
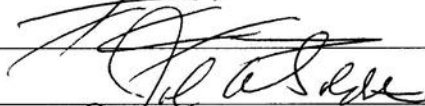
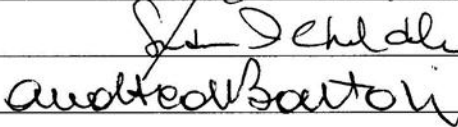


POLITICAL SHIISM IN THE ARAB WORLD: RITUALS, IDEOLOGIES, AND  
POLITICS

by

Jana El Horr  
A Thesis  
Submitted to the  
Graduate Faculty  
of  
George Mason University  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
The Requirements for the Degree  
of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Conflict Analysis and Resolution

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Fall Semester 2012  
George Mason University  
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Political Shiism in the Arab world: Rituals, Ideologies, and Politics

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

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## **DEDICATION**

In memory of my father...

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To write a dissertation I ran a marathon...

In April 2011, I “hit the wall” while writing my dissertation. My research was complete but the inspiration to write was painfully absent. Producing a 200 page dissertation seemed like a never-ending endeavor, and one that could certainly never be completed in a person’s lifetime. One morning, while sitting in a coffee shop in northwest DC and eavesdropping on the conversation of a couple next to me, I heard them talking about “hitting the wall.” I straightened up immediately and began to listen attentively, hoping to get some good tips on how to overcome my “wall”. To my surprise, they were not talking about their own dissertations; they were talking about running a marathon.

After doing some research and reading a few articles on long distance running, I became convinced that I needed to run a marathon in order to overcome my writer’s block. In a marathon, most runners “hit the wall” around mile 20 but they learn to overcome it and finish the race at mile 26.2. Therefore, I signed up for a marathon in October and started training. The long runs that I had to do every week in the summer heat of DC in preparation for the big day were as brutal as the many hours I sat in front of my computer staring at the header of Chapter One. Through running however, I learned that I have good runs and bad runs, just like with my writing. Also, I learned to accept that my pace is slow at the beginning, but that I accelerate when closer to the finish line.

On October 30th, 2011, on marathon day, I fully anticipated hitting the wall at mile marker 20 and confronting my greatest obstacle. Realizing my fears, I did hit the wall; in fact I hit several walls, most before mile 20. However, throughout the entire race, the only thing I was thinking about was the importance of finishing my dissertation. When I saw the banner at the finish line and realized that I had completed what seemed like an insurmountable challenge, I knew that my mind could overcome anything, even writer’s block. At that moment I knew I was ready to tackle my dissertation. The following Monday, on October 31<sup>st</sup>, I began writing.

Now that this project is over, I am grateful to my committee for their patience and for allowing me the necessary time to finish it. I’m deeply thankful to Dr. Solon Simmons for his guidance throughout the entire process. Thank you for the valuable knowledge you shared with me and for the countless conversations refining my questions and research. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Terrence Lyons and Dr. Jack Goldstone for their dedication, support and feedback.

Many people have dedicated time, effort and support to helping me accomplish this task. I would like to thank Steve A. Perez and Dr. Joshua Fisher for their editing and insights. Also, I would like to thank Myssan Layci Stouhi whose tremendous help with research accelerated the writing process. I would like to sincerely thank all my friends in Basra, Najaf and Kerbala who put their lives in danger to help me acquire the data I needed. Specifically I would like to thank Issa Moussa and Amir Rufai for their dedication and encouragement.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the help of friends who listened to me articulate my ideas and never stopped showing interest. I thank Kristin J. Russo, Kristen Azzam, and Heather Shelford for all their help. Special thanks to Dr. Jayne Docherty, Pat and Earl Martin and all the professors and staff at the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, Eastern Mennonite University, who continuously supported me through my doctoral program.

I would like to express my appreciation to my mother and brother whose love and belief in me helped me push through the hardest times. Even though they have often expressed their skepticism about my research, they always stood by me and were very proud of my accomplishments. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Christine Crumrine who taught me to believe in myself and in my abilities to excel. A special appreciation goes to all the friends who showed me love and support during the hardest times: Diana Abu Abass, Ayman Assi, Hadi Kebbeh, Tarek Soueid, and Michael Riley. Also, I would like to thank all my friends from the running club, especially Kayla Nicolay for helping me overcome the “wall.” I would like to extend special gratitude to all my colleagues at the World Bank who allowed me to take the time off to finish the dissertation.

Last but not least, I want to thank my father for being the source of inspiration for this project. He passed away when I was seven, but his death provoked a curiosity in me to research and understand the political and religious context of his era. His religious training in Najaf during the 1960s and 1970s made many of the Shiite clergymen discussed in this dissertation his friends or colleagues—I often heard him refer to them on a first name basis when I was a child. This research helped me understand the religious and political goals he fought for in his youth in Iraq, as well as his political ideals as the Chief Legal Authority of Lebanese Shiism in the 1980s. This dissertation and my entire doctoral journey are dedicated to him.

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## **NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION AND FORMAT**

Arabic and Persian words have been italicized throughout the dissertation, except for words that are used in the English language such as Quran. I have avoided the use of /‘/ or /’/ to prevent confusion about the proper pronunciation of words. Instead, I opted for the closest English spelling for the Arab and Persian words.

Spelling of word Shiite has been used to replace other spelling such as Shia, Shi’ite, and Shi’i.

The dates used throughout the research follow the Gregorian calendar and not the Islamic Hijri calendar for purposes of clarity.

## GLOSSARY OF ARABIC TERMS

Abaya:	Robe worn by Islamic religious leaders
Ahl-al-Bayt: Muhammed	People of the household referring to the family of Prophet
Arbain:	
Ashura: calendar	The tenth day of Muharram, the first month of the lunar Muslim
Bazaar:	The market
Dafna:	Burial of Imam Husayn following the Ashura ritual
Faqih:	Jurist
Fatwa:	Religious legal finding issued by an Islamic scholar
Fiqh:	Islamic Jurisprudence
Habibi:	My beloved
Hareesa:	A special kind of sweet wheat porridge served during Ashura
Ijtihad:	Independent legal reasoning to interpret Shiite Islamic religion
Imam:	Divinely ordained leader
Jihad:	Struggle waged in the name of Islam
Kaaba:	The black cuboid-shaped in Mecca
Khalifa:	Trustee, Islamic political leader
Majalis Taziyeh:	Gatherings of condolences and mourning
Marajaa:	Highest level that a Shiite clergyman can attain. It signifies that the clergyman has become a source of imitation for Shiite people. In Catholicism, Marjaa can be compared to papacy.
Muharram:	The first month of the Islamic lunar calendar
Mujahedeen:	Fighters who engage in a struggle in the name of Islam
Mujtahid:	A Jurisprudent who is capable of Ijtihad
Qarii:	A person who recites; a story-teller
Rawdat al Shuhada:	One of the early books written on the battle of Kerbala and Ashura
Sharia:	Religious law of Islam
Sheikh:	Shiite clergyman who wears a white turban. Black turban is worn by clergymen who claim direct descendant from the Prophet
Shi'at Ali:	Partisans of Ali (people who followed Ali after the death of Prophet Muhammed)
Tammouz:	Month of July
Taqqiyah:	Shiite practice to hide own identity to prevent persecution
Tashbih:	Theatrical representation of the Kerbala battle
Thekra Ashura:	Commemoration of Ashura

Ulama:	Clergymen (learned theologians)
Umma:	The community of Muslims
Wilayat Al Umma:	Governance of the people
Wilayet-e-Faqih:	Governance of the Jurist
Ya Husayn:	Oh Husayn

## **ABSTRACT**

### **POLITICAL SHIISM IN THE ARAB WORLD: RITUALS, IDEOLOGIES, AND POLITICS**

Jana El Horr, Ph.D.

George Mason University, 2012

Dissertation Director: Dr. Solon Simmons

Researchers and experts on Arab politics have often debated the role of political Shiism as a source of regional instability and conflict following the 2003 U.S-Iraq war. Some argue that the expansion of political Shiism in the Arab world is a quest for political leadership resulting from a long-standing conflict with Sunnis, coupled with centuries of Shiite political and economic marginalization. Other argue that political Shiism holds revolutionary elements that can be re-interpreted to fit any political context that Shiites perceive as threatening. This view perceives that Shiite religious elements can be made to fit the current needs of various political contexts and are the main drivers of political mobilization and ultimately conflict. Both these views offer a narrow and restricted description of political Shiism; hence, the literature on political Shiism lacks a systematic understanding of the phenomenon. To address this gap, the research asks the following questions: (1) What is political Shiism? Is it monolithic? What are its forms? And who are its ideologues?; and (2) How do Arab Shiites leaders mobilize their followers?

In order to answer these questions, the research provides an examination of rituals, ideologies, and speeches of political Shiism embedded in the historical and geographical context of the Arab region in specific, and the Middle East in general, during the last century. Following a combination of methodological approaches, the research will first examine the centrality of *Ashura* rituals and celebrations in political Shiism; second, the research will explore the plurality of political Shiism thought in the twentieth, its progression from quietism to activism, and the influence of regional politics on its development; third, through analyzing current speeches of Shiite leaders in Lebanon and Iraq, the research will shed light on contemporary political Shiism language, its themes that mobilize the masses, and its connection to past ideologues previously examined.

The research seeks to extend the debate over the forces of mobilization of political Shiism, and contribute to a more constructive and coherent understanding of Shiite political actions in the Arab world. It confirms that the transformation of political Shiism from quietism to activism can be traced back socio-political changes that occurred in the early twentieth century. Additionally, it identifies how conflict associated with political Shiism is not linked to the Sunni-Shiite schism. Instead, the divide between the Arab world and the West is at the heart of political Shiism. Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of *Ashura* in political Shiism, but it is the rituals coupled with local and regional political events that create mobilization.

One important contribution of the dissertation is that it offers an inside descriptive look into the formation of political Shiism, its main ideologues, and issues that distinguish political Shiism as one of the main forces for political mobilization in the Arab world.

The research aims at providing a broader understanding of political Shiism to address the gaps that exist in the current literature, and offer a new way of thinking about this rising religio-political phenomenon.

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: HISTORY AND CONTEXT**

### **I- Introduction:**

Throughout the last century and into the twenty first century, the Middle East consistently appeared as an unstable and strategically alarming region, and disproportionate with its levels of conflict accounting for 15 percent of the world's conflicts while only housing 5.5 percent of the population. (World Bank, 2011) In 1956, the nationalization of the Suez Canal by Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser led to an international crisis between the US-European allies and the Soviet camp that threatened to spiral into nuclear war. The Israeli-Arab wars in 1967 and 1973 and the ongoing conflict between Israel, Palestinians and Arab countries continue to hinder prospects of peace in the region. The Iranian revolution in 1979 created a new regional power that was anti-Western and anti-capitalist, and exerted influence in various Arab countries such as Iraq and Lebanon. The Lebanese civil war 1975-1991, The Iran-Iraq war 1980-1988, the Gulf War in 1991, the U.S war in Iraq in 2003 and its sectarian repercussions, the Israel war on Hizbollah in Lebanon in 2006, and ramifications of the Arab Spring in Libya, Syria, Yemen and other countries, are violent events that continue to place the Middle East at the forefront of international politics.



Economic and political concerns also add to the instability of the region: six of the twelve members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), net exporters of oil, are from the Middle East, giving them greater influence over prices of oil worldwide; the birth of nationalistic and religious movements that clash with Western countries' policies; and the birth of Israel in 1948, a Jewish state in a pre-dominantly Muslim region. We can add to this the unprecedented youth bulge facing the Middle East, where more than 30% of its population is between the ages of 15-29, and the fact that the unemployment rate among this group reaches about 25%, the highest percentage for youth unemployment in the world. (Shababinlcusion.org)

Within this context, one of the most debated aspects of the Middle East, specifically after the attacks of September 11, 2001, is the issue of the role and power of political Islam. It is important to note that the nature of Islam allows a merger of religion and politics and this has been exemplified since the birth of the religion in the seventh century. The first few centuries following the rise of Islam in the Arab peninsula, religious laws produced a set of rich economic, political and social principles, regulations and procedures. These rules helped provide an Islamic political infrastructure for the region to adopt for centuries of Islamic dynasties that ended with the Ottoman dynasty in 1918. During this period, the Islamic socio-political structure helped define local norms of citizen responsibility and welfare practices and instituted a legacy in the region where political, economic and social orders cannot be separated from religion. (Kuran, 2004)

However, the last fifty years witnessed the adoption of the concept of political Islam to characterize the re-emergence of Islam as a religion in the public sphere after

decades of nationalism and secular movements that dominated since the end of World War I. Scholars and experts coined the term political Islam to signify the intrusion of the religion in political matters, which are subsumed to be secular according to Western standards.<sup>1</sup> (Hirschkind, 1997) Maxime Rodinson characterizes political Islam as an *ideologie mobilisatrice* that can facilitate social and political mobilization in order to grasp social functions of the society. (Tibbi, 1983) Intellectuals such as Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis dominated the debate over political Islam and agreed that it is a purely cultural phenomenon where Islam drives both the culture and violence; (Huntington, 1996; Lewis 1993) hence religious fundamentalists commit acts of violence because they are motivated by their Islamic teachings. Huntington states:

It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future. (1996:1)

However, Mahmood Mamdani, an Islamic studies scholar, counters Huntington's theory: "Ascribing the violence of one's adversaries to their culture is self-serving: it goes a long way toward absolving oneself of any responsibility." (2005:1) Hence, other scholars emerged such as Gilles Kepel and Oliver Roy to provide a different description of political Islam beyond culture. In his book *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, Kepel seeks to provide a systemic understanding of the intellectual history of political Islam and

---

<sup>1</sup> Hirschkind's argument is that the term political Islam is not a suitable framework to approach religion and politics in the Middle East. For further information check his article in MERIP, Winter 1997

its evolution through the centuries. (2002) While Roy provides an understanding of the social conditions that help shape the context through which Muslims think and act in his book *Globalized Islam: the Search for a new Ummah*. (2004) Roy argues that the Quran does not explicitly mandate individuals' actions, but rather provides directives that, interpreted through the lens of ongoing socio-political conditions, guides individuals' behaviors. They both dismiss the cultural-ist approach of Huntington and Lewis, and substitute it with a socio-political and economic understanding of political Islam.

The nuances in political Islam and the inter-sectarian differences did not fully surface on regional and international levels until the U.S war in Iraq in 2003, followed by Shiite take-over in the country that led to overt violent Shiite-Sunni conflicts. Thus, a new source of instability was identified in the region, one pertaining to an intra-Muslim conflict that was not apparent in earlier years. The intra-Muslim conflict between Sunnis and Shiites reached its peak in 2004, when King Abdullah of Jordan and then-president of Egypt Hosni Mubarak warned about the expansion of an eminent threat with an agenda of terrorism, which they labeled as the 'Shiite crescent' starting in Iran and extending as far as Lebanon. (Hirst, 2005) The crescent refers to the geographical mapping of the countries that include either a majority or a powerful minority of Shiites: Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon.

While Shiites celebrated their new power in Iraq, “Sunni Arab leaders perceived a [Shiite] horde eroding a time-honoured Sunni primacy over the Arab heartland.” (Pelham, 2008:215) The years following 2003 showed an increased influence of the Shiite Islamic Republic of Iran in political matters in Iraq, Lebanon, and other Arab

countries, and an expansion of power and popular support for Shiite movements. The Shiite's new political power was coupled with economic power. Iran and Iraq, with their majority Shiite population, owned as much of the world's oil reserves as Sunni Arab states, and Shiite inhabitants largely populated areas of oil fields in Sunni controlled states. (Pelham, 2008) In this new context of the Middle East fears of militant political Shiism began to rise in the Sunni dominated Arab world.

Shiism of political Islam, better known as political Shiism, is a relatively new phenomenon in the Middle East that scholars trace back to socio-political transformation in the early twentieth century that took place in Iran. (Halm 1991, Nakash, 2006, Nasr 2007 ) These changes—which will be explored in later sections—have forced Shiite clerics to re-think their roles in politics and the influence that religion should exert in political matters. Experts agree that the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the years preceding it helped redefine political Shiism with profound consequences affecting Shiites and their political mobilization. (Keddie and Cole, 1986; Halm 1991, 1997; Nakash 2006; Nasr 2007) Heinz Halm states that “Not until October 1978 did the existence of [Shiite] Islam make an impression upon our consciousness.” (1991:vii) Hence, within the last few decades this burgeoning phenomenon developed a new political role in Middle Eastern politics and presented itself as a major political player that requires deep understanding of its origins and its power for mobilization.

The research presented in this dissertation explores the development of various forms of political Shiism and its power for mobilization in the Arab world. But first, in the following sections, I will start by charting the history of Shiites, their theological

development, and early political aspirations. This will be followed with a geopolitical mapping of the Middle East region during the twentieth century at the time that transformation of political Shiism began to take place. The chapter will conclude with main research questions that will be examined through the following chapters in order to present an in-depth description of this new emerging phenomenon.

## **II- Who are the Shiites?**

### *History*

Shiites comprise less than 15% of the global Muslim population, with high concentrations in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, and Lebanon. (Aslan, 2005) The divide between Sunnis and Shiites is one of the most essential schisms in Islam, tracing its origins to divisions over legitimate succession of Prophet Muhammed following his death in the year 632 A.D. A group of Muslims who became known as the Sunnis believed that the successor should be Muhammed's closest friend and father-in-law, Abu Bakr. An opposing group, later known as the Shiites, believed that the authority should stay within the family of the Prophet— a tradition known as *ahl-al-bayt* or people of the household. Under this tradition the rightful successor should have been the Prophet's cousin, son-in-law, and the first convert to Islam, Ali. (Aslan, 2005) Hence, Shiism is as old as Islam. Moreover, Shiism is often portrayed as an Arabic phenomenon similarly to Islam, where most of the Shiite literature is written in Arabic, despite the fact that some authors are by Iranian, Pakistani, or of other nationalities of Shiite clergy. (Halm, 1991) There are five main different denominations of Shiites: the Twelvers, the Bohras, the Hazaris, the

Yezidis, and the Alawis; the Twelvers comprise the largest branch, oftentimes referred to as the mainstream, and will thus be the focus of this dissertation.

“The origin of Shiism lies in the nucleus of “partisans of Ali” (*Shiat Ali*) who supported the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law” as the first Shiite Imam. (Arjomand, 1984:27) According to the Twelver Shiism, eleven other *Imams*, divinely ordained leaders, followed all descendants of Ali.<sup>2</sup> One of the first events that unified Shiites as a Muslim group was the killing of Husayn and his family in *Karbala* on the day of *Ashura*, the tenth of Muharram (the first month in the Muslim lunar calendar) in the year 680 A.D. (Arjomand, 1984) Husayn was the son of Ali, and according to Shiite history, Husayn left Medina in Saudi Arabia to save his Shiite followers from a tyrannical Sunni Umayyad<sup>3</sup> Caliphate in Koufa, Iraq.<sup>4</sup> However, before reaching Iraq, the Caliphate’s army ambushed Husayn and his family in *Karbala* and killed him and 40 male members of his family. The martyrdom of Husayn is considered one of the gravest Shiite tragedies, and is celebrated yearly on *Ashura* (the tenth day of Muharram) by all Shiite denominations. *Rawdat al Shuhada* is one of the earliest books that documents a “comprehensive martyrology” of the life of the Imams, and specifically details the *Karbala* battle and the martyrdom of Husayn, thus providing a common written history for Shiites. (Mahjdoub, 1988:74) Mahjdoub describes the importance of this history

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<sup>2</sup> Different denominations of Shiism believe in different number of Imams. The Twelvers believe in twelve Imams, on the other hand Ismailis believe in seven. Given the Twelvers are the largest branch of Shiism, the history will mainly focus on them

<sup>3</sup> The Umayyad Caliphate is the first dynasty in Islam. The Umayyad clan had bitter relations with the Hashemites (Muhammed’s clan) even prior to Muhammed’s claim for prophecy. For more information check Gerald’s Hawting book, *The first dynasty of Islam: the Umayyad caliphate, AD 661–750* (London, 2000)

<sup>4</sup> Koufa is an Iraqi city in South Central Iraq

saying, on the day of *Ashura*, “Shiites would assemble (...) and a murassa’-Khwan or someone with a good voice would take a copy of the *Rawdat al-Shuhada* and read while the assembly wept.” (1988:74-75)

Shiite theological formation took place in the eighth century under the leadership of Muhammed Al-Baqir and Jaafar Al-Sadik, who are respectively the fifth and sixth Shiite Imams. This early theological formation “developed a distinct doctrine and a distinct system of jurisprudence” that tightened Shiite unity and gave them their own specific rituals and traditions and identified them into a separate Muslim sect. (Arjomand, 1984:27) This initial Shiite doctrine can be summarized as follows:

(...) [Shiite] doctrine emphasized the absolute necessity of an Imam without whom the community could not function and would never be able to reach happiness and the true path to goodness. [Shiite] doctrine maintained that the Imamah belonged only to the house of the Prophet and his descendants. The Imam was chosen by God as He chose all the prophets to guide people on the straight path. The Imam, like the Prophet Mohammed, was infallible and was to be an interpreter and protector of the law. (Ismael and Ismael, 1980:7)

Shiite doctrine developed further in later centuries to include the doctrine of *occultation* which states that there is a twelfth Imam in hiding—the Hidden Imam—with messianic qualities, who is waiting to appear to save the Shiites from their tyranny. This doctrine was formulated following the death of the eleventh Imam without an apparent successor. However, a group of Shiites believed that the eleventh Imam had a son who would rightfully be the Twelfth Imam, hiding from the Caliphate and waiting for the right moment to reveal himself.

With the rise of the Sunni Ottoman Empire between the fourteenth and twentieth century, the Shiites were severely persecuted for not following Sunni Islam and were

labeled as heretics under Ottoman Law. (Nakash 2006; Nasr, 2007; Winter, 2010) This forced many Shiites to hide the practices that differentiated them from the Sunnis in order to obscure their Shiite identity—a process known to be called *Taqqiyah*. (Sivan, 1990; Ismael and Ismael 1980) Moreover, the Shiites were not allowed to participate in political processes or take part in the ruling government, forcing them to low socioeconomic and political status and compelling them to constant migration in search for a safe haven.

The oppressive measures adopted by the Ottoman Empire toward Shiites led to major changes in the region. For instance, Shiite clergy in Jabal Amil, a region in the Levant that held a long tradition of religious scholarship prior to the Ottoman period, had to relocate. Due to close monitoring of the clergy in Jabal Amil, their activities in the Ottoman Levant had to be curbed leading to a decline of their influence to preach about Shiism. (Nakash, 2006) In order to maintain their reputation as Shiite scholars, the *ulama*<sup>5</sup> of Jabal Amil had to migrate to regain their power. Iran under the Safavid rule was their safe haven. (Nakash, 2006:32)

Iran was predominantly Sunni until the fifteenth century, which was marked by the “flourishing of a number of millenarian movements, the last of which gave birth to the Safavid Empire.” (Arjomand, 1984: 105) The Safavid Dynasty had its origin in Sufism<sup>6</sup> that was established in Azerbaijan. From their base they were able to establish control over Iran, strengthen the Persian identity, and create a legacy of Persia as the stronghold between East and West. The Safavid made conversion to Shiism mandatory to all Sunni Iranians, while Sunni clerics were either killed or executed. The clergy from

---

<sup>5</sup> Ulama are Shiites theologians



Jabal Amil, oppressed in the levant, played an important role in spreading Shiism in Iran at the request of the Safavids and the Qajar dynasty later on. Both these dynasties invited Shiite clerics from Arab countries to immigrate and settle in Iran in return for land and money. (Momen, 1985) Hence, with the flourishing of Shiism in Iran, the Shiites were no longer a regional minority, and instead established their own state. (Arjomand, 1988)

Tabari argues the following about the birth of a Shiite Safavid empire near a Sunni Ottoman Empire:

The creation of an elaborate [Shiite] clerical apparatus with a differentiated hierarchy and specific judicial and administrative strata was an integral part of the construction of a centralized Safavid state. Moreover the preeminent role of the [Shiite] clergy gave the Safavid polity an ideological profile distinct from its Ottoman rival. (1983:48)

The Safavids brought Shiite religious leaders from Lebanon, Iraq, and the Arabian Peninsula to build the foundation of the Shiite scholarship. That scholarship was based on *consolidationism*, under which there could be no true Islamic rule on earth because political authority can never escape imperfection. Hence, the goal of the Shiite theologians was to keep their faith separated from the political power until the Hidden Imam, descendant of Muhammed, emerges to take control of political power and to bring justice to the world under an Islamic State. (Nasr, 2007)

*Consolidationism* confirms the Shiite tradition of following an Imam appointed by God—the role of an Imam appointed by God is to help end tyranny and bring peace. (Donaldson, 1933) Donaldson explained that Shiite *consolidationism* scholarship stated if God did not appoint an Imam to serve as mediator between God and mankind, then God

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<sup>6</sup> Sufism is a mystical dimension of Islam that originated in Azerbaijan

would desire corruption to persist on earth and, thus not want an Islamic state governed by Shiites. With the Twelfth Imam in hiding, and Shiites waiting for him to appear and lead a Shiite nation, the Shiite theologians retreated to the study of the religion awaiting for the Hidden Imam while the Safavid, and later on the Qajari, secularly-governed the Persian Monarchy. (Halm, 1997)

### *Shiite theological revolutions*

One of the first intellectual theological revolutions in Shiite thought took place in the eighteenth century with intellectual divisions between the strict constructionist *Akhbari* School and the rationalist *Usuli* School. The former believed that all sources of law were limited only to the “Quran and the oral reports of the Prophet and the Imams.” (Cole, 2002:66) While the latter “insisted that the consensus of the jurists could also serve as a source of legal judgment, as could the independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) of the jurist.” (Cole, 2002:66) Hence, the Usuli School would divide Shiites into jurists (*mujtahids*) and laymen, where people have to follow the *mujtahid* in all affairs related to religion. In contrast, the Akhbari School adheres strictly to the Prophet’s teachings.

Furthermore:

The rationalists asserted that *mujtahids*, as general representatives of the Hidden Imam, could substitute for him in performing such tasks as rendering legal judgments, implementing rulings, collecting and distributing alms (*zakat* and *khums*), mandating defensive holy war and leading Friday congregational prayers. While Akhbaris accepted that the relater (*muhadith*) of oral reports from the Imams could perform the functions of judges, they often disallowed some of all of the others in the absence of an infallible Imam. Akhbaris further rejected any division of believers into laymen and *mujtahid*-exemplars, holding that all [Shiites] must emulate the Twelve Imams. In practice, Akhbaris also made interpretations. (Cole, 2002:66)

The Usuli School dominated Shiism in Iran, even though there were apparent conflicts between these two schools. This conflict was mostly apparent between two main families, Al Hurr (Akhbari) and Karaki (Usuli) who migrated from Jabal Amil in Lebanon to Iran, upon the request of the Safavid Shah to help promulgate the Shiite faith. Toward the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century, a regional rift appeared between these two schools: the Usulis dominated among Shiites in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon, while the Akhabris settled among Shiites in Bahrain and Qatif (Saudi Arabia). (Cole, 2002)

The second notable intellectual revolution of Shiism took place when the peaceful contract between the Shah in Iran and Shiite theologians witnessed an essential crack in the twentieth century due to increasing ties between the Shah and Europe. These ties were marginalizing the Iranian economy by allowing European economic monopoly in Iran at the expense of local merchants. For instance, in 1879, the Shah granted Russian companies fishery rights for all the Caspian Sea. The theologians feared the “Imperialism of the West” threatening their Shiite religion and practices, which resembled the “imperialism of the Ottoman Empire” in previous years. (Nasr, 2007, p.124) This fear later increased after the Shah granted all marketing of Iranian tobacco to a British company, which heavily affected the economic interests of local merchants. Hence, the merchants and the clergy forged an alliance to stand firmly against the Shah.

The tobacco movement against the Shah’s policies in 1890-1891 highlights the beginning of change among the clergy in Iran. The clerics’ fatwa to stop using tobacco was the first direct engagement of theologians in political matters in Iran. This was

followed by a change of government in 1906 from traditional to constitutional—known as the constitutional movement—due to popular demands including the clergy. Many academics refer to this era as the first Iranian revolution because the traditional regime was overturned and a constitutional government was formed. However, the new regime was not able to address basic socio-economic demands, specifically in rural areas. At the same time it could not accommodate international economic interaction established by earlier governments. These new challenging circumstances allowed the Shiite clergy to keep an active role in politics.

Vali Nasr highlights that the 1960s and 1970s represented the highest tension—which can be seen as the third Shiite intellectual revolution—between the Shah and the theologians. One important factor behind this tension is the overthrow of Mohammed Mosadegh in 1953 and the imposition of Mohammad-Reza Pahlavi as Shah of Iran after an American intervention. This CIA-backed coup led to the formation of a Freedom Movement composed of clerics and academics and created an opportunity to discuss the responsibility of the clergy and Islam in politics. (Tabari, 1983) Other factors behind the tension between the clergy and the theologians include: the Shah support for Israel as a Jewish state in a Muslim dominated region; the growing gap between the rich and the poor; the growing influence of Western culture that was reflected through the Iranian media and the imported Western lifestyle; and political marginalization of the clergy. (Nasr, 2007)

This new role adopted by the clergy was further empowered through the support of the Iranian middle class that was dissatisfied with the Shah regime and its economic

and political policies. Iranians began approaching clergy leaders to solve their problems, and in return clergy leaders began developing ideas regarding a Shiite revolution against the injustices of the Shah and the creation of an Islamic Shiite state. (Halm, 1997)

Furthermore, the impact of the expansion of Western lifestyles in Iran, including the impact of secularism on Shiite faith created political groups, not led by the clergy, that wanted to revive the role of Islam in the life of Iranians. (Chatterjee, 2011) These developing events hence allowed a major breakthrough in Shiite theological thought.

The political significance of *consolidationism*, or quiet Shiism, of the sixteenth century led by the clergy of Jabal Amil was transformed in the mid twentieth century in Iran.

Arguably, during the latter half of the twentieth century, the Shiite clergy and political groups in Iran shifted their religious focus from introversion and the relationship between the individual and God, to extroversion and an emphasis to change the world at large. (Kepel, 2002)

### **III- The Middle East post World War II:**

#### *Cultural Arab Nationalism*

The socio-political changes in Iran were not exclusive to the country; rather, they were a reflection of the systemic changes taking place across the region. After World War II, as Arab countries were seeking their independence from European colonial rule, a wave of cultural Arab nationalism ruled the Middle East. The history of Arab nationalism is primarily based on the European notion of Johann Gottfried Herder's cultural revival, or *Kulturnation*. (Tibbi, 1997) Tibbi argues:

The Arab awareness of the European Concept of ‘nation’ led to the claim of an Arab *Kulturnation*. The politicization of this concept culminated in the call for an Arab *Staatsnation*, i.e. one Pan-Arab state. Pre-1913, early Arab nationalism was francophone and anglophone, i.e. basically liberal. Following the colonization of Arab East in the aftermath of the First World War a turn to *germanophilia* took place. (1997:203)

Hence, post World War II, Arab thinkers and politicians envisaged a united Arab national identity modeled after the German—Germany perceived as the anti-colonial power—concept of *Kulturnation* which defines nationality by a common cultural tradition and popular folklore. Supporters of this identity argued that Arab unity was a cultural fact, and the defeats that the Arab world underwent in previous centuries at the hands of foreign powers were a result of Arab divisions and fragmentation. This doctrine of cultural Arab nationalism can be found in speeches and writings of Michel Aflaq, founder of the Arab Ba’ath party and who advocated for a single Arab united state. (Smith, 2008)

Based on Aflaq’s writings, following a nationalist political framework for Arab societies, is the only suitable option to recognize the rights of Arab minorities and at the same time evade Islamic political movements. Aflaq, a Syrian Christian, argued that national freedom of the Arab world was halted in previous by the Ottoman Empire followed by Western colonization calling for the need of Arab *resurrection*. (Tibbi, 1997)

The high tide of cultural Arab nationalism came after 1948 with the birth of Israel. This has formed a common issue that Arab countries—some independent, some still under colonial rule— could agree on. Arabs have never recognized the Zionist claim to the Palestinian land that was under the British mandate between World War I and

World War II and refused to accept the UN resolution of November, 1947 to partition the region. (Rabah, 2009) Rabah states:

Hardly had the state of Israel been proclaimed when a pan-Arab volunteer force (Jaysh al-Inqadh of the Army of Deliverance), hastily brought together, crossed the international border to engage the Israeli army. The results of this clash were disastrous for the Arabs. Next, the armies of five of the Arab states (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria) were drawn into the war which ended in 1949 with a series of UN-brokered armistice agreements that culminated in a de facto recognition of Israel. To Arab nationalist everywhere, this Palestine debacle was strong proof that the Arabs can never hope to regain Palestine without first reconsidering their relationship with the West (clearly a friend of Israel) and without searching for new sources of arms other than the Western sources on which they had hitherto depended. (2009:36)

At a time when Arabs were shifting away from Western countries and influence, the United States and Britain were looking for new alliances in the Middle East to as bulwarks against Soviet Communism. The Soviet Union was similarly looking for alliances in the region. During this period, the US and Britain established treaties of cooperation with Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Pakistan. However, to ordinary Arabs, pacts and regional cooperation were pointless because “the real danger for Arabs came from the seemingly unconditional western support of Israel, rather than from an imagined threat from the Soviet bloc.” (Rabah, 2009:36)

In his memoirs Kamal Salibi, a Lebanese historian writes the following about the Arab conflict with the West:

The West has a problem with the Soviets, which does not concern us as Arabs. Our own problems are with the West, which supports Israel and continues to occupy and dominate most of the Arab world, and forces us to buy obsolete and defective weapons exclusively from western sources, while it provides Israel with advanced weaponry free of charge. The West now asks us to join foreign dominated alliances to protect western interests in the Middle East, which we have no interest in. There are countries like us in the world which have no interest

in the East or the West, such as India, Yugoslavia and the countries of Latin America. These countries can form with us a neutral coalition between the Eastern and Western blocs, and equidistant from both, in what maybe called positive non-alignment. We will thus be enabled, for example, to purchase weapons from any source we choose, under our own conditions and not necessarily from the Union but, for example, from Czechoslovakia. (2002:209-210)<sup>7</sup>

Thus, as Arab nationalism began to grow in the Middle East, popular sentiments were beginning to sway from the West. Israel was perceived as a continuation of colonialism in the Arab world to protect Western's interests; while communism was perceived as the anti-dote of Western domination in the region.

### *Capitalism Vs. Communism*

The years between 1948 and the fall of the Soviet Union marked a clear contest between Western and Communist blocs in the Middle East, with regional regimes ideologically divided between these two blocs. (Kepel, 2000) In Iran, a US-and British-backed coup to overthrow Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh revealed the close ties between the Shah of Iran and the Western bloc. At the time, Mossadegh was leading a movement to nationalize oil production in Iran, which was controlled by British and American companies, spurring anxiety in the Western bloc regarding their economic interests. After the coup, the Shah centralized power and ensured Western interests in Iran, creating euphoria among opposition groups who retreated to the study of revolutionary ideas to

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<sup>7</sup> This is based on an interview between Kamal Salibi and Ahmad Khatib, member of a Lebanese political group. Translated by Makram Rabah in his book *A Campus at War: Student Politics at the American University of Beirut 1967-1975* (2009)



resist the Shah's policies—some of these opposition groups found refuge in anti-Western revolutionary ideas such as those posited by Karl Marx and Frantz Fanon. (Smith, 2009)

In Egypt, the Free Officers Movement overthrew the pro-Western Monarchy, and Gamal Abdel-Nasser assumed the presidency in 1954. The charisma of Abdel-Nasser brought him the popularity and support to establish the United Arab Republic (UAR), a union between Syria and Egypt that lasted from 1958 until 1962. Abdel-Nasser's victory—with the backing of the Soviet Union—to force the British out of the Suez Canal and put it under Egyptian rule in 1956 “gave him the international credibility to be the voice and leader of pan-Arab aspirations for unity.” (Smith, 2008:34) Nasser's decision to nationalize the Suez Canal came as a result of the United States and Britain withdrawing their funds to build the Aswan dam in Egypt; the American and British withdrawal was a result of the close ties between Abdel-Nasser and the Soviet Union. However, the Arab cultural unity that Abdel-Nasser was mobilizing was short-lived and failed after the breakup of UAR in 1962.

The failure of cultural Arab nationalism to fight Western powers, as epitomized by the breakup of the UAR, created a vacuum for other ideologies to capture the anti-Western Arab popular sentiment, mainly due to ongoing Western support for Israel. While Arab nationalism tended to promote secularism—for instance, in Egypt Abdel-Nasser put Al-Azhar, one of the oldest Islamic schools, under state control, making it lose credibility for the lack of its religious independence—“nowhere in the Muslim world of the 1960's did religion vanish from popular culture, social life, or day-to-day politics.” (Kepel, 2000:47) This helped Islamic movements gain momentum and politically

visibility, which they had not enjoyed since the collapse of the Islamic Ottoman Empire in 1916. Hence, soon after the failure of Arab nationalism, the pan Arab identity found itself in competition with a pan Islamic identity.

### *The Rise of Islamic Movements in the Middle East*

In the 1950s and 1960s, Islamic scholarly and intellectual elites were divided into two camps: the Egyptian camp, which was anti-capitalist but still supported the secular Egyptian state, and the Saudi camp under the Wahhabi school, which believed in the necessity of an Islamic state and institutions. (Skovgaard-Peterson, 1997) Both camps attracted people from different social groups, and Kepel adds to this:

(...) two social groups were particularly susceptible to Islamists persuasion. One was the huge mass of young urban poor from deprived backgrounds, whose parents had come in from the country. The other was the devout bourgeoisies, a class excluded from political power and economically hemmed in by military and monarchical regimes. The two groups were both committed to the sharia and to the idea of an Islamic state, but they did not view that state in quite the same way. The former imbued it with a social-revolutionary content, while the latter saw it as a vehicle for wresting power for themselves from the incumbent elites without fundamentally disturbing the existing social hierarchies. (2000:67)

Within this new found power of Islamic movements, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt gained momentum. That momentum became visible in the 1970s, when Anwar Sadat—who assumed power in Egypt after Abdel Nasser's death—forged an alliance with the Brotherhood. This alliance primarily aimed to contain the younger generation that was showing greater interest in political protests, following the example of other

youth groups regionally and internationally within the same time period.<sup>8</sup> (Kepel, 2000:83) However, the Brotherhood-Sadat alliance fell apart in 1977, when Sadat flew to Jerusalem to initiate peace talks with Israel. This marked a violent year in Egypt and led to Brotherhood-led riots. The sources of the discontent were the policy of economic opening and the perceived westernization in Egypt that came as a result of Sadat's talks with Israel. Furthermore, the newly-acrimonious relationship between the Brotherhood and Sadat pushed the former into adopting Syyyed Qutb's<sup>9</sup> theories in an utmost radical form, including some of his ideas such as the use of terrorism and the killing of non-believers to promote Islamic political goals. (Kepel, 2000)

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 cemented the role of Islam in Middle Eastern politics. The symbolic image of Khomeini with his black Islamic turban as a leader of the revolution, and later on, his religio-political rhetoric, gave political legitimacy to Muslim clergy beyond Iran's borders. Kepel states:

(...) These events {Iranian Revolution} overturned all preconceptions and the common wisdom about Islam. What had previously been viewed as conservative somewhat retrograde religion, whose social and political relevance was declining in the face of progress and modernization, suddenly became the focus of intense interest, hope, and dread. The radical Islamist movement itself, whose very existence had been unknown to all but a very few, was now associated with a revolution whose contours were vague but whose essential nature appeared to be as radical as it was virulently anti-Western. (2000:61)

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<sup>8</sup> Student movements in the Arab world were on the rise during the 1960s and 1970s. These movements were primarily leftists, anti-capitalists, supporters of Arab nationalism and advocates of the Palestinian cause for land. For further information refer to Makram Rabah *A Campus at War: Student Politics at the American University of Beirut 1967-1975*, (2009), and Betty Anderson *The Student Movement in 1968*, March 2011

<sup>9</sup> Syyyed Qutb is a leading Islamist theorist, lived between 1906 and 1966, and was an influential figure of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood

The ripple effects of the Iranian Revolution reached many Arabs who sympathized with anti-Western sentiments; and religious leaders across the Middle East began demanding greater control over culture and morals in order to regain the stature they lost during the wave of cultural Arab nationalism. Furthermore, the revolution demonstrated that citizens in modern Middle Eastern countries could topple authoritarian governments, even when these governments were backed by powerful states such as the U.S and Britain. More specifically, the revolution illustrated how a political struggle can be led under the pretext of a religious struggle, where the religious energy was externalized and its goal was to change the world. (Kepel, 2000)

### *The Rise of political Shiism*

The year 1979 will be remembered in history not only because it externalized Islamic religious struggle, but also because it both bolstered the role of Shiism in politics and ignited an old conflict between Sunnis and Shiites in the region. This new reality led governments, regionally and internationally, to speculate about the consequences of a Shiite revolution in Arab countries with Shiite population. At the start of the Iran-Iraq War, the Baathist regime in Iraq imprisoned and executed Shiite individuals it suspected of harboring political affiliations to the Iranian regime; clergymen in close relationship with Khomeini; and members of political groups that advocated for a Shiite revolution in Iraq. (Shadid, 2005) Only those that publicly denounced political positions were spared. Bahrain and Saudi Arabia adopted harsher stances toward Shiites, including banning public Shiite gatherings, imprisoning potential political leaders, and publicly scrutinizing

the Shiite religion. In Lebanon, due to the civil war (1975-1991), and the resulting anarchy, the Iranian revolution succeeded in founding and funding Hizbollah<sup>10</sup> (the Party of God) to provide resistance against Israel, and Western domination.

Internationally, after the Islamic victory in Iran, world leaders, academics, and analysts began to draw closer attention to the phenomenon of political Islam.

The revolutionary zeal of what Khomeini called the *mustazifin*, or downtrodden, helped produce stubborn images of [Shiite] fanaticism—images that were fortified by venomous anti-Western rhetoric, and at times underscored by acts of defiance and violence against the West such as the seizure of the U.S embassy in Iran on 4 November 1979. These events, coupled with images of angry Muslim mobs transmitted by Western television channels on an almost daily basis, contributed to a widespread perception in the West that the new tone emanating from Iran was openly hostile to them. (Moghadam, 2012:2)

After 1979, Middle East political observers and analysts began to recognize the power of Islam to replace nationalism and Westphalian state concepts with an Islamic political, social, and cultural identity that posed a threat to Western states' *raison d'être*. The Shiite Islamic Republic that Khomeini founded embodied this new threat and gave a central role for political Shiism in the region; consequently, it led to the emergence of Shiite political movements such as Amal and Hizbollah in Lebanon.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The sectarian civil war in Lebanon and lack of legitimate government led to the emergence of several small militia groups that took part in the conflict. During the following years, Hizbollah grew to become a political organization with seats in the Lebanese government

<sup>11</sup> Amal was founded by Imam Musa Al-Sadr in the 1970s in Lebanon. Al-Sadr born in Iran and student of seminaries in Qom was sent to Lebanon upon the request of Khomeini to support the Shiites in the country. In addition to its Iranian ties, Amal and its leader Al Sadr had close ties with clergymen in Najaf. In 1976, Amal released a manifesto calling for a secular Lebanon where Shiite Lebanese can live freely. Al Sadr mysteriously disappeared on his trip from Libya to Italy in 1978. As for Hizbollah, it was founded in the early 1980s by past Amal members who rejected the secular identity of the movement and who were supported by the Iranian revolutionary guard. Soon after, Hizbollah was able to position itself as the resistance against Israel. For more information check August Richard Norton books on *Amal and the Shi'a: struggle for the soul of Lebanon* (1987) and *Hezbollah* (2007)

Thus, barely few decades after winning their independence, Middle Eastern states surpassed its nationalistic era and entered a religious era that ignited Sunni-Shiite and Shiite-Western politics. This new reality became apparent in 2003 with the war in Iraq and the ascension of Shiites to power in the first Arab country in a Sunni-dominated region.

#### **IV- Critical Issues on contemporary political Shiism**

Following the US war in Iraq and the difficulties associated with efforts to steer political realities in the Middle East toward democracy and stability, the sectarian violence between Iraqi Shiites and Sunnis put at the forefront the regional Islamic tensions that have been seething since the Iranian revolution. The rise of a Shiite-led State in a Sunni-dominated Arab world presented a real threat to centuries of Sunni domination, where Shiite marginalization was commonplace. Vali Nasr indicates that the early signs of this threat began in 2004, when Sunnis watched with fear as millions of Iraqis marched freely in the streets of *Kerbala* to commemorate *Ashura*, despite the nine explosions detonated by militant Sunni groups to halt the march. In previous years, under the Saddam regime, Shiites were banned from celebrating *Ashura*. (2007) Fear of Shiites' commemoration of *Ashura* was further highlighted in 2009, when, fearing the effects of a transnational Shiite movement, Saudi Arabia forced foreign satellites to discontinue live coverage of *Ashura* and prevented the event from being broadcasted on national television.

The fear of the rising power of political Shiism was further augmented by the 2006 war in Lebanon between Israel and Hizbollah. This 34-day war attracted citizens of

the Sunni Arab world to stand by the Shiite movement and hold pictures of its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, as the savior of the Arab world from Western hegemony. Hizbollah gained momentum by showing its courage and perseverance to fight the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Western interference in Middle Eastern politics. The surge in Hizbollah power also provided more support to its allies, predominantly Iran and Syria, and transformed them into key players in regional politics. Hizbollah was not the only Shiite movement that was fighting Western forces in the Middle East. The Mahdy Army and its leader Muqtada Al Sadr led the fight against Western colonialism of Iraq in the name of Iraqi Shiites and with the support of Iran. These various movements reinforced the role of political Shiism in shaping internal and international politics in Arab countries.

Within this new context in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and its Sunni regional allies were locked in a trap to halt the rise of political Shiism without being seen as abandoning the Palestinian cause and the anti-Western popular Arab sentiment. In an act designed to warn citizens and international states about this eminent threat that is facing the Arab world, King Abdullah of Jordan coined the geographical descriptor term ‘the Shiite Crescent’, starting in Iran and ending in Lebanon. “According to this view, Iran constitutes the heart of this crescent whereas local Arab Shiites, such as Lebanon’s Hizbollah, would function as mere satellites in the orbit of Tehran.” (Marcinkowski, 2010:82) Hence, this Shiite Crescent originates from a form of political Shiism that looms over Iran and echoes over the Arab world.

The “[Shiite] threat” continues to linger in Middle Eastern politics as the events of the Arab Spring unfold. (Bose, 2007:1) This fear has often been described as an expansion of a “Shiite octopus” in the Arab world. (Puelings, 2010:1) In certain political For instance, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) in Egypt continues to warn about Hizbollah cells growing within the country. While the uprising is focused on political voice, accountability, and democracy, the transitional governing body continues to warn its people about a ‘violent enemy’ within, embodied in political Shiism; this perceived enemy appears to have higher priority than people’s demands.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, several Shiite leaders have accused Sunni Arab countries of hypocrisy by evading events of violence against Shiites in Bahrain, but at the same time supporting the uprising in Syria in order to put end to the Assad regime—a sympathizer of political Shiism and supporter of Hizbollah.

The ongoing Arab and international fear of political Shiism and its increased mobilization in form of Shiite movements in the Arab world are the main focus of this dissertation. Many academics and analysts have addressed this newly rising religio-political power, most notably Vali Nasr in his book *The Shi’a Revival: How Conflicts within Islam will Shape the Future* (2007) and Yitzhak Nakash in *Reaching for Power: the Shi’a in the Modern Arab World* (2006). However, the socio-political field still lacks a systemic understanding of this phenomenon—an issue that will be closely examined in the literature review in the following chapter. Hence, this dissertation aims at providing a

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<sup>12</sup> In February 2011, after the resignation of Husni Mubarak in Egypt, SCAF announced that 22 members of Hizbollah spy cell in Egypt escaped from prison. These members were arrested in 2009 while plotting in



broad understanding of political Shiism and its linkages to Shiites in Arab countries, through the following questions.

- (1) What is political Shiism? Is it monolithic? What are its forms? Who are its ideologues?
- (2) How do Arab Shiites leaders mobilize their followers?

In the following chapter, I will review the existing literature on political Shiism and outline the assumptions of its mobilization. The review shows two main views: The first is that the Shiite quest for political power is a result of a long-standing conflict with Sunnis, coupled with centuries of Shiite political and economic marginalization. Holders of this view assume that political Shiism and Shiite mobilization is a country-specific phenomenon, with clear separation between local politics on one side and regional and international politics on the other. As a consequence, This view does not show concerns about a transnational Shiite political power—in reference to the Shiite Crescent—taking place among Shiite groups in the Middle East and thus provoking a form of mobilization that would threaten regional stability. The second view is that political Shiism holds revolutionary elements that can be interpreted to fit any political context that Shiites perceive as threatening. Experts who hold this view assume that the clergy plays an important role in defining and redefining these revolutionary elements, thus creating diversity of thought within political Shiism. At the same time, this view assumes that the

interpretation of the religious elements is mutable, and can thus be made to fit the current needs of various political contexts in order to provoke political mobilization.

In chapter 3, I will describe the methodology of the research which is comprised of a combination of mixed approaches tailored for each of the questions. The data collected includes anthropological studies of *Ashura*, primary resources written by main Shiite political ideologues, and contemporary speeches of Shiite leaders in the Arab world.

In Chapter 4, I will describe the celebration of *Ashura*, its history and its evolving political meaning for Shiites in the Arab world. Many Shiite experts stated that one cannot understand the essence of Shiism and its political actions without understanding *Ashura*. From this perspective, this chapter presents a thorough examination of the symbolism and implications of the battle of *Kerbala* and the collective memory it created among Shiites. Each chapter of the dissertation follows a specifically tailored methodology to examine the questions and issues raised, hence this chapter will utilize secondary literature of anthropological studies and observations of *Ashura* rituals, newspaper clippings, and personal observations and participation.

In Chapter 5, I will explore the questions: What is political Shiism? Is it monolithic? What are its forms? Who are its ideologues? The research identifies four main ideologues that changed the face of political Shiism between the 1960s and 1970s and who are: Ruhollah Khomeini, Ali Shariati, Muhammed Baqir Al Sadr, and Abu Al Qasim Al Khoei. These four ideologues offered a plurality of thought to political Shiism that fall on a continuum between activism and quietism. The research focused on primary sources

written by these four ideologues, in addition to historical accounts, biographies, and archival research to help contextualize the development of ideas within the political events that were taking place in country specifically, and the region writ-large. The novelty of the research is not to reveal the principles of Islam but to describe the philosophical formulation of ideologies of activism and quietism in political Shiism, and the influence that political developments had on shaping these ideas.

In Chapter 6, I will explore the question how do Arab Shiites leaders mobilize their followers? The research is focused on two case studies in Lebanon and Iraq where speeches of Hassan Nasrallah and Muqtada Al Sadr are analyzed to highlight main topics that incite mobilization. The focus will be on political mobilization during overt violent episodes which represent the utmost form of political protest. The analysis describes the content of current political Shiism language in these two countries; and also, it describes the close connections between the current political language used by Shiite leaders, ideas of political Shiism developed by the four ideologues introduced in Chapter 4, and *Ashura* rituals examined in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 7, which is the concluding chapter, I will underline the main findings of the research following the in-depth examination of religious rituals, long-standing ideologies, and current political speeches. Also, I will present recommendations to the conflict resolution community in addressing political Shiism and I will underscore research opportunities for further examination of political Shiism.

## **V- Conclusion**

This dissertation provides an examination of rituals, ideologies, and discourse of political Shiism embedded in a historical and geographical context to explore these questions. The aim of the dissertation is not to establish causality between Iranian and Arab Shiite politics, but to describe and understand the multi-faceted aspects of political Shiism and identify ideas that potentially might provoke Shiite political protests and thus increase the Shiite fear in Arab and international politics. The research conducted does not provide cookie-cutter models of types of political Shiism or forms of mobilization; instead, it offers an inside look into the formation of political Shiism, its main ideologues, and issues that distinguish political Shiism as one of the main forces for political mobilization in the Arab world.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW<sup>13</sup>**

### **I- Introduction**

The twentieth century was marked by the disintegration of Arab Nationalism, which coupled with the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict and its bearing on Arab-Western relations, propelled Islamist movements in the Middle East to the top of the agenda of political theorists and international analysts. Initially, the expansion of power of these Islamist groups created a negative reaction among Muslims and the West who compared them to a variant of fascism or even to “born-again medieval fanatics.” (Kepel, 2002:5) However, as the number of these movements increased, political Islam<sup>14</sup> acquired a popular base through such acts as offering services to the poor and the underprivileged, and framing their ideologies as a struggle for social and economic justice in line with Islamic virtues.<sup>15</sup> Thus as Kepel describes it: “barely a generation after many Muslim nations won their independence, the Islamic world entered a religious era that largely canceled out the nationalist period which preceded it.” (2002:5)

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<sup>13</sup> The literature review could have been framed in different formats: The literature review could have focused on the writings of political opportunities, social movements, and ethnic violence and reviewed theories of Charles Tilly (2004), William Gamson (1990), Sidney Tarrow (2006), Crawford Young (1976), Donald Horowitz (2000), and Stuart Kaufman (2001); This theoretical review could have been coupled by other theories of symbolic politics put forth by Murray Edelman (1971), and the role of constructed societies in the civil sphere by Jeffrey Alexander (2007). However, for the purpose of this dissertation, and in order to offer a deeper understanding of political Shiism through providing a systematic description of this phenomenon, the focus of the literature review will be to provide a general overview of the current literature that exists on political Shiism. The aim of the dissertation research is to be a much needed contribution to the literature of political Shiism that lacks systemization and depth.

<sup>14</sup> Political Islam holds that Islam is a religion and simultaneously a political ideology

As political Islam was ascendant in the 1960s and 1970s, its movements never portrayed a monolithic political approach. Islamist movements in Saudi Arabia were calling for an Islamic state, movements in Egypt were calling for breaking ties with the U.S, and movements in Lebanon were increasingly involved in a fight against Israel.<sup>16</sup> Following the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the pluralism of political thought of political Islam became more evident and created tension among state powers in the Persian Gulf:

The entire decade of the 1980s was overshadowed by a power struggle between the Saudi monarchy and Khomeini's Iran. Tehran sought to export its revolution, just as the Russians had once exported theirs. Riyadh set out to contain this ploy, just as the American had contained the Soviets during the cold war. (Kepel, 2002:7)

The Iranian Revolution revealed the sectarian differences of political Islam between Shiites and Sunnis and showed the importance of dividing the study of political Islam to focus on these different groups. The revolution constituted an initial signal for world politicians to attribute more importance to a religio-political power that can transcend country borders to reach Shiites in other regional countries. (Tibbi, 2008) However, during this period, the academic study of political Islam focused mainly on Sunni Islam as the main political "Islamic Phenomenon" that was rising in the Middle East. (Tibbi, 2008:133) Academics such as John Esposito, Hilal Desouki and Bryan Turner concentrated their efforts on this one faction of Islam to provide a strategic understanding of this burgeoning power. (Esposito, 1980; Desouki, 1982; Turner, 1978) For the West, Islam was monolithic, and Western political thought like Huntington's

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<sup>15</sup> Refer to Sayid Qutb book on *Social Justice in Islam* (1950)

“Clash of Civilization”—a clash between the West and Islam as a single entity—supported this concept. (Ayoob, 2008) Then, while the West focused on its political relationship with Islam, Islamic movements refined their sectarian identities, ideologies, and goals, catching the international political world by surprise at the turn of the twenty-first century.

After the US war on Iraq in 2003, and Shiite ascension to power followed by inter-sectarian violence between Shiites and Sunnis and intra-sectarian violence among Shiite militias, the Western perception of a single, monolithic Islam was shattered. Drawing on early scholarly work carried out by Dwight Donaldson, Heinz Halm, Nikke Keddie, and Said Amir Arjomand, the study of Shiism, both as a religion and political power, gained momentum. (Donaldson, 1933; Halm 1991, 1997; Keddie, 1983; Arjomand 1988) The interest in political Shiism further increased with the emergence of religious clergy as national political leaders. For instance, in Iraq, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, one of the main Shiite spiritual leaders, released a religious fatwa in 2005 urging Iraqi Shiites to vote in the upcoming elections. Similarly, Muqtada Al Sadr, heir of the Shiite cleric Mohammed Baqir Al Sadr, who was killed in 1980, gained prominence as a leader to fight the U.S army, while his Sadrist political bloc held governmental and parliamentary seats. In Lebanon, Hizbollah’s Secretary General, Hassan Nasrallah a previous student of Iranian seminaries gradually became one of the main leaders and shapers of local and regional politics.

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<sup>16</sup> Starting the 1970s, ad-hoc Muslim groups (Shiite and Sunnis) began forming in Lebanon as a resistance to Israel. Refer to Nicholas Blanford *Warriors of God*, 2011

The emergence of Shiite political action has spurred political debate and encouraged the study of political Shiism in order to provide a systematic description and understanding of its politics and culture. The literature review presented below captures the main ideas that fall within this debate, specifically with regard to the questions raised in the earlier chapter:

- (1) What is political Shiism? Is it monolithic? What are its forms? And who are its ideologues?
- (2) How do Arab Shiites leaders mobilize their followers?

As indicated above, the subject of political Shiism is a new field that has only recently begun to be explored. Despite the high interest in this subject, the literature review indicates a dearth of variety of ideas that can describe this phenomenon. It also highlights a paucity of exploration of the interaction between religion and politics to provide deeper understanding about the diversity of religion's roles in social and political actions. The review will discuss ideas of main academics who write on this subject including Vali Nasr, Nikkie Kedie Yitzhak Nakash, Heinz Halm, and Hamid Dabash.

## **II- Shiite revival for balance in the Middle East**

In his book the *Shi'a Revival: How Conflicts in Islam will Shape the Future*, Vali Nasr attributes the lack of study of Shiism to the Shiites' status as "the other Islam", highlighting the miniscule size of Shiites in relation to the Sunni majority in the Arab



word. However, he adds that “in the Islamic heartland, from Lebanon to Pakistan, (...) there are roughly as many [Shiites] as there are Sunnis, and around the economically and geostrategically sensitive rim of the Persian Gulf, [Shiites] constitute 80 percent of the population.” (2007:34) Nasr posits that “in the coming years, [Shiites] and Sunnis will compete over power, first in Iraq but ultimately across the entire region. The overall conflict will play a large role in defining the Middle East.” (2007:24)

Nasr presents Shiites’ current political action as merely a reaction to centuries of marginalization due to a long-lived Sunni-Shiite conflict that started after the death of Muhammad between *Shiat Ali* and Abu Bakr’s followers. He adds that “the [Shiites] learned the harsh lesson that secular regimes and ideologies may come and go, but Sunni biases endure.” (2007: 90) He distinguished political Shiism from Sunni trends in the region by highlighting that the former is not an affiliate of Arab nationalism like the Sunnis, and likewise not a follower of Abdul-Nasser and the pan-Arab Unity that enabled Shiite marginalization in the past. He states that the Islamic Sunni movements created a wave of “fundamentalism” that allowed the region to be “Sunnified”, and as a consequence transformed it into a hostile context for Shiites. (2007:107) Due to this Arab context, Nasr anticipates competition and intense rivalries between Shiites and Sunnis as Shiites rise to power in order to adjust the social, political, and economic structures to benefit all parties. He adds:

Peace and stability will come to the Middle East only when the distribution of power and wealth reflects the balance between the communities and the political system includes all and provides for peaceful ways of resolving disputes. Once the conflicts that have already been set in motion, the majority of the [Shiites] and Sunnis will settle for a political order that they can share (...) that represents everyone’s social, economic, and political aspirations. (2007:28)

Nasr associates the rise of political Shiism with the public persona of Ruhollah Khomeini, as a leader of the Iranian revolution. At the same time, he contradicts this statement by associating the majority of Shiites to more of a *quietest* school that rejects political involvement—including the concept of political Shiism—with Abu Al Qasim Al Khoei as its spiritual leader. He says “(...) neither atheistic materialism nor schemes of radical social change hold much charm for the majority of [Shiites], who remain at heart devout and fairly conservative.” (2007:116) He further accuses Khomeini of “discouraging popular [Shiites] piety” which represents the essence of Shiism for the sake of revolutionary ideas that only helped to promulgate “populist theocracy.” (2007:134-135) Thus Nasr does not associate Shiite conservatism with a blind support for Khomeini's religious leadership, or his *Vilayet-e-Faqih* ideology. Nor does he conclude that Iran would necessarily become the leader of political Shiism. He asserts that, unfortunately for the greater Shiite community, “the state that Khomeini built would be an intolerant theocracy in which Islamic law was narrowly interpreted and implemented to limit individual and minority rights and erase all Western influences on society and culture.” (2007:134) Nasr does not expand on the impacts of the Islamic State of Iran on Shiite politics in the Middle East. Neither does he grant it power or influence among major political actors in Arab countries. This insinuates that Nasr does not foresee spillover or direct influence of Iranian politics in countries with Shiite presence.

Nasr, himself a Shiite and son of the prominent Islamic scholar Mohammad Hossein Nasr, portrays Shiites as a modern and democratic group with whom the West

should establish closer ties. He considers the rise of Shiites as an inexorable force, and a main factor for changing politics in the Middle East. However, his perception of this change is benign because “the importance of protecting [Shiite] realm thus pushed the clerical stewards of Shiism in a new and more democratic direction.” (2007:123) In contrast to the benign image of Shiites’ rise to power, Nasr paints a fundamentalist portrait of Sunnis, describing them as the source of Islamic fundamentalism that is plaguing the world. He adds: “The [Shiites] revival constitutes the most powerful resistance and challenge to Sunni extremism and jihadi activism within the region” transforming political Shiism into the antidote of Sunni extremism. (2007:179) By painting these two contrasting scenarios, Nasr ignores the violence that has taken place at the hands of Shiite groups such as Muqtada Al Sadr’s Mahdy Army in Iraq, and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Furthermore, Nasr overlooks Iran’s nuclear policy, its ties with the different Shiite militias in the Arab world, and the probable consequences of these ties on Shiites in the Arab world.

Nasr’s advocacy for Shiite-Western relations caused him to devote little space for describing the different nuances that exist within political Shiism. He grants little attention to Khomeini’s populist theocracy and does not expand on what he perceives as the Shiite democratic direction. Instead, he portrays all Shiites, Arabs and non-Arabs as suffering several centuries of marginalization at the hand of Sunnis, a phenomenon he posits the 2003 Iraq War ended, and which consequently bring democracy to the region. However, Nasr disregards the fight between Shiites political movements, such as the Mahdy Army in Iraq, and the West. An example of this is the cry *Death to America*,

which gained notoriety after the Iranian Revolution and was often heard among Mahdy Army's protestors.<sup>17</sup> Nasr's theory of political Shiism as an ally with the West to counter-balance Sunni fundamentalism ignores the sophisticated political arguments of leaders such as Hassan Nasrallah and Muqtada Al Sadr, who often crafted an anti-Western political narrative. In short, Nasr oversimplifies the depth of political Shiism, and appears overly sympathetic to its revival. In doing so, he dismisses the aspects of political Shiism that do not conform to his theory.

The ritual of *Ashura*, the tenth day of Muharram or anniversary of the killing of Husayn has a great importance for Nasr because it is a "distinctive" part in Shiites' history that combines both political expression against tyranny and oppression with deep religious commitment to *Shiat Ali*. (2007:31) The expression *Every Day is Ashura, Every city is Kerbala* is cited several times in the book to express Shiites close attachment to this narrative for protesting centuries of marginalization in the Arab world. Nasr grants great importance to this ritual. He begins his book by describing images of blood and self-flagellation in *Kerbala* after the U.S invasion of Iraq in 2003 to demonstrate the importance of reviving *Ashura* rituals as a political expression for Shiite ascension to power. He further compares these public blood images with a rising fear among Sunni population. But he urges his audience in the West not to be fearful like the Sunnis, since *Ashura* is not only a unique practice for Shiites, but it is similar to practices in other religions such as Catholicism:

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<sup>17</sup> On my various visits to Iraq, to Mahdy Army stronghold areas, anti-Western slogans such as *Death to America*, were written on walls, heard on radio stations, and repeated in speeches of the religious leaders.

[Ashura]'s powerful focus on sorrow (...) and pageantry has a parallel in Catholic Lenten rituals, such as the Holy Week and Good Friday "Way of the Cross" processions and Passion plays that preface Easter Sunday in many places. Even the more extreme practices of some [Shiites], such as shedding one's own blood through a small cut on the scalp, resemble rituals such as those of Penitentes, a lay Catholic brotherhood originally formed on the Iberian Peninsula. (p.46)

Juan Cole, a Shiite expert, adopts a similar position in portraying political Shiism as power seeking for political balance in the Middle East. In his book *Sacred Space and Holy War*, published prior to the U.S invasion of Iraq, Cole presents the history of Shiites in the Arab world and Iran with a specific focus on their minority status in a discriminating Sunni context. His thesis is that "outside Iran, [Shiite] politics have been a politics of finding ways to assert [Shiite] interests in developing nation-states that had non-[Shiite] elites at their helm." (2002:173) He adds:

I would argue that much of what the outside world has understood as activism and militancy among [Shiites] after about 1975 has been a manifestation of attempts to find political representation in their various nations as an ethnic and religious community, as they moved from being peasant subjects to being urban citizens. (2002:173)

To support this thesis, Cole provides contextual examples from Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Iraq and Pakistan that portray a Shiite struggle for political representation. He pays specific attention to the question "who have the [Shiites] been in history?" to explain past underprivileged status and their current political motivation in these countries. (2002:3) However, the focus on history and theological development throughout the book does not offer a well-formed understanding of current actions of

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For further information on the origin of the slogan Death to America, refer to William Beeman, *Images of the Great Satan*, in Religion and Politics in Iran (1983)

political Shiism. This is largely because Cole focuses more on pure religious theology rather than the interconnection of theology and politics in day-to-day events. For instance, He goes into details exploring the Akhbari-Usuli conflict in Shiism, and the longstanding Wahhabi theological conflict with Shiism. But, he fails to identify the related political implications of these conflicts in the Middle East or their implications for Shiite politics.

Like Nasr, Cole does not establish a relationship between the revolutionary ideas of the Iranian Revolution and the current rise of political Shiism. He perceives these two entities as separate, with no clear political linkages. For example, he does not shed light on the relationship between Hizbollah and Iran, and he labels the former as “radical Islamists” who are a “major political grouping among Lebanese [Shiites].” (2002:182) Arguably, the absence of such a relationship can be attributed to Cole’s perception of Shiites as being in constant battle for local, as opposed to transnational, political representation. We can add to this that Cole perceives Iran’s politics to be dissociated from Arab politics, a hypothesis that can easily be negated given the history of the region and the influences of regional and international countries on local politics.

### **III- Arab Shiites’ struggle for power**

In his study of political Shiism, Yitzhak Nakash focuses on Arab Shiites to compare trends and behavior within a specific geographical context, in contrast to Nasr’s broader study of Shiism. Nakash’s choice of this geographical context is based on the fact that two Arab countries, Iraq and Bahrain have a clear majority of Shiites and they are both in

close proximity to Iran, the largest Shiite state in the world. As for Shiites in Saudi Arabia, they constitute only 8% of the total population. However they are concentrated in oil-producing Eastern Province. As for Lebanon, despite the lack of a national census since 1936, Shiites are estimated to be at 34% of the total population, making them the largest minority in the country. Furthermore, the region has a history of Shiite discrimination and marginalization under various Islamic empires and currently hosts a myriad of Shiite militant movements, including the well-known groups Hezbollah and Mahdy Army. (2006)

In his book, *Reaching for Power: the Shi'a in the Modern Arab world*, Nakash agrees with Shiite expert Vali Nasr that the only fixture of calls for Arab Shiite mobilization is the entrenched Sunni-Shiite conflict, which has dominated Middle Eastern politics for centuries. He asserts that this conflict that guides Shiites' political behavior. He starts the book with a chapter entitled "the Burden of the Past" elaborating the plight of Shiites as an oppressed group under the Ottoman Empire. He adds that the "history discussed here, illustrates that [Shiites] in the Arab world entered nationhood feeling excluded from power and seeking to redress political wrong." (2006:16)

Nakash does not present a unified picture of Arab Shiites until he presents his case for each of the four Arab countries that have significant Shiite populations, and where "all [Shiite] communities have experienced a degree of socioeconomic and political discrimination in their encounters with the state." (2006:159) For instance, in Saudi Arabia he presents Wahhabism ideology, a dominant branch of Sunni Islam in the

country, to be the main source of the alienation of Shiites because they are the infidels.

He adds:

The Al Sa'ud's adoption of Wahhabi-Hanbali Islam as the religious ideology of Saudi Arabia has had direct bearing on the inferior status of [Shiites] in the state. From the Wahhabi point of view, there is little to choose between the various [Shiite] sects. All [Shiites] including those who adhere to the main branch of Shi'i Islam, are considered either extremists or infidels. On several occasions in the twentieth century, Wahhabi activists and ulama argued that [Shiism] contains Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian, and Sasanid seeds, ruling out any possibility for accommodation between [Shiite] and Sunni Islam. (2006:44)

Nakash argues that despite their majority status, Shiites in Bahrain are oppressed by a Sunni royal family, banned from political protests, and oftentimes persecuted for calling for regime change.<sup>18</sup> In Iraq and Lebanon, Nakkash concludes that the ascension to power and the demographic expansion respectively in each of the countries have given great power to Shiites and increased their mobilization, mainly in the form of religious militant movements. He indicates that the leaders of these movements might have external allegiances to Syria and Iran, but their ascension to power has made them more democratic by adopting principles of political parties, and led them to move beyond their Islamic state aspirations. He adds:

The [Shiite] experience in Lebanon in the period following the civil war underscores the victory of pragmatism over [Shiite] radicalism—an outcome that has implications for the political reconstruction of Iraq where [Shiites], together with other Iraqis, will need to agree on power sharing and a new government system to replace the former Ba'th regime. (2006:144)

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<sup>18</sup> One can argue that events of the Arab Spring in 2011-2012 in Bahrain seem to confirm Nakash's representation of Shiite persecution in the country. While the international community is defending autocratic regimes that are oppressing their citizens in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and other Middle



In this statement, Nakash considers a direct relation between Shiite ascension to power and the democratization process of Shiite militant groups for the goal of creating an environment of “power sharing” with other groups. While the debate of Shiite political democracy is beyond the scope of this literature review, it is important to note that Nakash’s representation of Shiites’ aspirations for democracy does not provide an understanding about several phenomena currently taking place in the Arab world. These events include the fear of the rising of the “Shiite crescent”, inter-sectarian conflicts in Lebanon (especially between Shiites and Sunnis) and intra-sectarian conflicts in Iraq among the different Shiite political groups.

Furthermore, while Nakash limits his study of Arab mobilization to a history of oppression, he rarely addresses or expands on past, current, or future conflicts between Shiites and the West that might further amplify Arab Shiite mobilization. He does not grant much importance to an international fear of the rise of political Shiism. Thus, the Sunni fear of Shiism’s rise in the Arab world relegates political Shiism to an Arab, rather than international, issue. He says that, “[Shiites] as a whole are looking for ways to reconcile Islamic and Western concepts of government and reshape Islam in conformity with modern time.” (2006:162) Additionally, he alludes to the fact that Shiite marginalization has made this sect more apathetic for Western identities than Arab ones, by quoting poetry of Saudi Shiites:

We are Arabs, but  
Our land has become desolated  
And we who live on it have become

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Eastern countries, Shiite protests in Bahrain are rarely addressed in the media. Many Shiites refer to this case as one of the best examples of the ongoing Shiite marginalization in the region.

{a people} without identity...  
O God, give us American nationality  
So that we can live with dignity  
In the Arab countries. (2006:43)

The lack of attention to potential clashes between political Shiism and the West influenced Nakash to limit the discussion on the impacts of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on political Shiism. In his book on Arab Shiites, he describes the conflict between Hizbollah and Israel to be contextual, deprived from international influences—the United States and Iran—and having no impact on the future of political Shiism in the country or the region. He writes:

Although it provided weapons and training to Palestinian fighters, [Hizbollah] has been careful not to compromise its political achievements at home, and its members have therefore not joined the fighting inside Israel, or in the West Bank and Gaza. At the same time, Hassan Nasrallah, Hizbollah's Secretary General has acknowledged that a two state solution between Israel and Palestine is a "Palestinian matter." (2006:140)

Consequently, Nakash rarely addresses or describes current relations between political Shiite groups and the West, or the impact of nuclear Iran in the Arab region, giving these events less magnitude in Arab Shiite politics. However, speeches and political protests by Shiite political leaders in the region depict another reality, where entrenched conflicts and severed relations between the West and Shiite political groups are manifested in regional politics. This was highly visible in Hassan Nassrallah's speeches during the 2006 war between Israel and Hizbollah where he explicitly stated that his Shiite movement's *raison d'être* is to fight Israeli and American hegemony in the Arab world—a cause that has long been held by Sunnis of the Arab world.

In a nutshell, Nakash describes political Shiism to be purely a reflection of local context rather than regional politics, which diminishes the prospects of a “Shiite Crescent” or a transnational Shiite movement. At the same, he does not address the impact of the Iranian revolutionary ideologies of 1979 on Arab Shiites, which create a clear division between Iranian and Arab politics. As such, and similarly to Cole, Nakash separates local Shiite politics from regional and international levels. This is a misrepresentation of the Middle East, where, since nationhood, international politics have been manifested on the local level. Nakash’s various writings focus mainly on Arab Shiites history of marginalization and discrimination, which helped him develop a positive view about the role of Arab Shiites when and if they reach for power. This is a role of reform and rapprochement with the West. However, this optimistic view, shared by Vali Nasr too, plays down the influence of revolutionary Shiite ideologies on Arab Shiite networks, the various Shiite clashes with Israel and the West, and the ongoing Arab Shiite political protests despite the newly gained power in certain contexts.

#### **IV- Shiism: a religion of revolution and political protests**

Both Yitzhak Nakash and Vali Nasr perceive political Shiism as an outward reaction to marginalization and discrimination that ended with the ascension of Shiites to power during the U.S war in Iraq. They both discount the impacts of Shiite revolutionary ideologies that surfaced prior to and during the Iranian revolution on current Shiite politics, and thus present political Shiite groups as democratic entities and possibly the best Western ally in the region. On one hand, Nakash sees a rupture between Iranian and

Arab politics and hence a distinction between Arab Shiite groups and others. On the other hand Nasr presents Khomeini's Vilayet-e-Faqih—Guardianship of the Jurist which will be fully describe and discussed in Chapter 4—as a radical phenomenon that hurt the political Shiite cause to end marginalization. However, he discounts the importance of this phenomenon by stating that most Shiites follow the quietest school of Shiism.

In contrast with this outward look of political Shiism, Heinz Halm focuses on the ritualistic aspect of the religion. In his opinion, that ritualistic aspect is the basis for the formation and mobilization of the community. Heinz Halm, a long-time German expert on Shiism, expresses in his book *From Religion to Revolution*, that the essence of political Shiism lies in popular rituals and in particular the cult of martyrdom. (1997) He says that “the public display of guilt at the grave of the imam and lamenting over one's own sins are the roots of the large complex of atonement and mourning rituals for the [Shiites].” (1997:41)

Halm presents an in-depth historical perspective of Shiites since the death of Muhammed to support his argument about the presence of long time revolutionary elements in Shiism that came to dominate recent political rhetoric. He places great importance on the commemoration of *Ashura*, describing it as the “oldest documented form of [Shiite] rituals.” (1997:42) He considers his devotion to the historical ethnography of the passion plays and rituals of self-flagellation as necessary to understand the core of the faith, “since religion and politics are so closely intertwined in the Middle East.” (1997:viii) Hence, he proceeds in his book to describe in length the development of *Ashura* celebration while simultaneously portraying the political context

that surrounds it. For instance, he explains how “the Persian passion play suffered a hard blow when it was prohibited by the first Pahlavi ruler” because of his policies of secularization. (1997:78) Halm states that people celebrated *Ashura* in secret in their houses and mosques, creating tension between the Shah and the Iranians. Hence, when Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi took power in 1941, he loosened the laws on *Ashura* to appease to the Iranian people.<sup>19</sup>

Halm agrees that Shiism used to be a quiet political force where *Ashura* essentially was perceived by Shiites as the “quietly enduring martyr (...) and not the insurgent revolutionaries.” (1997:132) He states that:

Attaining legitimate power through the successor of the Prophet according to the will of God remained declared goal of [Shiism], but this was reserved for the Hidden Imam. Until his return as the messianic Mahdy, believers had only to wait, pray, and hope. Traditional [Shiism] is apolitical and holding power has always raised suspicions. (132)

However, according to Halm, political events that took place in Iran in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century along with the tobacco and constitutional protests “distorted outsiders’ ability to see [Shiism] as quietistic (sic).” (1997:132) Thus, “the conversion of [Shiite] tradition into a revolutionary ideology is (...) a very modern phenomenon and it demanded considerable modifications of the religious tradition.” (1997:132) He argues that Iranians who felt that they were “plagued” by Western influence in their country turned to their religious traditions of celebrating martyrdom and

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<sup>19</sup> Reza Shah was forced to abdicate to his son Muhammad Reza by the Allied powers. His son Muhammad Reza was considered weak and decreased the repression of the clergy

turned it into revolutionary principles to bring change to an enemy that is changing their culture.

As a result, Halm perceives the struggle against westernization as the main fixture for revolutionary political Shiism where Khomeini and other Shiite leaders grafted ideologies that revolutionized traditional Shiism. The most important change in traditional Shiism, Halm argues, is the change of *Ashura* from being the tenth day of Muharram to being “*Kerbala* is everywhere; every month is Muharram; every day is *Ashura*.” (1997:136) He claims, the “de-ritualization” of *Ashura* in the latter half of the twentieth century demanded martyrdom, a sacrificial death that did not exist before in the religion. (1997:136)

Within this context of “de-ritualization”, Halm places a great deal of importance on leaders who facilitated this process, specifically Ali Shariati and Ruhollah Khomeini, because they created diversity of thought in a religion that has been quiet and uniform for many centuries. While both Shariati and Khomeini called for the removal of the Shah in Iran by following the martyrdom of Hussayn, the former was calling to abolish the role of the clergy, while the latter was calling for consolidation of power within the clergy. Halm argues that the diversity of ideas that can appeal to the secular and the religious helped mobilize all Shiites of Iran to stand up against the Shah. (1997) He adds that similar forms of mobilization take place in other countries in the Middle East because “the segmentation of societies in the Middle East” is not exclusively defined in politics or religion, but it is a mixture of both where religion and politics come together to define action. (1997:157) He concludes that Shiite political protest is not a result of status or

power conflict because the elements of these protests are found within the religion.

Rather it is the re-interpretation of these ritualistic elements that help create revolutions.

In agreement with Halm on the importance of *Ashura* for the Shiites, Hamid Dabashi presents political Shiism in his book *Shi'ism: a Religion of Protest*, as a theology of discontent. (2011) He states:

Shi'ism with a prolonged history of militant political activism, re-entered the regional political scene in the late 1970s with the advent of the Islamic Revolution. Once again it wrote itself into the larger transformative domains of a global claim on Islam and Muslims and into the mankind of a massive social revolution. (302)

According to Dabashi, political Shiism suffers from a “*Kerbala* complex” that mutated across the generations to become Shiism’s “mode of deferred defiance.”

(2011:76) the *Kerbala* complex is “the figure of a tragic hero, an exemplary revolutionary who sacrifices his life for a superior cause”, and which became completely infused in the revolutionary ideologies of the late twentieth century in Iran and developed a debate among theologians and secular leaders about the future of Iran and political Shiism as a whole. Both Halm’s and Dabashi’s main focus in their respective books is the political protest aspect of Shiism that was revived in Iran in the 1970s but existed for a long time through the *Kerbala* complex. Their main attention in their analysis is on the intertwined relationship between religious rituals and the evolution of politics for Shiite mobilization in the Middle East. (1997, 2011) Dabashi adds:

[Shiism] is a festive gathering, a festival, a feast, a constellation, of moral manners, a commitment, a conviction, a mobile memory—the centerpiece of it is the iconic unsheathing of a dagger, for real, for sure, always half-drawn from its worn-out sheath. Always ready to change its own metaphors, [Shiism] is also a

raised lantern of hope in desperation, a green flag, a red marker for martyrdom, sacrifice, renewal, resurrection. (2011:xi)

Dabashi attempts to show a link between Iran's debate of ideologies in 1970s and current Shiite political movements, but he falls short of showing the breadth and depth of this relationship. He argues that the "revolutionary model" of the 1970s ideologies remains in current political Shiism that is manifested in militant groups that can mobilize Shiites across the Muslim world. However, he does not expand on how this "revolutionary model" of the last century is currently discussed and presented among current Shiite groups in order to create mobilization. (2011:308) While Nakash creates a complete separation between Iranian and Arab politics, both Halm and Dabashi argue that the changes in Iran in the 1970s changed the face of political Shiism as a whole, and created a strong link between Iranian politics and Shiite politics in regional countries.

The importance of *Ashura* and the battle of *Karbala* for Shiites are given great importance in various other literatures. For instance, Nikki Keddie demonstrates in *Scholars, Saint, and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions Since 1500*, how the Iranian clergy of the 1960s described and reformulated *Ashura* events to their followers to incite them for mobilization and revolt against the Shah. (1972) To quote some of the clergy's passages of that time about *Ashura*:

[Husayn] said, "this is not a type of revolt that you can cooperate with by giving wealth or giving speeches or giving religious magazines or newspapers to people, the only way you can cooperate with this revolt (...) is with martyrdom and self sacrifice." (...) I {[Husayn]} am not asking help from merchants or from powerful writers. The only help I can get is from sincere devotees, and heroes, who are willing to sacrifice themselves, who are truly willing to sacrifice their blood. (Keddie, 1972:360)



Interestingly, at the time of Husayn in Arabia in the seventh century there were no newspapers, religious magazines, or other media that the clergy is referring to in this text. Keddie says that the clergy's distrust of the Shah government that was oppressive through its various political and economic institutions led them to present a modern interpretation of *Ashura* to fit current time and space. Hence, the new political meaning of *Ashura* is communicated from clergy leaders to the people based on particular political contexts that have imminent relevance to the masses. *Ashura*, then, stops being a past symbol and becomes a contemporary issue where martyrdom and self sacrifice are inevitable.

It is from this *Kerbala* complex, Dabashi argues, Shiites developed the core of their political subconscious since "tyranny is not to be tolerated. Tyranny is to be resisted." (2011:83) Halm, Dabashi and Keddie argue that key concepts have emerged through centuries following the battle of *Kerbala* to collectively constitute a force of mobilization for Shiites to protest. The revolutionary hero embodied in Husayn becomes an "unending metaphysics of revolt against tyranny," and a "cosmic battle" against injustice. (Dabashi, 2011:83)

## **V- Conclusion**

The review of the literature on political Shiism presented above underscores two main diverging views. The first is the Shiite quest for political power is a result of a long-standing conflict with Sunnis, coupled with centuries of Shiite political and economic marginalization. This view argues that Shiite ascension in political matters will evidently

lead to power sharing and will transform Shiite militant movements into democratic political groups that can take part in the political process. Holders of this view agree that this outcome will result in more stability in the region, making political Shiism a valuable regional ally for the West. This view also assumes that political Shiism and Shiite mobilization is a country-specific phenomenon, with clear separation between local politics on one side and regional and international politics on the other. Shiite experts who hold this view draw no connection between Shiite revolutionary ideas that helped transform Iran and the Middle East region in the past three decades and current forms of political Shiism. As a consequence, holders of this view do not envision a transnational Shiite political power—in reference to the Shiite Crescent—taking place among Shiite groups in the Middle East and thus provoking a form of mobilization that would threaten regional stability.

The second view is that political Shiism holds revolutionary elements that can be interpreted to fit any political context that Shiites perceive as threatening. This view assumes that the clergy plays an important role in defining and redefining these revolutionary elements, thus creating diversity of thought within political Shiism. At the same time, this view assumes that the interpretation of the religious elements is mutable, and can thus be made to fit the current needs of various political contexts in order to provoke political mobilization. As such, this view does not provide clear and defined fixtures of conflicts between political Shiism and other factions, but instead portrays political Shiism as existing in a constant revolutionary state with no defined or clear goals. Holders of this view perceive Ali Shariati and Ruhollah Khomeini as the main

ideologues of political Shiism who were able to transform the religion from quietism to revolution through the use of *Ashura* narrative and the heroic qualities of Husayn.

However, this view falls short from exploring non-revolutionary elements of political Shiism such as the quietest school that rejects political involvement, and under which, Vali Nasr associated the majority of Shiites—as discussed previously.

Both these views offer a narrow and restricted description of political Shiism. The former portrays political Shiism in a constant conflict with Sunnis, where the only viable resolution is for Shiites to acquire political power. In contrast, the latter perceives it in a constant cyclical revolutionary state where there are no possible entry points for transformation to break the revolutionary cycles. However, current events of political Shiism in the Arab world do not fit either of these views. For example, during a speech on September 22, 2006, Hassan Nasrallah described Hezbollah's war with Israel as the victory of the haves over the have-nots, the marginalized over the moneyed few, the disenfranchised over the power holders, and the martyr over the appeaser. (Pelham, 2008) Nasrallah avoided sectarian terms, and direct *Ashura* references and instead he called the war a divine victory for all Arabs. He did not address Shiite marginalization and did not evoke Husayn's heroic qualities. Instead, he drew on concepts from both views presented above to incite his followers, mobilize Shiites, and grant Hezbollah political clout on both the national and regional level.

The questions that this dissertation raises will help provide a comprehensive understanding of current events of political Shiism and the knowledge to discern issues that create Shiite mobilization. The research will first provide a systematic description of

the *Ashura* rituals and celebration to highlight its centrality in political Shiism. This will be followed with a description of the different schools of thought of political Shiism of the twentieth century by focusing on their theological and political development.

Furthermore, the research will analyze speeches of leaders of political Shiism to illustrate how politics and Shiism come together to create a groundswell of Shiite mobilization.

The following chapter on methodology will provide a complete description of the research framework followed throughout the dissertation.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **I- Introduction**

The purpose of the research is to provide an in-depth examination of political Shiism that is formed through religious rituals, long-standing ideologies, and current politics. As presented in chapter 2, experts on the subject of political Shiism have not widely examined the integration of these three different aspects in the formation of the emerging phenomenon of political Shiism. The literature review is divided between those who believe that political Shiism is merely a reaction to current politics, and others who believe that it is an ongoing manifestation of *Ashura* and the martyrdom of Husayn. Thus in this chapter, I will lay out a combination of methodology approaches to show first the importance of *Ashura* in creating a political community among Shiites, second, the role of ideologies in changing the face of political Shiism from quietism to activism, and third the influence of current political speeches in mobilizing Shiites for political protests. Each of the chapters 4, 5, and 6 of the dissertation will follow a specifically tailored methodology to examine the questions and issues raised.

### **II- Methodology: chapters 4, 5, and 6**

*Chapter 4: Ashura and the Shiite political community: methodology*

There is a consensus among experts on the importance of *Ashura* for political Shiism. For instance, Vali Nasr often highlighted the importance of this ritual for the emergence of political Shiism in the Middle East. (2007) As discussed in the previous chapter, he provided detailed description in his writings of Iraqi Shiites' celebration after the end of the Saddam regime; but he refrained from describing and linking the political importance of this ritual for Shiites. On the other hand, Heinz Halm and Hamid Dabashi argued that for Shiism, religion and politics are intertwined and thus the *Ashura* ritualistic celebration becomes the basis for the formation of the Shiite political community. (1997; 2011) Halm added that the essence of political Shiism is founded in popular rituals and in particular the cult of martyrdom. Therefore in chapter 4, the analysis aims to describe the formation of Shiite political communities through the celebration of *Ashura*. The research will demonstrate, similarly to Halm's argument, how popular rituals during this yearly celebration have become closely coupled with political events engaging all mourners of Husayn in political matters.

Hence, in order to examine the symbolism and implications of the battle of *Karbala*, the research methodology uses secondary literature of anthropological studies and observations of *Ashura* rituals in the Muslim world. The resources are focused on authors who experienced first-hand or participated in *Ashura* celebrations specifically in countries of the Arab world. The resources include Elizabeth Fernea's (2005) studies of *Ashura* in Iraq, and Augustus Richard Norton (2005, 2007) in Lebanon.

In addition to the secondary literature, I will examine newspaper clippings in order to describe the contemporary political significance of *Ashura* celebrations in the Arab

world. The focus of the newspaper clippings will be on Lebanon and Iraq since both these countries have had increased media attention in the last decade during this yearly ritual. The use of these resources will help portray political events in order to contextualize the religious commemorations that took place during *Ashura*, as it will be exemplified in the analysis. The newspaper clippings will be used merely to identify the political context of the celebration and are not quoted for their analysis or their support for any political or sectarian party.

Also, as a complement to these resources, I will use my own experience as a participant in *Ashura* celebrations for over twenty years in Lebanon and Iraq. As a member of a Shiite Iraqi-Lebanese religious family, the community where I grew up celebrated yearly the martyrdom of Husayn whether in public in Lebanon or in secret in Iraq during the Baath era. Hence, I will use these personal observations to highlight certain rituals and further describe the collective political community that *Ashura* creates among Shiites.

#### *Chapter 5: Political Shiism and the debate of ideologies: methodology*

Political Shiism is not confined to *Ashura*'s rituals and symbolism as argued previously by Heinz Halm and Hamid Dabashi. (1997, 2011) Political Shiism surpasses the “*Kerbala complex*”, as coined by Dabashi, to include layers of political complexities that have existed in the Middle East for several centuries. As outlined in chapter 1, regional geopolitical events such as Western colonialism of Arab countries, expansion of Arab nationalism, the birth of Israel, and the cold war have helped empower a wave of Islamist

ideologies, Sunni and Shiites, in the 1960s and 1970s. And the Iranian Revolution of 1979 cemented the role of Islamist ideologies in Middle Eastern politics. More specifically, the revolution presented new ideas in political Shiism about Islamic states and role of Shiites that have not existed before, and transformed political Shiism into a phenomenon that is greater than *Ashura*'s symbolism.

Both Vali Nasr and Yitzhak Nakash discount the role of these newly developed ideas into the formation of political Shiism. As such Nasr does not discuss the transformation that political Shiism underwent during the latter half of the twentieth century which led to the revolution in 1979. Furthermore, he does not associate any importance to Shiite revolutionary ideas or political processes that led to their formation, and simply state that the majority of Shiites are not interested in radical social change. (2007) Similarly, Nakash does not address any of these ideas as part of political Shiism. (2006) Hence, the purpose of this chapter is to identify and describe the different Shiite ideologies that dominated during the time period of the 1960s and 1970s and which helped shape political Shiism. According to Milani, starting the early 1960s and through the 1970s, Shiism was attempting to reinvent itself through the clergy and Islamic non-clerical thinkers to make it more appealing for the masses and to mobilize them against the monarchy in Iran. (2009) Therefore, the examination of these ideas that have introduced activism to a religion that historically followed political quietism is necessary to develop a systematic understanding of political Shiism.



The research methodology followed in this chapter will focus on primary sources of four main ideologues of political Shiism in addition to biographies and historical accounts that document their lives. These ideologues are:

- (i) Ruhollah Khomeini was one of the first outspoken clergy during the period of the 1960s-1970s who recognized the needed change of political Shiism toward activism and who published his writings to articulate his novel ideas. (Tabari 1983; Halm 1997; Keddie, 1983; Rose 1983; Beeman 1983) Khomeini's manifestoes and agitation during the 1960s forced the Shah to exile him, but his followers inside Iran carried on with his ideas until his return in 1978. As indicated in the literature review, Vali Nasr blames Khomeini, single handedly, for promulgating populist theocracy and for ruining Shiite piety. While Khomeini is mostly known for his role in the Iranian Revolution and for his leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran in later years, the focus on this chapter will be on the formulation of his ideas and the political context prior to the revolution.
- (ii) Ali Shariati was a member of the movement God-Worshipping Socialists, whose writings contributed to the ideological development of Shiism among Iranian youth and working class. (Tabari, 1983; Akhavi, 1983; Chatterjee 2011) Shariati was an Islamic non-clerical thinker who used principles of Freud, Sartre, Marx and Fanon in an attempt to combine them with Shiite faith to create an ideology appealing to the educated middle class. Frustrated with the Shah's economic policies and his ties with international states, Shariati used

Shiism as an instrument for revolution and social change. (Milani, 2009)

Shariati viewed the clergy to offer a narrow and restricted version of Islam and called for a political Shiism that is separate from the clergy.

(iii) Mohammed Baqir Al Sadr was the founding member of the Iraqi religious opposition Ad-Dawa. Al Sadr of Iraqi origin became an admirer of Khomeini's ideas during the exile of the latter in Iraq between 1965-1978. However, he disagreed with Khomeini about the role of democracy which Al Sadr considered to be necessary to sustain an Islamic state. Al Sadr allowed for the reinvention of political Shiism not to be solely an Iranian phenomenon, but also a pan-Shiite movement. Al Sadr viewed in the Baathist regime in Iraq a threat to Shiites in the country and advocated for a new form of governance based on Islamic principles. His writings revived Islamic political movements in Iraq in the 1970s, and his brutal death in 1980 made him an important icon in political Shiism. (Mallat, 1993)

(iv) Abu Al Qasim Al Khoei was one of the most followed Shiite spiritual leaders until his death in 1992. (Mallat 1993; Nakash 2006; Nasr 2007) Of Iranian origins, Al Khoei took residence in Najaf, Iraq and was a staunch challenger to Khomeini's ideas. He was a firm believer of quietism in Shiism, and unfolding political events in the Middle East did not change his position. According to many experts, Al Khoei's former student and current Shiite spiritual leader in Iraq Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani is a living legacy of moderate

Shiite politics that Al Khoei advocated for during his life. (Nakash 2006; Nasr 2007; Milani 2009; Bazzi 2010)

The four ideologues presented above embody the main leaders of political Shiite thought during the time period of the 1960s and 1970s. Limiting the number of ideologues to only four does not discount the ideological influence of other Shiite clergy intellectuals such as Syyed Mussa Sadr, Ayatollah Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, Ayatollah Ali Sistani or Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. However, these individuals and others are associated, whether directly or indirectly, to one of the political Shiism schools of these four ideologues presented above. For instance, Ayatollah Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah and Ayatollah Ali Sistani are often viewed to be followers of Abu Al Qasim Al Khoei, especially that they both were his students in the Shiite seminary in Najaf, Iraq during the 1960s and 1970s. (Nasr, 2007; Milani 2009) Also, one can argue that each school of thought might have been influenced by other thinkers and ideologues, however the focus of this methodology will be to shed light on the ideas of the main founders of each school.

In order to examine the different forms of political Shiism the research will focus on primary sources written by these four ideologues. The collection of these primary sources took place during the span of three years between 2009 and 2011 in Iraq and Lebanon. Publishing houses in Shiite areas in Lebanon hold a monopoly over printing and distributing books on Shiism in the Arab world, hence this is where the collection of data

began.<sup>20</sup> The main publishing houses are: Dal Al Ta'aruf specialized in publishing Al Sadr's books, Dar Al Malak specialized in publishing Shariati's books, Dar Al Fikr Al Islami and Dar Al Amir specialized in publishing Khomeini's books. It is important to note that none of the Lebanese publishing houses held any of Al-Khoei's books despite his high tenure as a Shiite spiritual leader.

In 2010, I visited the Jaafari Shiite court in Lebanon to ask about locations of Shiite libraries specialized in Al Khoei's books longstanding conflict with Khomeini.<sup>21</sup> The lack of Al Khoei's books encouraged me to visit his personal library in Najaf-Iraq to acquire some of his initial writings. The curator, however, rejected my demands. Several of family members and acquaintances that live in the city attempted to reach out to the curator so I could obtain at least a few original documents pertaining to Al Khoei's political writing, but all these attempts were in vain.<sup>22</sup> Fortunately, the Al Khoei foundation established by Abu Al-Qasim's sons has a bookstore in New York City that carries a few of Al Khoei's written works, which I acquired for the purpose of this research.

None of the publishing houses that I visited publicly displayed original work of any of these ideologues. The short answer to my question about the lack of selling these resources was that *there is no demand for what happened before the Iranian Revolution*. Thus I had to visit archival warehouses to look through an immense number of dusty archived boxes in search for the books needed for the research. I spent a total of three

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<sup>20</sup> This monopoly is rooted in the fact that Shiite publishing houses in Lebanon are not harassed or threatened by the government or other groups in the country, unlike other Arab countries in the region

<sup>21</sup> Due to confidential reasons, I can not reveal the name of the cleric or give more identification about him

weeks in four different warehouses to collect most of the written works of Khomeini, Shariati, and Al Sadr. Most of the books are translated into Arabic, some are in French such as Khomeini's and Shariati's books due to the time they spent in France whether in exile or studying respectively, and few are in Farsi. Below is the list of publications that I have collected and that I will use for this section of the research. I am aware that each ideologue has written more than thirty books or treatise but my focus will be on the publications that have addressed religio-political issues, and not books that solely focus on Shiite Jurisprudence<sup>23</sup>—Fiqh:

**Ruhollah Khomeini:**

- Al Houkama Al Islamiyya: Vilayat-e-Faqih (The Islamic Government: Vilayat-e-Faqih. (Khomeini did not publish this as a book but as a collection of lectures that he presented in the 1960s and 1970s describing his vision of a Shiite Islamic state)
- Le testament Politico-Spirituel: L'Islam autrement (The Political Spiritual Testament: a different Islam)
- Al Jihad Al Akbar (The Greater Struggle)
- Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini

**Ali Shariati:**

- Al Tashayyou' Mas'ouliyyah (The Responsibility of Shiism)

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<sup>22</sup> The lack of access to Al Khomeini's books made me raise additional questions about the secrecy of his political writings, but this is beyond the scope of this research and should be addressed in follow up studies

- Al Shahada (Martyrdom)
- Bina' Al That Al Thawriyya (Building the Revolutionary self)
- Abi wa Oummi: Nahnou Moutahhamoun (Mother and Father: we are guilty)
- Ma'rifat Al Islam (Islamology)
- Al Umma wal Imam (The nation and the leadership)

**Mohammad Baqir Al Sadr:**

- Al Islam Yaqoud Al Hayat (Islam as the leader of life)
- Iqtisadouna (Our economy)
- Falsaphatouna (Our philosophy)
- Bahth Hawla El Wilaya (Research on the Islamic Leadership)

**Abu Al Qasim Al Khoei:**

- Minhaju Al Saliheen; 2 volumes (The Path of the Righteous)

In order to complement these primary resources with political and historical background, biographies and historical documentaries are examined. For this purpose, I contacted Dar Al Manar,<sup>24</sup> Hizbollah's TV archives in Beirut, to acquire the various documentaries and historical accounts they have produced on Khomeini and Al Sadr. Dar Al Manar does not have any references to documentaries pertaining to Shariati or Al

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<sup>23</sup> Jurisprudence books—Fiqh— focus primarily on how to practice the five pillars of Islam rather than explaining the relationship between politics and Shiism.

Khoei. Furthermore, I collected additional biographies examining the lives of the four ideologues from different Shiite libraries in Lebanon and the library of congress in Washington, DC. The utility of the archival research is to develop a historical timeline of the 1960s and 1970s that will help contextualize the development of ideas within the political events that were taking place in country specifically, and the region writ-large. Hence, the novelty of this methodology is not only to reveal the principles of Islam according to these four ideologues, but also to describe their philosophical formulation of ideologies of activism and quietism in political Shiism, and the influence that political developments had on shaping these specific ideas.

#### *Chapter 6: political speeches for Arab Shiite mobilization: methodology*

In addition to rituals of Ashura and political ideologies, political Shiism is exhibited through political events that are currently shaping the Middle East. Yitzhak Nakash has often argued that political Shiism is influenced by its own local socio-political context, separate from any transnational Shiite politics. (2006) He intentionally marginalized regional and international influences with regard to the development of political Shiism which he considered to be merely a product of politics confined within national boundaries of Arab countries—specifically Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. However, as argued in the methodology of the two previous two chapters, simplification of the phenomenon of political Shiism can be considered a misrepresentation of the

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<sup>24</sup> I want to highlight that I have cultivated a professional relationship with the curator of the archives at Dar Al Manar in order to release the various documentaries for my research. This relationship will be more beneficial for the purpose of collecting data for the following chapter

Middle East, where international politics have always been closely intertwined with national and local politics. These linkages are substantive to the understanding of Shiite political protests.

Furthermore, Vali Nasr perceives political actions of political Shiism to be simply a reaction to general politics of deprivation and marginalization of Shiites in past centuries. He paints a monochromatic picture of Shiite politics which he considers to be merely a reaction to centuries of marginalization due to a long-lived Sunni-Shiite conflict. However, in the Arab world, sources of conflict surpass inter-religious Islamic conflicts to encompass more nuanced political struggles that shape communities and incite for political protests. From this perspective, the purpose of this chapter is to shed light on the variety of political topics—local, regional, and international—that aim at creating political mobilization among Shiites in the Arab world.

The mobilization of Shiites is often noticed through leaders' speeches. It is the only public medium for political communication between the leader and his followers. This is evident in Iraq when Shiite supporters of Muqtada Al Sadr spend more than half of the speech chanting and repeating Al Sadr's political slogans; or in Lebanon where gunfire is shot in the air in celebration for Nasrallah's communication. These speeches constitute the main interaction between leader and follower. This interaction helps exaggerate admiration and intensify mobilization among Shiite populations. Hence, this chapter will explore the language of political Shiism that is being used during these speeches in order to mobilize the people. My goal is to describe the content of these speeches to better understand Shiite mobilization, and more specifically demonstrate connections of these



leaders' ideas, or lack of, with ideas of Shiite activism of the 1960s and 1970s discussed in chapter 5. Whether this connection exists or not will help understand the development of political Shiism—if it is only a product of current politics, or has ties with broader issues pertaining to Shiites' activism.

The focus will be on two Arab countries: Lebanon and Iraq. Both countries have large Shiite populations and have had political Shiism activism in the last decade: in Lebanon, Shiites are the biggest minority,<sup>25</sup> and Shiites constitute about 65% of the population in Iraq. (Nakash, 2006) The choice of these two countries does not discount the importance of other Arab countries that have Shiite populations, or the Shiite uprising currently taking place as part of the Arab Spring in Bahrain and Eastern parts of Saudi Arabia. But the fact that these events are ongoing limits my ability to analyze them in the context of political Shiism. Hence, focusing the analysis on other Arab countries that are not affected by the ongoing uprising and that have had past events of Shiite mobilization might offer insights for addressing consequences of the Arab spring in Shiite communities.

### **Lebanon:**

In Lebanon, I will explore the speeches of Hassan Nasrallah, Secretary General of Hizbollah. Nasrallah was born in South Lebanon to a poor Shiite family. Since his younger years, he exhibited yearning to Shiite theology, and traveled to Najaf, Iraq to

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<sup>25</sup> The last population census in Lebanon was done in 1936. There are no factual numbers about Shiite percentages of the population. But based on the last parliamentary Lebanese elections, Shiites constitute the biggest minority in the country (with less than 50% of the population)

purse his studies in theology. In Najaf, Nasrallah studied with tutors closely affiliated with Muhammad Baqir Al Sadr and Ruhollah Khomeini. However, the crackdown of the Baath regime on Shiite seminaries forced Nasrallah to move to Lebanon to continue his studies. He then assumed a leadership position with the Amal Shiite party that started in late 1960s by Musa Al Sadr<sup>26</sup> to support the marginalized Lebanese Shiites. Following the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982, and the decision of Amal to cease resistance against Israel in favor of a national salvation government, Nasrallah left Amal and joined a newly emerging group that believed in the importance of building an Islamic movement to fight Israel.<sup>27</sup> (Noe, 2007) This group, whose members were closely affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards later became known as Hizbollah, or Party of God, in 1985. (Noe, 2007; Norton, 2007) Nasrallah has been leading Hizbollah since 1992.

The choice to focus on Hizbollah's leader rather than Amal is due to the fact that the latter has often been perceived as a secular organization that is part of the Lebanese political system. Amal's<sup>28</sup> manifesto in 1975 was committed to a secular Lebanon, and since 1978 the party has been led by Nabih Berri, a secular politician, who has been the speaker of the Lebanese Parliament since 1992. (Deeb, 1988) As for Hizbollah, with their development in the early 1980s, they envisioned an Islamic state of Lebanon that follows the model of Iran. According to the Party's first Secretary General Naim Qassem, the stated goals in the 1985 manifesto are: (1) resistance against Israeli occupation, (2)

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<sup>26</sup> Musa Al Sadr mysteriously disappeared in 1978 on his way from Libya to Italy. For further information refer to Fouad Ajami the Vanished Imam

<sup>27</sup> Certain sources state that the idea of a Shiite Islamic Movement to fight Israel began as early as 1978. For more information refer to Nicholas Blanford *Warriors of God*, 2011

<sup>28</sup> For more information about Ama's history, refer to Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam*, (1986) and August Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a Struggle for the Soul of Islam*, (1987)

rejection of the Lebanese sectarian system, and (3) establishment of an Islamic state in Lebanon. (Qassem, 2005) The end of the civil war in Lebanon in 1991 and Syrian domination over Lebanese affairs allowed Hizbollah to concentrate its efforts on battling Israel. During the 1990s, Hizbollah went an overhaul revolution within their tactics and became more compartmentalized with units specialized in intelligence gathering, weapons, and military training.<sup>29</sup> (Noe, 2007)

Hizbollah's popularity supersedes Amal's in Lebanon. The Party of God has built hospitals, schools, and infrastructure in Shiite areas where the Lebanese government has failed to offer basic services. In the Shiite populated South Lebanon and Southern suburbs of Beirut, one would always notice, on every street corner, two to three men in civilian clothes watching the neighborhood and to prevent petty crimes and violent fights. Hence, when discussing Hizbollah, Shiites in Lebanon often evoke feelings of security and safety. (Blanford, 2011)

### **Speeches:**

Hassan Nasrallah has delivered over five hundred speeches since he took leadership of Hizbollah in 1992; it would be impossible to examine all of them. In order to narrow the choice of speeches, I focused on those that took place during major political events that involved Hizbollah directly and during which a national Shiite mobilization took place. It is important to note that prior to the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon in May of

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<sup>29</sup> For more information about the history of Hizbollah refer to Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance*, 1997; Augustus Norton *Hezbollah*, 2007; Naim Qassem *Hizbollah*, 2005; Judith Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah: the changing face of terrorism*, 2005; Nicholas Blanford *Warriors of God*, 2011

2000, Hizbollah was perceived as the Lebanese resistance against Israel, and not a Shiite entity. (Noe, 2007) It is after the Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon that internal political discussions started in the country about the sectarian nature and role of the Party.

Since the year 2000, there have been two major political events that heavily affected Lebanon, and in which where Hizbollah was a primary actor and Shiite mobilization was visible: (1) The Israel-Hizbollah war of July-August 2006; and (2) the capture by Hizbollah, Amal, and the Syrian Socialist National Party of Beirut, and subsequent calls for a coup against the government, in May 2008.

For the purpose of this chapter, the focus will be on the first political event because Nasrallah did not present any speeches during the second event. Instead he held one press conference prior to the conflict threatening the Lebanese government of a possible coup if they continue their anti-Hizbollah policies—the Lebanese government had just initiated an order to dismantle Hizbollah's communications network at the Lebanese airport. One can argue that Nasrallah did not present any speeches because Hizbollah was one of three actors who instigated the military conflict, and he, alone, could not be a spokesperson for these two other parties.

In order to collect the speeches presented during the July-August war 2006, I have been building a relationship with the staff at Al Manar archives, Hizbollah's TV station, since 2009. This relationship was possible primarily because of my family's stature in the Shiite community in Lebanon. I have informed the staff about my interests in the study of political Shiism, its evolution, and current politics, specifically the politics of Nasrallah. Based on the reputation of my family and my interests, they have offered to provide me

with the necessary data for the research which includes all speeches of Hassan Nasrallah during the 2006 war, total of ten. The collection of data would have not been possible without the help of the staff since there are no other archival references to these speeches. Prior to initiating the conversation with Al Manar, I contacted several Lebanese television stations and newspapers acquiring about the possibility of gaining access to their archives and I was turned down by each outlet. Furthermore, none of the universities or research centers in Lebanon carries such archives.<sup>30</sup>

### **Iraq:**

In Iraq, I will focus on the speeches of Muqtada Al Sadr, leader of the Sadrist movement, and its military wing, the Mahdy Army. Muqtada was born in 1973 in Iraq, son of Muhammed Sadiq Al Sadr—Sadiq Al Sadr hereafter—brother of Muhammed Baqir Al Sadr. He comes from a powerful and well known clerical dynasty in Iraq and the Shiite world. His father, Sadiq Al Sadr, was imprisoned with his brother Muhammed Baqir Al Sadr several times in the 1970s by the Baathist regime due to their political activism. But contrary to Muhammed Baqir, Sadiq retreated to religion and prayer after his release from jail, refusing to take part in the clerical political movement in Najaf. (Cockburn, 2008)

In the 1990s, after the Iraq war on Kuwait and the UN-imposed sanctions, poverty levels rose in Iraq and consequently increased malnutrition, lack of health services, and disease. Also, unemployment rates soared, literacy rates dropped, and child mortality

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<sup>30</sup> People have posted excerpts of Nasrallah's speeches on youtube, however they are incomplete and not

increased. (UNICEF, 2003) Within this deprivation context, Sadiq Al Sadr adopted an active approach to help the impoverished Shiite communities. He divided religious charities among the most affected Shiite regions, demanding international Shiite almsgiving to be provided to needy Shiite Iraqis. He also became more critical of the quietist clergymen in Najaf and began adopting his brother's political positions. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2008) As a result, Sadiq's popularity increased among Shiites in Iraq and became an essential condition for Muqtada's popularity later on.

Sadiq Al Sadr was killed in 1999 with two of his sons.<sup>31</sup> Many argue that Muqtada's life was spared because he presented himself to the Baath regime as gullible and inept for political participation. This was one of the early signs of Muqtada's intelligence to fool the Iraqi regime. (Cockburn, 2008) In 2003, during and after the U.S war on Iraq, Muqtada quickly organized his supporters, mainly people who benefited from his father's charity programs, or those who were committed to his uncle's political ideology. He wanted to ensure the mobilization of Sadrist supporters—supporters of his father and uncle—to take responsibility of Shiite neighborhoods after the fall of the Baath regime, and prevent any potential American takeover. (Cockburn, 2008)

The choice to study speeches of Muqtada Al Sadr does not reduce the importance of other Iraqi leaders in the Shiite context. Nouri Al Maliki, head of the Dawa party, became Prime Minister of Iraq, and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq—previously known as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq—led by Al-Hakim family—a

well known and revered Shiite clerical family—is one of the most powerful political parties in Iraq. These different leaders and parties became since 2003, the mainstream of Shiite politics in Iraq and cooperated with the U.S and other international and regional powers for Iraq’s post-reconstruction. (Cole, 2003) However, Muqtada Al Sadr along with his political party and its military wing refused to cooperate with other Iraqi political parties and denounced any foreign presence in Iraq. Hence, when Paul Bremer formed the Coalition Provisional Authority in 2003 as the transitional government, he ordered for Muqtada Al Sadr to be captured dead or alive, and called him a “rabble-rousing [Shiite] cleric.” (Cockburn, 2008:139)

After the U.S surge in 2007, Muqtada Al Sadr had to go into hiding. He sought a self-imposed exile in Iran, where he continued his theological studies. From his exile, he carried on delivering his speeches through his aides in Iraq. Also during this period, he started focusing on the political aspirations of the party rather than its military goals. With the help of Iran as a negotiating party, he built alliances with Nouri Al Maliki and the Dawa party and joined a unified coalition to form the Iraqi government after the Parliamentary elections in 2010. (Cockburn, 2008) Muqtada Al Sadr returned to Iraq in January 2011 after an Iranian negotiated agreement with Nouri Al Maliki, Iraqi Prime Minister.<sup>32</sup>

### **Speeches:**

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<sup>31</sup> There is no actual proof on who killed Sadiq Al Sadr and his sons. He was often threatened by the Baathist regime for his political action; but the Iraqi government blamed Iranian operatives for his death and executed them

<sup>32</sup> For a full biography on Muqtada Al Sadr, refer to Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq*, 2008

The speeches that I will select will be chosen from the time periods (2003-2006 and 2011 onward) that Muqtada Al Sadr was in Iraq where he was personally addressing his followers. As mentioned earlier, from 2007 till 2011, Al Sadr stayed in Iran, and his aides took on the responsibility of delivering his speeches. However, his aides were not politically unified and, hence, the messages differed between a region and another. (Cockburn, 2008)

Between 2003-2006, I collected over 200 speeches for Muqtada Al Sadr that he personally delivered in Iraq. Many of these speeches were purely religious sermons/lessons delivered during Friday prayers. I was successful in acquiring these speeches by building a relationship with Al Sadr's office in Kerbala, Iraq. My family's well-known reputation in the Shiite religious context facilitated my contact with Al-Sadr's office, and the staff was very keen to provide me with the necessary information, hoping that my research would spread Muqtada's teachings. I clarified to the staff that the use of the speeches will be solely for political analysis driven by my personal interests to understand Shiism. Given the large number of speeches, I will limit my analysis to the speeches that were published into pamphlets and distributed among Shiites in Iraq given the importance of their content.

These speeches are limited to seven:

1. The first speech of Muqtada delivered on April 11, 2003
2. The message to women
3. The message to the police
4. The message to the government



5. The second anniversary of the occupation in 2005
6. The third anniversary of the occupation in 2006
7. Al Sadr's message after explosions in Sadr City in March 2006

After Al Sadr's return to Iraq in January 2011, he delivered two main speeches that focused on the political direction of the Sadrist movement. Both speeches were delivered in January 2011, the first one was addressed to the general public, and the second one was addressed to the Sadrist leaders in various regions of Iraq. These two speeches will be added to the seven selected above for analysis.

### **III- Conclusion**

Through mixed methodological approaches, the dissertation aims at providing a broader understanding of political Shiism to address the gaps raised in the literature review chapter, and offer a new way of thinking about this rising religio-political wave. The research had its own challenges especially in the collection of speeches and primary sources of ideologues. Whether at Dar Al Manar archives or Al-Sadr's office, I was often questioned about the political purposes for acquiring these documents, and in certain instances, my requests were rejected because I am completing my degree in the United States. For this, I will always be in debt for the community of friends and family who served as intermediary negotiators with Dar Al Manar and Al-Sadr's office to make sure that I acquired all the necessary data to complete the research. The analysis of the data

will start in the following chapter through examining *Ashura* rituals and the Shiite political community.

## **CHAPTER 4: ASHURA AND THE SHIITE POLITICAL COMMUNITY**

*“Perhaps no other single event in Islamic history has played so central a role in shaping [Shiite] identity and communal sense as the martyrdom of Husayn and his companions at Kerbala.”*  
*Yitzhak Nakash, 1993:1*

### **I- Introduction**

Many doctrinal and legal disagreements distinguish the minority Shiites from the Sunni majority. However, at the heart of these issues lies the disagreement over Islamic leadership after the death of Prophet Muhammed (Norton, 2005: 143). Prophet Muhammed did not name an heir before his death. The Islamic religion he promoted dictated that the choice should fall on the person most merited to lead the Islamic community. Hence began a struggle over power among Muslims. (Fernea, 2005; Aslan, 2005; Nasr, 2007) Muslim scholars mention that the core of the disagreement was that while Sunnis believed in caliphate, Shiites believed in the Imamate. To Shiites, the caliph had to be a member of the Prophet's Holy family and blood descent. (Keddie, 1983; Halm, 1991, 1997; Aslan, 2005; Nakash, 2006)

As Abu Bakr, the prophet's closest friend and father-in-law became the first Caliph, some Muslims felt betrayed and disappointed. (Fernea, 2005) They believed that Imam Ali, cousin and son-in-law to the prophet and first Shiite Imam, should be the Prophet's direct successor. These became the “Partisans of Ali” or Shiite of Ali. (Arjomand, 1984;

Norton, 2005; 143) As for the Sunnis, Ali was the fourth Caliph following Omar bin Al Khattab and Othman ben Affan, second and third Caliphs respectively.

The primary event to define and unify Shiites as a Muslim group was the battle of *Karbala*, during which Imam Husayn, son of Ali and nephew to Prophet Muhammed, along with his family and companions were slain. (Arjomad, 1984; Elbadri, 2009; Fernea, 2005; Nakash, 1993; Norton, 2005) The battle of *Karbala* reached its zenith on the tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Muslim calendar, and therefore the term *Ashura* (meaning the tenth) (Norton, 2005: 143) The battle is commemorated yearly among Shiite communities as *Thekra Ashura*, or the Commemoration of *Ashura*.

*Ashura* is a key factor in the definition of Shiism. (Nakash 1993; Halm, 1991, 1997; Fernea 2005; Nasr, 2007) The martyrdom of Husayn, his family, and companions at the battle of *Karbala* is considered the major event in the history of Islam to shape the Shiite identity and sense of community. (Nakash, 1993) The battle created a strong and long-lasting collective memory among Shiites, giving them a unique identity as a sect significantly distinct from that of Sunnis. It gave birth to a series of rituals, each of which has a grave significance and symbolism in the Shiite doctrine, values, and social and political outlook. (Elbadri, 2009; Fernea, 2005; Nakash, 1993; Norton, 2005) Heinz Halm has often presented Ashura as the essence for the formation of any Shiite political community. (1991, 1997) Therefore, Understanding the continuous reformulation and symbolism of the narrative of the battle of *Karbala* will pave the way to building a comprehensive profile of the Shiite sect and the distinctive political development of the community.

What follows is a thorough examination of the symbolism and implications of the battle of *Kerbala* and the collective memory it created among Shiites as a basis for the formation of the Shiite political community. The chapter traces the evolution of the meanings of *Ashura* over the centuries in several parts of the Muslim World—especially the Arab world. The chapter will conclude with a description of the contemporary political significance of *Ashura* in Lebanon, Iraq and other Arab countries to demonstrate how Shiite rituals during this yearly celebration have become closely coupled with political events.

## **II- The Battle of Kerbala**

As he became the fourth Caliph, Ali declared Kufa in Southern Iraq the new capital of the Islamic world—replacing Medina in Saudi Arabia, which had been the holiest city in Islam in previous years. (Aslan, 2005) Thus, the city of Kufa became home to all the supporters of *Ahl al-Bayt*. After Ali's assassination in 661, Umayyad caliphs Muawiyeh followed by his son Yazid came to power. The people of Kufa rejected them, and wanted Hassan, the son of Ali, to be their Imam and caliph. The assassination of Hassan in 669, made the followers of *Ahl al Bayt* turn to Husayn for leadership. However, the latter had to flee to Medina and Mecca to preserve his life.

While away, Husayn received letters from the people of Southern Iraq in which they asked him to come and save them from Yazid's tyranny against all those who did not accept him as caliph. (Elbadri, 2009; Norton, 2005) Husayn accepted their pledge and began his journey from Mecca to Kufa in order to save his grandfather's (Muhammed's)

people. (Elbadri, 2009; Norton, 2005) When the news of Husayn's journey reached the caliph Yazid, who was in Damascus—current day Syria—he sent an army of thousands of troops to stop the Shiite Imam. (Elbadri, 2009) Husayn's entourage was made up of all his family members including women and little children, thirty two horsemen and forty foot-soldiers.<sup>33</sup> (Elbadri 2009) Scholars attribute the small number of Husayn's army to the fact that the latter had expected the people of Kufa to join him in fighting Yazid's army, but no record seems to exist on any direct involvement of the Kufans in the battle of Kerbala.

Thousands of Yazid's troops surrounded Imam Husayn, his family, and his 72 companions in the city of Kerbala, located near the Euphrates River in Southern Iraq.<sup>34</sup> (Elbadri, 2009; Norton, 2005) Yazid's troops tortured and insulted Imam Husayn and his people, denying them—even their children—water and food. Yazid's troops sought to force Husayn to announce his allegiance to the Ummayyad Caliphate; however, Husayn refused. This lasted for the first nine days of the month of Muharram in the year 680, until the tenth day, on which Husayn's men were slain one by one, and Imam Husayn was killed last and became the last Martyr in this battle. (Elbadri, 2009; Norton, 2005)

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<sup>33</sup> There is no definite record of the number of soldiers in Imam Husayn's army. Some sources do not mention any numbers. Other sources indicate that the number was forty five horsemen and a hundred foot-soldiers. (Elbadri, 2009)

<sup>34</sup> According to Shiite tradition, God had designated one thousand men who would protect Islam over the course of time. Three hundred and thirteen men fought with Talut, who fought Goliath before Prophet David did; three hundred others fought in the battle of Badr, one of the major battles in Islam. And as the army of the coming Mahdi (the awaited 12<sup>th</sup> Imam) is believed to be made up of three hundred and thirteen men, this leaves 61 men who are believed to have been the companions of Imam Husayn in Kerbala. It is also believed that these men were selected by God who would honor them as they became martyrs with Imam Husayn (Elbadri, 2009)

### III- Commemorating Ashura: A Historical Overview

The battle of *Karbala*, and especially the Martyrdom of Husayn, comprised the major turning point in the history of the Shiite sect. It was at this time that the gap between Sunnis and Shiites became wider, and each started to take on a more distinct identity.

(Nakash, 1993) The period would mark the foundation for the emergence of a rich set of rituals that would eventually be at the core of the Shiite identity. These rituals were the rites of remembrance or commemoration of the Imam, his journey, and his fate, and what each symbolized. *Ashura* rituals have evolved over the centuries, influenced by the various socio-political changes that the region witnessed. (Elbadri, 2009: 5)

In the Middle East, *Ashura* rituals went through four major stages based on the extent to which they were supported or prohibited by the ruling dynasties. The first stage started soon after the Martyrdom of Husayn, and lasted until the end of the Umayyad Dynasty (661-750). Despite the fact that these rituals saw the light during the Umayyad dynasty, they remained private among small Shiite groups and families. In order to divert the community's attention from their heinous crime of killing the Prophet's grandson, the Umayyad caliphates would throw festivals on *Ashura* to shadow the mourning of Shiites.<sup>35</sup> (Fernea, 2005) However, Shiites continued to hold *Majalis Taziyeh* (gatherings of condolences and mourning) in their own houses, in the house of the Shiite religious leaders, or in the houses of important Shiite personalities. (Nakash, 1993) During the annual mourning commemoration, Shiites would elaborate on the importance of

remembering Husayn, narrate the story of the battle at *Kerbala*, and lament the tragedy and the disaster that resulted.

However, a major change in the state's approach to *Ashura*, which made the commemoration significantly more important and elaborate, took place during the Abbasid dynasty. (Elbadri, 2009; Nakash, 1993) The Abbasids (750-1258) saw in the *Ashura* commemoration an opportunity to incite the masses to revolt against their Umayyad, transforming *Ashura* into a tool for political manipulation rather than a mere lamentation of unjust persecution. Elbadri writes:

The Kerbala narratives were used by the politically savvy Abbasids to incite revolution and the overthrow of the Umayyad Empire. The early Abbasid rulers found it useful to bestow their patronage on the rites of Ashura. They understood that Kerbala narrative had rebellious antigovernment connotations and they used it to their advantage. (2009)

Thus, with the beginning of the Abbasid ruling in Baghdad, the commemoration of *Ashura* was not anymore confined to people's homes. This represents the second stage of *Ashura* evolution. Shiites would thus attend *Majalis Taziyeh* in mosques and visit the shrine of Husayn and the martyrs who died with him. However, this would not last for too long as the Abbasids themselves started to feel threatened by the very tool that they used to steal power from the Umayyads. The remembrance of Husayn and the battle of *Kerbala* would later on pose a threat to them—they felt that they were starting to lose their power over Shiites. Consequently, Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil would later order

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<sup>35</sup> Fernea (2005) suggests that until present day, *Ashura* in several countries –such as Morocco–is still celebrated rather than mourned. Festivals take place in the streets and main squares of cities and villages, a symbol of the Sunnis' triumph over Shiites.



that Imam Husayn's shrine to be destroyed and the practice of the rituals of *Ashura* be prohibited. (Elbadri, 2009; Nakash, 1993)

The end of the Abbasid rule that largely marginalized Shiites in Iraq and the takeover of the Buyid Shiite dynasty constituted the third stage for the evolution of *Ashura*. The Buyid Dynasty<sup>36</sup> (934-1055) brought to the Shiites of the region the freedom to cultivate their rituals and practice them publicly. It is believed that the first public *Ashura* procession took place during the rule of Muizz al-Dawlah Ibn Buwayh, a Buyid ruler who announced the importance and supported the legitimacy of *Ashura* rituals. (Halm, 1991) In other parts of the Islamic world, the Fatimids (who ruled over several parts of Morocco, Egypt, Sicily, and the Levant) also supported the public commemoration of *Ashura*, which gave these rituals fertile ground to evolve. (Halm, 1991)

However, the Sunni majority in the Muslim world never accepted the public *Ashura* rituals or participated in them. Clashes between Shiites and Sunnis always dominated *Ashura* processions. In 963, as Shiites walked through the streets of Baghdad lamenting the loss of their Imam and weeping in remembrance of their tragedy, Sunnis organized processions of their own in which they publicly criticized Ali and *Ahl Al Bayt*. Serious clashes happened as the two processions collided, and many people were killed and injured. (Chelkowski, 1985) Consequently, the Buyids and the Fatimids would later discourage and even go as far as canceling public mourning (Halm, 1991). Hence, the tenth century witnessed fluctuating periods during which Shiites were either supported in their public commemoration of *Ashura* or rather coerced by the state to keep them private

or even secret. (Chelkowski 1985; Nakash, 1993; Fernea, 2005) The periods during which the state would support Ashura rituals were opportunities for Shiites to develop and enrich their practices, and lay the foundations of what became a major constituent of their beliefs, culture, and identity.

The Safavid dynasty, which took over Persia in 1501, created a fourth turning point in the lives of Shiites and the way they practiced their rituals. In response to the Ottoman Empire that ruled over the majority of the Muslim world, the Safavids declared the Twelver school of Shiite Islam the official religion of their reign. It is during this period that new *Ashura* rituals were added to the original *Majalis Taziyeh*. (Halm, 1991, 1997; Nakash, 1993; Norton, 2005) The period witnessed the emergence of *Tashbih*, a theatrical representation of the Kerbala battle, as well as the development of several new *Ashura* rituals such as self-flagellation. (Donaldson, 1933; Halm, 1991) The Safavids encouraged and promoted elaborate *Ashura* commemorations which paved the way to the development of rituals to become core parts of remembering *Ashura* in the modern world.

During this period, Shiite commemorators enjoyed more freedom to practice their rites and rituals in public. Moreover, the remembrance was not restricted to the day of *Ashura* or the battle of *Kerbala*; it rather extended over the whole month of Muharram and until the *Arbain* (the fortieth) day after the death of Husayn. (Donaldson, 1933; Halm, 1991 Fernea, 2005) Hence, Ashura rituals became an inherent part of the Shiite culture, and a strong force in their value system, to the extent that these rituals were

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<sup>36</sup> The Buyid Dynasty took control over Iraq and Iran, while the Abbasid dynasty enjoyed its control over the rest of the rest of the Middle East region.

practiced not only during Ashura but also on several occasions throughout the year.

Elbadri writes:

They [Ashura rituals] are held on the day of the memorial of the Prophet's death, in memory of each of the eleven Imams and other important personalities from the Holy family. During these remembrances, the preacher reviews the life of the person being remembered. He tells of the oppression and tyranny that was instituted against him or her, and he recites praiseful and lamenting poetry in honor of that person. The preacher concludes the rites of remembrance by mentioning Imam Husayn and parts of the struggle. (2009:45)

History seemed to repeat itself as major Shiite dynasties in Iran have allowed the development of the meaning and remembrance of *Ashura*, only for others to come forth and ban these practices all over again. (Donaldson, 1933; Nakash, 199; Norton, 2005)

Qajar Shahs who ruled after Safavids encouraged the commemoration of *Ashura* in an attempt to claim greater power over the people through religion and clergy. However, the Pahlavi dynasty, which took over afterwards, did not seek religious legitimacy. Consequently, it prohibited public commemorations of *Ashura* in an attempt to promote a more secular system whereby the state is the highest and only power. (Hegland, 1983)

With the overthrow of Reza Shah Pahlavi during the Iranian revolution, followed by the foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, the meaning of *Ashura* gained contemporary dimensions. The commemoration was a platform for leaders to promote Islamic ideals and virtues in application to the problems from which society was suffering. . (Halm, 1991, 1997)

#### **IV- Ashura Rituals: symbols of unity**

Scholars have laid out different groupings of *Ashura* rituals: some presented them as a progression that starts with “private rites of remembrance” and ends with “public rites of remembrance” (Elbadri, 2009: 46). Some spread them out on a happiness-tragedy continuum, as the story of Imam Husayn is traced, starting with hope and ending with Martyrdom (Fernea, 2005). Others present the rituals in the form of a list, differentiating between participants in each ritual based on gender and age. (Halm, 1991; Nakash, 1993) However, no matter what the grouping is, *Ashura* is remembered among Shiite communities all over the world: from Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, India, South Lebanon, and Turkey, to North African countries, and Jamaica. (Halm, 1991; Nakash, 1993; Fernea, 2005) Although each scholar illustrates the commemoration in a different region, there seems to be little difference in the ways the Shiites of the world commemorate *Ashura*.<sup>37</sup> (Fernea, 2005: 139)

### *Majalis Tazieh*

Accounts of *Ashura* commemoration of Shiites across the world suggest that it usually starts with *Majalis Taziyeh* (gatherings to pay condolences and lament the death of Husayn). (Halm, 1991, 1993; Fernea, 2005) During the whole month of Muharram, the community is prepared for the dramatic commemoration, reaching its peak on the tenth day of the month, *Ashura*. Men attend *Majalis Taziyeh* in the house of a religious leader,

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<sup>37</sup> Fernea (2005) suggests that few nations mourn Ashura in very unusual ways. She describes how Shiite Muslims in Jamaica build boats all year round, and destroy them or set them adrift on the day of the Arbain as a symbol of acceptance of the fate of Imam Husayn, and their own fate as Imam Husayn’s nation.

in the marketplace, in mosques, or in religious institutions. (Donaldson, 1933; Norton, 2005) On the other hand, women usually gather in private homes or in special rooms in mosques or religious institutions designated for them. (Norton, 2005)

During these gatherings, a *Qarii* (a person who recites; a storyteller) laments the loss of the Martyrs, the people who are the real heirs of Muhammed. This person is usually male in groups of men, but female among groups of females in private homes (Fernea, 2005). The story of the traitors of Muhammed and his Holy family is narrated, and Yazid is designated as a killer, a tyrant, totally undeserving to be caliph or leader of the Islamic community. (Donaldson, 1933; Fernea, 2005; Nakash, 1993) As the tenth of Muharram approached, the sermons recited during *Majalis Taziyeh* became more passionate and intense. More participants seemed to be moved by the rising intonation of the *Qarii*; their cries grew louder, their weeping more intense, and their breast-beating stronger. Most common were the expressions “*Ya Husayn*” (Oh Husayn), and “*Kul Yawm Ashura; Kul Ard Kerbala*” (Every Day is Ahura; Every Land is Kerbala).

The *Majalis Taziyeh* gatherings serve to remind the Shiites of some of the very initial causes and events that brought them together as one community (Donaldson, 1933; Fernea, 2005; Nakash, 1993). Through paying their condolences to each other (mostly over the loss of their Imam), and through showing each other the terrible feelings that this loss created (by weeping and beating their chests), they are solidifying their distinct Shiite identity and reinforcing their collective memory of shared persecution, misfortune, suffering, sorrow, sacrifice and tragedy. (Halm, 1993; Fernea, 2005; Nakash, 1993) They cement the sense of belonging to their sect; they have a shared history and a shared fate.

As they listen to the biography of their Imams, especially Imam Husayn, and the story of the battle of *Kerbala*, they are reminded of the events that mark the foundations of their identity and beliefs. The memories are passed down from one generation to the next so that everyone is aware of the significant historical events. Nakash states “they regarded [*Majalis Taziyeh*] as a vehicle for both protecting [Shiite] Islam from obliteration and consolidating their own position among their followers as the legitimate successors of the prophet.”(1993: 166) Contemporarily, *Majalis Taziyeh* is an opportunity for mourners to map the past to the present by comparing Husayn’s suffering to their own. *Majalis Taziyeh* is a forum for emotional protest against any kind of suffering that the believer is experiencing. (Halm, 1993) Furthermore, Shiite clergymen highlighted the importance of weeping in remembrance of Imam Husayn and his family. (Norton, 2005) They believe that the pious who pray and cry sincerely will be rewarded on the Day of Judgement.

*Majalis Taziyeh* evolved in the eighteenth century to include passion plays. For instance, In Iraq, on the ninth day of Muharram, villagers (particularly in the mid 50s in the city of Daghara in Iraq) and their children dressed their best and walked across the city streets at night, bearing colorful lights as well as scarlet, black, and green flags (the colors associated with Imam Husayn and his army), in celebration of the marriage of Husayn’s daughter Fatimeh to Hassan’s son Qasim.<sup>38</sup> (Fernea 2005) As they walked through the city streets in celebration of the marriage, people chanted “Ya Husayn” and

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<sup>38</sup> Associated with the army of Imam Husayn, these colors grew to symbolize courage, truth, and struggle for someone’s rights and causes. For more information, refer to Peter Chelkowski, *Shia Muslim Processional Performances*, 1985. Chelkowski (1985) suggests that *Ashura* rituals during the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century contained many mini-sketches of passion play that portray several events before, during, and after the battle of Kerbala. These are not necessarily common to all locations or periods of time.

“Husayn, he dies tomorrow”. Historical accounts indicate that Imam Husayn had promised to marry his daughter Fatimeh to Imam Hassan’s (his brother’s) son Qasim. Knowing that he was going to die the next day, Imam Husayn arranged for this marriage to happen before the day of *Ashura* and the battle of *Kerbala*. Hence, this *Ashura* ritual, developed in the eighteenth century could symbolize Imam Husayn’s virtue of keeping his promises to his family as he kept his promise to come and help the people of Kufa. (Chelkowski, 1985) It also symbolizes the great suffering that Fatimeh had to endure as she lost her newlywed husband only one day after their wedding.

### *Self-Flagellation*

The following day, on the tenth of Muharram, *Ashura*, young and middle-aged men prepare themselves for the public procession during which they perform self-flagellation in commemoration of the battle of Kerbala. (Donaldson, 1933, Halm, 1991, 1993; Nakash, 1993; Fernea, 2005) Some texts mention that few women also participate in this procession (Norton, 2005) The procession typically marches through a predefined trajectory that usually ends at a mosque or at the place where the *Tashbih*, the theatrical reenactment of the battle of *Ashura* is performed. (Fernea, 2005; Norton, 2005) The flagellants put on black or white sleeveless shirts and expose their shoulders. They carry chains in their hands with which they rhythmically hit their shoulders as they march through the streets and cry “*Ya Husayn*”. (Donaldson, 1933) Young children, senior men, and women usually watch the procession and admire the performance. (Fernea, 2005) Nakash argues that the time when knives and swords were introduced for self-flagellation

to the mourning procession is not definite. (1993) To represent the suffering of Imam Husayn and his companions in *Kerbala*, flagellants sometimes use razors to inflict shallow cuts on their foreheads and wrists in order to shed blood for Imam Husayn; the procession is usually accompanied by the local nurses who perform first aid on those who need it. (Fernea, 2005) Norton states that nurses “apply bandages and revive those who have fainted from heat, exhaustion or the loss of blood.” (2005) He observes that the flagellants would stop only after they could not go on anymore. He argues that this gave a violent dimension to *Ashura* rituals.

In the contemporary period, starting the 1990s, public health organizations started to raise people’s awareness of the serious health hazards associated with the cuts and subsequent bleeding. (Norton, 2005) New religious *fatwas* encouraged flagellants to donate blood instead of inflicting cuts on their bodies. Highly respected Shiite scholars have tried to draw out a more suitable manner to commemorate *Ashura*.<sup>39</sup> (Norton, 2005) They mentioned that many of the rituals, such as hurting oneself, are not prescribed or even recommended in Islam. These clerics believe that *Ashura* has become a rendition of some local customs and traditions combined with religious beliefs and practices. Still, Shiite communities differ in the ways they remember *Ashura*; some Shiites consider it a time for pondering and prayer rather than public gatherings and processions. Yet others still insisted on bleeding for Imam Husayn rather than donating blood or simply praying:

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<sup>39</sup> Mulla Darbandi, a Shiite clergyman, published a controversial book entitled *Asrar al-Shahada* (the secrets of Martyrdom). The book, rejected by the majority of Shiite clerics for containing strange *Ashura* rituals, encouraged Shiites to experience physical pain and suffering during the time of the battle of *Kerbala*. Jurists agreed that such practices are prohibited in Shiite belief, yet some Shiites still practiced them. For more information, refer to Elbadri, 2009



they parade in their blood-splattered shirts as a symbol of their strength and their loyalty to their sect.

People who participated in the public procession believed that it is an act of exercising their beliefs, fulfilling their duties towards their faith, bringing honor and attention to their community, and paying tribute to Imam Husayn, their most revered hero and the prince of all martyrs. (Donaldson, 1933) Norton argues that participating in the procession, although optional, was always considered important and honorable, not only to the participants but also to their parents: their mothers who promised them that they will reach an age when they will be able to participate, and their fathers who either participate with them or who had participated before them. (2005) They consider the procession as a public prayer for strength, for good health, and for a good life in which suffering is required and bearable. (Fernea, 2005) Fernea states “I was struck by the dignity and solemnity of the proceedings. These young men were message-bearers to the crowd, spelling out for them the penitence and sadness that lie in at the heart of Shiite Islam.” (2005: 138)

### *Tashbih*

The *Tashbih*, the theatrical representation of the story of the battle at *Karbala*, is carefully prepared, rehearsed, and performed. (Fernea, 2005; Norton, 2005) The performers are the villagers themselves rather than professional actors and actresses; so are the script-writers and the costume designers and keepers. Norton suggests that although the scripts have changed over the years, the storyline is more or less the same. (2005) The play usually

lasts up to three hours, and some villages (such as in Nabatiyya in South Lebanon) have performances so reputable that people (especially Shiites) from all over the country move to this village during *Ashura* to watch, “Thousands of people crowd around the field or on the roofs of neighboring buildings to watch the event.” (Norton, 2005: 152)

Sometimes, special seating arrangements are made for the audience, especially dignitaries who wish to see the *Tashbih*.

A narrator reads from the script intermittently as the performers recite their lines. (Fernea, 2005; Norton, 2005) Actors embodying Yazid’s troops enter the field where the performance is taking place, wearing yellow and red costumes; Imam Husayn’s troops follow, wearing green and black. The troops carry wooden swords and concealed paper-mache limbs. Actors would recite their lines, and the masses would shout and chant when incited. Fernea describes an old man who seemed to be playing the role of the mediator between the two armies, trying to repeatedly discourage them from fighting. (2005) His attempts seem to go in vain and the battle begins. This mediator is not mentioned in any real historical account of the battle at Kerbala.

The two armies engage in a battle, swords clashing, and paper-mache limbs flying in the air. The crowd is deeply provoked as everyone knew the terrible tragedy about to happen. (Donaldson, 1933; Norton, 2005) Spectators scream their support of Imam Husayn’s army and boo Yazid’s troops. Imam Husayn’s men fall one by one, and spectators could hear real swords clashing as Imam Husayn falls off his horse. His head will be severed and taken to caliph Yazid in Damascus. Some women sob and even faint at the heart-breaking scene. (Norton, 2005: 152) The crowd then retreats back to private

home gatherings in which *Hareesa*, a special kind of sweet wheat porridge, is served.

Imam Husayn had died in the battle of *Karbala*, and a funeral is to be held in honor of the Holy Martyr. (Norton, 2005)

The meaning of the *Ashura* rituals, especially the *Tashbih*, extends beyond massacring a small army of believers loyal to the Prophet and his family. It highlights the blood-thirsty villain and outlines the pious victim. The battle at *Karbala* is cast as being not between two armies, but rather between power and faith. Imam Husayn is portrayed as the tragic hero, a symbol of courage and sacrifice. (Halm, 1993; Dabashi, 2011)

Spectators witness a live symbolism of ultimate endurance of suffering and a representation of a story of holy martyrdom. They lament Imam Husayn's fate and the fact that they were not there to support him and fight with him. They weep the suffering of Fatimeh (Qasim's wife) and Zeinab (Imam Husayn's sister). (Norton, 2005)

Despite its great significance to this Shiite community, *Tashbih* has often been criticized by some clergymen. The Lebanese Sheikh Abd-al-Amir Qabalan, formerly the Jafari Mufti al –Mumtaz (chief legal authority of Lebanese Shiism) and current Deputy Head of the Higher Islamic Shiite Council, utterly disapproves of the theatrical performances which reenact the battle of *Karbala*. (Norton, 2005) He argues that the depiction of Imam Husayn is completely prohibited. In Islam, the portrayal of Prophet Muhammed or any member of the Holy Family in any type of medium is completely forbidden. However, Shiite Islam has often broken this rule through *Ashura* rituals. (Ozcan and Muller, 2007)

### *The Burial and Arbain*

Imam Husayn, now a beheaded martyr, is to be buried. The *Dafna*, or the burial ceremony, is also a public procession in which everyone participates. (Fernea, 2005) A corpse is designed out of straw—sometimes with a fresh and bloody cow’s neck—and wrapped in black velvet. It is carried by the townsmen and children. Villagers surround the corpse as it is taken to the local mosque, praying, mourning, and wailing “Ya Husayn”. They carry green and black flags. Even after the corpse’s simulated burial, the Ashura rituals continue.

Muslims mourn their dead for forty days. (Halm 1993; Fernea, 2005) Usually, on the fortieth day, *Arbain*, after someone’s death, family members and close friends gather to give support to one another, to remember the deceased, to cement the spirit of common loss. Hence, Husayn’s mourning continues until his *Arbain*. Those who have the means embark on a pilgrimage to *Kerbala* to the shrine of Imam Husayn. Fernea (2005: 137) writes:

Nearly a million pious Shiite Muslims travelled in 1957 to Kerbala, whose normal population at that time was about 30,000 (...) People had traveled by plane, train, bus and on foot to Kerbala (...) The greater purpose of the pilgrimage: to pray in the mosque attached to the shrine of Husayn. (2005:137)

Nakash and Dabashi describe *Kerbala* as the Shiite Mecca, and the shrine of Imam Husayn as the Shiite *Kaaba*—the black cuboid-shape in Mecca. (1993, 2011) It is the center point to which all the Shiites of the world belong, a location that emphasizes their communal sense and mutual understanding of the essentiality of protecting their sect. Visiting *Kerbala* is deeply carved into the teachings of Shiites, propagating a distinct

Shiite identity, and promoting the rituals associated with it. It is the place that embraces their collective memory. As the world changes, the shrine of Imam Husayn is stable and steady. Visitation to this shrine is the ultimate symbol of devotion to their sect.

*Ashura* rituals preserve and exalt the memory of Imam Husayn. They are elaborate outlets for Shiites around the world to unite in their communities for a common cause as they express their discontent over the power that was stolen from them. (Fernea, 2005) They dramatize the situation, pass down the message, and share the sorrow. It is their own unique and distinct means of dealing with persecution and injustice. Fernea argues that *Ashura* rituals are also internalized as each individual contemplates his/her own sorrow, misfortune, tragedy, and shares these feelings with brothers and sisters in faith. (2005) The meanings of *Ashura* are thus transformed from religious and political to social and personal.<sup>40</sup> In a chat with one of the locals in the village of Nabatiyya in South Lebanon (invaded and raided several times by Israel), Norton recounts the following story:

Raid Muqallid is a local optometrist who lost his son Ahmad in 1999 during a picnic, a day before his fifth birthday, when the boy picked up an unexploded cluster bomb dropped in the field by Israeli military (the small bombs look like toys). He participates in the ritual in tribute to his deceased son, and his friends join him to show support and share his personal tragedy. Even few Christians get involved in the ritual, either out of community spirit or to fulfill their own pledge, perhaps to mark the recovery of an ill relative, or reversal of their fortunes. (2005:151)

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<sup>40</sup> Emile Durkheim's Social Ritual Theory model illustrates how a significant event takes place from which a series of direct and indirect events and behaviors derive. The major event triggers a series of practices and a sense of communal co-presence. Deeply scarred and shocked by this event, individuals unite and seek solace in each other's company and sharing. Death is always an example through which this model can be illustrated. And while the death of one person can be tremendously significant in the lives of their family and friends, the killing of Imam Husayn was significant on the level of the whole Shiite community in the example of *Ashura*. For more information, refer to Durkheim, Emile. (1995). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Translated by Karen E. Fields

Shiites find it imperative to preserve and provoke the memory of Imam Husayn, making sure that all the generations will learn the story and live by virtue of the lessons behind it. The tragedy is thus transformed into meaning; the loss and the sacrifice are not wasted in vain. Sharing the collective memory of *Ashura* creates a feeling of co-presence among Shiites; it reinforces their sense of belonging to the same sect, the same set of beliefs, the same history. As they participate in the rituals, Shiites are reassured that they are not alone in their suffering (sorrow, weeping, chest-beating, self-flagellation, bleeding...). They are reassured by their brothers and sisters in pain. It is through these rituals that Shiites consolidate their common beliefs, and establish a strong bond and sense of belonging that will unite them for eternity. Imam Husayn's death is commemorated as a message of the holy duty for protecting Shiite Islam, the necessity of right to always prevail over wrong, and the revolution against injustice. (Halm, 1993; Nakash, 1993)

**V- Ashura and the Shiite political community: From religious practice to political protest**

Pious Shiite Muslims believe Husayn and his army were guided by holy angels during the battle of Kerbala. The angels watched over them as they died martyrs, and accompanied them to their tombs from which they will rise when the Mahdy, the twelfth awaited Imam will come. (Donaldson, 1933; Halm, 1997) Hence, Husayn's martyrdom in Kerbala was not a military mishap but rather a predetermined religious event. This voluntary death of

Husayn's gives the battle of *Karbala* a different direction and significance. It transforms it from a mere symbol of legitimacy of power to a certainty of a higher truth. Elbadri argues "(...) by advancing a certain defeat, Husayn was testifying to his followers that their cause was one so important and vital to merit their dying for it." (2009: 21) *Ashura* would thus be a message that belief and faith are stronger than power, and that the struggle for Shiite Islam is worth martyrdom.

It is this narrative that made *Ashura* the essence for the Shiite political community for both Heinz Halm and Hamid Dabshi. (1991, 1997; 2007) They have long argued that Shiite political protest started with *Ashura* and continued to this day through yearly celebrations that unite Shiites as a political community with shared vision and goals. Hence, Shiite leaders were able to find in the commemoration of *Ashura* an opportunity to go beyond religious values to promote political protest. Furthermore, the heightened senses and the frenzy of Shiites around the time of *Ashura*—due to the performance of rituals explained above—make them more receptive to messages more contemporary, revolutionary, and political, rather than exclusively religious, contemplative, and mournful. (Fernea, 2005; Norton, 2005)

For instance, the 1979 revolution and subsequent establishment of the Islamic Republic allowed Khomeini to transform *Ashura* into both a religious and political tool. During the Pahlavi reign the Shah banned *Ashura* rituals and promoted secularism of the state. Hence, after 1979, Khomeini along with the institutions of the Islamic Republic, revived in the pious Muslims a new spirit of *Ashura* whereby the rituals were transformed into forums for propagating contemporary and revolutionary messages—in addition to

religious ones. Khomeini saw in the battle of *Kerbala* a symbol of the importance of the eternal triumph of the blood of the martyrs over any sort of military power. Furthermore, he viewed *Ashura* not to be limited to any particular period of time but a continuing struggle until eternity. (Labbad, 2006)

This transformation of *Ashura* rituals was evident during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, which caused the death of more than half a million Iranians. During the war, Khomeini urged all Iranian men, including teenagers and un-experienced fighters, to engage in the war and sacrifice themselves for a higher Shiite cause, which is martyrdom. He compared their war to the battle of Husayn in *Kerbala* and their blood to that of the martyrs of *Ashura*. Furthermore, he equated the tears of the mothers, wives, and daughters of the fighters to those of the family of Husayn. (Dar Al Manar, n.d.i) Through these various comparisons, Khomeini recreated the political meaning of *Ashura* in contemporary times, helping him sustain a war for over eight years.

Thus, *Ashura* as time progressed has become a powerful tool used especially by influential leaders to direct society. The criticism has shifted from the blood-thirsty Sunni Umayyad and Abbasid who stole the power from the Prophet's family to any party who is causing Shiites injustice and pain. Hence, as argued by Halm and Dabashi, the rites of remembrance have gained a strong political edge over the years, mainly because of several events in the history of the Shiite community. Consequently, some religious leaders have transformed into political authorities propagating their causes especially during the emotional time of *Ashura*. The sections hereafter will illustrate the political protest created through the rituals of *Ashura* in the contemporary Arab world.



### *Ashura and political protest in the Arab world*

In recent times, *Ashura* celebrations have been closely monitored events by national and international leaders. This can be traced back to the year 1977, when the Baath regime in Iraq banned all *Ashura* rituals to put end to clergy activism in the country. During that period, Shiite clergy were looking for a greater role in politics—as it will be evidenced in the following chapter—and *Ashura* was the perfect platform to claim this role. (Davis, 2005) This governmental ban on *Ashura* lasted until 2003, following the U.S war on Iraq, and the end of the Baath era.

Furthermore, the release of wikileaks cables starting April 2010 shows an international interest in *Ashura* celebrations. For instance, in Bahrain the only Gulf country where public *Ashura* processions are allowed, the cables show an increased monitoring of the U.S embassy during this period. Between 2005 and 2009, the U.S cables reiterate that the Shiite opposition groups in Bahrain have the opportunity during *Ashura* to intensify their public expression against the kingdom, and rally the masses for their causes of justice and equal political representation. The cables detail the yearly processions of *Ashura* along with all the rituals of *Majalis Tazieh*, *self flagellation*, and *Tashbih*. Also, the cables show that the Shiite Bahrainis revolt is not only against the kingdom, but it is also against foreign countries. After the release of the Danish cartoons in 2006, the record of cables showed that the U.S was disturbed at the sight of Shiite groups chanting slogans “*Death to America, Death to Israel, Death to Denmark*” during

their Ashura commemoration.<sup>41</sup> Hence, local and international political events are always present during the rituals of Ashura; and this was manifested in December-January 2011, where Bahrainis, as part of the Arab Spring, composed Ashura ritualistic songs that lamented Husayn and incited fellow Shiites to oppose the Bahraini kingdom similarly to Husayn's opposition to Yazid.<sup>42</sup>

In the last few years, *Ashura* celebrations in Lebanon and Iraq have become a focus of attention and study for many scholars. This can be attributed to the large mobilization of Shiites in both countries and the scenes of immense crowds with bloody foreheads beating their chests. The following will describe the political protests that have enveloped the *Ashura* celebrations in these countries.

### *Lebanon*

In Lebanon, *Ashura* rituals have undergone a transformation since the end of the civil war in 1991, from a commemoration that was focused on mourning and collective identity, to one that is focused on Shiite activism. (Deeb, 2005; Norton, 2005, 2007) It has become a common practice in the last two decades for Shiite clergy in Lebanon to deliver speeches and sermons especially during the first ten days of *Muharram*. (Norton, 2005) *Sheikh* Muhammed Mahdi Shams al-Din, late President of the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council, was highly respected and his speeches mainly focused on mutual understanding between the various religious sects in Lebanon. During *Ashura*, Shams al-Din would discourage people from engaging in show-off rituals, encouraging them to understand the ethical

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<sup>41</sup> For full review of the wikileaks cables visit: <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2005/03/05MANAMA347.html>

dimension of sacrifice. Abdul Amir Qabalan, formerly the *Jaafari Mufti al –Mumtaz* and now the successor of Shams al-Din and the highly revered late Sayyid Muhammed Husayn Fadlallah are also examples of popular Shiite public speakers. (Norton, 2005, 2007)

However what changed the face of *Ashura* into full blown Islamic activism are the Shiite religious movements that were self-preserved after the end of the Lebanese civil war, most notably Hizbollah (Party of God). (Deeb, 2005; Norton, 2005, 2007) Norton states: “[in Lebanon] contemporary [Ashura] rituals, however, exemplify, and indeed encourage, a heightened and widespread sense of politicization.” (2007:67) Norton argues that *Ashura* ceremonies have become an occasion for political groups to show their power in mobilizing those—i.e. Shiites—who were often marginalized in previous centuries. He concludes that Shiite politicians work really hard in order to harness people’s sentiments for the advantages of their political group.

As an illustration of this transformation is the role that Hizbollah has played in the last few years. Beginning in the late 1990s, Hassan Nasrallah, Secretary General of the Party began delivering speeches every day during the first ten days of *Muharram*.<sup>43</sup> His televised appearances that are viewed by most of the Shiite community<sup>44</sup> focus on probing the real meaning of *Ashura*. (Nasrallah, 2009) In order to achieve his goal, he divides his speeches into two parts: the first part that is religious where he often repeats

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<sup>42</sup> To listen to these *Ashura* ritualistic songs, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UltbydIzzuA>

<sup>43</sup> It is not clear when Hassan Nasrallah began this tradition. In the early years of his leadership of Hizbollah, Nasrallah used to deliver a speech right on the day of *Ashura*.

<sup>44</sup> Hizbollah’s support grew significantly during the 1990s during their resistance against Israel which forced the latter to withdraw from the occupied Lebanese land in the South in the year 2000. For more information refer to August Norton, *Hezbollah*, 2007, and Nicholas Blanford, *Warriors of God*, 2011

that death is not to be feared and needs to be approached similarly to Husayn in his *Kerbala* battle. The second part is political where Nasrallah analyzes regional politics in which “he routinely castigates the United States for its policies in the Middle East and sometimes comments more generally on U.S. affairs” in addition to talking about Israeli politics. (Norton, 2007:67-68) Through combining these two parts, Nasrallah compares Yazid to Israel and the U.S. and emphasizes the inherent just cause of fighting Israel and the West which is the *raison d’être*<sup>45</sup> of the Party of God.

In all of his *Ashura* speeches, Nasrallah tailors the political argument according to the local context of Lebanon. For example, in the year 2000, following the news of high rates of Shiite immigrants to the U.S., he mocked the social system in Western countries in order to discourage and “dampen the dreams of many [Shiites] to immigrate to America.” (Norton, 2007:68) In other years, he often evoked memories of the 1996 Qana massacre in South Lebanon, where a UNIFIL base that hosted Shiite refugees was shelled during the Grapes of Wrath<sup>46</sup> war and led to the death of over 100 civilians, mostly women and children. After 2006, following the last war of Israel on Hizbollah, Nasrallah had to go in hiding to preserve his life after several Israeli assassination attempts, but he kept recording his *Ashura* speeches and they were aired every night on Al Manar, Hizbollah’s television station.

On the day of *Ashura* on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Nasrallah made a rare brief appearance on stage to remind his followers of the resistance and similarities between Hizbollah and

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<sup>45</sup> Further information on Hizbollah and its Secretary General will be provided in Chapter 5

Husayn. He stated: “I wanted to be with you for a few minutes (...) to renew our pledge with Husayn who stood on this day alone in the face of 30,000 individuals.” He further added “The resistance in Lebanon, with its weapons and *mujahedeen*, God willing, will continue to exist. We will hold onto our arms (...) our weapons do not rust. They are being upgraded.” While Nasrallah addressed the crowd, the people cheered “*Ya Husayn*”, “Death to America... Death to Israel” bringing religion and politics into one common platform of activism and protests.

### *Iraq*

In Iraq, the end of the Baath regime in 2003 marked a new era for *Ashura* celebration. Commemorating the battle of *Karbala* was banned in Iraq for most of the thirty five years of Baathist rule due to the political mobilization it created among Shiites. In 1977, the last public *Ashura* celebration, police officers were met with angry Shiites when they tried to stop processions between Najaf and Karbala. Shiites shouted “*Saddam, shil idak! Shab al Iraq ma yiridak!*” (Saddam, remove your hand! The people of Iraq do not want you!) which was a clear threat to the governing regime. (Rosen, 2004) For the following years, Shiites had to celebrate *Ashura* secretly: the *Majalis Tazieh* took place in homes and were not publicly announced, and public scenes of self-flagellation and *Tashbih* did not occur.

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<sup>46</sup> “Grapes of Wrath” is a sixteen-day war led by Israel on Hizbollah in Lebanon in 1996 to put end to Hizbollah military operations in Northern Israel. For more information refer to Augustus Norton *Hizballah and the Israeli Withdrawal from Southern Lebanon*, 2000

The end of the Baath era in April 2003 coincided with the *Arbain* of Husayn. Iraqi Shiites did not wait until the roads were safe and cleared of war debris. Instead million of pilgrims walked to *Kerbala* to celebrate a day that is at the core of their collective identity. (Nasr, 2007: Cockburn, 2008) Cockburn states that “the giant pilgrimage showed their religious commitment, their solidarity as a community, and their ability to mobilize vast numbers.” (Cockburn, 2008:18) The call for the pilgrimage was put forth by Muqtada Al Sadr, son of the late Muhammed Sadiq Al Sadr a revered Shiite cleric in Najaf, and nephew of the late Muhammed Baqir Al Sadr, one of the shapers of political Shiism as it will be discussed in the following chapter. However, Shiites who answered this call surpassed the number of supporters of Al Sadr to include all those who have been waiting for publicly demonstrating their faith. (Cockburn, 2008)

For the last eight years, Shiite pilgrimage to *Kerbala* on *Ashura* and *Arbain* occurred yearly despite all security threats. In 2004, five simultaneous bombs detonated killing over 270 worshippers and injuring more than 570. (Cockburn, 2008) At the height of the sectarian violence between 2006 and 2008, Shiite Iraqis fulfilled their religious duty amid tight security. Furthermore, Shiite satellite televisions began broadcasting images of pilgrims to the Muslim world inciting Shiites in other countries to join. In December 2011, *Ashura* celebration included more than 650,000 foreigners: about 430,000 from Europe, the United States, Iran, India, and Pakistan, and roughly 220,000 from Syria, Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries. (Hanoun, 2011)

Unlike Lebanon where Shiite leaders’ speeches decided the political tone of the celebration; in Iraq, the ritual itself became a way for people to cement their political

identification. It became a mixture of celebrating Husayn's struggle combined with the struggle of the Iraqi Shiites. (Nasr, 2007) Nasr argues that the revival of this ritual in Iraq was a signal for all oppressed Shiites in the Muslim world to join in a type of political revolution to define their religious identity that they have been forced to hide. (2007) Hence, images of Iraqi Shiites' commemoration of *Ashura* became a threat to Sunni regimes, and this was further highlighted in 2009 when Saudi Arabia forced foreign satellites to discontinue live coverage of *Ashura* and prevent it from being broadcasted on national televisions.<sup>47</sup>

Watching the millions of Shiites every year marching toward *Kerbala*, one can conclude that the large number of pilgrims is a reflection of the high expectations of Iraqis of their political outcome. Through these marches, pilgrims are asserting their political needs for rights and justice. They are redefining their community and competing for a power that seems to be within their reach. Contrary to Lebanon where the speeches were needed to politicize *Ashura*, in Iraq the march itself became a political protest. However, whether this new found Iraqi Shiite political protest is a clear signal of a general Shiism prominence in the Muslim world, as argued by Vali Nasr, this could only be validated or negated through future celebrations of *Ashura*.

## **VI- Conclusion**

The above *Ashura* description highlights the centrality of this event for Shiites, as well as its intrinsic political content and symbolism. Husayn's battle in *Kerbala* symbolizes the

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<sup>47</sup> The ban of Saudi Arabia of Foreign satellites of their coverage of Ashura forced several international

everlasting Shiite struggle for justice and power. Throughout the centuries, the symbolism of the celebrations has evolved to provide a collective identity for Shiites across the world. Furthermore, in current years, Shiite leaders have adopted Husayn's martyrdom as the main idol of heroism and sacrifice for all believers to gather and form a Shiite political community.

Experts of political Shiism including Vali Nasr, Yitzhak Nakash, Heinz Halm, and Hamid Dabashi have been right in placing a great deal of importance on understanding and describing this yearly ritual. It provides a common space and place for all Shiites to gather to celebrate one shared history which political repercussions can be compared to unfolding events that are affecting their lives. Ashura is thus not exclusively defined in politics or religion, but it is a mixture of both where religion and politics come together to define action.

In the Arab world, despite the commonality of the rituals among Shiite communities, the mobilization of believers is tailored according to political contexts rather than through a regional Shiite revival. As discussed above, in Lebanon, political speeches against Israel and the U.S became inherent to the celebrations, especially to create a frenzy among Shiites; however, in Iraq it is the actual celebration and people's marches in the streets of *Kerbala* that consolidated the political aspirations of Shiite Iraqis.

This historical presentation of Shiite rituals and its inherent political actions are necessary to understand the contemporary context of Shiites. It underlines the importance of rituals and collective identity in rallying the masses. But, these rituals do not describe



the development of political Shiism and do not address the current forms of political Shiism. Hence, in the following chapter, the analysis will explore the various ideas of political Shiism, the main ideologues and their potential use of *Ashura* for their own political goals. The analysis will also highlight the influence of local, regional, and international political developments on shaping and transforming political Shiism.

## CHAPTER 5: POLITICAL SHIISM AND THE DEBATE OF IDEOLOGIES

*“Are the thoughts of these individuals a guide to revolutionary action?... Withal the final outcome of the contention among these visions in the medium and long terms is by no means foreclosed”.*  
*Sharough Akhavi, 1988*

### **I- Introduction:**

Political Shiism, as discussed previously, followed the quietest school until the twentieth century where religious clergy chose not to be involved in political matters. Principles of quietism or what Vali Nasr refers to as *consolidationism* were founded during the Safavid rule<sup>48</sup> in the sixteenth century in Iran, the only Shiite country at the time. (Nasr, 2007)

During that era, Safavid rulers brought Shiite religious leaders from Lebanon, Iraq, and the Arabian Peninsula to build the foundation of the Shiite political scholarship that was engrained in a clear separation between clergy and politics. The clergy believed that true Islam will not exist until the Hidden Imam is revealed, therefore the clergy did not want to take part of an imperfect political ruling—as noted earlier Shiite scholars have always held the tradition of following a leading Imam appointed by God who is a direct descendant of Prophet Mohammad’s family. Hence, Shiite theologians believed that their role was to keep their faith separated from political power until the return of the Hidden Imam. (Donaldson, 1933; Tabari, 1983)

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<sup>48</sup> The Safavid ruled Iran from 1501 till 1722

Geopolitical events at the turn of the twentieth century have helped shape the face of political Shiism from quietism to activism. New religious and political ideas began to emerge creating an internal transformation of Shiism, and debates have spurred about the potential role of political Shiism in the socio-political sphere. By the 1960's and the 1970's, the activism aspect of political Shiism has successfully carved a new niche for its followers in the Middle East and put forth ideologies that are crucial to the understanding of this newly found religio-political power. While the attention of Shiite experts has been mostly focused on describing the geopolitical changes in the Middle East in order to understand political Shiism, the ideologies that took shape in the latter half of the twentieth century have rarely been addressed despite their centrality to understand the complexities of political Shiism.

Hence, this chapter will focus on addressing key questions to reveal the changes that political Shiism underwent in the latter half of the twentieth century and the resulting ideologies that were shaped during this period. It is through a well-integrated description of context and religious ideas that political Shiism can be described and understood. Questions will center on what is political Shiism? Who are its main ideologues? And what are its different forms? These questions will be answered through describing the different ideological philosophies of political Shiism during the 1960s and the 1970s, and the influence of local, regional, and international political developments on shaping ideas of quietism and activism in political Shiism. But, first, I will start with a historical description of the social and political changes that affected political Shiism in the early

years of the twentieth century and created opportunities for transformation in subsequent years.

## **II- Political Shiism in the twentieth century**

### *National Tobacco Movement and the Shiite clergy*

Political events in Iran at the end of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century changed the face of political Shiism and the role of the clergy. Between 1890 and 1908, under the Qajar dynasty,<sup>49</sup> European infiltration into the Iranian economy required several trade concessions that were granted by the ruling Shah. One of the main concessions that had national repercussions was in the tobacco industry, where the Shah granted Major G.F. Talbot of the British-owned Imperial tobacco company a monopoly on both the purchase and sale of tobacco for fifty years in Iran in 1891. In return, the Qajar rulers would receive a sum of 15,000 pounds annually and 25 percent of the profit generated by the arrangement. (Keddie, 1966) The agreement entailed that all Iranian producers of tobacco were forced to inform the British company of the amount of crop they produced annually and subsequently sell them the entire crop—at a lower price than market value. Furthermore, all tobacco merchants were required to seek permits from the British company and pay in cash for all the tobacco they obtained from them—at a higher price than market value.

The British monopoly directly affected the livelihoods of tobacco merchants and tobacco consumers. This carried dramatic economic implications, since at that time most

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<sup>49</sup> The Qajar dynasty, of Turkic descent, ruled Iran after the fall of the Safavid dynasty, from 1785-1925

of the adult population in Iran, men and women, used local tobacco products.<sup>50</sup> Hence, many tobacco merchants rejected the agreement and refused to register with the British company. The severity of the economic implications forced the tobacco merchants to protest the concessions and they were joined by other merchants who started to worry about future foreign agreements that could affect their own trades. The widespread opposition to the foreign tobacco monopoly led to the formation of a national tobacco movement, however it was rejected by the Shah as he maintained his deal with the British company.

The Qajari Shah's ties with European companies, and his marginalization of the national tobacco movement, alarmed Shiite theologians. Clergy from Lebanon, Iraq, and the Arabian Peninsula saw in the European economic infiltration a form of subjugation similar to the domination of the Ottoman Empire in Arab countries, where Shiites were marginalized in previous centuries. (Nasr, 2007) Hence, the clergy found in the national tobacco movement the ideal entry point to participate in political action that most Iranians supported and where the clergy could openly express their concerns and fears. Furthermore, the lack of impact of the national tobacco movement to change the agreement with the British company forced Iranian merchants to seek refuge with the clergy and support their open public disapproval of the Qajari ruler's policies. This relationship between clergy and merchants aimed at changing the Shah's policies constituted the first direct engagement of theologians in political matters in Iran.

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<sup>50</sup> Concessions that the Shah forged with other international companies in other services, such as infrastructure, had more abstract impacts for Iranian citizens and did not generate a quick national protest movement.

The most dramatic event led by the clergy during this period was the release of a *fatwa*—religious finding—to ban the use of tobacco by all Iranians. The *fatwa* stated the following: “In the name of God the Merciful, the Forgiving. Today the use of tunbaku and tobacco, in whatever fashion, is reckoned as war against the Imam of the Age (may God hasten his glad advent).” (Translation by Browne 1966:22) The fatwa was supported by the majority of the clergymen and created a national outcry against the tobacco agreement between the Shah and the British company, leading to protests in different parts of Iran. Consequently, the fatwa helped transform the national tobacco movement from being specific to merchants to include all Iranians who use any tobacco products. (Lambton, 1986) As a result, many Iranians adhered to the ban and joined the tobacco protestors forcing the Shah to cancel his agreement with the British-owned Imperial Company. (Keddie, 1966)

The fatwa, along with Shiite theologians’ active participation in the tobacco movement, granted the clergy political legitimacy among citizens of Iran. (Keddie, 1966) Furthermore, the introduction of religion into political matters allowed the merchants to carve support for their national protest within the religious condemnation of the clergy. The religious support helped tobacco merchants reframe the issues of the movement to become a battle to fight non-believers—non-Shiites—that the Shah is allowing to manage Shiites’ interests in Iran. (Lambton, 1987) For instance, merchants in Khorasan<sup>51</sup> were part of the tobacco movement and, took refuge in religious shrines were calling for the abolition of all tobacco agreements with the British company, and at the same time, were

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<sup>51</sup> Khorasan is a large Iranian province in the East and North East of Iran

cheering “threats against Christian infidels and avowing their determination to protest the cause of religion.” (Lambton, 1987: 244)

The success of the tobacco protests set a precedent in Iran and helped the formation of the constitutionalist movement in 1906, which called for the implementation of a constitutional monarchy and the creation of a parliament to limit the Shah’s powers. (Browne, 1966) Many academics refer to period of the National Tobacco Movement as the first Iranian revolution where citizens were able to win against the Shah and impede foreign interests in their country. (Browne, 1966; Keddie 1966, 1979; Keddie and Cole 1986; Lambton 1987; Bayat, 1991) Also, this era constituted the first apparent change in political Shiism where the clergy abandoned quietism principles and actively participated in political matters seeking both political and religious legitimacy to build stronger ties with Iranian citizens. From then onward, the clergy was perceived to be defending the common individual, while the Shah was perceived to be placing his own personal benefit above the nation’s interests. (Keddie, 1966, 1979)

Despite the direct religious intervention in political affairs, clergymen inside Iran were divided into two main camps. The first was led by Ayatollah Na’ini, who believed that political Shiism should resume quietism after the success of the National Tobacco Movement because humans are ill-fitted to establishing God’s government on Earth. (Tabari, 1983) Na’ini argued in his treatise *The Admonition and Refinement of the People* that the best form for Shiite clergy participation in politics is to advise the rulers and ensure that laws do not contradict *Islamic Sharia* without direct engagement in politics. The second camp was led by Shaikh Fazlollah Nuri who dismissed ideas of democracy

and rule of law and considered them to be heresy. He supported the direct engagement of clergymen in the Tobacco Movement and envisioned the Shiite clergy to be ruling an Iranian Islamic state that embodies the Quran and *Islamic Sharia* awaiting the revelation of the Hidden Imam. (Tabari, 1983; Kawtharani, 2007) Tensions between these two camps in Iran did not become apparent until later years with the emergence of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and Ali Shariati.

#### *From quietism to activism*

Following the Tobacco Movement in Iran, the new-found political power of the clergy offered a new refuge for people to seek help and guidance from religious leaders marking the beginning of the debate about the end of quietism in political Shiism. This relationship was further strengthened after the dissolution of the Qajar dynasty during the 1920s and the ascension of Reza Shah Pahlavi to the throne. The Pahlavi dynasty continued the same policies of previous rulers by accommodating international economic interests in Iran and marginalizing basic socio-economic demands, specifically in rural areas, generating further citizen rapprochement with the clergy. (Keddie, 1966)

Nasr and Tabari highlight that the 1960s and 1970s witnessed the highest tension between the ruling Shah and theologians in Iran, which led to the development of different forms of political Shiism. (2007, 1983) The critical event behind this tension was the overthrow, through an American and British intervention, of Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq in 1953 (who was one of the most popular politicians at the time). Mossadeq's popularity stemmed primarily from his goals to nationalize Iran's



control over oil production, which posed a threat to British interests in the country. The coup d'état sponsored by the U.S and Britain lead to the first covert action used by Western powers to remove a government in peacetime to preserve their own interests.<sup>52</sup> (Gasiorowski, 1987) Mossadegh's removal was followed by an increase in number of protests and opposition groups that continued through the 1960s and 1970s largely led by the clergy. Meanwhile, the Shah, who was widely viewed in Iran as a *British puppet*, was not able to contain these political protests or restore his relationship with the Iranians.

During the same period of the 1960s and 1970s, both the U.S and Britain were in search of allies in the Middle East to defeat the communist infiltration, and Iran represented a battleground for this conflict. The Shah's economic policies after the overthrow of Mossadegh increased the wealth of the few and impoverished the working class, creating large shanties around the main cities in the country. Also, the increase in urbanization and the decline in agricultural products exacerbated economic hardship and injustice among the working class. (Chatterjee, 2011) This uneven development accompanied with a rising bourgeoisie class and autocratic ruling elite encouraged many Iranians to adopt revolutionary ideas often associated with the communist bloc. This catalyzed the formation of intellectual groups in Iran composed of academics and civil society activists who supported the principles of the Bolchevik revolution<sup>53</sup> while simultaneously maintaining their Islamic faith. (Chatterjee, 2011) Many of these non-clerical Islamic thinkers believed that the Shiite history of Husayn's martyrdom coupled

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<sup>52</sup> Events surrounding the coup d'état to remove Mossadegh always remained unclear due to inconsistencies between CIA and British intelligence. For further information, refer to Mark Gasiorowski. the 1953 coup d'etat in Iran, International Journal of Middle East studies Vol 19 No.3 (1987) 261-286

with revolutionary ideals of class struggle could present the perfect nexus to mobilize the working class and the poor to revolt against the monarchy. However, for the Shah these revolutionary ideas were a clear threat to the Free World and to his vision of Iran, and as such needed to be subdued and crushed. (Chatterjee 2011; Dabashi, 2011)

Additionally, regional events in the Middle East increased tensions between the Shah and opposition groups - both clerical and non clerical. For instance, the Shah of Iran<sup>54</sup> recognized the state of Israel and maintained close ties with its leaders through his reign despite the unanimous rejection of neighboring Arab countries of the legitimacy of Israel. After the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Iran supplied Israel with most of its oil needs, and in return Iranian oil was shipped to European markets via the joint Iranian-Israeli Eilat-Eshkelon pipeline. (Bialer, 2007; Amman, 2009) Opposition groups condemned the close relationship between the Shah and Israel, especially after most Arab countries announced their decision to include Iran in their boycott of Israel. Moreover, opposition groups perceived the establishment of a Jewish state in a Muslim dominated region as a sign of infiltration and regional domination similar to that of the U.S and Britain with their attempts to penetrate the Iranian economy.

Other regional events include the rise of the Baath party in Iraq in 1968 and its direct influence on Iranian politics. (Karsh, 2002) The Iraqi Baath party that took power after a coup d'état was dissatisfied with Iran's possession of the oil-rich Khuzekistan province that Iraqis believed to be rightfully theirs, having been unlawfully given to Iran

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<sup>53</sup> Dabashi argues that the Bolchevik revolution against the bourgeoisie was transported to the Middle East in the form of Third world Socialism to fight colonial powers

<sup>54</sup> Iran was the second Muslim country after Turkey to recognize Israel

in the seventeenth century by the Ottomans. The rising tension between Iran and Iraq forced the former to increase its military spending in preparation of a potential war between the two countries at the expense of local economic development. The defense policies adopted by the Shah intensified economic pressure on the middle class who were struggling to make ends meet, and thus widened the gap between the rich and the poor in Iran. (Helm, 1984)

At the same time, the secular policies of the Baath party in Iraq threatened the role of the clergy in Najaf, leading to the formation of Shiite opposition groups similar to those in Iran. This new reality in Iraq strengthened the ties between the clergy in both countries. Hence, when Ruhollah Khomeini was exiled from Iran for openly attacking the Shah in 1963 and calling for his removal, he chose Najaf in Iraq - one of the holiest Shiite cities and a host for one of the most well-renowned Shiite seminaries - to be his destination. However, in the following years, with the increase of direct engagement of Shiism in politics and the development of political Shiite scholarship advocating for new forms of Islamic governance, the Iraqi government had to curb the power of the clergy to preserve the Baathist regime. (Mallat 1993, Shadid 2005) As a result Khomeini was exiled to France in 1978, other Shiite clergy such as Abu Al Qasim Al Khoei were put under house arrest, while Muhammad Baqir Al Sadr who was leading the opposition group Ad-Dawa party was killed.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> According to CNN, chants stating “long live Muhammad Baqir Al Sadr” were said during the execution of Saddam Husayn [http://articles.cnn.com/2007-01-03/world/saddam.execution\\_1\\_execution-team-rubaie-prime-minister-ayad-allawi?\\_s=PM:WORLD](http://articles.cnn.com/2007-01-03/world/saddam.execution_1_execution-team-rubaie-prime-minister-ayad-allawi?_s=PM:WORLD)

Within this context, new political Shiite ideologies began to formulate that allowed an active participation of the clergy in political life. The Shiite clerics have been debating their role in politics since the Tobacco Movement in Iran and some have been calling for the end of the quietist school in search for Shiite activism. Also, the emergence of Islamic non-clerical thinkers who merged Shiism and revolutionary ideas further revived the role of religion in oppositional politics. Thus, political Shiism, after almost four centuries of quietism, began to change its form where debaters of its various competing new schools included clerics and non clerical Islamic thinkers. (Bazzi, 2010)

### **III- Debate of ideologies**

In order to examine the emergence of these new Shiite ideologies, the following will focus on four ideologues of political Shiism whose ideas were developed and promulgated during the period of the 1960s and 1970s. The content of these ideologies have rarely been addressed by current experts on political Shiism whose attention has mainly focused on regional social and political affairs. However, these ideas cannot be detached from their context and are crucial in shaping political Shiism in order to understand it and reveal its different layers of complexities. Hence, for each of the following four ideologues, I will address the main political philosophy ideas, and describe the socio-political context that helped develop these ideas. It is through this well-integrated description of politics and religious ideas that we can start to understand political Shiism. It is important to note the order the ideologues below has no relevance to their importance or their ideas. The analysis will start with Ruhollah Khomeini.

### *Ruhollah Khomeini*

Ruhollah Khomeini was born in 1902 in the town of Khomein in Iran. A descendant of a Shiite religious family, he was educated in various Islamic schools and in 1922 settled in the city of Qom - one of the main centers of Shiite theology.<sup>56</sup> (Dar Al Manar, n.d.i; Moin, 1999) As a Shiite scholar and teacher, Khomeini produced numerous writings on Islamic philosophy, law, and ethics in an era where the Shiite clergy began to intervene in political matters. Khomeini was known to be an unyielding opponent to Iran's ruler, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, and was highly revered for his public attacks on Western influences in Iran and the region, and his uncompromising advocacy of Islamic purity that won him major following in Iran. In the 1950s he was acclaimed as an ayatollah, or major religious leader, which is the highest standing among Shiite clerics. Some of his followers referred to him as Imam, which is rarely used in Shiism because of its association with the 12 infallible Imams who are descendants of Prophet Muhammad. (Dar Al Manar, n.d.i; Moin, 1999)

During the 1960's, Khomeini spoke out publicly against the shah's reduction of religious estates, and the importance of Shiite clergy to reclaim political power. This led to his arrest and imprisonment for a year, and ultimately his exile from Iran in 1964. After spending a year of exile in Turkey, he settled in Najaf, Iraq, one of the holiest Shiite cities, until 1978 from where he continued to call for the Shah's overthrow and the establishment of an Islamic republic in Iran. (Dar Al Manar, n.d.i; Moin, 1999)

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<sup>56</sup> Qom in Iran, and Najaf in Iraq are known to be the main two centers for Shiite theology

The growing influence of Khomeini in Iran and Iraq forced the Iraqi government to expel him from Najaf, and he settled in Neauphle-le-Chateau, a suburb of Paris where he continued his political activism. The success of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, and the departure of the Shah, brought Khomeini back to Tehran where he was acclaimed as the religious leader of Iran's revolution. In 1980, a referendum on a new constitution created Vilayet-e-Faqih, the Islamic Republic of Iran, with Khomeini named as Iran's political and religious leader for life.<sup>57</sup> He died at the age of 86 in 1989 due to health complications. (Dar Al Manar, n.d.i; Moin, 1999)

### *Khomeini's Political Philosophy*

In Khomeini's various writings, Man has no independence or autonomy. He is merely a part of God's design for *this world* and the *other world* where everything is real, where life is eternal, and where Muslims are pure and at peace with one and another. In contrast, this world represents only illusions that people get attached to and force them to commit vices and engage in corruption. These two worlds represent for Khomeini signs of God who is the Only Reality, and who created Man to assert his real existence. Hence, being part of God's design, where both objects and subjects depend upon God's will for their formation, movement and existence, Man is seen as a *non-being*, without a free will or autonomy to make changes. (1981; 2001; 2004)

Within this view of Man, Khomeini considers men's hearts as the key to their faith, while reason has the capacity to betray them and make them commit *un-Islamic*

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<sup>57</sup> Iran Chamber Society [http://www.iranchamber.com/history/rkhomeini/ayatollah\\_khomeini.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/history/rkhomeini/ayatollah_khomeini.php)

behavior. The notion of a noble man, the person who chooses heart of faith over reason, has a paramount importance for Khomeini. He explains that nobility provides an intuitive understanding of the two worlds and God's plans and design for His people. Being noble makes the individual trust his fate, and accepts his destiny. In contrast, reason makes people skeptical of God's design and consequently this will make them confuse the reality of the *other world* with this *World*. As a result, people will lose their heart of faith. (1981; 2004)

Man ensures and preserves his nobility through his migration toward God. Khomeini views this migration to be three-leveled: (1) in the first level, there are those who have been overtaken by death in their movement toward God; (2) in the second level, there are those who migrated but death has not yet caught them up; and (3) a third group that is living in darkness and has yet to begin migration. A common underlying point in all three levels is that death is a natural and necessary step in the migration toward God. Within these three groups, Khomeini places the Shiite clergy at the highest level of migration toward God because they have the heart of Faith and the knowledge that help them maintain their intuitive understanding of the world. (1981; 2001; 2004; 2005)

Understanding Khomeini's view of the individual and the hierarchy between men and the clergy provides a basis for understanding his ideology for the socio-political transformation of Shiism. Starting early 1960's, Khomeini advocated for the establishment of a *flourishing* state whose government would be to implement the laws of God to help and preserve people's migration toward God. In his book entitled *Al*

*Houkama Al Islamyya: Vilayat-e-Faqih*, he argues that divine injunctions of Islam need *situational* leaders that are specifically chosen for the purpose of protecting the Islamic Community. (2005) He further adds that Man cannot follow his intuition in the abstract and he is not equipped to preserve the essence of Islam. Hence, these *situational* leaders who have completed their migration toward God can serve as guardians of the political and moral unity of the Islamic Community. (1981; 2005)

Thus, to preserve the Islamic Community, Khomeini proposes the idea of clerical rule in the absence of the Imam. (2005) While Shiite doctrine has classically held that only the Hidden Imam, direct descendant of Prophet Muhammad, is entitled to rule, Khomeini breaks away with this tradition. He calls for a Shiite Islamic state headed by a ruler who is a Faqih—Jurist—selected from among the clerical leaders. The Faqih is a clergy member that has reached the highest level of Islamic jurisprudence, and, who Khomeini argues, is the replacement of the Hidden Imam until his return. The Faqih will ensure the rigorous application of Islamic laws and *singlehandedly* will be responsible for all political and moral unity. Hence, the power invested in the Faqih becomes the absolute power on all matters, consolidating all local, national, and international issues in the hands of one person—similar to duties that traditional Shiism has given to the Hidden Imam. (2005)

Khomeini evokes several principles that outline the role of the *Faqih* in the government that can be summarized as:

- Secular rulers in Islamic states must implement Islamic laws and must necessarily submit to the *Faqih's* decisions



- A *Faqih*, single individual, may become the ruler of the community if he is determined by other clergy members to be the most learned and most just.
- If tyrants attempt to prevent the *Faqih* from exercising his rule, the *Faqih* should keep developing Islamic laws and fight for his right to rule because God vested him with this authority, since everything is part of God's design—This contradicts the application of the *Taqiyah* principle which allowed Shiites for centuries to hide their faith due to living under non-Shiite governments
- The *Faqih* is the only one who can teach others because he has acquired the necessary knowledge and because other clergy members have approved that he is the most learned and most just
- The *Faqih* should be an Imam because his role requires him to be a trustee of the prophet, and to hold the fortress of Islam. (2005)

Within these principles, it is important to underscore that the term Imam, prior to Khomeini's usage, was preserved in Shiism for the Twelve Imams and was never given to a religious leader. Hence, Khomeini, in his description of the *Faqih*, indirectly insinuates that an ordinary man can be infallible similarly to the twelve Imams. This idea of infallibility is discussed in his different books of *Al Houkama Al Islamyya: Vilayat-e-Faqih*, *Islam and the Revolution*, and *Le testament politico-Spirituel* but it becomes clear in his book *The Greater Jihad*, where he explicitly explores the idea of infallibility as a quality that Man can acquire though renouncing his attachment to the world. (2005;1981; 2001; 2004) Khomeini argues that ordinary men cannot achieve this quality. Instead, only

a religious and *enlightened* Shiite scholar who has devoted his life to the study of religion can achieve this. (2004)

Characterizing an individual as infallible radically breaks with Shiite traditions. The Shiite clergy, as discussed previously, has refused in the past to take part in politics mainly because they did not want to take part in an imperfect ruling. They believed in waiting for the emergence of the Hidden Imam whose infallibility will bring perfection to political ruling. However, with Khomeini's new notion that people can become infallible suggests that perfect ruling can exist while Shiites are still waiting for the hidden Imam. Thus, in Khomeini's views the clergy becomes a necessary element in Shiite politics and vital for the establishment of a *flourishing* state that can preserve people's migration toward God. (2004; 2005)

A careful reading of *Al Houkama Al Islamyya: Vilayat-e-Faqih* shows that Khomeini claims that his concepts of *Faqih* and infallible Man are not new. He perceives them as revival of the true Shiism that existed during the period of the Shiite Imams such as Ali, and Husayn without providing further explanation. Khomeini urges his Shiite readers not to reject his ideas because they are new, but to question the reasons why they have not been in practice anymore and who is to blame for this tragedy. He then locates the answer to these questions in what he refers to as centuries of *Westoxication* that alienated Shiites and made them lose their tradition. (1981; 2005)

According to Khomeini, *Westoxication* has two main causes: The first is the influence of the Jews that is hostile to Muslim communities. He argues that the West has purposefully put the Jews in Palestine among Muslim nations to alienate Islam and force

it to change its traditions. (1981; 2005) And, the second is the imperial ambitions of the Ummayyads and Abbasids, which were two major Muslim caliphates in Islamic history. In Shiite history, the Sunni rulers of the Ummayyads and Abbasids sought to marginalize the minority of Shiites that were formed after the death of Muhammad. The Shiites were perceived to be a threat to Sunni tradition and political authority. Khomeini considers that the Ummayyads and Abbasids ambitions still exist in Sunni politics and they are forcing Shiites to change their way. (1981; 2005) Hence, one main solution that Khomeini offers to address *Westoxication* and ensure the survival of Shiite traditions is the creation of a milieu that is governed by the *Faqih* and where the *Sharia* is applied to preserve the political and moral unity of the Shiite Muslim world. This form of governance allows the *Faqih* to decide what is best for the people and ensures a *genuine* Shiite identity. It is the *Vilayet-e-Faqih* (translated into governance of the *Faqih*) that can bring salvation. (2005)

### *Khomeini's Political Development*

Khomeini's political philosophy appears to be clear and well defined in his various writings. He is often considered by academics as a man of deep religious convictions—some would say extremist—who was waiting to seize power to enforce his vision of true political Shiism. (Rose 1983; Nasr 2007) However, examining Khomeini's actual political participation, his vision of political Shiism seems fragmented and incoherent. The unfolded political events in the 1960s and 1970s helped him reshape his vision to fit the current socio-political context in Iran. (Brumberg, 2001)

The year 1963 witnessed the first overt clash between Khomeini and the Iranian regime. (Dar Al Manar, n.d.i) At the time, the Iranian parliament passed a law granting Americans operating in Iran immunity from persecution in Iranian courts. The law created uproar in the country, and was a reminder for the ongoing domination of Western companies in the Iranian economy, beginning with the tobacco and constitutionalist movements in early twentieth century. Khomeini's stated the following as a reaction to the law.

If any of them commits a crime in Iran, they are immune. If an American servant or cook terrorizes your source of religious authority in the middle of the bazaar, the Iranian police does not have the right to stop him. The Iranian courts cannot put him on trial or interrogate him. He should go to America where the masters would decide what to do (...) We do not consider this government a government. These are traitors. They are traitors to the country. (Ettela'at, 1979:5)

As a result of this statement and other attacks on the Shah and the regime in Iran, Khomeini was exiled in Najaf<sup>58</sup> for fourteen years where he continued to give statements condemning the actions of the Iranian government and attacking imperialist goals in Iran. At this point, Khomeini had not revealed his vision of *Vilayet-e-Faqih*, yet. (Brumberg, 2001) Instead, he delivered few speeches about the importance of clerical intervention in politics in the Muslim world, which was a disputed issue among the clergy in Najaf. Abu Al Qasim Al Khoei had a staunch rejection to Khomeini's ideas, which created fragmentation among Shiite scholars and their followers. (Mallat, 1993; Brumberg, 2001) Since Khomeini could not unite Shiites under a religious banner to form a Shiite state, he opted for a political one. Hence, his ongoing rejection of the monarchy of Iran was

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<sup>58</sup> Khomeini settled in Turkey for one year prior to departing to Najaf

merely based on political principles to fight Western domination and not religious principles that advocate for a Shiite state. (Zadeh & El Amine, 2010) In one of his most well known speeches in the 1960s, Khomeini summarized his struggle against the Shah by stating the following:

[Foreigners] do not sleep. They are making plans to resume their pillaging in other form, (...) [Shah] have no purpose other than to realize the plans of the American plunderers; they have no purpose other than consolidating United States bases in Iran, the better to smother the resistance of the Iranian people and the other peoples of this region who are fighting against the occupiers of Palestine and against the international exploiters." (Editions Abu Dhar, n.d.)

Khomeini's speeches allowed the Iranians to have one entity to blame for their predicament: the West and anyone who is a supporter of the West. He was able to draw comparisons between political events in the Middle East and events taking place in Iran, where he put side by side *exploitation* of Palestine and the *exploitation* of Iran by the same external powers. (Ismael & Ismael, 1980) He even began addressing opposition groups in Iran as resistance, similarly to the Palestinian resistance that was fighting to reclaim its land. These various comparisons had a tremendous impact on Iranians who feared a future similar to the Palestinians, and started using his comparative rhetoric to address all national problems. (Ismael & Ismael, 1980) Furthermore, the continued Western support of the Shah and his repressive regime gave Khomeini a winning tool to increase attacks on the ruling party and foreign powers.

The 1967 Arab defeat to Israel presented the perfect metaphor for Khomeini showing his followers how foreign powers were ripping apart the Muslim world. He spoke about feelings of humiliation and shame that were conquering neighboring

countries and which should be prevented from entering the hearts of Iranian people. (Brumberg, 2001; Labbad, 2006) Hence, starting the 1970s, Khomeini began advocating for the idea of a noble human being who could rise above his defeat and fight for his rights and justice. He called upon noble men to start their migration toward God and to accept martyrdom and death as necessary acts demanded by God to achieve honor and glory. (Dar Al Manar, n.d.i; Editions Abu Dhar, n.d.) Some academics argue that this was the moment when Khomeini conceived the idea of *Faqih* and portrayed himself to his followers as a religious authority who is “empowered to act” by God. (Kotobi & Leon, 1979:83) He did not view himself, the *Faqih*, as having identical status to the Imams and the Prophet, but he described himself as an appointed Guardian by God to protect the minor—the people. (Rose, 1983)

While ideas of a noble Man, death, and martyrdom materialized before and during the Iranian revolution, Khomeini’s vision of a *flourishing* Islamic Shiite government, *Vilayet-e-Faqih*, did not materialize until after the Iranian revolution in 1979. It is important to note that in his books *Al Houkama Al Islamyya: Vilayat-e-Faqih* and *Le testament Politico-Spirituel*, Khomeini developed the argument that expanded the role of the *Faqih* in the political life for the purpose of helping people migrate toward God, but he did not clarify the structure or functions of this government. Having achieved the revolution in 1979, the Iranian people had given the opposition, with Khomeini as its leader, the role to transform the political institutions to be more just and equitable. This created the perfect opportunity for Khomeini to transform his political principles into

viable structure of political Shiism which constituted, in his opinion, an antidote ruling to the Shah. (Ismael & Ismael, 1980; Brumberg, 2001; Labbad, 2006)

In a series of Friday sermons in 1979, Khomeini explained to the Iranian people how Shiite clerical rule could restore social justice and dignity in the country. His speeches were able to “weave references to martyrdom, ascetic mysticism, and the quest for political power into a powerful ideological tapestry of regained unity and community.” (Brumberg, 2001:39) In his speeches, for the first time, he revealed the functions of the Islamic government which would: (1) enforce justly *Sharia* laws; (2) combat oppression and corruption, (3) fight heresies and wrongdoing, and (4) prevent intervention of foreigners in Shiite/Muslim affairs. (Ismael & Ismael, 1980) These various functions could only be achieved through a clerical rule with the *Faqih* as the leader because he represents the supreme moral authority. Khomeini states:

(...) that if Islamic government works under the supervision of the vice-regency of the chief theologian (...) no harm will befall the country (...) the chief theologian will control and prevent any measures taken by the government, the president or anyone else if they are contrary to the path taken by the nation or the interests of the country. (Brumberg, 2001:42)

Khomeini was able to understand the needs of the Iranian people for a new and reformed government that would restore their economic and political rights. He also understood the grievances of the people toward foreign countries which helped him develop ideas about national Islamic unity government that can stand up against colonialists and liberate Muslim lands from oppression. His leadership was founded on clever manipulation of hard economic conditions, repressive laws, and well-chosen

speeches which helped him formulate his ideas over the span of two decades in a manner that is acceptable for the Iranian people. Brumberg states:

It has almost become a matter of revealed truth among secular students of Islam that Islamic ideals do not “determine” politics in any fundamental way. Instead religious ideals are cleverly appropriated by leaders whose overriding goal is power. Since ideals come and go while universal desire for power remains constant, Khomeini’s self-serving transformation of [Shiism] (...) have a tenuous relationship to “genuine” [Shiism]. What really counts, according to this received wisdom, are the political or social resources that allow a leader to make his views of Islam “hegemonic” within a constituency. (1997:18)

Khomeini’s intelligence and his religious background, coupled with his daring opposition to the unjust regime of the Shah, offered him the opportunity to capture the minds of Iranians. Furthermore, his “staunch, uncompromising and courageous opponent of the regime in Iran” allowed him to gain popular legitimacy where he could present his newly transformed political Shiism in general, and his *Vilayet-e-Faqih* governance in particular. (Ismael & Ismael, 1981:11) His statements about selfless desire, heart of faith and deep commitment to religious rules made the people envision him as the only Faqih, a position he held until his death in 1989.

#### *Ali Shariati:*

Ali Shariati was born in 1933 to a deeply religious family in the provincial capital of Khurasan, Meshed. All his forefathers were important religious scholars of national fame. He attended modern schools in Iran and took part at the age of twenty in the national youth movement that was formed after the coup d’état that overthrew Prime Minister Mossadegh in 1953. He continued his political activities in Iran until 1960 when he



moved to France for his doctoral studies. Between 1953 and 1960, Shariati was arrested and jailed for undefined periods of time due to his political activities against the Shah. (Akhavi, 1983; Chatterjee, 2011)

The period of Shariati's stay in France has been a subject of debate. First, there seems to be disagreement about his subject of study. Many attributed to him a doctorate in sociology due to his writings and political commitments. However, Iranian history expert Yann Richard, uncovered that his studies were actually in medieval Iranian philology, after finding Shariati's dissertation in Sorbonne, Paris. (Akhavi, 1983) Second, there have been rumors with regard his close relationship and affiliation with Western thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Georges Gurevich and others at the University of Paris. But there is no clear evidence about the closeness of the relationship. (Akhavi, 1983)

Nonetheless, all academics agree that Shariati had radical positions on third-world issues. This was evident in his political activities with the Iranian students in Paris and more specifically through his contributions to the Algerian nationalist newspaper, *Al-Mujahid* in support of the Algerian National Liberation Front. He was highly influenced by Frantz Fanon's writings and translated his ontology into Persian. (Akhavi, 1983, 1988; Abedi & Abedi, 1986; Chatterjee, 2011)

After completing his studies, Shariati returned to Iran to reclaim his role in the youth movement. He then was appointed as a professor at the University of Meshed where he presented innumerable lectures on Islam and social justice. He argued that tenets of the Shiite faith are and should be the center of social and political action against oppressive

regimes.<sup>59</sup> He encouraged his students to study the literature that expresses Muslim grievances against the West. Shariati's influence upon large numbers of Iranian youths in the 1960s and 1970s has been catalyst to the Iranian Revolution. (Abedi & Abedi , 1986) His constant focus was on revolutionary struggle to break traditional leadership and support social action. His writings were critical of the Shah regime and his Western allies, capitalism, and of systems that he perceived unjust. Shariati's success made him a concern of the regime, as well as the concern of the clergy. He was heavily accused from traditional clergy to have changed Shiism and borrowed a lot from Western schools during his graduate studies, particularly on existentialism and Marxism at the expense of Islam. (Abedi & Abedi, 1986)

Due to his political positions, Shariati was arrested in 1973 and released into internal exile in Khurasan. Later, he was allowed to leave the country to England where he died under mysterious circumstances in 1977. The widespread belief is that the SAVAK, the Shah's secret intelligence organization, murdered him. (Akhavi, 1983; Chatterjee, 2011)

### *Shariati's Political Philosophy*

Shariati viewed Man as autonomous and independent. He believed in a complete separation between God, nature, and Man where the source is the same for all living things, which is God. He argued that since all things have the same source, they all have a single direction and move and live with one will and spirit, which eventually will lead to fusion of God, man and nature. This type of movement which he coined as Shiism

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<sup>59</sup> For further information visit [www.shariati.com](http://www.shariati.com)

*integralist worldview* is the primary force in the universe, according to Shariati's philosophy. Thus, his depiction of Man is an autonomous one but in search of fusion into unity with the creator. (2002; 2006)

In contrast with Man's autonomy, Shariati maintained historical determinism, in a sense that people cannot overcome historical conditioning factors automatically or escape historical causation. (2002; 2007i) He compares Man's historical determinism to a fish that has to keep itself in water. He says Man, like fish, has to keep itself in water (history), but can move in different directions and even swim upstream. Then, Shariati questioned on several occasion, if there is a possible way to change historical determinism; but he concluded that there is no escape, and the only change that Man can do is a continuous *revitalization* of society that can only happen through the doctrine and practice of revolution. (2002; 2005)

Within this view of Man and history, Shariati envisioned his political community, *Umma*,<sup>60</sup> to be based on justice and equitable allocation. He believed the *Umma* to be classless, where people can hold property—contrary to Western variants of socialism—and to be goal oriented. He identified the goal of the *Umma* to create *true leadership* that could eliminate dictatorship, elitism, and aristocracy. (2007ii) A close examination of Shariati's writings shows that *true leadership* is not to be confused with creating a single leader, which in his opinion would create a form of fascism, similarly to Nazi Germany—Shariati often warns of the dangers of one ruling individual. Thus, through *true*

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<sup>60</sup> Shariati purposefully used the word *Umma* to signify community instead of other terms such as nation or society. He believed the word *Umma* had more generic meaning to it, and it can encompass all aspects of the community

*leadership*, Shariati is referring to *enlightened thinkers* that exist within the society. He states that enlightened thinkers are not clergy, but they may be drawn in part from the clergy. Then, he adds that enlightened thinkers do not cooperate with oppressors, but oppose themselves to tyranny. Also, enlightened thinkers stimulate the political and class consciousness of the people, renounce false clergy, and revitalize societies. Such thinkers will be able to decipher the contradictions of societies and bring them to the attention of the people in order for the masses to take action. (2007ii)

It is important to note that Shariati often criticized the clergy in Iran for cooperating with the Shahs in previous centuries. A careful reading of Shariati further shows his adamant hatred toward clergy elitism. (2007i; 2007ii) He blames them along with despotic rulers and passive populations for the deviations from the true Shiite community in Iran and for succumbing to Western intervention. In his book, *Al Tashayyou' Mas'ouliyyah*, Shariati openly criticizes the clergy for their willingness to cooperate with the Shah for numerous centuries and for creating cleavages in the *Umma*. (2007i) He further blames them for choosing *silence* over action, which is obstructing the process of building a Shiite Islamic state. Therefore, he views his Islamic community a *renaissance*, free from the clergy, in which the consciousness of the masses would be radically stimulated in order for all people to be enlightened. (2007ii)

Shariati eulogizes the common people and proclaims they are the motor force of historical change. He says that it is the common people who should teach Islam, build an Islamic society, implement Islamic laws, and hold the mission of the prophet and the Imams until the return of the hidden Imam in order to prevent tyranny rule. (2007ii) He

further adds that *Taqlid*—a Shiite practice where people follow a clergyman for religious matters—should be abolished because clergy cannot tell enlightened thinkers how to practice Islam. He states that every person should do his own analysis and use his mental capacity to follow Shiism because clergy cannot claim more knowledge than enlightened thinkers. (2005; 2007i)

Hence, in his political philosophy Shariati offers four commands to the common people in order to build their Islamic community: (1) choose justice and overthrow tyranny, (2) provide funds for socio-political struggle, (3) choose to continue the constant historical struggle of Shiites until the return of the Hidden Imam, and (4) remember Ashura in order to show the Shiites the path of martyrdom against the rule of tyranny. (2002; 2005; 2007i) The last two commands stem from Shariati's historical determinism where he argues that the Shiite community can only go through renaissance in its genuine form if it followed the example of Husayn in Kerbala. He claims that Shiites cannot escape their history of rebellion and martyrdom, where their future is always determined by ongoing rebellions until the return of the Hidden Imam. For this purpose, Shariati coins the slogan *every day is Ashura, every land is Kerbala* to highlight the essence of this historical determinism. (2002; 2005)

Shariati adds that the meaning of Ashura that Husayn has established is a prototype of political order for all societies and cultures that are going through oppression. He urges third world people, Palestinians and others, to use the lessons of Husayn in order to fight their oppressors and to *uproot* foreign domination. (2005) The anti-imperialist position that Shariati advocates will bring, in his opinion, all oppressed societies together and will

be the *final* act before the return of the Twelfth Imam. In both his most well-known books, *Al Tashayyou' Mas'ouliyyah* and *Bina' Al That Al Thawriyya*, Shariati concludes that the only way for justice to prevail is through the return of the Twelfth Imam who would reveal himself only when all oppressed people rebel together against tyranny, following the example of Husayn. (2005; 2007i) In none of his writings, can one ignore his clear call for a Husayn-like third-world revolution that will ensure the return of the Imam, and consequently let justice flourish.

#### *Shariati's political development*

The political constituency that Shariati was able to create in Iran was new in the modern history of the country. (Akhavi 1983, 1988; Chatterjee, 2011) Since the end of the nineteenth century, and into the twentieth century, the clergy were the only ones that were pushing for an active political Shiism agenda. However, they were not able to reach out for the common people to adopt this new form of Shiism. At the time, people saw a clear separation of thought between themselves and the clergy, especially in that religion was not dominant in public life. What Shariati was able to do is transform the language of political Shiism to be used and owned by the common people in Iran. And the political environment in Iran, helped him achieve his goals. (Chatterjee, 2011)

At the ascension of Reza Shah Pahlavi to the throne in Iran in 1925, he began enforcing secularization laws in Iran to curb the role of the clergy and prevent their political participation. (Parsa, 1989) He outlawed popular manifestations of Ashura, veils and niqab, and increased the number secular state-run schools. Between 1934 and 1941,

the number of state-run schools that followed a Western curriculum increased from 300 to 2,300 with over 287,000 students. Furthermore, due to the Shah's secular laws, the number of religious schools/seminaries decreased to 250 from 389, which also decreased the numbers of students in these schools from 4000 to 1000. (Akhavi 1980, Sadiq 1959) This generated among a large number of Iranians a feeling of losing faith which was highlighted by known Iranian authors at the time who wrote about their experiences in these secular modern schools.<sup>61</sup> (Chatterjee, 2011) Changes in the education system and feelings of losing attachment to religion among large populations of Iranians helped form a community of non-clerical Islamic thinkers beyond the circles of the clergy starting in the 1940s. It was within this environment that Shariati began his political development. (Dabashi, 1983; Parsa, 1989; Algar, 2001)

Upon Shariati's return from France in 1965, he was faced with a young generation of secularly educated Iranians, and a country where the popularity of Islamic governance was limited to the clergy and was deemed unattractive to a sizeable portion of Iran's youth. At the same time, the Iranian population, especially the youth, were discontented by the Shah's reform laws—known as the White Revolution<sup>62</sup>—which backfired on the regime and created further discrepancies between the rich and the poor. Hence, small

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<sup>61</sup> Authors included Ahmad Kasravi, Sadeq Hedayat and others who were known for their attachment to the Islamic faith

<sup>62</sup> The White Revolution is a series of reforms that Shah Mohamed Reza Pahlavi launched in 1963 to support the peasants in rural areas in Iran—those who aligned themselves with the traditional monarchy of Iran. The failures of some of the land reforms and lack of democratic reforms led to unintended negative consequences and contributed toward the downfall of the Shah

groups started forming to oppose the ruling of the Shah but there was an absence of a strong powerful critique of the government.<sup>63</sup> (Akhavi, 1983)

During his university lectures, Shariati began exposing the Shah's traditional governance and began introducing a discourse of politics that was simultaneously modern but using Islamic principles that would intuitively resonate in people's minds. (Dabashi, 1983; Rahnema, 1998) Shariati learned from his upbringing that despite the secular public sphere in Iran, people remained attached to Shiism in their heart. Iranians have always found in their Ashura rituals a forum for socialization which no other secular options could offer. The Shah tried to impose non-Islamic Persian festivities to serve as a forum for socialization for Iranians but they were considered irrelevant among Iranians. (Chatterjee, 2011)

Shariati refrained from talking about an Islamic state and Islamic laws that would replace the Shah and the monarchy. At a time where political Islam was gaining momentum in the Arab world with Sayyid Qutb—Egyptian political Islamist thinker and advocate of an Islamic state—and where Khomeini was starting to formulate his Velayet-e-Faqih, Shariati was looking for a new way to introduce religion into politics without instigating fears of those who did not believe in clerical ruling and without upsetting the Shah's regime. In his classes, Shariati spoke to his students using concepts such as representation, accountability, democracy to attract the attention of secular youth who had mostly been studying in Western education establishment. Then, he introduced ideas about how societies should be governed in accordance with Islamic values that he

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<sup>63</sup> Jalal Al-e-Ahmad's book entitled *Gharbzadegi* was the only available critique of the government but it



claimed to be at the heart of every Shiite. (Rahnema, 1998) Also, he projected Islam to be leading the way to the new government, similar to how it has been leading the life of Shiites for centuries. He stressed the importance of building an *Umma* that differs from other advocates of political Islam who define it as set of laws negotiated by the clergy. He viewed his *Umma* to be a social system based on equity and justice where brotherhood among people is the fundamental principle. He often emphasized the human element and spoke about how people's intentions and activities can drive societies forward. Shariati's biographer, Ali Rahnema considers him utopic in his view of *Umma*, but it was this worldview that Shariati transmitted to his students that was able to gain him many followers. (Rahnema, 1998)

An in-depth understanding of the political context during which Shariati delivered his lectures would better define reasons behind Shariati's utopic views. Since Shariati returned from France and started teaching at Meshed University, he was heavily scrutinized by the Savak, the regime security intelligence. At one stage, Shariati had to submit all his lectures to the Savak first to be vetted prior to delivering them in his classes. (Rahnema, 1998) Thus, he was not able to criticize the Shah openly, which might have jeopardized him his teaching position. At the same time, the Savak did not want to prevent Shariati from teaching because of his fierce opposition to the clergy, which was in line with the regime's policies. Hence, Shariati's growing popularity did not immediately bring the Savak down on him. However, in order to ensure his job and his growing popularity, Shariati had to devise a vision of the *Umma* that did not directly call

for the abolition of the Shah regime, but an alternative one— more of a utopic one—that Shiites should move toward. (Rahnema, 1998)

Therefore, Shariati focused his attention on attacking colonialism and Western imperialism instead of attacking the Pahlavi regime. His audience found a ready appeal in his attack on foreign hegemony while he invoked historical examples from the Iranian context. (Parsa, 2000) Shariati's experience in France and his familiarity with anti-colonial rhetoric helped convince his followers that the real threat for Iranians and third world populations was the economic exploitation of the West. Accordingly, he referred to Iran as a society *colonized* by Western business where a revolution was needed to liberate the people.

Interestingly, while the Third World Movement was based on secularism and nationalism, Shariati's revolution was based on religion. (Parsa, 2000) He compared the success of Christianity and liberation theology<sup>64</sup> in Latin America to the success that Islam can create for repressed populations in Iran. He believed that Islam was wrongly presented by the clergy, and Husayn is the true representation of Shiite Islam. In a series of speeches between 1971 and 1972, Shariati advocated for a Husayni revolution to challenge the regime which alarmed the SAVAK leading to the decision to arrest him. He gave himself up in 1973, which delineated the end of his political career. (Parsa, 2000; Chatterjee, 2011)

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<sup>64</sup> According to Roger Lancaster (1988), Liberation Theology is a political movement within the Christian faith against economic, political and social injustices. The movement rose with the Catholic Church in Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s. Lancaster states that "liberation theology knows that the salvation of the poor is the common project of two faiths, Marxism and Christianity." (1988;xxi)

In conclusion, Shariati was one of the outstanding theorists who facilitated the transition of Iranian intellectuals and students to a commitment to a new revolutionary concept of Islam. He was considered the “precursor” and the “martyred teacher” whose ideas kept the youth rallying against the Shah even after his arrest and his death in 1977. He became one of the main sources for political awareness during the Iranian revolution where his speeches and lectures were often reprinted and circulated among the Iranian participants of the revolution. (Akhavi, 1983, 1988; Abedi & Abedi, 1986; Dabashi, 1983; Rahnema, 1998; Chatterjee, 2011)

#### *Mohammed Baqir Al Sadr*

Mohammed Baqir Al Sadr was born in Kazimiyya, Iraq in 1935 to a family that is famous in the Shiite religious scholarship sphere. The family is known to have roots in Jabal Amil, Lebanon and his great grandfather, Sadr El Dine Al Amili was famous for his immigration from Lebanon to Iran under the Safavid rule to help build Shiite scholarship. Despite the family’s renowned history, biographers often portray its members to be poor and penniless. (Dar Al Manar, n.d.ii) One of the often-told stories about the poor conditions of the family is that after the death of Mohammed Baqir Al Sadr’s father, the family struggled for months to secure their income and daily food. (Mallat, 1993)

As a child, Al Sadr was acknowledged to be very smart to the point of being called a child prodigy. (Ha’iri, 1987; Mallat 1993) He was often a subject of interest and curiosity for his teachers. In order to ensure his intellectual future, his family moved to Najaf, in 1945 in order to enroll him in the seminary. At the time, clergy in Najaf were trying to

strengthen and protect Najaf from the wave of communism that was becoming popular in Iraq. The clergy openly blamed the West for making the Arab world a fertile ground for communism due to Western policies and their support of Israel that made them lose their regional strategic allies.<sup>65</sup> (Mallat, 1993; Dar Al Manar, n.d.ii) It is within this context in Najaf and the Arab world, that Al Sadr began developing his ideologies that are based on complete rejection of communism, and more precisely its economic aspects. As the discussion below will show, Al Sadr wanted to build the foundation of political economy of Shiite Islam.

Al Sadr advocated for an Islamic Shiite state noting that Islamic states led by Sunnis are deemed non-Islamic. (Katouzian, 1983) He took control of newly formed political groups in Najaf that were anti-communist and built a reputation of the head of Islamic revolution in Iraq. (Aziz, 2002) Hence, with the Sunni Baath's arrival to power in Iraq in 1968, Al Sadr was their primary target along other like-minded clergy in Najaf. (Dar Al Manar, n.d.ii) He was arrested several times for openly critiquing the regime and for his close relationship with Khomeini—which is a debatable issue among experts who studied Al Sadr. After the Iranian revolution in 1979, Al Sadr became an eminent threat to the Iraqi regime raising fears about a similar revolution in Iraq. He was nicknamed Iraq's Khomeini and took the leadership in confronting the Baath party. (Mallat, 1993) In April

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<sup>65</sup> Chibli Mallat recounts the story that one of the leading clergymen in Najaf, Muhamma Husayn Kashif al-Ghita' complained to the American and British Ambassadors in 1953 during their visit to Najaf about the Western short-sighted policies in the Middle East

1980, Iraqi security forces arrested Al Sadr along with his sister Bint al-Huda<sup>66</sup> and they were both shortly executed and buried on April 9, 1980. (Dar Al Manar, n.d.ii)

From Al Sadr's death until 2003, the Baath party, as part of their repression of the clergy in Najaf, ensured to hide all documents pertaining to his ideas to prevent the rise of any supporting movements. However, his pictures were often brought up in Shiite protests especially during the Iraq-Iran war 1980-1988 and the Southern Shiite revolt in 1991.<sup>67</sup> (Dar Al Manar, n.d.ii) After the U.S war in Iraq in 2003, Al Sadr's nephew Muqtada Al Sadr took on the responsibility to revive the legacy of his uncle and bring back Al Sadr family to the forefront of Shiite politics in Iraq.

### *Al Sadr's Political Philosophy*

Al Sadr portrays the Muslim individual as one who has strong attachment to the Shiite faith despite historical experiences of injustices and marginalization. (2009) Al Sadr writes that Muslim men have had many adversaries from outside governments who tried to control their faith, but also from inside the religion from the quietest clergy who were a negative factor against developing any Islamic social system. It is important to note that Al Sadr does not consider contemporary Muslim societies as Islamic. He argues that besides the short ruling of Mohammed and Ali, Islamic states have no precedent in history refuting the legitimacy of all Islamic empires that governed in previous centuries. (2009)

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<sup>66</sup> Bint al-Huda shared her brother's political views. She was the reason behind the failure of previous attempts to arrest Al Sadr, so in order to ensure his arrest in April 1980, she was arrested before him

Al Sadr does not present religious arguments to prove the need to establish an Islamic state, but he says that the Islamic state is a legal necessity to ensure God's rule on earth. He further adds that it is only within an Islamic state that the role of a Muslim man can be studied and developed as a trustee of God to govern. (2009) Al Sadr thus believes in Man's ability to govern and become the head of an Islamic state. He calls Man *al Khalifa* (trustee) who inherited the earth from God through his prophets who witnessed the initial formation of life. He argues that the legitimacy of the Islamic state comes from the people not the clergy because being a trustee of God is a right given to all humanity. Hence he calls his Islamic state *Wilayat al Umma* (governance of the people) to set out his view of the Islamic state. However, he places a special importance on the role of the clergy, and he envisions an institutionalization of their position as guardians of the Islamic state from its enemies. (2001)

Through a modern interpretation of Quranic verses,<sup>67</sup> Al Sadr outlines the ideological commitment to *Wilayat al Umma* in his books *Al Islam Yaqoud Al Hayat* (Islam guides life) and *Falsafatouna* (our philosophy). (2003; 2009) He says that in order for the Islamic state to move towards God, Muslims should have an ideological commitment to the values outlined by God such as justice, science, power, compassion, and above all equality. However, this can only happen, in Al Sadr's view, through a complete liberation of Man from any attachment to the world in order for humanity to experience the true

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<sup>67</sup> 1991 Shiite uprisings in Southern Iraq took place in the aftermath of the Gulf war. The uprisings were against the repression of Saddam Husayn and the Baath regime of Shiites in the country

<sup>68</sup> Researchers who studied Al Sadr such as Shibli Mallat (1993) and Talib Aziz (1996 and 2002) often refer to him as a modern interpreter of the Quran. From a theological point of view, they consider him to offer a contemporary explanation of Quranic verses to fit people's present lives and consequently strengthen their faith.

concept of equality and be able to apply it in the Islamic state. Al Sadr concludes in both his books that if Man cannot detach from earthly values, equality will only be found in the rhetoric of the clergy but not in the daily life of people. (2003; 2009) What Al Sadr fails to do in any of his writings is to propose a method or a mechanism to realize his Wilayat Al-Umma. While he is clear on the end goal of creating a just and equal state, the process of establishing this state is not clarified in his writings.

Al Sadr's political philosophy focused mainly on the study of economics to show that Shiite Islam has all the necessary elements to build a just polity. While it is obvious through his writings that his focus on economics was a reaction to ideologies of capitalism and socialism, Al Sadr advocated for the study of the science of economics within an Islamic framework and making its principles more accessible to laymen and non-educated people. (1987) In his book *Iqtisadouna* (our economics), Al Sadr refutes capitalism's hypothesis that economics is the science of managing scarce natural resources within unlimited demand of people because, in his view, God has provided ample resources to mankind. Also, he refutes socialism's hypothesis that economics is the science of managing the contradiction between mode of production and relations of distribution, because the problem resides in people who are unjust and who did not denounce their attachment to earthly values. Hence, the issue of distribution places a high importance in Al Sadr's views of Islamic economics. (1987) His attention is primarily given to how Islam can organize distribution before and after production to ensure economic wealth and exploitation of natural resources.

Within this context, he perceives his *Wilayat al Umma* to have wide economic powers where the state is the sole owner, organizer of state and public properties, imposer of taxes on the private sector, lender of money to needy people, and having the capacity to nationalize or privatize properties considering the public interest. (1987; 2001; 2003) Al Sadr notes that his economics are not a new brand of socialism due to the dominant role of the state, but they are Islamic where people's trust is invested in the trustee, head of the state, to ensure social and economic balances in the society. Al Sadr states that the trustee will take all interventionist measures, in an Islamic manner, to level all economic disparities in order for wealth not to remain exclusively in the hands of the rich. (1987)

Al Sadr's work on land distribution, ownership, Islamic banking and finance, production and distribution, and other major economic topics were unprecedented in Shiite Islam. He wanted to provide an alternative to what he perceived two Western unjust ideologies. He believed that the creation of an Islamic state would allow an economic system determined by a socio-economic behavior defined by Islam. Al Sadr considered Islamic economics to be part of his general political theory to establish a complete Islamic state; however his early death in 1980 did not allow him to finish the writing of his theory. (1987) Many experts who studied Mohammed Baqir Al Sadr believed that he placed great importance on the martyrdom of Husayn and the importance of reviving this concept in modern Shiism to fight injustice, but this cannot be found in any of his original books. (Ha'iri 1987; Aziz 1996, 2002)



### *Al Sadr's political development*

The political context of Al Sadr's formative years had great influence on his writings.

The majority of his books were written during the 1960s and 1970s, a time during which the Middle East was experiencing an increase in socialist-communist supporters. In Iraq, clergy in Najaf were alarmed by this increase, and worried about a domination of Arab nationalism in the country and hence threatening the Shiite faith. Clergy were also critical of Western policies in the Middle East, which in their opinion bolstered the expansion of communism, and consequently did not accept capitalism as a viable alternative. Both Al Sadr's *Falsaftouna* (our philosophy) and *Iqtisadouna* (our economics) were written to counter these non-Islamic political waves. (Aziz 1996, 2002; Mallat, 1993)

In *Falsaftouna* (our philosophy), Al Sadr openly critiques communism and highlights various examples in Engels' and Stalin's philosophical classics to illustrate the limitations of their ideologies. One can argue that Al Sadr was obsessed with Marxist categories to a point that it affected his vision of an Islamic state which became a mere reaction to communism rather than a stand-alone ideology. A careful reading of the book shows that *Wilayat Al-Umma* is a result of negating what communism is, rather than being a positive by-product of Islamic principles and laws. (Mallat, 1993) However, this observation does not take away from the importance of the book that it is still considered to be one of the best examples in Shiite Islam in building a comprehensive Islamic state. (Katouzian, 1983) In *Iqtisadouna* (our economics), Al Sadr continues his critique of communism with little attention given to capitalism. This is mainly because, at the time, the clergy maintained good relations with Western powers. It is reported that the clergy in

Najaf used to have regular meetings with American and British ambassadors to discuss regional political developments. (Mallat, 1993) Al Sadr died before publishing his book entitled *Moujtamaouna* (our society), which was supposed to be the third installment in his series of books on *Wilayat Al-Umma*.

One cannot ignore the influence of regional Islamic movements in the Middle East on Al Sadr's writings. (Dar Al Manar, n.d.ii) At the time that *Falsaftouna* (our philosophy) and *Iqtisadouna* (our economics) were published during the late 1960s, the region was witnessing a rise in political Islam—as outlined in the first chapter—with the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb as one of its main intellectuals. Qutb, who fiercely attacked the Sunni clergy in Al-Azhar for their quiet attitude toward communist and capitalist interferences in the region,<sup>69</sup> wrote in 1950 his book on *Social Justice in Islam* in which he envisioned an Islamic state that follows the Quran in all aspects of life. The Shiite dimension of political Islam was missing from Qutb's writings, which were a precursor for Al Sadr to develop his vision of a Shiite Islamic state that is built on principles of equity and justice. As a result, Al Sadr developed a reputation of one of the early visionaries of a systemic and fully integrated Shiite Islamic state. (Mallat, 1993)

According to Mallat, Al Sadr's true vision of his Islamic state did not materialize until he joined the Ad-Dawa party which was a Shiite clergy led political group against secularism and Arab nationalism. (1993) His leadership of the party during the 1960s and 1970s helped him further develop his ideology and publish several treatises in 1978 on

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<sup>69</sup> For further information on Qutb's politics refer to Richard Rubenstein *Jihad and Genocide* 2010

the practical implementation of such a state including state laws, and archetypes of an Islamic constitution.<sup>70</sup>

The Iranian revolution in 1979 transformed Al Sadr from a clergyman who was trying to protect Shiism from Western ideologies into the ‘Khomeini of Iraq’ that could lead an Iraqi revolution against non-Shiite tyrants. (Mallat 1993; Dar Al Manar n.d.ii) What needs to be clarified in this context is that Khomeini never had a leadership reputation in Iraq prior to 1979. His political actions during his exile were always targeted toward Iran, hence he kept a low profile in Iraq to prevent expulsion. Khomeini’s return to Iran in 1979 to head the Islamic Republic made him gain a reputation of a revolutionary leader that the clergy in Iraq were hoping to replicate.(Brumberg, 2001) Also, what is worth clarifying is that the relationship between Al Sadr and Khomeini during the latter’s years in Najaf remains unclear. Many experts suggest that Al Sadr and Khomeini were intellectual comrades. (Dar Al Manar n.d.ii) Some argue that Al Sadr accepted Khomeini’s *Wilayat e-Faqih* in principle but he thought it lacked an electoral and participatory system that *Wilayat Al-Umma* embodies. (Aziz, 2002). Others argue that exchanges and debated ideas between the two clergymen were sparse, and each has developed its ideology of governance independently from the other.<sup>71</sup> (Ha’iri 1987; Mallat, 1993)

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<sup>70</sup> Many of the Dawa party members went into exile after the execution of Mohammed Baqir Al Sadr. The party was considered a terrorist organization during the Iraq-Iran war due to the West support of the Baath regime in Iraq. After 2003, the Dawa party gained more of a central role in Iraqi politics especially that Nouri Al Maliki, Iraq’s current Prime Minister belongs to the party. During the execution of Saddam Husayn in 2006 chants of “long live Mohammed Baqir Al Sadr” were heard.

<sup>71</sup> Shibli Mallat (1993) claims that Al Sadr’s reputation in Iraq was bigger than Khomeini’s. He hints at the fact that Khomeini might have adopted from Iraqi clergymen the vision of a Shiite Islamic state, but this cannot be proven for the purpose of this dissertation.

Biographies of Khomeini and Al Sadr show no significant interactions between the two Shiite ideologues. (Mallat, 1993) Contrary to the Baath party accusation of Al Sadr's close relationship with Iran, interactions between these two leaders show a different story. For instance, Khomeini and Al Sadr rarely met in Najaf due to the former's cautious political attitude and desire to keep a marginal role in Iraqi Shiite politics. Furthermore, one can argue that Khomeini was not in favor of Al Sadr's ideas. This became clear in the late 1970s when the Baath party began tightening its surveillance of the clergy,<sup>72</sup> an action that alarmed Al Sadr and made him seek refuge in Iran. But Khomeini recommended in a telegram to Al Sadr that he should stay in Najaf to protect the city from falling in the hands of non-believers. Al Sadr was executed few years later. (Mallat, 1993)

After Al Sadr's death in 1980, there was a long time before his ideas emerged again. (Mallat, 1993) This is primarily due to the Baath party repression of his followers in Iraq and the execution of many of his supporters. Furthermore, after the disintegration of the Soviet bloc and the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, Al Sadr's books that heavily critiqued the communist regime became irrelevant. In the late 1990s, and especially after the U.S war in Iraq, experts began revisiting Al Sadr's ideas to provide a new interpretation of his texts to fit the current context away from the debate of communism vs. capitalism.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Starting 1977, the Shiite clergy in Iraq started a series of protests against the Baath regime that forced the latter to impose new restrictions on movement and activities of clergymen in Najaf and Kerbala. For further information, refer to Jabar the *Shi'ite Movement in Iraq* (2003)

### *Abu Al Qasim Al Khoei*

Abu Al Qasim Al Khoei was born in the city of Khoy in the West Azerbaijan Province in Iran in 1899. He moved to Najaf, Iraq at the age of twelve to pursue his studies in theology, where he excelled and reached the level of a Marjaa,<sup>74</sup> which is the highest level that a Shiite clergyman can attain. Majority of Shiite scholars (current and past) were his students or students of his students, and this includes: Muhammed Baqir Al Sadr, Ali Hussaini Sistani, Ali Khamenei, Mohammed Husayn Fadlallah, Saeed Al Hakim, and many others. (www.alkhoei.org)

Al Khoei focused primarily on academia and developing Shiite scholarship. He established a new school in Jurisprudence in Shiite religious thought that specialized in exegesis of the Quran and prophet Muhammed's traditions. His contributions to theology and jurisprudence surpassed all of his contemporaries, which made him the most followed Marjaa among Shiites worldwide from the 1970s until his death. (Mallat, 1993; Nakash, 2006; Nasr, 2007)

Despite his high stature, Al Khoei lived a very poor life. He is known for wearing torn robes, keeping a simple lifestyle and relying on his daughter for cooking his meals. He established Shiite foundations around the world including in the United States, United Kingdom, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. His foundations have created schools, orphanages,

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<sup>73</sup> Refer to Patrick Cockburn *Muqtada: Muqtada Al-Sadr, the Shia Revival, and the Struggle for Iraq* (2008)

<sup>74</sup> Marjaa is the highest level among Shiite clergymen who have reached a certain level of knowledge. The word literally means a source of imitation where the Marjaa becomes the religious authority for Shiites. Usually the Marjaa receives the title Ayatullah and is compared to the role of papacy in Catholicism. For more information on the Marjaa and levels of studies in Shiite theology, refer to Shibli Mallat (1993) *The renewal of Islamic Law: Muhammed Baqer As-Sader, Najaf and the Shi'i International*

mosques, and hospitals to help Shiites in foreign countries. His students recount that he was always worried about the state of the believers in the world, and political affairs were on the top of his highest concerns.

Al Khoei kept a low political profile under the Baath regime, which helped minimize government's crackdown on his activities. He maintained the continuity of the Najaf seminaries, even after the Iranian Revolution, resulting in the killing of many Shiite scholars in Najaf due to their close relationship with Iranian revolutionaries. Following the failed Shiite uprising in 1991 in South Iraq, Al Khoei was arrested and was forced to appear on Television next to Saddam Husayn to calm down the Iraqi Shiite population. His arrest created worldwide uproar, forcing Husayn to release him.<sup>75</sup>

Al Khoei died in 1992 after health deterioration from natural causes. His family was forced to bury his body as soon as possible to prevent another Shiite uprising in the country. The funeral prayers were led by Ali Sistani, who became the new Marjaa that Al Khoei's followers turned to. Al Khoei's legacy survives through his foundations, primarily led by sons, that continue their charitable efforts worldwide and which are funded by Shiites' almsgiving. (Walbridge, 2001) Al Khoei foundations are the only Shiite institutions that have achieved General Consultative Status with the U.N. (The Guardian, 2003)

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<sup>75</sup> For further information, visit [www.alkhoei.org](http://www.alkhoei.org)

### *Al Khoei's Political Philosophy*

For Al Khoei, the idea of a Shiite state is problematic. He believes a Shiite state can only be controlled by an infallible Imam, a descendant of the Prophet; there are no possible other leaders who can act as a liaison between God and mankind. Al Khoei followed the Shiite doctrine of *consolidationism* that dictates that imperfect ruling will persist until the emergence of the Hidden Imam who will finally bring justice and equity. But, until then, Shiites should retreat from politics, and clergy should focus on the study of religion. Hence, while the Twelfth Imam is still in a state of occultation, any Shiite attempt to enter politics is an act of usurpation. (1981)

In his books, Al Khoei dedicates no attention to the relationship between state and people. Instead, he focuses on the relationship between the *Mujtahid*—a jurisprudent who is capable of *Ijtihad*, i.e. to derive Divine law from the Qoran and Hadith—and people. One can argue that in his view, the only legitimate relationship that exists, in the absence of a Shiite state and the Hidden Imam, is the relationship between the *Mujtahid* and the people. As a result, his writings cover mainly Shiite rituals (worship, marriage and divorce, burial, alms giving, and fasting) to answer questions of the believers and help them follow the rightful path—which is the name of his main book *Minhaju Al Saliheen*. (1981) He says that the essence of his writings is to help people reach eternal heaven in the other life.

Al Khoei's apolitical tradition renders the state invisible, and put Man in an ambiguous place between autonomy and dependence. Man relies on the *Mujtahid* to interpret God's will regarding issues of rituals, however Man is autonomous in his

relationship with the state—given that the state is non Shiite. Al Khoei does not discuss laws and doctrines that are solely the responsibility of the state such as criminal law and international affairs as if it is a deliberate decision to avoid any sort of overlap with the state. (1981) While Islamic *Sharia* has laws on these issues, and other Shiite scholars have developed laws that specifically address criminal law and international affairs, Al Khoei chooses not to discuss these issues in his writings. A careful reading of his books shows that the religious issues he discusses fall within two categories: (1) spiritual relationship between Man and God (worship, marriage and divorce, burial, and fasting), and (2) social relationships among people (almsgiving). Thus, he completely disregards the relationship aspect between state and people and offers no opinion on this subject matter—probably Al Khoei left this aspect for Man’s autonomy for decision-making.

While Al Khoei is known to be a staunch opponent of a Shiite state and Shiite political participation in non-Shiite states, he does not forbid Man in his writings from engaging with it. He has no prohibitions against Shiites working in the government (ministries, parliament or any other governmental body), serving in the police or the military, or even forming political groups. This raises questions about Al Khoei’s true perception of the state and what he envisioned to be the relationship between people and state. Is the state an illegitimate entity that he forbids Shiites from engaging with—even though he does not openly state this? Should Shiites live in complete separation and alienation from the government? Or, did Al Khoei have specific functions for the relationship between people and state that he was afraid from expressing due to political reasons in Iraq and the region? Answers to these questions remain unclear in his political



philosophy, however the socio-political events that took place during Al Khoei's leadership in Najaf might offer additional insights to understand his political development.

#### *Al Khoei's political development*

The quietism principle that Al Khoei adopted raises several questions about the political rationale of this decision. Did Al Khoei adopt quietism as a true ideology? Was it a true conviction? Or was it a survival mechanism to overcome governmental oppression of Shiites? Was quietism Al Khoei's form of *Taqiyah* to sustain the seminaries in Najaf and maintain the faith in one of the holiest cities for Shiites? The political events surrounding the time of Al Khoei's leadership in Najaf offer insights into these various questions.

Shiite quietism in Iraq was enforced by the state for the first time in 1920 after the Shiite clergy in Najaf called for Jihad against the British—at the time, following World War I, Iraq was under British Mandate. This led to the exile of the four main clergymen in Najaf, who were of Iranian origins, to Iran. After several months of petitioning with the Iraqi government, three of the four clergymen were allowed back to Najaf on the condition of not “interfering” in Iraqi politics. (Kadhim, 2011:68) However, quietism and separation between politics and religion in Najaf was not sustained in the following decades. With the rise of communism in the region and the establishment of the state of Israel, many of the scholars in Najaf such as Muhammed Baqir Al Sadr and others were

heavily involved in Iraqi politics and forced the Shiite seminaries to weigh in political matters. (Nakash, 1994; Kadhim, 2011)

The crackdown of the Baath regime starting 1968 on Shiite clergy was the second state-enforced quietism. Al Khoei did not oppose the crackdown. Being the *Marjaa*, he had to ensure the seminary from being forced to closure by the Iraqi regime. However, it is important to note that during the same time Al Khoei was the teacher of many of the clergymen who were part of the Ad-Dawa party and other anti-governmental political groups. However, there are no records that he actually banned them from engaging in political activities. One can argue that Al Khoei's responsibility to keep the Shiite scholarship alive obliged him to adopt quietism and not interfere in politics while he allowed his students to lead a revolution. Al Khoei did not speak in favor of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and was a staunch opponent to *Wilayet-e-Faqih*. (Kadhim, 2011) But his opposition remains unclear if it was due to deep commitment to Shiite *consolidationism* or it was his protection strategy of the Shiite seminaries.<sup>76</sup>

Both Mallat and Nakash identify Al Khoei as hesitant, rather than a clergyman who belongs to the quietism school. (1993; 2003) They argue that the Najaf clergy, with Al Khoei as their lead scholar, were weary in the 1960s and 1970s of the militancy of the Iraqi regime. Their primary goal was to protect the faith and its institutions, and shield the Shiite leadership, especially that the Middle East region during the same period was

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<sup>76</sup> Mallat (1993) recounts a telegram sent from Al Khoei to Khomeini congratulating the latter after the Iranian Revolution. Al Khoei addresses Khomeini as Hujjat Al Islam rather than Ayatollah which means that Al Khoei always considered Khomeini second in learning.

going through waves of independence and Arab nationalism that had the potential of threatening Shiite minorities.

Al Khoei's hesitant attitude helped minimize scrutiny by the Baath regime of Shiite seminaries. He did not voice any criticism of the Iraqi government despite the ban that was imposed on celebration of Shiite rituals, specifically Ashura, and the execution of several leading Shiite scholars during the 1970s and 1980s. Also, Al Khoei managed not to raise any suspicions during the eight year Iran-Iraq war despite his Iranian origins. In 1991, following the Shiite uprising in Southern Iraq and the killing of tens of thousands of Shiite men, women, and children, Al Khoei spoke publicly for the first time against the government's actions.<sup>77</sup> Soon after, he was summoned to Baghdad for interrogation and was forced to have a televised appearance with Saddam Husayn to calm down the Iraqi Shiite community.<sup>78</sup> (This was a first for Al Khoei. He had no further confrontational positions with the regime and died a year later due to health complications.

#### **IV- Conclusion**

The analysis presented above was directed at examining the following questions: what is political Shiism? Who are its main ideologues? And what are its different forms?

Answers to these questions described four main different philosophies of political Shiism, and shed light on the influence of local, regional, and international political developments on shaping the ideas of quietism and activism in political Shiism. The

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<sup>77</sup> Few sources indicate that Al Khoei's sons were involved in the uprising which lead to the death of his youngest son who was killed by the Republican Guards. ([www.jafariyanews.com](http://www.jafariyanews.com))

<sup>78</sup> For further information, visit [www.islamicinsights.com](http://www.islamicinsights.com)

analysis shows that political Shiism is not confined to Halm's and Dabashi's *Ashura* symbolism and expands to include layers of religious and political complexities.

Additionally, the analysis shows that these ideas cannot be disregarded or marginalized because they have been at the center of the political transformation in the Middle East during the twentieth century and are crucial to provide an integrated understanding of political Shiism.

Hence, the analysis presents a debate of ideas that took place during the 1960s and 1970s about the role of Shiism in politics. On one hand, the quietist school—rooted in Shiism's *consolidationism*—tends to avoid confrontation with oppressive regimes and refrain from direct engagement in political matters. On the other hand, the activist school emphasizes a Shiite state where martyrdom and rebellion are necessary for its inception. However, even within the activist school, there is a debate over the extent of clerical power, democracy, role of citizens, and state's role in socio-economic laws.

The model of absolute clergy role, known as *Vilayet-e-Faqih*, that currently dominates Iran is one of many debated ideologies that became to exist during the 1960s and 1970s. It is the only activist school out of the three presented above that succeeded to fully develop. The political analysis shows that Khomeini's charisma and intelligence captured the hearts of Iranians who bestowed him with the responsibility to transform Iran into what they envisioned a 'just' society after the collapse of the Shah's corrupt regime. His political skills and maneuvering overshadowed the theocracy he institutionalized in Iran and alienated other visions of political Shiism that had the potential to be more moderate. However, one can argue that if Shariati did not die in

1977, supporters of his ideas might have triumphed over the clergy. Prior to Shariati's death, clergy in Iran were not able to mobilize youth and secular Iranians who constituted the base of the Iranian revolution. His popularity and his opposition to the clergy were the only reasons that the SAVAK allowed him to flourish and did not arrest him earlier than 1973. Also, it is important to note that Khomeini did not become a leader of the revolution until his return from exile in 1978, due to the lack of a distinct leadership, a position that Shariati would have filled if he were alive.

Contrary to popular perception that political Shiism is centered in Iran—by stating that the Shiite Crescent starts in Iran—one cannot understand the evolution and the various forms of political Shiism without examining Najaf, one of the holiest Shiite cities. Most of the Shiite key figures that helped transform political Shiism in the 1960s and 1970s have spent a considerable amount of time in Najaf: both Al Khoei and Al Sadr were residing in the city, while Khomeini found in Najaf from 1964 till 1978 the perfect refuge to continue his rebellion against the Shah. In Najaf, the transformation of political Shiism took more of a moderate position. Al Sadr believed in democratic ruling in a Shiite state where people have full participation in governance, on the other hand Al Khoei refrained from political debates and focused on esoteric theological issues.

This historical presentation of the debate of ideologies shows the diversity in forms of political Shiism and the different interpretations of religious, social, and political matters. It affirms that there is no unified Shiite political system and modifications can and will take place based on political events. It also affirms the intertwined relationship between context and Shiite religious ideas in order to develop ideologies that would fit the socio-

political time and space. Therefore, the examination of these ideas that have introduced activism to a religion that historically followed political quietism is necessary to develop a systematic understanding of political Shiism. The following chapter will focus on describing how these political Shiite ideas of the past century transcended through time in order to create Shiite mobilization in the Arab world—and consequently create fear of an evolving Shiite Crescent. The analysis of the next chapter will describe the content of current political Shiism language in two countries that have large Shiite populations, Lebanon and Iraq, and the close connections, if they exist, between such a language and the various ideas discussed in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER 6: ARAB SHIITE MOBILIZATION FOR POLITICAL PROTESTS**

### *Vignette #1<sup>79</sup>*

*Following the 2006 war between Hizbollah (Party of God) and Israel, a woman contacted the Party asking to possess Nasrallah's robe, known as abaya, that he was wearing during the wartime televised speeches. She begged for it and asked for it numerous times until she was granted her wish. After acquiring the abaya, she traveled with it across all neighborhoods in Lebanon showing the robe and inciting Hizbollah supporters. People rallied after the robe, infusing it with the meaning of a holy icon. Hizbollah's support was not only found in Lebanon after the war, but it transcended national boundaries across the Arab world. In a poll in Egypt conducted in summer 2006, Nasrallah ranked first as favorite Arab political leader.*

### *Vignette #2<sup>80</sup>*

*Upon the return of Muqtada Al Sadr in 2011 from a four-year self imposed exile in Iran, he proved that his popularity did not diminish. For his first speech in Najaf, supporters slept on the streets, covered with cardboard, to ensure a front row position. When Al Sadr took the stage, crowds wept, clapped, and demanded encores. His speech combined elements of a rock show and a religious sermon- when Al Sadr came on stage, he has to wait five minutes for the roar of the crowd to dull before he could begin his speech. Those unable to attend the performance live watched on a national broadcast. People say his national popularity grew during exile, proving that his power will never diminish.*

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<sup>79</sup> Vignette #1 is based on a story presented in the Introduction of Nicholas Noe's book entitled *Voice of Hezbollah: the Statements of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah*, (2007)

<sup>80</sup> Vignette #2 is based on stories heard from inhabitants in Najaf and the Huffington post article entitled *Iraqi Cleric Muqtada al-Sadr: Resist the US by all Means Necessary*, dated January 8, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/08/iraqi-cleric-muqtada-alsadr\\_n\\_806172.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/08/iraqi-cleric-muqtada-alsadr_n_806172.html)

## I- Introduction

Such examples cited above are often recurring among Shiite communities in the Arab world. They illustrate the veneration that religio-political leaders can evoke, and their capabilities to mobilize thousands of Shiites, and in certain cases non-Shiites, for their support. Shiites, a religious minority in the Muslim world are often seen as heretical for their religious interpretations that differ from mainstream Sunni theology, are appealing to both Sunnis and Shiites in the region. This has heightened fears among regional and international leaders and forged alliances between Sunni led countries—primarily Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt—against Syria and Iran.<sup>81</sup>

However, Shiite mobilization in the Arab world is often linked to an infiltration of Iranian domination into Arab politics. On one hand, Iran is accused of wanting to export its revolution to neighboring countries through political movements such as Hizbollah and the Mahdy Army. On the other hand, these political movements claim to mobilize their Shiite followers out of national patriotic duty to liberate their respective countries from invaders—Hizbollah claims to be the resistance against Israel, and Mahdy Army claims to be the resistance against the U.S. The two leading experts on political Shiism, Vali Nasr and Yitzhak Nakash, associate the mobilization of political Shiism respectively to an intra-Muslim conflict between Shiites and Sunnis, or to local political context disassociated from regional and international influences. However, as argued previously, political events in the Arab world are more nuanced and complex, and require a more

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<sup>81</sup> Wikileaks cables show that King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia urged the United States to attack Iran's nuclear reactors. Syria is led by the Assad family who belong to the Alawite minority, an offshoot of Shiism.



systematic analysis. From this perspective, the purpose of this chapter is to shed light on the variety of political topics—local, regional, and international—that aim at creating political mobilization among Shiites in the Arab world. The chapter will examine the following questions: How do Arab Shiites leaders mobilize their followers? And how is this mobilization related to ideas of activism in political Shiism discussed in the previous chapter?

To answer these questions, as indicated in the methodology chapter, I will focus on two main countries: in Lebanon, I will explore speeches of Hassan Nasrallah during the July-August 2006 war between Israel and Hizbollah. And in Iraq, I will explore speeches of Muqtada Al Sadr between 2003-2007 and 2011-2012.

## **II- Analysis of speeches**

For the analysis below, for each country, I will provide first a short synopsis of the political context followed by a description of the content of the speeches.

### *Lebanon: July-August 2006: war between Israel and Hizbollah*

Known as the *Tammouz* (July) war, the July-August thirty-four-day war was another military conflict in the series of Arab-Israeli wars. (Kahlidi, 2008) The conflict started on July 12, 2006, when Hizbollah crossed the UN-demarcated blue line into Israel and captured two soldiers. Hizbollah called this operation The Truthful Promise aiming at swapping the captured Israeli soldiers with Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails. Israel responded through military actions on Lebanese infrastructure (airports and bridges) and

airstrikes and artillery fires on Hizbollah targets in Shiite neighborhoods in South Lebanon and Southern suburbs of Beirut. In return, Hizbollah fired over 3,500 rockets into Northern Israel. At the end of the war, more than 1,200<sup>82</sup> Lebanese were killed, about 1 million Lebanese were displaced in addition to three to four hundred thousand displaced Israelis. (Hovsepian, 2008) The war cost Israel 1.6 billion dollar, roughly 1% of its GDP, and the cost of reconstruction for the Lebanese government was estimated to be at 2.8 billion dollar. (The Guardian, 2006; UNDP, n.d.)

There were many arguments about what propelled the war, including Israel's response to the capture of two Israeli soldiers or a pre-planned attack on Hizbollah. (Hovsepian, 2008; Zurayk, 2011) Even in Lebanon, citizens were divided into two camps: those who supported Hizbollah and began joining its forces against Israel, and those who were blaming Hizbollah for the war and were calling for its abolition. Israel's heavy attacks on Shiite neighborhoods exacerbated this divide.<sup>83</sup> Stories were recounted about increased number of Shiites and their supporters enlisting with Hizbollah, receiving military training and engaging in relief efforts while other Lebanese citizens in adjacent communities continued their quotidian lives uninterrupted.

During the military conflict, Hassan Nasrallah's speeches became integral to the psychological aspect of the war. His speeches in the form of televised appearances<sup>84</sup> were his only medium of communication to deliver his messages, and they were listened to not

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<sup>82</sup> This number does not distinguish between Lebanese civilians and Hizbollah combatants

<sup>83</sup> During the war, Israel's military attacks included heavy bombing of Shiite neighborhood in Southern suburbs of Beirut and South Lebanon, in addition to destroying the country's three airport and most of the vital bridges and infrastructure that connect Lebanese cities across the country. For more information refer to Nubar Hovsepian *The War on Lebanon*, 2008

<sup>84</sup> Nasrallah has been hiding to date in an unknown location since the beginning of the July-August war

only in Lebanon, but in Arab countries, Israel, and the world at large. An Israeli poll that analyzed Nasrallah's speeches and their influence on the Israeli public showed he was the first Arab leader in over thirty years, since Abdel Nasser, with the potential to sway the public opinion. (Harel, 2010)

### *Analysis of Hassan Nasrallah's speeches*

In all of the ten speeches, Nasrallah presented himself as intelligent, calm, confident, and politically astute. He always started his speeches with a praise to God and a Quranic verse, then followed with detailed description of military operations of the war, honing on the details that showed the limitations of Israel and the advantages of Hizbollah. He explained in length how Hizbollah fighters were able to destroy Israeli Merkava tanks, while highlighting several times that Merkava was the most technological advanced type of tanks in the world. Nasrallah's detailed description also included the type of wounds of Israeli soldiers—whether they were hit in the shoulder, back, leg etc.—and the army rank of the soldiers. None of his detailed remarks focused on Hizbollah's losses. His approach in providing such precise accounts about the opponent's military operations helped his listeners better understand and be proud of the successes of Hizbollah, as well as it helped him gain credibility as the leader of the war.

In his speeches, Nasrallah came across as emotional and playful. He reiterated his appreciation and condolences to the martyrs and their families, and the suffering of the Lebanese people who were suffering the most “brutal” and “destructive” Israeli war. He minimized the gap between himself and his audience by insinuating that all people who

are affected by the conflict are his family, his friends, his brothers, and his sisters. It is important to note that Nasrallah's eldest son, Hadi, was killed while fighting Israeli forces in 1997, which has given the Hizbollah's leader legitimacy to assume a close relationship with his followers. He recounted in every speech stories of displaced people and their power and will to stand firm against "the oppressive enemy." In addition to his emotional side, Nasrallah always delivered a few jokes, mostly to belittle his enemy, accentuating his charisma and highlighting his leadership skills in capturing the attention of his audience.

Nasrallah recognized in his speeches that he was not only addressing the Lebanese Shiites, but also Arabs, Israelis and world leaders. He perceived himself as a transnational leader whose power of influence went beyond national or regional politics. In every televised appearance during the war, he included messages to his (1) fighters, (2) Lebanese followers, (3) Arabs leaders, (4) Muslims, (5) Israelis and their government, and (6) international leaders. Nasrallah always dressed down the Israelis and their leaders. He called their government foolish, and he specifically named Prime Minister Ehud Olmert "stupid and dumb". This type of rhetoric helped Nasrallah instigate fear among the Israelis, and at the same time, gave him leverage and popular support among Arabs who perceived Israel as an occupier of Palestine and a regional threat.

Nasrallah's speeches during the thirty-four day war were anchored in several themes including tactics and strategies of military fighting, processes and outcomes of shuttle diplomacy, and viability of a cease-fire. For the purpose of the content analysis in this chapter, my focus will be on topics that delineated his relationship with the Shiite

community to offer a deeper insight of Shiite mobilization. After a thorough review of the speeches, these topics are divided into the following: Shiites and the Lebanese identity, Shiites and the religious identity, Shiites and Israel, Shiites and the *Umma*.

- Shiites and the Lebanese identity

From Nasrallah's point of view, to win the war against Israel was to "stand firm" against a strong enemy. In almost every speech, he highlighted the superiority of the Israeli army and its massive capability to destroy many villages and cities in Lebanon. Hence, when Nasrallah was asked during an interview with Al Jazeera television on July 21<sup>st</sup> about his definition of a victory against Israel, he responded by stating that a victory against such a destructive army would be to "stand firm" and show the enemy that "our will to fight will not be broken."

At the onset and during the war, Lebanese people were divided among those who supported the war, and those who blamed Hizbollah for this devastating outcome. This divide was taking place while Shiites were being displaced from their neighborhoods in search for an asylum in non-Shiite areas in Lebanon. This created concerns among Hizbollah's leadership of a backlash between Shiites and non-Shiites, which might consequently affect the "standing firm" position and decrease the popularity of the Party. Thus, in his speeches, Nasrallah sought to unite the parties, religious denominations and communities in Lebanon, by stating that Hizbollah has done nothing that was not "Lebanese", and that the Party served the goal of the Lebanese state to preserve the independence, sovereignty, and unity of the nation.

In his famous speech on July 14<sup>th</sup> when Nasrallah threatened to bomb the city of Haifa and “cities beyond Haifa,” he declared that all Lebanese neighborhoods are the same. He said “there is no difference between the Southern suburbs of Beirut, or any home in South Lebanon, the Beqaa, the North, Mount Lebanon, or any other corner in Lebanon.” He further asserted in his following speeches that the Lebanese were currently going through the true independence war of their country, where Israel is in this context the enemy of all Lebanese. Through this image, Nasrallah was emphasizing the Lebanese identity of Shiites and strengthening their attachment to the land and the unity of the nation. His concept of “standing firm” is thus bolstered through making the Lebanese Shiites as part of Lebanon, and not only a part of the South or Southern suburbs of Beirut. And within this new identity, the enemy’s goal was to inflict damage on Shiites’ nationalism.

Nasrallah assuaged his supporters by acknowledging that “Hizbollah has done nothing that is not Lebanese” by capturing the two Israeli soldiers. He justifies that the capture fell within the rights of the Lebanese government. During the first speech on the eve of the war on July 12, 2006, Nasrallah explained that according to international law “if Lebanon has a small part of its land occupied by the Israelis, then its government is allowed to carry out operations in Tel Aviv”; however, he said, “we are not carrying operations in Tel Aviv.” In this statement, Nasrallah was equating the resistance and its members to the Lebanese government, giving more national legitimacy to the Party, and igniting nationalism feelings among the supporters.

The consequences of not “standing firm” were devastating according to Nasrallah. After U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced on July 25, 2006 that it was “time for a New Middle East,”<sup>85</sup> Nasrallah rushed on July 26<sup>th</sup> to publicly denounce the new American plan which signified the defeat of the resistance and the “Americanizing” and “Israelizing” of Lebanon. Nasrallah warned that if “we do not stand firm, we will be humiliated and we will lose our dignity.” He further added, “no one can bring our dignity back. Roads, houses, bridges, and airports can always be rebuilt, but dignity can never be replaced.” Thus, Nasrallah’s call to support Hizbollah was to preserve the country and the Lebanese identity from Western interference in its internal politics and its sovereignty. Nasrallah often reminded his followers of the defeat and humility that Arabs had to go through during the different past Arab-Israeli wars, and then he argued that “this war is different” because “we will be victorious.”

Nasrallah corroborated that Syria and Iran were close allies of the Party but did not influence its nationalistic agenda. He stated on July 21<sup>st</sup>, “we are a national resistance and we have local political values that are not affiliated with Syria and Iran.” Hence, in order to generate support and mobilization for the war, Nasrallah detached Hizbollah from any regional or international affiliation and represented the Party as solely a national phenomenon. As a consequence of this positioning, he envisioned edifying among his supporters their nationalistic feelings, and transforming each supporter of Hizbollah into a “heroic” defender of the country. This identity that Nasrallah shaped in his speeches helps understand why a mother appeared on local television during the conflict

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<sup>85</sup> For further information about the New Middle East, check USA Today article

announcing that six of her children were killed through the overnight Israeli strikes but she is still willing to sacrifice the other six to be victorious in the war.

- Shiites and the religious identity

The focus on national identity was important for Nasrallah to highlight the importance to win the war, however when he addressed his fighters, his rhetoric was more religious rooted in the Shiite faith. In his address on July 14, Nasrallah warned the Israelis by saying that “you are fighting the children of Muhammed, Ali, Hassan, and Husayn, and the Prophet’s family, *Ahl al Bayt*, and the Prophet’s companions.” This is a statement specific to Shiites because, as I presented in the introduction chapter, the Sunni-Shiite divide began after the death of Muhammed when Shiites pledged allegiance to *Ahl al Bayt*, and chose to follow Ali as the leader of the Muslim community. Nasrallah labeled his fighters as children of Ali, Hassan, and Husayn who were the first three Imams in Shiism and who were killed by opponents of the faith: Ali was attacked while praying in a mosque, Hassan was poisoned in his food, and Husayn was killed during the battle of Kerbala as described in the earlier chapter. By doing this, Nasrallah elevated his fighters to the highest rank in Shiism by making them descendants of *Ahl al Bayt* and heirs of Shiite martyrs.

Nasrallah added in the same speech that “you are fighting a people who have faith such as no one else on the earth” attributing deeper religious commitment to Shiite fighters than any other religious sect. He was strengthening the spirit of his fighters, and encouraging them to continue and “stand firm” against the enemy by acknowledging that



Shiites were not only the most committed religious people in Islam, but they were the most committed among all religions. In his later speeches on July 26 and July 29, Nasrallah reiterated that “our deep faith commitment will make victory eminent”, creating a causal link between faith and the outcome of victory. He thus presented the Shiite faith as a pillar for victory and redemption against the enemy.

Nasrallah did not limit “religious commitment” only to his fighters. In the interview with Al Jazeera on July 21, he recounted stories of believers who were “calling and asking if this might be the last war because they want to fight and die.” The concept of “last war” pertains to the Shiite faith where the belief is that there would be a last war—believed to be a third world war—in the world after which the Hidden Imam will appear. (Ferguson, 2006) Shiites are encouraged to participate in the “last war” and be martyrs because they are facilitating the return of the Mahdi. Hence, by reminding Shiite about the “last war”, Nasrallah was honing down his followers’ commitment to the war and to the faith. No one can verify if people in fact called and asked if this was “the last war”, but whether it happened or did not happen, Nasrallah was able to put the Shiite faith in the center of the war.

By evoking the past and history of martyrdom of Shiism, Nasrallah tried to bolster among his fighters and followers the grandiose of the faith. On August 5<sup>th</sup>, he stated in his speech “we are people who have a heroic history, we come from descendants of martyrs,” then he added “our fighters [currently fighting Israel] do not run away, because they have faith, courage, and willingness to sacrifice their blood.” This history of martyrdom, according to Nasrallah, is an honor of the believer who is aspiring for death.

Within this web of arguments, Nasrallah was able to transmit to his followers that their battles and death are consistent with their faith and sanctified by God.

- Shiites and Israel

Hassan Nasrallah was not clear in his rhetoric about the causes of the war with Israel. In his speech on July 14, he stated that it was Israel's decision to go to an "open war" as a response to the two captured soldiers. Up until his appearance on July 26<sup>th</sup>, he was always claiming that Israel wanted to avenge the humiliation of the soldiers, and its defeat in Lebanon in the year 2000 that caused its withdrawal. However, starting July 26<sup>th</sup>, after the announcement of the "New Middle East" plan, Nasrallah began arguing that the war was pre-planned and aimed at finishing the resistance. He professed to his followers that the war originally was supposed to take place between September and October 2006, however the captured soldiers had to thwart the preparations. Then, Israel was forced to launch the war sooner with a green light from the United States. Nasrallah asserted that Israel is only an executor of the war and the United States with George W. Bush as its president is the mastermind behind it.

However, despite this change in position, Nasrallah repeated in several of his televised appearances that the "resistance against Israel is our natural right." He went beyond the geopolitical context of causes of the war to state that Israel has "always been an oppressive enemy" and the fight against it is "our journey to be closer to God." On his speech on August 5<sup>th</sup>, he stated "We are people who love to be martyrs, people who have a heart of faith, who love to be closer to God and this is why we will win." He further

added that “our victory against this oppression is sooner than what we think. This is a definite truth no doubt about it.” Hence, Nasrallah transformed the Shiites’ war with Israel beyond current Lebanese borders into a theological symbol and an essential pillar within the Shiite faith.

The Shiite fight against Israel was not only a religious right, but also a historical one, according to Nasrallah. During the thirty-four day war, he always reminded his audience of past Arab military conflicts with Israel and the humiliation that the latter had inflicted on Arab communities. Also, he evoked examples of Palestinian suffering to highlight the moral responsibility of the believers to put end to the long lasting humiliation of the Arab and Muslim world. He incessantly repeated “you all need to remember that Israel is the one that created the destruction and provoked your displacement”, blaming it for all past and current havoc and destruction in Shiite and Arab land.

In order to fight Israel and be true to the Shiite faith, Nasrallah presented Hizbollah as the Shiite savior. He emphasizes the military capabilities of the Party, and he threatens the Israelis with “surprises” to take place in Haifa and cities beyond Haifa. Nasrallah assured his followers to be proud because Hizbollah was stronger than what it used to be—since 2000—and can inflict losses on the Israelis especially in land military capabilities, should Israel invade Lebanon. Through this language, Nasrallah was able to uplift the moral of suffering Shiites and encourage them to “stand firm” through promoting the strengths of his Party and exaggerating the weaknesses of the enemy. One of his most memorable speech conclusions was the one presented on August 9<sup>th</sup> when he stated: “We will transform our southern borders into a cemetery for Zionists that is

created by courageous fighters. You are the coward ones that kill our women and children. But we will kill your soldiers, and destroy your armed vehicles. We are proud fighters, not cowards. Welcome in the open land military operation.”

- Shiites and the *Umma*

Nasrallah clarified on multiple occasions that the resistance participation in the war against Israel was not in the name of the *Umma*. In his interview with Al Jazeera on July 21 he stated “we are not fighting on behalf of the Islamic *Umma* or Arab nations. But our anticipated victory will be our dedicated gift to the *Umma*.” Evidently, Nasrallah did not perceive Shiites as part of the Muslim world that is predominantly Sunni. He wanted to distinguish the activities of his group and followers than those carried out in other Muslim countries. More specifically, Nasrallah made this distinction because he accuses Arab and Muslim countries of “cooperating with the enemy” and allowing Israel to carry on with its oppression in the Palestinian land.

In a series of speeches on July 29, August 5<sup>th</sup>, and August 9<sup>th</sup>, Hassan Nasrallah expressed his profound disappointment with the conduct of Arab countries for “providing support to Israel in its war against the resistance of Hizbollah.” With the exclusion of Syria, a close ally of the Party, Nasrallah publicly blamed Arab countries for the length of the war and the destruction of Lebanon. He accused Arab states of giving “the green light to Israel to enter Lebanon and destroy the resistance, but we have proven them wrong”, then he added “probably it is time for Arab leaders to retreat from politics.” This message

clearly highlighted the intra-Muslim conflict between Shiites and Sunnis and widens the gap between these two groups.

Nasrallah presented himself proud of the outcomes that Shiites have been able to achieve in their war with Israel. He said “for the first time we will not be humiliated” and as a token of this victory “we offer our blood, to the *Umma*, the highest gift that we can ever give.” Through this statement, Nasrallah was flaunting the superiority of Shiite politics in the region, and claiming a victory not only over Israel, but over the Sunni Muslim world too. Hence, the distinction between the *Umma* and the Shiites was necessary all along for Nasrallah to settle down a long lasting conflict that started after the death of Muhammed.

Furthermore, Nasrallah was offering his assumed victory over Israel to the citizens of the *Umma*. In his speech on August 12<sup>th</sup>, he argued that people in the Arab world and Lebanon will taste victory over Israel for the first time. He even spoke about a new chapter in Arab history that the resistance has been able to create and write for all citizens. Hence, through these different messages, Nasrallah was offering to the people of the Arab world, a new leadership, different from their typical leaders, that can fight and win against Israel. This new reality that the 2006 war has created helps explaining why Nasrallah’s pictures were held high in admiration during anti-war protests across the Sunni Arab world, and offers insights about drivers of a regional fear created by the rise of political Shiism.

*Iraq: the Sadrist movement in Iraq post 2003*

After the war on Iraq in 2003, the Iraqi leaders that were expected to take power, such as Ayad Allawi, interim Prime Minister 2004-2005, and Ahmad Chalabi, member of the Iraqi National Congress opposition group, were quickly reshuffled and replaced. Instead new political actors emerged that were popular and powerful such as Muqtada Al Sadr. This miscalculation primarily originates from a U.S reliance on former exiles rather than local personnel and families with a longstanding, significant popular base. After the fall of the Saddam regime in 2003, Muqtada Al Sadr was quickly able to secure strong religious legitimacy in the eyes of his followers, due to the reputation of his father and uncle. This helped him capture the Iraqi constituency that believed in Shiite activism, in addition to those who believed in his father's activism for the poor and the disenfranchised.

During the sectarian violence that escalated after the 2006 Samarra bombing, the Mahdy Army, the Sadrist Movement's military wing, was heavily involved in the fighting between Sunnis and Shiites.<sup>86</sup> Muqtada and his movement were largely blamed for the fragmentation of the country. (International Crisis Group, 2006) Furthermore, they were involved in intra-sectarian conflict among Shiites. The Sadrist movement was accused of the killing of Abdel-Majid Al Khoei, son of the Shiite Marjaa Abu Al Qasim Al Khoei, in April 2003 as a result of the Shiite struggle between the activist and quietist schools. Al Sadr like his father and uncle despised the quietist school in Najaf and called for Shiite activism. On the other hand, Abdel Majid Al Khoei was the heir of his father's

legacy, who wanted to revive the quietest school and restore the stature of Al Khoei's family. (Cockburn, 2008)

The conflict between the quietist and activist schools escalated in 2004 when Al Sadr launched his attacks on Al Sistani, the Shiite Marja that took Abu Al Qasim Al Khoei's religious position after the death of the latter in 1992. The Sadrists wanted full control over Shiite sacred buildings and institutions in Najaf including the Shrine of Ali, and the seminaries; but Al Sistani rejected their threats. Fighters from both camps were involved in a week long fighting that culminated with an intervention from the U.S marines. The Coalition Provisional Authority found in the Najaf fighting the perfect opportunity to capture and kill Muqtada. But Al Sistani, did not want to become a Shiite authority who allowed the death of a fellow Shiite clergyman. Hence, Al Sistani's intervention in the conflict and negotiation between both parties helped save Al Sadr's life, and subsequently forced the Mahdy Army to leave Najaf. (Cockburn, 2008)

The Sadrist movement changed its politics in the last few years. Between 2008 and 2009, many combatants of the military wing laid down their arms and fully integrated within the political party. In the 2010 parliamentary elections, the Sadrists joined other Islamist political groups in Iraq to form the National Iraqi Alliance and won about 9% of total seats. Furthermore, the movement has established closer ties with Iran, a consequence of Muqtada Al Sadr's self imposed exile.

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<sup>86</sup> For detailed accounts of Sunni-Shiite conflict, refer to International Crisis Group Middle East Report N0. 55, 11 July 2006

Since its emergence till-to-date, the Sadrist movement headed by Muqtada Al Sadr identifies the U.S as the common enemy of all Iraqis, and their goal is to expel U.S troops out of the country.

#### *Analysis of Muqtada Al Sadr's speeches*

Muqtada Al Sadr presented himself as a religious and devoted clergyman. His speeches always took place in front of pictures of his uncle and father whom he calls the first martyr and second martyr respectively. He started every speech with lengthy prayers that took more than fifteen minutes—given that the total time of the speech did not surpass thirty minutes. The length of his prayers could be considered as his defense to his critics who often accused him of not having the necessary theological education to be a religious leader, given his young age. Therefore, when he was forced to leave Iraq to preserve his life, he chose Iran where he can continue his studies and have the legitimacy of a Shiite clergyman.

Despite the grey hair that covered his beard in his speeches in 2011, his attitude did not change between the two periods of 2003-2006 and 2011 onward. He was always frowning and serious, with a somber tone and threatening attitude toward the enemy. He used terms of endearment such as *habibi* (my beloved) to address his audience, especially when people's chants and cries intensified. His speeches were focused more on inciting the people rather than providing detailed description of his politics. He often evoked stories about his father and uncle, and then asked people to chant slogans, for over ten



repeats in certain instances. These slogans were emotionally charged, and range between “*Ya Husayn*”—Oh Husayn— “*no no to oppression*,” and “*no no to the occupier*.”

Muqtada Al Sadr did not only address Iraqis in his speeches, but he deliberately conveyed messages to Palestinians and Yemenis and “any people suffering from the enemy’s oppression.” He perceived his leadership to transcend Iraqi and Shiite boundaries to encompass all “faithful Muslims” who love God and want to put end to their own suffering.

In the nine speeches selected for the analysis, Al Sadr reserved more space for religious theology where he recounted stories of Prophets and Imams and dictated to his audience the proper attitude for their religious behavior. He did not negate religious teachings of other Shiite clergymen such as Al Sistani, but instead he called upon his audience to call his established office in Kufa, Iraq—rather than calling Al Sistani’s—in case they had religious questions or concerns.<sup>87</sup> Hence, he established himself as a *Marjaa* that can be followed by Shiites in Iraq. In the rest of the speeches, when he was not dictating religious behavior, he was promoting his political ideas that are a “must” for his audience. These ideas are presented more as pointers or directives. They are not descriptive, but instead they are orders for the Shiite community to act upon, and this will be the focus of analysis. These pointers and directive are divided into the following topics: Shiites and the religious identity, Shiites and the Iraqi identity, Shiites and democracy, Shiites and the foreign enemy.

- Shiites and the religious identity

Muqtada Al Sadr gave special attention to the Shiite identity of his audience. In his first speech on April 11, 2003, his main message was to invite all Shiites to march to Kerbala to celebrate the *Arbain* of Husayn—the fortieth day after Ashura. He said “I am not the one who is inviting you to do this march, but it is my father and uncle who are doing so.” Then he added “if you are scared, if you have work, if you are busy, you need to let go, and join the faithful because your reward is in heaven (...) I am saying this to you to clear my conscious in front of God.” Through these different statements, he was evoked symbols and rituals of high importance to Shiites such as Husayn, *Ashura* and respect to clergymen of Al Sadr family. Similarly in his first address after his return from Iran, he began his speech with a ten-minute ritualistic *Ashura* song that he asked the crowd to repeat after him. At the end of the song, people’s cries and applause increased, and everybody was unanimously cheering “Ya Husayn, Ya Mahdy.”

His appeal to the Shiite identity of his followers could be noticed in all his speeches. In the messages that he delivered during the second and third anniversary of the war in April 2005 and 2006 respectively, he reminded his people that the month of April marked the assassination of the first Martyr Mohammed Baqir Al Sadr, and hence all Shiites had a duty to protest the occupation and the “innocent blood that was lost during tyranny.” He stated “You should protest for Islam, you should protest for justice, you should protest for peace, you should protest for freedom, you should protest for security, you should protest for not losing people’s innocent blood, you should protest for independence (...) because

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<sup>87</sup> Usually *Marjaas* such as Al Sistani would have offices and representative across all over Iraq where

this is the duty of *Ahl Al Bayt*.” Thus, he was transforming Shiite political protest into a religious pillar that was required from any believer and follower of *Ahl Al Bayt*, and Al Sadr’s family.

In every speech, Al Sadr called upon the Iraqi government to reconstruct, renovate, and rebuild Shiite shrines, an appeal that Shiites could not claim during the Baathist regime. His persistence on bringing Shiite symbols to the forefront of his political rhetoric denoted a change in Iraq, marking the end of the Baath era that he wanted to convey to his followers. This change empowered the Shiite identity and made it an important decision-maker in the politics of the country. Furthermore, Al Sadr ordered his audience to make Friday prayers a “must and duty” where it was not the case prior to 2003. It is important to note that in Shiite teachings, Friday prayers are a duty only in Shiite Islamic states. Hence, Muqtada’s appeal to make Friday prayers a “must and duty” underlined his perception of what the new form of governance ought to be in Iraq, a Shiite Islamic state. And, at the same time, it signaled to his followers the beginning of Shiite dominance in the country after centuries of oppression.

In this new era of Iraq, Al Sadr encouraged his followers to be proud of their Shiite identity and follow its principles of non violence and commitment to religion and “good deeds.” In every speech he emphasized the importance of non-violent protests “because violence will only allow the killing of fellow Iraqis.” He said violence can only be used against the oppressor— a position he changed in 2011 when he announced that no violent actions will be executed against the U.S anymore. His call to non-violence is intriguing

especially that he is the leader of the militant Mahdy Army that took part in intra and inter-sectarian conflicts since 2003. Al Sadr attempted to clarify his position on non-violence during his speech on April 2006, by stating “ordinary Iraqis should not bear arms. Ordinary Iraqis should be non-violent in their protests. Arms should only be allowed to those who know how to use it, because they will know that they should only use it against the enemy.” However, Al Sadr does not clarify who the enemy is. Is it the U.S? The Sunnis? Or the quietist Shiites?

Also, as a sign of commitment to religion and “good deeds”, Al Sadr encouraged women, policemen, government workers to be successful in their jobs, whether as mothers or civil servants. He stated that “your jobs are your way to show your piety to God (...) because it is through your jobs that you will be able to fulfill your good deeds.” Al Sadr reiterated on several occasions that Iraqis have the opportunity to re-build their country through their commitment to their Shiite beliefs and respect to *Ahl Al Bayt* who taught their followers to be “humble, helpful, and beneficial to society.”

Al Sadr’s focus on Shiite rhetoric helped his followers celebrate an identity that they were forced to hide for centuries. The freedom to evoke publicly symbols of *Ashura*, Husayn, and *Ahl Al Bayt* is a novelty in Iraq since 2003, which Muqtada Al Sadr has often used to excite his crowds. One of my Iraqi Shiite colleagues that I worked with in Kerbala between 2006 and 2007, once told me: “there is nothing more humbling than a clergyman with a black turban, standing in Kerbala, and shouting the name of Husayn. It takes us all back to *Ashura*. We remember we are strong people that come from strong leaders.”

- Shiites and the Iraqi identity

From the first speech when Saddam was overthrown in 2003 to his recent address to his aides across Iraq in 2011, Muqtada Al Sadr never deviated from calling upon all Shiites to unite under an Iraqi national identity. He was often calling upon his audience to “let go of sectarian divides” because Iraqis needed to be united against the enemy. In his first speech upon return from exile in January 2011 his first command to his audience was: “*habibi* (my beloved), let us forget the conflicts we had. We should live together as Iraqi people.” Furthermore, his call for unity was not only for Shiites, but for Sunnis too. He recounted many stories about Sunnis calling his office seeking religious or political guidance, presenting himself as a key leadership figure who was able to bring closer the Sunnis and Shiites of Iraq. However, this call for unity was rarely translated on the ground where the Mahdy army was heavily involved in both sectarian and intra-sectarian conflicts.

In his speeches commemorating the war on Iraq in April 2005 and 2006, Al Sadr argued that arms were necessary for the military wing, but they were not to be used against the Iraqi unity. The military wing’s responsibility was to fight the occupier “that does not want Iraqis to be united.” He assured his audience that all faithful Iraqis have the same vision for freedom and independence. But in order to achieve this vision, “Iraqis need to love each other and transform their unity into violent acts against the enemy and the collaborators.” It is interesting to note that Al Sadr was calling for an Iraqi unity against the United States at a time that many Shiite constituencies that were part of the

government, such as Ad-Dawa party and SCIRI, were in close proximity with the U.S government. Furthermore, Al Sistani, the most revered Shiite cleric in Najaf, never presented a fatwa naming the U.S as an occupier or calling for U.S withdrawal, despite all the pressure he had from anti-U.S coalitions. Hence, Al Sadr's call for mobilization and unity against "the enemy and its collaborators" could be understood as a threatening message to all Shiite groups that reject the unity with Al Sadr's political ideas.

Al Sadr's call for unity—or lack of—continued even in the message he delivered after the bombing in Sadr City in March 2006. He stated "[for these bombings] I do not blame Shiites or Sunnis. They are all innocent. Shiites should pray behind Sunnis, and Sunnis should pray behind Shiites. (...) *Habibi*, I do not want to be involved in a sectarian war, this is why we need to do our best to ensure stability until the colonizer withdraws." During the period of this speech, there were increased speculations about a possible civil war in Iraq, and Al Sadr wanted to refute these allegations. He argued that "Rumsfeld is spreading these rumors in order to legalize the foreigners' presence in our country, but we will show them that we are united." However, Al Sadr had requirements in order to ensure the Iraqi unity: "I ask Sunni leaders one main request which is to announce publicly that Zarqawi<sup>88</sup> and his followers are non believers and they do not adhere to Islamic principles. This is a very important issue for us, and we will not compromise." However, Zarqawi's Islamic beliefs were never denounced by Sunni leaders and sectarian violence intensified exponentially afterward.

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<sup>88</sup> Abu Musab Al Zarqawi is a militant Islamist affiliated with Al Qaeda. He was responsible for many of the bombing and violent acts in Iraq after 2003. He was killed by U.S forces in June 2006.

In his last message to his aides in January 2011, Al Sadr presented the urgency for Iraqi unity as a humanitarian issue rather than a protest against the enemy. He called all past violence as the enemy's plot to divide the Iraqi people. Therefore, to address this problem, "all Sadrists should lay down their arms and become humanitarian workers who have a responsibility toward all Iraqis." He asked all his aides and representatives in the different regions in Iraq to unite with the people in their regions in order to ensure basic services to Shiites, Sunnis and Christians who were suffering from poverty and marginalization. He stated that "through our unity on the social and human level we will build our beloved Iraq." This transformation of the Sadrist movement is a reminder of the Hizbollah model in Lebanon that has been able to gain massive popularity through offering basic services including health and education in regions where the government has been inactive. Hence, it is probable, following this political transformation of the Sadrists, that Muqtada can finally achieve the Iraqi unity he has been calling for and rebrand himself as a national leader.

- Shiites and democracy

Al Sadr continuously warned his followers from the fear of going back to the era of the Baath dictatorship. He stated in his speech addressed to the civil servants "if we do not cooperate, there will be one party, one leader, and we will be left with dictatorship again." Al Sadr inherited his anti-dictatorship rhetoric from his uncle Muhammed Baqir Al Sadr who developed the concept of *Wilayat Al Umma* based on Islamic democracy. Hence, in many of his anti-dictatorship messages, Muqtada commenced by stating "let us

remember the teachings of the first Martyr Muhammed Baqir Al Sadr who fought against the dictator,” which intensified the chants and the cries of the audience.

In a series of messages Muqtada addressed to women, policemen, and civil servants, he argued that working against dictatorship and its ideals was a religious duty and a sign of piety to fulfill democracy. To women, he said that their society was in need for them to spread new ideas of Islam—Shiite Islam specifically—that the past Baath regime banned. He further added “time of dictatorship is over (...) and your society is in need of you.” Through his message, Al Sadr asked his women followers to be preachers of Islam to other Iraqi women and teach them about renouncing all forms of “vice” including wearing beauty products, and going publicly unveiled. He stated that these vices that were adopted during the Baath regime, were also spread by “the West and the enemy that is occupying our beloved country (...) thence if we do not fight these vices, you are accepting your enemy’s dictatorship.”

To civil servants and policemen, Muqtada cautioned them from working with previous Baath members. He reiterated in several passages to ban any Baathist (current or past) from joining governmental positions, and he said “rest assured, if we allow one Baathist in our government, we are allowing dictatorship to prevail again.” It is interesting to note that Al Sadr gave permission to civil servants and policemen to cooperate with U.S forces “only if it is for the good of the Iraqi people.” But, he added, “do not befriend the occupier forces, and remember they are your enemy, (...) they are the enemy of your freedom.” In these three different speeches (women, policemen, and civil servants), Muqtada Al Sadr clearly equated the dictatorship of the Baath regime with



the presence of U.S forces in Iraq, and consequently, he urged his followers to reject the presence of the U.S as much as they rejected the Saddam regime.

In his speech delivered on January 2011, Al Sadr recognized that Iraq is moving toward democracy. He affirmed to his audience that “we are living in a burgeoning democracy that we need to preserve. And it is our responsibility to preserve it if the government is incapable of fulfilling its tasks.” Al Sadr did not provide further elaboration on this point, whether the Sadrist movement will preserve the Iraqi democracy through militant or non violent means. However, in the remainder of the speech, he expanded on the issue of ensuring service delivery to impoverished Iraqis to help the Iraqi nascent democracy but he concluded by stating “we [the Sadrists] reserve our right to arms.”

In all his speeches, Al Sadr was unclear about his definition of democracy. He repeatedly used the word to stir up his audience without offering a detailed application of the concept. He often reminisced over Muhammed Baqir Al Sadr’s concept of *Wilayat Al Umma*, but he did not offer further explanation especially to his young audience who probably never learned Muhammed Baqir Al Sadr’s teachings. There are no specific reasons behind this vagueness and can be attributed to a myriad of issues such as Muqtada’s unfamiliarity with his uncle’s concept, or his preference to keep his speeches less descriptive and more emotional. However, what is clear in all his messages is that Muqtada Al Sadr’s vision of democracy is the elimination of the dictatorship of the Baath regime and presence of U.S forces in Iraq.

- Shiites and the foreign enemy

On the second anniversary of the war in April 2005, Muqtada Al Sadr labeled the U.S presence in Iraq as “cancerous and illegitimate” calling for immediate withdrawal of the troops. It is important to note that Al Sadr’s invectives against the U.S. date back to 1990s when Iraq was under the U.N sanctions. His father, Sadiq Al Sadr was a staunch opponent of the U.S due to the impact of sanctions on Iraq’s economy and the severe poverty it created. Sadiq Al Sadr often criticized policies of the West, calling Israel the expansion of the cancer, i.e. the U.S, in the Middle East. (Cockburn, 2008) Hence, when Muqtada Al Sadr evoked sentiments of hatred toward the U.S in his speeches, he often reminded his audience to remember the teachings of his mentor, Sadiq Al Sadr who helped the impoverished and marginalized at a time “when the cancer wanted to kill all Iraqis.” Muqtada is the evolution of Sadiq’s hatred to the West and its policies.

The cancerous West, according to Muqtada, was “the ill-omened *trinity [U.S, Britain and Israel]* that sows turmoil among us.” The turmoil was not only spread in Iraq, but it was also spread in the Arab world. In his speech on the third anniversary of the war in 2006, Al Sadr clarified that the ill-omened trinity was fueling conflicts among Iraqis as well as exacerbating tensions among Arab nations. He stated “our common enemy with our brothers in the Arab world is implementing a colonialist Zionist agenda to divide us. (...) but all these Arab countries are our friends and not our enemy.” Al Sadr did not refer to other Arab countries as part of the *Umma*, but as part of an Islamic brotherhood. This became clearer when Al Sadr pointed out that “unacceptable behavior” had originated from certain Arab countries like Jordan—in reference to the Shiite Crescent—however,

he argued, this is not a favorable time to address this issue and “we reserve our right for later times to address this unacceptable behavior in a proper manner.”

On several occasions, Muqtada warned his followers of the close relationship between the foreign enemy and the Baath regime. He frequently reminded his audience about the friendship that used to unite the U.S. and Saddam during the 1980s, and then he argued that the U.S., if it continued its occupation of Iraq, would build those ties again and eventually bring the Baath back to the government. His fear of the possible reversal or reform of the de-baathification policies that started in 2003 and which aimed at putting end to the Baath influence in Iraq were very clear in his rhetoric. In a series of speeches addressed to the Iraqi police and civil servants, he ordered his followers to reject any Baathist that would join the working force “because we want justice, not mercy for the members of the Saddam regime.” Furthermore, he added “building a relationship with the Baath is similar to building a relationship with the devil. And building a relationship with the illegitimate occupier is similar to building a relationship with the devil.” By conflating the U.S. and the Baath party, Muqtada Al Sadr further consolidated the eminent threat that the “ill-omened trinity” imposed on Iraq.

Upon Al Sadr’s return to Iraq in 2011, he announced to the thousands of spectators that he has trusted the Iraqi government with the mission of expelling foreign troops from Iraq. Al Sadr, whose return to the country was negotiated between the Iranian and Iraqi governments, declared that the armed resistance against the enemy will be replaced with a cultural resistance “where we educate the Iraqi people about the teachings of the second Martyr Sadiq Al Sadr who often spoke about the threats of our enemy.” Additionally, in

his speech to his aides, he prohibited any of his followers from establishing relationships with the U.S military forces. He stated “putting down our arms, and choosing non violent resistance does not signal our acceptance of the U.S presence (...) fighting the enemy will always be our Iraqi duty.” Al Sadr’s hatred toward the U.S and its allies that was initiated by his father is a cornerstone of his political mobilization, and his unswerving call to end the U.S presence since 2003 has given him the necessary political legitimacy among his followers.

### **III- Conclusion**

The analysis of speeches between Hizbollah and the Sadrist movement present a distinction in Shiite mobilization between these two groups. This finding shows that political Shiism is not monochromatic across the region, and is not driven by a unique cause of marginalization and deprivation. Instead, the analysis describes a host of issues, local, regional, and international that political Shiism in Lebanon and Iraq has put into use for mobilization. Furthermore, the analysis proves that for political Shiism, local and international politics are often intertwined and are fused together to incite the public.

In Lebanon, Nasrallah’s speeches and messages were crucial for his followers to “stand firm.” He had a televised appearance every three to five days to remind his audience about the need to be supportive and united, and to strengthen their belief in the necessity of the war that is inevitable given their religious and historical backgrounds. Nasrallah’s repetitive encouragement and admiration words to the fighters and the victims surely were one of the main factors behind the Shiite community’s endless

affection to the leader and the Party and willingness to self-sacrifice. At the end of the war, Nasrallah rewarded his followers by turning their “stand firm” position into a Divine Victory that is commemorated yearly till this day.

In his communication with his audience, Nasrallah touched upon concepts that are relatively new in the history of political Shiism and which became popular in the 1960s and 1970s. First, Nasrallah defined the war with Israel as a Shiite natural right, similarly to Khomeini’s and Shariati’s rhetoric in the 1960s and 1970s. As discussed in the previous chapter, both Khomeini and Shariati perceived Israel as the main enemy of Islam, specifically Shiism, which helped them galvanize and mobilize popular support. And Nasrallah adopted the same position. It is true that the Arab-Israeli conflict is at the heart of the Middle East region, and Israel is mostly considered an illegitimate entity, but Nasrallah’s choice of words portrays a deeper more nuanced Shiite-Israeli conflict. It is not a conflict about land, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and it is not to save face after years of humiliation during the Arab-Israeli wars. But it is an inherent conflict—as Khomeini and Shariati presented it in previous decades—that defines the identity of the Shiite community and their fight for rights and justice. Within this position, any peace process or negotiation with Israel unquestionably become forbidden, religiously and politically.

Second, Nasrallah repeats on several occasions that the war will help the believers migrate toward God and that the fighters are courageous because they have a heart of faith. Clearly, this shows the influence of Khomeini’s political ideology on Nasrallah’s speeches. Concepts of Man’s heart of faith and migration toward God are essential to

Khomeini's perception of Man and the state in politics as shown in the previous chapter, and probably they dominated Nasrallah's theological education in Najaf. However, these concepts are not commonly used among people, and would only be studied by Khomeini's students. Nasrallah does not provide additional clarification to these concepts in his speeches, and stops short from linking to Khomeini's Vilayet-e-Faqih.

The interesting point about Nasrallah's speeches is that he rarely addresses issues of martyrdom that have direct reference to Husayn and Ashura. He resembles his fighters to Ali, Hassan, and Husayn, but he refrains from evoking images of Kerbala that can incite the Shiite community as discussed in chapter three. This decision is a testimony to Nasrallah's political intelligence whose aim is to unite Lebanese and Arabs to generate greater support for the resistance. Nasrallah's main focus in all his speeches was to emphasize Hizbollah's national allegiances and goals and break away from sectarian or transnational characterization. However, despite these efforts for obtaining a Lebanese identity, he could not resist claiming a Shiite superiority in faith and politics, which is a battle that started between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the 1980s. And the Divine Victory appears to settle down this clash for Nasrallah.

On the other hand, Muqtada Al Sadr presents himself as one the most important Shiite political figures that emerged in Iraq since 2003. His speeches throughout the past nine years helped him assert himself as a religious figure, as well as an important political player during the post-Baath Iraq era. Despite his young age, he unexpectedly was able to mobilize Shiites across Iraq to take part in his political and militant movements, as a sign of rejection of past oppression and sanctions, and U.S presence. Furthermore, Al Sadr

singlehandedly was able to bring back the legacy of the Al Sadr family and their record of resistance to the Saddam Husayn regime to the forefront of Iraqi politics.

The influence of his uncle and father, Mohammed Baqir Al Sadr and Sadiq Al Sadr, is apparent in Muqtada's speeches. As mentioned above, he refers to them as the First Martyr and Second Martyr respectively, and their pictures are always in center stage while he is delivering his speeches. However, it is not clear to what extent is Muqtada's commitment to Mohammed Baqir Al Sadr's concept of *Wilayat al Umma* and consequently the role of democracy in Islam. Unlike Hassan Nasrallah who provided minute details about his politics, Muqtada Al Sadr is very vague in his political concepts and rarely provides further explanation about his goals, which make him very mysterious and at the same time, dangerous to his opponents. But, what is clear about Muqtada's politics is his contempt of the quietist school of Shiism, and his insistence on the active role of the clergy in Iraqi politics.

Activism for Muqtada Al Sadr starts with *Ashura* and the celebration of Kerbala. This was his first call to his supporters and a cornerstone for his speeches and politics. Slogans such as *Ya Husayn*, and ritualistic *Ashura* songs are present in all the analyzed speeches and are used very intelligently to incite the crowds and create a frenzy among his supporters. This approach is an indication of Al Sadr's religious knowledge of the Iraqi Shiite population who has been deprived from celebrating *Ashura* since 1977, and who is now presented with the opportunity of asserting its identity in the Iraqi political context. For instance, the march toward Kerbala that Al Sadr called for on April 11<sup>th</sup> 2003 was

able to mobilize over 16 million Iraqi Shiites, and showed their commitment to the community and to their religious heritage.

It is interesting to note that Al Sadr does not make any references to Iran in the selected speeches despite his self imposed exile that lasted over four years. Also, Iran played an important role in negotiating between Al Sadr and the Iraqi government to ensure the return of the former to Iraq. None of these political maneuverings are to be found in any of Muqtada's speeches. Nonetheless, the political transformation of the Sadrist movement into a humanitarian group after 2011 is a reminder of the Hizbollah model of social assistance in Lebanon, and subsequently the role that Iran has played in funding and supporting the Party of God since the 1980s.

Despite this distinction of approach between Al Sadr and Nasrallah, they both focus on inciting the religious and national identities of their followers. For Nasrallah, he always focused on the importance of preserving and defending the Lebanese identity, as for Al Sadr his focus was on promoting unity to ensure the independence of Iraq. Hence, Shiite mobilization becomes a local and national issue rather than a transnational Shiite revival against a common enemy. And, contrary to many other experts who regarded the Sunni domination to be a Shiite threat in the Muslim world in general and the Arab world in particular, analysis of speeches of these two leaders show that the enemy differs in each context, and the means to fight it changes according to the political milieu.



## **CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

### **I- Introduction**

The discussion above provided an in-depth examination of rituals, ideologies, and discourse of political Shiism embedded in a historical and geographical context to explore the following questions:

- (1) What is political Shiism? Is it monolithic? What are its forms? Who are its ideologues?
- (2) How do Arab Shiites leaders mobilize their followers?

The dissertation described the multi-faceted aspects of political Shiism in the Arab world and provided an inside look into, its rituals, main ideologues, and issues that distinguish political Shiism as one of the main forces for political mobilization in the Arab world. The literature currently available on political Shiism offers a narrow and restricted description of this rising phenomenon. As discussed in chapter 2, there are two diverging views that describe political Shiism: one view that perceives political Shiism as a marginalized entity that is in a constant conflict with Sunnis, and where the only viable resolution is for Shiites to acquire political power. The other view perceives political Shiism in a constant cyclical revolutionary state where there are no possible entry points for transformation to break the revolutionary cycles. These two views are simplified and

do not reflect the nuances, the complexities, and above all the major transformation of political Shiism that took place during the 1960s and the 1970s in the Middle East.

Hence, the focus of the research was not limited to religion or politics, but it described how leaders of political Shiism reconciliated these two concepts in order to create Shiite mobilization in the Arab world. Despite the fact that the research findings are not shocking or earth shaking, the dissertation aimed at providing a broader understanding of political Shiism to address the gaps raised in the literature review chapter, and offer a new way of thinking about this rising religio-political wave. The originality of such a research lies in the use of mixed methodology to fit each part of the analysis and which included: archival and media research, and personal observations for the *Ashura* rituals in chapter 4; examination of primary sources, biographies, and historical tracing process to highlight the main ideologies of political Shiism in chapter 5; and analysis of political speeches of Shiite leaders in Lebanon and Iraq in chapter 6. As a result, the research seeks to extend the debate over forces of mobilization of political Shiism, and contribute to a more constructive and coherent understanding of Shiite political actions in the Arab world.

The literature review and analysis above confirmed that the revival of political Shiism can be traced back to the early twentieth century. The transformation of the role of clergymen during the Tobacco Movements in Iran, in addition to an increase of foreign interference in domestic issues in the Middle East and the expansion of communism in the Arab world created a fertile ground to develop diverse sets of political Shiite ideas that used rituals and political context for their own gains. Also, political Shiism

expansion in the region was further bolstered due to the rise of an Islamic identity that prevailed over the Arab national identity which dominated since the independence of Arab countries following World War II. The main findings of the research are summarized in the sections below.

## **II- Main findings**

### **Political Shiism is not simply the result of a minority-majority conflict within Islam**

Vali Nasr argues that the rise of political Shiism is a result of a long standing conflict between Sunnis and Shiites. (2007) However, as discussed previously, political Shiism went through a transformation of ideas during the 1960s and 1970s. This transformation mainly took place in Iran and Iraq where Shiites are a majority rather than a minority. In Iran, these ideas aimed at attacking the Shah for his support of the West as an economic dominating power in the country, as well as for his policies of rapprochement with the U.S, Britain, and Israel. These ideas found support among the plethora of Iranians who were suffering from economic marginalization and extreme poverty. In Iraq, the new ideas of political Shiism that emerged during the same time were mainly a response to the expansion of “God-less” Communism in the Middle East, and consequently its influence on the existence and continuity of Najaf as a religious sanctuary. The clergy in Najaf blamed the West for its support for the birth of Israel which allowed a wave of Arab support to the Soviet Bloc. In both these cases, political Shiism was defining itself as a power against foreign hegemony, and not against Sunni-Islam.

Furthermore, the analysis of speeches of current political Shiite leaders demonstrated a call of unity for Shiites and Sunnis against foreign aggressors. Both Nasrallah and Al Sadr expressed their own disagreement with Sunni Arab leaders, but they prioritized Islamic unity for mobilization to fight Western interference in Arab countries. None of the leaders raised the issue of Shiite minority in the Muslim world; rather they referred to Arabs in other countries as brothers and sisters in Islam. Additionally, the celebration of *Ashura* that runs deep in the Shiite collective identity has not been commemorated as the essence of the struggle between Shiites and Sunnis: in Lebanon, *Ashura* has become the political platform for Shiite leaders to expand on the tyranny created by foreign countries. As in Iraq, *Ashura* has become in recent years the celebration of the religious Shiite identity that had its rights marginalized for over thirty years.

Hence, the rising power of political Shiism is in contradiction with the stereotypical belief of majority (Sunnis) vs. minority (Shiites) conflict. It is far more complicated, with subtle nuances that reflect local, regional, and international socio-political changes. Also, it has clearly defined itself in a common pursuit against external non-Islamic repression.

*Sunni Islam is not the enemy of political Shiism; Western political powers and Israel are.*

The absence in the analysis of the long standing Sunnis vs. Shiites conflict as portrayed by Nasr (2007) and Nakash (2006) allowed the emergence of a more salient conflict in the region that can be summarized as political Shiism vs. the West. The West is perceived as the U.S and its western allies in addition to Israel. This conflict is apparent in many facets of political Shiism. For instance, in his speeches during the 2006 war between

Israel and Hizbollah, Nasrallah reiterated that the main enemy of all Arabs and Muslims is the United States and Israel that is implementing policies of oppression in the Middle East. In Iraq, Al Sadr, who gained tremendous people support in 2003, presented himself as the heir of the first Martyr Muhammed Baqir Al Sadr and the second Martyr Sadiq Al Sadr who fought against Western domination in Iraq. From 2003 onward, Al Sadr never changed the position of his political party which focused on liberating Iraq from any Western presence.

The struggle against the West can be traced to the ideological transformation of political Shiism in the twentieth century. As highlighted in chapter 4, the clergy in Iran feared the economic domination of the West in the country, and its potential consequences of marginalizing Shiites. This fear originated from several centuries of Shiite marginalization under the Ottoman Empire which forced many to migrate from the Levant region to Iran. Hence, as soon as the Western infiltration became apparent in Iran, the Shiite clergy were encouraged to participate in political matters as discussed previously in the Tobacco and Constitutionalist movements leading to the rise of new political Shiite ideas in the 1960s and the 1970s.

In current events of political Shiism, the struggle against the West is still ongoing. It can be summarized as a fight for recognition and rights. In 2006 in Lebanon, Nasrallah stressed on the importance of recognizing the political power of Shiites to “stand firm” against Israeli military operations in the country. On the other hand, in Iraq, Al Sadr was calling for withdrawal of foreign troops to preserve the rights of Iraqis to govern themselves.

*Iran is influential in Arab political Shiism but is not the heart of the Arab “Shiite Crescent”*

The analysis shows that the stereotype of Arab Shiites as a monolithic community, and blindly loyal to Iran are generalizations that are misleading. In none of the speeches analyzed in chapter 5 did any of the political leaders, whether in Iraq or Lebanon, make a direct reference to their relationship with Iran. Certainly, a deep-rooted relationship exists between the respective leaders in each country and Iran—given that Iran funds Hizbollah in Lebanon, and it hosted Al Sadr during his self-imposed exile between 2007 and 2011—but this relationship is absent while these leaders are addressing their followers. This could be attributed to a general perception of Arab Shiites who might consider that their community politics is completely dissociated from any Persian influence.

The rise of sympathy in the Arab world for Hizbollah following the 2006 war alerted Sunni leaders of the influence that Iran might exercise in the region. The defiance stance that the Party of God held for 34 days was a source of pride for many Arabs—Sunni and Shiites—who were protesting the war holding Nasrallah’s pictures. Despite this growing popularity of a Shiite group in the Sunni Arab world, Shiite political leaders maintained their disassociation from Iran in their public speeches to appease to their followers. Even Muqtada Al Sadr, upon his return from exile in 2011 did not address his relationship with Iran to his Iraqi followers. Hence, this public separation between Arab and Iranian politics illustrates that the “Shiite Crescent” is absent among average Arab Shiites, while it might exist only on a leadership level.

*Political Shiism is pluralistic and is not only limited to the doctrine of Vilayet-e-Faqih*

Contrary to political perception that *Vilayet-e-Faqih*—current form of governance in Iran founded by Khomeini—is the only form of political Shiism, the analysis in chapter 4 describes a different scenario. It shows that Shiite clergy have long debated their role in politics: the quietest school which is rooted in the sect's tradition of consolidationsim believed in political participation only after the emergence of the Twelfth Imam; meanwhile the clergy would refrain from direct engagement in political matters. The quietist school survived and persisted through the transformation of political Shiism during the 1960s and 1970s due to the positions of Abu Al Qasim Al Khoei. On the other hand, the activist schools had different perceptions about governance and clergy role in politics. Ali Shariati who believed in rebellion and confrontation following the footsteps of Husayn, advocated for limiting the role of clerical political power; while Khomeini believed solely in the absolute rule of the Jurist-*Faqih*. As for Muhammed Baqir Al Sadr, he believed in Islamic democracy where people and clergy participate in governance and politics.

This debate of ideas in political Shiism portrays *Vilayet-e-Faqih* as one of several competing doctrines within political Shiism; but it is not the only one. Evidently, the Iranian revolution has vested Khomeini's doctrine with greater authority in the Shiite world, but as demonstrated through the above analysis, it has not proved to dominate the Shiite political world. For instance, as soon as the Baath regime was overthrown in Iraq in 2003, Muqtada Al Sadr focused on a reviving his uncle's ideas on Islam and

democracy. Furthermore, despite all Iranian third party negotiation between Al Sadr and the Iraqi government to ensure the return of the former to the country, he has not publicly supported *Vilayet-e-Faqih* as the only form of political Shiism in any of his speeches analyzed in chapter 5.

*Mobilization of Arab Shiites is contextual and focuses on rituals and local political events*

The analysis of speeches in chapter 5 showed an interesting fact about Arab political Shiism: none of the leaders called for a transnational Shiite uprising against oppressors. Instead, each of the leaders had addressed their followers focusing on multi-sectarian national unity rather than a pan-Shiite identity. In all of the speeches, Nasrallah and Al Sadr focused on the local context of Shiites, and did not elaborate on the plight of Shiites in other countries such as in Afghanistan or Pakistan.

Furthermore, the use of *Ashura* celebrations for political protests showed a focus on local context despite the commonality of the rituals among Shiite communities. In Lebanon, Nasrallah used the oppression of Yazid of *Ahl al-Bayt* to compare it to the U.S policies in Muslim communities. Hence, his rhetoric became a combination of religious and political terms used to formulate the political morality of Shiites and to excite the crowds. On the other hand in Iraq, Al Sadr used the *Ashura* celebrations in his political speeches to mark the change of regime that took place in the country. His call for *Ashura* marches was used to reflect the new religious rights that were accorded to Shiites after the end of the Baath regime and thus became a public celebration of Shiite religious



identity. Unlike Lebanon where Shiite leaders' speeches decided the political tone of the celebration; in Iraq, the ritual itself became a way for people to cement their political identification.

Finally, as discussed in chapter 4, the various forms of political Shiism that developed during the 1960s and 1970s were themselves the product of local and regional politics. The ideas of each of the ideologues were a reaction to economic hardships and governmental repression coupled with rejection of regional politics, and did not embody a divine truth to them. As shown in the analysis, none of the ideologues claimed to be the word of God on earth, nor did they perceive themselves to be pan-Shiite leaders—for instance Khomeini did not intervene in Shiite politics in Iraq from fear of deportation, and focused solely on Iranian politics. But instead the four ideologues, discussed in chapter 4, shaped and framed their ideas to fit the socio-political contexts in their respective countries, which further highlight the national aspect of political Shiism.

### **III- Recommendations**

Understanding the complexities and nuances of political Shiism offers insights for conflict resolution practitioners who wish to intervene in politics in the Middle East and the Muslim world especially in the realm of Shiite political protests. To these practitioners, the analysis and the findings above offer the following recommendations:

*Understand the role of rituals in the local political context of Shiites*

*Ashura* commemoration showed two different types of celebrations between Lebanon and Iraq: in the former, *Ashura* becomes the political morality for Shiites; while in the latter *Ashura* is a religious celebration of one's identity. Hence, during any intervention, the conflict resolution practitioner is compelled to analyze this public-private dichotomy to understand the role of Shiite political leaders in shaping the identity of their followers.

*Understand the Shiite perspective of politics in the Middle East, not only the Sunni one*

The conventional wisdom about political Shiism is that it is in a deep-rooted conflict with Sunnis due to religious conflicts that date back to the year 680. This conflict was further exacerbated by a rising fear of Sunni leaders following the popularity and the ascendancy to power of Shiite leaders. However, contrary to this view, the analysis shows that political Shiism considers itself to be in conflict with the West rather than Sunni factions. Therefore, conflict resolution practitioners need to understand the perspectives of all communities in the Middle East in order to acknowledge needs and rights of all parties involved.

*Focus on understanding the intertwined relation of religion and politics of political Shiism*

Political Shiism is dominated with leaders with black turbans who are able to synthesize religion and politics for social action. But a general knowledge of the Arab world, or a broad understanding of Islam is not sufficient to intervene in political Shiism affairs. What is needed from practitioners is a systematic understanding of political

developments in the Arab world, on both the local and regional levels, coupled with knowledge of Shiism in its different forms and nuances. This includes understanding the type of religious and political relationship that Iran holds with the Arab world on both the leadership and popular levels.

*Highlight the uniqueness of political Shiism as well as its common aspects with other religious movements*

For practitioners, it is important to understand the unique aspects of political Shiism within Islam and the Arab world as discussed in the analysis. At the same time, it is essential to compare this rising power to other similar phenomena in the world, past and present, from which analysts and experts can draw on lessons learned to serve as guidance for their intervention. Such international phenomena would include socio-religious movements who have had a history of economic struggle and political recognition such as liberation theology in Nicaragua.

*Recognize that political Shiism will always exist; it is not possible to be sidelined in politics in the Arab world*

Marginalizing or putting end to political Shiism is not a possible political outcome according to the analysis presented in this dissertation. Political Shiism long existed within the religion itself even under the quietist school that believes that the political aspect of the religion should prevail when the Twelfth Imam emerges. Hence, resolution of conflicts in the Arab world cannot be based on marginalizing or eradicating political

Shiism. But they require an understanding of the diversity of this religio-political power and an acknowledgment of its influence among Shiites in the Arab world.

#### **IV- Further Research**

The dissertation described the intertwined relationship between religion and politics that made political Shiism in recent years, an important political power in the Arab world. The research conducted is the beginning of a much-needed analysis to shed light on the complexities of socio-political development in Shiite communities specifically, and the Muslim world generally. Recommendations for further research would include:

##### *Analyze other case studies of Shiite communities in the Arab and Muslim world*

Analyzing speeches of Shiite political leaders in countries other than Lebanon and Iraq would help determine if the findings are specific to these countries or can expand to include the Shiite communities at large. Examining cases of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia where Shiites are struggling to gain their civil and political rights, or cases of Yemen, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and others might shed light on the influence of political systems and geographical locations on political Shiism.

##### *Assess the influence of the Arab Spring on political Shiism*

As mentioned previously, at the time this dissertation was coming to an end, events of the Arab spring were still unfolding in the region, and hence could not be examined in the analysis. To date, the repercussions of the Arab spring in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Yemen have showed an increase in political participation of Islamic political movements. Specifically in Yemen the Houthis, a Shiite minority that belong to the Yezidi denomination, have not supported the recently elected national government and have expressed their desire for autonomy. In Syria, there have been rumors about the participation of the Lebanese Hizbollah on the side of the Syrian Army against the rebels. Hence, a close examination is needed to understand the relationship between political Shiism and Arab communities that are experiencing the recent socio-political uprisings.

*Assess needs and demands of Shiite communities on the local level*

The findings of the dissertation offer a description of political Shiism on the leadership level. Further analysis of political Shiism in local communities, through interviews and surveys, is needed. It will help to (1) compare description and understanding of Shiites of political Shiism with the findings listed above, (2) determine gaps between leadership and Shiite followers, and (3) possibly offer additional entry points for intervention in conflicts.

*Compare the relationship of political Shiism with the private and public spheres*

Political Shiism is playing an active role in the ongoing development of Arab nations whether through *Ashura* rituals or political speeches, hence raising concerns about the

relationship between religion, politics and modernity. Religious traditions and political goals of Shiism have moved out of the private sphere of Shiites to a public one that is under close examination and scrutiny. Therefore, further research is needed to describe the influence of these religious traditions and political aspirations on the public life in the Arab world, and its repercussions in the Muslim world.

*Examine and assess the modern state of the quietist school*

The research has showed a dearth of information of the political view of Abu Al Qasim Al Khoei, and hence the modern vision of the quietist school political Shiism. Further research analyzing the political writings of Al Khoei's students such as the late Muhammed Husayn Fadlallah, and the current Shiite Marjaa of Iraq Ali Al Sistani can help describe the transformation of the quietist school in modern time and its current role in politics in the Arab world.

**V- Conclusion**

As I am writing the concluding words of the dissertation, the Middle East continues to experience major changes since nationalistic movements defined the contemporary Arab world in the twentieth century. Uprisings in Syria and Bahrain continue for the second year in a row, while Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya are experiencing national reforms to fit their post-revolution contexts. Many of these changes have brought Sunni political Islamists--previously politically sidelined—to the forefront of power—such as the *Ennahda* party in Tunisia, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Several experts argue

that this systematic rise of Sunni political Islam is a challenging wave to the rise of power of political Shiism in the last few decades.

Whether historical intra-Muslim divides, state repression, or socio-economic injustices are the factors behind shaping the new Arab world, it is important to distinguish that political Shiism will always be one of the main forces to account for and analyze in Arab politics. The complexity that political Shiism brings to a region that has had a long history of political and religious grievances allows this religio-political power to take center stage in Arab politics despite its minority status in the Muslim world. Therefore, to assume that political Shiism is associated with one set of ideas or to one specific country is an understatement of its role and regional influence. And it is time to move beyond this “simplistic” debate.

## **APPENDIX A:** **SELECTED WRITINGS OF SHIITE IDEOLOGUES**

Below is a compilation of the most recognized writings of the four ideologues presented in the research. Each of these scholars produced numerous writings, where many were gone unpublished. Therefore, the list below is a compilation of the most recognized published works in the field of Islam, politics, philosophy, law, and ethics.

Ruhollah Khomeini:

- Description of the dawn prayers
- Description of the raasaljaloot tradition
- Jonud aqle va jahle
- Misbaholhedayat elal kiielafa val welaya
- Fosusul-hekam
- Serrul-salat
- Adab-ul-salaat
- Kashful-asrar
- Anvarul-hedayat fil taaliqa alalkefayat
- Badaye-ol dorar fi qa-edah nafiul zarar
- Talab va eradeh
- Taqiyya
- Ketabal tahara
- Makasib muharrama
- Islamic rule or walayat-e-faqih
- Al Jihad Al Akbar (The Greater Struggle)
- Le testament Politico-Spirituel: L’Islam autrement (The Political Spiritual Testament: a different Islam)
- Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini

Ali Shariati:

- Hajj (The Pilgrimage)
- Marxism and Other Western Fallacies : An Islamic Critique
- Where Shall We Begin?
- Mission of a Free Thinker



- The Free Man and Freedom of the Man
- Extraction and Refinement of Cultural Resources
- Ali
- An approach to Understanding Islam
- A Visage of Prophet Muhammad
- A Glance of Tomorrow's History
- Reflections of Humanity
- A Manifestation of Self-Reconstruction and Reformation
- Selection and/or Election
- Norouz, Declaration of Iranian's Livelihood, Eternity
- Expectations from the Muslim Woman
- Horr (Battle of Karbala)
- Abu-Dahr
- Red Shi'ism vs. Black Shi'ism
- Jihad and Shahadat
- Reflections of a Concerned Muslim on the Plight of Oppressed People
- A Message to the Enlightened Thinkers
- Art Awaiting the Saviour
- Fatemeh is Fatemeh
- The Philosophy of Supplication
- Religion versus Religion
- Man and Islam - see chapter "Modern Man and His Prisons"
- Arise and Bear Witness
- Al Tashayyou' Mas'ouliyyah (The Responsibility of Shiism)
- Al Shahada (Martyrdom)
- Bina' Al That Al Thawriyya (Building the Revolutionary self)
- Abi wa Oummi: Nahnou Moutahhamoun (Mother and Father: we are guilty)
- Ma'rifat Al Islam (Islamology)
- Al Umma wal Imam (The nation and the leadership)

#### Mohammad Baqir Al Sadr:

- Buhuth fi Sharh al- 'Urwah al' Wuthqa (Discourses on the Commentary of al- 'Urwah al-Wuthqa)
- Al-Fatawa al-Wazihah (Clear Decrees).
- Mujaz Ahkam al-Hajj (Summarized Rules of Hajj)
- Al Islam Yaquoud Al Hayat (Islam as the leader of life)
- Iqtisadouna (Our economy)
- Falsaphatouna (Our philosophy)

- Bahth Hawla El Wilaya (Research on the Islamic Leadership)
- Bahth Hawl al-Mahdi (Research on Imam Mahdi)
- Durus fi Ilm al-Usul (Lessons in the Science of Jurisprudence)
- Al-Tashayyu' wa al-Islam - Bahth Hawl al-Wilayah (Discourse on Divine Authority)
- Ahl al-Bayt Tanawwu' Ahdaf wa Wahdah Hadaf (Ahl al- Bayt, Variety of Objectives Towards a Single Goal)
- Al-Madrasah al-Islamiyyah (Islamic School)
- Risalatuna (Our Mission).
- Nazrah Ammah fi al-Ibadat (General View on Rites of Worship)

Abu Al Qasim Al Khoei:

- Minhaju Al Saliheen: 2 volumes (The Path of the Righteous)
- Islamic Law: 18 volumes
- Sharh-el-Urwa-al-Wuthqa (Commentary on The Steadfast Handle)
- Al-Bayan fi tafsir al-Qur'an (The Elucidation of the Exegesis of The Qur'an)
- Lectures in the Principles of Jurisprudence: 10 volumes

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