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EMANCIPATION, EMPOWERMENT AND TRANSITION:

Historical, Religious and Political Narratives Among Iraqi Shi‘a in Dialogue with Catholic Pastoral Theology

by

Kieran Flynn

in completion of the requirements of the Ph.D. for the University of Dublin

IRISH SCHOOL OF ECUMENICS TCD 2011
I, Kieran Flynn, declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other University and it is entirely my own work.

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SUMMARY

This thesis reflects the concerns of Shi’i Muslims communities in Ireland and the United Kingdom, in dialogue with a Western Christian and Catholic voice. It introduces the specific communities who have been my dialogue partners, examines their social context and voices their particular concerns in order to provide a foundation for understanding and dialogue. The thesis explores the main narratives of Iraqi Shi’i doctrine, history and politics. These narratives are identified as emancipation, empowerment and transition. I introduce Shi’i religious teaching in relation to the Imamate and the Ashura Narrative which are central to Shi’i religious ritual, theology and self-understanding.

The methodology largely pursued is interpreted narrative, focusing on historical, religious and political themes. Over a number of years I attended talks by Imams in both London and Dublin. The subsequent conversations formed the basis for dialogue and cooperation between my western Catholic Christianity and Iraqi Shi’ism. This methodology permits Shi’a, especially those in exile from Iraq, to articulate their stories for westerners to hear. As a minority within Islam itself, Shi’a feel doubly misunderstood: the majority Sunni and the putatively Christian West fail to comprehend the decisive narratives that form Shi’i identity.

The Iranian Islamic Revolution and the political leaders of revolutionary Iran who are pivotal to the study of Shi’ism today. Throughout modern Iraqi history the Shi’a have played a significant role as both a religious and political minority. In this study I attend to the Shi’i narratation, within Iraqi Shi’ism, of opposition, liberation and political emancipation. The political transition that took place within Iraq from 2003 until 2008 is central in this regard.

Iraqi Shi’i sermons in Ireland provide an insight into the religious and political life of the community. The themes expressed indicate the concerns of the community at this juncture. They reflect the problems of integrating and living in the West; I present a dialogue between Shi’i and Catholic theology, liberation theology and Christian political theology. Finally, I offer an enhanced political theology, based on Metz, as a means of developing precisely those themes which emerged from formal conversations with Shi’i scholars and leaders.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of all those who lost their lives through violent conflict in Iraq following the War and Occupation in March 2003.
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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

“Always be ready to make a defence to anyone who asks for a reason for the hope that is in you, and make it with modesty and respect.”

(1Peter 3:15-16)

RATIONAL FOR THE STUDY AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As a catholic missionary working for many years in Africa I was keenly aware that much of our religious activity and theological speculation was shockingly introverted. When the opportunity to study came my way I embraced religious pluralism with a desire to move from the superiority and proselytizing of the past to a theology that was more inclusive and allowed for mutuality of expression and experience. I wished to respond to the task, expressed by Anthony O'Mahony, of developing strategies for entering into the meaning system of another tradition so that I would become familiar with a faith and a faith community different from that of my own.

I was commissioned by my religious community, St. Patrick’s Missionary Society, to study Islam. My pastoral missionary experience in Nigeria years provided the backdrop and experience to my present studies and the tools to engage with another cultural and religious community. The Catholic Church has developed a wide range of encounters with Islam focusing on a number of significant issues and levels, including: theological issues, religious freedom, the rights of the person, the rights of minorities and conflict resolution through religious exchange. I wished to focus my reflection on the lived experience of Muslim communities in the context of empowerment and emancipation despite the reality

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of violence and oppression of communities and minorities in the Middle East particularly Iraq.

My emphasis lay on presence and witness, important Catholic missiological themes that promote an attitude of listening, understanding and dialogue. My missionary encounter with Islam is build upon the insights of Jesuits Henri Sanson and Christian Troll who suggest that Christians should reflect on their missionary vocation towards Muslims 'in the mirror of Islam', meaning that Christians should take into account the fact that our Muslim partners equally convinced of their missionary faith and their witness to Truth. I wished to experience “lived Islam” and learn from Islamic communities as an insider, learning from the lived experience of Muslims, and in this way be a “missionary in reverse”. An example of Catholic mission to Shi’a Islam is that of the Dominican Cyprian Rice who developed an apostate among the Shi’a of Iran build upon witness and dialogue.

Following my initial dialogue, I chose to attend to the Shi’i communities in Ireland and the United Kindom. I was received by the Iraqi Shi’i community, through the friendship and hospitality of Dr. ‘Ali Al Saleh, the resident Imam at the Ahul Bayt Centre, Milltown, Dublin. My initial dialogues with the community were so well received that progress into dialogue was both an invitation to hospitality and friendship with a living, vibrant and faith-filled community.

There has been little academic research into the Muslim community in Ireland. The Shi’i community in Ireland and the United Kingdom provided me with a useful and

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4 Joshua Foa Dienstag, Dancing in Chains, Narrative and Memory in Political Theory, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1997, p.1. I had no desire for proselytism or to seek the conversion of Muslims, but to enter the meaning system of another religion and become immersed in its lived reality through dialogue.


valuable entry-point and sounding-board for the study of Islam in this part of the world. Although there are Shi’i members from Iraq, Pakistan, Iran, the Gulf States and Lebanon in abundance in Ireland, it would be impossible in a study such as this to deal with any more than the Arab Middle East and with one national community in particular. I began my reflection as American and coalition soldiers were occupying Iraq in 2004. The period of my field research from 2004 until 2010 corresponded with the war and occupation of Iraq by American and coalition forces. I decided to reflect almost entirely on the Iraqi Shi’i Community during this period. This time was one of obvious transition, turmoil and trauma for many Iraqi refugees among them the Shi’a. The period marks the tremendous movement of a nation from dictatorship, war, occupation and insurgency to security and democratic participation. It is this unstable political landscape that frames the background to my reflection and research.

I wished to engage in a listening exercise, to attend and participate in the religious and social space provided by the Hussania and the Mosques in Ireland and London. Over a period of time, I engaged in conversations with a great number of the men who attended the prayers, the sermons and the rituals on a regular basis. I sought to make sense of the narrative worldview – religious, historical and political – of the Iraqi Shi’a and in this way identify the recurring narratives that provide identity to the community and inform the religious, historical and political world of Iraqi Shi’a.

I wished to engage with the scholarly and academic work written about and by the Shi’a and to allow this reflection and reading to be guided by the needs and concerns of the Muslims I came in contact with.

Academic research into Shi’ism has concentrated for the most part on Shi’i Iran in the light of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The academic research into Shi’ism in Iraq has focused upon the role the Shi’a have played in the formation of an opposition to the ruling elite in the twentieth century. These sources and emphasises have provided a focus...

Flynn, “Understanding Islam in Ireland”, Islam and Christian Muslim Relations, Vol.17, No.2, April 2006, pp.223-238. At present there is a research project being conducted in University College Cork, by the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences; this IRCHSS-supported Project is entitled, “History of Islam in Ireland”; the Principal Investigator is Dr. Oliver Scharbrodt.

I use “men” because it would have been deemed wrong for me to engage with women. While not the only voice of Shi’a men are nonetheless normally the significant powerbrokers.

In Chapter III, I provide an overview of this literature and the available academic research into Shi’i Islam in Iran.

In Chapter VI, I proved an analysis of the literature that refers to Iraqi Shi’i opposition in the twentieth century.

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for my reflection and my reading. My theoretical and analytical research was informed by sources available for the most part in English although there are some Arabic texts that have been translated into English. Part of my purpose has been to address this perceived ethnographic and academic deficit.

My interest in the ethnography of Islamic preaching was stimulated by Patrick Gaffney, author of *The Prophet’s Pulpit, Islamic Preaching in Contemporary Egypt*. Like Gaffney I found it “often difficult to explain to ordinary people the purpose of my unaccustomed presence in their midst.”\(^\text{10}\) Similarly, to mark myself a Catholic Priest and a Catholic Missionary would have dominated all other considerations and perhaps recast a whole conversation into unwelcome, acrimonious apologetics or even put a future relationship into doubt. To clarify my purpose I began by locating my enterprise within the realm of *‘ulum ijtima‘iya*, that is, of the social sciences, and found that the most understood description of my purpose was to explain that I too was interested in studying *al-‘adat wa al-taqalid*, that is, the “customs and tradition” in an effort of shared friendship and interreligious dialogue.

What was immediately obvious was that I was in a Muslim space, a place where Islam was both the dominant “symbol and signification system”.\(^\text{11}\) As I had completed a thesis on “Understanding Islam in Ireland”\(^\text{12}\) which presented an overview of Muslim communities in Ireland, I was now in a position to develop this topic in dialogue with a Muslim community that was open and hospitable to ethnographic research and the exposition of religious, historical and political narratives of emancipation and empowerment.

This research was conducted during the period of the American and Coalition intervention in Iraq (2004-2010); the latter figured greatly in the preaching, teaching and discussions of the Iraqi community present in Dublin and London. This presented a creative space to explore dialogue between Islam and the West, under such heads as intra-Muslim conflict, Muslim-Christian relations, the changing face of Arab Islam, Iraq in the crossfire of violence and terrorism, and to offer a critique of paradigms of domination in Islam, to name a few. These were themes that were of interest to me as a researcher, and themes that were emerging in preaching and in dialogue among Iraqi Shi‘a.

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From April 2006 until December 2008 I recorded and transcribed 58 sermons as they were addressed to the community in Dublin and London. Over the period it was possible to identify emerging codes and themes that were of import to the community. In September 2007 and January 2009, I attended majali rituals in London, visiting Al Kho’ei Foundation, Dar Al Islam and Abrar House, where I gathered sermons and interviewed key personalities.

I wished to identify the Shi’i particularity in Islam, the elements of Shi’i faith and polity that identify its uniqueness in Islam. Of obvious importance was the centrality of the Imamate and the commitment to justice, emancipation and empowerment, which make up key elements in Shi’i teaching and practise. Although reflection on Shi’ism is incomplete without reference to the Shi’a of Iran and Lebanon, the Shi’a in Iraq have a unique history of opposition and encounter with governing political authority. The Shi’i ulama in Iraq shaped and were shaped by the political developments of the twentieth century.

In bringing together the elements of Shi’a history and politics that have informed Iraqi Shi’ism over the centuries and transporting them to a new context in exile, I believe that, Shi’i Islam has found a flourishing home in the West. Although there is a constant referral to the home country as most migrants are of the first generation, the experience of exile has been one also of transformation and liberation for many who have found their way to the West. This ferment is a fertile ground for new expressions of Islam, and for new ideas to emerge. Among the themes reflected upon are the following: the perception of Islam in the West, friend of foe; Islam and the West, confrontation or dialogue; education and integration; human rights, democracy and political participation; dialogue with Christianity and civil society; violence and Islam. These themes were reflected in the preaching and the teaching of the Shi’i community in transition as it expressed its faith in a multicultural and globalized world.

The focus of the research is on Iraqi Shi’a and the historical, religious and political narratives that have underwritten their emancipation and empowerment. The events of 2004-2010 have been truly revolutionary for Iraqi Shi’a. They have seen their country under dictatorship, war, occupation and ethnic conflict. Yet, despite the challenges, Iraqi Shi’a have emerged in political participation, empowered and emancipated for the first time in their history. Throughout this transition they had drawn on narratives of opposition to domination in the past and from their religion. They bring a unique critique of radical Islam, terrorism and violence perpetrated in the name of Islam.

The Iraqi Shi’i Community in Ireland and the UK reflects the concerns, narratives, history and religion of Iraqi Shi’a within Iraq. As a community in exile they bring a new
interpretation to the ancient narratives of emancipation and empowerment. Those living abroad are more influenced by globalization and western modernity. They are familiar with the narratives of human rights and democracy. They reinterpret the religious and political motifs of Iraqi Shi'a and express these in the language of the West in their preaching and conversations.

I seek to express the foundational religious, historical and political narratives of a particular community, Iraqi Shi'a in the context of the War and Occupation from 2004 until 2010. I wish to give voice and intelligibility to their religious, political and social concerns, so that they may recognize themselves in the narratives and that others in the West may understand and appreciate their perspective, which I believe is unique and significant for the larger Islamic community. The Iraqi Shi'i community in the West is the lens through which I view all Iraqi Shi'a and the means to interpret the larger Shi'i Middle East. There is a distance between what the community in exile reflects and the reality in Iraq and the Middle East, yet I believe that they offer a unique lens from which to reflect on the foundational narratives of all Iraqi Shi'a as they seek empowerment and liberation.

Iraqi Shi'a have a contribution to make to our understanding of Islam in dialogue with Christianity, the West and to intra-Islamic scholarship. They hold a perspective that is transnational and which gives a minority its own voice. They have the ability to critique dominant paradigms and narratives within the political and religious worldviews, and these would otherwise remain unexplored and tacit. In this way Muslims can articulate efforts at building bridges of reconciliation within Islam and with the West through understanding, shared meaning making and constructing narratives of intelligibility in the public space.

**Methodology and Scope of the Research**

The method combines the theoretical and the comparative, the analytical and the empirical. Theoretically, I investigate the foundational religious, historical and political narratives of Shi'i reflection in the Middle East with reference to the history, doctrine and politics of Twelver Shi'ism, particularly Iraq.

My methodology in relation to Iraqi Shi'a is that of interpreted narrative. Narrative is a central research category and organizational tool in relation to community history. Levisohn speaks of interpreted narrative as the means not only to communicate but also to "express the meaning and significance of historical events through their organization of
these events into plots of various types". I present religious, historical and political narratives from among the Iraqi Shi‘i community which are interpreted and verified by Iraqi Shi‘i communities living in Ireland and London. According to Levisohn historiographical inquiry is appropriately characterized by negotiation and interpretation among narratives. Therefore in conversation with these communities I present interpreted narratives of emancipation, empowerment and transition, reflecting the historical, religious and political narratives of Iraqi Shi‘a. Petra Munro Hendry informs us that “symbolic narratives are those that seek to respond to questions of human experience”. I apply this symbolic narrative to a national ethnic and religious community and interpret their experience in the light of conversations and dialogue with Iraqi Shi‘a living in exile. Narrative embodies a community’s meaning making. As Hendry says, “narrative has the potential to remind us of the complex and multiple ways in which humans make meaning.” I apply this meaning making narrative methodology to the religious, historical and political contexts of Iraqi Shi‘a. Another application of this methodology has been that of Jane Bristol-Rhys who has applied interpreted narrative to the context of the United Arab Emirates. Bristol-Rhys identifies several current historical narratives including those which are interpreted through participant observation, interviewing and meeting with focus groups.

Over the past several decades, many “ruptures of difference” have been asserted through postcolonial, feminist, diasporic, ethnic, queer, multicultural and “other” theories. With regard to Islam the discourse has been overstated by the dominant Sunni narrative. Here, critique based on the notions of human rights and democracy emerges but without self-reflection: there is little or no internal criticism from within the Muslim world. Shi‘i Islam presents itself at an internal other in the world of Islam; it is the minority voice that presents a different model of leadership and authority in Islam. We thus have here the


16 Petra Munro Hendry, “Narrative as Inquiry”, p.78.


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research complication of an outsider interpreting an insider discourse. There are many levels of complexity that make the situational analyses of narrative difficult to interpret; at base, where we tell stories to ourselves about ourselves, are narratives constructed by society’s dominant powers.

Given that narrative analysis and discourse analysis enables us to investigate social change, through attending to language in constructing social relations and establishing identities, it is through attending to the sermons and conversations of the Iraqi Shi’i community between 2004 and 2010 that we gain access to the community’s social, political and religious worldview at a time of unique political upheaval. There are codes and themes of interest to the student of Islam concerning the ritual and practises of a Muslim community. There are themes, too, of a social nature, concerning health, family, education, integration, gender roles and responsibilities, as this community situates itself within a world different from its home. There are Muslim narratives concerning Shi’i Islam and its minority status in Islam. There are political narratives including relationship with a western, secular society and there is the social, political and religious reality emerging in Iraq. Each of these I present as narratives competing for relevance and public recognition, each one reflecting fluid and creative realities, vying for meaning and recognition. Of particular interest to me as a researcher are those narratives that I encounter as original, counter-intuitive and creating a space for a dialogue of compassion and the formation of communities of empathy in suffering.

I have chosen the word narrative in my study to highlight the religious, historical and political themes appearing within the Iraqi Shi’i community. These narratives are expressed in the scholarly literature on Shi’i Islam in Iraq and I have used my conversations with Iraqi Shi’a in Ireland and the UK to verify and interpret scholarly research in these fields.

There has been much study on the concept of narrative. This has focused for the most part on individual lifestories, life story methodologies, individual and personal

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20 In his study, *Time and Narrative*, University of Chicago Press, Vol. I-III, London, 1990, Paul Ricoeur refers to the development of narrative within the individual. He is concerned with life stories and their intelligibility over time. He sees the development of a personal identity in time as part of an overall lived narrative that is intelligible to the individual. I am concerned with intelligibility, identity and story development within a particular community that is nationalistic but also in exile. I rely on religious, social and political themes as the foundations of identity and memory. Mary Chamberlain, in *Narratives of Exile and Return*, Transaction Publishers, New Jersey, 2007, focuses on narratives of migration and especially
identity development over time. I have used narrative to refer to foundational themes and paradigms, religious and political developments, collective identity and memory, within a specific community. The term is sufficiently elastic to carry a variety of political, religious and cultural themes as they are expressed and reflected upon throughout the study.

I seek to give an overview of the foundational religious themes in Shi’ism, the elements of Shi’ism that present its particularity in Islam with reference especially to the Imamate. Through an articulation of the central religious and theological themes within Shi’i Islam, I identify the Shi’i particularity with reference to the Imamate and ritual memory paying particular attention to the ritual practise of Ashura. My interest is in Arab Shi’i Islam but the world of Iraqi is situated alongside the majority Shi’i community of the Islamic Republic of Iran and developments that led to the foundation of the Islamic Republic in 1979. The narratives of emancipation and empowerment that are recognized within the Iraqi community find their initial expression within the experience of Iranian and Shi’a. I seek to particularize my reflection among Iraqi Shi’a paying attention to historic developments among Iraqi Shi’a in the post-colonial world that provide the background to Iraqi opposition to dictatorship and eventual political participation in democratic government. There is an underlying narrative of suffering and oppression that I allude to that continues to be reinterpreted in new political, religious and historical contexts.

The political and theoretical developments in post-revolutionary Iran and post-colonial Iraq provide the foundation for reflection and development among the Shi’a of Iraq. I focus on the development of the Shi’i opposition in the twentieth century and the recent transition to political participation and democratic government. I identify the narratives of emancipation, empowerment and transition as central foundational themes in scholarly research among Iraqi Shi’a.

The political developments that took place in Iraq between 2004 and 2010 are situated within a larger historical and regional narrative of opposition and emancipation.

“transgenerational life stories” again the focus is on the individual and the family. She presents family life stories as experienced in the process of migration and resettlement. Her emphasis is on the social and the cultural. She is interested in “transnationalism from below”, the process of accommodation and assimilation by individuals and families in a new social and cultural environment. Although I am interested in transnationalism and exile, I am interested in the religious, social and political narratives and foundations of identity for a national community in exile. Rina Benmayor and Andor Skotnes (eds.), in Migration and Identity, Transaction Publishers, New Jersey, 2007, focus on oral history, life story and personal testimony within the experience of migration by individuals. Their emphasis is on cultural, ethnic and social identity formation and the process of migration.
These developments provide the timeframe and context of my reflection and analysis. These developments have been most traumatic for the entire Iraqi people, many were killed, and many others were displaced. It is difficult and maybe naive to posit any central narrative to speak less of emancipation or empowerment without seeming to lend support to military rule. I seek to present a unique perspective that is informed by Iraqi Shi'a living in exile and that is build upon the opposition of the past to dictatorship and tyranny. This is an interpreted narrative and one that would not be univocal among Iraqi Shi'a, but is articulated by those living in exile and among the religious leadership (marja) of Najaf.

The qualitative and empirical research is dependent on the sermons and conversations carried out among the Shi'i community over a five year period. In his Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, John W. Creswell identifies five approaches to qualitative inquiry. They are: Narrative, Research, Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography and Case Study. My study draws especially on two categories within this typology, namely ethnography and narrative study; however, I also focus on sermon analysis.

In Chapter I, I identify the Iraqi Shi'i Community in Dublin and London as my dialogue partner and ethnographic research “field.” In my exposition of foundational narratives among Iraqi Shi'a in later chapters, I sought to have my scholarly research supported, verified and informed through conversations with Iraqi Shi'a. In my interactions with Muslims I presented myself as a “listening presence” to the Iraqi Shi'i community in Ireland, someone who was anxious to learn and understand all that was related to the symbols and signification systems of this community at this time. I sought to insert myself as an empathetic dialogue partner who was seeking understanding within a faith community. Though I belonged to a different faith tradition, I empathized with this Shi'i community’s members. I dialogued with individuals on many occasions on an array of topics and concerns about which they wished to express an opinion.

22 John D Brewer, Ethnography, Open University Press, Maidenhead, 2000, p.27. Brewer identifies ethnographic research as the study of a people in a naturally occurring setting or “field” in which it is the intention of the researcher to explore the meanings of this setting and its behaviours and setting from the inside. The methods of research used are naturalistic observation, documentary analysis, conversations and interviews. I identity my ethnographic setting in Chapter I and in Chapter VI I draw on sermons and sermon analysis from within the community.
Central to the life of the Iraqi Shi'i community is the Mosque, which in Gaffney’s term, is the “central value system”23 that is symbolically projected by the social organization of rituals embodied in this sacred community. The Mosque, the Hussania is the centre of ritual prayer, the breaking of the Ramadan fast, the Eid Festivals and the maj(a)lis’ rituals of Ashura. Furthermore, the minbar, the teaching centre from which the sermons are proclaimed, represents the centre of orthodoxy and continuity. The mihrab, facing Mecca, evokes Mecca and the sacred centre in ritual prayer. Thus, it also represents the highest authority and Islam’s transcendent ideals. In spite of the fact that the founding ideal of unity has generated a flourishing diversity within Shi‘i Islam and that each Mosque expresses the ideal within its own particularity, there is a sense in which Islam is created in every Mosque; it is through the rituals that memory of the divine revelation establishes the umma as a specific human experience in community.

This particular Islamic community represents a microcosm of the Muslim worldview insofar as it makes concrete and accessible the possibilities of the sacred realm. This is the embodiment of the religious paradox. On the one hand, it represents a universal and permanent ideal; on the other hand, this community is contingent, incidental and constrained by concrete facts. The sermons and the conversations reflect a particular but comprehensive worldview of Islam. The concerns of this Iraqi Shi‘i community based in the West reflect the aspirations of the national and religious community of Shi‘i Iraq.

In order to come to terms with this worldview I required a more flexible and multi-dimensional tool than quantitatively arrived at statistics could provide; thus, I turned to qualitative research. Qualitative research is inherently multi-method in focus. “It involves the studied use of a variety of empirical materials – cases study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artefacts; cultural texts and production; observational, historical, interactional and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals.”24 This wide family of methods enables me to construct a more wholistic view of the Iraqi Shi‘i community, especially that in exile. It permits me to knit together elements that might otherwise remain sundered from each other. Thus, I model myself on the researcher as bricoleur25 (maker of quilts) who, through observation

25 Ibid., p.4.
and reflection, pieces together the fabric of a community’s meaning system. As a methodological *bricoleur* I identify the significant categories and narratives emerging in conversations, sermons and rituals within a particular Shi‘i community. Also, in Chapter VI, where I identify nine sermons from among the Iraqi Shi‘i community in Ireland, my methodology encompasses sermon analysis as presented by Toby M. Howarth. This includes the presentation of the sermon in chronological narrative form, an analysis of the teaching and ideas expressed in the sermon, and an identification of key themes expressed in the sermons. As a theoretical *bricoleur* I examine different narratives that could be used to interpret this particular situation: this includes religious, historical and political narratives. I have chosen *Emancipation, Empowerment* and *Transition* as key terms in interpreting the narratives most central to providing meaning and context to dialogue with Iraqi Shi‘a.

Interpreting research as an interactive process shaped by personal history, biography, gender, social class, ethnicity and religious affiliation, I note the unavoidably partisan nature of academic research. The researcher and theorist accepts that, “all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social [sic] and historically constructed; that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values... that the relationship between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed.” I accept that my worldview and my religious orientation make a significant contribution to my interpretation. Thus, while identifying the religious truth claims expressed by this Muslim community in ritual and symbol, my own beliefs as a Christian are challenged and clarified. In conversation and dialogue there is a meeting of worlds: religious, political, social and personal. It is my contention that we can understand each other, identify our limitations, accept our bias, overcome our prejudice, and attend to our pain and articulate emancipatory action. Dominant religious, political and social constructions tend to protect the status quo such that religious and political minorities struggle under oppression that does not always have explicit recognition. Within the Islamic world there are the claims of the dominant Sunni majority to objectivity and neutrality, though they entail narratives of oppression, intolerance and injustice. These dominant claims rest on particular narratives of history and identity that are not shared by Muslims of minority status, particularly the Shi‘a, who argue that theirs is a history of violent oppression and intimidation; the


dominant majority players, however, read this history as criminality and revolution. As Kincheloe and McLaren say, hegemonic ideology “is a critical form of epistemological constructivism buoyed by a nuanced understanding of power’s complicity in the constructions people make of the world and their role in it”.28

There are different ways in which as a Christian researcher doing research in Muslim communities this can be understood. There is the obvious challenge of orientalism, which constructs images of Muslim communities based upon an overly romantic, essentializing and postcolonial reading of history. As a European researcher attempting to identify issues within Islam, political Islam, radical Islam, Middle East politics and international relations, it would be improper to suggest that I do not carry an orientalist mindset; clearly, my experience of Muslim society and my range of contact with Muslims are partial, limited and selective. However, it is possible to identify narratives that emerge in dialogue, narratives that are of critical concern to the community under investigation and that present themselves by virtue of repetition and proposition over a series of encounters. My task is to formulate an understanding of these narratives. Edward Said says that “human agency is subject to investigation and analysis, which it is the mission of understanding to apprehend, criticize, influence and judge... rather than the manufactured clash of civilizations, we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other and live together.”29 A Muslim community that is living in the West with links to the Arab Middle East presents itself as attending to a variety of concerns and living within the interplay of a variety of themes. There is concern for families and integration into western society; there is a world faith that is expressed as a minority within a minority; there is the trauma of loss of nationhood, violence and oppression, there is concern for those living abroad and the separation from them and their lived reality. For the Iraqi Shi’a there is the reality of a violent interventionist war on their homeland, the resulting violence and terrorism, the evolving political reality, and growing sectarianism and religious intolerance. There is an Islamic worldview that is sensitive to its minority status; the role of oppression, suffering and injustice; a victimhood that has become in part ritualised and sacralised though understood from a variety of perspectives. There is a critique of the dominant Sunni paradigm of expansionism, superiority and infallibility that seeks to establish itself as normative and unchanging. Through a critique based upon the Muslims’ relationship with the Prophet and the Prophet’s family, Iraqi Shi’i

28 Ibid., p.310.
Islam seeks to express an alternative narrative that identifies the suffering, oppression, injustice, and victimhood that lie at the heart of Islam.30

I present myself in Chapter VII as a Catholic dialogue partner with Shi'i Islam. I identify parallel themes of reflection between Catholics and Shi'a and possible future orientations for inter-religious dialogue. There are similarities between the developments in Liberation Theology, Political Theology and developments already expressed among Shi'a in Iraq. I see the theology of Johann B. Metz as an important foundation of future dialogue and discussion in the light of a history of oppression seeking emancipation and empowerment. I offer a note of caution, for a Christian attending to the social, political and religious worldview of a Muslim minority does not at once seem an appropriate conduit for a critique of dominant narratives in Islam; akin to the risk of orientalism as already mentioned, there is the temptation to "exoticize the other". However, there is a decentring of subjectivity that occurs through insertion in the world of an Other than can heighten sensitivity to injustice and propel one towards action on behalf of the aggrieved, though one's vision is far from universal or complete. Kincheloe and McLaren call this "resistance postmodernism"31 whereby the qualitative researcher seeks to challenge dominant research practices that are underwritten by a foundational epistemology and claim to universally valid knowledge at the expense of other local and subjugated knowledges. What is needed is a critical orientation towards knowledge production that allows diverse voices to emerge in order that a greater appreciation of difference can be heard; this would allow for a more creative space in which to build relationships of equality and dialogues of transparency.

So that an emphasis on the country of origin and on their original displacement, I have chosen to refer to Muslims living in the West as those living in the diaspora32. For the most part I have been dealing with individuals and communities who have experienced

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32 Recent studies on the Muslim diaspora in the United Kingdom focus on the emerging young Muslim population. The themes reflected upon by Philip Lewis in Young, British and Muslim, Continuum International Publishing, London, 2007, are Intergenerational Tension, Transmission of Islam, Radical Islam. These themes are for the most part of interest to first and second generation Muslims, notably the Pakistani Community who have a history of migration to the United Kingdom for over fifty years. The Iraqi Community has a migration history of less than twenty years. They are mainly first generation migrants and have young families. The term "exile" is more appropriate to communities who still prefer to speak in the language of their birth and enjoy "foreign" television channels over English ones, despite engaging in a process of integration and assimilation.
displacement in recent history. They are first generation refugees who have recently arrived in the West; here for the first time they begin to build a new life with their young families. Their first language is Arabic, the language of their home country, and their expressed concern is for their family, friends and relations who have been left behind. Their experience is often the difficult one of finding employment and building a home without the social support of an extended family. The experience is one of displacement and exile, rather that integration and acceptance. It has been important, therefore, in this study to retain a focus on these Muslims in diaspora.

Finally, and in relation to orthography, I have allowed myself a certain amount of latitude in relation to transliteration marks. I have not used transliteration marks when referring to Muslim names and Islamic terms throughout the study, relying rather on the simplified roman text to identify the individual by virtue of the context and the content discussed. Thus, Muhammad, ‘Ali, Hasan and Hussein refer to the Prophet himself and the First, Second and Third Imams respectively. I have included a Glossary of Arabic terms in the Appendix, which explains Arabic terms in the text.

**OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. From an introduction to the specific community, namely, the Twelver Shi’i exiles in Ireland and the United Kingdom (UK), I move to a presentation of the religious foundation and subsequent developments that have produced this community, so that the reader is prepared, first, for this community’s self-presentation, and, second, for a discussion of the dialogue of this community with so-called western issues, both secular and religious. Chapter I, then, presents the settlement history and migration of Shi’i Muslims into Ireland and the United Kingdom. I introduce the Iraqi Shi’i community as situated within the broad Muslim and Arab communities that are found in the West. I introduce the specific communities that I have been in dialogue with, their social context and their particular concerns. From the outset there is an emphasis on the political dimension of the community and its political expression as part of its particular identity.

Chapter II explores Shi’i Islam as such and the main narratives of Shi’i doctrine and history, these include emancipation and empowerment. The history of the succession to Muhammad and the Imamate are among the most popular topics in Shi’i preaching and
ritual. This history is both the mythic and primordial narrative of identity for the Shi’a.^^ Children and adults are aware of stories and narratives associated with ‘Ali, Fatima, Hasan, Hussein and the remaining Imams. Consciousness of these characters and their place in history form the basis of Shi’i spiritual life and religious ritual. I introduce the Ashura Narrative which is central to Shi’i religious ritual, theology and self-understanding.

In Chapter III, I examine narratives of empowerment among Shi’a in the Middle East. Shi’ism is overshadowed not only in Iraq but throughout the world by Shi’i Iran and, in particular, by developments leading to and following the Iranian Islamic Revolution. Although political Shi’ism has a long history in Iran, the developments and personalities of revolutionary Iran have an enormous influence on Shi’ism through the world. The intellectual and political leaders of revolutionary Iran continue to provide an important foundation for all the serious study of Shi’ism today. The Shi’a of Lebanon have been influenced greatly by Shi’i intellectuals from Iraq. The ethnic, political and religious pluralism in both countries provides important parallels for reflection. The history of political participation and emancipation by the Shi’a in both countries is an important Shi’i development in recent years and is included in this chapter.

Chapter IV looks at the history and development of the Shi’a in Iraq, particularly in the twentieth century. Throughout modern Iraqi history the Shi’a have played a significant role as both a religious and political minority. We recognize within Shi’ism in Iraq a history of opposition, liberation and political emancipation. These roots early in the twentieth century provide the foundation for the emergence of Iraqi Shi’a in political participation following the fall of Saddam Hussein. Iraq’s recent history of dictatorship, occupation and war is enmeshed in a larger narrative that has its roots in colonial history and the formation of the state. The development of political participation, the commitment to emancipation and liberation, the focus on human rights and democracy form a recurrent theme in this study, and its roots in Iraqi Shi’i communities are evident well before its present expression.

33 In Islam, Past, Present and Future, Hans Küng. Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 2007, presents five paradigm changes in Islam. The initial three paradigms of the early Islamic community, the Ummayad and ‘Abbasid Caliphas are presented almost as remote history. I wish to show that the foundational historical narratives of the early Islamic community are in fact alive and relevant to Islamic communities of today. They are held within the religious, ritual and political imagination of present-day communities and elucidate the mindset of the community. It is upon these foundational narratives that the religious and political identity of these communities is formed today. An important aspect of this study is to highlight narratives of history and politics that critique dominant, expansive and militant narratives that promote radical Islam, violence and intolerance.

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Chapter V looks at the developments that have taken place in Iraq throughout the years 2004-2010. The context of transition has been one of war, occupation, violence and insurgency. The Shi'a in exile have taken a great interest in developments in their country, assisting and providing insight where they can, and building bridges of reconciliation and understanding in the West and in Iraq. This chapter sets the immediate context for listening to the voices of Shi'a themselves. The Shi'a in exile have contributed and continue to contribute a great deal to political, religious and cultural development in present-day Iraq. They provide a contact with the western world and an insight into western scholarship and discourse.

The sermons and narratives that have made up much of my conversations and interviews with Iraqi Shi'a form, as mentioned above in relation to issues of methodology, the core of Chapter VI. I include nine sermons and an analysis of each. Each sermon reflects an aspect of the life of the community and its concerns. Together they provide an insight into the religious and political life of the community. The themes express the concerns and appreciations of the community at this particular moment in time. They reflect internal hopes and concern of the community, the problems of integration and living in the West, religious and political themes of memory and identity, the centrality of the Imamate and the foundational narratives to Shi'a, the hope for transparent political representation and the desire for dialogue with all sectors of society.

In Chapter VII I present a dialogue between Shi'i and Catholic theology, feminist discourse, liberation theology and Christian political theology. I have identified areas of common concern and possible future collaboration. Shi'i scholars likewise can draw on the rich Christian heritage of political theology to form a particular Shi'i political theology, which takes account of the centrality of the Karbala symbolism in modern Shi'i life and devotion. The central themes of suffering, liberation and memory which are central to understanding Karbala and are foundational to the Christian political and liberation theology, particularly the theology of Gustavo Gutierrez and Johann Baptist Metz. These could provide Shi'i scholars with valuable insights for further collaboration with Christian scholars.

In sum, then, the structure of the thesis follows the exigencies of identifying and introducing for western scholars and Christians these Iraqi Shi'i communities who have migrated to and settled within Ireland and the United Kingdom. They are my principal dialogue partners and it is their foundational story that requires articulation in the West. They form a specific social, religious and ethnic group, though they share much in
common with other migrants, particularly Muslim migrants. However, they occupy a
unique narrative within Arab settlement in Western society.

The narrative history of early Islamic community is foundational in the memory
and imagination of Muslims. This is the religious and symbolic narrative through which
Muslims understand and appreciate their Islamic identity. For Shi’i Muslims, their
interpretation of the early history of Islam and the foundations of the Islamic community
are at the heart of what it means to be a Shi’a, what it means to be a follower of Ahul Bayt
and the Imams. They have a particular reverence for Imam ‘Ali ibn Talib and identify a
unique relationship between the Prophet Muhammad and ‘Ali. They see in the history of
Islamic empire an alternative leadership to the golden age of the Caliphs and a legacy of
suffering and lament, denial of political participation, minority opposition, integrity in
guidance and divine designation. These themes are dominant themes today for Iraqi Shi’i
communities, for whom early Islamic history and the Imamate are alive, relevant and
vibrant realities.

Iraqi Shi’a are situated within the larger story of Shi’ism in the Middle East. Here
Iran and Lebanon are the dominant powers. Iran has a long history of Shi’ism and has
exerted much influence on the Iraqi Shi’i community over its history. There have been
close contacts between Iranian and Iraqi ulama over centuries but in the twentieth century
there has been a flourishing of intellectual and religious activity culminating in the Islamic
Revolution of 1979. This has the effect of promoting an Iraqi Shi’i religious opposition to
the state and fomenting a vibrant grassroots movement in Iraq. There are many parallels
between Shi’ism in Iraq and in Lebanon and there has been much sharing of ideas among
intellectuals. Shi’ism in the greater Middle East has contributed much to understanding the
larger international context of Iraqi Shi’a today.

Iraqi Shi’a have faced a long history of religious and political oppression in their
history. It is out of this context that a narrative of emancipation and empowerment

34 There have been many books written which describe the golden age of early Islam and particularly the
Tauris, London, 2007; Hugh Kennedy, The Court of the Caliphs, When Baghdad ruled the Muslim World,
Phoenix Books, London, 2004; Andre Clot, Harun al-Rashid and the World of the Thousand and One
and political. Nothing of the reality of the oppression of minorities and minority leadership is expressed.
These narratives perpetuate a mindset of religious and political expansion, intolerance and superiority
among Muslims, with little regard for the harsh realities of dictatorial rule. In my research I seek to
identify alternative narratives from a minority context that focus on emancipation, empowerment and
transition.

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emerges. It is this I believe that has given Iraqi Shi’a their distinctive political theology. In
the twentieth century Iraqi Shi’a faced the opposition of the state on many fronts, culminating in their opposition to the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. Over the last hundred years they developed strategies and resources to fuel this opposition and to define their specificity.

The Iraqi Shi’a have been in a dramatic transition in recent years; hence the framing of this study on the years 2004 to 2010. These years were among the most devastating and transformative for Iraq as a nation. Over this period, Iraq was subjected to war, occupation, sectarian terrorism and violence on an unprecedented scale due to the employment of modern methods of war. Yet there has been a slow and difficult political and religious emergence. Many Iraqis were forced to flee their country and seek refuge abroad; they went on to form Iraqi communities in exile. Others already in exile sought to participate in the political emergence that was taking place in their home country under the direction of American rule. The developments over these years form the basis for much of this research and the narratives affecting Shi’i Iraqi communities during this time.

Central to this research are the sermons, interviews and conversations I conducted among Iraqi Shi’i communities. Here the religious, political and social narratives of the community are expressed and made intelligible in a ritual space. The themes of exile, displacement, religious memory, suffering and loss, political awakening and leadership (among others) are expressed as religious concerns. The sermons give voice to the deep felt concerns of the community, the search for identity and the desire for reconciliation. In a new context of empowerment lies the possibility of recovery from the trauma of terror, violence, displacement and division. Furthermore I trust that a Christian political theology, which acknowledges the centrality of recalling and attending to suffering in history, will assist my dialogue partners in continuing to build their own specific political theology relevant to their needs.
Introduction

Little attention has been paid to the settlement histories of those Muslim communities in Britain and Ireland who subscribe to non-Sunni traditions. The reason for this is largely due to the public face of Islam in Britain having remained almost exclusively associated with South Asian Sunni dominated Islam. In most academic discourses Islam in the West seems to be equated with Sunnism. This monolithic view has obscured the proper recognition and understanding of the religious and social experience of a significant religious minority in the West. There is no significant study of Muslim minorities in Britain or Ireland.

I am particularly concerned with the Shi’a of the Twelver, Ithana Ashari, denomination and within that denomination those who have come from the Middle East, especially Iraq. This is essentially a minority nationalistic community within an already identifiable Muslim minority in exile. Identifying this community alone involves clarifying particular theological and historical narratives within a larger tradition and history that has deep theological and political roots.

A diverse range of historical, social, cultural and theological factors determine the ways in which minority Muslim communities come to terms with British and Irish society. I seek to examine the early history of Shi’ism as it impacts upon the contemporary religious, social and political experience of this Shi’i community. This is a process of identity building which takes account of the particular history of this community as it has evolved in recent decades. There is a constant interplay between past and present realities. The situation in the Middle East is a gathering place of diverse political historical and theological traditions.

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The recent history of Iraq, including the American war and occupation, the overthrow of Saddam and the establishment of a National Government is but the end of a much larger history that begins with the birthplace of civilization and covers twelve centuries of Islamic history before we see the arrival of colonialism and the emergence of a nation state. The recent and modern history of this state is tied closely to the experience and development of these communities in exile. It has been an experience that has been tainted with violence and tyranny, exile, the hope of return, state building and democratic participation. It has seen the arrival and importance of civil rights and organizations that reflect these concerns.

It is possible for those in exile today to travel to Baghdad, maintain contact with family and community and to access Arab television channels and newspapers. It is possible to have a role in religious and political life of that nation while continuing a life in exile. The experience of exile by this community in a globalised and multicultural European society is directly tied to and reflects the present reality of their home Middle Eastern culture and current, social, political and religious realities.

There are significant links between the Iraqi Shi‘i London community and the Shi‘i community in Dublin. These communities share a common contemporary history of exile and integration, common social, religious and political heritage. These communities are engaged in frequent dialogue and have shared religious and social leaders in recent times. There is much communication between these communities and with the ease of conventional air travel, there is a constant exchange of experts, ideas and information. There is however a significant difference in size, the London community consisting of a much larger number of members and with a greater diversity of services and organizations. There are particular national communities and organizations that are only represented in Ireland. Yet in Ireland, leaders and social activists of note have emerged that have played a significant role in the London community.

1.1 ISLAM IN IRELAND, A GENERAL OUTLINE AND HISTORY.

The Irish Muslim community is of relatively recent origin. The first Muslims arrived in Ireland in the early 1950s coming mostly for education. Many came to study


\[3\] Kieran Flynn, “Understanding Islam in Ireland”, *Islam and Muslim Christian Relations*, Vol.17, No.12, Birmingham, 2006, pp.224-233. This article gives an overview of the history and development of Muslim History and Migration in Ireland. It identifies the early development, the central institutions, the recent developments and the present challenges facing the Muslim Community in Ireland.
medicine, particularly at the Royal College of Surgeons. The first students were from South Africa but were followed by students from India, Malaysia and the Gulf States. By 1969 numbers had risen to 100 and the Dublin Islamic Society was established. With the assistance of the government of Abu Dhabi a permanent address at 7 Harrington St. was established. By 1983 the facilities in Harrington Street were no longer adequate for the needs of the growing community. With assistance of the Qatar and Kuwaiti authorities the property at 163 South Circular Road was acquired. Sheikh Abdullah and Sheikh Yahya M. Al-Hussein were among those appointed as trustees.

Dublin City Mosque is the oldest-established Mosque and Muslim community in Ireland. It is the headquarters of the Islamic Foundation of Ireland. Every Muslim is an honorary member of the Foundation. The Foundation owns a shop for the sale of halal meat and a restaurant which caters for the growing community. The Dublin Mosque attracts Muslims from all over the Islamic world and has members from at least 14 different states. Due to its centre city location it is extremely popular with students in the nearby colleges and those engaged in city-centre service occupations.

In 1992 Sheikh Hamadan Ben Rashid al-Maktoum, Deputy Governor of Dubai and Founder of the Al-Maktoum Foundation agreed to finance the construction of a Muslim Primary School and Islamic Cultural Centre at Clonskeagh, Dublin. The centre was opened in November 1996. Sheikh Halawa from Egypt is the present Imam. Each Friday this Mosque attracts over 1,000 Muslims for prayer. There are among others, growing Lybian and Egyptian communities attending Clonskeagh Centre. This community attracts many middle class and professional Muslims living and working in the southern part of the city. It is a valuable resource for the whole Muslim population, a centre of excellence in hospitality providing many forums for discussion on integration and multiculturalism. This is also the site for the well established and government funded Muslim Primary School and other educational activities.

With the increase in arrival of Muslims in Ireland in the 1990s there has been a growth in the establishment of Muslim communities throughout the country. This is most evident in Dublin; at present there are significant communities gathering in Blackpits, Moore Lane, Lucan, Castleknock and Tallaght. There has been the emergence of a growing South Asian community, with many young men arriving from Pakistan, Bangladesh and India preferring the economic and social climate of Ireland to London or the United Kingdom.
The Irish Muslim Community has been described as “coming of age” Presently there are active Muslim communities in many large towns in Ireland and a growing population of over 30,000. The first generation of migrants have set down roots here and there is a growing population of youth and children of the second generation attending schools here. While maintaining strong links with their home countries Muslim families are developing strong attachments to Irish Society and setting down roots in their adopted home. There is a gradual movement towards participation and integration into civil society with Muslims seeking employment at all levels of society and engagement in government, religious, cultural and civil bodies devoted to integration, settlement and security. With the formation of the Council of Imams in 2006, Muslims from diverse and minority communities now have a common voice and platform for articulating their hopes and aspirations within Irish Society. The Muslim Community is no longer trying to survive or establish itself; it now has established permanent administrative and organizational structures for integration, development and dialogue. This community plays a valuable role in the wider society articulating a new religious reality in this part of the world. Despite problems in representation and a dominance by Arab issues and concern in the past, Irish Muslims feel at home here and are being challenged to express their religious beliefs and practices within a society that has shown itself open to and tolerant of diversity and difference.

1.2 SHI‘I ISLAM AND THE AHUL BAYT CENTRE

Like the Islamic Foundation of Ireland the foundation of the Irish Shi‘i community was laid by a few medical students during the 1970s. Many of them came to study at the Royal College of Surgeons and the Department of Medicine, University College Dublin. As students they rented a small house in the Portobello area of South Dublin and when this was unable to accommodate them they moved into a bigger house in Rathgar. With the arrival of other members in the 1980s there developed the need for a more permanent site and centre for the expanding community. Tapping into their own resources, the community decided to build a proper centre and in September 1996 the present Hussania, Ahul Bayt Shi‘i Islamic Cultural Centre was officially opened in Milltown, Dublin. The Ahul Bayt Cultural centre is situated at Milltown Bridge and is the only Shi‘i Muslim Islamic centre for the whole of Ireland. It aims to serve social, cultural and spiritual needs of the entire Shi‘i Muslim population of Ireland and draws Shi‘i members from throughout the country.

particularly at festival and during Ramadan. At present there are over 3,000 Shi’a working, studying and living throughout Ireland with the majority coming from Dublin although there are sizeable communities in Galway and Belfast. The Shi’i community reflects the diversity of the Shi’i world with members coming from all over the Middle East and Pakistan and a large number from Iraq and Iran. The Iraqi community plays a significant role in community affairs: it accounts for about 55% of the Shi’i population. There is considerable interest in Iraqi affairs and Iraqi members are most involved in the running of activities at the centre.

There is a sizeable Iraqi Kurdish community in Ireland with 200 refugees arriving in 2006 alone. In the past there was a Kurdish association but this has been allowed to lapse. Even though these Kurds are Sunni, they rather gather in the Ahul Bayt Centre for occasions of marriage, funeral and remembrance of deceased ones. This centre offers a place of hospitality and prayer where they can express their Muslim faith without difficulty. They regard this centre as part of their Iraqi home and heritage and there are strong links with the Shi’i community and leadership.

Although there is a proportionately large number of doctors from within the Iraqi community, many of the members are working within the service industries in Dublin city. There are business men, academics, restaurant owners, I.T. specialists, security guards and nurses among the employed. There are a number who are dependent upon social welfare living as refugees and a large number of students. Most of the men arrived here within the last twenty years, leaving behind for the most part the repressive regime of Saddam Hussein and a futile Iraq-Iran War. Almost all of the eligible men have married wives from their home country although some have married Irish women and established young families here. The average age is 45 and the average family size consists of 3 children.5

There is a small percentage who come to Ireland on contract work, foreign affairs or for study leave. During their time here for the most part, they develop strong ties with the local Shi’i community and participate in communal activities faithfully. In subsequent years they often return on holidays to Ireland or maintain contact with their friends here.

The centre is a wonderful resource for Shi’i Muslims in Ireland particularly in the Dublin area. It is independent of foreign Foundations and Institutions and self funding through the generosity of its members. It is an active and vibrant Islamic institution. It is open each day for afternoon and evening prayers with *du’a kumayal* every Thursday and

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5 During the *Eid al Fitr* Celebrations 2002, a survey was carried out to account for new arrivals to the country and the number of their children. The survey enabled the community to assess the number of arrivals and their country of origin. It was also a valuable tool to identify the children of recent migrants.
regular lectures. Each Saturday there are prayers, lectures and meals together to help inform the community and build relationships. There is a strong commitment to build and foster community through mutual support. Friday prayers are well attended even by those living far from the Dublin area, and the community conscientiously gathers to mark the various observances set down in the Shi‘i calendar. Unlike similar centres in the UK, the Shi‘i Hussania in Dublin is served by a fulltime Imam, Dr. ‘Ali al Saleh, who is in residence to meet the needs of the community.

1.3 BRITAIN’S MUSLIM POPULATION

1.3.1 British Muslim History and Migration

Muslims began arriving in Britain from the beginning of the nineteenth century, from the time there were a small number of Muslim seamen and traders from the Middle East who began settling around major British ports. Arab Muslims settled in South Shield and began a community there. Similarly communities grew up around the ports of Liverpool and Cardiff. However, the vast majority of Muslim immigration dates from the post-war immigration of Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Indians who came to fill the labour shortage in the industrial cities of London and in the Midlands, the former textile cities of Yorkshire and Lancashire. The post-1945 migration of Muslims to Britain can be divided into two main phases. The first phase from 1945 to the early 1970s corresponds to a period of immigration through economic motivation on the part of migrants, employers and governments, following lines build up from the colonial period. The second period began with the oil crisis of 1973 and lasts to the present. A number of factors contributed to the overall trend in migration to Britain. The partition of India in 1947 and that of Cyprus in 1974 had major repercussions for the migration of Muslims to Britain. The building of the Mangla dam near Mirpur in 1960 also had a marked impact on the migration of Mirpuris. In 1961 the announcement of the forthcoming Commonwealth Immigrants Act triggered an enormous rush to “beat the ban”. Contrary to the expected result the rate of immigration from India, Pakistan and Cyprus rose sharply at this time. After the Commonwealth Immigration Control Act came into effect, nearly all new immigrants to Britain came as part of the family reunification schemes.

From the 1970s large numbers of people began to arrive as a result of involuntary and coerced migration. Responding to crisis produced by ethno-religious and communal conflict, famines and natural disasters, and oppression by various political regimes, large numbers of people began arriving from the developing world. A variety of socially and politically determined needs have brought a stream of Muslims from Asia and Africa. Immigrants not only from the lower classes but from the educated and middle classes made the decision to move from countries as diverse as Afghanistan, Iran, Somalia and Iraq.

The size of the Muslim population in Britain has been the subject of much controversy in the 1980s and 1990s varying from a low 900,000 to a high 3,000,000 as given by the Muslim parliament. A religious question was included for the first time in the 2001 census. This census showed that 71.6 per cent of the population of the United Kingdom considered themselves to be Christian, while Muslims were the second-largest religion with 2.7 per cent. The census showed that 68 per cent of the Muslim population was of South Asian origin. Pakistanis alone accounted for 43 per cent of the Muslim population and comprised the dominant group.

The British Muslim population are predominately immigrants from a predominantly Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian population. This population is largely young and rural in origin. It is often poor, badly housed and poorly educated, suffering from high levels of male unemployment with a very low female participation in the labour market. In 1994 unemployment among Bangladeshi and Pakistani men stood at about 40 percent – the highest rate among all ethnic groups and more than two times the rate for white men. Similarly, only a third as many Pakistani women and only a tenth as many Bangladeshi women were in paid work as compared with other women. 48 percent of Pakistanis and 60 percent of Bangladeshis had either no or only below O-level education. Muslims appear to be doing worse educationally than other groups. Among the women, the percentage with no or below O-level qualification was 60 percent for the Pakistanis and 73 percent for Bangladeshis.

It is a population within which religious and family values are strongly held. Marriage is almost universal and a within-ethnic-group affair. Although South Asian groups represent Islam in Britain, there is a danger in essentializing Islam and misrepresenting a much greater diversity. Islam in Britain is pan-ethnic and there are

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Muslims of Arab, Albanian, Bosnian, Iranian, Nigerian, Somali, Turkish and many other groups of origin whose characteristics and socio-economic profiles are very different from those of South Asian groups.

The vast majority of Muslims in Britain are Sunni (probably about 85 percent). Most of the Sunni Muslims are followers of the Hanifi school of Islamic law. They recognize the importance of the ulama (religious leaders) and the sharia (Islamic law). Similarly they accept the idea of secular government and of secular law. They are adaptable and politically moderate, well capable of fitting into a multicultural society. Within British Sunni Islam Muslims adhere to different traditions. The Deobandi school is one such designation. The origins of this tradition are to be found in the Indian theological centre of Deoband. Deobandis practise a stricter and more literalist form of Islam than other groups and are less influenced by Hinduism. The other tendency among British Muslims is represented by the Baredivs. These Muslims like the Deobandis represent a traditionalist group, particularly with regard to social teaching; however their philosophy is influenced by Sufism and elements of Shi‘ism. They believe in the importance of spiritual leaders (pir), who act as models and may intercede with God on behalf of Muslims. Many Baredivs belong to Sufi orders of which the most well known is the Naqshbendi. There is at times much tension between both traditions and conflicts emerge. The Baredivs have a majority of followers, but the Deobandis control more Mosques, religious schools and madrassahs. They are supported by the highly influential Tablighi Jama‘at which is based in Dewsbury in West Yorkshire and Bury in Lancashire. Tablighi Jama‘at originated in India and is seeking to infuse a new commitment in Deobandi Islam.

There are also extremist fringe groups within the Muslim Community. Some extremists follow fringe groups that are found in their home countries while other sympathizers are supporters of British movements like the Supporters of Sharia (SOS), established by Abu-Hamza al-Masri, or Al-Muhajirun led by Omar Bafri and Gama Islamiyya, an extremist offshoot of the Muslim Brothers; Jihad which is reportedly linked to Osama bin Laden. The Islamist group “Armed Islami Group” is associated with militant elements of Algeria’s Islamic movement and has sympathizers in Britain.

British Muslims are also characterized by ideological and political differences. These divisions are categorised by some along the following lines: firstly traditional versus

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9 R. Briggs and J. Birdwell, Radicalisation among Muslims in the UK, MICRON Policy Working Paper 7, Brighton, University of Sussex, Brighton, 2009. This paper gives an overview of radical and Islamist groups of Muslim within the United Kindgom. (MICRON refers to Micro Level Analysis of Violent Conflict, see www.microconflict.eu.)
militant Islam, sometimes referred to as Islamists; and secondly traditionalist versus modernist. The Indian sub-continent has not been immune to the trend in Islamic modernism that appeared during the mid-nineteenth century. Well known modernists include Indian Muslim, Sir Sayyed Ahmad Khan and poet-philosopher Mohammad Iqbal Lahori; these continue to have supporters in Britain.

Mosques are the most important institutions around which the Muslim community’s life is organized. As communities developed the number of Mosques increased and their ability to meet the needs of their growing communities expanded. Estimates of up to 1,000 Mosques by the year 2000 have been suggested.10 As well as being places of worship, Mosques often provide valuable community centres and perform educational functions including Qur’an courses and Muslim education.

1.3.2 Arab Migration in Britain

The presence of Arabs in Britain has tended to receive an almost incidental mention in published research in ethnic minorities. Where the presence of Arabs is acknowledged, it is most often in the tabloid media. Here Arab migration and Arab communities have been greatly stereotyped. Arab is often used synonymously with the term Muslim. There is little attempt in the media to acknowledge the Arab Christian population. The term Arab tends to conjure up images of affluence spiced with the exotic. The fact that the majority of Arab immigrants are not members of the exclusive “oil rich Sheik” variety but middle and lower class minorities is not always addressed. Finally the term Arab is linked with a complex Middle Eastern political dimension. Western and Arab Political relations immediately raise the question of geo-political security, terrorism and oil.

Information on the numerical strength and special concentration of Arab communities is hampered by the lack of accurate quantitative data. El-Solh by computing Home Office statistics on granting of work permits and asylum or permanent residence status estimates the number of Arabs settled in Britain at the end of the 1980s to be numbered around 250,000.11 The largest Arab community in Britain by the 1970s consisted of the Egyptians; they had arrived in significant numbers since the 1950s and by 1991 were

estimated to be less than 90,000. Unlike many other Middle Eastern migrant communities, it represents a wide social cross section both skilled, semi-skilled and former students who decided to stay in Britain after qualifying.

1.3.3 History of Arab Settlement in Britain

Towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries Somali and Yemeni seafarers were recruited to serve in the British Merchant Navy. These began to establish their own communities in British ports such as Cardiff, London’s East End, Liverpool and South Shields. Yemeni seafarers were apparently more inclined to marry indigenous women although this did not always lead to their inclusion into the wider British family and society. Social inclusion was difficult to achieve on a wide scale but nevertheless, many families were assimilated into British mainstream society; the British historian Albert Hourani is such an example.

By the late 1940s and early 1950s Arabs in Britain began to include more diverse nationalities such as Egyptians, Sudanese and Iraqis, many of whom came as students and remained in Britain following their studies. Various regional and political factors contributed to the arrival of certain Arabs; for example, following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 there was an influx of Palestinians. The post-war period of the 1960s was an important turning point in the history of Arab settlement with regard to increasing diversity of national and class origins. Labour shortages and the active recruitment of migrant labour opened up labour markets to Arab nationals who arrived in significant numbers. Moroccans were recruited for employment in the hotel and catering industries of London and to some extent in the National Health Service; they arrived in a process of chain migration. By the 1970s due to changes in immigration rules many Arab immigrants brought their families over to Britain, transforming an originally intended short migration into a longer-term settlement. With the declining fortunes of the British Merchant Navy and an expanding industrial economy increasing numbers took up employment in industrial and manufacturing sectors. This was almost always low-paid manual work and made the prospect of upward social mobility all the more difficult.

The 1970s were another important turning point. The oil crisis of 1973 created substantial wealth for many Arab nations and with that increased political insecurity. Many sought to migrate to seek better educational and career prospects as well as lucrative investment opportunities in Britain. The outbreak of the civil war in Lebanon led to an influx of Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians of mainly middle and upper class origin to Britain.
Since the rise in oil wealth in the mid 1970s, London has become a major site and international centre of Gulf Cooperation Council-funded financial enterprise, Arabic-language media and Arab cultural production. London has served as a second home, tourist destination and offshore investment site of choice for Gulf Cooperation Council states and nationals. Several factors have contributed to London’s desirability; historic and colonial links between the Gulf and Britain; familiarity with the English language; the perception of the city as friendlier to Arabs and Muslims than other European capitals; a comfortable climate; a geographic position midway between Europe and the United States; the presence of British ex-army and ex-civil service personnel once stationed in the Gulf; and periodic influxes of Arab and Middle Eastern immigrants following episodes of political upheaval in the region. Arab business men and women set up their own business ventures in Britain ranging from real estate and import/export ventures, to consultancy and leisure services, travel agencies and small-scale commercial enterprises.

By the 1980s the diversity which was becoming more characteristic of Arab communities in Britain was further reinforced by the increasing influx of refugees fleeing persecution from areas such as Iraq and Somalia. Refugees and political migrants of often middle class backgrounds were drawn into downward social mobility leaving behind locations of political instability, but often with social and economic stability, only to discover themselves without employment, income or status in their host country. This led for many, including vast numbers of Somalis, to a vicious circle of poverty and restricted educational and employment opportunities.

The centre of London, including SW1, NW London, W2 and W1 particularly around Edgeware Road, – has a thriving Arab community. In fact 60 percent of all Arabs in Britain are estimated to be resident in the British capital. The Borough of Westminster has the highest density of Arabic speakers in the capital and it is one of the most expensive areas to live. Knightsbridge is another example, with its nightclubs, banks, restaurants and the famous Harrods department store owned by the Egyptian Al Fayed brothers.

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12 The Gulf Cooperation Council consists of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.


14 Small-scale enterprises include economic activities in the informal sector ranging from the Somali woman sewing for her female compatriots, to the middle-class Lebanese woman catering for dinner parties, to the Moroccan extended family operating mobile food kiosks in London’s West end.
Various national and regional bodies were established to promote integration and Arab consciousness in Britain; one of the most prominent has been the Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding (CAABU). CAABU was formed in 1967. Among its aims and objectives were the need to develop mutual understanding and sympathy between the people of Britain and the Arab world. Building upon the long tradition of mutual respect and friendship that existed between these two worlds and encouraged by the growing number of Arabs who adopted Britain as their home, the hope was that in a changing world it may be possible to contribute to easing the tension and causes of distress in the Middle East by demonstrating a concern for justice. The Council seeks to promote links with Government, Parliament, the Media, those in education and the wider public. It is the oldest and largest organization of its type and in recent years has contributed greatly to Arab integration in Britain and a deepening of awareness among society of the complex political and social realities of the Middle East.

1.3.4 British Arab Identities and Commonalities

It is difficult to speak of the Arab community in Britain. Although the term is applicable as a collective category identifying a group united in history, culture and language there are significant variables: national origin, social-economic stature, religious/sectarian and political affiliation, dialect, generational and gender difference, as well as numerical strength and length/location of settlement in Britain. Nevertheless El-Solh identifies certain commonalities or cleavages within and between Arab communities,\textsuperscript{15} two patterns are broadly discernible.

The first pattern pertains to horizontal ties, particularly of class, and cuts across national origin. Middle and upper class Jordanians, Lebanese, Palestinians and Syrians tend to have more in common with each other than they are likely to share with compatriots of a lower class or income. These horizontal ties appear to be regionally bounded and do not include middle or upper class Arabs from North Africa: Algeria, Morocco or Tunisia. Upper Middle class Gulf Arabs tend to have their own social networks, have greater social mobility and trans-national connections. Populations of British and Middle Easterners familiar with the Gulf form a highly skilled, culturally sensitive and often bilingual workforce of mediators. As a centre of cultural scholarship and artistic endeavour, London has become the primary locus for the creation of heritage

\textsuperscript{15} C. F. El-Solh, "Arab Communities in Britain, Clevages and Commonalities", 1992, pp.243-244.
and national regional cultures in the Gulf. A highly developed Islamic art market has been established to meet the needs of a wealthy Gulf Arab elite.

The second broad pattern is related to vertical ties activated within a particular national group, which tend to work in complex ways. For the Somalis clan and lineage affiliation are more important that class differences although the experience of being a refugee continues to shape common ties. Similarly for political refugees from Iraq vertical ties override class considerations. Kurds and Shi‘i political refugees share common ties and histories of displacement which has created bonds of cooperation despite ethnic and often religious differences. Various voluntary associations identify the complexity of crosscutting ties. The Arab Club of Britain attracts middle class Iraqis, Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinians; not surprisingly, low income Egyptian or Moroccan migrant labourers are unlikely to be attracted. The Arab Women’s Association reflects a regional and class bias; it involves mainly upper and middle class women from mashriq rather that maghrib Arab countries. There are voluntary associations based almost exclusively on national origin. The Moroccan Information and Advice Centre, the Egyptian Community Association are examples of limited vertical ties. Arabic language classes further reflect the complexity of vertical and horizontal ties cutting across the Arab communities. The Egyptian and Tunisian diplomatic missions organize courses based on national curricula. The Arab Women’s Association appears to have a wider mix of Arab origins. Similarly there are a number of Arab schools which follow the British national curriculum attracting middle class and upper class Arabs and non-Arab Muslim children.

No clear line emerges to demark where Arab consciousness may end and national identity may begin. Rather this line is fluid and plastic and expands to include or exclude depending upon a series of complex variables. At times a pan-Arab identity may function as a centre overriding national, sectarian and class affiliations. At other times specific issues may be the focal point around which individuals or groups may rally. Political events since 2001 have created opportunities for many groups to organize themselves in formal and informal groups reflecting a greater pan-Arab identity. Stop the War Coalition was formed on the 21st of September 2001 following a protest march in London. This is just one example of an organization that has developed organically along both vertical and horizontal lines responding to the political situation in the Middle East since that time.

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1.4 THE IRAQI COMMUNITY IN LONDON

1.4.1 History of Migration and Exile

Iraqi exiles have been coming to Britain since the 1940s; household names from Iraq include Selim Zilkha, the founder of Mothercare, and Saatchi and Saatchi, the successful international advertisement agency. Through their participation in the wider society this community has benefited British society in many ways, for example the Iraqi Community Association (ICA) estimates that there are over 5,000 Iraqi doctors alone currently working in the British National Health Service\(^\text{17}\). Iraqis in London are numerically the second largest Arab Migrant community after the Egyptians. No accurate statistics exist although the ICA gives an estimate of 250,000, with 60 percent living in London.

The link between the formation of a migrant community and political developments at home is most clear in the case of Iraqis in Britain. Since the 1950s Britain and London in particular has been hosting thousands of Iraqis of different political persuasions, ethnic origin and economic class who have fled their country due to a succession of political developments. At this stage I wish to address only those events prior to 1991; more recent events, including the Gulf War of 1991, the subsequent years of sanctions and the American led occupation of Iraq in 2003, will be addressed in a subsequent chapter.

Between 1950 and 1991 four political developments have caused corresponding waves of migration: the 1958 revolution, the 1963 coup, the 1968 Baathish takeover and the Iran-Iraq War of 1980.

The British installed monarchy of Iraq was put to an end in the 1958 revolution. This revolution was the result of a wide alliance between the Communists, Baathists, the National Democrats and the Nasserites. With the fall of the monarchy hundreds of bureaucrats, diplomats, politicians and army generals who had been associated with the monarchy left the country. Many of these had maintained close contacts with Britain since the formation of the monarchy and were familiar with the country. Among this group were those of considerable wealth and influence in the formation of the Iraqi state since 1921.

In 1963 the Baathist and Nasserite elements took charge of the country. These had been associated with the 1958 revolution but endeavoured to eliminate the Communists

particularly those associated with the Iraqi Communist Party. Many within this party saw in London a welcome haven of safety and exile, moving there as the ‘hunt for the Communists’ gathered momentum. Unlike the early migrants these exile were not from the landed gentry but were middle class professionals, doctors, lawyers and intellectuals. Many came to pursue further education and were not without means.

When the Baathist leadership took over in 1968 a third wave of migration began to take shape. In Iraq the general climate was one of political intolerance and the imposition of an uncompromising Arab nationalist ideology. This led to the flight of those who were opposed to the regime’s attempt to suppress alternative identities, particularly the Kurdish and Christian Iraqis, who felt excluded from the regime’s Arab nationalist ideology. Similarly there were many who were opposed to the totalitarian activities of the state where basic freedoms of speech and expression were at times denied, and sought a life in exile. Many of these migrants would have travelled to Britain in the past and were established professionals and business-people. The 1970s were a time of economic growth in Iraq with the availability of economic opportunities; nevertheless, many professionals preferred to settle in London and await a more liberal political climate in Iraq.

With the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s a new wave of migration started. The war was accompanied by a systematic deportations policy (tahjir). This policy was enforced particularly against Shi’i families who were suspected of having Iranian ancestry (tabaiya irania). Tabaiya irania and tabaiya othmania were two categories used during the Ottoman Empire aimed at distinguishing Sunni and Shi’i Iraqi. The first were labelled as people of tabaiya othmania whereas the latter were known as people of tabiya irania. Those of a declared Iranian ancestry were regarded as not having any allegiance to the State and were represented as a national threat. Deportations to Iran took place, although many Shi’i came to European capitals as well. These groups included people of all socio-economic backgrounds coming as refugees and asylum seekers. London particularly had been receiving this category of exiles. Among them were rich merchants who had their properties confiscated, professionals who had lost their job or had fallen foul of the State, semi-skilled and unskilled workers with limited resources, education and linguistic skills.

The Iraqi community in London cannot be described as a community of economic migrants. From the period of the 1950s until the 1980s Iraq has never exported economic migrants, i.e. people who had to leave their country with the objective of achieving long term economic benefits. Economically this period in Iraq corresponds to the rise in oil prices and the subsequent economic development associated with that in many countries of
the oil producing Middle East. Rather, during this period Iraq received economic migrants from neighbouring countries and from the Indian subcontinent, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Iraqi exiles stress that they left their country because of various political pressures rather than economic necessity.

The majority of Iraqi political migrants belong to one of the following categories: firstly, those who have been politically active mainly in opposition in Iraq and have suffered under a repressive police state. Under fear of persecution they were forced to leave and find asylum in the West. Secondly: those passive individuals who have no allegiance to any political party but are dissatisfied with the political and social reality of their country. They may oppose the State but not always actively so or are they affiliated to the opposition parties. Thirdly: Iraqi students in Britain who are politically active and involved in political activities against the regime, through their participation in demonstrations or joining opposition parties. Such people would be prevented from returning to their own country and would decide to remain as political migrants in Britain. The fourth is the group of those who flee their country as a result of dramatic political events and immediate persecution. Such an example would be the Kurds or the Assyrians. There is thus a spectrum of those seeking political asylum from Iraq ranging from those who are being actually persecuted and fear the actions of the State to those who seek greater mobility and a more liberal lifestyle outside Iraq.

1.4.2 Iraqi Shi'a in Exile in London

In 1994 five religious institutions of Iraqi Shi'a were identified. These were four community centres (Markaz al-Imam al-Khoei, Markas Alh al-Bait, Dar al-Islam, Husainiyyat ar-Rasul al-A'zam) and one educational institute (Ma'had al-Sayyid al-Sadr). There has always been close co-operation between the religious institutions and the political groups represented mainly as opposition parties. There has also been close association with leading political and religious figures, who provided the inspiration and in some cases the backing for these groups. At present the outstanding religious institution which is representative of Iraqi Shi'ism in London is Dar al Islam which has close association with the Da'wa party and the al-Khoei Foundation. Dar al-Islam was established in 1993. Following the increase in the number of immigrants it became necessary to provide a permanent community centre that could be used to promote the

social, cultural and ideological values of Islam. Through engaging in various educational, social and religious programs, Dar al-Islam seeks to provide a necessary centre for Iraqi Shi‘i Muslims in the Cricklewood area of London. The community provide advice and support to refugees. It also organizes religious services, prayer occasions, weddings and seminars on comparative religions. There are also classes in Arabic in co-ordination with the North West College of London. There is a growing Friday weekly prayer assembly attracting Shi‘i Muslims from across a broad socio-economic spectrum.

Rahe identifies two major currents of Islamist groups among the Iraqi Shi’a in London.¹⁹ It is possible to identify a moderate camp defining itself as ‘liberal’ and ‘democratic’ and there is a group which defines itself as more radical and ‘revolutionary’. The first group tends to support a liberal democratic society with a pluralist political system; the second promotes a revolutionary change in society, aiming at the establishment of an Islamic state, supervised marja‘iyya. Differences between both groups correspond to significant differences in the confessional thought of these groups. There is a close relationship between the radical groups and the political thought and ideology of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr. The oldest and most experienced organization is Hizb ad-Da‘wa al-Islamiyya which was founded with Sadr’s support in the late 1950s in Najaf. The Da‘wa has been associated with opposition politics in Iraq and in the past presented a non-sectarian face. However in its newspaper ‘Voice of Iraq’ it reveals a more Shi‘i profile.

The al-Khoei Foundation was established by Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei in London to establish contacts with western government and international organizations such as the United Nations Centre for Human Rights in Geneva. The Foundation seeks to continue the charitable and educational functions historically associated with the office of the marja‘iyya. Khoei was concerned to put the Shi‘i faith in a better light, after its shameful misrepresentation during the Iranian revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. The Foundation began relief work in parts of Southern Iraq after the first Gulf War, delivering relief supplies in defiance of US-imposed sanctions. As a result of the efforts of the al-Khoei family the Foundation has become a United Nations affiliated consultative body and the voice of the worldwide Shi‘i Community, both East and West. The Foundation continues to demand the monitoring of human rights violations in Iraq and campaigned for the modification of economic sanctions and the removal of Saddam Hussein.

In 1993, the al-Khoei Foundation organised four conferences on “The crisis of the Shi’a of Iraq” at its headquarters in London. More than one hundred ‘ulama, Islamist and secularist thinkers discussed the situation and the state of Iraq’s Shi‘i population. Dr. Laith Kubba, Head of Public Relations at the Foundation, summarised the discussions and the conclusions reached. He says, “The Shi‘ites constitute a body, the organs of which are the marja‘iyah, the parties, the militias, the hawza, the tribes and the intellectuals.” He defines Shi‘ism as “...not a race and not a class. It is not acquired by birth. Shi‘ism is rather a loyalty and an affiliation and lately, due to the oppression, an everyday feeling, which the Iraqi Shi‘i has even if he is not religious.” Rather than referring to the religion itself, its doctrine or history; a socio-political criterion is used to identify Shi‘ism, state oppression. The Foundation remains committed to this interpretation in promoting the protection of the freedom of the individual, human rights, democracy through transparent leadership and dialogue.

Another political protagonist of Iraq’s Shi’a in exile has been Dr. Sayyid Muhammad Bahr al-Ulum who ran the Islamic centre Markaz Ahl al-Bait. His son continues the family political tradition as a prominent member of the present Iraqi Parliament. Muhammad Bahr al-Ulum was the principal representative of the Shi’a in the Iraqi National Congress (INC), which was the umbrella organisation of the Iraqi opposition. Bahr al-Ulum was considered among those who were moderate and used the term ‘democracy’ without hesitation. Bahr al-Ulum attempted to draw a positive picture of the Iraqi Shi’a, even at the expense of the Islamic Republic of Iran with which he preached a political detachment. Like the al-Khoei Foundation he was interested in promoting awareness across international levels of the plight of Shi’a in southern Iraq.

1.4.3 The Iraqi Community Association

The Iraqi Community Association (ICA) was established in 1987 to meet the needs of a growing Iraqi exile community especially in London. The association provides advice and advocacy on immigration, welfare, housing, health, education and training. It also provides services for older people, children and youth. It also organises social and cultural activities. In its mission statement it highlights its role in promoting integration in British society:

21 Ibid., p.216.
22 Ibid., p.216.
The Iraqi Association is a non-profit independent organization which exists to help Iraqis settle meaningfully in this country, through the provision of services that enable our people integrate at the social, the civic, and the economic levels.\textsuperscript{23}

In addition to efforts to promote integration and settlement needs, ICA has been instrumental in promoting Iraqi culture in Britain and in familiarizing the host society with Iraqi arts. The charity has used its position to provide quality information that has helped hundreds of individuals; this has included client-led seminars and workshops and the distribution of a bi-monthly community newsletter \textit{Al-Muntada}, which attracts over 10,000 readers. This publication won the Mayor of London’s award ‘London Local Press Award’ in 2005. The ICA is responsible for the promoting a greater awareness of Iraqi issues in the media. In recent years and in a post-war Iraq the need to promote responsible journalism is even greater.

The wave of Iraqis seeking sanctuary in Britain is higher than any other refugee group. This has meant the work has become more challenging as the number of clients has steadily grown. Becoming a refugee is a decision that is forced upon the person because of the tyranny of others; most of the clients face a future with neither home, nor friends, nor independence. The process of asylum also requires a process of healing, where those who are traumatised and displaced may face with dignity the prospect of integration, socially, economically and psychologically.

Volunteerism is becoming a pivotal part of the charity’s activity as different schemes are being provided. There is the Health Volunteers Project, Opportunities for Volunteering Project and the Millennium Volunteers Project. The commitment of volunteers has helped target vulnerable people through tackling issues that are associated with life in exile.

\textit{1.4.4 Political Emancipation and Empowerment among Iraqi nationals}

Iraqis living in London have had to face starting a life in exile. In many cases these individuals would have left behind situations that involved trauma and economic, political and social displacement. Under Saddam many people faced political deportation, torture and repression. There has been evidence of systematic abuse of human rights and violations of all kinds. Yet from such a history emerged people who were not willing to

risk beginning their lives over again and seek ways to provide a future for themselves and their families.

Emad Salma al-Hamadani arrived in 1975 as a student. He has studied at Swansea University and was involved in political awareness campaigns in University. He is a strong campaigner for human rights and also campaigned for the issue of emancipation, empowerment and democracy in Iraq during the regime of Saddam Hussein. He was active in the student movement in the 1970s which left him subject to the attention of Iraqi agents. He has worked for the welfare and cohesion of the Iraqi community in London in the 1990s during his time as director of the Iraqi Community Association. He says of his involvement in promoting human rights:

...since I have been in London we involve heavily in human rights campaign, so this is again the most active time, we haven't wasted time once moved from Swansea to London, immediately we began to expose the regime on human rights issues. I become a member of the committee called ‘Twelh Iran-Iraq War’, as the committee, as well as in a committee called CARDRI, the committee against Repression and for Democratic Rights in Iraq, which has the support of many MPs. We began to spend many hours in the House of Commons to meet and to lobby MPs and to pressure the government of the time, that to put the government of Britain pressure on the government Iraqi side to release prisoners, to respect democracy and human rights.

Emad is now working as a consultant and manager with the Evelyn Oldfield Unit, which is similar to the Refugee Council which provides training, advice, advocacy to well over five hundred refugee community and migrant groups mainly in the London area.

Abdul Ilah Tawfik arrived in Britain in 1963 after being imprisoned and tortured in Iraq. He was able to get his family out of the country at the same time and be reunited with them. Abdul got involved in education and achieved his teaching degree. Having taught for some time, he moved to the Middle East where he has worked as a consultant. He returned to Britain in the 1990s and has been an active member of the Iraqi Community ever since. He has worked as a director of the Iraqi Community Association for a few years as well as taking part in key Community events in Britain.

Abul says of his involvement with the Iraqi Community Association:

24 The following is taken from an interview given by al-Hamadani to Evelyn Oldfield Research unit in 2001. The survey was which conducted into Iraqi refugees living in the London area. Permission was grated by the Evelyn Oldfield Research unit to use this information in my research.

25 This interview was conducted by the Evelyn Oldfield Research Unit in 2001. I received permission from the foundation to reprint this section in my research.
I worked with the El Montada El Iraqi which is the Iraqi community association at the beginning, I was a member of the executive committee...because of my past I was actively involved in democracy as activist, but that by itself is richness, you know in human being, it does not have to be achievement in money or position. I mean I had a lot of these, I was a general manager and deputy general at one stage, I was a chair on main associations and so on and was very politically active at some stage in my childhood. I remember when in my 18, 19 years old I was leading a demonstration in Baghdad, that in for the peace in Kurdistan I never forget that you know, and I am very proud of that and all my activities and what I did in the past.

Despite the experience of trauma and exile many Iraqis exile remain committed to promoting emancipation, empowerment and political awareness within their community. Their experience of oppression within their own country was a catalyst for political activism. This political activism has remained important to them and has continued into their experience of exile.

**Conclusion**

I have attempted to outline the developments that have taken place in Muslim migration into the United Kingdom and Ireland focusing particularly on Iraqis and the Iraqi Shi‘i communities as they have presented themselves, from their initial inception through the formation of structures, institutions and a presently to a viable community. I have given an overview of the makeup of this community and their particular sociological character. There are many parallel issues within the Irish Shi‘i community and with Iraqi Shi‘i communities in London. Although the Irish Shi‘i community is smaller and more heterogeneous, it has a large number of Iraqi members. Many of these have relations and friends in the London community. Most Iraq immigrants to Ireland and the United Kingdom arrived at the same time and faced similar integration, cultural and social circumstances. Imam ‘Ali al Saleh travels between both communities and leads the prayers in both Communities; on Friday afternoon in *Dar al Islam* and on Saturday evening at the Hussania in Dublin. Both communities arrange to travel on Hajj in the same caravan. The Iraqi Embassy holds diplomatic responsibility for Iraqi citizens in Ireland and communicates with them on a regular basis despite being based in London. These I have taken as the primary conversation partners.

This is a religious community and their Muslim faith is at the heart of their experience and identity. Most of the interaction and dialogue takes place around and within the Mosque or Husain. This provides the religious context for exchanges and conversation.
Different themes emerge in dialogue, in the preaching and in the annual ritual cycle of events at the Mosque. At the heart of this is Muslim Shi‘i identity. These people are Muslim but they are Shi‘a. The Shi‘i community are conscious of their long history of disempowerment and discrimination with regard to Sunni Islam. Their religious tradition makes them more available to living in minority, empathising in victimhood and promoting human rights in public life. My thesis will attempt to mirror the narrative of empowerment, emancipation and transition as reflected among Iraqi Shi‘a.

It is impossible to divorce the political reality from the religious issues in dealing with Iraqi communities. At the fore stands a political reality that people have distanced themselves from and yet seek to remain attentive to. This has been the history of a community being attentive to its brothers and sisters dealing with the legacy of dictatorship, war and military occupation. The present political landscape in Iraq is the constant backdrop to discussions about family, religion, politics, present and future hope.

There is a growing optimism and desire for change that is in part fuelled by religious ritual and memory. I seek to chart these foundational elements that present themselves as the fundamental religious and historical narratives of Iraqi Shi‘i experience and identity.
CHAPTER II  SHI’I RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES IN HISTORY AND RITUAL MEMORY

Introduction

There is a long history of scholarship within Islam and particularly in Shi‘i Islam. Much has been written about Islamic history, theology and doctrine from both the Shi‘i perspective and the Sunni perspective. There has been little study however of Shi‘i communities and the popular piety that makes up much of Shi‘i worship and devotional practise. In this chapter, I bring together both the academic and scholarly work that has been written about Shi‘i Islam in the western academy (most of the sources are in English and there are a number of translations from the Arabic) and the popular and ritual knowledge of Shi‘i Islam that makes up the religious life of the worshiping community. This knowledge of Islam is evident in the sermons and the speeches that make up the annual and ritual celebrations of the community.

There are many commonalities between Shi‘i and Sunni Muslims and many would stress there unity. There are however differences in understanding and worship that identify the Shi‘i particularity. In the central place is that of the interpretation of history and leadership within the community. Here the place of ‘Ali and the Shi‘i Imams is central. In countless gatherings I have heard these hadith, stories and interpretations that make up the foundation of Shi‘i Islam. In this chapter I have gathered them together, using the academic works that introduce them and situate them. There proper place however is in the faith and hearts of the worshiping community, for whom such narratives and histories are a familiar as those stories and narratives of the life of the Prophet and the early Islamic community of Mecca and Medina.

2.1 ISLAMIC UNITY AND DIVERSITY

At the heart of Islam stands the reality of God, the One, the Infinite and the Absolute, the Infinitely Good and the All Merciful. The One God, Allah, is the central reality of Islam in all its facets and attestation to this oneness, tawhid, is the axis around which all that is Islamic revolves. Allah is beyond duality and relationality. Testifying to this oneness lies at the heart of faith in Islam. La ilaha illa Llah, “There is no god but God”, is the first part of two testimonies by which a person bears witness to Islam; the
second is *Muhammadun rasul Allah*, “Muhammad is the messenger of God”. The oneness of God is for Muslims the heart of their religion and the heart of authentic religion. Striving after that oneness, or *tawhid*, is the heart of Islamic life; and the measure of a successful religious life is the degree to which one is able to realize *tawhid*, which means the integration of multiplicity into Unity.

The Qur’an which is the Word of God mentions the ninety-nine “beautiful names” of God. The Qur’an states “To God belong the most beautiful Names. Call on Him thereby” (7:180). These names are divided into those of Perfection (*Kamal*), Majesty (*Jalal*) and Beauty (*Jamal*), relating to the essential oneness of God beyond all polarization. The Names include the Just, the Majestic, the Reckoner, the Giver of Death, the Victorious, the All-Merciful, the Forgive, the Gentle, the Generous, the Beautiful, and Love.

The great sin in Islam is forgetfulness, *shirk*, or taking a partner unto God. This means denying the Oneness of God or *tawhid*. For each human being has direct access to God and each human being in its primordial state is required to totally surrender to the Majesty of the Absolute. Islam states that a person must be the perfect servant (*’abd*) of God in the sense of following his commands and this must involve the whole of the person’s being.

Building on the theological consequences of *tawhid* and with a simplified and reductionist approach, Islam has often been depicted as a monolith with little attention being paid to the rich diversity which occurs within both its religion and civilization. There is a strong sense of unity in the Islamic community (*ummah*) and a constant desire for greater political unity within the Abode of Islam (*dar-al-islam*) despite the political fragmentation, theological difference and the ethnic distinctions. In reality Islam, though dominated by a Unity, has an incredible diversity and complexity.

The central factor in the creation of unity among Muslims is the Qur’an. It is the very Word of God, with the same text, which is chanted, read and written by all Muslims. Then there are the *Sunnah* and the *Hadith* of the Prophet, which are very powerful unifying factors. Despite variations in the understanding of the twin sources of Islamic religion, i.e. the Qur’an and the Sunnah, there are three central doctrines upon which all schools of Islam agree, *tawhid* or Divine Oneness, *nabuwwah* or Prophecy and *ma’ad* or eschatology. Another unifying factor is Islamic Law, or the *Shari’ah*, which is interpreted according to different schools but the basic elements of which are the same throughout the Islamic world.
As far as Sunnism is concerned, its followers are divided according to the schools of Law (madhhhab) they follow. In the eighth and ninth centuries the schools of fiqh or jurisprudence were codified by the doctors of the Law; four have survived and constitute the main body of traditional Sunnism. They are the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i and Hanbali.

Hanafism was founded by a Persian, Imam Abu Hanifah (d.768), who was a student of Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq (d.757), the sixth Imam of Shi’ism and founder of the Twelver Imam Shi’i Law, which is called Ja’fari Law. The Hanafi school held great attraction from the beginning for Turks as well as Muslims of the Indian subcontinent. Today the Hanafi School has the largest number of followers in the Sunni world.

Malikism was founded by Imam Malik ibn Anas (d.795); it is based mostly on the practice of the Medina and is considered conservative in its approach to the Law. The heart of Malikism is North Africa bringing a cultural unity to much of Islamic North and West Africa outside Egypt.

The Shafi’i School was founded by a student of Imam Abu Hanifah, Imam Muhammad al-Shafi’i (d.820). It was he who completed and perfected the methods of jurisprudence in Islamic Law. Buried in Cairo, he is greatly loved and admired by Egyptians, nearly all of whom are Shafi’i’s as are many others from Southeast Asia: Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

The Hanbali School, founded by Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d.855) from Baghdad, bases itself solely on the Qur’an and the Hadith and gave a very strict interpretation of the Shari’ah. Wahhabism, dominant in Saudi Arabia, is an offshoot of Hanbalism but must not be identified with it. The four founders of the traditional schools of Sunni Law mentioned above are highly respected and revered by all Sunnis.

2.2 Shi’i Islam

Islam embraces two principal branches: Sunnism, the majority faith, and Shi’ism. Today about 89 percent of all Muslims are Sunnis and about 11 percent are Shi’a. The Shi’i population is located almost completely in the heartland of Islam, i.e. in the area between Egypt and India.¹ Iran with at least 43 million believers (out of a total population of 52 million in 1990), possesses the strongest and most homogeneous Shi’i community, a homogeneity that transcends the ethnic and linguistic diversity between Persian, Arab and Kurdish populations. In Iraq, the Shi’a are in the majority, with about 55 percent of the total population (some 18 million). These are chiefly grouped toward the south of the

country, notably around the Shi'i holy places of Najaf and Karbala. In the Arabian peninsula, Shi'ism occupies an uncomfortable position because of its minority status and the theological hostility of the fundamentalist Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia. The Shi'a are in the majority in the islands of Bahrain (70 percent or about 170,000 Shi'i believers). Large Shi'i communities also live in Qatar (20 percent of the population, about 50,000 Shi'a) and in the United Arab Emirates (6 percent or, 60,000 believers). In Lebanon Shi'a, traditionally called motawila (mutawali), number about a million faithful and form upwards of a third of the population. In India today it is estimated that out of a Muslim population of 80 million people, between 15 and 20 percent are Shi'i, both Imamis and Ismailis. In Pakistan, the number of Shi'a is put at 12 million, centred mainly in the Punjab, in the Lahore region. The Shi'a of Afghanistan are about 15 percent of the total population of 2.5 million. They are found in the Hazara ethnic group and among the Qezulbash. There are substantial Shi'i minorities in Azerbaijan (4.5 million), Syria (4 million) and Turkey (900,000). In Syria, when President Hafiz al-Asad took power in 1971, the ‘Alavite minority, which represents 10 percent of the Muslim community, has controlled all the central political organs.

2.2.1 Shi'i Doctrine

The word sunni in Arabic comes from the term ahl al sunnah wa'l-jama'ah, that is, people who followed the Sunnah of the Prophet and the majority, while Shi'ism comes from the Arabic term Shi'at 'Ali, meaning partisans of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law.

To the essential beliefs of Islam, the uniqueness of God, the prophecy of Muhammad and the resurrection of the dead, Shi’a add belief in God’s justice (‘adl) and the Imamate. The Imamate (emama) is to some extent the consequence and the application of the principle of justice to the guidance of humankind. God, who created humanity, would not let them go to their perdition. Thus he has sent prophets, the last of whom was Muhammad, and revelations, to guide along the path of justice and truth. After the death of the last Prophet it was unthinkable that God in his wisdom should leave humanity to their own devices without their being, in every era, a spiritual guarantor, to direct the community: this is the Imam, the “Guide”. The Imam cannot be chosen by fallible men; he must fulfil certain conditions of principle, be perfectly learned in religious matters, be absolutely just and equitable, be perfect, free from any fault, be the most perfect man (afzal) of his time.
Shi'i doctrines are based on collections of traditions quite distinct from those of the Sunnis, the Four Books: "What Suffices in the Knowledge of Religion" (al-Kafr 'elm od-din), by Muhammad Koleyni (d.941); "He Who has No Jurist at His Disposal" (Man la yahzoroho 'l-faqih), by Sheikh Saduq b. Babuya (d.991); "The Correction of Doctrines" (Tahzib al-ahkam) of Sheikh Muhammad at-Tusi (d.1067) and lastly, "The Clear-Sighted View of the Divergences of Tradition" (al Estebsar fi ma-khtolefa fihe men al-akhbar), a resume of the foregoing by the same Sheikh Tusi.

Shi'a differ also in a number of areas of religious practice from Sunni Muslims. Strict Sunni Muslims, such as the Wahhabi sect, go out of their way to scorn the cult of the dead. Quite different is the custom of the Shi'a, who not only honour their dead, erect monuments to their saints, organize pilgrimages to the tombs of the Imams, but also turn death and martyrdom into the focal point of their devotions.

Shi'ites group the five obligatory prayers into three points in the day: the midday and afternoon prayers are performed together, as are those of the evening and night. The call to prayer is the same as for Sunnis, with the exception of the invitation to perform a good action as well as the phrase, "I attest that 'Ali is friend and possessor of the power of God" repeated after the profession of Faith. Customarily Shi'a place a tiny tablet of clay brought from a holy place on the spot where their forehead will touch the ground. Like all Muslims, Shi'a are under the ritual obligation to accomplish the pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj) at least once in their lifetime. They include one extra circumambulation of the Kaba in their devotional practice.

2.2.2 Literature and reference works on Shi'i Islam

Julius Wellhausen's study The Religio-Political Opposition Parties in Early Islam, Berlin1901, starts the academic research into origins of the Shi'a and remains an authoritative work on the subject. Research into the Shi'a is still only in the process of being disentangled from regular Islamic studies. Because of the dominance of the Imamiyya or Twelver Shi'a particularly in Iran the most space in research in given to this group. Since the 19th century a growing flood of printed works appeared in the main centres of the Twelver Shi'a such as Najar in Iraq and Qom and Tehran in Iran. A large proportion of Imami literature has not yet been published. A modern bibliography only exists in Arabic: Agha Burzurg al-Tihrani, al Dharia a ila tasanif al Shi'a. 25 volumes, Tehran/Najaf 1036-78 is an alphabetical catalogue of all known Imami book titles. Sections of general literary histories dedicated to the Shi'a include Carl Brockelmann, Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur, Leiden 1943-9; Faut Sezgin, Geschichte des

There are few works in English translation before 1979, the most academic account being by Dwight M. Donaldson, The Shiite Religion, Luzac and Company, London, 1933. In recent years this has been superseded by Moojan Momen, An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam, The History of Twelver Shi‘ism, Oxford 1985, a handbook of names and dates with an extensive bibliography, and Heinz Halm, Shi‘ism, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1991, which gives a historical account of early Shi‘ism and the various Shi‘i sects. In accordance with the tradition of European Islamic studies, academic works on the Shi‘a are predominantly philological and historical in nature. Comparative religion has only recently begun to take an interest in the Shi‘a. Yann Richard in Shi‘ite Islam, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1995 has presented a thematic and political approach to Shi‘i Islam, while David Pinault, The Shiites, Palgrave Macmillian, New York, 1992, presents a reflection on popular ritual and piety in Shi‘i Islam.

Important contributions to the study of the Shi‘a have been produced by academics who themselves adhere to one of the Shi‘i creeds for example Seyyid Hossein Nasr, The Ideals and Realities of Islam, Kazi Publications, Cambridge, 2001; The Heart of Islam, Harper One, New York, 2004 and The Shi‘ah, Origin and Faith, Ayatollah Kashif al-Gita, Al Khoei Foundation, London, 2002. There are representatives of the Shi‘a which are more like testimonials of belief than academic works, for example, Shi‘ite Islam, Albany, 1975 by ‘Allama Sayyid Muhammad Hussain Tabatabi, and The Shi‘a, Their Origin and Beliefs, Al Ghadeer Centre, Beirut 1996, by Hashim al-Musawi. There are also apologetic works on the Sunni-Shi‘a divide, for example; Shi‘a are the alh al Sunnah, Imam Hussein Publications, London, 2001 by Muhammad al-Tijani al-Samawi. Such works are authentic testimonies to modern Shi‘i self understanding; according to western terminology they should be reckoned more as primary sources than academic literature.

The Shi‘a in Iran have received proportionately most of the academic interest and publications. This has been the case following the Islamic revolution of 1979 and the establishment of the Islamic republic under Ayatollah Khomeini. Nikki R. Keddie and Juan R. I. Cole have been at the forefront on this research. In recent years there has been a number of works that seek to explain the Shi‘a beyond Iran. The Arab Shi‘is by Graham E. Fuller and Rend Rahim Francke, Macmillian, New York, 1999, portrays the reality of a large Shi‘i minority across Arab lands and their political and social marginalization. The Shi‘a of Lebanon, by Rodger Shanahan, I.B. Tauris, New York, 2005; The Shi‘a of Iraq, by
Yatzak Nakash, Princeton University Press, Oxford, 2003; and *The Shi’a of Saudi Arabia* by Fauad Ibrahim, Saqi Books, London 2006, attest to the national and regional realities of Shi’i life and their political emergence in these parts of the world.

**2.3 ISLAMIC HISTORY AND SHI’I INTERPRETED NARRATIVES.**

In this section I narrate the Shi’i interpretation of early Muslim history as expressed in the scholarly literature on Shi’i Islam and expressed in popular piety, sermons and ritual among Shi’i Muslims. I have identified the literature in section 2.2.2 while this section focuses on the particular interpretation of early history from the perspective of the Shi’i minority.

**2.3.1 Shi’i History and Ritual Memory**

When speaking to an Islamic scholar about my desire to know and understand a contemporary Shi’i community living in the West and about Shi’ism, he encouraged me, “spend time with the history”. History is at the heart of knowing who we are and most especially religious history and its interpretation is central to the formation of a religious identity. With this in mind I have developed a methodology of gathering and translating the weekly sermons within the Shi’i community over a five year period.

These sermons have been collated into various themes and points of similarity. Many involved the simple rudiments of prayer, ritual and Islamic life; many more involve the practice of Islam in the West and how to set about integrating an Islamic lifestyle in a secular, modern and western environment. Others relate directly to history and the religious self understanding of the Shi’a themselves. In the annual ritual cycle we encounter feasts, celebrations of birth and death of Imams and religious personalities. These events are recalled and the foundational narratives are retold in a liturgical and ritual setting. These narratives and their recalling form the interpretive tool that I seek to use in approaching Shi’i Islamic history and identity. It is from the ritual and liturgical life of the community that I gain access to its religious history and memory.

In seeking to explain and interpret Islamic history to give an account of who the Shi’a are today, I have chosen to attend to the religious and historical narratives that have emerged in the lifeblood of preaching and teaching within the community. In this way,

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2 In Chapter 6 I bring together and analyse nine sermons from the Shi’i community from within the period, 2003 until 2008.
over the period of the Islamic ritual year, we are introduced to the major feasts and memorials that form the bedrock of devotion, prayer and worship in the community.

The history that emerges is one that though ancient and familiar is rooted in the contemporary religious, social and political experience. The Shi’ā where they are a minority faith, have experienced social, religious and political marginalization. This has been the case in Iraq. In attempting to explain and recount ancient history, there is the constant temptation to be polemical and apologetic, my desire is to remain as faithful as possible to that which I have heard and that which I have learned. It is my hope that a comprehensive picture of Shi‘i history, doctrine and identity will emerge from the words of the Shi‘a themselves.

2.3.2 **The Islamic Community after the Death of the Prophet**

At the moment of the Prophet Muhammad’s death both the Shi‘i and Sunni traditions branch out with their own rival stories. The Sunni believe that the Prophet died resting on the lap of his wife Aisha, daughter of Abu Bakr the first Caliph. The Shi‘a believe that he expired leaning against the shoulder of ‘Ali, his cousin and son-in-law, the first Imam. As Rogerson says “this contradiction is emblematic of the whole schism within Islam.” Within the Arabic tradition, it was commonplace to have a historian tell at least two variant tales about any decisive event and leave the reader to make their own decision with the pious disclaimer that “The truth is known only to God”. It is possible that both accounts are true. It is similarly possible for Sunni and Shi‘i Muslims to reach a consensus about their respective histories and identities in the world, that there may be peace in Islam and peace in the world. For at the heart of religious intolerance is conflict and conflict has deep and historical roots in Islam. Despite the extraordinary expansion of the religio-political community (*umma*) at and after the time of the Prophet, the integration of a variety of different traditions and interests was never fully achieved; the points of fracture were obvious from the beginning.

The Prophet Muhammad was forced to flee his home town Mecca and relinquish the protection of his tribe, the Banu Hashim in September in 622. This was the emigration (*hijra*) and the beginning of the Islamic community and a large number of Meccan supporters or “exiles” (*muhajirun*) formed the original Islamic community together with the settled farming tribes in Medina, the “helpers” (*ansar*). Over the next decade these two groups were joined by the sedentary or nomadic groups of the Arabian peninsula which set

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aside the eternal blood feuds in the *Pax Islamica* and became able to channel their newly-harnessed energy outwards against the enemies of Islam. The original Medinan community experienced a drastic change with the integration of the old pagan trading town of Mecca. Its mercantile aristocracy with its proud traditions had driven the Prophet out of Mecca and then had been embroiled with his supporters in bloody conflicts which lasted until the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah and the retaking of Mecca by Muhammad in 630.

The old Meccan families, who now had become adherents of Islam for more or less opportunistic reasons, began to play an important role in the rapidly expanding community. Their business interests, directed towards Byzantine Syria, must have played a considerable role in the conquest policies of the early Islamic state.

The major social achievement of Muhammad’s ministry was the uniting together of a hundred or more disparate and feuding tribes into one nation, a unity that overrode the traditional ties of kinship and the enmity of blood feuds. These people were so united that neither Byzantium nor Persia could stand before them. Within one generation this nation of Islam had conquered territory stretching from Tunisia to the borders of India and within a few generations this uncultured people had become the centre of civilisation in the western world and remained thus for four hundred years.

Further social elements were included as a result of the expansion that placed tension on the whole community and extended the fracture line of earlier disunity. Firstly Arab tribal fighters from the campaigning armies who settled and were immediately assimilated into different regions of the Islamic empire, particularly Iraq and secondly members of the subjugated peoples – Mesopotamians, Iranians, Syrians, Egyptians and Berbers, were converted to Islam. As newcomers and in some cases non-Arab, their struggle for social equality would bring a new dynamic element into the history of early Islam.

Upon the death of Muhammad on the 8th June 632, the Islamic community was set upon by crisis. The period of pure theocracy during which God had spoken directly to the believers through the mouth of the Prophet had come to an end. None of his companions claimed the charisma of an inspired prophet, neither had Muhammad left behind a son or heir. Amid the panic and chaos Abu Bakr proclaimed: “Oh people, To those who used to worship Muhammad, Muhammad is dead. But to those who used to worship God, God is alive and can never die.” He reminded the crowd of the Prophet’s own Qur’anic recitation of his mortality, “Muhammad is but a messenger, a messenger the like of whom have passed away before him. Will it be that, when he dies or is slain, you will turn back on
your heels". The umma of Medina put Abu Bakr as the Prophet's successor (kalifa). He was one of the 'emigrants' (muhajirun), had fled Mecca along with Muhammad and was one of his closest and most faithful companions. The helpers (ansar) of Medina were unable to prevail with their own candidate against the Meccan emigrants. Despite certain tensions the umma held together. Much credit is due to Abu Bakr in forming a unity among the disparate tribes of Arabia. Some tribes like the Bani Hanifa sought to break from the central authority established under Muhammad and rallied around their own prophets, seeking financial and political independence from Medina. The suppression of the Ridda rebellion had been an extraordinary triumph. Both the diplomacy of Abu Bakr and the battlefield tactics of Khalid had been seamless in that they achieved the conquest in less than two years, in the process doubling the size of the Muslim state. The conquest had begun.

The second Caliph Umar (632-44) was also one of the Meccan emigrants. He was to prove himself a remarkable leader, an inspired strategist and a brilliant administrator as well as setting an extraordinary personal example. It was during his reign that the first phase of Islamic expansion beyond the bounds of the Arabian peninsula took place: in 637 after their victory at al-Qadisiyya by the Euphrates the Muslims conquered Persian-rulled Mesopotamia and in 642 the defeat of the imperial Persian army at Nihawand opened the way for the Arabs to conquer the Iranian highlands. At this time also Byzantine Syria was overrun; the occupation of Damascus in 635 was followed by the defeat of the Byzantine army in 636 on the Yarmuk; the capture of Jerusalem in 638 and the fall of Caesarea in 640. In the years from 641 to 642 Byzantine Egypt was in conquered and in 697 Carthage finally fell into the hands of the Arabs. By the end of his life Umar was ruler of the entire Middle East. He was killed by a deranged Christian slave of Persian origin, Abu Lulu and buried next to the Prophet Muhammad in Aisha's hut. In the five years before his death he had married the young Umm Kulthum, daughter of 'Ali. She bore him two children Ruqayyah and Zayd, so that the bloodline of the Prophet and the second Caliph mingled just as their bodies now lay side by side in death.

With the death of Umar, the difficult question of succession again emerged and particularly the right of 'Ali, son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet Muhammad to rule. In 644 Uthman was elected by an electing body (shura) of six leading Companions of the Prophet, the electing body included 'Ali. For the first time the umma was headed by a representative of the Banu Umayya clan. This clan had been prominent in Meccan

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aristocracy in pre-Islamic times and had been among the most tenacious opponents of the early Muslim community. Uthman was indeed as well qualified to succeed the Prophet Muhammad as his two predecessors, however his membership of the Umayya clan may well have tipped the balance in his favour. Through nepotism and patronage Uthman favoured his relatives and supporters to such an extent that within a short time a large proportion of the provinces were in the hands of his Umayyad clan. It was under Uthman that the old Meccan aristocracy which had not long ago driven the Prophet Muhammad from his town came to power and prominence in the Islamic community. The most powerful representative of the Umayyad clan was Mu’awiyah ibn Abu Sufyan, son of the arch rival of Muhammad Abu Sufyan and his resentful wife Hind. Mu’awiyah had distinguished himself in the conquest of Caesarea in Palestine and had established himself in Damascus as military governor of Syria. The rise to power and prominence of many former opponents of Islam infuriated the pious old guard. Many other tribes joined in the opposition to obvious corruption and nepotism displayed by the Umayyads. Uthman was murdered by discontented Muslims in 656 when the opposition within the umma burst out. Many now regarded ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, the now almost sixty year old cousin of Muhammad, husband of Muhammad’s daughter Fatima and father of the Prophet’s two grandsons al-Hasan and al-Hussain as rightful leader and caliph. Uthman’s most glorious and enduring achievement was to be neither military, political nor administrative. He had gathered a definitive written edition of God’s revelation to Muhammad – the Qur’an. In the company of his wife Naila, while reading a copy of his beloved Qur’an, Uthman was murdered by rebels who opposed his rule. It could be at this juncture that one of the sayings of Muhammad is most appropriate to describe the reality within the Muslim ummah,

Verily the Lord has a sword sheathed in a scabbard as long as Uthman lives, and when Uthman is slain that sword will be drawn and it will not be sheathed until the day of resurrection.\(^5\)

Islam has been in conflict with itself ever since Uthman’s blood stained the parchment pages of the first written Qur’an. Sunni and Shi’i communities look to early Islamic history for legitimacy and guidance as they continue to develop narratives of self-reflection and identity formation.

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Central to the disputes within the early Muslim community was the issue of succession and who should rule the nascent Muslim umma. This was the perennial question in early Islamic political theory, i.e. what exactly were to be the religious duties and prerogatives of the caliph. From early on Muslims were united on the centrality of the caliphate to the political and religious order of the Islamic empire. In other words they agreed that there must be a single male caliph who embodies the political unity of the Muslims. They disagreed on the qualifications of the caliph, the manner and means of his appointment, the nature and extent of his authority, and the grounds for his removal. In essence the issue boiled down to the fundamental question: was the caliph, like an Arab tribal sheikh, merely and ordinary human being elected to an extraordinary position or was the post only open to extraordinary men, like the Prophet, especially chosen, designated and gifted by God?

Faced with this dilemma it was Ibn al-Muqaffa (d.756) who offered political advice to the governor of Basra and identified two extremes to be avoided. In one view the caliph was an infallible source of religious guidance possessing intrinsic authority to which his followers were bound to submit. At the other extreme the caliph was intrinsically no different from any other believer. Ibn al-Muqaffa sought a middle ground. The caliph’s authority was not infallible or absolute but it was to be unique. He possessed the right and responsibility to exercise authority as the arbiter of Islamic law, ensuring the unity of the community. The caliph was neither prophet-like nor a glorified tribal sheikh, but something in between. The descriptions of the caliph as infallible religious guide, tribal sheikh or king represent the extremes of Islamic political theory. Orthodox Sunni political theory took shape in response to these extremes and alternatives. The most pressing alternative was the Shi‘i vision of leadership and of the Caliphate.

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2.3.4 The Shi'i Vision of Succession to Muhammad

The key question in Shi'i Islam and the principal factor separating Shi'is from the Sunni majority is related to the succession to Muhammad. The question is not only about who the successor to Muhammad was to be but also the nature and role of the successor.

'Ali was considered to be among those considered among those worthy of this role and position. In order to understand the personality of 'Ali and his position it is necessary to examine his part in Islamic history and his close relationship with Muhammad. It is also necessary to examine those Traditions, accepted by both Sunni and Shi'is, that are considered by Shi'is to mean that 'Ali was the rightful successor of Muhammad.

From a young age Muhammad was raised in the house of Abu Talib, the father of 'Ali. Thus Muhammad was very close to his young cousins from the time of 'Ali’s birth. In fact the two were regarded as foster-brothers despite the difference in age. 'Ali was only nine years old. Following Kadijah, Muhammad’s wife, ‘Ali is regarded as the first person to acknowledge the Prophet’s authenticity and to become a believer. It was not until after three years of the onset of his mission that Muhammad made a public statement of his revelation. This occurred during a gathering of his own clan. For Shi'i sources this gathering has special significance in that Muhammad is to have publicly indicated 'Ali as his successor. The chronicler Tabari recounts the deed as follows.

Muhammad spoke: ‘Which of you will assist me in this cause and become my brother, my trustee and my successor among you.’ 'Ali said, 'I, Oh Prophet of God will be your helper in this matter.' And he put his arm around my neck and said, ‘This in my brother, my trustee and my successor among you, so listen to him and obey.’

For Shi'a this passage is interpreted as indicating that even while 'Ali was but thirteen years of age and Muhammad was only in the early stage of his career he had designated 'Ali as his successor. Over the coming years ‘Ali was Muhammad’s constant

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9 Abu Bakr is regarded by some sources as the first to believe. But even the most respected of Sunni Traditions contain examples giving ‘Ali the credit for being the first Muslim. Ibn Hanbal, Masnad, Vol.1, 209-210. Moojan Momen, An Introduction to Shi’i Islam, 1985, p.1.
companion. On the night of the emigration (hijra) to Medina, it was ‘Ali who stayed behind and hid in the Prophet’s bed to dissuade those in opposition. ‘Ali remained in Mecca long enough to settle Muhammad’s debts and only later slipped away to Medina with some of the Muslim women. At Medina Muhammad decreed that each Muslim should become a brother to another Muslim. Abu Bakr and Umar became brothers, as did Talha and Zubayr and Uthman and Albu r-Rahman ibn Awf. However all sources agree that Muhammad chose ‘Ali to be his own brother.

‘O Apostle of God! You have made brethren among your companions but you have not made anyone my brother.” The Apostle of God said to him (‘Ali) ‘You are my brother in this world and the next.’

During the period while the Muslim community became established in Medina, ‘Ali acted as Muhammad’s secretary and deputy. It was ‘Ali who wrote the Treaty of Hudaybiyya. Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, was given in marriage to ‘Ali and their children al-Hasan and al-Hussain were the only grandchildren of the prophet to survive to adult life.

‘Ali is regarded as one of the most able and courageous men in the Muslim army. During the Battle of Badr and Khaybar (AH 7) he was appointed as standard-bearer for the Muslims. The following tradition is related by several Sunni and Shi‘i histories:

The Apostle of God said on the day of Khaybar, ‘I shall certainly give the banner to a man who loves God and his Apostle and through whom God will give victory...And the Apostle of God summoned ‘Ali, the son of Abu Talib and gave it to him and said: Go! and do not turn aside until God gives you victory.’

When Muhammad left to go to Tabuk, it was ‘Ali who was left in charge at Medina. ‘Ali voiced his discontent at being left behind with the women and the children, and it was at this point according to Sunni and Shi‘i sources that was spoken the famous Hadith of Manzilat Harun (position of Aaron). Muhammad said to ‘Ali: ‘Are you not content to be with respect to me as Aaron was to Moses, except that after me there shall be no other Prophet.’ The implication from this Hadith was that ‘Ali was to be Muhammad’s assistant during the lifetime of the Prophet and his successor after his death.

In Shi‘i preaching and Shi‘i works the episode of the Mubahala (mutual cursing) receives much prominence. In the ninth year of the Hijra, Muhammad sent out a series of

letters to nearby rulers, summoning them to accept Islam. In the Christian town of Najran not far from Yemen, the leaders assembled to decide what to do. They consulted a great book called al-Jami, which contained the writings and traditions of all the prophets. Here reference was found to how Adam had seen a vision of one light surrounded by four other lights and was told by God that these were five of his descendants. And so it was decided to send a delegation of their learned men to Medina to ascertain the truth. At Medina following a great debate it was decided to engage in Mubahala, referring the matter to God and calling down God’s curse on whomever was a liar. It was at this time that the verse of Mubahala (Qur’an 3:61) was revealed. The contest was set and on the next day, Muhammad came out with only ‘Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Hussain and they stood under a cloak. When asked by the Christians why he had not brought out the leaders of his religion, Muhammad replied that God had instructed him to do this. The Christians remembered what they had read in al-Jami and become convinced that Muhammad was the figure prophesised by Jesus. They withdrew from the contest and agreed to pay tribute. From this episode, Muhammad, ‘Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Hussain become known as Ahl al-Kisa (the people of the cloak).

‘Ali’s many personal qualities are amply attested to in various histories and collections of Traditions. These qualities are often referred to in preaching and teaching within Shi’i communities. Many of the statements made by the Prophet Muhammad regarding ‘Ali and his family are regarded as authentic by both Sunnis and Shi’is alike, although Sunni preachers are less likely to refer to them. The following are some well know examples.

There is no youth braver that ‘Ali.14
I am from ‘Ali and ‘Ali is from me.15
I am the city of knowledge and ‘Ali is its Gate (Bab).16

The Prophet took the hand of Hasan and Hussain and said: ‘Whoever loves me and loves these two and loves their mother and father, will be with me in my station on the Day of Resurrection.’17

The Prophet said: ‘Hasan and Hussain are the chiefs of the youths in paradise.’18

As the Prophet neared the end of his life, according to Shi’is, he confirmed ‘Ali as his successor. The occasion was the Farewell Pilgrimage during which the Prophet performed the pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca for the last time. Having completed the rites of the Pilgrimage, the Prophet set out on his return journey to Medina. At a place called Ghadidr Khumm he caused the caravan to be stopped and gathered those who had gone ahead and those behind. From an improvised pulpit he delivered his address. The principal Sunni and Shi‘i sources are in agreement about this. Ibn Habal gives the following Sunni account.

We were with the Apostle of God in his journey and we stopped at Ghadir Khumm. We performed the obligatory prayer together and a place was swept for the Apostle under two trees and he performed the mid-day prayer. And then he took ‘Ali by the hand and said to the people: ‘Do you not acknowledge that I have a greater claim on each of the believers that they have no themselves?’ And they replied, ‘Yes!’ And he took ‘Ali’s hand and said: ‘Of whomsoever I am Lord (Mawla), then ‘Ali I also his Lord. O God! Be Thou the supporter or whoever supports ‘Ali and the enemy of whoever opposes him.’

It was on the Feast of Ghadir Khumm in 2006 that democratic elections took place in Iraq. This was a moment of heightened awareness and anxiety among Shi‘i Iraqi communities, in Iraq and abroad. Here they had the opportunity for the first time to gain political power. Shi‘i preaching on that day reflected the empowerment of ‘Ali by the Prophet Muhammad at Ghadir Khumm and the palpable sense of Shi‘i emergence in Iraq.

There is the highly controversial episode in the last days of Muhammad’s life which is usually called the Episode of the Pen and Paper. Muhammad was only days before his death and in a state of terminal illness when he called for pen and paper. The following account is related by al-Bukhari, the Sunni Traditionalist:

When the Prophet’s illness became serious, he said: ‘Bring me writing materials, that I may write for you something, after which you will not be led in error.’ Umar said: ‘The illness has overwhelmed the Prophet. We have the Book of God and that is enough for us.’ Then the people differed about this and spoke many words. And he (the Prophet) said: ‘Leave me! There ought not to be quarrelling in my presence.’ And Ibn Abbas went out saying: ‘The greatest of all calamities is what intervened between the Apostle and his writing.’

19 Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, Vol.4, p.281, Moojan Momen, An Introduction to Shi’i Islam, 1985, p.15
In Shi‘i history and preaching it is claimed that Muhammad wished to write down his confirmation of ‘Ali as his successor. This, according to Shi‘i sources, would have solved much future enmity between Shi‘i and Sunni groups. This is refuted by Sunni authors and preachers. There are a number of other statements and Hadith which both Sunni and Shi‘i sources agree were made by Muhammad and point as evidence of the position of ‘Ali and his family as successor to Muhammad.

The Hadith of the Two Weighty Matters (ath-Thaqalayn) is a very widely reported statement of Muhammad. The following is the version of the Sunni collections of Hadith by Ibn Hanbal:

The Apostle of God said: ‘I have left among you two weighty matters which if you cling to them you shall not be led into error after me. One of them is greater that the other: The Book of God which is a rope stretched from Heaven to Earth and my progeny, the people of my house. These two shall not be parted until they return to the pool (of Paradise).’

This statement of Muhammad is repeated in many slightly variant forms. There is some disagreement as to who exactly is meant by the phrase ‘the people of my house’ (Ahl al-Bayt). However Shi‘i sources point to Traditions that do not include the wives of the Prophet but refer to ‘Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husyan, the group known as Ahl al-Kisa (the people of the cloak).

The Hadith of the Safina (Noah’s Ark) refers also to the family of the Prophet and their particular qualities as being salvific and worthy of devotion.

‘My family among you are like Noah’s Ark. He who sails on it will be safe, but he who holds back from it will perish.’

In addition to hadith, there are certain verses in the Qur’an that are held to relate to ‘Ali and his succession to Muhammad. For example:

‘You are a warner and to every people there is a guide.’ Qur’an 13:7.

God is ever just and at all times provides a guide and teacher for his people. This verse is understood to refer to ‘Ali as the guide of his people. Again we have:

‘Your guardian (wali) can only be God, His apostle and those who say their prayers, pay alms and bow down before God.’ Quran 5:55

The word wali can mean friend, helper or master. Both Shi‘i and Sunni commentators agree that this verse refers to ‘Ali and was revealed after ‘Ali had given his ring away to someone in need while prayers were in progress in the Mosque.

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22 Ibn Hajar, as-Sawa‘iq, p.150, p.18, Moojan Momen, An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam, 1985, p.17.
Although there is substantial evidence to suggest that Muhammad had recommended ‘Ali as his successor, following the death of Muhammad ‘Ali was passed over by the leaders of the Meccans. The house of Hasim were eliminated from consultation and in their absence the leadership was first awarded to Abu Bakr and later to Umar. All historians agree on ‘Ali’s attitude of loyalty to the Caliphate despite some support for his cause by Ammar, Miqdad, Abu Dharr and Shalman. They are acclaimed by the Shi‘is as the first four or their number.

Even historians who are staunchly Sunni can scarcely disguise the fact that Uthman’s Caliphate was something of a disaster for Islam. Uthman’s leadership was marked by nepotism and a love of wealth and luxury. The strict piety and simplicity of an earlier era had passed away. There was a growing dissatisfaction with and disaffection from the house of Umayya. Delegations from Egypt and Iraq arrived in Medina in 656 and voiced strong protests to the Caliph and found support among prominent citizens including Zubayr and Talha. Immediately after the murder of Uthman, ‘Ali was proposed as Caliph. The Muhajirun, the Ansar and the delegations from the provinces were urging acceptance upon him. In the year 656, 24 years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, ‘Ali had come to the position that was considered rightfully his.

2.4 THE LIVES OF THE IMAMS IN RITUAL MEMORY AND HISTORY

The Shi‘i understanding of early Islamic history is interpreted through the lens of a minority community. Themes tend to be apologetic, searching for legitimacy and foundational in the formation of a community identity. This is most clearly seen in the understanding of leadership, community guidance and succession among Shi‘a. For this reason the teaching on the Imamate is central to Shi‘i selfunderstanding. It is the teaching on the Imamate that clearly distinguishes Shi‘a and Sunni and creates the greatest tension in Islamic ecumenical dialogue.

A great deal has been written about the history and biography of the Imams. This for the most part is largely anecdotal and apologetic. In Shi‘i preaching these stories and

Sources on the traditional histories of the lives of the Imams is taken from , Heinz Halm, Shism Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1991, pp.7-38; Moojan Momen, An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam, Yale University Press, London, 1985, pp.22-45. This scholarly material in interpreted and verified within the ritual space of the Shi‘a community of Dublin and London.
narratives are repeated on the Feasts celebrated in commemoration of the Imams. Most consider that the Imams were all martyred and suffered opposition in their lifetimes. They have become legendary characters rather than historical figures and their histories in preaching today inspire the Shi‘i faithful to remain committed and loyal to their faith despite their minority status and often the violent opposition other Sunni radicals.

The remembering of history takes place in a context of violent reaction particularly in Iraq. Here the faithful are reminded that their family and friends face terror, opposition and violence. In the same manner members of the community live their lives in exile; they are for the most past removed from their family, friends, society and culture. They recall their lives prior to exile, which was for many an experience of dictatorship, war, oppression, denial of human rights and human suffering. In recalling the lives of the Imans in ritual, the faithful are connected to a deep symbolism that is full of meaning and significance. The Imams struggled against oppression, dictatorship and tyranny. In recalling these events and these Holy men, the Shi‘a are emboldened in exile and in their minority status.

There is the constant call to integrity of life style and democratic leadership and participation. There is the invitation to emulate these Holy men, calling upon them for assistance, intercession and inspiration. It is with this context that the traditional history is heard in contemporary teaching and preaching. The ritual history from the early centuries is full of meaning. It is alive and relevant. The recalling of these events and personalities is formative and transformative. The ritual memory leads to social and political praxis. In exile this has a variety of forms: participation in human rights groups, supporting democratic participation in Iraq and in exile, engaging in Interfaith, intercultural and interethnic activities and in the promotion of human welfare in public life.

2.4.1 The Imamate of ‘Ali

The succession of ‘Ali to the Caliphate was approved by the vast majority of Muslims in Medina and also in the provinces of the Empire. However during the caliphate of Uthman, all important governorships of the Empire had gone to members of the Umayyad family, led by Mu‘awiya, Governor of Syria. These refused to accept ‘Ali and urged vengeance for the death of Uthman. These rebels were supported by the prominent

24 Many examples from contemporary preaching in Shi‘i Hussania focus on the lives of the Imams. Celebrating the Wiladat (Birthday) of the Imam ‘Ali is a typical opportunity to extol ‘Ali as a model of virtue, courage, leadership and knowledge.
companions of the Prophet Talha and Zubayar; and the widow of the Prophet A’isha. At the Battle of al-Jamal (the camel) these Basran rebels were defeated. ‘Ali pressed ahead despite the fact that his forthright nature was provoking his enemies, moving his headquarters from Medina to Kufa in Iraq. In 657 Mu’awiya marched towards Kufa and for the first time Muslims faced Muslims in battle at the prolonged, bloody and inconclusive Battle of Siffin. The battle ended in a call for arbitration, enabling Mu’awiya an opportunity to regroup and strengthen his position. ‘Ali was forced to face the provocations of the Khawarij (seceders) at the Battle of Nahtawan who were opposed to the process of arbitration and sought to bring and end to the conflict by assassinating the leaders. ‘Ali was assassinated by one of their number Adhu’r-Rahman ibn Muljam at Kufa on the 19th Ramadan 661. He died two days later.

‘Ali has assumed even in Sunni eyes legendary proportion as a paragon of virtues. His courage, sincerity, straight-forwardness, eloquence and knowledge are matters of historical record. For the Shi’is his brief period as Caliph is looked upon as a Golden Age when the whole of the Muslim community was directed as it should be by the divinely chosen Imam. His place of burial at Najaf continues to be a centre of pilgrimage, learning and devotion for Shi’i followers.

2.4.2 Hasan, the second Imam

Abu Muhammad Husan ibn ‘Ali, known as al-Mujtaba (the chosen), was thirty-seven years old when his father was assassinated at Kufa and is considered to have become the Imam after the death of his father. He and Hussain were the beloved grandchildren of the Prophet Muhammad. In Kufa numerous supporters rallied around him in order to defend Iraq against Mu’awiya. However either because of the hopelessness of the situtation or because of his desire for peace Hasan abdicated to prevent future bloodshed. His abdication is viewed my some historians negatively but in Shi’i preaching, Hasan is portrayed as having little option but to bow to the superior political power of the Umayyads. Negotiations between the two armies at al-Mada (Ctesiphon) came to a successful conclusion, Hasan renounced his claim to the Caliphate in favour of Mu’awiya and returned to a life of considerable ease in Medina. There he is reputed to have lived in luxury with his many wives and countless descendants.

25 Relevant preaching concerning Hasan took place on 27/2/07, Shahadat (Martyrdom) of Imam Hasan and on 7/9/06 Wiladat (Birthday) of Imam Hasan.
Here historians and preachers see a parting of political power and legitimate religious leadership. Henceforth the Caiphate was dominated by desire for the political power at the cost of a genuine democratic and transparent leadership as proposed by the Shi’i. Although Hasan is criticised by some, many see his actions as pragmatic. He still received delegations offering support, but suffered house arrest and eventual poisoning at the instigation of Mu’awiya. Hasan was buried in Medina in al- Baqi cemetery next to his mother.

2.4.3 Hussain, the third Imam

Abu Abdullah Hussain ibn ‘Ali was born in Medina in 626 to ‘Ali and Faitma, daughter of the Prophet Muhammad. After the death of his brother Hasan he became head of the family and the focus of the aspirations of the Shi’i in Kufa. Mu’awiya died in 680 and prior to his death had arranged for his son Yazid to succeed him. The accession of Yazid to the Caliphate and his behaviour, was an affront to many pious Muslims. In Kufa the people looked to Hussain to assume leadership from Yazid. However many remained fickle and untrustworthy. Ubaydu’llah ibn Ziyad took control of Kufa and suppressed the growing dissent. Despite this Hussain pressed ahead and encountered the army of al Hurr at-Tamini on the plains of Karbala on 2nd of Muharram in AH 61 (2nd October 680). Despite some negotiation, Ubaydu’llah send his orders to attack through Shimr. On the fated day of 10 Muharram AH 61 (10th October 680), known as Ahura, Hussain and his seventy-two supporters and family members were struck down. The Umayyad army looted the tents, decapitated the bodies and raised the heads on spears to lead their procession back to Kufa. Zaynab sister of Hussain, and ‘Ali son of Hussain were taken prisoner and bore themselves with dignity as the head of their beloved Hussain was humiliated by Ubaydu’llah. At Damascus Yazid gloated over the head of Hussain and insulted ‘Ali and Zaynab, who mourned the passing of Hussain.

The impact and importance of the martyrdom of Musayn for Shi’is is enormous. Until today it is the most fervently celebrated event of the Shi’i calander. Through his martyrdom Hussain has given to Shi’i Islam a whole ethos of sanctification through redemptive suffering. Although all the Imams were martyred it is above all the martyrdom of Hussain that has given specific characteristics to Shi’i Islam.

Relevant preaching has taken place during the Celebration of the 10 days of Mourning leading to Ashura on the 10th of Muharram each year. I deal with the Ahsura Narrative in later in this chapter.

In Appendix 1, I present the Annual Shi’i ritual calander of celebrations and rememberances.

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Years later a shrine was built at Karbala, which has since become an important site of pilgrimage and burial for Shi’is.

2.4.4 ‘Ali, Zaynu’l-Abidin, the forth Imam

Abu Muhammad ‘Ali ibn Hussain, known as Zaynu’l-Abidin (the ornament of the worshippers) also known by the titles as-Sajjad (the prostrator) and az-Zaki (the pure), is regarded as the fourth Imam by Twelver Shi’is. He was born in the year 658 in Medina. He survived the slaughter at Karbala, was sent as a captive to Damascus and later freed to Medina.

Following the martyrdom of Hussain, some Shi’is began to seek atonement for his death. They elected Sulayman ibn Surad as leader and the name Tawwabun (the penitents) was given to their movement. The Tawwabun marched against the Umayyad army in 684 and were defeated. Mukhtar ath-Thaqafi began promoting the cause of Muhammad Ibn al-Hanifiyyha, the third son of Imam ‘Ali by a woman of the Hanifa tribe. Though this rebellion was eventually defeated, it brought to prominence two important Shi’i developments: the idea of the Mahdi (the rightly-guided one) and the concept of occultation and return.

The fourth Imam Zanu’l-Abdin kept very much in the background and did not involve himself in politics. It would appear that he lived a very secluded life with only a handful of associates, spending his time in mourning and in prayer. He is reported to have been poisoned on the orders of the reigning Caliph, Walid, at the age of fifty-seven or fifty-eight.

2.4.5 Muhammad al-Baqir, the fifth Imam

Abu Jar’ar Muhammad ibn ‘Ali, known as al-Baqir (‘the splitter open’ of knowledge) was born in 676. He was about thirty-seven when his father died. Like his father, Muhammad al-Baqir was politically quiescent and refrained from openly putting forward any claim. Al-Baqir’s half brother, Zayd advocated a more politically active role for the Imam and succeeded in promoting one particular Shi’i school of thought known as the Zaydiyya. Because of this al-Baqir emphasized the doctrine of nass or specific designation of an Imam by the preceding Imam. Al-Baqir is credited with promoting the beginning of an independent stance by the Shi’i on matters of law and ritual practices. He
was supposedly poisoned at the age of fifty-seven and lies buried at al-Baqi cemetery in Medina.  

### 2.4.6 Ja’far as-Sadiq, the sixth Imam

Abu ‘Abdu’llah Ja’far ibn Muhammad known as as-Sadiq (the truthful) was the eldest son of Muhammad al-Baqir. His date of birth is given as 699 and he was about thirty seven when his father died.

He is renowned in the Muslim world for his piety and his learning. Many of his students went on to become renowned scholars and jurists, including Abu Hanifa and Malik ibn Anas, founders of Sunni schools of law. Today the Shi’a are occasionally described as the Ja’far school (al-madhhab al-jafari) by analogy with the four Sunni schools of law.

During the period of as-Sidiq’s Imamate the Shi’a of his time appear to have been desperately looking for a descendant of ‘Ali who could establish his authority and take over the Caliphate. The Shi’a supported in turn: the Zayd revolt in 740; the rebellion of ‘Abdu’llah in Mu’awiya in 744; the ‘Abbasid rising in 747; and the revolt of Muhammad an-Nafs az-Zakiyya in 762 against the ‘Abbasids. Throughout this turbulent period as-Sadiq remained politically quietist despite being offered the Caliphate.

While the Umayyads were in power as-Sadiq taught quietly in Medina. During the reign of the ‘Abbasids as-Sadiq suffered harassment, imprisonment and eventual martyrdom in 765 by Caliph al-Mansur. He is buried in the Baqi cemetery in Medina.

### 2.4.7 Musa al-Kazim, the seventh Imam

Abu ‘l-Hasn Musa ibn Ja’far, known as al-Kazim (the forbearing), was born in 745 and was about twenty years of age at the time of his father’s death. The first years of his Imamate were concerned with a dispute over the succession to the Imamate. Many supported as-Sidiq’s eldest son Is’mail, however he died before the death of his father. Despite this he inspired a particular school of Shi’i devotion, the Ismailis who consider only seven Imams.

Throughout his life, Musa was faced with hostility and harassment from the ‘Abbasid Caliphs. He was brought to and imprisoned in Baghdad during the Caliphate of

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28 Following a return trip from the Hajj and Medina we were introduced to many photographs of the cemetery area around al-Baqi at Medina and stories of the Imams buried there. This is included as a sermon in Chapter 6.
Harun ar-Rashid when Alid persecution was at its highest. He was eventually poisoned in 799. He was buried in Baghdad in the suburb called Kazimayn and a shrine was built over the burial site in the 16th century.

2.4.8 ‘Ali ar-Rida, the eighth Imam

Abu ‘l-Hasan ‘Ali ibn Musa known as ar-Rida (the appointed) was born in Medina in 765. It was during the Imamate of ar-Rida that the Caliph Harun ar-Rashid died and the Empire was split between his two sons Amin and Ma’mun. Ma’mun summoned ‘Ali ar-Rida from Medina to join him at Marv and appointed ar-Rida as his heir-apparent. When those in Baghdad who were excluded from the succession revolted, the Caliph prepared to march West and was accompanied by ar-Rida, who died suddenly on the way at Tus in 818. It is reported by Shi‘i historians and in Shi‘i preaching that ar-Rida was poisoned by Ma’mun out of jealousy for his popularity among the masses. The burial place Mashhad grew up around the sanctuary and remains a popular pilgrimage site today.

2.4.9 Muhammad at-Taqi, the ninth Imam

Abu Ja’far Muhammad ibn ‘Ali, known by the title al-Taqi (the God-fearing) and al-Jawad (the generous) was born in 810 in Medina and remained there when his father went to join Ma’mun in Marv. He was only seven years old when his father died and he succeeded to the Imamate. His youth became a cause of controversy among the Shi‘a, however numerous stories about his extraordinary knowledge abound. Muhammadd at-Taqi had come to Baghdad shortly after his fathers death and received the daughter of Ma’mun, Umm al-Fadl, in marriage. After eight years in Baghdad, at-Taqi and his bride retired to Medina. Ma’mun died in 833 and was succeeded by Mu’tasim who is alleged to have had at-Taqi poisoned. Muhammad at-Taqi was buried in the cemetery of the Quraysh at Baghdad close to his grandfather.

2.4.10 ‘Ali al-Hadi, the tenth Imam

Abu ‘l-Hasan ‘Ali ibn Muhammad, is known by the titles of al-Hadi (the guided) and an-Naqi (the distinguished). He was born in 212 or 214 in Medina. He was seven years old when his father died. During the Caliphate of Mu’tasim and Wathiq, al-Hadi and the Shi‘is were relatively free and unmolested. However during the Caliphate of Mutawakkil which began in 847, both Shi‘is and Mu‘tazils came under intense persuasion. In reality al-Hadi was prisoner of the Caliph Samarra. Al-Hadi lived in Samarra for twenty years
always under the observation of the Caliph's spies. 'Ali al-Hadi and his son Hasan al-
Askari are buried in the twin shrines call Askariyayn in Samarra.

2.4.11 Hasan al-Askari, the eleventh Imam

Abu Muhammad Hasan ibn 'Ali, known as al-Askari, was born in 846 in Medina. He was only two years of age when his father was summoned to Samarra. When Hasan al-
Askari was twenty-two his father gave him a slave-girl called Narjis, who is named as the mother of Muhammad, the twelfth Imam.

The period of Hasan al-Askari's Imamate was brief only six years. During this time he was under intense pressure from the 'Abbasids who feared his importance and denied him access to his followers. He died at the age of 28 years on 1st January 874.

2.4.12 Muhammad al Mahdi, the twelfth Imam.

Alu '1 Qasim Muhammad ibn Hasan, known as al-Mahdi (the guided), al-Muntzar (the awaited), al-Hujja (the proof), al-Qa'im (the one who will arise) and Baqiyatu'allah (the remnant of God) is identified as the Twelfth Imam. Following the death of Hasan al-
Askari, there was a great deal of confusion among the Shi'a and some say that al-Askari did not leave a son while others attest that this child went into occultation and was hidden from human sight. It is believed in Twelver Shi'i Islam that Muhammad al-Mahdi is ever present and will return at the end of time, as the Light of Days implementing a reign of justice and right judgement.

2.5 THE IMAMATE, LEADERSHIP WITH INTEGRITY

The Sunni concept of leadership in the Muslim community is essentially a temporal leadership. To the Shi'a, however, succession is a matter of designation: each Imam designates his successor during his life-time, this is the source of the Imams authority. The Shi'a believe that whereas the function of legislation ended with the death of the Prophet, the function of guiding humanity is preserved in the line of Imams. At no time is the earth left without an Imam who is the Guide (Hadi) and Proof (Hujja) of God. The Imams remain a vibrant symbol of God's providence, benevolence, intercession and guidance for humanity.

Muhammad, Fatima and the Imams are conceived mystically as being a light that God created. This light is the inner essence of the Imams descended upon each of the Prophets and Imams and has become embodied in Muhammad, Fatima and the twelve
Imams. These Imams have received inspiration from God and have knowledge of the great mysteries of Islam. They are considered mansus (designated), masum (sinless or infallible) and agdal an-nas (the best of people). To Imam is attributed the quality of knowledge (‘Ilm) and spiritual guidance (Walaya). The Imam is the Guardian of the Law and the supreme educator of humanity. The Imam is at once master, friend and educator in the journey of the spirit.

Anthony O’Mahony identifies three particular parallels that can be observed between Twelver Shi’ism and Catholicism. They are, “meditation upon the significance of the passion of an innocent victim who took upon himself the sins of the community and atoned for them; belief that God’s grace is mediated through earthly and heavenly hierarchies; and faith in intercessors.” The memory of the innocent victim in Shi’i ritual memory has been transformed into a powerful political and religious symbol. This will form the basis of reflection in the following section of this chapter. The Imamate remains as a central moment of connection with the Divine, in intercession, prayer, memory and ritual. There is the realization that the heavenly and earthy hierarchies lead, guide, mediate through the recalling of lives of integrity, faithfulness, resistance in opposition to dictatorship, tyranny and oppression. Intercession is a locus of engendering creative energies, ideas and memories. In recalling the lives of the Imam and the presence of the Imam, the community fear is allayed, faith is restored and healing takes place. Iraqi Shi’i communities attend to their faith rooted in the experience of exile and displacement. They are a minority within a minority religion. For the most part many have experience and witness the trauma of suffering, oppression, violence and tyranny. They are reminded each day of the suffering of their families and friends in Iraq. Through the experience of their faith, in the recalling of their early and present religious history of the Imamate, they are encouraged, transformed and learn to integrate their present reality in a context that is meaningful, hope-filled and life-giving.

In Chapter 7, I present an outline of the dialogue between Shi’ism and the Catholic Tradition, drawing on traditions, dogma and ritual life within both communities.
2.6 THE **ASHURA NARRATIVE, RITUAL MEMORY AND EMPOWERMENT**

The central ritual narrative among the Shi'a is the Ashura Narrative, during which the Shi'a recall the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. During the ten days of Muharram, Shi'i communities gather to recall the final days of Imam Hussein, leading to his death in Karbala. During these ritual majlis, Shi'i comities strengthen their bonds of relationship and identity in the recalling of a historical narrative of emancipation and empowerment despite the defeat of the Prophet’s grandson at Karbala.

The history of the early Muslim community following the death of the Prophet tells of various tensions, and is well documented by, for instance, al Tabari and by popular accounts such as those written by Afsaruddin and Hazleton. The historical accounts yield to different interpretations and in time become interwoven with social, political and theological interpretations, which themselves become the basis for new interpretations. The interpretation of the historical narrative depends upon the standpoint of the interpreting community. I examine the centrality of *Ashura* in the life of the Shi‘i community as it is today, namely, as shaped by its dialogues with the modern world and other religious worldviews and their interpretive frameworks. The *Ashura* as historical event has socio-political as well as religious significance for the Shi’a and it is interpreted in light of current intellectual categories and debates.

During the caliphate of ‘Ali, the splits within the Muslim community became apparent and began the march towards civil war. ‘Ali with a mainly Iraqi army fought against Mu‘awiya, the governor of Syria at Siffin in 656AD. Mu‘awiya was the son of Abu Sufyan who was a prominent enemy of the Prophet and a member of the Abd Shams Umayyad clan. After the battle of Siffin ‘Ali was murdered leaving behind his two sons Hasan and Hussein by Fatima, daughter of the Prophet Muhammad. Hasan who was the elder became caliph but was forced toabdicate by Mu‘awiya. Mu‘awiya was succeeded by

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Afsaruddin presents the history of Islam in its formative period, attending to issues involved in the succession to the Prophet and the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, through to the era of the Companions in the during the Ummayad and Abbassid Caliphates.

31 L. Hazleton, *After the Prophet, The Epic Story of the Shi’a – Sunni Split*, First Anchor Books, New York, 2009. Hazelton presents the emerging divide within the Muslim community following the death of the Prophet. She narrates the emergence of ‘Ali as Caliph, the trauma of civil war within the community and the centrality of the martyrdom of Hussein to the emerging Shi’a minority.
his son Yazid, establishing the Umayyad family dynasty. Yazid asked Hussein for his formal oath of allegiance and submission. Hussein refused and withdrew from Medina to Mecca. Hussein was invited by supporters in Kufa to lead a fight against Yazid’s government. He was intercepted by Yazid’s forces at Karbala on the bank of the Euphrates in present-day southern Iraq. Hussein’s forces comprised of seventy two family members and supporters and were vastly outnumbered by Syrian forces led by Umar ibn Sad. On the tenth of Muharram 61/680, Hussein and the majority of his family members were slaughtered. The severed heads of the men and the captured women were taken to Kufa and on to Damascus the capital of the Umayyad Caliphate.

Almost immediately the supporters of Hussein began to mourn the death of Hussein and his companions. Hussein was survived by his son ‘Ali Zayn al-Abidin and the female members of his family. At Damascus, Karbala and Medina many grieved for their loss, the loss to the family of the Prophet and the loss to the Muslim community.

Almost immediately, political uprising was promoted by using Karbala symbolism. We see that the propagandist for the ‘Abbasid uprising, Abu Muslim, made use of popular sentiments against the Umayyad rulers by appealing to support for the family of the Prophet. The famous fourteenth-century historian Ibn-al Kathir states that, on the tenth of Muharram of this year (AH 353) Mu’izz ad-Dawla Ibn Buwayh, may God disgrace him, ordered that the markets be closed, and that the women should wear coarse woollen hair cloth, and that they should go into the markets with their faces uncovered and their hair dishevelled, beating their faces and wailing over Hussein Ibn Abi Talib.

During the sixteenth century AD., Shi’i symbols and rituals were utilized to provide legitimacy and self-definition to the Safavid dynasty. At this time the practise called rowzeh khani (a ritual sermon recounting and mourning the tragedy of Karbala) was introduced. By the Qajar period (1796-1925) the rowzeh khani had evolved into a much more elaborate ritual called the ta’ziyeh khani which included narrative ritual, procession and theatrical performance.

32 Kamran S. Aghaie, The Martyrs of Karbala, Shi’i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2004, p.10. However, the more elaborate Shi’i ritual referred to as the Moharran procession was not documented until the tenth century.


34 The catalyst in the creation of this ritual was the composition of Hussein Va’ez Kashefi’s Rowzat al-shohada,(The Garden of Martyrs) in 1502. This became the main source of Karbala narratives and histories retelling the story of Hussein and his companions.
For Shi'a the event of Karbala has become a "root metaphor" or paradigm upon which many religious beliefs, rituals and practises are based. For Shi'a it constitutes the central narrative in their understanding of human history, empowerment, salvation, socio-political emancipation and religious identity. The rituals and narratives associated with Ashura have historically served as a vehicle for expressing a variety of political, religious and social relationships. According to Martyr Murtada Mutahhari, Shi'a believe that in recalling the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, muslims believe that "Imam Hussein was killed in order to revive Islamic tradition, Islamic laws and regulations, not in order to create an excuse for the violation of Islamic norms". The practise of Ahsura has kept alive the dangerous and revolutionary memory of Imam Hussein in a variety of contexts. It has provided the religious foundation for the transformation of history, society, personal grief and faith for many muslims throughout history and the world.

2.6.1 The Ashura Narrative in Literature

In literature much reflection on Karbala and Ashura takes place within the context of Iran and South Asia. For instance, Kamran Aghaie, in examining Shi'i symbols and rituals in modern Iran, identifies how during three radically different regimes, namely, the Qajars (1796-1925), the Pahlavis (1925-1979) and the Islamic Republic (1979-present), these symbols and ritual were used by the state in different ways to bolster legitimacy. During the Qajars and the Pahlavis through patronage and political influence the state used the ta'ziyeh khani to promote cohesion and maintain the hegemony of the ruling elite. Having placed themselves at the top of the hierarchy of patronage, the state used these religious rituals to promote bonds of loyalty and maintain military control and the status quo. In the later rule of Reza Shah and particularly during the rule of Muhammad Reza Shah, however, the Pahlavi state became hostile to these religious rituals, outlawing many of them. This was in an effort to distance the state from its religious roots and promote the notion of a secular modern and western regime in its European and American allies. Nevertheless, during the Khomeini-led revolution of 1978-79, Ashura symbols and rituals were once again used as the primary means of promoting the revolutionary programme of

the new state and establishing the absolute rule of Jurist-Consult (Faqih). Rejecting foreign political and economic influence – "resisting imperialism" – was seen as promoting religious values in the service of the state. Ashura rituals were effectively used in mobilizing the masses, promoting self-sacrifice and military courage during the revolution and in the subsequent war with Iraq. Ashura symbols and rituals were used to express and promote bonds between the emerging Islamic state and the populace.

Thus, Toby Howarth, in discussing Ashura sermons and rituals in modern Hyderabad, identifies several ways in which these narratives and rituals are utilized in an Indian context. For the Shi‘i community as a minority faith within a Muslim minority, the primary utilization of ritual is that of “defending the faith in a pluralist world.” The Shi‘a are presented as the true and faithful followers of the Prophet in contrast to Sunni Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. The Shi‘i community identify with the early Muslim community marginalized and excluded by the Meccan authorities and with the early followers of Alul Bayt who were excluded from leadership and political power by the dominant Umayyad. The Ashura narratives and rituals “unite the community in praise of its heroes.” By providing the community with models of piety, bravery, courage, and fidelity, the ritual remembrance of Karbala inspires the community toward the emulation of the Shi‘i hero’s self-sacrifice and jihad. The Ashura narratives and rituals “bind the community in a narrative of suffering”. They forge a common identity through creating a space for empathy, creative memory and religious imagination. The majlis (mourning community space) is a threshold and liminal reality, bringing the present into communion with the transformative and revolutionary past. The narratives are also modernized by reference to other heroes. For instance, one of the three parts of the discussion of Karbala by Syed Akbar Hyder is the emulation of Karbala in the life and teaching of reformers Muhammad Iqbal, Mahatma Gandi and Munchi Premchand.

We see, then, that the Ashura narrative is a potent symbol and charged metaphor of “socio-religious reform” and “progressive discourse”. The memory of Karbala becomes a

43 Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala, Martyrdom in South Asian Memory*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2006; the other two parts are commemorating Karbala in Urdu literature and poetry and the celebration of Karbala in Sufi songs and musical assemblies.
"subversive force" that keeps up an "unyielding resistance" to the status quo. The Ashura narrative becomes a model that demonstrates how a minority can redress the asymmetry of power and can provide a "paradigm for all the oppressed peoples of the world". We see that the Ashura narrative has been recognized by many outside Shi'i Islam and Islam as a symbol of liberation, empowerment, revolution and emancipation. Karbala and the Ashura narrative as polyphonic symbol acquire meaning depending upon the social and political context of its use. It is available for overlapping interpretation and is constituted by the ideals of its "interpreting communities". There are multiple struggles constructed within this symbol that are evident from the narrative. Multiple binaries narrate the struggles expressed in the symbol: Hussein versus Yazid; 'Ali versus Alu Bakr, Uman, Uthama and Muawiya; Fatima versus Aisha; Shi’a versus Sunni; sobriety versus intoxication; affection versus duty, Marxism versus Capitalism; East versus West; and many more. There are themes of commemoration, devotion, sacrifice, celebration, reform, and liberation, themes which are essential to the symbol’s textual landscape.

2.6.2 The Ashura Narrative in Migrant Spaces

The Ashura narrative has been ritualized in many different contexts and has provided a metaphor for, among others, hegemonic control, revolutionary state transformation and maintenance of the status quo. It is the focus of this thesis to examine one particular context, namely, that of Iraqi Shi’i communities in the UK and Ireland during the years 2004 until 2010. It is my contention that in this time the Ashura Narrative has taken on one particular interpretation that, though it has universal elements, is in the main peculiar to the Iraqi Shi’i community in exile.

In their native countries Shi’a experienced a monolithic Shi’ism that was not informed by ethnic or cultural diversity. In a migrant space, such as the UK or Ireland, this monolithic and homeland experience is challenged both by the new pluralistic and multiethnic context and by an Islam that is defined primarily by Sunnism. For, the Iraqi Shi’i community in exile has to deal with a secular, if putatively Christian, and western majority, and with a majority Sunni Islam. However, it also has to deal with other national and regional Shi’i groups with whom it may have to share a ritual and religious space. In this context the challenge to move towards integration or towards isolation is doubly manifested.

44 Ibid., these quotes are taken from the conclusion to the chapter entitled "From Communal to Ecumenical", pp.200-1.
In the first generation “the immigrant psyche is shaped by the memory of the homeland”. There is the “myth of return”, “nostalgia for the homeland and the sense of loss that accompanies it”. Iraqis also bring with them a deep sense of religious commitment and a desire to replicate religious services in the West.

Ashura practises are changing and adapting especially in regard to the next generation and with Iraqi youth. During Ashura, Dar al Islam in London and other UK groups run majlis in English. These majlis are directed at a younger generations and treat topics including, family relationships, sexuality, education, psychology, Marxism, modernity, philosophy and other areas relevant to integration. The Islamic Unity Society is a society of Shi‘i youth in the United Kingdom that promotes unity among Muslims. During Ashura they run a campaign of blood donation in the name of Imam Hussein. This is an example of adapting the practise of bloodletting, flagellation and self-mutilation and

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45 This example is taken from research into Shi‘i communities in the United States. This reflects the reality also of communities in Ireland and the United Kingdom. Liyakat Nathani Takim, Shi’ism in America, New York University Press, New York, 2009, p.55.

46 Ibid., p.25. Takim contends that Iraqis in the US, especially recently arrived refugees, struggle with integration more that other migrant groups. There is a tendency towards cultural, linguistic and religious isolation, identification with the home country and the desire to return. This may be attributed to in many cases the experience of trauma that could have been associated with the migration, or events preceding exile. Many Iraqi Shi‘a experienced great violence, intimidation and terror before arriving in the West as refugees.

47 Its website is www.ius.org.uk. The Islamic Unity Society began in response to the growing number of radical Islamic Youth groups emerging in British Universities. (See Anthony Clees and Chris Pope, When Students Turn to Terror, The Social Affairs Unit, London, 2005) These radical elements tend to be anti-Shi‘a who recruit vulnerable individuals and groups on campus.

The IUS publishes a magazine, Unity, four times a year, promote a blood donation campaign during Ashura and discussion events throughout the year. It has run youth camps and excursions for Shi‘a youth in the UK and Ireland and plays a valuable role in promoting conscientization and integration among Shi‘a youth.

48 Flagellation is an important ritual in the month of Muharram. Flagellation included the use of swords to cut the head (tatbir) and the use of chains (zanjir) to strike the chest and back. The shedding of blood is seen as demonstrating grief for Hussein’s suffering and identifying with his mortal wounds. Heated discussion emerges in the West with regard to groups who want to engage in this activity. In the main it is discouraged by scholars and the ‘Ulama. Many regard it as barbaric and anti-modern, jarring with western sensibilities. Those Iraqi Shi‘i groups in the West who identify with western values and promote integration as against nostalgia for the home country oppose it strongly.
turning an ancient tradition towards something beneficial for society. Many Shi'i groups and individuals make use of internet and visual resources during the majlis. There is a wealth of sermons, rituals, and songs online that can be used during Ashura.49 Shi'i youth will visit www.al-Islam.org, a Shi'i internet site that speaks on many Shi'i issues. This indication of integration into western society particularly appeals to youth and those who are computer literate.

Ashura in exile, therefore is clearly allied to identity formation. Through participation in memorial and ritual Iraqi Shi'a engage in a process of religious and ethnic self-identification which begins with what Takim calls a “cognitive process of self-categorization”.50 According to Takim this involves making a claim to membership in a group and also contrasting oneself and one’s group with other groups and categories. In this way many Iraqi Shi'a are in the process of affirming a western Shi'i identity, especially among the younger generation and those who were educated in the West. This indicates a paradigm shift or a process of post-ethnicity or de-ethnicization. This process is taking place over the span of a generation and in the socio-political context of the so-called “Global War on Terror”, which impacts upon the lives of many Muslims but in a particular way upon Iraqis as they face occupation, war, violence and exile in great numbers.

The paradigm shift that marks the transition from Shi'a in the West to western Shi'a is deeply rooted in both interpreting the Ashura narrative along lines compatible to western values and seeing in Imam Hussein and Ahul Bayt the paragons both of opposition to violence and dictatorship, and of promotion of democracy, human rights and the emancipation of the oppressed, especially women. This has intensified fault lines among Muslims, particularly along radical Salafi and Wahhabi lines, as is well recognized. However, the fault lines among Shi'a becomes apparent in their dialogue with other Muslims and other westerners, in much the same way as I have identified in this dissertation.

The practise of blood donation is growing during Ahsura and is supported by the Red Cross and the NHS in the UK, where donation among ethnic minorities is often critical to maintain supplies.

49 Youth who want to hear nawahi, matamor and majlis visit sites like www.yahhusain.org. The internet site www.shiatv.net contains over two thousand videos that address specifically Shi'i issues. The internet chatline called www.shia.com addresses and discusses issues pertinent to Shi'a in the West.

2.7 Aシュラ REINTERPRETATION OF THE IDEOLOGY OF MARTYRDOM

Though the word *shahadat* is often translated as martyrdom it has, like *jihad*, different shades of meaning. While *shahadat* means “self-sacrifice” it also means “acting as a witness”. Though we may associate martyrdom with violent blind righteousness, it also, especially in the Judeo-Christian tradition, has been associated with witness, integrity, fidelity and the highest ideals. ‘Ali Shariati, perhaps most responsible for reinterpreting Alid Shi‘ism and revitalizing the martyrdom of Hussein, also coined the classical slogans\(^52\) that “the martyr is the pulsating heart of history” and that “every day is Ashura and every place is Karbala”. In Shariati’s view,

martyrdom has a unique radiance, it creates light and heat in the world. It creates movement, vision and hope. By his death, the martyr condemns the oppressor and provides commitment for the oppressed. In the iced-over hearts of a people, he bestows the blood of life and resurrection.\(^53\)

In the eyes of the Shi‘i Imam Hussein is credited with the greatest heroism: his death reclaimed Islam from corruption, despotism and moral ruin. His martyrdom was as central to Islam as the revelation of the Prophet Muhammad, for it reclaimed the original pristine integrity of the religion, ethical movement and political project that was initiated by his grandfather. At Ashura, Shi‘a identify with the heroism of Imam Hussein, his incorruptability and the clarity of his intention in renewing their faith.

In the context of a post-9/11 and 7/7 world, however, Islamic martyrdom has undergone a radical shift in perception. The reality of the murder of innocent victims by Muslim extremists provoked in Muslims a deep quest to understand their faith in the modern world. Muslims were now faced with the reality of suicide bombers and suicide

\(^{51}\) Mohammed M. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq, The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*, United States Institute of Peace, Washington, 2007. This gives a systematic account of the ideological and theological foundations to martyrdom with particular reference to suicide bombers in Iraq. It is not my intention to present this material only to identify in what ways the Ashura Narrative has informed Iraqi Shi‘a differently from their Sunni comrades and what resources Iraqi Shi‘a can draw on in order to combat dominant theological and ideological readings that support and underpin violence.


attacks against innocent civilians, including innocent Muslims. There have been suicide attacks justified by Hamas and Hezbollah in the past but these were regarded by some as acts of war in occupied territories; the attacks upon innocent civilians were significantly different. For Iraqis the war against terror has particular consequences as they were faced with a war of occupation in which thousands were killed, injured and displaced. There was, in addition to the military invasion, a bloody sectarian war involving countless suicide bombers, militia murders, attacks upon Muslim civilians, intimidation and the murder of religious pilgrims and Christian minorities.

Most of the attacks in Iraq have taken place against Iraqi security forces and Shi'i civilians. These have been perpetrated by al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and its affiliates. These and their supporters have adopted arguments to justify attacks upon fellow Iraqis and Muslims. The arguments can be divided into ideological, theological and emotional categories.

The ideological justifications emphasize a conspiratorial worldview that features prominently the dualities of West and East, colonizer and colonized, Zionist and Palestinian, invader and invaded, occupier and occupied, corrupt and innocent, halk and dove, etc. Those who associate with the invader are collaborators and guilty by association. For those living in the West, educated in the West, living on social welfare and being employed by western governments, this duality is harder to accept or promote. This has enabled Iraqi Shi'a living in the West to see beyond the ideological argument presented by radical groups, though, of course, not all Muslims in the western world agree with them.

The theological justifications revolve around Islamic traditions that appear to legitimize the killing of civilians, and the killing of Muslims by Muslims. Radicals cite three traditions to justify such violent behaviour: the war against the apostates in the formative period of Islam (hurab al-Riddah); the rule concerning killing Muslim human shields (qatl al-turse) and the rule concerning purging the ranks of enemies in battle (al-inghimas fi al-saf). The vast majority of Muslims can find no theological justification for the murder of innocent victims. Shi'a in the West, following in the tradition in the quietist tradition of many Iraqi Marja, are horrified that Islam could be instrumental in the cause of violence. They have no difficulty in condemning Muslim terrorists, radical and fanatical elements in the community, those who terrorise and those who support terror in any forms. There is an unequivocal condemnation of violence in all its forms aswithout theological justification. Fundamentalist Sunni Muslims do not have the same resources in their tradition to enable them to challenge for example, verse 9.29 in the Quran which states:
Fight those who believe not in Allah and the Last Day and do not forbid what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden -- such men as practice not the religion of truth, being of those who have been given the Book [i.e. Jews and Christians] -- until they pay the tribute out of hand and have been humbled.

Minority groups within Islam in the West seem to be best equipped to condemn violence, terrorism and oppression that those associated with the majority view. There is a tradition in Shi‘i Islam that can read the Ashura narrative against the grain and challenge the dominant religious political paradigm, leading valuable support to non-violent protest and revolutionary sedition.

Emotional appeals focus the attention of Muslims on the enduring humiliation and oppression suffered at the hands of colonialists, foreigners and their associates in Muslim states. There are constant referrals to the Palestinians and the Kashmiri Muslims and to the colonial past. There is an identification with the oppressor and an internalization of oppression, which externalizes blame and responsibility, often in states where there is police brutality, autocratic government, corruption and nepotism. Iraqi Shi‘a, particularly those in migrant spaces, through their reading of the Ashura narrative, identify with the victim of oppression, violence and intimidation. They tend to be outspoken in opposing oppression, dictatorship and corruption. Their reading of Ashura opens up the possibility of rapprochement with western values of transparent leadership, shared responsibility, democratic representation and constitutional law.54

Conclusion

The religious narratives of leadership and succession expressed within Shi‘ism are well known within the Shi‘i community. The centrality of ‘Ali and the Imams in Shi‘i piety is but a reflection of the centrality of the Ahul Bayt among Shi‘a. In ritual memory and preaching, the focus is on the relationship of the devoted Shi‘a to these holy personalities who have the power to transform and guide Muslims, leading them to eternal reward. The

54 Among ‘Ali’s bequests to Muslims and to humanity is a letter to one of his governors, Malik Ashtar. Here he lays down his guiding principles for a just government. It is an often quoted example of Islamic humanism, known for its reference to citizens as “brothers in religion or brothers in humanity.” It is a resource for Iraqi Shi‘a in the West to draw upon in promoting good government and in the supporting of democratic and constitutional law in Iraq following recent elections. A full copy of the letter is available in Syed Akbar Hyder’s Reliving Karbala, pp.81-2.
relationship is one of devotion, a sacred covenant and narrative of belonging that touches the heart and the deep religious needs of Shi'i Muslims.

At the heart of Shi'i theology and ritual is the Imamate. It is the Imamate essentially that distinguishes Shi'i and Sunni branches of Islam. Shi'a reinterpret the narratives of early Islamic history that identify the Shi'i Imams as designated leaders of the whole Islamic community. They did not seek after political rule and were not corrupted by political rule, yet they commanded the respect and admiration of the entire early Islamic community. Despite being mistreated, imprisoned and killed by the political leaders of the time their influence and memory remains alive within the Shi'i community. Their burial places are renowned centres of pilgrimage and prayer for large numbers of Shi'i pilgrims each year. Their leadership and influence continues through the twelfth Imam. Shi'a see in their religious leadership the highest integrity and divine guidance. These religious leaders continue to inspire, lead and guide the Shi'i community by modelling leadership styles that aspire to the greatest integrity and transparency. Respect for the Imams is equated with respect for integral leadership; thus, the marja and the ulama are expected to lead lives of exemplary Islamic piety and devotion.

Through perpetuating the memory of the Imams Shi'i communities are empowered anew each year. They seek to give political and social expression to their religious conviction. The main vehicle for remembering the original Imams is the Ashuara narrative. We have seen that this narrative vitalises the community while providing the key pillar of its identity socially and politically and no less religiously. We have also seen that this core narrative is open to reinterpretation and thus to a revitalisation of Shi'i theological and socio-political self-understanding.

In the Shi'i majority communities of the Persian Gulf; Iran, Iraq and Lebanon there has been in the end of the twentieth century and continues to be a political emancipation among the Shi'a that has drawn on a fruitful religious narrative of empowerment. It is to this narrative of emancipation and empowerment among the Shi'i Middle East that I now turn my attention.
CHAPTER III THE NARRATIVE OF EMANCIPATION AMONG SHI’A IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Introduction

I have chosen the narrative of emancipation as the central narrative within political Shi’ism of the Middle East. This aspect of Shi’ism is most evident in the Persian Gulf. The heartlands of the Persian Gulf also happen to be the Shi’i heartland. Out of an estimated 1.3 billion Muslims in the world¹, about 11 percent are Shi’a. More than 50 percent are Twelver or Ithna ‘Ashariyya Shi’i. These live in the geopolitically sensitive rim of the Persian Gulf, as majorities of the citizen populations in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain and as minorities in Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Iran is the single largest Shi’i Muslim country in the world, over 95 percent of its 40 million citizens are Shi’i. Events in Shi’i Iraq are intimately related to the developments within Iran. This is not a recent development, from the earliest time in Shi’i history Iraq played the significant role of an emerging empire. However, it was Iran that led to the spread of Ithna ‘Ashariyya Shi’a in subsequent centuries.

The history, the doctrine, the literature and the politics of Twelver Shi’a are intimately though not uniquely connected to an Iranian world and the particular developments of that world, that has seen the emergence of a national state, the growth of the monarchy and its eventual overthrow with the establishment of an Islamic state. Shi’ism has played a vital role in this history and has been a key factor in achieving its political ends. We see the turning of religious ritual into a radical politics of praxis in both Iran and in Lebanon. This has in turn laid the foundation of future political developments in Iraq and other countries in the Persian Gulf. The Shi’a in the modern world are in a process of "reaching for power"² which is a process of political and social emancipation.

In order to appreciate development in the Shi’i Middle East, particularly Iraq and with Ithna ‘Ashariyya political awakening it is necessary to situate our reflection around political developments in Iran. I wish to pay particular attention to political developments in 20th century Iranian history. In the decades leading to the Revolution in 1979, Shi’i

Islam experienced a profound awakening. Islam moved from being engaged with a life of quiet devotion and piety to being at a centre of political and social realities. There were steps along the way, but nevertheless at the end of the 20th century, Shi'i Islam emerged as a vibrant and powerful force in Iranian and world history and politics. I wish to chart these developments paying attention to the history and the political awakening that was taking place alongside the emergence of a radicalised faith.

3.1 Early Shi'i Political Developments in Iran

Iranians claim that their fidelity to Shi'ism goes back to the very beginning. Among the Prophet’s companions, Salman the Persian supported ‘Ali’s claim to become the first caliph. It was a Persian prisoner of war who killed Caliph Umar, who was particularly disliked by Iranians. The eighth Shi'i Imam, ‘Ali al-Reza, is buried in the shrine of Masshad and his sister, Massouma, is buried in the shrine of the religiously important city of Qom.

Shi’ism came to predominate in Iran in the sixteenth century, when the Safavids took over the country. These Safavids take their name from the Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili (d.1334) who traced his ancestry back to the Seventh Imam, Musa al-Kazim. The Safavid domain grew as they battled the Mongol rulers and in 1501 Shah Ismail defeated the Mongols once and for all and established the Safavid dynasty. The Ottomans and the Safavids fought many wars, but the line between the two rival empires came to follow much the same path as today’s border between Iran in the East and Iraq and Turkey to its West. The Safavids succeeded in establishing Iran as a Shi'i stronghold establishing at Isfahan an empire of cultural, religious and artistic excellence.

With the advent of the Shi’i state under the Safavids and the conversion of many Iranians to Shi’ism, there were many developments in the popular religion in Safavid times. These occurred for the most part during the end of the Safavid era. Muhammad Baqir Majlisi played a significant part in promoting Shi’ism at the popular level. The main trends included the increased importance of pilgrimages made to the shrines of the Imams in Iraq and at Mashhad in Iran. There was also increased popular involvement with Muharram ritual commemorating the martyrdom of the Imam Hussein.

The scholarly ulama and legal experts, mujtahids, became functional replacements for the authority of the imams. They undertook the task of ministering the community’s spiritual needs as well as its social and political interests. They were viewed as guardians

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of the faith and as the successors of the Twelfth Imam. Muhammad al-Mahdi was withdrawn by God into occultation in 939 C.E. in order to preserve his life. His return will herald the end of time and the ushering in of a reign of justice and peace, at which time the world will end.\textsuperscript{4} For the Sunnis the Mahdi is merely a descendant of the Prophet who will revive the faith. Many believe he is as yet unborn and await his arrival. Among the Shi'a the ulama enjoy a privileged spiritual status as the successors to the Twelfth Imam whom they seek to represent.

It was during the 11\textsuperscript{th} century (C.E.) that the controversy between the Usuli (fundamentalists) and Akhbari (traditionalists) schools came to the fore. The Akbari movement was a rejection of the rationalist principles on which \textit{ijtihad} and the whole of Shi'i jurisprudence come to be based. It sought to establish Shi'i jurisprudence on the basis of the Traditions (Akhbar) rather than on the rationalist principles (Usul) of jurisprudence used in \textit{ijtihad}. For the Akhbaris, the ulama hold far less power both in religion and in politics. Both schools competed for the soul of Shi'ism from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. In time the Usulis overshadowed the Akhbaris, reaching near dominance except for Bahrain.

The Shi'i ulama are firstly lawyers and experts in jurisprudence; they interpret and expand on religious law, particularly the Shi'i school of jurisprudence as developed by Ja'far al-Sadiq (d.756) on matters regarding family law, inheritance, religious taxes and commerce. For the most part Shi'i clergy are educated in seminaries like those gathered around Najaf in Iraq and Qom in Iran. When a student has completed his studies to his superior's satisfaction, he receives permission (\textit{ijaza}) to become a bonafide member of the ulama and can practise \textit{ijtihad} (independent reasoning). Shi'i clergy also judge one another on the quality of their scholarship and publication and it is the community of believers who determine the rank of the clergy who bestow, by popular peer acclaim, such titles as ayatollah and hojjat al-Islam. The most senior clergy are sources of emulation (\textit{marja al-taqlid}) who command vast numbers of followers. Today the most senior of the Ayatollahs with broadest following are the Iranian 'Ali al-Sistani, Muhammad Said al-Hakim, Muhammad Ishaq al-Fayyad, Bashir al-Najafi al Pakistani these are known as the sources of emulation (\textit{marja'iya}) in Najaf; Muhammad Taqi Mudarressi in Karbala; Mirza Javad Tabrizi, Taqi Behjat, and Hossein 'Ali Montazeri in Qom; and in Tehran 'Ali Khamenei. Muhammad Hussain Fadhallah until his death in July 2010 exercised great influence

\textsuperscript{4} Sermons on the days of celebration of the Birthday of the Twelfth Imam speak of his immanent return, his occultation and his reign of justice and peace.
within Lebanon and the broader Shi'i world. There has never been a sole source of emulation, with exception of Ayatollah Muhammad Hussain Boroujerdi (d. 1965). Although Khomeini did try to establish a Shi'i “Papacy”, his influence did not extend much beyond Iran.

The Safavid period in Shi'i history saw the foundation of a new Shi'i political doctrine. This was a new political reality with the rise of an avowedly Shi'i monarchy ruling over a Shi'i domain: Shi'i theology and religious sciences took on a new Iranian shape. Momen identifies four major developments in Shi'ism that took place during the Safavid period of Shi'i history. These include; the ending of the relative mutual tolerance between Sunnis and Shi'is that had existed from the time of the Mongol conquests onwards and the resurgence of hatred and hostility between the two sects; the change from a broad inclusive community of faith to a narrow outlook concentrating on law and the external observances of the religion. This included the rejecting of Sufism and its philosophy and the minimising of the esoteric aspects of the religion. The beginning of a separation between church and state and the emergence of an independent body of ulama capable of taking a political stand different from the state is one such change. Finally came the change from Twelver Shi'ism being a predominantly Arab phenomenon with its principal centres of learning in the Arab world to the centre of learning moving to Iran.

In 1722 the Safavid empire fell to Sunni armies from Afghanistan; these were followed in power by the Iranian king Nader Shah. Though he was of Shi'i origin, one of the conditions that he laid down for accepting the monarchy was that Iran should abandon Shi'ism and return to the Sunni fold. Nader made peace with the Ottomans restoring Iranian power to some prominence. Despite his efforts politically and religiously, Nader was unable to make Sunnism the religion of Iran. The period between the fall of the Safavids and the rise of the Qajars saw some significant developments. The fall of the Safavids brought about the cutting of the ties between the ulama and the state. This period of uncertainty and weak government increased the attractiveness of the Usuli School with its stronger claims to leadership for the ulama. The centre of Shi'i scholarship moved beyond the control of Iranian government to the Shrine cities of Iraq. This was in the future to have profound consequences for the Qajar era.

The 19th century (C.E.) saw important changes in the popular religion for the generality of the Shi'i. The ulama began making their presence felt more in the lives of the ordinary faithful, insisting that these turn to the marja at-taqlid for guidance and direction.

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The people began increasingly to look to the ulama as their leaders and voice. Being economically independent of the government the ulama was in a position to criticise government with impunity.

3.2 POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN 20TH CENTURY IRAN

The arrival of the 20th century saw the development of colonial interference in Iran. The Qajar monarchy (1795-1925) had restored the Shi'í government but was weakened by external interference and did the bidding of Britain and Russia. In 1891 Nasir al-Din Shah used his power to give control of the tobacco trade to the British Imperial Tobacco Company. A coalition of intellectuals, farmers, merchants and clerics resolved to resist. Sheikh Shirazi, the country's leading religious figure endorsed fatwa, declaring that as long as foreigners controlled the tobacco industry, smoking constituted defiance of the Twelfth Imam. Nasir al-Din Shah was forced to cancel the concession and borrow a million pounds to compensate British Imperial for its loss. The Shi'í ulama had become Iran's defender and most outspoken critic of colonialism.

In the decade since the Tobacco Revolt, the political consciousness of the Iranians had grown enormously. There was a growing belief in the need for popular sovereignty and doubt in the principle of monarchy. The spark for a Constitutional Revolution came in December 1903 in Tehran. Reacting to the heavy handedness of the local governor, bazaar and merchant crowds gathered initially to call for reduced taxes and ultimately for the formation of a national consultative assembly. With the country on the brink of revolt Muzzarrar al-Din Shah had no choice but accept the idea that Iran should have a parliament. Islamic clerics took a leading role invoking the martyrdom of Imam Hussein as defender of the poor. Ayatollah Muhammad Hussain Na'ini led many ulama in defending the rule of law and democracy as being compatible with the religious teaching of Shi'í Islamic law. The ulama promoted a national constitution and declared the people sovereign and did not seek to establish an Islamic state although some scholars had a more ambiguous relationship toward constitutionalism.

8 Scholars such as Kasrave, Adamiyat, Ha'iri, Arjomand, Lahiji and Bayat point out that the clerical establishment entered into negotiation with secular authorities, and in return for their support of the constitutional government secured a prominent position for themselves within that constitution. See
During the Constitutional Revolution, reformers tried repeatedly to withdraw Iran from the orbit of foreign powers. However these efforts were in vain as Iran fell deeply into bondage as the Qajars continued to sell the country’s assets. In 1907 Britain and Russia signed a treaty dividing Iran. The northern provinces were taken by Russia while Britain assumed control of the southern provinces. As Russia in 1917 was consumed by its own civil war and revolution, Britain took advantage of the power vacuum and formed the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, practically taking control of the economy and quelling the nationalist cause. On the 25th April 1926 Reza Khan ascended the Peacock Throne and proclaimed himself Reza Shah. His new dynasty had the support of a weakened majlis and the British; it would be known by the family name of Pahlavi, after a language that Persians spoke before the Muslim conquest.

Reza Shah set himself to limit the influence of foreign powers in his land, particularly the all-powerful British, and to establish a rule of strength and force. He embarked on a modernizing and secularizing path constructing new avenues, plazas, highways, factories, ports, hospitals, government buildings and schools. He created the first civil service and the first national army. He introduced the metric system, the modern calendar, civil marriage and divorce. Yet for all his reforms, he did not manage a true social transformation. The ulama resisted his rule, aware that the combination of a powerful centralising government and a modernizing society was causing their influence to fade. Reza Shah was fascinated by the fascist movements that emerged in Europe during the 1930s and he developed sympathy for the German cause which he saw as being allied to his own. During the World War II, to prevent Germany getting a foothold in Iran, British and Soviet troops entered the country on 25th August 1941. On September 16th 1941 Reza Shah abdicated and was succeeded by his young son, twenty-one year old Mohammad Reza. Reza’s legacy was far from the visionary reform he imagined for himself. His departure left Iran in the hands of foreign powers and with a weak and confused young king. The experience to date of monarchy in the country had failed to bring either reform, prosperity or integration.

Shi‘i political thought during the 1940s had been preoccupied with the Baha‘i faith and communism. The 1950s gave rise to the re-emergence of nationalism and the movement of emancipation chiefly identified with Mohammad Mossadegh, the champion of the Iranian nationalist resurgence. ‘Ali Akbar Tashayyud was responsible for the active
coordination of the Shi‘i doctrines with the dominant themes of nationalism in the 1950s. The ulama supported Mossadegh’s nationalization of Iran’s oil industry and the movement that created it. In 1953 a CIA backed military coup ousted the nationalist premier, Mossadegh, and restored power to the young Shah, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi. Fearing chaos and a communist takeover, many of the ulama supported Muhammad Reza Shah, setting aside for the present their nationalist feelings for the sake of stability.

The decade of the 1960s began with the death of Ayatollah Burujirdi who was the last of the apolitical jurists who was passive in condoning the monarchy. This created a vacuum in the supreme political authority among the Shi‘i community, leaving the opening for revolutionary ideas and rising Shi‘i ideologues.

3.3 FOUNDATIONS FOR REVOLUTIONARY POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SHI‘I ISLAM

3.3.1 Revolutionary Personalities in 20th century Shi‘i Iran

The conversion of Shi‘i tradition into a revolutionary ideology has been a very modern phenomenon and has demanded considerable modification of the religious tradition. This transformation was essentially the work of intellectuals who were strongly influenced by the West rather than religious figures. Foremost in these efforts were the Tehran teacher, ethnologist and writer Jalal Al-e Ahmad and his student, religious scholar and sociologist ‘Ali Shari’ati. Both were profoundly influenced by foreign colonial rule and the apparent victimhood of the Iranian people in the face of foreign domination.

Al-e Ahmad developed into an ardent nationalist and xenophobe under the influence of Stalinist politics. For him blind imitation of the West was the reason that Iranians were dislocated from their roots, culture and religion. His popular book Gharbzadagi – translated as Westoxification was immensely popular in Iran. Al-e Ahmad turned enthusiastically to his own religious tradition, which he saw as the only effective cure for a complete corruption that was taking place due to western influence. He sensed a revolutionary potential in religion that could surpass the potential among students intellectually influenced by Marxist ideology. The books of Al-e Ahmad impacted upon an entire generation of Iranians including theology students and clergy.9

Following Al-e Ahmad’s death in 1969, his ideas were taken up and developed further by ‘Ali Shariati in the 1970s. ‘Ali Shariati was born in 1933 in Mazianan in

northwest Iran. His father, Mohammad Taqi Shariati was a well known preacher. At twenty three he entered the Faculty of Letters in Mashhad and received a bachelor’s degree. He travelled to Paris, where he studied religious history and sociology. Among those who influenced him were Louis Massignon; Frantz Fanon whose *Wretched of the Earth* he translated; and Jean-Paul Sartre. In 1964 he returned to Iran with a doctorate.

He went to Tehran where his reputation as a lecturer quickly spread and was invited to speak at the progressive intellectual institution, Hosaniyeh Ershad. Shariati was imprisoned by the authorities and decided to leave Iran in 1977. He died in London on June 19th of the same year.

No complete bibliography of Shariati has been compiled as much of his material was in a lecture style. The titles of his lectures suggest his major themes: “‘Ali, the Superman of History”, “Man, Islam and the Doctrines of the West”, “Eqbal, Architect of the Renewal of Islamic thought”, “Community and Imamate”, “Shi’ism, the Perfect Party” and so on. Shariati was a politico-religious thinker in the context of Third World liberation struggles. He was acutely aware of the problems of colonialism and neo-colonialism which alienate people from their roots. Neither liberal capitalism nor Marxism can provide a way out. Shariati saw in Islamic humanism the sole ideology that could save Iran and all oppressed peoples. He presented a clear distinction between “Alid Shi’ism” from ‘Ali the first Imam and “Safavid Shi’ism”. Alid Shi’ism represented original Islam and is a movement of progress and revolution. This is Islam in its progressive and dynamic phase. The Safavids degraded Shi’ism to an institution enslaving it to piety and empty ritual. For Shariati Safavid Shi’ism is also Pahlavi Shi’ism and the ulama of today have renounced their role as awokeners, content to busy themselves with futile debates. Shariati devoted several lectures to the role of women and published *Fatima as Fatima*. It was this Fatima who shared her father’s trials and also those of ‘Ali and her sons, Imams Hasan and Hussain. For Shariati she was the centre of a family of fighters and reformers. She took on responsibilities and became socially engaged, equal to men but in different ways.

Shariati envisaged no hope in western democracies; this was partially because of the fundamental weakness of the majority principle, and partly because the western democracies continue to pillage and exploit the wealth of the third world. In its place


Shariati proposes the institution of a “guided” or “committed democracy which he defines as follows:

It is the government of a group, on the basis of a progressive revolutionary program, wants to change and guide in the best possible way individuals, people’s language and culture, social relations, and the standard of living...society must be liberated by all means from its fossilized yoke.\(^\text{12}\)

Shariati has an immense appeal for students and young Muslims explained by the originality of his position. Through this studies in France he acquired knowledge of modern ideologies, including liberalism, capitalism, Marxism and existentialism but at the same time remained a faithful believer. He spoke a language that was accessible to Iranians who were beginning to be educated in the modern world and were confronting new social problems such as urbanization, Westernization, industrialization - tied to Iran’s dependence upon the West. From the summer of 1977 on, Shariati’s books despite being banned initially were readily available and were sold by hundreds of thousands. Following his death, Shariati became a mythical and inspirational figure in militant Islam. His influence in providing thousands with an intellectual history to undertake an activist political standing in the coming years, gave an ideological foundation to a revolutionary generation.

In exile and many years after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the ideas and thinking of Shariati continue to be a source of inspiration and mobilization. In countless lectures and discussions his name emerges among Shi’a young and old. All have heard of him and are familiar with his teaching. Among communities who are seeking political participation and a more defined role in social and political life in Europe; his themes of fidelity to Islam in the face of secularism, Islamic political mobilisation and Islamic democracy are relevant, provocative and inspiring.

Most of the ulama avoided politics and political participation, deciding to remain quietest and engaged in philosophical and theological works. The most important among the politicalized ulama was Ayatollah Ruhollah Musavi Khomanin, father and figurehead of the 1978-79 Islamic revolution.

Ruhollah Musavi was born in September 1902 in Khomain into a religious family. His father was killed by a landlord before he was five months old, and he was raised by his mother. He studied theology at Qom, becoming a disciple of Ayatollah Abdol Karim Ha’eri Yazid. In 1927, he continued studying under Ha’eri and on his death became a

respected mujtahid. In 1944 Khomaini first published criticism of the Pahlavi regime. He asked the ulama in an open letter to unite against the immorality of public life. He unsparingly attacks Reza Shah and all associated with the monarchy, these are seen as the enemies of religion. In the 1950s Khomaini became a leading disciple and confidant of the chief ayatollah Bourjerdi who died in 1961. In 1960 Khomaini attracted many students to his courses in ethics and mysticism given in the Faiziyeh Madraseh in Qom. There his unconventional style and his outspoken criticism of the government’s policies drew him many supporters. He eventually became one of the successors of Borujerdi to the function of marja-e taqlid (source of imitation).

In 1962 Khomaini began direct combat against the Pahlavi regime. He was exiled to Najaf in 1964 from where he continued his struggles against the shah, imperialism and Zionism. In 1971, at the time of the royalist celebrations in Persepolis, he called upon the ulama to denounce the corrupt political practice of the shah and the waste of Iran’s resources. At this time was published from his student notes the book Vilayat-I faqih (Islamic Government). Here he condemns the monarchy, explaining that neither monarchy nor dynastic succession have any part with Islam. Islamic government is limited to God alone and should have an assembly to apply Islamic law, therefore authority must come officially from the jurist. Finally Islam is in danger of being corrupted by perverse doctrines, including materialism, Christianity and Zionism. The ulama must purify Islam and publicize the political and economic aspects of the Quranic message. In the text, The Great Holy War, Khomaini addresses the ulama of the theological colleges and exhorts them to correct their conduct in order to be an example to society. Khomaini lays the foundations of an Islamic society and the rule of the Jurist. He interprets the prophetic tradition to mean the jurists are to assume power, because, by virtue of having access to the specifics of the sacred law, they know how to regulate the daily affairs of Muslims.

Ayatollah Khomaini was not the sole marja-e taqlid. Despite the uncontested leadership he achieved later during the revolution he did not eclipse the political thought of others. Among the most influential ayatollahs who played different roles in the revolution and its ideology were Ayatollah Shariatmadari in Qom and Ayatollah Taleqani in Tehran who were especially influential in liberal and progressive circles.

One of the most frequent themes found in the survey in the Shi’i and Iranian political thought since the late nineteenth century is anti-imperialism, accompanied by a determination to free Iran from western economic and cultural dominance. It was Islam which appeared as the natural ideological base from which reformers who had rejected both liberalism and Marxism based their revolutionary fight against the West and the
Pahlavis. This utilization of Islam has involved new interpretations of old texts and practices, sometimes seen as unorthodox by the more traditional. It also involved attacks upon the West perceived as a monolithic evil.

Among Shi‘i communities in exile, Khomeini remains a powerful influence. He is recalled as a symbol of religious faith, revolutionary zeal and committed Shi‘ism. In death he is remembered and venerated, not unlike the devotion shown to Imams of early Islamic history. His memory and his teaching continue to have a powerful role in forming Shi‘i awareness and identity. This is especially true among educated Iranians abroad just as much as in their own country. The revolutionary era is looked upon as a high point in Shi‘i history, when political rule and Islamic faith coincided and flourished.

3.3.2 The Iranian Islamic Revolution

During the 1970s there continued a growth of malaise and discontent among many sections of the Iranian population as despotism and repression increased despite huge oil income. In 1977 President Carter inaugurated a human rights policy which implied that countries guilty of basic human-rights violations may be deprived of American arms and aid. Although Carter later visited Iran, the liberal opposition was encouraged and strengthened by Carter’s words. The Shah was suffering from cancer at this time and he refrained from many public duties, instead promoting his wife in public minded activities throughout the nation. Leaders of the revived National Front including Karim Sanjab and Shapour Bakhtiar, saw an opportunity for action and criticized the failure of the shah’s reforms, particularly the disregard for human rights, enshrined in both the Iranian constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the face of growing public discontent and economic problems the shah removed Prime Minister Hoveyda in July 1977 and Jamshid Amuzegar was installed. In November 1977 the shah visited Washington and was faced with hostile demonstrations which were relayed on Iranian television. Once the door was opened to protest, it was not to be shut.

In the 1970s over one hundred thousand Iranians were students abroad. Many of them opposed the Iranian government and formed oppositional groups including the Confederation of Iranian students which became increasingly radicalised over time. Militant students formed small secret groups, which were influenced by works on Mao, Guevara and Fanon. Some merged and formed the *Feda’iyan-e Kalq*. These looked forward to the day when they could shake the regime of the shah and oppose his dictatorial rule. Another guerilla group, as the *Mojahedin-e Kalq* came mostly from the Tudeh party and from the Marxists in the National Front led by Mehdi Bazargan and Ayatollah Muhamud Tuleqani. The movement was intended as a link between Shi’ism and modern ideas, claiming that true Shi’ism opposed not only despotism, but also capitalism, imperialism and conservative clericalism. As some Mojahedin began to study Marxism there emerged a split in the group, with the formation in late 1977 of two Mojahedin - Marxist and Muslim. When revolutionary activities began in 1977 all organizations had weapons, underground publications and revolutionary ideologies.

The various opposition groups – the predominately middle-class and remnants of the National Front, students inside and outside Iran, the workers and the guerrillas had ties to a growing number of religious opposition groups who voiced their opposition in Islamic terms. Keddie identifies within these two major groups firstly those with a traditional religious education and functions, notably Ayatollahs Khomaini, Shariatmadari and Taelqani, and secondly those with western or western-style educations who united modern and traditional ideas under an Islamic rubic, including among them Bazargan, Shariati and Bani Sadr.

Under the Pahlavi regime the trained ulama were aggrieved at the continued whittling away at their power and influence. Reza Shah instituted examinations to qualify who could be one of the ulama and wear a turban and he secularized the legal and educational systems depriving many ulama of their livelihood. Mohammad Reza Shah moved further in the same direction by establishing new controls in state education, pilgrimages and other religious activities. The shah tried to develop the area around the holy shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad, this inflamed the many bazzaris and the ulama who received income and support from this area. In 1971 Reza Shah set about a vastly wasteful celebration at Persepolis to give the world and Iranians the impression that Iran had an uninterrupted twenty-five-hundred-year monarchical tradition. This only inflamed the

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opposition and Khomaiini, who denounced the celebration from abroad. The imprisonment of religious leaders and their foreign or internal exile further aroused their colleagues and followers. Khomaiini was uncompromising in his criticism of the regime, Shariatmadari took a more moderate line but eventually called for the full restoration of the constitution, meaning free elections, a government responsible to the majlis, a weak shah and a committee of mujtahid to vet bills in accordance with Islamic law.

According to 'Ali Ansari the event that was to lead to the unwinding of the Pahlavi state machinery and the flight of the Shah into exile for the second time appears in retrospect to have been the most trivial of misjudgements. For Ansari this incident "reflected the heightened insularity of the court, the narrowness of political life and its conduct beyond the reach and comprehension of ordinary Iranians." In January 1978 at the instigation of the Shah, an article was published in the leading newspaper Ettela'at violently attacking and slandering Khomaiini. The article was entitled "Iran and Red and Black Colonization". The article, which ridiculed the black of the ulama, ended by saying Khomaiini was opposed to the reforms of the Shah, and suggested that he received large sums from the English to continue his fight against the Shah. The ulama and the bazaar leadership, sensing the grievance of their constituency, helped to organize massive memorial demonstrations. The bazaaris continued to remain an important focal point of all major political opposition movements through to 1979. Another group important in the victory of the revolution was the subproletariat. With the advent of urbanization, many poor people, particularly young males, were uprooted geographically and culturally. These took part in large commorative rallies which took place forty days after the killing of demonstrators and protested at the poor economic condition of the Iranian population. Women were another important group of participants in the Iranian revolution. Many women were opposed the regime tended to shun government officials and their organizations. The moves of the Shah's regime to modernize women's dress, education and work patterns were not felt by the majority of Iran's women. Chadored bazaari women came out in separate ranks to participate in mourning processions, where their presence took on a new and dynamic political meaning.

Faced with vast opposition and protest, the Shah tried to meet his problems with further concessions that still left power in his hands. He removed Amuzegar as premier and replaced him with Sharif-Emami but still maintained repression against demonstrations. A

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peaceful demonstration comprised of over a million people occurred on the fifth of September, five days later martial law was declared, but many did not hear of it, on “Black Friday”, September the eighth, over 600 were shot and killed in a massive but peaceful Tehran demonstration in Jaleh Square. According to Ansari\(^\text{17}\), this massacre epitomised the contradictions in the Shah’s approach. The monarchy was attempting unsuccessfully to impose two contradictory orders, one civilian and conciliatory, one military and confrontational. The final result succeeded in solidifying the opposition.

Throughout the period 1977-78 support for Khomaini grew from within many circles. In the fall there was the decisive entry of the industrial and salaried working class into the mass movement. Khomaini was forced to leave Iraq and having been refused entry to Kuwait, took refuge in Neuphle le Château near Paris in October 1978. Here he had easier access to communication through television and press coverage which vastly increased. The opposition became increasingly fearless and enthusiastic. In September there began strikes in the Tehran oil refinery and at a large petrochemical complex at Shapur. Strikes spread throughout the government sector and the oil industry. The military pledged to intervene but strikes continued nevertheless. Oppositionists returned from abroad and guerilla groups participated in oppositional demonstrations. The Feda’iyan and the Mojahedin were able to apply united front tactics effectively, attracting new members and growing in influence. Khomaini refused to compromise either with the Shah or with the liberal constitutional monarchists. This style maintained the unity and resolve within the revolutionary groups. During the celebrations to mark Ashura in December 1978 some two million (nearly half the population of Tehran) demonstrated their opposition to the Shah, depicted as the new Yazid the enemy of Islam, Imam Hussein, the people and democracy. Here a resolution was passed asking Khomaini to lead Iran and calling on Iranians to struggle until the Shah was overthrown.

Khomaini preaching from abroad inspired a charismatic potential. He was likened unto the Hidden Imam, out of sight and ruling from afar. He presented an image of unquestionable sincerity, integrity of purpose and uncompromising courage. In the words of Richard W. Cottam,\(^\text{18}\) Khomaini inspired a unique form of “authoritarian populism” that occurs when a radical elite with a charismatic figure is able to bypass the established political and social elite, gain access to a large mass public and overturn the established

\(^{17}\)Ali M. Ansari, Modern Iran Since 1921, The Pahlavis and After 2003, p.205.

structure. In the space of a few decades Iran had moved from a society where political participation was limited to the elite to the era of mass politics.

The Shah remained dilatory until the end. He tried to provide a moderate oppositional prime minister and got Shahpour Bakhtiar to form a new constitutional government, however such a compromise was not considered nearly sufficient or acceptable. By the end of December it was clear that the Shah would have to leave. Willingly or unwillingly therefore, the Shahihshah, Light of the Aryans, departed Iran for the last time on 16th January 1979, an era had ended.

### 3.3.3 Post Revolutionary Iran

The revolution of 1979 ended the monarchy and transformed the political landscape of Iran and Shi‘ism. Over the following years there ensued a unique period that brought about wide-scale political change that has been characterised as “state-shattering” rather than state building. Institutions that were associated with the old regime were weakened and destroyed as the revolution set in motion its own ideology. State actors, academics, senior statesmen, military and political forces, and the judiciary all faced the purging force of revolutionary committees that operated under Khomeini’s assumed power. This period from 1979-89 has been described as a period of “war fundamentalism.”\(^{19}\) This period was confrontational and militant, confident in its own moral superiority, disdainful of authority and intensely political. Prevailing institutions of authority were rejected, cultural norms and social values were expressed through the medium of a counter culture that was dynamic, new and forceful. The desire was to destroy the old order to consolidate political domination and create a new order. Islamic identity was as the centre of an emerging process of state building, which took precedence over economic and social interests.

The American hostage takeover on November 1979 was indicative of Iran’s confrontational and centralizing ideology, which perceived the event as a declaration of independence from western influence and was hailed as a second revolution.\(^{20}\) Khomeini had succeeded in his major objectives of overthrowing the Pahlavi state and curbing foreign influence in Iran.

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During the 1980s three main factions emerged within the Islamic Republic.\textsuperscript{21} The first favoured a relaxation of revolutionary vigilance and came to be known as the \textit{moderates} or the \textit{pragmatists}. The second came to be known as the \textit{conservatives}. They were interested in preserving the Islamic rather than the populist dimension of the revolution. The third group became known as the \textit{radical and hard-line} faction, supported strong anti-western policy and the export of the revolution.

Revolutionary fervour continued to unfold in the Iran-Iraq war. The war began in September 1980, when the Iraqi troops occupied Iran's oil province of Khouzestan and continued until 1988 when Iran’s siege of Basra collapsed and it became evident that the war was un-winnable. It was one of the most costly and devastating wars of the second half of the twentieth century, during which almost one million Iranians were maimed or were killed. The Iran-Iraq war shaped national politics and extended the lifespan of ideological politics by diverting attention away from socioeconomic concerns and interests.

One year following the end of the Iraq-Iran war, in June 1989, Khomeini died. These two elements marked the turning point of the revolution. War fundamentalism was now on the wane and attention turned to the pressing socioeconomic demands and state-building. According to Martin\textsuperscript{22}, Khomeini succeeded in creating a new Islamic order with a new value system, new identity, new social system and to some extent new institutional arrangement, all of which had the purpose of fortifying Islam. He had politicized the people and created the foundation for a new state.

During the period from 1980 until 1997 ‘Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was elected president for two terms. This was one of the most significant periods of state-building in postrevolutionary Iran. During this period there was continuity with and change from the revolutionary past. It was a time when new economic, social and political developments pushed the state and society in new directions. The pursuit of economic growth, stability and prosperity rivalled the preoccupation with ideology, revolution and the war against imperialism. Plans for development and economic reconstruction were put in place, creating an impetus for political change and a privatization and renewing interest in democracy. The Rafsanjani presidency tried to balance the demands of Islamic ideology and those of modern statecraft, bridging the differences between what conservative ulama and revolutionary institutions wanted with what civil society and democratic forces hoped for, in the end failing to meet the demands of either. By 1996, the Islamic Republic had


slid back into international isolation, repression continued, the economy languished and inflation soared.

The presidential election of 1997 took place among the power struggles that saw both Rafsanjani and the Supreme Leader Khamenei seeking to consolidate their respective positions among an electorate that was seeking greater democratic reform.

Khatami and his message of reform appealed to a broad cross-section of Iranians. His bid for the presidency enjoyed the support of Rafsanjani and the pragmatic reformers. His victory was seen as a decisive and blunt defeat of the conservative faction and was quickly dubbed a "second revolution." Khatami set about state-building and promoting democracy. His speeches made references to "democracy", "civil society", "women’s status", "rule of law", and the "dialogue among civilizations." Ansari identifies key themes in Khatami’s program, including social and economic justice for all, inclusivity, the fight against rampant commercialism and corruption, a better future for the country’s youth and the development of a transparent, accountable and legally based political system.

Khatami gave a new direction and new energy to reform. His election empowered the middle class, the private sector and civil society. These developments led to a short-lived thawing and renewal of international relations, particularly with the U.S. However, his strong mandate at the poll did not translate into strong executive powers and Khatami was restricted in his ability to effect economic reform or lasting political change.

The conservative leadership moved to protect its traditional powers through supporting the Revolutionary Guards and strengthening their hold on the press, the Guardian Council, Assembly of Experts and the judiciary. The second term of Khatami as president was marked by an unimpeded conservative consolidation of power. Student activism and lively political debate continued but in the shadow of an ever more dominant conservative control.

The Khatami presidency was a period of flux for reformists and conservatives. It brought to the fore the major divisions in Iranian society and politics. As the country prepared for presidential elections in 2005 central questions again emerged for debate:

the powers of the state, social forces and civil society institutions; the scope of social freedoms and individual rights; the role of religion in politics; the centrality of nationalism and discourse on culture to political change. The central axis of debate and the main historical concern remained the same as over a century ago. Today the main thread of Iranian politics is the struggle to build a representative democratic state committed to development and state-building.

In June 2005 Iranians elected Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the country’s sixth president and the first who wasn’t a cleric since 1981. The election brought to power a hard-line conservative populist and has confirmed the conservative consolidation of power in marked contrast to a pragmatic and reforming Khatami. According to Ansari, Ahmadinejad’s victory was both a confirmation of and a response to the profound social and intellectual changes in Iranian society. Being expressed by the population was the painful reality that twenty seven years following the Islamic Revolution, the Islamic Republic had not only failed to address the inequalities of the monarchical system but had in fact replicated them. As president, Ahmadinejad adopted a populist approach to the management of the economy and a militant foreign policy insisting on Iran’s right to continue its nuclear program in the face of widespread foreign opposition. While setting a collision course in foreign policy, populist politics and the high price of oil have maintained support at home although economic growth has been only incremental. Interest in competitive politics, public debates and elections has continued, and though many grieve the passing of the reformist agenda of the Khatami era and remain sceptical faced with the incumbency of a hard-line president.

The Christian community in Iran has an ancient lineage but has experienced diminishing numbers in the twentieth century. This critical presence in Iran has occupied a unique position, acting as a local interface between Shi’a Islam, the state and the Christian world.

There has been much volatility and instability in Iranian political life over the decades. A century after the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, the Islamic Republic of

Iran is still grappling with how to achieve a democratic state. In the words of Adholkarim Soroush,

We Iranian Muslims are the inheritors and the carriers of three cultures at once. As long as we ignore our links with the elements of our triple cultural heritage and our cultural geography, constructive social and cultural action will elude us...The three cultures that form our common heritage are of national, religious and Western origins. While steeped in an ancient national culture, we are also immersed in our religious culture, and we are at the same time awash in successive waves coming from western shores.\(^1\)

At various times in Iran’s recent history, each of these three cultures has expressed priority in forming a national identity. Undoubtedly each is essential and the future of Iran depends upon an integration of all three and not any hegemony of one of these cultures over the other two.

### 3.4 Shi‘i Islam in Lebanon, A Political Emergence

Lebanon has been important to the West from early antiquity. Since 1948 it has been important in providing the West with an entry into the Arab world, not only geographically but intellectually and in the words of Sandra Mackey “emotionally” and “symbolically.”\(^2\) In Lebanon more than any other Arab country the self-assured and technological life of the West was embraced by Arab life. Lebanon has had both an Arab identity and an identity open to the West. Consequently many Lebanese have found refuge in the West and have established thriving communities in Britain and in Ireland. This was particularly the case during the Lebanese Civil War. Since the Lebanese civil war, the door towards the West has been closing. During this time most of the causes in the Arab Middle East have assumed some form on Lebanese soil – the ever-enduring dispute between Israel and the Palestinians, the Palestinians’ blood feud with each other, the fading dream of Arab Socialism and Arab unity, the assurance of Islamic fundamentalism, Syrian hegemony, the antagonism of Iraq and Iran and the innate desire among Arabs to free themselves from western influence. Arabs coming to live in the West carry the burden of this history and are caught in a constant tension with regard to their personal loyalty to their adopted country and the painful legacy of division and crisis in their home.


Lebanon is a society resembling a "jumbled mosaic". It is a country of minorities: Christian, Maronite, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox; Muslim: Sunni, Shi‘i, Druze. Each group is fiercely protective of their individual identities despite sharing a common Arab heritage. To each minority Lebanon is something different. The Sunnis and the Greek Orthodox celebrate the Arab side of Lebanon and have pushed it toward some destiny with the Arab world. The Maronites grasped Lebanon as their refuge and homeland amid a hostile Muslim Middle East. The Druze have dug themselves into the Shuf mountains where they are prepared to defend Lebanon as the centre of their separated identity and their ancestral homeland. The Shi‘ites have emerged as a growing minority with an emerging political and social agenda over the past years. It is this group that I wish to attend to and their growing politicization over the past thirty years.

3.4.1 The Shi‘a of Lebanon

The Shi‘a of Lebanon are among the most significant Shi‘i community in the Arab world today. This is due in part to their particular political and ideological dynamism, for although they make up a modest 1.3 million they represent up to 40 percent of the population, the single largest sectarian group in the country. As throughout the Arab world the Shi‘a have suffered as an oppressed minority. “Rejected as heretics, downtrodden by economic and political polices imposed by the dominant Sunnis, the Shi‘a were relegated to the bottom of the social order”. Yet in a period of under thirty years they have become the most powerful political force in Lebanon today.

3.4.2 The Rise of the Lebanese Shi‘a

Prior to the politicisation of the Lebanese Shi‘a in the 1960s, the Shi‘a had been very much subordinated to the traditional power brokers in the Lebanese society – the powerful familial heads of zu‘ama. These small groups of families virtually monopolised formal political power, and within their own territory acted as a de facto government authority. The form of political organization amongst the Lebanese Shi‘a was rooted in the old and traditional leadership of the clan, a feature of the Arab world. The za‘im in simple terms is the leader. He leads a regional group of supporters, many of whom act as his client group. Through the ownership and leasing of lands, or by operating commercial ventures

in the cities the za'im established his influence and created a support base. There existed a tradition of cooperation between many of the zu'ama families of the southern Jabal 'Amil and the Bqi'a valley cemented through intermarriage. The families vied for positions of power and influence that would reflect their status in Lebanese society; in Lebanon this meant parliamentary representation. Being in parliament gave the deputy za'im access to government funds for the development of local projects, as well as the capacity to seek government jobs for his supporters. During the early period of the mandate, some of the zu'ama were members of so-called parliamentary blocks who strove to advance their own interests and those of their clients. It was not until the 1960s, when secular and Shi'i parties emerged to dominate the allegiance of the Shi'i masses, that the zu'ama felt their political influence threatened. Even though the zu'ama were able to retain their political positions until the beginning of the civil war, it is fair to say that by the time the first post-war election was held, the traditional Shi'i leadership no longer survived in any recognisable form. Society in the pre-civil war period had changed. Numerous economic émigrés from West Africa returned to their homes in South Lebanon changing social conditions, also the emergence of Shi'i candidates from the families of non-notable and other social realities contributed to the demise of the zu'ama's political dominance. Several of the zu'ama MP's died and were not succeeded by their family members. The presence of tens of thousands of Syrian troops meant that Syria increasingly played the role of kingmaker among local Shi'i communities. The unopposed confiscation of the al-Khalil family estate by the largely Shi'i Socialist Arab Action party in 1976 marked a defining moment in the terminal decline of the za'im's power.

Prior to the 1970s and the civil war competing political parties with different ideologies did not exist in Lebanon. Rather parliamentary groups consisted of "temporary alliances headed by traditional leaders". The political participation of the Shi'a prior to the civil war was best characterised in terms of alignment with establishment-dominated Christian parties or active participation in communist and other leftist groups. The National Liberal Party provided a good example of Shi'i support for a largely Maronite-dominated political organization. The attraction of leftist parties was twofold for the Shi'a who because of their poor socio-economic conditions were increasingly disillusioned with traditional forms of political representation. Firstly the leftist parties were an alternative to the Arab political parties that were dominated by the traditional notables. Secondly, the

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objectives of undermining the status quo and creating social equality proved very attractive to the poorer classes. Shi’a supported the Baath Party founded in 1942 as the Arab Revival Movement by Michel ‘Aflaq and Salah al-Bitar. The Lebanese Communist Party became the dominant party in many south Lebanese Shi’i villages to such an extent that during the 1960s and 70s the populist saying ‘Shi’i Shuyu’i (a Shi’a, a Communist) emerged.37

Sectarian parties allied to the Shi’a became established for all practical purposes following the civil war. In this case Shi’a dominated militias pre-dated the establishment of the sectarian parties Amal and Hizbullah. Amal (Afwaj al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniyya) emerged from Musa al-Sadr’s creation of the Movement of the Deprived (Harakat al-Mahrumin) in March 1974. It was in the main a mass protest movement aimed at forcing the government to address the lack of services for the Shi’a. It was the first attempt by the Shi’a to organize themselves politically along sectarian lines independently of the traditional zu’ama. Initially it was slow to capture mass support but events of the late 1970s increased its legitimacy and enabled it to become a significant force within the country. The first of these was the Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon in 1978. The second event was the disappearance of Musa al-Sadr in the same year and the final event was the Iranian revolution in 1979. Each of these events mobilised the Shi’a and gave Amal the opportunity it needed to establish itself as a viable political presence.

Shanahan identifies three features of the Movement’s Charter that identify it as a powerful opposition and sectarian movement.38 Amal is a Lebanese nationalist movement, supporting national sovereignty. Amal is situated on the left of the political spectrum and decidedly socialist, finally Amal advocates secularism.

Hizbullah is the second of the Shi’i political parties to start out as a militia. It has represented the more radical path of sectarian development among the Shi’a. It emerged more as an umbrella organization for other radical Shi’i Islamist groups including Islamic Amal which broke with Amal in 1982 and the Da’wa party. In contrast to the secular policy of Amal, Hizbullah advocated Ayatollah Khumaini’s concept of wilayat al-faqih and the movement’s leaders consisted of jurists. Hizbullah continued to emerge as a resistance movement against particularly the Israeli occupation which provided the trigger and focus for a more militant form of Shi’i expression.

During the civil war both Amal and Hizbullah fought each other, particularly to establish dominance in the suburbs of Beirut and in southern Lebanon. With the end of the

civil war and the establishment of the Ta‘if Accord in 1989 both Amal and Hizbullah were forced to recognize the Lebanese parliament as a viable institution and to change their focus from militia operations to constituent representation and the activities common to political parties in a parliamentary system. This period marked a turning point in the political fortunes of the Shi‘a. The number of Shi‘i parliamentary seats increased from 19 to 27 and the position of the speaker in the person of Nabih Berri was enhanced. Amal was in a position to dispense patronage particularly through the developmental Council for the South. Hizbullah has remained within parliament but outside government. It has relied on its own provision of social services including health and education and on its leadership of the anti-Israeli resistance movement, while maintaining strong links with Islamist Iran. Both parties have engaged in parliamentary elections establishing joint electoral tickets and both vie for support from the same constituency. Amal and Hizbullah now represent the two alternative and competing versions of Shi‘i political expression. Both are clear in establishing the basis of their existence in social justice and in the emancipation of the Shi‘a. Both are clear about demographic majority of the Shi‘a and are committed to changing the electoral law to reflect the country’s changing demographic realities.

3.4.3 Clerical Shi‘i Leadership in Lebanon.

There has been historically a significant tradition of religious scholarship amongst the Lebanese Shi‘a, centred for the most part on Jabal ‘Amil. In medieval times Jabal ‘Amil represented a pre-eminent centre of Shi‘i religious learning attracting students from throughout the Arabic and Farsi speaking world. In modern times scholarly discourse and political activity that has influenced the Lebanese has originated in or been influenced by Shi‘i centres particularly in Najaf and Karbala of Southern Iraq. The driving force behind the resurgence in Shi‘i intellectual activism has come from Najaf in the 1950s and 1960s. The decline in scholarly activities in the early 20th century was countered by a series of mujtahids who advocated a more political role for the ulama and thus made them more relevant to Shi‘i faithful. Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr (1936-80) was a highly regarded religious scholar who argued that Islam and not only capitalism or communism was an appropriate principle by which society could be organised. He influenced a great number of mujtahids in the Arab world, promoting greater political participation on the part of the ulama.

Prior to the 1950s most of the Lebanese ulama adopted a quietist stance with regard to political activity. This was largely in keeping with contemporary thinking by senior clerics outside Lebanon (Muhsin al-Hakim and Abu al-Qasim al-Koie of Najaf
promoted a quietist stance with regard to politics) and the desire to maintain links with the power-structure of the traditional zu’ama. There were however some scholars who railed against the political situation of oppression and neglect of the Shi’a. Muhammad Iwas Mughniyya promoted greater representation on behalf of Shi’a and criticised the docility of the Shi’i working class.

Shanahan groups leading politically active Lebanese Shi’i jurists of the twentieth century into three categories; these include: executive political leaders, ideologues and activist members of political organizations. All such ulama show evidence of strong connections with either a Najafi or Iranian hawza and the activist schools of the 1960s.

Musa as-Sadr occupied a unique role in the mobilization of Lebanese Shi’a in the 20th Century. This is due in part to his own natural ability as a leader and also due to the fact that he was politically active during a tumultuous period in Lebanese history. He promoted a thorough sea change in Shi’i community political expectations. His impact on Shi’i political consciousness was enormous. His success lay in an ability to reinterpret Shi’ism and in the “turning of old religious ritual into a radical politics of praxis”. He brought to the tale of Karbala a new reading which, stripped of lament made it a drama of political choice and resistance.

Musa as-Sadr displayed impressive scholarly pedigree. He taught Islamic jurisprudence at Qom and studied under the leading maraji at Najaf. Musa was cousin and brother-in-law to influential Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr. He demonstrated a family willingness to defy the status quo and oppose oppression and political hegemony at home and abroad.

Musa as-Sadr combined his political consciousness with an effectiveness in communicating to the masses and in the media. He also created an institutional framework that would give him, his successors and the Shi’i formal influence in the Lebanese political system. He was instrumental in establishing the Higher Islamic Shi’i Council and he was the founder of Amal. In 1974 he created Harakat al-Mahrumin (Movement of the Deprived). These political structures provided a foundation for future Shi’i advancement within Lebanese society. For the first time a representative body had been created exclusively for the Shi’a. As-Sadr was elected as Chairman to the Council on 1969, signalling his claim to the leadership of the Shi’a. The Council served as a political voice, an advocacy group and a spiritual home for Shi’i concerns.

Several years after his disappearance in 1978 his loss was greatly mourned, so great was his impact on Shi’i political consciousness.41

Muhammad Hussain Fadallah was one of the most politically active clerics and ideologues until his death in 2010. He was born in Najar in 1935 and studied under Abu al-Qasim al Koie and Sayyid Muhsim al-Hakim. He collaborated with Baqir as-Sadr in writing the Najar-based journal al-Adab from 1961. He moved to Beirut in 1966 where he involved himself in social justice issues and education. He was expelled from Nab’a in 1976 and wrote Islam and the Logic of Power (Al-Islam wa Mantiq al-Quwwa). In this piece he outlines one of his central beliefs: that the Shi’i heritage emerging from Karbala and the death of Hussain is one of resistance rather than submission.

Fadhallah has contributed to the Shi’i political development in providing juristic justification for the right to resist an unjust system. He also has provided guidance for what form this resistance should take. Islam should be given free reign in Lebanon but there must also be accommodation with other religious communities in order for Shi’i political advancement to succeed. Until his death Fadhallah continued to be a central figure in Lebanese Shi’i jurisprudence and political thought outside and independent of Iran.

Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah is the current Secretary-General of Hizbullah.42 He is an example of a contemporary pragmatic clerical leader. Although he did study at Najaf he can not be considered one of the Najafi activist clerics in the same manner as Fadhallah and Musa as-Sadr. He joined Amal at an early age and displayed leadership qualities even though he was later expelled for urging armed resistance. With Iranian backing he secured his position as Hizbullah’s Chief of Military Operations and was subsequently elected Secretary General in 1992. In this role he has proved to be an astute political leader engendering loyalty and support. He is well regarded for his role in resisting Israeli occupation of Lebanon but has been hampered because of his lack of scholarly credentials. Tantamount to his support for Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei has declared Nasrallah to be a hujjat al-Islam (an aspiring mujtahid). Nasrallah has worked to reassure other Lebanese communities that Hizbullah is not looking to make radical political changes in Lebanese society. Despite his loyalty to Iran and his adherence to Khomaini’s concept of wilayat al-faqih Nasrallah is keenly aware that realities in the Lebanese situation means that there must be room for compromise and accommodation.

Shi‘i ulama have enjoyed considerable political success since the achievements of Musa as-Sadr. They have been able to articulate the political demands of their communities and to provide practical assistance through charitable institutions, yet they remain limited. The higher the ulama’s profile in Shi‘i political circles the more apprehensive other communal groups are in ceding electoral power to the Shi‘a. As the political role of the ulama emerges into the future, the emphasis must continue to be on multilateralism and inclusion if the Shi‘a in Lebanon are to reach their desired political representation and capacity.

I have sought to examine the Shi‘i community in Lebanon’s political development attending to the main streams of political representation in recent times. The period since the end of Ottoman rule has been one of tremendous change affecting all Lebanese society. The creation of the state, the struggle for independence, the impact of Arab nationalism, the civil War, Israeli and Syrian intervention and the Ta‘if Accord have affected the whole of society. The previous 40 years have been momentous for the developments that have taken place among the political life of the Shi‘a. It is with the emergence of Shi‘i political parties Amal and Hizbullah that the community’s development is most clearly recognized. Yet it has been the role of clerics Musa as-Sadr and Muhammad Fadhallah that has engendered a transition from quietism and passivity to one of political conscientization and praxis within political Shi‘i Islam. Both these figures contributed intellectually and organizationally to the emancipation of their community; to that extent they were the harbingers of change. The Najafi activist model espoused by Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr found favour with Musa as-Sadr and with Muhammad Fadhallah. Yet these ulama have striven to promote a Lebanese specific model to advance their community’s interests. Hassan Nasrallah has adapted the expectations of Iranian wilayat al-faqih to the particular realities of Lebanese multi-religious society. In the major shifts that have taken place in Lebanese Shi‘i society, the ulama have recognized that Lebanese society demands the particular accommodation and integration of ideological models from Qom and Najaf.

**Conclusion**

In the past few decades there has been a surge of religious expression throughout the Middle East. Within Islam this revivalism of religion has taken peaceful as well as violent forms. The Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979 generated upheaval and emboldened Shi‘is throughout the Arab world. It has reinforced a trend towards greater activism within Shi‘ism that has its roots in Najaf during the 1960s and continues until today. The Shi‘a have often been associated with terrorism and Islamic radicalism, this particularly
following the Islamic Revolution in Iran and during the Civil War in Lebanon. Yet the period from 1991 and the First Gulf War has seen the Shi‘a moving away from forms of extremism and violence towards dialogue both with the West and with other members of their society. This movement towards accommodation reflects the desire among the Shi‘a for political empowerment.

Iran as the largest Shi‘i national state in the Middle East has an important role to play in the emerging geopolitical situation. The Islamic revolution while empowering a national transformation in the 1980s is now a passing reality. Many contradictions exist in a state in transition: a theocracy exists with limited democratic practices; a secularized middle-class shares the public sphere with a sizeable group that puts its trust in Khomeini and his legacy. There is the pull of modernity and reformism but tradition and conservatism is still strong.

The U.S. administration continues to maintain an unyielding position on Iran, focusing on its nuclear intentions, its aid to Shi‘i groups in Iraq and the election of Mahmud Ahmadinejad as Iran’s president. With the price of crude oil reaching $100 a barrel Iran is emboldened in its independence from the West and has developed close links with China and the developing world and it seems unlikely that reconciliation is forthcoming in the near future.

Within Lebanon the Shi‘is have emerged as a powerful political community that has been marginalised for decades. The Iranian Revolution assisted in radicalizing groups within the Shi‘a and led to the rise of Hizbullah, which has evolved from a revolutionary movement into a political party with a program for government.

I have charted the developments that have stood at the background of this Shi‘i narrative of emancipation. It has been a political emancipation but the role of religion, Shi‘i personalities and religious symbolism have been at the heart of these developments. The movement from quietism to activism among the uluama has had at its core a revival of the religious symbols of Ashura and Karbala, from symbols of submission to those of resistance and revolutions.

The narratives of emancipation introduced in this chapter identify that the political dimension in Shi‘i Islam is found at the heart of nationalist and state programs in the Middle East. This exposition identifies the regional religious and political context within which Iraqi Shi‘a are situated. The Iraqi Shi‘i narratives of emancipation have parallels with other countries in the Middle East but in Iraq the emancipation and empowerment of Shi‘a finds its clearest expression. It is to this national religious community that I wish to address my reflections in the coming in chapter.
CHAPTER IV NARRATIVES OF SHI‘I OPPOSITION AND EMANCIPATION IN IRAQ

Introduction

Iraqi Shi‘i exiles who have emigrated to the West recall a history of trauma and oppression from within their own country. Many have experienced the tyranny of dictatorship, war and terrorism. The reality of exile heightens the experience of isolation and dislocation. In mythical memory and in the narratives remembered in exile, Shi‘a have experienced violence and oppression in Iraq from the time of early Islamic history. Recalling Iraqi Shi‘i history is for many exiles to recall a history that goes back for centuries, leading back to the time immediately following the death of the Prophet Muhammad. In this history the Shi‘i minority experienced injustice at the hands of the Sunni majority.

Over many generations Shi‘i and Sunni lived in Iraq with a history of tolerance for each other, but the recent events under the Ba‘th regime, Saddam Hussein and American invasion have increased sectarian divisions to new levels of intolerance and violence. The previous history of Iraqi Shi‘is is viewed from this perspective of injustice and violence.

I wish to chart the history of Shi‘i experience and memory as it is presented by Shi‘i who have had to leave their home country and find asylum in the West. Having listened to countless sermons and interviews with Iraqis who were uprooted from their land and society because of violence and dictatorship, the overall impression is one of trauma and oppression. The present reality of exclusion is the perspective from which I view the history of state formation under the British, the rise of the Ba‘th and the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein.

Much has been written about Iraqi history in the twentieth century. The most well known examples are A History of Iraq, Charles Tripp, 2000; and The Modern History of Iraq by Phebe Marr, 2004. These are written from the perspective of political science, outlining the major trends and movements in society and politics. They do not present either a narrative of Shi‘i involvement in history, or a vision of society and history from this minority standpoint. Faleh A. Jabar in The Shi‘ite Movement in Iraq, presents the main actors and history of Shi‘i opposition and resistance in the twentieth century. This is a core
text I use in writing and reflection. These narratives are interpreted and verified in conversation with Iraqi Shi’a living in the west.

I believe there is a specific Shi‘i perspective that has been largely ignored in the popular history of Iraq. There is an overbearing dominant narrative of Muslim and Islamic unity that has been understood from the dominance of Sunni Islam. This seeks to minimize and criticize differences and diversity in Islam. Shi‘i faithful are regarded as unbelievers, unfaithful followers and disloyal citizens if they try to articulate their legitimate grievance and their religious difference. Shi‘a who are living the West are well equipped to articulate their own history and reality, in a context where difference is recognized and the reality of oppression and tyranny attended to. This has provided me with the context to compile a history of Iraq in the twentieth century. It also provides the context in which Iraqi Shi‘i were forced to leave their country and seek refuge in exile.

I am mindful that scholars and historians have tried in the past not to draw attention to Shi‘i particularity in case this led to further sectarian divisions and tensions. However, the history I present is one that has emerged from a wholly sectarian context. Although I have interviewed Sunni Arabs and Iraqi Sunni Muslims, the majority of my information has emerged from Shi‘i. It is my belief that they have a poignant narrative to tell and one that has been largely overlooked.

4.1 Early Iraqi History and Politics

Minorities within any system can expect to be marginalized and to find themselves removed from access to power and resources. The Shi‘a see in Islamic history a narrative of political exclusion and persecution that extends back to early Umayyad and ‘Abbasid times. The experience of Alid and Shi‘i Imams under Umayyad and ‘Abbasid tyranny is recorded and remembered today in sermons and ritual prayer. In popular memory, Iraqi Shi‘i society was formed a long time ago and has suffered continuous oppression and violence over centuries.

Iraqi Shi‘is are by and large recent converts to Shi‘ism. This is the result of a development which took place mainly during the nineteenth century as the bulk of Iraq’s Arab nomadic tribes settled down and took up agriculture.¹ This development began a process of Shi‘i state formation in southern Iraq. This process was aborted following the British occupation in 1917 and the subsequent formation of the Iraqi monarchy in 1921. Nakash outlines this continuum in the evolution of fragmented tribal confederations into a

state and the main stages and features in this process. The rise of Najaf and Karbala as two strongholds of Shi'ism in the mid-eighteenth century set the stage for the process of Shi'i state formation. The subsequent settlement and conversion of tribes to Shi'ism took place during the nineteenth century. According to Nakash, the defining feature of the Shi'i polity was the massive socioeconomic and religious interaction between the converted tribes and Najaf and Karbala, the nerve centres of the polity. This was a kind of political partnership between the tribal and urban components as well as between the ordinary people and the elite of the Shi'i society. The attempt of the mujtahid to establish an Islamic government in Iraq did not materialize, and the process of Shi'i state formation was aborted following the British occupation.

In 1918, the Society of Islamic Revival (Jam'iyya al-Nahda al-Islamiyya) was formed in Najaf. It brought together notables, clerics and tribal sheikhs with the purpose of defending Islam against the British. Opposition to the British culminated in the Iraqi Revolt of 1920. A secret society – the Independence Guard (Haral al-Istiqal) was formed, calling for the independence of Iraq. The majority of the Independence Guards were Shi'i. It was led by Muhammad al-Sadr, a son of one of the most eminent Shi'i mujtahid, Ayatollah Hasan al-Sadr of Kazimiyya. In Karbala, Ayatollah al-Shirazi issued a fatwa declaring that service in the British administration was unlawful. Meetings between Shi'i 'ulama and tribal sheikhs followed, producing a strategy for co-ordinated opposition and resistance. By the end of June 1920 armed revolt had broken out, triggered by a number of incidents and with the support of Ayatollah al-Shirazi, who issued a fatwa encouraging armed resistance. Kurdish, Sunni and Shi'i opposed British rule throughout Iraq but most strongly in the mid-Euphrates region. British forces faced as many as 131,000 men and took until February 1921 to regain full control of the country at a cost of £40 million and many British casualties. This revolt became part of the founding myth of Iraqi nationalism and is still recalled in contemporary discussion among Iraqis as a moment of unity, nation building and resistance to foreign occupation.

Throughout the Mandate Period, Shi'i participation in government polity was minimal. The government ministers, the senior state officials and the officer corps were drawn almost exclusively from the Sunni Arab population. The Sunni-dominated order of Ottoman times was re-established. The British were hesitant in promoting the Shi'a, who

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2 Ibid., Chapter One, pp.13-48.
had been largely excluded from Ottoman administration, and found among the ex-Ottoman officials Sunni Arabs who were eager to claim government as rightfully theirs.

The period of the Mandate had been a defining one in many ways. This period laid the demarcation of the territorial boundaries and laid the institutional foundations for the Iraqi state. The state was to continue to be the principal arena of the struggle for identity, privilege and power. Particular networks of privilege were set in place and those excluded from these circles could not easily alter the dominant polity.

4.2 THE HASHEMITE MONARCHY

In 1932, the British agreed to end their mandate and Iraq signified its new formal status by joining the League of Nations. British influence remained strong, not only in economic affairs, where British-owned companies were conspicuous, but most particularly in relation to the monarchy and its ministers. DeGaury relates the story of the Iraqi monarchy from 1932 until 1958\(^4\). As a British Orientalist and diplomat with close ties to the monarchy, he provides a narrative of unbridled nostalgia. He evokes the characters of the three Kings and of the Regent of Iraq and the "British Moment in the Middle East", casting a gentle and benign veil over imperialism and privilege.

The period from 1932 until 1958 coincides with a unique narrative in Iraqi history. This period was shaped largely by Great Britain, the Hashemite and the coterie of the former Ottoman officers and officials. Of those who sought mastery of the state polity, the most influential was Nuri al-Sa‘id. There were a number of Shi‘i notables who exercised state authority mainly through their association with Nuri. Salih Jabr became Iraq’s first Shi‘i prime minister in 1947. Salih Jabr later formed his own party, *Hizb al-Umma al-Ishtiraki* (the Socialist People’s Party), which sought to appeal to the younger intelligentsia and professional classes, especially among the Shi’a. In 1953, King Faisal II came of age and assumed his constitutional powers as head of state. Having consulted with the now crown prince ‘Abd al-Ilah and Nuri, the king asked Fadhil al-Jamali to form a government. Noticeably half of the cabinet, including the prime minister, were Shi‘i, representing the highest number and proportion of Shi’a included in an Iraqi government. This was an important symbolic advance and created a more hopeful atmosphere promising reform and with more equitable communal representation. Since the time of Salih Jabr there had been a rising awareness of the sectarian nature of government among the educated Shi’a, who were anxious to have this addressed, creating a viable opposition to Nuri and his coteries.

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Significantly, al-Jamali appointed a Kurd, Sa’id Qazzaz, to the sensitive post of minister of the interior, with control over public security.

With regard to foreign policy, there were significant features which contributed to a unique Iraqi polity. The British, when their interests were threatened by the activities of the Iraqi army officers and Rashid ‘Ali in 1941 had no difficulty in intervening militarily in Basra. During the period of the Second World War, the Axis powers, try as the may, could do little to tilt the balance of forces in Iraq against Great Britain. The escalating military conflict in Palestine, despite the fact that Iraq dispatched 15,000 troops in May 1948, contributed to Iraq’s already fraught pan-Arab relationships. These relationships were formed along historical lines with Iraq cementing rapport with Jordan and distancing itself from the pan-Arab nationalism of Egypt and Syria. With Iraq’s uniquely sectarian formation, the pursuit of pan-Arab goals was regarded as potentially divisive. Many Shi’a regarded Arab nationalism and Arab unity schemes as mere attempts by the dominant Arab Sunni minority to join itself to a greater Arab Sunni hinterland and reclaim the influence it had lost with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

The overthrow of the monarchy in the military coup d’état of July 1958 brought to an end a unique phase in the narrative of the Iraqi state. Those in power had relied on their economic influence, their networks of patronage and on the deference shown them to secure their privileges. The ruling class, landowners and status-conscious elites were not beyond using armed force and military intervention to overcome sectarian and provincial resistance. Over the period of the monarchy grievances grew and became structural, as those interested in promoting their advantage associated more freely. No longer could the loyalty nor the docility of the armed forces be assumed. Tripp says,

It was therefore appropriate and possibly inevitable that a regime created and sustained by authoritarian and conspiratorial ex-officers in their own image should have been overthrown by a new generation of military conspirators.\footnote{Charles Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq}, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p.147.}

\section{4.3 \textbf{The Republic}}

The governments of the mandate and the monarchy had been reluctant to interfere in the internal affairs of the Shi’i holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. This reluctance continued under the regimes of Qasim and the ‘Arifs. Despite the fact that Shi‘is began to make a proportionally greater contribution to the ranks of the civil service and the teaching profession, this representation was not replicated in Government. In the Revolutionary
Committee of 15 officers, only two were Shi‘is. During the period of the 1950s and 1960s important socio-economic developments began to affect the urban Shi‘i population as a whole. There was large-scale migration from rural areas to slum dwellings in the outskirts of Baghdad and other large cities. There was a notable separation between the new arrivals and the old-established urban Shi‘i communities and differences in orthodoxy and religious practices. Many of the new urban poor were attracted to the egalitarian values and principles of the Iraqi Communist Party, which had been at the forefront of the national struggle between 1945 and 1958, and many joined the ranks. The ICP also found strong support among important sections of the traditional urban Shi‘i population. The appeal of the ICP lay in its uncompromising call for the overthrow of the regime and for an end to exploitation and poverty.

Over this period there had been a decline taking place in the social status and the economic standing of all but the most prominent Shi‘i mujtahids. Secularism and the decline in family law accelerated in the Middle East. This made the religious profession less attractive and resulted in a drop in contributions of the faithful including zakat, khums, radd mazalim and sawm wa salat. The zakat was the tithe for the poor. The khums, or fifth part of the income formed, the prerogative of the claimants of descent from the Prophet. Radd mazalim was the special forgiveness purchased from the ‘ulama for earning state salaries. Sawm wa salat were fees for the observing of prayers and fasting on behalf of certain periods. Furthermore there was little formal religious activity outside the towns. The number of Mullahs (religious leaders) per head of population was significantly lower than that of Iran. With the spread of education and the emerging opportunities in government service there came about an inevitable reduction in the numbers recruited into the religious professions.

Shi‘a for the most part failed to be attracted by the political options of Arab Nationalism and Arab Unity. These were profoundly Sunni political currents. The only exception to this was the group around Fu‘ad al-Rikabi, the Shi‘i founder of the Ba‘ath Party in Iraq in 1952. However, when he left the party in 1959, almost all his supporters and family left also. Control of the Ba‘th Party passed into the hands of the Takritis after 1968 and at that time there were no Shi‘is in the higher echelons of the party. For the most part, the Shi‘i population remained indifferent to Ba‘thism.

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8 Ibid., p.589.
Towards the end of 1958 some the leading 'ulama of Najaf including Murtadha al-Yasin, took the step of founding a political organization *Jama'ata al-ulama fi'l-Najaff al-Ashraf* (the Association of Najaf 'ulama). The purpose of the body was to combat communism and reassert Shi'i values and Islamic tenets. On the 3rd April 1960 Murtadha al-Yasin issued a *fatwa*, published by the Hilla-based Fayha weekly, in which it was stated that "adherence to the Communist Party or lending it support is one of the greatest sins which religion denounces". Mahdi Shirazi ruled that prayers and fasting by Muslims who had embraced communism were "unacceptable". Such activity on behalf of the Association initiated the emergence of the Shi'i 'ulama into political activism, brought them into opposition with the Qasim regime and introduced new political parties into the changing polity. The tension between the Shi'i *mujtahids* and the government was further increased with the introduction of the Personal Status Law of December 1959. This law accorded women equal rights with men in matters of inheritance. The religious leaders regarded this law as an indication of the power of communism in Iraq and a government measure to curb their influence. The period leading to 1963, which marked the demise of the Qasim dynasty, began a critical period of Shi'i political activism. During this time the waning authority of the 'ulama was revived, there was an emerging renewal of Islamic thought, Najaf was re-established as the seat of grand marja'ism under Muhsin al-Hakim and emergence of the Da'wa Party began.

The *Jama'at al-'Ulama* was granted permission to publish a monthly journal *al-Adwa* (The Lights). Its objective was to counter the intense secular and antireligious propaganda that had followed the 1958 revolution. Muhammad al-Baqir Al-Sadr wrote its editorials, which he used to outline the basic political program for Islamic government. Through this process he emerged as a prominent political and intellectual leader.

### 4.4 THE DA’WA PARTY AND MUHAMMAD AL BAQIR AL-SADR

#### 4.4.1 Initial formation

At the time of the formation of the *Jama'at al 'Ulama* in Najaf, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr was a young scholar and was not considered an official member of the Association, which was made up mainly of elders and well-known *mujtahids*. Al-Sadr was descended

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from a very old, well-known noble clerical family originating from Jabal Amin in Lebanon. He was able to bring his influence to bear through his father-in-law Murtaza al-Yasin, President of the Jama'at, and through his older brother Isma'il al Sadr, who held a senior position in the Jama'at. His relationship with Grand Ayatollah Mushis al-Hiakim was a third source of his comparative strength. He had written a commentary on his patron's major work, _Riyadh al Salihin_ (The Garden of the Pious), and thus positioned himself to attain higher rank by commenting on the works of an already established authority.

Al-Sadr published his first philosophical study, _Falsafatuna_ (Our Philosophy), in 1959. It was a critique of communism, secularism and dialectic materialism. By Sadr's contention communism had too many flaws and shortcomings to be considered the final truth for humankind. His second work _Iqtisaduna_ (Our Economics), was published in 1961. Here he criticized the economic theories of communism and capitalism and introduced an Islamic theory of political economy in an effort to counter the arguments by secularists. He wished to show that Islam was concerned with humanity's economic welfare and to outline an Islamic economic doctrine based on Islamic law. He was the first to do so.

Al-Sadr and his colleagues sought to confront the secular forces through the formation of a political movement. This was the Da'wa (Call) Party. Such collaborators included a new generation of post-Burujerdi clerical class who were more inclined to an active political role in the world of political and intellectual action; modern-educated middle class professionals; the merchant class in the shrine cities who were dependent upon religion and lay organizers who witnessed the modern classes advancing their causes by means of mobilization and organization.

According to Jabar the party's original leadership consisted of Talib Kifa'I and Sahib al-Dakhil. Eventually Sadr was introduced to the leadership and became its head. He played an important role in settling party structure and doctrine and later became its supreme jurisconsult (_faqih al-hizb_). The aim of the Da'wa was to organize dedicated Muslims believers, with the goal of seizing power and establishing an Islamic state. According to Aziz, to achieve that goal it would indoctrinate revolutionaries, fight the corrupt regime and establish an Islamic state. This was to be achieved over a series of

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13 Ibid., p.100.
stages beginning with a clandestine stage. The party was organized in a hierarchical multi-branch cell structure. Its activities were not limited to Iraq alone but also other Gulf states and Lebanon.

Sadr was emerging as one of the leading mujtahids in the religious school of Najaf with a distinguished reputation in jurisprudence (fiqh and usul al-fiqh). He was being considered by his contemporaries for the position of grand marja. For this reason he was advised to give up his political role in the Da’wa and as editor of al-Adwa, for the hawaz was unwilling to accept a politically active mujtahid for the role of grand marja. Much of the pressure to leave politics came from the former marja Mushin al-Hakim. Reactions to Sadr’s editorials in al-Adwa, subtitled Risalatuna (Our Message), were also raising difficulties within the hawza. Finally, in 1961, Sadr relinquished his position as faqih of the party and editor of al-Adwa.

Following his resignation, Sadr confined himself to the traditional way of life of the hawza. He wished to avoid activities that would jeopardize his hope of achieving marja status, even delaying the publication of his book, Mijtama’una (Our Society). Sadr set about reforming the hawza itself. Previous teaching methods and resources were outdated and he wished to increase standards and learning. To do this, Sadr helped establish the Usul al-Din College in Baghdad in 1964. He wrote three textbooks on the Qur’an, the usul al-fiqh and Islamic economics. Despite his attempts to modernize the curriculum, his best efforts met with conservative resistance.

The years from 1964-68 were a “golden era” for modern Shi’i politics. The Ba’thist-Arif regime considered itself indebted to the Shi’i religious establishment for its help in ousting the Qasim regime and, secondly, the new leadership gained legitimacy from the Shi’i leaders who continued to support the government’s crackdown on communist forces in the country. Because of the internal struggles between nationalist and communist factions, those in the Shi’i religious and political authority were free to develop their interests with relative immunity. Because of this the Da’wa party increased its membership among the university and middle classes. There was a substantial increase in enrolment by students in Kufa and Najaf. In Baghdad and Kadhimiyya scholars organized themselves into another intellectual association known as the Hay’at Jama’at al-‘Ulama fi Baghdad wa al-Kadhimiyya.

The Da’wa thrived and expanded, with members and sympathizers increasing all the time. The military regime of the Arif brothers was alerted to the arrival of a newcomer

15 Ibid., p.211.
to the political stage and the General Directorate of Security was instructed to keep a vigilant eye on the emerging Shi‘i Islamists. However, the alternative political vision promoted by the Da‘wa overshadowed the Ba‘thist and communist underground movements that had attracted Shi‘i support in the past. The secular ideologies were less sensitive to the ethnic and communal needs of the Shi‘i disaffected and the Da‘wa grew to answer the more culturally specific and particularist needs of the Shi‘a. Jabar says of this rise in particularist and sectarian expression, “The more national integration is deformed the stronger religious lines becomes.”\textsuperscript{16} The Da‘wa was emerging as a viable Shi‘i political alternative and opposition with grass roots representation among many sectors of Shi‘i Iraqi society.

On the 17\textsuperscript{th} July 1968 three key officers and their Ba‘thist allies seized Broadcasting House, the Ministry of Defence and the headquarters of the Republican guard. A new regime was formed with Hasan al-Bakr as president and Nayif as prime minister. The previous decade in Iraqi history had seen the emergence of military in political power. On the whole the Iraqi people were denied representation or participation in government. Those in power became preoccupied with managing the resources that would serve their networks of patronage and privilege. Tripp describes this era thus:

\begin{quote}
The voiceless and the powerless were included in the rhetoric, but excluded from calculations of political advantage and thus from playing any significant role in a narrative dominated by those who enjoyed the privilege, often historically established, of close association with the centre of the administrative state.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

Despite the emergence of the Da‘wa party there was as of yet no viable opposition or unity among the diverse groups within Iraq who were seeking representation against a centralist and militant government that did not reflect the diversity of larger Iraqi society.

\section*{4.4.2 From Protest to Confrontation}

The rise of the Ba‘th party started a new phase in the confrontation between Shi‘i activism and central government. The tensions led to a series of clashes in which the three circles of Shi‘ism participated: the marja, the popular grassroots religious rituals or protest and the Da‘wa Party.

The Ba‘th political apparatus sought to undermine the religious credentials of the Shi‘i religious establishment by promoting secularization. It maintained the previous

imbalance and disequilibrium in terms of political representation, privilege and economic advantage and the Ba’th Party maintained its pan-Arab, social-nationalist ideology in contradiction to more particularist Islamic discourse developed by the Shi’i opposition. The Ba’th Party presented a formidable opponent, backed by extensive oil revenues, a strong security and military apparatus and mass party and popular welfare programmes; Shi’i sources faced a veritable Leviathan. Despite this, over the coming years Shi’i confrontation emerged in three distinct phases. These are identified by Jabar as: (i) the al-Hakim/Ba’ath tension and collision, 1968-70; (ii) the anti-Ba’th Da’wa agitation, 1974-75; (iii) the Marad al-Ras demonstrations of 1977.18

The Ba’th Party government sought to limit Shi’i power by curbing the religious activities of al-Haim and al-Sadr. This included closing the Jawadyn elementary and high schools and the Usul al Din-College in Baghdad, confiscating the land and the funds set aside for the building of Kufa University, shutting down the Risalat al-Islam journal, prohibiting the mawakib al-talaba in Karbala, expelling hundreds of non-Iraqi students from the hawza in Najaf and issuing a law requiring Iraqis attending the hawza to join the armed forces.

The Hay’at al-‘Ulama suggested that Mushin al-Hakim visit Baghdad to mobilize Shi’i support against the government. Al-Hakim took up residence in Kadhimiyya to receive supporters. Sadr went to Lebanon to organize protests from abroad and to campaign against the Iraqi government. The next step was to organize a mass demonstration in Baghdad in support of al-Hakim. Before the demonstration could be carried out the Ba’th government announced that Mahdi al-Hakim was plotting to overthrow the government in a military coup with the help of some generals and Shi’i businessmen who had links with Iran and the West. The Shi’i leaders became defensive and diluted their support. Mahdi al-Hakim was smuggled out of the country and Mushin al-Hakim retreated to Najaf, where he died a few months later. This was the height of the first almost open clash with the Ba’th. Huge masses of people attended his funeral, chanting anti-Ba’th verse.

With the death of al-Hakim the allegiance of the lay Shi’is shifted to the pacifist and apolitical Persian Grand Ayatollah Abu Qassim al Khoei and the younger, more vigorous and staunch Arab reformist Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr. The Ba’thist regime began to crack down on the Da’wa Party. Many suspected members of the party were rounded up in 1972 and sentenced to one to five years in prison. Sahib Dakhil died under torture in

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1973; he was head of the Da’wa Party’s Baghdad branch. In 1974-75 Da’wa Party members were detained by the security forces and five of those believed to be the leaders were sentenced to death by the revolutionary court. In Baghdad a crowd of some 200 friends and acquaintances of the executed gathered at the entrance to the morgue to mourn. Three of those sentenced were ‘ulama and their death prompted a public outcry and condemnation from Khomei, Khomeini and Sadr. Sadr was detained by the security forces and taken from Najaf to Baghdad for interrogation but was soon released.

Following the executions the bulk of the Da’wa leadership and many supporters fled the country to the Gulf, Lebanon, Iran, Jordan and Europe. The exodus weakened the Da’wa Party in organization and political terms. Where structures were beginning to strengthen they soon began to dissolve.

In 1977, the Ba’th regime banned the annual Ashura ceremonies commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn during the month of Muharram. In previous years the regime had tried to prohibit them, particularly in Najaf and Karbala. The traditional procession from Najaf to Karbala had always created considerable religious fervour and was used by the Shi’a to mobilize urban-based mass political demonstration against the government. Tens of thousands of Shi’i from all over Iraq participated in the pilgrimage. The march was perceived by the regime as providing the religious opposition with popular support and legitimacy. The episode is known in popular jargon as the Marad al-Ras or the Arba’in pilgrimage; in Da’wa jargon it is the Sufar Intifada. Local issues including drought contributed to the mood of defiance, particularly in Najaf, where the procession was banned. An estimated thirty thousand people began their procession, holding aloft banners printed with verses from the Quran and chanting verses of defiance.

Noble Najafis, Hoist aloft your banners.

Saddam take your hands off, neither our army nor our people want you.19

Anti Ba’thist sentiments were so high that even the intervention of Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim was unable to quell the atmosphere. The government mobilized a military brigade with tanks, helicopters and fighter-jets to block the entrance to the city of Karbala. 2,000 people were rounded up and transferred to the military prison in Baghdad. Karbala was placed under occupation and 16 demonstrators were killed while many were wounded in the violence that took place.

The government formed a special Revolutionary Court to try the defendants. Seven people were sentenced to death; 15, including Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim were sentenced

19 Ibid., p.212.
to life imprisonment. Many of the Shi‘i study circles in Najaf, Karbala and beyond were closed down; numerous religious scholars fled the country. This was a turning point in Shi‘i state relations. It shook the Ba‘th regime and created conflict and political difference within the Revolutionary Command Council of the newly established and autocratic leader Saddam Hussein. The impact of religion on public life, the power of the religious Shi‘i establishment in political and social life was brought home to a government struggling to find legitimacy, control and respect.

Saddam Hussein wanted there to be no doubt about his capacity to dominate the RCC and the government, and also to show that independent opposition such that shown in the Shi‘i cities would not be tolerated. Pragmatism prevailed and Saddam began to encourage official adoption of a more overtly Islamic narrative. He cultivated certain ‘ulama and drew others into his network of patronage. Employing a developing strategy of “carrot and stick”, he paid lip service to Islamic values as well as employing brutal intimidation where needed.

The Ba‘th leadership had thought that measures in 1977 against the Shi‘i would put to an end to all religious opposition for some years to come. However subsequent events were inspired by the Islamic revolution that would take place in neighbouring Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini had lived in Najaf for the fourteen years prior to his expulsion in 1978. He had witnessed the Ba‘th’s oppressive measures against the hawza and Shi‘i leaders. With the revolution in Iran, he was able to demonstrate that an oppressive regime, which had a well established security service and the support of the West, could be challenged and defeated. Muslim Shi‘i revolutionaries in Iraq were the first to follow the revolution that inspired the formation of an Islamic state and place religion at the centre of political life in the Middle East. Al-Sadr emerged as the leader of this Iraqi revolutionary-inspired movement. He declared his support for Khomeini and the revolutionary people of Iran; he encouraged the Arabs living within Iran to support the Islamic state and published six essays that were concerned with the foundation of the Islamic State, subsequently collected under the title al-Islam Yaqud al-Hayat (Islam Governs Life). Finally, al-Sadr issued a fatwa prohibiting Muslims from joining the Ba‘th party. Ayatollah Khomeini issued a message of support to Sadr in the context of militant repression by Iraqi security. This set off a wave of public demonstrations in several Iraqi cities, where inhabitants showed their support of Sadr and Khomeini.

The government began to crack down on dissidents. Sadr’s representatives and hundreds of Da‘wa supporters were rounded up and imprisoned or executed. Sadr was taken to Baghdad for interrogation. His sister, Amina al-Sadr (know as Bint al-Huda) gave
a fiery speech in his support at Najaf. This led to a series of demonstrations throughout the cities of central and southern Iraq. The spread of violence forced the regime to reevaluate the extent of the opposition and the leadership presented by al-Sadr, which had not previously posed a substantial threat to the regime. Islamic activists were arrested en masse, tortured and executed. Mosques were shut down and ulama were detained. Sadr was placed under house arrest. He was asked to withdraw support from Ayatollah Khomeini; support government policies; issue a fatwa forbidding association with the Da’wa party; revoke the fatwa prohibiting membership the Ba’th party and be interviewed by media affiliated with the regime. He responded unapologetically,

The only thing I have sought in my life is to make the establishment of an Islamic government on earth possible. Since it has been formed in Iran under the leadership of Imam Khomeini it makes no difference to me whether I am alive or dead because the dream I wanted to attain and the hope I wanted to achieve have come true, thanks to God.20

The final straw for the regime came with the attack on Tariq Aziz (Foreign Minister in the Ba’th party) by Islamic Action Organization activists. Newly installed President Saddam Hussein called for revenge against the perpetrators. The Revolutionary Command Council passed a law sentencing all past and present members of the Da’wa party to death and the fate of al-Sadr was sealed. On the 5th April 1980 al-Sadr was detained with his sister. Apparently after some hesitation, he and his sister Amina were executed on the 8th of April and buried discreetly in Najaf at dawn the following day.21 This was the first time that so senior a cleric had been killed. It was an ominous indicator of the determination of the regime to force the Shi’i leaders into a posture of obedience. The most senior mujtahid Ayatollah al-Khoei was placed under virtual house arrest in Najaf and the government stepped up its deportations of the so-called Iranian Shi’a, expelling an estimated 40,000 during 1980 alone.

With al-Sadr eliminated, the Iraqi Shi’i opposition and most particularly the Da’wa party lost a unifying symbol and centre of political gravity. He had been brought into public opposition to the regime by the leadership of the Islamic revolution in Iran even though he himself did not believe that that time was yet ripe or that the “objective conditions” to use his phrase were conducive. He was caught between the euphoria that the

revolution in Iran had engendered together with growing popular support for his leadership on the one hand and on the other a tyrannical regime that unlike that of Iran was prepared to use all violence and intimidation and had no will to step aside. The Islamic Shi'i militancy paid dearly for its euphoria at the success of the Iranian revolution. They were driven into exile under the protective umbrella of the Islamic state of Iran. They had miscalculated the brutality of the Ba'th state and overestimated the potency of their own opposition which failed to overcome its own particularist setting despite the efforts of al-Sadr to be universalist.\textsuperscript{22}

Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr continues to inspire Shi'a for his unflinching courage and keen intellect. In death he became a martyr to the Shi'i cause of opposition to tyranny and injustice. His face and that of his family relations continues to adorn the walls of Mosques and hussainias. In Ireland and the UK, conferences and sermons recall his struggle with a dominant Ba'th party and an emerging Saddam Hussein. The brutality of the regime is a continuing reminder of the trauma suffered by many Shi'a and most particularly by those who were forced to flee their county and live in exile. He is above all a symbol of the martyred one, Husain, fighting for the liberation of the Shi'i cause, hopeful but essentially tragic. The themes and narratives that formed the basis of Shi'i opposition in the past were as relevant and real in this time of Iraqi history as they were during the time of the Prophet and as they are today. This is a struggle that lies at the heart of the interpretation of Islamic history. Al-Sadr says of ‘Ali and his struggle with the Umayyad, “the community should realize that the battle between him (‘Ali) and his foes, between him and Muawiya was not a battle between two individuals, between two leaders but a battle between Islam and the Jahiliyya (pre Islamic era of ignorance)”.\textsuperscript{23}

The story of Ba'th brutality and Shi'i opposition was far from over but it had taken a decisive step. Opposition in Iraq was not to be tolerated in any form and the era of bloody political confrontation was well under way.

4.5 THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The years following 1980 in Iraq were dominated by the Presidency of Saddam Hussein. He sought to impose a political unity on Iraq that found its expression chiefly in his person. Distinct myths of Iraqi identity were promulgated.\textsuperscript{24} These not only stressed the usual qualities of martial prowess, spiritual fulfilment and historical rootedness, but also

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. pp.713-729.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p.718.
emphasized the succession of absolute rulers who presided over the mythical forging of the Iraqi nation. There was presented a continuous line of political succession between the rulers of the ancient kingdoms of Mesopotamia, the ‘Abbasid caliphs and Saddam Hussein himself. For the Shi’a, particularly those forced to live in exile, the dominant nationalist myth was one of oppression, tyranny and dictatorship. They saw in Saddam the culmination of rule that since the time of the ‘Abbasid caliphs was rooted in exclusion and privilege. The dominant motif is that of absolute tragedy; violence, terror and displacement. In the subsequent years, the Iraqi Shi’a were again placed in situations whereby their religious and nationalist identities were questioned, challenged and placed in opposition to one another. This was the case especially for the Iraqi army who were made up mainly of Shi’i conscripts as Saddam promoted a protracted war against their co-religionists in Iran.

Saddam miscalculated the degree to which the Iraqi Shi’i population as a whole was in sympathy with the Islamic state of Iran and was prepared to establish a similar theocratic regime in Iraq. He similarly underestimated the force of patriotic and Islamic fervour that the Iranian revolution had engendered in Iran itself. He assumed that the apparent disorganization and chaos of the Iranian army and political forces presented him with a unique opportunity to oust the highly inconvenient Khomeini regime. In September 1980 Saddam abrogated the 1975 treaty and asserted Iraqi sovereignty over the Shatt al-‘Arab waterway which separates southern Iraq from Iran. This he claimed was a matter of Iraqi honour and a sacred mission. Similarly he made claims on the province of Khuzestan and set in place a military invasion of Iran. In the beginning the was known as “Saddam’s Qadisiyya” after the legendary victory of the Muslim forces over the Persians in A.D. 636.

The Iraqi armed forces were fairly successful until the spring of 1982. The majority of the Shi’i population acquiesced and stood at the side of their country rather than side of their co-religionists in Iran. In March 1982, the Iranians launched a major offensive, which culminated in their regaining Khorramshahr. Khomeini had succeeded in mobilizing massive support across the nation for his crusade against Saddam cast as Satan. However, although casualties mounted on both sides, neither was able to achieve a decisive advantage and the war remained deadlocked until early 1986. In the following years the conflict became internationalized as the oil needs of the international community began to

be threatened by a series of attacks on oil tankers and oil installations by both countries. The United States aligned itself firmly on the Iraqi side and in 1987 both countries signed a five-year economic and technical agreement. This provided for the supply of sophisticated weapons including the means to manufacture chemical and biological weapons with the assistance of western powers. The appointment of ‘Ali Hasan al-Majid as commander in the North marked the beginning of a campaign of genocide against the Kurdish population. This culminated in the excesses of *al-Anfal* (Kurdish genocide) and the murderous chemical attack on al-Halabja in March 1988. It is estimated that between 150,000 and 200,000 Kurds were killed in these operations,\(^{26}\) some because of chemical attacks, others by execution.

In April 1988 the Iraqi forces recaptured the al-Faw peninsula. During the following months Iraqi forces went on the offensive, breaking the morale of the Iranian troops and demonstrating that Iran had little hope of achieving outright victory. The last straw came in June 1988, when an American warship shot down an Iran Air flight, claiming that it had mistaken the plane for an attacking jet fighter, killing 290 civilians. The only viable solution remaining was a diplomatic one.\(^{27}\) In July Iran announced that it would accept United Nations Security Council Resolution 598 and move for an end to hostilities. Since Iran faced the prospect of the failure of the revolutionary struggle against impossible international opposition, pragmatism prevailed and Khomeini reluctantly sued for peace declaring:

> Had it not been for the interest of Islam and Muslims, I would never have accepted this, and would have preferred death and martyrdom instead. But we have no choice and we should give in to what God wants us to do. I reiterate that the acceptance of this issue is more bitter than poison for me, but I drink this chalice of poison for the Almighty and for his satisfaction.\(^{28}\)

Saddam Hussein trumpeted the victory of Iraq. He had thwarted an attempt by Iran to overthrow his regime and maintained control over Iraq. Nevertheless, the Shatt al-‘Arab remained blocked and the war had cost Iraq an estimated quarter of a million dead. The country, which had once been with large foreign currency reserves had run up a debt of over $80 million. Iraq had paid heavily for the political ambitions of Saddam Hussein. However it was the internal opposition that endured the worse extent of the wrath of the regime, none more so than the Kurds. The PUK has a list of 3,839 villages that were


destroyed during the Anfal. An estimated 160,000 refugees to Turkey and Iran were displaced over two years. Although there was no united Shi‘i, Communist and Kurd opposition, the Shi‘i and particularly those exiled in Iran established an opposition under Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim.

4.6 THE FORMATION OF SAIRI

Following the execution of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr in 1980, there was a series of attempts on behalf of Iranian sponsored groups to organize the Iraqi ‘ulama into a viable opposition that had the support of the Islamic state and shared common ideals, particularly the goal of Islamic government. There was the Assembly of the ‘Ulama for the Islamic Revolution, the Revolutionary Army for the Liberation of Iraq and the Society of the Militant ‘Ulama in Iraq. In Tehran, Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim announced the establishment of the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI, al-Majlis-A‘la lil Thawra al-Islamiya fil Iraq), a scheme to provide an all-encompassing structure for Islamic activism in Iraq. In Tehran, where the Iraqi Shi‘i groups had transferred their headquarters and the bulk of their resources, Shi‘i Iraqi opposition underwent a radical change in organization and development. Jabar refers to this as period as the ideological-Islamist model.29 Shi‘i militant Islam was represented by the Da‘wa, the Islamic Action Organization (Munazamat al-Amal al-Islami, MAI), the Mujahidin and the independent Shi‘i ‘ulama. There was much disunity between the groups as each group associated with its own sphere of reference or family of origin, in Najaf, Karbala or Baghdad. The model of government proposed by Iran in wilayat al-faqih presented problems to the Iraqi groups, who would assume leadership; what forms of cooperation and struggle, political, social and religious were to be supported and implemented. In reality there was a crisis between the ‘ulama and the secular political organizations.

Khamene‘i, who was in charge of liaison with Iraqi groups appointed Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim as speaker of SAIRI and Muhmud al-Hashime as president. Al-Hakim had headed the Bureau of Islamic Revolution in Iraq and both he and al-Hashime were disciples of al-Sadr, named by him to form the leadership. Al-Hashime was a Najafi of Iranian origin and Al-Hakim was an Arab with a long Shi‘i heritage.

SAIRI functioned as an Islamic front for Shi‘i militants, operating in its capacity as a pan-Iraqi Islamist forum. There was a Council, Majlis Shura, that ran the administrative section much like a political party, and a Regional Assembly with elected members. In

reality, SAIRI functioned as an Iranian apparatus with the ideology of the Islamic state and the leadership of al-Hakim. SAIRI also had a military arm, the Badr Army. This was comprised of the constituency of Iraqi deportees and Prisoners of War. Despite its Iraqi composition, the force was essentially under Iranian command.

The vast majority of Iraq’s Shi‘i population was unconnected to the political organizations of opposition and endured the hardships of the war in line with other Iraqi Kurds and Sunnis. Powerful narratives of identity were propagated throughout the campaign which stressed the unity of all Iraqis, the Arab identity of the Iraqi Shi‘a and the Islamic credentials of the regime. The nationalist and Arabist myths prevailed over narratives that would have led more support by the Shi‘i majority to the Islamic state of Iran. These developments in *etatist* nationalism hindered the impact of SAIRI and its allies in their ability to reach effectively their co-religionists in Iraq and provided the Ba‘thist regime with a level of protection in popular sentiment. Iraqi Islamist groups were cut off from their national habitat and locked in exile within Iran and Syria. This limited their effectiveness and their connectedness to on-the-ground Iraqi issues. There was also a religious alienation that failed to recognize the powerful nationalist and secular grip on society held by the Ba‘th party. Essentially and pragmatically, Iraqi Shi‘is had to defend themselves or face dire consequences for themselves or their families. The brutality of the regime was evident in its treatment of the Kurds. Shi‘is were equally aware of the tyranny they faced should they refuse to fight or attempt to subvert the regime.

Following the end of the war in 1988, the Iraqi Islamic movement lost direction and confidence. A new phase of rethinking and re-evaluation emerged which led to many internal divisions and splits. There were splits in the traditional or clerical class. Clerical families which formed the traditional power blocks, including the al-Sadr, al-Hakim, Shirazi, Bahr al-‘Ulum and Khoei, began to move in independent directions and to establish multiple political centres. Many travelled to Europe and began centres of influence for example in the United Kingdom and Ireland, including the London based al-Harakta and the al-Khoei Foundation. The regime retained its brutal opposition, in 1988 Sayyid Mahdi al Hakim, who had based himself in London, was assassinated in a hotel lobby by Iraqi intelligence operatives, while attending an international Islamist conference in Khartoum.

The Da‘wa party gave birth to four splinter groups; the Jund Imam in 1977; the Da‘wa Islamiya in 1982; the Da‘wa Party-Majlis Fiqhi in 1988 and the Kawadir of Da‘wa Party in 1990. There was always tension among the ranks in regard to the authority and leadership of the clerics. This emerged in different stages and contexts. Splits emerged in
response to local and international factors. Some intellectuals resented the merger with Iran; others were sceptical of Islamic government under the form of *wilayat al-faqih* and professed more modern and secular influences. The new offshoots stressed Iraqi nationalism, the renewal and modernization of Islamic thought, and the adoption of democratic and party political ideals. It is these individuals and groups who presented themselves as dialogue partners in the West. Educated, articulate and modern, they embraced life in London and in the West. They were not the first Iraqi exiles but they were Iraqi Islamic exiles seeking to chart a future for their country and arrive at narratives that fit with their experience and desire for freedom from tyranny, transparency in government and democratic representation.

### 4.6 War against Kuwait and Subsequent Uprisings

Saddam Hussein made it clear, that following the war with Iran, the reconstruction of the country should be seen as a patriotic challenge requiring the cooperation of the whole Iraqi people. Falling oil prices and the maintenance of a large army drained the purse of the Iraqi economy which was already mismanaged and corrupt. Saddam saw in the annexation of Kuwait an answer to his economic problems, access to deep water harbours in the Gulf and the possibility of claiming his place as the head of the Arab nation.

The place of Saddam in the minds and hearts of Arabs is a constant narrative that emerged in Iraqi circles, particularly those Shi‘i in exile whom I encountered. This is a topic that I will return to later. It is sufficient to say at this stage that Saddam presented himself as the “strong man” of the Arab nation. Within the context of a disintegrating Soviet superpower and Eastern European fragmentation, the United States was emerging as the only viable superpower capable of exerting influence in the region of the Middle East. Saddam, despite leading a brutal and tyrannical regime, was able to attract a following both within Iraq and in the rest of the Arab world. His anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist rhetoric found an echo in the Arab street and among the refugee camps of Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza. There is a profound contradiction in this, as vulnerable people associate psychologically and emotionally with a brutal tyrant. Whether there are differences in attitudes between the Shi‘i and the Sunni of Iraq is for later discussion. At this stage it is sufficient to outline the narrative of aggression inflicted by Saddam upon his neighbours and his own people.

Saddam Husain ordered his forces to invade Kuwait on the 2nd of August 1990. The occupation was complete in 24 hours. There was widespread killing and looting. However,
the ruling family and leader Shaikh Jabir al-Sabah escaped to Saudi Arabia. Iraq established a provisional government and in essence Kuwait became the nineteenth province of Iraq, rectifying the injustice of British imperialism in Iraqi state formation seventy years previously.

Saddam had made a spectacular miscalculation in invading Kuwait. He was condemned by the Arab League and the United Nations. Iraqi and Kuwaiti assets were frozen and the UN Security Council imposed a total economic and trade embargo on Iraq. In November the United Nations issued Resolution 678, which authorized member states to use “all necessary means” to force Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. The United States mustered together an anti-Iraq coalition of some 30 states including Egypt and Syria. On the 17th January 1991, the coalition force began to bomb strategic targets within Iraq, causing a large number of civilian deaths and considerable infrastructural damage. Following four weeks of bombing, a ground offensive was launched which ended in a rout and destruction of much of the regular Iraqi army and troops which were driven from Kuwait.

The invasion and war resulted in 100,000 deaths among the military and the civilian population, with some 300,000 wounded. There were as many as 2.5 million people displaced, and over $170 billion property and infrastructural damage was caused in Iraq.30 There was an almost catastrophic effect upon the poorer countries of the Middle East and South Asia. Thousands of expatriates from Egypt, Palestine and South Asia were forced to leave Kuwait. This resulted in the loss of huge remittances, savings and investments.

The speed and scale of the Iraqi defeat temporarily alleviated the internal networks of security, repression and surveillance. These throughout the war had held together a political order of terror and tyranny. In March 1991, an uprising broke out across southern Iraq, centred principally in the Shi‘i cities of Basra, ‘Amara, Nasiriyya, Najar and Karbala. The revolts were largely spontaneous and lacked coordination and leadership. There was support from the Badr Brigade in Iran and army deserters fleeing Kuwait swelled the ranks of dissenters. Tribal groups such as the Marsh tribes of Albu Hicham and Albu Gasses joined with grassroots Ba‘th Party members and angry civilians. There was a violent and bloody backlash against Ba‘th and government officials. In the North, the rebellion was initiated by the Mezouri-Doski tribal chieftains, who had served as pro-government

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mercenaries. Following the desertion of many soldiers, urban masses took to the streets. These were followed by the parties of the Kurdistan Front.

Despite the fact that rebels persuaded Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei to give his approval to the formation of a committee to preserve order and security, no clear leadership or command emerged. The rebels were confined to the cities. Baghdad remained passive and security services were able to extend their control over the city. For two brief weeks the uprisings were successful, but the rebel forces proved to be no match for the Republican Guard who were held in reserve. The Guards, loyal units of the Ba'ath regime exacted a bloody toll upon the rebels. Government forces were allowed by the Americans to use helicopter gunships against the rebels. American forces allowed attacking Iraqi army units to pass unopposed through their positions and obstructed Shi'i forces from accessing arsenals and armaments. Slogans such as “No Shi'is beyond today” and “No Shi'is anymore” identified the execution and the slaughter perpetrated against the rebels. On March the 21st Ayatollah Sayyid Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei was summoned to appear on Iraqi media with Saddam and condemn the rebels. The Ba'ath party mouthpiece, the daily al-Thawra, ran a series of editorials degrading the Shi'is and calling the rebels “mob demagogues”. Over 50,000 refugees poured over the border into Saudi Arabia while many more sought sanctuary in Iran. Many fled to the marshes of the south in order to escape the violent pursuit of the Iraqi forces. Thousands were killed, thousands more were seized and left to perish in Iraqi prisons. In the north Republican Guards began their offensive using ground troops and helicopter gunships. Following intense bombing, Kirkurk was recaptured on the 28th March followed later by Sulaimaniya, Dohuk, Zakho and Erbil. Mindful of previous chemical attacks, there was a mass exodus of over two million people into the borders of Turkey and Iran. The United Nations passes Security Council Resolution 688, which called on Iraq to end its repression of its own people and paved the way for the creation of a “safe haven” north of the 36th parallel. Iraqi forces were forbidden to fly in this zone amid fears of further action by the coalition powers. President Bush had announced before the ground war that “there’s another way for the bloodshed to stop, and that is for the Iraqi military and the Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands to force Saddam Husain, the dictator to step aside”. However there was no support or interference from the coalition forces in the rebellion.

The rebellions signalled a new turn in Iraq’s history. There was now a clear divorce between the narratives of Iraqi patriotism and that of official Arab nationalism. The ill-fated war against Kuwait and the eventual defeat of the Iraqi army led to the disillusionment of the Shi’i and the Kurds in any narrative of Arab or Iraqi unity. The rebellion was against the regime which had failed to take account of its citizens over a period of external war mongering and internal repression. An urban phenomenon, spearheaded by a young war generation, had succeeded in turning party members and army units against their own government. However, the lack of real international support and the deadly efficiency of the Republican Guards meant that no victory could achieved.

Saddam Hussein remained in control. The United States and others in the region were fearful about the possible fragmentation of Iraq. They viewed Saddam with distaste but still favoured a strong leader in a united Iraq. Saddam was quick to make gestures of reconciliation. He appointed Sadum Hammadi, a Shi’i member of the RCC, as prime minister and embraced Kurdish leader Talabani in Baghdad. These were effectively cosmetic manoeuvres that bought time to consolidate his control and diminish the involvement of the international community.

For Iraqi’s Shi’is recalling these episodes in history and forming a memory and a narrative of these events that fits with their experience, these were painful and difficult times. Again they experienced the brutality of the regime and the fickleness of the international community in failing to come to their assistance or their support. There was a rupture in the narrative of Iraqi unity and Arab brotherhood. Iraqis Shi’i, Sunni and Kurd were isolated to suffer a familiar repressive reality at the hands of an even more entrenched and autocratic militarized regime whose only goal was survival.

**4.7 UNDER SANCTIONS**

In the aftermath of Iraq’s defeat, there was a consensus in the United Nations Security Council that Iraq should be prevented from launching similar aggression in the future under the pain of sanctions. United Nations Resolution 661, passed in 1990, “froze Iraqi financial assets abroad and banned imports and exports allowing only medical supplies to be imported without restrictions”. Resolution 687 was passed in April 1991. Under this resolution Iraq was permitted to import foodstuffs and only “materials and supplies for essential civilian needs”. Restrictions were to be lifted: when Iraq identified and eliminated its weapons of mass destruction; accepted the sovereignty and independence of Kuwait; and made reparation for damages incurred during the war.
The sanctions lasted for thirteen years, during which period the state as a system of government was weakened and the economy was devastated. The majority of middle class earners were reduced to paupers, while more than 60 percent of the population sank below the poverty line. Per capita income went down from $4,083 in 1980 to $485 in 1990. The sanctions crippled civil society, family life, the social networks of support and the most vulnerable in Iraqi society, especially women and children. The politics of impoverishment turned out to be the best weapon on control and brutality that the government could have wished for. There was large scale unemployment, which resulted in greater dependency upon the state and disempowerment. Families were forced to sell off their valuables and use their savings in order just to survive. There was increased pressure placed upon gender roles in society and on family networks, marital and relational problems as social and psychological problems abounded. Social life disappeared, children’s health deteriorated and life expectancy decreased.

Attempts to provide Iraq with humanitarian aid were indorsed with the passing of Resolutions 706 and 712. In 1996, Resolution 986 established an oil-for-food programme. Denis Halliday was made coordinator of the UN effort in 1997 only to resign in frustration to criticize the sanctions regime, saying that he did not want “to be part of a programme that was fostering genocide”. The oil for food deals were intended by the dominant powers to keep sanctions in place while alleviating the living conditions and health problems inside Iraq that were causing real concern. There were several studies that attempted to determine the effects of sanctions on Iraqi civilians. Many of those affected were children. A study funded under the auspices of the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) claimed that sanctions were responsible for the deaths of 567,000 Iraqi children aged five and under. The Iraqi people as a whole were the victim as the regime remained intact and cemented its control over the population.

The United Nations Special Commission on Disarmament UNSCOM, continued its work of identifying and searching for Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and missile capacity, which were deemed a potential threat to the region. A picture of Iraq’s nuclear,

36 Ibid., p.191.
chemical and biological programmes emerged, despite the denial, deception and obstruction of the Iraqi authorities. The United States, assisted by British forces, launched a four-day aerial bombardment of Iraq, codenamed Desert Fox, in December 1998. The targets were military and suspected weapons programmes. However, the future of UNSCOM was placed in jeopardy as Iraq exploited the disarray at the UN over the overwhelming use of force. The regime of Saddam Hussein was not much affected or intimidated by either the military action or the weapons inspection. He maintained a regional dominance through the illegal and legal export of oil. There was still fear concerning the strength of his army and the possibility of using weapons of mass destruction; these, combined with the ruthlessness of the leader, left no doubt that he intended to survive despite international opposition. Saddam was skilful at manipulating the rivalries and ambitions of those closest to him and those in positions of influence. Systems of favouritism, of inclusion and exclusion, reproduced among tribal chiefs, religious authorities, army officers and family members, served Saddam well. The flight to Jordan of Husain Kamil and his brother Saddam Kamil with their wives, two of Saddam’s daughters, witnessed the vulnerability of this particular logic of control. The brothers were erased from the family tree on their return.

The once secular Ba’th party began to deploy religious symbols and themes to fit the rising popular religiosity of the masses within Iraq and to gain a certain legitimacy in the eyes of the faithful. Saddam contrived a sacred family tree, linking himself to the Prophet in an effort to match Khomeini’s noble descent. Allahu Akbar (God is Great) was inscribed on the Iraqi flag and the motto “the Believer strides forward” replaced the old party slogan “the Ba’th strides forward”. The government launched faith campaigns to harness the rising religious sentiments. In Baghdad alone more than one hundred grand Mosques were build in a capital starving under sanctions. Women were encouraged and pressured back under the veil, and traditional and repressive gender roles were promoted as a growing patriarchy was re-established.37

Shi’i opposition to the regime continued during the period of sanctions. The main area of activity was in the marsh region in the south, which offered a refuge for dissidents and access to freedom across the border in Iran. Ground action against the Shi’a continued despite a no-fly-zone having been instituted by the United Nations. By September 1995, the UN estimated that 200,000 to 250,000 former inhabitants of the marshes had been

driven from the area. Large drainage schemes were put in place that destroyed the environmental stability of the region and virtually eliminated the way of life of the Marsh Arabs.

There was also an expansion in popular religious ritual and practise among the Shi‘i. The growth of insecurity, fear, dislocation drove many to the embrace of religious activity and religious charity. In 2001 over 2.4 million Shi‘a flocked to Karbala to celebrate the Ashura rituals commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. This rise in popular religiosity must be read against the activist background of Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, called Sadr II.

Al-Sadr seemed apolitical in line with the government’s pious activity. Rising to prominence following the death of Grand Ayatollah al-Khoei, Sadr II succeeded in building vast networks of followers among the urban lower classes in Baghdad, Najaf, Basra and Nasirya. He was able to gather large numbers to worship at Friday prayers, which was not always a very popular a Shi‘i tradition. Crowds gathered to listen to his sermons, which gradually grew more critical of the government. Feelings of pride grew as Shi‘i revelled to have a home-grown Iraqi Arab leading authority who vocalized their suffering and their powerlessness. The authoritarian Ba‘th rule could not tolerate a rival centre of power and popular dissent and in February 1999 Sadr II was assassinated together with two of his sons. This was a tragic event on a par with the assassination of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr years previously. Sadr II was dubbed by his followers as the “White Lion”, *al-layth al-abyadh*; his potency and symbolic influence mobilizing and motivating many, beyond the grave. By blending religion, charity and dissent during a period of brutal terror, Sadr II surpassed the influence of all Shi‘i groups working against the regime in exile.

**Conclusion**

In 1998, US Congress passed the Iraq Liberation Act, committing around $100 million to the assistance of a number of approved Iraqi opposition groups. This was effectively a symbolic gesture, but offered an insight into future American interventionist policy.

The dramatic attacks on New York and Washington by members of al-Qa‘ida on the 11th September 2001 changed American attitudes towards Islam and the Middle East profoundly. The Bush administration declared its “war on terrorism”, with the memory of the Gulf war and the decaying sanctions on Iraq in mind. There were immediate moves to

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revive a UN-based process of weapons inspection and disarmament, accompanied by direct military threats. The US military-led campaign had succeeded in overthrowing the Taliban in Afghanistan and establishing a more amenable regime in Kabul. This fact hinted at the possibility of greater interventionism in Iraq. President Bush’s reference to the “axis of evil” consisting of Iran, Iraq and North Korea appeared to outline a new strategy of containment in the Middle East and direct intervention in the case of Iraq. Consultations continued between the State Department and the informal network of Iraqi opposition. These consisted of the “group of four”; the Iraqi National Accord, the SCIRI, the KDP and the PUK. Enmity in Kurdish politics abated as Masoud Barzan and Jalal Talabani met face to face in January 2002, establishing a new era of co-operation between the KDP, which continued to rule in northern Kurdish region, and the PUK, with its traditional sphere in the south-eastern region.

Despite the posturing of the regime and attempts to curry support among regional allies, Saddam was forced to readmit UN weapons inspectors in the spring of 2002. There was the recognition that opposition was critical and military intervention inevitable.

This provides the context for the subsequent years of turmoil in Iraqi society. We see that there existed a sizeable opposition to Saddam. This was led for the most part by the Shi‘i community and the Kurds. The Shi‘a through their religious and social network had established a foundation from which to face the subsequent turmoil of war and occupation. The Shi‘i leadership played a significant role in mobilizing opposition to coalition troops and the imposed government of 2003. The previous years of war and sanctions had significantly weakened the state and the population. Many fled to the West as refugees as others had fled Saddam. Their legacy has been one of survival, empowerment and emancipation despite formidable resistance. Many would say it was their faith that supported them and the hope of a better tomorrow for the country of their birth.

The narrative of emancipation that is evident in Iraqi Shi‘i opposition to dictatorship and oppression drew strength and support from religious leadership and religious symbols within Shi‘i Islam. I present a narrative that consistently seeks political freedom, liberation and empowerment among Iraqi Shi‘a. This is an interpreted narrative expressed by Iraqi Shi‘i communities who now live in exile. In this narrative the theme of Shi‘i unity emerges clearly, the divisions and enmity within Iraqi Shi‘a pales into insignificance compared to the opposition presented to dictatorship and oppression.

With the American War and Occupation in Iraq, Iraqi Shi‘a entered a new phase in their history. The reality of war, violence intervention, armed conflict and military action coloured events from the period 2004 until 2010. It is to the Iraq under occupation and the
Shi‘i response to this attack that I now turn. While what has been written in this chapter is but recent past history, what emerges in the discussion, conversations and dialogue of the next chapter is immediate history.
CHAPTER V  THE NARRATIVE OF SHI‘I POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF WAR, OCCUPATION AND TRANSITION IN IRAQ

Introduction

The period following the First Gulf War, from 1991 onwards was an extremely important era for Iraqi Shi’a living outside Iraq. It was during this period that many Iraqi Shi’a left Iran and sought refuge in Europe and the West. During this period Iraqi communities began the process of consolidation and integration into western society through finding appropriate institutions and the process of establishing themselves as viable and sustainable entities. It was during this period that Dar al Islam in Wilsden Green, Abrar House in Edgeware Road and Ahul Bayt Centre, Dublin developed their properties, their communities and their institutions.

Many Shi’a moved abroad due to the pressure of sanctions and the difficulty in living in a police state. It was not only in the formation of institutions that these communities began to be more organized but also in terms of their own internal structures, their association with other political and social groups in the West and with groups within Iraq. There was a concrete desire for change and the desire to form a viable opposition to the dictatorship of the Ba’ath Party under Saddam Hussein.

American policy from the time of the first Gulf War remained hostile to Iraq. The place of sanctions and no-fly zones by the UN was an effort to contain Iraq and its ability to wage war on its neighbours or on allies of the West. With the arrival of the Bush administration and the beginning of the War on Terror, new directions and new foreign policy towards the Muslim world began to be articulated. The possibility of regime change in Baghdad was always on the cards, by 2003 this had become the centre strategy in the War on Terror. Iraq was presented as a threat to America and American allies in the region. It was presumed that Iraq had Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and the will to use them. It was also believed that the regime in Iraq had close connections with terrorist networks and sought to supply these with WMD.

America with the assistance of the UK decided to support Iraqi Opposition among the exiles and to remove the regime in Baghdad in the process establishing a stable democratic government that would have close links with the West.
This process of occupation and State rebuilding in the from the year 2003 until 2008, whereby coalition troops invaded Iraq, disposed of the Ba’athist regime and set about rebuilding the political and social structure of the state, has been a clash of cultures, a clash between the West and the Muslim world. The building of a political process in the aftermath of occupation has been an attempt at a dialogue between civilizations, bringing together of statebuilders, democrats and public servants of completely different values, religious and political worldviews. It has been an encounter of East meets West, in a violent, bloody conflict that continues, followed by a political and social process whereby by a State is recreated upon new political and social structures.

In this Chapter I wish to outline the narrative that surrounds the role of the Iraqi Shi’a in the development of a viable national government, that is built upon the opposition that was established from earlier days but was cultivated in the West and found political support in American and British foreign policy.

The period 2004 until 2010 is the context of this study and also the central period of the Iraq War and Occupation. It was during this period that it listened to and attended to the concerns on Iraq Shi’i exiles in London and Ireland. Obviously this was the period of war and occupation. Many lost their family and loved ones, many lost their homes and were forced into exile. Yet despite this there was a desire to promote a political transformation of the state of Iraq that took account of representative democracy, human rights, the rule of law and transparent leadership. The political process that emerged post 2003 was carried out in the context of a violent insurgency and a foreign military occupation. However the desire to see the formation of a viable state with democratic structure and institution was the greatest concern from Shi’a living abroad. This war and decapitation of dictatorship has presented the Shi’a in Iraq with an opportunity to express their democratic majority status for the first time. The process of elections, democratic leadership and constitution building was at the heart of every discussion over these years.

I seek to give an outline of these events from the perspective of those Shi’a living in exile. For this reason the following narrative of empowerment among the Shi’a, has its own particular bias and is grounded in the religious and ethnic concerns of the Shi’a of Iraq. This interpretation would be challenged by both the Kurdish and Sunni Iraqi who would find in this interpreted Shi’i narrative, a challenge to their own interpretation of recent history. The concerns are essentially political but coloured by the role played by religion in a Muslim society, the role of religious leaders particularly the Marja among the Shi’a and the climate of Islamic culture prevalent within the Arab Middle East.
5.1 IRAQI OPPOSITION AMONG THE EXILES IN THE PRE-WAR YEARS

The opposition to the Ba’ath regime began to take a more coherent shape in the 1990s. The brutality of the regime towards its opponents had created a critical mass, identified as living in Tehran, London and Damascus. Newspapers that reflected the views of the opposition began to appear in London and Tehran, notably the London-based Tayar aj-Jadid (‘The New Current’). A number of conferences were held highlighting the Ba’ath regime’s crimes which also presented the opposition to an international audience. In the period following the 1990s, the opposition was bolstered by new important considerations. Firstly, the United States was overtly hostile to the regime in Baghdad, seeking a regime change or removal. Secondly, the establishment of a mainly secure area in Kurdistan under the control of Kurdish parties gave the opposition a base from which to plot against the regime, and finally, the regime in Baghdad became isolated internationally through the actions of the United Nations. For the first time, an international audience was aware of the situation of the Iraqi opposition and was broadly sympathetic to the plight of the Shi’a of southern Iraq.

The opposition began to organise itself and to seek international support, Washington and London were the first ports of call. The Joint Action Committee organized the first national opposition conference in Beirut, which followed the liberation of Kuwait in 1991. This was the first show of unity against the regime in Baghdad.

The Chalabi family had been prominent in the political and commercial life of monarchical Iraq. Following the 1958 revolution the Chalabis relocated their business interests – to Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates and Switzerland. At the age of 21 Ahmad Chalabi went to study mathematics at MIT in the United States. There he developed a profound regard for all things American – including jazz. By the age of 31 he had built and controlled Petra Bank in Jordan. He had been active in Iraqi opposition politics and had become a vital link between exiled politicians and the Kurdish movement for self-determination. Although Petra Bank prospered in the 1980s, a combination of reduced remittances and a sharp fall in Iraqi expenditure in Jordan pushed the country into a serious balance of payments. Coupled with measures employed by the central bank to preserve the dinar, Petra’s balance sheet began to unravel. Chalabi was forced to leave the country.¹

Despite the legacy of the Petra Bank scandal which was to dog him for many years, Chalabi established himself within the Iraqi opposition as he was well known to many of its leaders. He concentrated on building up connections with the United States.² He was aware of the role of the media in forming public opinion in the US, and he wrote a number of opinion pieces in which he proposed pathways to a democratic, secular and pro-western Iraq that soon found their way into American newspapers. There were other contenders among the opposition figures for grabbing the United States' attention, including the liberal politician Saad Salih Jabr, an opponent of Saddam Hussein³, and Ayad Allawi, the head of the Iraqi National Accord (INA), that was set up under the direction of MI6.

Ayad Allawi was born in 1945 into one of the prominent Shi‘i families of Baghdad. At a young age he joined the Ba‘ath Party, rising in prominence to lead a command unit in its National Guard. He travelled to London in 1971 to study, but most likely he had fallen out with Ba‘athist leadership. He had a supervisory role for vast numbers of Iraqi students in Europe and maintained links with the grassroots party supporters. However, following an attempt on his life, his feelings turned to opposition and he began to form a network of like-minded Iraqi citizens who questioned the dictatorial power of Saddam over the party and the country. He maintained his credentials as an Arab nationalist and a reformed Ba‘athist and in 1990, with the support of western security agents, he formed the Iraq National Accord.

With the support of the United States, the Iraqi opposition conference was held in Vienna in April 1992. This was followed by a larger conference held in Iraqi Kurdish territory of Salahuddin on 27 October 1992. In attendance were both the Supreme Council of Islamic Republic of Iraq (SCIRI) and the Da‘awa Party, and the structure of leadership and the principals of a future Iraq as democratic, pluralist and federal were agreed upon. The Conference succeeded in establishing the Iraqi National Congress (INC) as an umbrella body of all opposition forces. Several groups refused to participate in the conference, including the Iraqi Communist Party and the Iraqi Islamic Party, both prominent in the politics of the 1950s and 1960s.⁴ The INC was sensitive to the sectarian, ethnic and ideological differences that existed within the opposition, as represented in the

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² Barbara Slavin, “Former exile Chalabi lobbies Congress for aid”, USA Today, 10 February 2003.
³ I refer to Saddam Hussein here using both his first name and surname, however Iraqi Shi‘a usual refer to the late President of Iraq as just Saddam. In deference henseforth I refer to his just using his first name, Saddam.
leadership council, which comprised of a Shi’a, a Kurd and a Sunni. Ahmad Chalabi was the Chairman of the executive council. Chalabi used the INC to promote his agenda among the opposition, using the support of his allies, especially the US including the CIA.

The INC was always dogged by disputes, jealousies and divisions. In 1995 the Da’awa Party and other nationalist groups pulled out leaving the body weakened. In 1996, with the outbreak of war between the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) factions, the INC’s presence in Iraq was challenged and defeated. The high hopes attached to the formation of the broad-based opposition at Salahuddin dissipated into recrimination and animosity. The INA planned a coup offensive in June 1996 with the support of Shahwani and his three sons, who were members of the Revolutionary Council, but the plan was penetrated and exposed. The INA continued to play a major role in the opposition with the support of the CIA and MI6 allies of Ayad Allawi.

The Clinton administration continued the polices of containment established following the first Gulf War. These policies included the continued support for the weapons inspection program, ensuring that sanctions were respected internationally. Operation Provide Comfort was implemented to offer the Kurds a degree of protection and support against the Iraqi opposition.

The germination of a new policy which differed from the earlier dual containment plan began in Republican majorities of the Senate and House during Clinton’s second administration. This period saw the rise of the conservative think-tanks such as the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy, funded by conservative right-wing benefactors. Such groups moulded the debate on American foreign policy on Iraq. Ahmad Chalabi and the INC began a campaign to change American foreign policy; “One of Chalabi’s most interesting schemes was to try to persuade the U.S. authorities to hand frozen Iraqi assets over to the INC.” The INC called for a more aggressive policy towards the regime in Baghdad, and in his testimony before the US Senate, Chalabi claimed, “Best of all, the INC can do all this for free.” The AEI was organizing conferences on Iraq calling for a strategy for regime change. Meanwhile an alliance made up of American academics, conservative senators and congressmen, right wing media personalities, advocates of military policy and congressional staffers became an enormous support to Iraqi opposition forces and a veritable government in waiting. The

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themes that would dominate discussion on American policy towards Iraq in the future were laid out during this period. 6

On 31 October 1998 Clinton signed the Iraq Liberation Law. This opened a new chapter for Iraqi opposition and initiated a new relationship with the US, mainly instigated by the INC and Ahmad Chalabi. The Act also provided funding for the opposition, defined as parties that supported “democratic change” in Iraq. There were seven parties identified as comprising the democratic opposition including the KDP, the PUK, the INA, SCIRI, the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan and the Constitutional Monarchy Movement. The INC, which acted as an umbrella organization for all the opposition groups, was treated as just another political party. The total funding available under the ILA was set at $97 million, with a further $8 million made available for humanitarian relief. The duty to implement the ILA was given to the State Department, which continued with a cautious policy towards regime change. Frank Ricciardone was appointed as Ambassador to the Iraqi Opposition, his role being to promote unity among the opposition and their efficacy abroad and within Iraq. In interviews given at that time Ricciardone seemed to rule out military intervention in favour of capacity building although the possibility of a coup was not overruled. 7 Throughout the Arab world the general feeling regarding the opposition groups was one of concealed hostility. In spite of American representation, no Arab country would host the proposed Iraqi National assembly. 8 The Iraqi National Assembly was finally convened in New York on October 1999. The Conference produced a sixty-five-member Executive Council for the reconstituted Iraq National Assembly and a leadership council consisting of Ayad Allawi, Ahmad Chalabi, Latif Rashid (PUK), Hoshyar Zibaari (KDP), Sharif ‘Ali ibn al-Hussein (Constitutional Monarchists), Riyaddh al-Yawar and Sheik Muhammad Muhammad ‘Ali (Islamist Shi’a). Neither the Da’awa Party nor the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution of Iraq (SCIRI) sent delegates to the conference, and although they refused to be involved, they followed development keenly. Ricciardone was keen to


There was a deep disquiet about challenges to American supremacy as the leading superpower. There were fears that the security of the state of Israel was being compromised by the Peace Process, that Saddam was developing weapons of mass destruction including nuclear weapons, and a fear that the State Department and the CIA were compromised and discredited in the Middle East.

7 Interview with Frances J. Ricciardone, Al Ahram, Cairo, Issue 439, July 1999, pp.22–8.

8 The opposition seemed complicit in plans to weaken and overthrow an Arab independent state, for the Arab street such a policy seemed much to threatening and hinted of colonial overtones.
maintain communication with the Shi‘i Islamists, knowing full well that they were key elements in the opposition and that their support was essential to further American plans.

5.2 OPPosition among the Diaspora Takes Shape

The 1990s was a time of great resurgence and creativity among the Iraqi diaspora which coincided with an explosion of ideas and plans for a free Iraq. ‘Ali Allawi identifies three that together broadly outline the evolution of political ideas among the diaspora: communitarian thinking; a liberal secular democracy; and a reformed Islamism. 9

It was the Kurds who developed communitarian thinking the most. Their long struggle with the centralized rule of Baghdad and the human cost of the suffering involved in their struggle for self-determination had created a mindset of communitarian independence. This accelerated the formation of structures of an autonomous regional authority which began in earnest in 1996. With the support of the United Nations plan of containment, Kurdish leaders had established relative autonomy from Baghdad and were keen in all discussions to preserve and promote the limited form of federalism that served their interests. They acknowledged their link to a central government, but insisted upon their regional laws, policies and institutions. In a post-Saddam order, the Kurds who were now in opposition and in exile pursued a high degree of autonomy for Kurds in Iraq. It was unclear where this policy would lead in a future Iraqi state, but it would continue to be a dominant theme in Iraqi politics for many years to come.

There were many others who proposed a secular, liberal democracy founded upon a constitutional government, human rights and democratic institutions. Such propositions formed the basis for many conferences and seminars. 10 Many Iraqis in exile gained first-hand experience of liberal, democratic institutions, diplomacy and high-level politics. The arrival of Adnan al-Pachachi into Iraqi oppositional politics galvanized many liberal democrats among the exiles and within Iraq, as he had been a former foreign minister and a long-time political advisor and was well regarded in western and Gulf capitals. Kenan Makiya, intellectual and writer, promoted his vision of a tolerant and pluralist Iraq within


media circles and beyond.\(^{11}\) Makiya is an example of the countless Iraqi artists and poets\(^{12}\) who contributed to discussion on liberal values, exile, lament and healing for a future free Iraq.

There was a profound reform in Iraqi Islamism in the 1990s. With the demise of revolutionary fervour in Iran, both the Da’awa Party and SCIRI began to make more tentative movements towards the West and western notions of democracy; there began to be promoted the possibility of reconciling Islamism with parliamentary democracy. *Islam 21*, and *Abrar*, edited by Iraqis and published in London were among the publications that paved the way for the adoption within Iraq of democratic principals, by exiled Iraqi Shi’a. In the summer of 1992, the al-Kho’ei Foundation hosted a seminar on “The Shi’a of Iraq at the Cross-roads”, which explored the identity of the Shi’a of Iraq and their history as an oppressed people culminating in the Ba’ath dictatorship. The seminar had a powerful impact on the Shi’i diaspora, and provided a platform to build a Shi’i consciousness and the desire for special status as an oppressed community. In July 2002, Mowaffaq al-Rubai’e, ‘Ali Allawi and Sahib al-Hakim wrote “The Declaration of the Shi’a of Iraq”. This publication gathered together a wide range of academic, professional, religious, tribal and military individuals, and was signed by over 400 Iraqi Shi’i leaders, calling for a new Iraq based upon democracy, federalism and community rights.

US involvement in the affairs of the Iraqi opposition changed substantially the focus and direction of the participating parties. The opposition was weak, undecided and lacking in unity. The Islamist element stayed shy of direct involvement with the US, and there developed a definite split between the INA and the INC which was further polarized by tensions in Washington. The State Department and the CIA were exposing a “realist” approach, and were wary of the dramatic changes that could come about by intervening militarily in Iraq and promoting democracy. The other neoconservative and more hawkish camp in the US called for a radical overhaul of the Middle East through the vigorous promotion of democracy, human rights and liberal secularism as a means of transforming

\(^{11}\) His books, *Republic of Fear* and *Cruelty and Silence*, written after the invasion of Kuwait became overnight bestsellers. He proposed a radical awareness of the suffering and disempowerment among the population as a cathartic process leading towards healing and integration.

\(^{12}\) Salih J. Altoma, “Iraqi Poets in Western Exile”, *World Literature Today*, October–December, University of Oklahoma, Norman, 2003, pp.37–9. The Kufa Gallery in the London Bayswater area was run by Mohammed Makiya and an Iraqi architect who settled in the UK in 1974. Makiya established Kufa to promote Arab and Islamic culture in general, yet it retained a distinct Iraqi character, hosting a Wednesday night program which focused specifically on Iraqi music, art and culture.
the societies of the Middle East. In this way, the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) contributed to the promotion and application of such Straussian thinking and policy, particularly with regard to the Middle East.

At this stage American opinion was conflicted and containment policies continued in Iraq. Despite aggressive containment policies the regime in Baghdad remained secure while the population languished in poverty. The ILA called for regime change but as yet it was unclear if this was a real possibility without American military intervention.

5.3 **The Iraq War and Occupation, 2003**

The attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 traumatised the American public. This was the largest attack on American soil in peacetime by a terrorist organization. The attack changed radically American perceptions of radical Islam and the threat posed by Middle Eastern regimes. The political landscape of the world had changed overnight. The Bush administration embarked upon a war against terrorism and its main targets were to be al-Qaeda, the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Ba'ath regime in Baghdad. In November 2001 Bush had instructed US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld to begin planning for war with Iraq. General Tommy Franks, the head of the US Central Command presented Bush with a plan before the end of the year.

The UN Security Council had authorised the setting up of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) to monitor Iraq’s weapons programs and to identify a movement towards complete disarmament. Hans Blix, former Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and veteran Swedish diplomat was put in charge of the UNMOVIC. Despite the fact that UN inspection teams in the 1990s had uncovered and destroyed most of what had been left of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programme and that Blix had dismissed the possibility of Iraq relaunching or reconstituting its nuclear capability in with any kind of speed. There was much fear over what Saddam may have been hiding.\(^{13}\) The assumption

\(^{13}\) Hans Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, Pantheon, New York, 2004. Blix comes out strongly against the war and affirms the work of the weapons inspectors under the UN in discovering, dismantling and destroying the WMD capability of the Baghdad regime. However, both American and UK intelligence communities continued to affirm the threat of WMD in Iraq as the main reason in justifying military intervention. Ahmad Chalabi insisted upon the viability of the Iraqi WMD program and succeeded in convincing David Rose of *Vanity Fair* to write on “Iraq’s Arsenal of Terror” in 2002 from an Iraqi defector source. *see* Aram Roston, *The Man Who Pushed America to War*, pp.206–11.
pushed by the administration was that if Saddam did have an arsenal of dangerous weapons, he would be willing to use them in an offensive operation against the United States and its allies, including Israel. A second rationale involved Iraq’s alleged ties to international terrorism, most particularly charges of links with al-Qaeda.\textsuperscript{14} However, few independent observers thought it possible that the secular Ba\'athist regime in Baghdad which had long suppressed Islamist Sunni and Shi\’a would maintain close links with Osama bin Laden and his followers. Prince Turki bin Faisal, former Saudi intelligence chief, noted how bin Laden viewed Saddam “as an apostate, an infidel or someone who is not worthy of being a fellow Muslim”.\textsuperscript{15} Through a strange collusion of public fear, misinformation, religious zeal and unrelenting resolve, the Bush administration took the decision to remove Saddam from power. It did not need its intelligence resources to inform policy, but merely to bolster its case for war. In the case of its allies, the UK under Tony Blair had convinced itself in the wake of terrorist attack and presented with evidence of Iraq’s weapons capability – however dubious – that war was necessary and justified. Notwithstanding significant opposition and divided public opinion,\textsuperscript{16} the Blair government won a mandate for war in the House of Commons in February 2003 by a vote of 412 to 149. Tony Blair referred to Iraqi non-compliance with the requirement of UN Resolution 1441 as justification for war when he addressed the House of Commons on 18 March 2003.

Sceptics and critics alike claim that the fundamental reason for proposing an invasion of Iraq was oil.\textsuperscript{17} The ability of the US and its allies to control Iraq – the largest Arab country in the Gulf region, containing the world’s second largest oil reserves, and borders three of the world’s five largest oil producers – would give the US enormous


\textsuperscript{15} Conn Hallinan, “President Bush’s Wag-the-Dog Policy on Iraq”, \textit{Los Angeles Times}, 7 May 2002.


There were substantial marches organized by the anti-war movement throughout the UK, US and continental Europe. Over one million marchers took to the streets of London and Glasgow to demonstrate against the war. This brought together a broad coalition of citizens keen to promote peace, tolerance and opposition to military intervention.

leverage. Through dominating Iraq, the US and its allies could not only control that country’s oil reserve, but would also be able to establish a permanent military presence in Middle East. With the emergence of radical Islamism in and growing opposition to Israel in the region, the US desperately need new options and new bases for its global reach.

5.3.1 Iraq’s Opposition in Exile

With the possibility of regime change in Baghdad now becoming a distinct possibility, Iraqi exiles now agitated for greater influence over the future direction of Iraq. Chalabi’s INC again allied itself with the groups responsible for the passage of the ILA. In the meantime, the INA grew in stature. The apparent success of the Northern Alliance model in combating the Taliban in Afghanistan meant that a similar model that involved local allied agents could be employed in Iraq. The Kurds redoubled their efforts with their Washington friends and allies, casting themselves as the Iraqi counterpart to the Tajik community in Afghanistan. Like the Tajik community, the Kurds claimed a unique position to support military engagement in Iraq using their own defence forces and army.

Within Britain there was no neo-conservative cabal that promoted an Iraqi regime change mentality, within London circles. However, Blair did receive support from Iraqi exiles living in the UK the Iraqi Community Association in West London and the Kurdish Information and Advocacy Centre in North London. In place of Washington’s hawkish neoconservative promoting military intervention within Iraq. Britain relied upon its unique status with the US as its foremost ally. This has been was presented as a “special relationship” between the UK and the US, Blair and Bush, and the CIA and MI5. Within

In a letter to the Prime Minister by Dr. Hamid al-Bayati, with 31 signatures supposedly on behalf of the “350,000 Iraqi exiles in the UK and the 4 million forced to leave Iraq”. Al-Bayati claims that the “anti-war coalition ignores the terror we have lived under for so long, offers no alternative to our nightmare, can only be construed as supporting Saddam Hussein and helping to maintain his regime indefinitely”. Jeevan Vasagar and Brian Whitaker, “Exiles cited by the PM are backed by Iran”, The Guardian, 19 February, 2003, London.
20 Robin Cook would write of this relationship in Point of Departure: “It would never occur to Tony Blair that there might be more respect for a Prime Minister who had the courage to say no to someone as powerful as the President of the US. … I have no doubt that Tony Blair genuinely believed the world would be better without Saddam. I am certain that the real reason he went to war was that he found it easier to resist the public opinion of Britain than the request of the US President.” Robin Cook, Point of Departure, Pocket, London, 2004, p.104.
this uniquely allied relationship, the INA of Ayat Allawi was settled upon as being the most suitable opposition partner, and found particular favour with British and American securocrats.

In August 2002, the main leaders of the opposition were invited to Washington to meet with Under Secretaries Marc Grossman of the State Department and Douglas Feith of the Pentagon. The Bush administration encouraged the opposition to organize a broad conference of exiles in preparation for the possibility of military intervention in Iraq. It was clear that the US intended to challenge Saddam.

The Democratic Principles Group compiled “The Transition to Democracy” report that was edited by Salem Chalabi and Kenan Makiya. This represented a thorough and complete statement of what the opposition groups sought as a plan for Iraq’s political future, and it reflected the thinking on Iraq as proposed by the INC and by the Pentagon. The emphasis was on breaking the totalitarian rule of the Ba’ath Party and establishing a body politic built on democratic accountability and transparency. In reality, it was difficult to know if this was truly a working blueprint for the organization and cooperation of the oppositional forces or merely a document that reflected US aspirations for a transitional authority.

The London Conference of the Iraqi Opposition opened on 14 December 2002. Allawi identified three key directions that the conference could take. Firstly, there were the idealists, congregated around Chalabi and the INC, who wanted a conference that would ensure that the opposition mapped out a new course for Iraq. The second direction was a public relations exercise designed to show wide Iraqi support for the US policy of military intervention against Saddam. The third direction insured that the leaders of the opposition parties would achieve their own narrow interests of self-advancement in a future Iraq. Several interested parties sent observers to the conference including, Turkey, Iran, the US, the UK and the EU.

There was much discussion at to whether an oppositional government should be set up in exile, either before or after military engagement. It was felt that such an initiative would alienate the internal opposition. Finally, a 65-person committee was selected that broadly reflected the changes in the composition of the over the previous decade. Although


22 The UK pursued a completely different policy from that of the rest of the EU, maintaining a strong link with the US and its policies of military engagement. There was a large US observer delegation, led by Zalmay Khalidzad, the new American envoy to the Iraqi Opposition parties.
some tension between the Shi'i Islamists and the role of SCIRI in the opposition was expressed, the conference finished by defining a clear role for the exiles in a post-Saddam Iraq.23

Following the London Conference, the US invited some of the opposition leaders to Washington for discussion. The 65-member committee was scheduled to meet in Salahuddin, Northern Iraq on 22 January 2003. The committee saw itself as the nucleus of a future transitional government, although there was some internal opposition to the exile. The Salahuddin gathering began on 25 February 2003. Khalidzad talked about a "rolling transition"24 whereby power would be handed over to Iraqis as soon as security measures were in place. All groups were wholeheartedly committed to an Iraqi sovereignty, but the US was adamant that no provisional government would be declared from Salahuddin. Eventually a six-person leadership council was formed, comprised of Talabani, Barzani, Chalabi, Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim, Ayad Allawi and Pachachi.

By the time the Salahuddin Conference had ended, war was imminent, despite representation to the UN and the failure of Hans Blix to find WMD. The US and its allies had mobilized a large force to invade Iraq from the south. In February 2003, the US fired cruise missiles at a location in Baghdad, the first of many unsuccessful attempts to kill Saddam and overthrow the regime.

5.4 War and Tragedy among the Shi‘a

The military campaign to end the regime in Baghdad began on 20 March 2003. The invasion started in the south and then progressed up the major highways towards Baghdad. The bombardment of immense proportions (more than 600 cruise missiles were launched and 1500 missions flown, with 700 aircraft hitting 1000 targets in one night on March 21) was appropriately termed "shock and awe."25 The rationale behind the attack was simple:

faced with such superior firepower, the Iraqi regime would simply collapse. The invading forces had reason to be confident; Iraqi air defences proved ineffective, no fixed-wing sorties were flown by Iraqi aircraft and only a small number of surface-to-air missiles were launched. In the space of three weeks US and Coalition forces had captured Baghdad International Airport. In the south, much of Basra was in British hands, Mosul surrendered to US troops and Kurdish Peshmerga and Saddam’s hometown of Tikrit was finally taken on 14 April. On 1 May a triumphant George Bush declared an end to major combat operations in Iraq from the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln. Coalition casualties had been relatively low with 125 Americans and 31 British killed. Unofficial estimates of Iraqi civilian casualties were placed at between 5,000 and 10,000.

Iraqi citizens living in Europe had conflicting feelings regarding the invasion of their home country. All who had suffered under the brutal dictatorship of Saddam and the Ba’ath party rejoiced to see images from Firdaus Square of jubilant Iraqis, assisted by American forces, dethroning the statue of Saddam, chanting, “There is no god but God, Saddam is the enemy of God” and “O Saddam, the blood of Sadr will not be in vain.”

Following years of sanctions and the previous experience during the Gulf War of 1991, many did not trust the Americans. Many Shi’a were dubious about American intentions. Clearly, the displacement of the Ba’ath regime was to be lauded, but was this a lasting end to dictatorship? Some feared that a Saddam-like strongman would be imposed against the will of the majority or that Saddam would be tamed and brought back to power under some new arrangement.

It was the chaotic devolution of political authority that caused the greatest concern. In the West, Iraqi exiles had followed the developments leading to the formation of the London and Salahuddin conferences and were aware that there was some provision for some form of civil executive authority in the wake of the military period, but the planning was perceived to be wholly inadequate and naïve. As one observer noted, “the Pentagon’s plan for a post-war Iraq seems to have hinged, until the war itself, on the idea that Chalabi could be dropped into Baghdad and, once there effect a smooth transition to a new administration,”

These are among a number of journalistic accounts of the War were written by war reporters from within Baghdad and with embedded Western journalists. They give a first-hand account of the destruction wrought by the military onslaught and superior airpower, coupled with the disintegration of Iraqi forces and the emerging lawlessness, insurrection and resistance.

embraced by the Iraqi population who would continue to accept the American-proposed democracy in all its simplicity. There was no real thought as to whether this government-in-waiting had any real connection with indigenous Iraqi groups inside Iraq, nor was there a detailed plan for how to stabilize and secure the country and implement a credible transition in a war-torn, occupied country.

Clearly, there was some disconnect between Iraqi reality on the ground and among those living in exile. However those in exile were not all represented by the political active exiles and there remained a large majority of exiles who followed developments closely, keeping in contact with their families who lived there and keeping abreast of media developments on terrestrial and Arab news stations. It is my contention that Iraqi communities living in exile in Ireland and the United Kingdom, reflect the broad diversity of opinion within Iraq and on the ground, despite the distance between the occupying powers and the political class that sought to establish itself in power.

The inhabitants of Iraq did not greet the invading American army with the expected joyous welcome. The collapse of the dictatorship left a power vacuum that was filled with Islamist forces and their allies, most notably in the towns and cities of southern Iraq and in Sadr City, the giant Shi‘i slum of East Baghdad. There, the dormant Sadr movement sprang to life, and within days of the fall of Baghdad succeeded in establishing control and also stabilised parallel local government structures. This assertion of local power by underground Islamist forces manifested itself with tragic consequences in the holy city of Najaf.

Sayyid Abd al-Majid al Kho‘ei was the secretary general of the Al-Kho‘ei Foundation in London, which acted as a benevolent, charitable and moderate voice for Shi‘i Islam in the West, Africa and Asia. Here it has emphasised tolerance, non-violence and social egalitarianism.\(^\text{28}\) He had developed a strong relationship with governments and


This interview was conducted with Ghanem Jawad, who is the Head of Culture and Human Rights office of the al-Kho‘ei Foundation in West London. Jawad outlines the background to the murder of Abd Majid al-Kho‘ei, al-Khoei’s role in London in developing a dialogue with Western agencies and the hope that he had in returning to Iraq. He maintains that the Shi‘a “were certainly pleased by the American intervention in Iraq… you can say that the major Shi’i political leaders, like Bahr-ol-Oloom, Abdel Aziz Hakim and Izeddin Salim have gone out of their way to find some kind of accommodation with the Americans”, p.25.

Abd Majid al-Kho‘ei was one of the most articulate voices of Iraqi Shi‘ism in the West, he had a good knowledge of the West and represented well the integrating position of the Foundation “firmly believing
agencies during his time there, and had been approached by the CIA to help to establish a conduit between the Marji of Najaf and the Coalition authorities. He was eager to accept the challenge, and travelled to Najaf where he organized a civilian council and set about returning basic services to the city. He unwisely associated himself with Haider al-Rufaii, the Saddam-appointed custodian of the Shrine, and failed to realize the significance of Moqtada al-Sadr and his supporters. His brutal murder was blamed on the Sadarists, however Moqtada asserted that he played no part in the murder.

Like Abd al-Majid al Kho‘ei, Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al Hakim decided to return to Iraq after his decades-long exile in Iran. In May his hundred-car convoy travelled through several Shi‘i towns and cities in Southern Iraq, greeted by thousands of well-wishers before reaching its destination in Najar. At Najar, he called for a rapid transfer of power to Iraqis, an end to the occupation and the establishment of a constitutional government through which Islamic values would be honoured. He seemed to recognize that the concept of Wilayat al-Faqih would not be acceptable to most Iraqis and to the Coalition, and yet he could play a unique role in Iraqi society, combining his political orientation and advanced religious training. His challenge was to carve out for himself a religiously sanctioned status as a political Marji. Although this was a new departure from the traditional institutions, Al-Hakim began a series of intensive consultations in Najaf with Grand Ayatollah Sistani, Said al-Hakim, Ishaq Fayyad and Bashir al-Najafi. Al-Hakim was making headway in convincing them that he could play the role of political Marji, bringing together his unique religious knowledge and his political acumen.

On Friday 29th August 2003, as Ayatollah Baqir al-Hakim was emerging from the Imam ‘Ali Shrine in Najaf, he and nearly a hundred other people were killed by a powerful car bomb. The murder of Ayatollah Baqir al-Hakim was a devastating blow to the Shi‘i Islamists and to the SCIRI which he had moulded and led for a decade.

The Shi‘i leadership had suffered the loss of many of its great leaders during the Ba‘ath Party rule, but the death of both al-Kho‘ei and al-Hakim were an immense loss to the entire community and the religious and political leadership of Iraq as a whole. The background of intimidation, terrorist attacks and violent insurgency will be the topic of

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that Muslims have a lot to learn from the West”, p.22. His untimely murder was a tragedy for the Foundation and for Iraqi Shi‘ism at this crucial period of transition.

This referred to the direct rule of the Jurisprudent as it has been applied by Khomeini in Iran.

future reflection on the insurgency in this chapter, but these are vivid reminders of the cost of occupation and liberation to the Shi’a in Iraq.

5.5 THE DEVOLUTION OF POLITICAL AUTHORITY

Following the occupation a provisional government was established by the Coalition forces. In consequence, a new political reality was established. This was the initial step towards democratic rule, though American oversight still predominated. Hence, an overview of this crucial period is important for Shi’a self-determination.

5.5.1 ORHA, the CPA and Reconstruction

To manage Iraq’s transition in a post-combat situation, President Bush established the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) on 21 January 2003, headed by Jay M. Garner, a retired three-star Army general with 35 years of service who was beloved by the Kurds for carrying out humanitarian relief operations in Northern Iraq. Garner’s ability to operate was however hampered by lack of trained personnel and a lack of clearly demarcated roles. The Pentagon sought to unify reconstruction efforts and humanitarian responses with security and political control. It was the intention of ORHA to maintain present ministries under the guidance of senior Ba’athist advisors, coupled with certain exile Iraqis vetted by the Pentagon who were mostly contracted with the Iraqi National Congress.31 Those who backed Chalabi never wavered in their determination to establish him in power. He pushed for the creation of an Interim Iraqi Authority (IIA) at Nasiriya and later in Baghdad which would give the exiled groups and especially the INC a head start in the formation of a future Iraqi government. This was to part of a “rolling transition”, during which ORHA would hand over power to an interim Iraqi administration. Later, a constitutional assembly would meet to draft a new constitution, leading to a sovereign administration established by election.

ORHA’s planning for a post-combat reality proved to be inadequate. Garner was blamed for the deteriorating security, for failing to curtail the wild or to provide adequate public services. The weeks Garner spent in post-invasion Iraq were dismissed as a disaster by the administration, both publicly and privately. Garner described the plan as “an ad hoc

operation, glued together over about four or five weeks’ time. We didn’t really have enough time to plan.”

On 6 May, Bush announced that Paul Bremer would become the civilian administrator in Iraq, and on 22 May, the UN passed Resolution 1483, which authorised the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). The Americans now maintained direct executive control over humanitarian assistance, security and military apparatuses, and government agencies. The involvement of the UN in the formation of a future Iraqi government was seen as a victory for the British who had insisted upon multilateral engagement from the beginning. The assembled Iraqi political leaders in waiting greeted Bremer’s appointment with indignation; was this a return to some form of colonial imposition?

Bremer arrived in Iraq seizing the initiative with a determination to tackle the pressing law and order issues. In Bremer’s meeting with the leadership council, he set to invoke his powers in no uncertain terms. He was responsible for overall policy and for managing the affairs of the country. Upon his arrival, Bremer issued CPA Order Number 1, banning from political participation, persons who had served in the top four levels of the Ba’ath Party from political participation, purging nearly 100,000 from the newly formed administration. CPA Order Number 2 forced some 350,000 trained and armed soldiers into unemployment. With the stroke of a pen, Bremer had completed Iraq’s revolution, destroying the pillars on which Sunni Arabs had relied to rule Iraq – the military, the security services and the Ba’ath Party – and thus laid the foundation for the coming violent resistance and insurgency.

In the political sphere, the CPA continued to work with the parties and leaders from the exiled opposition. Bremer set about expanding the Leadership Council, the G-7 into a broader body, forming a 25-person Iraqi Governing Council (IGC). The composition of the council attempted to mirror Iraq’s communitarian and ethnic diversity, and in all there

33 This council became known as the G-7, and it included Talabani, Barzani, Chalabi and Ayad Allawi. Naseer al-Chadirichi and Ibrahim al-Jaafari had been recently added to the leadership. Abdel al-Mahid represented SCIRI in the absence of Abdel-Aziz al-Hakim.
were 14 Shi’a, five Kurds, five Sunni Arabs, one Assyrian and one Turkman; this marked a definite shift towards communitarian representative politics. The IGC was seen as being the creation of the CPA and Bremer, which hampered both its credibility and its independence. The first task of the IGC was to draft a new constitutional law by 15 December. This proposed law would give the outlines by which a constitutional convention could then be elected. On the ratification of the constitution by referendum, multi-party elections would take place and sovereignty would be transferred to the new Iraqi Government.

This plan was not acceptable to Ayatollah al-Sistani, who demanded that, in order to be legitimate, delegates to the constitutional assembly must be democratically elected, a requirement which would in turn give dominance to the Shi’i majority. A new and more complex plan was created in response, which required the drafting of a Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) that would act as an interim constitution. A Transitional National Assembly (TNA) would be formed in a three-stage selection process, that included the formation of caucuses and the selection of members by the IGC approved by the CPA. Ayatollah al-Sistani and the SCIRI immediately objected to the new plan for the same reason for which they had objected to the previous one, namely that the new constitution should be drafted by a democratically elected body and not selected by caucus. Sistani noted that he would only reconsider his decision if a UN mission came to Iraq. On January 2004 UN Secretary General Kofi Annan announced that he would send a mission to Iraq. This mission was to be led by Lakhdar Braimi and would establish whether elections could be held before the transfer to sovereignty on 30 June. The UN report gave credence to the impracticality of holding early elections, while supporting the position of Ayatollah Sistani of holding elections at the earliest opportunity, which was believed to be December. The caucus selection system would be scrapped, and instead, a caretaker government would be chosen to govern following 30 June. It was still necessary to come up with an acceptable interim constitution, the Transitional Administrative Law. The IGC created solutions to certain fundamental issues: the Kurds succeeded in keeping

36 The Sunni Arabs members included Dr. al-Pachachi, Naseer al-Chadirchi, Sheikh Ghazi al-Yawar, Samir al-Sumaidaei and Dr. Aqila al-Hashemi.

On 20 September 2004 Aqila al-Hashemi, an outspoken and committed member of the Council was shot en route to a meeting of the Governing Council.


38 Barbara Slavin, “Power could transfer to an expanded Iraqi council”, *USA Today*, 19 February 2004.
control of their autonomous region; the Shi‘a compromised in having Islam named as “a source of legislation”, rather than “the source”; and Sunni concerns and negotiations were frozen until a later time. With the TAL in place, the next goal was to be the formation of the Interim Iraqi Government (IIG), which would succeed the CPA as the sovereign power in June. The IIG was staffed predominately by politicians who had dominated the IGC. The influential post of prime minister went to Iyad Allawi, leader of the INA, Ghazi al-Yawer a prominent Sunni exile became president of Iraq and Ibrahim al-Ja‘afari of the Da‘wa was made vice-president. Many Kurds were appointed to prominent positions within the cabinet. On 8 June, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1546, giving its blessing to the IIG.39

With the demise of the CPA, the Bremer’s legacy comes more into focus. The CPA’s website lists some of its more important achievements:40 it had overseen the reopening of all of Iraq’s 240 hospitals, administered over 22 million vaccinations, opened 22 universities and 43 technical institutions as well as virtually all primary and secondary schools. There had been a restoration of basic utilities and an increase in Iraq’s oil production. However, these positive developments were overshadowed by a rising insurgency that bordered on civil war and a weak and largely unrepresentative Government.41

In evaluating the rule and legacy of the CPA, Diamond identifies four key mistakes that proved to be costly, for which Bremer must take ultimate responsibility.42 Firstly, Bremer and his circle were slow to grasp the importance of Ayatollah Sistani; they proved to be unable to reach out to him and the political forces he represented. Secondly, Bremer did not allow for sufficient feedback to and interaction with the transition that was supposedly designed to herald democracy. Third, Bremer waited too long to reach out to disaffected Sunni elements and include them in the process. Finally, he could never forge a

40 www.cpa-iraq.org/essential_services.
41 Anderson and Stanfield point out that by the time of its demise in June 2004, the IGC enjoyed the confidence of barely one quarter of the Iraqi population and furthermore, even though the IGC and IIG were demographically representative of Iraqi society, both governments were unrepresentative by virtue of being dominated by returning exiles. None of the power positions were occupied by authentic “Iraq’s Iraqi”.
coherent strategy for addressing the insurgency, including the Shi‘i resistance of Muqtada al-Sadr. This legacy and its problems will form the basis of further reflection in this chapter.

5.5.2 **Elections and Constitution-Building in the New Iraq**

The next major step in Iraq’s political transition was the January 2005 elections. These elections were to be a major step in creating a more representative government, one that was more grounded in Iraq than any previous transitional government. However, a number of factors worked against the credibility of the process. Firstly, elections for the National Assembly would occur under occupation, which was an obstacle to their legitimacy. The electoral process evolved under the Transitional Government and the TAL, which were labelled by many leaders as illegitimate. Sunnis boycotted the elections, choosing not to participate and in the process diminished the possibility of their influencing the drafting of the permanent constitution. In the short-term other trends emerged, including a fall from favour for exiled leaders who had played a significant role in the previous administration. The Iraqi public seemed to distrust these leaders, and were cynical about their participation. Peter Munson quoted a political analyst when he said, “‘The Islamic political parties and movements have indeed reorganized whether they be Shi‘a or Sunni, but they have been limited to a narrow sectarian framework,’ without wide popular support across the nation.”

Similarly, Munson claims, many Iraqis expressed disdain for what they viewed as opportunistic use of religion for political gain. He quotes a Shi‘i observer who commented that “religious political parties corrupt the reputation of religion.”

This election was the first occasion on which the Shi‘a could demonstrate their numerical superiority and it represented their best chance to determine the constitutional make-up of the country. The genesis of the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) as an umbrella group for the Shi‘a came from inside the Marji‘yya itself. Ayatollah Sistani was determined that the constitutional assembly elections should mark a watershed in Iraqi history and a critical step in the political emancipation of the Shi‘a. Sistani himself was instrumental in bringing the main Islamist parties together. The UIA consisted of 228 candidates, headed by Abd al-Aziz al Hakim of the SCIRI.


The much photographed ink-stained fingers held aloft for the western media marked a significant leap forward for Iraq. Iraqis and particularly the Shi'a proved their enthusiasm for the democratic process when about 8.5 million Iraqis cast their vote, nearly 60 percent of eligible voters. Iraqis overseas, of whom nearly 1.2 million were eligible to vote, also played a substantial role in the elections. The majority winners were the UIA and the Kurdistan Alliance; out of the 275 seats in parliament, the UIA garnered 133, the Kurdistan Alliance 75 seats, while Ayad Allawi Iraqiyyah list managed 40 seats. The Sunnis, who made up 20 percent of the population, won only 6 percent of the 275 seats. It was the SCIRI which emerged as a major beneficiary of this identity-based voting, and it had won the trust of the US, the cooperation of several Shi'i Islamist parties and the hand of al-Sistani.

It was Ibrahim al-Jaafari who became the UIA candidate for prime minister. Al-Jaafari, the head of the Da’awa Party, Saddam’s implacable enemy, associated in the public mind with the decades-long struggle for Islamist power, was now to lead the first truly democratic government in Iraq’s history. Despite its democratic legitimacy, the Jaafari-led government was dogged by a limited mandate, particularly in the eyes of the Sunni Arabs. The next hurdle was the writing of the constitution.

5.5.3 The Constitution

The writing of a permanent constitution was to be an event infused with extraordinary significance and symbolism. Through this process Iraq’s different communities would secure democratic representation, preserve minority rights, alleviate corruption, decrease unemployment, ensure better security and solidify the processes of government. In reality, the process of constitution-making was to be the battleground for Iraq’s most contentious issues.  

45 The election results were drawn from the official website of the Iraqi Independent Electoral Commission, www.ieciraq.org


Arato focuses on constitution making in Iraq under occupation and in the context of state destruction. The constitutional process is initially an imposed, top down reality by American administrators in an effort to promote democratization within a proposed window of authoritarian rule. This aligns with the period up until the creation of the “Fundamental Law” and the Agreement of Political Process, November 15. It was the demands Ayatollah Sistani that established the creation of an interim constitution, a two-stage process which involved an elected Assembly and ratification by the population. His constant demands were for “democratic legitimacy”.

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The TAL decreed that the "system of government shall be republican, federal, democratic, and pluralistic, and powers shall be shared between the federal government and the regional governments, governorates, municipalities and local administrations." Federalism, however, continued to be an issue during negotiations for the permanent constitution. Sunnis remained suspicious of provisions that allowed for the creation of a virtually autonomous Kurdish region in the north and of a Shi’a super-state in the south. A Kurdish northern region and a Shi‘i southern super-region would control between them nearly all of Iraq’s oil resources, leaving Sunnis with an impoverished and oil-free shell of a region in the West. In conclusion, the constitution created a weak central government and set about empowering the regions, handing control over to the provinces for oil revenues, taxation and legislation.

The UIA had an absolute majority in the drafting committee, which initially included only two Sunni Arabs. The Kurds always saw the TAL as the basis of a permanent constitution which accommodated their independence and inserted built upon their ability to veto, and stated that the constitution could not be passed in a referendum if three provinces voted against it. Determining the status of Kirkuk was of particular importance for the Kurdish population, which was determined to return Kirkuk to the Kurdistan region despite its many Arab residents.

The place of Islam in the new state was a central issue of concern to the Constitutional Assembly. The TAL had endorsed Islam as one and not the source of legislation in Iraq. Article 2 of Iraq’s constitution designates Islam as the official religion of the state and “a fundamental source of legislation”. There was a fear among secular groups that the Iraqi constitution would enshrine Sharia law in the state and would undermine the status of women in the legal framework of the state. There had been attempts to change the personal status law of 1959, according to which marriage, divorce and inheritance are legislated by the state through secular courts. However, fears that the

Arato discusses state formation, government structure, rule of constitutional change and the relationship between state and religion, pp.135–204.

Through a permanent constitution, the Iraqi state could have fashioned the values and aspirations of its myriad communities, in the process solidifying democratic politics, promote cohesion and state unity. However, the reality of politics making is that of self-interest and self-preservation within each ethnic and religious group, and this got in the way of participation and inclusion.


laws would be changed were exaggerated, and even the secular Kurds were anxious to include Islam in providing a moral framework for legislation. The constitution’s wording reflected the need to strike a balance between Islam and democracy, affirming Islam as the religion of the state and stipulating that no law could be passed that violated its commonly agreed precepts.

The role of the **Mariji’iyya** was recognized and affirmed in the constitution, and the special status of the holy shrines of the Shi’a was included. In reality, the role of religion in the constitution took account of secular, modernizing and globalizing influences. The formation of the constitution was a significant development of state and society in Iraq where Islam is a majority religion. It was an attempt to dialogue with secular modern and minority voices and to include these in the document. For Iraqi Shi’a and for Arab Muslims, these were significant developments in a part of the world where constitutional rights are often undermined and the rule of law is often far from transparent and accountable.

The Iraqi constitution is a document that reflects the fractured nature of Iraqi society and the political deals that were necessary at the time to promote a united state. It was a fundamental step in a political process that was severely limited and partisan. On 28 August 2005, the draft constitution was read out to the National Assembly with only three of the fifteen Arab Sunni members present. In the Sunni provinces of Anbar, Salahuddine, Nineveh and Diyala opposition to the constitution was increasing.

Voting for the constitution took place on 15 October 2005 and the turnout was a 63 percent of registered voters. It was clear that the ‘yes’ vote had won by a significant majority, but the question remained as to whether three provinces could muster the two-thirds majority needed to block the constitution. The Sunni Arab provinces of Anbar and Salahuddin voted against the constitution by 96 and 82 percent respectively. In Nineveh, the final tally was 55 percent against 45 percent in favour. The constitution was therefore ratified by the election.

The constitution was representative of the wishes of the majority of the people to turn a new page in Iraq’s history. The constitution enshrined new state narratives and paradigms: democratic representation in government through transparent and accountable elections; civil and human rights; decentralisation; wealth-sharing to benefit the most disadvantaged. These values marked a significant departure from Iraq’s past and a leap forward for democracy in a part of the world that had known more than its fair share of dictatorship, tyranny and oppression.
5.5.4 The December 2005 Election and Iraq’s Government

Three months was not much time to prepare between the referendum and the general election on 15 December, but there was much to be done among ethnic and religious groups to promote a more representative result on election day. The UIA, which had held sway in parliament under the Jaafari government, now was part of an electoral alliance of the six major political units that comprised the Islamist Shi’i movement: the SCIRI, the Badr Organization, the Da’awa Party, the Sadarists, the Fadhila Party and the Independents. The UIA alliance enjoyed and benefited from the support shown to it by the Marji’iyya.

On 15 December 2005, 12 million voters, over 70 percent of those registered, turned out to select their state’s permanent government. The Shi’i UIA won 128 seats, confirming its status again as the most powerful block in parliament. The Kurdish Alliance gained 53 seats, and the Sunni Arab Iraqi Accord Front won 44 seats. The secular-leaning parties didn’t do as well, much to the disappointment to the American occupation: Ayad Allawi took only 25 seats, while the Iraqi National Congress, headed by Ahmed Chalabi, failed to win a single seat, getting less than 0.3 percent of the votes cast.

It took many months for Iraq’s elected politicians to form a cabinet to govern the country. Ibrahim al-Jaafai, the UIA candidate for prime minister, was seen (mainly by the American occupiers) as being too closely associated with Tehran, and had been largely

49 The document entitled “Perspectives on the Principles of Governance in Iraq” written by Adel Abld el-Mahadi, Vice President of the SCIRI was promoted among the Shi’a. This set out a vision of Iraq which placed the emancipation and empowerment of Shi’a at the heart of state power and state structures. The responsibility for state building and for reordering the state lay in the hands of the Shi’a.

Three main Sunni Arab parties joined together to form one electoral list, under the leadership of the Iraqi Islamic Party. The Tawajfuq front was built on three pillars of Sunni support: The Islamic Party, Adnan al-Dulamim’s “Conference of the People of Iraq”, and a third group which represented former Iraqi Army and tribal elements.


The Sunni Provinces of Sahahadden and Anbar saw turnouts of 98 and 86 per cent respectively. The three Kurdish provinces boasted turnouts of 92 per cent in Dohuk, 95 per cent in Erbil and 84 per cent in Suleymania. The Shi’i provinces averaged a respectable 71 per cent. The election was the subject of close observation by international authorities.

51 There was much division among the UIA alliance, which manifested itself in a split vote: the SCIRI ended up with 23 percent of the vote. Al Da’awa help 20 percent and loyalists of Muqtada al-Sadr were the largest block with over 23 percent of the total.
ineffective in the previous government. In April the UIA replaced al-Jaafari with Nouri al-Malaki, a long-standing member of the Da’awa Party who proved to be acceptable to the majority. Shortly after forming his government al-Maliki announced the Prime Minister’s initiative for national reconciliation, and sought to include elements of the resistance into the political process. At the same time, he set about tackling the Shi'i militias, those of Badr and the Mahdi Army. He showed himself to be a competent leader and a wily politician.

The official political process outlined a hope-filled reality of democratic participation, constitution-making and government-building. Clearly, this was a delicate process of political work and ethnic-sectarian co-operation. The consensus-building involved required the shaping of political alliances amid much tension and violence, and the spectre of insurgency, terrorism and civil war lay in the background and tainted developments throughout the period.

5.6 THE INSURGENCY AND REBELLION IN IRAQ

Much was written about the insurgency in Iraq between 2003 and 2007 and I draw upon a variety of sources. Ahmed S. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, gives an account of the Insurgency from 2003 until 2005, its structural elements, its evolution and the origins and motives behind the insurgency. There is an excellent section on “Contending National identities”, in which he outlines the significant players among the Kurds and the Shi'i Arabs. The book concludes with an outline of “Ideology and Politics” and the possibility of rehabilitation and reconstruction in a state that has suffered occupation, violence and division. Malcolm W. Nance, *The Terrorists of Iraq, Inside*, is a private security contractor responsible for many security teams in Iraq. He outlines the array of elements that constituted the insurgency in Iraq at the time of the Occupation, from defeated Republican Guards to foreign terrorists. He identifies their evolution, strategy and tactics in the context of a terrorist war and military occupation. Mohammed M. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*, draws from intelligence papers and primary sources from insurgent groups, Hafez examines the history of suicide bombing in Iraq, offering

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theoretical perspectives on suicide bombing and the varied factions that comprise the insurgency. He explores the ideology and mythology underpinning and supporting suicide bombers, their national origins and their characteristics. Some of his theological insights with form the basis of reflection in a later chapter. Loretta Napoleoni in *Insurgent Iraq* presents an in-depth analysis of the making of Iraq’s most notorious insurgent, Abu Mos’ab al Zarqawi. Napoleoni also chronicles the evolution of Islamic extremism, and maps the growth of Arab disillusionment with official politics, and the parallel trajectories of Salafism and Wahhabism. She provides an contextualization of the issues and actors that have combined to create an insurgent Iraq as both an anti-imperialist struggle and a civil war. Jonathan Steele in *Defeat, Why They Lost Iraq* identifies the context of the Iraqi insurgency from 2003 until 2007. He introduces the principal actors in oppositional politics and their resistance to military occupation in the face of an impotent political process. He argues that the foreign policy establishments of Britain and the US failed to recognize what a post-Saddam Iraq would look like. In the context of an intensive sectarian conflict and civil war, he declares the US and British imperialist project in Iraq to have been an epic catastrophe. There are a number of journalistic accounts from within the insurgency of the suffering and humiliation suffered by the Iraqi population in the context of violence, terror and war.

I wish to outline the main elements of the insurgency, its Sunni formation and elements of Shi‘i rebellion. I will identify the main elements of the insurgency and the motives behind their actions, among both the Nationalist Ba‘athists and Jihadi Islamist groups. It is from the perspective of Shi‘i narrative of emancipation and empowerment that I present the Shi‘i insurgency as a counter-movement to the forces of oppression and occupation.

The first indication of Sunni resistance to the occupation occurred in Fallujah, where in 2003 demonstrations against the US presence culminated in outright rebellion against the occupation. There were still reports of a post-war resistance plan crafted by the Ba‘ath Party and of the stockpiling of arms in secret locations. It was however a group of Ba‘athi operatives, security agents, military officers, Fedayeen Saddam members and tribal leaders backed by criminal elements that formed the nucleus of the nationalist insurgency.

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Support for the insurgency was born out of revulsion at the invasion of the country by foreign armies and the feeling that Iraq and its integrity had been violated. The Sunni Arabs rejected the occupation in its entirety and refused to accept the changes that had been brought about in the political structure of the country. The policies of de-Ba'athification and the dissolution of the Iraqi armed forces only provided justification for further acts of resistance. There was a tremendous sense of loss and disempowerment, these contributed to a nationalist resistance. This was compounded by the lack of amenities and the growing insecurity within the country. The development of a counterinsurgency that was culturally insensitive and indiscriminate further alienated many Iraqis. Humiliation, killing and honour crimes in a tribal society served only to compound vengeance and hatred. Groups and factions coordinated their attacks and cooperated on the field of battle. By 2006, claims of responsibility for operations narrowed to about eight groups: the Islamic Army of Iraq, the Mujahidin Shura Council, the Ansar al-Sunna Group, the al-Rashidin Army, the 1920 Revolution Brigades of the Islamic Resistance Movement, the Salah al Din al-Ayoubi Brigades of the Islamic Front for Islamic Resistance, the Mujahidin Army in Iraq and the General Command of the Mujahidin of the Armed Forces. Insurgent groups were united in their objective of expelling coalition forces, but there were differences in their goals, some seeking reintegration in the political system, and others seeking the collapse of the political process. Insurgents were however united and ultimately held together by family and tribal loyalties and a commitment to an extreme form of Islamism.

The Kurds and the Shi'a conditionally tolerated the Coalition’s presence as occupiers-cum-liberators. The degree of their tolerance was determined by the extent to which their relative power had been enhanced through cooperation with the Coalition.

The rise of the Sadarist Movement as a potent force and major player in Iraqi politics contributed to the factional struggle for power within the Shi‘i community. The Sadarists’ stance was based on the patriotic rejection of the occupation the empowerment of the Shi‘i underclass in the predominately slum areas of Baghdad, which had recently been renamed “Sadr City”, and access to political power for “home-grown” Iraqi Shi‘i nationalists. In March 2003 Sadiq al Sadr’s surviving son Muqtada emerged as leader of the Sadr Movement. The CPA attempted to intimidate Muqtada into compliance, which precipitated a revolution across southern Iraq and the empowerment and radicalization of the Mahdi Army in its attempt to fight the Coalition forces in the open. The Mahdi Army
was not the only Shi‘i militia in operation within Iraq; The Badr Corps\textsuperscript{58} also operated as a sectarian militia. Associated with the SCIRI, it had been involved in ethnic cleansing campaign and death-squad activity against Sunni Arab forces and populations.

In addition to the evolving home-grown insurgency, there was a flow of foreign, mainly Arab Islamists into Iraq. There were the so-called Jihadi Salafi foreign fighters, commonly assumed to be members of Al-Qaeda. These typically represented an extreme form of Sunni Islamism that rejected democracy and Shi‘i rule. The two major groups within the Jihadi Salafi camp were the Mujahidin Shura Council and the Ansar al-Sunna Group. Their core cadres were composed of fighters connected to the second-generation jihadi who had trained in Afghan camps during the 1990s. The most extreme of the jihadi Salafi had been linked to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, head of Al-Qaeda in Iraq. These terrorists were seeking a total war that would transform Iraq into a base for extreme Islamists in their battle against American imperialism and Shi‘i domination. Thus in insurgent Iraq for the first time, the two modern interpretations of modern jihad – the revolutionary jihad that seeks to purify and cleanse Islam of its al-Rafidin (rejectionists) and the counter-crusade against western imperialism would merge into one bloody, ruthless campaign of murder, kidnapping, beheading and suicide bombing on a large scale.

The delicate weave of Iraq’s historic convivencia that (however brittle) had remained over centuries now began to unravel. The Salafi ascendancy among the Sunni Muslims was matched by an often aggressive assertion of Shi‘i consciousness. Sectarian violence would be added to the war of resistance against a foreign occupier.

There were many significant moments throughout the insurgency that identify the depth of suffering endured by Iraqis during this period: the destruction of Fallujah, the murder of Abd al-Majid al-Khoei and Ayatollah Baqir al-Hakim, the Tragedy on the Bridge of the Imams\textsuperscript{59} and the destruction of the Shrine at Samarra. On 22 February 2006, a suicide bomber struck the ancient shrine at Samarra. Shi‘i militants were outraged by the attack on a symbol sacred to their religion, and struck out on a campaign of retribution that destroyed dozens of Sunni Mosques. Hundreds were killed, and many feared that civil war had erupted at last. A United Nations report affirmed that more than 34,000 Iraqi civilians


\textsuperscript{59} On 31 August 2005, Shi‘i pilgrims converged on the Bridge of Imams connecting the ‘Adhamiyya district of Baghdad with Kadhimain. The bridge became crammed with people. Panic and pandemonium ensued as rumours spread that a suicide bomber was in their midst. In the resulting crush, more than one thousand people were killed.
had been “violently killed” in 2006 alone. Similarly, sectarian violence was blamed for the displacement of over 2.3 million Iraqis who had fled their homes by the end of 2006. In December of that year, the bipartisan Iraq Study Group led by James A. Baker and Lee H. Hamilton had concluded that

The situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating ... Violence is increasing in scope and lethality. It is fed by a Sunni Arab Insurgency, Shiite militias and death squads, al Qaeda and widespread criminality. Sectarian conflict is the principal challenge to stability ... If the situation continues to deteriorate, the consequences could severe. A slide towards chaos could trigger the collapse of Iraq’s government and a humanitarian catastrophe.

Throughout 2006 and 2007, US officials and Iraqi leaders tried desperately to steer the country away from civil strife. The Maliki government showed resolve in going after Shi‘i militia with the increasingly capable Iraqi security forces, a move that many Shi‘a welcomed, albeit with some regret, as militias in the South were countered and disbanded.

General David Petraeus entered Iraq complete with presidential endorsement and an order to surge military forces. Central to the new offensive was to undercut the extreme violence of Salafi Al Qaeda by supporting Sunni sheikhs and tribesmen in a policy of Awakening. On the other side of the sectarian divide, Muqtada al-Sadr announced a six-month truce by his Mahdi Army in August 2007, which lead to a sharp drop in sectarian violence.

The majority of Iraqis are the silent victims of the destruction that their country has become. Despite this violence, Iraqi people are struggling to rebuild their country’s social and cultural institutions, and there are numerous signs of hope and change that reform from

62 The Arab Sunni Awakening (Sahwa –Sons of Iraq) was a product of the internal divisions within the Arab Sunni. Empowered and employed to turn their back on al Qaeda, foreign jihadi fighters and other insurgent groups, Sunni leaders joined with Coalition forces to defeat terrorists in Sunni regions. The Awakening groups spread to eight provinces with a total strength reaching one-hundred thousand by the fall of 2008.

the bottom up can overcome the corruption in the political system, sectarian strife and the ethical divisions that have been at the heart of the political process since 2003.

5.7 SHI‘I LEADERSHIP AND THEIR SUPPORTERS IN A WAR-TORN IRAQ

At this stage the narrative is brought up to date by introducing the significant Shi‘i religious leaders who emerged during the period of occupation, Ayatollah 'Ali Sistani and Muqtada al Sadr.

5.7.1 Ayatollah 'Ali Sistani

Following the period of British rule in Iraq at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was commonplace among the Shi‘a to believe that by failing to cooperate with the British mandate authorities and by rebelling against the occupation on nationalistic and patriotic grounds, they had effectively handed over the government of Iraq to the Sunni Arabs. On this occasion of occupation by the Coalition military in 2003, the Shi‘i interlocutors and the Najaf Marji‘iyya were determined that the Shi‘a would not confront the Coalition forces and would not lose an opportunity to rule. Their stance was pragmatic and not collaborative. The thinking and the loyalty among the Shi‘i leadership was dominated by Ayatollah 'Ali Sistani.

Sistani was born in Mashhad, Iran in August 1930. He came from a long line of religious notables. His grandfather, Sayyid 'Ali was a renowned scholar and had studied jurisprudence at Najaf. His forefather Sayyid Mohammad was appointed Sheikh ul-Islam (Leading Authority of Islam) by King Hussein in the Sistan province during the Safavid period. 'Ali Sistani began his religious training in Mashhad, moving on to study at the Shi‘i holy city of Qom in 1949. In 1951 he travelled to Najaf and studied there under the late Grand Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim al-Kho‘ei and Sheikh Hussein al-Hilli. He was marked by al Kho‘ei as a worthy successor. Sistani rose in religious rank to be named a Marja in 1960. At the young age of 31, Sistani reached the level of academic accomplishment called Ijtihad. He was acknowledged as having experience in the specialist religious science of 'Ilm al-Rijal – the biographies of narrators or religious traditions and sayings. When


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Kho’ei died in 1992, Sistani ascended to the rank of Grand Ayatollah through the established method of peer recognition of his scholarship. With the death of Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeq al Sadr, Sistani emerged as the pre-eminent Shi’i cleric in Iraq. He has a substantial following among Shi’a throughout the whole world, as he is the current Nayb-I Imam (Pre-eminent Marja) of the Twelver Sect.

Sistani’s association with Ayatollah al-Kho’ei, his avoidance of political agency under Saddam and his prolonged house arrest caused many to misunderstand his political philosophy. Many linked Sistani to the quietest tradition in Shi’i Islam.

Sistani emerges as one who is deeply concerned with the role of Islam in state and society. He was certainly not a proponent of the detached Marji’iyya, indifferent to the state and worldly power, nor was he a narrowly sectarian religious leader. The idea was that the Marji’iyya had to be democratic though not sectarian. The most important sociopolitical and jurisprudential innovation in recent times was the promotion of the doctrine of Wilayat at Faqih (Guardianship of the Jurisprudent) by Ayatollah Khomeini as the theoretical underpinning of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Sistani stood between the two poles in modern Shi’i religious politics: the apolitical strain exemplified by Ayatollah al-Kho’ei, and the interventionist strain associated with Ayatollah Khomeini. Sistani was concerned with the corrupting effects of politics on the reputation and authority of the ulema.

Sistani was deeply committed to democratic principles. He was well aware of political discussions with regard to democratic process in the West. His political philosophy and jurisprudential thinking could be considered as Wilayat al-Umma, (Guardianship of the People) reflecting the thinking of Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr. In this framework, democracy is not an end itself but a process by which the scaffolding of the Islamic state can be erected. In the absence of the twelfth Imam, Sistani, like al Sadr, argued that the practical application of the khilafa (governance) required the establishment of a democratic system whereby the people regularly elect their representatives in government. Al Sadr says that “Islamic theory rejects monarchy as well as the various

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One of the reasons for prevailing quietism among the Iraqi Shi’i clergy could be seen as a result of the fear of repression from the military regimes, particularly the Ba’ath Party under Saddam. However the actual roots for quietism among the leading Shi’i clerics of Iraq and Iran are much deeper. Marcinkowski focuses on the understanding of taqiyyah, which can be translated as “prudent dissimulation in times of fear” which has an established role in early Islamic theology and practise, especially among the Shi’a.
forms of dictatorial government; it also rejects the aristocratic regimes and proposes a form of government, which contains all the positive aspects of the democratic system.\textsuperscript{66}

With this being the case the state would have to acknowledge the involvement of the Marji‘iyya in all critical matters, even though this institution is not enshrined within the Constitution. In the same way the state is committed through the Marji‘iyya to implementing democratic processes that are transparent and accountable within electoral selection and constitutional formational processes.

With the arrival of Coalition forces and the formation of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), Sistani issued a number of fatwa calling for an end to looting and revenge killing, and he initiated a policy of non-violence towards Coalition forces. His constant political goal had been simple and consistent: democracy as quickly as possible. Juan Cole said of him: “He wants elections, he wants them ASAP, and until he gets them, he feels that Iraqis are living under an illegal government.”\textsuperscript{67} Coalition officials, however, tried repeatedly to bypass his demands, citing the lack of security and inadequate time to organize free and fair elections. The CPA had thought that it had won Sistani’s support for its plans to write a constitution for Iraq. Sistani’s fatwa\textsuperscript{68} on 26 June clearly stated that a

\textsuperscript{66} “A preliminary jurisprudence basis of the Islamic Republic” quoted in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammad_Baqir_al-Sadr_Political_Philosophy:_Wiliayat_Al-Umma This website was viewed on the 10\textsuperscript{th} November 2006.


\textsuperscript{68} Question address to Grand Ayatollah ‘Ali al-Sistani by a group of his followers on 20 June 2003.

The Occupation Authorities in Iraq have stated that they have decided to form a council that would write the new Iraqi constitution; and that they will appoint members to this council in consultation with political and social groups in the country; after which the constitution that will be drafted by this council will be presented for approval by a referendum. Could you inform us of the religious ruling on this project and what believers ought to do regarding the matter in which the new Iraqi constitution is to be drawn?”


“Those forces have no jurisdiction whatsoever to appoint members of the Constitution preparation assembly. Also there is no guarantee either that the assembly will prepare a constitution that serves the best interests of the Iraqi people of that it expresses their national identity whose backbone is sound Islamic religion and noble social values. The said plan is unacceptable from the outset. First of all there must be a general election so that every Iraqi citizen who is eligible to vote can choose someone to represent him in a foundational Constitution preparation assembly. Then the drafted Constitution can be put to a referendum.
constitution could only be written by an elected representative body and he would demand nothing less. This fatwa brought him directly into the emerging political process and elevated his status to that of the “most influential statesman” in Iraq. When it was agreed that there should be an interim legislative body, he restated that such a body also had to be elected.\(^6^9\) He succeeded in forcing the Bush administration to give the United Nations a greater role in Iraq’s reconstruction, and ensured that Iraqi Shi’i political power would be cemented by transparent democratic selection.

Sistani was consistent in calling for tolerance among Muslims in the face of a growing insurgency. He asked that there be no retaliation among the Shi’a for the terror atrocities committed against them and remained ecumenical in his dealing with Sunni communities despite growing instability and violence. Even after the bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque in Samarra in February 2006, Sistani, through his network of clerics, continued to preach tolerance and told his fellow Shi’a that “it was not their Sunni neighbours who were killing them but foreign ‘Wahhabis’.”\(^7^0\) Sistani demanded of sitting politicians that they behave responsibly and transparently without any hint of corruption or nepotism. He decried the use of militia, death squads and terror groups that promoted disunity, hatred and violence. With regard to future elections, Sistani issued edicts and rulings that provided Iraqi Shi’a with religious backing for participating in the January 2005 elections. He allowed his name to be used in the creation of the Shi’i list, which greatly assisted the religious parties in coalition with their recognition and eventual victory. He urged women to vote as a religious responsibility and told followers that they should realize that this is an “important matter” for all Iraqis. He said of women who vote on election day, “Truly, women who go forth to the polling centers on election day are like Zaynab, who went forth to Karbala.”\(^7^1\) In subsequent elections Sistani stayed outside the political process and did not give his backing to any specific group, allowing for a democratic process that was not a simple ethnocracy to emerge.

This pulling together of religious themes and political realities was a major achievement in religious Islam. Sistani stands as one steeped in the dialogue between Islam, democracy and human rights. He challenged Coalition powers about their motives in government and the values they expressed in occupation and invasion in not creating an

\[\text{All believers must insist on the accomplishment of this crucial matter and contribute to achieving it in the best way possible.}^\]


Iraqi government that is democratic enough. Yet Sistani was able to act impartially and act outside of the electoral process once the process of government had begun. He is regarded by many Shi’i as a most revolutionary Marja: decisive where necessary but tolerant, creative and ecumenical throughout. His international status and his religious following are indicative of his unique intellect and faith.

One of the greatest challenges to Sistani’s authority and standing within the Shi’i community came from within the Sadarist Movement, and particularly from Muqtada al-Sadr. Al Sadr had access to considerable public and popular support build up over the years of opposition to Saddam by his Al Sadr family members. Al Sadr presented a populist threat to the political process and to Coalition forces. He also presented the Mahdi Army as a violent opposition to a growing Sunni insurgency. Yet Sistani was capable of negotiating a peaceful solution to a dangerous and potentially destructive co-religionist.

5.7.2 Muqtada al Sadr and the Empowerment of Iraqi Shi’i

Muqtada al-Sadr is the fourth son of the late Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Sadeq al-Sadr also known as Sadr II and the son-in-law of the Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr. He was born in August 1973. He was just 25 years old when his brothers and his father were assassinated. He is a cousin of the disappeared Musa al-Sadr, the Iranian-Lebanese founder of the popular Amal Movement. The Sadr family contributed much to the empowerment of the Shi’a within Iraq and has paid a high price for this role. Defiant towards the Ba’athist regime, Sadr II preached against dictatorship and the corruption of the state under Saddam. From his base in Kufa, he succeeded in establishing a network of support and resistance, an act for which he and two of his sons were assassinated by Saddam. Following their deaths, Muqtada adopted a low profile, continuing his theological

72 Patrick Cockburn has written extensively about Muqtada al-Sadr. In this section In my narrative about al-Sadr I draw upon this book, Muqtada al-Sadr and the Fall of Iraq, Faber and Faber, London, 2008.

Cockburn as a war correspondent has been reporting from Iraq since 1977. His narrative combines first-hand account of his investigations with a vivid analysis of the realities within Iraqi society. His account of Muqtada al-Sadr recounts the legacy of Sadr II and the Sadr family under the Saddam regime. He speaks of the appeal of Muqtada within Baghdad especially in the Shi’i slum of Sadr City, and his emergence to prominence following the American occupation. Cockburn charts the rise of al-Sadr from firebrand cleric, to leader of the Mahdi Army to representative politician and religious leader.

There are other accounts that refer to the background and development of al Sadr including the following section from in the book by Pelhan.

studies. He studied alongside Mahmoud Hassan al-Sarki, Sayyid Hassan Husseini and Qassem Al-Ta‘i. Muqtada entered the *hawza* in 1988 but did not reach the status of *mujtahid*. Now Muqtada relies on the religious direction of Ayatollah Kazem al-Haeri in Iran, and points to him as his mentor and guide.

Following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Muqtada, building on his father’s network of charities and social services, shot to popularity, particularly among those Shi’a living in Sadr City. Pulling together a network of support and resistance among local *hussaniyahs*, Al Sadr voiced a critical opposition to the Coalition and established a grassroots resistance group named the Sadarist Movement, with its own militia known as *Jaysh al Mahdi* or the Mahdi Army. Within a short time he succeeded in asserting his authority over swathes of Iraq Shi‘a opposed to occupation and the Coalition, despite the fact that there were Shi‘i groups, notably the SCIRI, who were in dialogue with the Coalition. There were painful divisions within the Shi‘a between those who looked towards Tehran for support and direction as opposed to those who regarded themselves free of Iranian influence.

The supporters of Al Sadr were implicated in the murder of Sayyid Majid al Kho‘ei, and the legacy of this terrible tragedy was to damage Sadr’s relationship with the Coalition. The implication in the murder of al Kho‘ei caused Al Sadr to be more distanced from moderate voices within Iraq; it also led to a deterioration in his relationship with the CPA.

Al Sadr was in a position to exploit the populist resistance to occupation and the government of exiles that had been formed under the Coalition’s tutelage. In his sermons and public interviews, he repeatedly called for an immediate withdrawal of US-led Coalition troops and the establishment of a new central government, not connected to the Ba‘ath party or the present government. In September 2003 he declared a shadow government, in opposition to the Iraqi Government Council established by the Coalition. During the first siege of Fallujah in April 2004, Muqtada’s Sadarists sent aid convoys to the besieged Sunnis there, exhibiting a pan-Muslim opposition to occupation, with “No to dictatorship, no to occupation, down with America, down with Israel” their constant refrain, echoing the calls of Sadr II.

Bremer and the CPA chose to confront the Sadarist movement in March 2004 with the closing down of the *al-Hawza* newspaper and the arrest of Muqtada’s senior aide.

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Mustafa al-Yaqubi. The resulting violence and opposition throughout Baghdad, Najaf and southern Iraq threatened the stability of the state in the process elevated Muqtada to greater popularity. Later in the year, Coalition forces tried to dislodge Muqtada and his supporters from Najaf, from where they were leading their opposition and confrontation. The Mahdi army was heavily outnumbered by some 2,000 US marines and 1,800 Iraqi government forces, and outgunned by superior US firepower. The Mahdi resistance is thought to have suffered hundreds of casualties in the fighting. It was only the skilful and timely intervention by Ayatollah Sistani that enabled a ceasefire to be brokered between Sadr and the CPA. Sistani succeeded in showing his authority over the Iraqi Shi’a, which neither the Interim Government in Baghdad nor the Bush administration in Washington dared confront. Muqtada was forced to defer to Sistani, and could no longer denounce the “passivity” of this marji’yya Sistani which had saved Sadr from extinction.

Following a period of seclusion, Muqtada adopted a new political approach. He replaced military with political action. The Shi’i parties agreed to form an electoral coalition called the United Iraqi Alliance in December 2004. The Sadarists won 32 out of 275 seats in the December 2004 election, which placed themselves in the position of kingmaker within parliamentary politics. Yet many in the Mahdi Army were unhappy about Muqtada’s turn towards constitutional politics. Hatred for the US occupation ran deep among the militiamen, and although the Sadarist movement was predominately Iraqi nationalist, Iranian influences were not keen to see stability growing and their power diminishing in a changing Iraq.

Muqtada maintained a united stance with Sunni elements in opposition to Coalition and occupation, but the Mahdi Army and Shi’i militia were intolerant, puritanical and repressive in many respects. Death squads carried out ethnic cleansing and retaliation on a regular basis. In September 2006 alone 3,539 Iraqi security forces and civilians were killed. The inability of Muqtada to control the Mahdi Army and the Shi’i militants did much to contribute to sectarian tension and division within the country.

Washington never deviated from its deep hostility to Muqtada. In January 2007 President Bush announced that he was sending over 20,000 US troops as reinforcements, and gave priority to regaining control over Baghdad. It was a clear signal that the Iraqi government, in coalition with American troops, was determined to curb the power of the Mahdi Army. With less control over the Mahdi Army, which was now riven with factions

and disunity, Muqtada sought initially to comply with the Government of Nouri al-Maliki. In support of the Government he gave the prime minister a list of 450 names to be arrested because they were criminals, but later he withdrew his ministers from Government. This withdrew from the Government much of its popular support, but succeeded in appeasing American fears of bowing to radicals masquerading as politicians.

Muqtada spoke of four armies preparing to attack him: the Americans, the Kurds, Iyad Allawi’s forces and a shadow army of Iraqis under US control. However it was the Badr Organization, the military wing of the SIIC (previously the SCIRI) that was the traditional rival of the Sadarists as the political voice of the Shi’a in Iraq. There had been persistent intra-Shi’i clashes over southern Iraq between the Badr-controlled government forces and the Mahdi Army. In Basra, where the British were withdrawing, there was a complex three-cornered fight between the SIIC, Fadhila and the Sadarists. There were bloody clashes in Nasiriyah, Diwaniyah, Kut, Najaf and other Shi’i cities and towns. The Sadarist–SIIC violence culminated in the end of August in Karbala. By the time the fighting ended, 51 people had been killed and hundreds injured. Muqtada responded by freezing all actions of the Mahdi Army for six months, declared a ceasefire and closed down Sadarist offices.

Muqtada returned to Qom to continue with his religious studies. His Sadarist group has been integrated into the political process of government-making and has exercised considerable power in key ministerial positions. This Sadarist party however has been unstable and unreliable as a political partner in a system that is dependent upon alliances, coalition and compromise. In the elections in 2010 the Sadr Party gained 40 seats, giving it considerable leverage in a future government, but it remains to be seen if it can square its opposition with the occupation while participating meaningfully in democratic representative procedures.

Muqtada assumed the mantle of his father Sadr II and the Sadr name. His Shi’i credentials are aligned with Iraqi patriotism, nationalistic independence, Muslim identity and the support of a large underclass that has experienced all the trauma of dictatorship, oppression, war and occupation. Many in Shi’i Iraq are opposed to American intervention in their country. Others are opposed to the form of government that is only representative in name, lacking in participation and relevancy outside the Green Zone. Many Iraqis are disillusioned about the state of corruption, mismanagement of funds and the betrayal of confidence evident in Government, the security forces and the economy. Others Iraqis are dissatisfied at the ethnic disintegration of their country, and believe that the Kurds exercise disproportionate control and access to resources while many languish in poverty. The
violent insurgency has brought ethnic cleansing, revenge killing, suffering and death to Iraqi homes and communities. Muqtada probably represented his constituency of millions of poor Shi’a better than anyone else could have done, but he never wholly controlled his own movement. His attempts at reconciliation with Sunni groups failed to yield results as long as violent militia groups continued their deadly extermination under the guise of the Mahdi Army.

With growing political skill and political maturity, the Sadarist block in government may find the fruits of their aspirations, for a peaceful Iraq and a strong political alliance among the Shi’a. Cooperation with Coalition forces as they draw down their number may be the necessary price to pay for future security and a peaceful, united Iraq.

The Sadarist block among the Shi’a in Iraq is also reflected among those Shi’a living in exile. They represent a more confrontational alliance among Shi’a in their relationship with the west, critical of American foreign policy, colonial history and imperial intervention in the Middle East. This narrative of confrontation with the west among Iraq Shi’a is not the most dominant as many Shi’a in the west seek collaboration with western allies and governments. It does represent a strong Arab nationalist tendency that finds particular expression among radical Islamist groups. While all Iraqi Shi’a respect and admire the Sadr family and its place in Iraqi history, there is a divergence among Shi’a as to how to develop narratives of empowerment and emancipation through dialogue, political participation and leadership with integrity.

Conclusion

The events from 2003 until 2009 were among the most devastating in Iraqi history. The country, ruined by sanctions and dictatorship in previous years, faced the full force of America and Coalition military might. In an operation of Shock and Awe, that was designed to overwhelm and intimidate any opposition, Iraq was bombed into a condition that left it without leadership, without government, without institutions and without basic services. The military occupation that immediately followed did little to preserve security or the rule of law. This led to a breakdown in society, to lawlessness, anarchy and terror. Far from embracing foreign fighters as liberators, the Iraqi public retreated to the support of religious, ethnic and tribal concerns to rebuild their lives and their state.

The political process that followed, instituted mainly by Paul Bremer, was imperialist and colonialist. Great mistakes were made, there was no accommodation made for many who had operated with the Ba’athist government or army who could play a
valuable role in the reformation of the state and, therefore, chances to avert catastrophe were missed.

The Shi’a within and outside Iraq have played an intrinsic role in the developments that have taken place and have led to the near normalization of affairs within the country in 2009. From the start and with the assistance of those in exile, Iraqi Shi’a recognized their majority status and the possibility of exercising substantial power within a democratic government. These democratic aspirations were encouraged by the religious leadership and by those living in exile, who recognized the possibilities that could unfold in a future state, free of tyranny and dictatorship.

The possibility that democracy could be supported and encouraged by Shi’i religious authorities is significant in Islam and Islamic Arab society. That a state constitution, which in essence supported religious tolerance and pluralism, was supported by Shi’i religious authorities in Iraq and in exile is a significant development within the Islamic world. That the Shi’a saw in American and Coalition occupation an opportunity to work with and develop western ideas and values, despite a violent insurgency, meant that Shi’i leaders and faithful were able to look beyond the demand of religion and ally themselves with religiously and politically “Others” in an effort to promote democratic government, transparent and accountable leadership and a free and fair society.

It is true that the War in Iraq has become the War of Spin, with many political groups in the US and the UK claiming that it was an exercise in ridding the world of dictatorship, tyranny and terror. Obviously a great number of people have lost their lives, there has been a mass forced migration within Iraq, there has been untold suffering due to sectarian violence and terror networks have grown stronger. Yet there has been political change and despite the will of its nearest neighbours, Iraq moves closer to a freer society. Discussions among Shi’i exiles in 2009 revolve around, preserving democracy, encouraging greater transparency, civic society and economic development. This is an interpretation of narratives, a dramatic dialogue and an internal movement from a Clash of Civilizations to the Dialogue of Civilizations with an entire community. Two worlds brought together through war now negotiate the way to form viable and accountable security forces, transformative and transparent leadership in government through inclusion and dialogue, economic participation that sees all benefiting from natural resources and an education system that is founded on religious values of equality, dignity and inclusion.

The Iraqi Shi’a living in England and Ireland have witnessed the transformation of their country one step removed from the tragedy, violence and extremism. The narrative that I have expressed as a narrative of empowerment and transition, it their interpreted
narrative, validated in conversations and in dialogue others in the west. Iraq has experienced in a relatively short time an enormous transition and challenge. Iraqi Shi‘a have played a central role in this transition, from dictatorship to state re-building and to the foundation of a national government. The voices of Iraqi Shi‘a living in the UK and Ireland have contributed to the changes that have taken place in Iraq and to the thinking that goes with political process and participation. There has been a constant flow of information and ideas among family members, religious associates, intellectuals and interested parties. Iraqi communities in Europe have interpreted developments that have taken place in Iraq and society in Iraq in a post conflict situation. They see efforts at the formation of government and democratic structures in Iraq, through their interpreted experience of democracy and government in the West. Iraqi Shi‘a in the West discuss the emergence of democracy, elections and national government in the context of globalization and the creation of a new Iraq. This has been their constant preoccupation, the content of their sermons and their conversations. It is to the challenge, as presented in the sermons of Iraqi Shi‘a in the west and that I turn in the next chapter.
CHAPTER VI SHI‘I SERMONS AND NARRATIVES

Introduction

Thus far we have examined the political context that framed much of the popular discussion within the Iraqi Shi‘i community from 2003 until 2008. The context of war and occupation was the backdrop to all conversations and sermons. I now wish to examine the narratives that emerged from within the community as it reflected on the reality of war, occupation and community building. I do this through examining some of the themes that emerged in the preaching within the community. By and large those preaching the sermons within the community sought to address the concerns and spiritual needs of the community which were many and diverse. I have chosen nine sermons that best identify the narratives concerning life within the community during that period.

In September 2003 I first visited Hussein House, the Shi‘i Community Cultural Centre at Milltown, Dublin. This was the beginning of my project and an opportunity to introduce myself to the community and build a relationship that could develop into a viable research project. I developed my research through attending Saturday night prayer services and by interviewing members of the community at regular intervals about issues that were of concern to them in the context of exile and the current occupation of Iraq. In the process of my research I attended many sermons that were delivered over the period 2004-2010 and recorded many of them for reflection and analysis.

In this chapter, I present nine sermons as the qualitative data of my reflection for analysis. These are representative of sermons that are preached throughout the years and many themes are repeated in the annual ritual cycle. I have picked these sermons because they were delivered in English and they reflect diverse themes of interest to the research project.

There has been much research done on Islamic preaching. Richard T. Antoun has documented the Friday congregational sermon delivered in the mosque by the Muslim preacher in rural Jordan and Amman.1 He seeks to demonstrate the scope of the Islamic corpus (beliefs, ethics, rituals), its flexibility with respect to social and political issues and its capacity for interpretation. Antoun’s student Patrick Gaffney, examines the practise of

mosque preaching in Minya, Upper Egypt. His field work took place in the period 1977-79. This time period to a period of much social and political unrest in the Middle East and Egypt in particular. In his book he looks at the ways these social and political concerns (particularly the growth of the Islamism movement in Minya and Assiut) impacted upon the religious landscape of Muslim communities and their preachers. Antoun and Gaffney suggest that the Islamic preacher’s authority rests in an act of mediation between the political and the religious. Antoun highlights the preacher’s importance as a “culture broker” whose job it is to reconcile “great” and “little” traditions, acting as an interpreter of “the relationship of popular religion to the religion of the specialists.” Preachers, Antoun writes are “key figures who must accept, reject, reinterpret, or accommodate the diversity of local customs with the ordinances of the religion, be they ritual, ethical, legal or theological.” In my analysis of each sermon I focus on the role of the preacher to interpret religious narratives as meaningful and meaning giving to the social and political reality of the local congregation.

Charles Hirschkind has researched cassette sermon listening in Cairo using an anthropological perspective. For over thirty years the circulation of cassette media has nourished the sensory knowledge of mainly the young, middle and lower-classes residents of Cairo. Cassette sermon listening has created an Islamic counter-point that debates and argues the complexities of devout, pious and ethical traditions as they confront increasingly secular perspectives. For Hirschkind, the Islamic revival in Cairo takes place and is interpreted in the context of this counter point of popular religion.

I have adopted the methodology of sermon analysis as employed by Toby M. Howarth in his reflections on preaching among the minority Shi’a in India. Howarth presents the text of ten sermons preached in Hyderabad among the minority Shi’a. He also presents an analysis of each sermon, identifying the context of the preaching and the themes expressed in the sermon as they relate to the local community. He concludes his

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analysis by presenting emerging themes from the sermons that are relevant for further
discussion. There are parallels between the religious content of the sermons collected by
Howarth and those I wish to present from among Iraqi Shi‘a in Ireland and London. For
this reason I find the methodology employed by Howarth most appropriate for my work.

In this work each sermon is presented, (although some are excerpts from larger
sermons) and followed by an analysis. The analysis reflects the discussion and interviews
that I encountered in the community through the research period. It is not meant to be
reflective of the intellectual and written academic discourse that is reflected in previous
and subsequent chapters but is, instead, a more qualitative “recounting of narratives” that
emerged in dialogue with Shi‘i Muslims in exile. I draw parallels between the reflection in
previous chapters and those presented in the sermons.

6.1 PREACHING IN SHI‘I ISLAM

Oratory in Arabian tribal culture was a highly developed and much valued skill
during the pre-Islamic period (Jahiliyya, Age of Ignorance). Among the nobles of the
tribe’s leadership would be a khatib, who would function as the tribe’s voice. The Prophet
Muhammad was an accomplished preacher. A preacher is described as a khatib, while the
sermon itself is the khutba. From the early Muslim period preaching was an integral part
of the Friday congregational prayers. Among the Shi‘a the term imam, can likewise denote
a preacher who leads the Friday congregational prayers.

Mourning sermons that commemorated the death of ‘Ali’s son, Hussein, took place
when the family of Hussein mourned his death in Damascus and have continued ever
since. Over the centuries that followed, remembrance gatherings for Karbala, known as
majalis al-ta’zia (gathering for consolation), became a distinctive Shi‘i practice. They are
described by Nakash as the “oldest vehicle of creating and transmitting the memory of
Karbala”.

These rituals stand in direct continuity with the earliest funeral
commemorations that took place following the tragedy of Karbala itself. In the period
following the Battle of Karbala during the Umayyad dynasty (41/661-132/750) and under
the ‘Abbasid who displaced them (132/750-656/1258) Shi‘i majlis were mostly banned. By
the ninth century the position of professional mourner has been established; it was this
person’s responsibility to chant elegies, recount the sufferings of the Karbala martyrs and

8 Ibid., p.31.
read the martyrdom narratives (maqatil). The latter were called “readers for Hussein”, Qurra al-Hussein. After the decline of the Hamdanids in Syria, the Buyids in Baghdad and the Ismaili Fatimid in Egypt (358/969-567/1171), Shi‘i power in the Muslim world waned considerably and it is difficult if not impossible to assess the exact strength of the Shi’a and of the effectiveness of their ritual and preaching practices.

This history is reflected in the Shi‘i communities here under research, for there emerged different preaching traditions that reflect the needs of the diverse situations. The Iraqi Shi‘i community of Abrar House, Edgware Road, London, gather on Thursday evenings to share in sermons, dialogue and majlis, which are followed by prayer and a communal meal. Dar al Islam, Wilsden Green and the Al Kho‘ei Foundation, being communities of large numerical strength (over 2,000 members) and with numbers of over one thousand worshipers, gather for Friday ritual and prayers each week. Those at the Hussania in Dublin gather on Saturday evenings for prayer, preaching and common meal and do not have a significant gathering at Friday midday.¹⁰

Preachers with the Iraqi Shi‘i exile community, whether in London or Ireland, are ulama or trained religious leaders. For instance, the Imam living in Dublin and to whom I owe a great deal, is Dr. ‘Ali al Saleh (known as Abu Hassan), and he was trained in Qom. He has travelled extensively, preaching in Europe, the Middle East and America. I have collected and transcribed 58 sermons¹¹ that were preached in Dublin and London between April 2006 and September 2008. The sermons that were preached in Dar al Islam, London, took place during the Ashura period of 2008. The preaching is supplemented with 6 extensive interviews, 3 in London and 3 in Dublin among Shi‘i ulama and Shi‘i community leaders. Preachers are expected to have a good command of the narratives of early Shi‘i history, knowledge of the important Shi‘i traditions and their significance and knowledge of the Qur’an. For preaching during the season of Muharram a good command of the Karbala narrative is essential. A preacher must be able to communicate, fluently and without notes for a considerable length of time. He is also judged on his ability to move

¹⁰ There is considerable movement between each of these communities, including the sharing of preachers, travel between centres and sharing of information on a regular basis. The Irish community is much smaller numerically but has its own full-time Imam who has served the London community as preacher for considerable periods during 2006-2007. Common themes and codes emerge among the sermons and in interviews among members. Between the Shi‘i schools there was the question whether the Friday congregational prayers could be held in the absence of the visible Imam. Against the Akhbari school, Usuli scholars argue that the holding of and attendance at Friday Prayers is necessary and obligatory.

¹¹ Some of these are given in summary form.
people to tears. Gaffney presents a threefold typology that identifies the essential characteristics of a preacher. They are the preacher as a Saint, the preacher as a Scholar and the preacher as a Warrior. This reflects the preacher's own personal piety, his training and ability to communicate and his zeal to mobilize his community to face the world. All of these qualities are necessary for Shi'i preachers to be held in esteem within the communities.

Throughout the year the preaching reflects the cycle of feasts and celebrations in the Shi'i calendar. This corresponds mainly to the celebrations of the birthdays and the remembrance of the martyrdom of the members of the Ahul Bayt. Many of these events are mourning events, although it would be wrong to assume the Shi'i communities spend their whole time in mourning.

The first and most intensive period of mourning comprises the first ten days of the month of Muharram, leading up to the climax of the day of Ashura. During this period there are series of majalis, held in private homes, within the Hussania at Mosques and meeting houses. The first nine days of Muharram make up the most intense period of mourning of the entire year. Many Shi'a take their holidays at this time of the year in order to participate in the commemorations. On each of the first days of Muharram a particular person or event in the Karbala narrative is especially remembered at majalis. The calendar is part of the larger “liturgical calendar” of the year and generally the preacher will return to the character or event special to that day in the last part of the sermon known as the masaib. In general, then, there is a special mourning calendar, which is followed in preaching (and poetry).

The climax of the ten days and indeed of the whole mourning season is the day of Ashura, the anniversary of the Battle of Karbala. The whole community gathers to remember and mourn the battle of Karbala and the death of Imam Hussein. There is an intense preaching and matam. This is not a fasting day and the community gathers to share in a common meal after the majalis. The day concludes with a procession in London that takes the form of a public parade from Marble Arch to Kensington.

After the Muharram mourning period is over, majalis are not held with the same intensity. On the day of Arbain which is forty days after Ashura there is a special majalis for Iraqi Shi'a as the commemorate the death of Imam Hussein in solidarity with those

13 The Shi'i Annual Calander of Ritual celebrations is included in Appendix I.
14 The Ritual calander of the first ten days of Muharram is included as Appendix II.
thousands of pilgrims gathering in Karbala and Najaf. The days surrounding the death of ‘Ali are particularly important for Shi’a. The three days of mourning for the martyrdom of ‘Ali begin on the anniversary of his wounding and culminate on the third day afterwards when he finally died, 21 Ramadan. The anniversary of ‘Ali’s martyrdom coincides with the commemoration of Shab-e Qadr, the Night of Power, when it is believed that the Qur’an was received by Muhammad.

It must also be remembered that for all Muslims the month of Ramadan is of special importance as an opportunity to renew bonds of faith with community, family and with the Divine. During this fasting month, there is special dedication to reciting the Qur’an and to daily prayer with family members and in community. The emphasis is not on mourning.

Also there are many days when the community is not in mourning. The days surrounding the birthday of ‘Ali and the birthday of the Twelfth Imam, for instance, are particularly festive occasions. Wedding ceremonies are festive, too, and are occasions to reflect upon the role of marriage and women in society. Fatima and Zaynab are presented as role models of loyalty, faithfulness, piety and leadership to young women in the community as they face into married life. Marriage is extolled as the “half of Islam” and the necessary way of life for any devout Muslim. Such occasions are festive, joyful and celebratory.

6.2 SERMONS AMONG IRAQI SHI‘I EXILES.

In this part of the study I present nine sermons recorded between November 2006 and March 2008. The sermons are presented in chronological form. Each is presented with a heading, an introduction and analysis. The sermon texts are divided into numbered paragraphs for clarity and to identify the sermon material more clearly. The criterion that I used in selecting the sermon-texts was that they should together make up a representative sample of contemporary Iraqi Shi‘i preaching in exile within the period of the Iraqi War 2004-2010. They present the various themes under discussion at this time among this specific community and their worldview as it was emerging at this time. Concerns vary from the ritual and the symbolic to the theological, social, sectarian and political.

The sermon texts presented here are originally ‘live’ and unscripted material preached in a combination of English and Arabic. Therefore, these texts must be judged in a different manner from that where a speaker has the opportunity to polish his presentations for publication. There is a rich body of Qur’anic, hadith and narrative material from which preachers have drawn their sermons and only rarely are references
given to the sources. Many narratives are re-told from the early history of Islam. These narratives are generally taken from an oral body of material that does not always correspond to written sources.\footnote{\textit{The Life of Muhammad, The Greatest Liberator, The Holiest Prophet}, by Allama Baqir Sharif Al-Qarashi, translated by Abdullah al-Shahin, Ansariyan Publications, Qom, 2007 and \textit{The Life of Imam Husain} by Allama Bakir Sharif Al-Qarashi, translated by Sayyid Athar Husain S.H. Rizvi, Ansariyan Publications, Qom, 2007 are examples in English of the lives of the Imams used in popular Shi’i preaching.}

### 6.2.1 Sermon One, Condemning Violence and Intolerance in Islam

This Sermon was preached at the Shi’i Ahul Bayt Cultural Centre in Milltown Dublin on the 25th November 2006 by Shayyid ‘Ali Al Salleh.

1. When we face violence and crimes like we witnessed over the past few days in Iraq one must be ready to condemn those who perpetrated this. This is not a time to say one must sit and discuss, when we should allow for dialogue.

2. Sometimes you can find yourself defending Islam when in fact we are defending criminals. We use to spend years defending Islam, but then it was not the true Islam of Rasul Allah. We need to be careful when we are being critical of Islam, also when we are critical of the Pope. We were very quick to come forward to criticize the Pope. However we quickly defend Islam when in fact sometimes we are defending something that is not just, but rather violent an intolerant.

3. I told those leaders who came from Iraq to Belfast, you must deal with this problem of violence that is going on in Iraq. These Muslims, Sunni and Shi’i, who came to learn from the Christian how to resolve their difference. You are Muslim, above Christians, are you not aware of your history, that you have to come here to learn to promote peace. The regime has been targeting the Shi’a. Don’t say that the Shi’a are taking ground from the Sunna.

4. Last week you heard that before the time of Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq. It was this person who was the founder of the subsequent schools in Sunni Islam. Up until then there was only the Shi’a. But many Umayyad became corrupt, this was not the time to teach Muslims Islam, he did not teach them Shi’a, no, he taught them Islam. The imam of Maliki school had learned from Imam as-Sadiq, before this time, there was only one school: the Shi’a. These sects and legal schools grew out of the Shi’a. The divisions in Islam did not
emerge out of different understanding. Before the time of ‘Ali Imam as Sadaq people did not ask what is Shi’a, no, they all prayed the same, went to Hajj the same.

5 I am a noble person, I am not accusing the Ahal Sunna, only those who defend terrorism, I only condemn those who commit the crime. For that reason we can see that dictators are undermining Islam and the Arab world. After attacking the regime Sayyid al Hakim was attacked by those guns who were supporting Saddam. This shows that those criminals know where the power of the Shi’a is, i.e., among their religious leaders.

6 We should take seriously the role of our Marja this does not mean like in Iran and Islamic state, rather once you respect the ‘Ulama, the hausa and marja this is enough. If we are practising our Shi’a in London and Dublin, and nobody feels that they are oppressed then it is enough.

7 Pray to Allah, in the face of such violence, we pray that we will see such criminals humiliated as we have seen Saddam humiliated. We celebrated Sayyid al Hud (who died in Qom recently) and those who were killed in the recent violence in Iraq.

Sayyid al Hud spend time in Iraq in Kirkuk. I have attended his class, he passed away last week and a very big funeral was held for him.

8 Please recite Al Fatiha for those who fell in Iraq last week.

Analysis

This sermon took place during the height of the sectarian trouble in Iraq in 2006. At that time there was a delegation who travelled from Iraq to Ireland to dialogue with Nationalist and Unionist politicians about developing a peace process in Iraq. The preacher is lamenting the sorry state of religious sectarianism that is the reality in Iraq and fully aware of the suffering that the Shi’i community has endured under Saddam over the past decades. This has been the intimidation of the Religious Hausa and Shi’i religious leaders.

In reality the speaker sees no division between the Shi’a and the Sunna in early Islam. Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq was the father of all the schools of Islamic law and the teacher of the other schools of Islamic law. The division in Islam came following the political divisions that emerged under the Beni Umayyad and the Beni Abbassid. These turned

16 In making an analysis of the sermons, I am relying on material expressed during interviews and conversations with Shi’i members. The analysis is a coding of material in the qualitative research methodology.

17 In Chapter 5, section 5.6 I draw attention to the Insurgency and Rebellion in Iraq, the perceived anti-Shi’a nature of the terrorist attacks and the Shi’a response.

18 The interpretation of early Islamic history is an essential element of Shi’a preaching in Chapter 2, section 2.3. I have drawn attention to how Shi’a interpret early Islamic history within their context of being an
away from the noble Islam of the Prophet Muhammad and sought to return to a tribal and sectarian Islam that did not respect either Imam ‘Ali or the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

Muslims can be quick to criticize others, for example, Pope Benedict following the Regensburg Lecture, where he was perceived to criticize Islam and the Prophet. However Muslims are slow to criticize the violence and intolerance that has been and is going on in Iraq by terrorists and dictators. Sayyid Al Hakim was murdered in Iraq on the 29th August 2003, yet many Sunni did not respond or criticize this act of violence against a religious and saintly Muslim, because he was a Shi’a.

Saddam is perceived as a violent dictator who is following in the tradition of the Umayyad rulers of old in their opposition to Shi‘i Islam and the family of the Prophet. Yet he was defeated and humiliated. The Shi‘i community interpret the violent displacement of Saddam as an act of liberation made on their behalf by the Occupation forces, contrary to the dictum that says that dictatorship is better than political chaos.\(^{19}\) The preacher is delighted to have witnessed the displacement of Saddam and prays that all dictators will suffer a similar fate.

### 6.2.2 Sermon Two, Ashura, Democracy and Human Rights

This sermon took place on the 3rd of February 2007 at the Shi‘i Ahul Bayt Centre, in Milltown, Dublin. It was the night of the 9th of Muharram, during the Ashura mourning season. The Preacher was Sheik Muhammad Habib. This is the only sermon included from the Muharram mourning season.

1 Imam Hussein asked for one night of prayer before beginning the Battle of Karbala. Imam Hussein would address the group each night after prayer that the consequences of this journey would be different from what the people expected. Many people began deserting because of the need of a great sacrifice. Sura 37:107-8. There was going to be a martyrdom on the way. There was a need to purify the hearts of those present, so that they could offer a pure Islam, those who would offer only the pleasure of Allah. Imam Hussein said: “Brothers, you are mistaken, if you think that tomorrow’s battles will fulfil any of your worldly desires, I will be butchered, Abbas will lose his arms,
my son ‘Ali will be killed. All will be rolling a pool of blood even my son ‘Ali Askar will be killed; only my son Al ‘Ali will survive. They are only after my life. You are free to go if you wish. Please put out the lamps so that people may walk away in darkness.” Many deserted him, only a few people were left, the pure of the pure. Only 72 who stood fast in the battle for the truth. They said: “We are ready to sacrifice our lives for the sake of truth, sincerely we desire to follow Allah and be martyred.”

2 Many things happened on this night. Abbas guards the camp of Imam Hussein, a ditch was dug around the camp and a fire was lit within it. Hussein offered his last prayer on the morning of Ashura, 61/680 he said: “Oh, ‘Ali Akbar, let me hear again the Azhan as you resemble the Prophet in your voice”. The arrows started coming just as the prayer finished.

3 Imam offered the sermon on the day of Ashura. He said to the forces of Yazid, “Do you know me, am I not the grandson of Rasul Allah, do you know that my father was ‘Ali and my mother is Fatima? My grandmother is Khadijah, was Hamza not my Uncle? These were the first to join Islam and the most learned in Islam. The Prophet said of ‘Ali, ‘he is from me and I am from him’. Why are you killing me so?” It is from Yazid that has come the order. Tomorrow there will be a great battle. This night is the night that was requested for prayer.

4 It is important to celebrate Ashura. We need this Ashura to develop our faith, our humanity, we need to refresh ourselves by coming to Ashura. It is important for those to know and attend Ashura, as it is important to attend Ramadan. Depression can be cured by attending these religious celebrations. Living in exile here in Ireland can lead to depression. We need to socialize with each other by attending Jummah prayers, Ashura, etc. We need to encourage ourselves to pray each day, to attend the Hussania. Many don’t know their religion; when the time for majlis comes the man will not bring the children to the Mosque and they grow up not knowing about Islam. Yes, children need to come and learn in order to be rooted in their Shi‘i belief.

5 Islam allows freedom in religion. The Qur’an says you cannot use force to change the heart. Why I change is I have questions that make me seek peace of mind, in Saudi and Egypt you can see people turning to Shi‘a. In Rihad you can see 3 majlis in the heart of Wahhabi Saudi Arabia.

6 In Karbala you can find the answers to all of the questions that emerge. You can see the head of the grandson of Prophet Muhammad was killed. We not know what is going on in the world. At the time of Beni Umayyad the movement start to take another direction, following dictators, Imam Hussein redirects Islam back to human rights,
democracy, you can see until today no single country run by democracy in the Muslim world. How we can see India beside Pakistan, Turkey and Greece, these countries do not have democracy, Lebanon has democracy only because of the Christians. Ahu al Sunna promotes dictatorship. Iran and Iraq are run by the Shi’a. In Iran you can see democracy, there Rafsanjani lost election, this can not happen in the Arab Middle East. However only in Iraq do Islamic scholars promote democracy. Beni Umayyad point to the sword when they are proposing leadership; only the son may succeed. Muharram is good to enlightened people about the Shi’a and what happened to Imam Hussein, he was a prisoner of war. Zainab his sister is mourning the loss of Hussein. She too is a role model for women fighting for women’s rights, freedom of choice and democracy.

**Analysis**

This is the only sermon which occurred during the mourning period of Muharram. It takes place on the 9th of Muharram the day before commemorating the Battle of Karbala. Usually on this night the preacher will focus on the martyrdom of the infant ‘Ali Asghar, the youngest son of Hussein, who is killed by an arrow while in his father’s arms. On this night the preacher focuses on the fact that Imam Hussein is aware that tomorrow there is going to be a great battle and that he is outnumbered. He dims the lights and gives his followers the opportunity to flee without shame. Only seventy two faithful and family members remain. Next, Hussein challenges the forces of Yazid to recognize his heritage, his parents and grandparents as that of the Prophet and his family. These were the greatest and the most faithful of Muslims. Imam Hussein challenges his opponents to understand the nature of this conflict and why it is at odds with the message of Islam. This is the crucial claim of the Shi’a. The preacher is presenting the Shi’a as standing in the way of integrity and justice. They are opposed to violence and rather seek the way of prayer and reconciliation. However, they are not prepared to see their religion distorted to comply with the political and ethnic desires of the political class, who seek power and privilege.

In part four the preacher addresses the Shi’i community in exile directly. He encourages them to participate in the celebration of Ashura. Many in the community are isolated, struggling with integration, language, psychological conditions associated with their asylum and social difficulties. Coming to the Ashura ceremonies allows these people a safe environment to express their grief, their loss and their vulnerability. They can grieve

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20 In Chapter 2, Section 2.5 I discuss the centrality of Ashura within the ritual and religious life of the Shi’i community. This is the central religious narrative among Shi’a. In preaching it refers to empowerment, emancipation, resilience and commitment. In many ways it is the central organizing principal within Shi’ism.
for their families who are living in Iraq, many suffering because of violence and intimidation. They can grieve for their own particular exile, linguistically, culturally, socially and religiously. The grief expressed from Hussein and his followers becomes a therapeutic catharsis, expressing the pain and depression of a whole community. Through these rituals the children become socialized into a religious way of life that has survived for centuries and is now finding expression in a new context in the West.

In part six the preacher makes the crucial connection between Ashura, human rights and democracy. Imam Hussein is associated with the revolutionary freedom fighter, who is fighting for freedom from oppression and freedom of religion. Here the preacher is adopting the language of the liberal West and applying it to Ashura. We are made aware of how the language of human rights and democracy has been accepted into this particular discourse on Islamic politics and history. The Beni Umayyad are perceived as supporting dictatorship and suppressing freedom of expression, freedom of religion and freedom of human rights. The Shi‘i Imams are righteous and infallible saints who are promoting transparent leadership and integrity. When westerners consider in the Middle East, the antipathy towards western discourse about human rights and democracy among radical Islamic groups it is refreshing to hear a community accepting this language and discourse as their own.

The preacher makes the point that democracy has not taken root in many Islamic countries that continue to be dominated by monarchy or dictatorship and have only partial freedom. He sees the problem in Sunni Islam that from the time of the Umayyad dynasty it has failed to accept accountability and transparency into its political model, whereby the real religious leaders were suppressed, murdered and martyred.

6.2.3 Sermon Three, Majlis for Khadija

This sermon was preached on the 22\textsuperscript{nd} September 2007 at the Shi‘i Ahul Bayt Centre in Milltown, Dublin. The preacher was Sayyid ‘Ali Al Sallah. It was the 10\textsuperscript{th} Ramadan when the Muslim community remember the death of the Prophet’s wife, Khadija, who died in 619 CE.

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21 The commitment among the Shi’a to the formation of democratic structures in Iraq is a recurring theme in Chapter 5 and particularly Section 5.5.2. Shi’a draw inspiration for democracy and human rights from their religious tradition.

22 In Chapter 2, Section 2.4 I present the centrality of the Imamate to Shi’a thought and identity. Reflection of the Imamate is a recurring theme in Shi’a preaching.
1 On the tenth of Ramadan two years before the Hijra, the Prophet Muhammad lost his beloved wife Khadija. He had gotten married to her when he was twenty five years old and had stayed with her for thirty five years. This means that polygamy is not the tradition in Islam, he stayed for twenty five years with only one wife. It seems that many wives is not the Sunna; this is not the norm. You will be very astonished when you look to the life of Khadija to see how important, is the life of women in Islam. Muhammad used to show his love for Khadija before other men, he used after her death to keep her memory. After killing one sheep he used to say “keep meat for the friends of Khadija”. When he achieved his victory of liberating Mecca he put his tent next to the shrine of Khadija. Aisha used to annoy him saying “you do you still talk of Khadija”, Muhammad used to say, “Allah did not give me better than Khadija, Allah gave me children from her and not from other wives, she supported and encouraged me when times were difficult.”

2 One thing that is important for Ramadan is to do something specific for my family and for my children. One way to do this is to modify my behaviour. If you improve your behaviour during Ramadan, Allah will make your passing very easy during this period. Some men do not pay attention to their wife, when they return home they are depressed. Muhammad used to say that he who is good to his wife and family is the best, if you sit with your wife this is much better that worshipping Allah in the Mosque of the Prophet. This is better that prayer. We should be careful of our tone and our speech to our wife. Muhammad used to say that “tell your wife that I love you”. How much you say I love you to your wife you will be rewarded by Allah. Ramadan is a good season to change to that habit. So sit with your wife. I don’t know why we are ready to discuss everything with our friends and are not ready to discuss anything with our wife.

3 During Ramadan you are not only fasting from eating and drinking. A woman came to Muhammad and said I am fasting. He said, “how can you say you are fasting if at the same time you are backbiting”. Try also to send gift to your wife, even something small, so by your word also. So during Ramadan is a good time to change your behaviour and to practise new ways of relating.

4 The relationship between Muhammad and Khadija is a symbol for all Muslims and for all couples. Khadija was very precious to Muhammad. Khadija supported Muhammad when all the Quraysh turned against him. So that when Khadija died Muhammad called that year the year of great sorrow. Khadija was supporting the growth of Islam and the young Muslim community from her own resources.

Analysis
The women of the Family of the Prophet, *Ahul Bayt*, are presented as valuable role models for Islamic feminism. The most important of these are Khadija, Fatima and Zaynab. They are regarded as models of faithfulness, compassion, integrity and strength. The members of the Prophet’s family are presented as suffering the same fate of rejection that the Prophet Muhammad suffered. Yet despite this they grew in strength and in resourcefulness. Muhammad and Khadija are regarded as a very loving and intimate couple, their relationship built upon a deep love and respect for each other.

There is a tension, however, reflected within the intimate relationships of the Prophet’s family. The women Khadija and Aisha are placed in parallel roles. The older woman Khadija is the founder of the family, the bearer of children and the faithful companion of the Prophet. The younger woman Aisha is seen more as a role model for Sunni followers. She is portrayed as young, dynamic, politically active, attractive, warrior-like and independent. In early Islamic history, there is the clash between herself and Ali, at the Battle of Siffin, and the Battle of the Camel, they support opposing forces. The rivalries and petty jealousies of the early Islamic family and among the wives of the Prophet are symbolic of later rifts within the emerging Islamic community.

Within the Mosque environment I was afforded little contact with women. There was a strict gender segregation enforced by a culture of separation within the community. Women gathered, socialized and prayed in a room adjoining that of the men. It was obvious that the women enjoyed much social contact during their visit to the Mosque and occasions of wedding celebrations were particularly joyous ones for the women, from which the men were excluded. The women shared a community of friendship, care and support. There is only passing reference in the sermons and interviews to issues of particular concern to women, such as health, relationship, child care and education. Yet, in this sermon, reference is made to maintaining the married relationship and the responsibility of the husband to deepen the emotional and psychological relationship between the couple. Indeed, Ramadan is seen as a time of deepening relationship, feeling our humanity and our dependence upon each other and on the Divine. The model relationship of Muhammad and Khadija is seen as the exemplar for all married couples, a relationship of fidelity, intimacy and support through challenges and trials.

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23 In Chapter 7, section 7.2 I include a reflection on Dialogue with Feminism. Among western Muslims the role of women in society comes under considerable reflection. Popular culture criticizes Muslims for being anti-feminist. In this sermon we see an apologetic for Islamic feminism.

Shi‘i Muslims were not unaware of feminist discourse taking place in the West. On occasion the preacher referred to the fact that religious women in Shi‘i Islam enjoy considerable freedom in their religion and that coming to the West has supported women in their independence; religiously, economically, socially and politically.

In similar ways, Islamic feminists and specialists in gender issues are challenging patriarchal reading of tradition. This has been done by challenging the authority and integrity of some companions of the Prophet who have proposed particular patriarchal and misogynist hadiths and stories of the Prophet.25 Shi‘i scholars are also challenging the authenticity and integrity of some companions of the Prophet who have preached against Shi‘i Islam. In this way minorities and oppressed minorities within Islam are utilizing common arguments and resources to critique dominant and oppressive paradigms within the religion.

6.2.4 Sermon Four, Representing Shi‘i Islam

The presentation took place on the 3\textsuperscript{rd} November 2007 at the Shi‘i Ahul Bayt Cultural Centre in Milltown, Dublin, and the presenters were Sayyid ‘Ali al Salleh and Sayyid Siraj Zaidi. Although this is not a sermon in the traditional form but a visual presentation of slides that include recent events that had taken place within the community by members of the community. I decided to include it as a sermon, because it presents a different insight into the life of the community. There is a series of five events, three international and three local that happened over over recent weeks. The Community sent representative to the World Assembly of Ahul Bayt in Tehran, on Hajj in Saudi Arabia and to the British Labour Party Convention at Brighton.

Slides were presented from the following events:

1. The first is a conference held in Tehran for all Shi‘a all over the world. I (Sayyid ‘Ali al Salleh) and Sayyid Siraz received an invitation and we attended this conference which is a world assemble of Alul Bayt. Many personalitites came from all over the world. [There follows an introduction to many personalitites from Iranian Iraqi and

World Shi'i Society as well as converts to Shi'a from the Sunni world. People are becoming aware of the Shi'a through the internet and because of globalisation.

There are good relations between the Shi'a in Bahrain, in Kuwait, in Iran. We met with religious and political representatives from Najaf, Saudi Arabia, Iran.

2 Trinity Debate, Trinity College Dublin: The Philosophical Society debated "Islam is compatible with Western Liberal Society". There were representatives who opposed this from Britain. There were members of Hizb ut-Tahrir Islamic group. They were condemned by the Shi'i respondents as promoting a "sick ideology" and that they did not represent Muslims, especially Muslims in Ireland.26

You cannot impose your religions or your thinking on others, this is at the heart of the Qur'anic injunction, "No compulsion in Religion". These people are using the name of Islam to commit the most savage crimes; look at Iraq and look at Palestine, these people harbour hate in their hearts. They in Afghanistan have destroyed beautiful Shrines as well as the statues of the Buddha. These cannot preach like this, in their own homes. These people are a danger to society. We love and enjoy liberal society. Muslims and Christians are protecting liberal society, when we move to a western society we need to learn a new language and integrate ourselves. We are defending that liberal society. I implore you to reject this sick ideological people. They are doing damage to Islam in western society. Yet liberal society welcomes and gives a place for all of them.

3 Visit of Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin to the Milltown Hussania.27

Archbishop Martin accepted our invitation and kindly sat on the ground. He was most humble and wanted to know who cooked the food. The Archbishop thanked the cooks, he was most humble.

4 Meeting with the Governor of Sammara and the Governor of Karbala, during the Hajj celebrations in Saudia Arabia.

5 Labour Party Conference in Britain.

I received an invitation to attend this conference during Ramadan. We met with the Prime Minster, the Foreign Minster, the Minister of the Interior, Ambassadors of Iraq and Egypt.

26 The distinction between Shi'i Islam and radical Islam is a recurring theme throughout this work. In Chapter 1, Section 1.4, we see among Iraqi immigrants to London, a commitment to integration political participation, democracy and human rights.

27 The dialogue between Shi'a and Catholics is the theme of Chapter 7. We see in this sermon a close relationship between Shi'i Muslims and the Catholic leadership in Ireland. This commitment to inter religious dialogue is replicated in other Shi'i communities also.
Analysis

What is most striking here is the international exposure of the Shi‘i Community in Ireland and the United Kingdom. The latter represent their communities at large, international and reputable gatherings on many occasions. The occasion of the World Ahul Bayt Assembly and the Hajj were opportunities to meet with Muslims from throughout the world, to engage with issues of international concern and to gauge developments in the Islamic world. Rather that being isolated from the world of the Middle East Shi‘i Muslims in Ireland are in constant communication with their countries and communities of origin at least on the leadership level. This means that the leadership is informed and up to date with developments in the Shi‘i world and the Middle East. Through attending Hajj each year and international conferences on a regular basis it is possible to assess accurately the challenges facing Muslims, the emergence of radical elements, radical rhetoric and reformist ideologies that are taking place on the international stage. Rather that being isolationist and “exiled” the community is informed on relevant and progressive local and international issues. There are, of course, issues on which various groups divide ideologically.

The debate in Trinity College, Dublin, on the issue “Is Islam compatible with Western Liberal Society?”, November 2006, indicates one such division in ideology, that between Hizb ut-Tahrir and Shi‘i Islamic Communities in Ireland and the UK. Where Hizb ut-Tahrir sees no compatibility between Islam and western values of human rights and democracy, Shi‘i representatives are generally in favour of integration into western societies and utilizing western values to transform Islam. Shi‘i Islam presents a critique to radical Islam because of the latter fails to condemn terrorism due to the colonialism, foreign policy and imperialism of the West.

Without aligning themselves uncritically with western policy, Iraqi Shi‘i communities living in the West are aware that it was only through the intervention of the Coalition forces in Iraq that Saddam Hussein was removed from power, that a representative government with at Shi‘i majority was established and that a constitution recognizing religious freedom and human rights was implemented. These facts have opened a space for rapprochement between western values, ideologies and political practises and Shi‘i Islam. Radical Islam is seen to be aligned with Wahhabi Islam, and by virtue of that is anti-Shi‘i, anti-western, intolerant, violent and dangerous. It is encouraging to see a Muslim community being able to critique another Muslim community, despite the call of Muslim unity and in the face of a long history of foreign intervention, colonialism and imperialism by western powers.
The meeting with Iraqi Governors while on Hajj suggests that Iraqi Shi‘i leaders here are active and engaged with developments and peace processes in Iraq. They see themselves as also Ambassadors for Iraq in the West with valuable insights into western society and capable of making a contribution to the development of in democracy within their country of origin. The fact that religious and political leaders attended the Labour Party Convention and met with senior party leaders is an indication of their political and social capital in British society.

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Rev. Diarmuid Martin, was received by the Shi‘i Community who were impressed by his humility and his erudition. There is a well established Interfaith Forum in Dublin and London and Iraqi Shi‘i leaders are at the forefront of developments in the interfaith field.

6.2.5 Sermon Five, Majlis for Imam Ja‘far as-Sadiq

This sermon was preached on the 10th November 2007 at the Shi‘i Ahul Bayt Centre at Milltown, Dublin, by Sayyid ‘Ali Al Salleh.

1 If you look deeply into our history and you ask why am I touched by Ahul Bayt, why I have this love for Imam Hassan and Imam Hussein, this love did not come from one book, we did not learn this in the school. You recall that your father and your mother used to take you to those meetings, those majlis. What makes a difference between Ahul Bayt and the others is that Ahul Bayt is in your heart, this comes about by attending events in the Mosque.

2 That is because Imam Ja‘far al Sadiq, the sixth Imam, the Imam of today who passed away on 25 Shawwad, 128 AH., used to encourage the people to gather, to pray, to talk about the Imams. We have a lot of ulama saying that those who attend those majlis and are praying, that their life will be more lovely than those who are not attending the majlis. This is much better than praying lonely prayer in your home. So we need to be careful, especially we who live in West and don’t have that social life. Some say if you want to have that social life and if you want enjoy it, then go to those pubs. We don’t have that social life because we’re very professional, very advanced life; people move away from their parents from the age of 18 years.

3 For us we have all that we have in our personalities from those gatherings, not only those political things from Karbala but also those social and political. I like to tell the story about the three doctors who travelled to Kuwait after being in Dublin. The head of the department told them that there is some thing special about you, maybe it is because you were educated in Dublin, or the fact that you were in Shi‘a. If you have good belief in
your heart, this will affect your actions, look at Irish people who are religious: they behave very well because of the belief that they have in their hearts.

4 If you go to Hajj and if you look at the faces of those who are guarding the Kaba, their faces are so dark, why are they so full of depression, full of hatred, full of problems. If you have good belief it will have an effect on your tranquillity, if your mind is not at peace, then your mind will judge you. Did you have tranquillity when you were Wahhabi? That is why we say it is very important to attend to your peace of mind and your mental health. I know many people who give their lives to pass on the faith. I know of people who because of Christmas and shopping are unable to come and pray with Imam ‘Ali Ja’far. Once the children reach that level, it is very difficult to deal with them, from where do they learn what they need? If from childhood you encourage the love of Ahul Bayt they you do not have to worry, that will sustain them and encourage them. Even if you see Shaytan fooling you and pushing you to commit sins, don’t stop coming, leave some connection with Allah, with Rasul Allah, even if you come one time Shaytan will become tired.

5 About the three doctors one of the told his boss, you know why we have this blessing. This is the blessing of attending the Hussaina, for seven years while we are attending the school we attended the Hussaina. This is from where we developed our sense of love of Ahul Bayt.

6 We congratulate those who have graduated today, they have been very successful and very faithful in attending the Hussania. Some people here serve Imam Hussein even more than their own family. Try to bring along your children to this Hussania so that they may develop a love of serving Imam Hussein. We have good youth who come here each week and serve and make their parents very happy to see them growing and serving here. Bring your children here and look after them; if something bad happens to them after all of that then blame me, and I remember some of our brothers said that when our children come here they learn dirty words. Better to learn a dirty word than dirty deed. After ten years they have learned their prayer, learned love of Imam. If you did not bring your children here then where are they now? Where are their children now? If you want to challenge me now try it. Come again after 10 years and see where your children have gone to. Don’t go and hide yourselves. We have been here since 1985 and we know the reality of bringing up children in this society.

7 I went to Detroit and spoke with a headmaster there who told me that many people apply to send their children to our school because our school is free of drugs. This
is very good. This is what ‘Ali Imam as-Sadik is saying “you gather and you attend and you will learn and be changed”.

8 Some people think that Imam ‘Ali Ja’far as-Sadik is the Imam of our sect, and some like to say that in Islam we have five sects. I think that there is some mistake in all of this. There are the four sects in Sunni Islam. We have not seen one Imam who has so influenced the teaching of others as that of Imam al Ja’far. Abu Hanifa used to say that he learned in two years so much from Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq, and this led to his prominent position in Islam. I will leave my opinion to Imam as-Sadiq. He was the Imam for all Muslims; he taught all Muslims how to get their teaching and their guidance. All those schools appeared after Imam as-Sadiq. He used this period after the Beni Umayyad and the arrival of Beni Abbass to teach the Muslims how to love their religion, how to teach the Sunna and he used to teach all Muslims. I have found this school of Sunna and Shi’a, the second book of Ahul Sunna. If you see Abu Hanifa coming high up in the Sunna this is because of politics at that time. You will discover the Beni Umayyad and Beni Abbas push the book of Buhari at that time...because it served their agenda and their politics to do this. You’ve seen that. If your Buhari is higher that other book, study and check the history and the politics. You will discover that even Al Buhari included some Shi’i belief. That is why we Shi’a think that some of the clergy of the Sunna, it might be secretly they love Ahul Bayt. Because if you are Sunni and you love Ahul Bayt how do you get the courage to mention that. If you are a Muslim scholar you will know that it is not possible to identify the importance of your school without identifying Imam al Ja’far, don’t look to Ahul Sunna now they do not know anything, because if they know the truth they will not announce it. It has become the faith of dictators; at that time the real faith is to love Ahul Bayt.

9 The Sunni now are not the Sunni of that time. The Beni Umayyad used to say that they are Sunni but hate Ahul Bayt. At that time the Sunni used to sacrifice themselves for Ahul Bayt. If you hear of a Sunni and he is getting annoyed because somebody is praising ‘Ali Sistani, tell him you are not the real Sunni, because your grandfathers were Sunni but they used to love Ahul Bayt. But those who say they are Sunni and they hate Ahul Bayt, are from Beni Umayyad? Ahul Bayt is above other sects; it is not another sect. Nobody can compare Hanbali, Shafri, Maliki, etc., with Imam Ja’far. Abu Hanifa used to come and visit Abu Ja’far and pay his respects to him. You do not see the same respect being given to the other school and within the other school to each other that you see been given to Imam Ja’far. If you read the Sunni books of that time you will see how they talk about Imam al Ja’far. I used to say that repeatedly. All Muslims accept him, all Muslims
accept the twelve Imams. In fourteen hundred years nobody has been successful in adding a word to the Qur’an and nobody has been successful in adding another name to the imams’ Imams. Go to the books, go to the Mosques and you will see the twelve names without any change. The names of the twelve Imams have not been changed. Many have tried to push in other names as if they were the Marja of the Shi’a...because these have come for Allah. Now each of these have passed away, many were killed, poisoned, martyred.

There were many attempts to kill al Imam ‘Ali al Ja’far: the dictator at that time wanted to kill him, because he was the leader of the community, but he was afraid to do this and instead he had him poisoned by the Governor. That is why 25 of Shabbat this Imam was poisoned, while he was busy teaching. This is why the dictator is aware that people used to gather around these people and with his death, they hoped to put an end to their support and their faith.

**Analysis**

The preacher is teaching the importance of attending the Hussania in handing on the faith of the Shi’a to the next generation. This faith is not handed on through the reading of books alone but through participating in the rituals and memorials of the Shi’i calendar. Children may pick up bad habits from their Mosque friends but they will also be immersed in a community that values its Imam and saints who laid the foundation for Shi’i Islam. The doctors who went to Kuwait displayed the positive effects of attending the Hussania, despite living in a culture that is often at odds with Islam.

Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq is presented as the father of Islamic law, *fiqh* and jurisprudence. The other schools of law – Hanbali, Shafri, Maliki – learned their thinking from Ja’far as-Sadiq. The distinction between the *Beni Umayyad* and the Ahul Bayt is presented as an early Islamic concern. The division between the Shi’a and the Sunni today return to this period in Islamic history. Yet, during this period it was for political gain that certain schools of law were advanced while others that had greater authority were ignored. There was an alliance between the political elite and the intellectual elite to suppress the voice of the Ahul Bayt.

This radical rereading of history challenges the dominant Sunni grip on authority in Islam. It challenges narratives that have been dominant and that have sought support from the elite for political gain. The voice of the minority, it transpires, ends up being both the

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28 In Chapter 2, Section 2.4.6 I introduce Ja’far as-Sadiq, the sixth Imam. He is a central character in early Shi’a religious formation and history. His devotion and his efforts at Islamic unity are still remembered to day.

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voice of the oppressed minority and the voice of criticism of dominant readings of history, readings that need to be challenged.

Muhammad al Tijani al-Samawi wrote the book *Shi'as are the Ahl Al Sunnah*\(^{29}\), to present the idea that the true followers of the Sunna are in fact the Shi'a.\(^{30}\) He desires that the Sunna should reclaim the Ahul Bayt, the family of the Prophet. These Holy Ones and Imams are not the preserve of the Shi'a alone but for the whole of Islam. In the tradition of the Two Weighty Things, *al Thaqalain*, the Prophet Muhammad, speaks as follows, “I have left among you the Two Weighty Things: The Book of Allah and my Progeny; so long as you uphold both of them, you shall never stray after me”.\(^{31}\) It is difficult for Sunni authors and leaders to reclaim the family of the Prophet as this issue has become a sectarian one, yet, it is only through recognising the unique character of the Prophet’s descendents that true rapprochement can be achieved between the Sunni and the Shi’a.

The preacher combines a deeply sectarian issue with popular concerns among the Shi’a. The role of the Imams in the life of the Shi’a is critical to their relationship with their Sunni brothers and sisters. Rereading and interpreting early Islamic history have important things to say to contemporary society. The work of integration into the West is coloured by Shi’a being a minority in Islam and an oppressed minority at that.

### 6.2.6 Sermon Six, Globalization and Islam

This sermon was preached on November 24\(^{th}\) 2007 at the Shi'i Ahul Bayt Centre, Milltown, Dublin, by Sayyid ‘Ali Al Salleh. It in remembrance of the 11\(^{th}\) Zi’lqada, the Birthday of the eighth Imam ‘Ali ar-Rida, and the 29\(^{th}\) Zi’lqada, the martyrdom of the ninth Imam, Muhammad Taqi.

1 The eighth Imam ‘Ali ar-Rida passed away 148 al Hijra in Masshad, today is his birthday. His age was about fifty four. One thing that we notice about this time is that the leader then was aware that there could not be peace in his Kingdom unless he respected the Imam ‘Ali ar-Rida. Al Ma’mum appointed the 8\(^{th}\) Imam as crown prince. This is to accept he was the real leader of Muslims. If you ask any Muslim and ask him do you know Imam Musa, they would say yes he is our leader.

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30 In Section 6.3.2, I reflect upon an “Apologetic in relation to Sunni Islam”. This theme is of central relevance in Shi’i preaching. Shi’i Muslims are constantly aware of their minority status in the world and their sectarian relationship with Sunni Muslims.

2 Thank God because of Globalization, the multimedia, the internet it is not possible to hide the facts, you will now see people becoming aware of the life of the Imam. We learn that Imam ibn Musa was very popular and that Al Ma’mun was unable to rule without giving some authority to him at that time. This shows the fact that our Imam used to be the leaders of all Muslims and not just the leader of those who were known as the Shi’a, if you add this to another story that happened to Imam ‘Ali Musa, on his way to Quratta. The order came from Al Mam’un to collect the Imam ibn Musa and to avoid Basra and Kufa, because he knew that there were Shi’a living there. In the streets of Najaf thousands of clergy and students gathered to wait for him, and everybody was astonished. This gives us a clue of the popularity of the Imam.

3 It reminds you of another story, about the political leader trying to reach the Black stone in Mecca. Despite the soldiers and people around him he was unable to reach it while people opened a way for the Imam to touch the Black stone and allowed space for them. This shows that our Imams have been at the heart of the history of Islam.

4 If you go to any country of the Muslim world you will see something of the Ahul Bayt. This is what we are saying, we are the real history behind what you have known about Islam. If you want to know what is going on in the Islamic world now look to the Shi’a. If you want to know what is going in the world of Islamic terrorism, know that this is coming from the Wahhabi.

5 When I spoke to Sheik Al Halawi last week he reassured me that we would not allow anybody to attack any Muslim group, that we would not allow anybody to incite hatred among Muslims. And he assured me that when he spoke to that man in the conference that we do not have any difficult with the Shi’a and that we are brothers and that he removed that part from his article that refers negatively to the Shi’a.

6 If you want to defeat terrorism and know what is going on you need to know that background and the history. This background is the history of the Shi’a. The Shi’a and the Wahhabi is a conflict that will shape the future. The terrorist first wants to become Wahhabi and become nervous of the Shi’a and then will become a terrorist.

7 The Second Event that we are remembering is the anniversary of the martyrdom of the ninth Imam, Imam Muhammad at-Taqi. You haven’t seen extremism done by Shi’a, you haven’t seen terrorism done by Shi’a, even though for fourteen hundred years they have been under oppression, some people think that Saddam Hussein was the only dictator and was defeated by the foreigner; no, Saddam is the last dictator after fourteen centuries of dictators; if you see the history of Iraq it is a history of dictatorship. We haven’t seen a country with fourteen hundred years of dictatorship with the same slogan other that that of
crushing the Shi’a. Despite that the Shi’a have been patient and tolerant. We don’t know one explosion that was started by the Shi’a during the reign of Saddam.

8 Everything is going to normal now. The Iraqi have been very successful in defeating terrorism, as they were successful in defeating Saddam and now they have defeated terrorism without seeing their society disintegrate. The people have chosen to follow the marja. The efforts of others and particularly the US would not have been succeeded without the support of the clergy.

Analysis

Remembering and celebrating the lives of the Imams is of central importance to Shi’i communities. The Imamate and the rituals involved in remembering their birthdays, lives and deaths are the central events of the Shi’i ritual calendar.

With the advent of Globalization and particularly the developments in information technology, the internet, global media, etc., it is now possible for minority voices to be heard and appreciated. Conflict in one part of the world is relayed around the world instantaneously. The plight within minority Islam is coming more to the fore. The conflicts within early Islamic history were easily ignored in the past, yet today many people are becoming aware that there are many interpretations of these events. Images of Umayyad Damascus and ‘Abbasid Baghdad as imperial, expansionist, liberal and cosmopolitan belie a history of oppression and internal opposition. The self images of Sunni Islam have helped create a mindset that is expansionist, intolerant and imperialist and that has abetted dictatorship to the cost of a leadership and a society that is democratic and transparent. Radical Islam has sought refuge in such images and proposes a radical opposition to western values.

Shi’i reading of history is more nuanced and recalls the early period in Islamic history as a time when the true leaders of Islam were oppressed, imprisoned and martyred.

The Shi’a see a radical change in history with the defeat of Saddam Hussein. Through the support of Coalition forces, dictatorship has been defeated and in its place a

32 In Chapter 2, Section 2.4.8 I introduce ‘Ali ar-Rida the eights Imam and in Section 2.4.9, I introduce Muhammad al Taqi, the ninth Imam.

33 In Appendix II, I include the Annual Calendar of Shi’i ritual events.

34 Johathan Lyons, in his The House of Wisdom, Bloomsbury, London, 2009, presents a picture of ‘Abbasid Baghdad that is idealistic, tolerant and cosmopolitan much in contrast to Shi’i narratives of that time.
representative democracy begun. Through the support of the Shi‘i religious leaders and Marja it has been possible to return Islam to its true roots, where religion and politics are not seen as supporting oppression and dictatorship but are integrated into each other and supporting and defending democracy, human rights and civil society. This is a radical challenge to oppressive regimes that have had support from Sunni Islam in the past and have worked against a participative and representative democracy in the Middle East.

6.2.7 Sermon Seven, Commemorating Id-e Mubahala

This sermon was preached on the 14th December 2007 at the Shi‘i Ahul Bayt Centre, Milltown, Dublin, by Sayyid ‘Ali Al Salleh.

1 There are many incidents mentioned in detail by the Qur’an, nobody can argue about this. One incident about which there is in no debate happened in the 9th year of al Higra. This is a very beautiful story which tells of the context of communities of the Christians and the Jewish at that time. These were learned people and were awaiting the coming of a future prophet. This is why these communities gathered in these communities of Medina and around that area. For that reason you see the reaction of the Jewish and the Christian, this comes from the nature of both religions. Christians start from the early time to dialogue with Islam, while the Jewish were more confrontational. This is reflected in the Qur’an, which speaks about the hostility of the Jews and the Christians involved in dialogue. We have seen the Qur’an praising Christians, placing Christians above the infidels. Some Ulema say that the Christians will remain in the majority until the end of days. Some brothers speak about how the Christians received the Muslims with great hospitality. The Qur’an speaks about putting some kindness in the hearts of Christians. The Christians at the time of Muhammad had a difficulty, they could not convert to Islam and yet they could not confront Muhammad.

2 There is a beautiful story about the Christians sending their delegates to see Muhammad. As official delegates they came with their gold and their crosses, their bishops and their archbishops. Rasul Allah allowed them into the Mosque with their crosses and with their gold, and they were allowed to pray there. They were allowed to sleep in the Mosque and to prepare themselves for the debate. Muhammad received them with all

35 In Chapter 5, the support of Ayatollah ‘Ali Sistani for democratic elections and the formation of a constitution is seen as a central element of Shi‘i political policy in Iraq. Al Sistani (Section 5.7.1) played a vital role in brokering a reconciliation between the Sadarist group and the Coalition Government.

36 The celebration remembers the confrontation of the Prophet Muhammad and his family with the Christians of Najran.
kindness. In Manchester there is a group of Muslims who gather in a Church to pray and
gather on each Saturday night. Rasul Allah joined with them in debate, and he allowed
them to prepare.

3 The Christians say Jesus is without father, yet who is his father if not Allah.
Rasul said that Adam has more right to be called Son of God since from both sides he has
neither father nor mother. Muhammad was not successful in convincing them, this is
important. In the realm of religions there must be the freedom to believe and
understanding. The mankind in religion is so free that even the Prophet cannot put pressure
on them. The Prophet with all his knowledge was not successful in convincing the
Christians. Once you have religion, you don’t believe that you have the right to force your
faith on others. Nowadays we need to allow reason and conscience to convince people
about the truth of Islam.

4 You can see in many Mosques people speaking about Wahhabi Islam. We do
not see the Sunni nowadays. In Mecca you can see the Shi‘i Hajj and the Wahhabi Hajj.
Where you see the difference is on the 12th day. The Shi‘a finish before noon, while the
Wahhabi finish later. You can witness the difference. The Shi‘a are very organized and
respectful. Even the soldiers were amazed at what they had seen.

5 What we are seeing in the Sunni side is that the Wahhabi is becoming the
majority. We are saying the Wahhabi are not representing the Sunni, but they are
representing the Beni Umayyad. They do not respect the Ahul Bayt. But the Sunni regard
the Ahul Bayt. The Wahhabi look upon the Shi‘a with an ugly face. When we listen to the
story of how the Prophet accepted the Christian in the Mosque you will wonder where the
Wahhabi get their teaching. There is no Christian now in Saudi Arabia, our fathers told us
about the Christians and Jews who used to live in Saudi Arabia. But with the arrival of the
Wahhabi, there are no longer Christians and Jewish in this part of the world. When the
Wahhabi got control in Saudi Arabia they asked the Christians and the Jews to leave. This
shows us that the interpretation of the Wahhabi is not correct, that it is intolerant and
incorrect.

6 They regard the Shi‘a as being more dangerous than the Jewish. With the
dialogue with the Prophet they could not agree so they ask each other to make a prayer and
to ask Allah to show who is right and who is wrong. The Christians delegates and bishops
gathered in the Mosque. This was the Mosque of the Prophet and Fatima. Everybody was
waiting to see whom Rasul Allah would bring with him. He came out carrying Imam
Hussein and holding the hand of Hassan, being followed by ‘Ali and Fatima. The leaders
of the Christian looked and saw the holy faces of these people and said that they wished to
withdraw from the Cursing. The Christians said they would pay the tax of occupation asked by Muhammad, but that they would not to join in the cursing prayer. Rasul Allah could insist that they join in the prayer, but this is the beauty of being a Prophet, he was not going to force his will upon the Christians. So he accepted that from them, and asked them to pay the tax and to live in peace. If really they had joined in that prayer you would not see Christian living freely at that time. But rather we see that Islam is not to be spread by force.

7 ‘Ali was ministered by a Christian doctor; even at Karbala Christians witnessed to the piety of Hussein. The Christians returned to their home and Christians continued in Arabia until the Wahhabi.

8 So speak to the Sunni and say to them that they should not follow the Wahhabi. Because the real Sunni loves Ahul Bayt. Those who are praising terrorists, they brought these beliefs from Beni Umayyad. Who is the real Sunni, those who fought with Imam Hussein or those who fought against Imam Hussein? But if they are happy about killing Christians, and children, then they are not the real Sunni.

Analysis

This sermon concentrates on the feast of the Id-e Mubahala, the celebration of the confrontation of the Prophet Muhammad and his family with the Christians of Najran in 10/632. It is remembered that Muhammad received the Christians with all hospitality into his Mosque and allowed them to gather and to pray there. The Prophet’s relationship with the Christians was one of respect and courtesy. The Prophet brought his family, ‘Ali, Fatima, Hassan and Hussein to the confrontation with the Christians and not the military and political leaders of the community. This highlights the special place of the Prophet’s family within Islam. Present relations with Christians are characterized by the same respect and courtesy shown by the Prophet. The foundation of inter-Christian-Muslims relations is that of freedom and mutual respect. 37

This contradicts with the approach of radical and Wahhabi Islam, which tends to be confrontational and intolerant. The Shi‘i preacher makes the distinction between the Sunna and those who support the Beni Umayyad. Those who are have no love for the members of the Prophet’s family, are sectarian and tribal in their relationship with Shi‘i Muslims and Christians, and do not reflect true Muslim values of freedom and mutual respect. In an

37 In Chapter 7, I reflect upon Shi’a Chritain inter-religious dialogue and Shi’a Catholic dialogue. The foundation for this dialogue in the west, is based upon the hospitality and openness shown to Christians by Shi’a in the west. This hospitality is build upon the centrality in Shi’i Islam of the feast of Id-e Mubahala, where the Prophet receives Christians into his mosque in Median and discusses with them.
often quoted saying of Imam ‘Ali, “Each man is either my brother in religion or my brother in humanity.” Shi‘i preachers propose a mutuality and equality of relations between members of other faiths and Muslims.

Wahhabi Islam\(^{38}\) is on the increase, being promoted from within Saudi Arabia. This is obvious from attending Hajj and conferences in the Middle East. The struggle between Islam and the West is reflected in the struggle within Islam. The struggle to promote tolerance, dialogue and mutual understanding must begin first with Muslims respecting each other, allowing for diversity and minority dissent voices.

Too often Islam is presented as being involved in a clash of civilizations with the West and western values. This is to essentialise Islam and rob it of its diversity. This Huntington thesis is critiqued from within Islam by Shi‘i voices, speaking as a minority and a persecuted minority often in solidarity with western voices and universal values of freedom and respect.\(^{39}\)

### 6.2.8 Sermon Eight, Remembering the Death of the Prophet Muhammad

This sermon was preached on the 15\(^{\text{th}}\) March 2008 at the Shi‘i Ahul Bayt Centre, Milltown, by Sayyid ‘Ali al Salleh. It was to celebrate the death of the Prophet Muhammad which took place on the 29\(^{\text{th}}\) Safar in the 11\(^{\text{th}}\) year of al-Hijra.

1. During our calendar year we celebrate different birthdays and anniversaries of the Holy Imams during the month of Safar. When you study the history of the Prophet you will discover that his death was not an unexpected event. During the last few years of his life the Prophet used to give signals and signs that he is about to depart this life. He started to tell them stories about his death. This departure was not an accident. He was about 63 years, this was the average age at that time.

2. People ask us why we sit and mourn Imam Hussein for forty days but for Rasul Allah we sit only for tonight. This is a beautiful question, we thank God that it is for Imam Hussein and not for ‘Ali, or another would complain that we give too much attention to ‘Ali, more than the Prophet Muhammad. In Islam we see that Islam celebrates some occasions for the meaning that is involved in that occasion. We have seen many Imam

\(^{38}\)The division between Wahhabi Islam and Shi‘i Islam is discussed in Section 6.3.2 of this chapter.

\(^{39}\)A central narrative running through this thesis is that Shi‘a in the West offer an alternative Narrative to the “Clash of Civilizations” Thesis, expressed by Huntington. Many Iraqi Shi‘a in the west have combined western values with those of an Islamic culture creating a veritable internal “Dialogue of Civilizations.”
passed away, yet the Shi‘a gather especially to mourn Imam Hussein, and the others only for one night.

3 We have the prophet Jesus, if he died in a normal way his passing would not be of that importance. But because he was crucified his death has a great meaning for Christians and Muslims and that is why many people study it and reflect upon it. His birth was a miracle not an ordinary birth.

4 We are sitting on this night to commemorate the death of the Prophet, not that his death was extraordinary like the death of Imam Hussein but because he was the Prophet of Allah. It is normal if somebody is aware that he is about to pass away that he makes preparations for how his family or his company is going to continue after him. Very clearly we can see with the Prophet he has done all to make sure that the movement of Islam is left safe following his death. With regard to religion he had completed everything, he taught the Muslims how to pray, he taught the Muslims how to fast, how to go to Hajj. Regarding religion and worship, Rasul Allah has done his job and all Muslims accept that. The Prophet left Muslims very educated about their religion, what they believe about the day after, what they believe about Allah.

5 All Muslims (except the Wahhabi) accept all schools of Islamic law in Islam. We have problem only with the Wahhabi; before the Shi‘a they have targeted other Sunnis. Ibn Tayammia didn’t pass away as a great scholar, he died in prison rejected and humiliated by all Ulema. I was speaking in America just last week and I told them, if you are talking about extremism, we were very successful in defeating extremism seven hundred years ago. Wahhabi has been given life by the British and America in Saudi Arabia. If really you are a true religion you will not accept any elements of extremism. That is why we are proud of the Shi‘a, if you look to fourteen centuries you will not see terrorism or extremism. Only those who have got some problem in their life will go to extremism, we need to think about the psychological make-up of those who are extremist. Usually it is only a small percentage who are extreme. The mainstream are not given to extremism. That is why you see that it is not possible to fool the people for a very long period of time.

6 Look at communism: only by force did they succeed to rule for seventy years. Once the people got their freedom it came to an end. The only way to protect the people from extremism is by democracy. Democracy is not only to bring justice to society, not only to bring justice and prosperity to the people; democracy is also important to save the people from falling into the hands of dictators. That is why you see the difference between Muawiya and ‘Ali Talib. What is the difference between these people? Muawiya wanted
the people to pray, fast and go on Hajj by force under treat of the sword. ‘Ali, he wanted people to pray, fast and go on Hajj as a choice for them. That is why we say, that only the state that we got in history during the caliphate of ‘Ali ibn Talib was a democratic state. Once you decided to use the force you will find that you become a dictator. Whether by imposing Islam or by imposing communism we learn that forcing leads to dictatorship. If you find that you are in a position where people are not going to be Muslim unless you use force on them you need to think again. If that is the case then what you have brought to these people is not a true Islam. This is only a version of Islam, not the true Islam. The Prophet did all that was necessary in establishing a religion.

7 There is no dispute about the fundamentals of religion, about the prayer, the worship, the fasting, the Hajj. It is important that we see that the Prophet has done all that is necessary for the establishment of Islam. This is what we mean when we say that the Prophet is the Seal of the Prophets. There is only dispute about whether the Prophet appointed ‘Ali or left it to the community to decide who would lead Islam. The question is one of politics, whether the leader is the political leader or the one with moral and religious authority with regard to Islam. This is the point that we are arguing with our Sunni brothers about. It is very important to understand this point.

8 Sometimes Christians look at the Imamate and they wonder is this really democratic. Even with regard to Iran they question Valayat-i Faqih, but I told them that really the power is with the people to elect their leaders. With regard to the Imamate, we need to say that these have the authority of their religion and the learning in their religion. Imamate is something bigger than Caliphate.

9 If you look to the last few months of the Prophet you find the Prophet is very well aware of what is going to happen. The problem was political. He was aware that there were groups who were vying for political rule and stood in the way of Ahul Bayt. Similarly in Iraq today we have the problem of politics, the problems of religion only came later. Over time people developed theories about the Caliphate and about the Imamate. The Prophet as he approached his death had done his job, we need to do our job: to see the Prophet’s name is kept clean of all those who would defile him. We are offended by the cartoons only because they bring the name of the Prophet into disrepute.

10 However we recall that yesterday 70 teenagers were killed by a person who claimed to act in the name of Muhammad. They were killed only because they were Shi’a. What kind of Muslim are these? Those who caused the hijab to be banned in France are those who abuse the hijab and give a bad impression about the hijab.
The most popular name used today to name children is Muhammad. The Prophet was crying at one stage before this death and some of his followers asked him, for what are you crying? He said I am worried about you, about my family. Look at the history of his family. Have any members of the family of Jesus been tortured? The family of the Prophet faced opposition not from the Christian or from the Jew but from Muslims. All the grandchildren of the Prophet were killed by Muslims. Fatima passed away with her heart broken by the actions of Muslims who placed themselves in opposition to the family of the Prophet. If you want to understand terrorism and why it has happened, go to that early period of Islamic history and understand what is happening.

I have said that a "clash of civilizations" is happening but between which civilizations, between the West and the East, between the West and Islam, within Islam and that twisted version of Islam promoted by the Wahhabi? The other side in the clash of civilizations will not be the Christian, the Jewish or the West but that brand of Islam that is committed to violence, the Wahhabi. We are suffering till today because this group were committed to procuring power from the hands of the Family of the Prophet for their own ends.

Analysis

The Prophet Muhammad is presented as being aware of this death and the suffering that his family would endure with his passing. He had completed his teaching of the religion and the foundation of the Islamic community. Yet, he was aware that this community could return to its tribalistic roots and polytheistic practices. For this reason he was anxious to preserve the leadership within his family.40

The problem of extremism is not a new problem to Islam. Right back in the time of Imam Hussein there was extremism, fundamentalism, intolerance and terrorism. We recall the sacrifice of Imam Hussein because he was the one who stood up to this injustice and oppression and reclaimed Islam from dictatorship, tribalism and sectarianism. Today in the world of Islam we find the same problems facing the Umma. The rise of Political Islam among the Wahhabi, the rise of militant and radical Islam, is a problem for all Muslims and particularly the Shi‘a who are often the target of this violence and intolerance.41

40 The Islamic Community after the death of the Prophet Muhammad is dealt with in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2. These events are of central importance to the Shi‘a.
41 The problem of terrorism and violent insurgency particularly in Iraq is dealt with in Chapter 5, Section 5.6. Shi‘a can empathise with victims of terrorism and religious violence because of their history of violent oppression particularly in Iraq.
The preacher presents an ideal image of Shi'i religious heroes of early Islamic history in contrast to corrupt heroes of the Beni Umayyad. ‘Ali is associated with democratic government and the Muawiya is associated with dictatorship. This is a clash in early Islamic history that is revisited through the eyes of a twenty-first century discourse. In the eighteenth century with the emergence of the Qajar dynasty there were initiatives of reconciliation facilitated by Nadir Shah and certain Sufi orders that revered ‘Ali and Shi'i Imams.\(^{42}\) However, with the advent of Islamic modernism, during the second half of the nineteenth century, attempts to build reconciliation between the Sunni factions and the Shi‘i faction in Islam fell away. Wahhabism expanded within Saudi Arabia in the nineteenth century, being built upon Hanbali rigorism and a puritan militancy that sought to root out all innovations in Islam. In the words of Enayat, “Wahhabism represented the greatest fundamental challenge to Shi‘ism since the beginning of Islam”.\(^{43}\) The ravaging of Shi‘i shrines to Shi‘i Imams and members of the Prophet’s family at Medina aroused lasting passions among the Shi‘a rendering them even more diligent in guarding their separate identity.

Wahhabism is presented as a serious treat not only to Muslims but to Islam. The preacher continues to make the point that terrorism and violence particularly visited upon the Shi‘a in Iraq since 2003 have been supported by an ideology of radical Islam. The murder of innocents in the name of Islam is a new and frightening reality that has roots in Wahhabi ideology. This aberration in Islam is on the increase but needs to be addressed and confronted.

The essential problem of retaining political power to remain part of the political elite is one that has deep resonances in Islam. It goes to the heart of conversion to Islam at the time of the Prophet and the vision of the Prophet to transform Meccan society. Shi‘i preachers are reading modern history with the hindsight of years of political and religious oppression. Modern geo-political challenges, between Saudi Arabia and Iran, have religious and political interpretations that are expressed in Mosques throughout Iraq and the Shi‘i world. These are rooted in readings of early Islamic history and the idealization and demonization of characters within early Islamic history to support religious and political narratives today.

\(^{42}\) In Chapter 3, I identify developments in the early history of Shi‘i politics in Iran and political developments in the 20\(^{th}\) Century which led to the empowerment of the Shi‘a in Iran.

This sermon was preached on April 19th 2008 at the Shi‘i Ahul Bayt Centre, Milltown, Dublin, by Sayyid ‘Ali Al-Saleh.

1 The question is often asked of Shi‘a, why do you continue to mourn those human beings who have passed away, Rasul Allah, Imam Hussein, Fatima. When we mourn these people it is because their death is a sign of a new history, a sign of a new event, a sign of a tragedy happening to Muslims everywhere. When we sit and gather to remember the death of Rasul Allah, it is to remind ourselves of what has happened after his death. We want to talk about the death of Fatima to understand certain events that happened at that time. Our understanding is not complete because we are not tackling this question many people are asking, why is there terrorism? extremism? Nobody has got the courage to address the issue from its beginning.

2 That is why the followers of Ahul Bayt, the Shi‘a, have the complete picture, they know what is going on, why this is happening, and what is going to happen in the future. Once you understand it will give you an explanation. Rasul Allah has said about his daughter, “I am part of her, she is part of me. Those who hurt her are hurting me, those who mistreat her are mistreating me.” Allah will accept those that are accepted by Fatima, and will reject those who are rejected by Fatima. What does this mean? Come and respect my daughter, come and listen to my daughter. Does it mean that Rasul Allah was favouring his family in the way dictators are corrupt? Or, does is mean that Allah has chosen this person as a complete and incorruptible sign and symbol for Islam.

3 Why do we need an infallible person in the history of religion? In religion, do we need an infallible person? There is something in religion that when you accept it you surrender to it. You will believe in that religion and in the supreme power that is at the heart of that religion. It is said that without an infallible person in the religion there will not be the opportunity to convince others that what has been revealed is in fact from God. You can then find a way to escape from surrendering to Allah. This is the same in every religion, so that the people can say what has been revealed is truly from God. Once you say that he is not infallible you can find an excuse. There are some who say, when the Prophet talks about religion he is infallible; when he talks about other things he is speaking as a mere human being. But how can we distinguish between that which is religion and that which is just normal life? How you eat, how you wash yourself, all of these are connected with religion. Religion needs an infallible person in order for it to be accepted.
We are not saying that the Prophet is infallible because he is a great person. I can not accept him as Prophet until I know he was infallible. Saying that the Prophet is infallible is saying that he was infallible since his birth. Otherwise, I can criticise him and choose what teaching suits me and that I like. In revelation you have to convince the people that this is from God and not just a theory. When you see that there are people before you who have reached this level then you have the courage and the will to reach that level. That is why an example of perfectness is needed in the life of the human being. When you have Musa and Jesus and Muhammad and the Imams in your life then you can be confident what is asked of you in Islam can be achieved. If you are committing sin, don’t say, “I am a hopeless case”. Satan will want you to feel that you are hopeless so that you will be for him alone. Say rather, “if I commit sin today In ShaAllah, Allah will help me tomorrow”. Having the infallible person gives us the hope and the strength so that we can continue in this life towards Allah. There is no way to feel hopeless; one biggest sin is to feel hopeless from the mercy of Allah. Having Muhammad as a perfect person gives us the hope that we can continue on the road until we reach that level of the perfect which we see in Islam in the Prophet and in the Imams. This is much the same as in Christianity, where Christians believe that that Jesus can forgive sins. Not only man can reach the perfectness, it is a gift. Mary and Fatima were perfect human beings.

Analysis

The central claim of the sermon is that of the doctrine of divine leadership of the infallible (Masoomeen) including the twelve Imams. By virtue of their divine origin these holy ones are infallible and worthy of being followed. The Shi’a see in the Ahul Bayt a new history and a new revelation. This is the action of the Divine in history and is affirmed by the Qur’an.

There have been many challenges to Shi’i theology in Islamic history, in recent history challenges to Shi’i theology have come mainly for Wahhabism and radical Islam.

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45 Shi’i Muslims find Quranic support for the Imamate in Verse 124, Sura 2, Al Baqarah, “And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certin Commands, which he fulfilled: He said, ‘I will make thee an Imam to the people’. He pleaded ‘And also (Imams) from my offspring!’ He answered : ‘But My Promise is not within the reach of evil-doers’.”

46 In Section 6.3.2, I deal with the Apologetic in relation to Sunni Islam paying particular attention to the teaching of Ibn Taymiyya.
6.3 EXAMINATION OF THE SERMONS AND THEIR ANALYSIS

In the analysis above I have identified most of the points of concern that emerged within the interviews of Iraqi Shi‘i with regard to their understanding of these sermons and the sentiments expressed by the preachers. It is necessary however to examine in more detail what is being said in these narratives and to identify more common themes for reflection. I suggest the following themes and headings

6.3.1 Defending minority faith in a pluralist world

For the most part the preacher addresses his own Shi‘i community, however, other communities are often addressed apologetically in the discourse. There is the wider Iraqi community living in exile, the Sunni community, communities in the Middle East and western society that are often associated with Christianity. The apologetic functions by explaining the mainstream Shi‘i position as against the position of another community and also by means of a moral argument focusing on moral reform within the community.

Within the process of globalisation it is often difficult for minority views and non-dominant narratives to be expressed and heard. Yet a critique of dominant narratives is imperative to gaining insight into powers-relations within globalization. In the light of dominant narratives of expansionism, radicalism and fundamentalism in the Islamic world, it is important to defend minority voices within Islam and in a pluralist world. One of the efforts of this study is to give the Iraqi Shi‘i minority voice intelligibility and coherence in the world of Islam and in the larger pluralist world.

6.3.2 Apologetic in relation to Sunni Islam

The most common “other” addressed in the general discourse is the Sunni community locally, in Iraq and worldwide. The general discourse argues that, though the Shi‘a are a minority, they are the possessors of the original, pure and true Islam that was disimimed by the majority of Muslims after the death of the Prophet. It is the personality of ‘Ali as the first Imam and successor to the Prophet that is the key to the Shi‘i belief. There is much criticism of the Wahhabi who are seen to represent the Beni Umayyyad of early Islamic history in their opposition and intolerance towards the Shi‘a. The reality is most clearly seen in relation to the Shi‘a of Saudi Arabia. Wahhabi teaching has been influenced by Ibn Taymiyya a central character in Shi‘i apologetical preaching in relation the Sunni.
Ibn Taymiyya has many criticism of the Shi’a. He was at pains to point out that the Twelver Shi’a were misguided. His main criticisms of Shi’ism in general can be summarised as follow by Hamid Enayat:47

a) there is nothing in the Qur’an or the Sunna to support the Shi’i claim that the Imamate is one of the pillars of religion. The hidden Imam has been absent for hundreds of years, the anticipation of his return has produced nothing by false hopes and corruption

b) the claim and belief that ‘Ali was the rightful successor to the Prophet on the basis of divine designation are contradictory to that of divine justice. The Divine would not have allowed itself to commit an injustice against the emerging Islamic community, by depriving it of its rightful leader.

c) the doctrine of ‘ilm is the belief in a special knowledge inherited by ‘Ali’s descendants from Muhammad, thereby endowing them with the unique capacity to perceive the correct rules of religion. Clearly ‘Ali’s descendants had a unique exposure to Prophetic values and knowledge and through diligent hard work could rival Maliki, Shafi’i and Ibn Hanbal, however, Sunni Muslims were equally diligent and hard-working and in some cases more knowledgeable than the Alids.

These criticisms are often laid against the Shi’a by Sunni and particularly the Wahhabi, who criticize the Shi’a of idolotary and the worship of the Imams. The worship of one other that Allah is regarded as the greatest sin (shirk) in Islam.

These criticisms reach the core of much of Shi’i narratives and preaching. They strike at the core Islamic identity of Shi’i Muslims. The Shi’a are aware of their minority status and the history of oppression and intimidation over many centuries and contexts by Sunni rulers. Shi’a relate to the suffering of victims of religious violence and terrorism, have no difficulty in condemning radical Islamist as insisting Muslims to violence and in identifying elements in Islam that has in the past supported dictatorship and oppression.

There is much controversy over the difference between the issue of the “power to rule” and that of the “competence to rule”. It is possible to have the competence to rule but not the possibility to rule. Sunni realism recognizes that the legitimacy of the competent ruler is preferable to Shi’i idealism which craves the ascendancy of an inaccessible leader. The Shi’i preachers we have heard made the distinction between political and religious leadership. Religious leaders provide moral authority for political rule, through promoting democracy, transparency and integrity in government. The Shi’i preachers see a lack in

Sunni religious leadership, which in the past has supported dictatorship and oppression. The experience of being a minority and being oppressed has convinced Shi‘i preachers to denounce, terrorism, intolerance, fanaticism and violence in Islam.

There are a number of stock Traditions and Qur’anic texts that are cited in order to prove the original centrality of the Family of the Prophet and the right to succession of ‘Ali. The most popular are the so called Hadis-e Kisa (Tradition of the Cloak), when the Prophet gathered his immediate family under the cloak, the Confrontation with the Christians of Najran known as the Mubahala, referred to in Sura-e Al Imran 3:16 and the Tradition of Ghadir Khumm.

There are a number of cited passages from the Qur’an that refer to the centrality of the Imamate and the Ahul Bayt. These include Sura-e Nisa 4:59. “O ye who believe! Obey God and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority from among you.” This ayat is interpreted in relation to the Imams, in whom it is necessary that believers have faith and obedience. Sura-e Shura 42:23 quotes the Prophet as saying “I demand not of you any recompense for it (the toils of apostleship) save the love of my relatives”, which is interpreted as referring to love of the Ahul Bayt. Another popular text is Sura-e Baqara 2:124: “And remember when his Lord tried Abraham with certain words then he fulfilled them. He said ‘Verily I make thee Imam for mankind.’ (Abraham) said ‘And of my offspring’ He said ‘My covenant reacheth not the unjust.’” This makes of ‘Ali and the Imams divinely sanctioned leaders within the community.

The Ahul Bayt are placed in a category of infallibility, chosen by God and in possession of divine wisdom and knowledge necessary for the guidance of the community. ‘Ali and the Imamate are the “Speaking Qur’an” whose life and action are necessary in order to understand the inner aspects of the Qur’an.

In contrast to the Sunni understanding of the unletteredness of the Prophet Muhammad, Shi‘i preachers argue that the Prophet could indeed read and write and to think otherwise would be to denigrate him.

Within a rereading of early Islamic history the leadership of the community by political personalities is under dispute by minority groups within the Umma. These political rulers, Umayyad and ‘Abbasid Caliphs oppressed the religious and political authority of the Shi‘i Imams, confining them and having them killed. There is a parallel made between those political leaders, who opposed the Prophet in early Meccan times, those who opposed the Imam during Umayyad and ‘Abbasid times and those today who are committed to terrorism and violence against the Shi‘a. In the context of a violent and unstable Iraq, radical and violent elements within the Sunni camp who are committing
violent acts against innocent Shi'a are associated with the tyrants who defeated Imam Hussein at Karbala and successively martyred Imams. Particular hostility is reserved for those Wahhabi and Salafi Muslims whose intolerance of the Shi'a has become institutionalized and nationalized in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East.

6.3.3 Apologetic in relation to Christianity

Although the Sunni Muslim community is the most common “other” spoken to in the general discourse, preachers also speak of the Christian other in the general discourse. The role of religion in society is promoted. Religion is seen as a civilizing and a humanizing influence, giving meaning, purpose and value to life. It is about the values that are cherished and promote peace, reconciliation and love of one’s neighbour. Islam and Christianity are seen as within the great narratives of history, influencing peoples’ lives and creating a world ethic of global responsibility. Islam is presented as superior and the “fastest growing religion in the world” with the greatest numbers turning to Shi‘i Islam. This is evidence of its diverging origin and favour.

There is little of the antagonism expressed towards radical Islam and there is a real appreciation of the values promoted in Christianity, among religious groups, Church communities and religious orders. There is an appreciation of the role of the clergy and the episcopacy within the Catholic Church, its centralized authority and its centralized teaching. The experience of interfaith relations and interreligious dialogue have created a discourse of appreciation and mutual support, working with government groups as faith communities and seeking representation as faith communities on education and political platforms.

In this context, both Jesus and Mary become important not only for who they are in Islam but also in terms of what they represent as religious figures in Christianity. There is both an articulation of the role of Jesus and Mary and an acknowledgement of the importance of Christianity and interfaith relations in the Qur’an.

6.3.4 Apologetic in relation to the West

Given that these preachers are living in the West, western civil society figures greatly in the discourse. Preachers living here are aware of the perceived superiority of the West in areas of science, technology, human rights and political management. They are aware of how civil society and political society provide for its members within the social services in the fields of education, health and the law. There is a well-established welfare system and many Muslim immigrants have benefited from this system.

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There is the awareness of the colonial history of the West in Islamic societies and the neo-colonial foreign policy, particularly of the American and British governments. American and British involvement in the Middle East has been seen as one of self aggrandisement, political and military interference.

The situation in Iraq has changed radically for Iraqi Shi’a their perception of American foreign policy. There is a clear identification with promoting democracy and supporting human rights despite the horrors of war and occupation. There is an alignment with the marja in Iraq which see the Americans there as guests, unfortunate but necessary, in order that dictatorship can be replaced with democracy. Shi’i preachers in the West have been instrumental in changing attitudes within their community through their condemnation of violence, radical Islam and terrorism in the name of Islam.

6.3.5 Uniting the community through praise and in a narrative of suffering

Howarth identifies two elements of the preaching that respond to different aspects of the majalis ritual. The first is known as the faza’il and is an exposition of the virtues of the great Shi’i personalities. The second part of the preaching is referred to as the masa’ib and makes up the narrative of the suffering of these personalities, particularly those martyrs associated with Karbala.

6.3.5a Uniting the Community in praise of Shi‘i personalities

The faza’il follows the general discourse in the sermon. This is a section often phrased in poetry or poetic prose, recited in Arabic, and that corresponds to an exposition of the great Shi’i personalities, particularly ‘Ali. The word faza’il means excellencies. The faza’il is often composed of a series of short units strung together and made up of miniature narratives, mini-expositions of Qur’anic passages or Traditions. The discourse is decidedly ‘insider’ and Arabic. There are poetic references not only to ‘Ali but to members of the Ahul Bayt, e.g., Amir al-Mu’min, (Commander of the Faithful), Saqi-e Kawsar (The Cupbearer of the pool who distributes its water to his followers at Judgement Day), and Qasim al-Nar (Distributor of the Fire, sending sinners to Hell). The Masters of the Youths of Paradise are, according to tradition, Hasan and Hussein.

The faza’il is participatory and the congregation responds with exclamations such as Subhan Allah, (Glory to God), Ya ‘Ali, Ya Hayder, (Bravo ‘Ali, Well done ‘Ali). The faza’il appeals to the heart and to the emotions. The highlighting of the Virtues of the great
Shi'i heroes of faith creates in the hearts of the faithful feelings of pride and faithfulness. It deepens the relationship between the congregation and the Holy Ones. The faza'il helps the congregation to identify values and virtues of heroic self-sacrifice while creating a space of devotion, love and loyalty. In this way this element of the sermon deepens the commitment of the community to its Shi'i faith and to the service of each other.

An example of the use of narrative in the faza'il is a sermon preached on the anniversary of 'Ali's death, in which the Virtues expounded are those of 'Ali. His generosity is presented in his giving away his ring to a poor man and in giving a whole caravan of camels to a beggar who asked for bread. 'Ali assists the Prophet in eluding those opposed to Islam by sleeping in the Prophet's bed while the Prophet makes his way to Medina. 'Ali's prowess and bravery in battle is also exclaimed.

There is a clear distinction between the general discourse and that of the faza'il. The general discourse is reasoned to convince the outsider. The faza'il is directed at the Shi'i insider who would be aware of the link between giving Alms and the Tradition in which 'Ali gives his ring to a beggar during ritual prayers, after which Sura-e Ma'ida (5:55) is believed to have been revealed. The faza'il is the language of a common, familiar and shared narrative.

The faza'il has a moral function also, inculcating values such as generosity, loyalty and piety. There are countless stories of 'Ali's bravery in battle, his simplicity of lifestyle and his integrity in judgement. In this way the faza'il both functions to extol the virtues of the Ahul Bayt by glorifying them and inspires Shi'i followers.

6.3.5b Uniting the community in a Narrative of Suffering

The essential core of the majlis sermon is the masa'ib or the narration of the Sufferings of the Karbala martyrs and other Shi'i personalities. The masa'ib forms a distinct part of the majlis sermon following the general discourse and is always recognizable on the part of the congregation. The preacher may announce the transition to the masa'ib through the mention of Karbala and the martyrs involved. During the transition to the masa'ib the preacher may take off his turban, take out a hankerchief or unbutton his coat, all signals that he is beginning to grieve. These trigger-words and actions evoke a response of grieving and tears. The congregation cover their eyes with their hands and mourn aloud, grieving the suffering of their beloved Imams and Shi'i personalities.

The central feature of the masa'ib is the narration of suffering. This is generally the lead up to the death of the venerable personality. Important Shi'i personalities have their own masa'ib, Hussein, 'Ali, Abbas and Fatima. These personalities include the members
of Hussein’s family killed at Karbala. Members of the congregation have heard the recitation of masa’ib narratives since their childhood. This gives the preacher a certain flexibility in the use of the narratives. There are always essential elements of the Kebala Narrative that weave together the story in its particular pathos. These elements include the arrows killing the infant ‘Ali Asghar, the cutting of the arms of Abbas, the spear killing Hussein and young Sakina confronting the severed head of Hussein. The graphic quality of the violence heightens the tragic component of the narrative. The familiarity with the narrative and the emotion bind the congregation in an intimate union of shared grief and a common history.

The congregation is linked back to the events that are narrated. The congregation is linked to its community of origin in Iraq, to the extended family and relational context from which the congregation was exiled. The congregation is united with those who suffered grievously during the present Iraq war and occupation, sharing their struggle and their suffering.

This is the creation of a “liminal reality” a threshold experience, a liturgical and ritual world in which the events of Karbala are fused with the present painful reality, in this process community identity is reformed, strengthened and healed.

Conclusion

Having examined the qualitative methodology undertaken and given account of the sermons preached by Shi‘i leaders I have ended with a critical discussion of themes that have arisen in Shi‘i preaching. Though the sermons outlined are few in number they provide representative, clear, articulate and evocative evidence of Shi‘i grievance against a Sunni, in particular Wahhabi, distortion of “true Islam”. The sermons present a worldview that is deeply held and situated within a particular religious and cultural context. This is also a context of trauma and dislocation when we consider that these communities are communities in exile, communities removed from the cultural and religious soil of their homeland. Despite being removed from the reality of war and occupation, these communities still experience the grief of separation, the consequences of violence and the trauma of exile. Yet these communities have established roots and an identity here in Europe and have made links with European communities of reflection and religion through their insertion in society. Many have benifited through social welfare and education. This

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has enabled them to see and critique positive elements of western society that have in the past been considered only anti-Islamic, anti-Muslim and anti-Arab. In reality, a new appreciation of western values is being appropriated within the Islamic community and particularly the Shi’i community, one that is identifying common themes for the development of civil society, not only in the West but also in war-torn Iraq.

Much of the preaching in ritual Shi’i Islam is concerned with the martyrdom of the Imams, who were killed despite living exemplarly lifes. Remembering them evokes lament and sadness among the Shi’a and is a dominant theme in the Shi‘i sermons.
CHAPTER VII  SHI‘I NARRATIVES IN DIALOGUE WITH CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

Introduction

I have sought to develop an understanding of Iraqi Shi‘i Muslims as they build new lives in the West, especially in Ireland and the UK, by looking at their history and origins, their distinction from their Muslims, the Sunni, their emergence as a political force, their homeland in Iraq, and the circumstances that have brought about their emigration. In Chapter VI, we heard their voices in the sermons preached in ritual settings. This revealed a community in exile that was expressing its faith in new contexts and with different challenges. It also revealed a community that engaged creatively with the culture and ideas that surrounded it. The old narratives of faith and ritual become entwined with new, western narratives of democracy, tolerance and engagement. In this chapter I seek to deepen the Shi‘i-western dialogue with the West and its values. I pick up on themes already adumbrated in previous chapters and, by developing issues from my own western and Christian tradition, I seek to extend the boundaries of future Shi‘i-Christian dialogue by creatively combining current Shi‘i concerns with Catholic theology and western feminism. As well as highlighting the contributions that Shi‘i thought gives to the West and to theology I offer a contribution from my own tradition to Shi‘i thinkers in mutual respect and reciprocity. Various scholars to whom I have made reference, such as John Allen, James Bill and John Williams, have brought elements of a more theological hue to Shi‘i Muslim-Catholic Christian dialogue. Nevertheless, and apart from the contributions of Anthony O’Mahony, there has been little sustained theological engagement with Shi‘i thought, and nothing that I am aware of with political theology.

According to Louis Massignon (1883-1962) the death of al-Hallaj is an example in Islam of a Muslim mirroring the truth of the crucifixion\(^1\) and an important recognition for Muslim Christian relations and Islamic Christian theology. In reality no one community has a monopoly on suffering, many Muslims have been crucified and slaughtered in the Middle East under conditions of oppression, war and occupation. The death of Imam Hussain is a dangerous and explosive memory for Shi‘i believers, powerful enough to

transform religious, social and political structures. Yet it speaks deeply and profoundly to religious devotees as they recall their own suffering and grief in religious ritual and are transformed and enlivened to life their grief and loss with integrity.

In both the Christian and Muslim traditions there is little attention to grief and loss as central thematics in theological reflection within interreligious dialogue, though these themes are present separately in each. Part of the burden of this thesis is to explicate the possibilities for dialogue and mutual learning in linking grief and loss in both traditions. For this interreligious dialogue the preceding chapters provide the Christian theologian with the necessary foundations for dialogue with Shi‘i religious thought.

In this chapter, then, with its focus on the dialogical dimension of grief and loss, I engage reciprocally with partners whom I have to this point mainly sought to represent faithfully as well as seek to further the interreligious debate with resources from my own tradition that, I believe, can be authentically related to (some of) what I have learnt from those partners.

7.1 **SHI‘I AND CATHOLIC THOUGHT IN DIALOGUE**

There are many similarities between Catholicism and Shi‘ism. The growing power of liberation theology in the world of Roman Catholicism that appeared as a populism movement in the 1960s and 1970s could be compared to the populist opposition to the Shah that crystallized in the Islamic revolution of 1979. The resulting authoritarianism, centralism and clerical power can be compared to the Catholic authorities’ response to liberation theology in South America.

John Allen while writing about the future of the Catholic Church identifies Shi‘i Islam as one of the most “dynamic worldwide religious movements” today. He speaks of a “Shi‘a revival” and a “Shi‘a surge” whereby Shi‘i Islam is experiencing rapid growth and expansion worldwide and particularly across the Middle East. He indicates that there has been a growth of interest in dialogue between Shi‘i Islam and Catholicism and that the Catholic Church is well situated to promote this dialogue in the twentieth century. He sees these development rooted in the many shared parallels between Shi‘i Islam and Catholicism including: a tradition of clerical authority; devotion to a holy family and

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saints; a theology of sacrifice and atonement; belief in free will; holydays, pilgrimages and healing shrines; intercessory prayer and emotional forms of popular piety.\(^5\)

Dialogue has been taking place, especially in migrant spaces in the West, between Shi‘a and Catholics. There have been numerous encounters between Shi‘i thought and Catholicism, particularly Roman Catholicism. Though this dialogue may seem surprising at first it merits some attention as the Roman Catholic Church in the West is well known, on the one hand, for its struggles with secularism and other ideologies, and, on the other, for its own development of liberation and political theologies. Therefore, it is theologically profitable to look at the relation of Shi‘i thought to both liberation theology and political theology; we begin with a brief overview of Catholic thought.

### 7.1.1 Catholic Liberation Theology and Shi‘ism\(^6\)

Both Shi‘i scholars and Catholic scholars have had a long and lively debate about the relationship between faith and reason within their respective traditions. In both traditions the centrality of reason is affirmed. The general conclusion is that reason can lead to the truths of revelation and that revelation does not exclude reason. In Catholicism, the good of the community takes precedence over the well-being of the individual. Within Islam, the *umma* and hence unity takes precedence over individualism, dispersion and division.

Both Catholicism and Shi‘ism continue to reject the alternatives of Western liberalism and eastern socialism. Each attempts its own delicate balance between centralization and participation, authority and liberty. However, both traditions have leaned in the direction of central control. Despite this, the Roman Catholic and Twelver Shi‘i traditions have maintained a sensitivity to the needs of the individual and of the poor and to the importance of human rights and social justice.

The role of women in both traditions has come under close scrutiny. The Islamic educational system overwhelmingly favours men, and women *mujahids* are rare. In Catholic structures of ecclesial power and authority women are simply excluded. In Catholicism and Twelver Shi‘ism, then, opportunities for women to play a significantly (more) meaningful public role have yet to be explored.


Notwithstanding their resources in providing meaning, dignity and justice to humankind, the challenges of modernity, while preserving a valued heritage, remain demanding to both these faith traditions as they face the twenty-first century.

7.1.2 The Ashura Narrative in Dialogue with Catholic Theology

Like Islam, Catholicism is as much a tradition as a community and a way of being in the world. It has its own universe of meaning, which, following O’Mahony⁷, we see as including sacramentality, mediation, communion, rationality, regard for authority and order and openness to truth.

There has been significant encounter between Catholicism and Shi‘ism over the centuries⁸ which have identified several parallels and areas of convergence. O’Mahony identifies three that are most significant:

- mediation up on the significance of the passion of an innocent victim who took upon himself the sins of the community and atoned for them; belief that God’s grace is mediated through earthly and heavenly hierarchies; and faith in intercessors.⁹

I would also add that both Catholicism and Shi‘ism emphasize a mother figure in their belief systems, and she is regarded as both an intercessor and example to women and men. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is a central figure in Catholic prayer, ritual and theology. She is the virgin Mother of God, Theotokos and Mother of the Church, centre of Marian devotion and intercession. While Mary is likewise mentioned in the Qur’an it is not to her but to the daughter of the Prophet that the Christian Mary must be paralleled as intercessor and exemplar. Fatima, as the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, wife of ‘Ali and mother of Imams Hasan and Hussein, is a central woman in Islam and within Shi‘i Islam, central to the holy family of Ahul Bayt. She also occupies an intercessory role. Those who attend majlis believe that Fatima also attends, mourning for her martyr-son and interceding for those who mourn Hussein. She is al-Zahra (the Shining One) immaculate and impeccable,

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⁹ Ibid., p.99.
linking those who mourn Hussein and the Imams with the holy family in Islam and to the Divine, who hears all those who weep. In recent years the life and role of Fatima have been reinterpreted by western scholars, such as Louis Massignon, and Muslim scholars such as ‘Ali Shariati. She is interpreted as an inspiring companion to her father, an active and political defender of her family, the conscience and moral compass of the early Muslim community and a model faithful Muslims.

Suffering and martyrdom are essential marks in the history of both Shi‘i Islam and Catholicism. The early Christian community witnessed the growth of a cult of martyrs. The blood of martyrs was regarded as the seeds of the Church, its resilience, its fidelity and its forbearance. Those who were persecuted for their faith were termed confessors and the Church continues in its liturgical memory to revere martyrs and confessors. At a more fundamental level is the suffering and death of Jesus. The central redemptive mystery at the heart of Christianity is the Pascal Mystery, the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, a “free act of moral solidarity”\(^\text{10}\) with suffering humanity. This redemptive event has been interpreted as an act of substitution, an act of atonement, an act of reparation, an act of liberation from death and an act of deliverance. With these interpretations parallels with liberation theology and political theology that inform the Shi‘i understanding and practise of Ashura among Shi‘i communities in exile can be identified.

Within Islam and particularly Shi‘i Islam suffering and martyrdom has central significance. The suffering of the Holy Family in Islam and the suffering of the Prophet Muhammad are emphasized in Shi‘i ritual and preaching. In the tradition reporting a dialogue between God and the Prophet, on the night of the Prophet’s heavenly journey (\textit{mi‘raj}), the Prophet was told by God of his trials.\(^\text{11}\) He was to live a life of poverty, he was to suffer persecution and exile and his family would suffer persecution and martyrdom after his death. Such an interpretation is in sharp contrast to militant and domineering interpretations of the life of the Prophet, proposed by opponents of Islam and modern, radical Islamist movements. However, suffering is particularly associated with the Shi‘i Imams and, especially, the third Imam, Imam Hussein. These are regarded as the proofs of God, the \textit{Hujaj Allah} and they form a golden line of descendants, who suffer oppression, injustice, tyranny and eventually martyrdom. We have seen that the Imams constitute the

\(^{10}\) James A. Bill and John Alden Williams, \textit{Roman Catholics and Shi‘i Muslims}, University of North Carolina Press, North Carolina, 2002, p.64.

cream of humanity, the best of creatures, earthly as well as celestial beings. Each suffered injustice at the hands of Umayyad and ‘Abbasid Caliphs despite their noble lineage. The martyrdom of Hussein is regarded as an event of “cosmic significance”. It is the central and defining event of Shi’i Islam. It provides for the Shi’i community the focal point from which all subsequent history must be viewed and in this it parallels Jesus’s redemptive death on the cross. For Muslims it is as definitive in religious history as the Battle of Badr. The martyrdom of Hussein is the central event and sacrifice in the struggle (jihad) against injustice, wrongdoing and falsehood. In this way it is regarded as a redemptive act. Through recalling and re-enacting this memory, Shi’i Muslims participate in the sacrifice of Imam Hussein, they identify with the tragedy of his family and receive his intercession. Through mourning and the shedding of tears they win a participation in the heavenly rewards and paradise on the Day of Resurrection. Through the recital of lamentation poetry (marathi), through participation in the ritual of matam, through the remembrance of the Ashura narrative (ta’ziyah majlis), the Shi’i faithful relive an event in their spiritual history and renew their relationship with it. The past becomes a “now” of a religious community that is extended back into history and forward into the future and this, too, is analogous to the Christian community as it gathers around the communion table to celebrate the Last Supper, an event which is seen to link the past, present and future in an eschatological mystery. Those who visit the shrines of the Imams and grieve there for the family of the Prophet (Ahul Bayt) will cement their bonds with their Imam and have their sins forgiven.

Anglican Bishop and Islamic scholar Kenneth Cragg has reflected upon the tragic in Islam and particularly within Shi’ism. According to Cragg the Shi’a are acutely aware “that there is more to being human that unpitying pursuit of success. The keenest theology is the one most alert to the tragic”. The recalling the tragic is of vital importance to the Shi’a. It is both a central religious theme and a point of convergence and dialogue with Christians.

12 In a previous chapter we identified the centrality of the Imamate. Shi’i tradition equates rejection of the imams with the most unforgiveable sin of association, or shirk. For the Shi’a the doctrine of the Imamate is an integral part of the doctrine of prophethood.


14 *Ibid.*, p.143, Ayoub quotes the following hadith: “There is no servant (‘abd) whose eyes shed one drop of tears for us, but that God will grant his for it the reward of the countless ages in paradise.”

The pilgrimage to the shrine of the Imam (ziyara) provides a vehicle for pilgrims to express their protest at the injustices meted out to the Prophet’s family, in religious history and in their present history of religious and oppression as a suffering minority. Weeping re-enacts the cosmic drama, opens a space of liminal participation, allows for healing, forgiveness of sins and intercession for future needs.\(^\text{16}\)

Participation in the Ashura narrative is not only a religious event but also a powerful protest in Islamic history against all wrong, all oppression; religious and political. This narrative has been used and interpreted throughout the ages to provide legitimacy to monarchical rule, state control, revolution and democracy to name but a few.

Thus, in both Catholic Christianity and Shi’i Islam there are significant events which recall believers to believe, pray, act and live in similar identity-forming ways. And there are in both faiths significant intercessors who link the divine and human spheres: both faiths accept a mediator between God and humanity, who plays a determining role in the divine plan for creation, in revelation and in salvation. According to Henri Corbin Shi’i imamology is a kind of “Islamic Christology”.\(^\text{17}\) As Ayoub identifies\(^\text{18}\), Christ the eternal Logos, the divine Word, is the agent of creation, intercession and redemption. Similarly, the Imams are the pivot of creation and the reason for subsistence, the link between the divine intercession and Islamic piety.

### 7.1.3. The Ashura Narrative and Catholic Liberation Theology

Bill and Williams draw close parallels between Catholics and Shi’i Muslims not only in redemptive suffering and martyrdom but also in the area of “authority, justice and the modern polity.”\(^\text{19}\) In Catholic social teaching the state and the church should exist to promote the common good. Thus, the Catholic church has found that it co-exists with many different kinds of political systems: monarchical, military, theocratic and democratic; while maintaining a distance from political rule; the church tended to see, as observable in various official document of the magisterium, its role as providing moral and spiritual

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guidance in the context of the common good.\textsuperscript{20} This commited, and perhaps sometimes still commits, the church to defending the status quo; in its dialogue with the modern world up and until Vatican II the church at times colluded with institutional and state authority to the detriment of individuals' rights and dignity.

Within the Catholic church, from the early 1960s, a new movement known as liberation theology developed, particularly within the marginalized communities of Latin American. The key historical moments of liberation theology are associated with the aggiornamento theology of Vatican II and the meetings of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) at Medellín in 1968 and in Puebla in 1979. These built on the thinking of Gustavo Gutiérrez who held a conference on liberation theology in 1968 after many years of work and reflection with poor communities. Liberation theology challenged the church and the state on the grounds that key principles such as justice, equality and popular participation were being neglected in theological reflection and Christian praxis.

Marcella Althaus-Reid succinctly identifies the key themes in liberation theology\textsuperscript{21} as: the non-neutrality of theological reflection; option for the poor; the centrality of reality on reflection; praxis and social engagement; orthopraxis determines orthodoxy; and the social structures of sin. At the heart of liberation theology were the reflective communities, the so-called Basic Christian Communities, who were reinterpreting the Christian faith as a radical engagement of the church in the world.\textsuperscript{22} They modelled new ways of being church, of being religiously conscious and conscientious ("conscientization") and of reviving theology and theological method through new hermeneutical structures based on appropriating the Christian Scriptures in the context of poverty, injustice and oppression.

Catholic social teaching reflected the principles of liberation theology. In \textit{Populorum Progressio} Paul VI criticized sharply the abandonment of the poor, providing

\textsuperscript{20} Pope Leo XIII, author of the encyclical \textit{Rerum Novarum} in 1891, spoke out in favour of justice for the working class. Pius XI institutionalised the importance of individual and human rights within the state, in \textit{Quadragesimo Anno} (1931). Pope John XXIII in \textit{Mater et Magistra} (1961) continued the principal of subsidiarity, which protected and empowered the individual in society against a disproportionately powerful state.


\textsuperscript{22} Kieran Flynn, \textit{Communities for the Kingdom}, AMECEA Gaba Publications, Eldoret, 2007. In this publication I present the Small Christian Communities of East Africa as modelled upon the Basic Christian Communities of Latin America in their commitment to interpret Christian Scripture in the light of their experience. This modelled a new way of being Church, an ecclesiogenesis that was build on the principles of community, discipleship, empowerment and service.
inspiration to liberation theology. Twenty years later John Paul II wrote an encyclical designed to renew this message. In Sollicitudo Rei Socialis the magisterium of the church recognized its responsibility towards the poor and the right of every individual “to be seated at the table of the common banquet, instead of lying outside the door like Lazarus, while the dogs come and lick his sores.” Despite the clarity of Catholic social teaching, John Paul also moved quietly and effectively against liberation theology. His experience of communism made him wary of the roots of liberation theology, which he perceived to be in Marxism. Though he co-opted many of the ideas and programmes of liberation theology, lamenting the situation of the poor and stressing the importance of base communities although with qualification, he also implemented a programme whereby he sought to weaken liberation theology by excommunicating clerics sympathetic to the new theology and by appointing more conservative bishops and cardinals to key positions. Following the tradition of Leo XIII, Paul VI and others, Pope John Paul II has spoken loudly for the poor while at the same time undercutting the political movement of liberation theology. Pope Benedict XVI has continued in the tradition of his predecessor. He continues to promote Catholic social teaching, concern for the poor while at the same time undermining reform through protecting papal and church authority.

7.1.4 Liberation Theology of Populist Shi‘ism

Throughout the Muslim world there are many who are both poor and oppressed politically. Sunnism and Shi‘ism both face deep social, economic and political problems. As a minority the Shi‘a have experience their fair share of oppression and discrimination. Often the Shi‘a have retreated into a form of quietism, that is both religious and political, in order to protect themselves from hostile forces in majority countries. However, there have always been outlets of activism, rebellion and even revolution. One Sunni source says of the Shi‘a:

The history of the Shi‘a down through the ages is a history of constant revolutions, most of them crushed. Yet every generation of Shiites gathers its revolutionary strength until its revolution fails, then awaits the next generation, or more auspicious circumstances, with the same result.  


In Iran it was Ayatollah Khomeini who broke the mould, and instigated a new activist role for Shi‘i leaders in society. He established the position of the *Faqih*, the learned jurisprudent who represents the ultimate power in Shi‘i society. However, *mujtahids* such as Muhammed Reza Golpayegani in Qom, Abol Qasim Kho’ie in Najaf and Husayn ‘Ali Motazeri warned against clerical intervention in the affairs of the state and particularly the role of the a singular hierarchical ruler, who would have overall political and religious authority, (*Faqih*) within the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The vision of a more politicized *mujtahid* grew in popularity not only in Iran but also in Lebanon, under the direction of Imam Musa al-Sadr, and in Iraq with the rise and popularity of Muhamad Baqir al-Sadr. In Bahrain, a Shi‘i majority country, Shi‘i leader such as Shaykh ‘Ali Salman and Shaykh Abd Al-Amin Mansur al-Jamri were harassed and jailed by the state for their involvement in politics. In Saudi Arabia, Shaykh Hasan al-Saffar established a reform movement, promoting political participation and minority rights. His emphasis on praxis has been compared with that of liberation theologians in Latin America. These clerics represent a new awareness within Shi‘i theology. They were politically active and confronted the secular political elites who controlled their societies. They relied on popular and grassroot support for their policies and they mobilized their faithful through utilizing Islamic narratives of emancipation. Many governments reacted to these perceived threats through imprisoning, intimidating and executing these Shi‘i leaders.

The revolution in Iran was a classic revolution, whereby class conflict and social divisions dismantled the old, Pahlavi, system of patronage and elitism. Low-level government officials, workers, bazaaris and disaffected middle class members, mainly through the organization of religious leaders, overthrew the Shah’s government between January 1978 and February 1979. At the same time that the religious forces disposed of the secular liberals and had a strong base among the lower classes, religious rhetoric and social emancipation went hand in hand. Intellectuals such as ‘Ali Shariati, Morteza Mutahhari and Mehid Bazargan provided the influential articulation of Shi‘i narratives in popular discourse, mobilizing and providing support for the revolution. Khomeini presented his ideas about politics and the state in his books, *Kashf al-Asrar* (The discovery of secrets) and *Hokumat-i Islami* (Islamic government) and, with Bill and Williams, we identify the characteristics of Shi‘i rule as follows:26


• All power and authority emanate from God.
• There is no distinction between the religious and the secular.
• The community of the faithful takes precedence over any constituent parts.
• The divine law has been revealed through the Prophet and the Imams.
• The interpretation of the *shari`a* is entrusted to the guardianship of learned jurists.
• A special leader (*faqih*) oversees the political system.
• The principle of political participation is institutionalized in an Islamic constitution.
• The cardinal principles of justice and equality demand that the masses of the poor and the deprived be accorded special consideration within the Islamic Republic.

The system of state rule adopted by Khomeini has been identified as populist rather than fundamentalist. He borrowed concepts and ideas from the non-Muslim world to formulate a new interpretation of state and society that has much in common with the Third world populism of Latin America. Based upon his personal charism and religio-political philosophy that stresses equality, participation and justice, Khomeini was able to mobilize a multiclass movement into a state polity. He stressed the plight of the *mustaza`fin* (the oppressed) who were victims of the *mustakbarin* (the arrogant), through focusing on social justice and political emancipation. He promoted a legislative body chosen in national elections that would be representative and effective. The system, however, had a clear leaning towards clerical leadership and authoritarianism which became more established over time.\(^{27}\)

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\(^{27}\) The political developments in post-revolutionary and post-Khomeini Iran are beyond the scope of this study. Amir Arjomand speaks about the “post-revolutionary routinization of charism” that occurred in Iran following its revolution and the “subsequent evolution” from revolutionary radicals to reformists that took place among intellectuals in Iran. The succession of Khamenei, the election of Ahmadinejad, the ascendancy of the hardliners and the Revolutionary Guards have ushered in a “clerical monarchy” in the eyes of some. Yet, to Arjomand’s eyes, the future remains surprisingly open and pregnant with possibility. See Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini, Iran under his Successors*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2009. Coughlin examines revolutionary and post-revolutionary Iran, and the reach of Khomeini into all aspects of Iranian life and politics, and the legacy of Khomeini’s authoritarianism and its role in promoting Islamic radicalism throughout the world. In his view, Iran’s nuclear policy, its association with Iraq, Hezbullah and Hamas continue to make it relevant to American foreign policy in the region. See Con Coughlin, *Khomeini’s Ghost, The definitive account of Ayatollah Khomeini’s Islamic revolution and its enduring legacy*, Macmillan, London, 2009.
Within Iraq and during the period of Saddam’s rule, Shi’ism provided a counter-narrative to the central control, oppression and intimidation of the state. As we have seen Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr provided leadership to a growing populist Shi‘i opposition movement. Such a movement was grassroots based and formed by members at the lowest sectors of Iraqi society. Following the 2003 invasion and occupation, the Sadarist movement provided the basis for a groundswell Shi‘i movement against the occupation that had only belatedly become involved in the democratic process. Grand Ayatollah ‘Ali al-Sistani provided the leadership for the Shi‘i masses during the occupation and led the way in promoting the democratic and civil rights of the Shi‘a within the emerging state structures. Shi‘i populism was alive and vibrant in the state, which saw the liberalization and popularity of Shi‘i rituals and practices increase over the period of the occupation.

The commitment of the Shi‘i block in government to provide security for the whole country while participating in a national government was inspired by elements of Shi‘i narratives of emancipation along with practical concerns of building peace and providing for political participation. Shi‘i populism continues to remain relevant in a post-invasion and post-occupation Iraq, as religious identity and ethnic affiliation figure greatly in the politics of state-building that is still tentative and lacking in structure.

7.1.5 Islamic Liberation Theology and Theodicy

Identifying the reality at the heart of Islam is virtually impossible in a world religion that is globally poly-vocal and diverse. Throughout history various narratives have emerged and assumed a dominant status in Islamic ideology. According to Hamid Dabashi, militant Islamism emerged in the early nineteenth century in response to European colonialism and American imperialism in much the same way as liberation movements emerged throughout the colonial world at that time. This ideological resistance

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28 I have contended that the grief over the early divisions in Islam is at the heart of the Sunni-Shi‘a split and in modern Middle Eastern Society, much ecumenical work needs to be done to address the diversity that is often not even addressed in popular teaching of Islam. See Kieran Flynn, “At the Heart of Islam”, in John O’Grady and Peter Scherle (eds.) Ecumenics from the Rim, Lit Verlag, Berlin, 2007, pp.229-235.

29 I have chosen Dabashi as one of my principal dialogue partners. He combines an astute knowledge of Shi‘i Islam together with appreciation of Liberation theology. I believe that he can make a contribution to the formation of a particular Shi‘i political theology in dialogue with Christian scholars and secular intellectuals. Hamid Dabashi, Islamic Liberation Theology, Resisting the Empire, Routledge, New York, 2008, p.38.
to empire transformed Islam into an Islamic ideology that came to a head and a conclusion with the Islamic revolution in Iran. Nevertheless, the true revolutionary disposition is found in the charismatic moment of Muhammad’s prophetic mission and is most clearly expressed in Shi‘i Islam:

What is called Shi‘ism is nothing other than the very soul of Islam as a religion of protest. But Shi‘ism has succeeded precisely because, as the very soul of the Islamic message, it is a paradox. It can never, and should never succeed. It should always speak the truth to power. It can never be in power.30

Dabashi31 situates the prophetic and charismatic heart of Islam in the revelation of the Qu‘ran. He identifies the distinction in the Qur‘an between the Meccan surahs (those revealed between 610 and 622) and those revealed after the migration to Medina (revealed between 622 and 632). The Meccan surahs correspond to the “rising crescendo of the prophet’s mission and are revolutionary and destabilizing” in their moral defiance of injustice and tyranny. Both the Meccan opponents and the downtrodden are addressed and liberated. The Medinan surahs are the record of the prophet’s consolidating his power in Medina and the establishment of his political community. The tension, then, that exists between the Meccan and the Medinan, is that between the revolutionary movement and the political consolidation. Shi‘ism and particularly its Ashura narrative maintain, narrate and display this central tension in Islamic doctrine and history. Following the death of the prophet, his charismatic authority became routinized into the Islamic caliphate. The charismatic figures of the Imam in Shi‘i Islam personified the speaking to power, the Meccan spontaneity, the alterity that contrasts with the Medinan propensity to institution-building and consolidation. Thus, Shi‘ism encapsulates the insurrectionary moment of the nascent Islam as a religion of protest. For Dabashi, this is the dream of Islam as well as the historical other of Islam: Shi‘ism must remain always the Other and yet dream of the Same.32 The Ashura narrative speaks of the universality of protest, the universality or resistance to oppression and the manipulation of political power. It thereby provided and provides revolutionaries and theologians alike with a paradigm of liberation.

Though we can agree with Dabashi that colonialism and imperialism no longer define Islamic ideology as it did, prior to the Islamic revolution of Iran, yet, it would be
difficult to understand the occupation of Iraq as anything other than domination and oppression until 2007. American imperialism must accept the greatest responsibility for the sheer extent of the casualties, violence and terror inflicted upon this society. Yet, Islamic militancy, ethnic tension and criminality are major contributing factors to a festering division. What we witness anew in the Middle East is a rising Islamic theodicy. We are at the threshold of a new mode of Islamic consciousness. Many Islamic ideologues have been instrumental in the gradual mutation of Islam into militant Islamism – from Muhammad Abduh, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Rashid Rida to ‘Ali Shari’ati. But, the phenomenon that is Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda has denigrated militant Islamism into the criminal, the terrorist and the ideological corrupt. In Iraq, Muslims see innocent fellow-Muslims being murdered, without cause or justification yet in the name of Islam and Allah. The exposure of violent hatred, vitriolic intolerance and brutal criminality within Islam shocks the world and Muslims most of all. Among those most affected are Shi’i Muslims, and many of these have fled, as we have adumbrated above, and become migrants. The results were suffering, loss and grief. The only consolation, but a powerful one for Shi’i, is that “they did the same to the family of our Prophet”.

This is the rise of an entirely different set of circumstances to colonial invasion and American imperialism. The perpetrators are Muslim and essentially though not exclusively Sunni. This theodicy has deep historical roots in early Islam. The defining moment of Islam and particularly Shi’ism is the doctrinal sanctity of mazlumiyyat, of having been wronged, as is clearly outlined by Dabashi in In Authority in Islam.\(^{33}\) Dabashi distinguishes between the charismatic and the institutional, in the context of the emerging Imamate under the establishment of the Umayyads. The instant Islam succeeds to power it negates itself. Thus Islam is determined to be in perpetual insurrection or negation. The present crisis in Islam is not due exclusively to its colonial history. The binaries of the past are breaking down under the influence of globalization. The sites of conflict and the sites of support are no longer situated along the fault-lines of history. The pre-modern and pre-colonial binaries of Dar al Islam and Dar al-Harb, are no longer the geographical binaries of the West and the East. More modern designations are needed to describe the reality of Muslims living in the West today. Tariq Ramadan suggests the use of Dar al Dawa to describe these realities.\(^{34}\) There are currently Muslims dispersed and displaced throughout

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34 Tariq Ramadan, Western Muslims and the Future of Islam, Oxford University Press, New York, 2004, p.72, 239. Ramadan suggest the formation of Dar al Dawa as that space which Muslims occupy int the West, between Dar as Islam and Dar al Harb. He sees Muslims in the West as occupying a fruitful place of
the entire world and those in Europe and America have been more vocal and influential than most. Civil society is no longer the territorial possession of any particular state or category, uniting the unlikely and the unthinkable in common values and praxis. Dabashi says,

The difference between a liberation theology and a liberation theodicy is, very simply put, the difference between an emancipatory movement in categorical isolation from the rest of the world and one integral to the collapse of all binary oppositions.  

All liberation theories must be now formulated against new opposition which takes account of the fact that the binary oppositions of the past have fallen away. Areas of cooperation and support can be maintained and strengthened across geographical, political and religious divides.

According to Alastair Crooke\textsuperscript{36} we stand at another key moment in history. Islamic ideology has in the last century passed through the shadows. Sunni Islam was shocked and disorientated, dealt a psychological blow to a narrative that was already defensive. Muslims in the Middle East have seen their social and political continuities severed, their societies individualized and anaesthetised. The colonial project and the impact of neoliberalism have left citizens in the throes of great secularization and modernisation, weakened society, broken capacity, eroded self-regulation, destroyed community and increased ethnic tension. Significant and growing proportions of Muslim populations now live in absolute poverty, while their elitist overlords become richer and more powerful. Many societies in the Middle East are police states with little civil society and little civil freedom. Yet, this experience has not been one of entire isolation. New thinking is emerging, resistance is taking place that places the suffering Muslim population at the centre of its theodicy. There are green shoots of Islamic liberation theodicy, resistant to oppression and attentive to grief. In Iraq and spearheaded by Iraqi Shi‘i religious intolerance is giving way to cooperation, mutual understanding and participation. We are witnessing in Iraq the rightful struggle of ordinary people for social equanimity, economic justice, political participation and a legitimate place in the democratic world. Notwithstanding the tremendous loss, hope is emerging again to sustain a broken people. Here Islamic liberation theodicy replaces Islam back in the world, poly-vocal and

witness and encounter that goes beyond the binaries of the past. This space is open to dialogue and interpenetration.

multicultural. Islam is cognizant and conversant with the world, in the world, no longer the world of Islam and the West, but Islam suffering in and with the world.

The human desire for justice has been at the heart of Shi‘i theology. More recent developments in the Middle East and atrocities in the Muslim world have highlighted the need for justice and the need for Islamic thinkers to highlight the yearning for justice within their respective traditions. Sayyid Hossein Nars has been at the heart of Shi‘i though for many years. He describes the in detail the innate human search for human justice and the search for justice within Shi‘ism. He says of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib “Justice puts everything in its place”. This follows the Quranic injunction, “Give full measure and full weight in justice” (6:152) in which Muslims are reminded to “establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance” (55:9). Nasr reminds us that there can be no peace without justice and that justice implies a constant struggle to establish balance an equilibrium in the world, for one of the cardinal meaning of shahadah is “There is no justice but the Divine Justice”.

As one of the leading Islamic thinkers in dialogue with western scholars, Tariq Ramadan has a lot to say about liberation. Ramadan speaks of a liberation based upon Islamic confidence in its means and capacity to change and integrate new understandings and skills into classical Islamic ethics. He proposes a reform of Islamic ethics, through Muslims becoming again subjects of their own destinies and responsible actors in history. This means taking account of the complexity of knowledge and the process taking place in contemporary Muslim society. It it is possible according to Ramadan to have in Islam, a liberative encounter between faith and reason that is at the service of humanity.

For Abdolkarim Soroush there can be no external freedom without internal freedom, i.e. no freedom from from potentates, despots, charlatans and exploiters without the freedom from passion and anger. This is not an avoidance of responsibility and activity but a call to interiority in the struggle for justice. In order to achieve freedom we have to work toward truth and truth is not the slave of any ideology. The movement towards

wisdom is not a battle of the external will alone but the activity of the heart. Soroursh quotes the poet and mystic Rumi;

As much as I enlarge on love,
I am ashamed when I com to Love.
Renditions of the tongue reveal the core,
But Silent love reveals more.

Here we recognize that the struggle for liberation and a liberation theology in Islam is also the movement of the heart towards internal freedom and not the work of political activism alone. We are reminded of the deep spiritual heritage at the heart of Islam and in Shi‘ism in particular that is predicated on freedom and not blind submission. There is much to learn from Islam in the pursuit of liberty and justice that can not be articulated by the West alone, and there is much to work towards in Islam, that requires intelligibility and articulation by others.

Iraqi men and women have suffered a great deal in recent history. Al-'Ali\(^40\) tells in a narrative style the realities of Iraqi women’s lives within Iraq and among the Diaspora from 1948 until the present. Although there were times of state economic development and feminist emancipation, in recent years the realities of war, sanctions and occupation have transformed the everyday lives of women into one of oppression, poverty, violence and victimization. Al-Jawaheir\(^41\) draws attention to the period of sanctions in post-Gulf War Iraq and its impact upon gender relations. This period was a humanitarian failure of unprecedented calamity, “hyperinflationary rates, high unemployment rates, excessive pressure on wages, a slump in labour productivity, and social tension and uncertainty.”\(^42\)

Following the occupation in 2003, the humanitarian and political situation in Iraq changed for the worse. Despite putting an end to a brutal regime of dictatorship, a new ear of “devastation, violence, hardship and uncertainty for the Iraqi people”\(^43\) ensued. Iraqi women were the unwitting victims, in a war situation where the most vulnerable suffer the greatest hardship. It is a tragic irony that, following the destruction of the myth of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, the rhetoric promoting the continued occupation included the


\(^42\) Ibid., p.133.

\(^43\) Ibid., p.141.
liberation of Iraqi women and sought to align the liberation of women with war and military occupation.

For such women Mosque activities and the accompanying social interaction helped to replicate the intense social support and visiting that existed with extended family in their home societies. The Hussania or Mosque in the West became a "mosque-centred substitute family". Religious activities and rituals took on a greater meaning and purpose as Shi'i Muslims attempted to maintain and impart to their children a particular identity amidst the variety of influences in a secular society. Al-'Ali maintains that recently arrived Iraqi Shi'i women in the West "have a strong sense of their roots and identity, both as Iraqi and Shi'as" and that this involved a strong sense of entitlement in terms of rights and privileges in the new Iraq. In my experience Iraqi women arrived with high expectations for themselves and their families. They seized the opportunities offered to them and their children to promote themselves in society, to seek employment, education and emancipation. Yet, in contrast with their Iranian counterparts, to maintain a strong conservative Islamic dimension to their lives remained important; this often carried with it a sectarian bias.

In the light of their experience of grief, victimhood, the loss of family members through warfare and sectarian violence, women and men find comfort in Shi'i rowzehs, Moharram rituals and in the Ashura Narrative. The experience of exile amplifies the importance of belonging and identifying with a spiritual community. Iraqi feminists living in the West seek to combine their Islamic faith with the experience of living in a society that promotes tolerance, pluralism, diversity and mutuality. There are rich and potent narratives of liberation and emancipation that can be accessed within the Shi'i tradition; elements that favour the emancipation of women, the political participation of women in society at all levels, the education of girls and women and the breaking down of gender barriers of discrimination and male privilege.

Many Muslims experience in Europe, for the first time; the liberation of their gender, the freedom from intimidation, the accessibility of local government, the functioning of a health and education system that is empowering and respectful, a critical media, a transparent security service and religious freedom. This dialogue of experience and faith happens while remaining faithful to a rooted Islamic identity, drawing together a


rich symbolic field that extends beyond the polarities of East and West, Islam and Christianity, colonial and post-colonial, towards a deep humanism rooted in Islam while maintaining hold on Islamic values such as “love of knowledge, egalitarianism and tolerance”[^46] which are often only associated with the West. There is a “double difficult commitment”[^47] taking place among Iraqi Shi‘i women in the West as they reconcile their experience of sanctuary the West, with the rhetoric of radical Islam and the resources expressed within the interpretation of Ashura as emancipating and the reality of sectarian violence, murder and displacement. The dialogue is placed directly within the heart of Islam, and what is emerging challenges the easy and popular rhetoric of an Islamism that is all too often critical of the West and feminism. Many Islamic Shi‘i feminists in the West see their feminism as emerging organically out of their faith commitment and particularly their interpretation of Ashura.

Furthermore, this development of faith commitment and feminism together is not dominated by post-colonial discourse alone, rather it affirms the gift of sexual and psychological maturity as a dialogue open to God.[^48] Faith development takes place as men and women share their experience of the transcendent and the numinous in a context of trust and love. It is at once an encounter of trust and openness. Within the experience of a loving relationship and a faithful community, a dialogue takes place as men and women seek to situate their love and their future for each other in “liberating memory.”[^49]

### 7.3 Shi‘i Thought and Catholic Political Theology

Having touched on the role of liberation theology, especially in relation to Roman Catholic thought and praxis, above we are now in a position to deepen our understanding of the contribution of political theologies to Shi‘i thought. First, we turn to the rise of political theology from the ashes of liberal theology and the thought of Metz; then, we look at the dangerous memory that is the Ashura narrative. Shi‘i though could be greatly deepened and expanded with at dialogue with Political theology. There are many parallels within elements of reflection on Ashura and the dangerous memories of political theology. Political theology provides a framework from which to understand the centrality of Ashura

within Shiism and it liberative and transformative effect in the lives of countless Shi'a. In the same way political theology is enriched in dialogue with another tradition, opening new avenues of dialogue for Christians as they reflect of the central Pascal Mystery and the possibility of other faiths sharing in the experience and memory of suffering.

7.3.1 Dialogue with Catholic Political Theology

If political theology investigates the ways in which theological concepts and ways of thinking underlie political, social, economic and cultural discourses then the Christian religion has long been thoroughly political and the political and the social has always been at the heart of theological reflection. However, political theology more formally arose in 1960s Germany following a period of intense secularization in the western European world. In the aftermath of Vatican II and the Uppsala Assembly of the World Council of Churches (1968), the churches began to reflect strenuously on the challenge of the secular world. The euphoria of the 1960s gave way to a mood a sobriety when the horrors of the war on Vietnam and the failure of governments to curb corruption became known. There was increased disenchantment with the secular world and the positive developmental approaches in science and technology. A recognition that the Christian West had been elevated on the suffering of colonized masses helped to form a political theology that relocated the human subject in the mass of those who are marginalized, alienated, dispossessed and poor, the “suffering”, and that reinterpreted human existence through a praxis of freedom.

Political theology continues the Christian tradition only through its insistence that Christianity is the continual transformation of suffering and hope in the dangerous memory of Christ.51

Political theology carries forward modern theology’ critique of the secular, yet transformation and rupture, as the task of mediating tradition in a violent and changing world, are at the heart of this theology and they, too, come under close scrutiny. Without compressing the developments of twentieth century theology, it is possible to identify significant moments along this complex and multi-facetted journey that situate political theology. If liberal theologians such as Schleiermacher and Troeltsch sought to make Christian theology relevant to history, experience and identity by reconciling modernity

with religion they did so by locating faith in the individual’s encounter with God. When Rahner suggests that God gives to the human subject, through grace, an immediate relationship with the divine he is in continuity with the liberals. This contrasts with the “modern masters of suspicion”. These include Karl Marx, who accused the upper classes of hiding behind an ideology that supports their greedy interests while others are impoverished, Sigmund Freud, who revealed the power of the unconscious in influencing meaning, motivation and behaviour, and Friedrich Nietzsche, who warned that our conscious reflections of freedom disguise our unconscious drive for power. Critiques of modernity also emerge from the underside of history. The victims of history accuse modernity of building its progress upon their suffering. In post-war Europe, the Jews recall the memories of the Holocaust and their virtual extermination. Women accuse patriarchal modernity of maintaining and promoting misogyny by representing women as inferior. Blacks though free from slavery recognized their liberation as leading to poverty, homelessness, social and racial discrimination. Latin America and the Middle East denounce their history as the colony of the first world. Yet, political theology responds by saying that meaning, value and truth are always constituted in concrete historical particularity in individuals; suffering, then, is what interrupts this constitution, and theology becomes reconstituted by its identification or solidarity with those who suffer. Memories of solidarity with the poor become the basis of critique, transformation and hope.

7.3.2 The Political Theology of Johann Baptist Metz

Johann Baptist Metz specialized in interrogating these memories and he is recognized as the father of political theology; for him, these were ‘dangerous memories’. Catholic and German he was born into and grew up in the world of nationalist socialist Nazi Germany. He experienced at first hand Germany’s march into fundamentalism, violence, war and destruction. For Metz, as many Germans, the question was how did the Germany of Goethe, Kant and Beethoven become the Germany of Hitler, Himmler and finally Auschwitz? This was a tremendous interruption in his life and his theology. How

52 Neo-orthodoxy followed a similar trajectory.
was theology to continue on and to address itself after the horror of Auschwitz? In sum, the new paradigm of political theology understands theology in the twentieth century as being faced with three crises, three challenges or three “end phenomena”.

The first is the challenge of Marxism or the end of a dualistic understanding of history: theology faced with the end of ideological innocence. The second is the challenge of Auschwitz: theology faced with the end of idealism. The third crisis is the Third world challenge: the end of Eurocentric theology. Political theology tries to deal with these crises and to face up to these challenges.

Metz considers privatization to be the most important aspect of the crisis caused by the Enlightenment. He pleads for a conversation of middle class and bourgeois consciousness. He uncovers the consciousness of the bourgeois subject as distorted, private and comfortable. He finds our time to be a time of postmodern Godless Christianity. Here he means that Christianity is practised without recourse to the unsettling “history of catastrophe and consolation that comprises the narrative of Judeo Christian tradition.”

This is recognized in people turning more and more to new and ahistorical forms of religious myth and ritual, symbolized by the concept of New Age religion. The rise in capitalism, technological and scientific achievement has ushered in an evolutionary worldview of progress and development. Yet, this has proved to be groundless, lacking in meaning and only producing fatalism and apathy. People find themselves reduced to being consumers, small parts of an anonymous, inevitable, timeless, technological and economic progress.

The interruption of suffering and the definite memory of suffering is dangerous and transformative in its ability to render a critique of the evolutionary worldview and to stimulate the human imagination for social-political action. Metz discovers that the freedom to be a human subject is the freedom to suffer. It is the memory of suffering and the ability to remember suffering that provides the possibility for the concrete identity of the human subject. In to the freedom to suffer is the freedom to hope, to transform and to become. Memory, narrative and solidarity in suffering constitute human identity.

55 James Matthew Ashley, Interruptions, Mysticism, Politics and Theology in the Work of Johann Baptist Metz, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, 2002, p.32. Metz saw that Rahner never mentioned Auschwitz; this was critical for Metz, for whom theology could not be the same after Nazi Germany.


58 Ibid., p.25.
community and belonging. This is not an anonymous or a universal experience of the divine but grounded in specific memories, narratives and events. Such an experience of suffering and solidarity in suffering is a foundational experience of God, who interrupts history on behalf of the suffering and provides the full freedom to human emancipation, through suffering with by providing hope and meaning in compassionate solidarity.

According to Metz the function of theology⁵⁹ is to protect the narrating memory of salvation in our scientific world by helping Christians understand their own life stories in the light of the memory of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus and in this way to pass on this dangerous memory narratively. Suffering unto God⁶⁰ is the authentic mystical stance in modernity and also the stance which can save the ideals of the Enlightenment from their own destruction. Christianity tries to keep alive the dangerous memory of the crucified Lord as a memory of freedom. It disturbs the comfortable and comforts the disturbed. It provides hope in the face of violent oppression and anticipation of a better future. Precisely because it is inspirational it is dangerous, unsettling and a shocking interruption.

Metz’s christology serves two purposes for his political theology. Humanity is identified with the person and history of Jesus, the memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi attests to God’s solidarity with all victims and assures their final deliverance. Second, Christians take on the mission of obedience-in-poverty that Jesus received from God. They in turn are entrusted with the transformation of society, the service of the poor and the healing of the victimized. Through social and political consciousness in the interest of the suffering of others, Christians partake in a praxis through which they can realize their own capacities for “sorrow and joy, pain and play, mourning and expectation, generosity and gratitude, friendship and loyalty, solidarity and individuality.”⁶¹ Christians who are formed by the anticipatory memory of Jesus’ suffering, bring a new moral imagination to society and politics. This is not a new or a greater generosity on behalf of the bourgeoisie or a deeper understanding of citizenship but a total


⁶⁰ Leiden an Gott, is translated by Ashley as Suffering unto God. This is a stance toward God which is full of complaint, lament, but also of passionate expectation and hope that God will respond. It is closely related to following Jesus, the Crucified One and with biblical Israel’s poverty of spirit. It allows the suffering and the oppressors to become and remain authentic subjects.

conversion of who we are and how we are to live in history. It is the mystical-political
imitation of Christ.

One contribution of Metz to theology is the compelling case for how the modern
subject of religion needs to be deconstructed by an awareness of suffering in history and
reconstructed through a praxis of solidarity with those who now suffer or who have died
violently, through violence, poverty or neglect. This is in part the theodicy problem – the
question of God in the face of human suffering and also the question of human
empowerment and meaning in the face of the suffering of others. According to Metz it is
only because we believe in a definite eschatological meaning of history that we can face
negativities and catastrophes with hope. There is a danger in being too pious and too
mystical, discipleship and imitation of the Crucified One always contains a mystical and a
situational-political element.

This dialogue with Christian political theology has the possibility to develop Shiite
political thought and theology further and along new and creative lines. This would enable
Shi‘i scholars to root their political theology in the ritual and religious elements of their
faith and not only on the reflection of governance and political rule.

The ritual of Ashura provides a rich metaphor in bringing together religious
memory, suffering and identity. This has been underutilized by Shi‘i scholars who have
in recent years have focused almost entirely in Shiite Political thought on the developments
in political rule (particularly Wilayat al-Faqih) and not on the rich theological vein of
popular ritual and faith. There is the possibility of developing a Shiite political theology
that is sensitive to memory, suffering and ritual. That is deeply attentive to the religious
faith and practise of the grassroots that situates itself within the narrative of Ashura, draws
strength and insight from Christian political theology and the challenge of suffering and
memory to religious faith. Such developments would be transformative for Shiite political
thought and Islamic theology as a whole, providing a new and fruitful basis for dialogue
with other religions and the secular West that is rooted in experience and particularly the
experience of suffering.

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63 Ahmad al Katib, The Developmenet of Shiite Political Thought, From Shura to Wilayat al-Faqih, self-published by Ahmad al Katib, London, 2008. Al Katib focus his Shiite political thought entirely from the perspective of the ruling authority in Islam, with little regard for the importance of ritual or popular piety.
7.3.3 Memory and identity

We remember Auschwitz and all that is symbolizes because we believe that, in spite of all the past and its horrors, the world is worthy of salvation; and salvation, like redemption, can be found only in memory.\(^{64}\)

Elie Wiesel spoke these words in an address delivered on November 10, 1987, recalling after fifty years the infamous Kristallnacht which propelled Germany closer to the horrors of the Holocaust. For Wiesel, the central theme of his work is the saving power of remembering suffered wrongs. He is concerned with all significant wrongdoing, redemption and the fostering of human flourishing. Wiesel suggests salvation lies in memory and right remembering. We are our memories and healing emerges when we interpret our memories and inscribe them into the larger meaning making of our lives. In order to do this we need solidarity, companionship and the witness of others. Memory making towards salvation is an exercise in empathy. According to Volf giving meaning to suffering is “borne on the wings of hope”.\(^{65}\) Hope for full disclosure and for ultimate redemption from others in the face of their apparent meaninglessness. Hope that the future belongs to those who give themselves in love, not to those who nail others to a cross.

Transformed memories of wrong suffered can become catalysts for doing justice. They can lead to solidarity, empathy and compassion. Victims don’t remain victims forever but can rewrite the moral narrative in ways that are transformative and redemptive for victimizers. It is from the memory of a wrong suffered that a principled opposition to injustice emerges. This does not need to be destructive but life-giving, healing and mutually flourishing though clearly not without pain and solidarity. Dangerous memories disturb, sacred memories heal. In the Exodus and the Passion of the Crucified One God is remembered as having been at work in the faithfulness to God’s people.\(^{66}\) God hears the cries of the Hebrews and God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself. These are dangerous memories for all victimizers, all who exercise political power and all systems that support oppression.

The journey of the human subject is that of remembering truthfully, condemning wrong deeds, healing inner wounds, reconciling wrongdoers and ends with letting go the

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\(^{64}\) Elie Wiesel, *From the Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences*. Summit, New York, 1990, p.201.


memory of violence. "Memory is the ultimate form of justice." This work is done therapeutically through providing new meaning to victimization, intimidation and suffering. Even suffering has a place in God’s plan for the cosmos.

An essential part of politics in societies emerging from dictatorship and oppression is the flourishing of group memories as they seek to recover and win recognition by an overarching national collective memory. It is necessary for plural memories to emerge to critique the all absorbing official story of the past. That is the necessity of bearing witness, the responsibility of a community over time, to effect meaning, integrity and ethical wholeness.

7.3.4 The Ashura Narrative as Dangerous Memory

The Ashura narrative is the attempt to recover the dangerous memory of Karbala and apply it to the social, religious, and political context of Iraqi Shi’i communities. This narrative more that any other religious metaphor provides meaning, healing and integrity to this religious community. In the context of war and occupation it becomes the narrative of resistance. In the context of exile it becomes the narrative of loss, dislocation, emerging realities and new religious articulations. In the context of state building it becomes the narrative of accommodation, democratic participation, transparency and leadership with integrity.

Political theology provides the Ashura narrative with a rich and fertile theological context for dialogue and appropriation. Those communities in the West who are aware of liberation theology and political theology employ these concepts in their preaching and within their narrations. The dangerous memory of Karbala enlivens, inspires, transforms the Shi’i community each year, in its narration during Ashura but also provides the context for political participation in a new emerging state. Shi’i politicians are aware of the demand of their religious communities for political participation and truthful representation.

The developments in twentieth century Iraq for the Shi’a constitute an Auschwitz moment. Under Saddam people routinely disappeared, were imprisoned and murdered. Following the American invasion, hundreds of thousands were killed, displaced and

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suffered under occupation. Iraqi Shi’a are well acquainted with suffering, oppression and violence. The memory of the Ashura narrative provide them with hope and consolation throughout difficult and trying years. In the modern state, the Ashura narrative is used to promote democratic values and emancipatory leadership. Religion and politics are intertwined. The memory of past suffering provides the context for the formation of a future state, where all are cherished and the flourishing of all is respected.

As Shi’a remember the suffering, martyrdom and victory of Imam Hussein in their mournful majlis, they connect with the memory of their own suffering, oppression, exile, loss and grief. As they grieve for their beloved Imam they are healed, transformed and united in religious identity and motivated to implement their dream of a justice-filled democratic state. As Shi’a mourn those who died and suffered at the hands of terrorists, violent and fundamental radicals, they are encouraged to articulate an Islam free of radical rhetoric, in solidarity with victims of violence and oppression, open, tolerant and faithful to the prophetic mission of foundational Islam.

As Shi’a dream the dream of prophetic Islam they implement their own particular Islamic liberation theology and their own particular Islamic political theology deeply influenced by their dialogue with and experience of political theology in the West.

Conclusion

As Shi’i communities and Shi’i scholars dialogue with other religions and the secular West they must return to their own sources of ritual and religious faith, their own stories of grief and loss, and re-examine them in the light of new insights. Since 1979 and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran they have looked to their experience of government as the Shi’i majority under the guidance of clerical rule (Wilayat al-Faqih). In Iraq the situation is much different and new forms of government have been established that take account of the large non-Shi’i minorities. In order to bridge the divisions between the communities it is more fruitful to place the emphasis in theological reflection on the shared experience of suffering.

In the recent context of war and occupation virtually all citizens of Iraq have suffered a great deal. I have been dealing with those who through displacement have been forced from their country into exile and have found themselves in the West. Through reflecting on a shared history of suffering and making this the focus of theological reflection, Shi’i communities can begin the great work of reconciliation that is necessary for the future development of Islam.
There are numerous resources in western thought and political theology that can support Shi‘i scholars and communities to seek the liberation and emancipation of their people, without becoming in turn aggressors. Liberation theology has shown the need for post-colonial communities to work together to overcome their histories of oppression. What is now necessary is a transformation of consciousness within a deep sympathy for the suffering of others. European political theology in the West has embraced the painful history of violence, dislocation and trauma since World War II. It can provide valuable resources to Shi‘i communities as they reflect on their experience and make sense of their faith in a world where violence and hatred have been dominant for many years. Ashura as a metaphor for liberation and political emancipation is symbol-rich in meaning for Shi‘a. It can become a root symbol for an emancipated Shi‘i political theology that takes account of suffering, and the transformative power of memory and, at the same time, provide a solid basis for future interreligious and inter-theological dialogue. The debates with feminism and political theology, both highly influential in western theological discourses, have resonated with and thereby added to the insights that Shi‘i scholars have themselves gained. Metz in particular has offered a fruitful contribution to Shi‘i scholarship by elucidating and extending the conceptual framing of debate on grief, loss, suffering and redemption. In a story that has risked being lost in recriminations and bitter divide this thesis ends with a message of hope. In spite of their histories of suffering, Shi‘a and Christian ultimately place their faith in future reconciliation. The historical, theological and political narratives addressed in this thesis provide a foundation for this reconciliation. Working through the thesis has brought a certain personal reconciliation into my relationship with Islam. Building on that I have sought to develop a sound foundation for a wider theological, political and historical reconciling of opposities within and between Islam and Christianity.
GENERAL CONCLUSION

My aim in this work was to provide some insight into the meaning system of another tradition, one different from my own. It was to be a work of acknowledgment of hospitality and an attempt at understanding some aspects of Islam grounded in the experience of living, praying Muslims. It was my contention that my learning in this process was to consist of not only academic knowledge of Islam, but the living Islam of an Islamic community.

Through the process of attending lectures, interviews, meetings, majlis and prayers of a community I have been introduced to the concerns, the mindset and worldview of Iraqi Shi'i exiles. I have sought to supplement this learning through the academic material available mostly in this part of the world. Yet, it is clearly the concerns of the community that have most affected my vision of Islam and my learning to date.

I have learned about context and how situation informs one’s worldview. There is no objective Islam, only practising Muslims, with each community having its own diversity and internal world, making sense of its place within the larger Umma. There is a broad diversity not only between Shi'a and Sunni but also within Shi'i Islam and it has been the task of this thesis to attend in detail to one particular cultural, national and ethic community living in the West.

I choose the Iraqi Shi'i community to research and dialogue with, in part out of an act of solidarity in the face of war and occupation which began in 2003. But I was won over by the hospitality of Shi'i Muslims who sought to articulate their story, their concerns and their narratives in a situation of exile, especially considering the West’s lack of knowledge in their regard, and by the West I include Christian theology. Despite a long history of settlement and integration over thirty years, little has been researched into the backgrounds of Iraqi communities and Shi'i communities in the West. The context of war and occupation in Iraq provided a prominent and painful context to reflect and share with this particular community, as this thesis demonstrates.

Often associated with the Shi'a is a culture of lament and sorrow. The rituals of mourning are well known and play a central role in the religious life of the community. This is not to say that there is also often much cause to celebrate. However, among the Shi'a of Iraq there is a long narrative of oppression and opposition. From the turn of the twentieth century and most painfully under Saddam, the Shi'a of Iraq have suffered a great deal: theirs is a context of a whole nation in suffering, culminating in war, sanctions and occupation. The American and Coalition war and occupation form but the most recent chapter in a long history of displacement, violence and terror. Those who have fled to the
West carry with them the cares, concerns and hopes of their brothers and sisters in Iraq. The experience of exile compounds the loss and dislocation experienced by many Iraqi within Iraq. The mosque and Hussania in the West provide a social setting not only for prayer and ritual, but also for recreation, networking and a “home away from home”. It is for this reason I believe that oppositional politics has played such a large part in my reflections on Iraqi Shi'i communities. When Iraqi men want to talk, they talk of politics and the endless hope for a reconciliation between those who have enjoyed power and privilege in the past and the struggle and the desire of the majority to join in the government and the spoils of power.

I have learned of a tremendous loss and grief in Islam and among the Ahul Bayt. The prophet Muhammad suffered rejection, humiliation and exile before being accepted as the one true prophet of Islam. The Qur'an speaks of the Hypocrites in Meccan society who believe not with their heart but only out of political expediency. Muslims continue to pass judgement on other Muslims, often with deadly consequences.

Usually, Radical Islam is regarded as the primary challenge facing the West in terms of domestic security. American and western foreign policy regularly treats of and expends huge resources on the War on Terror as though the West was being undermined by radical Islam. However, Shi'i Muslims too face a great challenge from radical and fundamentalist Islam. Indeed, as we have seen in Iraq, the primary target for terrorists is not coalition troops but Shi'i Muslims. Yet, little attention has been paid either to why this is so or to what Shi'i Muslims have to say about radical Islam.

I have sought to identify the settlement history of Shi'i Muslims in Ireland and the United Kingdom. There has been virtually no work done on this to date and my research is a step towards articulating the lived reality of Muslim minorities in this part of the world. It is a contribution to scholarship and one that can be developed further by other scholars.

I have outlined the foundational narratives in Shi'i Islam, particularly in relation to early Islamic history and how a minority interpretation differs from the majority narrative. I have shown that this alternative narrative is necessary in a pluralist and globalizing world, where dominant narratives of oppression are in need of critique.

I have identified the significant developments that have take place in Shi'ism in the Middle East particularly in post-revolutionary Iran, Lebanon and especially Iraq. These narratives express a history of opposition, emancipation and political participation. Shi'i Islam has experience a veritable transformation at the end of the twentieth century, which reflects its participation in the political sphere in Iran and Lebanon. However, the history and development of Shi'i Islam was quite different. Struggling under oppression and
dictatorship, many were forced to submit to violence and others displacement. The narrative of these lay the foundation for how we encounter Shi‘i Islam at the end of the twentieth century.

The period of 2003 until 2010 has been decisive for Shi‘i Iraqis, those forced into exile have witnessed the war, occupation and destruction of their country. Yet many have participated in some way in developing strategies for the promotion of democracy and human rights within Iraq. The struggle against occupation and sectarian violence has awakened a critical reflection on terrorism, dictatorship and public violence, and it points to new possibilities for creative encounters, new insights and interpretations and learning – even from the West – such that there is real hope for reconciliation of Shi‘a with Sunni and Muslim with Christian. Iraqi Shi‘a have been able to find in their Tradition resources to strengthen their faith and resolve in the face of violence and terror. They can make a significant contribution to western scholarship as scholars and westerners alike seek both a more realistic understanding of diversity in Islam and support for countering narratives of radical fundamentalist Islam.

The context of the war and occupation in Iraq is a prism with which to view Muslim-West relations and learn of the reality of challenges facing Muslims and Islam. Muslims in the West are in a position to speak more clearly about the challenges facing Islam and of possible reconciliation between western and Islamic ideals. Many living in the West, as my study of Shi‘a living in Ireland and the UK has shown, have benefited a great deal from living here and can recognize more clearly how Islam has been captive to oppressive regimes, monarchical and dictatorial, in the Middle East. It is possible to speak of a flourishing of Islam in the West. The prophet Muhammad spoke of the sun rising in the West as a sign of the last days. Today Muslims interpret this as the emergence in the West of a western Islam, one that can shed light on Islam as a whole. Obviously, the creative commitment of Muslims working in the West for human rights and democracy is but an example of how mutual understanding, cooperation and integration can lead to liberation and transformation.

My work is one foundation stone in an initial dialogue, a dialogue that progresses within Islam and between Muslims and Christians. It builds on an emerging Shi‘i political theology that is grounded in experience, mainly the experience of suffering and loss. This loss is not necessarily defeating or stultifying but has the capacity to provide space in which genuine rapprochement can emerge, leading towards transformation, reconciliation and healing. There is much work that can be done by Christian scholars in seeking a dialogue with Islam. This work brings the thinking in Christian Liberation Theology and
Political Theology a step closer to Iraqi Shi'i political theology. I provide a path along which Shi'i and Christian theologians can walk further in the search for mutual comprehension, increased cooperation and shared reconciliation.

A recent discussion with members of the ulama\(^1\) highlights this point appositely. I enquired as to how the experience of war and occupation in the past years of Iraqi history has transformed Shi'ism. The ulama stated that Shi'ism has been in a constant stage of transformation, in opposition to corruption in power and supporting democracy for decades. Their immediate concern was political. It is not possible in Islam to divorce the political from the religious, for religious flourishing must include political flourishing. This was the dream and vision of the Prophet of Islam and remains the vision and dream of Shi'i Islam. The primary concern they said in Iraq is to build reconciliation, for there can be no security without reconciliation. They expressed their hope for an Islam that is inclusive and pluralistic, at home in the secular world and at peace with the West. At the heart of Shi'i Islam is a commitment to justice and this, they said, means doing justice to Sunni Islam and to Christianity. I was encouraged to see that with political reform came religious tolerance and religious inclusion.

Ultimately and without prejudicing fellow Muslims, this thesis has sought to draw forth, from otherwise conflictual histories and narratives, true and faithful sources of mutual understanding and dialogue so that, no longer bound by the chains of the past, Muslim and Muslim other are linked by emancipatory bonds that promise empowerment and human flourishing. It is estimated that over six million Muslims visited Karbala in Iraq to celebrate Ashura in 2010, in the same month a national government was at last formed under Shi'i leadership. The hope was that the worst of the past was over and that Islam in Iraq could return to an ecumenical conciliation issuing in a new future full of hope and promise in the land where once Eden flourished.

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\(^1\) I met with the Shi'i ulama in Najaf and Karbala in September 2010.
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The website www.yahusain.com promotes preaching and majalis for an English speaking audience with popular video content.

The website www.abulbayt.tv promotes videos and documentaries in the English language of an English speaking audience.
APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

The Annual Shi'i ritual calendar of celebrations and remembrances.

9 Rabi al-Awwal  The celebration of the death of Umar ibn-e Sad, who lead the
Umayyad army against Hussein at Karbala.

10 Rabi al-Awwal  The celebration of the marriage of the Prophet Muhammad with his
first wife, Khadija.

12 Rabi al-Awwal  The celebration of Milad al-Nabi (The Prophet Muhammad's
birthday).

8 Rabi al-Sani  The birth of the eleventh Imam, Hasan Askari in 232/846.

14 Jumadi al-Awwal The death of the Prophet Muhammad's daughter, Fatima, in 11/633.


20 Jumadi al-Sani  The birth of Fatima, in 615 CE.


1 Rajab  The birth of the fifth Imam, Muhammad Baqir, in 57/677.

10 Rajab  The birth of the ninth Imam, Muhammad Taqi in 195/811.

13 Rajab  The birth of 'Ali in 599 CE.

15 Rajab  The martyrdom of the sixth Imam, Ja'far Sadiq in 148/765.

25 Rajab  The martyrdom of the seventh Imam, Musa Kazi, in 183/799

27 Rajab  The Miraj (Ascension of the Prophet Muhammad) in 612 CE.

1 Shaban  The birth of Zaynab in 6/627.

3 Shaban  The birth of Hussein, in 4/627.

15 Shaban  The birth of the twelfth Imam, the Mahdi, in 255/869.

10 Ramazam  The death of Khadija in 619 CE.

15 Ramazan  The birth of second Imam Hasan in 3/625.

19 Ramazan  The fatal wounding of 'Ali in 40/661.

21 Ramazan  The martyrdom of 'Ali in 40/661.

1 Shawwal  Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan fast)

10 Shawwal  The beginning of the Ghaybat (Occultation of the Twelfth Imam, the
Mahdi), in 328/940.


29 Zi’qada  The martyrdom of the ninth Imam, Muhammad Taqi, in 220/835.

7 Zi’l-Hijja  The martyrdom of the fifth Imam, Muhammad Baqir, in 116/735.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 Zi‘l-Hijja</td>
<td>Eid al Azha (The Feast of the Sacrifice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Zi‘l-Hijja</td>
<td>Id-e Muhbhalah, the celebration of the confrontation of the Prophet Muhammad and his family with the Christians of Najran in 10/632.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 2

The Calendar of the first ten days Moharram leading to Ashura.

1 Muharram The demand by the officials of the Calif Yazid for the oath of allegiance (bay’at) from Hussein, and the departure of Hussein’s caravan from Medina to Mecca.

2 Muharram The departure of Hussein’s caravan from Mecca to Kufa.

3 Muharram The caravan’s arrival in Kufa.

4 Muharram The commemoration of Hurr, leader of the Kufan (Umayyad) cavalry who changed sides on the eve of the Battle of Karbala to become a martyr fighting for Hussein.

5 Muharram The martyrdom of the brothers Wan and Muhammad (b. Abd Allah b. Ja’far b. Abi Talib), young relatives of Hussein who were killed together at Karbala.

6 Muharram The martyrdom of ‘Ali Akbar, the second son of Hussein.

7 Muharram The martyrdom of Qasim, the son of the second Imam Hasan. Widely commemorated on this day also is the marriage believed by many Shi’a to have taken place between Qasin and Hussein’s daughter Fatima Kubra, at Karbala, just before the bridegroom’s martyrdom. Also remembered is the cutting off of Hussein’s camp from water (from the nearby Euphrates).

8 Muharram The martyrdom of Abbas (b. ‘Ali b. Abi Talib) the standard bearer of Hussein, who was killed attempting to fetch water for Hussein’s camp.

9 Muharram The martyrdom of the infant ‘Ali Asgar, the youngest son of Hussein, killed by an arrow in his father’s arms at Karbala.

10 Muharram The martyrdom of Hussein himself.
GLOSSARY

‘Abbasid (‘Abbasi) – descendant of al-‘Abbas, uncle of the Prophet Muhammad. This family seized the Caliphate in 132/750

Alid (Alawi) – a descendant of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet and the First Imam of the Shi’a

Ansar (lit. the helpers) – the Medinan followers of Muhammad

Ayatollah (lit. sign of God) – modern description of mujtahid (see below)

Caliph (Khalifa, pl. khulafa, lit. successor) – title given to those who held power over the Islamic Empire after Muhammad

faqih – an expert in fiqh (see below)

fiqh – religious jurisprudence, elucidation and application of the Sharia

ghaybah – occultation or concealment

hadith – Traditions, sayings attributed to Muhammad and the Imams. They are composed in two parts: the names of the transmitters of the Tradition (isnad) and the text of the Tradition (matn)

hajj – the pilgrimage to Mecca undertaken according to the prescribed ritual during the month of Dhu’l-Hijja

Hikma – (Hikmat-I Ilahi) – Divine Wisdom of Philosophy

ibn – son of

ijtihad – (lit. exertion) – the process of arriving at judgements on points of religious law using reason and the principles of jurisprudence (usul al-fiqh)

Imam – (lit. the one who stands in front) – principal meaning for the Twelver Shi’a is as designation of one of the twelve legitimate successors of the Prophet Muhammad. Also used to designate a religious leader of a community

jihad – holy war undertaken to expand the boundaries of Islam or to defend it against an attacker

kalam – speculative theology

khums (lit. one fifth) – religious tax originally paid to the Prophet and, by Shi’a, to the Imam from certain categories of goods and income.

kitab – book

maj(a)lis – gathering for the recital of the suffering of the Imams
marja at-taqlid (lit. reference point of emulation) – one who through his learning and probity is qualified to be followed in all points of religious practice and law by the generality of Shi’a

Muhajirun – (lit. emigrants) those who left Mecca and migrated to Medina during the lifetime of the Prophet

Muharram – The first month of the Islamic calendar

mulla – usual Persian form for one of the ulama

nabi – prophet

nass – special designation

rasul – apostle or messenger of God

rawzah – gathering for the recital of the suffering of the Imams

Sayyid – in Shi‘i areas this is the designation of descendants of the Prophet Muhammad

Shahid – martyr

shaykh - (lit. an elder) – designation sometimes for leading ulama

sura – chapter of the Qur’an

Tabatabai – descendant of Ibrahim at-Tabataba

taqiyya – dissimulation about one’s religious beliefs in order to protect one’s self, family or property from harm

taqlid – emulation, imitation or following

‘Ulama (lit. learned person) – the religious class. The singular of this word, alim, can be used of a person learned in any branch of knowledge but the plural is restricted to the religiously learned

Viliyat-i faqhi (Arabic: wilayat al-faqhi) – the concept that government belongs by right to those who are learned in jurisprudence

wali – guardian, helper or defender, a title used for the Imams