (Bin Sunaytain, 2005:117). This principle was supported by my fieldwork, which suggested that the *dā'iyāt's* authority is heavily anchored in her verbal communication skills, and far less so in her literary efforts or talents.

4.4 Data Translation

4.4.1 Process of translation

Translation of the data occurred only after selection of data for analysis. I avoided translation in the early stages to ensure that I remained as faithful as possible to the participants' own words and intentions. The Arabic language is complex, and its words can have various interpretations. Translation into English had to be sensitive to meaning as well as to the local idioms and styles of representation. I also attempted to translate participants' discourse wherever possible using syntax that represented their original speech in order to maintain an impression of their thought process and logic.

² That is, as a rare exercise in the production of religious knowledge (as opposed to constructing authority through reproduction of religious knowledge) that challenges one or more interpretations promulgated by male ulama.

4.4.2 Translations of canonical text

English versions of Quranic verses were taken from the *Interpretation of the Meaning of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language* (al-Hilali and Khan, 1996), which was chosen because it is one of the most commonly used translations in Saudi Arabia, and because its language and publication are local. Moreover, the interpretations represented in this translation are consistent with orthodox interpretations of the Quran in Saudi Arabia. The translation has received authentication from the Grand Mufti Shaykh Ibn Bāz.

English translations of the Hadith were taken from the *Summarised Sahih al-Bukhari* (Khan, 1996) and from *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari*, volumes 1-9 (Khan, 1997). For Hadiths that are not translated in either of these works, as well as for translation of quotations from classical works religious scholarship, verification and assistance was provided by Ms 'Ā'isha 'Alī, university lecturer and consultant in Islamic Jurisprudential Law at Um al-Qurā University in Mecca.

4.5 Reliability and Validity

As discussed in Chapter 3, this research followed a constructivist paradigm to understand the construction of authority. Moreover, it followed a naturalistic trajectory in the process of data collection. Reliability and validity as addressed here are therefore understood in light of this paradigm and approach, which entailed a purposeful movement from facts to representations and from 'judgment to understanding' (Creswell, 2007:205).

The aim of the study was to situate the subjective knowledge presented in this research in the wider realm of knowledge about the *dā'iyāt* in Jeddah rather than to represent it as a blanketed cultural reality. In other words, it was not the aim of this

research to hypothesise or generalise findings or to provide causal explanations for behavioural patterns. In light of this purpose, the data analysed in this thesis must be understood in terms of their connection to the research question and as limited to the context under study.

Accordingly, reliability is understood as ‘dependability’ (Creswell, 2007:204), and, since the results addressed in the dissertation are unique to the context under study, they are evaluated according to the ‘value of the data’ itself (ibid.). This entails providing thick descriptions of the data (such as describing context, interactions, and behaviour) and avoiding causal explanations. This study thus called for rigorous and detailed data collection processes, as described above. Moreover, increasing the dependability of the research depended upon the participants’ willingness to participate and on ‘developing sensitivities to signs of acceptance, discomfort, resentment, or sarcasm’ as well as insuring the cultural appropriateness of the questions asked (Saville-Troike, 1989:127). This included an on-going process of trial and error developed over prolonged time spent in the field and informed by my socialisation into Saudi society and my upbringing in Jeddah.

Validity, on the other hand, is addressed in light of the ‘credibility’ of the research. The credibility of this research was a ‘process’ (Creswell, 2007:204) that began with highlighting my self-reflection (see Chapter 1) as well as situating my methodology in relation to such notions as ‘accountable ethnography’, which aims to understand how we claim to know what we know as mentioned in Chapter 3. This was achieved by making my assumptions, emotions, and biases explicit at the beginning and repeatedly throughout the research, and by making attempts to overcome them (ibid.:212), as well as through the deliberate decision not to impose

preconceived categories or theories on the objects or products of this research as discussed in Chapter 3.

Providing detailed accounts of how I accessed the field, which was fluid and followed a naturalistic path, highlighted the subjectivity of this research as part of the process of credibility. The knowledge presented in this research is situated in light of my understanding of the topic as a 'sociohistorical interpreter', which takes account of my upbringing in the society as well as of the time spent in the field for the purpose of data collection (ibid.:206). This highlights the temporal meanings attached to this work and renders them constantly 'open to reinterpretation' (ibid.).

Orthodox methods of respondent validation were avoided for various reasons (see Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:228-230). First, these methods are 'not definitive' (Creswell, 2007:205). Also, the complex narratives and themes addressed here cannot be easily conveyed to the participants, particularly in a study that deals with complex meanings and social structures (ibid.:229). Additionally, the data presented in the following chapters are addressed with reference to categories that are key to academic inquiry but that may be 'at odds' with the participants' beliefs and/or value systems (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:229). For example, emulating male ulama in her demeanour and oratory style granted Dr Wafā' prestige and recognition among her followers (see Chapter 5). However, understanding this 'performance' in light of gaining authoritative legitimacy can be considered at odds with feminine attributes prescribed by local interpretations of Islam.

In the present study, I attempted to 'understand' the significance of what has been communicated rather than seek direct validation in texts or in concurrence with official authority (Creswell, 2007:205). This was achieved through the use of semi-structured interviews, in which I attempted to engage in reciprocal dialogue with the

participants as well as to gain their trust through prolonged engagement and socialisation outside the context of the lessons.

Another reason for avoiding orthodox respondent validation was that checking responses would complicate the data interpretation process because it would generate new data rather than validate existing data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). This principle was demonstrated when I attempted to authenticate dates for the recording of various information. The participants either denied sharing such information with me or provided conflicting accounts. Avoiding this process allowed the research to remain true to the essence and sincerity of communicative action that represents a particular subjective reality in a particular context.

Chapter 5

‘*Khallī Bīnak wa Bīn al-Nār Muṭawwa*’:

The Construction and Maintenance of the *Dā‘iyāt*’s

Authority through Association with Male Ulama

This chapter is divided in four parts: (1) introduction, (2) context, (3) discussion of the main research findings and themes, and (4) conclusion. The introduction presents the principal questions that inspired the present research, as well as other peripheral questions. It also elaborates on how the data are presented in this chapter. The second section discusses the wider social and religious context in which the *dā‘iyāt* operate in order to facilitate understanding of the research findings. The third section discusses the main findings and elaborates on how the *dā‘iyāt* construct their authority by capitalising on male ulama as primary *marjī‘iyya dīnīyya*. The concluding section summarise the findings and revisits the themes addressed in an attempt to provide perspective on how *dā‘iyāt* construct their authority in a male dominated religious realm.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter draws on primary data collected during the course of fieldwork in the form of interviews, observations, and transcriptions of religious *muḥadarat* (lectures) and *durūs* (lessons). These data are presented as responses and accounts reflecting the prevalent themes that emerged during interactions and interviews, interspersed with observation accounts and interview excerpts as well as my interpretations of what the data show about the construction of the *dā‘iya*’s authority.

The relationship between female and male religious authority in Jeddah is complex and changing. In the main, it oscillates between the strategies of adherence to male authority as legitimisation of one's own and contestation of the male ulama monopoly over religious knowledge and interpretation. This chapter presents data on the former, more mainstream strategy, whereby the female *dā'iyāt* whom I encountered in Jeddah relate to the male ulama as a source of legitimisation. In Chapter 6, I examine the case of a female *dā'iyā* building her authority by contesting the views of prominent Saudi male ulama. The present chapter presents the most dominant theme of my findings in order to stress the importance of the male ulama and other figures of religious authority as the most salient factor in the maintenance and formation of religious authority. It also discusses how the *dā'iyāt* are influenced by the ulama without allowing the latter to overshadow the *dā'iyāt's* independent skills and powers. To this end, the data have been structured and thematised in a manner that is consistent with the practice known as 'data conclusion drawing' (Miles and Huberman, 1994:11). Within each theme, I put female authority in different categories, as well as discussing the extent to which this authority operates independently of the male ulama.

I tried to enter the field setting without being guided by theoretically derived questions. The general question that regulated my interaction with my research participants was: *How is the authority of the dā'iyāt constructed in the male dominated religious context of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia?* In Saudi Arabia, Weberian conceptions of authority can be helpful in understanding and classifying the informal authority of the female *dā'iyāt* and the formal authority of their male counterparts (see Chapter 2). In addition, the following discussion makes use of Bourdieu's distinction between different types of 'capital' on the basis of which figures of authority enhance

their power and influence (see Chapter 2). In particular, Bourdieu's notions of social and cultural capital will be discussed in relation to the capacity of religious authority figures to create the elevated sense of religiosity that their audiences expect.

The following main questions provided the basis for collecting and interpreting the data:

1. *What conditions and conceptions pertain to the making of female dā'iyāt?*
2. *Is the authority of female dā'iyāt dependent or independent of male ulama?*
3. *How is their dependence or independence understood in the women's sphere?*

In addition, the following peripheral questions were borrowed from Jouili and Amir-Moazimi (2006:618):

1. *How do the dā'iyāt construct their authority through the acquisition and transmission of valued knowledge?*
2. *How is their authority modulated?*
3. *How is it challenged? How is it reformulated? How is it established?*

This dissertation addresses the phenomenon of the *dā'iyāt* and its local authority construction within a system of established male superiority. The views of the *dā'iyāt's* audience are analysed in terms of various themes that help to construct a symbolic framework regarding what is approved and disapproved. These views are then presented through data display and data explanation in order to develop an understanding of the communicative action of the *dā'iyāt* and to describe the relationship between the female *dā'iyāt* and the male ulama. The description seeks to capture a complex phenomenon by making it intelligible through its component parts. To this end, I employ theme-oriented analysis, building my arguments through

contextualised, case-oriented themes that are derived from the stories collected in the primary data and presented from an emic perspective.

The narratives that emerged from the reading and re-reading of the data (see Chapter 4) are analysed in their thematic contexts in order to ascertain 'when' religious authority is established. The question of 'how' this authority is constructed is answered through the data explanation process. To this end, I provide descriptions of the events, their contexts, their participants, and the justifications that the participants offered for their actions. The analysis of this material follows what has been discussed in Miles and Huberman concerning actors 'giving reasons' and 'making causal statements' (1994:144). I also utilise my knowledge of events that occurred outside the context of my fieldwork to add another layer of analysis. I discuss how and when each manifestation of authority (such as fatwa, pedagogical style, and charisma) is dependent on or independent of the male ulama, and I analyse the influence of the ulama on the introduction of women's religious authority in the realm of *da'wa*.

5.2 Context: Perceptions of Gender Roles

This section provides insight into the wider social context in which the *dā'iyāt* exercise their authority in the reproduction of religious knowledge. It attempts to contextualise these women by presenting the key players that shape women's status and attitudes towards women in the religious domain as well the governing social institutions that frame their social status. The interplay of gender with religion, local traditions, and politics are also addressed in the following sections.

5.2.1 The ideology of the woman's lack

In Saudi Arabia, as noted previously, a prevalent ideology asserts that women suffer from some fundamental shortcoming or 'lack' in their nature. The ideology of 'lack' – i.e., the belief that women are inherently inferior to men both mentally and spiritually – which was first proposed in Saudi Arabia by Ibn Bāz and other senior *ulama* in the 1970s – has been a major obstacle to the admission of women to positions within official institutions (Arebi, 1994:18).¹² As a result of this ideology, ideas such as 'Woman as a Nature and a Function' became topics of discussion in masculanist religious rhetoric and publications. Arebi further explains that 'the "woman's nature" is based on weakness, lack (*nuqṣ*), and immobility' (ibid). This perceived 'lack' has even limited the learning sphere of female *dā'iyāt*. For example, women, unlike men, have no access to formal education that prepares them to be considered qualified scholars. When Ibn Bāz was Grand Mufti, the popular *dā'iya* Dr Fāṭima Naṣīf sent him a proposal regarding the preparation of qualified *dā'iyāt*. As she explained,

I prepared a file containing all the material needed in order to produce qualified '*ālimāt* [female scholars], but I changed the name into *dā'iyāt*

¹ The following Hadith, narrated by Abu Said al-Khudri, is the most commonly cited source of the ideology of women's lack: Once Allah's Apostle went out to the Musalla (to offer the prayer) of 'Id-al-Adha or al-Fitr prayer. Then he passed by the women and said, 'O women! Give alms, as I have seen that the majority of the dwellers of Hell-fire were you (women).' They asked, 'Why is it so, O Allah's Messenger?' He replied, 'You curse frequently and are ungrateful to your husbands. I have not seen anyone more deficient in intelligence and religion than you. A cautious sensible man could be led astray by some of you.' The women asked, 'O Allah's Messenger! What is deficient in our intelligence and religion?' He said, 'Is not the witness (evidence) of two women equal to the witness of one man?' They replied in the affirmative. He said, 'This is the deficiency in her intelligence. Isn't it true that a woman can neither pray nor fast during her menses?' The women replied in the affirmative. He said, 'This is the deficiency in her religion.' (Summarised from Saḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī, The Book of Menses, Chapter 6, Hadith 210).

² The ideology of the lack can be traced back to 11th century Ottoman rule where, according to Peirce, the vezir Nizam al-Mulk in his book Book of Government denounced women's political participation because women are 'mentally deficient' and with 'incomplete intelligence' (1993:268).

and sent it to Shaykh Ibn Bāz through Shaykh Dawūd – and I don't know where it is now. I proposed to establish institutes that can embrace women. Let them name it whatever they see fit, as long as they provide the women with proper religious education. I just want to show you that through history no attention has been paid to the Saudi women, neither as a *dā'iyāt* nor as a *'ālimāt*.

Here, Dr Fāṭima seeks the approval and cooperation of the male ulama. Yet she does not wait for or depend on this approval. In her lessons, she often tells her female audience members, on her own authority, 'I declare you *sufarā' li Allah* (ambassadors for Allah).' The majority of *dā'iyāt* in Jeddah, however, do not share make such independent declarations. Almost uniquely (see Chapter 6), Dr Fāṭima challenges the institutions that undermine the role of women and their ability to produce religious knowledge in a context where the task of interpreting religion – both in general and for women – has been allocated to men. In doing so she leverages the women-only-space in which the *dā'iyāt* preach their weekly lessons, which allows them the freedom to redefine religious interpretations that have defined and predetermined their state and therefore provides space for empowerment.

Born in 1944 and considered one of today's most influential *dā'iyāt*, Dr Fāṭima's credentials provide her with the strength to reject the ideology of the lack. Not only does she descend from a well-known family, *Bayt Naṣīf* (The House of Naṣīf), which enjoys precedence in the dissemination and production of religious knowledge in the Ḥijāz region, she has established the credentials which allow her to encourage women's participation in the dissemination of religious knowledge. Dr Fāṭima had access to religious knowledge at a time when education for both men and women was scarce. Her late paternal grandfather, Shaykh Muḥammad Naṣīf, a respected Islamic scholar, owned in his day one of the most extensive libraries in Jeddah, which featured an array of books from all disciplines, particularly in the various Islamic sciences. Dr Fāṭima not only had access to these books, but she was

also present when her grandfather hosted various Muslim scholars in their house. Her personal contributions to women's education in al-Ḥijāz as well as her literary contributions add further legitimacy to her religious authority and, therefore, bolster her rejection of the ideology of the lack. Among her key contributions to women's formal religious education was establishing in the academic year 1974-1975 the field of Islamic Education in the women's section of King 'Abd al-'Azīz University, Jeddah, where she taught for 19 years and subsequently headed the department of Islamic Studies. She set precedence in the initiation of the contemporary *dā'iyāt* movement in the western region and is considered the mother of contemporary Saudi *dā'iyāt*. During her tenure at the university, Dr Fāṭima played an influential role in educating many of the most prominent *dā'iyāt* currently active in Jeddah, including Sanā' 'Ābid, Basma Badawī, and Fatin Ḥalawanī, all of whom obtained degrees in Islamic Studies. Among her significant contributions to women's religious practice was establishing at the university the first women-only mosque, with a capacity of 500, which has also served as a significant pedagogical space for the dissemination of religious knowledge.

In addition, Dr Fāṭima has made significant literary contributions in the form of books and newspaper articles that at many times subtly contest local traditions and aim to shift the social order that shapes women's social status and sphere of influence. Many of her books discuss various issues that concern Muslim women and families from an Islamic perspective, such as *The Natural Discharge Among Women: Between Purity and Impurity* (2006a), *Compatibility in Marriage* (1994), and *The Muslim Family in the Globalisation Era* (2006b), all of which use Islamic discourse to alter society's understanding of women's roles and to empower women. Dr Fāṭima has also been a consistently active advocate of women's rights in Islam through conferences

and symposiums around the world. Her doctoral dissertation on women's rights in Islam was published under the title *Women's Rights and Responsibilities in the Quran and Sunna* (1982-1983) and has been translated into four languages. Throughout her various activities and contributions to the women's sphere, Dr Fāṭima rejects the ideology of lack and advocates equality between men and women in their roles and responsibilities, utilising Islamic discourse (i.e., exegesis of the Quran and Hadith) to assert this rights (see Chapter 6).

By contrast, *Ustādha* Anāhīd, another equally popular *dā'iya* who is some twenty years Dr Fāṭima's junior, supports the ideology of lack and denies that women can exercise any prophetic attributes. As discussed later in this chapter, she also supports the idea that women cannot be equal to men as figures of religious authority.

Ustādha Anāhīd does not enjoy Dr Fāṭima's family precedence and does not hold equivalent credentials in the field of religious knowledge production. However, she plays a vital role as communicator and reproducer of valued religious knowledge. She reproduces the views of the established religious oligarchy, reinforcing their notion of women's subordinate social and religious status. This may be considered a result of her informal religious education, in that she began her pursuit of *da'wa* by learning and memorising Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn's series of cassettes on Islamic ideology (*'aqīda*). Prior to that, *Ustādha* Anāhīd earned a bachelor's degree in Computer Science from King 'Abd al-'Azīz University and a master's degree in Human Resource Management via correspondence from Alexandria University in Egypt.³

³ In the interview, she stressed the word 'correspondence' to assure me that she had opted out of studying in a mixed-sex environment, which could have impacted her legitimacy among her followers.

Ustādha Anāhīd holds summer lectures at Faiṣliyya Women Welfare Society in Jeddah. At the time of my fieldwork, her lecture addressed the different types of polytheism – the greater polytheism (*shirk akbar*) and the lesser polytheism (*shirk aṣghar*) – as part of a series of lectures on *al-'Uṣūl al-Sitta* (The Six Articles of Belief). While *Ustādha* Anāhīd was advising her audience on the various acts that might unconsciously lead one to the lesser polytheism, a member of the audience interrupted and asked her how to interpret dreams without unconsciously falling into the lesser type of polytheism. *Ustādha* Anāhīd replied,

Aḥlām [dreams] and *ru'ā* [visions/dreams with meanings/messages] are a problematic issue [among women] in this country. Shaykh Āl al-Shaykh was asked by a presenter [on television], 'what do you think of what's happening among women [in their concern/obsession with interpreting dreams]?' The Shaykh said, 'It's better for women not to pay attention to their dreams because they are *aḥādīth nahār* [thoughts of the day/thoughts of their consciousness].' This is a piece of advice to you from the heart: turn your heart completely away from *ru'ā*. Visions are signs of prophecy, and it is not possible to have all these women with all these visions.

It is essential to first address the locally perceived religious significance of dreams and their interpretation in Saudi Arabia. Dreams or visions during sleep are perceived to carry significance that is rooted in religious text; particularly among women, there is a preoccupation with interpreting dreams, justifying their worldly significance, and trying to decipher their messages and derive something that is tangible and meaningful. The prophetic Hadith, 'A good dream (that comes true) of a righteous man is one of forty-six parts of *al-nubuwwa* (prophethood)' means, as it states, that if a person has a vision in his sleep that eventually comes true in reality, that person possesses prophetic attributes that are usually righteous and virtuous.⁴

⁴ Narrated Anas bin Malik: Allah's Messenger Peace Be Upon Him said, 'A good dream (that comes true) of a righteous man is one of forty-six parts of *al-Nubuwwa* (Prophethood)' (Sahih al-Bukhari, The Book of Interpreting Dreams, Volume 9, Hadith number 6983).

In answering the audience member, *Ustādha* Anāhīd quoted Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Āl al-Shaykh, who represents the official religious discourse in Saudi Arabia and who descends from the same school of religious thought as Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymīn. Therefore, *Ustādha* Anāhīd represents, in Arebi’s words, ‘the far right of the ideological continuum’ (1994:234). By quoting the shaykh, she implicitly asserts women’s lack in the realm of spirituality.

In Saudi Arabia, there is constant social apprehension about attempts to define the nature of women and their social roles in the religious discourse. The male ulama speculate about women’s status and state on the basis of experiences and encounters with women that do not necessarily reflect the norm. This is due to the limited interaction between male ulama and the women who seek their religious advice, which is usually done by written letter or by posting a question online on an ulama’s website – or by telephoning the shaykh, or contacting the shaykh live on a televised religious programme.

In the above-quoted passage, *Ustādha* Anāhīd shows her adherence to the ideology promulgated by the shaykh, which denies women religious knowledge-producing capabilities. In supporting the shaykh’s statement, *Ustādha* Anāhīd contributes to the masculinist-defined socio-religious discourse that defines the status and state of women as subordinate to men in their religious and spiritual attributes. This ideological belief is in many ways fortified by the *dā‘iyāt* and conveyed by them to the wider spectrum of female followers. In the shaykh’s statement, there is a symbolic segregation based on spiritual grounds of prophethood, whereby women’s dreams are denied the possibility of spiritual significance. His rejection of the idea of women having prophetic attributes is one way of defining women’s identity and sphere of influence and limiting their domain of religious participation.

Placing 'the woman' as a subject of analysis and interpretation, the shaykh 'serve[s] the religious apparatus in the response to civilisational challenge' (Arebi, 1994:269). The purpose of such rhetorical gestures is to augment control and power over women, who constitute half of the society and therefore a palpable potential threat to male hegemony. At present, however, rather than serving as co-producers of social norms and religious knowledge, Saudi women serve as social and religious artefacts: symbols of piety, honour, and religious adherence.

It would be risky, of course, for *Ustādha* Anāhīd to challenge this ideology because one consequence could be to endow women with more power and therefore to challenge men's social control. By contrast, in conforming to the pervasive discourse that symbolises women and that uses the ideology of lack to justify the status quo, *Ustādha* Anāhīd and the other *dā'iyāt* who support the hegemonic discourse acquire for themselves power to exert influence over women, as maintainers of their symbolic of piety. Thus, for *Ustādha* Anāhīd, conformity with the shaykh's rhetoric is a mechanism for asserting her role as a participant in the process of communicating valued knowledge and thus to tap into socio-religious authority within the male-dominated domain. By allowing men to be the main interpreters of religion through the ideology of male dominance, she becomes eligible to borrow the prerogative to deliver valued religious knowledge to women.

5.2.2 Gender and hierarchy in religious authority

Dr Fūz Kurdī (b. 1968/9) is another prominent *dā'iya* who makes a clear distinction between the opinions of male and female religious authorities. Dr Fūz is an associate professor at King 'Abd al-'Azīz University who lectures in Comparative Studies of Contemporary Religions and *'Aqīda*. She currently runs the International

Association for New Muslims in Jeddah, and she lectures at various mosques, Quran schools, and public schools, as well as at Islamic centres such as the women's section of the World Assembly for Muslim Youth and the Quran Learning Society. Many of her recent literary and oratory contributions have advocated against therapeutic and spiritual movements such as Neuro-Linguistic Programming (commonly known as NLP), Transcendental Meditation, Reiki, and she has established a website (<http://alfowz.com>) called *al-Fikr al-'Aqdī al-Wafīd* (Foreign Ideological Beliefs) to express her opposition to these and other New Age practices.⁵ In her website, she provides 'scientific-religious' explanations of how these contemporary spiritual movements, which promise health and happiness 'through activating energies and unleashing capabilities', have lead many Muslims to be naively drawn to *shirk* (idolatry or polytheism) through a hidden agenda of advocating for Eastern religions.

In a section of her website headed *Ra'ī Ahl al-'Ilm* (The Opinions of the People of Knowledge), Dr Fūz divides the opinions of supporters of the aforementioned beliefs into the following categories: (1) 'male shaykhs'; (2) 'female *dā'iyāt*'; (3) 'male specialists in psychology'; and (4) 'female specialists in psychology'. This order suggests a social-hierarchical structure, with authorities ranked in importance, and a social system governed by a centralised system of authority. As Bin Sunaytan (2004) argues in his book on the Saudi elite, it is important to address this social hierarchy in order to contextualise and make sense of any findings about this group. Dr Fūz's classification also reveals that in matters of opinion, religious opinion is perceived as superior to others and that religious authorities are believed to have a comprehensive understanding of diverse disciplines.

⁵ NLP is commonly invoked or followed among local *da'iyat* as well as others in the Arab world (see Kamel, 2008).

Moreover, the opinions of female religious authorities, despite their lower status as *dā'iyāt* rather than *'ālimāt* (female scholars) or *shaykhāt* (female shaykhs), are still regarded as superior to the opinions of male specialists in other fields.

Through her loyalty to this socially established categorisation and hierarchy, Dr Fūz establishes a platform from which to negotiate her way into this male-dominated domain. While remaining within the context of established legitimacy, she prepares the ground for establishing her own legitimate and independent authority. In this way, despite their conformity to the established tradition of male-authority, the *dā'iyāt* manage to carve out a niche for themselves as transmitters of religious knowledge.

The female audiences of these *dā'iyāt* are also participants in the construction and the maintenance of the gender divide and social hierarchy. Nevertheless, the challenges resulting from the gender divide in the field of religious knowledge communication that the *dā'iyāt* face were revealed in some of my interviews with audience members at their lessons. Indeed, not only in Saudi Arabia, but also in other countries of the Muslim world, studies have revealed the challenges posed by the bias against women. For example, a study by Moaddel (2006) revealed general biases toward women in the work force in Saudi Arabia and in neighbouring Muslim countries such as Iran, Jordan, and Egypt. The same study revealed that the informants (both men and women) believed in the men's prerogative to have jobs over women. The informants also revealed their belief in men's political superiority over women.

My interviews revealed similar patterns. In several of the interviews, I asked members of the audience which female *dā'iyā* they thought were influential, and they provided me with names of prominent male *du'āt*. For example, Dīma, a medical

student and a friend of mine from secondary school, who lived in Boston until 2009, comes from a liberal and affluent background, with parents and siblings who have pursued postgraduate degrees. She describes Shaykh Salmān al-ʿAwda, a prominent local cleric with a television show that has recently become popular, as a very good friend of her father's and of her family, who commonly visits them at their house. She admits that her favourable slant toward his views and her admiration for his books provide her with a sense of religious 'sufficiency'. After she attended a lesson with Dr Fāṭima, I asked her what qualities she thought a *dā'iya* should have, and her answer made reference to a male preacher:

He is someone really well-read in religion and not biased. *He* knows religion and *sīra* [biography of the Prophet]... and how the Prophet delivered the message... It's not just the knowledge – it's the way you deliver it [italics added].

I asked Dīma why she used 'he' to answer my question about female authority, and she stated that it was, as far as she was aware, unconscious. She then declared, 'I cannot conceive a *dā'iya* as a general authority... It's a personal thing... I haven't met a female *dā'iya* that I felt I could consider an authority or [whom] I felt strongly about.' At this point she was interrupted by Khulūd, another colleague of mine from secondary school who comes from a more traditional and conservative background than Dīma. Khulūd revealed to me that she had recently professed her religious adherence by adopting more 'Islamic' attire and by making a commitment to attending several weekly *muḥādarāt* and inviting *dā'iyāt* to speak at her house:

- Khulūd: I have shaykhs who are men and women, but I can tell you that, if I have an inquiry, I ask men first. I feel that men are more dedicated to *ʿilm* than women. The woman is a mother. *Ustādha* Suʿād [a *dā'iya* whom Khulūd follows] is not married so she has time to dedicate to *ʿilm*.
- Dīma: Men are married too!
- Khulūd: No, with our [Saudi] men, their work takes much of their time. They don't cook or raise their kids...

- Dīma: I'm the same. If I had an equally qualified man and woman, I'd probably take the man's opinion.
- Khulūd: I think a male chef is better than a female chef.
- Interviewer: If you have equally qualified [male and female authorities available, are you saying that] you will still go to the man?
- Dīma: I'd probably go to the man.
- Khulūd: The male chef is better. A male designer is better.
- Interviewer: Why?
- Dīma: It has nothing to do with hormones. I don't know. I'd rather go to a man more.
- Khulūd: [To Interviewer:] You[r]...question made me realise: why didn't I send [a message] to *Ustādha* Su'ād [seeking fatwa]? I have men and women [religious authorities] in my phone. I have maybe four women in my phone, [but] I never sent [any of] them a message asking for a fatwa!

Dā'iyāt such as Dr Samīra Jamjūm and Dr Fāṭima have contested views such as those of Dīma and Khulūd, who believe in men's superiority. However, other participants, such as Ibtisām – a single woman from a less privileged background – supported the view that men are superior to women in their vocational skills.⁶ Despite being an avid follower of Dr Wafā' al-Ḥamdān and despite her claims that she has never missed any of her lectures, Ibtisām, for example, still believed that a woman's primary job is in her home and that her home duties are more important than any other tasks. Therefore, in her view, a man remains more competent in the production of religious knowledge: 'The woman is the one who raises the children, so she...raises [both] men and women. It is not the man who raises children. [Woman] is the producer of the generation, [but] we take fatwa from men because they are by nature stronger in *'ilm*'.

⁶ Dr Samīra is Dr Fāṭima's first cousin. She is among the oldest *dā'iyāt* in Jeddah. She started practising *da'wa* along with Dr Fāṭima in the 1970s, when very few *dā'iyāt* existed. Before retiring, Dr Samīra, who holds postgraduate degrees in Arabic and Islamic Studies, held a lecturing position in Aqida Studies in the Department of Islamic Studies at King 'Abd al-'Azīz University. Due to familial obligations, Dr Samīra currently gives one lesson every other week at the International Islamic Relief Organisation in Jeddah. As one audience member stated, she lacks the charisma and the appealing pedagogical style of Dr Fāṭima and therefore does not enjoy the same popularity.

Such value-oriented views are fortified by *dā'iyāt* and subsequently shared with their audiences. For example, *Ustādha Anāhīd* is among the *dā'iyāt* whom Ibtisām also follows. Considering her statement that dismisses women's dreams, I asked *Ustādha Anāhīd* in a subsequent interview whether she believes that there is a difference between men and women in their *da'wa* performance and their transmission of valued religious knowledge. She responded:

Da'wa has nothing to do with being a man or a woman. It has to do with 'ilm. This is the starting point. But the woman has a clear problem with 'ilm in terms of how she discusses it [because] she's lazy, and is very weak in her discourse rather than serious.

These opinions reveal an intrinsic belief in the superiority of men over women in producing religious knowledge. This belief is shaped by the same social dynamics that shape the relationship between men and women in Saudi society (see also Krause 2008:68-69 on UAE). The idea of 'woman as a nature and a function' was implicit in my informants' views of men's natural superiority. Thus, in addition to structural factors enforced by the state that prohibit women from gaining any formal legitimacy, the *dā'iyāt* also face challenges through the beliefs held by their own followers in their endeavour to exercise power in the religious domain. The discussions of the value orientation of women in Saudi society and its influence on their role as communicators of valued religious knowledge force us to consider the extent to which it is empowering for women to become *dā'iyāt* despite conditions that limit the extent of women's powers.

5.3 Representations of Authority from the Field: Interpretations and Findings

5.3.1 Introduction: Male ulama as paramount *marjī'īyya dīnīyya*

Recently, Sunni Muslim practice has shown a growing reliance on male ulama as figures of authoritative reference (*marjī'īyya*). In theory, classical Sunni tradition,

contrary to Shia tradition, locates authority in the 'system of thought (*marji'īyya fikr wa manzūma*) and not the *marji'īyya* of persons' (al-Khateeb, 2009:87). The former, *marji'īyya*, is based on the 'authority of ideas' (ibid.:95). The authority of these figures is not entirely vested in a specific clerical structure, as among the Shia, but rather builds on other capabilities. However, in Saudi Arabia, a hierarchal system has been established by the state to serve as a *marji'īyya* in religious matters. In matters of fatwa, for example, the General Presidency of Scholarly Research and *Iftā'* is headed by the Grand Mufti, and its members consist of the members of *Hay'at Kibār al-Ulama*, who are appointed by royal decree. This presidency serves as the primary and official *marji'īyya dīnīyya* (religious authoritative reference). These ulama are learned in the country's formal religious and educational institutions and are expected to endorse a particular system of thought that aims to maintain the state's moral underpinnings. This allows them a complete monopoly over the interpretation of religious texts, thereby constituting the official *marji'īyya* sought by the public.

Referring to the official *marji'īyya dīnīyya* is an important element in the formation of the *dā'iyāt's* authority (al-Khidr, 2010:123). This is an extension of an historical pattern in which men have publicly dominated the religious realm. The significance of this *marji'īyya* varies in importance depending on the avenues of authority exercised by the *dā'iyāt*. For example, the *dā'iyāt* can exercise their authority by issuing a fatwa, preaching, collecting donations, solving familial problems, advising, and so on. However, in several but not all of these cases, the blessing of male ulama is needed to legitimatise these actions. For example, the *dā'iyāt* do not need to resort to male ulama in order to collect donations or to consult on familial problems. However, as discussed below, the *dā'iyāt* do resort to male ulama as *marji'īyya*: (1) to gain legitimacy in issuing a fatwa; (2) to relate to their

audience through a familiar pedagogical style; (3) to gain charismatic inspiration; and (4) for reference and promotion.

I also address this issue below from the point of view of the audience, who contribute to the construction of the *dā'iyāt's* authority. Indeed, male ulama lend an aura of legitimacy to the *dā'iyāt*; however, it is the audience that defines what constitutes valued knowledge.

5.3.2 Male ulama as *marjī' iyya dīnīyya* in issuing fatwa

This section attempts to answer three major questions: (1) What is the meaning of fatwa? (2) Why is it socially significant? (3) Who is eligible to exercise fatwa? 'In its traditional format, a fatwa usually presents the opinion of the legal school (*madhhab*) of which the issuer (*muftī*) was a member' (Stowasser, 2009:191). Such opinions have the status of religious norms, and, as such, they guide people in how to conduct their daily lives. As Mahmood further explains:

[I]n contrast to premodern times, when fatwas were primarily a technical means of resolving transactional and contractual issues and entailed a delimited interaction between the questioner and the *mufti* (jurisconsult), they are now a popular medium through which scholars answer questions about practical problems of daily life. (2005:81)

The Saudi government has established specialised centres and assigned locally educated ulama to issue fatwas that are in accordance with the official Ḥanbalī *madhhab*, which usually enforces the strictest interpretation of Islamic scripture, as this approach is seen as embracing a more authentic form of Islam. The presidency has its own telephone hotlines where people can call and speak with the ulama to inquire about a fatwa. Office telephone numbers, faxes, mobiles, and emails of prominent official and unofficial ulama are widely accessible and are published over the Internet. People also often circulate the ulama's contact details to encourage each

other to seek a fatwa from legitimate and authentic sources.

Recently, many controversial fatwas have been issued by mosque imams and religious scholars. These received negative publicity in the global media for their purportedly 'strange', 'contradictory', or 'obsolete' views.⁷ In response to such media representation of fatwas, the Saudi government took steps to regain its monopoly over the public exercise of religious authority. On August 12, 2010 (Second Ramadan), King 'Abd Allah issued a royal decree limiting the official issue of fatwas to members of the Council of Senior Scholars. The decree states: 'Individual fatwas on personal matters such as matters of worship, dealings, [and] personal matters are exempt from this ruling, but they should be [limited to matters] between the questioner and the scholar' (Sidya, 2010). He further added: 'We urge you...to limit fatwas to the members of the High Scholars Authority and to advise on those among them who are wholly...eligible to be involved in the duty of fatwa so that we allow them to carry out fatwas' ('Saudi King Limits Clerics', 2010).

Despite the king's attempts to gradually broaden religious thought from its literal and narrow interpretation, most official fatwas remain within the strict Ḥanbalī *madhhab*. Scholars are appointed to educate people on what is *ḥalāl* (religiously permissible) and *ḥarām* (religiously forbidden or unlawful) and to contest practices that threaten cultural traditions or political legitimacy. Thus, following the fatwas of the official ulama means adhering to the government's interpretation of authentic Islam, as well as remaining within the officially sanctioned socio-religious

⁷ Among the controversial fatwas was the one issued by the senior cleric Shaykh 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-'Ubaykān that states that a grown man can become a woman's son if she breast-feeds him (see Ateef, 2010). In Islamic tradition, if a woman breast-feeds a child, she becomes his 'milk mother' (*um bi al-ridhā'a*) and therefore does not need to cover herself from him. Another fatwa was issued by senior cleric Shaykh 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Barrāk, in which he excommunicated and allowed the killing of anyone who promotes the mixing of the sexes (see Baamer, 2010).

boundaries. When the *dā'iyāt* issue fatwas on a daily basis, they are acting in a context in which such institutions and institutionalised authority are already established.

Moreover, by issuing fatwas, whether formulated independently or by reference to male ulama, the *dā'iyāt* are filling a social niche and appropriating their authority in accordance with social expectations. Many of the audience members who follow the *dā'iyāt* informed me that when there is a perplexing issue or questions about religious practices or tenets that require a religious opinion, they tend to seek the legal opinion of more than one authority. On this practice, Dr Fāṭima ironically reminded me of the popular saying, '*khallī bīnak wa bīn al-nār muṭawwa*' (put a religious man [*muṭawwa*] between you and hellfire).⁸ In other words, do not try to construct a fatwa yourself or make any religious judgments of your own, as one should always refer to a *muṭawwa* for advice in religious matters and comply with his verdict without protest.

Abla Ḥanīn, a *dā'iya* and a teacher at *Himmatī Da'watī*'s summer programme, adheres to the social practice that supports the idea of leaving the exercise of fatwa to those who are more learned. During my fieldwork, she gave a talk entitled *Kayfa Nu'idū Amjādunā* (How Can We [Muslims] Regain our Glory?) as part of the summer programme that trains young girls to become future *dā'iyāt*. She sat casually among a circle of students in their late teens and early twenties. It was significant that she seated herself so as to be equal to the students and to encourage discussion among them. The students listened attentively as she highlighted the virtues that Muslims nowadays are lacking in order to reach a level of piety that is satisfactory to God and

⁸ Another similar colloquial saying in Najd is '*inshid 'ālim wa imsh sālim*' (i.e., seek [an opinion of] a scholar to be safe).

similar to that of the righteous predecessors. The prophetic Hadith 'consult your heart...even though people give you their opinion...' emerged as the topic of discussion as the students and *Abla Ḥanīn* debated whether the meaning of the Hadith could be applied to Muslims today, given their weakened religious adherence, which makes them unfit to formulate independent religious opinions.⁹

Abla Ḥanīn asked the students, 'When the Prophet said '*istaftī qalbak*' [consult your heart], does this apply to everyone? Are all hearts eligible to be consulted?' Nadā, a charismatic, eloquent nineteen year-old from a middle class family and an aspiring *dā'iya*, answered confidently: 'only *al-qalb al-salīm* [the pure of heart].' In her answer, Nadā was referring indirectly to herself as having a 'pure heart', implying that her piety and awareness of right and wrong made eligible to issue a fatwa. She also stated that her family had an abundance of Islamic books in their library at home and that her father taught her how to use them as references. However, *Abla Ḥanīn* was worried about the students allowing themselves to pronounce fatwas. She therefore attempted to discourage them from casually issuing fatwas, given the limitations on their knowledge of religious sciences and their lack of skill in deriving religious opinions from their legal sources.

Bashāyir and Hanūf were college seniors at the time, both from middle class families; they never shied from voicing their views and therefore often clashed with *Abla Ḥanīn* in their religious opinions. They were not convinced of her answer and stated disappointedly that the course they were undertaking should equip them with

⁹ Narrated by Wabisa bin Mabad, who said: I came to the messenger of Allah and he said: 'You have come to ask about righteousness?'. I said: 'Yes.' He said: 'Consult your heart. Righteousness is that about which the soul feels tranquil and the heart feels tranquil, and wrongdoing is that which wavers in the soul and moves to and from in the breast even though people again and again have given you their legal opinion [in its favour].' (al-Nawawi's 40 Hadith, Hadith number 27).

the tools to be able to derive religious opinions from their sources. Side arguments arose between those who were convinced that issuing a fatwa should be left for the ulama and those who believed that the task could be undertaken if one learned the right tools and how to search and interpret canonical texts and religious literature. *Abla Ḥanīn* attempted to control the chaos while at the same time allowing the girls the freedom to voice their opinions. To convince them of her view, however, she elaborated on the criteria of eligibility to give religious opinions. In a high-pitched voice she interrupted their discussion and said, in local dialect:

Allah said 'if you obey and fear Allah, He will grant you *furqān* [a criterion to judge between right and wrong]....' (Quran 9:29) [T]he ulama described *taqwā* [piety] like walking on *shūk* [needles:]...one must be very careful and meticulous [as] not every heart can tell the difference between *ḥaq* [righteousness] and *bāṭil* [wrongfulness].... [W]e pray to Allah that he help us differentiate between *ḥaq* and *baṭel*.... [I]f the Hadith was *muṭlaq* [openly interpreted], then Allah would not have revealed *tashrī* ' [legislation] to us.

Abla Ḥanīn's answer is consistent with local traditions. Such ideas have often been invoked to reinforce the belief that women are inferior to men in their religious senses and capabilities. However, *Abla Ḥanīn* does not invoke the notion of 'lack' in piety (i.e., *taqwā*), as she encourages her female students to pray for enlightenment from Allah. Nevertheless, she promotes the view that the task of deriving a trusted religious opinion should be reserved to those who are more learned, i.e., the ulama, and that they represent the primary *marjī 'iyya dīnīyya* to issue a fatwa.

Ustādha Anāhīd promulgates this viewpoint as well. She is known for her strict adherence to the established rhetoric of the official ulama and her audience have declared that this is part of her appeal. In fact, *Ustādha Anāhīd* appeals to an audience with traditional and conservative values. Many of her audience members have a solid foundation in religious knowledge that they have acquired through her lessons and/or participation in some of the intensive programmes that she runs in her various

educational centres. In her lessons, she emphasises the belief that 'men enjoy moral superiority over women because men embody more reason and self-knowledge [*'aql*] than women, who are overly influenced by carnal desires [*hawā al-naḥs*]' . In one of the daily lectures in her summer series at Faiṣliyya Women Welfare Society, on the topic of *al-'Uṣul al-Sitta*, *Ustādha* Anāhīd elaborated on the meaning of *lā ilāha illā Allāh* (There is no god but Allah) and linked the notion of obedience to Allah and realising His oneness to the layperson's obedience to established religious authority. In other words, conforming to established religious authority is an extension of the application of the tenets of Islam.

Ustādha Anāhīd further contested the modern practice of forming independent religious interpretations by admonishing her students as follows: 'Your mind and the way you think must be edified through the revealed *nuṣūṣ* [religious scriptures]. We must not think '*alā hawānā* [according to our whim]'. She emphasised the idea that the ulama should be consulted for religious judgments based on a *dalīl* (evidence from the Quran or Hadith), and that when there is no consensus of opinion, students should accept the fatwa based on the stronger Hadith (*Ḥadīth qawī*) rather than on the weaker Hadith (*Ḥadīth da'īf*), which distinction is made according to the reputation of the narrators in the chain of transmission (*isnād*).

As noted, the *dā'iyyāt* typically appropriate the official discourse of male ulama to establish solid authoritative grounds in matters of fatwa, although they may differ with respect to the cases or contexts in which they refer to the judgement of male ulama in order to justify a particular fatwa. The authority that a female *dā'iya* can exercise when giving a fatwa herself is, in turn, influenced by a variety of factors, including her seniority and reputation, her educational background, the sensitivity of the issues addressed in the fatwa, the context of the fatwa, and the audience members'

expectations. Below, I elaborate on these themes and explain how the *dā'iyāt* in Jeddah utilised the ulama as a *marji' iyya dīnīyya* to legitimatise their authority and to enable the exercise of their own powers.

5.3.2.1 *The dā'iyāt's determination of the ulama as primary marji' iyya dīnīyya in the issue of fatwa*

During fieldwork, I attended a summer *da'wa*-learning workshop entitled *Himmatī Da'watī*, at which Dr Fāṭima was invited to speak. The workshop was intended to prepare young girls from primary to high school to become future *dā'iyāt*.¹⁰ The workshop was held in the Jeddah *Da'wa* and Guidance Centre's female section, which is located in the al-Ḥamrā district, where many middle to upper-middle class families reside. The main purpose of the centre, as its name indicates, is to educate non-Muslims (particularly expatriate workers) and to convert them to Islam. The centre carries out this task through various multilingual programmes and publications, which are distributed among expats in places such as hospitals,

¹⁰ The *dā'iyāt* do not enjoy official recognition as discussed in Chapter 2. However, the purpose of this programme is to increase young women's religious awareness and does not grant them the permission or any license to preach since preaching, by law, can only be conducted with approval from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. The programme operates on the basis that it provides young girls with the skills to informally advise those who are perceived to need guidance by teaching them pedagogical skills as well as provide a deeper understanding of the Quran and Hadith. Similar programmes to prepare young girls to be *dā'iyāt* run in other major cities. '*Dā'iyāt al-Mustaqbal*' is another initiative by Dār al-Nadwa in Riyadh, a women's organisation that operates under the auspice of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth. It consists of a three month intensive training in 'jurisprudence, exegesis, and self development' (al-Ansari, 2010). The organisation held a graduation ceremony to celebrate the girls' accomplishments and mark their readiness to commence *da'wa*. These programmes received media criticism. For example, the *dā'iya* Dr Fūz Kurdī and the Islamic writer, Suhayla Zayn al-Ābidīn criticised such initiatives because the material taught does not enable young girls to adequately perform *da'wa* (al-Khattaf, 2008). According to Dr Fūz, *da'wa* requires special skills and knowledge that are acquired through extensive learning in specialised sharia institutions and cannot be acquired in such short courses.

universities, and shopping centres. The centre also provides various publications in Arabic to help fortify the religious adherence and knowledge of Muslims.

The centre is a converted villa with a male and a female section, separated by a thick concrete wall; each section has its own entrance and gatekeeper. The women's section is run by Dr Wafā', a prominent female *dā'iya* in her early fifties who is widely known for receiving *tazkiya* (blessing) from the prominent Shaykh Muḥammad bin Ṣāliḥ al-'Uthaymīn ('Ibn 'Uthaymīn', d. 2001).¹¹ Dr Wafā''s husband runs the men's section. Although Dr Wafā' does not give these workshops herself, she designed the programme and supervises the workshops. Dr Wafā' also presents evening lectures on an occasional basis throughout the year.

Prior to initiating the summer programme, Dr Wafā' had created a curriculum for young aspiring *dā'iyyāt*. She had collaborated with her staff at the centre in creating the curriculum materials to be taught to the girls as well as in determining eligibility for programme participation. The programme consisted of intensive multimedia presentation and pedagogical training as well as subject instruction from religious books that represent orthodox religion as locally practised.

Dr Wafā' is known for her strict interpretation of Islam, and she advocates following the mainstream Saudi Islamic beliefs endorsed by the official ulama. Both her attire and her demeanour reflect this stance, and the workshops followed this same approach with respect to both content and pedagogy.¹² Dr Wafā''s attendees were

¹¹ The late Shaykh Muḥammad bin Ṣāliḥ bin Muḥammad al-'Uthaymīn al-Tamimi al-Najdī was and a scholar who is a figure of veneration for many Saudis. He acquired religious education from Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azīz Ibn Bāz and Shaykh 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sa'dī. His primary contributions are in the area of fiqh.

¹² The centre also imposes strict religious adherence on the girls. An admin from the centre usually stands guard outside the gated centre and checks the girls' attire prior to exiting the building. The girls are expected to be fully covered, including their faces. American products such as soft drinks are banned from the centre.

described by an assistant of Dr Fāṭima's (who preaches a more 'liberal' version of Islam) as follows:

I noticed that most of the people who attend Dr Wafā'[s lessons] are people who have studied Islamic Studies. Most of them are Saudi and *mutashadidīn* [religiously strict] and feel that she has 'ilm. Those who attend Dr Fāṭima[s programmes, by contrast,] are the type of people who don't want to constantly hear 'this is forbidden and that is forbidden'. They are people who are less strict in their religion than those who attend Dr Wafā's lessons.

Although the centre offers workshops to prepare young girls to be future *dā'iyāt*, it nonetheless advocates the glorification of male ulama in its daily summer workshop, which takes place on weekday evenings. For example, one evening when I was observing a class led by *Abla* Fāṭima al-Rifā'ī, an administrative assistant informed the instructor of the death of the prominent Shaykh 'Abd Allah al-Jibrīn (Ibn Jibrīn).¹³ *Abla* Fāṭima R. stopped her lesson to announce his death, whereupon she slowly tilted her head downward as a gesture of humility and, in a low and soft tone, performed a *du'ā'* (supplication) for him while the students repeated '*āmīn*' after her. The next day, pictures and clippings of newspaper articles were affixed to the classroom walls and corridors, and next to the newspaper clippings was a small banner reading, 'The Islamic umma has lost one of its assets'.

Ironically, the *da'wa* centre where these images of Ibn Jibrīn were posted preaches that photography and representations of living beings are forbidden in Islam since they mimic God's creation. The centre bans its students from wearing garments or carrying items that bear either photographic or cartoon images, and the banners and posters hung throughout the school containing quotes of encouragement, poetry, and excerpts from the Quran and Hadith contained few cartoon images and none with any

¹³ 'Abd Allah bin 'Abd al-Raḥmān bin Jibrīn (d. 2009) is a prominent senior scholar and member of the General Presidency for Scholarly Research and Ifta'. He has widely published audio and written material in the format of books, booklets and articles.

facial features. Under these strict and explicit restrictions, the prominent display of newspaper clippings containing photos of a well-known male *'ālim* raises some questions. At face value, these expressions of grief can be interpreted as a deliberate attempt to commemorate the ascetical life and work of Shaykh Ibn Jibrīn. However, they are also a means of introducing him as a figure of authority to young students and of immortalising his religious legacy. The *dā'iyāt* who work in the centre operate in awareness of religious values that glorify the male ulama and profess their commitment to orthodox interpretations of scriptures.

During the summer workshop, the pioneer *dā'iya* in Jeddah, Dr Fāṭima, was invited to the centre as a guest speaker. Dr Fāṭima enjoys the highest informal ranking among *dā'iyāt* in Jeddah. She has been performing *da'wa* for over 35 years. Her late mother set the precedent for women's religious education in al-Ḥijāz in the 1950s, and Dr Fāṭima followed in her mother's footsteps in the dissemination of religious knowledge. She holds undergraduate, master's and a PhD degrees in Islamic Studies from Um al-Qurā University in Mecca and was one of the first female undergraduates to obtain a degree in Saudi Arabia at a time when only distance learning was available for women. Her expertise in religious sciences adds to the legitimacy of her authority. She would always remind the audience that her sources of reference are the Quran and Hadith rather than the ulama. Chapter 6 further examines how Dr Fāṭima legitimises her authority by contesting male ulama's fatwas. However, depending on the social and religious background of her audience at any given time, she continues to cite male opinions to lend legitimacy and credibility to her stance.

All of the students and staff (around 120 combined) attended, and many waited to greet Dr Fāṭima at the door. The title of her talk was *Rubba Himma Aḥyat 'Umma* (Determination Might Revive a Nation). The students observed her in

admiration as she walked in wearing a long-sleeved, pure white *thūb* (a long tunic garment usually) with thick lining, a matching sheer scarf that draped softly around her shoulders and minimal gold and pearl accessories. One student described her as 'angelic'. Dr Fāṭima entered the room with a big smile on her face and greeted the students enthusiastically as '*ḥafīdātī al-ḥabībāt al-shābbāt al-mubdi'āt*' ('my beloved, young and innovative granddaughters').

The lecture room had a raised stage on which were placed a desk with a laptop, a projector, a microphone, a voice recorder, and a text of the Quran.¹⁴ However, unlike Dr Wafā', Dr Fāṭima did not preach while sitting at the desk at a level above the students. Rather, she remained at the same level as her audience and walked back and forth in front of the students, who sat observantly on the floor and in rows of chairs that filled the room.

Dr Fāṭima maintained her signature and predominant *wa'ẓī* (preachy) and didactic rhetorical style throughout her inspirational talk. At one point, she held the Quran in her hand, lifted it in the air, and raised her tone, urging the students to understand 'Allah's messages' as contained therein. She addressed the students and the staff continuously and eagerly with familiar phrases such as '*yā banātī*' ('my daughters'), '*yā ḥabībātī*' ('my beloved'), and '*yā mumayyazāt*' ('special ones'). She embellished her talk with a few basic English words in order to appeal to the 'Internet generation', as she called it, and spoke about utilising the Internet and social network sites such as Facebook to perform *da'wa*. She discussed topics such as how love should precede *wa'ẓ* (preaching) as a form of pedagogical persuasion, which kept the

¹⁴ Following the events of September 11th, 2001, the Ministry of Interior imposed a law that obliges the recording of all public religious sermons. Through these recordings the government can monitor and control the content of public religious discourse. The Ministry also requires all sermons and religious lessons to be transcribed by the host centre. Recorded copies remain in the archive of the host centre unless needed for investigation.

students interested and engaged. At some points, too, there was a hint of local accent in her recitation of certain verses of the Quran. By conducting her talk in *Hijāzī* dialect (from the region of al-Hijāz) and by interacting with the students, she sustained their attention.

During a question and answer period, Dr Fāṭima posed the question: 'Why do you love God? I am sure you are all registered in this programme [*Himmatī Da 'watī*] because you love God.' Two young students answered simultaneously: 'Because He is with us all the time' and 'Because He gave us so many blessings.' Dr Fāṭima asked the students to applaud their colleagues for their responses. Rather than clapping, the students applauded by saying *Allahu akbar* (Allah is great). Dr Fāṭima was surprised that the students did not clap, and she asked:

Who told you clapping is forbidden? The Prophet said that clapping is for women and *takbīr* [declaring the greatness of Allah by saying *Allahu akbar*] is for men.... Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Fūzān issued a fatwa saying [that clapping is] *ḥalāl*.¹⁵

I asked Dr Fāṭima about this incident in a subsequent interview, and she explained in a frustrated voice,

If people don't understand a particular *ḥukum* [religious ruling], I try to make them understand it – like, for example, the issue of clapping. I have been trying to explain it for a while but it's no use. I say, 'Go left', but they go right. It was only when this shaykh ['Abd al-'Azīz al-Fūzān] came and issued his fatwa [that progress was made].

In other words, Dr Fāṭima had taken recourse in the opinion of a male 'ālim after she had failed to get her point across on the basis of her own authority. She became more aware of the influential role of the ulama when she noticed the newspaper clippings with Shaykh Ibn Jibrīn's pictures affixed on the walls of the corridors when she

¹⁵ Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Fūzān is a popular and widely published shaykh in Saudi Arabia with numerous television and radio appearances. He is currently a professor of jurisprudence at al-Imam Muḥammad bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh and is known for his various *da'wa* activities, both locally and internationally.

entered the centre. In this respect, she was certainly aware of the ethos of this *da'wa* environment and of the sort of pedagogical and religious techniques that might be most effective in this context. She realised that in this particular performative space, she needed to refer to a prominent and official shaykh who had recently declared that clapping was not forbidden for women (see fatwa al-Fuzan, 2009). She did not completely surrender her authority to him, but she had to reconfigure her pedagogy of persuasion in order to relate to her audience.

In her own pedagogical space, I did not observe Dr Fāṭima referring to contemporary Saudi ulama in order to justify her fatwa. Rather, in our interviews and throughout her *muḥādarāt* she asserted that her religious opinions were derived directly from the Quran and Hadith, using statements such as 'We are *warathat kitāb* Muḥammad [inheritors of the book of Muḥammad, i.e., the Quran]', 'people now worship the ulama and *'ilm* and not Allah', and 'when you hear a fatwa, go to the source and not the shaykh'. Such statements do not prevent her from resorting to the ulama in situations such as the one cited above. However, in recent years most of her *muḥādarāt* have focused on Quran exegesis, in which she exercises the power to interpret the Quran herself and presents interpretations that are not always in agreement with the ulama's orthodox interpretations of religion. The assertion of such power to deal directly with the Quran and canonical text is mainly derived from her ability to 'speak...directly from and to the texts' (Arebi, 1994:283). Arebi further explains this as a way to 'liberate Islam itself from the shackles of cultural politics'. By virtue of her command of religious canonical text, Dr Fāṭima subtly contests the ideology of the 'lack' while still recognising the officially established *marjī' iyya*.

At this particular event at the *Himmatī Da'watī* workshop, a venue that challenged her independent authority and undermined her religious capital, Dr Fāṭima

referenced the Prophet first, as she usually does, but she also felt the need to supplement the fatwa by referencing a local male scholar to meet the expectations of her hosts. Part of the reason for this may be that although her primary audience consisted of teenage students, she was also speaking to the administrative staff and teachers who run the centre and who were also in attendance. Since many of the staff mirror the ideology of Dr Wafā', the head of the centre, Dr Fāṭima was aware that she had to conform to the boundaries of religious expression acceptable within the space in which Dr Wafā''s beliefs and practices are the norm.

In subsequent questions and answers, reactions from the students were a mixture of *takbīr* (the utterance of *Allahu akbar*) and clapping. This indicates that accommodating her pedagogy of persuasion to the ethos of the space (by referencing prominent male ulama to provide justification for a fatwa), enabled Dr Fāṭima to gain a degree of leverage with the students.

5.3.2.2 The dā'iyāt's reliance on ulama as marji'iyya dīnīyya in fatwas of extraordinary importance

I also witnessed the dā'iyā Ablā 'Ā'isha reference male ulama to support her opinion when I was invited to attend a *muḥādara* held at a government-run hospital. The invitation came from Ablā Fāṭima R., who also gave religious lessons at the hospital. Although I had not intended to attend *muḥādara*t outside of the Quran schools and *da'wa* centres, I felt that this experience would help me to better understand the ubiquity of religion and of *da'wa* practice in Jeddah.

In Saudi Arabia, ministries that have active women's sections each have a designated department or office, called *al-Taw'iya al-Islāmiyya* (Islamic Awareness) or *al-Taw'iya al-Dīnīyya* (Religious Awareness). The Ministry of Health and the

Ministry of Education, for example, have active offices of this kind to ensure the maintenance of religious adherence and of the proper code of conduct by women in the workplace, and these offices collaborate with various popular *dā'iyāt* to provide religious counselling on hospital campuses.¹⁶ Hudā Rashīd, the head female officer at the Religious Awareness Department in the Ministry of Health in Jeddah, informed me that the office's main functions is to provide spiritual and religious guidance to patients in times of difficulty and advice and emotional support to patients and their families through religious guidance. The *dā'iyāt* who volunteer to perform these tasks visit the hospitals on a weekly basis. They visit the patients' rooms and advise them on how to conduct religious practices such as prayer and ablution during times of sickness. Another purpose of religious awareness is to advise female hospital staff members on religious matters through individual counselling and through weekly *muḥādarāt* held on the premises. Such *muḥādarāt* are frequently requested by female staff, as one laboratory officer informed me, 'to help us maintain a connection with Allah and to be grounded, especially [since] while working in such an environment that is driven by science, you tend to forget Allah'.

These *muḥādarāt* are usually held during lunch or during *ẓuhr* (noon) prayer break. The *muḥādarāt* that I attended was held in the afternoon at al-Wilāda Hospital, a children's and maternity hospital. When I arrived, a male staff member announced that the lecture would be held at the Rufayda Hall in ten minutes, and I was able to observe (mostly young) female staff members from several departments entering the enclosed hall and taking off their headscarves in a relaxed environment secluded from men, where they were ready to, as one participant put it, 'reconnect with Allah'. *Abla*

¹⁶ Among the offices' other functions in hospitals is to call on non-Muslims to convert to Islam. The offices distribute brochures and booklets about Islam in hopes of converting hospital staff such as nurses, who mainly come from Asian countries such as the Philippines.

I'tidāl, the head of the Department of Islamic Awareness at the hospital, was going around the hall taking attendance.

Abla 'Ā'isha is a *dā'iya* in her mid-forties with an undergraduate degree in Islamic Studies. She is not as popular as Dr Fāṭima, Dr Wafā' or *Ustādha* Anāhīd, and her public *da'wa* activities are minor compared to those of the other *dā'iyyāt* discussed in this research. In addition to her bi-weekly talks at the hospital, she offers a bi-weekly talk (without pay) at a modest mosque located in one of Jeddah's less fortunate neighbourhoods, where her audience consists mostly of local residents. Occasionally, she is invited to speak at funerals and at private religious gatherings at people's homes, also for no fee. At funerals, the *dā'iya*'s role is to provide religious guidance and reassurance and to control outbreaks of mournful wailing, which is considered *makrūh* (detested) in Islam. On these occasions she discusses issues such as Quranic eschatology, merits and sins, and the afterlife.

Abla 'Ā'isha lacks the experience and therefore the prestige and influence of the other *dā'iyyāt* discussed in this research, but she has managed to find a *da'wa* niche and to tap into an area that is rarely discussed by other *dā'iyyāt*. She invests time in adjusting her talk to the concerns and expectations of the medical staff and allows them to suggest topics and often caters to their requests. Contrary to earlier *da'wa* practice, which focused solely on religious knowledge, its contemporary form entails that the *dā'iyyāt* become aware of various types of sciences, such as medicine, geography, astronomy, and biology. Notable *dā'iyyāt* such as Dr Fāṭima and Dr Samīra capitalise on this form of knowledge to introduce a new strand in contemporary *da'wa* practice called *al-i'jāz al-'ilmī fi al-Quran wa al-Sunna* (scientific miracles in the Quran and Sunna), which provides empirical interpretations of religious texts based on the scientific miracles recounted in a text.

For example, during a series of lectures entitled *al-Khushūʿ fī al-Ṣalāt* (Devoutness/Sincerity in Prayer), *Abla ʿĀʾisha* described the process of prayer in detail while providing religious and medical explanations and justifications for each prayer movement; she supported the description of every movement and supplication with evidence from contemporary scholars such as Shaykh Ibn ʿUthaymīn from medieval scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya, as well as demonstrating the correct physical postures. The hospital staff listened attentively and took notes as *Abla ʿĀʾisha* explained the process in detail, stopping frequently to allow the staff to take notes and to ask them if they needed further clarification:

Abla ʿĀʾisha: During *sujūd* [prostration], the knees should be apart while the feet should be touching each other like a 7 or 8, and this is so it won't cause digestive problems in the stomach and therefore cause difficulty in breathing.¹⁷

Attendee: Do men and women have similar postures in prayer?

Abla ʿĀʾisha: Yes, men and women have similar postures. I have inquired about this issue. If there were any difference, it wouldn't *yabṭil* [invalidate] the prayer. There are practices in prayer that are Sunna.

Contrary to the most common working conditions in Saudi Arabia, where men and women are segregated, a hospital is a space in which men and women work side by side. This might be one way of explaining the emergence of the question recorded above. Moreover, the importance of prayer (*ṣalāt*) comes to prominence because it constitutes the second pillar of Islam, and observing devotion and sincerity in prayer is an exercise of good faith on the part of the individual. Observing correct positions in prayer also enables the Muslim to fortify his spiritual bonds with God.

In any case, this topic stirred various side conversations between members of the audience, as they tried to recall their own prayer positions and compared them to

¹⁷ I.e., like a 7 (٧) or an 8 (٨) in Indian numerals.

what was being demonstrated. Audience members posed many questions to *Abla* 'Ā'isha and asked her to further clarify and demonstrate the correct position:

Abla 'Ā'isha: Shaykh al-Albānī, who is from the ulama of al-Ḥijāz, says that one should commence *sujūd* with the hands [touching the ground first]. However, Ibn Bāz, Ibn 'Uthaymīn and Ibn Taymiyya say that one should bow with the knees down first.

It is important to note here that *Abla* 'Ā'isha shifted the focus of the question from one that is concerned with gender differences in religious practice to one that is more concerned with basic prayer principles and practices that are gender neutral and more concerned with sincerity and devotion in practice. She attempts to help her audience achieve a state of heightened spirituality in prayer by presenting two different opinions as to how one is to achieve them through correct prayer positions.

Ostensibly, *Abla* 'Ā'isha did not show a preference for any of the above fatwas over the others; however, she felt the need to mention the view of al-Albānī, who embraces the Ḥanafī school of thought, in addition to those of Ibn Bāz and Ibn 'Uthaymīn from Najd, the archetypes of religious authority in Saudi, who embrace the Ḥanbalī, a stricter school of jurisprudence. Indeed, introducing both opinions demonstrates her competence and thorough understanding of the process of prayer, the second pillar of Islam. However, her reference to al-Albānī as one of the ulama of al-Ḥijāz is striking. Referring to an ulama who is not local, such as al-Albānī, and presenting his opinion as equal to those of local ulama, is unusual in light of the religious territoriality observed among the *dā'iyyāt* considered in this study, for which reason it warrants examination. However, presenting the fatwa of al-Albānī, who also subscribes to the Salafī school of Islamic tradition such as local ulama of Najd, was necessary in order for his religious views to be locally acceptable as reliable *marjī'iyya*.

Muḥammad Naṣr al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999) is a Syrian cleric and an influential scholar who lived most of his life in the Levant. He was educated in the Ḥanafī legal school of thought by his father and was famous for his contributions to the science of Hadith. One explanation for *Abla* 'Ā'isha's reference to him as one of 'the ulama of al- Ḥijāz' is to localise him for the people of Jeddah, which is one of the cities in al- Ḥijāz. In order for his views, on an important Islamic ritual, to be accepted by her audience, who align themselves with the Ḥanbalī school, *Abla* 'Ā'isha had to associate al-Albānī with the geographical area. However, it is debatable whether her attributing locality to al-Albānī reveals a personal bias on the part of *Abla* 'Ā'isha in favour of his opinion or whether *Abla* 'Ā'isha was in this regard demonstrating her competence in Islamic thought and the topic of prayer.

It would be challenging for *Abla* 'Ā'isha, who does not enjoy the popularity of some of the more prominent *dā'iyāt*, to publicly favour al-Albānī over other, more local and more officially recognised ulama, especially given the context in which the discussion examined here took place. Giving religious lessons in a government-run hospital requires adherence to orthodox religious opinions. Therefore, her strategy of presenting two different viewpoints should probably be interpreted as intended to maintain and augment her authority with her audience. By presenting both views, *Abla* 'Ā'isha demonstrated her thorough knowledge of the subject and deflected any possible criticism or disagreement with her position. Moreover, by stating that this difference in opinion is Sunna, which means that it does not annul the prayer, she reduced the importance of any perception of conflict between these opinions. Finally, by localising the authorities cited on both sides of the debate, she appealed to the regional prejudices of her audience.

Even though members of the audience tried to pressure *Abla* 'Ā'isha to give her final verdict on the preferred prayer position, she refrained from favouring one over the other on the basis that all the scholars who gave these various opinions have grounded them in evidence and canonical resources. Also, since the *dā'iyāt* do not enjoy formal power in the production of religious knowledge and therefore are not considered official *marji'iyya*, *Abla* 'Ā'isha had to exercise caution when presenting these opinions.

Mahmood (2005) encountered a *dā'iya* who also provided various religious opinions without openly preferring one over the other. She explained that a preacher's strategy in providing contrasting religious opinions also serves the purpose of 'train[ing] her audience in a mode of interpretive practice that foregrounds the importance of individual choice and the right of the Muslim to exercise this choice' (2005:85).

In *Abla* 'Ā'isha's attempt to convert what may be interpreted as an unorthodox into an orthodox opinion by localising the scholar, she provides the audience with a platform to choose equally between the opinions. Also, in order to legitimise both fatwas, she does not favour one over the other nor indicate that they are in disagreement with each other. Notably, however, *Abla* 'Ā'isha does not call upon her audience to interpret text themselves; rather, she provides them with knowledge grounded in orthodox Islamic opinions as a mechanism to gain power and influence.

Ceding to her audience the latitude to choose among fatwas is, in other words, an exercise in authority construction. In the process of presenting more than one fatwa while also indicating that she had done the research that supports both opinions herself, she exhibits flexibility in pedagogy while remaining within the limits of established religious orthodoxy. This makes her authority more appealing because it

allows the audience to choose the practice that is best suited to them so long as both opinions are grounded in a valid *marjī 'iyya*.

5.3.2.3 *Audience as interpreters and makers of marjī 'iyya dīnīyya*

It could be argued that the audience *makes* the *dā 'iya*, in that without the audience's recognition of the *dā 'iya's* authority, this authority does not exist. Therefore, in order to understand the nature of the *dā 'iya's* authority, it is important to understand how the audience perceives the *dā 'iya's* exercise of fatwa, whether that exercise is dependent on or independent of the support of male ulama's opinions. Moreover, it is salient to consider how the *dā 'iya* functions as a mediator between the opinions of the ulama and the moral needs of the people.

Dr Sanā' 'Ābid is a graduate of religious education from King 'Abd al-'Azīz University in Jeddah, where she studied with Dr Fāṭima. She further enhanced her religious knowledge by subscribing to Dr Fāṭima's informal private lessons in '*aqīda*. She began by teaching courses in religious education– such as jurisprudence, monotheism, exegesis, Hadith, and Quran – in formal school settings and later expanded her pedagogical sphere by introducing after-school activities for girls and by forming religiously themed clubs that espoused a philanthropic agenda. At the time of the fieldwork, Dr Sanā' ran the women's section of Jeddah Da'wa and Guidance Centre in al-Salāma district – an upper-middle and upper class neighbourhood. She also operated summer camps in which she discreetly introduced Islamic teachings into social activities. In addition, Dr Sanā' is an associate professor at a private college, which is where I first encountered her as the teacher of a general course of Islamic Studies. She also lectures in exegesis and in Quran sciences at King 'Abd al-'Azīz University.

In order to assert her independence and establish her right to reproduce religious knowledge in the public sphere, Dr Sanā' parted ways with her mentor, Dr Fāṭima, and adopted views and opinions that mirrored the official religious ideology of the state. She integrated herself into the official hierarchy and elevated her inherently subordinate position as a female *dā'iya* by associating herself with the official opinions of the male ulama.

Those who contest the stringent religious interpretations sanctioned by the state describe Dr Sanā' as an 'old school' *dā'iya* who is 'aggressive' and 'intolerant' by comparison to the 'cool' Dr Fāṭima. However, Dr Sanā' has managed to form a group of loyal young followers who support her ideology and who oppose the 'liberal' views of Dr Fāṭima. For example, Hayā was a recent high school graduate and one of the students attending *Himmatī Da'watī*. She described her family and upbringing as religiously conservative (*multazimīn*). During our interview, she mentioned how her parents would send her to attend the summer camps run by Dr Sanā' because they believed she was a positive religious influence on the girls. Hayā also mentioned that Dr Sanā' was one of the most influential *dā'iya*t in her life and described herself as a 'fan' of Dr Sanā':

I really like Sanā' 'Ābid in almost every respect. She has very strong reasoning *mashā'Allah* ['by Allah's will' – typically an expression of appreciation]. She provides you with very strong *adilla* [evidences] and [with information on] what the ulama said [in support of religious opinions] instead of just telling you 'Allah said this and the Prophet said that'.

Significantly, Hayā here uses the term *adilla* – which in religious matters refers to 'evidence' found in the Quran, Hadith, or Sunna – and states that Dr Sanā' supports her arguments *both* with such evidence and with reference to the opinions of the ulama (whether these arguments address spiritual merit, are a form of fatwa, or are eschatological, moralistic, or ritualistic in nature). Moreover, by 'strong *adilla*', Hayā

refers to evidence from the Quran and Hadith interpreted according to the opinions of the ulama. In this sense, Dr Sanā' serves as a bridge between the male ulama and her female students, who would not otherwise have easy access to their teachings.

When I asked Hayā to elaborate on how Dr Sanā' supports her arguments with canonical evidence in addition to opinions of the ulama, she discussed the issue of *'ikhtilāṭ* (the mixing of the sexes), which stands at the forefront of social issues of concern in contemporary Saudi Arabia. As enforcers of social and religious morality, the ulama have won the debate on *'ikhtilāṭ* and issued various fatwas deeming it unlawful. Any opinion opposing their fatwa is unorthodox.

Hayā highlighted how Dr Sanā', during an informal gathering with the girls in her summer camp, discussed *'ikhtilāṭ* with them and elaborated on its various lawful and unlawful manifestations. Dr Sanā' rationalised the significance of bringing this issue to the discussion table due to the 'unique' position of women in Islam. In this regard, Hayā informed me that Dr Sanā' argued that women's hijab acts as a barrier between women and men. Based on this idea of veiling, the concept of separating the sexes emerges as one mode of social control in order to maintain proper conduct between the sexes.

Dr Sanā' subscribes to the social and official religious rhetoric that prohibits the mixing of the sexes unless necessary, such as in public spaces like shops and hospitals. Hayā further explain:

Dr Sanā' provided us with all the evidence from the Quran and Hadith that indicate that *'ikhtilāṭ* is *ḥarām*.... She also indicated when it is permissible and gave us all the evidence [from the Quran and Hadith] and from the opinions of the ulama....

In the Saudi Islamic socio-religious context, this seeming contradiction is not in fact difficult to understand. Once again, we could refer back to the local saying: '*khallī*

bīnak wa bīn al-nār muṭawwa'. The ulama are seen as mediators between God and the people. They simplify the scripture and translate it into practical instructions and applicable practices. The *dā'iyāt*, on the other hand, typically reproduce the interpretations offered by the ulama, so in following this practice Dr Sanā' can be seen as operating behaviourally within her 'comfort zone'.

The need that many Muslims feel for recourse to and reliance on authorities who can explain the legal and moral precepts contained in the Quran and Hadith is, moreover, partly a response to the many challenges that they face in a rapidly changing modern world. Faced with the need to interpret religious texts in order to respond to moral, religious, and social dilemmas, people turn to those who have taken up the task of studying and upholding religion as their primary calling. This is understood to derive from a sincere desire to gain proximity to God by following his orders, and the ulama serve as a medium to guide individuals along this righteous path. To establish her religious authority, Dr Sanā' caters to the needs of her followers, who constantly want to be reconnected with the ulama.

The public media, too, urge people to seek out the opinions of the ulama, and there are dozens of freely accessible religious television channels, such as al-Majd, Iqra', al-'Afāsī, al-Risāla, and al-Quran, which carry hundreds of programmes that present religious advice and that debate religious issues around the clock. Many of these programmes allow viewers to call the studio with questions for the ulama, and even when the programmes are not delivering fatwas, many of the callers explicitly request advice on proper religious behaviour.

The majority of my informants reported that they did not depend solely on knowledge acquired from *muḥādarāt* or on fatwas sought from the *dā'iyāt* (see interview with Dīma and Khulūd in section 5.2.2 above). Rather, they follow shaykhs

and ulama on television and listen to them on the radio (*Ithā'at al-Quran* or Quran Station) and on cassettes. Among the most frequently repeated names are Shaykh Mishārī al-'Afāsī, Shaykh Salmān al-'Awda, Dr Ṭāriq al-Suwaydān, 'Amr Khālīd and 'Āyid al-Qarnī,^{18, 19} all of whom have been attributed with *'ilm* (religious knowledge). Since *'ilm* is generally regarded as a masculine attribute, those *dā'iyāt* who lack this quality maintain their authority by reproducing the knowledge produced and promulgated by the ulama.

5.3.2.4 The dā'iyā's lack of formal qualifications and continuation of ulama as marjī'iyya dīnīyya

One prominent *dā'iyā* who constructs her authority by conveying knowledge produced by the ulama is *Ustādha* Anāhīd al-Sumayrī. *Ustādha* Anāhīd delivers *muḥādarāt* in cities and towns across Saudi Arabia and throughout the Arabian Gulf region, as well as internationally by transmitting her lectures live over the Internet to registered female members.²⁰ Unlike other equally popular *dā'iyāt* in Jeddah, she does not hold any academic degrees in religious studies. Her knowledge of Islamic studies is largely self-taught through the *'aqīda* cassette series of Ibn 'Uthaymīn, and some of

¹⁸ Mishārī al-'Afāsī (b. 1976) is a popular Kuwaiti *qārī'* (reciter of the Quran) and *munshid* (one who performs anashid, i.e., Islamic songs) who is known for his beautiful voice. He is also an imam of a mosque in Kuwait where he leads tarawih prayer every Ramadan. He has his own television channel and appears frequently on religious programmes.

¹⁹ 'Āyid al-Qarnī (b. 1960) is popular Saudi preacher and a widely published author with numerous television appearance. He is the author of the widely popular book *Lā Tahzan* (Don't be Sad) which was translated into five languages. He was one of the active members of the powerful Sahwa movement in the 1980s and 1990s that called for drastic social, religious and political reform.

²⁰ In the online registration process, a member is asked to verify her sex (female/male) via email correspondence. The registered members are entrusted not to transmit the voice of *Ustādha* Anāhīd to men.

her students describe her rhetoric as reminiscent of Ibn 'Uthaymīn in terms of style and content. Her annual summer workshop attracts 300 to 600 students at a time.

Due to her lack of formal religious education, *Ustādha* Anāhīd does not declare herself to be an independent authority. Rather, she refers to herself as a *rābiṭ* (link/conduit) for the knowledge produced by the ulama. Since *Ustādha* Anāhīd lacks the academic qualifications that would allow her independence from the ulama, she reproduces the ulama's opinions so that they can be accessible and understood by the general public, and she frequently urges her students to consult the ulama's words. Limiting interaction with the audience during the lecture, *Ustādha* Anāhīd maintains a continuously narrative style that is similar in structure to that of a public lecture, a strategy that further enhances her legitimacy by giving her discourse an orthodox religious tone. A similar pedagogical tactic was observed among the Cairene *dā'iyyāt* observed by Mahmood (2005).

Ustādha Anāhīd runs three educational centres in Jeddah, at which many of the staff members offer their full-time commitment as volunteers.²¹ These centres, which conform to the orthodox religious stance, are supported by and run under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and are therefore regarded as 'official' and as 'scientific' in their approach to religious knowledge. In this regard, *Ustādha* Anāhīd's reputation and her orthodox pedagogy help to maintain support from the ministry.

Ustādha Anāhīd's centres not only offer diplomas in religious education, they also provide psycho-religious counselling for various social and mental health

²¹ There are two main reasons for allowing women to volunteer in these centres rather than have them request an opportunity for paid work. First, by volunteering, they profess their commitment to the advocacy of religion. Secondly, the socio-economic structure in Saudi Arabia, where the man is the primary provider, relieves women of the pressure of contributing financially to the maintenance of the welfare of the family. Therefore, volunteering in these centres provides these women with a heightened sense of self-worth.

problems such as suicidal impulses, antisocial behaviour, *wiswās* (abnormal anxiety or paranoia). In carrying out this function, her centres also treat students from government-run schools, which typically serve students from less fortunate socio-economic backgrounds.

In order to exercise her authority over her female audience, *Ustādha* Anāhīd uses her computer skills to broadcast lectures online and to prepare PowerPoint presentations with verbatim excerpts from books by the ulama. *Ustādha* Anāhīd's original contribution lies only in the explanations of the excerpts that she provides. She also urges her audience to make copies of these presentations and instructs them to highlight the important passages from the books rather than to quote her directly.

I interviewed a group of volunteers who were working in the three educational centres that *Ustādha* Anāhīd manages across Jeddah, in particular at *al-Ma'had al-ʿIlmī* (The Educational Institute), one of the three centres from which students can obtain a three-year diploma in Sharia Studies regardless of their academic backgrounds. In addition, I interviewed a group of her students who volunteered to help run a series of lectures that she held at Faiṣliyya Women Welfare Society, a local charitable organisation with an auditorium large enough to accommodate the approximately 400 women who attended *Ustādha* Anāhīd's lecture series on *al-ʿUṣul al-Sitta*. I asked the volunteers about their reasons for enrolling in the diploma programme and why they volunteered to help *Ustādha* Anāhīd run the series at the welfare society. They declared that knowing where to acquire fatwa in order to resolve daily dilemmas was one of the main reasons that they were attracted to *Ustādha* Anāhīd's programmes and lectures:

Yusrā: One must take the fatwas from *ahl al-ʿilm* [people with religious knowledge] – such as the *Lajnat al-ʿIfṭā* [Fatwa Committee], *Hayʾat Kibār al-Ulama*, Ibn ʿUthaymīn and Ibn Bāz – if Allah [had] made it easy for you to reach them. Here in

the centre we are taught how to research fatwas from their sources, and if we don't know then we should call *Lajnat al-ʿIfṭā*.

Nūr: She led us to the *shuyūkh* [sing. shaykh] and she was not biased toward her opinions. She told us 'don't come to me but refer back to the *shuyūkh*'. She was just a conduit for *ʿilm* and she referred us back to the *ʿuṣūl* [original religious sources].

Yusrā: So there's nothing negative in what she says because it's all from the ulama and there's no difference [between what she says and what they say].

These women attribute the ability to produce religious knowledge to the ulama by naming them the *ahl al-ʿilm*. However, they also realise that *Ustādha* Anāhīd is capable of producing religious knowledge. They do not deny that she may possess the attributes of *ahl al-ʿilm*; however, they recognise that she occupies a subordinate role within the established male-dominated hierarchal religious and social order – an authoritative structure that is supported by the state and reinforced through *Ustādha* Anāhīd's teachings. Because *Ustādha* Anāhīd lacks religious credentials, she urges her audience to refer to local religious governmental institutions and to the documented fatwas of Ibn Bāz and Ibn ʿUthaymīn as sources for religious information, and this policy also helps her to maintain her (informal) legitimacy as a *dāʿiya* with the state. However, the authority that she gains and the legitimacy that she maintains are sustained through her perceived lack of bias in presenting her views and through her ability to remain within the established religious boundaries and respecting the established hierarchal order. Her reticence and discretion in producing religious knowledge and her decision to reproduce the knowledge of others is a strategy to maintain her power and not an indication of a loss of power in a male-dominated socio-religious context.

Without official channels through which to exercise their authority and with no room for religious pluralism, *dāʿiyāt* like *Ustādha* Anāhīd acquire and maintain their authority to preach Islam by collaborating with institutionalised sources of

legitimacy. In this case, collaboration is achieved through maintaining a link with the official ulama and by teaching Islam as locally interpreted and endorsed by the fatwa that they issue. The difficulty that some women encounter in gaining direct access to the ulama in order to seek a religious edict is embodied in the above interview excerpt when Yusrā says, 'if Allah [had] made it easy for you to reach them'; this aspect makes the role of *Ustādha* Anāhīd more salient in the process of acquiring religious knowledge: she serves the people's religious needs by serving as a medium or conduit for the interpretations of the words of the ulama.

In her own pedagogical space and with her usual audience, Dr Fāṭima, who is conversant in all four of the main Islamic legal schools of thought, does not always justify a fatwa by referencing a prominent local shaykh or '*ālim*'. However, she capitalises on her comprehensive understanding of the Ḥanbalī *madhhab*, the official Islamic legal school of thought in Saudi Arabia, to increase her authority in practising fatwa. As Nādiya, a devoted follower of hers for the past 20 years, explained,

Her way of dealing with people who don't have traditional values is that she gives such people what they need and sends them on their way. For example, a princess asked her about a fatwa and [she gave an answer, even though] people were angry...because she didn't comment on [the princess plucking] her eyebrows. In this she follows the Imam Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal when he said '*al-fatwa 'alā ḥāl al-muṭṭi*' [the fatwa is formed in accordance with the condition of the person inquiring about it].

Dr Fāṭima did not comment on the princess's plucked eyebrows, which is interpreted locally as a religiously unlawful practice because it alters God's original creation; instead, she supplied the princess with her religious opinion regarding the latter's question about the different types of hajj that one can perform. This princess – like many members of the wealthy merchant class in Saudi Arabia – is commonly described as lax in religious adherence; in order to gain acceptance among such individuals, Dr Fāṭima prioritises focusing her advice on fundamental issues in

religious practice – such as prayer, fasting and hajj – as opposed to commenting on aesthetic issues that involve appearance (such as wearing the hijab), which are more likely to reveal differences of opinion.²²

Male ulama in Saudi Arabia apply the Ḥanbalī *madhhab*, which is known as the strictest of the *madhāhib* (plural for *madhhab*), and they endorse the strictest of the opinions expressed within the Ḥanbalī *madhhab*. Dr Fāṭima capitalised on her authority in this particular case by referencing the official *madhhab* rather than the individual views of contemporary Saudi ulama. She opted for the more lenient view within the strictest of the *madhāhib* as a means of persuasion and remained within the acceptable religious boundaries. Suhayla Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, a controversial Islamic women’s rights activist and a writer who is known for contesting current Islamic practices in Saudi Arabia, provided in a telephonic interview a useful perspective on this approach. As she explained, ‘even Imam Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal himself said that revealing the face and hands are a necessity in acts of buying and selling as well as giving and taking. Imam [Muḥammad bin] ‘Abd al-Wahhāb also said that..., but they [the local ulama] only impose the strictest of all views’.

Dr Fāṭima’s audience, as described above, represents primarily the middle to upper class strata of society. She has striven to include them in her religious circle by hosting lavish charitable functions at expensive ballrooms in order to cater to their expectations and standards. The purpose of these functions is to collect donations in order to establish new Quran schools and to support those that already exist. The two

²² Although the unlawfulness of plucking eyebrows has been established as the official legal opinion on the matter by the ulama, in my observation, many Saudi women yearn for an alternate yet valid opinion.

centres at which she usually holds her weekly lessons are located in the al-Andalus and al-Rawdah districts, which have many upper-middle and upper-class residents.²³

Both Dr Fāṭima and *Ustādha* Anāhīd reference the ulama in order to construct authority. However, *Ustādha* Anāhīd references contemporary local ulama, while Dr Fāṭima references medieval Muslim scholars. Thus, Dr Fāṭima is able to use her religious education and knowledge, the years she spent practising *da'wa*, and her reputation among her perceived 'open-minded' audience as means to subtly challenge the monopoly of local contemporary male ulama rather than to conform to their religious interpretations. She embraces the established ethos of religious interpretation in order to challenge established religious norms, thus using an approach adopted by Zaynab al-Ghazālī (d. 2005), a prominent Islamic activist in Egypt, to expand her gender role within the Muslim Brotherhood. In this way, Dr Fāṭima 'enlarge[s] or extend[s] her traditional role rather than adopting a completely new one' and uses the rhetoric of the state 'while subverting its meaning through her behaviour' (Cooke, 2001:103).

5.3.3 Male ulama as pedagogical model for the *dā'iyāt*

Altorki and El-Solh note that:

Since the middle of the 19th century, if not before, there has been a growing understanding among philosophers that the form and substance of knowledge – being a social product – is historically conditioned. The type and content of knowledge is subject to the continuing development of humanity, both socially and intellectually'. (1988:3)

²³ Coming from a privileged background herself, Dr Fāṭima has been heavily criticised – mainly by other competing *da'iyāt* – for throwing these lavish parties to attract followers of a certain social class. The argument behind the criticism is that targeting the privileged strata contradicts some of Islam's basic values of equality among people and contributes to schism within society.

Consistent with this view, four subthemes emerged from the data collected for this study with respect to the male ulama as a source of pedagogical inspiration; hence, they lend legitimacy to the *dā'iyāt's* authority through: (1) their pedagogy of valued knowledge; (2) emulating a male persona; (3) relying on ulama in interpreting Islamic text; and (4) disseminating the ideologies of the ulama.

5.3.3.1 *The language of valued knowledge*

The pedagogical styles observed among the *dā'iyāt* studied for this dissertation varied between *wa'ẓī* (from *wa'ẓ*, 'to preach') and *'ilmī* (to espouse knowledge). The *wa'ẓī* narrative style observed in the lessons of the *dā'iyāt* is reminiscent of Friday public sermons made from the pulpit of a mosque. In some mosques in Saudi Arabia these sermons are conducted in a language that fluctuates between colloquial and classical as a way of espousing authenticity while maintaining wider public appeal. This form of preaching through moralising narratives represents 'not theological analysis, but a type of knowledge that helps [people] make sense of their daily lives' (Torab, 2007:48). In other words, *wa'ẓ* serves the purpose of preaching practical religious knowledge rather than providing explanations of scripture.

The Arabic word *'ilm* means knowledge. My informants (the *dā'iyāt* and their audiences) defined this term in various ways, but the predominant theme was that those individuals who possessed *'ilm* or *'ilm shar'ī* (religious knowledge) had a wealth of theological knowledge that could be interpreted to meet the daily needs of modern Muslims. Someone with *'ilm shar'ī* is capable of theological analysis and demonstrates competence in presenting various textual interpretations. Such a person is also learned in the Arabic language and knows the Quran and the books of the

Sunna and exegesis by heart. An academic degree in Islamic education was not regarded by the majority of informants as a necessary requirement for one to have *'ilm shar'ī*. Moreover, according to the members of the audience whom I interviewed, *'ilm* was generally attributed to male authority figures, while some female authorities were more commonly said to adopt the *wa'ẓī* style.

In my interviews with members of the audience, the manner in which the speaker used language was often a significant feature in determining who was said to have *'ilm*. As Geertz (1983) notes, 'the sense of Quranic Arabic as the model of what speech should be, and a constant reproof to the way people actually talk, is reinforced by the whole pattern of traditional Muslim life'. Geertz continues:

The most important public speeches – those from the throne, for example – are cast in an Arabic so classicized that most [who] hear them but [only] vaguely understand them.... The cry for Arabization – ... swept forward by religious passions, for conducting education in classical Arabic... – is a potent ideological force [in which] language is as much symbol as medium[; for Arab Muslims,] verbal style is a moral matter. (ibid.:112)

According to Geertz, the perception of authenticity of rhetoric is heightened by its utterance in classical Arabic, the preferred idiom of (particularly male) religious authority. However, classical Arabic is losing its appeal among the Arab youth, and many of the *wa'ẓī muḥādarāt* by *dā'iyyāt* in Jeddah that target youth are conducted in colloquial Arabic in order to appeal to a wider audience and to appear more self-evidently applicable to their lives. In fact, the choice of language style on the part of the *dā'iyyāt* has a variety of implications, and whether they conduct their lessons in classical or colloquial Arabic depends on the type of audience whom they want to attract and the persona that they want to project. As discussed below, the pedagogical style of the ulama with whom the *dā'iyyāt* associate also impacts the demeanour and pedagogical style of the *dā'iyā*, as well as the audience's perceptions thereof.

5.3.3.2 The dā'iyāt's reliance on male ulama as a model in the pedagogy of valued knowledge

Abla Fāṭima R. is an unmarried dā'iyā in her early thirties who claims that she has dedicated her life to *da'wa*. She is a long-time volunteer at Dr Wafā's *Da'wa* Centre, which operates in accordance with the strict interpretations of Islamic law enforced by the official ulama and where I observed her lessons in the *Himmatī Da'watī* programme. Frustrated by her 'late commitment (*iltizām*) to religion' during her senior year in high school, *Abla Fāṭima R.* compensates for her perceived early negligence in religious practice by diversifying her religious commitment through involvement in such activities as philanthropy and volunteering at the Jeddah *Da'wa* Centre, as well as through her status as a student of 'ilm.

At the time of the interview, *Abla Fāṭima R.* was working on her master's degree in 'Aqīda Studies at Um al-Qurā University. She had graduated with a bachelor's degree in Islamic Studies because she had not been admitted to either of her preferred courses, Arabic or Geography.²⁴ *Abla Fāṭima R.* also practises *da'wa* in government-run schools and in government-run hospitals, and I observed her giving bi-weekly lectures for female staff members and doctors at al-Wilāda Hospital. She was introduced to the world of *da'wa* by Dr Āmāl Nuṣayr, one of the well-established dā'iyāt in Jeddah, who embraced *Abla Fāṭima R.* as one of the many whom she has trained to be dā'iyāt.

²⁴ In public universities in Saudi Arabia, if a female student does not succeed in gaining admission to her preferred course of study, she is automatically enrolled in Islamic Studies (*dirāsāt islāmiyya*). This practice has been highly contested by female religious authorities in Saudi Arabia, particularly by Dr Fāṭima, who has tried to influence the government to start taking women's religious education more seriously by applying the same rules as those enjoyed by the men rather than the haphazard admission of less competent students.

At *Himmatī Da'watī*, *Abla* Fāṭima R. was lecturing to high school seniors and college freshmen on how to prepare to become a *dā'iyāt*. She explained to me that the girls in the *da'wa* programme were divided into two groups, one of which studied with her and one of which studied with *Abla* Ḥanīn – whose instructional style is described by her students as more 'flexible', 'lenient' and 'contemporary' and who uses colloquial Arabic, as opposed to the classical language used by *Abla* Fāṭima R.. The division into groups was based on the students' religious foundations. *Abla* Fāṭima R. described her group as having a '*ta'ṣīl Najdī*' (Najdi religious foundation), which is often ascribed to those who come from the Najd region, particularly al-Qaṣīm, the bedrock of Imam Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb's puritanical movement. The majority of Saudi official ulama descend from that region, such as Ibn Bāz and Ibn 'Uthaymīn. They represent *al-ta'ṣīl al-Najdī* and are known for their strict adherence to Ḥanbalī jurisprudence. Moreover, this group also professes its commitment to the path of *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* of the first three centuries of Islam. The identification of others, and oneself, in such indigenous religious terms reflects an adherence to established norms and to sanctioned religious interpretations. *Abla* Fāṭima R. explained to me that this division had been 'studied and assessed' at the centre by a committee headed by Dr Wafā'. The purpose of the division was to fortify the religious education of those with pre-established *ta'ṣīl Najdī* and to introduce *ta'ṣīl Najdī* to those who do not already share these attitudes.

The instructional styles that the *dā'iyāt* use at the centre often depend on how much religious knowledge their students already possess, with religious knowledge being defined at the centre by adherence to the Najdī religious foundation described above. *Abla* Fāṭima R. described these students as follows: 'Their parents have religious resources such as books by Ibn 'Uthaymīn and Ibn Bāz. They [the students]

are advanced in religion and [in their knowledge of] classical Arabic language.' The students who were assigned to the class of *Abla* Fāṭima R. were thus those with well-established religious foundations and who were equipped with the tools to understand the concepts and terms that she elaborated. They were capable of grasping complex theological ideas and commenting on them, hence of making significant contributions to the lessons.

The setting where *Abla* Fāṭima R. gave her daily lessons reflected the strict and authoritative pedagogical style she adopted. Located in the largest and main lecture room at the centre, *Abla* Fāṭima R. took centre stage lecturing while standing. It was a setting reminiscent of a madrasa-style learning arrangement: the twelve students who were enrolled in her lesson sat around on scattered pillows on the floor. The lecture room had no chairs and they were only brought to the room when a senior *dā'iya* such as Dr Wafā' or a visitor *dā'iya* such as Dr Fāṭima gave a lesson. The seating arrangement was not comfortable and signs of discomfort were sometimes observable in the students. Such a setting established an evident hierarchical gap between the learners and the *dā'iya*, heightening the latter's perceived authoritative persona. However, *Abla* Fāṭima R. sometimes gave her lesson while sitting on the floor to create a more intimate environment.

Abla Fāṭima R.'s oratory style is monotonous, and she maintains a fast pace but delivers her words in a low tone of voice that was subtly enhanced as it echoed in the large lecture room. On occasion, she evokes emotion by elevating her tone to sound almost as if she were weeping, particularly when she is sharing ideas that relate to piety, fear of God, or the miracles of the Quran. One student even described her style as *muṣṭana'* (fake or forced) and expressed annoyance in this regard, while another student described it as evoking love and sincerity in her practice. Her lessons

are narrative in format, and in them she attempts to cover as much content as possible and to quote male ulama whenever possible, therefore placing her pedagogical style in the genre of *'ilmī*. She races through the information as if she were narrating from a memorised script, and at times the students (myself included) lost track of what she was saying. However, as soon as she noticed the students' confusion, she would slow her pace and attempt to allow for more interaction from the students.

In one lesson *Abla* Fāṭima R. described how she performs *dhikr* (remembrance of God) as part of her daily routine and noted that she performs this ritual more often when she faces daily challenges. She explained that she was inspired by the advice of Shaykh al-Maghāmsī (b. 1963/4) when he said, 'If you want Allah to remember you day and night, then you must perform *dhikr*'. Shaykh al-Maghāmsī is an orthodox *'ālim* who's widely popular in Saudi Arabia and among her students. His sermons are widely disseminated on the Internet and on television. By referencing him and associating herself with already familiar *marjī'iyya* to her audience, *Abla* Fāṭima R. connected with her audience and portrayed herself as a pious individual and consequently enhancing her legitimate authoritative traits.

Abla Fāṭima R. further explained that performing *dhikr* through *du'ā'* (prostration), for example, is one way to insure that one continues to perform good deeds:

Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Maghāmsī said, 'There will be moments when doing good is accessible at your footsteps and there are other moments when the *shayṭān* [devil] takes advantage of you and keeps you from performing good. So if you are committed to doing good, then do it, even if only with a *du'ā'*.... We sometimes hope to perform good but are unable to do so; or, if we are able to do it, we find excuses not to do it.

Abla Fāṭima R. conducts her lessons in classical Arabic, reminiscent of a shaykh preaching from a pulpit, and she stated in several lessons that her style is inspired by

that of Shaykh al-Maghāmsī. This style gives her more appeal and legitimacy among her students, who are already well-read in religious knowledge and who have expressed a desire to know the sources of the information being shared by the *dā'iya*.

To convince the students of her point of view, *Abla Fāṭima R.* first introduces an idea and then attributes it back to a male authority such as Ibn 'Uthaymīn or al-Maghāmsī, even when the idea is a common one. For example, in a lesson entitled *al-Athar al-'Aẓīm lil-Qurān al-Karīm* (The Great Effect of the Quran), *Abla Fāṭima R.* attempted to encourage the students to allow themselves to feel and live the meanings of the Quran and to relate its messages and meanings to their daily lives by quoting Shaykh al-Maghāmsī: 'Whoever has not been affected by the Quran, should allow the Quran to effect them by reading certain verses'.

Shaykh al-Maghāmsī presents himself as a charismatic and confident character, to whom some members of the audience of *Ustādha Anāhīd* and students at *Himmatī Da'watī* have attributed the quality of '*al-rāsikhūn fī al-'ilm*' (dedicated to knowledge). *Abla Fāṭima R.* stated in her lecture that she references his authority in particular because of 'his specialisation in Quran and Arabic', which expertise contributes to the legitimacy of a religious authority figure because it enables him or her to understand the complex language of the Quran. In addition, she encouraged her students to repeat a prayer that al-Maghāmsī recited to inspire the students to follow in his footsteps: 'Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Maghāmsī said, 'If a believer says 'Praise Be to Allah the Lord of the Universe' in his prayers, he should couple this by saying 'O Allah, make my tongue eloquent so as to express my appreciation to You''.

Abla Fāṭima R. was kind enough to share with me the contents of her portable hard disc, which contained the presentations and other supplementary material that she used in the workshop. The folder contained several YouTube videos of Shaykh al-

Maghāmsī's television appearances on the popular al-Majd Islamic channel, along with excerpts from his cassettes. Among the clips that are relevant to understanding his appeal is one entitled 'The Weeping of Shaykh al-Maghāmsī', which explains the relevance of *ikhlāṣ* (sincerity) in religious practice. This public exercise of showing humility and piety to God, along with openly weeping on live television, enhances Shaykh al-Maghāmsī's appeal as a pious figure of inspiration. *Abla* Fāṭima R. attempts to mimic his style and to present herself as the female version of al-Maghāmsī.

Abla Ḥanīn, who runs the senior group at *Himmatī Da'watī* that does not have *ta'ṣīl Najdī*, is a young *dā'iya* in her early thirties, an Islamic education teacher, philanthropist, and social worker. She is also the founder of a young girls' club called *Nādī Jūd* (Jūd Club), which operates under the umbrella of the World Assembly for Muslim Youth in Jeddah. The club functions mainly as a book club in which, at the end of every week, *Abla* Ḥanīn and her students (aged 13 to 16) discuss a book that covers a topic relating to Islam, such as the political turmoil in Palestine or other current Islamic and global affairs. All of her lectures are conducted in colloquial Arabic, into which she inserts local idioms and stories from everyday life in order to appeal to students, whom *Abla* Fāṭima R. described as 'not having a strong religious foundation'. In school, *Abla* Ḥanīn is known to be favoured among the students for her 'openness' in discussing 'girly' issues such as advising them against having relationships with boys and openly discussing sexual issues. She even teaches a course called *Dawrat 'Ālam al-Kibār* (The Adult World Course) – or, as she jokingly calls it, *Dawrat Gillat al-'Adab* (The Course of Discourteous Behaviour) – which is

basically a religiously packaged sex education class.²⁵ Her unorthodox teaching style and responsiveness to the students' needs and interests, as compared to the more orthodox and rigid teaching style of *Abla Fāṭima R.*, is among the main reasons for her wide appeal. She subscribes to a more contemporary pedagogical style rather than a traditional one.

During the summer *Himmatī Da'watī* workshop, many of the senior students wanted to be in *Abla Ḥanīn's* group, and some asked to be transferred from *Abla Fāṭima R.'s* class to hers. *Abla Ḥanīn* appeals to young adults in many ways, and she stated during her lessons and in interviews that she is inspired by the pedagogical style of Shaykh Dr 'Alī al-Shubaylī. For example, in a lesson entitled *Methods for Da'wa*, as *Abla Ḥanīn* was explaining the concept of *targhīb wa tarhīb* (encouragement and awareness) and when to use each when advising people on correct religious practice, a discussion opened up between *Abla Ḥanīn* and the students regarding which of these pedagogical styles is more appropriate for use in modern times. She encouraged the student to try to understand people's nature first and to start with *targhīb*, which helps to bring people closer to God:

- Safa: One of the biggest mistakes in *da'wa* is that we try to make people like us instead of [putting them on] the right *manhaj* [religious path].
- Abla Ḥanīn*: Dr 'Alī al-Shubaylī said you need to treat each person like they have a bait [i.e., assume that there is something that can lure them in, and keep searching until you find what it is]. If we relate *da'wa* to fishing, we see that the fishing rod [*sinnāra*] can either be short or long.

In other words, just as in fishing one needs to choose the right rod depending on the type of fish one aims to catch, each person will fall for a certain type of spiritual 'bait', which is what we must therefore use to attract them.

²⁵ *Adab* also 'entail[s] a complex of valued dispositions (intellectual, moral and social)' (Shakry, 1998:127)

Abla Ḥanīn keeps things casual and 'cool', as her young students would say. She does not follow in the footsteps of the majority of the ulama – or even the *dā'iyāt* at the centre – in using the classical Arabic oratory style. Rather, she relies on her signature colloquial oratory skills in order to maintain her appeal to the young generation. However, she adopts the technique of Dr al-Shubaylī in order to leverage her influence among those students who reject the rigid structure and expectations of Dr Wafā's centre, and she follows Dr al-Shubaylī's fishing metaphor in personalising her methods and strategies in order to lead each student to the righteous path. This is based on her understanding that in *da'wa* one must first understand the person whom one is trying to advise and then to select the appropriate method to use in advising that person.

Shaykh Dr 'Alī al-Shubaylī is an Islamic authority who writes and gives talks on life coaching and on issues relating to family life, such as the *tarbiya* (rearing) of children and familial relations. His appeal serves as an obvious model to a *dā'iyā* who works primarily with youth, such as *Abla Ḥanīn*, who wants to break out of the traditional *madrassa*-style in teaching religion. *Abla Ḥanīn* stated in our interview that she frequently refers to programmes and books by many of the 'contemporary' Islamic thinkers who introduced new pedagogical strategies, such as Muḥammad al-'Awadī,²⁶ Dr Muḥammad Rashīd al-'Uwayd,²⁷ who focuses on women's issues, and Muḥammad Rātīb al-Nābulī.²⁸ The appeal of these figures lies in the fact that they

²⁶ A popular contemporary Kuwaiti thinker and an Islamic activist whose pedagogy targets mainly youth and focuses on Islamic issues.

²⁷ A Syrian Islamic writer and magazine editor who focuses most of his writings on women and family issues.

²⁸ A popular contemporary Muslim scholar from Syria and widely published author in various religious disciplines. He currently teaches the subject of the miracles of the Quran at Damascus University and runs an Islamic magazine.

have broken out of the traditional mould of the preacher who focuses solely on a narrow view of religious orthodoxy and expanded into a more contemporary, orthopraxical and *tarbawī* (adj. of *tarbiya*, which is a term that simultaneously describes upbringing and educating) trajectory that some see as better suited to coping with the complexities of the modern world.

Al-Shubaylī presents a more contemporary and approachable persona than Shaykh al-Maghāmsī, who follows the more traditional pedagogical style that influenced *Abla Fāṭima R.* Unlike most traditional Saudi ulama and shaykhs, al-Shubaylī is not formal in his attire and does not wear the *bisht* (traditional men's cloak worn over the *thūb* to signal status). Similarly, in her appearance and attire, *Abla Ḥanīn* is more casual than *Abla Fāṭima R.*, opting for more vibrant colours and contemporary styles, and she contests the rules of attire enforced at the centre – which require girls to wear long dresses and long-sleeved tops – by wearing skirts hemmed just above the ankle and half-sleeved t-shirts. Her pedagogical style is reminiscent of that of al-Shubaylī in that she is flexible and adopts an open policy in class discussions. The manner in which she manages her lessons encourages her students to contribute their ideas and opinions, and this approach appeals to the young generation of girls – particularly to those who are still novices in religious education.

All in all, despite the fact that both *Abla Ḥanīn* and *Abla Fāṭima R.* work for *Maktab al-Tawjīh wa al-Irshād* (The Office of Guidance and Advice) within the Ministry of Education, they employ very different pedagogical styles.²⁹ *Abla Fāṭima R.* can be described as learner-distant while *Abla Ḥanīn* is learner-proximate and integrates the audience into the process of knowledge transmission while *Abla Fāṭima*

²⁹ *Maktab al-Tawjīh wa al-Irshād* is a department within the Ministry of Education that oversees all extracurricular activities within schools, which includes providing religious guidance and advice.

R. represents a more classical and traditional educational style. In the learner-proximate style as exhibited by *Abla Ḥanīn*, knowledge is a product of the interaction between the *dā'iya* and her audience. In the learner-distant style, the *dā'iya* stands literally or figuratively on a pulpit, allowing minimal interaction and reciprocation from the audience. The manner in which material is presented in this model assumes that the students have previously acquired religious knowledge with which they can interpret new information and advance their learning.

5.3.3.3 *The dā'iyāt's emulation of male persona to augment legitimacy*

Jeddah is widely regarded as the most cosmopolitan and 'liberal' city in Saudi Arabia – certainly more so than the Saudi capital, Riyadh, where many of the informants considered religious education among women at the centre of *da'wa* of Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb and the basis of the official Islamic scholars to be more '*jādda*' ('serious', i.e., more serious in the approach to studying and applying religion) – as Zuhūr, a follower of Dr Wafā's, described it. Indeed, many informants expressed negative views of the behaviour of people in Jeddah, claiming that the city's culture was 'too open' and that the people did not adhere properly to socio-cultural and religious norms. *Ustādha* Anāhīd, moreover, who is from Jeddah, reflected a common view when she described the *dā'iyāt* in Jeddah as 'weak in their discourse rather than serious'.

Among the most prominent *dā'iyāt* in Jeddah is Dr Wafā', who strives in many ways to challenge such impressions regarding Jeddah *dā'iyāt* and Jeddah women in general. In terms of outward signs, she wears the '*abāya* – an iconic symbol of religiosity that is not as prevalent in Jeddah as in other cities across the country – on top of the head (as opposed to draped casually over the shoulders),

which denotes heightened piousness for women in Saudi Arabia. Thus, in semiotic terms, the 'abāya – particularly when so worn – is a *signifier* of 'piousness', one that carries *associations* of 'legitimacy'. At the same time that she employs this feminine signifier, Dr Wafā' is also one of the *dā'iyāt* whose style several of the informants described as reminiscent of that of the male ulama. In general, this comparison is not surprising, as some of the *dā'iyāt* deliberately copy aspects of the demeanour of male ulama as a tactic by which to augment their legitimacy in the male-dominated religious sphere. The manner in which this is the case, however – and the dependence in this regard on audience expectations – provides a fascinating example of what Goffman states regarding 'performance': 'the individual offers his performance and puts on his show 'for the benefit of other people''. Thus, one must look at 'the individual's own belief in the impression of reality that he attempts to engender in those among whom he finds himself' (1990:28).

Apart from wearing the 'abāya, which is a *gendered* religious signifier, Dr Wafā' may be said to minimise the femininity in her persona in order to augment her authority in the eyes of her followers. Her naturally tanned and chiselled complexion contributes to a constantly serious expression. She is usually dressed in a plain, long-sleeved, collared, buttoned shirt, a coordinated long skirt, comfortable black loafers, and matching thick socks. Her hair is slicked back and pulled up in a bun. She wears glasses and minimal accessories. She has a small, slender build, but this does not prevent her from being noticed when she enters a space. Even her oratory style has been described by one of her followers as reminiscent of male ulama: authoritative, sober and didactic.

Ru'ā is a student who joined *Himmatī Da'watī* specifically in order to remain in close proximity to Dr Wafā', whom she viewed as a role model. In an interview, Ru'ā described Dr Wafā''s oratory style as follows:

I attended a three-day series of lectures entitled *al-Khaliq* [The Creator]. *Mashā'Allah lā quwwata illā bi Allah* [By Allah's will, there is no power except from Allah], her voice was beyond amazing. [When I listen to Dr Wafā',] I feel like Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya is talking. Everything she says you can find in books. It's like she's reading me a book; however, she's explaining it to me [at the same time], and she makes me perceive and sense the meaning.

Another student at the centre, Zuhūr, who also joined in order to follow Dr Wafā', said the following:

I feel like she's one of the *ṣaḥaba* from the time of the Prophet. In terms of hijab, she adheres to wearing the 'abāya over her head, and its sleeves are wide – not the like the ones [worn by those] who follow fashion – and she also wears gloves. I want to become like her. She is living for God and does not want anything from this life. She has a strong personality at a time when there is much *fitna*. She manages to hold on to her religion and not to be affected by [these divisions]. You feel that the only thing she cares about is God and that God made it her mission [to become a *dā'iya*].

Notably, both Ru'ā and Zuhūr described Dr Wafā' using masculine terms and with reference to features that are usually attributed to male authority figures. At issue here is the manner in which Dr Wafā' 'performs' her role, as Goffman defines the term, as well as how her audience perceives it. In a male-dominated religious realm, the personal element of the *dā'iya* is replaced by a *persona* that carries – or is perceived to carry – attributes usually associated with male authority. Sometimes, this perception may exceed the bounds of logic or observation. For example, Ru'ā claimed that Dr Wafā''s pedagogical style and voice were similar to those of Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, a Muslim scholar from the fourteenth century whose voice is hardly a matter of record, let alone something within the informant's sphere of observation. Both she and Zuhūr compared Dr Wafā''s piousness to that of the *ṣaḥaba* – again,

making a sort of leap of faith rather than a comparison based on first-hand evidence – and both also commented on the perceived ‘strength’ in her personality. Thus, the gendered associations of the performative self in the religious sphere may in a sense become *trans*-gendered where masculinity predominates the realm of expectations. In any case, there is a constant negotiation between the performative self, the persona of the *dā‘iya*, and the individual self, the one who functions outside the parameters of *da‘wa*. The personal is assimilated into a persona that becomes a ‘front’ observed by (and exerting influence on) the audience. As defined by Goffman, a ‘front’ is ‘the part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance’ (1990:32). The present paradigm, in which the *dā‘iya* assimilates herself into a ‘masculinised’ model of communication, requires the *dā‘iyāt* to observe and assimilate herself to the masculine persona, which is perceived as more legitimate and influential. This assimilation, however, is presumably both an *affect* of performance and an *effect* of perception, as evidenced by Ru‘ā’s illogical comparison of Dr Wafā’’s style to that of a male authority figure who has long since taken his style into the unobservable realm of the grave, as well as by both informants’ comparisons of Dr Wafā’ to male *ṣaḥaba* rather than to the female *ṣaḥabiyyāt*.

How the *dā‘iya* shapes her appearance and manner reflects her social status as a reproducer of religious and sacred knowledge, and, within a male-dominated religious sphere, a certain air of ‘masculinity’ in demeanour and physical attributes can contribute to the perception of her seriousness and to the effectiveness of her pedagogy, as in Dr Wafā’’s case. Nonetheless, the descriptions of her reserved and decorous attire are not a complete departure from terms associated with female attributes. The codes of conduct in female attire can be viewed in relation to ‘social

demands' and 'ritual episodes' (Hall, 2007:122). The social demands of being a female figure of religious authority necessitate abiding by these expectations. Moreover, as an expression of religious rituals, wearing the 'abāya in the manner described signifies a state of heightened adherence and piety. Thus, if Zuhūr's statement is understood in the socio-religious context of Jeddah, Dr Wafā' is set apart from the majority of women in the city in terms of her religious adherence and attire. Rather than describing Dr Wafā' entirely in masculine terms, Zuhūr acknowledges her gender and emphasises her distinctly feminine virtues. Dr Wafā' is a role model of how a woman with heightened religious adherence (*multazima*) should behave in relation to her audience and to male figures of religious authority at a time when adhering to religious principles has become a complex and shifting challenge.

5.3.3.4 The dā'iyāt's reference of ulama as marji'īyya dīnīyya in interpreting Islamic text

For many reasons, which this dissertation has already discussed in some detail, the male ulama have established a prerogative over the production of religious knowledge in Saudi Arabia and in much of the Islamic world. The present section addresses how the dā'iyāt reproduce this knowledge and appropriate it in order to establish their authority.

Ustādha Anāhīd's seminars at Faiṣliyya Women Welfare Society consisted of two one and one-half hour segments. The first of these was a lesson on *al-'Uṣūl al-Sitta*, based on the list presented by Shaykh Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb in his book *Kashf al-Shubuhāt wa al-'Uṣūl al-Sitta* (The Clearing of Doubts and The Six Articles of Belief). In her explanation, *Ustādha* Anāhīd followed the standard, widely-used book by Ibn 'Uthaymīn, *Sharḥ Kashf al-Shubuhāt wa al-'Uṣūl al-Sitta* (The

Explanation of 'The Clearing of Doubts and the Six Articles of Belief') (2005). The second half of the lecture was dedicated to first explaining the names and attributes of Allah ('*asmā*' *Allah wa ṣifātuh*) and then to a discussion of the Hadith. For the former, *Ustādha* Anāhīd used the book *Fiqh al-'Asmā' al-Ḥusnā* (The Deep Understanding of Allah's Names) (al-Badr, 2008), and for the latter she used the book *Bahjat Qulūb al-'Abrār wa Qurrat 'Uyūn al-'Akhyār fī Sharḥ Jawami' al-'Akhbār* (al-Sa'dī, 2003). The author of the latter, Shaykh 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sa'dī (d. 1947/8), was a teacher of Ibn 'Uthaymīn. His compilation of Hadīths – titled '*Ulūm Nafi'a*' (Useful Knowledge) – covers various orthodoxy issues ('*ibadāt*') of ritual worship and belief, such as *tawhīd*, '*aqīda*' and *al-'uṣul*, as well as orthopraxy or *mu'amalāt* (conduct) relating to such issues as jurisprudence.

For each lesson, *Ustādha* Anāhīd's assistants created a PowerPoint presentation that was projected onto a large screen in the centre of the auditorium while *Ustādha* Anāhīd sat at a desk in front of the screen facing the audience. The presentations consisted of verbatim excerpts of material selected from the aforementioned books, and each slide consisted of bullet points and summaries of the most important points in each book. Hard copies of the presentation texts were distributed to the students, and the books were sold onsite for a fraction of their original retail prices. Students were also encouraged to make electronic copies and to share them with their families and friends. In an effort to make these books more useful and accessible, *Ustādha* Anāhīd asked her students to highlight important passages and to make notes in the margins of the pages. She constantly reminded her audience to 'always refer to the book'. As she said, 'the purpose of this *muḥādara* is *al-waṣl bi al-aṣl* (to provide a link to the source [i.e., to the ulama]), so you should always refer back to *Hay'at Kibār al-Ulama*'.

The use of technology such as in the present example is not only a means of clarifying the views of earlier authors, it is also a means of embracing their rhetoric and making it more accessible to the audience. Jouili and Amir-Moazimi describe such a practice as 'typical of contemporary Islamic movements' (2006:630) that rely on scholars for authoritative interpretation.

The majority of the audience at lectures presented by *Ustādha* Anāhīd and by the other *dā'iyāt* observed in this study stated that they sought additional religious knowledge from prominent male ulama. Thus, the content and the legitimacy of *Ustādha* Anāhīd's lessons are judged against a formally recognised frame of reference. *Ustādha* Anāhīd herself gains her authority by referencing such ulama or those formally endorsed by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs as upholding 'true Islam [which] becomes...the major source of authority' (ibid). The appeal of a *dā'iya* such as *Ustādha* Anāhīd to women who profess their commitment to 'true Islam' as endorsed by the state comes from her reproduction of religious knowledge that has been established by the ulama and from making their authentic religious rhetoric more understandable and applicable in the contemporary world as experienced by Muslim women. Through such pedagogy, she confirms the attachment to the official rhetoric of the ulama by re-appropriating their knowledge and reconfiguring its content to serve women's needs in a context that is visible only to women, without altering the meaning of text or interpretation or challenging the established orthodoxy. Thus, she takes the linguistically and intellectually challenging discourse of al-Maghāmsī's Hadith book, simplifies it and applies it to oppose feminine practices that this orthodoxy deems religiously unlawful. Her pedagogical skill in carrying out this practice, along with the authority of her sources and ulama, contribute to her construction of authority.

For example, in an explanation of the Hadith 'Everyone will be with those whom he loves', *Ustādha* Anāhīd described the types of relationships that people form between each other and with God, and she appropriated the Hadith to criticise local women for not being able to keep secrets and for abusing close friendships by exposing each other's private lives to strangers.³⁰ She described gossip as a *balā*' (affliction) that is common among women. Similarly, in another lesson, *Ustādha* Anāhīd criticised women for 'showing off' while giving alms or performing good deeds by explaining the following Hadith: 'The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions, and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended. So whoever emigrates for worldly benefits or for a woman to marry, his emigration will be for what he emigrated for.'³¹ She described the behaviour of women who pay alms for worldly purposes rather than to seek the acceptance from Allah as *riyā*' (dissimulation).

Such criticisms of the behaviour of members of her gender serve two purposes. First, *Ustādha* Anāhīd legitimises her authority by echoing the official rhetoric of ulama, which in general is patriarchal and even misogynistic in its interpretation of religious knowledge and scriptures. In this way, she establishes her informal legitimacy by adopting the sanctioned depiction of the nature of women. Secondly, through participating in the dissemination of the ideology of lack, she perpetuates the need for the women who make up her audience – and for others like them – to continue to seek out her expertise and guidance, thus further legitimising her authority on an on-going basis. Thus, by highlighting women's deficiency in

³⁰ Sahih al-Bukhari, The Book of al-Adab (Good Manners) Volume 8, Hadith no. 6168.

³¹ Sahih al-Bukhari, The Book of Revelation, Volume 1, Hadith no. 1.

nature and capabilities, as well as the errors in their religious practices, she establishes their need for her assistance and for her practice of *da'wa*.

As noted, some members of the audience legitimatise the content of the *dā'iyāt's* rhetoric in their *durūs* or *muḥādarāt* by noting its resemblance to that of prominent local and international male religious figures of authority. Men have established precedence throughout history in shaping religious rhetoric by creating institutional bodies to codify their beliefs and by broadcasting their views via various international media outlets. Their prerogative to interpret religion and to produce its knowledge is rarely contested by the general public.

Şālḥa is a physics graduate and a housewife with three children whose husband was initially opposed to her attending the *dā'iyāt's* lessons until she convinced him of *Ustādha* Anāhīd's credentials. Like many members of the audience, Şālḥa put a great deal of effort into attending these lessons. Since public transport is scarce and unpleasant for women, many of the more financially challenged attendees show their commitment by planning ahead and carpooling with their friends and neighbours. Many, including Şālḥa, take their children to schools and then wait at the centre for several hours until the lessons begin. The intervening time is usually spent in acts of worship such as praying, reciting the Quran with friends, sharing notes, and reviewing ideas discussed in previous lessons.

Şālḥa had been attending *Ustādha* Anāhīd's *al-Ma'had al-'Ilmī* to prepare herself to become a certified Quran and Hadith school teacher and also to fulfil her role as a mother by instilling religious ethics and knowledge in her children. When I asked Şālḥa about the appeal of *Ustādha* Anāhīd, she said that

Ustādha Anāhīd pays attention to '*aqīda*. May Allah bless her work and knowledge. She's an asset to Islam and Muslims because she's an exact copy of *al-'allama* (scholar) Ibn 'Uthaymīn and al-Sa'dī in

explaining the book *al-Shawq* for Ibn 'Uthaymīn just like him and doesn't introduce anything from elsewhere and does not describe more than whatever is said in the book.

Ṣālḥa also stated that she listens to the cassettes of Ibn 'Uthaymīn and other prominent Saudi ulama that are distributed in mosques or on special occasions such as funerals. This behaviour is consistent with the majority of *Ustādha* Anāhīd's followers, who reported that they actively seek additional knowledge from officially recognised male ulama through their broadcasts either on television or on radio. Some also said that they attend mosque lessons in which the audio portion is transmitted electronically to the secluded women's sections.

Nahla, another of *Ustādha* Anāhīd's devoted attendees, is a graduate of Teacher's College in Jeddah. After obtaining her undergraduate degree, she enrolled in her district's Quran school; but because Quran schools teach solely memorisation of the Quran and do not provide lessons in Sharia studies, Nahla later joined Anāhīd's *al-Ma'had al-'Ilmī* in order 'to fill the gap [in her religious awareness] because there was something missing inside [her] heart'. After one lesson ended, I had the chance to sit with Nahla and to discuss her views on *Ustādha* Anāhīd's teaching:

You cannot find anything negative in what she says because [the source of the] *al-kalām* [oratory] is not from her. It's all about 'Allah said this and the Prophet said this', so there's no error because she's explaining *kalām* al-ulama [the oratory of the ulama]. I don't see any difference between what she's saying and what they're saying, so this made me feel content.

Salma is not a student of Anāhīd's institute but is a devoted attendee of her annual summer lessons. She also listens to the Quran radio station that is run by the Ministry of Culture and Information while commuting and while performing chores at home. The station airs various religious programmes that feature recognised Saudi ulama

and recitations of the Quran. In her interview, Salma expressed a similar opinion of *Ustādha* Anāhīd:

The books she provides us are certified by *Hay'at Kibār al-Ulama*, such as the *tafsīr* [exegesis] books of al-Baghawī, Ibn Kathīr and al-Shawkanī. In Hadith, it's *Ṣaḥīh al-Bukhārī* and [*Ṣaḥīh*] *Muslim*, so she's on the same *madhhab* as the ulama.

Ustādha Anāhīd compensates for her lack of formal religious education through her strict adherence to the knowledge produced by Saudi scholars. Her *muḥādarāt* and *durūs* echo the rubric of reproducing *kalām ahl al-'ilm* (oratory of the people of religious knowledge) or *kalām al-ulama*, which is one of the ways in which her authority is legitimatised in the eyes of her audience. This is evident in Nahla's statement that the '*al-kalām* is not from her'. *Ustādha* Anāhīd confirms her role as a reproducer of knowledge by acting as a conduit for the authentic and orthodox knowledge of male ulama. This is done not only through repeating and explaining the literature of such ulama but also through using material approved by the ulama of the state. She establishes her authority by transmitting knowledge that has established authoritative legitimacy, whether it is derived from the ulama or from canonical books such as those mentioned by Salmā. Furthermore, Zaynab, an informant in her early sixties who is a grandmother, described *Ustādha* Anāhīd as '*alā madhhab al-ulama*' (following the *madhhab* of the ulama) – and, indeed, the pedagogy employed at the centres that *Ustādha* Anāhīd runs follows that of the ulama when presenting religious knowledge.

Ustādha Anāhīd did not acquire a formal education in religion, and her students are aware that she is self-taught according to the teachings of Ibn 'Uthaymīn. Zaynab noted this fact when she said that Anāhīd 'acquired knowledge from those who are *rasikhūn* [*ft al-'ilm*] such as Shaykh al-'Uthaymīn'. Anāhīd's fidelity in reproducing his knowledge lends legitimacy to her authority.

The reality of *da'wa* practice and the form of religious discourse should be viewed as an artefact of the wider status of women in Saudi Arabia. The interviews conducted in this study make explicit the power structure in the authoritative religious hierarchy as it is perceived by the audience. The opinions of the audience are consistent with the system of hierarchy that *Ustādha* Anāhīd preaches in her lessons, which follow the pattern of authority in Islam as it is locally interpreted. This means that religious authority is viewed as derived from Allah, the apex of divine authority, and expressed in the Quran and in the teachings of the Prophet. Authority then falls to those scholars who uphold the laws of Allah through applying Sharia, such as Ibn 'Uthaymīn, Ibn Bāz and al-Sa'dī. Mernissi explains the appeal of adherence to this system as follows:

Submission in the Muslim tradition has come to include submission to God's interpreters on earth [in which regard] authority flows from the top to the bottom. Every individual is integrated into a flawless order, with duties and rights clearly defined. A strong sense of belonging stems from integration into this pyramid order, in which roles and ways of conduct are minutely defined according to age, sex and access to wealth and knowledge. (1996:112)

Thus, remaining within the proscribed boundaries of the social and moral order provides not only a means of survival but also a means of acceptance and of power maintenance. As members of Saudi society, the audience are also part of this system of integration, and their pattern of knowledge acquisition is part of the historically established traditional norm. In this sense, the significance of the *dā'iyyāt* in a physically segregated society is that they are part of the women's world that cannot be accessed by men without contesting or proposing major changes to established religious knowledge.

5.3.3.5 Male ulama as marji'yya for the ideological dissemination

Another example of how the *dā'iyāt* reproduce official knowledge can be seen in their advocacy for Imam Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb's teachings against *shirk* (polytheism). Rescuing believers from *shirk* was the main principle behind 'Abd al-Wahhāb's reformist movement, which started in the middle of the eighteenth century in Najd. His puritanical teachings still resonate in the official sermons of the Grand Mosque in Mecca as well as in the preaching of contemporary *dā'iyāt*. Moreover, by adhering to the principles of 'Abd al-Wahhāb's puritanical movement the state justifies its legitimacy and substantiates the king's title as The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. In addition, much of the material on the subject of *tawḥīd* (monotheism) taught as part of Islamic Studies in Saudi schools is derived from 'Abd al-Wahhāb's *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (The Book of Monotheism).

In a discussion with students on the difference between advising a Muslim and a non-Muslim, *Abla* Fāṭima R. said, 'In the *da'wa* of Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb and [the Prophet] Muḥammad, peace be upon him, he ['Abd al-Wahhāb] said, 'Start with *tawḥīd* (monotheism)'. So one must call for Islam gradually.' It is significant that *Abla* Fāṭima R. mentioned 'Abd al-Wahhāb before the Prophet Muḥammad, as this slip reflects the importance of the reformer's ideological teachings in the *dā'iyāt*'s rhetoric. This is a paramount signifier invested with respect and affection for 'Abd al-Wahhāb as a religious reformer. Moreover, there is totemic significance in the application of 'Abd al-Wahhāb's ideology in the realm of *da'wa*. Adhering to his teachings and advocating for his ideology legitimises *Abla* Fāṭima R.'s role as a bona fide *dā'iya*.

Similarly, Dr Fāṭima anchors her legitimacy as a *dā'iya* by applying the teachings of Imam 'Abd al-Wahhāb and disseminating his puritanical ideology. Her

concern about people falling into *shirk* is revealed in the supplication that she conducts after each lesson: 'O Allah, please make all our deeds righteous and sincere for You. O Allah, I take refuge in You lest I should commit *shirk* with You knowingly and I seek Your forgiveness for what I do unknowingly'.

Indeed, *shirk* had become a prominent issue during the local outbreak of swine flu during Ramadan and the hajj season of 2009. In the *dā'iyāt's* lessons and sermons, there were constant condemnations of the widespread tendency to fear a disease that was 'God's creation' rather than fearing Allah Himself, as well as frequent reminders urging people to apply concepts such as *tawakkul* (putting trust in Allah) and to fear no one but Allah. Dr Fāṭima was among the *dā'iyāt* who frequently addressed this issue, and Dr Wafā' headed a discussion entitled *Wa Iḥa Marīḍtu Fahuwa Yashfīn* (And When I Am Ill, It Is He Who Cures Me) (Quran 26:80), during which people sat outside on chairs, on the floor, and on staircases just to hear her talk and to rationalise the relevance of the disease through understanding their relationship with God.

During this time, Dr Fāṭima held bi-weekly lesson in exegesis at the International Islamic Relief Organisation, a centre that carries out philanthropic activities locally and internationally and that is located just behind her house. Although located in an upper-middle class part of Jeddah, the centre and its various philanthropic activities attract women of all social classes. Most of the audience were aged between 40 and 60 and most had been gathering at the centre for Dr Fāṭima's lessons for over twenty-five years. Many of the older women had only completed primary school education, so the religious lessons offered by Dr Fāṭima and the other *dā'iyāt* sought to compensate for their lack of religious knowledge. During one lesson concerning the exegesis of sura al-Ḥashr (The Gathering), Dr Fāṭima identified

people's fear of swine flu as a challenge to their core Islamic beliefs. In this context, she provided the following instructive anecdote:

One woman came to greet me after I returned from hajj, but because of swine flu [which she didn't have] she refused to shake hands and said, 'I will greet you from a distance!' I just want to show you how the media manipulated us into all this fear! ...Indeed, we are Muslims, but we have a lot of ignorance and we need to meticulously study and understand the Quran all over again so we can be real Muslims.... [After all], who are you worshipping? Allah has control over swine flu because he created it. *Sayyidnā* Hūd [the Prophet Hūd] said, '...I call Allah to witness, and bear you witness that I am free from that which you ascribe as partners in worship with Him. So plot against me, all of you, and give me no respite. I put my trust in Allah, My Lord and your Lord! There is not a moving [i.e., living] creature but He has the grasp of its forelock. Verily, my Lord is on a Straight [i.e., truthful] Path' (Quran 11:54-56).

In this way, Dr Fāṭima attempted to re-instill the fundamentals of Islamic belief in her audience by reminding them of the ultimate superiority and oneness of God. People's fearful reaction to the flu epidemic was interpreted by Dr Fāṭima and other *dā'iyāt* as a metaphor for their lack of religious adherence, and they used this example to demonstrate that how people reacted to any form of ordeal can be a reflection of the strength of their core Islamic beliefs, which the *dā'iyāt* attempted to bolster in their weekly lessons.

We discussed this particular incident in a subsequent interview. Dr Fāṭima reminded me that when religious education through *da'wa* started in Saudi Arabia in the middle of the twentieth century, it was based on principles that foster *tawhīd* inspired by the puritanical movement of 'Abd al-Wahhāb. She further explained that her late mother also focused primarily on eliminating *shirk* as advocated by Imam 'Abd al-Wahhāb, and that this has become an important subject in Dr Fāṭima's lessons as well.

Of her mother's influence in this regard, Dr Fāṭima reported the following:

She said [to me], 'Listen my daughter, God said, 'Indeed, God will not forgive associating with any god but Him. But He forgives anything less than this for whomever He so wills' (Quran 4:48). So the most important thing [when I performed *da'wa*] was to get people out of *shirk*.' Anyone who's a believer will follow the *da'wa* of Shaykh Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb [who also] focused on eliminating *shirk*....

Dr Fāṭima went on to note, with obvious disgust, that despite these efforts, 'all types of *shirk* have returned', and to cite such current practices as magic and witchcraft. This mission of re-educating people about their religion was a major contribution to the *dā'iyāt's* authority, since women's reaction to the disease was not visible to the male religious authorities. The *dā'iyāt*, although reproducing the knowledge conveyed by male ulama, assert their share of power through such rhetorical engagement in what is perceived as an act of faith. This is perceived as a legitimate and necessary role for them to play in order to participate in a male-dominated religious discourse. However, their status here is largely determined by their implicit accord with the male ulama and by their reproduction of officially sanctioned ideas. *Dā'iyāt* such as Dr Fāṭima assert their legitimate religious authority by sharing the prerogative to uphold and disseminate the puritanical ideology of Imam 'Abd al-Wahhāb.

5.3.4 Female charisma under the shadow of male authority

Charismatic authority is a trait commonly attributed to centralised authority figures, particularly in tribal-based social systems. However, as Weber (1991) notes, charismatic authority is not necessarily incompatible with the bureaucratic and patriarchal systems institutionalised in the other, more complex social structures. In my observations of the *dā'iyāt* and my interviews with their audience, charisma was repeatedly noted as a salient feature for the stability and maintenance of the *dā'iyāt's* position in a female-exclusive context. In this context, the perceived inherent

emotionality of women becomes an advantage for the *dā'iya* in seeking to attract followers. However, even in this regard, female *dā'iyāt* often take inspiration from prominent male ulama in determining how to capitalise on their own charisma.

For example, *Abla* Fāṭima R., a *dā'iya* and teacher at *Himmatī Da'watī*, refers constantly to the renowned Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn as a source of inspiration. In a lesson entitled 'The Effects of the Quran on the Life of the Islamic Nation', for which her group joined with *Abla* Ḥanīn's, both *dā'iyāt* discussed the importance of a meticulous understanding of the Quran and how its legislations supersede any of the other culturally normed *'ibādāt* (acts of worship) that commonly influence religious interpretation. In a discussion of how to develop courage in *hidāyat al-nās* (guide people to the righteous path), one of the students expressed the fear that she experienced when trying to advise people whom she does not know to wear proper hijab. In response, *Abla* Fāṭima R. clarified the difference between *'ibādāt* and *akhlaqiyyāt* (moralities) and explained how one needs to comprehend the primary *'ibādāt*, such as prayer. She then said: 'I learned courage from Ibn 'Uthaymīn', and described an instance in which he displayed courage, charisma, and a comprehensive understanding of the ethos of religious adherence:

In a *muḥādara* that Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn was giving at King 'Abd al-'Azīz University, he postponed the *'Ishā'* prayer from 9 to 11 [pm]. So, during his talk, the audience sent him a note urging him to commence prayer on time. He told them that in accordance with the understanding of *fiqh al-'awlawiyāt* [the fundamentals of religion] there is *al-tadarruj fī al-tashrī'* [gradation in the application of religion]; so, for example, the Prophet did not initially ask the people of Quraysh to refrain from drinking [alcohol] prior to commencing prayer.

As *Abla* Fāṭima R. gave this example of how a senior member of the *Hay'at Kibār al-ulama'* had been challenged by his followers despite his well-established reputation for extreme religious orthodoxy, *Abla* Ḥanīn stood next to her, nodding in agreement

while students from both groups gathered around them, visibly surprised by what seemed to be unorthodox and lax behaviour on the part of an eminent shaykh. Then *Abla* Fāṭima R. elaborated on what Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn had meant by *al-tadarruj fī al-tashrī*, according to which one must 'have a dialogue with people, understand them and listen to them' prior to advising people. She criticised what she called *thaqāfat al- 'ādāt wa al-taqālīd* (the culture of customs and traditions), i.e., the habit of making decisions based on invariant rules that dominates religious interpretations in Saudi Arabia and that explains the reaction to delaying prayer exhibited in the anecdote.

The following day, after performing *maghrib* prayer, *Abla* Ḥanīn's students were still puzzled, and one student continued to insist that prayer should be performed on time and that delays were religiously unacceptable. In response, *Abla* Ḥanīn explained the concept of *al-tadarruj fī al-tashrī* again and drew a diagram on the board depicting the different levels of legislation. She asserted that while it is preferable (*mustaḥab*) to begin prayer on time, Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn's delaying of prayer was within the range of what is considered *ḥalāl*. However, she explained that this position was not without its controversy, and that *Abla* 'Abīr, Dr Wafā's second-in-charge, had objected to her telling students that delaying prayer is permissible on the premise that such young students, who are novices in their religious knowledge, would become less meticulous about performing prayer on time. *Abla* Ḥanīn then said: 'I don't care if they ask me to leave. I will share what I think is right'. She went on, in a tone of dismay, to relate this matter to broader issues of religious and pedagogical approaches and interpretations: 'They also complained about my wearing short sleeves and a skirt just above the ankle. I don't understand why they apply these strict rules when it's religiously permissible to wear [such garments]!' In this

example, by engaging her students emotionally and by asserting her commitment to 'what is right', *Abla Ḥanīn* employed her charisma to help her overcome her students' objections to a controversial opinion.

In our interview the following day, I asked *Abla Ḥanīn* about the implications of what she had shared with us during the lesson the day before and whether she thought it affected her credibility as a *dā'iya* and a teacher of future *dā'iyāt*. In response, she said:

Can you imagine? The girls didn't know about this information [that it was permissible to delay prayer]. When I told the administration, they got angry at me and told me, 'Why did you tell them this? You should have let them still understand that prayer should be as early as possible.' But the Prophet taught us this, so how could we dismiss this Sunna? This is withholding *'ilm* and forbidding what's permissible, and this is not religiously permissible (*lā yajūz*).

In this example, both *dā'iyāt* exercised the courage to present this information to their students despite the centre's objections and the risk that doing so would affect their religious reputations. Although the etiquette of performing prayer is a critical issue in religious adherence, *Abla Fāṭima R.* and *Abla Ḥanīn* might not have had the courage to assert their views on this matter if it had not been for the charisma of Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn. Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn represents an apex of religious orthodoxy and piety and tends to advocate the most austere religious interpretations in his sermons and fatwas, and his established formal authority allows him to exercise a greater degree of latitude than any other figure of authority. The exercise of this personal and charismatic authority in the case discussed above was not necessarily consistent with established religious norms, and represented an attitude uncommon among his equals, who adhere to a stringent application of Islamic law in demonstrating religiosity and hence in legitimising their power.

The *dā'iyāt* are allowed to digress from the scheduled topics of their lessons only as long as they do not exceed the boundaries of the established male-defined religious framework. In other words, they cannot use their skills to break out of the structure that frames their work (Harding, 1975:308). However, within the enclosed female realm, the *dā'iyāt* assert their individuality and power through legitimate charismatic inspiration and by maintaining their attachment to male figures of authority as a demonstration of their commitment to performing correct Islamic behaviour. Moreover, through this attachment there is an implicit demonstration of their awareness and knowledge of the religious practices of the ulama and this in turn adds more capital to their pedagogical skills.

These *dā'iyāt* emerge from a position that is not traditionally in authority. They are attempting to break and diversify from rational-legal authority through charisma. A new tradition is being established by women as communicators of valued knowledge. The recent emergence of the *dā'iyāt* is in a context that does not fully recognise their legitimacy, and therefore, they don't have the same institutional support male ulama enjoy. Taking account of these limitations, charisma becomes a trait that they harness or use to establish their authority. Establishing charisma through association with existing institutionalised authority, they are able to strike a cord of familiarity, intelligibility, and attractiveness in the way they deliver their message. Charismatic inspiration helps the *dā'iyāt* acquire stability in bureaucratic structures. Association with a familiar persona (i.e., male ulama) is salient particularly when the *dā'iyāt* represent an unconventional position of religious authority. Both *Abla Fāṭima R.* and *Ḥanīn* are playing it safe in an attempt to make their messages more acceptable and agreeable. In the exercise of male-inspired female charisma, they

are aware that their target audience remains women, a constituency that does not usually recognise their agency.

The courage to stand up against the administration of the centre is also driven by their desire to establish a stronger relationship with God – as *Abla Ḥanīn* noted when she objected to ‘withholding *‘ilm*’. Moreover, in this example *Abla Fāṭima R.* and *Abla Ḥanīn* reproduced the knowledge and embodied the charisma of Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymīn in calling for a more thorough understanding of the Quran and in not allowing social traditions to influence the interpretation and application of religious obligations.

5.3.5 The *dā‘iyāt*’s dependence on male ulama for recognition and promotion

The dyadic relationship between men and women in Saudi Arabia is exemplified by the division of their social spaces into shared spaces, segregated spaces, and exclusive spaces. The distribution of functions among these three spaces is situated in reference to social traditions steeped in religious ethos. From this perspective, the separate or attached lives of men and women are ‘paralleled by the separation in their cultural and social knowledge’ (Altorki and El-Solh, 1988:4). Depending on the social space, the prerogative over valued knowledge fluctuates between being exclusive to a man or to a woman – or, sometimes being shared. The prerogative to realise the authority of the holder of valued knowledge is also in the same vein. In light of this range of possibilities, I discuss below the various channels that facilitate the *dā‘iyāt*’s religious authority in terms of: (1) the process of *tazkiya*; (2) the approval and maintenance of the *dā‘iyāt*’s religious authority; and (3) the acknowledgment of the *dā‘iyāt*’s religious authority.

5.3.5.1 The role of the ulama in recognising female religious authority through tazkiya

The careers of both male and female religious authorities thrive when they receive recognition from one or more prominent male clerics (al-Khidr, 2010:78). This is expressed by the term *tazkiya*, which derives from the root word *zakkā*, denoting growth, prosperity, purity, and *baraka* (blessing) (see Zakka, 2009). *Zakkā* (verb) *al-māl* means to purify money by, for example, paying alms. *Zakka al-naḥs* means to purify the soul, but it also means to praise or commend it. *Tazkiya*, or *tazkiya fikriyya*, as it is applied in the *da'wa* realm in Saudi Arabia, denotes receiving approval of one's views and convictions from a prominent, officially recognised male cleric. The blessing or approval bestowed by a male cleric on junior figures of religious authority means that the senior cleric consents to the religious ideology expressed through the junior cleric's demeanour and pedagogy and through the beliefs that he or she preaches, and the higher the position of the approving cleric in the religious oligarchy, the more prestigious the *tazkiya* becomes.

Maintaining ideological unity is at the vanguard of Saudi state policy, and because female *dā'iyyāt* are not officially recognised, *tazkiya* is one of the most sought after ways to gain legitimacy and survival in the male-dominated religious realm. Therefore, *tazkiya* is an effective means of controlling women's discourse. In addition to issuing *tazkiya* letters, the government was, at the time of the research, in the process of framing a new policy to begin issuing *taṣarīḥ* (permits) to state-approved *dā'iyyāt*. This initiative came to prominence after the events of September 11, 2001, when Saudi religious discourse came to be criticised widely for its extremist rhetoric. As *Abla Fāṭima R.*, a devoted follower of Dr Wafā', explained:

After the events of September [11th], all [religious] activities were stopped and you needed a permit from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs

[to preach]. It's not easy to become a *dā'īya*. You need *awrāq tazkiya* [documents granting approval] from more than one official shaykh. Usually, the wives of these *shuyūkh* attend these *muḥādarāt* and convey their observation to the *shuyūkh* [their husbands].... Dr Wafā' received *tazkiya* from Shaykh al-'Uthaymīn [in this way].

Both *tazkiya* and issuing *da'wa* permits are means of restricting the tone of the *muḥādarāt* and the values preached therein as part of the state's overall agenda to 'enforce collective conformity' (Torab, 2007:19), and are not necessarily initiatives intended to either to silence or to empower women.

In terms of format, the *tazkiya* is a signed official letter with a header showing the name and position of the senior cleric. The body of the letter contains the text of the appraisal and approval, and it is signed and stamped at the bottom. In the text, the cleric formally recognises the party in question as *ahl* (worthy) to represent religion and blesses his or her religious endeavours, which can involve performing *da'wa*, acting as an imam in a mosque, or any other religious activity. The senior cleric assess the individual's level of piety (*taqwā*), religious adherence, commitment, and worthiness to represent religion by either personally observing his or her sermons or talks or by receiving recommendations from trusted sources, such as the neighbourhood's local *'umda* (chief) or other religious associates.

Women's subordinate social, economic, and political position and their limited access to knowledge all contribute to the allure of receiving a *tazkiya* from a male scholar. This act of *tazkiya* not only grants the *dā'īya* legitimacy in the eyes of her audience, it also grants her prestige among fellow *dā'iyāt*. This institution is an example of how, as Harding states, 'those in the subordinate position must be accorded powers that are sufficient in nature and scope to preserve their pride and self-respect' (1975:308).

Dr Wafā' is among the most sought after *dā'iyyāt* and most reputable and known even among male ulama. This is because she is one of the few *dā'iyyāt* who has received *tazkiya* from a male cleric, and this has so greatly increased her credibility and the strength of her authority that she rarely needs to reference contemporary male authorities to authenticate her discourse because she has already received *tazkiya* from Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn.³² Her formal religious education as well as her numerous publications also helped her to reach the elevated social status that she currently enjoys in the realm of religious knowledge production. In 1981, she earned an undergraduate degree in Islamic Studies from King 'Abd al-'Azīz University. She also received a master's (1988) and a PhD (1991) from the same university in Islamic Studies and currently holds a position of assistant professor in comparative religious studies at the university. Her doctoral dissertation, *The Separation of a Marriage and its Consequences: A Comparative Study in Islamic Jurisprudence*, was published in 1999. Most of her literary publications are in a booklet format and are sold in many Islamic bookstores next to the publications of reputable male scholars for very affordable prices.

Although *tazkiya*, as the highest form of recognition available to female religious authorities in Saudi Arabia, indicates that the recipient stands 'inside the consensus of established orthodoxy' (Jouili and Amir-Moazimi, 2006:632), it does not mean that women become formally recognised figures of authority. Rather, it lends informal authority to their discourse and religious convictions. Moreover, it is far less common for women to receive *tazkiya* from senior male clerics as it is for men. However, this is true in part because men do not have direct access to women in order to observe and assess their piety, religious knowledge, and pedagogical style as

³² It has been reported that Dr Ruqayya al-Muharib, a prominent *dā'iya* in Riyadh, also received *tazkiya* from Ibn 'Uthaymīn (al-Salih, 2011).

well as their conformity to official religious discourse. While female *dā'iyāt* are inaccessible to the direct observation of male ulama due to the dictum that it is *ḥarām* (religiously unlawful) for a woman's voice to be exposed to a man, the wives of the ulama or of other senior male clerics are often invited to attend several *muḥādarāt* or *durūs* conducted by the *dā'iya*. They then convey the *dā'iya's* message to their husbands, who determine whether or not to issue a letter of *tazkiya*. In the case of Dr Wafā', it was the wife of Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn who carried out this task.

It is notable – and perhaps surprising – that in this practice the opinion of the male cleric is dependent solely on the judgement of his wife, her observations of the *muḥādara*, and her opinion regarding the *dā'iya*. In effect, although the wives of clerics have no officially recognised status of authority, they exercise the authority to recognise and establish the religious authority of other women through their association with their husbands. Thus, although the cleric issues the piece of paper that recognises the authority of the *dā'iya*, his wife greatly influences what is written in the *tazkiya* letter. Nevertheless, she acts only through an extension of her husband's authority; she possesses no recognised authority of her own and her opinion is in practice irrelevant without her affiliation to him.

Through receiving *tazkiya* from the archetype of orthodox religiosity, Dr Wafā' gained the highest form of authoritative recognition for her role in communicating valued religious knowledge that any Saudi woman can acquire. This, in turn, and unlike many of the *dā'iyāt* discussed in this paper, exempts her from the pressure to constantly exhibit pedagogical competence. As a result, she pays more attention to presenting canonical evidence and provide theological explanations without necessarily feeling the need to authenticate her arguments with opinions of male ulama.

5.3.5.2 *Recourse to the ulama for approval and maintenance of the dā'iyāt's authority*

In an oratory culture governed mainly by its tribal traditions, *tazkiya* is not the only way in which to recognise the authority of the *dā'iyāt*. Dr Fāṭima is one of the few *dā'iyāt* in Jeddah who did not need the blessing of male authority to authenticate her religious authority in the realm of *da'wa*. Rather, her authority derives in part from the status of her family, *Bayt Naṣīf*, and in particular from the fact that her mother, Saddiqa Sharafeddin, set the precedent for women's education in Jeddah in the twentieth century. However, Dr Fāṭima's authority as a *dā'iya* in an institution run by the government has nonetheless at times been threatened due to her outspoken religious views, which do not always mirror those of the government or of the senior clerics (see Chapter 6), and thus an intervention by a male religious authority was needed to regain her authority in that particular space.

Dr Fāṭima is a strong woman with a charismatic personality. She has travelled around the world to attend conferences, give *muḥādarāt*, and participate in philanthropic causes. During the Soviet War in Afghanistan in the 1980s, many Saudi *dā'iyāt*, such as Dr Fāṭima and Dr Samīra, accompanied their husbands to Afghanistan to support the wives of the Afghani *mujahidīn* and to establish schools for orphans (see Zahid, 2005b). The famous Muslim Palestinian scholar, 'Abd Allah 'Azzām, and his wife, Um Muḥammad, who lived in Saudi Arabia in the 1970s, were among the key players during the war in Afghanistan. Dr Fāṭima and Um Muḥammad were friends, and both participated in various *da'wa* activities in the al-Ḥijāz. However, since the government changed its position on the war in Afghanistan, Dr Fāṭima refrains from talking about such travels because of the implications that they might have with respect to her authority.

Dr Fāṭima asserts that she has not changed her religious convictions concerning what she thinks is wrong or right in Islamic practice. Nonetheless, she used to conduct public *muḥādarāt* that were attended by hundreds of people at a time when very few *dā'iyāt* existed, wherein she set a precedent for such public practices in Jeddah. After ten years of this practice, however, she was banned from giving public *muḥādarāt* at King 'Abd al-'Azīz University – due to her outspoken and controversial religious views – by official order from the former Grand Mufti, Ibn Bāz, who maintains his social position by administrating Sharia in a manner consistent with state policy. Dr Fāṭima explained to me that an official letter was sent by the Grand Mufti advising her that this *risālat al-hijab* (message of hijab) is for her to 'read and follow' and that her licence to give public *muḥādarāt* at the university was revoked. Dr Fāṭima continued lecturing in the university as a member of the faculty, but she transferred her *da'wa* practice to her home, where she claims that approximately 300 women typically attend each lesson.

I asked Dr Fāṭima about this incident one Thursday afternoon in the summer as she was breaking her fast. She greeted me at the door in a white *shalwar kamīz* ensemble such as is traditionally worn in her parents' native Pakistan.³³ Her daughter later joined us and brought some food. It is a family tradition for Dr Fāṭima's children to join her in breaking her fast on Mondays and Thursdays. Her house is rarely without visitors, who often join her for a meal, either to seek her help or to simply pay her a friendly visit, but it was surprisingly empty that evening. She also frequently accommodates disadvantaged women and those who have been abused by their husbands. Her accessibility to the wider public by allowing them unconditionally into

³³ *Shalwar kamīz* is a traditional dress unisex outfit worn in Pakistan and South and Central Asia. It consists of a pair of trousers and a long, long-sleeved shirt.

her home is one of the main reasons that her power and influence surpass that of other *dā'iyāt*.

After dining on dates and soup, we prayed *maghrib jamā'a* (prayer in congregation). Then we moved to her private living room, where she explained that Shaykh Ibn Bāz had accused her of erring by saying that covering the face is not mandatory for women in Islam, and she vented her frustrations about Ibn Bāz's unsubstantiated claim:

Dr Fāṭima: Nowadays we live on rumours. I don't know what sort of information was passed on to him [Ibn Bāz]. I thought about it, I prayed *istikhāra* [prayer to seek guidance from God] and I consulted my husband. I said to him, 'Father of Saddiqa [their daughter], should I write back to him [Ibn Bāz]?' He said, 'Don't reply.' So I said, 'Okay,' although I now feel guilty because I should have answered him! All of these [experiences] are tests from Allah. Anyway, by Allah's will, 'Abd Allah 'Azzām was in the Afghan war. At that time Saudi [Arabia] supported him and Usāma bin Lādin. They were all part of the 'Saudi package' [said in English, sarcastically].... During the glorious times of 'Abd Allah 'Azzām, he visited Shaykh Ibn Bāz. One of my cousins was in the *majlis* [gathering] of the Shaykh, so [I know that] he [Ibn Bāz] said to him, 'So, Shaykh 'Abd Allah, how are our Afghani brothers?' He replied, 'The Afghan brothers are good and safe; however, I want to ask you about *ukhtukum fī Allah* [your sister in Islam], who was banned from giving any *muḥādarāt* and fired from the university, and you're doing nothing about it! This is all I want to ask you. I assure you, we [in Afghanistan] are fine.'

Interviewer: How did 'Abd Allah 'Azzām know [about your situation]?

Dr Fāṭima: He's my husband's friend. You know, also, that these things cannot be hidden. Ibn Bāz told him, 'We were told that she urges women to *sufūr* [fail to apply proper hijab by not covering the face] in her *muḥādarāt*.' He ['Abd Allah] asked him, 'Who told you about this, Shaykh?' The Shaykh said, 'A woman called us and informed us.' He ['Abd Allah] asked him, 'How can you take information from one person when in the science of Hadith [ilm al-Hadith] we reject the Hadith that has one narrator?' After [I heard about how] 'Abd Allah 'Azzām spoke to him and explained everything, I

thought to myself: Allah defends His believers. 'Abd Allah 'Azzām came all the way from Afghanistan just to say these words [to defend me]. I'm telling you, even my brothers did not defend me because they said they were afraid of the Shaykh! 'Abd Allah 'Azzām told him, 'This is not right what you did to her! Her brother is Dr 'Abd Allah [Naṣīf], and what you heard about her is not true!' Ibn Bāz knows that I cover my face. No one taught women here to cover their faces but me! I just don't want to brag about it!

It seemed from her response that I had touched on a sensitive issue that caused Dr Fāṭima obvious discomfort. She initially hesitated to talk about it because she did not want any repercussions. However, it appeared that she was still immensely frustrated and could not get over how she had been treated by the university after what she called her 'unconditional giving' in working there without pay for many years, as well as her now former husband's donation of materials to build portions of the university's facilities. She vented her frustration in such a loud tone that it felt as if she were angry with me, so I remained silent.

According to Dr Fāṭima, the government and the ulama do not want to allow any variation in opinions. They want everyone to be *istimba waḥda* (a derogatory colloquial phrase meaning 'exact copies of each other'). Her daughter, Ālā', told me, 'I don't understand the allegations that she promotes *sufūr*.... She [her mother] believes that covering the face is not *wājib* [mandatory], but that it's *faḍl* [supererogatory] if one wants to be close to God'. Ultimately, Dr Fāṭima's frustration stems from the reality that the male ulama in Saudi Arabia have interpreted Islam for women. Nevertheless, she did not want to cross the boundaries of proper behaviour set by the ulama and did not want to publicly contest their authority.

As previously discussed, male religious authorities exercise influence over women's education because women's education was initiated on the basis that it would help women maintain their religious adherence and facilitate the religious

upbringing of their children. Ibn Bāz exercised arbitrary rule over educational matters, and his decision-making was influenced by his notorious adherence to Wahhābī interpretations of Islam, including its hypersensitivity about veiling. In the view of Ibn Bāz, the Grand Mufti at the time, Dr Fāṭima challenged the established authority of the state by declaring that not covering the face was within the permissible range of *hijāb*.

After the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979 and during the period of the Soviet War in Afghanistan in the 1980s, the government professed its commitment to Islam by taking drastic measures to publicly demonstrate its commitment to religion, and Ibn Bāz’s reaction to what he perceived as an error on the part of Dr Fāṭima was one of these measures. Therefore, his reaction was not only a move to suppress her authority, it was both a response to the state’s religious commitment and a demonstration of his own power.

The departments of Islamic Education and other departments and faculties in public universities in Saudi Arabia have their own female directors, but they fall under the general directorate of the men’s section, and therefore major departmental decisions cannot be made without approval from the men. Male ulama have leverage and power over every ministry and over every aspect of social life in which religious violations are observed, and the use of this power was exemplified recently in their influencing the Ministry of Education to ban the practice of sports among girls in school because it is perceived as ‘incompatible with their nature [as women]’. Therefore, it is not surprising for the Grand Mufti to interfere directly in an issue concerning *sufūr* – especially given that the university had been controversial when it opened due to the fear that it would undermine female modesty. Ibn Bāz’s rejection of Dr Fāṭima’s religious opinion was in part a defence mechanism to protect his own

authority. Her informal and charismatic authority was seen as challenging his formal and institutionalised authority. In addition, Dr Fāṭima had disrupted the sanctity of the religious authority and of the authoritative flow that is seen as descending from 'God [to his] interpreters here on earth' (Mernissi, 1996:112).

Conversely, while 'Abd Allah 'Azzām was not a formal authoritative figure in Saudi Arabia, he exercised a personal authority that enabled him to influence Ibn Bāz's opinion. 'Abd Allah 'Azzām, who shared, through his wife, a bond with Dr Fāṭima, was the mediator in the process of power negotiation between Dr Fāṭima and Ibn Bāz when neither her husband nor her family were able to support her. An intervention by a reputable and respected Islamic figure was needed to counterbalance the claims made against Dr Fāṭima. His credentials and prestige as a respected Sunni scholar who participated in the jihad in Afghanistan, which the Saudi government supported at the time, gave him leverage to influence Ibn Bāz. Since the *dā'iyyāt* are not institutionalised, there is no formal institutional system that can protect them. However, in 'Azzām's intervention there was an implicit assertion that Dr Fāṭima did not challenge or intend to undermine either the established religious order or the hierarchy of the Grand Mufti despite the fact that she had attempted to go beyond the limits of what had been declared as religiously permissible in terms of hijab.

'Abd Allah 'Azzām's intervention was also important since the mode of interaction between men and women is limited to means that do not require physical presence, such as phone calls, faxes, and letters – the impact of which is not as effective as physical interaction. This limited interaction is quite strictly observed in religious circles, which is why Dr Fāṭima contemplated reaching out to the Grand Mufti by letter, not in person. However, even with regard to this step she consulted her husband, who recommended that she not confront the Grand Mufti. In consulting

her husband, Dr Fāṭima demonstrated conformity to the established patriarchal social order that is rooted in local religious interpretations of the sacred text. In this interpretation, *ḥaq al-qiwāma* (the right to exercise guardianship) is granted to *maḥram* or *walī al-amr*, wherein men exercise guardianship over women as a means to maintain the latter's wellbeing.

It is also important to note that this was Dr Fāṭima's second husband, whom she married after the death of her first. Her decision to remarry has served rather than hindered her *da'wa* agenda. In taking this decision and implicitly acknowledging this fact, she showed her awareness that she is operating in a male domain while recouping a degree of female sovereignty through leveraging the concept of *maḥram* or *walī al-amr* to serve her purposes. By having a husband whom she could consult and use to her advantage, she pre-emptively deflects criticism that would otherwise be directed toward her.

Indeed, through her actions, in the anecdote related above, Dr Fāṭima relinquished her autonomy to her husband by consulting him, and this may be interpreted as a relinquishing of her power; however, remaining within the boundaries of established socio-religious norms opens other doors to exercise other types of power. This means that by demonstrating her compliance to local interpretations of religious text, she capitalises on her religious adherence. This conformity gives her religious authority more credibility and legitimacy. In the spirit of obedience, she thus found spiritual empowerment. Through her obedience to her husband, which is understood as an extension of her obedience to God, she found justification for her actions in the sense that 'Azzām was sent by God to defend her.

Dr Fāṭima still expressed her disappointment over not being able to exercise autonomy to defend herself. Although 'Azzām's influence resulted in Ibn Bāz

waiving against her public preaching, Dr Fāṭima's opinion and tone of voice at the time of the interview revealed regret for not contacting Ibn Bāz to clarify her stance on hijab.

The university served as one of the most important spaces that gave rise to Dr Fāṭima's *da'wa* career. In that particular space, she was able to preach to a large number of female students and an all-women general public who congregated weekly to hear her speak and empower them. Indeed, not being able to formally practise *da'wa* at the university limited her sphere of influence, but not the credibility of her religious authority. As discussed previously, Dr Fāṭima's credentials, reputation, and family precedence all support her religious authority. Being stripped of the right to preach in a formal setting did not alter women's need to have access to her discourse. During the ban, Dr Fāṭima moved her activities to the privacy of her home, which gave her more autonomy in exercising her informal religious authority but greatly limited her sphere of influence and narrowed the demographics of her audience. The university was a much more accessible space due to its nature, size, and location in what was the city centre at that time. Although she managed to create a pedagogical space in her house, Dr Fāṭima informed me that it did not accommodate as large an audience as the university. Moreover, access to her house was inconvenient since it was some distance for the substantial demographic that usually attended her sermons and was more easily accessible to the upper-middle and upper class demographic.

Dr Fāṭima now runs many centres such as the Quran School and *al-I'jāz al-Ilmī* Centre. In fact, activity outside of a shared but segregated social space, such as the university, as well as outside the traditional context of a mosque has given women more autonomy in their *da'wa*, allowing for diversification and expansion into philanthropy, collection of donations, and informal counselling in addition to

managing and running their own centres (which remain under the auspices of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs). Such activity allows more room for women to exercise various avenues of authority outside those usually constrained by the mosque, which is particularly significant given the negative political connotations attached to mosques after the events of September 11, 2001.

Despite Ibn Bāz's eventual approval, Dr Fāṭima did not regain her licence to give *muḥādarāt* at the university due to other internal issues with the administration in the men's section, which led her to later resign from the university. However, she is still recognised by Ibn Bāz as a source of informal religious authority among women in Saudi Arabia. He was later quoted as advising other women who sought his religious advice, 'You have Fāṭima – thank Allah – to ask. You do not need to meet with us whilst she, as well as others like her, are amongst you' (al-Hakim, 2008). Dr Fāṭima continued to lecture from home without any governmental intervention until the events of September 11, when all forms of large religious gatherings in private spaces were officially banned.

One of Dr Fāṭima's close followers, Asmā', believes that the death of Ibn Bāz in 1999 allowed Dr Fāṭima more freedom in expressing her religious views, which often clashed with those of the Grand Mufti. Even though someone else filled the power vacuum, Asmā' also told me that Dr Fāṭima gained even more prestige and freedom during the reign of King 'Abd Allah, who adopted more reformist political, social, and religious views than his predecessor. The king's reformist trajectory encouraged open dialogue between Sunni and Shite ulama in Saudi Arabia. Dr Fāṭima's brother, Dr 'Abd Allah Naṣīf (b. 1939), had an influential role in the mediation between Sunni and Shia religious leaders in Saudi Arabia as part of the king's policy of open dialogue between the two sects. This gave the Naṣīf family even

more prestige and subsequently allowed Dr Fāṭima more freedom in expressing her views. Dr 'Abd Allah is a reputable and renowned public figure who has held several significant academic, religious, and political posts. At this writing, for example, he is Deputy Chairperson of the Consultative Assembly (*Majlis al-Shūra*), President of the Specialised Committee at the International Islamic Council for *Da'wa* and Relief, and Secretary General for the Muslim World League, where Dr Fāṭima continued to give talks during the time of Ibn Bāz's ban.

5.3.5.3 *The ulama's acknowledgement of the dā'iya*

According to *Abla Fāṭima R.*, the process of becoming a *dā'iya* with authoritative leverage required both a solid religious foundation and guidance to prepare her to enter the exclusive female *da'wa* realm. *Abla Fāṭima R.* gives much of the credit to Dr Wafā' and Dr Āmāl for providing her with '*ta'hīl 'ilmī*'. In this regard she gives them credit for 'enabling' her *da'wa* practice and for 'preparing' her to face the audience. She informed me that during her four years in college, she took an intensive evening workshop at Dr Āmāl's house with ten other girls. Only serious and committed students who demonstrated religiosity in their demeanour and attitude were allowed to enrol. The workshop focused on enhancing and improving the students' pedagogical style as communicators of valued knowledge as well as providing intensive lessons in Quranic exegesis. According to *Abla Fāṭima R.*, the first half of the lesson consisted of intensive exegesis while in the second half the girls conducted short exegesis lessons themselves so Dr Āmāl could evaluate their arguments and communication skills.

In terms of enabling her *da'wa* activities, *Abla Fāṭima R.* gives most credit to Dr Wafā', who was also one of her college professors. After college, Dr Wafā' served

as mediator between her students who were interested in performing *da'wa* (including *Abla Fāṭima R.*) and the wider public. She facilitated the process of introducing the *dā'iyāt* to the wider public and helping them to gain the public's trust. One way of doing this, as *Abla Fāṭima R.* explained, was for Dr Wafā' to excuse herself from attending one of her weekly mosque lessons. For example, during menses, Dr Wafā' would not enter the mosque because it is interpreted as religiously prohibited for women to do so. Rather than cancelling the lesson, she used this as an opportunity to introduce new *dā'iyāt* to the wider public. According to *Abla Fāṭima R.*, when the audience knew that they were sent by Dr Wafā' to replace her for a particular lesson, gaining acceptance from the audience was not a challenging task.

The status that *Abla Fāṭima R.* enjoys among other *dā'iyāt* of her generation in addition to the position she holds in *Maktab al-Tawjīh wa al-Irshād* as a prominent *murshida dīnīyya* (religious counsellor) for schools, may not have been possible without a solid religious foundation. *Abla Fāṭima R.* attributes her solid foundation in religious education (*ta'ṣīl 'ilmī*), which eventually gave rise to the authenticity of her religious discourse and gave more value to her religious knowledge, to Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn. I visited her office at Jeddah *Da'wa* and Guidance Centre's female section after the *Himmatī Da'watī* course finished. The centre was quiet, but even at this time she maintained the strict attire that was imposed on the girls by the administration: long skirts and long-sleeved shirts. *Abla Fāṭima R.* held other responsibilities at the centre besides giving workshops in *da'wa*. Dr Wafā' allocated the supervising of the Arabic section of the *Da'wa* Centre to *Abla Fāṭima R.*. The Arabic section targets calling non-Muslim Arabic speakers to Islam. It also handles organising religious lessons for Arabic speaking Muslims such as those conducted by Dr Wafā'.

Abla Fāṭima R.'s office was colourful, and she had several posters in frames with words of encouragement and religiously-themed mottos similar to those that hung in most of the centre's corridors and classrooms. She offered me a cup of tea and was kind enough to offer me her chair so I could transcribe comfortably on her desk. I asked her about how she had started performing *da'wa*, and she started by telling me the story of how she became more religiously adherent (*iltazamat*; *iltizām* literally means 'adhere', here referring to religious adherence). The summer before her senior year in high school, she chose to spend her holidays with her aunt in Yanbu to study religion while her family travelled abroad. Her aunt's three sons, who were involved in *da'wa* themselves, were her link to Ibn 'Uthaymīn. During the following school year she borrowed two of Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb's most important books from her cousins: *Ta'ṣīl al-Tawhīd* (Authenticating Monotheism) and *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* (The Book of Monotheism). The latter is considered to be his masterpiece and is the foundation of the school curriculum on *tawhīd*. These books are also important because they establish the foundation of the puritanical '*aqīda*' as practised in Saudi Arabia and as preached and exercised by the ulama. They are also the core study material for Islamic studies curriculum at university.

Abla Fāṭima R. elaborated on the process of being mentored by the Shaykh:

In my second year, I managed to get the Shaykh's [telephone] number and I told him that I wanted to study '*aqīda*' directly from him but his mosque didn't have a women's section. He told me, 'If you find anything difficult, call me.' He was a very busy man, so I had to be very specific in my inquiries. The times I could call him were in the afternoon or after '*ishā*' prayer. His wife would answer sometimes.

By noting that Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn paid attention to her and dedicated some of his busy schedule to teaching her, *Abla* Fāṭima R. is claiming legitimacy in the competitive field of *da'wa*. She is claiming her legitimacy by subscribing to orthodox

religious knowledge through the teachings of the Shaykh and through the special treatment that he offered her. Given this privileged relationship, it is understandable that Dr Wafā', a sincere follower of the Shaykh and a recipient of his *tazkiya*, would grant *Abla* Fāṭima R. the authority that she currently holds at the centre. This, too, may shed light on the fact that Dr Wafā' included *Abla* Fāṭima R. – though not her colleague, *Abla* Ḥanīn – as part of the consulting team that revised the new curriculum for students at *Himmatī Da'watī*.

By noting that for five years she received direct guidance from Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn, the same Shaykh who had granted Dr Wafā' *tazkiya*, *Abla* Fāṭima R. attempts to place herself on an equal footing with Dr Wafā'. Indeed, the Shaykh had a mediator between him and Dr Wafā' when he granted her his blessings, but *Abla* Fāṭima R. was in direct contact with him. However, the recognition of Dr Wafā''s authority and legitimacy is more official than the attention paid to *Abla* Fāṭima R. because it was formalised in writing. Therefore, *Abla* Fāṭima R.'s claim is enough to give her higher positions at the centre in relation to other *dā'iyyāt*, but it does not supersede or undermine the authority of Dr Wafā'.

What is also of interest is that *Abla* Fāṭima R. did not shy away from declaring that she had direct access to Ibn 'Uthaymīn. Her contact with him for educational purposes remains within the limits of acceptable behaviour between men and women, particularly when it concerns religious education where men have established precedence in the production of religious knowledge and upholding *'ilm*. This behaviour is contrary to that of *Ustādha* Anāhīd, who also briefly mentored *Abla* Fāṭima R. after college. As discussed previously, *Ustādha* Anāhīd attributes her religious knowledge to the published material of Ibn 'Uthaymīn, i.e., books and cassettes. She did not have direct communication with the Shaykh.

Ustādha Anāhīd has established solid pedagogical grounds in the realm of *da'wa* in many respects, as noted. However, the current context of *da'wa* and the generation gap between *Ustādha* Anāhīd and *Abla* Fāṭima R. permits the latter to contact the shaykh directly. It is no longer frowned upon for men and women to have direct communication via telephone, email, or fax, and many women contact the prominent scholars and ulama who host the numerous religious-themed television programmes mentioned above. Means of communication via the internet also facilitate access to the ulama, and the *dā'iya*t use these tools as means to establish the grounds of their own authority. Many have their own websites and messages boards that allow the public easier access to the ulama. Using these modern means of communication and expanding communication methods to acquire knowledge is encouraged and serves as a useful tool to increase the popularity of the communicator of valued knowledge.

It is also important to mention that *Abla* Fāṭima R.'s cousins served as her personal link to Ibn 'Uthaymīn. Without this personal link, direct mentorship by the shaykh might not have been possible. For a single *dā'iya* like *Abla* Fāṭima R., it is important to have a male relative who links the *dā'iya* to the ulama. This is an advantage as it lends legitimacy and acceptability to her communication with the shaykh. By identifying her male cousins as her link to the shaykh, she is implicitly stating that she acquired family consent to contact the shaykh and therefore declaring that she was acting within the acceptable codes of conduct. She further asserts her conformity to behaviour when she reveals that the shaykh's wife sometimes answered her calls. In pointing out the wife's awareness, she lends further legitimacy and minimises the chance for public stigma regarding the mentoring relationship. This is

important given the sensitivities attached to communication between unrelated men and women in Saudi Arabia.

Abla Fāṭima R. further asserted her legitimacy by declaring her appreciation for Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn's difficult and demanding pedagogical style:

His teaching style is calm but fast. Before calling him you needed to have already revised [i.e., studied your material]. He always used to say, 'Before asking a question, you need to find the answer yourself.' He trains you to be an independent learner. I studied with him for five years. I finished studying his book *al-Qawl al-Mufīd fī Sharḥ Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* [The Useful Opinions in Explaining the Book of Monotheism] in two years. I read it. I understood it. I didn't memorise the *sunan* [plural of Sunna]; however, I knew where the topics were in each chapter and volume.

She also said that she referred to some of Ibn 'Uthaymīn's publications that explain and simplify the meanings and lexicons of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* for novice learners in religion. As she explained,

He would direct me to the simplified books and not *ummahāt al-kutub*, but I was drawn to the books of *al-Salaf* [i.e., *ummahāt al-kutub*]. After some time, Allah *fataḥ 'alayya* [enlightened me] and I began to understand them. He paid a lot of attention to me.

Abla Fāṭima R.'s description of Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn's pedagogical strategy in mentoring her establishes three essential points: (1) her competence as an independent learner; (2) her command of the religious text and books; and (3) her credibility as communicator of orthodox and valued religious knowledge. All of these factors contribute to the establishment of authoritative legitimacy as a *dā'iya*.

By stating that the shaykh trained her 'to be an independent learner', *Abla* Fāṭima R. asserts her ability to extract and reproduce established religious interpretations. Her task as a reproducer, rather than a producer, of valued religious knowledge was evident when she communicated her ability to locate the information

in the text rather than extract independent opinion. Her bona fide status as a *dā'iya* and her religious competence is established by studying what she termed *ummahāt al-kutub* or the books that represent the path of *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*, therefore affirming her orthodox religious stance. *Ummahāt al-kutub* literally means the 'mothers of all books'. It is a term used in Arabic culture to denote books of various disciplines that have established a reputation as credible sources of reference. They are usually very advanced and difficult to understand. Substantial literature has been produced by the archetypes of the Salafī school of tradition such as Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Taymiyya, and Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb. Local ulama frequently assert the legitimacy of their religious practices and interpretations by comparing them to the teachings of *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* that they acquire from their books.

Similarly, by declaring her attraction to the books of *al-Salaf*, *Abla* Fāṭima R. further establishes her legitimacy by aligning herself with the local practice and interpretation of Islam, which profess a commitment to the teachings of *al-Salaf* in the daily practice of religion. *Abla* Fāṭima R. likewise affirms her commitment in applying and teaching this tradition to her students. She affirms that she is able to communicate knowledge that is grounded in orthodox Islamic text and literature.

Ibn 'Uthaymīn's book *al-Qawl al-Mufīd fī Sharḥ Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (1994) is a simplified version of 'Abd al-Wahhāb's magnum opus *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. The book consists of notes from audio material collected and transcribed by his male students during his lessons at the mosque in Buraida. The shaykh subsequently edited the transcribed text and reorganised it into the form of a book that can be understood by the layman. *Abla* Fāṭima R. aligns herself with his male students and distinguishes herself from other *dā'iyyāt*, who did not have the privilege of acquiring guidance from the shaykh. *Abla* Fāṭima R. places herself on similar grounds to Ibn 'Uthaymīn's male

students in two ways. First, she stated that she was mentored for five years, which is considered to be a long time for a shaykh to mentor a woman. In this way she indicates her dedication and seriousness of her leaning endeavour. Also, in her studying of Ibn 'Uthaymīn's book, she adds another dimension to understanding the making of her authority.

In this regard, she gains more power than the other *dā'iyāt* at the centre by virtue of acquiring valued knowledge from the shaykh. This, in return, enhanced her religious capital, which resulted in Dr Wafā' allocating to her the group of students who are learned in Islamic theology.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated the most common approach to the construction of the *dā'iyāt*'s authority, i.e., by relying on the male ulama as primary *marjī'iyya dīnīyya*. It began by drawing from data collected during fieldwork in presenting the ideological orientations of the participants, such as the ideology of the lack (which served at intervals to explain reliance on the male ulama), and perspectives on gender hierarchy that contribute to the understanding of how the *dā'iyāt* construct their authority within the established value system. The chapter then presented the four predominant avenues in legitimising the *dā'iyāt*'s authority in relation to male ulama: (1) reliance on male ulama in issuing fatwas; (2) as a pedagogical model for emulation; (3) as source of charismatic inspiration; and (4) for recognition and promotion.

In relying on the male ulama to issue fatwas, several factors contributed to authenticating the *dā'iyāt*'s authority through their reliance on male ulama as primary *marjī'iyya dīnīyya*: (1) the importance of the fatwa as perceived by the audience; (2)

the expectations of the audience from the *dā'iyāt* to justify her claim by referencing prominent male ulama; and (3) the *dā'iyāt*'s lack of formal qualifications, which prevents them from expressing independent opinions. This reliance was significant in deflecting possible criticism from audience and in minimising the risk of others contesting her authority.

The second avenue of legitimacy highlighted how the *dā'iyāt* emulate and take inspiration from male ulama in order to anchor their authority in terms of: (1) the content of their pedagogy; (2) emulated persona; (3) interpretation of the religious text; and (4) in disseminating their ideology. An explanation provided by the study was that knowledge was generally attributed to male ulama because they have long dominated the production of religious knowledge. As a result, in order for a *dā'iyā* to legitimise their authority, she has to refer to a more authentic frame of reference and sometimes assimilate a masculine mode of communication.

The third such avenue discussed was one in which the *dā'iyāt* legitimise their authority by taking inspiration from the male ulama. Due to their non-institutionalised position, demonstration of charismatic traits often contributes to their perception of a *dā'iyā* as 'an authority'. The chapter showed how *Abla Ḥanīn* demonstrated courage and took charismatic inspiration from the prominent Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn to legitimise her view on the permissibility of delaying prayer and to defend her view against the centre's objections.

The fourth avenue of legitimacy consists in relying on male ulama for recognition and enabling of the *dā'iyāt*'s authority through: (1) the process of *tazkiya*; (2) approving their discourse; and (3) the acknowledgement of their authority. The findings revealed that even though the *dā'iyāt* were in positions of informal religious authority, they still depended on the authority and institutional position of male ulama

in order to further authenticate their authority and grant them higher status vis-a-vis other *dā‘iyāt* – as exemplified in the process of *tazkiya* as undergone by Dr Wafā’ and in the guidance that *Abla* Fāṭima R. received from Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymīn.

Chapter 6

Woman's Claim to Religious Authority:

Negotiating Interpretations and Roles

6.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter discussed the most prevalent strategy in authority formation and legitimation for the *dā'iyāt*, namely the means by which these women capitalise on male ulama as primary *marjī'iyya dīnīyya*. This chapter discusses an alternate strategy and some of the manifestations in which it is employed – in particular by the most popular and arguably the most influential *dā'iya* in Jeddah, Dr Fāṭima. The chapter addresses how Dr Fāṭima: (1) exercises power through negotiating her authority to interpret religious text; (2) asserts her right to produce and disseminate religious knowledge, particularly with respect to issues concerning women – a domain controlled by the ulama; and (3) negotiates and explores roles for women that lie outside of their traditionally inscribed sphere. The production of religious knowledge – which may involve an implicit or explicit contesting of some of the ulama's views – is not, as an authority-construction strategy, as prevalent among the *dā'iyāt* as conforming to orthodox discourse and reproducing received religious opinions. However, it is salient to discuss this unusual exercise of authority, particularly on Dr Fāṭima's part, in light of the evolving state and status of Saudi women. At the same time, it is not the aim of this research to generalise the findings of the fieldwork, for which reason it is important to note that the case of Dr Fāṭima with respect to the strategies discussed in this chapter emerged as virtually unique in the context under study and, although her path may represent an emerging

trend in the assertion of power among Saudi women, it remains a significant example of an alternate trajectory in authority formation.¹

The themes discussed in Chapter 5 provided a foundation for an understanding of the role of discursive power in the construction and exercise of religious authority. As Haraway explains, 'positioning oneself within the religious discourse is a factor in grounding knowledge' (1997:62). In other words, inhabiting or allying oneself with religious discourse grants discursive power even when none of the discourse originates with the 'agent.' By contrast, however, manoeuvring between complicity with and resistance to orthodox religious discourse and practice can be considered a clearer demonstration of agency. This chapter focuses on agency of the latter type, 'on the multiple sites of women's agency albeit within structures of domination [in order] to understand how women conform to, resist, and subvert their own domination' (Bedi, 2006:60). It thus addresses how Dr Fāṭima and, in rarer cases, other *dā'iyāt* legitimatise their religious authority by functioning as active rather than passive 'agent[s] of change' (Thapan, 1995:41).

The focus on Dr Fāṭima was not a preconceived plan for this part of the study. However, the evidence collected during fieldwork showed that contesting the orthodox views of the male ulama was rare to the point of being virtually non-existent among the other *dā'iyāt*. Indeed, broadly speaking, the exclusion of these women from religious institutions and their own program for social recognition were found to essentially dictate conformity on their part. Within this context, it is particularly notable that Dr Fāṭima was observed to contest orthodox religious interpretations with respect to a variety of issues – primarily

¹ The practice of negotiating roles for women that lie outside of their traditionally inscribed sphere, however, can be traced back to early twentieth century, when women in Mecca occasionally ventured beyond their traditional roles and activities. Nasr and Bagadir (2001) note that in the context of the al-Gēs festival, in which the Meccan women organise a series of processions during pilgrimage season, certain male and female roles are reversed in the accompanying folkloric re-enactments, with men, for example, pretending to flirt with the mayor and women assuming male personas when singing traditional songs. Women also take opportunities in the festival to reject the authority of prominent male figures in the city's administrative body by staying out late for the festival.

jurisprudential issues that concerned the prescribed scope of women's ritualistic practices and constraints on their mobility. All in all, in fact, it is the researcher's conclusion based on the evidence collected that, in her practice of *da'wa*, Dr Fāṭima challenges the established patriarchal conception of women – and its basis in the theory of 'lack' or insufficiency in the female nature – by reinterpreting text in ways that allow for woman-conscious and woman-inclusive perspectives, thereby supporting Saudi women's positive self-image and bolstering their position in society.

Naturally, however, Dr Fāṭima is not at odds with the ulama on every point of textual or religious interpretation. Thus, in practice, her positions and her discourse maneuver within and beyond the orthodox thresholds. The rarity of this practice – as well as the fact that it may contribute to extending Dr Fāṭima's authoritative space beyond those enjoyed by *dā'iyyāt* who rely more exclusively on conformity to orthodox interpretations – warrants examination that goes beyond and supplements the meager body of literature that presently exists on her work. This does not mean, however, that I exclude other *dā'iyyāt* from this discussion. Rather, I incorporate examples from the practice of the other *dā'iyyāt* where relevant, in order to provide a broader understanding of contemporary religious discourse in Saudi Arabia.

This chapter opens by addressing the 'symbolic politics of religion' (White, 2010:335) in Saudi Arabia. In other words, it elaborates the institutions of the *maḥram* and hijab as well as the laws that govern women's mobility in Saudi Arabia in order to situate Dr Fāṭima's unorthodox interpretations of religious text in the context of institutionalised practice. I further elaborate on how Dr Fāṭima capitalises on her gender as a platform for authenticating her arguments that contest orthodox religious interpretations. To explain this concept, we can turn to the words of Dr Nawāl al-ʿĪd, a prominent *dā'iya* in Riyadh and author of *Women's Rights in Light of the Prophet's Sunna* (2006). In justifying women's right to exercise independent reasoning, Dr Nawāl writes: 'On women's issues, the woman is

a'lam [more knowledgeable] than men because *laysa man ra'ā ka man sami'a* [the one/person who can see is not like the one who only hears]' (2006:255). In other words, women are better at understanding women's experiences because they share these experiences and are able to grasp what women are going through. A man can only hear about women's experiences but cannot experience them himself. (Indeed, in Saudi culture, men literally *only hear about*, not even *see*, since, due to gender segregation, women are frequently outside of men's gaze.) Dr Nawāl continues: 'therefore, *al- 'ālīma al-mu'mīna* [(it is up to) faithful female scholars (to)] advise [women] in matters where men err' (ibid.). In my observations of her lesson and in her writings, Dr Fāṭima's work reflects a belief in – and shows attempts to leverage – this creed. Indeed, the majority of Dr Fāṭima's followers whom I interviewed expressed a preference for the advice of a female religious authority in matters that require a woman-conscious perspective. Phrases such as 'realistic' (*'wāqī'iyya*'), 'understanding of their situations' (*'tifham awḍā'na*'), and 'aware' (*'wā'iya*') were repeatedly used to express the advantages inherent in such advice. In Chapter 5, we saw that Saudis of both genders rely heavily on the ulama for fatwas that help them to respond to a wide range of social, moral, and religious dilemmas – in keeping with the colloquial saying, *'khalīl bīnak wa bīn al-nār muṭawwa'*. This expression has a corollary: *al-dhanb yaqa' 'alīh* ('the sin falls on the person who sanctioned the religious verdict'). Nevertheless, some women, at least, would rather have a verdict that is better informed – or, as we will see, more convenient – from their perspective than simply indemnify themselves by 'outsourcing' the decision to any sanctioned authority. Thus, for example, in her research on the impact of the popular male preacher 'Amr Khālid on Yemeni women's religious observances, Pandya (2009) found that one of the reasons for his rising popularity was the fact that his discourse is perceived as conscious of women's dilemmas and as 'empowering' to women.

6.2 Symbolic Politics of Religion: Contemporary Discourses on Feminism, Islamic Feminism, and Women's Rights in Saudi Arabia

Some of Dr Fāṭima's followers perceive her as 'feminist' or at least use this term to describe her positions and/or discourses on women's rights in Saudi Arabia. Cooke defines feminism as 'an attitude, a frame of mind that highlights the role of gender in understanding the organisation of society' (2001:ix). Karam, in turn, defines feminism in terms of 'the awareness of women's inequality and subordination in society, and the concomitant attempt to change this situation for a more egalitarian and just society' (2002:226). Abu-Lughod further links feminism with practical awareness, stating that '[n]otions of "awakening", "women's rights", and "empowerment"' are 'narratives' associated with the 'feminist project' (Abu-Lughod, 1998:25). Similarly, in Saudi Arabia, the notion of *feminism* is intertwined with ideas about *women's rights*, and these terms are sometimes treated as synonymous. This equation was implicit in the words of Jawāhir, a college student in her early twenties whose interview responses are quoted more extensively in what follows: 'I am a feminist. I am a person [who is] pro women's rights.'

The term 'Islamic feminism' first began to appear in the 1980s and became more widespread in the 1990s, particularly following the publication in 1996 of the volume of studies entitled *Feminism and Islam*, which was edited and included a contribution by the Saudi anthropologist, Mai Yamani. The volume's primary contribution resides in illustrating women's endeavour to reinterpret Islam from a female-conscious perspective. In a similar vein, King describes Islamic feminists as those who 'attempt to contribute towards the construction of a new civil society worldwide, based on a culture of human rights and Qur'anic values such as democracy, social justice, freedom of conscience and gender equality' (2009:305). Moreover, as Karam points out, Islamic feminists have

...devoted themselves to writing, advising, and campaigning ostensibly in the name of all Muslims, but also on specific issues related to women.... [T]hese

women are aware of women's oppression and are actively seeking to combat it.... Each of these women realizes that women are oppressed in today's world and each in her own way fights against this oppression in the name of a proper Islamic society and state. (2002:26)

Islamic feminism, according to Badran, has emerged as 'a new discourse or interpretation of Islam and gender grounded in *ijtihād*, or independent intellectual investigation of the Quran and other religious texts.... Its concern has not been simply a religious and societal reform but a fundamental transformation reflecting the practice of an egalitarian Islam' (n.d.). This is done by treating the Quran as the primary source in grounding arguments for gender equality.

Islamic feminists commonly use the Prophet's wife, 'Ā'isha, and other Muslim women predecessors as exemplars of women's power and of their important role in society and to revive the legacy of a more egalitarian past. In Jeddah for example, Khadīja Bint Khuwaylid Businesswomen Centre, a women-exclusive centre that falls under the predominantly male Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry, was established in 2002 with the purpose of 'eliminat[ing] all obstacles the woman face and support her economical and social journey to effectively participate in the national development.' It was named after the Prophet's first wife, *Sayyida* Khadīja, who is used as an exemplar of a powerful businesswoman to push forward women's business opportunities and to reduce institutional obstacles.

Similarly, the Saudi Women's Revolution, a group established in February of 2011, claims in its mission statement that it 'endeavours to improve the reality of Saudi women and grant her humanitarian and natural rights in accordance to the objectives of Islamic Sharia with regard to principles of justice [*ʿadl*], equality [*musawāt*], and freedom [*ḥuriyya*]; and in accordance with international charters on women's rights' ('The Declaration', 2011). Other women's rights groups, however, use a secular language to counter limiting domestic social institutions. The group Saudi Women's Rights, for example, locates women's rights in universal secular notions of human rights. Their blog states that women's rights activists in

Saudi Arabia have the goal to 'disseminate the culture of rights [*thaqāfat al-ḥuqūq al-‘amma*] and to empower [*tamkīn*] women in Saudi Arabia in accordance with international charters and conventions to which the Kingdom is signatory' (al-Dosari, n.d.).

The women's rights activists Wajīha al-Ḥuwaydir and Fawziyya al-‘Uyūnī founded the Association for the Protection and Defence of Women's Rights in Saudi Arabia in 2007. The association's goals and its public pleas to King ‘Abd Allah, differ from many of the pleas of Saudi women in their rhetoric in not adopting a religious dictum. Wajīha, in fact, has gone unusually far in this direction in stating that 'secular society' is a 'better bet for women – and men too' (quoted in Pollitt, 2011). The discourses of activists such as Wajīha and Fawziyya, which embody a humanist and secular approach to women's rights that is essentially in keeping with international secular feminist discourse, avoid what some see as the contradiction of using the language of oppression to counter oppression. However, in Saudi eyes – and in Saudi socio-political debates – they are often seen and often attacked for espousing a 'liberal' and/or 'western' agenda (see Mir-Hosseini, 1996), a popular perspective that limits the authoritative space that such discourses can establish in a society in which the accepted norm is to anchor the legitimacy of rhetorical debate in evidence from the Quran and Sunna.

Whether they employ a secular or an Islamic paradigm, the women who call publicly for women's rights in Saudi society are predominantly career women from the upper-middle class or members of the upper-class elite. Nominally, at least, however, they do claim to speak for and to conditions that affect all Saudi women. In fact, many acknowledge that those who are the least likely to be able to overcome society's institutional limitations are women who are economically challenged. Moreover, to some degree at least, Saudi women from a wide variety of backgrounds are engaging in discourse on rights – either through debating on social networking websites or through connections to charities that support women and

children and that seek to elevate women's socio-economic status and decrease their dependence on men.

Saudi discourses on women's rights are driven by the perceived need to revise certain domestic institutions that are embedded in patriarchal interpretations of the religious text and that limit women from realising their full legal and social capacities. At the forefront of issues for both secular and Islamic women's rights activists are the right to drive, the right to autonomy (i.e., the removal of the requirement for *al-wakīl al-sharʿī* – an authorised male representative) in legal matters, and the removal of the institution of *wiṣāya*. Activists often point out that these restrictions and institutions contradict certain international conventions and charters to which Saudi Arabia is signatory and enforce the patriarchal social, political, and legal structure.

On the other side of the spectrum stand women who want to maintain the patriarchal model by actively supporting the idea of male guardianship and calling for maintaining the law that grants men *wiṣāya* over women. The campaign, 'My Guardian Knows What's Best for Me' (*Walī Amrī Adrā bi Amrī*), for example, was initiated in August 2009 in response to the movement to eliminate guardianship. On the organisation's website, support for the idea of male guardianship is provided in the form of patriarchal interpretations of canonical texts to which these women subscribe as a way to authenticate their religious practice. Embracing patriarchal social structure and 'buying in' to religious interpretations that proclaim its necessity are grounded in perceptions of women's weaknesses and need for protection – namely, the ideology of 'lack' discussed in Chapter 5. As also discussed, certain *dāʿiyāt*, such as *Ustādha Anāhīd*, gain power, legitimacy, and the recognition of the male ulama through echoing this ideology, as well as through accepting and employing the rhetoric that stems therefrom. Ironically, however, these women can unconsciously challenge the classical patriarchy that they preach. *Ustādha Anāhīd* stated in an interview that while she was

conducting her lessons in Jeddah and in many other cities in Saudi Arabia and throughout the Arabian Gulf, her husband took on the task of taking care of her four daughters until they became old enough to occasionally participate with her in her *da'wa* activities. Granted, her brother accompanies her on her travels in order to serve as her *mahram*. However, this does not undermine the fact that, in this family, traditional male and female roles are commonly reversed.

The discourse of the *dā'iyyāt* in Saudi Arabia has been criticised for preaching women's subordination and for supporting the application of patriarchal interpretations of religious text that mandate women's subordination in both the private and public spheres. Suhayla Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, for example, is a prominent activist who lobbies for women's rights from within an Islamic paradigm, urging for a re-interpretation of Islamic text that is not restricted to parochial patriarchal narratives. Suhayla, who is a member of the National Society for Human Rights Executive Council and Consultative Committee as well as other women's unions and organisations, has expressed her views on women's rights in Islam in a variety of publications (e.g., Zayn al-Abidin, 1982, 1984a, 1984b, 1987) and continues to do so. Suhayla is not a *dā'iya*, but she is actively involved in public discourse through her literary contributions and television appearances. She is perceived as a religious authority in the area of reinterpretation of canonical text in ways that challenge orthodox patriarchal norms (see Chapter 2).

In the telephonic interview that I conducted with Suhayla on December 18, 2009, she eagerly shared her frustration over what she considers the current misinterpretations of Islamic text that construct and perpetuate the notion of women's lack and therefore limit the realisation of female agency. When I asked her about her views on the salience of *dā'iyyāt's da'wa* among women in Saudi Arabia, she responded in what appeared to be an exasperated tone:

Da'wa has a more negative effect on women than a positive one because it does not communicate to women the understanding of true Islam and neither [does it explain] her rights as a woman. On the contrary, it communicates false information that makes women subject to *'ubūdīyya* [enslavement]. Unfortunately, women here are under *wiṣāya*. Among the major problems [in society] are, for example, a woman not knowing her rights to the custody of her children...and the forced marriage of young girls.... Religion has become a very *terrifying* thing for women! The woman loses her right to inheritance in the name of religion!

Suhayla went on to assert loudly and boldly: 'I am a woman *kāmilat al-ahliyya* [with complete capacity], so why am I treated like I am *nāqiṣa* [lacking (in capacity)]?!' This rhetorical question she followed with an insightful critique of the logic of the current system: 'If I am to be treated as *nāqiṣa*, then it does not follow that I can be subjected to *qaṣāṣ* [religiously sanctioned punishment].' In other words, if women are considered, under patriarchal hegemony, to be incompetent in their physical and mental capacities, consequently, they should be considered free from judicial punishment, whereas in fact the current system, citing canonical revelations, declares men and women equally subject to the enforcement of the law.

This latter critique, which has been put forward in similar terms by the *dā'iya* Dr Nawāl (see al-Id, 1992:88-103), is notable in that – although not itself an interpretation of canonical text – it shares with such interpretations the character of operating within specifically Islamic discourse to make a point about the perceived misinterpretations of Islam and/or misapplication of Islamic law. As noted above, debating from within an Islamic paradigm is often considered necessary by Saudi activists because there is no other way to appeal effectively to domestic cultural sensitivities and hence to effectively challenge male dominance. Without a discourse that finds legitimacy through authoritative Islamic text, many women activists feel, they will not be able to effectively expand their authoritative space. Espousing a religious frame of reference, on the other hand, opens an arena for debate

that is perceived as 'legitimate' by those who must be convinced of the need for change in a way that purely 'secular' or 'Western' discourse on women's rights is not.

In her research on female religious authority in Turkey, Tütüncü states that it is the 'consciousness-raising' aim of feminists that helps 'increase the self-esteem of Muslim women as opposed to the male supremacy in the politico-religious realm' (2010:599). She also states that among the sources of their appeal is their endeavour 'to elevate women's status in society by educating them about Islam and their rights' (ibid.:602). Tütüncü argues that female religious authorities often reject the association with notions of (Islamic) feminism and refuse to be called 'feminist' or 'Islamic feminist' despite being perceived as communicating similar values (ibid.:598). Similarly, Dr Fāṭima rejects such associations. According to one of her followers, Asmā', Dr Fāṭima repudiates any association with perceived 'Western' values, stating that her discourse is grounded in the Quran and Sunna, which she thinks are sufficient to locate women's rights from an Islamic perspective. Indeed, as Dr Fāṭima states in the conclusion of her book *Women in Islam*,

feminist authors...claim to be liberators of women. Their call to freedom, addressed to Muslim women, is but an invitation to liberate women from their religion that has dignified, honoured and cherished them, and is actually an invitation to return to Pre-Islamic oppression, despotism and tyranny of male legislators. (1999:254)

By contrast, Dr Fāṭima holds that woman is *mukarrama* (honoured) in Islam (see also Yamani, 1996), particularly in her role as mother, which places her in the central and most important position in the family. In Islam, the woman's central role as the mother and her responsibilities as the primary caretaker of the family and as educator of future generations are perceived as privileges rather than as burdens (Nasif, 1999, 2006b).

Jawāhir, the student informant introduced above, was eager to attend Dr Fāṭima's Islamic studies module at one of Jeddah's private colleges as part of her effort to learn how to respond to common misinterpretations of women's rights under Islam. Jawāhir is well-

travelled woman in her early twenties. Much of her travel has been carried out in order to expand her religious knowledge. She has accompanied the popular Kuwaiti preacher Ṭāriq al-Suwaydān (see Chapter 5) to religious-cultural summer camps around Europe and has attended religious courses at al-Azhar University in Cairo. She has also established a youth group aimed at educating and preparing the younger generation of Muslim's to become leaders. In order to successfully accomplish this task, Jawāhir sees her further acquisition of religious knowledge as crucial.

Like many of the students at the private college where she attended Dr Fāṭima's course, Jawāhir comes from an affluent background, as a result of which she was able to discuss women's rights in Islam in the context of the global media, with which she is familiar. As Jawāhir explained, 'Every time someone talks about Saudi [Arabia] in the media or elsewhere, all they speak about is women and the oppression of women and how women here don't have rights.' Jawāhir further explained how the two modules she took with Dr Fāṭima helped her to realise her rights as a Muslim woman over and above the manner in which they are presently manifested in Saudi Arabia. The primary course material for one of these modules consisted of Dr Fāṭima's book *Women in Islam: A Discourse in Rights and Obligations* (1999), which Jawāhir believed to be a summary of all six volumes of 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Abu Shuqqa's 2001 magnum opus *Tahrīr al-Mar'a fī 'Aṣr al-Risāla* (The Emancipation of Woman in the Time of the Prophet), a book that contests common interpretations of the Quran and Hadith that 'restrict women's participation in economic, political, and social domains' (Mahmood, 2005:111). In this course, according to Jawāhir, Dr Fāṭima shed light on various rights of which many of the students were not aware. Jawāhir noted, for example, that she had learned from the lesson on women's rights in Islam that, contrary to common belief regarding Islamic law, there are cases in which women receive as much inheritance as men, and sometimes more:

They [the ulama] take a few things in Islam that are *must'a li al-mar'a* [harmful to women] and interpret them in their own way, and they generalise this in the whole of Islam. Like for example on the issue of the inheritance. In the verse on inheritance it is mentioned that '*li al-dhakar mithlu haṣ al-unthayayn*' ['to the male, a portion equal to that of two females' Quran 4:11]. But when you come look at it [i.e., look closely at the verse], although I am not sure of the numbers..., I think there are 18 cases out of the 38 cases [that address] inheritance [in the Quran] in which the woman takes double what the man [takes].

Because Dr Fāṭima pointed out to her and her fellow students the incidents in which women received more inheritance than men, Jawāhir believes that Islam should not be perceived as misogynistic. Jawāhir considered this development in her understanding to be important because she aspires to 'become a leader' and to 'correct [Western] misinterpretations' about women's state, status, and rights in Islam.

In my observations of Dr Fāṭima's lessons during my fieldwork, she often preached about women's rights in her primary pedagogical spaces, which are the philanthropic centre that she runs, namely *Jam'iyyat Tahfīṣ al-Quran, al-I'jāz al-'Ilmī* Centre, and *Hay'at al-Ighātha al-Islāmiyya* (International Islamic Relief Organisation). Even when the subject of discussion was not self-evidently related to women's issues, she nevertheless integrated such issues into her discourses, which she often used as opportunities to intervene in cases of domestic abuse and other family problems. At *al-I'jāz al-'Ilmī Centre*, where Dr Fāṭima gives weekly exegesis lessons on Sundays, she gave a public lecture one Tuesday evening entitled *Waqafāt Imāniyya ma' Qadāyā al-I'jāz* (A Faithful Observation of the Scientific Miracles of the Quran). Almost two hundred women, ranging in age from approximately 20 to 60, attended. The purpose of the lesson was to explain the meaning of Quranic miracles and to provide examples of scientific facts from the Quran; however, Dr Fāṭima diverted from her topic to preach about the importance of knowledge for women in order to educate them about their rights. She stated '*al-insān 'adu mā yajhal*' (a person makes an enemy of his ignorance). This served as a segue for her to then reproach women for their ignorance of their

rights as granted to them by Islam and for not seeking knowledge of these rights. She proclaimed angrily and loudly that

One of the greatest *shubuhāt* [doubts] in Islam concerns women's rights. How many of you make an effort to read about it in Islam? We receive wrongful information and unfortunately it spreads! We have to read [the Quran]. Reading is the key to *'ilm*! We have to read to know the truth!

In addressing societal problems – primarily the oppression of women – Dr Fāṭima often places the woman at the heart of the solution and the man at the heart of the problem. In the exegesis of sura al-Mujādala/al-Mujādila (The Debate/The Female Debater), she stressed several times that *'al-mar'a maḥlūma'* (woman is oppressed) and *'maghlūba 'alā amrihā'* (helpless), and she located the source of this oppression in various masculine figures. At the same time, and despite their perceived oppressed state, Dr Fāṭima placed the burden of fixing society's ills on women because the mother takes on the responsibility of 'breed[ing] the sense of belonging [*intimā'*]''. According to Dr Fāṭima, in order for the woman (embodied in the persona of the mother) to exercise this responsibility, she needs to be aware of her rights that are granted to her by Islam.

Bedi refers to women who embrace motherhood as a critical source of female power as 'cultural' feminists (2006:54). However, Dr Fāṭima does not anchor her arguments on gender equality in terms of responsibility. On the contrary, she places the woman at a higher level than that of the man in her social responsibility. Dr Fāṭima shares similar views to those of Hiba Ra'ūf 'Izzat, a *dā'iya* from Egypt who conceptualises the 'proper Muslim family [as] the means to women's liberation' (Karam, 2002:236). However, this particular discourse is not only aimed at women. Through educating women, Dr Fāṭima is also educating the next generation of men, who are raised by these women. Her lesson emerges from a discursive premise for women in the sense that she attempts to improve women's status by assigning them the responsibility of fixing society's other half – i.e., men. By contrast, other *dā'iyyāt*, such as *Ustādha Anāhīd*, situate the man, embodied in the persona of the husband and father

as well in that of the political and religious authorities (who are predominantly male), in the place of responsibility for society's other half – i.e., women. However, even though Dr Fāṭima allocates to women the task of fixing society's ills, both *dā'iyāt* equally recognise that men are in a position of domination in the current religio-political hierarchy.

In the observed lessons, Dr Fāṭima highlighted the prevalence of women's oppression (*ẓulm*) and located it within the private family domain. She also drew attention to various public institutions that enable this oppression, such as the judicial system in Saudi Arabia. Thus, masculine oppressors figured in her discourse in various masculine forms: the husband (in his mistreatment such as refusing divorce or not providing financial support for his children), the corrupt judge (in issuing rulings that are biased against women), and the bribed lawyer. She also located oppression in social institutions such as the 'shame' (*'ayb*) that is attached to a woman's relationship with her father as well as in political institutions, particularly the corrupt judicial system. For example, she stated angrily that

Saudi courts are full of horrible cases. A woman once told me that she could not go to court with her problem or her family would disown her. Many families argue that decent girls should not go to court. It is shameful. [They tell her:] if you won't live with him, you can just go to hell, but courts are out of the question. It is a very complicated, multi-faceted problem involving families and all kinds of judges, who might happen to be ignorant or corrupt.

What is evolving in Saudi women's public discourse in the twenty-first century is an attempt to alter and redefine women's oppression in the various personal and political domains in order to locate avenues where change needs to be effected. Dr Fāṭima addressed these various sources of oppression, revealing their prevalence in order to legitimatise her authority, which she further bolsters through her attempts to alter women's status by improving the level of their religious adherence. She embodies charisma and courage in making women's oppression political and in not only locating it in the domain of the family but also in institutional corruption.

More so than any other *dā'iya* known to me, Dr Fāṭima can speak for women and their oppressed state because she is deeply and personally involved in their problems and shares their struggles. For example, Asmā', a close follower of Dr Fāṭima's, educated me regarding her efforts to alleviate the oppression of women by appealing to princes who hold prominent governmental positions. According to Asmā', Dr Fāṭima often contacts such patriarchal leaders and urges them to interfere in court cases that fail to bring justice to women. On a few occasions, Dr Fāṭima, accompanied by one of her sons as a *maḥram* (see further section 6.4 below), has gone directly to such persons, bringing with her the woman in question and all necessary evidence for an appeal. If this approach is not feasible, she makes contact by telephone. In any case, however, her passion for securing justice for women and her endeavours to solve their problems are what set Dr Fāṭima apart from the other *dā'iyāt* in Jeddah.

6.3 Polemical Engagement: The Debate Over Women's Ritualistic Purity

This chapter began by noting that, over and above capitalising, like the other *dā'iyāt*, on the male ulama as primary *marjī'iyya dīnīyya*, Dr Fāṭima, in particular, practices an 'alternate' strategy – in fact, a set of related strategies – by which she further constructs and legitimatises her authority within the scripturally-oriented and male dominated context of Saudi society and religious practice. Three branches of this strategy were identified, namely how Dr Fāṭima: (1) exercises power through negotiating her authority to interpret religious text; (2) asserts her right to produce and disseminate religious knowledge, particularly with respect to issues concerning women; and (3) negotiates and explores roles for women that lie outside of their traditionally inscribed sphere. The third of these branches constitutes what I have termed 'functional leadership', i.e., leadership through action and by example. This type of leadership – or, this means of authority construction and legitimation – is presented and

discussed in section 6.4 below, primarily based on Dr Fāṭima's observed leadership during hajj and in other religious practices. The first two branches of Dr Fāṭima's 'alternate' strategy are considered in the present section, as sub-branches of what I refer to as 'polemical engagement'. The presentation of this means of authority construction and legitimation – which, as with the means addressed in section 6.4, is discussed both in this chapter and, further, in Chapter 7 – is put forward through a detailed examination of a single, highly instructive example: a debate over women's 'purity' in light of Islamic scripture and in relation to women's bodies and Islamic religious practice that took place in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s.

The debate at issue here, which unfolded through competing scriptural interpretations put forward in public discourses and in published and private written communications, constitutes a nexus of many of the themes addressed in this dissertation: the ideology of women's 'lack', the gendered construction of identity, masculine control and determination of the feminine sphere (even to the point of defining aspects of feminine physiology), and the possibility of a role for Saudi women as producers as well as purveyors of valued religious knowledge (i.e., as polemical authority figures). Dr Fāṭima, as previously noted, both advocates for sanctioned religious training to provide a path to legitimacy for Saudi female religious authorities and practices scriptural exegesis alongside and at times in opposition to the ulama. In the debate in question, she carried out what many scholars would refer to as an 'Islamic feminist' project by mobilising discourses from and about the Quran and Hadith in order to promote women's interests. Specifically, acting as an authority both on matters associated with being female ('On women's issues, the woman is *a'lam* [more knowledgeable] than men...'; al-Id, 2006:255) and on Islamic scripture, Dr Fāṭima – who, we recall, rejects identification of herself as a 'feminist' – contested certain scriptural interpretations by a Saudi ulama that negatively impacted and, indeed, negatively

characterised women in relation to certain religious rituals – thereby problematising Saudi women's relationship to the practise of their religion and implicitly devaluing their place in society. The case in point thus demonstrates both the extent (or, one of the excesses) of masculine discursive and religio-political control over Saudi women and the possibility for female religious figures to leverage and augment their authority in attempting to mitigate these excesses. At the same time, it draws attention to an aspect of authority construction that is not addressed directly in this dissertation but that nevertheless should not be ignored: the extent to which, over and above charisma and other personal qualities, the *dā'iya* or other religious figures establish authority through popular appeal, or by telling the audience (in this case, Saudi women) what they want to hear. In other words, as we will see, the case examined here shows that it may be difficult to determine how greatly success in constructing authority through polemical engagement depends on or reflects the *dā'iya's* stature, the convenience for or popular appeal of her stance among her female followers, or the strength or 'correctness' of her scientific and/or scriptural knowledge (i.e., in the latter case, the validity or persuasiveness of her Quranic exegesis).

6.3.1 Ibn 'Uthaymīn's controversial fatwa regarding women's purity

In 1992 Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn issued a fatwa that stated that women must perform ablution if they experienced vaginal discharge while in a state of *iḥrām* (ritual purity). The discharge debated here is neither *manī* (semen), *madhī* (vaginal lubricant discharged during sexual stimulation/pre-seminal fluid), nor *wadhī* (thick white fluid discharged after urination), all of which the ulama consider to annul the ablution (see Nasif, 2006a:8). Rather, the 'natural discharge' debated here is defined by Dr Fāṭima as one that 'often occurs among most women (virgins and non-virgins) and it differs from woman to woman in its amount' (ibid.). For convenience, I refer to it simply as 'discharge' in what follows.

The shaykh issued the fatwa in response to a query posed by a woman (through a moderator) at the Grand Mosque in Mecca in a question-and-answer session connected to *Durūs wa Fatāwā al-Ḥaram al-Makkī* (The Fatwas of the Grand Mosque in Mecca).² The woman was inquiring as to whether her ablution was annulled if she experienced discharge while performing *ṭawāf*, i.e., while circumambulating the Ka'ba in the Grand Mosque. Ibn 'Uthaymīn said:

The female discharge is generally *ṭāhir* [pure] and it does not *tunajjis* [make impure] the clothes or the body but it annuls [*tanquḍ*] the ablution because it comes out of orifices. The majority of the ulama believe that whatever comes out of the orifices annuls the ablution even if it is not stool or urine.... [I]f this discharge is continuous, then it falls under the same *ḥukum* [religious verdict] as incontinence, and I would advise [the questioner] to perform ablution when it's time for prayer and to continue performing it whenever there's discharge because she can't get rid of it. (Ibn Uthaymin, 1992)

Ibn 'Uthaymīn here advises women to perform ablution again if they experience any kind of discharge while performing *ṭawāf* because whatever comes out of the orifices annuls the ablution – even though the shaykh declares this particular discharge to be *ṭāhir*, unlike stool or urine, which are deemed *najis*.

This fatwa created a lot of controversy among women, who had to interrupt their rituals (whether *ṭawāf* or prayer) in order to renew their ablution whenever they incurred discharge. Eventually, Ibn 'Uthaymīn reconsidered the verdict and announced that discharge does not annul the ablution (2004a, 2004b). In the revised fatwa, he acknowledges that there is no canonical evidence that declares the discharge *najis*. He also states that women have 'suffered' from this problem since the time of the Prophet, but that

There is no evidence that the Prophet has ordered the women to wash it [discharge] away, so if she had already performed ablution, she does not have to do it again... This is what appears to me to be the likely verdict, and it

² *Durūs wa Fatāwā al-Ḥaram al-Makkī* is a series of public lessons given by the official ulama in the Grand Mosque in Mecca. The ulama provide lessons in various religious sciences throughout the week.

makes it easier for women so long as there is no *naṣṣ ṣarīḥ* [explicit scripture (i.e., to the contrary)] by the Prophet. (see Ibn 'Uthaymīn, 2004a, 2004b)

Dr Fāṭima and Dr Ruqayya al-Muḥārib, a prominent *dā'iya* from Riyadh, both published booklets addressing this issue. Dr Fāṭima's book is *al-Ifrāzāt al-Ṭabī'iyya 'ind al-Mar'a: Bayna al-Ṭahāra wa al-Najāsa* (2006a) and Dr Ruqayya's is entitled *Ḥukm al-Ruṭūba* (The Verdict on Discharge) (n.d.). Both *dā'iyyāt* exercised analytical reasoning and concluded that the discharge does not annul the ablution based on evidence from the Quran, Hadith, and other scientific and religious sources. Both *dā'iyyāt* later claimed that they had influenced Ibn 'Uthaymīn to change his verdict. Dr Fāṭima declared this in an interview, as well as to some of her followers, while Dr Ruqayya authenticated her booklet by printing Ibn 'Uthaymīn's handwritten recognition of her research demonstrating the purity of discharge on the cover. Indeed, having Ibn 'Uthaymīn's signature authenticated Dr Ruqayya's work, in contrast to that of Dr Fāṭima, who did not opt to authenticate it via the shaykh. However, we are concerned here only with Dr Fāṭima's booklet for several reasons. First, the present study is limited to assessing the construction of authority among the *dā'iyyāt* in Jeddah. As observed during my pilot study, the construction of female religious authority among the *dā'iyyāt* differs in various cities and regions, and each would therefore require to be studied independently. Secondly, it is not possible to investigate which of the *dā'iyyāt*'s arguments contributed to Ibn 'Uthaymīn's revised fatwa without direct communication with the shaykh, who died in 2001.³ Thirdly, it is not the intention of this research to trace this or any other factors insofar as they may have influenced the shaykh's opinion, but rather to examine how the exercise of discursive authority and independent reasoning (i.e., polemical engagement) may have influenced women's religious observance and how this element, in turn, may have contributed in the realisation of the *dā'iya*'s authority. Moreover, due to the location of my

³ Dr Fāṭima published the first edition of the booklet in 2001, but she has indicated that she sent him her research prior to that.

research in Jeddah, which facilitated my companionship of Dr Fāṭima in performing hajj and umra in Mecca as well as my field observation of her teaching and of her involvement in women's ritualistic practices, I was able to gain first-hand insight into Dr Fāṭima's views on and influence over women's religious observance, and I can therefore consider her role in the discharge controversy as part of a larger analysis of her construction of authority, whereas I could not do equal justice to the work of Dr Ruqayya without further research.

6.3.2 Female biology through a male authoritarian lens: The roots and implications of Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn's fatwa

Interpretations of women's bodies that are sanctioned with reference to religious text influence various aspects of women's roles and mobility – and thus their overall state and status – in Saudi society. Indeed, decisions such as banning women from driving and limiting their vocational options 'according to their nature' result from a particular understanding of women's biology, psychology, and physiology that is centred around their primary function as caregiver by virtue of their role as mothers (Thapan, 1995). Moreover, the orthodox Saudi understanding of 'woman's nature' (*ṭabī'at al-mar'a*) is heavily anchored in the ideology of the lack, which institutionalises the notion of women's spiritual and mental inferiority to men (see Altorki, 1986:51-53). In fact, Ibn 'Uthaymīn was a student of Ibn Bāz, who introduced the ideology of lack to Saudi religious discourse. His fatwa on women's purity was an extension of this ideology, which has also structured notions of female biology based on masculine frames of reference. For example, knowledge about the nature and function of a woman's orifices (and, by extension, the nature of her discharge) is based on knowledge of a man's orifices. Thus, the women's vagina (the source of the debated discharge) is equated with the other two orifices (the sources of faeces), which are also found on the male body, in their nature and function as sources of impure discharge. Although the shaykh did not equate

the pure nature of women's discharge with the impure nature of faeces, he nevertheless allowed this association among orifices and their products to structure a view in which discharge, like faeces, annulled the ablution, leaving the woman in a state of impurity.

What can be understood from the above is that women's bodies and bodily functions are gendered according to masculine models or norms. Similarly, there is a gendered view of bodily waste and discharge that is shaped by cultural beliefs and patriarchal frames of reference, which in turn influences women's religious observance (Anwar, n.d.; see also Nasif, 2006a:11). In her booklet on discharge, Dr Fāṭima also presents various ulama's gendered views of the female body and its functioning. For example, she demonstrates that some scholars have declared female discharge as *najis* because, in their view, the vagina is connected closely (internally) to the uterus, which is a source of body waste and *najāsa* (impurity). This is in contrast to the man's penis, which protrudes from his body and therefore is not connected closely to sources of body waste (Nasif, 2006a:18).

Defining the purity or impurity of discharge must be understood in association with the notion of reaching *ṭahāra* (the state of ritualistic purity). Bouhdiba states that 'The life of the Muslim is a succession of states of purity acquired then lost and of impurity removed and then found again' and that 'Tahara is that which gives man back his original status' (2012, 43-44). The aim of *ṭahāra* is to 'to enable the good Muslim to face God' (ibid.:43) by reaching a state of physical and spiritual purity (ibid.:55). Purification is 'a way of returning to the ritual practices: prayer, fasting, profession of faith, [and] reading of the Quran' (ibid.:53). According to al-Ghazālī, 'purity constitutes "half of faith"' (ibid.). The importance of reaching and maintaining the original state of *ṭahāra* can be inferred from the meticulous prescription and classification of bodily wastes and the various instances that annul this state of purity in Islam (Bouhdiba, 2012).

'Islam regulates these bodily wastes in relation to the notion of purity, which determines a person's eligibility for religious observance' (Anwar, n.d.). The manner of purifying oneself from these impurities depends on the type of body waste. *Hadath akbar* (major impurities) include menstrual blood and semen and require *ghusul* (ritualistic bathing) to reach a pure state before performing religious ritual. *Hadath asghar* (minor impurities) include gas and faeces, and one can purify oneself through ablution. If a woman is incurring *hadath akbar*, i.e., menstruating or during postpartum bleeding, she cannot perform certain religious practices such as prayer. Anwar asserts that the exclusion of women from ritualistic religious performance (by masculine decree) should be understood as necessitated by this notion of purity rather than as imposed in response to the perceived nature of women's reproductive cycle (ibid.). After all, reaching the state of purity is an obligation for both men and women prior to commencing a religious ritual. For example, men and women are equally required to perform ablution prior to commencing prayer if they incur anything that annuls the original state of purity. However, it is also possible to interpret the imposed restrictions as an effort to protect the sanctity and purity of the mosque from women's perceived impurity. In this regard, Altorki attests that 'women seem to be ordinarily perceived as actors in the domain of nature [which] is the locus of irrational forces and physically unregulated currents that challenge human societies'; this, moreover, has 'to do with their physiology [and with] the social role they play as the ballasts of the domestic unit' (1986:53). Consequently, 'women are seen to have less reason, are viewed as more temperamental, less able to control themselves, more subject to the constraints of biological processes, and thereby likely to be at least temporary causes of ritual pollution against whom the community must be sheltered' (ibid.).

6.3.3 Access to the mosque and perceptions of piety

'[W]omen's entrance into public space', states Abu-Lughod, 'might have mandated new forms of puritanism' (1998:9). The mosque is a sacred public space wherein a heightened experience with God is achieved. Although it has long been the prerogative of men, Peirce points out that the mosque is 'the most intrinsically egalitarian space in Muslim society' (1993:10). The ritualistic practice of *tawāf* at the Grand Mosque epitomises this egalitarianism, as it challenges the enforcement of gender segregation as men and women circumambulate the Ka'ba side by side. However, the ulama's political and religious control of the Grand Mosque in Mecca and their monopoly over interpretation of the female body subverts this egalitarian notion. The Grand Mosque is a place of congregation charged with political, religious, and social significance for the Muslim community – it is the 'centre' of Islamic community. Yet women's religio-political participation and proximity to this important centre is constantly challenged by their bodily functions and by their identification with the realm of nature.

'The concept of the centre is important in understanding motives and interests because of the appeal the centre, as sacred space, has for Muslims. Proximity to the centre is assumed to invest persons or institutions with greater sanctity and thus religious or political legitimacy' (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1990:12). Moreover, a 'body-based methodology' is applied to define women's social, political, and religious participation (Abugidieri et al., n.d.) – and this methodology, once again, is based on masculine models:

The interpretive methodology is based, not on a principle of reciprocity and mutual equality that rationalizes the independent rights of man and woman as a contingent pair, but rather on an approach that plants man as the constitutive reference around which female rights and roles are understood, thus inscribed. (ibid.)

The woman's bodily functions influence her proximity to the mosque and impact her participation in religious rituals. However, 'the biological condition of menstruation puts [the

woman] in a state of ritual pollution which suspends religious duties of prayer and fasting. This brings temporary lapse in religious obligations not experienced by men' (Altorki, 1986:51). Similarly, under the fatwa at issue here, discharge suspended women's participation in religious rituals, including *ṭawāf*, and limited their access to the mosque.

According to the fatwa, a woman incurring discharge could not continue the ritual without performing ablution because she had entered a state of impurity. As Dr Fāṭima notes in her booklet, however, water for purification is not always easily accessible in mosques (Nasif, 2006a:6). In particular, reaching the state of purity is not easy for women performing rituals in the Grand Mosque, as women are expected to adhere to strict principles of modesty while in a state of *ihram*. (There is a religiously inscribed moral code that both men and women must adhere to in vigilantly maintaining modesty, particularly while in a state of *ihram* and during ritualistic practice.) In order to reach women's washrooms, women experiencing discharge must interrupt their ritual performance to access these facilities. There are water sources within close proximity to the Ka'ba; however, using these sources to perform ablution while in *ihram* attire is difficult because this attire covers the body parts that are supposed to be wiped during the process of ablution – such as the head, arms, and feet. Secluded women's washrooms, by contrast, are much further from the Ka'ba, which is the centre of the ritualistic practice of *ṭawāf*. Indeed, I have observed women using nearby drinking water facilities to perform ablution, but they had to struggle to maintain their modesty.

Rather than attempt to mitigate these challenges, the Saudi male ulama have attempted to discourage women from praying at the mosque in favour of doing so at home, which they see as more in keeping with women's nature and as a better way to ensure the continuance of her primary household role. In Saudi Arabia, in fact, mosques were primarily a male-dominated space – and women's sections were non-existent – until the 1970s, and Dr

Fāṭima was among the first to establish a women-only mosque at King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz University when she started working there. Members of the *Hay’at Kibār al-Ulama* as well as the Ulama of the Grand Mosque (*Ulama al-Ḥaram al-Makkī*) have continuously discouraged women from praying at the Grand Mosque in Mecca in favour of staying at home with their children.⁴ The ulama define women's piety within the limits of domesticity, which maintains her modesty and morality and prevents *fitna*. They advise that heightened piety may be achieved and observed in the privacy of one's own home and that a woman's role as a mother, at home with her children, defines her piety and supersedes her religious duties and need for public religious participation. Thus, a Saudi woman's religious participation is framed around her primary duty as mother and wife.

In keeping with this culturally-inscribed understanding of women's nature and function, which limits public religious participation, there are more prayer spaces allocated for men than for women in the middle of *al-ṣaḥn* (the open court around the Ka‘ba and the preferred area of prayer due to its proximity to the Ka‘ba) in the Grand Mosque in Mecca and in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. Women are discouraged, by male and female appointed guides, from praying outside the spaces allocated for them, and they often struggle to find a suitable place to pray. By contrast, women's religious participation from the confinement of their homes is supported by various media outlets that broadcast all five daily prayers from the Grand Mosque on television and radio. This further contributes to maintaining segregation and supporting women's 'remote participation' (Wynn et al., n.d.). Male and female religious authorities alike typically advise women to pray at home and to avoid crowded spaces because it is more in tune with their 'nature' and because they can

⁴ This is based on the Hadith (that the ulama often reiterate): Abd Allah Bin Mas'ud reported the Prophet [peace be upon him] as saying: It is more excellent for a woman to pray in her house than in her courtyard, and more excellent for her to pray in her private chamber than in her house. (Sunan Abu Dawood Vol.1 Chapter 204 Hadith No.570.)

achieve a more heightened level of piety in the privacy of their own homes (see al-Ruwayshid, 2003b).

One dimension of piety for Saudi women is defined by refraining from encounters with the *muzāḥamat al-rijāl* ('crowding of men') – as *Abla* Hanīn put it in one of her lectures – found at mosques and instead praying at home, where they can observe the imam at the mosque via television. The Hadith, '*ṣalāt al-mar'a fī baytiḥā afdal*' ('women's prayer in her room is preferable') is endorsed to discourage women from praying at the mosque. A feminist anthropologist would view this exclusion as 'sexual symbology that reproduces and naturalizes gender subordination' (Mahmood, 2005:112). In line with this view, gender segregation, isolation, and spacing in the mosque is 'in reality a larger debate about gender equality' (Hammer, 2011:458). However, Wadud explains this segregation in a different light: 'Gender distinctions and distinct gender functions contribute to the perception of morally appropriate behaviour in a given society' (1999:9). According to this view, women's exclusion or peripheral position in the mosque should not be reduced to the idea of subordination. Instead, it is an exercise in maintaining moral values and establishing boundaries of communication between the sexes. Wadud's conception of maintaining Islamic morality can be traced back to the eminent Muslim scholar al-Nasā'ī. In his tenth century book, *al-Sunan* (Traditions), al-Nasā'ī addresses the rules and regulations of men and women's division in mosques as he explains the Hadith 'Do not forbid the mosques of Allah to the women of Allah.' Mernissi (2006) asserts that al-Nasā'ī's intention is to regulate special divisions between men and women rather than to limit women's access to mosque as currently interpreted. However, not everyone accepted a similar interpretation when the General Presidency for the Affairs of the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina isolated women from the *al-ṣaḥn* in the Grand Mosque in order to prevent mixing of the sexes in September 2006 (al-Nughaidan, 2012). Indeed, Muslim women around the

world campaigned against the initiative to remove women from *al-ṣaḥn* (see Badran, 2009:337)

6.3.4 Proprieties of contestation and strategies for legitimacy

One afternoon when Dr Fāṭima was at home performing her usual Thursday fast, I asked her casually why the *dā'iyāt* justify many of the fatwas that they share with their audiences by referencing the views of the male ulama. This inquiry brought up the subject of the fatwa that Ibn 'Uthaymīn issued regarding discharge and purity. Dr Fāṭima explained to me how frustrating it was for so many women to have to renew their ablution whenever they were performing *ṭawāf*. She appeared to be trying to remain as content as possible while fasting, but her voice showed her anger:

They [the *dā'iyāt*] reinforce what they say by referencing Ibn 'Uthaymīn because he has taken up a significant place in the region and in people's hearts. Ibn 'Uthaymīn *kalāmū ma yṣīr itnīn* [colloquial saying meaning: 'people do not second guess him']. Excuse me, but there are a lot of errors in what he's saying and I replied to him but I did not put my name [on the communication] because it would come across as disrespectful! If people knew that I answered back to Ibn 'Uthaymīn, they would say: 'Who is Fāṭima Naṣīf to answer back to him?' But I did research in order to answer back to him. I conducted *baḥth 'ilmī muqayyam* [valuable scientific research] so I could prove to him that his fatwa was wrong! Just as the Imam [Malik bin Anas] said, *kul insān yu'khaḍh min kalamu yurad 'alīh*⁵ [any person whom one consults should also be questioned/answered back to], so my sources of reference are the Quran and the Sunna and *not* people whom I still respect and refer to them for '*ilm*, jurisprudence, and fatwa. But when the fatwa is wrong, it is wrong! It does not always have to be right! He said that this discharge is *najis* and that it annuls the ablution – this is a catastrophe! This is a disaster that spread all over! Look at how women are tired [from having to keep renewing their ablution whenever there is discharge] just because Ibn 'Uthaymīn's opinion must be followed, but not Fāṭima Naṣīf's opinion. When he issues a fatwa it is different than when I issue one.

Dr Fāṭima also expressed her frustration with people's unquestioning reliance on the ulama to her audience at one of her weekly exegesis lessons at *al-I'jāz al-'Ilmī* Centre. 'People today

⁵ The actual statement by Imam Mālik reads: "*kullun yu'kadh minhu wa yurad illa ṣaḥib hatha al-qabr* [i.e., the Prophet]'. 'The views and opinions of everybody may be accepted or rejected except his who is resting in this grave.' While saying this, Imam Malik pointed towards the grave of the Prophet' (Sultan, 1998:19).

worship the ulama', she said on that occasion, and this sentiment was reiterated by Ro'ā, a part-time postgraduate student at sharia college who often assists Dr Fāṭima at *al-I'jāz al-'Ilmī* Centre and during her travels. 'People think Ibn Bāz and Ibn 'Uthaymīn never say anything wrong!' said Ro'ā, but they 'are focusing on the *al-qushūr* [superficial] matters in religion, such as the wearing the 'abāyā to cover your head.' Similarly, a group of Dr Fāṭima's followers at *Himmatī Da'watī*, all of whom were in their early twenties, openly stated their frustration with the ulama in Saudi Arabia in a conversation that I had with them over dinner about a lecture that Dr Fāṭima had given at the centre two days earlier. As one of these women put it, 'The *shuyūkh*... do not have an understanding of religion. They do not have 'ilm. They *yunaḥḥirū* [repel] people from religion because they are limited in their comprehension of religion.'

The long passage quoted above makes clear that, despite her frustration and her obvious confidence in her own value and abilities, Dr Fāṭima is well aware of the challenges that she faces in terms of the credibility of her religious opinions. She points out that people 'do not' (i.e., almost never) second-guess authority figures like Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn, and she acknowledges the established social and religious hierarchy, in which he and the other ulama are considered superior to persons such as herself and, in fact, exercise a virtual monopoly over religious interpretations. None of this, however, deters her from exercising independent religious reasoning or from highlighting what she sees as the error in the shaykh's conclusion (although she herself appears to exaggerate – perhaps inadvertently – the error in the shaykh's reasoning when she says that he referred to discharge as *najīs*). In this context, it is clear that her question, 'Who is Fāṭima Naṣīf to answer back to him?' is rhetorical, even though she acknowledges her subordinate place in the hierarchical religious order. What, then, confers on her the right to 'answer back'? Based on this discourse, I infer at least that Dr Fāṭima felt empowered in this case by her sense of moral indignation, which

was clear from the conviction with which she stated that ‘...when the fatwa is wrong, it is wrong!’ Over and above this belief or certainty, one can also say that Dr Fāṭima rhetorically and polemically negotiates her status up the male-dominant hierarchical religious ladder on the strength of her ‘research’: ‘I conducted valuable scientific research so I could prove to him that his fatwa was wrong!’ This statement reveals an important element in Dr Fāṭima’s notion of authority. Authority, in her view, is constituted and legitimatised through ‘scientific research’, by which, presumably, she means seeking out and critically examining scientific facts, authoritative texts, and illustrative examples.

Another aspect of Dr Fāṭima’s definition of authority is evident from her reference to the statement of Imam Mālik (d. 795): *‘kul insān yu’khadh min kalamu yurad ‘alīh.’* In other words, any person (authority) whom one consults should also be questioned, as long as one has the knowledge to potentially refute the opinion of the one consulted. This view of authority is not consistent with orthodox Saudi religious practice, under which it is usually frowned upon to question the ulama’s verdicts. According to Dr Fāṭima, however, figures of authority, who communicate valued knowledge, are not exempt from erring in their judgments. She thus attempts to reintroduce reciprocity between authority figures and their followers, which is not presently the norm in her society. Indeed, the ulama in Saudi Arabia, who often demonstrate self-righteous certainty in their religious views, are idolised by the public due to their reputation for sapiential reasoning, and therefore their opinions are usually taken as final and many people believe that they can do no wrong. Dr Fāṭima not only contested Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymīn’s fatwa, however, she challenged the social norm with respect to the idolised status of the ulama by insisting that they do not always present correct opinions: ‘But when the fatwa is wrong, it is wrong! It does not always have to be right.’

By insisting on identifying and correcting this error, Dr Fāṭima challenged the ulama’s supreme status and contested their dominance over religious interpretation, although

she nevertheless attempts to maintain a balanced stance by praising the ulama and declaring her respect for their opinions ('...people whom I still respect and refer to them for *'ilm*, jurisprudence, and fatwa'). Moreover, in contesting the idolisation of the ulama and thus challenging prevailing notions of religious authority, Dr Fāṭima created, at least potentially, space for herself to be incorporated in the religious hierarchal structure as well as to allow her opinions to have value alongside the ulama's. By stating that her sources of reference 'are the Quran and the Sunna and *not* people...', she in fact sets herself and her methods up as equal to those of the ulama, who exercise independent reasoning, as well as setting herself apart from many of the *dā'iyyāt*, who do not exercise independent reasoning but who rely on reproducing the ulama's views.

As noted, Dr Fāṭima has made several proposals to negotiate a space for women in the religious hierarchy. She reminded me that in the 1990s she created a proposal to establish a learning institution to produce female scholars who would be capable in the field of religious knowledge production and whose verdicts could therefore be considered as authentic as those of the male ulama (see Chapter 5). She was clearly aware of the challenges faced by figures of religious authority who lack institutional sanction, and she felt that an advanced level of religious education could help to produce competent female scholars. The introduction to her booklet on the discharge issue, moreover, provides another perspective on her perception of the conditions of being a religious authority and exercising the right to give fatwa. In the first line of the introduction, she thanks God for giving the human being *al-'aql* (a mind) to guide him/her onto *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* ('the right path') (2006a). Having '*aql salīm* ('a sound mind') is consistent with the conditions for giving fatwa, as pointed out by the renowned scholar Imam Yaḥyā al-Nawawī (d. 1278): 'be an adult, Muslim, trusted, reliable, free from the causes of sin and defects of character, a jurist in identity, sound of mind, firm in thought, correct in behaviour and derivation, [and] alert... Equally [suitable] are a free man, a slave, a

woman, a blind man and a mute – if he can write or if his gestures are understood' (see Masud et al., 1996:18). Dr Fāṭima's repeated assertions that she and other living female religious authorities are among those referenced within the meaning of this classical Islamic scholarly dictum – i.e., that women have full mental capacity and can understand and serve as producers of valued knowledge – constitutes a challenge to the ideology of women's lack that presently pervades Saudi society.

In Saudi Arabia, indeed, it is frowned upon for men and women alike to publicly contest the opinions of members of *Hay'at Kibār al-Ulama*. In recent years, the advent of Internet social networking has engendered more horizontal dialogue between the ulama and the Saudi people. However, female religious authorities who wish to remain part of the religious social order must typically conform to orthodox discourse, as this practice facilitates their recognition and approval by prominent male ulama (see al-Khidr, 2010:272). By contrast, contesting or even questioning the ulama can have negative repercussions for one's social status and reputation.

In this context, it is understandable that Dr Fāṭima appears to have employed a number of strategies to help ensure that her polemical engagement with the ulama in the discharge debate did not have significant negative repercussions for herself, for her religious authority, or for women's religious participation. First, throughout her book, there is no explicit reference to Ibn 'Uthaymīn's fatwa, and the shaykh is not even mentioned by name. Indeed, rather than represent her discourse openly as a challenge, Dr Fāṭima rhetorically postures the book as motivated by an ethical imperative to guide women in matters of uncertainty regarding religious observance (*'ibāda*). By means of this context she constructs a rationale for revisiting scholars' opinions in the discharge matter and attempting to establish a consensus of opinion.

Similarly, Dr Fāṭima did not put her name on the initial letter, in which she responded directly to the shaykh.⁶ Instead, she anonymously provided detailed evidence and arguments regarding women's purity. Over and above considerations of repercussions for her, this strategy is salient in terms of Dr Fāṭima's interest in the cause in which she was writing: she is known among the institutionalised ulama as someone who commonly challenges orthodox views, and seeing her name on the letter might have caused the shaykh to reject it without consideration.

Moreover, in publishing a book on the subject, Dr Fāṭima used a legitimate platform of communication between men and women in Saudi Arabia to disseminate her views to a wider audience. In Arebi's words, her '[t]ext' allows her to "speak" to "remote generations" (1994:7). Indeed, Dr Fāṭima's publications are sold in Islamic and other bookstores alongside those of male scholars, who also advise the public on matters of religion. Currently, not many *dā'iyyāt* are as active in publishing as Dr Fāṭima, although their participation in this form of polemical engagement is increasing. For her part, Dr Fāṭima has achieved a reputation as a female pioneer in studying the various religious sciences, as well as in publishing books that make complicated religious matters understandable to laymen. Such discourses also provide recognition in a wider social sphere than speaking only in front of live audiences, thus furthering their contribution to the construction and legitimisation of her religious authority.

Arebi states that 'the type of leadership in the tribal societies of Arabia has depended on the effective use of rhetoric[al] debate' (1994:9). Dr Fāṭima demonstrates effective use of rhetoric through her various polemical engagements, whether oral or written. She deploys sophisticated analytical skills in her Quranic exegeses, both when citing examples in support

⁶ It is not unusual for Dr Fāṭima to communicate with formal authorities, and she often does sign her name. For example, she told me when I went to visit her in Mecca at Ramadan that she had written to the Minister of Health in late 2009, after he had sanctioned the use of swine flu vaccine in Saudi Arabia, to express her doubts about the effectiveness of the vaccine and her belief that it was part of a conspiracy against Muslims.

of views that are aligned with those of the male ulama and, in the case of her book on the discharge issue, when contesting their opinions. Moreover – and crucially, in the Saudi social context – she carries out these practices while remaining within the prescribed moral boundaries for communication between men and women. In this regard, written text is the safest means by which to contest an ulama's verdict without jeopardising her compliance with prescribed codes of conduct, as well as the most appropriate means to authenticate, support, and disseminate her detailed arguments.

Another important polemical authority construction strategy employed by Dr Fāṭima is to remain within a socio-culturally legitimatised frame of reference by grounding her arguments in the Quran, Hadith, and writings of reputable Muslims scholars. Thus, in her contestation of the institutionally sanctioned fatwa, she does not stray beyond the boundaries of institutionally valued religious discourse. Indeed, by including views from all four schools of Islamic thought on the various issues that undergird the discharge debate, Dr Fāṭima shows great care in establishing a legitimate frame of reference for her arguments, which she deduces from the opinions of these scholars. In this way – by exercising her agency within rather than against the prevailing discursive system – she constructs and legitimatises her religious authority even though her interpretations are seen by the religious oligarchs as non-orthodox. Moreover, by sharing the opinions of various scholars with her audience in addition to drawing her own conclusions, Dr Fāṭima allows her readers the autonomy to choose among a range of opinions without enforcing one over the others. This strategy is similar to what we saw when she voiced her opinion regarding the hijab (see Chapter 5).⁷

⁷ In Chapter 5, I addressed how Dr Fāṭima challenged orthodox views on hijab by declaring that covering the face is not mandatory but rather supererogatory in her preaching sessions at the university. However, Dr Fāṭima did not contest the Grand Mufti when she was banned from preaching at the university after declaring her opinion on hijab. She moved her preaching session to her home which was a mechanism to further assert her power to exercise *da'wa* freely in her own private space.

Dr Fāṭima's polemical engagement in the discharge debate should not be understood as the deliberate establishment of a confrontational stance with respect to Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn, but rather as an exercise in agency and in freedom of expression. In her book *Women in Islam*, Dr Fāṭima locates this freedom in women's political rights in Islam:

it is a duty [incumbent] upon all Muslim men and women to express their opinion if they feel that by doing so they can offer valuable advice and wise counsel for the benefit of the Muslim nation, as well as comply with the principle of enjoining good and forbidding evil. (1999:144)

Abugideiri et al. state that Quranic exegesis is not merely a scholarly practice of knowledge production; rather, it is 'a directly political and discursive practice' with a political and ideological purpose (n.d.). Such politically institutionalised religious interpretations have defined women's roles and theorised their bodies in ways that have limited their religious participation, as discussed above and as considered further in the following subsection.

6.3.5 Gender, purity, and proximity

As mentioned above, the fact that Dr Fāṭima is both a woman and a Quranic scholar might be said to render her eminently qualified to become engaged in the discharge debate. This perspective seems to be hinted at as a subtext in the introduction to her book on the issue, in which she positions herself as responding to the expressed needs of women with regard to a matter that other (male) authorities have been unable to resolve:

Vaginal discharge is common among women, and this led me to conduct research in this matter because I have received a lot of inquiries and concerns from women due to *ikhtilāf* [variation in the ulama's opinion]. The *ḥukum* of impurity on any matter has its consequences on the validity of the acts of worship [i.e.,] whether they are acceptable or not. (2006a:5)

Dr Fāṭima goes on to praise the Salafī ulama for their efforts in this regard; however, she expresses concern over their inability to agree on a final verdict. For this reason, she has decided to take it upon herself to conduct a comprehensive study in order to reach the correct

verdict – one that will ‘*awnan li al-nisā’ wa inqādhun lahun min al-ḥaraj*’ (‘help women and save them from embarrassment’).

Dr Fāṭima’s empathy with her female audience is palpable here, as it was in the informal conversation in her home excerpted above – when she referred to women as ‘tired’ from the burden of continuously renewing their ablution after incurring discharge – as well as throughout her lessons that I observed. Indeed, many of her audience members whom I interviewed cited among their main reasons for attending Dr Fāṭima’s lessons the view that she is ‘realistic’ (*wāqi’iyya*) and ‘understanding of their situations’ (*tifham awḍā’na*) in addressing women’s dilemmas and concerns from within a religious paradigm. In other words, she understands and sympathises with the concerns of women in the modern world, and she offers advice that is at once amenable to women and within the framework of acceptable Islamic practice. Unlike other *dā’iyāt*, moreover, who mainly reiterate the views of the male ulama, Dr Fāṭima is perceived as a legitimate authority in contextualising religious text and appropriating it to modern times without disrupting core Islamic values and principles (see Brown, 2006:423). For example, one audience member, Amānī, who had been attending Dr Fāṭima’s lectures at the Islamic Relief Organisation for fifteen years, informed me that Dr Fāṭima had taught them that reading the Quran while menstruating was permissible (see also Imamkhodjaeva et al., 2007). Amānī further stated that the Saudi ulama have advised women not to read the Quran unless they are in a state of *ṭahāra* (i.e., not menstruating or experiencing postpartum bleeding). She told me that Dr Fāṭima’s verdict was a relief for her because it allowed her to stay in communication with God by continuing her daily ritual of reading the Quran, even during menstruation.

In her study of women’s religious ritual in Iran, Torab also concluded that communicating what ‘ordinary women perceive as knowledge that is worth transmitting’ (2007:48) is what builds the preacher’s authority. This, according to Torab, is knowledge that

'helps them make sense of daily lives' (ibid.), but it may also be knowledge that makes these daily lives less burdensome. From this perspective, aligning herself with women and sharing their concerns is a strategy that Dr Fāṭima uses to construct and maintain authority among her followers. The interests of these followers (indeed, of Saudi women in general) were scarcely served by a fatwa that hindered their daily religious practice and inhibited their access to places of worship, where appropriate sources of water are not sufficiently available to accommodate renewing one's ablutions at a moment's notice. From this standpoint, Dr Fāṭima can be said to have come to these women's aid and to have used her religious knowledge and polemical skills to advocate for an interpretation that – whatever the merits of its scriptural basis – was far more amenable to her audience than that of the institutionalised ulama.

This strategic or 'populist' element in Dr Fāṭima's engagement in religious debates on behalf of her audience can be said to contribute significantly to the construction of her status as a religious authority; nevertheless, it does not invalidate her insight into the needs of Saudi women or negate the importance of her role as a mediator between this audience and the male-dominated religious establishment. As Thapan points out, 'It is...important for a woman to see her body on what she considers her own terms and not as defined by the other. It is also important for a woman to experience her body, and her manipulation of it, in terms which are seen as being profitable to her physical and emotional well-being (1995:39). Dr Fāṭima does not deny that there are biological and physical differences that shape each gender's roles; however, through engaging polemically in matters such as the discharge debate, she takes a stance 'against the values that have been attributed to these distinctions' (Wadud, 1999:7) – i.e., against patriarchal interpretations of gender differences that limit women's religious participation and/or implicitly devalue their place in society.

As noted above, proximity to the Grand Mosque carries considerable socio-political importance for Saudis. Yet the Grand Mosque has been divided among men and women along lines of perceived purity and gender superiority, with the so-called purest and first sex (Davis, 1971) enjoying greater access and priority. Indeed, access to the mosque is a proxy for piousness, and Saudi women are constantly challenged in this regard by biology and its (mis)interpretations. In contesting Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn's fatwa and asserting the purity of women's natural discharge and natural state, Dr Fāṭima sought to negotiate a space and an opportunity for women to be part of the wider Saudi socio-political arena. In the following subsection, I summarise and to some extent assess the main arguments by which she puts forward her case for the purity of women's natural discharge. Both as a woman and as someone not unfamiliar with scripturally-based Islamic scholarship, I find these arguments powerful and convincing, and their objective value (their sophistication or authenticity as religious scholarship) can be said to contribute to the legitimization of Dr Fāṭima's authority (see Abou El Fadl, 2001:53-56). However, it should be noted that the strength or merits of these particular arguments – i.e., the eloquence and accuracy of her logic and of her Quranic exegesis – are less relevant to the present discussion of the efforts of this particular *dā'iya* to construct and maintain authority in ways that are salient with her audience and in the context of the norms and values of her religious community than are the following: (1) Dr Fāṭima made a considerable and concerted effort to engage in this debate and to contribute a booklet on the subject; (2) this effort was successful (i.e., the fatwa was reversed, whether impacted directly by Dr Fāṭima's work or otherwise); and (3) this effort is emblematic of Dr Fāṭima's larger project of authority construction through polemical engagement, advocacy, and leadership. Following the account of the specifics of her argument regarding discharge, therefore, I proceed to address the third of these programmatic elements, i.e., the one promised above for discussion in section 6.4: Dr Fāṭima's leadership of Saudi women

through action and by personal example. As noted above, this discussion is based primarily on my observations of Dr Fāṭima's guidance of followers through hajj and in other Islamic rituals.

6.3.6 Dr Fāṭima's argument for the purity of women's natural discharge

The first edition of Dr Fāṭima's booklet was published in 2001 in Jeddah. The second and most recent edition is the one used for this analysis consists of 32 pages bright pink covered booklet. It is divided into three sections: an introduction, contents, and reference section at the end. She uses simplified classical Arabic throughout the book. Under each heading and subheading, the various definitions, views, and arguments are numerically listed to make it easier for the viewer to read and to be able to compare them to each other.

Dr Fāṭima's rationale to proving women's purity is based on two main arguments: (1) addressing the nature of women's orifices and proving its purity, and (2) the nature of women's natural discharge and prove its purity. She utilised inductive and deductive reasoning techniques and exercises logic in each analytical technique to conclude a discerning judgment on the purity of women when incurring discharge. For each argument, she presented the opinions of various ulama from all four main schools of Islamic thought and regarding the nature of the orifices and discharge and shares with the reader the canonical evidence used by each school of thought in its verdict about their nature. She also presented various and opposing views within each school of thought. After presenting their views, she discussed them and came up with a conclusion by exercising various analytical techniques such as logical reasoning, comparing consistent and contradictory views, and highlighting the stronger canonical evidence. Her conclusions are based on the application of inductive reasoning to carefully selected evidence.

One strategy for supporting her view is revealing the inconsistencies in the ulama's opinions regarding the nature of female biology, as well as demonstrating how some of their views and analyses contradict general principles in Islam that are guided by the Quran, stronger Hadiths, and female anatomy. In this regard Dr Fāṭima exercises deductive reasoning. Her analysis is guided by the general hierarchal principle in Islam that declares all matter to be pure in nature. She states:

Among the fixed principles in Islamic jurisprudence is *al-ḥal* [permissibility] and *al-ṭahāra* of [all] matters. Judging something as *najis* requires strong canonical evidence, to refute doubts, in order not to conflict with the fixed principle which is 'the origin of things is *al-ṭahāra*' and this is consistent with what Ibn Taymiyya (may God have mercy on him) said: 'the origin of things is *al-ṭahāra* so we must treat them so unless we receive evidence that proves that a matter is *najis*'. (2006a:25)

She begins the main argument in her booklet by presenting the scientific definitions of vaginal discharge as well as its various definitions in Islamic jurisprudence. For the medical definition of everyday vagina discharge, she cites a medical reference that states that 'The discharge is pure [*'naqiyya*'], odourless, and does not occur during menstruation. Its quantity changes from time to time and its colour fluctuates between white and clear. It is caused by many reasons, some are normal and some due to a disease' (ibid.:9). For its definition in Islamic jurisprudence, she cites the definition by al-Nawawī, which reads: 'the discharge of a woman's vagina is a white reoccurring liquid between *madhī* and sweat [in its texture]' (ibid.:8).

Dr Fāṭima follows this by presenting the inconsistent and various opinions of the scholars from the four schools of Islamic thought regarding the pure or impure nature of women's vagina (see also Mahmood, 2005:86). She reveals that inconsistency in the ulama's views is rooted in different opinions regarding the number of women's orifices. Some ulama (Shafi'ī, Ḥanafī, and Ḥanbalī) have declared that both women and men only have two orifices and that women give birth from one of these two while others confirm three orifices for

women (which includes the vagina) (2006a:12-13). She stated that there is explicit canonical evidence regarding the impure nature of the two orifices, but not the vaginal orifice (ibid.:14).

After presenting the views of these scholars, Dr Fāṭima explains the functions of each orifice and elaborated on the reasons for its purity or impurity. She defends the view that supports the purity of the vaginal orifice by explaining that it is a separate orifice on its own and that it is not attached to the two other orifices that discharge faeces and therefore it is not connected with sources that have been declared undoubtedly *najis* (ibid.). She also includes an illustration of female anatomy that identifies the woman's orifices and the detachment of the vaginal orifice from the other two, hence proving it pure because it does not share any connection with the other orifices that produce impure faeces (ibid.). Here she exercises authority in raising the validity of the science of female anatomy and uses it to refute the claims of medieval Muslim scholars. Dr Fāṭima uses scientific means to counter the unsubstantiated verdict of the scholars, thereby demonstrating competence in understanding female anatomy and aligning herself with modern scholars in communicating in the language of modern science. This increases her credibility and places her arguments in a contemporary and more accurate frame of reference, using modern science to supplement the principles of Islam.

Further, Dr Fāṭima infers that the vaginal orifice is pure from the verse that forbids intercourse during menstruation. She states that 'The womb becomes impure only in a few instances such as during menstruation and postpartum bleeding otherwise it is pure as indicated in the Quran' and referenced verse 1:222.⁸ In other words, according to verse 1:222, God made explicit that the woman's womb is *najis* only during menstruation and, in conclusion, when a woman is not menstruating, it is pure and by extension her vaginal orifice

⁸ 'They ask you concerning menstruation. Say: 'That it is Adha (a harmful thing for a husband to have a sexual intercourse with his wife while she is having her menses), therefore, keep away from women during menses and go not onto them till they are purified (from menses and have taken a bath).' And when they have purified themselves, then go into them as Allah has ordained for you.' Quran 1:222.

is also pure as part of the same reproductive unit (ibid.:16). Furthermore, she infers from the verse that 'The verse informs us that intercourse must only occur in a pure place and if it incurred impurities, then it must occur only after it has been purified according to the verse 'when they have purified themselves [Quran 1:222]'. She reasons that a woman's vaginal orifice is pure because it is the place for intercourse, based on the same verse where God stated that intercourse should occur when a woman is in a state of purity. She avers from this evidence that a woman's orifice is originally pure except when menstruating, as implied from the verse (ibid.:16-17).

Moreover, Dr Fāṭima states that the womb is where a new being is created and where the infant grows and receives nourishment. She provides justification from the Ḥanbalī school of jurisprudence, which judged the purity or impurity of matters based on the purity of their origin and states that 'a woman's womb is pure unless it has incurred impurities such as menstruation and postpartum bleeding. It is in the womb that the fetus is created, grows and receives nourishment. If it [the womb] were impure, then the infant that comes out of it would also be impure because it grew there. That is according to the Ḥanbalī [school of jurisprudence], which defines the impurity of things based on their origin' (ibid.:18). In other words, the womb cannot be impure because the new-born that comes out the womb is deemed pure in accordance to the Ḥanbalī school of jurisprudence whose scholars have stated that the 'human is pure whether dead or alive' (ibid.:18-19). This view is also consistent with the principle of purity in Islamic jurisprudence discussed earlier. Therefore, the woman's womb is pure because it produces something that has been declared (based on strong evidence) to be pure. By extension, the vaginal orifice is also pure. Because it was a highly debated matter and in order to use a more persuasive strategy, Dr Fāṭima locates her justifications here in an ultra-orthodox frame of reference (the Ḥanbalī school of jurisprudence). However, she departs from the masculine frame of reference in understanding

women's orifices by not using the male body as a frame of reference. Rather, she reasons from evidence on the nature woman's own menstrual cycle and the rules of intercourse in Islamic jurisprudence as frames of reference to assert the purity of the woman's vaginal orifices and by extension the purity of vaginal discharge.

After addressing the pure state of the female orifice, Dr Fāṭima presents the various arguments about the purity and impurity of vaginal discharge itself. She reveals two opposing views of scholars from all four schools of jurisprudence (ibid.:20-21). One group of scholars has treated vaginal discharge similar to faeces from other two orifices, therefore deeming it *najis*. The other has treated it as pure because the ulama equated it with the other natural discharge such as sweat and mucus, which are treated as pure.

In the first view, Dr Fāṭima demonstrates that among the reasons for the ulama's treatment of vaginal discharge as impure was because they gendered the female's anatomy according to that of the male and engendered the female body functions according to the male. She states that they compared the discharge to 'what comes out of the two orifices' and they declared that the discharge 'comes out of one of these two orifices (ibid.:21). She further states that they judge 'everything that comes of the orifices as impure' and consequently the discharge as impure (ibid.).

She also reveals that the ulama have judged the purity of women's orifices based on those of men. For example, she argues that some ulama's judgment of the impurity of women's vaginal discharge was based on the view that her reproductive system and its orifice (the vagina) are impure based on the interpretations that the other two orifices that females share with male are deemed religiously impure and whatever comes out of these orifices is consequently *najis* and requires ablution (ibid.:18) (see 6.3.2). Another example provided is that some of the scholars from Shafi'ī, Malikī and Ḥanbalī school of jurisprudence judged women's vaginal discharge as *najis* based on a saying that 'Uthmān bin 'Affān, one of the

Prophet's apostles, heard the Prophet order a man to wash after pre-seminal fluid (*madhī*) because it was *najis* and based on these interpretations, female's vaginal discharge is also deemed *najis*' (ibid.:22). In this particular example, Dr Fāṭima demonstrates the gendered view of female body functions whereby the purity or impurity of women's orifices is judged according to the orifices of the male body. She further states that women's discharge cannot be equated with *madhī* because it is not produced through sexual stimulation although it is a biological 'disorder' (*balwā*) (ibid.:25) (see 6.3.2).

In her conclusion, Dr Fāṭima introduces a new analytical technique to address the purity or impurity of the body's discharge. She proposes looking at the conditions that triggered a particular discharge. For example, she states that if 'the discharge was sexually stimulated', then it can be treated as *manī* or *madhī* and therefore require purification prior to commencing worship because there are explicit canonical texts that instruct one to purify oneself in this case (ibid.:29). However, 'if [a woman] incurred discharge in normal conditions throughout the day and night while performing daily chores or during ritualistic performances such as *ṭawāf*, *sa'ī*, and prayer, then it [the discharge] is pure because it is not similar to other [impure] discharges' In other words, if the discharge was continuous and not associated with any bodily function such as arousal or urination, then it should be deemed pure, and therefore the individual does not require purification.

6.4 Functional Leadership: The Journey to Mecca⁹

At the beginning of this chapter – and again at the start of section 6.3 – I put forward the view that one of the key elements in Dr Fāṭima's 'alternate strategy' for authority

⁹ The title of this section was inspired by its centerpiece – my observation of Dr Fāṭima's leadership of women and men during hajj – and by Dr Fāṭima herself, who noticed my note taking on that occasion and, when I went to greet her after our return to Jeddah, said to me, 'Now you can write a book and call it *The Journey to Mecca*.'

construction and legitimation in a male-dominated socio-religious realm is that she negotiates and explores roles for women that lie outside of their traditionally inscribed sphere. This strategic element, I further suggested, Dr Fāṭima mobilises primarily through action – through ‘leadership’ in the traditional or literal sense of demonstrating the ability to fulfill or complete a task (Wadud, 1999) or function. In the present section, and indeed for the purposes and in the interpretation of this dissertation, this element in Dr Fāṭima’s advocacy, teaching, and authority-construction program is demonstrated most emphatically in her leadership of other women (and men) during hajj and in the performance and observance of other religious rituals and practices. Notably, however, this type of leadership also includes Dr Fāṭima’s campaigning for formal religious training for women, her advocacy on behalf of the rights or needs of women as a group and in cases of individual distress, and, to some degree, her polemical engagements over such matters. In other words, discourse, to a certain extent, *is* action, and hence the line between the strategic elements or tactics discussed in the preceding section and those addressed here is not intended to be seen as absolute. Thus, in her engagement in the discharge debate, Dr Fāṭima took on a leadership role in attempting to secure – through valid, traditional Islamic scholarship conducted within the socially accepted boundaries for a Saudi female – an interpretation of the scope or nature of women’s participation in ritual practices that both seemed ‘correct’ to her and was more amenable to her followers than the official interpretation, but that stood for a time in contradiction to the position on this matter that was sanctioned by the ulama. Similarly, the leadership that Dr Fāṭima demonstrates during hajj (see section 6.4.2 below) and in the other examples discussed in the remainder of this chapter is bound up with her exegetical and discursive stance regarding the ‘appropriate’ interpretation of how certain Islamic practices might apply to Saudi women and how they affect these women’s religious participation. In the course of addressing these examples – which, in addition to (and in connection with) hajj, consist of the

requirement that women be accompanied by a male guardian when traveling (section 6.4.1) and the correct or appropriate wearing of the hijab and other ritual garments (section 6.4.3) – we will see that, similarly to the manner in which Dr Fāṭima presented views from all four main schools of Islamic jurisprudence in her booklet on discharge, she offers her followers not a single, monolithic dictum but a range of valid Islamic perspectives. For her own part, Dr Fāṭima makes choices among these perspectives that hold herself and her family to a high standard of orthodoxy and piety, a fact that can itself be considered an authority-construction strategy. Moreover, as we will see in the course of the hands-on leadership that Dr Fāṭima demonstrates during hajj, she takes careful steps to remain within the acceptable boundaries of modesty even when leading by example – a fact that is reminiscent of the propriety that she observed in her polemical engagements over discharge. Yet she encourages her followers to make their own choices within the scope of doctrinally legitimate options (as she, but not necessarily the ulama, sees them), and this, too, can be interpreted as contributing to her popularity and hence to her construction and maintenance of authority as a *dā'iya*.

6.4.1 Saudi women's mobility: The issue of traveling without a *maḥram*

Saudi interpretations of Islamic doctrine are heavily influenced by the nation's patriarchal, tribal-based social structure and by the austere, orthodox opinions of the Ḥanbalī school of jurisprudence. One of the effects of the dominance of these opinions, enforced through the fatwas of the official ulama, is that Saudi women are heavily dependent on men to facilitate their scope of activity, whether due to the ban on women driving, to provide permission for activities such as travel, employment, or involvement in official or governmental affairs, or as a *maḥram* to accompany her in the performance of religious rituals. As noted in Chapter 1 and in section 6.2 of the present chapter, Saudi women have expressed frustration with such strict conventions, which limit their autonomy and agency.

From this perspective, it is not surprising that many Saudi women appreciate the approach of Dr Fāṭima, whose understanding of religious doctrine is not confined to one particular school of jurisprudence and who therefore does not view institutionalised cultural practices as indisputable. Thus, for example, the orthodox Saudi ulama assert that it is prohibited for a woman to travel and to perform the ritualistic practice of hajj and umra without the companionship of a *maḥram*. By contrast, Dr Fāṭima preaches that such companionship is not required, in support of which view she often cites the precedent of 'Ā'isha, for whom traveling in companionship with a group of women was sufficient. One of her followers, Asmā' told me that Dr Fāṭima also uses this historical precedent to legitimatise her practice of traveling without a *maḥram* to attend various conferences around the world, as well as her trips to summer camps with and on behalf of young girls. Other, more orthodox *dā'iyyāt*, however, such as *Ustādha* Anāhīd, Dr Waf ā', and Dr San ā', do not accept the propriety of this practise.

According to Dr Fāṭima's daughter Ālā', 'a lot of religious scholars [such as] Ibn Bāz turned against her [Dr Fāṭima] because of this [view].' Ālā' is in her early forties and holds Masters and PhD degrees in curriculum studies from the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne. According to Ālā', her mother values education and often gives moral support to Saudi students who are studying abroad on government scholarships. She encourages husbands to accompany their wives to pursue higher education because, according to the rules of the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, a Saudi female student studying on scholarship abroad must be accompanied by a *maḥram*.

Ālā' is following in her mother's footsteps in *da'wa*, but with a focus on working with young girls. As Dr Fāṭima's daughter, she stated that she was accustomed to being held to a high standard of piety in her ritual practices and daily behaviour. However, Ālā' also told

me that when she travelled to the UK to participate in higher education after her divorce, she lived on her own, without the company of a male guardian.

I interviewed Ālā' one afternoon in her private villa adjacent to her mother's house. During the interview, Ālā' was eager to demonstrate to me how 'open-minded' her mother is in understanding religious text. She also stated that her mother is a very 'liberal' in her views and practices – i.e., neither stringent in religious adherence nor likely to enforce particular views on others. To illustrate this claim, she informed me that Dr Fāṭima holds a British drivers license and that she drives herself when in the UK. She also shared with me her mother's interpretations on women traveling without a *maḥram*:

My mother's policy is '*mā kān minka taqwā lā yakūn li ghayrika fatwa*' [whatever you do out of piety, do not enforce it as a fatwa on others]. She says there are fatwa *riwāya* and fatwa *dirāya*. For example, there's a Hadith that says 'it is forbidden for a woman who believes in Allah and Judgment Day to travel for a period of a day and a night without a *maḥram*'. Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī said that the Prophet made his judgment based on the duration of travel and not on the distance of travel.... If the duration of the trip is less than one day, then you don't need a *maḥram*. My mom is slashed in society because she follows this [view]. Shaykh Tawfīq al-Ṣāyigh said to me, 'Your mum created chaos in society because of this. Now women are going to [perform] hajj and umra without a *maḥram*.'¹⁰

To demonstrate her mother's 'liberal' and 'open-minded' religious views, Ālā' began in this passage by repeating one of her mother's primary religious mottos, which states essentially that one should not enforce one's strict religious views on others – or, more precisely, that if scholars have offered various opinions regarding a particular point of religious practice, one

¹⁰ Many of the women who follow Dr Fāṭima and attend her lessons also frequent Shaykh al-Ṣayigh's mosque. These women represent various ages and various educational, social, economic, and demographic backgrounds. According to Asmā', a participant closely following both Dr Fāṭima and Shaykh al-Ṣayigh, many of these women often contest the young shaykh whenever he preaches in the mosque that women may not travel without a *maḥram* – a view that contradicts Dr Fāṭima's. According to Asmā', many women (particularly those who frequent his mosque and attend his sermons) have tried to negotiate his acceptance of Dr Fāṭima's view. This might explain why he described Dr Fāṭima as causing 'chaos' (as Ālā' reported) – because her interpretation undermines his authority as a reputable religious figure and disrupts the established patriarchal social order.

may choose, out of piety, to follow the most strict interpretation, but one should not require others to do so.

In the above-quoted passage, too, Ālā' provides an important distinction between two types of fatwas. She went on to explain that fatwa *dirāya* is one for which 'you understand the text, so you contextualise it according to your circumstances.' Fatwa *riwāya*, on the other hand, is when a fatwa, based on a verse in the Quran or a Hadith, is applied blindly to one's situation, without understanding the conditions of its original revelation. This, according to Ālā', is done by applying to one's own circumstances the 'common words [that appear] in the Hadith without understanding them'.

The latter, Ālā' insisted, was a practise to which her mother does not subscribe. Rather, according to Ālā', Dr Fāṭima is possessed of sufficient command over the understanding of religious text that she is able in all cases to exercise her independent judgment in the application or rejection of a rule or precedent, and this ability and approach contribute to her well-respected position in society and to her religious authority. An example that Ālā' cited was the orthodox interpretations of religious text that limit women's mobility. Following the prominent Egyptian scholar Shaykh Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī – whose authority is important in lending weight to a point on which Dr Fāṭima is at odds with the Saudi religious establishment – Dr Fāṭima, according to her daughter, holds that a *maḥram* is unnecessary when traveling for periods of less than 'a day and a night'. The official Saudi ulama, however, hold that a *maḥram* is necessary regardless of the duration of travel. On the government's official fatwa website, the official religious verdict disregards the issue of the duration of travel on the premise that a woman is considered '*awra* and *fitna*, and she needs a man to 'protect her from the dangers' that she may encounter when travelling alone (see Ibn Baz, n.d.). For Dr Fāṭima, however, this purported rationale does not obscure the fact that the religiously inscribed institution of the *maḥram* is a local cultural norm rather than a religious

imperative. Dr Fāṭima therefore follows the scripturally sanctioned approach that calculates travel according to duration, by which measure traveling to Mecca and Medina from within Saudi Arabia does not require a *maḥram* because nowadays the duration of such travel is less than one day.

According to Ālā', her mother has been 'slashed' (i.e., criticised) in Saudi society for holding and promoting this view. The attitudes of the Saudi establishment or general public to the expansion of women's agency or scope of activities are not the subject of this dissertation; however, this perceived 'liberal' interpretation of scripture does indeed open the door for Saudi women to access places of worship and to participate in religious duties without male authority or assistance. It is little surprising, therefore, that acceptance of this viewpoint among women was evident when I visited Dr Fāṭima in Mecca during the month of Ramadan and when I accompanied her on hajj. Indeed, at our hajj camp in Mina, Saḥar, a single postgraduate student in her early thirties who was performing hajj without a male guardian, stated the following with respect to Dr Fāṭima's approach to religious doctrine, both on this point and in general:

I don't like people [i.e., religious authorities] who are stringent [*mutaḥajjirīn*] in [understanding] religion. They are ignorant [*juhalā'*] and their jurisprudential knowledge is narrow [*ḍayyiq*], and they consequently constrain people's [performance]. Their sources are limited [*maḥdūda*] and [therefore] cannot support the universal message of *da'wa* [*la yastaṭī'ā taḥqīq 'ālamīyyat al-da'wa*]. However, I also don't like those who are so open [*mutafattiḥīn bi ziyāda*] that they wholly abandon [*yatanāzalū*] religious [values] in order to attract people to [follow] them.

My observation did not reveal any discernible patterns of individual or demographic difference between women who choose to follow the view that traveling without a *maḥram* is not permissible and those who follow the alternate view that permits traveling with a group of women, following the precedent set by 'Ā'isha. In fact, even some women who adhere to strict interpretations on many points – such as *Abla* 'Abīr (see Chapter 5), who accompanied Dr Fāṭima to Mecca during the holy month of Ramadan at the time of my research (see

below) -- chose to follow the view endorsed by Dr Fāṭima. Moreover the women I interviewed at International Islamic Relief Organisation, where Dr Fāṭima lectures weekly, informed me that it is convenient for women in the region – since Jeddah is about a one-hour drive from Mecca – to perform the occasional umra without a *maḥram*.

One must point out that Dr Fāṭima does not call for women's liberation from the religious institution of a *maḥram*. Rather, she identifies justifications in scripture in order to allow women to work around limiting conditions such as the unavailability of a *maḥram*. As such, Dr Fāṭima's religious interpretations are alluring to many women in contemporary Saudi Arabia, particularly to those who do not have a *maḥram* to accompany them to Mecca or who do not wish to have their autonomy and the limits of their ritualistic practice so narrowly circumscribed. Indeed, Dr Fāṭima has negotiated enhanced physical and cultural 'space' for women to participate in the religious realm, and she has decreased the gap between women and the most important centre of religious observance, the Grand Mosque in Mecca. Nevertheless, when she herself makes the pilgrimage, even when traveling as a hajj group leader, she typically appropriates her daughter's husband as a *maḥram* to avoid any possible criticism to her leadership. Similarly, in Chapter 5, I addressed how Dr Fāṭima appropriated her husband as a *maḥram* and relinquished her power to him when he advised her not to contact Shaykh Ibn Bāz to defend herself against his claim that she was teaching women not to cover their faces. In this case, however, she did not relinquish her authority to her *maḥram* but allowed him to enhance it and to deflect some of the criticism that she might encounter. She allowed him to exercise his responsibility as a *maḥram* while still maintaining autonomy, and she allowed his *presence* but not his power to increase the legitimacy of her authority.

I have indicated earlier that the institution of the *maḥram* serves to 'protect' women by virtue of their perceived weakness according to the ideology of the lack. However, Dr

Fāṭima used the *maḥram* not for physical protection but to protect her authority from possible public criticism. Her followers legitimatise her authority through hajj because she communicates valued knowledge and demonstrates a thorough understanding of the values and principles associated with the hajj ritual. The *maḥram* is a symbol that helps her to maintain a positive public perception during this time, particularly for those who accept the official conception of the importance of the *maḥram* when travelling and for ritualistic practice. Indeed, Dr Fāṭima clearly does not see herself as seeking to diverge entirely from the established patriarchal social order, and she employs this and other rituals of conformity to help her construct and legitimatise her power and influence. Moreover, the greater the number of followers for whom she is responsible, the more salient her authority and leadership become and the greater becomes the pressure to maintain at least a polite alliance with the institutions by which the ulama themselves maintain and legitimatise authority. This does not, however, negate her preaching to women that they may travel to perform hajj and umra accompanied only by other women. Rather, on this as on other points of adherence, she communicates to women all of the options that she perceives as doctrinally permissible while remaining within the orthodox interpretation herself as a means of augmenting her authority.

6.4.2 Concealed in the centre: Dr Fāṭima's active yet pious leadership during hajj

In November of 2009, I accompanied Dr Fāṭima on hajj, the pilgrimage that is one of the five pillars of Islam. The leadership role that Dr Fāṭima and other *dā'iyāt* assume in this context challenges the dominant patriarchal social order by setting a precedent for unconventional female leadership in Saudi Arabia. Orthodox religious ideologues discourage female leadership, particularly in religious rituals – often citing the Hadith, 'Such people as are ruled by a lady will never be successful' (see Chapter 1). As discussed below, Dr

Fāṭima's hajj leadership (of both women and men) presents an alternative to this orthodox viewpoint and challenges traditional, culturally inscribed gender roles.

On the occasion when I joined her, Dr Fāṭima led *Dār al-Imān* hajj *ḥamla* (group or caravan), which offers services for Muslims performing hajj, such as accommodation, food, and transportation from and within all hajj sites. Featuring a popular male or female *dā'īya* as host has become a trend among hajj agencies to attract customers and to ensure their compliance and correct observance of hajj rituals. For female *dā'iyāt*, this is done at an informal level between the hajj group and the *dā'iyāt* and is not endorsed by the Ministry of Hajj. Many male *du'āt*, on the other hand, are officially endorsed and hired through collaboration between the Ministry of Hajj and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs.

Dr Fāṭima is among the most sought after *dā'iyāt* in Jeddah, and hajj agencies compete to have her in their hajj group. Indeed, the majority of the women I socialised with during this hajj journey told me that Dr Fāṭima was among the main reasons they joined this particular hajj group. Some told me that they try to perform hajj with her every year, while others informed me that Dr Fāṭima brings to their attention new and useful information pertaining to hajj that no other *dā'īya* shares.

Many of the women I spoke to during hajj also informed me that their husbands and fathers are supporters of Dr Fāṭima's religious views and that she is among the reasons these men joined this hajj group in order to allow their wives to be within close proximity to her and to gain valuable knowledge. Despite Dr Fāṭima's unorthodox views, she does not encourage women to rebel against their husbands, society, or orthodox religious interpretations. Rather, she presents her audience with a wide range of perspectives that they might adopt, which increases her appeal to both men and women.

Maysā, for example, a housewife in her mid thirties, left her children at home with her parents and decided to take the opportunity to perform hajj alongside Dr Fāṭima. She told

me that she was eager to bring her husband along and chose to be on Dr Fāṭima's bus because she wanted to expose her husband to Dr Fāṭima's teachings, which often call for women's rights. She said that often the religious discourse of male and female *dā'iyāt* stresses the wife's duties toward her husband, but that it rarely addresses the husband's duties toward his wife. Maysā's husband was also eager for his wife to join the group because of Dr Fāṭima's positive influence on his wife and on her role as a mother.

On the first day of hajj, before setting out for Mina, members of *Dār al-Imān* gathered at Jeddah's Intercontinental Hotel after *fajr* (sunrise) prayer. The five-star hotel was the meeting point for all members of the *ḥamla* and offered an open breakfast buffet in segregated rooms for men and women. Those who opted to remain with their families waited at the entrance hall, where Dr Fāṭima was heavily involved – along with the administrative staff – in the organisation and counting of hajj participants and allocating people to their designated buses. She had donned a loose black *'abāyā* and had covered the lower half of her face, but she was still recognisable by her energetic stride and loud and husky voice, calling out names and ordering people to get on the bus to reach Mina early to avoid the inevitable floods.

By 8 am, with the rain already falling heavily, Dr Fāṭima and organising members of the *ḥamla* had managed to get everyone on their buses, and we departed for Mina. I had registered for hajj early, so I managed to request to accompany Dr Fāṭima on her bus. Our bus led a group of 10 buses, each with a capacity of around 40-50 people. As the bus drove off to Mina, Dr Fāṭima, in her husky voice, loudly chanted the *talbiya* (salutation): '*labayka allāhumma labayk...*'. Both men and women repeated after her.

Later, as the roads began to flood, Dr Fāṭima assured us that the bus driver was competent enough to overcome the rain and to take us through on the shortest and safest route to Mina. The roads soon became more congested, however, and rain blocked the main

highway routes, so Dr Fāṭima decided to take charge and guided the driver to follow a different route to avoid the heavy traffic and impassable roads. She frequently got up from her seat to monitor the road and to advise the driver on the route to take. Neither the driver nor the men sitting at the front challenged her instructions.

On our bus were singles, couples, and families. Generally speaking, the single men were concentrated at the front of the bus, the couples and families in the middle, and the women without male companions sat at the back. Dr Fāṭima was strategically placed in the centre of the bus, in the second row of women adjacent to the door. One side of the door had a railing that was anchored to a rectangular wooden panel. Dr Fāṭima sat strategically behind this panel, which offered partial concealment from the men at the front. The bus windows were also tinted to provide concealment from the outside, allowing her the option to remove her face covering when possible. Her central position allowed Dr Fāṭima's voice to be heard at both ends of the bus, and she rarely shied from raising her voice to remind people to continue chanting the *talbiya* whenever they slacked.

This segregated seating arrangement (which is typical arrangement for spaces shared between men and women in mixed ritual spaces such as the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina), which offered partial visual concealment between the sexes, allowed Dr Fāṭima's power to be more articulate. Through the power of her voice and with partial visual concealment, Dr Fāṭima was able to demonstrate leadership and exercise authority without having to jeopardise her authority (piety) by crossing the prescribed moral threshold of allowing her body to be visible.

Segregation in Saudi society is a form of social control that is used to maintain discipline and acceptable code of conduct between the sexes (see Chapter 1). For women, maintaining this segregation and isolating themselves from men is crucial to maintaining a virtuous reputation. Also, Peirce states that in the sixteenth century Ottoman Empire,

seclusion from the public gaze was a symbol of higher status for both men and women, while people of lower socio-economic status 'mingled' with each other (1993:8). Rulers maintained a degree of seclusion from the public, which gave their authority a higher status. This tradition helps to shed light on our understanding of how Dr Fāṭima legitimatises her leadership by maintaining physical concealment from men and exerting authority through her voice.

However, Dr Fāṭima was criticised by Dr Sanā' and her followers for raising her voice and crossing the moral and religious threshold by allowing her voice to be heard distinctly by men.¹¹ During a lecture that Dr Fāṭima gave during in hajj, she placed herself strategically next to the wall of the tent that is adjacent to the men's tent (which was segregated from the women's camp). By sitting there, she wanted men (many of whose wives and daughters were with her in the women's section) to hear her lesson, so she deliberately raised her voice (although maintaining a pretence of not doing so deliberately) in order for them to hear her talk about women's rights and status in Islam as well as demonstrate men's mistreatment of women as a result of misunderstanding of the religious scriptures.

Dr Fāṭima did not wholly submit to the request of Dr Sanā'; although she sometimes consciously lowered her voice to avoid further criticism and to reduce the tension between them, she raised it when necessary in order to communicate valuable knowledge or give instructions – such as in instructing the bus driver – in perfuming supplication during hajj

¹¹ It is uncommon for hajj groups to include more than one a *dā'iya* at a time. *Dār al-Imān* hajj group invite Dr Fāṭima and Dr Sanā' in order to appeal to a wider range of people and lure them into joining the group. Both *dā'iyāt* have different ideological trajectories. Dr Sanā' adheres to a more orthodox stance (see Chapter 5) and therefore attracts followers who opt for more interpretations are more inline with those of orthodox institutionalised ulama. Her authority and leadership in hajj was confined to women unlike Dr Fāṭima. The decision to invite Dr Sanā' was not welcomed by Dr Fāṭima whose authority was occasionally undermined because Dr Sanā' gave talks when it was the time for Dr Fāṭima to do so. Daniya informed me that Dr Fāṭima was not happy with the decision of inviting a popular *dā'iya* such as Dr Fāṭima because there cannot be two leaders at the same time. Moreover, Dr Fāṭima interpreted Dr Sanā' taking over the time of the lectures as a sign of disrespect because she is her senior and Dr Sanā' was once her student (see Chapter 5). Despite these challenges, Dr Fāṭima maintained the predominant leader and authoritative person.

rituals, and in giving general instructions to staff members (both men and women) of the hajj group. Raising her voice is, in this context, a necessary authoritative technique, particularly if she is visually concealed, to allow her to manage and lead the group. Through her voice, she allows others to recognise her when she is at a heightened level of modesty and concealment in a space where men and women are mixed. When raising her voice to give instructions, she is often bold and speaks slowly and clearly in an assertive and authoritative manner, thus demonstrating her leadership skills.

However, Dr Fāṭima maintained a low voice whenever possible, only raising it when communicating valuable knowledge or giving instructions. Maintaining a low voice is part of the visual concealment expected from women, which is rooted in the understanding of the nature of a woman's body. Orthodox ulama preach that it is frowned upon for a woman to raise her voice and deem it *'awra* because it is incompatible with her nature (al-Musnad, 1996:338). Dr Fāṭima subtly challenges this socio-religiously inscribed feminine ideal by raising her voice to articulate her authority and leadership. Her leadership is exercised through verbal communication, while she maintains physical concealment to authenticate and legitimise her authority. The fluctuation between subscribing to the feminine ideal and resisting it is a strategy for authenticating her unprecedented leadership while stretching the parameters of the predefined ideal for female religious authorities.

Dr Fāṭima's actions should be understood in the wider evolving social, religious, and political context, in which Saudi women have communicated a need to elevate their status. I have addressed in Chapter 1 and in this chapter in section 6.2 how Saudi women are taking wider initiatives to change the various institutions that are limiting to their mobility and agency. Dr Fāṭima's behaviour and her communication must be understood as part of her contribution to this wider discourse and not only as a strategy to communicate her authority.

Moreover, the rituals of the hajj, such as the stoning of Satan, *ṭawāf*, and *sa'ī* pronounce her leadership. Such activities offer unique settings in that strict segregation between men and women cannot be applied while performing these rituals (due to the nature of the setting and the large number of people performing them at the same time) therefore making Dr Fāṭima's leadership more pronounced. It is up to one's discretion and level of piety to maintain an acceptable social space between the sexes. Due to the large number of people in our *ḥamla*, we were divided into smaller groups to take turns in performing the stoning of Satan (which is done throughout three days in hajj) to avoid over crowding.

I joined the group lead by Dr Fāṭima, which consisted of men and women. We left our tents to perform the stoning of Satan at 1 am. According to Dr Fāṭima, this is the best time to perform it to avoid crowds. The group followed Dr Fāṭima as she led us in performing these rituals. To maintain an acceptable level of modesty and as an embodiment of piety, whenever possible, Dr Fāṭima maintained a position at the centre of the group – shying away from over exposing herself to the men in the group – as opposed to a typical leader who would normally be at the forefront of a group. As we walked towards the stoning of Satan, many of the men and their wives walked slightly ahead of Dr Fāṭima, not out of disrespect but in order to grant her (and the other women in the group who were not accompanied by a *maḥram*) the socially appropriate personal space. Dr Fāṭima often donned a *ṭarḥa* on her face as a sign of modesty and piety (see further below).

We all repeated supplication after her and listened to her advice as she guided us through these ritual activities. The men who joined our group all represented a particular segment of society; however, the women (both the singles and those with a *maḥram*) represented an array of different backgrounds. The majority of the men held higher university degrees and came from privileged socio-economic backgrounds, meaning that they had been educated and socialised into accepting such leadership. I observed the men maintaining an

acceptable public distance from Dr Fāṭima while remaining close enough to hear her supplication and instructions. Before and after the ritual of the stoning of Satan, Dr Fāṭima performed a supplication. She raised her voice so that all members of the group (including the men who were maintaining a physical distance from her) could hear her, yet without raising her voice inordinately. Some *ḥujjāj* (people perfuming hajj) took notice and joined us in repeating after her supplication.

6.4.3 Hijab and other forms of ritual attire: Signifying piety as authority construction strategy

Underneath the black *‘abāyā*, Dr Fāṭima wore a white *iḥrām*, the special attire for performing hajj and umra, consisting of a long white cotton garment (*thūb*) that covers the whole body, except the face and hands, and a pair of matching loose harem trousers underneath.¹² This is standard *iḥrām* attire for women from the Ḥijāz and other parts of the Muslim world, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Levant. Men also donned a white *iḥrām*, however of a different shape. Almost all women in the hajj group wore this style (although each had a different style of embroidery) and covered their heads with a matching white scarf.

Many of the women I interviewed during hajj believed that there is an egalitarian purpose behind the unified *iḥrām* style for men and women in that it signifies unity and equality among all Muslims performing hajj and removes any signs of wealth. In orthodox Najdī religious practice, women don a black *‘abāyā* on top of the *iḥrām* (which is not standardised in style or colour such as the Ḥijāzī and does not conform to a particular colour) to add more coverage, provide more concealment, and differentiate them from men. Dr Fāṭima told me that many years ago she did not don the *‘abāyā* on the *iḥrām* when around

¹² *Iḥrām* also refers to the ritualistic state of which Muslims commit to performing hajj and umra.

men. She said people have contested her for not donning the *'abāyā* (as sanctioned by orthodox Najdī practice) to enhance her modesty as a prominent figure of authority. In the enclosed and private women's tents in hajj sites, Dr Fāṭima did not wear the *'abāyā* and exposed her *iḥrām*, allowing her to be unified with other women on the hajj. When her leadership was more pronounced, particularly in a public non-segregated space, Dr Fāṭima adhered to more strict attire in order to deflect criticism regarding her religious devotion and commitment. However, she did not advise women to adhere to this particular *iḥrām* attire.

As a prominent figure of authority, she is expected to apply the strictest interpretation on her own piety, as discussed above. For example, she also informed me that although not covering the face is among the conditions of *iḥrām*, she opted to cover the lower half of her face with one end of the headscarf to deflect criticism. When she felt the space was overcrowded with men and to avoid criticism from more strict adherers, she opted to fully cover her face as means to further authenticate her authority. In her observance of these ritualistic practices, she adheres to a more strict interpretation as a strategy for authority maintenance and legitimation.

In her daily practice, Dr Fāṭima covered her face and advises her daughters, but not other women, to do so. Ālā', showed me a documentary that she had produced about the legacy of the Naṣīf family, conformed to a more lenient form of hijab and did not cover her face but maintained modesty throughout her body by covering her hair and body in a black *'abāyā* and *ṭarḥa*, while Dr Fāṭima and her mother, Ṣaddīqa, adhered to a more orthodox form of hijab, fully covering their faces and bodies.

I asked Dr Fāṭima about her views on whether it was acceptable for her daughter not to cover her face given that the video (although not for public distribution) was accessible to their circle of immediate and extended family and was meant to be handed down to the next

generation of Naṣīf youth. Dr Fāṭima expressed her disapproval of her daughter's revealing of her face. In an ironic tone, she said:

Listen, my daughter; I didn't just decide to cover my face today. This means I will never reveal it [to a non *maḥram*]. I was put in *makān riyādī* [a position of authority] and I don't want to cause conflict or dispute. I could choose not cover my face [if I want] and lead *masīrat kashf al-wajh* [parade of revealing the face] but I don't want to cause conflict between myself and the ulama in Saudi Arabia. I don't want to open [conflict] fronts that I can avoid so it's better for me to cover my face. If someone like you came to me for a fatwa, I will give her all the available opinions on the matter and let her choose for herself. I advise people [as] to the correct sources and the correct [canonical] evidence on covering the face and revealing the face.

Shortly thereafter, she added:

My mother covered her face... Ālā' believes that since [covering or uncovering] the face is a *mas'ala khilāfiyya* [debated issue] among scholars, she can opt to follow [opinions supporting] revealing the face. When I gave her hand in marriage [I made sure] she was covering her face but after marriage she chose not to cover it and I did not want to dispute that because there is no consensus among the scholars so I don't care [if she chooses to cover or uncover]; but I cover my face, and my mother covers her face.

Here, Dr Fāṭima demonstrates many of the reasons why she opts to adhere to a more strict application of hijab by covering her face. First she reveals that she does so in light of her position of authority, which, according to her, entails one to demonstrate a heightened level of piety and observance in order to be perceived as legitimate. She also gave the example of the prominent Shaykh al-Albanī (discussed in Chapter 5), stating that he also permitted not covering the face but enforced it on his wives in light of his position of authority. She also told me that because she has an understanding of religious knowledge, she did not tell me to cover my face in an attempt to attract me to continue to attend the lessons even outside the context of my fieldwork.

There is here a clear awareness of the socially appropriate conditions for being a religious authority. Dr Fāṭima needs to demonstrate that she is not so attached to worldly attractions, and covering her face is an expression of her sincere religious commitment. She also located her decision to wear the hijab in avoiding conflict with the local ulama, who are

an important constituency in maintaining her authority. As discussed in Chapter 5, Dr Fāṭima was banned from giving lectures at the university because she was perceived as preaching unorthodox interpretations of hijab. She realised the authoritative position and power of the ulama and opted not to contest it. Unlike debating women's purity, she sees revealing her face as an unnecessary and avoidable confrontation with the ulama that would jeopardise her authority and might eventually discredit it among her followers. However, she maintains her adherence to the orthodox form of hijab in order to allow her to contest other interpretations, communicate alternate views, and stretch the parameters of orthodoxy. Remaining within the orthodox frame of reference is thus a strategy to allow her to extend her power and to legitimatise her alternative views.

Dr Fāṭima stated that she does not want be misunderstood as leading an emancipatory project of relieving women from hijab, which would be deemed heretical. Hijab is deeply rooted in Muslim women's identity, and she does not want to break out of that structure. In orthodox Islamic practice in Saudi Arabia, hijab is an important institution in authenticating Islam and for the state to maintain its legitimacy and power. For Dr Fāṭima, it is a strategy to deflect criticism on this important issue. She presents women with the valuable knowledge on the topic of hijab and allows them the option to choose because this is within her understanding of religion. Unlike the ulama in Saudi Arabia, who usually advise on the strictest interpretation and confine themselves to the Ḥanbalī more strict school of jurisprudence, Dr Fāṭima presents women with the range of verdicts and allows women to choose. This is because many in Saudi Arabia believe it to be the cradle of Islam and, because of the location of the two holy mosques, many Saudis believe that they are the upholders of Islamic morals and that the orthodox religious interpretation communicated by the state represents the most correct version of Islam, if not the only version.

Giving women a range of views is also a strategy adopted by *Abla Hanīn* in her lessons at *Himmatī Da'watī*. She informed me that:

When it comes to clothing, for example, *ahl al-dīn* [the people of religion or the people who represent religion] enforce their own way of dressing. They have created a [special] persona and a way of dressing to express religiosity. If you look at the time of the Prophet, you find that he has approved several ways of dressing.... When I was in fifth grade, they created 'abāya with French[-styled] sleeves and the *māshayikh* [sing. shaykh] condemned the trend but how can they condemn it when the French [people] don't even wear 'abāyāt [sing. 'abāya]. When you hear a *hukum*, you need to also be aware of the local customs and traditions [*ādāt wa taqālīd*]. We are forbidding things just because they [violate] customs and traditions. Always refer back to the [original] religious verdict...in the Saudi way of hijab, black is the customary colour. Some even say that wearing 'abāya on your head is *wājib*. When Ibn 'Uthaymīn said that it is *wājib* to wear the 'abāya on the head, it was the way the question was presented to him which gave him no choice but to issue such a fatwa. We must review the question first because understanding the question is half of understanding the answer.

She further contested orthodox views that forbid women to wear coloured 'abāya, declaring it not an acceptable form of hijab, and she stated that her mentor, *Ustādha Īmān*, said that it is permissible to *al-iltifāt* (turning one's head [left and right]) during prayer. In her addition to her appealing pedagogical style (see Chapter 5), *Abla Hanīn* appeals to students because, according to some of the students who switched from *Abla Fāṭima R.*'s lessons to hers, 'she gives a range of views in many religious matters, which demonstrates her knowledge'. Thus, along with that of *Dr Fāṭima*, allowing women autonomy in their decision-making sets *Abla Hanīn*'s pedagogy apart from the approach of the male ulama.

Thapan states that 'clothing offers the greatest space for acts of resistance' (1995:50). In the example discussed, religiously significant attire adds legitimacy to *Dr Fāṭima*'s authority, both in general and, in particular, to her unprecedented hajj leadership, for it communicates heightened morality, modesty, and religiosity. Although *Dr Fāṭima* does not advise women to cover their faces in everyday life, she does, however, urge her daughters to follow in her footsteps in covering their faces. Applying a stricter code of behaviour to oneself and one's family communicates the authority figure's realisation that her family's

socially perceived religious observance is an extension of her own religious observance and that her demonstration of authority within the familial sphere reflects her ability to demonstrate authority in the wider social context. In her daughters' demonstration of compliance, Dr Fāṭima thus maintains the legitimacy of her family's precedence in religious authority as well as its wider social reputation for piety and virtue.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented an alternate form of authority formation, whereby the prominent *dā'iya* Dr Fāṭima Naṣīf authenticates her authority by contesting some of the ulama's fatwas that reflect the theory of women's lack and, consequently, interfere with women's religious participation and constrain their mobility. The chapter began by providing background to trace the ideological trajectory of Dr Fāṭima polemical engagements and functional leadership practices, beginning with so-called secular and Islamic feminist discourses in Saudi Arabia that demonstrate an awareness of women's institutional subordination and lack of agency. The purpose of this background was to situate Dr Fāṭima's discourses within these emerging cultural voices and to understand how her authority is appropriated and perceived in this context. This was followed by a demonstration of how Dr Fāṭima has applied her ideological trajectory to the interpretation of scripture and to active leadership – as well as leadership by example and in outward displays of piety – in negotiating new roles and new spheres of activity for Saudi women.

Chapter 7

Discussion and Conclusions:

The Construction of Religious Authority Among *the Dā'iyāt in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia*

7.1 Summary of Research Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore how uninstitutionalised female religious authority figures in Saudi Arabia – specifically, the female preachers, or *dā'iyāt*, who were active in and around the city of Jeddah at the time of the fieldwork – construct their authority in a context in which men dominate the production of religious knowledge and in which the male ulama represent, both officially and unofficially, the apex of the religious hierarchy. The study was conceived and executed to be broad, descriptive, and explanatory and was rooted in the notion that ‘authority’ is a relational phenomenon that operates through existing and established values (Gunning, 2007:96). The research question was as follows: *How is the authority of a dā'iyā constructed in the male dominated religious context of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia?*

As discussed in Chapter 2, the role of women in Muslim communities around the world is no longer confined to primacy in the home or to the role of mother. In particular, Muslim women nowadays share with men the religiously inscribed moral responsibility of advising people for the betterment of society. Despite various institutional limitations placed on Saudi women with regard to their public mobility and participation, they thus share with men the responsibility of *da'wa*, which is a form of public religious participation and the fulfilment of a moral duty. In fact, women in Saudi Arabia today are at the vanguard of expressing religiosity and

morality; moreover, paradoxically, gender segregation provides them with a platform to establish authority, at least within the female sphere. As was demonstrated in Chapter 6, the process or mechanics of establishing authority for these women can extend beyond mere reproduction and dissemination to the production of valued religious knowledge. Indeed, as their uninstitutionalised status places them less directly under the control of the religio-political establishment, Saudi female religious leaders may be said to enjoy more latitude in their construction of authority than their male counterparts, who nevertheless maintain a virtual monopoly over the power to determine interpretations of scripture and religious practice that are sanctioned by the state. Within this traditional yet evolving context, the study attempted to identity the *dā'iyāt's* sphere of influence, some of the challenges that they face in constructing their authority within the patriarchal social order, and their roles and contributions within and beyond the limitations of serving as a conduit for the views of the ulama.

7.2 Summary of Dissertation Contents

Chapter 1 provided a detailed presentation of the rationale and purpose of the study and traced the foundations of *da'wa* as a moral duty in religious text and in Muslim history. This chapter also outlined certain similarities between the population under study and my individual characteristics in terms of gender, language, religion, and cultural background. These similarities and my own feelings about the subject and about the people under study were acknowledged as something that could impact my response to the collected data but that should help me to provide insight that will help to make this study a meaningful contribution to the scholarly literature on female preachers in Saudi Arabia, which is at present scarce.

Chapter 2 discussed selected theological and theoretical perspectives on authority, as well as empirical studies that address how female religious leaders establish their authority in contemporary Muslim societies. The material was selected in a manner that was intended to be consistent with the qualitative aims of this research. The literature reviewed in this chapter showed that the most prevalent authority legitimator in light of these theological, theoretical, and empirical perspectives was the prevalence of knowledge in its secular and religious forms. Knowledge was also a significant contributor to authority formation in the context of established gender hierarchies in which women's status was subordinate to that of men.

Chapter 3 detailed the methodological approaches adopted for the study, beginning with my role as participant-observer during the fieldwork. Data collection methods employed during fieldwork included observations, interviews, and survey of literary artefacts. To facilitate data collection, I adopted a flexible, non-systematic mode of inquiry that began by identifying snowballing networks through a gatekeeper to help solidify my insider status. This approach also helped me to overcome certain constraints on data collection that resulted from heightened government control of public religious discourse and activities after the violent attacks in the United States on September 11th 2001 and in Saudi Arabia in 2003 and 2004.

Chapter 4 presented the data analysis procedures that were used to identify thematic commonalities, differences, and relationships within the collected data. These procedures were chosen to comport with a data-driven mode of inquiry that allowed themes to emerge from rich data in order to serve the interpretative and descriptive aims of the research. Preliminary analysis of this data resulted in the division of the material into two broad thematic categories: themes associated with

the construction of authority through reproduction of and conformity to the views of the ulama and themes associated with contesting the views of the ulama and/or negotiating roles for women that go beyond their traditional sphere. The results of the analysis of the themes identified in these two categories were presented in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively.

Thus, Chapter 5 addressed the predominant themes that emerged with respect to the manner and extent to which the *dā'iyāt* operationalised the established legitimacy of male ulama as primary *marji' iyya diniyya* in order to develop their own authority in the private female *da'wa* domain. This meant that the *dā'iyāt* and their activities reported on in this chapter relied on the declarations and authority of contemporary and historical male ulama to serve as an authenticating frame of religious reference in the issuance of fatwas and in other matters of scriptural interpretation; they also relied on these figures as pedagogical models, sources of charismatic inspiration, and sources of the personal authentication that was identified as crucial to the advancement of their unofficial professional status. As background to examining the dynamics of this dependent relationship, the chapter began by discussing the various social institutions that have shaped Saudi society's ideas of women, including the ideology of women's 'lack' and the belief in men's superior capabilities, as well as the role of these views in circumscribing women's authoritative influence.

In Chapter 6 I addressed the virtually unique case of authority construction on the part of Dr Fāṭima Nasīf, who was shown to have contested certain views of the ulama and to have negotiated new roles for women within the male-dominated religious hierarchy and society. The analysis identified these activities as distinct but related strains in Dr Fāṭima's advocacy and authority-construction project, which I

identified and discussed under the rubric of ‘polemical engagement’ and ‘functional leadership’, respectively. The former was exemplified primarily on the basis of Dr Fāṭima’s engagement in the debate over women’s purity as it relates to certain ritual practices; the latter was treated mostly in light of her stance regarding women’s right to travel without a *maḥram* and her own traveling role as leader of hajj groups and in other religious and didactic activities. In both cases, it was shown that Dr Fāṭima presents, and in some cases embodies, a more woman-conscious (or female-friendly) interpretation of the religious text than the official one, and that she challenges the ideology of women’s lack while remaining, for her part, within the boundaries of propriety that patriarchal society imposes on Saudi women.

The remainder of the present chapter provides discussions of the research findings that supplement and build upon those presented in Chapters 5 and 6 above. Thereafter, I provide an assessment of some of the study’s limitations, suggest some of its implications for future research, and offer some concluding insights.

7.3 Discussion of Research Findings

7.3.1 Construction of female religious authority through association with and adherence to the views of the male ulama

In Chapter 5, I discussed the role of the male ulama as a *marjī‘iyya dīnīyya* in establishing, maintaining and legitimatising the female *dā‘iyāt*’s authority. First of all, in this regard, it was shown that many of the female *dā‘iyāt* relied on male religious authorities to establish solid pedagogical grounds. This technique might be considered virtually inevitable in a context in which male religious authorities have conquered the religious polity both literally and symbolically and within which, therefore, the

scope of a *dā'iya*'s activity and her sources of inspiration have to be moulded to fit a social structure that is more comfortable with the idea that knowledge production is a masculine trait. Also not surprisingly, therefore, the authority of the *dā'iyāt* also hinges largely on the reproduction of knowledge produced by ulama – such as in issuing fatwas and in explaining religious text – to support their arguments on matters of morality or appropriate behaviour or religious adherence.

Women's sphere of influence should also be understood with respect to explicit definitions of private and public space. The study revealed that the *dā'iyāt* can exercise authority, so long as it remains within the boundaries of the allocated private domain. However, when they attempt to expand their influence or to challenge orthodox religious interpretation by forming their own theological interpretations, they are considered to have crossed into the male-dominated public domain of knowledge production. This was evident when Shaykh Ibn Bāz banned Dr Fāṭima from preaching at the university in response to her sharing her unorthodox views on women's hijab in a context where proper hijab is a religious tradition that maintains women's status as symbols of piety.

On the other hand, conformity with established religious interpretations allowed *dā'iyāt* to augment their perceived stature and ability to influence other women. *Ustādha* Anāhīd's legitimacy as an orthodox *dā'iya* who serves as a conduit to explain orthodox religious positions and practices was, as reported, recognised by the Saudi Ministry of Education. As discussed in the chapter, *Ustādha* Anāhīd has run various educational centres that fall under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, as opposed to the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, therefore adding more weight and value to her pedagogical approach. As Lake points out, 'legitimacy is central in all human relationships [and] is rooted in interests vested in the social order' (2006:1-2). The

social order discussed in this study places the male ulama at the top of the religious oligarchy as producers of religious knowledge and upholders of *‘ilm*. Because the *dā‘iyāt*’s power is not officially recognised, the more they conform to the established norms and interpretations, the more they become part of the system; in this context, increasing one’s proximity to official authority implies more power and influence in the religious domain. Submitting to the male ulama in this social order is, in fact, both restrictive in its immediate effects and requirements and liberating in the sense that it deflects criticism and public contestation that might result from independent knowledge production. *Ustādha* Anāhīd’s reliance on literary contributions (exegetical treatises) by male ulama in explaining religious text is a clear example of conformity to this social system in order to legitimatise one’s own authority.

The study revealed, moreover, that in forming their authority the *dā‘iyāt* needed to be selective in choosing particular ulama as *marji‘iyya*. Two important factors influence the selection of the *marji‘iyya*: the male ulama’s popularity and his orthodox religious stance in subscribing to the Ḥanbalī school of jurisprudence and to a Salafī school of Islamic tradition. For example, as we saw, *Abla* ‘Ā’isha localised Shaykh al-Albānī, who follows the Salafī school of tradition, to increase the acceptability of his fatwa among her audience, and Dr Fāṭima referenced the popular and institutionalised al-Fūzān to legitimise her fatwa on the permissibility of clapping for women.

The findings of Chapter 5 also challenge the usual or widespread assumptions about the magnitude of the ulama’s influence and power over women in Saudi society. Indeed, male ulama play a major role in the making of the *dā‘iya*; however, their authority is not absolute, but is appropriated depending on various factors, such as the expectations of the audience and the social value of the knowledge

communicated. In Foucauldian terms, the *dā'iyāt* used 'technologies of the self' in the process of developing their own powers with respect to the communication of valued knowledge. In other words, in this traditionally male-dominant religious domain, the *dā'iyāt* had to employ a variety of methods to relate to their audience and to make inroads into the existing power structure. In this regard, each *dā'iya* had to make decisions in terms of when to appropriate the authority of male ulama for her advantage. This was exemplified in Dr Wafā's embodiment of masculinity in order to venture into a male-dominated religious domain as well as in the different pedagogical styles adopted by *Abla* Fāṭima R. and *Abla* Ḥanīn to increase their leverage in accordance with the religious background of their students.

The male monopoly over religious authority is mitigated, moreover, in the practise of *tazkiya*, in which the participation of the wife of the scholar is needed to grant his blessing. Indeed, even though Ibn 'Uthaymīn's mentorship of *Abla* Fāṭima R. in the example considered, solidified the foundation of her religious knowledge, it did not enable her to exercise *da'wa* in the private women's domain. Notably, the support of Dr Wafā', as well as the *da'wa* expertise of Dr Āmāl, were important factors in enhancing her pedagogical competence as well as in introducing her authority in the women's sphere.

Although this study revealed the important role of male ulama as sources of authoritative reference as well as in legitimatising, maintaining, and recognising female religious authority, it has also shown that Saudi women are not always subordinate to men. There are, in some cases, agreements in the sharing of religious authority, such as in the process of authenticating and acknowledging *Abla* Fāṭima R.'s role as a *dā'iya*. Therefore, the construction of female religious authority should not always be understood within the paradigm of submission to male domination. The

dā'iyāt, like other female religious authorities throughout history, have also legitimatised their authority by resorting to primary religious texts in order to justify their religious verdicts and opinions. Moreover, their prerogative to preach religion is also enhanced by their conformity to a private, female-specific space, where women gather to share and develop their skills in order to empower and perfect their relationship with God without the direct intervention of men.

7.3.2 Construction of female religious authority through polemical engagement and functional leadership

Chapter 6 elaborated on how Dr Fāṭima legitimatises her authority through independent interpretations of religious text, thus asserting her prerogative not only to disseminate but to produce religious knowledge, particularly with respect to issues concerning women. In addition to such 'polemical engagements' as her participation in the debate over women's purity, moreover, we also saw how Dr Fāṭima demonstrates 'functional leadership' in negotiating and exploring – through her own actions and through the example that she sets for and the advice that she provides to other women – roles for women that lie outside of their traditionally inscribed sphere (such as her roles of hajj leader and, when needed, bus route director).

As discussed in Chapter 2, Dr Fāṭima considers 'exceptional skills', 'knowledge', and 'virtue' to be necessary qualities for women to possess in order to be worthy of a position of religious authority. In her engagement in the debate over women's purity, for example, she leveraged both her knowledge of female physiology and her exceptional skills in Quranic exegesis to add authority to her contribution. In this exemplary case, the inconsistencies of opinion on the matter of female discharge among the male ulama had created a knowledge vacuum, and this paved the way for

Dr Fāṭima to exercise independent reasoning and to put forward a female-friendly scholarly interpretation. The fact that her finding was more convenient for women than the disputed fatwa certainly contributed to Dr Fāṭima's popularity among her followers, who considered her to be 'realistic' and 'understanding of their situations'. However, this element of 'convenience' does not undermine the legitimacy of Dr Fāṭima's exegesis as Islamic scholarship or the value of her service – as mediator between patriarchy and its female constituency – to society. In this regard, the following factors were noted as important: (1) the establishment ultimately adopted the 'female-friendly' interpretation; (2) as Thapan has stated, 'It is important for a woman to experience her body, and her manipulation of it, in terms which are seen as being profitable to her physical and emotional well-being' (1995:39). In other words, Dr Fāṭima's interpretation was the 'best' one for her Islamic society, due either to its value as scholarship, to its promotion of a positive self-image for women, or to both.

One might argue that theorising about a woman's body remains within the boundaries of the allocated private (gender-specific) domain of influence, wherein the *dā'iyyāt* are allowed to participate in the production (rather than mere reproduction) of religious knowledge. However, Dr Fāṭima took several other unusual and important steps in the case in question. In particular, she legitimatised her authority in providing an alternate fatwa to Ibn 'Uthaymīn's fatwa concerning women's impurity after discharge by providing documented opinions from recognised jurisprudential sources from all four of the principle schools of Islamic thought, as well as medical sources. In this regard she attempted to stretch the boundaries of orthodox religious interpretations in Saudi Arabia, particularly by supporting her view of women's discharge using Ḥanbalī scholars to represent the orthodox opinions of the official Saudi ulama. Thus, her polemical engagement in this matter should not be dismissed

as something provisional or limited to the female sphere; rather, it constitutes important evidence that, contrary to the norm identified in Chapter 5, knowledge in the Saudi religious context is not an exclusively male trait, and knowledge production is not an exclusively male domain.

While Dr Fāṭima redefines authority as based primarily in one's knowledge and command of religious texts, she nevertheless demonstrates her awareness of an existing hierarchal order within which she must operate. Therefore, when contesting the verdict, she did not mention the ulama's name or refer explicitly to his fatwa, nor did she sign her name when she wrote directly to him. As noted in Chapter 5, Dr Fāṭima had previously experienced repercussions as a result of the perception that she was preaching unorthodox views on hijab. She demonstrated social awareness of how the audience appropriate and accept her verdict and authority, as long it does not upset the established religious hierarchy and social order. By contrast, had she mentioned the ulama's name, she would not have been able to publish her book in Saudi Arabia, which would have narrowed her audience and limited the scope of her authority construction. In publishing the book, however, she shared in the prerogative of the production of valued religious knowledge – particularly since the Saudi publishing process entails official scrutiny of text and interpretation, and therefore acceptance implies approval.

The second branch of Dr Fāṭima's so-called 'alternate' strategy (or set of strategies) for advocacy and authority construction, as identified and analysed in Chapter 6, was termed 'functional leadership'. This term was introduced in order to draw attention to Dr Fāṭima's active, hands-on leadership and to the manner in which she demonstrates, by example, the possibility of expanding Saudi women's sphere of activity or influence. Here, too, however, polemical engagements were important, and

again Dr Fāṭima was careful to remain in many ways inscribed within traditional notions of piety and propriety. Specifically, the discussion in this regard centred on the issue or example of women's right to travel without a *maḥram*. Here, again, Dr Fāṭima put forward a religious opinion that differed from the institutionalised position. In this case, she used the following tactics to legitimatise her stance: (1) she used 'Ā'isha (the Prophet Muḥammad's wife) as an exemplar to demonstrate the permissibility of traveling without a *maḥram*; and (2) she compared her opinion to that of Shaykh al-Qaradāwī. First, by using a historical analogy to illustrate her point, she calls on others to imitate 'Ā'isha, not Dr Fāṭima; as such, she protects and elevates her authority by showing that her interpretations are not innovative, but are in fact imbedded in Muslim history. Moreover, her second tactic – comparing her opinion to that of Shaykh al-Qaradawī – is analogous to the standard reliance on male ulama to communicate orthodox fatwas examined in Chapter 5. Here, however, the tactic is used in a supplementary role alongside her own arguments. Dr Fāṭima, moreover, draws her net more widely than most of the *dā'iyyāt*, citing an internationally noted Islamic scholar rather than a member of the official Saudi ulama. Finally, she also practices what her daughter, Ālā', refers to as fatwa *dirāya* in that her alternative fatwa is based on consideration of the context from which the Hadith was drawn and that to which it is applied, not on an unquestioned acceptance of authority based on a text that may not be understood or relevant.

The alternative fatwa offered by Dr Fāṭima in this connection, as in the purity debate, has an element of convenience – particularly for women seeking to travel to Mecca without a *maḥram*. Once again, however, this fact does not undermine the value of her position as Islamic scholarship or reduce the 'social capital' (see Chapter 2) inherent in such a 'female-friendly' stance. In any case, however, it was noted that

Dr Fāṭima does not practice the most ‘liberal’ of the possible interpretations of acceptable religious practise that she presents to her followers. Rather, she typically appropriates her daughter’s husband as *maḥram* when leading women (and men) on hajj. In this she practises what Minganti – as noted in Chapter 2 – defined as ‘tactical orthodoxy’ (2011:384), i.e., enacting a heightened level of piety in order to strengthen her authority among her followers. This was also found to be the case with respect to hijab and other elements of ritual attire, as discussed in Chapter 6. As Pandya notes, a degree of ‘distinction’ (2009:65) in one’s look, attire, conduct, speech, and/or manner is important for a religious authority figure (see Chapter 2), and Dr Fāṭima’s strict adherence to hijab and covering her face should be understood as serving this function.

Even as she is careful to earn and maintain an exceptional reputation for modest and piety, Dr Fāṭima also anchors her authority in expanding, for others, the defined parameters of permissible Islamic practice in matters such as hijab and the use of a *maḥram*. (This is contrary to the finding of Mahmood (2005) that the *dā‘iyāt* do not contest the male ulama in matters where there is ‘considerable consensus’ among the orthodox scholars, such as hijab.) By presenting a range of interpretations on such matters – and by allowing women to experience piety outside of the home and to share with males the public religious rituals – she constructs authority through cultivating alternate yet legitimate *marjī‘iyya* that address the concerns of modern women without disrupting the core values of her religion. Thus, she constructs for herself the status of ‘an authority’, even though the male ulama have a monopoly on being ‘in authority’, because her discourse speaks realistically to women’s everyday problems and moral dilemmas (see Tütüncü, 2010).

Contrary to the discussion in Chapter 5, which showed gender as a construct imposing limitations on independent religious opinion, in the case of Dr Fāṭima, as discussed in Chapter 6, gender is an important construct in authenticating authority, particularly in issues such as women's purity, in which a woman's insight can be seen as filling a knowledge vacuum. Indeed, when discourse that is based in such knowledge associates with and speaks to women's everyday concerns, anything to the contrary is likely to be perceived as 'authoritarian' and 'hierarchal' (Tüttüncü, 2010:599). By contrast, through her 'female-friendly' fatwas, Dr Fāṭima – who preaches to women the permissibility of travelling without a *maḥram* and who redefines the restrictions on when and where women are allowed to participate in public religious practice – can be said to cause a shift in the established social order. To secure a platform that allows her to communicate valuable religious knowledge (and to provide reinterpretations of text that are more convenient to women than the official positions), however, Dr Fāṭima, as a *dā'iya*, must not only remain within and support the social order, she must maintain her positive reputation and social standing therein. This is a precarious balance to achieve, and we should not underestimate the importance of charisma, experience in *da'wa*, and family precedence – all factors discussed earlier in this dissertation in connection with Dr Fāṭima – in enabling her to accomplish this unique feat.

7.4 Limitations of the Study

Although the study was not designed or intended to produce generalisable findings, it must be noted that it was limited to exploring the construction of female religious authority among a certain group of practitioners in the city of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and that the dynamics that impacted the phenomenon of authority

construction as it emerged in the study are specific to the social, political, and religious conditions of the time and place in which the research took place. Therefore, the findings should not be considered generalisable even within the community under study.

A further limitation stems from my role as a researcher, which entailed that I select the information to share with the scholarly community, and that I exercise various forms of responsibility in doing so. Thus, the dissertation and its findings are impacted not only by any shortcomings in my perceptions of what was most relevant to record and report, but by the fact that I had to omit certain data due to the sensitivity of the information divulged by the participants. Finally, the research was limited in its understanding of authority construction, even among the select group of practitioners in Jeddah, in that data were collected only at and in connection with public lessons. Lessons conducted in private homes – whether on a scheduled basis or on occasions such as funerals or other family gatherings (where the discussions are less inhibited and where the constraints on public discourse do not apply) – were not examined during fieldwork. To do so, however, would have been impractical owing to current laws against such lessons in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the public space allows for a more open discourse and a broader audience, and hence it can be said to have contributed to a deeper understanding of how authority is constructed.

7.5 Implications for Future Research

This research, moreover, like any scholarly endeavour, cannot escape the impact of a personal trajectory, which might have steered the focus in the direction of a gender-conscious understanding of the formation of authority. The findings, nonetheless, indicted that the elements that contribute to the understanding of

authority go beyond the discourse of gender hierarchies, such as was suggested in the relationship between Dr Fāṭima and Dr Sanā'. Future research, therefore, might do well to delve further into the understanding of dynamics other than gender in the construction of authority among Saudi *dā'iyāt*.

Future research could, moreover, address how the *dā'iyāt* in Riyadh, who enjoy closer geographical proximity to Najd (the bedrock of religious orthodoxy), construct their authority in a context that epitomises *al-ta'ṣīl al-Najdī*. Moreover, future research could also address the relationship among female religious authorities in Sufi and Shia communities, as well as the construction of authority among uninstitutionalised male oligarchs in these denominations.

7.6 Concluding Insights

All in all, I feel that the main contribution of this research lies in the findings with regard to the roles of gender segregation and gender mixing in the formation of female religious leadership and authority. In Chapter 2, I noted the contributions of Le Renard (2011) in the context of Saudi Arabia and Bouzar (2011) in the context of Muslim communities in Switzerland in demonstrating that gender segregation provided the *dā'iyāt* with a platform within which to serve as figures of religious authority as well as a space in which to contribute to the reproduction of religious knowledge outside of the direct influence of the male ulama. However, this research suggested that gender *mixing* highlighted and authenticated the *dā'iyā's* leadership because it was in such a context that a *dā'iyā* was observed to be able to demonstrate leadership skills, piety, conformity to the institution of the *maḥram*, and modesty toward both women and men.

Adhering to orthodoxy in a non-orthodox setting, indeed, authenticates functional leadership and overtly demonstrates adherence to the patriarchal social order, which is the basis for authority legitimisation. Hence, the exclusion of Saudi women from state recognition as religious authorities inspires some *dā'iyāt* to re-evaluate patriarchal interpretations of religious texts and Muslim history in order to find means for women to manoeuvre around limiting institutions such as *maḥram* without altering the core values of their religion. At the same time, the authority of the uninstitutionalised *dā'iyāt* with respect to the communication of valued religious knowledge was found to be legitimatised primarily through reliance on the male ulama as *marjī'iyya diniyya* because the institutionalised male ulama in Saudi Arabia continue to monopolise religious knowledge and to do so in a manner that serves the interest of the state. However, the research presented here also demonstrated that the type of knowledge can be a factor in constructing women's authority in matters that are less comprehensible to men. In other words, the *dā'iyāt* steer a course toward power and legitimacy through conforming to orthodox interpretations and practises (knowledge, attire, social order, demeanour, etc.) in order to establish a platform based on which to communicate valuable religious knowledge, but they can and sometimes do branch out to construct new, female-friendly paths by which Saudi women can navigate their way through the established social order.

As both a researcher and a Saudi woman, I began this research with preconceived notions regarding how the *dā'iyāt* construct their authority. For one thing, I believed that their discourse was stagnant and did not address contemporary women's needs. However, this belief was dispelled by evidence that some of the women's religious discourse is indeed in tune with the constantly evolving state, status, and personal needs of women in Saudi Arabia, as well as with wider public

discourses on women's issues. At the same time, I realised that the relevant hierarchies are not just those that involve the ulama and the *dā'iyāt*. In fact, the *dā'iyāt* operate in a gender specific space allocated to women, yet this space is not an entirely egalitarian one. There are differences in status and implicit hierarchies among those who speak, listen, interpret, accept, lead, and are led. Finally, whether the strategies adopted by the *dā'iyāt* are perceived as liberating or restrictive, one must not dismiss the reality that these strategies and the niches that various *dā'iyāt* adopt are all responses to a religious and moral imperative that is rooted in the principle underlying *da'wa*: beyond the discourses of conformity and contestation, acting as viceregents of God authenticates the exercise of power and authority.

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