UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE INFALLIBLES: THE EFFECTS OF SHI'A

NARRATIVES ON SHI'A POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION IN THE

UNITED STATES

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

CYRUS ALI CONTRACTOR
Norman, Oklahoma
2011

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE INFALLIBLES:
THE EFFECTS OF SHIʻA NARRATIVES ON SHIʻA POLITICAL AND
SOCIAL PARTICIPATION IN THE UNITED STATES

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

BY

_____
Dr. Charles D. Kenney, Chair

_____
Dr. Ariel I. Ahram

_____
Dr. Suzette R. Grillot

_____
Dr. Ann-Marie E. Szymanski

_____
Dr. Joshua M. Landis

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

اللهم صل على محمد وآل محمد

All praise be to Allah, without whose grace none of this would have been possible. I dedicate this dissertation to the Prophet Muhammad and his Household, peace and blessings be upon them all. This work is also dedicated to my parents, Yasaman and Rustom, and my brother, Kurosh. They shared the hardships of my academic endeavors with unwaivering love and support. I also dedicate this work to the memory of my Aunt Sima Jatala-Brown and my cousin Derek Jatala, both of which left this world much too early.

Words cannot express how much gratitude I have for Professor Charles D. Kenney. As my committee chair, he has offered a great amount of guidance, advice, patience, and has shown me what it is to be a comparative political scientist. I am forever indebted to him, and immensely proud to have been his student. I would also like to express my gratitude toward Professors Ariel I. Ahram, Suzette R. Grillot, Ann-Marie E. Szymanski, and Joshua M. Landis, whose guidance and suggestions have contributed to make this dissertation a well-rounded piece of work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the effects of religious narratives on the political and social behavior of Shi'a Muslims in the contemporary United States. It finds that American Shi'as utilize the narratives of Shi'ism instrumentally, in support of their already formed political and social proclivities, rather than the narratives serving an essentialist role in which they operate as primary independent variables that inform and create identities predisposed towards particular forms of political and social action. Through surveys, interviews of Shi'a religious leaders and political and social activists, and participant observation at ten Shi'a Muslim communities of varied national and ethnic origins in the United States, this dissertation provides evidence of the nature and extent of Shi'a Muslim participation in local, state, and national politics from the 1990s through the 2000s. The dissertation examines the ways quietist, accommodationist, and *velāyat* tropes of specifically Shi'a narratives are used in Shi'a communities, and the effects of these tropes on Shi'a political and social behavior. It also looks at the linkages between Shi'as abroad (especially in Iran and Iraq) and Shi'as in the United States, the relationship between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims in the United States, and the nature of Shi'a identity and political participation as a minority within a minority in the United States. In more general terms, this dissertation contributes to the understanding of the relationship between religion and politics, and to a greater understanding of Shi'as specifically, and Muslims generally, in the United States.

INTRODUCTION – POINTS OF DEPARTURE

PURPOSE AND DISPOSITION

Research Questions

This dissertation is a study of the political dispositions of a rather small demographic group, Shi'a Muslims in the United States.[1] The general aim is to discuss what it means to be Shi'a in the United States and if and how that identity contributes to one's political and social participation. More specifically this is a study of how the narratives and symbols of Shi'ism affect the political and social activity of political activists within the American Shi'a community. The research questions ask: ***How do Shi'a narratives and symbols affect political and social participation among Shi'a community members living in the United States? Additionally, how do different tropes of Shi'a narratives and symbols affect the manner in which Shi'as in the United States participate politically and socially?*** Do the different tropes result in different forms of participation?

The research questions also imply other questions. First, do the leaders of the Shi'a community use Shi'a narratives and symbols to promote political and social

---

[1] In this dissertation, the term Shi'a is used to refer to those individuals who attend mosques and religious centers that practice the Shi'a school of Islamic jurisprudence. The individuals included were identified as Shi'as by the fact that they were located and contacted based on the fact that they are mosque attenders. Therefore, this excludes those individuals that are not mosque attenders, secular Shi'as, agnostics and atheists that may identify as Shi'a from a cultural perpective. It is also important to note that the term Shi'a is also only referring to those members of the largest denomination within Shi'ism, the *Ithnā'asharīyāh* ("Twelvers), and does not include other sects such as the Ismailīs, 'Alawīs, or Zaydīs.

participation? If so, how do they use these narratives? How do they tell and retell narratives that have little to no foundation in American political, cultural, or religious history? And how do they retell the story of ʿĀshurā, undoubtedly the most important narrative within Shiʿism, to initiate and increase political and social participation of Shiʿas?

Independent and Dependent Variables

The independent variable is the use of Shiʿa narratives and symbols. The narratives consist of the stories of the lives of the members of Islamic and Shiʿa history. For example, one can look at the narratives that depict the martyrdoms of Imām ʿAlī or Imām Ḥusayn or the manner in which Fāṭimāh, the daughter of the Prophet, chastised the first and second *khulafā'* (successors) for depriving her of her property and her husband of his right to lead the *ummāh*. Symbols are those things other than the narratives that serve a similar function, however the symbols in this dissertation are the actual protagonists of the narratives. So for many Shiʿas, the Prophet and his Household are all symbols and examples of how to lead one's life. Additionally, some of the *ʿulamā'* have been taken as symbols, and this is best exemplified by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, whose entire life and actions have been taken as symbols of resistance against oppression given his opposition against the regime of Mohammad Reza Shah.

Variation on the independent variable is manifested by the different manner in which the narratives are told and retold and how the symbols are utilized and to what

end. I distinguish three different approaches to political action in Shi'a discourse: quietist, accommodationist, and *velāyat* approaches. Quietists view political participation as being religiously forbidden, and this is especially true in the time of the occultation of the Twelfth Imām, which is the period from the year 941 CE until the present. Accommodationists and *velāyat* adherents, both being proponents of increased political and social mobilization, view political participation as useful and necessary, but they disagree on how to participate. Accommodationists believe it is acceptable to vote, donate, meet with policymakers, and other forms of "conventional" political participation. Adherents of the *velāyat* approach eschew direct participation in the United States because of what they perceive as the unjust and corrupt nature of the American political system. They follow the concept of *velāyat-e faqīh* (Guardianship of the Jurist), and as such have formed a political outlook that looks to the Islamic Republic of Iran as a model of political action.

The dependent variable is political and social participation of Shi'a community members. The variation on the dependent variable is represented not only by whether Shi'as participate or not, but also by how they participate. The different narrative tropes are expected to have an effect not only on whether participation occurs, but also on the mode of participation. Additionally, though the general focus is on the entire Shi'a community, the actors that I am specifically looking at are political and social activists. By political activist I am referring to those everyday Shi'as who take cues from religious leaders and participate politically and socially in a variety of ways. The leaders

are "storytellers" who tell and retell the stories of Shi'ism with the goal of convincing and influencing members of their congregations to either act or not to act politically. If they are attempting to convince people to act, then these storytellers also try to affect how people participate; pushing them to vote, contribute monetarily, or to protest against certain foreign policies. They target their whole community, but only a minority acts in meaningful ways. These include people that happen to be students, congressional staff members, and teachers. They come from different walks of life but share one thing in common; they are politically and socially active. They may espouse different methods of participation, but they all feel that it is important to strive for social justice, not just for Shi'as or Muslims, but also for society as a whole.

HYPOTHESIS 1 – THE ESSENTIALIST ARGUMENT

Shi'a leaders in the United States use the Shi'a narratives and symbols to influence and mobilize Shi'as in the United States, just as groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, revolutionaries in Iran, and Shi'a groups in Iraq, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia have utilized Shi'a narratives and symbols for the purpose of influencing political mobilization. *Hypothesis 1 – the essentialist argument- states that these narratives and symbols inform and create identities that are predisposed towards particular forms of political and social participation. In other words, the narratives of Shi'ism are major*

contributing factors to the formation of an identity that exudes the Shiʻa obsession with social justice and "enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil."[2]

In my discussions with religious and community leaders, they argued that social justice was the primary reason for their urging of mosque members to participate politically and socially. The Qur'an as well as the Shiʻa School of Jurisprudence strongly command believers to enact two of the most important aspects of their *furu' al-dīn*, which are *amr bil ma'ruf wa an-nahy anil munkar* (enjoin what is good, and forbid what is evil).[3] In the minds of the elites of the communities it is imperative that

---

[2] In order to clarify this point, it is important to understand that the issue of social justice is at the forefront of Shiʻa political thought, and is best exemplified by the martyrdom of the third Imām, Ḥusayn ibn ʻAlī, at the plains of Karbalā' in 680 CE. In the minds of the Shiʻas, the events of Karbalā' were the result of Imām Ḥusayn's struggle for justice in the face of evil, tyranny, and oppression. Unwilling to give his allegiance to the Umayyad caliph, Yazīd ibn Muʻāwīyāh, a man that openly broke the laws of Islam and oppressed the people of the *ummāh*, Ḥusayn instead took his family and companions to Kufa (in modern Iraq) at the behest of the oppressed people residing in that town. His clearly stated intentions were to restore the Islam of his grandfather, and to end oppression. His caravan was intercepted and diverted to Karbalā', where he and 72 of his family members and companions were killed and beheaded. Shiʻas see Ḥusayn as the greatest example of the willingness to sacrifice one's life in the struggle for justice. Ḥusayn could have accepted the leadership of Yazīd, but instead he followed the precepts of his grandfather's religion, and enjoined what was good, and forbade what was evil. An example of the narrative of Imām Ḥusayn's martyrdom is provided in Chapter 3.

[3] *Furu' al-dīn* (Practices of the Religion) refers to the practices that are the basis of Islam as described by the Shiʻa School of Jurisprudence. These are to be compared to the common understanding of the "Five Pillars" of Islam, which in fact is a Sunni heuristic. The Shiʻa *furu' al-dīn* is comprised of the following:
Ṣalāh – five daily prayers.
Ṣawm – fasting during the month of Ramaḍan.
Hajj – performing the pilgrimage to Makkāh at least once.
Zakāh – giving charity to the poor.
Khums – 1/5 of certain items which a person acquires as wealth, and which must be paid as an Islamic tax.
Jihād – struggle to please Allah.
Amr bil ma'ruf – enjoining what is good.
Nahy anil munkar – forbid what is evil.

members participate not only to better the lives of Shi'as specifically and Muslims generally, but to better all of society. It is through the narratives that depict the lives and deaths of the holy personalities of Shi'ism that one learns about what it means to "enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil." These examples can be used to influence members to participate politically in a system that is not necessarily Islamic, but yet where good can be enjoined for the benefit of society. Conversely, these same narratives can be used to persuade members that there is no good to be enjoined in a system based on something other than the *sharī'āh* and the Qur'an. Consequently, in the opinion of the *velāyat* leaders that hold this pessimistic view of the American political system, it is better to avoid direct participation. They however do not eschew political action outright. In fact they are rather political, but prefer other methods of political and social action such as rallies and protests. They utilize the same narratives and symbols, but quite differently. However, both groups of leaders are directing their congregations to "enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil."

Based on my research, most of the Shi'a leaders in the United States hold the opinion that participation in the American political system is permissible and even incumbent upon individual Shi'as because of the necessity to better society. Additionally, many of the members of these mosques are politically active outside of the mosque setting, in what might be considered as formal modes of participation such

---

Tawallā – to love the *Ahl al-Bayt* and their followers.
Tabarra – to dissociate from the enemies of the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

as voting, writing letters to politicians, and contribution to election campaigns. In many instances, members picket governmental offices, courthouses, and other similar institutions after every Friday prayer.

Causal Mechanisms of the Essentialist Hypothesis

Given that the independent and dependent variables have been defined, and that the essentialist hypothesis has been offered, it is then important to understand the causal mechanisms that determine Shi'a political and social behavior. As mentioned, I hypothesized that leaders, particularly religious leaders, use religious narratives to develop an identity that that exudes the Shi'a obsession with social justice and "enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil." This then results in individual Shi'as who are more disposed towards political and social action, who are not simply motivated by material wants and desires, but moreso by a moral, ethical, and religiously sanctioned mode of thinking.

In conducting the fieldwork for this dissertation, I attended various congregational gatherings in which the narratives of Shi'ism are told and retold. Additionally, I conducted various interviews that allowed for me to attain an understanding of how these narratives affect the lives of Shi'as living in the United States. As such, based on interviews of a handful of Shi'a activists, I determine the effect of these narratives on their lives.[4] However, ascertaining the significance of religious narratives and symbols

---

[4] The methodology used in this dissertation is discussed later in the introductory chapter.

on the lives of religiously minded individuals is not as simple as it sounds. The reasons for this are two-fold: First, given the religiosity of the interviewees, it is necessary for the researcher not to bias his or her questions as to influence the responses. Therefore, interviewees were not asked if Shiʻa narratives were the reasons they were politically and socially active, for this mode of questioning might cause them to feel compelled to answer that it was the narratives that "made them do act in particular ways." Therefore, they were instead questioned about their political proclivities, opinions, and actions, and then asked about the influence of Shiʻa personalities on their lives; which of these historical figures they held the closest and how those figures influenced the lives of the activists. Second, in regards to the congregational gatherings, or *majlis*, it is nearly impossible to analyze how these narratives affect the actions of individual Shiʻas. I did not have personal access to all the members of the communities I visited, and therefore it becomes difficult to make claims about the effect narratives and symbols have on their political and social action. As such, the findings of this dissertation are based on the personal interactions with the leaders and activists included.

Figure 1 – Causal Mechanism for the Essentialist Hypothesis

Shiʻa Narratives & Symbols	→	Identity Formation	→	Political & Social Participation
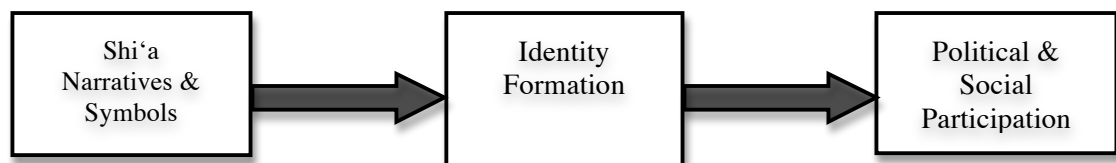
Given the essentialist hypothesis, Figure 1 illustrates the causal mechanisms that are responsible for determining Shi'a political and social participation. It is proposed that Shi'a narratives *cause* political and social participation by being the major independent variable that is responsible for identity formation. In regards to this dissertation, identity formation includes political proclivities. Therefore, though other variables such as ethnicity, race, gender, education, location, personal experiences and socio-economic status play a roll in identity formation and consequently political and social action, in the end the religious narratives and symbols are hypothesized to be *the main cause*. The other causes are secondary independent variables or perhaps even intervening variables. In this scenario, the narratives *cause* political and social proclivities, which then result in political and social behavior.

Observable Implications of the Essentialist Hypothesis

The essentialist theory is a simple one: Shi'a narratives *cause* political and social participation by being the main cog in the process of the formation of identities that are imbued with the desire for social justice. In other words, the narratives and symbols are *the main reason* for the creation of identities that are then predisposed to particular forms of political and social engagement.

The observable implications for such a theory and hypothesis are three-fold. The first two revolve around personal interviews with political and social activists within the Shi'a community. The third involves data that is obtained through the use of surveys. In regards to this dissertation, the first two are taken as stronger indications of the validity

of the theory and hypothesis, and the third is discussed in the dissertation, but given the low number of respondents to the Contractor survey, I am hesitant to make definite claims based on that data. Therefore, it serves as a point of discussion, and will be further examined in later research.

The first two observable implications for the essentialist hypothesis, and the most important for this dissertation, comprise of the expressed importance of Shi'a narratives in identity formation. When interviewed, it is expected that activists would argue that Shi'a narratives are the tools that they use to form their identities. Similarly, these activists use the narratives and the characters within those narratives as the main motivations to act in particular ways. In order to illustrate how these two implications lend credence to the theory and hypothesis, I utilize the fictitious example of a female interviewee named Maryam Ahmadi. This illustration is a simplified example of how I present the activists, their personal life stories, their religious convictions, and their political and social proclivities and actions.

> Maryam Ahmadi is a Shi'a Muslim of Iranian heritage that lives in a middle-class neighborhood in the greater Los Angeles area. When I met with her, she was working on her undergraduate education in biology, and planned to enter medical school after completing her studies. She only recently had begun to wear *ḥijāb*, and was a very active member in her mosque as well as a number of student organizations on her university campus. In my interviews with Maryam, she invoked the memory of Imām Ḥusayn's stand against injustice on the day of

'Āshurā, and she explained to me that she takes Imām Ḥusayn as a hero of hers, and she bases her life on his actions and sacrifice.

The political issue that she felt most strongly about was American military involvement in Iraq. Though she was not a fan of Saddam Hussein's regime, she nevertheless viewed the invasion and occupation of Iraq by the United States as an unjust act. She cited numerous reasons for why she felt the invasion was illegitimate, and these primarily were based on moral and ethical arguments. For example, she believed that liberating the Iraqi people would be an honorable goal, however she felt that the reason for the invasion was not to liberate the Iraqi people, but rather a rationale to control Iraqi oilfields. "I stand against all oppression because of what Imām Ḥusayn did at Karbalā'. He is the reason for who I am and what I do. He did not oppose the tyrant Yazīd in order to become the leader of the Muslims. Imām Ḥusayn did what he did in order to fight injustice. Those in charge in Washington DC, though they say they stand for justice, in fact commit the biggest injustice by shrouding their actions in the guise of justice. This is completely opposite of what Ḥusayn did. Therefore, I think it's important for us to look at the story of Ḥusayn and mould our lives, our souls, our thoughts, and ultimately our actions after him and his sacrifice. And this is true for the other Imāms and prophets as well. If it wasn't for them, and what they did, we wouldn't know what justice is."

As a result of this simple example, one might conclude that the manner in which Maryam looks at the world is based on her understanding of the 'Āshurā narrative, and as such her political and social proclivities are formed based on this understanding of the narrative. Therefore her political and social action is based on those proclivities. In this understanding, the fact that Maryam is a middle class, 19 year old college student of Iranian descent does not have the same weight on her political and social activity that her connection with the 'Āshurā narrative commands. These other factors are important, and they do play a role, but they are the identifiers. They are simply the visible characteristics of her race, gender, age, ethnicity and socio-economic status. Her real identity, in many ways, is the narrative. She lives Imām Ḥusayn's struggle everyday. Everyday is 'Āshurā. Every land is Karbalā'. Maryam's case would then lend credence to the essentialist hypothesis.

The third observable implication involves the Contractor survey, and the number of times individual congregants attend *majālis* (congregational gathering where the narratives are delivered). If I argue that these narratives have an effect on the identity formation of Shi'as, and they in turn act in particular ways political and socially speaking, then there should be a correlation between the number of times individual Shi'as attend the *majālis*, and those individuals' political and social participation. In other words, if one's political and social activity increases or decreases the more or less they attend *majālis*, then perhaps it can be said that narratives have an affect on this behavior. However, as stated earlier, due to the low number of reponses of the

Contractor survey, it is difficult to make concrete observations and claims using this data. For that reason, though this observable implication is discussed, it does not serve as a major indicator of the validity of the essentialist hypothesis.

All of these implications, if observed, lend credence to the essentialist theory. If these implications are absent then the essentialist theory is of course weakened. This would also raise the question of if and how narratives play a role in Shiʻa political and social engagement in the United States. In conducting the research I took painstaking measures to insure that the questions were worded as to not create any bias or compel the interviewees to answer in one way or the other. By this I mean to convey that the questions were formed in a neutral manner that allowed the respondents to answer based on their own thought processes. This is important to mention and clarify, because the possibility could have arose in which the respondent felt the need to "prove their Shiʻaness," especially given that the interviewer was a co-religionist. Again, by way of example, I never asked the respondents if they attended pro-Palestinian rallies because Imām Ḥusayn stood against injustice. The majority of Shiʻas would answer in the affirmative when the question is posited in such a fashion. And the likelihood of them answering in the affirmative to such a question would increase if they knew that I (the interviewer) was a Shiʻa; they do not want to be judged as being negligent of the sacrifice Imām Ḥusayn made.

Instead, I would ask for the reasons they attended these rallies or protests. If they stated it was because of Imām Ḥusayn's role at Karbalāʼ, then I would ask further

questions about what those events meant for them in this time and place; I would also ask them the more general question of whether or not they take the holy personalities of Shi'a history as examples for their political and social actions, and how these holy personalities affect their daily lives.

HYPOTHESIS 2 – INSTRUMENTALIST ARGUMENT

Conversely, the possibility exists that narratives and symbols do not *cause*, but rather *affect* political and social behavior. *Therefore, the instrumentalist hypothesis states that Shi'as in the United States use religious narratives in support of their already formed political and social proclivities to affect their political and social participation.* In other words, the narratives of Shi'ism are secondary independent variables or intervening variables that serve as religious rationales supporting already held political and social proclivities.

Causal Mechanisms of the Instrumentalist Hypothesis

This instrumentalist explanation results in the causal mechanism represented by Figure 2. In contrast to the causal mechanism represented by Figure 1, in this scenario, the narratives and symbols of Shi'ism aid the activists' already formed and forming political and social proclivities. These proclivities are a result of factors such as ethnicity, race, gender, education, location, personal experiences, and socio-economic status. One's proclivities lead them to chose narratives and tropes of narratives that best

support their already held attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, unlike in Figure 1, Shi'a

narratives in Figure 2 are relegated to a secondary causal effect.

Figure 2 – Causal Mechanism for the Instrumentalist Hypothesis

```
┌─────────────────┐
│  Gender, Age,   │
│    Soc-Eco,     │
│ Race, Ethnicity,│
│   Education     │
└─────────────────┘
         │
         ▼
┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐
│  Personal   │  ➕  │    Shi'a    │ ───▶ │ Political &  │
│ Proclivities│      │ Narratives &│      │   Social     │
│             │      │  Symbols    │      │Participation │
└─────────────┘      └─────────────┘      └─────────────┘
```
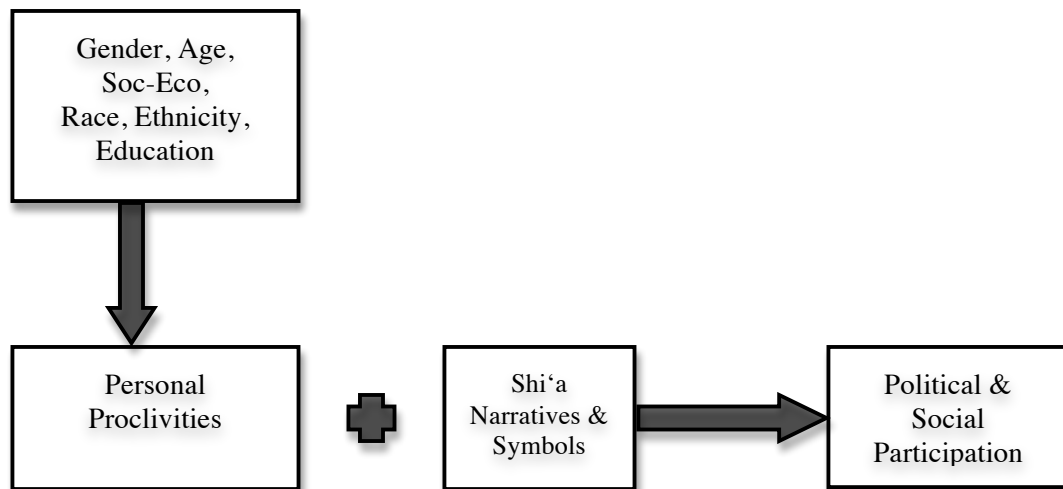
Additionally, in the instrumentalist theory, Shi'as play a more active, or *instrumentalist*,

role in which Shi'a narratives and tropes of those narratives they utilize. Therefore,

through this theoretical lens, individual Shi'as become savvier consumers of religious

narratives. They do not simply absorb narratives unconditionally from the mouths of

"political prophets," but rather they in essence partake in what can be termed "narrative

and symbol shopping" or "cherrypicking" of the narratives and tropes of the narratives.

In other words, they find the narratives, tropes of those narratives, and symbols that

accessorize their already held beliefs about political and social participation.

15

Observable Implications of the Instrumentalist Hypothesis

The instrumentalist hypothesis states that the narratives of Shi'ism play a role but as a lesser independent or an intervening variable. The observable implications for this hypothesis would be Shi'as forming their own political proclivities separate of their leaders' suggestions and influence, and the utilization of Shi'a narratives as backing of those proclivities. In other words, if Shi'as take the stories of the faith and utilize them as legitimizing tools for their already formed political and social proclivities, ideologies, and actions then the essentialist hypothesis would be weakened and rejected, and the istrumentalist hypothesis will be given more credence. Thus, in contrast to the example of Maryam Ahmadi that exemplified the essentialist theory, I use a second fictitious character named Nader Rizvi to demonstrate how I present the activists, their personal life stories, their religious convictions, and their political and social proclivities and actions.

> Nader Rizvi is a Shi'a Muslim of Indian descent, who happens to be a *sayid*, a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad through the bloodline formed by the marriage of Imām 'Alī and Fāṭimāh (the Prophet's daughter). As a 35-year-old civil rights attorney, Nader was adamant about protecting the rights of those Americans who were unable to defend themselves. He explained to me that though he always considered himself a Shi'a, his family was not the most outwardly religious. It was not until he was older and in university that he made a stronger connection with his religious tradition. He however was always active

16

in multicultural organizations and events from his time in high school until the present. Nader explained that his parents had instilled in him this multicultural, multi-religious, and multi-lingual appreciation from the time of his youth. He argues that it is a result of his parents being from India, a country of various ethnicities, religions, and languages.

Growing up in a suburb of Atlanta in the 1980s, Nader was of a few students who were not Anglo or African American. As such, he grew up with a mix of friends from various different ethnic and religious communities. Therefore, he never lived in a closed-off community of Indians, Muslims, or Shi'as. He however was not blind to the injustices that some people faced due to their minority status. As such, he vowed to always fight for the rights of those that were discriminated against. He explained to me that sometimes his work is so difficult, and often the odds seem stacked against him and his clients. However, he takes a cue from the lives of the Prophet and the Imāms, because they were people who were always surrounded by people of different ethnicities. "Some of the Prophet's best companions were not Arabs. He surrounded himself by Salmān the Persian and Bilāl the Abyssinian. These people were outcasts and had no tribal affiliation in the old way of thinking in Makkāh, but the Prophet didn't judge them based on their skin color, but by their words and their actions. Also, Imām 'Alī had many Persian companions, and never discriminated against people based on their ethnicity and religion. I'm reminded of a story of Imām

'Alī and his companions walking in a group, and one of the companions pondered about the amount of *shirk* (idolatry) that was taking place inside a church they passed. Imām 'Alī stopped all of them and explained that they should wonder about how much worshipping of God took place within those walls. You see… Imām 'Alī was a cup-half-full kind of guy. He focused on the positives, not the so-called negatives. Unfortunately, too many of us Shi'as focus on the negatives of what people do. I look at these people as support for what I do. I know that if Imām 'Alī or Imām Ḥusayn were here they would support my work… my struggle."

Unlike the example of Maryam, this illustration leads one to conclude that Nader looks at the world based on a developed proclivity, which is bolstered by his attachment to specific characters in Shi'a history and the narratives that surround their lives. As such his political and social proclivities are not based on the narrative. Instead, his political and social proclivities are formed from his upbringing, his surroundings, and his family's influence. Nader then is attracted to the multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual narratives involving the Prophet and Imām 'Alī. He is also attached to a narrative that portrays Imām 'Alī looking for the positive in people, and which discourages believers to look for the negative in others. Given Nader's proclivities and profession, his choice of narrative is the carefully chosen religious rationale and justification for his life. In this understanding, the fact that Nader is a middle class, 35

year old civil rights lawyer of Indian descent plays the most significant role in the determination of his political and social proclivities and action. The narratives are then relegated to a secondary independent variable or perhaps even an intervening variable. For Nader, his real identity is the composition of the influence of his family, his socio-economic status, and upbringing in a suburban area of various ethnic and religious groups. His case would then lend credence to the instrumentalist hypothesis.

Therefore, the dissertation determines the extent to which these narratives and symbols of Shi'ism affect individual Shi'as' political and social participation. The discussion is one akin to the proverbial "chicken and egg" question. What comes first? Does the narrative form proclivities that then result in action? Or conversely, are proclivities supported by the narratives, which then result in action? Hence, the importance of Shi'a narratives is obvious, but the role these stories and symbols play is the question at hand.

HYPOTHESIS 3 – EFFECT OF DIFFERENT NARRATIVE TROPES ON PARTICIPATION

The third hypothesis is dependent on whether the essentialist or instrumentalist hypothesis is found to be valid. If the essentialist hypothesis is found to be valid then the third hypothesis is as follows: *Different tropes of Shi'a narratives result in different forms of political and social participation.* Converesely, if the instrumentalist hypothesis is found to be valid then the third hypothesis is as follows: *Different tropes*

of Shi'a narratives are chosen based on one's proclivities, and these are the religious

rationale that lead to action.

Causal Mechanisms of the Trope Hypothesis

Figure 3a illustrates the causal mechanisms that are responsible for determining the

effect of of Shi'a narrative tropes on political and social participation. It is proposed that

different Shi'a narrative tropes *are the main causes* of specific modes of political and

social participation by being the major independent variable that is responsible for

identity formation.

Figure 3a – Causal Mechanism for the Trope Hypothesis
if the Essentialist Hypothesis is Valid

| Shi'a Narrative Tropes | → | Identity Formation | → | Political & Social Participation |
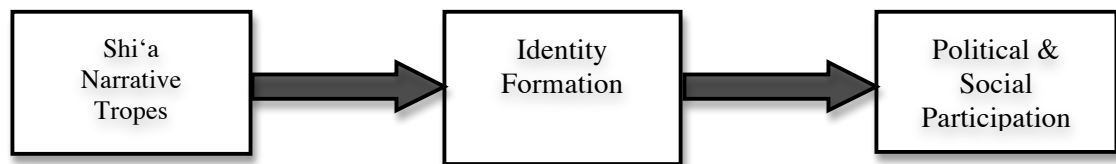
Figure 3b demonstrates that the different Shi'a narratives tropes aid the activists'

already formed and forming political and social proclivities and then result in different

forms of political and social participation. These proclivities are a result of factors such

as ethnicity, race, gender, education, location, personal experiences, and socio-

economic status.

Figure 3b – Causal Mechanism for the Trope Hypothesis
if the Instrumentalist Hypothesis is Valid
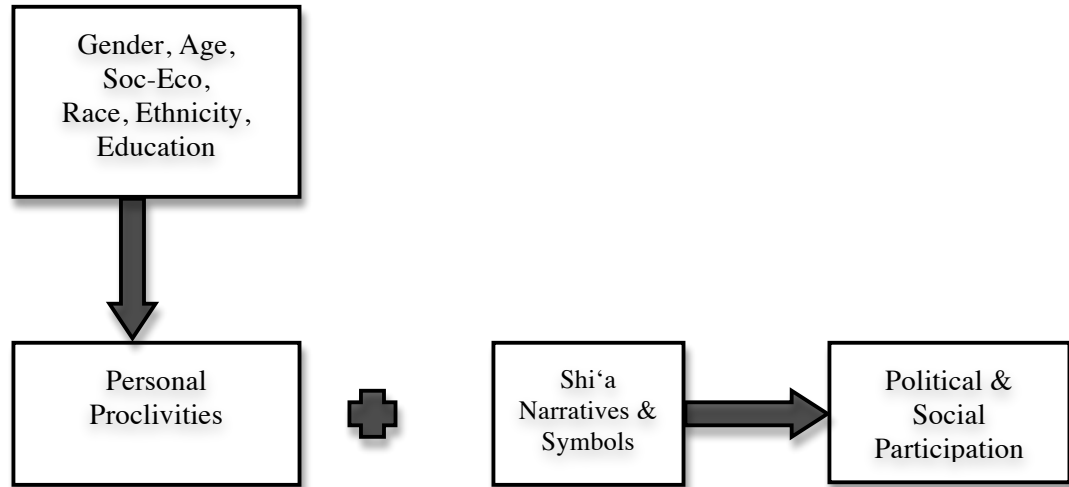
Observable Implications of the Trope Hypothesis

Simply stated, regardless of whether the essentialist hypothesis or instrumentalist hypothesis is found to be valid, the observable implications of the trope hypothesis would be witnessing different forms of political and social participation arising from the three tropes of Shi'a narratives introduced in Chapter 4: quietist, accommodationist, and *velāyat*. If the essentialist hypothesis was found to be valid, then we might notice a specific Shi'a trope being the main cause of specific types of political and social behavior. When interviewed, it is expected that activists would argue that a particular Shi'a narrative trope(s) is the tool that they use to form their identities. Similarly, these activists use those particular narrative tropes and the characters within those tropes as the main motivations to act in particular ways. On the other hand, if the instrumentalist hypothesis were found to be valid, then the observable implications for the trope

21

hypothesis would be Shiʻas forming their own political proclivities separate of their leaders' suggestions and influence, and the utilization of specific Shiʻa narrative tropes as backing of those proclivities.

METHODOLOGY

This dissertation analyzes the effects of Shiʻa narratives on Shiʻa political and social behavior. I argue that these narratives play a role in determining how Shiʻas participate politically and socially in the United States. The puzzle is to determine the fashion in which these narratives affect political and social behavior. Are they the main causal variable that constructs an identity that is predisposed to particular forms of participation? Or do actors pick and choose from the narratives that support their already formed political and social proclivities? The dissertation herein adopts a mixed methods approach to ascertain if Shiʻas are participating, how they are participating, the manner in which the narratives of Shiʻism affect participation, and how competing tropes of those narratives result in different forms of participation. This section offers the benefits of a mixed method approach, and then discusses the three methodological tools that are utilized to gather data: surveys, interviews, and participant observation. Additionally, I clarify how each of these methodologies were carried out and how they contribute to a well-rounded research project.

The Benefits of Mixed Methodology Research

I am of the mind that scholars should not be beholden to one kind of methodology as if they are choosing political ideologies or religious dogma. A method should be chosen based on the research question and puzzle. In the case of this dissertation, the survey data serves to set up the interview and participant observation data. The main purpose is to determine the role of Shi'a narratives on political and social action; therefore the survey data was utilized in a manner to simply show participation rates. There was little need for advanced statistical analyses. The interviews and participant observation served to produce interesting accounts and descriptions of the way Shi'as utilize narratives, participate in politics, and view their community as a minority within a minority.

Martyn Hammersley (1992) discusses the divide between quantitative and qualitative approaches to social science, and argues that in "one form or another the debate… has been taking place since at least the mid-nineteenth century."[5] He describes the emergence of a *détente* between proponents of both approaches; a *détente* that sometime leads to the mixing of methods. However, in his opinion this "understanding" has only preserved the dichotomy and does little to solve methodological disagreements. What he recommends

---

[5] Martyn Hammersley, *What's Wrong with Ethnography?: Methodological Explorations* (London, UK: Routledge, 1992), 159.

[Is] not that we should revert from two paradigms to one… [but rather] that this diversity cannot be encapsulated within two (or, for that matter, three, four or more) paradigms. Nor should the variety of approach be regarded as stemming simply from fundamental philosophical or political commitments. Arguments about the latter are, and should be important in methodology. However, they are not the only considerations that are significant; the particular purposes of the research and the practicality of various strategies given the circumstances in which the inquiry is to be carried out are others. Nor do philosophical and political assumptions have the sort of determinate implications for method that they are sometimes assumed to have.[6]

Hammersley believes that the choice of method should be based on the purpose and circumstance of the given research. Choosing one over the other involves a trade-off. For example, if a researcher wants the precision of quantitative analysis, then she might lose some breadth that would come from a qualitative approach. "And the costs and benefits of various trade-off positions will vary according to the particular goals and circumstances of the research being pursued."[7]

In *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Robert D. Putnam states, "The prudent social scientist, like the wise investor, must rely on diversification

---

[6] Ibid., 160.
[7] Ibid., 172.

to magnify the strengths, and to offset the weaknesses, of any single instrument."[8] This dissertation follows in this vein by utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry, however not simply to perpetuate the *détente* that Hammersley describes. Rather, the use of mixed methods in this dissertation was a necessity from the inception of the research project. Given the lack of a robust well-developed Shi'a American literature on which to base the research, it was important to ascertain if, how, and at what levels Shi'as in the United States were participating politically and socially, and much of this task was accomplished through the use of survey data. Therefore, the quantitative data served as a point from which the discussion of the effects of Shi'a narratives could begin.

As stated, my initial knowledge about the Shi'a experience in America was limited at best, and this went beyond my grasp of the voting behavior of Shi'as in the United States. I had little understanding of the religious and cultural lives of these communities. However, only after immersing myself in the communities, culture(s), and religious activities (much of which took an extensive amount of time learning and understanding the narratives of Shi'ism from lectures, books, electronic sources, etc.) was I able to construct a research question and hypotheses. Through the use of interviews, participant observation and surveys, this dissertation explains if and how narratives affect political and social participation of Shi'a Muslims in the United States.

---

[8] Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 12.

Survey Data

Understanding political participation of members of mosques is attained thoroughly through the use of surveys. The intricacies of my survey allow me to speak specifically to patterns of participation in Shiʻa communities in a handful of cities around the United States. If one of the goals is to ascertain how narratives affect political and social behavior, then it is necessary to understand if and how they are participating politically and socially.

The survey was distributed among the congregants with the expectation that it would be filled out individually and then placed into a locked box. The relatively low level of response (n = 86) on the survey does not allow us to draw strong conclusions, but does give us an indication of how Shi'as in the United States participate in society and politics. Additionally, the low response rate from females is of concern. Simply stated, it was difficult to get access to females in most of the locations I visited because of existing norms that shun mixing of genders within religious settings. If female Shi'as in the United States participate at much lower levels then male Shiʻas, then the participation rates attributed to Shi'as in Chapter 2 of this dissertation might be thought to be inflated. However, Amaney Jamal's (2005) recent work on Muslim American political participation shows that gender does not have a significant effect on levels of political participation, and that Arab women are more likely to participate than men.[9]

---

[9] Amaney Jamal, "The Political Participation and Engagement of Muslim Americans: Mosque Involvement and Group Consciousness," *American Politics Research* 33, no. 4 (July 2005): 521-544.

Barreto and Bozonelos (2009) also found that Muslim women are more likely than men to identify with a political party.[10] Though partisanship is not synonymous with participation, these studies indicate that Muslim women are not removed from politics, and Jamal's findings suggest that they are just as likely to participate as Muslim men. Therefore, though women are underrepresented in the Contractor survey, I do not believe that levels of Shi'a participation are inflated, and the inferences that are drawn are valid.

The survey findings also point to an interesting disconnect between the leaders' perceptions that their congregations are not participating, and the finding that community members are actually rather active. This allows for some interesting speculation as to why leaders are misreading their flocks. Is it a matter of them not knowing their own people? Is it because they expect an even higher level of participation? Are they expecting Shi'as in the United States to surpass the national averages? This disconnect interested me throughout the fieldwork and writing of this dissertation.

Interview Data

The findings of the dissertation are based heavily on the use of interview data. Throughout the data gathering process no fewer than 16 individuals were interviewed.

---

[10] Matt A. Barreto and Dino Bozonelos, "Democrat, Republican, or None of the Above? The Role of Religiosity in Muslim American Party Identification," *Politics and Religion* 2, no. August (2009): 1-31.

In addition to these official interviews I also engaged in various other impromptu discussions that helped inform my understanding of Shi'a political and social participation as well as their perceptions of the American political system. The formal interviews included religious leaders and Shi'as who filled a variety of positions within religious centers, and others who were activists in their own right. That being said, all of these interviewees were selected based on their position in their local communities as well as in the broader American Shi'a community. Additionally, the interviews allowed for the greater inclusion of Shi'a women in the study. As mentioned above, female participation in the survey was limited, and the interviews revealed that Shi'a women are actively involved in politics and society, and quite often play some of the most important roles in mobilizing community members.

The semi-structured format of the interviews consisted of seven very general topics, each including various questions. The topics included: biographic information of the interviewee; perceptions of Shi'a/Muslim political and social experience in the United States; opinions of the permissibility of participation in the political system; the role of Shi'as in the American pluralist setting; the relationship between Shi'as and other demographic groups (Sunnis, Jewish-Americans, Evangelical Christians, etc.); how Shi'as might be able to reach out to other groups in order to build bridges between different communities; and the role of Shi'a religious leaders in the community. Depending on the answers of the respondents, the interview could move in a variety of directions. Though I maintained control over the interview, I allowed for the

interviewee to continue on his or her vein of discussion as long as it remained germane to the topic of Shi'a American political and social life.

Out of the 16 formal interviews, I grouped the interviewees into three groups: activists, religious scholars, and community members/leaders. Membership in one group did not exclude and individual from another of the groups. There were five activists, eight religious scholars, and four were community members and leaders. The five activists interviewed include Imām Sayyid Rafiq Naqvi, Jihad Saleh, Fatma and Nadia Saleh, and Khadijeh Hosseinzadeh. The two other activists included in Chapter 5 are Irma Khoja and Maulana Shamshad Haider. Their proclivities were ascertained based on informal discussions (in the case of Haider) and content analysis of written material (in the case of Irma Khoja). The eight religious scholars were included because of their expertise in religious matter, as well as their positions as leaders of their communities. Additionally, these religious leaders were responsible for the use of the narratives of Shi'ism. Their biographies, perceptions and opinions were important to ascertain in order to understand how the narratives of Shi'ism were constructed, which tropes were favored over others, and how they were used to affect political and social behavior. The remaining four interviewees were included because of their roles as leaders or important members of the Shi'a community. Their insights helped in establishing a more robust understanding of the overall American Shi'a community and the issues that it faces.

Due to the sensitive nature of Muslim Americans' position in the post 9/11 United States some of the interviews were very difficult to conduct. Given the political nature of my questioning, some of the interviewees were hesitant to offer straightforward answers. However, the majority that agreed to be included was rather forthcoming with their responses, and their participation as interviewees allowed for a fuller and much more data rich project.

Ethnography as Participant Observation and as a Sensibility

Edward Schatz (2009) argues that ethnography is often equated with participant observation. "That is, immersion in a community, a cohort, a locale, or a cluster of related subject positions is taken to be the *sine qua non* of the approach." However, he goes on to offer that ethnography as a *sensibility* "is an approach that cares – with the possible emotional engagement that implies – to glean the meanings that the people under study attribute to their social and political reality." Therefore, if a scholar studies other media such as texts, cultural products, and narratives (to name a few) that give meaning to the world, then said scholar is conducting an ethnographic study.[11] Though we often equate ethnography with participant observation, and point to key works as the exemplars of "soaking and poking" and "thick description," more often than not the

---

[11] Edward Schatz, "Ethnographic Immersion and the Study of Politics," in *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 5.

scholars conducting these studies have also gleaned meanings from texts, cultural products, etc. in order to fully understand the people under study.[12]

Schatz's analysis is important in regards to this dissertation because this is precisely how the ethnographic work in this piece was formulated. Though participant observation was of incredible importance, and it aided in a great understanding of the communities included in the research, the study was bolstered by familiarizing myself with the narratives of Shi'ism through the use of electronic media, textual sources, and discussions with various individuals. This is similar to Thurfjell's (2006) study of ritualization amongst Islamist men in contemporary Iran, in which his ethnographic approach was based on his attendance of lectures, lamentations, and visual material. The lamentations were in connection with lectures, and exemplify participant observation, but his understanding of the intricacies of the lamentations (which more often than not is based on the narratives of Shi'ism) involved his familiarization with the narratives outside of the participant observation role. The visual material included pictures, placards, posters, and graffiti, which Thurfjell used to understand the "official viewpoint" of the community he was studying in Isfahan, Iran.[13] Walbridge's works

---

[12] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, New York: Basic Book, 1973); Richard F Fenno, *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts* (Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown, 1978); Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*; James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1976); James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1986); James C Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990).

[13] David Thurfjell, *Living Shi'ism: Instances of Ritualisation Among Islamist Men in Contemporary Iran* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Publishing, 2006), 42.

also involved extensive research on her part in understanding the intricacies of Shi'ism, from religious practice, to the roles of foreign religious leaders, as well as religious narratives and jurisprudence.[14]

The participant observation aspect of the ethnographic work of this dissertation was conducted in approximately ten religious centers throughout the United States. Additionally, further "soaking and poking" was conducted while "hanging out" with members of the communities I visited. This was particularly true in the Washington, DC and Los Angeles locations where I spent a significant amount of time discussing the role of faith in the public lives of a handful of younger, more politically active individuals.

The participant observation within the religious centers was the most difficult aspect of the research, mostly because of my outsider status. Quite often a leading member of the community made that outsider status clear, by simply introducing me. "This is Cyrus, he is working on his doctorate in political science. He's going to be observing us for a month. Please feel free to introduce yourself and talk to him." Though the intention of introducing me was to increase participation in the study, in

---

[14] Linda S. Walbridge, "Confirmation of Shi'ism in America: An Analysis of Sermons in the Dearborn Mosques," *The Muslim World* 83, no. 3-4 (1993): 248-262; Linda S. Walbridge, "The Shi'a Mosques and the Congregations in Dearborn," in *Muslim Communities in North America*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 337-358; Linda S. Walbridge, *Without Forgetting the Imam: Lebanese Shi'ism in an American Community* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1997); Linda S. Walbridge, "A Look at Differing Ideologies Among Shi'a Muslims in the United States," in *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, ed. Michael W. Suleiman (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999); Linda S. Walbridge, *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001).

many instances the fact that my field of study involved politics was enough to keep people away. Nevertheless, this aspect of the research was important because it led to the formation of my research question and hypotheses. As King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) mention, the formulation of hypotheses can require a long period of time learning the intricacies of a community.

> [The] single most important operational recommendation of the interpretivists is that researchers should learn a great deal about a culture prior to formulating research questions. For only with a deep cultural immersion and understanding of a subject can a researcher ask the right questions and formulate useful hypotheses… [King, Keohane, and Verba] only wish to add that evaluating the veracity of claims based on methods such as participant observation can only be accomplished through the logic of scientific inference… Finding the right answers to the wrong questions is a futile activity. Interpretation based on *Verstehen* is often a rich source of insightful hypotheses.[15]

As stated above, this process took quite some time in regards to the research for this dissertation. However, as compared to other scholars who have had extensive amounts of time to "soak and poke," then come back to conduct numerous observations of each location, much of my endeavor was conducted by casting a wide net, and then formulating research questions and hypotheses after taking inventory of what was found

---

[15] Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 37-38.

in the net. In other words, given restrictions based on time and resources, the survey included a wide variety of questions that could be analyzed at a later time, while simultaneously asking questions of my interviewees that would cover a wide variety of topics from religiosity, their perceptions of American politics, and the role of foreign religious leaders on Shi'a public life in the United States among others. By casting this wide net with the survey and interviews, I was left with an immense amount of data, much of which was incredibly interesting but eventually left on the cutting room floor as it did not contribute to answering the research question regarding the effect of Shi'a narratives on political and social behavior.

The participant observation involved sitting in religious centers and listening to lectures and observing interactions between the religious leaders and the congregation, as well as between the members of the congregation. Depending on the occasion, the gathering may have been attended by hundreds or tens of people. Muḥarram and Ramaḍān gatherings are heavily attended. The congregation of a simple Friday night gathering could vary depending on the location, the weather, or other circumstances.

Just as important, if not more, was the ethnographic work done based on gaining familiarity with the narratives of Shi'ism, the methods by which they are diffused, and the ways in which narrators use them to affect the emotions and actions of the congregation. Moreover, it has aided in my understanding of how the audience members absorb these narratives and use them to support their political and social proclivities. In order to accomplish this I listened to more than 200 lectures and sermons

equaling more than 200 hours of the telling of these narratives. Based on these lectures and sermons, I also learned about many of the jurisprudential issues within the Shiʻa school of thought. Additionally, I familiarized myself with various Shiʻa texts that discuss the narratives of the religion, as well as the differences between modern Shiʻa scholars on religious and political matters. My familiarity with these topics often has resulted in other people inquiring from me about the specifics of certain historical events in Islamic history as well as for clarification about jurisprudential issues. I have even been approached to give lectures during the mourning ceremonies associated with the martyrdoms and birthdays of the holy personalities of Shiʻism.

Criticisms and Potential Limitations of Ethnographic Methodology

As with any methodological tool, ethnographic approaches have limitations, such as those discussed by Bayard de Volo and Schatz (2004).[16]

1. Generalizability

    The most prevalent criticism of the ethnographic approach is that it is difficult to generalize. This is especially true if ethnographic methods are the only method used. Although my primary interest is to describe how the subjects view their lives, political and social participation, and their religiosity, I would argue that the findings of this dissertation may extend beyond the Shiʻa community in the United States. It is true that Shiʻas are the target community, but especially

---

[16] Lorraine Bayard de Volo and Edward Schatz, "From the Inside Out: Ethnographic Methods in Political Research," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 37, no. 2 (April 2004): 267-271.

given that the research failed to find evidence of "Shi'a exceptionalism" in regards to how religious narratives affect participation, the finding that narratives have a secondary or tertiary effect on how an individual participates may be investigated further in other communities. Further research might result in a greater understanding of the use of narratives as tools of mobilization in other communities through the use of cross-case comparisons.

2. Random Sampling

Another criticism about the ethnographic approach is the lack of random sampling and selection bias. Bayard de Volo and Schatz (2004) state that "[The ethnographer] seeks to establish relationships with informants based on mutual trust. On this count, the critic objects that ethnographic data is inherently biased, both in a statistical and a normative sense."[17] There is some validity to this criticism, but in regards to this dissertation the argument does not apply. I am studying mosque-attending Shi'as in the United States, and as such I contacted and visited Shi'as in mosques in the United States. I was sometimes denied access to communities because the existing taboo of discussing politics, because of post 9-11 paranoia, or past bad experiences with research conducted in their centers. Therefore, I conducted research in locations that allowed me access to their centers and locations. I interviewed Imāms, activists, and community

---

[17] Ibid., 269.

36

members that agreed to participate. Critics might argue that the centers included in this study have leaders that are more open to political participation than the centers that refused to allow me to study them. This could very well be a possibility, but the same would be true for a researcher conducting a quantitative study. This is less of a criticism of the method, and more of a statement on the realities of studying Muslims in the United States.

Ethnographers often pick their respondents because of the role they play in a community, their expertise, or status. When choosing these informants, an in-depth understanding is sought in which "extended interaction with informants can give the researcher a better idea of whether or not fruitful questions are even being asked."[18] This clarifies why I utilized a semi-structured interviewing process. Questions were chosen and modified based on how the interviewee responded to previous inquiries and in what direction he or she took the discussion. Furthermore, the analysis of the effect of narratives on the political and social behavior requires a more in-depth study of the interactions between the narrators and the members of the congregations. By using the ethnographic approach, I was able to formulate a detailed understanding of the relationships between community leaders, activists and everyday members of the communities I visited.

---

[18] Ibid.

3. Going Native

"Going-native" is a valid concern when utilizing ethnographic methods. I did become close with a handful of the interviewees included in this research, and my own religiosity (as well as knowledge of the religion) increased. Informal gatherings with members of a particular community were times in which I could get away from "my job" as a researcher, but more often than not, despite my best efforts to simply "hang out" I would find myself analyzing their words and interactions. The discussions would inevitably turn towards religious or political topics, and once again I would be back in my official capacity as a researcher. I have come to believe that as researchers, it is incredibly difficult to turn off the researching switch. With that in mind, I took painstaking measures to maintain my position as a participant observer and a researcher, even in those informal settings. Though I had affinities towards certain individuals, I have done my best to present the facts as they are in this dissertation.

4. Storytelling

The last criticism is that ethnographic work results simply in the telling of stories. Bayard de Volo and Schatz offer that "At best – the criticism goes – they merely give rise to hypotheses; it is a preliminary (read: "inferior") sort of research because it cannot 'test' propositions."[19] In other words, the argument

---

[19] Ibid., 270.

states that ethnographers do not offer tests of hypotheses, and to a large extent this is true. As such, I join in with those that criticize ethnographers for not formulating research that test hypotheses, however I believe that ethnographic approaches are more than satisfactory for testing hypotheses. The criticism should be directed at the practitioners of ethnographic approaches, not at the methodology. In this dissertation I have offered three testable hypotheses, and I demonstrate causality by finding that Shi'as utilize narratives to bolster their already held political and social proclivities.

In short, to reiterate, a mixed methods approach has allowed for a robust study of Shi'a participation in the United States. The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods contributed greatly to building an understanding of Shi'a political social participation in this country. The qualitative approach (including the interview data, participant observation and analysis of lectures, sermons and narratives) has afforded me the opportunity to get an in-depth understanding of how narratives and the manner in which the narratives are propagated affect daily life of Shi'as. The understanding of the intricacies of the faith and the daily interactions within a Shi'a religious center helps to clarify how Shi'as view the world and interact both within and outside the walls of the mosque. But in order to look at the effects of religious narratives on political and social participation, the quantitative survey data served as a measuring stick of what levels Shi'as are participated in from the 1990s to the 2000s. The survey data is also

juxtaposed against other national surveys that have been conducted, and allows for some comparison with national trends involving political behavior.

THE BEGINNINGS OF MY INTEREST IN THE TOPIC

My first visit to the Islamic Center of MOMIN (The Metroplex Organization of Muslims in North Texas), the largest Shi'a mosque in the Dallas-Forth Worth area, sparked my interest in the topic being explored. The first time I attended this mosque in October 2007 my sole purpose was to participate in the rituals and prayers that are involved with *Laylat al-Qadr*.[20] After the *maghrib* and *isha'a* prayers of that evening the then *'Alim-in-residence* of this mosque, Maulana Shamshad Haider, presented the congregation with a short informative speech in which he explained the importance of the month of Ramaḍān, and the importance of paying the *zakāt al-fiṭr*.[21]

He then began to recite *du'ā'*. As might be found in many congregational prayers, regardless of religious persuasion, he asked Allah to forgive the true believers of their sins and to protect the weak, the downtrodden, and the *mu'minīn* and *mu'mināt*.[22]

---

[20] *Laylat al-Qadr* is the night Muslims believe the Archangel Gabriel revealed the Qur'an to the Prophet Mohammad. One is recommended to keep a night vigil, in which the believer will pray and recite verses from the Qur'an. The Qur'an states that this night is better than 1,000 nights, and that Satan is chained so that he may not create any mischief.

[21] *Maghrib* and *isha'a* are the obligatory Islamic sundown and night prayers respectfully. The term *shaykh* is utilized in this dissertation to refer to many of the clergy in the mosques studied. However in the MOMIN mosque in Dallas and in other areas, the *'Alim-in-residence* typically goes by the title *Maulana*. *'Alīm* is an Arabic word which refers to a single clergyman. The plural of this word is *'ulamā'*. *Zakat* is charity that is given to the poor, which is an act that is incumbent upon all Muslims to do if they are able. *Zakat-e fitr* is the religious tithe that is paid at the end of Ramaḍān.

[22] *Du'ā'* is an Arabic word that refers to prayer in general. Usually when Muslims speak of "making" or "reciting" *du'ā'*, they are not referring to the five canonical prayers, but rather anytime when a believer petitions Allah for blessings, ease from hardship, etc. A very common *du'ā'* which is recited is as

However, his pleas for salvation and protection soon took on a very political tone. He asked for the blessings and mercy of Allah for "the leader of *our* revolution, Imām Khomeini" and for "*our rahbar* Ayatollah Khāmene'ī."[23] "Please protect *our* Islamic Republic's plans to strengthen itself against the plots of invading forces and ideologies." "Please liberate our holy cities of Madīnāh and Makkāh from the hands of the *Ahl al-Sa'ud*." All of these pleas for protection, mercy, and help were followed by *illāhī āmīn* (amen) from the congregation.

It was extremely interesting that in an overwhelmingly Pakistani congregation, the *shaykh*, who himself was Pakistani, referred to Iran as "*our* Islamic Republic." Some may argue that he was perhaps referring to Pakistan, as its official name is the *Islamic Republic of Pakistan*, but this is obviously not the case for the simple reason that Maulana Haider would not recognize any government as "Islamic" unless its affairs were run by the *'ulamā'* and specifically the Shi'a *'ulamā'* under the governmental type developed by Imām Khomeini entitled *velāyat-e faqīh*. Additionally, he never specifically mentioned Pakistani Shi'a. He asked, in a broad sweeping manner, for all the downtrodden people and for the *mu'minīn* and *mu'mināt* to be protected. Moreover, he raises the issue of the *Ahl al-Sa'ud's* (House of Sa'ud) control over Islam's holiest

---

follows: *Rabana 'atina fi dunya hasanatan wa fi akhirati hasanatan wa qina adhaban nar* (O our Lord! Bestow upon us good in this world and good in the Hereafter, and protect us from the torment of the fire). *Mu'minīn* is the plural form of the Arabic word *mu'min*, which means "believer" or "one who has faith." *Mu'minīn* can be the general plural as well as the masculine plural. *Mu'mināt* is the feminine plural.

[23] *Rahbar* is a Persian word, which translates to "leader" and refers to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, who at the present is 'Alī Hosseinī Khāmene'ī.

cities. The Wahhabi and Wahhabi-styled *Salafiyya* have never been friends of Shi'as and vice versa, and this type of polemical statement reflects a common Shi'a attitude towards Wahhabis, the Sa'udi state, and its virulently anti-Shi'a religious inclinations.[24]

Later in the evening I had the opportunity to engage Maulana Haider in a discussion in which he was very quick to point out that a Shi'a organization referred to as the Muslim Congress existed through the auspices of the Islamic Education Center of Houston and the Islamic Center of MOMIN that strived to extend the Shi'a cause in North America. "We are very political" he exclaimed after learning I was a doctoral student of political science, and began to show me this organization's website on his rather state-of-the-art cellular phone. I immediately wondered what he meant by *political*.

All of this raised questions in my mind. Does the congregation of this mosque see Iran as *its* Islamic Republic? Do the members of this mosque follow and believe what the *shaykh* exclaims to the fullest? Do the Pakistanis, Arabs, and Afghanis, as well as the Iranians, view the Islamic Republic of Iran in the same light as Maulana Haider? He seems to be proclaiming a *Pan-Shi'ism* that extends beyond any cultural, ethnic, or geographical ties. However, what possibly was witnessed was the difference between elite aspirations/beliefs and grass-roots compliance. I wondered what the real sentiment

---

[24] Further complicating matters, Shi'as have never forgiven the Wahhabis for their attack, destruction, and looting of Imām Ḥusayn's tomb in Karbalā' in the year 1801. Similarly, it is the *Ahl al-Sa'ud* that Shi'as blame for the 1925 destruction of many of the tombs in *Jannat al-Baqi* cemetery in Madīnāh that housed the graves of four of the twelve Shi'a Imāms, as well as other very important figures of early Islam, many of whom were the companions of the Prophet Muhammad.

of the rank and file of this mosque and other Shi'a mosques was. Though not all of these questions are specifically answered in this dissertation, they were nevertheless a part of the initial thought process that resulted in the current project.

Brainstorming led me to attempt to understand this group in the American setting. The more time I spent at the MOMIN center, the more I was led wonder if perhaps Shi'as were a group of people closing themselves off from American society as a whole. The rhetoric from the top painted a picture that Islamic values could not be fully achieved or realized in American society. I also had the impression that Shi'as were closing themselves off from the larger Muslim population, meaning there was very little intra-faith dialogue. My immediate concern revolved around the seeming impossibility of this community to thrive, exist, and flourish in the American setting.

As the fieldwork was being conducted, I came to the understanding that Maulana Haider and some of the members of MOMIN belonged to a significant minority of Shi'as living in the United States. Furthermore, it became quite clear that Maulana Haider was not "anti-American," and in fact welcomed the help and support of any person or group that was sympathetic to his cause. Additionally, it became quite clear (though it should be quite obvious) that being Shi'a does not necessarily indicate that one is a follower and supporter of Iranian policies or politics. The Shi'as in the United States are not proxies of the Iranian government, and to a large degree many of them are quite disgusted with the Islamic Republic's policies. There are staunch followers of the

Islamic Republic in the United States that is for sure, however these ways of thinking are not dominant among the overall community.

The average member of this community is looking to better his or her life and the life of their family members. Like other immigrant groups, they made their way to the United States for educational and economic opportunities, and some migrated to escape political, religious and/or ethnic repression. In doing so, they have assimilated and have added to the American experience. My interest, and the goal of this dissertation, is to ascertain what role the religious narratives of Shi'ism play in a setting where few people know the difference between a Sunni and a Shi'a, what 'Āshurā is, and who Imām Ḥusayn was.

My Position in the Community

Given the situation of the American Muslim community in a post-9/11 world, my role as a researcher and investigator visiting a mosque or Islamic center was met with varying degrees of suspicion. In some occasions, that suspicion subsided as soon as they realized I was "one of them." In other instances, me being Iranian, Indian, and Shi'a probably heightened their concern. "Who better to spy on us?!" I believe this is part of the reason that considerable difficulty arose in obtaining a higher response rate in regards to the surveys, or even obtaining permission to conduct surveys in some instances. As mentioned, much of this comes from post-9-11 fears, as well as local events that occurred prior to my contact with the different centers. Even if they knew I was harmless, there were many who were worried that others would use the survey data

to make claims and accusations against the community. Therefore, in the minds of some, it was better not to participate in order to avoid saying something that could come back to haunt them later.

Data collection in one location was sabotaged after a member of the community, who happened to hold a doctorate in anthropology, openly and emphatically criticized the methodology of collecting survey data. His criticisms were so vociferous that it consequently led me to abandon the survey in that location, as he had criticized it on the grounds that other groups could use the information to make false claims and accusations against members of the Shi'a community. Additionally, he attacked the methodology on the academic grounds that "political scientists were obsessed with surveys," and that as an anthropologist he believed this obsession with surveys and quantitative methods was the reason political scientists were missing the whole point of social interaction and political behavior. Being one of the influential members of the community, coupled with his position as an academic, he effectively slammed the door shut on any chance of getting a satisfactory response rate in that particular location.

Invariably, at every location I met members of the community that wanted me to be successful, not just for my own academic success, but because they believed that my work would benefit the community as a whole. Quite often I was told that they would pray for me to further the Shi'a cause in the United States. Requests and suggestions of what I should say and report in my work were never scarce. "Will you tell them that we approach politics differently than the Sunnis?" "Don't forget to mention the role of

Imām Mahdī in our politics!" "You must tell them that we don't do those crazy things that those Wahhabis do." On one such occasion I was labeled their "shining star," because from their estimation I was striving to relay a just depiction of Shi'as in the United States. Sayyid Mohammad Baqer Kashmiri, the representative of Grand Ayatollah Sistani in the United States, conveyed to me that my work was very important for Shi'as and Muslims in the United States; that the success of my work would propel Shi'as and Muslims further into mainstream American society. Consequently, he practically placed his office, which is the liaison of the Grand Ayatollah Sistani in North America, at my service to further the progress of my research. An older gentleman at another location upon learning my field of study was political science immediately exclaimed "Praise be Allah, now we have a brother who is learning about this *kāfir* system so he can teach us about it."[25] This is quite a bit of pressure to be placed on the shoulders of a lowly graduate student, however it speaks volumes as to how many of them were aching to have the story of the Shi'as in the United States told. It also allows for a glimpse into the perceptions and political dispositions of the overall community. Whether they were adherents of the accommodationist or *velāyat* approach, they showed interest in politics, and were eager to know what my thoughts were and how this dissertation would depict them.

---

[25] *Kāfir* is the Arabic term for "unbeliever," "rejecter," or "ingrate."

Once accepted into a community, balancing my role as an investigator with the necessity to become familiar with the subjects was very difficult. As a scholar the desire is to be an objective observer, however members of the community slowly but surely start becoming friends, and relationships are formed, many of which have continued until this very day. Invitations to lunch, dinner, and coffee become the norm. On one occasion I was even solicited to be a community member's business partner. More than two years after leaving one location, I received a Facebook message asking of my marital status. Evidently a young lady was interested in getting to know me with the hopes of marriage, and as such her friend inquired from my contact in that particular city about what my situation was. On another occasion, one Imām practically proposed on the behalf of what I assumed to be a single girl in his family. I politely declined, but quite often I felt as if I was the interviewee during my discussions with Imāms and community leaders.

Familiarity would sometimes put me in situations in which I felt that interviewees were offering me information that probably was not meant for my ears. They would sometimes open up to me in ways that would make me wonder, "Should she be telling me this?" or "Are you sure you want this to be on the record?" The candidness and comfort that many of my subjects had with me was quite surprising. Conversely, some interviews resulted in little or no benefit. The interviewee agreed to discuss, but were not very forthcoming with answers. It was as if they were worried that they would be painted in a bad light.

All of this points to the fact that being a participant observer is easier said than done. One must focus and attempt to distinguish both roles, and yet make sure not to totally separate them. As mentioned, it is difficult to do so when you are confronted with such hospitality, however the task was even more daunting given the fact that though I am a Shi'a, I never spent a significant amount of time around other Shi'as. In the course of the fieldwork, I found myself seeking out their company for conversations about what it meant to be Shi'a in the United States, as well as for camaraderie. Ironically, many of these casual discussions became the basis of much of my ethnographic data. I was gathering a large bulk of my data simply by "hanging out" and fulfilling my own personal curiosities. While in Washington, D.C., I became very close with a group of young Shi'a professionals and students. Some of them worked on "the Hill" in the halls of Congress, NGOs, or civil rights organizations; others were students at the local universities; a few actually worked for the Iraqi embassy. They were "hang-out buddies," and they welcomed me with open arms when they heard of my presence and purpose in the area. Consequently, I too became a "hang out buddy." Our time together usually consisted of attending a lecture at a local mosque, followed by late night snacking at a *ḥalāl* friendly establishment. The topics would vary from deep philosophical discussions involving Islamic jurisprudence, to the roles of Muslims in the United States, to past experiences growing up Shi'a in Saddam's Iraq or Wahhabi dominated Saudi Arabia, to the study of international relations, or which team would win the Cowboys-Redskins game that coincided with my trip to the DC area.

It was always difficult to leave the locations I visited. I usually formed great relationships and friendships with members of each community. I cherished the discussions we had, either in the professional or casual sense. There is still that nostalgic effect left in my mind. As a Shi'a, I often think that the community is in the good hands of the younger generation.

My own religiosity increased, due probably to my interaction with rather devout Shi'as. Just as with Thurfjell's (2006) experience when studying the ritualization among Islamist men in contemporary Iran, I found myself somewhat envious of my subjects' religiosity.[26] My lack of thorough knowledge of the theology of Shi'ism and my lack of experience in Shi'a mosques sometimes resulted in awkward situations. However, it also made it beneficial for me to clarify the way I was situated in relation to the field of the study (from Thurfjell quoting Eck 2000: p.140). The fact that I was not the most familiar with all of the discourses allowed me to analyze the situations as both an insider and an outsider.

The last point I make in regards to my position in the communities deals with the issue of gender. As a male, it was often quite difficult to get women to participate due to restrictions between inter-gender interaction. In some locations, I would obtain only a few females respondents in regards to the survey. A low response rate was often the result of having to hand a stack of surveys to a pre-teen child who would then take it to

---

[26] Thurfjell, *Living Shi'ism: Instances of Ritualisation Among Islamist Men in Contemporary Iran*.

the women's area. Once the surveys left the view of my eyes, it was extremely difficult

to get a response. If women had questions about the survey, it would be difficult to

reply to their inquiries. I would either never see those surveys again, or that same child

would return the whole stack of blank surveys. In regards to interviews, some of the

most telling and interesting interviews involved women. In one location, most of my

contact was with a woman named Fatma Saleh, who was one of the most helpful and

zealous supporters of my work and one of the activists discussed in-depth in Chapter 5.

THE SHI'A COMMUNITY & THE CURRENT POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE SURROUNDING MUSLIMS IN AMERICA

The analysis of the political and social activities of Shi'as living in the United States is

not disconnected completely from Shi'a history and politics in the setting of the Islamic

world, however it is a discussion of Shi'as in a totally different context, one in which

they are a minority within a minority. This psyche of being a minority has played a role

in how they view themselves in the political system and in what ways they decide to

participate politically and socially. This dissertation focuses on the largest branch of

Shi'ism known as the *Ithnā'asharīyāh* ("Twelvers"), also known as followers of the

Ja'fari madhhab (school of jurisprudence). Shi'as in the United States are diverse. As

can be witnessed in the greater Islamic world, Shi'as in the United States are comprised

of a wide variety of ethnicities and nationalities. In the American context, Shi'as

primarily consist of Iranians, Arabs (Lebanese, Iraqi, Yemeni, etc.), Pakistanis, Indians,

and Afghanis. The difference is that in the American context, the mix of different

ethnicities within one Shi'a community creates interesting and challenging scenarios that do not exist amongst the homogenous communities in Iran, Pakistan, or Iraq for example. Unlike much of the literature on Muslims in the United States, this study focuses specifically on Shi'a Muslims and is political in nature. As stated above, most of the literature that involves Shi'as in the United States has predominantly emerged from the fields of religious studies and sociology. This dissertation approaches the study of Shi'as from the academic tradition of political science, and discusses their political and social participation.

In an earlier article I suggested that Shi'a narratives possibly affect Shi'a political and social participation.[27] I found that though Sunnis and Shi'as living in the United States participate in political action on roughly the same levels (excluding participation in rallies and protests, in which 46% of Shi'as as compared to 26% of Sunnis participated), and I suggested that an understanding of Shi'a narratives and symbols would help explain *why* Shi'as participated. Given that I found congregants in a particular Shi'a mosque in Dearborn, Michigan that viewed Islamic teachings as being more compatible with participation in American politics than Sunnis or Shi'as that did not attend Shi'a religious centers, I postulated that perhaps there was something about Shi'a mosques and the activities that occurred within them that led to such beliefs. Additionally, I suggested "that the narratives that drive Shi'ism are also empowering

---

[27] Cyrus Ali Contractor, "The Dearborn Effect: A Comparison of the Political Dispositions of Shi'a and Sunni Muslims in the United States," *Politics and Religion* 4, no. 1 (April 2011).

many Shi'as to act politically for the benefit of society as a whole, not just for Shi'as' or Muslims' gains."[28]

The fact Shi'as in the United States have not been studied extensively presents both positive and negative implications for my dissertation. The negative aspects in studying the political disposition of a previously little or unstudied demographic group are quite apparent. In the absence of a robust "Shi'a politics literature," the question of how to proceed becomes a daunting task. The lack of a point of departure, or literature to either attempt to bolster or refute puts much of the onus of the "state of the field" in my hands. I constantly had to remind myself of this fact during the process of data collection.

In regards to the positive aspects, studying the political behavior of Shi'as in the United States does much in helping to understand not only the Shi'as, but adds to the burgeoning field of Muslim American studies in general. This could not be timelier given the recent surge of so-called Islamophobia that has surfaced since the 2010 U.S. congressional mid-term elections. Discussions of the Park-51 Islamic center, *sharī'āh* law dispute in Oklahoma and other states, and the 2011 Radicalization of American Muslim congressional hearings called by Representative Peter King (R-NY), make this dissertation a timely piece as it explains the political inclinations and behavior of a subset of American Muslims. Though Shi'as have not been implicated or accused of acts of terrorism or conspiracy to commit acts of terrorism in the United States, they are

---

[28] Ibid., 13.

nevertheless still targeted. Also, given the propensity to link Shi'as with the Islamic Republic of Iran, an air of suspicion always follows them.

As mentioned before, what has been lacking in the study of Muslim American political behavior is a study of Shi'as as a distinct group. As mentioned, the nuances of Shi'a political behavior contributes to knowledge accumulation, and helps to bolster not only the study of Muslim Americans, but also the study of minority groups and adds to the literature concerning the use of religious narratives for political purpose. The concern of sacrificing generalizability for nuance is important, but these peculiarities make this dissertation stand out as original.

Acknowledging that the political science literature on religious and ethnic minorities contributes to a better understanding of the political dispositions of Shi'as in the United States. Similarly, this dissertation contributes to the understanding of political dispositions and behavior of minority groups; both religious and ethnic minorities. Invariably, much of the expected behavior is not exclusively Shi'a or Muslim behavior, or Pakistani, Arab, or Iranian behavior. There are many Christian groups in the United States who feel that liberal democracy is dangerous and anti-God, just as the Nation of Islam has harbored "separatist" inclinations in its history. Therefore, there are some interesting inter-religious parallels that will become apparent, and it is anticipated that this dissertation will contribute to this discussion within religious studies.

Last, this dissertation speaks to a discussion that is very relevant in the Middle Eastern studies literature, and that is the topic of democratization. It is no secret that the Middle East and greater Islamic world has a reputation of being mired in authoritarianism and oppression. This is especially true in the Arab world, but permeates in varying degrees throughout the Islamic world. It is claimed by some that there is no real hope for democratization. Terms such as "Arab exceptionalism" are often thrown about as possible reasons for the lack of democracy in the Middle East. Often it is argued that Islam and democracy do not mix… that there is something about Islam that breeds authoritarianism and a complacency among everyday Muslims.[29] The events of the "2011 Arab Awakening" are now breaking those previously held theories. Though we cannot be sure of what will emerge after the dust settles in places like Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Bahrain, we can begin to postulate about the effects on Muslim minorities living in other parts of the world. Also, we can see the influence of Muslim immigrants to the West on the political revelations back in the Middle East and elsewhere in the Islamic world. We have witnessed Muslim Americans, Muslim Britons, Muslim French and even Muslims in the Islamic World, blogging, protesting, attending panel discussions, and the likewise in order to show their support for the people in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Bahrain, Syria, and elsewhere. Muslims in the United

---

[29] M. Steven Fish, "Islam and Authoritarianism," *World Politics* 55, no. 1 (2002): 34; Daniela Donno and Bruce Russett, "Islam, Authoritarianism, and Female Empowerment: What Are the Linkages," *World Politics* 56, no. 4 (2004): 26.

States are writing letters to their representatives and senators in order to affect policy towards the regimes in the Islamic world.

This dissertation delves into the puzzle of whether in a political setting where minority rights are protected and the rights to assemble and associate are guaranteed, are Muslims, and Shi'as in particular, participating politically? If given one of the best-case scenarios and possibilities to participate in the democratic process, are Muslims taking the opportunity to have their voices heard? The answer is mixed. The interesting point is to understand why they are or are not participating, what influences their participation, and how their participation in manifested.

LAYOUT OF THE DISSERTATION AND CHAPTER OUTLINE

The following is a delineation of how this dissertation unfolds. Chapter 1 is a review of the literature on the study of Shi'as in the United States and elsewhere as well as a review of the literature on political participation, especially focusing on the role of religion on political participation. Chapter 2 analyzes the dependent variable, how Shi'as in the United States participate politically. It also serves as an introduction of sorts to allow the reader to gain a feel for participatory actions of the locations included in this dissertation. What percentage of Shi'as are voting and contributing monetarily? Has there been an increase in political participation? Shi'as are participating in all modes of political participation and are doing so on higher levels than the average American in some instances. Chapter 2, then, describes how everyday Shi'as in the locations I visited participate politically.

The remaining chapters 3, 4, 5 and the concluding chapter 6 all revolve around the independent variable: the use of Shi'a narratives and symbols. Chapter 3 is an example of the Shi'a narrative *par excellence*, the story of the tragedy of 'Āshurā. This chapter is included to give the reader an idea of the narrative and how it is used. It invokes powerful imagery, and when narrated it brings tears and sobbing to the speaker and the audience. The story of 'Āshurā is by no means the only Shi'a narrative, but it is the most used and most recognized. Chapter outlines the leaders' telling and retelling of the narratives. In this chapter I discuss the theoretical approach espoused by David S. Gutterman in his book *Prophetic Politics: Christian Social Movements and American Democracy*, and how I use a similar approach when discussing the differing tropes of Shi'a narratives and how they are used by "political prophets" to influence political and social participation.[30] Here the reader is introduced to the "prophetic prophets" of the Shi'a communities I visited. Additionally, I discuss the three approaches to political participation: the quietist, accommodationist, and *velāyat* approaches. Chapter 5 then serves as the discussion of if and how the narratives of Chapter 4 affect political and social participation among a handful of Shi'a activists. As such, the activists' lives are discussed and we learn how they use these narratives in their lives as political conscious individuals. Each has his and her own approach to political participation, but they are all in search of social justice. Chapter 6, the conclusion, I summarize the findings

---

[30] David S. Gutterman, *Prophetic Politics: Christian Social Movements and American Democracy* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2005).

throughout the study, offering some insights as to what the study of Shi'a narratives means for understanding Shi'as in the United States, and also what implications this may have on the future study of this demographic group… this *minority within a minority*. With this dissertation, I hope to open a new avenue to the study of Muslims in the United States within the academic tradition of political science. The focus on Shi'as is an attempt to get a better understanding of how they form political and social proclivities, and how grand narratives play a role in that process.

CHAPTER 1 – REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY OF SHI'A IN THE UNITED STATES AND ELSEWHERE

There is an established literature on Muslims in the United States, and even some work on Shi'as in the American setting. The majority of the literature for this dissertation primarily includes both quantitative and qualitative research conducted by American scholars of religion, sociology, anthropology, and political science who focus on Muslims in the United States. Much of the literature focuses on Muslims in general, and is very instructive in understanding issues that are relevant not only for understanding Muslims in the United States, but also for the study of other minority groups. Other sources such as the Muslim American Public Opinion Survey is of paramount importance to the success of this dissertation. These data speak to the state of Muslim political and social participation in the American context. However, though most of this information is invaluable, it does not provide for an adequate understanding of the Shi'a perspective in regards to issues of politics and political participation.

As a discipline, political science has overlooked the importance of the uniqueness of Shi'as in the United States, and they have not been extensively researched as a distinct group in this country. This is one of the main reasons for embarking on the present project. Simply stated, most of the work focusing on Shi'as in the American context has been approached through the religious studies and sociological studies lenses. The fact that the Shi'a have not been given extensive attention by the discipline of political

science is somewhat understandable as they are a rather small demographic group and it has been an arduous task in simply estimating the number of Muslims, let alone the number of Shi'as, in the United States.

Walbridge (1993, 1994, 1997, 1999), GhaneaBassiri (1997), Takim (2000, 2002, 2009), and Schubel (1996) have looked at various aspects of Shi'ism in the North American context.[1] These studies are primarily within religious and sociological studies, and are invaluable sources of information about the formation of Shi'a identity in North America. Though not political scientists, their works are instructive for understanding how identity and communal formation can influence political participation. Additionally, the ethnographic methodology they utilize has been helpful in my own research.

Beginning in the 1980s interest in the Shi'as in the Muslim world increased primarily due to the events of the Iranian Revolution, the rise of Hezbollah, and the Iran-Iraq War. This interest has increased especially as a result of the collapse of

---

[1] Walbridge, "Confirmation of Shi'ism in America: An Analysis of Sermons in the Dearborn Mosques"; Walbridge, "The Shi'a Mosques and the Congregations in Dearborn"; Walbridge, *Without Forgetting the Imam: Lebanese Shi'ism in an American Community*; Walbridge, "A Look at Differing Ideologies Among Shi'a Muslims in the United States"; Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *Competing Visions of Islam in the United States: A Study of Los Angeles*, Contributions to the Study of Religion (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997); Liyakatali Takim, "Foreign Influences on American Shi'ism," *The Muslim World* 90 (2000): 459-477; Liyakatali Takim, "Multiple Identities in a Pluralistic World: Shi'ism in America," in *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 218-232; Liyakat Nathani Takim, *Shi'ism in America* (New York, New York: New York University Press, 2009); Vernon James Schubel, "Karbala as Sacred Space among North American Shi'a: 'Every Day is Ashura, Everywhere is Karbala'," in *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1996), 186-203.

Saddam's regime and subsequent historical emergence of the first ever Shiʻa governed Arab state, the rise in power and influence of Iran as a possible regional hegemon, and the debatable success of Hezbollah in holding off the superiorly equipped Israeli military in the summer of 2006. The 2009 Iranian election fiasco has once again brought to the forefront the discussion of the viability and sustainability of the Islamic Republic's ideology of *velāyat-e faqīh* (Guardianship of the Jurist). More recently, the "Arab Awakening" of 2011 has resulted in the Shiʻas of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia demonstrating for more freedoms and rights in their respective countries. Because this dissertation focuses on Shiʻas in the United States, I provide a brief overview of the different ways Shiʻism and Shiʻas have been studied in the American context.

Research Covering Shiʻism and Shiʻas within the American Context

As mentioned, Shiʻas in the United States have not been thoroughly studied, however it is important to clarify that Shiʻas in the United States have not been studied extensively *as Shiʻas*. Studies exist which take a look at Iranian Americans and Arab Americans, and invariably both of these groups include Shiʻas within their numbers.[2] However, there actually exists very little work on the *Shiʻas as Shiʻas*. The following is a review of works that have Shiʻas and Shiʻism in the American context as the primary focus.

---

[2] Abdolmaboud Ansari, *Iranian Immigrants in the United States: A Case Study of Dual Marginality* (Milwood, New York: Associated Faculty Press, 1988); Michael W. Suleiman, *Arabs in America: Building a New Future* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1999).

Linda S. Walbridge's anthropological approaches to studying Shi'as in the American context are fascinating to say the least. Much of her work focuses on the Dearborn, Michigan area, and provides a rich and in-depth analysis of this community.[3] Dearborn is home to the largest Arab-American population in the United States, and at present is home to the largest mosque in North America, the Islamic Center of America, which interestingly is a Shi'a mosque. In her analysis of sermons delivered by different *'Alīms* in Dearborn between 1987 and 1990 she utilizes an anthropological approach to look at the types of subjects addressed and the styles that are utilized to convey messages.[4] I include the following, as it is instructive in how Imāms and shaykhs utilize sermons and speeches to influence people.

> The three shaykhs [who give their sermons exclusively in Arabic] have arrived from Lebanon in the past ten years… their style of speech conforms to what Bloch refers to as formalized speech acts. The limitations on loudness, intonation, vocabulary, and sources for illustrations are all apparent and the speakers all conform to certain stylistic rules. The question arises as to whether or not the use of such formalized speech affects the message that is being conveyed. Bloch argues that it does. Formalized speech, he claims, prevents the

---

[3] Walbridge, "Confirmation of Shi'ism in America: An Analysis of Sermons in the Dearborn Mosques"; Walbridge, "The Shi'a Mosques and the Congregations in Dearborn"; Walbridge, *Without Forgetting the Imam: Lebanese Shi'ism in an American Community*; Walbridge, "A Look at Differing Ideologies Among Shi'a Muslims in the United States."

[4] Walbridge, "Confirmation of Shi'ism in America: An Analysis of Sermons in the Dearborn Mosques." Words in bracket are my own.

speakers from tackling specific issues or dealing with divisive actions. It conveys less information about the world than ordinary speech, but it enhances its "Illocutionary" potential; i.e., its ability to influence people. What the speaker says is predictable. The constraints of the speaking style make it so. The predictability of the speech is what makes it "coercive." As Boyer puts it, "the actors are 'caught' in a discursive pattern which makes it impossible to disagree or contradict, since the series of utterances is predetermined from the outset. Ritual language can thus serve an ideological purpose in that it is a 'hidden' yet powerful mechanism which reduces drastically the possibility of dissent." [5]

Walbridge's findings work contrary to what Bloch and Boyer both argue in regards to formalized speech acts. In her research she finds that the "illocutionary" potential of the formalized speech acts of the three *shaykhs* probably leaves much to be desired. Much of the Shi'a rank and file has exerted a particular type of independence from their clergy. Depending on which *shaykh* is conveying the message, the community responds accordingly. Shaykh Berri is seen as the "in between" *'Alīm* amid Burro's highly intellectual approach and Shaykh Attat's "proletarian" style. Berri generally speaks on the "everyday" aspects of Shi'a life such as praying, fasting, and the pilgrimage. On the other hand,

---

[5] Ibid., 251. Maurice Bloch, "Introduction," in *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society*, ed. Maurice Bloch (London, UK: Academic Press, 1975); Pascal Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 83.

Burro's highly intellectualized speech on ethics conveys a different message

than Shaykh Attat's more homely variation on the same theme. And by

introducing a topic such as *'irfan*, Shaykh Burro is subtly making the statement

that the people should approach Islam in such a way as to drastically

differentiate themselves from the rest of society.[6]

However, these differences that could be catastrophic for the Dearborn Shi'a

community's unity are checked and minimized. In other words, the rank and file attend

the sermons of these three *shaykhs*, but they downplay the differences and do not allow

the mild to drastic variations in approach to cause division in the community. "Partially

this is accomplished by simply ignoring much of what is said [and] by a conscious

decision… not to have major divisions. Thus, for many the choice is either to attend no

mosque functions or to attend those at more than one mosque."[7]

Walbridge (1997) extended her research from the 1993 article into a full

anthropological study involving the Shi'a community in Dearborn.[8] In doing so, she

completely immersed herself in the community, engaging in and formulating an

enriched account of its existence. Hers is a historical account of the process of the

foundation of the early Shi'a community in Dearborn which "Americanized" to fit into

larger society, and continues to the transformation that occurred with the influx of

---

[6] Walbridge, "Confirmation of Shi'ism in America: An Analysis of Sermons in the Dearborn Mosques," 256.

[7] Ibid., 261.

[8] Walbridge, *Without Forgetting the Imam: Lebanese Shi'ism in an American Community*.

immigrants from a "different" Middle East, one that had been changed by the failures of Arabism and the emergence of Islamism. Events such as the Iranian Revolution and the Lebanese Civil War contributed to the changing attitudes and identities in the Dearborn community. Through the use of in-depth interviews, Walbridge also analyzes the importance and salience of "all-things Shi'i" such as the concept of *marja' taqlid*, *'Āshurā* and the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn, *mut'a* (temporary marriage), as well as issues that affect all Muslims such as *sharī'āh* law, what is *ḥalāl* and *harām*, and the role and treatment of women.[9] Throughout she compares the experience of the Shi'a community to its Catholic predecessors in Dearborn. In doing so, she shows the parallels between Catholic immigrants facing discrimination from Protestants and the Muslim/Shi'a immigrant experience. Walbridge finds that the community she studied was distinctively Shi'a and Lebanese.

> [Their] distinctiveness fosters a sense of wellbeing – a sort of collective mental health – in the community at large. The mosques, the clerics, the rituals are a bridge tying homeland (usually village) to life in the new land. These things make the transition far less jarring than it might be. They serve the purpose of

---

[9] *Marja' taqlid* ("Source of Emulation") is the highest-ranking clerical title in Shi'ism. An ayatollah becomes a *marja'* when his students, less-credentialed clerics, and his followers trust him in answering their many questions in regards to Islam. A *marja'* usually compiles a book, referred to as *resalah*, which consists of his rulings and opinions based on his knowledge and the most authentic Islamic sources. The *resalah* is used by a follower (*muqalled*) of a *marja'* in order to understand how to approach different situations in daily life. It can also be used by prospective followers to decide between different *marāji'* (plural of *marja'*). A follower is expected to have a *marja'*, and to die without one is considered to be a sin. Additionally, though one may emulate a dead *marja'* on certain topics that do not change regardless of the era, they are nevertheless required to choose a new *marja'*, because inevitably new issues will arise that will need the judgment of a living *marja'*.

buffering the individual from the onslaught of new and "foreign" ways and

provide a framework of values within which to confront difficult choices and

experiences. For this community, and perhaps for all sincere Shi'a, religion can

still provide the means of challenging the status quo.[10]

Additionally, Walbridge comments on the pressures of trying to remain ethnically

and religiously distinct in the American context. She argues that at the time of

publication, the community was strong enough in its "Shi'a-ness" to exert pressures on

community members to follow the tenets of the religion, and that the continual influx of

immigrants only contributes to this unique ethnic/religious identity.

> While the intensity of the Shi'i experience was lacking in the lives of earlier
>
> immigrants and their children, today's children, on the other hand, hear the
>
> names of the Imāms repeatedly invoked, see increasing numbers of shrouded
>
> women, witness men beating their chests in a display of remorse and anger over
>
> the tragedy of the death of the Imām Ḥusayn and over the tragedies in their own
>
> lives.[11]

However, she argues that time will be the judge of how strong this "Shi'a-ness"

really is. The simple fact of the matter is that though children are witnessing the rituals

of *'Āshurā*, they are also becoming assimilated into the broader American culture.

---

[10] Walbridge, *Without Forgetting the Imam: Lebanese Shi'ism in an American Community*, 202.
[11] Ibid., 205.

Though religious pluralism and tolerance have been very beneficial to a myriad of immigrant groups in the United States, especially those that faced persecution in their homelands, from the perspective of those members of a given community who seek to maintain a distinctive identity and way of life, religious pluralism and tolerance can have a devastating effect. Small communities like the Shi'as face the possible problem of diminished numbers and diminished identity if adherents decide to convert, stop practicing, or take on more "liberal" forms of their own faith. That being said Walbridge paints a picture of the future that depicts the Americanization of the Shi'as in Dearborn (and probably elsewhere). The compartmentalizing of religion, the increasing congregational style of the mosques, and the changing roles of the *'ulamā'* from erudite scholars to family counselors are just a few ways in which this is happening. My own research brought me face to face with *'Alīms* who had full time jobs outside of their responsibilities as a clergyman. One individual was a graduate student pursuing a degree in family counseling. This is invariably a point of necessity due to the changing roles of the *'ulamā'* in the United States. Walbridge also believed that the community would change as time passes. Some will continue to stick strictly to the *sharī'āh* , others will become more lax, and other will leave the religion all together.[12]

---

[12] Though Walbridge's (1997) work is extremely instructive, one of its deficiencies is that it focuses primarily on the Dearborn community, and as such makes or implies claims of generalizability to the broader Shi'a community of the United States, when in fact many of these claims cannot be made. She correctly asserts that the Dearborn community she studies is distinctively Shi'a and Lebanese. However, Dearborn is a rare instance of such a large Shi'a population. The large population of Pakistanis in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex area is still not enough to exert the influence that the

Walbridge's study is extremely instructive, but I believe she failed to consider that these *'Alīms* would attempt to reformulate narratives for consumption by American Shi'as. Additionally, she could not have foreseen the impact that the events of September 11, 2001 would have on the American Muslim population as a whole; they were forced to become more politically and socially active. My own research has uncovered that Shi'a leaders are realizing the necessity to make the grand narratives and symbols appropriate for a younger generation that has no connection to their parents' homelands. They may have Lebanese, Iranian, Pakistani, or Iraqi blood, but they are American in every sense of the word. Therefore, the religious leaders are increasingly trying to tell and retell these narratives in order than they have relevance for young Shi'as as well as non-Shi'as that may come into contact with this community.

Walbridge (1999) also utilized her anthropological expertise to study "two approaches to activist Islam that can be found among younger Shi'as in the United States and Canada and how these approaches relate to political and ideological struggles in the Middle East."[13] In doing so she compares the political theories and views of Sayyid Muhammad Fadlallah and Imām Ruhollah Khomeini, and the political movements with which they are aligned, Da'wa and Hezbollah respectively. She is cognizant to point out that these two factions do not disagree about religious tenets (i.e. fasting, praying, etc,), but rather about the role of the *'ulamā'*, specifically the role of

---

Arabs (Sunni or Shi'a) in Dearborn have. The number of Iranians in the Los Angeles area is extensive, however do those that consider themselves to be Shi'a participate in politics as Shi'a?

[13] Walbridge, "A Look at Differing Ideologies Among Shi'a Muslims in the United States," 53.

the *marja' taqlid*. Hezbollahis view the *marja'* as being "an infallible leader who must be obeyed in all things, whether these matters are religious or secular. To a person related to Da'wa… the *marja'* is supposed to issue *fatwas* only on religious law and not in matters requiring expertise in other areas of specialization."[14] Again, this piece by Walbridge is extremely instructive for my dissertation, but the conversation about the role of the the *marja'* has transformed into a discussion revolving around Grand Ayatollah Sistani and Grand Ayatollah Khamene'i. This dissertation delves into the ideological differences between the followers of both of these jurists.

Liyakat Takim's (2000) look at the exterior influences on American Shi'as also discusses the institution of *marja'iyya*, and how the *marāji'* have become increasingly interested in fostering closer ties with their flocks in the West.[15] In doing so, the *marāji'* have sent emissaries to America to report on the needs of the community, and have attempted to respond to questions about living as a Shi'a in the West. Takim claims that most of the Shi'a religious centers in America affiliate themselves with one *marja'*.[16]

---

[14] Ibid., 64.This raises a discussion of the difference between *velāyat-e faqih-e motlaqeh* versus *velāyat-e faqih-e mashruteh*. Walbridge's "Hezbollah" sympathizers believe the *marja'* has *velāyat-e motlaqeh* (general/unconditional guardianship) over society, extending beyond just juridical matters. This is exemplified by Khomeini's treatise on government. Currently, Grand Ayatollah 'Alī Husseini Sistani is an advocate of *velāyat-e mashruteh* (specific/conditional guardianship). Therefore, those that make the claim that Sistani is against the concept of *velāyat-e faqih* (Guardianship of the Jurist) are actually in error. He is a proponent of the jurists' guardianship, but not in the all-encompassing manner that Khomeini theorized.

[15] Takim, "Foreign Influences on American Shi'ism." *Marja'iyya* is the institution of the role of *marja' taqlid* as a practice among the Shi'a.

[16] Ibid., 463. Takim claims that Khoja, Pakistani and Iraqi centers usually align themselves with the edicts of Grand Ayatollah Sistani; Lebanese tend to follow Ayatollah Fadlallah or Sistani, and Iranians tend to follow Ayatollah Khamene'i. This is contrary to what Walbridge (1997, 1999) argues. She offers

However, the situation is more complex than Takim makes it out to be. The religious

leader of a particular center is usually a follower of one of the *marāji'*, but he has the

permission to accept the religious taxes of a few. So for example, a particular *'Alīm* is

an adherent to the religious edicts of Grand Ayatollah Sistani, but he also has the *ijazah*

(permission) to collect the *zakat* (religious tax) on the behalf of Grand Ayatollahs

Khamene'i, Fadhlallah, and Sa'anei. In some instances, tensions arise within

mosques/centers between adherents of different *marāji'*, and this has resulted in

members of one location leaving and forming a new center.

Shi'as in the United States are also influenced by *khuṭabā'*, traveling preachers that

usually recite the eulogies of the Prophet and the 12 Infallible Imāms, and in doing so,

"forge a link between [Shi'as] abroad and those in America by bringing with them ideas

conceived in their countries of origin. Some of them act as representatives of foreign

political movements; others echo the views of thinkers in the Middle East."[17] The

khuṭabā' generally offer these recitations and eulogies in *majlis* (congregational

that Iranian Shi'a in the United States are more often than not averse to Islamic of Republic-style Shi'ism, and therefore to Khamene'i as a *marja'*. Additionally, many Lebanese Shi'a sympathetic to Hezbollah will more often than not, follow Khamene'i as they followed Khomeini, but this is not a given assumption. Moreover, in my experience (as alluded to above), many Pakistani Shi'a view Khamene'i as their *marja'*, but within a given mosque or religious center, the *shaykh* usually has the permission to collect the *zakat* and *khums* in the name of various different *marāji'*. I also found this to be true among Saudi Shi'a students in Norman, Oklahoma, a group that splits its emulation between Sistani, Khamene'i, and Grand Ayatollah Sadiq Hussaini Shirazi of Iran. This points to the fact that within a single Shi'a religious center or community the different congregants may be emulating different *marja'* and possibly more than one at the same time. Therefore, as Walbridge argues, assuming emulation of a particular *marja'* based simply on nation of origin of the *moqalled* (emulator/imitator) could possibly lead to faulty assumptions. However, I agree with Takim's assertion that the differences between the *marāji'* in the Middle East has prompted fragmentation in the American Shi'a community as a whole, but this might be slightly exaggerated.

[17] Ibid., 464.

settings), where their effectiveness increases. In other words, a large group setting increases the probability of effective permeation. The role of the *majlis* is crucial in the discussion of how leaders tell and retell the narratives of Shi'ism.

> The exposition of highly developed polemicized discourses and repeated affirmation of the historical injustices endured by the progeny of the Prophet helps mediate Shi'i Islam to the younger generation… [it] seeks to prove the verities of Shi'i beliefs and liturgical practices so as to forge and perpetuate a distinct Shi'i identity in America. This didactic function is indispensable to a religious minority that is required to defend its beliefs regularly from the assiduous attacks by the Wahhabis in America… By linking events in Kerbala with contemporary society, the *majlis*, although imported from abroad, acts as a source of moral edification, teaching young American Shi'is that Shi'i sacred history demands allegiance to the family of the Prophet, even in a non-Muslim environment. Thus, the *majlis* becomes an important tool in perpetuating Shi'i heritage and ethos. The *majlis* also provides the leadership with an important vehicle to bring about the necessary adjustments as this religious minority strives to assert its identity in the midst of the challenges of a pluralistic society.[18]

---

[18] Ibid., 465-466.

Additionally, Takim finds that some communities accentuate their Shi'a identity more than others. Shi'as in the United States are more likely to identify with the greater Muslim community in areas where they are extremely few in numbers. Much of this has to do with their attempt to "overcome the disadvantage of being in a double minority status, that is, Shi'i Muslims are not only disadvantaged (and thus in a minority) because they are Muslims but are further discriminated against because they are Shi'is."[19]

Another important factor to consider is the external influences from cultural forces. Many Islamic organizations in the United States have been formed less on a broader "Islamic," "Sunni," or "Shi'a" identity and more on ethnic, cultural, or national influences. The "process of ethnicization" has caused many communities, especially Shi'as, to be fragmented. While the members of a given ethnic group are united in particular religious centers, the community as a whole becomes fragmented. "In the processes of cultural negotiation, re-definitions and re-appropriation of a different culture, members of the Shi'i community have pursued different ways to adapt to the American milieu."[20] Accordingly, Iraqi Shi'a immigrants, as a consequence of their proximity to the holy cities of Najaf and Karbalā', tend to be more conservative, whereas the Lebanese and Iranians are seen as being more lax (especially in the eyes of the Iraqis) with their religious obligations. Takim claims that the pluralistic society of

---

[19] Ibid., 466-467.
[20] Ibid., 467.

Lebanon and the modernization and westernization project of the Shah have caused Lebanese and Iranian Shi'as to have a different cultural outlook.

Takim also discusses how the running of religious centers has not accommodated the complexities of being Shi'a in America. This has become especially problematic for the elders of the community who feel that the youth are being enticed by American culture. As a remedy, 70% of centers have incorporated youth programs to engage the attention of younger members of the community. For many Shi'as, the necessity to counterbalance the influence of "outside" pressure upon their children is one of the most important tasks that must be undertaken. Takim found in his study that the highly polemicized discourse that is common in these religious centers cuts against the more objective and accommodating discourse that exists in university settings.[21] Therefore, the youth find themselves in a precarious situation; do they succumb to one discourse over the other, or do they engage in a difficult balancing act? Takim's approach however ignores that Shi'as are making the attempt to blend these discourses. Though a minority, Shi'as are beginning to form an "American Shi'a" identity, one that is not bound completely to the old world, but rather one that struggles for justice in the United States. It is a true manifestation of the saying "Every land is Karbalā', Everyday is 'Āshurā."

---

[21] Ibid., 468.

To make this more complicated, in many areas around the United States, Shi'a centers simply do not exist, and therefore the Shi'a youth are often balancing more than two competing identities. Now they are forced to balance between being Muslim and American, but at the same time struggle to maintain their "Shi'a-ness" in religious centers that are dominated by Sunnis. For example, Muslim Student Associations on many campuses are Sunni dominated and influenced heavily by Saudi funding and dogma. Consequently, many "Shi'i students complain of enduring religious discrimination, of being barred from participating in MSA activities, and of Imāms reviling Shi'is in Friday sermons."[22] Furthermore, many Shi'as in the United States feel as if they constantly have to defend their beliefs from attacks coming from Sunnis, more so than from non-Muslims.

Much of this division between Sunnis and Shi'as in the American context is a result of the political disputes between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iran's influence on Shi'ism in the United States can be felt to varying degrees. However, due

---

[22] Ibid., 469. Though I have not witnessed open discrimination of Shi'as in Sunni mosques or MSA meetings, it is interesting that many of these gatherings are dominated by Sunni discourse. For example, the prayers are in the Sunni format. Shi'as are not necessarily barred from doing their prayers in the Shi'a manner, but there is an understanding that certain activities may not be tolerated or will be frowned upon. One of these is the utilization of *turba/mohr* (clay tablet), which Shi'as use for resting the head during prostration. Additionally, Shi'as repeatedly offer *salawat* (salutations) in a collective manner, in loud voice, whenever the *shaykh* mentions the name of the Prophet or any of the 12 Imāms, whereas Sunnis usually offer *salawat* only in the instances when the name of the Prophet is mentioned, and usually in a muttered voice. Also, *salawat* that Shi'as most often use is translated as follows: "Oh Allah, bless Mohammad and the progeny of Mohammad," whereas the Sunnis will often say "May Allah bless him and grant him peace." This does not mean that the *salawat* of the other is considered to be incorrect, however the Shi'a *salawat* is reminder of the importance of the 12 Imāms to the Islamic message. In the Shi'a mind, to neglect the Imāms is to neglect Mohammad, and therefore the laws of Allah.

to the poor relations between the U.S. and Iran, the Islamic Republic has attempted to influence Shiʻas in the United States in a less overt manner. Much of this takes place through education programs, the material of the Ansariyan Publication of Qom, and magazines and journals.

Takim (2002) is one of the only scholars to take a look at the political dispositions of Shiʻas in the American context, though his is primarily a list of how Shiʻas have participated in politics. The fact of the matter is that the list is rather short. However, what he does offer is instructive in trying to understand how Shiʻas view their situation in the United States. As Takim argues, Shiʻas do not view American citizenship something averse to being Shiʻa. In fact, most apply for citizenship as soon as the possible. When discussing political participation, Takim makes some very astute observations.

> The question of political participation by the American Shiʻi community is premised on two important considerations. Traditionally, Shiʻis have eschewed political involvement, because Shiʻi political theory is based on a hermeneutical structure that deems all governments in the prolonged absence of the twelfth Imām to be illegitimate. Because of this, even in their own countries, most Shiʻis have remained politically inactive. Lack of Shiʻi involvement in the American political process can also be explained by the relatively young age of the centers. Since most Shiʻi centers in America have been established since 1985, Shiʻis

have used their limited financial resources to build and consolidate their centers, rather than to engage in projects outside the community.[23]

As to the first consideration, though it is true that there has been a quietist stance towards participation in any temporal government in the absence of the Twelfth Imām, Takim makes too much of this as an excuse for lack of participation, and engages in slight reification of supposed Shiʻa principals. Perhaps the lack of Shiʻa participation can be attributed to the political realities of where they reside. Saddam-era Iraq was not necessarily the most politically free society, especially for the Shiʻas. Neither the Sunnis nor the Shiʻas have much say or influence on policy in the Saudi context. The situation for Shiʻas in Pakistan is not to be desired either. If Takim's assertion is correct, then why was such a high voter turnout witnessed in the Iranian presidential and parliamentary elections from 1997-2009? In fact, most of the Islamic Republic's elections have witnessed normal to high levels of voter turnout as compared to western democracies. Moreover, one of the main goals of Imām Khomeini was to dispel the quietist notion of political participation.[24] Therefore, it might be argued that the influence of Iran in the Shiʻa world might result in increased political activity regardless of location. Likewise, the massive numbers of Shiʻas that voted in the 2005 Iraqi

---

[23] Takim, "Multiple Identities in a Pluralistic World: Shi'ism in America," 226-227.

[24] It is understood that Khomeini's argument against quietist Shiʻism dealt primarily with the role of the *'ulamā'*, however I believe this can also be understood to encompass society as a whole. It can be argued that political participation is the movement away from what ʻAlī Sharʻiati referred to as *Black Shiʻism* to *Red Shiʻism*, that is from passive mourning to active participation.

elections is also proof against the "quietest explanation." This is further bolstered by the fact that Grand Ayatollāh Sīstānī, the quietest ayatollāh *par excellence*, issued a *fatwā* that instructed all Iraqis (Shi'a or otherwise) to participate in the election.

Takim's second consideration seems to have more merit and explanatory power. Simply stated, Shi'as in the United States are still in their infancy as members of American society, trying to gain a firm foothold. Political participation can wait until they have put things in order at home.

> [Shi'a] political aspirations in America have yet to crystallize into a concrete body with a properly formulated political agenda. In the absence of such political institutes, political activism manifests itself in public discourse on moral and social issues that impact the Muslim community. In Dearborn, an advertisement in the November 1998 issue of the newsletter of the Islamic Center of America (ICA), called *Islamic Insights*, urged its readers to go to the polls to vote against a proposal that seeks to legalize assisted suicides. "As Muslims we have a responsibility to the society in which we live… Go to the polls on November 3".

Takim asserts that when Shi'as do participate in the United States, it is usually in the conventional sense of participation. They lobby, vote, and contribute to campaigns. However, so many of his examples revolve around the Detroit area, where the Arab and Shi'a populations are rather large. Takim also offers the al-Khū'ī Foundation in New

York City as an organization that attempts to foster more political participation and even urges cooperation with Sunnis to gain influence in local politics. "The intent is to get [Shi'as] to vote for fellow Muslim candidates, planning for an eventual Muslim presence in Congress or the Senate" .

It is in these areas of significant Shi'a numbers where the most political participation takes place. This participation is primarily focused on local politics. For example, the Muslim population has successfully altered food programs in public schools of Dearborn. Though meals are not *ḥalāl*, pork is never served. Shi'as (and Muslims in general) make their voices heard through local politics.

However, in these areas where they have begun to exert their numbers through the appropriate channels of political participation, there is an increased effort in trying to affect politics on a larger scale.

> Increasingly, American politicians are acknowledging the need to rely on Muslim support in their constituencies. The March 1999 issue of the Islamic Center of America journal *Islamic Insights* carried *'Eid* greetings from the state representative to the local Muslim community. *'Eid* greetings were also sent by Governor John Engler, of Michigan. The governor had initially sought support from the Michigan Muslim community in running for his post. He attributed his victory in part to the support he received from the local Muslim community.

Muslims in these locations are garnering increasing attention from politicians, who view the members of these communities as influential constituents. Elections are won or lost based on how these communities vote. Realizing their importance, the leaders of these communities have begun flexing their political muscle and have used their newly found importance to further the Shi'a (Muslim) cause on the national scene. The best example is Imām Hassan al-Qazwini of the Islamic Center of America in Dearborn. He has been aggressive in his attempt to both encourage Muslim participation in American politics and to inform politicians of Muslim-American concerns. He has met with Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, former Vice-President Al Gore, as well as with many current and former Cabinet and congressional members. His advice to these officeholders has been to take heed of the Muslim population's opinion and to include them in positions of power within the government.

Increasingly, Shi'as have participated as members of organizations that do not exert a distinct Shi'a or even Islamic identity. For example, Takim offers that many members of the Greater Detroit community participate in Arab organizations such as the Arab American Political Committee (APAC), which is primarily constituted of Shi'as, but which avoids Islamic labels because of the stereotypes with which they are often associated.[25] Additionally, the Muslim Congress which is based out of the IEC-Houston has avoided using obvious Shi'a labels for its organization's name, however they do not

---

[25] Takim, "Multiple Identities in a Pluralistic World: Shi'ism in America," 228.

mince words when it comes time to identifying themselves as Shiʻas. Interestingly, gradually more Shiʻas are allying themselves with already established Sunni-based organizations, especially the American Muslim Council (AMC) and CAIR, and less so to Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). "They have taken CAIR's advice to seek out 'Muslim friendly' candidates in the election years."[26]

Schubel's (1996) study of the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn at the Jaʻffari Center in Toronto is also an instructive piece of work for my dissertation. In his analysis of these rituals, he finds that Karbalā' is something that permeates all time and space for the devout Shiʻas of Toronto, and aids in the construction of meaning and identity.

> By creating spatial and temporal arenas for the remembrance of Karbalā', the Shiʻa consciously adapt and accommodate existing institutions such as lamentation assemblies and processions in ways that allow them to claim space through the expression of central and paradigmatic symbols.[27]

These rituals therefore allow the Shiʻas of Toronto to claim space both as Shiʻas and as North Americans. "[T]hey thus Islamize elements of North American culture while creatively adapting Islam to the North American environment."[28]

---

[26] Ibid., 229.
[27] Schubel, "Karbala as Sacred Space among North American Shi'a: 'Every Day is Ashura, Everywhere is Karbala'," 186.
[28] Ibid., 187.

Ritual time and space are key elements of understanding the message of Karbalā'
and its emotive power. The commemoration of the events of Karbalā' takes place in
centers such as *Imāmbargahs* and *hosseiniyyehs*, areas consecrated for the myriad of
Shi'a religious activities. It is in these centers that important events that surround the
lives of the *Ahl al-Bayt* are commemorated throughout the year. These events include
such events as the birthdays and deaths of the *ma'asumeen*, as well as important days
such as *'Eid al-Ghadīr*, the victory of the Muslims at Khaybar under the command of
'Alī during the early years of Islam, *Yaūm al-Gham*, the commemoration of the events
of *Mubāhalāh*, amongst others. Schubel makes the argument that it is through the
commemoration of these events that devout Shi'a make sense of the world.

> As Professor Abdulaziz Sachedina… stated during a *majlis* in Toronto, the Shi'a
> believe that it is incumbent upon Muslims to remember the *ayam-i allah* (Days
> of God). For the Shi'a of course, these *ayam* include the days of Karbalā'.
> Optimally, the remembrance of Karbalā' should be integrated into the everyday
> lives of the Shi'i community. From the Shi'i perspective, the whole world
> continuously participates in Karbalā'; it is as if the events of Karbalā' are always
> taking place just below the surface of ordinary reality. Devotional ritual allows
> devotees to cut through the veil that separates them from Karbalā' so that they
> can actually participate in it. "Every day is Ashura, and everywhere is

Karbalā'," banners carried in the Muḥarram processions in downtown Toronto declare.[29]

The use of julus… illustrates an interesting juncture between Shi'i and North American culture. The julus has its origin in the Muslim world, and yet… could be seen by outside observers as simply another version of a secular activity, the parade. On one level the community was simply bringing a ritual to Canada, but on another it was Islamizing the already familiar North American ritual of ethnic groups parading.[30]

This section has focused on the study of Shi'as in the United States as well as Canada in the case of Schubel's piece. Though the literature is fully of very interesting studies, there is little to no research conducted in the field of political science about Shi'as in the United States. Muslims Americans in general have been studied, but the intention of this dissertation is to provide some nuance about a particular minority within the overall Muslim American community, the Shi'as. Additionally, this allows for future research that looks at the influence of foreign Shi'a politics on the American Shi'a experience by drawing on the burgeoning literature of Shi'a Transnationalism. The following is a review of the literature on political participation and the role of religion.

---

[29] Ibid., 189.
[30] Ibid., 199.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The discussion of the effect of religion on political participation has been thoroughly studied in the field of political science as well as other disciplines. This section serves as a review of some of the literature involving political participation in the American context, with purpose of outlining explanations that have been offered for American political behavior. The section begins by discussing the classic rational choice model of political participation, especially in regards to the quintessential democratic behavior, namely voting. Also discussed is the socio-economic model approach. Some of the civic engagement literature is included that discusses the effect that religious institutions/organizations have on political participation and perceptions towards participation. The literature on Latino political behavior is discussed because it gives the reader an example of the study of an important minority group in the United States. This allows for some possible parallels to be drawn between the fledgling Muslim/Shi'a community and the established Latino community, and the role that religion plays in political participation among these groups. This section concludes with a look at the literature on Muslim American political behavior, and in what manner all of this literature aids in determining how Shi'a narratives influence political and social behavior.

Rational Choice and Socio-Economic Status Models of Political Participation

Rational choice models such as Downs (1957) state that potential voters participate if the benefits outweigh the costs. Physical costs of getting to the polling location, taking

time off from one's job or busy day, as well as the realization that one's single vote has no effect on the outcome of an election leads to the conclusion that it is not rational to vote. Downs observed that voter turnout was higher than expected given the lack of rationality.[31] Riker and Ordeshook (1968) expand on Downs' theory and concluded that factors such as individuals' sense of political efficacy and civic duty help to explain who votes and why they vote. [32] Though these theories have been extensively used in the study of voting behavior, they do not give much credence to the effect of religion on political action.

Rational-choice models can also be used to discuss collective action. Mancur Olson's (1965) seminal work, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*, argues that groups organize when the incentives organize outweigh the costs of organization.[33] In explaining his theory, Olson argues that small groups actually have organizational advantages over large groups. Small groups have organizational advantages to deal with the logic of collective action: concentrated economic benefits, social incentives, and represent homogeneous individuals. Though the Shi'a community in the United States is relatively small, it nevertheless does not meet the definition of a small group as proposed by Olson, and this might explain the

---

[31] Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

[32] William H. Riker and Peter Ordeshook, "A Theory of the Calculus of Voting," *The American Political Science Review* 62, no. 1 (March 1968): 25-42.

[33] Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965). In my discussion of Olson's theory of large groups, I only focus on selective and ideological benefits as remedies to the free-rider problem. There are other remedies that he offers, but they are not germane to the topic of this dissertation.

lack of well-organized collective action among this demographic group. Shi'as are divided based on ethnicity, location, and politics. This political division is discussed in-depth throughout this dissertation by focusing on the ideological differences between those members who uphold a quietist, accommodationist or *velāyat* approach to political participation.

Larger groups face a much more difficult situation in regards to the logic of collective action. Within all potential groups, which are composed of all people who might be group members because they share some common interest, an actual group forms with a membership comprised of those members of the potential group who are committed to the common goal. They seek to provide some kind of collective good that cannot be withheld from a potential group member. This inevitably creates a free-rider problem, because potential members often decide not to join, but rather sit back and benefit from the work to which members of the actual group commit themselves. The free-rider effect increases as the size of the potential group increases. Selective benefits are offered as a remedy to the free-rider problem. These are goods that a group can restrict to those who pay their yearly dues, such as information publications, travel discounts, and group insurance rates.

Ideological incentives, the use of appeals to an individual's belief system, are another possible means to overcome the logic of collective action. In regards to this dissertation, it might be argued that Shi'a religious leaders appeal to the belief systems and sensibilities of their congregations through the use of Shi'a narratives. Additionally,

these leaders might also attempt to influence these sensibilities by utilizing particular tropes of the narratives that speak to the members of the congregation. Therefore, the leaders provide their communities with ideological incentives to participate politically and socially in a variety of ways. Conversely, it could be argued that organizing on the basis of ideological incentives results in a movement ideology that tends to be idealistic, radical, and prone to exclusivity. This in turn results in a movement that is isolated from the rest of society and is thus rendered ineffectual.[34]

Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) offer a socio-economic status model (SES).[35] In this approach as an individual's income level, educational attainment, and the prestige of career increase, then the likelihood of voting increases. Conversely, the likelihood of voting decreases if those independent variables decrease. Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) found that education is the most important predictor of whether one votes or not.

> The personal qualities that raise the probability of voting are the skills that make learning about politics easier and more gratifying and reduce the difficulties of voting. Education increases one's capacity for understanding complex and intangible subjects such as politics, as well as encouraging the ethic of civic responsibility. Moreover, schools provide experience with a variety of

---

[34] Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago, Illinois: University Of Chicago Press, 1986).
[35] Raymond E. Wolfinger and Steven J. Rosenstone, *Who Votes?* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale, 1980).

bureaucratic problems, such as coping with requirements, filling out forms, and meeting deadlines.[36]

They also conclude that age is the second most important variable in determining whether one votes or not. They view this variable as a measure of individual experience. In other words, the more one accesses and interacts with the system and the procedures of voting and participating, the more likely they are to vote. Other variables such as marriage, registration laws, race, income all matter, but not much.[37] Again, if religion has an impact it is a rather miniscule effect.

Civic Engagement, Social Capital and the Role of Religion

Robert D. Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000) has been one of the leading scholars studying the phenomena of civic engagement, civic community and social capital. Putnam defines social capital as the "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit."[38] Civic communities are populated with citizens actively participating in public affairs. "In the civic community… citizens pursue… self-interest defined in the context of broader public needs, self-interest that is 'enlightened' rather than 'myopic,' self-interest that is alive to the interest of others."[39] This civic engagement is advanced through those

---

[36] Ibid., 102.

[37] Ibid., 102-103.

[38] Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 1 (January 1995): 67.

[39] Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, 87-88.

networks, norms, and social trust that are characteristic of social capital to create civically-oriented communities.

In *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (1993), Putnam found in this study of northern and southern regions of Italy that the predictive power of civic community is greater than the power of economic development; the more civic a region, the more effective its government.[40] In other words, Putnam argues that social capital is necessary to insure high institutional performance and the maintenance of democracy. Putnam (1995, 2000) continued his work on social capital by focusing on what he described as America's declining civic engagement.[41] The following are the factors that have contributed to this decline:

> Pressures of time and money… suburbanization, commuting, and sprawl also played a supporting role… the effect of electronic entertainment – above all, television – in privatizing our leisure time has been substantial… and most important, generational change – the slow, steady, and ineluctable replacement of the long civic generation by their less involved children and grandchildren…[42]

Therefore, in order to strengthen civic engagement, and thereby American democracy, people must create social capital by joining civic organizations that foster engagement.

---

[40] Ibid., 98.

[41] Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital"; Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

[42] Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, 283.

Verba et al. (1995) focus on voluntary activity in politics as well as in religious and other non-political organizations in order to determine if participation in these other organizations affect one's political activism. These authors also argue that the differences in levels of participation between different ethnic groups originate from the variation in the way these groups acquire civic skills through associational memberships. They also found that religious organizations do the best job of building these civic skills.

Smidt et. al (2009) expound on the discussion of civic engagement and offer that "Religion serves to connect people across various social and cultural divides, assists and helps those in need through volunteering or charitable contributions, imparts important civic skills, and fosters important virtues, such as law-abidingness, honesty, and trustworthiness."[43] They found that the religious Americans join civic associations, religious or otherwise, at a higher rate than the non-religious. The religious also contribute monetarily and volunteer to both religious and secular causes on a higher level than secular individuals. Just as argued by Verba et. al (1995) and Correa-Jones and Leal (2001), Smidt et. al (2008) argue that places of worship help individuals develop civic skills necessary for increased political participation.[44]

Neiheisel et al. (2009) also contribute to the literature that extols the role churches play in developing politically active citizens. These authors focus primarily on the role

---

[43] Corwin E. Smidt et al., *Pews, Prayers, and Participation: Religion and Civic Responsibility in America* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 16.
[44] Smidt et al., *Pews, Prayers, and Participation: Religion and Civic Responsibility in America*.

churches play in the deliberative process set forth by political theorists.[45] They cite a considerable amount of literature from among adherents to the deliberative model of democracy who argue that political discussions within churches are usually characterized by a group of like-minded individuals who have their opinions and ideologies reinforced by clergy who think the same as they do. In other words, if and when political discussion occurs, there is very little deliberation; churches, in the opinion of this group of scholars, do not nurture deliberative capacity of congregation members.[46] Neiheisel et al. (2009) argue to the contrary, that churches serve a great deliberative function, but that it depended on the education level of the congregation; those churches that were of higher status tended to sponsor adult education, which in turn led to increased deliberation.

However, in those churches that do offer adult education, sessions often entertain a variety of topics beyond the analysis of religious texts, and most clergy are not taking it on themselves to reinforce a certain viewpoint via these

---

[45] Jacob R. Neiheisel, Paul A. Djupe, and Anand E. Sokhey, "Veni, Vidi, Disseri: Churches and the Promise of Democratic Deliberation," *American Politics Research* 37, no. 4 (July 2009): 614-643.

[46] John Gastil, *Democracy in Small Groups: Participation, Desicion-Making and Communication* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: New Society Publishers, 1993); Pamela Johhston Conover, Donald D. Searing, and Ivor M. Crewe, "The Deliberative Potential of Political Discussion," *British Journal of Political Science* 32, no. 1 (2002): 21-62; Cass R. Sunstein, "The Law of Group Polarization," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 10, no. 2 (December 2002): 175-195; Dietram A. Scheufele, Matthew C. Nisbet, and Dominique Brossard, "Pathways to participation? Religion, Communication Contexts, and Mass Media," *International Journal of Public Opinion* 15, no. 3 (September 2003): 300-324; Dietram A. Scheufele, Matthew C. Nisbet, and Dominique Brossard, "Social Structure and Citizenship: Examining the Impacts of Social Setting, Network Heterogeneity, and Information Variables on Political Participation," *Political Communication* 21, no. 3 (2004): 315-338; Diana C. Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side" Deliberative Versus Participatory Democracy* (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Diana C. Mutz and Jeffery J. Mondak, "The Workplace as a Context for Cross-Cutting Political Discourse," *The Journal of Politics* 68, no. 1 (February 2006): 140-155.

gatherings. Although our structured observation sessions in evangelical houses of worship reminded us that not all clergy are neutral moderators (the survey data also show variance on this front), our other empirics suggest that religious leaders seem to be filling a positive role by promoting discussion, encouraging participants to consider the views of others, and helping to ensure that all group members have an equal chance to voice their opinions. Critically, our observations suggest the widespread employment of deliberative norms in religious organizations that offer adult education sessions—these norms cross denominational divides and extend well beyond the mainline and the Catholic church…[47]

Neiheisel et al. (2009) also found that these small groups within the churches were not filled with like-minded individuals that reinforced one another's ideas. Rather they were extremely diverse ideologically speaking, and more often than not, these groups existed in churches that were characterized by partisan diversity. "Moreover, adult education is less common in politically unified churches and in those in which clergy perceive a great deal of influence. Thus, taking measurements of the diversity of churches and of deference to clergy strike us as essential questions for scholars pursuing research in this vein."[48]

---

[47] Neiheisel, Djupe, and Sokhey, "Veni, Vidi, Disseri: Churches and the Promise of Democratic Deliberation," 636.
[48] Ibid.

Latino-American Political Participation and the Role of Religion

Some ethnic groups do a better job of creating non-political organizations that promote political participation. For example, Verba et al. (1995) argue that African-Americans participate at a higher rate than might be expected given their socioeconomic status, and this level of participation is due to church membership. Conversely, the low level of participation among Latinos was a result of the difference between the manner in which Protestant and Catholic churches developed civic skills. The Catholic church, they argue, has done poorer job of developing these skills, and therefore Latinos, who are overwhelmingly Catholic, have lower than average levels of participation.[49] Given this last point regarding Latino voters, it is important to note that much of the literature of minority political participation has focused on Latinos. Therefore, it is important to discuss this literature in order to understand how other minority groups have been studied and if those observations have any significance for Shi'as (and Muslims in general) in the United States.

Jones-Correa and Leal (2001) find that the conclusions offered by Verba el al. (1995) were erroneous when it comes to Latino political participation, however they concurred with the finding that the associational roles of churches help in affecting political participation.

---

[49] Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995).

The relatively low level of participation of [Latinos] has been hypothesized by Verba et al. to derive in part from their predominantly Catholic affiliation. We therefore tested for religious denominational differences within the Latino and Anglo populations, but could find no evidence for any such effects. In fact, when the religious affiliation variable was significant, it suggested that Latino Catholics were more likely than Latino Protestants to take part in two forms of voting. Other explanations must therefore be found for the Latino participation differential… a better explanation for these differences can be found by looking more closely at the associational role of churches. Our findings confirm recent studies showing the importance of associational membership for civic behavior… This is particularly true of membership in churches, which function as a key civic association in many individuals' lives. If, however, churches are an important civic institution in general, they are much more so for Latinos, where church attendance is often the only form of associational membership. For Latinos, then, the role churches play as conduits of political information and recruitment is isolated from other forms of civic engagement, thereby stunting political engagement.[50]

Interestingly, Jongho and Pachon (2007) have found that among Latinos "being evangelical is exceptional and has an independent effect on the vote. Controlling for a

---

[50] Michael Jones-Correa and David L. Leal, "Political Participation: Does Religion Matter?," *Political Research Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (December 2001): 766.

host of explanatory variables, Latino evangelicals are more likely than Catholics to support [George W. Bush over John Kerry during the 2004 presidential elections]."[51] Additionally, they found:

> Latino evangelicals in general may be less committed to the candidate of their choice than are Latino Catholics. But Latino evangelical Republicans are distinct: They are clearly committed voters… a Latino evangelical is 18% less likely to be committed to his or her vote choice than is a Latino Catholic. But a Latino evan- gelical's likelihood of being committed to his or her voting decision increases as he or she identifies more strongly with the Republicans.[52]

Kelly and Morgan (2008) center their research on the effect of religious traditionalism on Latino participation. They found that Latinos' political behavior is affected differently by religious traditionalism as compared to Anglos. In fact, religious traditionalism has a stronger effect on Anglos than on Latinos. Among the latter, religious traditionalism has resulted in greater conservatism in regards to moral issues and general ideology, but has not transformed into support for the Republican party.[53]

> Among Anglos, the impact of religious traditionalism is fairly consistent. From moral issues to partisanship and even in the realm of support for redistributive

---

[51] Jongho Lee and Harry P. Pachon, "Leading the Way: An Analysis of the Effect of Religion on the Latino Vote," *American Politics Research* 35, no. 2 (March 2007): 262.
[52] Ibid., 265-266.
[53] Nathan J. Kelly and Jana Morgan, "Religious Traditionalism and Latino Politics in the United States," *American Politics Research* 36, no. 2 (March 2008): 258.

programs like food stamps, religious traditionalism pushes Anglos toward the right. This is not so widely the case among Latinos. Traditionalism is simply not the boon to Republicans among Latinos that it is among Anglos. To the extent that traditionalism does influence partisanship, in fact, it supports Democratic identification despite promoting conservative attitudes among most Latinos.[54]

Muslim Political Participation

Given this short discussion on how churches have promoted increased political participation and civic engagement, it is important to understand how Muslims approach politics in the United States and the role that mosques and Islamic centers play. Wuthnow and Hackett (2003) found that Muslims (as well as Buddhists and Hindus) have a high rate of educational attainment and therefore stronger possibilities of integrating into the wider American society. Despite this finding, Wuthnow and Hackett found that this educational achievement had not translated into political integration for non-black Muslims at the time of publication in the year 2003, though much of this may have been a result of recent immigration (therefore a lower number of actual citizens and eligibility to vote).[55]

> The low rates of voting among Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus are striking, especially in view of arguments about new immigrant groups or

---

[54] Ibid., 257.

[55] Robert Wuthnow and Conrad Hackett, "The Social Integration of Practitioners of Non-Western Religions in the United States," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, no. 4 (December 2003): 664.

underrepresented populations sometimes feeling a special responsibility to participate in the electoral process. High rates of alienation among nonblack Muslims, compared with those among Christians, suggest a further lack of social integration, as does the lack of ties to community leaders among Buddhists and Hindus. The dimension along which social integration among non-Western religious groups appears to be most deficient, therefore, is political integration. The high levels of political participation among Jews suggests that this deficiency can be overcome. Yet it is at present clearly an aspect of the social location of non-Western religious groups in the United States.[56]

Karen Leonard (2003) has found that the attacks of September 11, 2001 have resulted in a more politically active and astute American Muslim community. It has also resulted in greater youth involvement.[57] Leonard (2005) has also studied how American Muslims have attempted to follow the *shari'āh*, and how Islamic leaders are struggle to reconcile Islamic law with life in the United States. Included is a discussion about the role of leaders, and how others contest their conceptions of Islamic law in post 9-11 United States. She argues

> There are pressures on the political spokesmen even from their own followers to broaden their constituencies by generation and gender and to put greater

---

[56] Ibid., 665.
[57] Karen Leonard, "American Muslim Politics: Discourses and Practices," *Ethnicities* 3, no. 2 (2003): 147-181.

emphasis on American values, training, and domestic political issues. Post-9/11 spokesmen and women for Islam speak for and represent a wider range of Islam's sectarian, intellectual, artistic, and legal traditions than do the political spokesmen.[58]

One goal of this dissertation is to ascertain if increased mosque attendance by Shi'as has an effect on political participation.[59] There is some indication based on the Contractor survey that this is the case. Additionally, Amaney Jamal (2005) has found that for Arab Muslims, "mosques are directly linked to political activity, civic participation, and group consciousness."[60] She however found that though churches served as places of mobilization for African-American Christians, the mosque has not served the same function for African-American Muslims. "The mosque, however, does relate to higher levels of group consciousness deemed important for collective identity among African American Muslims."[61]

As stated, this dissertation focuses on the effects of religion on participation, however it is interesting to mention the literature that discusses the effect of religion on political partisanship. Kellstedt and Green (1993), Jelen and Wilcox (1995), and Corbett and Corbett (1999) have all found that higher levels of religiosity increase political

---

[58] Karen Leonard, "American Muslims and Authority: Competing Discourses in a Non-Muslim State," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 25, no. 1 (2005): 22.

[59] Barreto and Bozonelos, "Democrat, Republican, or None of the Above? The Role of Religiosity in Muslim American Party Identification."

[60] Jamal, "The Political Participation and Engagement of Muslim Americans: Mosque Involvement and Group Consciousness," 537.

[61] Ibid., 536.

participation as well as partisanship among evangelical Christians and Catholics.[62] In regards to Muslim-American political partisanship, Barreto and Bozonelos (2009) also looked at Muslim partisanship and found that mosque attendance did not have a significant effect on partisanship among Muslims. Ayers (2005) found that 84.1% of Muslim voters who cast ballots for Bush in the 2000 presidential election decided to vote for Kerry in 2004. Ayers argues that those Muslims that regarded Islam as "very important" in their lives and shifted towards Kerry in 2004 may have done so due to the "embodiment of fear and distrust among the Muslim community" post 9-11.[63] He goes on to suggest that this move towards Democratic candidates could materialize into long-term support, but also given the nature of the times in which candidates are all expected to "fight terror" and a perception that terror and Muslims go hand in hand, politicians might be expected to espouse anti-Muslim rhetoric. If this is the case, Muslims might fight themselves alienated in the American political system. To sum up Ayers' findings, it might be said that Muslim partisanship is based on the negative rhetoric that politicians use against them. At the moment, the Democratic party has used the lesser amount of anti-Muslim rhetoric, and as such Muslims have tended to vote in support of

---

[62] Lyman A. Kellstedt and John C. Green, "Knowing God's Many People: Denominational Preference and Political Behavior," in *Rediscovering the Religious Factor in American Politics*, ed. David C. Leege and Lyman A. Kellstedt (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 53-71; Ted G. Jelen and Clyde Wilcox, *Public Attitudes Toward Church and State* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1995); David E. Corbett and Julia Mitchell Corbett, *Politics and Religion in the United States* (New York, New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999).

[63] John W. Ayers, "Changing Sides: 9/11 and the American Muslim Voter," *Review of Religious Research* 49, no. 2 (2007): 194.

Democrats. The current anti-*shar'iāh* discourse in the United States as well as the discussion over Park-51 and other mosque-building plans have only served to repel Muslims from the Republican party into the hands of Democrats.

The Literature and its Consequences for Shi'a Political Participation

This short review of some relevant literature allows for insight into the discussion of political participation, and how religion, the religious, and religious institutions affect political participation. From this brief overview, a basic understanding is formed of how scholars have conceptualized the causes of political behavior. In doing so, I have offered some of the classical works of voting behavior, some which build off a rational choice perspective and others from a socio-economic model approach. I discussed the literature on Latino political behavior as an example of a heavily-studied minority group. It is important to mention that though there are some similarities between Latinos and Shi'as, there are also differences. Despite Latino religious traditionalism, they tend to vote for the Democratic party. Since September 11, 2001, this has been the case for Shi'as (Muslims in general), as this community has moved more solidly into the Democratic camp. That being said, Latinos participate with the goal of fortifying their economic and legal position given their socio-economic status and in regards to the immigration issue that surrounds this community. Despite their religious traditionalism, Latinos do not mobilize politically under a values agenda. Shi'as too participate in order to fortify their legal position in a post 9-11 America, but socio-economically speaking, the Muslim American community is middle class. The Shi'a

community, more so than the Latino community, does have a values agenda that focuses on the struggle for social justice. It is not necessarily an agenda laden with Islamic language, but the manner in which the Shi'as justify and support these proclivities towards social justice is through the use of religious narratives.

Also included was some literature that extols the positive effect religious institutions/organizations have on political participation and perceptions towards participation. In fact, many of the sources included throughout this section attest to the positive role that religious institutions/organizations play on political participation. The discussion ended with select literature involving American Muslim political participation in order to demonstrate how Muslims have fit into theories of political behavior.

All of this is important in order to understand the levels of participation of Shi'as in the United States. Given that other scholars have concluded that mosques serve as places of civic engagement, this dissertation focuses on one specific aspect of Shi'ism, narratives, and how these narratives affect political and social behavior. The introduction of Shi'a narratives is but a small contribution to the understanding of Shi'a political and social behavior, but it speaks to the greater issue of how mosques and leaders within those mosques are training their congregations to be citizens. Implicitly, just as Leonard (2005) argued, the leaders themselves are pushed to reformulate and defend their ways of thinking, their interpretations, and their methods. The mere fact the narratives have to be "retold" in order to have meaning for life in 21st century United

States demonstrates that the leaders have been affected by their surroundings and realize

the importance of keeping the narratives flexible in order to mobilize people.

CHAPTER 2 – SHI'A AMERICAN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In order to begin a discussion of the effects of the narratives of Shi'ism on political participation, it is first important to define what is meant by political participation. I utilize Verba and Nie's (1972) very basic definition: the many activities in which citizens engage to influence the selection of political leaders or the policies they pursue.[1] In my conversation about Shi'a political participation in the American context, I do not suggest that Shi'as are engaging in unfamiliar modes of participation. Like other groups primarily consisting of first and second-generation immigrants, the Shi'as are slowly beginning to incorporate themselves into the broader political and social fabric of the United States. As such they engage in both conventional and unconventional modes of political participation. In other words, they vote, they contribute money and volunteer for campaigns, write letters to elected officials, run for office, ring doorbells, and try to persuade others to follow suit. They also hold rallies and protests; some that have religious connotations such as *Yaūm al-Quds*, and others that are void of any religious message.

Just as with other immigrant groups, there is usually an event or group of events that have been the catalyst for increased action. Muslims, both Shi'as and Sunnis alike, were caught in a public relations nightmare soon after the events of September 11, 2001

---

[1] Sydney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America* (New York, New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 2.

which precipitated increased Muslim political and social action. In the face of accusations of being sympathetic or even complicit in the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, an Imām or other male figure speaking with an accent and with very little understanding of the American political and social system often delivered the Muslim response. In a climate where much of America was suspicious of Muslims, viewing them as outsiders and potential enemies, the image of a bearded foreign-looking man with an accent did very little to convince many that Muslims were part and parcel of American society.

This lack of public relations skills did not go unnoticed by certain leaders in the Muslim community. These leaders saw the writing on the wall: either Muslims had to speak for themselves in a clear, well-informed manner, or others would speak for them. If the later was the case, then there was a good chance that the American public would be misinformed about Muslims. These leaders also recognized the necessity of increased political participation. Muslims had to make their voices heard at the ballot box, through contributions and volunteering, as well as through other methods such as writing letters to policymakers and editors of newspapers, participating in community meetings, and even rallies and protests.

As such, Muslims were forced, pushed, and pulled into the public sphere by these leaders. Many Muslims themselves saw the necessity to become more involved, not only for public relations issues, but also in order to practice and safeguard their own rights as citizens of the United States. For example, in the three locations included in

this study in which a political participation survey was conducted, the percentage of voter turnout increased from 65% in the year 2000 to 77.3% in 2004. This is compared to a drop in voter turnout from 73% in 2000 to 63.3% in 2004 among all registered voters in the United States,[2] and 51.2% in 2000 to 56.7% in 2004 among Americans who had met the eligible voting age of 18.[3] Some were slower to respond to the necessity of increased political and social action. But that is not to say that the process is complete. There are still many Muslims that are resistant to political life. There are a host of reasons for this apprehension. Some attribute it to the relative youth of the American experience amongst Muslims in general. Others argue that an apolitical attitude exists due to the oppressive regimes in the countries-of-origin from which many Muslims emigrated. Similarly, the lack of even a possibility of meaningful participation in much of the Muslim world, some argue, has contributed to the lackadaisical approach to political and social life in the American setting. This way of thinking about Muslim political participation has now been challenged by the events of the 2011 "Arab Spring."

However, having gone over possible explanations that emanate from the immigrant experience of numerous Muslims in the United States, it is important to note that many do not participate for the same reasons that other Americans abstain: complacency, lack

---

[2] The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org), *The ANES Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies).

[3] This measure is a percentage of those who voted from among the voting age population of the United States as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. Therefore it is important to take into account that it is not a measure of the percentage that voted among registered voters.

of education and information, socio-economic reasons, or a feeling of apathy towards the political system. Just as with other citizens of the United States, it can be expected that there are Shi'as who believe their votes really do not matter in the long run. Some are tired of the perception that big business holds the real power in the political system. Simply put, the explanations of political participation (or its absence) that are used to describe all other Americans' political lives can be used to describe American Shi'as' political lives.

With that said, there are of course some peculiarities within each demographic group that might have some influence on political and social behavior. This research examines how one particular influence, the narratives of Shi'ism, influence different modes of political participation amongst Shi'as in the United States. However, before discussing narratives and their effects, it is important to have an understanding of how Shi'as are participating, if at all. The chapter first deals with a discussion of the population of Shi'as and Muslims in the United States, in order to clarify the size of this demographic group. Additionally, included is a review of a few scholars' research on American Muslim political participation. What follows is an explanation of Shi'a political participation based on surveys conducted for this research referred to as the Contractor survey/data set. Though the survey has relatively low N of 86, it includes respondents from three cities, and thus represents more than a single community. It can be used cautiously to get a better understanding of political participation (and attitudes) amongst those who congregate in mosques and Islamic centers that are dominated by

Shi'a fiqh (jurisprudence) and principles. The Contractor data is juxtaposed with survey data of Muslims in general (MAPOS and Pew), as well as national levels that are represented by the American National Elections Studies data.

MUSLIMS AND SHI'AS IN THE UNITED STATES: THE NUMBERS AND POLITICS

Just as in the greater Islamic world, the Shi'as are a minority in the United States. As Sachedina (1994) argues, the Shi'as in North America are a minority within the larger, yet still small minority of Muslims in the U.S., a *minority within a minority*. He offers that at the time of publication of his chapter in Haddad and Smith's (1994) edited volume, 30% of North America's Muslims were Shi'as.[4] Pew Research Center claims that there were 300,000 Shi'as in the United States in the 2009 report entitled *Mapping the Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population*.[5] This would account for 10% of the total Muslim population that Pew argues to be 2.4 million. These numbers are instructive, however both Sachedina and the Pew Research Center's estimates include all sects that call themselves Shi'a: Twelvers, Ismailīs, Zaydīs, Alawīs, etc. The exact number of Twelvers, the largest denomination, is difficult to ascertain.

---

[4] Abdulaziz Sachedina, "A Minority Within a Minority: The Case of the Shi'a in North America," in *Muslim Communities in North America*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 6.

[5] *Mapping the Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population* (Pew Research Center, 2009), 9.

Takim (2002) supports the claim that it is impossible to verify the numbers of Shi'as in the Untied States due to the absence of accurate statistical data. In fact, based on the sources that Takim offers, it seems that any figure that is proposed about the number of Shi'a in the United States is an estimate at best. In his opinion, it is Yasin al-Jibouri's approximation that is most justifiable, in which 15-20% of the total six to seven million Muslims in the United States are Shi'a.[6]

Complicating matters, there is little agreement about the number of Muslims in the United States. Ba-Yunus & Kone (2004) argue that the population of Muslims in the United States is around 5,745,100, but do not offer the number of Shi'as.[7] The recent Pew Research Center study of Muslim Americans (2007) places the number of Muslims at approximately 1.4 million, which equates to 0.6% of the U.S. adult population; however, the study concedes that pinning down the actual number of Muslims in the United States is and will be an onerous task.[8] The 2007 Pew study found that 16% of the 1,050 respondents identified themselves as Shi'as, while 50% identified with Sunni

---

[6] Yasin al-Jibouri, "A Glance at the Shi'a Communities in the U.S.," *Islamic Insights* (October 1993): 1; Takim, "Multiple Identities in a Pluralistic World: Shi'ism in America," 219.

[7] Ilyas Ba-Yunus and Kassim Kone, "Muslim Americans: A Demographic Report," in *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square: Hopes, Fears, and Aspirations*, ed. Zahid H. Bukhari et al. (Walnut Creek, California: Altamira Press, 2004), 314.

[8] *Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream* (Pew Research Center, 2007), 9. The Pew Muslim American study conducted their survey solely over landline telephones and counted only those who were 18 years of age or older. "The 1.4 million projection assumes that the proportion of Muslims who are cell-only or have no phone service is no different from the population overall. However, as a younger, predominantly immigrant population with relatively low levels of home ownership -- all factors associated with the use of cell phones rather than landlines -- it is possible that the number of Muslim Americans is higher" (9-10)

Islam, 22% see themselves as only "Muslim," 5% with other Muslim traditions, and 7% did not offer a response.

> Among Muslim Americans who were born in the United States, just 7% identify with Shia Islam... Among Muslims who immigrated to the United States, at least as many identify themselves as Shia (21%) as say they do not have a particular affiliation (18%)... Not surprisingly, religious affiliation is strongly linked to a person's country of origin. Muslim Americans who are first- or second-generation immigrants from Arab countries are mostly Sunni (56%), with about one-fifth each either Shia (19%) or just Muslim (23%). Large majorities of Pakistanis (72%) and other South Asians (82%) are Sunni, while Iranians are overwhelmingly Shia (91%)... 20% of U.S. Muslims are native-born African Americans, nearly half of whom (48%) identify as Sunni. Another third (34%) of native-born African Americans say they are just a Muslim, and 15% have another affiliation, including Shia and the Nation of Islam.[9]

Whatever the numbers may be it is given that they will be miniscule. Relative to other potential lobbying groups, the Shi'as do not have the monetary power to influence elections or policy in the United States. Thus, other than in a few places (Dearborn, Michigan being one of these areas) the Shi'as for the most part are not viewed as

---

[9] Ibid., 21-22.

important constituents. Simply stated, no politician talks of working hard to garner the Shi'a vote.

Moreover, based on the words of Maulana Haider, there seems to be some aversion towards American-style/liberal democracy from some of these mosque-going Shi'as.[10] Furthermore, Nimer (2004) shows that given the shortage of bodies and lack of political experience in the American context, a Muslim consensus has yet to form. "It is too early to predict how and whether a Muslim consensus can be developed in favor of a strategic place for the community in the American body politic, as the main thrust of the American Muslim public discourse is preoccupied with combating prejudice and ignorance."[11]

Nimer (2004) states that Muslims have been active in contributing monetarily to political campaigns. Using a CAIR survey, he offers that from 1995 through May 2000,

---

[10] In a speech Maulana Haider gave in Houston to commemorate the Islamic Revolution of Iran in early 2007 he made the following statements:

"For four or five years you have been hearing about spreading democracy around the world and it seems those efforts have been futile… it's now about how to save our skin, how to save our face… how to bring our troops back… a lot of money and effort and planning has gone into this whole thing which now has failed. The effort to bring liberal democracy in Iran failed, the effort to bring liberal democracy in Iraq… is failing, *Inshallah* (God-willing). The effort to bring liberal democracy and promote it… in Lebanon is failing in front of our eyes. And to liberalize the rest of the countries in the Middle East, as you can see they are failing. These efforts are going to waste all around us. More than that, you see them failing right here in this country. People are losing confidence in their political system. After all, it was the western democracies that invaded Iraq and supported it. It was the western democracies that allowed the massacres in Bosnia to go on for so long. It was the democratic regimes of the western countries that were supporting the 33 day war of aggression against Lebanon. It was these western democracies that were and are supporting all the brutalities being committed under many of the dictatorial regimes of the Middle East and elsewhere."

[11] Mohamed Nimer, "Muslims in the American Body Politic," in *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square: Hope, Fears, and Aspirations*, ed. Zahid H. Bukhari et al. (Walnut Creek, California: Altamira, California, 2004), 163.

various Muslims contributed approximately \$3,898,075 to political campaigns.[12] Additionally, Muslims through various political action committees (PACs) have supported campaigns, but these groups' contributions were smaller both in real terms and in comparison to individual Muslim contributions, being outspent by a ratio of 10:1.[13]

The 2007 Pew study discusses issues of assimilation, political participation, and challenges facing the Muslim population in the United States. For instance, 78% of those surveyed claimed they were happy with their lives in the United States, though 53% believed it was more difficult to be Muslim in the United States after 9/11.[14] In response to the question of primary identity, 28% responded as "American first," while 47% replied as "Muslim first."[15] In regards to political and social values, more Muslims (38%) identified themselves as espousing moderate political views as compared to liberal (24%) or conservative (19%). Sixty three percent lean towards or are members of the Democratic Party, while 11% identify themselves as leaning towards or are members of the Republican Party. However, only 63% of those Muslims in America

---

[12] Ibid., 158. CAIR is an acronym for the Council on American-Islamic Relations. The CAIR study was conducted by matching 1,200 unique last names from its membership list in the year 2000 against Federal Election Committee data from 1995 through May 2000. It found 5,653 contributions totaling \$3,898,075.

[13] Ibid., 159.

[14] *Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream*, 29, 35; Takim, "Foreign Influences on American Shi'ism."

[15] *Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream*, 31.

who are voting age citizens are actually registered to vote, as compared to 76% of the total American population.[16]

Khalidi (2004) looks at how Muslims act in a pluralistic society as compared to a Muslim dominated society.[17] His study delves into issues such as the applicability of *shari'ah* in non-Muslim territories, and whether Muslims can "fit in" in the so-called *dar al-harb*, and concludes that there is no reason why Muslims in the United States (and India) should not be able to live in peace and harmony. Interestingly, he comments on the lack of Muslim participation in American politics, but finds that though there is a minority of Muslims in the United States that advocates against political participation, the majority of Muslims are increasingly participating in the political process. In my opinion, his most important contribution is to suggest that the biggest hurdle facing those favoring participation is to develop "an agenda for political participation," which is hampered by "diversity of their national origins and because of their relatively new experience… with the notion of evolving compromises in a democracy."[18] In other words, Khalidi borrows from Leonard (2002) and argues that perhaps the more Muslims

---

[16] Ibid., 41, 47.

[17] Omar Khalidi, "Living as a Muslim in a Pluralistic Society and State: Theory and Experience," in *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square: Hope, Fears, and Aspirations*, ed. Zahid H. Bukhari et al. (Walnut Creek, California: Altamira Press, 2004), 38-72.

[18] Ibid., 69.

are exposed to the American political system, the more comfortable they will become with it and its peculiarities.[19]

McCloud (2004) offers that one possible explanation for the lack of political and societal participation can be attributed to the way in which Muslims understand the concept of community. She asserts that community in the Muslim sense has less to do with geographic space, and has everything to do with family. In other words, all attempts to better the community are inward looking, first at the family, then at the extended family, then the mosque.

> Perhaps a shift needs to happen in the conceptual worlds of new American Muslims. Some of the other conceptual worlds inside Islam are beginning to collapse due to living in a pluralistic society. Ethnic communities' cultural Islam is often held up for scrutiny both from inside and outside the Muslim community. Issues of authority and the authoritative have emerged as one primary set of concerns.[20]

This brief overview of the population size and participation of Muslims in the United States serves as a primer for the forthcoming focus on Shi'a Muslim political behavior.

---

[19] Karen Leonard, "South Asian Leadership of American Muslims," in *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 233-249.

[20] Aminah Beverly McCloud, "Conceptual Discourse: Living as a Muslim in a Pluralistic Society," in *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square: Hope, Fears, and Aspirations*, ed. Zahid H. Bukhari et al. (Walnut Creek, California: Altamira Press, 2004), 78.

ELECTIONS AND VOTING

Casting a ballot in elections has often been seen as one of the defining features and actions of democratic participation and political behavior. When people are asked how political they are, they more often than not mention that they are registered to vote, that they participate in elections, and for whom they cast their ballot in the previous or upcoming election, particularly during those elections cycles which include a presidential election. For many, voting is the epitome of political behavior. It is often stated that those who do not exercise their right to vote have no right to complain if and when they disagree with policies. They may not contribute financially to a campaign, go to a rally, or write letters to their representatives, but in the minds of many Americans, voting is the act that makes them either political or apolitical.

The same holds true for Shi'as in the United States. In conversations with members of the communities I visited, the discussion of the nature of political and social participation would more often than not revolve around elections and voting. The importance of elections and voting was no doubt heightened given the fact that much of my research took place during the hotly contested presidential election of 2008. For some, participation in elections was proof of their political behavior. In other words, voting was political participation *par excellence*. Others argued that voting was of no benefit or was religiously forbidden. These types of arguments would usually be based on a couple of different rationales. First, for many Shi'as voting is something completely foreign, especially for those who may have recently emigrated from states

where voting was either nonexistent or a façade for authoritarian regimes to claim some level of legitimacy. Secondly, a smaller number would argue that democratic style governance that did not take into account divine laws was *ḥarām* (religiously forbidden). For some, voting as part and parcel of democratic participation was seen as being *ḥarām* as well. Some were simply confused about whether voting was permissible.[21] In providing an example of this particular attitude towards electoral participation, Mohammad Amin Rahman of the Islamic Center of Portland recounted a conversation with another congregation member about whether participation in elections was religiously permissible.

> For example, … I gave a *khuṭbāh*, and I said we need to participate in the election… one person came after the *khuṭbāh* and [asked] "Are we allowed to vote?" So we are still fighting this. The people have no problem in sending their children to public school, but then [they ask] "Are we allowed to vote?"[22]

Rahman's consternation originates from his perception that members of his Portland community are "milking the system." Many of the community are Iraqi

---

[21] Many of these members are what are sometimes referred to as political quietists, those that eschew political participation due to a belief that it is forbidden in the period of the Greater Occultation of the 12th Imām. This quietist approach is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

[22] Rahman, M. A., 2008, Semi-Structured Interview, (Portland, Oregon). *Khuṭbāh* is best translated into English as a sermon, and usually refers to the sermon delivered during the Friday prayer gatherings. *Ḥarām* is usually translated into English as forbidden. For example, the consumption of alcoholic beverages is considered to be a *ḥarām* (forbidden) act by Muslims. Some issues are very clear-cut, such as the consumption of alcohol. However, there are other circumstances where labeling something *ḥalāl* (permissible) or *ḥarām* is more difficult. Much of this leads to differing opinions from scholar to scholar.

refugees who receive public assistance and enroll their children in public schools. Rahman believes that though they seem to have no problems in benefiting from the social services such as public assistance and schooling for their children, they are hesitant to participate politically in order to affect policy. In his opinion the perceived lack of participation on the part of his fellow community members is due not only to the lack of understanding of their religious scholars' arguments about political participation, but also complacency and a lack of civic duty.

It is true, many of the members who fail to meet the expectations of Rahman, act in the way that they do because of an interpretation and understanding of what their religion allows in regards to political and social action. As mentioned earlier, many are under the impression that the scholars of Islam do not permit voting. Some are confused about what is permissible and forbidden. Furthermore, as Iraqi refugees, many of them experienced years of political repression under Saddam Hussein's regime. Their familiarity with democracy is almost non-existent, and many shunned political activity in the Iraqi context during Saddam's era. This aversion to political life followed them to the United States. The Imām of the Portland community, Abu Haider Muhsin al-Dhalimy, also shared Rahman's sensitivities, and believed that Shi'as were not willing to take the necessary steps to become fully integrated into American political and social life. Al-Dhalimy encountered great resistance in simply trying to convince members of his community to vote.

Of course [at first] they couldn't vote, but even when many of them started getting their citizenship they didn't bother to register to vote. Even with our encouraging them to vote, some of them would say: "[It makes no difference who the president is]… United States policy is being set in particular way and we can't change it." But we argue with them saying that on the local level there are issues that will affect us as individuals… [for example] how much taxes you're going to pay… or how the school district will run [schools] that will affect the education of your child… whether they can get Fridays off (for the Friday prayer). There are some issues that might be considered against our values and morals, [and] if we could participate, [we could possibly] prevent them or encourage something else that would allow us to have more freedom…
[23]

As such, a disconnect exists between the expectations of leaders such as Rahman and al-Dhalimy and some members' understanding of what it means to be politically and socially active citizens. This is not unique to the Portland community. Rahman's argument that members were more than willing to send their children for public schooling does not take into account that children are required by state law to be enrolled. Parents regardless of religious persuasion, socio-economic status, or political inculcations must enroll their children for schooling. Therefore, the inference of

---

[23] al-Dhalimy, I. A. H. M., 2008, Semi-Structured Interview, (Beaverton, Oregon).

"milking the system" is perhaps unwarranted, but it serves as an example of the aspirations that many leaders have for their respective communities, as well as their frustrations with the seeming apathy among community members.

Additionally, he fails to appreciate their differing circumstances. Rahman being highly educated in conjunction with his high level of informal religious education allows for his particular perspective on political and social behavior. Additionally, he is an immigrant from Bangladesh, and arrived in the United States to attend the University of Texas at Arlington and is now a successful IT professional. His socio-economic situation is surely better than most if not all of the Iraqi refugees that attend the mosque in Portland. Moreover, initially being a Sunni, Rahman became a Shi'a in the mid-1980s after conducting his own personal research between the differences of the Sunni approach versus the Shi'a approach. His understanding of Shi'ism is based on an educational journey and less on adherence based on simply being born into that particular tradition. As such, though he may have been Shi'a for a shorter period of time as compared to some members of the Portland community, he nevertheless is seen as a leader of the community based on his religious knowledge. He is not a religious scholar by any means, but his awareness of the religion afforded him respect of the community, as he is able to speak intelligently about a wide variety of issues that members may face.

The members of the community that fail to meet the expectations of leaders such as Rahman are facing a completely different scenario. First of all, to reiterate the previous

quote from al-Dhalimy, many are simply not citizens yet, and many of those that are citizens are not educated about the political system. Others would prefer not to be politically active or simply do not see the benefit, instead focusing their time on providing for their families and making their way as immigrants. Political participation is sometimes the farthest thing from their minds. Simply stated, there are bigger priorities in their lives. They recognize that political life exists, and that it could be beneficial, but for many of them it does not warrant the attention that Rahman and al-Dhalimy would like them to espouse.[24]

With this interesting discussion about the permissibility of political participation and the perceptions and aspirations of leader, the aggregate data from the Contractor survey shows that among the Shi'as included in this research there has been a very high level of voter turnout.[25] Table 1 is a look at the Contractor survey for five presidential election years between 1992 and 2008. Within the three locations included in the Contractor survey, the percentage of citizens has steadily increased during each election cycle. This is to be expected; as the community matures, members become citizens in order to reap the benefits and privileges. Additionally, many start families and their children become citizens or are born in this country granting them citizenship. These children come of age and also contribute to the increasing number of eligible voters. Like all demographic groups, the maturing of the community increases the possibility of

---

[24] Imam Abu Haider Muhsin al-Dhalimy, "Semi-Structured Interview", October 19, 2008.
[25] The Contractor survey refers to the survey data collected for this dissertation.

Shi'as to use their increasing numbers in elections and other political and social behavior. Though their numbers are still small compared to other larger groups on the national level, Shi'as can use their numbers in local politics to affect outcomes in ways that benefit their community.

Table 1 – Contractor Survey Data – Voter Turnout 1992-2008

Election	Non-Citizens	Citizen Eligible Voters	Voted as % of All	Voted as % of Citizens	Abstained as % of All	Abstained as % of Citizens	Dem	Rep	Other
1992	29.5%	70.5%	50.0%	71.0%	20.5%	29.0%	95.5%	4.5%	0.0%
1996	27.7%	72.3%	48.9%	67.6%	23.4%	32.4%	91.3%	8.7%	0.0%
2000	20.0%	80.0%	52.0%	65.0%	28.0%	35.0%	38.5%	50.0%	11.5%
2004	15.4%	84.6%	65.4%	77.3%	19.2%	22.7%	76.5%	11.8%	11.8%
2008	3.3%	96.7%	78.3%	81.0%	18.3%	19.0%	95.7%	0.0%	4.3%

Source: Contractor Survey

Approximately 71% of the Shi'as who were eligible to vote in the 1992 presidential election did cast ballots, with 95.5% choosing the then Governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton, and the remaining 4.5% going towards the incumbent George H.W. Bush. The other approximate 29% of eligible voters (20.5% of the total respondents) simply abstained from participating. During that election 29.5% of the total respondents were not American citizens. In 1996, the percentage of eligible voters who participated in the presidential election decreased in comparison to the previous election (67.6%), again

with the overwhelming majority (91.3%) voting for the incumbent Clinton.[26]   The percentage of non-citizens decreased to 27.7%, however the percentage of those that simply abstained from participating increased to 32.4% of the eligible voters (23.4% of the total respondents). Therefore, though the number of eligible voters increased, the percentage of those that cast ballots decreased.

Participation in the hotly contested 2000 presidential election decreased among the Contractor Shi'as with only 65% of eligible voters participating. Again, the level of those without citizenship decreased, this time to 20%. George W. Bush received approximately 50% of the vote, Al Gore garnered 38.5%, and Ralph Nader mustered 11.5% of the vote. This result is significantly lower than most accounts of the 2000 election depicting Muslim Americans as being overwhelmingly in favor of George W. Bush. For example, Amaney Jamal cites survey data of the Detroit Arab American community which found that 74% of Arab Muslims in the Detroit Area voted for Bush in 2000, and that 72% of Muslim Americans voted for Bush according to the American Muslim Alliance.[27]

Beginning with the Presidential election of 2004, Contractor survey respondents began participating on a much higher level. In 2004, 77.3% of those eligible cast votes,

---

[26] Jamal, "The Political Participation and Engagement of Muslim Americans: Mosque Involvement and Group Consciousness," 526.

Jamal argues that in 1996, Muslims voted for Clinton approximately with 2:1 ratio. The Contractor data suggests a much larger ratio of approximately 10½:1. This either signifies that there was an underrepresentation of Republican candidate Bob Dole supporters amongst the Contractor respondents, or Clinton was overwhelmingly popular amongst these particular communities.

[27] Ibid., 541.

with Senator John Kerry receiving 76.5% of the vote and the incumbent President George W. Bush and Ralph Nader receiving 11.8% respectively. The percentage of non-voters was approximately 22.7%, and 15.4% were non-citizens.

The next election in 2008 was characterized by 81% participation of all eligible voters. Senator Barack Obama garnered 95.7% of the votes that were cast. In this election the number of non-voters decreased to 19% of the eligible voters (18.3% of all respondents) and the number of non-citizens also decreased significantly to 3.3%. This rate of participation is amazing given that the MAPOS data depicts 52% of all Shiʻa respondents voting in the 2008 election, compared to 47% of all Sunnis.

The following Table 2 allows for some comparison across time, among different surveys (Contractor, MAPOS and the PEW Foundation), as well as between other Shiʻas, Sunnis, and the nationwide average of participation in presidential elections (US Census and ANES). For example, 81% of the 60 eligible voters who responded to the question participated in the 2008 presidential elections, which is an increase from the 2004 level of 77.3%. In fact, in the three locations included in the Contractor survey, participation in voting during presidential elections is well above the U.S. Census for each of the included elections (1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008). Additionally, the voting rate of the members of these three mosques is significantly higher than the Shiʻas included in the Muslim American Public Opinion Survey (MAPOS) conducted by Matt

Barreto and Karam Dana of the University of Washington.[28] Interestingly, the voting rates in the Contractor survey (81%) were significantly higher than those of the Dearborn Shi'a mosque (41%) and the non-Dearborn Shi'a mosque (60%) included in the MAPOS set for the election year 2008. The Pew Foundation also conducted a survey of Muslims in the United States, and both the Shi'as (54.1%) and Sunnis (61%) of the Pew data voted at a lower rate compared to the Shi'as (75.9%) included in the Contractor data for the year 2004.

Table 2 – Voter Turnout – Comparison of Various Survey Data

Survey	Election Year				
	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008
Contractor[29]	71.0%	67.0%	65.0%	77.3%	81.0%
MAPOS Shi'as	___	___	___	___	52.1%
MAPOS Sunnis	___	___	___	___	47.1%
PEW Shi'as	___	___	___	54.1%	___
PEW Sunnis	___	___	___	61.0%	___
US Census [30]	55.1%	49.0%	51.2%	56.7%	57.4%
ANES[31]	75.0%	73.0%	73.0%	63.3%	74.4%

Sources: Contractor Survey, MAPOS, PEW Foundation, and ANES

---

[28] Matt Barreto and Karam Dana, *Muslim American Public Opinion Survey (MAPOS)* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Institute for the Study of Ethnicity & Race (WISER), 2009).

[29] The Contractor survey is a measure of the percentage of those who voted from among the voting age population, and not a measure of the registered voters.

[30] This measure is a percentage of those who voted from among the voting age population of the United States as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. Therefore it is important to take into account that it is not a measure of the percentage that voted among registered voters.

[31] The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org), *THE ANES GUIDE TO PUBLIC OPINION AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies). The ANES data is a percentage of registered voters who cast votes in the respective elections.

Given the numbers presented in Table 2, it is hard to imagine that the Shi'as included in this research are completely bereft of an understanding of the meaning and importance of political participation. At least when it comes to electoral participation, the Shi'as included in the survey are acting well above the national average using the US Census data as well as using the American National Election Studies (ANES) conducted by the University of Michigan and Stanford University.

When looking at a comparison of voter turnout between the participants in the Contractor survey, MAPOS, Pew, and ANES data it is important to further stipulate that literature exists which suggests higher levels of religiosity increases political participation as well as partisanship among evangelical Christians and Catholics.[32] Conversely, Barreto and Bozonelos (2009) found that the frequency of mosque attendance did not have a significant effect on partisanship, and that individual-based measures such as "degree of faith, degree of practice, perceptions of discrimination and linked fate" were significant.[33] Barreto and Bozonelos are cognizant to mention that party identification is not the same as political participation, however they assert that it is an important aspect of the political process.[34]

---

[32] The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org), *THE ANES GUIDE TO PUBLIC OPINION AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies).

[33] Barreto and Bozonelos, "Democrat, Republican, or None of the Above? The Role of Religiosity in Muslim American Party Identification," 21.

[34] Ibid., 23.

Table 3 – Voter Turnout for Mosque-Goers

	Election Year		
	2004	2008	N
Contractor Survey	60.0%	85.3%	35 and 34 respectively
MAPOS Shi'as	___	54.5%	66
MAPOS Sunnis	___	48.6%	615
PEW Shi'as	45.3%	___	29,086
PEW Sunnis	62.0%	___	200,394
ANES Service-Goers	75.4%	83.3%	558

Sources: Contractor Survey, MAPOS, PEW Foundation, and ANES

Table 3 is a comparison of the voter turnout for respondents who attend mosques at higher levels using the Contractor survey data, MAPOS, and the Pew data. Because each of these data sets describes frequency of mosque involvement through different criteria, it is important to clarify those differences. Contractor and Pew both utilize a measure that asks how often the respondent attends the mosque for prayers and the Friday prayer. They are given the choice of more than once a week, once a week for the Friday prayer, once or twice a month, a few times a year especially for the *'Eid* prayer, seldom, or never. The MAPOS data set asks the level of involvement in the activities of the mosque excluding the five daily prayers and the Friday prayer, and allows the respondent to answer very involved, somewhat involved, not too involved, and not at all involved. The ANES data set inquires if the respondent attended religious services once a week or more than once a week, and were given the opportunity to respond once a week or more often than once a week. I use the terminology of "mosque-goer" to signify those respondents who either 1) responded to the Contractor or Pew studies as

attending the mosque more than once a week or once a week for the Friday prayer, and 2) MAPOS respondents who responded very or somewhat involved to the question of their involvement in mosque activities outside of the daily prayers and Friday prayer. In the case of the ANES data, I use the term "service-goer" to signify those respondents that answered that they attended religious services at least once a week.

Compared to the responses in Table 2, after excluding those respondents who attend a mosque or Islamic center fewer than once a week for Friday prayer, lower levels of participation are witnessed in all presidential elections save 2008 among the Contractor respondents.[35] In the election of 2004, 60% of mosque-goers participated in the elections. This number is lower than the figure in Table 2, however higher than those Pew Shi'as (45.3%) and similar to the Pew Sunni respondents (62%). However, it is significantly lower than the 75.4% of ANES service-goers who participated in the 2004 election. Comparatively speaking, the Contractor mosque-going Shi'as participated in the 2004 election on a much lower level than the average service-going American. Focusing on the 2008 presidential election, and a comparison between the Shi'a respondents from the Contractor survey (85.3%) and MAPOS (54.5%), we see higher levels of participation. Lower levels of participation were witnessed amongst Shi'as after excluding members with lower levels of mosque attendance except in the in the Contractor survey and MAPOS in 2008.

---

[35] Voter turnout in 1992 was 48.3%, 50% in 1996, and 48.6% in 2000.

The most interesting comparison is between the Contractor "mosque-goers" and the ANES respondents "service-goers." The voter turnout of the mosque-going Shi'as in the three locations included in the Contractor data is comparable to that of the ANES service-going respondents in 2008. This cannot be said for the 2004 data, however it can be said that there was a rather significant increase in voter turnout amongst mosque-goers and service-goers in 2008, with 85.3% and 83.3% participating respectively. In other words, these particular Shi'as do not behave differently than other Americans who tend to participate in religious services at least once a week. Though Barreto and Bozonelos (2009) found that mosque attendance did not have a significant effect on partisanship among Muslims, the similarity between the Contractor mosque-going Shi'as and the ANES service-going respondents suggests that increased mosque-attendance in these three locations has a positive effect on voter turnout in 2008.[36] Likewise, it suggests that the findings of Kellstedt and Green (1993), Jelen and Wilcox (1995), and Corbett and Corbett (1999), that higher levels of religiosity increases political participation as well as partisanship among evangelical Christians and Catholics, have some validity among the Shi'as of these three communities.[37] Interestingly, comparing the Contractor "mosque-going" Shi'as with those who attend less frequently shows that mosque-goers have participated on higher levels in all

[36] Barreto and Bozonelos, "Democrat, Republican, or None of the Above? The Role of Religiosity in Muslim American Party Identification."

[37] Kellstedt and Green, "Knowing God's Many People: Denominational Preference and Political Behavior"; Jelen and Wilcox, *Public Attitudes Toward Church and State*; Corbett and Corbett, *Politics and Religion in the United States*.

elections save 1992. The election of 1996 displayed an approximate 6% difference, but the 2008 election witnessed a rather large gap between the two groups. But for all elections after 1992, mosque-goers did participate on higher levels. Therefore in regards to voting behavior, it can be said that Shi'as are indistinguishable from other Americans in that higher levels of religiosity increase political participation.

Table 4 – Voter Turnout for Contractor Non-Mosque-Goers and Mosque-Goers

Election	Non-Mosque-Goers	Mosque-Goers
1992	**50.0%** **(n=14)**	**48.3%** **(n=29)**
1996	**43.8%** **(n=16)**	**50.0%** **(n=30)**
2000	**44.4%** **(n=18)**	**48.6%** **(n=35)**
2004	**57.0%** **(n=21)**	**60.0%** **(n=35)**
2008	**68.0%** **(n=25)**	**85.3%** **(n=34)**

Source: Contractor Survey

MONETARY CONTRIBUTIONS AND VOLUNTEERING FOR CAMPAIGNS AND POLITICAL OFFICES

Though voting is often seen as the quintessential political behavior, participation in the American context involves other important modes of engaging the system. To be sure, the frustrated religious leaders of the communities included in this research are not necessarily arguing for increased political participation for participation's sake. They are instead urging their communities to participate in a more educated and sophisticated

manner. Once one becomes a citizen, voting is actually quite simple, and to be quite honest, casting a ballot does not necessarily require much information. There is no requirement to be an informed voter, though it better serves the individual and his or her community if votes are cast based on knowledge of the issues and the candidates participating in the election. The leaders of these communities would like to see their constituencies inform themselves about the pros and cons of each candidate; about the differing platforms; about the issues that are facing the country, both domestically and internationally. In other words, they would like to see the community members become informed, integrated, and engaged citizens.

Additionally, the leaders would like to see community members participate on multiple fronts, not only in the voting booth. One method is by making donations to campaign and political offices. Contributing monetarily to political campaigns depicts a more savvy understanding of the political system. Though votes are necessary to win elections, in order to procure those votes, candidates need financing for their campaigns in order to disseminate their platform to the public-at-large. There is considerable literature that attests to the influence of money on elections, and among many Americans there is the belief that the candidate who spends the most in a given campaign usually takes home the prize.[38] The belief exists that there is a direct correlation between dollars spent and votes earned in national, state and local elections.

---

[38] Gary C. Jacobson, "The Effects of Campaign Spending in House Elections: New Evidence for Old Arguments," *American Journal of Political Science* 34, no. 2 (May 1990): 334-362.

Additionally, those who donate on a large-scale are afforded greater access to those in political office. In other words, money buys access. As such, it is no surprise that the discussion of campaign finance reform has and continues to be a hotly debated in policymaking arenas.

The realization by individuals and communities that financial contributions can actually do more to aid their candidate of choice displays a more complete understanding of the workings of the political system. It can also be an indicator of greater knowledge of how to more effectively influence the decisions of officeholders. On the other side of the equation, it signals to office holders and policymakers that Shi'as, or any other demographic, are players in the political system. Money wins elections, and candidates go to and respond to those constituents who are willing to aid them during the election cycles.

Moreover, volunteering by helping a candidate with (re)election or an officeholder with the day-to-day operations in the district office is further proof of political maturity. Individuals and communities that come to recognize the benefits of engaging in more direct participation and interaction with campaigns and politicians, usually increase their ability to affect political decisions and outcomes in their favor. Furthermore, the mere presence of groups such as Shi'as (and Muslims in general) volunteering for campaigns informs officeholders that this particular demographic group is politically active and potentially a source of support and votes during an election season. Lastly, volunteering serves as a means by which a particular community can learn about the

intricacies of political life and the goings-on within the halls of policymaking as well as in the offices of policymakers.

The effects of contributing monetarily and volunteering are especially successful in locations where the Muslim populations, whether it be only Shi'as, only Sunnis, or a mix of sects, are large enough to signal to candidates and officeholders that elections can be won or lost depending on the way this particular community votes and contributes. As such, it indicates to those wanting to retain or win an elected position, that these particular demographic groups, though small, still have enough clout to make or break an election. This is particularly true on the local levels, and even so in a few states such as New York, Michigan and California where the Muslim population is relatively large. Even in such states as Oklahoma, which is not included in this research, there are significant numbers of Muslims concentrated in the 5th Congressional district, and as such they garner the attention of those candidates running for office. But the numbers are not the reason for their influence. The fact that they contribute financially and help with physical bodies to campaign on the behalf of candidates affords them the attention of those seeking office.

Turning to the communities included in this study, Table 5 indicates that approximately 26.8% in the Contractor survey contributed monetarily to a political campaign or office (school board, state and/or national elections), with 16.8% contributing on more than one occasion. Looking only at mosque-goers, 28.5% contributed with 12.2% doing so on more than one occasion. This is pretty much on par with the 22.7% of MAPOS

Shi'as and 27.3% of MAPOS Sunnis that contributed monetarily. According to the ANES data, only 11% of Americans contributed to a candidate's campaign in 2008. Table 6 indicates that 13.4% of the respondents to the Contractor survey volunteered for a political campaign or office, with 7.3% doing so on more than one occasion. However, among the mosque-going respondents, the percentage was higher with 18.3% volunteering. This percentage is more than three times that of the ANES service-goers for the year 2008. The participants of the Contractor study are well above the national average in regards to monetary contributions and volunteering for political campaigns. Just as with the effect of religiosity on voting behavior among the mosque-going respondents, contributions and volunteering increased as members attended services at least once a week.

Table 5 - Monetary Contributions

	Contributions	Multiple Contributions	N
All Contractor Respondents	**26.8%**	**16.8%**	**82**
Contractor Mosque-goers	**28.5%**	**8.1%**	**49**
MAPOS Shi'a	**22.7%**	___	**66**
MAPOS Sunnis	**27.3%**	___	**615**
ANES Service-goers	**11.0%**	___	**520**

Sources: Contractor Survey, MAPOS, and ANES

Membership in political action committees, interest groups, or political organizations was 10.8% participating in such a manner. Interestingly, 13% of those

who were members of political action committees, interest groups, or political organizations simultaneously contributed or volunteered for a political campaign or office.

Table 6 - Volunteering for Campaigns or Offices

	Volunteered	Volunteered more than once	N
All Contractor Respondents	**13.4%**	**7.3%**	**82**
Contractor Mosque-goers	**18.3%**	**8.1%**	**49**
ANES Service-goers	**5.4%**	**___**	**521**

Sources: Contractor Survey and ANES

OTHER FORMS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The members of Institute of Islamic Learning in the Metroplex (IILM), located in Plano, Texas, suburb of Dallas, were also questioned on their participation in other political activities such as attending community meetings, letter-writing campaigns, and rallying or protesting. Table 7 depicts a comparison between the Shi'a respondents at IILM and Shi'as included in the MAPOS data set.

Compared to the Shi'as included in the MAPOS data set, the IILM Shi'as in the Contactor Survey participate on lower levels across the board. However, a similar percentage of IILM and MAPOS Shi'a respondents have written letters to politicians or editors of newspapers, etc (30% and 30.2% respectively). In comparison to Sunnis in the MAPOS data, the IILM Shi'as were lower on levels of participation in rallies and

131

protests, but a higher percentage participated in letter writing campaigns and rallies and protests.

Table 7 – Participation in Rally/Protests, Letter-Writing, & Community Meetings

	Rally/ Protest	Letter	Community Meeting
IILM Shi'as[1]	**30.0%**	**30.0%**	**30.0%**
MAPOS Shi'as[2]	**45.8%**	**30.2%**	**52.1%**
MAPOS Sunnis[3]	**26.0%**	**25.0%**	**47.6%**

Source: Contractor Survey and MAPOS
[1] n = 10   [2] n = 96   [3] n = 960

Compared to the Shi'as included in the MAPOS data set, the IILM Shi'as in the Contactor Survey participate on lower levels across the board. However, a similar percentage of IILM and MAPOS Shi'a respondents have written letters to politicians or editors of newspapers, etc (30% and 30.2% respectively). In comparison to Sunnis in the MAPOS data, the IILM Shi'as were lower on levels of participation in rallies and protests, but a higher percentage participated in letter writing campaigns and rallies and protests.

In regards to rallies and protests, Shi'as on a national level have statistically significant higher levels of participation than Sunnis. In previous work, I found that Shi'as in a Shi'a dominated mosque in the Dearborn, Michigan area were even more predisposed to participation in rallies or protests than their co-sectarianists who

congregate at Sunni dominated mosques.[39] However, I stopped short of making the claim that Shi'as across the board are more disposed to participation in protests and rallies. This is due to my observations in a few locations that participation was low in rallies and protests even in the face of blatant smear campaigns against Muslims and Islam.

One glaring example in Portland revolved around the film *Obsession: Radical Islam's War Against the West*, which many commentators have labeled as hate and fear mongering of the highest degree. A controversial non-profit organization named the Clarion Fund distributed large numbers of DVD copies of the film in newspapers throughout the country, especially in swing states leading up to the 2008 national elections. *The Oregonian* newspaper included DVD copies of *Obsession* as advertisement inserts on Sunday September 28, 2008. Much of the Portland community was enraged at the inclusion in the newspaper of what was seen as "propaganda" and "scare tactics" to influence the upcoming elections.

My visit to Portland came a few weeks after the *Obsession* incident, and therefore it was still the hot topic of discussion. That being said, I was completely unaware of the existence of this film and the controversy surrounding it prior to my time in Portland. However, upon my arrival I was immediately introduced to the controversy, and was at first positively surprised at the seemingly strong reaction from many of the Shi'a

---

[39] Contractor, "The Dearborn Effect: A Comparison of the Political Dispositions of Shi'a and Sunni Muslims in the United States."

community members. There seemed to be a *complete lack* of apathy and complacency towards this film. Many members of the Islamic Center of Portland exclaimed that it was a great injustice that *The Oregonian* would allow such "garbage" to be included in such a respectable newspaper, and spoke about it with great passion and disdain. Surprisingly, my interviews with leaders of the community soon revealed that the verbal condemnation heard within the walls of the Islamic center was the furthest extent to which the majority of the people actually acted. Imām al-Dhalimy explained that the inclusion of *Obsession* was not a secret to the greater Portland area, and in fact members of the greater Muslim community as well as a large number of non-Muslims in the interfaith community attempted to persuade the powers-that-be at *The Oregonian* against including the film to no avail. Consequently, a demonstration was planned to send a message to the paper, that the people of Portland, Muslim or not, did not appreciate their decision to include the film.

> We were not successful in preventing *The Oregonian* from [distributing the DVD]… So the day after they distributed it, there was picketing and demonstration in front of the office. And it was sad to see there were many more Christians and non-Muslims [as] part of that demonstration than Muslims. Even though I mentioned that in the Friday prayer, we sent emails, and so on and so forth.[40]

---

[40] al-Dhalimy, "Semi-Structured Interview."

134

According to one anonymous member of the Islamic Center of Portland, only about a quarter of the approximately 70 to 75 protestors who showed to express their dismay were Muslims. "This is an issue that affects us personally, and there were more non-Muslims than Muslims at the protest! How do we progress when we are unwilling to stand for our rights?"

On the other hand, I witnessed participation in a *Yaūm al-Quds* rally on September 26, 2008 outside of Dallas City Hall. The Metroplex Organization of Muslims in North Texas (MOMIN), the largest Shi'a congregation in the Dallas/Forth Worth area holds this particular rally every year in support of the Palestinian cause. Yearly, a small group of Shi'as from MOMIN, accompanied by a handful of Sunnis and others who are supporters of the Palestinians congregate on Dallas City Hall to commemorate this event. The participants of the rally were not very effective in conveying their message into greater society, however Maulana Haider's primary goal was to instill a sense of responsibility into his congregations, while at the same time reinforcing their own opinions. A more detailed account of the events of the *Yaūm al-Quds* rally is presented in Chapter 5.

Taking into account these two examples of rallies, it is also possible to re-evaluate the effectiveness of the respective communities in regards to the outreach and saliency of their messages. In the Portland case, the fact that 25% of the 70 to 75 protestors were Muslim can be seen as a positive. Though Imām al-Dhalimy would have liked to see more Muslims at the rally, the presence of approximately 57 non-Muslims protesting

against the inclusion of the *Obsession* DVD in the newspaper speaks to the ability of the overall Muslim community to gain the support of members outside of their faith community. This can be seen as a victory for the Portland Muslim community. On the other hand, the Dallas *Yaūm al-Quds* rally was attended almost exclusively by members of the MOMIN Center save a handful of non-Muslim students from the University of Oklahoma and a few Sunnis from the Dallas area. The inability to garner support from other groups, Muslim and non-Muslim, illustrates the ineffectiveness of that particular community to speak to a broader audience outside of their mosque.

RUNNING FOR ELECTIONS AND HOLDING POLITICAL OFFICE

Earlier it was stated that contributing monetarily and volunteering for political campaigns and offices is often seen as more savvy political participation. Those who engage in such political behavior tend to have a better understanding of the system and recognize the importance of affecting policymakers and officeholders in a more direct manner. Access to these individuals is key if an individual, or a group, is aiming to become a bigger player in the American political system. Similarly, becoming a policymaker shows even more political maturity.

A few members of the Shi'a community in the Dearborn, Michigan area have been successful in either obtaining political office through election or appointment. Imām Hassan Qazwini of the Islamic Center of America offered three examples of members of his mosque attaining political office. He explained that in April 2006 Governor Jennifer Granholm appointed Charlene Mekled Elder, a Shi'a woman of southern

Lebanese descent, to the 3rd Circuit Court of Wayne County. This was historic as Elder would become the first female Arab-American Muslim to hold such a position in the entire United States. Furthermore, Qazwini informed me that in the same year of 2006, Haj David Turfe, another Lebanese Shi'a, was elected to the 20th District Court of Michigan. Yet another Lebanese Shi'a, Abdul Haidous, is the Shi'a Muslim mayor of Wayne, Michigan. Elected in 2001, Haidous is an immigrant from Lebanon who owned a grocery store before coming a politician. Qazwini considers these as small steps towards full participation of the Shi'a community. He does not see them as huge victories, but believes that they are encouraging.[41] Qazwini's humble approach to these "victories" is interesting given his opinion that the Shi'a political experience is lacking maturity. At least in his locality, the presence of Shi'a politicians, both elected and appointed, should be viewed as big victories. They signal the acceptance of Shi'as (and Muslims as a whole) into larger society, but they also indicate the realization of other non-Muslim officeholders such as Governor Granholm that Shi'as are an important constituency. Her electoral livelihood could possibly be made or broken based on the votes, contributions, and manpower from this community.

This kind of success is not surprising in the Dearborn area, given the large number of Arabs and Muslims that reside there. It is also an example of Shi'as (and Muslims in general) using their numbers to affect the decisions of officeholders as well as to help

---

[41] Ibid.

elect one of their own community members into a position of political prestige and influence. However, the example of Dearborn is definitely an exception to the rule. Very few communities exist with the large numbers that the overall Dearborn community possesses. Additionally, many of the Lebanese Shi'as of Dearborn are second or third generation Americans, meaning they have experience with the American system and way of life. Many of the first generation immigrants such as Mayor Abdul Haidous of the city of Wayne have been in the United States long enough to have integrated into society. As compared to other communities of Shi'as throughout the United States, Dearborn has a definite advantage in regards to familiarity with the system and the size of their community.

Summary

Religious leaders complained of apathy and low levels of participation throughout my interviews. However the Contractor survey shows the opposite. The levels are comparable to national averages, and in some instances they are even higher. Perhaps the leaders do not know their communities as well as they think they do. They believe their members are not participating, but quite obviously they are. It is also possible that the leaders do not have a good understanding of how people outside of their communities are participating, and as such they are unaware that their members are performing similarly and perhaps even at higher levels than national averages. The final possibility is that these leaders are well aware that their communities are participating, but hold such high expectations, that they want their members to surpass the national

averages. In other words, they want Shiʻas to be exceptional in their political and social participation.

This chapter has served as a point of reference to give the reader a glimpse at how Shiʻas are participating. It is difficult to make concrete claims based on the low number of respondents, but it allows for a starting point that informs the discussion of narratives. The remainder of the dissertation focuses on the narratives of Shiʻism and their effects on political and social participation.

CHAPTER 3 – THE NARRATIVE OF 'ĀSHURĀ

Gutterman's analysis of Sunday and King's versions of the Exodus story proves to be very instrumental in a discussion of the utilization of narratives by Shi'a leaders in the United States.[1] The narrative most used by Shi'as is the story of the massacre of Imām Ḥusayn at Karbalā'. As mentioned previously, this story is one that has been used by various people and groups throughout history to muster political action. The most famous recent example is the use of the 'Āshurā narrative during the Iranian Revolution by such political actors as Ali Shari'ati and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

The suffering of Imām Ḥusayn and his family and companions is mourned publicly in all cities of Iran, and as such has become extremely politicized as contemporary struggles of freedom and justice are likened to the struggle of Ḥusayn at Karbalā'. Immediately following the 2009 Iranian Presidential Election in June, many of the protestors of the alleged election fraud were heard chanting "Hossein! Hossein! Mir Hossein!" in support of presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi. "Hossein! Hossein!" referred to Imām Ḥusayn, and the connection with Mir Hossein Mousavi unified the struggle of Imām Ḥusayn at Karbalā' with the struggle of the pro-Mousavi faction. In effect, the pro-Mousavi camp was usurping the Shi'a symbols of the regime, casting themselves in the role of Imām Ḥusayn and his family and companions, with the

---

[1] Gutterman, *Prophetic Politics: Christian Social Movements and American Democracy*.

140

regime playing the role of the oppressive army of the tyrant Yazīd. Additionally, on the day of ʻĀshurā in December 2009, there were large protests against the regime in Tehran. The protesters used the actual occasion of ʻĀshurā to remind the authorities that the symbol of Imām Ḥusayn belongs the oppressed, exclaiming that his struggle is their struggle. The commemoration of ʻĀshurā was taken out of the traditional settings such as mosques and *hosseiniyyahs* onto the streets, and instead of the traditional mourning ceremonies, the protestors commemorated the massacre of Imām Ḥusayn by protesting the brutality and injustice of the regime that claims to follow the path of Ḥusayn. For its part, the regime tried to take back the symbols of ʻĀshurā by arguing that the protestors did not respect the sanctity of ʻĀshurā, accusing them of hijacking the message of Imām Ḥusayn for their political motives. The protestors' use of the occasion of ʻĀshurā proved to have little lasting effect. However, the events serve as an example of how the commemoration of the death of Imām Ḥusayn, and its symbolic meanings, can be used to mobilize large numbers towards political and social action.

In the American setting, the question arises; do the leaders of the Shiʻa community use Shiʻa narratives to promote political and social participation? Probably more importantly, how do they use these narratives? How do they tell and retell a narrative that has little to no foundation in American political, cultural, or religious history? And how do they retell this story of ʻĀshurā to initiate and increase political participation of Shiʻas? Following Gutterman's discussion of non-democratic and democratic storytelling, I discuss how various Shiʻa leaders retell the narratives of Shiʻism,

especially the story of 'Āshurā, in order to mobilize their congregations. From the outset, it is important to note that my task is slightly different from Gutterman's. His is an analysis of how the narrative of the Exodus has an effect on American society as a whole. The story of the Exodus speaks to Christians and Jews, as well as Muslims; it is a narrative that resonates to members of all three of these Abrahamic faiths. However, the story of 'Āshurā is primarily one that speaks to Shi'a Muslims. Most Sunnis do not even know the intricacies of this narrative. The names of the main protagonists and antagonists and the events of the day of the tale of 'Āshurā are unknown to the overwhelming majority of American society. In spite of this, the underlying story of justice, sacrifice, martyrdom, and injustice committed against the innocent is something that speaks to all. It would be difficult to find many that claim these issues are of no merit. Therefore, how do the leaders of the Shi'a community frame the narratives of Shi'ism, such as the story of 'Āshurā, to motivate greater participation in American politics?

INTRODUCTORY EXPLANATION OF THE NARRATIVES OF SHI'ISM

The use of the narratives that describe the calamities that were suffered by *Ahl al-Bayt* (the Household of the Prophet) has long been one of the defining features that distinguishes Shi'a Islam from Sunni Islam.[2] Some argue that these narratives become

---

[2] *Ahl al-Bayt* is best translated as "People of the Household," meaning the members of the Prophet's Household. According to Shi'ism, this includes the Prophet, 'Alī, Fāṭimāh, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn and the other nine Imāms. There seems to be some discrepancy if this also includes other members of the

support mechanisms by which Shi'as inform their identities, and they give meaning to the mundane (This of course would strengthen the essentialist hypothesis offered in this dissertation). As such, Shi'as often pull from these stories for comfort and guidance. As mentioned earlier, this reliance on narratives has resulted in the telling, retelling, and reformulation of these stories in order to fit specific political and social issues of the time.

In order to understand how Shi'a religious leaders in the United States use these stories, it is first important to gain familiarity with the actual narratives. This poses a difficult task. First, the narratives of Shi'ism are many. The births and deaths of each of the Imāms, the Prophet, as well as his daughter, Fāṭimāh results in at least 24 narratives.[3] Secondly, this does not take into account the variations of these narratives or the additional stories depicting particular instances in the lives of each of these historical figures. Some of the lessons that are relayed to Shi'as by their leaders involve the use of short descriptions of interactions of one of the *Ma'ṣūmīn* (infallibles), or even *'ulamā'* (religious scholars), with individuals who questioned their religious knowledge, the Shi'a school of thought, or simply the existence of God.[4] Each of these

Prophet's descendants such as the sons of the Imāms whom did not become Imāms. However, it might be best to state that all of the descendants through the marriage of 'Alī and Fāṭimāh are considered to be part of *Ahl al-Bayt*, but only 14 of those members (the Prophet, 'Alī, Fāṭimāh, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, and then the nine Imāms after Ḥusayn) are considered to be the *ma'sumeen* (Infallibles).

[3] It is important to state that the Shi'as believe that the 12th Imām did not die, but instead when into occultation. Therefore, there is no narrative about his death, but rather the narrative of his short public life followed by his time in occultation.

[4] *Ma'ṣūmīn* is best translated as "infallibles," and is the plural of *Ma'ṣūm*. According to the Shi'a school of thought, all of the prophets, the 12 Imāms, and Fāṭimāh, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad,

short stories served as an example - a tool - for how Shi'as should behave in similar circumstances. For example, there exists a famous oral tradition in which an atheist questions the sixth Imām, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, about the existence of God and why this Supreme Being was not visible to humans. In other words, how can humans worship something they cannot see or feel? Imām al-Ṣādiq replies by asking the man to look into the sun, resulting in the man turning his face away and complaining that the brightness of the rays was too much too handle; it was impossible to stare at the sun. The Imām asks the atheist, "How do you expect to see the Creator when you cannot even withstand the sight of the created?" Though a rather simple tale, the story serves as an example on multiple levels. Primarily it gives the listener an example of a very simple way to respond to the inquiries of those that might challenge the existence of God. The Imām, who is believed to be the most learned of his time according to Shi'as, responded very simply but made his point. Probably more importantly is that it serves as an

---

were considered to be infallible and never committed sins. There is a discussion within Shi'ism as to whether this *'iṣmāh*(infallibility) was instilled in these personalities by God, or was a result of their extreme piety. As such, it raises the discussion of whether the *Ma'ṣūmīn* were even capable of committing sin. Some Shi'a hold the belief that the *Ma'ṣūmīn* were incapable of sinning, and others argue that they were capable of committing sin, but were so in tune with the message of Islam, the *Qur'an*, and the example of the Prophet, that they feared God to the extent that they never committed acts that were contrary to the divine law. If the later is true, then it can be argued that all humans are capable of reaching the status of being *Ma'ṣūm*, though the probability is extremely low. Some scholars argue for this understanding of infallibility because it allows for the *Ma'ṣūmīn* to act as more realistic role models for Shi'as to emulate. They argue that if the *Ma'ṣūmīn* were incapable of sin, then they are more akin to robots rather than humans, and as such their examples are not as useful, as their level of piety is unattainable. Therefore, it would be impossible to be like them.

example of the preferred *akhlāq* (morals/ethics) of a Shi'a.[5] Although this man questioned the existence of God, the Imām never insulted him or refused to have dialogue with him. Instead, the Imām listened to his inquiry, and then politely answered his question. There are numerous narratives of non-believers or non-Shi'as converting to Shi'ism simply because of the *akhlāq* of the Imāms.

There are other narratives that relate stories in which an individual would question the knowledge and therefore the status of a particular Imām. Shi'as believe that each Imām was the most learned of his time, and that it was common knowledge that the Shi'as held such a belief. Therefore, many of the *khulafā'* (caliphs) would openly question the Imāms either personally or through the use of other scholars. One of these narratives involves a man questioning the ninth Imām, Muḥammad al-Jawād, about his knowledge given the fact that he was only eight years old when he inherited the Imāmate from his recently deceased father, Imām 'Alī al-Riḍa. The man asking the question was one of the most learned scholars of his time, and he was sent by the *khalīfāh* (caliph) to test the knowledge of the ninth Imām. The discussion unfolded in the following manner:

> "What is atonement for a person who hunts a game while he is dressed in the pilgrimage garb..." [Imām al-Jawād responded by saying,] "Your question is utterly vague and lacks definition. You should first clarify: whether the game

---

[5] *Akhlāq* is best translated as "morals" or "ethics," referring to the manner in which a person conducts him or herself in their daily interactions.

killed was outside the sanctified area or inside it; whether the hunter was aware of his sin or did so in ignorance; did he kill the game purposely or by mistake, was the hunter a slave or a free man, was he adult or minor, did he commit the sin for the first time or had he done so before, was the hunted game a bird or something else, was it a small animal or a big one, is the sinner sorry for the misdeed or does he insist on it, did he kill it secretly at night or openly during daylight, was he putting on the pilgrimage garb for Hajj or for the Umra? Unless you clarify and define these aspects, how can you have a definite answer?"[6]

Unable to offer the clarification for which the Imām asked, the scholar sat quietly while the eight year old child thoroughly answered the question, covering all the scenarios about which he requested clarity. Seeing this, the *khalīfāh* stated, "Did I not tell you that the people of the [*Ahl al-Bayt*] of the Prophet have been gifted by God with limitless knowledge? None can cope with even the children of this elevated House."[7] Narratives as this served as proof of the status of the Imāms, especially juxtaposed to the knowledge of scholars from other schools of Islam. This particular narrative also points to the uniqueness of these individuals, as it begs the question of how an eight-year-old boy would know the intricacies of Islamic jurisprudence as compared to a learned adult scholar. The Shi'as believe that this proves his status as the Imām, and also that his

---

[6] "Imam Al Jawad," http://www.al-islam.org/kaaba14/12.htm.
According to the Qur'an (Chapter al-Maidah), once a Muslim has put on the pilgrim's clothing known as the *iḥrām*, he or she is not allowed to kill or hunt any living thing, save the lawful food of the sea.
[7] Ibid.

father's knowledge would have been superior, and his grandfather's knowledge would have been superior, and his great-grandfather's… all the way back to the Prophet. Shi'as then ask the rhetorical question, "Who was the Prophet's teacher?" The answer of course is that the Prophet was informed and taught by none other than Allah. This therefore connects the Prophet with the Imāms, and Shi'as argue that all the Infallibles of *Ahl al-Bayt* hold the same understanding of the religion. They hold the same knowledge, and this knowledge is taught from father to son. This does not mean that the Imāms were the same as the Prophet, as Muslims believe that Muḥammad was the final prophet of God, but it means that their duties as Imāms are to uphold the Qur'an and teachings of the Prophet. In order to do so they are infallible, just as the Prophet was.[8]

These are two short examples of narratives of specific events in the lives of only two of the holy personalities of Shi'ism. However, the story of Imām Ḥusayn's stand at Karbalā' is the most often used Shi'a narrative. Though the story of the events leading up to the martyrdom of Ḥusayn and his family and companions is primarily told during the first 10 to 13 nights of the month of Muḥarram, specific portions of the 'Āshurā narrative are also recounted on other important occasion throughout the Shi'a calendar.

---

[8] I have encountered two ways in which the issue of infallibility (*'isma*) can be described. Some Shi'as argue that Allah created the Prophets and Imāms infallible. Others argue that the Prophets and Imāms were infallible based on free-will. In other words, they are exceptional because they chose to strictly follow the divine revelations and commandments. Their consciousness of Allah led them to lead the most perfect lives. In either scenario, the importance of an infallible leader has been a characteristic of Shi'a religious thought, and it is based on the premise that Divine Law must be propagated, explained, exemplified, and protected by sinless human beings. Otherwise, the message can and probably would be corrupted if the Prophet or Imām were sinners. For the message to remain pure, the messenger must be pure. For the explanation of the message to be pure, the explainer must be pure.

There are other Shi'a *aḥadīth* (narration) that involve Prophets Abraham and Jesus foretelling the tragedy of Karbalā', and weeping for the death of Ḥusayn. One of the more famous English speaking narrators in modern times, Sayyid Ammar Nakshawani, often connects the tragedy of Karbalā' to the deaths of other members of the Prophet's family. On the commemoration of the death of the Prophet's first wife, Khadijah, Nakshawani narrates a story about the Prophet asking Allah to provide a burial shroud for his wife. The family of the Prophet was so poor leading up to the death of his first wife that they were unable to provide a burial shroud for her funeral. God responded by sending the Angel Jibrael (Gabriel) with five shrouds, one for Khadijah and the rest for the Prophet, Fāṭimāh, 'Alī and Ḥasan. When the Prophet inquires from Jibrael about the absence of a shroud for Imām Ḥusayn, the Archangel responds by saying that God said that Ḥusayn will die without a shroud because there will be nothing left of him after the horses of Bani Umayyah trample his body at Karbalā'.

It is narrative of 'Āshurā that has become the quintessential vehicle for remembering the suffering of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (People of the Household). However it has also been used many times as a tool of resistance and mobilization. As such, I give an account of the main points of the story of the events of 'Āshurā in order to allow the reader to have some familiarity with the narrative before delving into an analysis of the different tropes that are utilized by the various Shi'a leaders in the United States. I base the majority of the telling of the events of 'Āshurā on the work of Shaykh 'Abbās Qummī (1294-1359 AH/1877-1941 CE) entitled *Nafas al-Mahmūm* (The Sign of the

Aggrieved), which is a compilation of reports from of the events of Karbalā' from credible sources. Additionally, I occasionally quote from speakers whose narrations I either witnessed in person or heard via audio recording. One difficulty that arises is that it is impossible to fully convey the emotive effect that one experiences from the personal experience, and to a lesser extent via audio or video recording. In text format, the narrative of Karbalā' sometimes resembles a list of events that occurred on that day. However, when one is listening to the narrative of the death of Ḥusayn, the torture of his family, or the bravery of his sisters after his martyrdom, the heart feels the heaviness of the events. If the speaker is a master of his craft, he can have all assembled crying uncontrollably over events that transpired almost 1,400 years ago. In those few minutes, he is able to transport the crowd to the desert of Karbalā', and they witness the massacre of Imām Ḥusayn, his family and his companions. They witness the whipping of the remaining women and children. They become the front row audience to the beheading of the Imām, forced to watch the heads of the deceased placed on spears and paraded from Karbalā' to Kufa to Damascus. As he mixes the narrative with prose and poetry, the speaker changes the inflection of his voice to pull the tears out of the eyes of the gathered mourners. It is often said that the non-Shi'a, even the non-Muslim, would be moved to tears by the story of the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn.

The narrative of Imām Ḥusayn can be told in a number of different ways. During the first ten nights of Muḥarram, it is common for the speaker to mention the story of a particular person that was with Ḥusayn leading up to and on the day of 'Āshurā. Each of

149

these particular stories serves as examples for the audience as how to live a just lifestyle. Within the main story of Imām Ḥusayn's migration from Makkah to Karbalā' and his subsequent martyrdom lies subplots involving the actions of other figures tied to the overall narrative. Some of these characters are family members and companions of Imām Ḥusayn, and others are his enemies. Through these smaller narratives, the audience is educated on the merits of following those on the side of Ḥusayn. Some of the narratives have an underlying message of service to the Imām regardless of the risks to one's life. Others show how within minutes the message of the Imām could turn one of his opponents into one of his staunchest supporters. Still others depict the importance of women to the message of Islam and for the propagation of the events of 'Āshurā. Within some of these narratives there is also the message that the truth is not restricted to Muslims, that some of the companions of Imām Ḥusayn were Christians and Hindus. In order to simplify this description I stick with those events after a brief description of the events that lead up the arrival of Ḥusayn and his entourage at Karbalā'. This account of the events of 'Āshurā briefly touch on the main points and characters of the overall narrative, but do not go into the minutiae given that the specifics are available in other works.

HISTORICAL EVENTS THAT LED TO THE MARTYRDOM OF IMĀM ḤUSAYN AT KARBALĀ'

Imām Ḥusayn's struggle with Bani Umayyah did not begin at Karbalā'. In fact, his father, Imām 'Alī, was forced to contend with Bani Umayyah during his time as

khalīfāh (35-40 AH/656-661 CE)), and as such Imām Ḥusayn was on the forefront of the battles between his father and the Umayyad armies. To be more exact, Imām ʿAlī first encountered the forces of Bani Umayyah during the lifetime of the Prophet, as they were the main antagonists against Islam before the conquest of Makkah in 8AH/630CE. During that time, ʿAlī was on the forefront of all the major battles against the Makkans, and as such he killed many of the family members of Bani Ummayah in combat. His prowess on the battlefield earned him the title *Asadullah* (The Lion of God). However, this prowess also garnered the animosity of many of the Makkans, including members of Bani Ummayah, who eventually converted to Islam after the conquest of Makkah.

After the assassination of the third *khalīfāh*, ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, in 35AH/656CE, Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan became Imām ʿAlī's main rival. Muawiyah claimed the *khilafah* (caliphate) for himself under the guise of fighting to avenge the blood of the slain third *khalīfāh*. Imām ʿAlī would be forced to fight three major battles during his time as *khalīfāh*. In the Battle of the Camel (35AH/656CE) he would fight the army one of the wives of the Prophet, Aisha, as well as two companions of the Prophet named Talha and Zubayr. During the Battle of Siffin (37AH/657CE), he would be forced into a truce with Muawiyah, which would effectively see the Islamic territories split into three different sections. The Battle of Nahrawan (37AH/657CE) pitched ʿAlī against the army of the Khawarij, a fanatical group that rejected the leadership of both ʿAlī and Muawiyah, but who used to be members of ʿAlī's army that fought Muawiyah at the Battle of Siffin. All of these wars that were imposed on ʿAlī during his short reign as

khalīfāh eventually resulted in the assassination of Imām ʿAlī at the hands of one of the Khawarij named Abdurrahman ibn Muljim al-Moradi in the year 40 AH/660 AH.

Imām Ḥusayn's Migration from Madīnāh to Makkah to Kufa

Prior to his death in 60AH/680CE, the Ummayad *khalīfāh*, Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan named his son Yazīd as his successor. This occurred after Muawiyah's assassination of Imām Ḥasan, the second Imām and elder brother of Imām Ḥusayn. Ḥasan and Muawiyah had earlier signed a treaty by which Imām Ḥasan would abdicate the *khilafah* (caliphate) in favor of Muawiyah under the stipulation that after the later died, that the *khilafah* would return to Imām Ḥasan. Additionally, it was stipulated that the public cursing of ʿAlī, Fāṭimāh, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn during the Friday prayers, which was the norm in al-Shām, would come to an end.[9] Shiʿas contend that Imām Ḥasan made such an agreement knowing that Muawiyah would not keep his end of the bargain, and as such he would expose himself as untrustworthy, and therefore unsuitable to rule as *khalīfāh*. Shiʿas also argue, that Imām Ḥasan was fully aware of the fact that Muawiyah would attempt to kill him, and therefore his poisoning did not come as a surprise. In fact, Muawiyah bribed one of the wives of Imām Ḥasan to poison him by promising her the hand of his son Yazīd in marriage. After she delivered her end of the bargain, Muawiyah refused to keep his promise under the reasoning that if this

---

[9] al-Shām refers to the land that currently contains the states of Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine.

woman was willing to kill the grandson of the Prophet, imagine what she might do to someone lower in morality and stature like Yazīd.

When Yazīd took power after his father's death, he demanded that all Muslims pay allegiance to him. It was known amongst the people that Yazīd was not a pious man. He was known to have been an alcoholic and to indulge in other acts that were considered to be ḥarām (religiously forbidden). Some narrations state that he openly refused the existence of God and equated the Prophet Muhammad's prophethood to the rule of a king or emperor. Other narrations explain that during the reign of Muawiyah, and the subsequently Yazīd, that the religion of Islam was being changed from within into something that would not have been recognizable to the Prophet. The charge is that Bani Ummayah, being on the losing side of the struggle between the early Muslims and the Makkans, reluctantly converted to Islam with the plan to grab power of the administrative organs of the Muslim community, and then regain their dominance as the elite clan within Arabia. Within a few decades after the death of the Prophet, this reality came true.

The allegiance to Yazīd from Imām Ḥusayn, Abdallah Ibn Zubayr, Abdallah ibn 'Umar, and other key figures were sought after with great vigor. Many of these men were the sons of some of the closest companions and family members of the Prophet. These men themselves were also considered to be companions of the Prophet. Yazīd, realizing his lack of credibility to be the khalīfāh, knew that he could gain legitimacy if these family members and companions of the Prophet endorsed his leadership.

Additionally, Yazīd knew that any resistance to his rule would more than likely come from these men because of their sincere commitment to Islam. They would not tolerate any deviation from the Prophetic mission. As such, if he could procure their allegiance, it would be much easier to deal with them if they decided to rebel against him. He would only have to claim that they were rebelling against the legitimate ruler of their time, and as such he would have free reign to deal with them as he pleased.

Only two of these men refused to give allegiance to Yazīd: Imām Ḥusayn and Abdallah ibn Zubayr. It is stated that Yazīd commanded his governor of Madīnāh to procure the oath of Ḥusayn or to have him killed if he refused to cooperate. Imām Ḥusayn was living in Madīnāh at the time and made the trip to Makkah to perform the obligatory Hajj pilgrimage. On the eighth of Dhu al-Hijjah in the year 60AH/680CE, Ḥusayn cut short his pilgrimage after discovering Yazīd's assassins were in Makkah.

Left in a dire situation, Imām Ḥusayn decided to leave for Kufa in Iraq. Kufa was where his father, Imām ʿAlī, ruled as *khalīfāh*. Many inhabitants of Kufa had written letters pleading for Ḥusayn to help them against Yazīd's tyrannical governor and policies. They pledged their allegiance to Imām Ḥusayn, offering their help if he would come liberate them. Despite the advice from other leading figures in Makkah, Imām Ḥusayn decided to take his family and numerous companions with him to Kufa.

In the telling of the decision to migrate to Kufa, Shiʿas argue that Imām Ḥusayn did not embark for the allegiance of the Kufans per se. Nor did he leave Makkah out of fear. Instead, Imām Ḥusayn made it quite clear that there was no way that he, the grandson of

the Prophet and the son of Imām 'Alī and Fāṭimāh, could ever give his allegiance to a man like Yazīd; a man who openly defied the laws of Islam. Shi'as argue that had he capitulated to the demands of Yazīd, Islam would have been changed into an ideology that justified the unjust policies and actions of Bani Umayyah. As such, Ḥusayn did not go Kufa for his own glory or own desire to be *khalīfāh*, but rather to defend the religion of his grandfather and father and to save it from being irreparably damaged. Before leaving for Kufa, Ḥusayn sent his cousin, Muslim ibn 'Aqīl, on a fact finding mission to ascertain the complaints of the people of Kufa, as well as the situation within the city walls.

The Martydoms of Muslim ibn 'Aqīl and Hurr ibn Yazīd al-Rīyahī

Upon Muslim's arrived in Kufa, thousands were in support of Ḥusayn. He wrote back to the Imām telling him to hurry for the people of Kufa had pledged their support for him. Muslims actions in Kufa did not go unnoticed, and within a few days, Yazīd dispatched Ubaydallah ibn Ziyad as a replacement to the previous governor. Though Yazīd did not like Ubaydallah on a personal level, he was advised to choose him based on the latter's ruthlessness. When the people of Kufa realized that Ubaydallah ibn Ziyad had been sent to be the new governor, they little by little relinquished their support for Imām Ḥusayn's cause out of fear. Ubaydallah eventually would have Muslim ibn 'Aqīl captured and then executed. Before being beheaded, Muslim asked his captors to please tell Ḥusayn that the people of Kufa had let him down, and to abort his trip. Ubaydallah ibn Ziyad refused this request before ordering his head to be cut off and his body

thrown off the room of the palace. According to some narrations of this particular part of the 'Āshurā story, just before he was beheaded, Muslim ibn 'Aqīl looked towards the west and yelled *As-Salāmu 'Alayk Ya Aba Abdallah!*[10] Some commentators suggest that though Ḥusayn and his caravan were still on their journey from Makkah, and not remotely close to Kufa, that Ḥusayn stopped. When asked why he stopped so abruptly, the Imām sadly explained that his cousin Muslim had been killed in Kufa.

At this point it is important to clarify the events that lead to the death of Muslim ibn 'Aqīl in Kufa. The Shi'a narrative of his death involves his betrayal and abandonment by the people of Kufa. Often, detractors of the Shi'a perspective of Islamic history argue that it were the Shi'as who betrayed 'Alī and Ḥusayn during their respective eras. In the case of Imām 'Alī, many Sunni and Western scholars, have argued that during 'Alī's four years as *khalīfāh* (caliph), a group of his own supporters betrayed him at the Battle of Siffin (37 AH/ 657CE) and would eventually fight him at the Battle of Nahrawan (37 AH/657 CE). Similarly, some have claimed that it were the Shi'as of Kufa that betrayed Imām Ḥusayn after initially calling for his help. They lead him to believe that he would be supported in Kufa, but when he needed them the most they left him alone on the plains of Karbalā' with only 72 companions to fight the Ummayad

---

[10] *As-Salāmu 'Alayk Ya Aba Abdullah* is best translated as "Peace be upon you oh Aba Abdullah!" The name Abu Abdullah refers to Imām Ḥusayn, and literally translates to Father (Abu) of the Slave of Allah (Abdullah). As Imām Ḥusayn did not have a son named Abdullah, he was probably given this title to signify his position in regard to the "true believer." In other words, he was the leader of the believers.

156

army of thousands. Behind such opinions is the implicit, and sometimes explicit, claim that the Imāms were deceived into believing they had more support than was the case.

The Shi'a rebuttal to such claims focuses on the definition of the word Shi'a. They argue that though the literal translation of the word Shi'a means "partisans," the definition of a true Shi'a is one who believes in the *wilāyāh* (guardianship) and *imāmāh* (divinely appointed leadership) of the 12 Imāms. From their perspective, it is true that many of those that betrayed the Imāms were initially Shi'as in the literal sense, however they were partisans only because it benefited them in some material way. Conversely, true Shi'as followed the Imāms because they recognized the divine appointment of these individuals. As such, they give this reason for the fact that Shi'as have always been a minority. In essence, the Shi'a response is to claim that early Muslims failed to heed the command of the Prophet to follow the Imāms from his Household, and successive Sunni dynasties did all they could to erase the historical facts relating to the *wilāyāh* of the Imāms. Though they attempted to remove this from the memory of the people, a few have held strong to the message of the Prophet and his Household. These people, though few in number, are the Shi'as of the Household of the Prophet.

The story continues by introducing a character named Hurr ibn Yazīd al-Rīyahī, who was sent by Ubaydallah ibn Ziyad to stop Imām Ḥusayn from approaching Kufa. When he met Ḥusayn he explained to him that it was his job to keep the Imām from entering Kufa, and as such redirected the caravan to a land called Karbalā'. Hurr then notified the Imām that he was to be arrested by the order of Ubaydallah and 'Umar ibn

Sa'ad who was one of the generals of Yazīd's army. The Imām replied that he would not allow himself to be arrested by Hurr, and used an Arabic proverb exclaiming, "O' Hurr, may your mother sit on your grave." To this Hurr replied, "O' Imām, if it was anyone else I would surely have cursed his mother, but your mother is Fāṭimāh!" This displayed Hurr's respect for the Imām, and it would become clear that he had no intention of killing the Imām. In fact, he was completely unaware of the plans to kill Ḥusayn. It was not until the leaders of Yazīd's army notified him that he understood the severity of the events that were about to unfold.

The narrations tell us that on the day of 'Āshurā, Hurr was seen shivering from the fear and gravity of the situation. According to Sheikh Abbas Qummi in *Nafas al-Mahmun* (The Sigh of the Aggrieved):

> Muhajir bin Aws told him, "O [Hurr]! What do you intend? Do you intend to lay siege"? Hurr did not answer him but was shivering. Muhājir said, "Verily your state seems dubious. I have never ever seen you in any battle in a similar state in which you are now. If I would have been questioned as to who is the most valorous among the Kufāns, I would not hesitate to take your name. What is this state I presently see you in"? Hurr replied, "I find myself between Paradise and hell. And by Allāh! I shall not exalt anything else over Paradise, even if I be cut

into pieces or burnt." Then Hurr struck his horse… and turned to go towards Imām Ḥusayn (a.s.)[11]

He begs for forgiveness from Ḥusayn, and is told that he would be forgiven if he asks Allah. When Ḥusayn asks him to dismount from his horse, Hurr politely refuses, and instead requests to fight the army of Yazīd. It is said that Hurr fought valiantly until he was surrounded by several troops and was dealt a fatal wound. Lying on the ground of Karbalā', he yells out *As-Salāmu 'Alayk Ya Aba Abdallah!* The Imām rushes to Hurr's side and begins to wipe the blood from the wounds on his forehead with a cloth that was given to him by his mother Fāṭimāh, and comforts him saying: "Well done O Hurr! You are at liberty in this world as well as the hereafter, as your mother has named you."[12] Qummi also narrates that the Imām continued with a few lines of poetry for the dying Hurr. "What a best Hurr is the Hurr of Bani Riyah, and the best Hurr during the exchange of spears, the best Hurr who was generous with regard to his life when Ḥusayn called out in the morning."[13] Therefore the story of Hurr serves as an example of how man can change his destiny. When facing a difficult decision, Hurr chose to stand for what was right, knowing that the wrong decision would result in hellfire. It is the quintessential redemption story, in which a man who was ever so close to being on

---

[11] Sheikh Abbas Qummi, "Nafasul Mahmum: Relating to the heart rending tragedy of Karbala'," trans. Aejaz Ali T. Bhujwala (al Husaynee), http://www.al-islam.org/nafasul-mahmum/.

[12] Ibid. The word *hurr* in Arabic is best translated as "freedom" or "liberty." As such, a better translation of Imām Ḥusayn's final words to the dying Hurr ibn Yazīd is "O' Hurr! You are free in this world as well as in the hereafter, as your mother has named you."

[13] Ibid.

the side of the oppressors realized the errors of his way and ultimately became one of the first martyrs on the day of ʿĀshurā.

Narratives Involving the Non-Muslim Companions of Imām Ḥusayn

The narrative of ʿĀshurā also serve as vehicle for interfaith understanding and dialogue. It is often stated that there were non-Muslims who fought on the behalf of Imām Ḥusayn at Karbalā'. The narratives of the Christians Wahab ibn Kalbi and Yahya ibn Howal are prime examples. Wahab is said to have only been married for a couple of weeks prior to the events of ʿĀshurā. He is said to have been traveling in the vicinity of Karbalā' with his wife and mother when he is informed of the presence of a man whom he has never met named Imām Ḥusayn. When he inquires about the Imām, he is told Ḥusayn is the grandson of the Prophet of Islam. He is then persuaded by his mother to inquire further about the identity and situation of the Imām. Wahab is informed that this Ḥusayn indeed is the grandson of the Prophet, and that an army of 30,000 was preparing to kill the Imām and his family and companions.

Wahab returns to his mother and wife and relays the situation of Imām Ḥusayn. His mother questions him, asking him if he was courageous enough to stand with the Imām against oppression. His wife begs him to consider their new life together, proclaiming that he had promised her a long life of happiness. Wahab is forced to decide between walking away and defending the Ḥusayn. His mother pleas with him to go to the battlefield, proclaiming that if he dies the mother of Ḥusayn will give him water in paradise. Wahab decides to fight, much to the disappointment of his wife.

160

The narrations tell us that he valiantly engages the enemies of Ḥusayn, killing many of the soldiers. When he returns to the camp, he asks his mother if his efforts satisfied her.

"O mother! Are you pleased now"? She replied, "I shall not be pleased until you attain martyrdom in the presence of Imām Ḥusayn (a.s)." Then his wife said, "I request you in the name of Allāh not to bereave me." Hearing this his mother said, "O dear son! Do not accept what she says, go and fight in the way of the grandson of the Prophet, so that he may intercede for you on the day of Qiyāmah." Wahab returned back saying: "I swear to you O Umme Wahab, to strike them with spears and sword, similar to the swordsmanship of a youth who believes in the Almighty, so as to give a taste of the bitter battle to this nation, I am valorous and a youth possessing a clear-cut sword, I am not fearful during battle, Allāh, the Wise, is sufficient for me."[14]

He rushes out to the battlefield once more despite the protests of his wife, and as he engages the enemy yet again he all of a sudden hears his wife yelling at him "Ya Wahab! Fight!" When he inquires as to her change in attitude towards his participation in the battle, she exclaims "Ya Wahab! The tears of the children of Abu Abdullah are killing me! I can hear the cries of the daughters of Abu Abdullah!"[15] She urged Wahab

---

[14] Ibid.
[15] Sayed Ammar Nakshawani, *The Crucifixion of Christ*, Muḥarram 2009/2010 (Burtonsville Maryland, 2009).

to fight on, until he was martyred. The story continues that even his wife was killed as she ran to his body. One of the generals of Yazīd's army threw the decapitated head of Wahab at his mother. When the head rolled to her feet, she threw it back and shouted "That head which I gave to Fāṭimāh al-Zahra, I do not take back… if I had twenty sons I'd give them to Abu Abdullah! I am ashamed that I only have one son to give away to him!"[16]

Yahya ibn Howal, often referred to as John, was a Christian Abyssinian servant of Imām Ḥusayn who, like many of the servants of the Imām and his companions, was freed from his service prior to the battle of Karbalā'. John had been a servant in the family of Imām 'Alī for years, and though he was an old man on the day of 'Āshurā, he refused to abandon the family of the Prophet. Narrations state that Imām Ḥusayn refused to allow John to fight on account of his advanced age. John, unwilling to accept the Imām's reasoning for exempting him from the battlefield, inquired from the Imām if the true reason he was not allowed to fight was due his African descent. He asked if the Imām was worried that John's African blood might pollute the blood of the Household of the Prophet if they were spilled upon each other. Imām Ḥusayn is said to have been shocked to hear John speak in such a way, especially due to the long relationship John had with the family of Imām 'Alī. The Imām explained to him that the Household did not discriminate on the basis of such things, and then invited John to put on his armor

[16] Ibid.

162

and escorted him to the battlefield. The narration goes on to explain that John fought ferociously in defense of Imām Ḥusayn, but eventually was martyred. As he lay dying he called out for the Imām, and Ḥusayn approached him and began to cry, asking John for forgiveness for not having the means to take care of him during his last few days on the earth. John comforted the Imām, and thanked him for the opportunity to defend the Household of the Prophet and then passed away with his head resting on the Imām's lap.

The stories of Wahab and John serve a few purposes. As mentioned above, the fact that they were both Christians allows Shi'as to argue that Imām Ḥusayn's movement was not for a particular sect of Islam or only for Islam, but rather he stood against the tyrant Yazīd in favor of justice for all humanity. The fact that Christians were able to recognize his intentions, and willingly fight for his cause is seen as proof of his divinely inspired mission. Narrations also tell us that Wahab, prior to engaging the enemy, converted to Islam. Shi'as therefore state that the piety, justness and conviction of the Imām and his message, were enough to convince Wahab to conver to Islam. John on the other hand, was a Christian servant who had lived in the household of Imām 'Alī, Imām Ḥasan and then Imām Ḥusayn. His being a Christian as well as being of African lineage, also contributes to the universality of Imām Ḥusayn's mission. Though Islam had abolished most forms of slavery and racism, it was still very much alive during the time of Imām Ḥusayn's movement from Madīnāh to Makkah to Karbalā'. The narrators of the tragedies that befell the Imām and the Household of the Prophet often explain

that though the Imāms had servants (sometimes referring to them as slaves), these workers were servants based on personal choice. Often it is explained that they were free to go, but they chose to serve the Imām and their families because it was in the houses of the Imāms where they were truly free. Some narrations explain that the servants of the Imāms were the most learned scholars of Islam, and that the prayers of the servants were so sincere that they could ask Allah for rain during a drought and water would immediately start falling from the sky. Usually the speaker ends this narrative by exclaiming, "If the prayer of the servant of Imām Zain al-ʿĀbidīn was answered so quickly by Allah, imagine the greatness of the Imām!"

Family of Imām Ḥusayn

In the last section of the narratives I briefly mention the roles played by the family members of Imām Ḥusayn on the day of ʿĀshurā. These particular sub-narratives are extremely numerous, and to recount them all requires extensive time and effort. For the purposes of this research, all of the events and versions of the afflictions that the family of Ḥusayn faced are not necessary to enumerate here. However, it is important to understand the main protagonists from among the family members.

On the day of ʿĀshurā, Imām Ḥusayn witnessed the martyrdom of numerous members of his family. During the first ten nights of Muḥarram, Shiʿas are told of the numerous sacrifices that were made by these family members. Among the narratives are those that recount the death of two of Ḥusayn's sons, the eldest ʿAlī al-Akbar and the six month old ʿAlī al-Asghar. ʿAlī al-Akbar was killed while fighting the enemies of

Ḥusayn, and the narrations explain that he was fatally injured with a spear through his chest. As Imām Ḥusayn approached his dying son, he saw that ʿAlī al-Akbar's facial expressions were vacillating between crying and smiling. When Ḥusayn reached him he asked why his mood was changing, and his son responded that he was smiling because he could see the Prophet walking towards him welcoming him to Paradise, but he was crying because he could also see Ḥusayn's mother Fāṭimāh slapping her face due to the tears that Ḥusayn was shedding for his dying son. The narrative then claims that Imām Ḥusayn looked towards the city of Najaf where his father, Imām ʿAlī, was buried and called out "Oh Amīr al-Muʾminīn! You lifted the gates of Khaybar, but you never had to lift a spear from the chest of your son!!! Oh my father, look at what they have done to us on the plains of Karbalāʾ!!!"[17]

---

[17] *Amīr al-Muʾminīn* is best translated into English as "Commander of the Faithful." Shiʿas believe this title was given to Imām ʿAlī by the Prophet due to the request of Allah. In the Sunni world, this title has been given to all of the first four *khulafa*, as well as to others throughout history. Shiʿas believe that only Imām ʿAlī can hold this title as he was the commander of the armies of the Prophet. Additionally, it is implied that those that follow ʿAlī are the *muʾminīn*… the faithful. In other words, Shiʿas are the faithful, and by default those that do not follow him are not the faithful.

Lifting the gates of Khaybar is a reference to the Battle of Khaybar in the year 629 CE/7AH. During the course of the battle, the Muslim armies attempted to penetrate the fortress of Khaybar on numerous occasions with no success. Finally the Prophet proclaimed that the following day he would put the banner of the army in the hands of a man who loved Allah and His Prophet, and who Allah and His Prophet loved. The members of the army slept restlessly, all hoping to be the person the Prophet would choose. In the morning, the Prophet called for Imām ʿAlī to lead the next attack, however ʿAlī's eyes were affected with some form of inflammation that impaired his vision. The narrations claim that the Prophet applied some of his own saliva on the eyes of ʿAlī, and immediately his vision cleared. In the course of his attack on the fortress, it is claimed by both Sunni and Shiʿa sources that ʿAlī lifted a gate that served as the entrance to the fortress, and used it as a shield. After the battle was won, it is said that it took 40 men to lift the gate that ʿAlī had unhinged and used to defend himself. Ḥusayn's reference to the gates of Khaybar, was his way of saying that though ʿAlī had incredible strength, lifting the gates of Khaybar is nothing compared to lifting a spear from the chest of one's son.

The narratives also recount the death of Imām Ḥusayn's nephew al-Qāsim, the son of Imām Ḥasan. It is said that Imām Ḥusayn did not stop any of his family members and companions from fighting, except al-Qāsim. Ḥusayn is said to have exclaimed that he did not have the heart to allow the son of his deceased brother to fight, and turned down al-Qāsim's request to fight. When al-Qāsim returned to his mother's tent, she gave him a letter and told him to take it back to Imām Ḥusayn. Imām Ḥasan had written this letter to Imām Ḥusayn, and in it he told his younger brother that al-Qāsim was his representative on the day of 'Āshurā, and not to turn him away when he comes to fight. As such, Ḥusayn tearfully allowed his young nephew to enter the battlefield where he was martyred.

In the many sub-narratives that make up the overall narrative of 'Āshurā, the story of Imām Ḥusayn's half-brother 'Abbās stand out. 'Abbās was known as a fierce warrior with an enormous physique and incredible strength. According to some narrations, his feet would come close to touching (and some say that they touched) the ground when he mounted his horse. During the Battle of Siffin, in which Imām 'Alī's troops fought the army of Muawiyah (657CE/36AH), 'Abbās was introduced to the battlefield for the first time. It is said that Imām 'Alī sent 'Abbās out on his horse, but with his face masked. The opposition saw his physique, but did not realize who this young man was. When they asked him to unmask himself he refused per the command of his father. They demanded to see who he was for a second time. Imām 'Alī commanded him again not to unmask himself. When the opposition requested a third time, 'Abbās was given

permission to reveal his identity. He introduced himself by proclaiming *"ana qamar Banī Hāshim, Abu Faḍl al-'Abbās!"*[18] The opposition tried to shake 'Abbās' resolve by claiming that Imām 'Alī does not allow Ḥasan and Ḥusayn to fight, but sends 'Abbās to fight, thereby arguing that 'Alī did not care for 'Abbās as much as he did for his two eldest sons. In response, the young 'Abbās claimed that Ḥasan and Ḥusayn were the son of the Prophet and that he was the son of 'Alī, and that it was the duty of the sons of 'Alī to protect the sons of the Prophet.[19] He also told them that Ḥasan and Ḥusayn were the eyes of 'Alī, and that he himself was the hands of 'Alī, and therefore the hands of 'Alī protect the eyes of 'Alī.

Shi'as are told that when Imām 'Alī was on his deathbed (661AH/40AH), that he told all of his children to defend their eldest brother Ḥasan, as he would be under attack as the new Imām. However, 'Abbās was told that he was responsible to defend Imām Ḥusayn. Throughout his life, 'Abbās would always refer to Imām Ḥusayn as *sayyidī* (my master), and never referred to Ḥusayn as *akhī* (my brother). Narrations also explain that 'Abbās never allowed others to give water or food to Ḥusayn, and even as a small child he would stop others from serving Ḥusayn. He would take the food or drink from others who wished to serve the Imām, and would then serve him.

---

[18] *"ana qamar Banī Hāshim, Abu Faḍl al-'Abbās!"* is translated into English as "I am the Moon of Bani Hashim, Abu Faḍl al-'Abbās!" Banī Hāshim refers to the Prophet's clan. Abu Faḍl is translated as "Father of Virtue," and is one of the titles of 'Abbās.

[19] The Prophet would often refer to Ḥasan and Ḥusayn as his own sons, despite the fact that they were his grandsons.

On the day of 'Āshurā, Ḥusayn commanded 'Abbās to defend the tents of the women and children, and though 'Abbās wanted to engage the enemy he submitted to the will of his elder brother. On many occasions, 'Abbās pleaded to go fight, but Imām Ḥusayn would tell him "'Abbās, you are my backbone, I need you to stay alive to defend the women and children. If something happens to you, we will all lose hope!" However, towards the later part of the day, the women and children were feeling the effects of not having water, as the opposition had blocked their access to the water. Therefore, 'Abbās asked Ḥusayn if he could go to the Euphrates to gather water for the children, and he was granted permission to do so. As he reached the water, the narrations state that 'Abbās grabbed a handful of water, but as he was about to drink he realized that his Imām and the children were suffering from thirst. Refusing to quench his thirst while the others suffered, he threw the water back into the Euphrates and filled the water skin, and began to fight his way back to the tents of Ḥusayn's camp. The army of the enemy ambushed him and in the fighting both of his arms were severed. He placed the water skin in his mouth, determined to reach the children in order to quench their thirst. However he lost all hope after the enemy archers punctured the container with their arrows, and then he was struck in the eye with one of those same arrows. The narrators often exclaim that "normally when a man falls of his horse, he catches himself with his hands, but 'Abbās gave both of his hands defending Imām Ḥusayn, and fell with an arrow in his eye!!!"

The narrations explain that Imām Ḥusayn came running to his brother lying on the ground. 'Abbās' face was covered in blood, and his vision was completely compromised. He heard the footsteps approaching, and yelled out for the person to leave him be so that he might be able to talk to his master (Imām Ḥusayn) one more time before he died. Suddenly Ḥusayn explained to him that it was no other than his Imām. Ḥusayn sat next to the body of his brother, and cleared the blood from 'Abbās' face. He placed 'Abbās' head in his lap as to comfort him, but 'Abbās refused and removed it back to the ground. Again, Ḥusayn placed his brother's head in his lap, and again 'Abbās refused. Ḥusayn asked why 'Abbās insisted on having his head on the ground. 'Abbās replied by saying "Oh Ḥusayn, now my head rests on your lap, but where will your head rest when they sever it?!" Other narrations also mention that as 'Abbās was dying, Imām Ḥusayn requested that at least once in his life 'Abbās refer to him as "my brother" rather than "my master." 'Abbās acquiesced, and in his final words he called Ḥusayn "my brother." As 'Abbās passed away, Imām Ḥusayn is said to have wept profusely, and shouted, "Now my back has been broken!"

Imām Ḥusayn was accompanied by two of his sisters with him to Karbalā', Zaynab and Umm Kulthum. These two ladies played pivotal roles in the propagation of the events of 'Āshurā. Before his martyrdom, Imām Ḥusayn had warned both sisters of the calamities that they would face after his death. The narrations always involve the story of the "daughters of Rasulullah" (The daughters of the Messenger of God, referring to the women of his Household) being whipped, chained, and unveiled by their captors.

The narrations also depict these two sisters, especially Zaynab, as being the lynchpins of the survivors. They kept the women and children together, and cared for their ill nephew, the Fourth Imām, ʿAlī ibn Ḥusayn who will be discussed shortly.

Of the two, Zaynab's role has been the more emphasized and crucial in the overall ʿĀshurā narrative. For Shiʿas, she is the model of what the perfect Muslim woman should be. She is especially remembered for the fiery sermon she delivered in Yazīd's court in Damascus in which she chastised him publicly for the offenses he committed against Imām Ḥusayn. She reminded him that his victory at Karbalāʾ was only a temporal success, and that he would have eternal punishment in the next life for the killing of the Prophet's family members. She reminded him of his family's ancestry as the staunchest enemies of the Prophet before their last minute conversion, by addressing him as "oh you whose father was freed by my grandfather." She continued by rebuking him for unveiling the women of the Household of the Prophet, while he simultaneously kept his wives and daughters veiled. Afterward, Yazīd, who was known to be an accomplished poet, commented on her high level of speech. Zaynab responds to him by proclaiming that she was talking at a lower level of her ability in order that he would be able to understand her, and that if she spoke her highest level he would not be able to even comprehend a bit of her sermon.

Following Zaynab, Imām ʿAlī ibn Ḥusayn, who is often titled as "Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn" (The Adornment of the Believers) or "Imām al-Sajjad" (the Prostrating Imām), also delivered a sermon in which he reminded the people of who *Ahl al-Bayt* were. In doing

so, he stated that he was the descendant of the Prophet, Imām 'Alī, Fāṭimāh, Khadījāh (the first wife of the Prophet and mother of Fāṭimāh), and Imām Ḥusayn. He recounted the merits of each of these family members, and as he concluded the people who were gathered were said to be in tears. Years of propaganda had created a false image of the Prophet's Household among much of the Muslim nation, especially in the areas that had been under the control of Yazīd and his father. Zaynab and Imām Zayn al-'Ābidīn's sermons turned the people against Yazīd, and according to some narrations he quickly commanded that they be set free and escorted back to Madīnāh in order to keep them from causing more sedition in the Damascus area.

This particular narration claims that on the way back from Damascus, the caravan was allowed to stop in Karbalā' in order to bury the bodies of the martyrs. When they approached the site of the massacre, they were greeted by one of the elderly companions of the Prophet, Jābir ibn 'Abdullāh al-Ansārī, who was performing the first *zīyārāh* (pilgrimage/visit) to the site of Imām Ḥusayn's martyrdom. There they buried the remaining bodies, and stayed only for a few days, deciding to return to Madīnāh as soon as possible. Narrations recount that Imām Zayn al-'Ābidīn decided not to stay for a prolonged period of time due to the mental state of his aunt Zaynab. She was noted as being the rock that all of the family members had steadied themselves upon, but Imām Zayn al-'Ābidīn was worried that she would breakdown after burying her brothers, two sons, and friends.

As the caravan entered Madīnāh, Imām Zayn al-'Ābidīn asked a companion named Bishr to go to the Mosque of the Prophet and inform the people of what happened to Imām Ḥusayn at Karbalā'. The narrations state that as Bishr began to speak an elderly lady approached and asked about the status of Imām Ḥusayn. When Bishr asked about this lady's identity he was informed that she was Umm al-Banīn, one of the wives of Imām 'Alī, with whom she had four sons who were half-brothers to Imām Ḥusayn. It is said that after the death of Fāṭimāh, that Imām 'Alī requested the hand of a woman who would give him strong sons that would protect Ḥusayn on the day of 'Āshurā (as the Prophet was informed by the Angel Gabriel that his grandson would be martyred at that location). Imām 'Alī's brother found him a lady from a tribe of fierce warriors who eventually became his wife. Her name initially was Fāṭimāh, but she requested that Imām 'Alī change it because she noticed that he shed tears every time he mentioned her name because it was the same as his beloved first wife, Fāṭimāh the daughter of the Prophet. As such, Imām 'Alī began to refer to her as Umm al-Banīn, the mother of the sons, because of the four sons she bore.

When Bishr realized who she was, he offered his condolences for the death of her son Ja'far, who died defending Ḥusayn. She responded by proclaiming that "May he (Ja'far) be sacrificial for Ḥusayn… tell me what happened to Ḥusayn." Bishr then offered his condolences for the death of her son Uthman, which was followed by her claiming that he too was a sacrifice for Ḥusayn. Again she asked about Ḥusayn, whereby Bishr offered condolences for her son Abdullah, by which she exclaimed

172

"*Waylak!!!* (Woe to you!!!) Tell me what happened to my Ḥusayn!" Bishr responded by informing her of the death of her eldest son, ‘Abbās. The narrations state that upon hearing that her eldest son had died, she collapsed to the floor and began wailing. She could not believe that her eldest, biggest, and strongest son would have died without defending Ḥusayn. But again she asked about Ḥusayn and was informed that he too was martyred at Karbalā'.

Rumors soon began floating around Madīnāh that Umm al-Banīn was not mourning the death of ‘Abbās because he failed in protecting his half-brother, Imām Ḥusayn. Soon the rumors reached Imām Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, who immediately rushed to her house. There he informed her she would be proud had she seen how ‘Abbās had defended his Imām and half-brother. In response, Umm al-Banīn explained that she knew that her son did not let Imām Ḥusayn down. She knew that he defended his Imām, the children, and the companions of Ḥusayn. However, she felt it was her duty to represent the mother of Ḥusayn, who was not present to cry for her own son. Therefore, Umm al-Banīn took that responsibility upon herself, knowing that others would mourn the death of her ‘Abbās.

MAJLIS: THE SCENE AND FEEL OF THE NARRATIVE

The setting in which the narratives of Shi'ism are recounted is usually referred to as a *majlis* (pl. *majālis*).[20] A *majlis* is often held in a mosque, *hosseiniyyah*, *Imāmbargah*, and even in private homes. The evening usually begins with th congregational sunset and evening prayer, which is followed by a lecture. The speaker usually tries to provide the congregation with a spiritual message that is also full of practical advice and knowledge. The speaker picks an ethical and moral topic, and the goal is to convey a lesson to the listeners. Throughout the lecture, which typically last 45 minutes to an hour, the speaker praises the Prophet and his Household, and many speakers in the United States tie the lesson into events and issues that Shi'as face in the American context. The *muṣībāh* (lamentation), which depicts one of the tragic events of 'Āshurā, is saved for the last few minutes. As such, in the verbal narration of these events, the narrator often changes the tone of his voice, even coming to tears in order to affect the emotional state of the audience. There is a belief amongst Shi'as, which has been narrated through strong sources and which Shi'as are continuously reminded, that a tear the size of the wing of a mosquito shed for Imām Ḥusayn clears the sins the size of the ocean. Therefore, the narrators feel it is their duty to help induce the shedding of tears during the 'Āshurā season (as well as during the other days of lamentation throughout

---

[20] Some people refer to this type of gathering as a *jalsāh*, but the terms *majlis* and *jalsāh* come from the same triconsonantal root (*j-l-s*) as the verb *jalasa* which means "to sit." Therefore, both terms *majlis* ("a place of sitting") and *jalsāh* ("gathering") have the same connotation. *Majlis* is also sometimes used as the term for parliament, assembly, or legislature.

the year). When the *muṣībāh* is narrated, the lights in the room are dimmed in order to give the occupants a level of privacy to shed their tears and mourn for the calamities that Imām Ḥusayn faced at Karbalā'. This serves two purposes: On the one hand, it allows for an individual in a group of possible hundreds to have his or her personal space in order that they can lament as they desire. Some cry loudly. Some sob gently. A few become overwhelmed by the emotion that they must be calmed. Others simple reflect on the tragedy. Some pray and make invocations to Allah. Some do nothing at all, maybe even checking text messages. On the other hand, it keeps others from judging one's actions. In your own personal space people can not see how hard you cried, if it was genuine or feigned, or if you were text messaging. I mention this in order to give the reader a glimpse of how these narratives can be used to affect the emotions as well as thought process of individual Shi'as in regards to a multitude of topics and issues.

SUMMARY: FINAL WORD ON THE NARRATIVES OF SHI'ISM

As with many of the narratives surrounding the Imāms, the historical validity is no longer pertinent. In some of the narratives, the Prophet or the Imāms perform miracles that seem beyond human ability. In others, they are privy to the unseen world and future events. Even the minutiae and specific details of the narratives of 'Āshurā raise questions about the events that took place. For example, how is it that we know the exact words that Imām Ḥusayn uttered to someone while they were dying on the battlefield, especially when we can expect that the scene was filled with the chaos and

violence associated with face-to-face combat? In the larger picture, the fact of whether these very specific aspects of the narrative of 'Āshurā took place is a moot point. The purpose of these narratives is to educate. In some instances it is simply used to conjure an emotional response. Shi'as are told that each tear shed for Imām Ḥusayn removes one sin. As such, the speaker changes the inflection of his voice, he cries when reciting the tragedies of that day, sometimes even fainting from the gravity of the particular narrative he is offering.

As mentioned previously, there have been occasions when the narrations involving 'Āshurā have been used to motivate people into political action. Revolutionary era Iran in the mid to late 1970s, the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, Hezbollah's successive wars and skirmishes with Israel, as well as the quietist approach of the Shi'as of Iraq during Saddam Hussein's reign all serve as examples of instances when political and religious leaders used the narratives of Shi'ism to affect political and social action, and in some cases inaction. This takes skill on the behalf of the narrator to carefully tell and/or retell the narrative in such a manner as to tie contemporary events to the examples of the struggles of the Imāms. As discussed in the following chapter, the probability of such narratives to affect political and social action is not only in the hands of a speaker to weave the appropriate manifestation of a particular story; this is one side of the interaction. On the other side, the audience must be receptive to such retellings of the narrative, and it must also have an understanding of the current political situation that faces the community, and have a willingness to engage in that political process. We see

that, Shi'a leaders struggle with both aspects of this puzzle. Many of these leaders simply do not do a good enough job of retelling the narratives of Shi'ism to have an effect. Conversely, much of the community is not open to such retellings, and his is particularly true for the older generations.

CHAPTER 4 – TELLING AND RETELLING SHI'A NARRATIVES

In this chapter I discuss the various ways in which Shi'a leaders in the United States use the narratives of Shi'ism to affect political and social participation. The predominant focus is on the narrative of 'Āshurā described in the previous chapter, with some reference to other Shi'a narratives. As such, the purpose of this chapter is to describe the variation on the independent variable, which involves the discussion of how the leaders tell and re-tell the story of 'Āshurā, and the next chapter discusses the variation on the dependent variable, the manner in which the different tropes of the same story result in different forms of political and social action. The leaders use the same story, some times the exact same element of a given narrative, in different ways. They focus on a particular sub-narrative that serves to bolster their claims. These leaders stress some points and omit others that do not serve their purpose. At times these differences are great between the narrators' choice of trope, and on other occasions the differences are negligible. The leaders' decision to approach the narrative from a particular angle or emphasize one aspect over the other is done in a deliberate manner to affect the audience.

GUTTERMAN'S DISCUSSION OF DIFFERING NARRATIVE TROPES

I use David S. Gutterman's *Prophetic Politics: Christian Social Movements and American Democracy* as a model of how to analyze the narratives of Shi'ism, in

particular the narrative of ʿĀshurā, included in this work.[1] Gutterman explores "the different forms of 'prophetic politics' in the 20th- and 21st-century United States that illuminate this tension between religion and democratic politics in America."[2] In doing so, he focuses on the manner in which the narrative of the Exodus in the Old Testament is told and retold to promote particular brands of prophetic politics. Gutterman analyzes the use of narratives for political purposes by distinguishing between those he refers to as "democratic" and "undemocratic."

> The relation between narratives and politics is not necessarily democratic; indeed, the Exodus narrative itself, neither in its initial telling among the ancient Hebrews nor in its retelling by the early American Puritans would be considered emphatically democratic in either content or expression. If the retelling of narratives does not necessarily encourage democratic politics, then what *is* the difference between democratic and non-democratic employments of storytelling? Democratic storytelling reveals, and encourages the understanding of, the shared public world as a realm of pluralism and freedom. In narrative terms, this democratic freedom is indicative of new interpretations and imaginative possibilities that embrace challenges created by relinquishing the pretense that there are definitive understandings of the past, present, and future.[3]

---

[1] Gutterman, *Prophetic Politics: Christian Social Movements and American Democracy*.
[2] Ibid., 2.
[3] Ibid., 34.

His analysis of the narrative of the Exodus focuses on how "American prophets" have used this story to promote particular democratic ideals. Additionally, the manner in which these "prophets" presented this narrative led to a vision that was more or less inclusive and participatory. For example, Gutterman offers the manner in which Reverend Billy Sunday used the Exodus narrative not to "expand the pluralist 'in-between,' or enhance the *sensus communis* vital to a vibrant realm of democratic politics, [rather his] evocations of the Exodus narrative limited admittance to the promised land to God's chosen people."[4] Sunday's narrative limited membership in the group of "chosen people" to Christian Americans, and the particular trope of his narrative labeled the United States of America as a "promised land." It constructed a dichotomy of "us" and "them;" the existence of a "chosen people" conversely labels all others as "not chosen." Gutterman concludes that although Sunday expressed a trope of the Exodus narrative that conveyed a political message, it was by no means democratic. "Preaching closed narratives of rigidly defined characters, enlisting muscular Christian soldiers to guard the borders of home and nation, Sunday disparaged the disorientation and subsequent openness to representative thinking that is the hallmark of visiting and the engine of democratic politics."[5]

On the other hand, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. utilized the Exodus narrative not to simply follow "in the tradition of 'white Protestant' portrayals of Americans as a chosen

---

[4] Ibid., 69.
[5] Ibid.

people in a promised land," but rather as sojourners in a wilderness; in which they were not quite chosen, and not yet in the promised land. African Americans were likened to the "Children of Israel" because of their status of a suffering people, not because they were "chosen by God." King's careful consideration for such language allowed for him to construct a trope of the Exodus story that allowed for inclusiveness. The epidemic of racism affected all of American society, and as such the remedy was to free the entire nation, not just African Americans from this affliction. King argued that all Americans would wander in the wilderness until every single member of society, regardless of race, creed, or color, makes it to the "chosen land."[6] "Such a shift engenders redemptive history that reminds much of the nation of what it has forgotten, an approach that brushes history against the grain. This redemptive approach to history is a central component of a critical and systematic social analysis and concomitant political activism."[7]

Gutterman's analysis of Sunday and King's versions of the Exodus story is a useful model by which to analyze the utilization of narratives by Shiʻa leaders in the United States. Described in detail in the previous chapter, the narrative of ʻĀshurā is the most often recounted story by Shiʻas. As mentioned, this story is one that has been used by various people and groups throughout history to muster political action. Some of these examples were mentioned early in the previous chapter. Dr. Ali Shariʻati and Ayatollah

---

[6] Ibid., 73-75.
[7] Ibid., 92.

Khomeini were both very accomplished purveyors of Shi'a narratives for political mobilization. Roxanne Varzi comments on Khomeini's masterful use of the Karbalā' Paradigm during the Iran-Iraq war to solidify the institutionalization of the concept of *velāyat-e faqīh* (Guardianship of the Jurist).[8] Kamran Scot Aghaei has also contributed great work on the use of Shi'a narratives and symbols and their relevance in contemporary Iran and elsewhere.[9]

In the American setting, the question arises; do the leaders of the Shi'a community use Shi'a narratives to promote political and social participation? Probably more importantly, how do they use these narratives? How do they tell and retell a narrative that has little to no foundation in American political, cultural, or religious history? And how do they retell this story of 'Āshurā to initiate and increase political participation of Shi'as? Utilizing Gutterman's analysis of Reverand Billy Sunday and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I discuss how various Shi'a leaders retell the narratives of Shi'ism, especially the story of 'Āshurā, in order to mobilize their congregations. From the outset, it is important to note that my task is slightly different from Gutterman's. His is an analysis of how the narrative of the Exodus has an effect on American society as a whole. The story of the Exodus speaks to Christians and Jews, as well as Muslims; it is a narrative

---

[8] Roxanne Varzi, *Warring Souls: Youth, Media, and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press Books, 2006).

[9] Kamran Scot Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2004); Kamran Scot Aghaie, ed., *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2005).

that resonates to members of all three of these Abrahamic faiths. However, the story of ʻĀshurā is primarily one that speaks to Shiʻa Muslims. Most Sunnis do not even know the intricacies of this narrative. Additionally, the names of the main protagonists and antagonists and the events of the day of the story of ʻĀshurā are unknown to the overwhelming majority of American society. In spite of this, the underlying story of justice, sacrifice, martyrdom, and injustice committed against the innocent is something that speaks to all. It would be difficult to find many that claim these issues are of no merit. Therefore, how do the leaders of the Shiʻa community frame the story of ʻĀshurā?

Also, Gutterman's work focuses on the effects of Sunday and King's tropes of the Exodus narrative on the *attitudes* of Americans. I am analyzing the effects of these narratives on *political action*. Therefore, this takes the analysis one step further than Gutterman's investigation, for in order to affect political action, political attitudes must either be changed or formed. In other words, out of necessity to fully understand how these different tropes of Shiʻa narratives affect political action, we must first understand how they affect political attitudes.

As with Gutterman's comments on Sunday and King, Shiʻa leaders differ in their understandings of the ʻĀshurā narrative (as well as the other narratives of Shiʻism). We ascertain their understandings of history, identity, and context through the manner in which they utilize the different tropes of the narratives. This in turn displays their political ideologies, or what Gutterman refers to as their "prophetic politics."

The Contemporary History of the Use of Shi'a Narratives: Shari'ati and Khomeini

Dr. Ali Shari'ati's *Red Shi'ism* is used to understand the different ideologies that I encountered during the fieldwork of this research. Simultaneously, the explanation of Shari'ati's work offers the manner by which a narrator or writer can use the examples of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (Household of the Prophet) to promote a particular ideology for political mobilization. In doing so, Shari'ati offers two "versions" of Shi'ism: *Black* and *Red*. He argues that the Shi'ism of Imām 'Alī was the religion of the oppressed and downtrodden. Shari'ati colors red what he deems to be the true Islam and Shi'ism of the Prophet and Imām 'Alī, and as such gives it a revolutionary characteristic, very much akin to the liberation theology in Latin America.

> Shi'ism is the Islam which distinguishes itself and determines its direction in the history of Islam with the 'no' of the great 'Alī (as), the heir of Mohammad and the manifestation of the Islam of justice and Truth, a 'no' which he gives to the council for the election of the caliphate in answer to Abdul Rahman, who was the manifestation of Islamic aristocracy and compromise.[10]

---

[10] Ali Shari'ati, "Red Shi'ism", http://www.iranchamber.com/personalities/ashariati/works /red_black_shiism.php.

Shari'ati was referring to the election of the third *khalīfā*, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, through the use of a consultative assembly known as a *shura*. When the second *khalīfā*, 'Umar ibn al Khattab, was on his deathbed, he ordered that six members of the Muslim community be sequestered in a house with the task of choosing his successor from amongst themselves. In that group were Imām 'Alī, Sa'ad ibn Abi Waqqas, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, Tahla ibn Ubaydallah, Zubayr ibn al-Awwam, and Abdul Rahman ibn Awf. Abdul Rahman ibn Awf was put in charge of the affair, and was given the right to cast a second

Going further, Shari'ati uses the *Ahl al-Bayt* (Household of the Prophet) as prime examples of the symbolic lives that he believes all Shi'as should espouse. "[Shi'as] turn their backs on the opulent mosques and magnificent palaces of the caliphs of Islam and turn to the lonely, mud house of [Fāṭimāh]."[11] In this house the Shi'as find the true leaders and heirs to the Prophet. This Shi'ism is characterized by the rejection of the lavishness of the oppressive upper classes and the embracing of the simplicity of the downtrodden. Additionally, Shari'ati tells and retells the stories of the members of the Prophet's Household in a manner which makes them significant to the socio-economic issues Iranians of the 1970s were facing, as well as examples of how weaker states should approach the hegemonic powers in regards to international relations.

For example, Fāṭimāh, the daughter of the Prophet, exemplifies "the manifestation of the 'rights of the oppressed' and, at the same time, symbol of the first objection, a strong and clear embodiment of 'the seeking of justice.' In the ruling system, these are the cries and slogans of subject nations and oppressed classes." Shari'ati likened

---

vote in case of a tie. When the votes were counted both 'Alī and 'Uthmān held three votes apiece. At that moment, Abdul Rahman asked 'Alī that if he became *khalīfā* would he uphold the Sunnah of the Prophet as well as the first two *khulafa*? Shari'ati's quoting 'Alī as saying "no" refers to his response to Abdul Rahman's inquiry. He would only follow the Sunnah of the Prophet. At that point, Abdul Rahman posited the same question to 'Uthmān, who in turn answered in the affirmative. Hence, Abdul Rahman gave the tie-breaking vote to 'Uthmān, making him the third *khalīfā*. Shar'ati comments that these events were the machinations of the Arab aristocracy of Makkah, that in fact now the leadership of the *ummāh* was in the hands of Bani Ummaya, the clan of the staunchest enemies of the Prophet and Islam prior to their very late conversion only when they were forced by political circumstances. This of course, does not mean that 'Uthmān was not a believer, but rather that his clan were the staunchest enemies of the Prophet, and Bani Ummaya would eventually form the Ummayad dynasty after the death of 'Alī and the subsequent reign of Mu'āwīyāh I as *khalīfā*.

[11] Ibid.

Fāṭimāh's stand against the usurpers of her husband's right to succeed the Prophet to the nations and classes that were demanding their rights in the face of the dominant states and classes. In Imām 'Alī there is "the manifestation of a justice which serves the oppressed, a sublime embodiment of the Truth who is sacrificed at the altar of anti-human regimes which lie hidden in the layers of the formal religion of the rulers." Imām Ḥasan embodies "the last resistance of the garrison of 'Imāmate Islam' who confronts the first garrison of 'Islamic Rule." Shari'ati depicts Imām Ḥasan's stand against the soon-to-be Umayyad dynasty, as the struggle to keep Islam from becoming a worldly empire, where the rulers would use the faith to oppress Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In doing so, this "Islamic Rule" would twist, change, and abrogate the tenets of the religion to serve the quest for power and empire. Imām Ḥusayn "bears witness to those who are martyred by the oppression in history, heir of all the leaders fighting for freedom and equality and seekers of justice, from Adam to himself, forever, the messenger of martyrdom, the manifestation of the bloody revolution." Ḥusayn's stand at Karbalā' is seen as the eternal struggle of good verse evil, justice verse injustice, and freedom verse oppression. Zaynab, the eldest daughter of Imām 'Alī and sister of Ḥusayn, "bears witness to all of the defenseless prisoners in the system of executioners, the messenger after martyrdom, and the manifestation of the message of revolution!"[12] Shari'ati saw Zaynab as the voice that spreads the message of revolution, and educates

[12] Ibid.

the downtrodden about the necessity to act against oppression. Her voice keeps alive the memory of the struggle.

In pre-Safavid Shi'ism, Shari'ati saw a philosophy that had been the "ideology of martyrdom." Historically speaking, the established "Islamic Rule" that Shari'ati referred to was represented by Sunni dynasties such as the Umayyads, Abbasids, Ghaznavids, Seljuks, and Timurids, as well as by the Shi'a Ilkhanids, and the Mongols. In the times of these dynasties, *Red* Shi'ism was a "well-organized, informed, deep-rooted and well-defined ideology, with clear-cut and definite slogans and a disciplined and well-groomed organization."[13] Through this ideology the deprived and oppressed masses resisted the "Islamic Rule" of the mentioned dynasties.

Shari'ati argues that the rulers of the time feared this ideology and movement, and therefore to stem the influence of Shi'ism they became increasingly oppressive. But instead of shrinking to the oppression, Shi'ism grew more resistant and increasingly anti-establishment.

> It changed from a School of thought, a way of study and religious sectarianism reserved for the intellectuals and the chosen few, to a way of correctly understanding Islam and the culture of the people of the house of the Prophet, when confronted by Greek philosophy and oriental Sufism, to a deep-rooted and revolutionary, socio-political movement of the masses, especially the rural

---

[13] Ibid.

187

masses. It caused greater fear among the autocratic rulers and the hypocritical religious bodies who rule the people in the name of the Sunni sect.[14]

Continuing, he claimed that the Sunni sect became the "government's Islam," thereby necessitating that Shi'ism become the ideology of rebellion against the murderous, evil, and oppressive rulers who were legitimized by the Sunni *'ulamā'*. This is not to say that Sunni Islam itself was characterized by oppression, murder, and evil, but rather it was used as the religious legitimacy to justify the actions of the rulers. In other words, Shari'ati is making the argument that Sunni Islam came about as a means to remove the true revolutionary spirit of the original Islam, which is what he refers to as Shi'ism. In the attempt to remove the examples of *Ahl al-Bayt* (Household of the Prophet) from the memory of the people, a different brand of Islam was created that was the "opiate of the masses, and an instrument for murder to be used to prevent any thought or action that jeopardizes the interests of the strong and harms the landlords and feudal chiefs." [15]

According to Shari'ati the *Red* Shi'ism of the Prophet and Imām 'Alī was the true Islam for all time. This *Red* Shi'ism was the ideology of rebellion and martyrdom, and the religion of revolution against tyranny and exploitation. However, he claims that all of this changed when the Safavid dynasty came into being in 1501CE. Until then,

---

[14] Ibid.

[15] "[Sunnism] becomes an opiate for the masses, and an instrument for murder to be used to prevent any thought or action that jeopardizes the interests of the strong and harms the landlords and feudal chiefs" (Shari'ati, *Red Shi'ism*).

Shi'ism had only resulted in one revolutionary movement, and then with the coming of the Safavids it changed forever.[16]

> Shi'ism left the great mosque of the common people to become a next-door neighbor to the Palace of ['Ālī Qāpū] in the Royal Mosque. Red Shi'ism changes to Black Shi'ism! The Religion of Martyrdom changes to The Religion of Mourning.[17]

Shari'ati's dichotomy of *black* and *red* Shi'ism often manifests itself as academic discussions about the difference between the traditional (black) and the radical (red) versions of political participation. The Safavid, or black, Shi'ism became the norm, as the Shi'a *'ulamā'* became complicit in the transformation of Shi'ism into a religion of mourning for the deaths of the members of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (Household of the Prophet). Therefore, traditionally speaking, Shi'a clergy have been quietists when it comes to political involvement. This was especially true during the time of the Safavid empire, given the fact that the Safavid Shahs claimed direct lineal relations to the Prophet, and as such they were able to establish themselves as the heads of both temporal and ecclesiastic authority. The *'ulamā'* did little to interfere with the temporal policies of the Safavids because the shahs were seen as protectors of the faith. As long as the shah

---

[16] In the village of Baashteen during the Mongol occupation of Iran.

[17] Shari'ati, "Red Shi'ism." 'Ālī Qāpū refers to one of the palaces of Shah Abbas the Great who ruled from 1587-1629CE.

protected the borders of Shi'ism from the surrounding Sunni empires, and granted the *'ulamā'* free reign in religious matters, the clergy accepted his leadership.

Shari'ati argued that the resultant Shi'ism was removed of its revolutionary spirit based on rebellion and martyrdom, and became similar to the Islam of the aforementioned Sunni dynasties. The difference was that the symbols of Shi'ism, the Prophet and his Household, were retained as important cogs in the state religion. Instead of living like these revolutionary figures, Shi'as were turned into a people who simply cried and mourned the deaths of *Ahl al-Bayt* (Household of the Prophet). As such *Black Shi'ism* was the religion of accommodation. As Heinz Halm states, Shi'ism became a passive religion, more worried about mourning the loss of Imām Ḥusayn during the *ta'ziya* and weeping at the graves of the Imāms.[18] Furthermore, Shari'ati despised the traditional *'ulamā's* position that it was sacrilegious for anyone to "usurp the power of the Hidden Imām during the Greater Occultation." This is discussed further later in this chapter.

Halm states that for Shari'ati the slogan "Karbalā' is everywhere; every month is Muḥarram; every day is Ashura" contradicted all conventional interpretations. "For traditional [Shi'as], Ashura is precisely *not* every day, but only the 10th of Muḥarram. On the eleventh, traditional [Shi'as] lie in bed with a bandaged head and on the twelfth,

---

[18] Similar to the passion plays in much of the Catholic world, *ta'ziya* refers to the reenactment of the events of the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn.

they are back at the bazaar selling onions."[19] Shari'ati argued that ritualized self-sacrifice was useless and served no purpose. If one is truly Shi'a, he is willing and ready at all times to sacrifice himself in the struggle against tyranny. "Real death is permitted."

> [Ashura] will provide a pattern for the unbroken continuity of history. It will declare an unending struggle between the inheritors of Adam and the inheritors of the devil. Ashura reminds us of the teaching of the eternal fact that the present version of Islam, is a criminal Islam in the dress of tradition, and that the real Islam is the hidden Islam, hidden in the red cloak of martyrdom.[20]

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the father of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, though in agreement with Shari'ati in regards to his position on the traditional *'ulamā's* stance on usurping the 12th Imām's power, saw an importance in the *ta'ziya* and the visiting of the shrines of the Imāms. He viewed these ceremonies and religious rites, collectively known as *'Azadari* in the Iranian context, as the tools by which the narratives of Shi'ism could be used to inform, awaken, and mobilize. Khomeini's greatest use of symbolism and narrative was in the form of what Moojan Momen refers to as the "Karbalā' factor." On the occasion of 'Āshurā in 1963 utilizing the "Karbalā' factor," Khomeini pondered:

---

[19] Heinz Halm, *Shi'a Islam: From Religion to Revolution* (Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Weiner Publishers, 1997), 136.
[20] Shari'ati, "Red Shi'ism."

If the Umayyads and the regime of Yazīd... wished to make war against Ḥusayn, why did they commit such savage and inhuman crimes against the defenseless women and children? ... It seems to me that the Umayyads had a far more basic aim: they were opposed to the very existence of the family of the Prophet... [similarly] If the tyrannical regime of Iran simply wished to wage war on the *marāji'*, to oppose the *'ulamā'*, what business did it have tearing the Qur'an to shreds on the day it attacked Fayziya Madrasa?... We come to the conclusion that this regime also has a more basic aim: they are fundamentally opposed to Islam itself and the existence of the religious class.[21]

By equating the Shah to Yazīd, Khomeini awakened the Shi'a sentiments of the Iranian people. They visualized themselves as being oppressed, just as Ḥusayn was at Karbalā'. As Yazīd was opposed to the family of the Prophet, Muhammad Reza opposed Khomeini, and therefore Islam. The people are then commanded by their beliefs and the symbols of martyrdom in the face of injustice, to willingly put their lives on the line. This is what Ḥusayn would do, and therefore the people must follow his example. Momen goes further to describe the effects of the "Karbalā' factor" by painting a vivid picture of Khomeini as the embodiment of the narratives and symbols of Shi'ism and the Shah as the oppressive tyrant Yazīd.

---

[21] Imam Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley, California: Mizan Press, 1981), 177.

[Khomeini's] role in the Revolution became the embodiment and fulfillment of numerous [Shi'a] themes on which the people of Iran had been raised from childhood. The whole struggle became cast in terms of the struggles of the Imāms against their enemies and, in particular, the battle of Karbalā'. The Shah and his powerful army were cast in the role of Yazīd and the Umayyad troops while [Khomeini] became the Imām Ḥusayn leading his people against overwhelming odds. The banners in the demonstrations proclaimed: 'Everywhere is Karbalā' and every day is Ashura.' The demonstrators killed… were designated as martyrs… [Khomeini] in distant Paris was also like the Hidden Imām sending his messages through special representatives. Stories circulated… that [Khomeini] had dreamed he would be buried in Qumm and therefore it was inevitable that he would return to Iran… the anticipation of [Khomeini's] return became like the anticipated return of the Hidden Imām; no sacrifice was too great to help realise it.[22]

After the revolution, this radical version of Shi'a political action was institutionalized in the system of *velāyat-e faqīh* (Guardianship of the Jurist), which itself was the product of a modified version of Khoemini's political ideology earlier

---

[22] Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1986), 288-289.

spelled out in his 1970 piece entitled *Hokumat-e Islami* (Islamic Government).[23] Saïd Amir Arjomand suggests that the use of these Shi'a images were necessary to support the concept of an Islamic government, which would preserve the traditional norms and social relationships. The martyrdom of Ḥusayn was the most productive means by which to accomplish this goal, since it provided the "expression of the oppression psychosis[24] in terms of primeval tyranny and for articulating the appropriate response in its glorification of martyrdom."[25] This is exemplified by a speech given by Khomeini commemorating the advent of the revolution as featured as footage on the documentary *Once Upon a Time in Iran*:

> No power could have made such a revolution except the power of the blood of
> the Master of Martyrs (Imām Ḥusayn). And no power can neutralize the plots
> that the great powers are preparing against us except for the mourning
> ceremonies of Imām Ḥusayn (note: Khomeini uses the Persian term *majāles-e
> 'azā*, which is better translated as the "gatherings of mourning")… Politically,

---

[23] Imam Ruhollah Khomeini, "Islamic Government," in *Islam and Revolution I: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (1941-1980)*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley, California: Mizan Press, 1981), 25-166.

[24] Arjomand states "Edwards noted that an enormous development of 'oppression psychosis" precedes the major revolution (Arjomand 1988, p. 100)." This "oppression psychosis" in addition to Selbin's earlier mentioned "group memory," form a basis for charismatic leadership to utilize narratives and symbols to mobilize the people.

[25] Saïd Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1988), 99-100.

these prayers, elegies and attention to God direct men's attention to one thing:

That is, they mobilize a nation towards an Islamic objective.[26]

Khomeini's insists on the importance of not only the message of 'Āshurā, but also on the ceremonies at which these narratives are told and retold. He reminds the listener that not only was it because of the "power of the blood" of Imām Ḥusayn that the revolution occurred, but that these ceremonies are the basis of the defense against the plot of external enemies. It is important here to understand that Khomeini does not contend that it was the people that had the power, but rather the "power of the blood" of Ḥusayn was the force that brought about change. His wording melds the struggle of Ḥusayn in 680 CE with the struggle of Iranians in 1979. Surely, Ḥusayn's blood was not a physical power, but Khomeini's masterful use of these symbols and narratives placed Imām Ḥusayn front and center in the struggle against the Shah, and subsequently against all external threats, especially the aforementioned "great powers." The spilt blood of the protestors during the revolution was the same as that of Ḥusayn, his family, and his companions at Karbalā'. He goes further to suggest that continued adherence to these principles, which are learned and engrained through the attendance of *majāles-e 'azā* (gatherings of mourning), become the means by which a society based on equality, justice, dignity and freedom is formed. In other words, that society moves closer to what he refers to as an Islamic objective. Though somewhat subtle, Khomeini grants

---

[26] Kevin Sim, "Once Upon a Time in Iran", February 22, 2007.

himself power and control over the people as the interpreter and narrator of his particular trope of the 'Āshurā narrative. This accounts for the large number of Iranians, both religious and secular, that supported his leadership of the revolutionary movement.

Based on this understanding of traditional verse radical, or *black* and *red* Shi'ism, I designate three different groupings in which the Shi'as included in this research fell. I use Shari'ati's *black* label to refer to those Shi'as in the United States that tend to not involve themselves in political matters, and I refer to them as political quietists. Those that Shari'ati would refer to as *red*, are instead labeled as those that follow a mobilizational strand of Shi'ism. This includes both those Shi'as who are *velāyat* and those that are more inclined towards an accommodating stance when it comes to participation. These differences are discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

THE QUIETIST APPROACH

It is important to keep in mind that none of the leaders, or narrators of prophetic politics, included in this research were proponents of a quietist, traditional, or *black* interpretation of Shi'a political behavior. However, it is prudent to understand the mindset of those Shi'as who hold this point of view, because more often than not, purveyors of both strands of the mobilizational interpretation of Shi'ism contend to bring the non-active quietists into the political realm. Additionally, the leaders were confident that a lack of participation was the largest problem facing their communities. In other words, they feared that this complacency was due to a religious mindset based

on the traditional quietist approach to political behavior, and this was usually coupled with what they saw as an inferiority complex given their extreme minority status.

Sayyid Rafiq Naqvi, the Imām of Idara Ja'afaria in Maryland and Director of the Islamic Information Center, is one of the most active Shi'a religious leaders in the United States, and is also Grand Ayatollah Sīstānī's representative on the East Coast. Despite his active role, he nonetheless finds it difficult to mobilize his community. He argued that although certain ceremonies and rituals, such as *'azādārī*, are characteristic of being a Shi'a, at the same time one should have the understanding that there are other aspects of the faith that must also be realized, and that these rituals should have a broader meaning for everyday life, including political life. In his opinion, many Shi'as living in the United States are missing the true point of these narratives, ceremonies, and rituals.

> When it comes to rituals and customs they are involved… when Muḥarram comes, all the Islamic centers are full. When Muḥarram leaves, you will not see those people. And [this is true] in Ramaḍān also. Other Muslims [non-Shi'as] have this problem, but not as much. But Shi'as are so very involved in those customs and traditions such as Muḥarram. They put all their resources and energy in Muḥarram… they don't want to use those days for any other thing except talking about Imām Ḥusayn. Most of them only want to talk and see [things] from this angle… about what happened at Karbalā'…Very few have vision and understand that what Imām Ḥusayn wanted was for future

generations to see what he was doing 1,400 years ago… they should understand that Imām Ḥusayn has done his part, now you have to do your part… if you just want to commemorate him, then it won't take you or his mission forward.[27]

Here Naqvi is suggesting the *majāles-e ʿazā* serves only the purpose of relaying the events of ʿĀshurā. The mourners are not interested in applying the examples to their daily lives outside of religious practices and obligations. Furthermore, Naqvi argues that many of the attendees only show up for the Muḥarram and Ramaḍān commemorations, and rarely return except for a few of the other special occasions. These "part-time" Shiʿas, in his reasoning, are missing out on the true meaning of the story of Imām Ḥusayn. The political and social implications of Ḥusayn's actions for today's world are all together ignored. Naqvi ties appropriate political behavior to increased mosque attendance. In other words, he believes that the more an individual participates in mosque activities, and is exposed to the narratives of Shiʿism, then he or she learns the appropriate means by which to contribute politically and socially from the examples of *Ahl al-Bayt* (Household of the Prophet). In his estimation, too many Shiʿas are negligent of what he sees as the social imperative within Shiʿism to be politically active for the good of society, and instead are content to simply rehash old historical stories of the lives and deaths of the 12 Imāms.

---

[27] Sayyid Rafiq Naqvi, "Semi-Structured Interview", November 30, 2008.

Naqvi argues that instead of using the message of Imām Ḥusayn as a tool to improve their lives politically and socially, most of his congregants are satisfied with the ceremonial and ritualistic aspects; of shutting themselves in the mosque or Islamic center and listening to the stories of 'Āshūrā', weep, mourn, and then go home. Though there may be some spiritual growth and education, what might be termed the motivational powers of the narratives remain largely ineffective, at least when it comes to political and social involvement.

Shaykh Amir Mukhtar Faezi of the Bait ul-Ilm in Streamwood, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, concurs with Naqvi's sentiments, especially in regards to Shi'as originally from the South Asian subcontinent. In his opinion, the quietist strand coupled with small numbers both in the South Asian and American contexts has caused South Asian Shi'as to be passive when it comes to political action.

> This Shi'ī community who came from India-Pakistan, they have background of remaining passive in politics, because in India and Pakistan, Shi'ī community *as a Shi'ī community* was only involved in their religious rituals, *'azādārī*. And they felt that because they are so little in number, they really cannot do anything as a Shi'ī group in politics… So they never organized themselves as Shi'ī political groups. Some Shi'as went ahead and they got involved with some major political parties like Muslim League or like People's Party or like other parties, even [Indian National] Congress, and they [got] elected and they hold some very important offices also in India and Pakistan, but not as a Shi'ī, [but]

as a Muslim, Indian, or Pakistani. So the Shi'ī community from [South] Asia doesn't have any political agenda or political background, and they are very much like passive or inward.[28]

He continued to argue that the particular ways in which their Shi'ism manifested itself in their homeland has continued in the American setting.

They had no appetite to reaching out or even converting people to be Shi'a, leaving this politics aside…. They were happy within themselves. As long as they were able to gather and have *majlis*, *mātam*, *'azādārī* they were happy with themselves. So that was a majority of the people in the centers… they didn't really get into politics. Politics was not their cup of tea. Only after Islamic Revolution again, [some of them got] some kind of inclination, but it again was for personal interest that they could only watch the news with more curiosity. They could appreciate the speaker if he would, in *majlis*, make that kind of comment. They would enjoy that, and come and give a good feedback. But still it was not that much that they could come out and organize something as a

---

[28] Shaykh Amir Mukhtar Faezi, "Semi-Structured Interview", April 2, 2009. *'Azādārī* refers to the mourning rituals associated with the death of Imām Ḥusayn. Typically these rituals are held in special congregational settings known as *majlis* (pl. *majālis*), where re-telling of the tragedy of 'Āshūrā', ritual chest beating, and mourning take place. There may be variation depending on the country of origin on how these mourning rituals are carried out.

political move or political group. That is another reason the Shi'ī community in this country didn't get involved into political activity… *as Shi'ī*.[29]

Faezi's statements lead us to believe that South Asian Shi'as are only preoccupied with rituals, and less so with politics. His statement of course is a generalization of this demographic group, but it is instructive in understanding the mindset of some of those in the Indian and Pakistani communities. In their roles as Shi'as they are only interested in the commemorative cultural customs that are characteristic of *'azādārī*. However, when they are political it is usually not *qua Shi'a*.

Much of the leaders' critiques of the quietist element within their communities usually focused on what they perceived to be a lack of information and education, both religiously and politically. As mentioned in the discussion involving the different forms of political activity in Chapter 2, leaders such as Rahman and al-Dhalimy in Portland dealt with the frustration of being unable to motivate people to participate. They referred to the belief among many of the community members that voting was *harām* (religiously forbidden). Al-Dhalimy recounted his dismay at not being able to get more Muslims to participate in the protest against *The Oregonian* newpaper's inclusion of the anti-Muslim *Obsession* DVD.

Shaykh Faezi of Bait ul-Ilm ascribes much of the apathy and complacency to the often-termed "quietist" tradition of Shi'ism, which is attributed to the concept of

---

[29] Ibid.

Imāmah in connection with the concept of *ghaybah*, the occultation of the 12th Imām. In juxtaposing his perceptions of Shi'a and Sunni political behavior, he argues that Sunnis participate politically at higher levels because they are not waiting for the return of a messianic figure that rights all wrongs in the manner that the Shi'as are waiting.

> Basically the Shi'ī community, for centuries has gone through such experiences in different parts of the world, in particular in India and Pakistan that they felt politics is not their cup of tea. And they are just sitting and waiting for the 12th Imām to come and to lead and then they will join. Right now what is happening, the Shi'ī community is in a waiting mode, while the Sunni community is in the active [mode]… one is waiting for *Imāmat*… the other is working actively for the *khilāfat*… The difference is we are passive. We are waiting for a time when Imām will come, and then we will join him. So we are not very much active for establishing the system. While the Sunni community is not waiting for anybody. They know they have to do it. And they are doing it… I'm not saying that I agree with [the Shi'a] approach. I'm just analyzing the situation, that the Shi'ī community is not in rush… is waiting [for] 1,000 years… and is not desperate. And while the Sunni community is right now very much desperate.[30]

Though much of Faezi's claim that Sunnis are "working actively for the *khilāfat*" revolves around the more global discussion of Shi'a and Sunni political action, and the

---

[30] Ibid.

actions of extremist Sunni groups such as al-Qaeda, and has little to do with the actions of American Sunnis, it still paints a rather telling picture for Shiʿa political behavior. It feeds into the traditional quietist approach that in the absence of the 12th Imām, the usurping of political power is forbidden.

There are many who are under the assumption that by participating in American politics, they are endorsing the policies, many of which are seen as being detrimental towards the Muslim world. There is a connection between this particular aspect of the naïveté of the community and the discussion of whether participating in American politics is Islamic. Sayyid Hassan al-Qazwini dismisses this claim.

> Participation of the Muslim community in the system does not mean justifying wrong policies done by the US. This is the mistake many people are unable to identify. They believe that once you participate in the political process you are endorsing the political system, which is not really the case. I believe America is a democratic system, and there are some means [by which] you can influence the system. But the most powerful method by with which you can influence the political system in the United States is from within, by participating in the system. Probably the most vivid example now is Barack Obama… the man is a black. He comes from a marginalized community. He comes from indeed an oppressed community. He comes from an underprivileged community. Yet he is rising today to be the Democratic presidential candidate, and he might be the president in three months. So this shows that persistence and courage may result

in huge results. I believe that when we participate in the political system, we do not endorse American foreign policies. Indeed we are trying to change these foreign policies by our participation. We think that the only way so far to change these foreign policies is by us participating and mounting more pressure on the system from within so we can have a more moderate foreign policy. Indeed America is more biased towards Israel for one major reason, there is a pro-Israeli lobby in this country that works so hard to influence the system, and they did… and they do! We need to do the same! [31]

Many believe that the system is completely under the control of other groups that are hostile towards Islam, and that there is no means by which to combat this. Usually it is the pro-Israeli lobby that is perceived as being one of the largest thorns in the side of the Muslim community. Because of the strong influence that groups such as AIPAC have in the policy-making arena, many Muslims feel that it is better to refrain from political behavior. In essence, from their perspective, it is a foregone conclusion that Muslims will not be able to influence the system given the resources and influence they would have to compete against. Furthermore, many Muslims believe that these groups and the media have deliberately painted Muslims in a bad light. Sayyid Hassan al-Qazwini argued that the "major problem we face in this country [is that] the American people view Muslims as a threat. Unfortunately the media has been able to depict us as a threat

---

[31] Sayyid Hassan al-Qazwini, "Semi-Structured Interview", August 25, 2008.

to this society, and Americans took that depiction, and they think of us as a bunch of potential terrorists."[32] In response to my asking whether he thought Muslims had done enough to dispel these misconceptions, he echoed the sentiments of many of the leaders, and laid the blame for the lack of mobilization squarely on the shoulders of the Muslim community: "Absolutely! We keep blaming these Jews and Zionists… the media… and when someone is vicious they are vicious! What do you expect?! There is an expression in Farsi: 'When a scorpion stings it's not out of hatred, it's its nature to sting.' It's the nature of Zionists to sting. It is our complacency that helps in dramatizing our own [situation]." After eliminating what he sees as excuses for a lack of political activity, al-Qazwini argues that not enough has been done by Muslims to better their situation. On the other hand, he believes that many have good intentions but are naïve as to how to accomplish their goals. Here he believes that Muslims in general, and Shi'as specifically, must learn from the examples of other minority groups that came before them. The Shi'as also must keep in mind the dedication to the *Ahl al-Bayt* (Household of the Prophet), and use these examples as models.[33]

This short section on the quietist members of the American Shi'a community offers a few interesting points. First, it permits us to see that many of the leaders of the American Shi'a community are worried about a lack of political participation. Those that they charge with complacency are either abstaining from political activity because:

---

[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.

205

1) They believe it is *harām* to participate in an "unIslamic system," 2) There is a minority complex that hinders their mobilization, 3) a lack of education and the presence of a naïveté about the American political system, and 4) the belief that in the absence of the 12th Imām, Shi'as are to not involve themselves in politics.

The quietist tendencies of these community members result from a mixture of these four points. First of all, most Shi'as come from societies where they are the minority. Therefore the minority status, and lack of political power *qua Shi'a* probably caused many Shi'as to hold on tighter to the quietist ideal. In other words, I am arguing that given their small numbers, quite often coupled with persecution, Shi'as interpreted the quietist school as one that requires adherents to remove themselves from politics completely. This is quite obviously not the case. The role of so-called "quietist" religious leaders such as Grand Ayatollah Sistani is nothing like the quietism of those that abstain from political action. Sistani's politics are mentioned in more detail in the next section. But those that shut themselves off from politics suffer from a misunderstanding of this traditional strand. The limit of political participation amongst the traditional school is more of a gray area rather than black and white. As mentioned earlier, during the Safavid era, the *'ulamā'* tended to allow the Safavid Shahs a free hand when it came to politics. However, the advent of the Qajar dynasty (1794-1925 CE) brought the *'ulamā'* into a more prominent role in the political matters of Iran. Though still considered to be traditionalists, the clergy would involve themselves in more direct political matters. The best example is the Tobacco Protest of 1891, in which

Grand Ayatollah Mirza Hasan Shirazi issued a *fatwa* forbidding the use of tobacco following the 1890 concession to the British for a full monopoly of Iran's tobacco trade for the next 50 years. Shirazi's order was strictly followed by the people of Iran due to his claim that smoking tobacco was analogous to warring against the 12th Imām. Nasir al-Din Shah was forced to cancel the concession as even his wives were reported to have stopped smoking. This move by Shirazi is said to have given the clergy both religious and political legitimacy in Iran. They strengthened their influence on the politics of the time, and it also had great sway on the politics in the decades that would follow.

The reason for mentioning this historical point is to clarify the difference between what the Shi'a leaders label as the quietism of the naïve members of their society and the traditional quietist approach of the *'ulamā'*. The difference is rather simple. The traditional clergy espouse a "quietism" characterized by the unwillingness to actually govern. In other words, they believe that in the absence of the 12th Imām, governing directly is forbidden. Advising the government, or staging a boycott as in the example of the Tobacco Revolt, is not a problem, but the direct governing of a state or group of people based on clerical credentials is considered to be outside of the traditional interpretation of Shi'a political behavior. Again, this is not a black and white discussion. There is a lot of gray between the two poles.

The Shi'as in the United States that abstain from political action are doing so based on a faulty understanding, that is, if they are using the "politics is harām" argument as

their rationale. It becomes clear, that most of the senior scholars in Shi'ism encourage at the most, and at the least do not forbid, political participation if it brings good for the community. By community they are referring to the immediate community as well as the greater society. The critique of the politically non-active community members by the American Shi'a leaders focuses on this misunderstanding, and their efforts at mobilization are directed at this group. The remainder of this chapter focuses on what I refer to as the mobilization approach to Shi'a political action in the United States.

MOBILIZATION APPROACHES: ACCOMMODATIONIST AND *VELĀYAT* APPROACHES

As mentioned, all of the Shi'a leaders included in this research hold the mobilization approach to political and social participation. However, amongst them I found two interpretations of political activism. Those that hold an accommodationist approach focus on the benefits that a pluralist political and social system can afford the Shi'a community in the United States. The focus of the propagators of the *velāyat* trope is much the same as that of the tellers of the accommodationist trope, but these *velāyat* storytellers tend to emphasize the importance of following leaders. For example, though both groups argue that following the example of the Prophet and his Household is of the utmost importance, the *velāyat* storytellers put a higher emphasis on leadership and the merits of being good devotees, and this stems from the nature of the concept of *velāyat-e faqīh* (Guardianship of the Jurist). *Velāyat* adherents tend to view direct political participation, especially meeting with politicians, in a negative light. They discourage

this because they believe that it gives tacit approval to policies that run contrary to Muslim policy preferences. They do not necessarily view the system as being corrupt, but rather they view it as being corrupted by individuals who have political agendas that *velāyat* adherents consider to be unIslamic, and even anti-Islamic in some cases. As such the *velāyat* approach usually promotes political activity such as protests and rallies.

In describing the different tropes of the narratives of Shi'ism, it is important to understand the background of the leaders that utilize these narratives. The personal baggage each one brings to the table influences how they perceive the world, and in turn how they respond to it. Additionally, it is important to clarify in what capacities these narratives are used by each leader. In some instances, the narratives are used in the mosque community during the various types of communal gatherings. Some of these leaders have either founded or are members of larger national organizations that pull from the Shi'a narratives to attempt to increase mobilization, participation, and membership. The mix of how some of these leaders and their organizations utilize symbols and narratives to both influence their respective communities, as well as to inform the greater society about the intentions of Shi'as (and Muslims generally) allows for an understanding of the effectiveness of these methods.

Accommodation Tropes

The accommodation approach is defined by its pragmatic view of political and social participation. Purveyors of this approach view the American political system through a

pluralist lens, and therefore they see an opportunity for their communities to carve a niche for themselves and to make demands upon the system just like other demographic groups have done before them. As such, they view all forms of political behavior to be acceptable as long as it brings benefit to the community and society as a whole and does not require actions that are religiously forbidden. They are proponents of increased voting, running for office, contributing both financially and with time, knocking doors, and even participating in rallies and protests.

Amongst the leaders interviewed for this research, the overwhelming majority were adherents of accommodation approach. Usually, those that have lived in the United States for a longer period of time have a better understanding of life in the United States as well as being a minority in this country, and as such they are better suited for promoting increased political behavior. It is interesting to note that the purveyors of the accommodation approach have lived in the United States for a considerable amount of time, some of them immigrating in the 1980s and the latest arriving in the late 1990s. This is instrumental when discussion the manner in which they tell and retell the narratives of Shi'ism, because for the narratives to have some saliency in the American setting, the narrators themselves must have an understanding of this society. Trying to make a tale that took place in Karbalā' in 61AH/680CE relevant in 21st century United States is not a simple task, especially given the lack of familiarity with the actors, setting, and historical significance of the narrative by the society in which it is now being told. Reverend Billy Sunday and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had a much easier

task at hand given that the Biblical story of the Exodus was part and parcel of American religious and political history. Shi'as, and Muslims in general, living in the United States are familiar with the Exodus narrative for two reasons: One being that they have been acclimated into American social-religious-political life, and as such they have heard the narrative being used quite often. Secondly, the Exodus story is recounted in the Qur'an, and therefore Muslims can claim that this is a Judeo-Christian-Islamic story. In other words, they are a part of the narrative regardless if others do not include them. However, the narratives that Shi'a leaders use have no historical tie to the political and social landscape of the United States. Consequently, it becomes difficult to re-tell these stories with the intention of promoting increased political action when even many of the congregants have a difficulty in associating Shi'a narratives with American politics. Even more so, as Maulana Amir Mukhtar Faezi is quoted as saying in the previous section, many Shi'a communities in the Islamic world have not exhibited explicit political action *qua Shi'as*. Not only is it a stretch to politicize the narratives within the American setting, but even in places such as India and Pakistan, Shi'a narratives were not regularly used as tools of political mobilization.

Those leaders that either stated that the narratives and symbols of Shi'ism were good examples of political behavior, or used them to promote political behavior were often unsuccessful in accomplishing their intended goals. They struggle with this disconnect of a "foreign" narrative in American politics. In my discussions with some

of them I would often realize that their perception of being political did not always match up with overt political action.

For example, in a discussion about the permissibility of political action in response to those who hold the aforementioned quietist perspective, Naqvi related a narration attributed to the last moments of the life of the Fifth Imām, Muḥammad al Bāqir, who commanded one of his devotees to utilize a specific sum of money he was leaving in his last will and testament to openly talk about the Imām's life, as well as about the lives of his descendants, the Prophet and his Household. The Imām commands that this take place at the time of the Hajj pilgrimage, because it would have an effect on a very large number and diverse group of individuals who would be congregated at Makkah.

> Even some of the scholars, they say to take part in politics is *ḥarām*. To go vote is *ḥarām*… I don't know how to answer these things. Let alone the community when they are saying that. What will you call this step of Imām Bāqir when he's saying that "I'm allocating this fund, not for Ka'aba, not to build any *masjids*, not any Islamic center, but [to] talk about me"? And when? At the time of the hajj. Why? Because there you will find [the] international community.[34]

For Naqvi this was an explicitly political move on the part of the Fifth Imām, and he contends that those Shi'as who argue that political participation is *ḥarām* should look to the history of one of their Infallibles to see that this is not the case. Additionally, Naqvi

---

[34] Naqvi, "Semi-Structured Interview."

and others like him argue that the oppression that the 12 Imāms faced was much worse than any kind of obstacle that modern Shi'as are facing. For Naqvi, this is proof that there is no excuse to say that political participation is prohibited, or that the situation is too dire to expose yourself politically. The exemplars of how to be good Shi'as, good Muslims, and good human beings themselves made political moves in their lives.

However, there is a dilemma with Naqvi's example involving Imām Muḥammad al Bāqir, and it is that the Imām's request can be construed as being political only in a very general sense. Imām Bāqir asked for the people to be reminded of the lives of the Prophet's Household, and in following their lives there is a clear call to "enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil," but all religious traditions include this injunction. One is hard pressed to find a religious tradition or worldview that argues against this principle, and it is more difficult to find one that argues for the opposite - "to enjoin what is evil and forbid what is good." In other words, this injunction is not exclusive to Shi'ism or Islam. Christian ministers remind their congregations on the merits of the life of Christ, but very little about his life would be considered to be explicitly political. As such, on face value, Imām Bāqir's request is not the overtly political maneuver that Naqvi makes it out to be. The disconnect between Naqvi's example and what is considered to be political participation in the modern American setting has possibly contributed to the frustration of many of the leaders of the Shi'a community. The example falls short of motivating people to vote, attend rallies, or write their representatives to name a few methods of political participation. But on the other hand, the example of the Imāms can

be a great tool for building socially conscious citizens. From that perspective, the narration is not devoid of all possible motivational capability. It is important to note that if this narration of Imām Bāqir can be used as an initial motivational tool, and then added on to with a call for explicit political action, it then serves its intended purpose. First build socially aware citizens, and then motivate them to increased political action.

Originally from Lucknow, India, Imām Rafiq Naqvi attributes much of his tolerant attitudes to his upbringing in a multicultural, multilingual, and multireligious society. His friends were Hindu, Sunni Muslims, Shi'a Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and Jews, and therefore the diversity of American society was not something foreign to him. It can be said that his experience of pluralism in the United States is an extension of his life in India. To go further, given that Imām Naqvi is a Muslim, and a Shi'a Muslim, he is aware of what it is to be a minority, and a minority within a minority in both the Indian and American contexts.

He is also a *Sayyid*, one of the descendants of the Prophet Mohammad through the bloodline created by the marriage of the Prophet's daughter Fāṭimāh to Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and for that reason he wears the black turban of Shi'a scholars who share the same distinction. Despite his ancestry, Sayyid Naqvi explained that he was different than all of his siblings in that he had a real "thirst for religion." As a youth he was interested in theology, but was directed by his family towards the study of business, and he obtained his MBA. However around the late 1970s, this "thirst for religion" took him to the holy city of Qom in Iran, the preeminent center of study for those who want to

become Shi'a *'Alīms*. Only Najaf in Iraq competes with the importance of Qom in regards to seminary studies in the Shi'a world. There he began what he refers to as his "sacred studies," and completed his seminary education with a specialization in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence).[35]

Naqvi's position in this research is absolutely vital because of his interesting past in Iran. During the 1980s, he translated for those individuals visiting Khomeini from the Asian subcontinent, and therefore was in regular contact with the late leader of the Islamic Revolution.[36] This relationship allows Naqvi to critique both the quietist and *velāyat* approaches included in this research, and it affords him the ability to use Khomeini to legitimize his own specific use of Shi'a narratives. Furthermore, his relationship with Khomeini allows him to use Khomeini as a symbol and a narrative within the intra-Shi'a political discussion happening in the United States.

In our discussion, Naqvi alluded to the common perception that Khomeini was extremely anti-American and anti-democratic. Much of this can be attributed to the dour characterization ascribed to Khomeini by both the West as well as the regime in Iran. From his experience, Naqvi concludes that Khomeini was more pragmatic than commonly believed. Naqvi is quite certain that Ayatollah Khomeini would champion the cause of those Shi'as living in the West who are attempting to better their society

---

[35] Ibid.

[36] In addition, Naqvi was the translator for Imām Khomeini's brother, Ayatollah Pasandideh, as well as for Ayatollah Montazeri, who was the one time chosen successor to Khomeini, but who fell out of favor in the late 1980s due his criticism of the purges and executions of 1988.

through political and social participation. He contends that those *velāyat ‘Alīms* in the United States who are critical of engaging politicians and claim to speak in the name of Khomeini, actually never knew him, and therefore are attributing faulty claims to his name and legacy. In Naqvi's opinion, Khomeini would have encouraged people to participate simply because of the religious injunction of *amr bil ma'ruf wa an-nahy anil munkar* (enjoin what is good, and forbid what is evil). It is the duty of Muslims to strive to improve their society by all legitimate means, and political participation is not *ḥarām*.[37]

Naqvi's interpretation of Khomeini in fact is his trope of the narrative of Khomeini's political ideology. Daniel Brumberg has discussed the struggle between Iran's hardliners and reformers over ownership of Khomeini's legacy, and it is quite evident that one of the conversations occurring between accommodationalists and *velāyat* adherents in the United States involves the importance of Khomeini's political ideology.[38] In fact, Khomeini seems to be the most fought over Shi'a symbol between the two groups, and this proves the importance of his figure in contemporary Shi'a politics. As such, both sides must address his influence in the modern political actions of Shi'as. Again, this has been playing itself out in Iranian politics since his death, but

[37] *Ḥarām* refers to those things that are Islamically forbidden. For example, sexual intercourse outside of marriage is considered to be *ḥarām*. Additionally, the consumption of pork or alcohol is *ḥarām*. In the discussion of political participation, there are scholars who argue that it is *ḥarām* to participate in any form of government that does not conform to the Qur'an and the divine laws.
[38] Daniel Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini The Struggle for Reform in Iran* (Chicago, Illinois: University Of Chicago Press, 2001).

for those Shi'a leaders in the U.S., the necessity of addressing Khomeini results in two variations.

First, there are those *velāyat* persons who view Khomeini's *velāyat-e faqīh* as the basis of their political ideology. They claim to follow the "line of the Imām," and see him as the rejuvenator, not just of the Shi'a faith, but also Islam as a whole. They argue that it was his movement and leadership that awoke the sleeping Islamic masses. Many in the West view Khomeini in this manner, albeit with a more negative perception. Many a commentator refers to him as one of the fathers of Islamic "fundamentalism" and extremism. The irony is that both Western critics and Khomeini's hardliner devotees paint him in a very similar light; as an unbending ideologue that did not cower in the face of Western hegemony, who was relentless in his condemnation of the state of Israel and the Great Satan.

The second group includes others who adhere to the accommodation approach and may agree that the Iranian revolution was a victory for Islam, Shi'ism and Iran, but stop short when it comes to invoking the Iranian regime type as a model of political action. Those such as Naqvi describe Khomeini as pragmatic, and they argue that he would not have seen the viability of a *velāyat* approach to government outside of Iran; the peculiarities of the Iranian case allowed for such a regime type to form. Simply stated, for many this form of government and the adherence to a foreign leader makes little to no sense in the American setting. Some members of the community find the *velāyat* approach to be very counterproductive and even detrimental to the reputation of Shi'as

living in the United States because of the perception of loyalty to a foreign sovereign. This is further compounded by the fact that this sovereign is consistently seen as one of the largest obstacles to American foreign policy goals in the Middle East and Islamic world.

Following September 11, 2001 various individuals and groups attacked the Muslim community, accusing all Muslims of being complicit in the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Mosques and Islamic centers were vandalized, and many Muslims received hate mail and death threats. Additionally, Naqvi was extremely worried that those Muslims with extremist interpretations of the faith would come to the forefront. In either case the moderate voice of Islam would go unheard. If moderate Muslims did not step up and defend what they claimed are the true teachings of Islam, then the enemies of Islam or extremist Muslims would misrepresent the beliefs and behaviors of the overwhelming moderate majority of Muslims worldwide.

He founded IIC in 2003 to combat both extremes, as well as media misconceptions. Another intended goal is to save the image of Islam and Muslims in the West through educating Muslims of "genuine Islam." By doing so, he hoped to avoid the extremist voice from gaining ground. For example he discussed that many Muslims infuse cultural practices into the religion, which is not inherently a negative. However, many of these cultural practices are un-Islamic.

> I always say that there are many Muslims [who] are ignorant. They don't understand. Sometimes they think that it is Islam, when in fact it's their culture

that they have been doing or they have see their forefathers doing... And they are afraid that they will lose Islam [if they remove these cultural practices]. In fact, they will not lose Islam, but they will lose the culture. And that makes them fearful. So I always say one thing, it's not only about Islamophobia… one is fear *of* Islam, one is fear *for* Islam.[39]

Naqvi use the idea of "fear of Islam" to describe the mentality of those individuals who are scared that Muslims constitute a fifth column in the United States, and are actively preparing to commit acts of terrorism against the state and citizens. The "fear for Islam" pertained to his discussion of the confusion of cultural practice and religious doctrine. Naqvi suggested that the extremist interpretations of Islam were a result of cultural practices that melded with Islamic doctrine. In some instances Islamic terminology was used to cover up and justify cultural practices that had no basis in the religion.

Naqvi believed that Muslims would discard those un-Islamic cultural practices if they learned the "genuine Islam," however he never defined that term clearly in my discussion with him. IIC's literature clarifies that this is a reference to Shi'a Islam. The stated agenda of the organization is to "provide and disseminate information about Islam as defined by the Prophet of Islam (p.b.u.h), [and] the teachings of Holy Quran as

---

[39] Naqvi, "Semi-Structured Interview."

219

interpreted by the Holy Progeny (a.s.) of the Holy Prophet."[40] In referring to the Prophet's Progeny, the language of this statement employs a language understood by Shi'as to indicate a specifically Shi'a interpretation of Islam.

IIC's leadership takes this initial mission statement and combines it with a plan of proposed solutions to tackle the diagnosed problem of a lack of political participation. The organization puts the onus on the shoulders of Muslims themselves, particularly the leadership, and offers a three-pronged strategy involving politics, the media, and interfaith dialogue.[41] Though simple, this plan exhibits an understanding of the importance of engaging in at least minimal interaction with political players, and the necessity of media coverage to project a good public image. If IIC meets with politicians or other important figures but the general population does not see or hear about it, then much of the educational effect is lost. The third aspect, interfaith events, displays IIC's understanding that in order to cultivate a more "mainstream" image it is necessary to dispel the notion that Islam is foreign and lacks a connection with the Judeo-Christian traditions. This contributes to the goal of portraying Muslims as ordinary Americans that share the same religious heritage.

In achieving these goals, IIC has attempted to stay on the forefront of the important political issues that face the American people. In doing so, they frame issues in two

---

[40] "What is the IIC?", 2009, 1.   P.B.U.H. is an acronym that stands for "Peace be upon him." A.S. is the English transliteration of the Arabic *'alayhī as-salām* (upon him be peace), *'alayhā as-salām* (upon her be peace), or *'alayhīm as-salām* (upon them be peace).

[41] "Islamic Information Center", n.d., http://www.islamicinformationcenter.org/.

ways: in a Shiʻa Islamic fashion and an American fashion. More often than not, these framing tasks are complementary. For example, on March 22, 2010, IIC's "Information Alert" discussed the controversial topic of healthcare reform. The correspondence included a statement that explicitly drew the attention of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. "Healthcare is an essential human right, and was exemplified in the governments of Prophet Muhammad and Imām ʻAlī (May God Bless Them). The Prophet and Imām ʻAlī made sure that all the sick and destitute were well cared for, and were exemplars in helping uplift society."[42] The issue of healthcare is framed Islamically, and the mention of Imām ʻAlī gives it a definite Shiʻa character, and it clearly shows that these early leaders of Islam were concerned with issues that Americans face today. It bridges a gap between Muslims and non-Muslims living in the United States, and goes further to suggest that this issue is a universal matter; the Prophet and Imām ʻAlī's emphasis to ensure healthcare was not limited to Muslims, but was open to humanity as a whole.

The remaining portion of the communication builds on this theme of universality by framing the discussion of healthcare reform in ethical and moral language, yet not in explicitly Shiʻa or Muslim terms. It speaks to all citizens regardless of religious affiliation, gender, race, or socio-economic status, and goes further to include all humankind, not just Americans.

---

[42] Islamic Information Center, "Info Alert: IIC Supports Healthcare Reform as Positive 'First Step'", March 22, 2010. An "information alert" is the correspondence that is delivered through IIC's e-mail listserv.

All American residents, and indeed all people around the world, should have access to safe, effective, and compassionate healthcare. The focus of such services should be preventative. Leaving the sick untreated has devastating economic, social, and moral costs. Lofty American values should not allow the sick to suffer because of lack of means. Untreated illness and insufficient prevention threaten all Americans' health and livelihood. It is therefore incumbent on all Americans to create systems to provide for all residents' needs. Accordingly, IIC applauds the passage of the healthcare reform bill as a positive first step in the direction of the teachings of the Holy Prophet and his divine family.[43]

The ability to frame a prominent issue in such a manner allows the IIC to solidify its Shi'a credentials, while at the same time educate non-Shi'a and non-Muslims about the merits of Shi'ism, albeit in a very subtle manner. The message is devoid of any language that could be construed as proselytizing, and the brief mention of the Prophet and Imām 'Alī educates the reader on these individuals' views on healthcare. The goal of IIC is not to convert people to Shi'ism, but instead to convey the message that the members of the Prophet's Household were concerned about the same issues that face American society today. By equating the stance of those in favor of healthcare reform with the goals of the Prophet Muḥammad and Imām 'Alī, IIC is signaling the

---

[43] Ibid.

222

universality of the message of the "genuine Islam" Imām Naqvi mentioned. Additionally, it signals that the values of Muslim-Americans are no different than those of some of their neighbors. In this instance, IIC's position resonates with those in favor of healthcare reform.

The "Information Alert" also speaks to a Shi'a audience, and serves to combat the quietist approach that views political participation as something *harām*. There is little need to educate Shi'a Muslims about the merits of the Prophet and his Household. By that I mean to say that Shi'as are constantly reminded about the greatness of these historical figures, and therefore it probably does not come as a surprise to them that the Prophet and Imām 'Alī were concerned about the health of the early Muslim community. There are a myriad of traditions attributed to the Prophet and the Imāms which extol the virtues of proper hygiene, eating habits, and healthcare in general. However, by connecting the Prophet's position on healthcare with the stance of other Americans, IIC is attempting to persuade its own Shi'a community members that they are a part of a larger society. It demands that they educate themselves on the pressing issues that Americans face, and it compels them to participate in order to improve society. For those who believe that there is an inherent conflict between being a Muslim and being an American, IIC informs them that the message of the Prophet's Household is universal by demanding healthcare for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, and it is incumbent on the members of the community to be informed and active citizens. To be sure, there are members of Naqvi's congregation at Idara Jaferia as well as IIC who

oppose the idea of healthcare reform; the community consists of quite a few physicians, many of whom may disagree with this legislation. Just as with greater American society, people within the Shi'a community have different preferences regarding policy issues. However, IIC's intention is not to formulate a dogmatic ideology or policy for members to follow blindly. The intended goal is to increase political awareness and activity of Shi'as, but the example of the Prophet and Imām 'Alī was not merely a tool to justify Naqvi and IIC's opinion. If we are to believe Naqvi, IIC's support for healthcare reform was reached after understanding the actions of the Prophet and Imām 'Alī; this is "genuine Islam." It implies that a good Shi'a is concerned with the healthcare issue, and conversely it suggests that negligence or indifference is not the way a Shi'a approaches such matters.

After the passage of the Patriot Act in October 2001, many Muslims began to worry about their privacy and well-being, making them hesitant to provide the government with information. Another "Information Alert" delivered on March 31, 2010 compels members of the Muslim community to participate in the 2010 Census. In doing so, IIC educates Shi'as on the vital importance of being counted.

> What is often misconstrued among the American-Muslim and Arab population is what their information will be used for. Based on the Census, every year the federal government distributes more than $400 billion to state, local, and tribal governments. Several faith-based organizations use the census data to apply for grants and determine locations for new facilities. Additionally, Census data from

Muslims affects their voice in Congress, including redistricting of state legislations, county and city councils. In order to promote and encourage public and civic engagement among the American Muslim community, it is vital for every Muslim household to complete and mail in the census form in order to get their voices heard and counted.[44]

Additionally, the IIC's blog page further allays fears that the information gathered will be used to target Muslims. Irma Khoja, the Miami Area Media Relations Officer for IIC uses her expertise as a law student at the University of Miami to blog: "[The] census is only being used for statistical purposes. It asks for the responders' name, race, and ethnicity, but not their religion. It aims to count all U.S. residents – that means both citizens and non-citizens, but the Bureau cannot share the information with other federal agencies. Doing so would be against the law."[45] Here IIC is using the expertise of one of its members to reach out to the Shi'a community. Khoja's role also reflects Naqvi's vision of including the youth and females in leadership positions in the community.

As can be seen from these two examples, IIC engages Muslims and non-Muslims, Shi'as and non-Shi'as. As such, it has both an external and internal objective. The "Information Alerts" allow for IIC to simply communicate about certain policy issues that are important to American citizens, while at the same time frames the discussion in

---

[44] Islamic Information Center, "Info Alert: IIC Calls Upon Community Members to Participate in the Census", March 10, 2010.

[45] Irma Khoja, "Why Muslims Need to Fill out the U.S. Census Form," *Islamic Information Center: Politics, Media, and Interfaith Since 2002*, March 27, 2010, http://iicblog.wordpress.com/.

a manner that is simultaneously Muslim/Shi'a and American. The two domestic issues discussed, healthcare reform and the 2010 Census, are relevant to all Americans in some manner, but this does not mean that IIC shies away from informing people on international topics. It has taken public positions such as supporting U.N. World Water Day; condemning the massacre of Shi'as in Karbalā', Iraq and Karachi, Pakistan during *Arbaeen* of 2010; and denouncing the treatment of the Shi'a Houthi minority in Yemen. The leadership of IIC is cognizant that many non-Muslim Americans are unaware of these international issues, and if IIC is to gain any traction with the broader American population it must speak to issues that affect the U.S. first and foremost. Simultaneously, IIC tries to draw the Shi'a community into increased political and social participation by continuously informing them of the universality of the message of the Prophet and his Household.

Sayyid Mohammad Baqer Kashmiri, like Sayyid Naqvi, is a descendent of the Prophet Mohammad through the bloodline created by the marriage of the Prophet's daughter Fāṭimāh to Imām 'Alī. Despite his name, he does not hail from the Kashmir region, rather he is Iraqi, and was born into a famous religious family that originally went by the surname of either Najafi or Raḍawi.[46] At sometime in the past, one of his ancestors moved to Kashmir to propagate the faith, and since the time of the return of his grandfather to Iraq this branch of the family has been known as Kashmiri. Being a

---

[46] Najafi signifies that his family is from the holy city of Najaf in Iraq. Raḍawi signifies that his bloodline is connected to the marriage of Fāṭimāh and 'Alī (and eventually the Prophet) through descendants of the eighth Imām of Shi'ism, 'Alī al-Riḍā.

member of this rather prestigious religious family served as the impetus for becoming a religious scholar, as most of his family took the path into the Shi'a religious establishment.

Kashmiri's family was forced to flee Iraq due to Saddam Hussein's repressive policy against Shi'as. They first moved to Kuwait and then eventually to Iran in 1982. Kashmiri attained a diploma in science, and officially entered the *ḥawzāh 'ilmīyyāh* in 1991; completing his seminary work in 1997.[47] The same year he moved to Lebanon and gave speeches during Ramaḍān and 'Āshurā commemorations, and he attributes this not to any special knowledge that he attained, but rather to the fame of his family. Because of the popularity of his family, he was invited to many locations throughout the Middle East, as well as throughout Europe and Canada. In 1999 he was invited to speak in the United States by the al-Khoei Foundation and the Ahl al-Bayt Mosque in California.[48]

He was attracted to the United States because of what he saw as endless possibilities, freedom, and the rule of law. He believed that this could benefit the Shi'a cause; the guarantee of freedom and equal protection under the law could allow Shi'as to prosper and to contribute to this society. This belief solidified as he visited more and

---

[47] *ḥawzāh 'ilmīyyāh* is a seminary of the traditional Shi'a Islamic studies. As mentioned earlier in the paper, Najaf, Iraq and Qom, Iran are the two preeminent centers of religious learning in the Shi'a world.

[48] The Imām al-Khoei Benevolent Foundation was founded by Grand Ayatollah Abul-Qasem Khoei. He started the organization to represent Shi'as in the West, especially due to the bad image they garnered after the Iranian Revolution and Hostage Crisis. It continues to this day with a location in Jamaica, New York.

more Shi'a communities in the United States. Based on his perception of this pluralist nature of American social and political life, he took it upon himself to write a report to detailing the possibilities for Shi'as in America, as well as the need for more clergy to cater to the spiritual needs of the community. He sent this report to Grand Ayatollah Sistani in Najaf, Iraq, who happens to be the father-in-law of Kashmiri's brother, and as such his recommendations were taken very seriously. In Kashmiri's opinion, the establishment in the seminary of Najaf realized the importance of his work; it was this report that paved the way for him to make a difference in the lives of Shi'as living in North America.

He returned to the United States in the year 2000, and started work as the resident scholar at Ahl al-Bayt Mosque in California. His aim was to understand life in the US, how people thought, and how the system worked. He contacted Islamic centers and Shi'a scholars to inquire how they ran their communities. This task was very difficult given that there was a lack of cohesion among the Shi'a scholars and centers. Kashmiri lamented that "Unfortunately, it is bad news, until that time we had [no] official list of how many scholars we have, [or] list of Islamic centers… team work until that time was [almost nonexistent]."[49] This resulted in another report that he sent to Sistani in 2002, which included all the information he gathered from Shi'a Islamic centers and scholars

---

[49] Sayed Mohammad al-Baqir Kashmiri, "Semi-Structured Interview", January 5, 2009.

in the US and Canada. In the report he urged the *marji'iyya* to open a liaison office in the United States in order to unify and guide the American Shi'a community.[50]

This culminated in the founding of the Imām Mahdi Association of Marjaeya (IMĀM) in 2004, as well as Kashmiri being named as the representative of Grand Ayatollah Sistani in the United States. Dr. Liyakat Takim describes IMĀM in the following words:

> IMĀM aims to be a religious organization that acts as a source of communication between all members of the [Shi'a] community in North America and the *marji'iyya*. IMĀM's vision is to encourage, equip, and develop all [Shi'a] Muslims in North America with the proper education and learning for the application of their faith, reflecting the [Shi'a] Muslim teachings and raising the status of the followers within their respective communities. IMĀM has also tried to cater for the socioreligious needs of the [Shi'a] community. Thus, where necessary, it intervenes to deal with matters such as marriage, divorce, wills, inheritance, along with other social issues within the community, like helping the indigent. IMĀM has also established an Islamic Institute for Higher Education. The intellectual and religious department of IMĀM is dedicated primarily to the preparation of leaders for the congregations served by IMĀM. Presently, IMĀM is the only national religious organization that functions under

---

[50] *Marji'iyya* is the collective institution of all *marja' al-taqlid*. In this particular instance Kashmiri is referring to the seminary in Najaf and the scholars who are affiliated with that school, the preeminent scholar of course being Grand Ayatollah Sistani.

the auspices of a [*marja'*] and provides various services to the Shi'a community across America.[51]

Kashmiri stated that Ayatollah Sistani urges all Shi'as to work to be good citizens of the countries in which they reside.

> Sayyid Sistani… is saying you are American, you are Canadian, you are Indian, you are from China… okay, you are Chinese, you are American… work in your country and get involved with others… This is a message of our religion. Get involved with others. Work on your citizenship. Try to be best person. Get more knowledge. Get the best position in your country. [The *maraja'*] don't care. They don't mind. Hopefully you be president of the country.[52]

He went further to argue against *velāyat* approaches to political participation, suggesting that this view point is actually counter productive to the goals of Shi'as living as minorities in the US or other places. In doing so he discussed the ideological differences from a historical perspective, carefully constructing his argument in a way as to not criticize the concept of *velāyat-e faqīh*, but to argue that it has no possible applicability in a country where Shi'as do not constitute a majority.[53]

---

[51] Takim, *Shi'ism in America*, 180-181. IMĀM uses the spelling *marjaeya* instead of *marji'iyya*. It is simply a preference of one transliteration over another.

[52] Kashmiri, "Semi-Structured Interview."

[53] The applicability of *velāyat-e faqih* has been problematic in Iran, and therefore a discussion of its reach and influence outside of Iran seems fraught with problems.

This topic, it has roots to very important and main point in the fiqh jurisprudence in the Shi'a. And the majority of the *fuqaha*, the jurists, they have idea, and the minority, a small minority, they have different… they see the (journey) is to try to establish government, an Islamic government, such as Sayyid Khomeini… During the last 1,200 years since the *ghaybah* (occultation) of Imām Mahdi until now we have just a couple numbers of the *fuqaha* they believe that. And never a time happened physically until the Imām Khomeini and the revolution of Iran. So this is just idea and they believe that, but majority of the jurist, no, they believe that since we have no infallible leader, so it's a problem. It's a job of the infallible leader. And we as long as normal human, just we have *taqwa* (God consciousness) and we have knowledge, people suppose to go back to knowledgeable people, *'ulamā'*, scholars, jurists and to take just religious advice, religious orders to get good connection in the worship with Allah, Subhanahu wa Ta'ala ("glorious and exalted is He"). So if you ask these majority of scholars what's your political agenda? They will say "We don't look for government. But we participate in the politics. [Politics] is a part of our lives. We can't say [politics] 100% doesn't match with the religion. [It is] a part of our life. But if we establish government, we will do more division, we will do more challenge, it will happen more problems for Muslims and non-Muslims. Our message, Our Prophet message, Allah's message [is] the peace. Not to make some thing to start more war and more challenge. Right now if you see in the

whole world Sayyid Sistani opinion [is] more acceptable. Why? For this example. Because time came and media helped us, and his opinion to go out. The point here, Sayyid Sistani ask all Shi'a people… let's say "Najafi school of thought"… ask all people… some of "School of Qom"… ask for all Shi'a in the whole world, anywhere you live… you have to work on your citizenship. First of all. This is very important… this is very very important. All other countries which they have concern from Shi'a … they are afraid from this point. This gentleman, born here in this country, grow up, and get so many benefits but his allegiance from out of border. Not inside. Based on this point will make so many problem. This group which you mention (Muslim Congress) also all time they ask people "Hey listen to that what saying from out of border." It will make so many problems inside. And which country will love us? Which country will work with us? So we will all the time be [on the outside]. Nobody will look to us. Nobody will shake hands with us. [54]

His words also revisit the figure of Khomeini as an important symbol within modern Shi'a political discourse. Much like Naqvi, Kashmiri presented Khomeini as a pragmatist in regards to political participation. Kashmiri questioned the intentions of those people who continue to hold annual *Yaūm al-Quds* rallies, and argued that many

---

[54] Kashmiri, "Semi-Structured Interview."

of them do so to promote an ideology, namely a *velāyat* ideology, instead of truly focusing on the plight of Palestinians.

> This kind of demonstration supports specific agenda. And a specific agenda which Sayyid Khomeini, in my personal belief, [if he was here today] he would change his mind. Because time is different. Thirty years ago he had this idea that Israel is supposed to be removed 100% from al-Quds, from Palestine. And he asked people to do demonstration every year on the final Friday of Ramadhan just to be solidarity with Palestine. So if we celebrate it as make unity and brotherhood with the *mazloom* (oppressed) people, then it's ok… But when we ask that Israel supposed to be removed from the world [then we have some problems]. Couple of years ago Ahmadinejad said one word, look what happened. So it's different between political agenda demonstration or human right demonstration.[55]

He argued that people call into question the true intentions of the organizers of *Yaūm al-Quds* rallies, and that these self-styled acolytes of Imām Khomeini were in fact misinterpreting the revolutionary leader's intentions requesting that people rally in support of the Palestinians. Kashmiri's Khomeini was sincerely concerned for the condition of Palestinians, and wanted people to unite for the cause, not simply to spread and reinforce a particular ideology. In order to provide an example, he juxtaposed the

---

[55] Ibid.

Yaūm al-Quds demonstrations with his work to organize a demonstration for the people of Gaza during Israel's "Operation Cast Lead," which coincided with my fieldwork in the Los Angeles area in December 2008.

> I'm very busy today and yesterday, two three days ago. People want demonstration for Gaza. Nobody will [question] "why?" Nobody will say "why you want demonstration and you ask Israel to stop killing?" But for *Yaūm al-Quds* if somebody ask you "Why you are there? Are you supporting this group? Are you supporting this anti-American people? Why?" So there are so many issues. I do not say this is 100% wrong, [or] this one is 100% right. There is some gray area. But we have to look at the general benefit for our nation, for our Shi'a, for our society, for our country which we live. In total, not in the part.[56]

Following Sistani's urging, IMĀM has attempted to create better citizens of its members through the use of outreach to greater society, as well as initiatives such as My Orphans which helps orphans in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Lebanon. However, very few of its efforts can be considered to be overtly and actively political. For example, Kashmiri mentions a *fatwa* (religious edict) handed down by Sistani in response to a question about the legality of voting for a non-Muslim candidate in the American political system.

---

[56] Ibid.

Sayyid Sistani doesn't say [it is] or not allowed… If you feel that it's good for your community… go ahead participate… He didn't give us his [opinion], he just gave us the principle… He is saying, "your leaders there, [religious scholars], they know [the] benefit better than me. I gave my religious perspective because I am [more] knowledgeable than anybody else. But [politics], management, economy, anything you see [that is a] benefit for your country or your community… you have to make decision about it."[57]

Sistani's position on this issue is resultant from the fact that he has no experience of American life, and as such he does not have the knowledge to make a ruling on whether voting in the US is absolutely mandatory or absolutely unlawful. However, he instead puts the onus in the hands of the individual based on the advice and guidance of the local religious scholar on whether participation is beneficial. Based on his *fatwa*, Sistani does not think that voting in the United States is *harām* (forbidden). He urges his followers to listen to the advice of their local religious scholars.

Zainab al-Suwaij is the Executive Director of the American Islamic Congress (AIC). Hailing from Iraq, al-Suwaij is the granddaughter of an ayatollah. She participated in the Shi'a uprising in Karbalā' against Saddam Hussein's regime in 1991,

---

[57] Ibid.

which was the reason for her fleeing Iraq for the United States.[58] She continued her education, and would eventually hold a position on Yale's faculty. After the events of September 11, 2001, she co-founded AIC.

Al-Suwaij argues that Muslim participation has become more active in the past decade, especially after 9-11, however Shi'a activities are still very limited in her evaluation. She can attribute this statement to the fact that a successful Shi'a organization fails to exist. In her opinion this is true due to the fact that Shi'as have always been discriminated against, and therefore the traditional quietist approach to politics formed. This quietist approach followed many of the Shi'as to the United States. This is not to say that Shi'as do not participate, but in her estimation those that contribute do so outside of the public's eye. She noticed an increased public display of political action before the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, primarily on the part of *'Alīms* with an Iraqi background, such as the Moustafa and Hassan al-Qazwini and Shaykh Hisham Husseini. All three were very vocal in their opposition to Saddam Hussein and his regime.[59] As such, al-Suwaij argues that the American government

---

[58] Mary Elaine Hegland, "Women of Karbala Moving to America: Shi'i Rituals in Iran, Pakistan, and California," in *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam*, ed. Kamran Scot Aghaie (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2005), 199-228.

[59] Consequently, after the invasion of Iraq transitioned into a long American occupation, Hassan al-Qazwini incurred a public relations nightmare among the Muslim community, both Sunni and Shi'a, for his various meetings with President George W. Bush. Many levied blame on him for the occupation. Many Sunnis cited his discussion with the Bush administration as a reason to label Shi'as as traitors to the greater Muslim *ummāh*. However, the most vocal and vociferous attacks came from a minority of the Shi'a community in the United States. When I interviewed him in Dearborn in August 2008 he discussed this issue, as well as the attack from non-Muslims labeling him as an agent of Iran

236

began to realize the importance of including the Shi'as. She believes this was done because Shi'as were an oppressed group in Saddam's Iraq. Their support would be paramount in the hopes of a smooth invasion given the fact that Shi'as constitute 60% of the Iraqi population. She also argues that she was privy to discussions in the Washington, D.C. area that much of this is due to a perception among some of those in the government that Shi'ism is a more stable sect. The allowance of reinterpretation of Qur'an and shari'ah through *ijtehad* had caught the eye of many in the policy-making circles. In our discussion, she never mentions that perhaps Bush administration garnered the support and expertise of the Shi'a leadership in the United States for legitimacy reasons. The support of Muslim religious leaders allowed the administration to argue that this was not a war against Islam or Muslim.

Velāyat Tropes

A minority of the Shi'as living in the United States adheres to the *velāyat* approach to political participation. In conducting the fieldwork for this research, I was able to have face-to-face interaction with only one religious leader that espoused the *velāyat* approach, and this never included an actual formal interview, but rather many informal impromptu discussions focusing on a variety of topics. Additionally, I was present at many of his lectures and sermons given to his community. I was unsuccessful, despite many attempts, to include other purveyors of the *velāyat* approach in this research. One

---

and Hezbollah. He argues that all of this criticism from different sides proves that the work he was and is doing was legitimate.

237

location came close to granting me access to the community, but subsequently declined due to suspicion from members as to what my intentions truly were. Though I provided the necessary documentation proving my status as a doctoral candidate performing dissertation research, as well as additional documentation from the chair of the Department of Political Science at the University of Oklahoma that further stipulated the nature of my research, the board members of this particular location simply were not comfortable with being included in the fieldwork. As such, my interaction with this sole individual in the Dallas - Ft. Worth Metroplex, Maulana Shamshad Haider, forms a large portion of my understanding of the *velāyat* approach. However, though my personal interaction was limited to Haider, I spent considerable time in the MOMIN Center where he was the resident religious scholar, and I also attended the annual convention of Muslim Congress, which promotes the *velāyat* approach to political and social engagement.

The *velāyat* approach is one in which the leaders attempt to persuade their followers that the only way to practice Islam is by following the example of the Prophet (upon which all Muslims agree), his Household (which is particular to Shi'as), and, in the absence of the 12th Imām, the *'ulamā'* that espouse an all encompassing conceptualization of guardianship should govern society. This *'ulamā'* is currently the Supreme Leader of Iran, Grand Ayatollah 'Alī Khamene'i and those other clerics who espouse the ideology. This devotion to the *rahbar* is not simply just in regards to religious matters. In fact, because of the blurriness between religion and politics in the

Iranian system, the devotion to Khamene'i connotes both religious and political commitment.[60]

The purveyors of a *velāyat* approach in the American setting are caught in a very interesting paradox. On the one hand, the rationale of devotion to Khamene'i within the concept of *velāyat-e faqīh* is difficult to imagine in the United States. Those that follow a *velāyat* perspective are in essence giving allegiance to a foreign political leader. Even more so, their allegiance is to a religious leader, who happens to be a head of state, and this cuts completely across the grain of the American ideal of a separation of church and state. On the other hand, though they may espouse an ideology which has no basis or foothold in the American setting, they nevertheless benefit from and participate in the American system. They criticize the same system that allows them to freely practice their religion and espouse their ideology without hindrance. They pay taxes into a system which they view as being corrupt. Many send their children to public schools which socialize students into the American political and social system which they openly criticize.

There is a rather vocal minority that champions the *velāyat* approach, and it is precisely their adherence to this more "radical" version of Shi'a political action that makes them politically active. To clarify this point, it is the fact that many times the adherents to the *velāyat* approach participate in certain political action, such as protests

---

[60] *Rahbar* is a Persian word that is best translated into English as "leader."

and rallies, that makes their political action much more visible. Many of them may not find voting to be of any value, but participation in *Yaūm al-Quds* rallies is political action. Rallies and protests are scene as non-conventional forms of political action, and especially given the subject matter of said protests – the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands – the political action is seen as being against the status quo and against the foreign policy of the United States, perceived or otherwise. This section describes the *velāyat* approach, albeit based on the rather limited access I had to purveyors of this particular mobilizational approach. In it I utilize my interaction with Maulana Shamshad Haider as well as my attendance at a Muslim Congress annual convention in the summer of 2008 in Dallas, Texas to describe how Shi'a symbols and narratives are used to instruct political behavior.

Maulana Shamshad Haider was born in 1966 in what is now Dhaka, Bangladesh. His family moved to Karachi, Pakistan when he was four years old.[61] After initially studying mechanical engineering, he decided to make his way to Qom in 1987 to begin his seminary education. In the early 2000s he became Resident 'Alīm of Metroplex Organization of Muslims In North Texas (MOMIN Center) in Irving, Texas, and held that position until the fall of 2008.[62]

---

[61] *Maulana* means "our master" in Arabic. It is quite often used as an honorific for clergy members, both Sunni and Shi'a.

[62] "al-Murtazawi", n.d., http://murtazawi.info/. The acronym MOMIN corresponds to the Arabic word *mu'min*, which is best defined as a "believer" or "one who has faith."

In the introductory chapter I recounted my first encountered with Haider in October 2007 as he gave a speech to the congregation at the MOMIN Center about the importance of the month of Ramaḍān. The *du'ā'* (supplication) turned into a polemical invocation for Allah to liberate Makkāh and Madīnāh from the hands of the Saudi royal family, and for Allah to shower His blessings on Imām Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamene'i. At that point in time I was completely unaware of the deep division within the American Shi'a community. Though I was quite aware of the difference of opinion regarding the role of the *'ulamā'*, I was completely caught off-guard by the fact that it was so present and divisive in the American context. My initial speculation was that given the relatively small Shi'a community within the United States, that they would be more united among themselves and with the broader Muslim community, in other words with the Sunnis. Of course much of this initial speculation was refuted by Haider's words, and also by what I learned from those that I no refer to as accommodationists. Shi'as are divided among themselves, but there are many Shi'as who reach out to Sunnis in order to form some semblance of unity among the broader Muslim community. To be clear, Haider's vilification of the Saudi regime does not mean he has animosity towards Sunnis in general. In fact, he had a close relationship with Sunnis that have similar points of view as his. Therefore, he has contact with Sunnis that harbor harsh feelings and condemnations of the Saudi regime and the policies of the American government. Additionally, many of the Sunnis with whom he associates are also admirers of Khomeini's revolution.

This first encounter with what I now refer to as the *velāyat* approach was the catalyst for the entire research project. Haider's use of Shi'a symbols in this instance, albeit not the traditional symbols of the Prophet and Ahl al-Bayt, but rather the symbols of the Islamic Revolution, is a great example of the *velāyat* approach at work. For example, his choice of giving ownership, by using the word "our," of Khomeini, Khamene'i, the revolution, and the Islamic Republic, all of which are specific to the Iranian political experience, to a congregation that is overwhelmingly South Asian demonstrates the motive to give these symbols a cosmopolitan nature beyond their domestic setting in Iran. There is the deliberate intention of removing the borders surrounding the Iranian state, and making the victory of the Islamic Republic not simply Iranian, but Pan-Shi'a. The difficulty of applying a cosmopolitan tint to the traditional symbols and narratives of Shi'ism has proved to be difficult given the lack of historical, religious and cultural traction in the West. The same can be said for these Iranian revolutionary symbols. To be fair, it proves even more difficult to garner the adherence of the majority of Shi'as using such an approach given the fact that the Iranian revolutionary symbols are simply very Iranian. In other words, it is true there was some attempt to export the ideology in the early years of the revolution, but history proves that this was a failed attempt. Despite the rhetoric from Tehran, the Islamic Revolution did not spread like wild fire throughout the Middle East. As such, even though many Shi'as look towards Iran with reverence, there are few that see any viability of promoting this form of governance in any other part of the world. This is especially

242

telling given that the Iranian system has been filled with much turmoil since its inception, and especially following the 2009 Presidential election fiasco. Similarly, what does adherence to a *velāyat* approach mean for these people in the United States? If they are following Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamene'i as a political leader, how does that translate into political and social action in the United States?

The answer to that is complicated and simple. Political adherence to a foreign religious leader on the one hand has no effect on the policy of the government of the United States. Though they consider themselves political, those like Haider see little benefit for engaging in the conventional modes of political behavior. As such, they do not promote voting, monetary contributions to candidates, and other similar activities. However, they are more prone to convening conferences where they discuss some political issues, but predominantly religious ones. They also hold rallies and protests in favor of the Palestinian cause and other issues that might surface.

This form of political behavior is resultant from the manner in which the leaders of this particular approach utilize the symbols and narratives of Shi'ism. By invoking the name of Khomeini and Khamene'i, and by placing them as the rightful representatives of the 12th Imām, these purveyors of the *velāyat* approach suggest that adherence to the Prophet and all the 12 Imāms necessitates adherence to Khomeini and subsequently Khamene'i. Because of Khomeini's use of the "Great Satan" label for the United States government and policies, these *velāyat* purveyors simultaneously criticize, denounce, and condemn the American political system. By this I mean to say they do not

243

necessarily condemn the institutional configuration of the American system, but rather the policies that have emerged from it. This is an interesting departure from Imām Naqvi and Kashmiri's portrayal of Khomeini. Naqvi and Kashmiri's Khomeini narrative depicts the late revolutionary leader as being more pragmatic and accommodational. However, the purveyors of the *velāyat* approach paint a picture of an unbending ideologue who never waivered in his condemnation of perceived unjust American policies.

Returning back to my first encounter with Haider, later in the evening I had the opportunity to engage him in a discussion in which he was very quick to point out that a Shi'a organization referred to as the Muslim Congress (MC) existed through the auspices of the Islamic Education Center of Houston and the MOMIN Center that strived to support Shi'as in North America. When I mentioned I was a political science doctoral student he exclaimed that "We are very political!" and began to show me this organization's website on his cellular phone. Very little of the content on the website might be construed as political. The organization promoted political awareness and social consciousness to a minimal degree, but nothing on the website argued in favor of overt political participation.[63] According to Liyakat Takim in *Shi'ism in America*:

---

[63] Interestingly, approximately eight months later, Azhar Peerbhai, Board of Directors member of the Muslim Congress (and also member of the MOMIN Center), very emphatically informed me that the Muslim Congress was not a political organization; that in fact it was only a religious group, and its 501(c)(3) status did not allow it to be a political organization. This of course was a misunderstanding of the political restrictions placed upon tax-exempt, non-profit organizations. Non-profit organizations

The Muslim Congress was established in 2005. Its primary goal is to provide educational services that will directly benefit members of the [Shiʿa] community. The Muslim Congress has established a state-of-the-art website, which serves as a focal point for all its activities, but the organization is in an embryonic stage. It has promised to provide community services such as family counseling, matrimonial services, career/business guidance, online discussion forums, and the like. Within [Shiʿa] circles, it is seen as rivaling UMAA as it duplicates many of the goals of and services rendered by UMAA. The Muslim Congress is more clerical-based, but, like UMAA, has yet to make a definite impact on the [Shiʿa] community in America.[64]

The MC is dedicated to the concept of *velāyat-e faqīh* (Guardianship of the Jurist), and as such they are supporters of the ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Because of his role as successor to Imām Khomeini as Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, the leadership of MC sees Grand Ayatollah Khameneʾi as the legitimate leader of Shiʿas, and even all Muslims, worldwide. Some of the leaders of the MC have a reputation for being critical of those Shiʿas who do not follow Khameneʾi's guidance despite the fact that the overwhelming majority are devotees of Grand Ayatollah Sistani. Their criticisms stem from Sistani's lack of support of a comprehensive *velāyat-*

---

are prohibited from participating in campaigning activities. Simply discussing political issues will not jeopardize their tax-exempt status.
[64] Takim, *Shiʿism in America*, 193-194.

e faqīh that entails the *'ulamā's* guardianship over all aspects of life. Much of MC's platform and ideology revolves around this concept of a leadership by the *'ulamā'*. The MC is very careful about publicly adopting such criticisms, because they would be seen as creating division within the Shi'a community. To be clear, fissures already exist, but open criticism of any *marja'* would garner incredible backlash, and would be detrimental to their goal of promoting unity. As such, during the 2008 Annual Conference, MC included a special guest, the brother of the son-in-law of Grand Ayatollah Sistani, who delivered a message of unity, trying to dispel any notions that there was some form of conflict between Ayatollahs Sistani and Khamene'i.

The MC has already gained the reputation for working with like-minded Sunni individuals and groups, but they refuse to meet with other Shi'a organizations such as the Council of Shi'a Scholars in North America. Many Shi'as were troubled with the MC's unwillingness to simply engage other Shi'a organizations in dialogue over contentious issues. One individual stated, "We are so few in number, and these people are dividing our community even further. How are we supposed to be united when our leaders can't even sit and talk?"

The leaders of the Muslim Congress convene annual conferences to propagate their particular point of view of how to be Shi'a in the United States. Usually these conferences are held in cities with a mosque or Islamic Center that has a connection with the MC. The fourth Muslim Congress Annual Conference was held in Dallas, Texas during Independence Day weekend 2008. Dallas was chosen because of the

proximity of the MOMIN Center in Irving, which at that time was led by Maulana Haider. The MC labeled the overall theme of the conference as "Pure Islam," which, similar to the "genuine Islam" discussed by Naqvi of IIC, was meant to signal a return to the original religion propagated by the Prophet Muhammad and protected by his Holy Progeny. Similarly, this theme is also explicitly Shi'a, however it does not exclude non-Shi'a from participating in the conference, as a couple of the speakers were Sunni scholars.

However, this "Pure Islam" goes further in suggesting that the real Islam is one of a revolutionary nature. It is not only a call back to what Shari'ati referred to as *Red Shi'ism*, but it also signifies a necessity to adhere to the principles of the Iranian revolution, which is said to be a rejuvenation of the Prophetic mission as well as the stance of the 12 Imāms. For the *velāyat* adherents, Khamene'i protects this stance, and as such "Pure Islam" is *velāyat-e faqīh*. Therefore, though it has a revolutionary characteristic, it is not the same as Shari'ati's *Red Shi'ism*, for it rests on the necessity of extreme devotion to a clerical leader, whereas Shari'ati did not argue in favor of a clerically ruled form of government. At best Shari'ati thought of Shi'ism as an ideology that guided all aspects of social life, but did not argue for a regime type dominated by clerics.

This conference was primarily concerned with religious issues, and Shi'a clergy delivered a majority of the speeches. Given Haider's claim to be very political, I expected overtly political language from the Shi'a speakers. However, little of what

they said could be construed as specifically political nor were conference attendees urged by the Shi'a scholars to participate in the conventional sense of voting, writing letters to congresspersons, trying to persuade others to participate, ringing doorbells for a petition, or running for office. To be fair, as a tax-exempt organization the MC is prohibited from endorsing candidates for election. But the 2008 presidential election campaign was so hotly contested, and much of the nation was so divided on the issues, that it was surprising the leaders of the MC were silent on the topic. This is especially true given the confusion among many Shi'as of the permissibility of voting in a non-Muslim country. I expected politically charged language from the Shi'a scholars given the negative Muslim-American opinion of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the Bush Administration's position towards the Iranian regime.

I argue that its absence suggests that Haider had a different conception of what the term political means, and it indicated a lack of knowledge about the American political system among the Shi'a leadership of the Muslim Congress. They openly criticize other Shi'a organizations and leaders for meeting with members of the government, yet they themselves have very little understanding of the political system that they criticize. The Muslim Congress aims to serve the Shi'a community by providing educational services that would make Muslims "well-informed and successful citizens," yet the only overtly political speeches at the 2008 annual conference were given by Sunni scholars, who did not come across as being completely anti-system, rather they understood the importance of political participation, including the possibility of engaging members of the

government under specific circumstances. This inclusion of Sunni scholars giving political speeches to a Shi'a audience is interesting given the different historical differences between Shi'a and Sunni political participation.

One of the Sunni speakers was Imām Muhammad al-Asi, who discussed whether Muslims should participate in the American political system. He did not condemn the system outright, and even lauded the freedoms and guarantees in the United States that are unknown in the Muslim world. However, he expressed concern that these guarantees could possibly be withering away in the post-September 11th era due to legislation such as the Patriot Act and increasing violations of civil liberties.

Similar to Imām Naqvi of IIC, al-Asi believed that those who have not realized the necessity of political participation are naïve, and as such proposed that Muslims form a political platform of their own. In his opinion, Muslims must become a political force in the United States, and the best way to do this is by bringing non-Muslims into the fold by using non-Islamic language when forming this Muslim political platform. He argued that a program centered on justice, equal distribution of wealth, combating illegal drugs, healthcare reform, the immigration situation, and unemployment speaks to all Americans regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender. In his opinion, once this political platform is formed, then the possibility of electing Muslim officials will increase, and it is at that time that Muslims should vote. However, before that time, if voting decreases the likelihood of the formation of a Muslim political platform, then they should refrain from voting. On the other hand, if one votes with the hope of

changing things and with the intent to urge a possible alternative to the status quo, then that individual can and should vote.[65] Though his speech was well received, its effectiveness was hard to gauge. He was asking a rather apolitical group of individuals to do something that was completely foreign to them. Many of them did not even vote. How could they be expected to form a political platform?

Additionally, being a non-Shi'a scholar probably hindered the effectiveness of al-Asi's speech. If the majority of the Shi'a scholars present were unable to clearly offer a cogent plan for real political action, it begs the question of the effectiveness of a Sunni speaker who does not utilize the same narratives or commands the same attention of his Shi'a counterparts.

Because of the absence of a real plan for conventional political engagement, MC has been more successful at encouraging political participation through the use of rallies and protests.[66] In addition to the annual conferences, the mosques affiliated with MC also hold yearly commemorations of *Yaūm al-Quds* (Jerusalem Day) that occur on the last Friday of every Ramaḍān. This commemoration is characterized by peaceful protests and demonstrations in support of the Palestinian cause, and was initiated by Imām Khomeini the 1980s. This event is planned and carried out by Shi'as around the

---

[65] Mohammad al-Asi, "Political Involvement" (Dallas, Texas, July 5, 2008). Al-Asi suggested that four million Muslims move to sparsely populated Montana, and use their numbers to dominate the political system of that state.

[66] In earlier work, I have found a statistically significant higher percentage of Shi'as participate in rallies and protests as compared to Sunnis. See Contractor, "The Dearborn Effect: A Comparison of the Political Dispositions of Shi'a and Sunni Muslims in the United States."

globe, and typically equates the struggle of the Palestinians with the difficulties and suffering the Prophet's Household endured, most notably the massacre of Imām Ḥusayn at Karbalā'. Those that gather for this event claim to do so for the cause of justice exemplified by the struggle between Imām Ḥusayn and the army of Yazīd.[67] Internationally, the symbolic power of *Yaūm al-Quds* has waned significantly in the past decade. Many Muslims, particularly Sunnis, view it as a propaganda tool of the Iranian regime and those who hold similar ideological viewpoints, including the leadership of MC. Even many Shiʻa leaders in the United States argue *Yaūm al-Quds* does more harm than good for the Shiʻa and Muslim cause. As mentioned, Sayyid Mohammad al-Baqir Kashmiri of IMĀM argues that it is no longer about supporting the Palestinian people, but rather serves the political agenda of denying the right of Israel to exist and for propagating what I refer to as the *velāyat* ideology. In his opinion, this is highly problematic, especially if Muslims are trying to build bridges in the United States.[68] It is precisely for beliefs such as Kashmiri's that the leaders of MC criticize those like him for being "corrupted" and "liberal." They argue that the bulk of the Shiʻa in the United States leadership has forgotten about the importance of standing up to tyranny. As such, MC's leadership has continued to organize *Yaūm al-Quds* rallies

---

[67] Ironically, those they are in support of are Palestinian and Sunni, for whom the Shiʻas narrative of ʻĀshūrā' has little emotional salience. Yet, for the Shiʻas that show up in the many cities of the United States on the last day of Ramaḍān, it is an obligation to "enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil," as the *Qur'ān* commands.

[68] Kashmiri, "Semi-Structured Interview."

throughout the United States. However, most of these commemorations have become events used to reinforce already held beliefs amongst the participants. Very little educating of society as a whole takes place at most *Yaūm al-Quds* rallies. The specifics of the *Yaūm al-Quds* rally on September 26, 2008 in Dallas are recounted in detail in the next chapter.

This indicates a great deal about the ability of Muslim Congress' seemingly rigid ideology. As the fieldwork for this research was being conducted, it became clear that Haider's dogmatic way of thinking belonged to a significant minority of Shi'as living in the United States. Despite the fact that Muslim Congress is able to garner the support of a large number of Shi'as, evident by the number of individuals that attend the yearly conferences, there is little evidence to show that the ideology is as relevant and pervasive among the membership.[69]

SUMMARY

This chapter was a description of the different approaches to Shi'a political and social participation in the American context: quietist, accommodationist, and *velāyat*. The previous chapter was an example of the 'Āshurā narrative, and in this chapter examples of the different tropes and interpretations were provided in order that the reader have an understanding of how the narratives and symbols are used. Simultaneously, it became

---

[69] I inquired, via MC's website, about the membership of MC and the average number of participants at the annual conferences. I was informed via e-mail that MC does not maintain membership data. However, the number of participants at the annual conferences has increased steadily. One thousand three hundred participants attended the 2009 conference held in Dearborn, Michigan.

apparent that the different tropes of Shi'a narratives are based on hotly contested interpretations of the faith, the role of the *'ulamā'*, and the permissibility of political participation. The different tropes are not mere interpretations. They resonate from a discussion, a debate, about what the faith is. The quietist and accommodationist approaches are the traditional and historical manifestations of Shi'a political behavior. The advent of the Iranian Revolution and the concept of *velāyat-e faqīh* as a form of government, introduced a novel topic into the Shi'a world. Though Shi'as are often labeled as "lovers of Iran" without any exception, the simple fact is that the majority of Shi'as do not agree with Khomeini's argument for an all-encompassing guardianship in the hands of the *'ulamā'*. They may be proud of Iran's achievement of overthrowing the Shah, but that does not translate into accepting the concept of *velāyat-e faqīh*.

This tension has therefore manifested itself in the American context. And just as in Iran, purveyors of the *velāyat* approach have reconstructed and retold the narratives of Shi'ism in a manner that befits their ideology. Similarly, accommodationists have told and retold the narratives of Shi'ism to make their case to engage the government directly, voting, donating, and the like. Both are telling and retelling these narratives in a new context, the United States. In the American context, few people know the protagonists or the history of what happened at Karbalā' on the 10th of Muḥarram in the year 680CE/61AH. Many of the younger Shi'as have no connection to the lands, cultures, and stories to which their parents cling. As such, these "storytellers" are

compelled to reformulate the narratives of Shi'ism as to give them relevance in America. Whether they realize it, they are Americanizing these stories and the ideas, lessons, and messages that are connected to them.

CHAPTER 5 – THE EFFECT OF ACCOMMODATIONIST & *VELĀYAT* TROPES ON SHI'A ACTIVISTS' POLITICAL & SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

This chapter is an analysis of the dependent variable, political participation of Shi'a community members in the United States, however it focuses on how these narratives influence a handful of activists withing the Shi'a community. The previous chapter laid out the variation of the independent variable, the use of the symbols and narratives of Shi'ism. As mentioned in chapter three, the Shi'as included in this research utilize both conventional and unconventional modes of political participation. In this chapter I investigate whether different tropes of Shi'a symbols and narratives affect the political behavior of Shi'as in the United States, and if so, how this manifests itself. The previous chapter illustrated how American Shi'a "political prophets," the Imāms and community leaders, utilize symbols and narratives of the faith to promote political and social awareness and action. Similar to Gutterman's "political prophets," namely Reverend Billy Sunday and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Shi'a leaders included in this research tell and retell sacred stories that in turn shape political and social dispositions and as such political and social action. However, these Shi'a "political prophets" are different than Gutterman's exemplars in that they by no means carry the reputation or command a following as large as Reverend Sunday or Dr. King. They hold influential positions in their own immediate communities, and some of them are seen as being important in the

larger American Shi'a community, however none of them are prominent national figures. Only members of the Qazwini family come close to having some national fame, and this is due to their positions as leaders in areas with dense Muslim populations. Imām Moustafa al-Qazwini is based in Costa Mesa, California, and his younger brother, Imām Hassan al-Qazwini is one of many Shi'a Imāms in the Dearborn, Michigan area. As such, politicians and policymakers due to the number of votes and possible monetary contributions that these large communities potentially offer sometimes approach the Qazwini brothers.

Whether they claim to be representing Grand Ayatollah Sistani or Grand Ayatollah Khamene'i (or some other *marja' al-taqlīd*), these "prophets" shape and reshape the symbols and narratives in manners that bolster their own political inclinations. They attempt to spread their version of "what is right and what is wrong" through the particular tropes they construct. On some occasions their interpretations of the ideology of the *marja'* they claim to follow is actually different from how others would interpret the same ideology. The best example was the accommodationist Imām Naqvi who argued that Imām Khomeini would not approach political participation in the manner the *velāyat* proponents advocate for Shi'as living in the United States. Naqvi did not base this assessment on simple interpretation of speeches or text, but rather on his personal experience with Khomeini during the 1980s. It was initially expected that the different tropes of Shi'a narratives would result in specific forms of political and social

participation. However, it became clear that these symbols and narratives do not have a direct effect on political and social action.

The analysis of the variation on political and social participation is carried out by focusing on individual politically and/or socially active Shi'as that I encountered during the fieldwork of this research. In addition to the community leaders mentioned in the previous chapters, I also interviewed lay individuals who constitute some of the membership of the audiences to which the leaders preach. They are the actors, the targets of the different tropes of Shi'a narratives. To a certain extent, they are the ones for whose allegiance the Shi'a "political prophets" are competing. Throughout I intend to determine if the different tropes of Shi'a narratives have a direct effect on political and social behavior. If they do, then what manner of political and social activity results from the different tropes? Another possibility to consider is that perhaps interviewees have already formed dispositions towards political and social participation, and the symbols and narratives of Shi'ism are used to reinforce these already formed or forming political and social inclinations. In other words, do these narratives and symbols serve as intervening variables or as one of many independent variables?

I begin the analysis of the variation on the dependent variable with a look at a handful of individuals that espouse a more accommodationist approach to political participation. These individuals each participate in different ways. Imām Naqvi is briefly revisited in this chapter as a political activist, due to his involvement with IIC. In the previous chapter, Naqvi is portrayed as a "political prophet," but as the face of IIC

he not only promulgates religious reasoning to influence political actors, he also partakes in key political and social activities. Additionally, I briefly include the work of another member of IIC, a young law student named Irma Khoja. Her expertise in the field of law in tandem with her political inclinations has lead her to contribute to IIC's goals. Jihad Saleh worked on Capitol Hill as a congressional staffer, and as the head of the Congressional Muslim Staffers Association. His contribution to this research is probably the most telling example of how the symbols and narratives of Shi'ism affect politically and socially aware Shi'a individuals. The sisters Fatma and Nadia Saleh both focus on educating the community of the Islamic Education Center of Orange County (IECOC), focusing primarily, but not exclusively, on the youth. Their goal is to affect the attitudes of Shi'as, both young and old, in order to encourage them to be productive and contributing members of society.

A young woman named Khadijeh Hosseinzadeh, a student at University of California – Irvine, exemplifies the *velāyat* approach. Though she has a close relationship with an accommodationist community, her political and social proclivities and activism are more akin to that of a *velāyat* approach. Despite her relationship with the Islamic Education Center of Orange County, she prefers the confines of what she describes as the more overtly political community of Masjid al-Nabi. Similarly, I analyze the political activities of the national Shi'a organization referred to as Muslim Congress, which espouses a definite *velāyat* approach to political and social

participation. In doing so I discuss the 2008 rally for *Yaūm al-Quds* in Dallas and the role of Maulana Shamshad Haider as a purveyor of the *velāyat* approach.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION RESULTING FROM THE ACCOMMODATION APPROACH

Those people that I designate as adherents of the accommodationist approach engage in a variety of political activities ranging from voting, to contributing monetarily to campaigns, volunteering, and even attending rallies and protests. The simple fact that the majority of the participants in this research held the accommodationist point of view allows for a rather detailed description of how everyday members of the American Shi'a community took this more pragmatic approach to political participation, and applied it to their lives in order to affect the political standing of their own Shi'a community, but also the greater community that surrounds them, both local and national.

Imām Naqvi, Irma Khoja and IIC

The accommodationist approach has resulted in a type of political participation that can be best described as advocacy work. By this I mean to say that the approach and the narrative trope that Naqvi and others like him espouse often is targeted at specific members of the community that lend themselves to use their specific skill sets to inform, help and educated other members of the Shi'a/Muslim community, as well as the greater American society. Additionally, younger members of the Shi'a community carry out much of this work. This "youth movement" has not gone unnoticed by the

259

leaders of the Shi'a community, and therefore they have gone out of their way to promote increased youth participation. Imām Naqvi of IIC explained to me that he almost exclusively enlists the help of the youth when it comes to his projects. Naqvi assigned to the older generations much of the apathy and unbending focus on ceremony and culture rather than on action. "From what I have seen, the youth community is a big help to me, and to be honest with you, the old folks… I have a hard time [trying] to make them understand… the youth are very receptive… they are the backbone of all my projects."[1] It is through the auspices of the Ja'afaria Youth Group that he has pushed his agenda of forming and shaping informed Shi'as who are more than willing to engage in American society. Additionally, many members of his IIC team are young professionals who were either born in the United States or spent a considerable amount of their formative years living in this country.

In the attempt to demonstrate this, I reutilize the example of Irma Khoja from the previous chapter. An example of his influence and a result of his open interpretation of political participation involves the worry that many Muslims adopt when it comes to cooperating with government, and a response by IIC involving the 2010 Census. After the passage of the Patriot Act in October 2001, many Muslims began to worry about their privacy, well-being and relationship with authorities. This made many Muslims hesitant to provide the government with information based on the opinion that perhaps

[1] Naqvi, S. R., 2008, Semi-Structured Interview, (Rockville, Maryland).

this data would be used to profile Muslims. Many were worried that the census information would give authorities the ability to identify areas of large concentrations of Muslims, and make it easier to round them up in a manner akin to Japanese-American internment during World War II. Large sections of the community simply saw participation in the census in a negative light, and this can be attributed to a lack of understanding the political system and the benefits that might emerge from the enumeration of a demographic group. That being said there were Muslims who understood the system, but nevertheless argued that civil rights protections had been violated in the past; if it happened before, it can happen again. Of course, there was the third approach that consisted of those individuals who simply did not find it important to be enumerated. This third group can be found among Americans of any demographic group. They simply do not see the importance in participating in the census, or any other political activity for that matter.

IIC tried to combat against these approaches by stressing the importance of Muslims being enumerated. An "Information Alert" delivered on March 31, 2010 compelled members of the Muslim community to participate in the 2010 Census. In doing so, IIC educated Shi'as on the vital importance of participating.

> What is often misconstrued among the American-Muslim and Arab population
> is what their information will be used for. Based on the Census, every year the
> federal government distributes more than $400 billion to state, local, and tribal
> governments. Several faith-based organizations use the census data to apply for

grants and determine locations for new facilities. Additionally, Census data from Muslims affects their voice in Congress, including redistricting of state legislations, county and city councils. In order to promote and encourage public and civic engagement among the American Muslim community, it is vital for every Muslim household to complete and mail in the census form in order to get their voices heard and counted.[2]

Additionally, the IIC's blog page further allays fears that the information gathered will be used to target Muslims. Irma Khoja, the Miami Area Media Relations Officer for IIC uses her expertise as a law student at the University of Miami to blog: "[The] census is only being used for statistical purposes. It asks for the responders' name, race, and ethnicity, but not their religion. It aims to count all U.S. residents – that means both citizens and non-citizens, but the Bureau cannot share the information with other federal agencies. Doing so would be against the law."[3] Here IIC used the legal expertise of one of its members to reach out to the Shi'a community, and to allay fears that Muslims would be identified as Muslims in the census. They can be identified as being Pakistani, Iranian, African-American, Hispanic, but one's religious preference is not sought out when the census is administered.

---

[2] Islamic Information Center, "Info Alert: IIC Calls Upon Community Members to Participate in the Census."

[3] Khoja, "Why Muslims Need to Fill out the U.S. Census Form."

Khoja's role also reflects Naqvi's vision of including the youth and females in leadership positions in the community. Naqvi's insistence on cooperating in this society, making sure that Shi'as and Muslims are counted, and that they participate in politics and society, has resulted in members, such as Khoja, believing in what he preaches, and it also emboldens them to use their expertise to inform others about the necessity of being involved. Undoubtedly, both Naqvi and Khoja realize the importance of being included in the Census goes beyond instilling a sense of security among their community members… simply put, the more Shi'as and Muslims in the United States that are enumerated in the Census sends the message to policymakers that this demographic group is an important one. It is increasing in numbers. There are potential votes to be won or lost during key elections, and probably more important is that many members of this group are highly educated and are considerably wealthy; they are worth more than a single vote, they are potential donors to political campaigns. Therefore, these types of initiatives, which are affected by the way people such as Naqvi think has resulted in political behavior that not only aides the Shi'a community, but also signals to policymakers that this community is a potential political goldmine, and possibly a minefield if they are not taken seriously.

As can be seen from this example as well as the example of healthcare reform mentioned in the previous chapter, IIC makes the attempt to engage Muslims and non-Muslims, Shi'as and non-Shi'as. As such, it has both an external and internal objective. The "Information Alerts" allow for IIC to simply communicate about certain policy

issues that are important to American citizens, while at the same time frames the discussion in a manner that is simultaneously Muslim/Shi'a and American. The two domestic issues discussed, healthcare reform and the 2010 Census, are relevant to all Americans in some manner, but this does not indicate that IIC shies away from informing people on international topics. It has taken public positions such as supporting U.N. World Water Day; condemning the massacre of Shi'as in Karbalā', Iraq and Karachi, Pakistan during *Arbaeen* of 2010; denouncing the treatment of the Shi'a Houthi minority in Yemen; and supporting the 2011 uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, and Libya. The leadership of IIC is cognizant that many Americans, Muslim or otherwise, are unaware of the intricacies of these international issues, and if IIC is to gain any traction with the broader American population it must speak to issues that affect the U.S. first and foremost. Simultaneously, IIC tries to draw the Shi'a community into increased political and social participation by continuously informing them of the universality of the message of the Prophet and his Household.

Some of the activists interviewed for this research did not claim to have been directly inspired by the lectures and speeches of Shi'a leaders. Rather, some had constructed their own tropes and rationales stemming from Shi'a symbols and narratives that affected their political and social behavior. It became clear that the narratives of Shi'ism did not necessarily have the immediate effect I initially expected. By this I mean that many of these actors already possessed dispositions that led them towards political and social action. The narratives and symbols of Shi'ism acted more as

intervening variables. In other words, the symbols and narratives of Shi'ism affected these actors, but they were not necessarily the reason for the political and social action. Instead, these people had already formed a politically and socially conscious lifestyle, which in turn was only strengthened and given spiritual legitimacy through the stories of Shi'ism. The remainder of this section discusses these activists.

Jihad Saleh

Jihad Saleh stands out as one of the most interesting interviewees in this research. His entire life can be described as a "sacrifice" for the greater good, more often than not to the detriment of his own personal desires. When I first was introduced to him, Jihad was working as a staffer for Democratic Congressman from New York's 6th Congressional District, Gregory Meeks, and he also served as the head of the Congressional Muslim Staffers Association. Jihad is of mixed ethnicity. His mother is African-American and his father is Mexican-American. He stated that he grew up in a working-class family. He was raised in South-Central Los Angeles, until his mother married a well-to-do lawyer, which resulted in a move to the more affluent Westside of Los Angeles. Jihad explains that he was baptized as a Roman Catholic, but predominantly attended Black Baptist churches on most Sundays. His conversion to Islam occurred during his junior year of high school, though he stated that he had been on this path as early as his freshman year. In discussing his conversion he gave a detailed and informative history of the thought process that led to his decision. His account is also instructive for

understanding how throughout his life he made decisions based on a researched and educated approach. This lengthy quote describes that process:

Like a lot of African-Americans, the Nation of Islam was kind of my first interest into Islam. I did go the Nation of Islam Mosque #27. I attended classes. I associated with the brothers on the corners. I read the books by Elijah Muhammad. Studied my lessons. I was on that path towards becoming a Nation of Islam member, because at the time it was very hard. I didn't always know the different between Orthodox Islam and what was Nation of Islam, because the Nation is so much more public in the black community. But I would always, here and there, have contact with people who were "orthodox"… largely Sunni African-American brothers. You know, brothers who would actually be wearing *thobes*, turbans, selling incents on the corner. But also some older brothers who were, as I see now, were out of the Warith Deen Muhammad community, that version of Nation of Islam… So I always had contact with them, dialogue with them about the Islamic principles. But at some point in time, I'd [realize] some contradictions with what I was told, what was Islam… compared to an orthodox, compared to a Nation of Islam. It was that kind of tension… who was saying what was right? Was Jesus really born without the intervention of a man? Is the white man the devil? All these different kinds of issues… Is Elijah Muhammad a prophet or not? It eventually led me to do more studies as much as I could in a Catholic high school. Using our library. Using my encyclopedia at home. Going

to libraries trying to find what I could. Remember, this wasn't during the age of Borders and Barnes and Noble… It wasn't like I could jump down the street. Plus I was in high school, this was the early 90s, and I was at a Catholic high school. There were basically no Muslims there. So my approach to Islam was all textual. So basically I became orthodox, and when I made the *shahadah* (the profession of faith)… stepping away from the Nation of Islam, at the point… I was also uniquely what I would call "proto-Shi'a." The books that I would find at the library were from Saudi, those types of books, good books… foundational books, but books that gave from the Sunni perspective using terms like the "five pillars," the "four *khalīfā rashidun*," saying predestination was a part of the faith. But I remember I had always said I was Shi'a from a basic passage I read in my junior year's comparative religion classes… a section called the "Sects of Islam," and there was a paragraph on who Shi'as were and a paragraph on who the Sunnis were. Based upon that one page, the only reason I felt more naturally comfortable saying I was Shi'a was because I remember it saying Shi'as believe in a continual connection of divine leadership through the Prophet's family, where the other one said it was somewhat of a democratic practice or a selecting by the community. For that reason I felt more natural with the Shi'a, and I always said I was a Shi'a.[4]

---

[4] Jihad Saleh, "Semi-Structured Interview", November 24, 2008.

His initial political activism was as an African-American. He became a member of the Muslim Student Association when he entered UCLA as a political science and sociology double major, and it was there where he interacted with more Shi'as and learned the intricacies of the faith. However he contributes his early forays into Islam and the interaction with the Warith Deen Muhammad community for his acceptance of all sects of Islam.

> The beautiful thing at UCLA… it was never based on this notion that if I was going to be Shi'a I couldn't associate with Sunnis. There was no notion of division. I never saw Sunni and Shi'a at the point of division… And looking back now, I think because I always had that at base level a lot of interaction with brothers and sisters from the Warith Deen Muhammad community, being a largely Sunni community, they still always accepted me no matter what I said, and I helped transplant that to my relationship typically when I started going to more South Asian, Arab communities which could have had [these] historical tendencies of conflict.[5]

He credits his time at UCLA for the manner in which he learned to become both Muslim and American, and how to be politically involved. His particular status of being extremely involved in the African Student Union, but also a part of the

---

[5] Ibid.

Muslim community at UCLA allowed him to interact with different politically-minded individuals, which influenced his own political development. He stated,

> I would say at that time I was more of an African-American activist who happened to be Muslim and who could sprinkle his activism with terminology with issues of social justice. But it wasn't until post-911, jumping a couple of years later… I started to flip because of necessity and choice and the demands of the situation where I've become now more Muslim who happens to be African-American… I was the "campus Muslim," because of my constant hanging out with the African-American, Latino, Asian. So I always felt, to some degree, my character, what I did, even though I may have not been the most core member of MSA, I, to most people, represented what the Muslim community was about. So I've always felt that burden that what I do will greatly determine how people perceive who or what Muslims are about.[6]

After graduating from UCLA, Jihad taught civics and hisroty at the City of Knowledge Islamic School, which was under the tutelage of Imām Murtadha al-Qazwini, the "patriarch of the Qazwini clan here in the United States" as Saleh refers to him. Two of Murtadha al-Qazwini's sons, Moustafa and Hassan, would eventually become well-known leaders of the Shi'a Muslim community in the United States, and along with their younger brother Ja'far al-Qazweeni, are all included in this research as proponents

---

[6] Ibid.

of an accommodation approach to political and social participation. Jihad's time with this family afforded him the opportunity to further his knowledge of the principles and beliefs of Shi'a Islam.

But it was a great experience; because I was around this family of learned Shi'a scholars… it was a learning experience. Even after school, going to their house, dialoguing with them greatly increased my level of Islamic knowledge. It was also at this time where I found out about Imām al-Khoei Foundation in New York, where basically I started ordering all the books from Ansariyan Publications, reading those books. So basically my last year at UCLA and my first two years out of school, was just a lot of knowledge whether it was book reading or having that access. But even when I was at UCLA, my senior year and the next couple of years, I would quite often go to the Muslim Youth Group at Imām Moustafa al-Qazwini's center out in Orange County. We'd bring other UCLA people and go listen to him and talk about issues to the youth. He's very accessible, and I think it's because he's had two children raised here, three children in the United States, and he's spent a good amount of time here… to really be a source to Muslim Americans. He, just like his other brothers here, is trying the best they can to be appreciative of the context of what Muslims are. And honestly, unlike other *masjeds* (mosques), Sunni or Shi'a, that are run by Imāms from other lands, they try to recreate the homeland… Imām Qazwini did not try to recreate a "little Karbalā'" or a "little Qom" where these rules and

norms that weren't truly Islamic were to dominate. They had freedom, at least particularly for the youth. We felt empowered that way. He wanted us to have our faith applicable to our situation. So I greatly respect that about him and his family in doing that.[7]

In discussing how he attained the staffer position he held at the time of our meeting, he stated that he never intended to do such work, nor was it his choice even after holding that position for as long as he did. He argued that he often felt that it was his burden to carry, one in which he would forgo his own aspirations and goals for the greater good. In the post-911 world, he felt it was his duty to present himself as a Muslim first and African-American second.

I never had this deep notion of doing this type of work, and if you ask me now still it's not what I always wanted to do. But I'm a person who has been at times… willing to take another track in my life which is not my preference to help other people. I guess my mom raised me to be selfless. But there are benefits for me. I enjoy my work here, but there are those unique opportunities in history where people are compelled to do something based more than on their own personal desire. That's not just myself. I've met other Muslims that have felt that way. So I decided to pursue a career in public life, potentially in city government or more traditional track. I think you can pick up, I was more into

---

[7] Ibid.

271

radical politics, counter-culture… and I still am in many ways. I didn't think it'd be Congress… I thought after graduating from Stanford, maybe going into public affairs type of career… I ended up doing a fellowship working for a city councilman in LA to see if I liked working in public affairs. It was a good experience! At the same time I applied for my public policy degree at the Woodrow Wilson School and I was accepted. And I went and studied domestic politics and public policy, and I've used that, both of my experiences at Stanford and Princeton, being great schools, great networks. Eventually that led me, in a roundabout way, to work on Capitol Hill, fortunately in an office of a Congressional Black Caucus member in a major city, New York compared to LA… I still get to do what I'm interested in personally, education… because of my teaching history, my degree in education, but I was also hired by the Chief of Staff of Congressman Meeks, Jameel Johnson, who was "the Muslim on Capitol Hill." He wanted me to basically help him run this newly formed Congressional Muslim Staffers Association.[8]

My first interaction with Jihad was at the weekly Friday Muslim congregational prayer in the Capitol building. He was acting in the capacity as leader of the Congressional Muslim Staffers Association, and it was through him that I was introduced to many members of the Washington, D.C. Shiʻa community. He is not your

---

[8] Ibid.

"average" Shi'a, or your "average" Congressional staffer. He has stayed close to his self-described "counter-culture" identity by sporting long, shoulder length hair and diamond earrings. He also stands out because of his reluctance to wear neckties, instead opting for the bowtie. His work on Capitol Hill, especially as the successor to Jameel Johnson as the head of the Congressional Muslim Staffers Association (CMSA), has entailed getting more Muslims involved in the day-to-day operations of the national government. He continuously has pushed for increased participation from women, African-Americans, and Shi'as within the Muslim American community. In Jihad's opinion, Muslims have been seen as the stereotypical Sunni, Arab and/or South Asian male in the media and in public relations. For most Americans, the average Muslim probably hailed from the Arab world or the Asian subcontinent, had a big beard, and spoke with an accent. He found this to be true not only of non-Muslims' perceptions of what a Muslim should look like, but also of what many Muslims believed to be the stereotypical Muslim. He is a proponent of including Muslims that do not "fit the mold." Consequently, as head of CMSA he pushed for the inclusion of Muslims from different schools of thought and ethnic backgrounds in the membership of different Muslim organizations as well as in positions of importance in governmental and policymaking arenas. He explained that he often questioned the leaders of Muslim organizations if they have attempted to include Shi'as in their mailing lists in order to inform them of the myriad opportunities that are available to the Muslim community. "Do you do any type of due diligence to reach out to the Shi'a community? I also do the

same for the African-American community… because we see in the larger major Muslim organizations generally African-Americans are also not present, even though they constitute literally one-third of the Muslim community."[9] He continued by framing his opinions in a discussion about his role as a public Shi'a, and how he does not necessarily relish that role, but how it was necessary to keep Muslim American organizations accountable to the greater Muslim community, which includes Shi'as, but also African-Americans and women.

> So, I take great pride in being a Shi'a, but at the same time I don't have the mentality of "I'm the only one up here! I'm mister Shi'a!" I do not like playing the role of the Shi'a voice consistently at certain meetings where I am the only one or one of the few in a larger group… and the same way being the only black person at these meetings. I shouldn't have to be there to speak on the behalf of the community. Now the thing is, it's a two way street. As we learn in our faith that "If we take one step towards Allah, He will take many steps towards you." Yes, we must call our organizations that claim to represent the Muslim American community, and make them really mean that *by engaging* Muslims. There's no need for you to claim to represent me if you won't engage me or

---

[9] Ibid.

contact me in some form or fashion. So these organizations need to do that. They need to take a step toward the Shi'a community.[10]

Through CMSA Jihad hoped to combat the negative perceptions of Islam in the United States, and the goal of the organization is to supply members of Congress with access to Muslim individuals that could help shape a more positive impression of Muslims. Additionally, it increases Muslim political involvement, and allows Muslims the access to centers of policy making.

> There is a general lack of knowledge by congressional members and their staffers about what Muslims are and their concerns. This organization was needed, this CMSA, to put on briefings, cultural programs, and religious events to increase the knowledge of congressional members, staffers, and other government officials, and also to the benefit of the larger community with public events.[11]

However, Jihad explained that staffers are not hired to be "Muslim staffers," rather they are staffers that happen to be Muslim, and as such they become assets for the offices in which they work. In essence, they often become a bargain hire: being specialists in their area of expertise as well as offering incite into the policy preferences of the ever-increasing Muslim community. Jihad himself served officially as the Educational

---

[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

Legislative Assistant for Congressman Meeks, and focused on education policy as well as Homeland Security issues. In performing his duties he laments the fact that unfortunately some of the only occasions in which he dealt with Muslim issues involved discussions of Homeland Security and foreign policy, but that he also, through his capacity as a Congressional staffer as well as his position through CMSA, was able to deal more directly with Muslims and issues that are relevant to this community. Additionally, given that many Muslim constituents populate Congressman Meeks' district, Jihad became an invaluable asset to the office as an advisor on Muslim-American issues. He argues, "I can say my Congressman is very sympathetic to the Muslim community, and his office is engaged with helping the Muslim community, because these are his voters, his constituents."[12] Additionally, Congressman Meeks' track record of hiring Muslim Americans for his office shows his willingness to bring members of this community into important positions in the centers of policymaking.

Jihad also commented on the work of CMSA in organizing the Friday prayer service in the Capitol building, which has become a symbolic place of pilgrimage for Muslims visiting Washington, D.C. "Young Muslim families are starting to take, like other American families, that traditional trip to the nation's capital… with your children. Not only do they get to go see the monuments now, the White House… now they're saying 'We're going to the Capitol because we heard there is a *jumu'ah* (Friday

---

[12] Ibid.

prayer service), and they get that experience."[13] Jihad believes that the symbolic power of holding a Friday prayer service in the iconic Capitol building does much for solidifying the place of Muslims' position in the American religious, political, and social fabric. For someone such as himself, the congruency of Islamic and American values comes from his experiences as a convert to Islam. As such, his personal history has led him to appreciate both his Shi'a Islamic identity, as well as his American identity. But to go further, the plurality of American society, has allowed him, someone of mixed ethnicity and of a minority faith, to affect political policy. Jihad's own personal passion for the fight for social justice does not necessarily come from his Islam or his belief in the Shi'a school of thought. However, his choice of Shi'a Islam as his religion has aided this search for social justice. The symbols and narratives that I describe as accommodationist are merely tools for individuals such as Jihad Saleh. He was an "accommodationist" before he became a Shi'a, and therefore he chose this particular understanding of his faith and its subsequent symbols and narratives because they fit his already forming worldview.

Individuals such as Jihad draw inspiration from the symbols and narratives of Shi'ism, and the manner in which he absorbs them is based on his previous experiences. However, that being said, his interaction with the Qazwini family also had an effect on his view of Shi'ism and the symbols and narratives that are associated with it.

---

[13] Ibid.

Therefore, though he described himself as a "proto-Shi'a" in his early years as a Muslim, his subsequent interaction with a family that espoused an accommodationist viewpoint to political and social participation undoubtedly had an effect on how he perceived the faith, and it helped to bolster his already forming political activism. This supports the finding that Shi'a symbols and narratives do not necessarily cause political behavior, but act more as an intervening variable that supplements and strengthens already held beliefs about political and social action.

Jihad's example shows us that he had drawn from a wide variety of examples and traditions to formulate a personal approach to participation. He is African-American, and as such is very much involved in that community, especially prior to and during his early years at UCLA. Post-911, he made the deliberate choice to work harder for the Muslim community because he felt an obligation to that identity given the public relations nightmare in which the Muslim community had found itself. And most recently he found it necessary to position himself in the center of policymaking in the United States, not necessarily as a Muslim activist, but a Congressional staffer and political activist who happened to be Muslim, and a Shi'a Muslim to be precise. His cause is not simply a Muslim cause, but rather a struggle and search for social justice, terminology that he brought up continuously during our interactions both in Washington, D.C. during November 2008 as well as in Los Angeles in December of that same year. Jihad's passion for social justice was not just reserved for Muslims, African-Americans, or any other particular demographic group. Rather, he saw social

justice as something that should be spread throughout society. It is no coincidence that his choice of the Shi'a school of thought puts a premium on the concept of *'adālāh* (justice) as one of the roots of the religion. *'Adālāh* refers to God's Divine Justice and Justness, but also by extension it requires that mankind behave with justice and justness with one another. Man is commanded to do good and forbid evil. Jihad's quest for social justice for all segments of society is supported by his religious convictions.

In a continuation of the discussion of Shi'a inclusion and participation within the greater Muslim American community he offered some interesting insight into his opinions involving how Shi'as have allowed themselves to play the role of a "minority within a minority."

> There is historical marginalization, which is why Shi'as are very hesitant. But we shouldn't run away from that. Historically they have been persecuted in other countries. But that doesn't have to happen here. Now the flipside is, the Shi'a community has to also open up and say "Yes, we want to be engaged and connected." I think lots of Shi'as constantly crave that situation… it gives them a certain level of the moral high horse where they can always point at being oppressed. That's stupid to me! From my perspective obviously from the African-American tradition we say "We're going to get our rights! We are going to get ours!" From the Shi'a community it's like our historical role to be

oppressed. Well, I didn't become Muslim for that. I didn't become Shiʿa for that. That is not part of my mentality. My intention is to fight.[14]

He continued to contend that even when he and other like-minded Shiʿas approach Sunni dominated organizations and convince them to be more inclusive of their Shiʿa coreligionists, Shiʿas often fail to show up. So on one hand the Shiʿas complain of being marginalized, but when they are invited they refuse to participate. This leaves the Sunnis with the impression that in reality Shiʿas simply do not want to work together for a greater Muslim cause. In the future, when Shiʿas complain of being left out, the Sunni organizations simply point to the fact that in the past they made an attempt to be inclusive but it only resulted in a waste of time and energy, which could have been used in a more productive manner.

When I inquired whether Imām Ḥusayn's struggle was an example he took a cue from when he works for social justice, he answered in the affirmative. "Am I trying to continue on his (Imām Ḥusayn) struggle? Yes. I always walk in the light of Imām Ḥusayn. And I try to help others to perceive that there is another way to see Imām Ḥusayn. You don't have to be slaughtered on the battlefield to be like Imām Ḥusayn."[15] Jihad approaches his own political activity as the continuation of the work that the Prophets and Imāms carried out. To go further, he also includes other figures such as *ʿulamāʾ* as well as Muslim and non-Muslim role models. Through these examples, he

---

[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

280

has constructed a sense of responsibility; he feels that it is incumbent upon people such as himself to follow the lead of those that came before, and to make themselves examples for future generations. He believes that Shi'as can look at all of the Imāms of the Household of the Prophet as examples, as each one offers particular ways to act in different contexts. He discussed this and returned to Imām Ḥusayn's willingness to sacrifice his life, and tied it to his own sacrifices in life.

> And even though each [Imām] did it in a particular style throughout their life, I have to see how I may have to switch up my gears at different stages of my life to reflect the different Imāms or Prophets. Imām Ḥusayn… he's an example for somebody of the ways that his determination, his love of humanity, his commitment, his willing to make that sacrifice… No one just wants to go and die. No one wants to leave their children. No one wants to leave their weeping wives and sisters. So I understand the sacrifice of Imām Ḥusayn… I'm Muslim enough to say, "Is there something else I'd rather have been doing?" But the context necessitated my position. If I've been blessed by Allah to be very public, to build rapport with people and to influence other people… Well what do I need to do in this post-911 era where the Muslim community needs to develop this public affairs, government, social engagement capacity by inspiring young

Muslims?… Then if I'm good at that, so be it, then I'm going to commit my life

to it to some degree. That is my sacrifice.[16]

He focused on Imām Ḥusayn and Imām ʿAlī's resoluteness in the face of struggles and

their respective sacrifices. The narratives of these two Imāms martyrdoms depict them

as not fearing death. They are portrayed as being fearless, not loving the temporal

world, and willing to make the ultimate sacrifices in order to establish justice, fight

oppression, and uphold the values of Islam. Shiʿas are told that they eagerly approached

martyrdom and the next life, and as such Shiʿas should be guided by the same

characteristic of selflessness. Jihad, in describing the ways in which he has sacrificed

large portions of his life for the political and social position of Muslims in the United

States, mentions how the martyrdoms of Imām ʿAlī and Imām Ḥusayn were victories

for these two men. They gained victory *through* the selfless act of giving their lives for

justice. From his description we see how he has developed a bond with the Imāms'

struggles and sacrifices, but also has placed other Muslim and non-Muslim activists in

the same genre of individuals that have given so much for the quest for social justice.

Imām Ḥusayn died to some degree with a sense of pleasure… Imām Ḥusayn

knows he is always successful. In the same way when Imām ʿAlī was struck in

the neck and he said, if I'm correct to paraphrase Imām ʿAlī, "Today I am

successful." Why did he say that? It's kind of like what Malcolm talked about.

---

[16] Ibid.

When you know you're being attacked by the system, that's when you know

you're doing something right. When someone's to the point [of] attacking him,

he's reached a point where he knows he is doing something right that the forces

of Shaytan have to take him out because he's doing so much good… The same

with Imām Ḥusayn. He died *fī sabīlallah* (in the way/path of Allah). He's an

example…of the ultimate sacrifice, and my struggle is nothing close to any of

these people, whether it be the Imāms, down to Malcolm, or other of the great

figures in Muslim history and non-Muslim history; Dr. King, César Chávez, all

these people. My struggle's nothing compared to them. Whether if it's as a

Muslim or African-American or as a person… I'm always appreciative that I

stand on the shoulders of giants.[17]

Jihad never intended to be a career staffer in Congress, and he left the Hill in the

year 2010. He sacrificed a part of his life for the betterment of society, and particularly

the Muslim community. In my discussions with him it became evident that he has

placed a tremendous burden on his shoulders because of the relative lack of Muslims in

politics. Therefore, he has tried to serve as that example in order to fill the void, and he

hopes that others follow his lead, just as he followed the lead of individuals that came

---

[17] Ibid. Mr. Saleh refers to the assassination of Imām ʻAlī in the Mosque of Kufa. The exact words that the Imām murmured after struck in the head by the poisoned sword of ibn Muljam were *fuztu wa Rab al-Kaʻaba* (By the Lord of the Kaʼaba I'm successful!)

before him. His political proclivities have been bolstered and strengthened by his faith, one in which was chosen not inherited.

> Look, I have the privilege, all praise due to Allah, for being a revert. I chose this *dīn* (religion). I chose this faith freely. I'm a "born again Muslim," if you want to put it in those terms. In that understanding of my Islam, Shi'ism has always been at the core of it. You hear the stories of Imām Ḥusayn. And how can I as an African-American… if I love Malcolm X, how can I not love Imām Ḥusayn equally or more? Because of his special position to the Prophet as an example, and his station with Allah. So, I chose this faith, and I carefully chose it and developed and studied it, and I've been inspired by it to be that consequent folding of what it is to be human as a Muslim. To become closer to the essence… to our Creator. And that's through the different facets of Islam, through our political, social, economic and our spiritual.[18]

Given the negative connotations that are often associated with the word *jihād*, I wondered why he willingly chose a name that could possibly bring him much grief. My initial experience with him, his long hair, black diamond earrings, and bowtie, coupled with the fact that he still saw himself as a part of the counterculture movement, led me to believe that he was going for shock factor by deciding on such a provocative name. However, as I spent more time with him, and learned more about his African-American

---

[18] Ibid.

284

and Latino background, his personality, his political inclinations, his sense of duty to a greater cause, and his placing such a heavy burden on his own shoulders, it became evident that he chose the name to represent his struggle… his *jihād*. He sees his struggle as a continuation of the struggle of those people that came before him, whether it is the Prophets, the Imāms, or other Muslims and/or non-Muslims. It is important to reiterate, that he does not see himself as being "cut from the same cloth" of these past historical figures. Rather, he uses them as inspirational models to bolster his own political and social proclivities. But to go further, he qualified his *jihad* by making it *ṣāleḥ*… an Arabic word that can be translated into English as "righteous." He viewed his life as a "righteous struggle" for social justice. Towards the end of our discussion in Washington, D.C., I asked if his sense of duty was the reason he picked this name when he became Muslim. He answered in the following manner:

> Yeah. Because I understood their struggle. If I'm able to see farther, it's not because I did it on my own. It's because other people struggled so I could be here to do this. So with opportunity and success comes great responsibility. I hope and pray I always do it for the right reasons. We're always human, but we always hope we do it for the right reasons. We do it for the pleasure of Allah, for the benefit of His creation. I have to give back the little bit I've benefited from. I'll say I try to be a leader in my own capacity, we all should be, but Imām Warith Deen Muhammad said, "What is leadership? It's the ability to reproduce yourself." If I die tomorrow, but it doesn't move on, what good was I? I've

already stated to some degree this is not my preference of what I want to do, but I know the importance of it. So if I'm not out there helping other people develop the skills to take my place or to be better than me, I know they can be way better than me… than what I do, then it's all for not. I've just been wasting my time for the last four or five years. So I'm very conscious of what I need to do in the same way that Imām Ḥusayn stood his ground, stood for his principles, was an example, but also… to reproduce himself. Some people say Imām Ḥusayn saved Islam, the true character of what a Muslim is… What is my sacrifice? To insure there is a continuation of real Muslims, or a more complete way to practice our faith, or to be publicly a Muslim. I'm always inspired by Imām Ḥusayn, he's always with me, very close.[19]

Fatma and Nadia Saleh

Fatma and Nadia Saleh's family emigrated from Lebanon in 1971 looking for better educational and economic opportunities. Fatma and Nadia were raised in the United States from the ages five and two respectively, and as such they consider themselves to be very American. They both speak broken Arabic, and neither knows how to read or write in the language of their birth. Nadia stated from her recollection that there was not a single mosque in the southern California area when they first arrived in the United States. There were no *ḥalāl* markets, and therefore they bought all of their meat from

---

[19] Ibid.

the supermarket. Their parents prayed and fasted, and as such the children followed suit, but they did not have much of an Islamic upbringing in their youth. Fatma stated that their parents were illiterate, and as such the children knew the faith only through what their parents taught them, which were basic rituals. "You fast, you pray, you fear God, you don't do *harām*. This is what was passed to us. But the treasure of Islam was never shown to us… it was more ritualistic."[20] Nadia claimed, "It was basically rituals that we kind of underwent, but not really understanding the significance of them. Growing up Muslim in California at the time, you were definitely a minority. If you said 'Muslim,' people would say 'What is that?' They just didn't understand."[21] She recalled being a child and telling others that she was Christian to avoid being different from everyone else. Fatma added that they were usually the only Muslim family, as well as the only "ethnic" family on the block. "My mom was probably the only *muḥajabāh* (woman who wears *ḥijāb*) for several counties. But it wasn't something [others in society] would look upon, because her *ḥijāb* was very loose… it wasn't something that caught people's attention."[22]

Their involvement with Shi'a community increased after Fatma experienced a self-proclaimed "spiritual journey" back to her faith 12 years prior to our meeting. She stated that she was never very religious, and that compared to her Nadia was always more dedicated to Islam, but that her personal "awakening" was a result of discovering

---

[20] Fatma Saleh, "Semi-Structured Interview", January 2, 2009.
[21] Nadia Saleh, "Semi-Structured Interview", January 1, 2009.
[22] Saleh, "Semi-Structured Interview."

information about her faith of which she previously was unaware. After her pilgrimage to Makkah, she began volunteering more with the community, and she was also concerned for her three children's relationship with God and Islam. She wanted them to have more knowledge about the faith than she had when she was their age, and she was also worried about exposing them to immoral and unIslamic situations they would face in public schools.

> I was raised here, so I knew exactly what was going on (in public schools), and I didn't want to feed my kids to the lion's den. So I sought out an alternative… the City of Knowledge School. Although there existed other Islamic schools in LA County, there wasn't a Shi'a one at all. And I was also very concerned because I went to look at the Sunni schools and I wasn't very comfortable… because I had an attachment to *Ahl al-Bayt*… and I love *Ahl al-Bayt* and I believe in them wholeheartedly. And I read a lot and understood where the differences lied, so I did not feel comfortable with my children being raised with role models such as Abū Bakr.[23]

Because her children were enrolled there, Fatma spent much of her energy at the City of Knowledge School run by the al-Qazwini family. After 9-11, Imām Moustafa

---

[23] Ibid. Abū Bakr refers to the first *khalīfāh* (successor) of the Prophet Muhammad, which Sunnis hold to be the first of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs. Shi'as on the other hand, do not view Abū Bakr or his two successors, 'Umar and 'Uthmān, as being legitimate leaders of the Islamic nation after the death of the Prophet. Instead, Shi'as contend that it was Imām 'Alī who was divinely appointed by Allah to be the successor to the Prophet.

al-Qazwini pulled her into a larger role at the Islamic Education Center of Orange County (IECOC). His approach and way of communicating with those inside and outside of the IECOC community appealed to Fatma, and this is probably true due to his understanding of American culture. Just as with Jihad Saleh's interaction with the al-Qazwini family, Fatma was drawn into action because of Imām Moustafa al-Qazwini's foresight to recognize that Islam must speak to American culture. He believes that Muslims must strive to be American if they are living in the United States. Additionally, he professes that there is nothing contradictory about being Muslim and American. In fact, in one of his lectures that I witnessed in Orange County, he explicitly stated that the future of Islam would be in the United States.

> Many intellectuals and commentators believe that America provides a fertile ground for the acceptance of Islam. For several reasons… Islam in America is going to be a source of hope for many Muslims worldwide. And many believe that if Islam is going to have a major breakthrough in the foreseeable future, it will happen right here in America… Number one, it's the diverse nature of the American community and the American civilization. This country was not based from day one on diversity or pluralism. But then this was one of the major goals of the Founding Fathers here. And they kept resisting and fighting many challenges, one of them is the prejudice, the racial barriers. And they succeeded to a certain limit… most of us witnessed what happened on November 4th [2008]. I think the majority of the American people succeeded in overcoming

the race barrier here. The race barrier was one of the strong elements that divided the society. But by electing a man who does not belong to the majority… his color, his race, his background does not subscribe to the majority of the Americans who are 60% of them are white. That's a major breakthrough. And this means that there is a future for Islam. Although Islam did not emerge here in America, but the growth of Islam, the development of Islam, the acceptance of Islam will have a big future here, *inshallah* (God-willing), here in America. This is one reason: a culture [that] is diverse. A culture that can provide you with the growth of not only Islam… take any religious tradition today. In fact… in this society there is almost the representation of every religious creed and every religious ideology and every religious tradition… There were some people who tried to hinder this, and curtail the movement of Islam and other religions in this country. There were some people who suggested that the American Constitution established America as an only Christian country. But this type of thinking was defeated on November 4th, 2008. So we have a big responsibility here. This is number one why we should look forward and be optimistic that, *inshallah*, Islam is going to spread in America. The diverse nature… a country that is based and established on religious pluralism and religious diversity… Number two reason is that religion plays a major role in the life of the American people. There was a recent survey I read two months ago. The survey says 92% of the American people believe in God.

This is a huge majority… 54% of the American people they say they pray regularly. They attend religious temples and mosques and synagogues and churches… Religion is flourishing in America. Maybe the economy is declining, but on the other hand religion and the belief in God and the system of belief is flourishing here. Another reason, brothers and sisters, that we make a big notice of it, we Muslims, immigrants in general, we notice this difference in America that is not found elsewhere: Government in America, the political entity, the political establishment in America can not manipulate religion in America. Cannot interfere in your religious life, unlike other countries. We have some countries that if you don't go to *masjid* (mosque) at the time of the *ṣalāt* (prayer), they destroy your shop. They close it down. They force you to go to the *masjid*… This is in Saudi Arabia… You have no choice. And always history taught us that when you use force and coercion and force people to do something, that is going to backfire.[24]

This way of thinking has brought many people to believe in the work that he does, and this is especially true of the youth who may sometimes struggle with being Muslim in a post-9/11 United States. Fatma is one of those people who claim to have benefited from Sayyid Moustafa al-Qazwini's approach to the Shi'a Islam and political and social participation. "He was very open-minded. He saw what was happening. He knew what

---

[24] Imam Moustafa al-Qazwini, *The Call of Muslims in America* (Islamic Education Center of Orange County, 2009).

needed to be done. And he went after it. I like the professionalism. I like the organization."[25]

Fatma sits on the IECOC board, and also participates as one of many camp leaders for the yearly youth retreat IECOC sponsors. She is also a member of the Universal Muslim Association of America (UMAA), a national organization that seeks to unite all the Shi'as under one umbrella. At the time of my interview with her, she was also acting as what I would term "media director" of IECOC, which required her to learn on-the-job how to operate the audio and video recording equipment of the two-story facility. She felt compelled to take on this task after a few gentlemen vacated the position due to time constraints. In discussing this additional burden, she stated, "I felt it was a shame for such informative information to go to waste. So I figured if Allah puts me to this task then I have to do it."[26] My visit to IECOC coincided with the Muḥarram season of 2008/2009 (December 2008/January 2009), and as such Fatma was extremely busy coordinating the speaking events on the first floor, keeping and eye on the recording equipment in the media room upstairs (which is were I interviewed her while she was operating the complicated audio and video equipment), as well as scheduling interviews for my arrival in Orange County. She works tirelessly for her community, even doing other work outside of the center such as outreach and inter and intrafaith dialogue. Nadia was a substitute teacher when I interviewed her, and had one semester remaining

---

[25] Saleh, "Semi-Structured Interview."
[26] Ibid.

to obtain her Masters degree in Education, which would make her fully credentialed to become an elementary school teacher.

Both sisters are heavily involved in the community that surrounds IECOC, and especially with the camp that is affiliated with the community. Fatma recruited Nadia to become a camp leader because of her rapport with the youth. As camp leaders they themselves do not impart religious knowledge on the students, but are instead in charge of the logistics and day-to-day running of the camp. In their close interaction with the youth, both have seen some promising signs in regards to political and social participation. Nadia explained that amongst the youth she has seen some increase in political activity. "I noticed there's a lot of fervor… among the youth. Wanting to have a voice and be heard, and spread the teachings of Ahl al-Bayt and clear up a lot of the misconceptions. I think they're on their way to getting to the point where they can maybe become equal with the Sunni."[27] Nadia encourages the youth she interacts with to become more active through voting, contributing their time and money, and writing letters to their congresspersons.

> I did have this conversation with a group of girls that were with me in my cabin, and they were kind of hesitant, kind of thinking if they should take that route, or if they should join Muslim organizations on campus at their local universities, and this was something I definitely encouraged them to do… [I asked her why

---

[27] Saleh, "Semi-Structured Interview."

they were hesitant]… Sometimes, especially after 9-11, being out there and

being recognized, sometimes people are looked at in kind of a negative way.[28]

Fatma also commented on how to help the youth become more politically and socially

aware through the youth group that is associated with IECOC. One year she instituted a

policy for the members to present current affairs during the youth group meetings. She

assigned a week to every member of the youth group, and they were required to inform

the rest of the members of the current events from around the country and the rest of the

world. These events could be political, social, religious, medical, or from a myriad of

other topics. The group would then discuss these topics in order hear different opinions

about the subject at hand. Fatma stated that the purpose of this was to inform the group

of pertinent events, but also to get the youth to think beyond their classroom educations,

their social circles, and/or their family units so as to open their eyes to the greater issues

that people are facing around the globe. "Once you become aware, then you need to

think about it. And think about possible solutions, or about what you can do."[29] To give

them a sense of what modes of political and social action they should use as solutions,

the leaders at IECOC would recruit the youth to acquire signatures for petitions and to

draft letters to the editors of newspapers, directors of television stations, and/or political

officeholders. "These are the things we would engage the youth with… because it is

---

[28] Ibid.
[29] Saleh, "Semi-Structured Interview."

294

important for them not to just be encircled with their own Islamic clique… we encourage them to be out and engaged."[30]

Nadia also says that in her daily life as a teacher and a graduate student she does draw on the narratives and symbols of Shi'ism to give her resolve. "I, often in my heart, whether it's the stress I experience in my life, or whatever it be, you always think back to *Ahl al-Bayt* and the difficulties and the obstacles the experienced, and think that whatever I'm experiencing is nothing compared to them. So that kind of gives you the encouragement that it's going to be okay and that it's not that bad."[31] For Nadia Saleh, the narratives have an effect on a personal and social level. I did not see much in the way of an effect in regards to her political activity. She argued that she is very socially conservative, but had voted for both Republican and Democratic candidates in the past, and that in the 2008 election cycle it was difficult for her to vote for Barack Obama because of his pro-choice position in regards to the abortion debate. However, she stated that though there was an internal dilemma, she eventually voted for Obama because of what she viewed as injustices that occurred during George W. Bush's tenure as president, especially in regards to the war in Iraq. She said that her thought process leading up to the election was as follows:

> I consider myself to be very conservative, very very conservative… on social
> issues. But I kind of felt very torn, and I thought I want to vote for Obama,

---

[30] Ibid.
[31] Saleh, "Semi-Structured Interview."

295

because I usually am a Republican, but the last two elections I decided I wasn't going to vote because I did not agree with George Bush. But this election I was a Democrat. It was hard… I felt torn. I'm so against abortion, and yet I'm voting for somebody who is very liberal when it comes to a woman's right to have an abortion. But yet, my people are being slaughtered because of George Bush and his cabinet. So, I kind of felt torn, but I felt as though it's the lesser of the two evils, and I had to weigh it…[32]

She nevertheless remained true to her social-conservativeness and voted in favor of the California Marriage Protection Act of 2008, commonly known as Proposition 8. This ballot-measure passed with a 52.24% majority, and restricted marriage to opposite-gender couples.

Fatma does not see much in the way of Shi'a political participation taking place. She attributes this to several things. One issue was in regards to what she perceives to be a lack of monetary contributions to start and organization that would represent Shi'a political aspirations. "If you want to open up an office in Washington, you are going to have overhead costs, you got salaries, and you have to pay the people comfortably. The people are not going to do it for free."[33] Secondly, she believes that people are needed who are in harmony with a purpose and goal, but simultaneously they need to know how to go about getting that task completed. She believes there is a lack of expertise

---

[32] Ibid.
[33] Saleh, "Semi-Structured Interview."

and experience among Shi'as when it comes to approaching the political system. "We're just beginners. We're just learning how to play ball."[34] She argues that one reason the Shi'as lag behind the Sunnis is because when a political, social, or religious issue needs to be addressed or an interview is needed, typically the Sunni mosques are the locations being called. Much of this in her estimation is due to the fact that Sunnis made a conscious effort years and even decades ago to form organizations such as ISNA and CAIR, whereas the Shi'as are only recently coming into the political fray in the American setting. Therefore, when a media outlet wants to interview a Muslim about any topic, CAIR directs them to an Imām of a Sunni mosque. She believes Shi'as must follow suit in order to have their voices heard, and to become relevant players in the Muslim American community as well as greater American society.

Nadia felt it is important to educate the public to clear up misconceptions about Islam in general and Shi'ism in particular.

> I know the group of friends I do associate with at school, when they hear about Shi'a Islam a lot of them think Hezbollah. 'You guys are the one's responsible for 9-11.' It's just the misconceptions out there. We tend to be looked upon as the most militant of the two sects... I think that going back to the Hezbollah issue, a lot of the suicide bombings, a lot of that was associated with the Shi'as in the early 80's. The bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon. All those

---

[34] Ibid.

297

began with the Shi'a, and slowly became more accepted among the Sunnis and the Taliban. It's just this misconception, this lack of understanding Americans have of the Shi'as… and also, a lot of times people with associate Shi'as as being Iranians.[35]

Being an educator, Nadia is often focused on how Muslims can affect policies related to education. Like many of the people I interviewed for this research, she is a strong proponent of political and social activity, especially at the local level. For her, one area that Muslim should be much more participatory is at the school board level. There are some Shi'as that argue the quietist approach to political participation. Others argue for a *velāyat* approach. Both of these approaches might result in a lack of political participation, or in limited forms such as protests or rallies. Though Nadia and her sister fall under the accommodationist approach, she argues that regardless of ones political outlook as a Shi'a, they should at a minimum try be active on a social level. If politics is not important, then at least try to do something on a societal level that helps Shi'as and Muslims acclimate into society and for greater society to understand Shi'as and Muslims. "The majority of our life is being spent outside [the mosque]. A lot of us are students or employees and we interact with Americans on a daily basis. And I think it's important if we are going to raise children in this country and be integrated, we need a

---

[35] Saleh, "Semi-Structured Interview."

voice. We need to be heard." [36] Fatma believes the reason for the delay in the Muslim community being proactive politically and socially is partly due to the lack of urgency pre-9/11.

> Before 9-11 happened, most of our works and effort were going into building the community. Was going into trying to bring the Muslim population back to the mosque… back to hear the words of Allah, the Prophet… if you lost that spiritual connection to Allah… you can continue to build that foundation. So we were busy trying to educate and inspire and bring the people back to the mosques. And all of a sudden 9-11 threw us in to this world, and we weren't ready. We were not ready, not whatsoever. We were not ready to deal with the public. We weren't ready to deal with the feedbacks. We didn't have the right people speaking behind the microphones in the interviews. We didn't have press conferences. We weren't ready for that. And so we were just scrambling trying to put the bandages on wherever. And they weren't bandages that were secure enough. It's hard to blame us completely, but people are becoming more aware that we need to be accountable. And the youths are also helping us be accountable… That's what we are beginning to do. The community is starting to be supportive and be more engaging. The Palestinian demonstration, they've been having it all week here in LA, and it's growing. People are concerned…

---

[36] Ibid.

but you have to give them the right words of encouragement. You have to put the fear that they have a little bit aside. You also have to tell them, "You got to wake up! If you don't this is going to really affect you… your rights are being violated, it's being stripped away, and you don't know nothing about it! And don't think it's going to go away. It's just going to get worse."… You can't remain silent anymore… [37]

Nadia gave the example of Najah Bazzy, a nurse from the Dearborn Shiʿa community who educates non-Muslims about Islamic practices in the medical field. For example, Nadia mentioned a conversation she had with Bazzy, in which the later explained that it was her duty as a Muslim and a nurse to inform non-Muslim male doctors how to interact with Muslim female patients, in addition to, but not limited to, educating hospital personnel on the etiquette and the dos and don'ts surrounding the body of a recently deceased Muslim patient. Nadia felt that the Muslim community needed more of this type of social interaction with the greater American society. Being an educator lead Nadia to a discussion of how to influence the manner by which Muslim children receive an education in public school districts. She urges members of her community to be active in the local school boards and PTAs.

I think school districts throughout the United States need to be educated [on] Islamic practices. For example, when it comes to Ramaḍān, it's difficult for

---

[37] Saleh, "Semi-Structured Interview."

[children] to participate in physical education while they're fasting. A lot of teachers do not understand this. Districts do not understand this. Districts don't cater to Muslim students when it comes to lunch programs at school… I believe in districts where there is a great Muslim population, these things need to be addressed.[38]

However, she places the blame not on the school districts, but rather on the Muslim community for being negligent. She believes that school boards cannot be held accountable if they are not privy to these issues. Simply stated, she feels as if Muslims have a duty to themselves and society as a whole to be more socially active.

I go to a lot of school board meetings, and I think I probably was the only Muslim attending. But this is how we educate. We start with the school board. Writing letters. Maybe encouraging our Imāms to come talk to principals and vice-principals… educating them. Even with ḥijāb for girls who come into the public school system wearing the ḥijāb. Maybe educating people that this girl isn't ill. A lot of people think she has cancer and so she's covered up. A lot of times Muslim girls can not wear the attire for gym class, which is typically a short sleeve shirt with shorts that are maybe three inches above the knee cap.[39]

Though she believes the Muslim community needs to be more active and vocal about

---

[38] Saleh, "Semi-Structured Interview."
[39] Ibid.

these issues, she also believes that there is a minority complex that hinders Muslims from being more active. Whether it be the post 9-11 climate, or simply not wanting to look different, Nadia argued that Muslims are sometimes scared to speak out or be politically or socially active. Her own experiences interacting with people of other faiths at school board meetings, has lead her to the realization that Muslims, and Shi'as in particular due to their minority within a minority status, must grab a seat at the table. She argues that if school board prayers can begin with a Christian prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, then Muslims should also be allowed to begin these meetings "In the Name of Allah the Most Gracious the Most Merciful." Her argument is not one of jealousy or spite towards the Christian members of the school board, but rather her argument is directed towards her own co-religionists. Their absence denies their children a voice. If Muslims do not participate and educate, then they cannot complain when their children are required to go to gym class during Ramaḍān or have no choice but to go hungry at lunch when there are no Islamically safe options on the lunch menu. But she also implies that the absence of Muslims in the social and political arena, and in her case this revolves around school board meetings, denies non-Muslim access to Muslims. If Muslims want to be treated as equals and want their voices heard, then they must use their voices. Just like Italians, Catholics, Women, and Jewish people, Muslims must grab a seat at the table. She argued, "There is a need for Muslims to get involved, because the majority of our time is being spent outside of the home. We are raising children in this society. If we can't make them feel as if though they are part of this

society, they are never going to be participants in it."[40]

Similar to Jihad Saleh's approach to political and social behavior, the Saleh sisters have previous inclinations of how Muslims should participate. It is quite obvious that they are not political in the manner that Jihad was during his time as a congressional staffer. Their jobs and everyday lives do not revolve around congressional committee meetings. They do not directly influence policy as it is being made in the office of Congressman Meeks. However, their form of political and social participation is primarily exemplified by their efforts to educate both their community and non-Muslims as well, but on a personal level. Being childhood immigrants that grew up in the United States has afforded them a very clear understanding of American social life. They understand the necessity of participating, and it is not as foreign a concept as compared to some of the more recent immigrants. As such, they understand the hesitancy of the older generations, and therefore they focus much of their education on the younger members of the community. As Fatma mentioned, it is through the youth that they inform the greater society about Islam. They urge the youth to be politically and socially aware, and to contribute in whatever way they can to make life better for their immediate Shi'a community, but also for American society as whole.

When I questioned them on the role of their religion, and especially the symbols and narratives of the stories of Shi'ism, on their political and social activities, they both

---

[40] Ibid.

303

responded that they often think of *Ahl al-Bayt* (The Prophet's Household), and use them as inspiration. Similarly to Jihad Saleh, they view these historical holy figures as models to follow and emulate, but they do not view them as the reason they do the work they do. The narratives of Shi'ism do not cause them to act, but rather reinforce their already held beliefs. Fatma and Nadia Saleh are politically and socially conscious because of a personal conviction and understanding of what is at stake if the community does not progress politically and socially. Fatma, also being the author of a book entitled *A New Perspective: Women in Islam*, has a special affinity towards two of the members of *Ahl al-Bayt*, Imām 'Alī and Imām Ja'far al-Sadiq. Shi'as are told that all of the members of the Prophet's Household were the most prominent scholars of their respective eras. However, Imām 'Alī is often considered to be the most learned of the Prophet's companions as well as the first person to write a exegesis of the Qur'an in order that Muslims had an understanding of the verses they were reciting. He also is credited with having the vowel and elocution markings included in the Qur'an in order that the words were pronounced in the proper fashion. Imām al-Sadiq is considered to be the father of the schools of jurisprudence within all of Islam. It was his work as a theologian that resulted in the codification of the jurisprudence of the Shi'a school of thought. His role as an educator affected the advent of the first two schools of jurisprudence within Sunni Islam, as he was the teacher of Imām Abu Hanifah and Imām Malik, the founders of the Hanafi and Maliki schools of Sunni jurisprudence respectively.

The narratives of the lives of these two historical figures reinforce Fatma role as an author and a leader within her community. Her personal inclination to inform and educate is only strengthened by the particular figures she uses as models of emulation. When discussing Imām ʻAlī and Imām al-Sadiq, she stated:

> Of course Imām ʻAlī stands out for me… Imām ʻAlī is my hero of them all. Imām Jaʻfar as-Sadiq is also another figure that I look up to… I've read so much about them. They intrigue me. Imām ʻAlī just blows me away. I don't think anything comes closer… the Prophet and him… nothing comes closer. Imām Jaʻfar because of the education and intelligence, and what he did, how he spearheaded the whole schools of thoughts. It's amazing how it all comes back to him. That's a great achievement, and it's something to be very proud of. When I look at *Ahl al-Bayt*, I have pride.[41]

Just as with Jihad Saleh, Fatma and Nadia view their mode of activism as being incumbent upon them. If asked, they argue that it is a burden they have to carry. They are under no delusions that they are the only Shiʻas working for their community. However, they feel it is their sacrifice to constantly try to portray Muslims, and Shiʻas specifically, in a good light, and to push their community to get involved both politically and socially. As such, they feed off Shiʻa symbols and narratives in a manner that supports their own dispositions. Fatma argued that because of *Ahl al-Bayt* she is

---

[41] Saleh, "Semi-Structured Interview."

able to do the work she does. Nadia concurred, and added that despite all the difficulties she faces in life, both personal and on a public level, she is able to stay grounded by the fact that none of her troubles match the trials and tribulations that the *Ahl al-Bayt* faced. This is the message they convey to the members of their community, especially focusing on the youth. They convey the message that regardless of how difficult it might be, it is incumbent upon Shiʻas to stand up for what is just, and never complain because the exemplars of their faith never cowered from their stands against injustice.

In my interaction with Fatma and Nadia, and coming to understand their devotion to Imām Moustafa al-Qazwini and his mission for Islam in America, I was struck by some similarities between them and the sisters of Imām Ḥusayn, namely Zaynab and Umm Kulthoum. Both of these sisters of Imām Ḥusayn were instrumental in the propagation of the events of ʻĀshurā, as well as the message of Imām Ḥusayn. Shiʻas are often told that had it not been for these two brave ladies, that the events of the massacre of Karbalāʼ would have been lost in history. Additionally, they were charged with the task of educating the surviving children… the younger generations of the sacrifices that Imām Ḥusayn and his companions gave to save Islam. Though Fatma and Nadia would eschew my comparison of them with the sisters of Imām Ḥusayn, I see similarities in regards to their devotion to the message of Imām Moustafa al-Qazwini. They believe in him wholeheartedly, and always poured praised on him and his family. They were instrumental in educating the youth, Nadia making it her profession. And both are dedicated to the spread of Islam in the United States, but again through an

educational approach. Similar to Zaynab and Umm Kulthoum, Fatma and Nadia are propagating an all-encompassing faith to the Shi'a youth at IECOC and to those that might not be familiar with Islam in the greater society, one that includes the true spirit of the religion, but also consists of a dedication to political and social life.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION RESULTING FROM THE *VELĀYAT* APPROACH

When conducting the fieldwork for this research, I ran into considerable difficulty in convincing purveyors and adherents of the *velāyat* approach to participate in interviews. As such, I was only able to acquire one interview with someone that I label as a *velāyat* adherent. The other example involves a look at how Muslim Congress, an organization that espouses the *velāyat* approach, propagates their ideology and how it manifests itself in political and social action.

Based on the scarcity of information from the *velāyat* purveyors and adherents, it is somewhat problematic to make decisive claims about their political and social behavior. This is especially true of the Muslim Congress section. As I never formally interviewed any leader of Muslim Congress, I can only make some very shallow observations based on one event, a *Yaūm al-Quds* rally in Dallas in September 2008. As such, much of that section involves a description of what I saw, with little commentary on how the symbols and narratives of Shi'ism affected the rally.

Khadijeh Hosseinzadeh

Khadijeh Hosseinzadeh was the only *velāyat* adherent I interviewed. She was a college student at University California – Irvine, and was very involved in the Youth Board at the Islamic Education Center of Orange County (IECOC).[42] In our discussions she exhibited a heavy dose of admiration and love for the IECOC and Imām Moustafa al-Qazwini, who I definitely label as an accommodationist, however she argued that she preferred the more conservative Masjid an-Nabi (Prophet's Mosque), which was a predominantly Iranian-filled location that had the characteristics of a location that propagated a *velāyat* approach to political and social action. I should clarify that she never labeled herself as a *velāyat* adherent, but her description of political and social behavior led me to label her as such. The reason for doing so was the similarity of her political approach to the one espoused by leaders of Muslim Congress.

My interview with Khadijeh gave me great insight into the mind of a youth that was actually extremely politically active, but who eschewed conventional political participation such as voting, contributing money and time, and writing letters to officeholders. She was replete with a sense of social justice, and was active on her university campus in organizations such as Muslim Student Association and mentioned organizing events in favor of the Palestinian cause. When I asked her about the manner in which the narratives of the lives of the Prophet and the Imāms affected her view on political and social participation she was quick to point out that she does not simply

---

[42] The name Khadijeh Hosseinzadeh is a pseudonym.

focus on one individual. She however was adamant that as Shi'as, they absolutely must follow the examples of these historical figures. She then offered an example of how Imām 'Alī stands out as an example when she deals with the other members of MSA that are predominantly Sunnis, and how Imām Ḥusayn's stand at Karbalā' serves as an example when she deals with "Zionists" who criticize the work they do for the Palestinian cause.

> When I deal with the MSA, I feel like Imām 'Alī stands out in my head a lot. Because his Imāmate was very sensitive because it was immediately after the Prophet's death. He was dealing with people usurping his position away from him. Sometimes I look at him and look at how sometimes he was silent, and his silence was very powerful. He was silent in the face of the other *khalīfāhs* but at the same time he would help them. I look at his example sometimes. A lot of times we have a week on our campus where we deal with Palestine and we obviously have a lot of Zionists that have an objection and they go out of their way to make life difficult for us that week, and that whole week that's all we do. We have events. We have a wall that we bring up to reflect the wall that is in Palestine right now. The Israelis are there protesting us. During that week I

always think of Imām Ḥusayn and when he stood up for justice. So it's not one specifically, it depends on what is happening at that time.[43]

Khadijeh, just like the accommodationists described earlier, is very politically active. And just like them, she uses the symbols and narratives of Shiʻism to bolster her political and social proclivities, but they do not form her proclivities. She is political and socially active, and the symbols and narratives act as intervening influences on how she acts. As mentioned above, she never explicitly stated she was an adherent to the *velāyat* approach, but her mode of activism and her eschewing of "conventional" forms of political participation led me to label her as such. That being said, it is very important to state that adherents of the *velāyat* approach must not be seen as being closed off from society as a whole. In fact, Khadijeh pointed out that during the wildfires that ravaged much of California, she and others from the Shiʻa community volunteered to help with the relief effort. Though purveyors and adherents to the *velāyat* approach may have issues with the American political system, they do not have the same feelings towards the American people. This also becomes evident in the discussion involving Maulana Shamshad Haider and the *Yaūm al-Quds* rally in Dallas.

Maulana Shamshad Haider and Muslim Congress

Because of the absence of a real plan for conventional political engagement, Muslim Congress (MC) has been more successful at encouraging political participation through

---

[43] Khadijeh Hosseinzadeh, "Semi-Structured Interview", January 9, 2009.

the use of rallies and protests.[44] In addition to the annual conferences, the mosques affiliated with MC also hold yearly commemorations of *Yaūm al-Quds* (Jerusalem Day) that occur on the last Friday of every Ramaḍān. This commemoration is characterized by peaceful protests and demonstrations in support of the Palestinian cause, and was initiated by Imām Khomeini the 1980s. This event is planned and carried out by Shi'as around the globe, and typically equates the struggle of the Palestinians with the difficulties and suffering the Prophet's Household endured, most notably the massacre of Imām Ḥusayn at Karbalā'. Those that gather for this event claim to do so for the cause of justice exemplified by the struggle between Imām Ḥusayn and the army of Yazīd.[45] By equating the plight of Imām Ḥusayn at Karbalā' with the situation of the Palestinians, Shi'as are able to describe the circumstances in the language of quintessential struggle between good and evil; justice and oppression. Just as Imām Ḥusayn stood against tyranny, the same is true for the Palestinians. Though they might be massacred, they are on the right path. Similarly, Shi'as believe that by rallying for the downtrodden Palestinians, they are also refusing to play the role of those individuals who failed to help Imām Ḥusayn on the day of 'Āshurā. It is said that God will also

---

[44] In earlier work, I have found a statistically significant higher percentage of Shi'as participate in rallies and protests as compared to Sunnis. See Contractor, "The Dearborn Effect: A Comparison of the Political Dispositions of Shi'a and Sunni Muslims in the United States."

[45] Ironically, those they are in support of are Palestinian and Sunni, for whom the Shi'as narrative of 'Āshurā' has little emotional salience. Yet, for the Shi'as that show up in the many cities of the United States on the last day of Ramaḍān, it is an obligation to "enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil," as the *Qur'ān* commands.

punish those people who knew of the impending massacre, but who did not come to the aid of Imām Ḥusayn. By supporting the Palestinian cause, one can tell God on the Day of Judgment that he or she stood up for justice against oppression.

As such, at base level, the commemoration of *Yaūm al-Quds* is not limited to *velāyat* adherents and purveyors. All Shi'as, Muslims, and non-Muslims were urged to participate. However, internationally, the symbolic power of *Yaūm al-Quds* has waned significantly in the past decade. Many Muslims, Sunnis and Shi'as, view it as a propaganda tool of the Iranian regime and those who hold similar ideological viewpoints, including the leadership of MC. Many Shi'a leaders in the United States argue *Yaūm al-Quds* does more harm than good for Shi'as and Muslim cause. As mentioned, Sayyid Mohammad al-Baqir Kashmiri of IMĀM argues that it is no longer about supporting the Palestinian people, but rather serves the political agenda of denying the right of Israel to exist and for propagating what I refer to as the *velāyat* ideology. In his opinion, this is highly problematic, especially if Muslims are trying to build bridges in the United States.[46] It is precisely for beliefs such as Kashmiri's that the leaders of MC criticize those like him for being "corrupted" and "liberal." They argue that the bulk of Shi'a leaders in the United States have forgotten about the importance of standing up to tyranny. As such, MC's leaders have continued to organize *Yaūm al-Quds* rallies throughout the United States. However, most of these commemorations

---

[46] Kashmiri, "Semi-Structured Interview."

have become events used to reinforce already held beliefs amongst the participants. Very little educating of society as a whole takes place at most *Yaūm al-Quds* rallies.

MOMIN Center held a *Yaūm al-Quds* rally on September 26, 2008 outside of Dallas City Hall. That day approximately 50 members of the local Shiʻa community gathered with only a handful of the protesters being Sunnis or non-Muslims. Maulana Haider enlisted a group of non-Muslim college students to give speeches at the event. This was not completely unprecedented on his part, given that in the past non-Muslim speakers attended the *Yaūm al-Quds* rallies in Dallas. However, it was interesting that the overwhelming bulk of the speeches given that day were by these non-Muslim students. His gamble paid off to a certain extent; at an event where the overwhelming majority of participants were Muslims, a handful of non-Muslim college students delivered compelling reasons to support the Palestinian cause. Community members were moved by the speeches, and thanked the students profusely after the event. Haider himself commented on the fact that one of the speakers, Rebekah Stone, was the first woman to ever address the MOMIN Center congregation. Why the gamble? Why allow for a group of non-Muslim college students to make all the speeches at this event that happens only once a year, and which is attended mostly by Shiʻa Muslims?

First, other than Maulana Haider, there were very few members that gave lectures or speeches at MOMIN Center events. The community is very *ʻAlīm* oriented, and as such most events consisted of Haider as the primary speaker. Additionally, according to Haider, his community is not very politically savvy. There are few that could be

counted on to deliver compelling speeches that would be appropriate for a rally in the middle of the afternoon in downtown Dallas. In order for the protest to be a success he needed speakers who were educated on the Palestinian situation, and could convey their thoughts clearly. They would also have to be politically knowledgeable. Moreover, by allowing these individuals to speak on the Palestinian situation, he educated the members of MOMIN Center on how to be politically and socially active members of society.

A couple years later, some younger members told me that much of what I witnessed was due to Haider's controlling demeanor. According to them, he approached his position as one who has the ultimate say in the working of the center. This partially explains my frustration in conducting research at MOMIN Center. Haider did not hesitate to give me permission to conduct the appropriate fieldwork, however he did not consult the committee that is in charge of the day-to-day life of the center. As such, they quickly stymied my ability to perform a thorough analysis of the MOMIN Center community.

Returning to the events in at the *Yaūm al-Quds* rally, Haider also wanted to place an "American face" on the protest. There were many passersby that day in Dallas, almost all of them were non-Muslims. It was important for those individuals to be engaged in order for the message of *Yaūm al-Quds* to permeate beyond the protestors. The Muslims were already informed of the reasons for the protest, but Haider wanted those casual observers to be informed of the plight of the Palestinians. As such, the

314

speakers were almost all white Americans, and none of their comments were explicitly Islamic in nature, instead focusing on issues of human rights and social justice. Though the topics of human rights and social justice are intrinsic to the foundations of Islam, they are not exclusive to Islam. Most religions include these an important elements. The speakers themselves being non-Muslims, did not frame the issue in Islamic language. These college students urged the Muslim participants to view and propagate the plight of the Palestinians in human rights language, and not couch it in Islamic or Arab terms. One speaker equated the struggles of his Irish ancestors to the plight of the Palestinians. When Haider gave the closing remarks, he also framed the issue in these terms. He used Islamic terminology, but in a manner that spoke to all of humanity, not just the 50 Muslims sitting before him.

In addition to the speaches, the Dallas *Yaūm al-Quds* rally also included a march around City Hall Plaza. The non-Muslim students came equipped with placards and fliers consisting of information from B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, which compared the number of dead, wounded and displaced Israelis and Palestinians. Again, this showed the political awareness of the non-Muslim speakers; comparative statistics go a long way in affecting public opinion, and they displayed their savviness in knowing that the passersby in Dallas may be more willing to accept information from an Israeli organization as compared to an Islamic or Palestinian organization.

Conversely, the plans of the Shi'a participants were much less sophisticated, and very little of those plans were successful in creating personal contact with the passersby. As the protest continued, participants were chanting slogans that were rather innocuous, and for the most part not very original. "Yes to America! No to Israel!" "No more occupation!" "Freedom for Palestinians!" "One, Two, Three, Four we don't want your racist war!" The slogans were rather ineffective in garnering any type of response from the passersby, and the event continued without much excitement. Shouting pro-Palestinian chants and displaying homemade signs with similar slogans of support were to be expected, but the lack of interaction with non-participants created a barrier and hampered the resonance of the message. In the end, the rally was more of an exercise to reinforce the opinions of the participants, and had less to do with engaging and informing society of the plight of the Palestinians.

A variety of groups use Dallas City Hall Plaza as a location to hold rallies and protests. As such, it is quite common to see groups marching and giving speeches in this location. If an organization or a group of individuals plan to affect public opinion, they must be able to speak to society as a whole. They must engage individuals on a personal level. The non-Muslim college students understood that, and for their part they did engage passersby. A few of the younger members of the Shi'a participants also helped the non-Muslim students pass out fliers. The majority of the older Shi'a participants marched and shouted slogans, but passing out fliers was asking too much.

That being said, one particular incident speaks volumes in regards to the marchers' understanding of American public opinion towards the existence of the state of Israel. During the rally a participant was handed the bullhorn to lead the protesters, and he attempted to liven up the participants by chanting "Death to Israel!" The overwhelming majority of the participants refrained from following his lead, and many of the protestors physically distanced themselves instantaneously. As quickly as he was handed the bullhorn, it was removed from his possession by one of the student speakers and the slogans resumed in a more conciliatory fashion. This signals that either the bulk of the participants did not agree with his statement, or if they did agree, they understood that making such caustic statements in public, especially about the existence of the state of Israel, could attract negative attention. It was obvious that they did not want to gain any enemies that day.

This indicates a great deal about the ability of Muslim Congress' seemingly rigid ideology. As the fieldwork for this research was being conducted, it became clear that Haider's dogmatic way of thinking belonged to a significant minority of Shi'as living in the United States. Despite the fact that Muslim Congress is able to garner the support of a large number of Shi'as, which is evident by the number of individuals that attend the yearly conferences, there is little evidence to show that the ideology is as relevant and

pervasive among the membership.[47] Simply put, many people come to the MC conferences to learn about Islam, to associate with other Shi'as, and for vacation. There may be a core group of *velāyat* adherents, but the overwhelming majority simply is not inclined towards that ideological perspective.

The events of *Yaūm al-Quds* showed willingness on his part to not only engage the non-Muslim passersby, albeit limitedly, but also to solicit the help of non-Muslim individuals as examples of politically involved individuals. Undoubtedly, there was little success in changing the minds of the passersby in front of Dallas City Hall. To be sure, it was going to be difficult for a group predominantly comprised of Shi'a Muslims chanting slogans about the Palestinian's plight to win hearts and minds that day, when they could not even win the support of the Sunni Muslim community. However, the presence of the non-Muslim college students definitely had some effect on the outlook of Haider.

Haider was removed as the scholar-in-residence at MOMIN Center only month or so after the *Yaūm al-Quds* rally I attended in September 2008. The events that surround his dismissal explain quite a bit about the resonance of MC's ideology. Shi'as pay the different religious tithing taxes to the *marja' al-taqlīd* of their choice. I was told that when members of MOMIN Center discovered that Haider was refusing to send the

---

[47] I inquired, via MC's website, about the membership of MC and the average number of participants at the annual conferences. I was informed via e-mail that MC does not maintain membership data. However, the number of participants at the annual conferences has increased steadily. One thousand three hundred participants attended the 2009 conference held in Dearborn, Michigan.

appropriate funds to the representative of Grand Ayatollah Sistani, and when questioned he responded with the reasoning that the representative was not a just person. Again, I was told that many interpreted this to mean that Haider was making a veiled argument questioning the opinion of Sistani on the issue of *velāyat-e faqīh*. To clarify, because of Sistani's criticism of the all-encompassing version of "Guardianship of the Jurist" as practiced in Iran, Haider supposedly refused to send the tithing taxes to Sistani's representative. In other words, the purveyors of the *velāyat* approach espouse the belief, though they may not say it explicitly, that denying the all-encompassing view of *velāyat* (guardianship) removes one from the faith. In essence, they argue that one cannot be a Shi'a if they deny Khomeini's "Guardianship of the Jurist" thesis.

This type of divisive action was not tolerated, and the community removed Haider from his position. I was not in Dallas during his dismissal; instead I learned of it from two representatives of Sistani, one being Sayyid Naqvi of IIC and the other being Sayyid Kashmiri of IMĀM. Both urged that this was proof that the Shi'a community would not tolerate the divisive measures of MC. Discussions of his removal were also common among Shi'as who were in the know. This was especially true within MC circles, and in the greater Shi'a community in Texas given that MC is headquartered in Houston, MOMIN Center is located in Dallas, and that Haider was temporarily the scholar-in-residence of a Shi'a center in San Antonio.

The Shi'a participants that participated in the *Yaūm al-Quds* rally felt it was their duty to stand up for the Palestinians. The symbol of Imām Ḥusayn and the narrative of

'Āshurā served as intervening variables which bolstered their already formed opinions and proclivities. These Shi'as were not all adherents to the *velāyat* approach, however the "political prophet" that was trying to influence them was a purveyor of that way of thinking. Again, this shows that the symbols and narratives of Shi'ism serve more appropriately as intervening variables that reinforce already held beliefs about political and social participation.

SUMMARY

In this chapter I analyzed the effect of Shi'a narratives and symbols on the political and social participation of Shi'as living in the United States. In particular I focused on activists within the Shi'a community, and in doing so, I found that Shi'a narratives and symbols do have an effect on political and social behavior, but not in the manner first anticipated. I initially expected that these narratives and symbols, and the different tropes exemplified by what I refer to as the accommodationist and *velāyat* approaches, would have a direct effect on whether Shi'as participated, and also I envisioned that the mode of participation would be affected as well. Simultaneously I was curious to see if the different tropes of the narratives and symbols would result in particular forms of political participation. In other words, my hypothesis that Shi'a narratives are used to affect different types of political/social behavior is rejected in the sense that they do not have the direct effect that I believed they would. I found instead the narratives and symbols of Shi'ism aided these activists' already formed and forming political and social proclivities. Simply stated, these narratives and symbols do not cause individual

Shi'as to participate politically or socially. They serve as intervening variables that serve as a religious rationale for already formed political and social proclivities.

Jihad Saleh and the two sisters Fatma and Nadia Saleh all held an accommodationist approach not because of the accommodationist tropes of Shi'a narratives and symbols that are promulgated by members of the Qazwini family, but rather they were already "accommodationists" and the manner in which "political prophets" such as Imām Moustafa al-Qazwini told and retold the stories of Shi'ism spoke to them. In other words, their already formed political and social outlook led them to prefer, adopt, and espouse specific tropes of Shi'a narratives that bolstered their way of thinking. They are all adamant that the historical personalities of Shi'ism hold great weight and are examples to mimic in the work they do, but the analysis shows that these historical personalities and the stories that are attributed to their lives serve more as religious support rather than the cause for the actions of the Shi'a activists included in this research. These tropes give meaning to their actions. If Jihad Saleh felt that his work was too much of a burden, he looks towards the sacrifices that Imām Ḥusayn made at the plains of Karbalā'. Did Ḥusayn want to die and leave his children as orphans? No. But he led his caravan into a battle that could not be won, but in the end it would result in a greater good that was something bigger than the life of Imām Ḥusayn, his sons, and his companions. It led to the reawakening of the *ummāh*, and a new zeal for justice against oppression. Likewise, Jihad stated that he did not want to go into the profession of being a congressional staffer or being a "Muslim activist," but he made

that sacrifice in order to serve as an example for countless Muslim youth, both Shi'as and Sunnis, that being politically and socially involved is a necessity in order that the Muslim community, and more specifically Shi'a community, makes progress in the United States. He does not see his sacrifice as being equal to Imām Ḥusayn's, but he legitimizes his own actions with the rationale that Imām Ḥusayn made the ultimate sacrifice by giving his life, and therefore how can he, Jihad Saleh, cower from putting himself in an unintended profession for five years in order to help the *ummāh* in the United States? He wants to help the Muslim community. He became a congressional staffer. He became the head of the Congressional Muslim Staffers Association. He reaches out to Muslim youth to get them involved in the political and social arenas. This is his struggle, his *jihād*. And though he does not equate his circumstances to the struggles of Imām Ḥusayn, he takes a cue from the narrative of 'Āshurā.

The same is true for the sisters Saleh. Both serve as examples within the Orange County Shi'a community of women who are committed to bringing members, especially the youth, into a more socially and politically active lifestyle. Fatma is an author, and Nadia is an educator. They focused heavily on the necessity to educate the Shi'a community about the importance of political and social involvment. Fatma was more specific about the roles of Imām 'Alī and Imām Sadeq play in her public life. This is of no real surprise given that the academic contribution of these two Imāms is often discussed. Fatma, as an author, pulls from the stories of these two Imāms to support her proclivity towards writing. Her book involving the place of women in Islam is an

attempt to educate Muslims and non-Muslims alike about the important roles of women as well as issues that Muslim women face. Additionally, it uses the Qur'an and *hadith* to give a "different perspective" of how Islam honors women. Nadia's interview focused heavily on the role of Muslims on school boards. That is natural given her chosen profession as an educator. Though attached to members of *Ahl al-Bayt*, she was less specific about which members of the Prophet's Household served as models of inspiration. She was more general in saying that whenever she acts publicly or privately, she often keeps these historical figures in the back of her mind as reminders that the difficulties she faces in her life can never compare to those that the Prophet's Household faced.

It is more difficult to make concrete conclusions about adherents to the *velāyat* approach given that I did not interview a single individual who self-identified as follower of that particular approach. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that these assertions are included to give an idea of how adherents of the *velāyat* approach may participate in politics and how the *velāyat* tropes of Shi'a narratives and symbols may affect their modes of political participation. What can be said is that the analysis of Khadijeh Hosseinzadeh, as well as the events of the 2008 *Yaūm al-Quds* rally in Dallas, led me to the same conclusion that was reached in regards to those who adhere to an accommodationist approach. The narratives and symbols of Shi'ism, even the *velāyat* tropes, do not have a direct effect on the political and social activity of Shi'as.

This became even clearer after looking at the example of Khadijeh Hosseinzadeh. She willingly attended two Islamic centers that espoused different approaches to political and social life in the United States. She was exposed to narratives that fit both the accommodationist and *velāyat* approach. She however was inclined toward the *velāyat* approach, and much of her political and social activity involved activities that proponents of this approach espouse. The fact that Khadijeh preferred a more "conservative" and "political" mosque, to use her words, leads the conclusion that her political and social disposition was formed first, and only then did the narratives and symbols of the *velāyat* trope serve as religious backing for her proclivities. For example, she felt as if the IECOC community was not political enough. Falling short of criticizing that community, she felt that the Masjed al-Nabi community was more political and that seemed to favor her own proclivities. However, my own experience at IECOC and interviews with members of that community revealed otherwise. They were political in the sense that they brought up issues such as the Israeli offensive on Gaza in 2008. But it was apparent that Khadijeh meant something different when she used the term "political." For her political meant being willing to speak out against actions in a more critical tone. She mentioned that the IECOC community would not say much about the 2008 Operation Caste Lead, but at the more conservative Masjid al-Nabi, the Imām would bring up the massacre of the Palestinians in Gaza continuously throughout Muḥarram. Khadijeh saw some merit in voting, but did not think it was something that Muslims should go out of their way to do, because in her mind the system and policies

were not going to change much by simply electing new officials. Therefore, she felt that unless Muslims were more informed about the candidates and positions, and that those elections would bring change that would benefit the Muslim community and the foreign policy of the United States towards the Muslim world, then Muslims should refrain from voting or other forms of direct participation and interaction with the political system.

As a student activist at UC-Irvine, Khadijeh was politically and socially active as a member of MSA. Her political activity and proclivity mirrored much of the rhetoric that I encountered with *velāyat* approach adherents. But she was not a *velāyat* trope adherent because she heard fiery sermons and used of Shi'a narratives, which subsequently molded her political outlook. Instead, she had an already formed political and social proclivity towards issues of social justice, with much of her focus being the Palestinian cause. Her choice of political participation was affected by her perception of the American political system, and therefore the *velāyat* trope was best suited as a religious rationale that supported her political proclivities. For example, as stated she is an adamant supporter of the Palestinian cause. She believes that the state of Israel has continuously broken international law in regards to the occupation of Palestine. Because the United States is seen as being the biggest supporter of Israel, both through economic and military aid as well as through unconditional support in the United Nations Security Council, Khadijeh believes that there is little that can be done through voting or letter-writing campaign that will change official US policy in relation to Israel. Therefore, she

takes a course of action that might change the minds of everyday Americans. Through the Muslim Student Association, Khadijeh and her fellow students hold rallies and events that are intended to expose Americans to the atrocities being committed daily in Palestine. The *velāyat* approach is one that backs her viewpoint that the American government is complicit in the Israeli occupation of Palestine. It gives a divine rationale for not compromising with those that are oppressors or those that support the oppressors. Did Imām Ḥusayn compromise with Yazīd despite the fact that he was outnumbered 30,000 to 72? No. When Yazīd offered peace if he was recognized as the legitimate *khalīfāh*, did Imām Ḥusayn acquiesce? No. When Imām Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn and Sayyidā Zaynab gave their stirring sermons condemning Yazīd and his generals after the massacre of Imām Ḥusayn, did they worry that they might be massacred as well? No. Therefore, if members of the Shiʿa community are unwilling to compromise and do not engage in more conventional forms of political participation such as voting and contributing to political candidates because they feel that the system is corrupted, then they have a greater tendency to use the *velāyat* tropes of Shiʿa narratives and symbols as rationales for their already formed political and social proclivities.

The 2008 *Yaūm al-Quds* rally in Dallas, also suggests that the *velāyat* approach belongs to a small minority of Shiʿas living in the United States. The events of that day point out two things in regards to the application of a *velāyat* approach in the United States. The simple fact that people showed up to the rally signifies some attachment to the plight of the Palestinians. However, that does not necessarily signify that all of those

attendees were *velāyat* approach adherents. Given that Imām Haider was removed from his position at the Dallas MOMIN Center suggests that an overwhelming ideological conviction by the congregation to one of these approaches does not exist. In other words, had there been a large contingent of *velāyat* approach supporters within the Dallas community, then the likelihood of Haider's dismissal would have been lower. Additionally, it could be said that ideological inclinations are trumped by the necessity to insure that the trust of the people is kept. By this I mean to say, that though these ideological viewpoints may play a role in the outlook of some of the congregants at MOMIN Center, in the end if the Imām or other leaders act outside of expected norms, rules, and regulations regarding their duties as leaders of the community, then ideology takes a back seat. People place a great deal of trust in the hands of these leaders, especially when it comes to issues of *zakat* and *khums*, and obviously did not care for the manner in which Haider dealt with their trust. In regards to the specifics of the rally at Dallas City Hall, the saliency of the message given by the non-Muslim college students raises interesting questions. How was a group of fifty South Asian Shi'as influenced by the lectures of non-Muslim students who did not speak the same "motivational" language? They did not use the narratives of Shi'ism. They did not speak of the Prophet or his Household. But they still had an impact on the political actions of those Shi'as that attended that day, especially the younger members of that community.

The last point I discuss clarifies that adherents and purveyors of both of these approaches, the accommodationist and *velāyat*, do not eschew interaction with non-Muslims or non-Shiʻas. In that sense, they are very open to working with members of other religious and ethnic groups. This makes sense when we think about the accommodationist approach. However, it probably comes as a surprise in a discussion of the *velāyat* approach, given the perceptions that surround the Islamic Republic of Iran, and its influence on this mode of thinking. That being said, purveyors of the *velāyat* approach have utilized the help and expertise of non-Shiʻas and non-Muslims on multiple occasions. I offered two examples in this research: the Sunni speakers at the Muslim Congress conference in Dallas during the summer of 2008, and the non-Muslims students at the *Yaūm al-Quds* rally later that year. There have been other occasions where Imām Haider has garnered the support of Neturei Karta, a group of Orthodox Jews who reject the existence of the State of Israel and often join pro-Palestinian demonstrations. The point here being that though their ideology emerges from a state that is in constant conflict with United States, the adherents of this ideology are open to working with individuals and groups that hold similar views as their own.

CONCLUSION

PURPOSE OF THIS DISSERTATION: WHAT WAS I SEEKING TO KNOW?

Throughout this dissertation my goal has been to ascertain the effect of Shiʻa narratives on the political and social action of Shiʻas living in the United States. I began with the following research question: ***How do Shiʻa narratives and symbols affect political and social participation among Shiʻa community members living in the United States?*** I offered competing hypotheses in order to determine in what manner Shiʻa narratives affect participation. The *essentialist hypothesis* states that these narratives and symbols inform and create identities that are predisposed towards particular forms of political and social participation. In other words, the narratives of Shiʻism are the main contributing factors to the formation of an identity that exudes the Shiʻa obsession with social justice and "enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil." The *instrumentalist hypothesis* states that Shiʻas in the United States use religious narratives in support of their already formed political and social proclivities to affect their political and social participation. In other words, the narratives of Shiʻism are secondary independent variables or intervening variables that serve as religious rationales supporting already held political and social proclivities.

The second research question is states as follows: ***How do different tropes of Shiʻa narratives and symbols affect the manner in which Shiʻas in the United States participate politically and socially?*** The third hypothesis is dependent on whether the

essentialist or instrumentalist hypothesis is found to be valid. If the essentialist hypothesis is found to be valid then the third hypothesis is as follows: Different tropes of Shi'a narratives result in different forms of political and social participation. Converesely, if the instrumentalist hypothesis is found to be valid then the third hypothesis is as follows: Different tropes of Shi'a narratives are chosen based on one's proclivities, and these are the religious rationale that lead to action.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH

This dissertation is the first in-depth political science study of the political dispositions of Shi'a Muslim communities in the United States, and is important because it speaks to important theoretical and substantive issues. Theoretically, it contributes to the discussion of the role of culture in political and social behavior. It examines how narratives affect behavior, and whether previous findings affirming that culture works in tandem with other factors to affect behavior hold true for this specific group.

Substantively, it contributes to an understanding of Muslims living in the West, and Shi'as the in United States specifically, asking how narratives specific to Shi'a Islam affect political and social behavior. The findings are important because they provide for a more nuanced understanding of Muslim American political behavior, as the focus on Shi'as shows that there is some difference in the manner in which they approach political and social participation, as compared to their Sunni coreligionists. Though the dissertation looks at modes of political participation (i.e. voting, monetary contributions, volunteering, protests, etc), the central purpose is to ascertain how

specific aspects of the Shi'a faith (i.e. narratives and symbols) affect political and social behavior. In other words, the research questions are also asking if "Shi'a exceptionalism" exists, and if so, how it is manifested.

Initially, I anticipated finding that, unlike Sunni Muslims, the attachment to the narratives of Shi'ism was *the reason* for if and how Shi'as participated. The interview and ethnographic data collected for this dissertation proved that there was no "Shi'a exceptionalism." In fact, Shi'a political and social engagement is not determined solely by adherence to narratives, but rather political and social proclivities are formed first, and only then do the narratives play a role. In fact, the activists included in this dissertation research gravitated to and cherry picked those narratives, tropes of narratives, and symbols that supported their already formed proclivities.

THE FINDINGS

After the introductory and literature review chapters, Chapter 2 of the dissertation presents quantitative data on Shi'a political participation. Although many Shi'a community leaders are concerned that their congregations are not participating sufficiently, the results of my survey (the Contractor survey) show that the leaders might not fully appreciate how active their communities truly are. My findings suggest that Shi'as are participating, especially in regards to voting. I argued that there are a few reasons that might account for this misperception on the behalf of the leaders. One possibility is that they do not know their communities as well as they think they do. They believe their members are not participating, but quite obviously they are. A

second option is that the leaders do not have a good understanding of how people outside of their communities are participating, and as such they are unaware that their members are performing similarly and perhaps even at higher levels than national averages. The final possibility is that these leaders are well aware that their communities are participating, but hold such high expectations, that they want their members to surpass the national averages. In other words, they want Shi'as to be exceptional in their political and social participation.

The aggregate data from the Contractor survey show that among the Shi'as included in this research there has been a very high level of voter turnout. In 2004, there was 77.3% turnout among those who were eligible to vote, with Senator John Kerry receiving 76.5% of the vote and the incumbent President George W. Bush and Ralph Nader receiving 11.8% respectively. The election in 2008 was characterized by 81% participation of all eligible voters. Senator Barack Obama garnered 95.7% of the votes that were cast. As a matter of fact, Democratic candidates garnered a higher percentage of the respondents' votes in all elections from 1992 through 2008, with the noted exception of George W. Bush in 2000. In that year, Bush received 50% of the Contractor survey respondents' votes, which was lower than the percentage reported by

other surveys claiming that 74% of Arab Muslims in the Detroit Area voted for Bush in 2000, and that 72% of Muslim Americans voted for Bush.[1]

The Contractor survey also suggests that in 2008 these mosque-attending Shi'as voted at a higher level than the overall national average as reported by the U.S. Census. They participated at higher levels compared to the Shi'as included in Barreto and Karam's MAPOS study, and they also participated at a higher level than both Shi'as and Sunnis included in the Pew Foundation survey of 2004 voter turnout.[2] Additionally, the similarity between the Contractor mosque-going Shi'as (those that attend the mosque at least once a week) and the ANES service-going respondents (those that attend religious services at lease once a week) suggests that increased mosque-attendance in these three locations has a positive effect on voter turnout in 2008. Chapter 2 also suggests that the findings of those who have shown that higher levels of religiosity increase political participation as well as partisanship among evangelical Christians and Catholics may also be true of the Shi'as of these three communities.[3]

Many Shi'a leaders would like to see community members participate on multiple fronts, not only in the voting booth. One method is by making donations to campaign and political offices. Contributing monetarily to political campaigns depicts a more

---

[1] Jamal, "The Political Participation and Engagement of Muslim Americans: Mosque Involvement and Group Consciousness," 541.
[2] Barreto and Dana, *Muslim American Public Opinion Survey (MAPOS)*; *Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream*.
[3] Kellstedt and Green, "Knowing God's Many People: Denominational Preference and Political Behavior"; Jelen and Wilcox, *Public Attitudes Toward Church and State*; Corbett and Corbett, *Politics and Religion in the United States*.

savvy understanding of the political system, and though voting is important, the leaders understand that the policymakers' choices are more directly affected by monetary contributions. Approximately 26.8% in the Contractor survey contributed monetarily to a political campaign or office (school board, state and/or national elections), with 16.8% contributing on more than one occasion. Looking only at mosque-goers, 28.5% contributed, with 12.2% doing so on more than one occasion. This is pretty much on par with the 22.7% of MAPOS Shi'as and 27.3% of MAPOS Sunnis that contributed monetarily. According to the ANES data, only 11% of Americans contributed to a candidate's campaign in 2008.

It was also determined that 13.4% of the respondents to the Contractor survey volunteered for a political campaign or office, with 7.3% doing so on more than one occasion. However, among the mosque-going respondents, the percentage was higher with 18.3% volunteering. This percentage is more than three times that of the ANES service-goers for the year 2008. The participants of the Contractor study are well above the national average in regards to monetary contributions and volunteering for political campaigns. Just as with the effect of religiosity on voting behavior among the mosque-going respondents, contributions and volunteering increased as members attended services at least once a week. Chapter 2 also shows that a few members of the Shi'a community in the Dearborn, Michigan area have been successful in either obtaining political office through election or appointment.

The information gleaned from Chapter 2, especially given the high levels of voting, particularly among mosque-going Shi'as, led me to ponder on what was happening inside these Shi'a mosques and Islamic centers. I thought that there could be something about the rituals that contributed to political and social participation. I focused on Shi'a narratives, as they are one of the defining factors of Shi'a Islam, which are not existent in Sunni Islam. Of course, narratives play an important part in many religious traditions, however Shi'a Islam is dependent upon these narratives, and for many Shi'as these narratives are the bases of their Shi'aness.

Chapter 3 explains the importance of narratives in Shi'ism. The chapter presents short examples involving the sixth Imām, Ja'far as-Ṣādiq, and the ninth Imām, Muḥammad al-Jawād, and offers an example of the 'Āshurā narrative. The intent is to supply the reader with some indication of how different narrators might use various aspects of the overall narrative of 'Āshurā and Imām Ḥusayn to influence their congregations.

Simultaneously, this chapter is intended to supply the reader with an impression of the sorrow that accompanies the 'Āshurā narrative, in order to serve as an indication of how these narratives can affect people's states-of-mind and behavior. The verbal accounts recounted during a *majlis* are intended to make the audience feel the pain that Ḥusayn and his family and companions felt. As such, in the verbal narration of these events, the narrator often changes the tone of his voice, even coming to tears in order to affect the emotional state of the audience. There is a belief amongst Shi'as, which has

been narrated through strong sources of which Shiʻas are continuously reminded, that a tear the size of the wing of a mosquito shed for Imām Ḥusayn clears the sins the size of the ocean. Therefore, the narrators feel it is their duty to help induce the shedding of tears during the ʻĀshurā season (as well as during the other days of lamentation throughout the year). This gives the reader a glimpse of how these narratives can be used to affect the emotions as well as thought process of individual Shiʻas in regards to a multitude of topics and issues.

Chapter 4 discusses the various ways in which Shiʻa leaders in the United States use the narratives of Shiʼism to influence political and social participation. The chapter focuses primarily on the narrative of ʻĀshurā, and how the leaders tell and re-tell this story. I explained how Shiʻa leaders use the same story, sometimes the exact same element of a given narrative, in different ways, focusing on a particular sub-narrative that serves to bolster their claims. These leaders stress some points and omit others that do not serve their purpose. At times the differences between the narrators' choice of trope are great, and on other occasions the differences are negligible. The leaders' decision to approach the narrative from a particular angle or emphasize one aspect over the other is done in a deliberate manner to affect the audience. Examples are offered of how Dr. Ali Shariʻati and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini used Shiʻa narratives and symbols to influence minds in revolutionary Iran. This chapter introduces the categories of quietist, accommodationist, and *velāyat* approaches to Shiʻa political and social participation, informed by Shariʻati's dichotomy of *Black* and *Red* Shiʻism. Many of the

leaders of the Shiʻa community are seemingly struggling with those quietist individuals who refuse to participate because of the belief that political participation is forbidden in the period of the Greater Occultation of the Hidden Imām. I argued that the Shiʻas in the United States that abstain from political action are doing so based on a faulty understanding, that is, if they are using the "politics is harām" argument as their rationale. The traditional clergy espouse a "quietism" characterized by the unwillingness to actually govern. In other words, they believe that in the absence of the 12th Imām, governing directly is forbidden, but advising the government, voting, contributing, is not seen as being outside the accepted behavior of a Shiʻa. In fact, even propensity of many to label Grand Ayatollah Sistani as a "quietist ayatollah" is completely negated by his own political involvement, albeit not direct political involvement. Through my interviews with Sistani's representatives in the United States, I was easily able to reject the notion that Sistani calls upon his followers to be political quietists. In fact, both of his representatives I interviewed, Imām Kashmiri and Imām Naqvi, were strident proponents of increased political and social participation for Shiʻas in the United States.

This dissertation briefly mentions the quietist approach, but focuses overwhelmingly on the dialogue between proponents of the accommodationalist and *velāyat* approaches. Leaders that hold either of these approaches are both struggling against quietists within their respective communities. However, they are also fighting a battle, so to speak, between each other. Neither accommodationist nor *velāyat*

proponents eschew political and social participation in the United States. In fact, they urge their congregations to be as active as possible. However, they disagree fundamentally on the modes of participation that are permissible. Accommodationists believe that all modes are permissible, given that one is not committing an act that is considered to be contrary to the teachings of Islam. *Velāyat* proponents have the same belief, but have a different perception of what is considered to be permissible. They argue that direct political participation is risky because in their opinion the system is corrupted and under the control of individuals and groups that form policies that are unjust. As such, if one votes, for example, one is giving one's approval, tactic or expressed, passive or active, in favor of "unjust policies." *Velāyat* proponents participate primarily through protests, rallies, and, as in the case of Muslim Congress, through yearly conferences in which they discuss many of these issues and reinforce or attempt to convert the Shi'as that are in attendance. Accommodationists argue that they too disagree with unjust policies, but they believe that Shi'as have a responsibility to at least inform politicians that they do not agree with these policies, and therefore they attempt to affect the system through both conventional methods (voting, contributing monetarily, seeking office, volunteering, letter-writing campaigns, and educating) and non-conventional methods (rallies and protests).

Chapter 5 analyzes the effect of Shi'a narratives on political and social behavior, primarily with respect to a handful of activists within the Shi'a community in the United States. Through in-depth interviews, I was able to ascertain that Shi'a narratives and

symbols do have an effect on political and social behavior, but not in the manner first anticipated. I initially expected that these narratives and symbols, and the different tropes exemplified by what I refer to as the accommodationist and *velāyat* approaches, would have a direct effect on whether Shi'as participated, and also I envisioned that the mode of participation would be affected as well. Simultaneously I was curious to see if the different tropes of the narratives and symbols would result in particular forms of political participation.

WHAT WAS OBSERVED?

Based on the evidence gathered, I rejected the *essentialist hypothesis* and found that Shi'a narratives and symbols do not have the direct effect that I believed they would; the narratives do not act as primary independent variables that inform and create identities that are predisposed towards particular forms of political and social participation. Instead I found stronger evidence for the *instrumentalist hypothesis*; Shi'as in the United States use religious narratives in support of their already formed political and social proclivities to affect their political and social participation. Simply stated, these narratives and symbols do not cause individual Shi'as to participate politically or socially. I suggested that they are more appropriately labeled as secondary independent variables or intervening variables that serve as religious rationales for already formed political and social proclivities.

NARRATIVE AS AN EXPLANATORY VARIABLE

Based on my interviews, interactions, and observations, I can clearly state that Shiʻa narratives are not the sole cause for political action. If that were the case, then all Shiʻas who attend ʻĀshurā gatherings or listen to recorded lectures would be politically and socially active. There would be very few who would hold on to the *quietist* approach to political participation given that situation. As such, the existence of a significant group of Shiʻas, who listen to the same narratives, and yet do not participate, negates any claim that narratives by themselves make people politically and socially active. If Shiʻa narratives caused political activism, then Shiʻas in Saudi Arabia, Saddam-era Iraq, Bahrain, Pakistani, and other locations, would not have garnered a reputation of being non-political. If Shiʻas acted solely on the basis of narratives, then there would be no Shiʻa criminals, murderers, or dictators. Shiʻas would never engage in the acts that are forbidden. They would always pray on time, and surely would never miss a prayer. They would sleep little during the night and supplicate through most of it. They would constantly be giving towards charity and helping orphans.

It is faulty to suggest that these narratives are the sole driving force behind Shiʻa political and social actions, and is an example of reification and essentializing of culture. To simplify all political and social action as being an outcome of listening to the narrative of ʻĀshurā ignores other factors such as personal desires, ethnicity, location, race, education, income, class, etc. As Eklins and Simeon (1979) argue:

…culture as an explanation is seldom direct and seldom operates alone. Rather, it is generally permissive and almost always acts in conjunction with other variables. This is largely because culture is defined by the range of assumptions found in the society. Hence, one cannot infer or predict directly from cultural assumption to individual attitude, individual act, or collective decision. Such an inference requires that the assumption or belief combine with particular information, goals and interests, personality needs, and the like. The cultural assumptions provide the lens through which these more proximate political forces are assessed; they influence what kind of interpretation will be placed on political forces, but alone they cannot account for the result… Political culture should seldom be seen as competing with other variables, but as a complement to them. Which other variables it most powerfully interacts with depends largely on what sorts of things we want to explain. If we are interested in individual attitudes, the focus will be on the interrelationships of culture, personality, and social position.[4]

The narratives of Shi'ism are one variable among others. Jihad Saleh's propensity to work as a congressional staffer was not determined by him listening to the narratives of 'Āshurā, but those narratives in conjunction with his already formed sense of responsibility and sacrifice, his desire to struggle for social justice, his ethnic

---

[4] David J. Elkins and Richard E.B. Simeon, "A Cause in Search of Its Effect, or What Does Political Culture Explain?," *Comparative Politics* 11, no. 2 (January 1979): 140.

background, and his life growing up in South-Central Los Angeles informed his particular brand of politics. Jihad had a struggle, and he picked pieces and versions of the Ḥusayn narrative that correspond with his own life. The narrative gives meaning and backing to his already formed proclivities.

Jihad is a Shiʻa Muslim, just as Fatma and Nadia Saleh and Zahra Mirnajafi are. Therefore, they are predisposed to pull from their own religious and cultural traditions in order to inform their life choices. Undoubtedly, they have strong emotional attachments to the historical figures of Shiʻism, but the affection is not based on names and lineage of these individuals per se. The Prophet, Imām ʻAlī, Fāṭimāh, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, Zaynab, and ʻAbbās are human beings, but they are remembered by the Shiʻas because of their deeds, words, beliefs, morals, lessons-taught, and their standing for justice and against injustice. Their simply being born into a particular family does not make them special. Shiʻa history is full of brothers, daughters, mothers, sons, cousins, and the like who were enemies of the Shiʻa Imāms. Therefore, the attachment to these people is based on qualities they exuded and actions they took. This is best summed up by Imām ʻAlī's recommendation to judge a person not by his or her name, but by his or her actions.

The point here is to clarify that the activists included in this dissertation identify aspects of the narratives that speak to them personally. Jihad speaks of Imām Ḥusayn because he on some level sees his own sacrifice of entering a profession he did not want

as similar to the selfless sacrifice Ḥusayn made by giving up his life in order to reawaken the *ummāh* of his grandfather, the Prophet. Fatma feels an attachment to the personalities of Imām ‘Alī and Imām Ṣādiq because they were known for their academic endeavors which speaks to the author in her. Nadia looked towards all members of the Prophet's Household because of their sacrifices. When Khadijeh works with Sunnis to plan Pro-Palestinian events, she uses as an example Imām ‘Alī's willingness to council and advise those whom he believed usurped his rights because it was for the betterment of the early Islamic community. Therefore, these narratives do not *make* these individuals; rather the narratives, and the specifie tropes, are picked to *reinforce* already held beliefs and proclivities. Additionally, the different tropes, accommodationist and *velāyat*, do result in different forms of political and social participation.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS DISSERTATION

This dissertation had a specific goal, but in understanding the effect of Shi‘a narratives on political and social action it speaks to more general influences that lead people to political and social action and participation. More specifically, it involves the discussion of how religiously active people participate and what causes them to participate in political and social affairs. Does their religion have an immediate effect on how they approach politics? How have Muslims as a minority in the United States, and Shi‘as as a minority within that minority, participated politically and socially? How do different tropes of Shi‘a narratives and symbols affect political and social participation among

Shi'a political activists living in the United States? In answering this very specific research question, this dissertation also sheds light on larger issues relating to religion and politics, especially those involving the use of narratives as motivational tools by religious leaders, as well as how these narratives influence political and social behavior of religious-minded people.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, there is much literature that depicts religious congregations as sources of civic skills and participation. Verba et. al (1995), Correa-Jones and Leal (2001), Smidt et. al (2008), and Neiheisel et al. (2009) argue that places of worship help individuals develop civic skills necessary for increased political participation. This dissertation confirms those previous studies. Additionally the findings of this dissertation suggest that higher levels of religiosity increase political participation among Shi'as in the United States.

On more substantive level, understanding of Shi'as in the United States is important due to the current situation that Muslims in the United States (and the West) find themselves. In a post-9/11 world, Muslim Americans are continuously defining and proclaiming their loyalties. The increase of Islamophobia during the 2010 mid-term election cycle unleashed a new series of attacks on Muslims in the United States, including current legislation in a variety of states aiming to ban *sharī'āh* law from being used in courtrooms. All of these issues, combined with the position the United States finds itself vis-à-vis the Muslim world, only heightens the necessity to have a more complete understanding of this minority community.

This dissertation contributes to a more complete understanding of Shi'as in the United States. Though Shi'as were not involved in the attacks of 9/11, or any subsequent plots to harm American civilians, they nevertheless still suffer from stigmas that emanate from their co-sectarian relationships with the Islamic Republic of Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon. There is also a commonly held belief that all Shi'as are beholden to Iran's dictates; that they are all puppets of that regime. This dissertation pushes that way of thinking aside, by showing that most Shi'as are not followers of the concept of *velāyat-e faqīh* (Guardianship of the Jurist), which is the regime-type in Tehran. Instead, the majority of Shi'as in the United States, and worldwide, are followers of Grand Ayatollah Sistani's approach to politics. In fact, out of the 86 respondents who participated in the Contractor survey, approximately 63% were followers of Sistani and 14% followed the Supreme Leader of Iran, Grand Ayatollah 'Alī Khamene'i. Most followers of Sistani are either quietists or what I refer to as accommodationists.

Even those members that are *velāyat* adherents are not calling for the end to the American political system, nor are they aiming to somehow topple the government. They are in fact beneficiaries of the freedoms and protections of the system. They too realize this, and as such are open to political participation, but not direct political involvement. They might not vote, but they hold rallies, demonstrations, and conferences.

At the same time, the overwhelming majority of quietists, accommodationists, and *velāyat* adherents in the United States decry acts of terrorism committed in the name of

Islam, or any other religion or ideology. Many were adamant that, "we Shi'as don't do this kind of thing," and wanted me to explain this to others. They themselves believe that terrorist acts are the actions of "Wahhabis and Salafis," and that more often than not Shi'as are the targets of these tactics in countries such as Iraq and Pakistan. This distrust of certain Sunni ideologies has led many Shi'as to use the term "Wahhabi" wantonly for any Sunni who might be slightly conservative in his or her approach to Islam. Though Shi'as in the United States condemn these acts of violence, they often point out that there are conditions that lead to these types of atrocities, and that these causal factors must be rectified in order to curtail violent acts, usually in reference to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

On another level, this dissertation shows that leaders and members alike want to advance their community's standing in the American political and social arena. They realize that the only way to secure their rights and position in this society is to take the plunge into public life. The leaders of course try to control this as much as possible, hoping to influence, on some level, how their flocks participate. Accommodationists and *velāyat* purveyors both want to have input in the lives of their parishioners. That does not necessarily mean that they want to control for whom people vote, but they want to at least have some influence in order to insure that people are not participating for the wrong reasons. Imām Hassan al-Qazwini in Dearborn even recounted a personal meeting with Sistani, in which the Grand Ayatollah told him it was absolutely permissible to participate in the political system of the United States under the

conditions that people are educated about the issues, they follow the advice and guidance of their local religious leaders, and that the intended outcome is for the betterment of society as a whole, not simply for the benefit of one individual or only for Shiʻas. Sistani operates under the old premise of the clergy being advisors and protectors of morality and society. In reality, most Shiʻas do not approach their local leaders asking for permission to vote, run for election, or protest. Nor is the intention for Shiʻas to run to their clergy to have every question answered. The intent is to give local clergy the ability to counsel their flocks on the decisions they are making. This of course is based on the idea that the particular clergy member is just, and that he is educated on the issues about which he is being questioned. Another way of stating this is to say that those like Sistani would like to see Shiʻas not make rash decisions based on false premises. Voting for voting's sake does no good. It is risky to give money to a candidate about whom you know very little. Running for office for mere personal gains is a form of greediness, that would not be considered Islamic. Therefore, the argument is that it might be better to run these ideas by your local leader because he is trusted as a just person who will help you understand your reasons for participating in the manner you wish.

It is also naïve to discount the idea that these religious leaders also want to remain significant. They have jobs they want to retain, and any loss of influence is detrimental to their overall standing within the community. However, throughout my research, I never encountered a religious leader who exuded any characteristics that led me to

believe that they were simply looking to keep their jobs. This certainly was not the case for Maulana Haider in Dallas, who refused to send the tithing money that was due to Sistani's representative, a decision that cost him his position in Dallas' MOMIN Center. He may not have known that this action would cost him his job, but he had to have known that it would disturb many members of his congregations, especially those that were followers of Sistani.

This dissertation also suggests, that Shi'as who frequent Shi'a mosques are voting in incredibly high percentages. This may signal to policymakers, officeholders, and prospective candidates that the Shi'a community is one that is willing to listen, and that in areas of large Shi'a populations elections can be won or lost based on the way this community votes.

FURTHER RESEARCH

This dissertation is the beginning of a larger research agenda involving American Shi'a political and social life. This agenda involves three separate approaches, one that deepens the ethnographic work conducted for this dissertation in order to get a fuller understanding of the effects of narratives and symbols on political and social action, and another that broadens the scope of the survey so that a more complete comprehension of political and social opinions and action of the overall community can be determined. The third approach is to extend the research to include Shi'as living as minorities within a minority in places such as Europe, Australia, and elsewhere.

Deepening the Research

By conducting more in-depth ethnographic research on the individuals and locations included in this dissertation, a fuller and thicker understanding of the effect of narratives on Shiʻa political and social behavior can be ascertained. The analysis of interviews, lectures, interactions, sermons, prayers, and other related activities leads a researcher to new questions that he or she may not have initially considered. For example, do the Shiʻa narratives involving women characters have similar or different effects on Shiʻa political and social behavior? Throughout my research, even the women activists drew inspiration from the male protagonists of the narratives. What kind of activist draws from the female-centered narratives? I mentioned that individuals draw from the narratives and characters with which they find something in common. Given that the narratives of Fāṭimāh al-Zahra, the Prophet's daughter and Imām ʻAlī's wife, and Zaynab bint ʻAlī, the granddaughter of the Prophet and daughter of Imām ʻAlī and Fāṭimāh al-Zahra, are strong accounts of women performing political actions in a very patriarchic society, I believe it would be interesting to determine how what kind of Shiʻa activist pulls from their stories. Furthermore, how do the narratives of Shiʻism affect African-American Shiʻas political and social behavior? It would be interesting to understand how the story of ʻĀshurā, which involves the oppression of a small group of individuals at the hand of a much larger faction that was connected to the governing authority, speaks to the African-American condition in the United States. Just as African-American slaves were oppressed by a system based on injustice, so too were

Imām Ḥusayn, his family and companions. Just as the children of Ḥusayn were taken from their father as a result of his death, African-American families were divided either by death or on the selling-block. Just as the women of the Imām Ḥusayn's household were whipped and put in chains, African-American women were whipped and chained. Also, because of the history of African-Americans being an oppressed minority, they may have an affinity towards Shi'ism because of the minority-status of Shi'as in relation to Sunnis. In other words, similar to American slaves' affinity towards the Exodus story in the Bible, a small group of African-Americans also draw spiritual justification from the narratives of Shi'ism. These are a few of the questions that I was led to as I was conducting the fieldwork, but which are not covered in this dissertation. Further work on this material will undoubtedly provide even a better understanding of minorities within this minority within a minority.

Moreover, time constraints also limit access to individuals and communities. Increased access to these activists, leaders, and communities, will contribute to a fuller understanding of Shi'a political and social opinions and actions, and how Shi'ism influences those aspects of Shi'a public life.

By focusing on these communities and individuals with which I have already established some rapport, I will delve deeper into the meanings of narratives for individuals. For example, how have the activists' lives changed in the two years that I last sat with them, and therefore how have their understandings of the narratives changed? Do they still perceive the narratives in the same manner? As I found, different

people based on their own individual situations use these narratives in different ways. Time changes one's life, sometimes drastically, and other times minimally. Events take place that change people's perceptions and beliefs. How have these Shi'as attachments to the Prophet, Imām Ḥusayn, Imām 'Alī, etc. changed alongside those life changes?

Also, by engaging in a more in-depth study of the narratives of Shi'ism, I would ascertain how the telling of these narratives is affected by the American setting. How will the adaptations to the American ear change the manner in which the stories are told? In other words, how does the Americanization of the Shi'a community affect the way in which they practice their faith? Surely, this process has started, and it has already affected some practices, but as the community's time in the United States increases the more the faith begins to take on aspects that are foreign to Shi'as living in the Muslim world.

Broadening the Research

Broadening the research entails increasing the number of locations (mosques, Islamic centers, *hosseiniyyahs*, etc.) in order to increase the number of responses to the survey. The more respondents included and a broader sampling of the greater American Shi'a community will result in sounder findings, and will provide for a better understanding of the political propensities of this demographic group. At the moment, the data that is included from the Contractor survey serves primarily as a point of reference. No hard conclusions can be drawn from those findings due to low number of respondents (n=86). I outlined the difficulties of conducting surveys in Muslim communities in the

introductory chapter. Success of the survey was hindered by the political nature of the questions, the Muslim apprehensiveness in a post-9/11 world, political apathy, and underreporting of the female population. The shortcomings of my initial survey must be overcome in order to produce a sounder data set by which more concrete conclusions can be drawn.

Surveys are the best way to have a feeling of how the larger community participates, but also of how it is thinking and to get a feeling of what American Shiʿa public opinion is. It is important to ascertain how Shiʿas will respond to the rise of Islamophobia, Congressman King's "Radicalization of Islam" hearings, President Obama's policy involving the "Arab Spring" of 2011, and a host of other issues that affect the Muslim community as a whole. Will Shiʿas not vote for President Obama in large numbers given the United States' lack of condemnation for the Bahraini government's violent crackdown of Shiʿa protestors and the deployment of Saudi troops to help the Bahraini Sunni monarchs in their efforts? Given that American foreign policy in the Middle East has a large effect on Muslim political and public opinion, Obama could possibly lose votes due to his administration's policy choice for the region. On the other hand, given the rise of Islamophobia, which has been linked to political conservatives, perhaps Shiʿas will stay loyal to the Democratic party; if anything, in order to hamper Republicans from gaining power in the Oval Office and in Congress. In other words, though they may disagree with President Obama's policy of staying quiet on the Bahraini issue, they would still prefer him to the alternative,

whoever that may be. These issues are still up in the air, but ascertaining Shi'a political opinion and action, the effects on them, and how they change and evolve over time is only the next step in understanding their political and social development in the United States.

All of that being said, though it might be interesting to find out what Shi'as are thinking, and how they are participating, the fact still remains that they are a rather small demographic group. Other than in a few areas (Dearborn is the best example), their vote *as Shi'as* really has little significance on political outcomes. During the election cycles, the "Shi'a vote" is never mentioned as one of the important goals of candidates. Shi'as are not blind to this fact. As such, how do they make up for this lack of numerical importance? Will Shi'as begin to use monetary means at a greater level? Will they begin to flex their political muscle, and if so, in what manner given their numerical inferiority? All of these types of questions can be answered through conducting surveys over consecutive election cycles. This allows for a look at the evolution of Shi'a political behavior over time. And additionally, it allows for data by which we can compare Shi'a political behavior and beliefs with national averages, Sunnis, and other ethnic and religious minorities. It also can allow for intra-American Shi'a comparisons based on location, education, income, ethnicity, and/or which *marja'* one follows.

Comparative Case Studies

I would also like to extend this research to include Shi'as living in Western Europe. This would allow for a comparison of Shi'as as minorities within a minority, and will undoubtedly allow for some interesting findings about the role of narratives in political and social action. The first location I plan to extend the research to is England. The socioeconomic status of Muslims in the England is different compared to those living in the United States. Muslims in the United States are typically members of the middle-class, and do fairly well economically speaking. However, in England, this is not the case with Muslims' socio-economic status being lower as compared to their American coreligionists. Much of this is based on the nature of Muslim immigration into England as compared to the United States. Muslims moving into Western Europe tend to settle in the former colonial power that occupied their respective countries of origin. This is the case for the Muslims of England, with the largest ethnic groups being South Asians, who have become the primarily inhabitants of large neighborhoods in areas of lower socioeconomic status, a phenomenon that does not exist in the United States.

Therefore, by extending the research to include Shi'as living in Western Europe and other locations, a better understanding will be ascertained of how narratives affect political and social behavior. Given the differences in socio-economic status of Shi'as and the difference in political systems from country to country, the status of living in the countries that used to be former colonial powers, and other particulars of the countries in which these Shi'as find themselves, will all contribute to how narratives are

used and how they are absorbed and influence political and social life. Additionally, survey data from these other case studies will allow for comparisons on political opinions and behavior of Shiʻas that live as minorities within a minority.

LAST WORDS

This was a study of how Shiʻa narratives affect the political and social actions of activists within the American Shiʻa community. Throughout this dissertation I have laid out my understanding of those narratives, the different tropes, and how they are used, absorbed, and then applied to give meaning to individuals' lives. By deepening, broadening, and extending this research I hope to contribute to an even better understanding of this community, and how it compares to other Shiʻa communities in Western Europe and elsewhere.

Getting to know the imāms, leaders, activists, and everyday people of these Shiʻa centers has contributed to my own comprehension of the narratives of Shiʻism and has introduced me to other ways of conceptualizing how narratives influence political and social participation. Though they do not make an individual, they surely play a very strong role in determining how the world is perceived, and they have an influence on how people act given that perception. This dissertation was just a glimpse of how the narratives of Shiʻism play a role in the politics and social interactions of this minority within a minority.

WORKS CITED

Aghaie, Kamran Scot. *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran*. Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2004.

Aghaie, Kamran Scot, ed. *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2005.

al-Asi, Mohammad. "Political Involvement", Dallas, Texas, July 5, 2008.

al-Dhalimy, Imam Abu Haider Muhsin. "Semi-Structured Interview", October 19, 2008.

al-Jibouri, Yasin. "A Glance at the Shi'a Communities in the U.S." *Islamic Insights* (October 1993).

"al-Murtazawi", n.d. http://murtazawi.info/.

al-Qazwini, Imam Moustafa. *The Call of Muslims in America*. Islamic Education Center of Orange County, 2009.

al-Qazwini, Sayyid Hassan. "Semi-Structured Interview", August 25, 2008.

Ansari, Abdolmaboud. *Iranian Immigrants in the United States: A Case Study of Dual Marginality*. Milwood, New York: Associated Faculty Press, 1988.

Arjomand, Saïd Amir. *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Ayers, John W. "Changing Sides: 9/11 and the American Muslim Voter." *Review of Religious Research* 49, no. 2 (2007): 187-198.

Ba-Yunus, Ilyas, and Kassim Kone. "Muslim Americans: A Demographic Report." In *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square: Hopes, Fears, and Aspirations*, edited by Zahid H. Bukhari, Sulayman S. Nyang, Mumtaz Ahmad, and John L. Esposito, 299-322. Walnut Creek, California: Altamira Press, 2004.

Barreto, Matt A., and Dino Bozonelos. "Democrat, Republican, or None of the Above? The Role of Religiosity in Muslim American Party Identification." *Politics and Religion* 2, no. August (2009): 1-31.

Barreto, Matt, and Karam Dana. *Muslim American Public Opinion Survey (MAPOS)*. Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Institute for the Study of Ethnicity & Race (WISER), 2009.

Bayard de Volo, Lorraine, and Edward Schatz. "From the Inside Out: Ethnographic Methods in Political Research." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 37, no. 2 (April 2004): 267-271.

Bloch, Maurice. "Introduction." In *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society*, edited by Maurice Bloch. London, UK: Academic Press, 1975.

Boyer, Pascal. *Tradition as Truth and Communication*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Brumberg, Daniel. *Reinventing Khomeini The Struggle for Reform in Iran*. Chicago, Illinois: University Of Chicago Press, 2001.

Conover, Pamela Johhston, Donald D. Searing, and Ivor M. Crewe. "The Deliberative Potential of Political Discussion." *British Journal of Political Science* 32, no. 1 (2002): 21-62.

Contractor, Cyrus Ali. "The Dearborn Effect: A Comparison of the Political Dispositions of Shi'a and Sunni Muslims in the United States." *Politics and Religion* 4, no. 1 (April 2011).

Corbett, David E., and Julia Mitchell Corbett. *Politics and Religion in the United States*. New York, New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999.

Donno, Daniela, and Bruce Russett. "Islam, Authoritarianism, and Female Empowerment: What Are the Linkages." *World Politics* 56, no. 4 (2004): 26.

Downs, Anthony. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper and Row, 1957.

Elkins, David J., and Richard E.B. Simeon. "A Cause in Search of Its Effect, or What Does Political Culture Explain?" *Comparative Politics* 11, no. 2 (January 1979): 127-145.

Faezi, Shaykh Amir Mukhtar. "Semi-Structured Interview", April 2, 2009.

Fenno, Richard F. *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*. Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown, 1978.

Fish, M. Steven. "Islam and Authoritarianism." *World Politics* 55, no. 1 (2002): 34.

Gastil, John. *Democracy in Small Groups: Participation, Desicion-Making and Communication*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: New Society Publishers, 1993.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York, New York: Basic Book, 1973.

GhaneaBassiri, Kambiz. *Competing Visions of Islam in the United States: A Study of Los Angeles*. Contributions to the Study of Religion. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997.

Gutterman, David S. *Prophetic Politics: Christian Social Movements and American Democracy*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2005.

Halm, Heinz. *Shi'a Islam: From Religion to Revolution*. Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Weiner Publishers, 1997.

Hammersley, Martyn. *What's Wrong with Ethnography?: Methodological Explorations*. London, UK: Routledge, 1992.

Hegland, Mary Elaine. "Women of Karbala Moving to America: Shi'i Rituals in Iran, Pakistan, and California." In *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam*, edited by Kamran Scot Aghaie, 199-228. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2005.

Hosseinzadeh, Khadijeh. "Semi-Structured Interview", January 9, 2009.

"Imam Al Jawad", n.d. http://www.al-islam.org/kaaba14/12.htm.

"Islamic Information Center", n.d. http://www.islamicinformationcenter.org/.

Islamic Information Center. Letter. "Info Alert: IIC Calls Upon Community Members to Participate in the Census", March 10, 2010.

———. Letter. "Info Alert: IIC Supports Healthcare Reform as Positive 'First Step'", March 22, 2010.

Jacobson, Gary C. "The Effects of Campaign Spending in House Elections: New Evidence for Old Arguments." *American Journal of Political Science* 34, no. 2 (May 1990): 334-362.

Jamal, Amaney. "The Political Participation and Engagement of Muslim Americans: Mosque Involvement and Group Consciousness." *American Politics Research* 33, no. 4 (July 2005): 521-544.

Jelen, Ted G., and Clyde Wilcox. *Public Attitudes Toward Church and State*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1995.

Jones-Correa, Michael, and David L. Leal. "Political Participation: Does Religion Matter?" *Political Research Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (December 2001): 751-770.

Kashmiri, Sayed Mohammad al-Baqir. "Semi-Structured Interview", January 5, 2009.

Kellstedt, Lyman A., and John C. Green. "Knowing God's Many People: Denominational Preference and Political Behavior." In *Rediscovering the Religious Factor in American Politics*, edited by David C. Leege and Lyman A. Kellstedt, 53-71. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993.

Kelly, Nathan J., and Jana Morgan. "Religious Traditionalism and Latino Politics in the United States." *American Politics Research* 36, no. 2 (March 2008): 236-263.

Khalidi, Omar. "Living as a Muslim in a Pluralistic Society and State: Theory and Experience." In *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square: Hope, Fears, and Aspirations*, edited by Zahid H. Bukhari, Sulayman S. Nyang, Mumtaz Ahmad, and John L. Esposito, 38-72. Walnut Creek, California: Altamira Press, 2004.

Khoja, Irma. "Why Muslims Need to Fill out the U.S. Census Form." *Islamic Information Center: Politics, Media, and Interfaith Since 2002*, March 27, 2010. http://iicblog.wordpress.com/.

Khomeini, Imam Ruhollah. *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*. Translated by Hamid Algar. Berkeley, California: Mizan Press, 1981.

———. "Islamic Government." In *Islam and Revolution I: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (1941-1980)*, translated by Hamid Algar, 25-166. Berkeley, California: Mizan Press, 1981.

King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Lee, Jongho, and Harry P. Pachon. "Leading the Way: An Analysis of the Effect of Religion on the Latino Vote." *American Politics Research* 35, no. 2 (March 2007): 252-272.

Leonard, Karen. "American Muslim Politics: Discourses and Practices." *Ethnicities* 3, no. 2 (2003): 147-181.

———. "American Muslims and Authority: Competing Discourses in a Non-Muslim State." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 25, no. 1 (2005): 5-30.

———. "South Asian Leadership of American Muslims." In *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens*, edited by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, 233-249. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Mansbridge, Jane J. *Why We Lost the ERA*. Chicago, Illinois: University Of Chicago Press, 1986.

Mapping the Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population. Pew Research Center, 2009.

McCloud, Aminah Beverly. "Conceptual Discourse: Living as a Muslim in a Pluralistic Society." In *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square: Hope, Fears, and Aspirations*, edited by Zahid H. Bukhari, Sulayman S. Nyang, Mumtaz Ahmad, and John L. Esposito, 73-83. Walnut Creek, California: Altamira Press, 2004.

Momen, Moojan. *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1986.

Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream. Pew Research Center, 2007.

Mutz, Diana C. *Hearing the Other Side" Deliberative Versus Participatory Democracy*. New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Mutz, Diana C., and Jeffery J. Mondak. "The Workplace as a Context for Cross-Cutting Political Discourse." *The Journal of Politics* 68, no. 1 (February 2006): 140-155.

Nakshawani, Sayed Ammar. *The Crucifixion of Christ*. Muharram 2009/2010. Burtonsville Maryland, 2009.

Naqvi, Sayyid Rafiq. "Semi-Structured Interview", November 30, 2008.

Neiheisel, Jacob R., Paul A. Djupe, and Anand E. Sokhey. "Veni, Vidi, Disseri: Churches and the Promise of Democratic Deliberation." *American Politics Research* 37, no. 4 (July 2009): 614-643.

Nimer, Mohamed. "Muslims in the American Body Politic." In *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square: Hope, Fears, and Aspirations*, edited by Zahid H. Bukhari, Sulayman S. Nyang, Mumtaz Ahmad, and John L. Esposito, 145-164. Walnut Creek, California: Altamira, California, 2004.

Olson, Mancur. *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965.

Putnam, Robert D. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 1 (January 1995): 65-78.

———. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

———. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Qummi, Sheikh Abbas. "Nafasul Mahmum: Relating to the heart rending tragedy of Karbala'." Translated by Aejaz Ali T. Bhujwala (al Husaynee), n.d. http://www.al-islam.org/nafasul-mahmum/.

Riker, William H., and Peter Ordeshook. "A Theory of the Calculus of Voting." *The American Political Science Review* 62, no. 1 (March 1968): 25-42.

Sachedina, Abdulaziz. "A Minority Within a Minority: The Case of the Shi'a in North America." In *Muslim Communities in North America*, edited by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith, 3-14. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994.

Saleh, Fatma. "Semi-Structured Interview", January 2, 2009.

Saleh, Jihad. "Semi-Structured Interview", November 24, 2008.

Saleh, Nadia. "Semi-Structured Interview", January 1, 2009.

Schatz, Edward. "Ethnographic Immersion and the Study of Politics." In *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*, 1-22. Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Scheufele, Dietram A., Matthew C. Nisbet, and Dominique Brossard. "Pathways to participation? Religion, Communication Contexts, and Mass Media." *International Journal of Public Opinion* 15, no. 3 (September 2003): 300-324.

———. "Social Structure and Citizenship: Examining the Impacts of Social Setting, Network Heterogeneity, and Information Variables on Political Participation." *Political Communication* 21, no. 3 (2004): 315-338.

Schubel, Vernon James. "Karbala as Sacred Space among North American Shi'a: 'Every Day is Ashura, Everywhere is Karbala'." In *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, edited by Barbara Daly Metcalf, 186-203. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1996.

Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990.

Scott, James C. *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1976.

———. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1986.

Shari'ati, Ali. "Red Shi'ism", n.d. http://www.iranchamber.com/personalities/ashariati/ works /red_black_shiism.php.

Sim, Kevin. "Once Upon a Time in Iran", February 22, 2007.

Smidt, Corwin E., Kevin R. den Dulk, James M. Penning, Stephen V. Monsma, and Douglas L. Koopman. *Pews, Prayers, and Participation: Religion and Civic Responsibility in America*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008.

Suleiman, Michael W. *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1999.

Sunstein, Cass R. "The Law of Group Polarization." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 10, no. 2 (December 2002): 175-195.

Takim, Liyakat Nathani. *Shi'ism in America*. New York, New York: New York University Press, 2009.

Takim, Liyakatali. "Foreign Influences on American Shi'ism." *The Muslim World* 90 (2000): 459-477.

———. "Multiple Identities in a Pluralistic World: Shi'ism in America." In *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens*, edited by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, 218-232. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002.

The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org). *The ANES Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies, n.d.

Thurfjell, David. *Living Shi'ism: Instances of Ritualisation Among Islamist Men in Contemporary Iran*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Publishing, 2006.

Varzi, Roxanne. *Warring Souls: Youth, Media, and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press Books, 2006.

Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Verba, Sydney, and Norman H. Nie. *Participation in America*. New York, New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

Walbridge, Linda S. "A Look at Differing Ideologies Among Shi'a Muslims in the United States." In *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, edited by Michael W. Suleiman. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999.

———. "Confirmation of Shi'ism in America: An Analysis of Sermons in the Dearborn Mosques." *The Muslim World* 83, no. 3-4 (1993): 248-262.

———. *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001.

———. "The Shi'a Mosques and the Congregations in Dearborn." In *Muslim Communities in North America*, edited by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith, 337-358. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994.

———. *Without Forgetting the Imam: Lebanese Shi'ism in an American Community*. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1997.

"What is the IIC?", 2009.

Wolfinger, Raymond E., and Steven J. Rosenstone. *Who Votes?* New Haven, Connecticut: Yale, 1980.

Wuthnow, Robert, and Conrad Hackett. "The Social Integration of Practitioners of Non-Western Religions in the United States." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, no. 4 (December 2003): 651-667.