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Making Yourself at al-Dar: On Islamic Education, Social Imaginations, and Affective Possibilities

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The American University in Cairo

The School of Humanities and Social Sciences (HUSS)

MAKING YOURSELF AT *AL-DAR*

On Islamic Education, Social Imaginations, and Affective Possibilities

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of Sociology-Anthropology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

by Alia Amr Amin Shaddad

under the supervision of Dr. Dina Makram-Ebeid

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"The exercise of imagination is dangerous to those who profit from the way things are because it has the power to show that the way things are is not permanent, not universal, not necessary."

(Le Guin, 2004, p. 417)

Figure 1. The Dar [Painting]. Alia Shaddad.

To Amr and Rania, my baba and mama.

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PROLOGUE

"I dwell in the city and the city dwells in me."

(Pallasmaa, 2012, p. 43)

2016-2017

I had already been attending *Duroos*[1] for quite some time, and I still felt like something was missing. My friends would tell me about the new *dars*[2] I should go, and ask if I would like to go with them, and I would. There was the eye-rolling *dars* that unwarrantedly drew out a relationship between being a woman and obedience. There was the one that we all liked to go to because Tante would always pray for us to get married at some point during. There was one with subsequent nightmares about eternal torture in the afterlife. And, the heartwarming one with a transformative story, where you left with chills, smiles, hugs, finger foods, and new friends. Too many to possibly remember, but I often find unintentional detailed recollections making their way through a flood of different social/personal interactions. They meant something. They mean something. But what they mean(t) is no longer my preoccupation. Instead, I want to learn more. I want to know why Tante 1 drew the relationship she drew, or why Tante 2 is consumed by marriage, or why Tante 3 did not at all want to scare us but somehow did, and why there was still space within all that mess for us to eat, and to feel, so much.

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[1] The ones I attended were women-only gatherings, usually weekly, in homes. One Tante (Aunt—not necessarily by blood, but in spirit) would give us a lecture of some sort on a topic in Islam. She would talk and incorporate *Quran* or *Hadith*, explaining them along the way. After, we would socialize a bit, until one by one we all left.

[2] Singular for *Duroos*.

Fifi Abdou[3] gave me a prayer mat. Yes, that happened and I cannot count the number of times I wanted to willingly, or after being asked to, share this story. Somehow it wasn't just surreal to me, but to most people I've come across; and so re-telling the story, eagerly keeping an eye out for their reactions, has become more of a hobby than anything else. Its a story that's made myself, and others, laugh; but it had also triggered so many questions within me about what Islam means, and what practicing looks like. It's a lot to think about considering the brevity of the exchange, and although I become in many ways, I feel most profoundly that I am *becoming-Anthropology*. I always questioned a lot, and I refuse to give anthropology much credit for that; but I have definitely become more constantly triggered. But when I am asked what triggered my exploration of the *Dar*[4] I cannot think of a story. I remember feelings, and I remember instances, and books, and people; but I cannot narrate them. Sometimes, it's just not as easy as saying "Fifi Abdou gave me a prayer mat, and so here are my questions for this paper." Instead, I stare into space and I try so hard to gather all the pieces that make the story whole, and fail. Then this triggers me into being angry at myself, for possibly failing to be self-reflexive. But in an attempt to figure things out, I will put them out in writing as the flow of my thoughts go, in the hopes of finding one thread or an amalgamation of ones that add to this story a little more.

I was born into a life of financial privilege—to a great extent. My parents gave me as much as they could. Growing up, I was taught what my parents and family believed were the 'basics' of Islam.

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[3] Famous Egyptian belly dancer.

[4] Any of the Islamic studies spaces that operate in a similar fashion to the one I will talk about next, is called *Dar*. *Dar* is Arabic for home. The owner of the *Dar* explained that it is called as such in reference to the *Dar al-Arqam*, one of the well-known spaces that the Prophet Muahmmad would gather with the companions to pass on knowledge. Therefore, the place usually has an additional name, making it "House o X"—whatever that X might be. For the purpose of this thesis, the X will have to be kept as such to protect the anonymity of the space and its people.

We pray, we fast, we believe in God. I never stopped bothering them with questions, and my parents were okay with that. They didn't always have the answers, and sometimes I didn't like their answers, and sometimes we fought; but it was okay to keep questioning. There wasn't much space to question in my first school, though. We had religion classes that were basically an extended break time, where we would eat, talk and laugh, while our teacher sat on a chair at the forefront of the classroom, displeased, going through the assigned textbook. There was a syllabus to finish, and an exam to prepare for—he thought, and often said; and we often ignored. They told me if you can't memorize the new Quran verses for the exam, just write the Fatiha[5] and you'll pass. I didn't tell my friends, but I would often memorize them.

In the tenth grade I changed schools. I wanted to do the IB Programme, and there were only a handful of schools that offered it. My parents asked me to pick which school I wanted to change to, and the final choice was between two schools. Both were really good schools, but one was known for being more *'liberal'* than the other. I opted for the other one; the one that promised to try and offer "the best of both worlds."[6] I had known quite a few people there, and they all loved being in that school. I ended up loving, or at least appreciating, the time I spent there. In my second school, religion classes were taken seriously. Growing up, they had two separate classes, one specifically for learning the Quran, and the other for going through its meanings alongside Hadith, and stories from the prophets' lives. But after a certain grade, both would be combined into a single class, and we would rotate every week between both. It was weird at first, and I remember being uncomfortable. It wasn't anything that was being said, but it was strange being in a class that was

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[5] The first Surah in the Quran, and the one constantly used in all five of the daily prayers. It was the first I remember memorizing.

[6] Those are not my own words, but their slogan.

quiet, where most of the people there eagerly listened to the teacher—a teacher that was close to them (and is one of the closest people to me, to this day). As time passed, that class became one of my safe havens. It wasn't like the duroos I attended. It wasn't like the break-like classes at my first school. I was comfortable, and I could ask all my questions. It wasn't always as perfect as it is in my retrospective memory. Several days were too tiring, and we would end up sleeping through Ms. Rola's class. Some days it was just a class, and we had to make it through one way or another. But even on those days, I would often visit Ms. Rola beyond class times, and we often talked after class. The more we talked, the more questions I had, and the more I wanted to know. I didn't just want to know 'the basics', or whatever that meant. I was angered by that word, because the more I asked the more it stopped feeling right. I stopped feeling like it was okay to just know what I know. I would read more at home, and then would again have more questions. These questions would no longer be answered simply by attending more Duroos with more Tantes.

After a while, I approached one Tante—my aunt—to ask what she did. She's a caring, exciting/excited, knowledgeable 50+ year old with the spirit of a hundred wise women and two hundred playful children. Whenever I heard something I didn't understand at one of the Duroos, I would always go to her and make sure to bother her with a million questions until I was satisfied. She (almost) always had the answers, and was knowledgeable enough to engage with any critical and cynical attitudes I was giving. She listened, and sometimes she shut me up so I would listen. My eagerness to talk to her was always unparalleled precisely because of the way we could engage the questions I had. She didn't answer, but she let our conversation, using different sources, guide me to reach one conclusion or the other. Sometimes we agreed, she would be happy. Sometimes we disagreed, and she would ask me to reconsider. But, more importantly, sometimes we disagreed and

she would be happy knowing that I made my choice based on some level of engagement with information. When it was time to move past the *Duroos*, I knew she would have an answer for what to move onto; and so began my introduction to the *Dar*.

She told me to find a *Dar* I can trust near where I lived to go to. I had no clue where this trust would come from, so it came from her. I let her know the names of some of the *Duur* around, and she told me that she knew one of them, and that the owner studied with her a long time ago. Familiarity was good, I thought. I needed it as I entered a strange place. I had never gone, and did not know anyone besides my aunt and my friends' mother who went to a *Dar*. My mother had never gone and she might freak out, I first thought. But later, she would surprise me by tagging along. Her friend told her to come with her since she had been going there as well, and their third friend was a teacher there. So we both went and paid the 600 EGP fees (around 38 USD), got our books, and started attending classes on Saturday evening. I cannot recall a precise timeline, but I can recount being in class with a few of my friends, as well. I was excited. I attended the first day of classes. I took my books. First class. Second class. Third class. Fourth class. I took my books home. One book. Two books. Three books. Four books. I was back home. I was excited. I started reading through most of them. Scrambling through the books, trying to, rushing ahead, eager, with every page turned, *know* God. In Islam, there is no Face to God—it is hidden, inaccessible—for it cannot be imagined, nor drawn. There is 'The Book'/Quran as "one colossal Signifier...pointing to a Transcendental Signified." (Dabashi, 2012, p. 50) Broken down, with commentary of the followers and scholars, Hadiths, different stories, the books laying in front of me were now my access point, my portal into the depths I was so eagerly rushing into.

2016-2018

I'm in an Anthropology of Violence class. It becomes quite clear that everything is violent. Now what?

Now, I think of the parts I can relate to most. I do not do it intentionally. I do not sit with a pen and paper and jot down all the things I relate to most; but I sit with a group of friends, and they discuss what it means to be a Muslim, and I can't get Talal Asad or Walter Benjamin out of my head. They've become part of my group of friends, and I wonder if I should ever let my friends know. In retrospect, I can say that they found out about it and have given puffs and eye-rolls of displeasure; I can always tell they've had enough. But when I have read about notions of secularization, the never-ending critiques of the modern and the nation and the state, I find myself sitting with unanswered questions about pieces of my own life. What does it mean to go to the *Dar*, and to talk about and study Islam, with a plethora of contestations around me all at once. These were not even just in the *Dar* itself, but were lying around the classrooms in so many of my undergraduate classes, they lounged on the sofas I share with my friends, they lay heavy in the air around my home, and are cuddled in the crevices of my very being.

"I dwell in the city and the city dwells in me."

(Pallasmaa, 2012, p.43)

2019-2020

Pallasmaa writes about architecture, the senses, sketching, perception, and so many things in between. I am, in a way, from before but also onwards, an architect. Or a painter. I'm not sure what

to call myself, but I can say that I sketch through and with senses and sensibilities, and become an architect of a story not fully my own, but not wholly detached. I want to architect this story with the backdrop of the knowledge that all I can say is a translation of my body's interaction with the space I dwelled in, and through the space that now dwells within me.

...

I frequently refer to the space as a *Ma'had*, because that is the usual name it's given by those who go; however, the space itself is called a *Dar* (دار)—Arabic for 'home'. The use of the word *Dar* is not as common in Cairo as other places, and home is often referred to as *Bayt* (بيت), instead. So the word *Dar* in its usage was new to me in the sense that I had not used it before to refer to anything else. The *Dar* is a space where different activities take place, but are mostly catered to the transmission of Islamic knowledge—specifically from the Quran, and Hadith. The *Dar* I attended and would later take as my fieldsite is located in New Cairo—a relatively new city in the north of Cairo in a prominently expensive neighbourhood. It started out as one apartment on the ground floor of a villa, and later expanded to take on the other apartment on the ground floor, right across the older one. The expansion would make it a space covering the entirety of the ground floor of the villa. When I talked to mu'allimah Lama—the owner of the *Dar*—about wanting to do fieldwork, she asked me to come over to meet with her and discuss what that would entail. On the day I went, the owner was sitting in her office with the managers, figuring out the plan for what will come ahead. I stood by the front desk until I was taken into her office. We talked about me attending classes and talking to the students, and she wanted to get some background about my thesis. After our chat, she asked the *Dar*'s manager to show me around the space. I asked her if it was okay to take pictures, and

since it was a day off and no one was there, she said it would be okay. Since it was a day off, there was a static facade untrue to the daily chaotic surges of women whispering, talking, laughing, yelling, stumbling about, eating, calming their children, running around to look for the children, running around looking for their class, going to the bathroom, asking for the owner, asking about a book, or asking about the fees. The place was quieter. There were cleaners that were preparing the space for its closure for sometime until it reopened in a couple or few weeks.

With the newfound quietness, I was able to actually notice the space and how it's arranged. To make it easier to map out what the space looks like, I took note of the route I took as I came in, and then as the manager showed me around. To enter, you pass through a large black metal gate that is left open. You make your way through a path and then up a few stairs to a large wooden door. The door is also left open for anyone to enter. As soon as you enter, on your left, is a large wooden engraved desk that uncovers behind the upper bodies of two receptionists. Right next to it, a small table with a computer screen that shows footage from different security cameras dispersed throughout the *Dar*. "That's strange. Why do they need security cameras? Why do they need this many?," I remember thinking when I first stood by the front desk, waiting to be accompanied by someone to show me around.

Figure 2. The Dar [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.

Figure 3. The Dar [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.

Figure 4. The Dar [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.

Right in front is a door to one of the classrooms. It is a large space, with black metal desks/chairs lined to the right and the left in rows of three or four. The desks trail, with a path in between, reaching the end of the class where a desk lays on a slightly higher step for a platform—the teacher's desk. Behind the desk, a large whiteboard occupies the large white wall. It's quiet now, but I can hear echoes of past footsteps, chair drags, questions, and laughs, bouncing off the white walls and seeping through from the sticker on the wall that says: "and say, "My Lord, increase me in knowledge." (The Quran, 20:114).

Figure 5. The Dar [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.

I exit the classroom and walk through the hallway on my left. A step forward, to my left, is a door that leads down to the bottom floor. We go down. There's another reception desk at the forefront, surrounded by a large bookcase filled with books. An open space with a carpet laying on the right sits awaiting the kneeling women in prayer. To the right and left, wooden doors of closed classes—given names of the prophet's wives, companions or scholars. If you move to the left, though, you soon pass

to find the mini-kitchen and snack space. This space hosts the women in between classes for breaks, and it's where they

Figure 6. The Dar [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.

Figure 7. The Dar [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.

get the chance to socialize. So much talking happens here. So much eating happens here. But it's silent, and clean; and the fridge lights it out. There are only almost-empty Molto boxes, and a clean kitchen. But the darkness of the kitchen is contrasted by the tunnel of light that stands in the middle of the ground floor. It shoots light all the way from the sunny outdoors, down to the ground floor of the *Dar*, enclosed by glass that allows for the light to seep in. It makes you feel like there is more air to breathe. It makes the space light, and airy. It's a nice spot to sit by when it's time for a break.

Figure 8. The Dar [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.

We climb back up the stairs, and down the hallway. There's a kitchen to my right. It's where the women talk and drink their coffee or tea in the morning right before classes start. If you walk

Figure 9. The Dar [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.

further down, one of the most important rooms reveals itself. I look inside to see stacks of household items—refrigerator boxes, spatulas, detergents, flasks, perfume, calendars, hair oils, creams, lip balm, miswak and more, covering the shelves right ahead. At the floor of the shelves sit bags with bed covers. To the right and left, a plethora of Abayas, scarves and different clothing items. A table on the left is covered in cookies and cakes, and other baked goods for home. The room was filled with so much to buy. What was this room doing here? And right next to this room, on the right, is a lounge for the teachers. There was a kid sleeping on the sofa. What was he doing here?

Figure 10. The Dar [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.

Figure 11. The Dar [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.

2018-

Why the *Dar*?

I finished my undergraduate studies in the Spring of 2018. As soon as I was done, I applied to the Sociology-Anthropology MA program at AUC. I was basically begged by most of the people around me to wait, and to give myself a chance to 'work' or to go through different experiences. My father called me Dr. Alia, though. My sister started Med school, and whenever his friends would ask him about us, he would say: "I have two doctors" ("أنا عندي دكتورتين"). I wanted to learn more, and wanted to learn as much as I could. I wrote pages for one of my classes critiquing 'the academy,' but I refused to escape. I stayed, and with my decision, started the never-ending anxiety accompanying the most Frequently Asked Question: "What is your thesis about?" My thesis is about *Ma'hid al-Ulum al-Shari'yyah*. No, it's about the *Dar*. Or, more simply, about Islamic studies institutes and Islamic education. *There was nothing simple about that.* Every single idea needed to be unpacked. But why the *Dar*? That is the first question I need to unpack.

I did not attend the *Dar* regularly for an extended period of time. I remember it being only a few months until I stopped going. I could not keep up with going there, and with still being in school. I always carried a heavy weight with me for not going, because when I did I finally felt some comfort in having a space to learn. Learning was worship.
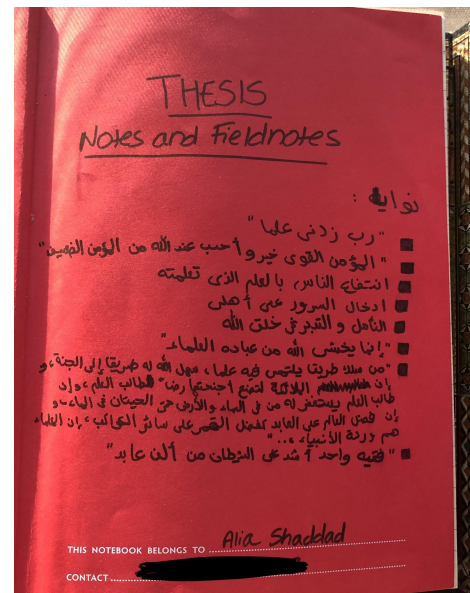
Figure 12. My Fieldnotes [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.

When I got my first fieldwork notebook (which was for my undergraduate thesis), I wrote down a list of 'intentions' I had. Parts of them were:

1. "رب زدني علما" | "My Lord, Increase my Knowledge"

   A supplication in the Quran, and one of the closest to my heart. I always prayed.

2. "**المؤمن القوي خير** وأحب إلى الله من المؤمن الضعيف" | "The strong believer is more beloved to Allah than the weak believer"

I saw strength in knowledge.

3. "انتفاع الناس بالعلم الذي تعلمته" | "Benefiting people with the knowledge I have learned"

I saw communal and collective value in knowledge.

4. "إدخال السرور على أهلي" | "Bringing joy to my parents"

I saw, from them, a happiness that came with any increase in knowledge.

5. "التأمل والتدبر في خلق الله" | "Meditation and reflection in Allah's creation."

I saw a process. Knowledge was a process by which one got to reflect and meditate on more than oneself.

6. "إنما يخشى الله من عباده العلماء" | "Those who truly fear Allah are his knowledgeable worshippers"

7. "إن العلماء ورثة الأنبياء وإن الأنبياء لم يورِّثوا دينارًا ولا درهمًا، إنَّما ورَّثوا العلم،فمن أخذَه أخذ بحظٍّ وافر" | "The scholars are the successors of the prophets. Verily, the prophets do not pass on gold and silver coins, but rather they only impart knowledge"

I saw an act of worship. I saw it as practicing. I saw its value extending beyond a material measure.

There was a value I placed on knowledge that had accompanied me for as long as I remember. I cannot claim to know precisely why. But I constantly found myself being drawn to knowledge, and spaces of knowledge. Leaving the *Dar* was hard, but it's memory never faded. With time, though, I could not recall much of what it meant to attend weekly or consistently, and the memory soon became a nostalgic yearning to a space.

"If you can see a thing whole...it seems that it's always beautiful. Planets, lives... But close up, a world's all dirt and rocks. And day to day, life's a hard job, you get tired, you lose the pattern. You need distance, interval. The way to see how beautiful the earth is, is to see it as the moon. The way to see how beautiful life is, is from the vantage point of death." (Le Guin, 2015, pp. 367-368)

Once I had that distance, and that interval; I saw the *Dar* as a beautiful whole. I would be lying if I were to say that what drew me to the *Dar* for this thesis was a critical eye, or a sceptical intrigue. It was a long-lived nostalgia, and even a rushed romanticization of a space I had physically left behind, but would not leave me. I chose this *Dar* because it is where I have access, and also where I was familiar. This is not to say I had to opt for a familiar space, but given that the types of questions that pushed forward this thesis were already based on an existing history with this space, it felt most

right. And after a while apart, I wanted to go back. But beyond the first instance of interest, I wanted a close up. I wanted, and aim, for this thesis, to close up on the everyday; the realness of the *Dar* in its daily and weekly rhythms. The movements, the noises, the smells, and the tiring realities of the day to day. I had the vantage point of distance to bring me only slightly closer, but I intend to try to be as close as possible to this space, to not only excavate remnants of the place I was familiar to, but to come in contact with the unknowns. Yet, it is not my intention to capture. It is merely my intention to architect, and to build a construction of a myriad of pieces that I come across. It is to retell a story I have lived, and continue to—while making sure this story is birthed with the acknowledgement of all the interactions that have allowed it to come to life.

INTRODUCTION

The *Dar* inspired a host of thoughts and questions that have accumulated and come to unravel in this thesis. As I walked into the same class with my mother, as I got compliments from the teachers following monologues about their personal lives, as I had women I did not know offer food, and help, and as I shared laughs with everyone there; I realized how this place was unfamiliar despite its familiarity. It felt like a home, like I knew everyone there. Somehow, it felt like family. But, it was still unfamiliar in the sense that I don't recall feeling the same way in other places of knowledge. Perhaps, school sometimes felt like that, and there were instances in university that did, too. But, there was something different about this place. For this thesis, I intend to explore the *Dar* as an alternative. The main question I grappled with throughout this thesis was how the *Dar* was alternative to the mainstream spaces of education and knowledge that I have attended, or have heard of—Islamic, or otherwise. In order to explore this alternative, I move through questions of space, time, subjectivity, and potential. In the first chapter, I explore space and time as the main themes that allow one to understand the *Dar*. The first chapter is me both answering the question 'what is the *Dar*?' that I so often get; but is also a recognition of the importance of that question itself, and it being so common. The fact that so many people I talk to about the *Dar* do not even have an imagination of what it is, allows us to begin our exploration of why/how it is an alternative. I look, in the first chapter, at its historical and geographical contexts in order to situate it and to think about its relationship with other spaces and times. I then move on to explore its rhythms that help us imagine what this alternative looks like in the everyday. In the second chapter, I look into what it means to be in that space. I cannot delineate student from teacher from owner. Instead, I

look at subjectivity relationally, to also explore what that everyday looks like for someone in the *Dar*. This is important because one gets to see how people forge relationships and how their lives intertwine with the *Dar*, and with others. It allows us to see its complexity, and the messiness of the lives within it, and how, perhaps, this messiness, and the way it is handled, is part of the story of its alternativeness. Then, finally, the third chapter explores the affective potential that this alternative space provides. It unravels how all of what was explored in the previous two chapters come together to allow us to think of the potentialities of this space, and how one can find that potential in the everyday rhythms and relationships as they unfold. This thesis is an act of storytelling; the telling of a story that is personal, and shared, and of a space that—in its alternativeness, lies potentialities one might have not imagined.

Who Said What? ‖ A Literature Review

A large portion of the literature on Islamic education situates its arguments within a framework of post-colonialism, globalization and the modern/traditional binary. The commonality between these pieces is that there is a separate imagination of modernity vis-a-vis tradition, and the debates are framed as a negotiation of these two states (Lukens-Bull 2001; Loimeier 2009; Reetz 2010; Lo 2016). In Lukens-Bull's piece, he explores the ways in which the Muslim community in Java, Indonesia, negotiate the question of modernity—with a link to globalization as the process of the modern infiltration. Lukens-Bull looks at the Pesantren, which are Islamic boarding schools, and at higher education, in order to understand the dynamics of this modern/traditional encounter (2001). While Lukens-Bull's question of the hybridity of these systems, and the ways in which "the

Indonesian Classicalist Muslim community has used education to appropriate the materials of modernity and subsequently (re)invent them," (Lukens-Bull, 2001, p. 351) is quite interesting, he is still stuck within the binary of modernity/tradition. For example, he mentions how the "leaders of this community have created an educational system to address the educational needs of a modernizing society and, at the same time, to guard against the perceived moral decay that comes with modernization and globalization." (Lukens-Bull, 2001, p. 351) He hence takes the binary of modern and traditional as already existing, emphasizing its separateness, but looking at the negotiations between the two concepts in their empirical manifestations. Others who have also framed their argument similarly has been Sahin, who frequently juxtaposes the Islamic notion of education with the Western, liberal and secular version (2018). Sahin also places both in conversation, but has still maintained their essentially split nature.

Additionally, others have also framed their work within this binary; but have especially emphasized questions of post-colonialism and a rejection of the Western state. One of those has been Hefner in *Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia*, where he looks at Islamic education in relation to politics within Southeast Asian countries. Hefner (2009) looks at the way in which the 'making' of modern Muslims has been a move counter to Western colonialism, and has hence been a means to "create pious and knowledgeable Muslims, with a sense of allegiance to the community of believers (umma), however it be defined," as opposed to an acceptance of a notion of the Western state (p.43). Thobani, on the other hand, has insisted that there has been movement towards an Islamic education in line with the political project of a Muslim modern nation-state (2007), but also that there is an existence of different forms of Islamic education that do not necessarily lie within this framework but that compete with this narrative;

similar to the way in which Liow also emphasized the changing dynamics of South Thailand, with an attempt to move beyond Orientalist discourses of the extremist *Salafi* movements—and to look empirically at existing practices (2009). In Liow's (2009) work, they explain the centrality and importance of religious education for practicing Muslims, and show how it has been hijacked by orientalist discourses that "perpetuate a stereotypical view of Islamic education as a stoic and static pursuit" (p. 1). Instead, Liow (2009) asserts—by looking empirically at the ways in which religious education has been taken up by Muslims in South Thailand—that

> In Islamic culture...knowledge has never been an end unto itself. Nor has the role of educational institutions been envisaged as a production line churning out individuals equipped to contribute to the bureaucracies and economies of the modern nation-state and global capitalist enterprise. Instead, Islamic education has had two overarching objectives at its core: the transmission of islamic heritage and values on the one hand, and the spiritual, moral, and ethical transformation and advancement of Muslim societies on the other. (p. 2)

Such works have attempted to problematize fixed notions of Islamic education, and to instead look at the more fluid ways in which they reveal themselves in practice. This recognition of the different tensions of Islamic education is crucial, especially since Thobani ends with implications on curricula with regards to the creation of a 'progressive' mode of Islamic education for younger Muslims. There are others who have focused on this notion of the 'progress' and development of Islamic education—along with its challenges (Abdalla et. al., 2006; Tan, 2014; Memon, 2011; Rufai, 2016; and Muborakshoeva, 2012). Tan (2014), for example, has emphasized the *ways* in which "Islamic educational institutions have evolved, adapted and transformed themselves in response to changing

needs, circumstances and times," (p. 1) Muborakshoeva (2012) has emphasized the *need* to develop , as well as the ways in which institutions in Pakistan can do so; and Rufai (2016) also emphasizes what *can* be done, and places his analysis within the discussion on the Islamization of knowledge.

Others have also discussed the question of the Islamization of knowledge, which is important in extending the question of 'progress' and 'transformation' within the context of Islamic education (Abaza 2013; Rufai 2016; Siddiqi 2011; Abu Sulayman 1994; Al-Alwani 1995; Che Noraimi and Langgulung, 2008; Ssekamanya et. al 2011; Choudhury and Nadwi 1992; and Jackson and Parker, 2008). Abaza, for example, discusses the

> development of Islamic intellectual and academic thought that has taken on a life of its own and followed a number of different trajectories following the landmark international conference on Muslim education that was held in Mecca in 1977, and Prof. Ismail Raj Faruqi's clarion call for Muslim scholars, Ulama, and intellectuals to take up the task of reconstructing the order of knowledge on terms that were fundamentally Islamic, more culturally authentic, and directly relevant to the needs of contemporary Muslims the world over. (pp. 9, 23-24) (Noor, 2003, para. 1)

What is interesting to see is the way in which the project of Islamization also extends from context of East/West binaries and post-colonialism, whereby Abaza asserts that "the Islamization of knowledge project comes across as the Muslim world's response to the intellectual and epistemological hegemony of the West, by coming up with an alternative order of knowledge and power that is nonetheless caught in an oppositional dialectics with the Other." (Noor, 2003, para. 3)

The relationship between the systems of Islamic education and other or alternative orders of knowledge have not only been dealt with in opposition; but others have dealt with them in conversation with one another. Daun and Walford give a compilation of different pedagogical methods and strategies by Muslims, in the 'east' and the 'west', within the framework of globalization. Strategies are explored in order to discuss their sameness, but also to investigate their plurality—which is done with an emphasis on the ways in which globalization has allowed for these similarities and differences to arise. Once again, the practice itself is outlined within a binary framework between the religious and traditional vis-a-vis the Western, modern models. There are also other pieces of literature, like that of Gopinathan (2017) and Bakar (2017), that have spoken along the same lines of globalization. Bakar (2017), for example, details the integration of Islamic education and the modern state in the form of curriculum implementation based on the expectations of the Ministry of Education; an entanglement and conversation in which the demands of the modern state on education are negotiated with the Madrasah's own programme. Mohammed (2013), Muborakshoeva (2013), Davids and Waghid (2014) and others (Cook 1999; Diallo 2012; and Abbas 2018) have all looked at the intersections and workings of Islamic education—also as "traditional," with the non-traditional, Western conceptions, and then the reworking of those intersections into different Islamic education institutions. Going even further beyond the conflict, and the integration debates, is the literature that discusses the ways in which non-Islamic education systems and structures can benefit from Islamic models (Rufai 2012; Sahin 2017; and Reagan 2004). Reagan (20, for example, discusses different forms of educational practices, what can be said to count as education, and how that opens up space to think about alternative ideas on education. It is

hence this literature's scope to view Islamic education as an alternative to more 'modern,' but more specifically 'western' education models.

Moving beyond the modernity/tradition binary, however, is the literature produced on secularism. The most famous being that of Talal Asad (2003) and Saba Mahmood's (2011) work. Both pieces intend to problematize the binary of the religious/secular that is constantly negotiated within the realm of the modernity/tradition and east/west binaries. Asad's work on secularism as a political project—and secularization as a process—highlighted the need to explore the ways in which the state actually regulates religious practice and experience, and offered a critique to the conception that what we deem as religious and secular are separate in modern life or what we deem as 'modernity'. Saba Mahmood, amongst others (Starrett 1998; and Arjmand 2008), looks at the question of 'modernity' vis-a-vis religious education. Mahmood (2011) specifically looks at the women's mosque movement in Egypt, and uses her fieldwork to pry open the conversation on secularism/religion. Mahmood questions notions of subjectivity and agency; and includes conceptions of experience within her piece. Mahmood (2011) states early on that her goal

> is not just to provide an ethnographic account of the Islamic Revival. It is also to make this material speak back to the normative liberal assumptions about human nature against which such a movement is held accountable-such as the belief that all human beings have an innate desire for freedom, that we all somehow seek to assert our autonomy when allowed to do so, that human agency primarily consists of acts that challenge social norms and not those that uphold them, and so on. (p. 5)

Several other pieces of literature also try to challenge this binary, especially with s gendered perspective in their exploration of Muslim women's practices. An example of this is Maritato's (2017) piece, where they tackle the ways in which the Diyanet (in Turkey) female preachers have positioned themselves in a grey area between the official state institutional hold of the Diyanet, and other activities that "are 'uncontrolled' and conducted by 'unofficial' religious communities (cemaatlar)," hence showing that the "Diyanet's alleged monopoly has been perceived as an arena where different religious interpretations could coexist." (p. 540) By doing so, they push further beyond the secularism critique, and unravel the further complexities of religious education. This work could also be framed within a wider discussion of feminism and Islam, and the texts on the ways in which women negotiate their presence as Muslims and challenging certain modern conceptions of the state and capitalism, for example (Parvez, 2016; Davids, 2015; Jonker, 2003; Abukari, 2014; Sayeed, 2011; and Badran, 2013). This work, falls in a long line of work that aims to look at Muslim women's lives, ecpecailly seeing them as lives of resistance. Sayeed's (2011) piece, for example, offers an exploration of the way Muslim women's Isalmic education had been handled both in the opinions of scholars, but also in practice. Sayeed (2011) gives an example of one woman—Shuhda, a female scholar in Baghdad (d. 1178) as a case study to induce further questions on the matter. Shuhda was taught by her father, who was a scholar himself; and would take her, as a child, to the different classes he would attend. Sayeed insists that Shuhda's biography offers insight into questions of women's participation in the transmission of Islamic knowledge, and in the formation of an 'orthodoxy'. Sayeed (2011) also highlights how "Shuhda's career offers valuable insights into the impact of institutional and non-institutional education in the lives of female religious scholars," especially

since Shuhda had attended classes in different institutional spaces such as Madrasas; but she herself did not teach formally in one (p. 99). Sayeed (2011) says:

> Though the legal literature aimed to regulate women's range of action, historical research reveals that numerous women from the time of onwards attained high status in the realm of religious education. This article has focused on summarizing the themes of scholarship in the area of Muslim women's education in classical Islam and on pointing out several directions for future research from within the field of Islamic studies. (p. 101)

Another critical text is on female Islamic education movements by Masooda Bano (2017), who explores ethnographically how female Islamic education has risen since the 1970s in different areas. Bano (2017) explores how the women, despite considering themselves as falling within the bounds of orthodoxy, renegotiate the terms and material they are taught. Referring to the process as 're-democratisation of Islamic knowledge,' Bano explores the women's backgrounds to reveal how their lives affect their education and the material they deem important. Bano's work is important in that it reveals how women's lives actually impact the education process, and shows how dynamic it is.

Finally, there has also been a large body of literature dealing with the historical and philosophical angle of Islamic education. Bagheri (2001) tries to outline the "foundations, principles, and methods of education by relying on the views of the Quran on human nature and by clarifying the Islamic concept of education," (p. 1) and others have also tried to unravel the conceptual dimensions of Islamic education—as Sabki and Hardaker (2013) do with the Madrasah at the center of their explications; and as Alkouatli (2018) does by looking at the contemporary conceptions of

Islamic teaching and learning. Others have also tried to explore the different philosophical narratives of Islamic education, as Halstead had done when looking at the principles of Islamic education (Halstead 2004; Afsaruddin 2005; Zaman and Memon 2016; Bolandhematan 2019; Mogra 2010; and Memon 2007). From a historical perspective, Berkey (1995) looks at the ways in which "Islam as practiced, rather than imagined, has been willing to draw creatively on the insights and experiences of all those who have called themselves "Muslim"." (para. 41) Berkey looks at the progression of Islamic education, and the different pedagogical realms within which knowledge has been transmitted and constructed historically (1995 and 2014). Berkey is hence positioned within a body of literature focusing on the historical and temporal question of Islamic education (Mahamid 2009; Slama 2017; Hilgendorf 2003; Ahmed 1987; Afridi 2016; and Devin 2014).

By recognizing what has already been written, I insist that the contributions made have and continue to be critically important in understanding spaces like the *Dar*, and the women that go. However, pushing the boundaries of categories, of the resisting Muslim woman, and of the ways in which spaces of Islamic knowledge have been written about is necessary. It has become even more clear that these contributions are no longer sufficient when I conducted fieldwork and found the literature unsettling with what I found, observed, talked about and felt. The literature does provide groundwork to work with and from, however there isn't much literature available on the daily practices or the everyday experiences women have in spaces of education. The literature "at times over-emphasized the coherence and singularity of commitment in Muslims' ethical experience. In so doing, they overlook the lived complexities and inconsistencies in individuals' efforts to live lives both virtuous yet socially and experientially varied." (Hefner, 2019, p.492) These sentiments are not merely Hefner's or my own; but are also reflections from the field itself. Women are often brought

up to discuss what they ought or ought not to do, and how they can get an education, and the extent of it. Furthermore, there are biographies of women who have historically been incredibly influential in the process of transmitting Islamic knowledge and in the creation of a tradition; however these biographies are often either lacking details, or are of women as an exception, or as these unattainable figures who had been brought up in households who catered to their education, or in households with members who have been part of large Islamic knowledge institutions themselves. Instead, the fieldwork I did in the *Dar* offers another angle, of women who do not often come from a background or family of scholars, who are explored as others should have been to unravel the complex lives they lead that are intertwined with the *Dar* but that are still varied, and who carry and negotiate responsibilities beyond the transmission of knowledge. Furthermore, I intend to add to the ethnographic literature on the ways women find ways to exist in spaces of knowledge, or to create their own, in ways that perhaps show the gendered alliances that form as a result, and the communities that are built—and, hence, the potentialities that arise.

Conceptual Conversations

The literature provides some groundwork to work with and through in the exploration of the *Dar*. The main argument of this thesis is to suggest that the *Dar* provides an alternative conception of spaces of knowledge—Islamic, and possibly otherwise. It is a space that challenges the historical and present day understandings of what such spaces look like, or what they ought to look like. Engaging with the previous literature, we can see that the *Dar* is situated within a large body of work on Islamic spaces of knowledge, and Islamic education; however, there seems to be almost no

ethnographic exploration of the *Dar*. The literature highlights different models, schools, and spaces; but the *Dar* remains out of clear sight. Therefore, the *Dar* will be explored in this thesis as an alternative space, and its potentialities addressed to allow us to imagine what spaces of knowledge could look like. This endeavour was undertaken with the intent to look at how spaces and bodies come to be and are constantly being in everyday life. Instead of looking at the *Dar* in the same way other spaces of knowledge have been explored in the literature—in ways that do not really explore these spaces' everyday rhythms; I instead tried to see what it means for this alternative conception to manifest itself in the everyday.

Situating myself within the previous plethora of literature has been more complex than I had anticipated. In this project, I attempt to strike a conversation with the literature on the modern/traditional binary, and to frame the arguments along with the literature on secularism that complicates this binary. The literature on modernity/tradition binary will be used, but only to be critical of in relation to the existing practices within the *Dar* that challenge it. However, the same literature has also emphasized questions of post-colonialism, which could provide a contextual framework for this project in order to understand what it means to say 'modern'. "The unprecedented power and ambitions of the modern state and the forces of the capitalist economy have been central to the great transformation of our time," (Asad, 2003, p. 253) and as such must be investigated in relation to the *Dar* in order to shed light on the context of *Dar* in Egypt. Understanding these structures and the resulting systems lends itself to an unravelling of the ways in which education in the *Dar* possibly reproduces culture and the social system itself as a result of the perpetuation of ideas that are intertwined with different relations of power and class structures.. Using this analysis would be useful in the *Dar*, in order to open up the discussion of the *Dar* as an

'alternative'—but also to conceptualize the possibility of its conformity and henceforward, it's messiness.

Furthermore, this project will also be using material from the historical and philosophical literature on Islamic education, in order to provide context for the *Dar* and the pedagogical practices and relations inside of it. The historical accounts I have mentioned in the literature review will be in the background with the question of temporality in mind, as I look at the ways in which teachers and students have a perception of past educational practice. This is done especially by questioning the intertwined categories of past, present and future, as per Bergson's (1988) notion of duration.

The comparative element within my thesis involves perhaps some referencing to pedagogical practices and structure of spaces like *al-Azhar*, because of its direct link to the *Dar* in the forms of its certification, it sending over people frequently, and because the owner of the *Dar*—and some of the teachers—having had to obtain their education and a degree from *al-Azhar* before being able to open their own *Dar*. This is important because, when I suggest that the *Dar* is an 'alternative,' it must be understood what it is an alternative to. "Geographies of education and learning need to examine the historical and contemporary policies of education ... This requires that we look into different education and learning spaces, and examine the links between these and other facets of life in diverse (and interrelated) local, national and transnational contexts," (Holloway and Jöns, 2012, p. 482) and therefore, the concept of space—which is not only physical but that includes the different spatialities composed of materials, relationships, policies, feelings etc. (Kraftl 2013)—is a necessary exploration in conversation on the *Dar* and its relation to other social structures in Egypt.

Since this *Dar* is also owned, managed, and run by women; who teach all-female students, the questioning of the way gender works here is important. I will try to understand the ways in which the women in the *Dar* are constantly living. This entails looking at life lived, and emphasizing the importance of looking at the everyday. The existence of an all-women space of Islamic knowledge that promises to teach at an advanced level, having a similar program to the one at *al-Azhar*, will be intriguing to look at. The exchanges between which will unravel more on the relations and context of the *Dar*. Furthermore, Bano (2017) says that:

> Women were known to be actively involved in the transmission of Islamic knowledge in Damascus in the early periods of Islam (Nadwi 2007). The trend gradually declined from the ninth to eleventh centuries, and subsequently revived between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, after which it largely disappeared.4 Since the 1970s, this tradition has seen a revival, and a growing number of girls and women of all ages are joining the mosque-based or home-based study circles to gain knowledge of Islamic texts. (p. 2)

This necessarily entails dealing with the question of gender, in relation to the aforementioned concepts. However, steering beyond the piety movement. Mahmood's (2011) account in the *Politics of Piety* tries to challenge the idea that agency can only be understood as resistance; and that one is either resisting, or is docile. Instead, Mahmood (2011) works in a context where women have a different understanding of 'submission'. In the women's mosque movement that Mahmood (2011) investigates, the women frequently claim that they want to shape themselves into a pious Muslim—and are hence already accepting the very fact of subjectivity, while recognizing the docility needed to become-subject. Mahmood hence challenges the very universality of the 'desire for

freedom' that is part of liberal, Western and secular understanding of the subject. She attempts to understand how different desires would hence constitute different subject and agentive formations. Within this context, Mahmood (2011) hence asserts that as a Muslim woman,

> her agency is predicated on her ability to be taught, a condition classically referred to as docility. Although we have come to associate docility with abandonment of agency, the term literally implies the malleability required of someone to be instructed in a particular skill or knowledge—a meaning that carries less a sense of passivity and more that of struggle, effort, exertion, and achievement. (p. 29)

Mahmood hence extends agency beyond a Western, secular understanding of it, and allows one to interrogate multiple ways of living that hence reflect multiple layers and formations of subjectivities and agencies. Although Mahmood's contributions are undeniable and powerful in challenging multiple layers of epistemological misconceptions and problematics; her work is not free of critique. In fact, the very grandiose influence that Mahmood's work has made has also been one of its issues. With Mahmood reconceptualizing agency using a lens of 'piety', writings that came afterwards on Muslim women could not deny the influence her work has made but remained highly uncritical of it. Instead, "the impact of her work, and the ontological prevalence of piety in the literature that began after it, inevitably led pious forms of subjectivity to dominate other subjectivities in studies of believing (and practicing) Muslims." (Sehlikoglu, 2018, p. 82) It would hence become limiting and crippling to only further analyses of Muslim women and their agencies through the lens of piety, without looking at the different subjectivities that these women are also immediately a part of. This meant that a large part of Muslim women's lives were ignored in favour of the 'pious' versions. This

is not to say that Mahmood has enforced an understanding of piety on the women that they themselves did not accept; since her interlocutors frequently reference their desire to become more pious and to hence become closer to God. There was hence a very real and grounded identification of piety extending from the field itself—which is a thing worth recognizing for its importance, as well. Nevertheless, perhaps understanding how the women perceived their subjectivity and agency beyond the realm of piety could have added more dimensions to Mahmood's conceptions of agency and would have extended, and empowered, her critique as one that asserts the multiplicity of subjectivity and agencies.

Instead, Muslim women's agency ought to be made more complex and rigorous instead of the reliance on reductionist perspectives for investigation. While Mahmood and others have provided a substantial amount of critical insights, it will more likely be more beneficial to investigate different constellations of agency and subjectivity depending on the context in which one is looking into. By doing so, we can hence start to conceive of different lifeworlds as complex as they have always been on ground—in the everyday. To understand what it means to 'be'. This being will be explored using Lefebvre's (2004) rhythmanalysis, to explore what the *Dar* is and the relationships within it, and beyond it, in a way that is based upon observation and placing oneself in the present. In being present, and living with the mess—and trying to put into words just snippets of the body's experience.

Finally, because this project is attempting to think of the *Dar* as a space filled with the mess of everyday life—as alternative, but also as intertwined with existing structures—there is necessarily a question of the potentialities existing within the *Dar*. This is not a question with a closed answer;

but is merely a way to explore openings and closures, and to understand how potentialities emerge and might exist within this space. This is done by thinking about affect and affective experiences—especially drawing upon Kathleen Stewart's (2007) understanding of ordinary affects. It also included thinking about the idea of potential itself, also as Weeks (2011) theorized; but also, perhaps, as Massumi (2003), Tsing (2015), Berlant (2010), Latour (2009), and so many others have. To think of potential as open-ended and perhaps necessary, while recognizing the cruelness of optimism attached to it. (Berlant, 2010) As Stewart (2007) explains, "Potentiality is a thing immanent to fragments of sensory ex- perience and dreams of presence. A layer, or layering to the ordinary, engenders attachments or systems of investment in the unfolding of things." (p. 21) This project tries to think of potential in the practice of alternative imaginations with minimally romanticized expectations, so that one can find ways to be that are less crushing. Optimism may be cruel, but most of life's endeavours are; but sometimes, thinking about potential and alternatives gives one hope that is not entirely cruel because it allows one to go on.

Ethnographic Labours: A Comment on Fieldwork, Positionality and Method

"عالية بتعمل بحث وإحنا الضحايا... بقول لكم عشان نحترم نفسنا"

"Alia is conducting research and we are the victims... I'm telling you so that we [behave]."

(*mu'allimah* Na'ima, Fieldnotes 2020)

I remember hearing those words as I stood next to the teacher, at the forefront of the class, with my back pushing back on the wall behind me, trying to blend into the whiteboard, knowing

quite well I was in all-black, and I was still human. They could still see me. But now, they looked at me with the background sound of mu'allimah Na'ima making sure to 'expose' me. It was not her idea, but mine. I did not regret it, but I felt the heaviness of the words weighing down my tongue and I was not able to make out any words for a few moments. A moment later, I made everyone know that they could approach me whenever they had any questions. And they did. Some approached with cynicism, others with welcoming smiles, and most with well-wishes and prayers. From then on, it was somewhat a "collective journey that unites the I/we with the you/they" (Nagar, 2019, p.21).

If there is to be an acknowledgement of productive social interactions as key to this thesis, then there must be an understanding of the position of myself as its writer. Even with the experience I have of the space I talk about, I still consider myself a storyteller of a story not fully my own, but neither fully external to myself. There is a relationality that demands a letting go of the conception of myself as an "autonomous or sovereign social [being] and [a need to] internalise that [I am] intensely co-constituted and entangled with the other." (Nagar, 2019, p. 21) Following Nagar's stream of thoughts on radical vulnerability and the act of 'storytelling', I view myself as neither only *Dar* student, or MA student, or friend, or daughter, or any one category. Instead, in the space of the *Dar*, I am seen as one of the students, but I am also looked at suspiciously, until I am looked at endearingly when my friend's mother teaches one of the classes I'm in. But, it is never enough to say that this is what I believe about the *Dar*, and to try to claim this as 'truth'. It is hence important to mention that, this thesis is the amalgamation of stories, of conversations and of shared interactions, within/without the field and its confinements, and beyond merely myself or the other. The world, as

Law (2004) suggests, "is complex and generative... we and our methods help to generate it. But the bottom line is very simple: believing something is never enough to make it true." (p. 8)

...

I do not know where my story will go.

I was born in the place called Aremia.

I do not know what story to tell.

I do not know what I will say.

I do not know.

I do not know my story.

We looked for *doidie* roots.

We found them near Cucarani.

Little birds, in the afternoon.

We painted our bodies.

We were *sucio,* dirty, in the afternoon.

We painted our bodies with ashes and down.

Black and white.

They were *sucio,* dirty.

Sucio.

They sang.

They told many stories.

They saw far away.

The old man was there, too.

He told stories.

I do not know what to say.

We ate honey.

We killed fish.

We were dirty.

I do not know my story.

I do not know what to say.

My thoughts and my memories are gone.

They will no longer come to me.

I do not know my own story.

(Bessire, 2017, pp. 198-199)

Tié's words contain a flow of unsettlement that already affectively informs what this thesis is about. The move beyond category work, labels, representations and hence discourse on 'rights' and the 'rights-bearing subject'. Tié's messy story mimics much of what many people feel when they are asked to narrate their story as a coherent tale of consistently rational events leading to an ultimate closure. It is this affective discomfort she has with the telling of a story that leads to her 'incoherence'; her stream of consciousness alone proof of what it means to try to translate life worlds—and to put a life in words. But this process of identification no longer stands if one wishes to move beyond the stagnant mechanics of modern category-work. Instead, if we are to observe and try to put into words what life as lived means, then there will inevitably be a blurring of subject and a rejection of "from"—as Bessire (2017) explains, drawing upon Deleuze's notions of becoming. Bessire (2017) insists that there will always be interruptions "by the constant slippage between category and content," (p. 199) and hence these slippages cannot be contained. As Puar (2017) explains, "becoming is awash in pure immanence, never coincident with itself, marked only by degrees of intensity and duration." (p. 56) This observation of the immanent body and its movements is what the turn to affect in the ethnographic sensorium attempts to do. It tries to describe the iterations, durations, and modes of being taking place (Stewart, 2007) without forcibly capturing them in categories—in an effort to be 'representative.' This entails situating oneself within the spaces we occupy, and to rend oneself vulnerable to the inconsistencies and pulses of affective bursts—hence opening up a space to trace the messiness of the everyday without enforcing upon

them a lens of presumed lucidity and coherence that often renders them enclosed by insincerity and unrelatability.

In order to produce an ethnography of the *Dar*, a few methodologies and methods have been drawn upon in order to incorporate as much in-depth material as possible. I approached this ethnography as a summation of ethnographic encounters. Ingold (2014) describes these encounters as follows: "in the conduct of our research, we meet people. We talk with them, we ask them questions, we listen to their stories and we watch what they do. In so far as we are deemed competent and capable, we join in." (p. 386)

Participant Observation

Following Ingold's (2014) understanding of ethnography and ethnographic encounters, I position myself as a participant observer since "there can be no observation without participation" (p. 387). This entailed enrolling in the *Dar*, attending classes and taking notes there; as well as walking around with the students, being in the teachers' break area, and sitting in the manager's office. Furthermore, I tried to continue to observe and engage with the students and teachers outside of the confines of the *Dar*, and to try to exist in their day-to-day activities. But to place myself as a participant observer, is to say that there is an 'observed'—but "to observe is not to objectify; it is to attend to persons and things, to learn from them, and to follow in precept and practice." (Ingold, 2014, p. 387) However, these interactions required the building of some rapport, which meant that at first I had to be distanced enough to also give them space and comfort. I felt like an intruder at first, and so I tried to blend in the setting and to silently observe. As time passed,

it became easier to strike conversations, and to be included in them. This was of course easier and more organic with the students than the teachers, since the teachers are older than I am, and also usually come in to give the class and have brief chats before leaving. I did manage to engage in some of these chats, but it was not as easy as the chats with the students who so eagerly asked me things and talked to me often. Yet, outside the confines of the *Dar*, it was harder to follow or observe or talk to them. I already knew some of the students and teachers from before, so they were the ones I was able to exist and engage with the most during fieldwork—especially outside the *Dar*. But I have learned that even the shortest conversations can reveal so much, and with the combination of close encounters, short-lived conversations, lengthy observations, and effortless side-talks, this story of the *Dar* unfolded.

Conversations/Semi-Structured Interviews and Oral Histories

Building on participant observation, I conducted semi-structured interviews; the importance of which lies in the personal, and one-on-one time that they allow with interlocutors. The semi-structured interviews are not separate from the participant observation, rather both complement one another in the "correspondence" that goes on "between humans," which feeds into the whole idea that participant observation—which is the main methodology for ethnography—is "about living attentively with others," and is "a practice of correspondence in this sense." (Ingold, 2014, p. 389) This correspondence would be enhanced by daily conversations with the people in the *Dar*. The teachers, the students, the staff, and their families, all have things to add and share that might be overlooked during observations, and would be brought to light through these

conversations. Furthermore, these conversations included questions on the history of the interlocutors' lives, in order to have a stronger contextualization of the spaces and its actors. This was necessary for my research, since there is a scarcity of information—archival or historiographic—on the *Dar*, when the idea started, when the first one opened etc. Hence, as part of the mapping process I had mentioned is part of my goals for contextualization and finding out the relations, I relied on people's oral histories of the *Dar* and other *Duur*, to get a glimpse of its genealogy. I use Mignolo's (2000) understanding of conversations as: "people's comments in passing, about an event, a book, an idea, a person. These are documents that cannot be transcribed, knowledge that comes and goes, but remains with you and introduces changes in a given argument" (p. xi). These conversations I shared with both students and teachers were what I relied on most for this thesis. These conversations brought up things that are perhaps not easily observed; and also struck a different light on the things that were observed. Although I say conversations, I also recognize the fact that there were certain questions that I had in mind beforehand—but these questions did not impose a rigidity on the communication, but merely opened up paths for the conversations to unfold. These conversations ended up unravelling the age differences, the different jobs the women have, where they live, and bits of who they are. The *Dar* has early morning classes on the weekdays, and a night class on the weekend. The morning classes on weekdays were split by year; and most of the women in the first and second year classes were in their late 20s or early 30s. They were often accompanied by their children, or, as I came to know through conversations, had children in school. When I talked to them, they would often bring up having to go pick their children up from school, especially if we talked towards the end of the day. However, there were also women in their 40s and 50s, who usually talked about their sons and daughters who are no longer

children; and so their conversations often ended up being about how their son went to this university or the other, or about how their daughter was getting married soon. Some women were older, in their 60s, and they would usually show up to the early morning classes on the weekdays. They often talked about their grandchildren, or talked to me as if I was their own. The first year classes usually had younger women; and the third, fourth and fifth years had older women. The first year classes were also usually full, with around 20-30 students; but the third, fourth and fifth year classes were often no more than 10 students. The conversations would reveal how it was easier for unemployed, older women to continue to come; while younger women who still had children or were employed would stop coming. During the weekend classes, however, most of the women were employed. The women were between the ages of 20 and 50. Again, talking to them, I soon realized they were either university students, or women who worked, and hence could only come on the weekend. The conversations with all these women also revealed that most of them lived in New Cairo, and most belonged to a similar socioeconomic level—knowing the similar international schools their children went to, or that they went to the same sporting clubs in New Cairo, and hearing where they went out. There were discrepancies, of course, and there were some women who did not live in New Cairo; but instead came from different areas across Cairo because they knew the teachers and wanted to study with them. However, they were the minority. These pieces of information were revealed in bits, through conversations—organic and planned; without which, the observations would not suffice. The conversations were sometimes long, but often short. They were initiated by me, but also sometimes by the women themselves. Sometimes I would ask, and sometimes they would; and between these emerges most of the ethnography.

Multi-Sited Ethnography

Based on what I have previously mentioned on following the interlocutors beyond the confines of the *Dar's* classes, I hence will consider this research as a multi-sited ethnography as a result of moving beyond the physical space of the *Dar* itself. This means that the multi-sitedness comes from "following the people" by looking at "what happens to…subjects in the other sites." (Marcus, 1999, p. 91) There was also a more immaterial form of multi-sitedness; which is following people's stories and narratives that are a "rich source of connections, associations, and suggested relationships for shaping multi-sited objects of research." (Marcus, 1999, p. 94) Furthermore, tracing stories and narratives enabled me to trace the history of the *Dar*, the history of the *Dur* in Egypt, and had even refered me even back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad's own spaces of Islamic education—which are still brought up and hence are crucial in understanding questions of temporality within the *Dar*, and the positionality of the space and people themselves.

Ethical Considerations

Another thing that is essential to mention is that the confidentiality of my interlocutors and their anonymity has been maintained throughout; and I only made use of the information I was given consent to use. This consent was in the form of informed consent, (Bernard 1998) whereby I will ensure my interlocutors know in advance what they are consenting to. This includes not only consenting to the material that will be included, but also in the way they see fit

for their own protection, safety and anonymity. This consent was obtained throughout the span of the research, and not just at the start; since the field is a dynamic space subject to different changes, and such changes may impact the research questions, aims and form—which were all continuously made clear throughout in order to obtain consent to use and make use of the methods, knowledge and material collected. This consent was obtained orally, and the extent of my interlocutors involvement and the details on their safety and privacy were highlighted. I had written consent forms ready, but none of my interlocutors cared much for them and instead wanted to simply give oral consent feeling that the written one was unnecessary. Consent included consent to the information given, and also the methods of obtaining such information (consent before writing, recording, meeting face-to-face, filming etc.). The informed consent also included a direct statement of the fact that such anonymity might be unintentionally compromised, in order for my interlocutors to know of that existing possibility for them to determine the extent they are willing to hence give consent.

Charting the Chapters

To explore the *Dar* as an alternative, I tried to look at different angles. Whenever I am asked about my project, I am always bombarded with questions about the *Dar*, and no one seems to know what it is, who are the people in it, where it is, and what it looks like. These questions in themselves show how the *Dar* is, in its obscurity, not part of the common imaginaries of spaces of knowledge. It is unknown by so many people that exploring its form itself is already telling of the alternative it provides. I attempt to challenge the notion that "in the anthropological study of Muslim societies

that the daily thought and actions of Muslims is best understood in terms of what falls within the domain of the Islamic and what lies in the realm of 'practical reason'" (Marsden, 2005, p. 53), and to instead rethink the religious/secular binary. To think of the complexity of being in the world, as a Muslim, and as many other things. However, insisiting on the fact that being Muslim; like being a mother, a friend, an artist, or any thing or the other, is never a realm on its own. All of what a person is seeps into one another, and to think of them separately is to reject an entirety of being in the world. Instead, I attempted to look through experience, especially with the help of Lefebvre's (2004) rhythmanalysis. This research has been an attempt to think "not in the abstract, but in lived temporality." (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 21) In the words of Asad (2020), explaining Wittgenstein:

> Thus when Wittgenstein asks, rhetorically, "Does everything we do not fnd conspicuous make an impression of inconspicuousness? Does what is ordinary always make the *impression* of ordinariness?,"[89] he is saying in effect that religious practice (including ritual) is not fundamentally different from behavior in ordinary life—because it *is* a part of ordinary life." (p. 427)

What we deem as religious is not separate from the ordinary; but being Muslim is in itself a way of being in the world, one that carries with it potentialities as with any 'ordinary affects.' The important thing is not to continuously try to differentiate between these ways of being; and instead, take them seriously (Danowski and De Castro 2017) and sit with them, finding affective entanglements and living through their ever-unfolding present/presence.

The first chapter explores the spatial and temporal context of the *Dar*, and the different spatiotemporal arrangements that allow us to see the dynamic of the space. The first chapter became

about the sounds, sights, smells that make up the *Dar*, and that demonstrate the loudness, messiness, and flexibility of the space. These vignettes about space and time reveal how the *Dar* is constructed, how it is lived in and how one might feel in it. This exploration in the first chapter allows us to see how a space of knowledge is linked temporally to a history, and how that link affects the education process and the relations. It also provides insight into alternative ways with which a space of knowledge can exist teasing the bounds of structure, order and rigidity. The second chapter then moves on to explore the different subjectivities that are also constructed relationally within the *Dar*. This unravelling of subjectivities and relationships in the *Dar* show the alternative conceptions of students of knowledge—especially of Muslim women. It tries to think through this categroy, and to move beyond the prescritpions, to think of alternative ways Muslim women live and exist within and beyond spaces of knowledge. Their everyday lives are traced in order to understand how the lives of women are intertwined with this space and with other women in it; thus allowing us to consider alternative conceptions of relations between students, and between students and teachers in spaces of knowledge. Finally, the third chapter is a discussion on the affective potentialities that emerge in this space; following affects that are interlinked with the different contexts and relations that were also discussed in the previous chapters. The third chapter tries to pull together the multiple strings that make up the *Dar*, that release energies as affects that are part of the everyday. This allows us to think about the potential that the *Dar* could have as an alternative space of knowledge; and to open up questions about how its arrangements are conducive of affective entanglements that in turn allow us to consider alternative ways of creating and being in spaces of knowledge. The hopefulness of looking for alternatives, constructing imaginations, and thinking

about everyday potentialities of what Stewart (2007) refers to as 'ordinary affects', made their way

on the pages.

Chapter 1

There's No Place Like *al-Dar*

"There is a resemblance of a home. I truly feel at home in any *Dar*... I really do feel this
unconditional love. Not necessarily deep love; but we all gather in the *Dar*, and no one has any
ulterior motives, so that's nice."

(Salam, Fieldnotes 2020)

Figure 13. The Dar [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.

Dar is home, and there is no place like home. No two homes are identical, and no two people will feel exactly the same at the mention of home. Home can be happy, home can be unloving, home can be silent, it can be light or warm, dark or small, cold or loud, large or loving; and it often is never just one thing at a time, and not even one thing over time. Homes change, and so do our feelings towards them. If one thinks of home, it is often more than just a place—it is the sounds of people, or the absence thereof; it is the smell that we can't figure out sometimes even though it's so blatantly obvious to visitors; it is the hugs we dwell in, or miss; home can be anything, and it can be nothing. To try to capture the word 'home' would be cheating the essence of what it means, and it would be unjust to the endless possibilities it carries. There are things one can say, things that can be described, and others that—although surely constitutive—fall in the unintended silences. However, to also say nothing is to fear capture to the point of erasure—which only makes it harder to experience, understand, critique, imagine, or even, to hope.

Like any other place, the *Dar* is not suspended in a vacuum. It is the precursor for, instigator of and result of a series of interconnections of space, time, emotions, conversations, bodies, objects, sounds, smells, sights, materials; of *rhythms*, as Lefebvre (2004) would say. The *Dar* is filled with movement throughout the day, and so with the bodies traversing through, life continually happens in all its messiness. The *Dar* is not this special or spectacular place where marvels happen; it just is. People come and go, sounds echo and fade, smells capture and disperse; and the rhythms do not seize. There is available in the literature three overwhelming manners to mark such a space: as a space of premodern wonder; or a space of religious enlightenment or pious presentations; or as a space that can thankfully still be salvaged with descriptions of the everyday non-religious existence

of Muslim women. But I struggled through colonial, postcolonial, postmodern, piety, secular, post-secular, and post-piety theories as one does through life itself: with agonizing long hours of labour, cynical displeasure, exhausting discomfort, and the tiniest bit of hope. The seemingly newest critiques that challenged the most commonly critical theories of piety (see: Saba Mahmood), ended up being an ode to the secular once more—where life, 'post-piety' is the everyday life of Muslims or Muslim women that is finally freed of pious entanglements. But what was the *Dar* like? The *Dar* was just like any other place, where people go, and things exist, and time passes. Most of what the previous theories did was either totalize, or set divisions. If I were to think about the *Dar* through the lens of piety or through the lens of 'everyday life', there always seemed to be the lingering notion that there is some divide between what we deem as religious and what is secular; as though these terms are not co-constitutive. It's not that they are separate and in conversation, but that we have made them separate and through this divide fail to see that every rhythm is already filled with contradictions.

But then, what of this 'mess'?

Perhaps it made sense to a lot of theorists (and it does carry some comfort) to try and find terms to describe what they observe. I intend, in the next few pages, to try and unravel these rhythms I have continuously referred to in a way that sits with the mess. To recognize it, without enforcing upon it one rigid lens. To possibly find meanings within it that do not necessarily jeopardize the existence of others. I cannot know all there is, and cannot even enunciate all I do

know; but I can try. This trial is perhaps akin to what Law (2004) refers to as "techniques of deliberate imprecision." (p. 3) To do so, I will first explore what it might mean to think about 'rhythms' according to Lefebvre's (2004) understanding of them. Then, I will use vignettes to draw out flashes of my experience in the *Dar* that will unravel snippets of the rhythms that make this space. This is to be able to think about the alternative understanding of a 'space of knowledge,' juxtaposed with several accounts of other such spaces—especially historically. In so doing, unravelling the different ways these spaces can be narrated, and unravelling the different constellations that make them up—thus making none like the other. There is "no rhythm without repetition in time and in space, without reprises, without returns," and the essential thing is that none of them are identical, and so there is always the potential for the unexpected. (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 6) The main question that guides this chapter is what is the *Dar*, and how it is an alternative—in order to eventually open up a discussion on its potential. The question 'what is the *Dar*' is in itself important for this thesis because of the context. I have been asked all too frequently to explain what this space is, and have found that most of the people I know do not seem to know what it is. I, myself, did not understand what it was until I actually started going. To think of this space as being 'hidden' in a sense, is to also understand how it stands as an alternative to the ways we experience, think about, and imagine spaces of knowledge—Islamic or otherwise. This is the main question that guides this thesis; and so this chapter is an exploration of this question through the contextualization and sketching of the *Dar*. This is done by looking at the temporal and geographic context the *Dar* exists in; and how it is situated historically. I want to suggest that given its context and relations with other times and spaces, the *Dar* can be seen as part of a story of Islamic knowledge—but also, how it can be seen to be the least known, especially because it was created and

is run by women who are first generation Islamic teachers. It is hence, in this context, an alternative to the ways in which we have historically thought about such spaces. Additionally, sketching the space itself and thinking through its rhythms allows us to see the messiness of everyday life within it, which further challenges the mainstream conceptualizations and historical narratives of different spaces of Islamic knowledge. This chapter is an attempt to explore how the *Dar* allows for different sounds, smells, and sights to exist within it that make it alternative to the way we have experienced, and the way we imagine, spaces of knowledge to be. It is also an exploration engaging with the notion of rhythmanalysis, in order to understand the ways in which time as duration can be explored through the workings of the senses. Following from that idea is also the way in which an object is a site for rhythmanalysis as it engages our senses; at times in ways beyond our own intentionality, making these rhythms revelatory of the everyday and its unraveling in space and time. This opens up an exploration of the different webs of interconnectedness that constantly overlap and interlink to eventually allow us to say things like: this is the *Dar*.

The *Dar* and Larger Social Formations

Temporal Trailing, and Cartographic Contemplations

Before getting into the different vignettes of rhythms, it is important to situate the *Dar* historically and geographically, since both give more insight into those rhythms and hence that space. This means thinking about the different temporal and spatial implications of the *Dar* that are interconnected with all that goes on inside, hence giving context to what will be described, and

unraveling the different social affairs connected to it. and so the context in which the *Dar* exists is important to understand the possibilities of things happening in it, and to understand why might things look the way that they do—and what importance might they have. What I intend to explore are the kinds of themes that can be drawn out temporally, that relate to what is already experienced and explained by the people I have managed to converse with and the space I observed. This entails exploring the temporal relations and imaginations that are expressed in the *Dar*; because to think of it as an alternative space requires us to think about what it is alternative to, and what relationships it has in time and space that support this alternativeness.

Historic/Temporal Considerations

If we are to think of time as nonlinear, then we can see it as duration, a flow that is the "(becoming/unbecoming) in all things," (Grosz, 2005, p. 7) whereby separating one instance from others is not only impossible but also unjust to the experiences of life and its everyday that are constantly being formed/deformed with our capacity to weave them with one another. Thinking about the past and the possibilities of the future are necessary encounters when thinking about what we call the present, since all temporalities are too intertwined for us to keep separate. Keeping them separate would be a kind of distortion into clarity—as Law would say (2004). Therefore, for this chapter, an exploration of the history of the *Dar* is necessary to understanding its present. Instead of viewing the *Dar* as an entity of what we deem as the present, without an exploration of any past implications, I intend to explore its "continuity" that we can see is "because scholarly engagement with the sacred texts is conducted in a way which links 'practitioners across the temporal modalities

of past, present and future through pedagogy of practical, scholarly, and embodied forms of knowledge and virtues deemed central to the tradition' (Mahmood 2005, p. 115)." (Enayat, 2017, p. 42) Therefore, to do this 'temporal trailing' I refer to, is to basically attempt to pick up certain hints—as pieces of historical accounts available—that can help in following the temporal constellation the *Dar* is a part of. This is important for the question of alternativeness because one cannot suggest that a space is alternative, without exploring the relationships it has that make it so. These relationships occur in space and time; and so the first element to explore here is the temporal element. When I think about the temporal relations of the *Dar*, I see it as being a space that links itself to a specific past and a specific history, that allows it to exist in the present in a certain way—that, in itself, being quite different from mainstream spaces of knowledge that do not necessarily link their presence to a past or history that influences the minutiae of practices of the everyday.

Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah[7]: The construction of the *Dar* vis-a-vis the Time of the Prophet

The first important piece is the name of the space itself. "*Dar*," as mentioned in a previous footnote, is Arabic for 'house' or 'home.' The use of the word *Dar* is not as common in Cairo as other places, and home is often referred to as *Bayt* (بيت), instead. So the word *Dar* in its usage was new to me in the sense that I had not used it before to refer to anything else. The name drew on spatio-temporal parallels between the space in 2020 *Tagammo'*, and the space that was set up during the time of the prophet Muhammad; both to serve the same purpose of passing on knowledge. The

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[7] Translates to the followers of the Prophet's and the community's ways. Those who refer to themselves as part of this group try to follow the precise teachings of Prophet Muhammad and his companions, and all those after who do the same.

Dar, through its name, is placed in a genealogical assemblage that is telling of not only its story and endeavours; but of partial stories of the bodies that move within it—and that also exist beyond it. When I asked *mu'allimah* Lama, the owner of this *Dar*, why its referred to as such, she gave me a concise answer that is already reflective of the continuous interlinking of the past and the present: "because of *Urf*[8], and like *Dar al-Arqam* that existed during the prophet's time." (Fieldnotes, 2020)

This *Dar* was the place of residence of one of the companions of the prophet, who opened it as a space for them to learn and gain knowledge. In the *Dar* today, the names of the classes reflect the way in which the present is the procession of the past as it devours the future. (Bergson 1988) Each class is named after one of the Prophet's wives, companions, or a famous Muslim scholar; marking an encroachment of different timelines, and a temporal interminlging represented in signs within that space.

Figure 14. The Dar [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.

However, the *Dar* did not continuously exist in the same form from a certain past time; rather there were the *Kuttab* and the *Madrasas* that became more common following the passing of the prophet. The *Dar al-Ulum* would emerge by the mid to late 1900s. Sidat (2018) offers a historical account of the emergence of such spaces:

> The name *Dar al-Uloom* is an Arabic expression that translates into 'house of knowledge or Islamic sciences'. The generic word '*madrassa*' can also be used, though in the British

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[8] Arabic for what is deemed as familiar or common.

Deobandi nomenclature, the *Dar al-Ulum* refers to a particular type of teaching institution: that of higher learning. Their history can be traced back to colonial India where the reformist *'ulama*, or religious scholars, sought to revive Islam by training well-educated believers to instruct the community in the true practice of Islam to create what Geertz (1968, p. 62) referred to as "scriptural Islam". They were part of a broader spectrum of revivalist movements that manifested in a visible expression during the 18th and 19th centuries in Arabia, and earlier during the 17th century in India. (p. 1)

Sidat (2018) then goes on to trace several schools that emerged, and what their aspirations were. Similar to his description of the Deoband movement, the *Duur*[9] in Egypt also have the primary objective of "the conservation of the classical Islamic texts and sciences, and not textual innovation," (Sidat, 2018, p. 2) which is evidenced by the consistent reference to the concept of *'Bid'ah.'* *Bid'ah* translates roughly to invention, and is frequently used in classes at the *Dar* to differentiate what is part of the classical Islamic teachings and what is a new addition to such a body of knowledge. This is also why the teachers at the *Dar* explain in the first year classes that the school of thought they follow is the *Salafi* school—one that emphasizes the importance of preservation of past classical teachings, such teachings being based upon the direct texts and science, and their explanations, from the Prophet's time and then from the few generations that follow. There are available resources that detail the prophetic exposition and explanation of the Quran sent from God; and these resources detail "this prophetic explanation [that] took many forms: the simple explanations of meanings, the addition of details, rational arguments, exhortation, and a living example of how to apply the Qur'an in one's daily life and of the purity of heart and soul that it came to engender.

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[9] Plural for *Dar*.

(Karamali, 2017, p. 14) Any explanations or texts that are not based on the Prophet's exact teachings are considered *Bid'ah*. This includes acts of worship, as well. The distinction is made clear in the words of *mu'allimah*[10] Marwa:

> The ummah of prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has been divided into sects in terms of how they understand belief, like the belief in the day of judgement or of destiny… for us there is *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah* (أهل السنة والجماعة) and *Ahl al-Bid'ah wa al-Dallalah* (أهل البدع والضلالة).

> Did we see the prophet or any companion do this? What is the definition of *Bid'ah*? It is doing an act of worship in a time, or place, or for a period of time, or in a certain way, that does not exist in the *Shari'a*. Worship is *tauqifiyah*, which means it is predicated upon evidence. The people of knowledge have all agreed that worship is to be based on the teachings of the Prophet in its form, place, time, type, and quantity. (Fieldnotes, 2020)

Furthermore, as the women progress over the years, they start having classes that directly address and discuss the different sects in Islam so that the women can understand why other sects are seen as having gone astray. *Mu'allimah* Dina teaches one of these classes, and in one of her classes she has a projector with slides on it. The slides are of snippets from the scholars' works, with explanations and comments for the students. Then there are parts from scholars that say one thing that she deems as wrong, surrounded and followed by commentary from several other scholars indicating *why* it's wrong. She tries to emphasize why and to show how they can make the claim that they take the opinions stemming from scholarly consensus. "We follow the *Aqeedah*[11] of *Ahl al-Sunnah*

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[10] Arabic for teacher. This is the word used by students when they talk to the teachers or refer to them.

[11] Arabic for Creed.

wa al-Jama'ah, which object to all of this," she says in commentary (Fieldnotes, 2020). The women ask her later on to highlight the parts of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* in the powerpoint so that they know which of what's written is the *right* one as opposed to the *wrong* ones.

Even if the women perceive some act of worship as being better, the *mu'allimat* urge them to stick to the direct teachings of the prophet. *Mu'allimah* Nariman was asked in class about making regular prayers for the purpose of asking God to end the Corona pandemic, to which she replied:

> Look because I trust that you—and not just you, but everyone here—are good and want to do good as a student of knowledge, so you should know this for when others argue with you. You have to ask, did it happen during the time of the prophet? What did he do? I don't want you to do better, I want you to follow him. Always have a *Shar'ii* evidence. (Fieldnotes, 2020)

It is hence of crucial importance to continuously search for evidence before commencing acts of worship. This is the approach with which the *Salafi Duur* in Egypt operate. However, that model is different from the Deoband in North India who follow the *Hanafi* school of law; instead, the *Salafi Dar* is similar to the "Ahle Hadith movement that shares some affinity with the teachings of the Wahhabi movement and broadly does not follow a particular school of law (*madhab*)." (Sidat, 2018, p. 2) This is confirmed and, again, thoroughly emphasized by the *mu'allimat*; whereby *mu'allimah* Nariman explains in one of her classes: "We do not follow a specific *madhab*, we take the more likely opinion." (Fieldnotes, 2020) This likelihood stems from the opinion being the most prevalent one amongst scholars from the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah*. The name itself describes precisely what has been explained above, as it roughly translates to 'the followers of *al-Sunnah* and *al-Jama'ah*.' *al-Sunnah* being the direct teachings and actions of the prophet; which was hence explained above as the

opposition of *Bid'ah*. *al-Jama'ah*, meaning the group/community, in reference to the opinions of the majority of the scholars of said group or the opinion on a matter that has achieved the general consensus amongst the scholars. *al-mu'alimah* Nariman has also said in another class, as they read one of the assigned books: "There are things the *shaykh* says that we will oppose, and I will say the more likely opinion." (Fieldnotes, 2020) This is to say that it's not merely about the *shaykhs* they read or study, but about following consensus even if they are to let go of some teachings from the books they read. The end goal being a preservation of what is deemed as the sound and accurate tradition of the prophet Muhammad. Karamali (2017) explains:

> To preserve revelation meant not only to preserve its words, but also to somehow preserve these more abstract prophetic explanations and examples so that people would be able to shine the light of revelation on every human circumstance to enable the eye of reason to see clearly. The goal of the revelatory sciences ('ulum shar'iyya) was to do just that, and it was through them that the madrasa academic community preserved revelation. (pp. 14-15)

Colonization Context

The emergence of the *Dar* was not haphazard or without context. Also understanding the colonization context, "schooling was only a part of the wider political process of discipline and instruction. (Mitchell, 1991, p. 89) It can also be thought of within the emergence of a modern Egyptian state, and the unfolding of a novel and particular political and politicocultural arrangement that is distinctly European in origin" (Hallaq, 2013, p. 77). I would disagree with Hallaq

about the fact that certain politocultural arrangements are distinctly European—as saying that implies that there is a line that can clearly be drawn between what is European and what is non-European entirely. At this point, this clarity would be inaccurate. However, there were models that started emerging that would be on the brink of what is *imagined* to be European vis-a-vis non-European:

> Just as the model schools offered the model of a modern system of power, this image of the old style of teaching was also the image of existing Egyptian society. Movement is haphazard and undisciplined, space is cramped, communication is uncertain, the presence of authority is intermittent, individuals are all unalike and uncoordinated, disorder threatens to break in at any point, and order can be reestablished only by the swift and physical demonstration of power...Despite the problem of disorder, the weakness of authority, the absence of regulation and system, and the confusion of noises, of colours, of ages, of clothing and of activities, nevertheless the pedagogical style manages, it is said, to maintain some sort of order. Its form is the individual exchange between master and student. This relation is seen as both the limitation and the strength of the social order. It is the limit, because every instruction, correction, encouragement and admonition must be given separately and repeated for every pupil. (Mitchell, 1991, p. 81)

It is with considering these changes in Egypt and that history that one can start to think about the *Dar*. It can also be seen as part of the history of the *Dar al-Ulum* University thats foundation "coincided with an upsurge of Muslim intellectual interest in renewing Islam, prompted partly by the challenge to Egypt and Muslims in general by European cultural imperialism." (Aroian, 1983, p.

1) Aroian (1983) goes on to explain how within the context of colonization, a discussion emerged over the need to return to the earlier ideals of the Prophet Muhammad, vis-a-vis others pushing for a move to more "European methods and ideas" as a means to strengthen the coutnry's postion. (p. 1) For Aroian (1983), the Salafiyya movement sought to incorporate both a return of the past ideals, and their integration with what was deemed as more modern ideals of the West. Whether that divide is in itself is existent is not as important here as the idea of this discourse existing to describe the movement itself. Stretching till today, there have been different agendas for the different Islamic groups; whereby some were "on mission of spreading Islamic values and ethics (*Da'waa*) and the others aiming at more general reforms that extend to the political realm." (El Sharakawy, 2013, p. 43) The *Dar* can be seen as a space for *Da'wah* with a clear avoidant stance on politics—embodied by a white A4 paper, hung on the walls of the classrooms, with the words: "No political discussions allowed." This is not to say that there is such a thing as being apolitical. The paper exists, especially since they are kept "under a tight monitoring system run by security agencies," but they also keep "the decision of interference present when it is required." (El Sharakawy, 2013, p. 47) For example, *mu'allimah* Lama explained to me how there is a supervisor that visits them who belongs to *al-Azhar* and works for the state, whose role is to make sure that they are teaching within the bounds of what is appropriate and legal. They have not faced any problems so far; and I am guessing that it's because there are no apparent mentions of political stances. However, there are political implications to the work they do, and to their imagination of a specific Islamic society. Nevertheless, these political implications are yet to challenge the state, and have conversely been used by it; El Sharakawy (2013) explains how:

Tolerating Salafism could be appraised in the context of proving that the state is Islamic not a full secular entity, in addition to the hidden appreciation of these groups role in depoliticizing Islam by keeping their agenda a socio-cultural one. The government gives a space of freedom to the Salafi movements and benefits from its rigid thoughts to depoliticize the Islamic movements and Islamic principles in general in the mind of Egyptians... One of the major statements of salafi traditional discourse that benefit the system and serve its interests is the obedience to the government despite its oppression or corruption out of fear from Muslim divide (*fitna*). (p. 48)

There was also an issue amongst the teachers whereby one teacher often told the students that it was impermissible to go against the ruler of the country—while other teachers disagreed, and were angered by her stance. Eventually, the situation diffused and the teacher was asked to not speak about politics again; and that was that. Nevertheless, there is always something political at the works; but perhaps its covert quality has made them survive thus far. The survival has not been inconsequential, for there is always an underlying aura of fear—even if no one clearly says it. You can feel it. You know it well. Mu'alimah Lama told me, when it was time for her to open the space in 2013: "there's no such thing as working for God and being afraid." (Fieldnotes, 2020) One time, I had my phone on the desk. It was off but I forgot to put it away. The teacher was going out to pray and looked over and found it. She stared at me, with a look that pierced through my soul, and said: "you better not be recording us;" (Fieldnotes, 2020) and for a moment, I panicked, insisting that it was off. She then laughs and tells me not to worry, that she was only joking with me; but that I should

know not to record. I tell her I won't, and awkwardly laugh until she leaves. But the fear still floats around with the weightlessness of an elephant in the room.

Getting back again to thinking about how colonization might have influenced the space in its practices; Aroian (1983) explains how the methods and practices of European and American educational theories would also eventually influence the practices in the *Dar al-Ulum*. By the mid nineteenth century, there were two systems of education in Egypt—one that was national, and the other being religious (Aroian 1983). For the national system, "the state regulated and financed education. Attendance would be required by law. The state would offer this education without charge. Promotion would depend on graded and standardized methods of evaluation. Continental Europe offered the model for the national system." (Aroian, 1983, p. 9) On the other hand, the religious system Aroian (1983) describes was organized "according to custom," was "decentralized," with individual financing, optional attendance that is "governed by religious duty or as preparation for a religious vocation," and "evaluation involved no specific grades or standards of uniformity." (p. 9) While the *Dar* now would never be identical to what Aroian describes, it still shares some of these features, even if their expression is different. For example, as mentioned by *mu'allimah* Lama, there are customary aspects that do govern the space—including its naming, and even the assigned books that have become relatively common. However, there is still flexibility in deciding the books, as I have been told that they can sometimes be changed, and even new ones could be introduced if suggested by the students. Furthermore, there is a decentralized aspect to the space, whereby the *Duur* now have started opening up all over the different areas in Cairo and in Egypt, which has made it so that one no longer has to go to *al-Azhar* to learn.

The interesting thing here is that, legally, the *Dar* has only been given a license to teach Quran and its sciences—*mu'allimah* Lama explaining to me that that is the only available license, and that supposedly anyone who wants to learn the other branches of Islamic knowledge should go to *al-Azhar*. Nevertheless, the *Dar* continues to teach all the different branches anyways; which opens up the suggestion of decentralization. The *Dar* is privately owned, however it is not individually financed in the sense that it was opened by charitable donations made by different people—those who want to get the thawab for opening up such a space, and possibly the network of students and teachers and their families who know *mu'allimah* Lama. The Dar continues to operate now using the fees paid by the students at the beginning of each term; fees that *mu'allimah* Lama explained are for the running costs of the space, and for savings that allow them to continuously expand and renovate it (with the most recent expansion happening over 2019-2020). As for the attendance, it is true that it is flexible; and the teachers often remark the importance of students showing up in order to have sufficient knowledge to be able to teach later on; and as for the teachers, the religious duty is highlighted in what *mu'alimah* Lama told me: "I come everyday, I come on Saturdays, and I go home everyday at night like employees; but I do this because I work for God, *alhamdulillah*." (Fieldnotes, 2020) Finally, although students do have exams and are given grades, they don't need to take the examination path and they can only attend the classes. However, doing so means they do not get the certificate that would allow them to teach later on. I have also been told by the students that the exams are straightforward, easy and are only meant to help them recap everything and check what they know. The grades do not mean anything, and no one fails. It is simply a matter of both bureaucracy, custom, and mainly a way to get the students to revise and test their knowledge. It also feeds into the preservation narrative, as Noor—a student—explains:

It's not about the certificate, I don't care, and there's a big chance that I will turn to the non-examination track; but still, the existence of exams makes me read. The classes that aren't connected, or do not have some syllabus, makes me feel like the knowledge that goes into my brain eventually flees it. I feel that, to me, anything with exams is important because then I revise and read so that the information is preserved in my brain, because I'm not the kind of person who remembers things without studying them. (Fieldnotes 2020)

Attending her school and going to the American University in Cairo, Noor has already gotten used to the consolidation of knowledge and its preservation through examination. When one is used to that—out of experience—it becomes hard to find other ways. But the teachers also know that the point of the examination is not the examination itself. There is a test far more important, and that is the afterlife; and *mu'allimah* Yomna emphasized this during her class on prayer in which she tells them: "We do not study and know so that we take a test, this is 'prayer,' and it is the first thing we will be asked about [by God]." (Fieldnotes 2020) And *mu'alimah* Marwa tells them, frequently:

Do your grades matter to me? No. Neither should your grade matter to you. Do not talk about your grades, do not share them with the person sitting next to you. Alhamdulillah that you studied. What should matter to you is that you studied. I keep hearing you guys say: "but I lost a grade here…" I don't care. It isn't important and it doesn't upset me if you don't do well; because the important thing is that the knowledge settles in your heart, and that you take it in and apply it… It is heavy. Who said that it would be interesting? Knowledge is heavy, but after a while, it gets interesting. Just pray that God gives you the patience and the ability to learn. (Fieldnotes 2020)

And just like that; unlike my experience and the experiences of so many others in their schools and universities, the exam and the grade had nothing to do with the purpose of the space and with what was being asked of the students. The mainstream forms of education often emphasize the need to get good grades, since good grades means finding a good job which then generates monetary value for the carrier of knowledge. The value ends up being reliant on the exams and the grades one gets. Madanipour (2011) explains how

> The contexts that generate knowledge but are not well equipped to commercialize it, for example, tend to lose out to the contexts that are... The value of knowledge in the knowledge economy is not knowledge *per se*, but an instrumental and commodified use of knowledge, hence the significance of converting knowledge into money. (p. 86)

The value of knowledge has become heavily intertwined with its capacity to be turned into profit, or a salary. It is because these are what we have to live; and it has become increasingly difficult to live for knowledge in itself—or for a value other than monetary. This is why the culture of examination has become so necessary and integral that one no longer imagines knowledge as valuable without being tested. The transformative value of knowledge becomes less important than its commodification. Nevertheless, even examinations in the *Dar* cannot be watered down to just that, since they are not—also based on others, and my own experience. The examination is also part of the wider goal of preservation of what is deemed as an Islamic tradition. It is a way for the students to revise what they have learned, to make sure that they have understood the material correctly, and to hence get a chance to ask about things that need clarification. Furthermore, the exams end up opening spaces of discussion between students, other students, and teachers about the things they

study, which allows for debates to ensue and more knowledge be circulated in class and beyond it. As one studies, gets examined, and discusses, they start consolidating their knowledge—which is what is intended by the *Dar* as a project to make sure Islamic knowledge is not lost, and is preserved in the minds, hearts, and practices of the students and teachers. Yet, the examination is also viewed as inferior to the heart of its carriers, and their actions—whose alteration is deemed to be the value of knowledge itself. The examination itself becomes a means to an end, so regardless of what grades one gets as long as they have understood what has been explained, and start to apply it in their own lives, then the end has been met. Knowledge is valuable for both what it says about the world, and more specifically how it transforms a person. For what it says about the world allows it to transform those who carry it; and so perhaps one ivalue of knowledge even if one does not immediately act on it, is that those who learn have the ability to act at some point. Also, they have the ability to transmit that knowledge to others who would act upon it as well—hence being transformative for the individual, and the community. In the *Dar*, it is often suggested by the teachers to the students that the knowledge that does not transform becomes useless. Instead, the changes that happen to the students are what make that knowledge valuable. In a few words by *mu'allimah* Marwa, the complexity of the space and the mess of its relations echo through; not entirely revealing themselves, but hinting at their intricacy and entanglement.

Geographic Considerations

One part of the complexity of any space lies in its very basic (but not so basic) geographic location. If we are to think of a space's many descriptions, one would need a host of different lenses;

and perhaps even several different maps. Lefebvre (1991) asks: "How many maps, in the descriptive or geographical sense, might be needed to deal exhaustively with a given space, to code and decode all its meanings and contents?" to which he answers, "It is doubtful whether a finite number can ever be given in answer to this sort of question." (p. 85) I will first explore the different geographic considerations of the space, and then later move on to look at the space as it is experienced and inhabited through an exploration of the rhythms within it. The relationship between these two sections—and the previous one—are important because they reveal some of the multiple layers one space has to offer. Setha Low (2017) makes a distinction between 'space' and 'place', whereby space "is preeminently social, produced by bodies and groups of people, as well as historical and political forces," (P. 32) whereas place is

> a space that is inhabited and appropriated through the attribution of personal and group meanings, feelings, sensory perceptions and understandings (Cresswell 2015, Sen and Silverman 2014). It is the spatial location of subjectivities, intersubjectivities and identities that transform space into places – that is, the lived spaces of human and nonhuman importance. (Low, 2017, p. 32)

Low (2017) draws the relationship between both space and place by explaining how place, although it can be studied through individual and/or collective experiences, "also derives its meaning from the social, political and economic forces and class relationships that produce its spatial, material and social form." (p. 32) The upcoming part is an attempt to explore the *Dar* as a space, prior to moving on to exploring it as a place.

The first important geographic consideration is the address. The famous (or infamous) *Tagammo'*, or New Cairo. It is an area known for its pricey property, gated communities, and unwalkable streets that make it difficult to walk anywhere. It is also where several malls and restaurant complexes are located—that also sell considerably expensive clothing, food, services etc. in comparison to others in other areas. It is a relatively new city where most of its land "is sold to large scale developers building unaffordable gated-compounds, and the small portion sold as 'social housing' plots, is too expensive for the low income families to buy." (Shawkat, 2019, para. 9) The *Dar* occupies the bottom floors of two villas, after their recent expansion. This includes 2 floors, and one basement; all of which have classrooms, bathrooms, and a kitchen. The first floors both have reception areas with a front desk, but only one is functioning currently as the other one is still in the opening phase. In the first villa, you have several classes, a market room, a teachers lounge, and the management's office (for the owner, and it is also used by the two managers). The basement area has another reception area, prayer area, classrooms, and kitchen with a space where snacks are sold. The second villa also has a reception area, an area with chairs and tables, a refrigerator for food and drinks, classrooms, and bathrooms.

Being in New Cairo is not inconsequential, but it is telling of what this specific *Dar* is, what it looks like, and who goes there. Or rather, how it *should* look like, and how the people who go there are *expected* to be like. Whether these expectations stand to be true or not cannot be fully covered in this section; but I intend to instead work through what some of these expectations mean, and how they could ring true with what the field says. Farida, an ex-student at the *Dar*, explained to me how the name *'Dar'* and the name of the program (*Maa'had al-Uloum al-Shari'yah*), made her feel like it's "a

lower class thing." (Fieldnotes 2020) She explained: "It reminds me of *Maa'had Electroniyyat* or *Maa'had Kahraba*, and those things that are less than a bachelor degree. Do you get me?" (Fieldnotes 2020) I get it. I get it not because I agree; but because I have lived in my own privileged bubble long enough to know how these words sound to someone who lives in New Cairo, has been to one of the most expensive schools in Cairo, and got an *actual* bachelors degree from the American University in Cairo. In that bubble, words like *Dar* and *Maa'had* are *too* Arabic, and <u>not expensive enough</u> to be allowed in it. But, thankfully, the *Dar*'s EGP 600 per term registration fee makes up for its name. Its location makes up for its name. Its furnishing and ACs make up for its name.

Mu'allimah Lama, the owner of the *Dar*, also carries an equally worrying title to the residents of New Cairo. But at first, she taught at a *Dar* in Masr El-Gedida—a relatively affluent suburb in the East of Cairo. However, she eventually decided it was, "not the way [she] wanted it to look." (Fieldnotes 2020) When she went on to open her own *Dar* is New Cairo, her goal was: "a place that teaches people their religion, ethics, order, compassion, understanding, cleanliness, everything; because what I saw was different than that." (Fieldnotes 2020) She often emphasized the importance of cleanliness, insisting that it was one of the reasons why the place was successful—because it meant that anyone coming in would recognize and appreciate this 'cleanliness'. This did not simply mean dusting off things; but it implied getting furniture that was not cheap, getting air conditioners, and setting up the space in a way that would allow for the residents of New Cairo to feel at home—a difficult and expensive feat considering the majority of those who attend live in one of the most expensive areas in Cairo. The rent alone is EGP 320, 000 a year (around 20, 370 USD), besides the running costs. But the students also recognize that; and Noor once told me: "This *Dar*, or any *Dar* in *Tagammo'*, will have much higher running costs than a place in Madient Nasr, or in any Shaa'bi area.

And there are less students; yet, owing to their higher social and income level, they need a higher quality of service... It's just like the difference between any private institution and a public one, the services are of course better in the private one." (Fieldnotes 2020) Salam, another student, is in her mid-20s and has graduated with a BA in Economics from the American University in Cairo, and currently lives in New Cairo. Salam also switched from another *Dar* in *Masr El Gedida* because she didn't feel like she belonged in that community," and the *Dar* in New Cairo was closer. She also felt like the aesthetics of the spaces suited what she preferred.

The location is not only significant because of how expensive it is, and what that entails. The location is also significant because it somewhat mimics—albeit differently, and perhaps even more aggressively—the symbolic geographical distance the first dar al-ulums had from *al-Azhar*. (Aroian 1983) Like these earlier spaces, the *Dar* places itself at a distance from *al-Azhar*; no longer physically a part of it is symbolic of an even greater divide. The rife is not as subtle. Almost all the students I talked to emphasized the lack of trust they felt towards *al-Azhar* that would make them unwilling to even consider going there. A lack of trust not merely directed at *al-Azhar*; but a lack of trust telling of the 'post-2011' relations with the state. From my interlocutor's experiences, that are similar to my own, the 2011 revolution marked a moment in time where so many people finally became part of an outburst in reaction to what the state had been doing to them for years. This was not specific to certain people, but was of course expressed differently and had different reasons. For many of my interlocutors, the revolution made it so that they no longer trusted the state and felt like they could express that. The Dar became a space accessible to them, that was no longer state-affiliated, and where they could trust the knowledge they got—as opposed to what they would hear from *al-Azhar*.

This especially became true with the statements *al-Azhar* were making about the revolution, and how they continuously sided with the government in a way that made them no longer trustworthy.

Although my research was based in Cairo, in that *Dar* in New Cairo, I was given an anecdote—that only reaffirmed the geographical symbolism—by a teacher in a *Dar* in Cape Town, South Africa. He explained to me that while he was studying himself at *al-Azhar* in Cairo, he started attending classes with a *Salafi* sheikh outside of *al-Azhar*. When one of his beloved teachers at *al-Azhar* found out, he vowed to never speak to him again and asked him to stop attending his classes. He recounts how he would stand at the back, hiding, trying to listen to his teacher, not knowing why it was such a big problem. Another friend studying at *al-Azhar* told me how her teacher frequently made sniding comments about the arrogant '*Salafi Dar*' juxtaposed with the humbly moderate teachings of the more *Sufi*-oriented *al-Azhar*. The location becomes even more important with these dynamics in mind, when *mu'allimah* Lama explained how she picked this spot precisely for the *Dar*: "There are people here who teach *Sufi* teachings, and are not from *ahl al-Sunnah*; so I said, fine, I will open next to them and take their students." (Fieldnotes 2020) With these words, the location could not be more symbolic of a struggle one could easily overlook—especially since there is no mention of *al-Azhar* within the bounds of the classes in the *Dar*.

This symbolic geographical set up is not only a reflection of institutional struggle, but is also reflective of the struggle of centralization. When *al-Azhar* was the only place to teach the different branches of Islamic knowledge, it was inconvenient for many women to join the programs and classes offered there. On one of my very first days of fieldwork, I joined one of the Quran classes

held at the *Dar*. Following the class, I had a brief conversation with the Quran teacher, in which she explained to me the importance of the Maa'had in its accessibility and closeness to a lot of women, saying: "Is there a man that would agree that his wife study all day? No way. Which makes going to *al-Azhar* for a full day everyday really hard if your home is your priority. This is why the Maa'had is easier for married women." (Fieldnotes 2020) She tells me how she used to study at *al-Azhar*, but that it's harder now that she's older because of her back problems. The distance she takes to get there sitting in the car is too much for her, and so she says: "the importance of the *Duur* is that we no longer need to go to *al-Azhar* to learn." (Fieldnotes 2020) Now, women with chosen or enforced responsibilities have found and made ways to be part of the knowledge transmission and production process. They have made ways to maneuver through the different states of being in the world; the location of the *Dar*, and its place on a map, shows us this. It is not just convenient for married women; but also for women who study, and work. The *Dar* is close to their homes, and since it offers weekend classes, they can easily make it there and be back home in time to sleep for work or school the next day. Salam, who is currently working at a company, says: "they were one of the very few *Duur* that had evening schedules that fit my schedule as a working woman. (she pauses and laughs). They were one of the few places in *Tagammo*' that had evening and Saturday classes which is perfect and very suitable." (Fieldnotes 2020) The *Dar* hence becomes a space where women with different lives can come together, whereby those who have a typical 9-5 job and those who don't can still learn the same things at the same place. Although it is still a Dar in *Tagammo*' that would hence be exclusionary based on class, it is also inclusive in other ways. This highlights the importance of looking at layers of spaces to understand what and how exclusions/inclusions take place, and how that space hence becomes a place with different meanings to different people.

Rummaging Through Rhythms: Vignettes From the *Dar*, and Sketching the Space

The *Dar* is a complexly arranged space that is constituted by its different resonances. Resonance being

> the modality and the by-product of people, materials and places "feeling each other out," of attending to each other, of being drawn to or repelled in the midst of so many things to which attention could be drawn... When things resonate with each other there is a connection that proceeds, not from the impositions of some overarching map or logic, but from a process of things extending themselves to each other. It is a matter of institutions, practices of knowledge production, and different tacit ways of doing things finding concrete opportunities to take each other into consideration. (Simone and Pieterse, 2017, pp. 16-17)

When these different sounds, bodies, smells, scenes, affects, conversations etc. come together, they are more telling of the space that is the *Dar* than merely labelling it as a space for the Islamic education of Muslim women. Such labels, while multiple, often do not reveal much of the dynamics of the everyday, nor do they give a real exploration of the complex spatio-temporal arrangements. Instead, looking at vignettes from different space-time settings of the *Dar*, give room to further explore what the *Dar* is as a lived reality—with all its rhythms. This allows for an imagination of the *Dar* that allows us to see it as a space alternative to the ways we imagine more rigid, and static, spaces of knowledge. Looking into the different rhythms—the smells, sounds, and sights—that can and do exist and make up this space, provides an alternative way for us to think about what spaces of knowledge could potentially look like.

I have frequently mentioned rhythms throughout this chapter, but have yet to unravel what I am referring to. Lefebvre (2004) explains that "everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is a rhythm." (p. 15) For Lefebvre (2004), the meaning of 'rhythm' is not clear because "we easily confuse rhythm with *movement...*speed, a sequence of movements... or objects. Following this we tend to attribute to rhythms a **mechanical** overtone, brushing aside the **organic** aspect of rhythmed movements." (pp. 5-6) This is not to say that there is not a form of repetition within the everyday, but that the essential thing about rhythms is that none of them are identical, and there is always space for something unexpected. Despite our imagination of a repetitive rhythm as being identical, there are always differences that seep in between and within rhythms that make them non-identical. This organic and empirical notion of rhythmanalysis involves an organic engagement with our surroundings. This engagement is not only about picking out what is there; but is sometimes realizing what is perceived in the negative, a place still seeping with different meanings. An example of that kind of engagement is given by Lefebvre (2004) in what happens when someone is listening to "noises, which are said without meaning, and to *murmurs...* full of meaning—and finally he will listen to silences." (p. 19) This engagement of our sense of hearing in the form of listening to what is around us is necessarily an engagement with noise/sound, but also with silence. Rhythmanalysis is a way to unravel the social, and can be mistaken as a form of inserting oneself in a space authoritatively. However, Lefebvre's understanding of rhythmanalysis as something that is not only an enactment of a form of agency or a capacity to 'grasp', but rather also as a function of being grasped ourselves, opens up the question of *how* and by *whom/what* are we grasped.

It is important to note that we are often grasped by our interactions with others, and more often than not it is easier for us to enunciate our relations with other people as opposed to with sounds, smells, tastes, or even objects. Or it might not necessarily be the ease of it, as much as it is a matter of being more used to observing and reiterating interactions with *people*. For Lefebvre (2004), there is an agency given to the person themselves in that they let themselves be grasped by rhythms; however, what if the question of an object's or material's agency derives from a gap in the agency of the person? For Bergson (1988), the objects around us are representative of the actions we can make upon them, or that they can make upon us through an experience. Bergson uses the word "must" to describe the experience we have from objects, which entails a form of experience that is brought about from the things around us that are not necessarily a direct result of us practicing our own agency. When I observed the rhythms, and let myself be grasped by them, I realized that our engagement with objects and the space around us is a sensorial experience that sometimes occurs beyond our intentionality. That is where the agency of objects starts to emerge, whereby it is considered as agency in so far as it allows for certain courses of action or emotions on behalf of people to take place as a result of a capacity within them to do so —even if we are to say that that capacity derives from the agency people give things, and as a result of human/nonhuman interactions. Perhaps an engagement with objects nuances the relationships that exist within and without bounds of space and time. In a Latour-ian fashion, Thrift (2010) suggests that "objects must be understood as involved in multiple overlapping negotiations with human being and not just as sets of passive and inanimate properties...they do not just provide evocations of times past or moral reckonings but affective senses of space, literally territories of feeling." (p. 292)

Vocal Vignettes, and Sketching the Space

At first, I would talk about the *Dar* like it was a reality in everyone's life. Like everyone I would meet would know what it is. Shortly after hearing a few "*Aywa*, that's so interesting, *bas yaani eh Dar baa'a?*[12]", I realized that the word *Dar* evoked many different scenes and descriptions that were unlike my own. In Karamali's (2017) book on Muslim education, he says himself: "the word "madrasa" evokes two kinds of images. The first is the sacred space of an ancient building; the second is abstract, archetypical groups of students studying sacred texts with religious scholars." (p. 1) But neither images rang true for me; even when they did to many people around me. All imaginations of the *Dar* were roughly along the lines of these prototypes. So as I sat in front of my laptop, thinking about all the different ways I could write about the *Dar*, to describe what it really was, I found myself stunted. The only way I could finally think of, was one that would embrace its incompleteness—mimicking the mess.

But again, how would one reflect these processes? There are problems with descriptions as they capture things in time and make them appear motionless, cheating the active reality; and although "there is no space here for discrete instants that can be counted, only a continuous unravelling of duration," (Quinlivan, 2017, p. 2) there also must be an attempt. So in the next few pages, I attempt to show you—through descriptions as 'vignettes' or short anecdotes, and reflections—the flashes that come to mind when someone asks: "*Aywa*, that's so interesting, *bas yaani eh Dar baa'a?*[13]" With the same initial struggle to put them in words, and with the same fear of

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[12] "Yeah, that's so interesting, but what is a *Dar*?"
[13] "Yeah, that's so interesting, but what is a *Dar*?"

holding them captive within these words; I move forward anyway to at least enable an imagination, or a communication of what the *Dar* could be.

"*Dar*" || "Home"

It's comfortable. If I need a Dar and could not find another one that is as well furnished, where I am psychologically comfortable, with good finishing, nice chairs, and an air conditioner ... these things are nice to have, and it's nice to have a comfortable place where you can find food, drinks, and that kind of stuff.

(Salam, Fieldnotes 2020)

I park my car on the side of the road outside, and I make my way through the large metal black door. There are no signs, nothing to say that this is where it is; only crowds of women parking and entering through the same door. At 8 in the morning, I doubt that they are here as guests. But it looks like any other home in *Tagammo*ʻ; a villa, with a beige exterior, 3 storeys, and a large beige wall around it marking its borders. As soon as you step inside, you find yourself moving with the swarms till you reach the front door. The large brown wooden door flung open, with only a smaller, black metal one attached at its hinges. The wooden door is only closed when the day is through, but as long as they're open only the metal door is in direct sight—easily swinging open and closed throughout the day. I embarrassedly push the door and enter, to find myself in the small and crowded front space—right in front of the wooden front desk. I look down and the first thing I notice is the carpet; I smile, because I think my grandmother has the same one at home. Or maybe

we do. Or maybe I saw it at one of my friends' houses? I wasn't sure, but it's awfully familiar. As I walk through to get to the classroom, I pass by the kitchen. I could've sworn my grandmother had the same sink and tiles. Or was it my friend's house? And in the classroom, the white walls, beige/light brown wooden

Figure 15. The Dar [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.

floor, and the air conditioner would have been identical to our living room—if it weren't for the white fluorescent lighting, and the black leather desk-chairs. The huge whiteboard, the mic, and the teacher's desk also didn't cater to my imagination; but the feeling of familiarity, that 'homey' feeling, persisted somehow. Perhaps it was the smell of coffee and tea in the air every morning. I don't drink either, but my parents drink both. But I've smelt them before, in so many different places; so why were they now reminiscent of home?

I think the other sounds might have helped. The food that everyone had, every morning, without fail. It was one of the more important daily rituals; a nonidentical, yet consistent rhythm. It often felt unbreakable. One day, when I was offered a biscuit, from the ones the teacher got, by one of the students, and I politely said I didn't want any, she told me "No, you have to take one or the teacher will get upset." (Fieldnotes 2020) The biscuit is part of the rhythm, and me rejecting it was a form of disruption; class couldn't begin, and the teacher would get upset. So every morning, before class, the women gathered in the kitchens, made their teas and their coffees, and had their sandwiches and snacks. They talked about everything. Two women exchanged recipes. Another two talked about their families. A group of four were frustrated with how they did on the exam. No,

wait; they sound pleased. I must have not heard them right from all the simultaneous murmurs. And laughs. That was the most consistent sound. The laughs echoed throughout the day; from morning breakfast, in classes, in every food and prayer break. I wrote ever so often throughout my fieldnotes, as interjections, "woman makes a joke, everyone laughs". (Fieldnotes 2020) These disruptions are almost consistent. They are very much part of the rhythms of the place. It is nice. It feels like home.

But there are also things that don't really feel like a home. The white fluorescent lights always remind me of school, or of science labs. They make you less comfortable. The teacher sitting alone on her brown wooden desk, placed atop a small stage at the end of the class, juxtaposes the crammed women. That makes you less comfortable. Constant resounding of "sorry," "excuse me," and "can you see?" bound within the classroom's walls, triggered by the tightly packed black desk chairs. (Fieldnotes 2020)
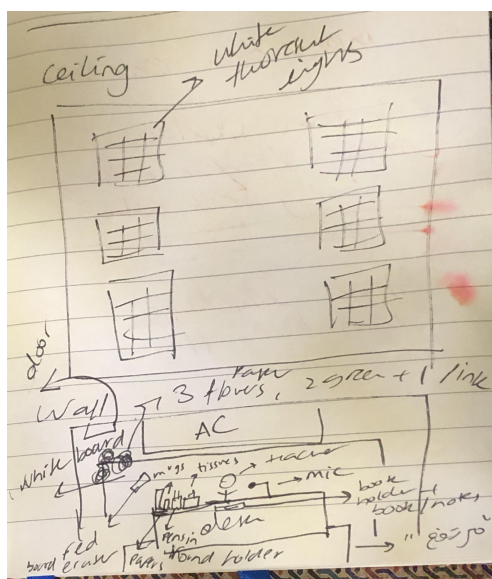
Figure 16. Sketch of the Dar [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.
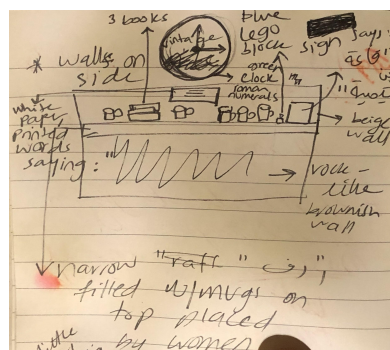
Figure 17. Sketch of the Dar [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.

The path between both sections of chairs in class sees a swooshing of long black Abayas. First and second years usually have more colorful classes; but the later years see more unified black. I remember writing in one of my field notes about the woman in the floral scarf. The colour black almost becoming a uniform—but sometimes it's comfortable. Sometimes the Abaya feels like home because you never have to
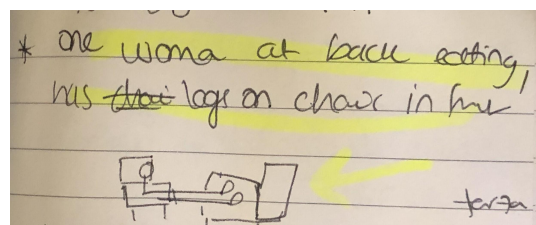

Figure 18. Sketch of the Dar [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.

leave behind the pajamas underneath. Maybe that's why sometimes the women would place two chairs in front of each other, sitting comfortably with their legs stretched out in front. One time, a woman had snacks. The other time another fell asleep. That makes you more comfortable.

But what's sometimes uncomfortable is the silence. Listening to my body, I would often hear my anxious heart slow down with comfort when the silences of class time were broken. Thankfully, these silences didn't last long. They were often pierced through with the laughs, and with the voice of the teacher explaining, or with the questions (often followed by laughter). One of the women can't recite a verse, so the teacher asks her to imagine what the verse means and what it's describing (it's describing a people that were torturing one of the prophets). When she can't say it again, the teacher says: "she can't say it because she is not evil, but I'm evil so I'll say it", and they all laugh (Fieldnotes 2020). When the woman repeats after her, and gets it right, the Quran teacher says: "Yes! I taught her to be evil," and they all laugh again (Fieldnotes 2020). But besides the laughter, some silence would persist until the sound of the *Athan*[14] ceased. But that kind of silence was not as quiet as the silence of getting speeches of displeasure from the teacher. The *Athan* time silence was less stern. There were the whispers and the breaths of the women, synchronizing with the *Athan*, as they took those moments to recite after it. These whispers weren't the only ones flooding the room daily; but other sounds were also harmonious. After every "*Salla Allahu A'layhi wa Salam*[15]," are echoes of "*wa A'layhi al-Salatu wa al-Salam*"—as subtle and unpronounced chirps (Fieldnotes 2020). But the more silent silence was the one that came after a teacher's outburst. These outbursts aren't as loud as you would assume; and the loudest voice was that of disappointment, not anger. "Shame on

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[14] Call to prayer.

[15] "Peace and blessings be upon him," in reference to prophet Muhammad whenver his name is said.

you, and more shame if I ask you how old you guys are." (Fieldnotes 2020) "I want some quiet, please, shhhhhhhhhh." (Fieldnotes 2020) In *mu'allimah* Lama's book on the ethics of the bearer of knowledge, she describes her as being: "not loud, not chatty, calm at heart, modest... does not play, fool around, or spend [class] time laughing and giggling ... nor being addicted to joking plentifully... and being of few words." (Fieldnotes 2020) Silence? *mu'allimah* Naima: "Stop talking, how old are you?" (Fieldnotes 2020) Baby sounds, sounds of women laughing, plastic, women talking, chairs screeching across wooden floors, shuffling shoes, clinking glasses... *mu'allimah* Marwa: "I'm going to leave you until you're completely done with everything, and I will just sit here, eat and drink and just [wait]". (Fieldnotes 2020) That's when the silence is the most silent. But the silence is soon broken after *mu'allimah* Marwa jokes, and everyone laughs. Some time passes, *mu'allimah* Marwa: "I want silence. I'm tired of all the movements in your class, I can't focus. I want silence." (Fieldnotes 2020) Sometimes, the women are silent when they are asked not to be. Especially in recitation circles (*halaqa*). They all sit in a circle to recite the Quran, but each one takes a turn where the teacher focuses on her recitation. The sound of the teacher reciting is usually accompanied by the whooshing of pages being turned, or the whispers of women trying to follow. Sometimes they fall silent, and all that's heard is the sound of the fingertip dragging across the page, following the letters—following the sounds that must be uttered. Until the fingers rest and she has to start reciting. She has to keep repeating until she gets it right. Sometimes it seems like the rest have zoned out, they are all silent. But when the recitation is done, the teacher then jokes about the spelling, or calls on someone else to ask a question, and the sounds flood the room again.

But even the silences and sounds don't alternate, and there are always different sound/silence combinations that go to show that this binary doesn't hold. We feel them, and

describe them, but they often don't exist in isolation of one another. The consistency of WhatsApp message beeps, phones ringing, alarms resounding. The phone's Athan, sometimes synching with the Athan from the mosque, or with other phones; sometimes each going off on its own. Sometimes the phone rings and interjects with the Athan and the whispers. Sometimes the class pauses for sometime, other times everyone curiously halts for a split second, staring at the phone or the person anxiously trying to get it to stop. Sometimes they look, and a mother lets the phone ring—it disrupts nothing when it's in the hands of her child; and perhaps, taking it away would be more noisy.

But perhaps most recently, the sound that triggers a complete disruption of rhythms is the sound of a cough. It existed prior to Corona. When one woman had a cough in *mu'allimah* Lama's class, early in the semester, she told her to go get something to drink for her cough, and asked if she's okay. When she leaves the women talk about how she is always coughing, and how they feel for her and always pray for her allergies to get better. The students ask the teacher to pause the class and wait for her, and so the teacher recaps what they covered until she comes back. But later on, one of the women is sick and is talking to the teacher; the teacher interrupts and says: "don't talk at all, the virus will come out. I will give you the final grade, but please keep quiet." (Fieldnotes 2020) They all laugh, but the room tenses up a bit. Corona starts to change things. *Mu'allimah* Yomna keeps her *niqab*[16] on during class because of Corona, and asks the women to excuse her. She's worried. "I graduated from business school, and we used to think about the possibility of a company going bankrupt and what to do…. Now we don't know what will happen." (Fieldnotes 2020) She speaks of the uncertainty Corona brings about, and what this will mean for them. She's explaining why they

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[16] Face veil/covering.

need to finish their syllabus quickly in case anything happens. The discourse in class changes, and the word 'grateful' circulates consistently. The teachers say: "God has bestowed upon us health... feel that, [and be grateful]." (Fieldnotes 2020) But the tension soon fades, and the familiar sounds of laughter soon echo again. When one student sneezes, *mu'allimah* Yomna says: "*Allahu Akbar*[17]", and they all laugh (Fieldnotes 2020). A student then says: "Gone are the days where we used to tell someone God bless you when they sneezed", and they all laugh again (Fieldnotes 2020). To which *mu'allimah* Yomna replies: "Yes! Now we say *Allahu Akbar*!" Laughs (Fieldnotes 2020). These silences, these sounds, the rigidity, the flexibility, the laughter, the effects and all these rhythmic motions fluctuate throughout the day. They always seem to exist, daily, without fail; but they are never the same.

Perhaps the most consistent but surprising sounds are that of children. Sometimes, they also make beds out of chairs, and sleep peacefully at the back of the class. Only until they wake up crying and one of the women has to calm them until they find their mother, that is. But their sounds always exist, mingling with all the other sounds, fusing and integrating; but sometimes breaking. I remember one day, the room echoes with the thuds of chairs and the squealing of desks as they drag across the white ceramic floor tiles. The students rush to find a spot to sit, their bodies cringely colliding. Amidst the layers of *Lamu'akhzas*[18] and the apologetic *'An Eznek*[19], a whaaa-mmmm-ehh makes its way past its mother's silencing attempts —she wants to stay. Deb-deb-deb, an old fist continuously knocks rhythmically on the black metal desk; never failing to skip a deb, and never allowing a new flow of debs to surmount, only the same deb-deb-deb. "*Hadretek 'ayza teshrabi haga?*[20]"

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[17] "God is great!".
[18] Excuse me.
[19] Excuse me.
[20] "Would you like to drink anything?"

she mutters over the room, her widely welcoming smile and wave almost drawing out the longings

hiding beneath awkward shaking heads and dishonest "*La'a, shukran*[21]"(s) (Fieldnotes 2020). The

deb-deb-deb halt, and a cracking coarse voice requests a cup of tea, with a spoon of sugar and just a

tiny bit of milk. The teacher's presence demands silence (just until she sits down), and so the tapping

of her heels, as she moves from the small wooden door to the desk and chair atop the mini-stage, is

only outdone by the sequenced squeals of the screaming child insisting on being fed—forgoing the

theatrics of awkward head-shakes and dishonest "*La'a, shukran*"(s). The women take turns cradling

the itty-bitty body of the determined child. His body is surfing the waves of cradling loud women

demanding tea and sugar and milk, and he seems like he might want milk, too—but no one asks. His

fist is clenched, his fingers curled inwards with his untrimmed yet soft nails almost piercing through

his marshmallow-like skin. His glaring eyes twitching as it meets his mothers'—abandonment? His

toothless mouth opens wide with a roar struggling to disrupt the drowning sounds, but then failing

and gasping some air to fill his now overworked lungs. Be the resistance. His legs spread, kicking

about, trying to escape the not-mum cradles. His arms soon fling into the air. It's the dance of

hunger. Or anger. Or frustration. Of abandonment? The teacher gives a reminiscing "hhhh" and

smiles, as she remembers her own childrens' hunger squeals. There's a room right inside the class

where the mama can feed her baby, but she translates the whaaa-mmmmmmmmmm-eeeeehhhs as

cries of irrelevant incurable pain and not hunger; and with her definitive judgement, the teacher

decides to move on.

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[21] "No, thank you."

Omnia—relentlessly trying to calm her crying baby in the back of the classroom, trying to hear the teacher over the tears: "Ana etfarhadt[22]." (Fieldnotes 2020) With an exhausted exhale, Omnia throws herself back in the chair at the end of the classroom, after having placed her baby in the baby seat by the foot of the chair. Being drained but pushing through to manage to come to class, and stay there, was not only Omnia's struggle, but that of several other women I've come across in almost every single class. There was always a mother or two. Sometimes even three, with their babies crying or running around class—and sometimes, on the good days, sleeping soundly in their baby seats or on beds made of abandoned Maa'had chairs. I remember one daughter, seemingly 4 or 5 years old, stretched on two chairs at the back of the classroom, dozing off. As soon as she got up, she started asking for her mother—her question marking the brink of a possible outcry or meltdown. A woman got up, carried her, hugged her tight to calm her down, walked her about, and waited until her mother could take her. The mother finished what she was doing, and eventually got up and took her into her arms as she was released from the arms of the other woman.

Even when it sometimes felt like the children were out of place, striking in their presence; they also sometimes seemed to fit in. Another little girl, around 5 or 6 years of age, was with her mother in one of the Quran classes. The girl wore a veil, and stood next to her mother. She was quiet, and didn't move a lot. As the women recited, she listened. Then once, she began reciting along with them. "*Yakhti*[23], your little one is reciting," the teacher says (Fieldnotes 2020). This is not the only time that children exist in the space of the Maa'had, or in its classes. In every class I have attended, a child or two were there. What was the reason the children were there? And what were

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[22] "I am drained."
[23] "Oh, dear."

the conditions? If you ask their mothers, they have nowhere to leave them. If you ask *mu'allimah* Lama, it's not allowed. Yes, according to *mu'allimah* Lama:

> Originally, I didn't allow the existence of children inside the classrooms unless their mothers could control them. Otherwise, there are rooms connected to the classrooms with screens and speakers so that the mothers with their children can attend and listen, and can see the whiteboard. Sometimes, they take shifts where one says 'my son is sleeping, can I leave them with you and attend?' to the others and they agree to watch him until she's done. (Fieldnotes 2020)

One time, when one of the children was being especially loud, the mother apologized to the teacher for disrupting the class. She didn't leave, and wasn't asked to; instead, the teacher said: "I am happy when children exist in these spaces." (Fieldnotes 2020)

As soon as class ends, the duaa of the end of the *maglis*[24] is recited by the teacher prompting the sounds of all the women to rise up at once, talking, mingling, catching up, or going up to talk to the teacher. "*Subhanak Allahuma wa Bihamdika Astaghfirak wa Atub Ilayk.*"[25] With those words, the volume increases, and whichever kind of silence ends.

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[24] A sitting of knowledge.
[25] Prayer said at the end of gatherings/classes.

Conclusion

The idea of 'home' cannot be grasped by words, because even if one does it never feels the same neither to the same person in time, nor to others. So to capture a place would be to do it injustice. However, to not say anything at all—although sometimes necessary—eliminates any chance at an imagination of a space. "*Yaani eh Dar baa'a*?"[26] The answer to that question will never be one thing or the other, but between the sounds, smells, sights, feelings, heartbeats, objects etc. some ideas can be drawn. The idea of the *Dar* being this one rigid space, with a fixed history and temporality cannot stand to be true amidst the mess of the everyday. No matter how much one can construct an image of a well-defined, orderly space with consistent daily schedules; the lived experience is never the same. I attempted to show that lived experience, first through myself, my body and my senses; and through the reflections of those around me who might have felt the same, or differently. This attempt was merely to try and complicate the fixed notions of what a space of Islamic knowledge might look like, in order to move on to the different imaginations and potentialities that emerge with its existence. Traversing through its history, geography and rhythms has possibly given a more complicated idea of what a space of knowledge could be—and what alternatives exist beyond the ones engraved in our consciousness or subconscious. To reflect, to imagine, and to hope, based on the realities of people, objects, spaces, and times. To think beyond the categories we affix, to allow the flux of potentialities to make their way through our work and lives. Instead of thinking about spaces of knowledge—Islamic, and otherwise—as those void of sounds of children, smells of food, laughters of bonding, whispers of stories, and compliments; we can begin to explore the potential of having all these exist in a space catered to the transmission of

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[26] "So, what is a Dar?"

knowledge, and the transformation of its holders. Instead of the rigid descriptions offered historically about the need for quietness, impeccable behaviour, and control; we can see spaces that cater and allow for the mess of life to happen everyday. We can imagine and find potential in spaces that embrace that mess, and work with it and around it instead of attempting to control and deny it. This shows us the potential of spaces of knowledge also becoming places of mess—while continuing with that same goal of learning and educating; and hence the Dar shows us that these need not be separate. In the upcoming chapters, I intend to move forward with these reflections, to further explore the space and its potentialities.

Chapter 2

Make Yourself at *al-Dar*

"I give God four and a half hours of conterated time from my week, so that when God asks me what

I did, I can say I tried to go to the *Ma'had* and to learn more about you."

(Farida, Fieldnotes 2020)

Figure 19. The Dar [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.

Everyone always makes fun of Meera, because she doesn't look like the kind of person that goes to the *Ma'had*. Whenever someone asks about something, and I say: "*Ha ya* Meera, tell us, you went to the *Ma'had*," she always laughs and says she either can't remember what it was or can't remember learning it at all (Fieldnotes 2020). Then everyone *always* makes fun of her for it; saying, sarcastically: "you, Meera, went to the *Ma'had*? Hahahahahahaha it's very obvious, and it really shows!" (Fieldnotes 2020) Meera laughs, our friends laugh, and oftentimes I do, too. But why?

The *Ma'had* is the 5 year program offered at the *Dar* for adult women to learn the general opinions and scholarly works concerning all of the major branches of Islamic knowledge. Following this program, if one chooses to go through the examination track, a certificate is awarded to allow its holder to teach later on. But Meera? Our tiny friend, with dimples, who often appeared shy and reserved—but was actually the one with the most words, loudest voice, and strongest opinions. Meera, a teacher? *Really?* Why was that so hard to believe? It was, at best, <u>silly</u> to make fun of her. *Why?* I keep thinking to myself. I hadn't thought much about it. It was always something we made fun of; and even she made fun of herself. But as I sit and reflect, especially after being in the *Dar* for some time; it didn't make sense anymore. No matter how much fun we made of her, she was still a student at the *Dar*. That didn't change. Maybe it did when she stopped going for a while. Maybe it didn't change; but perhaps our thoughtless sense of humor ought to.

The reason I became so frustrated with our jokes came about shortly after realizing how rigid I had been in my field notes, and with myself. I went to the *Dar* myself, and I knew I was more than just a student there. I also knew that being a student there itself was more than just a label. Yet, as soon as I got a hold of a notebook for fieldwork, it was a lot easier to forget that. It was a lot

easier to write down the snippets of observations as clear words on the lines of a page. "Wears black." "Is veiled." "Wife." "Mother." "Loves God." "Obedient." "Committed." But it's never one word, is it? Not for me, and most certainly not for anyone else. The harshness of singular adjectives was an unbearable weight I refused to carry, but somehow could thrust upon others. It was unfair. Sometimes, I wanted to apologize to Meera, and to everyone else.

With this realization halfway through my fieldwork, I decided to stop writing keywords and to start to observe and talk more to everyone around me. To start listening to the sounds, taking in the smells, engaging in conversations that—although never revealing all there is to know, were more helpful than a bunch of keywords. With this realization, I intend to explore in the upcoming pages who goes to the *Dar*. Who are the students at the *Ma'had*? Who are these women? I do not intend to find a single description, but to traverse multitudes, while recognizing that there is a lot more yet to be unraveled. But the more we unpack, and at times leave open endedly, the easier it becomes to come to terms with the messiness of people, and things, and places, and being in the world. It becomes harder to categorize, and a bit easier to move beyond basic category work. This chapter is to be an exploration of the way discourse on an ideal Muslim woman is negotiated in the *Dar*. If we are to think of the *Dar* as an alternative space of knowledge, then we ought to think about the way subjectivities and relations exist within this alternative and how they affect and are affected by this space. To see how alternative relationships form between students, and between students and teachers, and to explore how these relationships foster a sense of alternative to what we imagine relations in such spaces could be. This eventually helps us unpack the different potentialities that exist in the *Dar* as a result of these relational subjectivities. In order to unpack this, I will first go briefly through pieces of literature and approaches, in an attempt to try and situate myself

within/through/with, but also beyond, it. Then, I traverse through the different ways in which a discourse on Islamic knowledge and education is intertwined with a depiction of an 'ideal' within the *Dar*, vis-a-vis the everyday modalities of *being* in the *Ma'had*—using vignettes that show the relationship between discourse and being. Instead of looking at discourse on the ideal, and juxtaposing it to what women actually are, I want to try and complicate the relationship between the discourse and practice, and to bring the description closer to the lived reality in the *Dar*. I intend to explore how differences between what a woman in the *Dar* should be and who she really is do not simply manifest themselves as 'acts of resistance' to one category or the other, but are more complex as they unfold in the lived realities of **the women of the *Dar*.**

"The Women of the *Dar*"

Historically, skimming through the available literature on women and Islamic education, women have only recently been in spaces such as the *Dar*. While women used to be schooled by the prophet Muhammad himself, there seems to be a gap in the literature on what women would do when men were formally taught. As I read through numerous historical texts, I was unable to locate spaces for Islamic higher education in which women were students or teachers. However, Berkey (2014) traverses through the history in Cairo, and gives examples of spaces and schools that were financially endowed and supported by women. For example, the "Ashuriyya" which was "devoted to students of the Hanafi rite and established by the wife of a powerful amir at least half a century before the Mamluk coup, and named for her." (Berkey, 2014, p. 163) With the parallel of the *'Dar'* in retrospect, Berkey (2014) explains that it was a house "located in a predominantly Jewish

neighborhood of the Zuwayla quarter of Cairo." (p. 163) Berkey goes on to narrate the histories of women who—being part of royal families—would often establish these madrasas or schools, making it so that it was not completely unheard of that a woman would be involved in such processes and institutions of Islamic higher education—especially financially. Nevertheless:

> The intellectual, as opposed to the purely administrative side of institutional education, however, presents an entirely different picture. Women played virtually no role, as either professor or student, in the formal education offered in schools of higher education and supported by their endowments. (Berkey, 2014, p. 165)

The women were seen as in no need of being part of these spaces, and their exclusion was intertwined with their exclusion from their participation in "legal, religious, or bureaucratic occupations for which the systematic legal curriculum of the madrasa and its cognate institutions was designed to produce qualified candidates," (Berkey, 2014, p. 166) thus eliminating women from positions of religious and political authority. Another reason, Berkey (2014) states, for the exclusion of women is said to be due to the need to separate the women from men—a feat seen as necessary for the maintenance of proper decorum and hence the provision of solid instruction. However, this does not simply mean that women ceased to exist in the literature of religious education; but thus far, what I have found has been reaffirmed by Berkey who explained that, instead of such institutions, women would use private homes. Berkey (2014) gives an example of "one learned woman of the fifteenth century whose family seems to have devoted itself especially to the religious edification of women, for "her house was a gathering place for divorced and widowed women, devoted to the instruction of young girls."" (p. 173) Likewise, Karamali (2017) highlights the way in

which madrasas would only accommodate male students, and instead, women held gatherings where they would teach and learn from one another. Karamali (2017) explains how this is evidenced by and resulted in women's works and teachings not being as prominent or as widely circulated as those by men—resulting in women's authorship not being part of the texts taught at the madrasa, but were limited to "authorizations of hadith narration." (p. 30) Sayeed confirms this in her text, especially on account of even more recent literature. Sayeed (2007) explains that:

> Assemblies (*Halaqàt*) in private homes and mosques remain among the most vibrant and popular settings for the transmission of religious knowledge among women in the Arab world. Their popularity has grown with the spread of the Islamic revivalist movements of the 1980s and 1990s. These assemblies focus on the teaching of Qurʾàn, *Hadìth*, and Islamic law by female scholars to female students and help account for the spread of Islamic revivalism and Islamically-oriented feminism among the middle- and upper-class elite of the Arab world. (p. 346)

The *Dar* now perhaps opens up a space to think about possible changes in texts taught as canonical—challenging what Berkey explained was not found historically; and, with *muʾallimah* Lama's book being taught at the *Dar*, perhaps possibilities and transformations are already at way. These ought to be further explored in the next chapter, as I try to traverse through different possibilities of this space; but before that, in order to reach that point, we must first turn to understand who these women of the *Dar* actually are. The women, living, not on paper, nor in history or literature; but in the everyday.

Post[27]-**Ideal Muslim Woman™ and** *Post*-**Piety**

"الناس موتى وأهل العلم أحياء"

"The People are Dead, and the Knowledgeable are Alive"

(Fieldnotes 2020)

The previous line is part of a larger poem used as the opening to the book *mu'allimah* Lama wrote titled "Say, "This is my Way", How to [Invite Others] to Allah ("قل هذه سبيلي، كيف تدعو إلى الله"). (Fieldnotes 2020) The translation of the title is awkward, but it is taken from verse 108 in the Quran in *Surah* Yusuf, where the prophet is told to say that what he says and does is the way that God commanded. The next part of the verse is on the notion of "*Da'wah*" or inviting others to worship *Allah*; and hence to the way previously mentioned at its beginning. If we are to try and get some insight into the women in the *Dar*, it is also important to understand the type of discourse that is used to speak about the figure I refer to as The Ideal Muslim Woman™ within the *Dar*. To do so, it is important to use this book as reference. The reason this book is so important is because, besides being written by the owner of the *Dar*, it is also taught by her in the first semester of classes in a class called "حلي طالب العلم", which translates roughly to "student of knowledge's ornaments". (Fieldnotes 2020) The class is meant to be one to teach students *how* to be a student of knowledge, or what the student of knowledge should look like and what they ought to do. It is like a manual for what that archetype is, and what the ethical subject should look like.

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[27] I use the terms "post" as an indication of moving beyond, but also working with. There is no moving beyond without considering the previous intellectual endeavours of both categories.

The discourse on the 'ideal' ethical subject within the *Ma'had* is used with the backing up of the temporal relationship, previously outlined in the first chapter, which solidifies this notion of subjectivity as 'ideal' and being ultimately correct as per the direct instructions of the prophet. Salam, a student at the *Ma'had* now at the end of her third year, tells me: "I feel like it ought to be unified like in the past: the school was the Prophet *'alayhi al-Salatu wa al-Salam* (prayers and peace be upon him), and *everyone* would learn from him." (Fieldnotes 2020) The school and the teacher collapsed into an individual, with the prophet Muhammad as the embodiment of what the *Dar* would be; and an inference on how it ought to be. While the *Duur* are numerous and are not yet 'unified' in the manner Salam hopes, the importance of what this *Dar* does is also acknowledged by Salam:

> This knowledge is not only what we're taught on paper, so [the *Ma'had*] becomes a platform where we try to apply everything we learned in our dealing with others; so that's something nice. You try to actually see the fruits of this knowledge, and you see examples walking in the *Dar*. They are like the living embodiment of who you should be in terms of manners, dealing with others, worship, and everything. It's a nice place to find inspiration on how to apply this knowledge. (Fieldnotes 2020)

When I first entered the *Dar*, it was a bit weird for me. I had never been in a space where most of the women—in a way—looked like each other. Most were veiled, with the exception of one or two. Most of those veiled wore loose clothing, skirts, dresses, and abayas. But my friends were there, and I knew how they were much more complex than these descriptions. But why were these descriptions there to begin with? Farida, who graduated university this year, echoed some of my

own initial feelings as she reflected on her experience in the *Ma'had* when she had started a few years back:

> Especially in the evening *Ma'had*, because it is mostly students, it was where you could see the people that are your age; even though there were older people, and all the different age groups and types of women. But none of them came to the *Ma'had* wearing pants, not even loose ones. I cannot say whether this is because people who are similar in the way they dress, get attracted to the same things; or, is it because they are all trying to abide by Islamic dress regulations, or whatever. I cannot determine exactly... Oh, No, there was Meera... (Fieldnotes 2020)

I interrupted Farida: "Meera wears pants, normally (عادي), right?" I ask her, recalling our common friend. Farida continues:

> Yes, I just remembered. But there were people that would come in Abayas or dresses, but that's not how they dress in their everyday life. I mean, they respect the place so they dress a certain way in this space, but outside they wear different things... At some point, I did definitely relate to the place and I did relate to the people there; but then, at some point, I started feeling like I don't relate anymore. (Fieldnotes 2020)

There is this notion of a grouped bunch of women being very similar, or almost the same; and a failure on the part of some women, like Farida, to relate to that image. These were the women that went to the *Ma'had*, and that was how they dressed. Or, in reference to what Salam said before, that was how they behaved. The way they dressed or behaved, was *Islamic*; or at least, in accordance with the "Islamic dress regulations," as Farida puts it. (Fieldnotes 2020) This construction of an 'ideal'

Muslim women will be further explored in the following section; but before it is, it is important to address the issue of the 'ideal' category to begin with.

Since this ideal is a construction of an attempted *fixed* form of ethical subjectivity, it can be seen in different paradigms. It can either be seen as "exterior to individuals and imposed on them as a social superego: it is a given," or it can be seen, instead, as "the subjective work produced by agents to conduct themselves in accordance with their inquiry about what a good life is," as a process. (Fassin, 2012, p. 7) But drawing on Fassin, we cannot simply take this ideal of a Muslim women as a fixed category, failing to see the intricate networks the real women are actually embedded in. If we are to move beyond the stagnant mechanics of modern category-work, then this must entail a rejection of form. (Bessire 2017)

Saba Mahmood (2003), looking at what she refers to as "the women's mosque movement" in Cairo, Egypt; tries to unravel instead the ways in which "instruction in this tradition… is geared less toward inculcating a scholarly knowledge of the texts than providing a practical understanding of how these texts should guide one's conduct in daily affairs." (para. 6) Instead of looking at what the knowledge itself suggests a woman should be, Mahmood tries to recount the actual experiences of her interlocutors. Mahmood (2011) tries to push boundaries of category-work, and instead explore "the variety of ways in which norms are lived and inhabited, aspired to, reached for, and consummated." (p. 23) Mahmood, however, ends up replacing the discourse on Muslim women's autonomy, freedom, and even resisitance—as keywords that were commonly used to summarize Muslim women—with a discourse of 'piety.' Instead of exploring the complexities of these women, Mahmood projects an argument that ends up corresponding "with the claim of the women in the

piety movement who see westernization and secularization all around them and who seek to undo it," (Abu-Odeh, 2019, p. 5)—instead of problematizing these conceptions. What this does is that it allows for a discourse that attempts to "project Islam as a perfectionist ethical project of self-discipline, at the cost of the majority of Muslims who – like most of humankind – are sometimes but not always pious and who follow various moral aims and at times immoral ones" (Schielke, 2010, p. 2) There has, instead, been an increase in literature that emphasizes the what is deemed as part of the everyday and 'the ordinary'—the less spectacle-like turn and take on 'Muslim subjects'. It is an attempt "to push our vocabulary beyond pious self-cultivation allowing us to pay attention to times where ethical subjects act not-immediately-ethical (yet might not terribly unethical either)." (Sehlikoglu, 2018, p. 83)

This is again why categories, and trying to let women fit into them is useless and unfruitful. It casts a shadow on the reality that there is no such thing as a body that merely conforms, or a body that only resists; but there is always something happening in between. The women in the *Ma'had* can be read as either if one wishes to; but instead, if we look at the social interrelations that constitute the *Ma'had*, it becomes impossible to delineate. Salam talks of women that exist in the *Ma'had* that are the embodiment of the ideal (see above); but, interestingly enough, Farida mentions Salam as one of the people she used to see as also fitting into or projecting the facade of the ideal. But ideal or not, the lived reality is messy. When we want to explore who goes to the *Dar*, we cannot think about them as entering a space where nothing happens before or after. Where nothing is beyond the fixed identity of a pious Muslim women studying Islam at a *Dar*. The women being in the *Dar* "cannot be what lies 'between' a past and a future, between the end of one world and the beginning of another. Rather, it is encroachment and connection: it realizes the undividable continuum of Virtuality. It

exhibits the unity of the passage that binds the a-little-after to the a-little-before." (Badiou, 2019, p. 382) And with this, all that happens in the *Dar* becomes duration in the Bergsonian (1988) sense.

Mahmood, and others, have contributed immensely to the literature and theories of subjectivity that will always be important; however, they have not allowed much room to think about the varying lives of practicing Muslim women. Even Farida felt strongly about the conception of this uniform subject. However, Farida was speaking less on Anthropological literature, and more on the experience in the *Dar* itself. An experience that she felt not only set a uniform subjectivity; but also fixed it as an 'ideal.' She tells me:

> One of the things that I realized the most was their ideal of the Muslim woman, and maybe this is one of the reasons I stopped going, in a way. I feel like I'm not sure if this is because I am, right now, having faith issues in general; or, if I do not believe in the ideal that they have … I felt like the ideal they have of the Muslim woman, I don't fit that ideal; and, in a way, I do not believe in it. I don't know if this is because, truly, there are so many ways of being a Muslim woman, and there is no ideal that we have to kind of follow… I'm trying to maneuver between [the idea] that we're not supposed to be put in boxes, and that, no, there are actual boxes that exist in religion. And what are they saying that is correct? What are they saying that is their own interpretation? And there are many interpretations? And are they all correct? (Farida, Fieldnotes 2020)

Although Farida did leave, others continue to go even if they share similar sentiments. In one of the classes, *mu'allimah* Youmna recites from the Quran and says: "God looks not at your images or your bodies, but looks at your hearts and your acts." (Fieldnotes 2020) A woman tells her: "We would like

to only stop at hearts," and they all laugh, alluding to how, sometimes, they do not do the right thing because they can't, and would therefore only be satisfied with what they feel in their hearts. (Fieldnotes 2020) Just like that, moments from the field itself already capture what the literature has spent years trying to say—that there is no uniform, no ideal, that truly exists. There can be conceptualizations of it, and a discourse that does exist highlighting it; but if we are to choose to acknowledge and move beyond that, we should understand that it is grey. There are many women, and each has an entirety of life, and these lives intertwine and sometimes they mimic one another, and other times they are worlds apart. The importance is not to find a solid description, but to unpack all these instances. To unfold all the discourse on ideal and real, with all shades in between.

The women, like the space itself, are real and messy. I could have gone on about the structure and rigidity of the Dar in the first chapter; but it would have been a clear, and elegant, lie. No matter how many times the owner will say the space is made to work like a clock, to operate like a company, and disciplined; it's not. I remember her using all these words, and then going to find the loudness, the randomness, and the falling behind on schedule. Farida was even so mad at the fact that she was supposedly coming to a space where she thought would be super strict with their timing; but instead she recalls:

> Some people used to come on time, but others would be late. The thing is, the teachers themselves would be late and they wouldn't even acknowledge it. They could be late for an hour, or half an hour, and they wouldn't apologize. It was weird to me, how they were trying to teach me religion and teach me about the Prophet and his life, and then you just don't

respect my time. I was mad because these same teachers who were late were often the most strict ones, who would get mad when other students would be late. (Fieldnotes 2020)

Mess? It was everyday. The everyday of everywhere, not just the *Dar*. This is how life is and how it gets, nothing is fixed and nothing is ever as disciplined as it's worded out to be. Neither are the women. No matter how many times ideals are reiterated, they will never manifest as what we deem as real. This does not mean we cannot make arguments, rather we can tell our stories and think through them while staying with the mess.

"The Women of the *Dar*" || Take II

The ideal Muslim woman in the *Ma'had*, as a bearer of knowledge, the book contends, is "patient…
consistent… and they must be wary of cutting off knowledge from their teacher by being lazy,
sluggish, distracted, or not attending."

(*mu'allimah* Lama's book, Fieldnotes 2020)

I want to start by drawing upon one of my own experiences. In the introduction, I talked about my aunt—a teacher in another *Dar*. My aunt was my first encounter with the *Dar*. I remember her being my aunt, then being a teacher; and eventually the lines were blurred. I asked her for a *fatwa* as I sat snuggly on her couch. I eagerly listened to her explanations of the Quran and its stories, as I lay comfortably in her bed. These moments were my first encounter with the *Dar*. But these lines would be pushed back into clarity upon my first entry into the space. These were the teachers. These were the students. I was doing my fieldwork. It was clear. Even for them. As I

mentioned earlier in the introduction, in one of the first classes I attended for the purpose of conducting fieldwork, the teacher introduced me to the class as follows: "Alia is conducting research, and we are the victims. I'm just letting you all know so that we're all on our best behaviour." (Fieldnotes 2020) It was awful to hear, but worse to feel as I jotted down fieldnotes filled with single words attempting to encapsulate everything happening at once. As time passed, I realized that one of the ways in which everyone here was my victim is this chapter. The part that says 'these are the women of the *Dar*'. But I breathlessly move forth, with all the snippets that made me feel that way and made me rethink what it means to be.

To be in the *Dar*, and to be part of the *Ma'had*, requires one to labour through it. I remember when I first realized my aunt was a teacher at a *Dar*, and what all of it meant; and all I could think of was how she must be so happy to be there everyday. She must love all the effort she puts in, because it's for a higher cause. It was bigger than her. So big that it overcame all the laziness (like the one I felt going to school everyday). In my mind, they were happy to be there everyday. To an extent they are, and almost everyone I talked to explained that no matter how hard it was, it still brought them so much happiness. Noor, a student at the *Dar*, struggling to finish the prepping she had and going to the *Dar*, once told me: "As long as I keep seeing the people there, I feel like they influence me, religiously, in a good way. Any knowledge I get there, even if I don't feel its immediate effect on my heart—in the sense that it brings me closer to God—I still feel like it does something in the long run." (Fieldnotes 2020) As I spoke to the teachers about the way they value their work at the *Dar*, the main idea raised was that of the relation their work has to their own personal belief and value system beyond the form of labour they do. This was interesting because it challenges the notion that "production [has become] an area of life independent of people's social identities and obligations,

with a distinct rationale, [and] economic gain." (Carrier, 1992, p. 551) On the other hand, *mu'allimah* Dalia says:

> The value of work is determined by the person who does the action itself. For me, its value is higher than any other work because it is related to an action that is beyond myself. I transfer knowledge to others... For me, my vision of it is of a very high value because it is related to my own values. When I used to work in professional life, I used to have a vision and my work had value, so value is dependent on the vision you have. My vision here is to transfer knowledge to others, and vision of this life and the afterlife. Not only am I doing this for this life, but for things related to a belief; and that's why it's different to me than even the responsibilities that are related to professional life and are related to gaining money, to make self-achievement and self-actualization. This work can be all of this, but also in relation to the afterlife. This life and the afterlife. So, of course, my vision is bigger and hence the value is tremendous. (Fieldnotes 2020)

And it is this life/afterlife binary, that is based on an existing belief system, that determines the value of the work—instead of the time taken to complete it or even the more material translation of this in terms of money. But two things are necessary to address here; the first being this life/afterlife binary. As much as these are often thought of as separate, this is not the case here. In fact *mu'allimah* Dalia says: "This life and the afterlife" to describe the value of her work. (Fieldnotes 2020) It contains both. Similar to the work/life binary, these things often collapse into one another within everyday experiences. According to Weeks (2007):

It is not only that work and life cannot be confined to particular sites, from the perspective of the production of subjectivity, work and life are thoroughly interpenetrated. The subjectivities shaped at work do not remain at work but inhabit all the spaces and times of nonwork and vice-versa. Who one becomes at work and in life are mutually constitutive. There is no position of exteriority in this sense; work is clearly part of life and life part of work. (p. 246)

This hence becomes an important factor in understanding the value of work in the *Ma'had*. The constant going back and forth between 'this is work' but 'it is not work' in the interviews with the teachers, seems like the perfect manifestation of Weeks' description. There is no life 'outside' of work, as many would have it. This notion of work/non-work life is problematized because the distinction cannot be made anymore. The teachers in the *Ma'had* see their work as part and parcel of their belief that guides all aspects of their 'life' in its entirety. There is a wholesomeness from which value is extracted in their understanding. But while Durrenberger (2012) explains that "since work is an important part of most people's lives, it is a central factor in determining their consciousness and the shape of their culture," (p. 139) it is also here that we see the way in which work itself becomes determined by people's own consciousness and belief system. *mu'allimah* Marwa tells me that she feels like the value of this kind of work is different "because you do this work to take the *thawāb* [reward] from Allah. You don't do it so they call you a teacher, or so that anyone says anything about me, or even for any material payback... In this sense, it is different; you feel like you are doing something not for *thawāb* in this life." (Fieldnotes 2020) "The Qur'an is full of exhortations to pursue knowledge (e.g. Q. 20:114)...The pursuit of knowledge, it seems, is a religious duty," (Halstead, 2004, p. 520) and with this form of duty, a value is derived that is beyond the value of any other career

path one could choose, because it will always mean more than 'just a job'. "Industry produces no surplus except what is generated by social activity—and this is why, buried in the great whale of life, value is beyond measure." (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 365) The ideas of work, labour, and value, are all always hovering around throughout my conversations with the teachers. But it's not that clear cut to say that what they do can easily be equated to any other job. It's true that no two jobs can be equated, either; but here, that something that's different seems more messy. A thing to consider when using these terms and thinking about the idea of teaching as a job, is the idea of money as the "God of capitalism." (Hart, 2009, p. 138) In the case of the *Ma'had*, the teachers refuse the offer to get paid and the owner operates without any profit for herself. This denial of money to exist within the realm of the *Ma'had* is interesting considering how money "conveys meanings at the same time as it negates them; it has – or is thought to have—both structure and agency at once." (Hart, 2009, p. 136) This rejection of money could signal a rejection of the agency it has over the women; in the sense that it enmeshes the idea of value with multiple socio-political narratives (Lemon 1998) and the women would, instead, want the value circulating to transcend this. This is not to say that the agency and presence of money disappears with its rejection but it is the ways and contexts in which it is, that is actually telling of the agency it possesses and the way in which people negotiate that. There is a fee that is paid by the students at the beginning of the semester that is of monetary value; and that money ends up being used to sustain the *Dar*. The owners especially recognize the importance of money in the maintenance of the space; where a lack-thereof would force them to close it. This goes to show how the *Dar* will always be intertwined with the system of money circulation. It's never free. However, the context it is rejected in is when it is in the form of 'profit'—beyond the level of sustenance. For the teachers, 'letting go' of the money now is in favour

of compensation in the hereafter. Hart (2009) explains the way in which money enables us to "realize our limitless desires" as "they are trapped for a moment, frozen in money transactions that allow us to meet others in society who are capable of satisfying them." (p. 143) Perhaps it is this withholding from the desires of this life—as is the case for a lot of actions that are done by practicing Muslims—in order to get reward in the hereafter, that problematizes taking money *now*. All of this makes talking about teachers either as a job, or as a life-fulfilling transcendent journey, not make sense. The reality is messier.

Fast forward to me talking to Leila, a student. Leila gave me an analogy between the spiritual and the physical: "gaining spiritual strength is like gaining physical strength, if I'm going to exercise it needs "Hemma"[28] (همّة), some will, and motivation in order to go. I need to psychologically put in effort to push myself to go." (Fieldnotes 2020) This is one of the forms of labor that the women, as students, do. Again, my imagination of a student that gives up everything in her life to be there, was shattered. Leila told me that people naturally tend towards laziness, and that one must find the motivation within them to overcome it in order to be productive. One of the things the students at the *Ma'had* have to do is to put in effort to go against what they would affectively do—staying in place, and being lazy. Unlike their obligations outside the *Ma'had* in the form of university or work, going to the *Ma'had* is something—as I was often told—that is done during one's 'free time'. "It's on the weekend, and I could be finishing other things up, but I try to not make any plans during that time so that I go," Soha explained. (Fieldnotes 2020) There is hence an understanding of the time in which classes in the *Ma'had* take place as being part of the 'weekend', or

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[28] Could be synonymous with determination, steadfastness, eagerness, commitment, resolve, tenacity, courage, and/or mettle.

the free time one gets from their work or from their more formal studies. Instead of resting or making other plans, students at the *Ma'had* exert some form of affective labour by making themselves go to the *Ma'had,* in their free time, knowing they could be doing something else. It's not simple. Salam has work. Noor was starting to plan her wedding. Meera works, and is always complaining about needing her weekend. The relationship they have with the space was much more complicated than I could imagine. They weren't sent there by someone else; so it wasn't like how annoying it felt going to school when you didn't want to. But they also still went. Granted, some of them took time off. Some stopped going at the end. But there was ethical labour going into this that was not as simple as 'these women have a bigger goal, so they must be going with all the excitement and eagerness in the world.'

I remember, as I sit outside the *Fiqh* class, right before it starts, overhearing one woman telling her friend: "honestly, I can't really bear *fiqh* [classes]…" to which her friend replies: "me too, girl, you know I…" but their voices fade as they walk away. (Fieldnotes 2020) As their voices fade, a smile finds its way on my face. How could they say that?! I would have once panicked. How could they not like a certain class, weren't they here to learn about everything? Weren't they so eager and grateful? They were, but sometimes, and for some parts, they were not. Sometimes, it's not exciting, or fun, or even bearable. Sometimes, it's like when one of the students in class said: "I like *Aqeedah*," to which her friend said: "I only dropped half a mark in *Aqeedah*"—laughing proudly. (Fieldnotes 2020) Other times, their absence can only be recounted in the words of *mu'allimah* Marwa: "I said all of this before, what happened? Why did you forget? Is this because some people don't attend?" (Fieldnotes 2020) Other times, their presence is not founded on a whimsical and mystical affective experience; Noor tells me: "I don't feel like the *Ma'had* is really beneficial to me, or that it engenders

the spirituality I am seeking; but it has consistency—its an establishment that is always there."
(Fieldnotes 2020) And even when Noor mentioned so many times how nice it was to go somewhere
and be committed, and have fixed times; she also told me that what pressured her the most was
"that it was so long, at the end I was drained, and it ate up the weekend because we have to go from
4 pm till 8 pm. The next day is work. I didn't like listening to all the teachers. I had no choice,
because in the *Ma'had* you just attend with the teachers that are there. That wasn't so nice."
(Fieldnotes 2020) Noor 2018-2019 was consistent. Noor 2020 only had the weekend to buy things for
her wedding and her new home because she had work all week, and so she stopped going for a while.
This is especially important to highlight when the notion of 'Hemma,' is so frequently mentioned.
This word is often used to encourage women in different classes to never stop pushing. Sometimes it
took all the effort in the world, sometimes it was easier; and sometimes they stopped.

Meera is Noor's sister. She started going at first mainly because Noor did; and because their
mother was a teacher at the *Dar*. But after a while, she liked it: "To know more about the religion
from different branches, not just the Seerah, and it was something that was fixed and made me go all
the time. I learn stuff I never knew before." (Fieldnotes 2020) I remember listening to Meera and
thinking how interesting it was to decide to go just because your sister did. I'm sure it wasn't as
simple, but her phrasing of it still went against everything I imagined. It showed, again, that it's not
always an intentional journey, either. Sometimes, it happens. In Meera's case, she stayed. Maybe
others didn't. But Meera late 2019-2020 didn't. She stopped going. She doesn't remember when or
exactly why, but she recalls that it stopped being as easy to her when she started working. Her job
made her need the weekend, meaning that going for 4 or more hours on a Saturday night would be
hard to maintain. She also says: "when it was Noor's wedding, I used to skip a lot because we had to

go finish things. But also once we were travelling, and then there were other silly reasons. There were times where I was just lazy and couldn't get up to go so I just didn't, and there were a few times where I had engagement parties; and Noor was not encouraging at all. So we just decided we would repeat this year again next year." (Meera, Fieldnotes 2020) She wants to go back again now. "I used to love it, and I used to really benefit from it." (Meera, Fieldnotes 2020) Salam echoed Meera's sentiments. Salam never stopped going, but she said "it makes it harder to go" when you have to work the rest of the week, and especially harder when she has to work on Saturdays. (Fieldnotes 2020) But Salam also echoed Leila's words: "*Hemma*." She said: "When you're in a place where everyone has the same goal, supposedly, it feels like your *Hemma* is heightened... going to a *Ma'had* tied me to a specific time, on a specific day, which makes me more consistent." (Fieldnotes 2020)

Despite the messiness, it is also worth noting that perhaps that idealized obligation to mother, and to continue to mother regardless of what one does, persists. One thing I noticed was that the most consistent women were also mothers. They show up everyday without fail, attending all the different classes. Although in some of the later years, some mothers no longer show up; but the majority, and especially earlier years, seem to struggle through in order to learn while still taking care of their babies. The baby keeps walking out of class, and their mother is trying to concentrate while following them around. She ends up ignoring her baby, and she has to listen to the teacher with echoes of her baby saying: "Mama, my toys..." How is that woman listening to the teacher with her baby crying so long? (Fieldnotes 2020) Perhaps to mother is to be guilty for all the things you could/should/would have done, but didn't/couldn't. Perhaps it's to be guilty with what you did, because it was/is/will never be good enough. These are merely some reflections I ponder on as I watch the mothers of the *Ma'had* struggling to quiet their children, to feed them, or to have them sit

still. These are reflections that have also occured to me, even when the mothers and children seem unusually calm. Even when everything seems to flow well, you go back to the time where they wouldn't and didn't—despite all efforts—and you wonder what it could mean and how it could feel to be the mother. And as I think about the mother, I think about the child—what could they be feeling, now? But eventually, these are just reflections and thoughts that have come about from observations. If I've pegged some emotions here or there, it must be because I am informed by more than just these observations. In this case, I wasn't just informed by, but I have *felt* Iman Mersal's (2019) words cut through me before when she describes her own experience being a mother:

> When there is a struggle between the self of the mother and the self of her child, then neither will be victorious: the dinosaur will win, "of course." This dinosaur is guilt. It appears that guilt may be the single feeling that unites all mothers in spite of their differences[4]. It is implicit in the distance between ideal and reality in relationships of filiation, in love, work, and friendship. It also emerges out of the distance between the idealized vision of motherhood in the dominant narrative and the many failures that accompany it in personal experience. Guilt is such a core feeling that it serves to define the mother's practices in her daily life. (p. 12)

> It is not just a juxtaposition between two elements within the identity of the mother-writer or the writer-mother, but a ripping apart, a struggle over time and energy. When the writer succeeds in being a mother for a day she will feel like a failure for all the reading and writing that she did not get done, and when she has a day to herself she will agonize over her selfishness. When she is able, on a third day, to write while her child sits on her knees, and to

play hide and seek with him while she thinks about how to change a word in a poem, there is no guarantee that she will not feel guilty or feel like a failure even while doing this. Moreover, there is no guarantee that her child will read what she wrote someday, or that he will not be angry like John, Elizabeth Costello's son. (p. 31)

It is from these lines that my questions surface. With these feelings that I think through what it means to be a mother in the *Ma'had*.

Albeit it seems like a strictly personal endeavour, my questions are also informed by the observations and conversations made within the *Ma'had*. They are pushed by the words of Omnia—relentlessly trying to calm her crying baby in the back of the classroom, trying to hear the teacher over the tears: "I am drained" ("أنا اتفرهدت"). (Fieldnotes 2020) With an exhausted exhale, Omnia throws herself back in the chair at the end of the classroom, after having placed her baby in the baby seat by the foot of the chair. Being drained but pushing through to manage to come to class, and stay there, was not only Omnia's struggle, but that of several other women I've come across in almost every single class. There was *always* a mother or two. Sometimes even three, with their babies crying or running around class—and sometimes, on the good days, sleeping soundly in their baby seats or on beds made of abandoned *Ma'had* chairs. I remember one daughter, seemingly 4 or 5 years old, stretched on two chairs at the back of the classroom, dozing off. As soon as she got up, she started asking for her mother—her question marking the brink of a possible outcry or meltdown. A woman got up, carried her, hugged her tight to calm her down, walked her about, and waited until her mother could take her. The mother finished what she was doing, and eventually got up and took her into her arms as she was released from the arms of the other woman. "In academic

spaces, collaborative work provides a safe space where vulnerabilities associated with mothering can be acknowledged and normalized and recast as a form of resistance." (Johnson Searcy and Castañeda, 2020, para. 10) Perhaps this is not true for all academic spaces, and although complexities of 'resistance'—or at least thinking through potentialities—are yet to be addressed throughout the upcoming chapter, the scenes previously recast are examples of these collaborative moments ensuing in spaces of learning that allow one to forgo the heaviness and burden of detachment from that space. Sounds of a baby playing, sleeping, weeping, laughing, or even participating was not part of the expected audial assemblage of a space of learning dedicated to adult women; but they are. As I go in in the afternoon, there is a girl (5-7 years old) sitting on the steps outside the entrance to the *Ma'had*. She rests her back on one of the columns, and has a phone in her hand. I can hear her playing a game or watching something on the phone. All the women are passing by her, no one wincing. No one talks to her. She's just there, like the steps, the column, and the entrance—no one asks them any questions. But the space becomes more than one for "women" as an imagined universality, and that category—as that of feminism in Butler's (1990) piece—"is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions." (p. 4) The *Ma'had* constantly becomes a more complexly arranged space, that is constituted by the different resonances comprised of the "affective process of people and things associating with each other, of having something to do with each other, of acting as components in the enactment of operations larger than themselves and their own particular functions and histories." (Simone and Pieterse, 2017, p. 16)

A little girl, around 5 or 6 years of age, sits in one of the Quran classes. The girl wore a veil, and stood next to her mother. She was quiet, and didn't move a lot. As the women recited, she

listened. Then once, she began reciting along with them. "*Yakhti*, your little one is reciting," the teacher says. (Fieldnotes 2020) What was the reason the children were there? And what were the conditions? If you ask their mothers, they have nowhere to leave them. If you ask *mu'allimah* Lama, it's not allowed. Yes, according to *mu'allimah* Lama:

> "Originally, I didn't allow the existence of children inside the classrooms unless their mothers could control them. Otherwise, there are rooms connected to the classrooms with screens and speakers so that the mothers with their children can attend and listen, and can see the whiteboard. Sometimes, they take shifts where one says 'my son is sleeping, can I leave them with you and attend?' to the others and they agree to watch him until she's done. (Fieldnotes 2020)

The accommodations were made because *mu'allimah* Lama explained that she had to make it easier for the mothers who would have to wait 3-4 years until they could get their children into a nursery so that they could to learn; but because this knowledge is important, and not obligatory, she tries to make it appealing and easy for them to attend; "especially because they are mothers and have priorities and responsibilities." (Fieldnotes 2020) Perhaps this itself is telling of the ideal/real contestations of the Muslim woman. You're a mother, and you have an obligation; and you can bring your child. But are the terms of their existence decided by the owner? Not necessarily. There were always kids in the classroom, and even when their mothers couldn't 'control them', they continued to exist. One time, when one of the children was being especially loud, the mother apologized to the teacher for disrupting the class. She didn't leave, and wasn't asked to; instead, the teacher said: "I am happy when children exist in these spaces." (Fieldnotes 2020) And they do. Continuously—silently,

and noisily. And they continue to not be just the mother's responsibility, but a sort of shared one. One time, a baby in class wakes up and starts to make noise. A woman gets up, goes to her and asks her "do you want your mother?" (Fieldnotes 2020) Following a nod of approval, the woman carries her and walks to her mother—now standing, looking at them, smiling, and takes her into her arms. She sits back, tuning back into the class. Class is still at way, and one mother peeps through the blanket she removed from on top of her baby, looks at her, smiles, and says: "I missed you." (Fieldnotes 2020) She then goes on to play with her. She's not the only one with a baby in class. There is another woman, simultaneously holding her baby, breastfeeding her under a cover as she sits in the front row of class. In the middle of class, *mu'allimah* Na'ima sees a child there with her mother and says: "May god bless her." (Fieldnotes 2020) She then goes on to say how happy she is, how much she admires how mums come and learn, and how this space is open to them and their children. She explains how great it is for a child to grow up in such a space, referring to them as seedlings (نبتة). The post-ideal Muslim woman does not entirely break from the expecations of the ideal, nor does she only follow through. The *Dar* allows for women to constantly negotiate the terms of their existence as Muslim women, mothers, friends, students etc. Perhaps mothering has taken a large section here because that is what is discussed most in the *Dar*, and is what is frequently assumed to be the most important responsibility for a woman. Perhaps this is true; but even with that in mind, it is still messy. The dynamics themselves reveal the complexity of subjectivties, and how they scontinously challenge, work with, negotiate, and reaffirm ideals; but through it all manage to bring to light alternative ways of imagining being studnets, being mothers, and being Muslim women.

Coronavirus Chronicles

The first time I heard the word 'corona' at the *Dar* was in March 2020. It was fairly new, and everyone was only just figuring out what it could mean to their presents and futures. *mu'allimah* Na'ima was the first one to mention corona in front of me. She enters class, and when the students try to kiss her and hug her, she rejects their greetings. She explains how she is no longer hugging or kissing, gives them a brief on how Corona affects older people, and reminds them what happened last time she was sick. Apparently, a while back she got so sick she couldn't leave the house for months which stopped them from covering the material they wanted to. Because of that, she explains that she will keep wearing her *niqab*, even in class, as a mask. "I have a weak immunity… and I want to continue to teach you." (Fieldnotes 2020) One of the students says: "You do not need to justify," to which *mu'allimah* Na'ima answers: "But I am your teacher, so I have to teach you." (Fieldnotes 2020) And so began my numerous encounters with corona in the *Dar*. It is still not exhaustive, since the *Dar* was closed soon after; but it made me think about the ways in which even spaces that would sometimes seem 'isolated' for some, are entirely embedded. Yet, the ways in which something like corona exists in the *Dar* is itself messy. After giving them the advice and warning to take care, and justification for her own precautions, *mu'allimah* Na'ima continued with an extra piece of advice: "never tell your son not to go to Friday prayers because of Corona. He should go, get sick, it's fine, God will cure him, we all get sick." (Fieldnotes 2020) It didn't make sense to me, yet somehow it did. It revealed some of the modes in which the women in the *Dar* make sense of the present viral clamour. One woman in *mu'allimah* Na'ima's class tells them about how a French newspaper was headlined: "Corona is afraid of the *niqab*" (she says in french, then translates).

(Fieldnotes 2020) She insists that she wanted all French people to read that paper because they were so terrified of the *niqab*, and now everyone is covering their face for Corona anyways. One of the students remarks that this is: "glory (عزة) to Islam." (Fieldnotes 2020) Almost all the women in class nod, or echo 'yes'. A victory was presented. None of the women in that class wore the *niqab*, besides the teacher; yet, it still signified something they stood for. Even during the messiest of times, strong meanings consolidate themselves one way or another.

Other consolidations were that of a form of othering. After the teacher prays that Corona ends, she explains that non-believers might not pray, and will still not get affected by Corona, because there is no relationship between praying and getting Corona, it is a *ibtilaa*[29] (إبتلاء) one must go through. Some people will get it, others will not. Praying will not eliminate your chances. Others who do not believe, nor pray at all, do not increase their chances. I discussed in the previous chapter the notion of *bid'ah*, and hinted at a form of juxtaposition drawn between those on the right path and those who are not. Perhaps within the conversations on corona lies a manifestation of this separation, and in parallel a consolidation of a specific ethical subject. Perhaps that subject exists, and perhaps it doesn't; yet, the discourse pertaining to that subjectivity still seeps throughout the conversation. Which is why moving forward, the women continuously ask about all the different, and new situations they find themselves in. They are eager to know what the religious stance and ruling on them might be. Questions they never thought they would ask, that make their way into class anyways. Questions that show how subjectivity is relational, and is constantly in flux. For example, a question about a specific prayer to make for corona, and a rejection by the teacher on the grounds of it being a *bid'ah*. Another question about TikTok. There's a video that's trending where

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[29] Arabic for trial.

people sneeze next to each other to scare one another. One woman's children did that, and got punished at school. It's forbidden. They had to be punished. The teacher recites the hadith on scaring others (الترويع), and explains how they are not allowed to scare each other, as Muslims. The women ask, and their questions are met with conceptions like "*ibtilaa*" that carry through in their lives even beyond the *Dar*. This concept itself stands as a clear embodiment of the formation and constructions of subjectivity in the *Dar* that is in constant interplay with forces and instances even beyond the spatio-temporal confines of the *Dar*.

Conclusion

The women of the *Dar* cannot even be grouped as such. They are all so different, even with the similarities. Like rhythms, repeating, but never precisely the same. Like rhythms, to capture one and deem it as standard or idealized is to cheat every other rhythm there is—and to hence eliminate an entirety of time and space. The women are not one, but many; each going through an entirely different set of life stories. And sometimes, they do get entangled. Especially with something like COVID that would inevitably entangle lifeworlds within and beyond all boundaries of the *Dar*. But while COVID seemed like a distant problem; in retrospect, it opened up more than anyone could have thought, very quickly. *mu'allimah* Youmna teased her class about not being committed enough, and not listening well. She tells them: "everytime I think about making these sessions on zoom, I ask myself what will this class do!" (Fieldnotes 2020) To which a student responds: "No, we want it live!" (Fieldnotes 2020) And all of them laugh. But the resounding of laughter soon faded till the space felt more silent. They had to shut down, it was safer that way. With the prospects of online learning

opening up, an entirely new space could be imagined and unraveled—but the time for that exploration is yet to come. What one can do is, and as I will attempt to do in the next chapter, is to think about the potentialities that already exist and manifest themselves—to think through what they might bring about, or what they open up. This entails thinking about the ways in which subjectivties and relations in the *Dar* open up ways to think alternatively about Muslim women as students of knowledge, but also to complicate the existing idealized discourse. The *Dar* is not only constructed by and offers an alternative space to *be*, but it also provides an alternative narrative to the literature and stories most abundantly available about a sort of ideal Muslim woman, to move past that and to recongize the post-ideal Muslim woman and what that entails as a lived reality. These alternative possibilities bring about potentialities that allow us to rethink being in the world, as Muslims, as women, as students, as teachers; and to rethink arrangements of spaces of knowledge, too. But I mention this here to remind myself—and everyone reading this—before the upcoming endeavour, to hold potentials loosely, even with strong-held hopes.

Chapter 3

al-Dar is Where the Heart Is

"The intention is what I bring in at the start of my action, so that the heart is present; and indeed it

is called heart (*Qalb*) because it constantly changes (*wa ma summiyah bi al Qalb ila li taqqalubuh*)."

(Mu'allimah Marwa, Fieldnotes 2020)

Figure 20. The Dar [Photograph]. Alia Shaddad.

"*Taqqalub*" comes from the root word "*Qalb*", meaning changing, turning, or flipping. *Qalb* also means heart. If one is able to physically capture 'the heart', to hold it in our hands and explore it, to figure it out, define it, and make sense of its entirety—it would still be impossible; if not for the absurdity of the claim, but for its ever-changing essence. *mu'allimah* Marwa talked about the importance of reigning in the heart before action; to set an intention by making the heart present. Everyone agreed, but everyone also recognized the difficulty. The heart is called '*Qalb*' in Arabic, meaning 'turning' or 'changing'. It's constantly shifting. Sometimes, one can make it as present as possible, to intend their actions. But also often, one unintentionally succumbs to the heart's transformations. And we often imagine affect as that instance; but it's not. It often extends and surpasses a specific moment. It oscillates between intentionality, and unintentionally. It is not in a vacuum. It projects the past into the present, and allows for the future to essentially trespass. It is duration. Drawing on Massumi, it is "a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential." (Shouse, 2005, para. 4) It is hard to put into words precisely what that means in the world, but I would like to try and unpack it through certain conversations, or even through different experiences and examples within the *Dar* that help us navigate our understanding of affect and its potential. I intend to unpack the "ordinary affects" that Kathleen Stewart (2007) writes about that show us the potential found in our everyday lives.

Maram is my friend Amina's relative, and I've come to know her through Amina. All three of us ended up going to the same art class, and would carpool together. On one of our rides, Maram asked me what I was studying and what my thesis was about; and as soon as I said it was about the *Dar*, I prompted a monologue from her that was almost an abstract for my thesis. By chance, I

discovered that Maram used to go to the same *Dar* I was going to. She told me how she used to go to another one before it, and she felt like it was too advanced for her. Wanting someplace that would break down knowledge easily, she started going to the *mu'allimah* Lama's *Dar*. She told me all about the space, how friendly everyone was, how nice it was that they were all women, that they could get their children, and that they were all like one family. She went on about how, during the time she went, she had gotten close to a group there and they used to hang out outside the *Dar* as well—which made her feel like that place was an entire community, supporting one another on their transformative journeys. "There's something about it." (فيه حاجة كده) (Fieldnotes 2020)

Massumi explores how affect "cannot be fully realised in language," because it "is always prior to and/or outside of consciousness." (Shouse, 2005, para. 4) It is "the body's way of preparing itself for action in a given circumstance by adding a quantitative dimension of intensity to the quality of an experience." (Shouse, 2005, para. 4) These affects are generated not in an instance, but through processes of everyday socialization and interactions. They reside in the body as capacities to act. These capacities are perhaps the potential that can be found in the everyday; potential that goes beyond the resistance narratives, and instead, flows with narratives of *being* in the world. It is a narrative of finding potential in the lived present. In understanding time as duration, we come to see how duration is in another sense the flow of affects, and the way in which affects are constantly crossing one another and intersecting due to the "affective work of memory [that] is just one among many forces that together constitute what gets refracted as the present: memory and the past emerge in mediated zones of visceral presence distributed across scenes of epistemological and bodily activity." (Berlant, 2011, p. 52) When the body interacts with the material world around it, and within a network of relations with both people and objects, it is constantly working with affects

arising not only in the spur of the moment with a seeming unconnectedness with other moments; but rather affects arising in the spur of the moment with connection to every other moment experienced, and is yet to be experienced. That "something" that Maram talks about, that others have mentioned, that I have felt emerge in different negotiations and expressions in the *Dar*, and that I have felt myself, is to me as mushroom picking is to Tsing (2015)—an imaginary, and a possibility. Tsing says that "it is time to pay attention to mushroom picking," a sentence that would seem nonsensical had it not been for the reason Tsing would go on to give: "Not that this will save us—but it might open our imaginations." (p.19) As such, I would like to suggest the same; that perhaps the kind of affective capacity and potential I describe within the realm of the *Dar* need not save us; it just has to 'open our imaginations' to the possibilities this kind of affect holds.

This is to be done with caution and critique, as it is not inconsequential. Maram went on to say that even though for the first two years she felt that sense of solidarity and community, by the third year she started to feel un-welcomed or out of place. The first couple of years, there were many women who looked like her—she explained. But starting the third year, she felt like most had started changing the way they dressed, looked, behaved, spoke; and although she didn't find fault in that, and wished to be like them, it wasn't her time. She explained that she felt like she was still "not there yet," and in that same space became two different lifeworlds, breaking that sense of belonging (Fieldnotes 2020). Maram later started going to another *Dar*, but instead of attending the '*Ma'had*', she opted for classes called "*halaqat hurra*". These classes are basically not part of the program at the *Dar*, and are instead just lessons that are open for anyone to join—no specific exams, or years. Maram tells me:

At the *Ma'had*, they become one community, all together, and it's closed off. Like I told you, when you start to reach later years in your study, you are either with them or you are someone who is different. At the open classes in the other *Dar*, because everytime new people come, there are those who are veiled, those who are not, some with abyas, some with niqab, there is everything. So it was more or less nicer and easier for me, and I was happy because I also didn't need to commit as much. There weren't rigid set times, or examinations; so I continue to go there till now. (Fieldnotes 2020)

Maram's story does not exist in isolation, and Farida had also mimicked similar sentiments. These instances help us understand the potential, while recognising its limitations; which eventually helps in the process of imagination, that has become so crucial in the present course of action. Imagination based on lived experience, rather than utopian ideals of practice; that kind of utopian thinking and imagination that disregards subjectivity, and ignores the realness of being in the world, that can become unrealistic in its scope of action. Utopia as an end, not process, can be important; but it is important to realize that the process can be very 'realistic' in terms of its 'practicability,' even if the end is so unimaginable (Weeks 2011). But to reach that understanding, unfolding the potentiality of everyday affects, and their limitations, is important.

Going back to what I mentioned before about the messiness of the everyday, it is hence when we imagine spaces with annihilated differences that we abstract what must not be abstracted—what must be rendered *real*, because it is. This is why I attempted to show this messiness of the space and the people, and everything in between, in the previous chapters. Now, I move on to think about the potential this arrangement offers and its limitations. Mainly, the theme of this

chapter lies on the notion of community and solidarity—which will be explored and elaborated on further. Perhaps it is also an ode to our vulnerability, and hence the greyness of it all. Perhaps of that precarity as "a state of acknowledgment of our vulnerability to others. [To recognize that] In order to survive, we need help, and help is always the service of another, with or without intent... We change through our collaborations both within and across species." (Tsing, 2015, p. 29) The idea of collaboration, instead of annihilation of difference. "Brown brought pickers together through a practice of translation that, rather than resolving difference, allowed difference to disturb too-easy resolution, encouraging creative listening." (Tsing, 2015, p. 254) Whether this is fully achieved in the *Dar* or not is subject to contestation; and I will attempt in this chapter to work through and unravel parts of these contestations—perhaps with a subjectively hopeful open-endedness that "reveal cracks in the local experience of life that can be mobilized toward alternative imaginaries." (Berlant, 2011, p. 68)

Alternative Aspirations, and Tracing Possibilities

They're things that happen. They happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters, and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment, and agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like something.

(Stewart, 2007, p. 2)

'Something that feels like something,' is what Maram described. A thing she felt that she could not explain in itself, but could give examples of. The next part is intended to be that which not necessarily captures that affective experience, but perhaps some of its elaborations or examples. Perhaps one of the most common words I have heard at the *Dar*, and that the women often would use when they try to elaborate on that indescribable thing, is 'love'. I base this on the multitudes of echoes, from both students and teachers of: "I love you for the sake of *Allah*." (Fieldnotes 2020) In one instance, and the one I choose to begin with here, was directed at me. I sat in my first *Quran* class, listening and observing. Everyone sat on desks, in a circle. The teacher tries to explain how the women should pronounce a word containing the letter 't' (ت), and so she explains that it's the same sound as the 't' in English. She asks one of the women to tell her how to say 't' in English, and when she does, the teacher jokes about it not sounding English. She then turns to me and says: "We are joined today by someone from the American University," and asks me to say the letter 't' (Fieldnotes 2020). I say it, and it also sounds all wrong; so we all laugh. Teasing me, the teacher says: "You won't leave here until we fix it, why else are you here?" As we laugh, *Hagga*[30] Nesma—a student in her mid-60s, with kind eyes and a warm smile—says: "No, after a while she will come when she loves to." (Fieldnotes 2020) I tell them I am happy being here, and I do want to learn, so the teacher says: "May *Allah* bless you, my dear." (Fieldnotes 2020) At that moment, I felt welcomed. I felt like I wanted to come again, if not for my fieldwork but for myself and for the people there. But beyond how I felt, the notion of 'love' here was used as a force that drives on to come. This love is deemed by *Hagga* Nesma as essential for someone to come, and to commit. I reflect on this as I reflect on the rest of the upcoming interactions; for it rings true that for many, there is an attachment to the space that is

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[30] This title is commonly given to older women as a form of respect.

pushed by a love of that knowledge and the people in it. It also rings true in many cases, where that love is no longer enough, or no longer exists; and that makes many women decide not to go. There are cases where there are things that happen out of someone's control, like with Noor and her wedding happening. But even when I talk to her after she stopped going, she says: "part of it is the *Suhba* (companionship). When I meet these people every week, I don't feel lost in life." Those words echoed with Asi's (2018), who writes:

> being able to meet new situations and challenges, for love gives the strength needed. Truly loving means mutual support and respect, it means being courageous and honest, it means carrying out love into the world and also nurturing and loving the community at the same time. (para. 10)

Thus understanding the love shared between the women as each other's companions as one that essentially 'guides' in a sense; but that guidance is less about making clear and firm decisions, and more about the ability to adjust to whatever challenges are met—even outside the confines of the *Dar*. Affective entanglements expanding, never being constricted within bounds or walls, but seeping into everyday life within the *Dar*, and without.

COMMUNITY/BELONGING

This companionship can also be understood as an establishment of a sense of community—and belonging. It is seen to be part of the knowledge process, where I remember one of the teachers insisting that the women form mini-groups to discuss the material and then to open up

reflections with the entire class—emphasizing the importance of sharing how they feel and what they have learned *together*. "Working collaboratively meant bearing witness to the fits and starts of ideas and to the roughest of drafts. Collaboration offers a space to build academic arguments in an atmosphere of exchange rather than a solitary echo chamber." (Johnson Searcy and Castañeda, 2020, para. 9) She adds: "Say what you have felt (استشعرتيه) has benefitted you, the students of knowledge extract countless benefits." (Fieldnotes 2020) This notion of togetherness is hence reiterated throughout the learning process. Knowledge becomes a shared experience, with collective conditions as opposed to it coming from one source or being the monopoly of each individual. When Maram spoke to me in the car, she felt that at some point she belonged there, and belonged to the people as much as the space. When Salam talked about the *Dar*'s resemblance to a home, she said: "I really feel at home in any *Dar* in general, because of that bond and community [gathering] over one unified goal." (Fieldnotes 2020) She goes on to describe this as a form of attachment that surprised her. She says: "*Subhan'allah*, even the older women... I love them, and have gotten so used to seeing them all the time." (Fieldnotes 2020) The sense of community extended beyond those she felt she would bond with; and it even extended beyond the confines of the classroom, or her own year. "[I feel that way] even with those who are not in the same year as I am, and the people who work at the *Dar*. I really do feel this bond and warmth, so much." (Fieldnotes 2020) Thus extending even beyond the realm of the students, to include the teachers and all those working there; virtually creating an imagination of a community composed of everyone in the *Dar*. That sense of community extends into an imagination beyond even the space of that *Dar* itself. Salam grounds her imagination in a duration that brings the past into the present into the future. She says: "I love how all of this actually used to

happen at the mosques[31]. I feel like all of the *Duur* should be more unified as a whole; and there should be some sort of unity, especially since the same teacher could teach at several places." (Fieldnotes 2020) But Salam also recognizes that this unified community is not easy, and is still vexed with political contestations:

> I know that everyone has their own ideology, especially with regards to disobeying the ruler, their [political] ideology, and about protests; but I feel like there still should be something like in the past, where the 'school' was the prophet—peace be upon him—himself, and everyone would learn from him. It's nice to have a place like in the past, with a playing area for kids, a place to eat in between classes, and things that make it easier for you; like [a place] to buy frozen food, or to buy anything else you need—Abayas, and so on. I feel this unconditional love. It's not deep love, but we all gather in the *Dar*, and no one wants any favours from anyone... This is nice. (Fieldnotes 2020)

Salam puts into words this possible affective imagination of such a space. An alternative perhaps to the way in which one could think about a place of knowledge—Islamic, or even otherwise. I remember myself thinking about my school experience, and how the bond I can remember was an us vs. them with the teachers. But here, the imagination and experience seems to extend to all members of the space, and even beyond that space itself. It is not without critique though; and there are many things to consider when observing what really happens. In a sense, I have also seen and felt what Salam tries to explain; but I also question this equality, in the sense of how much this feeling extends to everyone in that space. I recall how I would often observe the cleaning staff—whom I,

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[31] Referring to the time of the prophet and the followers, who had made communities of mosques.

unfortunately, did not get a chance to observe or talk to enough and hence cannot make definite statements about, but are still important to think about here. Ann Meiser (2017) explains how indigenous knowledge space, although more accessible, "not all members of a given society share it in the same way. In fact, it is necessarily heterogeneous, as it is organised by specific responsibilities and even internal power relations." (p. 10) Likewise, in the *Dar*, despite it being seemingly more accessible than other spaces of knowledge (and especially *al-Azhar*), and even though it reflects a sense of shared community, is still not free of different power relations. It does not have equal accessibility and, even all who do access will not feel the same inside. I also thought about what Maram says, about eventually leaving after not feeling like she belonged anymore. Salam, in a way, fits—at the very least, aesthetically—what Maram described as the woman in the *Dar* who could still belong after the 3rd year. For Maram, that woman dressed in abayas, she dedicates most of her time to learning and practicing; something Maram felt she could not always do. This is not to say that that idealized vision exists—even in Salam. Yet, still, Salam could appear to fit that imagined ideal that Maram saw herself as unfitting. One then thinks about that affective community, and how—and to whom—it extends to. This is not to say it is devoid of potential. Potentiality comes to be deliberated and unraveled with the unfolding of the ordinary. This unfolding is hence important to look at, and to sit with in order to think about, reveal or simply consider the possibilities that come. These possibilities need not be known for a fact, or cannot necessarily be judged clearly—but potential still exists. Stewart (2007) explains that the importance of these everyday, 'ordinary affects', if sound in considering "where they might go and what potential modes of knowing, relating, and attending to things are already somehow present in them in a state of potentiality and resonance." (p. 3) Hence, trying to think through these effects allows us to see the potential, one perhaps being

in bringing together people, with a recognition of the different subjectivities; and realizing that there is a sense of community, and love, that is not necessarily even 'deep' love. That part was also so important in that it broke down that charged description and declaration of 'love' that one feels is so major; and introduces another notion of love, one that has more to do with communal imaginations than with necessarily burning sentiments. It is more grounded, more accepting of what it is; and, perhaps even, more practical?

I think about it also as I reflect on the words of Farida, who answers the question of "why did you keep going?" She says: "I kept going because it had helped me at the time with my faith crisis, and with my own personal problems. It helped me reconcile everything with everything." (Fieldnotes 2020) But even as she explained to me her attachment to the place for sometime, it wasn't solely based on love, community, and belonging—as Salam, Maram, and Noor. Yet, for Farida, it was also affective.

> When I didn't have the motivation to go, and when I didn't want to go anymore, I still stayed for like a year because I would say to myself that this is the only thing that I do [for God], so I might as well... There is this mixed feeling of is it actually my choice, or is it because it's an obligation so that I have to do it. (Farida, Fieldnotes 2020)

Obligation, and even guilt, are also affective experiences that end up translating to staying—revealing the complication of saying words like 'community' and 'love' without thinking through other affective experiences that make someone go, and stay—and eventually even, leave.

These affective experiences can also be rendered laborious. I think through Massumi's (2003) explication of affect as

> experiencing the eventfulness and uniqueness of every situation, even the most conventional ones, that's not necessarily about commanding movement, it's about navigating movement. It's about being immersed in an experience that is already under way. It's about being bodily attuned to opportunities in the movement, going with the flow. It's more like surfing the situation, or tweaking it, than commanding or programming it. (para. 27)

This description of affect invites us to look at the ways in which students control their organic bodily flows and movements as labour—labour of discipling the bodies. This labour is affective because it deals with the affective responses of the students, and the ways in which they would—in the moment—express themselves, versus what they have to do in the *Dar*. In the previous chapter, Noor told me about her *'Hemma'* (همة) and the effort she makes to go, and Soha told me about her forgoing free time on the weekend. These instances express what the students at the *Dar* have to do: to put in effort to go against what they would affectively do—staying in place, and being lazy.. Instead of resting or making other plans, affective labour is also underway, allowing for the women to continue to exist in this space. Belonging.

But sometimes, these affects are even expressed more ordinarily than in grand words. Meera told me: "I used to love it, (عمتا). It was nice (لذيذ), and it made me committed every week because you learn new things, and the people there were nice (لطاف، عادي)... I used to love it (عمتا), and I used to benefit from it, and I feel like I will start going again (عادي)." (Fieldnotes 2020) Meera talks in an ever-so laid-back tone. No more grand words, full of complex meanings, and loaded with

contestations. Or even if there were, Meera simplified it. When I talked to her, it felt like banality was affective. It felt not as charged coming from Meera; but it still opens up questions of belonging and the ways in which this sense is enacted, felt, and experienced.

SOLIDARITY/SUPPORT/COLLABORATION

Even though Farida didn't feel like she belonged, there was still a sense of obligation—an obligation to support. She recalls a story where one woman in her *Ma'had* group on WhatsApp sent a message asking the teacher if it was permissible to mortgage her house, because both she and her husband were facing financial difficulties. She referred her to ask someone else, telling her that she is not experienced enough on the matter to tell her what to do. They then continued to pray for her in the group, and on their own. Farida didn't really like this. She felt like the *Dar* functioned as a sort of community, and should have helped the woman collectively, using monetary means or any other forms of material assistance beyond prayers. Perhaps this was one of the moments that made Farida feel like she didn't belong to that community anymore. As I talked to her about it more, I felt a sense of her having had hope in that community, and then losing it. She told me she wanted to, initially, send a text message to *mu'allimah* Lama to ask her how they can help. She eventually opted not to. I never understood exactly why, but the couple of times I asked her about it, she gave a shrug of indifference, and moved on—perhaps the same one she would give the *Dar* itself.

Despite this example, there were still other manifestations of solidarity or support that existed in the *Dar*. To me, as to others, perhaps the most striking example was that of the market or showroom. It is a room in the *Dar*, and it exists in most of the other *Duur* as well. This room

contains things one would imagine exist, and others that I would never have guessed. Fitted sheets, duvet covers spatulas, whisks, glassware, toys, abayas, summer dresses, pajamas, lipstick, face masks, bath salts, candles, accessories, henna for hair, henna for skin, snacks, scrunchies, frozen vine leaves, frozen chicken, tupperware, and children's clothes. Salam saw this as one of the expressions of the 'unconditional love' she described. Farida also appreciated it; she tells me: "I feel like it is one of the things I used to love the most, because they acknowledge that you have needs, and that you need to eat." (Fieldnotes 2020) The showroom has become an essential part of any *Dar*—as *mu'allimah* Lama explained. "Even though it is illegal, it does provide some income for the *Dar*, and the students can come and leave with frozen food, abayas, scarves, clothing for their kids, bed sheets... I fulfil their needs, but it's not for profit." (Fieldnotes 2020) She adds that she decided to have one because she used to benefit from it herself when she went to another *Dar* before, and she liked to have something like that in her own *Dar*. This market also becomes symbolic of solidarity/support for the mothers and the women in the *Dar* who want to be able to make it, while juggling responsibilities of the house or of their children. This kind of support eases that guilt of motherhood, especially, that I talked about in chapter 2. That guilt that Mersal (2019) describes as being so definitive to motherhood: "Guilt is such a core feeling that it serves to define the mother's practices in her daily life." (p. 12) It allows the women to finish their shopping, and even get food so that they can come and learn what they want to without worrying about their obligations. This support also extends beyond that space, and moves into the classes whereby the women are often helping one another with their kids. During class and break times, they would take turns to hold each others' babies so that they all get a chance to focus/take a break. Maram told me how, even though her children were old enough to leave at home when she went, she still appreciated that if she ever needed it she could

get them. She also reflected on her time in another *Dar*—one that belonged to *al-Azhar*, and is quite

different in its arrangements (it is not all women, for example, but mixed; and the teachers are all

men). She told me that she could never imagine going there with kids, and if she had needed to she

would have not been able to attend classes there; instead, this *Dar* made it so mothers could feel

supported and welcomed with their responsibilities, and with the messines of being a mother. I

would like to return to what I mentioned in the previous chapter about how in "academic spaces,

collaborative work provides a safe space where vulnerabilities associated with mothering can be

acknowledged and normalized and recast as a form of resistance." (Johnson Searcy and Castañeda,

2020, para. 10) Perhaps, I would shy away from the term resistance, and would rather think about

it—once again—as a scene of potentiality, providing imaginations of what spaces of knowledge can

look like, and how collaborations, solidarities, and support can exist and be maintained within it.

FLUIDITY/FLEXIBILITY

The food provided at the *Dar* is not only relevant for the women outside it, but also while

being inside. Farida says: "I used to like being able to get food, and then taking it inside the *dars*

(class), and you can go make a hot drink and come back; I liked that environment." (Fieldnotes 2020)

Although eating and drinking might be so basic, and would not trigger any meaning for some; but it

shows a form of flexibility and fluidity in the space that breaks down the assumed rigidity of spaces

of knowledge. I think back to my days at school, and constantly sneaking in food under desks or in

backpacks. Heads swooshing around, scared of getting caught. Muffling bags of chips, and chewing

slow enough to hide and fast enough to not get caught. This was different; and there is a comfort in

being able to do your basic wants and needs without fearing being caught. I thought a lot about how such a minor thing can mean so much to several of those around me; but eating together is a social ritual that does bring people together. It does allow for a sense of community to be had. It is affective. I remember the teachers often commenting about how they would have never been able to eat, drink, or even chew gum in front of their own teachers; but here, it was different—and most of the women felt it. But that flexibility is also not always the norm. "There are things that every teacher doesn't like us to do, or there's a code that every teacher has, and she likes it more when we don't do these things. Like chewing gum, for example. I personally like chewing gum, but I'm just like 'ok, I won't chew gum,'" Farida says—showing that even that sense of shared space of eating, or that flexibility, is not generalizable (Fieldnotes 2020).

This is not to say that it doesn't also exist. On the contrary, Salam feels that the *Dar* caters to so many different types of people; not just in the provision of food and spaces to eat, but even the schedules. She says: "I love how there is this flexibility, because what's important to them is that you receive this knowledge, and so they try to make it easy for so many people. This flexibility caters to all types of people who take this seriously. If you're completely freeing yourself for this, or if you want to learn but don't have time." (Fieldnotes 2020) And Salam acknowledges that this is not specific to this *Dar*, but that even "the *Duur* on a large scale vary in difficulty so that everyone can find what they want." (Fieldnotes 2020) This flexibility includes classes varied in difficulty, length, and the ability to choose to be examined or not. One can opt out of an examination track if they don't want to, and to just come and listen. They can also choose to be examined to get feedback, or as a revision. When women who work wanted to come, classes were opened on Saturdays. Even with the pedagogy itself, there is room to be flexible on the part of the teachers. I remember how, in

almost all of mualimah Lama's classes, when she is asked a question, and a debate arises, she tells the

student: "great, this is so simple, this is your homework." (Fieldnotes 2020) She then asks them to do

their research and come back with answers or debates backed by sources. She always says: "If

someone isn't interested in knowing, don't look it up. If you're interested, don't wait for someone

else to start searching. Who's interested in finding the truth?" and the women would raise their

hands, to which she says: "Then everyone does research." (Fieldnotes 2020) It's true, I've seen her

listen to them, and want to hear what they have to say. On numerous occasions she's confessed to

learning so much from her students and from teaching, and always emphasizes how she always keeps

learning—even as a teacher. One time, she also insisted the students look something up, and said:

"The benefit you get from researching is more than what you get from what I say." (Fieldnotes 2020)

Breaking down this assumed singly directional pedagogy of teacher-to-student. The relationship

between students and teachers is often always traversing fluidity. I remember hearing, for the first

time, *mu'allimah* Lama telling the students: "I bear *Allah* witness to my love for you all." (Fieldnotes

2020) I continually heard this from all of them; from almost every teacher, and from many

students—shared with one another. There were relational assumptions in my head that broke down

frequently. I even remember being wide-eyed when one teacher comes in, and tells them how she

gained 5kg since the start of the new year. They discuss weight loss tips before class starts. When

they're done, the teacher looks over and says: "How are you, beauties? (ازيكم يا قمرات)—and class

officially commences (Fieldnotes 2020). Even when the students sidetalk, eat loudly, walk into class

late, the reactions are often different from my expectations. An example, that did not only happen

once, was when a student came in late, and so *mu'allimah* Marwa tells her: "you're so late, beautiful;

should you be so late?" and when the student seems timid, *mu'allimah* Marwa tells her: "I'm just kidding, please come in," and they all laugh (Fieldnotes 2020).

But Farida had the most to say about the way teachers act in relation to the students. Farida says:

> I don't like the way they interact with us. Aside from the fact that I do like some of them, I feel like they see themselves a lot. They would say 'if you do these things with my teacher, she would've made you leave.' The older teachers would say 'you haven't seen the places we used to study at' or 'if my teacher saw you she would be shocked; we would've never done these things.' (Fieldnotes 2020)

The way the teachers speak about themselves establishes their authority as 'the teacher'—the one who's already been taught, and has learned from her own teachers before. She employs stories from her own experience to show how she must be perceived just as her own teachers were perceived by her. This is one of the basic forces that construct the teacher as such. Within the institution, this discourse affirms the power relations. The authority that the teacher establishes in the *Dar* is consequential. Farida said:

> They give themselves too many excuses for things that aren't excusable. For example, the lecture starts at 4 sharp, the teacher *should* be there. Every time they're late, they make all the other lectures after them run late as well...Once your lecture ends, I get a break to do whatever I want, or to go to the bathroom... you can't decide because the next teacher hasn't come yet, then you get extra time to finish what you want to finish. Little things that upset

me, and I feel like in class they are the rulers. They are the only ones who say what we do and what we don't do. (Fieldnotes 2020)

Farida, who had appreciated the ability to drink in class, also went on to say:

> There was such a weird thing; they had mugs specifically for the teachers, and mugs for us. That was so strange to me; it was like, what? Their mugs were gold and looked so nice, so one time I took one and someone told me 'oh, by the way, these are the teachers'. And I felt like, what? We are all human beings, you know. (Fieldnotes 2020)

She laughed, but it seemed to bother her. Farida often had an issue with the teachers; despite her respecting a couple and loving them so much, as she told me. But for others, she felt like there was a sense of invalid authority, or a problematic power relation that made her uncomfortable. Farida often commented on how the teachers would come in late, and would not apologize:

> It made me so angry because these specific teachers were often the most strict, and would get so mad if we would talk, or if someone came in after them. These things would make me feel like, no, be flexible because we are here to learn about our religion, and that process should be respectful. (Fieldnotes 2020)

Perhaps, the issue was not, to her, a matter of the teachers not being super disciplined, and more to do with the lack of reciprocation of this flexibility. Despite the above examples of a certain flexibility, when it came down to other times, there was still some rigidity to the space. Noor, who didn't show me as much frustration as Farida, also commented: "If I were talking with you at home, for example, I could lie down on the couch as we talk; but when we're talking in the *Ma'had*, I try to

sit properly," and that "Inside, I try to not check my phone a lot if they can see me." (Fieldnotes 2020) Additionally, even the teachers at some point would highlight this sense of respect that needed to exist from the students to their teachers. One time, *mu'allimah* Lama gave a lengthy speech to the students at the start of *mu'allimah* Marwa's class about the importance of respecting teachers, and bringing complaints to the administrators/herself, so she can take care of it. She details how problematic it gets when the women start talking amongst themselves, and feeding each other's anger instead of going to her; and then sometimes dropping out of the *Ma'had* over something that can be easily resolved. She continues to lecture them on the traits of a student of knowledge, and how they should behave with their teachers. It even became problematic at some point, even for me, when *mu'allimah* Marwa told me not to tell the women about my research because they won't understand, and that if I need any of them, she will tell them herself. She's trying to be helpful, or sees it as such, but it was still highly problematic to think that teachers often saw themselves as having the capacity to decide these things for students. This capacity extended even more to *mu'allimah* Lama, when she refused at first to let the students know that I was conducting research at all. I eventually convinced her to tell them, but only because of the IRB. Again, it wasn't her trying to control or manipulate the women, but she feared security-related consequences. Nevertheless, just the notion of that decisive capacity is problematic, and needs to be considered when thinking about these affective trajectories, and potentialities, within the *Dar*.

Conclusion

I have tried, in this chapter, to explore the different affective potentialities that come out of this space; ones that relate to its alternativeness, but that also contribute to it. I have tried to highlight some of these possibilities, while still trying to keep some open-endedness. This open-endedness is not a feat of laziness, but one that recognizes that "the world is not a solid continent of facts sprinkled by a few lakes of uncertainties, but a vast ocean of uncertainties speckled by a few islands of calibrated and stabilized forms," (Latour, 2009, p. 245) and it is in these uncertainties that potentialities arise that we could never calibrate or plan for. This is to say that perhaps the importance of looking at the potentialities of this space is not to say that these were carefully planned to act as such. Instead, these alternative arrangements that can be read as potential to rethink spaces of knowledge, come to be through the relationships that are formed and the different subjectivities and experiences coming together. This chapter has been an attempt to understand potentialities as they happen in the everyday; the everyday that is not always calculated, and is mostly messy and unruly. The everyday where life happens, and where bursts of potential break through it regardless of what we might think or hope. The *Dar* is an alternative imagination not because of clear instruction or intention, but through being in the world and just by existing. But it's also worth stressing that its alternativeness has some element of planning; and I recall how—as I mentioned before—*mu'allimah* Lama wanted to create this space to serve as that alternative. It was meant to be part of the genealogy of Islamic spaces of knowledge, but one that would be different to the ways that most people had been accustomed to. So there was some intention; but just as she intentionally made a rule to not allow kids to join classes. However, just as

we see and hear the kids all throughout these pages, so do we see the way the everyday reconfigures intentions, holds all the 'ordinary affects' we don't necessarily dwell on, and always emits potential along the way.

An Alternative?

Attempted Conclusion, and Hopeful Unfoldings

"To me the important thing is not to offer any specific hope of betterment but, by offering an

imagined but persuasive alternative reality, to dislodge my mind, and so the reader's mind, from the

lazy, timorous habit of thinking that the way we live now is the only way people can live. It is that

inertia that allows the institutions of injustice to continue unquestioned."

(Le Guin, 2004, p. 416)

Instead of thinking about grand ways to change, to dream of revolution, to constantly pick

out acts of resistance, perhaps sitting with the present by simply *being,* and accepting that, is the

most generative form of hopefulness. To think of the intricacies of the everyday, as opposed to

grandiose utopic 'events'. To do so by centering the body that is "involved more actively, more

intimately, and more intricately in social processes than theory has usually allowed." (Connell and

Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 851) By looking at bodies as they traverse different spaces and through their

affective entanglements with the world, one comes to see the "complex and relational

subject-subject, subject-object combinations." (Khoja-Moolji, 2017, p. 395) To consider an approach

to explore the possibilities emerging from

> all the bodies, the lines of things on the move, the widespread joking, the sonorousness, how
>
> any line of a life vies with an unwitting ungluing, how things get started, how people try to
>
> bring things to an end, why thought as such might become an add-on or window dressing,

why conceptuality might take radically different forms, or why it matters that attention

sometimes slows to a halt to wait for something to take shape. (Stewart, 2017, p. 196)

To challenge the narrative that one must be in a certain way, and instead to think of ways that being is already so affectively charged with the power of potential. To live change, instead of rigidly planning it. Sometimes, it is important—or even necessary—to plan it out, and to think about the politics of actions and of being itself. However, the acceptance that life happens anyways is not surrendering to the impossibility of the plan, but a hopefulness of it persisting nevertheless—despite every single thing that says otherwise. It is to dissolve "the idea, the hope, the belief, that we can see to the horizon, that we can see long distances. It erodes the idea that by taking in the distance at a glance we can get an overview of a single reality." (Law, 2004, p. 10) But as Law continues, we would learn a lot more about a multitude of realities, and we would be making way to participate in their formations. There will still be an active way to think through and work with things, with less rigidity. This flexibility allows a constant reinventing of what one can do, and allows for imaginations that challenge the status quo—while still being kind to the bodies that still live.

Romanticization Withdrawals

The world is still tentative, charged, overwhelming, and alive. It is not a good thing or a bad thing. It

is not my view that things are going well but that they are going.

(Stewart, 2007, p. 128)

This is the most strongly held belief that endured with me throughout fieldwork, and as I wrote the chapter on potential. The notion that none of this is to detail a 'better' alternative, or to pass judgment—although I do not reject judgement, as it is an important political consideration. But, in an attempt to move past romanticized expectations and explications of the *Dar*, I want to highlight the notion that things are going. Everyday things happen, affects arise, and rhythms ensue. One cannot always deem them as revolutionary, or reject them as invaluable. Instead, there is often potential. Even with concepts like 'love', that could be so easily rejected in 'academic' literature as wishful thinking. The concept of love is not even an innovation. "Parts of the world are caught in our ethnographies, our histories and our statistics. But other parts are not, or if they are then this is because they have been distorted into clarity." (Law, 2004, p. 2) Sometimes, we need not to distort acts into clarity to give them this quality of being an action. Practice often precedes the language we might want our practice to be enveloped with. We might already be practicing novelty, with an absence of a language to encapsulate it. There are possibilities in present action—in practice. We live, before thinking of, change. We might lack the language, but the concepts around us are not lacking. There is always capacity to act, especially when the subject is at the center of analysis. "Like many mushroom pickers, [the Matisman] has explored the limit spaces of capitalism, neither properly inside nor outside, where the inability of capitalist forms of discipline to fully capture the world is especially obvious." (Tsing, 2015, p. 278) And with this possibility of the creation of some form of 'limit spaces of capitalism', love, and affect, makes its way in this narrative. "Each attempt to speak or even write about love is inevitably linked to a profound difficulty, to an anxiety: words are always insufficient," (Horvat, 2016, p. 8) but there is always the capacity, and the acts of love that forgo language altogether and instead exist and persist anyways. That is the potential love has to

offer. I started out thinking of love as an emotion; which is an idea that quickly fizzled and was replaced with an understanding of love as affect. Love as this "fall" we experience, that is not controlled and that we don't think through. But love is more than that. It is not just affect, but it carries affective capacity. If love is this 'energy of warmth and solidarity', then it is a relational energy that incites affective responses. Love is the capacity for affect, and so with love there is always a regeneration and reinvention of affect. "This is the true meaning of "falling in love." We take the risk, whatever the consequences might be. Even if we are aware that this fatal encounter will change the very coordinates of our daily lives, we insist on it precisely because of that." (Horvat, 2016, p. 13) This power that love holds, is what Hard and Negri propose as

> a key force that can help us release the political potential of this multitude. Love, they argue, is a generative power that enables people to form alliances across alterity, allowing us to create political goals in common. Love is a vital part of the political project of the multitude as it offers the possibility for self-governance and collective transformation. (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 57)

Love offers a narrative that works with difference, and hence works in praxis. It is a narrative that has within its capacity the power to encapsulate and work with the real and not the abstract. Love's potential is that it is a power that allows for an affective capacity to emerge, where affect can invent and reinvent itself constantly and consistently, even as capital tries to subsume it. It has the capacity and power that is characteristic of capital, and that is the ability to rework and reconfigure. Love hence becomes quite like revolution; both rejecting habit, both "a form of eternal dynamism and at the same time fidelity to the first encounter. It is a tension, or better, a sort of dialectics: between

dynamism (this constant "invention) and fidelity (to this fatal and unexpected crack in the world)." and just as "The moment when a revolution stops to reinvent, not only social and human relations, but stops reinventing its own presuppositions, we usually end up in a reaction, in a regression," so does love. (Horvat, 2016, p. 9) It is this relationship of love and revolution that makes love the potential for it operates in the same manner and hence is revolution in and of itself; but is also grounds for the possibility of revolution to take place because love has already fostered what revolution fosters: hope, solidarity, strength, power, and collective. Love is not simply an emotion; but it is power that prompts affective responses that incite forms of emotional labour that are important and necessary for the overcoming of alienation, and in finding collective solidarity. As Wharton (2009) said, "not all caregiving in the workplace is exploitative," (p. 154) and it is in caregiving that is not exploitative that traces of love, and revolution, can be found. Considering these affects, it's important to also realize how

> there's a politics to being/feeling connected (or not), to impacts that are shared (or not), to energies spent worrying or scheming (or not), to affective contagion, and to all the forms of attunement and attachment. There's a politics to ways of watching and waiting for something to happen and to forms of agency—to how the mirage of a straightforward exercise of will is a flag waved in one situation and a vicious, self-defeating deflation in another (as when someone of no means has a get-rich-quick daydream—a daydream to be free at last—that ends them up in jail). There's a politics to difference in itself—the difference of danger, the difference of habit and dull routine, the difference of everything that matters. (Stewart, 2007, p. 16)

Thus, I recognize that this discussion on potentialities is in itself a political decision, and not an obvious given. It is based on the rejection of thinking about religion as separate from what we deem as 'ordinary'. Even Salam suggested a difference when she said—about going to the *Dar* as being: "to put dunya (life) on pause, at least for some time." (Fieldnotes 2020) But it is never like that, as evidenced with all of the above. "The greatest failure of modernity — one that Wittgenstein sensed [98]— has been the continuous desire to move the world toward an increasingly controlled future: such a failure issues from the belief that every problem we meet must have a solution." (Asad, 2020, p. 430) Instead of doing so, one lets go of this detailed future plan, and thinks through the everyday and the ordinary with less rigidity than that of constantly dealing with 'a problem'. Not only so, but of constantly figuring out a solution, as though it is always already in our assumed capacity to solve.

But to do so is not to remain uncritical, or to romanticize the everyday or its potential. I want to highlight that I have tried throughout these chapters to alternate viewpoints and bring about as many discussions as possible, in order to remain critically hopeful. However, I have also tried to move past what Ortner (1995) refers to as "sanitizing politics," and to

> recognize that resistors are doing more than simply opposing domination, more than simply producing a virtually mechanical reaction … They have their *own* politics—not just between chiefs and commoners or landlords and peasants but within all the local categories of friction and tension: men and women, parents and children, seniors and juniors; inheritance conflicts among brothers; struggles of succession and wars of conquest between chiefs; struggles for primacy between religious sects; and on and on. (pp. 176-177)

A rejection of such and "the absence of analysis of these forms of internal conflict in many resistance studies that gives them an air of romanticism, of which they are often accused (for example, Abu-Lughod 1990)." (Ortner, 1995, p. 177) This entails moving past the resistance narrative, and opening up space for more to unravel. To recognize that, these chapters—for example—are very much political, and are vexed with different meanings; but they cannot be placed in the romanticized narrative of resistance when that is not what life as lived is. It is not how being in the world is, even if parts of it may be.

The relationships formed in the *Dar* are complex. They are messy. Even notions of 'love' are not the idealized visions of the words. Eric Fromm describes love: "If I truly love one person I love all persons, I love the world, I love life. If I can say to somebody else, "I love you," I must be able to say, "I love in you everybody, I love through you the world, I love in you also myself." (Asi, 2018, para. 10) But in the *Dar*, even when we talk about love and its potential or any sort of affective potential, it should not be through the filter of romanticized resistance. One can even see them as "only pieces of an argument about the centrality of optimistic fantasy to surviving in zones of compromised ordinariness. And that is one way to measure the impasse of living in the overwhelmingly present moment." (Berlant, 2010, p. 116) However, one can account for what Berlant says while still admitting the existence of potential but remaining skeptical. It's to approach what happens with acceptance, and critique. It is to realize that sometimes this love will not carry the potential across differences. Sometimes students and teachers will no longer belong, and they will leave. Sometimes, the potential we see does not see what we hope through. Sometimes, it stays encapsulated within the *Dar's* walls; but other times it floods through its doors. It sometimes means that students will stay stuff like: "it's so funny how happy everyone was when Corona hit China, and

thought they deserve to get corona in China because of what they do; but that at the end, we got Corona too because everytime we choose to look at what others do, and we never look at ourselves." (Student, Fieldnotes 2020) It is to accept the mess, and to understand that "an experience of transcendence may arrive unexpectedly even in small moments of everyday life, striking with surprise." (Mattingly, 2018, p. 174)

What, now?

If truth by itself is not a gold standard, then perhaps there may be additional *political* reasons for preferring and enacting one kind of reality rather than another. Such, at any rate, is a possibility.

(Law, 2004, p. 13)

I do not claim this research to be the ultimate truth about this space or the women there. However, the reason to explore it, the ways in which and the possibilities considered are always, of course, political. Perhaps, what comes next ought to be further exploration of this space and its multiple intelinkings—especially since so much of the literature I found did not even mention it. This further exploration would allow for an exploration, as well, of the different realities one could consider—and hence all the different possibilities. There are still so many questions left unanswered, and gaps in my own research. Perhaps the most prominent one having to do with the state, its relationship, history and present contestations—or even alignments—with this space. Also, the post-2011 and post-2013 dynamics in these spaces, and how they have heavily influenced relationships within and across them. There have been partial intentional silences for reasons

beyond me; but I thought it necessary to imply, and feel it crucial to be explored when the time for it comes. I do not only say this out of my own convictions, but also because almost all my interlocutors mentioned one viewpoint of that relationship—even when I didn't necessarily ask. Furthermore, there also needs to be more work done to move with the women across spaces, beyond the *Dar*, in a more detailed way perhaps than what I managed to provide. I tried to show several aspects of their lives, but still feel like there is so much more left unsaid—for a lack of time, trust, or sometimes just because to capture all in words is not possible. I also think that one of the things that <u>need</u> to be unpacked are perhaps more viewpoints. One of the most critical ones for me was that of the staff at the *Dar*—those who do not own the place, teach, or are students. The cleaning staff, and the desk staff that all cater to this space's constant functioning. Although my fieldwork did provide some insight, it felt insufficient to write about as it would not be enough to tell the story—or even one version of it. Finally, it is perhaps important to look further into the dynamics between this *Dar* and others; since, the more fieldwork was done, the more spaces I found that were not identical to it. Instead, I have heard multiple stories of different ones that seem entirely different from this *Dar*—and perhaps these, as well as the relationships they have, are important to look further into.

The importance of doing all of this is trying to remain critical and move beyond category work that has influenced the ways in which we understand the world. In a world where "natures, cultures, subjects, and objects do not preexist their intertwined worldings," (Haraway, 2016, p. 13) our enforcement of categories for representation does not allow us to see the intertwining or worldings that Haraway speaks of, and the possibilities that arise from letting go of category-work and instead looking at affective entanglements that are as infinite as the instances of affective encounters and interactions. It is important to note that this process of tracing is to enable us to

"stage moments when it could become otherwise," while recognizing that "shifts in affective atmosphere are not equal to changing the world." (Berlant, 2010, p. 116) Instead of looking at affect the same way one looks at the representation discourse—that usually tends towards resistance and change, tracing affect and the possibilities that come forth can instead be a means of what Haraway (2016) calls "staying with the trouble" (p. 4). This process of affect-driven research is best portrayed by Richa Nagar's (2014) own endeavour in *Muddying the Waters*. Throughout the text, Nagar (2014) is not only critical of what it means to produce knowledge about different peoples' lives; but also translates the raw affects that are entangled throughout the process. She most eloquently explicates on the notion of 'dialogue' that she suggests is part of the ethnographic process, saying:

> At the same time, the promise of this continued dialogue, this patching and quilting between us—and between fragments of our multiple worlds that haunt us and make us—is precisely what makes me hopeful about narration through words—written, imagined, and felt; about sharing pieces in which chaos and dissonance, silence and mourning do not have to be analytically separated, translated, or made visible; about the process of finding faith, meaning, and languages together so that we can make ourselves radically vulnerable as we create an honest dialectic between our "internal" struggles—of making sense of our souls, our intimate silences, betrayals, nightmares (the uttering of which has been permanently postponed at times)—and our "external" struggles that involve our associations with other souls, their silences, hopes, fears, and sufferings. (Nagar, 2014, p. 41)

Not only does she lay out her reflections so poignantly; but she also follows through with her suggestion to recognize "all theorizing as an exercise in storytelling," and, hence, also recognize the

possibility "that the epistemic violence of existing paradigms and frameworks can be resisted, mitigated, or confronted by telling stories differently." (Nagar, 2014, p. 161) Indeed, Nagar tries to make her act of storytelling more engaged. With this, she recognizes the radical vulnerability that comes with the act of telling stories differently. This radical vulnerability and its interplay with situated solidarity entails a form of ethnographic practice that depends on an immersive experience that requires the ethnographer to render themselves vulnerable, and then to enact a solidarity based on their immersion. This act of vulnerability is not to paralyze one from going about ethnography, but is rather to recognize the existence of the ethnographers' body that is very much part of the affective arrangements and entanglements that they attempt to retell. If we are to resist the modernist categories in ethnographic writing, then we must be able to embrace this sense of vulnerability that comes with it. In doing so, the ethnographers' vulnerable self becomes situated within a dynamic space of rhythms that they can hence enact a form of solidarity within—and then translate into stories of affective encounters, filled with all the messy details of life as lived in the everyday and the "foregrounded time of the nonevent, the sheer passage and duration of living in "real time"." (Tadiar, 2013, p. 32) They offer the potentiality of exploring "multiple transversal alliances across communities: many recompositions of the human and new ways of becoming-world together." (Braidotti, 2017, p. 41) On a final note, this also entails being critical of affect to avoid theorizing "whiteness as the official human affect," for example. (Khoja-Moolji, 2017, p. 386) Instead, it is to use the tracing of affects in ethnography to shed light on the "bastardized, ex-, incomplete, and resolutely open-ended" (Bessire, 2017, p. 200) subject that has all too often been erased by categories. It is to realize the potentialities in embracing narratives and testimonies that "unsettles

this erasure." (Bessire, 2017, p. 200) It is to remain hopeful as one stays with the trouble, and to keep

hold of imaginations of what could be through and by the potentials already pulsing in the everyday.

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