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SHI'ISM

IN EUROPEAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN CONTEXTS

EDITED BY
FRANCESCO ANGHELONE
SHIRIN ZAKERI

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Introduction. Explaining contemporary Shi'ism in European and Middle Eastern Contexts: a Glance at the Recent Evolutions og Shi'ism in the Region

Francesco Anghelone (Observatory on the Mediterranean, OSMED)
Shirin Zakeri (Observatory on the Mediterranean, OSMED)

Since antiquity, the Mediterranean basin has constantly been witnessing episodes of cultural clashes and encounters between civilizations. Thus, the region was not unfamiliar with cultural diversity and during the early Middle Ages Shi'i dynasties ruled in Asian, African and European sides of the basin. Due to this presence long before the recent migratory influx, it seems that there is not any historical discontinuity in the Shi'i presence in Europe. However, from sociological viewpoint there is a significant difference between the former and the current presence of Shi'is in Europe. The contemporary socio-political conditions in the region are the main responsible of this difference that ignites curiosity about the emerging tendencies of Shi'ism and its recent evolutionary patterns.

The study of contemporary Shi'ism in Europe that examines the life-experience of Shi'is through anthropological and sociological approaches is a relatively neglected area of research and Shi'is have so far been subsumed under broader general narratives of mainstream Islam. This negligence is higher where Islam is a relatively young phenomenon such as in southern Europe. Obviously, the socio-political tendencies of the Asian countries of the Mediterranean basin and their relation with Europe have an impact on both migratory influx and the European policies for managing the religious minorities. Hence, the situation of Shi'is in Europe cannot be fully understood without considering both departure and arrival points.

On 9 April 2021, Sapienza University of Rome, Research Centre for Cooperation with Eurasia, the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa (CEMAS), Institute of Political Studies "S. Pio V" Observatory on the Mediterranean (OSMED) and the Association for the Study of Persianate Societies held an online study day on contemporary Shi'ism. In this event, some scholars from different national backgrounds presented the results of their studies and analyzed Shi'ism from anthropological and sociological viewpoints.

The conference was the first attempt of this kind in Italy and aimed at preparing a suitable terrain for dialogue on contemporary Shi'ism and its evolution in Europe and the Mediterranean basin. The three panels of the conference were divided based on the thematic lines and geographic zones. The first panel presented a state of the art of research on contemporary Shi'ism as studied in the West, whereas the second and the third panels were devoted to the case studies and geographical specific areas.

The first panel was about the relation of modernity and Shi'a studies. Migration, identity, and the relation between European secular states with Shi'ism were among the thematic lines. Scholars

discussed the ways in which Shi'as in Europe negotiate the tension between religious duty and forms of secularized civic belonging. In such a context the meaning of being Shi'a is created through negotiation with new contexts of settlement.

The second and third panels investigated the cases of some Mediterranean countries besides Iran and Iraq. The southern European countries, namely Italy, Spain and Greece - presented in the final panels - have experienced the presence of Shi'a minorities later than Britain. Therefore, their shorter experience generates Islamophobic tendencies and the unfamiliarity of the context with the Shi'a rituals. The panels provided an excellent terrain for comparing the Shi'a experience in southern Europe with their homelands, namely Lebanon, Iraq and Iran.

This study day opened the door to future initiatives on contemporary Shi'ism in Italy. It has created a network of scholars active in this field of study and generated a platform for dialogue among young and senior scholars on this subject. Moreover, it offered new and easily accessible insights to academic and non-academic audience who assisted the conference.

The papers contribution of the scholars who has been participated as the speaker to this conference are:

First, **Oliver Scharbrodt** paper is explaining the concept of the relationship between religion and space, in particular as they arise in relation to migrant or diasporic religious communities in the West. By distinguishing between different spatial scales (the local, the national and the transnational) and between different types of spaces (physical, social and discursive), this paper discusses how the multi-local trajectories of global Shi'i networks, ritual practices and discursive identity formations around the veneration of the *ahl al-bayt* can be conceptualised and analysed by a adopting a transnational perspective. Shi'a presences, as minorities in particular, are embedded in particular local and national contexts and entertain multi-local and supra-temporal orientations. They are part of transnational networks, engage with global articulations of 'Shi'a-ness' and as local actors are affected by, respond to and participate in a transnational public sphere of global Shi'a Islam.

Second, **Ghiath Rammo** describe the relationship between the Yazidis and the Shi'ites in Iraq in particular, was scrouded in some ambiguity in the last century, for several inaccurate reasons, some of which are historical, namely linking the Yazidis to the Muslim caliph Yazid bin Muawiyah (683-647 A.D.) who ordered to fight Hussein bin Ali in the Battle of Karbala in 680 A.D., and some of them are politically linked the Iraqi regime used some Yezidis to suppress the 1991 uprising in the south. The relationship between the Yazidis and the Shi'ites converged after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, as Yazidis and Shi'ites were both participants in government positions or members of the new Iraqi parliament. The relationship entered a new phase after ISIS took control of the Yazidi cities and villages in the Sinjar region, as well as after the liberation of that region from the Islamic State, in a geographical area where militias and alliances abound.

Third, **Minoo Mirshahvalad** purpose of this first study on Shi'i gathering places in Italy is to demonstrate how Twelvers create sacred space in a country where they cannot have mosques. A by-product of the Italian model of secularism is that Islamic communities are not considered religious entities and hence are not allowed to build mosque. The absence of mosques has generated two main changes in the sense of the sacred space. First, the creation of the space of gathering does

not maintain the standards established by senior Shi'a authorities based in Iran and Iraq, but has developed its own mechanism. Second, online communities have emerged to compensate for the absence of mosque. Therefore, in this peninsula we witness a significant change in the form of the Shi'a religious gathering places comparing to what we see in the Shi'a heartlands.

Fourth, **Marios Chatziprokopiou** paper examines the performance of the Ashura in Piraeus as performed by a group of Pakistani Shi'a Muslims, with a particular emphasis on the Greek political and cultural context. Combining ethnographic fieldwork with archival research, he explore how this ritual is mediated by Greek media and film. The presentation aims at unfolding Greek neo-orientalist and islamophobic discourses regarding the 'Asian excess' or 'backwards barbarism'of lament, in connection to similar arguments from the Muslim world. These rhetorics are juxtaposed with more tolerant views, but also with arguments of my interlocutors themselves regarding the 'cultural intimacy' of their ritual lament with Greek embodied practices of religiosity. Finally, dominant narratives of the 'national self' are juxtaposed with the discourses and practices of the migrant Shi'ite community of Piraeus, focusing on the symbolic and practical uses of blood: from murderous threats of Neo-Nazi groups against them, to their rejected intention for a blood-donation campaign parallel to the Ashura.

Fifth, **Avi Astor, Rosa Martínez Cuadros, Victor Albert Blancoin** paper examine the civic dimensions of Shi'a public lamentation processions in Barcelona. Recent work on diasporic religiosity has emphasized how public rituals serve as a stage for religious minorities to become visible, assert their rights, and gain recognition. Although this focus has yielded important insights, it has led scholars to overlook alternative forms of civic performativity that, while less conspicuous, are nonetheless crucial for understanding how religious minorities demonstrate deservingness of inclusion in the polity. The challenge of this assertive bias in the study of public religiosity by drawing attention are more "conciliatory" forms of civic performativity, or performative practices that demonstrate qualities associated with civility (e.g., respect for local norms, compliance with the law, and openness to dialogue and compromise). Highlight the various features of local Shi'a leaders in Barcelona that dispose them toward conciliatory rather than assertive forms of civic performativity, most notably their migration trajectory and socio-structural location.

Sixth, **Ingvild Flaskerud** in her paper examines the self-organised activities among the current generation of young Shi'a adult in Norway regarding religious formation. Which methods do they employ to shape and educate themselves as Twelver Shi'a Muslims and which topics are introduced during their meetings? The presence of Twelver Shi'a Muslims in Scandinavia is related mainly to the migration of people from the Middle East and Asia since the late 1960s, first as labour migrants and subsequently as refugees and asylum seekers. Like in every country in Europe, Twelver Shi'ites in Norway constitutes a minority within the broader Muslim minority group. Denominational religious education in this situation is provided for by the local mosques and a few religious elementary schools. But with the coming of age of a generation young adult. Her analytical assumption is that by establishing an overview of methods applied and analysing topical issues presented, we can gain insight into what knowledge and competence is considered important and relevant to young Shi'ites living in Northern Europe today.

Seventh, **Abbas Ahmadvand,** examines Islamic or Shi'ite Studies in the West are a science that is strongly linked to various cultural, social, political, and economic developments in the West. By using the approach proposed by Anthony Giddens in the design of late modernity and then conceptualized by Zygmunt Bauman in liquid modernity, the present study seeks to show that the age of modern liquidity is a period that emphasizes individualism and at the same time uncertainties, and the living human in the age of liquid modernity is in fact a tourist who moves in the midst of all different kinds of relationships throughout his life. The rising tide of Muslim migration to various regions of Europe and the birth of later generations of these immigrants has made Islam and its believers, including Shi'ites, a domestic issue for Western scholars. They no longer can study Islam from an external and neutral point of view as a religion. This has caused the Islamic Studies of the West and Shi'ite Studies to undergo fundamental changes. In his paper, present the study to identify the characteristics of Shi'ite Studies of the West in the age of liquid modernity and to draw attention to the recording and documenting of the history of this attitude and new approach among the collection of Western Islamic studies.

At the end, **Mina Moazzeni** review the book of *The Shi'ite Studies in the West*. Until the Islamic Revolution in Iran, most Islamic studies by Orientalists were based on Sunni readings of Islam. The lack of Shi'ite sources and references in Western languages in Western libraries, the selective confrontation of some Orientalists with existing Islamic sources, and the extent of the West's historical encounter with Sunnis from Andalusia and Sicily and eastern Europe, especially the Balkans to the Indian and southern subcontinent and East Asia is one of the factors that has led to the neglect of Shi'ite studies in the West. However, some Shi'ite studies have been conducted in the West. The book *Shi'ite studies in the West* consists of six articles in which the most important Shi'ite studies of Orientalists are presented.

Islam By Country: Sunni - Shi'as
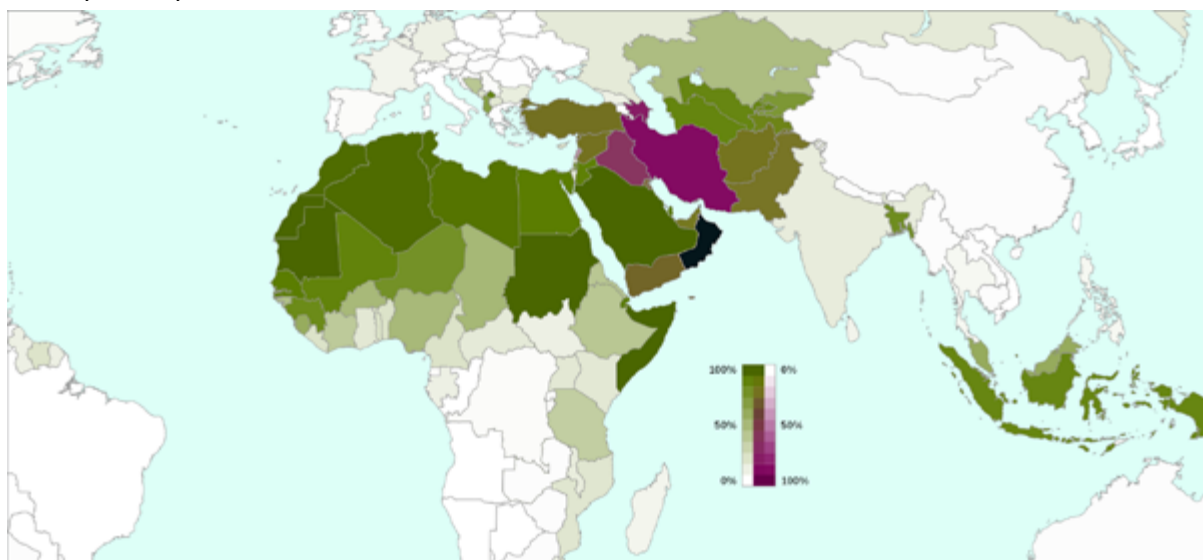
Fonte: Islam by country Sunni Shi'as Ibadi

'My Homeland is Husayn':
Transnationalism and Multi-Locality in Shi'a Contexts

Oliver Scharbrodt (University of Birmingham)

My homeland is Husayn (*watani al-husayn*)'[1] is a prominent eulogy on the third Shi'a Imam Husayn. It articulates an identification with Husayn that transcends territorial boundaries and allegiances and suggests that a Shi'a's true homeland is not the town where one was born or one's country but Husayn. While Husayn's shrine in Karbala is an important destination of pilgrimage (*ziyara*) and hence allows Shi'is to ritually perform their allegiance to Husayn at this physical site, the eulogy moves beyond transnational identifications. The eulogy is 'supralocal'[2] as it pronounces a vertical connection with the transcendental: Husayn as the ultimate isthmus between God and humanity. As such, the eulogy suggests an ideational and emotive connection to Husayn that not only transcends but defies the limitations of physical spaces and territorial boundaries and unites the Shi'a in their collective memory of his martyrdom.

This paper will discuss some recent debates on the relationship between religion and space, in particular as they arise in relation to migrant or diasporic religious communities in the West. By distinguishing between different spatial scales (the local, the national and the transnational) and between different types of spaces (physical, social and discursive), this paper discusses how the multi-local trajectories of global Shi'i networks, ritual practices and discursive identity formations around the veneration of the *ahl al-bayt* can be conceptualised and analysed by a adopting a transnational perspective. Shi'a presences, as minorities in particular, are embedded in particular local and national contexts and entertain multi-local and supra-temporal orientations. They are part of transnational networks, engage with global articulations of 'Shi'a-ness' and as local actors are affected by, respond to and participate in a transnational public sphere of global Shi'a Islam.

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[1] For more detailed discussions see O. Scharbrodt, *A Minority within a Minority?: The Complexity and Multilocality of Transnational Twelver Shi'a Networks in Britain,* Contemporary Islam 13, 2019, pp. 287-305. '*Creating a Diasporic Public Sphere in Britain: Twelver Shi'a Networks in London'*, Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations 31:1, 2020, pp. 23-40.
[2] T. A. Tweed, *Our Lady of Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. 1997, p. 85.

Multi-local Shi'a Imaginaries

The paper investigates questions of migration, transnationalism and diaspora in various Shi'a contexts and therefore resonates with debates in this area, in particular as they pertain to the study of transnational or diasporic religion. In discussing transnational Islam, Bowen (2004) distinguishes different dimensions: the actual movement of Muslims from one location to another as part of global migratory processes that leads to the formation of diasporas. The creation of Shi'a minority presences in Europe or North America was part of such processes. Similar to Vertovec's definition of transnationalism[3], another dimension, identified by Bowen, refers to the networks and interactions occurring between the homeland and the diaspora as part of transnationally operating Islamic networks, organisations and institutions. Given the nature of clerical networks Twelver Shi'ism, their modus operandi is inherently transnational. The same is true for Shi'a political organisations that initially extended transnationally across the Middle East and then – in response to state oppression – became exilic and engaged in diasporic politics from Europe or North America.

However, the reduction of transnationalism to the migration of people and the operations and activities of transnational networks does not sufficiently capture the de-territorialising and re-territorialising processes of religions on the move. For Bowen, there is a third dimension to transnational Islam: 'a global public space of normative reference and debate'[4].It denotes a discursive field of Islamic normativity and legitimacy, involves Muslim actors in Europe or North America who debate the place and nature of Islam within these particular Muslim minority contexts while retaining reference points to the wider Muslim world and traditional sources and centres of normative authority within Islam: they debate on 'how to become wholly "here" and yet preserve a tradition of orientation toward Islamic institutions located "over there"'[5]. Recent contributions to the study of diaspora have emphasised this ideational aspect of diasporic formations. Diaspora has been defined as 'an imagined connection'[6] with the place of origin or a wider community which can be real but is also imagined in the sense that it purports strong emotive connotations and is based on collective memory. Werbner broadens the meaning of diaspora by arguing that 'diasporic, rather than simply ethnic or religious, is an orientation in time and space – towards a different past or pasts and towards another place or places'[7]. This transnational discursive space is evident in the authority that maraji' based in Najaf or Qom hold over the global Shi'a community.

'My homeland is Husayn (*watani al-husayn*)' is a prominent eulogy on the third Shi'a Imam Husayn, recited during 'Ashura' to commemorate his martyrdom. It articulates an identification with Husayn that transcends territorial boundaries and allegiances and suggests that a Shi'ite's true homeland is not the town where one was born or one's country but Husayn. While Husayn's shrine in Karbala is an important destination of pilgrimage (*ziyara*) and hence allows Shi'ites to ritually perform their

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[3] S. Vertovec, *Transnationalism*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 136.
[4] J. R. Bowen, *Beyond Migration: Islam as a Transnational Public Space*, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 30:5, 2004, p. 880.
[5] Ibid, p. 882.
[6] S. Vertovec, ivi.
[7] P. Werbner, *The Place Which Is Diaspora: Citizenship, Religion and Gender in the Making of Chaordic Transnationalism*, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28:1, 2004, p. 125.

allegiance to Husayn at this physical site, the eulogy moves beyond transnational identifications. The eulogy is 'supralocal'[8] as it pronounces a vertical connection with the transcendental; Husayn as the 'master of martyrs (*sayyid al-shuhada'*)' is the ultimate isthmus between God and humanity. As such, the eulogy suggests an ideational and emotive connection to Husayn that not only transcends but defies the limitations of physical spaces and territorial boundaries and unites the Shi'a in their collective memory of his martyrdom. In this sense, the eulogy raises interesting questions on the multi-local sites of Shi'a 'homing desire'[9]. Home is understood here to be both 'a realm of concrete locality and everyday experience' and 'a more ideational, symbolic or discursive realm'[10].

Conclusion

Shi'a presences, as a minority within a minority embedded in particular local and national contexts, entertain multi-local and supra-temporal orientations They are part of transnational networks, engage with global articulations of 'Shi'a-ness' and as local actors are affected by, respond to and participate in a transnational public sphere of global Shi'ism. Ritual practices, such as reciting eulogies in memory of Imam Husayn, foster a collective memory to create Shi'ite socialities and articulate 'the idea of an alternative, utopian, as well as potentially millenarian and apocalyptic, moral space exceeding the limits of their diasporic location and minority status'[11].For example, Shi'ites of South Asian background in North America do not identify with Pakistan, the country of origin of their parents or grand-parents, but articulate a trans- and supra-local identification with the shrine cities in Iraq and Syria as their actual 'spiritual' homeland. In Argentina, Imam Husayn's revolt against the oppressive Umayyad dynasty is framed as an example of anti-imperialist struggle and aligned with leftist post-colonial South American politics. The use of the internet to expand the transnational reach of clerical authorities and facilitate easier and more direct communication between the office of a senior cleric based in the Middle East and his followers around the globe can also destabilise normative discourses and interrogate traditional conceptions of clerical authority, as Riggs points out in his contribution. For Shi'a converts in Sri Lanka as a minority within a minority in particularly volatile position, the orientation towards a 'Shi'i International'[12] led by Iran is more pronounced, while the examples of Cambodia and Indonesia illustrate how Shi'ites in these contexts negotiate between the need to localise Shi'ism and the role of transnational (often Iranian) actors and their influence. 'Decentering Shi'ism'[13] can assume various forms as part of demotic processes to create

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[8] T. A. Tweed, *opt.*, *cit.*, p. 85.

[9] S. McLoughlin, *Muslim Travellers: Homing Desire, the umma and British Pakistanis*, in K. Knott and S. McLoughlin (eds), *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities*, London and New York: Zed Books, 2010, p. 225. A. Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, London and New York: Routledge. 1996, pp. 179-180.

[10] F. Stock, *Home and Memory*, in K. Knott and S. McLoughlin (eds), *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities*, London and New York: Zed Books, 2010, pp. 26.

[11] S. McLoughlin, and J. Zavos, *Writing Religion in British Asian Diasporas*, in S. McLoughlin, W. Gould, A. J. Kabir and E. Tomalin (eds), *Writing the City in British Asian Diasporas*, London and New York: Routledge, 2014, pp. 170-171.

[12] Ch. Mallat, *The Renewal of Islamic Law: Muhammad Baqer as-Sadr, Najaf and the Shi'i International*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1993.

[13] M. Clarke and M. Künkler, 'De-centring Shi'i Islam', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45:1, 2018, pp. 1-17.

alternative forms of individual and collective Shi'a religiosities and respond to the needs of local communities. Authoritative discourses coming from transnational state and non-state actors are never carbon copied but indigenised, creatively re-interpreted and localised by Shi'a communities in diverse contexts[14].
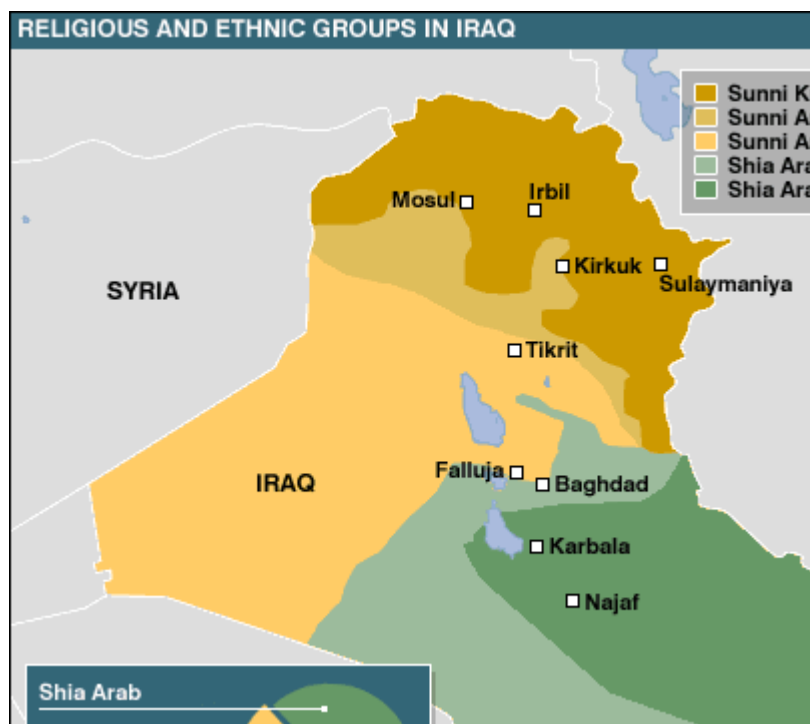
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[14] M. A. Leichtman, *Shi'i Cosmopolitanisms in Africa: Lebanese Migration and Religious Conversion in Senegal*, Blooming-ton: Indiana University Press. 2015, pp. 236-241.

Relations Between Yezidis and Shi'a in the New Millennium

Ghiath Rammo (Sapienza University of Rome)

The Iraqi population in 2020 reached forty million and one hundred fifty thousand people, according to the official statistics announced by the Iraqi Ministry of Planning in January 2021.[1] According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and estimates made in 2015, Muslims account for 95-98% of the total Iraqi population (Shi'a 64-69%, Sunni 29-34%) and Christians account for 1% (divided between Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants and the Assyrian Church in the East). The rest of the population constitutes between 1 and 4% overall; among them are Yezidis, Shabaks, Sabians and Yarsan.[2]

Source: BBC News

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[1] Iraq population exceeds 40 million people, https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2021/1/12/.
[2] CIA Report 2015, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/iraq/#people-and-society.

The death of Al-Ḥusayn bin ʿAlī

The Shiʻa Muslims belong to the *Ahl al-Bayt* and follow the fourth Rashidun (rightly-guided) caliph, ʿAlī bin Abī Ṭālib, who is the cousin and son-in-law of prophet Muhammad. Because of Ali's delay in obtaining the caliphate after the death of the prophet, a sharp conflict arose between his followers and the Rashidun caliphs, especially with the Banū Uthman. After the killing of caliph 'Othman ibn 'Affàn, ʿAlī bin Abī Ṭālib took over the caliphate in 656 AD in Medina. He then moved to Kufa, transferring the capital of the caliphate there, and remained in that city until his death, i.e. 661 AD. Once ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib died, Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān took the caliphate from 661 to 680 CE - when he died - and chose Damascus as the capital of the newly born Umayyad state.[3]

Muʿāwiya's successor, Yazid ibn Muʿāwiya (680-683 CE), received the Umayyad Caliphate in Damascus. He sent in that same year an army led by ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād towards Iraq to fight Al-Ḥusayn bin ʿAlī bin Abī Ṭālib, the son of 'Alī who claimed to be the legitimate caliph successor. The two sides met in the Battle of Karbala 680 CE, which ended with the defeat and death of Imam Al-Ḥusayn bin ʿAlī[4]. That incident was the beginning of a long-term conflict between the two groups, Sunni and Shiʿa, which after more than 1,340 years is still alive and evident today, with all its side-effects.

The Yezidi minority

Yezidis are a religious minority of the Kurdish ethnic group. Most of them live in the Iraqi Kurdistan and in northern Iraq, but they are also present in Syria, Turkey, Armenia and Georgia. Outside their region of origin, some Yezidis can also be found in the United States and Europe, especially in Germany, where more than half of this community in diaspora live there. The total number of followers of this religion, according to the estimates, is less than a million[5]. The largest part of this community populates four large regions of northern Iraq: Sheikhan, Dohuk, Baʻshiqa/Bahzani and Sinjar.

The first appearance of the Yezidis on the historical scene dates back to the 12th century. They were an isolated community in the Kurdish mountains of northern Iraq. Originally they had to be the heirs of a variety of cultural and religious beliefs and practices, including old Iranian and Mesopotamian cults[6]. They later became the supporters and followers of the Sufi scholar Sheikh 'Adī[7]. Thus, a syncretic new doctrine and a unique religious belief system grew up.

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[3] C. Brockelmann, *History of the Islamic Peoples*, Beirut 1968.

[4] Ibid.

[5] S. Zoppellaro, *Il genocidio degli yezidi*, Guerini e associati, Milano 2017.

[6] P. Kreyenbroek, K. Omarkhali, *Introduction to the special issue: Yezidism and Yezidi Studies in the early 21st century*, Kurdish Studies 4 (2), London, 2016, pp. 122–130.

[7] Sheikh 'Adi (1073-1162) is considered an important reformer and renovator of the Yezidi religion. Born in Beyt-Far, in the province of Baalbek, Lebanon, as 'Adi ibn Musafir bin Ismail bin Musa bin Marwan bin al-Hakim bin Marwan.

The centers of the Yezidis in the Middle East (today).
B. Açıkyıldız, The Yezidis: The History of a Community, Culture and Religion, I.B. Tauris, London 2017.

According to some scholars, such as R. H. W. Empson, for example, the Yezidi religion should be considered an Islamic sect that emerged from the "official" branch dating back to the end of the seventh century AD. The Yezidis belonged to and originated from the dynasty of Yazid ibn Muawiya, the second ruler of the Umayyad dynasty. For more than 1340 years the Yezidis were accused by many members of the Shiʿa of being the ones who killed Al-Ḥusayn bin ʿAlī, so the name of the Yezidis was "cursed" and a prohibition was established against all forms of contact with them.

The Yezidis in Baʿathist Iraq

In recent times (1970), The Kurdish Autonomous Region was established in northern Iraq, more precisely in the governorates of Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah. However, the Yezidi regions remained outside the administrative boundaries of this autonomous entity. Almost all Yezidi regions were subject to a comprehensive Arabization process implemented by the Baʿath Party regime in the years 1965, 1973-1975, and 1986-1989[8]. Most of their inhabitants were forced to leave their villages and dwell in new collective villages, or "the compounds", that were mostly located near the lands where they used to reside[9]. Others were transferred to other areas in central and southern Iraq. To suppress the independence desires of the Yezidis and make them dependent on the government,

[8] B. Açıkyıldız, *The Yezidis: The History of a Community, Culture and Religion*, I.B. Tauris, London 2017.
[9] A. Almikhlafi, *A day in the life of the Yezidis in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region*, https://ar.qantara.de/content.

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Yezidi villages were destroyed or resettled by the Arabs. Since 1974, the Iraqi government has tried to exclude the Yezidis from the Kurdish society and Kurdish nationalism by declaring that they are descendants of the Arabs and related to the progeny of the Umayyad Caliph Yazid bin Muawiyah. With all these attempts, only a few Yezidis joined the Ba'ath Party, the ruling party in Iraq from 1968 to 2003. Since 1974 and due to the Autonomy Law for the Kurdish regions, the Kurds have been able to teach the Kurdish language in their affiliated schools, but in areas where Arabization was strong, such as the areas where the Yezidis lived, like Sinjar, the Kurdish language was banned like those of other minorities, such as the Syriac and Turkish ones.

Some Yezidis lost their lives during the Anfal campaign in 1988[10] when the Iraqi regime targeted Kurdish civilians. In the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, the Kurds organised revolts against the Iraqi government. After the fierce fighting between the Iraqi forces and the Kurdish ones, the Iraqi government withdrew from the Kurdish region in October 1991. This meant de facto the conquering of independence by the Kurds, which would place them outside the control of Baghdad (the Iraqi Capital) and stay under the name of the Kurdistan Region. After the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government in northern Iraq, the Kurdish area was splitted, partly becoming the autonomous region of the Kurds and partly falling into Iraq, under the control of Saddam Hussein's government, and thus the Yezidi community was divided into two parts. Roughly 90% of Yezidis live outside the Kurdish safe havens. The entire Sinjar region and a large part of Sheikhan, including its main cities - Ain Sifni, Bahzani and Ba'shiqa - remained under the control of the Iraqi government. Only Lalish[11] and Ba'dara, as well as some villages, remained within the Kurdish Autonomous Region.[12]

In early March of 1991, the Shi'a uprising erupted in the South[13] and during the suppression of the popular uprising, specifically in Najaf and Karbala, the two holy cities, this incident was exploited by the Ba'ath regime to send troops and diverse forces to Shi'a cities to fight against the uprisers. The fact that the latter had mustaches and wore the red kufiya on their heads, in a clear resemblance to the Yezidi character. It was the chance for the official propaganda to spread among the people the idea that they were Yezidis who had come to take revenge on the Shi'a again.

After the 2003 war and the fall of Baghdad into the hands of the Iraqi opposition and the American forces, a new phase of interaction began between the main Iraqi ethnic, cultural and social components: they began to leave many of their previous frictions aside. From these new relationships emerged the communication between the Yezidis and the Shi'a, as many members of the Yezidi component obtained positions in the government and became members of the Iraqi Parliament. Consequently, representatives of the Shi'a and Yezidis came into direct contact by virtue of working closely with the decision-making sources. These included the various political parties and forces as well as the Shi'a and Yezidi religious authorities, "in a special meeting between a group

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[10] The Anfal was unleashed against the Kurds from February through September 1988 in the final phase of the Iran–Iraq war. Human Rights Watch estimates that between 50,000 and 100,000 people were killed during al–Anfal; while Kurdish officials have put the number as high as 182,000. M. Galletti, *Storia dei Curdi*, Milano 2014.

[11] Lalish, (LALiş in Kurdish), 120 km north ovest of Erbil, is the main spiritual center for Yezidis around the world, and contains the tomb of Sheikh 'Adi

[12] B. Açıkyıldız, *opt., cit.*

[13] M. Galletti, *Storia dei Curdi*, Jouvence, Milano 2014.

of members of the Iraqi parliament, including some Yezidi representatives with His Eminence, Mr. Ammar Al-Hakim[14], who indicated the extent of his satisfaction with the meeting and affirming his sovereignty to move forward in defending the rights of all the sons of the original Iraqi components, on top of whom is the Yezidi component".[15] After the establishment of the Federal Republic of Iraq, representatives of minorities assumed important positions in Baghdad within the ministries and the public administration. This official presence gave representatives of the Yezidi community the opportunity to meet and communicate with many Shi'a leaders and references, including Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, thus a new phase of direct relations between the leaders of the two sides has developed.

The Genocide of Yezidis by ISIS

After the wave of the Arab Spring that swept across North Africa and the Middle East in 2011, chaos and instability reigned in many regions, especially in Syria. Then militant jihadist groups emerged that took control of cities and towns by force of arms and terror. With the establishment of the so called the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its control in mid-2014 over most of the Sunni cities in Iraq[16], and the massacres committed against the Shi'a in the Mosul Governorate, specifically in the Tal Afar district, a mass exodus of Shi'a families arose towards other Iraqi cities, including the Sinjar district. The Yezidis received these families and provided them with urgent assistance, as they were accommodated in homes and schools until they could go to the camps of Najaf and Karbala provinces. This news, among the painful and rapid events that was taking place, was circulated by various media and it led to great sympathy of the Shi'a with the Yezidis.[17]

During the summer months of 2014, ISIS incited the displacement of more than half a million people from within Nineveh. Ethno-religious genocide was carried out against members of the Yezidi community[18], women were enslaved into sex and / or forced into marriage, children were forcibly recruited as fighters in the ranks of ISIS and prisoners were forced to convert to Islam.[19] And an organized campaign was led in order to empty the region of religious and ethnic diversity. Yezidis, Christians, Turkmen, Shabak and others faced killings, kidnappings and persecution. These practices against these minorities led to the migration of large numbers out of Iraq, but the majority became

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[14] Ammar al-Hakim, an Iraqi politician, Ibn Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim, the former president of the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq, is currently the secretary of the National Wisdom Movement.

[15] Hussein Hassan Narmo, a Yezidi parliamentarian in the Iraqi Parliament, currently on the PUK list. https://kitabat. com/2016/10/16/.

[16] Mosul fell to the Islamic State on June 10, 2014, and a few months later, ISIS managed to gain control of up to a third of Iraqi territory.

[17] S. R. Khairafayi, *The relationship between yezidis and shi'a before and after ISIS*, https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show. art.asp?aid=604331

[18] OHCHR, *United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria: ISIS is committing genocide against the Yezidis*, https://www. ohchr.org/AR/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20113&LangID=A

[19] On August 3, 2014, ISIS launched a major offensive which led to the fall of Sinjar and the surrounding villages. Nearly 200,000 people were displaced within days, many of them Yezidis. About 50,000 people have taken refuge on Sinjar Mountain. Of the nearly 6,000 people who had disappeared or were kidnapped by ISIS, the fate of about half of them remains unknown. https://news.un.org/ar/story/2020/08/1059182

internally displaced. While some have been able to flee to relatively safe areas, others have since resided in highly volatile areas.[20]

Displacement patterns emerged such that linguistic, religious and / or ethnic convergence determines the choice of the area of displacement. Usually minorities tend to seek protection in areas where their identity resonates in one way or another with the identity of the host community. While some Shi'a minorities used to seek refuge in provinces such as Karbala and Najaf, most Yezidis were displaced from Nineveh to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq or to the Kurdish-controlled parts of northern Nineveh. Christians were displaced to predominantly Christian areas, such as Ainkawa in Erbil and some areas in Baghdad. These patterns of displacement effectively divided many camps into ethnic and / or religious affiliation.[21]

Although the Kurdistan region of Iraq hosts most of the displaced Yezidis, a minority of them reside in different parts of Iraq, especially in the Shi'a areas. These fluctuations in displacement and instability increased the number of visits and initiatives between the Yezidi and Shi'a community, and opened a new page of relations between them. "It is our duty to protect the Yezidis"[22] said Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani after the occupation of Sinjar and the genocide committed by the ISIS in August, 2014. On the occasion of the liberation of the Yezidi lands south of Sinjar in 2017[23], the former Yezidi Prince Mîr Tehsîn Seîd Beg said in a press release: "In this genocide committed by the terrorist organization ISIS against us as Yezidis, the positions of the brothers in southern Iraq were honorable, especially the Shi'a brothers, as the historical fatwa issued by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani prohibiting yezidi blood will remain as a historical witness stuck in our minds and their positions are unforgettable."[24]

Conclusions

During the visit of Pope Francis to Iraq at the beginning of March 2021, a unified interfaith prayer was held in which the Pope participated in the historic and archeological city of Ur in southern Iraq. During the memorial photos monitored by the lenses of the news agencies, what was striking was the wide presence of representatives of different religions and sects[25], and the allocation of 4 seats to personalities who sat near the Pope, representing Yezidis, Sabeans, Sunnis and Shi'a. Farouk Khalil, a member of the Yezidi Spiritual Council, from Ba'shiqa, came to participate as a representative of the Yezidi religion, who presented a paper on the reality of the Yezidis and their demands. On the other hand, Jawad al-Khoei, the grandson of the religious authority of the Shi'a community, Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei, participated for the Shi'a. It is a rare event for all of these personalities to come together in one session to perform a joint prayer, but it may be the beginning of leaving the differences of the past aside and starting to build a better future for all.

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[20] L. Higel, *Iraq's Displacement Crisis: Security and protection*, Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights, Report of 2016. (p. 17).
[21] Ibid.
[22] Press release on 10 Sep. 2014, https://www.alalamtv.net/news/
[23] Kurdish fighters liberated the strategic town of Sinjar in northern Iraq, which was in the hands of ISIS militants, on November 13, 2015, but the villages and southern regions remained in the hands of ISIS until 2017. https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2015/11/151113_kurds_sinjar_entrance_all_directions
[24] *Prince of the Yazidis in the world: the positions of the shi'a are honorable and historical evidence will remain stuck in our minds*, https://www.alshirazi.com/world/news/2017/005/020.htm
[25] *Clergymen sit near the Pope in the historic meeting of Ur*, http://www.bahzani.net/?p=70153.

Freedom of religion, belief and religious affiliation means the protection of all individuals of all religious components and sects. There is a need to protect freedom of religion and belief more and to make dialogue and coexistence a primary goal for the various sects, whether they are a minority or a majority. Communication and dialogue are important anywhere, but especially in the religious and cultural fields, such as the importance of making yourself known and communicating with others. Not only to receive information and to discover the other, but precisely to return an image of yourself by sending a clear and direct message to those who live with us, or who are simply curious to know and discover the cultural and spiritual cosmos in which we live daily. How is it possible to be understood, if you do not get involved in discovering a part of yourself by dialoguing and talking with the other?

Wars, violent conflicts, poverty, inequality, and state institutions based on authoritarianism, nationalism and religion are all factors that aid in violations of freedom of religion and belief and contribute to creating an irreparable rift.

Creating Shi'a Sacred Space in Italy

Minoo Mirshahvalad (University of Turin)

In what follows I present a summary of the second chapter of my Italian monograph on Shi'as in Italy, published in November 2020. In this chapter of my book, I tried to answer the following questions: "How do Twelver Shi'is create gathering places in Italy where their conventional places of worship are absent? What is the nature of these places?" To find the answer of these and some other questions regarding Shi'is in Italy, I undertook a three-year study (2016-2019) in 13 Italian cities where I conducted ethnography and participant observation within Shi'i gathering places and interviewed 89 people among attendees of Shi'i prayer halls, their administrators and a few Italians who had developed close ties with Shi'i groups.

Shi'is in Italy are mainly from Iranian, Pakistani, Lebanese and Afghan origin. Italian converts, albeit active both within communities and in relation with the Italian authorities, form a low percentage of this population, while Iraqis are almost absent. The exact number of Shi'is in Italy is not clear because, according to the Italian law, census of religious belonging is not possible; however, some authors estimate it to be around five to 15 percent of Muslim population in Italy[1]. Thus, it should be around 70 thousand people.

The main challenge that Shi'as face in Italy regards their places of prayer. According to the article 8 of the Italian constitution, the non-Catholic religious organisations have to conclude a bilateral agreement with the Italian Minister of the Interior to be recognised as religious entities and benefit from the facilities envisaged for such organisations.

Currently only four Sunni associations have presented the protocols of agreement to this ministry but none of them have reached the agreement yet. No Shi'a organisation has ever attempted to present such a protocol. One of the indirect consequences of the absence of this agreement is the almost impossibility of the construction of mosque in Italy. Conversely to Norway[2], Germany[3], Cana-

[1] F. Re, *Sciiti in Italia: Una minoranza silenziosa, difficilmente quantificabile*, «Il dialogo al-hiwar», 13 (2011) 2, pp. 14-15. A. Menonna, *La presenza musulmana in Italia*, «Factsheet», Fondazione ISMU, 2016, pp. 1-4.

[2] Bøe, M., and Flaskerud I., *A Minority in the Making: The Shi'a Muslim Community in Norway*, «Journal of Muslims in Europe», 6 (2017) 2, pp. 179-197.

[3] A. Böttcher, *The Shi'a in Germany*, in Leslie Tramontini, and Chibli Mallat (eds.), «From Baghdad to Beirut: Arab and Islamic Studies in Honor of John J. Donohue S.J.», Beirut: Ergon-Verlag Würzburg in Kommission, 2007, pp. 209-230.

da[4] and the U.K.[5], in Italy there are not purpose-build Shi'i mosques. The locals used by Shi'i groups can be divided in two categories.

First, those occupied occasionally only for important Shi'i mourning ceremonies, as created by Afghan and Pakistani groups in Rome and Varese, the Iranian students in Padua who have chosen the name Muhibbin Ahl al-Bayt for their group, and the group of Iranian students and workers in Milan called Acqua. In such cases, Shi'is gather in schools, sport centres, bars, parishes, intercultural centres, dormitories, isolated factories on the outskirts of cities or any local that the Italian authorities offer them.

The second category includes the Iranian-backed Imam Ali Centre (AC) in Milan, the Imam Mahdi Association (MC) administered by Italian converts in Rome, the Tohid Centre (TC) administered by Lebanese in Turin, the Pakistani Imamiya Association in Brescia and other two Pakistani organisations in Carpi.

These groups have their own headquarters that were formerly basement, warehouse, shop, garage, car showroom or dilapidated and abandoned structures to which hardly anyone could have attributed any function. In these unpretentious places of prayer, the position of toilets and entrances was not always compliant to what *marāji* ʿ (Shi'a clerical authorities) have envisaged for mosques. Moreover, sportive and various recreational activities were performed inside them and in different initiatives non-Muslims were welcomed as required by the Italian authorities.

Carpi ornaments of the hall, foto by Minoo Mirshahvalad, Imamia Welfare Organization Carpi Italy

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[4] V. J. Schubel, *Karbala as Sacred Space Among North American Shi'a: "Every day is Ashura, Everywhere is Karbala*, in Barbara Daly Metcalf (ed.), «Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe», Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 186-203.

[5] K. Spellman-Poots, *Manifestations of Ashura Among Young British Shi'is*, in Baudouin Duret, Thomas Pierret, Paulo G. Pinto, Kathryn Spellman-Poots (eds.), «Ethnographies of Islam: Ritual Performances and Everyday Practices», Edinburg University Press, 2012, pp. 40-49.

Despite their non-mosqueness, these locals could not be considered lay structures of everyday life. The specificity of their space was comprehensible through the ways in which informants treated them. All interviewees attributed a certain *ḥurma* (reverence) to these places. This Arabic word derives from the root *ḥ-r-m* and corresponds to connotations like honour, modesty, respect and veneration. Words like *ḥaram*, with a twofold meaning: both prohibited and sacred and *ḥarim*, indicating inviolable territory and domestic spaces for women in upper-class houses, stem from the same root.

In the second chapter of my book, I presented ten strategies adopted by Shi'as to sacralise their places of gathering. I divided these strategies in two main categories: strategies aimed at including some elements and those meant to exclude some others. Because of word limits, here I present only the strategies of the second category, which are similar to Durkheim's negative cults. Comparing to inclusive elements, these strategies turn to be more complex and controversial.

Making the space by exclusion

The sacred space obligates people to be prepared by taking off some elements, wearing some others and performing different types of ablution. It demands different levels of restriction in access, appearance, and behaviour. Such a space should be a rapture in the ordinary life and should restore the pure and ideal order that the real world lacks to guide human beings towards perfection. In the case in point, excluded components were those that threated the universality, purity and extraordinariness of the space. Many of the excluded components had to do with instincts, appetites, ordinary life and utilitarian relations with the world.

The "political", "national" and "cultural". This strategy is the most complicated measure of this list. The groups did not adopt it with the same approach and the same frequency because the definition of these three "threats" to the sacredness of the space was different. Shi'as repelled what *they* considered political, national and cultural. The presumed characteristics of community, namely love, freedom, trust, loyalty, respect, and care, as well as the sacredness of the space were jeopardised in the presence of utilitarian and lay elements that could push the group towards formality and less fluid human interaction. Converts were in particular interested in a de-territorialised and de-culturalised Shi'ism. "Cultural" was a useful mega-category that accumulated all the unwanted aspects of Shi'ism that allowed converts to be selective without running the risk of being accused of heresy. Converts would welcome the anniversary of the Iranian Revolution, the Quds Day and the Liberalisation of Southern Lebanon, but not the Catholic Christmas. It was then amusing to see that Shi'i-borns would celebrate Christmas and Easter on their online communities to show respect for Italy.

Usually "non-religious" events were held either outside the hall or in the "profane" areas of the headquarters. In 2018, a Pakistani association in Legnano celebrated the 14th of August in a park. In Carpi, young Pakistanis around mid-August would participate in sportive tournaments alongside their Sunni fellows but no celebration was held inside their *imāmbārgah*s. Pakistanis, who were the most active Shi'i groups in Italy and spent lots of time and money on their ceremonies, left the

celebration of the Pakistan Day and the Independence Day to their embassy or would join Sunni associations that had bigger halls and could host all Pakistanis.

These events generated some deformations in the normal order of the space especially in terms of gender relations and gender segregation. Conversely to Pakistanis, the AC celebrated the anniversary of the Iranian Revolution in its "profane" space. During the celebration of the Iranian Revolution, both in 2018 and 2019, the normal fluid Iranian gender segregation of the AC was abolished and women were present in heavy makeup and colourful dresses in company of their husbands and other male participants. In those occasions much less restriction was applied to women's veil. Informants – who believed in the necessity of compulsory veiling for women – admitted that such restrictions could be lifted in "cultural" events.

Conversely to the IC, in a multi-national and multi-ethnic hall, such as the TC, any hint to politically or nationally charged symbols was removed. In December 2016, the Iranian consul came from Milan to visit Iranians. In that exclusively Iranian meeting, students had gathered to ask their questions and submit their requests. During the event, the Iranian flag was hung on the wall and the photo of the Iranian Supreme Leader was placed on the table. The flag and the photo, which were put by a then Iranian member of the executive committee of the TC, soon after the meeting were removed.

Sensitivity to politics, in some halls involved *marāji'* as well. While Pakistanis in Carpi, besides many other emblems related to Imams, put three giant posters of ayatollahs Khomeini, Khamenei and Sistani in their prayer hall (the greatest images of these ayatollahs in all Italian-based Shi'i gathering places), among Lebanese prioritising some ayatollahs could arouse controversies. The MC, instead, had an A3 poster in its "profane" hall in which the three aforementioned ayatollahs were present. The AC, which was the only explicitly Iran-backed organisation, had the photos of ayatollahs Khomeini and Khamenei near the direction of *miḥrāb* in the way that people could see them while praying.

Carnal attraction. This strategy united Shi'is not only with Sunnis, but also with Christians and Jews. To enter the realm of the Sacred, human beings should be cleansed and temporarily de-sexualised. Women are deemed owners of a specific "power" that can threat men's spirituality, hence, women's sexuality should be controlled otherwise it creates *fitna* (chaos). Therefore, Shi'i sacred spaces appealed to two measures to neutralise this women's threatening characteristic: the veil and the gender segregation. Regarding the making of the sacred space through women's veil, men and women had quite different ideas. It was difficult to identify a clear trend among informants concerning the issue, but approximately one might conclude that men's previous religion (in the case of converts) and educational level were important factors that could shape their ideas about it. The more educated men and those who had converted from Catholicism, did not consider women's veil such a fundamental requisite for the making of the sacred space, or would even criticise its obligation in various manners. Male Iranian students were more prone to seeing benefits in welcoming unveiled women within prayer halls both because, in their view, the Italian context was different from Iran, thus unveiled women could be tolerated, and because in this way such women could be guided to the "right" path or be attracted to the community. Like many other issues regarding women and private sphere, sexual division was more subject to *'urf* (custom) than what

orthodoxy has prescribed. People's reaction to the sexual division depended on their nationality, age and educational levels.

Shoe removal. Following the Jewish tradition, among Muslims wherever the divine is present one is supposed to take off their shoes because shoes symbolise the profane space. Shoe removal, especially where homes are normally bereft of carpets, was a strong token that declared the particularity of the space.

Final discussions

The absence of the conventional places of prayer has forced Shi'as to create prayer halls based on rules that they set anew in Italy, which entails a re-definition of the sacred-profane boundaries. Despite controversies over the existence of the sacred place within the Islamic tradition, the Italian-based Shi'i prayer halls are sacred for their attendees. They receive their particular status thanks to people who gather in them and consider them imbued with *ḥurma*. They are sacred and reverable because they compensate the absence of some elements that Shi'is miss in Italy, namely, direction, harmony, collective effervescence and, hence, community.

The sacred place in the present case is not the locus of hierophany or a place that has become mosque via the judicially recognised process of *waqf* (pious endowment), but a place that re-order the space because it becomes the exclusive venue for satisfying social needs. For Shi'is the most pressing need in a non-Islamic context regards the boundaries of the Self. In the present case, the excluded elements, which are the main instruments that establish such boundaries, were chosen and decided upon by ordinary Shi'is who were elaborating norms of the places in constant negotiation with their host context and with their coreligionists. Indeed, these places had developed their own logic independently from norms set by *marāji ʿ*.

The most controversial strategy among what I mentioned in chapter two of my book concerns the construction of "cultural", "national" and "political", and their exclusion from the places of worship. The meaning of these three "threats" can be understood only considering issues from the viewpoint of the attendees of these places, who constantly define and redefine them. Only insiders, based on their relation with the religion and the in-group, can identify the "threats" to the sacred. In Italy, Shi'is learn and un-learn some cultural elements as a consequence of the two-fold acculturation process that they undergo due to their constant contact with Italy, on the one hand, and with their coreligionists that come from other countries, on the other. Such a contact triggers a ceaseless evolution of the sacred-profane boundaries.

Performing Ashura in Piraeus.
Towards a Shi'ite poetics of 'cultural intimacy'

Marios Chatziprokopiou (University of Thessaly)

At the start of my research on the Ashura seven years ago[1], I focused on the Pakistani Shi'a Muslim Association (from now on, PSMA): the longest-established Shi'a Muslim association in Greece, and the one that has attracted most public attention, primarily due to the *Ashura*. Its history dates back to 1978, when the religious practices of a then small community took place privately in people's homes. PSMA is based at the Azakhana *Gulzar-E Zainab* (the garden of Zainab), in Piraeus, Greece's major port. Although very close to the town centre, this is a non-residential, post-industrial area; the landscape is dominated by abandoned small factories and warehouses. Since 2004, the community commemorates *Muharram* mostly within its premises: an abandoned warehouse arranged as a prayer hall. The tenth day is observed on the street outside the prayer hall, with a procession reaching its climax in self-flagellation. Both national and international media are widely invited to capture and transmit the event; yet the organizers frame the ritual with two voluminous pieces of cloth placed on both sides of the street.

In what follows, I will try to show how a decontextualized focus on self-flagellation, and the act of blood-shedding, in particular, accentuated by the mass media, reinforces local stereotypes of Shi'a community practices as 'incompatible' with Greek or European cultural values. Moreover, I will demonstrate that, confronted with xenophobia and social estrangement, my Shi'ite interlocutors systematically attempt to articulate counter-narratives of 'cultural intimacy'[2] that stress the similarities of their ritual lament with Greek embodied practices of religiosity. Finally, I will juxtapose dominant narratives related to the Greek 'national self' with the discourses and practices of the migrant Shi'ite community of Piraeus, focusing on the symbolic and practical uses of blood.

In order to better understand current debates on the Ashura in this contemporary migratory context, I shall bear in mind the performative aspects of the Muharram rituals, and especially the publicly exposed self-flagellation, which have often been considered diametrically opposed to the

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[1] This paper summarizes my previous publications on the topic; see indicatively, M. Chatziprokopiou, *Between the poetics of difference and the politics of similarity: Performing Ashura in Piraeus*, in Journal of Muslims in Europe, 6:2, 2017, pp. 1-19. M. Chatziprokopiou, *Displaced Laments: Performing Mourning and Exile in Contemporary Athens, Greece*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Department of Film, Theatre and Television Studies, Aberystwyth University. 2017.

[2] M. Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics and the Real Life of States, Societies, and Institutions*, London and New York: Routledge. 2016.

theological foundations of Islam. Various critiques are not only articulated by Sunni Muslims or non-Muslims, but also by several Shi'ite religious scholars, especially those engaged in the project of representing Shi'ite identities to the rest of the world. To mention two indicative examples: during the thirties, when Lebanon was in the process of gaining independence from France, 'modernists opposed themselves to what they perceived as "barbaric" or "uncivilized" practices'[3]. The leading Shi'ite cleric Muhsin Al-Amin was particularly concerned with honing a modern, self-controlled and reasoned image of Shi'a believers: exhibiting a 'particularly modernist anxiety about the sanctity of the individual body' [4] Al-Amin argued that any self-harming activity was 'religiously unacceptable', and that '[t]he most important thing is the protection of the self'[5]. From a different standpoint, during Muharram in 1995, Iran's political and religious leader Ayatollah Khameini outlawed the public performance of self-flagellation: in his words, '[i]t is not a question of individual or physical harm, but of great injuries to the reputation of Islam'[6]; not the ritual act per se, but the image of the Shi'ites to the rest of the world, an even more urgent issue within contemporary contexts of globalized Islam[7].

At the same time, I shall note that the practices of blood-shedding today are often replaced by, or co-exist with, blood-donation campaigns; both in the Muslim world and in the West but, as I will show in what follows, not yet in Greece. Studies from other European migratory contexts also demonstrate other crucial issues at work throughout the Muharram rituals, such as tradition, memory, belonging and community, but also transformation[8]. By concentrating on Northern European countries, this body of literature demonstrates how the Shi'ite lament is performed and experienced in multicultural societies, whose traditions and habits are perceived as directly opposed to the Shi'a embodied expressions of mourning: acts of excessive mourning including self-harm are characterized as 'so "un-British"', as one of Kathryn Spellman-Poots's informers eloquently states.[9]

Things are quite different in Greece, where many of my interlocutors compare their own lamenting practices with Greek embodied practices of religiosity. Borrowing and redefining here Michael Herzfeld's expression in a contemporary context of heterogeneity, I argue that, in this sense, Shi'ites in Greece do not rely on multicultural difference, but foreground a 'poetics of cultural intimacy'. For instance, some of my discussants underline the element of religious self-harm in rituals such as the Christian orthodox pilgrimage to the church of the Virgin Mary on the island of Tinos. During the major celebrations of that church on August 15th, many pilgrims fulfill their vows by walking on their knees all the way from the port to the Virgin's miraculous icon. Moreover, many of them compare

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[3] M. Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism: Law, Shi'ism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon*, Cambridge Mass./ London: Harvard University Press. 2010, p. 90.

[4] Ivi. P. 80.

[5] Ibid.

[6] D. Pinault, *Horse of Karbala, Muslim Devotional Life in India*, New York: Palgrave. 2001, p. 149.

[7] O. Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, Columbia University Press. 2004.

[8] I. Flaskerud, '*Women Transferring Shi'a Ritualsin Western Migrancy*', in Pedram Khosronejad (ed.) 2015, Women Rituals and Ceremonies in Shi'ite Iran and Muslim Communities: Methodological and theoretical challenges. Berlin: Lit Verlag. K. Spellman-Poots, (2012), 'Manifestations of Ashura among Young British Shi'a', in *Ethnographies of Islam: Ritual Performances and Everyday Practices*, Baudouin Dupret et al.(eds.), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012. Y. Shanneik, *Remembering Karbala in the Diaspora: Religious Rituals among Iraqi Shii Women in Ireland,* in Religion, 45 (1), 2015, pp. 89-102.

[9] K. Spellman-Poots, *opt, cit*, p. 40

the Ashura with Holy Friday and the lament for Hussein with the lament for Christ, pointing to the procession of the dead Jesus' *Epitaphios*. This is the preclimactic moment in the performative drama of Holy Week, but also 'the term for the gold-embroidered icon carried on the pall (*kouvouklion*), the piece of cloth bearing a representation of Christ's crucified body'[10]. My discussants highlight the striking similarities between the ways of expressing faith in both religions but also between the two sacred objects: the taboots and the Epitaphios.

Finally, several interlocutors also refer to the *Anastenaria*, a ritual involving fire- walking that takes place in Northern Greece by locals descending from Eastern Thracian refugees, remarking that fire-walking is a common practice during the Ashura commemorations in Pakistan and throughout South Asia, where it is shared even among other religions such as Hinduism. Although they emphatically underline these similarities, my interlocutors at the same time assert that they would not allow themselves to perform fire walking in Greece: 'we do not feel comfortable to do in a foreign country what we would in our own'.

It is important to raise here a question: if in the previous cases the Ashura is linked with major and official Greek Orthodox rituals, what happens when comparisons are drawn with the Anastenaria? Although the Anastenaria practitioners -descendants of refugees- consider themselves to be Christians, their ritual is not fully recognized by the official Greek Orthodox church. Furthermore, and despite the attempt of Greek folk studies to inscribe this ritual in the discourses of national continuity by casting it as a revival of Dionysian cults, the Anastenaria is today generally considered a marginal practice in Greek society. What happens then when the Shi'ites compare their lament not with the nation's canon, but with its margins? Do they, in this case, not simply articulate a poetics of cultural intimacy but rather, in a much more complex way, unsettle the operational binary between intimacy and difference? Do they simply suggest not that 'we are like you', but that 'you are not like yourselves' (the ones you would like to believe you are)?

In any case, their arguments are interesting exactly because they relativize the 'exotic' character of their own lament, linking it with local practices of religiosity. This argument is further supported by other receptions of the Ashura in Greece such as the movie 'I heard God crying' by Elpida Skoufalou: in this, the Shi'ite lament for Hussein is interwoven with the lament of the Anastenaria devotees for the hero Mikrokonstantinos and of South Albanian women for a real dead person; the shooting and editing of these images appears not to juxtapose 'exotic' laments to 'indigenous' ones but, on the contrary, to trace the common features of different rituals of lament.

This is clearly not the case of the televisual representations of the Ashura, despite the fact that, during the last decade, there has been a significant change in perspective, at least as far as influential national mainstream media are concerned. Looking into the news coverage of the ritual by the private TV-channel Antenna since 2013, we can observe a shift towards an increasingly moderate tolerant gaze on the 'Other': the ritual is no longer exposed solely as the proof of irrational, exotic difference, but rather explained and contextualised. Details are given on Shi'ism in general, and of the Karbala battle as its founding narrative in particular. The camera does not emphasise self-flag-

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[10] N. Panourgiá, *Fragments of Death, Fables of Identity: An Athenian Anthropography*, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press. 1995, pp. 152-3.

ellation, but also takes into consideration the less spectacular aspects of the ritual, whilst a voice-over explains that 'For Shi'as the self-flagellation is a way to verify their faith and to be redeemed'. Moreover, a clear demarcation line is traced between Islamic terrorism and Shi'ite minorities, explaining that the latter constitute a repeatedly oppressed population in the Muslim world, and currently a primary victim of organizations such as the Islamic State or the Taliban. Such a distinction echoes the systematic attempts of my interlocutors who have tried to clarify for years their position as a vulnerable religious minority: as they repeatedly explain: 'we are the easiest targets for the Jihadists.'

Yet, looking back to past programmes of the same channel, the adjectives used to describe the ritual had more negative connotations: 'impressive', 'unusual', 'shocking', or even 'extremely ferocious'. The more we go back in time, the more clangourous the vocabulary tends to be: in earlier years, the Shi'ites 'mercilessly', 'in delirium', 'submitted themselves to hideous tortures, and injured themselves with knives until they fainted'. Even though, as mentioned already, the *Ashura* is commemorated at a non-residential area, it is interesting to note how, in these journalistic narratives, the ritual appears to take place 'at the very centre (sic) of Piraeus', while 'the inhabitants (sic) of Dimitras Street watch breathlessly what takes place in front of their houses (sic)'.

The very first coverage of the Ashura by Antenna channel in 2004, only a few years after 9.11 and just before the 2004 Olympic games in Athens, is characteristic: the broadcaster attests that 'the extreme manifestation of religious devotion by Shi'a Muslims residing in Greece preoccupies the authorities, as they estimate that within these organizations it is possible for *al-Qaeda* members to intrude'. Shots of training *Al-Qaeda* soldiers are rapidly interwoven with images from the interior of the *Azakhana*, marked by a red target. Although the broadcaster adds that 'the Shi'a claim to be enemies of the Taliban', the narrative produced by this editing is clear: the practices of terrorism (violence against Others) are connected to the 'extreme manifestation of religious devotion' of the Shi'ites (violence against the self).

In the last decade, such a perception of the Ashura has been reproduced by the far-right press in Greece. In the vocabulary of the Neo-Nazi party 'Golden-Dawn', whose members were sentenced and imprisoned in September 2020, the open wounds of the Shi'ites 'contaminate the 'bleeding' streets of the 'homeland', while their self-directed violence is read as the threat of a future armed invasion. Once again, the *Ashura* is portrayed as taking place in 'downtown' Piraeus, which loses its identity as the main Greek port and 'becomes Islamabad'. The blood-shedding of the Shi'as becomes a threat to the national body, and its 'purity of blood'. I would like to briefly refer here to the symbolic and practical uses of blood. In May 2013, amidst extreme Neo-Nazi violence in the public space, the PSMA received an anonymous letter in Greek, English and Arabic, addressing its receivers as 'Muslim Murderers', insulting Islamic religion, and concluding with the threat 'There Will Be Blood' (I quote their original translation). Directly inspired by German Nazism and its roots in the 'Blood and Soil' (*Blut and Boden*) ideology, Greek Neo-Nazis not only cast the blood of these national, racial, and religious 'Others' as polluting, but also clearly state their will to spill it by their own initiative. It is worth noting that Golden-Dawn was not only the party that has orchestrated or supported murderous attacks against 'deviant subjects' throughout the country: it has also run blood-donation

campaigns 'for native Greeks only'.

Returning to the Shi'ites themselves, it is crucial to remind that blood-donation has been an increasingly frequent practice that replaces or coexists with blood-shedding during the Ashura commemorations, both in the Muslim world and in Western migratory contexts- but not in Greece. The Shi'ite spokesman Ashir Haider expressed to me his intention to initiate such a campaign in Greece on behalf of the PSMA, an intention that did not materialise because, according to the responsible person he discussed this issue with, 'people from South Asian countries including Pakistan are not allowed to donate blood because of fear of transmission of certain diseases'. Indeed, the regulations of the Ministry of Health clearly state that 'men and women that had sexual contact with individuals that live, or come from, Africa (sub-Saharan countries), South Asia, South America and the Pacific islands, in the course of the last decade' are not allowed to give blood.'

I would like to suggest that, in this case, the bio-politics of the state obliquely echo Nazi ideas regarding blood, as they do not allow this 'foreign blood' to be offered by a group of religious Others to the 'national body'. In Roberto Esposito's terms, the *communitas* of the nation-state is essentially based on its *immunitas*; borders become a corporeal metaphor while, flowing in the streets of the city, the blood of Others is perceived as a threat, an intruder, and an infection[11]. Even if, on the level of discourses and representations, the distance between 'Us' and 'Others' can be crossed through a poetics of 'cultural intimacy', when we move towards national health regulations, we are once again confronted with a politics of difference and, here, of exclusion.

To conclude, I would like to remark that, in this migratory context, and fully conscious of the neo-orientalist image produced by the media, the Shi'a community in Greece foregrounds a politics of visibility which aims to undo stereotypical associations of the Shi'a faith with the act of blood-shedding. Connecting the productive use of the blood in Greek hospitals with its ritual expenditure in the streets of Piraeus, the useful work of blood-donation counterpoints the 'spectacle' of blood-shedding and the open wounds, foregrounding the universal message of Shi'ism over embodied practices of faith. Nonetheless, the 'foreign' blood of the Shi'as cannot flow into the 'national body': 'wasted' in the streets of the city, it becomes the ultimate proof of their supposed 'clash' with post- Enlightenment European values. Yet, I suggest that depicting the Other mirrors, even if obliquely, the 'Self'. It seems to me that this insistence on casting the laments of Others as barbaric, oriental, and consequently premodern reveals an anxiety regarding Greece's own Western and European identity, an identity that seems not to be fully guaranteed. In other words, 'we' try to secure our 'civilized' or 'European' status by casting the 'Others' as 'Barbarians'; or, in Cavafy's terms, 'we' need Barbarians as our 'solution' which guarantees our own inscription to the 'Western' world of privilege, together with an obsessive repulsion of our inner 'East'.

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[11] R. Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, translated by Timothy C. Campbell, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 2009.

Public Lamentation Processions and Civic Performativity among Shi'a in Barcelona

Avi Astor, Rosa Martínez Cuadros, Victor Albert Blanco
(Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)

Spain's Shi'a population, while still modest in size, has grown significantly since the late 1990s, mainly due to rising levels of migration from Pakistan. While there are several small communities dispersed around the country, the largest communities are located in Barcelona and its surrounding area.[1] Barcelona's principal *imambargah* (ritual sanctuary), al-Qaim, was founded in 1999 in the neighborhood of Santa Caterina, which is part of the city's Old Quarter. Since 2005, al-Qaim has organized public processions on the day of Ashura, and more recently, during Ramadan to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Ali. This essay examines the civic dimensions of Shi'a public lamentation rituals in Barcelona. We explore how these processions, as well as the array of meetings surrounding their planning and organization, provide representatives of al-Qaim with a platform for performing their deservingness of inclusion in the neighborhood, city, and nation. Rather than focusing on a single performative strategy, we examine differences in performative style among representatives with distinct social and political backgrounds, trajectories, and perspectives.

Our findings are based on ethnographic observations of public lamentations processions conducted between 2015 and 2019. We also carried out several semi-structured interviews with Shi'a leaders and community members, as well as municipal authorities and civil servants involved in the organization and planning of local Shi'a processions. Our conclusions challenge the existing literature on public religious rituals by drawing attention to performative strategies that have been largely ignored by previous studies.

Civic Performativity and Public Religious Rituals

In recent years, social scientists have dedicated increasing attention to the civic dimensions of religious parades and processions, in large part, due to the proliferation of public ritual acts organized

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[1] It is unclear exactly how many Shi'a live in Barcelona since no official data are collected on religious affiliation. Most, but not all, Shi'a in Barcelona are Pakistani nationals. Some are Spanish nationals of Pakistani descent and others are of Middle Eastern descent. Given what we were told by community leaders and what we know about the proportion of Shi'a among Pakistan's general population, we estimate there to be somewhere between two to three thousand Shi'a in the city.

by oftentimes stigmatized or marginalized religious minorities in cities across the globe. Their analyses have tended to emphasize how public rituals serve as a stage for religious minorities to become visible, assert their communal identities, and demand rights[2]. The emphasis on civic performativity and agency in the literature on public religiosity bears certain affinities with performative perspectives on citizenship that stress what civic actions *do*, rather than what they express or reflect[3]. The concept of "performative citizenship," which grows out of this line of scholarship, "signifies both a struggle (making rights claims) and what that struggle performatively brings into being (the right to claim rights)"[4]. Conceiving citizenship as performative claims-making "helps elucidate how status, rights, participation and identity can at times be interwoven and reinforcing"[5]. It also makes it possible to conceive of how citizenship may be performed by noncitizens[6].

Although the emphasis on performativity and agency has yielded important insights into the civic dimensions of public forms of religiosity, its narrow focus on assertive demands for rights and recognition has led to a general neglect of alternative forms of civic performativity that, while less conspicuous, are nonetheless crucial for understanding how religious minorities demonstrate deservingness of inclusion in the polity. In order to address this "assertive" bias, I develop the notion of "conciliatory civic performativity," a concept which refers to the performance of moral qualities associated with civility, such as respect for local norms, compliance with the law, and openness to dialogue and compromise. Distinguishing between assertive and conciliatory forms of civic performativity facilitates a more precise understanding of the performative strategies that give form to public religious expressions, and civic practice more generally, especially as access to citizenship rights becomes increasingly contingent upon the demonstration of civic "worthiness"[7].

Summary of Findings

For the first several years in which public Shi'a lamentation processions were organized in Barcelona, two interlocutors with contrasting styles of dialogue and negotiation represented the communi-

[2] D. Garbin, *Marching for God in the Global City: Public Space, Religion and Diasporic Identities in a Transnational African Church*. Culture and Religion, 2012, 13(4):425–47. P. Hatziprokopiou, and V. Evergeti. *Negotiating Muslim Identity and Diversity in Greek Urban Spaces*. Social & Cultural Geography, 2014, 15(6):603–26. Ch. Saint-Blancat, and A. Cancellieri, *From Invisibility to Visibility? The Appropriation of Public Space through a Religious Ritual: The Filipino Procession of Santacruzan in Padua, Italy*, Social and Cultural Geography2014, 15(6):645–63. G. Schmidt, *Grounded' Politics: Manifesting Muslim Identity as a Political Factor and Localized Identity in Copenhagen,* Ethnicities, 2012, 12(5):603–22. P. Werbner, . *Stamping the Earth with the Name of Allah: Zikr and the Sacralizing of Space among British Muslims*, Cultural Anthropology, 1996, 11(3):309–38.
[3] I. Bloemraad, *Theorising the Power of Citizenship as Claims-Making*, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 2018, 44(1):4–26. E. F. Isin, *Performative Citizenship,* in The Oxford Handbook of Citizenship, edited by A. Shachar, R. Bauböck, I. Bloemraad, and M. Vink. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. M. Morgan and P. Baert, *Acting out Ideas: Performative Citizenship in the Black Consciousness Movement*, American Journal of Cultural Sociology, 2018, 6(3):455–98. K. Zivi, Making Rights Claims: A Practice of Democratic Citizenship. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
[4] E. F. Isin, Ivi.
[5] I. Bloemraad, opt, cit, p. 4.
[6] E. F. Isin, Ivi.
[7] S. Chauvin, and B. Garcés-Mascareñas, *Becoming Less Illegal: Deservingness Frames and Undocumented Migrant Incorporation*, Sociology Compass 2014, 8(4):422–32.

ty in discussions with district authorities. The founder and president of al-Qaim, "Hasan," was the chief interlocutor before he fell ill and eventually passed away in 2014. By all accounts, Hasan was mild-mannered, deferential, and oriented toward compromise in his interactions with municipal authorities. The other main interlocutor was "Amir," a Catalan lawyer and Muslim convert who had established ties with Hasan and other members of al-Qaim through his work offering legal counsel to immigrants seeking to obtain citizenship or regularize their legal situation in Spain. Amir was more assertive and uncompromising in demanding religious accommodations from the district.

Amir viewed being assertive and forceful in his engagements with municipal authorities as necessary due to their intransigence and racism toward immigrants, as well as the reticence of Shi'a of Pakistani descent to defend their rights. His viewpoint and combative stance make sense if we consider his previous experiences and activities. He was a former activist in the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSUC) while it was still a clandestine organization prohibited by Franco's dictatorial regime (1939-1975). He also worked for four years at the Workers' Commission (CCOO), a communist labor union. He spoke to us of police brutality and other forms of state repression that he had personally witnessed. Seeing such abuses had a powerful influence on his perception of governing agencies.

Although Amir's confrontational style colored several of the initial interactions between al-Qaim and municipal authorities, his role in negotiating with local authorities has faded over time due to his involvement with a community in a neighboring city and the emergence of other Pakistani-born leaders with sufficient proficiency in Spanish to dialogue with municipal authorities. "Shabbir," who assumed much of the responsibility for representing al-Qaim when Hasan fell ill, adopted a style of interaction much more akin to that of Hasan than Amir. Shabbir was also from Pakistan's Punjab region. In 1999, he abandoned his pursuit of a law degree to migrate to Athens, where he lived and worked for a year with his brother. However, he found the language difficult to grasp and had trouble adapting to the local lifestyle. In 2000, he traveled to Spain as a tourist and chose to stay after enjoying his visit to Barcelona. When we met Shabbir, he was working at a philanthropical association that promotes the integration of Muslim immigrants. The association's mission was core to his outlook and general approach to civic activism.

The generally flexible and conciliatory stance of Hasan, Shabbir, and other representatives of al-Qaim is evident in how they have responded to the various demands imposed by municipal authorities regarding different aspects of the lamentation processions. For instance, on various occasions, district authorities have rerouted the procession – in some instances with little forewarning – in order to prevent interference with local events and transit. Representatives of al-Qaim could have protested the myriad reroutings of their procession, demanded greater continuity from year to year, and insisted that their preferences be respected. If Amir still had significant sway as an interlocutor, they very well might have. Nevertheless, although they grumbled privately and in confidence, they complied with the district's directives without voicing the full degree of their frustration. The priority placed by al-Qaim's representatives on conciliatory forms of civic performativity that demonstrate their civility and orientation toward compromise is critical for understanding why they have not reacted in a more combative fashion to the multiple reroutings.

The generally conciliatory stance of the al-Qaim's representatives is equally evident in their responses to other limitations imposed by the district. Since 2007, municipal authorities have prohibited minors from practicing *matam* and required adults to wear shirts to ensure that the redness of their chests resulting from *matam* not be visible to the public. Apart from imposing restrictions on youth participation and requirements regarding attire, the city has intervened in how the community narratively explains Ashura to the broader public. When we first began our observations, al-Qaim would distribute pamphlets it had prepared in Spanish that explained the story and broader message of Muharram and Ashura for the general public. The Office of Religious Affairs (OAR) recently proposed that its personnel collaborate with the community to create a new pamphlet about the meaning of Ashura that could be distributed in addition to the ones used previously. Al-Qaim was asked to supply an initial draft that the OAR staff would then revise. The new pamphlet that emerged from this process was in Catalan rather than Spanish. While the previous pamphlets used language and references that were poetic, spiritual, and emotional, the new one was more encyclopedic and neutral in its descriptions. The OAR-produced pamphlet also lacked references to contemporary political issues, whereas the previous pamphlets condemned al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Boko Haram for claiming to represent the true Islam and for citing the Qur'an to justify their crimes.

As in other instances, the representatives of al-Qaim who worked with the OAR on the pamphlet accepted the proposed revisions without any major qualms. This might have been due to their trust in the OAR personnel's judgment regarding the most effective way to convey the history and message of Karbala to the general populace. Or it might have been due to their desire to demonstrate their openness to dialogue and collaboration with OAR personnel. Regardless, the tone and nature of their response was in keeping with the conciliatory form of civic performativity that has characterized their recent engagements with municipal authorities surrounding the organization of public ritual processions.

This conciliatory orientation is equally evident in the emphasis al-Qaim's representatives place on being cognizant of the broader public and complying with local regulations when communicating with the general membership. During one of the evening *majalis* preceding the 2018 Ashura procession, Shabbir gave an impassioned speech in the *imambargah* about the importance of being orderly and respectful toward local residents, and acting as Hussain would act. He told me that he generally emphasizes how Ashura is not an occasion to simply engage in ritual and go home, but also to be conscious of where you are, reach out to those around you, and spread the message of peace and beneficence that Hussain tried to spread. His remarks highlight how, in practice, civic and religious performances may become entwined such that it is difficult to disentangle them empirically.

Although public Shi'a lamentation rituals in Barcelona have civic dimensions and are adapted in accordance with the perceived sensibilities of local audiences, their primary performative logics are religious. From our formal and informal conversations with members of al-Qaim, it was evident that the main audiences they had in mind when participating in public lamentation processions were their Shi'a brethren, whether in Pakistan or India, other European cities, or elsewhere in the diaspora. Showing the world that Barcelona had a strong and vibrant Shi'a community was a source of pride.

Social media provide an important means for Shi'a to share their ritual practices and experiences with distant audiences. Many of the participants in the lamentation processions in Barcelona record their experiences with digital cameras, cellular phones, and tablets. Filming and posting on social media were actively encouraged by leaders of the community. For example, during the aforementioned speech in which Shabbir urged procession participants to be orderly and respectful, he also implored them to record and share their experiences: «By using the resources you have, you should try to share this message with every Muslim through [social] media... And everyone should keep in mind that [the message of Karbala] belongs to everyone. And every person should make their contribution»[8].

Most of those whom we observed recording videos had their devices directed toward the inner circle of *matamis* engaged in the most fervent chanting and displays of *matam*. Many took "selfies" and some filmed the reactions of the general public observing (and oftentimes recording) the procession. A Pakistani media outlet (Almahdi TV) was also present at one of the processions we attended.

As a community, al-Qaim has an active social media presence, mainly on Facebook and YouTube, and to a lesser extent on Instagram. Al-Qaim's official pages are currently managed by Hasan's son, Haider, though he receives material to post from different members of the community. The audiences toward whom al-Qaim's social media postings are directed are primarily ethnic South Asians, as indicated by the languages used. Most of the textual images and commentary on the Facebook and YouTube sites are written in Urdu. There are also some postings and commentary in other South Asian languages, as well as occasional but infrequent postings and commentary in English and Spanish.

The Facebook page currently has over 1.5 thousand likes and over 1.6 thousand followers. There have been 361 posts on the site since it was created in 2012, which include videos, re-posted links, images, and announcements. Of the 112 videos posted (at the time research was conducted for this paper), 74 (66%) were of *matam*, mostly in Barcelona but also in a few other locations abroad. 47 of these captured ritual performances in public space, while 27 capture ritual performances within the *imambargah*. To give an idea of the ethnicity and geography of the audience, the most-watched video of the 2019 Ashura procession (966 views) was liked by 34 people, all of whom had South Asian names. According to their profiles, ten resided in Barcelona and two in other Spanish cities, nine in Pakistan and three in India, and five elsewhere in Europe or the UK (several had profiles that did not include location of residence). The two comments on the video were in Urdu and were religious in orientation (e.g., praise for Hussain). Similar socio-demographic and geographic patterns are characteristic of the viewership of the vast majority of videos posted on the site.

The importance of *matam* to al-Qaim is also reflected in the content of its YouTube channel, which had over 2.5 thousand subscribers at the time research was conducted for this paper. The channel included 794 videos dating back to 2010. Of these, 42% were of *matam* either in public spaces or in *imambargah*s, mainly in Barcelona but also abroad. Most of the other videos were of religious sermons and recitations. The most-watched videos by a significant margin were of Shi'a

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[8] Field recording, September 16, 2018.

practicing *zanjir-zani* in open spaces or *sineh-zani* in large *imambargah*s abroad. These were likely filmed by community members during their pilgrimages to sacred sites (e.g., Karbala) or during visits to Pakistan. About a quarter of the videos filmed outside Barcelona were filmed in Germany, as there are strong connections between al-Qaim and a Shi'a community in Bonn. *Matamis* from Barcelona occasionally travel to Bonn and vice versa to participate in lamentation rituals. As with the Facebook page, most of the commentary on the videos has been posted by ethnic South Asians. The comments are usually messages of condolence or praise in Urdu and, to a lesser extent, English. There are, however, a number of "trolls" whose comments condemn *matam*, especially *zanjir*.

The centrality of *matam* to ritual performativity among members of al-Qaim, despite their cognizance of how the ritual might elicit feelings of unease among locals, stems largely from the history and socio-demographic makeup of the community. As mentioned above, most Shi'a in Barcelona are working-class, first-generation immigrants from Pakistan who remain oriented more so to family and friends abroad than to local Catalans. Generally speaking, *matamis* and those sympathetic to *matam* tend to be working-class, though *matam* is by no means an exclusively working-class ritual[9]. A number of the men we observed practicing *matam* in the *imambargah* had scarring on their backs from having performed *zanjir* in the past. Some continue to practice *zanjir* in Barcelona, either at the *imambargah* or in other enclosed spaces. While not all adult males partook in *matam*, there was strong support for those who did. Nobody whom we interviewed or spoke with informally provided any indication that *matam* – in any of its forms – has ever been a source of dissension within the community. Including *matam* as part of al-Qaim's public processions has never been openly questioned, despite the possibility that the ritual might be interpreted as threatening by some of the neighborhood's residents.

In other diasporic contexts where South Asian Shi'a have had a longer historical presence or are of higher socioeconomic standing, *matam* has elicited greater internal dissension. In London, such dissension has led to legal battles and the splintering of communities[10]. Similar dissension may be found in Toronto, where active and vocal *matamis* have entered into a degree of conflict with certain clerics and other Shi'a opposed to the ritual[11]. In Barcelona, by contrast, members of al-Qaim are more or less in consensus regarding the substance and balance of religious and civic performativities, in large part due to similarities in their social location and in the cultural milieu where they were socialized.

These features of al-Qaim's membership also account for why explicitly civic or political messaging – a form of civic performativity present in Shi'a processions staged in other European contexts[12] – is a minimal part of lamentation processions in Barcelona. None of the processions we observed

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[9] Pinault, David. 1992. The Shi'ites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community. New York: St. Martin's Press.

[10] S. A. Dogra, *Karbala in London: Battle of Expressions of Ashura Ritual Commemorations among Twelver Shi'a Muslims of South Asian Background,* Journal of Muslims in Europe, 2017, 6(2):158–78.

[11] A. Astor, V. A. Blanco, and R. Martínez Cuadros, *The Politics of 'Tradition' and the Production of Diasporic Shi'a Religiosity,* POMEPS Studies, 2018, 32:32–38.

[12] E. Degli Esposti, *The Aesthetics of Ritual--Contested Identities and Conflicting Performances in the Iraqi Shi'a Diaspora: Ritual, Performance and Identity Change*, Politics 2018, 38(1):68–83. K. Spellman-Poots, *Manifestations of Ashura Among Young British Shi'is*, 2012, pp. 40–49, in Ethnographies of Islam: Ritual Performances and Everyday Practices, edited by B. Dupret, T. Pierret, P. G. Pinto, and K. Spellman-Poots. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

included banners or placards with political messaging in Spanish or Catalan. Aside from the pamphlets distributed at the processions, there are no initiatives aimed at spreading the message of Karbala to the broader local public. Non-Shi'a locals are simply not the main audience that members of al-Qaim (other than a few community organizers and representatives) have in mind when performing public rituals.

The orientation of al-Qaim's membership toward foreign, rather than domestic, audiences is also evident in the community's political activities. On various occasions, leaders have organized protest actions within the *imambargah* and broadcast them via Pakistani media outlets. For example, they organized an event at the *imambargah* protesting the assassination of the Iranian general, Qasem Soleimani, in January of 2020. Their statement was given in Urdu and broadcast by a Pakistani media outlet called SBI News HD.[13] A similar protest action was staged at the *imambargah* in 2013 in the wake of a terrorist attack targeting Shi'a in Quetta (Pakistan). Thus far, al-Qaim has yet to organize an event dealing with local civil rights issues (e.g., combatting Islamophobia and other forms of discrimination) or other domestic matters, though leaders displayed solidarity with other Muslim communities in condemning the terrorist attacks that occurred in Barcelona in 2017. The fact that al-Qaim's membership remains oriented primarily toward South Asian Shi'a audiences when engaging in public rituals and political acts is crucial for understanding why more assertive performative logics directed at local audiences do not figure prominently in the community's public lamentation processions.

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[13] The video may be viewed at https://www.facebook.com/101723151174677/videos/2110344362401975/. Retrieved June 8, 2020.

Localizing Islam. Organised religion among young Twelver Shi'ites in Norway

Ingvild Flaskerud (University of Oslo)

this paper I discuss the recent decade's proliferation of new religious organisations among the young Twelver Shi'a Muslims in Norway. The groups are self-governed in the sense of being initiated by the young and administered by them independently from the mosques. Since 2009, nine groups have been established in the Oslo region. The number is relatively high considering that by 2017 there were about ten mosques and religious centres in the area, some supporting their own youth associations.[1] The development concurs with recent years' studies of young Muslims in Europe suggesting their religious behaviour conforms with the late modern tendency to give less attention to traditional religious culture and authority. Much of this research has discussed processes of the individualisation of religion which,[2] in the Muslim case, often is characterized by selective adoptions of elements of Islamic teaching to create eclectic and individualised versions of Islamic belief and practices.[3] The questions that arise are: Why do Twelver Shi'a youth in Norway organise in self-governed groups independently from the mosque? Can the relative high number of groups be explained by a search for individualised and personalised religion?

I give some preliminary answers to these questions by examining the youths' motivations for establishing self-governed groups and how the members proceed to achieve their objectives. Approaching organised religion from below, from the perspective of those who organise, a theoretical underpinning in my analysis draws from Scott.[4] He has connected the concept 'temporality of generations' to the notion of 'problem-space', understood as a discursive formation of concepts, ideas, meanings etc, and a context of argument. Importantly, what defines a problem-space are not simply the posed problems, but the questions asked and the answers that seem worth having. In examining the youths' motivations, I seek to establish their perceived posed problems and the questions they asked. In examining how they responded I seek to identify answers they opted for. I shall argue that the problem space identified by the young generation Twelver Shi'a youth was the need for

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[1] M. Bøe and I. Flaskerud, *A Minority in the Making: The Shi'a Muslim Community in Norway*. Journal of Muslims in Europe, 2017, 6. 179-197.

[2] A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and society in the late modern age* Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991.

[3] F. Peter and E. Arigita, *Introduction: Authorizing Islam in Europe*, The Muslim World. Vol 96. 2006, 537-542; C. Jacobsen. *Islamic Traditions and Muslim Youth in Norway*. Leiden, Brill, 2011; J. Berglund. *Islamic identity and its role in the lives of young Swedish Muslims*, *Contemporary Islam*, 2013, Vol. 7: 207-227.

[4] D. Scott, *The Temporality of Generations*, New Literary History, 2012, 45:157–181.

finding ways of localizing Islam in the Norwegian social context. While engaging each other in critical reflections on the meaning of Islam, the objective goes beyond creating individualised interpretations and practices. Rather, it created opportunities for the Shi'a youth to speak to society from the position of being a religious minority in a democratic society.

Data and method

The data draw from nine groups run by young Twelver Shi'as from about the age 30 to 15. The first group was established in 2009, the most recent in 2021, all in the Oslo region. Most members of the groups were born or raised in Norway. Their parents' cultural heritage was mainly from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. The youth were competent in Norwegian which was their shared language. It was used when they convened and posted information and thoughts online. Many also mastered the language of their parents and some formalised this competence by obtaining a university degree. References to religious classical texts in Arabic and Persian thus occurred in the data. In terms of organisation, the groups typically had a board or organising committee and, in some groups, both men and women were represented. It is difficult to establish the number of members in the groups. In each case, a core faction of members was involved in planning and organising activities, while a higher number of people attended meetings, and a much higher number registered as members on the groups' Facebook accounts. In obtaining data, I have used a combination of methods, include participant observation at meetings and stands organised by the groups, semi-formal interviews with members, and reviewing information available at Facebook and Homepages.

The groups' motivations for organising

The groups' motivations for organising varied somewhat, but three important questions were addressed: How adequately respond to current ideas about Islam and Muslims endorsing violence? How adequately respond to offences against Islam in a peaceful and socially acceptable manner, while insisting on the right to freedom of religion? How support each other in finding ways to live harmoniously in the Norwegian society? The questions were based on their everyday experiences as young Muslims in Norway. A general answer to all of these questions was the need for spreading knowledge about Islam. A new question emerging from this acknowledgment was how?

Nations, according to Anderson, are imagined because its members are not likely to know all their fellow-members, to meet with them, or even hear from them. Nevertheless, in the mind of every citizen is nurtured an image of their mutual communion. Nations can thus be understood as 'imagined'

communities.[5] The last decade's public debate display a general attitude of scepticism towards Islam and distrust in Muslims. The Norwegian public's perception of religion, Lundby argues, is very much shaped by news media and social media.[6] The global media debate on Islam and Muslims has in the recent decades, particularly since 9/11 2001, been associated with a Western-led war on Islamic terror, and new eruptions of war and violence instigated by individuals and groups acting in the name of Islam. Among these was the Islamic State, IS, (Daesh in Arabic), gaining momentum since 2014, when seeking to stablish a Salafi inspired state in Iraq and Syria. Another cluster of events is the violent reactions from Muslims across the world to what they perceive as attempts to defame Islam, such as the many Muhammad cartoons crises (in 2005 2006, 2010, 2015) and the production of the Islamophobic film the *Innocence of Muslims* in 2012. Non-Muslims often see violent reactions from Muslims as indications of their lack of respect for freedom of speech. In addition, there are the prolonged media discussions in Western European countries about the legal status of 'Muslim rights', such as women wearing headscarf, halal food, minarets on mosques, and debates about the influence from visiting imams trained abroad.

Norwegian newspapers, radio, television, and social media have addressed the global debates referred to above, combined with national versions of related topics. Debates about Islam and Muslims have revolved around politics of integration, Islamic terrorism, and whether Islam is compatible with western values (identified for example as the freedom of speech and women's rights). From 2008, and increasingly since 2012, when many of the Twelver Shi'a groups were established, the debates were stirred by the establishment of two Sunni Salafi youth groups. 'IslamNet', founded in 2008, takes its authoritative guidance from Salafi scholars based in Saudi Arabia and can been characterized as an expression of 'puritan Salafism'.[7] 'Profetens Ummah' (The Prophet's ummah) consolidated in 2012 after organising street demonstrations against the Muhammad cartoons in 2010, the Norwegian participation on the NATO ISAF Forces in Afghanistan in 2012, and against the Islamophobic film the *Innocence of Muslims* also in 2012. The group has endorsed Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the 'Islamic State', in Syria and Iraq and can be described as salafi-jihadists.[8] The Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) estimate that around 100 Norwegian male Muslims went to Syria to fight for the Islamic state, the al-Nusra front and related groups. As some began returning to Norway in 2015, the public debate has revolved around to what extent they represent a national security threat.[9] A telling example of the general lack of trust towards the Muslim population in Nor-

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[5] B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London, 1983.

[6] K. Lundby, *Religion i medienes grep. Medialisering i Norge*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, 2021.

[7] S. Bangstad and M. Linge, *Da´wa is Our Identity'– Salafism and IslamNet's Rationales for Action in a Norwegian Context*, Journal of Muslims in Europe, 2015, 174-196.

[8] Dagbladet 26.01.2012. Spokespersons for the group have provided ambiguous answers to journalists about possible attacks in Norway. Aftenposten 02.feb. 2012, http://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/islam-debatten/islam-net-leder-mener-ingen-muslimer-kan-vaere-motstandere-av-doedsstraff/a/10082007/
See, also: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOk35IPTDLw
Arfan Bhatti warned the Norwegian people that their security would be jeopardized if not Norwegian soldiers are pulled out of Afghanistan. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzZ9vZXKol4 Promotion video for a demonstration against the Norwegian presence in Afghanistan.

[9] Published April 10. 2018: https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/aktuelt/aktuelle-saker/2018/hjemvendte-fremmedkrigere.html
Published May 13. 2019: https://www.nrk.no/norge/pst_-ytterligere-ti-norske-fremmedkrigere-trolig-drept-1.14549058

way around the times many Shiʻa youth groups were established, is the speculations that evolved in the media after the terror attacks in and near Oslo on 22 July 2011. Seventy-seven people were killed when a bomb detonated by the government building and young people attending the Labour party's annual summer camp at Utøya were massacred. Before the perpetrator was identified, the media speculated on possible connections with 'Islamic terrorism'. As it turned out, the terrorist was a young, male ethnic Norwegian motivated by ideas to be found to the far right. Nevertheless, those initial speculations created a new awareness among many Muslims about how they are imagined among fellow citizens. A question emerging among the Twelver Shiʻa youth since 2009 was thus how to present a more 'correct' understanding of Islam as a peaceful religion.

In addition, the youth were motivated to organise in order to support one another in the face of criticism they encountered in everyday life, for example, women for wearing the headscarf in the public. Many youth were also unhappy about how the Prophet Muhammad and holy symbols were offended and ridiculed in Norway and internationally. For example, in 2019 and 2020 the group SIAN (Stop the Islamisation of Norway) publicly burned copies of the Quran.[10] A pressing question arising from this, which the Twelver Shiʻa groups in various ways sought to deal with, was how to adequately respond to such offences in a peaceful and socially acceptable manner, while insisting on their right to freedom of religion.

A third motivated the Shiʻa youth to organise was harassment from Sunni Muslim youth inspired by Salafi ideology. Like in every country in Europe, the Twelver Shiʻa constitutes a minority within the broader Muslim minority group. In the years between 2008 and 2013, many Shiʻa high school pupils told me about harassments from schoolmates influenced by the Sunni Salafi youth group IslamNet, who expressed intolerant attitudes towards non-Salafi Muslims.[11] The Shiʻa were accused of being infidels (*kuffar*), and many felt intimidated as some IslamNet members joined the Prophet's Ummah who endorsed holy war on infidels. Again, a pressing question was how to adequately respond to inter-Muslim harassment in a peaceful and socially acceptable manner.

Norwegian governments have not remained indifferent to the pressure felt by religious minorities. For example, in 2013, the Ministry of Culture published policy statement called 'A faith and life stance tolerant society. A concise faith and life stance policy.' It introduced eight basic principles, among them, 'everyone should accept to be exposed for other's faith and life stance practices in the public space' (2013, Nou, p. 17). Although the document may not have been known to the Twelver Shiʻa youth, public debates revolving around tolerance towards religion has also been a motivating factor for organising.

How to respond: Self-teaching in independent groups

The questions asked and answers given by Twelver Shiʻa youth organising in self-governing groups

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[10] https://www.dagsavisen.no/fremtiden/nyheter/2019/11/25/sian-profil-sier-han-vil-brenne-koranen-igjen/
https://www.dagbladet.no/nyheter/sian-brente-koranen/73134128

[11] As of 2013, IslamNet had around 2000 members. U. Mårtensson. 'Norwegian Haraki Salafism: *The Saved Sect Hugs the Infidels*, Comparative Islamic Studies 2012, 8 (1–2): 113–138.

suggest they have identified a problem space revolving around how to develop new interpretive spaces to advance new understandings and practices of Islam in Norway. The first step in the process was to develop sound knowledge about the teaching of Islam among themselves. For example, a young male lecturer asked at a group's meeting: 'Is Islam inherited from one generation to the next? No.' At another meeting, a speaker asked: 'If someone asks you about Islam, what do you answer? That you do not know?' To develop their religious knowledge, the youths did not turn to the mosques to seek help from peers educated in Islamic subjects. This is remarkable, since the first Twelver Shi'a mosque was established in Oslo almost forty years ago, in 1979 and the mosque environments were well known to most youth as children often accompany their parent to the mosques, particularly for the celebration of religious holidays. Instead, they organised independently of mosques and relied on self-teaching, working together in groups to identify which knowledge was necessary to pursue and to explain to each other. The justification for their independence was a desire to develop an understanding of Islam which was appropriate for living as Muslims in Norway. As explained to me by a young man, the young knew the local language, they grew up in the Norwegian culture and could now create a 'Norwegian Islam'.[12] Having established groups independent of traditional authorities such as the local mosques, each group developed its own method to create spaces that could inspire reflections around various issues regarding Islamic belief, practices, and behaviour.

I now turn to a short description of how the groups worked to develop new interpretive spaces to teach each other about religion through the methods of discussing texts, giving lectures, and posting material online.[13] One group translated Arabic and Persian religious texts into Norwegian and printed the texts as booklets. They were intended for a Muslim as well as non-Muslim public and available at an affordable price. During board meetings, the members decided which texts to translate, and a guiding principle was to select topics they believed there was a need for more knowledge about. In conversations with me, a member explained that considering increasing Islamic terror like IS, it was important to show Islam stands for peace, love, grace, and respect and that "Islam teaches us to help, collaborate and contribute to the best for everyone in society".[14] In the view of the members of this group, information about the teachings of central Muslim figures had the potential of altering the way people thought about Islam. Differently from the other groups, they were transparent about which religious scholars they refer to. For example, a text authored by Ayatollah Sayed Sadik al-Hussaini al-Shirazi explaining about the guidance offered by the Prophet Muhammad on how to behave in this life to live well in the hereafter. This book was described as important to translate because it demonstrates that Islam is the path of grace and love.

The other group translating texts instead discussed texts at a study circle. The purpose was to motivate young people to read texts on their own. They met every other week to translate passages from the Quran, Hadith, supplication prayer (dua) and speeches of the Prophet Muhammad, Imam Ali, Imam Husayn and others into Norwegian and to discuss content and meaning. However, after

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[12] Conversation January 18, 2015.

[13] Only one group has engaged in face-to face interactions and conversations with the persons in Norwegian public on street-stands, see: I. Flaskerud. *Street Theology: Vernacular theology and Muslim Youth in Norway*, Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations, 2018, Vol.29(4), 485-507.

[14] Conversation January 18, 2015.

the attacks in Norway in 2011, the members of this group changed their method. They felt an urgent need to counteract prejudice, hate and extremism, and initiated interfaith dialogue collaboration with Christian and Jewish groups. In meetings, Muslim, Christian and Jewish youth introduced their religious traditions and conceptualizations, for example on fast and prayer, and discuss similarities and difference. They also visited each other places of devotion, such as a church, a synagogue, and a mosque.

Three groups convened for seminars and lectures in which members prepared speeches and comments on topics relevant to being a young Muslim in Norway and on the message of Islam. The format of the meetings resembled lectures and seminars at educational institutions like university and college. Speeches were often supported with Power Point and followed by a question-and-answer session. Most attendants were familiar with this format from their educational background. The topics discussed were known from their everyday experiences. For example, picking up on recent years' public debates about how poorly Muslims seem to integrate, one lecturer encourages the audience to reflect on how Muslims could integrate and what Islam says about integration. Arguing that integration is the opposite of segregation, she underlined three points: 'be involved in society, have knowledge, and interact with non-Muslims'. How to be involved in society was also discussed in relation to situations when Islam was defamed. For example, after the attack at Carlie Hebdo in 2015, the topic of a lecture was how to respond when Islam is offended. The speaker advised people to be patient and calm since the Prophet Muhammad always encouraged people to be knowledgeable and spread knowledge. On some occasions, however, critique was directed at the wide society. For example, during one question-and-answer session, frustration was raised regarding the status of religion in society. It was perceived as being a paradox that although there is freedom of religion, it is permitted to offend religion. During seminars and lectures, critical reflections on social and religio-political issues were thus often turned inwards, to discuss what they, as Muslims, could do to deal various issues. I suggest such self-critical reflections on how to respond and react do not indicate submissiveness to the current situation. Rather, it points to empowerment, to find ways to speak back to society.

Differently from the groups introduced above, two groups communicated on Facebook and Homepages. These formats permit people to post and share information and opinions. Facebook also facilitate people responding to posts, which in this case, sometimes resulted in long discussions online. In general, the sites presented information about religious holidays, charity work, stories about the Imams, and their saying about worship and devotion. Advice was often contextualised. For example, to read the supplication *ziyarat ashura* was presented as a good alternative when, during the pandemic, it was impossible to visit Imam Husayn's shrine located far away in Karbala, Iraq. On the Homepages, the method of communication was instead monologic. Posted texts informed about the tenets of faith and ritual practice, while short and long articles explained about various issues, such as prayer, the merits of pilgrimage and the position of ahl al-bait in Islam. An entry called 'Often asked questions' would take the reader on to articles discussing 'What are the rights of women in Islam' and 'What does Islam say about terrorism?'

What seems to be the benefit from organising in groups independent from the mosques was to

be able to define the questions asked and to explore possible answers based on the youths' own everyday experiences and perceptions of the time and society they live in. Organising in groups to self-educate, they benefitted from sharing resources, experiences, and reflections.

Concluding remarks: Localizing Islam in a new interpretive space

A shared purpose among Twelver Shi'a youth groups established in Norway since 2009, has been to localize Islam in new interpretive spaces in the Norwegian society. Localization in this context implied using the vernacular language, develop a vernacular terminology to speak about Islam, and speaking to a local audience of non-Muslims and Muslims. It also meant engaging with current issues such as such as terrorism, religious tolerance and plurality, the right of women, and peaceful coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims. Moreover, it involved developing teaching methods and knowledge and competence suitable to the local context. On the one hand, they offered first-hand knowledge of classical texts. In mediating knowledge, they did not, however, use instructor-centred methods applied in many mosque schools and Muslim higher education institutions.[15] Traditional authorities were also partly side lined in that they did not, with one exception, mention any of the Twelver Shi'a authoritative religious scholars known as *marjaʿ al-taqlid* (source for emulation). This is remarkable, since every Shi'a lay-person is expected to choose a religious scholar to act as their source of guidance (*marjaʿ al- taqlid*).[16] A discussion during a group's meeting in 2015 may throw some light on this. Some members asked why it was not permitted to quote a *marjaʿ al-taqlīd* on Facebook and in lectures when in fact the religious scholars were being anonymously referred to. The explanation given by members of the board was that discussants often attack each other over which religious scholar is right and not. Such disputes among the laity drew attention away from the Prophet and his family (ahl al-bayt). To focus the debates on ideas and not persons, they adopted the policy not to connect quotations to any religious scholars. Instead, the youth developed a critical and dialogical model which encouraged self-reflection, and which created spaces for debating and reflecting on what to think and do. Answers were presented in an advisory style often formulated in an open-ended manner highlighting ethical underpinnings. For example, a male lecturer discussing 'What does Islam say about terrorism?' referred to a story about the generosity of the Prophet Muhammad and concluded that terrorism is evaluated as 'the greatest sin'. The lecturer thus did not simply make the point that terrorism is "un-Islamic" but offered generosity as alternative an ethical ideal. What defines generosity was, however, left for the individual to work out.

The methods of self-education chosen by the Twelver Shi'a youth groups thus span from information which can be transformed into a kind of knowledgeability described by Bereiter as 'statable', i.e., knowledge which the knower can put into sentences and stories, and which can be discussed, evaluated, contradicted, and defended as true, to develop understanding which, Bereiter argues,

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[15] A. Sahin, *New Directions in Islamic Education*, Kube Academic, Markfield, 2013, 13.

[16] A. Abbas, *In between the madrasa and the marketplace: The designation of clerical leadership in modern Shi'ism*, in: *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, S. A. Arjomand (ed.) State University of New York Press, New York, 1988, pp. 98-99.

implies a relation between the knower and the object of understanding, and is gained from experience.[17] Based on this, the notion of problem space, as formulated by Scott as a discursive formation of concepts, ideas, meanings, a context of argument. the questions asked and the answers that seem worth having, could be expanded to include methods of education. The establishment of as many as nine groups, suggest the youth were exploring different types of educating methods, information, interpretive frames, questions, and answers. The fact that many youth were members of several groups suggest they were in a process of exploring different ways of localizing Islam. Ultimately, the answers would be developed by the individual members, but the locally organised interpretive spaces created opportunities for the Shi'a youth to speak to society from the position of being a religious minority in a democratic society.

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[17] C. Bereiter, *Education and Mind in the Knowledge Age,* Routledge, London, 2010, 137-139.

Western Shi'a Studies in the Liquid Modernity Time: A Domestic Historiography Experience

Abbas Ahmadvand, Shahid Beheshti University

Background and Definitions

Orientalism derives from the word Orient, which means the East, to orientate, or to go towards the light[1]. The term recently has been replaced by terms such as Islamic Studies, Arabic Studies or Middle Eastern Studies[2]. However, these words have a closely interconnected lexical network that is closely related to each other. As Arberry explains in his famous book *The British Orientalists*[3], China and Japan are studied under the term the Far East; the Near East consists of Israel or the Hebrews, and what remains of the East in the meaning of the Orient is Islam: Islam as a religion, as a culture, a civilization, or a government. Whatever its meaning, Orientalism is a field whose task is to study the East, its history, customs, culture, geography, economics, etc[4].

The Field in a Socio-Cultural Context

Oriental studies is influenced by and related to the whole society, the scientific community, and cultural orientations because the researcher basically takes the subject of his research from society. Orientalism and its approaches, goals, methods, and system of subjects have also been influenced by many events, such as the Crusades, the Reformation, the invention of the printing industry, and colonialism. One of the most important of these events was the World War II, which brought about historical revisionism, many long-term developments in the field of politics, culture, economy, and society. These were important actors in the fields of Islamic history, Quranic studies, Hadith studies, etc[5].

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[1] N. d. "East", "Orient" and "Orientalism", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, London, 2003.

[2] B. al Bustani, *Da,ira al Ma,arif (in Arabic),"al Istishrak"*, Beirut, 1876; E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, London: Penguin, 1977, pp. 51-52.

[3] A. J. Arberry, *British Orientalists*, London: William Collins, 1943, pp.7-8.

[4] W. Said *opt., cit.*, pp.51-52. Abd al Rahman Umayra, *al Islam wa al Muslimun* (in Arabic), Beirut: Dar al Djil, N.D, p. 90. J. Warrdenburg, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1960-2005, s.v "Mustashrikun".

[5] M. Asadi, *Islamic Studies in the Anglophone West from the beginning until the second Council of Vatican (1965)* (in Persian), Tehran: Samt Publications, 2001, pp. 78-79; N. Daniel, *Islam and the west, the making of an image*, Oxford: One World Publications, 1997, pp.42-4357, 65-67; T. Ramadan, *Plotting the Future of Islamic studies, Teaching and Research in the Current Political Climate*, in Higher Education Journal, Academic Matters 2007, p. 6.

1960s and occurrence of liquid modernity

Going forward, looking at Europe and the West from the 1960s onwards, we are faced with strange decades. This is the age of space, the age of extreme social, political, economic changes, the age of movements, journalism, and the popularization of politics. All these issues are events that occurred during this period, and, in a word, these events signaled the emergence of postmodernism. However, a group of important thinkers and sociologists of the world who do not want to use the term postmodernism use other interpretations. This latter issue constitutes the basis of this article. For example, Anthony Giddens uses a term for late modernity that is completely different from earlier modernity[6]. Giddens himself was, of course, influenced by the famous sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who in fact used the term liquid modernity[7]. Ulrich Beck later elaborated on this subject in his famous work Risk Society[8].

Theoretical framework

According to Giddens, Bauman, and Beck[9], the West or Europe has entered into the so-called liquid modernity, which means that the modern human being lives in a liquid age as if he were a tourist. The earlier fixed, stable, less changeable conditions no longer exist. The modern human being travels like a tourist throughout his life. His values are liquid. The environments he lives in and the jobs he changes are constantly fluctuating, and this is because of the eras and circumstances that have happened, and everything is changing[10]. As we move forward, with the computer revolution, individualism and the uncertainty of things have substantially overshadowed all branches of science in genera and humanities in particular.

The Situation of Islamic Studies during liquid modernity

In the meantime, Orientalism or Islamic studies underwent profoundly serious changes; as it entered the world of liquid modernity, its paradigms and views were all influenced. For example, in a Persian article entitled "The Evolution of the Concept of Orientalism and the Negligence of Muslims," I explained that before the era of liquid modernity, an Orientalist was a Christian European who, from an external perspective, explored the East. People like Noeldeke and Goldziher are the best representatives of the current or the branch of this Orientalism[11]. Currently, Western Muslim Orientalists

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[6] A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford University Press, 1991. pp. 9-10, 28, 144, 180, 184, 209, 228.

[7] Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2013, Introduction.

[8] U. Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, Translated by Mark Ritter, London: Sage Publications, 1992, pp. 3, 23, and 49.

[9] C. Dowson, F. Bauman, M. Beck, *Giddens and Our Understanding of Politics in Late Modernity*, Journal of Power, Vol.3, 2nd Issue, 2010, pp.189-207.

[10] Z. Bauman, *Liquid Life*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2005, pp. 1, 3, 10, 11, 39 ff, 80 ff.

[11] A. Ahmadvand, *The Evolution of the Concept of Orientalism and the Negligence of Muslims*, Journal of Islamic History, Vol.1, No.2, 2011, pp. 5-23.

or several Muslims were entering this field of study: From Mohammad Asad to Mari Ingrid Matson and to Hamid Algar[12] and many others (Tables 1-2). They had converted to Islam and adopted Islamic names, which did not mean a mere change of name; it signaled a methodological change in the way Muslims studies the Quran, revelation, history, and Islam from a comprehensive and intra-religious perspective. Furthermore, in Iran and some other Islamic countries, there appeared a generation of people who were influenced by Western Orientalists emerged who were Muslims, Iranians, Arabs, or Turks, and thought in the same way as Westerners. This liquidity, like great heat melted down the mountain of ice, formed by Orientalism and Islamic studies gradually changed its paradigms, themes, methods, and attitudes. If we compare the entries of the Leiden *Encyclopedia of Islam* in the first edition[13] with the second edition[14] and the third one[15], which is currently being written, we will understand this issue.

Gradually, other issues emerged: conversion to Islam, immigration to Europe and the West, and especially the "Mediterranean area" on which this conference is being held. Algerians, Moroccans, Libyans who lived and worked in Spain, France, Italy, and other countries, and sometimes married indigenous peoples, and their second and third generations were coming from a Muslim background. Muslims, i.e. Muslims who are referred to as the European Muslims. We came across a phenomenon called European Islam that despite apparent similarities, had serious differences with the traditional form of Islam in Islamic countries, for example, in Saudi Arabia and the central areas of the Islamic world. These changes in paradigms created another era of Islamic studies and Shi'a studies, which is also being considered at this conference. Of course, I am very pleased about this, because Islam or Shi'ism is not limited to the East or the West of the world. According to Rumi[16] this East and West are geographical boundaries. Wherever the sun rise is the east, and wherever the sun sets is the west.

Islamic/Shi'a studies is a domestic historiography at home

Our frame of reference is the logical thinking. The occurrence of this phenomenon caused Western and Eastern Islamologists and Shi'ite scholars to come to the scene and, as if they were filming a scene, everyone worked with their angle and perspective. Especially since Shi'a studies in Europe also had an interesting feature: unlike the previous generation of Islamologists or Shi'ite scholars, the scholar or Orientalist would not research a religion, world, or culture from an external perspective and only from the books. Also, they became more and more aware of the cultural capacities of Islamic societies, social capacities, and the common heritage of Islamic societies, and these were addressed in research. Furthermore, a new research method emerged. As we know encyclopedia in the West in the course of Orientalism is a symbol of a neutral and phenomenological, non-judgmental and normative approach. Islam cannot be known by reading books; one must live it and understand its rituals and traditions. Incidentally, if it is as close as our home and history that we can later

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[12] For an Example, See: *The life and Works of Muslim Orientalists*, under the supervision of Abbas Ahmadvand with the assistance of Iranian Researchers Fund, no.91002710, Tehran 2012.

[13] M. Th. Houtsma et al. (eds.), *The Encyclopædia of Islam: A Dictionary of the Geography, Ethnography and Biography of the Muhammadan Peoples*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1913–38. (4 Volumes. and Supplements).

[14] Edited by P. J. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs et al., *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, 12 vols. with indexes, etc., Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960–2005.

[15] ibidem.

[16] See: Edited by. R. A. Nicholson, *J. Rumi, Mathnavi*, , Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1925-1933, Book 4, Verse 3058.

understand those societies more deeply and correctly.

If we realize these mentioned points, we will see that fortunately many works have been produced in different languages and in different countries with the attitude that is the result of the era of liquid modernity. To summarize, our task is to write the history of this current and the wave of Western Islam and Shi'ite Studies, to analyze them quantitatively and qualitatively, to know the trends, and to compare the German, English, Spanish, French, and Italian schools together in order to have a more complete and accurate image and to know that we also entered the liquid age in Shi'ite studies. To give an example, the encyclopedia contains some entries about family, even in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Modern Islamic World* [17], under the entry of family it is stated that the family faced challenges during the colonization and its values were influenced. Therefore, communicating, marriage, and all that has changed and is becoming similar to Western culture. It seems necessary to begin writing the history of Islamic/Shi'a studies in their new era in Muslim countries, namely in the era of Liquid modernity and try to understand their new direction.

Conclusion Tips

Research in liquid Modernity times has its own requirements. Islamic studies in general and Shi'a studies in particular are no exception to this rule. Today, European and Western Islamologists and Shi'a Scholars no longer study the subject of their research from an external perspective and behind their books. The phenomenon of European Islam has made this generation of western scholars and researchers write about their own life, their own city and the current customs nearby. Now the volume of scientific research (Using the comprehensive approach) of this generation in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, etc. has increased so much that enough attention should be paid to writing the history of this kind of Orientalism, Islamology and Shi'a studies.

Annex

Table no. 1: Some orientalists who converted to Islam based on Abbas Ahmadvand et el. 2012.

Causes of Conversion to Islam	Orientalists Name	Descriptions
Quran	Tofian Tiufa Nufa, Lois Lamya al-Faruqi, Alexander Nelson Webb, David Musa Pidcock, Murad Wilfried Hofmann, Hamid Marcus, Scott Lucas	
History and Life of Prophet Mohammad	Timothy John Winter Abd Al- Hakim Murad, Rene Jean Marie Joseph Guenon, Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch or mah yerovitch, David Musa Pidcock	Meyerovitch attracted to Islam because of its universality and Pidcock studied Quran with a comparison to the other divine books and attracted to power of reseaning in Islam
Studying Islamic books and being influenced by great religious and literary figures, Shi'ite scholars and Orientalists	Bilal Philips, John (Yahya) Cooper, Julius Abdulkerim Germanus, Vincent Mansour Monteil, Christian Yahya Bono, Martin Lings	
Muslim Rituals and Daily Life; Travel to some Islamic Countries Such as Saudi Arabia,Muslim parts of India, Pakistan,Turkey and Bosnia Herzegovina	Mari Ingrid Mattson,Hamid Algar, David Musa Pidcock, Alexander Nelson Webb,Murad Wilfried Hofmann,-Mohammad Asad,Mohammad Marmaduke Pickthall, Lird Headley, Oskar(Othman) Rescher	
The peaceful views of Islam	Khalid Yasin, Bilal Philips	

Table no. 2: Nationalities of orientalists who converted to Islam based on Abbas Ahmadvand et el. 2012

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[17] *Oxford Encyclopedia of Modern Islamic World,* Edited by. J. L. Esposito, Oxford University Press, 2009.

Nationality	Orientalists Names
Iranian	David Benjamin Keldani
British	Hamid Algar, David Musa Pidcock, Mohammad Marmaduke Pickthall, John (Yahya) Cooper, Martin Lings, Timothy John Winter, Lird Headley
German	Titus (Ibrahim) Burckhardt, Oskar(Othman) Rescher, AUGUST MULLER, Murad Wilfried Hofmann
American	Lois Lamya al-Faruqi, Khalid Yahya Blankinship, Abdul Hakim Sherman Jackson, Alexander Nelson Webb, Bilal Philips,-Scott Lucas, Mari Ingrid Matson,Khalid Yasin
Canadian	Mari Ingrid Matson
Bulgarian	Tofian Tiufa Nufa
French	Christian Yahya Bono, Rene Jean Marie Joseph Guenon, Vincent Mansour Monteil, Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch or Mah Yerovitch

Shi'ite Studies in the West

Book by: Seyed Abolghasem Naqibi and Abbas Ahmadvand
Review by: Mina Moazzeni (University of Shahis Beheshti)

Book cover: A review of Shi'a Studies in the West

For a long time, the majority of studies on Islam were conducted by scholars that were neither Muslims nor lived in Islamic countries. These studies were mainly based on Sunni interpretations of Islam. Due to the lack of Shi'ite literature in European languages and the extent of the West's historical encounter with Sunnis from Andalusia, Sicily, and eastern Europe, especially the Balkans to the Indian and southern subcontinent and East Asia, Shi'ism was neglected in most studies. However, some researches on Shi'ism have been conducted in the West and Shi'ite researchers in Iran have written many critics in response to them. This book is an attempt to categorize and analyze the Shi'ite studies in the West[1] to not only identify the weaknesses and strengths of these researches but also start a conversation around academic cooperation among Muslim and Non-Muslim researchers around the world.

Introduction

Europeans first came across the concept of Shi'a Islam during the Crusades. Before that, their knowledge of Islam was solely limited to Sunni Islam. During the Crusades, because of the inevitable contacts that were established between East and West, Western historians and scholars became aware of Shi'ism. In fact, William of Tyre was the first to regard the distinction between Shi'a and Sunni Islam and to mention them in his works. Other scholars became acquainted with Shi'a Islam under his influence, but at that time the understanding of Shi'ism was very limited. The Ismailis, also known as

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[1] S.A. Naqibi and A. Ahmadvand, *Shi'ite Studies in the West*, Shahid Motahari University Press, Tehran 2021 (1399 Solar Hijri).

the Order of Assassins, were the first Shi'ite sect to be introduced to Western scholars, and this led to them perceiving Shi'ites only as rebels against the Islamic caliphate.

During the 15th and 16th centuries, at the same time as the beginning of Islamic studies in the West, European scholars became interested in learning about Islam, and thus learned the Arabic language and became acquainted with important Shi'ite texts. One of these texts was *Nahj al-Balaghah*, which Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy studied in his research on Islam. Later, in the 19th century, rapid developments took place, and the Shi'ites and Shi'a thinking were realized in the studies of great orientalists. Some important events during this period were that Heinrich Fleischer corrected the book *One Hundred Words (by Amir al-Mu'minin Ali)* by Rashid al-Din Vatvat and published it in German. Gerlof van Vloten wrote the book *Shi'a and Mahdaviat during the Umayyad Caliphate* in which he historically explored the formation of various Muslim sects, especially Shi'ites, and their internal beliefs and sects. Goldziher has written important works on Shi'ite studies in Europe and Germany, as well as Julius Wellhausen and Rudolf Strothmann, who studied Islamic sects, including the Twelver Shi'ites. Amid their debates about Islam and its internal differences, these scholars addressed the issue of Shi'a Islam as a political conflict with the intention of confronting the authority of the Islamic Caliphate.

In the 20th century, this way of viewing Shi'ites as a revolt against the central Islamic power continued until Dwight Martin Donaldson studied the Shi'ite countries of Iran and Iraq and wrote a book entitled *The Shi'ite Religion: A History of Islam in Persia and Iraq*, after living in Iran for 16 years. This was the first time that a western researcher gave character to Shi'a Islam in his studies. His book became a source for Shi'ite studies.

After the Second World War, the path that Donaldson had paved for research in Shi'ite studies was continued. After 1980, some notable events, such as the Lebanese Civil War, the Islamic Revolution of Iran, and the Iraqi Civil and Foreign Wars, attracted the attention of the Western scientific community and expanded the boundaries of Shi'ite studies, especially on Twelver Shi'ite. During this period, many works were compiled in the field of Shi'ite studies. Gradually, a need developed to write its history, to examine where the path of studies has gone and where it will continue in the future. There was also a need to evaluate the quality of the literature of Shi'ite studies, and to identify their strengths and weaknesses. In the West, many detailed books on the history of Islamic studies were written. On the other hand, after a while, Iranian Shi'ite scholars and researchers viewed themselves as the center of these studies and did not endure the external view of Western scholars. Thus, a movement began in Iran intending to analyze and criticize Western literature in the field of Shi'ite studies. Many books were translated to Persian for this purpose. As a result, the process of answering or Muslim responses began, and a new group of literature was written in response to Western works. For instance, Heinz Halm's book, The Shi'ites, was translated and widely critiqued, and numerous articles were written in response to it. Today, we have two groups of scholars who are discussing Shi'ism and are researching and writing literature.[2]

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[2] A. Ahmadvand, *A Review of Shi'ite Studies in the West (Gozari bar Motāleāt-e Shi'i dar Gharb)*, Maqālāt va Barresihā, No.63, Summer 1998, pp. 153-183.

Influenced and followed by Western researchers who wrote the history of Shiʻite studies, several Iranian and Arab researchers also wrote similar books. In Iran, the first person to pay attention to the subject of historiography and the study of Shiʻite studies was Mojtaba Minavi in an article called *Islam through the eyes of Christians*. Later, the *Encyclopedia of Orientalists* by Abd al-Rahman Badawi was translated into Persian and then an *Encyclopedia of Orientalists* was compiled at the Iranian Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies. An Iranian researcher named Seyyed Mostafa Hosseini Tabatabai wrote a book called *Critique of the Works of Orientalists*. Later, Morteza Asadi published a book entitled *Islamic Studies in the English-speaking West from the Beginning to the Second Vatican Council in 1965*. Also, Dr. Mohsen Al-Weeri published a book entitled *Islamic Studies in the West*. All of these studies sought to examine, categorize, and periodize the works produced in the West, and the works produced in response to them. These researchers studied the characteristics of each period, the scholars and historians, their methodology, and their strengths and weaknesses. *Shiʻite Studies in the West* by Naqibi and Ahmadvand was also published to continue the trend of analyzing the history of Shiʻite studies. It is a collection of six articles and each of them is written by a Shiʻite expert in Iran who has studied this issue from a particular perspective.

Summary of Contents

The first article in the book examines the history of Shiʻite studies from the beginning to the present. Although this article focuses more on the studies conducted in the twentieth century, by periodizing previous studies, it shows the impact of the studies of previous centuries in the twentieth century. It also focuses on the critical and revisionist approaches in studies from the twentieth century and demonstrates the fundamental changes in these studies. According to the conclusions of this article, in the twentieth century, the attention of Western scholars to Shiʻite theology and the Qurʼan increased, and research on Shiʻite rites and rituals flourished. The cultural presence of Shiʻites in Southeast Asia, East Asia, and the West, as well as the influence of Shiʻite researchers in Western academies, has also been considered.

The second article examines new research in Shiʻite history. This article presents some of the research on Shiʻism published in recent decades in English, French, and German, with particular emphasis on the emergence of the Imami Shiʻite majority, the meaning of Shiʻism among Shiʻites, and the spread of theoretical unity among them. This article proposes that any social or political history of Shiʻism will inevitably be biased in the first place, as when we consider early Islam, the division between analytical categories and intellectual progress and religious principles and beliefs is somewhat affected.

In the third article the authors translate and review the entry "Shiʻa Islam" in the Encyclopedia of the Qurʼān. In addition, they examine the state of Western Shiʻite studies and knowledge in the mentioned encyclopedia, and the point of view of Western encyclopedias on Shiʻism.

The fourth article has been compiled in the course of Shakht's approaches in jurisprudential studies and the position of Shiʻite jurisprudence in these studies. Yousef Shakht (1902-1969) is one of the

orientalists who has devoted the main field of his Islamic studies to jurisprudence. This article clearly shows that Shi'ite jurisprudence, especially the Twelver Imami jurisprudence, has been neglected in the jurisprudential studies of Shakht.

The fifth article shows the religious developments of the Safavid era in the studies of scholars. Religious developments in the Safavid era are one of the issues that have been considered by Safavid scholars and many articles have been published about it. The article proposes that Andrew Newman should be considered the most important scholar who has tried to present a new analysis of the religious developments of the Safavid era. The article states that the most important critique of Newman's views in interpreting the religious developments of the Safavid era is his disregard for the traditions of Islamic culture in general and Shi'ism in particular.

The sixth article examines the documents of the Shi'ite entry of the Encyclopedia of the World of Islam and the Leiden Encyclopedia of Islam. Encyclopedia writing has prospered in the Islamic world as well as in Iran, as a Western tradition that seeks to have an unbiased, and impartial view of a subject. The authors of this article compare, analyze, and quantify the citations of the two encyclopedias of Islam published by Leiden and the Encyclopedia of the World of Islam, which is published in Iran. The article states that the number of Shi'ite entries in the Encyclopedia of the World of Islam is much more than the articles in the Leiden Encyclopedia of Islam. It also proposes that by writing and publishing fully documented articles on Shi'ite and Iranian scientific heritage, the Encyclopedia of the World of Islam has become an important source within the framework of world scientific standards and also faithful to the ancient tradition of Islamic lexicography.

To provide the Western angle on Shi'ite studies, some important sources such as the Leiden Encyclopedia of the Qur'an and the Leiden Encyclopedia of Islam have been selected. From the effective eras in the field of Shi'ite culture and civilization, the Safavid period and the studies of Safavid scholars have been selected. Among Shi'ite scholars, Shakht has been proposed as a researcher in the field of Islamic jurisprudence. An article by Robert Gleave Recent Research into the History of Early Shi'ism has been selected from the works of contemporary orientalists in recent research in the field of Shi'ism.

Evaluation

In this book, the authors emphasize that Shi'ism is introduced in Western works mainly as a sub-sect of Islam and its existence has been reduced to a socio-political conflict, so little attention has been paid to the religious causes that gave rise to Shi'ism. In six articles, the authors explore the approaches and currents of Shi'ite studies in the West and examine new researches in Shi'ite history. Each article is proposing an argument which ultimately leads to the main argument of the book. The definitive statement of the book is to exhibit the need to review and complete the studies of Westerners in Shi'ite studies. This book is an attempt by Iranian Shi'ite scholars and researchers in this field to record the history of Shi'ite studies in the world and its orientations in this time and era. Because recording the history and path of Shi'ite studies is one of the most important parts of Shi'ite studies.

Given the recent establishment of the field of Shi'ite studies in Iran (in 2005) as a Shi'ite country, the authors intend to focus their studies on domestic research instead of Shi'ite studies in the West. In this regard, the authors introduce the Encyclopedia of the World of Islam as a reliable source in the field of Shi'ite studies and encourage junior Shi'ite researchers to use such sources while being aware of Shi'ite studies in the West and their shortcomings.

The authors strongly believe that scholars in the field of Shi'ite studies, both in Shi'ite communities and Western countries, should be informed of each other's work and their weaknesses and strengths and conduct their research in interaction with each other. The book emphasizes the collaboration between East and West and the cooperation of scholars of Shi'ite studies that could lead to the positive direction of future studies.

One of the positive features of this book is examining Shi'ite studies in the West from the perspective of various Shi'ite scholars. However, the contributions of Western Shi'ite scholars to the knowledge of Shi'ites in the West and the establishment of the field of Shi'ite studies (esp. Studies from the last decade) could have received more attention. Also, there is not much information on the research of Shi'ite researchers in Iran, apart from the works written to critique Western studies. Since the purpose of this book is to encourage the interaction of Western and Eastern scholars in Shi'ite studies, it would have been more helpful to have a more comprehensive view of research in this field by both groups. Of course, the purpose and motive of this book in encouraging cooperation between researchers from around the world are beneficial for the future of Shi'ite studies.

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